The Battle of Adobe Walls and the Red River War, 1874-5

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Adobe Walls became the site of two major engagements between the whites and Indians, first in 1864 and ten years later in 1874. In 1843, William Bent established a trading post near a crossing of the Canadian River in the panhandle area of north Texas. The original structure was probably constructed from wood. Two years later, in 1843, the fort was rebuilt out of adobe or sun-dried brick. It was a formidable structure that with walls about 30 feet (9 meters) high, but the fort proved to be in a dangerous area, and Indian raids soon made the location too dangerous for the whites to remain. William Bent abandoned the site in 1849 after blowing up the walls, so no one else could use the fort, but much of the adobe structure remained as ruins.

The first Battle of Adobe Walls took place 25 November 1864, when the famous scout, Kit Carson, led a force of over three hundred men on a campaign to punish the Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Plains Apache Indians for recent raids on wagon trains on the Santa Fe Trail. Carson’s men attacked a Kiowa village that morning, and the Indians soon retaliated. The soldiers were heavily outnumbered, and they could have been overwhelmed and killed. Only Carson’s skillful withdrawal of his command kept this disaster from happening. This fight was the only time the Indians of the southern plains forced the army to retreat after a battle, but this victory was far from decisive. The defeat in the second battle of Adobe Walls in 1874 and in the Red River War forced the Indians to leave the plains and go to reservations in Oklahoma.¹

Background to War in 1874

The second Battle of Adobe Walls and subsequent Red River War took place in the panhandle area of north Texas. The immediate cause of the war was the destruction of the buffalo (North American bison) which threatened the Indian way of life by removing an important supply of food and resources. The Indian tribes of the Great Plains of North America made efficient use of the buffalo. The Indians used almost the entire animal for food, housing, clothes, ornaments, tools, and weapons which included bows and arrows. They also used the animal’s dung for fuel for their fires, and they even used the dried manure for ceremonial smoking which included the famous peace pipe. The buffalo was so essential to the Indians’ survival, culture, and way of life that any threat to the animal was also a threat to Native Peoples’ very existence. When the whites began to destroy the herds of buffalo, the Indians felt they had no choice but react violently, and war broke out.

Before the arrival of the white men, Buffalo herds once roamed huge sections of North America. At that time, there might have been over sixty million bison on the Great Plains, and when they ran, it seemed like the entire earth trembled. Sometimes herds stretched more than sixty miles (97 kilometers). When the transcontinental railroad pushed west starting in the 1860s, the bison often became a problem. At times, the animals would cross the tracks and force the trains to wait hours for them to pass. Some of the braver railroad engineers tried to use their locomotives to push through the herds only to learn a sad lesson when the animals threw their

engines off the tracks. Often the train passengers shot the buffalo just to fight boredom. The animals were also a problem for the transcontinental telegraph lines, the first one being completed in 1861. The buffalo often scratched themselves by rubbing up against the telegraph poles and pushed them down in the process. To deal with the problem, the telegraph companies often drove metal spikes through their poles to keep the bison away. This often made matters worse because the buffalo seemed to think that the spikes were an excellent back scratcher, and they seemed to push over even more poles.

The Indians clearly killed thousands of animals every year to support their needs, but their harvest of buffaloes was insignificant to the numbers of bison remaining, and the losses were quickly replenished. In fact, the Native Peoples were active in the trade in buffalo hides. Between 1815 and 1830, the Indians were shipping roughly 26,000 hides down the Missouri River each year, and that number increased to 184,000 hides yearly just a few years later.

The white Americans were not significantly involved in trading buffalo hides because the robes initially had little commercial value. The men who hunted the buffalo for meat or for the fun of it often left the hides to rot. This changed by 1870 when tanneries in Europe and the United States learned how to turn the hides into useable leather, and they had become commercially valuable. The tanneries soon sent orders to the hunters in the West requesting that thousands of hides be sent to them, and the great buffalo hunt of the 1870s began.

Soon many buffalo hunters were killing the animals in huge numbers in Kansas. As one prominent hunter, Billy Dixon, observed, “During the fall and winter of 1872 and 1873, there were more hunters in the country than ever before or afterwards. This was the beginning of the high tide of buffalo-hunting, and buffalo fell by thousands.” He believed that more animals were killed in those years than in all later years combined and also thought about 75,000 buffaloes were killed within 60 or 75 miles of Dodge City, Kansas, within a few months. In the city, “the noise of the guns of hunters could be heard on all sides, rumbling and booming hour after hour, as if a heavy battle were being fought.”

By the summer of 1873, many buffalo bodies were rotting in various areas of Kansas. As William Blackmore, a sportsman from London commented, “There was a continual line of putrescent carcases, so that the air was rendered pestilential and offensive to the last degree. The hunters had formed a line of camps along the banks of the river and had shot down the buffaloes, night and morning, as they came to drink.” The entire effort was so wasteful with the losses of

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2 Edward Douglas Branch, The Hunting of the Buffalo (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), 139.


4 Branch, Hunting the Buffalo, 139.

hides to wolves, insects, and improper skinning that reportedly every hide sold meant the loss of from two to twelve animals. A reasonable estimate of the number of buffalo killed from 1872 to 1874 alone was about 7,500,000.

The hide hunters had so depleted the number of buffalos in Kansas that the men knew they would have to travel farther south into the area of the panhandle of north Texas to find more game. The main problem was the threat of Indian hostilities. The Kiowa, South Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Comanche tribes had signed the Treaty of Medicine Lodge in 1867 which restricted white incursions into the lands south of the Arkansas River in Kansas. The hide men feared to go south of the river because they could be fined by the federal government. The hunters sent a commission to Colonel Richard Irving Dodge at Fort Dodge near Dodge City to ask his permission to pursue the buffalo farther south. One of the men asked the Colonel, “If we cross into Texas, what will be the government’s attitude toward us?” “Boys,” the army officer replied, “If I were a buffalo hunter, I would hunt where the buffaloes are.” Colonel Dodge had opened the area for the white hunters, and the hide hunters started to move south in the fall of 1873.

The hide hunters faced a major problem because there was a great distance back to Dodge City from north Texas, which was about 150 miles [241 kilometers] away, and the men would have to take their hides many miles to sell them and to purchase any needed supplies. Alexander Charles Myers, a prominent Dodge City merchant, tried to solve the problem by establishing a trading post in the middle of the buffalo-hunting area. That way, the hide men could stay in the field the entire year, get their wagons repaired at a blacksmith shop, get a hot meal, and share a drink with their friends.

The merchants and hunters chose to build their trading post about two miles (3 kilometers) north of the Canadian River in the Panhandle area of Texas in a favorable location. It was on a broad open meadow with high grass that was good food for their horses and cattle. The area was relatively flat, and it had long been used as a convenient place to cross the river and avoid the steep banks found elsewhere. There were enough trees on the streams near the post to provide timber to construct buildings. Additionally, springs of fresh water were located at the sides of the valley, which would give the men safe and refreshing water to drink. The merchants also placed their trading post near the center of the meadow. This would give them a broad field of fire that would allow them to use their long-range buffalo hunting guns to great advantage if Indians ever attacked them.

In March 1874, Alexander Charles Myers and Frederick J. Leonard, started to construct a trading post of several buildings, which were part of a picket corral approximately 120 feet (37 meters) by 190 feet (58 meters). This enclosure was designed to hold stacks of buffalo hides that would be brought by the hide hunters, but it was built also as protection from Indians. The corral started as a trench that was two feet (61 centimeters) deep and one foot (30 centimeters) wide.

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The men placed logs hewn from the nearby cottonwood trees upright in the ditch that stood about eight feet (2.4 meters) above the ground. At regular intervals the men placed loopholes about four feet (1.2 meters) above the ground to allow them to fire at any adversary on the outside.\(^9\)

Within the stockade, Myers and Leonard placed a stable about 70 feet (21 meters) long and 26 feet (8 meters) wide. Nearby was a mess hall complete with a kitchen where the men could take their meals. On the other side of the corral, the two merchants had a store built that was roughly the same size as the stable. For efficient defense, the outer walls of the stable, mess hall, and store formed part of the walls of the stockade.\(^10\)

Charles Rath and members of his trading company also came to the area, and they soon built his trading complex roughly 330 feet (100 meters) south of the Myers and Leonard buildings. Rath's buildings included a store, a corral for hides, and an outhouse. The store was made of sod bricks which were cut from the top of the soil which was held together by the roots of the grass.

Settlers commonly used sod bricks in Kansas at this time because lumber was scarce while the prairie grasses were everywhere. Sod bricks were also cheap, and they were good insulation from the cold in the winter and the heat in the summer. The men cut the bricks and constructed the walls of the store in a slightly pyramid fashion which were roughly three feet (1 meter) at the base and half that at the top. That way, the walls were very sturdy and were less likely to fall. The store was 23 feet (7 meters) wide by 60 feet (18 meters) long. The men built the ceiling out of wood, and they placed sod on top of the roof to proved a waterproof covering. The men also built a saloon and a blacksmith shop roughly between the two trading posts. The saloon was made of sod with openings at intervals through which rifles could be fired in case of an Indian attack. The blacksmith shop was built out of wood, probably to allow for better ventilation.\(^11\) As Billy Dixon observed, "Thus a little town was sprouting in the wilderness—a place where we could buy something to eat and wear, something to drink, ammunition for our guns, and a place where our wagons, so necessary in expeditions like ours, could be repaired."\(^12\)

While the men waited for the buffalo herds to migrate north for better pasturage, they killed time and fought boredom in various ways. These activities included, "card-playing, running horse races, drinking whiskey and shooting at targets ... to improve our marksmanship."\(^13\) Seth Hathaway stated that nothing interesting happened on his trip to Adobe Walls, "until I got within a few miles of the place when I heard the sounds as though a fight was going on." When he got closer, he learned that sounds of battle were in fact men were "trying their new Sharps 50 caliber .


\(^{10}\)Baker and Harrison, 16-17.

\(^{11}\)Ibid., 19-22.

\(^{12}\)Dixon, 176.

\(^{13}\)Ibid., 181-2.
... rifles by shooting at different objects at a hundred to a thousand yards distance.”

The hunters liked the Sharps .50 caliber (13 mm) rifle, which was designed to be accurate at long range and still have great penetrating power. The weapon was ideal for killing even the large buffalo at great distances, but the hunter also needed to have the skill to hit his target. Emanuel Dubbs said the men at Adobe Walls practiced shooting long distances. “There was a hill or small mountain at a distance of 800 yards (732 meters) from the lookout on the store building where the men could see... [on] the side of the cliff a white chalky substance.” For amusement, the hunters “used to shoot at it for a mark, some one having stepped the distance... [as] 800 yards.” Dubbs believed that practicing at that long range before the battle aided Billy Dixon in shooting an Indian at a very long distance after the fight.

Even though the buffalo hunters were experienced marksmen, accidents still happened. J. Write Mooar said Billy Dixon was quite secretive when he came to camp. “He pull up his trousers and showed me a bullet hole through his calf.” After Mooar bandaged the leg, Dixon stated, “I don’t care for anybody to know how I got that,” obviously because the incident was embarrassing. In his detailed autobiography, Dixon made no mention of this wound.

The hunters soon brought in huge numbers of hides to the trading post. As the famous law man, William Barclay “Bat” Masterson, would later recall. There were “piles of 40 and fifty, all ready for shipment.” near Rath’s store. The stacks represented thousands of hides which stretched “from 30 to 100 feet” (9 to 30 meters) from the store. Andy Johnson, who worked for Rath, estimated that by late June the store had brought between 35,000 to 45,000 hides. When Seth Hathaway came to Adobe Walls, he was sure that he was approaching a town, but when he got closer he realized that the houses were actually “buffalo hides stacked up and ready to be hauled to the railroad.”

Billy Dixon liked the climate. “Drinking in the pure fresh air of the Plains, we rolled from our blankets every morning, clear-headed and ready for any enterprise. Just to feel one’s self living in that country was a joy.” The men liked each other, and some of the men entertained the others by telling war stories. “In the party were a number of veterans of the Civil War, with endless stories of desperate battles that were greatly to our liking.”

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17 Mooar in Baker and Harrison, 28-9.

18 Masterson, Johnson, and Hathaway as cited in Baker and Harrison, 24.

19 Dixon, 151-2.
Fear of an Indian Uprising

A man named Fairchild gave the group with Billy Dixon cause for concern after the hunters had crossed the Cimarron River and entered Indian territory. "Ever since we left Dodge City, Fairchild had been eager to get into an Indian fight, and had bragged about what he would do when the time came." He stated he would kill any Indian who said or did anything to him, and the hunters became afraid of what the man might do. "We really feared that he might fire upon a peaceable Indian, and cause all of us to be massacred." To teach Fairchild a lesson, the men pulled a joke on him. Bat Masterson was a formidable man or "a chunk of steel," who loved to play tricks on others. "I do not believe it would have been possible to find a man who loved practical joking more than did 'Bat' Masterson," and he planned the prank on Fairchild.

Masterson and two other men took Fairchild hunting wild turkeys at night. Masterson and Fairchild found a camp fire which Bat said had been set by Indians. Soon after, the other white men took a few shots over the men's heads, and Masterson rapidly emptied his revolver of six shots in the direction of the rifle fire. In faked desperation, Masterson called, "Run, Fairchild; run for your life!" The man ran all the way to the hunter's camp, and he was so frightened that he could not speak for several minutes. Finally, he just whispered, "Indians!"

A hunter took a knife and slit open Fairchild's shirt. Another man took a coffee pot and dumped the liquid down the frightened man's back, "which alarmed Fairchild with the fear that he had been wounded." When asked what had happened to his two companions, he gasped, "Killed, I guess." The others wanted to guard the camp all night, and Fairchild took the first watch. When he was not relieved later, he finally realized he had been fooled. They laughed at him for days, but he showed much less bravado after that, and he was less likely to do something rash and provoke the Indians to retaliate.

However, there was reason for concern in the spring of 1874 because the Indians were on the verge of war. On June 11, 1874 the men at Adobe Walls heard that two men, Dave Dudley and Tommy Wallace, had been killed four days earlier. When the two men's partner, Joe Plummer, returned he found their bodies. A war party of Kiowa warriors led by Lone Wolf had killed the two men and badly mutilated them. "Through the breast of one hand been driven a heavy wooden stake, pinning him to the ground. Both were scalped, and otherwise mutilated in a shocking manner." Plummer immediately fled to Adobe Walls to spread the alarm and to get men to help him return and bury the bodies. "The news he brought caused much excitement, as these were the first men that had been killed since the building of Adobe Walls."

Other distressing news soon reached Adobe Walls when Anderson Moore reported the

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20Ibid., 157.
21Ibid., 150 and 163.
22Ibid., 163-5.
23Ibid., 165-7.
24Ibid., 189-90 and Baker and Harrison, 32-3.
deaths of his two partners. An Englishman, John Thomson Jones, also known as “Antelope Jack and “Cheyenne Jack” and a German, W. Muhler, known as “Blue Billie” were killed. Moore came to Adobe Walls to report that Indians had murdered these men and had mutilated their bodies. About a week later, a party of hunters left Adobe Walls to find the bodies of the two unfortunate men and to bury them. But before they arrived a flood came down the creek where the bodies lay and washed them away. They were never found.25

Just two days before the warriors attacked Adobe Walls, Amos Chapman and James E. McAllister, came to the post. These two agents told the men that the Indians near Fort Supply, which was about fifty miles (80 kilometers) away, had said that “they were going down to Adobe Walls and kill the buffalo hunters.” This was another warning that a war party was on its way, but the hide men were still skeptical. As McAllister admitted, “They wouldn’t believe us. They weren’t even looking for them [the warriors] when they came.”26

The Indians presented a very real threat and Dixon commented that “a blind man could see that it was entirely too risky to stay in camp with Indians all around us.” Dixon’s party went to Adobe Walls with the greatest speed. Many other men had fled to the post. “The story of the Indian depredations had spread to all the hunting camps, and by the time we reached the Walls a large crowd had gathered in from the surrounding country.” The men attempted to assess the danger, but none of the hide hunters had seen an Indian or any sign of one. Surprisingly, “every man of us was dead set against abandoning the buffalo range.”27

At least, the hide hunters banded together for protection, and they stated that each man should be on his guard. But they also believed, “It was not unusual to hear of two or three buffalo-hunters being killed and scalped every year, and perhaps there would be no further outbreaks by the Indians.”28 Even the experienced men were not concerned. “The older plainsmen did not think it foreboded a general outbreak. . . . we might be called upon occasionally to give up a few scalps, [but] this was no evidence that the Indian was on the war path. . . . The hunters were not being disturbed.”29 These men would rather risk their lives hoping to make more money than take the warnings seriously and flee to safety. There were about thirty men and one woman at the post on the night of 26 June 1874.30 These thirty-one whites were in the compound with no idea of the danger they would face the next morning.

The Indians Prepare for War

Many of the white men and hide hunters hated the Indians and wanted them to be


27Dixon, 192-3.

28Ibid., 93-4.

29McKinnley in Baker and Harrison, 38.

30Baker and Harrison, 75-92.
exterminated. The Army Colonel, Nelson A. Miles, reported that the Indians were “accustomed as they were from childhood to the wild excitement of the chase or conflict . . . [they were] taught that to kill was noble and to labor demeaning.”

As Emanuel Dubbs, a hide hunter, explained, the Indians “are a lazy, dirty, lousey, deceitful race. True manhood is unknown [to them], and they hold their women in abject slavery.” He further stated. “The old adage ‘The only good Indian is the dead Indian’ is not very poetical, but it is true.”

Even though the traffic in alcohol was illegal, some unscrupulous whites sold whiskey to the Indians. Reportedly, the “firewater” was so strong that it caused many Indians to go crazy. They exchanged buffalo robes for liquor, and many warriors were so desirous of getting more intoxicants, or were so drunk, that they even neglected to hunt and to feed their families. Some of whom nearly starved. Colonel Miles stated that when the Indians were so “filled with whiskey” they could be no more restrained than anyone could “control a fire by piling on fuel.”

The Indians who followed the government’s orders to live on reservations also suffered from a lack of food. As Nelson A. Miles asserted, this condition was caused by “the fact that the promises made them to induce them to go on reservations were not always carried out by government authorities.” The Native Peoples had been removed from their traditional source of food, the buffalo, and “they were sometimes for weeks without their bread-rations” from the government. Many of them were “half-starved; a condition which very naturally tended to create great dissatisfaction among them and arouse their turbulent spirits.” Their distress often led to hostilities. “They would usually remain peaceable during the winter, but an outbreak in the spring or summer was the usual result.”

This was true of the spring of 1874.

Even though the Indians had too little food, they always had plenty of guns and ammunition. The warriors traded for weapons at the same time they bought alcohol, and the government authorities were unable to stop the arming of the Indians. Into this volatile mix of alcohol, hunger, and weapons appeared a young Comanche medicine man, Isatai (Rear-End-of-a-Wolf), who called on the Indians to go to war.

**Isatai urges the Indians to go to War**

Isatai shared the same grievances as the other Indians, but he had personal issues as well. In December 1863, a Comanche and Kiowa raiding party was returning from Mexico when a unit of the US Cavalry intercepted them. In the following fight, the soldiers retrieved the stolen stock and killed some of the warriors. Among the dead was Isatai’s uncle. Also the Kiowa Chief, Lone Wolf list his favorite son, Tau-ankia (Sitting-in-the-Saddle), and a nephew, Gui-tain (Heart-of-a-young-Wolf). When the Kiowa camp learned of these deaths in January 1874, they went into

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deep mourning. Isatai swore to avenge his loss, and he began to agitate for war.\(^{35}\)

Saying that he was a prophet who had received revelations from the Great Spirit, Isatai tried to convince the Indians that he had supernatural powers to protect them for the white men’s weapons. He chastised the Indians for cooperating with the whites, and he assured them that the Comanches would go out of existence if they failed to resist. They must become a powerful nation, as they had been before, by going to war and killing as many whites as possible. His credibility was strengthened when he apparently predicted the great drought which occurred that year. Many Indians were dazzled by a comet that had appeared in the sky, and they were also impressed when Isatai said it would disappear in five days, which it did. The medicine man also made the bold prediction that “the bullets would drop harmlessly from the guns of the white men.” Even if they were hit, their enemies bullets would pass through them doing no damage.\(^{36}\) Only desperate men would give any attention to such fantastic claims.

**Quanah Parker joins Isatai**

Isatai visited various groups of Comanches, but he soon visited bands of Kiowas, Cheyennnes, and Arapahos as well. A young man, Quanah (Sweet Odor or Bed of Flowers), accompanied the medicine man on many of his visits. Soon known as Quanah Parker, this warrior was showing some of his early signs of leadership that would make him much more famous later. Quanah came from an unusual family. His mother was a white woman, Cynthia Ann Parker, who moved with her family to Fort Parker in Texas when she was a little girl. On 19 May 1836, Comanche Indians attacked and overwhelmed the fort. Cynthia was only nine or ten years old at the time, and she witnessed the massacre of her family and friends. The girl was soon adopted by a kindly Comanche couple who raised her as their own daughter, and she became thoroughly integrated into the Indian culture.\(^{37}\)

Cynthia Ann Parker married the Comanche chief, Peta Nocona, and they apparently had a good relationship. It was common practice for prominent Indian leaders at that time to take more than one wife, but Nocona was probably quite satisfied with Cynthia, and he took no other wives. The couple had three children including Quanah, who was probably born around 1845, as well as another son, Pecos, and a daughter, Topusana (Prairie Flower). The white woman lived with the Comanche for twenty-four years until a band of Texas Rangers located her in the Indian camp on 18 December 1860. The Texas lawmen overwhelmed the camp and probably killed Peta Nocona, but both Pecos and Quanah escaped. The Rangers took Cynthia and her daughter back to white society where she lived with relatives, but she never readjusted to the white culture, and she continued to worry about the welfare of Pecos and Quanah. When Prairie Flower died of


\(^{36}\)Dixon, 68-9.

pneumonia in 1864, Cynthia seemed to lose all interest in life and died a few years later. What Quanah knew about the fate of his mother and sister are unclear, but he knew they had been taken from him, and he had yet another grievance against the whites.

Isatai and Quanah Parker met with various groups of Indians. Quanah offered the various leaders a pipe to smoke. If the chiefs smoked the pipe, they would participate in the war. If not, Quanah maintained that, “God [will] kill him, [because] he [was] afraid.” When Isatai spoke he claimed “he had power . . . To prevent [our] enemies’ guns from going off, so they gave him the leadership” of the warriors. The medicine man assured them that the buffalo would soon return and added that “God tell me we going [to] kill lots of white men. I [will] stop the bullets in [the white men’s] gun. [Their] bullets [will] not penetrate [our] shirts. We [will] kill them just like [they were] old woman.”

The warriors decided to attack the buffalo hunters at Adobe Walls. It appeared to be an easy target that was close by, and it would serve as a valuable warning to the hide hunters that they faced great danger if they continued to slaughter the buffalo. When the war party approached the trading post, they sent seven warriors to reconnoiter and appraise the number of defenders at Adobe Walls. When the men returned the next day they reported to the others, “I tell you true, I see four or five log houses. I see horses running around.” The news was acceptable and one chief, Black Beard, said, “all right pretty soon we kill a white man.”

As the main party approached Adobe Walls, they prepared for war. As Quanah Parker observed, they “put saddles and blankets in trees and hobble extra ponies. [They] make medicine, paint faces, put on war bonnets.” The warriors continued to approach the post, and they took time to rest before they went into battle. Some of the men had shot a buffalo that day, so the warriors had a meal to give them strength and stamina in the coming ordeal. One leader, He Bear, gave orders, “dismount, hold lariats in [your] hand. I [will] call you [to] mount again.” Each warrior took the time to prepare themselves for the coming fight. “Some [of the men] go to sleep. Some smoke tobacco and talk until He Bear and Tabananica call [them to battle].” Some of the men were able to deal with their fear, and they rested well, but others were more concerned. They stayed up all night talking with their friends and worrying about Isatai’s medicine and protective war paint. When the warriors again advanced, they finally came in sight of the buildings of Adobe Walls even though it was still night time.

The Crack of the Ridgepole

On the night of 26 June 1874, most of the men at Adobe Walls went to bed at the usual


39Quanah in Baker and Harrison, 45-6.

40Ibid., 48.

41Ibid.

42Baker and Harrison, 48-9.
time, but some of the hide men stayed up well past midnight in the saloon, “celebrating our return to the range, telling stories of past experiences and joking about how much money we would have when the hunt was over.” Billy Dixon was proud of his new Sharps Rifle, and he brought the weapon and a full case of ammunition to the saloon to show the others. He then made a serious mistake. “For some reason which I can not explain... I left the case of ammunition [in the saloon]... little dreaming how greatly I would regret my carelessness.” The day had been hot, so the store owners left the doors to the buildings open to allow a breeze to come in, and many men slept outdoors in the cool of the night under the stars. The night was peaceful, and there seemed to be no reason for alarm. The men were soon all asleep.43

Some of the men thought that the sod covering on the roof of the saloon was too thin as a safe covering from heavy rain, and they placed more turf on it early in the day. At about two o’clock on the morning of 27 June 1874, the sound of a large crack, much like the report of a rifle, startled the men awake. The beam holding the sod roof had apparently buckled under the weight of the additional turf, and the entire covering was on the verge of falling and potentially burying the men under it. The owner of the saloon, Jim Hanrahan, yelled to everyone that they were in danger, and he got several of them to shovel off some of the new sod from the roof to relieve some of the pressure on the beam. Hanrahan offered free drinks to anyone who would help. This incident was most fortunate because it meant that some men were awake, so they could react more swiftly when the Indians attacked.44

Seth Hathaway was perplexed “by the crackling of the ridgepole, and the dirt falling down” on the men. There seemed to be no reason why this should have happened, and some of the men thought the crack was meant to save their lives. “In the light of what occurred later, some of the old timers insisted that the falling dirt was something in the nature of a supernatural warning” that helped the men defend themselves from the imminent attack.45

The Warriors’ Advance

In the predawn light at about four o’clock, the warriors could see the trading post, and Isatai seemed to be correct about one fact. The whites did not appear to be ready to receive their attack. Quanah Parker remembered the Indian deployment. “Pretty soon we make a line—the chiefs try to hold young men back [they] go too fast—pretty soon they call out ‘all right, go ahead.’ we charge down on houses in wild charge—threw up dust high.”46

After the men scrambled to repair the roof of the saloon, Billy Dixon decided to remain awake, so he could get a good start on the day. He sent Billy Ogg to bring in the horses, so they could be made ready for that day’s hunt. Dixon just happened to glance in the direction of the horses, when he saw something very unusual. “Just beyond the horses, at the edge of some timber, was a large body of objects advancing vaguely in the dusky dawn toward our stock and in

43 Dixon, 198-9.
44 Baker and Harrison, 51.
46 Quanah in Baker and Harrison, 52.
the direction of Adobe Walls.” He looked more carefully became astonished at what he saw. “The black body of moving objects suddenly spread out like a fan, and from it went up a single solid yell—a warwhoop that seemed to shake the very air of the early morning. Then came the thudding roar of running horses, and the hideous cries of the individual warriors, each embarked in the onslaught.” The frightened man “could see that hundreds of Indians were coming.” He then realized that “had it not been for the ridge pole, all of us would have been asleep.”

The warriors were well armed and ready for battle. Man of them carried many .45 caliber Colt revolvers, also known as six-shooters, which could fire six rounds very rapidly and were very effective at close range. Many of the Indians also carried the famous “Gun that won the West” which was the new Winchester lever-action rifles. These weapons were reliable and could fire rapidly, but the some warriors also carried some of the Sharp’s rifles which could fire accurately at long distances and carried much stopping power.

The hunters soon learned that their enemies had powerful weapons. The hide men initially thought that the Indians were trying to steal their horses and their stock, but they quickly realized that the warriors were attacking the buildings and the men in them. Billy Dixon fired a few shots in the general direction of the warriors, hoping he could chase them away, but he soon realized that they had no intention of running. “They were coming as straight as a bullet toward the buildings, whipping their horses at every jump.” When the warriors came more clearly into sight, Dixon was very impressed, and he commented, “There was never a more splendidly barbaric sight.”

The Splendid View of the Indians

The Indian’s advance was so impressive that Dixon remained proud his entire life that he had seen it. “Hundreds of warriors, the flower of the fighting men of the southwestern Plains tribes, mounted upon their finest horses, armed with guns and lances, and carrying heavy shields of thick buffalo hide, were coming like the wind.” The warriors were also impressively arrayed. “Over all was splashed the rich colors of red, vermillion and ochre, on the bodies of the men, on the bodies of the running horses. Scallops dangled from bridles, gorgeous war-bonnets fluttered their plumes, bright feathers dangled from the tails and manes of the horses, and the bronzed, half-naked bodies of the riders glittered with ornaments of silver and brass.”

Seth Hathaway was also impressed with the view of the advancing warriors. As the morning grew lighter, the white men could see that the Indians were riding in a line of warriors that was two deep, and this formation stretched all the way across the valley. “It was the grandest and most awesome sight I have ever seen. Their many colored blankets and the eagle feathers in their war bonnets waved in the wind, as they came riding on at an easy canter, chanting a war

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47 Dixon, 201-4.


49 Dixon, 204-5.

50 Ibid., 204-5.
song.” He estimated that the Indians numbered three of four hundred warriors.

When the Indians were within about five hundred yards (460 meters) of the post, “They broke into their war cry.” Hathaway admitted that, “It was a sound I shall never forget, that yell and defiance and hate coming from . . . [the warriors] throats.” The hunter knew what that meant. “The war cry was the signal for battle, for they dropped their blankets to the ground, disclosing their naked bodies painted all colors.” The Indians then made their attack. “They made a grand charge towards the ranch buildings, firing their guns and arrows as they came swooping on. It sent a thrill through everybody that saw and heard it.”

Clearly, none of the hide men were in a position to count how many Indians attacked them. While the estimates on the number of warriors vary widely from about two hundred to the unbelievable total of 1,500, a few hundred appears to be a reasonable figure as Hathaway suggested.

The Initial Fight at the Saloon

Only in retrospect did Billy Dixon think of the sight of attacking Indians as being splendid. At the time of their advance, the hunter was more concerned with survival. He fired one more shot, but he ran before he saw where the bullet went. The man called a warning to the others, “Indians boys, Indians and lots of them!”

Unfortunately for Dixon, the hunters inside had already closed and locked the door, so when the frightened man reached the building, he could not get in. He shouted to the men and pounded on the door. It seemed like a very long time before the hide men inside opened it and let him enter. In the meantime, “bullets were whistling and knocking up dust all around me.” At the same instant that the men in the saloon opened the door, Billy Ogg ran to the opening and fell inside. He was so breathless from his run to safety that he could no longer stand up. Dixon was very impressed with Ogg’s dash for his life. “I am confident that if Billy had been timed, his would have been forever the world’s record.” Dixon added, “Billy [Ogg] had made a desperate race, and that he should escape seemed incredible.”

The hide men locked the doors in saloon in the nick of time because the Indians were soon upon them. “We were scarcely inside before the Indians had surrounded all the buildings and shot out every window pane.” Many of the men had no time to get dressed, so they fought the entire summer day barefooted and in their night clothes. As the action commenced, the bartender, Oscar Shepherd, saw some humor in how the men rushed to defend the saloon. Acting like a caller in a square dance at a social gathering, he called out, “Gents to the right and ladies to

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51Hathaway, 131.
52Baker and Harrison, 70-1.
53Hathaway, 131.
54Dixon, 205-6.
55Ibid., 206-7.
the left.” Few others saw any humor when their lives were in imminent danger.

The Indians were soon close to the buildings, and many of them shot through the windows into the interior. Some of Quanah Parker’s men climbed on the top of the buildings and attempted to make openings in the roofs to fire at the occupants within, but they were unsuccessful. Others flattened themselves against the outer walls to become the smallest targets possible and to wait for an opportunity to shoot at the whites through the windows and doors. “For the first half hour the Indians were reckless and daring enough to ride up and strike the doors with the butts of their guns.” The hunter’s buffalo rifles were not effective at close range because they could not be swung around rapidly to fire on the warriors near the building. Early in the attack, the hide men made effective use of their pistols, and these “six shooters” helped to hold back the Indians.

Frederick Leonard made good use of his pistol, and he reported that, “I killed one Indian that I know of, and don’t know how many more, as I was shooting at them with my revolver form forty to sixty yards for twenty shots.” Fred Meyers, Leonard’s partner, was also successful because he “killed two Indians.” Leonard admired the warriors’ fighting ability. “They rode around up to the corral and got off their horses, and fought as brave as any man I ever saw.”

When Quanah Parker saw a slight opening in one of the doors, he threw his lance through it into the interior of the building, but he did not hit anyone. A few of the warriors tried to force the doors open by backing up their horses in a vain attempt to break in. One warrior was so bold that when he got to one of the buildings, he picked up an empty barrel and threw it against the door. This effort cost the warrior his life because, “Just as he let fly the missile, a bullet from Miller Scott’s rifle tore its way through his chest. He gave a great leap into the air and with a wild shriek fell dead upon the buffalo hide.” The men inside began to pile sacks of corn, flour, feed and anything else that might stop a bullet, and one hide man estimated that they had stacked a ton of material against it.

Chief Quanah Parker described the initial Indian attack. “We at once surrounded the place and began to fire on it. The hunters got to the houses and shot through the cracks and holes in

56Little, “Battle of Adobe Walls,” 77.
57Dennis Collins, The Indians’ Last Fight or the Dull Knife Raid (Girard, Kansas: Appeal to Reason, [ca. 1915]), 215.
58Dixon, 208.
59Baker and Harrison, 53.
61Baker and Harrison, 53 and Little 78-9.
62Collins, Indians Last Fight, 219-20 and Hathaway, 131.
the wall.” He confirmed the bravery of his men. “We tried to storm the place several times but the hunters shot so well we would have to retreat.” This caused the warriors to change their tactics. “At one time I picked up five braves and we crawled along a little ravine to their corral, which was only a few yards from the house. Then we picked our chance and made a run for the house before they could shoot us, and we tried to break the door in but it was too strong and being afraid to stay long, we went back the way we came.”

**The Fight at Charles Rath’s Store**

The Indians focused their initial attack on the saloon which was between the other buildings. These men were in a good position to give fire support to the other structures. The people in Charles Rath’s store were apparently nearly all asleep when the Indians attacked with the exception of the blacksmith, Thomas O’Keefe. He had been sleeping outside the blacksmith shop. Early that morning O’Keefe’s little dog licked his face to wake him up, and he saw what he thought were a herd of buffaloes. O’Keefe roused and laid on is elbow to watch the animals approach. He then heard Billy Dixon’s warning call to the men inside the saloon, and he was soon shocked to realize that Indians were advancing towards him. He grabbed his blankets and ran barefoot to Langton’s store.

The first warning many of the men heard in the store was O’Keefe kicking against the door and shouting, “Open the door and let me in... the Indians are coming!” James Langton who was only wearing his underclothes let him in. Right behind the blacksmith came Sam Smith running to the store. He was also undressed, and he had no time to pull on his trousers, but he carried a gun in one hand and a belt full of cartridges in the other.

Only seven people were in Rath’s store, which was the smallest number of people in any of the buildings. However, the store was well supplied with weapons and ammunition adequate for defense. Langton had stocked the store with more than one hundred buffalo guns and roughly eleven thousand rounds of ammunition, which he planned to sell to the hide men. But these supplies were needed that day. The hide hunters in Rath’s store were able to keep up a heavy rate of fire against the Indians. “As soon as one gun became too hot to handle, another was put in his hands to carry on the defense. Mr. Langton personally saw to it that... [each defender] was amply provided with ammunition and guns to perform his duty.” One problem in defending the store was the fact that there were too few holes in the walls through which to fire at the enemy, the men “punched holes in the sides of the building,” so they could fire more effectively.

**The Fear of the Defenders**

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63 Quanah Parker in Bob Boze Bell, “A Long Shot: Buffalo Hunters vs Quanah Parker’s Warriors” *True West* (April 2016), 56.

64 Little, 77.

65 Baker and Harrison, 54 and Little, 81.

66 Collins, 215.

67 Ibid., 217.
Many of the defenders of the store were terrified, and some were unable to meet the challenge of battle. They became “so excitedly helpless that they were unaccountable for what they did.” While “Others became nauseated and freely parted with the contents of their stomachs” by throwing up. James Langton “became so overcome with the realization of the horror of the situation that he too parted with his supper of the night before and the only reason why he did not lose his breakfast was that he had not had time to eat it when the first attack was made.”

Langton had good reason to fear because many bullets hit inside the store and all of his canned goods were shot off the shelves during the battle. Langton and the other defenders who threw up were not alone in their terror. Hannah Olds, the wife of William Olds, was the only woman at the post, and she was clearly very fearful of what might happen to her if captured. She soon fainted and “kind hands poured water on her face until she revived.” She was probably better off unconscious because “when she recovered her senses, the realization of the predicament in which they all were ... so overpowered her that she tried to commit suicide.” And “she set up a series of yells and screeches in her fright, that the Indians outside must have thought they were killing one another to save themselves from butchery.” Fortunately, “strong hands prevented her form doing violence to herself, but there was no way to prevent her screeching, and the only thing to do was to give her freedom to screech until she became exhausted.”

Billy Dixon maintained that the brave hide hunters would have protected Hannah Olds as well as possible. “None [of the men] would have suffered themselves to be taken alive or permitted Mrs. Olds to be captured.”

Before the battle, some of the hunters had captured a young crow which became the pet of the entire trading post. “The crow had been petted by every man in camp.” The hide men all knew the old superstition that the crow, as a black bird, was an omen of death. At least, it was supposed to bring bad luck, but this old story did not seem to bother the men until the battle began. “During the worst of the fight this crow flew from one building to the other.” It came in and out through the open windows, and it was calling “Caw! Caw! Caw!” in the most discouraging manner. Finally, one of the men would tire of racket and shout, “Get out of here, you black rascal!” and chase him away. Undeterred, the bird would then fly to another building and start cawing again. Despite the heavy rate of fire in the battle, the crow was never hit. The only other pets at Adobe Walls were the dogs, and when the battle stared, they ran away or “cut for tall timber” and did not return until several days after the fight ended.

The Fight at the Corral

The Indians also attack the store of Myers and Leonard. The gunfire from the saloon

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68 Ibid., 216.
69 Little, 81.
70 Collins, 217-18.
71 Dixon, 217.
72 Ibid., 224.
alerted the men in these buildings. Apparently, Bat Masterson was sleeping inside the corral when the firing began. Foolishly, he made a mad dash to the saloon rather than seeking shelter inside the store, risking death at every step. Leonard had been resting near Masterson, and he grabbed his shoes, six-shot revolver and a belt of ammunition before he ran inside the door. He went straight to a sealed case of Sharps rifles, broke it open, and handed out the formidable weapons to the men.\footnote{Baker and Harrison, 55.}

After failing to take Adobe Walls from horseback many of the warriors dismounted to continue the fight on foot which allowed them to fire more accurately and to take cover more effectively. Myers and Leonard had unwisely attached the corral to the store. This meant that the Indians could use the structure for a defensive position. Andrew Johnson stated that the corral was “of more protection to the Indians than it was to the white men.” He also gave good advice. “If you ever build a place to withstand an Indian attack, don’t build your stockade like we did.”\footnote{Johnson in Baker and Harrison, 56.}

TheIndians did as much damage from the corral as possible, and “The cattle were all killed, and every head of stock about he place was either captured or killed.” The warriors killed the animals most efficiently. “The Indians would point their guns through between the logs fo the stockade and shoot down everything inside.”\footnote{S. S. Van Sickel, \textit{A Story of Real Life on the Plains} (Np: np, [ca. 1890]), 17.}

Apparently, the warriors planned to take away or kill all the horses, thus leaving the defenders on foot, so they would be unable to escape or to send a mounted messenger for aid to Dodge City. One of the Indians rode to one of the animals and tried to cut the rope which tied it to a wagon. Yet this horse was “notorious for her vicious kicking.” She did not allow the Indians to approach her, so they shot her. Billy Dixon lamented the loss of his saddle horse he had owned for years, as it was “highly prized,” but it was among the first animals shot.\footnote{Dixon, 224-5.} After the fight, the hide men counted fifty-six dead horses scattered in the immediate area of Adobe Walls. The bodies of an additional twenty-eight head of oxen that belonged to the Scheidler brothers were also found nearby. Wounded animals would instinctively wander close to the buildings perhaps seeking aid only to be shot down by the Indians every time.\footnote{Ibid., 225-6.}

Many of the hunters were very attached to their horses and lamented their loss. Hannah Olds owned a mustang colt that was a her favorite animal. The colt had been given to Mrs. Olds, and she treated it like a pet. She would often stroke the “affectionate little creature until it followed her form place to place like a dog.” The small horse stayed near the buildings throughout the fight, but later Billy Dixon saw an arrow sticking in the animal’s back. He never

\footnote{73 Baker and Harrison, 55.}
\footnote{74 Johnson in Baker and Harrison, 56.}
\footnote{75 S. S. Van Sickel, \textit{A Story of Real Life on the Plains} (Np: np, [ca. 1890]), 17.}
\footnote{76 Dixon, 224-5.}
\footnote{77 Ibid., 225-6.}
learned if the colt died from wounds or if someone put “the poor little thing out of its misery.”

The Death of Billy Tyler and the Scheidler Brothers

Early in the battle, Frederick Leonard and Billy Tyler went to the stockade perhaps trying to defend the cattle and horses in the compound. Yet the Indians’ fire soon became too intense, and these men were forced to run back to the store, and they turned several times to send a bullet at their adversaries. Leonard made good his escape, but Tyler was hit. “Just as Tyler was entering the door of the adobe store, he turned to fire, and was struck by a bullet that penetrated his lungs.” And “He fell just outside the door badly wounded. Dixon stepped out, picked him up and carried him inside, where he died some time later.” The other defenders in the store came to the badly wounded man’s aid, but his injury was severe, and there was little they could for him. “He lived [only] about a half hour after he was dragged into the store.” A few days before the battle, one of Tyler’s companions made a prediction, when he said that Tyler was “going to fall early in this war.” That may or may not have been a joke, but in either case, the comment was clearly in bad taste.

Two brothers from Germany had arrived at Adobe Walls the day before the battle. They were Jacob and Isaac Scheidler who arrived with a wagon and also with their large Newfoundland dog. Jacob “Shorty” and Isaac “Ike” were sleeping in the wagon box probably to enjoy cooler temperatures and also to get an early start in the morning. Billy Dixon believed that the Indians found the two men fast asleep in their wagon where the warriors killed them. But the other accounts gave different accounts on what happened to the two unfortunate men. One of the Germans woke up first and ran to the Leonard’s store but then turned back to help his brother who was still asleep in the wagon. But his brother had already been killed while still in the wagon. His body was found later, “partially dressed, laying alongside the wagon, cut in a terrible manner.” The surviving brother then ran towards the store but was killed before he could reach safety.

A few of the Indians remembered the two men. As Quanah Parker stated, “We killed two white men in [a] wagon.” Another warrior remembered that even “though there were Indians all around” the wagon, “none of them knew that there was anyone in the wagon.” Later, one of the Indians rode to the wagon and lifted up the wagon sheet to look inside when one of the Scheidlers fired at him. In a matter of minutes, the warriors fired many arrows and bullets into the wagon, killing both brothers. The Indians scalped both men and also killed their big black dog. They also

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78 Ibid., 226-7.
79 Ibid., 212 and Hathaway, 131.
80 Baker and Harrison, 57.
81 Dixon, 208-9.
82 Baker and Harrison, 60.
“scalped” the dog by cutting a long strip of hide from the animal’s side.\textsuperscript{83} In an obvious attempt to intimidate the whites, the warriors “flaunted the bloody scalps of the poor Shadler’s [sic] with devilish glee.” Clearly indicating that the same would be the fate of the hide men if the Indians killed them.\textsuperscript{84}

**The Hide Men’s Defense**

The hide men soon fired back at the warriors, “The Indians were about one hundred yards [91 meters] from the house when the hunters turned loose their guns.” Apparently the white men aimed well in their first volley. “At the first fire a number of horses and riders went down.” After the first salvo, the defenders were no longer fired in unison. “We had no time to see anything more, for they were on us in a flash and for the next few minutes, which seemed like hours, it was each man for himself.” The men fired so rapidly that “The house soon filled up with smoke” which caused a problem. “And as of course every chink [in the walls] was closed by the loopholes, it became stifling in the place, and every man perspired freely.”\textsuperscript{85}

The hunters saw an Indian leader who seemed to separate himself from the other warriors. He was “chanting wildly, dragging a dry buffalo hide by the tail.” He seemed to be trying to inspire the Indians to fight harder by his courageous example. Incredibly, he “advanced fearlessly up to the very door of the ranch, gesticulating in a wild manner.” The man threw the buffalo hide on the ground and began a “weird chant to incite his followers to follow his example.” His courage proved to be misspent because a shot from a white man’s rifle, “tore its way through his chest.” The warrior “gave a leap into the air and with a wild shriek fell dead upon the buffalo hide.”\textsuperscript{86}

Often when the Indians attacked, they advanced waving their shields made of buffalo hide and wood as though these devices would protect them from the white men’s bullets. But these flimsy items proved to be no defense from the powerful guns the hunters used. When a Sharp’s rifle bullet hit a shield, “nothing was seen,” as Bat Masterson explained, “but flying feathers and a dead Indian.”\textsuperscript{87}

Both the hide men and the warriors fired rapidly at each other, and the din of battle was almost constant. Dennis Collins described the sound, “Pit, pit, the bullets [of the Indians] sank into the three foot [1 meter] walls of the ranch.” But the hide men answered in kind. “Boom, boom responded the buffalo guns in a roar that was interrupted only for such time as it took to” reload their weapons “and then they boomed again.” The Indians would attack, fall back, regroup, and attack again. Collins counted three times the warriors rallied at a distance to renew

\textsuperscript{83}Baker and Harrison, 61.

\textsuperscript{84}Dixon, 220.

\textsuperscript{85}Hathaway, 131-2.

\textsuperscript{86}Collins, 219.

\textsuperscript{87}Masterson in Little, 80.
their assaults. Sometimes the Indians used their excellent horsemanship to get closer to their adversaries, and they often rode in circles around the buildings while firing from under their animals’ necks. To accomplish this, they had to drop to the sides of the horse and hold on by the strength of their ankles.

Warriors that had been wounded or killed were retrieved by the Indians whenever possible by other braves on horseback. These courageous men often rode to their wounded and fallen comrades to pull them upon the animals or to drag them away. Their actions were very commendable because they “showed traits of character that would be worthy of emulation by any race or color of men, exposing themselves freely to save their comrades.”

During one of the attacks, Billy Dixon noticed an Indian riding a white horse to where another warrior had fallen in the tall grass. The wounded man jumped up behind the man on the horse, and they both started to ride back to safety. But one of the hunters fired, and the bullet struck the horse, breaking one of the animal’s rear legs. The hide men could see blood streaming down the horse’s leg. In desperation, each of the two riders began whipping the wounded animal, hoping that it could continue to carry them. Even though the horse was “lurching and staggering on three legs,” it carried them away from the battle.

Billy Dixon became concerned because there was a large stack of buffalo hides about seventy-five yards (69 meters) behind the store. As the fighting progressed, the hunter noticed that an Indian’s horse was standing near it, and he could also see the feathers in the head dress often worn by the warriors. The white hunter fired at the feathers of the head dress, and the warrior dodged to the side where he drew fire from the men in Rath’s store. The Indian ran back and forth evading the shots for about ten minutes, until Dixon found his mark. The hunter was using a Sharp’s big buffalo gun, and he “fired right through the hides at him.” The shot hit the man “for he immediately broke from his hiding place, ran about 15 steps, and then dropped in the grass.” The warrior had cried out in pain when hit, and “He gave a short yelp like a coyote at every jump.”

Oscar Shepherd also saw a dismounted warrior behind a small sod outbuilding, and was determined to shoot him. The young white man took a position at a window, and began firing his Winchester lever-action repeating rifle. But Shepherd had a reputation as a poor shot. In frustration, the young man turned to Bat Masterson whom he considered to be a better marksman, “I’ve fired at that cussed buck six times and missed him every time. You try it.” Shepherd then helped the other man get into a firing position at the window. Masterson said that

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88 Collins, 219-20.

89 Little, 81.

90 Hanrahan in Baker and Harrison, 63.

91 Dixon, 213.

soon, "I saw Mr. Indian backing my way, getting out of range of the fire from... [the] store. I commended getting a bead on him. As he back an inch or two more I let fly and Mr. Indian bounded in the air about three feet, dropped his rifle and fell dead." With some satisfaction, Masterson turned to Shepherd and said, "Shep, I got him on the first crack." 93

One especially courageous, young warrior charged the Rath store, and he leaped from his horse. In a foolish act, he ran to the side of the store and then shoved his revolver through one of the loopholes in the wall. He then emptied his six shooter in the interior of the building, but the Indian missed at every shot, and he just filled the room with powder smoke. The warrior was soon disabled by a shot the probably went through his spine. Apparently, the young man called to his father to come and help him, but the older man only kept calling instructions to his son. Finally, one of the hunters decided to put an end to the conversation when he dared to lean out a window to shoot the Indian and to finish him off. "As soon as the boy saw the gun at the window he drew a revolver and shot himself." He probably thought it was more honorable to shoot himself that to be killed by a white man. 94

Other warriors also showed similar foolish courage. Some Indians would hide behind the stacks of hides. They would then run out, take a shot at the white men, and then jump back behind the hides. Their poorly-aimed shots did no damage to the white men, and the warriors risked their lives to no purpose. One Indian was probably eight hundred yards (731 meters) away from the hide men when he climbed on the top of a pile of hides and "started to dance," clearly in defiance of the hunters. He apparently paid dearly for his show because "a bullet from one of the buffalo guns ended his career as a dancer." 95

Quanah Parker was one of the Indians wounded in the battle. Apparently, his horse was hit by gunfire from the hide men, and he was thrown to the ground. He soon sought shelter either behind a buffalo corpse or a rock, but the obstacle left part of him exposed, and he was hit. The bullet probably was a ricochet that struck him in the back between his neck and his shoulder blade. This injury stunned him badly and caused his arm to become paralyzed for a time. He managed to get to a plum thicket where some of his warriors picked him up. Later, Quanah Parker stated, "I got shot in the side." Likely, the bullet hit the powder horn made of buffalo bone which he wore on a strap around his shoulder before it struck the chief. If the horn had not deflected the bullet, it likely would have killed him. Quanah Parker's wound took him away from the battle, and he was no longer present to lead his forces. His absence from the fight could have changed the nature of the battle, and at that point, the warriors were less aggressive and more likely to fight the hide men at a distance. 96

After the initial attacks on the building, or after Quanah Parker was wounded, the Indians seemed to pull back, but they kept a steady fire on the buildings nearly all day. The warriors

93 Masterson in Little, 81.
94 Johnson in Baker and Harrison, 61-2.
95 Hathaway, 132-3.
96 Quanah Parker in Baker and Harrison, 63-4.
stayed in groups at different locations, but maintained a steady fire on the hide men’s positions. Some of the heavy fire was clearly designed to provide cover for wounded warriors attempting to escape. “Sometimes the Indians would fire especially heavy volleys, whereupon wounded Indians would leap from the grass and run as far as they could and then drop down in the grass.” This effort was successful because, “In this manner a number escaped.” The rate of fire was very impressive. “The door [to the saloon] framed a good target. I have no idea how many guns were cracking away at us, but I do know that bullets rattled round us like hail.” Billy Dixon could hardly understand why no one in the buildings had been hit. “I could never see how we escaped, for at times the bullets poured in like hail and made us hug the sod walls like gophers when a hawk was swooping past.”

**Wonderful Water**

The fighting lasted for hours, and the hunters’ condition in the buildings was challenging. In their fear, the men perspired freely, and the buildings were choked with powder smoke which made the men’s suffering more intense. The air became so fetid that one observer stated, “The sanitary condition of the place resembled the Black Hole of Calcutta to a lesser degree.” The “Black Hole” was a room which caused many prisoners to die of suffocation and heat exhaustion in India in 1756.

The hunters also began to suffer from thirst because water supplies were exhausted early in the fight. Some of their tongues began to swell up from lack of water, and many of them could only communicate in whispers. One of the men was so desperate for water that he started to dig in a corner of the building. Two men were soon digging to make the work go faster. When they became tired, two others took their place and continue digging while the remaining hide hunters were defending the building from the Indians. When the men had dug about five feet, (1.5 meters) they struck water. Even though the water had plenty of alkali in it, the men were very happy to have it, and they drank eagerly.

The besieged hunters felt much better after drinking the water, and a “wonderful” change came over them. “Some tried to sing, others to whistle as well as their parched lips would allow.” They made themselves as comfortable as possible for the long battle, and they brought out canned fruit, crackers, and anything else that could be eaten. The men had renewed hope, but they still wondered how long they would have to stay in the stinking building and face the constant fire from the Indians. Fortunately for some of the men in the stores, they did not have to dig for water because there were many canned goods in the store. Many of these were probably canned fruits and vegetables. The men cut the cans open and then drank the liquid found in them. “It

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97 Dixon, 213 and 215-16.

98 Collins, 223.

99 Hathaway, 132.

100 Ibid.
was not entirely satisfying as water, but it tided him over a difficulty."\(^{101}\)

**The Mystery of the Indian Bugler**

One of the more curious aspects of the battle is the story of the bugler with the Indians. Within an hour after the battle began, the white hunters heard "the clear notes of a cavalry bugle sounded in the distance." Very much like the old western movies that were popular in the United States from the 1930s to 1960s, the besieged hide men hoped that the bugle sounds meant that the US Cavalry would soon come riding over the horizon to attack the Indians and save the day. When the besieged men first heard the sound, they raised a cheer and waited for relief.

"Crouching behind sacks and boxes every eye was glued to the loop holes to catch the first sight of the rescuers, every nerve and muscle drawn to the fullest tension." The men were very anxious. "The suspense was fearful, as every moment we expected to see a party of cavalrmen dash to the scene." Yet as the time passed and no troopers appeared, the hide men realized that no help was coming. They also noticed that the Indians were not concerned about the bugle calls, "and our hopes of rescue dropped to zero."\(^{102}\)

The man with the bugle knew his instrument well, and he "could blow the different calls as cleverly as the [Army] bugler on the parade ground at Fort Dodge." How he learned to do so was a mystery. Some of the hunters believed that the Indian bugler was in fact an African-American who had deserted from the Tenth Cavalry, an all black unit in the US Army. But this theory remains uncertain. The white hunters soon noticed that the warriors often charged with the sound of the bugle, and this effort to coordinate their movements to the sound of the instrument proved to be an advantage to the hide men who would be prepared for the attack. When they heard the bugle calls, they knew that the Indians would advance on them.\(^{103}\)

The white men in the saloon had another advantage because two of them had served in the US Army. This was to be expected because nearly three million men had served in the Civil War (1861-65), and many veterans of that conflict had come west in the intervening years to seek their fortunes as hide men. Their experience and skills proved to be helpful at Adobe Walls because they "understood all the bugle calls." As Dixon stated, "Every bugle call he blew was understood by the ex-soldiers and were carried out to the letter by the Indians, showing that the bugler had the Indians thoroughly drilled." At one point, "the first call blown was a rally, which our men instantly understood. The next was a charge, and that also was understood, and immediately the Indians come rushing forward to a fresh attack."\(^{104}\)

At first, the hide men thought the bugler was little more that a curiosity, but when they noticed that he was directing many of the activities of the warriors for most of the fight, the hunters became determined to kill him. Most of the time the bugler kept to the rear and would only step into sight to give a short call to the other Indians. Finally, one of the hunters swore, "I

\(^{101}\)Collins, 223.

\(^{102}\)Hathaway, 132.

\(^{103}\)Dixon, 210-11.

\(^{104}\)Ibid., 211-12.
am going to shoot that damned . . . [Black man] the first chance I get.” Soon after the hide men heard the bugle again. At that point, “three rifle shots sounded . . . and before the reports” of the gun shots died away, “the bugle notes were cut off as though the instrument had been snatched from the lips of the blower.” One of the hide men known as “Dutch Henry” or “German Henry” shouted in glee, “I got that damned . . . [Black man] boys, that will end that music!” Hathaway was very impressed with the shot stating, “It was a long shot but a good one. Afterward it was found that the Negro had been shot through the breast.” As Bat Masterson stated, the shot “plunked a big forty-caliber bullet through him and he bugled no more that day.” J. W. McKinley affirmed that “a Negro was found amongst the dead” and he associated the man with the “bugler who could blow a number of calls quite creditably.”

**The Hunters’ Marksmanship**

As the fight progressed, the marksmanship of the professional hunters began to make a significant difference in the battle, using their highly effective Sharps’ rifles. Clearly with some exaggeration, Emanuel Dubbs bragged, “Nearly every shot we fired found its mark.” The white hunter considered the Indian casualties as a matter of revenge. “To me it was a positive delight and every shot I fired I thought ‘there is one . . . [for] the poor boys that so cruelly lost their lives the day before’” at the hands of the Indians.

The battle raged for most of the day, and many of the hunters shot large amounts of ammunition. The men in the saloon finally realized they had a problem. “We had been pouring a pile of bullets from out stronghold, and about noon were running short of ammunition.” Billy Dixon and James Hanrahan, the saloon owner, decided that they had to replenish their supply of bullets by making a run to Rath’s store where they knew thousands of rounds had been placed with the intention of selling them to the buffalo hunters. The two men looked outside the saloon to see if the warriors were waiting to ambush them. When they saw no Indians, “We crawled out of a window and hit the ground running like jack-rabbits, and made it to Rath’s in the fastest kind of time.” Yet the warriors saw them and opened fire at the two men at long range. Dixon admitted, “I have no idea how many guns were cracking away at us, but I do know that bullets rattled around us like hail.” The men’s survival seemed to be miraculous. “Providence seemed to be looking after the boys at Adobe Walls that day, and we got inside without a scratch, though badly winded.”

Hanrahan and Dixon found the men in Rath’s store to be in good shape. Of course, Hanrahan wanted to return to the saloon with the needed ammunition, and he suggested that the two men make a return dash to that building with the extra bullets. Yet Dixon was reluctant to accompany Hanrahan on the return trip to the saloon. He noticed that only six men were in the store which was less than the other buildings, and the presence of Mrs. Olds concerned him as well because he believed that the woman required extra protection. The men in the store begged

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105 Hathaway, 133; Masterson in Little, 80; and J. W. McKinley, “Narrative,” *Panhandle Plains Historical Review* 36 (1963): 63.

106 Dubbs, 59.

107 Dixon, 216-17.
Dixon to stay with them to provide one more marksman in the fight. Hanrahan finally lost patience with the situation, and he was determined to return to the saloon. He placed the needed ammunition in a sack. “We opened the door quickly for him, and away he went, doing his level best all the way to his saloon, which he reached without mishap.”

Many of the hide men were excellent shots, and they often loaded their cartridges with the precise amount of powder to give the desired effect when discharged. The tradition of holding competitions at long range in the United States had already been established. The year before the Creedmore rifle range had been established, and contests frequently included shooting at targets that were often more than one thousand yards [914 meters] away.

When Billy Dixon was in Rath’s store he made a long-distance shot that was admired by the other men. Dixon noted that one of the doors to Rath’s store had been well barricaded, but there was a window above the opening, and the marksman thought it would make a good sniper’s perch from which he could fire on the Indians. He climbed to the top of the barricade to have a better look, when he saw something “crawling along in the edge of the tall grass” at a distance of about eight hundred yards. Taking aim by leveling his gun with his elbow resting on one knee, the man fired. The recoil from the powerful .50 Sharp’s rifle caused him to fall backwards from the top of the perch. As he fell, he hit a washtub, some cooking utensils, and tin pans that made a “terrific crash as they struck the floor around me.” The noise startled everyone. Some of the other men ran to him wondering if the hunter had been shot or killed, but he assured them that the noise was only the result of his lack of balance when he fired his rifle.

The slightly embarrassed marksman was then even more determined to find the target he had shot at and to hit it. He crawled back to his perch upon the sacks. Dixon again saw the object move and he tried to hit it again. “I now fired a second time, and was provoked at seeing the bullet kick up the dirt just beyond the object.” Having used the first two shots to show him how to adjust his aim, the hunter shot yet again. “I tried the third time and made a center shot.” Apparently the Indian never moved again. After the fight, Dixon went to see the results of his marksmanship. He found “a dead Indian lying flat on his stomach, . . . naked, save for a white cloth wrapped around his hips.” One of the dead man’s knees had been broken by a bullet. Dixon believe that, “He had crawled a quarter of a mile with shattered knee before I killed him.”

William Thornton Parker hit an Indian at long range during the battle. At the outbreak of the fighting, he had gone to Rath’s store to find the door barricaded with sacks of flour. Once inside the building, Parker viewed his surroundings and “noticed something wrong at the base of the hills about 800 yards [732 meters] away.” The white marksman fired several shots so he could get the range on the distant target. Finally, after a very long shot, “the object stopped moving.” After the fight, Parker walked to the location to see what he had been shooting at and found the

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108 Ibid.

109 Ibid., 218-19.

110 Ibid., 219.

111 Dixon in Baker and Harrison, 65.
body of a dead Indian. The warrior had been hit twice. “He had his knee crushed with a bullet, and had crawled and dragged himself a quarter of a mile [402 meters], when I hit him a center shot through the breast and finished him.”

The hide men’s ability to hit targets at long range seemed to dishearten the Indians. The warriors rode their horses back and forth across the valley from side to side obviously trying to coordinate their attacks and future movements. This “exposed them to our fire. So we began picking them off.” The Indians seemed to notice their mistake, and they began to ride in a bigger circle that kept them out of range. Dixon reported that the hide men’s fire with their long-range rifles was most effective. At one point when the Indians “were standing there having a council the hunters began to pick them off and killed a great many before they could get out of range.” Some of the white men believed that they had hit Isatai’s pony. Sam Smith stated, “One chief fell from his horse, and the medicine man’s horse was killed. This broke up the council.”

This even confirmed what the warriors probably realized much earlier in the battle. Isatai had no magical powers to defend the warriors from the bullets of the white men. Clearly, the outcome of the battle meant that medicine man had been thoroughly disgraced. The Indians were supposed to defeat the white defenders of Adobe Walls easily had been unsuccessful despite numerous attempts to overwhelm their adversaries, and they were forced to fall back. Some of the Cheyenne Indians suggested that they whip or even kill the impostor. Other warriors were less vengeful stating that Isatai had already suffered great disgrace and he need not be punished further. Quanah Parker remembered that one of the Indians insulted the medicine man, “What’s the matter [with] your medicine . . . you [have] pole cat [skunk] medicine.” Isatai lived probably until 1912 at Fort Sill, and many of the Indians dismissed him as an old fool by calling him, “that comical fellow.”

The Indians affirmed that the hide men did much damage with their long-range shooting. One of the Comanche warriors in the battle, Co-hay-yah, stated, “The Buffalo hunters were bad . . . They sure killed us [at long distances]. . . . Buffalo hunters had awful long range [with their weapons]. Sometimes we wouldn’t be thinking of it and they would kill our horses. . . . No wonder they could kill the buffalo!” Another warrior recalled that a group of their men were approaching with their horses “trying to devise some means of rescuing their dead.” Then “suddenly, and without warning or apparent cause, one of the warriors fell from his horse dead.” The companions of the fallen man dismounted to see what had happened to him, and they saw that he had been shot through the head. The shot had been made at such a long distance that the

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113Dixon, 219.

114Dixon and Smith in Baker and Harrison, 64-5.

115Baker and Harrison, 72.

116Co-hay-yah in Baker and Harrison, 66.
warriors did not even hear the sound of the rifle.\textsuperscript{117}

A Comanche warrior, Timbo, also told about the shooting skill of the hide men. A number of men went around the side of the trading post with Timbo because they believed that the buildings had fewer openings from which to shoot at that location, when one of their men fell from his horse. Timbo stated that the hunters were digging holes in the side of one of the building from which to shoot better. He guessed that “a white man poked his rifle through there and took good aim, for he dropped him dead, shot squarely through the back. We got his body and dragged it behind the hill.” Quanah Parker agreed about the skill of the hide men, “They killed us in sight and out of sight.”\textsuperscript{118}

**The Battlefield**

Late in the afternoon of 27 June 1874, there appeared to be a lull in the fighting, when Jim “Bermuda” Carlisle saw a trinket probably near an Indian body, and he risked his life and went outside to retrieve it. Since no one fired on him, the man went outside another time to retrieve more artifacts, and others realized that the danger had subsided. They also left the buildings to examine the battlefield and to retrieve anything of interest left by the Indians. These items included “warbonnets, weapons, shields, quirts, kerchiefs, bridles and a number of scalps.”\textsuperscript{119} Billy Dixon also ventured away from the store. He wondered about a horse that had been standing near the saloon for hours. Finally, the animal had been killed by the Indians. When the hide hunter reached the carcass, he saw a “dead warrior who had fallen in such a way as to make fast the rope that held the horse.” When Dixon examined the animal, he saw that a scalp was fastened near the bit “which evidently had been taken from the head of a white woman, the hair being dark brown in color and about fifteen inches [38 centimeters] long.” He also retrieved a silver bridle from the horse’s body.\textsuperscript{120}

Billy Dixon also examined the sod house that was outside the buildings where the hide hunters had made their stand. During the battle, he had seen feathers whipping around the corner of the house every time there was a breeze. Believing that an Indian lurked there, the hide hunter had often shot at the corner of the building, knocking a piece of sod off the structure with every discharge of his rifle. When the Dixon went around the corner of the building, he jumped back when he saw an Indian, fearing that the warrior would kill him. Upon closer examination, the hunter saw that the man was dead, but the corpse sat in a lifelike position. “There sat a painted and feathered warrior in a perfectly upright position with his legs crossed and his head turned to one side in the most natural way imaginable.” The man’s “neck was broken and he was dead as they ever made them.” Dixon realized that he had been shooting at the dear warrior’s lance which

\textsuperscript{117}Ibid., 66.

\textsuperscript{118}Timbo and Quanah Parker in Baker and Harrison, 66.

\textsuperscript{119}Baker and Harrison, 73.

\textsuperscript{120}Dixon, 222.
Late in the day, when the hide men realized they could move around outside the buildings without the danger of being killed on the spot, they were concerned about the bodies of Tyler and the Scheidler brothers. The hunters took the corpses of their friends, wrapped them in blankets, and buried them in a common grave on the north side of the corral. The hunters placed no marker above the graves of these men, but they never forgot where they had lain them to rest. Perhaps to honor their fallen comrades, Billy Dixon commented rather poetically about their condition, “The boys are sleeping as quietly and as restfully as if they had been buried in the village churchyard back home.” The ordeal of the battle had been very taxing on the white men, and many of the hunters suffered mentally afterwards. As Billy Dixon reported, “What we had experienced ate into a man’s nerves.”

Few if any of the defenders slept at all the night after the battle because they feared that outside in the darkness of night the Indians were still watching and looking for the opportunity to kill any white man. The hide men took some comfort in the belief that the Indians rarely attacked at night, but the hunters were afraid of a renewed advance at dawn when the shadows were long and when the men could be sleeping soundly. This fear caused one man to overreact when he thought he saw a warrior. “Late in the night a sentry alarmed the camp by firing on what he mistook for an Indian proceeding toward a building. It was a dog and the sentry made a good shot” by hitting the animal.

In the next morning after the battle, the Indians kept firing at the trading post at long distances. This firing did little damage, and the hunters paid little attention to it. The hide men took a better look at the site of the battle, and it was a scene of complete devastation. Dixon reported, that the “next morning the pet crow was the only living object to be seen in the valley.” Crows are avid scavengers, and they are also omnivorous, and they will often eat almost anything from fruits and nuts to meat. That morning, “He was holding high carnival on the dead horses, flying from one carcass to another” to eat them.

**Warning the other Hide Hunters**

The hide men at Adobe Walls had survived the first day of battle, but they were still worried about the dangers they yet faced, and they were also concerned about the other hunters that were still far away from any protective buildings. Some of the other hide men could hear the sound of gunfire at a great distance, and they realized that a battle was taking place. They correctly believed that they were in potential danger if hostile Indians intercepted them.

When Frank J. Brown and his group of hunters heard the report of heavy gunfire, they believed that a battle was in progress at the trading post. They were afraid that they could be killed if they returned to their own camp, so they decided to return to Adobe Walls by an unusual

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121 Ibid., 222-3.

122 Ibid., 227-8.

123 McKinley, “Narrative,” 63.

124 Dixon, 229.
route. Arriving the next day, they could see the trading post from a distance, but they could also see many warriors all over the hills nearby. "The Indians were thick on every side but I noticed they kept out of range of the guns from the stockade."125

The fact that the warriors kept a distance from the trading post gave these hide men the opportunity they needed to run to the buildings. Some of the men drove the wagons while others rode next to them with their guns ready for action. Luckily for them, the men at Adobe Walls saw their desperate race, and the marksmen from the Myers and Leonard store set down a heavy covering fire to protect them. Fortunately, the Indians fell back. As Brown recalled, "We whipped up our horses and went in on the run. The men had the gate open. If they hadn’t... shot so well from the inside, I don’t believe we’d ever made it."126

However, many other hunters were too far away to hear the din of battle or to know anything about the fight, and these men had to be warned. Billy Dixon surmised that after their attacks on the trading post many Indians might split up into small bands to raid the countryside. His guess was correct, and these bands directly threatened any hide men in the area. The hunters at Adobe Walls discussed the situation, and they believed that there were enough men to defend the trading post in the case of renewed attacks, so a few very brave men decided they would go to spread the warning. All the horses had been killed, so the men would have to travel on foot. They could be easily apprehended and killed by any warriors on horseback.

At 10 PM (2200 hours) in the evening following the first-day fighting, Seth Hathaway and Dutch (German) Henry set out on foot to warn the others. They had heard that Charlie Newell’s camp was on the Palo Duro Canyon far away which they reached at dawn. The two exhausted men rested for an hour, where they split up to warn more men. Hathaway continued to Gardner’s camp, and Henry went to some other hunters they believed were in the area. When Hathaway found Gardner’s group, the men became quite excited at the news of the attack on Adobe Walls. These hide men then loaded their wagon and fled immediately to San Francisco Creek because they thought it was the safest place.127

But when they arrived the next morning, they realized the Indians had been there one day earlier because “everything was cut up and destroyed.” Upon examination, they found the body of a man named Sharpe who had been Dutch Henry’s partner. The evidence suggested that Sharpe had killed some buffaloes about six or seven hundred yards up the stream. He was in the act of skinning them when he saw the Indians approach. Desperately, he ran for the dugout that was part of the camp, but he lost his race to safety, and he was killed. They “found his body about half way between the dead buffaloes and camp.”128

Soon after, Dutch Henry arrived with the companies led by Hoodeo Brown and Gus Johnson, and they helped bury Sharpe’s body. Charlie Newell arrived that night, and he was


126Ibid.

127Hathaway, 133-4.

128Ibid., 134.
taking his family to a settlement for protection. By this time, there were twelve men in the group. Even though a small party of Indians showed up the next day and took a few shots at them, the whites were large enough in numbers to scare them off. This group of hunters remained in the field for weeks.

On one occasion, they were surrounded by about thirty Indians. The men placed the wagons about sixteen feet (5 meters) apart and tied their stock between the vehicles. “While some of the men stood the Indians off, the rest dug rifle pits.” A few of the warriors attempted to dash towards them from opposite sides to draw the hunter’s fire, but the men were good shots, and their adversaries did little damage. That night, the whites build a sod wall around two sides of their wagons that was about three feet (1 meter) high to protect them from additional attacks, but the Indians left without any further effort to overwhelm them.129

**The Death of William Olds**

Even after the Indians no longer attacked Adobe Walls, many warriors clearly stayed in the area after the battle, and they were in a position to renew the attacks or at least harass the defenders at the trading post. The hunters abandoned the saloon thinking that they could better fortify the other buildings, and they began to strengthen the defenses in the two stores. The men also removed some of the sod off the roofs of these buildings to construct look-out posts on top of them. This would allow them a clear view of the surrounding country in all directions.

Shortly after the battle, William Olds was taking his turn as a look out on top of one of the Rath’s store. Soon, “The lookout on the other buildings shouted that Indians were coming.” Reacting rapidly, “All of us ran for our guns and for shelter inside the buildings.” When he saw Indians approaching at a long distance, William Olds became excited. He called to the others and began rapidly running down the wooden ladder which led to his perch. As Billy Dixon reported, “Just as I entered Rath’s store I saw Olds coming down the ladder with his gun in his hand.” Apparently, the frightened man accidentally placed the butt of his rifle on the ladder’s steps to steady him when he came down. In that action, he inadvertently pointed the weapon towards his own head. Somehow, “the hammer struck one of the rounds [rungs] in the ladder,” or he jarred the weapon hard enough for it to discharge. “A moment later his gun went off accidentally, tearing off the top of Old’s head.”130

William Olds died instantly. The bullet entered his head under his chin and went entirely through his head. In the process, the shot splattered his bones, blood, and brains all over the room. The scene immediately became all the more tragic when Hannah Olds, William Olds’ wife, came into the room at the same instant. She was just in time “to see the body of her husband roll from the ladder and crumple at her feet, a torrent of blood gushing from the terrible wound.” The unfortunate scene was terrible and ghastly. Billy Dixon lamented having ever seen it. “Gladly would I have faced all the Indians from the Cimarron to Red River, rather than have witnessed this terrible scene.” Dixon believed that “it would have been better for any other man there to

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129Ibid., 134-5.

130Dixon, 235 and Van Sickel, 16.
have been taken than the husband of the only woman among us."\textsuperscript{131}

The woman’s “grief was intense and pitiable.” The hunters felt deeply for the Mrs. Olds in her distress, and they did what they could for her, but their efforts often seemed to be awkward. “Had we been called upon to fight for her, we would not have asked about the odds, but would have sailed in, tooth and toe-nail,” but they could do little to comfort her even though they did what they could. “When we tried to speak to her we just choked up and stood still.” They buried her husband the same evening only about sixty feet (18 meters) from where he died.\textsuperscript{132}

**Indian Losses**

The Indians commonly removed many of their wounded and dead comrades in battle, but they were unable to retrieve some of them that lay close to the guns of the white men inside the buildings. “Despite the utmost efforts of our savage foes to carry away their dead and wounded, thirteen dead Indians were left on the ground near the buildings, so closely under the muzzles of our guns that it would have been suicide for their comrades to have attempted their recovery.”\textsuperscript{133}

Apparently, a prominent Indian leader lay dead near the door of one of the buildings because the warriors tried to retrieve his body several times. They finally gave up perhaps thinking that the hunters were using the corpse as a trap to lure the Indians to their death. Yet the warriors were able to recover the body later. Under cover of the darkness in the night following the battle, one of them sneaked to the corpse, tied a rope around it, affixed the other end of the cord to a pony, and dragged the body away. The sound of this activity attracted the attention of the hunters, and they shot in the direction of the noise. The men missed their mark, but the warrior was successful in removing the corpse because the hide men were unable to find the body the day after the battle.\textsuperscript{134}

The hunters later found evidence that the Indians had removed their wounded for treatment. When the hide men ventured at a distance from the trading post they found “a lot of clothing, such as moccasins, leggings, blankets, etc., had been cut up and destroyed.” These materials might have also been cut up to use as bandages because “The fragments were bloody” probably meaning they had been used to cover wounds or to staunch bleeding. Dixon added “from these indications I judge that many of the Indians had died of their wounds.”\textsuperscript{135}

The total number of Indian losses in the battle cannot be determined precisely. Billy Dixon said thirteen bodies were found after the battle, which is the most common number reported in the survivor accounts, but Seth Hathaway reported that there were only seven. However, Hathaway left the trading post shortly after the fight, and he might not have known about all the bodies. Other reports stated that the hunters found nine or eleven bodies, and still

\textsuperscript{131}Dixon, 235.

\textsuperscript{132}Ibid., 235-6.

\textsuperscript{133}Ibid., 227-8.

\textsuperscript{134}Collins, 221-2.

\textsuperscript{135}Dixon in Parker, 62.
other accounts say that the hide men found from fourteen to twenty-seven dead warriors.\textsuperscript{136}

The Indian accounts tend to present relatively low numbers for casualties. Quanah Parker stated that “the white men killed six Comanches, 4 Cheyennes and some Arapahoes.” In the months and years following the battle, various Indian agents talked with the surviving warriors and came up with similar figures. J. M. Haworth stated that the Cheyennes lost five men, the Comanches six, and an additional warrior died later of wounds for a total of twelve. George Bent agreed with these figures, and the historian, Wilbur Sturtevant Nye, believed that fifteen had been killed, and many others had been wounded.\textsuperscript{137} However when asked how many of his men had been killed, Spotted Wolf, the Arapaho leader, held up “fingers on both hands three times and then five fingers on one hand” indicating that thirty-five men had been killed.\textsuperscript{138}

If the Indians had reason to downplay their losses as a matter of pride, the hide men could be expected to present larger numbers of warriors killed for the same reason. Apparently, most of the hunters thought they had killed roughly thirty Indians in the battle, which appears to be the most credible number. Frederick Leonard wrote a letter four days after the battle claiming “about 25 or 30 Indians were killed, we found 11” bodies. Other reports repeat the estimate of thirty Indian dead. Even General Nelson A Miles reported, “Nearly thirty of these were killed outright and sixty or seventy others were wounded.”\textsuperscript{139} Other estimates are much higher and they range from forty to seventy to seventy-five and more. Bat Masterson stated “over eighty [were] killed.” In a later account by Masterson claimed that “fully 100 . . . [were] shot dead or badly hurt.” The reports go as high as 150 warriors killed.\textsuperscript{140}

Seth Hathaway was aware of the tendency to exaggerate the numbers when engaging the warriors, and he urged caution when reporting on the Indian losses. He repeated an old saying by those involved in the wars, “You can never count a dead Indian till you have him in your hands.” Soon after, Hathaway ignored his own advice and repeated a rumor he had heard from “Mexican Charlie” who reportedly talked to the Indians about their casualties at Adobe Walls. “They told him there were sixty odd Indians killed, and over eighty wounded.”\textsuperscript{141}

**Dead Horses and Dead Indians**

The day after the battle the bodies of the dead horses and Indians began to rot in the hot weather, and the stench soon became offensive. The hide men knew they had to get rid of the bodies, but no horses were left alive which could drag them away. The men tied ropes to a few of their buffalo hides, and then rolled the dead bodies onto them. It took three or four men to drag a

\textsuperscript{136}Hathaway, 133 and Baker and Harrison, 70-1.

\textsuperscript{137}Nye, *Carbine and Lance*, 191.

\textsuperscript{138}Baker and Harrison, 71.

\textsuperscript{139}Miles, 160.

\textsuperscript{140}Baker and Harrison, 71-2.

\textsuperscript{141}Hathaway, 135.
dead horse away, but by this means, the hunters were then able to pull the bodies far enough from the camp to keep the awful smell from reaching the people at the post.

At one location near Hanrahan’s store, twelve dead horses laid in a pile. The hunters then dug a pit near the mound of bodies, and then rolled the corpses into it. Some of the other bodies were treated differently. They were not placed in a pit and were not buried at all. As Billy Dixon reported, “The other horses and the Indians were dragged off on the prairie and left to the coyotes and buzzards.”

The hide hunters probably felt embittered because of the long battle, the four white people who were killed in the fighting, and the fear of being killed. Some of them took revenge on the bodies of the dead Indians. The hide men cut the heads off several warriors and used these ghastly trophies to adorn the gate that led into the corral Leonard and Myers’ store. These heads had been scalped, and they had been place on wooden pegs near the opening. Billy Dixon came back to the scene of battle with the army in August 1874 where he saw the heads, “Some mischievous fellow had stuck an Indian’s skull on each post of the corral gate.”

Apparently, W. C. Cox was involved in the grotesque vengeance on dead men and later recalled, “We pitched out their headless bodies like you would a dead dog’s.” J. Phelps White visited the area three years later in 1877 and said, “The skeletons of some twelve or fifteen Indians were out behind the houses where the boys had dragged and left them.” Many years afterwards, “Brick” Bond also described the scene. “They were a hideous looking sight, for they looked like they had been laughing when their heads were cut off.”

Colonel Nelson A. Miles took a cavalry unit to Adobe Walls in the months following the battle, and he confirmed what the newspapers had said about the bodies of the warriors. “Twelve more were left where they fell, and the heads of these twelve men were found adorning the gateposts of the hunters’ Corral.” The white people were often horrified by the fact that many Indians severely mutilated their dead adversaries to make sure these enemies did not have a complete body to pursue them in the afterlife. As hideous as this seemed to the whites, they were sometimes involved in similar activities.

Billy Dixon’s Legendary Shot

Dixon slept fitfully after the battle, “I dreamed all night, the bloody scenes of the day passing in endless procession through my mind.” In his imagination, “I could see the Indians charging across the valley, hear the roar of the guns and the blood-curdling war-whoops, until everything was a bewildering swirl of fantastic colors and movements.” Dixon certainly could have started to suffer from post traumatic stress disorder at that point, a condition that could have

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142Dixon, 230.
143Ibid., 248.
144Baker and Harrison, 97-8.
145Miles, 160 and 163.
146Dixon, 228.
bothered him for the rest of his life. Yet his mental distress was an insufficient distraction to keep him from making one of the most legendary shots in the battle and perhaps in the history of the American West. It has even been considered as possibly “the greatest rifle shot ever made by an American marksman in battle.”

Late in the siege, a group of Indians appeared at a long distance from the trading post. Billy Dixon reported that “a party of about fifteen Indians appeared on the side of the bluff east of Adobe Walls Creek.” Some of the men suggested that Dixon “try my big ‘50’[fifty caliber Sharps rifle] on them.” The hide hunter estimated the distance as being “not far from three fourths of a mile [1207 meters].” The marksman stated, “I took careful aim and pulled the trigger. We saw an Indian fall from his horse.” The other Indians then fled obviously to keep from becoming targets themselves. Two courageous warriors soon dashed forward and dragged away the body of the fallen man.

Emmanuel Dubbs gave a slightly different spin on the event. While Dubbs was clearly impressed with the shot, he maintained that the target was only about eight hundred yards (732 meters) away. He stated that during the siege “An Indian climbed out upon a rock” at that distance. The warrior was sure that he was safe because he was far away. “Believing no doubt that he was out of range of our guns,” he began to show his utter contempt for the hunters when “he turned his back toward us making indecent motions.” This obscene gesture was too much of an insult to go unanswered, and “Billy Dixon picked up his ‘big fifty Sharp’s,’ took careful aim, and fired.” The shot seemed to be directly on the mark because “Mr. John Big Indian” was apparently hit. The man “doubled up and rolled end over end down the mountain.” Apparently, with some satisfaction Dubbs claimed, “They never tried the experiment any more.”

Willis Skelton Glenn was a hide hunter who knew some of the men at Adobe Walls. They told him that a large number of Indians assembled at a small hill about 1400 yards (1280 meters) away. Clearly these warriors believed that they were at too great a distance to be hit by rifle fire from the hide men, but the hunters did their best to prove them wrong. Several of them fired at their distant targets, and one of the Indians finally fell being hit by a bullet. Each of the whites claimed to have hit the mark, and no one was at first certain to whom to give the credit. Finally, some of the hunters went to the spot where the warrior had fallen, and they found the body. They still could not tell who’s bullet had killed him until one of the men cut the projectile out of the corpse. It proved to be a new Sharps bullet believed to be identical to the round used by Billy Dixon.

The distance of the shot seems to have increased with the telling of the story over time. In the first edition of Billy Dixon’s memoirs published in 1914, the distance of the shot is listed as 1200 yards (1097 meters). In the second edition published in 1927, the distance of the shot is

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148Dixon, 233.

149Dubbs, 63.

150Glenn in Baker and Harrison, 67.
stated as 1538 yards (1406 meters). In 1924, a surveyor measured the supposed distance of the shot and maintained that it was 1,028 yards (940 meters).  

Questions still remain on the actual distance of the shot, or if it was possible. Modern marksmen using similar rifles as those of the hunters, have been able to accomplish impressive feats, and some have been able to hit a 36 inch (91.4 centimeters) target consistently at 990 yards (905 meters), but significantly longer distances are much more challenging. Recent examinations of the location of the shot indicate that the distance of shot was about 1400 yards (1280 meters). As recently as 2015, modern researchers have visited the site of the battle and examined the shot scientifically. Mike Cox reported that “To appreciate the significance of Dixon’s shot, it’s important to know that bullets do not follow the line of sight when fired. A projectile’s arc-like course is affected by its rate of spin, gravity, air drag, temperature (it goes farther the warmer the air), elevation (the higher the elevation, the more a bullet’s range) and wind.”

Dr. James A. Baily stated that the bullet would have dropped approximately 26.5 feet (8 meters) in the course of its trajectory. Baily also surmised that Dixon had to account for any wind that might have been blowing at the time. If the breeze had been only fourteen miles an hour (22.5 kilometers) then the “gritty buffalo hunter would have had to train his weapon 337 inches (8.6 meters) to one side or another.” Another researcher, Roy Young, gave a summation on Dixon’s skill. “He was either the best shot in the West . . . or the luckiest.”

Billy Dixon seemed to agree with the assessment that it was a lucky shot, and he admitted, “A number of exaggerated accounts have been written about this incident.” He confirmed that he made the shot, but he added that there was perhaps as much luck as skill involved in hitting a target at such long range. “I was admittedly a good marksman, yet this was what might be called a ‘scratch’ [chance or lucky] shot.”

The Call for Help

In the days following the initial attack on Adobe Walls, dozens of hunters came to the trading post seeking safety. Their number eventually reached between one and two hundred, but many Indians remained nearby. For at least a week, the hide men saw warriors, most often at a distance, and the two sides frequently exchanged shots or briefly skirmished. This large number of hostile Indians convinced the hunters that they were still in danger, and they needed additional supplies and manpower to secure their safety. The problem was that no messengers had been sent to Dodge City to call for such aid.

On 1 July 1874, about four days after the initial attack, the men at Adobe Walls decided to send a courier for help. Frederick Leonard composed the message, and he addressed it to A. C. Myers, his partner. The letter presented a brief account of the attack and subsequent siege of the trading post, but the writer seemed to be more interested in preserving the goods at Adobe Walls than in saving lives. Leonard explained that he might have to abandon the store unless aid arrived, “The hunters are sick of hunting so they say, and are apt to leave without a moment’s
warning.” He added, “I am willing to stay if I can get enough men to hold the place.” This number was “an escort of fifty men.”

Anyone carrying the message would clearly be risking his life because the Indians were still nearby, but Henry Lease volunteered. A German hide man, George Bellfield, loaned his horse. The brave messenger led the animal into the night, but the moon was full, so he could find his way along the Canadian River. He rode the horse at night, so he would be harder to see, and he arrived safely in Dodge City on July 5, 1874 after a journey of about 150 miles (241.4 kilometers). The hunters at the trading post were doubtful Lease had come safely to his destination, and they sent another man, known only as Reed, with a similar message. This man also arrived safely on July 8 with the notice that Adobe Walls was still under siege. The courage of Lease and Reed is unquestionable, but they also received about $200 for making the journey, a large sum of money at the time.

When the men at the trading post were waiting for reinforcements and support, they slept wherever they could. One man unwisely placed his bed near the well outside the buildings. When Andrew Johnson was on guard duty one night, he was surprised to hear someone splashing in the water. Clearly someone had fallen into the well. When Johnson asked what was the matter, the man “stared swearing and cursing.” He also said, “I would kill the man that dug this well.” Johnson admitted that he was the man who had dug the well, but he happily reported, “You can see that he did not kill me.”

When no relief came from Dodge City, the hunters thought that both messengers had been killed, but their fears lessened considerably when they no longer saw the warriors in the area. The men thought it unwise to keep hunting for buffalo, and could not longer make money by selling hides at the trading post, so many of them decided to leave. The men also had gotten tired of their cramped conditions and tempers flared. When a man named Brown was sent to retrieve a rifle belonging to Hannah Olds, he nearly got into a shootout with James Hanrahan. Cooler heads kept the two men from killing each other, and Bat Masterson soon returned the gun to Mrs. Olds, but few seemed to be sorry when a number of men left the post the next morning. One man called to them, “Goodbye, we don’t care for any of you [who are] leaving, except Billy Dixon.” Both Masterson and Dixon left the post on the same day, probably 13 July 1874.

On the second day of their journey, the men came to a camp where they found the dead body of Charley Sharp. “He had been dead about a week, and the body was shockingly mutilated.” Sharp was probably an Irishman because he was known as “Dublin,” and he had been the hunting partner of Henry Lease. Unfortunately, Lease’s courage in bringing the news of the attack on Adobe Walls to Dodge City had not been in time to save his friend. The men buried

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156Johnson in Baker and Harrison, 99-100.

Sharp where they found his body.\textsuperscript{158}

The men reached Dodge City several days later without further problems. The hunters who came from the trading post did not know if the messengers had arrived with the news of the battle, and they were surprised that the people of the city were anxious to hear more about the fight. The city was very excited about the war, “and the whole town turned out to see us.” The people in town “asked thousands of questions” in their eagerness to find out what had happened at Adobe Walls and what had driven most of the hid hunters to take shelter at Dodge City. The men were greatly relieved to be in the relative comfort and safety of the town, and they soon sought the various forms of entertainment of the city. However, while these men relaxed, the war continued.\textsuperscript{159}

The merchants in Dodge City had been slow in organizing a relief party to come to the aid of the men at the trading post. They had to find men and organize a train of heavy freight wagons, which took time. Most importantly, they wanted a military escort to accompany them, and they appealed to the governor of Kansas, Thomas A. Osborn, for help. Osborn took the pleas seriously, and he appealed directly to the army for help. Yet the overall commander of the Department of the Missouri stationed at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, was General John S. Pope, and he refused to send aid.

The General was reluctant to help because the thought that the white hide hunters should have not been in the area, and they deserved what happened to them. Pope flatly refused when he replied to the governor. “I have no men to send down to the unlawful trading Posts in the Indian Country south of Dodge without endanger[ing] the safety of honest & respectable Frontier settlers in Kansas.” Pope was dishonest because he had not deployed all the forces available to him for the protection of the whites, and he had enough manpower to help the relief party. The General suggested that the hide hunters leave all their possessions and run to safety. “It is presumed that as soon as the Buffalo hunters now defending these illegal trading posts are willing to abandon the Goods, they can get away as easily as their messengers can.” Any assistance from the army was much delayed.\textsuperscript{160}

General Pope had failed to follow the army’s policy of protecting white people from Indians no matter what the circumstances. More than one month after Pope’s refusal of aid, his superior, General Philip H. Sheridan, sent his subordinate a sharp rebuke on 21 August 1874. “You should have sent [aid] to the relief of the hunters or traders close to in at Adobe Walls.” No matter what “may have been the character of these men, they were in distress, & They came near being all massacred, and they had the legal right to hunt or trade at that point for it is in Texas.” Sheridan then stated clearly, “You should have used the troops for the protection of life and property wherever it might have been.”\textsuperscript{161} Unfortunately, for the hide men, Sheridan’s rebuke

\textsuperscript{158}Ibid., 243-4.

\textsuperscript{159}Ibid., 244.

\textsuperscript{160}Baker and Harrison, 103.

\textsuperscript{161}Ibid., 103-4.
came too late to help them, and they still had to rely on other resources for their safety.

The business owners in Dodge City organized a wagon train to retrieve the goods at Adobe Walls, and they offered anyone who would accompany them the handsome some of forty dollars a month plus meals. Unfortunately, the relief party was much delayed because the merchants still hoped that the army would accompany them. No doubt, they realized that if they had a military escort, then the merchants would not have to pay the civilians to protect the wagons. The group left Dodge City on 16 July just a day before the hide men fleeing the trading post arrived in that town. The wagons proceeded slowly, but they finally arrived either on 22 or 23 July. The men at Adobe Walls were very pleased to receive the aid they so badly needed. The men loaded about forty thousand hides onto their wagons and returned to Dodge City on 5 August. Many of the men left as well, and Mrs. Olds went with them. A few of the hide men agreed to remain at the trading post to protect it from destruction. Some of the merchants hoped that they would again use the post after the Indian uprising had been suppressed.162

The Army Comes to Adobe Walls

No doubt reacting to General Sherman’s rebuke for failing to come to the aid of the hide men, General Pope sent his forces to protect the traders and to drive the Indians back to their reservations. One of the most important units sent to deal with the warriors was the famed 5th Infantry regiment under the command of Colonel Nelson A. Miles who would prove to be one of the most effective Indian fighters in American history. The Colonel wisely realized that he needed scouts to aid his troops in their campaigns, and clearly the men who knew most about the area were the hide hunters. When John Curley told Billy Dixon that Miles was looking for scouts, the hide man hurried to volunteer. He signed up on 6 August 1874, and he served in that capacity until 10 February 1883. Dixon joined with his friend, Bat Masterson. Colonel Miles wanted to test the shooting skill of his scouts and ordered them to “shoot at a snag in the river.” He called out the names of the marksmen “as he pointed out the objects each was to shoot at.” Dixon was most impressive as he admitted, “I never missed a single shot.”163

The master plan was for the army to converge on the areas of northwest Texas inhabited by the hostile Comanche, Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Arapaho Indians from five different directions. Colonel Ranald McKenzie was ordered to move north from Fort Concho, Texas, and Lieutenant Colonel George P. Buell was to advance to the northwest from Fort Griffin, Texas. At the same time, Major William R. Price was to move east from Fort Union, New Mexico, and Colonel John W. Davidson was to advance from Fort Sill, Oklahoma (then Indian Territory). Colonel Nelson Miles was supposed to converge from the north, starting his advance at Fort Dodge, Kansas. The four columns were supposed to move toward the same area and for the purpose of apprehending the Indians, but there were no plans for them to coordinate their activities. Nelson A. Miles organized his command into two battalions of cavalry under Major C. E. Compton and Major James Biddle, four companies of infantry, a detachment of artillery under Lieutenant James W. Pope, and a group of friendly Delaware Indian guides, and frontier scouts under Lieutenant Frank

162 Ibid., 104-5.

163 Dixon, 246.
The command under Colonel Miles marched out on 14 August 1874 under trying weather conditions. “The season was also one of intense heat, the whole western portion being parched, blistered and burnt up in a universal drouth [drought].” During the march, “the heat, even for the month of August, being unusually intense, great suffering was experienced on the part of both the troops and the animals.” This led to the loss of nearly all the dogs with the command. “So intense, indeed, was this heat that of the large number of favorite dogs that had accompanied the train when we moved from Fort Dodge, only two remained with the command when we reached Camp Supply about a hundred miles [160 kilometers] south.” The men and animals of Miles’ command would face many more challenges from the heat as the command advanced.

Colonel Nelson Miles soon ordered Lieutenant Frank Dwight Baldwin to lead his detachment of scouts and a company of cavalry to Adobe Walls. Lieutenant Baldwin was to become one of the most legendary men in the United States Army because he is one of only nineteen soldiers to be awarded the Medal of Honor, the nation’s highest decoration for valor, twice. The first time was during the Civil War in 1864 when he boldly went into the Confederate lines. His citation read “Led his company in a countercharge at Peach Tree Creek, Ga., 12 July 1864, under a galling fire ahead of his own men, and singly entered the enemy’s line, capturing and bringing back 2 commissioned officers, fully armed, besides a guidon of a Georgia regiment.” The second award was granted to him after he rescued two white girls late in 1874 who had been held prisoner by the Indians, an event which will be described later.

The men still defending Adobe Walls were pleased to see their old friends, Masterson and Dixon, come riding into the trading post on 18 August 1874 ahead of Baldwin’s column of soldiers and scouts. The Lieutenant had realized the danger of riding into the post after dark because the defenders might mistake them for hostile Indians, so he had sent Masterson and Dixon ahead with the message that the hide men had nothing to fear from the men approaching on horseback. As Dixon described, “I rode up within speaking distance and hollowed to the men and waved my hat, to let them know who I was. Recognizing me, they gave me a hearty welcome.” In celebration the men at the post fixed some food for their old friends. “The boys cooked me a hot supper and I was telling them stories of the outside world when the soldiers arrived about 9 o’clock.”

Lieutenant Baldwin was curious about the battle that had taken place at the post, and on the next morning, he invited Dixon to walk over the area and to describe the fighting. Their conversation attracted much attention, and “practically all the men went with us.” The group eventually wandered about one mile (1.4 kilometers) from the post. Clearly, the arrival of the soldiers had given everyone a false sense of security, and many men let down their guard with...
disastrous results. “Everybody was laughing and talking and telling jokes, without the slightest thought of danger.” Dixon stated that Tobe Robinson and George Huffman had been out searching for wild plums on the banks of the Canadian River that morning when they were attacked. Baldwin added a few details. He wrote in his diary that he was riding with an officer and four of his men toward the trading post when the action began. “I had proceeded about half a mile [1 kilometer] when I heard the yells of wild Indians who were in pursuit of 5 men who belonged at the stockade, two of them mounted and three in a wagon.”

A war party of about fifteen Indians came riding towards the men. Dixon saw the “two horsemen riding at top speed from the direction of the river toward the Walls.” Robinson and Huffman were riding their horses as fast as possible while the warriors were attempting to get ahead of them and cut off their line of retreat. Dixon and the other hunters were too far from the trading post to grab their rifles and come to the aid of the fleeing men. The two white men were riding next to each other, and they kept their distance from the pursuers until they reached a small hill.

Apparently, they had to slow down to make the turn around the hill, which allowed an Indian “to ride up near enough to run his lance through Huffman’s body,” and “Huffman fell dead from his horse.” The fallen man’s mount kept running beside Robinson’s horse, and the Indian still charged after them. The warrior tried several times to grab the rein of Huffman’s horse. “Finally, he seized the rein, checked the horse, and rode back at full speed toward his companions.” The hunters took some comfort from the fact that “Robinson reached us in safety, though shaking from excitement” and fear. “From the Indian standpoint, the warrior who had killed Huffman and escaped with his horse had covered himself with glory.”

Lieutenant Baldwin and his group were also in grave danger during the attack, but they escaped without harm. The warriors “had run very close on my little party who had opened [fire] on them, [and] we made our way to the stockade through a shower of bullets.” The Indians withdrew, but Baldwin organized his men and chased the warriors about a dozen miles [20 kilometers] “over the worst kind of sand hills,” but the soldiers only succeeded in seizing a few Indian ponies. The hide men took Huffman’s body and buried him next to the others who had fallen in defense of Adobe Walls. In all “this made five graves” for the people who had been killed at the trading post since the war started in June 1874. When the Lieutenant gave chase to the other Indians, they “retreated south before him, burning what there was of prairie grass behind them.”

The hide men at Adobe Walls believed that they were still in danger of another Indian
attack, and they decided to abandon the post entirely to join with Lieutenant Baldwin’s force and return to the safety of Dodge City. Baldwin agreed with the decision even though he wondered if it were wise to leave the supplies still located at the trading post. The army officer had said he could give them enough ammunition to defend themselves, but the twenty-two men still at the post decided they had risked their lives long enough. They left with Baldwin’s command on 20 August 1874 thus ending the occupation of the post. In the weeks that followed, the Indians wreaked their revenge on the buildings. The warriors came to the location and burned everything they could. Only the saloon escaped destruction.\(^{173}\)

The white men got some revenge for Huffman’s death when they came upon two “Indian scouts camped by a small fire with meat roasting on a stick.” When the two warriors heard the approach of the white men, they tried to get away. One was successful, but the scout, Lemuel T. Wilson, killed the other. Wilson said his victim “came from behind a stump, and we met face to face not over six feet [2 meters] apart.” The scout stated that one of the two men had to die. In what sounded like an account of a gunfight in the Old West where two antagonists faced each other and drew their weapons, Wilson stated, “I beat him to it, and I took his scalp.” The scout believed his victim was a great warrior named “Whizzing Arrow.” Wilson also tried to kill the other Indian, but “I shot several times but missed him.” The white man was pleased to have killed the warrior because Indians had killed and scalped his favorite uncle years before, and he had promised his grandmother that when he grew to manhood he would find and “kill an Indian to avenge Uncle Jim.”\(^ {174}\)

**The Miles Campaign**

Lieutenant Baldwin rejoined Colonel Miles’ command on 24 August 1874. The Miles expedition then was comprised of eight companies from the 6\(^{th}\) Cavalry and five from the 5\(^{th}\) Infantry. In addition, the command brought a ten-pound Parrott gun, which was a rifled cannon, and two Gatling guns under the command of Lieutenant J. W. Pope. With about 150 civilian employees, the entire command numbered about one thousand men.\(^ {175}\)

With such a large force, the Colonel was confident that he could meet any challenge from the Indians. When his men marched out, Miles stated, “the chase now began in earnest” to catch his adversaries. Every morning the army broke camp at five o’clock and advanced with its wagon train “marching about twenty-five miles [40 kilometers] each day.” The men soon suffered “hardships and privations which it is seldom the misfortune of man to be called upon to endure.” The drought was so intense that many of the stream beds, where the men had hoped to get water, had become dry. The soldiers only found stagnant water holes, but the moisture was often so full of gypsum that those who tried to drink it learned that the water increased their thirst rather than

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\(^{173}\) Baldwin in Baker and Harrison, 107.


alleviated it.\footnote{Miles, 166-7.}

The army’s pace of advance increased when Lieutenant Baldwin and his scouts struck what they thought might be the main Indian trail on 26 August. “From the large number of camps along its banks [of the Washita River], there must have been a very large force of them.” And “everything indicated a hasty flight.” On the following day, the soldiers believed that their enemies were only a short distance ahead of them. The warriors were evidently watching the approach of the army, and the Indians burned the prairie before the advancing soldiers to slow them down. That clearly left less fodder for the army’s horses and mules to eat, but the smoke from the fires might also have been a signal to other Indians that soldiers were nearby.\footnote{Marshall, \textit{Miles Expedition}, 15-16.}

To make their advance go faster, Colonel Miles ordered the main wagon train to be left behind, while only five ammunition wagons and two ambulances remained with the command. The soldiers were excited to meet the enemy, and they were willing to keep up the additional exertions to move faster. “The troops were elated at the prospect of meeting the foe; new life was infused into their weary limbs; and during the ensuing two days the marched sixty-five miles \[105 meters\], incredible as such an accomplishment may seem in such a country.” The feat is even more impressive with the “infantry and cavalry marching together.”\footnote{Miles, 167.}

On the morning of 30 August, the command was on the move at 4 AM with Lieutenant Baldwin’s scouts and friendly Indian guides in advance of the others. When a band of several hundred hostile Indians struck. “The Indians came over the hill, whooping, yelling and firing.”\footnote{Marshall, 16.} The scouts dismounted, fell to the ground, and opened fire from the prone position. These frontiersmen then “commenced pouring lead into the charging redskins.” Their accurate fire allowed them to hold their position until they remounted and advanced, forcing the Indians to retreat. The warriors were soon “charging back with greater rapidity than they advanced.” Colonel Miles soon sent cavalry units to support the scouts. Major Compton deployed his cavalry battalion to the right and Major Biddle positioned his men on the left. Lieutenant J. W. Pope soon brought his two Gatling guns forward for support.\footnote{Marshall, 16 and Miles, 167-8.}

The Gatling gun was the first successful rapid-fire weapon. It was a hand-cranked, multi-barreled gun that could shoot at the rate of two hundred rounds per minute, but it was cumbersome in operation, and it was also prone to jam. The gun was not well suited for offensive operations, but it was a superb defensive weapon that could easily intimidate any Indian force that faced it.\footnote{Paul Wahl and Donald R. Toppel, \textit{Gatling Gun}, (np: Arco, 1978).} In this instance, the Gatling guns rotated ten barrels, and they “worked to perfection
and when they commenced to vomit lead into the ranks of the . . . [Indians], they retreated in great confusion.” The ten-pound Parrott gun also gained great praise for its effectiveness in battle. As J. T. Marshall, a scout, wrote. “It . . . [blew] several Indians into the cool and behaved itself well throughout the fight.”

The army officers tried to make wise use of the terrain to give them an advantage over their adversaries, and Lieutenant Frank Baldwin ordered two scouts to dislodge some Indians on high ground. To keep out of sight, Lemuel Wilson and William F. Schmalsle crawled about two hundred yards (183 meters) in front of the army’s skirmish line, but some of the soldiers had not been told about their orders. Believing that the two men were Indians crawling away, the troopers opened fire on them. The scouts were then under fire of both the soldiers and the warriors, and they realized that they could not remain in that position. In desperation, Wilson called to Schmalsle, “Let’s get up and run for it.” The two men made a dash for the high ground, and fortunately for them, the Indians fell back immediately. After the two guides rejoined Baldwin’s command, they joined in the army’s attacks. In fact, the eighteen scouts with the Lieutenant were so enthusiastic that Baldwin had a hard time holding them back.

Captain A. R. Chaffee attempted to inspire his men with a speech when they went into battle. Addressing the many privates in his unit he yelled, “Forward!” and added with some humor, “If any man is killed I will make him a corporal.” Major Compton rode in front of his men. He waved his hat and led the troopers in an attack that pressed the Indians to fall back. At one point, a group of Indians had gathered on a hill and seemed to be holding a council. They were an inviting target, and Colonel Miles ordered Lieutenant Pope to bring up the ten-pounder Parrott cannon. Once again, the fearsome weapon did well. Wilson heard the command to fire, and the cannon soon boomed. “It seemed to me a long time before the shell hit.” The gunners aim was very good, and “it struck right in the middle of the bunch.” Apparently the shot inflicted no casualties, but these warriors immediately scattered to safer areas.

The Colonel kept pressing the warriors back by taking one hill after the other, and the army used these tactics almost the entire day. The battle had turned into a running fight. The warriors retreated rapidly over rough terrain, and the soldiers swept through the Indian camp that had been abandoned in such haste that they left their eating utensils on the ground, and they also left their campfires burning. The men also found, “lodge poles, beds, cooking utensils, camp equipage, etc.” The soldiers thought they had inflicted heavy casualties on their adversaries, and Marshall reported that “twenty-five dead Indians were found on the field after the fight, and they [the warriors] were seen to carry off as many more.” Only three soldiers were wounded in the battle. Michael Bartley was shot in the left leg, while the Delaware scout, Young Martin, was struck in the head with a spear, and George Everett, also a Delaware, was struck by a bullet in the face. The entire command received praise for their part in the battle, but the Delaware Indians

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182 Marshall, 17.


184 Miles, 168 and Wilson, 508.
were considered the most remarkable of them all.  

Unfortunately, the rapid pursuit left the soldiers exhausted. The “intolerable heat of sun and earth, and the absence of water, caused intense suffering among men and beasts,” and they were “almost famished from want of water.” The men had some hope of getting something to drink when they reached the stream bed of the Red River, which was about half a mile (1 kilometer) wide at that point. But the river was dry, and the men only found a small pool of stagnant water that was so saturated with gypsum and alkali that they could not drink it. Colonel Miles admitted that “During the chase the men tried every means of finding water, but without avail.” Many of them resorted to one of the most desperate measures imaginable to get some moisture. They had “suffered so greatly that some of them resorted to the extreme of opening the veins of their arms and moistening their parched and swollen lips with their own blood.” Many years later, Miles reflected on his lengthy military career, and he only remembered one other time when soldiers had become so desperate, and that was in the “arid plains of Arizona” in 1886.

The soldiers suffered for days from heat and lack of water until a major change came in the weather about ten or twelve days after their fight with the Indians. After a few drops hit the ground, the storm began in earnest. Lightning struck and the rains came that was a “drenching flood of water, and then came the fierce onslaught of the terrible storm in all its wild and relentless fury.” At first the cool water was refreshing, but it later seemed to be relentless, and the storms slashed with hail and rain. “From extreme heat to... cold harsh winds that are filled with particles of ice which neither man nor animal could face.” In just a few days the Red River went from an almost empty streambed to a channel that was filled with a torrent of water and all its tributaries, including creeks and rivulets, overflowed their banks.

Despite the problems related to searing heat and the icy rain, Colonel Miles decided to keep his soldiers in the field. He believed he could do more damage to the Indians if he kept his command in pursuit of them, to keep them moving, and to wear them down. The Colonel also knew that Indians trying to avoid the army would have no time or interest in attacking white settlers or travelers. His main problem a lack of supplies. “Therefore we determined to send our trains back for supplies, and to ourselves remain in the country and indefinite time, and until they [the Indians] were finally subjugated.”

**Lieutenant Baldwin’s Escape**

Colonel Miles ordered Captain Wyllis Lyman to take the empty wagons with him back to the supply base at Camp Supply, refill the vehicles with supplies, and return to the main command. The Captain left with a military escort and thirty-six empty wagons on 1 Sept. 1874. They later were joined by additional army units, and Lyman’s command numbered 104 men when they began their return journey. By that time, Colonel Miles was becoming increasingly

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185 Marshall, 16-17.

186 Miles, 168 and 491.

187 Ibid., 170-1.

188 Ibid., 170.
concerned about his supplies, and he sent Lieutenant Frank Baldwin with important messages for Camp Supply. Baldwin chose experienced hide hunters and army scouts to accompany him, William Frederick Schmalsle, Ira Wing, and Lemuel T. Wilson.

These men rode away from Miles' command at 4 PM on 6 September 1874. They had planned to ride at night and hide during the day, so the Indians would be much less likely to catch and kill them. The next morning, Lemuel Wilson was on guard, and he was exhausted from the overnight ride. "I was so drowsy I could hardly keep my eyes open." Fortunately, he had a trick to stay awake. "I chewed tobacco at that time, and I put tobacco spittle in my eyes to keep awake." He was very wise. "It was well I did or I would not have seen that Indian who was looking for us." The sleepy scout ran back to the other men in the party, and they shot the warrior Wilson had just seen. This alarm meant that the white men were ready when the Indian band charged them immediately.\textsuperscript{189}

In the attack, the warriors killed their pack mule, and the white men lost all their food. But they were lucky to be alive, and they still had the saddle bags on their horses. The four men grabbed their mounts and tried to run to safety. As Wilson described, "On we rode, firing as we went." But the warriors gave chase, "as soon as they could get their ponies." The scouts soon engaged in a running battle where they would stop, dismount, and fire on their adversaries. They would then remount and keep running. "This fighting kept up all day." Yet the scouts "had long-range army guns and were all good marksmen." In the flow of the fight, "we were corralled [surrounded] three times by Indians and fought our way out each time."\textsuperscript{190}

The running battle left the scouts exhausted and hungry by the end of the day. Overcome by the fear of his possible fate, Lieutenant Baldwin took a photograph of his wife and little girl from his pocket. He looked at it for a long time, shook his head sorrowfully and said, "I never expect to see you again." But the men were befriended by "fate" because a sudden rain storm struck. It was a cloudburst at first, but then a steady downpour followed. The rain may have been a reason why the Indians withdrew, and they "bothered us no more."\textsuperscript{191}

The men kept riding through the night, and they finally stopped to rest. They slept using their saddles for pillows and their saddle blankets for cover. On 8 Sept. 1874, the next morning, the men resumed their march. Late that afternoon the men found the body of a dead buffalo. They were so hungry that "we cut a big chunk [of meat] from his rump, which we ate raw." Wilson explained, "None of us had any matches, and if we had any [to start a fire], we would not dare to use them, as we were afraid to build a fire." Their precaution was wise because later in the afternoon they ran across a huge herd of about fifteen hundred horses, meaning that a large Indian encampment was nearby.\textsuperscript{192}

Lieutenant Baldwin was a courageous but also a foolish man, and he thought they could

\textsuperscript{189}Wilson, 509.

\textsuperscript{190}Ibid., 509-10.

\textsuperscript{191}Ibid., 510.

\textsuperscript{192}Ibid.
ride right through the camp before the Indians could react. Lemuel Wilson was far more cautious, and he suggested they go around the village. The two men started in different directions before the Lieutenant followed Wilson’s advice and went with him. Later, Baldwin often praised the scout for saving his life.

The men rode over a little ridge where they saw an Indian, “naked except for his G-string and moccasins.” The warrior was distracted by tending his horses and singing to himself, and he did not see the scouts. The white men were perplexed and the Lieutenant asked, “What will we do?” Wilson answered, “We can’t shoot; we are too close to their camp. We will catch him, disarm him, and take him with us.” The men rushed forward, grabbed the warrior, and pulled him to the ground. They disarmed the man and informed him by the use of signs, that if he made noise they would kill him. 193

The warrior they had captured was Tehan. The scouts learned that he was a white man who was then about eighteen years old. Apparently as a child of six, the Indians had captured him and raised him as one of their own. By the time he grew up, Tehan was culturally an Indian. Later when Ira Wing’s horse gave out, he rode the warrior’s pony while the Tehan, “had to trot or run most of the way.” 194

When the scouts came to the Canadian River, the stream was flooded by recent rains, and the white men had to make another decision about what to do with their captive. If they let him go, he would go to the Indian camp and spread the alarm. If they forced him to swim the river he would drown. Ira Wing suggested killing him but Wilson protested, “No, that would be murder; he is unarmed and helpless.” The men finally solved the problem by tying their prisoner to the tail of Wilson’s horse, so he could be pulled across the river safely. Finally, at 2:30 AM on 10 Sept. 1874, the scouts heard the call, “Halt, who goes there?” from an army sentry. They had stumbled onto Captain Lyman’s wagon train, and they had finally reached safety. When the famished scouts got something to eat, Lemuel Wilson was still protective of his prisoner, and he went to Captain Lyman’s tent requesting that the commander give orders that Tehan be fed. The Captain responded, “Yes, by all means.” 195

The young warrior put on a good act. After he was fed, he began to act as though he was very grateful to be among the whites again. He still remembered a little English, and he became friendly with the men who recently held him as a prisoner. His attitude was convincing, and the soldiers started to trust him. Lyman’s wagon train was under siege by Indians at that point, and Tehan convinced a guard to allow him to accompany a group of soldiers going out at night to get some water. He was even given a gun for protection. Taking advantage of the darkness, Tehan made his escape and returned to the people and to the culture that was most familiar to him. 196

The Battle of Lyman’s Wagon Train

193Ibid., 511.
194Ibid., 512.
195Ibid.
196Ibid., 513.
After Captain Lyman’s wagon train left Colonel Miles’ command on 1 September 1874, the
Captain pushed his men to meet the wagon train coming with supplies from Fort Supply. The two
groups met on 7 September, and “the stores were transferred in the midst of a wild storm and
rain.” Lyman immediately turned around and headed back. On 9 September at about 8 AM, the
men in Lyman’s command began to see Indians at a great distance to their front and sides.
Apparently, the warriors were gathering to attack, and Lyman ordered the wagons to proceed in
two columns about twenty yards (18 meters) apart for better defense.\textsuperscript{197}

The Indians exchanged shots with the soldiers at long range, but the wagons continued to
advance. The command reached a water hole, and the horses and mules were allowed to drink.
Also the men filled all their kegs and canteens with water, which was very wise because the men
would soon run short of water. The warriors pulled back across a number of hills and displayed
great skill to the admiration of Captain Lyman, they were “showing themselves openly and boldly
like disciplined cavalry.”\textsuperscript{198}

The Indians looked for the most favorable moment to strike. The wagons were coming out
of a “very deep and bad ravine” when a small group of Indians advanced to about two hundred
yards (183 meters) of the column. Their advance was probably a feint to distract the troopers
because immediately “we were fiercely charged from the rear and right by a mass of some seventy
Indians.” This group rode within a hundred yards (92 meters) of the wagons. Lieutenant Lewis
had command of the soldiers in the rear, and he shifted his men to meet the attack and opened fire.
The movement was successful, but his troopers were then “subject to a heavy fire from several
directions.” Sergeant William de Armond stood his ground as best he could. He was “a gallant
and experienced soldier and skillful shot,” but he “was here instantly killed while in the act of
firing.” The brave Sergeant was later awarded the Medal of Honor for his courage.\textsuperscript{199}

The soldiers suffered another loss, “Lieutenant Lewis was struck down by a shot through
the left knee,” which completely disabled him. The army successfully repulsed the attack, but the
firing continued. Captain Lyman was very impressed with the conduct of his men, and he gave
them credit for saving the entire command. “I regard the skillful management of Lieutenant Lewis
as having perhaps decided the fate of the [wagon] train.” The Captain stated that at the time of the
attack on the rear of the command that the wagons had not yet formed into a circle or a corral to
meet the enemy, “and the rear of the train was on the verge of a stampede!” The brave men could
have prevented this panic from leading to the entire collapse of the army’s defense.\textsuperscript{200}

After the loss of Sergeant de Armond and Lieutenant Lewis, Sergeant Fred S. Hay took
command of the soldiers in the rear, and he did so with such courage and skill that he was later
awarded the Medal of Honor. The rifle fire of these men was so efficient that several Indian ponies

\textsuperscript{197}Wyllys Lyman, “A Fight with the Comanches and Kiowas,” in \textit{Eyewitness to the Indian Wars}, 3: 516-17.

\textsuperscript{198}Ibid., 517.

\textsuperscript{199}Ibid., 518.

\textsuperscript{200}Ibid.
were seen which had no riders. Presumably, the warriors had been shot off their mounts. At the same time, the army skirmishers under Sergeant John Mitchell led the infantry to the right and front of the column. When these men faced an attack on their position, they opened fire. Even though the Indians fired from more than one direction, and they kept up their barrage well into the dark, the soldiers kept their enemies from taking aim carefully enough to do damage to the troops. In recognition of his courage and skill Sergeant Mitchell later also received the Medal of Honor.201

The warriors’ skill in fighting was very impressive, and Captain Lyman described their abilities. “The Indian practice of circling early began around our front and increased until it became a wonderful display of horsemanship.” He added that the Indians sat “erect on their ponies with shining spears and flaming blankets and lofty fluttering headgear, dashed along the ridges with yells and defiant and insulting attitudes, appearing and swiftly disappearing, showing portentous against the sky in the bright sunlight.” These displays could have been a diversion. “This wild entertainment appeared to be intended to divert attention from their dismounted firing parties” which attempted to shoot any soldier foolish enough to expose himself.202

The wagons formed a corral, and the draft horses and calvary mounts were placed in the middle of the formation for protection. The soldiers then formed a skirmish line near the wagons. When Wagonmaster Sanford was bringing ammunition to the men, he was shot in the stomach, and he suffered a severe wound. When the sun set and the darkness kept the Indians from seeing their targets clearly, all the soldiers started to dig in. “The coral on the right, front, and rear was protected by a series of pits close upon the wagons.” Many of these positions were also fortified with forage sacks and many other items, which could be expected to stop or deflect a bullet. The men wisely took the precaution of retrieving water from a pool about four hundred yards (366 meters) away. The warriors did not fire on the soldiers in the night, but they apparently dug in as well because it appeared that they had cover from rifle fire in the morning.203

When the sun arose, the Indians started firing again, and the soldiers shot back. The warriors had the army surrounded and fired on their enemies from all angles. The adversaries on both sides fired almost continuously with only some short interruptions and lulls. The Indians used a large number of effective new weapons including the same kind of rifles used by the buffalo hunters. They also wielded the Henry lever-action repeater. The warriors were highly skilled and achieved fire coordination, and “They practiced volley firing at times.”204

Most of the firing was at long range because the army suffered only two casualties the next day. Sergeant Singleton was hit in the leg and severely wound, and Private Buck was “painfully wounded in the head.” The Indians suffered as well when they made “occasional pony dashes.” These continued until two of them “were stretched” or shot. After that, the Indians stopped trying to advance on horseback. The soldiers and warriors continued to fire at each other even after the

201 Ibid.

202 Ibid., 519.

203 Ibid., 520.

204 Ibid., 520 and 522.
sun went down. Under cover of darkness, the Indians crept close to the army positions, and the warriors called to the whites to intimidate them. The warriors shouted that they had "heap Comanches and Kiowas," obviously threatening that they had enough manpower to annihilate the soldiers. The troopers shouted insults back that were superior in "Doric strength" to those of the Indians, meaning that the soldiers shouted obscenities to the warriors in an insulting manner.205

As the battle continued, the troopers drank all the water they had, and some began to clamor for more. Captain Lyman was sympathetic to their plight, but he refused to risk lives unnecessarily "[u]ntil real suffering arose." No doubt, some of the men thought they had suffered enough, and a group of soldiers and teamsters left their positions to retrieve water without orders to do so. They tried to reach the pool of water, but they retreated after a volley from the Indians showed that the effort was too dangerous. The warriors realized the soldiers' plight, and they tried to keep the whites from getting the water. After the battle, the troopers found over thirty rifle pits near the water hole obviously placed there to keep the army away.206

In all, the Indians dug over one hundred rifle pits to besiege the soldiers. Some of these were large and quite sophisticated, being able to hold several men. Lyman reported, "Many . . . [rifle pits] were well made and skillfully placed and covered, and at distances varying form six hundred [550 meters] to within three hundred yards [275 meters], a few even nearer."207 This is one of the few examples in the history of the Indian wars in the American West, where Indians dug in for protection.

Captain Lyman became concerned for Lieutenant Lewis and Wagonmaster Sanford because they were suffering from their wounds and needed medical treatment. The commander also realized that no other army units knew where they were or anything about their dangerous situation, so he knew he must send for help. Luckily, the scout, William F. Schmalsle, had recently arrived in camp, and the brave man volunteered to take a message back to Fort Supply. The Captain's message for help was more surprisingly polite. "I have the honor to report that I am corralled by Comanches . . . . I consider it injudicious to attempt to proceed further . . . [and] I think I may properly ask [for] quick aid." Schmalsle left with the message on 10 September 1874. "He was chased from the start, but his pluck and shrewdness carried him through" to Fort Supply where he arrived two days later.208

The soldiers at the wagon train finally saw some of the Indians withdraw. Even though a few warriors remained and continued to fire on the soldiers, Captain Lyman believed he had a good opportunity to send men for water. Sergeant Mitchell led an infantry detachment of fifteen men to push back the Indians. The soldiers advanced "beautifully" and cleared a path to the water. Finally, "the wounded and choking men and animals were relieved of their thirst." But this effort was unnecessary because "soon after, rain fell and a violent storm set in." The storm continued

205 Ibid., 520.
206 Ibid., 521.
207 Ibid., 521-2.
208 Ibid., 521.
into the next day, "and we were now [as] drenched as before we had been dry." The Indians then withdrew, and the siege was over. At 2:30 AM on 14 September, Lieutenant Colonel Lewis and a company of cavalry arrived after a forced march of eighty miles (129 kilometers) through the storm in a little more than one day. Lyman's wagon train had finally received relief. Captain Lyman reported that "thirteen men belonging to the escort and train were killed or wounded" in the fight. He added that "Twenty-seven Indians were killed."209

The Battle of Lyman's Wagon was known for the courage of many of its men, and Captain Lyman nominated many of them for the Medal of Honor. Thirteen of these men received that award. The citation for Sergeants Fred S. Hay, William Koelpin, John W. Knox, George K. Kitchen, Josiah Pennsyl, William de Armond, Frederick S. Neilon, Corporals John Kelly, John James, and Private Thomas Kelly all read, "Gallantry in Action." William Koelpin was a German who had been born in Prussia. The wording in the citation for Sergeant John Mitchell and Corporal William Morris was slightly different, "Gallantry in engagement with Indians." The citation for Corporal Edward C. Sharpless was the most distinct in the group. The honor stated that Sharpless received the award for action that took place from 9 to 11 September 1874. It reads, "While carrying dispatches was attacked by 125 hostile Indians, whom he (and a comrade) fought throughout the day." The Medal of Honor award for Sharpless reads very much like those given to the men who were engaged in the Buffalo Wallow Fight at about the same time.210

The Buffalo Wallow Fight

On 10 September 1874 Colonel Nelson Miles ordered the scouts, Billy Dixon and Amos Chapman, along with four enlisted men in the army to carry dispatches to Fort Supply in Oklahoma. These four troopers were Sergeant Zachariah Woodall, Privates Peter Roth (Rath), John Harrington, and George W. Smith. These six men were soon to face the onslaught of more than one hundred Indian warriors in one of the most desperate fights in the entire war.

Colonel Miles clearly believed that the letters were very important, and he told the messengers that he would send as many soldiers with them as they wished. Yet the small party believed that they would potentially travel faster, be less visible, and face less danger with the fewest men possible. The little group of men knew that there were Indian war parties in the area, so they traveled mostly by night, and they rested in relatively sheltered areas in the daytime.

Early in the morning of the second day, 12 September 1874, the messengers rode to the top of a little knoll to find themselves facing a large party of Kiowa and Comanche warriors. The Indians reacted rapidly, and they moved to surround the small group of white men. Believing that if they tried to run away on horseback that the Indians could overtake them and easily kill them, the couriers decided to make a stand on the spot and fight for their lives. Realizing that they could fire more accurately and rapidly on foot, they dismounted and gave their horses to George Smith to hold their reigns.

The warriors opened fire and shot Smith in the chest almost immediately, and the horses ran away, stranding all the white men on foot. When he was shot, the unfortunate soldier fell forward on his stomach, and his rifle tumbled onto the ground and laid far outside his reach. The

209Ibid., 521-3.

210Medal of Honor Recipients–Center of Military History www.history.army.mil/moh/
weapon became a prize that the Indians tried to get during the fight, but every attempt failed because the white men always shot them down. Smith did not move and appeared to be dead.

Billy Dixon observed, “I realized at once that I was in a closer quarters than I had ever been in my life, and I have always felt that I did some good work that day.” Even though he was shot in the calf of his leg, he felt most fortunate because the wound was not severe, and that he had not become “disabled at any stage of the fight, which left me free to do my best under the circumstances.” Yet he was in great danger throughout the battle. He wore a thin cashmere shirt that fitted loosely around him, and it was “literally riddled with bullets.” The mystery of the shots that nearly missed him perplexed Dixon his entire life. “How a man could be shot at so many times at close range and not be hit I could never understand.”

The Indians had such a numerical advantage that they clearly could have run down and killed the white men immediately, but they took their time probably to avoid needless casualties. Perhaps they also wanted to satisfy some “desire to toy with an enemy at bay, as a cat would play with a mouse before taking its life.” A bullet struck Amos Chapman, and Dixon happened to be looking at him when he was hit. The wounded man stated, “Billy, I am hit at last.” The Indians’ fire was accurate, and every man was hit and wounded except Peter Roth.

The messengers’ situation was desperate, and they had to take decisive action before the warriors killed them all. Billy Dixon looked around desperately and saw a buffalo wallow where those huge animals had pawed the ground and rolled in dirt for protection from insects. It made only a small depression in the ground about ten feet (3 meters) wide and only a few inches deep, but it was all the whites had, and Dixon ran to it while bullets “whizzed past me at every jump.” At least, this location provided a small amount of protection. He shouted to the others to run to the wallow, and they arrived successfully except for George Smith and Amos Chapman, both of whom were too badly wounded to run.

The men had no tools for digging except the butcher knife each of them carried, but they began digging desperately with their knives and bare hands in an attempt to pile up dirt around the sides of the wallow. Fortunately, the ground was sandy, and the men made progress in improving their position even though they had to stop frequently to fire at the warriors when they came within rifle range.

Even with the improvements to the wallow, the messengers were still in a very challenging position. In desperation, one of the men seemed to lose his nerve briefly. He raised up and shouted, “No use, boys, no use; we might as well give it up.” The others were not as concerned and called to him to lie down. At that instant, a bullet hit the soft ground in front of the frightened man throwing up dirt which completely filled his mouth. The sight made Dixon laugh in a sickly way. The defenders soon settled down to the serious work at hand, and they determined to sell their lives at the highest possible cost to the enemy.

The white men kept up an accurate fire on the warriors to keep them at a distance, but the messengers feared that their adversaries would rush them if they realized how few men were actually in the fight. As a ruse, some of the whites would sit up, so the Indians could see them and not be able to guess accurately that almost all of the defenders had been wounded.

One of the men then called to Chapman and told him to come to the wallow with the

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211Dixon, 256-7
others. Only then did they learn of the severity of Chapman’s wound when he called back that his left knee was shattered, and he could not walk. Billy Dixon tried several times to reach the wounded man, but each time the Indians drove him back with a heavy volley. Then Dixon made a final run and reached Chapman. Billy told his friend to climb onto his back, and Dixon carried him back to the wallow. This was challenging for Dixon because Chapman was larger than Billy, and he was unable to help, but the smaller man was successful in rescuing the bigger man.

The messengers kept digging with their bare hands and knives until they had made a little wall of dirt which surrounded them. Dixon was very impressed with the other men. “Whenever I look back and recall our situation, I always find myself thinking of how my wounded companions never complained nor faltered, but fought bravely as if a bullet had not touched them.”212 The Indians staged charges in which they rode forward apparently trying to spear the men with their lances, but the whites drove each advance back. The warriors also circled around the defenders obviously looking for an opportunity to close in.

The white men faced the heat of the long day, and they had no water to quench their thirst. The wounded men suffered the most because their wounds bled, and they could not replace lost body fluids. Then in the afternoon a black cloud appeared, and the sky shook with thunder and lightning. The men were soon drenched in a thunder storm, and the rain came in sheets. Water soon gathered at the bottom of the wallow, and the wounded men drank from the muddy pool of water even though some of the moisture was mixed with their own blood.

The storm relieved the men of their thirst, but the rain water and the wind soon blew bitterly cold, and it chilled “us to the bone.” Unfortunately, the men’s coats had been tied behind their saddles, and when the horses ran off, they took the extra clothing with them. “Not a man in our crowd had a coat, and our thin shirts were scant protection” from the cold. The wounded men shivered heavily. Dixon was heart sick at the loss of his coat because the inside pocket contained his most treasured possession, a photograph of his mother, and he never saw it again.213

The lengthy fight brought other problems because the men were running low on ammunition, and they only fired at the Indians when the warriors were advancing directly at them. The only place they could get additional cartridges was to retrieve those that Smith had with him when he was shot. Roth volunteered for the dangerous effort to get them. He ran to the fallen man and returned with the surprising news that Smith was still alive. Since the badly-wounded man had not moved since he fell, everyone had assumed that he was dead. They regretted that they had not known of his condition earlier in the day, so they could have done something for him. Roth and Dixon ran to Smith. “By supporting the poor wounded fellow between us, he managed to walk,” and they took him back to the wallow.

Despite their heroic efforts to save the man, Smith had been wounded too severely to live. “He was shot through the left lung and when he breathed the wind sobbed out his back under the shoulder blade.” The men did what little they could for him, and they used a stick to stuff a silk handkerchief into the hole in the man’s back, so he wouldn’t lose so much air when he breathed.

212 Dixon, 260

213 Ibid., 262.
But they had no way to alleviate his suffering.\footnote{Ibid., 263-4 and 266.}

Later in the night, Smith’s agony became more intense, and he “was begging us in piteous
tones to shoot him and put an end to his terrible sufferings. We found it necessary to watch him
closely to prevent his committing suicide.” However, the others still respected his courage, and
Dixon commented. “Poor Smith endured his agony like a brave soldier.” Late in the evening Smith
finally fell asleep or went into a coma. The others were pleased because they knew he could feel no
pain in that condition. Later one of them felt Smith to see how he was doing, but the man was
cold in death.\footnote{Ibid., 266-7.} The men showed their fallen comrade what respect they could. They lifted the
man’s body outside the wallow and covered his face with a silk handkerchief.

The men also suffered from the conditions. “We were cold and hungry, with nothing to
eat, and without a blanket, coat or hat to protect us from the wind. It was impossible to rest or
sleep in the two inches of water in wallow.” Dixon soon regretted losing his hat when the fighting
started because it could have given him some protection from the cold later. He had then worn a
wide-brimmed sombrero, and he feared that the large hat would draw attention to him. Seeing that
he was dressed differently, the Indians might have aimed at him, so he threw it away. The whites
needed some kind of a bed to lay on to keep them off the cold, wet ground. The Indians had
already burned all the grass from the entire area, but Roth and Dixon looked around and found
many tumbleweeds nearby. These plants would often blow for miles until they were stopped by
some object. They had the “spring” of a wire mattress, and the two resourceful men crushed them
to make a comfortable bed for the wounded.\footnote{Ibid., 264-5.}

The Indians seemed to withdraw when the sun went down, but Dixon feared they might
return, so he carefully cleaned every gun to make it ready for action. Dixon remembered that
terrible night the rest of his life. “Many a time have its perils filled my dreams, until I awoke
startled and thrilled by a feeling of imminent danger.” He was also tempted to take his butcher
knife which had a sharp edge and cut off his long hair, which draped to his shoulders, so no Indian
would be tempted to scalp him. The besieged me realized that they were helpless in their position
and agreed that someone must go for help. Only Roth and Dixon were in a condition to walk, and
each volunteered to go. Dixon was the logical choice because he knew the country, and he was
sure he could find the trail that led to Camp Supply, but the wounded men complained about him
abandoning them. They believed that Dixon was the best shot among them, and they felt more
secure with him to protect them. Bidding everyone farewell, Roth disappeared in the darkness, but
he came back in two hours, saying he could not find the trail.\footnote{Ibid., 266-8.}

When daylight finally came, everyone agreed that Dixon should go for help and to try to
find the trail. Having lost the cover of night, the brave man could then be seen from far away, so
he advanced with great care. In a little more than a half a mile [1 kilometer], he found the trail

\footnote{Ibid., 264-5.}
leading to Camp Supply. Dixon soon saw a column of troopers about two miles [3 kilometers] riding in his direction, and he fired his rifle to get their attention. Major Price was the commanding officer, and the soldiers were accompanying a supply trail to Camp Supply.

As Dixon described the battle to Price, the army surgeon and a group of soldiers rode to the buffalo wallow to give assistance to the wounded men. Much to Dixon's surprise he soon heard a shot and learned that one of the men in the wallow thought the approaching troopers were Indians and had fired on them, killing one of the soldiers' horses. Surprisingly, the doctor did little more than examine the men's wounds, and Major Price only gave the men some crackers to eat before he took his command and left. 218

The men in the buffalo wallow had to wait until the middle of the night before additional help finally reached them. From a distance, the men could hear the bugle notes from the advancing soldiers giving them hope that they would soon be found. The messengers fired their weapons to let the troopers know their location. Finally, the soldiers came riding out of the darkness. The doctor tended the wounded, and the men buried Smith's body in the bottom of the wallow where he had died. They covered him with the dirt that they had dug with their butcher knives to give them some protection. The next day the cavalry took the men to Fort Supply where the doctors amputated Amos Chapman's leg above the knee. "Amos was as tough as . . . hickory [wood] and was soon out of the hospital and in the saddle" again. The amputee won Dixon's admiration. "Chapman could handle a gun and ride as well as ever, the only difference being that he had to mount his horse from the right side, Indian style." 219

Colonel Nelson Miles was so impressed with the valor of the men who fought at the buffalo wallow that he wrote a letter within two weeks of the engagement. In it, he recommended that each of the men be awarded the Medal of Honor, the United States' highest military decoration for courage in battle. He outlined what the men had accomplished, and he added that the badly wounded, Private George W. Smith, should receive the award as well because he had performed an important deed even when he was dying. According to Miles, "the dying [Smith] aided the wounded by exposure to fresh wounds after the power of action was gone." 220

Miles' request was granted, and each man received the Medal of Honor even though two of them, Billy Dixon and Amos Chapman, were civilian scouts and not in the US Army. At that time, Medals of Honor were often given to every man in a unit which had fought well, and the men were not always singled out for their personal conduct in a battle. Sergeant Woodall's citation for the Medal of Honor reads, "While in command of 5 men and carrying dispatches, was attacked by 125 Indians, whom, he with his command fought throughout the day, he being severely wounded." Private Harrington's citation gave a few more details. "While carrying dispatches was attacked by 125 hostile Indians, whom he and his comrades fought throughout the day. He was severely wounded in the hip and unable to move. He continued to fight, defending an exposed dying man."

218Ibid., 268-72.
219Ibid., 272-3.
220Miles to Adjutant General, U.S.A. September 24, 1874 as cited in Dixon, 275-8.
While George Smith’s contribution to the battle must be considered as minimal, he still received high praise. “While carrying dispatches was attacked by 125 hostile Indians, whom he and his comrades fought throughout the day. Pvt. Smith was mortally wounded during the engagement and died early the next day.” The citation for Amos Chapman and Billy Dixon are short and identical. “Gallantry in Action.”

**Billy Dixon’s Dog, Fannie**

A detachment of soldiers returned to Adobe Walls on 20 October 1874, and the men saw the effects of the Indian devastation. Bat Masterson described the scene, “the last time I was there in October, 1874, everything was destroyed, all the buildings, etc., at Adobe Walls, and all the stockades had been burned down.” Billy Dixon added, “When I passed that way the following fall [October] with United States troops the Indians had been there and burned the place to the ground. The walls were still smoking.” On this trip, Colonel Nelson A. Miles was leading the force. The troopers camped near the location of the fighting at Adobe Walls, and the Colonel asked Billy Dixon “hundreds of questions about the fight appearing curious about every detail.” Obviously, Miles was interested in learning as much as he could about the tactics employed by the Indians. The soldiers took advantage of the situation by looking for souvenirs and picking up anything they could find. They even took the bones of dead horses.

When the Indians had destroyed the trading post, they “gathered up all the bones of their dead and wrapped them in new blankets depositing them at the foot of the hills on the east side of the valley of Adobe Walls Creek.” In this case, the troopers were more interested in the blankets than they were in the bones of dead Indians. “The soldiers threw away the bones and carried off the blankets.” Surprisingly, the Indians had removed the bodies of their fallen comrades, but they left the skulls of their fellow warriors sitting on the posts of the corral. Apparently, the Indians were too superstitious to take any of the supplies from the buildings, probably fearing that the food had been poisoned.

Billy Dixon might well have been thinking about the fear of battle and the loss of life that took place during the battle at Adobe Walls, but he had a very pleasant surprise. On this trip, a dog he had owned at the time of the battle walked up to him, and Dixon was moved by the experience. “Her appearance affected me greatly, as I was fond of her and loved all dumb animals.” The dog was “a highly intelligent setter” which was a breed of hunting dogs, and her name was Fannie. She had disappeared with the rest of the dogs during the battle, and Dixon was sure that the Indians had killed her, or that she had staved to death.

The men made a big fuss over Fannie, and they gave her something to eat and petted her. Then she left. “She soon came back with something in her mouth and stood wagging her tail, to attract attention.” When the men saw what she had brought everyone broke into a smile. “Fannie

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221 Medal of Honor Recipients—Center of Military History [www.history.army.mil/moh/](http://www.history.army.mil/moh/)

222 Masterson in Baker and Harrison, 109.

223 Dixon, 252.

224 Ibid.
had brought a fat, bright-eyed little puppy in her mouth.” The dog left the small animal on the ground and returned with three other puppies one at a time. The men assumed that the father of the brood was the large Newfoundland dog that had belonged to the Scheidler brothers, and the animal had bravely tried to defend its masters at the beginning of the battle before the Indians killed it. The family of dogs was a big hit among the men, and they gave Fannie and her babies a comfortable place in the mess wagon when the troopers pulled out. The dog and her puppies were some small consolation for the high cost of the Battle of Adobe Walls.

The Ordeal of the German Sisters

While Colonel Nelson Miles kept up the pressure on the Indians in the fall of 1874 and the winter of 1875 to the point that they faced starvation, perhaps the most heroic rescue took place at the same time. This was the deliverance of the four sisters named German. The father of the four girls was John German and his wife was Lydia Cox German. John and Lydia had a farm in Georgia, but the area was devastated in the Civil War. As the family grew to seven children including one son and six daughters, the couple decided they could do better in the West, so they moved with their children to Missouri then to Kansas with Colorado being their ultimate destination. They never arrived.

When John German took his family across Kansas, he never realized that Indians may have moved that far north from the Texas panhandle seeking easy targets for revenge. The family had breakfast on the morning of 11 Sept. 1874. When they started on their journey John and Stephen, his eighteen-year old son, stood guard, each carrying an old-fashioned muzzle-loading rifle. These weapons could only be loaded slowly, and were of little use in a fight with the Indians. But the rifles’ deficiencies made little difference because warriors quickly overwhelmed the family.

A war party of seventeen Cheyenne warriors and two women led by Chief Medicine Water, had apparently been stalking the family for days. At the right moment, they sprang from their concealment on the unsuspecting settlers and soon committed murders and atrocities on them. Stephen was about a half mile (1 kilometer) away trying to find some loose stock, when he looked up and saw the warriors riding toward them. Excitedly he shouted, “Indians! Indians!” Catherine German, only seventeen, “heard shouts and yells, and running closer, saw my father fall, shot through the back by an Indian.” She admitted with some understatement, “I was terribly frightened.” John’s wife, Lydia, tried to run to the badly wounded man, when she became the next victim. A warrior caught her by the arm, and she begged, “Oh, let me get to father! Let me get to father!” She then “received a shot from another Indian who fired at her head, killing her almost instantly.”

John German was not yet dead because he was still moving his arms, but he was then

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225Ibid., 252-3.

226Grace E. Meredith, ed. *Girl Captives of the Cheyennes: a True Story of the Capture and Rescue of Four Pioneer Girls, 1874* (Los Angeles: Gem, 1927), 15-16. This account is from Catherine German. Hereafter cited as Catherine German.

227“Catherine’s Story,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, Mar. 26, 1875, page 1. This is an interview Catherine gave after her release.
scalped by one of the warriors. The Indians then scalped Lydia as well. An Indian woman finished John off, an “old squaw picked up our axe and stuck in my fathers head, leaving it fixed in his skull.” At the same time, a warrior rode after Stephen who was on foot. The Indian was on horseback, and the white man had no chance to escape. The Indian overtook him and then “shot and scalped him.”

Rebecca was the oldest German child at age twenty and was driving the oxen when she was attacked. Courageously, she “made a brave defense with an axe.” She even succeeded in knocking one of her attackers down. The spirited white woman “would have killed him if she had not been tomahawked from behind.” The blow did not kill her, but her courageous defense probably led her attackers to treat her with exceptional cruelty. Five or six of the warriors raped her one after the other, and they then scalped her, but she was still alive. The Indians then inflicted on her one of the most cruel of all deaths. “They carried her to a wagon, tore off her clothes, piled them over her, with some other things from the wagon, and while she was still alive set fire to the pile and burned her up.”

Nothing could ever excuse such an atrocity.

Catherine shook with fear, but she attempted to run in the same direction where Stephen had fallen, when one of the warriors shot an arrow into her thigh. The wound stopped her flight from the scene. A large Indian then “jumped off his horse, grabbed me and pulled out the arrow” which probably had not gone far into her leg. Not content with this rough treatment, “He kicked me several times; then put me on his large bay horse and rode to our wagon.”

The Indians then had a long discussion of what to do with Catherine and Joanna. Apparently, the warriors decided to keep the four youngest children. Although Joanna was younger than Catherine she “was larger and flesher.” The Indians tore the bonnets off the two girls to see who had the longest hair because long hair made for better decorations made from scalps. Luckily for Catherine, her hair was cut short, but Joanna was not so fortunate because her hair was long. The leader of the war party examined the two girls. He then “suddenly drew up his gun and shot [my] sister’s head off.” The warriors took the hair of the five victims as prizes. “The Indians then scalped their long-haired victims.”

This left the four remaining girls to be taken captive. Catherine was seventeen years old, Sophia was twelve, Julia Arminda was seven, and Nancy Adelaide (Addie) was only five. Julia had been hiding under a feather bed in the wagon, but the Indians soon found her and pulled her out. Addie was terribly frightened, and an Indian cocked his gun and was ready to kill the little girl because she was crying. At the last instant, an old “small sized squaw” jumped between the warrior and the girl in an attempt to keep the man from shooting, clearly saving Addie’s life. The old woman then claimed the little girl because she had saved her. All the girls learned quickly that

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228Ibid.

229Catherine German, 17-18.

230Ibid., 18.

they must keep quiet. Even little Addie was terrified into silence.\textsuperscript{232}

The Indians plundered the wagon and took what they wanted. They then set it on fire. The Indians took the four frightened sisters and placed them on horses. They tied Sophia’s feet with a thong that ran under the horse’s belly. Sixty years later Sophia stated, “That strap held my legs so tightly I soon had large sores and raw places on my legs, knees, and ankles—I still have the scars today.”\textsuperscript{233}

The warriors cared little for the distress of the girls. When they crossed a stream of clear water, Catherine tried to make them understand. “Oh,” she explained later, “how I wished for a drink, but my captors gave no heed to my gestures.” Later in the afternoon, a strong thunderstorm hit, and they were all drenched with rain. This probably helped quench Catherine’s thirst, but it then rained slowly for the rest of the afternoon and evening, and the girls had no shelter. Later the Indians killed the cattle they stole from the German family, and they “sang and made merry over the terrible deed of the morning.” Their captors finally offered the girls some meat, “but we were so terrified and heart-sick that we could not eat.” Catherine was so frightened that she could barely think. She kept remembering the “dead bodies of my parents, sisters and brother.” In her mind, “I heard again the awful outcries of the Indians and [the cries] of their victims.”\textsuperscript{234}

Catherine described their condition, “As we rain-soaked, pitiful children huddled together, we tried to comfort one another in this our great distress and grief.” The Indians then chose the girls they wanted to keep. The “little squaw” who had saved Addie’s life took her and the other young girl, Julia. This was a blessing for both of them because they could look to each other for comfort. Catherine was not so fortunate because she was taken by a man who proved “to be a hard-hearted, brutal and cruel savage.” Some of the Indians liked to try to intimidate Catherine by frequently threatening to kill her. At times, she heard the verbal threat and then “felt the muzzle of a gun against my back.” But the young woman faced the threat well because she had become so miserable that she no longer feared death. “I stood very still for I felt that death would be better than living a miserable life with them. I was very despondent and did not care really what happened to me.” The Indians who taunted her seemed to believe that she was very brave.\textsuperscript{235}

The Indians traveled mostly by night and rested during the day. At one point, Catherine saw Julia and Addie sitting on the ground. This was uncommon because they were usually placed on horses with the Cheyennes who had claimed them. When Catherine next saw the two Indians, her sisters were not with them, and she was shocked to think that the Indians had killed the girls. “How sad I was!” When Catherine next saw Sophia, she told her “that the Indians had killed our

\textsuperscript{232} Catherine German, 18 and 20.


\textsuperscript{234} Catherine German, 19-20.

\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 25.
The two sisters were separated for most of their captivity, so their ordeals were separate. Even though Sophia suffered a great deal, her older sister was thrust into a living hell of abuse. Catherine was forced to bring wood to her captor’s lodge and “at night was often whipped and beaten because I could not carry as much wood and water as some of the squaws.” When winter hit, the white prisoner had to continue her work. At times, the snow was one foot deep (30.5 centimeters), and the girl’s toe nails fell off because of the cold. “At times I was nearly frozen, having nothing but a blanket to keep warm with at night.”

The young woman was traded three times and finally came into the possession of Long Back. This man often received payment from the young warriors to visit his lodge and rape the defenseless girl. At times, Long Back’s wife forced Catherine to retrieve water at night. Any woman outside a lodge at night was considered easy prey, and she was routinely raped on these trips, sometimes by as many as six men, before she could return. She admitted, “I was made the victim of their desires—nearly all in the tribe—and was beaten and whipped time and time again.”

When the miserable girl found herself alone in the lodge, she would throw herself on the ground and cry “bitterly.” Her only solace was to call upon “Heavenly Father in my grief and depths of despair, asking repeatedly, ‘Oh why has this fallen on us?’” In her deepest agony, she claimed that the “Holy Spirit” comforted her. “One night I dreamed that I had a visitor.” At first, she failed to recognize him, but the figure spoke to her. “He told me how sorry he was for me, and that I must keep up my courage, for surely I would be recaptured and rescued some time.” When the man left, she realized that he was her dead brother, Stephen. The next night Catherine had a similar dream. “There seemed to be a kindred and living presence near me. I felt a warm kiss and heard these words very distinctly, ‘Catherine, do the very best you can.’” The young woman then recognized that this figure was her dead mother. The advice she had received was very comforting to her, and she used it as a guide for the rest of her life.

On one of the many nights when Catherine went to bed hungry, she had yet another dream. In it, “I crawled along a lightly traveled wagon road and searched for grains of corn.” Later, “I dreamed that I saw little sisters, Julia and Addie, walking toward me.” She was disappointed when she woke up to realized that the dream was not reality. However, this dream soon proved to be more than just the impossible wishes of a desperate young woman. Soon after, Catherine and Sophia were briefly reunited much to their mutual joy. They had not seen each other in three months, and Sophia surprised her older sister with the question, “Have you seen Julia and Addie?”

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236 Ibid., 27-8.

237 “Catherine’s Story.”


239 Catherine German, 41 and 49-50.

240 Ibid., 57.
The question shocked Catherine who answered, “I dreamed last night that I saw them both, alive and well, but I have not seen them, nor do I ever expect to see them again.” Sophia then stated, “They were alive a month or six weeks ago, for I saw them.”

At that time, Sophia had found Julia “so weak and dizzy that she could scarcely sit up.” The Indians put the little girls on the ground and then had rode off and left them. Julia and Addie wandered until they found some wagon tracks. They knew that only white people used wagons, and they followed the tracks, hoping to be saved. The two girls came to a place where the soldiers had made a camp, and they found some grains of corn scattered on the ground where the cavalry had fed their horses. Also, the troopers left some crackers and scraps of food. The girls ate everything they found, and they then gathered wild plums, wild grapes, and hackberries. They also ate the roots of wild onions, and they pulled up the “white tender stems ends of grass” to eat, “for we were very hungry.”

The girls scavenged food wherever they could find it, and they had an agreement. If either of them found something to eat, that girl would share the food with the other. One day, Julia had wandered away when Addie found a cracker on the ground dropped by the soldiers. When Addie told Julia of her good fortune, Julia requested her half of the food. Poor Addie had to admit that she was so hungry that she had eaten all of it. Julia admitted, “I was so disappointed that I cried.”

The young girls often hid in the bushes when wolves frightened them. They made beds of dry leaves to sleep on at night, but they often feared that the wolves would find them in the night time. Addie often cried in fear, but Julia would remind her, “Hush! The wolves might eat us.” The girls’ resourcefulness was remarkable, and they managed to keep from starving to death for the six weeks they were alone, even though they became emaciated, sick, and very weak. Finally, the Indians found the two girls and brought them to the camp only the night before Sophia saw them. When Sophia finally saw Addie, “She was so very thin that I could scarcely believe she was my five-year-old sister.” But Julia and Addie were soon rescued.

The Rescue of the Four Sisters

The US Army also knew about the captured German sisters. From spies and captured Indians, the soldiers had learned that the four girls were alive and were held by Grey Beard who was the head chief of the largest band of hostile Indians. Every command of troopers had “as one objective the rescue of the white captives, whatever the risk or hazard might be.” Colonel Miles gave orders to a detachment of troopers on 4 November 1874, telling them to take twenty-six empty wagons to retrieve supplies for the soldiers in the field, but they were also supposed to engage the Indians if possible. “Should you find any considerable body of Indians, you will

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242 Ibid., 101 and Julia and Addie in Jauken, 93-4.

243 Catherine German, 59.
communicate with me, and attack or pursue as you may deem expedient.”

On 8 November 1874, William F. Schmalsle, one of the scouts under the command of Lieutenant Baldwin, reported that he had found a large Indian camp nearby. He believed it was Grey Beard’s village of Cheyenne Indians because the scout recognized the leader’s lodge. When the detachment of wagons got close to the Indian village, the soldiers believed that they were probably outnumbered by at least two to one, but they decided to attack the superior force anyway. The troopers used the wagons in the attack. The infantrymen rode in the empty wagons and the cavalry supported them on the flanks. The army’s advance was impressive. “Every trooper, wagon train and all, rushed down the slope, into and right through the Indian camp like a hurricane. The charge was spectacular, grand, and most effective in results.” The Indians were completely surprised and fled as fast as they could. They abandoned their camp, and the warriors only fought a rear-guard action that was sufficient to allow the women and children to escape.

The attack was a big success. Grey Beard’s band was completely scattered, and the warriors lost their lodges, much of their equipment, and many horses. But the army’s most important accomplishment was the rescue of Julia and Adelaide German. During the attack, some of the soldiers noticed a buffalo robe that looked much like a tent, and Baldwin ordered his men not to fire into the structure. After the Indians fled, the troopers examined it. When they lifted up the covering, “there were revealed two of the most deplorable and abject looking little girls ever seen, unkempt and ragged, their nether limbs sore, chafed and raw from riding.” One of the pitiful little girls asked, “Are you soldiers?” When the answer was yes, Julia, the older girl, said we glee. “We’re so glad, we heard [our] sisters [Catherine and Sophia] praying all the time, that God would send soldiers to deliver them.”

Billy Dixon had advanced with Lieutenant Baldwin’s scouts. Someone had noticed that there was something moving under a pile of buffalo hides. When they pulled the hides back, “we were astonished at finding two little white girls, who proved to be Julia and Adelaide.” They were pitiful objects. “Hunger and privation had reduced them to mere skeletons, and their little hands and fingers resembled bird’s claws.” The poor children were trembling from fright, but when they recognized the soldiers, “their terror changed to a frenzy of joy, and their sobs and tears made hardened frontiersmen turn away and hide their own emotion.” Catherine was finally reunited with Addie and Julia seven months later in June 1875 at Fort Leavenworth.

For his bravery in attacking the village and rescuing the girls, Lieutenant Baldwin was awarded the Medal of Honor for the second time. The citation for his second medal reads: “Rescued with 2 companies 2 white girls by a voluntary attack upon Indians whose superior numbers and strong position would have warranted delay for reinforcements, but which delay

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245 Ibid., 74.

246 Ibid., 76.

247 Dixon, 294 and Catherine German in Dixon, 292.
would have permitted the Indians to escape and kill their captives.”

In the winter weather, the US cavalry was pressing the Indians hard, and the soldiers did not allow their adversaries to rest, while they were running out of food. “Their ponies and horses were dying by the hundreds from starvation, ... [and they] were forced to eat the flesh of those starved animals, thus saving their own lives.” While the army kept the Indians on the run, the soldiers also did what they could to rescue Catherine and Sophia because the federal officials feared the warriors would kill the two girls. When the army sent messengers to negotiate with the hostile Indians, one of them, Romeo, met Catherine. He said, “Here, I have something for you,” and he pulled out a package from beneath his blanket. Colonel Miles had sent a picture of Julia and Addie taken in December 1874. In it, the two girls look heathy, clean, and well fed. On the back of the picture, Miles had written, “To the Misses Germaine [sic] Your little sisters are well, and in the hands of friends. Do not be discouraged. Every effort is being made for your welfare. [signed] Nelson A. Miles, Colonel.” Catherine was almost wild with joy to think that her sisters were safe and that she and Sophia might soon be released.

Colonel Miles told Chief Stone Calf, who then held the girls captive, that there could be no peace until the German girls were released unharmed. At about noon on 1 March 1875, the troopers advanced on the village. The Indians cried out, “White soldiers!” “White soldiers!” But they could not flee because their horses were too weak from the cold and starvation to run. They had no choice but to raise a flag of white rags tied to the end of a stick in an act of surrender. Catherine and Sophie were released to the army on 1 March 1875 after an ordeal that had lasted nearly six months. When the girls rode into the headquarters of Cheyenne Agency to be freed, Catherine kept repeating to herself, “Safe at last! Safe at last!”

Later, Catherine described their release. “Just before the sun set,” she recalled, “we came to the soldiers’ camp. They [the troopers] stood at the side of the trail cheering. We stopped, but I could hardly say anything, and when I think of it now a lump rises in my throat. Oh, I was so glad.” Only someone who has been held for months in vicious captivity could possibly appreciate the relief and joy she felt. Moved by the plight of the German Girls, the United States Congress set aside $10,000 for their support. Each received $2,500 when she turned twenty-one years of age, which was a large amount of money at the time. Colonel Nelson Miles and his wife, Mary Hoyt Sherman Miles, took care of the orphaned girls until 1876, and they often praised the kindness of Miles and his wife.

Despite the psychological damage each of them certainly faced after their ordeals, each married, had children, and led productive lives. For the rest of her long life, Sophia wore large shoes and extra pairs of socks to keep her feet warm, and she always kept her house very warm. She had gotten so cold when she was a captive that she never wanted to be cold again.

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248 Congressional Medal of Honor Society [http://www.cmohs.org](http://www.cmohs.org)

249 Catherine German, 57 and 70 and Miles, 176.

250 Catherine German, 86.

251 Catherine German in Dixon, 296.
The sisters lived in Kansas, Colorado, and California. Catherine German Schwerdfeger was born in 1857 and died in 1932, Sophia German Feldman was born in 1862 and died in 1949, Julia German Brooks was born in 1867 and died in 1959, and Adelaide German Andrews was born in 1869 and died in 1943.252

The End of the War

The official surrender of many of the Indians took place on 2 March 1875, but a few determined warriors stayed away for a few more months. When Quanah Parker came to surrender in June of 1875, the war was all but over because the starving Indians had been surrendering for months. The Indians had lost the war, and the slaughter of the remaining buffalo continued until they almost became extinct. With the loss of these animals, the Indian also lost their main source of food and with it lost their way of life. They had no choice but to throw themselves on the mercy of the federal government for support. Unfortunately, their treatment left much to be desired, and many would starve or die of disease on government reservations in the coming years.

The army also attempted to locate and arrest those who were guilty of murder and other crimes during the war. While the German girls attempted to identify those who had committed atrocities, only two of the warriors, Grey Beard and Long Back, were arrested for abusing the girls. A total of 74 Indians including 35 Cheyennes, 28 Kiowas, 10 Comanches, and 1 Caddo Indian were put in chains and sent to Fort Marion in Florida.253 These men were never tried for any crime, and their level of guilt remains unclear. Some of them were probably arrested for no other reason than that they were Indians with the warring tribes. The army held most of them for several years and attempted to strip them of their Indian culture by teaching them the ways of the white man. When they were released, most of them went back to their old culture on the reservations as best they could.254

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252 www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page.

253 R. N. Pratt to General Sheridan April 25, 1875 in Joe F. Taylor, ed. The Indian Campaign on the Staked Plains, 1874-1875: Military Correspondence (np; np, 1962), 279-80

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