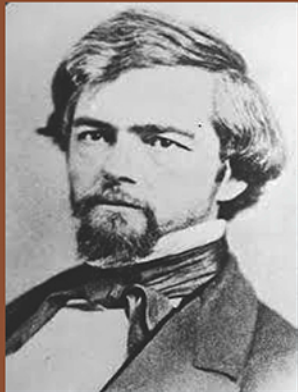


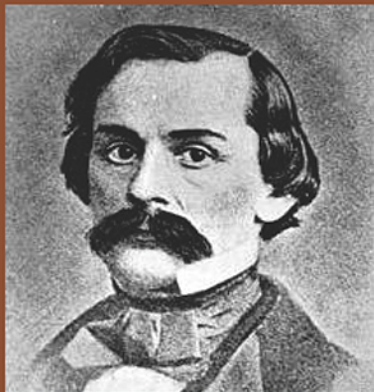
# STEVENS SKIRMISH OF 1856

From September 19-20, 1856, fighting took place in the vicinity of Bennington Lake between Washington Territorial Volunteers led by Gov. Isaac Ingalls Stevens and members of several Indian tribes, led by Quil-ten-e-nock, brother of Chief Moses. The attack on Stevens' party occurred as he was returning to the Dalles following the failure of the 1856 Walla Walla Treaty Council negotiations further up Mill Creek. After being attacked, Gov. Stevens' party of 38 wagons pulled by 80 oxen, with 50 teamsters and quartermaster's men, 69 Washington Volunteers, and over 50 friendly Nez Perce under Chief Spotted Eagle, circled their wagons in an area just below the end of the present concrete intake canal leading from the Mill Creek diversion dam to Bennington Lake. There they defended themselves until rescued by federal troops and escorted back to the camp of Lt. Col. Edward Steptoe next to the council grounds. After building the first Fort Walla Walla there, the main Steptoe party along with the Stevens party returned to The Dalles without further incident.

*Gov. I.I. Stevens:* "So satisfied was I that the Indians would carry into effect their avowed determination in the councils in their own camps for several nights previously, to attack me, that in starting I formed my whole party and moved in order of battle...Following me as I set out about eleven o'clock on the way to the Dalles, they attacked me within three miles of Steptoe's camp at about one o'clock in the afternoon...I moved on under fire one mile to water, when forming a corral of the wagons and holding the adjacent hills and the brush on the stream by pickets, I made my arrangements to defend my position and fight the Indians. Our position in a low, open basin, 500 or 600 yards across, was good, and with the aid of our corral, we could defend ourselves against a vastly superior force of the enemy...The fight continued till late in the night. Two charges were made to disperse the Indians, the last led by Lieutenant Colonel Shaw with twenty-four men.... (Finally), a shot from a howitzer, a mile distant, told that the regulars were coming to our assistance. They reached my camp about two o'clock in the morning...The whole force immediately returned to Lieutenant Colonel Steptoe's camp. Soon after sunrise, the enemy attacked the camp, but were dislodged by the howitzer and a charge by a detachment from Steptoe's command."



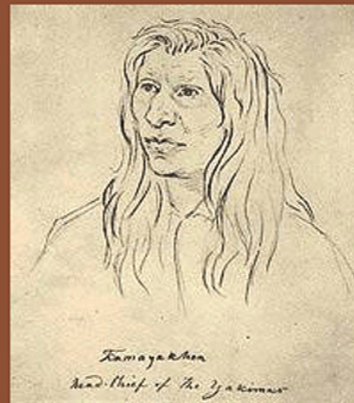
Gov. Isaac Stevens



Col. Edward Steptoe



Lo-Kout, by Edward S. Curtis



Chief Kamiakin, by Gustav Sohon

## THE INDIAN SIDE OF THE STORY

by Wm. Compton Brown

Historians have habitually said Kamiakin was the prime mover in this attack on Stevens' party. My information is all to the effect that Quil-ten-e-nock and the youthful Qualchen led the fighting, and it was to them that the young looked for inspiration and directions.

The spirited young Quil-ten-e-nock was the head chief of the "Half-Sun" people or so-called Isle de Pierres Indians. The famous Chief Moses was his younger brother. Quil-ten-e-nock was not notified of the first Walla Walla Treaty Council and his people had no representation there. When Kamiakin and the rest signed the Yakima Treaty, it ceded away the Half Sun lands. Quil-ten-e-nock became filled with a desire to see Governor Stevens and lay the matter directly before him and get him to right the wrong.

Quil-ten-e-nock got no consideration from Stevens. In consequence, Quil-ten-e-nock and some of his followers attacked Stevens' escort and some sharp fighting ensued....

Qualchen's younger brother, Lo-Kout, was in the forefront of the scrimmage all the afternoon and evening. He got caught in the sortie that Shaw and a detachment of the volunteers made from the white camp after dark and was so severely wounded as to render him helpless.

The principal war chiefs were the son of Ow-hi and the Isle de Pere chief, Quil-to-mee. "From what I have gathered I don't think over three or four Indians were killed. And as for four or five hundred Indians having joined in the attack, I am inclined to think that there is certainly very much of an exaggeration unless the on-lookers from a distance be counted."

Fifteen points of activity were described by participants in the September 19-20, 1856 attack on the party of Governor Stevens and are shown on the contour map below:

1. The point where the Stevens party crossed a stream coming into Mill Creek not more than three miles after leaving Steptoe's camp, and was first attacked.
2. The course of the wagon train from the initial point of attack to where a corral was formed.
3. The place where the wagons halted and a corral was formed.
4. The site of the first Volunteer charge, led by Lt. Hunter.
5. The east hill where Lt. Hunter retreated after the first charge, and pickets were established by the Volunteers
6. A second hill where pickets were established to protect the corral.
7. The area where Volunteer pickets were placed in the brush.
8. The third hill to the south where the second Volunteer charge took place.
9. Where Indian spectators were located to the left of the south hill.
10. The area where Elijah Hill, Co. K, was killed.
11. The area where Sgt. C. Riggs, Co. K, was gravely wounded.
12. The place where Volunteer rifle pits were dug in, abandoned, then retaken.
13. The area where Col. Steptoe's troops fired their howitzer on their way to the corral to rescue Stevens.
14. The course of the party during its return from the corral to Steptoe's camp.
15. Steptoe's camp further up the Mill Creek canyon where the final skirmishes occurred on Sept. 20.

