Herbert T. Rogers,
Investigator,
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Interview with Mrs. Frank Munson
Alva, Oklahoma

Mrs. Munson was born in Ohio on December 13, 1886. Her mother was a senior in the Female Academy of Ohio while her grandfather was a Baptist minister.

Mrs. Munson has taught school most of her life. She graduated in 1904 from Elgin High School. She then attended Carlton College in Northfield, Minnesota. She taught rural schools after she finished High School and then finished college in 1912. Mrs. Munson taught for sixteen years in Minnesota and two years in Pennsylvania. She taught English, German and Journalism along with Dramatics. She sponsored the High School newspapers while in Minnesota. The newspaper Tech from Technical High School from St. Cloud won National honors at the Central Press scholastic association at Madison, Wisconsin. During this time she had several short stories published in farm magazines. She worked for several months as a feature writer on a St. Paul daily.

The summers of 1925 and 1926 she spent in

summer school in Columbia University in New York City.

In the Fall of 1926 she went to Pennsylvania to accept a position as director of publicity in the Aliquippa Public School. She stayed there during the Fall of 1926 and 1927 and returned to Columbia that Spring, where she got her Master's Degree in English and Education in the Teacher's College.

The next Fall she came to Oklahoma, at Alva, to teach English, Journalism and Dramatics in the Northwestern State Teachers' College.

She taught there until her marriage, July 26, 1929, to Frank Gordon Munson of Alva.

Mrs. Munson is now a business partner to her husband in the hatchery they are running.

She has given a story of the Kansas 19th Cavalry which passed through Woods County to join Custer at Fort Supply.

The massacre of white men and the kidnapping of three white women led the Kansas 19th Cavalry from Topeka across Woods County in the Autumn of 1868 on their way to join General Custer at Fort

Supply.

The army wanted to punish the Indians severely; the Department of the Interior, the humanitarians and the church people were always intervening, as one of the soldiers of the Nineteenth complained. However, General Custer and General Phil Sheridan were finally given full power, and they determined to go into the wilderness in the Winter when the Indians would be at a disadvantage, to recapture the white women and pen the Indians on their Reservation if possible.

Kansans were in a fever of rage at the kidnapping and formed their own regiment to join Custer. Headquarters were at Topeka, east of the first Santa Fe passenger station. A fine body of horses had been recruited from the stables of Kansas, Missouri and Iowa, a beautiful group that were destined for a hard fate in Oklahoma Territory.

It was on November 19, 1868, when the regiment reached what is now Kiowa. The morning had been warm but before noon it began to rain and rain kept up all day, changing to frost and snow as night came on.

For a whole day the men had had nothing to eat but the buffalo which they had hunted. The horses, however, had had no grain nor hay for the three days previous, and there was nothing but short, dry prairie grass for them. They were already hungry and weakened by their three days' fast. In such a plight they entered Oklahoma.

Toward night the wind changed and it grew cold. The train was far in the rear and deep in the mud. A bivouac was made just before dark on a crooked, sluggish stream, probably the Salt Fork of Red River. Soon after, the wind increased to a hurricane, the temperature lost its grip and fell to zero and under. The wet clothing of the soldiers stiffened and whitened with frost.

Not a stick of wood was found, and the buffalo chips were saturated with water. The wind was so furious that fires were impossible except in holes. The night was moonless and very dark. Every available man was clinging to the horses. These were still excited by a stampede they had gone through

the night before. All night the horses were led up and down, up and down. The sudden lurch of a horse or an unexpected movement of a man would have carried every animal out onto the plains a fugitive, trampling men to death as they went.

Thus in storm, cold and darkness, without food and without fire, the Kansas Nineteenth Cavalry entered Woods County.

At eleven o'clock that night a few men found the end of a log protruding from a river bank several miles away. It took until three in the morning to build a fire, which they did in a hole in the ground where some of the men became warm once more and slept until dawn.

The Salt Fork of Red River had risen in the night and it was with difficulty that a ford was found, but this predicament was slight compared to the foodless day which followed with no buffalo meat to be found. The hills near the Cimarron were looming high ahead, but at noon the sky clouded over and those were lost to sight. The snow began to fall and the soldiers and horses were covered with it.

Their encampment that night was on Sand Creek, in five inches of snow, but with timber about them and roaring fires to keep off the wintry chill.

There was no buffalo meat that evening; the only food in camp was six barrels of cube sugar for the officer's mess, which Colonel Crawford meted out to the thousand. Every man was given a little handful of cubes after their days tramp through the snow.

Officers and men camped on Sand Creek in five inches of snow with more falling on the night of November 22, 1868. Something had to be done. A few sugar cubes could no longer feed a thousand men. The wind might change and the snow start to drift; then they would have to kill the horses and begin to live off them - and the kidnapped white women would not be rescued; the massacred men would not be avenged.

The snow continued falling and by ten 0'clock that night there was a ten inch blanket over the fields, when Captain A. Y. Pliley left in the darkness in search of General Sheridan and Fort Supply.

Captain Pliley was then accounted one of the most romantic figures in Kansas and one of the most agile in getting out of difficult situations. At the Aricharee Fort, with one soldier accompanying him, he had crawled out in the dark, with Indian warriors all about him and sought and obtained help from another regiment and had saved the lives of many.

Now, accompanied by Lieutenant Jesse E. Parsons of Troop C, with fifty picked men and horses, he left the camp at Sand Creek, setting out in the snow storm to find possible safety for the whole regiment. He must find Fort Supply at once. All that Colonel Crawford knew was that this fort was "somewhere near the forks of Beaver Creek and the North Canadian River"

The regiment woke up on November 23, with the snow still falling heavily and with a foot of snow upon the ground. All the cottonwoods possible were cut down and their branches and twigs were fed to the weakened horses, but it was poor eating for the beasts. The men had nothing all day.

The next morning the snow had stopped, and the army grimly moved out of camp breaking the icy crust and floundering about. They could not go horseback any longer, for the horses were too weak to carry them; so they had to walk as best they could.

That night they encamped within close view of the Cimarron hills, but this time with buffalo meat for supper. There were also hackberry trees at this place and the soldiers stripped the trees of the berries, which tasted fine with buffalo meat.

This point where they camped became known officially as Camp Hackberry Point, although the soldiers knew it as Camp Starvation, or Camp Desolation. Here on a plain between high hills, with a brook and spring at their feet and Wild Cat Mountains at their right, the army made themselves as comfortable as possible.

Hackberry Point became known to the Woods County settlers as "Custer's Camp", because the men were going to join Custer, although rightfully the place could have been called "Crawford's Camp", as Crawford was the commanding officer. The belief is that this camp has been located west of the station of Brace

on the Santa Fe branch to Freedom, up the Cimarron from Waynoka. This would be in the pasture of Fred Viban, a mile or two off of the road. However, to have reached this spot the regiment must have wandered far off their course.

Simply to remain there and eat horse flesh was impossible and for the whole army to move was impossible also, as men and beasts were both weakened, some of the men were sick and some were frostbitten.

Five hundred picked men and horses then left camp setting out without beds, tents or food for Fort Supply, living on game if they could get it, going without if they couldn't. These stronger, sturdier men were under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Horace L. Moore, while the remainder, over six hundred men, were left with Major B. W. Jenkins and Colonel Crawford.

The next morning the picked men crossed the Cimarron River through three feet of water, and came to a blank wall of precipice on the other side of the Cimarron. For several miles they skirted the base of the cliffs, and finally found a narrow defile through which they might go, climbing up

some five hundred feet to the mesas above. It was dark when they reached the mesas and there were five hundred men camped in the snow by cottonwood fires at a little creek with nothing at all to eat and only branches of trees for their horses.

The thermometer went to twenty degrees below zero that night of November 25, 1868, with the Kansas Nineteenth Cavalry encamped beside a creek beyond the Cimarron on the way to Fort Supply. The horses were shivering and without feed, and the men were too; but they tried to scrape off the snow and find a little grass for the horses to eat.

Many men sat up all night over the fire, covering their horses with their only blankets; for those horses must not die!

The horses began to sicken and die, however, for they had not had a good ration since they left Wichita, two weeks previous, and a few cottonwood branches could not keep them alive.

With no food for themselves and with the horses starving to death, the men woke to Thanksgiving day, bitter and cheerless. If they could not reach Fort

Supply in fair condition, the whole object of their expedition would be defeated.

There were three white women to be found among the Indians; there were Mrs. Clara Blinn and her two year old boy, who had been taken from a train going from Lyon to Dodge; her husband was killed at the time. She had found opportunity to send a note by Mexican traders, saying, "I am with the Cheyennes and they say when the white men make peace, we can go home. They expect traders to come and they will sell us to them. If it is Mexicans, I am afraid they will sell us into slavery in Mexico."

Then there was the white girl(name unknown) whose father, mother, brother, and sister were all killed when their house on the Republican River was surrounded and this seventeen year old girl was taken captive.

Then there was a bride named Mrs. Morgan. She was taken from near the Solomon River. Her young husband was shot, and she herself was stunned with a war club and was thrown across a pony's back. Both of these young women were believed to be in the same party of Indians, though neither had seen

the other before.

Thanksgiving day passed with little to eat, and little to be thankful for; but the next day cheer after cheer went up from the army, for they had discovered the stump of a tree recently cut by a white man's axe!

It was Pliley's trail they were crossing now. The men had wild turkey for supper.

A day later they came to Fort Supply

Pliley had arrived three days previous, and General Sheridan had sent back suitable supplies to the detachment left in Woods County on the Cimarron; Sheridan ordered his men to clear the snow, erect tents, and fill them with hay for dry bedding for officers and men.

Safe and snug in the camp at Fort Supply, the first half of the Kansas Nineteenth Regiment waited for the others to come in, which they did shortly after without the loss of a man, although a number of good horses were left by the wayside. There was chagrin, though, to find that General Custer had not waited for them, but had gone off to fight the Indians himself.

On November 29, the day after their arrival, a scout brought the news that the battle of the Washita had been fought on November 27, and that Black Kettle, Little Rock and most of their warriors had been killed and the women and children captured, while two distinguished white officers had been killed, as well as seven men of the Seventh Cavalry.

From this time on the Nineteenth Regiment was merged with the Seventh as part of Custer's army. On December 6 they left together on the Indians' trail, about eighteen hundred horsemen and three hundred mule wagons.

At the South Canadian River the cold was so intense that the thermometer registered eighteen degrees below.

On December 10 the soldiers arrived at the battleground of the Washita, and here found in a wagon the dead bodies of Mrs. Clara Blinn and her little boy. Mrs. Blinn had been shot and her little boy killed by being dashed against a tree.

On to Fort Cobb marched the army, to dismantle and abandon it soon after; thence to Fort Sill in the Wichita Mountains.

Death now began to take toll of the horses, although they were getting grain and green grass; but the privations they had endured were too much for them. Bodies of dead horses lined the way from Fort Cobb to Fort Sill and finally, the few surviving horses were turned in at Fort Arbuckle.

March 10 the mules, too, began to fall, and mule meat became the only food in the army. The coffee, sugar and tobacco had long since been gone, and even the salt was gone. After many days of privations, however, Custer caught up with the Cheyennes.

The army believed that their time for revenge had come, and it was with great bewilderment that they saw Custer maneuver quietly without permitting them to fire. But there were two kidnapped women to be rescued, and though the brother of one was there, raging to get at the savages, Custer knew the girls must be rescued without a fight, lest they perish as did Clara Blinn and her boy.

At last, by parleys between Custer and the chiefs and threats of immediate execution if the women were not brought to General Custer before

the sun went down, the Indians were induced to deliver their prisoners. First, on a hilltop could be seen a single Indian, beckoning to someone in the rear, then another appeared, beckoning, then another and another. Finally a pony came on which were two figures. These slid off and were met by an interpreter of Custer's army, who signalled for them to advance to camp.

They came slowly, hand in hand. Custer sent the Kansas colonel forward to receive them in the name of Kansas. The two young women clung to each other desperately. Colonel Moore of the Nineteenth asked the older one, "Are you Mrs. Morgan". She answered that she was, and her compation was Miss White. Then Mrs. Morgan asked, "Are we free now?" When reassured, she said, "Where is my husband?" He was wounded, but alive." and my brother?" They replied, "With the Army." But they did not tell her that her brother was under arrest until she and Miss White were safe, so that he would not kill every Indian in sight. Miss White knew that all her people had been killed, so asked no questions.

The girls were dressed in flour sacks, with leggings and moccasins. Officers and men drew off their coats at once to give to them.

The girls showed marks of hard and cruel usage. Heavy burdens had been carried on their bare shoulders till the skin was as hard and calloused as the palm of a laborer's hand. The jealous squaws, with their barbaric rawhides, had covered their backs with scars. Some of the more recent lashings had left unhealed gashes as wide as a man's finger. At first they had been sold back and forth among the bucks for fifteen ponies, but their last owners only paid two. For five or six months these women had borne distress, homesickness, grief, abuse, cold, hunger and loss of hope, and still lived.

From this place back to camp Supply the men marched every day weaker from loss of food; every day more mules fell, their wagons being burned rather than left behind. At last they staggered into Supply, where they were fed, and in some measure, healed of their privations. Within a

few days they were ready to turn northward and commence the two hundred mile march to Fort Hays, where they were mustered out April 18, 1869.

There are other marks of their coming, however, than the ruts of their wagons across the hills; for David Payne, chief of the Boomers, was one of their number; and there were many others who had crossed the land of Oklahoma, and declared it fair and worth having - a desire that finally led to the opening of Indian Territory and the Cherokee Outlet to white civilization.