

A REMINISCENCE OF THE INDIAN
WAR, 1853.

BY HON. J. W. NESMITH.

During the month of August, 1853, the different tribes of Indians inhabiting the Rogue river valley, in Southern Oregon, suddenly assumed a hostile attitude. They murdered many settlers and miners, and burned nearly all the buildings for over a hundred miles along the main traveled route, extending from Cow creek on the north, in a southerly direction to the Siskiyou mountains. General Lane, at that time being in the Rogue river valley, at the request of citizens assumed control of a body of militia, suddenly called for the defense of the settlers.

Captain Alden, of the regular army, and Col. John E. Ross, of Jackson county, joined General Lane and served under his command. Old Joe, John and Sam were the principal leaders of the Indians, aided by such young and vigorous warriors as George and Limpy.

The Indians collected in a large body and retreated northward in the direction of the Umpqua. Gen. Lane made a vigorous pursuit, and on the 24th of August overtook and attacked the foe in a rough, mountainous and heavily timbered region upon Evans creek. The Indians had fortified their encampment by fallen timber, and being well supplied with arms and ammunition, made a vigorous resistance. In an attempt to charge through the brush Gen. Lane was shot through the arm, and Capt. Alden received a wound from which he never fully recovered. Several other of the attacking party were wounded, some of whom subsequently died of their injuries. Capt. Pleasant Armstrong, an old and respected citizen of Yamhill county, was shot through the heart and died instantly.

The Indians and whites were so close together that they could easily converse. The most of them knew General Lane, and when they found that he was in command of the troops, they called out to "Joe Lane" and asked him to come into their camp to arrange some terms for a cessation of hostilities. The General, with more courage than discretion, in his wounded condition, ordered a cessation of hostilities and fearlessly walked into the hostile camp, where he saw many wounded Indians, together with several who were dead and being burned to keep them from falling into the hands of the enemy, which clearly demonstrated that the Indians had gotten the worst of the fight. After a long conference it was finally agreed that there should be a cessation of hostilities and that both parties should return to the neighborhood of Table Rock, on the north side of the Rogue river valley, and that an armistice should exist until Gen. Joel Palmer,

then Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Oregon, could be sent for, and that a treaty should be negotiated with the United States authorities, in which all grievances should be adjusted between the parties. Both whites and Indians marched back slowly over the same trail, encumbered with their wounded, each party keeping a vigilant watch of the other. General Lane encamped on Rogue river, while the Indians selected a strong and almost inaccessible position, high up and just under the perpendicular cliffs of Table Rock, to await the arrival of Superintendent Palmer and Agent Colver.

At the commencement of hostilities, the people of Rogue river valley were sadly deficient in arms and ammunition, many of the settlers and miners having traded their arms to the Indians, who were much better armed and equipped for war than their white neighbors. The rifle and revolver had displaced the bow and arrow and the war club with which the native was armed when the writer of this knew and fought them in 1848.

General Lane and Captain Alden, at the commencement of the outbreak had sent an express to Governor George L. Curry, then Secretary and acting Governor. Major Rains of the 4th U. S. infantry, commanding the district, with headquarters at Fort Vancouver, was called upon to supply the threatened settlers with arms and ammunition, Major Rains responded to the call for arms and ammunition, but was deficient in troops to escort them to their destination at the seat of war. Governor Curry at once authorized the writer to raise seventy-five men and escort the arms to the threatened settlements. The escort was soon raised in the town of Salem and marched to Albany, where it waited a couple of days for the arrival of Second Lieutenant August V. Kautz, in charge of the wagons with rifles and cartridges, together with a twelve pound howitzer and a good supply of fixed ammunition. Kautz was then fresh from West Point and this was his first campaign. He subsequently achieved the rank of Major-General and rendered good service during the "late unpleasantness" with the South, and is now Colonel of the 8th U. S. infantry.

After a toilsome march, dragging the howitzer and other materials of war through the Umpqua canyon, and up and down the mountain trails, made slippery by recent rains, we arrived at Gen. Lane's encampment on Rogue river near the subsequent site of Fort Lane, on the 8th day of September. On the same day Capt. A. J. Smith, since the distinguished General Smith of the Union army, arrived at headquarters with Company C, first dragoons. The accession of Capt. Smith's company and my own, gave Gen. Lane a force sufficient to cope with the enemy, then sup-

posed to be about 700 strong. The encampment of the Indians was still on the side of the mountains of which Table Rock forms the summit, and at night we could plainly see their camp-fire, while they could look directly down on us. The whole command was anxious and willing to fight, but General Lane had pledged the Indians that an effort should be made to treat for peace. Superintendent Palmer and Agent Colver were on the ground. The armistice had not yet expired, and the 10th was fixed for the time of the council. On the morning of that day Gen. Lane sent for me and desired me to go with him to the council ground, inside the Indian encampment to act as interpreter, as I was master of the Chinook jargon. I asked the General upon what terms and where we were to meet the Indians. He replied that the agreement was that the meeting should take place within the encampment of the enemy; and that he should be accompanied by ten other men of his own selection, unarmed. Against those terms I protested, and told the General that I had traversed that country five years before and fought those same Indians; that they were notoriously treacherous, and in early times had earned the designation of "rogues," by never permitting a white man to escape with his scalp when once within their power; that I knew them better than he did, and that it was criminal folly for eleven unarmed white men to place themselves voluntarily within the power of seven hundred well armed hostile Indians, in their own secure encampment. I reminded him that I was a soldier in command of a company of cavalry and was ready to obey his orders to lead my men into action or to discharge any soldierly duty, no part of which was to go into the enemy's camp as an unarmed interpreter. The General listened to my protest and replied that he had fixed upon the terms of meeting the Indians and should keep his word, and if I was afraid to go, I could remain behind. When he put it upon that ground I responded that I thought I was as little acquainted with fear as he was, and that I would accompany him to what I believed would be our slaughter.

Early on the morning of the 10th of September, 1853, we mounted our horses and rode out in the direction of the Indian encampment. Our party consisted of the following named persons: Gen. Joseph Lane, Joel Palmer, Superintendent of Indian Affairs; Samuel P. Colver, Indian Agent; Capt. A. J. Smith, 1st Dragoons; Capt. L. F. Mosher, Adjutant; Col. John E. Ross, Capt. J. W. Nesmith, Lieut. A. V. Kautz, R. B. Metcalf, J. D. Mason, T. T. Tierney. By reference to the U. S. Statutes at Large, v. 10, p. 1020, the most of the above named will be found appended to the treaty that day exe-