

BLACK HAWK WAR ECHOES

Story of the last battle as told by Mrs. Vanatta who camped in this, the Grand Ronde valley.

Mr. A. E. Huff on returning from Portland, where he had been as a United States Juryman, called the Observer Office and stated that while in Portland he had met an aunt who is nearly ninety years of age. The following story was printed in the Grand Ronde paper: "BLACK HAWK WAR ECHOES". Story of the last battle as told by Mrs. Vanatta who camped in this, the Grand Ronde valley in 1854.

Gearshum Vanatta, who was born in Pennsylvania, June 2, 1813 and died in Clark County, Washington, May 28, 1896 served in the Black Hawk war on the steamboat that did such effective service in this closing battle of the war where the power of the Black Hawk was broken and his people hopelessly defeated. The venerable lady now resides in Vancouver, Washington. Her memory is clear and she tells the story of the battle, as her husband told it, as follows:

"The American army had brought the wily Black Hawk to bay on the Mississippi river. The maneuver, if effected would leave the broad river between him and the troops and open to him the defenseless settlements an easy prey to his tomahawks and scalping knives. A courier reached our boat with orders to move up the river with all possible speed, prepared to fight at any moment.

The fires were kept roaring in the boats furnaces all night long; the engine was pushed to its utmost capacity. I stood at my gun throughout the long, dark night. Early in the morning the cracking of rifles, the rattle of muskets and the roar of the artillery mingled with the shouts of the soldiers and the war whoop of the Indians; old us a battle was nigh. A wild yell from the savages told that a critical point on the conflict was near. The sound of the battle was awful. The troops seemed to be falling back, we soon beheld some half a mile up the river, the stream blackened by a multitude of Indians in canoes, buffalo skin boats and hundreds of Indians holding onto the tails of their ponies, all making for the opposite shore.

"Load" - was the sharp order of the officer. Bang!! went the rammer, followed by, "All ready Sir", The boat soon brought us within easy range of the swarming mass. Aim low, Fire; said the officer. The priming hissed, the great gun roared, a discharge of grape and canister sped among the floating savages. Canoes, boats, ponies and human bodies leaped into the air along the pathway of the murderous shot. Volley after volley from the Redman's rifles, from the shore and canoes and boats fell upon the steamer like deadly hail. Faster and more deadly the boats guns worked, vomiting fire and death among the struggling swimmers. The dead floated a moment in silence, and then sank, the living struggled; the inexorable engine drove among the helpless Indians, horses, frantic with fright or maddened from wounds, turned toward their home shore and with fierce splashing beat many to death. Grape, canister and chain shot showered from the boats guns crushing and mangling. Panic seized the Savages. They swam in aimless circles like inanimate drift in whirlpools. The slaughter was terrible. Few of the vast multitude that began that mad swim reached either shore. The last desperate move of the Black Hawk in the game of war was checkmated, his power was broken, his tribe almost annihilated. I saw him surrender, and the Black Hawk war was over."

Mr. Huff had never his aunt before, and among the many incidents of family history which she told him was the same Baptist minister, Elder Clark, who baptized herself and husband, nearly three quarters of a century ago in Illinois also baptized the father and mother of Dr. Huff. Though warrior brave and frontiersman bold, Mr. Vanatta was a Christian member of the Baptist church from early manhood during all his journey through life. The Vanatta's passed through Grande Ronde valley in the fall of 1854, camped where "Old LaGrandi" now is. They were then three hundred miles from white settlements, dusty and travel worn, with wearied team, scant of provisions, two great mountain ranges to cross, the great and

dusty and dreary was done, and the hero, who won his honors on the broad Mississippi in grassy Illinois, now sleeps on the banks of the Columbia River.

Note: Told to Mr. A. E. Huff (son of Susan Palmer Huff) by Sarah Palmer Vanatta when she was nearly ninety years old, after Gearshum had died. Printed in the Grand Ronde, Oregon newspaper.



Contributed by Carolyn Hutton