

# The Last Stand of Chief Joseph

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In June 1877, just one year after the Custer debacle, an unexpected Indian outbreak flared in the West. To an American public wearied and disgusted with a governmental policy, or lack of policy, that seemed to breed Indian wars, this one, an uprising by formerly peaceful Nez Percés of Oregon and Idaho, was dramatized by what appeared to be superb Indian generalship. One army detachment after another, officered by veterans of the Civil War, floundered in battle with the hostiles. Western correspondents telegraphed the progress of a great thirteen-hundred-mile fighting retreat by the Indians, swaying popular imagination in behalf of the valiant Nez Percés and their leader, Chief Joseph, who, as handsome and noble in appearance as a Fenimore Cooper Indian, became something of a combined national hero and military genius.

The government received no laurels, either, as the long trail of bitter injustices that had originally driven the Nez Percés to hostility became known. The war, like most Indian troubles, had stemmed from a conflict over land. For centuries the Nez Percés had occupied the high, grassy hills and canyon-scarred plateau land where Washington, Oregon, and Idaho come together. A strong and intelligent people, they had lived in peace with the whites since the coming of Lewis and Clark in 1805, and it was their proud boast that no member of the tribe had ever killed a white man.

Joseph was the leader of only one of the Nez Percé bands, a group of some sixty males and perhaps twice that number of women and children, who lived in the Wallowa Valley in the northeastern corner of Oregon. Isolated on all sides by natural barriers of high mountain ranges and some of the deepest gorges on the continent, the valley's lush grasslands provided some of the best grazing ground in the Northwest, and settlers were particularly anxious to possess it. But Joseph's band of Nez Percés had lived there in security and peace for generations, and just before he died in 1871 Joseph's father, a prominent chief named Wellamotkin, known familiarly to the whites as Old Joseph, had fearfully counseled his son: "When I am gone, think of your country. You are the chief of these people. They look to you to guide them. Always remember that your father never sold the country. You must stop your ears whenever you are asked to sign a treaty selling your home. A few years more, and the white man will be all around you. They have their eyes on this land. My son, never forget my dying words. This country holds your father's body. Never sell the bones of your father and your mother."

The crisis came for Joseph almost immediately after his father's death. He was thirty-one years old, a tall and powerfully built man with the philosophical bent and strong and logical mind of a civil, rather than a war, chief. Like most members of his band

he had had many friendly contacts with white men, and he did not fit the typical picture of a hostile Indian who had grown to manhood hating the Americans. Though he had come to believe that the Indians and whites did not mix well, he had a humanitarianism that transcended national loyalty and an understanding of conflicting forces that was rare in either Indians or whites.

He had been born in the spring of 1840, probably near the juncture of Joseph Creek and the Grande Ronde River in the deep, sheltered warmth of the Joseph Canyon, where his father's people and their herds waited out the winter till chinook winds told them that they could ascend to the high, greening meadows and fast-running streams of the nearby Wallowa Valley. At the time there were some four to six thousand Nez Percés; most of them lived in small fishing villages that dotted the banks of the Clearwater and Salmon Rivers and the middle stretches of the Snake and its tributaries, and were widely spread over a vast expanse of territory. Each village or small concentration of them lived under the leadership of its own chief, and during his youth Joseph visited most of the settlements with his father, learning the tribal lore that held them all together as a single nation. It was a colorful past, filled with dramatic events that spoke of many lands and tribes other than their own.

From their earliest days, the Nez Percés were known to be a traveling people, and at various periods of the year journeyed far and wide from their home settlements. War parties constantly ranged southward through Idaho and Oregon against the Shoshonis, who were the Nez Percés' traditional enemies. Others traveled to northern Idaho and Washington to visit Spokans and Coeur d'Alènes, with whom they sometimes fought and were sometimes friendly, and still others made long excursions across the rugged Bitterroot Mountains to join Flathead Indians on buffalo hunts in western Montana. All the Nez Percés, at one time or another, traveled down the Columbia River to the Dalles to trade with Chinook people who came up from the Pacific Coast, and until the middle

of the eighteenth century the western Indians exercised a dominant influence on the culture of the Nez Percés, whose way of life more closely resembled that of the fish-eating Columbia River tribes than the buffalo-hunting plains Indians of Montana.

Sometime about 1730 the Nez Percés first saw horses in the camps of their Shoshoni enemies in the south. The animals had come overland from the Spanish settlements in New Mexico, via Apaches and Utes, and by trading and raiding the Nez Percés soon had herds of their own. With the animals they began to cross the Bitterroots in larger numbers and move farther east across the plains, assimilating to a greater degree than before the ways of the plains Indians with whom they traded and fought. At the same time a remarkable event occurred in their own homeland. Perhaps alone among all the Indian tribes on the continent, the Nez Percés learned to practice selective breeding and developed a strong and beautiful type of spotted horse that became known for its speed and endurance. The Nez Percés were already fashioning the most prized bow on the plains, one made from the horn of a mountain sheep, and now they appeared with the handsomest war horse, a spotted and painted pony, which they festooned with feathers. Known today as the Appaloosa (from "a Palouse," the name of a portion of the original Nez Percé country), the horse is still a favorite of cowmen in the rugged plateau country of the Northwest.

By the end of the eighteenth century many of the Nez Percés had become essentially plains Indians, though they continued to return regularly to their home villages on the Columbia River tributaries, where fish and roots still constituted a major part of their diet. But their journeys took them into strange and faraway lands, and they were already in contact with tribes who lived along the upper Missouri River in the Dakotas. From them they heard of white men, and in their camps they saw trade guns and other goods that made the strangers with beards seem worth meeting. They had already learned of white men from the coastal tribes

at the Dalles, who showed them metal goods left along the Northwest Coast. But unlike the Missouri River whites the sea traders on the Pacific did not give guns to the Indians, and fire-arms were already becoming a necessity in the hunts and wars on the plains. In the spring of 1805 the Nez Percés sent three of their young men to the Missouri River villages of the Minnitarée Indians in present-day North Dakota to try to purchase guns, and they returned with six of them.

In the fall of that same year, the members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, bound for the mouth of the Columbia River, struggled through the Bitterroot Mountains and emerged in the Nez Percé country. It was an exciting event for the villagers, who had never seen whites before. The explorers were starving after their ordeal in the mountains, and the Indians welcomed them into their settlements and gave them food. But the natives' kindly feelings for the Americans increased when the captains promised to send them traders who would provide them with more guns and white men's goods. The expedition leaders could not live up to their promise, and the first known white man to arrive within trading distance of the Nez Percés was David Thompson, a member of the Canadian North West Company, who crossed the Canadian Rockies and circulated through the country of the upper Columbia River and its tributaries between 1807 and 1812. There are indications in Thompson's journals that a mysterious group of Americans was also in contact with the Nez Percés during part of the same time, but history knows nothing else about them, and for a number of years the Nez Percés did most, if not all, of their trading with Thompson and his colleagues.

Thompson called the Nez Percés Shaphtians, which was a Flathead word for them and referred to the geographic location of their homeland, south and west of the Flatheads. But from the Columbia River tribes some of the Nez Percés copied the habit of wearing small pieces of shell in their noses as adornments. They abandoned the custom entirely soon after the arrival of white men

in their country, but Thompson's French-Canadian *engagés* saw their pierced noses and found that Nez Percé was easier to say than Shaphtian, so that name soon took hold for all of the tribe.

In 1812, American traders of John Jacob Astor's company finally reached the Northwest and opened trade of their own in competition with the Canadians. The American stay was of short duration. The War of 1812 forced the sale of Astoria, and the Americans abandoned the country to Canadian monopoly. The Nor'Westers built inland posts and pursued a vigorous trade through much of Idaho, and the Nez Percés received a growing supply of guns and trade goods. In the early 1820s the North West Company merged with the Hudson's Bay Company, and factors and traders of the big British firm brought new wealth to their Indian clients.

With their horses and guns, the Nez Percés continued to roam eastward, and in the late 1820s their buffalo-hunting parties began to meet American trappers and mountain men as far east as Wyoming's Green River Valley. The Indians liked the wild, free fur men, who helped them fight their mutual enemies the Blackfeet, and who lived with them in their camps as equals and gave them higher prices than the British for their pelts. The Nez Percés whooped and sported with the Americans at the trappers' annual rendezvous, and some of the mountain men took Nez Percé women as their wives.

During the 1820s, also, another influence of the white men entered the Nez Percés' lives. Hudson's Bay men began taking Northwest Indian youths to an Anglican mission school at Red River in central Canada, and when the youths returned to their villages they stirred an interest in Christianity among their people. Earlier, many of the Nez Percés and Flatheads had learned some of the rudiments of the white men's religion from Iroquois Indians, who had been reared as Roman Catholics in eastern Canada and had followed the Nor'Westers as *engagés* and free trappers into the Oregon country. Now, both the Nez Percés and the Flatheads desired to have the religion for themselves, regarding it

as a power like their own medicine that would endow them with added wisdom and strength. In 1831 they began to send emissaries to St. Louis with returning mountain men, hoping to enlist teachers who would come to live with them.

In the American city they met both Roman Catholics and Protestants, and missionaries from various churches were soon racing one another to Oregon to save the Indians' souls. In 1836 the Reverend Henry H. Spalding and his wife opened a Presbyterian mission at Lapwai in the heart of the Nez Percés' country near present-day Lewiston, Idaho. At first the Indians were overjoyed to have teachers among them, and they attended the mission classes with enthusiasm. The Spaldings taught them reading, writing, and farming as well as religion, and many of the Nez Percés abandoned their trips to the buffalo plains and settled down to raise grains, vegetables, and herds of the white man's cows. A few of the leading men were converted as examples for the rest, and among them was Old Joseph of the Wallowa band, who became a fast friend of the Spaldings. On November 17, 1839, Spalding recorded that he "lawfully" married Joseph and his wife "Asenoth," and on April 12, 1840, he noted that he baptized Joseph's new son "Ephraim," who was undoubtedly the future young Joseph.

All did not go well at the mission, however, and in time many of the natives became disillusioned with the white man's medicine, which did not seem to give them the new power in war and hunting that they expected. Other Indians, who had somehow thought that the missionaries would be like the "big-hearted" trappers and would be a new source of white men's goods at cheap prices, began to quarrel with the Spaldings and urged them to leave their country. By the late 1840s, when settlers began to stream into Oregon, the situation at the mission had become dangerous. Many of the natives now accused the Spaldings of having brought the white men to steal their country, and when the neighboring Cayuse Indians, with similar fears, heightened by the panic of a measles epi-

demic, turned on their own missionaries, the Marcus Whitmans, and massacred them in 1847, the Spaldings fled from Lapwai.

Some of the Nez Percés, including a chief named Lawyer, who lived on the upper Clearwater River, were loyal to the missionaries and were sorry to see them go. Old Joseph probably also regretted their departure, though Spalding believed that Joseph had turned against him. At any rate, Joseph and his people retired to the isolation of the Wallowa Valley and, like the rest of the Nez Percés, avoided becoming involved in a punitive war which the Americans waged against the Cayuse who had killed the Whitmans.

In 1855, after peace had returned to the country, Joseph and the other Nez Percé leaders signed a treaty that defined a large reservation for the tribe. According to Americans at the treaty council, the Wallowa chief still carried a Bible and spoke warmly of the Spaldings. His friendship for the whites had apparently not waned, and shortly afterward, when the Yakimas and other Northwest tribes, who had been traditional allies of the Nez Percés, rose up against the Americans, Joseph approved of aid that some of the members of the Nez Percé nation gave to the United States troops. But in 1860, when white trespassers found gold on Nez Percé land and miners overran part of the reservation, his good feeling came to an end. White men cheated, bullied, and murdered Nez Percés in their own country, and there was no redress. New towns sprang up, crowding Indian villages out of existence, and in 1863 commissioners arrived from the East to try to end the turmoil by gathering the Indians into a new and smaller reservation. For a while the Nez Percé chiefs at the council were united in opposition to the Americans' proposal, but finally, after secret night meetings with individual chiefs, in which the commissioners apparently gave promises of private favors, some of the leaders, headed by Lawyer, agreed to accept the new reservation.

The agreement reduced the Indians' land to less than one-fourth of its previous size, and all the chiefs who signed represented bands whose homes already lay within the

boundaries of the new reservation. The Wallowa Valley was part of the huge area being ceded, and Joseph, along with some two-thirds of the tribal leaders, refused to sign the document. Neither Joseph nor his son were regularly practising Christians at this time, but the aging chief is said to have returned to the Wallowa in anger from the council and to have torn up the Bible the missionaries had given him, exclaiming that he wanted nothing more to do with the white men or their civilization.

From then on, Lawyer and the other Indians on the new reservation lived in close and unhappy relationship with the white settlements that mushroomed about them, while Joseph's people continued their old way of life, unmolested by the Americans, who made no move immediately to claim the Wallowa. But as the settlers edged toward the routes into the valley, the Indians sensed the approaching conflict, and the old chief knew that a crisis was inevitable.

In 1871 young Joseph buried his father in the beloved Wallowa and assumed leadership of the band. Almost at once the emergency arrived. Settlers from Oregon's Grande Ronde found a pass into the valley and moved in, claiming the Indians' land. The new chief-tain protested to the Indian agent on the reservation, and an investigation was undertaken by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to determine whether the Treaty of 1863 affected Joseph's band, which had not agreed to it. The inquiry resulted in a decision that the Wallowa still belonged legally to the Indians, and on June 16, 1873, President Grant formally set aside the Wallowa "as a reservation for the roaming Nez Percé Indians" and ordered the white intruders to withdraw.

Recognition of their rights brought satisfaction and relief to the Indians, but it was short-lived. The settlers, refusing to move, threatened to exterminate Joseph's people if they did not leave the valley. In defiance of the presidential order, more whites rolled in by the wagonload. As friction increased, Oregon's governor, Lafayette P. Grover, attacked Washington officials for having abandoned the government's position of 1863 and forced the

Administration to reverse itself. In 1875 a new and confusing presidential edict reopened the Wallowa to white homesteaders.

The Nez Percés were dismayed. Young Joseph, called by the Indians Heinmot Tooyalakekt, meaning "thunder traveling to loftier mountain heights," counseled patience. He moved the Indian camps from the neighborhood of the settlers and again appealed to the federal authorities. The assistant adjutant general of the Military Department of the Columbia, Major H. Clay Wood, was assigned to make a survey of the conflicting claims, and in his report, forwarded to Washington by his commanding officer, O. O. Howard, the one-armed "Christian" general of the Civil War, stated, "In my opinion, the non-treaty Nez Percés cannot in law be regarded as bound by the treaty of 1863, and insofar as it attempts to deprive them of a right to occupancy of any land, its provisions are null and void. The extinguishment of their title of occupancy contemplated by this treaty is imperfect and incomplete."

At first the government took no action, but as harassment of the Indians continued and the threat increased that they might retaliate with violence, a new commission of five members was appointed to meet with the Nez Percés in November 1876 with authority to make a final settlement of the matter for "the welfare of both whites and Indians."

The commissioners—Howard, Wood, and three eastern civilians—found Joseph a disquieting figure. Thirty-six years old now, straight and towering, he seemed strangely amicable and gentle; yet he bore himself with the quiet strength and dignity of one who stood in awe of no man. And when he spoke, it was with an eloquent logic that nettled the whites, who found themselves resenting their inability to dominate him.

Why, they asked him, did he refuse to give up the Wallowa? He answered by referring to the land as the Mother of the Indians, something that could not be sold or given away. "We love the land," he said. "It is our home."

But, they insisted, Lawyer had signed it away in 1863.

Joseph had a ready reply that embarrassed them. "I believe the old treaty has never been correctly reported," he said. "If we ever owned the land we own it still, for we never sold it. In the treaty councils the commissioners have claimed that our country has been sold to the government. Suppose a white man should come to me and say, 'Joseph, I like your horses, and I want to buy them.' I say to him, 'No, my horses suit me, I will not sell them.' Then he goes to my neighbor, and says to him, 'Joseph has some good horses. I want to buy them but he refuses to sell.' My neighbor answers, 'Pay me the money, and I will sell you Joseph's horses.' The white man returns to me and says, 'Joseph, I have bought your horses and you must let me have them.' If we sold our lands to the government, this is the way they were bought."

To all their arguments, Joseph replied with an uncompromising "No" and the exasperated commissioners made no progress with him. But events were moving against the Indians. The situation in the Wallowa had grown perilous, and the commission was under political pressure. Two excited white men had killed an Indian youth after mistakenly accusing him of stealing their horses. Joseph had had all he could do to keep his people calm, and the settlers, fearing an uprising, were arming and calling for military protection.

To the commissioners, despite the fact that it was unjust and there was no legal basis for it, there could be only one decision, and before they left the reservation headquarters at Lapwai they rendered it: Unless, within a reasonable time, all the nontreaty Nez Percés (the other bands that had not signed in 1863, as well as Joseph's people in the Wallowa) voluntarily came onto the reservation, they should be placed there by force. General Howard, symbolizing the force that would be used, signed the report along with the three easterners. Only Major Wood's name was absent; it is believed that he submitted a minority report, though it has never been found.

Immediately after the decision the Indian Bureau defined the "reasonable time"

and ordered the Indians to come onto the reservation by April 1, 1877. It was almost an exact repetition of the order of a year before that had started the hostilities with the Sioux. Unable to move their herds and villages across the rugged canyons in the dead of winter, the Nez Percés appealed for another conference, and as April 1 came and went General Howard agreed to one last meeting with all the non-treaty chiefs at Lapwai. It did no good. The die had been cast, and Howard adamantly refused to discuss the commission's decision. As the Indians pleaded in proud but pitiable terms to be allowed to remain in the lands where their fathers were buried, the general finally lost patience and threw one of the most respected old chiefs, a deeply religious war leader and tribal orator named Toohoolhoolzote, into the guardhouse. It broke the spirit of the others. To gain Toohoolhoolzote's release they capitulated with bitterness and agreed to have their bands on the reservation in thirty days.

All Joseph's skill as a diplomat had to be called into play when he returned to his people. He had abandoned his father's counsel and trust, and there were cries to ignore him and go to war rather than to move to the reservation. When Joseph argued that the white man's power was too great for them to resist and that it was "better to live at peace than to begin a war and lie dead," they called him a coward. But he received strong assistance from his younger brother, Ollokot, a daring and courageous buffalo hunter and warrior who had won many tribal honors and held the respect of the more belligerent younger element. Eventually the two brothers won agreement to the capitulation from the band's council, and the Indians prepared to round up their stock and move.

A half year's work was crowded into less than thirty days as the people combed the mountains and forests for their animals and drove them down the steep draws to the Snake. The river was in flood, and hundreds of head of stock were swept away and drowned during the tumultuous crossing. Other portions of the herds, left behind on the bluffs and plateau, were driven away by

whites, who attacked the guards and harassed the withdrawing Indians. By June 2, with twelve days of grace remaining, the people reached an ancient tribal rendezvous area just outside the border of the reservation. Here they joined the other non-treaty bands and lingered for a last bit of freedom.

It was a fatal pause. On June 12 the Indians staged a parade through the camp, and one of the young men named Wahlitits, whose father had been murdered by a white man two years before, was taunted by an old warrior for having allowed the slaying to go unavenged. The next morning, his honor as a man impugned, Wahlitits stole away with two companions. By nightfall, in an outpouring of long-suppressed hatred, the youths had killed four white men along the Salmon River and wounded another one, all notorious for their hostility to the Nez Percés. The young men returned to the camp, announced what they had done, and raised a bigger party that continued the raids during the next two days, killing fourteen or fifteen additional whites and striking terror among the settlers and miners of central Idaho.

Both Joseph and Ollokot had been absent from the camp during the first raid, butchering cattle on the opposite side of the Salmon River. They returned to find the camp in confusion and the older people crying with fear and striking their tipis, intending to scatter to hiding places. Most of the Indians were certain that there would now be war, but Joseph still hoped to avert it. He tried to calm his people, assuring them that General Howard would not blame the whole tribe for the irresponsible actions of a few of its young hotheads, and urged them to remain where they were and await the troops, with whom he would make a settlement. The situation, however, had gone too far. The warriors rode around the camp, crying out that they would now give General Howard the fight that he had wanted, and the people would not listen to Joseph. One by one the bands departed to a hiding place farther south, in White Bird Canyon, leaving behind only Joseph, Ollokot, and a few of the Wallowa Indians.

Joseph's wife had given birth to a daughter while he had been across the Salmon, and he lingered with her now in their tipi. Several warriors were detailed to watch him and Ollokot, lest these leaders who had so often pleaded for peace would desert the non-treaties and move onto the reservation. But though he had vigorously opposed war Joseph would not abandon his people; two days later he and Ollokot, resolved to fight now that hostilities seemed unavoidable, joined the non-treaties in the new camp at White Bird.

Back at Lapwai Howard was stunned by news of the Salmon River outbreaks. He had planned all winter against trouble in the Wallowa, and when Joseph had moved out peacefully he had thought that all danger was past. At the news of the outbreaks he hastily ordered two troops of the 1st Cavalry that had been stationed at Lapwai, ninety troopers and four officers under Captain David Perry and Captain Joel Trimble, to round up the hostiles and force them onto the reservation. Eleven civilian volunteers and twelve treaty Nez Percés accompanied the troops, and after a rapid two days' march of almost eighty miles they learned of the Nez Percé camp in White Bird Canyon and prepared to attack it early the following morning.

Alert Indian spies warned the Nez Percés of the troops' approach. The soldiers would have to descend a long draw of treeless, rolling land, flanked by ridges and hills, to reach the Nez Percé village, which lay behind two buttes at the bottom of the slope. The chiefs were uncertain whether to resist and detailed six men to take a flag of truce forward and try to arrange a peaceful meeting with the officers. At the same time the old men, women, and children were ordered to drive in the camp's stock, while the warriors stripped for action, mounted their ponies, and sought hiding places to the right and left of the draw to await events. The total manpower of the Indian bands was about a hundred and fifty, but many of the men that morning were lying in camp, drunk on whisky seized during the raids and unable to fight. Others had no weapons or were too

old, sick, or frightened to use them. Altogether not more than forty-five or fifty Indians—armed with bows and arrows, shotguns, old muzzle-loading fur-trade muskets, and a few modern rifles—rode out to defend the village.

The nature of the terrain, offering a multitude of hiding places for flanking attacks, should have put the troopers on their guard. Instead they trotted confidently down the draw, ready for a thundering surprise charge. As they rounded a small hill the Indian truce team appeared directly ahead of them. Behind the men with the white flag were other Nez Percés, sitting on their horses waiting to see what would happen. There was an instant of surprise. Then a volunteer raised his rifle and shot at the truce team. The Indians backed away, unharmed; a Nez Percé behind them fired in return, killing one of Perry's two trumpeters, and the fight was on. As Indians began shooting from all directions, Perry hastily deployed his men in a line across the draw, placing the volunteers on a high, rocky knoll to his left. The company in the center dismounted, letting men in the rear hold their horses, and the company on the right remained mounted.

The battle, fought without plan by the Indians, lasted only a few moments. On the left a small body of Nez Percés swept from behind a hill and galloped straight at the volunteers, sending them flying in panic back up the draw and exposing Perry's whole line. At the same time Ollokot, leading a large number of warriors, emerged from cover on the right and, firing as he came, charged into Perry's mounted troop, frightening the horses and disorganizing the soldiers. The men in the center, seeing Indians and confusion all around them, gave way and made a sudden rush for their horses. In a few minutes the entire command was cut into small groups fighting desperately for their lives. Nineteen men under Lieutenant Edward Theller tried to make a stand but were driven against a rocky wall and wiped out. The rest of the troop disintegrated into a fleeing rabble and got away, leaving behind them a total of thirty-four dead, a third of Perry's

command. The Indians had only two men wounded and none killed; equally important for the future, they retrieved from the battlefield sixty-three rifles and a large number of pistols.

Perry's defeat spread alarm throughout the settlements of the Northwest and angered the rest of the nation, to whom the Custer massacre was still fresh. Howard was shocked; fearing that the uprising would spread to the treaty Nez Percés as well as other Northwest tribes, he called for troop reinforcements from to what was considered the white man's code of war. This too was credited to Joseph, whose dignity and decency at prewar councils were recalled by Howard and the Indian agents.

The truth was that Nez Percé successes were resulting from a combination of overconfidence and mistakes on the part of the whites, the rugged terrain that made pursuit difficult, and, to a very great extent, the Indians' intense courage and patriotic determination to fight for their rights and protect their people. Indian strategy and tactics had also played a role, but at each step of the way these were agreed upon in councils of all the chiefs and were carried out on the field by the younger war leaders and their warriors. Joseph sat in the councils, but since he had never been a war chief his advice carried less weight than that of such men as Five Wounds, Toohoolhoolzote, and Rainbow. On the march and in battle Joseph took charge of the old men, women, and children, an assignment of vital importance and sacred trust, while Ollokot and the experienced war chiefs led the young men on guard duty or in combat. The whites had no way of knowing this, and, as events continued to unfold, the legend that Nez Percé strategy was planned and executed by one man, Joseph, was spread far and wide by the hapless army officers opposing him and accepted without question by correspondents and the United States public.

On July 11, with a reinforced army of four hundred soldiers and a hundred and eighty scouts, packers, and teamsters, Howard was back in pursuit of the Nez Percés.

Suddenly he sighted their camp lying below him on the opposite side of the Clear-water River, opened fire with a four-inch howitzer and two Gatling guns, and prepared to launch an attack. The Nez Percés were taken by surprise, but old Toohoolhoolzote and twenty-four warriors raced across the river, scaled a bluff to the level of the soldiers, and, taking shelter behind boulders, engaged the troopers with a fierce and accurate fire that held them up until more Indians could come across and get into the fight. The firing was sharp on both sides, but as increasing numbers of mounted Nez Percés began appearing over the top of the bluff to circle the troops' rear and flanks, Howard hastened his men into a square and ordered them to dig in on the open, rocky ground with their trowel bayonets.

The fighting raged all day and continued in the same spot the next morning, an almost unprecedented length of time for Indians to maintain battle in one location. The Nez Percés, out-numbered almost six to one and occasionally under artillery fire, kept the troopers pinned down and on the defensive with marksmanship that Howard's adjutant, Major C. E. S. Wood, described as "terribly accurate and very fatal." Several times small groups of Indians darted forward to engage the soldiers in hand-to-hand fights, and once they almost captured Howard's supply train. In addition, the Nez Percés held the only spring in the area and controlled access to the river; under the blazing July sun the soldiers suffered terribly from thirst.

By noon of the second day the chiefs had decided that there had been enough fighting without decision. Many of the warriors had become restless and tired and wanted to leave. Holding the line long enough for Joseph to get the families packed and safely away with the herds, the Indians, one by one, ceased fighting and withdrew down the bluff. Howard's troops followed the last of them across the river and through the abandoned camp. It was an anticlimactic and hollow finish to a battle that had cost the army thirteen killed and twenty-seven wounded, two of them fatally. Howard could

count four Indians killed and six wounded, but the hostiles had escaped from him again.

The Nez Percés crossed the Clearwater north of the troops and paused at an old meeting ground on the Weippe Prairie to decide what to do next. They had had enough of Howard and thought that if they left Idaho and went somewhere else the general would be satisfied and would leave them alone. Looking Glass, who many times had hunted buffalo and fought with the Crows in Montana, urged that they cross the mountains and join that tribe. They could then hunt on the plains in peace, he told them, and the war would be over. It was a harsh proposal, for it meant the final abandonment of their homeland, but with the people's safety weighing heavily on them Joseph and the other chiefs reluctantly agreed to the exodus. On July 16, having named Looking Glass as supreme war chief for the trek to the Crows, the bands set off on the arduous Lolo Trail across the wild and precipitous heights of the Bitterroot Mountains.

Smarting under increasing criticism from Washington, as well as from the press and public, Howard once more took after the Indians, doggedly following their trail up through the thick and tangled forest growth of mountain slopes to the high, ridge-top route that led from Idaho to Montana. It was a painful and grueling trip for both pursuers and pursued. The Indian families, stumbling along over steep and rocky trails, guarded by the warriors and driving some two thousand horses with them, managed to keep well ahead of the troops, who, with their guns and camp equipment, found the going even rougher. In the meantime word of the Indian flight had been telegraphed ahead to Montana, and from Missoula Captain Charles C. Rawn, with thirty-five men of the 7th Infantry and two hundred citizen volunteers from the Bitterroot Valley, hastened to the eastern end of the Lolo Trail and threw up a log fort from which to block the hostiles' passage until Howard could catch up to them from the rear.

On July 25, after nine days in the mountains, the Nez Percés appeared above Rawn's

fort, and Joseph, Looking Glass, and an elderly chief named White Bird came down for a parley. Explaining that they were on their way to the Crows, the Indians promised to move peacefully through the Bitterroot Valley, respecting the settlements and paying for any supplies they needed. It satisfied the volunteers, who, having no stomach for an Indian fight, deserted Rawn and stole back to their homes. As a federal officer, Rawn was obliged to continue his posture of resistance, but fortunately for his depleted garrison the Indians shrewdly bypassed his fort and, making a noisy feint in front of him, quietly filed around him on another mountain trail that led them into the Bitterroot Valley. The embarrassed Captain withdrew to Missoula, and his log bastion was promptly dubbed Fort Fizzle by the many wags who were beginning to root for Joseph and the apparently unconquerable Nez Percés.

Moving through the heavily settled valley, the Indians scrupulously maintained their promise to commit no hostile act. At Stevensville they paused to buy coffee, flour, sugar, and tobacco and paid the merchants with gold dust and currency. The friendly treatment they received from the Montana citizens made the Indians believe that, now that they were out of Idaho, the war was over and they were safe. They moved leisurely south to the Big Hole Valley and, on an open meadow beside the willow-lined Big Hole River, pitched camp to rest.

Howard was still far back in the Bitterroots, temporarily out of the picture. But, unknown to the Nez Percés, a new force of 163 army regulars and 35 volunteers under Colonel John Gibbon was hurrying across country from Fort Shaw, on the Sun River, by forced marches to attack them. On the night of August 8 Gibbon gained a wooded hill above the unsuspecting Nez Percé camp and, the next morning at dawn, launched a surprise attack. Firing volleys into the sleeping village, the soldiers charged down the hill in a long line, forded the shallow river, and swept into the camp, shooting and clubbing men, women, and children. Some of the Nez Percés were able to seize their weapons and

ammunition belts and escape to the shelter of the willows. There they were rallied by the aged White Bird, who cried at them, "Why are we retreating? Since the world was made, brave men have fought for their women and children! Fight! Shoot them down! We can shoot as well as any of these soldiers!"

Gibbon's commanding officer on the left had been killed during the opening charge and without a leader that part of the line faltered as Indians stood their ground and fought back desperately from the tipis. The troopers were forced toward the right, allowing the Nez Percés in that sector to erect a firing line against them. This brought confusion to the main part of the camp, where Gibbon's men, in complete control, were unsuccessfully trying to set the leather tipis afire. With his milling troops being pushed together and soldiers being struck both by the Indians on the left and by White Bird's snipers on the right, Gibbon, who had been wounded in the leg, ordered a withdrawal across the river to the protection of the wooded knoll from which the attack had been launched. To his chagrin the Nez Percés swarmed after him, and in a few moments he found himself on the defensive, fighting fiercely, his position encircled by well-concealed Indian sharpshooters.

As the soldiers pulled out of the village, the old men, women, and children, directed by Joseph, hurried back in, picked up their dead and wounded, struck the tipis, and, driving their pack strings and pony herds ahead of them, moved off toward the south. The warriors remained behind, continuing the siege on the hill throughout the day and into the night, pinning down Gibbon's men in shallow holes and behind fallen trees, and picking off anyone who showed himself. Cut off and without prospect of relief, the soldiers found their position rapidly becoming desperate. The men ran out of water, and cries from the unattended wounded filled the air. Gibbon's howitzer, ordered to come up after the initial attack, arrived on the scene and was immediately captured by a group of wild-charging Nez Percés, who rolled it over a steep bluff. Another body of Indians seized

a packload of two thousand rounds of Gibbon's ammunition. By eleven that night, with their camp safely away, the warriors mercifully decided to break off the engagement and spare the surviving troopers. Backing off slowly to guard against pursuit, they took the trail after Joseph.

Gibbon's men, cut up and dazed, were in no condition to follow. Thirty-three soldiers were dead and thirty-eight wounded; fourteen of the seventeen officers were casualties. Howard's men, coming up hurriedly the next day, found the troops still in a state of shock, burying the dead and trying to care for the groaning wounded.

The Indians' losses at the Big Hole had also been high. Between sixty and ninety Nez Percés had lost their lives, including Rainbow, Five Wounds, and some of the tribe's ablest warriors. Many of the casualties had been women and children, slain during the initial attack on the tipis. Joseph's wife had been among the seriously wounded, and Joseph had been seen fighting his way through the early part of the battle sheltering his new baby in his arms.

The Nez Percés now quickened their retreat across southwestern Montana. Gone were illusions that the whites would let them be. In their desperation to escape, only one haven seemed left to them. Like Sitting Bull, they would go to Canada and seek refuge among the tribes in the country of Queen Victoria. Canada was hundreds of miles away, but they would get there somehow. Looking Glass, blamed for the false sense of security that had led to so many deaths at the Big Hole, was relieved of command, and a tough fighter named Lean Elk, whom the whites had known as Poker Joe, was elevated to supreme war chief. The column headed eastward toward Targhee Pass, which would lead the refugees over the Continental Divide to the Yellowstone, where they could turn north to Canada. West of the pass, rear-guard scouts brought word that Howard was catching up and pressing close behind them again. In a bold night attack, twenty-eight warriors led by Ollokot and three other chiefs stole back to Howard's camp and ran off the gen-

eral's entire pack string. Howard came to a dead halt, forced to scour the settlements for more animals, and the Indians hurried on, unhampered, across the Divide and into the area which five years before had become Yellowstone National Park.

A sight-seeing party, of which General William Tecumseh Sherman was a member, had just left the area, but the Nez Percés swooped up two other groups of campers and took them along. The chiefs insisted on humane treatment for the frightened tourists, who included a number of women. In time, as the Indians continued across the park, past geysers and bubbling mudpots, the sight-seers were allowed to escape. On the eastern side of the park the Indians found themselves harassed by new bodies of troops, coming at them from posts on the Montana plains. One force of the 7th Cavalry under Colonel Samuel Sturgis tried to set a trap for the Indians in the upper Yellowstone Valley, but the Nez Percés fought their way skillfully through a mountain wilderness where the whites thought passage would be impossible and emerged on the Clark's Fork River in Sturgis's rear. Realizing he had been tricked, Sturgis gave chase with three hundred men, following the Indians across the Yellowstone River and down its northern bank past present-day Billings, Montana.

On and on the Indians hurried. Near Canyon Creek they passed a stage station and captured a stagecoach. The warriors let its occupants escape into some nearby willows and had a day of great fun, driving the incongruous-looking coach along in the rear of the column. The sport ended abruptly. At Canyon Creek the bands turned north, and here, on September 13, Sturgis's hard-riding cavalry overtook them. There was a furious fight. A rear guard of Indians, hiding behind rocks and in gullies, held off the troopers while the Nez Percé women and children drove the pack strings and herds to the protection of a narrow canyon that cut north through rimrock country. Sturgis ordered his men to dismount, an error that allowed the Indians to escape into the canyon. Later the cavalry tried to follow the Nez Percés in a

running fight up the canyon, but the Indians succeeded in making pursuit difficult by blocking the canyon floor behind them with boulders and brush. At darkness, weary and running out of ammunition and rations, Sturgis gave up the chase. Three of his men had been killed and eleven wounded. The Indians counted three wounded, but the long pursuit was beginning to tell heavily on them. They too were becoming tired and dispirited, and they were losing horses. Many of the animals were going lame from the difficult trek and had to be abandoned. Others were being lost in the hurry to keep moving.

Beyond Canyon Creek their old allies the Crows, now in service as scouts for the army, began to attack them. The Nez Percés fought them off in running engagements and continued across the Musselshell to the Missouri River, helping themselves to army stores at a military depot on Cow Island while a frightened sergeant and twelve men looked on helplessly from behind an earthwork. Just across the Missouri the Indians fought off a half-hearted attack by a small force from Fort Benton and hastened on across badlands and open, rolling plains to the Bear Paw Mountains. About thirty miles short of the Canadian line, exhausted by the long flight, they paused to rest, confident that they had out-distanced all pursuers.

Once more they were wrong, out-flanked again by the telegraph, and this time the pause would end in their last stand. From Fort Keogh in the east, Colonel Nelson Miles, with nearly six hundred men that included the 2nd and 7th Cavalry, the mounted 5th Infantry, and a body of Cheyenne warriors, was hastening obliquely across Montana, hoping to intercept the hostiles before they crossed the border. On the cold, blustery morning of September 30, Miles' Cheyenne scouts sighted the Nez Percé tipis in a deep hollow on the plains close to Snake Creek on the northern edge of the Bear Paw Mountains. Miles ordered an immediate attack, and the Cheyennes and 7th Cavalry, supported by the 5th Infantry, charged across the open ground toward the village.

The assault caught the Nez Percés in three groups. Some, including women and children, were on the distant side of the camp and were able to mount and flee to the north, where they scattered on the broken plains, to die from hunger and exposure or eventually to reach Canada in small, pitiful groups. Others, including Joseph, were trapped with the horses at some distance from the camp. A third group, at the village, found protection behind a low-lying ridge. These warriors, hidden behind rocks, opened a deadly fire on the attackers, inflicting heavy casualties and sending the troopers reeling back short of the camp. Two officers and twenty-two soldiers were killed in the assault and four officers and thirty-eight enlisted men wounded.

The 2nd Cavalry, meanwhile, had been sent around the camp to capture the Nez Percé horse herd and try to cut off escape. This unit had better luck. The troopers charged into the herd, stampeding the horses and splitting the Indians into small groups that fought back hand-to-hand or sought cover in gullies or behind rocks. A few of the Indians got away on ponies and disappeared to the north. Others, among them Joseph, crawled or fought their way back to the main body of Nez Percés and reached the camp under cover of darkness. The troopers drove off at least a third of the horses, however, and killed most of the Nez Percés' remaining war leaders, including the brave Ollokot and Toohoolhoolzote.

The heavy casualties Miles had sustained deterred him from ordering another charge, and he decided to lay siege to the camp. He made one attempt to cut off the Indians from their water supply by establishing a line between the village and the river, but the troops detailed to the task were driven back by fierce Indian resistance. As the siege settled down, both sides dug in, continuing a desultory sharpshooting fire between the lines. The weather turned bitterly cold, and the next morning five inches of snow covered the unretrieved bodies of the dead. The Indians, wounded, hungry, and cold, suffered intensely. Using hooks, knives, and pans, the people tried to dig crude

shelters in the sides of the hollows. One dugout was caved in by a hit from Miles' howitzer that had been tilted back for use as a mortar, and a woman and child were buried alive.

As the siege continued, Miles grew concerned. There were rumors that Sitting Bull, with a band of Sioux, was coming to the Nez Percés' rescue from Canada. And, even if they did not show up, Howard was getting closer, and Miles wanted the glory of Joseph's end for himself. Hoping to hurry the surrender, he hoisted a white flag over his trenches and, after negotiations with a Nez Percé who could speak English, lured Joseph across the lines. The two men parleyed amicably for a few moments, but when Joseph began to detail terms for an honorable surrender, Miles had him seized and made prisoner. The same day, however, the Nez Percés captured one of Miles' officers. The next morning an exchange was agreed to, and Joseph was returned to his camp.

The siege went on amid cold and snow flurries, and on October 4 Howard reached the battlefield with a small advance party that included two treaty Nez Percés. The appearance of their old enemy, heralding the arrival of reinforcements for Miles, finally took the heart out of the suffering Nez Percés. The next morning the two treaty Nez Percés crossed the lines and told the chiefs that if they surrendered they would be honorably treated and sent back to Lapwai. The chiefs held a final council. White Bird and Looking Glass still opposed surrender. Joseph pointed to the starving women and children in the shelter pits and to the babies that were crying around them. "For myself I do not care," he said. "It is for them I am going to surrender."

As the council broke up, Looking Glass was suddenly struck in the forehead by a stray bullet and killed. As the surviving warriors gathered around the slain chief, Joseph mounted a horse and, followed by several men on foot, rode slowly up the hill from the camp and across to the army lines where Howard and Miles awaited him. As he reached the officers, he dismounted and

handed Miles his rifle. Then he stepped back and adjusted his blanket to leave his right arm free; addressing Miles, he began one of the most touching and beautiful speeches of surrender ever made.

"Tell General Howard I know his heart," he said. "What he told me before I have in my heart. I am tired of fighting. Our chiefs are killed. Looking Glass is dead. Toohoolhoolzote is dead. The old men are all dead. It is the young men who say yes or no. He who led the young men is dead. It is cold and we have no blankets. The little children are freezing to death. My people, some of them, have run away to the hills, and have no blankets, no food; no one knows where they are—perhaps freezing to death. I want to have time to look for my children and see how many I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead. Hear me, my chiefs. I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever."

The fact that neither Joseph nor any other individual chief had been responsible for the outstanding strategy and masterful success of the campaign is irrelevant. The surrender speech, taken down by Howard's adjutant and published soon afterward, confirmed Joseph in the public's mind as the symbol of the Nez Percés' heroic, fighting retreat. Although the government failed to honor Miles' promise to send the Indians back to Lapwai, sympathy was aroused throughout the nation for Joseph's people. At first the Indians were shipped by flatboats and boxcars to unfamiliar, hot country in the Indian Territory, where many of them sickened and died. But friendly whites and sympathetic societies in the East continued to work for them, and public sentiment finally forced approval of their return to the Northwest. In 1885 Joseph and most of his band were sent to the Colville Reservation in Washington. Joseph made many attempts to be allowed to resettle in the Wallowa but each time was rebuffed. In 1904 he died, broken-hearted, an exile from the beautiful valley he still considered home.