On a dark night in early September, 1878, a band of Northern Cheyenne Indians left their assigned place of imprisonment at Fort Reno, Indian Territory, and began a memorable trek northward to reach their Montana homeland. That episode, during which the destitute tribesman passed over a vast portion of the Great Plains while eluding numerous army troops sent to stop them, comprises a classic chapter in the history of Indian-white confrontations of the nineteenth century.

One of the army participants in the Cheyenne campaign was First Lieutenant George H. Palmer. A career soldier, Palmer was raised in upstate New York and Illinois before entering the volunteer forces in 1861 at the beginning of the Civil War. He took part in several significant engagements, notably that at Lexington, Missouri, and emerged from the war a captain of Illinois infantry.

In 1867 Palmer accepted a commission in the regular army and was sent with the Twenty-seventh U.S. Infantry to guard emigrant trails in Wyoming and Montana. Two years later he was sent to the South, then undergoing Reconstruction, where his new regiment, the Sixteenth Infantry, was active in overseeing state and local elections and in assisting federal revenue officials in Mississippi, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana. With the close of Reconstruction in 1877, the regiment was shipped west, and Palmer’s company took station at Fort Wallace, in western Kansas near the Colorado line. The assignment of manning this frontier outpost on the plains promised monotony of the worst kind. Scarcely a year passed, however, before Palmer found his unit embroiled in one of the more noted campaigns in the annals of Indian warfare.

The following account of the so-called Dull Knife chase and its aftermath, excerpted from the journal of Lieutenant Palmer, highlights one phase of the army’s frustrating pursuit of the Cheyen-
nes across western Kansas. Palmer herein recounts the day-to-day activities and incidents that affected his immediate command, and besides offers some critical insights into the overall conduct of operations against the Indians. The account begins with the arrival of Palmer's unit at Fort Wallace from the South.

In June, 1877, my regiment was ordered to the Department of the Missouri.¹ We left New Orleans and reached Fort Wallace, Kansas, on the 14th of June, 1877.² Col. [James] Van Voast commands the post. . . . [In July] the Cheyenne Indians who were being taken to the Indian Territory camped 15 miles east of here.³ Many of them came to visit the post. I issued rations to 1000 of them. November 4th to 10th, went on buffalo hunt with [Captain Peter M.] Boehm, 4th Cav. Rode 90 miles. 4 buffaloes killed . . . .

[In September, 1878,] Cheyenne Indians reported to have left their reservation in the Ind Territory and going north. They are raiding on the settlements.⁴ About 100 men of the 23d Inf, mounted, arrived at Wallace to assist in intercepting the Indians.⁵ Reported that Indians had been seen near Sheridan Station and had chased a party of emigrants. My Co. left the post at night on the 13th [of September]. Went by rail to Sheridan.⁶ From Sheridan I went with five men on an engine to Gopher Siding where we found an abandoned wagon but no evidence that Indians had been in the vicinity.⁷ At 2:30 A.M. of the 14th, left Sheridan and marched 7 miles to Gleason's Ranch where we remained until 10 A.M. when Captain [Richard J.] Eskridge with his Mounted Co., 23d Inf. arrived from Wallace. We marched in the P.M. to Gopher Siding and made dry camp, getting water from a passing engine. At daylight of the 15th, marched to Sheridan Station where we found Maj [Alexander J.] Dallas, 23d, with the remainder of his mounted command.⁸

The whole command returned to Wallace at 4 P.M. 23d [Infantry] went into camp. On the 16th I was detailed Post Adjutant. Scout with [on?] 17th reported that Ronderebroke [sic], 4th Cav.,⁹ had had a fight with the Indians on the 13th and had lost 6 men on Bluff Creek¹⁰ north of Camp Supply [Indian Territory]. 26th, reported by several that the Indians have crossed the A.T. and S.F.¹¹ Rail Road—and confirmed by telegraph—But little has been done to find out just where the Indians are.

September 28th at 11 P.M., Lt. [Cornelius] Gardner [Gardener], Dr. [T.A.] Davis & 20 of the 4th Cavalry as escort came to the post with the body of Lt Col. [William H.] Lewis of the Inf who was killed by the Indians at Big Bend of the Beaver on the 27th
herein recounts the day-to-day activity of his immediate command, and into the overall conduct of operations begins with the arrival of the South.

is ordered to the Department of and reached Fort Wallace, Kan. [James] Van Voast commands the Indians who were being taken east of here. Many of them were to 1000 of them. November [Captain Peter M.] Boehm, is killed.

The Indians reported to have left Dry and going north. They are 30 men of the 23d Inf, mounted, excepting the Indians. Reported Sheridan Station and had chased an a post at night on the 13th [of in. From Sheridan I went with a search where we found an aban-
dinations had been in the vicinity. Reported Sheridan and marched 7 miles to
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inst in the evening. There were also brought in 2 wounded soldiers. This is the first intimation we had had of the whereabouts of the Indians. The officer in command at the Big Bend has made a fatal omission of duty in not sending a courier at once to inform us of the battle. It seems that the troops who fought were mostly of the 4th Cavly. That after Lewis was killed there was no one to properly direct affairs and the Indian moved off at dark on the 27th and gained a march on the troops. Capt. [Clarence] Mauck has assumed [command] of the column and will follow on the trail of the Indians.

Today the 29th [28th] Genl Jeff C Davis arrive at For Wallace and assumed direction of affairs. He withdrew Capt [Clayton] Hale and Lt [William H.] Vinal from Monument and Carlyle Stations east of here. The 29th we took the Cars and with Genl Davis went by rail to Monument. Returned at 1 P.M. At 4 P.M. the 29th, we heard that the Indians had crossed the K.P. Road going north on the night of the 28th at or near Carlyle Station, from which place Lt Vinal had been withdrawn. If Mauck had sent us word immediately after the fight we would have been in front of the Indians before they crossed.

In the afternoon a command was got ready to go in pursuit of

Fort Wallace, Kansas, from which post Lieutenant Palmer's company operated during the Cheyenne raid and after. Sketch prepared in 1953. Courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.
Lieutenant George H. Palmer, Sixteenth Infantry, as he appeared in the 1890s. Note Medal of Honor Palmer received for his service at Lexington, Missouri, during the Civil War. Courtesy of General Bruce Palmer, Jr.

the Indians who are reported as raiding [and] killing the settlers north east of here. The command consisted of Co “F,” Lt Palmer; Co “G,” Lt [Leven C.] Allen; “H,” Hale & Vinal. [Captain Duncan M.] Vance in command. The detachment of 29 men of the 4th Cav­ly which brought in Lewis’ body accompanied us, also Dr. Davis. Marched with 10 days ration & 5 wagons. On the 29th we camped at the RR station [near] Wallace.

Sept 30th, Marched at daylight—noon halt at Lake Creek—and after crossing north Smoky made dry camp. While here, Dodge, a Scout, arrived with orders from Genl Davis to change our course more to the east as the Indians were raiding on
4th Infantry, as he appeared in the 1890s. His service at Lexington, Missouri, during Palmer, Jr.

raiding [and] killing the settlers consisted of Co “F,” Lt Palmer; Hale & Vinal. [Captain Duncan] accompanied us, also Dr. Davis. On the 29th we camped at daylight—noon halt at Lake Smoky made dry camp. While 1st orders from Genl Davis to as the Indians were raiding on

Solomon river.17 October 1st, marched to Beaver Creek & made noon camp. October 2d, marched down Beaver & passed Major Dallas in camp with 23d Inf mounted. Camped 4½ miles above the forks. On the 3d, marched to the forks of Beaver and learned that the Indians had crossed 15 miles below on the 2d, going north with Capt Mauck of the 4th Cavly in pursuit.18 The Indians had raided on Beaver and Sappa Creeks and had secured about 100 fresh horses. [They] killed about 20 men and women and ravished a number of girls. one of whom, a school teacher, had been stretched on the ground and secured by stakes driven in the ground and outraged by fifteen of the fiends. Her hair was cut off and after the Indians left her she crawled into the creek and remained there until the Indians had passed. At this time she is at a ranch at the forks of the Beaver.19 At 11 A.M. of the 3d we continued the pursuit with the mounted 23d in advance. We struck the Indian trail about 12 M and followed it to

Map of northwestern Kansas at the time of the Cheyenne Campaign of 1878.
the Republican and, marching during the night, reached the Republican at 1 A.M. of the 4th inst. A march of about 40 miles. On the 4th Maj Dallas continued on the trail. And a scout from Capt' Davis carried an order for our return to Wallace. We (the 16th Inf) started on return march via forks of the Republican. (No water in South fork of the Republican.) At Big Timber found good supply of water, grass & wood. On 5th, camped on divide between Big Timber and Beaver Creek. No water in this camp. On the 8th, marched to beaver dams on Beaver Creek—found no water in the north fork of the Beaver. On the 7th, camped on North fork of the Smokey where we found water. On the 8th, marched to Wallace, reaching there at 12 M Total marched during the raid, 220 miles.

On the 13th we learned that the Indians had crossed the U.P.R.R. and no body had yet caught them. After crossing three lines of rail road and as many lines of troops, the Indians were finally forced to surrender at Camp Robinson, Nebraska. It seems miraculous that two or three brigadiers, four or five colonels, majors and about a thousand men in good positions with wagons, rail roads and telegraphs were unable to stop the march of this party of 50 warriors who carried their women and children with them and rode broken down ponies from the Indian Territory away into Nebraska. When the Indians crossed the rail road on our line, Col. [Captain Francis S.] Dodge [Ninth Cavalry] was wandering around in wagons on the Smokey, south of Sheridan [Station]. Dallas with all the mounted men was about 40 miles south of Wallace, and the 16th Infantry were at Fort Wallace and at this time the Indians crossed at Carlyle 50 miles east of Wallace. We can now see that our troops should all have been on the rail road and all east of Sheridan with cars ready to carry them to where the Indians crossed.

A most fatal error was in the failure to send at once a messenger from the battle field at Big Bend of South Beaver to Fort Wallace. The battle at the Big Bend of South Beaver was on the eve of the 27th. News brought to Wallace by Lt. Gardner [sic], Dr. Davis and 20 early. [They reached Fort Wallace] with the body of Col Lewis at 11 P.M. of the 28th, at which hour the Indians were crossing at Carlyle. From Wallace to the battlefield is 46 miles. A messenger on a good horse could have brought us the news in 8 hours at most which would have enabled our troops to move in the proper direction early on the morning of the 28th and place themselves in front of the Indians some hours before they could have possibly reached the rail road. Lt Gardner [sic] would have done a good thing by detaching two of his twenty men and sending them with all
during the night, reached the
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Chief Dull Knife of the Northern Cheyennes who led his tribesmen in their attempt to return to Montana in 1878. Courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.

speed before him to Wallace.33

On the 10th of October Capt Hale (H Co) returned to his station at Ft. Riley. On the 1st and 2d [of November] I went to Hays City & made entry of 160 acres land at Wallace. On the 3d of Nov. the Cheyenne Indians (Standing Elk) reached Wallace in Charge of Capt Mauck, 4th Cav., en route to the Indian Territory. These were not the band of Indians who made the raid in September.24 On the 6th Lt. [Lea] Febbiger [Febiger] arrived with the horses of the 23d used in pursuit of the Cheyennes. My Co., “F,” 16th Inf, is to be mounted on them for scouting duty south of Wallace. Co. mounted Dec 1, 1878.

The Co. mounted on the 9th of April, [1879.] started on scout. Camped at Allen Clarks Ranch on Rose Creek. 10th, marched S.E. 17 mi and camped on Punished Woman Creek at [Samuel B.] Schracks Ranch. The forks of this creek are 4 mi above this camp. 11th, marched S.E. to Poison, or White Woman, Creek, 16 miles,
and camped at Schrack's old hunting camp. 12th, marched down Poison Creek 6 mi and found water here. No water below here so reported. From here, marched due north 10½ mi to Punished Woman or South Beaver and camped at 2:30 P.M.

April 19th, Co. scouted south east. Crossed Butte Creek 10 mi from Fort. Camped on Chalk Creek 16 mi from Wallace. Found little water. We should have borne more to the east after crossing Butte Creek. Apl 20th, marched down Chalk, or Hackberry, 18 miles and camped—found but little water in holes. Apl 21st, continued down Chalk miles and made permanent camp on the trail from north fork of Smokey to Big Bend of Beaver. Here we found fine grass, wood and water. To Fort Wallace from here is about 36 miles. April 22d, Capt [William G.] Wedemeyer returned to Wallace for forage.

On the 23rd 1 marched with Lt. [Charles R.] Tyler and 14 men on the Indian trail of last year and reached the battle field at Big Bend of South Beaver at 12:30 P.M., 14 mi from our camp. At 2 P.M., marched down Beaver 2 mi then east along canon and camped at Ed Court's Dugout, 2½ mi from mouth of canon. Fine wood, water and grass here. A bad place to reach with heavy wagons. On the 24th, marched to camp which we reached 2 P.M. Total marched 28 miles.

On the 25th, marched to Spring Canon, east of camp. Marched around the head of the canon which puts in from the south, and down east side until about 2 mi from its mouth where we found a fine spring of excellent water, plenty of wood and grass. From camp via head of canon, 9 mi. Marched back to camp via valley of Hackberry, or Chalk, Creek, 7 miles. Total, 16 miles. 26th, Capt W. returned from Wallace.

On the 1st [of May], Co. marched east to Punished Woman Creek, 11 miles. With 2 men I went up the creek to Courts Ranch and returned, 14 miles. May 3d, marched to north west—crossed Hackberry and Butte Creeks which were dry—and reached the Smokey 10 miles from starting place and camped 2 mi east of Old Smokey Hill Stage Station. Found here wood, water and grass.

On the 4th, [marched] to mouth of North Smokey 19 miles and camped near Mathews Ranch. To day near Smokey Hill Station we came upon a dead Indian who had been killed during the raid last summer. Some cowboys had dragged him to the road side and thrust one of his legs into a prairie dog hole, leaving him half reclining with his body turned side ways and upward. His skin had dried and stiffened on his bones, his scalp was bare and he presented a
ng camp. 12th, marched down here. No water below here so we north 10½ mi to Punished ed at 2:30 P.M.

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The permanent camp on the trail Bend of Beaver. Here we found Wal­

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h of North Smokey 19 miles and ay near Smokey Hill Station we been killed during the raid last ed him to the road side and[ ] living hole, leaving him half reclin­ing upward. His skin had dried was bare and he presented a

horrid appearance to passers by. We thought to taking him to Wallace but the stench was too much and we left him as we found him sitting at the side of the road. On the 5th we marched to Wallace 16 miles. Total marched on this scout, 150 miles. (Since 19th Apl)

On the 12th day of May I marched with 11 men to scout south of post. At the top of the bluffs five miles from the post a severe hail storm came on and we took shelter under the rocks. Just as the storm had abated a message came from the post with orders to return. The company was ordered to go into the Indian Territory to keep settlers off Indian lands. The papers report that thousands are pouring into the Territory. Our experience there proved that these reports were utterly groundless. We found no more than 3 unauthorized persons where we were stationed, although the presence of troops there had the effect of keeping people from coming in. Is there no place on this earth where an Indian can rest in peace?

Lieutenant Palmer's chroni­ling of his unit's participation in the pursuit of the Northern Cheyennes and its aftermath points up the tough reality of Indian campaigning in Kansas during the 1870s. Moreover, his account is particularly useful for two reasons: first, the campaign and any criticism therein of his superiors are above military politics. Unlike most army memoirs of the day, Palmer's views were neither colored by anticipated advancement nor tailored for eventual publication. Second, the detail provided in regard to western Kansas place names is helpful in locating with some precision the sites where local events occurred as described by Palmer. These factors combine to make Palmer's narrative a significant contribution to our knowledge of the Army's Cheyenne campaign in 1878.

For Palmer, the years immediately following the Dull Knife chase were mild by comparison. He remained assigned to Fort Wallace until October, 1880, when his unit was sent to the arid flatlands of central Texas where it undertook patrolling details and roadbuilding exercises. Palmer was quartered at Fort Concho and Stockton until 1883. Two years later he won promotion to captain while still in Texas, and eventually he saw service in Utah and Washington State. During the Spanish-American War Palmer led troops in the campaign of Santiago de Cuba and participated in the assault on San Juan Hill. Weary and ill from the accrued effects of thirty-seven years active duty on the plains and in the tropics, Major
George H. Palmer retired from the army on February 27, 1899. He died little more than two years later.

NOTES

¹Department of the Interior, one of four administrative subdivisions within the Military Division of the Missouri, encompassed the states of Michigan, Wisconsin, Kansas, and Colorado, as well as New Mexico Territory, Indian Territory, and Forts Bliss and El Paso. Tenth Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1878 (Washington, 1878), p. 37.

²Fort Wallace (1866-1867) was named for Brigadier General William L. Wallace, killed at the Battle of Okeechobee in 1864. A separate history of the post appears in Mrs. Frank Montgomery, "Fort Wallace and Its Relation to the Indians," Kansas State Historical Collections, XVIII (1896-1898), pp. 185-220. Fort Companies K and G of the Seventeenth Infantry were sent to Fort Wallace in June, 1877. The remainder of the regiment was assigned to other locations within the Department of the Interior. Report of the Secretary of War, 1877, pp. 10, 17, 49, 50.

³The Northern Cheyenne were removed to the Indian Territory following the Sioux-Comanche War of 1876-77 on the northern plains. On August 8, 1877, nearly a thousand Indians, including many children, served under military guard at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency near Fort Reno, Indian Territory. Report of Expenditures of the Indian Office for the Military Division of the Interior, from 1868 to 1878 (Washington, 1880), p. 15.

⁴Custer at the Indian Terriories in 1877 and 1878 had been disarmed among many of the Northern Cheyenne. Disease had taken a toll on lives and the warring indifference of the government in matters of future, medical supplies, and proper subsistence brought disparagement to the Indians. Determined to return to their homeland, Chief Lone Wolf and other leaders took flight from their camp near Fort Boarding during the night of September 9, 1877. With them were 120 women and about 140 children. For discussion of the Cheyenne migration, see James W. Coggins, "Causes of the Custer Fight, 1876," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXI (1939), pp. 187-222; N. Bishop, "The Indian War Stand, or the Custer Fight (Great), Kansas Post of the Appeal to Reason, 1918" pp. 235-41. Kansas Review, "Win the Northern Cheyenne Last Indian Territorial 1878 - A Cultural Analysis," Kansas Quarterly, 113 (Fall, 1971), pp. 74-81 and Palmer, "The Northern Cheyenne (2) Through Western Kansas in 1878: Forthematical, Ethnological and Cultural Conflict," The First Guide of the Kansas City Rose, the Wichita, XXIX (September, December, 1972).

⁵Chickasaw - a strategy selected for the employment of troops from the Kansas into the Kansas-Pacific Railroad to intercept the Indians. The Cheyenne had to move their cattle forward from the Indian Territory. With the Chickasaw, the Cheyenne were equipped for travel and able to move in a more stationary manner. A more permanent settlement was established at Fort Wallace, Kansas. Navajo - a term deriving from an old name for the Navajo Indians. Navajo - a term deriving from an old name for the Navajo Indians. Navajo - a term deriving from an old name for the Navajo Indians.

⁶The expedition, under Captain William G. Weldin, numbering thirty, was mounted in wagons. Tepees, Lieutenant Colonel A. Van Vrees, the Adjutant General of the Seventh Cavalry, Kansas, September 13, 1877. Fort Wallace, Kansas, Letters West, Records of the War Department, Vol. 65, National Archives (hereafter cited as Fort Wallace, Letters West).

⁷Contrary to Palmer's statement, the commanding officer at Fort Wallace issued instructions to Fort Reno on the 7th of September to move a few miles northwest of Great Bend. Van Vrees to Adjutant General, September 11, 1877. These.

⁸Dallas had left Fort Wallace the previous day on a report that some of the Indians were encamped a few miles southeast of Great Bend. Van Vrees to Adjutant General, September 11, 1877. These.

⁹Joseph Bird's location at a location southeast of the Missouri River into the Fort Hays. When he was arrested and a court martial was at Fort Hays, Maryland, in November, 1863, he had been in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. ¹°Joseph Bird's location at a location southeast of the Missouri River into the Fort Hays. When he was arrested and a court martial was at Fort Hays, Maryland, in November, 1863, he had been in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He was charged with having been found guilty of guilt of a court martial and neglected duty in the Cheyenne campaign and was convicted of desertion at the war. Bird's term was

34
army on February 27, 1899. He

were subsequently within the Military Division of the
and Columbus, as well as in New Mexico Territory. Indian
Secretary of War, 1874 (Washington, 1875), p. 57.

General William H. Wallace, killed at the Battle of
Frank Montoya," Fort Walla Walla and Its Relation to
1882. pp. 198, 282. Dick Carpenter III and G. of the
the center of the regiment being engaged to other
Secretary of War, 1872. pp. 115, 17, 147.

Fort Reno. Indian Territory. Record 2
atoms of the Museum, from 1876 to 1962 (Washington,

had been dispositions among ranks of the Northern
indians of the government seizerers of property
in the Indian Territory to return to their Montana
farms from their camps near Fort Reno during the
night of about 148 children. For Discussion of the Cheyenne
Foot, Waco, Texas. chronicles of Oklahoma. XXXII History
Senior, George Bird Grinnell. "The Cheyenne War of

This Eight took place along the Smoky Hill River.
The Indians had laid a trap for the troops which both failed, with the soldiers gaining the initiative. After the shooting of Lewis, however, the army offensive collapsed and the Cheyennes withdrew under cover of darkness, continuing their advance southeasterly. Involved were detachments of Companies D, F, and E, composed of Indians and detachments of Companies H, F, and F. Fourth Cavalry. Record of Engagement, p. 50. Welch, Chronicle of Fort, p. 16. Palmer's mistake regarding the date of Lewis' death. "He died in September 1971, about twenty-seven hours after the reception of the report, having been transported to the Fifteenth instant of Fort Walla Walla, Kam., and about thirty miles from the
place where he was wounded." Report of the Secretary of War, 1872 (Washington, 1879), p. 166.

Colonel Davis' "discovery of attack" involved the plan of operations already undertaken by Lieutenant Colonel Van Vactor. Van Vactor had prepared a train of railroad cars loaded with supplies and troops to go east or west as a move's wishes. On his arrival, Davis ordered the train unloaded, desiring to work south and east of Fort Walla Walla in the direction of Cheyenne Women's Fort. H. W. "Fort Walla Walla," pp. 249-250. Davis issued his report on September 28 (from Fort Walla Walla). "I now know where the Indians are and can begin to operate vigorously." Dodge City Republican Times, October 8, 1878

Kumalo Railroad

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below the Arikaree Fork. The trees stretched along either side of the stream for about fourteen miles, offering a stark contrast with the otherwise barren terrain in that locale. According to one who traversed the area in the 1860s, their evergreen branches reaching in at the place, and on the edges through the brush were dense enough to gimble through.

Camp Robinson was located in southwestern Nebraska close to the Dakota line. Named in memory of First Lieutenant Louis M. Runyon of the Seventh Infantry, who was killed in Indiana in Wyoming, the post was built in March, 1874, to guard against Indians roaming along the Black Hills region. The Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes were under the control of the Lakota and Mandan nations, and were permitted to reside at the Cheyenne Agency. The Cheyenne band, led by Little Wolf, consisted of several other bands which were often at war. After that these Cheyennes succeeded in establishing power and were permitted to reside with other Cheyenne bands. The Cheyenne Agency was established in February, 1875, by the了一个名称 "Camp Robinson." In January, 1876, the

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