

"Father Ravalli labored as much as he could to pacify the tribes which reside toward the west—namely, the Cayuses, the Yakimas, the Opelouses [Palouses], etc. As our neophytes [Flatheads and Cœur d'Alenes] hitherto have taken no part in the war, the country is as safe for us as ever. We can go freely wherever we desire. No one is ignorant that the Blackgowns [Catholic priests] are not enemies—those, at least, who are among the Indians. Almost all the Cœur d'Alenes, in order to shield themselves from the hostilities of the Indians, and to avoid all relations with them, are gone bison hunting. A few days since Father Joset wrote me that Father Ravalli had already written him several weeks before: 'I fear a general rising among the Indians toward the commencement of spring. Let us pray, and let us engage others to pray with us, to avert this calamity. I think that it will be well to add to the ordinary prayers of the mass, the collect for peace.' The outbreak did not occur as predicted, owing, possibly, to the efficacy of the worthy missionaries' prayers, but apparently due to an absence of a sufficient provocation which might serve as a pretext for war. That not much of a provocation was required was made evident the following year.

In the spring of 1858 Palouse Indians stole some stock from the troops at Walla Walla, and on the 8th of May Colonel Steptoe marched north with a force of 150 men, intending to visit Fort Colville, and on his return to capture the thieving Indians. This expedition met with signal disaster, through most unmilitary carelessness. One hundred mules were detailed for the pack train, and when these were loaded it was found there was no room for the surplus ammunition which had been set out. This was taken back to the magazine, and the command marched with only the ammunition carried in the cartridge boxes of the men. Such carelessness invited the disaster which followed.

Steptoe crossed Snake River near the mouth of the Alpowa, where he was joined by a friendly Nez Percé chief, named "Timothy," and three of his warriors. Continuing north, he approached the group of four lakes lying north of Pine Creek, the Indians gradually collecting in great numbers. Here he was informed by them that he must leave this region and return to Walla Walla, or they would attack him. His lack of sufficient ammunition, and the comparative weakness of his force, compelled Steptoe to do as they commanded. Camping at the lakes for the night, the command began its retrograde march at three o'clock on the morning of the 17th of April, the Indians continually hovering on its flanks. While in this relative position Steptoe held a conference with Saltees, a Cœur d'Alene chief, Father Joseph acting as interpreter, and was assured that no attack would be made upon him. The chief then shouted something to his followers, when one of the friendly Nez Percés, named "Levi," struck him on the head with a whip, saying, "What for you say 'no fight' and then tell your people 'wait a while?' You talk two tongues."

About nine o'clock in the morning, as the command approached Pine Creek, near the present town of Rosalia,

passing down a natural waterway, then dry, it was fired upon by Indians secreted in the timber across the stream and occupying elevated positions on the flank. Lieutenant Gaston promptly charged, and cleared an opening to the highlands south of Pine Creek, being followed by the entire force. The howitzer was unlimbered and discharged, killing no one, but serving by its noise to somewhat intimidate the assailants. By charging them the enemy were cleared away, and the retreat was resumed with the pack train in the rear, the flanks and rear being covered. Lieutenant James Wheeler was on the right, Lieutenant William Gaston on the left, and Captain O. H. P. Taylor guarded the rear, each with a company. Charge after charge of the enemy was repulsed, men falling continually, and being left to the tender mercy of the savages in many cases where it was impossible to carry them away. At last many of Lieutenant Gaston's men used their last round of ammunition, and he sent an orderly to Colonel Steptoe, who was with the train in the van, asking that the command be halted until more could be issued; but there was no more, and the request to halt was not granted. Captain Taylor's company next fired its last shot, and this fact, as well as the fall of Gaston, was communicated to the superior officer. He then ordered a halt. The contest in the rear was now a desperate hand-to-hand struggle. Both Gaston and Taylor lay on the ground, their men fighting stubbornly for possession of their bodies. Among them was a private named De May, who had been an officer in the French army in Algiers and the Crimea, and was an excellent swordsman. Clubbing his musket he made a furious onslaught upon the assailing savages, and as he was borne down by numbers he cried, "Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, mine sabre!" At last the Indians were driven back and the body of Captain Taylor was rescued. So demoralized had become the main body of the troops, that the call of Lieutenant Gregg for volunteers to go to the assistance of the hard-pressed rear guard was answered by only ten men. He then led a charge, but soon found himself alone, and returned without uttering a word. To save the retreat from becoming a complete rout, which would have resulted in an utter annihilation of the force, Colonel Steptoe went into camp and threw out a strong line of pickets. The Indians camped near by, apparently willing to bide their time, feeling certain of their victims. Every avenue of escape was guarded but one, and that was a difficult pass, which they supposed the soldiers could not traverse. The Nez Percé chief was then their savior. When the night was well advanced, having cached the howitzers and left their surplus stores to engage the attention of the savages, so as to delay pursuit in the morning, the troops mounted and followed Timothy in single file, as he led them through the unguarded pass.

The wounded of each company were placed in charge of some of their comrades, a few of them being so badly hurt as to be utterly helpless. These were tied upon pack animals. Two of them, Sergeant Williams and Private McCrossan, suffered such excruciating agony from the motion of the animals that they begged to be killed,