

CHAPTER 4

A DAY OF DECISION

(As of February 23, 2011)

December 4, 1855 (Tuesday):

Incident at Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Walla Walla

1: Colonel James Kelly Official Report: "On the morning of the 5th (4th) (*this "5th" was a typographical dated error, should be the "4th"*) a body of Indians was observed on the opposite side of the Columbia, apparently making preparations to cross the river with a large amount of baggage. Seeing us in the possession of the fort, they were deterred from making the attempt, when I sent a small detachment down to a bar, making into the Columbia immediately below the mouth of the Walla Walla, and opposite to where the Indians were, with directions to fire upon them and prevent the removal of their packs and provisions. The width of the river at this place is about two-hundred and fifty yards, and a brisk fire was at once opened upon the Indians, which was returned by them from behind the rocks on the opposite shore. No boats could be procured to cross the river in order to secure the provisions or to attack the body of Indians."

4: Captain A. V. Wilson (Company A) Account: "Early next morning (December 4th), I went down to the river to wash, and saw on the opposite side of the Columbia what I supposed to be cattle. I hurried into the fort to tell the good news and get the spy-glass to count them, but in sweeping the opposite shore with the glass, the supposed cattle proved to be horses, Indians and packs. In a short time we had one of the 6-lb. howitzers we had taken out of a *cache* the evening before cleared for action. In the meantime we were joined by twenty (20) others from the (main army) camp. Col. Kelly assigned me the command of the howitzer, and with four men of Multnomah Company carrying the howitzer, we started for our first Indian fight. The others pushed ahead to gain the nearest point over-land opposite the redskins. To gain the bar we were compelled to wade the Walla Walla River, but our brave men did not hesitate at cold water...they carried the howitzers and trucks on their shoulders and pushed through the rapid stream. Before the howitzers could be got to the nearest point to the enemy, our riflemen were engaged in a skirmish with them across the river. One shot from our howitzer and they fell back and drove all their horses on the mountain. Then for two hours by occasional shots, when one would show his head above the rocks, we kept them away from their packs, but before we could construct boats to cross and capture the packs, an order came from camp for all to go to camp immediately, as the Indians had appeared in large force near our encampment. With disappointment depicted in every countenance we had to

relinquish our plunder and give up our maiden fight after having shot down but one Indian, whose comrades dragged him behind the rocks out of sight.”

6: Lieutenant Charles Pillow (Company A) Official Report: “On the morning of the 4th, quite early, they saw a party of Indians on the opposite bank of the Columbia River, which engaged the party for some time in a fight.”

5: Private Plympton Kelly (Company A) Account: “It was reported in camp this morning (December 4th) that 25 Indians were crossing the Columbia River near the fort. All those that wished to (left) for the fort in hopes of getting a fight with the Indians. They found the Indians on the opposite side of the River with their provisions deposited on the Bank of the River. The volunteers waded a slough in order to get as near the Indians as possible. They fired at the Indians across the River, it being 400 yards wide. They had no means of crossing it but a canoe so they did not attempt it. They believe that they killed one Indian.”

33: Sergeant William G. Haley (Company H) Account: “Some few Indians were on opposite side of the (Columbia) river, which our boys fired upon, and think they killed one.”

Incident at the main army camp east of Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Walla Walla

1: Colonel James Kelly Official Report: “and while engaged in this firing (on the bank of the Columbia River), a report came from camp that a body of Indians, numbering fifty (50), made their appearance on the hill north of Walla Walla (River), who after surveying our encampment, started off in a northeasterly direction **(maybe they were on the Indian road for which Lewis and Clark took to the Touchet River on April 30, 1806?)**. I at once determined to follow in pursuit of them on the following day (December 5th).”

4: Captain A. V. Wilson (Company A) Account: “On reaching our camp (in returning from Fort Walla Walla) I ascertained that Lieut. Pillow with twenty-five (25) men from Multnomah Company (A), and Lieut. Sheppard with twenty-five (25) men from Company F, had been sent in pursuit of the Indians. I was immediately ordered with twenty-five (25) men from Company A; Capt. Bennett with the balance of Company F; and Capt. Cornoyer with his company of scouts (Company K), all under the command of Major Chinn, to relieve his former command. When we reached the detachment, they were returning, having completely run their horses down chasing and skirmishing with the Indians. But the wily devils had good and fresh horses, and would not allow our men to get within rifle range of them. We passed the returning parties, and soon came within hailing distance of a few who loitered back. Through Capt. N. Olney and his friendly Indians, we succeeded in having a short talk with two (2) of their number, which resulted in learning where Pee-Peu-Mox-Mox and his people were encamped. We then returned to camp.”

6: Lieutenant Charles Pillow (Company A) Official Report: “At, or about the same time, as some of the men from the camp were strolling about the hills, they were fired upon by a party of Indians well mounted, from Pee-Pee-Mox-Mox's camp. They immediately returned to camp and gave the alarm. Lieutenant Sheppard, of Company F, with twelve (12) men, and myself, with twelve (12) from Company H, was sent out as a reconnoitering party. We found the Indians to be about forty (40) in number, reported the same, and skirmished with them most of the day. They commencing the attack about 4 o'clock PM. Finding we could not engage them at close quarters, and our horses being much wearied, we concluded to return to camp, and on our return we met the command coming to our relief, under the command of Major Chinn, with parts of companies A, B, H, I, and K (not R), accompanied with Mr. Nathan Olney, Indian agent. They proceeded on and found the Indians. Mr. Olney commenced a conversation with them, and the Indians informed him where Mox-Mox's camp was on the Touchet River, and said that if the command would come there in the morning with these they would meet them there and have a talk.”

37: Sergeant A. B. Roberts (Company A) Account: “At the placing of (the) pickets, my duty was done for the day, and as I turned to start for camp I observed a party of horsemen going out from camp towards the hills which rose up from the adjacent plains, and on those hilltops was to be seen Indians in quite numbers.”

“Turning towards the party of scouts, I was soon among them. The detachment was in command of Lieutenant Pillow (Company A) of my Company A and was composed of about 30 of our company, and were “going” for those Indians on the hills.”

“As our party approached the Indians who were of about equal numbers, they fled upon our nearing gunshot range. They went flying across a level grassy flat for about **one (1) mile** and again made a stand on the top of a ridge or hill. Rushing rapidly after them over the valley, we were soon ascending the hill and lively fire was opened upon them, but again the Indians retreated to farther hilltops.”

“Late in the afternoon...we pushed the Indians across a deep ravine (present day Nine-Mile Canyon Road) and as they ascended the opposite side, we got in a few rather close shoots which seemed to make them quite mad...we rushed down and across the ravine and again drove them to the hilltops. We rested about 10 minutes and then concluded to return to camp as we were now some 12-15 miles away (***If it was Nine-Mile Canyon, it is only 7-8 miles distant from the OMV's camp to the west.***)”

“Descending this ravine, which runs to the Walla Walla (River), we soon met a large detachment coming out to support us. With this command was Nathan Olney, the Indian Agent and some of his Indians. We told them where we had left the Indians and as our horses were needing rest, we went on to camp while the other command with the Agent went on up to the Indians and succeeded in getting an interview with them. The Indians told our people that they did not come out to fight us, but were sent out by Peopeomoxmox to invite us to come to his camp to have a council...with this report they returned to camp.”

5: Private Plympton Kelly (Company A) Account: “It was reported about noon in camp that the Indians were advancing to attack the camp. After considerable bustle and confusion, the scouting parties were sent out to see where the Indians were. We found them on top of a hill **3 miles up the river**. There was perhaps forty (40) of them. We found our horses too weak to come up with them. We followed them **three (3) or four (4) miles** but never could get nearer than 4 or 5 hundred yards. We fired a few shots at them and once they returned it the balls sassing close to us. In the evening we discovered that they were driving of cattle so it was thought necessary to send back for more men. On the way back we met Major Chinn on his way out accompanied by Nathan Olney the Indian agent. When they came near the Indians, Olney called to them and invited them to send

some one to talk with him. After receiving assurances that they would not be hurt, they sent three (3) to talk with him. They told him that the Cayuses were still friendly toward the whites.”

NOTE: From the Volunteer’s camp, where they forded to the North side of the Walla Walla River, those who chased after the Indians on this day were on the hills above the Walla Walla River Valley going east and/or northeast. The “deep ravine” that Sergeant A. B. Roberts refers to is thought to be present day Nine Mile Canyon. Between Roberts account and P. Kelly’s account, this puts the “crossing” of the ravine anywhere up this canyon which runs in a northeast direction from the Walla Walla River Valley which accounted for the difference in miles accounted by both men.

Where Olney finally caught up with the Indians was anywhere on the east side present day Nine Mile Canyon.

NOTES

In reviewing the Muster Rolls for the 1st Regiment Oregon Mounted Volunteers, the spellings of certain participants may have been spelled wrong in the above narratives.

ABOVE NARRATIVES	MUSTER ROLLS	CORRECT NAME
Sheppard/Shephard (Co. F)	Shepherd	
Bennett (Co. F)	Bennet/Burnet	
Cornoyer (Co. K)	Connoyer	

DOCUMENTS USED

1. The Oregonian, January 5, 1856, "**Official Report of Col. Kelly Of The Battle Between The Oregon Mounted Volunteers And The Indians**" from Fort Bennett, December 14, 1855, To Wm. H. Farrar, (Adjutant 1st Regt. O. V.) from Lieut. Col. James K. Kelly (December 14, 1855: Kelly to Farrar: Official Report);
4. The Weekly Oregonian, December 29, 1855 "**Particulars of the Fight at Walla Walla**" from Fort Bennett, December 14, 1855, To T. J. Dryer from Unknown (Captain A. V. Wilson, Comoany A, a daily account) (December 14, 1855: Wilson to Dryer);
5. "**We Were Not Just Summer Soldiers**" a daily account (in diary form) by Plympton Kelly, Oregon Mounted Volunteers, Company A; (Plympton Kelly Daily Diary);
6. #906 HED 3rd Sess., 34th Cong., Vol. 9, Ex. Doc. #76, Indian Affairs On the Pacific, 1856-1857: (Report of Battle of Walla Walla) To W. H. Farrar (Adjutant First Regiment Oregon Mounted Volunteers) from Charles B. Pillow (2nd Lieut., Company A, First Regiment, O.M.V), June 18, 1856, page 201-203 (June 18, 1856: Pillow to Farrar: **Official Report**);
33. The Oregon Statesman, January 1, 1856: December 15, 1855 letter, W. G. H. (1st Sergeant William G. Haley, Company H, Linn County) to Bush (Editor of the Oregon Statesman);
37. "**The Yakima War of 1855: The Campaign to Walla Walla: The Capture of the Most Noted War Chief of the Pacific Coast**" by (Sergeant) Alvin Brown (A. B.) Roberts (Oregon Mounted Volunteers, Company A, Multnomah County), Clark County History, 1967, (FHA);