

The Flight of the Nez Perce – II

Lead: Considered among the most cooperative and adaptable of the Native American tribes in the western territories, in the summer and fall of 1877 a part of the Nez Perce stopped being cooperative.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: For many years the Nez Perce had inhabited tribal homelands in Eastern Oregon and Washington and western Idaho. Under the pressure of white ranchers and miners their hunting and grazing lands reserved by

treaty with the United States had been shrinking. In 1877 they were about to shrink again this time under force. Chief Joseph, leader of a clan who had yet to participate in the treaty process and whose ancestral home along the Wallowa River in Eastern Oregon was about to disappear, had at last reluctantly agreed to move his people to the reservation in Idaho.

Naturally the move was resented and it took very little to set off Nez Perce already irritated with white violations of previous treaty terms and what they considered to be thirty unavenged murders of members of the tribe by settlers encroaching upon their land. Three young warriors struck the spark, they killed Richard Devine, a

white who earlier with impunity had killed a helpless and crippled Nez Perce tribesman. That was just the beginning.

Soon other Indians joined in the murderous spree. Joseph and the other tribal chiefs were faced with an agonizing choice of joining the insurrection or abandoning their fellow clansmen. They didn't. Thus began one of the most fascinating campaigns in American military history. Employing classic guerilla tactics the Nez Perce clans won a series of running defensive battles with the Army and civilian volunteers. Their objective was to escape north to Canada and this led them north, then south, then east through the Yellowstone National Park, then north to try to recruit Plains

Indians in the Missouri Valley, but when rejected they made a dash for Canada.

Their cause was of course, hopeless. After a slow and embarrassing series of defeats, the Army got its act together and ran the Nez Perce to ground in north central Montana after a chase lasting nearly 1500 miles. Total casualties on both sides nearly 300 killed and 250 wounded. Though he was not the only chief leading the Indians, because others had escaped or been killed it was left to Joseph to surrender. In a moving speech he acknowledged the futility of their attempt to resist the onslaught of white civilization. "...Our chiefs are killed..The little children are freezing

to death...I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever."

In Richmond, Virginia this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Beal, Merrill D. *I Will Fight No More Forever: Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce War*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1963.

Howard, Oliver O. *Nez Perce Joseph*. Boston, MA: Lee and Shepherd Publishing Company, 1881.

McWhorter, Lucullus Virgil. *Yellow Wolf: His Own Story*. Caldwell, ID The Caxton Printers, 1940.

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