

Metis Battles: Battle at Olga (O'Brien's Coulée) and the “Bataille “des la Rivière Outardes” (Goose River)



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Battle of O'Brien's Coulée, 1848

In the mid-summer of 1848 a large Chippewa-Metis and Dakota battle took place at O'Brien's Coulée¹ near present day Olga, North Dakota. The Chippewa-Metis hunting camp was made up of 800 Metis men and 200 Chippewa Indian men. They had their families, horses and over 1,000 Red River carts. The Chippewa were led by Old Red Bear and Little Shell II. The Metis were led by Jean Baptiste Wilkie whose mother was a full-blood Chippewa. François Corvin Gosselin who along with William Gaddy who would later be a sub-leader of the 49th Rangers attached to the British Boundary Commission were also at this battle.²

This battle took place two years before Little Duck (Shee-seep-ace) left Warroad, or 1848. It was before mid-summer, wheat ripened after the fight. Toward the SSW of the fort lay a large lake, very narrow, 100 yards wide between the edges of the cut prairie on the general level each side. The lake was four miles away, no name. A Sioux in to the shore. A hunter from the camp was near the shore and heard a drum across the lake where the Sioux were holding a pow-wow. He reported this in camp, late at night after the camp was mostly asleep.

They took position in the night on the shore of the lake up the bank on a small hill. When morning came they swarmed down to the shore and began to fire on the Sioux across the narrow space. The Sioux saw them at once and rushed down to fight. Then the yells intermingled with shots, the guttural calls of the Sioux and the high pitched

¹ So called because O'Brien lived at this location some 35 years after the event. It is a short distance west of Olga, N.D. Olga is between one branch of the Pembina River to the north and the Tongue River to the south.

² Libby Papers, A85, Box 36, Notebook #14. August 4, 1910 interview with Little Duck, Dominion City, MB, interpreter Roger St. Pierre. This paper was given to me by Louis Garcia, historian for the Mni Wakan Oyate.

cries of the Chippewa and the wop-wop of the old flintlocks. They were double-barreled flint guns in use then. A few used arrows. The Chippewa guarded each end of the lake to keep the Sioux back. Many Sioux ponies were killed and some Sioux who were mainly on horseback. Of the Chippewa, three were killed, the father of Flying Nice was one. A Sioux was killed at the south end of the lake by a Chippewa on horseback. The Sioux had no gun, and he found it was no use to get away, he folded his blanket around himself and was shot through the breast. He was scalped and left. Four wounded all lived. Two were shot through the body.

In the small camp there were 200 tents. The tents were pulled up on the poles quite away from the ground. The Sioux at this camp sent a man on horseback to a larger camp west of the lake (ten mile) that contained about 1,000 warriors. They came up to fight about dark and drove the Ojibwas from the end of the lake and back to camp following a small creek that ran parallel to the SE ditch two miles away. They did not dare go farther than the creek because it was very dark.

The day of the fight the Half-Breeds were busy fortifying the camp. The women did most of the work with their turnip spades, about four feet long, sharpened to a point. A Chippewa scout had reported the big Sioux village earlier in the day. On a hill SE of the Chippewa camp about one mile away was all covered with Sioux on horseback. Soon, early in the forenoon they had all gone.

One Chippewa, White Shell, was shot through both hips at the creek and hid all night. In the dawn he hobbled toward the camp with his gun as a crutch. A party on horseback started for him as he reached the ditch, just as the Sioux reached the hill. Big Indian³ (Ki-chi-un-ish-e-nau-bay) and two friends went out and met the wounded Indian. He fell one mile out, where the rescue party reached him. Francois Corvin Gosselin was one of the party. Francois gave up his horse to the wounded man. Big Indian provided Francois his horse, because he was big and heavy, while he (Big Indian) would run behind. The Sioux pursued them. They heard the Sioux come yelling through the woods. The Red River carts were placed in the ditch lengthwise with the hitch part of it where there was no ditch. There the carts were put tongue up, tents inside, horses also.⁴

³ "Big Indian" was a warrior of the Red Lake Band, he signed the Pembina Red Lake Treaty with Ramsey in 1863. Little Duck was the Chippewa Chief at Roseau River.

⁴ Op. cit.



Sheeseepace (Little Duck) and Kichiunishenaubay (Big Indian)
State Historical Society of North Dakota No. A 57

“Bataille des la Rivière Outardes” (Goose River)

On the north side of the Goose River where the old Walhalla Trail crosses it, about 20 miles from the Red River, on a flat there are many poles in the ground (sandy) showing where the women dug holes to protect the Half-Breeds and Chippewas. They were in a hunting party for buffalo, led by Parenteau. The Sioux stampeded their horses and the hunters fought from their corral. After a while they sent to Pembina for more horses to get their carts and meat back home. There were three brothers, mostly French there, and one of them, Pierre Haller (Vallée), rode after the Sioux and got back some of the horses.⁵ Jules Valle was killed. The Sioux had bows and arrows only.

An interview at Minot, August 9, 1938 with Louis Gourneau gives additional detail:

With reference to that Sioux attack upon a party of hunters on the north side of the Goose River at Caledonia, he said his father was there (Joseph Gourneau) and that

⁵ Libby Papers, A85, pg. 79, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks.

the expedition was not led by Parenteau. In the party were such well-known men as Gabriel Dumont, Jean Wilkie, Peter Cadotte, Henri Poitras and Pierre Bargee (Berger). Black Cloud was the Chippewa Chief and the Sioux Chiefs were Wanata (Charger) and Mato Wakan (Medicine or Holy Bear). The Sioux stampeded their horses and they had to send to Pembina for more in order to get their carts loaded with pemmican and get the meat back home. Jules Valles (Vallée) was killed here. Pierre Valles (Vallée) rode after the Sioux and recaptured some of the horses.⁶

The biography of Gabriel Lafournaire (1816-1910) a HBC employee and buffalo hunter indicates that he was also present at this battle. In 1873-74, Lafournaire was a sub-leader of the 49th Rangers, the Metis Scouts with the Boundary Commission survey.



Medicine (Holy) Bear

⁶ Op. cit. pg. 150.