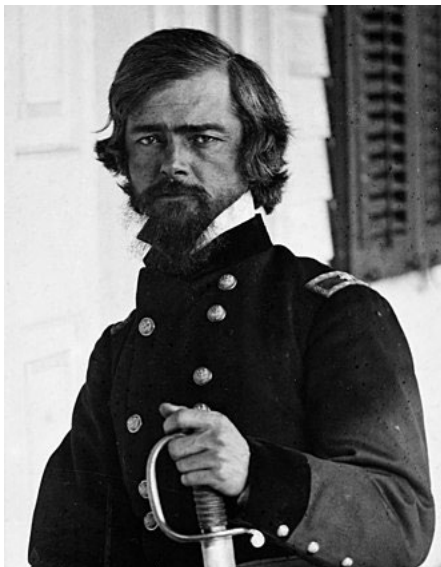


US Military Men During the Fur Trade

When Hudson's Bay Fort Colville was established in 1825 the steam locomotive had already been invented (1814). The increased efficiency of McCormick's Harvester and the Cotton Gin made farming on a large scale lucrative. For both the delivery of equipment and the shipment of grain and cotton, a railroad was imperative. President Franklin Pierce was a strong advocate of railroads and westward expansion. When he took office in 1853, he sent his friend and supporter Major Issac Ingulles Stevens west to become the first



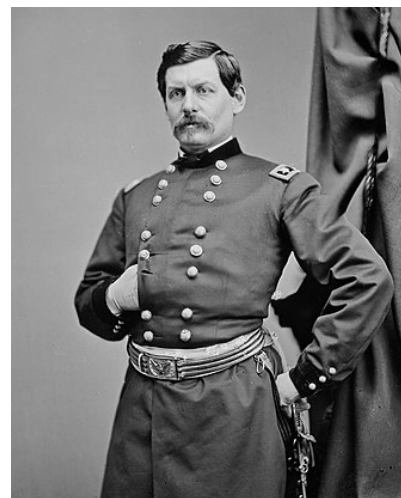
General Stevens

governor of the Washington Territory and Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Then Secretary of War and future president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis additionally made Stevens the surveyor for the transcontinental railway thinking that the northern route to the Pacific would prove to be impossible and open the door for a southern route and more slave states. In that capacity Stevens, who finished first in his class at West Point, hired into his party West Point graduate John Mullan. Before they reached the west coast, they met up with Mullan's fellow West Point Graduate, George McClellan who had surveyed a route from the Pacific to the

Spokane River.

Thus, three military men were intent on building a railroad into the Northwest. That road would become an impetus to the Indian Wars of 1858 and a factor in the Civil war of 1861-1865, in which all these men would be involved.

Stevens, after which Steven County is named, is the most controversial of the three. His friendship with Pierce, a Democrat with strong southern ties and Jefferson Davis would indicate a preference for the Confederacy. But eventually he died after seizing the American flag from a fallen soldier and leading a charge that turned the tide to the Union at the battle of Chantilly. He was a



General George McClellan



John Mullan

man of intense passion and ambition without reservations when it came to having his way. Stevens compelled Native American tribes of Washinton Territory “by intimidation and force, into signing treaties that ceded most of their lands and rights to Steven’s government, likely forging some of the signatures.” (Kluger, Richard, *The Bitter Waters of Medicine Creek*) He imposed martial law illegally in Pierce County, jailed those opposed to his actions and pardoned himself of judgements against him. This made him popular enough with White settlers on the West Coast that they elected him to Congress. He left for Washington D.C. in 1857.

In 1855 news of gold discoveries in Washington triggered an influx of prospectors from California. They had no respect for treaty rights or reservations. Two of them encountered two Yakima women and an infant while trespassing on the Yakima Reservation. They raped the women and murdered all three. The husband of one of the women, Mosheel, tracked down and killed the prospectors with help from his



General John Wool

friend Qualchan. This led to a series of conflicts known as the Yakima Wars. General John E. Wool was called in from California to deal with the situation. Generally, he defended the Indian tribes and condemned the acts of the militias. Stevens on the other hand encouraged militias and wanted any rebellious natives exterminated.

News of conflict to the south prompted settlers in the Colville Valley to request protection from the US Military. In response to that, Edward Steptoe and a detachment of 159 soldiers armed with two howitzers and 40 rounds of ammunition each left to answer the call. Crossing the Snake river he broke the promise of Governor Stevens that the government would respect Spokane land if the tribe remained peaceful. Tribal leaders confronted Steptoe and demanded an explanation for his incursion.

Steptoe told them that he sought a resolution to tensions between miners and the tribes near Fort Colvile. He asked for help to cross the Spokane River. The Tribes refused.

Stephens's troops led by Nez Perce Chief Timothy took an unfamiliar route that led into the root digging grounds of the Spokanes and other tribes. Timothy came upon his old rival Tilcoax and having the soldiers at his back made threatening remarks. Tilcoax amplified the threats sending word to other tribes in the area. The defiance on both sides amplified despite entreaties for restraint by Jesuit Priest Father Joset. The resulting battle and narrow escape by Stephens is called the Battle of Pine Creek.

Stephens's commanding officer, Newman S Clarke, upon hearing a report of the battle in Vancouver demanded that the tribes return all property, that the over 1000 warriors who participated in the battle surrender and that the Coeur d'Alenes allow Mullan to build his military road through their territory. Knowing full well that the tribes would not concede to these demands, he dispatched Colonel George Wright with five hundred soldiers to redress his grievances. They were soon joined by reinforcement. Clarke's command was the direct opposite of Wright's inherent desires and



Colonel George Wright



Edward Stephens

previous attempts to establish peace. At the heart of the problem was the constant interference of volunteer militia of undisciplined troops such as those under the leadership of Gabriel Rains who killed, robbed and destroyed the villages of Natives indiscriminately. (Rains later became head of munitions for the Confederate Army and devised land mines.) Wright hated the interference of these, local men who caused more trouble than they stopped.

Wright devised a plan to trap the offending tribes in a pincer movement. While he took his troops east to Fort Walla Walla, Major Robert Garnett went north from Fort Dalles toward Wenatchee. Wright intended to circle through the territory of the Coeur d'Alenes to HBC Fort Colville and then down

to the Spokane River where he would meet up with Garnett coming east from the Okanogan.

Marching in torrid heat through scorched earth burned by the Natives to deprive Wright's horses of feed, Wright with around 800 well-armed men met the assembled warriors of the Spokane, Yakama and Coeur d'Alene tribes at Four Lakes on September 1st 1858. It was no contest. Wright's men had new guns whose rifled barrels could hit their target at twice the distance of the HBC guns carried by the Natives. Losses were heavy for the tribes and none-existent for the US Army. The warriors eventually dispersed into the woods.

They reassembled 4 days later for the battle of the Spokane Plains. The results were the same. Wright's men then pushed east through the Spokane Valley where they came upon a herd of nearly 1000 Indian ponies and killed them all. Wright had in his custody Chief Owhi, one of those involved in starting the Yakima War. He demanded that Owhi's son Qualchan come to his camp or Wright would hang his father. Knowing his probable fate, Qualchan bravely went to Wright's camp anyway and was immediately hanged near what became known as Hangman's Creek.

The fallout from these events soon moved north into the Colville Valley.

Many of the details are from the excellent book *Finding Chief Kamiakin* by Richard D. Scheuerman and Michael O. Finley.