

## Cheyenne Outbreak of 1878

There is considerable contradictory matter in the various accounts of the attempt of the band of Northern Cheyenne under Dull Knife to return from Indian Territory to their old home in Montana and Dakota. Briefly stated, the essential facts are as given here.

After the Custer battle of June 26, 1876, the army made a determined effort to round up all the hostile Indian camps. One of these was a large camp of Cheyenne under Dull Knife, hidden in a valley among the Big Horn Mountains. It was attacked and captured in the early winter of 1876-77. The village was burned and most of the horses taken, but the greater part of the Indians in the camp escaped and went to Crazy Horse's village on the Powder River in Montana.

In the spring of 1877, Dull Knife, with his band of Northern Cheyenne, and Crazy Horse with his Sioux, being destitute and starving, surrendered to United States troops. Most of the Cheyenne subsequently were sent south to Indian Territory with the understanding that they were to remain there with their relatives - the Southern Cheyenne.

New conditions faced them. Coming from the high, dry climate of Montana and Dakota to the hot humidity of Indian Territory; from a country still rich in game to one where game had been exterminated; adaptation to the new life was difficult. Fever and ague, new to the Indians, attacked them. Food was scanty and they began to starve. Of about 990 people, more than 600 were stricken with ~~the~~ illness and forty-one died the first winter. They begged to be allowed to return to their old home in the north, but this was refused.

The Cheyenne endured the life for over a year and then determined to return to their own country. On September 9, 1878 about 300 of them, 87 warriors, the rest women and children, left the Darlington Reservation and made a dash for the north. Dull Knife and Little Wolf were their leaders. Troops were immediately sent in pursuit. The Indians moving with incredible speed eluded the soldiers for the most part but stood and fought them off on several occasions. In the dash through Kansas a number of settlers were killed and horses and other property taken. In Nebraska, however, there were few depredations.

The Cheyennes separated into two groups. One, under Little Wolf, comprising most of the younger warriors, eluded all pursuit and reached Sitting Bull's band in Canada. The group under Dull Knife, however, had a more tragic experience. Hampered by the women and children, Dull Knife took refuge in the sand hills of Northern Nebraska and appealed to Chief Red Cloud for succor. But the Sioux chieftain either could not or would not offer any help. So Dull Knife, his camp on Chadron Creek surrounded by troops, was finally forced to surrender and agreed to go willingly to Fort Robinson.

After arrival at the fort the Indians were informed that they were to be returned immediately to the Indian Territory. Vainly they pleaded to be allowed to stay in their own country. The government was inflexible in the intention of returning them at once even though it was mid-winter. Chief Dull Knife and his sub-chiefs refused

point blank saying they would die first, before they would return south. They barricaded themselves in the barracks where they were confined and defied the military. Rations and finally even water was withheld from them in an effort to force their submission. After several days of this, the Indians, desperate, made a forlorn dash for escape. In the night they left the fort through the windows. In bitter cold weather suffering incredible hardships they succeeded in reaching a point about forty miles from Fort Robinson. Here in a canyon of the rugged Pine Ridge country they made their last stand. Worn out, famished, and with hardly any weapons or ammunition, their case was hopeless. In a desperate, last ditch fight most of the band were killed or wounded.

Chief Dull Knife was not with them at the end. He had managed to elude the soldiers and eventually made his way to Canada and joined Sitting Bull.

#### References

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