

Albert Bloomer of Platteville, WI meets history December 15, 1890

ALBERT BLOOMER RECALLS HISTORIC INDIAN WAR INCIDENT

Guarded Body of Indian Chief

Events of Half Century Ago Recalled

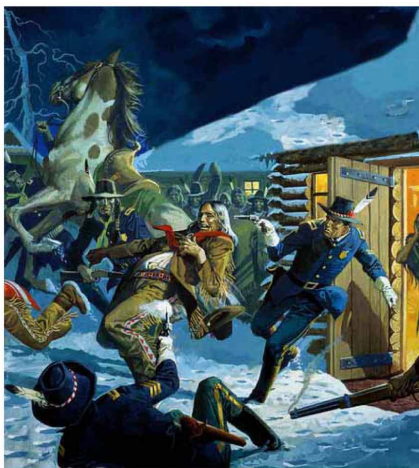
Fifty years ago, on the night of December 15, a young soldier of Troop F, 8th U. S. Cavalry, guarded the body of Sitting Bull, famous leader of the Sioux Indians. That cavalryman was Albert Bloomer of this city, one of very few survivors of the famous Indian Wars, and veteran also of the Spanish American War and the Philippine insurrection. It is only natural that the approach of the Christmas season brings to Mr. Bloomer's mind the days of that historic stand made by the Sioux against the white men, in South Dakota on the Grand River.

"When I enlisted in the U. S. Army at St. Paul in 1888," Mr. Bloomer recalled, "the total strength of that army, including all branches, was 25,000 men. I was only 22 years old at the time. We men of the cavalry wore blue serge suits with brass buttons. Each soldier of the cavalry was issued a horse, saddle, a carbine, or short rifle, carried in a boot on the saddle; a sabre, and a Colt's 45 pistol."

In the winter of 1890 Bloomer was with Troop F, 8th United States Cavalry, which, with Troop G, was stationed at Fort Yates in the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, when over the countryside swept what was known as the "Messiah craze." This craze promised the Indians that a Messiah would come to deliver them from their enemy, the white man. The Messiah would roll 30 feet of soil upon the white man—wiping them out. All dead Indians would again come to life—they would once again be supreme in the land, with ponies to ride and buffalo to kill, on the hunting grounds which they had owned and loved.

To hasten the coming of this Messiah, the Indians, under Sitting Bull, once again held their terrible Ghost dances—holding them in secret when possible, and dancing until they dropped with exhaustion, only to take vapor baths, rest, and continue their fiendish dances throughout the night.

"Finally," Mr. Bloomer continued, "orders came to Ft. Yates from the government in Washington, telling us to arrest Sitting Bull in order to stop these dances, which had so excited the hostile Indians. From our fort 40 Indian police were sent to capture Sitting Bull in the night and carry him away, while his followers slept. He was captured, but once outside his cabin, he yelled so loud that he awakened his band, calling them to come to his rescue.



"A terrible fight followed. The Indian police, far outnumbered by Sitting Bull's men, went inside the chief's cabin for protection, but, before they could take refuge, Red Tomahawk, a rival of Sitting Bull, had shot the Sioux chief through the stomach. And that shot was fatal.

"When the Indian police were meeting with reverses, one of them managed to mount a pony and ride to our fort for help. He did not have to go far before he met us, Troops F and G. We had already been sent to help.

"After we drove Sitting Bull's band away, we found the Chief, himself, and eleven other Indians lying dead in front of the cabin. We had come just in time, for the Indian police were down to their last round of ammunition."

For most of the cavalrymen, the Sitting Bull episode was over. But not for young Bloomer. Lieut. Matthew F. Steel of the 8th Cavalry, ordered Bloomer to drag the body from where it lay to prevent its freezing in a pool of blood. He then placed Bloomer on guard to keep the Indians from mutilating the body and carrying it away for a victory celebration. It was a hard job. After the body was loaded onto a wagon to be returned to Ft. Yates, Mr. Bloomer was one of the three detailed to guard it.

Platteville, Wis. 12-26-29

Mr. W. S. Campbell
Norman, Okla.

Dear Sir:

Yours of the 22nd inst. received.

I think Sitting Bull was about 5-10 to 5-11 and must have weighed from 250 to 300 lbs. and after it was all over and I was ordered to move the body away from a large pool of blood I took hold of his arm and tried to drag him away so his body would not freeze to the ground I thought he weighed a ton.

He was dressed in trousers, shirt & moccasins. I think the trousers had fringes, clothing soiled. Had coarse black hair streaked with grey - just fringes watch chain.

He was lying on his back with head toward his cabin. There was no snow but the ground was frozen. He was about 10 to 15 yds from the cabin.

When we arrived and the Indian police left the cabin one of them dropped his gun in an attempt to crush Sitting Bull's skull while another struck him in the face with his gun. and that is the reason I was detailed to guard.

with orders to allow no one to molest the body.

I am sending you the address of Mr. James Hanagham who was 1st Sergt of Troop F, 8th Cav. and one of the best posted men of the army when it comes to records he was the Sergeant who detailed me for guard duty, and I am sure he would be able to furnish with any information you want.

I am writing to him today.

Yours truly
A. L. Bloomer

Address:
Mr. James Hanagham
1420 Smith St.
Phila., Pa.