

“A Good Day To Die” Indian Wars in the American West



Course Outline



- Week 1: What Came Before (*From Christopher Columbus to Manifest Destiny*)
- Week 2: A House Divided (*Genesis of the Western Wars*)
- Week 3: The Opponents (*The US Army and the Natives*)
- Week 4: Red Cloud's War, the Lakota, and the Northern Plains
- Week 5: Hancock's War, *Commancheria*, and the Southern Plains
- Week 6: The Long Struggle for *Apacheria* and the Southwest
- Week 7: The Forgotten Wars (*The Great Basin and Pacific Northwest*)
- Week 8: Finale (*From the Little Bighorn to Wounded Knee*)

“A Good Day To Die” Indian Wars in the West



OLLI “Spring” 2021

*Week 7: **The Forgotten Wars***

The Forgotten Wars

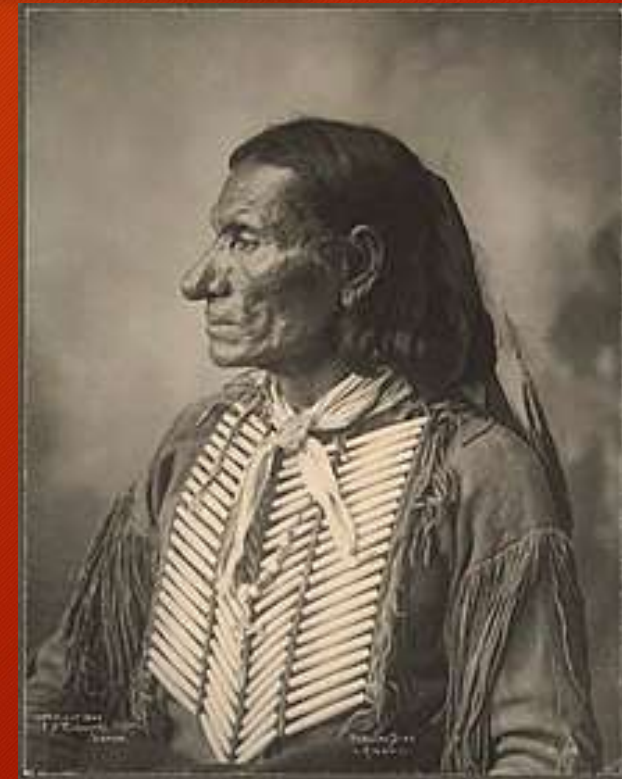


- 1) Navaho (1863-4)
- 2) Paiutes (1867-8)
- 3) The Tonto Basin Campaign (1872-3)
- 4) Modocs (1873)
- 5) Nez Percé (1877)
- 6) Bannocks (1878)
- 7) Utes (1879)

But First . . . Hairpipe Bead Breastplates



- Originally popular with Ponca Indians. First introduced in 1878 by Joseph H. Sherburne.
- Made from the stems of corncob pipes (called hairpipe beads). By 1879 could be purchased in bulk (without the pipe bowl).
- In widespread use 1880 to 1910.
- Have again become popular element in regalia.

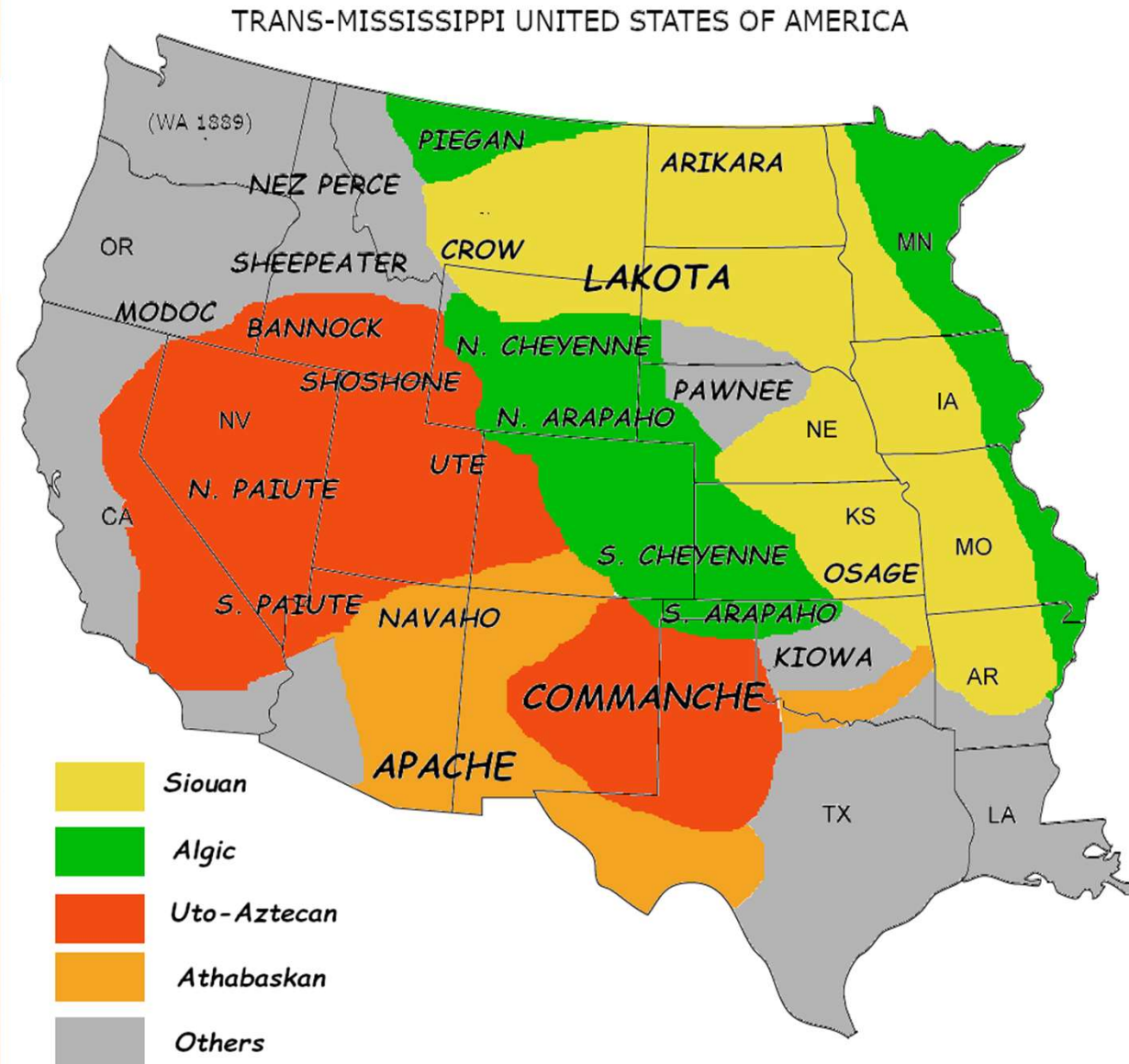


Native Geographic and Cultural Regions

- **Great Plains:** Rolling grassland, limited water. More suitable for grazing than farming. Excellent horse country.
- **Southwest:** Desert, little or no water.
- **Great Basin:** Surrounded by mountains, limited water, rocky and broken.
- **Rocky Mountains:** Tall, timbered mountains, mostly unsuitable for farming.
- **Northwest:** Mix of coastal farmlands and inland wooded hills and mountains.



Major Linguistic and Tribal Groups



**PART 1:
Navaho (1863-4)**



Who Were the Navaho?



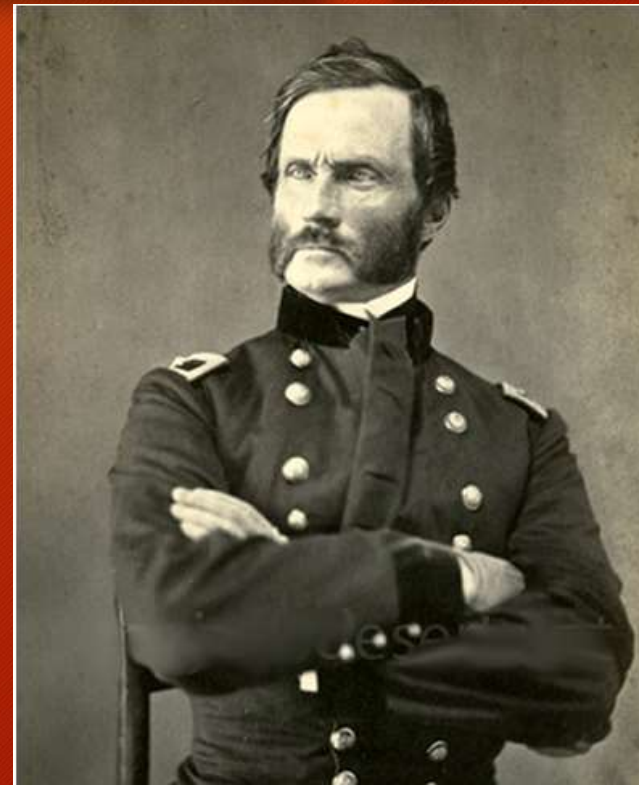
- Athabascan speakers, originally part of same tribe as Apache, but split off between 1500 and 1600.
- Settled in Southwest. Strong warrior culture. But also farming and herding of sheep and cattle.
- 12,000 total population by 1863.
- There was never a state of open warfare between the Navaho and the US before 1863, but raiding travelers and the Rio Grande settlements continued, sometime at a low level, sometimes much higher.



What Started the War?



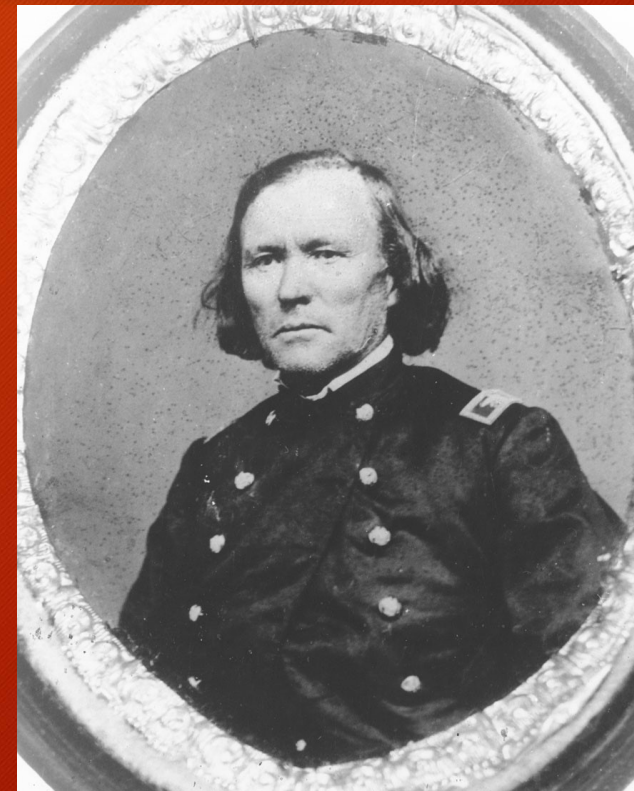
- **Who**, not What: Bde Gen James Henry Carleton, commander Department of New Mexico (which at that time included Arizona).
- Decided the only solution was to wage total war on the Navaho and move the survivors to the sterile Bosque Redondo reservation on the Pecos River in Texas.



What Happened? *Kit Carson*



- Colonel Kit Carson, commander 1st New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry. Former mountain man, army scout, and Indian agent.
- Used his regiment to attack crops, herds, flocks, and villages. Intent was to break the Navaho will to resist by destroying their possessions and sources of livelihood.
- It worked. By the end of 1864 eight thousand had given up and moved to Bosque Redondo
- The remaining four thousand gave up in 1866.



Bosque Redondo



- Not enough tillable land to support 12,000 people. Not enough grass for their goats and sheep.
- Hunger and disease, including venereal disease spread by the Army garrison, ravaged them.
- In 1868, the government admitted failure and agreed to move them back to their homes on the Colorado plateau.



**PART 2:
Paiutes (1867-8)**



Who Were the Northern Paiutes?



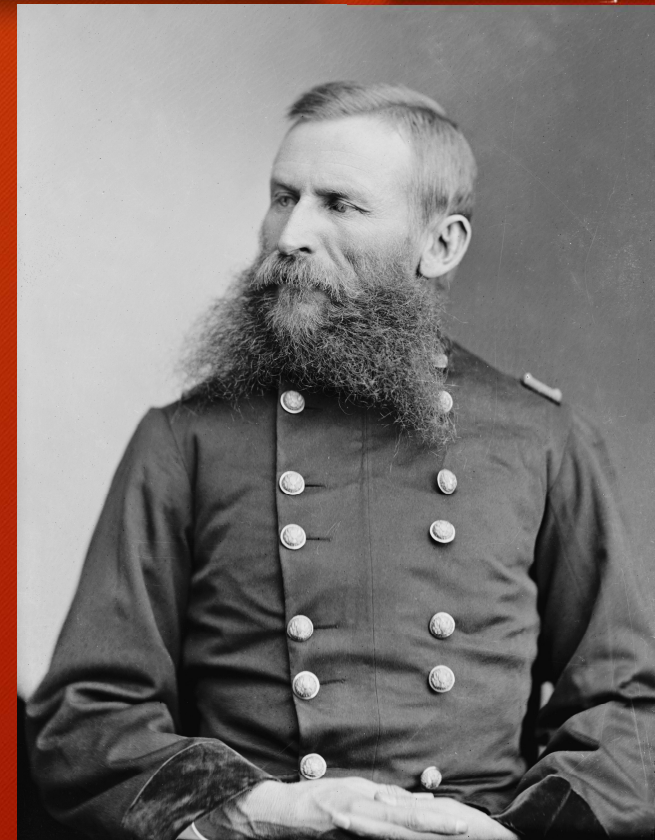
- Often called the Snake Indians the Northern Paiutes lived in northwestern Nevada and spoke a language in the Ute-Aztecan family.
- They were hunters and gatherers with a strong raiding tradition, particularly to capture slaves.
- Although they had made peace and accepted reservation life in the early 1860s, the continued influx of miners into their traditional lands as well as the disruption caused by the Civil War caused them to resume raiding.



George Crook



- Crook was a 38 year old lieutenant colonel in 1866, commanding the newly formed 23rd Infantry Regiment. He was also in charge of prosecuting the war against the Paiutes.
- The war lasted two years before the remaining Paiutes made peace. The important things about the war are the methods Crook used.
 - Recruitment of Indian scouts, both to track the enemy and to fight them.
 - Extensive use of mules to carry supplies and enable columns to stay in the field longer.
 - Use of many small columns to comb the countryside and pursue enemy bands to exhaustion.

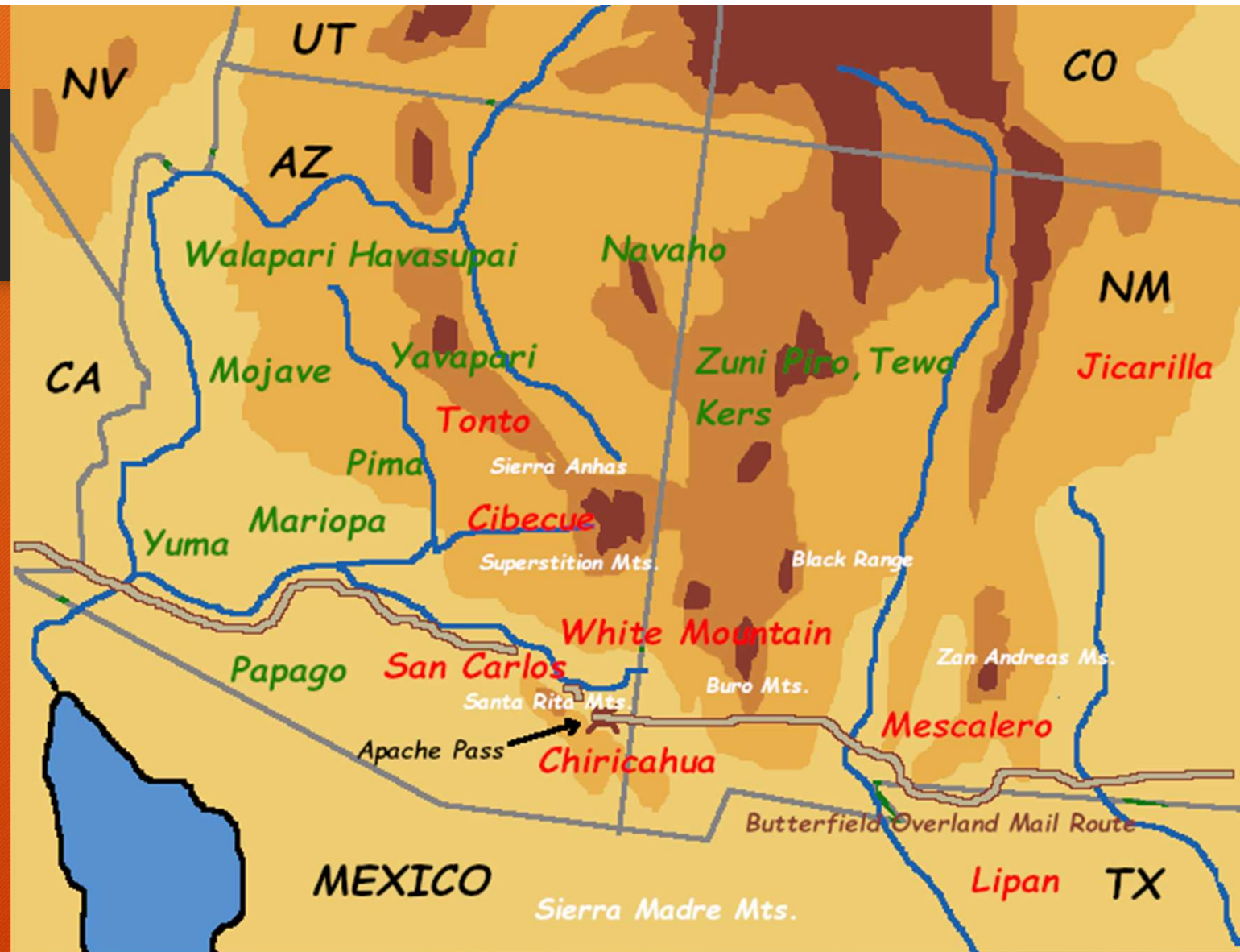


PART 3: The Tonto Basin Campaign (1872-3)



APACHERIA

- Red: Apache Tribes
- Green: Other tribes



Tonto Basin Campaign

- Although the Chiricahua under Cochise had made peace and were sticking to it, the Northern Tonto Apache and their Yavapori allies were raiding settlements and travelers from the Tonto Basin.
- George Crook fresh from his successes against the Paiutes, was given command in Arizona and ordered to suppress the raids from the Tonto Basin.
- He used the web of forts surrounding it on the south and west as bases and then used the same techniques he had perfected against the Paiutes.



The Tonto Basin Campaign



- Crook had all twelve companies of the 5th Cavalry under his command and he raised over a hundred Indian scouts: Mohave, Yavapori, and White Mountain Apache.
- He sent out multiple columns, each with a troop or two of cavalry, a detachment of 30 Indian scouts, and its own pack mule ran for supplies.
- He launched his campaign in November, making it harder for the Indian villages to escape and also make the loss of dwellings and stored food more damaging.
- By spring he had broken Indian resistance in the Tonto Basin and Indians were surrendering by the hundreds.
- The campaign was such an overwhelming success that Crook was promoted from lieutenant colonel to brigadier general, jumping seniority over all the colonels in the Army.

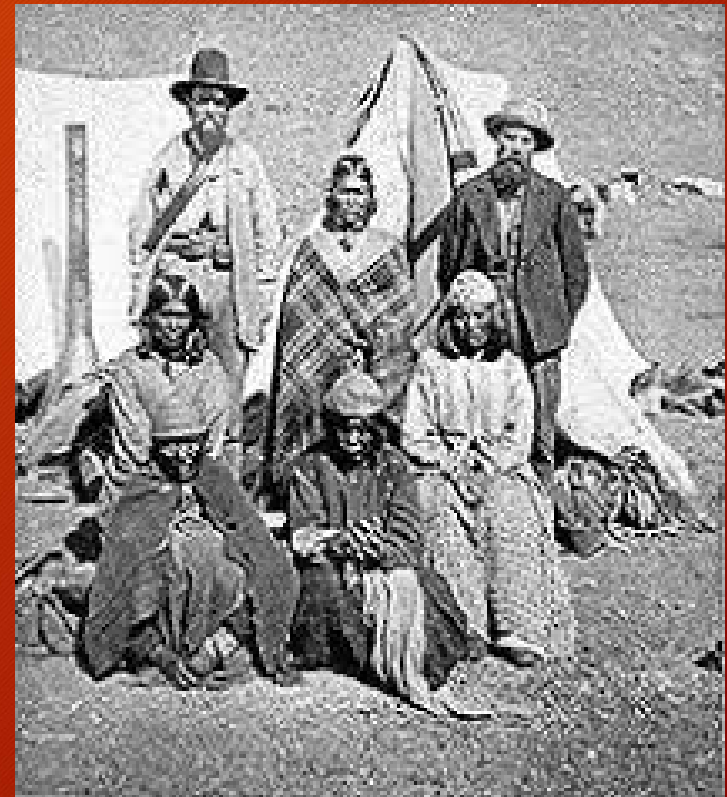
**PART 4:
Modocs (1873)**



Who Were the Modocs?



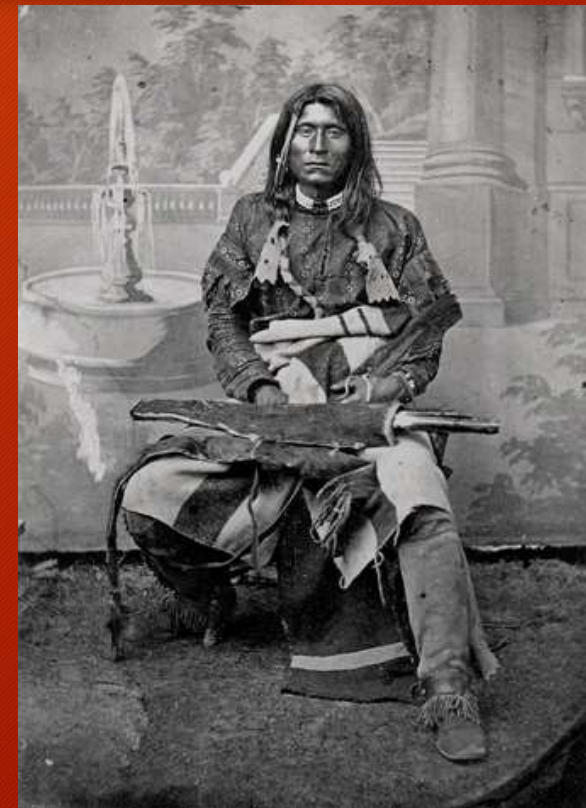
- Lived in northeastern California. Fewer than 300 total in 1870. Spoke a dialect of Penutian.
- Made living by hunting, gathering, fishing and digging roots. Had been extremely warlike and predatory, but for twenty years had settled into a friendly relationship with local Whites.
- Had settled on the Klamath Reservation, but old antipathy between the Modocs and Klamath made life difficult.



Kintpuash (Captain Jack)



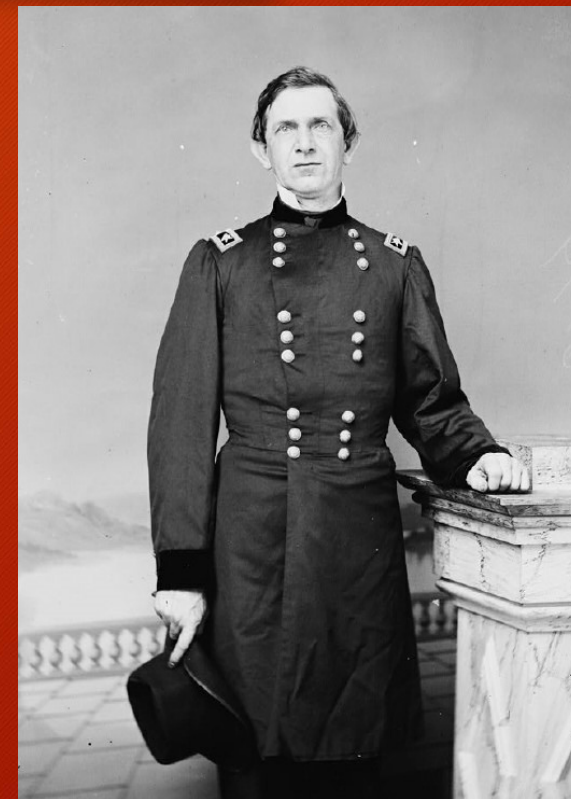
- A young, ambitious Modoc leader. Left reservation with a small band of followers to return to their ancestral lands.
- Lived there alongside White settlers for seven years: sometimes with friction, but no violence.
- More settlers moved in and agitated for removal of the Modocs to the reservation.
- November of 1872 a troop of cavalry arrived to remove them. Both sides traded rifle fire and the war was on.
- Captain Jack withdrew with 50 warriors to a series of lava beds. Eventually a thousand soldiers would besiege them.



What Happened?



- January the Army stormed the stronghold. The Army was driven back by accurate rifle fire from snipers they never saw. The Army lost 9 killed and 28 wounded while inflicting no casualties.
- General Edward Canby attempted to negotiate a settlement in April but he was murdered by Captain Jack during a truce. (The only regular army general killed in all of the Indian wars.)
- By May all of the Modocs had slipped away or surrendered. On June 1 Captain Jack captured. Jack and three others tried, convicted, and executed. 155 escorted back to reservation.



A Good Day to Die



•QUESTIONS?

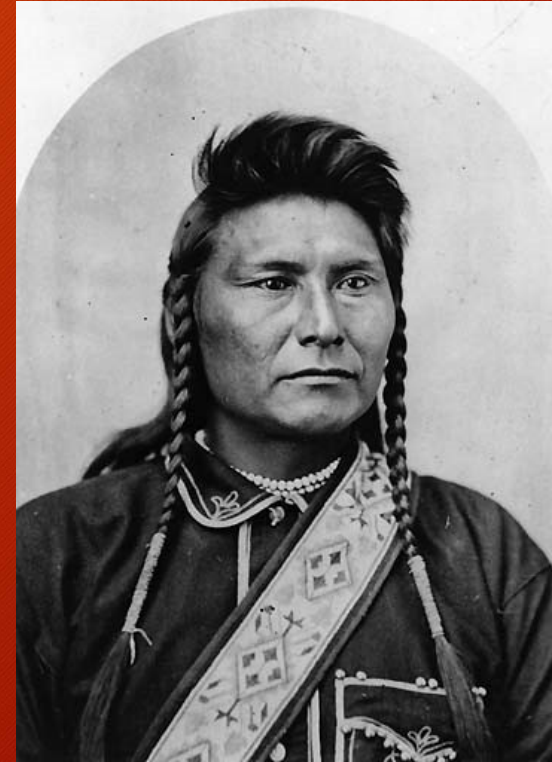
**PART 5:
Nez Percé (1877)**



Who were the Nez Percé?



- Lived in the Snake, Clearwater, and Salmon River valleys of Idaho. 4,000 total in 1860. Spoke a dialect of Penutian.
- Agreement at Walla Walla in the 1850s laid out a reservation which included most of the tribe's ancestral lands.
- There had never been war between the Whites and Nez Percé. The tribe was divided into two main factions:
- “Christians:” Mostly converted to Christianity, had taken up farming, committed to living with the Whites. About two thirds of total tribal population
- “Heathens:” More committed to traditional values, religion, and customs. Predominantly hunters and gatherers.



What Started the War? (*Gold . . .duh!*)

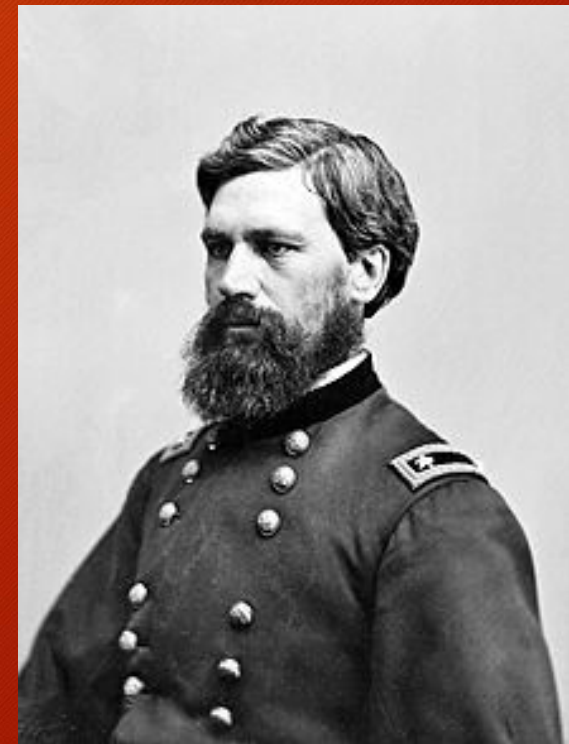


- 1863 Gold discovery in the Clearwater Valley brought pressure to reduce the Nez Percé reservation. “Christians” agreed to the new treaty, but “Heathens” who lived in the area affected did not.
- Increasing white settlement increased tension and Army gave the “non-treaty” Nez Percé an ultimatum: agree to the treaty or go to war.
- Young hotheads from the tribe attacked several Whites who had earlier attacked Indians.
- Non-treaty Nez Percé decided war was inevitable, so they would flee west across the Rockies to their Buffalo hunting grounds.

General Oliver O. Howard



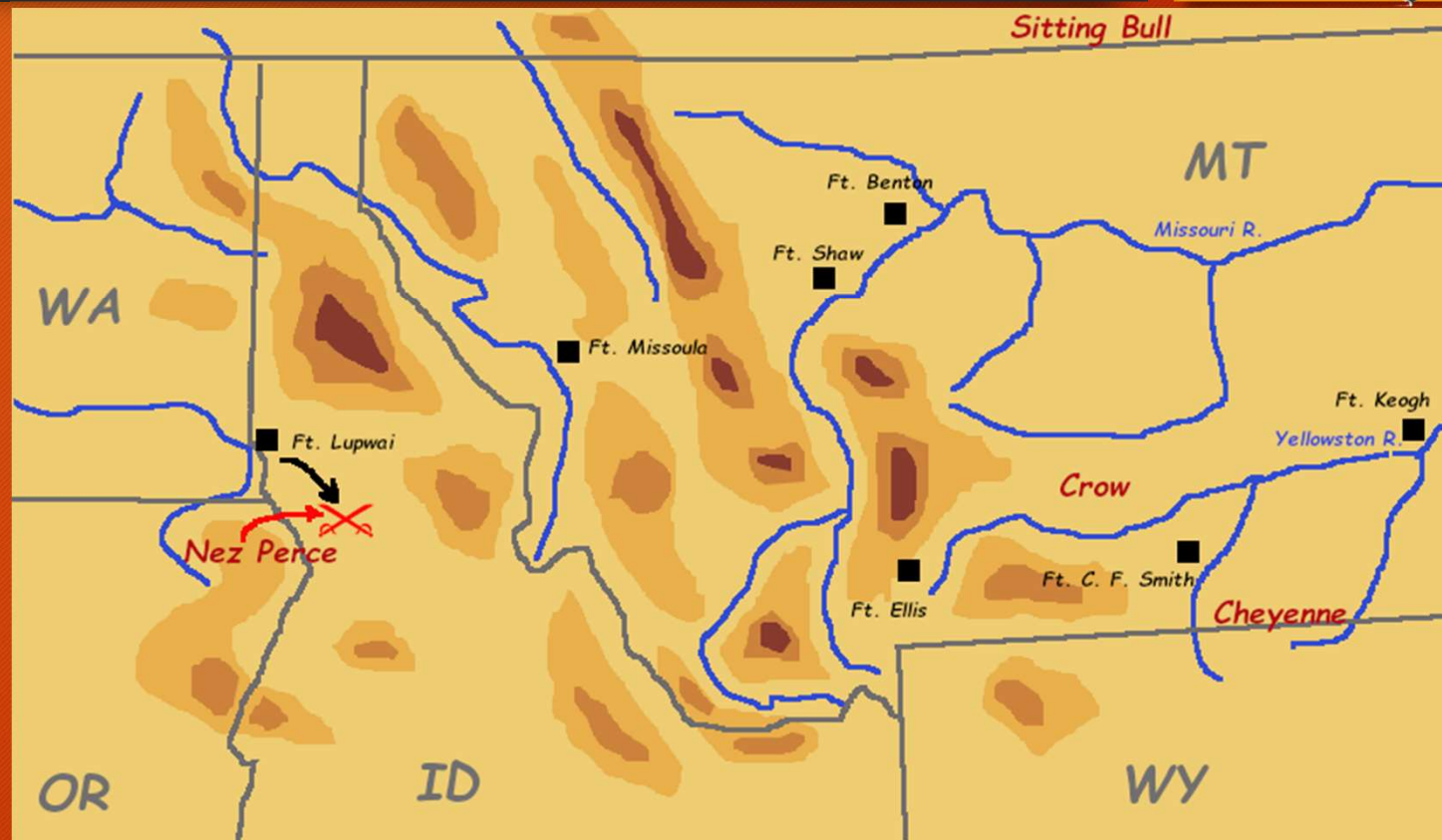
- Principled and courageous. Decorated for bravery in the Civil War, where he had lost an arm.
- Had already become famous for making peace with Cochise.
- Sympathies were with the Nez Percé, which may explain his cautious approach to the campaign.
- Military options limited by the difficult logistics of the campaign and the near impossibility of pinning the Nez Percé down.



White Bird Canyon, June 17 1877



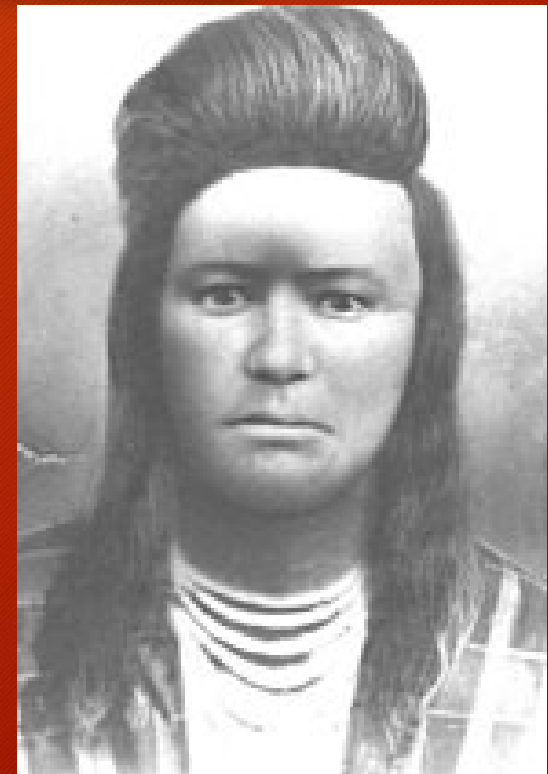
- General Howard sent two companies of cavalry from Fort Lupwai to force the non-treaty Indians to disarm and come to the reservation.
- The cavalry, under Captain David Perry, reached the Indian encampment on June 17 and attacked.



White Bird Canyon, June 17 1877



- Indian encampment along White Bird Creek had about 200 warriors but they had spent most of the previous night drinking and only 60 or 70 could be roused to defend the camp.
- Nez Percé had only 40 to 50 firearms total. Many warriors used bows. They had never fought US Army troops before.
- Cavalry advanced south, mounted in the open with creek on left (east) and broken rugged hills on the right (west). Nez Percé took cover on both flanks and in some rocks ahead of the cavalry. Chief Joseph's brother **Ollokot** led half of them, Chief White Bird led the rest.
- Cavalry rode into a box lined on three sides by Nez Percé, and discovered that they were **excellent shots**.



White Bird Canyon, June 17 1877



- Cavalry had no cover, no reserves, and the civilian volunteers panicked almost immediately, followed by parts of the two cavalry troops, and then all of them.
 - Both of the cavalry buglers present were killed early, reducing the ability to give orders to the command.
- The cavalry had 90 soldiers and 11 civilian volunteers in action. They lost **34 soldiers killed**, 2 soldiers and 2 volunteers wounded.
 - None of the dead were scalped, stripped of clothing, or mutilated
- 70 Nez Perce warriors opposed them (not all of them initially armed and many of them badly hungover). Two warriors were wounded, none killed.
 - 37 cavalry Springfield breech-loading carbines and many revolvers were captured, more than **doubling** the number of firearms the tribe had.

Nez Percé Course of Action



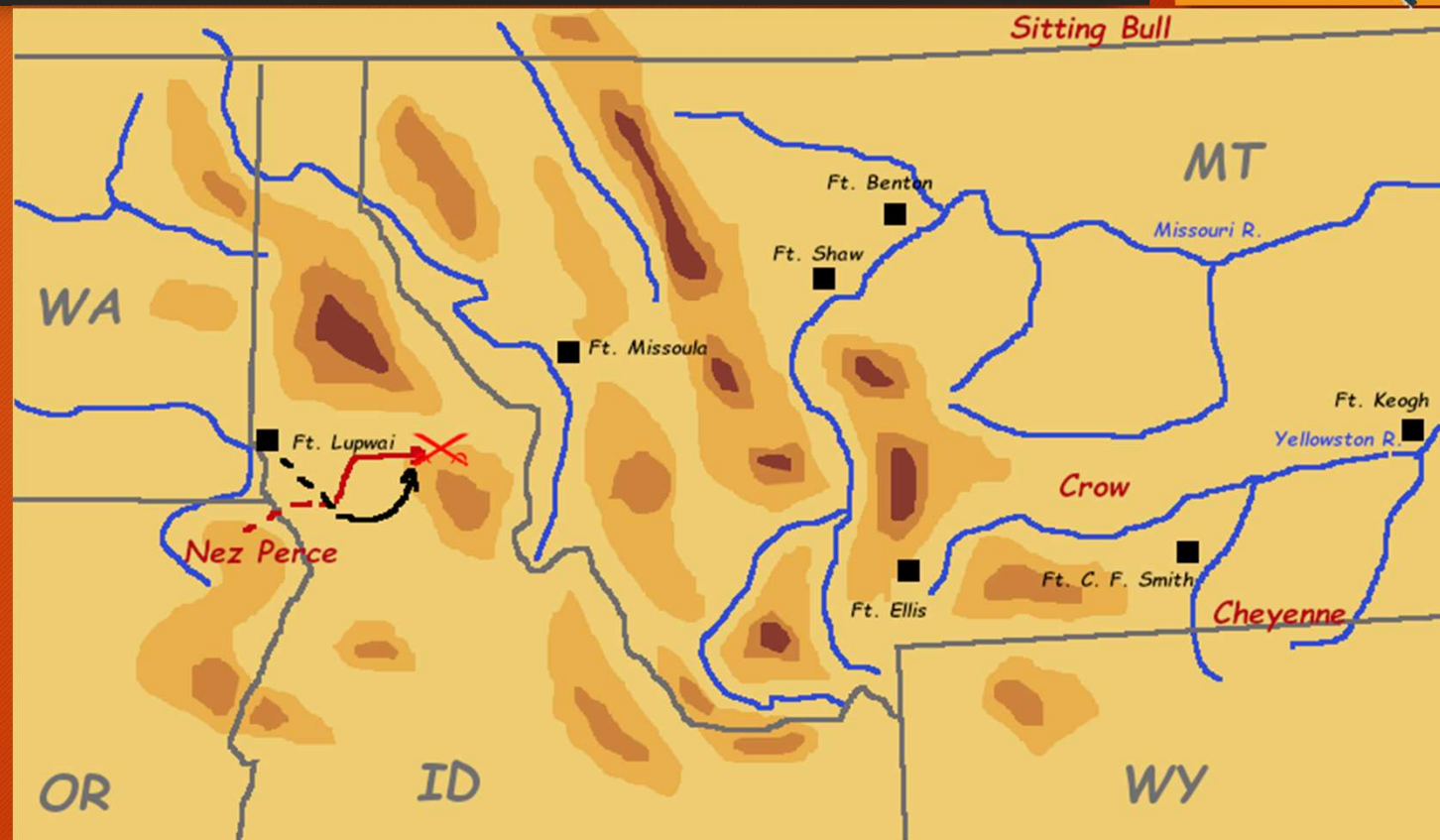
- Have already decided to march west into the Great Plains, hunt buffalo, and then see if they could make peace.
- **Chief Looking Glass** argues for an indirect route to avoid soldiers: south through the Bitterroot Valley, into Yellowstone Park, then out the east side of the park, and north into Crow country.
- The Crow had been traditional friends of the Nez Percé and so might be persuaded to join them in their war.



Battle of the Clearwater, July 11-12, 1877



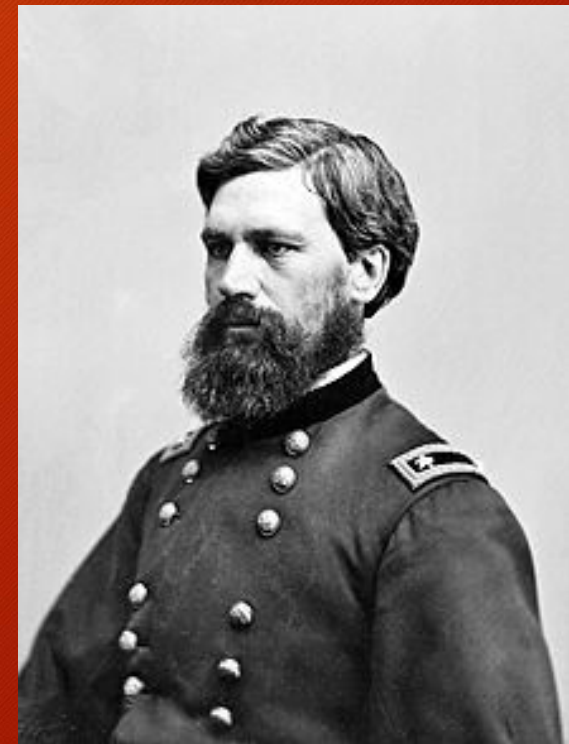
- Nez Percé withdrew to Clearwater and were joined by other small bands. Now about 800 total.
- Howard attacked. Battle lasted for two days but Indians driven from field.
- Indians fought skillful rearguard action to cover withdrawal of the women and children.



Battle of the Clearwater, July 11, 1877



- Howard's Column
 - 150 cavalry (1st Cavalry)
 - 250 infantry (21st Infantry and 4th Artillery serving as infantry)
 - 100 Volunteers and mule packers
 - Casualties: 13 killed, 27 wounded
- Nez Percé
 - About 800 people total
 - 300 warriors
 - Casualties: 4 killed, 6 wounded, but driven from the field.
- Indians in disorder and discouraged. Howard might have ended the campaign with an immediate vigorous pursuit, but he paused to reorganize and absorb reinforcements.



Reinforcements for Howard

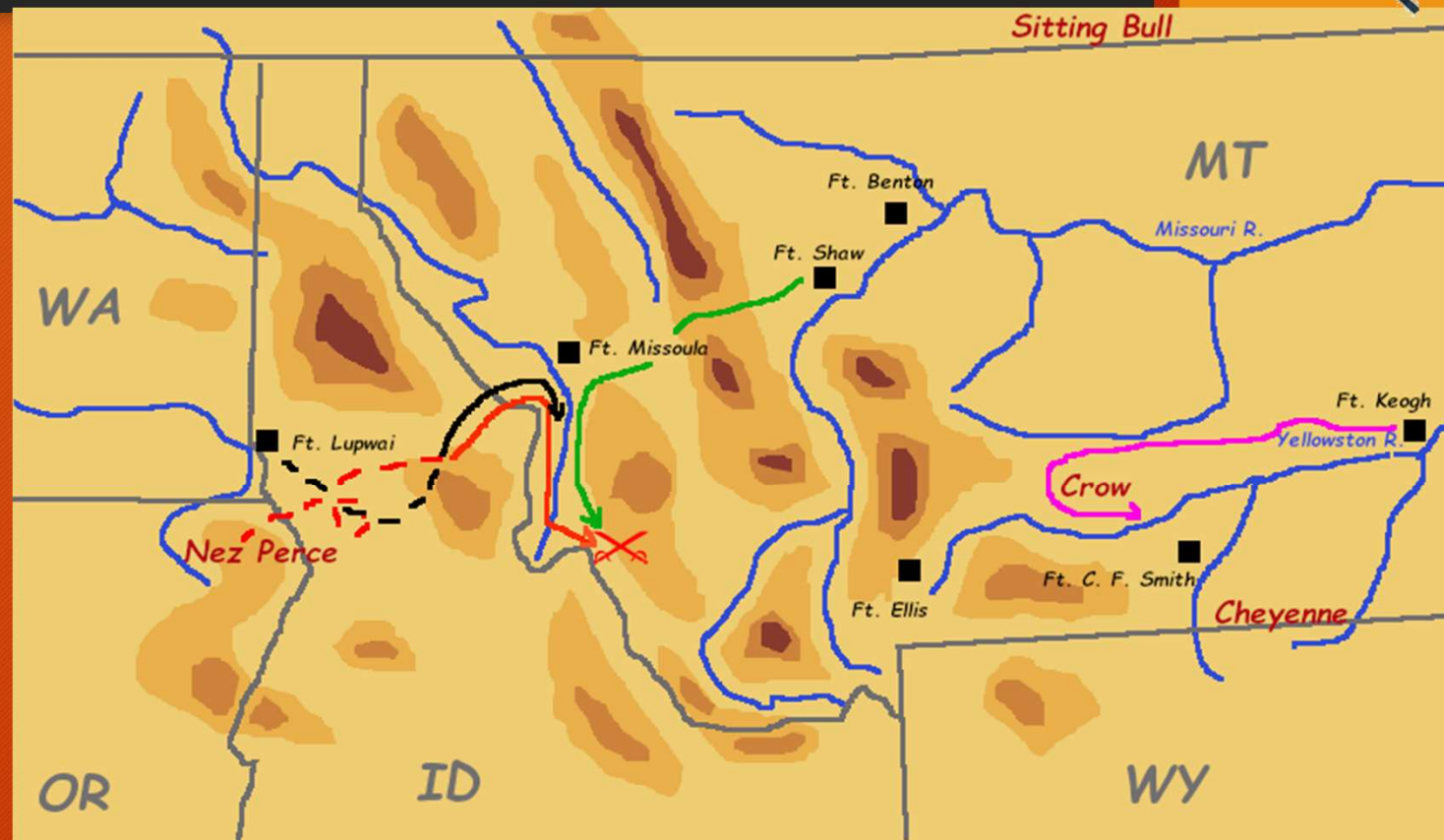


- Gibbon's Column From Fort Shaw
 - 150 infantry (7th Infantry), 45 civilian volunteers
- Howard's Column
 - 200 cavalry (1st Cavalry)
 - 360 infantry (21st Infantry and 4th Artillery serving as infantry)
 - 25 Bannock scouts
 - 150 Volunteers and mule packers (with 350 pack mules)
 - 1 howitzer 2 gatling guns.

Battle of the Big Hole, August 9-10, 1877



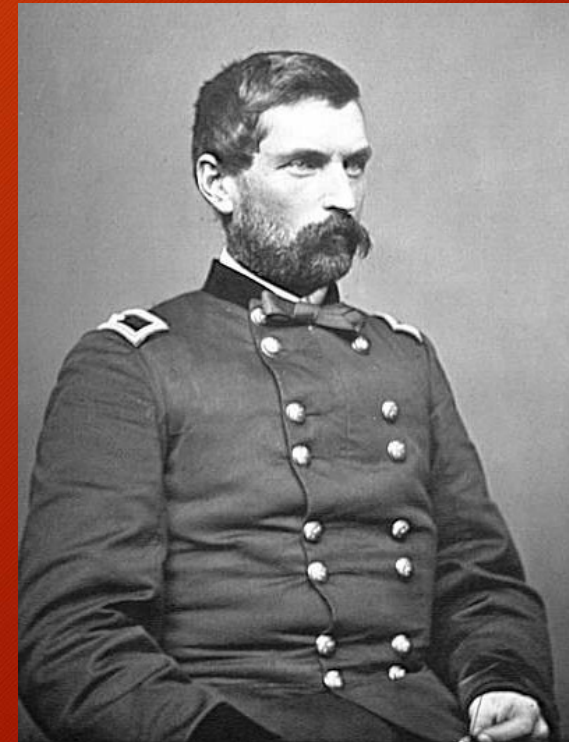
- Indians outdistanced Howard, but very tired from the rapid march.
- **Looking Glass** argues for a halt to allow the people to rest. **Joseph** argues against it but the Council agrees to pause.
- Gibbon's column takes them by surprise.



Battle of the Big Hole, August 9-10, 1877



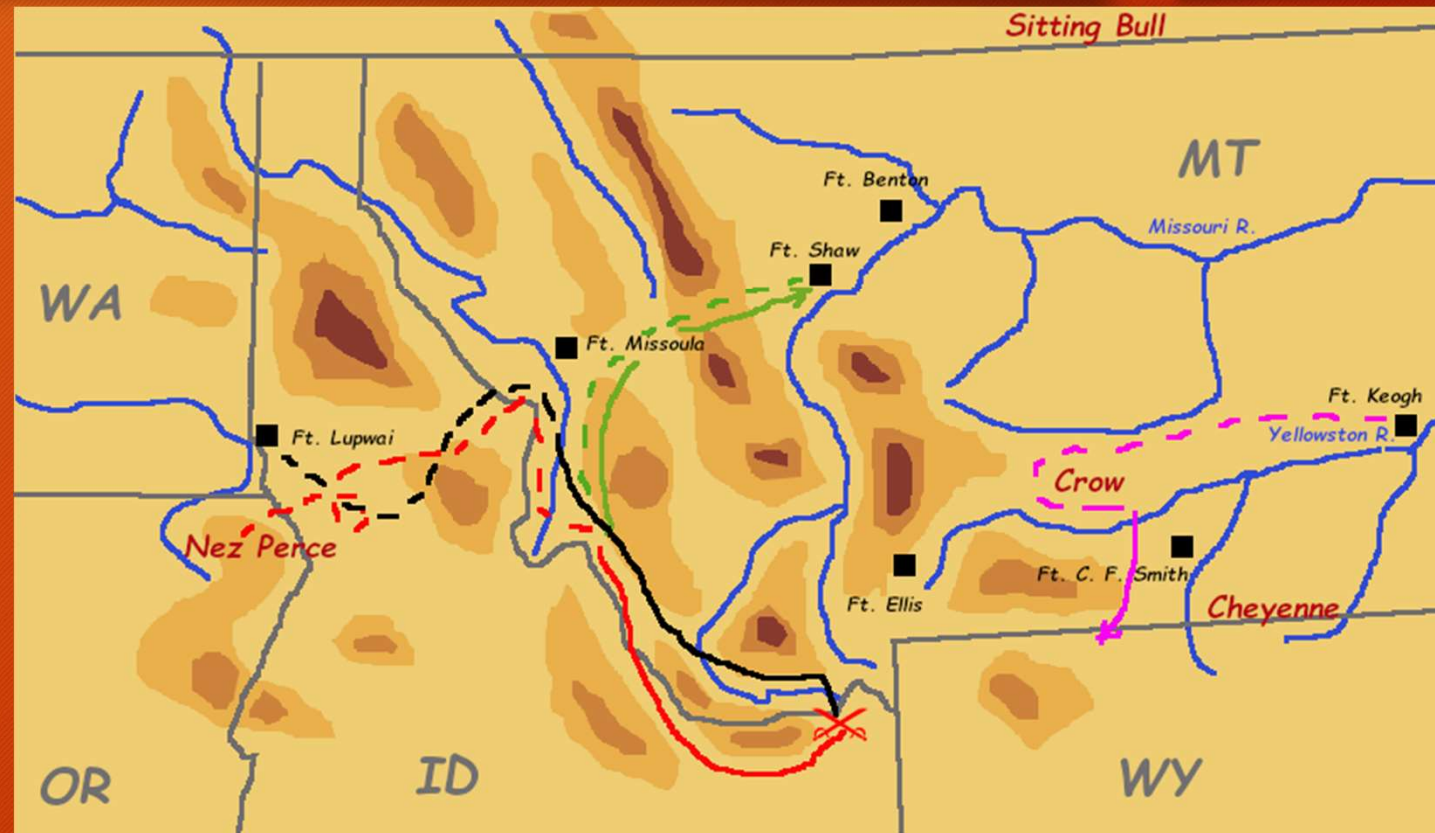
- Forces Engaged
 - Gibbon: 150 infantry (7th Infantry), 45 civilian volunteers
 - Nez Percé: 300 warriors (800 total)
 - Casualties
- Battle
 - Gibbon attacked with surprise and captured the camp killing many people before they could resist.
 - Nez Percé rallied and counterattacked. Fire was so heavy and accurate Gibbon withdrew to broken ground.
 - Nez Percé kept Gibbon's men under siege as the village packed and withdrew. Then rearguard withdrew the next day
- Casualties
 - Gibbon: 30 dead, 39 wounded
 - Nez Percé: 57 or 89 killed (mostly women and children), unknown number wounded.
 - Nez Percé also captured one mule with **2,000 rounds** of carbine ammunition loaded on it, an invaluable addition.



Action at Camas Meadows, August 20, 1877



- Looking Glass lost much of his influence after the disaster at the Big Hole.
- Gibbon's force was so damaged it returned to Fort Shaw.
- Howard pursued to Camas Meadow.
- The Nez Percé sent back a raiding party to drive off Howard's cavalry mounts.



Action at Camas Meadows, August 20, 1877

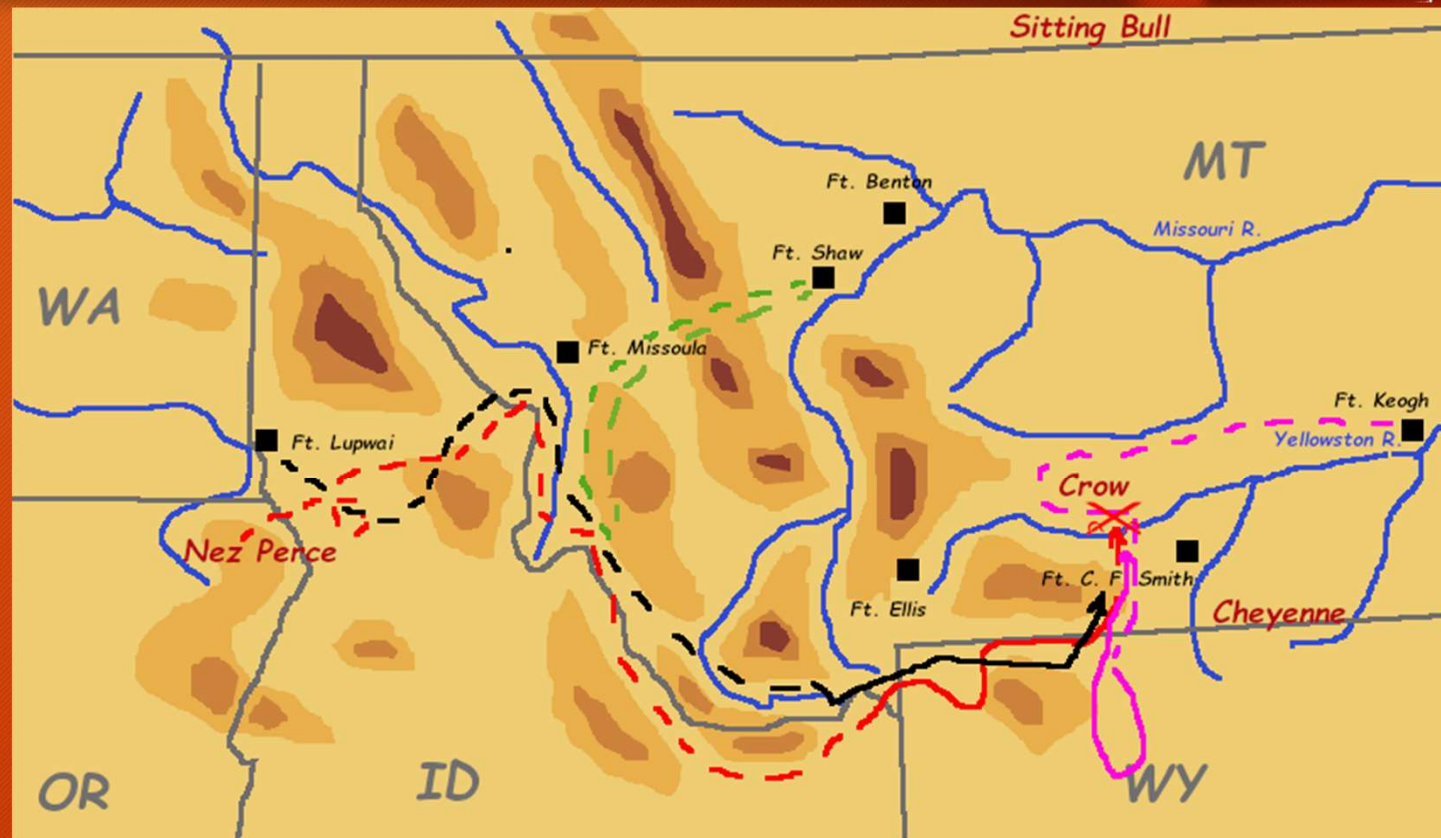


- The raid was discovered quickly and failed to drive off any cavalry horses, but it did drive off almost half of Howard's pack mules.
- Although the Indians were bitterly disappointed by not having taken any horses they had actually ruined Howard's chance of overtaking them. They had broken his already strained logistical system.
- Howard's casualties: 3 killed, 5 wounded, 150 mules stolen
- Nez Percé casualties: 2 very lightly wounded

Battle of Canyon Creek, September 13, 1877



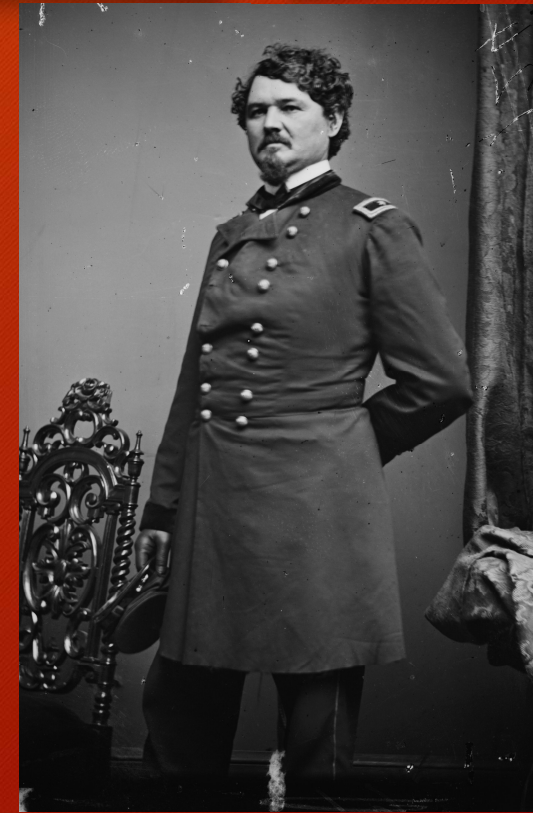
- Sturgis had to cover two exits from Yellowstone Park.
- Joseph feinted south. When Sturgis marched south, Joseph force marched north to Yellowstone River crossing.
- Sturgis caught up there at Canyon Creek.



Battle of Canyon Creek, September 13, 1877



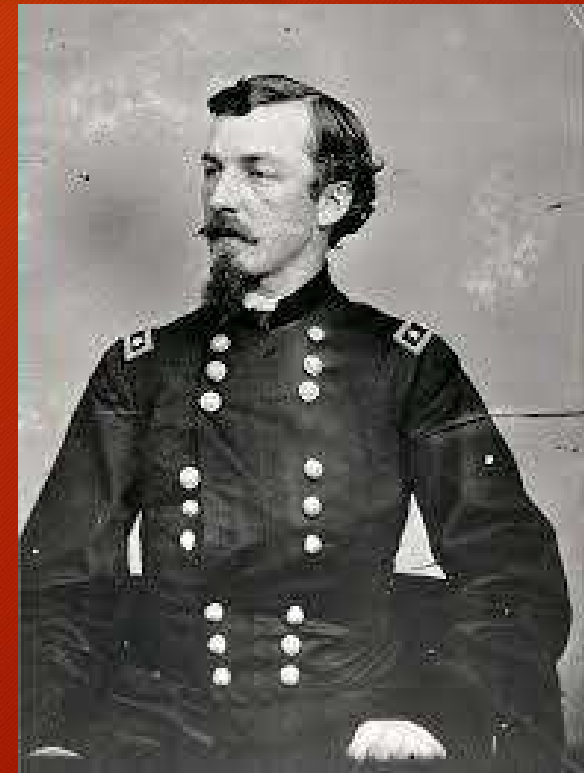
- Sturgis's Column
 - 400 cavalry (7th Cavalry) and 2 howitzers
- Nez Perce
 - 250 warriors (700 people total)
- Battle
 - Sturgis closed in with troops mounted.
 - Natives covered their rear with dismounted sharpshooters in excellent cover, while village and main force withdrew.
 - Sturgis dismounted his command, sent horses to the rear, advanced under cover.
 - Native rearguard mounted and escaped, rejoined main body.
- Casualties
 - Army: 3 killed, 11 wounded
 - Natives: none killed, 3 wounded



Colonel Nelson A. Miles



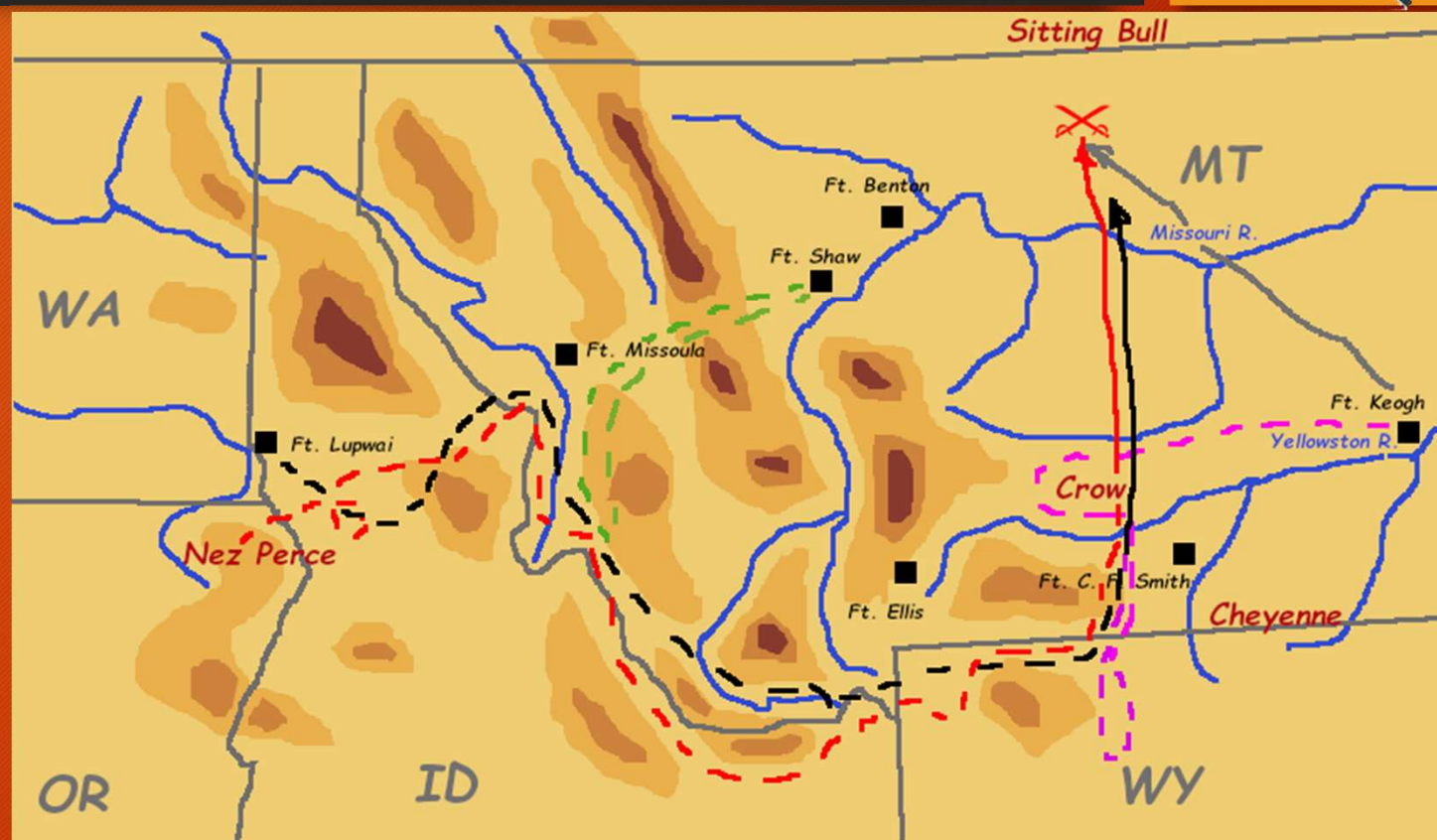
- Brilliant and very ambitious officer, with an excellent Civil War record. Eventually became Army Chief of Staff. Theodore Roosevelt later described him as a “brave peacock.”
- Trained his troops to take the field on short notice, so was on the march the day after he received the message asking him to cut off the Nez Percé.
- Had been aide to General Howard during the Civil War so they were friends. Miles’s efforts to take the credit for the final victory, and undermine Howard’s reputation, ended that friendship.
- After the Nez Percé surrendered, Miles campaigned tirelessly for their repatriation to their ancestral home.



Battle of Bear Paw, September 30 to October 5, 1877



- Col. Nelson Miles set out from Fort Keogh to cut them off.
- Howard's and Surgis's column slowed and fell behind. Nez Percé, unaware of Miles's column, stopped to rest.
- Surprised by Miles at Bear Paw.



Battle of Bear Paw, September 30 to October 5, 1877



- Strength

- Miles: 380 soldiers (180 cavalry of 2nd and 7th Cavalry, 200 mounted infantry of 5th Infantry), 2 field guns
- Nez Percé: About 250 warriors 700 people total
- Miles attacked, believing surprise and impetus would overwhelm the Natives. Cavalry swept around either flank while infantry charged the village.
- Nez Percé marksmen broke the charge and forced soldiers to take cover. Some Nez Percé escaped, but pony herd scattered.
- Turned into six day siege. On October 5, Howard's column arrived.

Battle of Bear Paw, September 30 to October 5, 1877



- Army casualties
 - 23 dead
 - 45 wounded
- Nez Perce casualties
 - 25 dead
 - 46 wounded
- Surrendered with Joseph
 - 418 (87 men, 184 women, 147 children)
- Escaped with White Bird
 - 233 (140 men and boys, 93 women and girls)
 - About 200 reached Canada

Afterwards



- Nez Perce were relocated to Oklahoma for several years.
- Disease and poor diet reduced the Nez Perce to only 328 survivors by 1881. By 1884 there were only 282.
- Eventually 268 were returned to their ancestral land, May 1885.
- Joseph died in September, 1904. By then he had become a respected national figure and a symbol of freedom and resistance to injustice.

**PART 6:
Bannocks (1878)**



Who Were the Bannocks?



- Lived in the middle Snake River valley of southern Idaho. 1,000 total in 1870. Spoke a Ute-Aztecan language.
- Lived by hunting and gathering, particularly camas root, which was protected by treaty (in theory).
- Rising young chief named Buffalo Horn increasingly aggressive.



What Started the War?

- White settlers increasingly were depleting the game, and hog farmers on Camas Prairie were destroying the camas roots, which was against the treaty, but no one on the US side seemed interested in enforcing those provisions against white settlers.
- The Nez Percé War had shown that the army was not invincible.
- Also friendly with the Northern Paiute, who were suffering similar frustrations and were influenced by a charismatic medicine man named Oytes



What Happened?



- Murder of several White men by Bannocks convinced Buffalo Horn to begin raiding in May with about 200 warrior west.
- Buffalo Horn killed in June, but raiders join with 250 Paiutes under Oytes.
- General Howard with about 500 soldiers, pursued the raiders north, defeated them in pitched battle in July, and by August had put down the rising.

**PART 7:
Utes (1879)**



Who Were the Utes?



- Lived in western Colorado and eastern Utah. 4,000 total in 1870 in seven bands. Spoke Ute, a Ute-Aztec language.
- Lived by hunting and gathering.
- Had accepted reservation life in a very large reservation including the upper stretches of the White, Colorado and San Juan rivers.

What Started the War? (Silver)



- Colorado silver strikes in 1870s in San Juan mountains caused Utes to give up four million acres to keep the peace.
- 1876 Colorado enters the Union as a state. Miners agitate for removal of all Utes to Indian Territory and opening entire reservation to white settlement.
- 1878 government appoints Nathan Meeker as new agent to the Utes of the White River Agency. He tried immediate conversion of Utes to farmers by demanding they plow their horse pastures to grow row crops.
- When Utes refused Meeker asked for Army assistance, which the Utes viewed as an illegal invasion of their land. Despite efforts by both sides to peacefully resolve the issue, someone fired a shot and then there was full-scale war.

What Happened?

- The Army force of 175 soldiers was attacked and held under siege for a week before being relieved by Buffalo soldiers of the 10th Cavalry. The defenders suffered 13 killed and 48 wounded.
- A peace mission managed to negotiate a settlement with the White River insurgents, but the incident was all the ammunition Colorado needed to demand the removal the Utes to Indian Territory and open their land for White settlers.



A Good Day to Die



•QUESTIONS?