Battleground| Narrative and evaluation of intertribal warfare on the buffalo plains of eastern Montana and in adjacent areas prior to 1880

Arthur Roy Buntin

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BATTLEGROUND: A NARRATIVE AND EVALUATION
OF INTERTRIBAL WARFARE ON THE BUFFALO PLAINS
OF EASTERN MONTANA AND IN ADJACENT AREAS PRIOR TO 1880

by

ARTHUR ROY BUNTIN
B.A., Montana State University, 1949

Presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
1952
This thesis has been approved by the Board of Examiners in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

\[\text{Date} \]

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Chairman of the Board of Examiners

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Dean of the Graduate School
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is grateful to Professor Paul C. Phillips for suggesting the subject of this thesis and for his critical reading of the contents. To the staffs of the Montana State University Library and the Missoula Public Library he is indebted for their assistance in the use of source material, and to Mrs. E. R. Buntin for her patient encouragement and her tireless efforts in the proofreading of the manuscript.

A. R. B.
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PART I

BUFFALO, HORSE, AND SCALP

Drawn by the magnet of bison and the lure of horse and scalp, Indian tribes of plain and mountain hunted, stole, fought, and died on the rich hunting ground of Eastern and Central Montana in the years prior to 1880. On this northern land, where great bison herds roamed seeking the grass and water of life, the plains Indians—Assiniboins, Crows, Blackfeet, Gros Ventres, Cheyennes, and Sioux—moved within and outside of their favored territories while, from west of the Rocky Mountains, Flatheads, Pend d'Oreilles, Kutenais, Nez Perces, and Shoshonis and Bannocks journeyed into that hunter's paradise with the full realization that the tribe or band into whose territory they entered resented such intrusion. This was so because they had developed a strong attachment to the land; for although regarded as migratory and wandering, these tribes moved back and forth in a comparatively restricted area which to them was a homeland, sacred as the land of their fathers. Their resentment was great because they considered as their property the bison which roamed their land.

This strong personal attachment to the land and the compelling economic dependence on the buffalo were the basic
causes for intertribal warfare. This resentment was fired into bitter enmity by deeds motivated by varied desires and emotions. War was waged for horses to maintain mastery over the bison range, to augment one's personal wealth, and to have the means to establish a family. The compelling urge to revenge the injury or death of kinsmen and friends resulted in a vicious circle of death and reprisal. War provided the means to gain prominence and glory in the eyes of the tribe and enabled the ambitious and able to rise to a position of leadership. The desire to monopolize the source of firearms, the competition for favored ground around trading posts, the search for adventure and excitement by Indian youth, the necessity to replenish tribal numbers from the ranks of enemy women and children, and the pressure of eastern tribes migrating westward were contributing factors to intertribal rivalry.

The effects of intertribal rivalry were numerous. It frequently resulted in joy, increased confidence and pride, and a sense of triumph on the part of the victors. It increased wealth and glory for some but caused sorrow, suffering, and death for many and a weakening of the race at a time when strength was needed to oppose the ever-advancing white man. War created a feeling of insecurity, which was especially strong in the Snake Indians. Because of their fear to go to the buffalo plains, many suffered from hunger. The loss of warriors affected the whole tribe economically as well as psychologically. Lost hunters and warriors meant
fewer men to provide the tribe's economic needs and to pro-
tect the women and children. It meant also that the remaind-
er of the tribe had to shoulder the burden of supporting the families of those warriors who had been slain. War subjected Indian women to such vicissitudes as separation from one's own people, frequent adjustments to new husbands, and emo-
tional and economic distress due to the loss of loved ones in battle. One significant factor of intertribal warfare upon Indian life was its role as a stimulant to polygamous marriage. This custom sprang, in part, from the fact that there was a higher death rate among the men who were exposed to the dan-
gers of the hunt and of the warpath.

Intertribal warfare aided and hindered exploration and the fur trade. Indian rivalry enabled the Verendrye expedi-
tion of 1742-43 to journey within sight of the shining moun-
tains, but it also hindered the Verendryes from further ex-
ploration in that direction. Indian hostilities made it possible for Sacajawea to accompany and aid the Lewis and
Clark Expedition. Intertribal warfare laid a groundwork of hostility to the fur traders and others, which the white man had difficulty in overcoming. In gaining the friendship of one tribe by fighting on their side or by providing them with arms and ammunition, the white man gained the enmity of the opposing tribe or tribes. In some areas such hostility re-
tarded for many years the development of the fur trade al-
though it also fostered the fur trade in that the Indians traded many furs and later buffalo robes and hides for guns.
needed in warfare.

Indian rivalry had a detrimental effect upon the white man in that the Indians often stole the white man's horses in order to replace horses taken by other Indians or to make up for failure to steal enemy horses. Their raids upon each other were often accompanied by depredations on whites and white settlements which they encountered along their route of travel. The Catholic missionaries at St. Mary's Mission in the Bitterroot Valley were caused considerable trouble by Blackfeet marauders. Certainly intertribal warfare was not without significance to both Indian and white.

The story of that rivalry is one of two major themes which run through the history of the American Indian, the other being their wars with the white man. Much has been written of the latter; but the story of intertribal warfare on the battleground of Montana's great bison range has not been chronicled in its entirety. Pieced together from the journals and reports of explorers, fur traders and trappers, naturalists and artists, missionaries, military men, settlers, Indian agents, and Indians, this narrative offers proper scope for the writer to tell not only a story interesting in itself, but also one which emphasizes the causes of conflict, the factors ending that warfare, and the significance of such warfare to both the Indian and the white man.

_Battleground_ is a story broad in scope, covering over a century in time and geographically the vast land area of present-day Montana and adjacent areas. It encompasses a
gamut of human emotions; for here may be seen the exuberant young brave, the grief-stricken Indian woman, the Indian elder who, schooled by experience, knew war's true meaning, the Indian of strong character, the weak and cowardly Indian, the kindly and loveable Indian, the jealous Indian, the bitter and revengeful Indian, the fearful, the cautious, and the daring Indian. It is a blood and thunder narrative of raid and reprisal, of attack and counter-attack by the warriors of a dozen Indian "nations" who contested the richest of hunting grounds and made it a battleground on which the lords of the land assailed all interlopers and on which many warriors chanted their death songs and fought no more.
CHAPTER I

INDIAN AND BISON IN THE NORTHWEST

Montana was a meeting ground for Indians from far and near. Some tribes lived permanently in this region; other tribes came in to hunt the buffalo and to raid the camps of their neighbors. In Northeastern Montana lived the Assiniboine Indians—a Siouan tribe which occupied territory bordering on the Missouri River from the mouth of the Milk River to below the mouth of the Yellowstone and from there extending north to the Saskatchewan and east to the Assiniboine River. A large part of their country was in present-day Canada.¹ Not until the establishment of a permanent trading post near the mouth of the Yellowstone did they come in force from the more northern regions to occupy permanently the neighborhood of the Missouri River.²

During the height of the fur trade, stated one authority, the Assiniboins numbered about twenty-eight thousand;³ this number seems too high in the light of statistics

³Chittenden, Fur Trade, II, 857.
in Hodge's Handbook, which gives their estimated number in 1829 as eight thousand. Another estimate placed their number at ten thousand before the smallpox epidemic of 1836-37, during which four thousand died. The United States Indian Report of 1843 showed seven thousand Indians. In 1879 the United States Indian agent reported the presence of 977 Assiniboins at the Fort Belknap Reservation and 1469 Assiniboins at the Fort Peck Agency. In the early nineteenth century they were not so well supplied with horses as were some of their neighbors; of course, this only provided greater motivation for horse stealing. From the time they separated from the parent stem and joined the Crees until brought under control of the white man, they were at war with the Teton Sioux and all other Dakota tribes. The Crows, the Blackfeet, and the Aricaras were also their most confirmed enemies.

Bordering Eastern Montana were the Dakota Sioux, the most powerful division of which was the Teton Sioux. These

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6 Chittenden, Fur Trade, II, 857.

7 Hodge, Handbook, II, 103.


Sioux, hard pressed by the gun-wielding Chippswas, migrated, in the middle eighteenth century, through Wisconsin and Minnesota into the grasslands of the upper Missouri Valley. Along the Missouri River they found the horses which were to give them great power. In 1804 Lewis and Clark found them already ranging west of the Missouri. Their war and hunting parties penetrated Montana where they ranged over the valleys of the Powder, the Tongue, the Big Horn, and the Yellowstone Rivers; this was particularly so after 1850 when white pressure crowded them into that area. These Indians, wrote Farnham, "have conquered and destroyed immense numbers of their race. They have swept the banks of the Missouri from the Great Falls to the mouth of the Great Platte." The Sioux formed an alliance with the Cheyenne which grew stronger as white pressure increased; they made war upon the Assiniboins, the Blackfeet, and the Crows.

10 Ibid., II, 578.


13 Thomas J. Farnham, Travels in the Great Western Prairies, the Anahuac, and Rocky Mountains, and in the Oregon Territory, in Early Western Travels, ed. Reuben G. Thwaites (Cleveland, 1906), XXVIII, 153.

The Crow Indians, a Siouan people, were horse stealers without peer among the Missouri tribes. In proportion to their numbers they owned more and better horses than any other tribe and in 1843 were reported to have had in their possession from nine to ten thousand horses. The Crow agent, in his report of August, 1880, stated that the Crow owned from twelve to fourteen thousand mules and ponies. These tall, graceful, and exceptionally fine-looking tribesmen took great pride in their dress and ornamentation. Particular attention was given to the growth and care of long hair which to them was one of the most beautiful of ornaments and marked the well-dressed Indian. They were more friendly to the white man than other plains tribes; several white men were even made Crow chiefs. Despite this avowed friendship for white men, they often robbed them of everything but their lives. Their so-called friendship was based on the white man's usefulness in opposing Crow enemies.

The valley and watershed of the Bighorn River was the


\[19\] Maximilian, *Travels*, XXII, 351.
true "Crow country" which was prized for its abundance of water, grass, and game. Crow attachment to "their country" may be seen through the following eulogy by Arappoish, a Crow chief:

The Crow country....is a good country. The Great Spirit has put it exactly in the right place; while you are in it you fare well; whenever you go out of it, whichever way you travel, you fare worse. If you go to the south, you have to wander over great barren plains; the water is warm and bad, and you meet the fever and ague. To the north it is cold; the winters are long and bitter, with no grass; you cannot keep horses there, but must travel with dogs. What is a country without horses? On the Columbia they are poor and dirty, paddle about in canoes, and eat fish--bones out of their mouths. Fish is a poor food. To the east they dwell in villages; they live well; but they drink the muddy water of the Missouri--that is bad. A Crow's dog would not drink such water. About the forks of the Missouri is a fine country; good water; good grass; plenty of buffalo. In summer, it is almost as good as the Crow country; but in winter it is cold; the grass is gone; and there is no salt weed for the horses. The Crow country is exactly in the right place. It has snowy mountains and sunny plains; all kinds of climates and good things for every season. When the summer heats scorch the prairies you can draw up under the mountains, where the air is sweet and cool, the grass fresh and the bright streams come tumbling out of the snow-banks. There you can hunt the elk, the deer, and the antelope, when their skins are fit for dressing; there you will find plenty of white bears and mountain sheep. In the Autumn, when your horses are fat and strong from the mountain pastures, you can go down into the plains and hunt the buffalo, or trap beaver on the streams. And when winter comes on, you can take shelter in the woody bottoms along the rivers; there you will find buffalo meat for yourselves, and cotton-wood bark for your horses; or you may winter in the Wind River Valley; where there is saltweed in abundance. The Crow country is exactly in the right place. Everything is to be found there. There is no country like the Crow country.  

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Crow territorial claims extended eastward to include the valleys of the Rosebud, the Tongue, and the Powder Rivers and also a strip of territory on the north bank of the Yellowstone. Hayden wrote in 1862 that their territory was "along the sources of Powder, Wind and Bighorn rivers on the south side of the Yellowstone as far as Laramie fork of the Platte River. They are also found on the west and north side of that river, as far as the source of the Musselshell and as low down as the mouth of the Yellowstone." However, their villages seldom left the true Crow country; but war parties stalked the land of the Assiniboins, the Sioux, the Blackfeet, the Arapahos, the Cheyennes, the Eutaws, and the Snakes. Of course, raids of reprisal by these Indians followed. The Blackfeet and the Cheyennes were their chief enemies in the first half of the nineteenth century; then their warfare with the Sioux became more constant and bloody. Their friends and allies were the Gros Ventres of the Missouri, the Mandans, and at times the Gros Ventres of the Prairie. Friendly at times and hostile at other times, the Bannocks and the Nez Perces hunted on Crow land and occasion-

21 Chittenden, Fur Trade, II, 855-56.
24 Chittenden, Fur Trade, II, 856; Maximilian, Travels, XXII, 353.
ally joined them in war against the Sioux.  

In the best days of the tribe, according to Chitten­
den, there were probably no more than ten thousand Crow
Indians.  

In 1804 Clark wrote that they had "400 lodges and
about 1200 men." Irving's sources credited the Crows with
the ability to muster fifteen hundred fighting men. Farn­
ham estimated their number at five thousand in the early
1840's. De Smet declared that those Crows whom he had
visited numbered four hundred eighty lodges with about ten
persons to a lodge. Referring to the 1860's and 1870's,
Bradley believed the Crows to number about four hundred
lodges and about four thousand individuals. They had tradи­
tions that at one time they numbered over one thousand
lodges. The Crow agent's report of February, 1880, char­
acterized by that agent as the "most complete and accurate
that has probably ever been taken," listed a total of 3470
Crows. Of these, 957 were men, 758 were boys, 1093 were

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26 Fur Trade, II, 855.
27 Original Journals, I, 220.
28 Bonneville, 227.
29 Travels, 264.
30 Pierre Jean De Smet, Western Missions and Mission­
aries; a Series of Letters (New York, 1869), 157.
women, and 662 were girls. Part of the Crow tribe were classified as Mountain Crows because they hunted and roamed near the mountains away from the Missouri River while those Crows who left the mountains to occupy the country along the Missouri River were called River Crows. However, in 1871 the twenty-seven hundred Mountain Crows and the fourteen hundred River Crows considered the possibilities of a reunion of the two groups in order to combat the Sioux menace; and by 1873 such a reunion was well under way.

The Cheyenne, an Algonquian tribe, lived east and south of the Crows with whom they were frequently at war. The Cheyennes had been driven by Sioux pressure from the upper Mississippi region toward the Missouri River where their westward movement was stopped temporarily by a people who had preceded them to the West. After a period of hostility the two tribes became allies. Some time after this the Cheyenne crossed the Missouri River below the entrance of the Cannonball and later occupied the Black Hills about the head of Cheyenne River of South Dakota. There Lewis and Clark found them in 1804. After that time they moved


west and south. Up to the time of Lewis and Clark they fought the Mandans and the Gros Ventres of the Missouri who probably helped to drive them from the Missouri River. They next established their authority on the upper branches of the Platte, driving the Kiowa of that region farther south. In 1832 a large part of the tribe decided to move to the upper Arkansas River while the rest continued to rove about the headwaters of the North Platte and the Yellowstone Rivers. From 1860-78 they were active in border warfare and lost many men in conflict with the whites. In 1876 the northern Cheyennes joined Sitting Bull and were active participants in the Custer massacre. At a later period the northern Cheyennes were assigned to a reservation in Montana. 35

The Gros Ventres of the Prairie (Atsina) ranged the country south of the Missouri from the Great Falls to the Judith Basin; 36 in winter they generally stayed on the lower Teton and the Marias Rivers. 37 The name Gros Ventres (Big Bellies) was used by the French and after them by others to name two entirely different tribes—the Atsina and the Hidatsa. In the Lewis and Clark narrative the former are called Minitarees of Fort de Prairie and the latter Minitarees of the Missouri. The two tribes have generally been

36 Chittenden, Fur Trade, II, 853.
distinguished as Gros Ventres of the Prairie (Atsina) and Gros Ventres of the Missouri (Hidatsa). 38

Once the Atsina had lived together with another kindred tribe, the Cheyennes, near the headwaters of the Mississippi. They migrated westward, the Cheyenne first branching off to the south, and later the Arapahos to the southwest; the Atsina continued on to the west. 39 The Gros Ventres were kindly received by the Blackfeet who invited them to remain in their country. From the earliest time that the whites were familiar with Blackfeet affairs they found them and the Gros Ventres of the Prairie on the most friendly footing with each other. Their hunting and war parties pursued the bison and sought the enemy in common—a state of affairs which continued until the middle of the nineteenth century. 40 In August, 1853, according to Isaac Stevens, a break occurred between the Gros Ventres and the Blackfeet; 41 not until the 1870's was the Piegan-Gros Ventre feud ended. 42 The Gros Ventres were commonly called Blackfeet by the traders, very few of whom understood their true tribal relation—

39 Chittenden, Fur Trade, II, 852.
40 Bradley, "Bradley Manuscript," M. H. S. Contributions, IX, 304.
ship. Their own language was very difficult to learn; and, as they understood the Blackfeet language, they used it in communicating with the white men. Because of their close relationship with the Arapahos, it became customary to visit them every two or three years. The Gros Ventres sometimes traversed the Crow country and the Black Hills, but generally they went by the headwaters of Snake and Green Rivers and the mountains of northern Colorado in order to avoid the Crows, who were their most powerful and uncompromising enemies.

The Blackfeet tribes held a large body of land. Their western boundary was the Rocky Mountains in Canada and Montana. Then the boundary followed a line east through Edmonton in Alberta to Battleford in Saskatchewan; from there it went due south to the Missouri River in Montana and westward through Great Falls and back to the Rockies. The heart of the Blackfeet country in Montana was in the valley of the Missouri River near the mouth of the Marias, where the river makes its great bend from north to east. The territory above the Three Forks of the Missouri was a common hunting ground of various tribes; the Blackfeet had claims to it but so did other tribes.

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43 Chittenden, Fur Trade, II, 853.
44 Ibid, 852.
45 Clark Wissler, Indians of the United States Four Centuries of their History and Culture (New York, 1940), 87-88.
46 Chittenden, Fur Trade, II, 850.
The general name Blackfeet included three distinct tribes: the Blackfeet proper (Siksika), the Piegan (Pikuni), and the Bloods (Kainah). Sometimes included as a fourth band were the Gros Ventres of the Prairie. Maximilian, in the early 1830's, estimated that there were probably from eighteen to twenty thousand Blackfeet with five to six thousand warriors. In 1835 Samuel Parker estimated them at twenty thousand. The Blackfeet numbered around ten thousand in the 1840's and 1850's, according to De Smet. A. J. Vaughn in 1858 placed the total Blackfeet population at seventy-three hundred. The Piegan's were credited with four hundred sixty lodges and thirty-seven hundred people—nine hundred men, twelve hundred women, and sixteen hundred children. The Bloods numbered three hundred lodges and twenty-four hundred people—five hundred men, eight hundred women, and eleven hundred children. The Blackfeet were credited with one hundred fifty lodges and twelve hundred people—two hundred sixty men, four hundred women, and five hundred forty children. In 1864 the Blackfeet agent estimated the Piegan's at

47 Ibid., II, 850-51.
48 Maximilian, Travels, XXII, 96.
49 Samuel Parker, Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains under the Direction of the A.B.C.F.M. Performed in the Years 1835, '36, and '37 (Ithaca, 1838), 236.
50 De Smet, Western Missions, 168.
twenty-eight hundred, the Bloods at nineteen hundred, and the Blackfeet at 2150. The Blackfeet agents in 1871, 1873, 1879, and 1880 listed the total Blackfeet population at seventy-five hundred. The Blackfeet lived in the Slave Lake country north of Edmonton in the eighteenth century and gradually moved southward. Upon their arrival in the region of the upper Missouri, they found that area claimed by the Snakes and the Flathead. By these tribes they were called Blackfeet. A probable cause for their being so named was the color of their moccasins and leggings which had become black from traveling over the recently burned prairie. Being in possession of guns which they had obtained from Hudson’s Bay Company traders, the Blackfeet drove out the tribes who were there and took the land for their own. Their reputation for courage has been questioned, but their war record showed they were not afraid of battle. They were constantly at war before 1855 with the Cree, the Assiniboins, the Sioux, the


Crows, the Flatheads and other Indians west of the Rocky Mountains. After 1855 their efforts were directed mainly against the tribes east of the mountains, although warfare with the western Indians did not completely stop.

The Salish, usually known as the Flatheads, lived in the Bitterroot country and through the whole range of the valley of the Clark Fork. They left that area on excursions east of the Rocky Mountains to kill bison. Nearly all of their hostile encounters were with the Blackfeet, for it was in their country that they went to hunt. At times they were at war with the Crows and the Snakes and Bannocks. The Salish were very receptive to religious influences and were friendly to the whites and to most of the neighboring tribes. In June, 1865, their agent reported that there were five hundred fifty-one Flatheads. Of these, one hundred forty-seven were men, one hundred eighty-one were women, and two hundred twenty-three were children. They were brave and extremely warlike when war was unavoidable.

The Pend d'Oreilles or Kalispells occupied land around Pend Oreille Lake and Pend Oreille River and frequently inhabited Flathead territory. Irving's sources of the early 1830's credited them with about three hundred

55 Chittenden, Fur Trade, II, 891.
57 Hodge, Handbook, I, 646.
lodges. Their agent in June, 1865, listed a total population of nine hundred eight. Of these, two hundred fifty were men, 289 were women, and 369 were children. They were well armed and possessed many horses. During the spring, summer, and autumn they hunted the buffalo about the headwaters of the Missouri; they also hunted game on Henry's Fork of the Snake and on the northern branches of the Salmon River.

The Kutenai Indians inhabited a small and beautiful district near the foot of the Rocky Mountains, about sixty miles to the northeast of the Flathead lands. Ross Cox, referring to these Indians as they lived around 1816, wrote that their land "is nearly surrounded by a chain of lofty and thickly wooded mountains and is consequently very difficult of access." He further observed that the Kutenais:

....are the remnants of a once brave and powerful tribe, who, like the Flatheads, were perpetually engaged in war with the Blackfeet for the right of hunting on the buffalo grounds....As with the Flatheads, buffalo is the cause of all their misfortunes, for although....their lands abound in plenty of other animals their hereditary attachment to the buffalo is so unconquerable that it drives them every year to the plains, where they come in contact with the Blackfoot. In these contacts they are generally

58 Irving, Bonneville, 127.
60 Irving, Bonneville, 127.
61 Ross Cox, Adventures on the Columbia River Including the Narrative of a Residence of Six Years on the Western Side of the Rocky Mountains among Various Tribes of Indians Hitherto Unknown Together with a Journey Across the American Continent (2 vols., London, 1831), 152-53.
victors, but they always return with diminished number. They have entered into a kind of alliance, offensive and defensive, with the Flatheads by which they have agreed that neither party shall make peace with the Black-feet until the latter shall permit them to hunt without molestation on the buffalo plain. 62

Their legends and traditions indicate that they originally dwelt east of the Rockies, probably in Montana, from which they were driven west by the Blackfeet. 63 In June, 1865, their population was reported to number two hundred seventy-three people. Of these, ninety were men, eighty-nine were women, and ninety-four were children. 64

The Shoshoni or Snake Indians, the most northerly division of the Shoshonean family, lived in Western Wyoming, the central and southern parts of Idaho, Northeastern Nevada, and in a small strip of Utah west of Great Salt Lake. The Snake River country in Idaho was their stronghold. 65 The northern bands were found in 1805 by Lewis and Clark in Montana near the present-day Idaho border, 66 but they had previously ranged farther east on the plains. Many of the Shoshonis depended to a large extent upon fish, supplemented by rabbits, roots, nuts, and seeds. They included the Indians most frequently called Diggers. The more northerly

62 Ibid., II, 153-54.
64 Charles Hutchins, "Flathead Agency, June 30, 1865," in Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1865,
65 Hodge, Handbook, II, 556.
66 Lewis and Clark, Original Journals, II, 374.
and easterly Shoshonis were horse and buffalo Indians and were excellent horsemen and good warriors, despite some characterizations showing them as a weak and dispirited race. They made long excursions to the hunting grounds. Referring to the Shoshoni excursions to the buffalo plains, Meriwether Lewis wrote in his journal for August 19, 1805:

From the middle of May to the first of September these people reside on the waters of the Columbia where they consider themselves in perfect security from their enemies as they have not as yet ever found their way to this retreat;...about the first of September they are compelled in search of subsistence to resort to the Missouri, in the valleys of which, there is more game even within the mountains. Here they move slowly down the river in order to collect and join other bands either of their own nation or the Flatheads, and having become sufficiently strong as they conceive venture on the Eastern side of the Rocky Mountains into the Plains, where the buffalo abound. But they never leave the interior of the mountains while they can obtain a scanty subsistence and always return as soon as they have acquired a good stock of dried meat in the plains; when this stock is consumed they venture again into the plains; thus alternately obtaining their food at the risk of their lives and retiring to the mountains while they consume it.

War parties frequently went out to plunder. The Shoshonis were fairly expert horse thieves although not so good as the Crows. They were at war with the Eutaws, the Crows, and the Blackfeet; at times they were on friendly terms with the Nez Perces and the Flatheads, and at other times they engaged in hostile actions against these tribes.

67 Chittenden, Fur Trade, II, 385.
68 Original Journals, II, 373-74.
69 Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 309-10.
The territory of the wandering Bannock Indians, a Shoshonian tribe, extended vaguely between the area of Great Salt Lake and Snake River. Also, there were some Indians generally known as Bannocks who lived in the Beaverhead Valley. They frequently sent war parties to harass their enemies, the Crows and the Blackfeet. By 1876 the loss of hunting lands, decrease of the bison herds, and the failure of the government to render timely relief led to an outbreak which was put down by the United States government. They were quite adept at stealing horses and ambushing both whites and Indians.

The country of the Nez Perce Indians was the lower watershed of the Snake River in Idaho. They particularly frequented the valleys of the Clearwater and the Salmon Rivers. Physically the Nez Perce Indians were a well-developed tribe and compared favorably with the tribes east of the mountains. They were well-supplied with horses and lived on both salmon and buffalo. They were on good terms with all of the Salish people but not with the Blackfeet, who bitterly resented their hunting excursions to the plains and in particular to the Judith Basin. One of their most noteworthy

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70 Chittenden, Fur Trade, II, 890.
characteristics was their deeply religious nature, which affected their actions in war. Believing that the Great Spirit frowned upon warlike actions, they were less aggressive than the plains Indians. They were friendly to the whites, and at the Walla Walla Council of 1855 they ceded a large part of their territory to the United States. Later a new treaty was made by which the tribe was placed on the Lapwai Reservation in Idaho. A portion of the tribe refused to recognize the treaty. In 1877 these Nez Perces, under Chief Joseph and other chiefs, fought their way to Montana where they were defeated in the Battle of the Big Hole.

Since the preceding paragraphs referred to the land areas occupied by the various tribes, it seems desirable at this point to paraphrase E. T. Denig's words on the Indian view of land and the importance of land to the buffalo hunters. A majority of the Indians believed that they had the right to roam at will on any land inhabited by the buffalo, for Wakonda, the Creator, had made the prairie and the buffalo for the sole use of all Indians. In case of scarcity of game in its customary hunting area, a tribe extended its hunting operations into another part of the plains, which the Creator intended for Indian support. They sought not land but the means of subsistence which every Indian believed himself entitled to, even though it was necessary to destroy

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his enemies or to risk his own life to obtain it.

Possession in itself meant nothing without the power to retain and the force to repel such aggressors. If one Indian nation spread its forces over too large a territory, their striking power might be weakened. Therefore, in order to defend successfully a portion of the buffalo plains, they claimed a restricted area as their country. They claimed the land as theirs because the buffalo of that area satisfied their economic needs more fully than the animal life of another region. To sell their land to the white man was the same as selling their means of living. If forced to move elsewhere by white pressure, their entrance into another area of the buffalo plains would be opposed by the occupying tribes. Therefore, the Indians valued their land and hated to part with it.75

The battleground on which these combatants fought constituted an important part of the great buffalo range of the Northwest. This range swept east and west from the Black Hills of South Dakota across the plains of the upper Missouri to the Rocky Mountains76 and north and south from the great prairies of the Saskatchewan in Canada and the plains of Montana and North Dakota to the prairies of Nebras-


76 H. A. Trexler, "Buffalo Range of the Northwest," The Mississippi Historical Review, VII (March, 1921), 348.
The terrain of these northern plains was made up of drifting sand dunes, millions of acres of buffalo grass, waves of sagebrush and prickly pear, barren and stony buttes, bluffs, hills, and valleys; cottonwood and willow trees often lined the valley streams.

The Rocky Mountains very definitely formed the western boundary of the bison range. Lewis and Clark wrote that they saw fewer and fewer bison after passing the mouth of the Musselshell and almost none after entering the mountains. On May 17, 1805, when some one hundred twenty miles above the mouth of the Milk River, Lewis wrote that the buffalo were "not so abundant as they were some days past," although there were enough to shoot a few. Some fifty miles above Great Falls, Montana, well within the foothills of the Rockies, members of the party killed their last bison on July 16, 1805. Three days later Lewis wrote, "We have seen no buffalo since we entered the mountains." But at times the buffalo wandered beyond the Three Forks of the Missouri since Lewis and Clark saw bison bones and chips on the upper waters of the Jefferson. On their return in 1806 Clark, on July twentieth, wrote, "We appear to be in the beginning of the buffalow country. the plains are butifull and leavel but the soil is....thin Stoney and in maney parts....are great quantity of prickly pears." This was at a point east

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78 Trelaxed, "Buffalo Range," 348-49.
79 Ibid., 349-50.
of Livingston, Montana. 80 George Catlin also considered the Rocky Mountains the western limits of the buffalo range. Furthermore, he referred to the area around the mouth of the Teton River on the upper Missouri as the heart or nucleus of the buffalo country. 81 Warren Ferris, who frequented the Montana region and wrote of the boundaries of the bison range, observed that bison ranged on the plains of the Mississippi and the Missouri, from the Pawnee hunting grounds to the far-off ranges of the Rockies. Horse Prairie, wrote Ferris, was a popular grazing ground; bison also penetrated to the Big Hole. 82

On the grass of this range the buffalo grew fat. The great Missouri River and its branches—the Yellowstone, the Milk, the Musselshell, the Marias—furnished them with a permanent water supply. Thus provided with water and grass, the bison thrived. Their numbers were countless—almost beyond belief; but so many travelers told the same story and so consistently that one must be convinced of their staggering numbers. Seeing many bison in every direction, Clark, on June 30, 1805, estimated their number to be around ten thousand. 83 Lewis, on July 5, 1805, wrote that

80 Original Journals, V, 279.
81 George Catlin, Illustrations of the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians: in a Series of Letters and Notes Written during Eight Years of Travel and Adventures among the Wildest and Most Remarkable Tribes Now Existing (London, 1848), I, 249.
82 Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 109-10.
they were very numerous around the falls and wrote of seeing ten or a dozen different herds; although many miles apart, these herds traveled in one direction. On July 11, 1806, the journals stated:

...plains covered with immense herds of buffaloe. It is now the season at which the buffaloe begin to copulate and the bulls keep a tremendous roaring. We could hear them for many miles and there are such numbers of them that there is one continual roar. Our horses had not been acquainted with the buffaloe. They appeared much allarmed at their appearance and bellowing. When I arrived in sight of the white-bear Islands the Missouri bottoms of both sides of the river were crowded with buffaloe. I sincerely belief that there were not less than 10 thousand buffaloe within a circle of 2 miles around that place.

On July 18, 1806, Clark passed great buffalo herds; they appeared to him as one herd which extended for about twelve miles.

Thirty-four years later, Father De Smet wrote that "the Yellowstone country abounds in game. I was for seven days among innumerable herds of buffalo." Speaking of the country held by the Blackfeet, Isaac Stevens, in 1854, estimated that the Blackfeet killed yearly 150,000 bison above the age of three. Stevens thought there were about a million and a half bison in the Blackfeet country. In 1866 Granville Stuart commented on the bison legions of the upper

\[84\textbf{Ibid.}, II, 212.\]
\[85\textbf{Ibid.}, V, 199.\]
\[86\textbf{Ibid.}, 208.\]
\[87\textbf{De Smet, Letters}, I, 243.\]
\[88\textbf{Hazard Stevens, I}, I, \textbf{Stevens}, II, 105.\]
Missouri:

I went back to St. Louis by way of Colorado and the plains, and returned by steamer up the Missouri. At one place the boat was forced to stop an hour and at another point an hour and a half for the buffalo to cross the river. Both above and below us the stream was covered with buffalo for half a mile.\(^{89}\)

Captain La Barge in the spring of 1867, while on a voyage to Fort Benton, encountered along the upper Missouri an immense herd of buffalo pouring over the high bank. The water was one living mass of animals. The distance through the herd was more than four miles; and it required hours to pass through them. Every few minutes the engines had to be stopped to enable the deck hands to push the struggling animals out of the way with long poles, to keep them from being drawn under the wheels.\(^{90}\) Three years later, Peter Koch, who traveled with a party from the Musselshell to the Milk River, wrote, "For a distance of forty miles, I do not think we were ever out of rifle shot of buffalo." Riding along a ridge, they saw below them herd after herd as far as the eye could see.\(^{91}\) Of course, not all travelers met with such great herds owing to the migratory nature of the bison; but the evidence is undeniable that the buffalo were most numerous.

\(^{89}\)Trexler, "Buffalo Range," 352.


\(^{91}\)Peter Koch, "Life on the Musselshell 1869 and 1870," M. N. S. Contributions, II, 302.
Death thinned the ranks of these bison legions in their struggle with nature and man. The large herds would, in all probability, have remained intact if their only struggle had been with nature, for reproduction made up for deaths such as those described in the following scenes:

Buffalo carcasses floated on the upper Missouri; some drifted towards the heads of islands and sandy bars where they remained. Not far off mired in the quick sand were several bison. Some were half immersed; others were nearly out of sight, gasping their last breath. The dead bodies of others stood with all legs fast and one half of their bodies under water, their heads sunk under it. They had been in such a state for several days; ravens and crows covered their backs, picking off the flesh. 

The ex-bison leader's kingdom disappeared under a cloud of dust. The herd had gone with its new leader. The dethroned king was alone. His fading eyes roved over his body; their gaze rested on each scar—testimonies of an endless battle for survival. That livid crease on his rear shank had been made by the bite of a hopeful Sioux arrow. That gash on his rib was the memento of a persistent Crow. His life had, indeed, been a charmed one. Then his eyes flashed and the mountain of flesh quivered with anger as he surveyed his last scar—a long furrow on the right fore-leg, from the bite of a wolf. No longer was he to maintain unchallenged rule over the herd; pride would not permit him to follow at the outskirts of the herd. He would make his stand alone against the inevitable attack of the wolves. With the coming of winter the hungry wolves found him in his refuge. The fight was bloody; several wolves felt the crushing blow of bison hooves; but it was the end! The bull bison, former king of the herd, prize of the red man, could stand no longer and sank slowly to his haunches. The massive black form shivered, his fighter's heart stilled. This was struggle for survival on the bison range of the Northwest!

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Mature was given a helping hand by man. The upsetting of the balance of nature by the red man is illustrated by the following scene:

The morning rang out the welcome cry of buffalo, buffalo! The hunters mounted their ponies and proceeded toward the newly discovered herd. Previously the prairie had lain in the majesty of solitude; now all had changed. A few enormous bison bulls appeared first; then came long files of single beasts, which in turn were followed by a dark mass of bodies. The dun-colored vegetation of the plain soon became lost in the deeper hue of their shaggy coats. Several of the bull bison dug up the ground to make wallows in which to bathe. Many fed quietly; others tumbled about, rolled on the ground, and filled the air with dust. Some, digging their horns into the earth, tossed sand over their bodies in a frenzy to rid themselves of the pests that bothered them.

Hundreds of Indian hunters armed with bows and arrows or long lances approached. They divided into two columns, spread out, and encircled the herd at a mile or more distance from them. At length the bison "got the wind" of the approaching enemy; sudden agitation by the bison on the skirts of the herd aroused this shaggy wilderness of hair into motion. The thunder of frantic hooves was met by the continual and loud Indian yells. The hunters galloped around the herd, finding it difficult to enter the compact mass. Some Indians penetrated the herd, each Indian singling out his own game. Parts of the herd scattered. Arrow after arrow found its mark. In many instances, the bison were enraged by deadly wounds and plunged at the sides of the Indian horses, sometimes goring them to death and forcing the rider to flee on foot for his life. Within an hour hundreds of bison had fallen by the hand of mighty man. Man could not hold back the torrent for long and the remainder of the herd fled out of reach; the uproar was now gone. The clouds of dust blew away and a clear range was left to the eye. Carcasses were strewn thickly over the ground. Here and there stood wounded bison, their bleeding sides feathered with arrows. One old bull lay on the ground, an immense shaggy mass, heaving and hissing in agony. Blood poured from his open mouth and his nostrils, making a dark pool of blood on the earth. The hunters moved among the dead and
dying animals and claimed their victims by private marks upon the arrows. This, too, was struggle for survival on the bison range of the Northwest.

An even greater destroyer than the red man was the white commercial hunter with his rapid firing weapons and his insatiable desire to line his pockets with the almighty dollar. By 1884 the bison legions were no more. No longer would buffalo products provide the white man with food and fuel on his prairie adventures; no longer would their robes, skins, and tongues enrich the trader. To the white man the bison had been a gift of providence to use as he saw fit; for some it had been a means of making a livelihood, and it had often been a life preserver. More satisfactory substitutes had been found; bison were no longer needed. In fact, the military found the reduction of the bison valuable in carrying out its reservation policy. To the average American the disappearance of the buffalo seemed somewhat dramatic and romantic, important only in that it paved the way for better things.

However, to the Indian the passing of the buffalo was an incomparable tragedy; it meant the passing of a way of life and of independence and freedom so treasured by man in all ages. This significant event also dealt a final blow to intertribal warfare; motivation for war with other Indians vanished. Prior to 1880, when the bison were numerous, the

\[9^4\] Catlin, North American Indians, I, 199-201, 249, 251. These scenes are not exact quotations; they have been thus set off for emphasis.
importance of the bison in Indian economy was the underlying basis of war and rivalry. The bison legions furnished nearly every comfort and necessity of Indian life. Bison meat furnished one of the Indian's basic economic needs—the need for food. The Indians not only ate the meat fresh but also cured great quantities of it for winter use. It was a food that could be kept for at least a year and combined the lightest weight with the greatest nourishment. At first this was the main object for which the bison was hunted; but it was not long before it was discovered to be useful in other ways. A buffalo robe became the Indian's winter cloak by day and his covering by night. The lodges were made of hides, dressed and sewn together with the sinew found along the back of the buffalo. Buffalo hides were laid upon the earth for the young braves to play their endless games of chance, and the wounded were taken from the field on stretchers of buffalo hides swung between a pair of ponies.

From buffalo hides boats were made. The bull boat was made of willows woven into a round basket around which was fitted bison hide. Thomas James described the use of another kind of boat by the Indians in crossing a river in the spring of 1810. James wrote that they:

95 Denig, "Indian Tribes," 582.
96 Branch, Hunting of the Buffalo, 227.
97 Helen F. Sanders, Trails Through Western Woods (New York, 1910), 197.
98 Lewis and Clark, Original Journals, II, 191-93.
....stripped themselves entirely naked, and every ten piled their accoutrements together, blankets, saddles, weapons on a tent skin made of buffalo robes, and tying it up in a large round bundle, threw it into the river and plunged after, some swimming with these huge heaps, floating like corks, and others riding the horses or holding by the tails till they had all crossed the river.\footnote{99}

The Indian's shield was commonly made of the toughened rawhide of the bull's neck, dried by smoke, and hardened with glue boiled from buffalo hooves. It was only a light weight on the arm; but it was arrowproof, and turned obliquely it deflected the shot of the old smoothbore rifles. Bows were usually made of wood, but the best and strongest were made of pieces of bone and horn--buffalo, elk, or mountain sheep--spliced and glued together and wrapped with sinews of buffalo. Strands of buffalo sinew made the bowstring. The handles of lances were roughened by a sinew wrapping. The quivers and bow cases were often made of the skin of a buffalo calf. \footnote{100} Knives were made of the dorsal ribs of the buffalo. Moccasins were sometimes made of buffalo skin dressed with the hair turned inwards. When saddles were used, some Indians placed a piece of buffalo skin, with the hair on, between the horse and the saddle. \footnote{101} The grease of these animals was used to anoint Indian bodies and to season certain foods. From the horns spoons were made. The shoulder
blade fastened to a stick served as a digging instrument. From the hides of unborn buffalo calves bags were made to contain war paint. From the hair, cord and cloth were made. Buffalo dung served as an important, and sometimes only, source of fuel on the plains.

In addition to using the bison as previously mentioned, the Indian secured most of his firearms and other supplies from the white man by exchanging buffalo robes and tongues for them; this was truer of the years after 1830 when the buffalo trade overshadowed the fur trade. The bison had its place in the dance, a rite of the first importance, in the practice of medicine, and in the legends of creation and the after-life; the very fact that the bison had such a part in legend and ritual substantiates the thesis that the buffalo was of extreme importance in Indian life.

Thus it was that this all important animal became the principal booty prized by the Indian. Horses with which to hunt the bison ranked next in Indian esteem as booty. The maintenance of the right to hunt on the sacred land of their fathers was the only way to survive and to enjoy what they considered the better things of life. Of course, it involved war with Indian neighbors who, too, were struggling to survive. However, the risks of war were deeply rooted in the Indian mind as an unavoidable part of Indian life. No sacrifice seemed too great to continue their way of life and to

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102 Sanders, Trails Through Western Woods, 197.
103 Lewis and Clark, Original Journals, II, 249-50.
preserve their independent and free state. In the realm of the Great Spirit a high place was assured the strong of heart who fought and died to protect their tribal hunting ground, and in the hearts of his people such a warrior became a true patriot and hero. Who could ask for more?
CHAPTER II

LET THERE BE WAR!

War is a bloody business and full of evil; but it keeps the eyes of the chiefs always open, and makes the limbs of the young men strong and supple; in war everyone is on the alert. If we see a trail, we know it must be an enemy; if the Blackfeet come to us, we know it is for war, and we are ready. Peace, on the other hand, sounds no alarm; the eyes of the chiefs are closed in sleep, and the young men are sleek and lazy. The horses stray into the mountains; the women and their little babes are about alone. But the heart of a Blackfeet is a lie, and his tongue is a trap. If he says peace, it is to deceive; he comes to us as a brother; he smokes his pipe with us; it is to deceive; but when he sees us weak, and off our guard, he will slay and steal. We will have no such peace; let there be war!1

So replied spokesmen for a joint war council of the Nez Perces and the Flatheads in November, 1833, to Captain Bonneville’s suggestion for a peace conference with the Blackfeet. And war there was on the plains and in the mountain passes and valleys of Montana! The war drums beat; the warriors danced; the shadow of the raised tomahawk rose menacingly before the fires; war parties stalked the land; the youths dreamed of adventure and glory; and the mothers and wives lamented over the dead and wounded. Passions were high; the thirst for vengeance seemed to be unquenchable.

1Irving, Bonneville, 143-44.
Threats were uttered, such as this one made by a Blackfeet chieftain in 1833:

What need...have the Nez Perces to leave their homes and sally forth on war parties, when they have dangers enough at their own doors? If you want fighting, return to your villages; you will have plenty of it there. The Blackfeet warriors have hitherto made war upon you as children. They are now coming as men. A great force is at hand; they are on their way to your towns, and are determined to rub out the very name of the Nez Perces from the mountains. Return, I say, to your towns and fight there, if you wish to live any longer as a people.  

Bitterness toward his enemies flamed high within the Indian breast, resulting in curses like this one uttered by a Flathead woman in August, 1840, "Oh! Blackfoot bitches, if we could only eat the hearts of all your young ones and bathe in the blood of your cursed nation!"

What was the nature of this warfare that produced such bitter feelings? How long were the casualty lists of that day and what importance did the Indian attach to them? How much energy did the Indian tribe put into its war effort? What strategy and tactics were employed by the combatants? What kind of leadership directed the attack and counter-attack? What fate awaited the vanquished who were taken prisoner after an Indian battle? The answers to these questions should convey, in some measure, the full implications of what the Indian spokesmen meant when they said, "Let there be war!".

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3 *De Smet, Letters*, I, 220.
Characteristic of the Indian was his inability to carry on sustained operations of any size. Very rarely was there total warfare in which the whole power of the tribe or tribes was mustered to force the aggressor to surrender unconditionally and to bring about an early and permanent peace. The Indians engaged in intermittent warfare; they clashed when they met accidentally in the search for bison. Also, they were at war when upon killing or horse-stealing expeditions.

Some white men considered Indian battles of little consequence, but to the Indian any losses caused great concern. If they lost even one warrior in a fight, that loss was a cause of mourning to their people and cast a shade over the glory of their achievements. The concern, the grief, the bitterness, the desire for revenge was, no doubt, great when the Flatheads mourned for twelve departed warriors and cared for several wounded in May, 1832, as a result of one clash with the Blackfeet, and when the Blackfeet lost forty men in a battle with the Bannocks in August, 1834.

4 James Bradley ("Bradley Manuscript," M. H. S. Contributions, IX, 283) wrote, "It is rare that a battle of any consequence takes place and when it does it is more frequently the result of accident than of design." Charles Larpenteur (Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri 1833-72, (New York, 1898), 91) stated that "Indians seldom stand a long battle, and when they do it does not amount to much."

5 Irving, Bonneville, 294.

6 Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 146-47.

7 John K. Townsend, Narrative of a Journey Across the Rocky Mountains to the Columbia River, in Early Western Travels (Cleveland, 1905), XXI, 242.
The true realization, in all probability, came to many an Indian of what was meant by the words, "Let there be war!", on these occasions: On November 23, 1834, the Gros Ventres sent thirty Assiniboins to their death and wounded ten. In 1838 forty Crow warriors in one encounter were massacred by the Blackfeet. In the summer of 1845 twenty-three Blackfeet warriors were left dead on the field of battle as a result of a clash with the Pend d'Oreilles and the Flatheads. In August, 1846, the Flatheads and Nez Perces fought with the Crows who lost fourteen warriors and had nine wounded. In a battle between Crows and Assiniboins in September, 1865, four Assiniboins were killed and two Crows wounded. The Crows and the Sioux greeted each other in their usual manner on July 22, 1866, with the Crows taking five Sioux scalps as a memento of their meeting; and in the fall of 1869 in one engagement the Sioux slew thirty River Crow warriors but at the expense of the lives of one hundred of their own. A Siouan calendar chronicled Indian losses, beginning in the year 1800:

8Larpenteur, *Forty Years a Fur Trader*, 78.
10Ibid., II, 574.
11Ibid., 576-77.
12Larpenteur, *Forty Years a Fur Trader*, 372-73.
13Ibid., 383-84.
1. Thirty Sioux killed by Crow Indians....
6. Eight Sioux killed by Crows....
12. Sioux fought a battle with the "Gros Ventres" and killed a great many....
31. Sioux fight a battle with Crows and kill twenty-three....
40. Sioux killed an entire village of Snake Indians....
54. Eight Sioux were killed
65. Sioux killed four Crows
71. Sioux had a fight with Crows and killed twenty-nine.15

So the dead were counted—lost to their loved ones, lost to their race. Such battle casualties were an incentive for those to come to shed more blood and a cause for reflection by the philosophers of their day, for such casualties as recorded above could not be taken lightly by those who must carry on to insure the continuation of the race.

According to the testimony of some early white observers, Indian losses in battle were small. Peter Koch referred to their engagements as usually bloodless in character.16 Captain Bonneville observed that the chiefs were checked in their boldest ventures by the fear of sacrificing their warriors, the loss of any of which would lessen Indian glory and achievement. The Indian, in his opinion, was often less fierce and reckless in general battle than he was in a

15 Richard Dodge, Our Wild Indians: Thirty-Three Years' Personal Experience Among the Red Men of the Great West (Hartford, 1882), 401-04. This calendar was secured in 1874 by Dodge. The years were designated in numbered periods with period one beginning in 1600. Only those portions pertaining to this investigation were selected for quotation.
16 Koch, "Life at Muscleshell," M. H. S. Contributions, II, 300.
private brawl. In reference to a clash between a group of Blackfeet and a body of Flatheads, William T. Hamilton thought there should have been more slaughter for the shooting that took place. The small number of dead, he reasoned, was due to the Indian technique of fighting; when out in the open, the Indian never remained stationary. Another important factor mentioned by Hamilton was the expertness with which the Indians took their wounded off the battlefield. There was also that tenacity of life which seemed so instilled in the Indian heart and mind.

In a sense, these men were correct in their statements, for in comparison with the number of men engaged in these raids and battles, losses did seem small in the eyes of a white man. There were fewer Indians killed in the fights among themselves than one might expect, and Dodge gave additional reasons why this was so. One reason was that they fought best on their own home ground. When a marauding party infiltrated enemy territory, they often did so with timidity and nervousness; they kept out of sight until ready to strike and were ready to flee to the home camp on the appearance of danger. Furthermore, having killed an enemy in a running fight, a warrior had to rush at once on the

17 Irving, Bonneville, 294.
19 Dodge, Our Wild Indians, 436-38.
fallen body and strike his coup regardless of other enemies who might be nearby. This was necessary in order to secure the proper recognition and reward. A brave and skillful warrior who pursued the enemy and slew many a warrior by striking quickly and not letting up on the pursuit knew in his heart that he had done a good day's work. He had taken risks and had done much killing, but in the eyes of others he had nothing to show for his skill and courage. When he finally returned to his victims, the scalps of the fallen were in the possession of others who had been slower and less courageous. This drive for recognition caused the slayer, even in the hottest race and though other enemies were in his power, to give up all thought of further killing in preference to making his coup and taking the scalp of the fallen. This enabled the fleeing foe to escape injury and death in many cases, and accounted, in some measure, for the death of so few Indians in comparison with the numbers involved.20

Also, Indian education stressed the avoidance of unnecessary risks and the utilization of craft and cunning in preference to bold and courageous but dangerous deeds. This was due to the small Indian population which had to be kept intact as much as possible. Dodge described Indian fighting techniques and their avoidance of unnecessary risks:

Should two hostile bands of nearly equally numbers meet on the Plains, a long contest is likely

20 Ibid., 465-66.
to ensue, in which the fighting is done at extreme long range, and consists principally in dashing about at the full speed of their ponies, making short feints or charges, yelling most vociferously and once in awhile firing a shot. Occasionally a young buck, anxious to signalize his bravery, will dash, well covered by his position on the side of his horse, up to within two or three hundred yards of the enemy, fire off his gun in mid career, and circle back to his own party. A youngster from the other side then shows his courage in the same way and with the same result. This goes on until one party shows signs of weakness or timidity, which so emboldens the other that it charges in real earnest, and the whipped band gets away as best it can. This was not usual, however. Generally the affair is kept up until the ponies of both sides are completely tired out, when each party draws off to try to achieve by superior craft and cunning what it failed to do in an open fight.....If one party was greatly superior in numbers to the other, it dashes in at once, relying on the demoralization of the weaker side to prevent its doing damage. Then it was Indian against Indian, pony against pony, and unless the ground be particularly unfavorable, the beaten force, breaking up, each man for himself, will get away with much less loss than would naturally be expected.21

There were occasions when many Indian lives were lost. Even the whites admitted that there were exceptions to what they termed generally bloodless conflict. Indian war parties particularly liked to surprise the enemy, in this way demoralizing him and neutralizing his fighting ability. In fact, their fights with each other were usually surprises, in which the surprised party frequently got the worst of it. Often times the slaughter was terrible when a camp of many women and children was surprised while the warriors were

21 Ibid., 437-38. Although the white man's point of view on the bloodless character of Indian conflict has been presented, this thesis emphasizes as more truly important and accurate the Indian point of view which considered even a "few losses" as too many; these "few losses" were characterized by them as bloody engagements which called for mourning, ceremony, and reprisal.
gone on a hunting or raiding expedition. Nevertheless, no matter what the number killed or wounded, few or many, casualties caused a great commotion in the village where the women with their cries of sorrow and revenge goaded the men to further acts of violence. Thus the cry, vengeance, kept up the vicious circle of hatred, war, and death on the plains and in the mountain passes and valleys of Montana.

What strategy and tactics were employed by the combatants? One fundamental principle of Indian education and war strategy was the necessity of avoiding unnecessary risks. For instance, in June, 1835, some Blackfeet had been discovered near a Crow camp, were pursued, and overtaken in the middle of a level area by a superior number of mounted Crow warriors. Many Blackfeet fought their last fight while a few fortunate ones sought the protection of a close thicket of willows where entry for a horse was almost impossible. From this protective thicket Blackfeet arrows checked the Crow attack. So far the Crows had been quite successful, but the risks to their lives were increasing. It was good judgment to draw back, out of range, and try some method to draw the Blackfeet from their cover. To rush them would result in victory but victory at a price. Crow taunts and jeers as to Blackfeet cowardice failed to draw the enemy out. Then one Crow advanced. Within an arrow's flight of the thicket, he galloped forward, his body seeking the protection of his horse's side. As he swept along in front of the thicket, he shot his arrows from under the horse's neck. Then, assuming
his regular riding position, he wheeled around and returned to his comrades who cheered his deed. Others imitated this maneuver; but still the Blackfeet remained safely in their shelter. Not wishing to expose themselves to unnecessary risks and fearing to drive desperate men to suicidal and deadly deeds, the victors did not attempt to penetrate the thicket. Towards night they gave up the attack and returned with the scalps of the slain.

One can visualize the Blackfeet stealing away in the darkness, their hearts thankful that the Great Spirit favored them with a shelter and the audacity and courage to discourage the Crows, who, in their opinion, were a cowardly lot anyway. Thankful hearts and minds, yes; but also hearts steeled with a determination to wreak vengeance for the humiliation suffered on that segment of the vast battleground of Montana.

W. A. Ferris commented unfavorably on the Flathead attitude toward fighting and on their avoidance of unnecessary risks. "Never to go out to hunt their own graves" was a precept followed by them; fight only in self-defense and remain home to protect the women and children were guiding principles. Ferris looked on this policy as foolish because it only encouraged the Blackfeet to harass them, to steal their horses, and to kill their hunters. Thus, according to him, the Blackfeet did not dread retribution as they might

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22 Irving, Bonneville, 438-39.
if the Flatheads had been more aggressive.²³

The Indian acted on the belief that craft and cunning were superior to courage. Such Indian cunning was shown by the Pend d'Oreilles on a raiding expedition in the fall of 1861. Having stolen some Gros Ventre horses, they retreated until they reached a spot some twelve miles below Fort Benton. Knowing that the Gros Ventres would be on their heels, they sought a means to avoid being caught. A solution was forthcoming. They left a number of the horses at a nearby Piegan camp and continued their flight with the remaining horses. The pursuing Gros Ventres found the horses in the camp of the Piegans who were thought to be friends. Such conduct on the part of supposed friends caused great indignation and resulted in a Gros Ventre attack on the Piegan camp while the real culprits rode safely away.

Father De Smet described another example of Indian craft which took place on a summer hunt in 1845. The combined camp of Flatheads and Pend d'Oreilles were threatened by a band of Blackfeet four times their number; they attacked despite the odds. The Blackfeet skulked around their enemies, avoiding an open fight. The Flatheads saw this and pretended flight so as to draw the Blackfeet into the open. The trick

²³Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains*, 87-90. Nevertheless, when the Flatheads had to fight to gain the right to hunt bison or to defend themselves, all restraints were put aside to right past injustices and abuses. A Flathead could be quite brutal and cruel in war and in his treatment of prisoners.

worked, and the Flatheads inflicted considerable losses upon the Blackfeet who then retired.25

Ferris recorded an example of Crow cunning which occurred around 1830. A Crow force discovered a village of Blackfeet camped in a large prairie valley. They decided to place a few lodges in a conspicuous spot where the Blackfeet could not fail to see them. The greater part of the Crow village remained concealed. A few of their poorer horses were allowed to stray down the plain as an inducement to the Blackfeet to investigate. The Blackfeet thought they would have an easy time attacking so few lodges; their young warriors were to surround the Crows at night while the older braves were to join them in the morning. These young men failed to reach the spot; early in the morning the older veterans raced toward the Crow lodges. When they approached, the Crows rushed upon them. Seventy Blackfeet scalps were taken.26

A most important principle of Indian war strategy was reliance on the surprise attack as the means to inflict the most casualties with the least danger to the attacker. The excitable, nervous, and easily stampeded Indian was demoralized when surprised by an enemy. The unknown strength and position of the attacker interfered with his thought processes and his shooting ability; consequently, as a rule, the

25De Smet, Letters, II, 574.
26Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 306.
surprised party got the worst of it. The surprised Indians first thought only of a place of safety and were quite adept in finding such places; they had enough presence of mind to take their weapons with them. While under the initial terror of the attack, they were not to be feared very much. However, if once brought to bay in their retreat or once wounded, they recovered their presence of mind. A wounded Indian was especially dangerous because in that condition he was less likely to escape and thus became more reckless in trying to destroy the attackers. 27

In the winter of 1830 a surprise attack took place when a party of twenty-three Crows were assailed by the Sioux. This is how the tragedy happened. During a long storm the Sioux had stolen nearly one hundred fifty Crow horses, and a party of eighty Crows pursued them. They traveled several days in pursuit, but the protracted storm blotted out all traces of the thieves. Most of the Crows returned to camp, but a determined minority of twenty-three continued the search. Finally thinking they had followed in the wrong direction, they resolved to return home. However, during a snow storm on the return journey they passed near a Sioux village. Sighting them, a large party of Sioux pursued the Crows who, unaware of their danger, advanced at their usual pace. At night they stopped to eat and set up camp. During the night the Sioux surrounded them and awaited

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27 Dodge, Our Wild Indians, 438.
the dawn to attack. In the morning the Sioux killed all the Crows, with the loss of only two of their own warriors and several slightly wounded. 28

It was Indian policy to kill or capture women and children since each woman might fight 29 or be a mother of warriors and each child would grow to be a warrior or a woman. Such was the case when the Assiniboin chief, Tchatka, organized a war party to attack a Blackfeet encampment. At the break of day the four hundred Assiniboin warriors surrounded thirty Blackfeet lodges which were occupied mostly by old men, women, and children. Assiniboin war whoops knifed their way to Blackfeet ears; Blackfeet hearts were gripped with fear. Since most of the men had gone on a war

28 Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 307-08.

29 Irving (Bonneville, 182) wrote of a battle in March, 1833, between the Blackfeet and the Nez Perces in which a Nez Perce woman, seeing her man badly wounded and unable to fight, seized his bow and arrows and bravely and successfully defended his person.

Father De Smet told of a battle in 1846 in which women participated. The Crows had attacked a Flathead-Nez Perce hunting expedition. One mother led her sons onto the battlefield; and when her eldest son's horse broke down in an individual contest with a Crow, she threw herself between the two and with a knife put the Crow to flight. Another woman picked up scattered arrows to replenish the nearly exhausted supply of her party (Letters, II, 578).

E. T. Denig ("Indian Tribes," 433-34) wrote about an Indian woman who was unusually active in battle. She was called "woman chief" and had been taken prisoner by the Crows when a young girl. During the ten year period in which Denig had heard about her, she led large war parties against her native tribe, the Blackfeet. One time she rode after a party of Blackfeet and killed one single-handed within sight of one of the trading forts.
party, only a small number of Blackfeet youth remained to defend the camp. Their resistance was soon crushed, and old men, women, and children gave up the ghost. One Assiniboin told a white trader that he had killed fourteen children and three women. Since the killing of each individual was a blow to the enemy and helped to weaken his power and to strike terror in his heart, this type of unequal struggle was frequently repeated.

The Crows and the Gros Ventres usually spared the lives of women and children. Denig, referring to the late 1840's, stated that the Crows, after killing all the men and large boys of fifty lodges of Blackfeet, took two hundred women and children prisoners. The children were adopted into the tribe, and the women were retained to work and to become wives of Crow warriors. Although Denig remarked that the Sioux, the Blackfeet, and the Assiniboins usually killed women and children, there were occasions when those tribes took women and children prisoners. The most famous of Indian women taken captive by tribal enemies was Sacajawea. Women and children were desired to increase tribal numbers depleted by disease and war. Since women did most of the camp work, additional women were desired for that purpose.

These combatants of the bison range and adjacent areas were aided in their movements in hunting buffalo and

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30 De Smet, Western Missions, 184-89.
31 Denig, "Indian Tribes," 552.
attacking their enemies by that most useful of animals, the horse. The dispersion of the horse, which began in 1541, was completed over the Plains area of the United States by 1784. The horse intensified already existing traits in Indian culture. The Indians became more warlike and far better buffalo hunters than before. Renowned for their speed, intelligence, and endurance, the war horse and the buffalo horse were prize possessions and were valued above all else. 32

The Indians counted their wealth in horses. With horses an Indian could purchase the most powerful medicine bundle to aid and protect him in his dangerous life. He could give a large number of horses to the parents of the girl of his choice to assure their approval of his marriage. He could trade horses for any other articles that might interest him and could give away horses or could loan them to the less fortunate members of his tribe, to add to his reputation as an important and generous man. 33 With the horse the Plains Indians became more nomadic. The horse aided the Blackfeet, for example, in their southward expansion. They found that larger travois could be made, that they could be attached to horses which enabled whole villages to move faster, farther, and with heavier loads than before. 34

In acquiring horses the Indians found possessions of


33 Ewers, "Story of the Blackfeet," 33-34.

34 Ibid., 13.
great value for the reasons stated above. The supply of horses was limited by the number they could obtain from other tribes who were not satisfied with the number of horses in their possession. So it was difficult for one tribe to obtain horses in large numbers through peaceful means. The alternative was to take them by force or by stealth. Thus horse raiding became a common place in Indian life. 

Since concealment and avoidance of battle were desired, ten to thirty men were sufficient for a horse-stealing party. Usually the party went on foot, and each warrior carried six or eight pairs of strong-soled moccasins on his back. No provisions were taken; food could be secured by hunting as they moved along. Wolf skins were frequently taken to be used in approaching an enemy camp. The entire skin of the wolf, with head, ears, and legs intact, was worn so that by lying down or standing on his hands and knees one might pass for a wolf. While moving through their own country, they were less cautious than when in enemy territory. Frequently dissension or unfavorable omens caused a party to return before it had gone far.

Upon entering enemy country they scattered in different directions for miles around to scout the area. If nothing were seen, they signalled each other to reassemble. They

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35 Breeding of horses was not in itself enough to satisfy the great demand for this most valuable animal.
36 Ibid., 14.
37 Denig, "Indian Tribes," 545.
then moved a few miles and reconnoitered again. They seldom shot any game unless absolutely necessary. By observing the movement of carnivorous birds and animals, they found the carcasses of animals killed by Indian hunters. The state of its decay and the presence of tracks and other signs determined the direction in which their enemies went.\(^{38}\)

When they found that they were near an enemy camp, they moved only at night, met in ravines and other secluded spots, and never shot their guns or built fires. Having discovered a camp, they agreed upon a rendezvous after the attack and decided upon a direction for the return trip in case they were separated from each other. At night they approached the enemy camp to size up the situation. The best horses were usually picketed near the owner's lodge. Usually it was risky business to penetrate the camp late at night, for the young men moved about from lodge to lodge to see various women. Near daylight, when all were supposedly asleep, but when it was still dark, the raiders moved toward the horses they had selected to steal. They cut them loose, led them to a dark spot, mounted, and drove the rest of the horses away. Frequently the alarm was sounded before they had a chance to steal the desired horses. The thieves were usually pursued if their tracks could be found.\(^{39}\)

Occasionally the negligence of some Indians made it

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 545-46.  
\(^{39}\) Ibid., 546-49.
easy to make off quietly with horses. Irving wrote of such an incident. The Flatheads and Nez Perces, with whom Captain Bonneville traveled, allowed their horses to range the hills at night. In a single night a sweep was made through the area by the Blackfeet who absconded with eighty-six of their finest horses. Even after this the only precaution taken by the Nez Perces was to drive their horses to some secluded spot; there they left them for the night with no guard to watch over them. So a second swoop resulted in which forty-one horses were taken. This caused them to be more cautious, and they drove them regularly to camp every evening and fastened them to pickets. However, once the horse was picketed the care of the owner was over for the night. The Blackfeet band that hovered about redoubled its daring. The horses were picketed before the lodges, so in the early part of the night, a number of Blackfeet scouts penetrated into the very center of the camp. Here they quietly went about cutting loose the horses that stood picketed by the lodges of their sleeping owners. One of these prowlers, more adventurous than the rest, approached a group of Nez Perces who were gambling around the fire. Muffled up in his robe, he stood there for some time, peering over the shoulders of the players. He retired undiscovered. Having cut loose as many horses as they could conveniently manage, the Blackfeet scouts rejoined their comrades to await the horses when they drifted out of camp towards their customary grazing ground. As they emerged from the camp, they were silently taken
possession of until each Blackfoot had one. The Blackfeet sprang upon their backs and rode away; there was no spirited pursuit.

Indian strategy involved the use of taunts, boasts, and derogatory remarks toward one's enemy as a means of drawing him into a disadvantageous position or of angering him so he would lose good judgment and caution and expose himself. Such taunts as, "Where are the Crow men? We thought we saw Crow men among you." or "Bring up your squaws! Let them lead you." were frequent, the inference being that they were not fighting as a true man would fight and that they were inferior to their women.

Indian tribes were, as a rule, broken into bands so as to obtain food more easily. This also gave an opportunity for ambitious sub-chiefs, leaders of bands, to exert sole leadership; whereas if the bands remained intact in one large village, they would be under control of one chief. These men took care to prevent any such concentration except when forced to do so by war or by the medicine chief. 41

40 Irving, Bonneville, 140-49. James Bradley ("Bradley Manuscript," M. H. S. Contributions, IX, 287) stated that:

"Horses were usually picketed in the vicinity of the lodges. Horse corrals were made within which horses of the whole village were nightly assembled. When no danger was apprehended, bands of horses were sometimes driven to a secluded place and left for days together without a guard. It is thus seen why a daring war party could successfully approach within the vicinity of a village and drive off the outlying bands of horses."

41 Dodge, Our Wild Indians, 45.
Social standing and chieftainship were dependent on military ability. Courage, oratorical ability, showmanship, and ambition might elevate a warrior to a high position, especially, if his father or an uncle had been chief before him and if he had a large family ready to maintain his authority and to avenge his quarrels. Specified deeds of valor were expected of any one who desired to be chief. The touching of an enemy, whether he was hurt or not, counted as the coup proper. A coup stick, quirt or bow was used for this purpose. To strike the first enemy warrior falling in battle, no matter who killed him, was a part of counting coup. Another way of counting coup was to strike the enemy's breastworks while under fire. Seizing an enemy's weapons in a hand to hand struggle was a deed of valor; and the theft of a horse picketed in a hostile camp so that it had to be cut loose was still another. Being the raid planner was another deed that counted toward the chieftainship.

Some chieftains inspired greater respect or terror than others. A chief in order to be successful and to hold power had to gain the confidence of his uncertain subjects or hold them by fear. A chief's power was sometimes merely nominal; sometimes his authority was well-established and his name and influence extended beyond the limits of his own

Such a man was Tchatka, most renowned chief of the Assiniboins. He had great success in war against the Blackfeet and other enemies, probably because of the great confidence his followers had in him. He seized power by poisoning his uncle and working on the superstitious fear of his people. During his first years as chief, his undertakings were quite successful. However, sometimes his warriors were beaten. In 1830, after having predicted success, he suffered his first great defeat at the hands of the Blackfeet; his losses were sixty dead and nearly an equal number wounded. Defeats such as this bode him no good, and he was continually in search of easy victories to bolster his position.

The formation of a war party required certain things of the man who was to lead it. A chief or a warrior who wished to form a war party stood in the middle of the camp, brandished his weapons of war, chanted his war song and proclaimed his great deeds, his warlike spirit, and the sentiments and motives which prompted this course of action. The youths listened. Anyone who rose became a volunteer who also chanted a war song—a ceremony which was a solemn pledge from which a young Indian could not honorably withdraw. Generally at the age of seventeen or eighteen, after selecting his manitou or tutelary spirit, the youth could join a war party. Each volunteer armed and equipped himself.

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45 De Smet, Western Missions, 169-94.
46 Ibid., 156-57.
Among the Blackfeet a chief or warrior who desired to go to war announced his intentions and sought volunteers. When a sufficient number was obtained, the next step was to secure the consent of the soldier's lodge which usually put its stamp of approval on expeditions. Sometimes, in cases of public danger, which made it desirable to keep the whole force together or where the proposed expedition was against a friendly tribe, permission was not given. On rare occasions a war party stole off without the authority of the lodge, but this was risky business. Sometimes before setting out, the members of a war party performed the Begging Dance in which they called at the wealthier lodges before which they danced until the owners gave some present such as powder or moccasins to aid them in their work. After all preliminaries were finished, the leader of the band appointed a rendezvous some distance from the camp. Before morning all were assembled, and the expedition began.

War parties of two hundred to four hundred men were formed if killing the enemy was the principal objective. Such expeditions usually failed to carry out their original plans. When a fight began, it was every man for himself. Shelter was usually desired. Those who could not find a thicket, timber or rocks to fight from never stood still. Host slaughter occurred when individuals of both parties rushed to scalp or to defend the body of a slain comrade.

Frequently several fell on each side before one party retreated. When any unusual losses occurred, one side fled; and the other side was usually able to massacre the scattered fugitives. As a rule, there had to be a great superiority in numbers and an advantageous position in order to inflict any great destruction. The greatest loss of life occurred when a party of two hundred to four hundred warriors surprised a camp of twenty or thirty lodges.48

Such destruction was wrought by one of Tchatka's war parties. Deciding that a favorable opportunity had come to increase his prestige safely, Tchatka formed a war party with these words:

Arise, follow without delay the war-path which leads to the Black-Feet. At the source of the Milk River thirty lodges of the enemies are encamped. Set out instantly, and after five days' march thou shalt reach the camp. On the sixth thou shalt make a fearful carnage....At this moment a Black-Feet war party is prowling around the camp. They sought a favorable moment, but not finding it, have gone in search of a weaker enemy. Set out, then, without delay; thou shalt find an easy victory; thou shalt find in the Black-Feet camp only old men, women, and children.49

This prediction, like many others characterized by his people as miraculous, actually was based on secret information brought by several active young scouts.50

War to the Assiniboin was "The Breath of their Nostrils." Hatred for the Blackfeet had been transmitted from

48 Denig, "Indian Tribes," 549-50.
49 De Smet, Western Missions, 183.
50 Ibid.
father to son and augmented by continual aggression and reprisal. Each family numbered some member slain. So but a few words such as these from their leader were all that was necessary to raise a war party. Around the lighted fires, the scalp dances began. The camp became a workshop in which soldiers sharpened their knives and tomahawks and prepared their horses for the journey. The women mended and prepared the moccasins, the leggings and the sacks of provisions for the expedition. Enthusiasm was at a high pitch. All relied on the promises of Tchatka and counted on certain victory.

There were four hundred warriors in this party. They marched the whole night and during the next day with the greatest precautions so as to prevent surprise. Some Indians scouted the surrounding country and left signals and rods planted in the earth to show the correct route. About evening these scouts saw a thick wood on the border of a stream and there built a protective barrier with dried branches and tree trunks. After passing the night there, they awoke to find themselves in the middle of a herd of bison from which they replenished their food supply.  

Towards nightfall a loyal scout returned and secretly told Tchatka what he had seen. After marching several miles, the chief stopped, beat on his drum to call the men together, pointed to a high hill some miles away, and told them there they would trace the Blackfeet war party of which

\[\text{Ibid.}, 183-87.\]
he had spoken before leaving camp. Several horsemen went to the spot where they found tracks of nearly one hundred horses. Confidence in the chief increased. Several days passed. By the evening of the fifth day they found the Blackfeet camp. The battle was short and bloody. The inhabitants of thirty lodges were destroyed. Some women and children were taken captive and provided amusement for the Assiniboins on the return trip. They ran pointed stakes through their bodies in order to roast them alive before the fire. They flayed some alive. Their reasons for acting so cruelly were to satisfy their dead parents and kindred who had suffered death and torture by the Blackfeet—their greatest enemies.  

Indeed, warfare waged by Indian against Indian was accompanied with much cruelty. The conquerors often returned to their village dragging with them prisoners destined for torture. The women came to meet them, wailing in expectation of the loss of loved ones. One Indian called out the details of the expedition. The roll of the warriors was called; and when there was no answer, it was assumed he was lost forever. Then the cries of the women arose again. Grief, despair, and rage were the emotions aroused by these events. Then followed the victory celebration. Torture was a part of that celebration. The tearing out of nails by the root, the chewing of flesh off the finger, the crushing of toes between stones, the applying of red hot guns or weapons.
to all parts of the body, and the skinning of the victims alive were forms of Indian torture. Such cruelties might continue for several hours or for a whole day until the victim died. Often the prisoner dared his tormentors in such a manner as this, "I do not fear death; those who dread your torments are cowards, they are lower than women. May my enemies be confounded; they shall not draw a groan from me. Let them rage and despair. Oh! if I could devour them and drink their blood in their own skulls to the last drop!"

About December 24, 1813, a large band of Flathead warriors set up a camp after returning from the buffalo country where they had revenged a previous defeat by the Blackfeet. Several Blackfeet with their women had been taken prisoners. Ross Cox heard that they were about to put one of these prisoners to death and went to witness the scene, which he described in the following manner:

The man was tied to a tree; after which they burned him on the legs, thighs, neck, cheeks and belly. They then commenced cutting the flesh from about the nails, which they pulled out, and next separated the fingers from the hand joint by joint. During the performance of these cruelties the wretched captive never winced and instead of seeking for mercy, he added fresh stimulants to their barbarous ingenuity by the most irritating reproaches, part of which our interpreter translated as follows:—"My heart is strong.—You do not hurt me.—You can't hurt me.—You are fools.—you do not know how to torture.—Try it again.—I don't feel any pain yet.—We torture your relations a great deal better, because we make them cry out loud.....—You are not brave; you have small hearts, and you are always afraid to fight." Then addressing one in particular, he said, "It was

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53De Smet, Letters, I, 249.
by my arrow you lost your eye;* upon which the Flat-head darted at him, and with a knife in a moment scooped out one of his eyes; at the same time cutting the bridge of his nose nearly in two. This did not stop him: with the remaining eye he looked sternly at another, and said, "I killed your brother, and I scalped your old fool of a father." The warrior to whom this was addressed instantly sprang at him, and separated the scalp from his head. He was then about plunging a knife in his heart, until he was told by the chief to desist. The raw skull, bloody socket, and mutilated nose now presented a horrific appearance but by no means changed his tone of defiance.—"It was I," said he to the chief, "that made your wife a prisoner last fall;--we put out her eyes;--we tore out her tongue; we treated her like a dog. Forty of our young warriors----"

The chieftain became incensed the moment his wife's name was mentioned: he seized his gun, and, before the last sentence was ended, a ball from it passed through the brave fellow's heart, and terminated his frightful sufferings.54

E. T. Denig also described Indian torture which occurred in the 1850's. In the spring of 1853 five Blackfeet were caught stealing horses from the Crow village. Pursued, the Blackfeet took refuge in a cluster of bushes. The Crows killed all but one who was shot through the leg. They scalped him and cut off his hands. Crow boys fired into his body

54Cox, Adventures, I, 232-34. This account of Indian torture was a core of truth which was substantiated by other observers later in the century although Duncan McDonald denied the truth of his description. Some incidents seem exaggerated, for it is difficult to believe that the captive did not wince or cry under such torture. It also seems improbable that the captive could identify his captors so carefully as to recognize the man whose eye he had put out, the brother of one whom he had slain, and the husband of a woman whom he had taken prisoner. Since Blackfeet-Flathead clashes were frequent, it is possible that he had performed these feats against this band of Flatheads. However, the main forms of torture described at first were typical of Indian tortures. The story also illustrates a point of Indian psychology. The captive who knew he must die realized it would be less painful to die quickly; so in order to enrage the captors to the
and hit him on the head with stones and tomahawks until he died. Afterwards the appendages of the dead Blackfeet were displayed on poles. A few weeks before this, twelve Blackfeet stole horses from a Cree camp. In the pursuit that followed, eleven were slain. The remaining one was taken alive and scalped. After he was scalped and his right hand removed, the Crees sent him home. However, as the man left their camp, he met a Cree boy whom he killed with his remaining hand. The Crees pursued him and tortured him to death.

These then were some of the elements which went into Indian warfare. This was what the Indian meant and realized when he said, "Let there be war!", although not all Indians may have realized war's full implications until experience schooled them in that lesson. On this battleground of mountain and plain the Indian had to keep his eyes and ears open and to watch the natural environment for signs of an enemy if he wished to live and enjoy the fruits of the earthly hunting ground instead of the spiritual one. The footmark might indicate the nearness of a war party; the report of firearms might betray a nearby foe. Strange horsemen could be scouts of a predatory band. Rising smoke might be from a friendly camp, but it might also signal the gathering force of an enemy recruiting their scattered bands for a point where they would kill him, he insulted them and told them about supposed cruelties and injuries that he had inflicted upon their tribe.

55 Denig, "Indian Tribes," 491-92.
brief war effort.

Truly, the shadow of the raised tomahawk covered the land. The raised tomahawk to the Indian youth was a symbol of adventure and glory and of the time when he could obtain recognition by feats of daring and assume his role as a man among men. It was a sign of power and leadership to the older and more experienced men and a symbol of grief and despair which gripped the hearts of Indian women. The raised tomahawk symbolized the revengeful spirit which inflamed many an Indian tribe and which caused a vicious circle of theft, torture, and death. Warfare for these tribesmen of Montana resulted in survival and glory for some, but also sorrow, suffering and death for many and a weakening of the race at a time when strength was needed to oppose the ever-advancing white man.
PART II

STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL: 1740-1820

The first recorded evidence pertinent to this investigation of Indian rivalry in or near the Montana region in the eighteenth century was that provided by the Verendrye expedition of 1742-43 which encountered some plains tribes who had been terrorized by the fierce Snake Indians. The Verendryes told of an Indian expedition of two thousand warriors against the Snakes and of their hasty retreat from Snake country which prevented further exploration by the Verendryes in the direction of the mountains. From about 1740 to the end of the eighteenth century Blackfeet tribes assailed the Snakes and gradually drove them from the plains. The Crows and the Gros Ventres of the Missouri were active also in driving the Snakes farther west. In this struggle the Snake girl, Sacajawea, was taken from her people to the land of the Gros Ventres and thus was placed in a position where she was able to aid the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

The Flatheads and the Kutenais also were pushed from the plains into the mountain area.

The buffalo plains of Eastern Montana became a part of the United States in 1803, and white penetration of that region followed. The white man found the Indians of that
area hunting the bison and their fellow Indians in a struggle for survival. The Indians driven west of the mountains had been at a disadvantage in that they lacked firearms, which the Blackfeet possessed. When the white traders provided the Flatheads and their allies with arms, these Indians attempted to reassert their right to hunt on the buffalo plains. On those plains life and death revolved around that shaggy mountain of flesh—the buffalo.
CHAPTER III

KNOCK THEM ON THE HEAD! INDIAN RIVALRY
AND WARFARE IN THE 18TH CENTURY
IN AND NEAR THE MONTANA REGION

Sources of information on Indian rivalry and warfare in present-day Montana during the 1700's are almost nonexistent because traders and trappers, who were the important sources for the period after 1800, had not expanded into the Montana region. There were several reasons for this delayed penetration into the Columbia River Basin and the valley of the upper Missouri River. Other regions rich in furs were easier to reach than the two above areas; and human nature being what it is, the trappers took the easiest path to wealth. Also, the established routes of trade and exploration crossed the continent to the south by means of the Great Lakes, the Ohio, and the Mississippi or to the north by means of the Great Lakes and Canadian rivers and lakes such as the Saskatchewan River and Lake Winnipeg. The Columbia River was not known until near the close of the eighteenth century; and even after its discovery, the falls and rapids of that river were thought to make that route to the interior an arduous one. Furthermore, the coastal ranges seemed an almost impass-
able obstacle to the interior.¹

The geographers of that day pictured the upper Missouri country as an area of endless wastes inhabited by poor and unfriendly Indians who lived on herds of bison; and since at that time there were no markets for buffalo robes, explorers and trappers left the region alone. Finally, the French and Indian War stopped all French expeditions of discovery; and with the expulsion of the French from North America, the British Hudson's Bay Company, although its charter had provided for exploration, contented itself with profits around the Hudson Bay area. That company made little effort to extend its control until the formation of the Northwest Company in 1783-84 forced it to expand westward. If this were not done, the Hudson's Bay Company would lose its trade with the western Indians which had grown up after the expulsion of the French. Both companies then began to push their explorations and to establish posts farther westward.² Eventually a rich trade in furs and the discovery of accessible routes into the Montana region led to serious competition among the trading companies and their respective traders and trappers. The work of these men in the 1800's brought them in contact with the Montana Indians of which they left a record of factual observations, impressions, opinions, and prejudices.

²Ibid., 19-21.
Despite these conditions which created a scarcity of source material prior to 1800, two important sources are available as evidence that warfare existed among Indians inhabiting and traversing the Montana area of the 1700's. The first to be cited is the Verendrye journal of 1742-43 which recorded a journey in search of the Western Sea and included references to Indian rivalry pertinent to this work.

The Chevalier de la Verendrye, with his brother, left Fort La Reine on the Assiniboine River, on April 29, 1742, for the country of the "Mantanne" Indians on the first leg of a journey in search of the Western Sea. After visiting a number of Indians they arrived, on November 19, 1742, at a village of Indians, called by them the Gens des Chevaux. These Indians were in a state of sorrow because their villages had suffered greatly from an attack by the Gens du Serpent, hereafter referred to as Serpent or Snake Indians. These were identified by the historian Francis Parkman as Shoshoni or Snake Indians and were described by the Chevalier.

Several difficulties confront one in using this account. First, it is impossible to identify with any degree of certainty the tribes met by the Verendryes, for whenever they met a new group of Indians, they invented a name for them. Also, there are those who dispute the claim that a Verendrye reached Montana, that the mountains seen were not the foothills of the Rockies. It is possible that the Verendryes advanced into Montana, if not as far as the Big-horns, at least as far as the Rosebud Mountains. However, if the Verendryes were not in Montana, they were close enough to warrant the use of their remarks as the first evidence that warfare existed in and around Montana. A definite location of the Indians involved is not altogether necessary in this period of scanty information since with horses it was quite probable that Indians roamed in Montana as well as in adjacent areas.
as follows:

This Serpent tribe is considered very brave. They do not content themselves in a campaign with destroying a village, according to the custom of all savages; they keep up the war from spring to autumn. They are very numerous, and woe to those who cross their path! It is said that in 1741 they had entirely ruined seventeen villages, killed all the men and the old women, made slaves of the young women and sold them on the coast for horses and merchandise. The ferocity attributed to the Snake Indians may well have existed, but it must be borne in mind that these Gens des Chevaux Indians may have exaggerated that ferocity owing to their own fears and perhaps also to a desire to influence the actions of the white men along a particular course. It is evident that these words described not what Verendrye saw himself but what the Indians told him of their fierce enemies.

The Chevalier persuaded them to guide his party to another tribe, the Gens de l'Arc, which apparently did not stand in such fear of the Serpent Indians. Continuing southwest they came to the Gens de la Belle Riviere Indians on November 18, 1742. Three days later they arrived at a village of Gens de l'Arc Indians and found that these people had held Snake prisoners and that they were going on an expedition against the Snakes. Their chief said to the Frenchmen:

Don't be surprised if you see so many villages assembled with us. Word has been sent in all directions for them to join us. You are hearing war shouts

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"Chevalier de la Verendrye, "Journal of Expedition of Chevalier de la Verendrye and One of his Brothers to Reach Western Sea 1742-43," Journals and Letters of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes de la Verendrye and his Sons, ed. Lawrence Burpee (Toronto, 1927), 411-12."
every day; it is not without intentions; we are going to march in the direction of the high mountains which are near the Sea to find the Gens du Serpent.\(^5\)

After some urging the Chevalier went with them. They proceeded south-southwest and sometimes northwest, adding more Indians to the party as they continued.

On January 1, 1743, they saw the mountains. Over two thousand fighting men, accompanied by their families, marched on "through magnificent prairies where wild animals were in abundance." The protection of their wives and children in a home base during their foray into Snake country and the methods to best approach the enemy were discussed. The expedition moved on until January 8, 1743, when a camp was established; the Chevalier's brother remained behind to guard the luggage. The women and children stayed there, too, for safety's sake.

The war party left on January ninth; most of its members were on horseback. On January 12, 1743, they reached the mountains, possibly the Bighorn Mountains, which were "for the most part well wooded with timber of every kind and appear(ed) very high." The scouts came up in an excited mood, exclaiming that the main village of the Serpent Indians was deserted and that much equipment was intact. Fear seized the warriors. Knowing the warlike reputation of that tribe, they could not believe that the Snakes had retreated. Thoughts of an enemy attack on their women and children

\(^{5}\)Ibid., 415-16.
cauged them to return to camp. They had come that far in very good order, but the return was quite different. "Everybody fled as he felt inclined.....Nothing had been seen or heard but the war party was hopelessly discouraged."\(^6\)

Thus, conquered by their own fears and by what seemed to be Indian inability to carry on sustained operations for any period of time, they failed even to meet their enemies; and so could not knock them on the head, that is to kill them. Indian rivalry had aided exploration to a point in that it enabled Verendrye to reach "the mountains"; but it had also checked exploration beyond that point. It was not until 1787 that another record was produced, in notebook form, of Indian rivalry in and near the Montana region; and that account was not put into more acceptable literary form until about 1840.

This second account\(^7\) of pre-nineteenth century warfare was recorded by David Thompson who was sent in the fall of 1787 to find the Piegan Indians. He was to induce them to

\(^{6}\)Ibid., 416.

\(^{7}\)The Blackfeet of the Blackfeet-Snake war told of in the following paragraphs lived at that time (1730's and after) north of the present international boundary; but due to their proximity to the Montana region, they clashed with the Snake Indians who lived in the Montana area south of the boundary. These Blackfeet did not live in Montana during most of the 1700's; but the investigator feels justified in including this account of their activities because of their proximity to Montana, because of their involvement with the Snake Indians who did live in the Montana region, and because that sometime before 1800 the Blackfeet began moving into Montana to occupy the great hunting grounds and could then be truly called Montana Indians.
hunt furs, to make dried provisions, and to entice them to the Hudson's Bay Company's trading post. Thompson found them on the Bow River near the present city of Calgary. At this camp he secured his information from the Indian Saukamappee who, despite his seventy-five or eighty years, seemed to be a steady fellow of sound mind. It seems most remarkable that over the years such detail could be remembered accurately by Saukamappee. Probably time altered events and certain details in the mind of the teller; but even taking this into consideration, his story gives a very good picture of Indian warfare. Thompson felt that it was reasonably accurate. According to Thompson, this account of former times went back as far as 1730 and revealed methods of fighting on foot before guns were used, the introduction of firearms, and the introduction of the horse among the Blackfeet. The southward movement of the Blackfeet is also to be seen in the movements of the Blackfeet against the Snakes.

David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative of his Explorations in Western America 1784-1812* (Toronto, 1916), 324-25.

J. B. Tyrrell, the editor of Thompson's *Narrative* characterized it in this way (334):

"We have for the first time a circumstantial account of the use of the horse by the Snake Indians west of the Rocky Mountains, and of the first sight of one of these animals by any of the Blackfeet, and the clear inference that the Blackfeet obtained their horses first from the Snake Indians, and not from the Indians to the South of them east of the Mountains. Thompson's date of 1730 as the time of the Blackfeet-Snake War, when the Blackfeet obtained their first horses, must be approximately correct, for in 1754, when the same Indians were visited by Anthony Hendry from York Factory, the Blackfeet had very many horses, and their neighbours, the Assiniboin, had a few."
Old Saukamappee began by telling of early warfare and how it led him to join the Piegan Indians. Of all the Blackfeet tribes these Piegans were closest to the Snakes, and it was their duty to resist Snake aggression. The Piegans asked Saukamappee's tribe, the Nathathaways, for aid; at that time he was a lad of sixteen. His father, with about twenty warriors, complied with the request. The old man described their state of war preparedness in these words:

There were a few guns amongst us, but very little ammunition, and they were left to hunt for the families. Our weapons was a Lance, mostly pointed with iron, some few of stone, a Bow and a quiver of Arrows; the Bows were of Larch, the length came to the chin; the quiver had about fifty arrows, of which ten had iron points, the others were headed with stone. He carried his knife on his breast and his axe in his belt. Such was my father's weapons, and those with him had much the same weapons. I had a Bow and arrow and a knife, of which I was very proud.  

Their party came to the Piegan camp, located on the plains near the Eagle Hills, and were feasted and entertained. The chiefs selected a war chief. Guided by spies' reports of a large camp of Snakes on the plains of the Eagle Hills, about three hundred fifty warriors proceeded toward the Snake aggressors who, in Saukamappee's opinion, appeared to outnumber the Piegans. He described the battle in which there was no close contact and few casualties:

After some singing and dancing, they sat down on the ground, and placed their large shields before them, which covered them: we did the same, but our shields were not so many, and some of our shields

had to shelter two men. Theirs were all placed touching each other; their Bows were not so long as ours, but of better wood, and the back covered with the sinews of the Bisons which made them very elastic, and their arrows went a long way and whizzed about us as balls do from guns. They were all headed with a sharp, smooth, black stone (flint) which broke when it struck anything. Our iron-headed arrows did not go through their shields, but stuck in them; on both sides several were wounded, but none lay on the ground; and night put an end to the battle, without a scalp being taken on either side, and in those days such was the result unless one party was more numerous than the other. The great mischief of war then, was as now, by attacking and destroying small camps of ten to thirty tents, which are obliged to separate for hunting.

With the passing of time Saukamappee grew into manhood and became a good hunter and provider for his newly acquired wife. The Piegan again asked for aid. The situation had changed somewhat since the last battle in which they had participated. They had guns and a greater supply of iron-headed arrows; but the Snakes and their allies had Misstutia (Big Dogs, that is horses) on which they rode swiftly into Piegan ranks and knocked them on the head with their stone battle axes. The Piegan had no horses, but they countered with a deadlier secret weapon—the gun.

Saukamappee and two companions were alarmed about news of these big dogs or horses, for they had never seen them before. Saukamappee went only because of the pressure put on him by his wife's relations who wanted him to get a scalp for her father's medicine bag. Between the new arrivals and the Assiniboin Indians there were ten guns and about

11 Ibid., 329-30.
12 Ibid., 330.
thirty balls and powder for the war. The Piegans considered these ten guns the key to victory. After a few days' journey they encountered a large enemy war party, but thanks to the Great Spirit they had no horses with them. The Piegan secret weapons helped them score a decisive victory over a large Snake force to whom the gun was unfamiliar. This was how it happened:

When we came to meet each other, as usual each displayed their numbers, weapons and shields, in all which they were superior to us, except our guns which were not shown, but kept in their leathern cases, and if we had shown them, they would have taken them for long clubs. For a long time they held us in suspense; a tall Chief was forming a strong party to make an attack on our centre, and the others to enter into combat with those opposite to them; we prepared for the battle the best we could. Those of us who had guns stood in the front line, and each of us (had) two balls in his mouth, and a load of powder in his left hand to reload. We noticed they had a great many short stone clubs for close combat, which is a dangerous weapon, and had they made a bold attack on us, we must have been defeated as they were more numerous and better armed than we were, for we could have fired our guns no more than twice; and were at a loss what to do on the wide plain, and each Chief encouraged his men to stand firm....all this time we were about the strong flight of an arrow from each other. At length they formed their long usual line by placing their shields on the ground to touch each other, the shield having a breadth of full three feet or more. We sat down opposite them and most of us waited for the night to make a hasty retreat. The War Chief was close to us, anxious to see the effect of our guns. The lines were too far asunder for us to make a sure shot, and we requested him to close the line to about sixty yards, which was gradually done, and lying flat on the ground behind the shields, we watched our opportunity when they drew their bows to shoot at us, their bodies were then exposed and each of us, as opportunity offered, fired with deadly aim, and either killed, or severely wounded, everyone we aimed at.

13Ibid., 330-31.
These results pleased the war chief and caused the Snakes to keep behind their shields. In pairs the gun bearers then interspersed themselves along the battle line. The sun was only halfway down when some Snakes deserted their comrades. The Piegans were readied for a charge at the chief's signal. The charge that followed caused most of the enemy to flee although some fought courageously. Piegan losses were ten slain and many wounded. A few Snakes were killed in the pursuit which was of short duration owing to the fact that the Piegans haggled with each other over the scalps, clothing, and weapons of the slain. The next morning a large war tent was erected to commemorate the victory. Saukamappee thought that fifty scalps had been taken. The ten who had terrified the enemy with guns were given a scalp apiece. Then an argument developed over which scalps belonged to whom. This is the way the controversy went:

All these whose faces were blackened for the loss of relations, or friends, now came forward to claim the other scalps to be held in their hands for the benefit of their departed relations and friends; this occasioned a long conversation with those who had the scalps; at length they came forward to the War Chief; those who had taken the trophy from the head of the enemy they had killed, said the Souls of the enemy that each of us has slain, belong to us, and we have given them to our relations which are in the other world to be their slaves, and we are contented. Those who had scalps taken from the enemy that were found dead under the shields were at a loss what to say, as not one could declare he had actually slain the enemy whose scalp he held, and yet wanted to send their souls to be the slaves of their departed relations. This caused much discussion; and the old chiefs decided it could not be done, and that no one could send the soul of an enemy to be a slave in the other world, except the warrior who actually killed him; the scalps you hold are trophies of the Battle,
but they give you no right to the soul of the enemy from whom it is taken, he alone who kills an enemy has a right to the soul, and to give it to be a slave to whom he pleases.14

Before leaving, Saukamappee and his companions went with a large camp to the borders of the Snake country to hunt the bison; they were also eager to see the horses of which they had heard so much. Toward autumn they heard that one had been killed, so they went to see him. The horse reminded them of a stag that had lost his horns. They were puzzled as to what name to give him; but as he was a slave to man, like their beast of burden, the dog, he was named the Big Dog.

Saukamappee and his two companions, anxious to return to their people, departed from the Piegsans. Upon their return home, they had to tell and retell the story of their adventures. Saukamappee's enjoyment in reciting his adventures was dampened by the news that his wife, having given herself to another man, had gone northward to live. Embittered by this experience, Saukamappee left his people and returned to the Piegsans who welcomed him. The Piegan chief gave Saukamappee his eldest daughter as a wife.15

Guns had inspired such terror among the Snakes that there were no more general battles as described above; warfare then became characterized by ambush and the surprise of small camps. The Piegsans secured guns, arrow shods of iron,

14 Ibid., 332-33.
15 Ibid., 334-35.
long knives, flat bayonets and axes from the traders. To their misfortune the Snake Indians did not have traders with whom they could deal, and the few weapons of this type in their possession were taken from the Piegans. By 1781 the steady Piegan advance through the plains had taken them to the Red Deer River, which joined with the Bow River to form the South Saskatchewan. In this advance the Piegans encountered a suspicious looking Snake village. There were no men hunting or moving about this camp; the horses were unattended, and a herd of bison was feeding close by. This unusual situation caused alarm because it was feared that not far off was a larger camp which waited for an enemy to attack the decoy camp. As had happened once before at the cost of many Piegan lives, this bigger camp would then come to its assistance and overpower the attackers. The Piegans attacked and found a disease-stricken camp. Death was all around and, within a few days, visited the Piegan camp. Thoughts of war did not seem so important when in the grip of disease. The smallpox reduced their population; but it also inflicted heavy losses on the Snakes and caused them to withdraw to the south. The fine Bow River country was left to the Blackfeet. 17

All was quiet for some two or three years after this epidemic. However, Piegan prejudice against the Snakes still

17 Thompson, Narrative, 336-38.
persisted as is evident from these words, "The Snake Indians are a bad people, even their allies the Saleesh and Kootanaes cannot trust them, and do not camp with them, no one believes what they say, and (they) are very treacherous; everyone says they are rightly named Snake People, for their tongue is forked like that of a Rattlesnake." 18

Then an incident occurred which ended this period of quiet. In the fall of 1763 or 1764 five lodges of Piegans were hunting mountain sheep in a mountain valley on a branch of the Bow River, probably in the vicinity of modern Banff. 19 They failed to return in a reasonable length of time, and a group of thirty warriors was sent to see what detained them. After two days' march they found the remains of the camp. Sticks marked with black snake heads pointed to the Snakes as the guilty ones. The women and children were scalped and their bodies partly eaten by wolves and dogs. 20

This news was told and retold over Piegan camp fires. A war council was called. One old chief arose and said:

I am an old man, my hair is white and (I) have seen much: formerly we were healthy and strong and many of us, now we are few to what we were, and the great sickness may come again. We were fond of War, even our Women flattered us to war, and nothing was thought of but scalps, for singing and dancing. Now think of what has happened to us all, by destroying each other and doing the work of the bad spirit; the Great Spirit became angry with our making the ground red with blood; he called to the Bad Spirit to punish and destroy us, but in doing so not to let one spot

18 Ibid., 338.
20 Thompson, Narrative, 338.
of the ground, to be red with blood, and the Bad Spirit did it as we all know.

Now we must revenge the death of our people and make the Snake Indians feel the effects of our guns and other weapons; but the young women must all be saved, and if any has a babe at the breast it must not be taken from her, nor hurt; all the Boys and Lads that have no weapons must not be killed, but brought to our camps, and be adopted amongst us, to be our people, and make us more numerous and stronger than we are. Thus the Great Spirit will see that when we make war we kill only those who are dangerous to us, and make no more ground red with blood than we can help and the Bad Spirit will have no more power on us.21

These words of the old one struck a responsive chord in the hearts and minds of the listeners. Saukamappee remarked that his advice had sometimes been carried out, usually in regard to the women more than the boys. 22

Then the war chief reminded them that the bodies of their friends and relations lay exposed to the elements and that it was the Snakes who had sent their souls to be slaves of Snake relations in the other world. No war had been made for three years, but now that race of liars—the Snakes—had to pay the penalty for making war; the quiet path could no longer be trod. The road to war loomed ahead. The war chief voiced these sentiments:

The country where they now are is but little known to us, and if they did not feel themselves strong they would not have dared to have come so far to destroy our people. We must be courageous and active, but also cautious; and my advice is that three scout parties, each of about ten warriors with a chief at their head, take three different directions,

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21 Ibid., 339.
22 Ibid.
and cautiously view the country, and not go too far for enough of our people, are already devoured by wolves, and our business is revenge, without losing our people. 23

Five days later the scouts returned without having seen an enemy camp or any fresh traces of them. The war chief, Kootanae Appe, was disturbed at this; he felt that some Snakes would have been spotted. He concluded that they had gone southward. 24

The old man whose council is quoted above told Saukamapppee that in the Piegan mind the Snake Indians were no match for Piegan warriors. However, he recognized that they had the power to deliver the sting of death to a small hunting party; and consequently, it was necessary for the Piegans to keep always on their guard. 25 The Snakes had withdrawn southward, and no more battles of importance occurred to the time of Thompson's visit to the Piegans in 1787.

Such was the state of affairs when Thompson arrived at the Piegan camp. In 1787 he accompanied a Piegan party southward about eighty miles beyond the Bow River. On this journey they lived on the bison herds as their stomachs dictated. The main party decided not to proceed any farther south, but a war chief and fifty warriors were sent to scout

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23 Ibid., 340. Italics are mine.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
the country. The principal war chief told the chief in charge of this party to remind his warriors that they were to kill their enemy, not to be killed themselves; he emphasized that they must be cautious and not undertake unnecessary risks. After about twenty-five days they returned with some thirty-five horses and fifteen mules stolen from the Snakes. This expedition must have taken them many miles south of the present international boundary. Several young men who had been on the expedition expressed the belief that the leader of that party had not shown enough daring and courage since no scalps were taken. Youthful blood did not appreciate either the fact that they had remained in hiding most of the time and had undergone hunger since they could not alarm the enemy by firing their weapons. An elderly Indian, the father of one of the youths, replied to this criticism. They were most fortunate to be under such a chief; "it required no great bravery for a War Party to attack a small camp, which they were sure to master; but that it required great courage and conduct to be for several days in the face of a large camp, undiscovered and each.... bring away a horse from the enemy instead of leaving your own scalps." 26

Piegans leadership, wrote Thompson, was invested in a civil and a military chief. The civil chief of 1800 was about sixty years old and was the presiding authority in all

26 Ibid., 342-44.
the councils except of war. His scouts or messengers went from camp to camp to bring important news regarding the bison herds. The war chief was Kootanae Appe, who led the expedition of 1787. His kindly and mild mannered disposition secured the love and respect of his people who often urged him to become more active in civil affairs. However, he was content in taking the leadership in war; his camp was a day's march closer to the Snake Indians than any other camp.

Friendly to the white man, Kootanae Appe reminded his people of the benefits of that friendship. Through them they owned many useful articles and guns for hunting and conquering their enemies. He seldom ventured far without having at least two hundred warriors with him. His policy was to induce as many allies to join him as possible; in this way he would not only have a strong force but also would avoid jealousy among the tribal chiefs, for they would all have a share in the honor and the plunder of the enterprise. He recognized the value of praise to men whose deeds merited it. Honor was important to him; even his son's marriage had to wait until honor was satisfied. While his son waited to be married, an insult from the Snakes caused Kootenae Appe to gather his warriors to chastise the Snakes for their action. His son gained two horses from this expedition and was thus mollified for the delay of his marriage. Through Kootanae Appe's able leadership the Piegans celebrated many successes on the field of battle.27

27Ibid., 347.
The Blackfeet and other tribes pressed the attack on the Snakes and drove them farther south and west. The Gros Ventres of the Missouri were among those tribes who actively fought against the Snakes. The Snake girl, Sacajawea, had fled many times with her people from such attacks which interrupted their buffalo hunts on the plains. One summer when Sacajawea was about ten, between the years 1796 and 1800, food became so scarce that the Snakes were forced to cross the mountains to hunt buffalo. It was better to die with full stomachs than to die from starvation. Establishing their camp along the Jefferson River, Snake hunters went out each day to get buffalo meat and hides. One morning soon after the hunters had gone out to hunt, one of them hurried back, shouting that the enemy was coming. Some Snakes, including Sacajawea’s father, were slain in an attempt to keep the enemy back until the women and children could seek safety. Some women ran for the brush; others started up the trail. Only a few heeded the old men and waited for the horses to arrive.

Sacajawea was playing with several girls a short distance from the camp. Unable to find her mother, she ran from the camp into the timber. Finally reaching the trail, she started to cross a shallow ford of the river. Four riders approached. Thinking they were friends, she stopped to get

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a ride. As they came nearer, she realized that they were enemy riders. She plunged into the river, but a rider seized her and placed her upon his horse. Biting and scratching did no good. Two of her playmates lay dead upon the trail. When they returned to the camp, there were more than a hundred Gros Ventres who guarded the prisoners and the horses, looted the camp, and set fire to the lodges. There were nine prisoners, four boys and five girls. 29

On the way back to enemy country, riders rode in front of and behind the prisoners. Escape was not possible. Red Arrow, the captor of Sacajawea, and a certain Otter Woman informed them that they would be treated as his own children and would help his women in their work. After four or five days their captors were negligent in guarding the captives whose minds were filled with thoughts of escape. In the middle of the night contemplating escape, one of the captive boys awoke the others and proceeded to crawl out of the camp. Sacajawea’s companion, Otter Woman, went back to sleep; and when Sacajawea tried to wake her again, Otter Woman shrieked, "Don't kill me." The Gros Ventres awoke to prevent Sacajawea, Otter Woman, and another girl from escaping. In time they came to the Gros Ventre village of earth-roofed lodges. It was from these people that Toussaint Charbonneau won Sacajawea in a game of chance. Thus inter-tribal warfare made it possible for Lewis and Clark to have

29 Ibid., 71-74.
a guide through unknown country. In the years after her capture, the Blackfeet and the Gros Ventres continued to assail the Snakes.

In the concluding years of the eighteenth century the Blackfeet expanded and consolidated their territory. In so doing they forced the Kutenais, the Flatheads, and with the aid of Crow pressure, the northern Snakes to leave the plains and seek safety west of the mountains. Evidence of the Flathead exodus caused by this pressure was given to W. A. Ferris in his visit to the Flatheads in 1833. One Flathead told of his childhood of the late eighteenth century when his people were continually in fear of the Blackfeet who frequently attacked them while they were hunting bison. The thunder and lightning of Blackfeet guns gave them cause to wonder what they had done to be so punished by the Great Spirit. Flathead arrows could not reach the Blackfeet who stayed at a

30Ibid., 75-104. Schultz wrote that Sacajawea in 1816 told her story to Hugh Monroe, and he in turn told Schultz in the 1870's what Sacajawea had said. A Snake chief, Black Lance, told Monroe in 1816 that Sacajawea's capture had occurred "twenty winters back" which would place the date of her capture in 1796; he gave this additional information: the Gros Ventres had killed four men, four women, seven youths and had captured four boys and five girls. (Ibid., 16-18). Of course, it must be borne in mind that in the course of over fifty years Monroe's memory may have played tricks upon him; his story corresponds with what information was given in the Lewis and Clark Journals except that they place the date of her capture in 1800.

Lewis wrote that Sacajawea had been taken in war by the Minnetarees. In his entry for July 28, 1805, he wrote that Sacajawea had informed them that, on the Jefferson River five years previously, the Minnetarees of Knife River sighted the Snakes who retreated three miles up the Jefferson. They were pursued; the attackers "killed four men, as many women and a number of boys, and made prisoners of four other boys, and all the females, of whom Sacajawea was one." See original journals, II, 282-83.
distance. Occasionally there was hand to hand combat in which the Blackfeet were defeated; but they repaid such losses fourfold. The best of Flathead manhood was falling, without a possibility of reprisal. Eventually, Big Foot, the great chief of the tribe, assembled his men and told them it would be best to leave the plains area:

My heart tells me that the Great Spirit has forsaken us; he has furnished our enemies with his thunder to destroy us, yet something whispers to me, that we may fly to the mountains and avoid a fate which, if we remain here, is inevitable. The lips of our women are white with dread, there are no smiles on the lips of our children. Our joyous sports are no more, glad tales are gone from the evening fires of our lodges. I see no face but is sad, silent and thoughtful; nothing meets my ears but wild lamentations for departed heroes. Arise, let us fly to the mountains, let us seek their deepest recesses where unknown to our destroyers, we may hunt the deer and the bighorn, and bring gladness back to the hearts of our wives and our children! 31

So with the words, "Knock them on the Head!", in their thoughts and on their lips, the Blackfeet came to Montana wielding gun and tomahawk to shatter the opposition and to make themselves lords of the land.

31 Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 90-91.
CHAPTER IV

TO THE BUFFALO PLAINS! INDIAN RIVALRY 1800-1820

The cry, "To the Buffalo Plains!" arose from Indian throats in the years 1800 to 1820 and brought a challenge to Blackfeet lordship of the land. The Flatheads and their allies west of the Rocky Mountains reasserted their ancient rights to the land with some success although the Blackfeet continued to take the lives and the horses of these mountain Indians. This Indian rivalry basically revolved around the right to hunt bison as the observations of Lewis and Clark, David Thompson, Alexander Henry, and Ross Cox testify. The recorded evidence shows that the Gros Ventres, the Snakes, the Crows and the Assiniboins were also combatants during these years. During this time the Montana region was penetrated by explorers and trappers who became fairly well acquainted with the natives except for the Blackfeet with whom they had little contact outside of battle; therefore, very few accounts of Indian rivalry were based on the Blackfeet version of a battle. During the years 1800-20 increased participation by the white man in Indian affairs gained him friends and enemies and aided and hindered him in the business of exploration, trapping, and trading.

David Thompson recalled an incident, revealed to him

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while trading with the Blackfeet in the Canadian area, which showed one link in a chain of raid and reprisal which continued year after year. Not quite certain of the date, he placed the event in the year 1802. During the summer of that year a Blackfeet camp lost about thirty-five horses to a party of Stone or Assiniboin Indians. The Blackfeet pursued the thieves to their camp. After a three-day wait the Blackfeet young men retook most of their stolen horses and collected an equal amount as interest on the temporary loan; they then drove them to their own camp. The Assiniboins made up their loss by stealing horses from the whites at a post on the Saskatchewan.¹ This was but one way intertribal warfare affected the white as well as the Indian.

In the meantime in the first three years of the nineteenth century, forces were at work which resulted in the penetration of the Montana region by the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Thomas Jefferson, who showed great interest in the Northwest, had become President; and the United States had purchased Louisiana territory. Plans were made in 1803 for an expedition to explore the Missouri River and to open a route to the Pacific. Jefferson chose his secretary, Meriwether Lewis, and a frontier man, William Clark, to lead the party; and on May 14, 1804, they started up the Missouri from St. Louis.

Before Lewis and Clark reached present-day Montana,

¹Thompson, Narrative, 368.
they heard about and saw results of intertribal warfare among the Missouri River Indians living outside the Montana area. As they proceeded through the Dakotas, they noted several instances of rivalry among the Indians of this narrative. On October 12, 1804, Lewis wrote that he saw a party of Cheyenne Indians who told him that they were at war with the Crows and showed him three Crow children whom they had captured. The fate of growing up as adopted children in a Cheyenne village was, at least, better than having their brains dashed out; although that fate might still have awaited them. Were the mothers still living? If so, what emotional chaos must have been loosed within their being; and what mischief would they urge on their men to avenge these lost ones? A few lines of a journal miss so much of the story! This practice of capturing women and children was well established among the Indians as a means of increasing tribal numbers, which were lessened by warfare and disease, and in turn motivated the tribe that had lost women and children to increase their numbers by similar raids on enemy camps.

Thirteen days later when the party was not far from the present Washburn, North Dakota, Clark learned from a third party that the Sioux and the Gros Ventres had clashed. The Sioux had successfully taken some Gros Ventre horses, but their triumph had been short-lived because on the way home the spoilers were killed by Assiniboins who took the horses

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"Original Journals, I, 89."
for themselves. Horses circulated rapidly in those days.

On October 29, 1804, the party learned that Gros Ventre raiders were on their way against the Snake Indians of the Rocky Mountain area. Their source for this information was an old chief who, having retired from active leadership in war, allowed his son to shoulder those responsibilities. Young blood was ever eager for such opportunity since it was in this way that youth acquired wealth and tribal approval and satisfied natural cravings for adventure and excitement. No doubt, this young man would not return without living up to his father's expectations.

Through an interpreter, Lewis and Clark learned on November 12, 1804, that the Ravin or Crow Indians were at war with the Sioux and the Snakes; these Crows were supposed to be some four hundred lodges or twelve hundred men strong.

On January sixth of the next year Lewis and Clark undertook the role of peacemakers, as other white men were to do in the future. A great war chief of the Gros Ventres, while visiting Lewis, spoke of his plans for a campaign against the Snake Indians in the spring. Their advice to him was to think of the many tribes that had been weakened and destroyed by war. The chief apparently thought he had displeased the white men and said he would give up this plan,

3 Ibid., I, 205.
5 Ibid., 220.
rationalizing his decision with the reason that he had enough horses.6 One wonders if he ever took the advice of these white men, for what Indian had so many horses that he could not find room for a few more?

Several months passed. Then, on April 7, 1805, Lewis wrote that he had seen fresh Indian tracks, probably made by a party of Assiniboins returning from a raid against the Rocky Mountain Indians.7 This was only an assumption based, no doubt, on some information, picked up along the route, that Assiniboins had been on such an expedition. This was the last entry in their journals involving the Indians of this narrative made before the expedition reached the present day Montana border.

Having thus become acquainted with intertribal warfare, Lewis and Clark were probably not surprised to learn that such warfare existed in the Montana area also. By May 17, 1805, the Lewis and Clark party had reached Central Montana. On that date Lewis wrote that his partner, Clark, had seen a fortified Indian camp which appeared to have been occupied recently. The Indians often built such forts when hard pressed by enemy forces. He conjectured that it had been built by a war party of Gros Ventres who had left their village in March with the express purpose of attacking the Blackfeet. These Gros Ventres had a score to settle with

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6Ibid., I, 249.
7Ibid., 317-18.
the Blackfeet who had killed some of their finest warriors the previous autumn.

The Gros Ventres of the Missouri, called by Lewis and Clark the Minnetarees, roamed the Montana region during the early 1800's and seemed to have been particularly active against the Snake Indians. Lewis wrote about them on May 30, 1805, "The Minnetarees of the Missouri we know extend their excursions on the South Side as high as the Yellowstone River." Frequent reference is made to the Minnetarees or Gros Ventres of the Prairie. One such reference is that of July 26, 1805. Lewis learned, on that date, that the Gros Ventres had first seen the Snakes five years previously. At that time contact with the Gros Ventres had caused the Snakes to retreat about three miles up Jefferson River to the safety of a forested area; but they had been found and attacked by their pursuers who killed four men and four women and a number of boys; all the women taken at that time were made prisoners.

When the expedition was somewhere in the vicinity of present-day Dillon, Montana, Lewis reported, on August 13, 1805, that some Indians he had sighted earlier in the morning had returned. They expected to meet their enemies, the Gros Ventres of the Prairie. Bows, arrows and shields were

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8 Ibid., II, 42.
9 Ibid., 98.
10 Ibid., 282.
their principal weapons. Only three carried guns. These people had good cause for meeting the Gros Ventres because that spring they had attacked and killed twenty of their people and had taken prisoners. Many horses had also been lost and many lodges destroyed.11

Causes of warfare in the Montana of that day were revealed by Lewis' remarks on the Shoshoni or Snake Indians whom he met somewhere near the Montana side of the present Montana-Idaho border. On August 19, 1805, Lewis commented on the Shoshonis who lived in security from their enemies on the west side of the Rockies. Their enemies had not yet found their way to this new retreat. However, the Shoshonis found it necessary to leave that security about the first of September to hunt game on the Missouri. They often joined with other bands in so doing and remained only long enough to secure enough dried meat to sustain them for a time; then they returned to the mountains, for the risks to their lives were great while they remained on the plains. At the time of writing, these people were making preparations for their fall hunt and told the explorers that several bands of Snakes and one Flathead band were going to join them about the Three Forks.12

The next day Lewis again wrote about the Shoshonis. They apparently had had contact with the Spaniards to whom

11 Ibid., II, 343.
12 Ibid., 374.
they were unfriendly because they had refused to give them guns and ammunition. The Spanish excuse had been that armed with guns the Snakes would kill each other, thus enabling their enemies to continue with greater ease the murder of their people and the theft of their horses. Lewis was told that to avoid their ever-active enemy they had to remain in the interior of the mountains at least two thirds of the year which caused them sometimes to live for weeks without meat. Their spokesman, Camlahwait, described as one of "fierce eyes and lank jaws, grown meager for the want of food," told them that if they only had guns,\textsuperscript{13} they could live in the bison country and eat at leisure, as did their enemies.\textsuperscript{14} These remarks reveal that the need for bison meat was a cause of rivalry between Indians east and west of the Rockies and that some Indians were at a disadvantage in that they lacked firearms.

The condition of these Shoshonis was further elaborated upon by Lewis on August 22, 1805. He referred to them as "half starved" and "poor devils"; a good meal of boiled corn and beans was prepared for them which evoked a Shoshoni reply that they wished they could live in a country which provided such food. Lewis told them that it would not be many years before the white man would make it possible for

\textsuperscript{13}They had a few guns reserved for war but bows and arrows were used in hunting (\textit{Ibid.}, III, 30).

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid.}, II, 383.
them to live in the country below the mountains. Lewis did not realize that it would be years before the country east of the mountains could be characterized as a safe common hunting ground.

On August 24, 1805, Lewis noted Shoshoni war customs and rendered a judgment on the possibility of peace among the Indian tribes of the Missouri River area:

It seems that every important event by which they happen to distinguish themselves intitles them to claim another name....those distinguishing acts are the killing and scalping an enemy, the killing of a white bear, leading a party to war who happen to be successful either in destroying their enemies or robbing them of their horses, or individually stealing the horses of an enemy. these are considered acts of equal heroism among them, and that of killing an enemy without scalping him is considered of no importance, in fact the whole honour seems to be founded in the act of scalping....Among the Shoshones, as well as all the Indians of America, bravery is esteemed the primary virtue; nor can anyone become eminent among them who has not at some period of his life given proofs of his possessing this virtue. with them there can be no preferment without some warlike achievement, and so completely interwoven is this principle with the earliest Elements of thought that it will in my opinion prove a serious obstruction to the restoration of a general peace among the nations of the Missouri.

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15 Ibid., III, 14. Eleven years later this promise had not been fulfilled, for in 1816 trapper Hugh Monroe was asked about the fulfillment of this promise by a Snake chief, Black Lance, who said, "Summer after summer we have looked for the white traders that they promised to send to us with plenty of guns for us to buy, but the summers pass and they do not come. Tell me, white youth, do you think that they ever will come?" (Schultz, Bird Woman, 35).

16 A safe common hunting ground was supposedly established by the Blackfeet Treaty Council of 1855, but even this treaty failed to give complete safety to the western Indians who ventured forth on that ground.

17 Original Journals, III, 29.
This last statement was a sound evaluation as future events were to prove.

On the same day that Lewis made this last entry in his journal, Francois Larocque, who had moved into the Yellowstone country of Southeastern Montana, reported in his journal that the Indian camp where he was staying was alarmed by news that three Indians had been seen on a nearby mountain and that two shots had been heard from the direction of the Big Horn River. Thirty horsemen set out to see what was happening while the rest of the camp readied itself for any eventuality. After a few hours a warrior returned with the report that thirty-five persons had been seen advancing on foot toward the shore of a branch of the Big Horn River. Most of the Indians dashed to the pursuit, leaving only a few old men and some women in camp. Larocque accompanied them. Serving as weapon carriers, many wives went along with their husbands. Before the battle began they were to give the weapons to their men. After a pep talk to his men, the chief gave the signal for action. Larocque described the events that followed:

The region is very mountainous and furrowed with large streams of waters whose banks are bordered with rock, which permitted those who were pursued to shelter themselves in the places where it was impossible to penetrate with the exception of two of the most advanced, who sent as spies, had drawn nearer to us than the others without perceiving us. After a long pursuit they were surrounded, then killed and scalped. ... When I arrived near to the body, I ascertained that the scalp and the fingers on the right hand had been taken off and that those who had done the trick had left. They borrowed my hunting knife to cut off the left hand and returned it to me all covered with
blood. Men, women, and children crowded to see the cadavers and taste of the blood. Each desired to poignard the corpse to show what he would have done if he had met them living and to pour out then on these remains insult and outrage in a horrible language. In a little while it became difficult to recognize in this debris the form of a human body. All the young men had attached a piece of flesh to their gun or on their spears, then they retook, while singing, the route to the camp and showed their trophies with pride to all the young persons they met. 

The Lewis and Clark Expedition by August 25, 1805, had passed through Lemhi pass and had camped just over the present Idaho border. Near the upper part of Shoshoni Cave, Lewis stated that the Shoshonis had been severely defeated by the Gros Ventres about six years previously. 

Six days later, on August thirty-first, Clark observed that signal fires were gathering the Shoshoni bands and a Flathead band to go on their winter hunt. 

By September 10, 1805, the expedition was back in Montana near the present Missoula. Lewis admired the many fine horses owned by the Flatheads. Each man owned from twenty to one hundred head. What a temptation for Blackfeet braves!

Lewis and Clark were not the only ones of the expedition to record their adventures in the wilderness. One of their men, Sergeant Patrick Gass, kept a journal and, on

19 Original Journals, III, 38.
20 Ibid., 49.
21 Ibid., 60.
September 10, 1805, wrote that three Flatheads had come to camp; they were in pursuit of two Snake Indians who had stolen some of their horses. Gass met more Flatheads on September twenty-sixth and wrote this comment about them:

This band of Flatheads...have a large stock of horses. Their buffalo robes and other skins they chiefly procure on the Missouri, when they go over to hunt, as there are no buffalo in this part of the country and very little other game. The most of the men of this band are at present on a war expedition against some nation to the northwest, that has killed some of their people.

The expedition had by October 10, 1805, crossed the present Washington-Idaho boundary. On that day Clark wrote about the Nez Perce Indians. Their amusements were limited because so much time was spent in getting food. They fished for salmon in the summer and fall; in the winter they hunted deer on snow shoes in the plains, and in spring they crossed the mountains to the Missouri to get buffalo robes and meat. In so doing they frequently met with their enemies and lost their horses and many of their people.

Many months elapsed before any further record was made of Indian rivalry pertinent to this narrative. Then, on May 11, 1806, not far from present Kamiah, Idaho, on Lawyer's Creek, Gass stated that he saw many more Cho-no-nish (Nez Perce) warriors and chiefs than when he had gone through

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22 Patrick Gass, Gass's Journal of the Lewis and Clark Expedition (Chicago, 1904), 140.
23 Ibid., 150.
24 Lewis and Clark, Original Journals, III, 105-06.
that area the previous year; they had been out to war at that time and had now returned. 25

The following day Lewis learned from one Indian that the advantages of peace were fully recognized; in fact, the Nez Perces had sent a three-man peace mission early the summer before to the Shoshonis. However, that tribe had not wished to hear words of peace, for they murdered the members of the delegation. Consequently, that fall came an expedition of reprisal in which forty-two Shoshonis were killed, with only a loss of three Nez Perces. Thus satisfied, the Nez Perces were supposedly now at peace with the Shoshonis; and they would also like to be at peace with the Blackfeet and the Gros Ventres of the Prairie so they could venture onto the plains in safety. 26

On May 13, 1806, the Lewis and Clark party moved four miles down the Clearwater and, on the fourteenth, travelled a short distance to the site of a Nez Perce camp where they remained for a month. On May fifteenth Gass noticed one of the natives wearing around his neck an Indian scalp and six thumbs and four fingers of Snake Indians he had killed in battle. Gass learned that the Nez Perces and the Snakes had been long at war and had killed a great many of each other in past years. He described the favorite weapon of Indians

25 Journal, 229.
26 Lewis and Clark, Original Journals, V, 24.
west of the Missouri: "A club with a large head of wood or stone; those of stone are generally covered with leather and fastened to the end of the club with thongs or straps of leather and sinew of animals." Clark, on the same day, mentioned that one of their great chiefs had been killed the previous year by the Gros Ventres. On June 4, 1806, the Nez Perces asked Clark to bring about peace with the Blackfeet and the Gros Ventres.

On July 17, 1806, near the Yellowstone River some miles past present-day Big Timber, Clark investigated an Indian fort, which apparently had been built the summer before. This fort, one of many built by plains Indians when pursued by a larger war party, was circular in form and about fifty feet in diameter. It was built of logs lapped closely together and covered with pieces of bark. The next day Clark remarked that at that time the Shoshonis and the Crows were friendly to each other.

Lewis found himself, on July 26, 1806, west of the present city of Cutbank and northeast of Browning, Montana. Having seen thirty horses in the distance, he expected that many Indians would soon approach; however, only eight Indians appeared. They were Gros Ventres, a part of a large band

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28 Original Journals, V, 36.
29 Ibid., 106.
30 Ibid., 270.
31 Ibid., 273.
which was near the main branch of the Marias, one and one
half days' march away. He also learned that it was a six-
day march to their trading post on the Saskatchewan where
they traded skins for arms and ammunition. Lewis informed
them that he had found most Indians at war with their neigh-
bors and that he wanted them to make peace with those Indi-
ans west of the Rockies. They readily agreed to do this,
more for the sake of getting on Lewis' good side than any-
thing else; they said many of their relations had been killed
lately so that peace appealed to them.\(^{32}\)

Stopping, on August 14, 1806, at a Gros Ventre vil-
lage on the Missouri between present-day Elbowoods and Stan-
ton, North Dakota, Clark found the chief crying for the loss
of his son who had been killed by the Blackfeet; however, the
next evening Charbonneau told Clark that the chief's son and
one other had been killed in a fight with the Snakes.\(^{33}\)

Thus ended the observations of Lewis and Clark re-
garding intertribal rivalry in the Montana region. They had
seen captive children on their way to a new life among an
alien tribe, crude forts built by Indians for protection
against superior forces, and Indians suffering from hunger
due to their fear of hostile tribes which roamed the buffalo
plains. They had learned that the need of bison forced moun-
tain tribes to go on the buffalo grounds claimed by fierce

\(^{32}\)Ibid., V, 221-22.

\(^{33}\)Ibid., 338, 342.
warriors who killed such transgressors wherever they could find them. They returned eastward with the knowledge that the Snakes had been particularly harassed and that they needed guns and ammunition to bolster self-confidence which had reached a new low. Penetrating the wilderness world of Montana and adjacent regions, Lewis and Clark learned of horse stealing among the tribes and heard of encounters in which warriors of the Sioux, Gros Ventre, Snake and Nez Perce tribes had been slain. Their contribution to the knowledge of intertribal warfare, although not so definite as that of some later observers, was indeed considerable.

David Thompson, a man of keen mind and acute observation in the employment of the Northwest Company, on April 20, 1806, began a journey down the Kootenai River through the extreme northwestern part of Montana and through Idaho. On May sixth he came around Kootenai Falls in present-day Montana, and on May eighth he came to a camp of Kutenai and Flatbow Indians near Bonners Ferry, Idaho. These ten lodges of Indians were living on fish and told Thompson that they had to live in this way due to hostility between them and the Piegan.

Piegan warriors had pursued some of Thompson's men who had been sent to the Kutenais to encourage them to trap beaver; they, in turn, were pursued by the Kutenais. An encounter followed in which one Piegan was slain and another injured with a broken arm. The Kutenais lost an elderly chief who was shot through the thigh. The loss of one man and the disabling of another did not deter the Piegan from further reprisal.
Hiding themselves nearby, they waited for a favorable opportunity to strike. When it came, they took thirty-five horses and left the area. 34

Sometime in the year 1808 John Colter, who had orders to establish close trading relations between the Indians and Fort Manuel on the Big Horn, met a large band of Flatheads whom he led close to the three forks of the Missouri; there a Blackfeet war party assailed them. During the battle Colter received a leg wound and had to fire from a small thicket while sitting on the ground. At first the Blackfeet were faced by only five hundred Flatheads; but the noise, shouts, and firing brought the Crows to the aid of the Flatheads. A desperate contest ensued, but finally the smaller

34 David Thompson, David Thompson's Journals Relating to Montana and Adjacent Regions 1808-1812, ed. Catherine White (Missoula, 1950), 27-28. In his Narrative Thompson's account of this incident gives the additional information that forty-seven Piegans were involved. The Narrative varies in that the Kutenai chief was killed at the time and place of the horse theft instead of in an earlier encounter. In this case where there is a chance to compare versions, the journal version is more acceptable since it was written at the time of the event while the Narrative was written many years later and based on notebooks which were probably sketchier than the journal account. See Narrative, 388-89.

In using the term, Piegan, in his journal Thompson may have had in mind exclusively the Piegan tribe of the Blackfeet nation, but it is more probable that he used the term loosely to include all the Blackfeet tribes. However, one exception to this may be found in the paragraphs on the Piegan-Flathead peace discussions of 1812. In writing about these discussions, Thompson gave a clearer indication that the Piegan tribe exclusively was involved, without the support of other Blackfeet tribes, in proposing peace with the Flatheads.
Plathead-Crow forces emerged victorious; however, the orderly withdrawal of the Blackfeet could hardly have been considered a defeat.\textsuperscript{35}

Engagements such as this one in which white men participated on the side of one group of Indians were significant in that by giving aid and comfort to one side they gained the enmity of the opposing Indians for themselves and other whites to come. John Colter's fighting side by side with Blackfeet enemies was an important factor in stimulating natural Blackfeet dislike of the non-Hudson's Bay trapper and trader.\textsuperscript{36} During this period Blackfeet opposition became so strong that American fur trading operations were carried on in the Crow country where the white man received a friendlier reception.

In September, 1809, Thompson began construction of a post on Lake Pend Oreille in Idaho, which came to be called Kullyspell House. Of the eighty warriors, including fifty-four Salish, found there, only four Kutenai Indians had guns; the rest had only a few crude lances and flint-headed arrows. Thompson wrote about the happy Indian reaction to his arrival on September eleventh, their need and desire for guns, and their capable use of guns when once acquired:

\textsuperscript{35}James, \textit{Three Years}, 52-53. In 1810, having seen an Indian battlefield where many skulls and bones were scattered about, James asked John Colter if he knew what had happened. This was the substance of Colter's story.

\textsuperscript{36}Stallo Vinton, \textit{John Colter Discoverer of Yellowstone Park} (New York, 1926), 34.
Good bowmen as they are, these arrow heads broke against the Shield of tough Bison hide, or even against thick leather could do no harm; their only aim was the face; these they were now to exchange for Guns, Ammunition and Iron headed arrows, and thus be on an equality with their enemies, for they were fully their equals in courage. All those who could procure Guns soon became good shots, which the Piegan Indians, their enemies in the next battle severely felt; for they are not good shots, 37 except a few, they are accustomed to fire at the Bison on horseback, within a few feet of the animals, it gives them no practice at long shots at small marks. On the contrary, the Indians on the west side of the mountains are accustomed to fire at the small antelope at a distance of one hundred and twenty yards, which is a great advantage in battle, where everyone marks out his man. 38

While camping with eight lodges of Kutenais near Horse Plains, 39 on February 24, 1810, Thompson learned of the death of one white man and one Indian and of the wounding of several Indians in a battle with the Piegans while hunting. The Kutenais felt that the party had been unwise in going on the war grounds with such a small number to hunt the bison and trap for beaver, 40 for they and other tribes had experienced disasters in the past due to their venturing on the plains with insufficient forces. The smaller number of

37 This personal opinion should not be accepted as the complete truth. Their constant involvement in war gave the Blackfeet sufficient practice to produce sharpshooters. The reason given to support his contention that the Blackfeet were poor shots has some validity, but the Indian method of fighting was, no doubt, responsible for much of what Thompson described as the poor shooting ability of the Blackfeet.
38 Journals, 411.
39 Horse Plains received its name because it was a favorite grazing ground for horses. The area was at one time known as Wild Horse Plains; then it was called Horse Plains. In more recent times it was called Plains.
40 Thompson, Narrative, 419.
the individual western tribes caused them to combine their forces before proceeding to the hunting grounds. Thus they could check most Blackfeet attempts to drive them away from the land of buffalo; but those who dared to venture out in small parties, such as this one, frequently met with disaster.

On February 25, 1810, a Piegan attack was directed against the Salish, several of whom were wounded. On the tenth of the next month news was spread in the Salish camp that Piegans had been sighted to the north of Flathead Lake and tracks had also been found southeast of the camp. A Salish youth was sent to warn the Kutenais to the east. Later, about noon, Jaco Finlay, who had just arrived, reported that he had seen a suspicious looking band. So one hundred men, proud of their guns and iron headed arrows, rode out to investigate. They soon returned, having discovered that the "suspicious band" was only the Kutenais who had finished bison hunting and were returning to their own territory. The whole incident, however, gave pleasure to Thompson and the old men of the tribe because the warriors had gone out to seek the enemy with eagerness; whereas, before their thoughts and efforts had been to get away from their enemies. During the winter Thompson traded the Salish over twenty guns and several hundred iron arrowheads, which were put to good use that summer.

41 Thompson, Journals, 90.
42 Thompson, Narrative, 420.
43 Ibid., 424.
In the spring Thomas James proceeded with a party of whites from Fort Manuel on the Bighorn toward the Forks. On the second day they came to a sacked Indian lodge near which lay a Snake woman and a boy with their heads split open, evidently by a tomahawk. The woman's husband had fled with his younger wife and had joined the party. Gros Ventre raiders had done the deed. 44

Gros Ventre mourners had a custom which seemed unusual to James but which was common to many plains tribes; this custom James described as follows:

A singular custom prevails among them in cutting off a finger or inflicting a severe wound in remembrance of any severe misfortune. Few of the men thirty years of age, were without the marks of these wounds, made on the death of some near relation, or on occasion of a defeat of the nation in war: Some I saw with three and one with four fingers cut off. I saw a young man bewailing the death of his father in a battle with the Blackfeet. He had compelled his friends to draw leather cords through the flesh under his arms and on his back, and attaching three Buffalo skulls, weighing at least twenty-five pounds, to the ends of the cords, he dragged them over the ground after him through the village, moaning and lamenting in great distress. 45

In the spring of 1810 James saw one hundred fifty Gros Ventres, "the whales of the wilderness", headed for Snake country; later he learned that many Snakes had been killed and many taken prisoner. 46 Shortly after seeing these raiders, the James party found a large camp of Crows near the mouth of Clark's River. These Crows were then at war with

44 James, Three Years, 47.
45 Ibid., 90.
46 Ibid., 84.
the Blackfeet and had sought them to give battle. Having re-
mained with the whites for a few days, they proceeded south-
ward. A day later a force of one hundred Crows, who had
been on an expedition against the Blackfeet and who belonged
to the group that had left the day before, approached the
white camp; after learning that their comrades were only a
day's journey away, they set out to join them. 47

With the coming of summer (1810) one hundred fifty
Salish warriors formed a hunting party which included three
white men—Finan McDonald, Michel Bourdeaux, and Baptiste
Buche. They crossed the mountains by a wide defile east of
Flathead Lake, which in the past had been watched by the
Piegans to prevent the Salish from hunting bison. Now with
renewed courage, inspired by their guns and iron-headed
arrows, the Flatheads were determined to hunt boldly and to
wage battle with the Piegans. Just as they entered the hunt-
ing grounds Flathead scouts reported the presence of an enemy.
A battle between one hundred fifty Salish and one hundred
seventy Piegans was soon to begin:

Instantly down went the Tents, and tent poles,
which with the Baggage, formed a rude rampart; this
was barely done, when a steady charge of cavalry came
on them, but the Horses did not break through the
ramparts, part of pointed poles, each partly discharged
their arrows, which only wounded a few, none fell; a
second, and third charge was made; but in a weak manner;
the battle was now to be of infantry. The Saleesh,
about one hundred and fifty men, took possession of a
slightly rising ground about half a mile in front of
their tents, the Piegans about one hundred and seventy

47 Ibid., 85.
men drew up and formed a rude line about four hundred yards from them. The Saleesh and the white men lay quiet on the defensive; the Peeagans, from time to time throughout the day, sent parties of about forty men forward, to dare them to battle; these would often approach to within sixty to eighty yards, insulting them as old women, and dancing in a frantic manner, now springing from the ground as high as they could, then close to the ground, now to the right, and to the left;...Buche, who was a good shot, said they were harder to hit than a goose on the wing.

When these were tired they returned, and a fresh party came forward in like manner, and thus throughout the day, the three men had several shots discharged at them, but their violent gestures prevented a steady aim in return; the three men were all good shots, and as I have noticed the Indians allow no neutrals, they had to fight in their own defence. Mr. Finan McDonald fired forty five shots, killed two men and wounded one, the other two men each fired forty three balls, and each wounded one man; such were their wild activity, they were an uncertain mark to fire at; the evening ended the battle; on the part of the Peeagans, seven killed and thirteen wounded, on the part of the Saleesh, five killed and nine wounded; each party took care of their dead and wounded; no scalps were taken, which the Peeagans accounted a disgrace to them; the Saleesh set no pride on taking scalps.48

Thus the Piegans suffered a defeat at the hands of the Salish.

They judged this a severe defeat because it was the first time they had been beaten by the Salish and because they had a high casualty rate compared to former battles in which the enemy lacked guns and ammunition. This defeat could only have been due to the white man who crossed the mountains with

48 Thompson, Narrative, 424-25. Italics are mine. This description illustrates, among other things, these characteristics of intertribal warfare: Indian ability to improvise at crucial moments by making a fortification out of camp equipment; use of insults in an attempt to anger the enemy and cause him to be less cautious; the difficulty of shooting Indians due to their continual movements which, in turn, often prevented a steady aim on their part; and the participation of white men on one side, which, of course, increased the enmity of the attackers against all white men.
the Flatheads and to the arms which they furnished. Piegan vengeance would make the white man regret his audacity.

Alexander Henry, an employee of the Northwest Company, also wrote an account of the "first severe check the Piegans ever received from the nations on the waters of the Columbia"; it occurred in the summer of 1810 and may have been the same battle of which Thompson wrote. According to Henry's account, the Piegans suddenly met the Flatheads and others marching to the bison plain; so unexpected had been the meeting that they could not have avoided battle if they had wanted to. Courageously fighting nearly all day, the Piegans finally used up all their ammunition and even had to throw stones at the Salish. A hand to hand encounter was fought for a short time; but eventually the Piegans were forced to retreat, leaving sixteen dead warriors. The battle, of course, angered the Piegans and increased their hostility to the whites; but it did not discourage them from similar forays.49

49Alexander Henry, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson 1799-1814. New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, ed. Elliott Coues (New York, 1897), II, 723. Details vary in the two accounts of the summer battle of 1810. The Thompson account states that it had been the Salish who were suddenly attacked, having barely time enough to erect a rampart while Henry called it an unavoidable meeting—"so sudden and unexpected". Perhaps, Henry's use of the words, "could not avoid going to battle", did not convey the real situation. Thompson implies that the Piegans, if they so desired, could have avoided the conflict, although it was not Piegan nature to do such a thing. They vary in the number reported wounded or killed. Thompson wrote that seven Piegans were killed and thirteen wounded while Henry stated that sixteen Piegans were slain. In any case, the disagreements are not too great. Both agree
On June 8, 1811, Thompson saw a small camp of Pend d'Oreille Indians who were discussing the best methods to fight their enemies. Some of them had white earth on their heads, which was a first step in forming a war party. Each morning and evening they pretended to cry for a short time while naming loved ones who had fallen in battle. If the tribe wanted war, the war clique increased until it was strong enough to make the chief call a council. The council was usually composed of steady fellows over twenty-five years old; the core of conversation was of those who had been slain, especially women and children, and the method to enter and enlarge the hunting grounds. If war were decided upon, several men of good oratorial ability were sent to their allies to secure aid. These ambassadors emphasized past injuries inflicted by the enemy and the sweetness of revenge. If the friendly tribe did not wish to go to war as a tribe, the elders allowed as many warriors as wished to go to the assistance of the war tribe. After determining the available

that it was a sudden attack; both claim that it was the first severe Piegan defeat at the hands of the western Indians and was due to the arming of these Indians; both agree that a number of Piegans were slain.

If these are accounts of the same battle, Thompson had the advantage of being closer to the source of information in that three of his comrades fought in the battle while Henry did not have such close contact with the event. Henry had the advantage of writing his account at the time; thus he was less apt to forget details, although the persons who gave him the information may have garbled the story. Thompson wrote his account some thirty years later, and where detail was left out of his notes, he had to fill them in by memory which is not the most accurate source.

Of course, it is possible that Thompson and Henry told of two different battles which would account for variation in detail.
warriors and weapons, the council might decide that there were only enough for a horse-stealing expedition.

One very old Indian told Thompson of his days as a young man when he made a heavy war club which bolstered his confidence in victory. A large war party had gone out against the Piegan who met them for the first time with two guns. Flight to the mountains followed; and even there, Blackfeet war parties harassed them, killed men, women, and children and took away horses and mules, for they had no defense until the white men crossed the mountains and brought firearms. The old man remarked that now it was no longer necessary to hide themselves and much of their country could be regained to "hunt the bison for food and clothing and have good leather tents".  

On November 4, 1811, Thompson learned, through two companions, that the Piegan had killed two Kutenai and had then made peace with that tribe. His Narrative gives additional and slightly different information. According to that account, Thompson learned that a Piegan war party, on its way to intercept the white men, discovered a tent of Kutenai Indians; disregarding the peace between them, they put all to death. Later they met three Iroquois Indians whom they stripped and robbed of all they had. Both accounts agree on the death of the Kutenai at Piegan hands.

50 Thompson, Narrative, 462-63.
51 Thompson, Journals, 178.
52 Thompson, Narrative, 544.
Whether or not an existing peace was broken or one newly established, peace would not have lasted long under prevailing conditions.

Referring to his arrival at Salesh House in November, 1811, Thompson described a battlefield nearby. A spur of hills bordered the river in the form of a cliff about sixty feet high, beyond which to the southeast the country opened out into a broad area of meadow—the scene of many a battle. The Salish Indians, with their allies, always made for this rock when hard pressed; scattered about were the bones of their enemies who had been slain at different times in an attempt to force the Flatheads out of the shelter. 53

Sometime in the latter part of January, 1812, the Piegans showed considerable interest in peace negotiations with the Flatheads. For several years they had watched with apprehension the acquisition of arms and ammunition and the increased boldness in hunting the bison by the tribes west of the mountains. These Piegans had borne the brunt of war since they were closest to the western tribes; they were anxious to bring about a settlement, for awhile at least. They asked the Flatheads to send a delegation of five old men to talk about peace. The request was granted, and the Flathead delegation was well treated at the conference. The delegates held a private council and then replied that peace was always welcome if it could be enforced. Since the

53 Ibid., 542.
question of peace or war was of such importance, they alone
could not render a decision but would have to consult their
allies who were not represented. The Piegans replied that
their allies had done them more harm than had the Salish,
for on a pretence of raiding the Flatheads they often stole
Piegan horses. One moon was set as the deadline for an
answer to their proposal. The delegation asked about the
wounded and missing, especially the women and children. They
lectured the Piegans on the shamefulness of killing women and
children; and stated that if war should continue, Flathead
policy would demand only the taking of women and children as
prisoners, not their destruction. 54

In a short time the Salish allies sent some of their
most respected men to talk over the Piegan peace proposal;
however, only two Nez Perces came because they could not spare
many men who were needed to hunt on dangerous ground. All
were urged to speak frankly, which they did; many seemed
doubtful of the possibility of a lasting peace. One old
Spokane Indian threw aside his robe, showed his scarred
breast and said in a bitter tone:

So our enemies have proposed peace, how often have
they done so, and whenever we trusted to their mouths,
we separated into small parties for hunting the Bison,
and in this situation they were sure to attack us, and
destroy the Women and children. Who is there among us
that has not cut off his hair several times, and
mourned over our relations and friends, their (flesh)
devoured, and their bones gnawed, by Wolves and Dogs.

54 Ibid., 546-47.
A state of peace has always been a time of anxiety; we were willing to trust and sure to be deceived; who is there among us that believes them. 

Then waving his hand toward the older men, he continued, "We were foremost in the battle; but now we can only defend the Tents with the Women and children. Do as you please, I now sleep all night, but if you make peace I shall sleep in the day, and watch all night." 

These sentiments expressed the feelings of several old men. After some conversation the Salish chief made a long speech which he concluded by saying:

You all know we are the frontier tribe, the enemies must break through or elude us, before they can attack you, it is our Horses they steal, and our men that are slain in battle far more than any other people; as a proof of the truth of what I say, we have now twenty tents of Women who have no husbands, with their children, whose fathers are in the land of Spirits, and as many tents of aged Women whose sons have fallen in battle; the different speakers have all noticed the arrival of the white men among us for these three years bringing us Gun, Ammunition and shods of iron for the heads of our arrows. Before their arrival we were pitiful and could not defend ourselves, we are as well armed as our enemies, and our last battle has obliged them to give up to us great part of our lands for hunting the Bison. Now we do not fear to war with them, but it is a hard life to be constantly watching, and the lives of our Women and Children liable to be destroyed; to prevent this harassed state of life I am very willing to make peace, but who are we to make peace with. It is the Peleagans only to offer us peace, none of their allies were with them, and peace with the Peleagans will not prevent their allies from making war with

55Ibid., 548.

56Ibid. The old man here declares for a continuation of war. Note that as the years proceed there is a change in the attitude of the old men toward peace and war.
us. We wished for Peace, but we do not see how we can obtain it. 57

Having voiced his sentiments, the chief asked the white men present to tell them what the chances for peace were. Thompson replied that war was the cause of the ground being red which, in Salish belief, the Great Spirit disliked; however, over Salish enemies the Piegans had no control and could not prevent their making war. Making peace would not insure security from the other tribes since they had not offered to make peace. His advice was not to make peace with only one tribe, "Let your answer be that you claim by ancient rights the freedom of hunting the Bison, that you will not make War upon any of them but shall always be ready to defend yourselves." 58

To this advice, the younger men remarked that if peace were made, Piegan women and children would be safe and the Piegan men could go to war with whom they pleased. The Flatheads were now as well equipped for war as were the Piegans; no longer would they have to yield to them and be called cowards! The Flatheads must show themselves on Piegan land, as the Piegans had been seen on Salish land. Impressed by these words, the chief spoke:

There can be no hopes of peace. It has been truly said, our enemies have often been seen on our lands and have left their marks in blood, we are not now as we were then, and those that are for war, shall have a fair field to show themselves in, for in the

57 Ibid., 548-49.
58 Ibid., 549-50.
summer at the time the Bull Bisons become fat, we shall then not only hunt upon the lands we claim, but extend our hunting on the lands of the Peeagans, which will be sure to bring on a battle between us; and you may all prepare yourselves for that time and our answer to the Peeagans shall be 'that as we are now, such we will remain.' 59

Thus, on February 29, 1812, the Piegan peace feelers were rejected. The Salish allies were notified that they must prepare for war. Peace was but an idle dream.

The months slipped by; then came August when the bull bison were fat. The Nez Perces could not send many men since they had their hands full fighting the Snakes; already they had about forty tents of widows and aged women, and so were more cautious at this time. Nevertheless, a strong party was formed and included two white men—Michel Bourdeau and Michel Kinville. As was predicted, encroachment on Piegan land brought on a battle, which Thompson described as follows:

the Saleesh and their allies had chosen their ground, on a grassy ridge with sloping ground behind it. Horses were not brought into action, but only used to watch each others motions; the ground chosen gave the Saleesh a clear view of their enemies, and concealed their own numbers. The action was on the green plains; no Woods were near; the Peeagans and their allies cautiously advanced to the attack, their object being to ascertain the strength of their enemies before they ventured a general attack, for this purpose they made slight attacks on one part of the line, holding the rest in check, but no more force was employed against them than necessary, thus most of the day passed. At length in the afternoon, a determination was taken to make a bold attack and try their numbers. Every preparation being made, they formed a single line of about three feet from each

59 Ibid., 550.
other, and advanced....to bring their whole force into line, but they did not quit their vantage ground; they also sung and danced their wild war dance; the Peeagans advanced to within about one hundred and fifty yards, the song and the dance ceased, the wild war yell was given, and the rush forward; it was gallantly met, several were slain on each side, and three times as many wounded, and with difficulty the Peeagans carried off their dead and wounded and they accounted themselves defeated....The combatant(s) were about three hundred and fifty on each side, the loss in killed and wounded made them withdraw to where they could hunt in safety.®

Ross Cox, sent to the Flathead country to help build a Pacific Fur Company post on Clark Fork River to compete with the Northwest Company's Salesh House, also wrote of warfare between the Salish and the Piegan in the summer of 1812. This incident described by Cox may have taken place after the battle on the ridge, but in some details it is quite similar to a Salish-Piegan clash in the summer of 1810. Cox learned of this contest from several Indians. On the buffalo plains the Flatheads and the Blackfeet met; in time the latter were forced to take cover in a thick cluster of trees from where they kept up a steady fire which killed and wounded several Flatheads. Each Flathead warrior appeared opposite the center of Blackfeet fire, fired a random shot into the trees and then galloped away. Courageous and reckless Finan McDonald showed them what he considered to be a better method. He rode opposite the center of fire, dismounted, and aimed at the head of a fellow who had just popped from behind a tree. The Blackfoot brave fell, with a

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®Ibid., 551-52.
bullet in the mouth. After shooting once more, McDonald retreated. Despite this example, the Flatheads still adhered to their old practice of sallying out, firing some chance shots and then dashing back to shelter. 61 Here again a white man's participation on the Flathead side promoted Blackfeet hostility to white Americans.

The Snake Indians had not developed the recently acquired confidence of the Salish. They still feared to venture on the buffalo plains, but necessity demanded that they do so from time to time. In October, 1812, a party of Snakes found a fur trader's cache 62 which so equipped them and encouraged them that they decided to hunt on the bison prairies. Three white Canadian voyageurs went with them. After safely crossing the Rockies, they descended to the headwaters of the Missouri, where they killed many bison. Their camp was full of meat; they gorged themselves and dried great quantities of meat for winter use. In the middle of this rejoicing and hard work the Blackfeet attacked. Several Snakes died on the spot while the rest fled to the mountains, leaving horses and buffalo meat behind. They made their way back to the Snake

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61 Cox, Adventures, I, 355-56.

62 A cache was a hidden spot, usually a hole in the ground concealed from the eye by sod, grass and brush, where Indians and fur trappers placed provisions and equipment which they intended to use at a future date (Irving, Astoria. The Complete Works of Washington Irving, Astoria, Captain Bonneville (New York, n.d.), 210.
River, poorer than ever but feeling glad to be alive.  

Robert Stuart and his companions, approaching a branch of the Green River, on October 18, 1812, met about one hundred thirty Snake Indians who were in very poor condition; the Crows in a recent raid had taken their horses, several of their squaws, and most of their belongings. The Crows were camped on Wind or Sweetwater River but in such large forces that the Snakes dared not venture forth to avenge their losses. Robert Stuart told them that the time would come when white men would take vengeance on the Crows and Blackfeet; hearing this, the Snakes offered to help, joyful at the thought of taking the field with such powerful allies and anticipating their turn at stealing horses and abducting squaws.

Stuart encountered a war party of twenty-three Arapahos on December 10, 1812; their village, several days to the east, had been attacked during their absence by Crows who had carried off several of their women and most of their horses. These Arapaho warriors were out for vengeance. For sixteen days they had been tracking the Crows. They were armed with bows and arrows, tomahawks, scalping knives and a few guns.

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63 Ibid., 319-20. This incident is based on information secured from the expedition of John Reed who was sent to visit caches made by W. P. Hunt at the Caldron Linn.


65 Stuart, Narrative, 192; Irving, Astoria, 305-06.
Ross Cox during his winter of 1813-14 at Salesh House had a further opportunity to study the Flatheads; he was then in the employee of the Northwest Company. About December 24, 1813, he wrote of a large band of Flathead warriors who camped about the post after returning from the buffalo country where they had avenged their defeat of the previous year. They had taken several Blackfoot warriors, with their women, as prisoners. The torturing of one of their prisoners has been described in chapter two. Cox and his comrades put pressure on the Flatheads to give up such cruelties or they would not trade with them or give them guns needed to repel enemy attacks. He talked to the Flathead chief about civilized methods of war in which prisoners were exchanged and urged him to free captives of the last campaign. The chief replied thus:

My white friends, you do not know the savage nature of the Blackfeet; they hope to exterminate our tribe; they are a great deal more numerous than we are; and were it not for our bravery, their object would have been long ago achieved. We shall now, according to your wishes, send back the prisoners; but remember, I tell you, that they will laugh at the interference of your relations beyond the mountains, and never spare a man, woman, or child, that they can take of our nation.67

In considering the cause of war and its effect upon Flathead population, Cox observed that:

The Flatheads were formerly much more numerous than they were at this period; but owing to the constant hostilities between them and the Blackfeet

66 Cox, Adventures, I, 231, 235.
67 Ibid., 244-45.
Indian#, their number had been greatly diminished. While pride, policy, ambition, self-preservation, or the love of aggrandizement, often deluges the civilized world with Christian blood, the only cause assigned by the natives of whom I write, for their perpetual warfare, is their love of buffalo. There are extensive plains to the eastward of the mountains frequented in the summer and autumnal months by numerous herds of buffaloes. Hither the rival tribes repair to hunt those animals, that they may procure as much of their meat as will supply them until the succeeding season. In these excursions they often meet, and the most sanguinary conflicts follows. Cox further described Blackfeet-Flathead relations, emphasizing the Blackfeet attitude toward intruders on the buffalo plains and the Flathead defense of their ancient heritage to the land:

The Blackfeet lay claim to all that part of the country immediately at the foot of the mountains, which is most frequented by the buffalo; and allege that the Flat-heads by resorting thither to hunt, are intruders whom they are bound to oppose on all occasions. The latter, on the contrary, assert that their fore-fathers had always claimed and exercised the right of hunting on these "debatable lands;" and that while one of their warriors remained alive the right should not be relinquished. The consequences of these continual wars are dreadful, particularly to the Flatheads, who, being the weaker in numbers, were generally the greater sufferers.

The effect of arms and ammunition on Blackfeet-Flathead relations, mentioned earlier by Thompson, was also a part of the conclusions drawn by Cox while visiting the Flatheads:

Independently of their inferiority in this respect, their enemy had another great advantage in the use of fire-arms, which they obtained from the Company's trading posts established in the department of


Forts des Prairies. To these the Flatheads had nothing to oppose but arrows and their own undaunted bravery. Every year previous to our crossing the mountains, witnessed the gradual diminution of their numbers; and total annihilation would shortly have been the consequence, but for our arrival... They were overjoyed at having an opportunity of purchasing arms and ammunition, and quickly stocked themselves with a sufficient quantity of both.

From this moment affairs took a decided change in their favor; and in their subsequent contests the numbers of killed, wounded and prisoners were more equal. The Black-feet became enraged at this, and declared to our people at Forts des Prairies, that all white men who might happen to fall into their hands, to the westward of the mountains, would be treated by them as enemies, in consequence of their furnishing the Flat-heads with weapons, which were used with such deadly effect against their nation.... The lands of the Flat-heads are well stocked with deer, mountain sheep, bears, wild fowl, and fish; and when we endeavoured to induce them to give up such dangerous expeditions, and confine themselves to the produce of their own country, they replied that their fathers had always hunted on the buffalo grounds; that they were accustomed to do the same thing from their infancy; and they would not now abandon a practice which had existed for several generations among their people.  

Cox learned that the Flathead chieftainship was hereditary; but because of intertribal warfare the Flatheads followed a custom of electing annually as leader in battle the warrior noted for greatest wisdom, strength and bravery. It sometimes happened that the leader in one campaign became a follower in another. This war chief had no authority in the home camp and was subordinate to the hereditary chief; but when on a hunting excursion, he ruled with complete authority. This chief carried a long whip with a thick handle decorated with scalps and feathers. He always took the lead

70 Ibid., I, 238-39.
in the advance toward enemy land and followed in the rear on the return trip. Cox learned through McDonald, a first-hand observer, that those who violated discipline and order on the march were whipped. The war chief at the time of writing had been re-elected five times. He was around thirty-five and had suspended from a pole, at the door of his lodge, the scalps of twenty Blackfeet, slain by him in various battles. He was at that time seeking solace in the woods, for his wife had been captured the year before. Here in the solitude of the woods, said some of the tribe, he called on her spirit to appear; he was often heard to utter oaths of vengeance. When these periods of grief were over, his face still showed a mixture of the emotions of sorrow and hatred. 

On April 4, 1814, Cox left the Flatheads. In 1816 he described the Kutenai Indians. Previous to his arrival they seemed to have had hatred for the white man whom they blamed for arming their enemies, the Blackfeet. They seemed aware that beaver was the article that brought white men into their country, so they worked hard to secure beaver pelts in order to secure fire arms and meet their enemy on more equal terms. Their love of buffalo also caused them to go to the plains from which they returned fewer in number.

Hugh Monroe and some Piegan, in the winter of 1816-17 on a trapping expedition, camped at Deep Creek in the Sun

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71 Ibid., I, 241-43.
72 Ibid., II, 153-54.
River Valley, where they encountered a number of Snake Indians. Their chief, Black Lance, begged them to help his hungry people. He asked for aid in making peace with the Blackfeet and in securing Blackfeet permission to kill buffalo on the Blackfeet plains. Monroe and his Piegan friends arranged for a peace with the Piegan tribe. It was agreed that the Snakes should camp beside the Piegans and kill all the game they needed, but they were not allowed to trap fur animals. Later, the Snake chief, in reply to Monroe's statement that there were guns available at Hudson's Bay Company trading posts, said:

The Blackfeet tribes will never permit us to do that! If they now allow us to camp out here until green grass time and kill a few of their buffalo, it will be more than we ever expected of them. Summer will soon come again, and back we must go across the mountains, there in hunger to hide from the war parties of Blackfeet, Earth House people, Assiniboines, Crees who come to kill us and take our horses.....We Snakes are a poor and most unhappy people!

During this same winter of 1816-17 the Crow camp slowly moved down the Clark's Fork. The scouts sighted thirty Assiniboins, on foot, crossing the ice; they had been on a horse-stealing expedition against the Crows. One Crow charged but retreated quickly when the Assiniboins fired at him. He was soon joined by a large force of Crow warriors who proceeded to wipe out the Assiniboin party. In due time their home camp concluded that their warriors had met with disaster; so they resolved to prepare a retaliatory expedition

73 Schultz, Bird Woman, 12-13 and 36.
in the spring of 1817. Hundreds of Assiniboins would wipe
the Crows from the face of the earth. The squaws dried meat
and made moccasins, the warriors prepared their weapons, the
chief harangued, and the medicine man predicted success.

Nearly a thousand warriors set out on foot. When
they arrived near the Crow country, scouts were sent out.
They reported a wide lodge trail, recently made, leading
across the Big Horn from the Clark's Fork. With high hopes
the chief looked for an omen of success; by placing a stone
on the ground before him and carving it with his knife, he
learned that the Great Spirit would grant victory. The Crow
village of one thousand lodges was on the Little Horn River.
There were nearly three thousand warriors in the village at
the time the Assiniboins approached; few war parties as yet
had departed. The Assiniboins' approach was discovered by
Crow hunters who warned the village. Hundreds of warriors
went forth to battle. The Assiniboins found themselves en­
gaged in a battle of survival and sought the safety of timber
and thickets of the Little Big Horn, where they were soon
surrounded. Desperate Assiniboin resistance could not check

74It was customary for war parties to go on foot,
especially if their main purpose was to steal horses. During
the day it enabled them to hide more easily from enemy scouts.
They needed several changes of footwear on such excursions
and preparations for a war party were indicated when one
said, "I had moccasins made for myself." However, it would
seem that on a mission of revenge and of such magnitude as
this that horses would be needed to strike swiftly and to
flee safely in case of an emergency. Smaller parties expect­
ed to come back on stolen horses; but such a large party
might find it difficult to secure enough horses to make a
speedy return trip.
Crow courage and superior numbers. After several hours of fighting the Crows were masters of the battlefield; only a remnant of the Assiniboins escaped. How large a remnant was not told. These few hid in the thickets and escaped under cover of darkness. Two prisoners were shot after they had told that the purpose of the expedition had been destruction of the Crows. 75 This was a severe loss to the Assiniboins. Even challenging the statement that one thousand Assiniboins were involved and substituting one half or one third that number, the losses suffered, if only a "remnant" had escaped, must have jolted the Assiniboin tribe. If that tribe had lost only one hundred warriors, the economic and psychological effect on the tribe would have been profound. In losing that many men or possibly more, the tribe not only lost hunters and warriors who provided tribal economic needs and protected the women and children but it also placed on the remainder of the tribe the burden of supporting the families of those warriors who had been slain. Psychologically it created respect for Crow power in open war; of course, small horse-stealing parties continued to be sent to the Crow country.

In any summary of intertribal rivalry during the years 1800 to 1820, foremost attention should be given to the development of a new attitude on the part of the Flatheads in their relations with the Blackfeet. Feeling that

75 Bradley, "Bradley Manuscript--Book F," M. H. S. Contributions, VIII, 236-238.
the bison lands had once belonged to them and that they should have a right to hunt with safety on them and having the firearms to substantiate their claims, they challenged Blackfeet lordship of the land. There occurred a remarkable change from a state of submissiveness and a feeling of inferiority to a state of boldness and a feeling of self-confidence. So great was the challenge that the Piegsans—the Blackfeet tribe in closest contact with the Salish—made serious peace proposals only to have them rejected. This challenge was met by renewed Blackfeet efforts; and although there existed more equality between Blackfeet and Salish than before, the superior numbers of Blackfeet caused the Flatheads many anxious moments. The Blackfeet still pressed the attack not only on the bison range but also into the Flathead territory west of the mountains.

This twenty-year period was one in which many horses changed hands and in which losses became greater and battles bloodier than before owing to the distribution of firearms among the western as well as the plains Indians. The recorded evidence of the period shows at least one specific example of rivalry for one cause or another among these combatants: Assiniboine vs. Blackfeet, Assiniboine vs. Sioux, Assiniboine vs. Gros Ventres, Assiniboine vs. Crows, Cheyenne vs. Crows, Crow vs. Blackfeet, Crow vs. Snake, Snake vs. Blackfeet, Snake vs. Gros Ventres, Snake vs. Flathead, Snake vs. Nez Perce, Salish vs. Piegan, Piegan vs. Kutenai, Blackfeet vs. Pend d'Oreille, and Sioux vs. Gros Ventres. Many of these
clashes revolved around the search for bison and the necessary equipment—guns and horses—for a successful hunt. Examples of this were the Piegan-Kutenai clash on February 24, 1810, the Salish-Piegan conflict in the summer of 1810, the Blackfeet surprise of the Snakes on the bison range in October, 1812, and the Salish-Piegan struggle of August, 1812.

In such cases as the stealing of thirty-five Kutenai horses by the Piegans in May, 1808, and the taking of more than thirty-five Assiniboins by the Blackfeet in one raid of 1802, a return theft on the part of the injured party evened the score; but such deeds as the capturing of Crow children by Cheyenne warriors, the splitting of a Snake woman and boy's skull by Gros Ventre raiders, and the murder of a Nez Perce peace delegation by Snake Indians only added fuel to an already explosive situation. The strong Indian sense of justice demanded that for each life taken one should be given in return. Since the Indian organization was highly tribal, there was no need to discover the guilty individual. A tribe had caused the loss of life and retaliation upon the tribe would balance the scale. The Assiniboins expedition in the spring of 1817 against the Crows was plainly one of reprisal for loss of warriors the previous year.

This intertribal warfare laid a groundwork of hostility to the fur traders and others which the white man had difficulty in overcoming. In gaining the friendship of the Salish and other mountain Indians, the whites gained the enmity of the Blackfeet, for they considered as unfriendly
the furnishing of their enemies with weapons which challenged
their power. They also considered unfriendly the white man's
participation in actual battle on the side of their enemies.
Such acts as Finan McDonald's shooting a Blackfeet warrior
through the mouth were not conducive to peaceful white-
Blackfeet relations. John Colter's accidental participation
on the side of Blackfeet foes—the Crows and Flatheads—was
an important factor responsible for Blackfeet hostility to
American trappers and traders.

Such hostility played a part in the direction taken
by the fur trade. The Missouri Fur Company worked in the
Yellowstone Valley among the Crows because the Blackfeet were
consistent in showing hostility to Americans for a number of
years. This was due to natural dislike of any invader, to
experiences with Colter and others who fought on the side of
an enemy, to the furnishing of arms to their enemies, and,
perhaps, to the influence of Canadian fur men. Blackfeet
ferocity prevented trapping near the Three Forks; and when a
trading expedition in the spring of 1823 was returning from
the Bannocks and the Salish, it was ambushed by four hundred
Blackfeet on Pryor's Fork of the Yellowstone—a disaster
which virtually ended the activities of the Missouri Fur
Company in Montana. Blackfeet hostility blocked plans of
William Ashley to establish a post on the Missouri; not until
the coming of Kenneth McKenzie—a former leader in the British
trade who was friendly with the Blackfeet—was a fort estab-
lished on the Missouri in the heart of Blackfeet territory.
Although they may have been hostile because of their dislike of anyone invading their territory and because of the influence of Canadian competitors, many of the motives for Blackfeet hostility to white men would not have existed if there had been no intertribal warfare.

Intertribal warfare fostered the fur trade in that white traders were able to get many rich fur products from the Indians who gladly traded for guns needed in warfare. Cox substantiates this when, referring to the Flatheads, he said, "The great object of every Indian was to obtain a gun. Now a good gun could not be had under twenty beaver skins; a few short ones we gave for fifteen." This need for guns gave the white man great bargaining power over the Indian; if the Indians did not follow a proposed course of action, the suggestion might be made that the whites would trade elsewhere.

Another detrimental effect of intertribal warfare upon the white man was that the Indian often replaced horses stolen by other Indians by taking the white man's horses. Thus, due to intertribal warfare the white as well as the Indian had to be alert to all the pitfalls and dangers that surrounded them in their wilderness world, where the law of tooth and claw and survival of the fittest and the most cunning governed man's actions, his fate and destiny.

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76 *Adventures*, I, 199.
PART III

THEY LEFT THEIR MARKS IN BLOOD: WARFARE 1820-50

A period of intense rivalry, of victory and defeat, with moments of exultation, grief and remorse, the three decades, 1820-50, were a time when the Indian tribes left upon each other their marks in blood. For the years 1820-40 the fur traders were the main contributors to the investigator's knowledge of intertribal conflict; for the last ten years of the period the accounts of Catholic missionaries were the principal sources of information. During these years the Crows resisted many enemies, but their most frequent clashes were with the Blackfeet. The Blackfeet were most active in harassing the western Indians, especially the Flatheads, who fought back most courageously. Active enemies of the Blackfeet were the Assiniboins whom their great chief, Tchatka or Gaucher, led from victory to victory to final defeat. The Sioux too from time to time engaged in hostilities with the Montana Indians. These decades saw scenes of violence enacted by rival tribes around the trading forts. Disease took its toll, even more than warfare, at intervals during these years. Before the half way mark of the period was reached there occurred the battle of Pierre's Hole—the most publicized although not the most important battle be-

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tween the Indians in the history of the fur trade.

Numerous individuals stood out as victims of Indian rivalry or as active participants in the encouragement and the execution of intertribal warfare. Wide were the spaces to roam, to hunt and to pursue the enemy; no white settlements existed on lands between one group of Indians and their tribal enemies to make it difficult to carry on warfare. Thus attempts at peace during this time were rare; and if peace were made, it was easily broken. Wielding tomahawk and gun, bow and arrow and scalping knife, the tribal warriors dotted the great bison range and lurked in the surrounding areas, watching for and pursuing all opportunities to bolster personal prestige and tribal honor and to put the sleep of death in the eyes of their enemies.
CHAPTER V

TERROR OVER THE LAND

Centering around the maintenance of hunting rights and the punishment of horse stealers and scalp takers, rivalry among the tribes of Eastern Montana in the years 1820 to 1850 raged in all its ferocity. In carrying out these objectives, Indian warriors became destroyers of human life and spread terror over the land. Crow leaders and followers traveled the war path against the Blackfeet, the Sioux, the Cheyenne, and others who stole and killed and hunted without permission in the Crow country.

Crow action was necessitated in the summer of 1820 when a party of Arickaras entered Crow territory to hunt bison without permission. Since the bison herds had failed to come to their regular haunts in Arickara territory, this party, acting upon the belief that the buffalo belonged to all Indians but realizing the risks involved in traversing enemy territory, traveled southward into the Crow country where they sighted many bands of buffalo. The hunters and their women established hunting headquarters along a valley stream. After three successful days of hunting, a party set out on the fourth day to kill more buffalo, which they did a short distance from the camp. The Crows could not let such
audacity go unpunished, for to permit such a thing would only encourage further violations of the Crow hunting ground. Death to the interlopers was the cry of a Crow war party which sighted the Arickaras.

Hard at work skinning the game and preparing it for the return journey, the Arickara women were suddenly diverted from their task by the warning cries of their men; they looked up and saw many warriors riding swiftly toward them. Fearful and terrifying were the thoughts and feelings that surged through their minds and hearts when enemy war cries knifed through the air to bring to them the realization that death or captivity was imminent. The Arickaras mounted their horses and fled toward the camp. Is-sap-ah-ki, an Arickara girl who had accompanied her husband on the hunt, described the ensuing events thus:

I whipped my horse as hard as I could....; My husband rode close beside me also whipping him, but the poor thing could go only so fast, the enemy was getting nearer....and then suddenly, my husband gave a little cry of pain, threw up his hands, and tumbled off on to the ground. When I saw that I stopped my horse, got down, and ran to him and lifted his head and shoulders into my lap. He was dying; blood was running from his mouth in a stream.

Most of the Arickaras were slain in the pursuit, and Is-sap-ah-ki was taken captive by a Crow chief.  

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1 James W. Schultz, My Life as an Indian (New York, 1906), 67-69. Is-sap-ah-ki, called Crow woman by the Blackfeet, told Schultz this story when he lived with the Blackfeet in the 1870's.

2 Schultz, Bird Woman, 3-4.
In the years that followed, she traveled with the Crows, apparently adapting herself to her new status but still hoping some day to return to her people. It probably did not take Is-sap-ah-ki long to learn of the bitter enmity existing between the Crows and their rivals, the Blackfeet and the Gros Ventres of the Prairie. In the lodges and around the camp fires she most likely heard of the hated enemy, and in time she was, no doubt, able to tell stories of her own participation in the never-ending struggle. Five summers after her capture, the Crows moved to the upper part of the Musselshell River. From there a party of fifteen men, Is-sap-ah-ki, and another woman recently married to a noted warrior, went on foot and by night to raid the herds of any Blackfeet camp they could find. Entering the Sun River Valley, they sighted many lodges of the Blood tribe. Just below the mouth of Sun River, the men left the two women at the edge of a choke cherry thicket while they entered the Blood camp. Each man was to cut loose as many horses as he could handle, and all were to meet at the thicket as soon as possible. However, their entrance into the camp was discovered by Blood braves who pounced upon the intruders and killed four of them; the others fled. The two women were later captured by a Blood war party; and its leader, Lone Otter, made Is-sap-ah-ki his third wife.\footnote{Schultz, My Life, 71-77. Subject to such vicissitudes as separation from one’s own people, frequent adjustments to new husbands, emotional and economic distress due to loss of loved ones in battle, and hard work in the Indian camp the life of the Indian woman was none too enviable.}
Raid and reprisal on the part of the Crows resulted in intensive Blackfeet operations against them. By 1831, Crow morale was at a low ebb. The flower of Crow youth had been picked off in various battles. In August of that year a Crow war party tried to restore that morale by ambushing a party of Gros Ventres near the head of the Yellowstone River. Eager to strike a blow against the Blackfeet or their allies, these assailants captured the Gros Ventre horses, took many women and children prisoners, and killed most of the men. A few escaped; and, after suffering great hardships, these few Gros Ventres reached their friends the Blackfeet.  

Despite this victory, Crow morale was not materially restored. Grieved over the Blackfeet devastation of his tribe, the Crow chief, Arapoish, determined to reestablish Crow prestige and morale by striking a great blow against these enemies. In June, 1832, the two tribes met in mortal combat. Arapoish urged his warriors to risk all in one fierce charge and then led the way into the Blackfeet center, where he soon became separated from his men. Blackfeet braves closed in upon him and sent him to the land of spirits, but it was too late to stop the determined Crows who routed the Blackfeet. Although saddened by the death of their chief, the Crows emerged from the battle with renewed confidence and looked forward to future battles in which they could avenge this great man's death.  

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4 Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 202-03.

5 Irving, Donner Party, 437-38.
Later in the month, came an opportunity to avenge past injuries when Blackfeet were sighted near the Crow camp. The Crows pursued the Blackfeet and overtook them in the middle of a plain where, having the advantage of numbers and of fighting on horseback, they slew most of these hated rivals. The survivors hid in a willow thicket from which they fought off the Crows. Not wishing to sacrifice many men to kill these survivors, the Crows, toward evening, left the area; the Blackfeet then made their escape.6

In August of the same year the Crows dealt another blow to the Gros Ventres. Desiring to right past wrongs and to vent their anger over a recent defeat at the hands of Indians and whites at Pierre's Hole,7 a Gros Ventre expedition moved into the Wind River country to raid the Crows. Always on the lookout for raiders and interlopers, the Crows prepared an ambush in which forty Gros Ventres were slain.8 Discouraged by the recent defeats, the Gros Ventres headed for home territory, probably thinking to themselves that the day would come when many Crow scalps would be taken for this humiliation. Yet this day seemed to be far off, for the Gros Ventres continued to suffer from Crow attacks. While at Fort Union, in July, 1833, Maximilian learned that the Gros Ventres of the Prairie had lately ransomed about thirty of

---6 Ibid., 488-89.---

---7 For Battle of Pierre's Hole see chapter six of this thesis.---

---8 Ibid., 100,111-12.---
their warriors who were Crow prisoners and that in their clashes with the Crows the Gros Ventres had lost so many men as to upset the balance between the sexes. At this time some well-informed persons told Maximilian that there were from four to six hundred Gros Ventre warriors to carry on the struggle.  

Crow war parties continued to venture into enemy country to steal and kill and to harass intruders in the Crow country. In April, 1834, one such party neared the Fort McKenzie area about the time a group of three Blood warriors and a squaw stopped at the fort on their way to the Crow country to steal horses. However, these Bloods abandoned their project, owing to the persuasion of Alexander Culbertson, and prepared to return to their people. Waiting until the Bloods journeyed some distance from the fort, the thirty mounted Crows assailed their enemies, killed two of the warriors, and wounded the third. Despite his condition, the surviving Blood warrior knocked one Crow from his horse, mounted it, and dashed toward the fort. With the squaw as their captive, the Crows headed south. Eluding her captors somewhere along the trail, the Blood squaw for five arduous days made her way back to the fort where she warned the whites of an impending Crow attack. Forced by tribal opinion, Rotten Belly led the besiegers, who were eventually frightened off by the firing of a canon. According to the Crows,

they had meant to destroy the fort which supplied their Blackfeet enemies with arms and had not intended to harm the white occupants of the fort. After the Crow humiliation at Fort McKenzie, Rotten Belly called for an expedition against the Blackfeet to make up for loss of prestige. Near the highland northwest of Fort Benton, this war party of one hundred Crows met eleven or twelve Gros Ventres whom they destroyed, but in the battle Rotten Belly was slain. Much Blackfeet and Gros Ventre blood would be spilled to atone for the death of Rotten Belly.

About six months after this encounter, the Blackfeet suffered another setback at the hands of the Crow tribe. On November 20, 1834, a Crow hunting party, bent on showing Zenas Leonard and other beaver trappers their skill in hunting buffalo, sighted a Blackfeet war party moving along the base of some hills. Abandoning all thoughts of the buffalo hunt, the Crows dashed forward to overtake the unmounted Blackfeet who, aware of their approach, climbed up among the rocks. In an encounter which took the lives of three Crows and one Blackfeet, the Blackfeet were forced to withdraw to a natural fort of rock wall shaped like a horseshoe. A

10 Bradley, "Affairs at Fort Benton," M. H. S. Contributions, III, 212-16. Hazard Stevens (I. I. Stevens, I, 369) recorded a version of this incident. On reaching the rocks and seeing the Gros Ventres, Rotten Belly was reported to have said, "Here I will die to day; you have brought me to this." Then he rushed upon his enemies; after killing two of them, he received his death wound. Before he died, he advised his people to be friendly to the white man as the only means to escape destruction.
ledge of rocks three to four feet high was on either side, and a ten foot ridge gave protection at the rear of the horse-shoe. A breastwork of logs, brush, and stones, built by the besieged, provided frontal protection. While the Blackfeet strengthened their position, the Crows sent for reinforcements.

Taunt after taunt came from the Blackfeet fort as to the invincibility of Blackfeet arms and as to the squaw-like nature of the Crow besiegers. With the arrival of reinforcements the Crows carried out various strategic moves to penetrate the fort. First, a line of two or three hundred Crows charged the fort, only to be driven back by Blackfeet fire. With the failure of these tactics, Crow warriors were sent to the top of the hill, and one after another rode swiftly down hill past the breastwork, firing as they passed. Each warrior threw himself to the opposite side of his horse, hung there with only one arm and leg exposed to the fort, and shot under his horse's neck. However, this method proved unsatisfactory since it caused the death of too many horses and men. There were by this time ten Crows lying on the hillside. For the time being the Crow chiefs halted the attack and held a

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11 In many skirmishes the Indians of both sides paused at intervals to rest and to plan new strategy. While they were doing this, some Indians used this time to yell insults at each other. The pause in battle gave them an opportunity to boast of deeds done or to be carried out in the future against that particular enemy. The expression of one's feelings in this manner not only was psychologically satisfying but also served a strategic purpose. One side hoped to so anger the enemy as to cause him to abandon caution and resort to rash deeds which exposed him to enemy fire.
council of war, which finally decided to charge into the fort. War whoops again filled the air. Despite their supposed determination to destroy the enemy, the Crows were forced back with severe losses each time they attacked. Signs of despair appeared among Crow ranks, and many were ready to leave the hillside and call it a day.

Edward Rose, seeing that Crow spirits had to be restored, gave a fiery oration which shamed the Crows for their inaction. With blistering words he branded the Crows as loudmouthed boasters and cowards who acted like squaws and impressed upon them that if they failed to measure up to Crow standards of bravery they would bring dishonor upon the tribe and would be looked upon with contempt by all tribes and by all white men. Having delivered this slashing attack on Crow consciences, Rose leaped from the rock on which he had been standing and ran toward the fort. Deeply moved by his words and inspired by his example, the Crows followed. Within the acre of ground enclosed by the fort there occurred a terrific struggle in which loss of life was heavy. Realizing there was no escape, the Blackfeet finally left their fort in an orderly manner, using their knives to cut a path through Crow ranks. If one of their number received a dangerous

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Edward Rose joined the Crow tribe, frequently participated in their battles, and attained such distinction as to be made a Crow chief. He left the Crows in 1823 because of a disagreement but returned later. His presence among the Crows gave them confidence and promoted Crow-white friendship. Bradley gives an interesting account of the man in M. H. S. Contributions, VIII, 156-61.
wound, he dropped to the ground as if dead; and if his
strength were not too exhausted, he might rise to his feet
to plunge his knife into a passing enemy. Despite heroic
and desperate resistance, it was not long before the Black-
feet line disintegrated.

When the last of these sixty-nine Blackfeet had
fallen, the Crow warriors rejoiced while the Crow squaws
mourned over the thirty Crows who had died in the struggle.
Tormenting their wounded enemies before killing them, the
victors cut off the ears, noses, hands and feet of some and
plucked out the eyes of others. Some bodies they cut open,
and others they pierced with sharp sticks. As a means of
mental torture they brought into the presence of the dying
the dead bodies of their comrades and proceeded to tear out
their hearts, livers, and brains which they threw into the
faces of the living. After these tortures were finished,
Blackfeet heads were hoisted upon poles and, after being
carried about for some time, were dashed against trees and
rocks.

Upon their return to the village everyone danced and
sang in celebration of the victory and in honor of the dead.
When the corpses, wrapped in buffalo robes, were laid to
rest, the musicians, followed by the mourners, marched through
the camp. Female mourners pricked the front part of their
heads from one ear to the other by making incisions half an
inch apart, and the male mourners went through a similar pro-
cedure on their legs and arms. After doing this each female
that had lost a near relative or a particular friend gathered along a log and cut off a finger at the first joint. This was done by the males also, except that the two first fingers on the right hand were saved for bending the bow.\footnote{Leonard, Narrative, 273-76.}

By November twenty-second the Crows were ready to resume their buffalo hunt, and after eight days of successful hunting they had many buffalo robes to trade to one Captain Walker. While camped at the junction of the Bighorn and Wind Rivers, the Crows discovered, during the evening, a party of about fifty Blackfeet among their horses, killed one of the marauders, and forced the rest to flee before they could take any horses. In the pursuit that followed, the Blackfeet were aided by darkness and escaped. Exultation was in order, for the Blackfeet Indian was an important chief and had been killed without shedding a drop of Crow blood.\footnote{Leonard, Leonard's Narrative Adventures of Zenas Leonard Fur Trader and Trapper 1831-1836 (Cleveland, 1904), 261-62.}

Deep-rooted among the Indians was the idea that no man's life should be lost if by any possibility it could be avoided. Since the tribe wished to keep its small population intact as much as possible, even a few losses lessened a victory and called for mourning and ceremony. The Indians could truly rejoice when an enemy was slain with no losses to themselves. See Dodge, Our Wild Indians, 437-38; Irving, Bonneville, 438-39, 294; Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 87-90.

When all had returned to camp and every one had carefully examined the chief, they hanged him from a tree, shot at him, and pierced him with sharp sticks. When this work was finished, they began dancing and singing.\footnote{Dodge, Our Wild Indians, 437-38; Irving, Bonneville, 438-39, 294; Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 87-90.}
With such animosity dwelling within Crow breasts the possibility of peace between the Crows and the Blackfeet seemed remote, yet from time to time the Crows entered into peace negotiations with the Piegan tribe of the Blackfeet nation. These negotiations were promoted by the chiefs and elders who from experience saw the advantages of peace, but their young warriors rarely shared their chiefs' views on this matter. Living in a society which demanded warlike deeds to prove manhood and to attain tribal approval, these young men found it difficult if not impossible to keep the peace.

In the summer of 1836, the Crows and the Piegans made such a treaty. They exchanged squaws and for several months continued on the most friendly terms. While this state of affairs existed, five Crows set out to visit the Piegan village on the headwaters of the Missouri. When near the village, they met two Piegan hunters whom they killed and scalped. Past prejudice and enmity had made it impossible for them to refrain from violence. Concealing the scalps upon their persons, they boldly entered the village where they were well received. The prolonged absence of the two Piegan hunters resulted in a search which revealed the Crows as the murderers. For their indiscretion the Crows forfeited their lives, and hostilities between the two tribes were resumed.  

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16 Bradley, "Affairs at Fort Benton," M. M. S. Contributions, III, 219. Bradley may have the wrong date for this event since De Smet told of a similar event which happened in 1843 and Robert Vaughn wrote of the breakdown of a Crow-
In the fall of 1838, forty Crow warriors were massacred by their Blackfeet foes; and two years later, around a blood-stained pile of stones below the mouth of the Clark's Fork, memorial services were held for them. When the services were concluded, the memorial party departed, no doubt, strengthened in their resolve to redouble their efforts against the Blackfeet.

In August, 1842, the Crow village, at which De Smet was visiting, received news that two of their most renowned warriors had been slain by the Blackfeet. The relatives of the two men broke the silence with mournful cries and implored the warriors to avenge the death of their loved ones. To aid these men in the pursuit of the murderers, the relatives gave up the deceased's horses. A Crow chief mounted one of the horses, brandished his tomahawk, and proclaimed he was ready to avenge the dead. Several young men rallied about him, and the pursuit began. In time the warriors returned with enemy scalps, which they presented to the widows. Then passing from a state of grief to one of exultation, the mourners washed their bodies, smeared themselves with paint, and with the scalps on a pole marched around the camp. They were soon joined by the whole village.

Piegan peace negotiations which occurred in the early 1850's. It may be that all are varied accounts of the same event; however, I prefer to regard them as three different although similar attempts to negotiate peace.

17 De Smet, Letters, I, 237.
18 Ibid., 398-99.
Despite the fact that in the past intertribal warfare had been characterized by unsuccessful attempts to make peace, the Crow chief, in 1843, harbored hopes of establishing friendly relations with the Blackfeet. To decide the best means to approach the Blackfeet he called a tribal council which decided to send twenty-five braves to contact the Blackfeet and to present the Crow peace offer. A former Blackfeet who had been captured years before was appointed leader of the delegation and was given his liberty and many presents as an inducement to promote the peace negotiations. Among the delegates were two brothers who had volunteered in order to find an opportunity to avenge the slaying of their two brothers by the Blackfeet.

When a few days' journey from the Great Falls area, the Crows separated into groups of two or three to scout the country. Constituting one of these scouting parties, the two brothers spotted two Blackfeet who were returning from the hunt, approached them, and declared that the Crows had come on a mission of peace. Having allayed Blackfeet suspicions, the two Crows journeyed with them and proved to be fine traveling companions until they passed through a ravine at which time the two Crows killed the Blackfeet hunters, placed the two scalps in their bullet bags, and set out to rejoin the rest of their delegation. 19

Cordially received by the Blackfeet chiefs who seemed

19De Smet, Western Missions, 159-61.
to be in favor of such a peace, the Crows were feasted and
given fine lodges in which to sleep. Accustomed to filching
the effects of visitors, one of the Blackfeet women slipped
into these lodges to steal Crow valuables. While searching,
she found a fresh scalp which she took to the chief. He
recognized it as that of a young hunter who had failed to re-
turn and decided to confront the Crows with the evidence.
At daybreak the Crows arose and were surprised to see their
lodges surrounded by four or five hundred warriors. Spotted
Deer, the Blackfeet chief, called the Crows to council where
he told them that he had discovered evidence which contra-
dicted their words of peace. Displaying the scalp, he asked
who claimed the trophy. Since the amazed Crows remained
silent, the woman who had stolen the scalp was called in to
point out the guilty warrior. The young Crow stood up and
exclaimed:

I fear not. It is I who took the scalp! If I
endeavored to conceal it, I did so with the desire of
doing more evil! Thou askest whose hair is this.
Look at the hairy fringe of thy shirt and thy leggins.
In my turn, I ask whose hair is that? Belongs it not
to my two brothers, slain by thee or thine, hardly two
moons ago? or belongs it not to the relation of some
Crow here present? 'Tis vengeance brings me here! My
brother holds in his shot-bag the companion of this
scalp. We determined, before leaving the camp, to
cast into they face these bloody tufts.

The chief replied that custom and honor forbade his
people to slay them on the ground where the peace pipe had
been smoked. However, the Crows were to leave the camp; and

20 Ibid., 161-64.
21 Ibid., 164-65.
when they came to a nearby hill, the Blackfeet would pursue them. The Crows departed; and as the Blackfeet riders drew near, the Crows took refuge in a ravine where, in resisting the first onslaught, they killed eighty Blackfeet warriors. Then the Blackfeet dismounted, surrounded the ravine, and finally rushed in to massacre the Crows whose corpses the Blackfeet women cut into small pieces and whose scalps they mounted on poles. With this done, the victors returned to camp. 22

The Crows avenged these losses in succeeding years, especially in 1845, which was a year of disasters for the Blackfeet. De Smet described one of these disasters thus:

The Crows have struck them a mortal blow, fifty families, the entire band of Little Hobe, were lately massacred and 160 women and children have been led into captivity....In the first excitement numbers of the captives were sacrificed by the Crow squaws to the manes of their husbands, brothers, fathers or children. The survivors were condemned to slavery. 23

However, when scarlet fever appeared in the victorious Crow camp, the Blackfeet were able to take vengeance in an unusual way. Thinking they were attacked by smallpox, the Crows questioned their Blackfeet captives on the best means of escaping death by smallpox. Motivated by revenge, the Blackfeet captives advised the Crows to take cold baths in order to stop the disease. The sick then plunged into the cold water which caused many to die, and cries of despair took the place of the victorious shouts which had previously

22 Ibid., 165-66.
23 De Smet, Letters, II, 524.
been heard throughout the camp. Death had visited the tents of the victorious Crows to reap vengeance for the vanquished Blackfeet. 24

Hostilities continued with Crow, Blackfeet, and Gros Ventre tribesmen pouncing upon and mauling each other. Some raiding parties were successful and carried out with little or no loss of life, such as that which returned to the Blood camp on September 21, 1846, after having successfully penetrated Crow territory and taken twenty-seven Crow horses. 25 However, many raiding parties penetrated enemy country only to find themselves trapped; they were sometimes fortunate enough to escape, but frequently they were destroyed. For instance, in the Bear Paw Mountains sometime in 1846, the Gros Ventres cornered their old enemies, the Crows, who occupied an impregnable position from which they shot down all who came within twenty paces. In the ensuing struggle the Gros Ventres were able to kill only one Crow and were eventually frustrated in their desire to starve them out by the darkness of night which enabled the Crows to slip away. 26

The Crows were not always that fortunate. In March, 1849, forty Crows found a Gros Ventre camp on the Teton River and prepared to steal some horses; but before they could carry out their plans, the Gros Ventres discovered them and gave pursuit. Finding themselves hard pressed, the Crows

\begin{align*}
24 \text{Ibid., II, 525.} \\
25 \text{Ibid., 595.} \\
26 \text{Hazard Stevens, I. I. Stevens, I, 361.}
\end{align*}
used their knives and tomahawks to entrench themselves on the bluffs south of the Marias River at its junction with the Missouri. Refraining from an immediate charge, the Gros Ventres fired until the Crows, in reply, had exhausted their ammunition. However, due to the protective covering of the bluffs, Gros Ventre fire power failed to injure the Crows. As the day grew older, one Crow jumped over the one hundred-foot bluff into a group of Gros Ventres and was killed before he could strike a blow. Deciding to carry out a decisive and final charge before darkness set in, the Gros Ventres showered dust into the Crow retreat. Thus blinded, the Crows were less able to resist; and the Gros Ventres destroyed them without losing a man.

Aside from reckoning with the powerful Blackfeet to the north, the Crows resisted Sioux and Cheyenne invaders from the east and south. In the years 1820-50 Sioux-Crow hostilities were not so intense as they were in later years when white pressure pushed the Sioux into Crow territory.

27 Bradley, "Affairs at Fort Benton," M. H. S. Contributions, III, 218-19. This contest was dated by Bradley as March, 1835. An account of the same contest may be found in I. I. Stevens which places the event in 1849. This later date has been accepted because Stevens's account was based on eyewitnesses who told their story a few years after the event. Stevens learned of this incident from several Indian participants in the battle who stated that there were twenty-two Crows instead of forty and that there were two hundred lodges of Gros Ventres. Both accounts are similar in these respects: the scene of action was in the vicinity of the Marias River, the combatants were Crows and Gros Ventres, the Gros Ventres used dust or sand to aid them, there were no Crow survivors, and the Gros Ventres suffered no losses. See I. I. Stevens, I, 262.
Nevertheless, there were some bloody engagements between the Crows and these rivals in the earlier period. One of these occurred in the summer of 1822 or 1823.

The summer sun then warmed Indian blood which coursed through bodies eager to range far and wide in the search for buffalo, horse, and scalp. What opportunities awaited the braves who responded to the loud, persistent, and irresistible call of the drums? Despite the frowns of the elders over the exodus of so many warriors from the home camp, seven large war parties had gone into the field to uphold Crow prestige and honor. The exuberant and youthful warriors with visions of adventure and plunder gave little thought to the fact that the Sioux, superior in number and fierce in battle, recently had intruded into the Crow country more than usual. This caused concern on the part of the Crow elders, but their protestations were of no avail. An eighth party prepared to take the war path without its leader, Red Owl, for he had some business to attend to in camp. When finished, he would overtake his men. Having attended to these camp affairs, Red Owl rode fast and furious to rejoin his band, but on the way three Sioux brave blocked his path. Despite a severe head wound inflicted by a Sioux tomahawk, Red Owl outdistanced his attackers and overtook his war party; but since he was too severely injured to carry on the expedition and was unable to return alone, Red Owl and his men returned to the Crow camp.

The news of this attack stirred the Crow camp, and the next morning scouts were sent out to see if enemies were
near. The scouts had been out only a short time when they returned to the camp, shouting that the Sioux were coming. Confused and frightened Crow men, women, and children scattered over the plain as hundreds of Sioux swarmed down to attack. Crow power was reduced considerably that day when hundreds were overtaken and killed in the village and in the pursuit, which continued for miles. The Indian teller of this tragedy probably exaggerated, as so many Indians did in telling such stories, for he stated that at least five thousand Crows had fallen. It is possible that the number was at least around one thousand. What a rewarding day for the Sioux and the Cheyenne, their allies in this attack! The booty consisted of hundreds of lodges and horses, camp equipment, and about four hundred young women and children; most of these captives were given to the Cheyennes for their cooperation.

Satiated by these fruits of victory, the Sioux retired leaving the survivors to drift back to the village site to begin reconstruction. The plentiful bison were hunted with success, and the squaws tanned and sewed bison skins; thus robes and clothing were replaced. When the returning war parties learned of the tragedy, they cursed and raved for almost every warrior had lost a loved one; and many had lost all. The Crow tribe now lacked wives for many of its braves. Thus, two motives prompted retaliation. The spirit of revenge had to be satisfied, and the tribal numbers had to be increased by seizing women and children from other tribes.
Driven by these compelling motives, a strong war party entered Sioux territory, found a small Sioux village, attacked and killed all the men, and captured several hundred squaws and children. A similar attempt, later in the year, against the Blackfeet was equally successful; according to the Indian version, between seven hundred and one thousand prisoners were taken. It is likely that this Indian estimate is too high; at least, many were captured, probably numbering in the hundreds.

Seven or eight years later, on May 25, 1830, two Cheyenne Indians received their death wounds in an encounter with their rivals, the Crows. Warren Ferris, on his way toward the rich fur country of present-day Montana, observed their hacked and mangled bodies, five days later, as they rested on a raised platform in a lone Indian lodge. The disfigured body of a four-year-old boy lay on the ground a few steps from the lodge. He had been beaten; there was also a deep, wide gash in his left side. This Crow child, taken prisoner by the Cheyennes the preceding winter, had been murdered by his captors in retaliation for the death of the two Cheyennes killed by the Crows. So strong was the compulsion to revenge the lost loved ones that the Cheyennes put to death one who might have rendered service to their tribe when he reached manhood.

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29 Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 34.
During a long storm in the winter of that same year, Sioux raiders enlivened Crow-Sioux hostilities by stealing one hundred fifty Crow horses. Eighty Crow warriors followed the horse thieves in what seemed to be a fruitless pursuit, so the majority decided to return to the Crow camp. Twenty-three Crows continued the pursuit for some time before they finally concluded that it would be better to return home. On their way back they passed near a Sioux village concealed from their view by a snow storm. However, the storm did not screen the Crows from the watchful eyes of the Sioux. Pursuing the Crows, the Sioux found their night camp, waited till dawn, and then attacked. That morning twenty-three Crows and two Sioux departed to the realm of the Great Spirit. 30

Two years after this Sioux victory, the Cheyennes penetrated the Crow country to carry out some deviltry against their Crow enemies. Finding a Crow village, they attacked it, killed one Crow, and probably drove off a few horses. A large Crow war party was formed to follow and punish the raiders. After a twenty-five day pursuit these Crows emerged, on May 24, 1832, from the bluffs along the banks of the Platte River where they questioned a passing trading caravan about the Cheyennes. Having learned nothing of their enemies, the Crows pressed on, determined not to return home until they had tasted vengeance. Such determination was to be rewarded, 30

30 Ibid., 307-08.
for on July first these Crow warriors again encountered the trading caravan and displayed five Cheyenne scalps to back up their claim that the Crows always avenged their dead.\footnote{11}

During the fall of 1834,\footnote{12} the great Crow chief, Rotten Belly, learned that a strong force of Sioux was a few days' march from his position on the Big Horn River. Interested in securing bison meat and keeping his own force intact, Rotten Belly moved to Pryor Creek. By this action he thought he might prevent an untimely battle; however, if the enemy happened to find him, the terrain in that area would be to his advantage. A few days after the Crow departure from the Big Horn, the Sioux discovered the remains of their camp fires. In time they overtook the Crows who were forced back into a mountain gorge. Since the Crows, according to their version of the battle, were outnumbered, they resorted to trickery. Followed by his braves, Rotten Belly rode to a raised portion of a hillside and called to his warriors so loudly that the Sioux chief heard him. At first, that chief thought Rotten Belly was calling for a parley and halted his men. However, the Crow chief had not asked for quarter; he only called for the Great Spirit to come to his aid, to come to him on a white horse, and to give his people strength to kill all enemies. Then, so the story went, there appeared at

\footnote{11}{Irving, \textit{Bonneville}, 60, 66.}

\footnote{12}{This was the date given to Allen by his Indian informants. However, it is probable that these events occurred at least during or before the spring of 1834 because Bradley and Stevens wrote that Rotten Belly was slain in the spring of 1834.}
his side a large, white horse bearing a white rider with yellow eyes. This was the trick with which Rotten Belly planned to save his outnumbered force. The sight of the rider confused the superstitious Sioux and provided the psychological moment for attack. The Crows rode into their ranks, dehorsed many of them, drove spears through them, and smashed their skulls with war clubs. Leaving their squaws to the mercy of the Crow victors, the Sioux fled. Soon darkness settled over the land, providing sanctuary for the beaten Sioux and rest for the exhausted but elated Crows.33

Although in Montana the struggle of the Crows against their Blackfeet, Siouan, and Cheyenne enemies constituted a large part of warfare among the tribes east of the Rockies,

33. William R. Allen, Adventures with Indians and Game or Twenty Years in the Rocky Mountains (Chicago, 1903), 95-99. Allen, in retelling this story which he heard from the Crows, gives the impression in one passage that the white rider was a "stratagem" used to save Rotten Belly's people. However, as the years passed, the belief that the rider had actually been the Great Spirit became widespread among the Crows who told Allen of the battle. It might be that other factors not remembered by the Crows were responsible for the victory and that "a large white horse, bearing a white rider with yellow eyes" was a product of Indian imagination to account for the victory that followed.

The accuracy of other parts of the story is questionable. According to the story, Rotten Belly's camp was estimated by the Sioux to have had three thousand people, which was small compared to the enemy who outnumbered the Crows "twelve to one". This would make 36,000 Sioux, or if only warriors were considered, 12,000 Sioux warriors compared to one thousand Crow warriors. A Crow victory under such circumstances would seem almost impossible. In all probability, the numbers were much smaller, at least on the part of the Sioux. Allen himself wrote, "I heard this story from several different members of the Crow tribe and they all told it alike, varying only in minor details. What really took place can only be imagined."
the contest between the Blackfeet and their northeastern neighbors, the Crees and the Assiniboins, during the years 1820-50 contributed much to spreading terror over the land. This enmity between the Blackfeet and their northeastern rivals is revealed in an incident which occurred in the Indian camp at Fort Union on the night of June 30, 1833. A young Blackfeet named Matsokui was visiting at the fort when the Assiniboins and Crees arrived to carry on trade with the white men. Since there existed a long-standing enmity between his tribe and these arrivals and since the previous year a visiting Blackfeet had been shot by the Crees, the white men warned Matsokui to stay away from these Indians. However, the friendly attitude of some of the Crees lulled his fears; and Matsokui made the fatal mistake of visiting and carousing with the enemy. During the night Cree bullets ripped into his body. As he gazed upward into triumphant Cree faces, the scalping knife descended; and Matsokui slept the sleep of death.34

Intertribal rivalry was fostered by the establishment of trading forts35 which attracted not only Indians who de-

34 Maximilian, Travels, XXIII, 22.

35 The American Fur Company established a post near the mouth of the Yellowstone which came to be known as Fort Union, and in 1832 built Fort McKenzie, about six miles above the mouth of the Marias, as a trading post primarily for the Blackfeet and the Gros Ventres. Until the early 1840's Fort McKenzie served as American headquarters for trade with the Blackfeet. Due to their increasing dependence on American white traders for many articles which they began to consider as necessities, the Blackfeet, at least in the area of the fort, developed a friendlier attitude toward the white man.
sired to trade but also their tribal enemies who found greater opportunity in the vicinity of the forts to secure horses, scalps, and other plunder. Eager to secure such prized items as liquor, tobacco, guns, and ammunition the tribesmen brought furs and buffalo robes to trade; and desiring to be first to get the best bargains, they competed for the favored ground nearest the forts. Disliking the distribution of guns and ammunition which increased their enemies' war-making ability, the tribal enemies of an Indian nation often protested in a violent manner.36

With so many Indians congregating in the vicinity of the forts and roaming the nearby countryside, opportunities for raiding and horse stealing were increased. This was so because, in many cases, the presence of the fort decreased Indian vigilance against raiders. Furthermore, under the influence of the white man's liquor some Indians resorted to violence; and many Indians, as a result of liquor consumption, eventually sank into a deep slumber in which condition they were less able to resist attack. Indians on their way to the fort possessed robes and furs which an enemy might take from them to trade later for needed supplies, while Indians who had finished trading at the forts left with newly acquired goods desired by lurking tribal enemies. Even if they did

than in the years prior to 1833. Nevertheless, Blackfeet country continued to be dangerous ground for individuals or parties of whites who travelled through it (Ibid., XXIII, 96).

36 For an example of this see pages 143-44 of this chapter.
not possess robes and furs or newly acquired goods, Indians on their way to and from the forts usually had horses and always had scalps which in themselves were great inducements for an enemy attack. Thus, it was that these trading forts were often the scene of violence.

At Fort McKenzie, on August 10, 1832, the opening of trade between eight hundred Blackfeet and the whites was preceded by a reception in which the Indians who assembled before the gates were given liquor and tobacco. They were quite demonstrative; some sang while others fired their guns. Many were affectionate toward the whites, and others were noisy and angry. Blood troublemakers who stole three fort horses and killed a white man incurred the wrath of the Piegan chief, Ninoch-Kiau, who, probably wishing to maintain friendly Blackfeet-white relations, beat one of the Bloods with the butt end of his gun and drove him and several Gros Ventres from the fort. 37

Differences among the Blackfeet were not uncommon; occasionally such differences were inflamed by violent deeds into a state of hostility or even open war. Such a deed of violence occurred in July, 1833, when the nephew of Ninoch-Kiau was murdered by Blood Indians while he was looking for stolen horses on the hills near the Teton River. Informed of this vile deed, Ninoch-Kiau talked of leading his warriors against the Blood camp across the river. His brother fervent-

37 Ibid., XXIII, 87-93, 121-34.
ly approved such talk, walked about the fort with a loaded pistol, and told the weeping relatives that crying served no useful purpose but that their beloved relative could be honored by sending at least two Blood Indians to the land of spirits to wait upon him. One elderly Indian advised that they not act hastily and that, instead of attacking innocent Bloods, they wait for an opportunity to take vengeance on some member of the murderer's family. To this the white men added their words of moderation and persuaded the Piegan not to do anything rash since the greater number of Bloods might endanger the Piegan. This advice was accepted, so the lamentations of the mourners provided the only solace for the chief at this time. The corpse, wrapped tightly in buffalo skins, was brought into the fort on a horse-drawn sledge. Among the relations following the body was an aged woman who, as a sign of mourning, had just cut off one joint of her little finger, the bleeding stump of which she wrapped in a handful of wormwood leaves. Thus the dead man was honored, and vengeance was postponed to another day.38 Unknown to the Piegan, they would soon be preoccupied with more vital affairs than their differences with the Bloods.

On the early morning of August 28, 1833, shadowy figures moved into position on the plains surrounding Fort McKenzie. With dawn's approach they readied themselves to deal death to their Piegan enemies who were camping near the walls

38Ibid., XXIII, 139-43.
of the fort and who were then in a deep sleep produced by an all-night orgy of singing and drinking. Dawn came; and at their leader's signal six hundred Assiniboin and Cree warriors advanced swiftly to satisfy their blood lust, fired their guns and arrows into the eighteen or twenty lodges, and, with their knives, cut up many of these lodges. A few of the inhabitants in the lodges were so disabled they could not flee. Aroused by the shots and thinking that the fort was under attack, the fort's garrison mounted the walls and fired at the attackers. Their action was too late to prevent the slaughter of four Indian women and two children. When the attack had begun, the Piegans rushed toward the fort's gates, which had been opened for them; but because the entrance had been temporarily blocked by belongings dropped by

39 Their leader was Tchatka or Gaucher according to an extract from Alexander Culbertson's diary; see Maria Audubon, Audubon and his Journals (New York, 1897), II, 133. Maximilian (Travels, XXIII, 147) called the leader Minohanne (the left handed). Bradley ("Affairs at Fort Benton," M. H. S. Contributions, III, 209-10) stated that Gaucher was the Assiniboin leader and that this was his last exploit due to the fact that he was then seventy-five years old. However, he credited Gaucher with the leadership of an expedition in 1834 which massacred sixty lodges of Gros Ventres. According to De Smet (Western Missions, 199-201) Tchatka led the remnant of his band against the Mandans in 1839 but was foiled by an Arikara attack which left only thirty Assiniboin warriors. Thus it is likely that Bradley was mistaken when he said this attack on Fort McKenzie was Gaucher's last exploit.

40 Maximilian, Travels, XXIII, 146. Culbertson stated that there were about four hundred attackers (Audubon and his Journals, II, 133). Bradley ("Affairs at Fort Benton," M. H. S. Contributions, III, 208) gave their number as fifteen hundred.

41 Maximilian, Travels, XXIII, 146-47.
the squaws, a number of Piegans were massacred before they could get into the fort. Once in the fort, the Piegan men climbed the walls and shot at the attackers who then retreated about three hundred paces, carrying with them all their slain and wounded except the body of Tchatka's nephew.

Meanwhile, the courtyard of the fort became filled with wounded men, women, and children who had managed to seek the shelter of the fort. Some were propped up against the walls; others were pulled about by their tearful relatives. One Indian, the White Buffalo, who had a head wound, was carried about by his noisy relatives, who gave him brandy to drink and rattled their medicine in his ears that the evil spirit might not overcome him. Instead of permitting the exhausted wounded to rest, their relations continued to pull them about, to sound large bells, and to rattle their amulets in an effort to keep them alive.

After an hour of gradual retreat, the enemy took up positions on the bluffs a half mile away, where they made signs for the Piegans to come out and meet them in equal battle on the prairie. This retreat gave the people in the fort a chance to go out and see what damage had been done.

Some enterprising Piegan relieved the slain Assiniboin of his

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42 Audubon, Audubon and his Journals, II, 133-34. See also Bradley, "Affairs at Fort Benton," M. H. S. Contributions, III, 208.
43 Maximilian, Travels, XXIII, 146-47.
44 Ibid., 147-48.
45 Audubon, Audubon and his Journals, II, 134.
scalp, while the rest of the Piegan men vented their rage on
the body by firing their guns at it, and the women and chil-
dren expressed their hatred by beating it with clubs and
pelting it with stones. Maximilian, intent on securing the
skull for study, was unable to do so because the Indians left
no trace of the head when they had finished their pleasant-
ries. Not far from the river, old Haisikat lamented over his
grown-up daughter who had concealed herself in some bushes
where she had been accidentally killed by shots from the fort. 46

Several Blackfeet chiefs sent word to the Blackfeet
camp, some eight or ten miles away, for reinforcements and
suggested that if the white traders seriously desired their
friendship, they should help them attack the enemy. So
Mitchell organized the ablest hunters and rifle-men and, ac-
cording to Maximilian, proceeded to the enemy positions where
one hundred fifty to two hundred Blackfeet were already fir-
ing at the enemy; 47 but Alexander Culbertson gave the im-
pression that the white force sought and fought the enemy
before Blackfeet forces engaged them. First firing at two
hundred yards, they gradually lessened the distance to one
hundred yards. After two hours the horses of the white
force became tired, and fighting ceased. During this lull
the whites awaited Indian reinforcements which, when they
arrived, consisted of only one hundred fifty mounted Piegans. 48

46 Maximilian, Travels, XXIII, 149-50.
47 Ibid.
48 Audubon, Audubon and his Journals, II, 134.
Although these Piegan were anxious to get into the fight, a majority of that tribe spent most of their time at the fort and neglected to help their comrades in battle. 49

After the arrival of these reinforcements, the fighting was resumed. Alexander Culbertson described the contest as follows:

We charged and fought again for another two hours, and drove them across the Maria River, where they took another stand; and here Mr. Mitchell's horse was shot under him and he was wounded. In this engagement the enemy had a decided advantage over us, as they were concealed in the bushes, while we were in the open prairie. However, we succeeded in making them retreat from the place back on to a high prairie, but they suddenly rushed upon us and compelled us to retreat across the Maria. Then they had us in their power, but for some reason, either lack of courage or knowledge, they did not avail themselves of their opportunity. They could have killed a great many of us when we rushed into the water, which was almost deep enough to swim our horses; they were close upon us, but we succeeded in crossing before they fired....

We, however, did not retreat far before we turned upon them again, with the determination of driving them to the mountains, in which we succeeded. By this time it was so dark that we could see no more, and we concluded to return. 50

49 Maximilian, Travels, XXIII, 150.

50 Audubon, Audubon and his Journals, II, 135. Bradley's account differed regarding Piegans' actions in this battle. However, since Bradley was not present and did not make his sources known, the observations of Maximilian and Culbertson must be accepted as more dependable evidence. The greatest variation in the two accounts was in the number of casualties suffered at the river crossing. Culbertson stated that the Piegan "succeeded in crossing before they fired" while Bradley remarked that fifteen Piegan were slain at the river crossing. Following is a paraphrase of Bradley's account.

Nearly two thousand Piegans came from their village of five hundred lodges, some three or four miles above the fort. Seeing this large force, the Assiniboins retreated across the Marias River. At this point Mitchell and Culbertson joined the Piegan. When several hundred Piegan
Culbertson further remarked that the Piegan-white force had twenty wounded and had lost seven men, two of whom were scalped by the enemy. He surmised that the Assiniboin loss had been greater than theirs and characterized the Piegans as laggards in battle, for they always allowed the whites to go ahead. Nevertheless, the battle had produced one good effect in that it demonstrated to the Piegans the white man’s bravery and cemented friendly relations with that tribe. The Assiniboins, in Culbertson’s estimation, had shown great bravery; and if they had more ammunition, they would have increased the Piegan casualty list.

During the night the Assiniboins retreated toward the Bear Paw Mountains. They were pursued by some Blackfeet who returned to the fort during the morning of August twenty-ninth and told the whites of the pursuit in which they killed or wounded one Assiniboin. Having heard they were accused of cowardice, several Blackfeet came to the fort to justify themselves with the excuse that their horses had been too

had crossed and were thus separated from the rest of their comrades, the Assiniboins fell upon them. Offering no resistance, the Piegans plunged into the river in their flight to the opposite shore. Fifteen Piegans were slain in this skirmish. For some time after this both parties fought a war of words intermingled with some shooting. Finally mustering their superior forces, the Piegans crossed the river and gradually drove back the enemy. When night came, the fighting ended; and the Assiniboins left the area with more than forty Piegan scalps. Six or eight Assiniboin scalps were all that the Piegan force could boast of taking ("Affairs at Fort Benton," M. H. S. Contributions, III, 210).

Maximilian (Travels, XXIII, 152) wrote that the Assiniboins had three killed and twenty severely wounded.

Audubon, Audubon and His Journals, II, 135.
tired to participate in the battle. Now that danger of further Assiniboin attack had disappeared the Piegans could continue their trade with the white men and resolve their differences with the Bloods.

Intending to camp near the fort where some four hundred Blackfeet lodges were already set up, a large body of Blood Indians, on August thirty-first, appeared on the heights across the river from Fort McKenzie. Seeing this, the Piegan chief, Ninoch-Kiau, who still had vengeance in his heart for the slaying of his nephew, said that there would be bloodshed if the Bloods did not keep their distance. The Piegans were to have priority in the trade. So Mitchell sent Berger, the interpreter, over the river to tell the Bloods that it would be better to put off their trade until that with the Piegans was over. Most of the Bloods withdrew, but a few of them approached and were fired upon by the Piegans. The Bloods returned this fire, but later atoned for their actions by presenting gifts to the Piegans. On the morning of September fourth, the Bloods occupied the favored trading grounds recently vacated by the Piegans, who moved to their customary camping grounds.

In the spring of 1835, Blackfeet-Assiniboin warfare


54 Ninoch-Kiau, who fought in the battle around Fort McKenzie, attributed his safe emergence from the battle to the fact that Bodmer, the artist, had taken his portrait a few days before (*Ibid.*, 151-52).

about the trading forts followed its usual course. Having left their village around the middle of March to raid their Blackfeet enemies, a party of two hundred to three hundred Assiniboins eventually sighted thirty lodges of Blackfeet, camped approximately a day's march from Fort McKenzie. On their way to the fort to make their spring trade, these Blackfeet were rich in trade goods and horses. What a promising situation, and the Blackfeet made acquisition of these valuables all the easier by being in a state of drunken celebration. At daylight the Assiniboins swooped down upon their rivals, captured three hundred horses, and slew most of the Blackfeet. 56

Approximately a month after this tragedy, a war party of one hundred fifty mounted Blackfeet came to Fort Clark to wreak vengeance on the Assiniboins for this March massacre. There happened to be at the fort an old Assiniboin who was on the verge of leaving by steamer when these Blackfeet arrived, convinced him that they were interested in reaching the Assiniboin camp on a mission of peace, and, offering him a pony, persuaded the old man to guide them. When they were some distance from the fort, the Blackfeet shot and scalped the old man. 57 However, the death of one old man would not make up for the many Blackfeet lives lost the month before.

The war party continued on in search for more accursed Assini-

56 Larpenteur, Forty Years a Fur Trader, 92.
57 Ibid., 93.
Constantly seeking opportunities to bolster his position, Tchatka, most renowned chief of the Assiniboins, was active in pressing the attack against the Blackfeet and their allies, the Gros Ventres. In the fall of 1834, approximately one year after Tchatka's men had attacked the Piegans at Fort McKenzie, they brought terror to sixty lodges of Gros Ventres which were camped near the Snowy Mountains. Having discovered and surrounded these lodges, the Assiniboins assailed the occupants and killed about four hundred of them. In September of the ensuing year near the Sweet Grass Hills, a similar massacre took place in which a large force of Crees and Assiniboins surprised a camp of four hundred Gros Ventres, only one of whom survived to tell the story.

58 The Gros Ventres of the Missouri, although not Blackfeet allies as were the Gros Ventres of the Prairie, were also hunted by Assiniboin war parties which were sometimes defeated and sometimes successful. In the fall of 1834 the Assiniboin chief, La Lance, and his warriors proceeded on an expedition against the Gros Ventres of the Missouri. On November twenty-third the Assiniboins were surrounded; thirty of them were killed and ten wounded. Greatly aroused over this defeat, the Assiniboins sent several war parties to surround and if possible destroy the Gros Ventre village (Elliot Coues, footnote in Ibid., 78). Perhaps Chardon's journal entry of December 1, 1834, recorded one retaliatory raid for the above defeat. On that date Chardon received news from the Gros Ventres that in a battle with the Assiniboins they had lost four men and the Assiniboins eighteen. The Assiniboins also took several horses (Chardon's Journal at Fort Clark 1834-39, ed. Annie H. Abel [n.p., 1932], 16).


60 Ibid., 218-19.
When returning home from the massacre, the Assiniboins passed through a foggy area where they encountered twenty to thirty Blackfeet who, aided by the enveloping fog, defended themselves most courageously. Despite all precautions to protect himself from unnecessary involvement in the struggle, Tchatka found himself in the middle of the fight and had just lost his horse when a Blackfeet warrior discovered him and hurled his lance. Grazing the dismounted chief's head, the lance struck the ground, quivered, and stood still. A hand to hand combat followed, with Tchatka seizing his adversary's arm in an attempt to check the downward movement of the Blackfeet's knife. Meanwhile, having forced the Blackfeet to retreat and missing their chief, Tchatka's followers spread out through the fog bank to search for him. Finding him in a life and death struggle with his enemy who was in the act of raising his knife to plunge it into Tchatka's breast, one Assiniboin sent his tomahawk into the Blackfeet's skull. The Assiniboin chief then seized the tomahawk and dealt the finishing touches to the man who had dared to attack the great Tchatka.

Tchatka and his men were not always victorious as was the case in the autumn of 1837, when he led some four to five hundred Assiniboins against the Gros Ventres. After a long and desperate battle above the mouth of Knife River, the Gros Ventres emerged as victors. The Assiniboins fled the plain,

[De Smet, Western Missions, 191-92.]
leaving five of their best warriors behind while the Gros Ventres suffered slight losses in comparison with those of the enemy. Some of the Assiniboins escaped to Fort Union where Culbertson described them as a badly mauled group of Indians. 62

In the spring of 1837 or 1838, Indian power to make war was curbed temporarily by a smallpox epidemic which hit the Assiniboins and their rivals, the Blackfeet. Denig summed up the Assiniboin loss with these words, "The result was that out of 1,000 lodges and upwards of the Assiniboins then in existence but 400 lodges or less remained and even these but thinly peopled." Tchatka's band of two hundred fifty lodges was struck more severely than others; when the disease had abated, Tchatka found himself at the head of about sixty fighting men. Other bands caught the disease when visiting Fort Union and many died there; cartloads of dead were daily thrown into the river. 63

Severely afflicted were the Assiniboins' rivals, for at least six thousand Blackfeet, Piegans, and Bloods were estimated to have perished. Around October first, Alexander

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62 Rufus Saxton, "Report of the Route of Lieutenant R. Saxton, U. S. A. from the Columbia Valley to Fort Owen, and Hence to Fort Benton," February 11, 1854, in U. S. War Dept., Reports of Explorations and Surveys to Ascertain the Most Practicable and Economical Route for a Railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean (12 vols., Washington, 1855-60), I, 266.

63 Denig, "Indian Tribes," 399-400. Bradley ("Affairs at Fort Benton," M. H. S. Contributions, III, 221-22) stated that the Assiniboins lost two thirds of their tribe and that Tchatka's village shrank from twelve hundred to eighty warriors.
Culbertson visited the Three Forks area where he sighted a Piegan village of sixty lodges. He wrote:

Hundreds of decaying forms of human beings, horses and dogs lay scattered everywhere among the lodges. Two old women too feeble to travel, were the sole living occupants of the village. All who had not died, had fled in small bands here and there, frantic to escape the pestilence which pursued them at every turn, seizing its victims on the prairie, in the valley, among the mountains, dotting the country with their corrupting bodies.

The Gros Ventres escaped such tragic losses, for they lost less than two hundred people.

This epidemic, which caused the afflicted tribes to temporarily neglect the warpath, motivated them in time to renew their warlike enterprises. Reproduction could not immediately make up for their recent losses, thus they had to resort to the capture of women and children from other tribes to increase their tribal numbers and to maintain themselves in their competitive environment.

In order to secure new tribal numbers and plunder, Tchatka, in 1839, made plans to raid a Mandan village which

64 Ibid., III.
65 Ibid., 226. Despite these losses, trading at Fort McKenzie the following season was good. Accumulated at the fort were ten thousand buffalo robes.
66 Warfare did not stop altogether during this time as the following evidence indicates. At Fort Clark Chardon received, on May 15, 1837, news from the Gros Ventres that two of their tribe had been slain by the Assiniboins while they were out making dried buffalo meat (Chardon, Journal, 112). On October 29, 1837, Chardon learned of a battle between the Gros Ventres and the Assiniboins in which each side suffered only one fatality (Ibid., 86). On July 6, 1838, Chardon learned of the death of one Gros Ventre who was hunting when the Assiniboins found him (Ibid., 167).
had also been reduced by smallpox. Having collected his eighty remaining warriors, Tchatka told them of his plan:

We will go to offer the calumnet of peace to the Mandans. They will accept it with joy, for they are feeble and have the hope of finding in us a protection against the Sioux. As soon as we are admitted in the village, under this appearance of friendship, we will scatter ourselves here and there throughout their lodges, then we will fall on all that remains of the Mandans.

To the Assiniboins this looked like a great opportunity, so they followed their chief to the Mandan village.

Unknown to the Assiniboins their deadly enemies, the Arickaras, numbering about five hundred warriors, were camped about a mile away from the Mandan village; and a few of these Arickaras had stopped to visit the Mandans. As the Assiniboin peace delegation smoked the peace pipe with the Mandans, these Arickaras set forth to tell their chief of the unforeseen reconciliation. Such an alliance could not be tolerated, so the Arickaras rode forth to destroy the Assiniboins. Soon their war cry echoed through the Mandan village, and the twelve Assiniboin deputies fell under the first burst of gunfire. Their scalps were at once lifted and their bodies mutilated. Then some three hundred Arickaras headed toward the hill behind which rested the remainder of the Assiniboins. Tchatka mounted his horse and fled, but most of his warriors did not have horses and were easily overtaken by their mounted enemies. Resisting, they killed three Arickaras, but soon

67De Smet, Western Missions, 196.
fifty-three Assiniboin corpses dotted the plain. Having his horse shot from under him, Tchatka fled on foot toward the near-by forest, where he rejoined thirty survivors most of whom were wounded and some fatally. Two of Tchatka's sons had fallen in this engagement. The remnant of the once powerful band of twelve hundred warriors could no longer remain independent and survive. Humbled and broken, the old chief found it necessary to join the northern Assiniboins; the warpath had raised him to great heights and finally cast him down. 68

Despite disease and defeat in war, Assiniboin and Cree hostility with the Blackfeet continued in the decades of the 1840's. On July 6, 1843, Audubon and Alexander Culbertson were sitting near the back gate of Fort McKenzie when fourteen yelling and singing Indians came toward the fort.

68 Ibid., 199-201. E. T. Denig wrote of this event, and although his account differs in some respects with that of De Smet, they were basically the same. Denig's account is paraphrased as follows:

Tchatka desired to make up for his losses by acquiring Mandan property. At a given signal his fifty men were to rush upon and destroy the unsuspecting Mandans. This plan would probably have succeeded if it had not been for the Arikaras who, at about the same time Tchatka made his way to the Mandan village, returned from the Platte River country and reoccupied their village a short distance from the Mandans. These deadly Assiniboin enemies, numbering five hundred men, interrupted the peace conference and killed twenty Assiniboins. Chief Tchatka escaped, but shortly afterwards he took poison ("Indian Tribes," 400-01).

The main differences in the two accounts are in the number of men involved. De Smet gives Tchatka about eighty men while Denig credited him with about fifty. The Assiniboin losses were greater in De Smet's account than in Denig's. The number of survivors seems to have been thirty according to both accounts.
Part of a war party, these filthy, foul-smelling Assiniboins had only three guns among them; each man was armed with a knife and carried a lump of fresh buffalo meat on his back. Audubon recorded their report of action against the Blackfeet as follows:

Their party at first consisted of nearly fifty; they travelled several hundred miles in search of Blackfeet, and having discovered a small troop of them, they hid till the next morning, when at daylight... they rushed upon the enemy, surprised them, killed one at the onset, and the rest took to flight, leaving guns, horses, shields, lances etc on the grounds. The Assiniboins took several guns and seven horses, and the scalp of the dead Indian. It happened that the man they killed had some time ago killed the father of their chief. ...After eating and resting awhile, they followed the trail of the Blackfeet, hoping to again surprise them; but not seeing them, they separated into small parties, and it is one of these parties that is now with us. The chief, to show his pride and delight at killing his enemy, has borrowed a drum; and the company have nearly ever since been yelling, singing and beating that beastly tambour. 69

The Cree nation, formidable enemies of the Blackfeet, numbered perhaps six hundred lodges in 1845. In 1844 they had stolen more than six hundred Blackfeet horses; and, in October, 1845, they collected eight hundred warriors with which to strike at the Blackfeet. Before setting out in search of the enemy, every kind of magic was used to assure the expedition's success. It was decided that a blindfolded young girl should be placed at the head of the party to serve as a guide. In case of success, she was destined to become the bride of the most valiant. Confidently following their

69 Audubon, Audubon and his Journals, II, 77-78.
extraordinary guide, the Cree encountered, while traversing a plain, a party of seven Blackfeet, who, according to the Indian version, might have avoided a fight but for their chief’s determination to oppose the aggressors. It seems more likely that the Blackfeet were unable to avoid battle; so using their knives, they dug a hollow in which they made their stand. The next morning the eight hundred Cree surrounded them and the battle began. The Cree lost seven men and in the first attack had fifteen wounded. The lack of ammunition finally put the Blackfeet at the mercy of the attackers, who cut them to pieces. Meanwhile, the medicine men had discovered unfavorable omens which indicated that the spirits looked with disfavor upon their warlike aims at this time, so they removed the blindfold from the girl’s eyes and headed back to their home territory.70

This then was the nature of warfare among the tribes dwelling on the great bison range east of the Rockies. Individual Indians left their marks in blood as they traveled the warpath on missions of vengeance or in defense of the right to hunt on the buffalo plains. Arapoish, the Crow chief noted for his appraisal of the Crow country, raised Crow morale and died leading his men to victory. The Piegan chief, Ninoch-Kiau, thirsted for blood when his nephew was slain and resisted Assiniboine attackers around Fort McKenzie. Ranking as a great man was the Crow chief, Rotten Belly, who led an

70 De Smet, Letters, II, 520-21.
attack on Fort McKenzie in 1834 and afterwards died a hero's
death fighting the Gros Ventres. Most outstanding of all
personalities of the period was Tchatka, the all wise and
powerful Assiniboine chief who over the years witnessed the
decimation of his band by disease and war. It was he who led
the Crees and Assiniboins against the Piegans at Fort McKenzie
in August, 1833, who nearly lost his life in a hand to hand
struggle with a Blackfeet warrior, who supervised the massacre
of four hundred Gros Ventres in 1834, and who in 1839 led the
remnant of his band to destruction.

During these years a greatly accelerated fur trade
was made possible by the Indians who, in order to maintain
themselves in their competitive environment, gladly bartered
robes and furs for the sinews of war. Thus the Indians en­
riched the trader, but in so doing they slaughtered many more
animals than they needed for their own use and hastened the
extermination of the buffalo. Around the trading posts, which
offered splendid opportunities for horse thieves and scalp
takers to increase their wealth and prestige, scenes of vio­
ience were enacted. Truly the bison country of Eastern Mon­
tana was a battleground on which the defeated nursed their
wounds, mourned their dead, and awaited their chance to even
the score, while the victorious counted their plunder, boast­
ed of their deeds, displayed newly acquired scalps, and,
along with the vanquished, grieved over their dead.
CHAPTER VI

EAST VERSUS WEST

In the struggle between the Indians east and west of the Rocky Mountains, the Blackfeet were most active in har­assing the western or plateau Indians. They pressed the at­tack against the Snakes and Bannocks, the Kutenais and Pend d'Oreilles, and the Nez Perces and Flatheads. The recorded evidence shows that they were not always victorious in their excursions across the mountains. When in their own country, the Snakes and Bannocks, for example, were often victorious over Blackfeet invaders. This was true in the summer of 1825 or 1826 when a large force of Blackfeet roamed the Snake River country where they sighted a Snake village, attacked it, killed three men, and wounded two others. The Snake chief sought the aid of some three hundred trappers at a near-by rendezvous\(^1\) to avenge these killings. Pursuing for about five miles, the combined force of Snakes and trappers overtook the Blackfeet who took up strong positions around a pond and for two hours held their assailants in check. Oc-

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\(^1\)The rendezvous was a designated spot where traders, trappers, and Indians met for trading purposes. To such an appointed place in the late spring or early summer a fur company sent out a large expedition by wagon or pack train to meet its trappers and traders; these trappers and the Indians brought in their furs to trade for provisions.
casionally they ventured from their shelter to make a sortie upon their foe. Eventually the trappers left to get something to eat and told the Snakes to press the attack until they returned. The Snakes, however, did not relish the task of fighting the Blackfeet alone, so they too left the scene. Taking advantage of this opportunity to escape, the Blackfeet left their dead comrades behind and made a hurried exit.²

Returning on September 7, 1832, from one of their retaliatory raids against the Blackfeet, a party of Snake Indians displayed to W. A. Ferris and his companions twenty Blackfeet horses and said that they had also captured a Blackfeet woman and a child both of whom they had slain within a short time after their capture.³ Approximately one month later, in retaliation for this or some other Snake depredation, a party of one hundred fifty Blackfeet invaded Snake territory and attacked a Snake and Bannock village of two hundred lodges located on Big Lost River. Apparently having misjudged the number of their foes, the Blackfeet fled into a willow thicket as soon as the Snakes and Bannocks rode forth to do battle. The Snakes set fire to the prairie,⁴ and


³Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 167.

⁴In buffalo country no Indian would deliberately start a fire which he thought he could not control, for an uncontrolled prairie fire would destroy acres of buffalo grass. If the buffalo's supply of grass were destroyed in one area, it meant migration of the buffalo to another region. However, Indians did use fire when it could be localized to flush the enemy from cover. Plenty-Coups, the Crow chief, told his
soon the dry willow thicket was in flames. Forced into the open, the terror stricken Blackfeet fled toward the nearest mountains, about three miles away. Charging and firing on them, the mounted Snakes followed until the Blackfeet reached the safety of the mountain timber. Giving up the chase and apparently satisfied with the scalps of forty men and five women, the Snakes rode back toward their village. However, nine of their own warriors, including the noted Horned Chief, had been killed.

Approximately two years after this encounter, on August 10, 1834, the Bannocks and the Blackfeet fought a bloody battle on an open plain near the Idaho mountains known as the "Devil's Bedstead". The Blackfeet, although having superiority of numbers, were on foot while the Bannocks had

interviewer of the Crows' use of fire for this purpose:

"Twice I have known of the use of fire in war by my people. Once, when I was too young to remember anything well, the Crows surrounded a band of Pecunies near the spot now occupied by the city of Red Lodge. They were in thick willows, and our warriors could not drive them out. There was grass among the willows, and a high wind, so that a fire started in the dry grass soon drove the Pecunies into the open where they were finished by the Crow warriors, who were many times their number.

The other time our people used fire I was seven years old, and I remember what was said among the men. The Hairy-Noses (Prairie Gros Ventres) got into our village to steal horses, and were driven out and surrounded in some willows not far from this place....when daylight came they killed several Crows who tried to drive them out, and our warriors saw that something different had to be done. Thick grass grew among the willows, and at last the Crows set it afire. But when the flames drew close to the enemy, one of their Wise Ones sang his medicine song, putting the fire out with rain. I got this story from others who were older." See Linderman, American, 297.

Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 186-87.
the advantage of fighting on horseback. Having no cover to protect them or to enable them to reload their guns, the Blackfeet were trampled to death or killed with salmon spears and axes. The victors killed over forty Blackfeet, but were able to take only about thirty scalps.  

Despite Blackfeet superiority in numbers on their own home ground, Snake war parties from time to time continued to penetrate Blackfeet country. Father De Smet, on June 30, 1840, came face to face with three hundred Snake warriors who apparently had returned from enemy territory. He observed that "they were hideously painted, armed with their clubs and covered all over with feathers, teeth and claws of animals. Those who had wounds received in battle, and those who had killed enemies..., displayed their scars and waved the scalps they had taken on the ends of poles." Later, he encountered other Snakes who were preparing an expedition against the Blackfeet.

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6 Townsend, Narrative, 242.
7 De Smet, Letters, I, 217.
8 Ibid., 219-20. The Snakes and Bannocks also clashed with other western Indians such as the Flatheads. Around September 11, 1841, a party of Flatheads, accompanied by Father Mengarini, were approached by fifty Bannock warriors who stopped a short distance away. The Flatheads had fought with them the previous year and did not relish doing so again. Neither party advanced to meet the other; and after following the Flatheads for several days, the Bannocks disappeared. See Gregory Mengarini, "Mengarini's Narrative of the Rockies, Memoirs of Old Oregon 1844-1850 and St. Mary's Mission," ed. Albert J. Partoll (reprinted from Frontier and Midland, XVIII, no. 3 and 4, Missoula, 1938), 6. During the winter hunt of 1845 the Flatheads were attacked by Bannocks who outnumbered them nearly three to one; but despite this inequality, the
Blackfeet efforts were particularly directed against the Flatheads and their allies, the Pend d'Oreilles and the Nez Perces, because of their challenge to Blackfeet control of the buffalo grounds. The Blackfeet assailed them on these hunting grounds and in their camping grounds west of the mountains and took many of their horses and scalps, but in so doing they too suffered loss of life in victory as well as in defeat. One day in May, 1831, a party of Flatheads skirmished with some Blackfeet, two of whom they killed. The day before, these Blackfeet had slain one of their tribesmen and had taken a Flathead squaw whom they found walking some distance from the village. After ravishing her and cutting off her hair, they had allowed her to return to the Flathead camp. The following month, Fontenelle's party of Indians and whites on Snake River skirmished with Blackfeet braves who lost five of their horses and one of their warriors; and on August sixth a large party of mounted Blackfeet approached the Nez Perce camp but, probably awed by superior numbers, departed without a hostile act.

About November 10, 1831, the Flatheads and their allies, while hunting bison, encountered Blackfeet raiders who killed three of their warriors and put the rest to flight. On another occasion seven Flatheads were reported to have fought a whole village of Bannocks that had violated the rights of hospitality (De Smet, Letters, II, 574). Greater evidence of this hostility is available for the years after 1850; see chapter seven of this thesis.

9Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 86-87.
10Ibid., 120.
from whom they recovered some stolen horses and took two scalps. In January of the next year the Rocky Mountain Fur Company camp and fifty lodges of Flatheads and Nez Perces were camped across from the entrance of Lemhi Pass which the Blackfeet, with twenty Flathead horses, had recently used to escape to the Missouri. Two nights after Ferris arrived at this camp, a party of Blackfeet approached; several of them entered at different points and cut loose some horses. One of them mounted a magnificent horse and rode slowly through the camp. Because he was able to give the usual Flathead answer, he passed by the guard unchallenged. Soon after this, the owner of the horse discovered his loss; and believing his mount had broken loose, he left with a friend to find him. About fifty yards from camp they encountered a Blackfeet who thought they were comrades. He quickly realized his error and fled, but a shot brought him to the ground. Then about twenty other Blackfeet rose from the sage and fled into the woods. Feeling that the scalp of their fallen foe compensated, in some measure, for the seven or eight horses that had been stolen, the Flatheads returned to camp.\footnote{Ibid., 129.}

Two days after this affair, news was received from John Work's party, camped at Beaverhead with a large band of Pend d'Oreilles, that they had cornered some Blackfeet horse thieves. These Blackfeet shouted that Kenneth McKenzie of the American Fur Company had already supplied them with one hundred sixty guns and plenty of ammunition and that they
only awaited the arrival of a large band of Blood Indians to begin a war of extermination against all the whites, Flatheads, and others in that part of the country. 12

Four months later an attempt was made to carry out this threat. Having been supplied with many guns and plenty of ammunition, approximately one thousand Blackfeet braves set out to intercept any intruders who might venture forth on the buffalo plains. Sighting, on May 18, 1832, a large Flathead and Nez Perce hunting expedition, they rode forth determined to annihilate the interlopers. So often before, such determination had not been backed by appropriate and sustained action; but, perhaps, the outcome would be different this time. In the first fierce onslaught the Blackfeet cut up six or eight Flathead tents and ran off many horses. As the battle continued, Flathead resistance stiffened. A quick victory was soon ruled out. So strongly had the Flatheads and their allies defended the slain that the Blackfeet could not take a single scalp. Finding, after a two-day battle, that they could not fulfill their ambition of annihilating the enemy, the Blackfeet withdrew, leaving sixteen of their comrades on the field of battle. The price paid by the Flatheads and Nez Perces for their freedom to hunt and to continue as a tribe was considerable. Several of the Flatheads and Nez Perces were severely wounded; and twelve of them went to the spirit land, never again to fight for the right to hunt on the buffalo plains. Furthermore, this

12 Ibid., 129-30.
hunting party suffered a heavy blow with the loss of approximately one thousand horses to the Blackfeet marauders. \(^{13}\)

Later in the same month, Ferris joined a Flathead camp which was preparing to hunt buffalo. Interested in persuading the Indians to come to Pierre’s Hole for trading purposes, Ferris offered them ammunition, blankets, and tobacco as inducements to journey to that rendezvous. It so happened that this was a particularly strong inducement at this time since the Indians had fought an all-day battle with the Blackfeet the day before in which they had expended so much ammunition that they now had powder and balls for only half their number. In this battle there had been forty wounded and many killed. \(^{14}\) The news of this contest probably caused Ferris to think somewhat as follows, "Could that have been the battleground I passed over on my way to this camp? Indeed, if so, it had been a fierce battle since the ground had been covered with many scalped Indians; in fact, I counted sixteen in an area of several hundred yards. These Blackfeet devils certainly are persistent, but at least one good result of their actions will be to insure the presence of the Flatheads at Pierre’s Hole where they can get ammunition to repay the Blackfeet for their recent outrages." \(^{15}\) Little did

\(^{13}\)Ibid., 146-47. This incident was related to Ferris on May 21, 1832, near Cotas Creek in the Salmon River region.

\(^{14}\)Ibid., 333-34.

\(^{15}\)These quoted sentences are not direct quotations from Ferris’s journal. The substance of the first two sentences of the quotation was written by Ferris a day earlier.
they know that they would have the opportunity to fight as well as trade at Pierre's Hole.

While crossing the Deer House Plains (the Deer Lodge Valley) a party of traders of which Ferris was a member and a band of Flatheads, on their way to the bison range, found a Blackfeet message warning them to go no further toward the hunting grounds. On a small area of smooth earth was drawn a map of the junction of three rivers near which were several small mounds and a small square enclosure made of pointed twigs. From the location and direction of the three rivers it was certain they were meant to represent the Three Forks of the Missouri, while the square enclosure represented a fort. In the center of the enclosure a tall stick with a piece of rag fastened at the top was fixed upright in the ground to represent the fort's flag. Around the enclosure were arranged many conical piles of earth among which red earth was scattered; these indicated a village of the Blood tribe with its numerous lodges. At the enclosure's entrance were the erect figures of two persons, one of whom wore a hat and was represented in the act of smoking; these two figures stood for an Indian chief and a white trader. Behind the figure wearing a hat, some horse hair was rolled up and placed on a piece of tobacco. At the feet of the other were four small, wooden pipes and by his side a bit of dressed

and in different form on page 332 of the journal. The third and last sentence within quotation marks are possible thoughts which the investigator assumes went through Ferris's mind on this occasion.
skin which contained a few grains of powder. The pipes symbolized peace and intimacy. The tobacco, horse hair (for horses), powder and skin showed that such articles had been exchanged between the Indians and the trader. This was confirmed by the presence of a cross formed by two sticks stuck in the ground near the two figures; this was the Indian symbol meaning "to trade". A small stick pointed from the feet of each of the two figures to the breast of the other and indicated the Indian sign for declaring that it was "the truth". There were also numerous little figures of men which indicated the presence of many Indians. Scattered about were bits of scarlet blankets and cloth which were proof of the abundant supplies they had in their possession. On the ground eight or ten paces from the figures of Indians in attendance lay thirty small red sticks which represented thirty Flatheads killed the previous spring. Seven small figures, symbolizing horsemen, faced north and represented those who prepared the letter. They were now proceeding northward to their own country.

This letter had been arranged the day before and was evidently intended for the Flatheads, warning them against hunting on the plains of the Missouri. Had it been expressed in words Ferris believed it would have read somewhat as follows:

Flatt-heads, take notice, that peace, amity and commerce have at length been established in good faith,
between the whites and our tribe; that for our benefit they have erected a fort at the three forks of the Missouri, supplied with every thing necessary for trade that our comfort and safety require; that we have assembled in great numbers at the fort, where a brisk trade has been opened, and that we shall henceforth, remain on the headwaters of the Missouri. You will please observe that we scalped thirty of you last spring, and that we intend to serve the rest of you in the same manner. If, therefore, you consult your own interests and safety, you will not venture on our hunting grounds, but keep out of our vicinity. You may depend upon the truth of what we now tell you. Done by a party of seven Blood horsemen, now on our way home to the forks.17

Undaunted by this communication and all the more determined to uphold their right to hunt, the Flatheads continued on toward the bison plains.

In the summer of 1832, both Indian and white converged on the valley of Pierre's Hole. 18 Extending from south-

17Ibid., 323-24.
18The trappers of that day referred to the valleys as holes. Pierre's Hole is now known as Teton Basin.

The battle of Pierre's Hole, fought on July 18, 1832, between Gros Ventre Indians and an allied Indian and white force, was the most publicized fight of this nature in the fur trade era. Washington Irving's striking account of the battle, drawn from various sources, played an important part in making it such a well-known event. However, it was not the most important battle in the history of intertribal warfare in the area under consideration. Considering the numbers involved and the length of time the skirmish continued, the losses were much fewer than one would expect and did not affect materially the tribal strength of the Indians involved. The Gros Ventres probably suffered the most fatalities; but because of their larger tribal numbers, they were less affected than the western Indians whose fewer losses seemed important due to their smaller tribal numbers. This encounter, of course, gave the Gros Ventres another reason to intensify hostilities against the whites and western Indians alike.

The variations in the story of the battle may be attributed to individual differences in ability to observe accurately coupled with unusual emotional stress which is always likely to cause inaccuracy and variation in the story
east to northwest along the headwaters of Snake River, this oasis was the designated rendezvous for the Rocky Mountain and the American Fur Companies. In this valley hundreds of Flatheads and Nez Perces gathered as did some two hundred white trappers. At this time some Gros Ventres of the Prairie, who were returning from a visit to their Arapaho friends in Colorado, approached Pierre's Hole, unaware that they would soon come face to face with unsympathetic whites and their Indian rivals, the Flatheads and Nez Perces.

On July seventeenth when the business of rendezvous had been nearly completed, a party of approximately sixty trappers under Milton Sublette set out towards Snake River country; but after traveling only six or eight miles, they

of observers. In some cases one observer may have had a more favorable position than another to see what happened. Ferris apparently was not present to observe the beginning of the battle because he wrote "in the meantime an express was dispatched to inform us..." and, of course, Zenas Leonard while crawling through the woods could not observe action elsewhere. The usual battle or skirmish found in this narrative is based on one source only and in a few cases two or possibly three sources, which make it difficult to determine accuracy by the comparison method. However, the sources for the battle of Pierre's Hole are numerous. Five accounts are here used as major sources; two others are referred to briefly, and two more were not available for comparison. Although the story of this battle may not warrant all the space allotted to it, detail has not been spared in order to illustrate variations in the observations of several witnesses who were on the scene of action. The testimony of eyewitnesses does not always agree—a fact which the student and the historian must always bear in mind. However, the testimony of such witnesses must be made the starting point of investigation.

19 Irving, Bonneville, 87-88.

20 Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 336; Irving, Bonneville, 82.
halted for the night. On the next morning along a stream on the valley slope above them, these whites sighted strange Indians, whom they identified as Blackfeet. In reality they proved to be Gros Ventres who, seeing that they had been observed, yelled and came down into the valley. Mostly on foot, they numbered approximately fifty warriors and one hundred women and children and, perhaps, thought that they were approaching friendly traders.

Their approach has been described with some varia-

21 Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 153; Irving, Bonneville, 53.

22 Frances P. Victor, The River of the West Life and Adventures in the Rocky Mountain and Oregon (Hartford, 1871), 112.

23 Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 136, 154. Irving’s sources (Bonneville, 89) gave one hundred fifty men, women, and children. Leonard (Narrative, 116-17), when he had seen the inside of the fort with its many rifle pits, thought there might have been from three to four hundred. John Wyeth “calculated that they had amounted to about three hundred.” See Oregon, or a Short History of a Long Journey from the Atlantic Ocean to the Region of the Pacific by Land. Early Western Travels (Cleveland, 1905), XXI, 72. When Samuel Parker visited the scene of battle on August 29, 1835, he was informed that there had been about sixty men and more than the same number of women and children (Journal, 89).

24 Stanley Vestal, Mountain Men (Boston, 1937), 113. According to Vestal’s information received from the Arapahos, the Gros Ventre chief had been directed by Kenneth McKenzie of the American Fur Company to be on the lookout for Fontenelle who would be in Pierre’s Hole about this time. When the chief saw the white camp, he thought it belonged to Fontenelle’s men and rode down. The Arapaho believed the chief had good intentions and thought that if he had known that these were McKenzie’s competitors he would never have risked his life by advancing alone with only a pipe in his hand, especially since the Indians outnumbered the whites. (In fighting men they may have not outnumbered the whites.) Nor would he have brought his women and children down out of the hills into danger.
tion. Leonard described them as advancing with a British flag; and Wyeth remarked that at first they flew a white flag, but with the firing of shots they displayed a red flag.独自和未武装，一个Gros Ventre酋长向前走，带着一根和平烟斗；但在眨眼之间，他被送进了永世。一个扁头人，其中一个是Sublette的捕猎者和一个易洛魁人的猎人，被黑脚杀死，骑着一个扁头人去见他。当Gros Ventre伸出手来表示友好时，扁头人开火了。一声大嚎从Gros Ventre的喉咙中发出。子弹被射出，所有的人都逃到掩体中。

While the warriors skirmished with the trappers, the rest of the Gros Ventres withdrew into a nearby cottonwood grove and constructed a fort about fifty feet square by building a breastwork of timber large enough for themselves and their horses. When completed, a trench of rifle pits extended entirely around the inside of the fort, which enabled them to shoot from the bottom of the breastwork.

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25 Narrative, 112.
26 Oregon, 70.
27 Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 154.
28 Victor, River of the West, 112-13. Wyeth (Oregon, 70) states that the Flathead chief shook the other chief's hand while his companion did the shooting.
29 Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 154, 201-02, 336. Ferris's description follows: "the battleground...was situated in a grove of aspen trees, several hundred yards in extent. The pen or fort was probably about fifty feet
In the meantime, while riders were sent to the main rendezvous camp for reinforcements, the trappers hid in a ravine from which they could pick off the Gros Ventres. Leonard stated that it took several hours for reinforcements to arrive, while Ferris declared that in one hour "a thousand guns were constantly discharging at every hole in the pen." W. L. Sublette directed the battle in which some two hundred trappers, two hundred Flatheads, and three hundred Nez Perces were allied to besiege the Gros Ventres.

The allied forces did not realize at the time that many of the square, was composed of green and dry aspen timber, and though hastily, yet firmly constructed..... The besieged had excavated holes or cavities in the earth, within the pen, sufficiently capacious for two or three persons to remain in, quite below the surface of the ground. These holes extended entirely round the pen; and we ascertained that the Indians had fired, in most cases, from small holes at the surface of the ground, beneath the pen or breastwork, which circumstances was not observed in the smoke and confusion of the battle, or they would have been annihilated in a few moments" (Life in the Rocky Mountains, 201-02).

Meek remarked that the Gros Ventres took refuge in a swamp formed by an old beaver dam and thickly overgrown with cottonwood and willow, matted together with tough vines. There the breastwork was made (Victor, River of the West, 113). Irving follows this version, but Samuel Parker (Journal, 90) when visiting the scene in 1835 saw no swamp.

Victor, River of the West, 113.

Narrative, 112.

Life in the Rocky Mountains, 336.

Leonard, Narrative, 112, 117. This number of Indians was corroborated by Wyeth (Oregon, 69-70) who wrote, "we had about five hundred friendly Indian warriors with us, who expressed their willingness to join in our defense." Leonard (Narrative, 113) stated that Fitzpatrick was in charge of the battle, not Sublette.
the Gros Ventre women and children had headed for the mountains, leaving only fifty or sixty Gros Ventres, with some women, to resist the attackers. 34

According to Leonard, the allied force, hopeful of a decisive battle, speedily advanced; but met by a destructive fire from the enclosure, they retreated. 35 After six hours about thirty whites, including Sublette, Campbell, Sinclair, Meek, and Leonard and an equal number of Indians, worked their way through the thicket. More exposed to enemy fire as they emerged into an open area near the fortification, Sinclair received a mortal wound and Sublette, after killing a Gros Ventres, was shot and carried out by Campbell and Meek. 36 In the meantime, Wyeth, with some Indians, had gained nearly the opposite side of the fort when one Indian near him was killed by a shot from Sublette's party. 37

Among those in the brush was Leonard with two companions and two Indians one of whom was killed about forty yards from the fort by a Blackfeet marksman. Seeing this,

34Victor, River of the West, 114.

35Narrative, 113. Leonard stated that the allied force was not aware of the fort in the timber until they charged upon it; this charge took the lives of five whites, eight Flatheads and ten Nez Perces and wounded a large number of whites and Indians. In the light of casualty statistics from other sources, however, these figures are greatly exaggerated.


37Victor, River of the West, 115; Irving, Bonneville, 94.
Leonard and his companion tried to remain still; but one companion, Smith, shook the weeds as he was lying on his stomach and soon fell prey to a "Blackfeet" sharpshooter. Deciding it was too dangerous, Leonard and his remaining companion, Kean, fell back; but Kean's retreat was stopped by an enemy bullet. \(^{38}\)

Firing continued until late in the afternoon; but owing to the enemy's secure position and the attackers' reluctance to storm the fort, no great progress was made. Finally, the white leaders proposed a plan to burn the enemy out of their shelter, and the Nez Perce and Flathead women gathered up sticks for this purpose. At this point in the story of the battle two observers gave varied accounts of the events that followed. Both agreed that the allied Indians objected to the plan because it would result in lost plunder. Ferris wrote that as night came on the whites left for their camps because they were provoked at the allied Indians for their failure to agree on the use of fire to annihilate the enemy. The deserted Indians also departed, enabling the Gros Ventres to leave in safety. \(^{39}\) In his version Meek remarked that when a Gros Ventre chief saw the allied Indian women gathering sticks to be used to fire the breastwork, he yelled to the besiegers that there were four hundred lodges of his people near at hand who would avenge their deaths.

\(^{38}\) Leonard, *Narrative*, 114.

\(^{39}\) Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains*, 154. Parker was informed that when night drew near, the hunters retired to their camp; and the Indians made their escape (*journal*, 90).
should they be destroyed. These words were not clearly understood or were wrongly interpreted and created the impression that an attack was in progress at the main rendezvous camp. Fearing the loss of their valuables, the whites and Indians left a small party to watch the enemy and hastened away to protect the camp. Upon reaching the rendezvous, they found that there was no cause for alarm; nevertheless, they remained on guard that night in case of attack. Those who remained to watch the enemy rested in the woods during the night, secure in the belief that the enemy was trapped. When their comrades returned in the morning, all advanced to the fort which they found deserted.

Observers differed as to the number of killed and wounded. A number of dead horses were in the fort. Leonard stated that the bodies of two warriors and one squaw lay in the enclosure, while Ferris remarked that the bodies of three Gros Ventre Indians, a child, and several dogs were

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40 Victor, River of the West, 115-16. Leonard (Narrative, 114-15) mentioned the preparations made to set fire to the fort. According to him, the scheme was frustrated by a deliberate trick of the enemy in which they said aid was near at hand.

41 Victor, River of the West, 116.

42 Meek stated that there were over thirty dead horses (Ibid.). Ferris, twenty-four horses (Life in the Rocky Mountains, 155). Wyeth, twenty-five horses (Oregon, 72). Leonard (Narrative, 117), forty-two horses. Irving, thirty-two horses (Bonneville, 96).

43 Narrative, 117.
there. In a later article (1873) Ferris contradicted this earlier statement with a new and probably inaccurate one. He said, "we visited the pen which was literally full of dead Indians, squaws, children and horses. It is not probable that any escaped." Ten Gros Ventres were found dead inside the fort and other dead outside, according to Meek. The Nez Perces found seven dead Blackfeet in near-by brush where they had been hidden to save their scalps. Ferris stated that the bodies of five more Gros Ventres were found later. The loss of Gros Ventres was never fully known, although Irving wrote that they admitted losing twenty-six warriors.

As to the allied losses, Meek listed one half-breed, seven Nez Perces, and six whites slain and about the same number of whites and their allies wounded. Ferris commented on allied casualties as follows, "We lost....two men killed, one mortally wounded, and many others severely or slightly. The Indians on our side lost five killed and many wounded, some supposed to be mortally." In his 1873 article, Ferris wrote that they had buried sixteen allied Indians and six whites and that other parties involved in the battle had

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44 Life in the Rocky Mountains, 155.
46 Victor, River of the West, 116-17.
47 Leonard, Narrative, 117.
48 Life in the Rocky Mountains, 155.
49 Bonneville, 96.
50 Victor, River of the West, 117.
suffered a similar loss. Wyeth remarked that twenty-five allied Indians were slain and thirty-five wounded. An approximate summation of losses on both sides appears as follows: ten to twenty-six Gros Ventres slain, six whites and from seven to twenty-five allied Indians slain, and many allied wounded, possibly as many as thirty-five or forty.

Following the trail of the Gros Ventres for several miles, the Flatheads and Nez Perces found much baggage hidden along the way. At one point they came upon a squaw who was leaning against a tree at the foot of which lay a dead warrior. Irving credits her with noble motives in remaining by her husband where she was slain by the allied Indians. However, Meek stated that her leg had been broken by a ball which prevented her from moving. According to him, the girl implored the approaching trappers to kill her, but they refused her request. Finally, a ball from a vengeful Indian silenced her.

Two fourteen to fifteen year-old girls who apparently had been hunting berries and who had concealed themselves when the fighting began were captured the next morning by the allied Indians who offered to help them; however, the girls retorted that since their friends and relatives had been

51 Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 154-55, 337.
52 Oregon, 72.
53 Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 155.
54 Irving, Bonneville, 97.
55 Victor, River of the West, 117.
slain, they wanted to die. Since white men were not present to interfere, one old warrior used his tomahawk to grant their wish.\textsuperscript{56} Fearing that if they pursued further they might run into the main body of Gros Ventres, the trappers and Indians returned to the rendezvous, where they remained several days to see if an attack occurred.\textsuperscript{57}

Having thus achieved a victory over these Gros Ventres, whom they considered Blackfeet, and resupplied with ammunition, the western Indians continued their journeys into the buffalo country in defiance of Blackfeet threats. This resulted in intensified Blackfeet activity and brought disaster to many allied Indians, as Captain Bonneville and others learned in the months that followed the Battle of Pierre's Hole. On November 20, 1832, Bonneville joined a camp of Flatheads and Nez Perces who, strange to say, considered themselves safe from Blackfeet marauders; and consequently took no precautions. Despite Bonneville's warnings, their lodges and horses remained scattered; so when the Blackfeet raided the village, they had no difficulty in taking eighty-six horses in one raid. Since game was becoming scarce, Bonneville suggested that they move to Horse Prairie; but the Indians at this time wished to go to a more sheltered hunter's paradise where there was less danger from roving Blackfeet. There elk were plentiful, and a little ways beyond were buffalo. Before they departed to this region,

\textsuperscript{56}Ferris, \textit{Life in the Rocky Mountains}, 336-37.

\textsuperscript{57}Victor, \textit{River of the West}, 118.
Blackfeet raiders struck again, stealing forty-one horses. A third raid shortly followed in which thirty horses were lost. The Flatheads and Nez Perces did not speak of retribution; and at first, Bonneville found it difficult to rouse their war spirit. One orator declared that it was not good to go to war for mere revenge and that lost horses could be replaced by the Lower Nez Perces without risk; whereas, in war they should lose men who were not so easily replaced. However, due to Bonneville's urging, early next morning thirty warriors departed in pursuit of the thieves. Leading a few broken-down horses, they returned the next day, satisfied that they had fulfilled the demands of honor and had soothed the wounded pride of the Nez Perces.  

Bonneville left the Nez Perces for a time but rejoined them on March 13, 1833, when they informed him that they had been out to hunt buffalo and had been harassed by the Blackfeet, who had continued to steal many horses. In order to increase their striking power, scattered parties of Blackfeet united to form a force of three hundred men. Having discovered the former Nez Perce camping ground which was covered with empty lodges, they concealed themselves in the brush to watch for some straggler who might lead them to their enemies. Kosato, a Blackfeet renegade living with the Nez Perces, passed by with his bride on his way from the main body of hunters to a little band of ten lodges which had left

the main camp in search of better pasturage. Following him, the Blackfeet discovered the ten lodges which were defended by only twenty men, nine of whom had fusees. When attacked, the Nez Perces dug holes inside their lodges from which they fought desperately. Several Blackfeet were slain; but not a single Nez Perce was killed, although several were wounded. One Nez Perce woman defended her husband until he could crawl to safety, while in another area of action a Blackfeet brave decided to slay a Nez Perce warrior whom he had seen hiding behind a fallen tree trunk. He placed a round log before him, lay down beside it, and rolled it forward towards the tree trunk beside which his enemy crouched. When the logs touched, the Nez Perce jumped up and shot his antagonist in the back.

The Blackfeet chieftain did not relish the sight of Blackfeet bodies sprawled on the ground nor did he like the determined resistance of the Nez Perces. Since he was a Nez Perce renegade who, unlike Kosato, had no vindictive feelings against his native tribe and since about seventy horses were in Blackfeet hands and the ammunition was low, the chief decided it would be wise to leave. The departing Blackfeet encountered Kosato's tearful wife who held the renegade's fusee was a flint lock gun. A flint lock was "a lock for an old fashioned gun, having a flint fixed in the cock, or hammer, which on striking the battery or cover of the pan, ignited the priming which communicated its fire to the charge through the touchhole." See Webster's New International Dictionary, second edition, unabridged.

Irving, Bonneville, 181-82.
apparently lifeless body in her arms and urged her to leave him and return to her people. This she refused to do, and they passed on. As she watched the face of her husband, she thought she saw him breathe and was overjoyed to discover that he had only been stunned by a nearly spent bullet. Having made a gradual recovery, Kosato had redoubled love for his wife and increased hatred for the Blackfeet. 61

After the departure of Bonneville in March, the renegade, Kosato, goaded the Nez Perces to strike at the Blackfeet who had so recently outraged them and declared that such raids would continue until by might of arms the Nez Perces showed that they were men. His eloquence had effect, and a band of braves under his leadership departed for Blackfeet territory. At Horse Prairie they met and fought a strong party of Blackfeet. Finally, as was customary, they paused for a long parley or war of words. 62 The Blackfeet chief taunted Kosato and told the Nez Perces to return home where a large Blackfeet force would soon strike. Taking these words to heart, Kosato hastened back to the Nez Perce village where his words of warning fell on deaf ears. Such Blackfeet threats of extermination had been made before and had proven to be only boastful words. However, several days later three hundred Blackfeet were sighted on the near-by hills; and since many young Nez Perce men had gone to their relatives to

61 Ibid., 183.

62 For fuller explanation of this characteristic of Indian warfare see page 145, footnote 11, of chapter five of this thesis.
get horses, the remaining Nez Perces felt it would be suicidal to oppose this force in an open fight. What were they to do to ward off a blow which threatened annihilation?

A Nez Perce chief, called by the whites Blue John, volunteered to approach the enemy camp and to try to drive off their horses. Should this blow be successful, the spirit and strength of the invaders might be broken; and with horses, the Nez Perces would be able to resist. Setting out, Blue John and twenty-nine others found the weather favorable until they reached a defile near the enemy camp at which time it began to rain—an ill omen according to their medicine man. Nevertheless, they pressed on further into the defile where they met enemy scouts, whom they drove back among the hills. Pursuing them with such eagerness, they threw caution to the winds and were soon trapped. Determined to sell their lives dearly, Blue John and his men sprang forward to meet the enemy and split many Blackfeet skulls before they were overwhelmed. By jumping on the horse of a slain warrior and racing to his village, only one of the thirty Nez Perces survived.

With the enemy so near and the flower of their men slain, the Nez Perces were panic stricken. The remaining warriors armed themselves, while the women shrieked, cried, threw their ornaments to the ground and tore their hair. The Blackfeet, however, did not pursue their advantage. The sacrifice of Blue John and his followers apparently had not been

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63 Irving, Bonneville, 195-97.
64 Ibid., 197-99.
Although not successful in carrying out their original plan, they, by fighting the enemy and providing them with twenty-nine scalps, had possibly satiated, for the time being, their warlike spirit and may have caused them to be disheartened by their own losses in the fight. Taking advantage of this tragic event, the renegade, Kosato, again strove to rouse the vindictive feelings of his adopted brothers and to urge them to revenge the death of these brave men.65

Blackfeet braves were also destined to visit the Flatheads, for they had uttered a threat of extermination the previous fall which they were bound to fulfill. At the

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65 Ibid., 199-201. The renegade, Kosato, mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, had fled his native tribe because he had murdered his chief who had become jealous and angry over Kosato's association with his wife and also had appropriated Kosato's horses for his own. So one evening in a meadow, where the horses were pastured, Kosato saw the chief and killed him. Then he returned to camp, told the chief's wife what he had done, and they both fled to the Nez Perces (Ibid., 152-56).

John Townsend (Narrative, 192-96) referred to a renegade Blackfeet who dwelt among the Nez Perces. On June 22, 1834, he saw the Nez Perces, Bannocks and Shoshonis trading furs for ammunition and trinkets at the Ham Fork's rendezvous. Among them was a Blackfeet chief, a renegade from his own tribe, who had killed a great chief of his tribe and was forced to flee. He had joined the Nez Perces and fought against his own people. Although he was active in tribal ceremonies, he was disliked "for all men seem to detest and scorn a traitor."

It is possible that this is the same renegade mentioned by Irving. However, this last quoted statement by Townsend does not describe Kosato because Irving pictured him as a directing force in the Nez Perce camp and made no mention of scorn or dislike by the Nez Perces. Kosato was also only a young brave not a chief when he slew the chief of his village. So it may be that Townsend referred to another renegade.
summit of Lemhi Pass, in the spring of 1833, a Blackfeet war party, on its mission of annihilation, encountered a small band of Flatheads which was headed for Blackfeet territory on a retaliatory expedition of its own. In the desperate fighting that followed, the Flatheads were completely defeated. Among the thirty Flatheads that died that day were several of the bravest warriors in the whole Flathead tribe. However, instead of pushing on to carry out their threat completely, the Blackfeet returned to their own country. Their action was due perhaps to their own considerable losses in the battle of the pass or to the feeling that they had done enough to keep their promise of a spring visit. 66

Four years after this, near present-day Helena, Montana, twelve Flathead hunters in advance of the main camp discovered a party of twenty-five Blackfeet against whom they directed a devastating fire. In this brief encounter five Blackfeet were slain and another five wounded, while only two Flatheads were wounded. Seven days later Blackfeet messengers came to the Flathead camp to arrange a peace for trading purposes. Accepting their proposition, the Flatheads, nevertheless, remained alert in anticipation of treachery. Two days after the conclusion of peace, the Blackfeet renewed hostilities by killing two Flatheads not far from the main

66 Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 217-18. The only Flathead who escaped had been separated from the rest early in the action and fled to tell the story. Ferris learned of it when at the Flathead village on August 15, 1833.
Arriving among the Flatheads for the first time, Father De Smet was not long in learning of their rivalry with the Blackfeet. Not long before, sixty Flatheads had fought two hundred Blackfeet warriors. Determined to die rather than retreat, the Flatheads fought desperately for five successive days. At one point during the contest all the Flathead horses were in danger of falling into Blackfeet hands. So the Flathead, Pilchimo, dispossessed a squaw of her horse and drove the horses back into camp. Another warrior named Sechelmeld encountered a lone Blackfoot who car-


68 For the decade of the 1840's the observations of Catholic missionaries provided the principal sources of information on intertribal warfare. Due, in part, to the failure of the Great Spirit to give greater protection against the Blackfeet, the Flatheads in the 1830's sent for missionaries to come to their aid. Responding to their plea, Father De Smet came to the Flatheads in 1840 and remained for two months amongst them. Then he returned to the East to bring other missionaries to the Flatheads. After a campaign to raise money, De Smet organized a missionary party in the spring of 1841. With De Smet were two other Jesuit priests. Father Nicholas Point, a Frenchman who had come to America in 1835, was an able artist; and Father Gregory Mengarini was an Italian and an able physician. They arrived in the Bitterroot Valley in late August, 1841, and proceeded from there, with the main body of Flatheads, to the present site of Old Fort Owen. De Smet decided to build a mission which was named St. Mary's; however, he did not remain long with the Flatheads. When he left in 1842, Father Mengarini remained in charge and in 1845 received assistance when Father Anthony Ravalli came to St. Mary's. This versatile priest helped the Indians and was instrumental in the mission's success during the years 1845-50. Throughout the 1840's Blackfoot hostility threatened their work; thus that hostility occupied a place in missionary writings.

69 De Smet, Letters, I, 220.
ried a valuable musket. Thinking that Sechelmeld was one of his comrades, the Blackfeet asked him for a ride. Agreeing to this, the Flathead allowed him to ride for a short time, then seized the weapon, killed its owner, and galloped off in pursuit of another enemy. Discouraged by the boldness of their antagonist and by the fifty Blackfeet dead which dotted the battleground, the Blackfeet finally gave up the attempt to destroy the Flathead force. In the struggle no Flatheads were killed, although one died of wounds received in the fight.

70 Ibid., I, 319-20.

71 Ibid., 220. This is one of three similar accounts of a battle fought before De Smet's arrival among the Flatheads. The other two accounts are as follows: In one five-day contest seventy Flatheads opposed one thousand Blackfeet. During the struggle many Blackfeet were killed and wounded but no Flatheads were slain (Ibid., 319). The second version stated that a formidable band of nearly eight hundred Blackfeet fought about sixty Flatheads and Pend d'Oreilles. Confident of success after asking God's help, the Flatheads fought a five-day battle in which the Blackfeet lost eighty warriors. The Flatheads lost only one man who died from wounds four months later (Ibid., II, 573). On page 573, volume two, De Smet remarked that sixty Flatheads killed eighty warriors out of two hundred lodges of Blackfeet involved in the attack.

All the accounts are similar in that the Blackfeet suffered heavy losses and that the Flatheads lost no men in the actual fighting. They agreed on the fact that it was a five-day battle and that one Flathead later died from his wounds. They vary in the number of combatants involved and in the number of Blackfeet dead. The most reasonable version is the one which credited the Blackfeet with two hundred warriors, for war parties of that nation roamed more frequently in bands of two hundred or less than in bands of eight hundred to one thousand warriors.

Since the Flatheads, who were De Smet's informational sources in this case, were probably anxious to impress this new arrival with their bravery and achievement and since the Indian had a tendency to exaggerate in such stories, the statistics in these accounts have to be questioned. Could it
St. Mary's Mission, established by the Catholic missionaries, became the object of Blackfeet attentions because it ministered to Flathead needs. Father Mengarini described their predicament:

To get rid of the Blackfeet was harder than to get rid of mosquitoes, for the Blackfeet were the hereditary foes of the Flatheads. Hence the history of our mission would, if written fully, be an account of Blackfeet inroads and Flathead reprisals. I have already related how, when we were but a few days from the mission, the long-robed Blackfeet came and drove off the horses of some of our Indians who were about twenty miles distant. I have now to record that they came by night to our mission itself and drove off our horses and mules. The frequency of the visits of the Blackfeet will cause no wonder when it is known that, had not a pestilence decimated the tribe... before our arrival, our mission at St. Mary's would have been impossible.

Thus the Blackfeet, now peaceable, now warlike, were the most constant callers at our mission. But even when they came peaceably the Flatheads generally kept aloof and would have nothing to do with them. Hence, on occasion of the feast which I gave none of my Indians came to offer anything towards it; hence, also on another occasion, when some twenty or thirty Blackfeet came on foot, the Calispels, upon their de-
parture, fired guns in the air, to show that the people of St. Mary's were not their friends. The Blackfeet however, kept on their way, neither hastening their steps nor even turning to see who had fired the shots.

There was perpetual warfare between the Flatheads and the Blackfeet who repeatedly raided the property adjoining the mission. The custom of the Flatheads to make two hunting expeditions annually for buffalo left the mission unprotected for long periods and rendered the process of making them dependent upon agriculture difficult. While away hunting many of them were involved in wars with their enemies and came in contact with roving whites whose carefree life was not the best example of the results of civilization. The Blackfoot troubles broke the security of the Indians and rendered concentration on the arts of peace difficult. 72

Thinking that they could carry on instruction and give the comforts of religion to those who became sick or died during a hunt, the missionaries, in the beginning, went with the Indians on their long hunting trips. Father Point accompanied a Flathead camp of forty lodges and approximately sixty warriors on the winter hunt of 1841-42. On the way they met a party of seventeen Blackfeet whom they soon encircled and would have destroyed if Father Point, in response to Blackfeet appeals for aid, had not asked the Flatheads to spare them. At this interference of the priest, the Flatheads were highly indignant; but they yielded to his request. 73

Father Point thus familiarized himself with the dangers accompanying a buffalo hunt. The greatest of these came from Blackfoot bands which lurked in the region. They were

72 Mengerini, "Narrative," 8-9, 18.
73 L. B. Palladino, Indian and White in the Northwest a History of Catholicity in Montana 1831 to 1891 (Lancaster, Pa., 1922), 52.
pictured as a dastardly lot who merited all the punishment inflicted upon them:

Happily, however, from having been often beaten by the smaller tribes, they have become so dastardly that unless they are twenty to one they confine their attacks to the horses, which thanks to the carelessness of their courageous enemies, they go about with so much dexterity and success, that this year, while our good Flatheads were asleep, they discovered their animals as often as twenty times, and carried off more than one hundred of them.

Divine justice is punishing a number of their robbers. This year the Nez Perces caught twelve of them and killed them, thirty others were killed by Pend d'Oreilles.... A few days ago the spot was pointed out to me where six Flatheads withstood one hundred and sixty Blackfeet with so much resolution, that with a handful of their men who came to their aid, they gained the victory.74

The western Indians continued to be an instrument of "divine justice" in the new year of 1842 when the following scene was enacted. A war whoop knifed the air as Blackfeet braves bore down upon four Pend d'Oreilles and a Couer d'Alene who, in response, raised their weapons and fired. When the smoke cleared, the Blackfeet leader's lifeless body was sprawled upon the ground. More shots rang out, and the Blackfeet pressed the attack; however, their attentions were soon diverted from the four by the arrival of many Pend d'Oreilles. Camped near-by, they had been aroused by gunfire and had come to the aid of their companions. Without losing a single man, the Pend d'Oreilles completely routed the enemy.75

75 Ibid., II, 573-74.
During the summer hunt of the next year the united camp of Flatheads and Pend d'Oreilles fought a band of Blackfeet four times their number. Observing that the Blackfeet avoided an open fight, the Flatheads, in order to draw the Blackfeet into the open plain, pretended flight; and when the Blackfeet followed in pursuit, the allied Indians suddenly wheeled, attacked, and repulsed them. Twenty-three Blackfeet warriors, three Pend d'Oreilles, and one Flathead departed to that undiscovered country from which no traveler returns. 76

In the spring of 1846, accompanied by Father Mengarini, some thirty Flatheads and forty Pend d'Oreilles under the aged chief Frize set out on their usual hunt; and after a few days' journey, they met an old French trader who, in two or three days of barter, provided them with a large ammunition supply, which would be needed in Blackfeet country. Again they pressed on over the mountains until they came to the Missouri River, which took more than an hour to cross. After lighting large fires and drying themselves, they started in search of bison. Encountering a Blackfeet camp eight days later, they prepared for battle, with some men stripping themselves and others clothing themselves in colorful calicoes to show their riches and to invite the attack of those who dared. After the women and children had been taken to a place of safety, both sides began firing; and thundering across the plain, rival horsemen strived to kill each other.

76 Ibid., II, 574.
Having gone to the sanctuary provided for the women, Father Mengarini gave this description of the events that followed:

Arrived at the thicket. I found it already fortified by the old men and the women who had retired thither. Lodges had been set up in various places, and behind there the Flatheads would make their last stand if beaten in the field. A hillock separated us from the plain, but we could hear the whistling of the balls as they passed over our heads. No cry was raised during the battle, but we heard the reports of the rifles nearer and nearer, and knew that our warriors were hard pressed. I had no sooner reached the thicket than I raised my hands to heaven and prayed fervently. The battle lasted nearly all day, but excitement and anxiety caused hours to pass like moments. The shots at first loud and numerous, grew fewer and fainter in the distance, and as the sun was sinking in the west our victorious warriors returned, bearing with them the bodies of the four slain. The enemy, leaving twenty-four upon the field, had sought safety in their camp.

I told the chief that we had come to hunt buffaloes and not to fight. He recalled his warriors and they obeyed, but with great reluctance. He told me that we could not avoid passing before the Blackfeet, and, in fact, no sooner had we passed the hillock which had sheltered us than we saw the Blackfeet upon the mountains, but behaving like people that scarcely knew what to do. I was afterwards told that had I not called the Flatheads from the fight, the village of the enemy, with all its ammunition, traps, and skins would have been ours. I knew nothing of the panic that had seized upon the Blackfeet, and considering it as a special grace that we had come forth the victorious the day before, I thought that it would be tempting God to endanger our lives again.

After marching ten to twelve miles, the Flatheads met Pierre Choquette, a Frenchman who lived among the Blackfeet and who had fought against the Flatheads the day before. He told Mengarini that the Flatheads had fought courageously, that the superior numbers of Blackfeet had been thoroughly defeated, and that they mourned twenty-four slain and about forty

77 Mengarini, "Narrative," 17.
wounded. Gladdened by this news, the party moved on to hunt the many bison which appeared in the distance.

Accompanying the Flatheads and their allies on these buffalo hunts, the priests found themselves involved in delicate situations, for the presence of a missionary with any one tribe gave other tribes the impression that he was in league with their enemies. Since a priest would become less respected if he continued this practice and since the Indians while on a hunt found little time for religious instruction, the fathers eventually abandoned the plan of accompanying Indians on their buffalo excursions.

Although in the years 1830-50 the Blackfeet were the principal enemies of the plateau Indians, the Flatheads and their allies occasionally found themselves engaged in an unexpected combat with other eastern tribes. Such was the case in October, 1846, when a large body of Flatheads, accompanied by thirty lodges of Nez Perces and strange to say, a dozen lodges of Blackfeet, came into the Yellowstone Valley to renew peace terms with the Crows. However, the presence of these Blackfeet endangered peaceful negotiations as did the presence of the Nez Perces with whom the Crows were unfriendly at this time. Superior in number, the Crows eagerly rushed toward the camp in a manner which bode no good for overtures of peace. The calm Flathead protest over this behav-

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78 Ibid., 18.
79 Palladino, Indian and White, 51-53.
ior, coupled with the Crow chief's warning, prevented at that
time an attack which would have proven most destructive to
the allied camp. Realizing the presence of Nez Perces and
Blackfeet might cause trouble, De Smet sent to the camp a
Blackrobe whose presence and urgings caused the Crow chiefs
to speak to their spirited braves; but even their admonitions
could not keep the two forces separated for long. The Crow
theft of thirty Flathead horses the next day proved to be
the spark that changed a state of hostile feeling into one
of open warfare. 80

Aware of their precarious position, the Flatheads
had been fortifying their camp, stationing their women and
children in a place of safety, and arming themselves for any
eventuality. About ten o'clock in the morning an immense
dust cloud near the Crow camp announced the expected attack.
Chief Stieltietlotso spoke to his warriors, "If it be the
will of God, we shall conquer--if it not be his will, let us
humbly submit to whatever it shall please his goodness to
send us. Some of us must expect to fall in this contest....
let us constantly keep Him in mind." With these words in
their ears, the Flatheads returned the fire of the approach-}

80 De Smet, Letters, I, 154-55; II, 574-77.

81 Ibid., II, 576.
pursuit continued until sundown, at which time they had driven the enemy two miles from their camp. It was learned from three prisoners, who had been liberated from the Crow camp, that fourteen Crow warriors had lost their lives and nine had been severely wounded, while the allied camp lost only one man—the son of a Nez Perce chief—and had three men wounded, one of whom died from his wounds.\textsuperscript{82}

In this battle there had been many instances of individual bravery. There was the example of Raphael, the youthful son of a Flathead chief, who, despite the fact that he had recently recovered from sickness, asked for and received his father's permission to join the battle. Taking his father's horse, Raphael soon found himself upon the heels of a Crow chief who, noticing his pursuer and wishing to take the boy's scalp, pulled up his horse. In so doing, he leaned down to escape the arrow aimed at him; but he was not quick enough, for the arrow entered under the lower left rib, with the barb passing out under the right shoulder. The chief's death resulted in the direction of Crow fire on his slayer whose horse fell and pinned its rider under him. Stunned by the fall, Raphael lay as if dead, and Crow warriors dealt heavy blows upon his supposedly dead body. When the Flatheads passed in pursuit of the enemy, they rescued the battered and bruised youth.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{82}\textit{Ibid.}, II, 576-77.  
\textsuperscript{83}\textit{Ibid.}, 577-78.
Even the Flathead women participated in the battle. One, the mother of seven children, led her own son onto the battlefield and aided her eldest son in a fight with a Crow warrior, while a young Flathead woman collected scattered arrows to replace the nearly exhausted supply of her loved ones.\(^\text{84}\)

Father De Smet, who arrived at the Flathead camp a day after the battle, found marks of Crow grief all around the spot where the Crows had camped. There were disassembled finger joints; and blood stains, caused by self-inflicted wounds of mourning relatives, blotted various natural objects in the area. Deeply impressed by the defense of the Flatheads, those Blackfeet present expressed a desire to be friends in the future with their former foes. After congratulating themselves on the victory and seeing no sign of further danger, the allied camp set out for the buffalo country of the Judith Basin.\(^\text{85}\)

During this same year, Father De Smet visited the Piegan chief, Big Lake; there in the Blackfeet camp De Smet held mass for a group of more than two thousand Flatheads, Nez Perces, Piegons, Bloods, Blackfeet, and Gros Ventres and managed to arrange a peace between the Flatheads and the Blackfeet which, remarkably enough, lasted approximately a month. During the winter of 1846-47 Father Point remained with the Blackfeet, some of whom requested baptism which they

\(^{84}\text{Ibid.}, \text{II, 578.} \)

\(^{85}\text{Ibid.}, 579.\)
thought might aid them in destroying their enemies. Certainly a powerful war spirit reposed within the breast of each Blackfeet brave!

As has been seen, many western Indians in their resistance to enemy attacks displayed leadership and courage. One such man was Kosato, the Blackfeet who left his native tribe to live among the Nez Perces and who did his best to arouse their war spirit against the Blackfeet. Ranking high in Nez Perce hearts and minds was the chief Blue John and his followers who sacrificed their lives to prevent the annihilation of a Nez Perce village. Another worthy was Raphael, son of a Flathead chief, who demonstrated Flathead bravery when he killed a Crow chief and in turn was severely wounded.

Blackfeet raids against the Flatheads in the Bitterroot Valley hindered agricultural development and made the work of the missionaries at St. Mary's more difficult; and as long as these plateau Indians continued their excursions east of the Rockies to hunt bison, these Blackfeet raids at home and abroad were bound to continue. Since the western Indians had no idea of relinquishing their ancient hunting privileges and since the Blackfeet remained adament in their claims to the bison plains, war was inevitable; and attempts at peace were usually unsuccessful and, when made, were broken within a very short time. Powerful outside forces were needed to end Indian rivalry, and in the years 1850-80 such forces

jolted the Indian economy and Indian ability to wage war. An era of discipline and control loomed ahead for the Indians of the great bison range of the Northwest.
PART IV

WAR AND PEACE: 1850-1880

In the three decades from 1850 to 1880 hostilities became less frequent among some tribes and increased among others. As in the period before 1850, there were contests involving large numbers of men and resulting in considerable loss of life although, as in the past, most warfare was confined to raid and reprisal by small war parties of six to fifty men. Notable battles occurred between the Piegans and the Crows in the early 1850's, the Kutenais and the Blackfeet in 1858, the Crows and the Blackfeet in the same year, and the Pend d'Oreilles and the Assiniboins in 1860. The Piegan-Gros Ventres feud resulted in a massacre in 1867, and the Sioux and the Crows dealt death to each other in 1868, in 1875-76, and at other times. The efforts of Indian chiefs and elders to establish intertribal harmony during these years occasionally were successful but more often were made ineffective by the turbulent nature of their young braves.

The government established large Indian reservations, the boundaries of which were not always respected by their inhabitants and other Indians until the white settler, the Indian agent, and the army moved to restrict Indian movement and thus prevent intertribal conflict and the accompanying
depredations on white men. As the year 1880 approached, the Indian found it increasingly difficult to sustain himself on long horse-raiding expeditions. White settlement on lands between one tribe and another and possible interception by the military discouraged Indian raids. Finally, with the decimation of the buffalo herds the Indian was forced to rely on government annuities and whatever agricultural produce he could raise. Independence, as the Indian had known it, vanished. The extermination of the bison and the white restriction of Indian movement meant that the Indian would no longer travel the road to buffalo or participate in deeds of raid and reprisal. The end had come for the wielding of gun and tomahawk and the search for horse and scalp.
CHAPTER VII

LET THERE BE PEACE!

In the early 1850's intertribal warfare continued in its traditional manner. As in the past, peace feelers were put forth from time to time, only to be rejected due to some indescretion on the part of the tribe proposing peace or due to mistrust of the peace proposals as a device of treachery to secure a military advantage.¹ Such a situation developed in the early 1850's when the Crows proposed peace with their long-time enemy, the Piegans. The shattering of Crow hopes of peace and the bloody aftermath illustrates a characteristic of intertribal rivalry: young, rash braves often made the establishment of peace, sought after by their chiefs and elders, most difficult. In the following narrative of the

¹One exception to this was the Crow-Assiniboin peace of 1850, which lasted for a number of years. E. T. Denig was present at this peace which ended years of warfare and wrote of the mutual advantages that this peace offered the Crows and the Assiniboins. The Crows received permission to hunt in the Assiniboin country and were assured protection against Blackfeet attacks. The peace agreement made one less enemy to contend with and enabled them to go in safety to trade for corn with the Gros Ventres. The Assiniboins received a good many horses each year as a token of friendship, and a common winter hunt assured the Assiniboins plenty of meat without exerting so much effort. For the Assiniboins there was one enemy less; and while hunting in common, their joint forces were likely to discourage attack (Denig, "Indian Tribes," 404).
Crow-Piegan peace failure and the unusually severe contest that followed, vengeance for the death of a noted Piegan tribesman was particularly compelling because the treacherous act had been committed while peace negotiations were in progress.

Piegan lodges of various camps dotted the Sun River Valley in the early 1850's. A messenger entered one Piegan camp and proceeded to the lodge of the noted medicine man--Skoon-a-taps-e-guan, The Strong Man. His presence was desired at the Piegan chief's camp where the Crows and the Piegans were to discuss intertribal peace. With his assistant, The Strong Man set out for the council. Doubts that a sound peace could be arranged probably crossed the medicine man's mind as he proceeded through the valley which had frequently been the scene of bloodshed. When within a few miles of the Piegan camp, they stopped for a brief rest. The Strong Man lighted his pipe; then suddenly he groaned, dropped the pipe, and slumped to the ground. An enemy ball had found its mark. His companion, only stunned by a similar missile, recovered in time to see the Crow murderers leaving; scalps dangled from their saddle bows. Fearing to move, he lay quietly for awhile, trying to keep his mind off the pain which seared through his scalpless head. After a time he got up and left the area. When he arrived at the nearest Piegan camp, he told the head men of the tragedy. Then exhausted, he fell to the lodge floor.

At the main Piegan camp, after the council had been
in session and plans had been discussed of a future Indian nation made up of both Crows and Blackfeet, the chief called a temporary adjournment to await the arrival of The Strong Man, for it would not do to have the medicine man absent at the final agreement. Until he arrived all would be entertained by feasting and dancing. The feast continued, but where was The Strong Man? While the Crows were being entertained, a curious Piegan woman found a bundle of moccasins hidden in the snow. With this find was a fresh scalp which looked like that of a Piegan. Informed of this discovery, the chief left his lodge to look over the Crow visitors and saw, dangling from the neck of one Crow, the sunglass which The Strong Man used to light his pipe. Governed by what he had seen, the Piegan chief convened the peace council and told the Crows that no peace treaty could be signed until The Strong Man had approved such a peace. Until his consent was given the Crows would be considered enemies. Many of the leaders of both tribes were shocked at the chief's attitude, for negotiations had been going so well up to this time. They followed the chief to ask him the reason for his action. His only answer was to the Crow leaders whom he told to go to their camp and prepare for war. Departing with haste, the Crow leaders moved their camp some miles away where they built fortifications and prepared to meet the Piegans if pursued.

Meanwhile, the Piegans gathered from the different camps, having learned of the murder from messengers and from
The Strong Man's assistant. By night time over a thousand mounted warriors were ready for revenge. After some preliminary skirmishing, the Piegans drove the Crows into their fortifications from which they were dislodged after an all day and night struggle. Early in the morning the Crows moved down the valley. The Piegans rested until evening at which time they renewed the pursuit and overtook the Crows about two miles below the town of Sun River, where a high bluff bordered the river and provided a good defensive position. On the morning of the third day the Piegans attacked this position and succeeded by nightfall in forcing the Crows out; however, because of the peculiar nature of the bluffs at this point, this victory proved to be of no great advantage since the immediate ground beyond was as well adapted to defense as that just lost. There the Crows entrenched themselves; and when morning came, yells of defiance answered the taunts of the Blackfeet.

The arrival of reinforcements for both sides swelled the combatants, according to the Piegans, to around five thousand. The desperate and bloody struggle continued for two days, with the Crows yielding slowly and inflicting severe losses on the enemy. Finally making a last stand, the Crows resisted a Piegan charge which piled the ground with the killed and wounded of both tribes. So crippled by their

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2 It is most likely that this is another example of Indian exaggeration of numbers if the narrator considered these five thousand to be warriors. At the most an estimate of 2500 warriors involved would be within the realm of possibility; and, in all probability, there were fewer than that.
continuous battle, the Piegan made no effort to pursue those Crows who survived and escaped down the river and across the Missouri. Tribal numbers were drastically reduced on both sides; over five hundred Piegan warriors, according to Little Plume, marked the battlefield. The Crow losses were equally severe. Thus the Sun River Valley had again lived up to its reputation as a bloody battleground.

Blackfeet rivalry with their eastern neighbors, the

3 Indian losses in most battles were small, although each life lost was considered a serious blow to tribal strength. There were a few contests in which the casualties were unusually high. In most cases this was due not only to a severe struggle in which surprise was an important factor but also to Indian or white exaggeration and inaccuracy in reporting the numbers involved.

In this contest it seems that a loss of 500 warriors in a three-day struggle is too high; more acceptable, in the investigator’s opinion, and within the realm of possibility, would be a casualty list of between 100 and 250 casualties on each side. The following facts lend support to the lower figure.

Major Alexander Culbertson estimated that the Piegan had 550 lodges in 1835 while Isaac Stevens, in 1853-54, credited the Piegan tribe with 350 lodges and 875 warriors. Accepting the fact that the 1835 estimate may not be too accurate due to the white man’s lack of knowledge of the Blackfeet tribes at this early date, the difference between the two estimates is 250 lodges. Accepting an average of eight persons to a lodge and at least two warriors to a lodge, the total number of warriors lost over a period of twenty years would be five hundred. During this period (1835-55) the Blackfeet tribes suffered considerable loss from smallpox; warfare also took its toll. In the light of these statistics it would have been impossible for the Piegan to have lost five hundred warriors unless they had been joined by warriors from the other Blackfeet tribes.

4 Robert Vaughn, Then and Now; or, Thirty-Six Years in the Rockies (Minneapolis, 1900), 151-55. The account of this story was given by Little Plume, a Piegan chief, to three frontiersmen of the Sun River Valley, James Gibson, Judge Burchey and S. M. Carson, who at the time were on the staff of the Sun River Sun and in which paper the story was published December 25, 1884. Little Plume had witnessed this battle as a boy.
Crees and Assiniboins, continued unabated in the years after 1850. Their enmity had been long standing, and such deeds as recorded in the following paragraphs only served to keep the war fires burning. Approximately a half mile from Fort Union in the spring of 1851, a Cree woman trudged through an area of high grass which concealed Blackfeet whose arrows soon streaked toward her. The Cree squaw fell, ready for the scalping knife.5

In July seven Assiniboins set out on the warpath against the Blackfeet. Having taken eight Blackfeet scalps and having wounded some twenty more near a Blackfeet village, the Assiniboins deemed themselves most fortunate and looked forward to the pleasure of reciting their deeds to eager listeners around home camp fires. However, destiny had decreed otherwise. Their deeds had so aroused the Blackfeet chief that he set out at the head of two hundred horsemen to hunt down the marauders. Seven fresh Assiniboin scalps soon adorned Blackfeet lodges, giving the Assiniboin tribe further reason to assail their hated enemy.6

A superior Blackfeet force in September, 1851, surprised nine Cree braves who fled for their lives. Seeing they would soon be overtaken, the Crees halted at the side of a low hill, dug in with their knives and hands, and fought


6Ibid., 206.
their last fight. In October the Blackfeet surprised a party of Assiniboins, killed one woman while she slept, and inflicted eight wounds upon the young son of Chief Mad Bear before near-by Crows rescued the party and pursued the attackers. The Blackfeet entrenched themselves on a hill, and during the night escaped from the Crow besiegers.7

In the winter of 1851-52 one Joe Dolores discovered a wounded Assiniboin who told him of the tragedy that had befallen his party. Seven lodges of his people under La Main Poque had been hunting near a small lake when they were pounced upon by Blackfeet. One Assiniboin was felled by a bullet in the brain, and in the ensuing struggle one hundred others were wounded. The Blackfeet lost three men. Concealing themselves in the brush after the first attack, the Blackfeet fired on the Assiniboins whose only protection was a snow bank. Lying flat on their stomachs, the women covered themselves and their papooses with buffalo robes. The Assiniboin Bluefoot was not man enough to fight; he played the part of a woman and hid under the robes too. Eventually, the Blackfeet left the area, allowing the survivors to make their way home.8

By the early 1850's many Blackfeet chiefs and elders saw that incessant warfare slowly but surely destroyed their warriors. This way of life might be substituted for a more

7Ibid., 128.
8Ibid., 320-21.
peaceful existence if it were not for the rash nature of their young braves. The white man, too, had become seriously interested in ending such warfare in order to promote the exploration and settlement of the country and the passage of emigrants through it. So rapidly had the Pacific coast developed that in 1853 a series of four surveys was undertaken to discover the best route for a railroad to the Pacific. In charge of the survey in the Montana region was Isaac I. Stevens, governor of Washington Territory and territorial Superintendent of Indian Affairs, who was determined to make a lasting peace between the Indians and their tribal enemies as well as between the Indian and the white man.

On his way west, in July, 1853, Governor Stevens stopped at an Assiniboin camp of one hundred fifty lodges where one old Assiniboin spoke to him substantially as follows, emphasizing the importance to them of the buffalo and their fear of that animal's eventual disappearance:

My father, you see us now as we are. We are poor. We have few blankets and little clothing. The Great Father of Life, who made us and gave us these lands to live upon, made the buffalo and other game to afford us subsistence; their meat is our only food; with their skins we clothe ourselves and build our lodges. They are our only means of life, food, fuel and clothing. But I fear we shall soon be deprived of these: starvation and cold will destroy us. The buffalo are fast disappearing, and before many years will be destroyed. As the white man advances, our means of life will grow less. We will soon have to seek protection in our poverty from the Great Father, who can so well supply it.

9Hazard Stevens, I. I. Stevens, I, 343.
Actually buffalo were still plentiful in the Northwest. For many tribes the year 1853 was a most successful hunting year; it just happened that at the time of Stevens's visit the Assiniboins had had a poor hunt, and it is not improbable that self-interest produced an exaggerated story to gain the governor's sympathy. However, the Assiniboin's speech was a predecessor of other speeches indicative of the gradual diminishing of the herds.

Governor Stevens left Fort Union, on August 10, 1853, with a Blackfeet war party of forty Piegons and twenty Blood Indians. He desired their company in order to impress upon them the importance of a council to make peace between the Blackfeet and the hunting tribes west of the mountains. This war party was led by the White Man's Horse who had been a frequent visitor to the Bitterroot Valley and who had stolen horses from the Flatheads. This chief evaluated his raids into Flathead territory as worthwhile and said, "I take the

\[10\] Lieutenant Saxton's entry of August 11, 1853, told of a party of at least one hundred Pend d'Oreille Indians returning from the Missouri "loaded with buffalo robes and dried buffalo meat." See U. S. War Dept., Report of Explorations, I, 257.

On October 2, 1853, Lieutenant Saxton stated, "At Fort Union...visited by a party of Assiniboins. They are very rich this year, on account of the abundance of buffalo, and offered to bring us a large supply of dried meat if we could wait till they could send for it." See Ibid., 264.

Also, Lieutenant Mullan in his "Report of a Reconnaissance from the Bitter Root Valley to Fort Hall, Thence to the Head of Hell Gate River, Thence to the Bitter Root Valley Jan 21, 1854," wrote on December 4, 1853, "We passed several Nez Perce lodges in crossing the mountain, with many animals loaded with meat and furs. This has been a great hunting season with all the Indians, both east and west of the mountains. Hundreds of thousands of buffalo have been slain." See Ibid., 325.
first Flathead horse I come to, it is sure to be a good one."¹¹

In his journal for August 24 and 25, 1853, Stevens told of a break between the Gros Ventres and the Blackfeet and of his attempt to disuade them from using violence to settle the matter:

I learned today that a feud has lately broken out between the Gros Ventres and the Blackfoot tribes. A Gros Ventre was married to a Blackfoot woman. Traveling alone, he was attacked, killed, and a fleet horse of his stolen. His wife was with him at the time, and the assassin proposed that she should marry him, go northward, and the Gros Ventres would never learn of the death of one of their tribe. She assented. He gave her the slow animal, upon which he had ridden himself, mounting the fast horse which had been taken from her murdered husband. They soon arrived at water; she went off to get some, and on her return pressed him to go, as the water was very good. He did so leaving his horse with the squaw. After he had gone some two or three hundred yards she mounted the fast steed, and, pursuing, a contrary direction, joined the tribe of her deceased husband, and gave such information as would lead to the revenge of his untimely death. I find these Indians determined to revenge this outrage, and they are now fitting out war parties for the purpose of cutting off straggling Blackfeet, and stealing their horses.¹²

Stevens found an atmosphere of deep indignation and anger at the Gros Ventres camp of three hundred lodges and requested them to refrain from whole-scale warfare until a settlement could be worked out. He suggested that they ask the Blackfeet for a satisfactory reparation or for delivery of the offender. Dwelling on the follies of war, the advantages of peace, and the inconvenience and danger to which whites were

¹¹Hazard Stevens, I. I. Stevens, I, 351-52.
¹²Ibid., 355-56.
exposed by roaming war parties, Stevens urged the Gros Ventres to come to Fort Benton to settle this difficulty with the Blackfeet. 13

Stevens sent out agents to hold meetings with the tribes and to discuss the merits of peaceful intertribal relations. These efforts brought new hope to the tribes west of the mountains. Lieutenant John Mullan journeyed to the Musselshell River to examine the country and to tell a band of Flatheads in that region about the coming peace council. His instructions, dated September 8, 1853, were in part, "Assure them that the Great Father appreciates their services and understands their merits; that he will hereafter protect them from the incursions of the Blackfeet, and other Indians east of the mountains, and make them live as friends." 14

Returning on September twentieth from a trip to the Blackfeet, Mr. Stanley brought with him to Fort Benton thirty chiefs and their families to hold council, while nearly a thousand of the tribe remained to hunt in the Milk River area. At this council the next day Governor Stevens spoke thus:

Your Great Father has sent me to bear a message to you and all his other children. It is that he wishes

13 Ibid., I, 357-58. For many years before the 1850's the Gros Ventres and the Blackfeet had lived, hunted, and fought together against all enemies. As a result of this break the Gros Ventres found it convenient to ally themselves with the Assiniboins and the Crows at a later date. Rivalry between the Gros Ventres and the Blackfeet tribes continued until 1874.

you to live at peace with each other and the whites. He desires that you should be under his protection, and partake equally with the Crows and Assiniboines of his bounty. Live in peace with all the neighboring tribes, protect all the whites passing through your country, and the Great Father will be your fast friend.

Low Horn, the principal Piegan chief, responded favorably to the governor's words, but he emphasized the difficulty of restraining the young men who wished to perform warlike deeds and to take scalps and horses in order to become braves and chiefs and to gain the good will of the young women. In reply the governor said:

Why is it that you have two or three women to one man? Is it not because your young men go out on war parties, and thus the flower of your tribe is cut down? And you will go on diminishing every year until your tribes are extinct. Is it not better that your young men should have wives and children and that your numbers increase? Won't your women prefer husbands to scalps and horses? The Gros Ventres desire to meet you in council, and have the difficulties between you arranged. Will you meet them in council?

Before the council adjourned, the Blackfeet delegation agreed to refrain from traveling the warpath against neighboring tribes, to respect white travelers passing through the country, and to allow the Great Father to settle their difficulties. After the council Low Horn urged his people to

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15 Hazard Stevens, I. I. Stevens, I, 373.

16 Ibid., 374. Here Stevens refers to the Indian custom of polygamy which stemmed in part from the fact that there was a higher death rate among the men who were exposed to the dangers of the chase and of the warpath. The fact that the women did most of the camp work also was a factor in the development of polygamy. Thus, one significant effect of intertribal warfare upon Indian life was its role as a stimulant to polygamous marriage.
keep faith with the promises made in council and requested Stevens to tell the Indians west of the mountains that the Blackfeet were no longer their enemies and that they would meet them in council at Fort Benton. 17

Having thus consulted with the Blackfeet, Stevens proceeded to Fort Owen to confer with the Flatheads. From September 30 to October 1, 1853, he conversed with them on the idea of a peace council; at first they were dubious of such a council due to their recent bitter experiences with the Blackfeet. 18 They pointed out to him six or seven orphan boys whose fathers had been slain by Blackfeet within the previous two or three years 19 and asked what they should do in case of a Blackfeet attack. The governor advised them to fight only in self-defense. 20 These Indians expressed a strong desire for protection, for an agent to live among them, and for agricultural tools. 21 Their status at this time Stevens described as follows:

The Flatheads number about sixty lodges, but many of them are only inhabited by old women and their daughters. The tribe has been almost exterminated by the Blackfeet, and the mass of the nation consist of Pend d'Oreilles, Spokanes, Nez Perces and Iroquois. I estimated their number at 350. Their country is admirably adapted to grazing; they own many cattle,

18 Hazard Stevens, I. I. Stevens, I, 381-82.
20 Hazard Stevens, I. I. Stevens, I, 382.
which they corral at night, have on their village sixteen log-houses, and many have small patches of wheat and vegetables. Much greater advances would have been made by them in agriculture, had it not been for their entire insecurity from the incursions of the Blackfeet, and for the great diminution of their able-bodied men. Even Victor, during the last season, cached the remnant of his tribe, and a fine band of horses reserved for the winter hunt, while the bulk of his tribe were on the Missouri Plains. 22

When Stevens departed westward, he took with him their promises to attend the council. He took pleasure in telling a band of sixty Couer d’Alenes, on their way to the hunting grounds about October eighth, that the western Indians no longer needed to fear Blackfeet war parties; this news gladdened the hearts of these Indians. 23

However, the governor had spoken with undue optimism, for Lieutenant Mullan, in his report of November 18, 1853, informed Stevens that the Blackfeet had not lived up to their promises. Mullan had been informed by the Pend d’Oreille

22 Ibid. An estimate of Indians encountered in the survey is included in Stevens’s "Report". The Gros Ventres are credited with 360 lodges, 900 warriors, and a total population of 2520; the Bloods and the Piegans each were credited with 350 lodges, 875 warriors, and 2450 people, the Blackfeet proper with 250 lodges, 625 warriors and 1,750 population, and the Assiniboins and Crees with 400 lodges, 1000 warriors, and 2,800 population. The Flatheads were credited with 60 lodges and 350 warriors; the Kutenais and Flatheads with 400 warriors, the Pend d’Oreilles of the Upper Lake with 40 lodges and 280 warriors, of the Lower Lake with 60 lodges and 420 warriors, and the Nez Perces with 1700 warriors. The tribal numbers of the Blackfeet nation were based on the enumeration of James Doty who, according to Stevens, "had the opportunity of making an actual count of more than half these Indians, and his estimate cannot be far from the mark." Stanley had estimated the three Blackfeet tribes at 1330 lodges and 13,300 people and Stevens himself estimated them and the Gros Ventres at 14,400 people (I. I. Stevens, "Report", 150-52).

23 Hazard Stevens, I. I. Stevens, I, 386.
Indians that a party of Blackfeet had stolen horses belonging to chief Victor who had been on his way to hunt buffalo. Pursuing the thieves, the Flatheads killed one and wounded another. The Pend d'Oreilles were highly indignant at this lack of Blackfeet faith and followed the Blackfeet into Fort Benton where they saw a band of horses and mules from which they took a number of Indian horses. Thinking these belonged to the American Fur Company, they reasoned thus, "Here are these whites, the employes of the American Fur Company, who have bought, and who do still buy, from the Blackfeet the horses they steal from us, thus giving encouragement to their thieving propensities; and here are some of our horses; we will take them!" Returning to Victor's camp with these horses, they told the chief what had happened. Chief Victor told the Pend d'Oreilles to return the horses to Fort Benton, for the Flatheads had promised to live in peace with the Blackfeet and only to fight if directly attacked; horse stealing was not to be condoned.

James Doty, in his report of December 28, 1853, reported the return of the horses on November first; however, the Pend d'Oreilles who returned them were themselves in danger. During their stay of two days, the Pend d'Oreilles were bothered by Piegans; and the whites had to protect the Pend d'
Doty reported that the Piegan camp of Little Dog had been attacked recently by Crees and Assiniboins; Little Dog and another had been wounded. Despite this provocation, Little Dog had decided to forego revenge, at least until the peace council had been held. Despite this action of good faith by the Piegens, Doty confirmed Mullan's report of Blackfeet inability to keep their promises with these words:

I am sorry to inform you that many of the Indians do not abide by their promises to remain at peace this winter. About five hundred, principally Piegons have passed this post, on their way to war, since October 1st; about one hundred were induced to turn back. In the same time eight hundred or a thousand warriors must have passed above and below the fort, on their way to the Flatheads, Snakes, and Crows, as I have, from time to time, heard of large parties of Bloods, Blackfeet and Gros Ventres, on the march; and parties are constantly going from the different bands. Several of the chiefs have taken a very decided stand for peace, and keep the warriors of their own bands at home. Others say "this is the last winter we can go to war; next summer the white soldiers will stop us, therefore, let us steal this winter all the horses we can." It is becoming a serious question in my mind whether these Indians will desist from their predatory incursions until a sufficient military force is stationed in the country to check every attempt at sending out war parties. No military force, however, is needed to protect white men in this country.27

In January, 1854, many Flatheads came to cantonment Stevens, anxious to learn if the Blackfeet were still at war with their neighbors. They had so often had their hopes of peace dashed and so often had trusted to treaties and prom-


27Ibid.
ises, which had as often been broken, that they doubted if they would ever be able to dwell unmolested in their own country. However, Blackfeet braves could not be completely restrained, and on April twelfth they took some fifty Pend d'Oreille horses. Thus deprived of their transportation, the Pend d'Oreilles had to await the arrival of friends. Upon their arrival, seventeen Flatheads and Pend d'Oreilles pursued the Blackfeet across the mountains through deep snow and timber but failed to overtake them.

Disregarding Stevens's request for peace, Indians still warred upon their neighbors. Farther east, in July of the same year, a boat carrying A. J. Vaughan and goods for the Crows glided along the Yellowstone River. On the morning of July 19, 1854, six Crows who followed along the river on horseback were fired upon from a thicket of willows. Whooping and yelling, over seventy Blackfeet rushed out of the brush; and before the men aboard the boat could come to their aid, two Crows were killed and scalped. This was but one example of the truth of Vaughan's statement that "scarcely a day passes but the Crow country is infested with more or less parties of Blackfeet, who murder indiscriminately anything


that comes within their reach." Also, during the spring or summer of the next year three Crow warriors and a squaw, returning from an unsuccessful horse-stealing raid against the Gros Ventres, were overtaken and destroyed by forty Gros Ventres at Cow Island.

While conferring with Columbia River Indians regarding a treaty, Governor Stevens learned from the Nez Perce chief, Looking Glass, that Blackfeet promises had not been kept. Looking Glass and his hunters had entered the village singing a war song and waving, on the top of a pole, a freshly taken scalp. While hunting, the chief had been in several fights with the Blackfeet. At one time they stole seventy of his horses. The chief had pursued them, killed two and recovered his horses. He had reached the Bitterroot Valley on his return home when he heard the Nez Perces were at a great council to conclude a treaty without his presence.

In the afternoon of July 7, 1855, Victor of the Flatheads, Alexander of the Pend d'Oreilles, and Michelle of the Kutenais visited Stevens who told them of the treaty made with the Nez Perces and of efforts to make peace with the Blackfeet. When he urged that they send a delegation to the peace council, they complained that many of the young Black-


32 Hazard Stevens, I. I. Stevens, II, 53-54.
feet braves had continued their raids and had inflicted severe losses upon them since the governor's last visit two years before. Victor remarked,

The Blackfeet have troubled us very much. I am going to tell what has happened since you were here. Twelve men have been killed when out hunting, not on war-parties. I fear the whites and keep them quiet. I cannot tell how many horses have been stolen since. Now I listen, and I hear what you wish me to do; were it not for you, I would have had my revenge ere this. They have stolen horses seven times this spring.\(^33\)

In spite of these doubts and complaints, the chief promised to attend the council.

With the love of country strong in Indian hearts, it was not surprising in the opening days of the council (July 9 and 10, 1855) that they objected to leaving their land for a reservation in another area. Stevens had offered an area either in the upper Bitterroot Valley or the Horse Plains and the Jocko River in Pend d'Oreille territory. Big Canoe, a Pend d'Oreille chief, did not think it necessary to relinquish land and told of his compliance to the white man's request to keep the peace:

I want my country....I am very poor. This is all the small piece I have got. I am not going to let it go....It is two winters since you passed here. Every year since, my horses have gone to the Blackfeet. Here, this spring, the Blackfeet put my daughter on foot. She packed her goods on her back. It made me feel bad. I was going on a war-party as your express passed along. Then I think of what I heard from you, my father, and take my heart back and keep quiet. If I had not listened to your express, I should have gone on war parties over yonder....When I found my children going on war parties, I would tell them to stop, be

\(^33\)Ibid., II, 78-79.
quiet; tell them I expect now we will see the chief; I expect he will talk to the Blackfeet again. 34

Moses, a Flathead chief, was reluctant to sign, and he said, "My brother is buried here. I did not think you would take the only piece of ground I had.... Last year, when you were talking about the Blackfeet, you were joking. A few days ago the Blackfeet stole horses at Salmon River." Then, pointing to a Nez Perce chief who was going to attend the council, he said, "They will get his hair." 35

After the tribal leaders had given their opinions concerning points of the treaty and the future of their nation, they agreed to sign the treaty which gave them a reservation on the Flathead River of a million and a quarter acres. It was agreed that the three tribes would be known as the Flathead nation and would be under the leadership of Victor. Then the Flatheads, Pend d'Oreilles, and Looking Glass's delegation of Nez Perces agreed to proceed to the buffalo country south of the Missouri until the time of the great peace council at Fort Benton. Agent Thomas Adams was to accompany them to prevent any clashes with Blackfeet war parties and to induce the Crows to attend the council. 36

The fact that they were so accompanied by one whose duty it was to regulate their movements and those of the Blackfeet, to prevent bloodshed, was indicative of greater regulation to

34 Ibid., II, 83-84.
35 Ibid., 89.
36 Ibid., 90 and 92.
By early August, when the council had been originally scheduled, the various tribes were scattered over the region north and south of the Missouri. The Blackfeet were mostly north of that river and the western Indians south of it. However, the Gros Ventres camp and Low Horn’s band of fifty-four Piegan lodges were near one camp of western Indians located on the Musselshell River. In this camp of two hundred sixteen lodges and over two thousand Indians were one hundred eight lodges of Nez Perces, sixty-eight lodges of Flatheads and Pend d’Oreilles, and forty lodges of Snakes. Because of the failure of treaty goods and presents to arrive, the council had been postponed until arrival of those goods, which was not until October. In the meantime, the western Indians had found the game becoming scarce and were forced to move southward to the Yellowstone to find buffalo. Some chiefs remained to represent their people. Eventually the goods arrived and the council met, on October thirteenth, at the mouth of the Judith River instead of the previously designated Fort Benton.\footnote{Ibid., II, 96, 99, 109-10.}

It was most remarkable that such long-standing enemies could have hunted in the same general area without bloodshed. The Blackfeet chiefs deserved much credit for this; they exerted all their influence to honor their promise to the western Indians in which they said, "Come to the council
without fear. Your persons and your horses shall be under
our protection, and if a horse be taken by some of our wild
young men, his place shall at once be made good." The good
faith behind this promise was tested when four young braves
of the Pend d'Oreille tribe visited Stevens at Fort Benton
and grazed their horses with the governor's band two miles
from the fort. During the night two northern Blackfeet war-
rriors stole these Pend d'Oreille horses. Stevens acted with
dispatch, putting a Blood chief, Little Dog, on the trail of
the raiders and sending James Doty to the northern Blackfeet
camps. After an unsuccessful ride of thirty hours, Little
Dog returned to Fort Benton from where he proceeded north on
the trail of Doty who had pushed on fifty miles a day for two
hundred thirty miles to the Bow River in British territory.
There Doty entered a large Blackfeet camp two hours behind
the thieves. Informed of the situation, the head chief, Lame
Bull, returned three of the horses; the fourth was still in
the possession of one brave who had left the village. To
make amends the chief offered two of his horses in place of
the one not recovered. These horses were relegated to the
charge of Little Dog who had overtaken Doty. Resuming the
pursuit, Doty rode seventy miles to Elk River where he found
another large Blackfeet camp. Here the chief, Bull's Head,
returned to him the last horse and offered an additional one
for the trouble caused. Thus through cooperation of the
whites and the Blackfeet chiefs, the Pend d'Oreilles were able
to reclaim their horses sixteen days after they were taken,
and danger to temporary intertribal harmony was averted.\footnote{Ibid., II, 99-101.}

So the council began. Colonel Alfred Cummings of the Central Indian Superintendency told the Indians that the Assiniboins had given him their assurances that they wished to live in peace with all other Indians and as evidence of their good faith had given him tobacco to distribute at the council. Governor Stevens then told how pleased he was to see Indians from both sides of the mountains meeting together and remarked that:

There is Peace now between you all here present. We want Peace also with absent tribes. With the Crees, and Assiniboines. With the Snakes, and yes, with the Crows. You have all sent your message to the Crows, telling them you would meet them in friendship here. The Crows were far and could not be found, but we expect you to promise to be friends with the Crows here ....It was Low Horn, who, two years, since, said to me, 'Peace with the Flatheads and Nez Perces.' The Lame Bull said, 'Peace with the Flatheads and Nez Perces.' The Little Dog, Little Gray Head, and all the Blackfoot chiefs said, 'Peace with them, come and meet us in council.' I met them the same year, I told them your words. They said: 'Peace also with the Blackfeet.'\footnote{Albert Partoll (ed.), "The Blackfeet Indian Peace Council," \textit{Sources of Northwest History} no. 3 (reprinted from \textit{Frontier and Midland}, XVII, no. 2, Missoula, Montana, 1937), 4-5.}

Then he emphasized the white man's wish to establish the Indians on farms and to interest them in raising cattle and crops to take the place of buffalo, which would eventually vanish from the earth. After this, Stevens presented the idea of a common hunting ground of all the tribes in the region between the Missouri and the Yellowstone Rivers:
The Blackfeet know that the Western Indians go to buffalo on the other side of the Missouri. They use certain passes. The Medicine Rock, the Big Hole, and others further South. They pass over and through those passes, go to the Musselshell, and the Yellowstone and return home by them. There the Western Indians have hunted, and there the Blackfeet have hunted. We propose that all the Indians here shall continue to hunt on that ground, and that it shall be common hunting ground. I have a word to say to the Western Indians: They have hunted at the Three Buttes. The Blackfeet complain of them. They say give up hunting here, and you may hunt on the common hunting ground. We think that talk is good, and wish the Western Indians should not hunt there. I think, Alexander will think it good.

However, Alexander, the Pend d'Oreille chief, objected to the exclusion of the western Indians from the country north of the Missouri and fervently stated his argument as follows:

A long time ago our people, our ancestors belonged in this country. The country around the Three Buttes. We had many people on this side of the mountains, and now you have shown us only a narrow ridge to hunt on. ...It is a very small place you give us for a hunting ground. A long time ago our people used to hunt about the Three Buttes and the Blackfeet lived far north.... We Indians were all well pleased when we came together here in friendship. Now you point us out a little piece of land to hunt game on. When we were enemies, I always crossed over there, and why should I not now, when we are friends. Why cannot I go there? Which of these chiefs says we are not to go there?

The Piegan chief, Little Dog, replied that he had no

40 The Three Buttes (Sweet Grass Hills), located in the upper Missouri River area, were frequented by war parties and buffalo hunters who wished to scan the surrounding country for enemies and bison. The Blackfeet believed that the Creator made the Three Buttes for the tribe to ascend to look for buffalo (U. S. War Dept., Report of Explorations, I, 360).


42 Ibid., 7.
grudge against the western Indians but that such a restriction would keep them at a distance from the North Blackfeet who were quarrelsome. If they no longer crossed north of the Missouri, they would less likely be involved in skirmishes with these North Blackfeet who had not come to the treaty council. Commissioner Stevens argued the case for the Blackfeet with these words:

In making this division we looked to the Indians obtaining their living. The Blackfeet need all their country here. The Western Indians have enough in the piece given them in proportion to their numbers. Alexander does not want the Blackfeet to starve. The Blackfeet also want Alexander to have food.... The western Indians are only one fourth as numerous as the Blackfeet. Let Alexander think of this. He does not get all his food from the Buffalo. He has farms and cattle. The Blackfeet have none.43

In the end the western chiefs agreed to a common hunting ground with the Musselshell as the southern boundary of Blackfeet territory. No permanent villages were to be established in the common hunting ground. North of a line drawn from Hell Gate in the Rockies to the "nearest source of the Musselshell River" was Blackfeet territory, extending from the Continental Divide as far eastward as the mouth of Milk River. The Assiniboins were given permission to hunt in the eastern-most portion of the area. The western Indians were to use no passes north of the Hell Gate or Medicine Rock passes, and they also agreed that they would not hunt or otherwise disturb the game when visiting Blackfeet territory for trade or a social visit. Article eleven arranged, among

43 Ibid., 7-8.
other things, for intertribal payment for depredations against each other. 44

After this article had been read, Lame Bull asked what they should do in case their enemies, the Assiniboins and the Crees or the Crows, stole their horses. Stevens advised that they pursue the thieves to recover their horses and report the incident to their agent. The Nez Perce chief, Three Feathers, asked the Blackfeet to make a definite statement on the matter of peace. In reply the head chief of the Blood tribe spoke prophetic words:

I wish to say that as far as we old men are concerned we want peace and to cease going to war; but I am afraid that we cannot stop our young men. The Crows are not here to smoke the pipe with us and I am afraid our young men will not be persuaded that they ought not to war against the Crows. We, however, will try our best to keep our young men at home. 45

Stevens told the Blackfeet that he wished them to be at peace with the Crows as with all other tribes; but if they were attacked, they had a right to defend themselves. He declared, "If the Crows come into your country to make war and to steal your horses, drive them out and kill them, but do not go into their country to war....If they come to your country as friends treat them friendly." 46 Commissioner Cummings supplemented Stevens's advice with his own:

I am alike the Father of the Crows and the Blackfeet, the words I have this day said to the Blackfeet

44 Ibid., 9.
46 Ibid.
I will also say to the Crows. I will tell them that the Blackfeet have made a Treaty of Peace, and that you will all consent to send out no more war parties. Where a young man of the Blackfeet is lost in Battle, there is a great lamentation in your lodges and so when a young man of the Crows loses his life. He lays down in death upon the prairie, but in the lodges of the Crows there is weeping and every night they cry for the dead....Your Great Father wishes all his children to live in Peace; if you do not live in peace, and continue to go to war, he will be mad with his children....Tell your young men to take wives and live happily in their own lodges, then the old men will see their sons. Your sons will see their children, and you will all be happy.\(^47\)

The United States Senate ratified the treaty on April 15, 1856, and it was proclaimed on April twenty-fifth by the President. The treaty was obligatory on the Indians when they signed it. In Stevens's estimation "the lion and the lamb" had "laid down together."\(^48\)

This, however, was not quite true; for the Blackfeet, as well as other tribes, found it impossible to break so completely with traditions of warfare by signing a piece of paper of such a revolutionary nature. Despite the sincerity of Blackfeet leaders to maintain peace with their long-time enemies, they were unable to control their restless young men, who believed they should have the same opportunities as their present chiefs had to acquire wealth and to become leaders. Unable to perform deeds of skill and daring in which scalps and horses were taken, they could only be compared to women and could never rise to positions of responsibility and lead-

\(^47\) Ibid., 10-11.

\(^48\) Hazard Stevens, I, I. Stevens, II, 130.
ership. The white man expected too much from men schooled in such an atmosphere; but considering the great adjustment involved, intertribal relations improved somewhat. It is true that horse stealing ranked as a commonplace practice among the tribes after 1855 and that war parties continued to go out in quest of scalps, but one important result of the Blackfeet treaty of 1855 was the decrease of Blackfeet raids into the Bitterroot Valley. However, it must be stressed that it had little restraining effect on Blackfeet warfare with tribes east of the Rocky Mountains.

Hostilities, in violation of the treaty, were initiated against the Crow tribe by young men of the Blood tribe. A war party left the camp of the principal Blood chief less than ten days after the signing of the treaty. From that time until February 1, 1856, many others went on similar expeditions. Their chief defended his men with the excuse that they thought the Crows had not been included in the treaty and promised that there would be no more war parties; but the agent to whom he spoke did not seem sympathetic toward the Bloods as is evident from this portion of his report:

I consider it absolutely necessary that every individual who has led a party to war since the treaty should be arrested and punished....They evidently intended to entirely disregard the treaty made by them last fall, and to treat the whole matter as a farce got up for their amusement, expecting the other three tribes will join them. They even passed through the camp of the Gros Ventres and Piegans, and when they found the young men of those tribes did not join them, ridiculed them for listening to the advice of the whites; but they soon discovered that the other tribes were determined to conduct themselves according to the terms of the treaty, became alarmed and put a stop to
the war. They stole a few horses, destroyed one lodge of Crows, and killed five Assinaboinés. \(^{49}\)

Only twenty days after the signing of the Blackfeet treaty, twenty-two horses were reported to have been stolen from the Flathead, Francis Saxa, by members of the Blood tribe. \(^{50}\) Blackfeet and Blood hostility, according to the agent at Fort Union in September, 1856, caused the Crows to fear to come to that fort for their goods. \(^{51}\) In August, 1857, a few days after A. J. Vaughan's arrival at Fort Benton, he was visited by one of the principal Blood chiefs who apologized for some of his warriors who had gone to war and had stolen horses during the winter and summer of that year. He


\(^{50}\) John Owen, The Journals and Letters of Major John Owen, Pioneer of the Northwest 1850-1871, ed. Seymour Dumbar (2 vols., New York, 1927), II, 59. Saxa's sworn claim was as follows: "Personally appeared before the undersigned United States Indian Agent for the Flathead Nation residing in Said Territory Francis Saxa a member of the Flathead Tribe of Said Nation and who being previously Sworn upon the Bible deposes and Saith as follows. Having with his people attended and taken part in the Blackfoot council and treaty at mouth of Judith in October 1855 he left that place in company with Victor, head chief of the Flathead Nation and his camp and went up the Judith and then over the Mountains between the Judith and Musselshell rivers and was about halfway between the mountains and Musselshell river when just twenty days after the Blackfeet treaty twenty-two head of horses Three geldings, one a race horse, Seven Mares with seven colts and two colts of two years old and three mares... were stolen from him by one Piegan and Six Blood Indians... as he verily believes, witness Jono Owen.

Subscribed and Sworn to before me on this 23rd day of June, 1856 R. H. Langsdale Ind. Agt. Flathead Nation."

offered the excuse that the whites had not given him promised presents. Vaughan also wrote that the Blackfeet proper had ignored the treaty stipulations by going on the warpath. Vaughan, in 1858, wrote a sympathetic report which pictured the Blackfeet as having been tempted into battle by Crow and Assiniboin raiders, who had killed several Blackfeet and had stolen many of their horses. Admitting that there were ambitious young men who went on the warpath to revenge the death of a comrade or to count coup, he believed that the older men had done their best to keep faith with the treaty and that under the circumstances there had been a change for the better in Indian relations among themselves.

However, the agent at Fort Union in an earlier report (September 9, 1857) remarked that horse stealing was still common with most tribes under his supervision. At Fort Union many Assiniboin horses had been stolen within gun shot of the camp. Small war parties in quest of scalps were also on the prowl. This agent had learned of an encounter between forty lodges of the north band of Assiniboins and two or three Gros Ventres of the Prairie. The Assiniboins killed one woman; the others escaped. Thus it was that reports of warfare trickled in to Forts Benton and Union in the years after the

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Blackfeet Treaty of 1855.

The Bannocks and Snakes continued hostile activities against other tribes and in turn were subject to raids of reprisal. Around March 25, 1857, a Bannock killed a Flathead in Hell Gate Canyon. On the eleventh of April, John Owen learned from Moiese, a Flathead, that some of the young men of his tribe had been organizing a war party against the Bannocks. No mention was made of the proposed raid ever being carried out. On April fourteenth there arrived at Fort Owen two lodges of Blackfeet who brought news of an approaching Blackfeet war party destined for Snake country. They were out to avenge twenty-six of their people killed when the Snakes had invaded the buffalo country. Approximately two months later (June eighteenth) a letter from Mr. Smith, President of the Salmon River Mission, reached Owen informing him that a Bannock war party was on its way to the Bitterroot Valley; they intended to take vengeance on the Pend d'Oreilles who had stolen some of their horses the previous winter in

55 The name Hell Gate was given to the western entrance of a mountain pass which opened into the flat area on which the city of Missoula, Montana, was eventually established. Along the sides of this pass the Blackfeet lurked, ready to pounce upon any Flatheads who passed that way on their trip to the buffalo plains. Alexander Ross passed through Hell Gate around 1820 and wrote a few words about it: "This place is notorious as being the great war-road by which the Piegons and Blackfeet often visit this side of the mountains; by the same pass the Flatheads and other tribes cross over to the Missouri side in quest of buffalo. The spot has, therefore, been the scene of many a bloody contest between these hostile nations. See The Fur Hunters of the Far West; a Narrative of Adventures in the Oregon and Rocky Mountains (2 vols., London, 1855), II, 13.

56 Owen, Journals and Letters, I, 160.
the vicinity of that favorite winter hunting ground, the Beaverhead. On July first, Owen received news of a Bannock raid on the Nez Perce camp in the Big Hole. Many horses were taken.

One morning in 1857 the Crow village, camped along the Missouri River, received news that Plenty-Coup's brother, who had gone on the war trail against the Sioux, had been killed on Powder River. Thus sorrow came to the lodge of Plenty-Coups and his parents. The words of Plenty-Coups best express the Crow position in those days and the emotions and feelings of the young boys who yearned for the time they could take the warpath:

I was nine years old and undeveloped, but I realized the constant danger my people were in from enemies on every side. Our country is the most beautiful of all. Its rivers and plains, its mountains and timber lands, where there was always plenty of meat and berries, attracted other tribes, and they wished to possess it for their own. To keep peace our chiefs

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57 Ibid., I, 167.
58 Ibid., 169.
59 Linderman, American, 34.
60 Plenty-Coups was interviewed by Frank Linderman who asked him to tell his story as a means of promoting mutual understanding between white men and red men. Plenty-Coups agreed but insisted that two companions sit with him. He reasoned thus: "I am an old man, and they will help me to remember." Linderman thought he was more than eighty; one eye was gone and the other was filmed by a cataract. Plenty-Coups said, "I was born eighty snows ago this summer....not far from the present site of Billings." This places his birth date in the year 1848. In telling his story he also stated, "I am sure I shall not be able to tell you things in their order. I shall get things behind that ought to go ahead." Since the events of Plenty-Coups first story supposedly took place when he was nine, the year would be 1857.
sent out clans to the north, east, south and west. They were to tell any who wished to come into our country that they were welcome. They were told to say, 'You may hunt and may gather berries and plums in our country, but when you have all you can carry away you must go back to your own lands. If you do this all will be well. But if you remain overlong, we will warn you to depart. If you are foolish and do not listen, your horses will be stolen; and if even this does not start you homeward, we will attack you and drive you out.

These clans did not go to the other people, but camped near the boundaries of our domain so that they might speak to any visitor coming from any direction and give him the message from our chiefs. But little heed was paid to what we said. There was almost continual war with those who coveted our country....All tribes were against us, the Blackfeet north and west, the Cheyennes and Sioux east, the Shoshones and Arapahoes on the south; and besides these there was often war with the Flatheads, Assiniboines, and Hairy-Noses (Gros Ventres of the Prairie)....we were obliged to fight alone, and we could fight. Our chiefs were able men when I was a boy. They were Long Horse, Sits-in-the-Middle-of-the-Land, Thin-Belly and Iron Bull. How they inspired me, a boy, aching for age and opportunity. We followed the buffalo herds over our beautiful plains, fighting a battle one day and sending out a war-party against the enemy the next. My heart was afire. I wished so to help my people, to distinguish myself, so that I might wear an eagle's feather in my hair. How I worked to make my arms strong as a grizzly's and how I practiced with my bow. A boy never wished to be a man more than I. 61

With such emotions and desires surging through the heart and mind of the youthful Indian, no wonder it was difficult to maintain peace on the great hunting ground of the Northwest!

By October 27, 1858, William T. Hamilton, who was ordered to report upon the condition of the Indian tribes from Washington Territory to the Blackfeet country, had joined the Kutenai Indians on their homeward journey from the hunting grounds. Hamilton and a few Kutenais were a half mile ahead

61 Ibid., 68-69.
of the main village and had reached a high point from which they could see in all directions. From their position they saw that a force of at least two hundred Blackfeet were concealed near-by, ready to strike at the Kutenais as they proceeded along the trail. Young Black Bear immediately signalled for those in the rear to close up. Realizing their presence had been discovered, the Blackfeet divided into two wings and advanced with much noise and yelling. The Kutenais placed their squaws and young ones where they could secure the protective covering of the pack animals; and with their Hudson's Bay flint lock, muzzle loading guns, they fired upon some one hundred charging Blackfeet. Momentarily, the advance stopped when the Blackfeet saw their leader fall to the ground. At this moment the Kutenais charged; when within forty yards of the enemy, instead of pressing a full-scale charge, they wheeled to the right to engage in aimless skirmishing. Outnumbered, the Blackfeet retreated. Because he feared there might be other Blackfeet near-by Black Bear restrained his warriors and insisted that they remain with the

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62 Indian desire and need to preserve tribal manpower affected the conduct of war operations as this struggle between the Blackfeet and the Kutenais points out. The Blackfeet on three occasions planned to destroy as many of the Kutenais as possible at the least cost to them by resorting to surprise and ambush. The Blackfeet attacks were persistent but intermittent and brief war efforts characterized more often by aimless skirmishing. The Kutenais also failed to press their advantage at the crucial moment in the first attack. This aimless skirmishing and the failure to follow up successful efforts stemmed from the desire to preserve tribal strength. In the final contest the failure of the Kutenais to attack until the fire had reached the grove, again illustrates their desire to preserve tribal manpower.
moving village to ensure its safety. The Kutenais had gotten the best of this engagement, for they had taken thirty-five Blackfeet scalps, about fifty of their horses, many robes and blankets, and had wounded many of the attackers who escaped. Four Kutenais had been killed and twenty wounded.

The Kutenais could not relax and celebrate their victory, for the Blackfeet were persistent and would likely secure reinforcements for another attack. They hastened to reach Marias Pass through which they could safely reach their own country. Also, as a precautionary measure, the chief sent two mounted Indians over the mountains to get reinforcements. Black Bear believed that the Blackfeet would have by the next evening four to six hundred warriors ready to challenge their passage over the mountains, and Hamilton agreed with him that it would be wise to proceed as fast as possible through the canyon and timber before they were outnumbered. The squaws showed great concern over their little ones, afraid that they would be taken prisoners as had happened in former years. Old Black Bear with picked warriors guarded the rear, while the rest of the warriors were scattered along the trail. The chief would not heed Hamilton's advice to send thirty or forty men to scout on each side of the trail to discover any Blackfeet concealed in the timber.

Continuing up the canyon and through the timber, the

This delay gave more Blackfeet a chance to escape, but it also saved Kutenai lives which would have been expended if they had attacked before the fire made it impossible for the enemy to shoot accurately.
Kutenais came to open country. When half the Kutenais had left the timbered area, they sighted fifty mounted Blackfeet about four hundred yards to the west. Soon forty others appeared. Apparently sent to block the Kutenais before they emerged from the timber, these Blackfeet were surprised to see that the Kutenais had preceded them. Then, these Blackfeet and others from the canyon and timber charged and wounded several Kutenai horses and warriors. A Blackfoot attempt to stampede the stock was resisted by Kutenai boys, one of whom was slain and two of whom were wounded. Evidently thinking that newly arrived Kutenai reinforcements, which numbered about forty, were greater than they were, the Blackfeet retreated into the timber. Many had been wounded on both sides.

All of the Kutenais had gotten clear of the timber, at the edge of which one hundred men remained until all the packs and wounded were safely beyond the range of any guns or arrows. Believing that caution was the better part of valor, they did not go into the timber to find the Blackfeet as Hamilton advised. The dead were buried, and the horses counted. Some of their ponies were missing but none of the pack horses. The Kutenais had been fortunate; if the Blackfeet had reached the timber at the head of the canyon before they had come into open country, the losses would have been heavier. Hamilton estimated that there had been no more than three hundred fifty Blackfeet in the attack, although the Kutenais thought there had been twice that number. Small
bands of reinforcements continued to arrive and busied themselves with mutilating the dead Blackfeet and picking up arrows and other objects lying on the ground. The village then proceeded toward the Tobacco Plains, where they could gather more Kutenais to resist another expected Blackfeet attack. By October twentieth one hundred warriors had reinforced the village. To the Hudson’s Bay trading post on the north side of Tobacco Plains two men had been sent to trade for powder and lead and were waiting with a good supply of ammunition when the village arrived on the south side of Tobacco Plains. Preparations were then made to resist any Blackfeet attacks. The squaws dug rifle pits around the village in such a position as to have the enemy in a cross fire. The young people sang and danced and the older ones smoked and looked on.

Fifty mounted warriors scouted the countryside on November first and returned with the report that they had seen smoke signals on the mountains. The days passed with increasing signs of Blackfeet, but still no attack. Tension mounted. On the morning of November seventh, three Kutenais gave the alarm; all stock was brought in, and three hundred mounted warriors were readied for action. Young Black Bear with about one hundred warriors, Hamilton, and two other trappers went out to survey the situation. Before they had gone half a mile, they were fired upon by some one hundred Blackfeet who, when charged by the Kutenais, retreated. The Kutenais themselves retreated when within two hundred yards.
of the Blackfeet, for a near-by grove was filled with more Blackfeet as was a deep, narrow draw to the left. Yells of anger followed the Kutenais as they escaped from this death trap.

Believing that energetic action was needed to inflict any serious damage on the enemy, Hamilton suggested that the grass be set afire to smoke them out. About fifty braves crawled within twenty-five yards of the Blackfeet and formed a half circle on the windward side, while the rest maintained a distracting fire. In a few moments the dry grass was afame; but the Kutenais would not attack until the fire had reached the grove. In the meantime, under cover of the smoke the Blackfeet departed for timber half a mile away. Kutenai horsemen pursued and gained rapidly. Those Blackfeet who were mounted wheeled in their saddles and fired at random. As they drew near the timber, Kutenai enthusiasm for pursuit dwindled. By sundown the Kutenais returned to the village with a few scalps, which they professed to have taken in the timber. However, Hamilton felt these scalps had been taken from some wounded Blackfeet who had failed to keep up with the main body in the retreat. In this final contest three Kutenais had been silenced by death and many had been wounded. Three Blackfeet were found burned in the grove. 63

In the fall of the same year a Piegan camp approached the divide separating the Musselshell from the Missouri.

Ahead of the four to five mile column rode thirty or forty scouts and behind the loosely scattered column were the hunters, who were skinning buffalo and other game. The warm sun caused the Indians to move slowly along the trail. The old people dozed in their saddles, the mothers sang softly to their babes, the young men sang war or hunting songs. All were content. Little did they realize the impending doom which lurked on the trail.

As the head of the column neared the summit, some two hundred mounted Crows emerged from a large pine grove on the right. Shrieking for help, the women and old men prodded their horses, scattering travois and lodge poles along the trail while those warriors present along the endangered area tried their best to check the Crow advance and to cover the retreat of the weak and defenseless. Hearing all the commotion, the scouts came back; and men from the rear advanced to the front. It was not long, however, before the trail for at least two miles was covered with dead and dying men, women, and children. When the Piegans finally organized to offer effective resistance, the Crows departed, singing their victory songs and waving Piegan scalps over their heads."

Stunned by the tragedy that had befallen them, the Piegans made no attempt to follow and exact revenge. They devoted their efforts to searching for the dead and missing. By night all the bodies had been buried. Nearly every lodge

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had its mourners. One hundred thirteen Piegans were killed while only seven Crows had been shot down. After the news of this tragic event spread throughout the Blackfeet nation, Blackfeet war parties roamed the Crow country seeking revenge; and within two or three years, according to Rising Wolf, they had killed enough Crows and had stolen enough horses to more than make up for their own losses in the massacre and in later fights in which the Piegans had not always been victorious.

One night in the early spring of 1859 in the Crow village camped near Pompey's Piller, Bear-in-the-water, a young Crow warrior, dreamed of Flatheads, with many horses, to the west. When he told of his dream, thirty-five young men, including Plenty-Coups, agreed to go with him to steal horses. When they reached the forks of the Missouri, their scouts reported that they had seen Flathead hunters loading their horses with elk meat. Twenty-five Crows went in search of the Flathead camp while nine others searched for loose

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65 Rising Wolf was a white man who had joined the Piegan tribe in the 1850's. Before joining the tribe he had lived and traveled with the Piegans as an employee of the fur companies and as a "free trapper". His name was Hugh Monroe. Born in 1798 and apprenticed to the Hudson's Bay Company in 1814, he married the daughter of a Piegan chief. He died in 1896. Schultz heard stories of the Piegan past from this man.

66 Ibid., 196.

67 Pompey's Piller, along the Yellowstone River, was a two hundred foot high rock on which William Clark found Indian figures engraved. He in turn carved his name and the date of his visit there on the rock. See Lewis and Clark, Original Journals, V, 292-93.
enemy horses. At about the time the Flathead village was sighted, it began to rain. Thinking they would be aided by the downpour, Plenty-Coups and three others entered the camp and searched for some of the better Flathead horses; but because of the heavy rain Plenty-Coups cut loose a mule, which he mistook for a horse, and was about to lead it away when a Flathead stepped out of a lodge behind him. Leaving as fast as they could, Plenty-Coups and his companions realized that nothing could be done at this time because of the heavy rain which made it impossible to see about them.

Later, as six Crows, including Plenty-Coups, took refuge in some timber, they heard shots and saw some of their comrades with stolen horses enter another timbered area. Because the Flatheads had come between them the six at first feared to join their friends but eventually risked exposure to Flathead arrows to ride to the spot where they had seen their comrades enter. They were nowhere to be seen, and now the Flatheads were scattered throughout the timber; so the six sought the refuge of a deserted log cabin, which the Flatheads soon found. As the Crow, Big Horn, stepped out of the door, a bullet smashed his right arm and buried itself in his armpit. Bullets smacked against cabin logs, and some found their way through cracks in the logs. The Crows could not use their bows unless they went outside to fight, which would be a most precarious undertaking since they had only one gun and were outnumbered. However, three Crows decided to take

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68 Linderman, American, 85-80.
that risk and left the cabin amidst a hail of bullets. The three remaining Crows sent forth a defiant war whoop from the cabin and waited, while singing their death songs. No attack ensued, and with the arrival of darkness and an accompanying rainfall, the Crows were able to leave the cabin unseen. Hoping they would not creep in among the Flatheads, they crossed a creek near which the wounded Big Horn slumped to the ground. His comrades had to leave their dead friend in the enemy country; their hearts were on the ground beside him. 69

These five Crows returned quietly to their village.

Plenty-Coups expressed his feelings thus:

I dread the mourning of his family more than I can make you believe. I had gone with the party to help even up some old scores, and now, although we had many of their horses, I had another and a stronger reason for going again against the Flatheads. They had killed my friend. 70

The only consolation he could give the father and mother was the promise that he would go back to get Big Horn's body.

Plenty-Coups with five friends departed for Flathead country, and on the third day of their journey they sighted a Flathead whom Goes-Against-the-Enemy struck with a quirt. Then Plenty-Coups rushed forward and grabbed the Flathead's gun upon which the owner maintained a firm grip. With each rider trying to pull the other off, both horses rushed on toward a Flathead camp of four lodges. Finding themselves in the midst of this

69 Ibid., 89-95.
70 Ibid., 99.
village, the Crows found it necessary to say they were on a mission of peace. They left the camp without harm, discovered Big Horn's body, and returned it to the bereaved parents. 71

Violence and theft continued as the 1860's approached. In a letter of August 16, 1859, John Owen wrote of a Bannock raid which occurred about August twelfth; some one hundred Flathead and white horses had been taken. 72 After informing E. R. Geary that the Blackfeet had been quiet, Owen had to write, on March 10, 1860, that peace had been disturbed between the Blackfeet and the Pend d'Oreilles. He expressed his concern to Colonel Vaughan of the Blackfeet agency in a letter of the same date:

I exceedingly regret to hear that the friendly relations subsisting between the tribe of your formidable nation and those of mine are once more disturbed.....It places us here in a very alarming condition. Since the treaty of 55 we have slumbered in safety. The former predatory visits of your Indians ceased and now to have them again threatened....is intolerable.73

Also, to Geary, on June 30, 1860, he wrote of Blackfeet actions:

In March last a deputation of Six Lodges of the Peagan tribe of the Blkfoot nation came over on a

71 Ibid., 99-104.

72 Owen, Journals and Letters, II, 193-94. Owen (Letter to Geary, August 16, 1859) also told of the emphasis on agriculture in the valley. The Flatheads seemed convinced that "they must depend upon other means for their subsistence beside the Buffalo which are yearly growing less in point of number. They neither find them in such herds or as close as in former years."

73 Owen, Letter to Geary dated March 10, 1860, in Ibid, 202-03.
peace mission to the Flatheads. Report is that the Blood Band of the Blackfoot nation have again raised the tomahawk against the whites and the friendly tribes on the Pacific Slope of the Mountains. Since the treaty of 55 the Blackfeet have made frequent predatory excursions to the different camps from this side and have run off many horses. It seems strange to the friendly Indians on this side when I tell them they must quietly submit to the many wrongs and not take the matter in their own hands. They very naturally demand restitution.74

The Crows also had been guilty of violence, for Owen reported, on July 9, 1860, that they had killed two Nez Perces.75

In the late fall of 1860 Chief Alexander's Pend d'Oreilles had reached the Milk River area, where they bowed in prayer and offered thanks for the many buffalo in that region. Here they would make their hunt and gather their winter's meat. That night the Pend d'Oreilles dreamed of the morrow's hunt. However, the sweet dreams of that night were never to be realized, for one hour before dawn a force of some two hundred Assiniboins and Crees, on foot, surrounded the camp, approached the lodges, and cut openings through which they thrust their rifles and fired. Pandemonium followed with the neighing of horses, the wailing of women, and the yelling of warriors intermingled with rifle shots. The Pend d'Oreilles were unsuccessful in attempting to recover some of their horses and consequently were forced to leave most of their camp equipment behind. Those who remained alive and could walk fled toward their distant homeland. Traveling four hundred miles on foot, lacking provisions and clothing, and

74 Owen, Letter to Geary, June 30, 1860, in Ibid., 216.
75 Owen, Journals and Letters, I, 219.
carrying their children on their backs, the women were completely exhausted. They had suffered a great blow, for two hundred ninety horses had been lost, twenty Pend d'Oreilles had been slain, among them Alexander's son, and five of the twenty-five wounded later died. Owen met the defeated band before it arrived at the Jocko Reservation, gave them four oxen to help out temporarily, and ordered a pack train of stores. This tragic event prompted Owen to say, "I have no doubt....but there will be a large war party in the field this spring." About three hundred horses had to be replaced, and the thirst of Alexander and his people for revenge had to be quenched.76

In 1861 and 1862, as in previous years, horse thieves and scalp takers were active. This was substantiated by Granville Stuart, on June 17, 1861, when he learned of a Flathead-Blackfeet encounter in which some Blackfeet who had been stealing horses from the whites suddenly came upon a Flathead camp. In order to make their escape the outnumbered Blackfeet left behind many of their stolen horses, which were returned by the Flatheads to the whites. Aside from chasing such Blackfeet raiders, the Flatheads frequently pursued Snake Indians who raided the settlers throughout the Bitterroot Valley. On June 20, 1861, at American Fork a party of Flatheads, with ten loose horses, appeared across from Stuart's quarters, halted, sang a war song, and waved a scalp

76 Owen, Letter to Geary, December 21, 1860, in Ibid., II, 239.
which had been lifted from a Bannock. In the struggle to recover these horses, one Flathead had lost a lock of hair from an enemy bullet. Later, these eleven Flatheads recovered some of Stuart's horses stolen by the Bannocks whom they had overtaken at Moose Creek on Big Hole River. Killing two of them, they claimed that they had let the other two escape as a warning to the Bannock tribe. On February fourth of the next year a party of Flatheads passed by Stuart's place in the Bitterroot Valley with some Bannock horses stolen from their camp in Beaverhead Valley. About nine P.M. the same day a party of Bannocks passed by in pursuit of the Flatheads, and on the morning of February fifth they returned with two Flathead scalps and a band of horses.

Two days later those Flatheads in the Bitterroot Valley talked of forming a war party against the Bannocks and Snakes in retaliation for a recent murder and robbery in the Hell Gate Valley. Deeming it futile for a few young Flatheads to venture forth against such a formidable enemy, Owen tried to restrain them, at least until the Flathead camp returned from the buffalo hunt. Nevertheless, by February twenty-second these Flatheads were still determined to go on the raid.

77 While hostilities continued in the Bitterroot Valley, warfare east of the Rockies between the Crows and the Blackfeet was waged as before. While at Fort Benton in July, 1861, Stuart learned that ten Blackfeet had been killed by the Crows (Forty Years, I, 182).

78 Ibid., 174-75, 177, 196.

On the night of February 24, 1862, strangers approached the lodge of a Snake Indian named Peed-ge-gee. They were Aeneas, an Iroquois adopted into the Flathead tribe, and Narcisses the Flathead; and it was their intention to see that Peed-ge-gee joined his ancestors. When this had been accomplished, they took his lodge fixtures and one of his wives. The other two wives escaped to the white settlement on Cottonwood where they were cared for by some Bannock women until they could rejoin their own tribe. The captured wife was later ransomed by James Stuart and a companion to save her from the drudgery which would have been imposed by the Flathead women.

In March, 1862, the Nez Perces and the Bannocks engaged in hostilities. Seven Nez Perces on a horse-stealing trip to the Beaverhead Valley found four lodges of Bannocks. Taking a few of their horses, the Nez Perces departed; but before long they were overtaken. Two Nez Perces were slain; the other five escaped.

Flathead complaints were voiced to Granville Stuart in early April, 1862, about the Snake and Bannock visits to Grant's trading post at the mouth of the Little Blackfoot. After leaving the post, these Indians had been in the habit of stealing Flathead horses, and the Flatheads thought the Snakes and Bannocks should be forbidden to spend the winter

80 Stuart, Forty Years, I, 197.
81 Ibid., 202.
and to hunt in the valleys of the Deer Lodge, Big Hole, Beaverhead, and the Jefferson. The Bannocks, however, were not the only ones who stole horses, for on May 28, 1862, a party of Flatheads and Pend d'Oreilles passed near Stuart's place with twelve Bannock horses. Also, in July, twelve Kutenais had penetrated Snake and Bannock territory in an unsuccessful attempt to steal horses. They claimed to have killed one Bannock; but before they could strike again at the Bannocks, they had been captured by white men whose camp they had planned to raid.

John Owen learned, on February 1, 1863, from the Flatheads, who were returning from a buffalo expedition, that one of their number had been killed in a battle with the Crows. On March second, Chief Victor told Owen that his people were in a deplorable condition. Game had been scarce and the Blackfeet had stolen their horses. Palchina's band of Flatheads had been robbed of seventy horses around April first, in the vicinity of the Little Blackfoot on Flint Creek. Victor sent horses to the party on April sixth. Then, Palchina with a few men pursued the Bannocks; and in so doing he and one other Flathead were killed.

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82 Ibid., I, 203-04.
83 Ibid., 210.
84 Owen, Journals and Letters, I, 257.
85 Ibid., 290.
86 Ibid., 274.
87 Ibid., 279.
In early April, 1863, two lodges of Flatheads, while camped along the Missouri between Beaver Creek and Spokane Bar, were discovered by a Bannock war party which captured thirty-five of their horses and killed seven Flatheads. On May 31, 1863, six Pend d'Oreilles passed Stuart's place on a raid against the Snakes. Their priest had given them a paper stating who they were and where they were going and requesting that they be allowed to travel unmolested. Then, on July twentieth, Stuart saw sixteen Flatheads and Pend d'Oreilles returning from a horse-stealing expedition against the Crows. They returned several horses stolen by the Crows from one Fred Burr.

The Piegans and the Gros Ventres of the Prairie had been unfriendly toward each other for a number of years. The Blackfeet agent in January, 1863, stated that the Piegans continually denounced the Gros Ventres and demanded that they be forced to repay the Piegans for losses inflicted by their tribe. Gad E. Upson, in his report of September 1, 1864, also found the Piegans and the Gros Ventres active in the hostilities of that area. War parties roamed the prairies and passed and repassed the agency, and hardly a week passed that a fight had not occurred between them. On January fif-

83 James Stuart, "The Yellowstone Expedition of 1863," M. H. S. Contributions (Helena, 1876), I, 153-54 and 156.
89 Granville Stuart, Forty Years, I, 246.
90 Ibid., 252.
teenth the Piegan chief said that he would be willing to make peace with the Gros Ventres, but he could not vouch for his young men. On February thirteenth the Gros Ventres came to Fort Benton where a peace was made which up to September 1, 1864, had been kept, "with slight exceptions", by both parties. However, the Blood and the Blackfeet chiefs had not participated in the peace; so hostile feelings still remained between those tribes and the Gros Ventres, although owing to the distance between them and the Gros Ventres there were less frequent clashes than those which characterized the Piegan-Gros Ventre feud. ⁹²

The winter of 1864-65 was a bad one for the Blackfeet because their tribal strength was reduced by the measles. The Piegans lost two hundred eighty, the Gros Ventres one hundred sixty; the Blood and Blackfeet tribes reported the loss of fifteen hundred, probably an exaggerated number. ⁹³ Such epidemics resulted in a population reduction which would have taken several years of warfare to have produced a similar result.

On August 11, 1865, some twenty Piegans clashed with a party of thirty Crows on the Marias River about twelve miles from Fort Benton. Each side lost four men, with the Piegans remaining masters of the battlefield. Both parties

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had been escorting trains for the whites to and from Fort Benton. ¹⁴

H. D. Upham, in January, 1866, remarked that war parties of Piegan Indians passed Benton City every day for a two-week period on their way to and from the Pend d'Oreille camp. Furthermore, the Piegan Indians had again been at the throats of the Gros Ventres. While Upham had visited the Gros Ventre camp, a party of fifty-two Piegan Indians under Little Dog's son hovered in the vicinity to steal horses. The Gros Ventre chief spoke to the whites in council about their relations with the Piegan Indians; he said, "Why do they (the whites) keep telling us to keep still, keep still, keep still, and we have kept still until the Piegan Indians have stolen all our horses and killed many of our warriors, and now that they have killed the best two friends we had among the whites, Hunnicke and Legree, we have stopped keeping still, and now it shall be war to the death." ¹⁵

Around New Years, 1866, a party of Piegan Indians headed by Eagle Rib stole Crow and Gros Ventre horses, and in return those Indians killed nine Piegan Indians.¹⁶ Hostilities between the Gros Ventres and the Piegan Indians were stimulated in late January, 1866, when two hundred sixty Piegan horses were stolen by the Gros Ventres and the Piegan Indians killed nine Piegan Indians.

¹⁴Ibid., 696.
¹⁶Ibid., 198.
Ventres. The Piegans prepared for large-scale warfare. At war with the Piegans, the Gros Ventres had to fight their way through Blackfeet and Piegan territory for some two hundred miles to reach the Benton area. Their agent remarked that "they would rather do without their goods than come here after them, as they are sure to lose their horses at the hands of the Piegans." Agent George Wright stated that because of their constant warfare the Piegans and the Gros Ventres received their annuities at Fort Benton on different days.

The western Indians also had their difficulties. Nathaniel T. Hall wrote, on April 6, 1866, that neighboring Indians frequently had raided the Shoshonis and Bannocks, had taken their ponies, and had killed all who guarded the stock. Augustus Chapman of the Flathead agency reported that while the summer buffalo hunt of the Kutenais and the Flatheads had been most successful, that of the Pend d' Oreilles had been most unsuccessful. Shortly after they had arrived at the hunting grounds, they had been mauled by a
large force of Bloods, Piegans, and Blackfeet. Twenty-seven had been wounded and twenty-one killed, including one woman. The Pend d'Oreilles returned from their hunt hungry, exhausted, and mournful. They had a right to be after suffering such losses which were unusually severe for Indian battles usually characterized by the loss of less than a dozen men at the most.

The Gros Ventres, at war with the Blackfeet tribes, found it advantageous to conclude a treaty with the Crows in the spring of 1867. While the Crows and Gros Ventres gathered on the lower Milk River to celebrate the event, a Gros Ventre party, returning from a raid against the Creeb, brought news that a Piegan camp was in the Cypress Hills. With their combined forces what revenge could be inflicted on the Piegans! The plunder would be great! So with their women, who were brought along to help care for the booty, they set out, not realizing that their war party’s report had been incomplete. That party had seen the Piegan camp but not the large Blood village about half a mile distant. Would this faulty intelligence result in tragedy for the Crow-Gros Ventre expedition.

A Piegan hunter, in search of meat which he had hidden the day before, spotted the expedition while it was over a mile away and sent one of his women to the Blood village while he warned the Piegan camp. A warm reception awaited the confident Crows and Gros Ventres who were already rejoic-

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ing over the plunder which would soon be theirs. The attackers urged their horses on; and as they came over a rise of ground east of the Piegan camp, they encountered an overwhelming force of mounted Blackfeet. Firing a few shots, they turned and fled, leaving their women to fend for themselves. The Blackfeet chiefs issued orders that the women be spared, although a few were slain before these orders had been issued. Many of the fleeing men were overtaken, shot or brained with war clubs. Only five of the Blackfeet had been killed and a few had been wounded, while three hundred sixty Crows and Gros Ventres had been sent to their maker. After taking what plunder and scalps they desired, the Piegans and Bloods moved westward, leaving the battlefield to the wolf and the coyote.

Upon their return from an eight month stay on the hunting grounds, in 1867, the Flatheads had little meat, fewer horses than they had started with, thanks to the Blackfeet, and had even lost some of their people. However, on March 1, 1868, John Owen heard that they had returned from a successful hunt; the buffalo had been close and plentiful. The expedition had not been without incident, for they had some skirmishes with the Blackfeet in which one or two men had been killed and some wounded. A year later, on March


104 Owen, *Journals and Letters*, II, 94.
thirty-first, the Flatheads again reported a poor hunt.\textsuperscript{105}

On June 1, 1869, Owen commented that "the buffalo hunt and poor nomadic customs keep the Indians pretty busy to get sufficient to eat. They have gathered their drops of Bitter Root and put it away. They will fall back upon that when they return to cut their wheat harvest."\textsuperscript{106}

The Flathead agent, in a report dated September 6, 1869, stated that the Flatheads had a successful hunt, but that the Pend d'Oreilles and some Kutenais had not been successful in their summer hunt because of Blackfeet opposition to their invasion of Blackfeet land. While hunting, they had lost a number of horses and five warriors in one engagement.\textsuperscript{107}

Peace was cemented between the upper Assiniboins under Long Hair and the Gros Ventres in the summer of 1870 when Gros Ventre men married about one hundred of the Assiniboin women. Thus, the Gros Ventres strengthened one alliance against the Blackfeet.\textsuperscript{108}

An incident in 1872 strained relations between the Flatheads and the Crows. At the end of a visit to the Crows, some of the departing Flathead young men took a few Crow horses, which Flathead Charlie, a halfbreed, and some of his

\textsuperscript{105}\textit{Ibid.}, II, 133.

\textsuperscript{106}\textit{Ibid.}, 138.

\textsuperscript{107}Alvin S. Galbreath, "Flathead Agency, September 6, 1869," in Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1869 (Washington, 1869), 739.

older tribesmen returned. This action and Flathead apologies failed to satisfy one Crow, Little Iron, who discovered that one of his horses was among the returned animals and fired his rifle into Charlie's breast. The other Flatheads fled; however, no hostilities resulted from this deed. 109

During the winter of 1872-73 the Bannocks and the Nez Perces battled on Fleischman Creek. Eight or ten lodges of Bannocks were camped on that creek while a dozen lodges of Nez Perces were camped in the lower Yellowstone Canyon, a few miles above the present city of Livingston, Montana. Warned by some white men of the impending Nez Perce attack, the Bannocks prepared defenses. Their women and children were placed in snowbank tunnels. Afoot, the Nez Perces approached the Bannock lodges and opened fire. Hidden behind snowbanks, the Bannocks fired upon the Nez Perces who then retreated. One Nez Perce was slain and one Nez Perce and one Bannock were wounded. After this engagement the entire band of Nez Perces departed for their own country. 110

By 1874 both the Gros Ventres and the Piegans had enough of war and found it to their advantage to come to terms; efforts of the white men and Sioux hostility were persuasive factors in concluding a peace. At Port Benton, on May 18, 1874, thirty-six Piegan headmen signed such a treaty

110 Ibid., 76.
with the Gros Ventres and the Assiniboins, thus ending a feud of many years. 111

Not long after this, a young Piegan warrior named Wolverine expressed to J. W. Schultz his longing to marry a Gros Ventre girl and told of the difficulties he had had with her father. Possessing only twelve horses, he had been characterized as too poor by the girl's father to marry, so he had gone on a raid against the Crows. Returning with eight good Crow horses, he had gone again to the girl's father to tell of his improved status. 112 Still the father had refused, declaring that he would never permit his girl to marry a Piegan because that tribe had killed his son and his brother. So Wolverine decided to take the girl without permission, and Schultz promised to help him. Having seen a Cree war party in the vicinity of the Gros Ventre camp, they entered that camp on the pretext of warning the Gros Ventres about the lurking raiders. The girl's father refused to believe the report; but Old Three Bears told Wolverine not to take Bull's Head seriously, for he had been embittered by the loss of loved ones. Three Bears continued, "Others of us also lost brothers and sons in the war with your people, yet we made the great peace. What is past is past; the dead cannot be


112 Here is an example of the importance of horses to the Indian youth who desired to secure the girl of his choice and to establish a family.
brought to life, but the living will live longer and be hap-
pier now that we have ceased to fight and rob one another." Wolverine and Schultz took the girl while the Cree war party raided the village. Having been forwarned of the attack, the Gros Ventres killed seven Crees and prevented them from steal-
ing a single horse. 113

Having proven himself an apt woman stealer, Schultz was asked to go on a Piegan horse-stealing raid against the Assiniboins. Thirty Piegans led by Heavy-Breast made up the party which set out on horseback toward Milk River. After a hard night's ride, they found themselves not far from the mouth of the Marias, where buffalo were plentiful. Skirting the eastern slope of the Bear's Paw Mountains, they found several war houses. 114 Later, they surprised Crees hurrying home with stolen horses. The Crees checked the Piegan advance for a time; but after four Crees had tumbled from their horses the rest fled. Only one Piegan had been wounded. The final count of dead Crees was nine; sixty-three horses were taken. 115

During one February of the 1870's a delegation from a Crow camp wintering on the Tongue River offered to make a treaty of peace with the Piegans. Rock Eater, the leader of

113 Schultz, My Life, 20-35.
114 War houses were lodges constructed of poles, brush, pieces of rotten logs and so closely laid together that no fire could shine through them. In this manner war parties could build a fire to cook meat or to warm themselves without revealing their presence to any watchful enemy (Ibid., 53).
115 Ibid., 49-56.
the delegation, was half Crow and half Blackfeet, for his mother, when a young girl, had been captured by the Crows. In reply to a query on his loyalty to the Crows, he said:

Generally, we are quite happy; but there are times when a party returns with Piegan scalps, or horses taken from them, boasting, loudly of their victory, calling the Piegans cowardly dogs. Ah! Then we feel very sad. And often the proud young Crows have made fun of me, and joked about me, calling me bad names. Oh! yes, we are very miserable at times. Long ago my mother began to urge my father to talk with the chiefs and urge them to make peace with her people. I have also long been saying what I could to help the plan. But always the most of the people would object. One chief would arise and say, 'The Piegans killed my son; I want revenge, not peace.' Others would speak, crying out that they had lost a brother, or father, or uncle, or nephew in war with the Piegans, and that they could not think of making peace.

He felt that the Crows had had enough of war with the Piegans, that each tribe had its own large area covered with buffalo, and that they could live without killing one another. A peace council was held. The Piegan, Three Suns, supported peace; but Little Deer, representing the Raven Carrier Band, wanted no peace with the Crows whom he characterized as murderers of their loved ones and stealers of their horses. As soon as spring came, he and his friends would set out against the Crows. Each had his say; many declared for peace. A few, generally the younger men, voiced Little Deer's sentiments. One speech of an old, blind medicine man particularly impressed Schultz. Substantially it was as follows:

Oh, my children! Oh, my children! Hear me, listen understandingly. When I was young, like some of

116 Ibid., 192-93.
you here, I was happiest when raiding the enemy, killing them, driving off their horses. I became rich. My women bore me four fine sons; my lodge was always filled with good food, fine furs. My boys grew up, and, oh, how proud of them I was. They were so strong, so active, such good riders and good shots. Yes, and they were so kind to me and to their mothers. 'You shall hunt no more,' they commanded. 'You grow old; set you here by the lodge fire and smoke and dream, and we will provide for you.' I was happy, grateful, I looked forward to many pleasant winters as I aged. Hai-yah! One after another my handsome sons went forth to war, and one after another they failed to return. Two of my women were also killed by the enemy; another died, and she who remains is old and feeble. I am blind and helpless; we are both dependent on our friends for what we eat and wear, and for a place by the lodge fire. This is truly a most unhappy condition. But if there had been no war—Aii! If there had been no war, then this day I would be in my own lodge with my children and grandchildren, and my women, all of us happy and content. What has happened will happen again. You who have talked against peace, think hard and take back your words. What war has done to me, it surely will do to some of you.\footnote{Ibid., 200-02. Here is an excellent expression of the feelings and emotions which motivated the older men and the chiefs to assent to peace among the tribes. The young braves had not yet learned the lessons or experienced the emotions which had to be learned over a long period of time in the school of experience.}

The majority agreed that it was better to have peace than to mourn loved ones.

One evening before the final peace arrangements were to be made, some Assiniboins got safely away with forty horses. They left a memento of their visit in the middle of the Piegan camp. This was an arrow to which was tied a scalp. If stated in words, this message would have read something like this, "We present you with a scalp, which we tore from the head of a member of your tribe. We have taken some of your horses. We are Assiniboins." The Piegans assured
Schultz that they would answer the message personally in the summer. 118

A young Piegan interrupted a feast, given by the Piegan chief, Big Lake, to inform everyone that, as he had approached the camp, he had seen some fifty men on a ridge and that they would certainly steal Piegan horses that night. Big Lake scattered his men through the camp and sent groups of men a half mile from the camp to await the raiders. When the enemy approached, shots stabbed the darkness. Returning the fire, the enemy fled. Five had been slain and were soon scalped. An occasional shot was fired at a retreating figure, but it proved useless to pursue further in the darkness. In the morning the Piegans discovered that at least seventy horses had been taken. Seven bodies had been found; they were Crows. Big Lake said that he would never again listen to peace proposals from the Crows. "Let us teach our children," exclaimed Big Lake, "that they are like the rattlesnake, always to be killed on sight." Schultz observed that the Piegans kept this promise and sent party after party against the Crow tribe until the government put a stop to intertribal warfare. 119

The bison herds in the past had attracted the tribes and had brought them into closer contact with each other, resulting in a frequent clash of arms. So it was one day in

118 Ibid., 202 and 206.
119 Ibid., 218-23.
the late 1870's. A party of Piegans had sighted a fine herd of buffalo and had killed twenty of them. Jubilant, they started to butcher them when fifty mounted Assiniboins swooped down for a kill of their own. Two Piegan men and a woman fell amidst the meat which they had prized so much. The rest fled to the safety of the Piegan camp. One of the wounded Piegans died later. A brief moment of resistance on the prairie had resulted, however, in the slaying of seven Assiniboins; two more Assiniboins who rode slow horses had been killed by pursuers from the Piegan camp. Thus, the Indian continued to hunt not only the bison but also his fellow man. The great hunting ground still served the dual function of a hunter's paradise and a battleground in which the hunter often became the hunted. To the last, violence and death revolved around that most prized of animals—the buffalo.

120 Ibid., 245-47. Schultz was informed of this incident by a white hunter named Ashton.
CHAPTER VIII

THE SIOUX: SCOURGE OF THE PLAINS

After 1850 the entry of the Sioux into Montana proved to be a most disturbing factor among the tribes, especially among the Crows. The Sioux had ventured into the Montana area previous to 1850 and had engaged the Crows, the Assiniboins, and others in battle; after 1850 the pressure of advancing white settlement and military supervision and the scarcity of the buffalo in their old hunting grounds caused them to move in ever increasing numbers to the hunting paradise of the Montana region. This, of course, brought them into closer contact with the Montana Indians who resented their intrusion. The stage was set for violence and a fierce outburst of intertribal warfare.

The Assiniboins in 1853 complained to Isaac Stevens about this invasion of their hunting grounds. Emphasizing that they had abided by the Treaty of Fort Laramie which had fixed the hunting grounds, they pointed out that the Sioux had disregarded the restraints placed upon them by that treaty and had come into their land. ¹

¹Isaac Stevens, Report to Commissioner George W. Manypenny, September 16, 1854, in Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1854, 396.
War parties of Sioux made it difficult and often impossible for the whites to deliver annuities to the Crows, and the Crows often retaliated for such Sioux interference. In September, 1857, agent Redfield noticed fifty mounted Crows returning from a raid of reprisal against the Sioux. There had been fifty others on the raid, but they had taken another route home.  

This same agent reported that at Fort Clark, on September 19, 1857, six hundred lodges of Sioux had assembled to make plans for extensive operations against the Assiniboins, Crows and possibly the upper Blackfeet.

Long Hair, orator of the Gros Ventres, on July 1, 1857, expressed that tribe's sentiments about Sioux encroachment and hostility. Disregarding treaty stipulations, the Sioux had made war upon his people; and in support of this statement he mentioned that eight Gros Ventres had been slain and fifty horses had been stolen by the Sioux. Long Hair described their position in these words:

My country extends from Hart river around to the mouth of the Yellowstone, and yet I cannot send my young men just across the river here to kill a buffalo, if I see one, without their being attacked and killed. This country is not the Sioux country. Why do they not stay at home and let us alone?....My women and children dare not go out of our village to gather a plum or a cherry without danger of being killed....My young men caught a Sioux who was trying to steal horses from us and asked him questions, but he would say nothing; they asked him why he had ears, if not

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3 Redfield, "St. Louis, November 9, 1857," in Ibid., 424.
to hear, but he said nothing; so they cut off one of his ears, they cut off one of his hands, and they took off his scalp, and sent him back to his people to learn sense. The Sioux came here to make peace at once; they smoked the pipe with me, and then turned away and immediately stole our horses and killed our people. The Sioux seem to wish to be the strongest and most powerful people on the earth, and nothing else would seem to satisfy them."

So great was the Assiniboin dread of the Sioux that they abandoned their country on the south side of the Missouri and spent more time in the Canadian area. They urgently requested that the military establish a post near the mouth of the Yellowstone to keep the Sioux back. The River Crows also found it more difficult to live in their customary haunt in the Yellowstone region and found refuge in the mountains, from time to time.

The Blackfeet agent reported, on February 19, 1864, the movement of some fourteen hundred Yanktonai and other Sioux lodges toward Mouse River, some sixty miles north of Fort Union; these with some one hundred sixty lodges of Teton Sioux, he expected would terrorize the countryside if the whites were not vigilant. Sioux power was increasing to the point where not only the Indians but also the whites were becoming fearful.

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4Redfield, "Speech of Long Hair, Orator of the Gros Ventres, at a Council Held with Them at their Village July 1, 1857," in Ibid., 427.


In August, 1864, a Crow force fought with the Sioux over a period of ten days. The Sioux were victorious. In telling their story to some visiting Nez Perces, the Crow chiefs said that they wished to remain friendly with the Nez Perces and to secure their aid in fighting the Sioux. The Crows, in an attempt to gain sympathy, told their visitors that their years of resisting the Sioux had impoverished them. According to them, this particular feud had been started by one White Horse, who had been wounded by the Sioux seven times. His wife had joined the Sioux who refused to give her up. So the war fires had been lighted. This may have been an immediate cause for enmity between this partic-

7From time to time in the past the Nez Perces and the Crows had been hostile to each other owing to Nez Perce hunting on Crow buffalo land and to resulting thefts and skirmishes. Theirs was not such a bitter warfare as that existing between the Crows and the Blackfeet and Sioux. Between the Nez Perces and the Crows there were intervals of peace in which the Nez Perces were invited to hunt and even to live with the Crows. In J. A. Vial's report of September 15, 1871, he mentioned that twenty-five lodges of Nez Perces had been, with Crow consent, incorporated into the Crow tribe (Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1871, 415). Also, the Crow chief, Blackfoot, told Commissioner Brunot, in August, 1873, that the "Nez Perce Indians made peace with us, and they like us." See "Report of the Council at the Crow Agency, August 12, 1873," in Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1873, 131. Here the Crows welcomed Nez Perce aid against the Sioux; but when Chief Joseph's Nez Perces sought refuge in Crow country in 1878, Crow scouts aided the whites in pursuit of the Nez Perces. Father De Smet referred to hostilities between the two tribes in September, 1846. See page 216, chapter six of this thesis.

8James O'Neill, "Office Nez Perce Indian Agency Lapwai, August 3, 1865," in Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1865, 423. O'Neill learned of this from the Nez Perce chief, Three Feathers, who met ten Crow chiefs on his journey into the hunting ground and from whom Three Feathers secured his information.
ular group of Crows and Sioux, but more basic was the Sioux desire for buffalo and plunder, which were so plentiful in the Crow country.

On November 2, 1868, at Fort Peck fifty Sioux warriors were sighted by two hundred fifty Crows. Taking refuge on a river bar covered with willows and driftwood, the Sioux fought for three days. After securing five Sioux scalps and losing one brave, the Crows departed for the fort, where they held a war dance outside the stockade. In the meantime, the Sioux gathered two hundred reinforcements. Realizing that it would not be long before the Sioux pursued them, the Crows started for their own country. However, the Sioux overtook them along the Musselshell River. In the encounter that followed the Sioux lost fifteen warriors but compensated themselves for that loss by killing twenty-two Crows and capturing three hundred horses. The Sioux then returned to Fort Peck, surrounded it and fought with the whites for six hours to indicate their displeasure with those who had allowed the Crows to celebrate near the fort area. 9 The Indian Peace Commission in its report of January 7, 1868, recognized Sioux power in Montana when it stated, "The Sioux have gradually driven the Crows back upon the headwaters of the Yellowstone, in Montana, and claim as a conquest almost the entire country traversed by the Powder River Route to Montana.....The luxuriant growth of grass in this region made it desirable as an

9Stuart, Forty Years, II, 84-85.
Indian hunting ground."\textsuperscript{10}

The Bannocks and Shoshonis who still came to hunt buffalo suffered from the Sioux also. Some five hundred Bannocks, headed by Taggee, while camped with the Eastern Shoshonis in the Wind River country, were attacked by the Sioux, who killed twenty-nine Bannocks and Shoshonis.\textsuperscript{11}

Plenty-Coups, the Crow chief, told his interviewer of a summer battle between his people and the Sioux which took place possibly in the 1860's. After losing many warriors defending themselves against Sioux attack, the Crow village in the Bighorn Valley, drove them back into the hills where the Sioux resisted from fortified positions. More lives were expended to dislodge them. The victorious Crows, however, did not feel so victorious because of their many casualties. The women set the hearts of the young men afire to avenge the dead, and a war party was formed to go into Sioux territory. After traveling southeast, they sighted, near present-day Sheridan, Wyoming, an enemy village which was so large that nothing drastic could be accomplished except for the stealing of a few horses. Plenty-Coups crept into the village, secured two horses, and moved toward the edge of the village; but before he had gone very far, shots cracked through the

\textsuperscript{10} "Report to the President by the Indian Peace Commission, January 7, 1868," in \textit{Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1868}, 500.

night air. Immediately Plenty-Coups sprang upon one of the horses and dashed from the village. Having failed to strike a severe blow at the Sioux, three days later the party returned to the Crow camp. Their deed, however, was cause enough for the Sioux to follow in order to chastise the Crows for their audacity in penetrating Sioux country and in stealing Sioux horses.  

The Sioux came at the time of high water. Fortunately for the Crows, the Big Horn stood between them and the Sioux. Since neither could cross without giving the other a great advantage, most of the time was spent showing off. Many Sioux rode toward the river, as though they intended to swim it, stopped at the river's edge, whooped, yelled insults, and dared the Crows to come over and fight. Each time a band of Sioux rode to the river the Crows raced down on their side, taunted the Sioux and dared them to come across. At last the Sioux moved downstream, and the Crows on their side did likewise to prevent a crossing. The Sioux moved to the Little Big Horn, and the Crows hastened away from the area; for if they were forced to give battle, the Crows, thought Plenty-Coups, could have been wiped out.  

12Linderman, American, 123-31.

13Ibid., 135-37. Many an Indian contest was characterized by this display of horsemanship and bravado without loss of life or at the most with only two or three casualties. Their showing off served as a means to prove to themselves and to their enemies that they were not cowards, that it was the enemy who had been afraid to fight. Furthermore, their actions had the purpose of goading the enemy into fighting even under disadvantageous conditions. However, Indians of both sides were wise enough to realize that under the disad-
The Crow agent's report of August, 1870, revealed that in May of that year sixty lodges of River Crows came to live with the Mountain Crows. During the summer hunt, the remainder of the River Crows joined them. In large measure Sioux hostility had been responsible for this reunion of the two tribes; united they could hunt buffalo with greater security. In the middle of July near the Big and Little Horn Rivers on the Crow reservation, the Crows were attacked by the Sioux. The Crows recovered some of their horses which had been run off, but in so doing they lost about thirteen warriors as did the Sioux. Fleeing the scene of conflict, some Crows came to the agency; but the majority crossed the Yellowstone River and headed toward the Musselshell. In answer to their agent's questions why they ran from the Sioux and why some left the reservation to go to the Musselshell, they answered that if they only had good guns and plenty of ammunition they would feel able to fight their many enemies. They exclaimed, "Look at our country and look at our enemies; they are all around it; the Sioux, Blackfeet, Cheyennes, Arapahoes and Flatheads, all want our country, and kill us when they can. We have no friends among the Indians, but the Bannocks, and they are all away from us now." So effective were their arguments that the agent recommended arming them with good guns and believed that by fighting the Sioux the vantageous fighting conditions inherent in a river crossing it would be best to preserve tribal numbers for another day when they could choose more favorable ground to strike their enemies at the least possible cost in manpower.
Crows would be serviceable in promoting territorial progress.\footnote{E. M. Camp, "Crow Agency, August, 1870," in Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1870, 662-63.}

The Gros Ventre and River Crow agent, in his report of August 31, 1870, stated that the Sioux had attacked the agency five times since June and that on July twenty-fourth they had swooped down on a Gros Ventre herd, taking twenty-eight horses. In a similar raid two Sioux had been killed on July thirtieth. The agent reported the Crows, Gros Ventres, and the upper Assiniboins at war with the Sioux while the lower Assiniboins were apparently on friendly terms with the Sioux.\footnote{A. S. Reed, "Gros Ventres, River Crow Agency, August 31, 1870," in Ibid., 665.}

Claiming the right to follow the buffalo wherever they could find them, some eight hundred lodges of Sioux under Sitting Bull moved into Montana in 1871, and another large body of Sioux roamed in Montana near their enemies, the Gros Ventres and Assiniboins.\footnote{H. R. Clum, Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1871, 4.} The presence of so many Sioux caused the Mountain Crows to confine themselves on their reservation more than before. Occasionally they went north of the Yellowstone after buffalo, but these hunts were of short duration because of their fear of the Sioux.\footnote{J. A. Vial, "Office Superintendent of Indian Affairs, September 15, 1871," in Ibid., 414.} The Crow agent in his report of August 31, 1871, expressed Crow concern over Sioux attacks and advanced arguments for arming the
Crows:

Another serious cause of complaint is one account of their country being overrun by war parties of Sioux Indians, making it almost impossible for them to feel any degree of safety for themselves or property... I would respectfully recommend that 100 breech-loading rifles be issued to them for their protection until the Sioux and other tribes of Indians can be induced to remain on their reservations. The late raid of hostile Indians... into the Gallatin Valley, a short time ago, is another good reason why the Crows should be properly armed; they would act as a border guard for the frontier settlements of the Territory, and by keeping hostile Indians from their home reservation, would be also the means of keeping them from the settlements.18

The Flatheads while on the hunting grounds had to be wary of Sioux war parties to avoid unfortunate incidents such as that which took place on July 1, 1871. Supposedly mistaking one hundred buffalo-hunting Flatheads for Crows, the Sioux prepared an ambush and pounced upon the hunters. To the small Flathead tribe the loss of eighteen of their best men that day was a most serious blow to tribal security.19 It not only reduced the number of warriors and hunters needed to maintain their food supply and to protect the women and children, but it also imposed an economic burden on the whole village, which would have to care for the families of the dead. Such tragedies proved to be important in promoting Flathead interest in agriculture—a less dangerous way of making a living.

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19 C. S. Jones, "Jocko Reservation, September 1, 1871," in Ibid., 426.
Sioux hostilities were directed against the Blackfeet tribes to such an extent that Major W. H. Lewis, special inspector, reported, on July 18, 1871, the nature of popular opinion at Fort Benton regarding the Sioux. The people there believed that the Blackfeet, Piegans, and Bloods might seek the sanctuary of Canadian territory from the Sioux in the Milk River area. Opinion seemed to concur that the Sioux who had already come into that area were only the forerunners of large numbers attracted by the promise of good hunting.  

Major General W. S. Hancock advised that increased military forces be brought into Montana to prevent the Sioux from committing hostile deeds and to restrict their movements.  

Ordered to negotiate with the Crows on a cession of a portion of their reservation, a commission proceeded, on July 31, 1873, to the Crow Agency where they learned that the main body of Crows had been delayed by sickness, high water, and the Sioux. By August eighth the Crow camp arrived. Long Horse, a distinguished warrior, mourned for the death of his brother who had been slain a few days before by the Sioux.  

Sioux aggression was further confirmed by a supplementary report of the commission's chairman which stated that:

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The portion of the reserve which lies east of Clarke's Fork, and includes Pryor's Creek, is within the limits of the country claimed by the Sioux as their hunting grounds. It is constantly frequented by them in large bands for the purpose of fighting the Crows, and is the battle ground upon which the two tribes often meet. The Sioux largely outnumber the Crows and have even extended their raids against them to the present agency. 23

The narrative of the proceedings of the special commission reveal further incidents of Crow-Sioux hostility. Blackfoot, the Crow chief, informed Mr. Brunot that they had met the Sioux and the Cheyenne at the foot of Prior's mountain about twenty miles across Prior's Creek. The large force sent out a small party to fight the Crows, who managed to kill one of the Sioux. Advancing, the Crows followed the Sioux down the Big Horn, which was too high for the Crows to cross. On Warm Springs Creek, across the Big Horn, the Crows fought and defeated these Sioux but could not get across the river to pursue them. Scouts were sent over to bring back horses from the Sioux camp, which was between the Big Horn and the Little Horn. Six Crows brought back twelve horses. Then two more scouts were sent out. They found a Sioux hunter, killed and scalped him and took his horses. From Pompey's Pillar three Nez Perces went out and took five horses and

23 Ibid., 118. Typical of such raids were these described by the Crow agent. A large war party of Sioux and Arapahos on September 21, 1872, raided the Crow agency, stole many horses, and killed one white man (Dr. Frost), two Crow squaws, and one Crow infant. In the fall of 1873 (September third) their efforts to steal agency stock were foiled, but they killed two men (Charles Noyes and Joseph Hosea) and got away with a few cows (F. D. Pease, "Crow Agency, Montana, September 28, 1873," in Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1873, 243).
mules from the Sioux. Two more men were sent out to the
Sioux camp near the mouth of the Little Horn; they secured
some horses and shot into a few Sioux tents. Then the Crow
camp moved from Pompey's Pillar to Prior Creek, where the
Sioux attacked. After a skirmish the Crows pursued. By the
time they reached the Stinking Water, three of the Sioux had
been killed. After another skirmish, the Crows pursued the
Sioux for sixty miles to Fly Creek.

After describing the encounter which had delayed the
Crows on their way to the agency, Blackfoot voiced the tribal
complaint of the white man's supplying guns to the Sioux:

The Sioux must have good white-men friends on the
Platte and Missouri. They get guns and ammunition;
they are better armed than we are; they have Winchest-
er, Henry, and Spencer rifles and needle-guns. We
took some of these guns from those we killed; we took
two Henry rifles and one needle-gun; they threw away
their blankets and saddles, and we got a number of
them; they threw away their ammunition. Their outfit
was better than ours. We get needle, Spencer and Win-
chester cartridges and powder and balls from them.....
We want you to know how the Sioux trouble us. There
are many Sioux, but we are not afraid of them. They
want to come on our land, but we intend to keep them
off.....Too many of us cannot leave the camp at one
time for fear of the Sioux. Even at the agency we
watch for the Sioux. The Sioux want to get our coun-
try, but we will not let them have it.25

24 Thomas K. Cree, "Narrative of the Proceedings of
the Special Commission of 1873," in Ibid., 123-24.

Ibid., 124. The Needle gun or Dreyse Rifle, men-
tioned in this paragraph, was a single-shot bolt type, breech-
loading rifle. It fired a paper cartridge which contained a
powder charge and a bullet with a percussion cap fastened on
its base. A long firing pin, or needle, pierced the car-
tridge and fired the cap against the bullet as an anvil. One
weakness was that the long firing pin was easily bent or
broken ("Small Arms," The Encyclopedia Americana, XXV).
Wolf's Bow, on August 13, 1873, reemphasized Blackfoot's words:

We have fought the Sioux, and have left many good men on the battle fields. When I go for buffalo, the Sioux fight me for my land. I will continue to fight them. We went to fight this summer; they were as well armed as we were. We want you to tell the Great Father the Sioux have more guns than they ought to have, and he ought not to give them any more. 

In the winter of 1874 the Mountain Crows learned that the River Crows, having already been driven across the Missouri, were being pushed south of Milk River by the individual efforts of the Crees, Sioux, Assiniboin, and some Blackfeet. Allied with the Gros Ventres, they there defended themselves against all comers. Sixty Mountain Crows left to help them; but when they sighted several villages of Sioux, they returned to their own camp after a horse-stealing attempt in which one Sioux was killed and two Crows wounded. 

In the early summer of 1875 a powerful Sioux attack drove many of the Crows off their reservation. The Crow agent, in his report of September 10, 1875, described Sioux attacks on the reservation:

The annual Sioux invasion of this reservation and of the eastern settlements of Montana is a matter of very serious importance, both to the Crows and to the whites. This summer eight whites have been killed and several wounded. About one hundred horses and mules belonging to whites, and something over two hundred horses belonging to the Crows, have been stolen. (The Crows) see their hereditary enemies mounted on the

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27 Linderman, American, 183-87.
best horses, supplied with blankets and sheltered by tents that bear the U. S. brand, systematically murdering and plundering the whites as well as themselves from year to year without any effort being made to repress or punish them. It is the constant plaint of the Crows that the larger and most fertile portion of their reservation is permanently occupied by their enemies, and that as long as they are harassed and driven from point to point, during the summer months, there is no use in asking them to settle down and farm. 28

One summer, possibly between 1875-76, Plenty-Coups and his companion scouted for Sioux east of the Little Big Horn. Plenty-Coups killed one Sioux warrior before returning to the Crow camp with the news that the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho were in their country. Not wishing to fight, the Crows moved to Arrow Creek; but the enemy sought them out. Burdened by women and children, they could not flee. To stand and fight was the only alternative. Forty lodges of Nez Perces, visiting the Crows at the time of the attack, fought with the Crows against the forces of the Sioux, the Cheyenne, and the Arapaho. Plenty-Coups described the type of fighting which followed and included an account of his personal participation in the fight:

We swung our lines around our village, riding out from it so that bullets would not reach our lodges. Racing in a wide circle, Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho gave their war-cries and fired at us from their running horses. But they were not near enough. Their bullets fell short. Iron Bull had ordered us not to fire a shot until the enemy was very close, and then to aim at the middle of the mark, just where a man's body sits on his horse, so that our bullets would kill or cripple

either horse or rider....a young Sioux dashed from
their line. He rode straight at us until he was with-
in easy rifle range; then he turned his horse and rode
him along our line.....Two shots spurted from our line,
and down went the Sioux and his horse. Swan's Head
was after him to count coup. He struck him with his
quirt but the Sioux turned around and fired, with his
gun's muzzle almost against Swan's Head's breast. The
Crow reeled on his horse but did not fall sticking to
his horse to reach our line, with a big bullet through
his breast. I saw a piece of his lung sticking out
of the hole in his back, and he was bleeding so badly
that his horse was red.

He-is-brave-without-being-married darted after
the running Sioux, who was now close to his friends.
I saw the Crow strike him and count his coup fairly;
but even as he struck him, the Sioux shot He-is-brave-
without-being-married in the breast, just as he had
shot Swan's Head. He was a brave man, that Sioux, and
a good fighter. It was now that Iron-Bull, our chief,
ordered me to charge with forty men. I headed straight
for the running Sioux who had shot two of our men. He
reached his friends before we caught up, but we broke
through their line and turned its ends, losing only one
man in the charge. My own line was scattered. Seeing
the....Sioux running to catch up and mount behind a man
riding a white horse, I gave chase, hoping to catch him
and count coup on him, but before I could come near him
he had climbed up with his friend.....I struck them
both with my rifle barrel, and both fell, the one be-
hind backward to the ground. He was the one I wanted.
I whirled my horse to ride him down, but he got up and
fired. He missed me but he killed my horse, which fell
on us both.....When I got up he was running again, and
his friend who had fallen with him was a long way ahead.
He would have escaped without a scratch if my uncle,
Long Horse, had not come up just then. He let me take
his horse and I raced after the man who had done so
much damage. As we ran the Sioux shot Crazy-wolf, who
was giving chase with me.....The Sioux stopped only
long enough to take the Crow's gun and then ran on;
but not for long. He heard my horse behind him, and
when he turned to look I shot him dead.29

Both sides had lost many men. The Crows had taken two hun-
dred Sioux horses. Without the aid of the Nez Perces, Plenty-
Coups admitted, the Crows would have been badly defeated.30

29 Linderman, American, 255-60.
30 ibid., 270.
Plenty-Coups revealed his participation in another encounter in which his war medicine supposedly had aided the Crow cause. Word was received that the Crees and the Yank-tonai Sioux had attacked the River Crows, killed several of them, and had taken a band of horses. The Mountain Crows, determined to give aid, found the Sioux village, consisting of three large circles of lodges one inside another, on a flat near the Missouri River. It was decided to lead the Sioux into a trap. Crow scouts were to approach the village, kill one or two if possible, then fall back until they reached a bushy area where the main body waited to ambush the Sioux. One of the scouting parties was led by Plenty-Coups; other parties were led by Goes-Against-The-Enemy and Scalp-Necklace. Having a grudge against all Crow enemies, Scalp-Necklace had continually sought revenge. This rash and vengeful man wore a strip of buckskin over his chin to hide ugly battle scars; from that strip hung many scalps. Altogether some twenty Crows went out to stir up the Sioux while three hundred Crow warriors waited in the bushes. The scouts had a most difficult task to perform because they were apt to be caught before they could lead the Sioux into the trap.

Approaching near enough to hear Sioux laughter, Plenty-Coups prepared to shoot several Sioux who were swimming. But before he could do so, two shots rang out. Something had gone wrong. Soon Plenty-Coups saw a Sioux bearing

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31 Ibid., 267-72.
down upon him. After shooting the Sioux in the calf of the leg and firing two shots at the swimmers, he joined six other Crows in a search for a place to stand off the Sioux. A buffalo wallow, where two other Crows had stopped, offered the best available protection. Plenty-Coups attributed their escape to his good medicine:

I caught a mirror signal on a distant butte telling me to come in....Enemy too strong. However they couldn't move—we were surrounded. Each of us held tightly to his horse's rope, knowing that to be set afoot now meant certain death. The Sioux charged, and we drove them back. When their line broke, I saw a good chance and ordered my men to ride at them, nine against a hundred. And in spite of such odds, we drove them away, coming back to our wallow with two scalps....I made up my mind to let six of them go, and sent them to catch up with our main party if they could, leaving me with two others in the wallow. The Sioux did not attack us—waiting was wearing them down. We left the wallow, caught up to our main party which had taken some horses from the Sioux, who had killed and scalped old Scalp-Necklace after he had scalped two of them.32

Plenty-Coups believed his escape from such a desperate situation had been due to his war medicine; but, assuming that it was nine against a hundred or even fifty, his escape was probably due to the boldness of the Crow attack from the buffalo wallow. The Sioux probably believed that so few men

32Ibid., 273-75. The buffalo wallow, mentioned in this narrative, was formed as follows. In the heat of summer the buffalo often grazed on low prairie ground where there was some stagnant water amongst the grass. The ground was soft and the bull frequently plunged his horns and head into it to make an excavation into which the water filtered. The bull rolled in it, ploughed up the ground, and mixed the water and mud. When he finished taking this bath, the next in authority and strength would step in. Within half an hour sometimes, a circular hole fifteen to twenty feet wide and two feet deep was formed (Catlin, North American Indians, I, 249-50).
would not have dared to come forth against so many unless
they had been made invulnerable by powerful medicine; and so
they avoided further conflict with them. The Sioux also
might have feared a larger Crow force near-by and thought it
best to return to the safety of the main camp. Plenty-Coups
went on another expedition in 1875 or 1876 against the Sioux,
who had killed that beloved Crow, Long Horse. One hundred
Crows took part in this expedition of revenge; Plenty-Coups
and his companions took eight scalps and several horses.\(^{33}\)

The Sioux had become such a menace that the military
took action. On April 9, 1876, General Gibbon met the Crows
in council at their agency. Emphasizing that the Sioux had
been enemies to both the whites and the Crows, he asked their
aid, stressing that the time had come to take revenge:

> If the Crows want to make war upon the Sioux, now
> is their time. If they want to drive them from their
> country and prevent them from sending war parties into
> their country, to murder their men, now is their time.
> If they want to get revenge for the Crows that have
> fallen, to get revenge of such men as the gallant
> soldier, Long Horse, now is their time.\(^{34}\)

The Crow reaction was varied. One Crow, Mountain Pocket,
said that he had fought the Sioux so much he was tired; the
white man could fight alone. For his services another asked
for ammunition to kill game. The chief, Iron Bull, stressed
the fact that formerly when they had asked for help they re-
ceived none and had to fight alone. The white man had his

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\(^{33}\)Linderman, American, 287-92.

\(^{34}\)Bradley, "The Sioux Campaign of 1876 under General
John Gibbon," M. H. S. Contributions, II, 158.
way of hunting the Sioux, and the Crows had their way.\textsuperscript{35}
However, the Crows aided the military in fighting the Sioux and also in the pursuit of Chief Joseph's Nez Perces. In the late 1870's the military defeat of the Sioux, their agreement to settle on reservations, and the establishment of military posts reduced the danger to the Crows. George W. Frost, in his report of August 20, 1878, stated that the presence of military posts had helped to keep the Sioux from the Crow hunting grounds.\textsuperscript{36}

A combination of horse stealing, murder, and the personality of a dominating medicine man resulted in a marshaling of Gros Ventre and Assiniboin numbers against a force of Yanktonai Sioux in the summer of 1878. Each Indian agent designated the Indians of the other agency as the guilty parties in stealing horses. The Gros Ventre and Assiniboin agent at Fort Belknap stated that the Yanktonai Sioux had been active in stealing horses from his Indians in the summer of 1878.\textsuperscript{37} The Fort Peck agent had given permission for thirty or forty Indian families to hunt; while hunting, their horses were stolen by the Assiniboin White Dog's small band. In all probability the Indians of both agencies had been stealing horses. This horse stealing and the murder of a

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., II, 160-62.


twelve year old Assiniboin boy, in the fall of 1877, resulted in hostilities near Fort Belknap in June, 1878.

The boy's father, White Shell, and his relative White Dog blamed the murder on the Yanktonai Sioux, although there had been no evidence to warrant the charge, according to the Fort Peck agent. The matter had supposedly been settled when several Yanktonai chiefs had given horses and blankets to White Shell. However, dominated by the medicine man White Dog, White Shell continued all winter to threaten the Yanktonais. In the spring or in June, White Shell with White Dog and others left Wolf Point for Fort Belknap. The Gros Ventres and the Assiniboins approached the Yanktonai hunting camp. Despite the efforts of several leading Yanktonai chiefs to maintain peace, a few hot-headed chiefs led their followers against the Gros Ventres and Assiniboins, who were better armed. Not supported by the majority of the Yanktonai, the war party was forced to leave the battlefield after a skirmish in which three of their number were slain and four wounded. This victory only whetted White Dog's appetite; and if it had not been for lack of ammunition, he would have attacked the Yanktonais again. 38

The Fort Belknap Indians, on their way to the lower Milk River country in 1879 in pursuit of buffalo, were frightened back by hostile Sioux. Referring to the Gros Ventres and the Assiniboins at the agency, their agent wrote:

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Their supply of game has been very limited, more, however, from the fact that their enemies (the Sioux and the Yanktonai) have and do hold possession of and completely dominate their territory upon which buffalo have roamed the past years so that practically they have been debarred from hunting on their own soil. 39

In the spring of 1879 Alexander Culbertson and his son Joseph made a final trip through the Indian country before leaving for Nebraska. Setting out from Poplar with White Feather, a Sioux Indian, they proceeded up the Milk River to find a camp of Yanktonai Sioux. Upon arriving at the camp, located at the site of present-day Malta, the Culbertsons found that these Sioux had recently fought the upper Assiniboins and the Gros Ventres. Each side had suffered heavy losses. The scalp dance was in progress and the mourners wailed over the dead, especially one of their great warriors named Bull Eagle. 40

Sitting Bull's followers from their Canadian sanctuary still caused trouble for the Blackfeet, Gros Ventres, and Assiniboins. Testifying to Piegan-Sioux hostility is the Blackfeet agent's report of July 28, 1879, which reveals that the need for buffalo had been a cause of a cease-fire for several years; this truce was finally broken by the Sioux theft of Piegan horses:


40 Joseph Culbertson, "Joseph Culbertson, Son of a 'King of the Upper Missouri' Tells of Father's Last Trip Among the Montana Indians," Sanders County Signal, February 10, 1922. Clipping in Fur Traders and Trappers, Missoula Public Library.
The hostile Sioux under Sitting Bull are among the ... enmies of the Piegan.... During the past two or three years there has been a sort of armistice between the Sioux and these Indians, in order that they might hunt the buffalo over the same general range, but even this truce has now ended. According to their custom, these Indians, late in the fall of last year, went on the winter hunt, dividing into two bands. The larger one, under White Calf, head chief, went toward the Bear Paw Mountains, where they found a moderate quantity of buffalo, and many Indians of other tribes engaged in hunting. Among these were Sioux from across the Canada line. An understanding was made that they should not war upon nor steal from each other, but should camp together peaceably; this was adhered to until the time for breaking up camp, when some of the Sioux stole from the Piegan 35 ponies, and made for across the Canada line, but were pursued and overtaken. When called upon to stop and talk, their reply was by firing on their pursuers; a fight ensued, in which the Sioux lost six warriors and the Piegan one. The stolen ponies were run across the line and reported as having been received in Sitting Bull's camp. Since that time there have been other smaller encounters reported, and the old feelings of hostilities against the Sioux has been revived.

During the winter of 1879-80 Sioux raiders stole Piegan horses on several occasions. In the pursuits that followed there was usually fighting in which a total of six Piegan and one Sioux had been killed; usually the Sioux got away with their booty. The agent had difficulty in restraining the Piegan young men from going to war to get back horses equal to the number taken. Two times horses were brought back by parties who had gone to hunt at Cypress Mountain, but the agent insisted that they be returned.

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42 Young, "Blackfeet Agency, August 6, 1880," in Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1880, 228.
The Sioux had, indeed, been a potent force in fostering intertribal warfare, but by 1880 they no longer were to be feared as the scourge of the plains. Their long-time enemies the Crows could at least breathe in an atmosphere free from Sioux war cries; and aside from minor raids and some horse stealing, the Indians in Northern Montana lived a peaceful existence after 1880. Montana had seen the last fierce outbursts of intertribal warfare.
The new era in Indian life in Montana which began around 1880 was marked by the change from a hunting to an agricultural economy. Although crude beginnings in agriculture were made before 1880, the buffalo remained the chief means of Indian support previous to that year. This chapter deals with the dawn of this new era. In 1872 Montana Territory had within its borders some 32,412 Indians. There were Blackfeet, Piegans, Bloods, Gros Ventres of the Prairie, Assiniboins, Yanktonais, Santee, and Teton Sioux, part of the northern Arapahos and Cheyenne, the River and the Mountain Crows, the Flatheads, the Pend d'Oreilles, the Kutenais, and a few Shoshonis and Bannocks. Most were supposedly settled on Montana reservations, although some Nez Perces and Bannocks came into Montana from their Idaho reservations.

Most earned their living by hunting buffalo and by trading robes and hides to the whites. Their source of hides and food, the northern buffalo herd, was estimated at four million in 1874. In the middle of the 1870's commercial hide hunters with repeating rifles entered the Montana buf-

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faio range and, with the Red River half breeds, killed off the remaining buffalo in a surprisingly short time. By 1879 the buffalo had virtually disappeared from the country of the Canadian Blackfeet; but they lingered awhile longer in the United States. The rate of its extermination in Montana may be seen in the number of robes and hides shipped by I. G. Baker and Co. from Fort Benton: there were 75,000 in 1876, 20,000 in 1880, only 5,000 in 1883, and none at all in 1884. The increasing scarcity of the buffalo and the partial substitution of agricultural interests was such a vital cause of the decline of intertribal warfare that the following paragraphs have been set aside to record the observations of Indian agents in the period 1865-1880 regarding the decline of the buffalo, Indian persistence in hunting that animal, the crude beginnings of agriculture, and the Indian realization that a new era in their way of life was near at hand.

The Indians west of the Rockies had a greater incentive than those east of the mountains to develop agriculturally in anticipation of eventual cessation of buffalo hunting because they were farther from the buffalo plains and encountered increasing difficulty in finding them on the common hunting ground. The buffalo had moved farther east and north into Blackfeet and Crow territory; of course, if the western Indians invaded that territory, they were likely to have to fight for the right to hunt. Also, the Flatheads had been

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introduced to farming techniques in the 1840's and 1850's by the Catholic missionaries. So in 1865 it was not surprising when the Flathead agent reported that "many of these Indians already have a disposition for agriculture." He believed that the greater number of the Flatheads would settle down and farm because game had become increasingly scarce and had gone farther than ever from the Flathead country. The hunt was still accompanied by danger from the Blackfeet and Crows and from accidents of the chase. Furthermore, the prospect of obtaining good prices for agricultural products to sell to the whites, in the agent's opinion, might be an additional inducement to farm. In contrast to these opinions of future prospects, it is interesting to note that about sixty Flathead families were on the buffalo grounds at the time this report was written.\(^3\) The agent recognized this fact in his report of June 30, 1865, when he admitted that all the Indians participating in the Montana treaties of 1855 still relied chiefly on the chase for a livelihood. That June at least half of the Flatheads were on the buffalo plains, well within Blackfeet and Crow territory.\(^4\) Agriculture had not yet displaced buffalo, even with these agriculturally inclined Indians.


\(^4\)Hutchins, "Flathead Agency, June 30, 1865," in Ibid., 430. At this time (1865) the Flatheads lived in the Bitterroot Valley north of the Lojo Fork; the Pend d'Oreilles lived on the reservation in their original country and the Kutenais resided at the north end of Flathead Lake.
A shortage of horses existed among the Kutenais and prevented some of them from going on buffalo hunts. This was the case in 1868 when time for the fall hunt arrived. The Flatheads and the Pend d'Oreilles had no difficulty of that nature, but they had their troubles as their agent's report of August 31, 1868, revealed:

A few years ago these tribes found, along the banks of the Missouri, and in the broad valleys of the Gallatin, Madison, and Jefferson rivers and their tributaries, vast herds of buffalo, elk, and smaller game, furnishing food and clothing from one year to another; but the steady encroachment of the white man has cut off these hitherto inexhaustible sources of supply, converting these vast "hunting grounds" into theatres of busy, active industry, and driving the buffalo farther and farther into the remote valleys of the Yellowstone and Big Horn rivers, where the chase is attended with much difficulty and danger on account of the hostility of the Sioux, Cheyennes, and Blackfeet. The recent annual buffalo hunt of these two tribes, attended as it was with the loss of some of their braves in an encounter with the Blackfoot, and the small quantity of meat and robes obtained, has produced an increased desire to give up the precarious mode of living by the gun and bow, and a disposition to turn to the plough and hoe as a surer and safer means of support.  

Many of the Flatheads and Pend d'Oreilles had already felt a need to change their way of life and had cultivated land in the Bitterroot Valley, where they raised wheat, oats, barley, potatoes, cattle and horses. The Pend d'Oreilles on the Jocko Reservation also showed interest in cultivating the land; during 1868 they produced three thousand bushels of grain without material aid from the government.

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6 Ibid., 672.
These were but beginnings, for their agent, in September, 1869, admitted that the greater part of the Pend d'Oreilles and Kutenais were still dependent upon the chase; the Flathead hunt of 1869 had been successful while that of the Pend d'Oreilles and some Kutenais in the summer had been unsuccessful because of Blackfeet hostility. The hunt was becoming less reliable each year in meeting Indian needs, and the conflicts occurring on these hunts caused territorial opinion to press for the curbing of these annual excursions.7

In 1873 the Flathead agent, interested in getting his Indians to abandon war and the chase, offered to fence, break, and seed a piece of land for each family that remained at home and refrained from hunting and warring upon his neighbors. By September of that year the Flatheads had fifty-two farms under cultivation and the Pend d'Oreilles fifty-five, averaging fifteen acres each, while the Kutenais had only four farms or about sixty acres.8

The Flathead agent, in his report of August 12, 1879, commented on agricultural progress and the decline of interest in the buffalo hunt as a means of securing a livelihood:

The Flathead reservation....is dotted everywhere with Indian farms and habitations, where heavy crops of wheat, besides other grains and vegetables, are raised; and the past year shows a steady increase in


the number of Indians thus engaged in civilized pursuits. The fact is beginning forcibly to dawn upon them that food and raiment must be obtained from mother earth, and slowly, but surely, they are advancing step by step in agricultural pursuits.

One year later the Flathead agent was pleased to see that the reservation Indians had had their most fruitful season. A marked tendency to give up their wandering and hunting interests for peaceful pursuits characterized the year. "The snug log houses, well-fenced fields of waving grain, vegetable gardens, the thriving stock and permanent appearance of the homes of the industrious portion of the tribe" truly marked the dawn of a new era in the life of this tribe.

In Idaho the Nez Perces had settled down on reservations with the exception of some non-treaties occupying the Wallowa Valley and the lower waters of the Snake River. Those on the reservation farmed. The non-treaties continued their excursions to the buffalo plains and on their return from the buffalo ground often brought back stories which caused the reservation Indians to become restless and to become envious of the booty acquired by the buffalo hunters. When the reservation Indians went to the hunting grounds, they remained a year during which time their farms were neglected. This was reason enough for their agent to recommend that the

Indians be prevented from going east of the mountains. It was not long before the buffalo hunting excursions of the Nez Perces were over, and all Nez Perces were confined to their reservations. With regulation of hunting parties and the defeat of Chief Joseph's Nez Perces in Montana in 1878, their excursions ended. They had made agricultural progress before the last buffalo herds were decimated, which was more than can be said for most of the Indians of the Montana region.

The Bannocks and other Shoshonis had long been participants in intertribal warfare in Montana, but they too learned to live on their reservations in Idaho Territory and in Wyoming Territory. However, from time to time they would journey to the buffalo plains to satisfy their economic needs. They too found that hunting buffalo was becoming more difficult. The Bannock chief, Taggee, recognized this fact in August, 1869, when he said that he hoped that his present excursion to the land of buffalo would be his last one and that upon their return in the spring he desired his people to settle down.

J. A. Vial, territorial Superintendent of Indian Affairs, remarked that in the fall of 1870 the Crows had given serious consideration to permitting the Bannocks and Shoshoni to settle and hunt with them on their reservation. A. J. Sim-


mons was sent to gather the scattered Bannocks who were prowling over the countryside. However, in the meantime, some Bannocks and Shoshonis who were along the Yellowstone and the Crows accused each other of horse stealing. As a result, the Bannocks decided to return to the Salmon River country. In a valley some twenty miles above the mouth of the Lemhi Fork, work was begun to break and fence the land, to build houses and to grow some cereal crops and vegetables. The Indians, with the help of four whites, fenced in a farm of four hundred fifty acres and constructed over a mile of irrigating ditch. The Indians did much of the work in fencing and helping to raise crops in a sixty-acre area.  

In 1873 at the Shoshoni and Bannock agency in Wyoming Territory, the Indians were reported to have resolved to settle down on their reservation and cease roaming about. Most of the 791 men, women, and children there wanted to begin farming. That spring some two hundred acres were broken and sowed. Thus encouraged, two hundred sixteen additional Shoshonis came to the reserve to stay and farm; and neighboring tribes sent their representatives to see if it were true that the Shoshonis had settled down to farm.  

Although a new era had dawned for these Shoshonian tribes, still Bannocks and Shoshonis from Idaho journeyed to

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the buffalo country. Their agent estimated that four hundred fifty Bannocks and other Shoshonis had gone to hunt buffalo in the fall of 1877. However, owing to regulation and military force, the Bannocks, after their short uprising in 1878, settled down permanently to an agricultural existence. Their agent remarked, in August, 1879, how successful they had been in cultivating the soil the previous year and that they had been so encouraged that in the spring of 1879 nearly every able-bodied man had been eager to raise a crop for himself. By 1880 to travel the road to buffalo no longer ranked as a must in the hearts and minds of these Indians west of the mountains.

The Milk River Agency supervised the Sioux, Assiniboins, Gros Ventres, River Crows, Northern Cheyennes, and Arapahos during a part of the 1870's. Their agent emphasized, in his report of August 31, 1879, their dependence on buffalo, and the slaughter of that animal and predicted the eventual change in the Indian way of life:

All of these tribes have managed to procure their own meat during the summer chiefly from the buffalo that range to keep them constantly hunting, not only to provide meat for present use, but to cure and store a quantity for winter. The buffalo are being rapidly killed off. It is estimated that 50,000 have been slain during the past summer on the hunting-grounds of these tribes. They appear to fully appreciate the fact that the game will in a short time disappear, as

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it did, from the hunting grounds in the eastern country, which they formerly inhabited, and that it will necessitate a change in their mode of life....They talk a great deal about farming, that their "people may live after the game is dead." 17

The seventeen hundred upper Assiniboins of the Fort Belknap Agency were persistent hunters and procured sufficient game in 1874 and in 1875. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs reported that the nine hundred fifty Gros Ventres of that agency lived only on their annuities and the chase, which provided most of their food and furs for barter. Buffalo inhabited the area in large numbers. 18

Efforts at farming were being made at the Fort Peck Agency. There, in 1879, the 4,043 Yanktonai Sioux and the 1,469 Assiniboins made their first attempts at farming. Seventy acres were broken and thirty acres were cultivated. Their agent summarized the situation in these words:

I think they already see the advantage of it, and that next spring, if more land is broken up, a large portion of them will try to raise crops for themselves. The Assinaboine are in advance of the Yanktonai a couple of years in regard to farming and this year will have 100 acres in crops....besides about 15 acres in small scattered farms that they have plowed and dug themselves. 19

The Fort Belknap agent wrote, on August 1, 1879, of the difficulty of his Indians securing game because of Sioux domination of the hunting ground. Referring to the 1,135

18 E. P. Smith, Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1875, 63.
Gros Ventres and the 977 Assiniboins under his supervision, he wrote:

They, however, begin to perceive that it is but a question of a few years, at most, before the buffalo and other game will cease to exist, and that soon they must depend upon their own efforts to some extent to procure the subsistence necessary to existence, and to that end they begin to look forward to the time when they shall commence tilling the soil. In fact many of them will be ready next spring to engage in agricultural pursuits.  

The Fort Peck agent, who supervised 5,829 Yanktonai Sioux located at Poplar River and 1430 Assiniboins at Wolf Point, reported on August 12, 1880, that the Indians had had fair hunting on their fall hunt of 1879, but that no winter hunt had been possible due to the movement of buffalo farther south and the deep snow which blanketed the ground from November to March. However, in June and July the buffalo had come north to ensure a successful hunt. The unfortunate aspect of their hunt was the fact that they were unable to save enough meat to last them longer than ten days. Satisfied over their progress toward civilization, the agent revealed that the majority of them were anxious to farm; however, there remained a small group in both tribes which preferred the roving life.  

In 1880 the Fort Belknap agent reported a scarcity of game due to the activities of Indians from Canada and to the

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unfounded fear of his Indians of the Sioux. He remarked, "Although buffalo are the one thing they most desire and they are plenty in the region of Milk River, about 100 miles from here, they are afraid to go to them for fear of coming in contact with the Sioux. No amount of reasoning can convince them that there is no particular danger." Thus, the Indians of the Fort Belknap and the Fort Peck Agencies, although still hunting buffalo, recognized that the bison would soon be a thing of the past.

Mr. Brunot of the Indian Commission, eager to negotiate a treaty with the Crows in 1873, spoke to them of the dawning of a new way of life:

I see the white man's towns coming further and further; they are almost here. A few years where these towns now are, there were buffalo. The buffalo used to be on the Platte, as they are now on the Big Horn and Powder River. They are all gone now. Why are they so plenty here still? They have been driven from there and have come here. The Sioux cannot find any buffalo on the Platte, so they come up north to hunt them....And when they are killed off here, they will be all gone everywhere. Buffalo are the Indian bread, but they are going away, and soon will be all gone, and the friends of the Indians want them, by that time to have plenty to eat; we want you to teach your children so that they may live on white man's food.

However, these arguments proved to be ineffective to a people who so loved the chase as did the Crows. As long as there were buffalo to hunt, the Crows showed little interest in

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farming. This love of the hunt was borne out by the reports of their agents, one of whom wrote in September, 1874:

They seem to desire to continue the chase for a living. While the buffalo are in reach they will not resort to any other means of living. When this subject has been presented to them, they have replied that when the buffalo are all gone they will go to farming. Others have said that when the agency is moved to a good place they will settle down and farm.

Agent Dexter Clapp concurred with this in his report of the next year, but added that he had had some success in influencing individuals to farm. He felt confident that when the Sioux raids were stopped agricultural progress would be made. 25

"The first request of the young is 'to go to buffalo' and so was the last request of the aged" summed up agent Frost's analysis of the role of the hunt in Crow life. Able to conclude a successful hunt each year, the Crows could not be expected to till the soil. 26 Agent Keller, on July 29, 1879, vividly described events that soon would be looked upon as the good old days:

When the grass begins to grow in the Spring they all sigh for the excitement of the chase, strike their tents, and, like a grand army, move out upon the broad prairies to engage in their summer hunt, which they keep up until mid summer, when they return to the agency, dress their hides, make their lodges and remain

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until fall, when robes are good, when they go out to kill the buffalo and secure the robes and dry the meat which constitute their stock in trade. So soon as this hunt is concluded, which usually runs to the middle of January, they return to the agency, tan their robes, draw their annuities, and enjoy themselves singing and dancing.\textsuperscript{27}

In the final year of this investigation, 1880, the Crow tribe, numbering 3,470 inhabitants, owned from twelve to fourteen thousand mules and ponies and during their summer hunt took and traded from six to seven thousand buffalo robes, receiving four dollars for each robe. They were still essentially nomadic; since the government furnished them only about four month's supplies, hunting was a necessity. However, they had to go farther and farther away from the agency to get game; in 1880 none existed within one hundred miles of the agency. The good old days would soon be gone, but the Crows took advantage of them to the very last.

By presidential and congressional action in 1873 and 1874 the southern boundary of the Blackfeet country was moved northward over two hundred miles. Their reservation comprised all of Montana east of the Rockies and north of a Birch Creek-Marias River-Missouri River southern boundary. In this very large area buffalo were still numerous. The Blackfeet continued to earn their living by hunting the buffalo and trading robes and hides to whites. Several trading posts were established on the upper Marias during the 1870's for that


\textsuperscript{28}Ibid.
purpose. The Blackfeet agency did not serve as a focal point of Blackfeet interest. In 1873 the Piegans were the only Blackfeet who came in tribal strength to the agency for supplies. Only one band of Bloods, under chief Running Rabbit, came regularly for rations. The Blackfeet proper and the main camp of Bloods did not visit the agency and roamed often two hundred fifty to four hundred miles away from it. 29

The Blackfeet agent commented in 1875 on the declining numbers of the buffalo which eventually undermined such Blackfeet independence:

A large number of buffalo ranged in the hunting ground of these people during the past winter, but the amount was insignificant compared with that of former years. Each year the vast herds that once swept the prairies...became less...The hardy frontier settlements are pursuing them to their most remote pastures. A few years and the hunt will afford a scant, precarious means of living. 30

Their agent, in his report of August 1, 1877, gave additional evidence of the dawning of a new way of life:

The winter hunt of the buffalo was not so productive as the one before, only about one-third of the number of robes being taken. They are now absent on the summer hunt, and the word is sent here that buffalo is plenty, and they are making abundance of dried meat...I find it difficult to prevail even on the more sensible and reflecting portion to give up their nomadic life and settle down to farm or raise cattle. They admit the time approaches fast when the buffalo will disappear, but until then the excitement of the chase and the notion that labor is only for women will prevent the change to a more certain and civilized


life. Some of the headmen have, however, taken steps looking to a change, and are trading their ponies for horned cattle, and talking of selecting locations and asking help to build cabins.\textsuperscript{31}

Three years later their agent reported that as the years went by more men built houses and worked small farms; "the rapid decrease of buffalo....has its effect in their willingness to give up their nomadic habits."\textsuperscript{32} No longer able to make their living by the hunt, by 1884 the Blackfeet tribes had become dependent upon the government for their economic needs; the warpath was no longer traveled.

The importance of the disappearance of the buffalo to intertribal warfare deserves reemphasis at this point. In some respects it fostered more intensive intertribal warfare. The Sioux were attracted to the Montana region not only because it served as a place of refuge from white supervision but also because it was a hunter's paradise. The disappearance of the buffalo in Sioux country made it imperative that they move to other regions. Likewise, the disappearance of the herds from the so-called common hunting ground around the forks of the Missouri caused those western Indians who de-

\textsuperscript{31} John Young, "Blackfeet Agency, August 1, 1877," in \textit{Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs} for 1877, 528.

\textsuperscript{32} Young, "Blackfeet Agency, August 6, 1880," in \textit{Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs} for 1880, 227. The year 1880 has been chosen as the final year of this investigation since warfare and bison hunting after that date were insignificant compared to previous years. However, since the Blackfeet agent's report of August 11, 1882, lends support to the contention that the Blackfeet became more dependent as the buffalo decreased, it is herein included. That agent remarked that the winter hunt of 1880-81 had been unsuccessful and that the winter of 1882 was the first in the history of
sired buffalo to move into Blackfeet and Crow territory with the result that they often had to fight for the right to hunt.

The growing scarcity of buffalo also hindered inter-tribal warfare. The western Indians found that they had to go farther east into dangerous territory to find buffalo; and when they got there, there was no assurance that the hunt would be successful. The increased distance, the dangers involved, and the uncertainty of a successful hunt discouraged these Indians and eventually caused them to look toward farming as a safer and easier way of making a living. With the main herds concentrated in Northeastern Montana, particularly the Milk River area, and in Southeastern Montana, there was no motive for large groups of Indians to move into other areas of Montana where they could find no food. Without buffalo meat, war parties found it more difficult to sustain themselves on long excursions into enemy country. With insufficient buffalo the Indians found it to their advantage to stay in a limited area not far from the agency, where they might secure government aid and where they could establish farms. Thus, the scarcity of bison helped to restrict Indian movement which in former years had resulted in closer tribal contact and intertribal warfare.

In the years following the treaty of 1855, white civilization began to close in on the Montana Indians. A

the agency that the tribes had spent in its vicinity (John Young, "Blackfeet Agency, August 11, 1882," in Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1882, 98).
host of people entered their hunting grounds. Large reservations, which were reduced from time to time, were established for the Indians; but there was no strict enforcement to keep them there. Bands of Indians roved beyond the reservation boundaries which they did not like to recognize. On their wanderings in search of buffalo and plunder, the Indians clashed with each other; and frequently, whites were the victims of their war parties. Regulation of intertribal warfare which actually meant restricting Indian movement was important in Montana where the headwaters of the Missouri and the Columbia formed the thoroughfare for early travel to the Idaho mines and the west coast and where a new territory, born in 1864, needed peace and security to thrive. The Blackfeet agent summarized the situation on October 2, 1865, when he wrote, "The rapid increase of population in this Territory, the new and rich placer and lode discoveries, the extensive and fast increasing business, the immense mineral wealth, rapid development of the country demand the fostering and protective arm of the government."33 So the white settler, the Indian agents, and the military worked to restrict Indian movement and thus prevent intertribal conflict and the accompanying depredations on white settlers.

Referring to the strained relations between the Gros Ventres and the Blackfeet, the Blackfeet agent remarked, in September, 1864, that hostilities between the two would have

been frequent and bloody if it had not been for their fear of punishment by the whites. It was the agent's belief that the presence of troops at Fort Benton, more than any other factor, would make for peace among those Indians.  

Since there were few soldiers in the area, Indian agents and the white settlers occasionally exerted themselves to regulate Indian movement. Piegan war parties had been accustomed to stopping at Benton City on their way to and from their enemies. In late January, 1866, fifteen Piegan warriors, with some stolen Pend d'Oreille horses, arrived at Benton where the agent told them to continue on to their camp without stopping. If they were to continue their hostile raids against other tribes, they would not be allowed in Benton.  

On September 18, 1866, a party of Piegans, returning from a raid against the Crows and the Snakes, approached the settlement of Benton. Twenty of the town's inhabitants attempted to discourage such parties by killing one and wounding three of the eleven Indians; and in the afternoon of September 19, 1866, an Indian who had been on an expedition with three others against the Crows and the Snakes was captured by the whites near Fort Benton and told to return to his camp.

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The Marias, Teton, Sun, and Deerborn Rivers cut broad fertile valleys which served the Blackfeet as a hunting ground. Above the mouths of these rivers, the Missouri became smaller and could be more easily crossed. This made the region an important passageway for Indians who were bent on raiding the southern Montana area. Control of this area might limit Indian movement in this direction. With this purpose in mind, Fort Shaw was established in the Sun River Valley on June 30, 1867. However, in its initial years the fort did not prevent the Indians from carrying on their raids; but it was a step in the right direction.

The Bannocks in Idaho Territory insisted that their agent allow them to go on their buffalo hunt in 1867. Certainly the fact that this most restless and wandering tribe asked permission to go on a buffalo hunt was indicative of restrictions on Indian movement. Formerly, they had gone when they pleased. Their agent approved their request since if deprived of the privilege they might starve.\(^{37}\)

For several years during the summer months, movement of Indians was regulated at Cadotte's Pass about fifty miles west of Fort Shaw. The troops stationed there prevented wandering bands of western Indians from going to the plains country without approval of the proper authority and kept the plains Indians from western valleys. A small detachment of troops often accompanied the Pend d'Oreilles or Flatheads on

their hunts.\textsuperscript{38}

The Commissioner of Indian Affairs, in his report of November 1, 1873, commented on warfare as a hinderance to civilizing the Indians and recommended steps to stop that warfare:

In view of the hostilities among the different tribes of Indians and the frequent attacks by some of the tribes, requiring a constant state of defense on the part of others, an order has been issued that no Indians be allowed to leave their reservation without permit from the agents, and the Secretary of War has been requested to direct the commanders of military posts to prevent Indians from passing from one agency to another without such permit; and if they find Indians marauding or engaged in any hostile expeditions against any other tribe, to strike them without parley. A satisfactory execution of this arrangement will probably require either an increased enlistment of scouts from friendly Indians, or an increase of military force in the different portions of the Indian country.\textsuperscript{39}

The Nez Perce agent, disturbed over the actions of the non-treaty Nez Perces to induce, in some cases with success, reservation young men to leave their farms and to go to the buffalo country, notified the Indians that those who left their farms to go buffalo hunting forfeited their right to these farms; and upon their return, if their farms were occupied by other Indians, the one in possession would be protected and allowed to hold the farm. This notice, along with the influence of several chiefs, kept many from going to the

\textsuperscript{38} W. S. Hancock, "Report of Major General Hancock, November 1, 1870," in Report of the Secretary of War for 1870 (Washington, 1871), 28.

\textsuperscript{39} Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1873, 8.
buffalo country.  

The Indian wars in Montana (1876-77) caused a noticeable decline in Indian wandering about the countryside; although large bands roved occasionally beyond their reservations. Before 1876 there had been only six hundred soldiers to regulate Indian movement. By the autumn of 1877 there were 3,298 soldiers in Montana. New forts were established. The Indians found it even more difficult to move about.

The Bannocks were refused permission to leave their Idaho reserve to hunt during the summer and autumn of 1877. One band of Bannocks hunted, with no great success, in the Crow country in the spring of 1878 and were accompanied to their reservation by troops. Unrest in the Idaho reserve resulted in larger bands setting out for Montana, but they were obliged to return by force of arms in the Yellowstone National Park area and on the plains of Clark's Fork River. The days when the Bannocks could travel the road to buffalo were about over. In the words of Brigadier General Crook, on April 3, 1878, this was confirmed, "Hitherto it has been the practice to permit the young men to hunt the buffalo in the Big Horn and Yellowstone country, but the rapid settling


41 Merrill Burlingame, The Montana Frontier (Helena, 1940), 243.

up of that region, as well as the country around this agency, makes any such dependence for the future most precarious.\^3

This increasing regulation of Indian movement along with the increasing scarcity of buffalo limited Indian contact with each other, and consequently intertribal warfare declined. As the buffalo disappeared and the country became peopled by settlers, the horse raiders frequently found themselves on the verge of starvation on their long journeys to the enemy camp. The Mounted Police of Canada and the United States Army sometimes intercepted returning parties and took all the stolen horses from them.\^4 Chances of success became slimmer and slimmer. Indian police\^5 and courts of justice took the place of revengeful massacres of fellow Indians.

\^3George Crook, "In the Field, Franklin, Idaho, April 3, 1878," in Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1878, xix.

\^4The Fort Peck agent reported in 1880 on horse stealing and what was being done about it: "Horsestealing is common among all the Indians in this Northwest country, and causes an agent more trouble than any other one thing. But great inroads has been made toward breaking it up the past year, as, in conjunction with the military commanders at the different posts, we have endeavored to take and return all stolen stock to the rightful owners. Where a horse belonging to a white man is found in the possession of the Indians I have had no difficulty in getting him; but horses stolen from other Indians they do not like to give up, as they claim it is one of their customs to steal from one another, and the more horses an Indian steals the greater Indian he is considered among his tribe." See N. S. Porter, "Fort Peck Agency, August 12, 1880," in Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1880, 235-36.

\^5The Blackfeet agent's report of August 11, 1882, had this to say of the Indian police: "The police are moderately efficient, and improve as they become better acquainted with their duties.... Three young men were returned to the reservation from a raid toward the Bear-Paw Mountains bring-
After 1880 the Indian learned to work his fields. No longer did he hunt the buffalo and his fellow men. Upon the reservation the young men, prevented by the military and by economic needs, found it impossible to imitate the heroic deeds of their ancestors; they could only listen to their elders tell of days gone by when men resorted to cunning and stealth, violence and bloodshed in their search for buffalo, horse, and scalp.

ing with them three branded horses, two guns and a field glass which they had stolen. The police brought them in, they were Indians belonging across the line.....When horses are stolen from neighboring tribes, as they say in retaliation for thefts committed on these tribes, the police are lukewarm in their efforts to restore the property or to have the thieves punished. This thieving is considered Indian justice; they are willing to make exchange of stolen property, and promise to stop the evil, but the details are difficult to agree upon." See John Young, "Blackfeet Agency, August 11, 1882," in Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1882, 99.
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SOURCES

JOURNALS, DIARIES, LETTERS, HISTORIES, AND MEMOIRS

Allen, William A. Adventures with Indians and Game or Twenty Years in the Rocky Mountains. Chicago: A. W. Bowen and Co. 1903.
These memoirs provided only one account of intertribal rivalry—that of Crow resistance against the Sioux. Allen learned of this incident in Crow history from the Crows.

The Missouri River Journals, which are found in volume two, proved to be the only journals pertinent to this thesis. They contain an extract from Alexander Culbertson's journal, which told of the Assiniboin attack on the Piegans at Fort McKenzie, and Audubon's description of an Assiniboin war party which had battled with the Blackfeet.

Stationed in Montana after 1870, Bradley compiled historical events of the region. This portion of his history includes material on Tchatka, the Assiniboin attack on the Piegans around Fort McKenzie in 1833, Gros Ventre-Assiniboin clashes, and the death of Rotten Belly. Bradley failed to cite all his sources, and his dates vary sometimes with those of other writers. Chronologically some of the events in his history may be misplaced.

"Bradley Manuscript, Book 'F'". Ibid., VIII (pub. 1917). 197-250.
This portion of the Bradley manuscript contains accounts of an Assiniboin expedition against the Crows and a destructive Sioux attack on the Crow camp—both distinctive contributions to this narrative.
Accounts of Blackfeet-Snake hostilities and material on the Crows were useful; however, limited use was made of this history.

This portion of the manuscript contains valuable information on the characteristics, habits, and customs of the Blackfeet and some material on the Crows.

This portion of the manuscript contains valuable information on the characteristics, habits, and customs of the Blackfeet and some material on the Crows. A historical sketch of the Crows is included.

The author used material on the buffalo hunt to illustrate the bison's struggle with the Indians and with nature; also included are Catlin's comments on the heart of the buffalo country and on a buffalo wallow. Although Catlin's descriptions have been criticized by some as romanticized, they provide interesting reading and seem to basically agree with the descriptions of other observers.

Chardon recorded many examples of Indian rivalry, but they were not too valuable for this work since they concerned the area outside of Montana.

An excellent source, volume one contains observations on the cause of war and its effect upon Flathead population, a scene of Indian torture, the Blackfeet attitude toward intruders on the buffalo plains, Flathead defense of their heritage to the land, the effect of arms and ammunition on Blackfeet-Flathead relations, and the Flathead chieftainship. Less valuable was
volume two which contained observations on the buffalo
as a cause of misfortune to the Kutenais and the Flat-
heads.

Denig, E. T. "Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri," ed. J. N.
B. Hewitt. Forty-sixth Annual Report of the Bureau of
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dence it seems safe to say that it was written about
1854. It is an excellent source for Indian customs,
written by one who spent two decades among the Indians.
The author used material dealing with the Indian view
of land and the importance of land to the buffalo hunt-
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1830's, and Tchatka's raid on the Mandans.

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in Indian battles are described.

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bia and Colorado from February 1830, to November 1832.
Co. 1940.
This is an excellent primary source which contains a
description of a strange Indian letter, an account of
the Battle of Pierre's Hole, a description of the buf-
falo range, and material on Blackfeet-Flathead hostil-
ities.

Gass, Patrick. Gass's Journal of the Lewis and Clark Expedi-
This journal contains a few observations on the Nez
Perce Indians; it is not so valuable as the Lewis and
Clark Journals.

Harris and Holman. 1870.
Gray, a member of the Presbyterian mission in Oregon,
visited the Flatheads in 1837, and wrote, among other
things, about a Flathead-Blackfoot battle.

An excellent detailed description of Kutenai-Blackfeet hostilities is included in this primary account.


Little use was made of this work. Only one account—that of a summer battle between the Blackfeet and the Flatheads—was used.


This derived source contains one noteworthy example of intertribal warfare—a Blackfeet surprise of Snake hunters on the buffalo plains.


This valuable derived source contains an account of the Battle of Pierre's Hole, an eulogy of the Crow country by a Crow chief, and extensive material on Flathead and Nez Perce rivalry with the Blackfeet. Where comparison was possible, the investigator found some variation from the accounts of actual observers of Indian rivalry. Approximately two-thirds of this book is based on other sources than Captain Bonneville's journal. Irving had access, due to his friendship with John Jacob Astor, to numerous journals and letters of the fur traders. These he worked over in his own inimitable style to produce a vivid but fairly accurate and comprehensive account of the fur trade days, including intertribal rivalry.


This primary source contains John Colter's account of his accidental involvement in Blackfoot-Flathead hostilities and James's own observations on intertribal war.


This primary account was used in describing the staggering numbers of bison and in stating the white man's view of Indian losses.
Kurz, Rudolph. *Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz, an Account of his Experiences among Fur Traders and American Indians on the Mississippi and the Upper Missouri Rivers during the Years 1846 to 1852.* Translated by Myrtle Jarrell and edited by J. N. B. Hewitt. Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 115. Washington: Government Printing Office. 1937. Several incidents of Blackfeet rivalry with the Crees and the Assiniboins were the only important contributions to this narrative.


Larpenteur, Charles. *Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri the Personal Narrative of Charles Larpenteur 1833-72.* Vol. II. "American Explorers Series." Edited by Elliott Coues. New York: Francis P. Harper. 1898. Larpenteur's comments on the length and ferocity of Indian battles were used. In this narrative is an excellent example of the lure of the trading forts as a factor fostering intertribal warfare.

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Plenty-Coups, Chief of the Crows. New York: The John
Day Company, c. 1930.
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produced inaccuracies in time and events, his stories
are extremely valuable in expressing the Crow position
in the period 1850-80. The feelings of a young boy
who yearned for the time when he could take the warpath,
the Crow use of fire to flush the enemy from cover, and
incidents of Crow-Sioux hostility are described.

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terior of North America. Early Western Travels 1743-
1846. Edited by Reuben G. Thwaites. Cleveland: The
Arthur H. Clark Company. 1906. XXII-XXIV.
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around the trading posts. Maximilian was a scientist
who was fairly accurate and discriminating in observa-
tion. He was conservative in recording his impressions.

Mengarini, Gregory. "Mengarini's Narrative of the Rockies
Memories of Old Oregon, 1841-1850, and St. Mary's Mis-
sion." Edited by Albert J. Partoll. Sources of North-
west History no. 25. Reprinted from Frontier and Mid-
land. XVIII. no. 3 and 4. Missoula: Montana State Uni-
versity. 1938.
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Mission due to intertribal conflict and of a battle
between the Blackfeet and the Flatheads.

Owen, John. The Journals and Letters of Major John Owen Pio-
nier of the Northwest 1850-1871. Edited by Seymour
These volumes reveal that Blackfeet hostilities contin-
ued after 1855 and record skirmishes between the Ban-
nocks and the Flatheads and a destructive Assiniboin
attack on the Pend d'Oreilles, who were hunting on the
buffalo plains. This was an excellent primary source.

This book contributed two items—an estimate of Blackfeet numbers in 1835 and a second-hand version of the Battle of Pierre's Hole.


This primary source was used only to gain information on Hell Gate Canyon and its part in intertribal war.


The author used two accounts of Sacajawea's capture by the Gros Ventres—one from the Snake point of view and one from Sacajawea's point of view. Sacajawea supposedly told her story to a trapper, Hugh Monroe, in 1816; he in turn told Schultz her story in the 1870's when Schultz came to live with the Piegans. Assuming Monroe's story to be basically true, the author realized that due to a fifty-four year lapse in time, Monroe could unwittingly have introduced inaccurate or additional details not in the original story. However, for lack of contradictory evidence, this investigator is inclined to accept the basic truth and details of Monroe's story as retold by Schultz.


In this primary source, valuable information is given by one who lived with the Piegans in the 1870's. It contains an account of a Crow ambush in which the Piegans lost 113 people and of a Crow-Gros Ventre defeat by the Blackfeet in 1867. Schultz's personal participation in a horse-stealing expedition and the failure of Crow-Piegan peace negotiations were used in the preparation of this thesis. Schultz secured much information from Rising Wolf or Hugh Monroe who dwelt among the Piegans.


This primary source contains material on Flathead-Blackfeet hostilities, Crow-Flathead rivalry, and Crow-Blackfeet warfare. De Smet was an interesting writer and was careful in describing what he saw or what was told to him; but at times he seemed too willing to accept as the truth what others told him. He did not spend much time with the Indians of this thesis in
comparison to such men as Ferris and Thompson. His correspondence with European friends was written with the idea of publication in mind; he wished to interest the Catholic public in his missionary work and to aid him in securing funds. Traders and Indians furnished him with much information.


This primary work contains accounts of Indian cruelty, of Tchatka the Assiniboin, and includes a detailed account of the failure of Crow-Pieggon peace negotiations in 1843.


Written by a son who admired the work of his father, this source contains extracts from Stevens's journal and Hazard Stevens's actual observations of events. It is a valuable source for the period 1850-55 and emphasizes Stevens's attempt to make peace between the tribes and contains accounts of Blackfeet-Flathead hostilities.


Nez Perce and Flathead hostilities against the Bannocks receive emphasis.


Bannock-Flathead hostilities are illustrated in this primary source.


Only two incidents were taken from this primary source: one deals with Crow-Arapaho warfare and one with Crow-Snake warfare.


Although most of the journal is a record of geography and natural history of the regions through which
Thompson traveled, there is some valuable material on rivalry between the Kutenai and Flathead Indians and the Blackfeet. The desire of the Indians for guns and their effect upon those Indians when once acquired is stressed.

David Thompson's Narrative of his Explorations in Western America 1784-1812. Edited by J. B. Tyrrell. Toronto: The Champlain Society. 1916. The Narrative is a more readable account than the Journal; it was written many years after the events occurred and was based on notebooks which contained his record of events as they happened. The Narrative was more valuable to the investigator than the Journal and gave an account of Blackfeet-Snake warfare in the 18th century as well as an account of Blackfeet-Flathead hostilities during the years 1808-12.

Townsend, John K. Narrative of a Journey across the Rocky Mountains to the Columbia River and a Visit to the Sandwich Islands, Chile etc. Early Western Travels. Edited by Reuben G. Thwaites. Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Co. 1905. XXI.
A primary source which contains material on a Blackfeet renegade who lived with the Nez Perces and material on a battle between the Blackfeet and the Bannocks.

Vaughn, Robert. Then and Now; or, Thirty-six Years in the Rockies 1864-1900. Minneapolis: Tribune Printing Co. 1900.
Although a primary source in many ways, this book may be more properly classified as a secondary source for the materials used in this thesis. This work records the failure of a Piegan-Crow peace council in the early 1850's and includes incidents seen by Vaughn as well as incidents derived from interviews with old timers.

This secondary source contains an account of the Battle of Pierre's Hole by Joe Meek, who was one of the trappers participating in the battle.

This primary source contains an account of the Battle of Pierre's Hole.

REPORTS OF INDIAN AGENTS

An invaluable source of information, these reports provided information on Blackfeet hostilities in violation of the Blackfeet Treaty of 1855, the Piegan-Gros Ventre feud, Sioux intrusion on the Crow and the Assiniboine hunting grounds, the decline of the buffalo, Indian persistence in hunting that animal, the crude beginnings of agriculture, the Indian realization that a new era in their way of life was approaching, and efforts to regulate Indian movement.

Two different sets of volumes were used. One was the serial set in which the Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs was one of several reports of the Department of Interior. The other volumes were complete reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs published in one volume by the Indian Office, with no other Department of Interior reports included. Consequently page numbers differ in the two sets as do the titles of the main reports. These differences are indicated for each report in the following list.

U. S. Dept. of Interior, Commissioner of Indian Affairs.


Council Held with Them at their Village July 1, 1857," submitted by A. H. Redfield.

Contains report of A. J. Vaughan to Colonel A. M. Robinson.


Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Annual Report for 1867. Washington. 1867. Published as a separate volume from other Interior Department reports. The same report with different page numbers may be found in Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. 40 Cong., 2 Sess., House Exec. Doc. 1.
Contains report of George B. Wright to Governor G. C. Smith dated July 5, 1867, and the report of Charles F. Powell, "To Indian Agent, Boise City, July, 1867."


Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Annual Report for 1873. Published as a separate volume from other Interior Department reports. The same report with different page numbers may be found in Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1873. 43 Cong., 1 Sess., House Exec. Doc. 1 (pt. 5). Washington. 1874. Contains the reports of F. D. Pease, "Crow Agency, Montana, September 28, 1873"; W. T. Ensign, "Blackfeet Agency, September 1, 1873"; D. Shanahan, "Flathead Indian Agency, September 8, 1873"; James Irwin, "Shoshone

Annual Report for 1874. Published as a separate volume from other Interior Department reports. The same report with different page numbers may be found in Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1874. 43 Cong., 2 Sess., House Exec. Doc. 1 (pt. 5). Washington. 1874.

Annual Report for 1875. Published as a separate volume from other Interior Department reports. The same report with different page numbers may be found in Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1875. 44 Cong., 1 Sess., House Exec. Doc. 1 (pt. 5). Washington. 1875.

Report for 1877. Published as a separate volume from other Interior Department reports. The same report with different page numbers may be found in Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1877. 45 Cong., 2 Sess., House Exec. Doc. 1 (pt. 5). Washington. 1877.

Annual Report for 1878. Published as a separate volume from other Interior Department reports. The same report with different page numbers may be found in Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1878. 45 Cong., 3 Sess., House Exec. Doc. 1 (pt. 5). Washington. 1878.
Annual Report for 1879. Published as a separate volume from other Interior Department reports. The same report with different page numbers may be found in Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1879. 46 Cong., 2 Sess., House Exec. Doc. 1 (pt. 5). Washington. 1879.


Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Annual Report for 1882. Published as a separate volume from other Interior Department reports. The same report with different page numbers may be found in Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1882. 47 Cong., 2 Sess., House Exec. Doc. 1 (pt. 5). Washington. 1882.

Contains report of John Young, "Blackfeet Agency, August 11, 1882."

REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY OF WAR


Contains report of General W. S. Hancock on the stationing of troops to regulate Indian movement.


TREATIES

Partoll, Albert (ed,) "The Blackfeet Indian Peace Council." Sources of Northwest History no. 3. Reprinted from Frontier and Midland, XVII, no. 2. Missoula, Montana. Contains speeches of Blackfeet and Salish chiefs which
reveal Blackfeet depredations, Indian love of "their country", and Indian reaction to the idea of a common hunting ground.

WAR DEPARTMENT REPORT

U. S. War Department. Reports of Explorations and Surveys to Ascertain the most Practicable and Economical Route for a Railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean. 12 vols. 33 Cong., 2 Sess., Senate Exec. Doc. 78. Washington: Beverley Tucker. 1855. Only volume one was used; it contains the following reports:

Doty, James. "Reports of Mr. James Doty on the Indian Tribes of the Blackfeet Nation." December 28-29, 1853. 441-446.


Mullan, John. "Report of a Reconnaissance from the Bitter Root Valley to Fort Hall, Thence to the Head of Hell Gate River, Thence to the Bitter Root Valley." January 21, 1854. 322-349.


These reports contain valuable material on the Flathead Peace Council of 1855, on efforts to get the Indians to meet with the Blackfeet in a peace council, on tribal statistics and on Blackfeet-Flathead hostilities.
SECONDARY ACCOUNTS

This popular account describes the extermination of the buffalo herds which so affected the Plains Indians. It was useful to the author in showing the extent of buffalo migrations and the value of the buffalo to the Indian.

This textbook was useful to the author as background for preparation of this thesis. In the footnotes this book was cited only once in reference to the number of soldiers garrisoned in Montana in the 1870's.

Only volume two of this standard work was consulted for the brief accounts of various Indian tribes.

This collection of adventures was prepared for popular reading and contains Fraser's description of the buffalo's struggle with attacking wolves, which was used in this thesis to illustrate the bison's struggle with nature.

The book, written for the average man, was used as background material in preparation for this thesis. Cited from this account is only one paragraph which describes buffalo on the Missouri.

This book contains excellent background material on Crow war customs and the chieftainship.

The author made limited use of this work which was valuable for the reasons for discontinuance of missionary trips to the buffalo plains and for its descriptions of trips to the buffalo plains made by Father Point and Father Mengarini.
Phillips, Paul C. "The Fur Trade in the Northwest." The Journal of John Work a Chief-Trader of the Hudson's Bay Co. during his Expedition from Vancouver to the Flatheads and Blackfeet of the Pacific Northwest. Edited by William S. Lewis and Paul C. Phillips. Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Co. 1923. This is an excellent account of reasons why the Columbia Basin and the Upper Missouri areas were penetrated later than other regions and was used in this thesis to point out the reasons for scarcity of source materials on intertribal rivalry in the 1700's.

Sanders, Helen F. Trails Through Western Woods. New York: The Alice Harriman Company. 1910. A popular account which was useful in securing background material and for the paragraphs on the value of the bison to the Indian.

Vestal, Stanley. Mountain Men. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1937. A popular account which was of value only in that it included the Arapaho view of Gros Ventre intentions at Pierre's Hole in 1832. Vestal acquired this information from the Arapahos but did not cite any definite source.

Vinton, Stallo. John Colter Discoverer of Yellowstone Park. New York: Edward Eberstadt. 1926. Vinton points out the significance of John Colter's accidental involvement in intertribal rivalry. Also included in the book is Thomas James's account of the battle in which Colter was involved.

Webb, Walter P. The Great Plains. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co. 1940. The spread of the horse in the United States and the importance of that animal to the Indians were the only contributions of this book to this thesis.

Wissler, Clark. Indians of the United States Four Centuries of their History and Culture. New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co. 1940. This book includes brief but valuable accounts of the Blackfeet tribes, the Assiniboins, the Sioux, the Cheyennes, and the Salish. Useful as an introduction to the topic of Indian rivalry, it contains an interesting conception of the Blackfeet as pocketed and hemmed in by enemies on the east and on the south. The aggressive nature of the Blackfeet is not stressed so much as that of other Indians.

The Encyclopedia Americana
Contains an article on small arms and was used to clarify terms such as needle gun.

Webster's New International Dictionary. 2d ed. Unabridged. G. and G. Merriam Co. 1939. Used to check spelling of words and in obtaining information on fusees and sharps' rifles.

PAMPHLETS

Ewers, John. "The Story of the Blackfeet." Indian Life and Customs Pamphlet no. 6. Ed. Division, U. S. Indian Service. Lawrence, Kansas: Haskell Institute, 1944. Ewers, the curator of the Museum of the Plains Indians, has written an interesting account of the Blackfeet from the 18th century to the present; this contains useful information on the importance of the horse to the Indians.

PERIODICALS

Trexlér, H. A. "Buffalo Range of the Northwest." The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, VII. March, 1921. This article contains worthwhile material on the extent of the buffalo range, the numbers of bison, and the importance of the bison in Indian economy and as a cause of conflict.