

## GUMPANDAMA'S GIFT

Osage Chief Clermont was in high spirits. Once again he had fulfilled his own pledge, "to never make war on whites, and never make peace with his Indian enemies. Clermont, whose village was located six miles north of his namesake town Claremore, had moved his tribe from Missouri to the site in 1800 after being persuaded by Jean Pierre Chouteau. When Chouteau establishing his first trading camp at Salina in 1796, he discovered that the area, though rich in wildlife, had no hunting tribesman. Chouteau then returned to the Osage camps and persuaded both Clermont, earlier known as Gra-mo and Cahseegra or Big Track, to move their tribes. It had been a good decision, but age old animosities between tribes still existed. While Clermont and his warriors were on a western hunting trip in 1817, a coalition of tribes led by the Cherokees had nearly wiped out his village killing or kidnapping nearly 100 old men, women and children.

Now, in 1833, while hunting near the Salt Plains in what would become Woodward County, the Osage had discovered the trail of a large party of Kiowa warriors headed northeast toward Osage villages in Kansas. This meant that the Kiowa village would be unprotected, offering the Osage an opportunity, not only to destroy the village, but take anything of value for themselves. Backtracking to the southwest, Clermont's warriors discovered the village near present day Fort Sill. Those defenseless occupants who didn't escape were systematically slaughtered, five were taken hostage, and anything of value to the warriors was confiscated. Among the five prisoners were two children, Tunkahohye, ten years of age and Gumpandama, about twelve.

Raids on opposing villages that resulted in kidnappings were commonplace among tribes. And, in many respects, the fate of those taken was worse than death. Fortunate captives were occasionally ransomed, but the less fortunate became slaves, or even worse they were eaten. French explorer Bernard De La Harpe, wrote about cannibalism among tribes upon his return from visiting a Takawoni village near Jenks in 1719. He noted that during his visit, the chief gave him a young boy, and apologized for not providing more hostages for gifts "because seventeen had been consumed during a public feast." History does not record the fate of three of Clermont's other prisoners, but the two youngsters were spared, given the gift of life.

In 1834, the following spring, Hugh Love who had a trading post at Three Forks, bought the children from Clermont. His motive was to establish positive trading relations with the Kiowa by returning the children to them. That same spring, General Henry Leavenworth arrived at Fort Gibson intent upon leading a force of 500 Rangers and Dragoons southwest to treat with Kiowa, Comanche and Wichita tribes and to impress them with the might of United States Military forces. When he heard about Love's recent purchase, Leavenworth decided that returning the children to their Kiowa tribesman could be a key to successful negotiations, so he purchased them from Love. However, just a few days before the expedition began, the boy was killed instantly when a ram struck him in the abdomen and pinned him against a fence. Although his sister would accompany the party, Tunkahtohye's death proved to be the first omen of what proved to be a disastrous expedition.

The companies of Dragoons involved in the expedition were mostly new, unconditioned recruits from northern states, outfitted in colorful wool uniforms of the most ornate fashion, but totally impractical for travel on the plains during the summer months. Within days, sickness and death began taking a toll that ultimately included General Leavenworth. By the time the expedition reached its final destination in southwestern Oklahoma in mid-July only 183 troops could answer muster and many of them were weak and sickly. Leavenworth's objective of impressing tribesmen with the might of the army was forgotten.

However, the long suffering soldiers suddenly had a run of good fortune. The Indians were highly suspicious of the white man's motives and many were intent upon their destruction. But, fortunately during the interval before meeting with the chiefs, the uncle of Clermont's former hostage, Gunpandam, had ridden into camp and recognized his niece. And perhaps even more fortunately for the soldiers, during the meeting, her father, uncle and others thanked them so profusely it positively influenced many tribesmen in attendance. Lady luck was definitely smiling on the expedition that day because the meeting was attended by over 2000 armed warriors, a superior force that could easily have annihilated the emaciated troops.

Kidnapped the year before, traded, then used as a pawn but now among her own, Gunpandam, the young Indian girl, had now returned the favor, the gift of life, to remaining members of the Leavenworth expedition. They returned safely to Fort Gibson in August.



















