

**FIGHTING THE MILL CREEKS:  
BEING A PERSONAL ACCOUNT  
OF CAMPAIGNS AGAINST  
INDIANS OF THE NORTHERN  
SIERRAS**

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Fighting the Mill Creeks: Being a Personal Account of Campaigns Against Indians of the Northern Sierras by Robert A. Anderson

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**ROBERT A. ANDERSON**

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NORTHERN SIERRAS**





**ROBERT A. ANDERSON**  
Early-Day Indian Fighter and Former Sheriff of Butte County, California

## FIGHTING THE MILL CREEKS

### CHAPTER I.

CROSSING the plains in '57, I tried mining for a short time on the North Fork of Feather River, but soon continued my journey to the Sacramento Valley and settled on Deer Creek. With broad plains to the north and south fit only for grazing purposes, the fertile land along the creek bottom seemed doubly attractive, and for several years I engaged in gardening. By way of quick delivery, I possessed an ox team, while my market lay wherever buyers were to be found. I made one trip with my vegetables as far away as the mountains of Trinity.

Later I sold out and went into the cattle business. In 1861, snow fell in the valley to the depth of six inches and lay on for two weeks. That snow put me out of the cattle business.

During these years Indians were numerous. Those who infested the region where I lived were called Mill Creeks or Deer Creeks, the rough canyons of these two streams offering thousands of hiding places to these wild bands. During the winter of 1857 they caused much uneasiness among the settlers. Many raids were made into the valley, followed always by swift retreats into the hills. People

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were killed, dwellings burned, and stock driven off. These depredations occurred usually along the edge of the valley, but extended on some occasions as far as the Sacramento River.

This state of things could not continue. The Indians, with the accustomed stealth of savages, always made their attacks unexpectedly. Since the settler could not guard against surprise, it was decided to retaliate by carrying the war into the Indians' own territory.

Jack Spaulding, who claimed to have had experience in fighting the reds, organized a party of fifteen men for the purpose of following the marauders into the hills. Hi Good and myself were members of this party. Good, whose acquaintance with the hills was extensive, was elected Lieutenant, while Spaulding acted as Captain.

We knew that to beat the savages we must outplay them at their own game; therefore, we traveled by night, lying over in the daytime. Passing north-easterly over the foothills we kept to the broad ridge between Deer Creek and Mill Creek, this being the ridge along which the Lassen Trail leads.

After two nights of travel we reached old Bluff Camp, which was one of the stopping places of the early emigrant trains. It lies in the midst of a vast forest just over the ridge on the Mill Creek slope.

Here we found considerable snow still lying on the cool floor of the pinery, and signs of the Indians were numerous. They had been about the spring in considerable numbers, and the greenest scout in our

party could easily discover their trails leading through the forest.

We were taken into a steep, sheltered ravine, where it was thought we would be hidden; then Good and Spaulding set out on a still hunt to try and locate the Indians' camp.

Our leaders had been gone but a short time when the mountains on both sides of us suddenly began to blaze with rifle shots, the reports booming heavily through the dense forest. The Indians had taken the first trick. To say that we were a startled lot of man-hunters would be to put it mildly. I frankly admit that I was ready to run four ways at once. Our retreat was a scramble for first place. I had another man's rifle and someone else had mine. A companion and I were streaking it up the hill, slipping on the pine needles and making, it seemed to us, about as much progress backward as forward. The bullets of the Indians were playing lively tunes about our ears. Suddenly a small pine limb, clipped off by a piece of lead, fell just over the other man's head, and at the same instant he fell flat and lay limp. I sprang toward him, reached down and clasped his body in my arms, determined to do my best to rescue his body; but I felt his sides shaking convulsively in my hands and in a second he had rolled over, laughing heartily, and asked:

"What's the rush? What the devil are you running for?"

His fall was due to the pine needles and not to a bullet.



When we had finally gathered together at the head of the hollow and had taken a hasty inventory of our numbers, our excitement was in no wise allayed. One man was gone! The Indians had got a scalp!

There was nothing to do but to return to the scene of the ambush and make a search for the body. The Indians had stopped firing now and, of course, were nowhere to be seen. Slowly and cautiously we crept back down the ravine, peering and peeping, and ready to shoot at the first thing that moved, or to run at the first sound, we hardly knew which. But, behold! at last we found our missing comrade, sitting placidly upon a rock and wondering where the profanely qualified nation we had been! He was extremely deaf and swore that he had not heard a single shot nor seen an Indian.

Good and Spaulding soon came running up, as ready for retreat as the rest of us. As soon as we got into something like order, the Indians melted away, but the surprise had taken all the hunt out of us for the time.

The next morning we started for the valley, the Indians hanging on our flanks and rear, clear to the edge of the hills. Many times, as we topped a ridge and looked back, we could see our dusky pursuers peering over the last ridge behind us and keeping tab upon our movements. It was useless to attempt to lead them into an ambush, for they knew our exact number, and as we wound up the slope ahead of them they would make their count, and if our full

number was not in sight would make a detour around the intervening ravine.

We were gone on this expedition four days, and on our return had to draw pretty freely upon our imaginations for stories that would satisfy our friends.

After this, I became better acquainted with Hi Good. He lived near me on Deer Creek, and we were together on several of the subsequent Indian hunts. We both thought that the savages would be encouraged by our failure to beat them, and warned our neighbors to be on the alert.

Our surmises were correct. In a short time a neighbor's barn was visited in the night and four very valuable mules spirited away. The Indians had a habit of stealing all horses and mules that they could lay their hands on, driving them into the hills and butchering them. Perhaps they preferred them to cattle, because with them they could beat a more hasty retreat; but it always seemed to me as if they liked horse-flesh better than beef and mule-flesh better than either.

Upon receiving word of this last robbery, Good and I enlisted as helpers a young man named Jones and another named George Carter, and started for the hills. These young men seemed to have plenty of nerve, especially Jones, who had been with us on the former hunt and who, I believe, was the coolest man of the party when the surprise came.

We advanced swiftly into the hills, picked up the Indians' trail, and, the second day out, located

their camp. They were snuggled away near the bed of Dry Creek, well up toward the head of that stream, but still several miles below the pinery.

We promptly made an attack. We were sheltered behind bowlders, while the Mill Creeks were partially protected by a cave. However, we had obtained a position from which we could shoot directly into the cave and it was not long until we had them moving.

We got no Indians, but recaptured considerable stolen plunder. They had killed the mules. On this and subsequent hunts we learned that the crafty fellows made a practice of secreting their supply of "jerked" mule-meat or other provisions in some spot at a distance from where they camped, so that if their camp were surprised their food would still be safe, and in all the years that I followed them I never but once found their hidden meat-house.

We returned home much elated with our success. Indeed, it put quite a bunch of feathers in our caps when compared with our previous attempt.