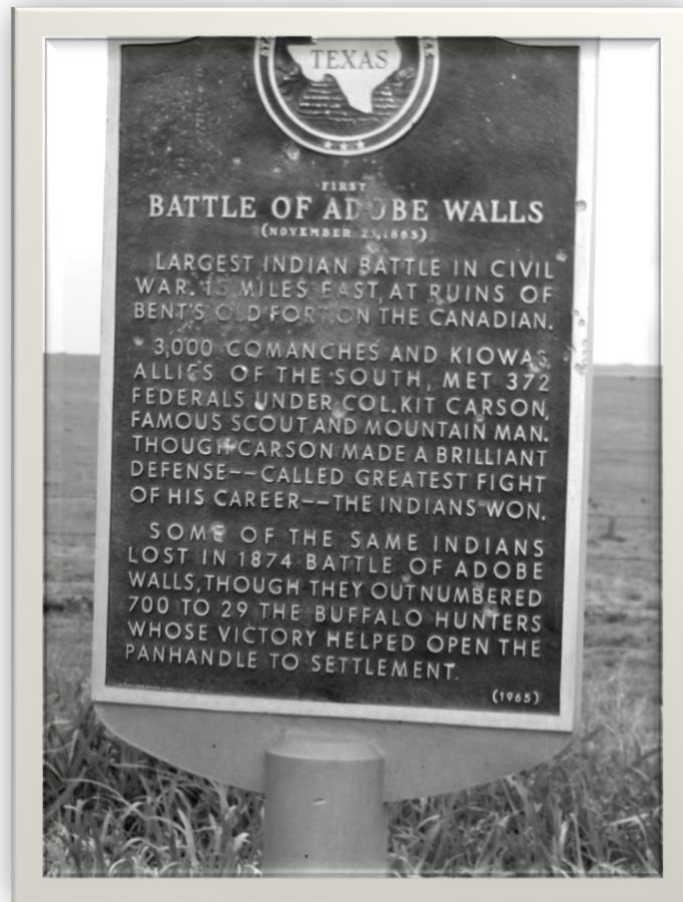


Tombstone by Tombstone

William "Billy" Dixon and Adobe Walls

There were two noted Indian battles at Adobe Walls within ten years of each other. We will touch briefly on the first one because at that time our subject was only about 13 years old and nowhere near the battle. Adobe Walls is located just north of the Canadian River in the Texas Panhandle at the site of the ruins of William Bent's old fort and saloon. The first battle, on November 25, 1864, was between 335 soldiers of the US Army under the command of Kit Carson. With the soldiers were 72 Ute and Apache scouts. On the Indian side were about 1400 Kiowa, Comanche and Apache under the leadership of Dohäsan, Satanta and Iron Shirt. The battle was the largest Indian battle on the plains during the Civil War. The casualties were very low on both, sides and it is considered as an Indian victory. It is also considered as possibly Kit Carson's greatest battle as he struck a blow to the Indians and was able to lead his greatly outnumbered force with minimal casualties.



Billy Dixon was born on September 25, 1850, in Ohio County, Virginia (now West Virginia) to European and Native American parents. He was orphaned at age 12 and went to live with an uncle in Ray County, Missouri. In Missouri, he heard lots of stories of the great adventures of the frontier and at age 14 he left his uncle to go find those adventures. He had the clothes on his back, an extra shirt and a photograph of his mother.

Over the next few years, Billy could be found working as a mule skinner for the government, as a trapper and Buffalo hunter. On September 28, 1867, he was at Medicine Lodge Creek where the famous treaty was signed. In the spring of 1874 he acquired his own

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buffalo hunting outfit. By this time the buffalo had been thinned out in many areas and the treaty land below the Arkansas River began to look appealing to the hunters.

Billy and some of his buffalo hunting friends from Dodge City, Kansas area finally decided on Adobe Walls as the place to set up their camp. They built two trading stores, a blacksmith shop and a saloon. Then the hunters scattered out in groups to hunt the buffalo. The Indians were aware of the hunters' presence and made scattered attacks. They increased the attacks in late June and a few hunters were killed.

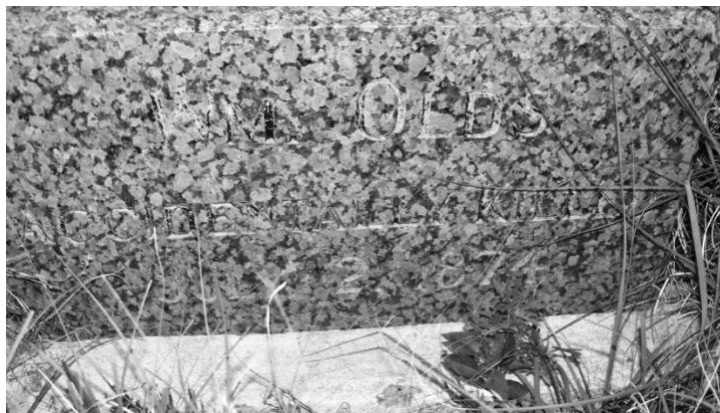
On June 27, 1874, there were 29 brave souls still occupying Adobe Walls. Of the 29 folks, there was one husband and wife team, Mr. and Mrs. William Olds. Besides Billy Dixon, the other most noted occupant was Bat Masterson who would become a famous lawman. The group was so sure that the Indians would not attack the buildings they did not even post a watch.

What the hunters were not aware of was that a Comanche medicine man known as Isatai (Little Wolf) had convinced the Indians that a secret paint had been revealed to him in a dream. This paint would prevent the white man's bullets from striking the warriors. The most noted of the Indians was the famous Quanah Parker (see Volume One). The Comanche force has been estimated at between 700 and 1000 warriors and they decided on June 27th as the day for attack. The fact that they chose that day was the flaw in an otherwise almost perfect plan.

Any other morning and the hunters would all have been sound asleep at the chosen hour of attack. But, as fate would have it, about two o'clock in the morning the pole holding up the roof of the saloon broke with a loud snap that woke up many of the hunters. After repairing that damage it was decided to stay up and get an early start on the hunting. This decision saved most of their lives.

Billy left the saloon with his rifle and just happened to notice a body of Indians in the distance. He did not suspect an attack on the buildings, but thought they would make an attempt on their horses. He fired a couple of shots at them and then, to his amazement, saw they were headed for the buildings. He ran for his life back to the saloon. Years later he would describe the wild charge as "splendidly barbaric" and that he was glad he saw it.

The loss of the surprise element doomed the Indian attack to failure, even though they outnumbered the hunters from 24 to 34 to one. The hunters were fortified within their buildings and they made their living by their ability to shoot their buffalo guns. The initial charge took the Indians almost to the doors of the building, but they could not overrun the defenders. Afterwards, 15 Indian bodies that could not be carried away by their fellow warriors were found very close to the buildings. The hunters lost four men in the initial charge. Two brothers were asleep in a wagon and one other was shot through the lungs. The worst tragedy of all was when Mrs. William Olds was passing her husband a loaded rifle it accidentally discharged. The bullet entered under his chin and exited through the top of his head. By 4:00 a.m., the Comanche had retreated to a safe distance and set up a siege.



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William Olds' headstone at Adobe Walls

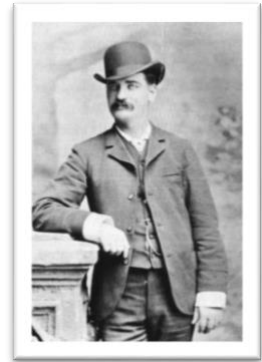
Date of July 2 must be in error as the head shot occurred on June 27. There is no indication that he lived for five days.

During the first two days of the siege Bat Masterson was extolling Billy Dixon's expertise with a buffalo gun. Some of the old hunters were skeptical and few of these marksmen could be impressed by someone else. On the third day they were converted to true believers. On that day a few mounted Indians appeared on a bluff to their east. The hunters urged Billy to go ahead and take a shot with his Sharps. Billy took very careful aim and completed what may be the most famous shot in Old West history. He fired his Sharps and 1538 yards away the .50 caliber bullet slammed the targeted Indian out of his saddle. The siege was over as this totally demoralized the Comanche and they rode away. Dixon (**pictured at left**) was a modest man and years later he was embarrassed over all the talk about his one-mile shot. After all, it was only

seven-eighths of a mile.

Isatai was completely disgraced. Not only did his paint not protect the warriors from the white man's bullets, but he had stayed behind the fighting which was an unforgivable act. He would be Little Wolf no more, but would be called Coyote Droppings.

After the battle, most of the hunters had lost their zeal for buffalo hunting and Indians and they returned to Dodge City. Some bought tickets back home, wherever that might have been. Most remained in and around Dodge City and enjoyed the attractions of city life. In August of 1874, General Nelson A. Miles came to Dodge City on his way to putting down Indian uprisings. Billy and Bat Masterson (**Photo at right**) signed on as scouts. On September 10, 1874, Billy and another famous scout, Amos Chapman, were sent to Fort Supply with dispatches. The soldiers that went with them were Sergeant Woodhull and Privates Rath, Harrington and Smith from the Sixth Cavalry.



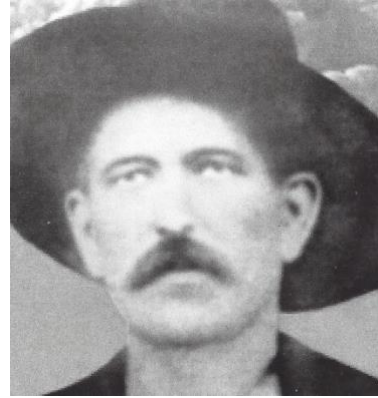
Attempting to avoid Indian war parties in the area, the group traveled at night and rested in the day in any cover they could find. On September 12th the party was looking for cover when they topped a rise and found themselves looking at a war party of about 100 Kiowa and Comanche. They were immediately surrounded and had to defend themselves where they were. Private Smith was immediately killed while holding the horses and the horses were driven off. The Indians could have easily charged and killed the dismounted soldiers and scouts, but for some reason they did not attack. Instead they played games with the Americans by standing off at a distance, pouring heavy and effective fire on the troops. All but two of the men were wounded, and it was obvious they would soon be dead without some relief or shelter.

They did find that there was a small buffalo wallow nearby, and they managed to get into it. Still it did not provide much in the way of a breastwork. So they began to dig with their knives and bare hands. The Indians continued to hold back and the troop soon had a defensible position. The hostiles realized the mistake they had made and began to attack. The wounded men were now able to sit up in their little fort and shoot along with their comrades. This show of defense along with the white man's tactic of concentrating on shooting the Indian leaders kept them alive. Around 3:00 in the afternoon a heavy rainstorm blew in and drenched both sides. An hour later a bitter cold wind blew in and discouraged the attackers. That was most fortunate as the defenders were getting real low on ammunition.

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A Kiowa ledger drawing possibly depicting the Buffalo Wallow battle in 1874



**Amos Chapman
Medal of Honor Recipient**

The men were forced to spend the freezing night, soaked to the skin and in the buffalo wallow that now had accumulated blood stained water. At dawn there were no hostiles in evidence, but that didn't mean the danger had disappeared. Billy Dixon was elected to go searching for help. Before he was even out of sight of his companions, he spotted a large body of men approaching. And that is when I find the story to become unbelievable. The approaching men turned out to be an army supply train escorted by a detachment of Eighth Cavalry under command of a Major William R. Price.

The elation of the frozen and wounded men was to be short lived. The surgeon with the wagon train was sent over and he did nothing more than examine the wounds. Major Price refused to give the dismounted, wounded and out of ammunition members of this U.S. Army patrol any men to stay with them or ammunition to protect themselves. He continued on his way, leaving the men as he found them. His most gracious act was to report their location when he reached headquarters. Billy Dixon and his men lay on the prairie for two more days before help arrived.

Not one of the men came out unscathed. Private Smith was killed, Sergeant Woodhull, Private Harrington and Amos Chapman were seriously wounded; and Private Rath and Scout Billy Dixon received minor wounds. General Miles recommended all the men for Medals of Honor and they were all awarded. (The author only hopes that Major Price's scalp adorned some Indians lance.)



Dixon (**Photo at left**) returned to civilian life in 1883, worked on the Turkey Track Ranch, built a home near the site of the original Adobe Walls, planted an orchard and thirty acres of alfalfa that he irrigated from Bent's Creek and became postmaster at Adobe Walls, a position he held for twenty years. In 1901 he was elected the first sheriff of the newly formed Hutchinson County but resigned in disgust at the political strife aroused in connection with the organization of the county. In addition, he served as a state land commissioner and justice of the peace for the area around Hutchinson, Gray, and Roberts counties. He and S. G. Carter operated a ranch-supply store at the house. On October 18, 1894, he married Olive King Dixon of Virginia, who for three years thereafter was the only woman living in Hutchinson County. They had seven children.

Tombstone by Tombstone



The Turkey Ranch still exists today as evidenced by this sign at the Adobe Walls Historical site.



However, they may not welcome you with open arms when you arrive.

pp



Matter of fact, I think placing six locks on one gate to keep you out is a matter of overkill and a sure sign you aren't wanted.

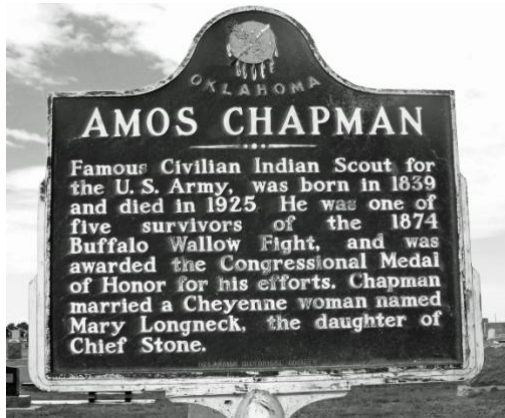
Do not let this worry you. The Adobe Wells Historical site is open to the public.

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The family moved to Plemons in 1902 to provide schooling for their children. Small-town life proved irksome to the former scout, and in 1906 he went to homestead in the open spaces of Oklahoma. During his last years Dixon reportedly lived near poverty, and friends tried to obtain a pension for him. On March 9, 1913, he died of pneumonia at his Cimarron County homestead; he was buried in the cemetery at Texline by members of his Masonic lodge. On June 27, 1929, his remains were reinterred at the Adobe Walls site. Dixon Creek in southern Hutchinson County is named for him, as is the Billy Dixon Masonic Lodge in Fritch. Personal artifacts from his scouting days are housed in both the Hutchinson County Museum in Borger and the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum in Canyon.



Billy's markers on his Adobe Walls gravesite



Amos' historical marker and his grave are located in the Brumfield Cemetery in Seiling, Dewey County, Oklahoma.

Just a note: The term Congressional Medal of Honor is erroneous. It is officially known simply as the Medal of Honor. It is presented by the President in the name of Congress and Congress established the law creating the medal. A member of congress may even recommend someone for the honor and can enact a law to award the medal, but they are not in the approval process.

Source: Chase, Bob. "Double Jeopardy: The Battles of Billy Dixon." Old West, Spring 1987, p. 56.

Texas State Historical Association: <http://www.tshaonline.org>