



# Edward J. Steptoe and the Indian Wars: Life on the Frontier, 1815–1865

*Ron McFarland, Ronald E. McFarland*

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Lieutenant Colonel Edward J. Steptoe's escape from encirclement by 1,000 Northern Plateau Indians in 1858 is a familiar story from the Indian Wars. Yet the details of the Battle of Pine Creek (or Tohotonimme) and its aftermath remain subjects of debate. Outnumbered six to one, Steptoe's 164 troops slipped away in the night. Newspapers called it a "disaster." A few weeks later, Colonel George Wright avenged the defeat and Steptoe, who had suffered a stroke months before the battle, lived his final years in relative obscurity in his native Virginia as the Civil War erupted.

This definitive biography of Steptoe chronicles the career of a field officer who served nearly four years in the Second Seminole War, won commendation for gallantry during the Mexican War, performed admirably (though controversially) in the Utah Territory, undertook construction of forts at Walla Walla in the newly defined Washington Territory and engaged with various tribes throughout his deployments. His personal letters reveal a thoughtful, sensitive commander who came to question his choice of career even before his final battle.

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