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BUSH, GEORGE W.

SECOND INTERVIEW

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Investigator, Linnaeus B. Ranok,
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Interview with George W. Bush
Shattuck, Oklahoma.

Born September 14, 1865,
Bremen, Germany.

September 14, 1865, at Bremen, Germany. George W. Bush was born of fairly well-to-do parents. In order to escape compulsory military service in his native land Mr. Bush managed to get to New York by the time he had reached the age of about sixteen years.

In midsummer of 1887 as an employee of the Santa Fe Railroad he was in their Topeka, Kansas, office to receive orders for a new assignment on the Santa Fe system.

"You are to go to Buzzard's Roost and take charge of the pump station for us in that vicinity," said the general superintendent for the Santa Fe to young Bush, and the latter wondered where Buzzard's Roost was. He had never heard of it before.

About three miles down stream on Wolf Creek from where Gage now stands and in the bottoms of this stream there used to be an extensive and dense growth of timber. About a mile west or upstream from this wooded nook is the confluence of Buzzard

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and Wolf Creeks. According to the earliest of the early-day pioneers of this section the sheltered woods around the confluence of Wolf and Buzzard Creeks became noted as a roosting place for buzzards. They say that hundreds of these carrions of the air used to swoop into this particular, immediate locality to roost at night. Hence the name, "Buzzard's Roost," given to it by early-day men.

At this point on the south side of Wolf Creek and just east of Buzzard Creek's mouth was a stopping station on the old stage line between Fort Supply and Fort Elliott, (Mobeetie) Texas. At Buzzard's Roost, the old timers say the stage coach changed teams. They say, too, that usually the teams on this old line were wiry, Spanish mules, four head of them hitched tandem to one coach.

George W. Bush rode a "swing train" out of Kiowa, Kansas, and arrived at Buzzard's Roost in the Cherokee Strip, June 8, 1887.

There the train stopped for a short period of time. A few passengers got off and some supplies for the Stage Station were unloaded. Thence west this Santa Fe train proceeded about five or six miles to the point on the line where Willow Creek

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converges with Wolf Creek. Here the Santa Fe had established a pump station to furnish water for their trains. It stood on the south bank of Wolf Creek and at the mouth of Willow Creek about half way between the present towns of Shattuck and Gage. This was the end of the line then. The grade was completed way on southwest but the steel and rolling stock did not extend beyond the confluence of Willow and Wolf Creeks. Located here was a steam boiler, steam pump, etc., inclosed by a roofless, rough board, foursided, pen-like structure. Without, stood a water supply tank. They "dumped" Mr. Bush and his camp stove off here. He made a quick survey of his new home's surroundings and resources. It was not long till time for supper.

"What am I going to eat here?" he inquired. "That is your lookout, I guess," was the train master's laconic reply.

At this time, June 8, 1867, several hundred men were employed by the Santa Fe on this part of their line laying steel. The first track was of fifty pound rails. A string of cars where this large crew ate stood on an improvised, temporary siding just a few miles east of Mr. Bush's new home and base of operations as a Santa Fe employee and about half way distant to Buzzard's Roost.

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Young Bush returned to these "chuck" cars for his supper. From these in charge he managed to procure a meager supply of simple articles of food. They gave him part of an old tent, too, to cover the roofless shanty for a rainstorm was threatening. As soon as possible after eating his supper he swung his old tent and "grubstake" over his shoulder and hurried back west to his lonely vigil at the mouth of Willow Creek.

Bush was scarcely more than a boy at this time, only twenty-one years old. While in New York before coming west he had read much of the bloody depredations of the western Indians and of the desperate white outlaws of the west. Here he was, in the very heart of these hostile and lawless characters' playground.

That first night in the pump house Bush's bed was made of a few clumps of the native sagebrush which he had pulled from the creek bank. And a rain and storm came upon him that night. The old tent covering the pump house leaked and flapped. Bush said that every sound he heard from outside he suspected were movements of savage Indians come to scalp him. That first night on Willow Creek was to him the longest he ever experienced and a night of such mortal, dreadful fear as he

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never before nor since went through.

However, his difficulties and problems were to multiply in the days to come; if dreadful fear of savage Indians and desperate white men was to pass, other anxieties immediately followed.

The heavy rain of June 8, and the 9th extended west to the headwaters of Wolf Creek and its western tributaries. The afternoon of June 9th, Wolf Creek was booming with a flood of muddy, sandy water. The storage tank at the pump station was low, and though the water line's source was the rolling current of Wolf Creek, Bush could but pump from it anyway. Not long, however, for the boiling sands of the creek stalled his pumps. While the high waters receded Bush cleaned and repaired his pumping system. He despaired in observing that the big raise had changed the current of water to about fifty yards north of where it had been before the high water. He therefore set to work with his coal shovel excavating another basin in the creek-bed around the intake end of his water line and dug a ditch extending north to the new channel deep enough to carry an ample supply of water to his pump line.

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Upon coming to the Willow Creek pump station Mr. Bush knew not even the most elementary rudiments of cooking, had no one to look for him and no place within reasonable distance to board. Consequently, he declares that for awhile eating for him was a problem. Food supplies were most difficult to obtain, for he was afoot and alone at the pump-house. He was not without means to buy food but sources of supply were miles from him. He had no cooking utensils whatever to begin with, instead, he used a few tin cans he had fortunately found along the right-of-way. It was "root hog or die" for young Bush.

About six miles distant from his station was a Buzzard's Roost and those in charge helped him some. And right by this historic old land mark was the KH Ranch headquarters. KH was the ranch's brand but strictly speaking it was the New York Cattle Company, which company was a member of the first and original Cherokee Strip Livestock Association. The KH boys aided Bush much for the first month or so. Along the bottoms on the south side of Wolf Creek and right by his lonely dwelling wound the route of the overland freight trail from Fort Supply to Fort Elliott, Texas. At intervals the "bull-team trains" rumbled southwest over this old trail

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with great loads of supplies headed for Fort Elliott and isolated trading posts in the Texas Panhandle. These bull-team trains were heavy freight wagons drawn by oxen, usually not less than four head, two teams of two each were hitched tandem fashion to a single unit and in many instances pulled a stubbed tongued trail wagon behind. Bush got food from these ox team freighters occasionally.

Mr. Bush swears by the cowmen and cow punchers of those days and proclaims them the best friends he ever had. Amongst them were desperate characters, "hard nuts", as he recalled them, but in times of need they were friends indeed to young Bush. To cross their paths those days was a fatal mistake. But for kindness and generosity he declares them the greatest of all mankind.

One of the K H boys took time and pains with Bush in teaching him how to cook. Beans was the staff of life those days and the K H puncher admonished him to add soda to the pot in boiling them. Bush said that his first attempt at bean cooking ended in a revolting mess. He had put too much soda into the boiling water and the contents of his bean pot turned sickeningly yellow. The K H cowboy advised him of the cause of his failure, however. He also taught Bush how

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to bake biscuits, and how to use a "dutch oven" for this purpose.

In '87 Johnson and Hoover were big merchants in the border town of Kiowa, Kansas. Not many years later they re-located at Canadian City, Texas. Johnson became a wealthy cowman and banker and Hoover became a very prominent Panhandle and Western Oklahoma lawyer. For a time Hoover maintained a law office at Woodward during the early days of Woodward's history. It was known as the firm of Hoover, Wybrant & Swindall. Both of the latter men became prominent in Oklahoma, Swindall especially. He was the Swindall who later went to Congress from the Eighth Oklahoma District and served on the bench of the Supreme Court of Oklahoma. The Johnson of this partnership was the father of Will Johnson who while in school at Kemper Military Academy became quite companionable with the late and famous Will Rogers. This Will Johnson, it can be said, was solely responsible for Rogers' coming to Higgins, Texas, in February, 1898, and becoming a cowhand on the W. P. Ewing Ranch then on Little Robe Creek in the southwest corner of what is now Ellis County.

The firm of Hoover & Johnson of Kiowa operated ox team freight wagons from Kiowa down through the Cherokee Strip to points in the Panhandle of Texas. The bull trains travelled

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the old Fort Supply-Fort Elliott freighters' trail past Bush's isolated station at the mouth of Willow Creek.

Mr. Bush had known Mr. Johnson and Mr. Hoover at Kiowa before he came to his remote post on the new railroad in the Strip. He arranged with this firm's freighters to bring him supplies from Kiowa such as food, some cooking utensils, bedding, guns and ammunition and clothing.

It was a lonely, trying vigil Bush kept on Willow Creek. But by the Fall of 1887 he was faring better. The Santa Fe had covered his pump shack with a waterproof roof. He had arranged for sure and ample sources of such supplies as he had to have. He had guns and plenty of ammunition for killing of the abundant wild game. He had procured ample clothing for the winter coming; also, a bedstead which after a fashion he had constructed of a few 2x4 pieces of railroad lumber. For this crude "bunk" he had made a bulging mattress of burlap sacks and sagebrush. He learned how to successfully cook and prepare simple food for himself. And best of all he had established friendly contact and relationship with several others inhabiting his section of the Strip.

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One morning during the fall season of 1887 while at work about his pump station, Mr. Bush was startled by the sudden appearance of many men on horse back in the woods away to the north of him in Wolf Creek bottoms. They were advancing toward his location. This was indeed unusual and as they came on in Bush's direction, some thirty or forty strong he observed that their mode of dress was most unusual. Soon he was to have his first brush with the Indians.

They were Cheyennes in full war-like regalia, streaming feathers and savage war-paint. Just the night before they had fled from old Fort Supply where they were being held as prisoners. Their approach frightened young Bush into near rigidity. He had guns, good guns, and could use them effectually. He was a stalwart six footer of a hundred and eighty pounds but what was this against 30 or 40 Cheyenne savages. It was hopeless.

He said that he felt as if his end had come. He knew the Indians would carry his scalp with them as they fled on. He heard the Cheyennes as they came splashing through the waters of Wolf Creek coming directly to his shack.

The entire band rode up to Bush's abode. Some had rifles, others were armed with bows and arrows tied on their backs. A few had knives and tomahawks on their persons. Most of them made straight for the pump-house and as many as could scrambled in and proceeded immediately to ransack, eat and carry out his "grubstake" and belongings. None of them molested him as he stood on the creek bank some distance away in abject despair as he observed the Indians work havoc and ruination upon him.

With only threatening gestures and guttural, unintelligible utterances the plundering Cheyennes proceeded in their preparations to appropriate about everything in Bush's possession but the pump-house and machinery. While their looting went on, however, Mr. Bush observed in the fringe of the woods along the north banks of Wolf Creek another band of horsemen riding in his direction. His first thought was that more Indians were coming. Soon though he observed that all were dressed much alike, in the blue of the United States Army and leading the column was a white man.

It was Amos Chapman, the famous scout; he knew it was; for from the rider's saddle on one side a leg dangled.

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Amos Chapman had lost one foot and part of his leg in a sharp skirmish with hostile Comanche and Kiowa warriors on the Texas plains about 1874. It occurred while he was on scout duty with a small detachment of United States Cavalry troopers en route from the camp of General Miles on McClellan Creek to Fort Supply with dispatches. With a command of about 50 Indian policemen Chapman was on the trail of the fleeing Cheyenne prisoners. Bush waved to Chapman and beckoned him on to aid him in this his greatest hour of despair.

The detachment pursuing the renegade Cheyennes were all Indians except Chapman, their leader. Their equipment from stem to stern was the property of the U. S. Army. They wore the regular United States Cavalry uniform. Each and every man carried a regulation carbine, saber and forty-five calibre Colt's revolver. They were mounted on good Cavalry horses. Down over their shoulders, Chapman included, they wore long, flowing hair.

As Chapman and his command approached, the plundering Cheyennes made no effort to get away or resist capture. Bush affirms that attempted flight or resistance would have been utterly futile and the renegade Indians knew it.

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The Fort Supply detachment had been on their trail all night and Amos Chapman was in no mood to temporize. He promptly deployed his troopers in a circular formation and in the sharp, native tongue of the Cheyennes he ordered every one of them within it. Each man in his command faced the center of their ring formation with carbines drawn. Amos then rode commandingly within the circle too and "gave those Indians hell in their own lingo."

A part of his "grubstake," the Indians had eaten, but the balance remained and everything else they had prepared to carry off they were required to replace. Every one was searched and given a thorough "shakedown" by the famous Chapman. Without further ceremony the Indian troopers started back to Fort Supply with them.

This thrilling incident on Willow Creek was not the first meeting of Bush and Amos Chapman. After having dispatched his command with their prisoners on the return trail to Fort Supply he remained a few minutes with Bush. He assured the young station attendant that for some weeks to come one of his "Indian policemen" would pay Bush weekly visits at his Willow Creek "hangout." Mr. Bush was to report any untoward

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actions of the nomadic plains Indians who at that period were still harassing white habitations in this section of the Southwest. Over a number of weeks to come an Indian government trooper visited young Bush as per schedule, but on each occasion he would beg for tobacco from Bush to the point of nearly exhausting Mr. Bush's supply.

Track and rolling stock on the new railroad extended far southwest of Bush's isolated post by this time. On a west bound train one day in the late Fall of '87 Ed Hoover came down the line from Kiowa, and while the engine replenished its water supply from the Willow Creek tank Hoover left the train long enough for a visit with Mr. Bush. He left with an order from Bush for a quantity of food supplies including a cured ham, potatoes and flour. Within a week another west bound train stopping at Bush's station for water delivered the articles.

Not many days later about two hundred Colorado and New Mexico Indians who were returning from a trading expedition to the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, pitched camp on Willow Creek just a short distance south of Bush's pump station. Before these Indians broke camp and journeyed on northwest, Bush left his shack early one morning for the woods in

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the bottoms north of Wolf Creek to shoot wild turkey. Upon his return he discovered immediately that his ham and all of his potatoes were gone. He went straight to the nearby Indian camp.

Walking into the midst of the Indians he soon located his ham and potatoes they had stolen from him while he was away turkey hunting. "Here you dang rascals," he exclaimed to those nearby, "You stole that ham and potatoes from my house."

The Indians shook their heads in denial, uttered grunts in guttural tone, and by clumsy gestures bade him to depart.

Bush changed tactics. Assuming a pacific attitude he plead dire hunger. An old squaw approached Bush as if to escort him from their midst. Instead, she took him by one arm and lead him to a large soup kettle near them from which protruded the hind leg of a large hound dog. "John," she mumbled to him and pointed to the kettle of boiling dog meat. This ceremony was bitter irony to Mr. Bush. A piece of cooked dog was offered him to compensate for the ham and potatoes which they had stolen from him.

In violent rage and despair he left the camp roundly cursing them as he departed. He warned the Indians the first

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one observed near his premises would be punctured with his Winchester rifle.

The marauding bands of Indians, mostly Cheyennes and Arapahoes, who prowled the Strip country in those days were workers of mischief and iniquity. They pestered the cow-men with incessant cattle stealing. They would lurk in seclusion about the stage lines, and apparently for the more fun of it try to frighten the spirited stage teams into wild and uncontrollable flight. They annoyed the "bull train" freighters with their constant and persistent begging, and, given the slightest opportunity they would steal or rob a freighter of as much of his cargo as they could make away with.

At Fort Supply a strong garrison was maintained for service in this section, yet a wild frontier then. The troop force included the 9th United States Cavalry, a regiment of negro soldiers and also an imposing force of Indian Policemen.

Military detachments and expeditions out of Fort Supply endeavored to maintain constant surveillance over this quarter of the country during those days Bush spent in this section. One lonesome cavalry trooper could overawe a dozen pilfering

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Cheyenne warriors. In these parts in those days Amos Chapman was the very embodiment of law and order. He was not inclined to temporize with any evil doer coming within his authority and jurisdiction. Bush declares that Chapman was the "crack" markaman in frontier skirmish of that day and time around Fort Supply.

During the '80's the military telegraph and telephone line between Fort Supply and Fort Elliott, Texas, was strung with copper wire. Mr. Bush says that a common practice and prank of the invading and lawless Indians was to cut this line and carry away stretches of the wire, which they cut into small pieces and made rings for their fingers and ears.

A common adornment of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes was a copper ring in each ear lobe made of wire cut out of the Government's telegraph line. Soldiers rode and drove the line constantly to protect and repair it.