

Col. T. R. Cornelius
Pioneer to Oregon 1843

COL. T. R. CORNELIUS.—In view of the prominent part sustained by Colonel Cornelius in the Indian wars of our early history, as well as in our political history since, it seems best to give at length the interesting picture of his connection with those wars. This is done mainly in his own language, and hence preserves the vividness of his own recollections.

T. R. Cornelius was born November 16, 1827, in Howard county, Missouri. At an early age he moved with his parents to Arkansas, and in 1845, then a youth of nineteen, came with them to Oregon. The company of thirty wagons, to which his father, Benjamin Cornelius, with his family, be-

longed, was organized on the frontier under Captain Hall. At the Malheur river some forty wagons of the train followed Stephen Meek, who, for a consideration of three hundred dollars, agreed to pilot them by a shorter and better route to The Dalles. Meek, however, proved wholly ignorant of the country; and the journey hence was most disastrous. He led them into sage-brush plains and alkali deserts, to spend twenty-four hours at a time without grass or water, and once nearly two days. Many died from exposure to heat, and from other hardships. Cattle sank down, and were left to perish. Game, except jack-rabbits and sage-hens, altogether failed. At length, at a place called Last Hollow, a council was held, and amid various opinions to go south, north, to continue west, to go back the way they came, or to stay where they were, fearing to leave the water, it was decided by the Cornelius party to go north to the Columbia. Followed by a few other wagons, they set out one evening, taking their course towards the North star, and at ten o'clock the next day found water and grass in abundance, and, sending word back to those still at Last Hollow, were soon joined by the train. Following down the stream for several days, it became necessary to send out nine men to go in search of provisions at The Dalles. The nine were

saved from starvation on the way by meeting with Indians, who furnished them dried salmon. They accomplished their errand, and, by aid of Black Harris, relieved the emigrant party and brought them safely through. Enduring still further hardships down the river from The Dalles to Vancouver, and arriving at the fort in a condition of clothing and general appearance which would well serve to illustrate a comic almanac, Mr. Cornelius was treated by Doctor McLoughlin with a fatherly kindness and consideration which, he says, gave him at once a place nearest his heart, and will cause him to love and reverence him as long as life lasts.

The family settled in Washington county on what is frequently called the Cornelius plain, one of the most beautiful and productive regions in the state. T. R. "got his hand in" in the matter of Indian fighting in the Cayuse war of 1847. Returning to his ranch, he pursued the peaceful work of farming for about seven years without interruption. Then came the great Indian war of 1855-56. At this point the narrative of the Colonel proper begins.

In the fall of 1855, while surrounded by his little family of wife and three children, and busily engaged in conducting his farm work and his sawmill on Dairy creek, he heard the call for volunteers. Having had some experience before in fighting hostiles in their own country, many looked to him as one who should now go. Finally concluding that, if he did not go, he might stand in the way of someone else, he bade good-by to those that he loved and entered the service on the 14th of October at Hillsboro, and was elected captain of the company. They proceeded to Portland for equipments. While they were there, Philip Foster, who resided at the foot of the Cascade Mountains, became alarmed at the various rumors of desperate Indian bands, feared that they would cross over the mountains and massacre his family, and so came down to

Portland and importuned the governor to send a company of soldiers to protect his home. The governor therefore ordered the company of Captain Cornelius to guard the place.

After a time spent at Foster's, in which they were busy in making their preparations, the company moved on to The Dalles to meet the other troops. Soon after reaching The Dalles, they were ordered to cross the river, where they camped preparatory to a campaign in the Yakima country. This campaign began on the 8th of November. Major Raines was in command of the regulars, four hundred in number, while Colonel Nesmith commanded the volunteers. Nothing of moment occurring, they reached the Yakima valley in three or four days; and then Nesmith became satisfied that the Indians would not engage so strong a force, consisting of eight or nine hundred men in all. He accordingly directed Cornelius to pick out sixty men, mount them on the best horses in the command, and go in a westerly direction up the Atahnum near the base of the Cascade Mountains to what was known as Haller's battleground. This was where the Indians had attacked Haller and driven him back to The Dalles with the loss of one-fourth of his command.

In the morning, before Cornelius started on his march, Colonel Nesmith pointed across the Yakima valley in a northerly direction to what was then called the Two Buttes (this was the gap just below the present site of Yakima City), saying that he would travel in that direction, and that, in case Cornelius found the Indians in force, he might take a strong position and attack them, and then under cover of the following night send a courier to the main body, which would then at once come up and reinforce. This, the commander believed, was the only way to bring on a general engagement. Cornelius selected ten men and one lieutenant from each of the six companies then present, and went without interruption to a point about three miles north of where the Indians had attacked Haller. They then discovered the warriors converging on them from all sides, but especially from the direction of the Two Buttes. The Captain formed his little army into a hollow square, each lieutenant commanding his ten men, and every seventh man being detailed to hold the horses of the others. The men being thus dismounted, and being somewhat sheltered by the sage-brush on the level plain, had an advantage over the three hundred mounted warriors who came swooping down on them. After a few rounds, the charging savages gave back, and the Whites moved on in the direction of the Buttes. Whenever they would move ahead, the Indians would renew the attack and give way again before their well-aimed volleys as before. Then they would mount and press on again, to be again attacked. This running sort of fight continued till nightfall, when the Indians disappeared in the direction of the Buttes.

The men had been so well protected by the brush and the form in which they were arranged that the day's casualties were almost nothing. Two men, however, Holmes and Weighmire, were badly wounded. Discovering lights, correctly supposed to be those of the main command, the detachment

pushed on and joined them. They then learned that Nesmith and Raines too had been fighting during the day with the Indians, and that some of Raines' men had been drowned while attempting to cross the Yakima. It was decided in the morning to send Captain Cornelius with about eighty men, in company with Lieutenant Phil Sheridan and nineteen dragoons, towards the Buttes, where the natives had built stone walls across the road and had otherwise fortified themselves. The object of this move was to bring on a general engagement.

Having reached a point a quarter of a mile from the walls, Sheridan sent back for a mountain howitzer, by means of which a few shells were sent among the Indians, with the effect of speedily scattering them. The main command soon arriving, they proceeded to a camp at the Catholic Mission. There they had expected to meet a company of soldiers in command of Captain Malone. Nothing being heard of them, and there being apprehensions that they might have got into trouble, Colonel Nesmith ordered Cornelius, with a portion of his company and parts of other companies, and Lieutenant Sheridan again with his nineteen dragoons, to go in search. The detachment started in the direction of the Nahchess Pass; but, after having been out two days and one night, there came a very heavy snow-storm, insomuch that it was thought useless to go on.

The whole command now returned to The Dalles. On arriving at that point Nesmith directed Cornelius to discharge as many of his men as were unprepared or unwilling to remain any longer, and to then proceed with the rest to Walla Walla. There were then only about sixty men left. Captain Hembree's company, which went with them, numbered about one hundred. They were put in command of Colonel Kelley, who was already at Walla Walla in command of the left wing of the army. Captain Cornelius and his men were almost afoot, as their horses had crossed the Cascade Mountains and made the campaign into the Yakima country without forage, except grazing on the dried and blackened bunch-grass. The weather, too, was stormy, and the men were without tents, and were short of blankets and poorly clad. Nesmith had by this time become satisfied that the winter was not the time to fight Indians successfully, and so he resigned his office and returned to Salem.

In pursuance of his orders, Cornelius proceeded to Walla Walla, and on reaching Umatilla found that Major Chinn, who had preceded Colonel Kelley, had built a stockade fort called Fort Henrietta, at which Colonel Kelley had left a detachment of men, and had himself started a week before in the direction of Walla Walla. He had left directions for Cornelius to await further instructions from him there. The next evening after his arrival, with forty men, mounted on the best horses, Cornelius went up McKay creek a distance of about twenty miles to reconnoiter, where he hoped to find some beef cattle and Indian horses, on which latter he might mount his men. After traveling till about two or three o'clock in the morning, they reached the place where Doctor William C. McKay had formerly settled; but they found the buildings burned. Remaining there till daylight, they went up the creek towards the base

of the Blue Mountains. They were divided into squads, and made a "rounding up" of stock as they went, all the squads converging towards a point near the mountains previously agreed on. When the point designated was reached, they found that they had gathered together some two or three hundred head of stock, mostly Indian ponies.

They returned with them to Fort Henrietta, where they found Doctor McKay, who had just arrived with a communication from Colonel Kelley detailing the facts of his engagement with the Indians near Whitman station, and directing Cornelius to join him with all the men, ammunition, provisions, etc., at his command. Accordingly, with all the accessible provisions, including the beef cattle just captured, they set out, one hundred strong, with Doctor McKay as guide, at about sundown. They had with them quite a number of wagons, cattle, pack horses and loose horses. It was raining as they started, and soon became quite dark. The captain accordingly arranged his men in four lines, one in front, one on each side of the road, and one in the rear, so as to be ready for an attack from the Indians, and also to prevent the loose stock from wandering. The road was familiar for the first twenty miles, as they had passed over it that day; and, as the guide had not slept any for two or three nights, he was permitted to get into a baggage wagon and sleep, with the understanding that he was to be awakened as soon as necessary.

The command proceeded in perfect silence across the high rolling prairie which lies between Fort Henrietta and the Umatilla at the McKay place. On arriving at the Umatilla, just below where the road leaves it, the Captain sent back to the wagon for the guide, Doctor McKay. Being awakened suddenly, and not realizing just where he was, the Doctor leaped on his horse and came dashing up with such speed that, coming to a very abrupt bend in the river, he went right over the bank, horse and all. Captain Cornelius concluded not to follow the guide just at that time. However, the Doctor soon recovered himself and landed on the proper side of the river, leading them thence to Wild Horse creek. During this little detention, the Captain's pack horse, on which were all his blankets and extra clothing, was lost; and thus the Captain and his messmates were left destitute the rest of the winter.

Reaching the hills above Wild Horse creek at two or three o'clock in the morning, the command waited until daylight; and then, looking down into the valley of the Walla Walla, they could see Colonel Kelley's camp and the battle then in progress. The Indians below could see the company of Cornelius coming; and, as it had become somewhat scattered during the march of the night, they thought it a large army. By the time they had crossed the river and come upon the battlefield, the Indians had begun to withdraw. At about three in the afternoon, Captain Cornelius reported to Colonel Kelley; and at sundown, as the Indians had disappeared, the company went into camp for the night. After some fruitless attempts to follow the Indians up the Touchet river, the army moved up the Walla Walla river above Whitman, and established Camp Curry, where they remained some weeks.

Colonel Nesmith and Major Armstrong having now resigned, an election was ordered, with the result of electing Cornelius Colonel, Cornoyer Major, and Narcisse Captain. The commission of Cornelius not having yet arrived, Major Chinn disputed his authority to act; and the Colonel therefore simply remained in command of his company until his commission came, which was on the 27th of January. The command had in the meantime moved up Mill creek a short distance above the present site of Walla Walla. From the middle of December they had been having snow and cold weather; and their jaded animals had had no food except what they got by digging the snow off from the grass. Many of them perished in consequence.

Here Colonel Cornelius found himself in command of about three hundred men, called mounted men, but in reality having no horses or provisions, and but little ammunition. They were, however, ordered to prepare for a campaign on Snake river. The Colonel therefore made requisition on the quartermaster at The Dalles for supplies; and, while waiting for them and the reinforcements which had been promised, he decided to send to the Nez Perce nation, who were friendly, and buy horses. He sent Lieutenant W. H. H. Myers of Company D, and Lieutenant William Wright of Company E, on this perilous and trying trip. In spite of the snow and cold, they succeeded in their trip. The Colonel feels that too high praise cannot be bestowed on them for the faithful and heroic manner in which they discharged that duty.

Major Cornoyer had been ordered in the meantime to form a camp near where the French settlers and friendly Indians were gathered. Hostile Indian spies from time to time managed to get into the camp; and finally two of these were executed, and others sent to the governor of Oregon, to be detained till the close of the war. On the 7th of March, after the arrival of five companies of recruits previously ordered out by Governor Curry, there was an election held for a major of the Second Battalion. James Carl was elected. About the same time, Lieutenants Myers and Wright having arrived from the Nez Perce nation with the horses, as already mentioned, the army began to prepare for a campaign in the Snake river and Palouse country. In anticipation of Snake river being high from the melting snows, the Colonel had directed Assistant Quartermaster D. H. Lonsdale to construct six boats in such a way that one would fit into another, and two would go into a wagon instead of the wagon box. The lumber for these boats had to be sawed by hand with an old whipsaw.

On March 9th the command broke camp and started in the direction of the Touchet, sending men on towards the Snake river to reconnoiter. During the night of the eleventh, the scouts discovered a large body of Indians on the north side of Snake river at Fish-hook Bend. The command pushed on to this point; and when the Indians saw them they supposed that, as they had taken the canoes with them, they were entirely safe. But while they were making many threats and demonstrations, the Colonel dismounted his men, turned the horses out to graze and made every apparent preparation to

camp for the night. In the meantime the wagons with the boats were moved to a convenient place; and sixty picked men, with an officer from each company, were made ready with their guns and saddles. The horses were massed in a bunch near the edge of the water; and all at once the men slid their boats into the water and began rowing powerfully for the other shore. The men remaining on the bank pushed the horses into the water, and they followed the boats. As soon as the Indians comprehended the design, they began firing; but so excited were they that they did no execution. The men in the boats returned the fire. When, however, the boats were half across the river, the Indians seemed to become panic-stricken, and left with all possible speed.

When the detachment landed, the Indians had hurriedly gathered up most of their effects, and were already speeding across the plain. Catching the horses with all possible speed, the soldiers saddled up; and, leaving directions with the rowers of the boats to transfer the rest with all possible haste, they set out in hot pursuit. They followed the savages about ten miles in the direction of Priest's Rapids on the Columbia. At intervals they passed a bunch of pack animals driven by women and children. When they overtook the main band of them, they had driven their animals, families, etc., into a low place surrounded by sand hills, and covered with sage-brush. There it seemed they expected to make a stand; and they did indeed fight until the second load of men from across the river came up. Then they abandoned everything and disappeared. The soldiers thereupon took the animals and returned to the river. There the entire army was now gathered and encamped for the night. There Colonel Cornelius issued the following order:

“HEADQUARTERS FIRST REGIMENT,

“OREGON MOUNTED VOLUNTEERS,

“CAMP SNAKE RIVER, March 12, 1856.

“Commanding officers of companies will detail one-fourth of the whole number of men in their respective commands, and order them to report at headquarters to-morrow morning at six o'clock, prepared for an expedition to the mouth of Yakima and Snake rivers. Camp will not be moved to-morrow.

T. R. CORNELIUS,

“Commanding Regiment.”

On the thirteenth they left camp at six o'clock with about one hundred men, and one or more commissioned officers in each company, and traveled down Snake river to a point near the mouth. Overtaking a party of Indians running up the river, the troops pursued, and, after a running fight that lasted till night, drove them across the Columbia and otherwise scattered them, killing a number. The next day the Colonel ordered the horses captured the day before to be driven to the encampment on the Walla Walla river near Wallula, in charge of Lieutenant Pillow.

Then, lightened of all unnecessary baggage (which was also sent to that post), the command went along the north side of Snake river to the mouth of the Palouse, and thence up the Palouse six or eight miles to the Falls, where they camped, waiting for

a pack train from The Dalles via Walla Walla. Nothing being heard of them, however, a courier was sent to The Dalles via Lieutenant Pillow's camp on the Walla Walla. Colonel Cornelius himself, with Captain Wilbur, went with the expressmen to help them across Snake river. The turbulent stream swollen with the melting snows was difficult to cross with their driftwood raft; but pluck and perseverance accomplished it. In addition to this they captured forty head of fat Indian ponies, which in the depleted state of their larder were speedily disposed of for food.

The pack train soon appeared, too, with flour and coffee; and the troops once more reveled in abundance. But, before the arrival of the train, some of the officers and men in the battalion of recruits had found the service harder and the fare poorer than they had bargained for, and had begun to talk of mutiny. A report reached Colonel Cornelius that Major Carl proposed to take such of the company as would follow him and return to The Dalles or the valley. Finding that this charge was well founded, the Colonel immediately ordered the regiment to parade and form in a hollow square in close order. He then took his position in the center and addressed them, explaining as fully as he could the situation and the duty of the company. He called on all good men to stand by him, and warned them that any who should leave would be considered as deserters and treated accordingly.

After he was through, the men called for Major Carl, who thereupon spoke in justification of his proposed course. He ridiculed the thought of the Colonel of a regiment driving in Cayuse ponies for his men to eat, and then expecting them to fight Indians. He ended by saying that he proposed to march back with his command to The Dalles. After he was through his speech, Colonel Kelley was called for and made a very strong speech in support of Cornelius, and pledged his honor and his life in defence of the position taken. He also reminded Major Carl that he had no command, and was subject to orders. Then Major Cornoyer was called on, and took the same ground. Some then called for Geo. K. Shields, who belonged to the same battalion as Carl, and from whom the disaffected expected encouragement. He was a man of very considerable ability, and not much accustomed to camp life. But they made a great mistake in the man. He took very strong ground in favor of the position of Colonel Cornelius. He appealed to them to know if they thought when they enlisted that they were going on a fishing party. After the speaking, the men were dismissed, retiring to their respective quarters; and those who had prepared their horses to leave turned them out.

The pack train arriving the next day, harmony was once more restored; and on the day after that the army broke camp and started in a northwesterly direction towards the Big Bend country. After traveling a day or two, they found that the Indians had gone in the direction of Priest's Rapids on the Columbia. They accordingly went as far as White Bluffs, and, there finding no sign of any considerable number of Indians, followed the Columbia down to a point opposite the mouth of the Yakima.

Here the Colonel issued the following orders to Major Carl :

“ HEADQUARTERS FIRST REGIMENT,

“ OREGON MOUNTED VOLUNTEERS,

“ MOUTH OF YAKIMA RIVER, March 31, 1856.

“ MAJOR JAMES CARL, Recruiting Battalion :

“ You will assume command of the companies ordered to report to you this morning for duty, consisting of the following companies : B, H and K of the First Regiment, and A, D and E of the Second Battalion. You will proceed to the Walla Walla river in the vicinity of Fort Walla Walla, and there form a camp. You will then scour the valley of that river to the base of the Blue Mountains, occupying the country till you are satisfied that the United States troops have come into the valley. You will then proceed with your command to Ten-mile Creek near The Dalles, there form a camp and await further orders. On your march from Walla Walla, you will drive in all the horses and cattle found on the road.

“ W. H. FARRAR, Adj. of Regt.

“ By order T. R. CORNELIUS,

“ Col. Commanding Regt.”

On April 6th, Colonel Kelley was ordered to relieve Major Carl of his command in the Walla Walla valley, and to hold an election in his command on the first Monday in April in pursuance of an act of the legislature authorizing the volunteers to vote, wherever they might be on that day, on the question of a constitutional convention. Soon after this the command, remaining in charge of Colonel Cornelius, moved up the valley of the Yakima to a small creek called Cannon creek, at a point where the road passes through a narrow gap into the Simcoe valley coming from The Dalles. They reached this place at two o'clock on the 9th of April. Having learned of the capture of the Cascades by the Indians, they were debating whether they had better go on towards the Cascades to intercept parties that might be moving, or return directly to The Dalles. That evening a guard came in and reported having seen at a distance three or four hundred Indians moving in the direction of The Dalles.

The Colonel now had in his command Companies A, E and D, of the First Regiment and B and C of the Second Battalion. The entire number of men ready for duty was two hundred and forty-one. Thinking himself strong enough to fight, he went out with Captain Hembree to make a reconnaissance. The captain was very skeptical as to there being any Indians in reach. That night Colonel Cornelius called a council of war to decide the course of operations for the next day. It was decided to send a squad of picked scouts to scale the hills the next morning, and see what the view might reveal. Accordingly, at an early hour, Captains Wilbur, Wilson and Hembree, and Lieutenants Stillwell and Hutt of Company C, with four privates, volunteered to undertake that service. Colonel Cornelius cautioned Captain Hembree against going up the rugged trail which he and the Captain had explored the evening before, and in which the Colonel was sure he had seen some Indians. The Captain answered that he would do as directed, but at the

same time he did not believe that there was a hostile Indian within a hundred miles. The Colonel insisted that there was great danger, and told him to use all precautions.

The squad started at six o'clock. When they had gone a mile and a half from camp, not having yet reached the top of the hills, they were suddenly attacked fiercely by a force of seventy or eighty Indians, led by the victorious chief Kamiakin. At the first or second fire, Captain Hembree fell mortally wounded, and died where he fell, still bravely endeavoring to return the murderous volley of the enemy. The rest of the party tried to protect and rescue the body of the gallant captain; but the overwhelming superiority in numbers of the enemy rendered the effort fruitless. The escape of anyone was remarkable, and was accomplished only by the cool, prompt and effective return of the fire. At the time of Captain Hembree's death, the Indians were within ten paces of the little band. Some of the Indians were killed in this close encounter. This sudden onslaught was the signal for the instant appearance of Indians on every prominence overlooking the camp. The most accessible entrance to the camp was from the hills opposite those where Captain Hembree had been slain. To those hills Kamiakin and the greater part of his band were hastening for the unmistakable purpose of throwing themselves upon the camp. Fortunately the movements of the troops were more rapid and decisive than those of the Indians.

The furious onset upon Hembree's party had been witnessed in part from the camp. Lieutenant Hibler, with part of Company E, and Lieutenant Caldwell, with part of Company D, rushed to the rescue of the fallen captain. Dashing to the deadly point, they drove the enemy from their position. Captain Wilbur here rejoined the detachment, and led it in its further operations. Captain Ankeny, with a detachment of Company C, attacked and drove the Indians from an eminence on the extreme right. Major Cornoyer rescued the body of Captain Hembree from the enemy. He then drove and hotly pursued those on the north side of the creek for several miles up the cañon, killing and wounding several. Lieutenant Powell, of Company E, cleared and held the bottom to the west; while Lieutenant Hayten, with a part of Company B, held that on the east. He thus prevented the occupation of the brush that skirted the stream.

On the south, before the return of Captain Wilson, Lieutenant Pillow, with Company A, charged and carried a steep and elevated position occupied by the enemy. Captain Wilson then rejoined his company, and was ordered to retain the butte, as it afforded a complete protection to the camp. Lieutenant Myers, with the greater part of Company D, assailed a force which had collected on the rear of Company A, dispersed and pursued them, until they had joined a party with which Lieutenant Hutchinson was warmly engaged. Lieutenants Hutt and Stillwell swept the hills northwest of the butte, and drove the enemy up the creek. Captain Burch ascended the hills on the south, and led detachments of Companies B and C in eager chase of the Indians for several miles. Captain Revins

gallantly participated in the attack and pursuit, though not being in charge of any company, since his own was then at Walla Walla.

Colonel Cornelius had taken his station on the hills to the south, from which he had an unimpeded view of the forces and positions of the enemy, as well as of the operations of his own command. The fighting was hot till noon, when the Indians dispersed in every direction. The Colonel then recalled his various detachments to camp preparatory to a movement of his whole force in pursuit. The amount of ground covered by the Indians had compelled him to divide the companies into parts, and to assign to each officer a particular district, from which to dislodge the threatening foe and then to hold at all hazards. This necessity, in connection with the total lack of knowledge of the force of the Indians, and the broken nature of the ground, compelled the commander to employ this plan of battle. In not a single case did an officer or private hesitate in the duty assigned; and each bravely, promptly and thoroughly performed his part. The Colonel felt justly proud of his men. He was greatly indebted, too, to his adjutant, Captain Farrar.

The battle over, the removal of the camp was hindered by the non-appearance of four men who had been sent out the previous afternoon to look for missing horses on their route up the valley. As removal of the camp even for a short distance would have been almost equivalent to the abandonment of those men, the Colonel deemed it necessary to send a detachment of twenty-five men in command of Lieutenant Hutchinson down the Yakima river in search of the missing men. Before their return the scouts reported that the Indians were fortifying on an abrupt and rocky eminence six or seven miles up the creek. Immediately the Colonel ordered Major Cornoyer with detachments of all the companies except A to dislodge them. Lieutenant Pillow was assigned to the command of a force of reserves ready to go to Cornoyer's support if the need should arise; while Captains Wilson and Burch were retained in camp to be in position to repel attacks if any should be made.

The force of Indians on the eminence was about three hundred strong. Their position was formidable. It was strengthened by stone structures, from behind which they poured forth a steady fire. Major Cornoyer dismounted a part of his men, and had them go up the hill facing their fire. They would run as fast as possible and fire as they ran, so as to excite the Indians and make their aim ineffectual. Then, when their guns were empty, they would fall to the ground or dodge behind rocks to reload, then up to their feet again, running and firing, then down once more to reload and all the time making a steady advance. These tactics they pursued till they reached the top of the hill, when they burst in full force upon the Indians, who then fled routed from their intrenchments.

In this fight Kamiakin was conspicuous in command of the savages. When too distant from any of them to reach them by his voice, he would wave a black flag to the right or left, or lower or raise it, a kind of signals which they seemed to understand perfectly, and which they promptly obeyed. By

sundown no Indians were to be seen; and soon afterwards the men who had been out in search of the horses returned in safety with Lieutenant Hutchinson and his band. Aside from the lamented Hembree, none of the Whites were killed in this engagement; and, strange to say, but one was wounded, notwithstanding the hot fire. No Indians were to be seen the next day; but the main body of them seemed to have gone in the direction of the mouth of the great cañon.

The next day, having prepared a litter on which to carry the body of Captain Hembree, the company set out for The Dalles. They traveled all that day without seeing an Indian; but, expecting an attack from the Indians in the cañon, they proceeded with great caution. They camped that night about five miles from the mouth of the cañon. Before sunrise the next morning, twenty or thirty Indians were seen on the brow of a hill above camp. This led the soldiers to hope that Kamiakin would meet them in the cañon. The command accordingly started at an early hour, and proceeded over a rough trail, winding along the bases of projecting hills and bluffs, until about a mile from the cañon. The Colonel then ordered Major Cornoyer to take charge of detachments under Captain Ankeny and Lieutenant Stillwell, and scale the mountains on the right with all possible expedition. He himself, in command of the main column, went to the mouth of the cañon. They met and killed two Indians; but not another did they encounter. Ankeny and Stillwell reported that there were none on the bluffs.

The conclusion was now plain that Kamiakin did not dare to remain to fight, and had given them the slip. The company were in no condition to hunt him down. Their supplies consisted solely of coffee and flour; and of the latter they had but a single ration. They had not been able to procure horse-meat even in the Yakima country. The only course seemed to be to return to The Dalles. Leaving the main command in the Klikitat, some five miles north and east of The Dalles, the Colonel, with a small detachment of officers and men, went on to procure provisions for his brave but almost exhausted soldiers. They carried with them the remains of Captain Hembree, which at The Dalles were taken charge of by the Masons and conveyed to the home of his family in Yamhill county.

Colonel Cornelius now sent his report to the governor, and awaited further instructions. As it was not yet certain when the regulars would take the field, the governor hesitated about disbanding the volunteers. The Colonel accordingly made all needful preparations for beginning another campaign against the Yakima Indians on the 2d of May; and, in the meantime, leaving the army in command of Major Cornoyer, he went to Portland for a personal interview with the governor. The governor finally directed him to bring the troops to Portland, preparatory to mustering out of service as soon as in the commander's judgment it was best.

On the twenty-ninth the Colonel returned to The Dalles, and on the thirtieth ordered Captain Wilbur with Company D, and Captain Wilson with Company A, to go to Portland, where they were mustered out. The other companies were mustered out in turn between that time and the middle of

May, at which time the regulars, under command of Colonel Steptoe, were ready to take the field. At this time Colonel Cornelius had a conversation with Colonel Steptoe, in which he told him of the nature of the country in which he must fight, and the character of the Indians, telling him that if they ever got the advantage of him they would use it. Colonel Steptoe laughed at the idea, and said that the natives might cause untrained troops trouble, but not men trained as his were. The next that Colonel Cornelius heard of Steptoe was that he had been surrounded and badly whipped near a place ever after memorable to all inhabitants of the Palouse country,—Steptoe Butte.

On the 14th day of May, the attention of Colonel Cornelius was called to a communication of the governor to Colonel Kelley, bearing date of April 16th, which he thought reflected somewhat upon his official conduct. He therefore addressed the following communication to the governor:

"HEADQUARTERS FIRST REGIMENT, O. M. V.,
"PORTLAND, O. T., May 14, 1856.

"*Sir:* My attention has been called to your official communication to Lieutenant-Colonel Kelley, under date of April 16, 1856, in which you say that you are assured by the chiefs of commissary and quartermasters' departments that there has been at no time an inadequate supply there for the comfortable subsistence of the whole force in the field, and that the derangement beyond that point has been in consequence of the inefficiency of transportation, resulting from the want of proper escort. The construction given to this quotation is that the blame and responsibility properly attaches to myself for the great lack of subsistence for my command during the spring campaign on the northern frontier. I am therefore constrained to request of you to order a court of inquiry to which shall be delegated ample power thoroughly to investigate and report as to the causes of the meagerness of the commissary and quartermaster's supplies furnished the troops under my command since the day I entered upon the duties of my office.

"It is in my power to order a court of inquiry restricted to my regiment. Such a court would not have authority nor the right to investigate the action of the chiefs of commissary and quartermasters' departments, so far as in all matters relating to their connection with the First Regiment. You alone can order a court invested with the power of embracing the acts of the heads of those departments, as well as of their subordinates in my regiment, and of my own acts. I can assure you that I desire the opportunity to show that the derangements to which you refer have not been in any degree in consequence of the inefficiency of transportation resulting from the want of adequate escort, but that they have been occasioned and resulted from derangements not connected in any wise with my branch of the service.

"I have the honor to be, very respectfully,

"Your most obedient servant,

"T. R. CORNELIUS,

"Col. First Reg., O. M. V.

"To His Excellency, Geo. L. Curry, Gov. and
Commander-in-Chief of O. M. V."

To this letter the governor answered as follows:

“ TERRITORY OF OGN.,

“ PORTLAND, May 14, 1856.

“ COL. THOS. R. CORNELIUS,

“ *Colonel:* Your letter of the thirteenth instant has been received; and in reply I have to say that I regret that I am constrained to decline granting the request you have preferred for a court of inquiry, for reasons which were fully expressed to you in our personal interview of yesterday.

“ The construction generally given to that passage quoted by you in my communication to Lieutenant-Colonel Kelley of sixteenth ultimo, as reported to you, is entirely erroneous. It was foreign to my purpose to cast the slightest censure or reproach upon any part of your official conduct. You have faithfully discharged your duty; and the confidence in your ability and fidelity, which is breathed in all my communications, remains unqualified and unimpaired.

“ I am, very respectfully,

“ Your obedient servant,

“ GEO. L. CURRY, Gov. of Ogn.”

The most of the volunteers had been by this time mustered out of the service, and had found their way home. They were very kindly received by the people, especially in Washington, Yamhill and Polk counties, where they manifested their appreciation of their services and of the dangers and hardships that they had undergone. The citizens of Yamhill gave a grand banquet to the volunteers of that county at Lafayette on the 15th of May; while those of Polk county were similarly entertained at Dallas at about the same time, and those of Washington at Hillsboro on the thirty-first.

The war ended, Colonel Cornelius returned to his farm, determined to make up the seven months' lost time; but his friends, having found him faithful in the field, put him into the legislature. On the first Monday in June of that year he was chosen to the territorial council, then the highest body of the legislature, to represent the counties of Washington, Columbia, Clatsop and Tillamook. He was kept in the legislature constantly till the admission of the state to the union; and then he was chosen by the same district to the Senate of the state, which position he held till 1861.

The great war then coming on, he offered his services to the government, and was appointed an adjutant-general to act as Colonel of a cavalry regiment which he might raise himself. With him were associated Lieutenant-Colonel R. F. Morrey and Quartermaster B. F. Harding, all the appointments being made at the suggestion of E. D. Baker, then United States senator from Oregon. The term of service of this regiment was mainly spent on the frontiers of Idaho and parts of Utah and Nevada adjoining, though the Colonel himself was stationed as commandant at Fort Walla Walla until the summer of 1862, when he resigned and returned home. He was at once re-elected for service in the legislature, and continued in it every session till 1876, being twice president of the Senate. In 1876 he retired to private life, having made a record for legislative efficiency and honesty of which he may well be proud.

In 1872 he became established in the town of Cornelius (named after him); and there he has made his home ever since. His active energies are expended in a variety of lines of business, such as a store, sawmill, several large farms, and an extensive dairy and cheese factory. In 1886 he was the candidate of the Republican party for Governor of Oregon; but, owing to political complications for which he was in nowise responsible, and which he did his best to avert, the opposing candidate, Sylvester Pennoyer, was elected.

Colonel Cornelius has been twice married, and has six children. His first marriage was in 1850, to Miss Florentine Wilkes. She died in 1864; and in 1866 he was married to Miss Missouri Smith. Though now approaching old age, he is in the most vigorous health, and enjoys throughout the state in which he has been so prominent a figure the esteem and friendship of all.

[History of the Pacific Northwest – Oregon and Washington p. 279-286]