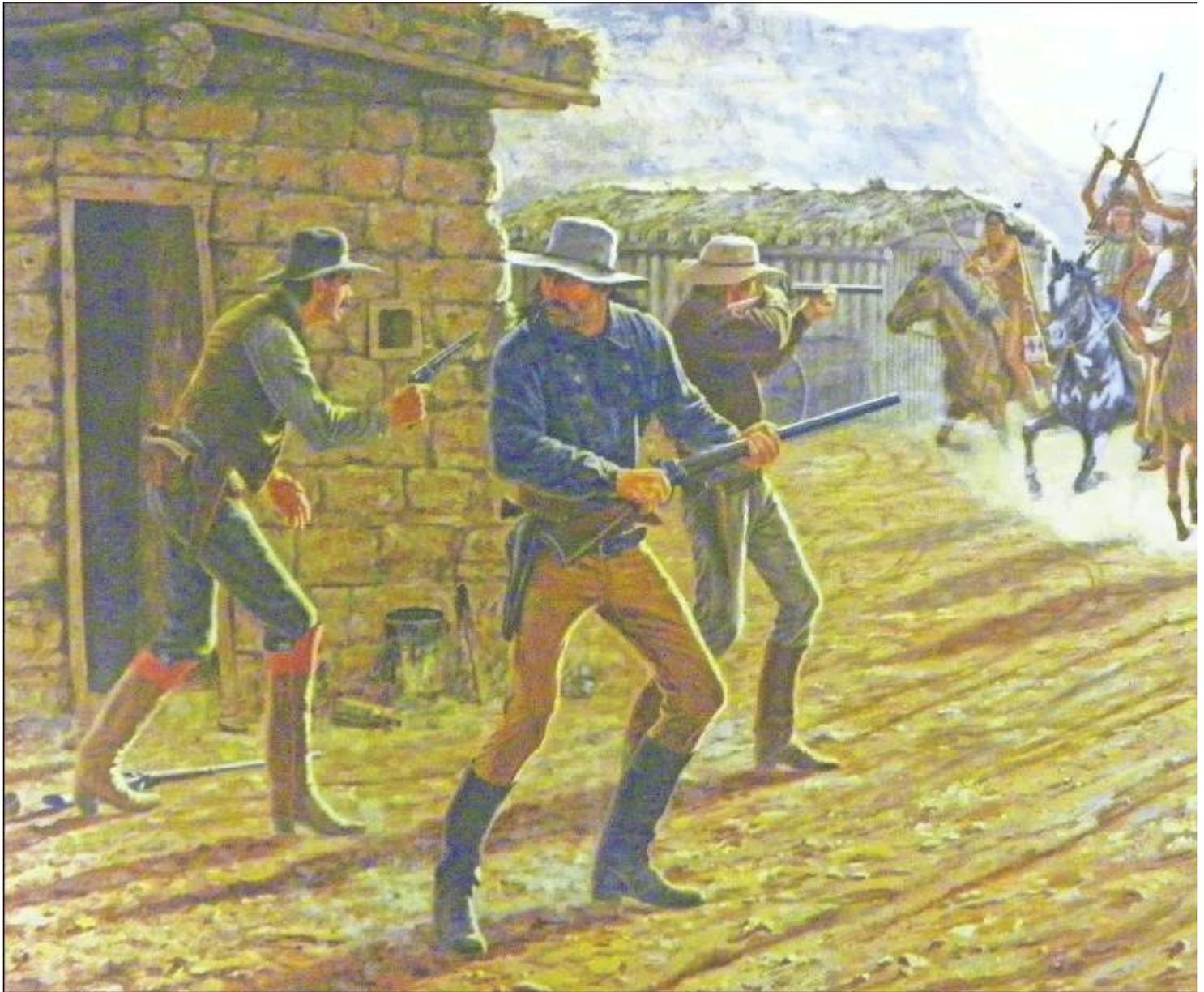


CAPROCK CHRONICLES

# The Second Battle of Adobe Walls

CHUCK LANEHART



The Second Battle of Adobe Walls. [ART COURTESY OF JOE GRANDEE, HISTORICAL WESTERN ARTIST  
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Nothing remains of the ruins, but historic monuments mark a place in Hutchinson County known as Adobe Walls, where two celebrated battles—ten

years apart—between Native Americans and frontiersmen shaped the future of civilization on the Llano Estacado.

Adobe Walls was a Texas Panhandle outpost established in the early 1840s as a marketplace for white trade with Indians in the area. But by 1848, conflict with aggressive Comanches forced the traders to abandon the fort. They blew the place up with gunpowder. The adobe ruins became a landmark to warn those venturing into dangerous Comanche territory.



**Quanah Parker [PHOTO COURTESY OF HUTCHINSON COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM]**

Indian uprisings on the Texas plains culminated in 1864 at the First Battle of Adobe Walls. Kit Carson's Union troops stationed in New Mexico rode east, attempting to quell the unrest. When his 330 men reached the ruins, an estimated 3,000 Comanches and Kiowas attacked, driving Carson's forces back to New Mexico.

In 1867, some tribes accepted the terms of the Treaty of Medicine Lodge, requiring them to relocate to reservations in what is now Oklahoma. The Indians understood the ambiguous terms of the treaty as prohibiting "white settlements" in the Panhandle, which they believed was reserved as their exclusive hunting grounds "so long as the buffalo range there in such numbers as to justify the chase."

But buffalo hunters—known as “hide men”—continued to exploit the territory. In the 1870s, bison became scarce, which the remaining Indians saw as a serious threat to their existence, and they blamed the illegal hunters. When the federal government failed to intervene, Comanche leader Quanah Parker resolved to drive out the hide men.

In the spring of 1874, Kansas merchants established a buffalo camp near present-day Stinnett in the Indian’s hunting territory. Among the 29 occupants were Billy Dixon—the best shot in Dodge City—and 20-year-old Bat Masterson, a novice hunter. The site was named after the original Adobe Walls—a mile away—and developed into a center for the buffalo hide trade, with semipermanent sod structures.

Outraged by this blatant violation of the treaty, Quanah and Kiowa Chief Lone Wolf recruited a force of perhaps 700 Comanche, Cheyenne and Kiowa braves. Comanche medicine man Isatai’i claimed his magic would make warriors invulnerable to bullets. He promised a dawn attack would surprise the hunters, and they would be annihilated.

Relying on Isatai’i’s advice, Indians struck Adobe Walls at dawn on June 27, 1874, but many hunters were awake repairing a broken ridgepole.

Dixon described the scene. “There was never a more splendidly barbaric sight. Hundreds of warriors, the flower of the fighting men of the southwestern Plains tribes, mounted upon their finest horses, armed with guns and lances, and carrying heavy shields of thick buffalo hide, were coming like the wind. Half-naked bodies of the riders glittered with ornaments of silver and brass.”

The 28 hide men—and a hunter’s wife—took cover in two sod stores and a saloon. Initial fighting was at close quarters, with combatants firing handguns as Indians attempted to overrun the village. Thanks to good shooting and the protective earthen walls, the warriors were turned back.

“We tried to storm the place several times, but the hunters shot so well we would have to retreat,” Quanah recalled.

The hunters kept the Indians at bay with .50-caliber Sharps rifles, the latest in long-range, high velocity weaponry. The rifle-fire took a heavy toll on the warriors before they could come close enough to return effective fire. The



War. Quanah and Lone Wolf led their followers to the reservation. Dixon won a Medal of Honor for bravery in the Red River War. Masterson went on to careers as a gambler, lawman and later as a journalist, producing colorful tales of the American West. As the buffalo vanished, the dominance of nomadic Plains Indians and their unique lifestyle faded into history. The Texas plains were now safe for ranchers, farmers and other settlers.