

Little Soldier

Lehi Yesteryears by Richard Van Wagoner

During one of the exploration trips conducted shortly after the Mormon pioneers arrived in the Great Salt Lake Valley they encountered a small, mixed band of Utah and Shoshones on the Lower Weber near present day Ogden. Their chief, for reasons now lost in history, was given the name of "Little Soldier" by his white compatriots. The Shoshone sachem at the time claimed as hunting grounds most of David and Box Elder counties. Peaceful, and agreeable to allowing Mormons settlement on his lands, Little Soldier was greatly favored by the territorial Superintendent of Indian Affairs. As a reward, the chief's domain was extended southward to "Wimmer's fish trap," the area we locals call Indian Ford on the Jordan River west of Lehi. (By Thanksgiving Point).

Rather unfamiliar with the southern and western reaches of his unexpected and unsolicited new protectorate, Little Soldier led his people in several exploratory missions to become acquainted with the area's resources. While camped near Lehi in 1861, one of his daughters died during childbirth. Indian burials have considerable spiritual and sacred significance. After conducting proper funerary ceremonies for his deceased daughter and grandchild, Little Soldier conveyed their bodies back to his ancestral home in Davis County.

High on the Lake Bonneville bench east of Farmington the bodies were interred in a large rockfall. The site, long known to settlers in the area as "Indian Annie's grave," was restored and rededicated in 1989 as a collaborative effect of the Utah Archaeological Society, the U.S. Forest Service, the Shoshone Nation, and the Boy Scouts of America.

Recently I took my grandson Travis with me to see if we could locate the ancient crypt. After receiving general directions from a clerk at the Farmington City Offices, and specific instructions from a nearby resident, we were successful, but only after doing much more hiking than my neglected body was used to. The strenuous effort was worth all the huffing and puffing, however. The hallowed burial site, marked by a stone and a marker, is spectacularly situated. To the west lies a panoramic view of Antelope Island and the Great Salt Lake stretching to the horizon. For a few moments, that rainy day, I was drawn away from my world into the weave of history wondering what became of Little Soldier

and his people.

My research uncovered a 01 July 1863 article in the Deseret News. The account relates that Little Soldier and a group of 20-30 kinsmen on April 1, 1863 fell in with a twenty-five man cavalry troop west of Lehi. The troopers, under the command of Lieutenant Ether, on the lookout for hostilities, were on official assignment from Fort Douglas to protect the Overland Mail and Telegraph line in the vicinity of Shell and Deep Creeks. "For reasons never stated," the newspaper explained, "but either in disobedience to orders, for the procurement of scalps... the obtainment of glory, or from some other motive, the officer in command of the detachment offered battle to Little Soldier...who was compelled to fight."

Although the Indians repelled their attackers at the mouth of West Canyon north of Cedar Fort, the conflict resulted in several casualties before the soldiers retreated. Fearing an additional attack by a stronger force, Little Soldier and his surviving followers, rode through Lehi and found refuge in Battle Creek east of Pleasant Grove.

On the evening of April 12th a group of teamsters camped in Pleasant Grove was accosted by Little Soldier and approximately fifty of his fighting men. W.H. Seegmiller recounted "none of them wore much clothing, a breech cloth and mocassins were their uniform; their faces were painted black, all seemed to have guns and pistols." They demanded to know if the teamsters were "Americats." The outnumbered men said no they were Mormons, but a company of California Volunteers were camped elsewhere in the town. The Indians left saying "we find them." By the time they had located the small troop from Ft. Douglas, the servicemen had been warned of an imminent attack and had commandeered the home of Samuel Green.

Pulling their howitzer into the house, where they ripped up the floor for fortification, the soldiers awaited their attackers. Unable to breach the bulwarks, the Indians began peppering the adobe house with bullets. When they saw this would not rout the soldiers they began to plunder the nearby wagons and stock corrals. Rather than allow their horses to be stolen the artillerymen fired a round of grapeshot over corral, killing many of the animals. In the confusion Little Soldier and his men escaped back into their mountain stronghold with considerable booty.

Not forgetting that several of his band had been killed during the April 1 skirmish in Cedar

Valley, Little Soldier vowed retaliation. On June 9th, he and some of his men told Caroline Ball, wife of the Jordan bridge tollkeeper, that they were going to attack an Overland Stage and “take revenge on the blue coats.” The following day as the eastbound coach rounded the hill near the present Byron Dastrup residence (11149 West and 8570 North) the marauders struck hard and fast. The driver and freight agent aboard were both killed and horribly mutilated.

A few days later the territorial Indian agent sent Bill Hickman to Pleasant Grove to try and negotiate a treaty with Little Soldier. But the wily sachem was distrustful, and could not be induced to come down into the valley, fearing extermination. Hickman returned the following day with a supply of blankets to convince the chief he was not talking “forked, and trying to entrap them.”

Little Soldier send down one “Weber Jim” to conduct negotiations for the Shoshone. The envoy was taken to Fort Douglas in a carriage where peace was arranged. A few days later Little Soldier and about a dozen of his warriors were invited into Salt Lake City where Superintendent Doty gave each of them a blanket, hat, and shirt, “with which they seemed well pleased.”

“The presumption is, “ noted the July 1, 1863 Deseret News that “Little Soldier and his band will hereafter enjoy an immunity from attack by soldiers, while roaming over their domain in a quiet, peaceable manner, as they were wont to do before the unprovoked assault made on them Near (Cedar Fort.)”

A “Treaty of Peace and Friendship” between the Shoshone/Goshute and the United States government was made near Tooele on October 12, 1863. This agreement, which ended Indian hostilities in the area, was ratified by Congress in 1864 and signed into law by Abraham Lincoln on January 17, 1865.

Although I have no information on Little Soldier’s ultimate demise, I presume he and his band eventually returned to their ancestral lands in Davis County. Recent archaeological work at the mouth of Bear River has discovered dozens of Shoshone graves in the Great Salt Lake marshes. Perhaps one of the is Little Soldier’s final resting place.