Cheyenne Dog Soldier Depredations on Settlers in the Northern Kansas Frontier
From 1864 to 1869

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“\textbf{I} sometimes think the encroachments of our people repeated and grieving upon the claims and rights of the red man may soon be beyond all endurance and their impatient spirit will vent itself in unheard of cruelties or are they destined to melt away worthlessly before the consuming avarice of the white man.”\textsuperscript{1} James Griffing, a Methodist minister of Kansas, wrote this to his beloved wife J. Augusta Goodrich in 1854 during the early days of Kansas settlement, regarding the tenuous Indian situation. This was ten years before the massive outbreaks of Indian depredations on Kansas settlers, but he accurately predicted that eventually the tribes living in the central plains would not tolerate encroaching settlers much longer. With the passing of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, thousands of displaced Native Americans from the Great Lakes, who were forced out west twenty-five years prior to 1854, were once again forced to relocate from the newly created state of Kansas.\textsuperscript{2} During the last two years of the Civil War and a few years after, westward expansion across Kansas was encouraged by overland trade routes, railroad constructions and free land promised by the Homestead Act of 1862.\textsuperscript{3} People from all across the United States and Europe packed up their lives and made the trek out to Kansas, looking to start a new life with endless possibilities. Some settlers decided to make areas of northern Kansas their home, and they were greeted with flint hills, many rivers, native animals such as the beaver and buffalo, blue stem prairie grass, and Indian

\textsuperscript{1} Territorial Kansas Online, letter from James Griffing to J. Augusta Goodrich, September 1854, accessed May 4th, 2010, \url{http://www.territorialkansasonline.org/~imlskto/cgi-bin/index.php?SCREEN=view_image&file_name=k307044&document_id=102819&FROM_PAGE=}


Howard

4 Encroaching settlers greatly upset many Indians, particularly young men of the Cheyenne tribe. Some bands of the Cheyenne vehemently opposed the deals their chiefs and the U.S government continued to make, and they began forming their own militias as early as the 1840s, with the most famous of these militias being the Dog Soldiers.5 Their name is derived from the French word for dog, “chien,” since the word sounds similar to “Cheyenne.”6 In an effort to drive settlers out of Kansas, the Dog Soldiers, along with some of their allies from the Arapaho and Sioux, committed many depredations on Kansas settlements during the mid-to-late 1860s. “The Plains War”, as it is more commonly known, affected many parts of Kansas, especially the areas of northern Kansas that are now Clay, Washington, Republic, Cloud, Jewell, and Mitchell counties, seen in figure 1 below.7

Figure 1: Map of Kansas and Major River Systems


Note: On the left is a map of Kansas along with major river systems in the state. Many

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Indian raids took place near major rivers, since many settlements were created on them. Highlighted in black are the counties that were greatly affected by frontiers raids by the Dog Soldiers during the Plains War of 1864-1869. The picture on the right is a zoomed in image of northern Kansas, with the counties labeled.

Almost no source on the matter refers to the Indians who raided this frontier of northern Kansas as “Dog Soldiers”; however, by using first-hand accounts from people who lived in northern Kansas through this turbulent time, as well as secondary resources on the Plains War, evidence points to the Dog Soldiers as being the culprits. The tales of the Indian incursions during the early settlement days of northern Kansas also reveal another side to the story: How the settlers coped with the raids. Each settlement, colony, family, and individual person had a different perception of the Indians, and that greatly altered how they handled the situation.⁸

It is important to understand in detail why the Dog Soldiers acted so violently towards the settlers in Kansas and the U.S government. One was of course for the reason previously stated, with the U.S government passing laws that basically forced the Indians off of their lands and onto much smaller reservations. In the 1860s the government finally decided the most effective way to drive Indians off their lands was to kill their most valuable resource, the buffalo. The government and settlers saw the buffalo as the biggest barrier towards westward expansion, and by killing off the herds, it not only would force Indians to relocate, it would also create open pastureland for cattle.⁹ Initial

⁸Generally, settlers who migrated to Kansas migrated alone or with their immediate families, but some migrated in “colonies”. Colony in this context means a group of settlers that migrated west who shared similar ethnic backgrounds; religious views, or come from the same general area. Colonies of settlers tended to come from European countries or eastern states.

⁹Kansas State Historical Society, “Topics in Kansas History: Essay on the Plains War.”
slaughtering of the buffalo began in the early-to-mid 1860s, and it is no coincidence the Cheyenne began attacking settlements soon after.\textsuperscript{10}

The Dog Soldiers knew America was fighting a brutal civil war in 1864, and they seized the opportunity to raid defenseless settlements. Initial outbreaks of Indian trouble in northern Kansas began in Washington County in the spring of 1864, when a group of predominantly Cheyenne with a few Arapahoe and Sioux appeared along the Little Blue River. Dressed in their finest attire, the Indians began raiding the settlements.

“Most of the Indians were mounted; all were bedecked in their brightest colors, their heads crowned with the brilliant war-bonnet, their lances bearing the crimson pennant, bows strung, and quivers full of barbed arrows. In addition to these weapons, which with the hunting-knife and tomahawk are considered as the forming the armament of the warrior, each one was supplied with either a breech-loading rifle or a revolver, sometimes both—the latter obtained through the wise foresight and strong love of fair play which prevails in the Indian department.”\textsuperscript{11}

There were no deaths reported in these raids, however; a few men were taken as prisoners, but were let go soon after. Twelve Indians even “outraged” a settler of Washington County named Mrs. Canfield.\textsuperscript{12} Some settlers tried to retaliate and formed their own militia to chase the Indians down, but they left well before the settlers were able to organize themselves. Most of the residents in the county fled south to Clay Center until the scare was over, and a few settlers never returned to their homes.\textsuperscript{13}

By far, the county most distraught and effected by the raids of 1864 was Republic County. Sometime in the 1860s, a party of nineteen Mormons traveling through

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{11} Custer, \textit{Wild Life on the Plains: The Horrors of Indian Warfare}, 41.
\textsuperscript{12} Outraged in this context means rape.
Republic County on their way to Salt Lake City was massacred by Indians near the present day town of Scandia.\textsuperscript{14} Although no year is given for this massacre, the author states it occurred before the town of Scandia was created, which was 1868.\textsuperscript{15} Therefore, the death of the Mormons more than likely occurred sometime around the initial attacks in Washington County, since the counties are side-by-side.

The best documentation of the Dog Soldier raids actually occurred in Nebraska. It was one of the largest and most skillfully planned raids by the Cheyenne, with some Arapahoe and Sioux joining as well. The raid began in August 1864 on the Little Blue River in Gage County, Nebraska, just northeast of Washington County in Kansas. “The Massacre along the Medicine Road” stretched all the way to Denver, Colorado, with Indians attacking almost every station and settlement along the overland trade route. Parties traveling on overland trade routes, along with many settlements, were raided, women were raped, and people were brutally murdered and scalped.\textsuperscript{16} Reports even came in from the Overland Stage Lines in Atchison, Kansas with coaches arriving from the west with nothing in them.

“One coach arrived from west. No mail or passengers through. Indians have murdered all families on Little Blue. One entire family, eight in number. Fifteen are known to be killed. All families are moving in for safety.”\textsuperscript{17}

Over 200 settlers from Clay, Cloud, and Ottawa counties gathered near the present site of Clay Center after reports of the devastation that occurred on the Little

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., “Republic County, Pt. 2”.
\textsuperscript{15} “History,” accessed April 27, 2010, \url{http://www.scandiaks.com/history.html}.
\textsuperscript{16} Ronald Becher. Massacre Along the Medicine Road (Caldwell: Caxton Press, 1999), 144-222.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 185.
Blue. When word came to Republic County, every settler except one fled the county. In September of that year the counties of Clay, Cloud, Washington and Republic form an organized militia, led under the command of Captain Isaac M. Schooly. Every able-bodied man excitedly joined the militia, and many thought it would lead to their demise.\(^{18}\)

“In that company stood every male inhabitant of lawful age, and in close proximity stood the women of their households. Good-bye came at last, and heart-rending cries and sobs rent the air... Life seemed beautiful and good; but, alas! Man ever mars the harmony established by the Creator, and here on this beautiful morning and on this lonely spot, stood a band of men in the very prime of life's enjoyment, preparing to rush into the jaws of a cruel death. Alas! With so intrepid a leader, much danger must be encountered, many a brave one must fall, and many a fair face must be mutilated by savage hands”\(^{19}\)

The militia never encountered one Indian when they marched through the prairies, and most returned to their settlements after they felt it was safe, while some left Kansas altogether.\(^{20}\)

Although many sources on the raids on northern Kansas counties in 1864 refer to the Indians as “Cheyenne, with some Arapahoe and Sioux”, the location and date of the raids appear to point to the Dog Soldiers. For one, many sources on the matter state the raids in Nebraska were carried out by the Dog Soldiers. Because the raids occurred in the same year and close to northern Kansas, more than likely the same Indians carried out the raids. Furthermore, in the early 1860s, gold was discovered in the Rocky Mountains as well as in eastern Kansas, bringing thousands of European immigrants into Cheyenne


occupied territories. In order to keep up with the massive number of immigrants moving out west, the government felt it was time yet again to reduce the territories of the Cheyenne.\textsuperscript{21} In 1861 the chiefs of the Southern Cheyenne tribe signed the Treaty of Fort Wise, which forced the Cheyenne to give up most of their lands from the Treaty of Fort Laramie and move out to a much smaller establishment in Eastern Colorado.\textsuperscript{22} Most of the Cheyenne chiefs urged for peace, and most Cheyenne begrudgingly complied. However, the Dog Soldiers found it despicable to accept the treaty, and ignored its terms and boundaries and continued living east of Colorado in Kansas and Nebraska.\textsuperscript{23} The U.S government despised the Dog Soldiers, and considered them a great nuisance towards western settlement.

“They were the Indians that infested the Republican and Solomon River Valleys... The warriors were all fine looking men, braves of magnificent physique; they never consented to the ratification of treaties, only wanted war. They were principally composed of the Cheyenne, but made of the turbulent and uncontrollable spirits of all the tribes.”\textsuperscript{24}

For the most part, the raids died down in northern Kansas by the end of 1864, although a few isolated incidents still occurred. The last raid by the Dog Soldiers on northern Kansas within this period occurred in western Cloud County in 1865, when a group of forty Cheyenne attacked seven buffalo hunters. The hunters fought off the Indians multiple times and at one point the fight even turned into a hand-to-hand

\textsuperscript{21} Hoig, \textit{The Peace Chiefs of the Cheyennes}, 61.
\textsuperscript{22} The Treaty of Fort Laramie was signed in 1851, and it recognized the Cheyenne and the Arapahoe as owners of all the land between the North Platte and Arkansas River, and eastward from the Rocky Mountains to western Kansas.
\textsuperscript{23} Hoig, \textit{The Peace Chiefs of the Cheyennes}, 62. The five Southern Cheyenne chiefs were Black Kettle, White Antelope, Lean Bear, Little Wolf, and Tall Bear.
\textsuperscript{24} Custer, \textit{Wild Life on the Plains: The Horrors of Indian Warfare}, 122.
engagement. Eventually the team of hunters was just too tired and outnumbered to continue fighting, and finally the opportunity came for the Cheyenne to kill them.\textsuperscript{25}

Raids continued across the state of Kansas between 1865 and 1867, as the Dog Soldiers continued to attack frontier homes as well as the Arkansas Overland mail route. In one incident, the Cheyenne and Sioux burned a station on the route, killed the employees, and captured the stock.\textsuperscript{26}

But the Southern Cheyenne chiefs and U.S government continued to urge for peace, and in July of 1867 they created the United States Indian Peace Commission. In October of that year, both parties agreed to sign the Medicine Lodge Treaty in Fort Larned, Kansas. Within this treaty, the Cheyenne were expected to remain south of the Kansas state line, but were allowed to hunt buffalo north of the Arkansas River. In return, the Cheyenne promised not to block the expansion of railroads and military posts, and they would also refrain from attacking settlements and their property.\textsuperscript{27} However, the Dog Soldiers needed to comply with this treaty as well before it could become ratified. They agreed and signed the treaty; however, the Dog Soldiers would not remain true to their word.

In 1868, the Dog Soldiers once again began raiding settlements in northern Kansas.\textsuperscript{28} The initial war party, composed of around two hundred Cheyenne, twenty

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\item Custer, \textit{Wild Life on the Plains: The Horrors of Indian Warfare}, 122.
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Howard 10

Sioux and four Arapahoe attacked settlements up and down the Solomon and Republican River Valleys. They began their attacks on the 2nd of August in 1868 throughout parts of northwestern Kansas and into areas of northeastern Mitchell County. The first settlement they came across was on the Solomon River, where they entered the home of a woman, and “forcibly took possession of her.” The war party avoided settlements where they could see men that had loaded rifles, so they continued down the Solomon and came to a house where only one man lived in it. The Dog Soldiers beat him down with a club, and one shot him in the head as they rode off. Atrocities like these continued throughout the day, as they killed two more men and took two young girls captive. Finally, the war party saw mounted troops coming after them, and they fled from the settlements, dropping the children in the process. The girls, however, were never found.²⁹ In the eyes of the U.S government, this was a blatant disregard for the Treaty of Medicine Lodge, and war had to be declared on the Cheyenne. Thomas Murphy, superintendent of Indian affairs stated,

“When I reflect that at the very time these Indians were making such loud professions of friendship at Larned, receiving their annuities, etc., they were then contemplating and planning this campaign, I can no longer have confidence in what they say or promise.”³⁰

The Dog Soldiers gave little care to the declaration of war by the government, and soon after the incidents on the Solomon River occurred, they turned their attention to eastward to areas of northern Kansas which they attacked in 1864. The first attack occurred in the spring of 1868 in Cloud County, where six Cheyenne appeared at the

home of Benjamin White on White Rock Creek. His wife was alone at the house with the
youngest of their children, Sarah, fifteen, Angeline, twelve, Elvin, six and Janine,
eighteen months. The Indians, decorated in their war paint, plundered the house and took
Sarah prisoner. The mother quickly gathered all the other children and hid them in brush
near the creek; the Indians never found them and rode off with Sarah. Benjamin White
was with his sons along with a neighbor making hay in a distant meadow when the
Indians approached. The boys and neighbor immediately fled on horseback, but
Benjamin was not so quick to do so.

“Benjamin White though unarmed, jumped off the haystack and made for the red
men. Benjamin White was not afraid of Indians, he was born in the piedmont near
Lynchburg Virginia, he had pioneered near Darlington, Wisconsin. In 1849 he had made
the California overland trade trip. That day when approached the Indians they killed
him.”

Obviously pride played a great role in some settlers when they had to deal with
Indians. It was evident in 1864 when members of these counties thought it was their duty
to form a militia and ride into death; this belief clearly did not change with Benjamin
White four years later. Eventually, Sarah White was traded with Sioux for another
woman. Eventually General George Custer and his men tracked down this Sioux war
party, and Sarah White was returned to her mother. During the attack, the Indians told
the Whites the reason they were raiding their settlement was due an offense committed by
White Father. Throughout 1868 and 1869, White Creek was by far the most hostile
area in northern Kansas, as it was a prime hunting ground spot for buffalo.

31 Victor Murdock, "Brother of Sarah White Living in Wichita Tells of Her Capture...by the Cheyenne
Indians," Wichita Eagle (Evening), August 14, 1933, 1.
32 Ibid. White Father was the Indian name for the U.S government.
After the incident at White Rock Creek, reports began to spring up all over northern Kansas of Indian depredations. Although Jewell County was not officially created until 1870, settlers began staking their claim on the area as early as 1868, with the first settlers consisting of immigrants from Sweden and Scandinavia, as well as a colony of settlers from Chicago. But soon after their arrival, the Dog Soldiers killed a few of the settlers in this area, and the rest left the county in fear and returned to their home lands. Not a soul was left in Jewell County by the end of 1868.33

The Dog Soldiers continued to wreak havoc across northern Kansas during the spring and summer months of 1869. Once again the attacks occurred in Cloud County, and very similar to 1865, a party of eight hunters, led by a guide who lived who lived in Waterville in Republic County named John McChesney, was attacked by the Dog Soldiers. The hunters appear to have instigated the engagement, for when they initially saw the Indians across the creek they fired their weapons at them, knowing their bullets would not reach the Indians.34 The Indians did not fire back upon the hunters, however, this did not settle well with them, and the next morning a group of one hundred Indians predominantly the Cheyenne with some Sioux and Arapahoe ambushed the hunters and killed all but one of them, an uncle of John McChesney. Cutler does not give the name of the other hunters, however; the Western Observer stated there was a father and a son with the last name Cole, a man named Phillip Burke and three brothers with the last name

34 Cutler, “Cloud County.”
Winklepleck, all from Michigan.\textsuperscript{35} A party of buffalo hunters from the Excelsior colony in Jewell County came upon the massacre and buried the men soon after.\textsuperscript{36} This turned out to be the last Indian depredations that would occur in Cloud County, but other counties in the surrounding areas were not so lucky.

Not all of the settlers were so quick to fight the Indians, and it appears that many who made the trek out to Kansas as immigrants from other countries or colonies from eastern states feared the Indians the most. An example of this occurred in Jewell County in 1868, and it occurred once again the following year. In May of 1869, a second migration came to Jewell County; it consisted of a company of Scottish merchants, clerks, and professional men and mechanics that left New York City for Kansas. These settlers had no experience in farming, and more than likely were not aware of the severity of the Indian troubles other settlements were facing.\textsuperscript{37} A few days after the eight hunters were attacked, residents decided to flee Jewell County once again. A group of the New York colonists, along with two Englishmen, left the county once they heard of the attacks. They gathered their things together and loaded everyone into a wagon and began their trek to Fort Riley. However, soon after they departed, a group of Cheyenne and Sioux attacked the wagon, and the settlers dispersed immediately. The \textit{Burr Oak Herald} never states whether or not the colonists made it out alive. The Dog Soldiers raided the wagon, and from a distance, one settler observed the Indians wearing a “gorgeous array

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
of clothing”. The Indians, not realizing it, were actually wearing silk dresses and fancy hats. Setting humor aside, the residents of Jewell County were greatly terrified by the Indians, and much like 1868, not a settler was left in the county after they heard of this incident.

Some settlers of northern Kansas did not flee. They weathered the storm, hoping the army would eventually intervene. They refused to give into fear, and would not leave their settlements at any cost.

“Nothing but death can bring these fiends to terms of peace which can be in the least depended upon. Past experience has taught that with too great force, to those who have attempted to lead civilization westward. As extermination is their watchword, let extermination be our reply, and let them be paid in coin from their own mint.”

Eventually the settlers formed their own militia similar to 1864; this time led under the command of W.H Fletcher, a former Civil War captain as well as the clerk for Clay County. In late May of 1869, they began searching all the counties for Indians, as well as settlers who were in need of assistance. A.J Kelley was a member of the militia, and in a very detailed journal in the Western Observer he observed and wrote about everything he saw between May 25th and June 2nd in the June 16th and 23rd issues of the newspaper in 1869. On the 26th of May, Kelley reported that the war party of Cheyenne once again murdered a party of four hunters at the mouth of White Rock Creek, adding to the already grisly number of deaths that have occurred on the creek. He also reported

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39 Ibid.
40 Ibid, 1.
about the members of the Excelsior colony who buried the seven hunters were attacked by eighty Cheyenne as well. Those eighty Cheyenne may very well have been the same group of Dog Soldiers who attacked and killed the hunters they buried. On May 28th, A.J Kelley and his party amazingly came across the missing Ackerlys who fled from Jewell County. Apparently, they hid in the bushes for a very long time before they saw Kelley and the other men. Soon after, the group also came across the missing wagon and heard gunshots at a nearby settlement, where they found the missing Fraziers as well. The settlement was being attacked by seventy-five Dog Soldiers; however, the colony easily repelled them and the Indians fled soon after.42 Finally, Kelley reported the last death in Republic County on May 31st, when a party of six hunters was massacred on the Republican River near the mouth of White Rock Creek. Similar to the other massacred hunters, they were hunting buffalo.43 The last reported massacre in the six counties occurred on August 15th of 1869, where a man from Republic County named Gordon Windbigler was chased off his land by Indians, and killed soon after with a lance.44 Between the years of 1868 and 1869, over nineteen people died along the Republican River Valley in northern Kansas, and eleven family homes were burned and destroyed.45

Even before the incident on August 15th the end of the Plains War was fast approaching. By the summer of 1869 organized militia were popping up all over these counties and being commissioned by the governor of Kansas, which meant militias were

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43 Ibid.
44 Savage, A History of Republic County, Kansas, 49-50.
45 Custer, Wild Life on the Plains: The Horrors of Indian Warfare, 149.
now going to receive a regular supply of weapons. The Indians realized they could no longer raid settlements with large numbers of militia protecting the counties, and the raid of frontier settlements on northern Kansas counties came to a screeching halt.\textsuperscript{46} Soon after, the most influential chief of the Cheyenne, Little Robe, banished the Dog Soldiers from his camp, for he felt the Dog Soldiers were just too detrimental to preserving the peace with the government.\textsuperscript{47} Never again did any settlement in Kansas experience the wrath of Cheyenne war parties led by the Dog Soldiers. A few Indian outbreaks in western Kansas occurred in the 1870s, with the pinnacle being the raid led by Dull Knife and the Northern Cheyenne in western Kansas during the fall of 1878, but nothing compared to what settlers experienced from 1864-1869 in Mitchell, Jewell, Cloud, Clay, Republic, and Washington Counties.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 49.
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