A KATO WAR*

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Warfare among the North American Indians was as variously motivated as its forms were different. In the Eastern United States, bravery was the most obvious road to social status for the ordinary man. In the Plains it was virtually indispensable for whoever wished to count in the community, and the rules governing recognition were strictly standardized. In the Southwest, the Pueblos fought out smouldering grudges or civil dissensions; the Athabascans went to war for booty or as they might hunt. In the Northwest, the acquisition of properties and privileges, and ultimately of rank, seems to have been the leading motive. Maya warfare probably resembled that of the Pueblos; in the Aztec sphere there was the well known specialization on tribute and sacrifice captives.

In the Californian area, the general tenor of life was unwarlike. The one clear-cut exception is furnished by the Mohave, Yuma, and other tribes of the lower Colorado river, whose attitude was surprisingly Eastern. Elsewhere in California war principally served the purposes of revenge or punishment. In the northwestern sub-area, the occasion was generally a legal default measurable in terms of property and obligation. Persons, families, and lineages were more likely to be involved than settlements and communities. For the remainder of the state, it has been said that the cause was normally a death attributed to "poisoning" or bewitching. Within a community, shaman killings occurred and were adjusted without further bloodshed, mostly. If suspicion fastened on a member of another community, a war might result.

This opinion now proves to need qualification. Among certain groups, war was evidently more frequently caused by poaching. This was recently stated to me as a generalization by the survivors of the Patwin, and most of the accounts of specific wars which they were able to relate with motivation given, bear them out. The same evidently held for the Pomo. Of seven cases collected by Loeb in regard to the Russian river and Clear lake Pomo, six begin with food trespasses and one is unexplained as to cause. However, this motivation as the predominant one appears to have been more or less localized. The Pomo referred to and the Patwin were prosperous and wealthy by native standards of the region, and concentrated in good-sized villages. For the poorer Coast Pomo Loeb relates two wars, one due to insult and robbery, the other to witchcraft. In another part of the state, among the Yokuts, intertribal visiting for food-gathering was so customary, and shamanistic ideas so strongly developed, that witchcraft was probably a more potent cause than poaching.

Associated with the waging of war primarily on account of food trespass seems to have been some tendency not to celebrate victory with a celebration and dance over scalps or heads. At any rate most the Pomo

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except the Northern ones, and the River Patwin, performed the dance less regularly than their neighbors, if at all.

A third trait characteristic of the groups in the same region, or rather a somewhat larger area, is the neutrality of chiefs during combat. The Patwin specify this; and the Kato account below illustrates it vividly. The Pomo do not mention the fact, but Loeb's relations leave room for it. It seems to have been Yuki practice also. A chief might instigate or even declare war. In a stated open fight he was present, but as a non-participant, ready to confer with the enemy chief and terminate the combat. It was he also that made peace; this is clear from most Pomo accounts. This set of customs assigns the chief a more definite function and higher status than have been recognized before.

On the other hand, the war leader was not the incumbent of any office or station, nor even a person of distinction in ordinary times. Bravery, it seems, was given no social value by the central Californians, except as a temporarily and specifically useful asset.

The war history that follows was obtained from Bill Ray, Goddard's chief informant for Kato Texts and Elements of the Kato Language. He also served as Gifford's informant on Kato kinship. The story refers to certain events in a bitter embroilment between Kato and Yuki of which other incidents have previously been recorded from the Yuki. Both accounts tell of the interruption of the warfare by the coming of the whites. The Yuki version is more anecdotic and personal, concerned with murders and surprise attacks. The Kato story is mainly that of a series of pitched battles at agreed times and places during one summer. Between them, the two accounts probably give a fairly complete picture of the principal events of a major war ultimately involving a number of tribelets or independent political communities on each side. It seems to be also an objective or at least unbiased picture.

Unemotional and inexpressive as the central Californians were, it appears from the narrative that sufficient stimulus would occasionally throw the Indians of the area involved -- Kato, Wailaki, Yuki, Huchnom, Northern Pomo -- into a bellicose excitement lasting for months.

Probably the risk involved in the open battling was slight enough not to dampen seriously the quality of sport which attached to warfare of this order. The gathering of unaccustomed numbers would tend to contribute to the attitude of mind. In comparison to the numbers involved, the fatalities must have been fewer in the pitched battles than in the ambushing and murdering such as the Yuki tell of.

Other features of interest are the merrymaking and abandon at the dance over trophy heads in the lulls of the campaign; the magic made to weigh down the foe; and the spreading of the war-fever. What began as a quarrel between specific Kato and Yuki tribelets, came to involve further groups of each people and the Wailaki; went on to a challenge to the Pomo; and finally resulted in an invitation to a whole series of coast settlements to fight it out. Evidently old grudges were dragged up after

the fighting had got well into the blood. The line-up in part ran across ethnic relationships. The Yukian Huchnom sided with the Athabascan Kato against the Yuki; Athabascan Wailaki groups seem to have been with both the Kato and the Yuki; Athabascan Sinkyone and Pomo joined the Coast Yuki against the Kato.

The Kato Narrative.

Black Rock is a fighting ground. It is a dark, rocky ridge about six miles east of here (the present "reservation" near Laytonville). They dug obsidian from the ground there. The Yuki quarreled about this: they were stingy and did not want the Kato to dig. They also did not like to see the Laytonville Kato burn over the ground at White Rock. That is how the war began.

Four girls were eating clover at Martinez, a mile east from here. The Yuki from Tatnak killed them in the field. I do not know the Yuki name of Tatnak, but it lies about four miles below the Dos Rios bridge at the forks of Eel River. The bodies of the girls were found, one of them headless, and all the people went out to bring them in. The chief said, "What will you do?" They tracked the Yuki to Black Rock.

Then the chief sent (messengers) out in various directions, and the men gathered, about 50 of them. The next day they went west; the day after, north to Slide; then they went southward to Outlet creek (Huchnom or Northern Pomo). At Laytonville bridge where Johnny Williams lives, they gathered. The whole field was full of people. The old men said, "Let us make poison". Some of the young men said, "How?" The old ones answered, "We shall make it". Then the chief sent six men: "Go and find where their camp is." These men went out, found a Yuki camp, returned, and said, "There are many of them".

Then an old (Kato) man, Fred, dug up a corpse and took an arm bone. One said, "If you want poison, look for a coyote". At Saisa'nsbi ('sand-heap place'), there was a den where a coyote fed her little ones. Then a man shoved a log into the hole and said to light it. They put on pitch and fanned the flames inward. They could hear the coyote barking far in the hole. After a time they scraped out the embers and probed deep in the hole with a stick until they felt the coyotes. They were all dead, the young ones as well as the big one. They twisted the pole until they were able to pull them out. Then they skinned them, took out the sinew from the legs, and waited while it dried on a rock in the sun. After a time the old man started a little fire. The young men came to see; he half burned the sinew and also the human bone. It was now dark and they all danced there. Then the old man took his bone with the sinew tied to it, pointed it toward Eel river (where the Yuki lived), and blew through it. That was the poison. Those Yuki in the morning would be weak, stupified, unable to get up.

Next day they all went out, taking the bone with them. Two men were sent northeast to notify the Yuki that they would be ready to fight

tomorrow. They came back and reported: "They will burn the grass. When the smoke rises they will fight."

Then the people here also burned the ground, and were ready. When they fought, they shot with their arrows as far as from here to there (fifty to sixty yards). It was a big fight. I think there must have been 700 (sic) in it. On both sides some stood and looked on. When any became exhausted, these stepped into the fight in their place. No one drank: there was no time for it.

The chiefs stood on each side and told each other how many had been killed. The Yuki chief said: "Six are killed." "On this side three." Then our chief said to his people, "Enough! Stop! Don't fight any more! In ten days we will begin again." So they stopped fighting, but stood there and quarreled. Some, to make the enemy angry, would show a cut-off head. "Whose is it?" they shouted. Then they carried their dead back and camped in the flat at Panchnande'hding. I saw it all: we big boys went out on the mountain to look on. I was about fourteen then.

After ten days it was reported: "They want to fight again." The chief said, "Good! I have my men here". So they watched for the smoke. "There is the fire now; they are coming." Then they made a fire here too. So they came together. They dodged as if dancing, sideways. The chief would say to someone, "You have never fought before, go in". If one was killed they would carry him out and another came into his place. They were naked, sweating, and without drinking. Sometimes one side drove the other. The chief walked about, watched the battle, looked at the sun, but never shot. Then he would call, "Enough", and they stopped. "How many are killed on your side?" "Two. And on yours?" "One." "It is enough." Then they stopped. The chief orated to his people. "We will try it again at Se'tang" (a standing rock at George Knight's place). The people agreed to come again in ten days and bring more men.

The Kato chief sent westward and eastward, and south as far as Outlet creek, to gather fighters. Two young men came in and reported that there were many tribes (Yuki village groups) assembled in Round Valley now. The chief said, "I have my men ready". Then they saw smoke on "Sam Holman". When they came to Martínez, they could hear them shouting from far off; they were angry already. So the chiefs told them to fight. They shot until three were killed. The Yuki lost two. The dead were taken away, new men entered, and the fight went on. The chiefs watched and thought and decided that they would end soon. The fighters were becoming more angry. "Let us stop." The other chief agreed. So they stopped and stood in two bodies while the chiefs conferred. The Yuki chief said, "We will try it at another place, at White Rock, farther north."

Then they fought there with the Yuki. Soon they drove the Yuki down towards the river; then the Yuki drove them back. Now all shouted, "Let us fight them", and abused the enemy, and the arrows began to fall like snow. The Yuki shot back and killed two. Then they stood and rested, but quarreled and began shooting again. One of us was killed, and four of the Yuki. That was too many. The Yuki chief took off his hair-net, waved it, and shouted. The Kato chief did the same, and each line gathered into

a body, while the chiefs conferred and agreed to stop for the day. If a man was shot, his skin stripped off him as if he had been scalded. This was from the (magical) poison put on the obsidian arrowheads.

So they all came back here and buried their dead. Then the chief stood up and orated. "What do you think? Do you want to fight the Sherwood people (Northern Pomo)? Let us fight them here." The Sherwood people had burned a Kato dance house at Nonina'tading (on the Manchester place, four or five miles from here, on the other side of the town of Cahto). Then two men went to Willits, going in a circuit westward and then southward. They went to Calpella, to Walker valley, and to Potter valley. Then the chief sent word to Jackson valley, Alder Flat, and to Horseshoe Bend. All the young men went northeast to Slide. Next day they went on below Cummings to Bangkastsa'idang, and the day after they went to Lelingcho'hding beyond Red mountain. Then they came back to Seincha'dang, Blue Rock, and to Se'talbai yokta'kut (gray stone in the middle) on this side of Cow mountain; then to Kwi'nteLchbi, the little valley where Jim White's place is; and from there they returned to the camp from which they had started out. Now they were assembled and ready for the Sherwood people, watching for smoke. The Sherwood people saw their smoke at TochiLkat, about three quarters of a mile southwest of here. Then the Kato started south. "Where shall we begin to fight?" they said. They lined up near Box Springs at Tocha'ns ('muddy water'). There the two chiefs said, "Go on now, fight." And they began. You cannot well hit a man at fifty or sixty yards on account of his dodging, so the Sherwood people tried to kill our men by catching them, and sometimes nearly succeeded. The women were shouting off in the woods. Then the Pomo were driven to NeLkaichete'ndang, over a narrow trail. The Kato kept driving them back toward Sherwood flat. Here they made a stand, but were driven to the open place where the Sherwood house later stood. Then the chiefs said, "It is enough", and waved their hair-nets and stopped the battle.

The Kato chief said, "Now let us dance. Come here, you, and sing." They began to dance with a head which they had taken, and all shouted, "Whose head is this?" "I will kill you yet", would be the answer from the other side. In dancing they threw the head up and others caught it. This was done to anger the enemy. The chief did not speak badly to the enemy, but merely talked to his own people. Then they all bathed in the creek at Johnny Williams' and washed their hair with soaproot to make it shine. In those days they wore their hair long, so that you could not tell if it were a man's or a woman's. They cooked and ate and gathered dry grass to sit on and keep clean; they talked, laughed, and rested before returning home. Then the chief said, "I want to see the women dance". So they called out two good singers. All the girls and women came, pulled out the bone hairpin which they had stuck through the hair at the nape, and shook their hair out. They were painted with white earth or "chalk" that had been gathered near Slide. Then they danced and made love and did not quarrel and everyone was happy.

After dancing they said, "We will go home now". The chief said, "It is good; but what do you wish to do about the Coast people? My 'father' was killed by them. I will send you word about that." They agreed, and he asked when they wished to go to the Coast; they answered that they would

go whenever he directed. At Bangkastsa'idang, below Cummings, was a large settlement, so the chief ordered they should be sent for. He sent also for the people of Lelingcho'hding; of Yehli'nding; of Kwi'nteLchbi; of Leto'mi, Sulphur Springs, north of Sherwood; of U'si''dang, at the head of this valley to the southeast of here; of Di'neschohkut on Willow creek. All these they sent to. "That will be enough", said the chief.

Then messengers went to Usal, to Westport, and to Mussel Rock. They said, "You once killed three of our men. We shall fight on account of that". Word was sent (by the challenged) to Ten Mile River; to Seno' ngading at Laguna (probably Cleone), north of Fort Bragg; to KwinteLya'chbi at Little valley, a mile east of Fort Bragg; to L'ocho'bi, Bald hills, on the ridge near Fort Bragg. All these were on the other side. They gathered at Mussel Rock and sent two men here to say, "Come tomorrow; we are ready and have a good place to fight".

Then the Kato gathered at Williams', traveled over to the Coast, and fought. Two Kato were killed and one (or more?) Wailaki; four on the other side. They fought on all day but no more were killed. Each side had taken one head. Such heads are dirty and smell like a seal; the eyes shrivel. When they have dried enough, they are scalped. I smelled them when I was young. The Coast people took their head to Sa'iuni beyond Ten Mile river, where there was open ground from which they could see far; and there they danced. Our side all came to Cahto and danced there.

This fight took place at Lo'hkaichokat ('white grass mountain'), on a hillside close to the shore. There was a village there with a dance-house. All the fights happened in one summer. This one at Lo'hkaichokat was the last one. Immediately afterwards the white people came and everything of the sort stopped.

Sometimes when they met a man from another place they would invite him to come home with them and give him food. Then four or five or six people would suddenly seize him and he would be killed.

The war dance was made in an open flat by an open fire. It was not made in a house on account of (fear of) the head; the head was kept out-doors at all times. The dance would go on for a number of days so that all could take part in it, one group after another.