

Attack at the Washita

Colleen Cometsevah (From Oklahoma Historical Society transcripts by Mary Jane Warde)

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT:

"...But when the shooting started, she said her father stuck his head in their tepee and told his wife, "Mosaio, get the children up and ready and run down to the other camps...And she said, "We took out, started running with the rest of the women." She said it was just mass confusion; you couldn't hear anything, anybody. She said the women and children were screaming and crying and the shooting and the soldiers on horseback were just riding every which way. And the men were shouting to each other, and everybody was just running..."

FULL TRANSCRIPT:

"My ancestors-this story was related to me and my siblings from the time we were small. She was-she told us she was the daughter of Black Kettle and that her mother's name was Mosaio which is Sioux, a branch of the Sioux. And she, the Sioux were with a group called Watapio. And they joined up with the Cheyennes and at some later date they left them. But they were also called Sutaio, and she told us that. Black Kettle was a Sutai and her mother was a member of the Watapio, that her name was Mosaio. Anyway, at the Washita site, she said they had a separate tent, a separate tepee from Black Kettle and his wife. I believe her name was Woman Later. And her, her name, Cheyenne name is Ahnstashua is her name. And my grandmother used to call my mother that once in awhile. She'd say, "Ahnstashua", you know. "You're just like her," you know. So that's how come I knew that name. But when the shooting started, she said her father stuck his head in their tepee and told his wife, "Mosaio, get the children up and ready and run down to the other camps." And my great-grandmother, she jumped up, put her moccasins on real quick and grabbed her back packs. And she said her little sister did the same. I asked her, I said, "How old was your little sister?" She said, "Oh, about five or six." And I said, "How old were you?" She said, "I must have been eight or nine." And I said "What about your little brother?" And she said her brother was just learning to walk," she said,"not quite two years old." And she said,"We took out, started running with the rest of the women." She said it was just mass confusion; you couldn't hear anything, anybody. She said the women and children were screaming and crying and the shooting and the soldiers on horseback were just riding every which way. And the men were shouting to each other, and everybody was just running. "And we followed our mother," she said. "I was holding my sister by the hand, but just before we got to the banks of the river," she said, "I heard my mother call my name, which was Amithneh. She says, "As I turned around I saw my little brother just tumbling head over heels. And it knocked the wind out of him, and my little sister ran to pick him up. As I ran to my mother and tried to raise her up. I just lifted one arm, and I

could see her eyes were already glassy. And she said take care of your brother and sister. Run down with the rest of the women." And she said, "Don't look back." So she said, "I started to cry-she told me-she said- "My mother told me, Don't cry. Go! Go and do what I tell you." And she said, "I had to leave her and take my brother by the hand." She said he couldn't run so we had him by one hand each and he was just dangling between the two of us. She said we ran down to the bank. She said, "I looked back to my mother and she had her face on the ground. She -I knew she was dead. She was shot in the back. She said," I don't know how they missed the baby, but I guess that he was situated in such a way that it went- the shot must have gone between his legs. Anyway she said, "I saw two soldiers on horseback. They were chasing a pregnant woman, and they shot her. As she fell, one of them jumped off his horse and sliced her stomach and he held up that unborn baby on his saber. And they were laughing. She said," I ran on down and jumped in the water." She said you could hear the thin sheet of ice cracking as people were jumping in. She said there were some other women with them and she said we were wading in water up to her thighs. And she said her little brother- she was carrying her little brother. She said as we were going down the river, the water- she said, "I looked up. There were three men on the bank. They were shooting and fighting to keep the soldiers away from the people. They were going along fighting, she said. One of them got shot, and this second person ran back and picked up his pistol and she said, "I seen that he had just bow and arrow. And when we got down a little further, they told us to get out because it was too deep there. And we got out. They were fighting- those two men were fighting the soldiers as best they could. Then the rest of this picture that I picture in my mind is from my paternal grandfather's story. I have it- he wrote the account that his mother told him. ...He said his mother and father were camped-that would be his grandfather and grandmother were camped somewhere close to the Cheyenne camp. He said when they heard that shooting start, he said his grandfather's name was Cut Arm or Walks Different. Well, he said, "My grandfather got everybody up, that he stirred the fire up to give them light. He said, "My mother was fifteen years old at that time, and her name was Little Woman Curious Horn. And she had a sister named White Buffalo Woman. And then their three brothers were named Standing Bird, Bird Chief, and Red Bird. Well, their father got them up and out. He threw the two girls on a horse apiece. He said they used to tie their best horses around the teepee so they wouldn't wander far. He said he put the girls on their horse apiece and their mother on another. And he said he took out his whip and just whipped those horses and told them to keep going and don't come back, or don't stop. Go down to the other camp. And then he and his three sons got on their horses and they went down to help Black Kettle. And he said the youngest one was shot through the stomach, and he fell off his horse and the father, Walks Different, he jumped off his horse and he gathered up his son in his arms and his son told him, "Keep my horse." And he said, "No, he's going with you." And he kissed him on the cheek and he died right there. And so the father shot that horse, his horse. And that's what my paternal grandfather told us and me what my great-grandmother when she talked about those getting out of the water she said those warriors from the other camp came riding up about that time and they started firing on those soldiers. It was Major

Elliott's men, and my grandfather said if they had stayed on their horses they would have had a better chance but they jumped off their horses and started crawling in the tall weeds and sunflowers. And one of them came up and seen what was taking place and he made signs to the rest of 'em and they got off and they started killing them one by one. And that is what I was told about the massacre at the Washita. That was from my maternal and my paternal side.