

An Army Doctor's Wife On The Frontier

Letters From Alaska And The Far West, 1874-1878

Kamiah,
Indian Territory
July 29, 1877

My Precious Darling Wife,

Got here today at 10 A.M. without adventure of any sort. It seems a month and longer since I left you. Yet, excepting this feeling of long lapse of time, I have, after a fashion, enjoyed this nomad's existence of two days and nights. Made a long march yesterday and felt considerably fatigued when we got in, but Lt. Forse and I went down to the water with soap and towels and bathed our heads, hands, and feet. I found a nice, cool spot under some bushes where a great pine tree had fallen across the hollow, and served to keep the little pool of rainwater cool. I sat for some time with my pantaloons and drawers rolled up and my boots off (of course), with my feet and legs up to the knees in that cool water, and with so much of my body in the water, of course, I was soon cool as a cucumber. Slept in open air, sound as a log. Got up at 3 A.M. and had my breakfast and enjoyed it. Mr. Otis was half sick all night with a terrible headache.

As I said, we got here about 10 A.M. The troops to go (and with whom my lot is cast) are all across the river, and stores are being crossed over. It looks like a war picture, indeed quite an army, and among them, I am glad to see about 25 Indian scouts who were brought through by Colonel Sanford. By the by, I go with colonel Sanford who has Jackson's, Carr's, Bendire's, and Wagner's companies, 1st Cavalry, 200 strong. And Assistant Surgeon Newlands (nephew of Mr. Newlands--West Point) is my assistant. He is quite a boy in appearance and quite handsome.

I shall mess with Colonel Sanford, whose mess consists of Captain Carr, Mr. Cresson (1st Cavalry), and Doctor Newlands. Everybody here seems pleased to see me with them. Field also goes with this column and it is intended and arranged to go along together. The Indian scouts will be in the advance. It is said and believed here that Joseph's Indians are all over in Montana and peacefully disposed among the settlers in that region. Doctor Alexander says that I will be back at my post in 30 days. I hope so, Darling, for I feel that I have been away from you for an age already. I don't see how I can stand it for 30 days. You may rest assured, Darling, that

absence for that time, or maybe a week or so longer, is all you have to fear on my account. The Infantry (15 companies including the artillery) numbers about 600 now, and the command altogether will be 800 or thereabouts.

Kamiah region is very beautiful and picturesque. Today, when we came out on the crest of hills overlooking the Indian settlement, I was astonished and delighted with the prospect spread out, as it were, at our feet and from 4 to 10 miles distant. Of course, it looked better at a distance than it does now, for down here on the scene, you come in contact with the more repulsive features of the still savage inhabitants. General Howard and others went down to hear preaching by some of the young protégés of Miss McBeth. How good it was or how bad, I don't know or care.

Major Jackson's Company is out about 2 miles on the Lolo Trail as a picket guard. No signs of Indians have yet been seen. I forgot to tell you our Indians all wear soldier's uniforms with a kind of blue sash of stripes and stars. It looks, in fact, like a piece of old garrison flag. They belong to the Bannock tribe of Indians farther to the south, and they can be depended on.

I forgot to say I found Captain Winters and Mr. Forse very pleasant traveling companions, but Winters remains behind with a command about Mount Idaho. Colonel Sumner also remains behind. He asked after you, as also did a dozen others, including General Howard. Colonel Sumner says he intends soon making a scout into Fort Lapwai and will call and see you. I have heard many remarks from Infantry officers about the general stampeded condition of several companies. And I must tell you this. I was to lunch (and such a lunch) with Doctor Alexander at General Howard's Headquarters, and the General asked after you and added, "And Mrs. Perry? She is well, is she? She went off into hysterics when she arrived."

I hardly know, Darling, what else to tell you. I suppose we will reach Missoula in a week at farthest. I was going to say you might write me there, but that would not do, as I suppose it would take two weeks for a letter to reach that place via San Francisco.

There will be one or more opportunities for you to write me by courier from Lapwai. Take care of yourself and the babies, and wait for me as patiently as you can. I am writing all this under a pine tree back from the river on this side in Colonel Sumner's camp. I have a memorandum book on my knees for a table and am sitting flat down.

If I can, between now and the leaving of the courier tomorrow morning, I will add a P.S. to this long scrawl. I keep thinking of the long absence from you, my dear wife, but it must be. I suppose there are 30 or 40 more gentlemen in this command who have left their wives and babies, and who, in case of more fighting, will be in far greater danger than your man can

possibly be in, but, honestly, I don't think we shall see an Indian hostile. I said to Colonel Miller, "Colonel, what are we all going to do over there?" He replied, "Oh, we will have a big mountain picnic with no Indians to trouble us," or words to that effect. The impression is general that we will have some hard marching only, with no fighting of any kind.

Be my patient, darling, sensible wife, as you always have been, and 'ere long I will be with you again. My ink is getting low, so goodbye, my honey, and believe me

Ever you faithful

John FitzGerald

Fort Lapwai

July 30, 1877

Mamma Dear,

I have had two letters and lots of nice bundles since I wrote last. John left on Friday and I am lonely without him, but I would not be any place else than here for anything, as here I can hear from him every time anything goes in or out to General Howard. I heard this morning from Kamiah, and I will enclose John's letter, as I can't tell you all he says.

The Indians, it is supposed, have gone off over that Lolo Trail to Montana. A dispatch from the Governor of Montana says a great number of ponies, women, and children, with a lot of wounded men, had come over the Lolo Trail, and he had not force to stop them. No one knows whether Joseph and his warriors have gone over there too, or whether they just got rid of their families and helpless men so they could make the better fight themselves. General Howard is determined to find them and has formed two columns. The one he commands to himself will follow over the trail the Indians took into Montana. The other goes north through the Spokane country and joins General Howard's column sometime in September over at Missoula where General Sherman will meet them. Then, if the trouble is not over, a winter campaign will be organized, but we hope it will be over even before that. If it should be that John will be obliged to be out all winter, I will come home in the fall, as he would not want me to stay here alone so long, but I hope he will be with me here long before that.

Doctor, I expect, is marching up the mountains today, farther and farther away from us. How I hate the army and wish he was out of it! I hope they won't find any Indians, and I hope he will come back to me safe and sound. I had made up my mind he would not be ordered from here, as

the wounded are all here, and Dr. Sternberg can't do all the work. But Dr. Alexander said they must have Fitzgerald in the field, and he would be sent back here as soon as he could be spared. Poor Dr. Sternberg is disgusted and worked to death. The hospital has 36 men in it, 28 or 29 wounded, and the others sick. I don't see what they do want with John on that Lolo Trail. They have four or five medical officers, and that ought to be enough. Sometimes when I think what might happen out there, I get half distracted, but I fight against it and keep my mind occupied with other things, and I plan for John's coming home. As long as there is a chance of John's coming back soon, I will stay here.

John said before he left he would not think of leaving us here unless he felt perfectly sure we were safe, so don't feel anxious about us, I am only anxious for the Doctor. Write soon. Lots of love to all.

Your affectionate daughter,

E. L. F.

Fort Lapwai
Sunday
August 5, 1877

Dear Mamma,

It is doleful living along this way without John and not knowing when he will come home. I don't know how much longer I can get along.

We have not heard anything from General Howard's command up in the Lolo trail for a week. I wish we could hear! We have had all sorts of rumors about the Indians, but we don't know anything. I had a note from John written Monday night at their first camp on the Trail. He said it was a hard mountain trail. They had been all day going 15 miles. It is a zigzag, winding, steep trail, in many places impossible for two to walk abreast, with either rocks or a dense pine forest close on all sides.

There are several companies of troops over on the other side in Montana, and we have heard that the Indians were allowed to pass, but we don't think it possible. We also hear the Indians have gotten back on General Howard's rear. Mrs. Monteith spent yesterday with me. I wish I had some of my home people with me all the time, I would miss John under any circumstances, but how much easier it would be to bear if you were here.

August 1, 1877
Camp Spurgin in the Field
Bitter Root Mountains

Darling Wife,

Last night we had rather an unpleasant time, but I was somewhat comforted with your letter of the Saturday after my departure, and was made happy in your saying that you are all well, or were so when I left. I said we had rather an unpleasant night of it, for we went to bed without our tents, and it began to rain about midnight. So I had to get up and make a shelter with a tent fly which I had laid on the ground as a sort of mattress. Doctor Newlands and I were bunking together. However, we finally made it comfortable and rain proof, and then slept on till morning.

Got up at 5 A.M. but did not march until 11 A.M., and then only went 8 miles and made the nicest camp we have yet had in among partially wooded hills, or rather, mountains. We had some fine mountain views yesterday and today. We were so high up that the whole extent of

mountainous country was spread around us. Tomorrow we are to march about 18 miles and make camp on the Clearwater River, the same river that runs by the Agency, only we shall find it a mere mountain brook that can be easily forded by the men and horses. I shall think then of my darlings, and make the stream a little mental address about going down to Lapwai and leaving a message from me to those I so love.

Captain Spurgin, 21st Infantry, caught up with our army last night, and today some beef cattle arrived to serve as food for us all, poor things. We find for the last 3 nights hardly any grass for our horses and packmules. It is very poor, indeed, and we shall not get any better for 3 or 4 days to come. We are still some 50 miles from the summit of the Bitter Root range of mountains which, you know, is the dividing line between Idaho and Montana Territory. Then we shall have 60 miles more to Missoula. No Indians have been heard of yet, and I suspect that our mountain climbing this week and next will not accomplish any substantial result. The life we lead on such a campaign is very rough, and it would puzzle many to account for the fact that it is, to some extent, enjoyable. Only when the elements frown upon us does it seem discouraging. Last evening and night, and also this morning, everyone looked disgusted with everything, but we made an early and very pleasant camp after a short day's march, and presto, everybody is changed, and a generally cheerful aspect prevails.

I hope, Darling, that this scribble will find you all well. Tell Bert that Papa is coming back to his place at table and home just as soon as he can. Tell him that when I was riding along in the big woods today, I came upon a poor little Indian pony which had been left behind, and it followed us into camp. If I was only going towards home, I would try and bring it in for him. Tell Bessie, my girl, that Papa yesterday saw a great many beautiful flowers along the way, and they made me think of my little girl. I wish I could send her some fresh ones. As it is, I will put in for you, Dear, and for her a sprig of heather in bloom which is all about our camp tonight. I gathered an armful of it to spread my blankets on for my bed tonight. I wish, Darling, you would write--every chance you get. I will endeavor to do the same.

Your loving,
John

Remember me to the Sternbergs and the Boyles

Fort Lapwai

August 12, 1877

Dear Mamma,

Your letters have been coming somewhat irregularly lately.

I am still lonely, as, of course, I should always be without John. It had been nearly two weeks since I had heard from him until I had a note yesterday. It seemed so long since it was written that I wanted another one, as soon as I had read it, to tell me what he had been doing since. By John's note, I suppose General Howard had not, up to that date, heard of the Indians going North, but some official dispatches were brought back by an Indian that show the news reached him just about that time. He cut loose from his infantry and artillery and hurried on with his headquarters and cavalry and expected to be in that region on the seventh and then follow the Indians. This is the 12th, and I feel so anxious to hear what has happened.

We have heard two stories about the Indians. Both are believed by some of our people here. One is that Joseph is going North, as fast as he can, but is obliged to move slowly, sometimes making only a few miles a day, because his stock is worn out and he has a great many wounded to carry with him. The other story is that Joseph has come or is on his way back to this valley by the Elk City Trail, reinforced and ready for another fight. Two companies have been sent up the Elk City Trail, and we just wait here, not knowing anything. I am the only one at the post whose husband is with General Howard's command. Colonel Perry has gone on the Spokane expedition and will be back soon. How I wish it was over and John safe back home. I told you the 2nd Infantry was to come out here to this Department. They did not come out to the post but started for the Spokane country.

Bert and Bess have both added to their prayers lately, "Please, God, take care of our dear Papa and bring him home safe to us." Yesterday, Bert heard his Papa's letter read, and when he went to say his prayers, said, "Please, God, take care of my dear Papa, and bring the little Indian pony home safe to us." A great deal of love to all.

Your affectionate daughter,

Emily FitzGerald

P.S. We have had dreadful news this morning of a horrible fight. Eight killed or wounded. When will it end? Oh, the aching hearts that must follow when the list of names is known.

Camp on the East Lolo
20 miles from Missoula
August 7, 1877

Darling,

The last two days we have been in rather a handsome country, i.e., since we struck the eastern Lolo River, which is a tributary of the Bitter Root river. Last night we had the most picturesque camp I have ever seen -- a very remarkable spot where there are 4 hot springs. The steam from them this morning rose up as if from a number of steam mills. I bathed my feet in one of them last night and found it as hot as I could bear comfortably. There was a good trout fishing in the Lolo nearby, and Colonel Sanford and I got quite a fine string and had them for breakfast. Today we had a long hard march over the hill and got down on the Lolo again this evening for camp -- and in a pretty place. Colonel Sanford and I again had some trout fishing.

We are 20 miles from Missoula, but we learn tonight that the Indians are about 60 miles off, and that General Gibbon is after them with about 200 infantry in wagons, and is within 30 miles of them. We are to push on tomorrow with the cavalry, with a view to overtake him. The Indians were allowed to pass through this valley by the scalawag population that bought their stolen horses. And it is said some of them traded ammunition, powder, etc., to the redskins for their stolen property, gold dust, etc. We hear that several watches have been traded for by citizens of Missoula, and it is possible that Mr. Theller's watch may be recovered. Mr. Fletcher went into Missoula this morning, and Mr. Ebstein is to go in tomorrow, but our command, the cavalry, is to turn off in another direction about 10 miles this side of Missoula tomorrow. The artillery and infantry are nearly two days behind us, but General Howard and staff are now with the cavalry commands. It seems to me that things look as if we should have an end of it all in a few days or weeks, as the Indians will either be whipped or driven across the line into British possessions. The rumor is that Joseph has left White Bird and Looking Glass and is somewhere in the mountains by himself with his band.

Our poor animals are tired and considerably run down. Old Bill is but the shadow of what he was when I left Lapwai.

Well, Darling wife, how are my precious ones? What a happy hub you will have when his "Footsteps homeward he hath turned." I hope you are well. I am and have been, and a large part of the time have rather enjoyed this nomadic life. Do you know, or rather, can you realize, that

for nearly every morning of this month we have found ice in our wash basins and buckets? It is rather rough on us to be roused out of our warm beds at 3, 4, or 5 A.M. It almost "takes the hair off," as they say.

Your old husband, John

Weippe Quotes

"What are we fighting for? Is it for our lives? No. It is for this land where the bones of our fathers lie buried. I do not want to take my women among strangers. I do not want to die in a strange land. Some of you tried to say once that I was afraid of the whites. Stay here with me now and you will have plenty of fighting. We will put our women behind us in these mountains and die on our own land fighting for them. I would rather do that than run I know not where."

Chief Joseph

"The Indians ride with a hair-rope knotted around the under jaw for a bridle. The men use a stuffed pad with wooden stirrups. The women sit astride, in a saddle made with a very high pommel and cantle, and in traveling carry their infants either dangling by the cradle-strap to the former, or slung in a blanket over their shoulders; while children of a little larger growth sit perched upon the pack-animals, and hold on as best they may."

George Gibbs

surveyor and ethnologist, 1855.

"The ascent of the heights beyond Kamiah was tedious in the extreme. It was raining hard, and the muddy, slippery trail was almost impassable, filled with rugged rocks and fallen timber. The descent to the Lo-lo Fork was made by slipping, crawling and scrambling over rocks and

through thick underbrush. At the "We-ipe" was an opening in the forest with water and grass. Here was a camp made for the weary, footsore animals and exhausted men, after a sixteen mile march of the greatest severity."

Lt. E.S. Farrow

"At the "We-ipe,"... there was quite a lengthy opening in the forest, and plenty of water and grass. The hostile Indians had pastured this plat pretty well, and had dug over much of the land for the camas roots...."

Gen. Oliver Otis Howard

"The first night we camped at the Wey-ipe (Nez Perce for a marshy place in the mountains), where camas was so plentiful that the path had taken by our men was in many places actually white with that favorite Indian bulb."

Thomas A. Sutherland

"The camp was generally rectangular in form. One battalion covered the front, usually, camping in line, and sending guard and picket details well out. A second covered the sides or flanks, a third the rear. The battery took its place at will....For headquarters a place was sought of easy communication, and having a neat plat of ground, with wood and water convenient....

The "big tent" was a common square tent. Mason had a smaller one of special make....His was put beside the big one, on one side; a tent-fly was pitched, with open front and back, on the other [for Dr. Alexander, Lieutenant Fletcher and Sutherland]....The quarter-master, Lieutenant Ebstein, pitched still another tent-fly for himself and his clerks. A small pack train, under Louis, the Mexican, came up promptly after the night's halt was called.

The kitchen was placed some twenty paces off...The kitchen consisted of our mess-chest and one or two canvas bags, one or two mule-loads, according to the state of the supplies. When the nights were damp or cold we always had a large fire made in front of the big tent. Our beds were common blankets or robes....Our table consisted of a square of canvas, spread near the "kitchen," in fair weather, and within the big tent when it was rainy."

Gen. Oliver Otis Howard

The Lolo Trail Quotes

"The trip through Lolo Trail was made in excellent time, and to General Howard is due the full credit, as he alone appeared to be the man anxious to hurry ahead, at all hazards to life or limb, and at all times. On leaving Kamiah we were accompanied by a severe rain which kept us company for the entire day, making the march. Which was single file on account of the narrowness of the path, far the most slippery, sticky, muddy and filthy of the trip.

For about three days and a half of our experience on this trail our horses were entirely without grass, the only semblance of it being a tough species of wire growth which mules and horses alike refuse to eat. The rapid marches, lack of food and camping on the sides of the mountains which deprive the poor brutes of rest at night, made our last tramps before reaching the east end of the Lolo very laborious."

Thomas A. Sutherland

"For ten days we toiled along this pathway. The marching hour was sunrise, the camping hour sunset. Often the hillsides were so steep that we could not sleep comfortably without digging out a bed. Each calvaryman had been required to start with ten pounds of grain for his horse, but several times horses and patient pack-mules were tied up at night without a mouthful of any kind of fodder."

Lt. C.E.S. Wood

“The trail ahead being obstructed by fallen trees of all sizes and descriptions, uprooted by the winds and matted together in every possible troublesome way, a company of forty "pioneers," with axes, was organized and sent ahead to open the trail, wherever possible. It is true that the Indians had gone over this trail ahead of the troops; but they had jammed their ponies through, over and under rocks, around, over and under logs and fallen trees and through the densest undergrowth, and left blood to mark their path, with abandoned animals with broken legs or stretched dead on the trail.”

Lt. E.S. Farrow

Soldier Meadows Quotes

“The second day's march involved a perpetual vaulting over fallen timber and wallowing in mud holes until our arrival at the next camp. Here we found a most delightful marsh, filled with mosquitoes and bog holes seemingly without depth. Our cavalry horses on being turned out fell into the holes [from which they were extricated only by means of considerable neck and tail stretching]....”

Major Mason

And Major Mason informed his wife that *"we live on hard bread, bacon and occasional potatoes, coffee."*

Weitas Meadows Quote

“The command left Camp Winters at seven, A.M. Artillery at head of column. Day clear and pleasantly cool....The trail led through woods of the same general character as before; rather a "slow trail," owing to mountainous country and fallen timber. The summit of the hills was

covered with rough granite boulders, making the path quite difficult. There was plenty of excellent springs on trail; our men travel it well, and are in good order. We march sixteen miles and encamp on a slope of the mountain. Poor grazing, indeed, here. The only feed consists of wild dwarf lupine and wire-grass. Several mules were exhausted, and some packs of bacon were abandoned by the way....Loose Indian horses, broken-down always, were seen along the trail."

Gen. O. O. Howard

August 2, 1877

Bald Mountain Quotes

"This Friday morning is cold and disagreeable. It began to rain during the night and this morning it's almost cold enough to make ice--for we are up near the snow line, with the snow peaks all around us. We are making a late start this morning for our mules are almost played out on this trail. How can I describe...this mountain trail? It runs through the thickest of forests, and the most broken mountains I have ever seen. The fallen timber covers the trail so that every few feet there is a log to climb over or crawl around. We have to keep our pioneers at work [with] their axes all day long. We start at 6 A.M. and ...work hard all day and make about 16 miles by 6 P.M. Our train and troops string out about 5 miles in length, as there is no danger of a flank attack in these forests, for no one can travel a foot off the trail, it makes no difference about the length of our line. The scenery is very grand from the top of some of the mountains we cross. While all day long it has the top of some of the mountains we cross. While all day long it has been very pleasant to travel through the dense forests with the sunlight glinting through the trees. It looks a little brighter in the sky just now and I think it will clear up. We will have only a short march today--about 10 miles--but that will take until late in the afternoon. The grass is very scanty in these mountains and it's very poor feeding for the poor fellows [sic--horses and mules]."

Major Mason

“This camp was on the side of a mountain and so precipitous that at dinner [sic--supper?]...Gen. Howard had to rest his coffee cup on a stone, on one side, to keep it from going over the hill. According as the tents were pitched, or rather beds made in them, we slept almost erect or standing on our heads.”

Thomas A. Sutherland

Howard Camp Quote

“Our American horses were not used to the fodder of the native cayuse. We carried no forage. If we should chance upon one of the little mountain valleys where there should be grass, we found it either trampled down by Joseph's ponies or destroyed in some other way. Many is the time we have cut bark from the trees for our horses. Colonel Sanford, in charge of the cavalry arm of the service reported that there were not more than 20 or 25 horses in the entire command fit for a run of 70 or 80 miles.”

Pvt. William Connolly

21 Mile Camp Quote

“We had passed the last tine of the Clearwater, where at night, after twenty-one miles of the roughest country, with Spurgin's pioneers ahead, cutting out the trail, we came into camp in the twilight, where we had heard loud echoes of firing by the advanced scouts, and thought they had come upon Joseph's rearguard. Then we spurred up the weary animals into a tired trot, and, along this narrow trail descended for miles through the almost impenetrable forest, till we came

to the narrowest of valleys, to find not a mouthful of food for horse or mule, but the nicest of salmon for the men, in water about knee-deep,--water clear as crystal, rushing and splashing over the rocks. The echoes which deceived us into thinking the enemy near, were from the scouts' carbines, shooting the bigger fish, as they were swimming up the Clearwater [Crooked Fork].”

.Gen. O. O. Howard

Packer Meadows Quote

“Here was the place where mule and man enjoyed a rest and a breakfast far more satisfying than in inhabited regions which are replete with abundance.”

Gen. O. O. Howard

Lolo Hot Springs Quotes

“When the Nez Perces camp reached the Hot Springs on the Lo Lo trail... three Indians met them in their camp. One of these Indians was Nez Perces, but his home was in the Bitter Root Valley. He told Looking Glass there were some soldiers on the trail watching for them to come.”

Duncan McDonald

Nez Perce reporter

“Horses and mules were feeding on the green, as quiet and contented as if it had always been their home... Blankets and clothing were spread for airing, and already the under-clothing was being wrung out by the half-naked owners, in the hot water of the pools, and waving gently on the bushes, as the sun and breeze caused speedy drying.”

Gen. O. O. Howard

“The last two days we have been in rather a handsome country, i.e., since we struck the eastern Lolo River (Lolo Creek), which is a tributary of the Bitter Root River. Last night we had the most picturesque camp I have ever seen--a very remarkable spot where there are 4 hot springs... I bathed my feet in one of them last night and found it as hot as I could bear comfortably. There was good trout fishing in the Lolo nearby, and Colonel Sanford and I got quite a fine string and had them for breakfast.”

Dr. John FitzGerald

August 7, 1877

“At half-past five, A.M., Spurgin, with his axemen, was already out on the trail, working hard, to get well ahead of the command, so that it might make, today, the utmost distance over this terribly rough and obstructed pathway. He cleared away the fallen trees, made bridges across chasms, and, when there was time, by side-digging or walling with fragments of the rock, he improved portions of the break-neck trail.

At half-past six, A.M., with some reluctance leaving these hot springs and this charming camp, we set out, and made twenty-two miles.”

Gen. O. O. Howard

“No matter if they do 'only want to be let alone', the people of Idaho are our people and their 'butchers' would be ours if circumstances were favorable.”

J.H. Mills, editor, New Northwest,

in letter to Governor Pott, July 22, 1877

“It is an outrage that the Nez Perce shall be allowed to pass through our territory...”

J.H. Mills, editor, New Northwest

“I had a talk with Chief's Joseph, White Bird and Looking Glass, who proposed if allowed to pass unmolested, to march peaceably through the Bitter Root Valley.”

Captain Rawn

“You are volunteers; you come to fight us. I could kill you if I wanted to, but I do not. You can go to your homes. I give you my word of honor that I will harm nobody.”

Looking Glass to volunteers returning from Lolo Trail barricade

‘Looking Glass met us and told us he would not harm any persons or property in the valley if allowed to pass in peace and that we could pass through his camp to our homes.’

W.B. Harlan, settler

“I recognize the fact that the Indian must yield to the white man . . . but power is not justice, force is not law!”

Major H. Clay Wood

Adjutant to General Oliver Otis Howard

Commander, Department of the Columbia

"I . . . was made not to suffer the bondage of government! I would be as the coyote and the wolf . . . seeking to die in the wild forest alone . . . to be eaten by the wolf's fang or the vulture's beak - instead of the slow dying of bondage!"

Shot-in-the-Head

Nez Perce Warrior

" . . . we as soldiers . . . said it was a shame to kill those people. But we were soldiers and had to do as told."

Charles N. Loynes

Corporal, 7th Infantry

"We took away their country and their means of support, broke up their mode of living, their habits of life, introduced disease and decay among them and it was for this and against this they made war. Could anyone expect less?"

Gen. Philip H. Sheridan

"It is my conviction that the main cause of the bloody Nez Perce War lay back of ideas of legal ownership. It rested in the natural and persistent resistance of independent nations to the authority of other nations."

General Oliver O. Howard

Department of the Columbia

"If we ever owned the land we own it still, for we never sold it. . . Suppose a white man should come to me and say, "Joseph, I like your horses, and I want to buy them." I say to him, "No, my horses suit me, I will not sell them." Then he goes to my neighbor, and says to him: "Joseph has some good horses. I want to buy them, but he refuses to sell." My neighbor answers, "Pay me the money, and I will sell you Joseph's horses." The white man returns to me and says, "Joseph, I

have bought your horses, and you must let me have them." If we sold our lands to the Government, this is the way they were bought.

Heinmot Tooyalakekt
Chief Joseph

"A great many lies have been told us. They say I want to fight, which is not true. I have a wife and children, cattle and horses. I have eyes and a heart and I can see and understand that if we fight we have to leave all and go to the mountains."

Chief Ollicot
Joseph's Brother

"You asked what right we had to go into the fight when the Nez Perces passed through our valleys peaceably: we answer, "To avenge the wrongs they had committed on the early settlers at Mount Idaho.

"Captain John B. Catlin, Commander, Civilian Volunteers

"Let me be a free man -- free to travel, free to stop, free to work, free to trade where I choose, free to choose my own teachers, free to follow the religion of my fathers, free to talk and think and act for myself - and I will obey every law, or submit to the penalty."

Chief Joseph

"In all this trouble with the Indians - it is to be remembered - the officers are subject to the 'Higher Ups' in Washington. If the Indians are off their reservations, the military is sent to put them back - now if the Indians object, you have an Indian War on your hands.

Charles N. Loynes
Corporal, 7th Infantry

"The army has had no part in making or breaking the long list of treaties; was not responsible for the constant crowding of the Indian by the onward march of the settler and miner; nor can the oppression of the weaker race by the stronger be charged against the army."

Lieutenant Charles A. Woodruff

Acting Battalion Adjutant, 7th Infantry

"It was the old story of the government . . . sending a handful of soldiers against a host of Indians better armed than ourselves. They rallied from all directions and soon every bush and tree covered an Indian."

Charles N. Loynes

Corporal, 7th Infantry

Big Hole Battlefield Quotes

"We came to that place in the afternoon, towards evening. We stayed that night and next day. Evening came on again, and it was after sundown - not too late - lots of us children were playing. It was below the camp towards the creek that we . . . boys played the stick or bone game. They were noisy, having lots of fun, and I was with them. We were only having a good time."

White Bird

Nez Perce Child

"We received orders to give three volleys, then charge - we did so. That act would hit any one old as well as young, but what any individual soldier did while in the camp, he did so as a brute, and not because he had any orders to commit such acts."

Charles N. Loynes

Corporal, 7th Infantry

"Suddenly a single shot on the extreme left rang out on the clear morning air, followed quickly by several others, and the whole line pushed rapidly forward through the brush. Logan's company being sent in on the run on the extreme right. A heavy fire was at once opened along the whole line of tepees, the startled Indians rushing from them in every direction, and for a few moments no shots were returned."

Colonel John Gibbon

Commander, 7th Infantry

"We were trapped - sleeping - unarmed. They spied on us across the mountains when we thought not of foes."

Yellow Wolf

Nez Perce Warrior

"The women, all scared when the soldiers charged the camp, ran into the water, the brush. Any place where they could hide themselves and children. Many were killed as they ran. They had no guns. Those two brave women must have run for shelter, but seeing so many women and children falling, got guns, maybe from dead soldiers, and helped drive the enemies from the camp."

Red Wolf

Nez Perce Warrior

"Why are we retreating? Since the world was made brave men fight for their women and children. Are we going to run to the mountains and let the whites kill our women and children before our eyes? It is better we should be killed fighting. Now is our time. Fight! Shoot them down. We can shoot as well as any of these soldiers."

White Bird

Nez Perce Chief

"The soldiers had set fire to some of the tepees. I heard the voice of an Indian calling to the warriors to drive the soldiers from the camp. Many had no guns, but the few who did have them rallied. Those soldiers soon turned back across the creek. The fighting continued, and I, Two Moon crossed the creek and helped in driving those soldiers, shooting whenever a chance offered."

Two Moon

Nez Perce Warrior

"At this stage of the game our forces . . . were badly whipped. General Gibbon rode up the right bank of the creek and ordered a retreat. Our forces then fell back, one half mile up the creek . . . Here General Gibbon called a halt and told his men that we would make this place our final stand. Our men were mad and desperate."

Captain John B. Catlin

"The fighting now stopped for a while. The Indians returning to the camp. They all cried when they saw what had been done, so many killed every where. Men, women, and children lay dead among dead soldiers and burned tepees and bedding."

Red Elk

Nez Perce Warrior

". . . we came back . . . to find part of our village in ruins. This tepee here was standing and silent. Inside we found . . . two women lying in their blankets dead. Both had been shot. The mother had her newborn baby in her arms. His head was smashed, as by a gun breech or boot heel . . . Some soldiers acted with crazy minds."

Yellow Wolf

Nez Perce Warrior

"Few of us will forget the wail of mingled grief, rage and horror which rose from the camp when the Indians returned to it and recognized their slaughtered warriors, women, and children."

Colonel John Gibbon

Commander, 7th Infantry

"I was getting pretty hungry and dry. After we had dug in the trenches for a while, three soldiers were detailed to go down to the creek and get water for the wounded. It was pretty risky business, but they got back all right. One of them stopped to ask me to take a swallow of water, which I willingly did. It had been some time since I had any food or water, and it tasted mighty good."

Thomas C. Sherrill

Citizen Volunteer

"The night grew old, and the firing faded away. Soldiers would not shoot. Would not lift head nor hand above their hiding . . . We knew then they were holding cartridges for maybe a charge by us. We did not charge. If we killed one soldier a thousand would take his place. If we lost one warrior, there was none to take his place."

Yellow Wolf

Nez Perce Warrior

"All along on that trail was crying. Mourning for many left where we thought no war would come. Old people, half-grown boys and girls, mothers, and little babies. I can never forget that day."

Black Eagle

Nez Perce Warrior

"What made Joseph so hostile was the killing of some of their women and children by accident as we were told not to shoot the squaws and I honestly can say it was not done on purpose."

Homer Coon

Private, 7th Infantry

"The Nez Percés never make war on women and children; we could have killed a great many women and children while war lasted, but we would feel ashamed to do so cowardly an act."

Chief Joseph

"After this battle the Indians knew that there was no safety for them in Montana; they fled and led General Howard a lively chase . . ."

Lt. Charles A. Woodruff

Adjutant, 7th Infantry

"Every day was struggling. Fighting and hurrying on. Faint for food; tired with the hard travelling. Many difficulties I cannot explain. Little children, some of them wounded. Women dying of wounds on the trail. Men left to die or be killed by the soldiers and scouts because they were too old to travel further, or shot too badly to ride."

Raven Spy

Nez Perce Warrior

"What sort of man will brag as to how many he killed. There were many killed on both sides."

Charles N. Loynes

Corporal, 7th Infantry

"...General Miles struck across the Missouri, by forced march, with 600 men, intercepted steamboats and made them ferry him across the Missouri, attacked and surrounded Joseph, and after four days of fighting captured hundreds of ponies and compelled the surrender of Joseph and all of his band, except those under White Bird, who escaped through his lines and fled to British America."

Lt. Charles A. Woodruff

Adjutant, 7th Infantry

"You know how you feel when you lose kindred and friends through sickness-death. You do not care if you die! With us it was worse! Strong men; well women and little children killed and buried. They had not done wrong to be so killed. We had only asked to be left in our homes; the homes of our ancestors. Our going was with heavy hearts, broken spirits. But all this is now placed back of us."

White Feather

Nez Perce Woman

"The soldier, the big white chief had said: 'My brother, we will no more fight. When you turn back, and I turn back, we make the path clean from blood. Next generation coming will have friendship pure for all. Of course we have hurt on both sides; destroyed on both sides. But all this is now placed back of us.'"

Red Elk

Nez Perce Warrior

"What I now feel as I sit here, what comes to me, is this: My own blood - our mothers and fathers, our brothers and sisters - if you dig in this ground you will find their bones. It was not our fault, all of that early morning killing. I speak it for the record I recognize to be true. I think of only the few of us left."

White Hawk

Nez Perce Man

"Hear me my Chiefs! My heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever."

Chief Joseph

"If the white man wants to live in peace with the Indian he can live in peace. There need be no trouble. Treat all men alike. Give them all the same law. Give them all an even chance to live and grow . . . Whenever the white man treats the Indian as they treat each other, then we shall have no more wars. We shall be . . . brothers of one father and one mother, with one sky above us and one country around us . . . Then the Great Spirit . . . will smile upon this land, and send rain to wash out the bloody spots made by brothers' hands upon the face of the earth. For this time the Indian race are waiting and praying."

Chief Joseph

"The Assiniboinés are killing the Nez Percés as I sent them word that they could fight any that escaped and take their arms and ponies."

Colonel Nelson Miles

"I had no food, no blankets except the one I used for the horses saddle-blanket. Along came an Indian, and when we threw the signs, I discovered he was a friendly Cree. He was kind and generous, for he gave me a pair of moccasins and some food."

Ten year old Suhm-Keen

Nez Perce

"Just how many Nez Perce died at the hands of the Assiniboine and nearby Gros Ventre is unknown. At least one report claims as many as thirty-four."

Sherman to General
Otis Howard, 12 December 1877. And Sherman to Philip Sheridan, 31 August, 1887, Records of
the U.S. Army

“At the same time, the Bannock scouts began to disinter the Nez Perce dead, scalping and mutilating the bodies. They scalped one dead warrior, then kicked him in the face, and jumped on his body and stomped him. In fact they did everything mean to him that they could”.

“...And it is said some of them traded ammunition, powder, ect. to the redskins for their stolen property, gold dust, etc.”

Dr. John FitzGerald

“I was told by one of Colonel Gibbon's officers that the squaws were not shot at until two officers were wounded by them and a soldier or two killed..”

John FitzGerald

“I rode closer, Eeh Crows! A new tribe fighting Chief Joseph. Many snows the Crows had been our friends. But now, like the Bitterroot Salish, turned enemies. My heart was just like fire.”

Yellow Wolf