

There the men were put in prison, and their wives guarded in camp. They were allowed to visit their men on certain days. Many of them had lost everything; there were but a few who had even one child left. They were heartbroken.

These despairing women appealed to their husbands to die fighting. Their liberty was gone, their homes broken up, and only slavery and gradual extinction in sight.

At last Dull Knife listened. He said: "I have lived my life. I am ready." The others agreed.

"If our women are willing to die with us, who is there to say no? If we are to do the deeds of men, it rests with you women to bring us our weapons.

As they had been allowed to carry moccasins and other things to the men, so they contrived to take in some guns and knives under this disguise. The plan was to kill the sentinels and run to the nearest natural trench, there to make their last stand. The women and children were to join them. This arrangement was carried out.

Not every brave had a gun, but all had agreed to die together. They fought till their small store of ammunition was exhausted, then exposed their broad chests for a target. The mothers even held up their little ones to be shot. Thus died the fighting Cheyennes and their dauntless leader.

DULL KNIFE



by
Charles A. Eastman



A LearningIsland.org
15-Minute Biography

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Dull Knife/ Charles A. Eastman

Summary: A brief look at the life of Dull Knife, Cheyenne Warrior.

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taken to the Indian Territory without his consent in 1876. When he realized that his people were dying like sheep, he was deeply moved. He called them together. Every man and woman declared that they would rather die in their own country than stay there longer, and they resolved to flee to their northern homes.

Here again was displayed the genius of these people. From the Indian Territory to Dakota is no short dash for freedom. They knew what they were facing. Their line of flight lay through a settled country and they would be closely pursued by the army.

No sooner had they started than the telegraph wires sang one song: "The panther of the Cheyennes is at large. Not a child or a woman in Kansas or Nebraska is safe." Yet they evaded all the pursuing and intercepting troops and reached their native soil. The strain was terrible, the hardship great. Dull Knife, like Joseph, was remarkable for his self-restraint in sparing those who came within his power on the way.

But fate was against him, for there were those looking for blood money who betrayed him when he thought he was among friends. His people were tired out and famished when they were surrounded and taken to Fort Robinson.



Dull Knife and other reservation captives

A few resisted, and declared they would fight to the death rather than go. Among these were the Sioux, but nearly all the smaller tribes were deported against their wishes.

Of course those Indians who came from a mountainous and cold country suffered severely. The moist heat and malaria decimated the exiles. Chief Joseph of the Nez Perces and Chief Standing Bear of the Poncas appealed to the people of the United States. They finally succeeded in having their bands or the remnant of them returned to their own part of the country. Dull Knife was not successful in his plea, and the story of his flight is one of poignant interest.

He was regarded by the authorities as a dangerous man. With his depleted band he was



DULL KNIFE

The life of Dull Knife, the Cheyenne, is a true hero tale. Simple, child-like yet manful, and devoid of selfish aims, or love of gain, he is a pattern for heroes of any race.

Dull Knife was a chief of the old school. Among all the Indians of the plains, nothing counts save proven worth. A man's caliber is measured by his courage, unselfishness and intelligence.

Many writers confuse history with fiction, but in Indian history their women and old men and even children witness the main events, and not being absorbed in daily papers and magazines,

these events are rehearsed over and over with few variations. Though orally preserved, their accounts are accurate. But they have seldom been willing to give reliable information to strangers, especially when asked and paid for.

Racial prejudice naturally enters into the account of a man's life by enemy writers, while one is likely to favor his own race. I am conscious that many readers may think that I have idealized the Indian. Therefore I will confess now that we have too many weak and unprincipled men among us.

When I speak of the Indian hero, I do not forget the mongrel in spirit, false to the ideals of his people. Our trustfulness has been our weakness, and when the vices of civilization were added to our own, we fell heavily.

It is said that Dull Knife as a boy was resourceful and self-reliant. He was only nine years old when his family was separated from the rest of the tribe while on a buffalo hunt. His father was away and his mother busy. He was playing with his little sister on the banks of a stream, when a large herd of buffalo swept down upon them on a stampede for water. His mother climbed a tree, but the little boy led his sister into an old beaver house whose entrance was above water. Here they

On one occasion, however, the enemy had a strong buffalo-hide shield which the Cheyenne bear fighter could not pierce through, and he was wounded. Nevertheless he managed to dispatch his foe. It was from this incident that he received the name of Dull Knife, which was handed down to his descendant.

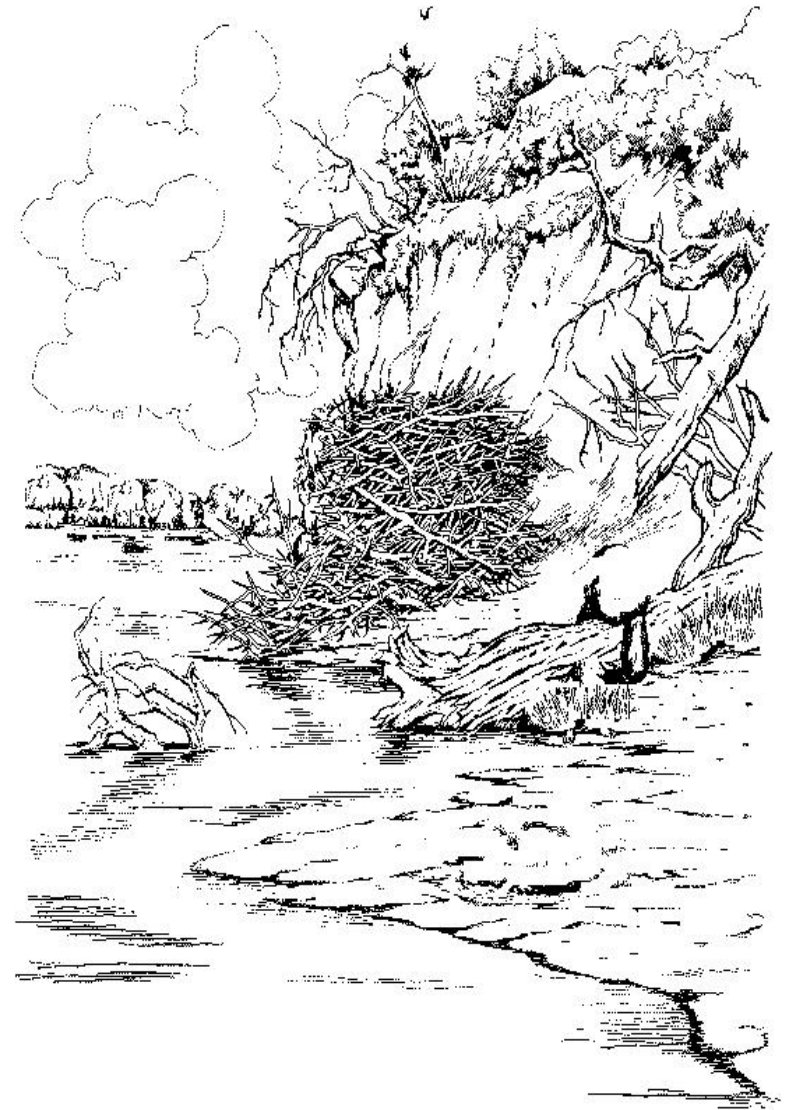
As is well known, the Northern Cheyennes uncompromisingly supported the Sioux in their desperate defense of the Black Hills and Big Horn country. Why not? It was their last buffalo region -- their subsistence. It was what our wheat fields are to a civilized nation.

About the year 1875, a propaganda was started for confining all the Indians upon reservations. There they would be practically interned or imprisoned, regardless of their possessions and rights. The men who were the strongest advocates of the scheme generally wanted the Indians' property -- the one main cause behind all Indian wars. From the warlike Apaches to the peaceful Nez Perces, all the tribes of the plains were hunted from place to place. Then the government resorted to peace negotiations, but always with an army at hand to coerce. Once disarmed and helpless, they were to be taken under military guard to the Indian Territory.



A Cheyenne camp.

remained in shelter until the buffalo passed and they were found by their distracted parents.



Dull Knife was quite a youth when his tribe was caught one winter in a region devoid of game, and threatened with starvation. The situation was made worse by heavy storms, but he secured help. He led a relief party a hundred and fifty miles, carrying bales of dried buffalo meat on pack horses.

Another exploit that made him dear to his people occurred in battle. His brother-in-law was severely wounded and left lying where no one on either side dared to approach him. As soon as Dull Knife heard of it he got on a fresh horse, and made so daring a charge that others joined him. Thus under cover of their fire he rescued his brother-in-law, and in so doing was wounded twice.

The Sioux knew him as a man of high type. Perhaps he was not so brilliant as Roman Nose and Two Moon, but he surpassed both in honesty and simplicity, as well as in his war record. (Two Moon, in fact, was never a leader of his people, and became distinguished only in wars with the whites during the period of revolt.) A story is told of an ancestor of the same name that illustrates well the spirit of the age.

It was the custom in those days for the older men to walk ahead of the moving caravan and decide upon all halts and camping places. One day the councilors came to a grove of wild cherries

covered with ripe fruit, and they stopped at once. Suddenly a grizzly charged from the thicket. The men yelped and hooted, but the bear was not to be bluffed. He knocked down the first warrior who dared to face him and dragged his victim into the bushes.

The whole caravan was in the wildest excitement. Several of the swiftest-footed warriors charged the bear, to bring him out into the open, while the women and dogs made all the noise they could. The bear accepted the challenge. As he did so, the man whom they had supposed dead came running from the opposite end of the thicket. The Indians were delighted, and especially so when in the midst of their cheers, the man stopped running for his life. He began to sing a Brave Heart song as he approached the grove with his butcher knife in his hand. He would dare his enemy again!

The grizzly met him with a tremendous rush, and they went down together. Instantly the bear began to utter cries of distress. At the same time the knife flashed, and he rolled over dead. The warrior was too quick for the animal. He first bit his sensitive nose to distract his attention, and then used the knife to stab him to the heart. He fought many battles with knives thereafter and claimed that the spirit of the bear gave him success.