Jim Savage, The Mariposa Indian War, and The Discovery of Yosemite Valley

By Dan Carrion

To fully understand the Mariposa Indian War, we need to look at the circumstances that occurred in the area during the months before the Winter of 1850-51. First, we must recall that Mariposa County was huge at the time. California had just become a state in 1850, and Mariposa County was one of the original counties created at statehood. It was the largest county at the time, covering all of present day Merced, Madera, Fresno, Tulare, Kings, and Kern counties, and parts of San Benito, Inyo, San Bernardino, and Los Angeles counties. The county contained about ¼ of California. The county seat was at Agua Fria, located along Agua Fria Road between today's Mt Bullion and Highway 140.

By 1850, the hills were crawling with miners, who were panning every creek and gulch they could find. This didn't sit well with the local native tribes, many of whom felt that the miners were encroaching on their territories. Trading posts and mining camps had been established in several locations throughout the hills, and soon these became targets for vengeful natives.

One trader, a man named Jim Savage, was actively mining and trading with anyone who would happen by. By 1849-50, he had trading posts on the South Fork of the Merced River and at Agua Fria. Later, he would establish several other posts, in several other locations further south. When his post on the South Fork of the Merced was attacked by Yosemite Indians, Savage and his workers attempted to drive them off. The Yosemites were felt to be dangerous and treacherous by the miners, but they were mostly interested in plunder, or so everyone thought.

Born in Indianapolis in 1823, Savage's family soon moved to Illinois. While a teenager, he lived with the Sac and Fox Indians, learned French, German, and Spanish, along with five Indian languages and was on good terms with the local tribes. Savage was blonde, very large physically, good looking, intelligent, and had a way with people. In 1846 he and his wife Eliza joined the Boggs wagon train going to California. They would soon merge with the Donner

Party and would follow them into the Hastings Cutoff which promised a 200 mile short cut. The only problem was that it didn't really exist as a wagon road. The Donner Party turned back to go through Fort Hall, costing them precious time. Savage's party continued forward and forged a road in 4 days' time. Ultimately the party would get sick with fever. Savage lost his wife Eliza to illness and buried her near the Truckee River. He left the wagon train and continued alone to Sutter's Fort on horseback.

He joined Company F of John C Fremont's California Battalion during the Mexican War and acquitted himself well as a fighter and mountain man. He made many friends that would cross his path again in the next few years. He worked for John Sutter when he was building his sawmill at Coloma, where James Marshall later discovered gold in the races. Savage left Sutter's Fort after some Indian friends told him stories of a great valley to the south, The Valley of the Tulares. There were very few white men in the valley at that time and the area was beautiful, wild, and primitive.

As a trader, Savage was a man well suited to his business. He became friends with nearly every central California Native tribe, learned their languages, and even married several of the daughters of the chiefs of those tribes, thereby cementing friendship and cordial relations with them. He often travelled with at least five of his native wives.

He became something of a legend in his own time, because he was able to prove to the natives that he was superior to them through feats of strength, athletic contests, and through plain old trickery. The natives felt he was sent to them by the Great Spirit, and they both respected him and feared him. In time, he employed native workers in his mining operations. The Indians would bring him gold from rivers and streams and he would trade them for supplies and trinkets. These Indian miners were among the men who helped him fight off the Yosemites when they attacked his trading post at South Fork of the Merced River. He made huge profits from his businesses, and he would often travel to Stockton and San Francisco to deposit his money and buy new supplies. In time, Savage was known as the "King of the Tulares," a title indicating that he was an important chief and could be trusted.

Understanding the danger inherent with their presence in the area, Savage felt that he should leave the South Fork of the Merced and build a new trading post somewhere further south. He moved to a location on Mariposa Creek, near where it is joined by the Agua Fria Creek and built a trading post there, which would become his headquarters, so to speak. He also chose another site where Spangle Gold Creek joined the Fresno River. He built this trading post near what is now known as Fresno Crossing and placed it in the charge of a man named Greeley. Once again, his businesses thrived, and he made great profit.

As the Indians became more and more agitated one of Savage's wives informed him of a plan maturing among the Indians to kill, or at least drive off, the white "gold diggers," and plunder their mining camps and trading posts. Savage sent word to the miner's camps to be prepared for attacks. Savage tried to convince the Indians that their efforts to repel the white "gold diggers" would be futile. In an effort to demonstrate his point, he took a few of his wives and a very powerful chief (Jose Juarez) to San Francisco for the October 29,1850 celebration of California's statehood. He wanted to show the Indians the power and diversity of the white people. He wanted them to understand that there were many more white people coming and that they would be unstoppable. What Savage didn't know was that Jose Juarez was one of the chief proponents of the war that was being planned.

There was a huge parade, and the Indians were awed by what they saw. So many white people in one place! They appeared invincible, with so much equipment and technology. Jose Juarez spent most of his time in San Francisco stupid drunk. Or so it appeared. At one point, the drunken Indian was annoying Savage terribly with his drunkenness. Savage was tired of it all and dressed down the drunken Indian in emphatic terms. The chief then became agitated and yelled at Savage and told him of the secret plan to wage war on the miners. Savage lost his composure, lashed out, and punched the Indian chief, knocking him to the ground. The Indian appeared to sober up rather quickly, but to the other Indians in the party, this was a terrible insult. How could their friend possibly allow himself to attack such an important chief? It was unheard of and it would ultimately drive a wedge between Savage and the Indians.

Upon their return to Mariposa County, at Quartzberg, Savage learned that the Kaweah Indians had begun charging white people money to pass through their territory. When he arrived in Mariposa, he learned that a man had been killed by Indians not far from his Agua Fria post. Savage heard more rumors that the Indians were planning more attacks, and that they wanted to declare war on the “gold diggers.”

When he arrived at his post on the Fresno River, his worker, Mr. Greeley reported that many Indians had been hanging around for days, but not doing any trading, which was odd. Savage gathered the Indians together for an impromptu meeting. He explained that if they were planning to go to war with the white people, they would surely all be killed. He pleaded with them to live peacefully and not start a war with the white miners. If they started a war, more white people would come from the city, “more numerous than the wasps and the ants” and they would join the miners in pushing the Indians out or killing them all. He asked Jose Juarez to speak to the group and explain the power that he had seen during the statehood celebration parade.

The chief stood up and said that he had seen many things in the city, but these people were not of the same tribe as the “gold diggers,” and he felt that they would NOT come and help the miners if the Indians attacked them. He felt that if all the local tribes would band together, they could easily defeat the “gold diggers,” and drive them away forever. Obviously, this was exactly the opposite of what Savage had in mind.

Savage quickly rose up and explained that the chief had greatly misinterpreted the white people. They ARE all one tribe, and they would surely come to the aid of their brothers in the hills, he tried to explain. But another chief, Jose Rey, chief of the Chowchillas, stood up and said that Savage was speaking with a crooked, forked tongue, and that Jose Juarez was correct. All the tribes should join together and fight the white people until they were pushed out of Indian territory. If the white people later came looking for them, they could hide in the mountains and the white people would never find them.

Unfortunately, the mountain men and miners of the area discounted Savage’s reports of his experiences with the Indians. They thought that this was just a dust up between Savage and the Indians, so no attention was paid to Savage’s warnings of impending doom.

The miners felt that the Indians were no threat to them. Mr. Cassady, who operated Cassady's Bar, a mining operation on the San Joaquin River, (near the present-day site of Temperance Flat) completely rejected Savage's warmings and took no precautions whatsoever.

But soon enough, it would be clear that Savage was correct. Reports began coming in that Savage's post on the Fresno River had been attacked by Chowchilla and Yosemite Indians. They plundered the post, and everyone connected with it was killed, including Mr. Greeley. Only one man lived to tell the tale because he had been warned of the attack at the last second by a friendly Indian. Then came more reports that Savage's post on near Agua Fria had been attacked, plundered, burned, and everyone killed. Some of Savage's wives who lived there had been carried off by their people. Soon, more reports arrived from the San Joaquin River. Cassady's Bar had been attacked and Cassady and four others had been killed, Cassady was left dead with his legs cut off and his tongue removed.

Yet another report came from a man named Frank Boden from Four Creeks (near the Visalia area). His party had stopped at Four Creeks to rest their horses when a band of Kaweah Indians demanded payment for their passage. Unfortunately, the immigrants didn't believe the serious nature of this demand and gave the Indians a bit of tobacco for payment. The Indians left grumbling, but soon returned. Boden had left to follow some antelopes he saw nearby, but soon heard rifle and gun fire. Upon his return he found the house where they had been resting was surrounded by screaming Indians. The four men inside were valiantly trying to defend themselves, but the obvious outcome was never in doubt, and all were killed. The Indians spied Boden in the distance, and fired arrows at him. He beat a hasty retreat, but not before an arrow had pierced his arm, causing it to go numb, broken, and forever damaged. He managed to get one rifle shot off at the Indians, finding one of them squarely and killing him instantly. This caused the others to come after him, but his horse understood the nature of their predicament and ran as fast as it could from the scene, with Boden barely able to hang on. Ultimately, Dr Lewis Leach, who had just arrived in California from St Louis, Mo., amputated that destroyed arm. Leach would later become one of Savage's closest friends, and a partner in one or more of Savage's trading posts.

Finally, the fledgling government of California would have to do something. Indian raids on mining operations were becoming very frequent, and local residents began writing letters to the Governor, John McDougal. But before any kind of official response could occur, a militia of 74 men (mostly miners and local merchants) headed into the mountains and followed the Indians. This party was captained by Sheriff James Burney of Mariposa, with J W Riley and E. Skeane as his lieutenants. Jim Savage was also part of the group. The Indians knew the militia was coming, and they began a retreat. The Indians knew the mountains well, and the militia, with only 8 days provisions and lacking a sufficient number of pack animals and volunteers, was flummoxed by the dense forests, trees, and brush.

The party finally managed to catch up with the Indians on a mountain high up the Fresno River. It is unclear exactly where this mountain is. On January 11, 1851 there was a skirmish there, where Lt. Skeane was mortally wounded, William Little was shot through the lungs but would ultimately survive, and several others were wounded. Of the Indians, it appeared that forty or fifty were killed or wounded. The Indians appeared to focus their energy on the location of Jim Savage, targeting him more than anyone else. The Indians were furious at Savage because he had not led them against the whites, as they felt a true chief of the Tulares would have done. They also knew that the white men would never be able to follow them into the mountains without having Savage as their guide.

The fledgling militia was very unsatisfied with the outcome of this brawl. They felt it should have gone better for them. But the Indians had the advantage. They had local knowledge, and they easily could disappear into the forests. Which they did. Nevertheless, the white men managed to burn 100 Indian homes several tons of dried horse and mule meat, and all the rest of the natives' stores of food.

The wounded were taken to the Fresno Flats area (Oakhurst) where Lt. Skeane died and was buried. They began to build a log fort there, and half the party remained there. The rest returned to Agua Fria, about fifty miles away, to obtain more supplies and reinforcements, if possible.

While waiting for reinforcements, the men who stayed at the log fort followed the Indians to the north fork of the San Joaquin River where they found the Indians camped on a rugged hill covered with

“dense undergrowth, digger pines, and oaks.” This would come to be known as “Battle Mountain” and it would appear to be in the Nelder Grove area around Sivels Mountain. Or, perhaps it is Fresno Dome, which actually sends water down into the Merced, Fresno, and San Joaquin Rivers, as is described by some eyewitnesses of the location. According to eyewitnesses, the Indians camped there seemed to be from the Chukchansi, Chowchilla, Nootchu, Holmachee, Potoencie, Pohonochee, Kaweah, and Yosemite tribes. The leaders of these warriors were none other than Jose Juarez and Jose Rey. Estimates are that they had about 500 warriors at their command. The area where they camped was an old Indian village

While the Indians were camped, the volunteers casually arrived in the neighborhood. The Indians, protected by rocks and trees, yelled out to the white men, taunting them of their cowardice and their recent defeat. Bragging about the robberies and murders they had committed, they yelled for Savage to show himself and be killed. Savage and Sheriff Burney had gone to Agua Fria for reinforcements. But on January 15,1851 the reinforcements arrived with Savage acting as guide, leading Captain John Boling and new volunteers headed by Lieutenants John Kuykendahl and Reuben Chandler. The total was now around 100 volunteers. Sheriff Burney had taken a smaller force to the Four Creeks area to attend to agitation in that area.

Savage was livid at the taunting, ready to attack full force. But Captain John Boling, providing good sense, insisted that they wait. Savage’s knowledge of the Indians couldn’t be wasted on such an obvious enticement. But on January 18, Savage would command a quick daybreak attack which wounded Jose Rey (who was also known by his English name King Joseph) and killed about twenty other warriors. The daybreak assault scenario was one held over from the Mexican War and was very effective. The village was set on fire while the Indians were barely aware of the volunteer’s presence. The whole affair was over very quickly. Savage and Boling, who were holding their men in reserve, were never put to use. Kuykendahl and Chandler attacked so rapidly and so effectively that the reserves just weren’t needed. The Indians scattered in confusion and haste, and the volunteers decided that further pursuit would be ineffective. However, the fires which were set to destroy the old Indian village raced downhill and nearly destroyed the volunteer’s camp. The volunteers returned to Agua Fria on January 20, with no volunteer deaths and

only minor bruises and burns suffered from the skirmish at what Dr Lafayette Bunnell called “Battle Mountain.”

After the return to Agua Fria, it was only a matter of a few days before Governor McDougall would issue a proclamation calling for volunteers to prevent further outrages and to punish the marauders. The Mariposa Battalion was mustered into existence on January 24,1851 with newly appointed “Major” James Savage as its leader. Another battalion would patrol the Los Angeles area. Two hundred mounted men would ride with the Mariposa Battalion. These men came from all walks of life … former soldiers, former Texas Rangers, miners, merchants, doctors, and recent immigrants from the east. Supplies and pack trains would be furnished by the state, but the expenses were at the control of the federal Indian Commissioners, specifically Adam Johnston who had gone with the first party of volunteers into the mountains. Captains John Kuykendahl, John Boling, and William Dill would be in charge of companies A, B, and C respectively. Savage set out for the San Joaquin River where he brought in new recruits from Cassady’s Bar. Living in the Mariposa area were several former Texas Rangers, who would also join the battalion. According to Dr. Lafayette Bunnel, the Rangers were simply amazing in the saddle, and there was nothing they couldn’t do from their perch. But, out of the saddle on foot they were nearly useless on a mountain trail.

Chief Tenaya of the Yosemite tribe had been somewhat placated by the removal of Savage’s trading post on the Merced River. He was pleased that the attack performed by his warriors had driven the miners away from his territory. He temporarily seemed content to simply steal the odd horse or clothing, but there was still fear that a larger scale attack or even a war was on the horizon. After Battle Mountain, many of the valley Indians had left their homes and had taken their families into the mountains, a sure sign that war was coming.

The Mariposa Battalion formally reported for duty at a camp about two miles below Agua Fria on February 10, 1851. Soon the Commissioners arrived and explained that a policy had been established that would require the Mariposa Battalion to treat the Indians with moderation and humanity. The Commissioners had wanted to avoid armed conflict. They felt the Indians weren’t entirely responsible for their actions against the white miners and settlers.

This didn't sit well with the volunteers, some of whom had lost relatives, friends, cattle, horses, and other possessions in Indian attacks. But the Commissioners understood that the white settlers had been encroaching on Indian lands for several years, and the reaction of the Indians was understandable, if not defensible.

At this point, the commissioners sent out friendly "Mission Indians" to each of the tribes in the areas. These "Mission Indians" would tell the tribes that the commissioners had been directed by the President of the United States to make peace between the tribes and the settlers and miners. The "Mission Indians" were members of various tribes who had been taught by Spanish padres in the old mission system to follow Catholic beliefs. They spoke fluent Spanish along with many Indian languages and had not participated in any of the aggression against the miners. But they still weren't fully trusted.

At the behest of the Mission Indians, some Indian leaders ventured into camp to speak with the Commissioners. They were wary at first, fearing that they would be punished. But the Commissioners handed out presents and gave assurances that all Indians who came in and made peace would be provided with food and clothing and other useful items. Of the Indians who came in, two proved very useful in negotiating with the other tribes. "Vowchester," a chief of one of the peaceful tribes, and "Russio," a Mission Indian from the Tuolumne tribe were friendly and were very effective in translating and promoting peace. Another, "Sandino," was less competent and often gave bad information.

Vowchester and Russio promised to bring in their tribes and make peace. They were rewarded with presents for their cessation of hostilities. But the hitch in the whole deal was that the mountain tribes refused listen to peace terms if it meant that they would have to give up their territory. Jose Rey's tribe, for example, was very angry that their chief had been so badly wounded at Battle Mountain (he had been thought dead by the battalion up to that moment).

Chief Tenaya's people, who lived in a deep mystical valley up the Merced River, according to Russio, did not wish for peace. They felt that the white man cannot find them in their special valley hiding places in the rocks, and therefore they cannot be driven out of their valley. According to Vowchester, "One Indian in this valley is more than ten white men. The hiding places are many. They will throw rocks

down on the white men if they come near them. Other tribes do not make war on them because they are like the Grizzlies and are as strong. We are afraid to go into this valley, for there are many witches there."

The mention of this mysterious valley aroused the interest of several of the volunteers. When asked about it, Jim Savage said he had never been in the valley proper but had nearly ventured in when his trading post on the South Fork of the Merced was attacked. He followed the reprobates into a deep canyon, but wary of an ambush, decided to stop short of the actual valley. But he presumed to know roughly where it was located. The only white man who had ever actually been close to this valley was Joseph Walker, who stumbled past it while on the Mono Trail. But his Indian guides were very careful to lead him east of the actual valley, so he only saw the upper High Sierra.

No messengers of peace had come in from the mountain tribes, just as Russio and Vowchester had predicted. The mountain Indians continued their depredations, stealing cattle, horses, and mules, some of which were stolen from the very camp of the Mariposa Battalion! However, a camp on the Fresno River would be established as a reservation for the Indians who would come in peacefully. This would also be the Commissioner's headquarters, and it was located at the present-day Adobe Ranch (near Madera on Road 400). Jim Savage would later establish a trading post here, and some of the walls of it are still standing.

Given the fact that the Commissioners were willing to wait for the Indians to come in voluntarily, and the fact that they wanted to avoid bloodshed, no actions of the Mariposa Battalion took place until around March 20. The Battalion was divided into two forces. Savage, with the companies of Boling and Dill (B and C companies) would head north to the San Joaquin and Merced Rivers. Captain Kuykendahl would take Company A to the Kings and Kaweah Rivers. The object would be to bring any Indians they encountered into the reservation on the Fresno River. Savage was counting on the weather, especially snowfall, to hinder the efforts of the Indians in any escape over the high mountains to the east. Unfortunately, rains were hampering the efforts of the battalion as well.

Savage marched the men over Chowchilla Mountain, which was then called “Black Ridge,” somewhere around March 23. They met snow near the top, and their Indian guide, “Bob,” lead them over the top. They travelled at night and it was very dark. Often the men would hear one of their comrades mutter expletives as his horse stumbled in the darkness, or worse, threw the rider off as it stepped in a hole. Finally reaching Wawona, Major Savage declared that the Indian village was less than a mile away down the South Fork of the Merced, and he asked for volunteers to go with him. They might be in for a battle, or maybe not. Time would tell the tale. Even though they were exhausted from the night march, in minutes Savage soon had enough men for the task.

The men followed Savage along the South Fork of the Merced, traveling along the left bank to avoid detection by the Indians. The Indian village would be coming up soon. They stealthily marched down the river, stopping very near the village. They formed a tight military skirmish line and walked directly into the village. The Indians were taken by surprise and began running to and fro without much purpose. Finally, they threw up their hands in surrender.

As it turns out, this was a Nootchu village, with Ponwatchee as the chief. He and Savage had been friends previously, Savage having taken one of the tribe’s women as his wife. Ponwatchee’s brother Cowchity had been the supervisor of the Indians that mined the Merced River for Savage. Within a short time, the Indians agreed to leave, go to the reservation, and packed their belongings. The Indians themselves set their village on fire as they left, proving that they meant to stay on the reservation.

Chief Ponwatchee had dispatched messengers to the next Indian camp along the river, a camp of Pohonochees. Soon, they, too arrived in camp, ready to surrender. But Ponwatchee was unsure about the intentions of Chief Tenaya. He didn’t feel that his tribe would come in. No Yosemite had responded to the messengers.

The next morning, the camp was surprised when Chief Tenaya himself walked into camp, proudly. He was treated with respect and kindness and fed well. Tenaya and Savage entered into long and protracted discussions. Tenaya stated that his people would not go to the plains. Savage insisted that they must go if they want to survive. Tenaya was afraid of the tribes already there, saying that those tribes

would make war on his people. Savage reminded Tenaya that his people would be destroyed if they stayed in their home. Reluctantly, Tenaya finally agreed to bring his people to the Fresno River Reservation soon, if he was now allowed to return to them. He was allowed to leave.

The next day he was back, saying that his people would soon be in the camp. Another day came and went, no Indians appeared. Tenaya said the valley was deep with snow and that his people were having great difficulty getting their belongs out. Savage decided to go to the village and help the people, but Tenaya said the snow was so deep that the horses would not be able to make their way. He also said that the rocks were so steep the horses would never make their way back out of the valley once they were in it.

Savage asked for volunteers to go to the valley. Everyone in camp volunteered at once. After establishing which men would stay back as camp guard, Savage, with Tenaya guiding him, stepped off with the rest of the company in tow. Between the South Fork and the main Merced, the snow became between three and five feet deep at the upper elevations. But the snow packed easily and left behind a nice trail. Halfway to the village, the Yosemites appeared in the distance, marching toward the battalion's camp. Approximately 72 people of all ages met the battalion. "This is all that would leave," declared Tenaya. "Many of my people come from other tribes, and they have taken their wives and children and gone back to their tribes." The Yosemite Indians were, in fact, not a tribe all unto themselves. They were a band of outcasts and runaways. They represented tribes from all over the area, such as the Tuolumnes, Paiutes, Pohonochees, and the Monos.

Savage wasn't buying Tenaya's story and decided that they should continue into the valley and see the village for themselves. According to Cowchitty and Ponwatchee, the Yosemites had numbered around 200 people. Savage sent Tenaya on to the Fresno River Reservation with the rest of his tribe. But he picked one young Indian to serve as his guide to the village. Once they marched forward, the going got easier, not harder as Tenaya had insisted. In a short time, they entered the valley of the Indians, a most stupendous valley, a meadow surrounded by high cliffs, a swift flowing river in its center, many waterfalls, a huge rock monolith at the front, and a great

half cleaved stone dome in the center. The date was around March 21, 1851.

The valley was called Ahwahnee by Tenaya's people. They called themselves Ahwahnechee. Yosemite was a name chosen by the Ahwahnechees and acknowledged by the other tribes to denote the fierceness of the Ahwahnechee. "Yosemite" roughly translated to Grizzly Bear. While they lived in the mountains and valleys where the Grizzlys lived, they were also legendary among other tribes for their fierceness. But that reputation seemed to be abated now, as Tenaya slowly marched his people toward the Fresno River Reservation to sign the white man's treaty.

Savage and the men found the valley deserted for the most part. There were empty Indian villages near the base of El Capitan, Royal Arches, Cathedral Rocks, and at the base of Half Dome. At all locations, large caches of acorns, pine nuts, seeds, and other foods were also found. The acorns alone were estimated to be between four to six hundred bushels worth. The villages were recently occupied, perhaps even as late as the night before. Everything was put to flame. Burning their food supplies and villages would ensure that the Indians would not be tempted to return to the valley once they were captured.

The men found one old Indian woman, who had been left behind because she was too old and weak to travel such a distance. She spoke but few words to anyone. After concluding their destruction of the Indian food stocks and villages, the men bundled up the old woman, set her on a mule, and attempted to take her back to the Fresno River Reservation. But she was so frail that she died on the way. When later asked about her age, Tenaya said that it was unknown, but that the legend among his people was that when she was a child when the great mountains were but small hills.

Tenaya would also later explain that the Ahwahnechee had once been a large and powerful tribe living in the valley and the territory surrounding it. But wars and diseases (probably small pox and measles) had nearly destroyed it. The survivors abandoned the valley and went to live with the Monos and other tribes. For many years to follow, the area was completely deserted, and no other tribes would venture into the valley for fear of the spirits and witches that lived there. On his father's side, Tenaya was a direct descendant of the original Ahwahnechee tribe, and his mother was a Mono.

Eventually, some of his father's tribe went back into the valley with Tenaya, and they began the new tribe, called the Yosemite. According to Tenaya, some members of the new tribe were members of his father's tribe, while others were the outcasts from tribes in the area, some coming from as far away as present day Nevada.

While camping in the beautiful valley overnight, the men decided that they should name the place. Many names were bandied about, but when it came down to it, an Indian name was felt to be the most appropriate. Since the assembled men didn't know that the Indians actually called themselves Ahwahnechee, they named the place after the Indians and called it "Yosemite." In his book, Dr Lafayette Bunnell takes credit for suggesting that name, and many other names that are now commonplace in the area, such as Tenaya Lake.

Oddly, the Indians in the valley did not keep animals. The only animals found were dogs, and these were meant to serve as a source of food. Horses that had been stolen were stolen purely as a source of food. The bones of horses were found readily around each village.

A few of Captain Dill's men had gone out toward the Little Yosemite Valley, and climbed up to see Vernal and Nevada Falls, becoming the first white men to ever do so. They found no Indians, but due to the thickness of the clouds, determined to head back to the main camp before the weather turned ugly.

Savage was certain that the rest of the Yosemites were hiding somewhere in the valley. The uniqueness of the valley afforded the Indians a plethora of hiding places. Each trail that the men tried to follow was soon lost or disappeared in the thick brush and rock. Rock caves, talus piles, steep canyons, and hidden ledges all gave the advantage to the Indians.

The second night in the valley was colder than the first. The men had been wet from rain and snow during their entire time in the valley, so the huge oak wood fires built that night were a welcome comfort. Since supplies were low, and bad weather was coming, it was decided to leave the valley and head back to the camp on the South Fork the next morning. Very little real exploration was accomplished during this first foray into the "Incomparable Valley." Not many of the men were as awed by the scenery as was Doctor Bunnell, who wrote pages

upon pages describing the beauty of each part of the valley. But there would soon be another opportunity for plenty of exploration.

When they reached the camp at the South Fork, they discovered that they were completely out of food there as well. So, they would now march quickly back to the camp on the Fresno River. They were now travelling with a large number of “captives” from Tenaya’s tribe, who had been waiting for them at the South Fork. Hunters and scouts were sent out each day to procure enough food and supplies as would be needed by the group.

After several days of travel, the men didn’t feel any particular need to post extensive guards on the “captives.” The Indians seemed to be happy and had appeared content in their new lives. One day’s ride away from the Fresno River Reservation several of the volunteers were allowed to ride ahead due to their extreme hunger and exhaustion. This left only Captain Boling and nine men to stay with the “captives.” They would guard and bring the captives to the camp the next day. Ultimately, Captain Boiling and the men would arrive, but not with the captives.

The night before their arrival, Captain Boling had allowed a hunting party consisting of Indians and militia to go out looking for food. One young Indian brought back a deer, on his shoulders. Everyone ate well that night, and the Indians snuggled down for the night’s sleep. The Captain allowed all of his men to sleep, saying that he would guard the captives as he wasn’t sleepy. After making rounds most of the night, he finally decided that the Indians were happy and safe and wouldn’t dare to leave. He took a short nap, and when he awoke, the entire Indian population was gone, except the young man who brought in the deer. This mistake in judgement had probably saved their lives. Had they attempted to stop the Indians from leaving, they surely would have been overpowered by the larger number of warriors. After giving chase, they realized that the Indians had scattered, going in all directions and their trails were lost in the thick brush and forest.

It was soon discovered that, during the night, the Chowchilla Indians had sent secret runners to the “captives” in Boiling’s care, and these runners told the “captives” that they would be killed by the white men once they reached the valley floor, due to their participation in the egregious attacks on the white men. This is what caused the Indians

to stampede away during the night. The Commissioners at once sent Savage with Companies B and C under Boling and Dill to find the Chowchillas and retrieve them. It was felt that no meaningful peace could be created while the Chowchillas were allowed to stir up trouble. The men spent their first night at Coarse Gold Gulch.

The next day found the men marching up a trail that would eventually lead them to a small valley with plentiful grass and water, including a double waterfall at its headend. A creek wandered through the valley, and several of the men thought that this pretty valley would be a good place to come back (once the war was over) and build a ranch. It was early in the day still, but Savage felt that good grass and rest was what was needed. So, they set up camp for the night. While doing so, they spied a group of what appeared to be a flock of Sand Hill Cranes that were startled by the men and suddenly took flight. This became a course of discussion for quite a while, and the valley was then and there dubbed Crane Valley. Of course, Crane Valley is the site of present-day Crane Valley Dam and Bass Lake, a PG&E reservoir. The birds were actually Great Blue Herons which still live there today.

In the morning, Savage received a message from the Commissioners calling him back to discuss a treaty with a group of Kaweah Indians that had just come into the Fresno River Reservation with Captain Kuykendahl. Leaving Sandino as interpreter, Savage schooled Captain Boling on what he wanted done, how to do it, and what to avoid. Savage didn't want to leave, but there would be no remedy. Dr Bunnell, who was already a surgeon for the battalion, was selected to assist in the interpreting duties, since Sandino didn't speak English. Sandino would speak to the Indians, then speak Spanish to Bunnell, who would translate into English.

The group hiked up a branch of the San Joaquin River to very near Battle Mountain. They camped there, and before dark saw the smoke from Indian fires. Early the next morning they rode to the main river, being careful not to startle any Indians who might still be camped there. After crossing the river, they came upon the newly abandoned village of Chief Jose Rey, situated on a beautiful table between the main river and the South Fork. This site had a 360-degree view of everything, so there was no way anyone would ever sneak up on them. They had witnessed the militia crossing the river,

and the Chowchillas beat a hasty retreat. The lodges were ordered destroyed and all acorn caches were fired.

In the village they found the remains of a funeral pyre. Sandino identified the trinkets and possessions as those of Chief Jose Rey, who must have finally died from wounds he suffered on Battle Mountain. His knife was found nearby, and Sandino was practically in tears. The death of Chief Jose Rey would have a drastic negative effect on the Indians.

The men proceeded further and further up the canyon until, at last, it filled with rock and narrowed down to a nearly impossible and impassible width. They decided to turn back, as there was no way the Chowchillas would have come this way. They were upset that the Indians had outwitted them and had eluded capture. They were using fires, and other means, to communicate with each other in ways that the battalion didn't understand.

The men continued to travel the area around the San Joaquin and found themselves on Chowchilla Mountain. There they found several more acorn caches dotted around the area, and they burned them. They were estimated to be somewhere in the neighborhood of eight hundred to one thousand bushels worth. Ultimately, the battalion returned to the Commissioner's camp at the Fresno River Reservation.

There they learned that the new chiefs of the Chowchillas had visited the Kaweah chief and told him that they were nearly starved. As Sandino had predicted, they were despondent over the death of Jose Rey, and had lost their will to continue fighting. A meeting was set between Savage, the Kaweah chief, and the Chowchilla chiefs. A huge feast was held with food provided by the Commissioners. At the end of the feast the Chowchillas and the Kaweahs signed treaties ending their participation in the war.

The next campaign would now begin with its goal to bring in Tenaya and the Yosemites. Captain Kuykendahl's men had performed their duties in an outstanding manner, bringing peace to the region of the Kings and Kaweah Rivers, extending even further south to the Tejon area. Some of Captain Kuykendahl's men would join Companies B and C in pursuit of Tenaya. They would guard the supply train. One of the Battalion's surgeons had resigned, allowing

Dr Lewis Leach to join the fray. Savage would not be joining this expedition, as he was sorely needed at the Commissioner's camp. Captain Boling was placed in charge of the Battalion.

Once again, Captain Boling and his troops entered the mysterious Yosemite Valley, but this time with a bit more stealth. Of course, the Indians knew they were coming and again, the valley was empty. A new village had been started, but it was empty. It was discovered that the previously burned acorns had been hulled and the burnt hulls were left behind, This meant that the fires had been put out before all the acorns were consumed. The burned acorns were not tasty, but that was the only food now available for the Yosemites.

Five Indians were spotted up valley from El Capitan, but they retreated when pursued by the men. Their trail disappeared near the rocks now known as the Three Brothers. The Indians were seen by one trooper to be climbing a ledge. Captain Boling sent Indian scouts to secure them, and ultimately they were brought in. It turns out that three of them were well known to the group, being Tenaya's sons. Another was the husband of one of Tenaya's daughters. These men told Boling that they were posted by Tenaya as watchmen, to observe the actions of the battalion. Tenaya was well aware of their approach, and he would come in to talk to the Captain when he was told that the Captain had arrived in the valley.

More exploration led to the discovery of several baskets of acorns along a trail that headed up a path to a narrow rocky canyon. As one ascended the path, the Canyon began to pinch off. It would be the perfect spot for an ambush, as was exactly the case when two unthinking soldiers ascended the path to the point that it pinched out. A sudden torrent of rocks rained down on them from above, causing both to fall fifty or more feet down the steep wall. One was seriously injured by the fall and the falling rocks. The Indians had set a trap and sprung it.

In a few days' time, after the unfortunate death of one of Tenaya's sons at the hands of radical elements in the battalion while being held prisoner in camp, Tenaya was captured by Lt. Chandler and several of his men and some Indian scouts. The old chief was calm and peaceful but derided the Indian scouts for their help in his capture. Upon his arrival in camp, Tenaya was the celebrity of the

day, and everyone's attention was on him. Captain Boling expressed his sincere sadness and apologized for the death of Tenaya's son.

It was learned from the Indian scouts that several of Tenaya's tribe, who had formerly belonged to the Tuolumnes had left with their families to re-join the Tuolumnes. Since the charge of the Mariposa Battalion was to subdue Tenaya and the Yosemites, the Tuolumnes were off limits, so no attempt was made to pursue these escapees.

It was now May, but there was still snow in some spots. Tenaya would talk to no one. The next morning, Captain Boling ordered the men to resume their search for the rest of Tenaya's tribe. Several fruitless days went by with no meaningful result. At night, Tenaya would howl in despair over the loss of his son. He tried to escape once but was quickly apprehended by Sgt. Cameron. Upon being brought to Captain Boling the next day, Tenaya let loose with a barrage of Spanish words that amazed everyone within earshot. His hatred for Boling over the death of his son was raging. Tenaya harangued the captain for several minutes. When Tenaya finally ran out of steam, Captain Boling ordered Sgt Cameron to give Tenaya double rations and make sure that he was well secured so that no further escape attempt could occur.

Sandino, the not-so-trustworthy interpreter was constantly trying to convince Captain Boling that the rest of Tenaya's people had gone through Mono Pass to live with the Monos. But the deep snow would make that journey highly improbable, and Boling rejected Sandino's argument. Scouting parties would be sent out with little to show upon return, but Boling refused to give up. Much time was spent in the exploration of the valley by many of the soldiers, and a great amount of thought and discussion was spent on the naming of features in the valley.

Captain Boling fell ill for a period but was subsequently nursed to health by Dr Bunnell and the others. Fresh tracks had been discovered near the top of what had been named "Indian Canyon." When he was sufficiently recovered, Boling and Bunnell accompanied by several of the men engaged on a trek up Indian Canyon. With Tenaya and Sandino acting as guides, the trek went up dangerous passageways and over high cliffs. It wandered above and behind the Royal Arches, but ultimately nothing came of the trip. No signs of Indians were found.

Captain Boling sent to the Reservation for more supplies, and with that request, a message was sent to Major Savage complaining of the incapacity of Sandino as a guide. It was felt that Sandino was acting to win Tenaya's favor, and not in the best interest of the battalion. As a result, Cowchitty and his scouts were sent immediately, and Major Savage guaranteed him to be effective, as he was once Tenaya's mortal enemy. This proved to be the correct adjustment.

Cowchitty lead the men up a path above Mirror Lake. This was a foot patrol, rationed with three days' worth of supplies. Indian signs were discovered at the summit, and a fresh trail was discovered nearby. Once in the deep snow, the trail disappeared, yet Cowchitty was rapidly moving forward, seemingly seeing a trail that no one else could see. The tops of the ridges were bald, the snow having been blown off to the sides. Barely perceptible were tiny, dislodged pieces of rock and lichen that Cowchitty was following as evidence of the recent movement of people through this area. After travelling some distance, Cowchitty pantomimed to Bunnell that Indians were nearby.

Captain Boling couldn't see the Indian's trail and he was thinking that they were getting lead on yet another wild goose chase. His hopes were fading, but he felt that they should continue on if Cowchitty was certain that they were on the correct path. He summoned Tenaya and asked if the people were nearby. Tenaya repeated his claim that they had fled over Mono Pass, and the if Boling's men continued on this course they would soon end up in the Tuolumne's terrritory. Sandino, of course, agreed with Tenaya. Captain Boling was still not quite recovered from his recent illness, and required a slower pace and frequent stops to catch his breath and strength.

Cowchitty told the group that he thought Tenaya's scouts had been watching the valley from a few yards below their present position, and they had seen nearly all of the militia's movements the entire time they were in the valley. He said that there were scouts present below them now, unaware of their presence. In a few moments, a scout came running up the trail. He was quickly apprehended before he could alert the rest of his tribe. This proved Cowchitty's theory was correct.

Soon, the group saw a curl of smoke in the sky ahead of them. In time, they saw a pretty village sitting on the edge of a beautiful lake. The Yosemites were aware of the battalion's presence, but the Indians had nowhere to go. There was a bald granite knob ahead that was designated as a rallying point should the group become dispersed. The village appeared to be only a half mile away, but in reality it was over two miles away. Lt. Crawford and his men were the first to arrive in the village. The terror-stricken Indians immediately threw up their hands and begged for peace. Some tried to escape, but none did, and there was no real show of resistance.

Tenaya was not allowed to join in the interrogation of the young chief of the village, and was sent to be with the camp's women, since he was "just as harmless as the women," according to Captain Boling. Tenaya's physical appearance was far superior to that of his people. He had been well fed and clothed. His people were starving and were in a worn out and sorry condition. This made the villagers feel that living with the Americans might not be so bad. The young chief said they were "anxious and willing to go to the reservation on the Fresno."

Captain Boiling ordered the soldiers to make camp near a pine grove by the water and ordered the Indians to pack up and join them. They would make an early start in the morning. The lake and the village were quite beautiful, and Bunnell decided that the lake should be named in honor of the man whose village once rested on its shores. The lake is now known as Tenaya Lake.

It was early June 1851.The band left the lake early the next morning and made their way back to valley below. It was night by the time they reached their camp. The following morning, Boling gave orders to pack up and leave for the Fresno River Reservation. It was bitterly cold, and the soldiers and the Indians suffered through their journey. But the rest of the journey was otherwise uneventful. They arrived at the Fresno River Reservation and the Indians were left there, in the hands of the Commissioners.

The Battallion marched back to Agua Fria and remained there. With the Chowchillas and the Yosemites subdued, and the rest of the local tribes under treaty, there wasn't much left for the Mariposa Battalion to do. By July 25, 1851 the Mariposa Battalion was mustered out, and the Mariposa Indian War was over.

Before the winter of 1851-52, Tenaya and his people were allowed to leave the Fresno River Reservation and return to Yosemite Valley for a short visit. They complained that the food they were being served was not what they liked. There was a a cattle ranch on site at the Fresno River Reservation that supplied them with beef any day they wanted it. But the Indians didn't like beef. They preferred horsemeat, which is what caused them to steal horses in the first place. They were allowed to leave if they followed rules set up by the Commissioners. A few days after they left, another small group of Yosemites that had stayed behind also left, presumably to join the main body. There was never another complaint about Tenaya or his group's activities, and no action was taken to return them to the Fresno River Reservation.

During that winter, many horses were stolen from the area, but it was believed that they were stolen by the Indians who had left after Tenaya, not Tenaya's people. When a group of miners began prospecting around the entrance to Yosemite Valley, they were attacked by five Indians. Two of the miners were instantly killed and the others were wounded. From Fort Miller, a detachment of US Army soldiers lead by Lieutenant Moore was dispatched to bring back the reprobates. They made their way into Yosemite Valley, and immediately found the offending Indians. The five Indians were wearing clothing and carrying personal items belonging to the miners. The bodies of the two dead miners were there as well. Lt. Moore ordered the miner's bodies buried near Bridalveil Falls. Since the Indians admitted to the murders of the miners (to prevent them from entering their sacred valley), the Indians were ordered shot, with sentence carried out post haste.

Lt Moore and his men tracked Tenaya to the Tenaya Lake area, but he wasn't there. Tenaya had scouts watching Moore as the guilty Indians were executed. The scouts had warned Tenaya, who then took his family east over the mountains to the area we now know as the Mono basin and Nevada. This was the domain of the Monos, Tenaya's mother's people. The Monos accepted him as he had been born in one of their villages. They gave Tenaya land for his people to live on. The Monos had great respect for the old chief, as the stories of his battles with the white man were now part of their lore.

Moore's men followed tracks east across the mountains but never found Tenaya or his people. Lt. Moore returned to Fort Miller

and became the chief proponent of the beauty of Yosemite Valley and the area surrounding it. The Mariposa Battalion had also spoken to members of the press about the beauty of the valley, but their proclamations had been dismissed as obvious exaggeration. Nothing could be as beautiful as all that! But the exaltations of a reputable United States Army officer would not be dismissed so easily. Tourists would now begin travelling to the valley to see its beauty. I wonder if they had to have reservations?

After the Fort Miller soldiers left the beautiful valley, Tenaya returned with some of his people. They no longer had any thoughts of ever attacking the white men again. But an attack on an Indian tribe would probably not be noticed by the white men. There had been reports of a raid on a southern California ranch where the Monos had taken several fine horses. Some of the young warriors of Tenaya's tribe stole these horses from the Monos and then took a long way around to get back to their valley home to insure that they weren't followed.

They stayed quiet for several days, thinking that they had deceived and out run the Monos. They then killed a few of the horses and had a huge feast where everyone stuffed themselves on the horsemeat, gorged to the point of immobility.

At that point, the vengeful Monos attacked. Tenaya probably didn't approve of the horse theft, but he and his family fled when the attack began. They were cornered in a narrow canyon with no escape. Tenaya fought valiantly but was eventually killed when a young Mono chief crushed his skill with a rock. The rest of the Monos then hurled rocks down on top of Tenaya until he was covered by a mound of rocks. All of the Yosemites were then killed, with the exception of a few young women who were taken as slaves. Today there are no direct descendants carrying the blood of Tenaya. Most of the Yosemite Indians that are living in the area are descendants of the Yosemite Indians that worked for Savage.

The Mariposa Battalion volunteers would return to their previous endeavors. Most went back to mining and some became ranchers and merchants again. Major Savage almost immediately regained the confidence and trust of the Indians, and the high esteem in which he was previously held returned. They were calling him "Chief" once again. And again, he was receiving reports from the Indians about

nearly everything that was transpiring in the valley and the mountains. Savage opened new trading posts on the Kings River with Dr Leach, and in the Visalia area. With LH Visonhaler he opened a trading post on the Fresno River (now under Hensley lake) and soon moved to the Adobe Ranch where they built Fort Bishop at the Fresno River Indian Reservation. Visonhaler had been a guide in the Mariposa Battalion.

In April1852, Tulare County was carved out of Mariposa County. With that there was a need for all manner of officials. Among those was Walter Harvey, elected as a judge. When the Fresno River Reservation was established another reservation was established on the Kings River. Chief Wahtoki's tribe (the Choinumnis) was given some choice land as part of their territory. Walter Harvey (and other white men in the area) wanted that prime land for themselves.

Harvey aroused the local white men to anger and they eventually squatted on the reservation land. Chief Wahtoki and some of his followers went to the Campbell and Poole store and told the clerk BF Edmunds that the white man were free to pass through their lands, but they had a paper (a treaty) from the Indian Commissioners that said those lands were theirs alone to hold and occupy freely, without any white men.

Edmunds immediately went to Fine Gold Gulch, Coarse Gold Gulch, and to the San Joaquin River, saying that the Indians threatened to kill any white men who encroached on their lands. Two days later twenty-five men arrived at the Kings River Reservation, captained by Walter Harvey and seconded by Bill Campbell.

Harvey demanded to speak with Chief Wahtoki, but he was not in the village. After some discussion with three of the men in the village, the conversation turned tense, and a few minutes later, Harvey decided that these men were against him. Shooting started and many Indians were killed and wounded, mostly women and children. Harvey's men then retreated to Campbell and Poole's Ferry because they heard that another chief was headed their way with over 100 warriors.

Fearing another Indian uprising, the Governor asked Savage to go to Four Creeks and meet with 1500 Indians and hear their issues. At that meeting Savage agreed that the Indians had been wronged, he

asked them to preserve the peace treaties, and he told them he would get them justice.

Public opinion was hugely against the actions of Harvey and his band of miscreants. Eventually, two companies of US Army soldiers were sent to Tulare County to bring in Harvey and his men, and to conduct an investigation into their attack on the reservation.

Jim Savage angrily denounced Harvey and Campbell. And he let his opinion be widely known. Campbell and Harvey all but declared war on Jim Savage, sending him a message saying that if he ever entered the Kings River area they would kill him. “Jim Savage is afraid to meet me face to face,” was Harvey’s brag.

Upon first hearing this message, Jim Savage immediately saddled his horse and went to the Kings River. He found the judge in Bill Campbell’s store. Campbell and Harvey and the others were already tense because they knew the soldiers were coming to take them away. Savage demanded that Harvey apologize for his remarks about Savage. Harvey said he wouldn’t, saying that Savage had said things about Harvey. “Yes,” said Savage, “I said that you are a liar, a coward, and a murderer.”

Harvey stepped back, somewhat aghast at Savage’s boldness, saying it was a lie. Savage punched him in the face and knocked him to the ground. “I have a good horse and a good saddle. I’ve brought them for you to have them to leave the country. I’m giving you two days to get out,” Savage told him

“I have a fine mule and I will leave on my own animal when I’m ready,” squeaked Judge Harvey from his position on the floor. With that, Jim invited Judge Murphy, who was also there, to have breakfast with him in a small hut outside the store. When he was finished with breakfast Savage went back into the store and asked Judge Harvey if he couldn’t persuade him to change his mind. Harvey said he wouldn’t. So, Savage knocked him down again.

From the floor again, Harvey used some insulting language and Savage picked him up, slapped him around a bit, and then knocked him to the floor again, kicking him a few times just for good measure. But as Jim was bent over Harvey, his pistol fell from his belt. Judge Murphy picked it up. Then Harvey drew his own pistol and shot Jim in

the chest, the bullet emerging through his left hip. Savage was dead before he hit the floor.

Harvey ran from the store. He would eventually be tried and found not guilty, as the shooting of Jim Savage was called self-defense. The judge in the case had been appointed by Harvey.

But it didn't matter, Jim Savage, Blonde King of the Tulares, was dead at 29 years old. His partner, Dr. Lewis Leach erected a large monument to Savage and had him buried at the Fresno River trading post. Dr Leach and LH Visonhaler would continue to run Savage's trading posts until at least 1860.

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