



# SAGA OF CHIEF JOSEPH

Helen Addison Howard

SAGA of CHIEF  
JOSEPH



*Oil painting by Rowena Lung Alcorn*

Chief Joseph, the Nez Perce

---

# *Saga of Chief* **JOSEPH**

*By*  
**Helen Addison Howard**

MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
**GEORGE D. McGRATH**



**UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS**  
LINCOLN AND LONDON

---

COPYRIGHT 1941 BY  
THE CAXTON PRINTERS, LTD.  
CALDWELL, IDAHO

© 1965 BY  
THE CAXTON PRINTERS, LTD.  
CALDWELL, IDAHO

*First Bison Book printing: 1978*

Most recent printing indicated by first digit below:

4    5    6    7    8    9    10

### **Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data**

Howard, Helen Addison.  
Saga of Chief Joseph.

Reprint of the 1971 ed. published by Caxton Printers, Caldwell, Idaho;  
first published in 1941 under title: War Chief Joseph.

Bibliography: p. 381

1. Joseph, Nez Percé chief, 1840-1904. 2. Nez Percé Indians—Wars,  
1877. 3. Nez Percé Indians—Biography. I. Title.  
[E99.N5J584 1978] 970'.004'97 [B] 78-16138  
ISBN 0-8032-7202-2

Reprinted by arrangement with The Caxton Printers, Ltd.  
Manufactured in the United States of America

TO THE ORIGINAL AMERICANS—  
THE RED INDIANS OF NORTH AMERICA



---

---

## Acknowledgments

THE AUTHOR gratefully wishes to acknowledge the help and cooperation of the many people who so willingly and generously aided her in obtaining source material for this biography. She is especially indebted to the late Dan L. McGrath who assisted her in the original research in 1933-34 for WAR CHIEF JOSEPH; to the late William Andrews Clark, Jr., whose splendid collection of Americana made it possible to study the subject thoroughly; and to Dr. Clifford M. Drury for his constructive criticism.

Among those to whom special credit is due are: Mrs. Rowena Lung Alcorn, the well-known artist of Tacoma, Washington, for permission to reproduce her fine oil portrait of Chief Joseph; and to the following who assisted in the preparation of the original volume during the 1930's: Chief James Allicott, Umatilla Reservation; Mr. Omar Babcock, superintendent of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Pendleton, Oregon; Mr. Jean Baptiste, Flathead Indian Reservation, Arlee, Montana; Mr. Joseph Blackeagle, Nez Perce Reservation, Lapwai, Idaho; Martin L. Brown, Missoula, Montana; Mr. John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Washington, D.C.; Mr. John Connolly, Long Beach, California; the late Mr. Bernard DeVoto; Mr. George W. Fuller, former librarian, Public Library, Spokane, Washington; Dr. Garland Greever, Professor of English, University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Mr. J. H. Horner, Enterprise, Oregon; Judge William I. Lippincott, Butte, Montana; Mr. George D. McGrath, Columbia Studio, Hollywood, California; the late Dr. Edmond S. Meany, Professor of History, University of Washington, Seattle; Dr. Harold



G. Merriam, chairman of the English Department, University of Montana, Missoula; Miss Cora Sanders, librarian, Clark Memorial Library, Los Angeles; Chief Nipo Strongheart of the Yakima tribe, Hollywood, California; Mrs. Adeline Stumph, Los Angeles; Mr. Samuel Tilden, Flathead Indian Reservation, Arlee, Montana; Mr. W. Joseph Williams, Umatilla Reservation, Pendleton, Oregon; the staffs of the public libraries of Los Angeles, California; Portland, Oregon; and Spokane, Washington; Mrs. Esther Hanifen, former assistant librarian, Idaho State Historical Library, Boise, Idaho; the staff of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California; Clark Memorial Library, and to the Library of the University of California at Los Angeles. The author also wishes to express her gratitude to Mrs. Charlotte Tufts, Western Americana Librarian, Public Library, Burbank, California, for recent assistance in supplying additional materials.

---

---

## Foreword

ONE of the most romantic and important figures in the history of the Pacific Northwest is Chief Joseph, the reluctant but highly effective leader of the Nez Perce uprising of 1877. He has been called the "Indian Napoleon." Endowed with unusual abilities, well informed in Indian lore, gifted with a forceful physique and a magnetic personality, Chief Joseph was by nature destined to be the leader of his people in their futile struggle against the encroachments of the whites.

The tragic and dramatic story of Chief Joseph has never been told in its fullness. Many have written about him, dwelling upon some particular episode in his eventful life. He has been the subject of several magazine articles, and he moves across the pages of many a book on Northwest history. A few have endeavored to set forth his story in more completeness, but such works have been open to the criticism of inaccuracy and partiality. Now for the first time serious-minded and well-trained students have set themselves to the task of telling a story that needs to be told.

Mr. Dan McGrath, whose parents were witnesses of some of the stirring events of those times, assisted in the assembling of the necessary historical data. Miss Helen Addison Howard, also a native of the Northwest and a historian in her own right, began this project several years ago. She has added new material to the work of her collaborator and has done the final writing of the original manuscript. Deliberately and conscientiously, the author has sought to tell the story of Chief Joseph with strict historical accuracy and in all of its details.

Every known source bearing upon this episode has been examined. Old-timers whose memories go back to those stirring days have been interviewed. With literary skill Miss Howard has woven a multitude of widely scattered facts into an absorbing story.

While this book will no doubt stand for years as the authoritative life of Chief Joseph, at the same time it will have a fascination for those who are not historically minded. Let the reader get but a few pages into this book and, if he has any compassion in his heart for the mistreated red men, or any interest in a dramatic story, he will be loath to lay the book aside until he has read the full account. No novelist could ever have conceived such a tale. This book gives proof to the old adage that truth is sometimes stranger than fiction.

CLIFFORD M. DRURY,  
*San Anselmo, Calif.*



# Contents

	<i>Page</i>
PROLOGUE .....	15
 <b>PART I—EARLY HISTORY</b>	
<i>Chapter</i>	
I. THE VALLEY OF WINDING WATERS .....	21
II. THE COMING OF THE MISSIONARIES .....	31
III. THUNDER-ROLLING-IN-THE-MOUNTAINS .....	37
 <b>PART II—TREATY HISTORY</b>	
IV. THE COUNCIL SMOKE OF 1855 .....	45
V. WAR IN THE COLUMBIA BASIN—1856-58 .....	58
VI. THE TREATY OF 1863 .....	72
VII. THE TAH-MAH-NE-WES BECKONS .....	84
VIII. THE EARTH-MOTHER DRINKS BLOOD .....	98
IX. THE COUNCIL AT FORT LAPWAI—1877 .....	119
X. CHIEF WHITE BIRD'S MURDERS .....	134
 <b>PART III—THE MILITARY CAMPAIGN OF 1877</b>	
XI. THE SETTLERS PREPARE FOR WAR .....	151
XII. THE BATTLE OF WHITE BIRD CANYON .....	162
XIII. THE SKIRMISH AT COTTONWOOD .....	179
XIV. THE BATTLE OF THE CLEARWATER .....	196
XV. THE MARCH OVER THE LOLO TRAIL .....	213

XVI. THE AFFAIR AT "FORT FIZZLE" .....	229
XVII. THE BATTLE OF THE BIG HOLE .....	239
XVIII. THE CAMAS MEADOWS RAID .....	261
XIX. THE ATTACK ON THE COWAN AND WEIKERT PARTIES .....	273
XX. THE BATTLE OF CANYON CREEK .....	293
XXI. THE SKIRMISH AT COW ISLAND .....	308
XXII. BATTLE OF THE BEARPAW MOUNTAINS .....	314
XXIII. JOSEPH'S SURRENDER .....	327

#### PART IV—LATER HISTORY

XXIV. PRISONERS OF WAR .....	339
XXV. "SOMEBODY HAS GOT OUR HORSES" .....	342
XXVI. RETURN FROM EXILE .....	354
XXVII. THE TRAIL TO THE SETTING SUN .....	359

#### APPENDICES:

GENEALOGY CHART .....	375
SIDELIGHTS .....	377
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	381
INDEX .....	391



## Illustrations

Chief Joseph, the Nez Perce .....	frontispiece
	<i>facing page</i>
Monument to Tu-eka-kas, Chief Joseph's father .....	88
Major General O. O. Howard .....	116
Chief Joseph .....	152
Map of the Nez Perce country in 1877 .....	153
Alokut, Joseph's brother, killed in Bearpaw battle .....	166
Retreat of the Nez Perces through Montana .....	228
A hand-to-hand encounter in battle of Big Hole .....	248
Big Hole battlefield, looking north .....	249
In the face of Joseph were registered courage, etc. ....	280
Eastward march of Chief Joseph and his Indians .....	310
"He flung out his arm to its full length" .....	332
Escape of Chief White Bird .....	333
Joseph at Lapwai in 1895 .....	354
Monument at the grave of Chief Joseph .....	366
Joseph's monument at Nespelem, Washington .....	367



---

---

## Prologue

THIS is the biography of Hin-mut-too-yah-lat-kekht, known to the whites as Young Joseph, Nez Perce chief, diplomat, and warrior. His story is the tragic and epic struggle of the American Indians who were relentlessly, fraudulently, and treacherously dispossessed of their hunting, fishing, and grazing grounds to satisfy the white man's greed for more land. The conflict in which Joseph was forced to engage against the whites, known as the Nez Perce War of 1877, was the last important contest between the Indians and the United States Army. Dr. Cyrus T. Brady has called Joseph's struggle "the story of the bitterest injustice toward a weak but independent people to which the United States ever set its hand."<sup>1</sup> Buffalo Bill also put the matter succinctly when he said: "They [the Indians] never broke a treaty, and we never kept one."

Joseph, it has been stated by earlier writers, conducted the most scientific campaign against the United States Army ever generated by an Indian. No one knew better than he the tremendous odds against him, yet, for the freedom of his people, he fought with a puny force of never more than three hundred warriors against superior forces of a mighty nation of millions. He stood up in battle array against veteran troops, fresh from the victory of Appomattox, who were considered the "greatest soldiers in the world." He has been called the "Red Napoleon of the West," and his march toward Canada has been likened to Xenophon's March of the Ten Thousand.

However, more recent available data based on the

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Cyrus T. Brady, *Northwestern Fights and Fighters*, p. 3.



Indian testimony so painstakingly collected over a period of thirty-six years by the late L. V. McWhorter and published in his *Hear Me, My Chiefs!* caused him to conclude that "Chief Joseph was not a military genius," or was he the "war chief" during the retreat, although he did fight as a warrior. Indians were individualists; they recognized no supreme head chieftain. Thus, Nez Perce tribal organization precluded this rank. Unlike the chain of command in the white man's military organization, they had no commander in chief serving continuously throughout the campaign. Chief Looking Glass, though, along with Poker Joe (Lean Elk), did act as a war leader during much of the march. On the other hand, Joseph, according to McWhorter's two dozen sources, was the camp guardian during the war, protector of the women and children and old men. His was a "sacred trust," in McWhorter's words. In the battles Joseph fought only in self-defense when the families of the five warring bands were hard pressed by the soldiers.

But few men in the world's history have fought for the cause of liberty on both the diplomatic and military fronts as long as this Nez Perce chief. For thirty-three years—from 1871 until 1904—Chief Joseph carried the burdens of his people and used every resource to win what he believed to be justice for his tribe. He tried every kind of peaceful means to gain his ends. Like Ghandi, he pursued a policy of noncooperation, and when this failed, he unwillingly sought recourse to arms.

His valiant efforts, unparalleled in the Indian annals of America, gained for him an immortal place among the heroes of the West. Far more remarkable, however, was the chief's strict adherence to the white man's civilized code of war. The evidence shows that all the atrocities committed against civilians were perpetrated by White Bird's band before Joseph reluctantly cast his lot with the hostiles.

His character fulfilled the fondest desires of novelists who would depict the "noble red man." Colonel G. O. Shields, who knew Joseph, rated him as "easily the peer