

## **Simpson Everett "Jack" Stilwell**

Stilwell's remains were reinterred in the Old Trail Town Cemetery in Cody, Wyoming, on May 12, 1984. The following is a reproduction of the memorial plaque on his grave site:

Simpson E. Stilwell, better known as "Comanche Jack" was born in Kansas in 1850 and served on the frontier during his youth as a scout and hunter. He is best known for his heroic deeds at the Battle of Beechers Island in September of 1868.

August of 1868 was trying times in Kansas Territory as bands of marauding Sioux and Cheyenne were killing many settlers in what is now western Kansas and eastern Colorado.

It was well known that the regular troops had little effect against the hit-and-run tactics of the Indians.

On August 24, 1868, General Sheridan ordered Colonel G. A. Forsyth to enlist "50 first class frontiersmen" and arm them with the new "Spenser Carbine", a repeating cartridge rifle that could fire nine shots without reloading. These guns were far superior to the single shot muzzle loading guns that had been in use for many years.

The ranks were soon filled, and among the volunteers was 18 year old Jack Stilwell, described as "a youth of six feet three or more, short of years but long on frontier lore."

Forsyth's contingent left Fort Hays on August 29, 1868, and headed north-westward into the Indian country. On the morning of September 16, the scouts crossed the trail of a large band of Indians. That evening Forsyth's party camped along the north bank of the Arikaree Fork of the Republican River. Before dawn some young warriors tried to steal some of the scout's horses. Then, shortly after dawn, the entire horizon seemed filled with mounted and unmounted Indians. It is said that Jack Stilwell pointed to a small island in the river and the officers and scouts made a dash for it. Almost immediately, approximately six hundred Cheyenne and Sioux warriors began their charge down the slope toward the island. The scouts killed their own horses for breastworks and dug into the sand behind them, then, like a cyclone, the massive screaming force hit the island. When the first warriors were within twenty-five yards of the scouts, they opened fire with the new repeating arms. Horses and men fell in the first volley. Many of which rolled over the defenders of the island. Colonel Forsyth's leg was shattered by a bullet; Lt. Beecher and Surgeon Moore were fatally wounded while others received lesser wounds.

The warriors, surprised by the rapid fire of the new guns, changed their tactics. They began riding in and swerving off as they fired, while others sniped at the defenders from hidden positions. After the first day of fighting Forsyth realized that without food and medical supplies their position was hopeless. That night Jack Stilwell

and Pierre Trudeau volunteered to try to sneak through the Indians and bring help from Fort Wallace, 125 miles away. Everyone feared that they would not make it. But after several close calls and a great deal of hardship, they did make it. On the 25<sup>th</sup> Jack Stilwell arrived with the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry and saved the survivors on the island.

After the Beecher Island battle, Stilwell remained a scout for the army for a length of time. Later in life he became a deputy United States marshal in Oklahoma Territory, where he killed and captured several outlaws. Later he became the Police Judge at El Reno, Oklahoma, and in the mid-1890s became a government cattle inspector for the Comanche Agency at Anadarko, Oklahoma. After that, Stilwell became a United States Commissioner and the Master of the Masonic Lodge at Erwin Springs, Oklahoma.



**Jack Stilwell**

Through the influence of his friend Buffalo Bill Cody, he came to Cody, Wyoming, in 1897 where he took care of Cody's interests while he was away with the Wild West show. Jack Stilwell had a small ranch on the South Fork, near Cody, Wyoming and died from a sudden illness, in Cody in 1903.

Stilwell has stated that he was born in 1851, in Kansas and noted historian Dan L. Thrapp records that he was born on August 25, 1849 in Tennessee. In 1863,

Stilwell was supposedly sent to the well to get some water, and never returned and made his way to Kansas City where he joined a wagon train bound for Santa Fe, New Mexico Territory.

For four years he traveled between Santa Fe, Kansas City, and Leavenworth, Kansas. While spending his winters in Santa Fe, he hunted buffalo along the areas streams and returned with the wagon trains in spring.

In December of 1875, Stilwell was charged with larceny because he had come to acquire a mule owned by a fellow named James Jelm. The case was discharged when it became obvious there was no evidence upon which to convict.

Stilwell had a younger brother named Frank who earned a bit of notoriety. Jack and Frank made a trip to Prescott, Arizona where Frank fell in with some bad company and killed a Mexican cook. Frank was acquitted and moved to Tombstone and Jack left Arizona. Frank Stilwell was involved with the murder of Morgan Earp which led to Frank's murder at the hands of Wyatt, Doc Holliday and others at the train station in Tucson. Jack's return to the west in hopes of avenging his brother was not successful.

Stilwell returned to the Oklahoma Territory and became a deputy U.S. marshal.

He died of Bright's disease in 1903.



**Jack's final resting place in Old Trail Town**



He was originally buried in Riverside Cemetery, Cody, Wyoming, and was moved to Old Trail Town in 1984.