Chapter 6

Battle at the Colorado

The Rose-Baley wagon train was now entering the domain of the Mojave Indians. The Mojaves are members of the Yuman language group. They inhabited an area along the Colorado River stretching from about fifteen miles north of the present Davis Dam southward to a group of three sharp mountain peaks known as the Needles (from which the modern city of Needles takes its name), and eastward from the Colorado River to the crest of the Black Mountains. Their territory lay in three different states: Arizona, Nevada, and California, but the vast majority was in Arizona. These Indians occupied approximately the same area in 1858 that they occupied when first encountered by the Spaniards in 1604. They still occupy this same area today. The Spaniards never established missions or colonies among them. The first European to visit the Mojaves was Father Francisco Garcés in 1776. He estimated their population at approximately three thousand.¹

The Mojaves practiced a form of agriculture by planting their crops in the rich silt deposited by the annual flooding of the Colorado River, much like the ancient Egyptians did on the Nile River. Their principal crops were corn, beans, pumpkins, squash, and various types of melons, which they supplemented by hunting, fishing, and gathering different types of wild seeds. A reliable and varied food supply helped to promote good health and proper physical development. Whipple described the men as tall, erect, and finely proportioned.² They made some pottery and baskets, but their workmanship in these crafts was mainly utilitarian.

Although divided into several bands and family groups, the Mojaves thought of themselves as a national entity, enabling them to
present a united front against any potential enemy. They prized courage above all other virtues. These qualities made them splendid warriors. Raiding parties of young Mojave warriors would travel great distances to raid other tribes, but these expeditions were more for curiosity and gaining knowledge about new lands than they were for acquiring booty or new territory. However, they did sometimes capture young women and girls for slaves. They took enemy scalps and held scalp dances. The scalps would be placed on poles and set up in an open field or playground; the young men and girls would paint their hair white and dance around the scalps for four days and nights.

The Mojaves had hereditary chiefs, in the male line, but it is uncertain how much power they possessed. They might have had more moral influence than actual authority. War leaders and shamans (spiritual leaders or doctors) also played important roles in Mojave society. These leaders were believed to have received great power from dreams.

After crossing the summit of the Colorado (Black) Mountains at Sitgreaves Pass on the late afternoon of August 27, 1858, the Rose-Baley wagon train halted while its members prepared a meal, their first of the day. They labored so hard in getting over the pass they had not taken time to eat. While they were preparing their supper, a small group of Mojaves approached. They acted quite friendly. They had with them a small quantity of green corn and some melons, which the vegetable-hungry travelers eagerly purchased. Speaking a mixture of poor English and poor Spanish, the Mojaves asked how many individuals were in the wagon train and whether or not they intended to settle on the Colorado River. Very unusual questions, the emigrants thought! On being assured by the emigrants that they were en route to California and had no intention of settling anywhere near the Colorado River, the Mojaves seemed satisfied and asked no further questions. Some of them traveled with the wagon train and made themselves useful by pointing out the road and volunteering other help during the night travel.

By traveling all night the wagon train hoped to reach the Colorado River by early morning. From the summit of Sitgreaves Pass, the river appeared tantalizingly close, but the descent proved to be nearly as difficult as the ascent. The road descended into a very deep canyon (Silver Creek Wash), which it followed for some distance
before climbing out of the ravine and taking off over some rugged hills. The climb out was so steep the wagons had to be partially disassembled and pulled up by means of block and tackle. The Rose company wrecked one of its wagons when it accidentally bashed against the rocks while being brought up out of the canyon. Beale lost one of his wagons at this same spot the previous year.

During the night the Baley company, traveling in the rear, began falling farther and farther behind. Their animals had become so weak and worn down from lack of food and water and continuous travel that it was feared they might not be able to pull the wagons out of the mountains. Shortly before midnight the company decided to stop and pitch camp. They would unhitch the oxen from the wagons, and drive them and the loose stock to the Colorado River along with the livestock of the Rose company. After the work stock was sufficiently recruited, they would be brought back to camp to pull the wagons out of the mountains and down to the river to join the Rose company so that the wagon train would be united before crossing the Colorado River. The women and children remained with the wagons along with some of the men to protect the camp from Indians. The others, mostly the younger men, went with William Right Baley to help drive the stock to the river. Bentner, from the Rose company, also left his family and light wagon at the mountain camp while he drove his two mules to the river with the other stock. They expected it would take two or three days to recruit the animals sufficiently for them to be returned to the wagons. Those men not engaged in herding the stock would assist Rose’s men in cutting trees for the construction of a raft for crossing the Colorado River.

The next morning, August 28, Udell and others who remained with the wagons at the mountain camp began a search for water for domestic needs. They had brought only a small quantity of water with them since they expected to arrive at the Colorado River the next morning. Neither Udell nor the others were successful in locating water, although they searched long and hard. To get more water they had to go back three miles to a small spring they passed the previous day on the east side of Sitgreaves Pass.

Although they were unsuccessful in finding water in the canyon, Udell made an important observation.
I spent the day in examining the road on ahead and looking for water, for we had to bring it three miles over the mountain, from the last spring we passed. I did not succeed in finding water, but I concluded we could improve the road ahead; here it leaves the canon, [sic] where Mr. Rose broke a wagon. I thought we could, with some labor, keep down the canon we were in, and shun those bad hills and shorten the distance half a mile.6

The following day, Gillum Baley and Joel Hedgpeth went with Udell to examine the route he had suggested. They all agreed it would be better to construct a road down the canyon than to attempt to take the wagons out of the canyon at the place where Beale and Rose had left it. The shattered remains of one of Rose’s wagons were clear evidence of the difficulties they would encounter if they tried to leave the canyon at that point. The main obstacle to continuing down the canyon was the large boulders that blocked the way, but with some effort these could be removed. They started work on the project immediately.7

Meanwhile, The Rose company, along with the livestock and some of the men of the Baley company, continued traveling during the night. After climbing out of the canyon they found the going much easier. By noon they had cleared the last hill and arrived at a grove of cottonwood trees about a mile from the river. From this distance the thirsty animals smelled the water and made a mad dash for it. The work oxen were unhitched from the wagons and allowed to join the loose stock, lest they stampede and overturn the wagons in their rush to water.

As the emigrants neared the river, they encountered many Mojave Indians, but unlike the friendly Mojaves back at the pass, these Indians acted in a rude and impudent manner. They asked the same questions as those back in the mountains: Did the emigrants intend to settle on the Colorado River? How long did they intend to remain in Mojave territory? They were assured that the wagon train was en route to California and would be leaving Mojave territory as soon as the train got across the river. Their furtive glances and constant jabbering made it apparent that these Indians viewed the emigrants’ answers with some suspicion.

As quickly as the work oxen were watered, they were returned to the wagons. When the watering was completed, the Rose company

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started for the river to locate a suitable campsite. L. J. and Amanda Rose decided to lighten the load by getting out of their wagon and walking the remaining distance to the river. As they were walking along, one of the more bumptious Indians stepped between them and placed his hands on Mrs. Rose’s shoulder and bosom. This frightened the poor woman so that she ran screaming back to the nearest wagon, climbed upon the wagon tongue between the oxen, and remained there until the wagon reached the river. Leonard Rose was naturally incensed by this outrageous conduct, but not wishing to start an incident while surrounded by hostile Indians, he wisely held his anger in check.

A second group of Indians approached the Alpha Brown wagon, which had been unhitched a short distance from the others. Brown was away herding the loose stock to water at the river. As it was very hot day, Mrs. Brown asked the Indians if they would bring some water to her and her children. They said that they would if she would pull off her dress and give it to them. She offered them other articles of much greater value, but nothing else would do. They then took hold of her little boy, saying that they were going to take him. L. J. Rose, seeing what was happening, had the Brown’s wagon pulled closer to the others where he could keep an eye on it. This discouraged the Indians and they left. Shortly afterwards Alpha Brown returned to the wagon with water for his family, thus ending any immediate danger.

They made camp that evening, August 28, in the shade of some large cottonwood trees about two hundred yards from the river. The exhausted men, except for those still herding cattle, lay down in the cool shade of the trees and were soon fast asleep. Had the Mojaves chosen this moment to launch an attack, they probably could have wiped out the whole camp. The sharp-eyed Indians, however, did not fail to take notice of the general state of unpreparedness. They took advantage of the situation by driving off cattle in plain sight of the herders, who were too few in number to prevent the depredations. To add insult to injury, some of the cattle were butchered and the meat cooked and eaten in full view of the whites. Whenever the Mojaves were caught in the act of stealing, they would treat the incident as a big joke. There was little the emigrants could do about it without risking a major battle for which they were ill-prepared since a large part of the wagon train was still at the mountain camp ten miles back. They
believed their best chance in getting away safely and without further incidents was to get across the Colorado River as quickly as possible and out of Mojave territory. Finally, at nightfall, the Indians departed, leaving the wagon train to enjoy a peaceful night of much needed rest.

The next morning the emigrants awoke feeling rested and refreshed. After a hearty breakfast, camp was moved to the river bank in order to be nearer to water. Some of the men began searching for the best place to cross the river, while others began looking for better grass for the stock. They were successful on both accounts. To their great relief, no Indians had yet shown up in camp.

Bentner, who had left his family and light wagon back at the mountain camp with the Baley company, now decided that his two mules were sufficiently recruited for him to go back to the mountain camp and bring his family and wagon to the river camp. As his mules were well shod, their only suffering had been from thirst and lack of feed. After an abundance of grass and water and a day’s rest, his animals were now in good working condition, Bentner believed. Being a member of the Rose company, he was anxious to get his family back with the rest of that group. As soon as he finished breakfast, he set off for the mountain camp astride one of his mules while leading the other. He expected to travel all day and all night and be back at Rose’s camp the next morning.

About noon on August 29, the river camp received a visit from a Mojave chief accompanied by about twenty-five of his warriors. When the emigrants complained to him about the theft of their cattle by some of the chief’s men, he took his warriors aside and talked with them. Just what he said is unknown as the emigrants did not understand the Mojave dialect, but when he returned he assured them that his men would steal no more. He, too, wanted to know where the emigrants were planning to settle. Again they explained that they were on their way to California and were only passing through. The chief seemed satisfied with these answers and asked no further questions. Presents, consisting of blankets, shirts, pants, knives, tobacco, beads, mirrors, and rings, were then given to the chief, who in turn distributed these gifts among his men. The chief appeared well pleased by this gesture. He told the emigrants they could cross the river whenever and wherever they wished without being molested by any of his warriors.
About an hour after this group of Mojaves departed, another chief, with his entourage of warriors, arrived at the river camp. This chief was a tall, stout individual, his skin decorated with war paint. He spoke with a bombastic style. On his head he wore a gorgeous feather headdress, and on his body he wore many bells and gewgaws. With his tall stature and splendid costume, he presented a very imposing figure. He asked the same questions as the previous chief and received the same answers. He also was given presents and he likewise assured the emigrants that they would encounter no further problems from him or his men. He and most of his warriors then left.

The emigrants noticed that most of the Indians who visited their camp came from across the river. This contradicted information they had received in Albuquerque that when they crossed the Colorado River they would be out of Mojave territory and safe in California. Actually, the Mojaves inhabited both sides of the Colorado River between modern Needles, California, and Laughlin, Nevada, moving their villages and cultivated fields to conform with the annual spring floods of the Colorado. In 1858 all of their villages and cultivated fields were on the west, or California, side of the river.

Late in the afternoon of August 29, the emigrants again moved camp, this time about a mile down the river to a spot near where they expected to cross. This location was selected because it was near a large grove of cottonwoods they intended to use in constructing a raft for crossing the river. There was a good supply of grass here also, and with the river nearby, the cattle could be watered and grazed near camp where a close watch could be kept on them. The men cutting the trees and constructing the raft would be within hailing distance of the camp in case of any trouble with the Indians.

That evening, William Right Baley returned to the mountain camp from the river and reported that the Indians were stealing cattle and driving them across the river before the very eyes of the herders, they being too few in number to stop the depredations. This news alarmed those at the mountain camp. That same evening Baley, his brother, Gillum, and several more men left for the river camp to reenforce those already there, and to expedite driving the work stock back to retrieve the remaining wagons. The men remaining at the mountain camp continued working on the road all the next day so
everything would be ready as soon as the work stock were brought back to the wagons.

The work of constructing the raft was not expected to take more than two or three days. By then the Baley company should have all of its wagons and people down from the mountains and the wagon train once more would be united and ready to continue its journey. As they had done in crossing the Rio Grande in New Mexico, each company would take one entire day in crossing the Colorado River. The Rose company expected to cross first since their stock had been resting and grazing for the last few days. Some of the work stock of the Baley company would have to go back to the mountain camp to bring in the remaining wagons and the women and children, and would probably need a day’s rest before crossing the river. If all went according to schedule, they should be across the Colorado River and in the Promised Land of California in three or four days.9

Crossing a major river such as the Colorado was always a difficult and time-consuming process for a wagon train, especially when there was no established ferry service. The lower Colorado was vastly different in those days than it is today. There were no dams or other diversions on the river; it ran free and wild all the way from its source in the Rocky Mountains to the end of its journey at the Gulf of California. This is how L. J. Rose Jr., described the crossing site:

The river at this point was about five hundred yards in width, composed of alternate expanses of shallow water and swift running, deep currents in the more confined areas. The bottom throughout, shifting in nature, was composed of atomic particles of silt and sand, which caused the formation of more or less quicksand in the shallow places. Although it would be possible to cope successfully with these conditions with the loose stock and mounted horsemen, to undertake to haul the heavy wagons across would be but to court certain disaster.

It therefore became necessary to construct a log raft and rig a ferry crossing with which to transport the women and children and the wagons.10

The new river camp was pleasant and well situated for making the necessary preparations for crossing the river. Although the weather was hot, its effects were somewhat mitigated by a cool breeze blowing
off the river. The camp was located in a clearing about one-half acre in size with a huge cottonwood tree providing ample shade in the center of camp. On both sides of camp were trees with a considerable amount of brush growing under them. In front of camp was a large area covered with mesquite and creosote bushes. The river enclosed one end of camp while the other end was open for coming and going. The wagons were drawn up in two parallel rows with considerable space left between wagons, giving the camp a strong defensive position.

No Indians visited camp that night and no cattle were stolen. The next morning found everyone refreshed after a good night’s sleep and eager to get started on the day’s work. The herders were sent out to graze the cattle, while other men began cutting trees for construction of the raft. The women took advantage of this opportunity to get caught up on baking and washing so that everything would be ready for crossing the river. Only two Indians visited camp that morning, but neither demanded anything nor stayed long.

About 10:00 a.m., a large number of Indians were observed crossing the river at some distance above camp. More than two hundred and fifty were counted and all were carrying bows and arrows and dressed in war paint. The appearance of such a large number of Indians aroused Savedra’s suspicion. He turned around and said to Rose, “I don’t like the way them Injuns is actin’. We are going to have trouble with them, and I bet before night.” Rose took Savedra’s concern seriously and sent word to his foreman, Alpha Brown, to have the cattle brought closer to camp. Yet, there was little fear of an attack on the camp; the main concern was for the safety of the stock.

Rose began to feel some uneasiness about the Bentner family. Bentner had gone back to the mountain camp the previous morning to bring in his family and wagon. He expected to be back at the river camp early the next morning. It was nearly noon and they should have returned by now. Rose decided to send someone back to the previous campsite to see if the family might be there, since the camp had been moved again after Bentner left. Since it was now almost dinner time, Rose decided to wait until after the noon meal. Immediately after dinner he sent two young men on horseback, Edward A. Young and Billy Stidger, to see if they could find the Bentner family. During dinner, a lone Indian came into camp. He looked around for a short time and then left.
Shortly after dinner one of the herders came into camp and reported that he saw a good many Indians in the vicinity. They told him that a steamboat was coming up the river and pointed where the sun would be when the boat would arrive. This created some excitement in camp, but the emigrants soon realized that this was just too good to be true. And it was. No regular steamboat service had yet been established this far up the Colorado River; only a couple of experimental runs had been made past this point earlier that year. The steamboat story was apparently a ruse to divert the emigrants’ attention while the Mojave warriors made last minute adjustments for a surprise attack on the unsuspecting wagon train.

At approximately 2:00 p.m. on August 30, 1858, the emigrants were enjoying a well-earned siesta after the noon meal, that is, all except the Brown children, who were playing in their parents’ wagon. Sallie Fox, the thirteen-year-old stepdaughter of Alpha Brown, was climbing upon one of the wheels of the family wagon, where, from her elevated position, she spied Indians sneaking up through the underbrush on their hands and knees. Terrified, she cried out, “The Indians are coming and they will kill us all!” At almost the same instant the Indians let out a series of bloodcurdling war whoops followed by a hail of arrows. The men in camp, aroused from their slumber by the little girl’s cries, quickly grabbed their pistols and rifles and met the charge head-on. Robbed of the element of surprise by the little girl’s screams, the Mojave warriors beat a hasty retreat, taking cover in the chaparral in front of the camp just beyond effective gunshot range.

Meanwhile, Young and Stidger arrived at the previous camp and made a gruesome discovery. There stood the Bentner wagon but without the mules or the Bentners. A closer inspection revealed the battered body of the older Bentner girl lying on the ground near the wagon. The body was stripped of all its clothing and the face was horribly mutilated. No trace of the other members of the family was ever found, but during the battle an Indian across the river waved a pole with a number of scalps dangling from it. It was assumed that these trophies came from the Bentner family.

At the mountain camp the night before, members of the Baley company tried in vain to persuade the Bentners not to travel by themselves. William Krug, one of the young men of the company and
a fellow German immigrant, remonstrated with Bentner that the Indians might prove hostile, but he would not listen.13

Young and Stidger no sooner made their macabre discovery when they heard gun shots from the direction of the river. Realizing that a battle was in progress, they mounted their horses and made a dash for camp, arriving just in time to participate in the beginning of the battle. The young men herding cattle also heard the firing, and they, too, reached camp safely.

The men at the site where the raft was being built, Alpha Brown, Ed Akey, and Lee Griffin, were not so fortunate. Hearing gun shots, Lee Griffin shouted, “What does that mean?” “Great God, it’s the Indians!” Brown exclaimed, as he mounted his horse and galloped for camp. He had ridden only a short distance before he was struck by a volley of arrows. One penetrated his back and lodged near his heart, but he was able to keep riding and reached the safety of camp. He rode up to his wife and reportedly said, “Where’s my gun, Mother?” He then toppled from his horse and was dead by the time he hit the ground.14

Akey and Griffin, who were not mounted, made a run for camp on foot as fast as their legs could carry them. Fortunately they were both armed with Colt revolvers. As they ran, they carried their weapons fully loaded and cocked, with their fingers on the triggers ready for instant action. As Akey rounded a clump of brush near the camp, he found himself face to face with an Indian who had an arrow on his bow string and was about to let it fly. Akey quickly fired a bullet into the Indian’s chest, bringing him to the ground and sending his arrow flying feebly up in the air. A moment later he came upon another Mojave and he promptly dispatched him before the Indian could get his arrow away.

As Akey neared camp, he saw Griffin standing in the open space near the wagons in a dazed condition. “What are you standing there for?” Akey asked. Griffin partly extended his right arm, which had two arrows dangling from it, and responded, “That’s what for.” One arrow had gone almost through his arm just above the wrist, and the other had struck near the same place. Both wounds were bleeding profusely. Akey gave Griffin a vigorous shove in the direction of camp and said, “Run for it.” As they both ran across the open space toward the wagons, they received a shower of arrows; one struck Akey just below the left collarbone inflicting a nasty wound.15
The death of Alpha Brown and the wounding of Akey and Griffin further reduced the already thin ranks of those fit to do battle. Young Ed Jones was still recovering from his wounds after his narrow escape from the Hualapais; thus, he too, was effectively out of the fight. This left only twenty-five to thirty able-bodied men trying to hold off an estimated three hundred attacking Mojave warriors. Fortunately for this wagon train, the Indians were armed only with bows and arrows.

The battle plan of the Mojaves apparently had been to take the emigrants by surprise, attacking camp before the men could get to their guns. Those not killed by the initial flurry of arrows could then be finished off with knives and war clubs. But the element of surprise was lost thanks to the screams of Sallie Fox, forcing the Indians to change their plans. Their strategy now was to keep the emigrants pinned against the river with no way to escape, gradually wear them down and let them exhaust their ammunition, then make the final charge. The Mojave warriors seemed confident that they would soon have many new scalps to add to their trophy poles and a vast supply of loot to divide. From their concealed positions in the chaparral, and well out of range of the white men’s guns, they fired intermittent barrages of arrows at their intended victims. Some arrows they aimed in a high arc so that they came down in the camp and inflicted casualties. Several of the emigrants, including Elizabeth Jones, Rose’s mother-in-law, were wounded by this tactic. Now and then an overanxious warrior would advance too close and be picked off by one of the white men.

Ironically, one of the first to be wounded was Sallie Fox. As soon as the battle started, Mrs. Brown herded her children inside the wagon where she placed featherbeds, blankets, and comforters around them for protection. Nevertheless, an arrow pierced this makeshift barricade and struck Sallie in the abdomen causing a serious wound.

One of the most effective fighters was Tom Billings, a young herder with the Baley company. When the fighting began, Tom took a position near a wagon wheel where he could rest his pistol on one of the spokes. Every time an Indian advanced within range, Tom’s pistol barked and the warrior would kiss the earth.16

While the battle continued, those Mojaves who were not actively engaged in the fighting busied themselves by rounding up all of the emigrants’ livestock they could, and swimming them across the
river where they were safely corralled near the Mojave Villages. The Mojaves knew that the wagon train would be doomed without animals to pull the wagons and soon the Mojave nation would harvest an even richer bounty.

With neither side able to gain a decisive victory, the battle settled down to a stalemate. The fighting continued in this manner for more than two hours, during which time the emigrants began to run low on ammunition. The women gathered up all their kitchen knives from the wagon beds and put them in a bucket which was placed near the men in case the battle came down to hand-to-hand fighting. But just when things seemed darkest for the emigrants, an event occurred that turned the tide of battle in their favor. One of the Mojave chiefs, who appeared to be directing the battle, stepped out in the open as if to say, “Try and hit me if you can.” He was a tall individual, all decked out in a gorgeous array of feathers and gewgaws. He was a very conspicuous figure as he stood out in front of his men. Thinking that he was out of range of the emigrants’ guns, he began making defiant gestures and beating himself on the chest as if attempting to rally his warriors for the final victory charge.

To members of the wagon train, Gillum Baley was known as the “Missouri Preacher” because he was from Missouri and a lay minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. He also had the reputation of being an excellent marksman and was probably the only member of this group who had ever had any military experience, having served in the Illinois Mounted Militia during the Black Hawk War in 1832. Knowing this, one of the emigrants pointed out the gaudily dressed chief to Baley, saying, “Why don’t you shoot that Indian?” Baley replied that he didn’t think his gun would carry true that far. A man wounded by an arrow in the forehead who could not aim his gun because of the blood running down into his right eye overheard the conversation and said to the Missouri Preacher, “Here, take my gun. You can hit him with it.” Baley took the proffered weapon but had difficulty holding it steady because it was heavier than his own gun. He then knelt down and rested the rifle on a spoke of a wagon wheel, murmured a quick prayer, took slow, deliberate aim, and gently squeezed the trigger. At the crack of the rifle the haughty chief fell face-down to the ground. His comrades quickly rushed out and dragged away their fallen leader’s limp body.
With the death of their chief, the Mojave warriors lost stomach for further battle. They began to disengage and slowly withdrew from the battlefield, taking their dead and wounded with them except for the bodies of those slain at the beginning of the battle near the wagons. Thirty minutes later there wasn’t a live Indian to be seen anywhere.

Safe for the time being, the emigrants counted noses. They discovered that, other than the Bentner family of seven who were all exterminated when caught between camps, and Alpha Brown, who had been mortally wounded while riding back to the encampment, there were no other fatalities. However, eleven or twelve were wounded during the battle, some of them seriously. A partial list of the wounded included Sallie Fox, Elizabeth Jones, William Right Baley, Tom Hedgpeth, L. J. Rose, Ed Akey, and Lee Griffin. Of these, the wounds of Sallie Fox, Ed Akey, and Lee Griffin were the most serious. The number of Indian casualties was never determined with certainty, but according to statements they made later to army officers, the Indians admitted losing “heap” warriors in the battle. Seventeen bodies were counted by the emigrants near the wagons.19

Some good news for the emigrants was the fact that they were able to save a small number of their livestock. A few animals who happened to be grazing nearby when the fighting started became frightened by the sound of battle, ran into camp, and thus were spared. Some of these were the animals that the men were using to pull the logs from the grove to the river to construct a raft. Rose stated that they numbered seventeen cattle and ten mules and horses. Among these were six oxen, just enough to pull one large wagon, and two mules to pull the light ambulance. There were also two or three riding horses in this group including Old Bob, one of Rose’s favorites. Most of the rest were cows, calves, and colts. There were also two or three oxen belonging to members of the Baley company. Except for a small number of riding horses that might still be alive at the mountain camp, these were all that remained of a combined herd of cattle and horses that numbered more than four hundred at the beginning of the journey.

Thomas Hedgpeth was able to save his horse, but he took a serious risk to his life in so doing. At the beginning of the battle Tom had his riding mare tied to a tree about a hundred yards from camp. When he heard the Indians yelling, he made a dash for the animal and
was able to untie her and bring her safely back to the wagons, although the Mojaves were chasing and shooting arrows at him all the way. He was criticized by some of his companions for risking his life to save an animal, but he responded by saying, “A man had about as well be killed as be left in this wild savage country without a horse.”

Rose had not been so fortunate with his horse. He had a prized stallion, Black Morrill, that he intended to use to start a trotting horse stable when he arrived in California. He always kept this animal near camp and secured by a strong chain so that he could not wander off or be stolen. The Indians attempted to take this horse during the battle, but finding that they could not cut the chain, they satisfied themselves by slitting the horse’s throat, leaving his carcass hanging in the halter.

After the Indians departed the battlefield, and the emigrants were certain that the battle was over, they held a council to decide what to do next. It was their unanimous opinion that the only course open to them was to retrace their steps all the way back to Albuquerque, a distance of nearly five hundred miles over a burning desert with little food and an uncertain water supply. Although they were only about one hundred and seventy miles from San Bernardino, the nearest settlement, they felt that their numbers were too small to hold off such a vast horde of Mojave warriors a second time. They knew, too, that they would be especially vulnerable while crossing the Colorado River since they would have to divide their pitifully small force and defend both banks of the river while crossing.

Another factor in their decision was that they were low on ammunition. In addition, their psychological condition was probably not too good either. The sudden, fierce, and unexpected attack from a group of supposedly friendly Indians left them in a state of shock both physically and mentally. The men of the Baley company had an especially good reason for being concerned; their wives, children, and other loved ones were all back at the mountain camp, and for all they knew the Mojaves might have attacked the camp and slaughtered them all.

Given their very limited resources, the emigrants realized that the odds for a safe return to Albuquerque were not good. There was one small ray of hope: They just might meet another westward-bound emigrant party that could render them enough assistance to return safely to Albuquerque where they might be able to refit and attempt
the trip again next year. This faint hope was enough to start them on their long retrograde march.

Before they could leave, however, there was one sad and final duty to perform—the burial of Alpha Brown. His arrow-filled body still lay under the shade of a large cottonwood tree where it had been tenderly placed after he toppled from his saddle. The body was carefully wrapped in blankets, and then, after a few short prayers, it was gently committed to the turbid waters of the Colorado River. Logging chains were added as weight so that the body would sink to the bottom of the river where it would not be found and mutilated by the Indians.

This sad duty performed, they now began the unenviable task of selecting the few articles they could take with them. Only the most essential items could be taken; everything else had to be abandoned. Just enough work animals had been saved to pull one wagon and the ambulance. Most of the hauling space of these vehicles was reserved for those too young, too infirm, or too badly wounded to walk. The emigrants had neither the time nor the inclination to cache their property for future recovery. They might have burned their possessions to keep them from falling into the hands of the Mojaves, but this, they feared, would invite a night attack. Besides, perhaps discovering, examining, and dividing all that plunder just might occupy the Indians long enough for the emigrants to slip away undetected.

In the only remaining wagon rode Grandma Jones (Elizabeth Burgett Jones) because of her infirmities and wounds; the Rose children, Nina and Annie, ages four and one respectively; the small children of Mary Brown, Orrin and Julia; and the badly wounded Sallie Fox. Also riding in the wagon was eighteen-year-old Ed Jones who was still suffering from the wounds he received a few days previously from his encounter with the Hualapai Indians. He was still unable to walk. In the ambulance, on an improvised stretcher, rode the seriously wounded Lee Griffin. As many provisions as possible were crammed into the wagon and the ambulance.

Those who had horses, and were physically able to ride them included Amanda Rose, who was mounted on Old Bob, one of the riding horses that had been saved. The newly widowed Mary Brown rode the horse that had carried her husband into camp after he was mortally wounded. Tom Hedgpeth, also wounded, was mounted on the mare he
had risked his life to save. Because he was lame, Grandpa Ezra M. Jones was assigned the task of driving the ambulance, pulled by two mules and carrying the wounded Lee Griffin. Everyone else walked.

It was after 6:00 p.m. before the bewildered emigrants got well enough organized to slip away from the river camp. They traveled only a mile or two before darkness overtook them. Since the moon hadn’t yet risen, the night was pitch dark; they could not see where they were going and they kept losing their way. When they came to an elevated spot, they decided to call a halt and wait for better conditions. They chose this location because it was free of chaparral and no Indian could sneak up on them. Fearful of giving away their position, they dared not show any kind of light, and when they spoke to each other it was in whispers; even the Brown’s little dog Pedro sensed the necessity for silence and uttered not a sound. The emigrants constantly strained their ears for any sign of danger; the slightest sound, even the hooting of an owl or the creaking of the harness of the oxen caused the men to stiffen the grip on their guns and edge their fingers ever closer to the trigger.

About ten o’clock that night, the evening stillness was shattered by the tumultuous sound of war whoops, accompanied by the clanging of kettles, pots, and pans, coming from the direction of the river camp which the emigrants had recently evacuated. The Mojave warriors had come back expecting to catch their quarry asleep and finish them off with knives and war clubs. Finding that their intended prey had flown the coop, they contented themselves by sorting through the large quantity of loot left behind. This called for a victory celebration. One wag, who still retained his sense of humor in spite of recent events, suggested that perhaps the reason for all the merriment emanating from the Indians was because they had broken into Rose’s medicine chest and found his eight-dollar-a-bottle brandy. Their great joy with all the booty that fell into their hands is very likely the reason why they did not pursue the fleeing wagon train.

Shortly after midnight the moon rose, casting just enough light for the emigrants to resume their flight. All night and all the next day, August 31, the weary survivors, driven by fear of what they might find at the mountain camp, continued their torturous backward march. Their anxiety to learn the fate of their comrades and loved ones motivated them to hurry on at the utmost speed. The day was scorching
hot, but there was little water or food for either man or beast. Pushed to its utmost limits, the mule team driven by Grandpa Jones and pulling the light ambulance with the wounded Lee Griffin inside, began falling farther and farther behind until it lagged almost a mile behind the others. The exhausted mules, acting mulish, resented the rough treatment, and they expressed their displeasure by stopping more and more often. Each time they stopped it took a greater effort to get them started again. Finally, neither the whip nor the sharp tongue of Grandpa Jones could get them to take a forward step. Grandpa Jones, alone except for the badly wounded Griffin, and doubtless under great physical and mental stress from events of the previous day, made an unfortunate and unwise decision. He unhitched the mules from the ambulance and turned them loose, thinking that they would discover water on their own and be recovered later after they drank their fill. He then caught up with the others who were nearing the mountain camp, leaving the ambulance and Griffin alone in the hostile desert. The mules were never seen again; both they and the ambulance with all its contents, except for Griffin, were a total loss. All the blame, however, should not attach to Grandpa Jones. Others in the group should have noticed when he began to fall behind and they should have gone back to help him, but they didn’t.

When Ed Akey learned the ambulance was abandoned in the desert with Griffin inside, he determined to go back and rescue his friend. Although rather badly wounded himself, Akey, without waiting for his supper, went back to the desert alone to look for the ambulance and Griffin. After a long search in the dark he finally located the rig. The problem now was how to get Griffin back to camp. Griffin could hardly stand, much less walk. Both knew that to be caught in the desert by the Indians in such a vulnerable condition meant certain death. Self-preservation being a powerful force, the two devised a plan where Griffin would take a step forward by leaning heavily on Akey’s shoulder, rest, then take another painful step forward. Repeating this process over and over again, the pair returned safely to camp. Thus, by the force of sheer determination, another life was saved.

Thomas Hedgpeth, who was probably the only man in the group who still possessed a mount, rode ahead of the others and was the first to make contact with the mountain camp. He was spotted by
his father Joel Hedgpeth Sr., who was watching from a hilltop for signs of anyone coming from the direction of the river. They had been expecting the men to return with the work oxen to pull the wagons down to the river camp so they could join the Rose company. Just that day they had put the finishing touches to the road they were building and were eagerly looking forward to joining their comrades at the river and continuing their journey to California.

Joel Hedgpeth Jr., a youth of seventeen at the time, who was present at the meeting between father and son, describes their tearful reunion.

The next day Brother Thomas came on ahead to bring us the news of the disaster. I well remember his arrival. Father had walked out to an eminence that enabled him to see down the road some distance. I was near him when we saw Tom coming. My brother was a splendid horseman—no Spanish cavalier of the olden times ever sat on his horse more knightly than he. But that day—Oh, that day! How different! He was riding the animal that he had risked his life to save the day before. He was sick from riding in the sun and weak from loss of blood. His left arm was swinging in a big white handkerchief, that had many blood stains on it. He seemed almost as limber as a wet dish rag. All his starch and usual knightly dignity were gone. Father walked on to meet him and exclaimed, “Well, Tom, I see something awful has happened. What is it? Are the rest killed?” Tom replied rather slowly, “No, only Mr. Brown is killed but a dozen or fifteen others are wounded, myself among them and the Indians have taken nearly all the cattle.” The faith of my father’s reply, like that of Job’s, has been ringing in my soul all these years. Looking Tom in the face, Father said, “Well, thank God the boys are not killed. The Lord will take care of us somehow.” Brother Thomas was helped from his horse and taken charge of by his wife and mother, perhaps the best friends that any man ever had—except the Divine Father. That night I heard Mother sobbing quietly and Father said to her, “Don’t cry. Don’t cry, Jane, the Lord will provide for us in some way.”

Soon the other survivors came into camp, and finding that all in the mountain camp were well, a joyous reunion was held. That night a well-cooked but frugal meal was enjoyed by all.