

# TALES OF THE OLD WEST

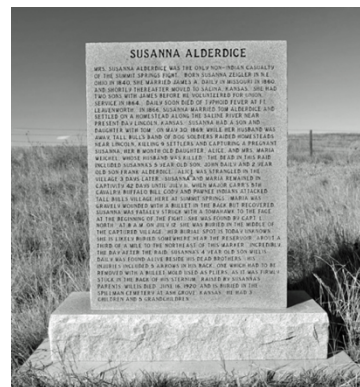
## Susanna “Susan” Alderdice

July 11, 1869 was going to turn out to be a fateful day for Chief Tall Bull and his band of Cheyenne Dog Soldiers and his captive white women. An Army trumpet sent out the command to charge, and 244 officers and men of the 5<sup>th</sup> US Cavalry and 50 Pawnee Indian scouts attacked the unsuspecting village of 84 lodges. The Indians were completely caught by surprise.

In about three hours the Indians — mostly Cheyenne Dog Soldiers, but also a few Sioux and Arapahos — had been thoroughly beaten. The Indian casualties were heavy with 52 warrior’s dead, including Chief Tall Bear and 17 women and children were captured. Unbelievably the cavalry only suffered one injury. An arrow ricocheted and hit one of the troopers in an ear.

It seemed as if the cessation of shooting caused a severe hail and thunderstorm to descend on the scene of destruction. While everyone was trying to take shelter, lightning killed one horse being ridden by a soldier. Twelve other horses died during the night, but it was mostly because they had been run half to death chasing the escaping Indians for many miles. There were other casualties as the result of the cavalry attack. Six weeks earlier in Kansas, Tall Bull had taken two young white women as captives. The ladies were on separate ends of the village when the raid began. As the soldiers raced in from the north, the Indians were trying to escape to the east and south. Whenever Indians holding captives were attacked, they always killed the captive first thing.

Maria Weichel, one of the captives was shot in the back. The ball bounced off a rib and lodged in the flesh of her left breast. It was a severe and a painful injury, but she survived. Susanna Alderdice, however, was not as lucky and the pregnant mother of four other children was shot just above the eye and as she died her skull was crushed by a tomahawk. She was given a Christian burial at 8:00 the next morning. She was wrapped in two lodge skins and the best buffalo robe that could be found in the village and placed into a very deep grave. Her grave has never been located, but a monument (Photo courtesy of Doyle Brewer) in her honor stands near the location on the Summit Springs Battle Site.



Alderdice was born Susanna Zeigler (some believe it is Zigler) in early 1840 (some claim 1845) in Green Township, Ohio. The first of Michael and Mary Zeigler’s several children, Susanna (photo at right) would grow up in the Buckeye State. On October 28, 1860, she married 20-year-old James Alfred Daily in Missouri’s Clay County. The Civil War was raging when they moved to Salina, a new town in central Kansas. James, taking advantage of the Homestead Act of 1862, had staked a claim. Susanna’s first child, John Daily, was born there on July 1, 1863.



James Daily felt the call to duty and in July, 1864, enlisted for 100 days in the 17<sup>th</sup> Kansas Volunteer Infantry. One month before his expected return Susanna gave birth to their second son, Willis Daily. Two days before his expected discharge, Daily was running a fever and checked into the hospital at Ft. Leavenworth. He was put into quarantine and died 11 days later from typhoid fever. Needing help raising the two children, Susanna moved to Salina, Kansas to be with her parents.

In Salina, Susanna met Tom Alderdice from Pennsylvania. He was serving with the 2<sup>nd</sup> US Volunteer Infantry and stationed near Salina. What Tom wasn’t telling anybody was that he was a “galvanized Yankee.” He had served in the 44<sup>th</sup> Mississippi Infantry in the Confederacy. He was taken as a Prisoner of War at Chickamauga and held at Rock Island, Illinois where he spent the next 13 months. He took the oath of allegiance to the US, joined the US Army and was sent to the west where he would not have to fight the Confederacy, just Indians.

Tom and Susanna were married on June 28, 1866, and set up a homestead along the Saline River. Susanna gave birth to Frank in 1867 and Alice in 1868. The area experienced extreme drought in 1868 and devastating raids by Cheyenne Dog Soldiers, along with some Sioux and

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Arapaho warriors. Many settlers lost their lives and Sarah White, 17, was taken captive after seeing her father killed.

General Philip Sherman authorized 50 civilian scouts to join Major Sandy Forsyth in stopping the Dog Soldiers' raids. The youngest of these scouts was 16-year-old Eli Zeigler, Susanna's younger brother. Her husband Tom also served as a scout for four months. They called themselves the Solomon Avengers.

In September, the scouts found themselves in a fight with Chief Roman Nose, the Cheyenne leader, and about 700 Dog Soldiers, including Tall Bull and his band along the Arikaree River. The scouts made it to a small island in the river and stood off the Indians for nine days. The only thing they had to eat were the horses killed in the fight.

Five of the Forsyth Scouts, including 1st Lt. Frederick Beecher, for whom the island and the battle was named, lost their lives. Twenty-five men received serious wounds, but four of the men managed to escape the siege and obtain military help. The estimated Indian loss was 50 warriors, including Roman Nose who was killed in one of the many charges.

One hundred eighteen years ago, as of this writing, a large obelisk monument was erected at the sight and bears the name of every scout. Tom Alderdice is first on the list and Eli Zeigler is last and both survived this famous battle.

The battle didn't even slow down the Indian raids and within a month more settlements were hit, and more settlers murdered. James Morgan, a newlywed, was luckier than many. He was seriously wounded in the hip but managed to escape. His new bride was not so lucky and joined Sarah White in Cheyenne Chief Stone Forehead's village.

George Armstrong Custer was returning to duty following an 1867 court-martial in which he was convicted on eight counts that included conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline, and absence without leave from his command after he left part of his regiment on the Kansas frontier while he returned, without orders, to Fort Riley in order to see Libby. Custer was suspended from rank and command without pay for a year, but Sheridan reinstated him after 10 months to lead a bloody campaign against the Cheyenne.

Custer was put in command of 11 companies of the 7th Cavalry. At the crack of dawn on November 29, 1868, on the banks of the Washita River in Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma), Custer surprised the village of Black Kettle, killing the Cheyenne chief and at least 100 others. More than 50 Indian women and children were taken captive. During the Battle of the Washita, the Indians apparently killed two white captives — Clara Blinn and her 2-year-old son, Willie, who had been taken two months earlier in southeastern Colorado Territory.

On March 13, 1869, Custer and his men found Chief Stone Forehead's village in the Texas Panhandle. Knowing there were two white captive women, Sarah White and Anna Morgan that would be killed as soon as he attacked, he adopted another plan. He arrested several of the band leaders and threatened to hang them unless the women were returned, and they soon were. Custer then promised to release the chiefs as soon as all the Indians returned to their reservation. Most settlers, and Custer himself, believed the Indian war to be over. He stated in one of his reports, "This I consider as the termination of the Indian war." As we all know, that was not to be so.

Major Eugene Carr and several companies of the 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry from Colorado were on their way to Fort McPherson in Nebraska in May of '69 when they surprised Tall Bull's band of Dog Soldiers. In the ensuing battle, at least 25 warriors were killed and four soldiers. Carr's men destroyed 25 lodges. Three days later there was another engagement that cost the Dog Soldiers 20 more casualties and several soldiers were wounded. Carr was then forced to continue on to Ft. McPherson as he had used all his resources.

This left Tall Bull free to seek revenge for his losses. His Dog Soldiers struck in a series of raids in Kansas, beginning on May 21. The most disastrous raid occurred on May 25 when six hunters were killed. The seventh hunter, John McChesney, hid in some tall grass and was the only survivor. On May 28<sup>th</sup> they attacked a railroad crew, killing two and wounding four. The next day they attacked another hunting party of four, but only managed to wound Solomon Humbarger. These hunters were neighbors of Tom and Susanna Alderdice.

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May 30<sup>th</sup> found about 60 Dog Soldiers headed for a newly established Danish village. Susanna's brother Eli Zeigler and a brother-in-law John Alverson were in a wagon near the settlement when they spotted the war party. The Indians also spotted them and about fifteen of them gave chase. The white folks managed to reach a creek bed and the Indians shot at them many times but would not charge the pair. They stole the horses, disabled the wagon and departed.

The folks in the settlement were not so fortunate. Erskild and Stine Lauritzen were on the way to a neighbor's house to pick up their son when both were shot, scalped and stripped naked. Nearby the Indians also surprised Maria and George Weichel and family friend Fred Meigerhoff. The men were armed and put up a running battle for about four miles and ran out of ammunition. They cut off one of George Weichel's fingers in order to steal a ring. They took his 20-year-old wife, Maria, as a captive. They also killed Otto Pearson, a man living with the Lauritzens. His scalped and mutilated body was not found until two days later.

About 5:00 that afternoon they attacked the home where Susanna Alderdice was staying while Tom was in Salina for supplies. With Tom were Timothy Kine and William Hendrickson. In the home with Susanna were her four children, John, Willis, Frank and baby Alice; Kine's wife, Bridget, and their 2-month-old daughter, Katherine; Thomas Noon and his wife; and Nicholas Whalen. Bridget heard a noise outside. She saw the Indians stealing her husband's mare. The Noons also saw the Indians and fled from the house. Bridget and Susanna were deserted without any weapons. The women gathered up their children and ran for the high banks of the Saline River about 100 yards away.

With only the one baby, Katherine, Bridget made it to the river first and hid as best she could in an overhanging branch. With two small children to carry, Susanna could not make it to the river. Her boys were struck down and abused before her very eyes. Bridget Kine could hear the screams of the boys and Susanna from her hiding place. Susanna and baby Alice were taken captive. Bridget and her baby then fled five miles to a neighbor's fortified home.

On May 30<sup>th</sup>, there was one more atrocity committed. An old Indian man and a young Indian boy found two 13-year-old boys, John Strange and Arthur Schmutz. The old man tried to tell the boys, in very bad English, that he was a good Pawnee. He touched both boys on the shoulder, an act known to all Indians as counting coup. The young warrior then struck Strange in the head, killing the boy instantly. Schmutz ran for his life, but the young warrior quickly fired an arrow that penetrated into his lung. He pulled the arrow out, but the tip remained in his lung. Riley and Marion Strange, younger brothers to John, heard the commotion and came running. One was carrying a box of ammo and the other firing at the young brave. The Indians fled and Arthur was taken to the hospital. The doctors were unable to remove the arrow tip and he died 11 days later.

Lieutenant Edward Law and 2nd Lt. Thomas March were in command of Custer's G company when later that day they were met by panicked settlers who told them of the murderous raids. March took 30 soldiers and some of the settlers to go after the raiders. Five miles later, March and his men came upon a small party of Indians. One of the settlers recognized five horses that belonged to his neighbors. The patrol fired upon the Indians without any effect and the Indians escaped.

The next day, March 31<sup>st</sup>, March's party found victims scattered all across their path. Tom Alderdice learned of the fate of his son and stepsons, as well as the capture of his wife and daughter. He viewed the bodies of his children in real agony and his cries of sorrow would not be forgotten by those who were witnesses. His only solace was that one stepson had survived, though critically wounded.

On June 1, Alderdice despite all of the tragic news, set out all alone to find Susanna. Several miles to the north, he found the trail he was looking for near the Solomon River. Following the trail for several more miles, he spotted a group of Dog Soldiers around a creek that was unfamiliar to him. From his hideout, he watched the comings and goings of the Indians for a while and soon realized they were preparing for a hunting and raiding expedition. Knowing he needed help, he headed back to Ft. Leavenworth in hopes of getting the army to take on a rescue mission.

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The *Leavenworth Times and Conservative* interviewed Tom while he was there. They made some mistakes in their reporting of the interview about where Tom first saw the bodies of the children. They reported that one child had four bullets in his body and the other had five arrows in his back. The four-year-old wounded Willis was said to have five arrows in his back. This report is also just a bit doubtful.

Another report said that Alderdice also met with George and Libby Custer. Libby later wrote about the encounter in *Following the Guidon*:

“The man was almost wild with grief over the capture of his wife by Indians, and the murder of his children. ... The man was as nearly a madman as can be. His eyes wild, frenzied, and sunken with grief, his voice weak with suffering, his tear-stained, haggard face — all told a terrible tale of what he had seen and was enduring. He wildly waved his arms as he paced the floor like some caged thing and implored General Custer to use his influence to organize an expedition to secure the release of his wife. He turned to me with trembling tones, describing the return to his desolate cabin. The silence in the cabin told its awful tale, and he knew, without entering, that the mother of the little ones had met with the horrible fate which every woman in those days considered worse than death.

Tom Alderdice told about his own scouting activities and also provided a written description of Susanna to the officers at Fort Leavenworth, and a copy was then forwarded to Major Carr in the field. Tom described his wife as medium height, light complexion, with light brown hair and blue eyes. He also noted that Susanna had a female child eight months old with her when captured. Tom returned to the Saline River valley, but soon ventured out again to the creek where he had discovered the Indians earlier. This time, as Major Carr would later report, Tom came upon the Dog Soldiers’ abandoned camp and discovered a most horrible sight — the lifeless form of his baby, Alice, strangled with a bowstring. His captured wife, Susanna, had been allowed to carry Alice for three days before the baby’s incessant crying had prompted the Indians to silence her forever. Now, there was nothing left for Tom Alderdice to do but pray that Carr and his troopers would find Susanna and bring her home safely.

During this period of time a white woman’s worst fear was to be captured by the Indians. Death was far more preferable than to be held captive. Many of the atrocities they suffered were not topics to be discussed in those times, even if they did happen to escape or be rescued. Published accounts about Indian captivity were often mere whitewashes of the truth. Consider the account left by Veronica Ulbrich Megnin, written only for the government, regarding her captivity when she was just 13. Veronica was seized in 1867, not too far north of where Susanna Alderdice was captured two years later.

“I remember vividly the hot summer day of 1867 when a band of Cheyenne Indians swept down upon our farm, captured me and my brother Peter. They whipped us with their rawhides and we cried bitterly for help. More dead than alive they took us away from home and three miles later they shot my brother off the horse and left him where I pointed out the location four months later to my father.... They compelled me to travel with them, we were traveling from one place to another, some of the band were on the go all the time. I did not get enough to eat, suffered from thirst, had to wash and do other work; sometimes they whipped me, sometimes they wanted or threatened to kill me. Soon one Indian belonging to another band forcibly violated my body, causing me immense pain and anguish thereby. This was almost a daily and nightly occurrence which would have killed me, if I had not been liberated almost exhausted.”

Every woman knew that if captured, repeated rapes were likely to occur, but rapes were not mentioned in popular captivity narratives written by women who were later rescued. Like Veronica, Susanna Alderdice and Maria Weichel undoubtedly suffered horribly during their captivity, receiving little food or water and too much sun. The rapes would go on, night and day. To the end of her days, Susanna would surely remember the screams of her children as they were being killed. Susanna and Maria traveled hundreds of miles in captivity.

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Major Carr, with orders to eliminate all Indians from the Republican River country, left Ft. McPherson on June 9, 1869, with eight companies of the 5th cavalry and three companies of Pawnee scouts. There would be several small encounters with the Dog Soldiers.

On July 5, a detachment of Pawnee soldiers entered into a brisk attack with some Dog Soldiers, killing three of them and wounding some others. Carr was fearful that this battle might cause Tall Bull to up stakes and flee to Wyoming Territory.

On July 8, several Dog soldiers and a detachment of soldiers rode into a battle that resulted in two more of Tall Bull's braves wounded with no effect on the US soldiers. Corporal John Kile would later be awarded a Medal of Honor for bravery during the skirmish. That night, the Dog Soldiers made an unsuccessful attempt to steal the army horses. Sergeant Mad Bear of the Pawnee Scouts was wounded by friendly fire after charging the departing enemy forces. For his bravery that night, and killing two warriors on July 5, he was awarded a Medal of Honor. Riding with them at the time was non-other than Buffalo Bill Cody.

The following day, Carr's troops made a valiant effort to reach the Indians before they could reach the Platte River and cross over into Wyoming Territory. Knowing it would be a long, hard ride to catch them as Tall Bull was aware they were being chased. Carr reduced his force to men that had horses that could make the ride. He was now down to 244 soldiers and 50 Pawnee scouts.

July 11, found Carr's men on a rapid pace to the northwest in an attempt to go around Tall Bull and be able to attack him from an unexpected direction. By 2:00 in the afternoon, they had traveled 35 miles and were ahead of the Indians. Rolling, sandy hills provided them good cover from the Indians and Carr's people were within two miles of Tall Bull. The Pawnee scouts stripped down to the point where they only had enough clothing to prevent being mistaken for a Dog Soldier. The soldiers and scouts were lined up for the charge and the trumpet was sounded. The raid was swift, hard and caught Tall Bull by complete surprise

Tall Bull (photo at left) chose to face the soldiers in the high bluffs just to the south and east



of the village. There, after he and 19 other warriors engaged the soldiers in the most desperate fighting in the battle, he was killed. Buffalo Bill later took credit for killing Tall Bull. So, did Major Frank North, who, as fate would have it, later toured with Cody's Wild West Show and died in 1885 from injuries incurred when he was thrown from a horse at Hartford, Conn., the previous year. But **it** might not have been either of them. Major Carr wrote in 1901 that Daniel McGrath, a Company H enlisted man at the time of the fighting, particularly distinguished himself at the Battle of Summit Springs, Colorado where he killed the Chief Tall Bull. Given that Cody mentioned in one of his accounts of Summit Springs that McGrath had captured Tall Bull's pony, perhaps McGrath was indeed the one who killed the chief.

The soldiers captured and destroyed a huge amount of booty the next morning and set 160 separate fires to make sure everything burned. Some of the items found included a necklace made of human fingers, 56 rifles, 22 revolvers, 40 bows with arrows, 350 knives, 47 axes, 17 sabers, 690 buffalo robes, 552 panniers (saddlebags), 152 moccasins, 150 pans, kegs and kettles, 9,300 pounds of dried meat, 340 tin cups and plates, 28 new dresses, 1,500 dolls, 200 coffee pots, 418 horses and mules, and more than 10 tons of various Indian clothing, equipment and food. Tall Bull and his followers had lived well. Almost \$886 was found in the village, and Lieutenant Edward P. Doherty gave it to the wounded captive, Maria Weichel. Carr wrote: "There was the greatest quantity of plunder in the Indian village, such as clocks, watches, photographs, shawls, kitchen and household utensils, mules, horses, etc., etc., which they had taken from settlers and freighters." Carr's success, however, was somewhat tempered by the death of the other captive, Susanna Alderdice, who must have at least had hope of rescue before the end.

On the morning of July 12, she was buried, according to Carr, "on a little bluff, which overlooks Summit Springs, with such religious services as we were able to perform. Dr. Louis Tesson performed the ceremony." The officers at first called the battle Susanna Springs in honor of the late

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Mrs. Alderdice, but Carr later changed it when he learned the place already had the name Summit Springs. After the burial, the soldiers marched for Fort Sedgwick.

Susanna died without knowing that her son, Willis Daily, was still alive. The day after the murderous raid, a soldier had discovered Willis and his two dead brothers naked under a pile of brush. In addition to many arrow wounds, the 4-year-old had taken two bullets in the back and a spear through a hand. One of the arrows had penetrated deep into his breastbone. For some reason, the surgeon accompanying Lieutenant Law's company had refused to treat Willis, or even to examine him, and the lieutenant could not order him to do so because the boy was a civilian. This surgeon later would be chastised in a Kansas newspaper editorial for his callousness. Willis remained for two days with the metal arrow point imbedded 5 inches in his back before some settlers removed it at the Hendrickson house. No one thought he would live.

Willis survived his ordeal but would walk with a limp the rest of his life. He was raised by Susanna's parents in Cedron Township, about 20 miles north of Lincoln, and eventually received a pension for the Civil War service of his father, James Alfred Daily, who had died just seven weeks after Willis was born in 1864.

Tom Alderdice (photo at right) left Lincoln County soon after learning that Susanna was dead. While living in Iowa's Clinton County in 1873, Tom remarried and had a second family. He would not return to the old homestead for 42 years when he made an unsuccessful search for the grave of his son and stepson. He died in Conway Springs, Kan., in 1925.

As for Willis, he married Mary Twibell on March 25, 1886, and they raised a son (named James Alfred after Willis' father) and two daughters (Anna and Elsie). He lost both of his legs to what was believed his old wounds, but it was cancer, and removing the legs did not stop the cancer's growth. He died a beloved man on June 16, 1920



Headstones for Thomas Alderdice and Willis Daily

Thanks to Mike Day (Old History Buff) (FAG)

Sources: *Death at Summit Springs: Susanna Alderdice and the Cheyennes*

[www.historynet.com/death-at-summit-springs-susanna-alderdice](http://www.historynet.com/death-at-summit-springs-susanna-alderdice)

Summit Springs Battle, July 11, 1869, Colorado Territory