



Solomon Valley History

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The Battle of Solomon Fork, 1857 *(Part I)* scroll down for Part II

[Excerpts from Journal of Lieutenant Eli Long, 1857, unpublished manuscript located at U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. Some entries omitted. Long's Journal provides best account of distances traveled on the Cheyenne Expedition and includes his description of the battle on July 29, 1857.]

Sunday, July 5th [Camp on south bank of South Platte, opposite Col. Sumner's camp] . . . We are going to scout after the Cheyennes on pack mules.

Monday, July 6th Left camp at usual time and marched until about ½ past 1 o'clock. Country about the same as usual. Fine grass along the river in the bottom. Marched about 20 miles on our side of the river. Col. S's command that came down opposite side to us say they marched 15 although they started and stopped with us. Timber plenty. . . . Crow Creek a stream dry at the mouth but having water in it above emptys into the Platte on the north side about 8 or 10 miles above here.

Tuesday, July 7th [crossed river to north side to Sumner's camp] . . . we are only going to take 20 days rations along with us exclusive of Cattle enough to last for three or 4 months. Most of the Officers think we are going on a wild goose chase. . . .
Wednesday, July 8th Remained in camp all day. . . .

Thursday, July 9th . . . There are 100 pack saddles, 10 to each company besides the other 10 which will be distributed among the Officers. . . . We are not going to take any tents as a matter of course. 150 pounds is the weight allowed for each mule. . . .

Monday, July 13th Commenced crossing the river with the mules packs in the wagons at 7 a.m. and got over without accident about 9 o'clock and commenced packing the mules having sent the wagons back across the river. Most of the mules were Spanish or Mexican mules and having been packed before stood it very well. . . . Marched 9 miles. . . .

Tuesday, July 14th Left camp at ½ past 7 and marched until 20 minutes past 1 about 18 miles. Left the river immediately after leaving camp and marched 6 or 8 miles over broken sandy ground before striking it again. . . . Passed a fine stream of water with a little timber on it about 10 miles from camp.

Wednesday, July 15th Left camp at 7 A.M. and marched until about ½ past 2 P.M. and marched 20 miles over high and level table land most of the way. . . . We lost sight of the mountains. Grass and mosquitoes of the very best kind in abundance. . . .

Thursday, July 16th Left camp at ½ past 7 and marched about 7 miles over level and grassy plain. Camped at the point at which we leave the river. Game getting scarce. No timber. Got into camp by 10 o'clock. . . .

Friday, July 17th Left camp at 7 o'clock and marched until 11 about 10 miles over sand hills principally in a direction nearly perpendicular to the river, a little down stream and east of south. . . .

Saturday, July 18th Left camp at usual hour and marched in same direction over more level and grassy ground-less sand-12 miles. . . . Camped about 11 o'clock on a stream that had water in holes. . . .

Sunday, July 19th Left camp at 6 o'clock and marched until about ½ past 1 o'clock about 20 miles when we overtook the Infantry nooning it at a pond. . . . Left watering place about 5 o'clock P.M. and marched about 15 miles, struck the sand hills about 8 miles from watering place, got lost about an hour after dark, guides all ahead, found a trail after stopping over an hour and looking for it; marched an hour or two or three after finding it in hopes of finding water that the Indian guide told us was only 1½ miles on ahead and stopped at last on top of a hill, every body suffering very much for water . . . it was now 12 o'clock at night. . . .

Monday, July 20th Got up at day light and saddled up and led over about a mile and half to a branch the Indians had found and camped, remained in camp all day, nobody dead. . . .

Tuesday, July 21st Left camp at 7 o'clock and marched 20 miles over very rugged country up hill and down hill all the way. Struck a branch of the republican called rock creek about 6 miles from camp with pot ash looking water and no timber. . . .

Wednesday, July 22nd Left camp at usual hour and marched until after 2 o'clock P.M. 18 miles and camped on the Republican Fork a foot deep, i.e. you have to dig a foot deep in the sand before you come into it. . . .

Thursday, July 23rd Left camp at 7 o'clock and marched about 10 miles until 11 o'clock A.M. and camped on top of a pretty high hill at the foot of which runs (i.e. sometimes) a small stream well timbered with not much grass. Came along side of the Republican Fork for 2 or 3 miles , no water on top of its bed as far as we could see, we are now I think some 3 or 4 miles from it. . . .

Friday, July 24th Left camp at 6 o'clock and marched until near 3 o'clock about 23 miles. Stopped an hour [at] a small stream about 18 miles from camp to water about an hour, traveled first 18 miles over a level and high prairie. . . . We expected to light right down on the Cheyennes where we struck the creek on which we camped, but did not. . . . We are expecting to find the Cheyennes every day now. . . .

Saturday, July 25th Left camp at usual hour and march until ½ past 1, about 15 miles. . . . Ambulance broke down yesterday, overloaded with ammunition, they are bringing the remains along on two wheels.

Sunday, July 26th Left camp at 7 o'clock and marched in a S.E. direction until 1 o'clock about 15 miles. . . . This is a beautiful country up here, creeks with fine water, and beautifully timbered with elm, oak, hackberry, cedar will &c. the bottoms are very fertile, high land moderately so. . . .

Monday, July 27th Left camp at usual time and marched until about 2 o'clock P.M. about 16 miles. . . .

Tuesday, July 28th Left camp at usual hour and marched until after 2 o'clock about 20 miles in our general course a little south of east, struck a creek about 15 miles from camp and marched down stream about 5 miles and camped. . . . Rained terribly during the night. . . .

Wednesday, July 29th Left camp at usual time and struck off across the country, following the trail of 5 or 6 ponies that left the creek and struck south of east, the trail kept getting fresher and fresher, about 12 miles from camp found very fresh manure and other signs of Indians, found a little puppy they had left in their hurry. at about 12 miles from camp the Pawnee guides reported that they saw Indians ahead 5 or 6 the Col gave the command trot march, we then trotted down to a wide but shallow creek supposed to be Solomons fork, at the mouth of a small stream running into it, went down it some distance perhaps ½ mile when we saw some Indians going over a hill on north side of creek about 5 miles down the creek supposed the squaws and lodges, in 15 minutes after we saw the warriors coming up to meet us on their ponies stretched out in line, they had their shields and all their warlike utensils flying, they came up very boldly to within about one hundred yards of

us about I think 250 of them, Col Sumner had in the meantime given the command gallop march and we were charging on them in full speed when they by unanimous consent showed the white feather turned tail and run. Col Sumner before giving the command charge gave the command draw sabre and we charged with drawn sabre but soon returned them and made use of Colts revolvers instead, the command was divided into three columns, each of 3 companies of Cavalry in the flanking columns and the guard, artillery and infantry composing the centre column, the infantry could not keep up or rather were not ordered to do so and were 2 or 3 miles behind when the fight commenced, and Bayard with the Artillery had been ordered to stay behind as it could not keep up, so that only the 6 companies of Cavalry and the Cavalry guard were in the fight; (I was Officer of the guard) of course the command front into line was given before the command charge, they [the Indians] ran down on the south side of the stream for 3 or 4 hundred yards when they crossed over to the north side, as soon as the command charge was given my horse let himself out and soon distanced the Col. whose body guard I was.

The Battle of Solomon Fork, 1857 (Part II)

[This concludes excerpts from Journal of Lieutenant Eli Long, 1857, unpublished manuscript located at U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. Some entries omitted. Long's Journal provides best account of distances traveled on the Cheyenne Expedition and includes his description of the battle on July 29, 1857. Long's story continues at the point contact was made with the Cheyennes at Solomon Fork. It should be noted that the Cheyenne plan of decoy and ambush was foiled when the cavalry troops saw the main body of Cheyennes and pitched into them instead of following the small party of Indians serving as the decoy.]

Wednesday, July 29th (continued) -- Four [Fall] Leaf a Delaware Indian and myself got over the creek before anyone else that I saw and commenced firing at three or four Indians, one or two of them got away and 2 or 3 I forget which stopped and showed fight, of these was the chief so said the Delaware, I shot 8 times at those two or three, whichever it was, but I don't think I hit but one of the 8 and that was not the fatal shot, there were several perhaps 8 or 10 Indians in my immediate neighborhood when I first got across the creek but all but 3 at most of them cleared out pretty soon, but one old fellow gave four leaf or myself, I don't know which, a parting salute before he left at about 20 yards with a blunderbuss it looked like an old fashioned carbine. Four Leave and I were right together when he shot but he missed us both. By the time we had finished these two or three Indians all of the rest had vamosed. The Col came up pretty soon after this and we marched on to where Lt. Stewart [J. E. B. Stuart] was wounded. he [and] Lts McIntyre [James B. McIntyre] Lomax [Lunsford L. Lomax} and Stanly [David S. Stanley] were after about 50 but could not catch but one, he had an old fashioned self-cocking 6 shooter, he stopped doubtless to save the rest and put out his hand to a Corpl, saying how do at the same time shooting at him but missed him. Lt Stewart attacked him when he shot Stewart in the breast. McIntyre ran up in time to run him through with the sabre. Stewart was not wounded very badly the ball not penetrating deep. I did not see this or in fact any of the fight, besides what I was engaged in myself. Stewart and McIntyre were the only ones who came any ways near distinguishing themselves. There were about 9 Indians and one of our men killed on the field. It is supposed that between 25 & 30 Indians were killed and wounded. 4 more of our men were seriously and 4 or 5 slightly wounded. Taylor a private in E Company ran up very gallantly on an Indian when his horse fell down and he [went] over his head and the Indian after him with his tomahawk I think, something he could strike with. Taylor got up though after receiving a slight wound in the forehead and struck the Indian over the head two or three times, downed him and then ran him through. We chased them 5 or 6 miles beyond the creek but could not catch them. Our horses had no grass the night before, marched 12 miles, then trotted 1 or 2 and then charged without water since morning (we did not stop to water when crossing these streams). The fight commenced about One O'clock and ended about 3, rode back to the creek and camped. The Cheyennes got 3 of our horses, the Pawnees and soldiers together got about 30 of theirs. Going into camp we found one possuming, pretending to be dead [this was Private Peter Robinson]. We soon brought him to, he was placed in charge of the guard. I was Officer of the guard had to set up all night and walk around a camp 2 or 3 miles in circumference across a creek 8 or 10 inches deep and 20 yards wide which was pretty tired after a long day's march. The ground was very good no timber. Their ponies could beat our horses running all to pieces, as they were fresh and fat

and ready waiting for us. The simple incident of the Indian dog coming into our camp cost them dearly. No grass in camp with the exception of Buffalo grass, horses getting very poor.

Thursday, July 30th Remained in camp all day, one of the wounded men died and they buried them both together, i.e. near each other. They are going to leave one Co. (Capt Foot's [Rensselaer W. Foote]) of infantry here to take care of the wounded. He is to remain until the 20th of August when if he does not get further orders he is to go to Laramie via the crossing of the south Platte & Lt Riddick [Richard H. Riddick] who I believe is to go down to Kearney. The infantry commenced building a mud or sod fort with bastions at the South east and North west corners, they got it half done in one day. The Pawnee Indians got the scalps of all the Cheyennes that were killed yesterday and had them stuck on a stick and hung out to dry. They think we won't catch the Cheyennes anymore and want to go back home. They say that the Cheyennes will out run us. They have got a good many ponies and are satisfied I suppose.

Friday, July 31st Left camp at usual hour and marched across the battle ground over hilly ground most of the way for about 15 miles when we came upon the deserted camp of the whole Cheyenne nation, which they had from appearances left with great precipitation the night of the fight. They left one hundred and 70 odd lodges standing besides about an equal number that had fallen and been torn down and a great many small bunking arrangements. They left any quantities of Buffalo meat done up in nice leathern panias painted and dressed very nicely, they must have left 3 or 4 thousand pounds of this, and great numbers of Indian trinkets and skins of all sort but they were the most worthless they had I suppose. There were 3 Cheyennes ahead looking at us when we got here could not catch them. The trail is concentrated and large across the creek on which we are camp. Buffalo grass pretty good water, some timber. Their lodge poles were an immense loss to them as they are fine long pine poles 25 feet long which they can only get by going to the rocky mountains after them, they are about as large as your arm, they tie them to their ponies and drag them along. They took a great many away from this camp besides what they left as you can see from the tracks across the creek. As soon as we came up to it everybody that could fell to plundering picking up beads and all sorts of trinkets. I tasted the Buffalo meat when made into a sort of soup but could not stomach much of it as it tastes and smells too much like Indian. I got some few Indian trinkets.

Saturday, August 1st Left camp at usual time and marched about 20 miles until 3 O'clock over moderately hilly ground, saw one Buffalo. . . . About 12 miles from big Cheyenne camp saw where they had stopped at a pool of water. If we had only come on 10 miles further the day of the fight and caught them in their lodges we could have surrounded them and made them do anything we pleased.

Sunday, August 2nd Left camp at usual time 7 O'clock and marched until ½ past 3 about 22 miles. . . . (I forgot to mention that we camped last night on what was thought to be Grand Saline fork of smoky hill, Buffalo grass, no timber). Crossed Smoky hill about 10 miles from camp, very low, water yellow and muddy tastes of soap stone but is very sweet, the bed is about 30 to 40 yards wide but it is no where over 18 inches deep— after getting out of Smoky hill valley the balance of the day's march was almost a dead level (with a mud hole every 6 or 8 miles) until just before getting into camp on the head waters of Walnut Creek [see below] with tolerable grass. . . . A sentinel coming off post went to lift up his [rifle] by the muzzle when it went off shooting him in the arm and wounding him. . . .

Monday, August 3rd Remained in camp all day on account of the wounded man whose arm was amputated. . . . Found three Cheyennes buried near here where from the signs the Indians must have stopped a day. This makes 12 dead ones the result of the battle. The Pawnees leave for Ft. Kearney tonight with dispatches. . . .

Tuesday August 4th Left camp at 6 O'clock A.M. and marched in a South & S. West direction for about 20 miles until 1 O'clock, crossed 4 or 5 water courses during the day fine water, some of the streams well timbered. . . . The camp we left was said by Four Leaf to have been on Pawnee Fork instead of Walnut Creek.

Wednesday, August 5th Left camp at 6 O'clock and marched for a little while due south thence east of south and pretty soon almost due east, crossed 2 or 3 streams some dry ones. Marched about 10 miles and camped on a stream don't know the name. The [Cheyenne] trail disappears here. . . .

Thursday, August 6th Marched due south for 15 miles. Camped on branch of Pawnee Fork. .

Friday, August 7th Marched South and South East, camped on Wood Pile creek [probably Sawlog Creek], marched 15 miles...

Saturday, August 8th [The command marched back to find a man who was lost the day before, without success, some kept looking for him.] . . . The remainder of the command went on in a South and South West direction . . . striking across to Ft. Atkinson [military post west of present Dodge City, active from 1850 to 1854] and camped about 3 miles above there with first rate grass and plenty of mosquitoes. The Infantry stopped about 7 miles from the Arkansas and camped, it being to long a march for them, they are to come in in the morning. The cavalry marched 27 miles [including the search for the missing man].

Monday, August 10th . . . There is a wagon road from wood pile creek to old Ft Atkinson 12 miles over which they used to haul wood. . . . [this information confirms that it was Sawlog Creek.]

[Distances recorded by Lt. Long:

From Camp Buchanan on the South Platte to the battlefield on Solomon Fork: 261.5 miles.

From camp at battlefield to Arkansas River (excluding the backtracking of August 8): 129 miles.]