

THE SLAYING OF PIO-PIO-MOX-MOX

On the afternoon of December 7, 1855, Samuel Newton Warfield of Company "H," First Regiment, Oregon Mounted Volunteers, saved himself from possible death, thereby winning some measure of historical recognition,¹ as well as contributing to the origin of a controversy which has been going on intermittently until now. All this he accomplished in a moment by the expedient of bending a rifle barrel over the head of Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox, Chief of the Walla Wallas.

A recent letter written by F. B. Warfield, grandson of Samuel Newton Warfield, gives a graphic account of the incidents attending the passing of Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox. This account agrees in the main with other versions of the affair, and perhaps supplies additional items. The relevant part of the letter reads substantially as follows:

"Vernonia, Oregon, December 20, 1933.

"Miss Edna Headrick,²

Dear Niece:

"... It was your great-grandfather, Samuel Newton Warfield, who killed Pu Pu Mox Mox. I have heard him tell about it. . . . It happened in 1855 or 56 near where Walla Walla is now located. The whites had Pu Pu Mox Mox and several of his warriors captured and Grandfather and some other men were left to guard them. Later, word was sent to put the Indians in the fort so it would not take so many men to guard them, as they were at battle and the whites needed all help possible. They were getting the Indians in the fort and when they came to Pu Pu Mox Mox, he refused to go in and grabbed Grandfather's gun, a muzzle-loading rifle, and tried to wrench it away. They were both husky men. At that time Grandfather was six feet tall and weighed 190 lbs. Grandfather swung the chief loose from his gun. When the chief fell, Grandfather fired his gun but missed the chief. . . . The chief rose, pulling a dirk from his moccasin, drawing it on Grandfather. In self-defense Grandfather brought his gun barrel down over Pu Pu Mox Mox' head, killing him instantly. The gun was broken off at the breech and the barrel was bent four inches out of straight. Grandfather took the chief's scalp, which was a beauty—hair about 18 inches long, all braided in with beads, eagle feathers, etc. This scalp was buried in Linn County, near Shedd, Oregon, as Grand-

¹ Victor, Frances Fuller: *The Early Indian Wars of Oregon*, 445.

² This letter is in the possession of Miss Edna Headrick of the Library Department, Oregon Normal School, Monmouth. Through the courtesy of Miss Headrick, the letter was brought to the writer's attention and permission was granted for its use in the preparation of this article.

father had gone from there to Eastern Oregon to help conquer the Indians. After keeping the scalp for several years, my step-grandmother persuaded Grandfather to bury it. . . .

"F. B. Warfield."

Interesting by way of comparison is a letter written to Mrs. Eva Emery Dye in 1892 by Mrs. Archibald McKinlay, daughter of Peter Skeen Ogden and his Indian wife. McKinlay, it may be said, was once in charge of the Hudson's Bay Company post at Fort Walla Walla, and, while there, engaged in a serious altercation with Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox.³ A reconciliation followed, however, and the Walla Walla chief afterward gave convincing proofs of friendship. From 1846 to 1862, or thereabout, the McKinlays lived at Oregon City. Consequently, Sarah Jane Ogden McKinlay had more than a superficial knowledge of the matters concerning which she wrote. A part of her letter to Mrs. Dye follows:

"Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox (means Yellow Bird) that was his Indian name, but the Hudson's Bay Company called him Yellow Serpent. . . . At the time of the Cayuse War he supplied the troops with beef from his own cattle and did not join the Cayuses although his wife was a Cayuse woman. I believe he never got any pay for all the cattle the troops killed. . . . After the war they put the Indians on the reserve and wanted to put Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox on also, but he said he was not a hog to be put in a pen and fed by the whites, he would not go and when the Yakima War started he joined them but soon after he came with a white flag and the men let him come in the camp and had a talk with him, then they killed him."⁴

Apparently, Samuel Newton Warfield and Mrs. Archibald McKinlay differed in their opinions as to the justifiability of the killing of Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox. Yet, this difference may be more apparent than real. Close-range and long-range viewpoints give varying perspectives.

Warfield had the full benefit of a close-up. One of the battles of the Yakima War was in progress. The air resounded with rifle-shots and the cries of the combatants. Warfield, with a few comrades, was guarding the Indian prisoners. At a critical moment Franklin Crabtree, another member of Company "H," returned from the front with a shoulder shattered and an arm dangling. Crabtree reported Captain Davis Layton, with five or six others, sur-

³ Elliott, T. C.: "The Gunpowder Story," *The Oregon Historical Quarterly*, XXII, 369-374.

⁴ Letter to Mrs. E. E. Dye, January 18, 1892. Original files of the Oregon Historical Society.

rounded by the enemy. It was imperative that re-enforcements be sent forward immediately. In this time of stress, orders were given to tie the prisoners, "and if they resisted or attempted to escape, to kill them."⁵

They resisted, Sergeant-Major Isaac Miller receiving a wound from a knife which had been concealed by one of the Indians. It was then that Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox seized Warfield's rifle. Warfield acted resolutely and as a good soldier.

That Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox and his fellow-tribesmen had been captured under a flag of truce was something for which the rank and file were not responsible. Warfield was confronted by a fact, not a theory.

Amos Underwood, one of Warfield's comrades in arms, has written a circumstantial account of the events leading up to the death of Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox. This account tells among other things, how the great chief of the Walla Walla came to be a prisoner in the hands of the whites. A quotation from Underwood follows:

"I was fourth corporal of Company B, Oregon Volunteers, and had charge of Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox when killed. . . . Part of the command started up the road toward Walla Walla with teams and pack trains and about 200 of us on horseback went across the hills a little north of east. We rode on until about three o'clock in the afternoon, when we saw a big band of Indians coming. . . . They were carrying a white flag. Some six or eight of them left the others and came within 100 yards of us, where they halted and called for some of our officers. . . . A few officers went and had a handshake with the Indians. The rest of us sat on our horses and while our officers talked with the chief we would flap our arms and crow and take sight at the Indians with our guns. The Indians did the same. Old Pepe (Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox) said, "I see your boys are like mine—they are keen for a fight. But we old men have better sense."⁶

Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox then inquired why the soldiers had come. He was informed that they had come to punish the Indians for certain wrongs committed. Thereupon, Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox requested an armistice until the following day, promising that he would then sign a treaty of peace. Lieutenant-Colonel James K. Kelly, who was in command of the Volunteers, replied that the chief and certain others must remain as hostages, or the soldiers would attack immediately. Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox and several of his companions remained.

5 Victor, Frances Fuller: *The Early Indian Wars of Oregon*, 445.

6. *Ladd and Bush Quarterly*, December, 1914, 4-5.

According to Kelley's official report, the Walla Walla chief promised to call his people together and require them to surrender all stolen property, besides offering to furnish horses as remounts for the entire command.

Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox was permitted to send a messenger to the Walla Wallas, informing them of their chief's plans. Next morning, however, the Indian village was deserted, although the fires still smoldered. Kelly believed that the chief has sent word to his warriors to remove the women and children and prepare for battle.⁷ If the captive Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox sent such a message, he must have known that he was endangering his own life.

But to go back to Underwood's story:

"Some of the boys from The Dalles (they were called the 40 thieves) could beat the Indians at their own game. . . . They dug down a foot or two and found a cache under every one of those fires. (The smoldering embers in the deserted encampment.) . . . We fed our horses, ate all we wanted and threw the rest into the fires."⁸

Later, one of the hostages attempted to escape, and, in the resulting scrimmage, Warren Keith, one of the men in Underwood's squad—

". . . shoved the muzzle of his gun against the breast of the chief, pushed him over and held him to the ground. . . . All hands turned out and tied the prisoners hand and foot. . . . As we marched up the road next morning our position was about the center of the column, then followed the wagon train, and last the rear guard. . . . I saw a dead Indian lying on the hillside. I pointed him out to old Pepe, who shook his head."⁹

Perhaps "Old Pepe" thought of a lonely grave on Feather River in California where, because of a white man's misdeed, his son, Chief Elijah, lay sleeping. The missionaries preached forgiveness—well, "Old Pepe" did some forgiving in his time.

About two in the afternoon, near the ranch of a Frenchman named Ramo, there was heavy fighting, and the prisoners, now unbound, presented something of a problem. Underwood's account of what followed is in substantial agreement with the account of F. B. Warfield. However, the "fort" mentioned by the latter appears to have been Ramo's house, one of a number of dwellings in the scattered settlement, "Frenchtown," which gave name to the battle in

⁷ Carey, Charles H.: *History of Oregon*, 592-3.

⁸ *Ladd and Bush Quarterly*, December, 1914, 6.

⁹ Same.

which Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox lost his life.¹⁰

Underwood writes:

"I saw Olney (the Indian agent) coming along and said to him, 'What shall I do with these prisoners?' He said, 'Tie them and put them in the house.' . . . Old Pepe said, 'No tie men; tie dogs and horses.' The boys pulled them off their horses and commenced to tie them. Champoege Jim resisted and cut old Ike Miller in the arm. Then all began to fight. . . . Down they all went except the 15-year-old boy who was climbing up my stirrup leather. . . . Olney had gone about 100 yards away when he heard the shooting. He came back and as he rode up he drew his revolver and fired a shot into Old Pepe and said, 'You old rascal, I am satisfied now.'"¹¹

Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox was then scalped, his ears cut off, and his body otherwise mutilated. Preserved in a jar, the ears were on exhibition for several years.

Such was the end of the greatest of the Walla Wallas. When his son was murdered at Sutter's Fort, Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox had refrained from a policy of revenge. When it was suggested that he and his people should go on a reservation, Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox had "felt blown away like a feather";¹² still he had offered no armed resistance, although his "heart cried."

Perhaps Chief Lawyer of the Nez Percés well expressed the situation as it was with Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox at the time he seemed to be making preparations to join the Yakimas in a war against the whites. During a conference with General Isaac Ingalls Stevens, first territorial governor of Washington, Chief Lawyer said:

"I have all along been thinking that the Walla Wallas . . . would not join in the war. But when I . . . heard news of their fighting there (near Fort Walla Walla) and since have had no news; I don't know what they are doing. I don't know what to think. But we do hear that the chiefs say no; we won't fight; but we cannot stop our young men."¹³

These words were spoken on December 12, 1855. Pio-Pio-Mox-Mox had been killed five days previously.

Apparently the policy of the "young men" prevailed, with the tragic consequences already related.

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10 Fuller, George W.: *A History of the Pacific Northwest*, 288.

11 Ladd and Bush *Quarterly*, December, 1914, 7.

12 Stevens, Hazard: *The Life of General Isaac I. Stevens*, II, 46.

13 *Journal of James Doty*, 118, Oregon Historical Society.