Fort Laramie and the U. S. Army

On the High Plains

1849 – 1890

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Preface

This report is one of three parts comprising a Historic Resources Study for Fort Laramie National Historic Site. The scope of the study encompasses the fur trade era, the military era, and the years subsequent to army occupation up to the eve of its acquisition by the National Park Service in 1938. A general Introduction has already been prepared for the Study, therefore none is presented herein. It should also be taken into consideration that two historians have written the chronological narratives at different times, the post-military era being the first completed. Consequently the reader may perceive a degree of overlap in transitioning from one era to another.

Part Two of the comprehensive study is an examination of Fort Laramie as a United States military post, taking up in 1849 and concluding in the late 1880s when the army recognized the disappearance of a defined western frontier. The military aspect has been treated generally in LeRoy R. Hafen and Frances M. Young, *Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West* (1938) and Ramie Nadeau's *Fort Laramie and the Sioux Indians*

(1967). As their titles imply, neither of those studies was intended to serve as a detailed history of military operations relating to Fort Laramie. Moreover, the interpretation presented in both of those works is dated to some degree because it is has been possible in more recent years to tap a considerably larger body of information. An excellent, though narrowly focused, study of the post's role during the Great Sioux War is Paul L. Hedren's, *Fort Laramie in 1876: Chonicle of a Frontier Post at War* (1988).

This section builds upon the story told by Barton H. Barbour in his "Special History Study: The Fur Trade at Fort Laramie National Historic Site" (1999). Barbour defines the importance of the region around the confluence of the North Platte and Laramie Rivers in relation to Plains Indian tribal hunting grounds and as an economic center for the fur and buffalo robe trade. He also demonstrates how the post, coincidentally, sat squarely astride what became the key emigrant route to the Pacific Northwest. Fulfilling the government's obligation to protect the citizens venturing westward in pursuit of the nation's "Manifest Destiny," the United States Army established a series of forts along the Oregon Route. Army officers making a reconnaissance of the area in spring 1849 concluded that the site of Fort John, an American Fur Company post more commonly known as Fort Laramie, was as adequate for military purposes as could be found, and it possessed the added benefit of extant buildings for the immediate shelter of vital supplies. The government purchased the

rather derelict old post later that same year. The military occupation of the fort marked the dawn of a new era on the plains that would continue for four decades, until the power of the formerly great tribes was broken and Euro-Americans claimed their lands for agricultural and other economic purposes.

Many persons assisted me during the preparation of this study, first and foremost Librarian Sandra Lowry and Park Ranger Steve Fulmer, both on the staff at Fort Laramie National Historic Site. Sandy's intimate knowledge of the library and archival collections, as well as her willingness to copy or lend me much material, saved me a great deal of time and effort during my research at the park. And, both she and Steve always responded graciously to my many telephonic requests for follow-up bits and pieces of information. A special thanks also to Steve for reading the draft manuscript and offering many insightful comments based on his long tenure and thorough familiarity with the Fort Laramie story.

I am particularly indebted to Mike Pilgrim and Deanne Blanton at the National Archives, Washington, D. C. for all the help they rendered in accessing materials during my visit there. Jean Brainerd, reference historian at the Wyoming State Archives in Cheyenne, bent every effort to accommodate my research, but I have found that for Jean, providing thorough, cordial assistance is the norm. Equally responsive in facilitating my work was Venice Beskey at the Wyoming State Library. She always seems to be able to

come up with just the right document. Brent Wagner, librarian in the Western History Department, Denver Public Library, was most helpful with accessing the Collins, Ward, Ellison, and other papers held there. Staff at other repositories also contributed to this effort by either hosting my work or filling long-distance requests via telephone or e-mail. Among these are: Historian John Doerner at Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument; Norlin Library at the University of Colorado, Boulder; Carl Hallberg at the American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Lilly Library, the University of Indiana, Russ Taylor and Helen Hoopes, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University; Lisa F. Leibfacher of the Ohio Historical Society; and the staff at the Kansas State Historical Society. I am most grateful to all for their assistance and dedication.

Chapter 1

"A Chain of Posts"

When United States soldiers first raised the national colors over a somewhat dilapidated old Fort John, on June 26, 1849, they could hardly have imagined that the event marked the beginning of four decades of army occupation. Four years earlier, Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny, after making his epic trek to South Pass, concluded that seasonal patrols over the emigrant route to Oregon would suffice to control the Indians. Kearny argued that permanent posts would be expensive, and largely unnecessary for most of the year. His opinion stemmed not only from his own experience, but relied as well on Colonel Henry Dodge's earlier expedition to the Rocky Mountains in 1835, and another led by Major Clifton Wharton afterward to visit the Pawnee villages on the

Platte. Kearny and his troops took every opportunity on their march up the Platte to awe the Indians with the might of the federal government by showing off two gleaming mountain howitzers, as well as their sabers, and carbines. Arriving at Fort Laramie in mid-June, Kearny met with Sioux leaders during an unseasonable snow storm in an effort to induce them to avoid the evils of liquor offered by the traders and, more importantly, to offer no opposition to the white man's road through their country.

The troops camped along the Laramie approximately two and one-half miles above the post on a grassy bottomland that was to serve as a bivouac from time to time throughout much of the active life of the post. As important as the abundant grazing found there was the distance placed between the soldiers and "the questionable allures of raw alcohol and Indian belles" at the fort.[1]

Convinced of the practicality of regular patrols of the trail, Kearny boasted to his superiors that mounted expeditions "would serve to keep the Indians perfectly quiet, reminding them of (as this one proved) the facility and rapidity with which our dragoons can march through any part of their country, and that there is no place where they can go but the dragoons can follow and, as we are better mounted than they are, overtake them."[2]

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[1] Otis E. Young, *The West of Philip St. George Cooke,* (Glendale: 1955), p. 160.

[2] S. W. Kearny, "Report of a summer campaign to the Rocky mountains, &c, in 1845," Senate Executive Document No. 2 (Serial 480), p. 212; Kearny's column, composed of 16 officers and 265 enlisted men,

Yet, Kearny's views contradicted those expressed some years earlier by Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett, and his successor, John C. Spencer, both of whom advocated the establishment of a chain of permanent posts along the Oregon Route for the protection of emigrants. Poinsett suggested three posts, one of which should be "on the north fork of the river Platte, near the confluence of the Laramie's fork. This station would seem to be highly important."[3] No less a figure than Thomas Fitzpatrick, widely recognized as a preeminent mountaineer and familiar among the Indians as "Broken Hand," also weighed in on the strategic significance of the place when he correctly assessed the changing tribal dynamics in the region. "A post at or in the vicinity of Laramie is much needed," Fitzpatrick opined in an uncannily accurate prophecy. "It would be in the vicinity of the buffalo range, where all the most formidable Indian tribes are fast approaching, and near

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along with a small wagon train and two howitzers, departed from Fort Leavenworth on May 18, 1845. The expedition proceeded to South Pass, stopping en route at Fort Laramie for a few days. Leaving behind one hundred dragoons, Kearny resumed his march on June 17, following the North Platte and the Sweetwater to arrive at the pass about two weeks later. By mid-July the column was back at Fort Laramie. The reunited column then marched southward, crossing the South Platte, to Bent's Fort on the Arkansas River, thence back to Fort Leavenworth. Kearny covered a total distance of 2,073 miles in 99 days. H. S. Turner to Col. A. E. Mackay, October 22, 1849, transcript in vertical files, library, Fort Laramie National Historic Site (hereinafter cited as vert. files); For another account of Kearny's expedition, consult Aurora Hunt, *Major General James Henry Carleton, 1814 – 1873: Western Frontier Dragoon*, (Glendale: 1958), pp. 91- 94. Carleton, destined to become a notable western figure in his own right, served as a member of the 1845 expedition; Intrepid army explorer Lieutenant John C. Fremont tested the resolve of the Sioux during his 1842 expedition to South Pass. After stopping at Fort Laramie and being warned by Lakota leaders to stop there, or risk being attacked, Fremont ignored the threat and was not molested, thus further bolstering Kearny's theory that periodic expeditions would intimidate the tribesmen. However, Fremont advocated the establishment of a military post at or near Fort Laramie for two reasons: the existence of the road directly to the Missouri River, and its strategic position "to prevent any such coalitions as are now formed among the Gros Ventres, Sioux, Cheyennes, and other Indians . . . ." J. C. Fremont, "Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1842 and to Oregon and North California in the Years 1843-'44," Sen. Ex. Doc., 28th Cong., 2d Sess, (461), (Washington, D. C.: 1845), pp. 41, 47-48.

[3] Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett to Richard M. Johnson, president of the Senate, February 24, 1840, *Senate Ex. Doc*., 26th Cong., 1st Sess, No. 31, (231), p. 2.

where there will eventually (as game decreases) be a great struggle for the ascendancy."[4] Presidents John Tyler and James K. Polk concurred with Fitzpatrick's views, urging Congress in subsequent annual messages to provide funds to build the forts, and provide for an "adequate force of mounted riflemen . . . to guard and protect them [emigrants] on their journey."[5] The statement was particularly far-reaching in its effect as a formal commitment by the government to facilitate emigration to the Pacific Northwest territories.

After years of debate, Congress finally adopted the concept of fixed stations on the Oregon Route, and in May 1846 legislated funds to acquire Fort Laramie. Even though the secretary of war directed the army to establish two of the posts on the emigrant road, one of which would be at or near the American Fur Company station, the onset of war with Mexico precluded the military from taking any action on the matter at that time. Nevertheless, two years later a battalion of Missouri volunteers was sent out on the trail to establish the first post on the Platte subsequently named "Fort Kearny." Prior to that time, Fort Leavenworth, situated on the Missouri, had been the only military garrison in proximity to the Oregon Route.

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[4] LeRoy R. Hafen and W. J. Ghent, *Broken Hand: The Life Story of Thomas Fitzpatrick, Chief of the Mountain Men,* (Denver: 1931), p. 139.

[5] John D. Unruh, Jr., *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-60,* (Urbana: 1993), p. 202 (hereinafter cited as *Plains Across*).

Also included in the appropriation was $76,500 for organizing a special unit, designated as the Regiment of Mounted Riflemen, to garrison the posts and patrol the trail. The regiment was recruited and organized during the summer and fall, and by November was ready to take the field. It comprised ten companies of sixty-four privates each. Despite the enabling legislation, however, the army's manpower needs took precedence over the intended mission of the unit. Emigrant needs on the Oregon Trail notwithstanding; the regiment was soon en route for Mexico. There the Mounted Riflemen saw considerable action, and by war's end had participated in numerous engagements, including the Battles of Vera Cruz, Plan de Oro, National Bridge, Molino de Ray, Churabusco, and were present at the capture of Mexico City. The unit lost four officers and forty men killed in action, along with 183 wounded, and an additional 203 who died from disease. Following several months of provost duty in the enemy capital, the Riflemen were sent back to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri to reorganize and prepare to carry out the regiment's original mission.[6]

The riflemen were unlike either infantry or dragoons, rather they represented a combination of the two. Not only did they wear a distinctive uniform, they were also

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[6] The Regiment of Mounted Riflemen was re-organized as the Third U. S. Cavalry in 1861. Theophilus F. Rodenbough, *The Army of the United States: Historical Sketches of Staff and Line With Portraits of Generals-in-Chief*, (New York: 1966), pp. 193-98 (hereinafter cited as *Army of the United States*); The Mexican-American War statistics differ somewhat from those found in Raymond W. Settle, (ed.), *The March of the Mounted Riflemen From Leavenworth to Vancouver, May to October, 1849*, (Lincoln: 1989), pp. 13-15 (hereinafter cited as *Mounted Riflemen*).

specially armed with the handsome brass-mounted Model 1841 "Mississippi" rifle, a .54-caliber percussion-primed weapon having considerably better range and accuracy than the smoothbore muskets used by the infantry. The Mississippi rifle was also much shorter than the musket, making it easier to handle by mounted men, yet it possessed greater range than the musketoons and carbines issued to cavalry. Each soldier was also issued a twelve-inch fighting knife, rather than a saber. The Riflemen were expected to travel horseback, then dismount and engage the Indians more effectively on foot with their superior long arms.[7]

Spring 1849 found five companies of Mounted Riflemen at Fort Leavenworth, ready to make an epic two thousand-mile march up the Oregon Route all the way to Vancouver. Companies G and I were already in garrison at Fort Kearny, where they had been since the previous October, and B Company had departed Fort Leavenworth a few days earlier to act as vanguard for the main body. An enormous supply train of 436 wagons, carrying over a half-million pounds of freight, was to follow somewhat later escorted by Company E. The cavalcade would be the first military body to travel over the full length of the trail to Oregon. In recognition of the momentous occasion, Major General David E. Twiggs and Lieutenant Colonel Aeneas Mackay traveled all the way

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[7] Louis A. Garavaglia and Charles G. Worman, *Firearms of the American West 1803 – 1865*, (Niwot: 1998), p. 122; M. H. Cole, *U. S. Military Knives, Bayonets, and Machetes- Book III*, (Birmingham: 1994), p. 2.

from department headquarters at St. Louis to review the Riflemen on their departure. On May 10, with the companies formed on the parade ground, highly polished arms and buttons glinting in the morning sunlight, Twiggs himself bellowed the order setting the battalion in motion for their long trek across the plains to the Rocky Mountains and beyond, almost to the Pacific.

Rather than tracing the usual emigrant route, the column marched northward into Nebraska Territory. Crossing the Big Nemaha before turning northwest, the Mounted Riflemen intersected the main Oregon route originating at Independence, Missouri. Nine days later they arrived at Fort Kearny, described by Major Osborn Cross as "a not very pleasing one, having nothing to recommend it in the way of beauty."[8] Along the way, the troops passed numerous emigrant trains stricken with cholera contracted in the towns from which they had departed on their journey. But, even those who recognized the symptoms were eager to be on their way, and mistakenly concluded that the healthy climate of the prairie would prove to be a panacea for the disease. Cross observed that "the number who had died with it was sufficient evidence that the emigrants were suffering greatly from its effects. They are truly to be pitied, as no aid in any way could

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[8] Settle, *Mounted Riflemen*, p. 57.

be afforded them."[9] While the troops faired better than the civilians, probably because of the great care exercised in selecting clean campsites and good water, they failed to escape the scourge completely. During the first three weeks, eleven enlisted men died from the disease. This may have been a significant factor in the comparatively large number of desertions experienced along the way, though some may have resulted from a ploy by many recruits to get free transportation to the California gold fields.

Officers at the post had alerted Colonel William W. Loring that thousands of emigrants had already passed over the road and had no doubt depleted the grazing and firewood at the usual campgrounds. Acting on that advice, Loring divided the column into three divisions when it departed Fort Kearny, spaced each one three to five miles apart to enable them to camp separately wherever they might find adequate resources.

The first contingent of Mounted Riflemen, E Company led by Major Winslow F. Sanderson, sighted Fort Laramie on the morning of June 16, having traveled some 639 miles during the six weeks since departing Fort Leavenworth. An emigrant camped nearby witnessed the moment the troops rode into view:

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[9] Ibid., p. 44; Cholera was not the only disease to ravage the plains. When the column passed through Pawnee country, Cross noted that small pox had taken such a heavy toll on their population that their war-making powers had been reduced to the point that neighboring tribes no longer feared them. The Sioux, in particular, took advantage of the situation to encroach into Pawnee hunting grounds. ibid., p. 56.

> . . . then came the sound of the cannon that was fired to greet the arrival of Major Sanderson came booming from the fort. The hills around echoed the report one from another and it dwelt long among them before it died away. It was soul stirring their successive reports in this expansive wild.[10]

The other divisions, slowed by the regimental and general supply trains, came up during the next few days and bivouacked a mile or two above the post. Sanderson was accompanied by First Lieutenant Daniel P. Woodbury, Corps of Engineers, who was jointly responsible for finding a suitable location for the military post, and was vested with the authority to purchase the fur company post should it prove to be the best site. The two officers lost no time conducting a reconnaissance for approximately sixty miles farther up the Oregon Trail, following the "ridge" or "mountain" branch as far as Boise (Big Timber) Creek, and returning via the so-called "river" road. Sanderson and Woodbury concluded that the mountaineers had chosen well; there was no better site than the one already occupied by Fort Laramie. Good grass suitable for making hay was found within six miles, and limestone and pine timber for building purposes was available only twelve miles distant. Sanderson described the Laramie River as "a beautiful and rapid

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[10] Elijah Bryan Farnham Diary, transcribed notation for June 16, 1849 in McDermott File, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

stream, and will furnish abundance of good water for the command."[11] Of more immediate importance, the old adobe post afforded ready-made shelter for the supplies that were even then arriving, even though Adjutant General Don Carlos Buell had previously cautioned Sanderson not to be unduly swayed by that "momentary advantage."[12] All things considered, however, the site was a good one and Woodbury acted quickly in opening negotiations with Bruce Husband, the resident agent for the American Fur Company. Although Congress had authorized only $3,000.00 for the purchase, Husband insisted that he had instructions to accept no less than $4,000.00. Woodbury considered the price too high, but signed the contract nevertheless, justifying his decision on the savings he predicted would be realized by not losing supplies to the elements. The deal concluded, the traders immediately relinquished the fort to occupy a temporary camp near the ford, a mile below, and Fort Laramie officially became a U. S. Army post.

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[11] Major W. F. Sanderson to Major Don Carlos Buell, A. A. G., Military Department No. 7, June 27, 1849, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie, Records of U. S. Army Continental Commands1821 - 1920, Record Group 393, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (hereinafter cited as LS, Fort Laramie); In the foregoing letter, Sanderson stated that he arrived at the post on June 17, but the Post Returns record the date as June 16. The author has elected to rely on the latter. Post Returns, Fort Laramie, Oregon Route, June 1849, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N. A., copies in library, Fort Laramie NHS (hereinafter cited as Post Returns, Fort Laramie).

[12] Adjutant General D. C. Buell to Major W. F. Sanderson, April 19, 1849, Letters Received, Fort Laramie, R. G. 393, typescript copy in vertical files, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

All the while, the command labored to unload a mountain of supplies brought in by the train that had accompanied the regiment, in addition to an even slower-moving ox train that pulled in on the twenty-fourth. Clerks poured over the attendant paperwork until late at night in an effort to get the trains on their way. On the morning of June 25, the battalion of rifles destined for Oregon broke camp and forded the river to begin the remainder of the journey. They were followed by the wagon trains, now considerably lighter after depositing several months of supplies at the post.

Meantime, the men of Company E were busy settling in to their new home. Within days after their arrival, Sanderson had men making hay, cutting and hauling timber, and burning lime to make mortar and plaster for repairing the old fort and constructing new buildings. The troops were even assembling a sawmill that had been transported up the trail by wagon, and were preparing sawpits for laborious hand sawing to augment lumber production. The new commanding officer announced to his superiors at the headquarters of Military Department No. 7 in St. Louis that "everything is being pushed forward as rapidly as circumstances will admit."[13]

The little garrison had taken possession of the fort just in time to play host to their first official guests, a party of Topographical Engineers en route to Fort Hall. The expedition, commanded by Captain Howard Stansbury, was operating under instructions

[13] Sanderson to Buell, June 27, 1849, LS, Fort Laramie.

to survey a site for the third military post in the chain to Oregon, after which they were to proceed to Utah to map the Great Salt Lake Valley. They laid over at Fort Laramie six days to rest their animals and repair the wagons before continuing. First Lieutenant John W. Gunnison, Stansbury's assistant, wrote

> There are two army ladies here—one made a present to her husband of an infant the day we arrived and the other we understand is about to do equal service to his family & the country . . . We are better situated here being close at the Fort and open doors at the Mess table have been offered to all of us. It is a Rifle company here and pretty green on military etiquette, at which Capt S. had taken offense & won't come to the Fort—the commander not having been over to his camp. But it is understood among us that we are at home, and technical courtesies not required or even practical on the plains, particularly as those who are journeying to the posts are acquaintances & meet & stay at quarters when & as long as they choose . . . Sunday P. M. – This morning two were gathered together to worship and we had the greater part of the morning service read in the W.d room. Even this was quite charming & appeared quite church-like . . . .[14]

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[14] First Lieutenant John W. Gunnison to his wife, July 13, 1849, John Gunnison Papers, Hunting Library; William H. Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West 1803 – 1863*, (New Haven: 1959), pp. 219-20; For Stansbury's own observations of Fort Laramie and the surrounding area, see Howard Stansbury, *Exploration and Survey of the Valley of the Great Salt Lake of Utah, A Reconnaissance of a New Route Through the Rocky Mountains*, (Philadelphia: 1852), pp. 52 – 54.

Shortly after Stansbury's party left on July 18, the garrison was augmented by the timely arrival of Captain Benjamin S. Roberts and his Company C of the Riflemen. Those sixty-two men provided Sanderson the additional manpower he needed to prepare for the coming winter. Accompanying Roberts were Lieutenant Colonel and Deputy Quartermaster Mackay and First Lieutenant Stewart Van Vliet, an assistant quartermaster assigned to oversee construction at the new post. Quartermaster General Thomas S. Jesup had directed Mackay to supervise operations along both the New Mexico and Oregon routes, with special attention to arrangements for the establishment of the new posts on the latter. Upon seeing Fort Laramie for the fist time, Mackay described it as:

> Enclosed in a square of about 40 yards of Adobe wall of 12 ft. height. On the east side are quarters of two stories with a piazza. On the opposite side, the Main Gate, Lookout, Flag Staff, &c with shops, storehouses &c to the height of the wall on their right & left, and each of the other two sides ranges of Quarters on one story—all opening on a small Parade in the Centre. It is in a good deal of decay & needs repairs.[15]

Although the trading post was adequate enough for storing supplies and corralling animals, it was only marginally fit for human habitation. With two companies of the

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[15] Major Aeneas Mackay to Quartermaster General Thomas S. Jesup, November 1, 1849, LS, Fort Laramie, copy in vert. files, library, Fort Laramie NHS; Mackay to Jesup, August 14, 1849, ibid.

Mounted Riflemen already present, and another of the Sixth Infantry due to arrive during August, additional barracks and houses for officers became a high priority. Confirming that the army never considered using Fort John over the long term, Van Vliet reported upon his arrival, "The new post is to be erected in the immediate vicinity."[16] Mackay also noted that the troops were already engaged in constructing new quarters on the low plateau outside the walls, and with some crowding, everyone could all be sheltered by winter.

When Lieutenant Woodbury rendered his annual report that fall, he could boast that the construction program was proceeding well. The Mounted Rifles were well on the way to completing the main section of a two-story frame officers quarters, later dubbed "Old Bedlam" for the reputation it gained as the raucous home of bachelor officers. The interior was temporarily partitioned into sixteen rooms to accommodate the officers and a few family members through the winter. At the north end of the parade ground stood a new frame barracks, also consisting of two stories. Although it was designed to house only one company, circumstances dictated that double the number of men be crowded into it that first winter. Near the river, along the east perimeter of the parade, were two frame stables for sheltering the horses of the Riflemen. Of particular necessity to the

[16] Captain Stewart Van Vliet to Jesup, July 27, 1849, Consolidated Correspondence File, Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, R. G. 92, N. A., (hereinafter cited as CCF), copy in bound correspondence, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

garrison was a bakery, which Woodbury located a short distance north of the parade ground on the gently sloping ground leading toward the river. Woodbury added that he had a remaining balance of only $10,000.00 for construction, an amount that would provide for another block of officers' quarters and a hospital, but would be insufficient to build quarters for Company G, Sixth Infantry, assigned to Fort Laramie in August. The lieutenant predicted that most of the work on the first group of buildings would be finished before winter, even though detachments had to travel fifteen to twenty miles into the Black Hills (north of present-day Guernsey, Wyoming) to find suitable timber. Bolstering his justification for additional funds to complete the post, Woodbury recorded that nearly 8,000 wagons and approximately 30,000 people, most of them bound for California, had passed by the fort that summer.[17]

Meantime, St. Louis businessman John S. Tutt was preparing to take advantage of that traffic, in addition to having a monopoly on trade with the Fort Laramie garrison.

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[17] *Index to Executive Documents*, 31st Cong., 1st Sess., (Washington, D. C.: 1850), p. 225-26; Merrill J. Mattes, "Surviving Structures at Fort Laramie National Monument," (1943) (hereinafter cited as "Surviving Structures"); The army's estimates were probably low, since many trains had passed Fort Laramie prior to the arrival of the troops in mid-June. A more accurate tabulation of the 1849 emigration is 39,697 bound for the West Coast, plus 1,500 more traveling to Utah. Unruh, *The Plains Across*, p. 120; Responsibility for construction at Fort Laramie was transferred from the Engineer Department to the Quartermaster Department effective August 16, 1850. The Engineer Department, embracing the Corps of Engineers, was primarily responsible for sapping and mining operations in wartime, bridging streams, reconnoitering and surveying, selecting sites, and erecting permanent defenses. Consequently, Lieutenant Woodbury of the Engineers had been sent to determine the best site for Fort Laramie, but the construction of buildings was properly the province of the Quartermaster Department. Special Orders No. 57, Adjutant General's Office, August 16, 1850; Captain F. H. Masten to Jesup, November 22, 1850, CCF; Rodenbough, *Army of the United States*, p. 113.

Tutt maintained a shadowy financial arrangement with Robert Campbell, one of the original owners of the fort; John Daugherty, with whom Campbell was partnered in a freighting business serving the Oregon Route posts; and a another man identified only as "Wilson." While Campbell and Daugherty were using their contacts in the government to secure the freighting contract, Tutt and Wilson cornered the lucrative post sutlership at Fort Laramie. Nevertheless, Daugherty approached Tutt to negotiate for a piece of the business, offering to supply goods at special rates in exchange for a one-third share of the post income, and half of the Indian trade. Dougherty and Campbell agreed to divide the profits from their jointly owned portions of the venture.[18] Exactly when Tutt completed the adobe sutler's store, situated approximately a hundred yards north of and on a line with the officers' quarters, has not been determined but circumstantial evidence suggests that he had commenced business by late summer 1849.[19]

Contrary to the decision establishing permanent posts on the Oregon route, some army officers unfamiliar with the region continued to argue that the forts would be too expensive to maintain year-around. They pointed to the difficulty of providing enough

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[18] John Daugherty to Robert Campbell, April 27, 1849, Daugherty Papers, Missouri Historical Society, copy in McDermott File, library, Fort Laramie NHS; Barton H. Barbour, "Special History Study: The Fur Trade at Fort Laramie National Historic Site," (Santa Fe: 1999), pp. 148-49 (hereinafter cited as "Fur Trade at Fort Laramie"); Tutt and Wilson apparently were the licensed sutlers at Fort Kearny as well as Fort Laramie. Merrill J. Mattes, "The Sutler's Store at Fort Laramie," *Fort Laramie: Visions of a Grand Old Post*, p. 23, (Fort Collins: 1974) (hereinafter cited as ("Sutler's Store").

[19] Mattes, "Sutler's Store," pp. 23-24; Barbour, "Fur Trade at Fort Laramie," p. 150.

grain and hay as one of the most critical and costly logistical problems. Some forewarned it would cost at least $45,000.00 a year to supply forage alone, much less supplies for the troops. Some even went so far as to propose that the animals be moved back to Fort Leavenworth during the winter months to avoid having to feed them during a season when they would seldom be used. However, Mackay saw things in a more positive light. "At Laramie, in the Valleys," he reported, "the grass grows very high and in the latter part of the season, dries and becomes hay upon which they subsist." To bolster his point, Mackay requisitioned Fort Leavenworth for a supply of grass, oats, and barley seeds as an experiment for growing additional crops. Many of the preconceived impressions about the inadequacies of Fort Laramie, he observed, were entirely unfounded. On the contrary, the place had many advantages that may have been minimized by the American Fur Company in an effort to discourage potential competitors from establishing their own posts in that area. Fort Laramie, he predicted, would "soon make Herself as desirable a spot as perhaps could be found any where so remote from those parts which we are in the habit of thinking only capable of furnishing with comfort and happiness."[20]

To reduce the anticipated high cost of supplying Fort Laramie, officers of the Quartermaster Department considered alternative routes from the main depot at Fort

[20] Adjutant General Roger Jones to Major General Winfield Scott, June 22, 1849, CCF; Twiggs to Jones, April 23, 1849, McDermott File; The quotations are from Mackay to Jesup, November 1, 1849, LS, Fort Laramie, copy in vert. files, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

Leavenworth. Mackay suggested establishing a supply depot father up the Missouri would significantly reduce expenses for maintaining both Forts Laramie and Hall. An improved road roughly following the northern segment of the old traders' trail from Taos to Fort Pierre, via Fort Laramie, would reduce the distance to the river to only 326 miles. Steamboats could transport goods more economically to that point than by freighting them over the longer overland route. Mackay himself, along with an escort of Mounted Rifles, returned to Fort Leavenworth by that route to verify its feasibility. Another potential route lay along the Republican River. To test the practicality of that course, Mackay directed Captain Langdon C. Easton, an assistant quartermaster who had conducted a train of supplies to Fort Laramie, to return to Fort Leavenworth via the southerly route. Easton left the post on August 2, marching to Lodgepole Creek, which he followed downstream for some distance before again turning south to intersect the South Platte near present Sterling, Colorado. From there, the train took a southeasterly course, to strike the Arickaree Fork of the Republican, thence down that stream. Arriving at Fort Leavenworth in mid-September, Easton admitted that the 811-mile route he took offered no advantages over the Platte road, a distance of only 638 miles to Fort Laramie. "With regard to the road," he reported, "I doubt if as good a one could be obtained, as the one leading up the Platte, that road being almost unexceptional."[21] While the overland route

[21] Mackay to Jesup, November 1, 1849, typescript in vert. files, Fort Laramie NHS; Mackay recorded the

to Fort Pierre was considerably shorter, a long winter season in that latitude made travel on both land and water impractical. Consequently, for the next two decades, the principal avenue to Fort Laramie and beyond would be the Oregon Trail.

Improvements were made almost immediately in the means for reaching the post. The "Oregon" Trail actually branched into three termini, and depending on the traveler's destination, it could be known by any of three names. One historian appropriately christened the combined trunk line across Nebraska as the "Great Platte River Road," though during the nineteenth century it was commonly known as either the California or Overland Trail. The route from Missouri and Fort Leavenworth generally coursed along the south side of the river, while Mormon emigrants bound for Utah departed from the Council Bluffs area to trace the north side of the stream. The "Saints" often forded the North Platte directly north of Fort Laramie to follow the south bank, while many emigrants bound for Oregon and California crossed the Laramie at one of several fords at and below the fort. Some then crossed the Platte to avoid less desirable fords farther upstream. Although the Laramie could usually be negotiated by wagons, the Platte was wider, deeper, and more treacherous, especially in spring when most trains were in the

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time for a freight train to travel the distance between Fort Leavenworth and Fort Laramie as 33 days. Mackay to Jesup, October 30, 1849 ibid.; Easton to Mackay, October 12, 1849, CCF, copy in bound correspondence, library, Fort Laramie NHS; For a complete copy of Easton's report with supplementary material, see Merrill J. Mattes, (ed.), *Capt. L. C. Easton's Report: Fort Laramie to Fort Leavenworth Via Republican River in 1849*, (Topeka: 1953).

area. An unidentified entrepreneur took advantage of the increasing emigrant traffic, as well as the obvious potential of government supply trains, by establishing a ferry at that critical point during 1849. He was charging two dollars for each wagon when Stansbury's survey party came by early that summer.[22]

That first winter was not an agreeable one for the new garrison on the Laramie. Both officers and men endured cramped, unfinished quarters. Bathing was out of the question. And by every standard, Fort Laramie was isolated. It would be more than a year before regular mail service would be inaugurated over the Oregon Trail. Mail to and from the post was apparently carried intermittently by government supply trains, and occasionally by "expresses" comprised of small detachments of mounted soldiers.[23]

When supply wagons were being loaded the previous spring, one officer had predicted because of the fort's remoteness, it would be impossible to provide fresh vegetables for at least two years, yet he stressed that anti-scorbutic foods were necessary

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[22] Merrill J. Mattes, "Potholes in the Great Platte River Road: Misconceptions in Need of Repair," *Wyoming Annals*, (summer/fall 1993), p. 7; It is interesting to note that two experienced frontiersman stated they never heard the term "Oregon Trail" used during historical era, rather the road was always known to them as either the California or Overland Trail. William Garnett interview, transcribed Walter Camp Field Notes, Brigham Young University, p. 651; Luther North to Walter Camp, January 27, 1928, Letter no. C23, Richard S. Ellison Papers, Denver Public Library; The ferry was allegedly sunk by drunken Californians having a spree on June 9. However, it must have been repaired by the time Stansbury arrived in July. LeRoy R. Hafen and Francis Marion Young, *Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West, 1834 – 1890*. (Lincoln: 1984), p. 159 (hereinafter cited as *Fort Laramie*).

[23] Thomas E. White, "A Postal History of Fort Laramie," typescript in vert. files, library, Fort Laramie NHS (hereinafter cited as "Postal History").

to prevent an outbreak of scurvy among the troops. He noted that not even dried fruits were included in the wagons bound for Fort Laramie. Yet, despite the lack of vegetables, only two cases of scurvy appeared, and those late in summer. However, the disease reappeared during the winter afflicting thirteen men, one who died. "The habitual use of salt and unwholesome food, conjoined with fatiguing labor, were the exciting causes of the disease," one report stated. Dr. John Moore treated the victims with "fresh animal food . . . in conjunction with vegetable acid drinks." There were no cases reported among the officers, perhaps because of the wider variety of foods available to them. The surgeon requested and received a large supply of more healthful food for the garrison, after which the disease disappeared.[24]

Emigrants and Indians suffered worse. Van Vliet informed the quartermaster general that seven hundred new graves dotted the trailside between the Missouri and Fort Laramie. He urged that supplies be rushed forward to prevent unnecessary losses. However, one emigrant thought the casualties had been exaggerated; rather than being victims of cholera, he attributed the majority of deaths to bad water, something his party

[24] Richard Coolidge, *Statistical Report on Sickness and Mortality in the Army of the United States, Compiled from the Records of the Surgeon General's Office, 1839 – 1855*, (Washington, D. C.: 1856), p. 82 (hereinafter cited as *Statistical Report*); William A. McCarty to John Daugherty, April 5, 1850, Daugherty Papers, copy in vert. files, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

avoided by boiling and skimming their drinking water. Despite his claim, Indians coming in contact with whites along the way suffered terribly from the disease.[25]

The potential for farming in the area, thereby creating a local source of fresh vegetables, was recognized early on, but the troops were too occupied with sheltering themselves to make any attempts at gardening that first season. Although the soldiers planted a garden the following spring, the results must not have been encouraging because the post quartermaster sent all the way to Taos for a dozen New Mexican farmers, laborers, and herdsmen. He noted that the garden required proper irrigation, a skill mastered by the Hispanics of that region. In an official attempt to improve hygiene, the secretary of war issued a directive in 1851 for all posts to plant vegetable gardens. No record of the results has been located, but his annual report admitted the general failure of gardening at most of the frontier posts.[26]

By early April regular mails were still not running, yet the residents at Fort Laramie anticipated service would begin at any time. Even though Sutler Tutt had been

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[25] *Statistical Report*, pp. 79 – 80; Van Vliet to Jesup, July 7, 1850, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie, copy in vert. files, library, Fort Laramie NHS; O. F. Davenport Letters, Denver Public Library; Coolidge, *Statistical Report*, pp. 79 – 80.

[26] Van Vliet to Jesup, July 23, 1850, CCF, copy in bound correspondence, library, Fort Laramie NHS; John D. McDermott, "No Small Potatoes: Problems of Food and Health at Fort Laramie, 1849 – 1859," *Nebraska History*, (winter, 1998), pp. 165-66 (hereinafter cited as "No Small Potatoes"); When scurvy again broke out at Fort Laramie during the winter of 1855-56, the commanding officers sent six wagons to Fort Kearny in March to bring back a supply of potatoes. Of the 1,000 bushels shipped, only 200 finally reached the post, and those were beginning to spoil. The garrison successfully grew a crop of potatoes in 1856, but the yield was small due to poor seed. Forty-two cases of scurvy were reported at the post in 1857-58. ibid., p. 167.

appointed postmaster a month earlier, the wheels of bureaucracy turned slowly. It would be summer before a mail contract was let to the Independence firm of Samuel H. Woodson for $19,500 a year.[27] The irregular service notwithstanding, emigrants often found mail from home awaiting them at the store, and took advantage of this last opportunity to send a letter to concerned relatives back in the “States."

The seasonal emigration began to appear at Fort Laramie shortly thereafter and by mid-May, Van Vliet recorded that a thousand people had already passed by the fort.

> They require considerable assistance in the way of repairs, which I render as far as it is in my power to do so . . . I burnt during the winter a large amount of [char]coal. Collected a large quantity of old iron which had been thrown away by the last emigration and prepared temporary shops for their use . . . Loads are generally lightened and rearranged at this place and such things as are not absolutely necessary are either sold or thrown away.[28]

Twenty-nine year-old Lucena Parsons, an Illinois emigrant who visited the post early in August, recorded:

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[27] McCarty to Daugherty, April 4, 1850, Daugherty Papers, copy in vert. files, library, Fort Laramie NHS; Woodson retained the first mail contract from 1850 – 1854. John S. Gray, “The Salt Lake Hockaday Mail,” *Annals of Wyoming*, (Fall 1984), p. 12.

[28] Van Vliet to Jesup, May 14, 1850, CCF; Unruh, *Plains Across*, p. 120.

> This morn went to the Fort to get some blacksmithing done but could not they have so much work. This is a pretty place to look at, it is so clean. There are 250 soldiers & some 12 families. They have a saw mill, one public house, one store . . . They are now building several fine frame buildings. They say they have 75 thousand pass here this season & some days there were 1500 here. There was some sickness among them & some deaths. There are hundreds of wagons left here which can be bought for a few dollars each from the soldiers.[29]

The post also afforded the only source of medical assistance between Fort Kearny and Fort Hall. In 1849 the surgeon treated four or five victims of accidental gunshot wounds, the result of their own carelessness, while four civilians died from various causes at the post during the following season. Because many emigrants took up the long journey ill-prepared, the army began stocking extra quantities of certain staples, like flour, hams, bacon, and dried fruit, intended for sale to destitute travelers. According to one source, the post was literally overrun with emigrants during the summer of 1850. Tutt's clerk, William A. McCarty, noted that some 400 men were at the post on one day alone. But the crest of the wave passed quickly and by July most of the travelers were beyond Fort Laramie. McCarty informed his employer that "there is but little to do" but

[29] Lucena Parsons, Walnut Grove, Illinois, 1850, quoted in "Contemporary Descriptions of Fort Laramie," typescript in vert. files, library, Fort Laramie NHS, p. 4.

that he was still experiencing a brisk trade with local Indians. Before summer ended, approximately 52,500 people had gone west, most of them to seek their fortunes in the gold fields of California.[30]

The troops, meantime, were occupied with patrolling the road to Fort Kearny and with construction duties. Despite Major Sanderson's intention to finish the quarters prior to that first winter, his successor, Captain William Scott Ketchum lamented just before Christmas that when Sanderson left in September,

> not a single set of quarters was completed and that the soldiers were in canvas. Since that time, 'G' Co. 6th Infty has been comfortably quartered in one end of one of the large stables, & the two Rifle Cos, in a new building intended for one Company. The Infantry moved into quarters, one block, so as to accommodate four officers. This block still requires pillars to the porches, which are now being sawed, also a ceiling to the upper porches, and yards, the post for which are on hand, and the slabs being sawed.[31]

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[30] McDermott, "No Small Potatoes," p. 165; Unruh, *Plains Across*, p. 229; A contemporary account indicated that over 9,000 wagons and 42,000 people had passed Fort Laramie by July 1, 1850, and that by that time the emigration was "pretty well over" for that season. Van Vliet to Jesup, July 1, 1850, CCF, copy in bound correspondence, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

[31] Captain W. Scott Ketchum to A.A.G., Mil. Dept. No. 7, December 23, 1850, v. 1, Orders, Fort Laramie, RG 393.

Ketchum's redoubled efforts also resulted in the completion of three canvas storehouses to protect supplies, a guardhouse at the northeast corner of the parade, and a kiln for firing bricks. Fatigue details laid the foundation for another set of officers' quarters as well. With the arrival of Post Chaplain William Vaux in May, the need for housing had become critical. At that, progress was slow and the garrison was compelled to spend another winter in temporary and unfinished buildings.[32] Fort Laramie was, nevertheless, a permanent military installation on the Overland Trail and it would play an increasingly important role in shaping events on the Northern Plains.

[32] Captain Frederick H. Masten to Jesup, February 5, 1851, LS, Fort Laramie, typescript in vert. files, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

Chapter 2

"The First to Make the Ground Bloody"

While the Overland Trail may have been the road of destiny for the whites, it represented the harbinger of a less promising destiny for the Indians, who were astonished by the long columns of troops and the crowds of emigrants suddenly passing through their country. Cholera, understandably, terrified the natives. Yet, the tribesmen resisted any temptations they may have had to molest the interlopers—they only watched with mounting anxiety. During the first two years, only one isolated incident resulted in the death of a white man at the hands of an Indian, and that murder was attributed to

blind reprisal for the loss of the warrior's father to cholera.[1] Only in 1851, when it became clear that the steady stream of whites was depleting the grass, the wood, and game did the once friendly Northern Cheyennes begin to test the whites through bold confrontations and demands for compensation. Their Sioux allies, meanwhile, remained comparatively passive. Yet, it was only a matter of time until an incident sparked open hostility, or the emigrants became caught up in the continued warring among the plains tribes.

Thomas "Broken Hand" Fitzpatrick, crippled years earlier when a rifle exploded, was appointed as Indian agent on the plains in 1846. Wintering at Bent's Fort on the Arkansas two years later, Fitzpatrick met with leaders of some of the southern tribes to discuss the potential for a treaty that would curtail intertribal conflicts by defining tribal boundaries. He also thought the government should compensate the Indians for the loss of game. The agent suggested that the tribes gather for a grand council at some convenient point, as soon as he could secure permission from the newly created Interior Department.[2] In March 1849, Fitzpatrick journeyed to St. Louis to propose his plan to

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[1] The Indian approached a man named McDowell on the road near Scott's Bluff, about sixty miles below Fort Laramie, and shot him without warning. Upon learning of the murder, the leaders of the tribe took it upon themselves to execute the man. Major Sanderson and a detachment of Mounted Riflemen proceeded to the village to investigate, but took no action when they learned that the Indians had exacted their own justice. This isolated incident blew over with no further trouble. Mackay to Jesup, August 14, 1849, typescript in vertical files, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

[2] Prior to the establishment of the Interior Department, Indian affairs were managed by the War Department. The Central Superintendency at St Louis dealt with all of the tribes along the Rocky

Colonel David D. Mitchell, a Virginian by birth, former fur trader on the Upper Missouri, and veteran of the Mexican War. With the exception of his army service during the war, Mitchell had been superintendent over all the western Indians since 1841. Although Mitchell concurred with Fitzpatrick's idea, he lacked the necessary authority to approve it, and therefore urged Fitzpatrick to continue on to Washington to achieve his purpose. Both the commissioner of Indian Affairs and the secretary of war enthusiastically embraced the proposal for a grand council, but first Congress had to authorize any conference for treaty-making purposes. Meantime, Fitzpatrick returned to the plains with instructions to plan for a conference the next year, and he was provided with $5,000 worth of government goods to maintain the Indians' good will.

Although the Senate passed the legislation for a council in 1850, the bill stalled and died in the House. Still, the Indians had faith in Fitzpatrick and kept the peace despite increasing emigration and continued depletion of game necessary for their subsistence. For political reasons that remain unclear, Fitzpatrick was temporarily removed from his post during the following winter, but was reinstated in February after he mounted a protest in his own defense. At about the same time, Congress passed an appropriations bill that included $100,000.00 to back his council. In a meeting with Mitchell at St.

Mountains and the Oregon Route. John D. Unruh, Jr., *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-60*, (Urbana, Ill.: 1993), p. 221(hereinafter cited as *Plains Across*).

Louis, the two selected Fort Laramie as a logical meeting place, the conference to begin on September 1. The influential Jesuit missionary Father Pierre-Jean De Smet was also enlisted to induce the northern Indians to attend.

It was to be a gathering like no other previously seen on the plains. Fitzpatrick trekked up the Arkansas spreading word along the way for the tribes to gather at Fort Atkinson to learn of the great council. Although the Cheyennes and Arapahoes readily agreed to go to Fort Laramie, the Kiowas and Plains Apaches refused to participate. Arriving at Fort Laramie a few weeks later, Fitzpatrick dispersed messengers to all the northern tribes. Of serious consequences to the future success of the treaty was the omission of the tribes being crowded out of their traditional lands in southeastern Nebraska by the more aggressive Sioux. The Pawnees, Omahas, Poncas, and other tribes were on generally friendly terms with the whites, yet they were not included in the conference. The exclusion of those groups meant that their enemies, the Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes, would be at liberty to continue raiding against them. At the last minute, Mitchell realized the potential effects of such an oversight and attempted to convince the Pawnees to accompany him to Fort Laramie. Learning of this, the Sioux sent word welcoming their bitter enemies to attend, but promised they would be attacked

and destroyed immediately afterward. The Pawnees prudently declined Mitchell's invitation to participate.[3]

The secretary of the interior suggested the army assemble a large force of troops at Fort Laramie to impress the Indians with the might of the government, thereby coercing them to agree to a binding peace. However, army command argued that the troops required for such a display were more urgently needed elsewhere. Adjutant General Roger Jones considered the present force of two companies of riflemen and one of infantry adequate to protect the commissioners, but an additional company of dragoons was assigned to accompany Mitchell, thereby augmenting the Fort Laramie garrison. Mitchell's party, including representatives for the *Missouri Republican* and the *New Orleans Picayune*, Robert Campbell, and an observer, Lord Fitz William from England, left Fort Leavenworth on July 25. Company B, First Dragoons served as escort.[4]

Arriving at Fort Laramie in late August, the dragoons found that the animals of the Riflemen and the emigrants had already grazed off the vegetation for some distance

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[3] Anthony McGinnis, *Counting Coup and Cutting Horses: Intertribal Warfare on the Northern Plains 1738 – 1889*, (Evergreen, Colo.: 1990), pp. 85 – 88 (hereinafter cited as *Counting Coup*).

[4] A contemporary account lists the members of the party as George Knapp, owner, and B. Gratz Brown, correspondent, of the *Missouri Republican*. Percival G. Lowe, *Five Years a Dragoon and Other Adventures on the Great Plains*, (Norman: 1965), pp. 60 – 62 (hereinafter cited as *Five Years a Dragoon*); Another names Colonel Chambers, editor of the *Republican*, along with H. C. King, of Georgia, and J. H. King of England in addition to Campbell, Kendall,and William. *Publications of the Nebraska State Historical Society*, XX (1922): 234-35 (hereinafter cited as *Nebraska Publications*).

around the post. To find adequate forage, they moved "four miles above the post, on the opposite side of the river . . . an amphitheater of rugged hills, the pure clear river with it's pebbly bottom running gently by, fringed with willows, orchards of box elders in the bottoms, cedars, and pines upon the hills . . . ." to re-establish "Camp Maclin," a bivouac the dragoons had used earlier that summer.[5]

As the dragoons marched upstream, they were greeted with an impressive array of Indians, nearly 500 lodges, already camped in the vicinity. Dragoon sergeant Percival G. Lowe remembered, "The plain between our camp and Laramie was filled with Indian lodges, mostly Sioux, but here was a large camp of Cheyennes and Arapahoes."[6] With camps stretching along the Laramie Valley both above and below the fort, the post was nearly overrun with Indians, the most popular place being the sutler's store, which was crowded to overflowing with men and women eager to trade for manufactured goods. Wisely, the sale of liquor was prohibited for fear it would ignite fights among the Indians, thereby ruining any chance of talks. So great was the concern that when rumors reached the post that James Bordeaux was dispensing liquor at his trading post on the south side

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[5] Lowe misspelled the name as "Macklin." The correct spelling is Sackfield Maclin, a paymaster that Lowe's company escorted from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Laramie in June 1851. They used the same ground for their bivouac at that time, hence its christening for Maclin. Lowe, *Five Years a Dragoon*, p. 46 – 47, 62; Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army From Its Organization , September 29, 1789, to March 2, 1903*, (Washington, D. C.: 1903), I, p. 676 (hereinafter cited as *Historical Register*).

[6] Lowe, *Five Years a Dragoon*, p. 62; Sutler Tutt also reported about 500 lodges of Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and Sioux in the vicinity. Tutt to Daugherty, August 22, 1851, Daugherty Papers, copy in McDermott File, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

of the North Platte, about eight miles below Fort Laramie, Fitzpatrick took Post Sutler Tutt, Lieutenant Washington L. Elliott, and ten riflemen to investigate. Bordeaux was one of several long-time resident French traders married to Sioux women. A search of Bordeaux's place allegedly produced only one pint of whiskey, therefore no action was taken. If Fitzpatrick discovered a larger quantity, and he probably did, he diplomatically chose to turn a blind eye to it because of the trader's potential value as an ally. The point was made nevertheless.[7]

Next to arrive was a band of about sixty Shoshonis (also termed Snakes) from the mountains of the Wind River country. Led by their head-chief and friend of the whites, Washakie, they made a magnificent appearance arrayed in all their ceremonial finery. They were accompanied by consummate mountain man Jim Bridger, an old and trusted friend who would interpret for them at the council. Because of the intense mutual animosity between the Shoshones and the vastly more numerous plains tribes, they camped above the dragoons to provide a margin of safety between themselves and their enemies. There was, in fact, fresh resentment on the part of the Shoshonis. Although the tribes had all agreed to come to the Laramie in peace, a party of Cheyennes had attacked

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[7] Ibid.

them en route, killing and scalping two men. As a precaution, half the dragoons were placed on guard to forestall further trouble.

While the Indians continued to arrive, swelling the camps with every passing day, Mitchell anxiously awaited the supply train from Fort Leavenworth bearing several tons of gifts and food for the tribesmen. Without presents, the Indians would not convene the talks, a factor that threatened the entire treaty process. Word had it that the train had departed more than two and a half weeks earlier, yet there was still no sign of it. Mitchell therefore arranged for several wagonloads of goods from Fort Laramie as an inducement for the Indians to begin the council regardless. With so many Indians already camped near Fort Laramie, grazing was almost non-existent for miles around and the odor of accumulated human and animal waste was overwhelming. And, more tribes had yet to arrive. It was obvious to Mitchell and Fitzpatrick that the site for the council would have to be moved to another location, and quickly.

They chose the bottomlands around the mouth of Horse Creek, some thirty-five miles down the Platte. Not only would that area provide sufficient space, grass, and water for the large assemblage, Mitchell shrewdly calculated that it would shorten by two days the distance to be traveled by the tardy supply train. Runners carried word through the camps and on September 4 the great exodus began. Two companies of soldiers led the way, followed by the dignitaries and the supply train. Behind them, riding and walking,

came the Indians—men, women, elders, and children, in addition to thousands of horses and packs of barking dogs--in a slow-moving, dusty cavalcade that stretched for miles down the valley. Two companies of Riflemen brought up the rear, leaving behind only one to garrison the post.

The column began arriving at the new location the following afternoon. Horse Creek flowed into the North Platte from the southwest. Another smaller tributary coursed from the northwest to enter the valley at nearly the same point, making it an excellent camping ground with ready access to water for all. Captain Ketchum and G Company, Sixth Infantry, along with Company B of the Dragoons, established headquarters on the first terrace south of the Platte, just below the Horse Creek confluence. The two companies of Mounted Riflemen camped above on the same side. The Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes were told they could erect their lodges above Horse Creek, on either side of river and the tributaries, so long as they were not in close proximity to the troops. As it turned out, the Cheyennes chose the south side, the Sioux the north, with other bands scattered about wherever they could find suitable ground. The area below the creek, adjacent to the headquarters bivouac and wagon park, was set aside for the Shonshonis. Nearby, Ketchum laid out a parade ground on the prairie and designated an adjacent area

to serve the council ground. Mitchell established his own camp on the point formed by the angle of the river and Horse Creek, while Fitzpatrick camped farther up the creek.[8]

More people--now including Gros Ventres, Mandans, Arikaras, Assiniboins, and Blackfoot--continued to swell the camps on the sixth, until there were nearly ten thousand Indians camped along the valley. Tens of thousands of horses grazed on the gentle slopes above. The next day being Sunday, the Indians were informed the council could not begin because it was the white man's medicine day. Nevertheless, Sioux and Cheyenne women proceeded to erect a semi-circular pole-and-brush arbor for the council, not far from Mitchell's tent, having an opening to the east, as was traditional for Plains Indian camps. Feasts, visiting, and dancing continued throughout the remainder of the day and evening.

The sharp report of a howitzer reverberating across the valley on Monday morning signaled the camps that the talks were to begin. From all over the valley, Indians filed to the great circle where the commissioners awaited them. Headmen took their places around the arbor, while other men of lesser stature stood behind. Women and children remained outside the circle. Mitchell opened the proceedings by acknowledging the universal professions of good faith, after which he explained the government's desire to compensate the tribes for the losses caused by the great migration. He further

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[8] Lowe, *Five Years a Dragoon*, p. 67-68; *Nebraska Publications*, p. 236; Much of the description of the treaty council provided herein is drawn from Burton S. Hill, "The Great Indian Treaty Council of 1851," *Nebraska History*, (March 1966), pp. 94 – 103 and W. J. Ghent, *Broken Hand: The Life Story of Thomas Fitzpatrick, Chief of the Mountain Men*, (Denver: 1931), pp. 228 – 45.

explained that the government wished to ensure the safety of whites traveling through their country and, to accomplish that, it wanted the right to build military posts. The tribes would also agree upon certain boundaries for their hunting grounds that would be respected by all the others, thus eliminating the traditional rivalries that fueled unremitting warfare. Such a proposal threatened the very foundation of plains culture. In a further contradiction to Indian society, Mitchell stipulated that each tribe was to elect one head chief to act on its behalf. In return, they would receive $50,000.00 in goods and food each year for fifty years. The Indians, representing a near-pure democracy, must have been puzzled by the superintendent's strange demands.

The proposals having been made, Mitchell and Fitzgerald held no formal meeting on the following day to allow the Indian leaders to discuss the terms among themselves. Throughout the day, young warriors performed riding demonstrations and mock combat as the rest of the people and the amazed soldiers looked on.

On the tenth, the howitzer again summoned the leaders and principal men to the council. Not long afterward, the camps were electrified by the news that the Crows, traditionally friendly to whites but staunch enemies of the Sioux, had been sighted coming down the valley after an 800-mile journey from the upper Yellowstone country. They were assigned a place to camp and the leaders were immediately shown to the

council circle to join the talks. Most of the discussions centered on the poverty of the tribes and their desire to see the promised goods, which still had not arrived. Father De Smet and Robert Campbell also arrived late that day, along with a delegation of more Crows, Minnetaris, Assiniboins, and Arikaras. De Smet's powerful influence over all the Indians did much to ameliorate tensions throughout the duration of the council.

In the days that followed, the commissioners worked diligently to hammer out agreements for tribal ranges, a difficult task because it was a largely foreign concept to the Indians. Although the respective tribes recognized certain general hunting regions, the boundaries were fluid, often changing as one tribe encroached into the territory of another. The Sioux had been particularly aggressive in that respect for more than half a century as they expanded onto the plains. Undaunted, Campbell, Bridger, and Fitzpatrick used their intimate knowledge of the mountains and rivers, as well as the usual haunts of the various tribes, to gently guide the leaders to consensus. Day after day the talks continued until disagreements were eventually resolved and the treaty document was prepared for signatures.

The commissioners and Indian leaders assembled once again on the seventeenth to conclude the agreement, even though there was as yet no sign of the supply train. The treaty provided that the United States had the right to construct roads and military posts within the respective Indian territories; all parties agreed to an "effective and lasting

peace" among the assembled nations. The tribes also recognized the boundaries laid out in the accord and they would make restitution for any wrongs committed against the people of the United States while passing through their country. In return, the government would protect the Indians against depredations by the whites.[9]

Of particular significance for Fort Laramie was the territory specified for the Sioux. Beginning at the mouth of White Clay River on the Missouri, the line extended southwesterly to the forks of the Platte in present-day Nebraska. The boundary then followed the North Platte as far as Red Butte, near modern Casper, Wyoming, where the Oregon Route departed from the river. From that point the boundary angled northeasterly, skirting the Black Hills, to the headwaters of Heart River, turned down that stream to the Missouri (present Bismarck, North Dakota), and returned to the starting point. In short, an area encompassing all of western Dakota Territory, Nebraska, and northeastern Wyoming was reserved for the Sioux, thus the government recognized their comparatively recent claim to the Black Hills region.[10] The Cheyennes and Arapahoes would inhabit the region south of Red Butte to the source of the Platte in the Rocky

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[9] Charles J. Kappler (ed.), *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, (Washington, D. C.: 1904), II, pp. 594 – 95 (hereinafter cited as *Laws and Treaties*).

[10] In the late eighteenth century, the Black Hills region was occupied by the Arapahoes, Crows, and somewhat later, shared with the Cheyennes after Sioux pressure forced them from an agrarian lifestyle east of the Missouri. Only during the 1820s did the Sioux encroach into that area, claiming it as there own in an ever-westward conquest of additional territory. McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, pp. 10, 16, 102; Royal B. Hassrick, *The Sioux*, (Norman: 1989), pp. 66 – 68; Remi Nadeau, *Fort Laramie and the Sioux*, (Lincoln: 1967), pp. 20 – 21.

Mountains and southward along the range to the headwaters of the Arkansas, thence down that stream to the Cimmaron Crossing of the Santa Fe Trail. The line then extended back to the forks of the North and South Platte.

The treaty concluded, Mitchell was more anxious than ever to know the whereabouts of the overdue ox train from Leavenworth. The Indians had cooperated with the whites, and now they wanted the presents that had been promised them. Mitchell stalled for time by compiling a list of all the Indian chiefs and headmen, arranging them in their relative order of stature, a process that required several more days. At length, the train pulled in on September 20 and the distribution of gifts began with each leader being presented with an officer's uniform, a saber, presidential medal, and a certificate of good character. The highest ranked chiefs received the uniform of a major general, with lesser chiefs and headmen being issued uniforms of lower ranks in descending order according to their importance in the respective tribes. Subsequently, the leader of each band was assigned an area where his portion of goods was piled. The members encircled the mounds of foodstuffs, cloth, beads, cooking utensils, clothing, and all types of trinkets to draw their shares. Content that the word of the whites was honorable, the respective tribes then began taking down their lodges and moving off in various directions in search of winter camps.

The 1851 treaty was doomed from the outset. Almost every provision was flawed, starting with the selection of chiefs to speak for entire tribes. Although it seemed perfectly logical to the white concept of politics and authority, it had little meaning to Indians subscribing to a complex system of leadership generally segregated by tribal domestic and war needs. Men influenced the affairs of the band by earning stature through accomplishments in war, sound judgment, and generosity rather than by any notion of arbitrary rank. Just how the commissioners selected the head chiefs remains a mystery. Illustrating the government's lack of understanding was its assumption that a treaty had been concluded with all the Teton Sioux, when only three bands, Brules, Oglala, and Two Kettles, were actually represented at the council. "Conquering Bear," named by the commissioners as chief of all the Sioux, knew that he spoke only for his own Brules. Certainly, the old mountaineers in attendance appreciated this aspect of Indian culture, yet they apparently raised no objection. In fact, three other signatories also were Brule. Another, representing the Yanktonais, belonged to the Nakota division of the Sioux that resided far to the northeast and had virtually no influence in the country traversed by the Oregon Trail. Yet, the wording of the fourth article of the treaty stated that in the event of any depredations, the signers agreed to make restitution "for any wrongs committed . . . by any band or individual of their people . . . .," implying that all

bands of the Teton Sioux were bound by the agreement. That error alone rendered the treaty unenforceable, a fact that would become apparent all too soon.[11]

While the agreement may have comforted the whites that emigrants would not be molested, there was no way to enforce peace among the disparate tribes. The Sioux, occupying the most critical portion of the road as a result of their own expansion into the Platte River region, posed the greatest threat to emigration--any comprehensive peace hinged on their cooperation. Their continuing conquest of additional territory kept them in conflict with neighboring tribes, particularly the Pawnees and Crows. Earlier differences with the Cheyennes had been settled through an informal alliance and even intermarriage between the two groups. Since the Sioux were the most numerous and most powerful tribe on the Northern Plains, and had demonstrated considerable success in dominating a large region beyond the Missouri, they had no motive to cease the expansion they had begun decades earlier. Were that not enough to derail the treaty, a little-noticed provision recognized that "the aforesaid Indian nations do not hereby abandon or prejudice any right or claims they may have to other lands; and further, that they do not surrender the privilege of hunting, fishing, or passing over any of the tracts of

[11] Harry Anderson, "The Controversial Sioux Amendment to the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851," *Nebraska History*, (September 1956), pp. 211-12 (hereinafter cited as "Controversial Sioux Amendment"); The seven bands of the Teton, or Lakota, Sioux were: Oglala, Miniconjou, Hunkpapa, Brules (or Burnt Thighs), Two Kettles, Black Feet, and Sans Arc. Hassrick, *The Sioux*, pp. 3, 6.

country heretofore described."[12] In short, there was nothing to prohibit one tribe from trespassing on the lands of another. The increasing competition for game, especially for the declining numbers of buffalo, was in fact a central factor promoting intertribal warfare.

The commissioners forwarded the document to the Senate for ratification, a process requiring several months during which the provisions were carefully reviewed and debated. An amendment to the document unilaterally reduced the period of annuities from fifty to only ten years, with a presidential option to extend the payments for an additional five years. Although the treaty was ratified on May 24, 1852, the Senate recommended withholding public proclamation until the Indians were given the opportunity to review and concur with the changes. Nearly a year passed before the concerned tribes were contacted, but eventually they too ratified the accord, though it is by no means clear that they fully comprehended the drastic reduction in the government's obligation. The Indian Bureau wisely took the initiative to contract for and deliver the annuity goods in fall 1852, following Senate approval, rather than delaying until the document reached the plains the next spring. Acting under instructions from the commissioner of Indian affairs, Agent Fitzpatrick informed the Indians that failure to approve the amendment would result in the withholding of annuities in the future.

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[12] Kappler, *Laws and Treaties*, II, pp. 595.

Although the Indians probably did not realize the implications for the future of their very culture, the treaty also signaled the beginning of their dependency on the federal government.[13]

Despite its shortcomings, the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 (also known as the Horse Creek Treaty) established peaceful relations along the Oregon Route. Sutler Tutt, whose license to trade at Fort Laramie was renewed in 1852, continued to actively trade with the Indians for buffalo robes and beaver pelts. He took in so many robes, in fact, that he was forced to delay shipments to St. Louis because he had only two men available to press and bail them. Other smaller traders, among them James Bordeaux and Joseph Bissonette, another of the old French traders inhabiting the area, purchased goods from the Fort Laramie store for resale at their own establishment. Even with the Indians receiving annuity supplies, trade with the Sioux remained brisk.[14]

By that time, buildings at the post had increased in number and the military presence at the place was unmistakable. In a most graphic description, one Oregon-bound

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[13] Some historians have doubted the validity of the 1851 treaty because it was believed for nearly a century the Indians, or at least not all the original tribes, were contacted to ratify the Senate amendment. Later evidence, however, proved that the various tribes did indeed concur. The question is conclusively resolved in Anderson, "Controversial Sioux Amendment."

[14] The post council of administration elected John G. Tutt sutler for three more years beginning August 25, 1852. Fort Laramie file book No 76, transcribed in McDermott File, library, Fort Laramie NHS; John Tutt to John Daugherty, January 14, 1852, Daugherty Papers, Missouri Historical Society, transcribed in McDermott File; Tutt to Daugherty, April 14, 1852, ibid.; Bissonette operated a store on the North Platte, just west of the mouth of Deer Creek. He was formerly associated with Fort Platte and was hired by Stephen Watts Kearny to serve as his interpreter. Typescript page 652, William Garnett interview in Walter M. Camp Papers, Brigham Young University.

traveler expressed the elation, and surprise, emigrants experienced upon reaching Fort Laramie that summer:

> When we came in sight of the fort it looked like a settlement of houses. Every one was straining his eyes to catch a glimpse of white settlements. The day we passed, Laramie was a very fine looking place. Though it was Monday we all stopped and went over to see. Our feelings were something like the sailor when [he] gets in port after a long voyage. There was a store, a grocery, several dwellings, and the fort and soldiers' quarters, which was a long shed or stable appearing building, and the magazine house.
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> The fort [referring to Fort John] is a long hollow square about 30 feet high and walls about 20 inches thick, built of unburnt bricks; three or four cannon mounted on the walls. There are several small rooms on the inside of the square, and a kind of porch on the inside four or five feet of the top, so wide that six men can walk in abreast. Near this is the magazine house. It is under guard day and night. This squad of buildings is situated about two miles from the Platte, on the Laramie fork . . . There was about 60 soldiers stationed here when we passed. The whole squad of buildings seemed under guard when we were there. I presume this was done more for form than necessity. The soldiers are under absolute control by

> their officers. They are mostly boys and foreigners. They have blue caps, white pants and roundabouts. The outside seams of their pants are trimmed with blue ferriter [sic] (tape), blue patches on their shoulders and stripes of blue on the front of their caps.[15]

A company composed of several enterprising local civilians funded the construction of a bridge spanning the Laramie in 1851. That convenience enabled trains to avoid fording the rapid current, provided they were willing to pay the required tolls to continue their journey on the south side of the Platte. When First Lieutenant Richard B. Garnett took command of the post in July 1852, he described it as "an insufficient structure" at that time. Since the bridge lay below the fort, within the ten-mile square military reservation, the government consented to the operation in return for free passage and a share of the profits. The partnership, however, devolved into a stormy relationship when the army demanded that the bridge be repaired and made safe for its heavy freight wagons. "I perceived much animosity and harsh feelings among the contractors (which on one occasion proceeded to blows among some of them), as well as a great want of

[15] Silas W. Miller to Hugh Miller, November 24, 1852, typescript copy in vert. files, library, Fort Laramie NHS; The term "roundabout" referred to a short, tight-fitting uniform jacket often called a shell-jacket. Although the army adopted a new uniform in 1851, Miller's description leaves no doubt that the Fort Laramie garrison was still garbed in the regulation clothing in use since 1839. Frederick P. Todd, *American Military Equipage 1851 – 1872,* (Providence, R.I.: 1974), p. 51; Randy Steffen, *The Horse Soldier 1776 – 1943, The United States Cavalryman: His Uniforms, Arms, Accoutrements, and Equipments*, (Norman: 1977), I, pp. 111–21.

concert."[16] Whether or not Garnett was successful in his effort to affect the needed repairs became a mute point the next spring when the annual runoff from mountain snows caused the structure to collapse. Later that summer, Seth E. Ward and his partner Henry F. Mayer, probably both members of the original company, contracted with the army to build a replacement bridge over the Laramie not far above its mouth. In exchange for the exclusive right to maintain a bridge on the reservation, the proprietors paid the army five per cent of the gross receipts. Tolls charged were $2.00 for emigrant wagons, carts, and other vehicles, along with teams and drivers, and $3.00 for freight wagons. Lesser fees were charged for loose animals and saddle horses. Military personnel were allowed the use the bridge free of charge.[17]

Whereas the Laramie was normally only about fifty yards wide, swelling to as much as twice that in spring, bridging the North Platte with the means at hand was quite another matter. Several fords within a mile above the confluence had been in use during the fur trade era to access Forts William, Platte, and John. In 1847, the first Mormon

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[16] First Lieutenant R. B. Garnett to Colonel S. Cooper, AG, USA, July 24, 1853, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie, Records of United States Army Continental Commands, 1821 – 1920, Record Group 393, National Archives, Washington, D. C., (hereinafter cited as LS, Fort Laramie) typescript also in vert. files, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

[17] The first bridge was approved by the post council of administration on December 28, 1850. File Book No. 76, Fort Laramie, typescript in McDermott File, library, Fort Laramie NHS; "Articles of Agreement" between First Lieutenant R. B. Garnett and Seth E. Ward and Henry F. Mayer, July 16, 1853, Box 1, Letters Received, Fort Laramie, R. G. 393, N. A. (hereinafter cited as LR, Fort Laramie); Mayer to commanding officers, Fort Laramie, N. T., March 5, 1860, John Hunton Collection, Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne; Merrill J. Mattes and Thor Borrensen, "The Historic Approaches to Fort Laramie," (1947), pp. 5 – 6.

emigrants established yet another crossing immediately downstream from the later site of the government iron bridge. The army installed a ferry at the same point probably in late1849 or early 1850. It probably consisted of a flatboat connected to an overhead rope-and-pulley guideline, the boat being drawn across the stream by the force of the current and stabilized by fore and aft lines. By spring of that year, the government was charging $1.00 per wagon. The crossing nevertheless remained hazardous, despite the convenience. When the ferry sank on April 25, one man was drowned, and a subsequent swamping only two days later nearly took two more lives. Another common boat was finally substituted for the regular barge.[18]

By June, eighty to one hundred lodges of Miniconjou Sioux led by Little Brave were camped on the north bank of the Platte not far from the ferry. They had come down from the Black Hills to join their Brule and Ogallala relatives for the summer hunting season. The Miniconjous, unlike the Oglalas and Brules, had not inhabited that part of the

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[18] "The 1850 Overland Diary of Dr. Warren Hough," *Annals of Wyoming*, (fall 1974), p. 21l; A Sioux, Thunder Bear, testified that the ferry was about where the bridge stands today. MSS 57, box 2, Walter M. Camp Collection, Brigham Young University; That the traditional crossing of the Platte, at or near the bridge site, was used for some time prior to the arrival of the army is borne out by Quartermaster Aeneas Mackay. He stated that when he and an escort of Mounted Riflemen, with wagons, departed for Fort Pierre on August 17, 1849, "we crossed the Platte immediately at the Fort and proceeded in a N. Easterly direction . . . ." Mackay to Jesup, November 1, 1849, LS, Fort Laramie, copy in vert. files, library, Fort Laramie NHS; A new ferry was established at the crossing of the North Platte under contract with Enoch Raymond & Co. on May 9, 1854. Raymond was obligated to keep a good flat boat, manned by not less than two men, and not to sell liquor or goods. The army received five per cent of the gross tolls collected. Articles of Agreement between Enock W. Raymond & Co. and 1st Lieutenant R. B. Garnett, May 9, 1854, Box 1, LR, Fort Laramie.

country on a regular basis and therefore had no established relationship with the white traders in the vicinity of Fort Laramie. However, Little Brave's band had been seen in the Platte country from time to time during the previous two years. Not long after their appearance at the crossing, Miniconjou warriors began harassing passing emigrants, obstructing their way by riding in front of the wagons, and extorting them for presents to assure their safety. Emboldened by their successes at intimidating the whites, one warrior seized an emigrant, rifled his pockets, and finding letters, threw them on the ground and stamped on them.

Soldiers near the ferry were soon involved in their own altercation with the Sioux. Sergeant Raymond, in charge of a vegetable garden on the north side of the Platte, discovered that Miniconjous had taken control of the ferryboat from the civilian who had been manning it. Raymond and his men immediately re-took the boat and sent word of the trouble to Garnett, who apparently elected not to take any further action. That same afternoon, the sergeant returned to the ferry and found the Indians once again in possession of the boat. Again Raymond forced them to give it up. But, as the sergeant was crossing the river, one of the warriors on the bank fired a shot at him, the ball striking the water close beside the boat. Out of patience with the escalating situation, Raymond went directly to the fort to report to Garnett in person. The emigrant that had

been harassed earlier accompanied him to testify that the same individuals were involved in both incidents.

Garnett decided that ignoring the problem any longer would only lead to further trouble. He therefore ordered newly minted Second Lieutenant Hugh B. Fleming to take all the available men at the post, proceed to the village, and take custody of the offending warrior. Although Garnett was an officer of a dozen years' experience, Fleming had joined the regiment less than a year before after graduating West Point. Only days earlier, he had finally received a permanent appointment in the Sixth Infantry. If the Indians did not give up the man, Garnett authorized Fleming to seize two or three other hostages instead who could be used for bargaining purposes.[19]

Fleming assembled twenty-three non-commissioned officers and men of G Company, along with Assistant Surgeon Charles Page, and marched out of the post at about 8 o'clock on the evening of June 15. Reaching the river, the detachment experienced some difficulty making a crossing, but eventually succeeded by using two

[19] Robert Brooke Garnett, a Virginian, attended the U. S. Military Academy from 1836 – 1841. Upon graduation, he was appointed a second lieutenant in the Sixth Infantry. He served with the regiment throughout the Mexican-American War. He received his captaincy in 1855, but resigned his commission to join the Confederate States Army six years later. As a brigadier general, he was killed in action at the Battle of Gettysburg. Heitman, *Historical Register*, I, p. 447; Garnett's subordinate, Hugh Brady Fleming, graduated West Point in June 1852, after which he was appointed a brevet second lieutenant pending a permanent vacancy. Congress confirmed his appointment on June 9, 1853, less than a week prior to the Platte Ferry encounter, and in all probability, word of it had not yet reached the post. Fleming continued to serve in the regular army until his retirement in 1870. ibid., p. 424.

small boats they found nearby. Fleming knew that the post interpreter was then residing in the Indian village, so sent in Page alone to retrieve him. Fleming then advanced to the village with the entire detachment. Arriving there a few minutes later, he directed the interpreter to find Little Brave and inform him of Fleming's mission. When Fleming learned that the chief was absent, along with most of the warriors, he demanded that the entire band surrender. Not surprisingly, "They all refused to comply . . ." Fleming later reported.

Retaining Sergeant Raymond and four privates, the lieutenant dispatched Sergeant Perry and the remaining men to surround the circle of lodges to prevent any surprise from outside. The two officers, Raymond, and the rest of the soldiers walked daringly to the center of the village. As the soldiers advanced, the Indians fled toward a nearby ravine in rear of the tepees, firing as they ran with both guns and bows. Fleming's men promptly returned fire, driving the Indians from cover in a brief skirmish. Only about thirty shots were fired at close range by both sides when the shooting ended as abruptly as it had begun. Fleming later stated that he saw two warriors fall near him, while others in the party reported seeing two or three more killed or seriously wounded. But, by that time it was dark and the casualties could not be confirmed. Fleming assembled his men and found that all were present and uninjured. Two Indians were taken prisoner and their

hands bound. Fleming wisely took the precaution of throwing out advance, flank, and rear guards to protect his detachment as it returned to the post.

Next morning, Garnett sent for Little Brave to come to the fort to talk, but the messenger discovered the village deserted. The Indians had packed up and departed northward toward the Big Horn Mountains during the night. Word nevertheless reached Little Brave, whereupon he and approximately sixty of his men warily returned to Fort Laramie at few days later to meet with Garnett. The lieutenant was firm in his approach, informing the Miniconjous in no uncertain terms that while he regretted the incident, he supported Fleming's actions. If they wanted to be friends, he would be willing to forget the matter, but if they preferred to be enemies, he would accommodate them. Little Brave responded that the soldiers' handling of the matter was probably right, at least according to white customs, and they were agreeable to let the incident pass. However, when they demanded a present to seal the bargain, Garnett refused on the grounds that such an act would recognize the Sioux as the injured party. His opinion of them, he said, would depend on their future conduct. As a gesture of good faith, Garnett released the prisoners and the Indians departed. It should be noted that the Miniconjous could have easily exacted vengeance on any of several outlying parties of soldiers, such as those guarding

the herd, cutting hay, or working the farm fifteen miles away. That they did not suggests they had no desire to further escalate the matter.[20]

The Platte Ferry encounter presaged the decline of the formerly peaceful relationship that had existed between the army and the Sioux up to that time. On strictly legal grounds, it could be argued that the Miniconjous were interlopers in the Platte country and, since they were not party to the 1851 treaty, they were not bound to maintain a peaceful attitude toward white emigrants. Even had the treaty been more specific as to the Sioux bands affected, it is doubtful whether either civilians or the military would have drawn such fine distinctions, especially when an Indian had fired the first shot, and at a soldier.

The greater significance of the affair lay in the signal it sent to the Indians, and the precedent it established in the minds of the officers at Fort Laramie. Although the friendly Brules in the area were not directly affected by Fleming's actions, they learned of the incident within a short time. Never before had United States troops exhibited any hostile intent toward the Sioux, but the Platte Ferry skirmish demonstrated to them that the soldiers would react with deadly force, and to comparatively minor provocation.

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[20] Garnett to Major F. N. Page, AAG, June 30, 1853, LS, Fort Laramie, copy in vert. files, library, Fort Laramie NHS; Bvt. Second Lieutenant H. B. Fleming to Garnett, June 16, 1853, LR, Fort Laramie; A subsequent report concerning the Grattan affair states that, "nearly all the warriors were absent" from Little Brave's camp at the time the soldiers arrived. This suggests that only a few warriors were left behind to protect the non-combatants, therefore Fleming had the upper hand. Captain Ed. Johnson to Bvt. Lt. Col. William Hoffman, October 10, 1855, Annual Report of the Secretary of War, *Senate Executive Documents*, 34th Cong., 1st Sess., (823), (Washington, D. C.: 1856), p. 22.

Despite their passive behavior in the immediate aftermath of the skirmish, the Indians confided to Agent Fitzpatrick three months later that they now objected to the very presence of Fort Laramie. The post, they had been told, was put there for their protection, "but now the soldiers of the great father are the first to make the ground bloody."[21] The contradiction so angered them that they initially refused to sign the Senate-modified treaty, until Garnett personally explained the circumstances and the motivations for his actions. The headmen were consoled for the moment, but remained apprehensive. For the officers, especially Lieutenant Fleming, who would command the post during the following calamitous summer, the incident at Platte Ferry established the false notion that a small number of soldiers taking an aggressive stance could intimidate the Sioux into submissiveness. That mind-set would have grave consequences for Fort Laramie and, indeed, would forever influence Indian-government relations on the plains.

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[21] That the garrison at Fort Laramie did not fully trust the Sioux is revealed in the agent's request to Captain Michael E. Van Buren, temporarily camped nearby during the September council, to remain there with his two companies of Mounted Riflemen "lest any accidental disorder should arise." Fitzpatrick to Alfred Cumming, November 19, 1853, Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *Senate Executive Documents*, 33rd Cong., 1st Sess., Part I, (Washington, D. C.: 1853), pp. 366-67.

Chapter 3

"The Unfortunate Affair"

The early 1850s marked the high tide of westward emigration. In 1852 alone, some 70,000 people tramped by Fort Laramie, and over half that number came the following year. In the six years since counting began, over a quarter of a million Americans traveled the road to Oregon, California, and Utah. The Oregon Trail was also marked by the dust clouds raised by the enormous government freight wagons of David Waldo and Brown and Russell--626 loads in one year alone from Leavenworth to Forts Kearny and Laramie.[1]

[1] John D. Unruh, jr. *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-60*, (Urbana: 1993), p. 120; Henry Pickering Walker, *The Wagonmasters: High Plains Freighting from the Earliest Days of the Santa Fe Trail to 1880*, (Norman: 1986), p. 237.

Monthly mail coaches also plied the trail in a fledgling attempt to link the nation with its new territories. The summer of 1854 witnessed the letting of a new transcontinental mail contract to William M. F. McGraw and John Reeside to replace Woodson's Salt Lake mail runs. They were joined by the Hockaday brothers, John and Isaac, who offered passenger service in conjunction with carrying the mail. Two vehicles were used on each trip, a light wagon for the mail and a coach for passengers. By July, McGraw had established six stations between the Big Blue River in Kansas and Fort Bridger. One of those was situated about a mile below Fort Laramie. The stations provided changes of teams, along with meals, but on the long stretches in between the drivers, conductors, and passengers camped out.[2]

Yet, despite the great volume of traffic, the Sioux abided by the treaty insofar as not opposing the emigrants or stage men. It was well known, however, that the Indians had become beggars of the first order, and would turn surly when travelers were not forthcoming with sugar, coffee, or other goods to assure their passage. So prevalent had the practice become that departing emigrants were advised to purchase extra quantities of food for that purpose. The army, meantime, had become so secure in its belief that the treaty would insure the peace that the two companies of Mounted Riflemen had been transferred from Fort Laramie immediately thereafter, leaving only one company of

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[2] John S. Gray, "The Salt Lake Hockaday Mail," *Annals of Wyoming*, (fall 1984), p. 12.

infantry at that vital point. Noting this, Commissioner of Indian Affairs John W. Whitfield remarked:

> The military posts located in this agency are perfect nuisances. The idea that one company of infantry can furnish aid and protection to emigrants who pass through this agency is worse than nonsense. They can protect themselves no further than their guns can reach; they have no effect upon the Indians so far as fear is concerned; neither respect nor fear them; and as to protecting the traveler on the road, they are of no more use than so many stumps.[3]

The clash at Platte Ferry the year before should have sounded a warning to the army, but if anyone paid attention, the signal was not heeded. The combination of under-strength garrisons and young, inexperienced officers was to prove tragic for both the army and the Indians.

August saw the passage of the last few emigrant trains that had jumped off from the Missouri late in the season. The Sioux had gathered near Fort Laramie in July to draw the annuity goods that had been recently deposited at the trading post managed by J. P. B. Gratiot, five miles down the Platte.[4] The little fort was situated on the south bank, just

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[3] *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1854, (Washington, D. C.: 1855), p. 95 (hereinafter cited as *ARCIA* with year).

[4] The train carrying the goods accompanied a Mormon train, sometimes traveling ahead of the Mormons and at other times with or behind them. Apparently, the government train pulled ahead by a couple of days

where the bluffs forced the Oregon road to closely parallel the river. Trains had no alternative but to pass by the front door of the place. This post, constructed by the American Fur Company after the sale of Fort John, was actually owned by the old plains trader Pierre Chouteau, Jr., but was known locally as the "Gratiot Houses." That summer J. B. Didiar managed the place for Gratiot, who had returned to the States, and Charles Gereau, who had frequented the Indian country for many years and would later serve as post interpreter at Fort Laramie, clerked in the store.[5] While Oglalas camped on the river bottom not far below the Gratiot Houses, the Brules, under the leadership of "Conquering Bear," located their village nearer a trading establishment owned by James Bordeaux, about three miles downstream from Chouteau's. The village, composed of two hundred to three hundred lodges arrayed in a great circle opening to the east, lay on gently sloping land just north of the road and about three hundred yards from Bordeaux's house. Since the annuity goods could not be issued until Agent Whitfield arrived from St. Louis, the hungry Indians waited, but were growing more impatient each day.

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prior to reaching the American Fur Company post because the supplies had been delivered prior to the Mormons' arrival. Lydia D. Alder, The Massacre at Fort Laramie," *Improvement Era*, (June 1909), p. 636.

[5] By the 1860s, the old post was owned by James Beauvais of St. Louis. It was reportedly located just below the five-mile boundary of the military reservation in the N ½ of SE ¼, Sec. 6, T25N, R63W. In 1918 the site was said to be at the headgate of the Grattan Ditch, and was then eroding into the river. Transcribed notes, p. 263, Walter M. Camp Collection, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University; Deposition by J. B. Didiar, August 3, 1855, transcript in Choutous Manuscript Collection, Missouri Historical Society, copy in vertical files, library, Fort Laramie NHS (hereinafter cited as Didiar deposition).

As a Mormon train passed by Bordeaux's on August 18, a lame cow being driven along in the rear became frightened and ran into the Brule camp. The herder was reluctant to follow his cow into the village, therefore he abandoned the chase to catch up with the train. Animals straying from trains were a common occurrence, so a visiting Miniconjou thought nothing of killing and butchering the serendipitous gift. Some accounts state that the animal was too footsore to keep up and was left behind. However, other contemporary statements assert that the warrior first shot an arrow at the cow's owner, before dispatching the animal in retribution for a relative killed in the Platte Ferry skirmish the previous year. That both Lieutenant Fleming and Lewis Dougherty later corroborated that part of the incident lends considerable credence to the story. In any event, the train proceeded on to Fort Laramie where the emigrant filed a complaint with young Fleming, who at that time was commanding the post.[6]

Later that same day, Conquering Bear came to the fort with his own version of the affair. In his discussion with Fleming, Bear acknowledged that the Miniconjou band had "bad hearts" towards the whites, probably the result of the ferry incident, and had

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[6] This statement was offered by J. H. Reed, a visiting civilian convalescing in Grattan's quarters. He had the opportunity to speak with Indian witnesses after the affair. Unless otherwise cited, most of the details of the Grattan incident related herein are drawn from a series of official interviews and reports contained in Annual Report of the Secretary of War, *Senate Executive Documents*, 34th Congress, 1st Session (823), No. 91, (Washington, D. C.: 1856); (hereinafter cited as "Senate Report"); That the Miniconjou was seeking revenge for relatives killed near the Platte Ferry is supported by Lewis B. Dougherty to John B. Dougherty, August 29, 1854, R. H. Miller Papers, Kansas City Public Library, copy in vert. files, library, Fort Laramie NHS. Dougherty was a clerk in the sutler's store at the time of the incident and no doubt spoke with Indians that had been in the camp.

committed depredations in the vicinity of John Richard's bridge across the North Platte near Red Butte, about 130 miles from Fort Laramie. Bear explained that he and his Brules had no desire to be implicated in the cow affair because the perpetrator simply happened to be in their village at the time. Even as chief, Bear had no authority over the man that had committed the offense because he belonged to another band. Bear pointed out that the Miniconjou had only two or three friends in the Brule camp and the chief felt certain that if the soldiers would come for the warrior, he would surrender. But Fleming declined, expressing his desire to defer the matter until Agent Whitfield arrived to adjudicate the matter. The chief seemed content with that and left.[7]

Fleming, at the insistence of Brevet Second Lieutenant John L. Grattan, reconsidered his course of action and the next day ordered Grattan to take twenty men to arrest the warrior and bring him back to the post to await Whitfield. Since Bear had informed Fleming that the Miniconjous occupied only a few lodges in the camp, the lieutenant assumed the more numerous Brules would not oppose Grattan's actions.

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[7] A Sioux version, although second-hand, declared that Bear offered the Mormon his choice of any horse in the chief's personal herd. When Fleming refused to settle the matter that way, Bear supposedly told the officer to come get the man himself, declaring, "That is all I have to say. My band is not going to help you." Frank Salaway interview, November 3, 1906 in No. 27, Eli Ricker Tablets, Nebraska Historical Society, copy in vertical files, library, Fort Laramie NHS (hereinafter cited as "Ricker Tablets" with appropriate interview); If the exchange occurred as described, Fleming omitted these details from his official report. Senate Report, p. 7; Man Afraid, an Oglala, testified that Bear offered a mule for the cow, but this did not occur until after Grattan arrived at the camp the next day. Captain Ed. Johnson to Bvt. Lt. Col. William Hoffman, October 10, 1855, Senate Report, pp. 24.

Moreover, his own experience of the previous summer convinced him that the Indians would not stand up to a strong show of force. Having only a single infantry company at his disposal, Fleming augmented Grattan's detachment with two twelve-pound howitzers, one a mountain gun and the other a larger field piece, to ensure the intimidation was complete. Fleming purportedly cautioned Grattan to use his own discretion in the event the Indians refused to surrender the man, specifying that he was not to bring on a fight unless he was certain of success, that is, by confining it to the Miniconjous.

John Grattan was perhaps the most ill suited man for this task in the entire army. A twenty-four year old native of Vermont, he had been appointed to the U. S. Military Academy in 1848 and graduated five years later. A month after being appointed as a brevet (or extra) second lieutenant, he was assigned to the garrison at far off Fort Laramie to await his commission. There can be no doubt he was rash and full of bravado. His disdain for Indians soon became well known around the post. Even Post Chaplain William Vaux, who expressed his reluctance to criticize the young officer after his death, stated that Grattan,

> had an unwarrentable contempt of Indian character, which frequently manifested itself in my presence and at my quarters; and often, at the latter place, have I reproved him for acts which I conceived highly improper, such as thrusting his

> clenched fist in their faces, and threatening terrible things if ever duty or opportunity threw such a chance his way.[8]

On other occasions, Grattan had told J. H. Reed, a civilian sharing Grattan's quarters while he recovered from an injury, that "if it was ever necessary to fight Indians when they were in their village, that he would place his artillery some three or four hundred yards from their village, and run the risk of their driving him from his position."[9] In other words, he would immediately assume a defensive position. There can be no doubt that Grattan's preconceived notions of how he would conduct himself were modeled after Fleming's experience at the ferry and that event strongly influenced Grattan. A reviewing officer later concluded:

> It was after this occurrence that Lieutenant Grattan solicited, and had the promise made him, that, on the occurrence of any other difficulties, he, Lieutenant Grattan, should be sent against the Indians. It is said that he considered that the officer in command on this occasion [Lt. Fleming] had distinguished himself, and he was anxious for a like occasion. The occasion presented itself, and he claimed the honor. He earnestly and strongly urged it, and he was sent as above stated.[10]

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[8] Chaplain William Vaux to Col. William Hoffman, October 4, 1855, Senate Report., pp. 26 – 27.

[9] Undated report by J. H. Reed, ibid., p. 4.

[10] Johnson to Hoffman, October 10, 1855, ibid., pp. 22 - 23.

Rather than the twenty men the commanding officer had authorized, Grattan violated his instructions by calling for volunteers for dangerous duty from the men not occupied with any other duty. Two non-commissioned officers and twenty-seven men responded. The lieutenant assembled his men under arms and marched them to the old adobe fort where they obtained a wagon and rolled out the artillery pieces. Onlookers, including the Oglala Man Afraid of His Horses, watched as the soldiers cleaned and readied the pieces. Ordnance Sergeant Leodegar Schnyder, a veteran of the Seminole War who had seen seventeen years of army service, issued munitions from the stone magazine. Schnyder, in fact, had formerly been first sergeant of Company G prior to his appointment to the post staff. Aware of the sergeant's experience, Grattan suggested that Schnyder accompany his old comrades on the coming adventure—an offer Schnyder wisely declined because, as he later confided, he had no confidence in the lieutenant's judgment and felt the detachment was headed for trouble. As his men made final preparations, Grattan put in an appearance at the sutler's store, where he loudly bragged that he hoped to have a fight and probably repeated his usual boast that with only ten men he could whip any number of Sioux.[11]

[11] Ibid., p. 22; Lloyd McCann, "The Grattan Massacre," *Nebraska History*, (March 1956), reprint ed.. pp. 9 - 10; For a complete biography of Sergeant Schnyder, see John D. McDermott, "Fort Laramie's Silent Soldier: Leodegar Schnyder," *Fort Laramie Visions of a Grand Old Post*, (Fort Collins, Colo.: 1974), pp. 120 – 32.

With the men crowded aboard the wagon and upon the gun limbers, Grattan directed his small force to start down the Fort Leavenworth road at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. He assured them he would catch up as soon as the rest of the party was ready. Accompanying him was Augusta Lucia, a Frenchman known to the Sioux as "Wayus," who would act as interpreter. Also along, unofficially, was Man Afraid of His Horses and Obridge Allen, a veteran emigrant guide who had come to Fort Laramie only the day before. Lucia was compelled to borrow a horse from the sutler and while it was being saddled for him, the Frenchman went to the store for whiskey. There Grattan continued his antics, chiding Lucia to get moving, while playfully prodding him with his sword. Eventually the four men rode out and bystanders heard a highly excited Grattan proclaim in mock heroics that he would "conquer them or die."[12]

The little expedition rumbled across the new bridge over the Laramie and proceeded down the trail toward the villages. Lucia soon produced a bottle of liquor and began indulging freely to further bolster his courage. As the little expedition ascended the bluffs overlooking the Platte, the troops were met with an astonishing view down the valley, one that should have given Grattan pause to reconsider. Stretching along the river

[12] The interpreter's identity has often been corrupted as "Lucien," however the name used herein was provided by his daughter. Julia Clifford interview with Walter M. Camp, January 12, 1920, Robert S. Ellison Papers, Denver Public Library; Johnson to Hoffman, Senate Report, p. 23; Lloyd McCann, *The Grattan Massacre*, p. 11n.21.

about three-quarters of a mile to the left of the road below them was the Oglala camp, and a mile and a half farther down surrounding Bordeaux's post was the great Brule circle—some six hundred lodges in all. Allen gasped, "Lieutenant, do you see how many lodges there are?" "Yes," Grattan replied, "but I don't care how many there are; with thirty men I can whip *all* the Indians this side of the Missouri."[13] When Man Afraid also prevailed on Grattan to reconsider, the lieutenant turned a deaf ear.

By the time the troops reached the Gratiot Houses, Lucia was well on his way to becoming drunk, and with good reason. When Grattan made a rest stop at the trading post, Lucia took the opportunity to enter the store and procure more whiskey, as did some of the soldiers. Before long, the interpreter had found his courage and was completely out of control, brandishing his pistol, and loudly "threatening to give the Indians a new set of ears." Some of the American Fur Company employees, probably Didiar and Gereau, tried to reason with him, but to no avail. A French-speaking soldier in the detachment confided to a half-blood Oglala working at the post that he thought the whole affair was foolishness and feared the interpreter would get them all killed.[14]

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[13] Johnson to Hoffman, October 10, 1855, Senate Report, p. 23; Grattan has been accused of being drunk as well, but eyewitness accounts do not support the charge. McCann, *Grattan Massacre*, p. 10; Statement by Obridge Allen, Senate Report, pp. 9 – 10.

[14] Salaway interview; Statement by Man Afraid of His Horses in McCann, *Grattan Massacre*, p. 10.

Before leaving the Gratiot Houses, Grattan ordered the soldiers to load their muskets and fix bayonets, and a short distance below the store he again halted the detachment to give the men a pep talk, explaining his expectations of them in the event of a skirmish. He instructed them to listen only to his commands, and those of the sergeant, and "When I give the order, you may fire as much as you damned please." The lieutenant concluded by telling them, "Men, I don't believe we shall have a fight; but *I hope to God we may have one*."[15] Meantime, Lucia began running his horse back and forth to wind him, at the same time slurring threats at the Indians. Allen suggested that he might need all of his horse's speed before the day was out, but the inebriated Frenchman paid no attention. Grattan and his men moved on down the road. Behind them, at a distance, a stream of Oglalas followed and began filing off to the north toward the river. Beyond the camp circle, the men could be seen driving in the horses, an ominous sign of coming combat.

Ignoring the behavior of the Indians, Grattan led his men directly to Bordeaux's house, situated a short distance north of the road. As they approached, unsuspecting

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[15] Johnson to Hoffman, October 10, 1855, Senate Report, p. 23; Statement by Obridge Allen, Senate Report, p. 8; The arm in use by the Sixth Infantry was the Model 1842 musket, a .69-caliber smoothbore percussion weapon. Although smoothbores could be loaded and fired fairly rapidly, they were not particularly accurate, one hundred yards being the maximum effective range. Muskets dictated that conventional troops form in tight ranks and deliver their fire in volleys at close range, usually less than eighty yards. In Indian fighting on the plains, the weapon was all but useless against individual warriors darting about on horseback. Louis A. Garavaglia and Charles G. Worman, *Firearms of the American West 1803 – 1865*, (Niwot, Colo.: 1998), pp. 110-13.

though inquisitive villagers began walking up from the nearby lodges. Lucia rode out to meet them, shouting, "We have come to fight, not to talk. Last summer we killed some of you, but now we have come to wipe you out; you are women. If you want to fight, come on; we have come to drink your blood and eat your *liver raw*!" While Lucia ranted, Bordeaux came out of his house and immediately told Grattan to quiet him, or there would be trouble. Bordeaux felt certain that if the interpreter could be squelched, the matter could be settled amicably. Apparently, Grattan attempted to subdue Lucia, without success. Most of the Oglala people, meanwhile, had positioned themselves down near the Platte where they could observe what was happening, while a small party of a half dozen, stood atop a low eminence about a quarter of a mile west of the trading post.[16]

Bordeaux sent word for Conquering Bear to meet with them and in a few minutes the chief appeared, rather surprised to see the troops. Speaking through Bordeaux, Grattan informed the chief that he had come for the man who had killed the cow and that he must take him back to the fort, where he would be held until the agent came to resolve the dispute. Bear responded by saying that before he could give an answer, he had to return to his lodge to get appropriately attired in the general's uniform that he had been

[16] This group included Charles Gereau, from the American Fur Company post, and Frank Salaway, a half-blood Oglala. These men, who had provided themselves with a telescope, had a ringside seat above the village. Salaway interview; The hill on which they stood is about four hundred yards south of the Grattan burial monument and is approximately fifty feet higher than the surrounding land. Today, it lies within a corn field. The Oregon Trail passed between this eminence and the village. Author's note based on a personal examination of the site and a sketch map drawn from memory by Salaway in 1906.

given at the treaty council. Awhile later, Bear returned, along with three other headmen--Big Partisan, Little Thunder, and Man Afraid, who had already exerted his influence to try to find a peaceful solution. They had no sooner arrived when a messenger from the camp ran up to say that High Forehead, the accused Miniconjou, refused to be taken, and was waiting in his lodge, armed and prepared to resist to the death. Bear, consequently, told Grattan that he had no authority over the guest , therefore he could not force the man to give himself up.

The lieutenant then swore emphatically to Bordeaux, "You tell the Bear that I have come down here for that man, and I'll have him or die."[17] When Grattan asked which lodge belonged to High Forehead, Bear pointed it out. Grattan said he would approach within sixty yards to call the offender out. He then ordered his men to load the two howitzers and marched down into the circle of lodges. Bear rode double behind Lucia and the large group of Brules that had assembled withdrew to the village. Just inside the circle, Grattan halted as a second messenger confronted him, again bringing word that the warrior would not be taken alive. Grattan repeated his intentions and, turning to his men, instructed them to remain cool and upon his order they were to open fire on every man that was not a white man. Bordeaux, who had accompanied the lieutenant into the camp, warned the chiefs they had better get the man, but the leaders

[17] Statement by Obridge Allen, Senate Report, pp. 8 – 9.

objected on grounds that their custom required such a demand to be made four times before taking any action. They appealed to the officer to respect the rule, but Grattan steadfastly refused. By that time, tensions were running white hot on both sides. Bordeaux, thoroughly familiar with Indian psyche, advised the young officer that he was dealing with a very dangerous situation and that if he went in, he had better be ready to fight. Grattan, displaying more immature bravado than good sense, confidently replied that he had two revolvers with twelve shots. The trader suggested he had better unholster them, then turned back toward his store. All the while, Lucia continued to taunt and harangue the Indians deeper in the village. Grattan's efforts to get the drunken interpreter to back off had proved useless.

Bordeaux, meantime, climbed atop a robe press outside his store to get a better view. From his perch, he watched Grattan lead his men to the far side of the circle and there deploy them in a single rank about sixty yards from the lodges. The two artillery pieces and their crews were in the center, with a squad of infantrymen flanking them on either side. Directly in front of the troops were three lodges--Bear's somewhat to the right, while the Miniconjou's tepee stood to the left. A dry slough lay immediately behind the camp. Unbeknown to Grattan, warriors were already concealed there, and more were getting ready near the river. About fifty villagers gathered about as Grattan and Lucia,

both still mounted, confronted Bear in the open space between his lodge and the middle one. However, Lucia failed to accurately convey the conversation and, unbeknown to Grattan, continued to goad the Brules to fight. Oddly enough, the soldiers seated themselves on the ground during the protracted exchange, suggesting that Grattan and his sergeant were exercising little control. Grattan reiterated his demand for Bear to turn over the Minconjou warrior, but the chief attempted to placate him by offering a mule in exchange for the cow simply to keep the peace until Whitfield arrived. Grattan repeatedly rebuffed the chief's proposals, maintaining that his orders did not permit him to accept restitution; only the man would do.

Obridge Allen had paused at Bordeaux's to visit a friend working at the establishment, but just as he mounted to join Grattan, Man Afraid returned from the village to implore the influential trader to intervene. "My friend," he pleaded to Bordeaux, "come on, the interpreter is going to get us into a fight, and they are going to fight if you don't come."[18] Almost forty-five minutes had elapsed by that time and all attempts to convince High Forehead to surrender had failed. He responded only that he was ready to die. A reluctant Bordeaux asked to borrow Allen's horse, which he mounted and rode toward the village. Although Bordeaux would later claim that he was compelled to turn back because the stirrups were too short, it is obvious he wanted no part of the

[18] Johnson to Hoffman, October 10, 1855, Senate Report, p. 24.

volatile situation by that time. He no sooner returned to the post than Man Afraid again approached him, even more emphatically, to come to the village to prevent violence. Bordeaux finally consented to try, but the two had gone only about 150 yards when Bordeaux saw it was already too late. Woman and children were evacuating the village, while warriors beyond were mounting and winding their horses, sure indications that a clash was imminent.

Now at an impasse, Grattan drew out his watch and said, "It is getting late and I can't wait any longer."[19] Bear responded that there was nothing more he could do; if the soldiers wanted High Forehead, they would have to take him. Suddenly, all was pandemonium as the scene exploded. At Grattan's command, the soldiers jumped to their feet. Bordeaux saw a soldier on the right of the line fire his musket into the Indians standing near Bear's lodge. In the momentary lull that followed, an Indian, probably Bear himself, shouted for the others not to fire, that the soldiers had killed one man and might be content to let it go at that. He had hardly uttered those words when soldiers on the left fired a volley; a split second later one of the howitzers cracked, sending a load of canister ripping through the tepees. The warriors immediately loosed a fusillade of arrows and a few gunshots as they rushed forward, killing two bluecoats in the initial onslaught. Three

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[19] Hoffman to Bvt. Major J. N. Page, A. A. G., Dept. of the West, November 19, 1854, Senate Report, p. 2.

others were wounded and were quickly helped into the wagon by their comrades. Grattan dismounted and leaped to the remaining gun, pulled the lanyard, and was instantly overwhelmed and killed. Both cannons somehow missed the Indians, still the muzzle blasts alone checked them momentarily.[20] The soldiers who were still on their feet began withdrawing, loading and firing as they went. The fact that observers noted a fairly orderly retreat suggests that one or both of the non-commissioned officers took command after Grattan fell. However, the driver on the limber panicked, turned about, and whipped the mules toward the road without waiting for anyone. The wagon followed close behind, one man desperately struggling to hold on to the tail gate as he ran along behind, but warriors shot him down within twenty yards. The rest of the detachment withdrew from the village and retired toward the road, firing as they went and holding the Indians at bay. Warriors, some on foot, others mounted on ponies, moved around their flanks, launching

[20] The author presumes that Grattan had the guns loaded with canister shot, an antipersonnel round consisting of a tin cylinder, with closed ends, of bore diameter. Those for mountain howitzers were loaded with .69-caliber lead musket balls, those for field guns with 1-inch diameter cast iron balls. *Ordnance Manual for the Use of the Officers of the United States Army,* (Philadelphia: 1861), pp. 36, 275. It is difficult to imagine how both shots could have missed at point blank range, unless the inexperienced infantrymen manning the guns had the muzzles elevated to the degree that they overshot the Indians. Indians who later showed up at Fort Pierre apparently told the agent that was what had happened. Alfred J. Vaughan to Colonel Alfred Cumming, October 19, 1854, *ARCIA*, 1854, p. 88; Another explanation is that the Indians simply dove to the ground when they saw the soldiers were about to fire. The pause noted between the first musket shot and the cannon fire would have permitted them just enough time for the Indians to fall down. This scenario, purportedly based on an Indian account, is found in Theophilus F. Rodenbough, *The Army of the United States*, (New York:1966), p. 489; The following winter, Private Simeon Covington, Company D, Sixth Infantry, was found guilty of having stolen some of the personal effects of Lieutenant Grattan that were still at the post. Covington was sentenced to walk in front of the guardhouse for seven days wearing a sign "thief," after which he endured another twenty-three days of hard labor while wearing a ball and chain. He was additionally fined a month's pay. Orders No. 13, February 27, 1855, Orders, Fort Laramie, Records of U. S. Army Continental Commands, Record Group 393, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (hereinafter cited as Orders, Fort Laramie).

arrows at the tightly bunched soldiers. The troops fell back to the low hill approximately half a mile south, either hoping to make a stand on the higher ground, or simply to get back to the road. Indians overran the limber and killed the driver withhin a quarter mile of the camp. Atop the rise, Oglalas coming from the upper camp intercepted and stopped the wagon. The surviving soldiers, about eighteen according to one witness, were quickly surrounded and cut down in close combat.

In the confusion of the first shots, Lucia, still mounted on his borrowed horse, broke out of the circle and made for the river east of Bordeaux's. Alongside him rode a soldier that had caught and mounted Grattan’s horse. But more Indians coming from the north compelled them to veer to the right, circling back around Bordeaux’s house. Mounted warriors gave chase. Lucia and the soldier probably sought safety at the store, but may have been waived off by the traders, who had no desire to get themselves killed by trying to harbor the two. Galloping at full speed, the panicked men crossed the road and appeared to be making good their escape when a hunter returning to the village was sighted coming across the bench land. A pursuing tribesman signaled to the hunter, who fired, bringing down the horses. The others were on them in a moment, quickly dispatching the loud-mouthed Frenchman who had done so much to incur the wrath of the Indians.

It was all over within ten minutes. The bodies of dead soldiers were scattered in ones, twos, and threes, from the abandoned cannons all the way to the hilltop, where the last of them lay in a group. The villagers immediately vented their wrath on the bodies, stripping, scalping and mutilating them to deprive the spirits of an afterlife. They slashed the throats of some, others had hands, feet, or even arms and legs severed. Clubs and hatchets were used to crush most of the heads beyond recognition.[21]

Immediately after the fight, the women of both villages, fearing more soldiers would come down from Fort Laramie, dismantled the lodges and began moving to Rawhide Creek, eight miles north of the river. Only one lodge was left at the old Brule camp. Conquering Bear, who had been shot in three places, was in no condition to be moved. A number of warriors stood guard over him that night.

Some of the Indians, whose blood was now hot to kill all the whites, immediately descended on Bordeaux's post, threatening to wipe out the traders too. However, Bordeaux's wife, Marie, was the daughter of Swift Bear, a respected Brule war chief. She had numerous relatives in the band and Bordeaux himself had established many close friendships during his years of trading among the Sioux. Fortunately for the whites, some of those allies stepped forward to protect the trader and pacify the hotheads. Still not content, both Brules and Oglalas threatened to go to Fort Laramie, kill all the whites

[21] L. B. Dougherty to J. B. Dougherty, August 29, 1854, Miller Papers.

there, and burn the fort to the ground. Regardless of the threats made on his life, Bordeaux was generally respected among the Sioux and he used that influence to calm the warriors and eventually dissuade them from attacking the post. Instead, they helped themselves to the goods in his store and appropriated his cattle and horses. Thunder Bear, an influential leader of Bear's ilk, explained that the people were hungry, but he knew too that some of the warriors were simply trying to pick a fight as an excuse to loot the store. He moved among the warriors that night calmly urging restraint. The traders, and Allen, who had taken sanctuary in the store when the skirmish began, stayed awake all that night to guard against a surprise attack in the event the Indians changed their minds.[22]

During the night, some friendly Brules brought in a seriously wounded soldier. Private John Cuddy, like his comrades, had sprinted toward the high ground, but had diverged to the left to take refuge in bushes growing near a spring behind Bordeaux's house. The Indians had not seen him in the confusion and had later overlooked him during the subsequent mutilations. Shortly after Cuddy was brought in, Swift Bear appeared and expressed his concern that the soldier would be discovered by the more hostile factions, who would use his presence at the house as an excuse to kill Bordeaux

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[22] Virginia Cole Trenholm, "The Bordeaux Story," *Annals of Wyoming*, (July 1954), pp. 121-22; Statement by James Bordeaux, August 29, 1854, Statement by James Bordeaux in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, (Washington, D. C.: 1855), pp. 93 – 94; Statement by James Bordeaux, Senate Report, p. 6.

and his family. Cuddy, still conscious, expressed his desire to return to Fort Laramie, if only someone would assist him. Bordeaux therefore sent one of his white employees and two reliable Indians to escort the wounded man to the post under cover of darkness. The three returned a short time later, saying they had gone only about a mile when Cuddy told them he could make the rest of the way on his own. At about 1 o'clock on the morning of Sunday the twentieth, Bordeaux sent a message to Lieutenant Fleming with the news of what had happened. Meanwhile, Private Cuddy turned back, either because of weakness or reluctance to try to slip past the intervening Oglala village. Whatever the reasons, Bordeaux was astonished the see the soldier back at his post shortly after daylight the next morning. How Cuddy managed to traverse the open prairie between the two Indian villages without being caught remains a mystery. Nevertheless, Bordeaux secreted the soldier in or near his house until Monday, when he saw that he was returned safely to the fort. By that time, however, Cuddy had been without medical attention for almost two days and was in critical condition. His wounds, apparently not too serious initially, had become infected by that time. He died at the post hospital the following day without being able to give an account of the fight.[23]

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[23] A cogent description of the site of the place where Cuddy concealed himself is given in McCann, Grattan Massacre, p. 16n.29 and p. 20n.38. McCann concluded that the spring may have been west of the trading post. However, Antoine Bordeaux, who was eight years old at the time, recalled that the slough was behind the house, that is, to the north, and the spring was on the hillside beside the slough. The store faced south, toward the road. Antoine Bordeaux interview, Walter Camp Papers, Lilly Library, Indiana University; William Garnett interview, typescript p. 654, Camp Collection, Brigham Young University; James Bordeaux statement, Senate Report, pp. 6 – 7; Colonel William P. Carlin (formerly 6th Inf. during the

On Sunday morning, Bear had been carefully moved to the temporary camp across the Platte, while approximately five hundred warriors rode to the Gratiot Houses to claim their treaty goods. Didiar informed them that the supplies were locked up in a storeroom that he had no authority to open until the agent arrived. The Indians became quite belligerent, saying they had waited long enough and now demanded the food because they had nothing to eat. The traders resisted, though probably not very strenuously, as the warriors forced their way into the fort and broke open the doors to the warehouses. After sacking the rooms containing the annuity goods, the Indians loaded the supplies on their ponies and moved back across the Platte. They returned shortly after daybreak on the twenty-first, boldly threatening to kill the residents if they did not turn over all of Chouteau's goods as well. Didiar steadfastly refused. Despite the intervention of a few influential men among the Sioux, the warriors used tomahawks and axes to break through the door to the fort and overwhelm the occupants. Didiar, Gereau, and most of the others fled to Fort Laramie, daring not return until the following day. When they did, they found the shelves of the store empty and the place thoroughly ransacked. Sacks of flour, sugar, and coffee had been slashed; bolts of cloth unrolled and strewn

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1850s) to Bancroft, November 14, 1884, typescript in vert. files, library, Fort Laramie NHS; Swift Bear was later credited with protecting Cuddy and trying to save his life. Colonel William Hoffman, Sixth Infantry, presented him with a letter of recommendation, sometimes called a 'begging paper," for the purpose of securing favorable treatment by whites. Letter No. 60, William Collins Family Papers, Denver Public Library.

about, while all sorts of other goods were destroyed and scattered throughout the post. They had overlooked the whiskey, however, because Didiar had carefully concealed it. A year later, the company would petition the government for a redress of its losses.[24]

Nor did the depredations stop there. A party of warriors came to within a mile of Fort Laramie to raid the new McGraw & Reeside mail station. Although no one was killed in the attack, the tribesmen pillaged the station and made off with ten company mules, along with twenty-six head of horses and mules owned by Sutler Lewis Dougherty that happened to be in the same corral.[25]

With 1,000 – 1,500 warriors bent on death and destruction suddenly rampaging in the area, Fort Laramie was in grave peril. Besides himself, Lieutenant Fleming had only Assistant Surgeon Page, Ordnance Sergeant Schnyder, and 45 soldiers left to defend the post. Fleming made use of old Fort John by concentrating most of the garrison and civilians inside its walls and fixing "it up for the last resort," according to Dougherty.[26] Prudence would have dictated that he have the men move the ammunition from the magazine to the adobe fort as well. How many pieces of artillery remained after the loss

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[24] Didiar deposition; Frank Salaway, one of the employees, recalled that Charles Gereau, the interpreter, fled all the way to Green River in Utah, while his wife and child joined her band at Fort Laramie. Gereau did not return for a month. Salaway interview.

[25] This raid apparently occurred later the same night, after the Grattan fight. L. B. Dougherty to J. B. Dougherty, August 29, 1854: Affidavit of Jesse A. Jones, Samuel Rider, and N. A. Mitchel, November 1, 1854, Records of the Upper Platte Agency, copied in McDermott File, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

[26] L. B. Dougherty to J. B. Dougherty, August 29, 1854.

of Grattan's two is not known, but there was almost certainly another twelve-pound field howitzer on hand, with a large supply of ammunition.[27]

Dougherty also recorded on August 29 that "a small blockhouse is being erected which, held by ten men, will add greatly to the strength of the post and protect the frame building from being fired."[28] The blockhouse Dougherty mentioned was situated a few yards off the east corner of the magazine and was situated to command the floodplain between the two rivers. It was, in fact, one of two identical structures (Dougherty failed to mention the second), the other located between old Fort John and the Laramie River to defend the diagonally opposing corner of the post.[29] Thanks to the efforts of James Bordeaux, who dissuaded the Indians from attacking the fort, a last-ditch defense never became necessary. Had they carried out their plans, the Sioux almost certainly would have succeeded considering the small garrison present at the time.

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[27] Post Returns, August 1854, Fort Laramie, Oregon Route, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N. A., Washington, D. C., copy in vert. files, library, Fort Laramie NHS; Three years earlier, there were 2 field howitzers at the post. "Inventory of Ordnance and Ordnance Stores, 3rd Quarter, 1850, Fort Laramie, box 1, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie, R. G. 393 (hereinafter cited as LS, Fort Laramie).

[28] L. B. Dougherty to J. B. Dougherty, August 29, 1854.

[29] The existence of these blockhouses has not been previously recorded. Both measured twenty-two feet square, but other architectural details are lacking. They appear on a plat of the fort, prepared by Major Oscar F. Winship within a few days following the Grattan incident, contained in: "Report of An Inspection of Forts Ripley, Ridgely, Snelling, Laramie Kearney, Riley, Leavenworth, and Atkinson," Letters Received, Records of the Office of the Adjutant General, 1822 – 1860, (Main Series), National Archives, Washington, D. C., microfilm publication 567, roll 508.

With those preparations underway, Fleming dispatched a courier to Fort Kearny with news of the incident and a request for reinforcements. At the same time, he responded to Bordeaux's message with a note stating:

> Sir: Your letter of the 19th has been received by me, and in reply I say that I am unable to take further notice at present of this unfortunate transaction; and I wish you to speak to the Bear and other Chiefs with reference to the matter. Make the best terms with them you can for the present, for your own safety, and the safety of others likewise unprotected in the country. I wish you to use all means in your power to procure the restoration of the bodies of those who have been killed.[30]

The next day, Monday, Bordeaux and his men went to the now deserted camp to bury the soldiers. However, before they accomplished their task, another train of Mormon emigrants passed through the battlefield. One of the travelers described "the sickening sight of forty dead faces upraised to the blazing sun, murdered and scalped, but still unburied beside the wreckage of a train that had been looted by the Indians."[31] The emigrant failed to realize that the mostly nude bodies and the wrecked vehicles actually belonged to Grattan's command. The lieutenant's body, along with two others, still lay

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[30] Quoted in *Publications of the Nebraska State Historical Society*, (Lincoln: 1922), 20, p. 261 (hereinafter cited as *Nebraska Publications*); Assistant Quartermaster E. A. Ogden to Major General Thomas Jessup, September 5, 1854, Fort Laramie box, Consolidated Correspondence File, Records of the Quartermaster General's Office, R. G. 92, N. A., Washington, D. C., typescript in bound correspondence, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

[31] Statement by James Bordeaux, Senate Report, p. 7; Alder, "Massacre at Fort Laramie," p. 637.

where they fell near the field pieces, which the villagers had chopped up and dismantled. Grattan's corpse, pierced with twenty-four arrows—one through the head--was identified only by a watch that the Indians had overlooked in the pocket of his trousers. No one was present who might have identified any of the enlisted men, even if that had been possible after the disfigured and swollen corpses had baked in the sun for two days. Bordeaux scraped out a shallow pit on the hilltop near where most of the bodies lay and deposited the remains there. The only exception was the body of one soldier, probably the man that had nearly escaped on the lieutenant's horse, who was buried where he fell some distance south of Bordeaux's place. Grattan was also buried on the field, though his remains were later removed to the national cemetery at Fort Leavenworth.[32]

There can be no doubt that John Grattan's impetuosity, arrogance, and lack of judgment were the immediate causes of "the unfortunate affair," as Agent Whitfield afterward termed it. Not only was he unreasonably contemptuous of the Sioux, he seems

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[32] Bordeaux to Samuel Smith, August 21, 1854, in *Nebraska Publications*, pp. 259-60; The statement regarding one soldier being buried separately was made by Antoine Bordeaux, Camp Papers, Lilly Library; Grattan's remains were exhumed and moved to Fort Leavenworth sometime prior to August 1857. His grave may be seen today in the National Cemetery at that post. Jesse A. Gove, *The Utah Expedition*, (Concord: 1928), p. 49; Initially, the mass grave was simply mounded with earth, but prior to 1864, someone, probably troops from Fort Laramie, erected a stone cairn "two feet high and ten feet square." Eugene F. Ware, *The Indian War of 1864*, (New York: 1960), p. 218; Gove noted the mound. ibid.; John Hunton, the last post trader, was familiar with the grave and, in fact, led the later exhumation party to it when the post cemetery was abandoned. He was also instrumental in marking the location of the grave with the present monument. Hunton noted at the time that the grave was "at the center of and nearly against the east side of the quarters of Mr. Quick. Battle was about 300 feet west and 100 feet north of this. Bordeau's Store was at center of S ½ of Sec. 14, a little more than ½ mile east, almost due east of battlefield." Hunton interview, envelope E-8, typescript p. 261, Camp Collection, Lee Library, BYU; Douglas C. McChristian, "Historic Resource Study, Fort Laramie: The Private Property Era 1890 – 1937," (1998), pp. 127-28.

to have been obsessed with demonstrating to the Indians the government's military might and his own prowess in combat. Lieutenant Fleming's brief skirmish at the ferry the year before served as a powerful influence on Grattan's attitude and he sought a similar opportunity, as he saw it, to distinguish himself. However, both he and Fleming underestimated the effect of the Platte Ferry fight on the Sioux mindset. No longer were the Indians naïve enough to believe the soldiers would not fire on them. Although they did not welcome conflict a year later, they were mentally prepared to resist when Grattan's blustering made it obvious he was spoiling for a fight.

But the blame was not Grattan's alone. The Indian Bureau also bears a share of the responsibility. The underlying purpose of the 1851 treaty was to prevent the Indians from interfering with traffic on the Oregon Trail. Yet, by locating the Upper Platte Agency at Fort Laramie, the Indians were in fact drawn to the road, where they camped for weeks awaiting the issue of the their goods. Accordingly, the Indians and the emigrants were placed in a situation where contact, if not collision, was inevitable. Forethought should have suggested establishing the agency at some other convenient point farther removed from the trail, perhaps at the forks of the Laramie River, or on Chugwater Creek to the south.

Similarly, Lieutenant Grattan's superiors committed mistakes in judgment that had a direct bearing on the events of August 19. Indeed, after speaking with Conquering

Bear, Fleming initially made the proper decision to defer the matter to Agent Whitfield, since the army had no clear authority to act on such a complaint. Lieutenant Fleming was well aware that his young subordinate was "rash and impulsive almost beyond belief," yet he allowed himself to be coerced into reversing his decision. Compounding his error, Fleming placed Grattan in command of the detachment sent to seize the man. The post surgeon subsequently opined that the entire matter of the cow might have been overlooked had it not been for Grattan's insistence that an expedition be sent to arrest the accused warrior. Interestingly, there is nothing to suggest the Mormon that lost the cow ever demanded compensation, or that he remained at the fort to witness the outcome of his complaint. That the emigrant quickly disappeared from the official record indicates that he moved on with his train and that the plan to take the Indian into custody was hatched afterward by Fleming and Grattan simply to flex their military muscles. At the least, more mature judgment should have suggested that the commanding officer personally handle such a sensitive assignment, while leaving his junior in charge of the post. Fleming's acquiescence to Grattan's demands had serious consequences for which he must bear a large share of the responsibility.[33]

[33] Another of Grattan's motives probably stemmed from his making fun of some local civilians that had recently pursued a party of Cheyennes guilty of killing an ox belonging to Augusta Lucia. When the whites caught up to the Indians, they lost their courage and turned back. Lieutenant Grattan made much of this incident, therefore he knew he could not fail when the opportunity arose for him to deal with the Indians, lest he suffer similar ridicule. Statement by Assistant Surgeon Charles Page, Senate Report, p. 12; The army's final report on the Grattan affair eluded to Fleming's inexperience, but stopped short of formally censuring him, probably out of courtesy to a young officer just beginning his career. Consequently, most of

One must also question why the department commander, Major General David E. Twiggs, allowed command of an important post like Fort Laramie to devolve on a mere second lieutenant, a man of very limited experience only two years out of West Point. Why were all senior officers allowed to be away from an isolated frontier command? For that matter, why had the garrison at Fort Laramie dwindled to but one company of infantry? It should have been obvious to department headquarters that a single company would be hard pressed to perform the necessary garrison duties, much less police the Indians. No less a figure than D. D. Mitchell penned an editorial castigating the army for its lack of preparedness.

> The miserably mistaken policy which the Government has pursued in establishing petty little Forts, along the Arkansas and Platte, for the purpose of protecting traders and travelers, and at the same time overawing the Indians, has been worse than a useless waste of the public money. These little Forts were generally garrisoned by the fragments of a company of *infantry*, a force that could be of no more use in protecting travelers, or chastising Indians, than so many head of sheep. The Indians being well mounted, could at any time come within sight of a fort and commit any murders or outrages that chance might throw in their way,

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the blame was heaped on the deceased Lieutenant Grattan. Johnson to Hoffman, October 10, 1855, Senate Report, pp. 25 - 26.

and laugh with scorn at any impotent attempts that might be made to punish them.[34]

If the army had lulled itself into a state of complacency, with the self-assurance that the 1851 treaty would prevent any problems, the incident at the ferry should have awakened commanders to the potential for trouble. Yet, it did not. Although the two junior officers at Fort Laramie foresaw, in fact hoped for, another confrontation, their superiors apparently dismissed the 1853 Platte Ferry affair as an isolated event. The Sioux, however, did not take it so lightly, and when similar circumstances arose a year later, they were not so forgiving.[35]

[34] *Nebraska Publications*, 20, pp. 260-61.

[35] Fort Laramie had been commanded by First Lieutenant Richard B. Garnett, a thirteen-year veteran, including the Mexican-American War, from July 1852 until May 1854. At the time of the Grattan affair he, like G Company commander Captain William S. Ketchum, was assigned to general recruiting duty, a detail that amounted to a furlough in the East. That left Second Lieutenant Fleming in command of both the company and the post during the summer of 1854. Post Returns, Fort Laramie, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N. A., Washington, D. C., copies in library, Fort Laramie NHS.

Chapter 4

"A Thunder Clap"

In the aftermath of the clash at Bordeaux's Trading Post, the Sioux began fragmenting into small bands, going their own way in search of game, though the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, who had avoided becoming involved in the trouble, remained peaceably disposed in the area. Conquering Bear died of his wounds several days after the fight and the Sioux, having obtained their annuity goods, albeit by force, only invited further trouble by staying in the area. Nevertheless, once their noncombatants had been removed a safe distance to the north, war parties began frequenting the Oregon Trail, prompting Agent Alfred J. Vaughan at Fort Pierre, to predict: ". . . any white man found on the road will certainly be killed by them. They state openly that next spring they will

keep parties constantly on the emigrant route, and kill all they find."[1] That the threat was real was evidenced on November 13 when a small party of Brule warriors, among them Red Leaf, Spotted Tail, Young Conquering Bear, and Long Chin, returned to the Platte to kill white men in retaliation for the chief's death. The raiders pounced on the mail coach at Cold Spring, twenty-four miles below Fort Laramie, killing the driver and the conductor riding alongside. The only passenger, Salt Lake businessman Charles A. Kinkaid, was wounded in the leg, but managed to escape with his life. The Indians destroyed the mail, and made off with the mules, along with over $10,000 in gold coin, leading the Sioux to record 1854 in their winter count as the year of "Much Money." The attack caused Reeside to withdraw from the mail contract, forcing Isaac Hockaday to also dissolve his partnership in passenger service. The increased trouble along the Upper Platte finally moved the army to send two additional companies of the Sixth Infantry to reinforce Fort Laramie.[2]

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[1] *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1854*, (Washington, D. C.: 1855), p. 88 (reports hereinafter cited as *ARCIA* with year).

[2] Frank Salaway interview, November 3, 1906, Eli Ricker Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society. copy in vertical files, library, Fort Laramie NHS; John S. Gray, "The Salt Lake Hockaday Mail," *Annals of Wyoming*, (fall 1984), p. 13; Antoine Bordeaux interview, typescipt notes, p. 442, Camp Collection, Brigham Young University; A Tenth Infantry officer marching over the trail in 1857 recorded that they "passed near or rather through the gap where the mail party was killed the same year [1854]." Jesse A. Gove, *TheUtah Expedition 1857 - 1858*, (Concord: 1928), p. 49; An attack on Fort Laramie was registered on August 28, 1854, yet no mention of it is found in the post records. Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army*, (Urbana: 1965), II, p. 401(hereinafter cited as *Historical Register* with vol.). This may allude to an occasion when approximately 200 Cheyennes rode into the post at about 10 o'clock at night and fired three shots. Obviously, they considered it to be only a

Officials in the Indian Bureau beseeched the army to take punitive action against their charges. Agent John W. Whitfield of the Central Superintendency declared,

> It is evident to every man who has travelled [sic] over the plains recently, that the time is not very far distant when the buffalo will cease to furnish a support for the immense number of Indians that now rely entirely on them for subsistence; and as soon as this is the case, starvation is inevitable, unless they can be induced to change their mode of life, which never can be done until the government gets the control over this people, and that can only be done by giving every band of Indians from Texas to Oregon a genteel drubbing.[3]

Agent Vaughan at Fort Pierre echoed Whitfield's views, saying that in a meeting with the Sioux at his agency, Red Leaf had demonstrated his disdain for the whites by slashing bags of provisions presented to the tribesmen as gifts, scattering the contents, and tossing a keg of powder into the river. Fifty warriors then fired at the floating keg. According to Vaughan, even the traders on the plains felt threatened by the sudden belligerency of the Indians, yet no further deaths resulted.[4]

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symbolic raid. Unfortunately, no date was recorded, but we know that Whitfield arrived soon after the Grattan fight. John W. Whitfield to Colonel Cumming, September 27, 1854, *ARCIA*, 1854, p. 94.

[3] Ibid., p. 95.

[4] Ibid., pp. 88 - 89.

Raiding continued the next year. In February Sioux drove off sixty-five head of horses and mules from the Ward and Guerrier trading post eight miles above Fort Laramie. Thomas S. Williams reported that a large war party also stole stock from his party near Devil's Gate, as well as all the animals belonging to the mail company and two other ranchmen at the same point. Mineconjou raiders subsequently scooped up four army mules just west of Fort Laramie early in May. Then in June at Deer Creek Crossing, Sioux warriors shot down Robert Gibson, leader of a wagon train from Missouri, as he was in the act of shaking hands with them. The same party attacked another group of emigrants at about the same place a few days later, lancing a man and a woman and running off some stock.[5]

Even before most of these depredations occurred, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis had decided that Grattan's death could not go un-avenged. The previous October he and General of the Army Winfield Scott had hatched a plan to strike a blow on the Sioux to teach them a lesson. Scott named Colonel William S. Harney, a blustering, hard-bitten old dragoon officer then on leave in Paris, to head the expedition. Harney, recently promoted to the rank of brevet brigadier general, arrived at St. Louis on April 1 to begin making preparations for the coming campaign. By July, he was bound for Fort Kearny

[5] LeRoy R. Hafen and Francis Marion Young, *Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West,* (Lincoln: 1984), pp. 237-39; Antoine Bordeaux interview, Camp Manuscripts, Lilly Library, Indiana University; Thunder Bear interview, MSS 57, Box 2, Camp Collection, Lee Library, BYU.

where the troops would assemble prior to making the thrust into Sioux country. The expedition numbered about six hundred men in all, including elements of the Second Dragoons, the Sixth and Tenth Infantry Regiments, and part of the Fourth Artillery. Leading the mounted force was Lieutenant Colonel Philip St. George Cooke, author of the army's new manual of cavalry tactics. Major Albemarle Cady, an infantryman since 1829 that had distinguished himself at Molino del Rey during the Mexican-American War, commanded the foot troops.

As Harney was about to launch his campaign, the Indian Bureau subdivided the large unwieldy agency that had encompassed most of the plains, creating a one headed by Agent Whitfield especially to serve the tribes on the Arkansas. Thomas S. Twiss, a West Point graduate that had served briefly in the Engineers three decades earlier, was placed in charge of the new Upper Platte Agency. Twiss arrived at Fort Laramie to assume his duties on August 10, establishing himself temporarily at Ward and Guerrier's trading post.

Little Thunder professed to be friendly, yet the young warriors that had been raiding along the Platte Road resided in his village, then situated on Blue Water Creek, a tributary of the Platte in western Nebraska. The chief failed to heed Twiss' warning to move south of the river for protection, lest the army consider his people as hostile. Little Thunder's decision to continue hunting north of the Platte would prove a fatal error.

In early September, Harney's scouts discovered the Brules still in the valley of the Blue Water. Directing Cooke and four companies of mounted men to maneuver undetected into a blocking position above the village, Harney and Cady moved up the creek with the infantry. At dawn on the 3rd, the Sioux sighted the advancing troops and began withdrawing northward. Harney waived Little Thunder aside as the chief attempted a last minute plea for peace. The infantry rapidly deployed and opened fire as soon as they came within range, stampeding the villagers into a headlong panic. When the Indians saw the cavalry charging down from above, they diverged into a side canyon to avoid being caught between the two forces. Surrounding the rim of the canyon, troops on all sides fired into the people cowering below, shooting down men, women, and children alike. Cooke's mounted men then thundered down the ravine, scattering the Indians and cutting them down with sabers and pistols as they ran. In the end, eighty-six Brules lay dead. The troops rounded up seventy women and children as prisoners. Harney lost only four men killed in the fight. Soldiers plundering the abandoned lodges in the aftermath found uniforms from Grattan's men, as well as items taken in the raid on the Salt Lake mail, thus Harney felt fully vindicated that he had punished the guilty band.[6]

[6] Bvt. Brigadier General William S. Harney to Lieutenant Colonel Lorenzo Thomas, September 5, 1855, Selected Letters Received Relating to the Sioux Expedition, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives, typescript copies in library, Fort Laramie NHS (hereinafter cited as Sioux Expedition Letters).

After the Blue Water fight, Harney established a temporary cantonment, appropriately christened Fort Grattan, at the mouth of nearby Ash Hollow. Leaving a small garrison behind to man the new station, the Sioux Expedition marched upstream to Fort Laramie, arriving there on the 15th. Twiss, at Harney's request, had sent runners to summon the other bands to meet with him, the Oglalas at Ward and Guerrier's, the Brules at Bordeaux's post. Stating that he thought the reports of attacks by the Sioux had been falsely magnified, Twiss informed the army that he had assembled the peaceful Indians on the Laramie River so as to avoid any collision with Harney's expedition. He had taken the further precaution of warning other Indians to move south of the Platte for their own protection. The Indian leaders present assured Twiss that the Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and Oglala Sioux had remained firm friends of the whites during the recent troubles and that the government had been right in whipping Little Thunder because "he had no ears."[7] Likewise, most of the Brules, now headed by the more moderate Thunder Bear, had no further desire to challenge the army. Twiss had correctly determined that the Wasagahas, a sub-band of the Brules to which Bear had belonged, were the culprits responsible for the murders of the mail party and other depredations.

Shortly after the Blue Water battle, some four thousand people gathered in a great camp thirty-five miles above Fort Laramie. Harney took the opportunity to meet with

[7] Thomas S. Twiss to Colonel Willaim Hoffman, September 10, 1855, Sioux Expedition Letters.

headmen of the peaceful bands. Mustering all of his pomposity for the occasion, the general admonished them to cease depredations and to return all stolen stock they might have in their possession. He further warned that if any of the perpetrators of the mail coach attack were among them, they should be surrendered to authorities. In an effort to deprive the tribesmen of guns, powder, and lead, Harney issued an edict prohibiting all trade with the Sioux, except in the immediate vicinity of military posts. Post commanders were to notify the local traders to re-establish themselves nearer the forts at points designated by the army.[8]

A unexpected benefit accrued from Harney's visit when he later outlined to the secretary of war the strategic importance of Fort Laramie:

> The habit of the Indians of concentrating about it, has long existed & doubtless will be kept up. It is also an important point on the great route of Emigration to Utah, Oregon, & Washington Territories & California. The large trains of wagons which pass on this route in summer, offer tempting inducements for Indian depredations which are often invited & provoked by the insolence & violence of the whites themselves.[9]

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[8] Circular, Headquarters, Sioux Expedition, September 18, 1855, ibid.; As a result this directive, Ward and Guerrier moved their operation to a site just across the Laramie River, opposite Fort Laramie. Author's note.

[9] Harney to secretary of war, November 10, 1855, Sioux Expedition Letters.

He backed his words by detaching five companies of infantry, a company of the Fourth Artillery then serving as cavalry, and portions of three companies of dragoons to bolster the garrison at Laramie. Then, in a grand display of force, Harney audaciously marched the remainder of his column through the heart of Sioux country to Fort Pierre, where he planned to convene a general council with all the Sioux bands.

Writing from Bordeaux's house in October, Twiss sent a letter to the commissioner of Indian Affairs recommending that a separate agency be established for the Arapahoes and Cheyennes on the South Platte, perhaps at St. Vrain's fort. This, Twiss implied, would remove them from the potentially evil influences of being too closely associated with the Sioux. "In a very short period of time," he predicted, "the Araphoes and Cheyennes would become fixed and settled, and a part of each tribe . . . would become agriculturists, rude it is true, yet sufficiently skillful to raise corn, potatoes, and beans, and dwell in cabins or fixed habitations." The Sioux would be consolidated at an agency in the vicinity of Fort Laramie. Twiss reported that the Sioux were scattered from the Powder River region in the north, westward to Utah, as far south as the territory occupied by the Kiowas and Comanches, and eastward to the Pawnee villages. "Their habits are roving, and, consequently, predatory; and the sooner the government shall take steps to break these habits the better will it be for the Indians."[10] He concluded his

[10] *ARCIA*, 1855, (Washington, D. C.: 1856), pp. 402-03.

remarks by noting that Harney's attack had been a "thunder clap" to the Sioux that had impressed upon them the power of the government.

Thunder Bear subsequently sent word to Twiss that he desired peace, and to prove his good intentions, he would see that those guilty of the mail coach murders were turned over to government authorities. The agent placed little confidence in the promise, but to his surprise, Spotted Tail, Long Chin, and Red Leaf appeared at the agency on October 17th, expressing their earnest desire to surrender themselves to prevent any further war being made on the Brules. They were told they would be imprisoned at Fort Leavenworth, to which they acceded, but they were not then prepared to make such a long a journey. The men promised to return in ten days, after they had seen to the welfare of their families and gathered necessary belongings. The other two perpetrators, they informed Major Hoffman, were mere boys. One had gone off among the Sioux near the Missouri River, while the other was seriously ill and could not travel. Nevertheless, Hoffman insisted they be brought in. A delegation comprising Little Thunder, Man Afraid, and other chiefs assured Hoffman a few days later that they would comply as an added gesture of good faith. Since winter was already setting in, the major determined to send the first three captives to Fort Leavenworth for confinement as soon as they

returned. They would be accompanied by a guard detachment, as well as a small party of their relatives. When the others surrendered, they would either be jailed at Fort Laramie for the winter, or sent to Leavenworth with one of the mail escorts.[11]

A month later, Red Leaf's nephew appeared at the fort to present himself as a prisoner in lieu of the man who had gone with the Missouri River Sioux. The fifth member of the raiding party, probably Young Conquering Bear, still lay ill with consumption in the Brule village. The nephew was shackled to a ball and chain and placed in a lodge adjacent to the post guardhouse until he could be transferred to Leavenworth when the road cleared in spring. Meantime, the youth changed his mind about being a surrogate prisoner and took advantage of a chance to escape on January 2 while one of his two guards was eating supper. Having cut the shackle bolt with an axe provided earlier by a Sioux woman, the Brule burst out of the tepee within twenty feet of the startled sentry and scampered away. The guard fired a futile shot at the shadowy figure as he vanished into the darkness. The sergeant of the guard and eight men quickly took up the chase, and behind them followed a lieutenant and twenty-five more infantrymen, yet the Indian made good his escape.[12] Eventually, the real offenders were brought in to join their tribesmen in prison.

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[11] Hoffman to Assistant Adjutant General, Sioux Expedition, November 4, 1855, Sioux Expedition Letters.

[12] Hoffman to Major D. F. Winship, November 6, 1855, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie, Records of U. S. Army Continental Commands, 1821 – 1920, R. G. 393, N. A., Washington, D. C., (hereinafter cited as LS, Fort

With the Sioux now thoroughly chastised and in a submissive mood, Secretary of War Davis authorized Harney to negotiate another treaty with them to secure peace on the plains. The general sent out word for the tribal leaders to meet with him at Fort Pierre on March 1. By proclaiming himself to be the sole agent of the government in the proposed council, Harney usurped the authority of the Indian Bureau, a transgression that clearly galled Twiss. The general further isolated the Sioux, thus making them more dependent on the army, by ordering Twiss to instruct the traders to have no communication with the Indians, nor could they send out messengers inviting them to their camps. Harney also insisted that traders not be permitted to visit the agency unless they had business with Twiss, even then they could not speak with any Indians without the government interpreter present.[13]

The conflict brewing between Twiss and Harney erupted the following month when the general returned from an absence to learn that Twiss had told the Oglala and Brule head men not to attend the Fort Pierre council. Harney was livid. “This is not the first occasion, which Mr. Twiss has embraced to meddle in the affairs of the Sioux,” he thundered in a letter to Major Hoffman at Fort Laramie, “but his conduct at this time, has

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Laramie); Hoffman to Captain Alfred Pleasonton, December 13, 1855, ibid.; Hoffman to Pleasonton, January 6, 1856, ibid.; Hoffman to Captain Henry W. Wharton, March 21, 1856, ibid.; Captain A. P. Howe to Hoffman, January 4, 1856, Sioux Expedition Letters.

[13] This notice was sent to Ward & Guerrier, C. Bissonnette & Co., Beauvais, Bordeaux, Richard, and Simero, thus providing an accuate list of the traders then operating in the vicinity of Fort Laramie. Twiss to Indian Traders, January 31, 1856, Sioux Expedition Letters.

so seriously impeded the General's plans and arrangements, as to call for decisive action on his part, to prevent any further bad consequences."[14] Harney instructed Major Hoffman to make rooms available at the fort for the agent and to order Twiss to relocate there immediately, the better to keep an eye on him. By that time, Twiss had moved his operation back to the old American Fur Company post, which had been acquired more recently by James Beauvais, another of the resident St. Louis traders. Furthermore, Harney insisted that Twiss was to have no dealings whatsoever with the Sioux. He was to confine his activities exclusively to the Cheyennes and Arapahoes. Harney alone would deal with the Sioux. Nevertheless, Twiss' ploy had delayed the two Lakota bands so long that it was now impossible for them to reach Fort Pierre in time for the conference. Harney, still simmering over the agent's shenanigans, was left no choice but to meet with them at a later time. At that, Twiss symbolically thumbed his nose by ignoring Harney's directive.

But Harney's wrath did not end there; he wanted Twiss's head, and a written complaint from Seth Ward and William Guerrier provided just the tool he needed to rid himself of the recalcitrant agent. Rumors had been circulating for some time that Twiss himself was trading with the Indians at the agency camp in violation of Harney's orders.

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[14] Pleanonton to Hoffman, February 19, 1856, ibid.

The unscrupulous Twiss was in fact lining his own pockets by offering generous trades in buffalo robes and pelts in exchange for the Indians' own annuity goods. When Major Hoffman initiated an investigation into Twiss' illicit activities, he found the disgruntled traders were only too willing to sign affidavits indicting the agent. Rather than issuing the government supplies as stipulated by the Fort Laramie Treaty, the agent withheld large quantities and invited the Indians to come in and trade with him. Twiss thus had sole access to a full array of merchandise—knives, kettles, blankets, yard goods, sugar, flour, coffee, tobacco and much more--in which he had absolutely no investment. On at least one occasion, he even accepted the trade of a horse, presumably stolen from a passing emigrant train. James Bordeaux also revealed that the agent was culpable in withholding the two younger Indians involved in the Salt Lake stage attack. He testified that as the Indians rode to the fort to surrender themselves, they paused at the trading post, where Twiss happened to be living temporarily. He misled the Indians by telling them it would not be necessary to surrender the younger participants in the raid, thus the two youths turned back. It was also revealed that Twiss extorted "valuable presents" from the other traders, implying that if they failed to show him appropriate hospitality, he would use his influence to have their licenses revoked. The government interpreter, Antoine Janis, testified to the level to which Twiss would debase himself by exposing an occasion when the agent traded a considerable amount of annuity goods and horses, probably stolen from

whites, for an Oglala woman. What Harney did not reveal, and it would prove to be the undoing of his "evidence," was that the accusations were colored by the traders' desire to eliminate a competitor, albeit an illegal one, in the Indian trade.[15]

Harney lost no time in presenting his case against Twiss to the adjutant general. A few days later, on March 6, he directed Hoffman to inform Twiss that he was to cease all functions as Indian agent until the matter could be resolved, and if the agent resisted, the post commander was authorized to take appropriate action. Again, Twiss resisted Harney's bullying. Although he agreed to suspend all activities with the Indians, he refused to move the agency to Fort Laramie. Moreover, he challenged the legality of Harney's authority over him by declaring his intention to leave for the nation's capital to discuss the situation with the secretary of the interior. Penning a note the next day from Pierre Bissonnett's camp near the fort, Twiss advised Hoffman that the Sioux agency was closed forthwith and that he was moving to St. Vrain's post on the South Platte, where he had established the Cheyenne and Arapaho agency the previous fall. But Harney was determined to get Twiss out of the country altogether. The old dragoon doggedly fired off another missive barring the agent from having anything whatsoever to do with *any* of the tribes. Even though Harney had no official authority over him, neither was Twiss willing

[15] Ward & Guerrier to Hoffman, February 7, 1865, ibid.; Hoffman to Pleasonton, February 9, 1856, ibid.; The Sioux War Letters file also contains copies of the numerous affidavits collected by Major Hoffman.

to risk incarceration in the Fort Laramie guardhouse. Fact was, Harney had him outgunned if came to a showdown. Twiss prudently chose to leave immediately for Washington where he could marshal his own forces from among his many political friends.[16]

While Harney had been jousting with Twiss, the general had proceeded with his plan to meet with the Sioux on the Upper Missouri. Nine bands were represented, only the Oglalas and Brules being absent as the result of Twiss's duplicity. Those two bands nevertheless made their appearance at Fort Pierre in the latter part of April and agreed to Harney's terms. Thus, the Sioux signed a second treaty with the government, based on recent events, stipulating they were to surrender to the military all tribal members guilty of murder or other crimes; all stolen property was to be returned; and they must not obstruct the white man's roads or molest travelers. Harney dictated that each band would name a certain number of chiefs and sub-chiefs that would be officially recognized by the government, and each band would likewise have a specific number of "soldiers" to serve as a police force over their people. The fact that the impulsive actions of Lieutenants Fleming and Grattan had provoked the Brules to defend themselves in the first place was lost in the government's zeal to further control all the Sioux. Harney revealed in his final

[16] Twiss to Hoffman, March 6, 1856, ibid.; Twiss to Hoffman, March 7, 1856, ibid.; Twiss to Hoffman, March 17, 1856, ibid.; Harney to Cooper, A. G., U. S. A., March 23, 1856, ibid.

report that the government's real motive was to acculterate the Indian into the ways of the whites. “The character of the Indian is undergoing great modifications” because of decreasing food supplies, disease, and white encroachments he wrote. Because of this, the tribesmen were being forced to recognize "the irresistible conclusion that to live hereafter they must work . . .”[17]

Secretary of War Davis agreed with the validity of Harney’s complaints about Indian traders in general, though he had no authority to deal with Agent Twiss and his illicit activities. It was evident that the government had an inherent mistrust of the old French traders, who Davis claimed were “irresponsible either through property or character, and often bound to our government by no sentiment or tie of allegiance . . . with every opportunity to sell them deleterious articles, and to receive property acquired in marauding expeditions . . . .”[18] Thereafter, he concluded, traders should be confined to the immediate vicinity of military posts as a better control over traffic in contraband goods. Indian annuities, likewise, should be distributed at or near the forts.

Even though Agent Twiss was half a continent away by that time, Harney had not heard the last of his nemesis. Once in Washington, Twiss gained the enthusiastic

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[17] Harney to secretary of war, March 8, 1856 in “Council With Sioux Indians at Fort Pierre,” Annual Report of the Secretary of War, *House Executive Documents*, 34th Cong., 1st Sess., (Washington, D. C.: 1856), pp. 1 – 4.

[18] Jefferson Davis to the president, May 31, 1856, ibid.

cooperation of Commissioner of Indian Affairs George W. Manypenny to scuttle Harney's treaty. Manypenny had been outraged by the general's haughtiness in presuming to infringe on the authority of the Indian Bureau. The commissioner had not yet received a copy of the proposed treaty, but acting on rumors of its contents, he had his accomplice Twiss prepare cost estimates necessary to implement the treaty provisions. The vengeful Twiss, of course, applied a heavy hand to ensure the estimates would be shockingly high to members of Congress. Providing teams and farm implements, plus outfitting a police force for each band, in addition to food and other annuties, would cost no less than $62,000.00 annually. By the time Twiss's estimates were reviewed by the Interior Department, they had increased to $100,000.00. Manypenny and Twiss could not have been more pleased when the treaty failed to pass the Senate. The salt in Harney's wound came when he learned that Twiss had not only been exonerated of the allegations made against him, but reinstated as Indian agent and sent back to the plains.[19]

Good to their word, the Sioux bands came to Fort Pierre on May 20 to turn over not only the stock stolen by them, but the warriors guilty of past misdeeds. There were twelve in all, among them High Forehead, known by then as "The Man Who Killed the Cow." In an uncharacteristic gesture of clemency, Harney was persuaded by the chiefs to

[19] Twiss to George W. Manypenny, June 24, 1856, pp. 10 – 1l, ibid.; Manypenny to secretary of the interior, June 25, 1856, p. 11, ibid.; Sec. Of Interior R. McClelland to president, June 26, 1856, pp. 11- 12, ibid.; Robert M. Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian 1848 – 1865*, (New York: 1967), p. 119.

release the men on their promise of future good behavior, thus all was forgiven for the man who, right or wrong, had sparked so much bloodshed on the plains. Harney, accordingly, closed out his campaign by declaring the end "of all our difficulties and grievances with the Sioux."[20]

[20] Harney to secretary of war, May 23, 1856, Sioux Expedition Letters.

Chapter 5

"The Cheyennes Are An Unruly Race"

The Sioux troubles of 1854-55 immediately deterred emigration to Utah and the West Coast, scarcely 8,000 people risking the journey in the season following the Grattan incident. Californians clamored that there were not enough troops and not enough forts to adequately protect travelers on the overland trails. Some thought the government should provide more supplies and repair stations, and even special rescue parties for stragglers. Raised again was the question of whether routine mounted patrols would be more effective than infantry garrisons.[1]

[1] John D. Unruh, jr. *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-60*," (Urbana: 1993), pp. 120, 221.

While the army took no immediate steps to send cavalry to the posts on the Oregon Route, the commanding officer at Fort Laramie affected operational changes to bolster security along that segment of the road. Major Hoffman detailed escorts comprised of an officer and twenty men to protect the "downward" mail as far east as Ash Hollow, where they met a similar party from Fort Kearney with the "upward' mail. Above Fort Laramie, troops escorted the westbound mail coaches over the most dangerous stretch of road from Upper Platte Crossing, approximately 130 miles west of the post, near present-day Evansville, Wyoming, to Independence Rock, or even as far as Devil's Gate.[2] At the post itself, any alarm was to be signaled by the "long roll," sounded by the drummer on duty at the guardhouse. All soldiers, except the sick and those detailed as hospital attendants, were instructed to turn out under arms on the parade ground. In the event of a night attack, company commanders were to use their own discretion in repelling it "having reference firstly to the quarter of the garrison most concurrent to them." The men were to attend tattoo roll call armed and equipped, after which they were to place their muskets and accouterments within easy reach in the barracks. Sentinels were admonished to maintain constant vigilance.[3]

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[2] *Orders No. 35*, June 10, 1855 and *Orders No. 36*, June 23, 1855, Orders, Fort Laramie, Records of U. S. Army Continental Commands, 1821 – 1920, Record Group 393, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

[3] *Orders No. 73*, September 30, 1855, ibid.

Special guard detachments, comprised of an officer and at least twenty-five men, were posted at Upper Crossing. John Richard (pronounced “Reeshaw”), a swarthy, slightly built Missourian of French decent, had constructed a bridge over the river at that strategic point. The enterprising Richard had been engaged in the fur trade since the mid-1830s, operating for a time on the South Platte, later moving to the north fork. By 1840, he resided near Fort Laramie and afterward was employed at nearby Fort Platte. By the time Francis Parkman passed by in 1846, Richard was the proprietor at Fort Bernard, approximately six miles downstream. The decline of the fur business forced Richard to turn to the market for buffalo robes. He also discovered lucrative profits could be made by exchanging supplies for footsore animals belonging to passing emigrants. The animals could be restored through rest and grazing, then traded to other travelers at the going rate of one good animal for two emaciated ones. He had been one of the original investors in the flimsy bridge spanning the Laramie, and he built another near the mouth of Deer Creek, a hundred miles west of Fort Laramie. In 1853, he shrewdly constructed another toll bridge at Upper Crossing, where the main road departed from the Platte to continue westward along the Sweetwater to South Pass. There Richard built a compound of several buildings, including a grocery store, dry goods store, blacksmith shop, and his own cabin. In addition to his own Oglala wife and children, several of Richard’s mountaineer friends resided at the crossing. He charged $5.00 per wagon and $4.00 for every hundred head of

stock using his bridge, and while he preferred payment in cash, he would accept trades in animals, furniture or tools, and even whiskey.[4]

The 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty had proven only marginally effective in maintaining peaceful relations on the plains. If the tribes ever seriously intended to respect their neighbors' hunting territories and stop warring against each other, the situation had deteriorated markedly only a few years after the document was signed. Even though most of the raiding was of an intertribal nature, the continuing conflicts nevertheless endangered emigrants on the Oregon road. At the very time that Harney was forging a new peace with the Sioux, trouble erupted with the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, who had been growing increasingly belligerent toward both the Pawnees and whites. Parties of Crows, hunting as far south as the Platte and supplied with powder by Agent Twiss, threatened collisions with the Cheyennes and Arapahoes by their very presence in the region.[5]

Hoffman sensed the growing tensions with those tribes, a situation aggravated by the breech in relations with Twiss, as well as Harney's insistence that the agent have no

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[4] John D. McDermott, *Frontier Crossroads: The History of Fort Caspar and the Upper Platte Crossing*, (Casper, Wyo.: 1997), pp. 7 – 9.

[5] Bvt. Second Lieutenant Robert C. Hill to Lieutenant E. N. Latimer, post adjutant, Fort Laramie, Neb., March 7, 1856, Selected Letters Received, Sioux Expedition, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N. A., typescript copies in library, Fort Laramie NHS (hereinafter cited as Sioux Expedition Letters).

contact with any of the tribes in the area. That left responsibility for local Indian relations in the hands of the military, a situation anything but comfortable to the tribesmen. In March 1856 Hoffman met with several principal men of Cheyenne and Arapaho bands, coercing them into a promise to behave. They in turn sent runners to the bands on the South Platte and even as far away as the Arkansas urging them to maintain the peace, but the leaders feared that war parties from those groups had already departed northward to raid the Pawnees. Hoffman insisted that if that were correct, messengers must be sent to bring them back. The Cheyennes must stay away from the Pawnees until a more binding peace could be negotiated. Conversely, the Cheyennes complained that the Sioux, notably the Oglalas, habitually crossed the North Platte and trespassed into their bison range along the South Platte. Noting their objection, Hoffman assured them that General Harney's order for the Sioux to stay north of the river was still in force and they were permitted to cross the river only to visit Fort Laramie. He prevailed on the Cheyennes to be patient until Harney had an opportunity to meet with those bands to reiterate his instructions. “The Cheyennes are an unruly race,” Hoffman observed, adding that he had little confidence in their promise of good conduct unless they were “kept in dread of immediate punishment.”[6] Harney’s decision to strengthen the garrison at Fort Laramie undoubtedly served to deter the restless warriors, at least temporarily.

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[6] Major William Hoffman to Captain Alfred Pleasonton, A. A. G., Sioux Expedition, Marcy 31, 1856,

The following month about twenty lodges of Cheyennes camped near Richard's bridge to trade. Not long afterward, a young man from the band found and appropriated four horses belonging to Charles Antoine, one of Richard's employees. The horses were grazing loose, and the traders, thoroughly versed in Indian ways, understood that the warrior considered the animals as fair game for the taking. Antoine went to the camp to offer a reward for the return of his horses. The Cheyenne, a young man then called Two Tails, but who would later gain fame under the name Little Wolf, agreed to return three of the animals on those terms, but insisted on keeping the best horse for himself. Rejecting that notion, Antoine decided to seek the help of Captain Henry Heth, commanding the bridge guard.

Heth, who would later author the army's first marksmanship manual and would still later serve as a major general in the Confederate Army, pursued what was becoming a familiar course for the army. Sending for the head man of the band, the captain informed the chief that the horses must be brought to Camp Davis, the temporary cantonment near the bridge, for identification by Antoine, and if they proved to be his, a reward of five dollars in trade goods would be paid to Two Tails. Heth prudently elected to conduct the negotiations on his own ground, rather than going to the Indian camp. Two Tails consented to the terms, but brought in only three head for Antoine's inspection. He

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Sioux Expedition Letters.

claimed that he had owned the fourth horse for some time. However, Heth supported Antoine's claim by insisting that the warrior return with the other horse that evening. But, evening came and by then Two Tails had decided not to comply. The young warrior again stated his intention to retain the best horse, because it had not been among those he recovered, and he threatened to shoot anyone who tried to take the animal.[7]

Heth had committed himself and now had little choice but to make a show of force in hopes the headmen would exercise their influence over Two Tails. He detailed thirty men of Company E, Tenth Infantry under the command of First Lieutenant Nathan A. M. Dudley to proceed to the camp. Dudley was a rare exception to the common rule that officers of the ante-bellum army were graduates of West Point. Appointed to the army on his own merits in 1855, the young lieutenant would have a long career in both the volunteers and the regulars, serving as a field commander with the black Ninth Cavalry during the Apache wars. Assisting Dudley was Second Lieutenant James Deshler, a recent military academy graduate, who as a Confederate brigadier general would be killed in action at the Battle of Chickamauga.[8]

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[7] This account of the incident at Richard's bridge is based on Captain Henry Heth to Pleasonton, April 22, 1856, ibid.; First Lieutenant N. A. M. Dudley to Heth, April 20, 1856, ibid.; and George B. Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, (Norman: 1971), pp. 111-12.

[8] Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army 1789 – 1903*, (Washington, D. C.: 1903), I, p. 386 (hereinafter cited as *Historical Register*); For further reading on Dudley's participation in the Lincoln County War, see William H. Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West*, (Norman: 1970), pp. 199 – 205; Heitman, *Historical Register*, I, p. 369.

Dudley marched his detachment to the Indian village, half a mile distant, where he again met with the headmen. A short talk ended in stalemate. Dudley calmly expressed his determination to use force to take both Two Tails and the horse, whereupon the leaders conceded to surrender the horse, but not the man. However, an elder chief, Double Head, consented to point out Two Tails' lodge. Dudley drew his revolver and entered the tepee, where he found the warrior seated with a rifle across his legs and holding a strung bow. Two Tails drew his bow, and at the same instant Dudley pointed his revolver at the man's chest. With both men were poised to fire, the lieutenant signed for the young man to follow him. Two Tails lowered his bow and complied.

The detachment took the Cheyenne back to Richard's fort where he was to be placed in irons. Dudley stationed two guards just outside the gate adjacent to the blacksmith shop, and two more at the door to the forge. Four other soldiers went inside with the prisoner. Just as the manacles were ready, Two Tails knocked one soldier aside and made a desperate leap out the door. The soldiers scrambled out after him as he ran through the gate toward the river. The guards outside fired as he sprinted away, followed by a volley from all of the others. Only one ball struck the tribesman, knocking him down, but he quickly gathered himself and made his escape in the darkness.

At the sound of the firing, the alarmed villagers hurriedly gathered their belongings and fled the camp. Dudley pursued, capturing two of the leaders and bringing them back to Camp Davis, while the remainder escaped. The Cheyennes, incensed by the shooting of one of their tribal members, encountered Peter Garnier, an old trapper, on his way back from Richard's grazing camp the next evening. They quickly exacted their revenge by killing and butchering him.

Heth, meantime, released one of his prisoners and sent him back to his people with instructions to either bring in the young man, or if he were dead, to substitute his father. Heth had concluded that the father was the real instigator of the whole affair anyway. When word came about Garnier's murder, Heth had the remaining chief, Wolf Fire, placed in irons to make certain he would not escape. The villagers, including the leader Heth had released, continued on their way. Wolf Fire was later sent to Fort Laramie where he was incarcerated in the guardhouse.

When General Harney learned of the incident, he took surprisingly lenient view of the matter, coming close to defending the actions of the Cheyennes. Harney opined that the young man shot by the guard must have died, "and that his people in the excitement of grief and revenge, have, as is their custom, killed the white man without designing to

throw themselves in a decided and hostile attitude against the Government."[9] Still, he thought punitive action might become necessary to keep the Cheyennes in line.

The fact that seven out of eight soldiers had missed a fleeing Indian at point blank range probably reinforced Hoffman's decision to initiate target practice at Fort Laramie early in March. Initially, only ten men in each company were armed with Model 1841 "Mississippi" rifles, while the rest still used the 1842 Harpers Ferry musket. Practice consisted of each member of the old guard firing his piece at a target at the end of his twenty-four hour tour. The results of the rifle firing at 150 yards were generally disappointing, although with the musket at eighty yards, "the men became comparatively quite proficient."[10] Even the reward of a gill of whiskey failed to induce better scores. A disappointed Hoffman concluded: "the skillful use of the rifle requires a degree of expertise which most of our men are not equal to." Neither was General Harney pleased because he realized the situation on the plains had changed and the men under his command were expected to be more than just parade ground soldiers. In fact, Harney ordered forty additional rifles to be issued to each company in mid-April. Thereafter, the troops practiced daily, weather permitting, each man firing two or three shots. Scores

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[9] Bvt. Brigadier General William S. Harney to Adjutant General, U. S. A., May 9, 1856, Sioux Expedition Letters.

[10] The first quotation is from Hoffman to Pleasonton, May 24, 1856, ibid.; The second is found in Hoffman to Thomas, June 14, 1856, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie, N. T., R. G. 393, N. A. (hereinafter cited as LS, Fort Laramie); Douglas C. McChristian, *An Army of Marksmen: The Development of United States Army Marksmanship in the Nineteenth Century*, (Fort Collins, Colo.: 1981), pp. 10 – 13.

gradually improved, though Hoffman and his men complained that the rifle and its ammunition were defective, making it impossible for even good shots to shoot as well as they might. The issue of the new .58-caliber rifle musket the next year would place in each man's hands the epitome of the military muzzleloader.

Following the incident at Richard's bridge, Wolf Fire's relatives fled to the Black Hills, while the rest of the band moved south to join the Southern Cheyennes on the Arkansas. The coming of spring on the plains found them migrating to the Smoky Hill and the Solomon Fork of the Kansas River, and in June warriors were ranging as far north as the Pawnee country along the Platte. The messengers Major Hoffman had relied upon to contact the southern bands were either not sent or they failed to catch up with the raiders. By that time, the annual emigration to California and Oregon was well underway and the trains, with their herds of cattle, posed enticing targets. Cheyennes stopped a Mr. Phillips' party on the Big Sandy, beyond Marysville, Kansas, to demand a cow. With both the Cheyennes and the whites attempting to communicate through broken Spanish, Phillips concluded that the Indians wanted to trade, then one of the warriors summarily shot a cow, but refused to pay for it. John Tutt, the post trader from Fort Laramie, who happened to be present at the time, recognized the raiders as belonging to both northern and southern bands, and a few Sioux were in the group as well. Ostensibly, they were in

that area to raid the Pawnees, but it soon became apparent their real purpose was to harass emigrant trains.

Only days later the same party, purportedly lead by White Antelope, one of the men who had gone to Washington, D. C. after the 1851 treaty was concluded, confronted Davis' train about near the crossing of the Little Blue on the Fort Riley Road. Davis was seriously wounded when the Cheyennes unexpectedly opened fire, while another man was stripped naked and attempts were made to spear him. Yet another member of the party was shot with three arrows. The wounded men were taken to the hospital at Fort Kearny for medical treatment.

Cheyenne headman Big Head and a few others came to the post shortly afterward and were recognized by a man of Davis' party. Captain Henry W. Wharton ordered the officer of the day to take the Indians into custody, but the warriors broke loose as they were being escorted to the guardhouse. In the ensuing scuffle, one of the Cheyennes was mortally wounded, but all managed to escape. Wharton immediately sent dispatches to the commanding officers at Fort Laramie and Fort Riley warning them of the potential danger for further trouble along the road. Because of the recent depredations below his own post, Wharton suggested that cavalry from Fort Riley begin patrolling the road.

Unbeknown to the army, however, Big Head convinced his people to overlook the incident.[11]

Soon after the attacks in Nebraska Territory, most of the Cheyennes gathered at the great tribal encampment on the headwaters of the Republican to observe the annual sun dance and to talk about what they should do in response to the affair at Richard's bridge. Well aware of the punishment the army had inflicted on the Sioux a year before, most of the leaders favored peace. The chiefs warned the young warriors not to provoke the whites any further, yet they had no way to know that the war parties in the Pawnee country had already fanned the embers into a flame.

General Harney enthusiastically supported Wharton's recommendation that mounted troops patrol the trail to disperse any war parties that might still be lurking along the Platte. Additionally, he directed Colonel Edwin V. Sumner, commanding the First Cavalry at Fort Riley, to assemble an expedition that would march all the way to Fort Laramie for that purpose. Sumner was given discretion to punish any deserving Indians he might encounter along the way. Aside from their attacks on whites, Harney based his action on the recent treaty. By agreeing not to make war on the Pawnees, Harney reasoned, the Cheyennes had no business being in that region. But, he had again

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[11] Captain H. W. Wharton to to A. A. G., Sioux Expedition, June 7, June 10, and June 11, 1856, Sioux Expedition Letters; William Y. Chalfant, *Cheyennes and Horse Soldiers: The 1857 and the Battle of Solomon's Fork*, (Norman: 1990), pp. 36 – 39 (hereinafter cited as *Cheyennes and Horse Soldiers*).

overstepped his authority. Hoffman, in fact, advised the general that the Cheyennes he had spoken with disclaimed any knowledge of the treaty. Indeed, they had neither attended the Fort Pierre council, nor were they party to the agreement. Harney, admittedly, had no legitimate authority over the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, still he was "of the opinion that the Cheyennes have been for so long a time in the commission of outrages and insults upon the whites, and their bearing has been so haughty and defiant that it will be necessary to chastise them severely for their misdeeds before they become tractable."[12] The proposed campaign was postponed, however, when the slavery controversy in Kansas demanded that troops be sent to maintain order.

If any lingering hopes remained for a peaceful resolution of the Cheyenne situation, they were soon dispelled. After the annual encampment, the bands once again split up to continue the summer hunt. Some of them immediately invaded Pawnee territory. A war party camped on Grand Island in the Platte below Fort Kearny, spied a mail wagon coming up stream on August 24 and two young warriors went out to beg tobacco from the whites. However, when the driver saw the Indians, he pulled his revolver, fired, and whipped his mules into a run. One of the tribesmen wounded the conductor with an arrow as the wagon passed. According to tribal custom, the leader of

[12] Harney to Cooper, A. G., Headquarters of the Army, July 5, 1856, Sioux Expedition Letters.

the party lashed the young man with a quirt to punish him for his foolishness. The damage was done nonetheless.

That same afternoon Captain George H. Stewart led a reinforced company of the First Cavalry out of Fort Kearny in search of the Cheyennes. They found tracks of the two warriors on the road where they had intercepted the wagon and, camping there for the night, took up the trail the next morning. At midday they came upon the camp site of the war party, and found the cooking fires still burning. After a fifteen-mile pursuit, the soldiers caught up with the Indians and surprised them, killing six, and capturing most of their equipment. Agent Twiss later testified that the tribesmen had signaled that they did not wish to fight by laying down their bows, but the troops opened fire anyway. William Y. Chalfant has concluded that this disproportionate reaction to the mail coach affair "was possibly the major event in a series of unfortunate incidents that spelled the end of peace and the beginning of long years of open warfare between the United States and the Cheyenne nation."[13]

[13] Chalfant, *Cheyennes and Horse Soldiers*, pp. 40 – 41; Captain G. H. Stewart to Wharton, September 1, 1856, Annual Report of the Secretary of War, *House Executive Documents*, 34th Cong., 3d Sess., (Washington, D. C.: 1856), pp. 107-08 (reports hereinafter cited as *ARSW* with year); Twiss to commissioner of Indian Affairs, September 25, 1856, Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior, *House Exec. Docs*. 34th Cong., 3d Sess., (Washington, D. C.: 1857), pp. 650-52 (hereinafter cited as *ARSI* with year); Twiss to commissioner of Indian Affairs, October 13, 1856, ibid.; Another version of the mail incident was told by Black Foot's son, a Sioux, who happened to be at Fort Kearny at the time. Thomas H. Twiss to Hoffman, September 12, 1856, Letters Received, Fort Laramie, N. T., R. G. 393, N. A.

The Cheyennes, now convinced the army was at war with them, unleashed their fury on all the whites in their path. Thirty-three miles northeast of Fort Kearny, they swooped down on a small train on the Council Bluffs Road, killing two men and a child. They also captured the child's mother, Mrs. Wilson, but later killed her when she could not ride well enough to keep pace with the party. After the party returned to the village on the Republican, relatives and friends of the six warriors killed on the Platte descended on a train camped about eighty miles west of Fort Kearny, killing a woman and carrying off a four-year old boy. A week later the Cheyennes attacked a party of Mormons, killing four, and capturing a woman. Another party of emigrants was reportedly attacked and murdered on the Little Blue River.[14]

In the midst of the Cheyenne rampage, Almon W. Babbitt, secretary for Utah Territory, insisted on reaching Salt Lake City as quickly as possible despite Wharton's advice against traveling beyond Fort Kearny because of the recent raids. Babbitt and two companions, lightly armed but carrying a great deal of money and important government papers, continued up the road, determined to press on to Utah. The war party operating in the area soon spotted them and ambushed them in their noon camp near O'Fallon's Bluff.

[14] Twiss to commissioner, September 25, 1856, *ARSI*, 1856-57, pp. 650-51; Wharton to Cooper, A. G., U. S. A., September 8, 1856, *ARSW*, 1856, pp. 109-10.

When the bodies were discovered three weeks later, the press and the public called loudly for retaliation.

At about the same time, an army surveying expedition commanded by Lieutenant Francis T. Bryan, Topographical Engineers, was working its way back from the Continental Divide in Wyoming. Bryan and his party had mapped out a potential new route from Fort Riley to the Platte and westward along the South Platte and Lodgepole Creek to Bridger's Pass. Rather than returning the same way, Bryan elected to reconnoiter down the Republican, thinking it might make a more direct route to the west. He failed to consider, however, that he was trespassing through the very heart of Cheyenne country, and the Indians had seen enough surveyors to know that they presaged more roads and more white intruders. While the party was on Rock Creek, a minor tributary of the Republican, a large band of Cheyennes rode into sight, threatening to attack the engineers. Fortunately, Bryan's dragoon escort caught up at the critical moment, causing the discouraged tribesmen to withdraw.[15]

General Harney officially terminated the Sioux Expedition in July 1856 and by early August Thomas Twiss was back in business at the Upper Platte Agency, this time headquartered at the post of veteran trader Andrew Drips, nineteen miles below Fort

[15] W. Turrentine Jackson, *Wagon Roads West: A Study of Federal Road Surveys and Construction in the Trans-Mississippi West 1846 – 1869*, (New Haven: 1965), p. 127-29; William H. Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West, 1803 – 1863*, (New Haven: 1959), pp. 368-70.

Laramie. Assisting Twiss as interpreter was old Joseph Bissonnette, another former trader, who had been employed at Fort Platte during the 1840s and had served as Kearny's interpreter while he was in the area.[16]

Following the raids near Fort Kearny, the Cheyennes migrated from the Republican to the South Platte, near Beaver Creek, where they camped and selected a delegation of headmen to meet with Twiss. The representatives arrived at the agency on September 22. During their discussions with the agent, the chiefs readily acknowledged that they had broken the peace, but begged the government's forgiveness because they had been unable to control the warriors that had wreaked vengeance on the whites in the wake of Stewart's attack. They also claimed that their people had nothing to do with old Pete Garnier's murder, that the man responsible was a visiting Southern Cheyenne. Nevertheless, Twiss suggested that they claim responsibility in the hope of negotiating with the army for the release of Wolf Fire, who was still imprisoned at the fort.

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[16] An army officer traveling the road in August 1857 described Drips' post as follows: "We passed Dippie's [sic] trading house. He has a squaw for a wife, and keeps a trading house for the Sioux Indians and travellers [sic] on the road. There is a trader encamped in his tepee made of buffalo skins, tanned, near him; he also has his squaw and some children. The tepee is the best one I ever saw, clean and commodious Squaw and children clean and pretty well behaved." Jesse A. Gove, *The Utah Expedition 1857 – 1858: Letters of Capt. Jesse A. Gove, 10th Inf., U. S. A.*, (Concord: 1928), p. 49; The trading post, situated on the south bank of the North Platte above present-day Lingle, Wyoming, was recorded on a map prepared for the "Survey of Route No. 1, West of Missouri River From Leavenworth, Kas. To Fort Laramie Conducted by Lieutenant C. C. Hewitt, 19th Infty, 1876." Department of the Platte, Records of the Corps of Engineers, R. G. 77, National Archives, Chicago, Ill., copy filed at Fort Laramie NHS.

The Cheyennes elected to hold their two white captives as bargaining chips to secure Wolf Fire's freedom. While Twiss agreed that the man had done no wrong, neither did he have much influence with Major Hoffman. The chiefs responded by saying they could not guarantee the release of the whites under the circumstances, though they promised that the prisoners would be well treated. What the chiefs did not know was that the woman had already escaped. According to the Indians, she had been given the liberty of their village and had no guard over her. When she learned that Bryan's topographical party was in the vicinity, she apparently slipped away to the safety of the surveyors' camp. The fate of the boy was not known. In the end, the attempt to free Wolf Fire failed. Although he was guilty of nothing, he eventually died while still a prisoner.[17]

Twiss, to his credit, did everything in his power to allay concerns that the Cheyennes were bent on a general uprising. On the contrary, he announced in October, "the Cheyennes are perfectly quiet and peaceable and entirely within my control and obedient to my authority." The agent, never reluctant to criticize the army, placed the blame for the recent trouble squarely on the shoulders of the military authorities. "It is clearly evident to my mind," Twiss wrote, "that the exasperation, excitement, and hostile feelings of the Cheyennes, have been caused, in the first place, by the measures adopted

[17] Twiss to commissioner, October 13, 1856, *ARSI*, 1856, p. 652; Grinnell, *Fighting Cheyennes*, p. 117.

and carried into force by the military authorities at the North Platte bridge early last spring; have been kept up and increased in virulence, subsequently, by those others at Fort Kearny . . . .” He explained in cogent detail how the “attack” on the mail party had been an unintentional overreaction to the carrier’s firing first, and that if the war party had wanted to kill the mail party, they could have easily done so. The situation was aggravated when Captain Stewart persisted in attacking the warriors after they had professed their desire not to fight. The “merciless and relentless slaughter” of six of warriors caused “an excitement and exasperation in the Indian mind beyond control” leading to the retaliatory murders of whites along the Platte.[18]

Higher authority had already determined that the Cheyennes were to be punished for their actions, regardless of the circumstances. Harney, of course, had intended to send the First Cavalry up the road in a show of force early in the summer, but the troubles in Kansas had thwarted his plans. Just a few days after Twiss dispatched his assurances of peace, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis announced that a campaign would nevertheless be launched against the Cheyennes in spring to subdue them and force the release of captives and property.

[18] Twiss to commissioner, October 13, 1856, *ARSI*, 1856, pp. 652-54.

Command of the expedition was given to Colonel Edwin Vose Sumner, First Cavalry, whose army career spanned nearly four decades. For most of that time, Sumner had served in the dragoons on the western frontier. To ensure that all the Cheyennes were made to pay for the wrongs of a few, Sumner laid out a two-pronged advance from Fort Leavenworth to sweep the plains. Major John Sedgwick would lead a column of two squadrons up the Arkansas; another squadron, under Sumner's personal direction, would march to the Platte. Sumner would be reinforced by a squadron of the Second Dragoons at Fort Kearny, and from there the column would move to Fort Laramie, where three companies of the Sixth Infantry would complete his force. The two dragoon companies would remain temporarily at Fort Laramie, later joining their regiment as a component of the Utah Expedition.[19] Sumner hoped that the mere presence of the two columns on the plains would cause the Cheyennes to withdraw from both the Santa Fe Trail and the Oregon Route, after which he and Sedgwick would join forces on the South Platte. The combined columns would then march eastward through the heart of Cheyenne country in an attempt to lure them into a decisive encounter.

Departing from Fort Leavenworth in mid-May 1857, Sumner's column marched up the dusty Platte road to arrive at Fort Kearny about three weeks later. There

[19] Colonel E. V. Sumner to A. A. G. Headquarters of the Army, September 20, 1857, Annual Report of the Secretary of War, House Exec. Docs., 35th Cong., 1st Sess., (Washington D. C.: 1858), vol. 2, p. 98.

Companies E and H, Second Dragoons were added to his mounted battalion. When he arrived at Fort Laramie a short time later, a hundred recruits that had marched afoot up the trail brought the infantry units at the post up to full strength. On June 22 the expedition filed up the south side of the Laramie and went into camp a mile and half above the post. Sumner's men spent the next four days getting their animals re-shod and drawing additional supplies in preparation for the long march back across Kansas. Meantime, the commanders of the infantry companies had to arm and equip the recruits, while sergeants endeavored to train the new men in the rudiments of soldiering. Major Hoffman designated Company B to remain at the post, with C, D, and G being assigned to Sumner. The companies vacated their barracks and moved into a field camp above the cavalry bivouac for a brief shakedown before the column took up the march. Sumner placed Captain William Scott Ketcham, who had come to Fort Laramie at the head of Company G during that first summer of 1849, in command of the infantry battalion. Its role would be to establish and guard a supply base, while light columns of mounted troops scoured the country to locate the Cheyennes.

The troops formed up on June 27 and the long column proceeded nearly due south from the fort in hopes of finding Sedgwick's battalion somewhere on the South Platte. The two forces achieved a juncture near the mouth of Cherry Creek, in the vicinity of

where the city of Denver would later stand, then moved eastward toward the upper reaches of the Kansas River.

Meanwhile, Cheyenne scouts were watching the approaching troops. Although there were more bluecoats than any of them had ever seen together, a medicine man assured the warriors that by dipping their hands in a particular small lake, they would be protected from the soldiers' bullets. Arrayed in line of battle, the Cheyennes confronted Sumner on the South Fork of the Solomon on July 29. The warriors, outfitted in full regalia, made a magnificent sight as they slowly rode forward to the accompaniment of a war song. A First Cavalryman recalled the scene:

> We were armed with muzzle loaders (carbines) raised, the Cheyennes seemed to treat them with the contempt they deserved, but when they were dropped, and the sabres of, I think, seven companies flashed in the sun, the effect was magical . . .[20]

In the only documented saber charge made during the Indian campaigns, the cavalry raced forward toward the startled warriors. The Cheyennes suddenly broke and fled as the soldiers pursued them toward their camp on the Saline River. It became a running fight that continued for seven miles. Nine warriors were left dead on the field, as well as two soldiers. Ten others suffered nasty arrow wounds. The villagers hastily departed,

[20] *Army & Navy Journal*, August 17, 1878, p. 27.

abandoning most of the lodges and supplies, including the winter's supply of buffalo meat. The troops destroyed the village and its contents the following day.[21]

Leaving behind a company of infantry to protect the wounded, sheltered in a hastily erected sod enclosure, Sumner followed the Cheyenne trail toward the Arkansas. Failing to catch up with them after a pursuit of several days, he turned upstream to Bent's Fort where he found Indian Agent Robert Miller waiting to distribute the Indian annuities to the southern tribes. Sumner demanded that the share intended for the Cheyennes be divided among other tribes, except for the guns and ammunition, which he destroyed.

The Cheyennes, although they had been humiliated, were not defeated by any means. Sumner fully intended to prosecute the war into fall, but demands for additional troops to accompany the expedition to Utah cut short his plans. In the aftermath of the fight on the Solomon, the Cheyennes retaliated by attacking "Fort Floyd," the little post left in the vastness of the Cheyenne country, compelling the infantry garrison and the wounded men to seek refuge at Fort Kearny. Raiding parties also appeared along the Oregon Trail, where they harassed army supply trains bound for Utah. Still, the Cheyennes had learned a bitter lesson from their experience confronting regular cavalry in a pitched fight. This became evident during the following summer and in subsequent

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[21] This account of Sumner's Cheyenne Expedition relies heavily on the definitive work, Chalfant, *Cheyenne and Horse Soldiers*; Robert C. Miller, Indian agent, to John Haverty, superintendent of Indian Affairs, October 14, 1857, *ARSI*, 1857, pp. 429-36.

years as gold seekers bound for the new strikes in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado swarmed across their territory. Despite flagrant incursions by the whites, the Cheyennes, and their allies the Arapahoes, refrained from retaliating. Only the provocation of events at Sand Creek six years later would compel them to again challenge the army.

Chapter 6

"A State of Substantial Rebellion"

Lingering uncertainty in army circles about the necessity for permanent posts on the Oregon Route was reflected in the small garrison and limited physical development at Fort Laramie until after the Grattan affair. The construction of new buildings had all but ceased after initial needs were met during the first two years of army occupancy. Even though the arrival of Major William Hoffman with two additional companies of the Sixth Infantry in November 1854 created a critical need for more quarters and support buildings, the army was not inclined to expend large sums for construction at a post that might be abandoned at any time. Having no place to shelter his men, except for tents, Hoffman suspended all drills and dress parades to devote full attention to producing

lumber and constructing economical adobe buildings to serve as temporary quarters until the high command decided the fate of Fort Laramie.[1]

At that, progress was slow and by fall it was obvious that new barracks could not be completed before cold weather set in. Hoffman, in a practical adaptation to local culture, concluded that hide lodges would make better shelter for his men than the canvas tents issued by the Quartermaster Department. He immediately negotiated with Ward and Guerrier to obtain the requisite number of tepees from friendly Sioux still residing in the area. Fort Laramie now reflected a bizarre combination of structures including a walled fort, Southern-style planter's home, Spanish adobes, log hackals, stone buildings, and Plains Indian lodges. By the end of December, one company had moved into a portion of the ramshackle commissary storehouse near the river, while two others were crowded into the old Mounted Rifles barracks at the north end of the parade ground. Even that building had never been completely finished, and the roof was already leaking. “In consequence of its unfinished condition this building is very open, and those quartered in it suffer much from cold during the winter,” Hoffman observed.[2]

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[1] Hoffman was of the opinion that adobe was the best and most economical building material available. Although southeastern Wyoming was generally considered to be north of the region where adobe construction was generally used, its low humidity and rainfall made the area marginally suitable. Hoffman may have looked to Fort John as a practical example, and he also may have been influenced by his own observations of such buildings during his service in the Mexican War. Author’s note.

[2] *Orders No. 55*, Fort Laramie, August 7, 1855, Orders, Fort Laramie, Records of United States Army Continental Commands 1821 – 1920, Record Group 393, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (hereinafter cited as Orders, Fort Laramie); Major William Hoffman to Major T. S. Twiss, Indian agent, October 20, 1855, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie, R. G. 393 (hereinafter cited as LS, Fort Laramie); "Annual

Those were not the only problems facing the commanding officer. In the spring, he reported that the portion of old Fort John that had been adapted for use as a hospital, was "in a very ruinous condition and must fall down in a few months." The sick and injured were subsequently moved into tents for safety. The adobe fort was so dilapidated, in fact, that Hoffman had his men raze the north and west portions soon thereafter to prevent the walls from falling on someone.[3] A month later, the shaky 200-foot long building used as a stables and storehouse collapsed. Miraculously, the half-dozen animals inside at the time escaped uninjured. Hoffman alerted his superiors that that the pine-slab mate to that structure, then being as a barracks, was just as old and "there is no telling how soon it too may fall down. The soldiers quartered in it are possibly in some danger, and I shall probably be obliged to put them in tents during the summer."[4] By June, the men were able to erect two adobe buildings, each measuring 72 feet long by 21 feet wide, behind the two-story barracks. Company C, one of the hapless units that had spent much

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Report of the Inspection of the Public Buildings at Fort Laramie, N. T., June 30, 1856," Consolidated Correspondence File, Records of the Quartermaster General's Office, R. G. 92, N. A. (hereinafter cited as CCF); The record does not indicate exactly where the infantry tepees may have been erected, but logic would suggest they stood along the outer side of the parade ground northwest of and adjacent to the two-story barracks. Author's note.

[3] Hoffman to Captain Alfred Pleasonton, Acting Assistant Adjutant General, Sioux Expedition, April 18, 1856, LS, Fort Laramie, transcribed copies in library, Fort Laramie NHS; Hoffman to First Lieutenant James L. Corley, A. A. A. G, Sioux Expedition, ibid.; In the only known photograph of Fort John, taken in 1858, it is evident that major portions of the north and west walls are missing, indicating that the first post hospital had been located in that section. Author's note.

[4] Hoffman to Pleasonton, A. A. A. G., Sioux Expedition., May 21, 1856, LS, Fort Laramie.

of the winter in tepees, moved into one of those, while two companies shared the other as a kitchen and mess hall. Hoffman arranged the new adobe structures so that they could be adapted later as auxiliary buildings for permanent barracks in the event they were eventually constructed.[5]

The officers were quartered only slightly better than the rank and file. Company commanders occupied the four apartments in "Bedlam." Wings containing kitchens had been added at the rear corners, yet the piazzas on that imposing structure had never been finished. The notoriously hard winds roaring down the Laramie Valley had already damaged its shingle roof so badly that a new one was needed. Eventually, Hoffman was able to hire an experienced civilian builder to oversee the work of some fourteen soldier-carpenters, ten masons, and three plasterers to finish and repair the buildings. Another crew cut timber and operated a sawmill in the hills thirty-five miles west of the fort, however, doors, windows, and other millwork had to be ordered from St. Louis. Work progressed more rapidly after that and by August the men had completed a new adobe officers' quarters accommodating four subalterns immediately north of Bedlam. Standing to the south, between Bedlam and the river, was a line of three more two-room houses.

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[5] "Report of Inspection, 1856;" Hoffman to Corley, August 19, 1856, LS, Fort Laramie.

Chaplain William Vaux, a civilian, continued to inhabit a decrepit three-room adobe shack covered with a mud roof.

By fall 1855, the garrison had erected an icehouse, a couple of temporary granaries, and had enlarged the bakery to increase its output for the larger garrison. Other extra duty men constructed a footbridge over the Laramie at a point just east of Fort John to facilitate crossing to Ward and Guerrier's temporary trading post and the camping ground frequented by both emigrants and Indians. However, Major Hoffman closed down the self-serve blacksmith shop that Van Vliet had established several years earlier as an accommodation to emigrants. Thus, travelers were deprived of repair services for the entire 460-mile distance between Fort Kearny and Richard's station at Platte Bridge.[6]

Hoffman's decision may have been rooted in rumors circulating once again that Fort Laramie would be abandoned and the garrison transferred to the Pacific Northwest. Campaigns against the Yakima tribe in Washington Territory during 1856 had brought a tentative peace to that region, but the army prudently established two new forts near the Yakimas to maintain stability between the Indians and white settlers.[7] Its mission on the

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[6] First Lieutenant John C. Kelton to Major George H. Crosman, October 28, 1856, CCF, copy in bound correspondence, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

[7] Created as a direct result of the Yakima War, Fort Simcoe was established as a supply base in the Simcoe Valley on August 8, 1856. Fort Walla Walla was founded the following month. Additional military posts were established in Oregon Territory consequent to the Rogue River War and other outbreaks in the mid-1850s. Robert W. Frazer, *Forts of the West*, (Norman: 1977), pp. 129-33, 174, 177; An overview of these campaigns is found in Robert M. Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian 1848 – 1865*, (New York: 1967), pp. 175 – 210.

frontier expanding with each passing year, the tiny regular army was stretched to its limits, consequently troops in comparatively quiet areas, like Fort Laramie, were shuffled to scenes of more urgent need. While Army Headquarters was pondering the fate of the Fort Laramie garrison, Cheyenne retaliation for Stewart's attack on the party at Grand Island forced the commanders to reconsider their designs for abandoning Fort Laramie. The post was the only available supply point for expeditions operating against the Indians in the region.

Concurrently, events in Utah were taking shape that would cast Fort Laramie in a new light of importance. In the wake of the Grattan incident, William M. F. Magraw negotiated with the Post Office Department to win release from his mail contract, and the Cheyenne troubles along the Platte only lent further impetus to his efforts. Adding to the Indian scare, unusually heavy snows during the winter of 1854-55 all but terminated mail and passenger service to California. The government eventually freed Magraw of his obligations in August 1856, and consequently passenger service ended because of Hockaday's partnership in the overland stage line. Disgruntled Mormons, already frustrated with Magraw's irregular service and the resulting collapse of communication with the East, took the initiative to make their own bid for the route to Utah. As the Cheyenne troubles were winding down along the Platte in fall 1856, a new mail contract

was issued to Hiram Kimball of Utah. Kimball served as agent for Mormon leaders who had plans for securing, and thus controlling, service to the territory, a scheme originating with Latter Day Saints leader and ad hoc territorial governor Brigham Young. Mail stations established along the route, he calculated, would serve as seed for Mormon trading posts and communities, thus spreading the church's influence across the frontier. Left unsaid was the potential for wielding control over the road to Utah. The mail firm came to be known as the Brigham Young Express & Carrying Company, commonly shortened to "the B. Y. X."

The Mormons, who had begun migrating to Utah a decade earlier to escape religious bigotry in the States, covertly desired to establish a powerful territorial government controlled by the church. Those plans were bolstered by the failure of Magraw's mail contract, the resulting interruption of communications with Utah working to the advantage of Mormon leaders desiring control over the territory. When rumors eventually filtered back to Washington early in 1857, federal officials became alarmed at the perceived threat to central authority and to the Constitutional tenet separating church and state. In Washington circles, conditions in Utah quickly assumed the dimensions of an open revolt.

A. O. Smoot, mayor of Salt Lake City and designated agent for the B. Y. X., happened to be in the States during February when he learned of the government's

reaction to the news. When postal authorities at Independence refused to allow him to carry the mail back to Utah, it became apparent to Smoot that the government looked upon the Mormons as rebels. Federal distrust was further evidenced when the postmaster general summarily cancelled the B. Y. X. contract. Developments in Utah suddenly resolved the question of whether or not Fort Laramie should be abandoned. Being the nearest military post to Young's domain at that time, the fort assumed a new strategic importance.

Magraw may have given up the mail business, but he soon reappeared on the frontier in another capacity. A personal friend of President James Buchanan, the ex-stage man got himself appointed as superintendent over a federal survey of the Central Overland Route, part of a larger on-going effort by the Department of the Interior to lay out and improve roads on the frontier for the ultimate purpose of constructing transcontinental railroads. Magraw assembled a crew of one hundred men, equipped for ten months in the field, to improve that portion of the overland road from Fort Kearny westward to Independence Rock. The expedition, operating under the grandiose title of the "Fort Kearny, South Pass, and Honey Lake Wagon Road Survey," carried with it letters of authorization to draw supplies at military posts along the way. Frederick W.

Lander, considered by many to be a more competent superintendent than Magraw, was selected as the engineer in immediate charge of the crew.[8]

Lander left Fort Leavenworth with a reconnaissance party of fourteen men in June 1857 and camped at Fort Laramie early in July, just a few days after Sumner's column departed for its rendezvous with Sedgwick on the South Platte. During their brief respite, tragedy struck when a drunken soldier shot and killed a boy accompanying Lander's crew. Major Hoffman profoundly apologized for the unprovoked attack, assuring Lander that the errant soldier had been confined in the guardhouse and would be tried for his crime. Presumably, the youth's body was buried in the post cemetery before the party pushed on.[9]

Lander found several points along the road in need of work, but his most notable contribution was his discovery of a better crossing over the South Platte, on what had become known as the "Fort Laramie Route." Emigrant and army freight trains coursed along the south side of the Platte, past the forks, until they reached the Upper or California Crossing, where they turned due north cross-country over the divide to

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[8] The activities of the federal Wagon Road Office are fully elaborated in W. Turrentine Jackson, *Wagon Roads West: A Study of Federal Road Surveys and Construction in the Trans-Mississippi West 1846 – 1869*, (New Haven: 1965), pp. 192-93 (hereinafter cited as *Wagon Roads West*).

[9] Hoffman to Lander, July 5, 1857, LS, Fort Laramie.

intersect the North Platte. Lander's new ford was nine miles below the usual crossing, shortening the distance between the branches of the Platte by an entire day's travel.

Lander's improvements were timely because plans were already being made to place an army in motion toward Utah Territory to restore order. Writing from Army Headquarters, General Winfield Scott justified the expedition by declaring that the populace and the civil government there were "in a state of substantial rebellion against the laws and authority of the United States."[10] Although Brigham Young had been the duly appointed territorial governor, his term had expired in 1854 and was allowed to lapse thereafter. Young, boasting that he needed nothing but divine authority to rule his people, continued to serve as governor without presidential approval. Buchanan decided that a new territorial government, composed primarily of selected federal authorities, would be installed to regain control over the wayward Mormons.

The Leavenworth freighting firm of Majors and Russell was notified on June 10 to be prepared to transport three million tons of army supplies to support the Utah Expedition. Owner William Russell objected to the Quartermaster Department's request because most of the company's trains were already out on the road. To meet this new demand, he informed the quartermaster general, they would be forced to purchase more

[10] Lieutenant Colonel George W. Lay to Harney, June 29, 1857, Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1858, *House Executive Documents*, 35th Cong., 1st Sess. (Serial 943), p. 21 (hereinafter cited as *ARSW*, 1858).

wagons and teams, a prospect that risked an overextension of capital and financial ruin for the company. The proposed contract was lucrative enough, nonetheless, to finally induce the freighters to take the gamble. Trains were organized, loaded, and sent up the trail as quickly as possible, the first one reaching South Pass before the end of August.[11]

Meantime, General Scott directed Brigadier General William S. Harney, who had subdued the Sioux two years before, to lead the expedition against the Mormons. Colonel Edmund Brooke Alexander, Tenth Infantry, was selected to command the first Utah-bound contingent, comprising eight companies of his own regiment (the other two would catch up later), along with the entire Fifth Infantry, the light battery of the Fourth Artillery, and another battery of twelve-pound field guns manned by members of the Ordnance Department. The units began the long trek across the plains piecemeal in the latter part of July, each one departing a few days after the other.

Assistant Quartermaster Stewart Van Vliet was also dispatched with an escort to ride ahead to Salt Lake City to make arrangements for quartering and supplying the Army of Utah once it arrived there. The federal government was still under the misimpression that the rebellion involved only certain Mormon factions, not the entire population. Van Vliet paused for three days at Fort Laramie, where he had served at the beginning of the

[11] Henry P. Walker, *The Wagonmasters: High Plains Freighting from the Earliest Days of the Santa Fe Trail to 1880*, (Norman: 1986), p. 239.

decade, to requisition a number of teams and empty wagons for use in hauling the forage he intended to purchase from Mormon farmers. He then pushed on to Salt Lake City, where he was courteously, though coolly, received by Brigham Young. The governor and his associates firmly informed the captain that the army should make no attempt to enter the territory. Van Vliet was taken aback by Young's attitude and was surprised to find the Saints so united in their opposition to Federal control in any form. It hardly needed saying they would make nothing available to the invading army. Van Vliet informed the Mormons that they might defeat the first battalion being sent against them, but warned that a much larger force was already scheduled to follow the next season. Church leaders responded by boldly challenging the troops to come; they would find nothing to support men or animals once they arrived. If necessary, the entire territory would be laid waste—fields, orchards, storehouses, even homes would be burned.

Van Vliet reported this intelligence to headquarters at Fort Leavenworth, adding his observations that for fifty miles east of the Salt Lake Valley the road wound through narrow canyons. Such terrain would make it easy for comparatively small forces to delay the progress of Alexander's column. The coming winter, already evident at that altitude, would soon choke the canyons with deep snow, effectively preventing any further advance that season. Van Vliet therefore suggested that it might be prudent to have the troops winter at Fort Bridger, a trading post on Black's Fork, and at another temporary

camp he would establish on Ham's Fork thirty miles away, there to await reinforcements and the coming of spring.[12]

During Van Vliet's reconnaissance, President Buchanan had bowed to a request by Kansas Governor Robert J. Walker to retain Harney at Leavenworth to deal with continuing troubles between anti-slavery and pro-slavery factions in the territory. General Scott summoned Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston, commanding the newly organized Second Cavalry in Texas, as his replacement at the head of the Army of Utah. Since his forces were already on the march west, Johnston, with an escort of dragoons, lost no time trying to catch up. Bringing up the rear were six companies of the Second Dragoons under Lieutenant Colonel Philip St. George Cooke, veteran of the Battle of the Blue Water, and several federal civilian officials to be installed as the nucleus of the new territorial government. Included among them were Governor Alfred E. Cumming, a Georgian and former commissioner of Indian affairs.[13]

Alexander's advance battalion reached Fort Kearny on August 7 and remained there for four days to rest before continuing up the Platte. The troops went into camp near Bordeaux's trading post on the last day of the month, probably on the same ground once

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[12] Captain Stewart Van Vliet to Captain A. Pleasonton, A. A. A. G, Army of Utah, September 16, 1857, *ARSW*, 1858, pp. 24-27.

[13] A. A. G. Irwin McDowell to Colonel A. S. Johnston, August 28, 1857, ibid., pp. 23-24.

occupied by Conquering Bear's village. From their bivouac, soldiers could easily distinguish the ominous mound of earth covering the grisly remains of Grattan's men. The head of the long column wound its way into the Laramie Valley late the next morning, and went into camp below the post. Over the next few days, nearly 1,500 men comprising the various elements of the battalion arrived on the floodplain, making the largest body of troops to visit Fort Laramie up to that time.[14]

Captain John W. Phelps, commanding the light battery, noted in his diary that the fort was "one of the prettiest outposts I have seen. It has been furnished with a steam sawmill and enough lumber has in consequence been made to enable the commanding officer to put up passable quarters and store houses . . . But by far the neatest and most elegant and comfortable quarters are those which the commanding officer has designed and executed in adobes. There is a neatness, simplicity, and architectural effect about them that is really classical . . . ."[15] The following day, Major Hoffman extended the hospitality of the post by inviting the officers to dine at his quarters. They learned from him that Johnston had recently been placed in charge of the Army of Utah, a command

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[14] Presumably, the Army of Utah bivouacked on the nearly level flood plain between the two rivers. The author's opinion is based on the accounts by Jesse A. Gove, *The Utah Expedition 1857 – 1858:Letters of Jesse A. Gove, 10th Inf.U. S. A.*, (Concord: 1928), p. 50 (hereinafter cited as *Utah Expedition*); LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *The Utah Expedition 1857 - 1858: A Documentary Account of the United States Military Movement Under Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston and the Resistance by Brigham Young and the Mormon Nauvoo Legion*, (Glendale: 1958), p. 122-23 (hereinafter cited as *Utah Expedition: Documentary Account*).

[15] Ibid., p. 123.

that now included Forts Kearny and Laramie for the purposes of coordinating movements and supplies. The officers of the column privately rejoiced in the decision to supplant the aging Alexander. "The old woman feels it sensibly," Captain Jesse A. Gove confided in a letter to his wife. "He grows more worthless every day he lives."[16] To his credit, Alexander had received two brevets for gallantry during the Mexican War, but his nearly four decades of military service had left him with little energy and less enthusiasm for a rigorous campaign on the frontier.

At 4 o'clock on the morning of September 4, the assembled drummers rattled out reveille, summoning the troops of the expedition to continue the advance on Utah. Captain Gove himself lacked enthusiasm for the movement against the Mormons and probably echoed the sentiments of others in the officer corps when he wrote, "They will offer no resistance. . . . we are to go and have it done with . . . the sooner it is over the better."[17]

Slowed by heavy rains and deep sand, Colonel Johnson and his escort finally reached Fort Laramie a month after Alexander and the main body had departed. Lieutenant Colonel Charles F. Smith, commanding the two tardy companies of the Tenth Infantry, had also just passed through trying to catch up with the column. Smith left

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[16] Gove, *Utah Expedition*, p. 50.

[17] Ibid.

behind a large detachment of soldiers to reinforce the headquarters party with Johnston and Governor Cumming. Johnston drew off from the garrison Companies E and H, Second Dragoons, left behind by Sumner in June, to ensure the governor's safety. That left only two companies of the Seventh Infantry at the post.[18] The long-suffering companies of the Sixth Infantry had recently been ordered to rendezvous with the regiment at Fort Leavenworth in preparation for a welcome transfer to the Pacific Coast. Two companies had therefore been assigned to join Sumner's Cheyenne expedition, destined to return via Fort Riley, while the last two had just marched eastward, encountering Johnston en route to Utah. It was an unfortunate meeting for Hoffman and his men. Anticipating the potential vulnerability of his supply line by having only two companies stationed at Fort Laramie, Johnston ordered Hoffman to turn back and resume command of the post.[19]

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[18] *Orders No. 20*, Battalion of the Tenth Infantry, September 26, 1857, Letters Received, Fort Laramie; *Orders No. 21*, September 28, 1857, ibid.; Johnston to Major Irvin McDowell, Headquarters of the Army, October 5, 1857, reprinted in Hafen and Hafen, *Utah Expedition: Documentary Account*, p. 145-47; The Seventh Infantry was posted on the Arkansas frontier in 1857, but the War Department planned to include the regiment as part of the Army of Utah. Companies B and F were ordered from Fort Smith to Fort Laramie in August as an advance party to this movement and to replace the Sixth Infantry, which was at that time being withdrawn from the Oregon Route. Theophilus F. Rodenbough, *The Army of the United States: Historical Sketches of Staff and Line With Portraits of Generals-in-Chief*, (New York: 1966), pp. 490, 500 (hereinaftr cited as *Army of the United States*); Returns for August and September 1857, Seventh Infantry, Returns from Regular Army Infantry Regiments 1821 – 1916, R. G. 94, Microcopy 665, National Archives, Washington, D. C., roll no. 80, copy at University of Arizona Main Library.

[19] The original orders called for the Fourth Infantry to be recalled from Washington Territory. They were to march from Fort Walla Walla to Fort Benton, on the upper reaches of the Missouri, building a road between those two points as they went. This route, connecting the Missouri with the Pacific, would be known later as the Mullen Wagon Road, after the officer who surveyed the route. The regiment would then take steamers down-river to Fort Leavenworth. Conversely, the Sixth Infantry would travel the same route to exchange stations with the Fourth in the Northwest. However, the Mormon trouble in Utah caused the War Department to alter its plans, the Sixth being assigned to the Army of Utah and eventually being

Meantime, the Mormons took the offensive by sending out parties of guerillas to strike Johnston's army before its full weight could be brought to bear. During the night of the 24th raiders attempted to stampede the mules belonging to the Tenth Infantry's baggage train, but only a few animals were driven off. Members of the regiment recovered those the next day. However, an attack on October 5 proved more successful. A small party of Mormons led by Major Lot Smith discovered two supply trains totaling 52 wagons on the trail along Green River. Smith and his men quietly approached the trains, parked in parallel lines, after dark and were able to surprise and disarm the teamsters. After helping themselves to whatever they needed from the wagons, the raiders burned both trains. The next day, Smith attacked and destroyed another train a short distance away on the Big Sandy, along with a few more wagons belonging to the sutler with the Tenth Infantry. The army was thus deprived of 150 tons of critical supplies needed for feeding the troops during coming months, not to mention 74 wagons. By a stroke of luck the Mormons failed to discover Majors and Russell's unprotected train of a hundred wagons camped on Ham's Fork for three weeks.[20]

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posted along the California coast. The Fourth, consequently, was left in place until the outbreak of the Civil War. Jackson, *Wagon Roads West*, pp. 257-60; *ARSW*, 1858, p. 59; Rodenbough, *Army of the United States*, pp. 462, 490-91.

[20] Colonel E. B. Alexander to Colonel Samuel Cooper, A. G. , U. S. A., October 9, 1857, *ARSW*, 1858, p. 29; Rodenbough, *Army of the United States*, p. 536; Murray A. Carroll, "The Wyoming Sojourn of the Utah Expedition, 1857 – 1858," *Annals of Wyoming*, (Winter 2000), p. 11.

Johnston stopped only briefly at Fort Laramie before racing on in pursuit of the advance elements of the Army of Utah. Fearing Mormon rangers might attempt to capture or assassinate Cumming along the way, he left behind twenty-five dragoons from his own escort to further bolster the governor's bodyguard, now numbering about 200 men. Since Lieutenant Colonel Smith's force, already out on the road, had been reduced to a mere twenty-two men, Johnston urged the officer in charge of the escort to take Cumming in tow upon his arrival at the fort and catch up with Smith and himself as quickly as possible to unify the fragmented elements of the command. Cooke and the other six companies of the Second Dragoons did not ride into Laramie until October 20, their march having been retarded by the same bad roads Johnston had encountered. Nevertheless, Cooke found instructions awaiting him to press on through South Pass "permitting nothing but the rapid approach of winter and an impracticable march delaying you."[21]

Two couriers from Alexander met Johnston at Three Crossings of Sweetwater River. They informed him of the Mormon raids on the supply trains, as well as Alexander's plan to reach Salt Lake City via Bear River, thus avoiding the dangers of approaching through Echo Canyon. But, after a short, abortive march during which the

[21] Johnston's instructions to Cooke are reprinted in Hafen and Hafen, *Utah Expedition: Documentary Account*, pp. 148-49.

column was plagued by bad weather and rough terrain, Alexander went into camp with the intention of remaining where he was. Johnston, however, dispatched orders for the colonel to countermarch to Black's Fork, where all the troops and trains would rendezvous for the winter at what would be called, "Camp Scott." A handful of raiders thus thwarted the army's first grand effort to invade Utah, bringing the effort to an abysmal end in the snow.

Fortunately, the tents, blankets, and most of the other camp equipage had not been aboard the trains burned by the Mormons, but food was in extremely short supply. Johnston sent word to Major Hoffman at Fort Laramie to organize a pack train loaded with enough salt to see the expedition through the winter. Early in December, Johnston dispatched two messengers, John Bartleson and mountaineer Antoine Janis, to trace Stansbury's 1849 route back to Fort Laramie in hopes that trail might prove useful as an alternate supply route. The usual overland passage via South Pass had been seriously impacted by both military and civilian traffic, leaving little grass and fuel along the way for subsequent trains. He also hoped the lesser known route might be unfamiliar to Mormon guerillas. However, Bartleson reported that it would take a force of 200 men at least a year to improve the trail for use by wagons. Meantime, the Commissary Department amassed an enormous quantity of supplies at Fort Laramie, including almost 294,000 pounds of flour, 46,000 pounds of bacon, and over 10 tons of coffee. Problem

was no mules suitable for long overland trips were available. Major Isaac Lynde, then in command of the post, had only half a dozen poor teams used for hauling wood to the post. So, while Johnston and his army endured short rations at Camp Scott, a mountain of food sat unused at Fort Laramie. Conversely, the Army of Utah had appropriated so much of the clothing on hand at the post that Lynde had no shirts, drawers, or socks left for his own men. By the end of the year, he was compelled to open some of the bails of clothing intended for Johnston's army, since the materiel could not reach the expedition before the road cleared in spring.[22]

The supply problems were compounded when, for no apparent reason, Forts Kearny and Laramie were placed back under the authority of the Department of the West, headquartered in St. Louis. This move, leaving Johnston in command of the new Department of Utah, which had been carved from the western portion of Department of the West, reduced his ability to provide for his army since most of his supply line now lay outside his personal authority. Although Johnston argued to have the order rescinded, Army Headquarters allowed it to stand.[23]

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[22] Annual Report of the Secretary of War, *Senate Documents*, 35th Cong., 2d Sess., (Washington, D. C.: 1858), pp. 49 – 56; Johnston later denied stockings to the garrison because they were in such short supply, but he did authorize the issue of one pair of trousers for each man. ibid., p. 65.

[23] Ibid, p. 48; Raphael P. Thian, *Notes Illustrating the Military Geography of the United States 1813 – 1880*, (Austin: 1979), pp. 100, 105.

While Congress debated the wisdom of the Utah invasion, the army advanced its plans to mobilize reinforcements. A circular promulgated in January 1858 directed the entire First Cavalry to assemble at Fort Leavenworth in preparation for joining Johnston's army. With them would be two companies of the First Dragoons, the remaining ten companies of the Sixth Infantry, ten companies of the Seventh Infantry, and two light batteries of the Second Artillery. The combined forces would number over 5,300 men, a disproportionately large percentage of the United States Army, which at the time numbered only 17,000 men. General Harney would lead the reinforcements, marching in six separate columns, and would assume command of the entire Army of Utah upon his juncture with Johnston.

Former Fort Laramie commander Major William Hoffman, who had since joined his regiment to Fort Leavenworth, was directed to take charge of the train of 156 wagons and a herd of some 300 extra mules. The army would not repeat its mistake of allowing unguarded trains to fall prey to the Mormons. This time, two companies of the Sixth Infantry, along with the two Dragoon companies, served as escort. The train would take the established route via Fort Laramie, where the two remaining companies of the Sixth and one of the Seventh stationed there would join Hoffman. The train arrived at the post on April 21 and was combined with four contract trains totaling 100 additional wagons.

Hoffman's command moved on toward Utah three days later, leaving only F Company, Seventh Infantry to man the fort.[24]

The intrepid freighters, Russell, Majors, and Waddell prepared to send additional trains to Utah to supply the burgeoning army there. Although the reinforcements were responsible for carrying three months' rations with them on the journey, Harney wanted another eight months' worth for the entire expedition to be stockpiled at Fort Laramie prior to winter. It would be necessary to haul some 8,000 tons of supplies up the trail from Fort Leavenworth, a feat that challenged the firm to muster all the available wagons, teams, and men available in and around Leavenworth. Russell, Majors, and Waddell eventually hired over 4,000 men and launched a total of 3,956 ox-drawn wagons up the trail, traveling in trains of twenty-five wagons each. The partners also requested and were granted permission to construct depots consisting of shops, storehouses, and corrals at Forts Kearny and Laramie to support the ambitious operation, including the maintenance of more than 40,000 oxen.[25]

To ensure adequate supplies of grain for the draft animals, without having to devote a portion of their own vehicles for that purpose, the company also established

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[24] Hoffman to A. A. G., Department of Utah, June 10, 1858, *ARSW*, 1858, pp. 177-81.

[25] This endeavor eventually bankrupted the firm after the partners lost thousands of oxen to freezing temperatures and lack of forage. As a result, they were forced to sacrifice wagons costing $150.00 - $175.00 each for as little as $10.00 to Mormon citizens, who salvaged them for the iron needed to make nails. Alexander Majors, *Seventy Years On the Frontier*, (Columbus, Ohio: 1950), pp. 142-43.

farms near both posts. However, Lynde dragged his feet when it came to designating a place within the military reservation for those operations and ordered the freighters to keep their haying activities at least forty miles away from the post to preserve the available grass for army herds. He continued to stall until July, provoking the freighters to complain directly to Secretary of War John B. Floyd about Lynde's failure to cooperate. Russell, Majors, and Waddell suspected that Seth E. Ward, who had been appointed post sutler the previous year, viewed their interests as competing with his own, since he held the government hay contract. Late in July, Floyd directed General of the Army Scott to demand that Lynde comply with his earlier directive.[26]

The army maintained an interest in Bryan's more direct route from the South Platte via Cheyenne Pass to Fort Bridger. The mission in Utah provided additional impetus for the army to consider it for military purposes. While the rest of Harney's columns would follow the traditional overland route, a battalion of the Sixth Infantry was ordered to take the alternate trail to test its feasibility. Lieutenant Bryan himself was attached to the command as engineering officer. An additional twenty-four man

[26] *ARSW*, 1858, p. 797; Russell, Majors, and Waddell to secretary of war, February 26, 1858, LS, Fort Laramie; Samuel Cooper, A. G. U. S. A., to commanding officer, Fort Kearny (copy to Fort Laramie) March 26, 1858, ibid.

detachment, led by Lieutenant William P. Carlin, would assist the engineers with developing a primitive track to facilitate the passage of wagons.[27]

The winter months had provided time for diplomacy to work and before Harney's column was fairly underway, President Buchanan sent two emissaries speeding to Utah bearing a proclamation to Brigham Young. If the rebellious Mormons would promise to respect the federal government, and would allow Governor Cumming to take the reins in Utah unopposed, all would be forgiven. The president's commissioners arrived at Salt Lake City near the end of May. Young agreed to step aside and to demand the obedience of his people. Cumming was installed as governor in mid-June and soon thereafter Johnston marched into the capital city at the head of his army. The troops, under strict orders not to molest the populace or cause trouble of any sort, passed through without incident and established Camp Floyd some forty miles south of the city.

With such a large portion of the army in Utah, and the posts along the way so meagerly garrisoned, Scott relieved the Fourth Artillery from its police duties in Kansas and redirected the red legs to protect the routes west. In late July three companies took station at Fort Kearny, two more camped on the new trail across Cheyenne Pass, while the regimental headquarters and three companies occupied Fort Laramie. Because of the

[27] Carlin would witness profound changes in the region when he returned to command Fort D. A. Russell in the early 1880s. His observations are quoted later in this study. Author's note.

vital importance of Platte Bridge on the supply line to Utah, two more companies were sent to that location to re-establish a temporary cantonment, christened by Captain Joseph Roberts as "Post of Platte Bridge."[28]

General Johnston also designated Fort Bridger as a military post prior to continuing his march to the Salt Lake Valley. Although the Utah campaign had been as abortive as Captain Gove and some other officers had predicted, it had convinced the army's high command that Fort Laramie could not be abandoned after all. It had proven essential in supplying Johnston and, in fact, making the Utah Expedition possible. And, with the establishment of Fort Bridger, it was an indispensable link in the supply line to Salt Lake. At the same time, Harney's Cheyenne Expedition had confirmed the worth of Fort Laramie as a base of operations against the tribes in the vast area on the eastern fringe of the Rocky Mountains.

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[28] Rodenbough, *Army of the United States*, p. 359; The temporary cantonment, named Camp Walbach in honor of deceased Colonel John De Barth Walbach, Fourth Artillery, was established east of Cheyenne Pass on Lodgepole Creek on September 20, 1858. Troops were withdrawn April 19, 1859. The site is about twenty miles east of present-day Laramie, Wyoming. Robert W. Frazer, *Forts of the West*, (Norman: 1977), 186; Besides being the home of John Richard, Platte Bridge was the site of "Mormon Ferry," also called "Mormon Station," established in 1847. In December 1857, troops from Fort Laramie were sent to that location, as well as the station at Deer Creek Crossing, to search for caches of weapons and munitions that might be seized by the rebellious elements from Utah. The place was also known variously as "Camp Platte," and "Camp Payne," but was abandoned in spring, 1859. It later became the site of Fort Caspar in May 1862. ibid., p. 179; Lieutenant John L. Marmaduke to commanding officer, Fort Laramie, N. T., December 16, 1857, LR, R. G. 393, N. A.; John D. McDermott, *Frontier Crossroads: The Story of Fort Caspar and the Upper Platte Crossing*, (Casper, Wyo.: 1997), pp. 16 – 17.

Chapter 7

The Overland Mail

The apparent end to hostilities with the Cheyennes and the mostly peaceful resolution to the Mormon situation inspired a renewed westward surge of emigrants at the end of the decade. Rumors of gold discoveries in the Rockies late in summer 1858 fueled the passions of adventurous Americans to head west like nothing had since the California rush a decade earlier. Initial reports from the Pike's Peak region proclaimed that gold was to be found simply by sticking a shovel in the ground. But, prospectors arriving there the following spring found to their dismay that unscrupulous merchants had as grossly inflated the magnitude of the strike as they had their prices for supplies. However, in January 1859 George Jackson, a prospector working alone in the mountains west of

Denver, serendipitously stumbled upon a gold-bearing gravel bed in Clear Creek. Marking the spot, but taking the precaution to cover any signs of his digging, Jackson spent the rest of the winter in Denver before returning to his claim, along with several eager partners, in May. Although the bonanza turned out to be less promising than Jackson had anticipated, it was nonetheless impressive. When a member of the party went to Denver for supplies and indiscreetly bragged about the richness of the strike, the news instantly flashed to the States and the backwash of miners from Pike's Peak reverted to a new wave across the plains.

Hoards of would-be prospectors, spurred by visions of instant wealth for the taking, hurried to Colorado. Many took the established route as far as California Crossing, but instead of turning northward, they proceeded directly up the South Platte to the settlement of Denver. Others pioneered a new route, the Smoky Hill Trail, leading from the Missouri River at Atchison, Kansas directly to Denver. The trail led to Fort Riley before taking a course almost due west along the Smoky Hill Fork of the Kansas River. Although it was about ninety miles shorter than traveling by either the Platte road or the old Santa Fe Trail, the track along the Smoky Hill sliced across the heart of the

Cheyenne hunting grounds. Consequently, comparatively few of the "Fifty-niners" were willing to gamble their lives by going that way.[1]

Communication with California had remained uncertain and sporadic during the late 1850s, especially after the failure of the mail contract. On the eve of the "Mormon War," the tracks of the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad building across Missouri reached the latter city, shifting the eastern terminus of the Oregon Trail fifty miles north of the traditional point of departure at Independence. At the opposite end of the line, construction crews extended rails from Sacramento eastward to Placerville, shortening the intervening distance to be traveled by stage to only 1140 miles. Steady progress on the railroad during the next three years further reduced the route to a mere 660 miles.

The overland route itself also witnessed improvements. In 1859, Louis Guinard constructed a new bridge over the North Platte about ten miles above Richard's old crossing. The following year the Nebraska legislature granted Guinard's application for incorporation of the bridge. Thus, the Platte City Bridge Company, as it was titled, attracted most of the traffic because the structure was approved for commercial

[1] Although the Smoky Hill Trail was not heavily used by gold seekers, it possessed undeniable advantages as the most direct route across the plains to Denver. It was officially surveyed in 1860, starting at Leavenworth, Kansas. But, an ever-present Indian danger discouraged most people from taking the road until David A. Butterfield established both freight and mail service over it in 1865. It was largely abandoned after the Kansas Pacific Railroad was completed five years later. Leo E. Oliva, *Fort Hays: Keeping Peace on the Plains*, (Topeka: 1980), pp. 1–3.

operations.[2] The Pacific Wagon Road Office also sponsored improvements in the trail by spending $50,000 to upgrade the segment from Council Bluffs to Fort Kearny, a project that included bridging several streams on the route. The government also invested $300,000 in the Fort Kearny, South Pass, and Honey Lake Wagon Road that Frederick Lander had surveyed two years earlier. Additionally, a more direct cut-off was pushed through from South Pass to Fort Hall and an entirely new trail was extended southwest from Salt Lake City via Camp Floyd to reach Northern California.

Meantime, communications between the States and the Pacific Coast began to improve. Following the cancellation of the B. Y. Express mail contract in June 1857, John M. Hockaday submitted a bid of $62,000 a year to provide monthly service over the central route between Missouri and Salt Lake City. He proposed to utilize the same six stations that Magraw had built and to keep three trains in motion to Fort Laramie, where the mail would be transferred to three others running between that point and Salt Lake City. However, the slavery question and regional politics significantly influenced changes in western communications and travel.

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[2] John Richard continued to reside at and operate his bridge at the lower crossing until 1865, when he moved to Rock Creek. Soon thereafter, troops destroyed much of the old bridge to use for firewood. John D. McDermott, *Frontier Crossroads: The History of Fort Caspar and the Upper Platte Crossing*, (Casper, Wyo.: 1997), pp. 23, 43, 80.

Since both President James Buchanan and Postmaster General Aaron V. Brown hailed from the South, special interest representatives exerted intense pressure on the administration to designate a route across the southern tier of territories as the primary transcontinental route. The visionary Brown was a staunch advocate of western business and settlement, firmly believing that expediting the mail across the continent was key to that development. He was comfortable in the knowledge that he had strong backing by many legislators eager to expand, if not exploit, the West. He therefore handed out generous mail contracts intended to subsidize the companies for passenger service and the additional stations required for rapid trips. Not only would an eastern terminus at St. Louis be of economic benefit to the South, it would place the entire route within southern territory. If the slavery controversy led to war, control of transcontinental communication would be of strategic value, considering that many thousands of southerners had migrated to California during the previous decade. Moreover, rich gold deposits there combined with Pacific Coast port would be vital to a war effort.

Thus began a struggle between political factions favoring the central route via South Pass, and those supporting the Ox Bow route, so-called for its circuitous U-shaped course from twin termini at St. Louis and Memphis via El Paso and San Diego to San Francisco, a total distance of 2,795 miles. An even more northerly route starting at St. Paul was proposed as well, but it garnered fewer supporters. On the score of distance

alone, there was clearly no contest with the central. Southern advocates argued, however, that travel over the California Trail was often limited by the severity of winter conditions, when mountain passes frequently became choked with snow. Then too, there were the Indians, whose moods toward whites had become increasingly unpredictable. The southern route, conversely, enjoyed considerably milder weather and the Indians in those regions had demonstrated less hostility up to that time. In the end, Brown succumbed to regional favoritism by awarding a new contract to the Butterfield Overland Mail Company on June 22, 1857. Each trip would be made in twenty-five days, one-way, a requirement for which Butterfield was handsomely compensated in the amount of $600,000. By the time the company was ready to begin semi-weekly service, the mail was being brought to Tipton, Missouri by rail, somewhat reducing the stage haul to 2,635 miles.

Northern factions immediately cried foul, causing Brown to appease them by contracting with the partnership of Hockaday & Liggett to continue service between St. Joseph and Salt Lake City, while Hockaday's other partner, George Chorpenning, established a connecting line from the Utah capital to California. However, Brown, who had sole control over the contracts, awarded a dramatically lower amount for the central route to preclude any serious competition with Butterfield. Brown accurately calculated that less compensation would translate into correspondingly slower service because the

company could not afford to build an optimum number of way stations, nor could Hockaday afford to buy enough coaches and teams to produce faster deliveries. Despite the shorter distance, the Hockaday-Chorpenning line required thirty-two days to complete the trip to California, and then only on a semi-monthly schedule.[3]

At the peak of the Colorado gold rush, freighting magnate W. H. Russell, of Russell, Majors, and Waddell, partnered with John S. Jones to inaugurate stage service over the tenuous Smoky Hill route. Alexander Majors considered the venture risky at best, fearing the gold boom to be only temporary, and therefore declined to invest in the enterprise. Undaunted, Russell and Jones borrowed heavily on ninety-day notes to purchase the required number of mules and Concord coaches and immediately dispatched crews to build stations every ten to fifteen miles all the way to Denver. By May 1859, the new company was providing daily stages that made the trip in only six days, but the anticipated government mail contract failed to materialize and private express fees and passenger fares were insufficient to place the company on a profitable footing. Majors' apprehensions that the boom would quickly subside were realized to the extent that slowed traffic and sagging revenues failed to turn a profit. When their loans came due, the partners were unable to meet their obligations. They again appealed to Majors for

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[3] John Gray, "The Salt Lake Hockaday Mail," I, *Annals of Wyoming*, (Spring 1985), pp. 14 – 17 (hereinafter cited as "Hockaday Mail," I); J. V. Frederick, *Ben Holladay The Stagecoach King: A Chapter in the Development of Transcontinental Transportation*, (Glendale: 1940), pp. 50 – 54.

help, proposing he use the freighting company's considerable assets to acquire their holdings. Majors reluctantly acceded rather than see his friends fail financially.

Shortly thereafter, Russell, Majors, & Waddell also bought out Hockaday & Liggett's interests in the St. Joseph to Salt Lake City line, thus forming the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company (C.O.C. & P. P. Ex. Co.). The owners hoped that by combining the two lines, they might yet realize a profit. Service on the Smoky Hill route continued on the previous schedule, but the company constructed dozens of additional stations on the Central Overland Road to allow daily stages to travel in both directions simultaneously, covering the distance in only ten days. At that, Brown saw to it that the only through transcontinental mail transported over the central route consisted of newspapers and franked government documents, thereby further protecting Butterfield's near-monopoly of the business over the Ox Bow Route. By the end of the decade the regular Pacific mail was totaling nearly ten tons monthly, making it plain to the postmaster general that overland transportation was fast becoming "wholly impractical" and that only the completion of a railroad would resolve the problem.[4]

Russell, Majors, and Waddell apparently discontinued use of the old Magraw change station just below Fort Laramie in favor of establishing a station at Gemenian P.

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[4] Alexander Majors, *Seventy Years on the Frontier*, (Columbus: 1950), pp. 165-66 (hereinafter cited as *Seventy Years*); Gray, "Hockaday Mail," I, p. 17; Annual Report of the Postmaster General, 1859, *House Executive Documents*, 36th Cong., 1st Sess., (Serial 1025), pp. 1409-10.

Beauvais' trading post (formerly the American Fur Company post) five miles down the North Platte. The coaches followed the usual road paralleling the river before crossing over the Laramie River bridge to swing through the fort. There they paused briefly at the post office, located in the Sutler's Store, while Ordnance Sergeant Leodegar Schnyder, the designated postmaster, exchanged the incoming and outgoing mailbags. The meticulous Schnyder, appointed to his position in 1859 and serving in that collateral capacity until 1876, became legend for his autocratic management of the post office. On one occasion, the sergeant even physically ousted a superior officer from his domain when the man dared to sort through the mail looking for his own letters.[5]

Although Hockaday provided reasonably reliable delivery over his portion of the central route, Chorpenning's operations on the western segment were not so well managed. Repeated failures to deliver the mail on time led the Post Office Department to reconsider his contract early in 1860. This fortuitous circumstance played into the hands of Russell, Majors, and Waddell. Having acquired Hockaday's Utah mail contract as part of the arrangement to buy out his interests, the company already controlled the eastern half of the line. Moreover, they possessed the resources to extend service to California. To the company's benefit, Postmaster Brown had died the previous year and his

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[5] *Chicago American*, February 10, 1901, transcript in vertical files, library, Fort Laramie NHS; Gray, "Hockaday Mail," I, p. 19; John D. McDermott, "Fort Laramie's Silent Soldier Leodegar Schnyder," *Fort Laramie: Visions of a Grand Old Post*, (Fort Collins: 1974), p. 128.

successor, Joseph P. Holt, did not share his predecessor's preference for the Ox Bow route. In fact, the new postmaster general was dedicated to making the department financially self-sustaining, rather than pay exorbitant subsidies to the stagemen as inducement to carry the mail over routes that could not otherwise support themselves. Holt therefore annulled Chorpenning's contract and granted a "star route," with no subsidy for passenger service, to Russell, Majors, and Waddell, thus unifying mail service in their hands over the entire central route.[6]

The thriving town of Denver lay at the crossroads of the Smoky Hill route and the old Taos Trail from New Mexico, in addition to the approach up the South Platte.[7] With

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[6] LeRoy R. Hafen, *The Overland Mail 1849 - 1869: Promoter of Settlement. Precursor to Railroads*, (Glendale: 1926), pp. 156-57. Much of the information presented in following sections relies on this source.

[7] Fort Laramie also lay along the trappers' trail leading northward from Santa Fe and Taos to Fort Pierre on the Missouri. During the 1830s and 1840s, according to Colonel Stephen W. Kearny, white traders from New Mexico followed the Taos Trail to Colorado and beyond to exchange whiskey for furs and buffalo robes. Lieutenant G. K. Warren, Topographical Engineers, made an official survey of that segment of the trail between Forts Laramie and Pierre in 1855 when the Quartermaster Department considered it as a possible supply route for Fort Laramie, rather than using the Oregon - California Trail. However, it proved to be impractical because the Missouri River froze in winter, preventing its use by steamers. Nevertheless, the fact should not be overlooked that prior to the existence of Denver, Fort Laramie was the principal point at the intersection of the major east-west travel route with a north-south one. Famed frontiersman Christopher "Kit" Carson, William Bent, and Tom Goddell brought horses and mules from Taos to Fort Laramie in June 1850 to barter for Indian goods, and three years later Carson again came up the Taos Trail en route to California with a large herd of sheep. David A. White (comp.), "Stephen W. Kearny, 1845: Report of a Summer Campaign to the Rocky Mountains," *News of the Plains and Rockies 1803 – 1865*, (Spokane: 1998), 4, p. 124; "James H. Carlton, 1850: The Overland Route to California," ibid. 5, pp. 61-63; LeRoy R. Hafen and Francis Marion Young, *Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West, 1834 – 1890*, (Lincoln: 1984), pp. 166, 201-02; The road from Santa Fe to Denver eventually became a well-traveled route for both freight trains and mail coaches operating between those points. Other important sites on the trail were St. Vrains Fort and Fort Lancaster, just east of the Rocky Mountains and Pueblo, initially known as Hardscrabble, Colorado. Henry P. Walker, *The Wagonmasters: High Plains Freighting From the Earliest Days of the Santa Fe Trail to 1880*, (Norman: 1986), pp. 179-82 (hereinafter cited 0as *Wagonmasters*); A map of this trail is found in George B. Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, (Norman: 1971), p. 114.

mining camps springing up all over the Pike's Peak region, Denver became the natural point of supply. Thousands of men flocking to Colorado in search of gold made their demands for regular mail service heard in Congress. Postal routes were quickly established between Denver and outlying points, including Boulder, Breckenridge, and Colorado City, while short-line firms using pack mules or other appropriate transportation hauled the mail over narrow, treacherous trails to the mountain settlements. For over a year, the C. O. C. & P. P. Ex. Co. ran a private express and passenger service to Denver as a branch of its trunk line to Placerville. No regular arrangements were made to convey the mail to Colorado until August 1860, when a new contract was awarded to the Western Stage Company, headquartered in Omaha, to connect Fort Kearny with Denver via the South Platte. Colorado, at last, had a reliable weekly communications link with the Missouri River whereby mail and newspapers flowed to the camps, and gold dust was expressed back to the States.

The directors of the Central Overland Express Company once again found themselves in a financial predicament. Even though they had managed to piece together a transcontinental mail route, the government still paid only for semi-monthly service, a legacy of Postmaster General Brown's biased administration. Their hopes for securing a lucrative line to the new El Dorado vanished almost as suddenly as the opportunity had arisen. Neither the trail across Kansas Territory nor the new Julesburg – Denver route had

materialized for them. The peculiar way in which the company had obtained its separate contracts--literally by picking up the crumbs of its predecessors--the Central Overland was now desperate to secure a more profitable contract for daily through service from St. Joseph to Placerville. With the C. O. C. & P. P. Ex. Co. staring bankruptcy squarely in the face, something had to be done, and quickly, to rekindle the government's interest in the central route.

The concept for carrying express mail by mounted couriers originated with Senator Gwinn of California, who was adamantly opposed to the circuitous Butterfield route. Gwinn argued that his state's importance to the nation and its growing population demanded that communication with the East be improved. Thoroughly familiar with Russell, Majors, and Waddell's experience in the transportation business, and of their excellent reputation for realizing their plans, the senator approached Russell with a daring proposal for a system of couriers that could carry mail all the way from St. Joseph to San Francisco in only ten days. The flamboyant Russell was intrigued by the idea, but found his ever-cautious partners less enthusiastic about such a wild gamble. They initially saw no possibility that the venture could ever yield a profit, and they would likely not recover their investment. Majors and Waddell may well have been more concerned about the effects on their reputations were they to allow the Leavenworth & Pike's Peak Express go bankrupt. Whatever the motive, Russell eventually prevailed by convincing his partners

that in this instance there was more to consider than short-term financial gain. If they could demonstrate that a daily mail could reach California via the middle route in only ten days, at all times of the year, pressure would mount in Congress to abandon the Ox Bow as the principal transcontinental route. Considering their existing capital investments, familiarity with the region, and an established reputation in the transportation business, Russell, Majors, and Waddell would be favorably positioned to acquire a new postal contract.

The firm purchased five hundred well-bred horses and hired eighty courageous riders of small stature at the unheard-of salary of $125.00 a month. To conserve the animals and maximize their endurance, Russell, Majors, and Waddell built additional relay stations ten to twelve miles apart to fill the gaps between the existing ones for coach service. Fort Laramie, despite its post office, was not a practical location for a relay because it would have required special authorization for the company to erect quarters and livestock corrals within the military reservation. A station in or near the garrison itself would have posed further complications by forcing nighttime sentinels to challenge the riders as they approached. Express stations were therefore established a few miles distant from the fort, though the riders did cross the Laramie River bridge to continue their journey along the south side of the North Platte. The firm therefore elected to utilize its existing station at Beauvais' ranch, and constructed another at Register Cliff.

Living up to their reputation, the partners completed preparations in only sixty days after making the decision to proceed. Each courier normally rode three segments, an average of thirty-three miles, before handing off the mail to another, though circumstances frequently required the expressmen to endure considerably longer distances between rider relays. Messages were written on tissue paper to reduce weight, the postage for each half-ounce letter costing $5.00. The riders carried a maximum of ten pounds of mail, secured in locked leather pockets of the mochila, a special removable saddle cover that was transferred from one horse to another during the journey. Harry Roff began the first trip, leaving Sacramento on April 3, 1860. As promised, the mail arrived at St. Joseph just ten days later, a reduction of eleven days under Butterfield's best record. The theory was proved, though as Majors and Waddell had feared, the proceeds for the company were but one-tenth of the costs. Nevertheless, the feat itself, and the unfailing consistency of subsequent service vindicated Russell's confidence and were convincing evidence of the Central Route's superiority over the southern.[8]

As populations expanded in various regions of the West, Holt was in a stronger position to defend his more conservative policies based on fiscal responsibility. He reported in 1859 that his department had lost three million dollars on the heavily subsidized overland mail, and recommended instead that semi-weekly service be reduced

[8] Majors, *Seventy Years*, pp. 173-76, 182-85.

to only one trip weekly in each direction. Further, he substituted shorter and more economical star routes wherever possible, even to the extent of lopping off that portion of the old contract line from east of El Paso, by which mail had been conveyed from the Gulf to San Diego. Since Butterfield's contract duplicated service between El Paso and the West Coast, there was no need to engage two companies for that leg of the route. And, while Holt was at it, he took a hard look at that albatross Brown had hung around his neck--the Ox Bow. The new postmaster general vindicated his stance when he subsequently demonstrated to Congress the substantial cost savings he had already affected since taking office.

Although Holt harbored reservations about the year-around feasibility of the Central Route, certain members of Congress, influenced by a number of powerful Wall Street magnates, became convinced it would be the cheapest and fastest way to get mail service to California. Ignoring Holt's reluctance to fully endorse the proposal, the legislators passed a bill in March 1861 calling for the termination of the Ox Bow route and for transferring Butterfield's assets to the Central Route. An appropriation of $1,000,000 not only compensated the Butterfield line for damages on the existing contract, it provided daily regular mail on a twenty to twenty-three day schedule, according to season. An adjunct route would service Denver. Additionally, the Pony

Express, conveying urgent mail, would operate separately on a semi-weekly basis until the transcontinental telegraph line was completed to the Pacific. Butterfield was given the primary contract by virtue of his prior arrangement with the Post Office Department. By a peculiar turn of events, however, he had become heavily indebted to Wells Fargo & Company and when he was unable to repay the loans he had incurred for expanding his business, his own board of directors dismissed him from the firm and renamed it the Overland Mail Company. By the time the government let the new mail contract over the Central Route, Wells Fargo controlled Butterfield's assets, and thus assumed control of the central overland mail. Because Butterfield had previously bought much of the stock and coaches belonging to the C. O. C. & P. P. Express, arrangements were made with the latter firm to run both the Pony Express and the daily mail between St. Joseph and Salt Lake City. This was indeed fortuitous for Russell, Majors, and Waddell because Russell's extravagant gambles had not only tied up the company's capital, but had plunged it into debt so far that eastern bankers would no longer extend credit or loans. The lucrative transcontinental mail contract amounted to a last-ditch subsidy critical to the company's very survival.[9]

[9] Even Russell's shrewd move to capture half the contract was not enough to save the company. The partners had been counting on once again securing the army's large freighting contract over the Fort Leavenworth to Salt Lake City road, but they were underbid by a competitor, leaving them only with the business of supplying posts in New Mexico in 1860. At that, their expected proceeds, along with appraised property, did not approach their indebtedness. Russell was fired as president and in 1862 western stagecoach magnate Ben Holladay bought the bankrupt O. C. O. & P. P. Express Company for only $100,000.00 and in the same stroke the legendary firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell ceased to exist.

Delivering the Denver mail posed a problem, since that community lay some two hundred miles off of the main trail. Extending a connecting star route southward afforded the most obvious solution, yet it would be expensive and service would be no more than once every three weeks. Moreover, once the telegraph was completed only a branch line would service Denver. Conversely, were Denver situated on the primary route, it would benefit by having daily mail, the Pony Express, and eventually, instant contact with the States by telegraph. That the rapidly growing town on Cherry Creek stood to become the great halfway point between New York and San Francisco was not lost on its business community. A director of the C. O. C. & P. P. Ex. Co. took advantage of this potentiality by proposing that the residents of Denver underwrite the construction of stations along the line of the Cherokee Trail running northwest from the city to the Laramie Plains, thence to Fort Bridger.[10] The company would in turn alter its main line to depart from the

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Walker, *Wagonmasters*, pp. 240-41; David Nevin, *The Expressmen*, The Old West Series (New York: 1976), p. 110.

[10] Fur trader William H. Ashley is credited with first exploring the Cherokee Trail during the 1820s as a route to the annual Green River rendezvous. The track was also followed by a party of Cherokee Indians migrating from Indian Territory to California in the 1840s, hence its name. Some of those mixed-blood individuals remained in Colorado as mountaineers and were credited with sharing in the discovery of gold with Georgians that had migrated there as an adjunct to the anti-slavery movement in Kansas. Considering Georgia their native land, the Cherokees identified closely with these men. John C. Fremont probably conducted the first formal examination of the lower portion of the route during his 1843 expedition to the West. Proceeding northwest across what is now Kansas, Fremont divided his party at St. Vrain's Fort, a portion traveling southward to the site of modern Pueblo, Colorado, then retracing their steps to join Fremont on an excursion up Cache la Poudre River into the Laramie Mountains. Fremont and a small handpicked party attempted to find a way through the mountains, and eventually did, coming out on the Laramie Plains. However, instead of traveling westward after reaching the North Platte, Fremont elected to go north to cross the divide at South Pass en route to Bear Lake. Benjamin F. Hall to President of the U. S., October 26, 1861, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, (Washington, D. C: 1886), Misc. Union Correspondence, Series II, Vol. 115, no. 5, p.

old emigrant trail at the California Crossing, and the nearby settlement of Julesburg, to continue westerly from that point. Denver would thus be assured of a bright future. And, Russell, Majors, and Waddell would at once shorten considerably their mileage and reduce expenses by creating a more direct route to Salt Lake, without having to operate a star line to comply with the terms of the postal contract.

During spring, a party of surveyors, funded by the citizens of Denver and guided by the intrepid Jim Bridger, set out to find an even shorter way through the Rocky Mountains to Salt Lake City. A few weeks later the expedition discovered a feasible pass across the range and promptly named it for the head of the party, E. L. Berthoud. Once this news reached the directors of the Overland Express, they voted immediately to change their course to follow the new Colorado passage, nevertheless it would require time to develop it for regular travel.

Mail coaches began plying the usual Salt Lake - California road via Fort Laramie and South Pass on July 1, 1861. The southern states having seceded from the Union during the early months of that year, and with guerilla activity intensifying in Missouri, the Post Office Department authorized the establishment of an alternate route across Iowa to Omaha, connecting with the Overland Stage Line at Fort Kearny. When Confederate

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120; William H. Goeztmann, *Army Exploration in the American West 1803 – 1863*, (New Haven: 1959), pp. 89 – 90, see also map p. 71; Hafen, *Overland Mail*, pp. 230-31n. 490.

incursions threatened the mail, Russell, Majors, and Waddell arranged to meet westbound coaches there to take receive the mail. During following months, however, Postmaster General Holt again modified the route, this time more significantly. The task of improving Berthoud Pass to accommodate wheeled vehicles proved almost insurmountable, and year-around snowfall at that 11,300-foot altitude further dimmed the prospects of using the newfound route within a reasonable time. The menace of Indian raids along the middle portion of the old emigrant road induced Holt to justify moving the mail line via the South Platte to intersect the Cherokee Trail at the Cache la Poudre. From that point, mail traveled to Denver over a spur route, while the through mail coaches traversed the Cache la Poudre Valley, turned northwest to the Laramie Plains, then rounded Elk Mountain, to make the long monotonous haul across what is now southern Wyoming to Fort Bridger.

Service over the new road started July 21, 1862, thus bypassing Fort Laramie and ending its role in protecting the "great through mail." With thousands of emigrants still using the old California route, combined with the decision to construct the transcontinental telegraph along that line, the impact of events in Colorado was not immediately evident at Fort Laramie. Nevertheless, the new overland trail to the south and the booming town of Denver presaged its eventual demise.

Chapter 8

"We Are Holding This Territory by a Thread"

Fort Laramie might have reached its zenith even sooner had not the citizens of Colorado Territory been so niggardly with their hard-earned gold. The superintendent of the Western Union & Missouri Telegraph Company, Edward Creighton, made the residents an offer similar to that advanced by the stage men. He proposed that if the populace would invest $20,000 to subsidize the construction of the main line, he would route it through Denver. The measure failed to garner the necessary public support, however. Creighton thus elected to lay his line along the familiar Oregon – California road, since Postmaster General Holt was yet undecided whether to reroute the transcontinental mail via the South Platte and Bridger's Pass. There can be little doubt

that the government itself influenced his decision by reminding him there were no military posts between Fort Kearny and Fort Bridger to protect the line the more southerly route. Moreover, the nearest one, Fort Laramie, would be circumvented and thereby deprived of rapid communication. The Western Union construction crew therefore strung wire through the post during late summer 1861 to complete the army's eastern connection with the States, and on October 24 the east and west lines were joined at Salt Lake City. The Pony Express consequently suffered a quick death, having lost as much as a half-million dollars during its meteoric life, yet true to Russell's prediction, it had contributed significantly by proving the feasibility of the Central Route across the nation.

The previous spring, a pony rider had brought news of the state of war existing between North and South. For the garrison at Fort Laramie, like others all across the frontier, the issue of secession had been a topic of heated debate for months, causing the officer corps to divide itself into Unionist and secessionist camps. The two factions eyed each other suspiciously, often boasting about what they would do were war to break out. With the firing on Fort Sumter, individuals hailing from the South were suddenly faced with backing their words with action. For most, it was a very personal choice between standing by the oath they had made as officers in the United States Army, and loyalty to the position taken by their respective native states.

Political passions ran high at Fort Laramie in the wake of that momentous news. Although Captain John McNab, commanding the post since mid-May, was a Vermonter, he had frequently and publicly expressed his pro-secessionist sentiments at the sutler's store and to other officers of the garrison. When Seth Ward's manager, William G. Bullock, "dared to proclaim his intention to hoist the secession flag at the post," McNab took no action. However, the great majority of enlisted men, being regulars sworn to defend the U. S., took offense at Bullock's proposal and threatened to hang him from the flagstaff if any attempt to raise the stars and bars. Bullock prudently backed down. McNab's conspiracy against the United States was evidenced when he granted long furloughs to Lieutenants George Jackson, James H. Hill, and Assistant Surgeon Archibald M. Fauntleroy, all of whom had resigned their commissions and were awaiting confirmation from Confederate authorities.[1]

McNab went a step further by providing them with five Colt revolvers drawn from reserve arms at the post, then falsified the records concerning the disposition of the

[1] First Lieutenant George Jackson, a native Virginian, graduated West Point in 1856. He served in both the First and Second Dragoons prior to the war. Following his resignation, he was appointed to the rank of major, Fourteenth Virginia Cavalry, C. S. A. and survived the conflict; Hailing from Maine and appointed to the U. S. Military Academy from New York, First Lieutenant James Hoffman Hill exemplified the contradictions of the time by casting his fortunes with the South. At the time he resigned his commission, he was serving as regimental adjutant of the Tenth Infantry. He spent the Civil War as a major in the Confederate States adjutant general's office; Assistant Surgeon Archibald McGill Fauntleroy, another Virginian, had only received his appointment in the Regular Army in June 1860. He, too, survived the war practicing his profession with the Confederate Army throughout the four years of conflict. Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army From Its Organization September 29, 1789 to March 2, 1903*, (Washington, D. C.: 1903), I, pp. 415, 530, 567(hereinafter cited as *Historical Register*).

weapons. Prior to their departure on June 1, the three ex-officers solicited enlisted men to accompany them on the assurance they too would be commissioned in the Confederate Army. McNab, they told the men, would readily grant them generous furloughs to avoid their being apprehended as deserters. Apparently Jackson, Fauntleroy, and Hill were unsuccessful in their attempt to recruit defectors, but two men, First Sergeant John Mix, Company F, Second Dragoons, and a corporal from the same company, applied for leaves of absence, inducing McNab to believe they would join the southern forces.[2]

Furloughs in hand, the two soldiers proceeded immediately to Washington, D. C. where they reported to Army Headquarters the recent turn of events at Fort Laramie. The captain interviewing Mix was personally acquainted with the ten-year veteran soldier and therefore attributed unquestionable credence to his story. Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas was alarmed to learn that not only was McNab's "very weak and ineffective" leadership creating an atmosphere of "disorder and lack of discipline" at Fort Laramie, but an avowed Confederate sympathizer was now in control of that highly strategic western post. Of even more serious portent, McNab's actions had left one company

[2] John Mix enlisted in the Second Dragoons in 1852 and served in the ranks, rising to first sergeant of Company F, until that fateful summer of 1861. Seeing an opportunity to improve himself, Mix applied for a commission when war broke out. McNab later accused Mix of creating a groundless scandal to ingratiate himself to the army, and thereby gain promotion. However, Mix's allegations were substantiated by other witnesses. He was indeed commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Second Cavalry effective August 14, 1861 and served successively as major and lieutenant colonel of the Third New York Cavalry until April 1862. Apparently the volunteer service did not suit the old soldier, even at higher rank, because he resigned to accept a slot as a first lieutenant back in his old regiment. Mix remained with the Second until 1881, rising to the rank of captain, when he was promoted to major in the Ninth Cavalry. He died just ten months later. Heitman, *Historical Register*, I, p. 718.

without any commissioned officers; other than McNab himself, and only two other junior officers remained at the post. Moreover, Fauntleroy's exodus left the garrison deprived of medical services. Indeed, McNab may have secretly plotted to create a general mutiny among the troops, or at least weaken the post's defenses, to ensure its capture in the event Confederate forces moved against it.

Colonel Edmund B. Alexander, commanding the Tenth Infantry from his headquarters at Fort Laramie, had been sent to St. Louis in late April to replace General Harney as head of the Department of the West. Alexander, who had only recently arrived at St. Louis, was immediately directed to return to the post to reestablish control. Arriving there on June 10, he promptly initiated an investigation into McNab's conduct, which the latter attempted to thwart by making "use of trickery and falsehood to prevent said investigation." But, Commanding General Winfield Scott had already heard enough and peremptorily dismissed McNab from the service.[3]

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[3] McNab swore his innocence and attempted to get reinstated,, but corroboration of Mix's testimony by Lieutenants Gooding and Mizner sealed his fate. Captain S. H. Starr to Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas, June 27, 1861; John McNab to Senator J. Colamer, Woodstock, Vt., September 24, 1861; Sarah McNab to "My Dearest Aunt, September 14, 1861; First Lieutenant Oliver P. Gooding to Thomas, January 29, 1862; Captain Joseph K. Mizner, Second Cavalry, to Thomas, February 9, 1862; These and other letters bearing on the McNab incident are found in John McNab file, Box 905, Letters Received (Main Series), Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, D. C.; Copies are in vertical files, library, Fort Laramie NHS; Captain Seth Williams to Colonel Lorenzo Thomas, April 29, 1861, *O.R.*, I, 3, p. 489; Despite the incriminating evidence, the author found no record indicating that McNab defected to the Confederate States Army.

The danger posed to Fort Laramie at that time was not as far fetched as it might appear in hindsight. That Southern sympathizers were even then casting covetous eyes on the Trans-Mississippi is well substantiated. Henry Hopkins Sibley, West Point graduate and former Second Dragoons officer with a distinguished record in the Mexican War, recently proposed a plan to Confederate President Jefferson Davis for annexing the Southwest, Colorado, and eventually California. Sibley reasoned that by acting quickly and aggressively in a movement from Texas up the Rio Grande, his forces could brush aside the small force of regulars and occupy the territorial capital at Santa Fe. From there he could move against Fort Union, the southern anchor of the Santa Fe Trail and central supply depot for all of New Mexico Territory. Capturing Fort Union would at once cut off sustenance to all the other the garrisons, and would provide food, clothing, arms, and munitions to carry the Confederate column northward to Denver, where Sibley would gain control of the gold and silver fields for the Southern treasury. On the diplomatic front, a successful offensive would do much to sway England and France to assist the Confederate States. Moreover, a subsequent movement against California would garner more resources to fund the war, and once the entire Southwest was conquered, the land area of the Confederacy would be doubled "with . . . .plenty of room for the extension of slavery, which would greatly strengthen the Confederate States."[4] Although Sibley

[4] The quotation, attributed to a member of Sibley's staff, appears in Ray C. Colton, *The Civil War in the*

expressed no specific concern about the forts on the Oregon Trail, he could hardly have ignored the threat Forts Laramie and Bridger posed to the ultimate execution of his plan.

Less well known was a similar proposal advanced by secessionist F. J. Marshall of Marysville, Kansas. Marshall, like Sibley, recognized the value of Colorado Territory. Similarly, he was under the impression that because Georgians had pioneered the gold discovery there, and many other southerners had migrated there, a telling percentage of the population would side with the Confederacy. Marshall estimated the population to be about 40,000 people, three-fourths of them males capable of taking up arms at the first opportunity. He predicted that by capturing Colorado for the Confederacy, the suppressed pro-southern element in "Bloody Kansas" would rebel against the "poor, worthless, starving abolitionists." Marshall also looked upon the Cherokees in Indian Territory, and perhaps even the plains tribes, as potential allies in this effort. Writing to Davis on May 20, Marshall outlined his plan to,

> . . . seize and hold Forts Laramie and Wise, and Fort Union, if necessary, and take possession of all military stores and munitions of war at the other forts in Kansas and Colorado, and will destroy what will be of no utility, establish headquarters near the Cheyenne Pass, and with the possession of Forts Laramie and Wise, cut

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Western Territories, (Norman: 1959), p. 11; Jerry Thompson, *Henry Hopkins Sibley: Confederate General of the West*, (Natchitoches, La.: 1987), pp. 215-18 (hereinafter cited as *Sibley*); For a definitive treatment of the 1861-62 New Mexico campaign, see Don E. Alberts, *The Battle of Glorieta: Union Victory in the West*, (College Station, Tex.: 1998) (hereinafer cited as *Battle of Glorieta*).

> off all communication between the Northern States and the Pacific coast; and at the same time, acting in conjunction with Missouri, can seize Forts Leavenworth and Riley, and expel from Kansas the horde of Northern vandals that now infests it.[5]

It was an ambitious scheme, certainly, but considering that only four under-strength companies garrisoned Fort Laramie, and at that very moment a southern sympathizer was in command of those troops, it was a valuable prize ripe for the picking. Marshall pointed out that all the western garrisons had been reduced and he predicted that "a large number of the soldiers would immediately enlist in the services of the Confederate States . . . ."[6]

With Confederate forces threatening Washington, D. C. in spring 1861, the army's high command had no time to consider the strategic importance of the western territories. Secretary of the Interior Caleb Smith was more familiar with the natural resources of the

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[5] F. J. Marshall to Jefferson Davis, May 20, 1861,*The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. (Washington, D. C.: 1880), Series I, vol. 3, p. 579 (This reference hereinafter cited as *O.R.* with respective series and volume noted.); An estimated 6,000 of the 30,000 residents in Colorado Territory were in sympathy with the South. These men migrated to Kansas during the 1850s, where they were armed in an attemptd to force the territory into the slave-holding fold. Failing in that effort, many moved on to Colorado in search of gold to recoup lost personal fortunes. At the outbreak of war, these southerners formed secret groups totaling some 1,400 men, and accumulated all the available arms and ammunition in anticipation of assisting an expected Confederate invasion. Prior to their displacement, the Cherokees resided in Georgia and maintained a strong loyalty to that state. Benjamin F. Hall to President of the United States, September 13, 1861, *O. R.*, III, 1, p. 506; The Confederacy's broad strategy to conquer the Intermountain West is discussed in Colton, *Civil War in the Western Territories*, pp. 3 – 9 and in Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *The Civil War in the American West*, (New York: 1991), pp. 17-30.

[6] Marshall to Davis, May 20, 1861, *O. R.*, I, 3, p. 579.

region, and the mood of the Indians, than were most other Washington officials. But, when he attempted to alert his counterpart in the War Department to the necessity of defending the frontier, Secretary Simon Cameron curtly informed him that the military would consider action appropriate to the situation. A large portion of the Army of Utah, including the Fifth Infantry, Seventh Infantry, and part of the Tenth, had previously been siphoned off to counter the Navajo uprising in New Mexico and southwestern Colorado. In May, Scott ordered most of the remainder of federal forces in Utah, as well as those in New Mexico, to concentrate at Fort Leavenworth, preparatory to their transfer to the eastern theater of operations. Meantime, most of the Eighth Infantry was captured in Texas after the department commander betrayed his men by ordering them to leave the state via a gulf port, rather than making a quick overland exodus into northern territory. The combined effect of these events was to clear the way for Sibley to make his thrust into New Mexico almost unopposed and to lay vulnerable the Oregon Trail.

As the Texans moved up the Rio Grande that summer, Colonel Edward R. S. Canby, commanding the Department of New Mexico, prevailed on the territorial governors of both New Mexico and Colorado to raise companies of militia to stem the Confederate advance. Although Colorado volunteer units ultimately played a critical role in defeating Sibley, Canby initially envisioned them as a reserve force to support Fort Wise, located on the Arkansas River near Big Timbers. Because of its position on the

Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail, the post was of key importance in maintaining communications with St. Louis and Fort Leavenworth. Also rumored was yet a third projected Confederate invasion, one aimed at the central plains by Texan forces under the leadership of General Albert Pike. Pike, styling himself as a Confederate States commissioner, proposed to unite several Indian tribes in the "Nations" against the Union, then strike north to capture Forts Larned and Wise on the Arkansas. Such a movement, if successful, would sever the Santa Fe Trail, cutting a the lifeline upon which federal forces in both New Mexico and Colorado depended. Pike managed to convince the Comanches, Wichitas, and other southern plains tribes to sign a pact of friendship, but only later did they admit to U. S. officials that they had been duped.[7]

Newly appointed Governor William Gilpin, however, viewed his Colorado militia merely as a constabulary to maintain order in the event Southern factions within the territory rebelled, and they would defend the citizens against Indian attack consequent to the reduction of federal troops. Regardless of his divergent viewpoint, Gilpin began recruiting men to fill ten companies of the First Colorado Infantry in July. Trouble was, Canby had no arms to spare from Fort Union Arsenal and other posts, since he was already committed to supplying three regiments of New Mexico volunteers, nor did Gilpin have ready access to other supplies. Acting on Canby's suggestion, the governor

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[7] *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D. C.: 1862), pp. 715-16 (hereinafter cited as

dispatched couriers to Forts Laramie and Kearny to request whatever assistance the army might provide, until additional quantities could be furnished from the depot at Fort Leavenworth.[8]

As beleaguered authorities in Colorado attempted to respond to the dual menace of secessionists and Indians, General Sibley met with unexpected success as the spearhead of his invasion force thrust from El Paso northward into New Mexico. At Fort Fillmore, near Mesilla, he encountered Major Isaac Lynde, previously the commanding officer at Fort Laramie, and several companies of the Seventh Infantry. After making an uninspired feint against the Texans, Lynde abandoned the fort and began a hasty retreat toward Fort Stanton. Confederate cavalry quickly overtook the regiment, however, and Lynde capitulated without firing a shot, despite the protests of his own officers.[9] The commander at Fort Stanton, as the result of Lynde's surrender, was likewise compelled to withdraw his garrison from Fort Stanton, leaving all of southern New Mexico in the hands of the Confederates.

ARSI with year of report); George B. Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, (Norman: 1971), pp. 127-28.

[8] Canby also informed Gilpin that he was having trouble recruiting the number of volunteers requested of New Mexico by federal authorities, therefore Colorado should be prepared to raise two additional regiments. Colonel E. R. S. Canby to Governor, Colorado Territory, September 8, 1861, *O. R.*, I, 4, p. 69.

[9] Lynde was later forced to resign his commission because of his actions at Fort Fillmore. Company B, which had been stationed at Fort Laramie in 1858, was one of those captured by Confederate Lieutenant Colonel John R. Baylor. Colton, *Civil War in the Western Territories*, pp. 14 – 16; Heitman, *Historical Register*, I, p. 649; Theophilus F. Rodenbough, *The Army of the United States 1789 – 1896: Historical Sketches of Staff and Line With Portraits of Generals-in-Chief*, (New York: 1966), p. 502-03 (hereinafter cited as *Army of the United States*).

Sibley proceeded up the Rio Grande against his next objective, Fort Craig, where the last of the regulars and the newly organized territorial volunteers stood poised to resist his advance. Having only light artillery, Sibley avoided a direct assault on the fortified position, electing instead to skirt around the post thereby forcing Canby to leave the fort and fight on open ground. The one-day engagement at Val Verde ended in a draw on the battlefield, but strategically it caused Union forces to withdraw to the safety of the fort, while the Texans bypassed it to capture both Albuquerque and Santa Fe. The Confederate juggernaut continued up the Santa Fe Trail toward Fort Union, the prize that would afford a wealth of provisions and armaments, and would open the door to Colorado. Success seemed to be nearly within Sibley's grasp.

In late March 1862, a hastily organized Union force composed of regulars and Colorado volunteer infantry and cavalry confronted Sibley's brigade at Glorieta Pass a short distance east of the ancient capital. It was the crucial battle of the campaign, with the fate of the southwestern territories hanging in the balance. Although the Confederates pressed the Federals hard and nearly broke their lines, a circuitous flanking raid by Union cavalry under the command of Major John Chivington captured and destroyed Sibley's supply train parked in a nearby canyon. Deprived of virtually everything except what his men had on their backs, and with another column of Union troops marching east from

California to sever his already tenuous supply line, Sibley had no choice but to retreat to Texas while he could still escape.

The Battle of Glorieta Pass marked the crest of Confederate ambitions in the West. Marshall's bid to launch a drive from Missouri never came to fruition, but had Sibley been successful in capturing Fort Union, it is conceivable that both Colorado and Kansas would have fallen to the Confederacy. Fortunately for the Union, Pike's planned invasion of Kansas and Colorado from Indian Territory also fizzled out. Had he better understood Indian nature, Pike would have realized that it was all but impossible to hold an Indian coalition together for any length of time and to expect them to act with the concert of conventional troops. When the Indians tired of waiting, they simply went home and Pike's army evaporated. What the fate of Fort Laramie might have been had any of these plans succeeded can only be speculated, but the post would have been extremely difficult to maintain under those circumstances. Sibley's campaign, for all its inherent implausibility, had been a close call that at last awakened Washington to vulnerability of frontier resources.[10]

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[10] Sibley's plan was flawed in several respects, making it unlikely that it ever would have succeeded. He calculated, wrongly, that the native population of New Mexico would rise up to join him, but Sibley neglected to take into account that New Mexicans harbored a long hatred of Texans after their attempt to annex the territory for themselves in 1841. Likewise, his intention to subsist his men off the land demonstrated a lack of practicality on his part, something an officer of his considerable frontier experience should have realized. And, as Alberts points up, Sibley simply was not the man for such an undertaking. His personality was such that he tended to live for the moment and let the morrow take care of itself. Moreover, he had been an alcoholic for years, an abuse that affected his ability to reason. Because of his habit, he managed to miss every battle of the campaign. Had his troops had the benefit of a good leader, the

Washington's appreciation of the far West had nevertheless been slow in coming. In November 1861, Army Headquarters withdrew the two companies of the Second Cavalry from Fort Laramie to rendezvous with their regiment en route to join the Army of the Potomac. Their exodus left only two companies of infantry at the post, a situation reminiscent of the Grattan days, but with potentially even more serious consequences. Marauding Cheyennes had raided Seth Ward's horse herd only the previous May and rumors abounded that southern agents were on the plains inciting the Indians to take advantage of the army's current weakness on the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails. The government countered by making prompt delivery of annuity provisions in hopes of quelling any predisposition the tribesmen might have to raid along those lines. Three months later, the army took the further precaution of directing the commanding officer at Fort Kearny to "give protection to the stock and property of the Overland Mail Company and not allow any interference in carrying the U. S. mails, under color of any civil authority or pretense whatever."[11] Presumably, the same instructions applied to the garrison at Fort Laramie.

California Governor John G. Downey had recognized early-on the importance of the Overland Trail when he requested permission from the War Department to raise a

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outcome might have been different. These aspects are discussed in detail in Alberts, *Battle of Glorieta*, pp. 8-9; Thompson, *Sibley*, pp. 337-39.

regiment of infantry and five companies of cavalry to protect the mail and telegraph as far east as Fort Laramie. Californians quickly responded to his call to arms, but before those units could be mustered and trained, General Scott redirected Brigadier General George Wright, commanding the Department of the Pacific, to organize an expedition to march across New Mexico Territory to intercept Sibley's Texans on the Rio Grande, thereby securing the southern route to California, and the mines of the Southwest.[12] Downey was left no choice but to recruit additional troops to prevent Indians from cutting the state's northerly lifeline with the East.

Californians were not the only people with a stake in preserving the overland mail; so did Brigham Young and the Mormons. The purported insurrection in Utah had not materialized, and the Mormons had patched up their relationship with the federal government without bloodshed. The army all the while had wisely maintained a low, respectful profile in its occupation of the Salt Lake Valley with the result that the citizens remained loyal to the Union. A man of action, Young subsequently took the initiative to fill the void created by the absence of a significant regular army presence. In April 1862, in response to reports of increasing thefts of stock by Indians preying on emigrant trains

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[11] Report by A. G. Thomas, April 24, 1862, *O. R.*, I, 50-1, p. 1027.

[12] Although the Oxbow route would soon be relinquished in favor of the Central Overland, mail service to the southwest territories and southern California would eventually be restored to flow more directly via the Santa Fe Trail, thence the old Chihuahua Trail to Mesilla (and El Paso), where it connected with the road to Tucson and San Diego. Wayne R. Austerman, *Sharps Rifles and Spanish Mules: The San Antonio – El Paso Mail, 1851 – 1881*, (College Station: 1985), p. 196.

along the trail, he instructed the state militia commander to send an escort with a mail party bound for the states. The very next day Acting Territorial Governor Frank Fuller requested a second armed escort to accompany a small trainload of mail and passengers as far as Richard's bridge on the North Platte River. No Indian depredations had been experienced recently east of that point, therefore the mail party proceeded alone toward Fort Laramie, while the twenty-man escort turned back to Utah. The willingness of the Mormons to assist with the protection of the mail route influenced President Lincoln to authorize Young to raise a one hundred-man company of cavalry as a stop-gap measure until federal troops could be deployed to relieve them. The Utah Volunteers, headquartered at Fort Bridger, performed a valuable service by patrolling the trail between Salt Lake City and Independence Rock, rebuilding stations and bridges, and assisting emigrants along the way.[13]

Colonel Alexander, too, was aware of the reports of depredations west of Upper Platte Crossing, but had taken no action, probably because of his diminished garrison. The lack of cavalry notwithstanding, the Overland Mail Company complained to the secretary of war that the army was not doing enough to protect their interests. Cameron subsequently prodded Alexander to "afford every necessary protection in men and means,

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[13] The Utah Volunteers were paid by the government, but due to the exigencies of the situation, had to provide their own horses, equipment, and weapons. Colton, *Civil War in the Western Territories,* p. 162.

also report why this has not been previously done."[14] His admonishment spurred Alexander to send a patrol along the line with the means at his disposal. Lacking horses with which to mount his men, the colonel instructed Captain Alexander Murry and a detail of fourteen soldiers to ride aboard the Overland Mail coach as far as the crossing of the Sweetwater to investigate conditions. The detachment was to remain at the bridge to protect the mail as best it could until other arrangements could be made. Once there, Murry sent back word that the rumored raids along the road had been "greatly exaggerated," yet the route lay exposed to anyone bent on disrupting transcontinental communication. Colonel Alexander also explained that his reluctance to furnish the Overland Mail with arms and assistance was founded on his distrust of stage company employees, believing that many of them were secessionists. Governor Gilpin echoed that concern in a report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

> It is necessary to inform the department that the powerful company (Overland Express Company) is exclusively filled with rebel agents, and that all correspondence with the Territory by mail and telegraph has been handled by the enemy, and, when important, has been intercepted and suppressed.[15]

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[14] Thomas, April 24, 1862, *O. R.*, I, 50-1, p. 1027.

[15] Ibid.; Return for April 1862, Post Returns, Fort Laramie, Neb. Terr., Records of Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (hereinafter cited as Post Returns, Fort Larmie). Microfilm copies in library, Fort Laramie NHS; *ARSI*, 1862, p. 714.

Events in the Southwest, combined with the realization that communication with the Pacific Coast was in serious jeopardy, prompted the army to name Brigadier General James Craig, who had led a unit of Missouri cavalry during the Mexican War, to command all of the troops posted along the transcontinental route within the District of Kansas.[16] Designating a general officer to oversee that mission ensured better coordination of the available troops to keep the mails running, and more important, it was an indication of the War Department's renewed attention to the frontier. Craig arrived at Fort Laramie in June to establish his headquarters at that central point. Several of the state regiments enlisted for three years' service under federal authority were placed at Craig's disposal to bolster defenses along the overland mail route.

Reinforcements finally reached Fort Laramie in May when two companies of the Fourth U. S. Cavalry passed through on their way to relieve Murry and his infantrymen at Sweetwater Bridge. On the 30th, Lieutenant Colonel William O. Collins rode into the post at the head of 348 troopers of the Sixth Ohio Cavalry, sent to the frontier specifically to patrol the great thoroughfare. Later that same day, Company G, Eighth Kansas Cavalry

[16] Several adjustments were made in the geographical commands at the beginning of the war as the army responded to changing priorities and larger numbers of volunteer troops being posted in the West. The old Department of the West ceased to exist on July 3, 1861 when it was merged into the Western Department, an area embracing all of the territories west of the Mississippi River and east of the Rocky Mountains, including New Mexico. However, it too was subdivided into three separate departments in November, placing Fort Laramie in the Department of Kansas. That command included the state of Kansas, and the territories of Nebraska (including Fort Laramie), Colorado, and Dakota, as well as a large portion of Indian Territory. Just before Craig took command in April 1862, the department was reduced to a district within the Department of the Mississippi, but less than two months later, the order was countermanded to recreate

arrived to augment the permanent garrison. The Ohio troops paused at the fort only briefly before continuing their march west, posting detachments along the way at the telegraph and way stations as far as the Sweetwater. Collins created a strong point at Platte Bridge, and established his headquarters at Pacific Springs, near South Pass.[17]

Conditions were somewhat improved for travelers, yet the Indians—identified by Craig as Snakes (Shoshonis), Crows, Cheyennes, and some Sioux—continued raiding west of the Sweetwater, beyond the reach of his troops. Two men were reported killed by Indians near Rocky Ridge, in addition to six men being wounded and 160 head of stock stolen from emigrants at Ice Springs. In addition to stages being attacked at various points along the route, a company employee was killed while tending the mule herd at Green River. The real perpetrators were principally resident Utes and Shoshonis, but it would still be some time before California volunteers could reach the trouble area.

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the Department of Kansas. Raphael P. Thian, *Notes Illustrating the Military Geography of the United States 1813 – 1880*, (Austin: 1979), pp. 66-67, 107.

[17] Post Returns, May 1862, Fort Laramie; Major General H. W. Halleck to Brig. General S. D. Sturgis, April 6, 1862, *O. R.*, I, 8, p. 668; Collins initially raised the Seventh Ohio, but when recruitment failed to produce enough men to fill the regiment, that unit was disbanded and all available recruits were combined into Companies A, B, C, and D, Sixth Ohio Volunteer Cavalry. Assigned to the frontier early in 1862, these companies never served with the remainder of their regiment during the war and were designated as the First Independent Battalion, O. V. C. The army intended to send the battalion to the Southwest to resist Sibley's invasion, but Indian trouble on the Central Overland Trail caused them to be sent to Fort Leavenworth, thence up the trail via Fort Kearny and Julesburg to Fort Laramie. In summer 1863, Collins was authorized to recruit a second battalion for service in the far West. It was organized with the former battalion to form a new regiment, the Eleventh Ohio Volunteer Cavalry. Whitelaw Reid, *Ohio in the War: Her Statesmen, Generals, and Soldiers*, (Cincinnati: 1895), II, pp. 819-20 (hereinafter cited as *Ohio in the War*).

Not to be forgotten was that decision by Overland Mail Company to move its operations south to the route via Bridger Pass. By the time the volunteers arrived on the scene, preparations to change lines were well underway. General Craig, in fact, authorized small escorts from Fort Laramie to protect company employees while they transferred the rolling stock, mules, and other property southward to the new route. The through mail coaches began following the South Platte west from Julesburg on July 21, rather than turning north over the divide to Scott's Bluff. Suddenly, the army was challenged to protect not only the four hundred miles of road and telegraph line between Forts Laramie and Bridger, but the mail route through northeastern Colorado to that point as well. Even though he had not been specifically charged with the welfare of emigrants, Craig could hardly ignore that additional responsibility. He reported the intensifying situation to his superior at Fort Leavenworth:

> . . . I will retain upon the present route the larger portion of the troops to protect the telegraph line and the emigration, at least until the emigration, which consists principally of family trains, has passed through my district, I do this because the Indians evince a disposition to rob the trains and destroy the wires. Indeed I am satisfied that unless the Government is ready to abandon this route both for mails and emigrants an Indian war is inevitable. All the tribes in these mountains, except perhaps one of the Lenox bands are in bad humor; charge the Government

> with bad faith and breaches of promise in failing to send them an agent and presents. They have come in by hundreds from the Upper Missouri, attacked and robbed emigrants trains and mail station, and in one instance last week they robbed a mail station within two hours after a detachment of Colonel Collins' troops had passed, and carried the herdsman away with them to prevent him from notifying the troops for successful pursuit. That renegade white men are with them I have no doubt . . . I fear if the mail and all the troops leave this route the Indians will suppose they were frightened away, and will destroy the telegraph line and probably rob and murder such small parties as are not able to defend themselves.[18]

In his request for reinforcements, Craig suggested that a regiment of cavalry be sent via steamer to Fort Pierre to mount a joint expedition against the tribes suspected of sending forth many of the raiders. Until help arrived, however, he was granted authority to recruit a 100-man force of local mountaineers, and to re-enlist the Utah Volunteers. However, Craig's suspicions that rebel sympathizers were still at work in the region heightened when Brigham Young suddenly declined to cooperate, stating simply, "You need not expect anything for the present, Things are not right."[19]

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[18] Craig to General James G. Blunt, July 11, 1862, *O. R.*, I, 13, p. 468.

[19] Craig to Blunt, June 26, 1862, ibid., p. 451; Craig to Blunt, July 1, 1862, ibid., p. 458; Craig to Secretary of War Stanton, August 23, 1862, ibid., p. 592; Craig to Halleck, August 25, 1862, ibid., p. 596; Stanton to

In mid-August, two Santee Sioux boys hunting in far off Minnesota created circumstances that would have dramatic implications for the Plains. When the youths, acting impulsively on a dare, murdered five settlers near Redwood Agency, the tribal council members reacted by venting pent up grievances against the whites. The Sioux murdered scores of men, women, and children, destroying their homesteads in the process, during the rampage that followed. Local militia and regular forces quickly marshaled to contain the uprising, and eventually defeated the Sioux, but the news of the atrocities fueled already pervasive fears, especially in Nebraska, that raiding along the Overland Trail was but a precursor to a general outbreak. "Indians, from Minnesota to Pike's Peak, and from Salt Lake to near Fort Kearny, committing many depredations," Craig reported in an obvious overstatement of the true situation. Nevertheless, the raids in Minnesota served as an opportunity for him to renew his plea for reinforcements. Craig telegraphed the secretary of war, "If I concentrate my force [about 500 men] to go against the Indians, mail line, telegraph, and public property will be destroyed . . . I am building [a] new post on new mail route near Medicine Bow Mountain."[20]

At Craig's direction, Major John O'Ferrall, with a small force of the Ohio Volunteers, proceeded to the stage road and on July 20 established Fort Halleck at the

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Craig, August 27, 1862, ibid., p. 600; Craig also was told by Indians at Fort Laramie that, "Mormons good men; all others bad men," a further suggestion that the Saints were not entirely loyal to the federal government. Brigadier General W. Scott Ketchum to Halleck, April 27, 1862, ibid., p. 377.

northern base of Elk Mountain. Placing a permanent garrison at that critical point along the route enabled the cavalry to patrol the road for some distance in both directions and to respond to incursions as they arose. The post remained occupied with that task throughout the Civil War.

The troops under Craig's command were also critically short of ammunition, each man possessing only about ten rounds. Craig complained to his superiors that it would be foolish to mount an offensive against the Indians until his men could be adequately supplied. Moreover, he was disgusted with the Mormons and claimed "the mountain men are scarce and reluctant, and in my opinion both are to some extent disloyal. I am convinced that nearly all the French in these mountains are unfriendly to the Government. They are wary and prudent . . . ."[21] The general eventually grew to trust a few of the local traders, some of whom he invited to dine at the fort, but he locked up others who acted suspiciously. In their defense, however, experienced mountaineers better understood the dynamics of the frontier and appreciated that it was to their own benefit not to take sides against the Indians.

The "Indian scare" that swept the plains following the outbreak in Minnesota largely resulted from overactive imaginations. The Santee Sioux, inhabiting the country

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[20] Craig to Stanton, August 23, 1862, ibid., p. 592.

[21] Craig to Blunt, August 30, 1862, ibid., p. 608.

on the Red River of the North, actually had little to do with their brethren below the Missouri, and their troubles with the whites in no way translated into a general war by the western Teton bands. In fact, most of the depredations in the vicinity of the emigrant road were probably incidental to intertribal raiding among old enemies and the continuing competition for the ever-shrinking buffalo range. The Cheyennes and their Arapaho allies, for example, raided back and forth against the Shoshonis and Utes from Colorado to Utah. Crows occasionally swept down from the Big Horns to attack both the Sioux and Cheyennes, and vice versa. As it happened, the emigrant and mail routes crossed through the heart of the disputed territory that had once attracted the fur traders for the very reason so many tribal ranges converged there. Although it would appear that raiding parties did not go out of their way to molest whites, at the same time they were not averse to stealing livestock when opportunities arose. Depredations were usually a matter of whites being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Chance encounters by war parties moving through the country were quickly overblown and misinterpreted by whites as part of a widespread uprising. For example, when a Sioux war party set out to attack a Pawnee village on Loup Fork in central Nebraska, they encountered and killed an isolated farmer en route to their objective. The incident created instant panic among other white settlers,

many of them congregating for mutual defense at Columbus, while others abandoned their homesteads and fled the country entirely.[22]

In Colorado, however, it was a different matter. The many thousands of Pike's Peakers that had settled in the region during the first two years after the discovery of gold had attracted more of their kind. And behind them came farmers eager to take advantage of the rich lands bordering the foothills of the Rockies. Soon, women and children joined them and the formerly raw-boned mining society began to assume a new air of civilization. Late in 1861, Gilpin reported: "Property in mills, towns, farms, and cattle, has accumulated to the amount of many millions. This is scattered and located everywhere, in the gorges of the mountains, upon the great roads, along the river bottoms, and on both flanks of the snowy Cordillera." Alarmed by the rapid influx of whites, the Cheyennes and Arapahoes reacted by stealing livestock and threatening the interlopers. "Innumerable temptations and opportunities for isolated attack, for theft and debauchery, everywhere occur," Gilpin noted. "These bands of Indians constantly frequent the settled central region of Colorado, where they claim to have a right to remain permanently." [23] Indeed, the increasing animosity among the Cheyennes and Arapahos was perfectly legitimate, since the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty had granted the two affiliated tribes the

[22] For further discussions relative to the true nature of the 1862-63 "outbreak," see Grinnell, *Fighting Cheyennes*, pp. 128-32; Anthony McGinnis, *Counting Coup and Cutting Horses*, (Evergreen, Colo.: 1990), pp. 105-08.

right to roam that very region. Although the accord had provided whites safe passage through Indian lands, it had not granted them the right to settle there and build towns. Indian frustrations increased when the game was either taken by the newcomers, or disbursed onto the plains. Indian agent A. G. Boone attempted to forestall further trouble early in 1861 by coercing some of the leaders, including the prominent Cheyenne peace chief Black Kettle, to sign a treaty at Fort Wise. In return for relinquishing their great range all the way to the North Platte and west to the crest of the mountains, the two tribes were given a barren tract of land north of the Arkansas River in eastern Colorado and the promise of government rations. The reservation was called Sand Creek.

The change of the mail route left Fort Laramie 160 miles off the Overland Trail, and without mail service. The commanding officer attempted to compensate for the loss by periodically sending a wagon with an armed escort down to Julesburg to pick up the mail destined for the post. Initially, the details made only one trip, going by way of Scott's Bluff and Mud Springs, every two or three weeks. Within a year, however, the mail was arriving at noon on Mondays and leaving on Wednesday afternoons. Complaining about the poor service, an army wife wrote: "They, the driver and guard, go

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[23] All quotations are from William Gilpin to William P. Dole, June 19, 1861, *ARSI*, 1861-62, p. 710.

about 15 miles and camp, which means they light a fire, make some coffee, spread their blankets on the ground, picket their mules, and stay all night."[24]

The approach of winter found the Indians settling into camp at the conclusion of their summer migrations. No further depredations had occurred in recent months and it appeared to the army that the increased presence of troops in the region had the desired effect. But, when Indians suddenly attacked the cavalry detachment at Sweetwater Station on November 24, post commander Captain John A. Thompson responded by sending out fifty men of the Sixth Ohio from Fort Laramie to investigate. "We were just beginning to think what a nice time we would have here this winter, wrote an Ohio sergeant, "but all our hopes were blasted yesterday . . . . and a damd [sic] cold ride it will be too." The raiders, reportedly about 150 Shoshonis, had attacked the nine-man detachment at the station during the night and killed one trooper before vanishing into the mountains. Lieutenant Colonel Collins, commanding the Eleventh Ohio from his new

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[24] Presumably, the first stop was at Dripps' Ranch on the south bank of the North Platte, after which the mail parties camped successively at Ficklin's and Mud Springs, both of which were telegraph stations, and on Pole Creek. Catherine Weaver Collins, *An Army Wife Comes West*, (Denver: 1954), p. 20 (hereinafter cited as *Army Wife*); Twiggs still maintained his Upper Platte Agency at Dripps' Post. With Indian woman available there, it is not surprising that the mail drivers camped overnight so near the fort. This was probably the reason for Mrs. Collins subtle sarcasm; Soldiers detailed as express riders carried the mail by relays from Fort Laramie to the various detachments posted along the road as far as the Sweetwater. Major Thomas L. Mackey to Lieutenant Oliver S. Glenn, November 29, 1862, Order Book (actually a letter book), October 27, 1862 – April 8, 1863, typescript copy in vertical file, library, Fort Laramie NHS (hereinafter cited as 11th Ohio Letter Book); Captain Frank Eno, A. A. G. to Lt. Col. W. O. Collins, November 25, 1862, ibid.

headquarters at Fort Laramie, ordered each detachment at the stations west of the post to shuffle a few men to those above in the event of another raid.[25]

Despite isolated incidents, life at the post went on much as it had prior to the war. It was probably by design that the two companies of the Fourth Cavalry had been recalled to Fort Laramie in June 1862, after being relieved by the volunteers at Sweetwater Crossing. When the last members of the Tenth Infantry departed in the previous spring, higher command no doubt thought a core of regulars should remain in charge of the post until the Confederate threat subsided and the volunteers gained more experience. The regulars subsequently set the tone for dress and deportment at Fort Laramie. "They make the soldiers wear white gloves at this post and they cut around very fashionably," Lieutenant Caspar Collins noted in a letter to his mother back in Ohio. Awed by the professionalism of the regulars, Collins admitted that, "Any of the non-commissioned officers are better than a great many commissioned officers of Volunteers."[26] Nevertheless, a display of white gloves did not always reflect personal cleanliness among the newly arrived citizen soldiers. In one instance, soldiers of other companies began complaining that the men in Captain John Van Pearce's company of the Sixth Ohio were

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[25] The quotation is from Sergeant Sam R. McCleery to Sam, November 26, 1862, vertical file, library, Fort Laramie NHS; The soldier killed in action was Joseph Good. Lieutenant C. J. Vanada to Lieutenant Colonel William O. Collins, November 25, 1862, 11th Ohio Letter Book; Eno to W. O. Collins, November 29, 1862, ibid.

[26] Lieutenant Caspar Collins to Mother, September 21, 1862, letter no. 8, W. O. Collins Family Papers, Denver Public Library (collection hereinafter cited as Collins Papers).

so badly infested with lice that they refused to serve with them on guard duty. An abhorred Captain Thompson reproved Van Pearce to have his men clean their quarters twice a week under the supervision of an officer. The men were instructed to boil their clothing to rid them of vermin and to keep themselves clean and soldierly, rather than appearing like "a dirty awkward crowd of men resembling so many monuments of rags."[27]

A few of the volunteers perceived the regulars with a degree of envy, probably for their smartness in appearance and discipline, as well as for their generally more competent leadership. That equated to better food and living conditions. An unusual general order promulgated in September 1862 permitted willing volunteer soldiers to transfer to the Regular Army. However, when at least three members of the Sixth Ohio actually "defected," to the Fourth Cavalry, their officers filed an official complaint to higher authority that their men were being lured away illegally. The federal forces nevertheless took precedent over those of states and the order stood, which probably did

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[27] Post Adjutant to Captain John Van Pearce, Sixth Ohio V. C., November 13, 1862, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie, Records of U. S. Army Continental Commands 1821 - 1920, R. G. 393, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (hereinafter cited as LS, Fort Laramie).

little for the already strained relationship between the regulars and the volunteers at an isolated post like Fort Laramie.[28]

With the camp of the friendly Brules, dubbed the "Laramie Loafers," still nearby, not to mention the penchant soldiers had for collecting pets, the post became overrun with dogs and cats. Even a pet antelope strolled about the grounds. Lieutenant Collins cheerily informed his feline-loving mother that

> there are cats enough at this place to delight you for ten years. I saw several Indians barbecuing a very fine fat one this morning . . . The whole family was gathered around licking their lips in expectation of a treat. Boiled cat was to them an unusual delicacy which they properly appreciated . . . I wish they would eat half about the garrison and then commence on the dogs, not ours however."[29]

Just after Christmas Collins witnessed a scalp dance hosted by the resident Sioux. Indicative of the deep animosities among the tribes in the region, despite the Horse Creek Treaty, the young lieutenant recorded: "A war party of Indians have returned from fighting the Crows and have got 4 scalps. They have painted some of their ponies and

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[28] *General Orders No. 154*, Adjutant General's Office, September 9, 1862; Captain John A. Thompson to A.G., USA, November 14, 1862, LS, Fort Laramie; Post Adjutant to 2nd Lieutenant J. G. Reeves, March 21, 1863, ibid.

[29] C. Collins to Fanny, September 21, 1862, no. 8, Collins Papers.

have had several dances . . . They only danced one scalp. They stick it on a pole and as they dance around they shake their fists at it and scold it."[30]

Winter, as always, passed slowly for the inhabitants of Fort Laramie. "It is as dull as possible here at the fort," wrote Lieutenant Collins. Indeed, there was little to disturb the monotony, except in February when some two hundred Cheyennes arrived and set up camp near the post. That evening, two of the companies hosted a ball for the garrison to recognize the birthday of George Washington. The lonely young bachelor regretted there were only eleven white women at the post, "and all of them are married."[31]

After the Treaty of Fort Wise, the Cheyennes and Arapahos attempted to subsist on the plains primarily by hunting within the designated reservation, but game was scarce causing the tribes to fragment into small independent groups. By 1863, young men among these far-ranging parties became discouraged and angry with tribal leaders they felt had again acquiesced to the white man's insatiable greed. From time to time as

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[30] C. Collins to Aunt, December 28, 1862, no. 11, ibid. This incident contradicts the long-held perception that the so-called "Laramie Loafers" had settled into a benign existence at Fort Laramie. Author's note; When the post commissary condemned a large quantity of hard bread, Captain Thompson suggested it be issued to the local Sioux over a period of time. But his concern for making the Indians even more dependent on Fort Laramie was evident when he wrote, "I think it is useless to keep so much of it here and thereby keep so many lazy wretches hanging on the post." Captain John E. Thompson to Captain Frank Elm, A.A.G., Dept. of the Platte, December 29, 1862, LS, Fort Laramie.

[31] C. Collins to Mother, February 23, 1863, no. 12, Collins Papers; This band of Cheyennes was probably among those that had not signed the Fort Wise Treaty and remained in the Upper Platte country. There is also evidence suggesting that the Cheyennes belonged to a band headed by Bull Bear that hunted, not very successfully, along the North Platte that winter. Agent John Loree hosted some of these same Indians in August 1863, convincing them at that time to join in the peace council planned that fall. John Evans to Dole, October 14, 1863, ARSI, 1863-64, *House Ex. Doc.*, 38th Cong., 1st Sess. (serial 1182), p. 240, 248 (hereinafter cited as ARSI, with date).

opportunities arose, the warriors committed depredations on settlements, isolated ranches, and on travelers. But, the very lack of cohesiveness among the tribes made it all but impossible to identify and punish the guilty parties. Near Fort Lyon, (formerly Fort Wise), raiders struck the Cotterel, Viceroy, & Company Stage Line carrying mail between Kansas City and Denver, and in March, Cheyennes forcibly extracted provisions and other goods from settlers in Weld County, near Cache la Poudre River. Within the next few months, Utes stole animals from the Overland Mail Company near both Forts Halleck and Laramie, and raided the stations at Rock Creek, Medicine Bow, and Cooper Creek. Penning a report from his Denver office, the new governor of Colorado Territory, John Evans, summed up the difficulty:

> "Depredations have thus far been committed by single bands, or small parties, on their own account without any general responsibility of the tribes to which they belong . . . the Indians talk very bitterly of the whites—say they have stolen their ponies and abused their women, taken their hunting grounds, and that they expected that they would have to fight for their rights."[32]

Reliable information received from a band of Arapahos in spring 1863 indicated that their people, along with bands of Sioux and Cheyennes, planned to hold a council for

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[32] Ibid.; Information concerning the raids is found in ibid., pp. 240-41and in a report by J. H. Jones, Overland Stage Line, July 7, 1863, *O. R.*, I, 22, p. 370.

the purpose of discussing a united war against the whites to drive them from the plains. Evans alerted John Loree, who had replaced Thomas Twiss at the Upper Platte Agency, of these developments. He suggested they jointly attempt to convene their own meeting with the Indians to settle grievances. In so doing, they could attempt to convince the Cheyenne and Arapaho bands not already party to the Fort Wise Treaty to settle permanently on the Sand Creek reservation.

Assembling the scattered bands, however, proved difficult. The commission, composed of Evans, Loree, and Samuel G. Colley, agent for the Upper Arkansas, hired as messengers two experienced plainsmen trusted by the Indians. Elbridge Gerry was a reputable trader known for his close relationship with the Cheyennes and Arapahos, while Antoine Janis had long been a trader, interpreter, and staple figure around Fort Laramie. The old Frenchman was once again called upon to use his considerable influence with the Indians scattered over the vast domain from the headwaters of the Republican all the way north to Powder River. Loree and a stand-in for Janis, who took sick and was unable to make the trip, succeeded in convincing several bands to meet at Julesburg on the first of September where, incidentally, their annuities would be distributed. At that, only one northern band actually showed up. The others, hunting buffalo in the vicinity of Beaver Creek, informed Gerry that a recent wave of disease had

so decimated their children that they could not make the journey to Julesburg. Moreover, they were piqued that a sentry at Fort Larned had recently killed a drunken Cheyenne man when he attempted to ride into the post. The headmen flatly told Gerry he could inform the commissioners that the Cheyennes would never sign a treaty and would never cede the country between the Republican and the Smoky Hill, though they acknowledged the loss of the South Platte region already. When presented with the proposition of living on the reservation "like white men," one Cheyenne defiantly countered that, "they were not reduced quite that low yet." Despite their initial lack of interest, Loree was eventually able to obtain the signatures of leaders representing many of the bands residing north of the South Platte. In October, Evans confidently informed the commissioner of Indian Affairs, "This will accomplish the design of the commission in securing the general written assent to a settlement of these Indians on their reservation on the Arkansas river [sic], and an undoubted cession of their claims to all other parts of the country."[33] So far as the Cheyennes and Arapahos were concerned, the agreement effectively nullified the terms of the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty.

The peace talks, designed to corral the Cheyennes and Arapahos in the wastes of eastern Colorado, brought a temporary calm to the central plains by summer's end. When a party of soldiers gave chase to Ute warriors who had run off a number of horses near

[33] The first quotation is from Evans to Dole, October 14, 1863, *ARSI*, 1863-64, p. 244, the second is found

Fort Halleck in June, the raiders turned on their pursuers, killing one soldier and wounding four others. A minor expedition was subsequently sent out from a new station on the Cache la Poudre called "Camp Collins," but failed to catch up with troublesome Utes. However, the timely return of a delegation of their leaders from Washington, D. C. impressed the warriors with the ultimate power of the government to crush them if necessary. At the same time commissioners were meeting with the Cheyennes and Arapahos, other delegates from the Indian Bureau concluded a treaty with the Utes. By October, Governor Evans confidently reported, "there seems to be a period of quiet among the Indians, and a general feeling of security from danger in the public mind."[34]

Despite the governor's optimism, Colonel Collins maintained cautious vigilance over the routes of travel that fall, a job made all the more difficult after the withdrawal of the two companies of the Fourth U. S. Cavalry from Fort Laramie in April, along with the Ninth Kansas Cavalry from the Overland Mail Route. Their departure left only Companies A and C, Sixth Ohio at the post, and two additional companies scattered in detachments along the Pacific Telegraph line. Other companies of Ohio troops guarded the central portion of the stage line from Camp Collins all the way to Fort Bridger. Colonel John M. Chivington, commanding the District of Colorado by that time,

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on p. 243.

[34] Ibid., pp. 239, 243-44.

informed his superior in September that there was "ample protection, but no more than ample."[35]

The departure of the last regulars from Fort Laramie may have placed an additional burden on Collins, but at the same time it indicated the confidence of higher command that he and his men had gained the experience necessary to manage affairs on their own. That the time served alongside regular troops had not been lost on the volunteers was reflected in Mrs. Collins' observation that, "These, that are here, are well equipped in every particular and well drilled, and in their appearance and bearing—and make a fine appearance on dress parade."[36] Her husband had earlier gained permission to recruit a second battalion for his regiment, which he accomplished during June and July 1863. Once the second battalion was organized, it was combined with the old Sixth on the frontier to form a new regiment, designated the Eleventh Ohio Volunteer Cavalry.[37] The second battalion arrived at Fort Laramie in mid-October, but one of the officers, Lieutenant George C. Finney, was unimpressed with his new home. "Fort Laramie is not much of a place," he wrote, "and Nebraska Try [Territory], what I have seen of it is not

[35] Colonel John M. Chivington to Major General John M. Schofield, Department of the Missouri, September 12, 1863, *O. R.*,I, 22, p. 529.

[36] Collins, *Army Wife*, p. 25.

[37] Reid, *Ohio in the War*, p. 820.

worth living in. I would not give the amount of ground occupied by a house in Cadiz for the Territory I have passed over."[38]

Having more men at his disposal, Collins decided to organize some of them into a battery of artillery. "I have gone into an artillery battery called the Mountain Battery," wrote Private Hervey Johnson. "It is composed of forty-eight men from the different companies. Our guns are called Mountain Howitzers. We have but four guns. Have been drilling some with the artillery. Not made much progress yet." [39] The battery was carried on the returns as an independent unit until January, when bad weather prevented further drill and forced Collins to order the members to rejoin their respective companies. To his credit, the colonel had the foresight to prepare a cadre of men trained to use the howitzers should they be needed in the future.

Christmas 1863 was observed with an elaborate dinner hosted by Company D and a party for the officers later that evening at the recently completed cottage occupied by Sutler Ward's manager, William Bullock. By New Year's night, the temperature had

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[38] Lieutenant George C. Finney to Richard, October 13, 1863, vert. files, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

[39] William E. Unrau, ed., *Tending the Talking Wire: A Buck Soldier's View of Indian Country 1863 – 1866*, (Salt Lake City: 1979), p. 59 (hereinafter cited as *Tending the Talking Wire*); The 12-pounder Model 1841 mountain howitzer had a bronze tube measuring approximately 33 inches long and weighing 220 pounds. The bore was 4.62 inches in diameter. The tube was mounted on a two-wheeled oak carriage painted olive drab. The gun could fire three types of ammunition: explosive shell, case-shot, and canister. It had a maximum effective range of approximately 1,000 yards with shell and about 800 yards with spherical case. The anti-personnel canister round was fired at massed troops at point-blank range. Fired from the short-barreled howitzer, it was probably effective up to about 200 yards. The prairie carriage, having a wider wheel base than the mountain type, weighed an additional 287 pounds complete with implements. The mountain howitzer was preferred for frontier service because of its comparatively light weight and ability

plummeted to twenty-nine degrees below zero. The military road to Fort Halleck had been closed by snow for five weeks, as was the emigrant trail to South Pass. All the detachments at the various telegraph and stage stations were stranded and hunkered down for the winter. Nothing was moving over the frozen white wilderness of the plains and no news reached the fort, except by occasional telegrams, most of which were just routine army business. Johnson lamented, "There is so little to do here, that the boys just lay around and do nothing but wear fine clothes."[40]

That would soon change. Already there were rumors circulating on the frontier that the Comanches, Kiowas, Apaches, Northern Arapahos, some of the Sioux, and all of the Cheyennes had once again met on the Arkansas to discuss commencing a war against the whites. It was reported through Indian channels that the tribes had agreed to go to war in the spring when the grass greened, and arms, ammunition, and other supplies could be procured.[41] It was yet another ominous indication of what Evans had been predicting for months. Even though the army had sent more troops to the intermountain district, the Indians seemed undeterred in their resolve to take back the plains.

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to traverse rough terrain, either on its wheels, or disassembled and packed on three mules. *Ordnance Manual for the Use of the Officers of the United States Army*, (Philadelphia: 1861), pp. 20, 54, 75, 386.

[40] Uhrau, ed., *Tending the Talking Wire*, p. 93.

[41] This intelligence was reported by Robert North, a white frontiersman married into the Arapahos. Evans to Dole, November 10, 1863, *O. R.*, I, 34-4, p. 97.

Chapter 9

"This Requires Vigorous War"

While discontentment smoldered among the Indians from the Platte to the Arkansas, white prospectors were extending their quests for riches into areas farther north along the Rocky Mountains. Recent years witnessed the development of a rich mining area in the vicinity of South Pass, and in 1862 other parties discovered promising gold deposits in the Boise Basin of Idaho. Later that year, miners examining the country east of the Bitterroot Range announced yet another strike along the Beaverhead River in southwestern Montana. As news of these discoveries flashed across the West, prospectors disgruntled with the fruits of their labors in Colorado, Nevada, and elsewhere began migrating to the new diggings, creating a backwash of adventurers streaming eastward from Washington and Oregon Territories. And, despite the Civil War, or perhaps because

of it, other hopefuls jumped off from both St. Joseph and Omaha, taking the Oregon route west to Fort Hall, where they departed from the old emigrant road to follow a new trail northward to Montana. Still others chose to take the South Platte and Overland Stage Road to the junction of the Oregon Trail at Fort Bridger. Within just two years, camps at Bannack, Alder Gulch, and Virginia City boasted populations numbering in the thousands.

The traffic following the old Mormon Trail on the north side of the Platte apparently increased enough to inspire James G. Chapman, an Omaha businessman having political connections, to submit a proposal to the War Department to construct both a ferry and a bridge across the North Platte near Fort Laramie. He offered to establish a new ferry immediately; the bridge would be constructed within two years. Chapman suggested that government freight trains might also be routed from Fort Leavenworth northward to Omaha, and from that point to Fort Halleck, via Fort Laramie, to Salt Lake City. It went without saying that Chapman and other businessmen would stand to benefit by making Omaha the principal eastern terminus for overland travel. Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs concurred with the plan, but stipulated that all government trains and troops would be exempt from the toll since the bridge would be located within the military reservation. The secretary of war approved Chapman's application on June 10, 1863, but for reasons that are not clear, the project never

materialized.[1] Consequently, government trains and most other traffic followed the time-honored trail paralleling the south side of the Platte.

Meantime, one of the Montana miners, John Bozeman, set out to find a shorter, more direct path to the new gold fields. Leaving Virginia City in spring 1863 with only one companion, Bozeman mapped out an alternate passage following down the Yellowstone River almost to the Stillwater, where that stream departed southeasterly, rounding the Big Horn Mountains and crossing the upper reaches of Powder River to intersect the North Platte near the mouth of La Bonte Creek. That location, approximately fifty miles above Fort Laramie, was already occupied by a telegraph station and provided a convenient connection with the Oregon Trail. Bozeman had only to camp near the confluence to await passing trains, then attempt to persuade some of the emigrants to form a new party that he would guide over his shorter, but as yet undeveloped, route.[2]

The difficult terrain traversed by the Bozeman Trail was but one of its drawbacks. The journey was made all the more perilous because it passed directly through lands designated for the Crow Nation, and the southern portion of the trail lay in Sioux

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[1] General Montgomery C. Meigs to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, June 6, 1863, Correspondence, Fort Laramie, 1849 – 1874, Records of the Quartermaster General's Office, Record Group 92, National Archives, bound transcriptions and microfilm available in library, Fort Laramie NHS.

[2] Bozeman's guide was John M. Jacobs, an experienced mountaineer familiar with the Yellowstone and Big Horn country. Dorothy M. Johnson, *The Bloody Bozeman: The Perilous Trail to Montana's Gold*, (Missoula, Mont.: 1983), pp. 50, 56; Famed mountaineer Jim Bridger had established a rude ferry near the site of La Bonte Station in 1857, which probably influenced Bozeman and Jacobs to select that area as the

territory. Were that not enough, the Crows and Sioux remained implacable enemies, the latter having encroached on the hunting lands of their neighbors for decades. The hotly contested region was no place for whites, nor had they any legal right to be there since the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty provided only for the United States Government to establish new roads within the recognized Indian territories. John Bozeman, through his own ignorance, had unwittingly ignited the fuse to a powder keg.

The Platte was not the only avenue to the Montana and Idaho mines. When adventuresome souls in the upper Midwest and Great Lakes regions learned of the new strikes, they either trekked overland or rode steamers up the Missouri to reach western Montana. The threat of these new interlopers alarmed the Teton Sioux in Dakota Territory. The inordinately large numbers of whites coming to the region lent credibility to the rumors of further conquest being spread by displaced Santees and Yanktonais that had fled from Minnesota to join their western kinsmen in the wake of the 1862 uprising. Although white settlement of any significance extended only as far as Yankton, the seven bands of the Tetons were determined to resist any further invasion of the lands they themselves had usurped from the Arikaras and Cheyennes half a century earlier.

The army had exacted swift retribution for the troubles in Minnesota. In the summer of 1862, a command of state militia led by Colonel Henry Hastings Sibley closed

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departure point for their trail to Montana. Grace Raymond Hebard and E. A. Brininstool, *The Bozeman*

with the Sioux in a series of skirmishes. In the decisive action at Wood Lake, the remaining perpetrators of the Minnesota outbreak were killed or captured, or they escaped west to the plains. The following season Sibley, since promoted to the rank of brigadier general, crossed the Red River at the head of a three thousand-man force and marched on the surviving hostiles, gathered near Devil's Lake. Concurrently, another brigade commanded by army regular Brigadier General Alfred Sully, advanced northward from Nebraska following the Missouri River. While the department commander, Major General John Pope, did not intend to engage the Teton bands, he nevertheless wanted Sully to skirt their territory, thereby discouraging them from joining the Santees and Yanktonais. When the latter turned abruptly southwest in an attempt to throw off their pursuers, Sibley pressed hard forcing them to turn and fight again. He estimated that his troops killed approximately 150 warriors, and destroyed an immense amount of equipment and food prior to returning to their stations in Minnesota. Late that summer, Sully also confronted the Indians and dealt them a disastrous defeat at Whitestone Hill.

Still, the will of the Sioux was unbroken and the campaigns further inspired the Teton bands to resist white incursions. But, that was to become increasingly difficult after Sully established new forts along the northern emigrant route, roughly on a line from

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Trail, (Glendale, Calif.: 1960), I, p. 81.

Devil's Lake to the Yellowstone. General of the Army Henry W. Halleck suggested to the commander of the Department of the Northwest, encompassing Fort Laramie, that Sully station garrisons at two posts, one on the Yellowstone near the mouth of the Big Horn River, and another where the Bozeman Trail intersected Powder River. Major General John Pope, however, doubted the new forts could be established until the logistics of getting supplies to those remote points could be worked out. The plan was therefore deferred to the following year. Meanwhile, the post commander at Fort Laramie would have to provide whatever assistance he could to protect the miners.[3]

Lieutenant Colonel Collins correctly anticipated that more gold-seekers would pass through Fort Laramie during the 1864 season. Considering the mood of the Indians, he also predicted that it would be necessary to provide escorts to the prospectors. The Eleventh Ohio still had not been recruited up to full strength, even though Collins was charged with protecting both the Overland Stage Line and the emigrant road via South

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[3] General H. W. Halleck to Major General John Pope, March 14, 1864, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, (Washington, D. C), v. 34-2, pp. 608 (series hereinafter cited as *O. R.* with volume); Pope to Halleck, March 20, 1864, ibid., p. 678; The geographical boundaries of the various military departments witnessed frequent reconfigurations during the Civil War in response to changing needs. Whereas Fort Laramie, Nebraska Territory has been assigned to the Department of Kansas at the outbreak of the conflict, it was brought under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Northwest, which included the states of Wisconsin and Minnesota, and the Territories of Nebraska and Kansas, with the establishment of that area on September 6, 1862. Territorial lines were redrawn with the creation of Idaho Territory effective March 3, 1863, thus Fort Laramie gained a new geographical designation, though army administration remained unchanged. Department headquarters was located first at St. Paul, and later at Milwaukee. Raphael P. Thian, *Notes Illustrating the Military Geography of the United States 1813 – 1880*, (Austin: 1979), pp. 82, 125.

Pass. Collins's motives for providing artillery training to some of his men were fully justified when department headquarters assigned additional mountain howitzers to defend the garrisons along the mail route. Accordingly, more cavalrymen could be shifted to escort duty on the Oregon and Bozeman Trails.[4]

Recruitment of the new regiment continued unabated back in Ohio, and by January the garrison at Fort Laramie had increased to five companies. A melancholy soldier wrote home, "Fort larama is ver[y] nise plase, but very lonsom [sic].[5] Noting that the mercury in the available thermometers froze each night during January, some of the men conducted an experiment by pouring a quantity of whiskey in a tin cup. "It froze solid in twenty minutes, and was tossed about like a brickbat." The soldiers calculated that the temperature had reached fifty to sixty degrees below zero.[6]

The isolation, overcrowding, and notoriously long winters of that region combined to stress discipline among the new men to the breaking point. When two companies were ordered out on March 9 to patrol the road above the post, the men of Company E got drunk and rebelled just as they were about to depart. Attempting to

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[4] Major General S. R. Curtis to Lieutenant Colonel William O. Collins, March 5, 1864, *O. R.*, I, 34-2, p. 511.

[5] The first quotation is from George C. Finney to Richard, October 13, 1863, vertical files, library, Fort Laramie NHS; The second is in William Henry Cowell Journal, typescript in library, Fort Laramie NHS (hereinafter cited as Cowell Journal). Cowell was a sergeant in Company B, Eleventh Ohio.

[6] Whitelaw Reed, *Ohio in the War: Her Statesmen, Generals, and Soldiers*, (Cincinnati: 1895), p. 821 (hereinafter cited as *Ohio in the War*).

restore order, a sergeant shot and seriously wounded one man who attacked him with a knife. The officer of the day, First Lieutenant Edwin L. Pettyjohn, immediately rushed from the guardhouse to assist. Private John Sulivan, mounted on his horse, fired his revolver at Pettyjohn, but missed, then struck the officer on the head with his pistol, causing a bloody scalp wound. An alarmed Collins, expecting the rest of the drunken mob to join the fray, ordered the other four companies to assemble under arms. The expected confrontation failed to gain steam, yet Sulivan remained out of control, riding about and threatening all comers with his pistol. As the Irishman galloped full-tilt across the parade ground, Collins suddenly ordered the entire battalion to open fire on him with their Spencer repeating rifles. A soldier who witnessed the affair scoffed, "Something near a thousand shots were fired at him but he being mounted, and his horse running at a full gallop only received one shot which took effect in his thigh . . . several balls passed through his clothes, and one wounded his horse very badly . . . and that before he got halfway across it [parade ground]." Sulivan was taken to the hospital, where he died of his wound several days afterward.[7] The absurd incident proved one thing to Collins--his

[7] First-hand accounts of this incident are found in William E. Unrau, (ed.) *Tending the Talking Wire: A Buck Soldier's View of Indian Country 1863 – 1866*, (Salt Lake City: 1990), p. 103 (hereinafter cited as *Tending the Talking Wire*) and Cowell Journal. Cowell recorded that the winter had been particularly severe at times, resulting in several men having their hands or feet frozen. One unfortunate victim had both legs amputated by the post surgeon. He noted that John Sulivan died on March 18 and was buried in the post cemetery that same afternoon. Cowell Journal.

men needed more target practice before confronting Indians. He immediately issued an order directing the garrison to conduct target practice for ten consecutive days.[8]

The chances for action became more apparent within a month when elements of the First Colorado Cavalry had two minor engagements with Cheyennes. Lieutenant Geoge Eayre, posted at Camp Weld on the outskirts of Denver, was dispatched to western Kansas to track down a raiding party accused of running off livestock from a freighter's herd on Sand Creek. The trail eventually led Eayre and his men to a small camp of five lodges on the Republican River. A brief fight ensued when the cavalry approached the Indians, who fled after killing one of Eayre's men. Even though the Indians and their families escaped unharmed, Eayre re-captured twenty head of stock and destroyed the contents of the camp. The Cheyennes later denied they had stolen the cattle, rather the oxen had strayed from the whites and were discovered on the open plains by the hunters out searching for buffalo. Since there was never any evidence that Indians had indeed stolen the animals, it was quite likely the herders blamed the Cheyennes to cover their own neglect. Nevertheless, ex-Methodist preacher John M. Chivington, by then a colonel

[8] Cowell Journal; The arrival of spring and the lure of gold in Colorado also caused some of the volunteers to desert. Five Company H men bound for Denver were apprehended by a detachment sent out from Fort Laramie. ibid.

commanding the District of Colorado, made the most of the incident by boasting to his superior that Eayre had returned with a hundred head of stock.[9]

A short time later, a party of Southern Cheyenne Dog Soldiers were riding northward to help their kinsmen avenge the death of Brave Wolf, a Northern Cheyenne killed in combat with Crows the previous summer. On their way, the Dog Soldiers found four mules wandering the plains near the South Platte. The Indians drove the animals along with them, but that evening a white man arrived at their camp claiming the stock to be his. The Cheyennes said they were willing to give up the mules, but requested a gift as compensation for their trouble. Disgruntled with the proposition, the man rode off to a nearby cavalry camp where he reported to Lieutenant Clark Dunn, First Colorado, that the Dog Soldiers had stolen his mules. Dunn led a platoon of troopers after the Indians and caught up with them late the following afternoon, April 12, just as they were crossing the South Platte near a point known as Fremont's Orchard. The lieutenant later stated that the Indians showed a disposition to fight when he attempted to approach them, a claim the Cheyennes afterward denied. According to their version, which rings true, the soldiers charged without warning and opened fire. The Dog Soldiers lived up to their reputation as fighters by felling four troopers, two of them mortally. The body of a sergeant left on

[9] George B. Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, (Norman: 1971), pp. 138-39.

the field was stripped and decapitated. The act was a harbinger of brutality to come, on both sides.[10]

On the nineteenth, other Cheyennes extorted goods from the occupants of a ranch east of Camp Sanborn, and murdered a man at another homestead farther down the South Platte. One of Chivington's staff subsequently told Agent Gerry to warn the Indians the army would respond to these incidents by attacking any and all Cheyennes, found outside the reservation. These incidents, along with tensions in the Big Horn country, set the stage for a general Indian war that was to stain the plains with human blood for the next fifteen years.

News of these events prompted Collins to order out patrols in an attempt to intercept the Cheyennes. Captain Peter W. Van Winkle led a scout comprising one hundred cavalrymen out of Fort Laramie in pursuit of raiders reported to be near the Denver road, but failed to find them. However, unbeknown to Collins, the Indians had been caught so unaware by Dunn's attack that part of the group became frightened and returned to their village on Beaver Creek in northern Kansas. The others, perhaps fifteen warriors, were spotted a few days later near Pine Bluffs, in what is now the southeast

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[10] Fremont's Orchard was named for a grove of trees along the South Platte that appeared much like an orchard when the explorer John C. Fremont viewed it at a distance during his reconnaissance to the Rocky Mountains in 1843-44. It was located approximately eighty miles northeast of Denver. Grinnell, *Fighting Cheyennes*, pp. 137-42, 140n.5; See also William H. Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West 1803 1863*, (New Haven: 1959), p. 101; Collins to Chivington, April 18, 1864, *O. R.*, I, 34-3, p. 219.

corner of Wyoming, moving toward Crow country to carry out their plan. Chivington, meantime, struck the main trail and dogged the Indians back to the Republican. Even though he was unable to force the Indians into an engagement, probably because the people of the village scattered to the four winds, he had at least forced them away from the Colorado settlements.[11]

The establishment of Fort Laramie at the junction of the respective tribal hunting territories in 1834 had been a carefully calculated business decision on the part of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. That strategic location allowed the traders to deal with the greatest number of Indians for optimum commercial advantage. It worked well for the mountaineers, whose success, if not their very survival, demanded that tribal antagonisms be set aside when the Indians of warring bands visited the fort. But the army found the location only complicated its mission. The Horse Creek Treaty notwithstanding, old tribal rivalries had not diminished, and in subsequent years the once cordial relationships the whites enjoyed with the Sioux, Cheyennes, and Utes had gone sour.

Collins and his Eleventh Ohio may not have fully appreciated their situation, but senior commanders did. Major General Samuel R. Curtis, commanding the Department of Kansas, recognized the potential for conflict when he predicted on March 18 that "an

[11] Crowell Journal; First Lieutenant George W. Hawkins to Lieutenant G. H. Stilwell, A. A. A. G., Dist. of Colorado, April 25, 1864, *O. R.*, I, 34-3, p. 292; Chivington to Collins, April 21, 1864, ibid., p. 252; Grinnell, *Fighting Cheyennes*, p. 142.

immense emigration is concentrating in the Platte Valley en route for the Bannock mines . . . and they are liable to create trouble with the tribes northwest of Laramie, whose territory they will undoubtedly invade."[12] Writing from his Milwaukee headquarters two days later, Major General John Pope advised that the eastern and western Sioux bands had reportedly formed a powerful alliance "and will, in all likelihood, concentrate on the upper Missouri . . . to obstruct navigation and prevent the passage of emigrants up the river or across the plains . . . There is little doubt that such is now the intention of these bands."[13] Robert North, married to a Cheyenne woman and living with the tribe, informed authorities that Sioux warriors swore they would resist any attempt by the whites to make a road through either the Yellowstone or Powder River regions. Meantime, and without consulting Collins, Chivington publicly announced that Collins would provide escorts for the Montana and Idaho-bound emigrants. He concealed whatever reservations he had about that commitment when he assured Nebraska district commander Brigadier General Robert B. Mitchell that, "my officers and men are equal to any duty here."[14]

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[12] Major General Samuel R. Curtis to Pope, March 18, 1864, ibid., p. 653.

[13] Pope to Halleck, March 20, 1864, *O. R.*, I, 34-2, p. 678.

[14] North's statement is with Governor John Evans to Curtis, June 16, 1864, *O. R.*, I, 34-4, p. 422; That the respective district commanders were unclear as to who actually had authority over Fort Laramie is evident in this correspondence. Collins to Brigadier General Robert B. Mitchell, April 25, 1864, included in Mitchell to Captain John Williams, April 26, 1864, *O. R.*, I, 34-2, 305.

Collins advocated opening the Bozeman Trail on the score that it reduced the distance to Bannack by two hundred miles, compared with the Idaho route. He admitted, however, that any emigrants making the journey would have to be accompanied by strong military escorts. Whether or not the Ohio lawyer-turned-soldier was familiar with the provisions of the 1851 treaty, he accurately predicted there would be trouble when large numbers of whites began penetrating the last prime hunting grounds east of the Big Horn Mountains. Moreover, he had already observed that army deserters and secessionists were fleeing the war and coming west in search of gold, portending even more problems with the Indians. As he noted, "even good men make trouble through ignorance." The army, he said, should control the migration by guiding parties along a designated route. Collins in fact suggested that he be allowed to personally lead that escort, claiming to have gained a useful knowledge of the country and an understanding of the Indians that would be advantageous in avoiding problems with the Indians. Mitchell, however, doubted that the emigrants could be controlled under any circumstances, considering the civilians to be numerous enough to provide their own protection.[15]

In Colorado, meanwhile, the Cheyennes continued to foment dissent among the other tribes. One reliable mountaineer and trader, Jack Jones, alias William McGaa, who

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[15] Curtis to Mitchell April 28, 1864, ibid., p. 330; Captain Eugene F. Ware reinforced the view that many of the west-bound emigrants in 1863-64 were "either deserters from the army, North or South, were out for

had lived among the Cheyennes for two decades, identified them as the ringleaders of the effort to build an Indian alliance during the previous two or three years.

> They said the whites had robbed them of their country by settling here, and given them nothing for it, and that they would stand by no treaty, or make no treaty, but wanted their country again. Last October they commenced to gather ammunition, and made a league with the Arapahoes and Sioux, and said they would trade for all they could get, and then plunder for more. The inducements were to get stock, and that they would make the white man's heart bleed, and make him cry tears of blood.[16]

Governor Evans responded to the threat of an uprising by requesting federal authority to raise an additional regiment of cavalry for one hundred days' service to reinforce the troops already posted along the Santa Fe Trail and the Overland Stage Line. He also established "safe" camps for friendly Indians at Forts Lyon and Larned, and on the Cache la Poudre, at the same time notifying the friendly tribes to rendezvous at those points to avoid punishment. Evans further suggested that any Sioux who wished to remain peaceful should go to the Upper Platte Agency below Fort Laramie for

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cash only." He added that most did not care whether or not the federal government won the war. Eugene F. Ware, *The Indian War of 1864*, (New York: 1960), p. 55.

[16] Governor John Evans to Curtis, June 16, 1864, *O. R.*, I, 34-4, p. 422.

government protection. The effect, he believed, would be that "others will join them, and we will bring it to a close. This requires vigorous war and it can be effected soon."[17]

Just as the vanguard of the spring migration reached Fort Laramie in early April, General Mitchell made a direct attempt to mitigate the numbers of Indians his forces might have to face in a war that by then seemed unavoidable. Thus far, the Sioux of southern Nebraska Territory and northern Kansas, remembering the drubbing Harney had dealt them in 1855, remained largely on the sidelines. Mitchell sent word inviting leaders of the Ogallalas and Brules to meet with him at Camp Cottonwood on the Platte River. This post, later to be re-named Fort McPherson, had been established the previous September by elements of the Seventh Iowa Volunteer Cavalry, one of the regiments raised especially to protect the frontier in the wake of the Minnesota outbreak.[18]

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[17] Ibid.; John Hunter, a resident of the Fort Laramie area who had married into a Sioux band, blamed Agent John Loree for the dissent in that tribe. Just why they rejected Loree is not clear, but Hunter informed Mitchell that if a new agent were appointed, he had no doubt the Indians would abide by a treaty. Mitchell to Captain John Williams, Dept. of Kansas, March 24, 1864, *O. R.*, 34-2, p. 270; Captain Eugene Ware commented that Loree "did not stay around the agency, and confined his time and services, as was said, to keeping in a safe place, and drawing his salary." Ware, *Indian War of 1864*, p. 219. This strongly suggests that Loree was incompetent and not tending to the needs of the Indians for whom he was responsible.

[18] Camp Cottonwood, founded by Major George M. O'Brian, Seventh Iowa on September 27, 1863, was located on the right bank of the Platte River, eight miles above the juncture of the North and South Platte Rivers. The post was initially named Cantonment McKean in honor of the current district commander, Brigadier General Thomas J. McKean, but was changed in February 1864, and again on May 18, 1864 to Fort Cottonwood. Two years later, it was designated Fort McPherson. It was officially abandoned by the army in 1880, though the national cemetery established there in 1873 is still active. Robert W. Frazer, *Forts of the West*, (Norman: 1977), p. 88; The Seventh Iowa was authorized in late 1862. Eight companies were recruited by April of the following year and were mustered into federal service. The last four companies

Mitchell and his adjutant arrived at the post on April 16 to find the Sioux already close by. On hand were three skilled interpreters, and it was said that one of the warriors also had a working knowledge of English. Seventeen chiefs, with an escort of approximately eighty warriors, rode to the council site the next day. There they were met by General Mitchell, a large bearded man outfitted in full dress uniform, complete with cross sash, looking "like a king," according to one witness. Among the Sioux was the revered warrior chief Spotted Tail, representing the Brule band, and Bad Wound, head chief of the Oglalas. Also present was Two Strike of the Minneconjous and Big Mandan, speaking for the Missouri River Sioux. The council began amicably enough, until Mitchell responded to Spotted Tail's inquiry as to why he had asked them to come there. Mitchell said bluntly that the government wanted them to keep out of the Platte Valley, thereby not endangering wagon trains on the Oregon Trail. Furthermore, he told the chiefs, they were not to cross the valley without notifying the nearest army post so that an escort could accompany them to the opposite side. The chiefs summarily rejected his demand, stating that they had already agreed to allow whites to travel that road unmolested. Besides, they had always traded at posts in the valley, including Fort Laramie and the neighboring civilian establishments, and they were not about to concede

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were comprised of the independent company of Sioux City Cavalry and four companies of the Fourteenth Iowa Infantry. Once up to full strength in July 1863, the regiment was sent to Omaha for a brief period of training, thence to the plains. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers in the War of the Rebellion, 1861 – 1866,* (Des Moines: 1910), vol. IV, p. 1253 (hereinafter cited as *Roster of Iowa Soldiers*).

that right. If the whites wanted them to consider surrendering the Platte Valley, the government would have to negotiate a formal treaty and compensate the Sioux accordingly. Additionally, the Indians countered with their own demands that the Smoky Hill route be abandoned, and work stopped on a new road being surveyed up the Niobrara River, northwestward across Nebraska to further shorten the journey from the Missouri to Montana.

The uncooperative attitude exhibited by the Sioux clearly frustrated Mitchell, who insisted that "he was not there to coax them, but was there to tell them what to do."[19] If they refused, he would send many soldiers to enforce his words. Spotted Tail, now clearly rankled, rose to his feet and told the officers present that the Sioux were not afraid of the whites and they could put more warriors in the Platte Valley than there were white men living. Furthermore, he stated, the Sioux had uncovered the white man's game--the same people who went up the Platte, returned by the Smoky Hill. Scouts watching the emigrants and had concluded they were all the same people moving constantly in a great circle to make the Indians believe there were more whites than Sioux. Mitchell, at a loss for words, adjourned the council, saying they would meet again in fifty days.

The general unrest in the region also became evident at Fort Laramie that spring. "Emigration continues to pour along in a continual stream," one soldier observed. "A

great many have big letters painted on their wagons such as 'Bound for Bannick [sic] or bust."[20] Collins once again assigned some of his men to drill with the mountain howitzers, arousing the curiosity of the garrison. Sergeant William Crowell recorded in his journal:

> They are busy fixing up the artilry. I my self are not abel to do duty so I do not no any thing about the business . . . the fort at this time is all most with out troops, but i think there is no dainger of the fort being atacked by the enemy at this time, at least I hav not saw any signs of it yet. The Indians that are at this post has not shone any hostile apearance yet, but there may be other tribes coming near . . . that have created this exsitment [sic].[21]

Crowell also noted that patrols had been sent from the post a few weeks earlier, but he was uncertain of the reason until the men returned to report that they had intercepted a trader's train, and upon inspection discovered a large quantity of munitions intended for barter with the Indians. Although the powder and other contraband were confiscated, the

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[19] Ware, *Indian War of 1864*, p. 116. Ware, incidentally, was present at this council.

[20] Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire*, pp. 124, 163.

[21] Crowell Journal; That the local Indians were on friendly terms with the army at Fort Laramie was further evidenced when a band, probably Oglala or Brule Sioux, came to the post on February 4, 1864. Approaching from the west, the Indians created quite a stir of excitement among the people of the garrison. Colonel and Mrs. Collins observed them from the rear upper porch of Old Bedlam, their residence and post headquarters at that time. The Indians came into the post and staged a dance on the parade ground, after which the officers took up a collection to purchase flour, meat, and rice to give to them. The Indians then departed "in very good humor." Catherine Weaver Collins, *An Army Wife Comes West: Letters of Catheine Wever Collins 1863 – 1864*, (Denver: 1954), pp. 18-19.

smugglers were allowed to proceed with the food and other supplies aboard the wagons.[22]

Another group of approximately two hundred Ohio recruits arrived at the post early in May. But, rumors of the presence of smallpox in the command prompted Collins to send a messenger to halt the men and have them to go into camp four miles below until Post Surgeon Rudolph B. Hitz could examine them. Apparently, Hitz confirmed some cases, causing him to quarantine the entire party. A week later, Collins permitted them to move up to the confluence and bivouac just below the Laramie River bridge, yet they were not allowed to visit the post. Once the surgeon pronounced the command healthy, over two weeks after its arrival, the men were permitted to move into quarters on the post, some being assigned to fill up existing companies, others being organized into new units. Six full companies now resided at Fort Laramie, so many in fact that one company had to live in tents pitched on the parade ground.[23]

Mitchell convened a second council with the Sioux at Fort Cottonwood on June 8, with more positive results. The intervening weeks had given the leaders time to modify their previous stance after considering the potential cost of joining in the hostilities. Spotted Tail and the others agreed to remain on the sidelines of the conflict and to stay

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[22] Ibid.

away from the roads, with the proviso that they be permitted to enter the Platte Valley periodically for trading purposes. They also expressed their fear that they might be mistaken for hostiles by troops operating in the area and requested that a reliable white man be sent to live with them until the war with the Cheyennes was over. In addition, they wanted their annuity goods delivered to a point northwest of Fort Cottonwood so that it would not be necessary for them to come to the Platte Valley. To all of this, Mitchell readily agreed.[24]

It was none too soon, because despite the professions of peace, Sergeant Crowell recorded in his journal soon afterward that, "The indians is getting quite troublesome." Much of that trouble, however, was in the form of the usual recurring intertribal warfare. The army identified the principal troublemakers in the immediate area as the Utes, Cheyennes, Shoshones, Arapahoes and other Teton Sioux bands that frequented the area to raid each other, and to prey on Old Smoke's resident Loafers at Fort Laramie. The other bands considered the peaceful "Laramie Sioux" as weak and disloyal to their own nation. A soldier explained: "They are fighting among themselves. The Missouri Sioux

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[23] The first bivouac site was dubbed "Camp Underhill," in honor of George C. Underhill, surgeon of the Eleventh Ohio. Lewis B. Hull, "Soldiering on the High Plains: The Diary of Lewis Byram Hull," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, (February 1938), pp. 12-13 (cited hereinafter as "Soldiering on the Plains").

[24] Transcription of council proceedings as part of Mitchell to Major C. S. Charlot, Dept. of Kansas, June 19, 1864, *O. R.*, I, 34-4, p. 459; By 1864, the Upper Platte Agency, known locally as the "Woc-a-pom-any" agency, was located on the north bank of the North Platte River approximately 28 miles below Fort Laramie, near the present-day Wyoming-Nebraska state line. Apparently, it was not occupied by anyone at that time. Captain Eugene Ware described the site as: " . . . a little grassy flat consisting of several acres of

say they are going to kill all the Laramie Sioux that stay among white men."[25] On one occasion raiders ran off several horses belonging to an ex-soldier named Foote, who operated a tailor shop about five miles from the fort. Foote and two other men followed the trail left by the party and eventually overtook them approximately one hundred miles away. The Indians opened fire first, killing one man outright and hitting Foote six times, but none of his wounds proved fatal. The two white men continued to defend themselves, until a bullet grazed the neck of Foote's surviving companion. Outnumbered and wounded, the two survivors retreated from the scene. About three weeks later, on May 25, the Indians returned to Foote's ranch bent on finishing the job. The veteran killed one of the attackers, and wounded two others. The more seriously injured was Robert Smoke, son of the old chief, and formerly a friend of Foote's, shot through the stomach. The surgeon treated Smoke at the post hospital, but failed to save him. Just a day after the shootout at Foote's ranch, the Utes waylaid another Laramie Sioux man twenty-five miles from the post.[26]

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land on the Platte river, susceptible of irrigation. In fact, there were old ruins of the irrigation ditch." Ware, *Indian War of 1864*, p. 219.

[25] Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire*, p. 136; Sergeant Cowell shared the same view, stating "They are at ware [sic] with each other killing each other and steeling [sic] stock from each other." Cowell Journal.

[26] Hull, "Soldiering on the Plains," pp. 13-14; Crowell Journal; Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire*, pp. 135-36; Just why Robert Smoke and perhaps other Oglalas were involved in this incident is unknown. Since Smoke lived with Foote during the previous winter, his motives may have stemmed from a personal grievance. Others participating in the affair probably belonged to less friendly bands. Author's note; Foote was among the community of "hunters and trappers . . . mexicans, spaniards, creoles, and half-breeds" who had taken up residency in the area around Fort Laramie since the fur trading days. Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire*, p. 91.

By late June Ute raiding parties were openly preying on the swelling tide of emigrants moving west of Fort Laramie, ambushing and killing two men en route to Bannack and stealing livestock from other parties, including eighty head of horses from one especially hard-hit train. Crowell probably echoed the feelings of his comrades when he wrote:

> It appears just at this time that the indians is dertemed [determined] for to go to war. I hope we will hav a chance to giv thim a small brushing. I think it wood do thim a great deal of good to get a nother good whipping. Thare getting very sausey. [27]

The situation worsened in Colorado and western Kansas as well. Alfred Gay and John W. Smith, two plainsmen General Mitchell had hired to find and invite the Sioux to the Fort Cottonwood council in June, used that opportunity to gather as much information as possible about the hostile bands. Their report confirmed the worst fears of Governor Evans and the army-- the Cheyennes had already formed their proposed alliance with other tribes and were bent on conducting an all-out struggle for control of the Central Plains. The Sioux informed the emissaries that the hostile elements had gathered in an

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[27] Crowell Journal; Private Hervey Johnston corroborated the rising frequency of Indian depredations, including the murder of the two men and the sacking of their wagons. Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire*, p. 135.

enormous camp of approximately 1,200 lodges, composed of Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Kiowas, and Comanches, on the Solomon Fork about eighty miles north of Fort Larned. They were reportedly well armed with rifles and revolvers systematically procured by trade with Mexicans plying the Santa Fe Trail during the previous five years. George Bent, half-blood son of famed trader William Bent, joined his Cheyenne brethren there.

> It was one of the largest villages I ever saw and the camps were full of plunder. War parties were setting out every day, and other parties coming in loaded with plunder and driving captured herds of horses and mules. As I rode past each village, I saw war dances going on in each one, and every lodge was full of plunder taken from captured freight wagons and emigrant trains.[28]

More ominous, Smith and Gay learned that the Cheyennes intended to intensify raids in the Platte Valley for the purpose of destroying the ranches and murdering emigrants to capture even more arms and ammunition. Meanwhile, the Kiowas and Comanches would conduct similar attacks along the Arkansas, though that route offered a less lucrative source of booty because of reduced traffic and fewer ranches. The Cheyennes had scouts ranging far and wide, some posing along the Platte as peaceful

[28] George E. Hyde, *Life of George Bent: Written from His Letters,* (Norman: 1968), p. 140 (hereinafter cited as *Life of George Bent*).

Sioux to spy on the army, while others had been placed among the Sioux as informants. "The war is opened in earnest," Evans declared to Indian Agent Colley at Fort Lyon.

In the midst of mounting Indian unrest during summer 1864, life at Fort Laramie went on with the much the same routine that had marked antebellum years. Held sacred were several Regular Army traditions, such as daily guard mounting, Sunday morning inspections, and evening dress parades. When it was discovered that some soldiers wore shirts that were overly ripe in hot weather, Sergeant Lewis Hull remarked that the troops "had to open our jackets and show shirts; a new inspection, but a good idea." The volunteers also formally observed Independence Day in the manner of the regulars. Hull described the activites:

> A salute of fifty guns was fired at noon; then we had a splendid dinner: roast beef, veal, mutton tongue, pies, cake, etc. Table neatly spread and decorated with wreaths and ornamental cake stands. The officers were invited to dinner with us, but having mess dinner of their own, none but the officer of the day, Lieut. Pettijohn, responded. Officers and ladies visited our quarters, and praised our taste very highly. Quite nice, a spread eagle of cedar in each room and one at the top of the arbor . . . Salute of fifteen guns fired after eleven [that night]. Fine sight.[29]

[29] Hull, "Soldiering On the Plains," p. 15.

Occasional regimental band concerts were popular with both the men and visiting emigrants, and performances by the "Laramie Varieties" often brought down the house, literally. At one performance, for example, there was "some disorder caused by there being too much whiskey on hand; some of the performers the worse for it." That liquor flowed freely and in copious quantities is reflected in Hull's descriptions of enlisted men's dances in the barracks. "Considerable whiskey about," he wrote. "Dance in Co. I's kitchen. Four women present, nearly all drunk. Hewett dressed in women's clothes and went with Dr. Dryden. Dance broke up in an uproar." On other occasions, the dancers got out of hand by consuming "too much whiskey entirely," which led to quarreling, and one "dance at band room breaks up in a row. Welsh and his wife part." At other times, the soldiers maintained enough decorum to socialize with the young ladies with passing emigrant trains, sometimes receiving invitations to dine at their camps along the Platte.[30]

Weddings were infrequent, but when they did occur, they were popular, well-attended diversions from the usual hum-drum. One exceptional month witnessed two weddings among the enlisted personnel, one a company sergeant and the other Post Ordnance Sergeant Leodegar Schnyder, who performed nuptials to a former laundress remembered only as "Cross-eyed Julia." Hull noted that the band serenaded both couples

[30] All quotations here are from ibid., 20 – 25.

and that the Schnyder ceremony was followed by a large reception dinner. He added wryly that "Must be going to have a cold winter as weddings are all the rage."[31]

Some members of the garrison simply did not bother with the formalities of matrimony to secure feminine companionship. A soldier opined:

> I believe our people are the most to blame, except in barbarism & cruelty, for where one Indian cohabits with a white woman, ten white men, or being in human shape, cohabit with Squaws . . . But some argue differently, some in Co. K do. Smith thinks he can run where he pleases when away from home, but if his wife should do the same, he would not live with her any more, and perhaps kill her."[32]

Nor were enlisted men the only ones engaging in illicit relationships. Captain Ware remembered that during this brief time at Fort Laramie:

> Two of the officers of the Ohio regiment had bought Indian wives, and had them stationed at the squaw camp . . . Two officers of our command [Seventh Iowa] bought squaws, but in one case the father ran off with the horse and the young squaw disappeared, and the officer was out his horse . . . Another one of our officers bought a wife for two horses, and the Indian girl fought and scratched him up in a most ridiculous way, so that he was in his quarters pretending to be

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[31] Ibid., p. 25.

[32] Cyrus C. Scofield, K Company, Sixteenth Kansas Cavalry to Mary E. Scofield, June 25, 1865, copy in vert. files, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

> sick for some time until he healed up. The Indian girl was a fighter and a perfect tigress, and broke through the door to the rear of the officers' quarters, and went to the squaw camp, and quickly disappeared . . . The latter officer was pushed out of the service quite a while before the regiment was mustered out as a regiment.[33]

While no hostiles appeared in the immediate vicinity of Fort Laramie during early July, warriors did strike emigrant parties above the post, and attacked Ficklin's Station, just east of Scott's Bluff near present-day Melbeta, Nebraska, on the fifteenth. A train comprised of approximately sixty emigrants happened to be camped there at the time. The telegraph company employees joined them in putting up a defense. Fortunately, the Indians failed to cut the telegraph wires, so the operator was able to send a message requesting help from Fort Laramie. Company B was immediately dispatched to the scene to relieve the beleaguered civilians. Colonel Collins took the additional precaution of moving the quartermaster beef and mule herds nearer the post and placed heavier guards over them.[34]

Since there were too few troops to escort the passing trains, therefore emigrants began banding together for mutual protection, just as Collins had suggested. "A great

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[33] Ware noted that General Mitchell was greatly displeased with the conduct of the officers at Fort Laramie, and presumably with Lieutenant Colonel Collins for permitting such behavior. Mitchell "much decimated " the squaw camp, reproved all the officers, and ordered three of them to be mustered out. Ware, *Indian War of 1864*, p. 213-14.

[34] Hyde, *Life of George Bent*, p. 16.

many have been killed, their wagons plundered, and property burned, dead and wounded men are picked up every day and buried by the soldiers and emigrants," Private Hervey Johnson wrote. Even though small detachments were sent out to scout the countryside, the Indians easily eluded them to strike the trains. Hostiles posing as friendly Indians approached a train below Deer Creek Station on July 12 to beg for food. After obtaining what they wanted and riding off a short distance, the warriors turned and opened fire on the unsuspecting whites. They killed most of the men, wounded two others, and captured the two women and two children traveling with the party. A trooper passing over the scene of the attack a few days later described what he saw:

> . . . the road was strewn for miles with arrows, clothing, beds, flour, bacon, salt,and other pluder, six dead men, one of them a negro . . . all of them had been killed by arrows. The indians were piling the pluder together and burning it; the wagons were not destroyed, the harness was all cut to pieces by the indians to get the mules out. [35]

Hardly a week later, two soldiers from Deer Creek Station were delivering several cases of ammunition to a party of Eleventh Ohio recruits coming up from the post when they encountered a war party. Fortunately, the men were armed with Spencer repeaters,

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[35] A few days later, one woman and her son escaped from the Indians and came to Deer Creek Station, where she was reunited with her wounded husband. A detachment of soldiers from the station went out

and an abundant supply of cartridges. The pair fired about eighty rounds, which was enough to discourage their attackers. News of this event, along with the report of a raid on the herd at Deer Creek, caused Collins to send two hundred men and two artillery pieces to the station, there to await further orders. A few days later, he directed the officer in charge to leave forty men to guard the station, taking the rest in search of the Indian village. During the five-day scout, the command divided to cover a larger area. Some forty to fifty Indians surprised and attacked the smaller group near Powder River. Second Lieutenant John A. Brown was mortally wounded with two arrows in his back, and his men, assuming he was dead, made good their escape. A force sent to recover his body the next day found to their amazement that Brown was still alive, but only barely. He died two days after the fight and his body was temporarily buried at the scene of the incident.[36]

Mitchell and Evans had done everything within their power to segregate the warlike factions from those Indians who preferred not to become involved in the conflict. Mitchell now acted upon a suggestion Collins had made earlier in the spring that the district commander move his headquarters from Omaha to Fort Laramie, where he would

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seeking the other captives, but found only the dead body of the girl. The other woman remained in the hands of the Indians. Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire*, pp. 147-49.

[36] Indians also raided the herd at Deer Creek Station a few days earlier. The little punitive expedition comprised Company H, Eleventh Ohio, along with detachments of men from Companies E, G, I, and K. Ibid., p. 148.

be better positioned to assess the situation and direct operations. Early in July, Mitchell left Omaha with an escort of the Seventh Iowa bound for Laramie, via Forts Kearny and Cottonwood. Pausing at Fort Kearny on the eleventh, Mitchell directed a change of commanders at Fort Laramie, perhaps the most critical station in the entire region. Colonel Collins had proven himself to be an able administrator, but Mitchell was of the opinion that the middle-aged lawyer might not be equal to the challenges of what was shaping up to be an extended campaign. The men of Eleventh Ohio also lacked confidence in their commander. Only a month earlier, Private Johnston had confided in a letter to his parents:

> If we were to get into a skirmish with them [Indians] he would run and hide tell us to let them alone they are too strong for us, or give them some bacon and flour. The Col might make a good farmer but he aint fit to command a regiment. He might make a good private if awkwardness was any help. The boys have to laugh at him often at 'dress parade.' he draws his sabre so gracefully, handles it with such skill, gives the commands with such accuracy, then returns his sword to the scabbard, the wrong side foremost and works half an hour to get it out to put it in right. I don't want any more Col Collins in mine if I can help it.[37]

[37] Mitchell to Curtis, July 11, 1864, *O. R.*, I, 41-2, p. 141; Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire*, p. 136.

In a move calculated to remove Collins from active field operations, Mitchell issued orders charging Collins with "general supervision of all posts and detachments west of Julesburg in the District of Nebraska, including both lines of communication westward . . . ."[38] Mitchell's obvious lack of confidence in Collins was amplified by his authorization for the colonel to make any changes he deemed necessary along the roads, but only with the district commander's approval. Collins was therefore effectively sidelined and reduced to a mere figurehead. He relinquished command of Fort Laramie and rode out of the post with a strong escort on August 8 to inspect the troops at Cache la Poudre and Fort Halleck, a tour that would last five weeks. Even after his return to Fort Laramie, he would exercise only oversight, not command, of operations along the lines of communication.

On July 25, just two days prior to Mitchell's arrival at Fort Laramie, warriors gathered in threatening numbers in the vicinity of Platte Bridge. The officer in command led a small force out to repel them and engaged them in a running fight back to their camp. There the troops destroyed the lodges and captured a number of women, as well as thirty ponies. However, Collins threw a wet blanket on the successful operation by ordering the horses brought to Fort Laramie, whereupon he returned them to the Indians. "Just what we expected," a disgusted Private Johnson complained. Demoralized by their

[38] *General Orders No.* [left blank], District of Nebraska, July 28, 1864, Letter No. 80, William O. Collins

commander's passive action, Johnson and his comrades swore that in the future they would not go out of their way to fight Indians and would simply shoot any ponies that might fall into their hands. "Not another captured pony shall go to the fort," Johnson declared, "We think that if the indians can kill white people, take their horses, burn their property &c., we have the right to retaliate, to play the same game if it is a dirty one."[39] His insightful comment reflected not only the low opinion the men had of their commander, but the no-holds-barred attitude taken by both sides during the Indian campaigns.

The general replaced Collins with modest thirty-nine year old Major John S. Wood, Seventh Iowa Cavalry. Wood, at least, could claim some practical frontier experience, having gone to California in the rush of 1849 and later settling in Ottumwa. During his trek to the Pacific Coast, he had been engaged in at least one Indian skirmish, in which he claimed to have killed a Pawnee warrior. During the regiment's formative months, Wood had so ably led Company A that he was singled out to command the regiment's third battalion once the unit became operational. Mitchell directed Wood, then

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Family Papers, Denver Public Library (hereinafter cited as Collins Family Papers).

[39] Ibid., pp. 156, 158-59.

at Fort Kearny, to take one company from that post and proceed to Fort Laramie, picking up Company F at Fort Cottonwood on this way through to serve as the general's escort.[40]

A salute of seven guns announced Mitchell's arrival at Fort Laramie on July 27. Among those on hand to greet him was Indian Agent John Loree with a complaint that some of the Ohio troops had mistakenly killed a friendly Sioux when they attacked a party on Rawhide Creek two days earlier, and now the local Indians were threatening revenge. However, Loree may have had his own motives for trying to cast Collins in a bad light, since friendly Sioux Loafers that went out with another detachment the day after the fight plundered what was left of the camp and apparently had no adverse reaction to the scalped corpse. John Richard also denounced the purported Indian war as a "humbug," but escalating depredations throughout the region argued against his and Loree's impression of the situation.[41]

Farther south, warriors raided the overland route near American Ranch, located about midway between Julesburg and Denver, murdering three whites and running off a large number of horses and mules. Governor Evans attributed the incident to Sioux that had reportedly come down from Fort Laramie about two weeks earlier. General Curtis

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[40] Reed, *Roster of Iowa Soldiers*, p. 1261; Ware, *Indian War of 1864*, p. 14.

[41] Hull, "Soldiering on the Plains," p. 17; John D. McDermott, *Frontier Crossroads: The History of Fort Caspar and the Upper Platte Crossing*, (Casper: 1997), p. 36.

responded by instructing Collins to take one company from a less dangerous part of the line to reinforce Fremont's Orchard and Camp Collins.[42]

Upon his arrival at Fort Laramie, Mitchell found the situation was even more serious than he had imagined. The hard-pressed Eleventh Ohio, fragmented in detachments scattered across 500 miles, was stretched too thinly to adequately protect the district. Three of its companies were stationed along the mail route southwest of Julesburg. Mitchell reported to Curtis that he could only protect the mail, emigrants, and the telegraph line by mounting constant patrols on both lines of communication in hope of either deterring the Indians, or being in the right place at the right time to intercept them. Virtually all of his cavalry was in the field. Learning from local mountaineers and friendly Sioux that there were a thousand lodges of hostile Sioux within seventy miles of Fort Laramie, Mitchell warned Curtis to expect a widespread outbreak at any moment.[43]

"The alliance of all the tribes, as I have reported to you is now undoubted," Evans informed Curtis.[44] Military authorities scrambled to concentrate all the available troops on the overland routes. Pouring over the district returns, Mitchell discovered he had over 300 furloughed veterans of the First Nebraska that could be recalled and sent out on the

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[42] Evans to Curtis, July 18, 1864, *O. R.*, I, 41-2, p. 256; Curtis to Evans, ibid., p. 302.

[43] Mitchell to Curtis, July 23, 1864, ibid., p. 370; Mitchell to Curtis, July 27, 1864, ibid., p. 429.

[44] Evans to Curtis, August 11, 1864, ibid., p. 661.

roads. Problem was, they had no horses and would have to be remounted before taking the field. Governor Evans also urged Curtis to field the two regiments of Colorado Volunteers immediately, and to authorize the enlistment of 5,000 additional men. Fearing for the safety of their employees, the Overland Mail Company temporarily suspended all service on the line.

Mitchell paused at Fort Laramie only a short time. As he and his escort traveled down the North Platte Valley during the first week in August, Captain Eugene F. Ware noted a scene of desolation:

> ". . . the ruins of stone stations which had been put up by the ranchmen for the overland express company running to Salt Lake, but the express company, for the time being was knocked out of existence, so that there was . . . no mail, stage or express carried over the road except by soldiers."[45]

Back at Fort Kearny, Mitchell penned a subsequent report to Curtis apprising him of the alarming conditions he found along the road on his return trip.

> I find the Indians at war with us through the entire District of Nebraska from South Pass to the Blue [Water River] a distance of 800 miles and more, and have

[45] Mitchell to Curtis, July 11, 1864 *O. R.*, I, 41-2, p. 141; *Special Orders No. 66*, Dist. of Nebraska, July 14, 1864, published in ibid., p. 192; Ware did not realize that the company had shifted its route southward a year earlier, nevertheless, the Oregon Trail was a scene of desolation. Moreover, his memory was faulty as to the date of their departure from Fort Laramie, which he recorded as August 31. Hull gave the date in his journal as August 4: "Gen. Mitchell and Dr. Hitz and Mrs. Collins started for the States." Hull, "Soldiering on the Plains," p. 18.

> laid waste the country, driven off stock, and murdered men, women, and children in large numbers. In my humble opinion, the only way to put a stop to this state of things will be to organize a sufficient force to pursue them to the villages and exterminate the leading tribes engaged in this terrible slaughter. On this part of the line the tribes engaged are the Cheyennes, Kiowas, and Arapahoes, part of the Yanktons, and straggling bands of the Brule Sioux. On the west part of the line are the Winnebigoshish, Snakes, and part of all the bands from Minnesota and with the Indians there are a large number of white men engaged.[46]

Mitchell added that twenty emigrants and homesteaders had been killed on the stretch of road between Forts Kearny and Cottonwood, and that all the ranches had been abandoned, except those adjacent to Cottonwood and Julesburg. "Unless the Government intends to abandon the Laramie route entirely," Mitchell wrote, "I have taken all the troops off that route that can possibly be spared." To improve control, he divided his district into two sub-districts, assigning the First Nebraska Cavalry to man the eastern portion of the road from Kearny and Cottonwood, and posted the Seventh Iowa primarily at camps between Fort Cottonwood and the strategic road junction at Julesburg. The only exception was Company D, sent to Fort Laramie to augment the single company Collins had left behind. Collins and the other seven companies of the Eleventh Ohio had the

[46] Mitchell to Curtis, August 15, 1864, ibid., p. 722.

unenviable job of holding down the stage line from Julesburg west beyond Fort Halleck, and the emigrant road from Julesburg all the way to Sweetwater Crossing. During his march up the North Platte, Mitchell saw the need for a sub-post to afford greater protection to that portion of the trail in the vicinity of Scott's Bluff. Men of the Eleventh Ohio began building Camp Shuman, later re-named Camp Mitchell, in August.[47] Mitchell also established garrisons on La Parelle Creek and La Bonte Creek, west of Fort Laramie. Nevertheless, Mitchell's troops were a pitifully meager force to contend with such a formidable situation, so much so that by August 20, the Overland Mail suspended operations until the route was better protected. Freighters, too, corralled their trains to wait out the storm. The Platte road was effectively closed, and Denver was all but cut off from supplies and communication.

While the army redistributed its forces, the Indians became even bolder in their attacks. The day after Mitchell left Fort Laramie, a war party swooped down on the quartermaster's mule herd, grazing along the Laramie about a mile above the post, and made off with a number of animals before the startled sentries could respond. Some Iowa cavalrymen were sent out after them, and in their haste to escape, the raiders abandoned

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[47] The site of Camp Mitchell is on the right bank of the North Platte, about three miles northwest of Scott's Bluff and about twelve miles east of the Wyoming-Nebraska state line. Captain Jacob S. Shuman, who established the post, first named it after himself, but within a matter of weeks the name was changed in honor of Nebraska District commander, Brigadier General Robert B. Mitchell. Frazer, *Forts of the West*, p. 88-89.

the animals.[48] Later the same day, news arrived that marauders struck a wagon train at Star Ranch, wounding one man and running off all the stock. Near the mouth of Plum Creek, thirty-two miles west of Fort Kearney, a war party killed eleven emigrants, captured a woman and a boy, then fired the wagons.[49] On August 11, the herd guard sounded an alarm, falsely as it turned out, when about 150 friendly Utes passed through the area in search of their Sioux enemies. But, the very next day, a Sioux raiding party destroyed a civilian camp near Fort Laramie. Wood prepared for the worst by detailing a dozen cavalrymen to serve as an emergency response force. The detachment was to be

[48] Ware relates the details of a raid on Fort Laramie in which a war party scooped up a number of cavalry horses right off the parade ground in late July. Ware, *Indian War of 1864*, pp. 207-08. However, the author has found no evidence to corroborate the story. The incident was not recorded in the post returns, where it certainly should have been noted, nor did Sergeant Lewis B. Hull, present at Fort Laramie at that time, describe such an event. His entry for August 5 simply states: "Indians stole part of the Quarter Master herd a mile above the fort. . . . Iowa boys sent out immediately." Hull, "Soldiering on the Plains," p. 18; Private Frank Tubbs, Eleventh Ohio, returned to the post on September 14 after escorting Lieutenant Colonel Collins on his inspection tour. Tubbs informed his parents that the magnitude of the "attack" on Fort Laramie, as related in a recent letter to the home-folks written by one of his comrades, Frank Armstrong, was a grossly exaggerated version of the August 5 raid. Tubbs assured his parents that, "it was nothing but 15 Indians stole some Horses from the quartermaster and they was a going to send some men after them but the Indians got scard [sic] out and left the horses so they did not go after them. They is no such good news as having a big fight in this Country." Frank Tubbs to Father, September 24, 1864, Frank Tubbs letters, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming. Bound copy in library, Fort Laramie NHS (hereinafter cited as Tubbs letters); Another Eleventh Ohio man, Hervey Johnson posted at Deer Creek, was sent to the fort twice during the period in question, but made no mention in his detailed letters of what would have been an exceptional event, had it occurred. The author has concluded that the usually reliable Ware repeated an apocryphal story based on second-hand information relating to the August 5 raid, an event that occurred the day *after* his company left Fort Laramie. Ware's memory was faulty in that he recorded the date of his departure from Fort Laramie as August 31. General Mitchell, with Ware in command of the escort, actually left the post on August 4, 1864. Ware, *Indian War of 1864*, p. 217; Post Returns, August 1864, Fort Laramie; Hull, "Soldiering on the Plains," p. 18.

[49] This unidentified woman was released the following spring and made her way back to the road at Deer Creek Station. There she identified her captor, a Cheyenne leader named Big Crow, who happened to be present at the time. This story is continued in the following chapter. On August 10, 1864, two days after the Plum Creek incident, Cheyennes raided Liberty Farm in the Little Blue Valley of Nebraska. They captured Mrs. Eubanks, two children, and another woman, Mrs. Roper. These women figure prominently in the "hanging of the chiefs" episode also related in the following chapter. Grinnell, *Fighting Cheyennes*, p. 155.

equipped and ready for field duty at all times. He also renewed artillery training by designating a corporal and eight men to serve as a permanent crew for the mountain howitzer.[50]

Indian depredations above Fort Laramie subsided quickly after mid-August with the passing of the high tide of emigration. One contemporary observer estimated that approximately 20,000 whites had traveled over the road during the 1864 season, consequently it was hardly surprising that the Indians would object to so many interlopers. Although wagon trains continued to ply the trail, their former large numbers suddenly dwindled to only one or two per week. With the exception of ambushing a lone soldier near Deer Creek Station, the hostiles all but vanished as they concentrated their attention on the Platte Valley. By that time, however, the volunteers were on edge and ready to shoot at anything that moved. At Fort Laramie, a false alarm was sounded during the night of August 15 when pickets fired into the darkness at what they thought were Indians. Shots again roused the command from its slumbers on another evening about six weeks afterward. An investigation disclosed that the alarm was not only a hoax, but that the herd guards were asleep in a nearby ravine.[51]

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[50] Hull, *Soldiering on the Plains*, p. 18-19.

[51] Hull mentions the "Emigrant Escort," a force, presumably of civilians, organized by the federal government to accompany trains from Fort Leavenworth. He sarcastically notes that the emigration for that year was nearly over by the time the escorts were inaugurated. Ibid., pp. 157,. 158-59.

Near the end of August, Agent Loree issued the local Sioux their treaty annuities, although the supplies were hardly adequate. The summer migration and increased military activity in the region scared away the buffalo and other game, making it all but impossible for the Indian to subsist by hunting. Exacerbating the situation, Loree withheld a large pro rata portion of the rations intended for those bands that were unaccounted for and presumably had joined the warlike factions. The local Indians were in such a starving condition by late summer that they resorted to eating dead draft animals abandoned along the Platte road. General Curtis expressed his concern that if the peaceful Indians could not be fed, they too would join the hostiles. In any event, Curtis urged that no ammunition be issued to any of the plains tribes for fear it would be used to further the war. Meanwhile, he assured the secretary of war that he was bending every effort to stabilize the region and restore transcontinental mail service.[52]

While depredations continued to the east and south of Fort Laramie, comparative calm allowed the garrison to resume most of its normal activities. Private W. R. Belnymer wrote to his father in September:

> We have plenty of warm weather out here at present and it goes pretty tough with us too, for there is so many details that takes men out from the post and there is

[52] Curtis to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, August 25, 1864, *O. R.*, I, 41-2, p. 857; Continued Indian attacks on the road between Fort Kearny and Fort Laramie disrupted mail service to the post for several more weeks during August and September. W. R. Belnymer to Father, September 11, 1864, W. R. Belnymer Papers, Wyoming State Archives (hereinafter cited as Belnymer Papers).

not a particle of shade in this country the nearest timber to this post is eight miles back in the bluffs that is the distance we have to haul our wood for this winter. Wood hauling has just comenced [sic] there are about thirty teams hauling. The contractor that furnishes Hay for the post has just commenced his part of the work. The hay we get here comes from Scotts Bluffs a distance of sixty miles that is not considered very far in this country . . . hay and wood hauling will continue until cold weather commences & then we will have to pack ice for next summer's use. So the prospect is at present that we will have plenty to do this fall and winter and I am glad of it for when a fellow has nothing to do Camp life grows very monotonous . . . We have a good Library here and a good reading room that is one good thing for a person can get any kind of reading matter we want almost . . . It is not much fun to get into the guard house here and a fellow has to carry him self pretty straight to keep out of it.[53]

Private Frank Tubbs added,

We have inspection every Sunday morning when we are out in line we have to unbutton our coats then the officers comes around and look at our shirts and cloathing if our cloathing haint clean and our boots black they will put them in the

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[53] Ibid.

> guared house but they have not put any one in the guard house in our company besides they inspect the quarters and see wether they are clean . . . when a man is to lazy to keep himself clean they make him.[54]

The men that enlisted in the Eleventh Ohio were not always dedicated Union loyalists, however. The state being adjacent to the border states of Kentucky and West Virginia made it rather easy for men desirous of avoiding service with the Confederate forces to slip into the Union ranks, especially with the knowledge that regiments like the Eleventh were being sent to the frontier. Confederate deserters also found their way north of the Mason-Dixon Line as a means of escaping to the gold fields in the West. Still others, natives of Ohio, may have secretly sympathized with the Southern cause and enlisted in such units to avoid being drafted to fight against the Confederate States. That these men were eventually discovered is revealed in Belnymer's letter to his father:

> There are men here that represent almost every state in the Union and a great many of the men in this Regt. were once in the Rebel Army. They are still good rebels or would be if they had a chance. Of the latter named gentleman [sic] there are about twenty-three in the Guard House for attempting to desert. Each of them is furnished with a piece of government jewelry in the shape of a ball & chain . . .

[54] Tubbs to Father, November 3, 1864, Tubbs letters.

> The Gd. House at Fort Laramie is a kind of military prison there is men in it that is sentenced for three years Hard labor with Ball and Chain and others for two years. Some for one year and some for six months.[55]

It would not be long before Fort Laramie would play host to entire units of ex-Confederates. Even as Private Belnymer penned his comments, the U. S. Army was recruiting Confederate captives in northern prisoner-of-war camps in Ohio, Illinois, and elsewhere. As the bloody battles in the East ground up staggering numbers of Federal soldiers, the enthusiasm for defending the Union receded from the high tide of patriotism demonstrated in 1861. Recruiters found it increasingly difficult to induce men to volunteer and the institution of a national draft sparked riots in several northern cities. With thousands of Confederate prisoners sitting idle in camps, it occurred to someone that those men might be willing to exchange incarceration for service on the frontier fighting Indians. They would not be compelled to take up arms against Southern forces, yet they would be comparatively free in return for their promise to serve in the Union Army. For the Union, the prisoners presented a means of supplementing its forces to conduct what had become a two-front war. During the latter months of 1864 and early 1865, six regiments of so-called U. S. Volunteers, nicknamed "Galvanized Yankees" by

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[55] Belnymer to Father, September 11, 1864, Belnymer Papers.

their Union comrades, would be organized and sent west. Some of them would come to Fort Laramie in the months to follow.[56]

There was also dissention among the men of the Eleventh Cavalry's old first battalion, formerly the Sixth Ohio. As the term of their three-year enlistment expired, the men anticipated going home, but the army was too hard pressed on the plains to release them from federal service. Every man was needed to protect the overland routes and the loss of four whole companies at one time would have had disastrous effects on communications with California, not to mention the danger posed to outlying ranches and settlements. Those reasons may have been perfectly logical to the army, but they were hardly compelling to the restless men in the ranks. The situation reached the ignition point on November 1 following an election of officers. Several members of the regimental non-commissioned staff were passed over for promotion in favor of other noncoms having less tenure. That date also marked the original muster of most of the first battalion men. "Some signs of mutiny. The non-commissioned staff and companies A and D want to go home," Hull recorded in his diary the next day. "They send a remonstrance to the colonel [Collins] demanding that they be sent home, or they will take the matter into their own hands and go."[57] The situation was aggravated by Southern sympathizers

[56] D. Alexander Brown, *The Galvanized Yankees*, (Urbana: 1963), pp. 1–6.

[57] Hull, "Soldiering on the Plains," p. 27; W. R. Belnymer was one of the enlisted men commissioned on November 3, 1864 and confirmed by the adjutant general of the State of Ohio. Belnymer served with the

fueling the dissention already brewing in the ranks. On the third, Major Wood cancelled a scheduled mounted drill in favor of ordering the loyal companies to assemble on foot, and issued them carbine ammunition. The companies drilled dismounted on the parade ground, but recall was not sounded at the customary time. Word spread through the ranks that the reason they were being kept out under arms for an unusually long time was to intimidate the would-be mutineers. At the same time, several of the old sergeants that had been ringleaders in the movement were arrested and confined. Major Wood's firm handling of the situation, and his isolation of the leaders, caused the other men to reconsider. Hull commented, "Dissatisfied men willing to let their remonstrance slide. They did not expect that the matter would prove so serious."[58]

Although the Indians moved off the western portions of the roads, marauders continued to raid along the eastern segment. On September 29, near Plum Creek, a war party struck an eastbound train of emigrants who had "seen the elephant" and were returning home. The Indians killed one man and wounded two others. Nebraska volunteer cavalry gave chase, but lost the trail when the Indians scattered in the sand hills north of the Platte. Two converging cavalry patrols operating along Elk Creek during the first week in October expected to rendezvous, until Indians ambushed the detachment from

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Eleventh Ohio for the duration of the war and was mustered out at the rank of first lieutenant in 1866. Reid, *Ohio in the War,* p. 819.

[58] Ibid.

Little Blue Station, killing the lieutenant in command and wounding another soldier. The other patrol pursued the Indians for a short distance, but to no avail. Within a week afterward, twenty-five warriors attacked the Overland Mail stage eight miles west of Plum Creek. The Indians opened fire from a deserted ranch house as the stage drew near, felling one of the team with the first volley. The driver, guard and passengers took cover behind the coach and put up a stiff defense for over two hours. After two of the attackers were killed, the rest fled and the party proceeded on their way.

The area around Plum Creek proved to be particularly dangerous. A fifteen-man detachment of the First Nebraska Veteran Volunteers posted at Mullahla's Station encountered sixty tribesmen, probably the same ones that had attacked the stage, as they attempted to join another company already in the field and searching for the raiders. Firing from concealed positions, the warriors killed two soldiers instantly and scattered the rest. Seven men rode on to Plum Creek Station, while the other six men were cut off and were forced to fight their way back to Mullahla's. The troops killed three Indians, one believed to be a chief, and wounded several others. In addition to the two men killed in the sharp skirmish, the soldiers suffered the loss of two wounded, two horses killed, and another ten animals disabled.

A band of two hundred Indians crossed the Platte fifteen miles west of Alkali Station on October 20, killed an emigrant, and ran off fifty head of oxen. Again, troops followed the trail, but lost it at Ash Hollow. Another detachment, armed with a howitzer, had attempted to intercept the same party as they moved past Julesburg earlier, but gave up the chase after it was unable to close with them. The next day, the warriors boldly returned to attack the troops at Alkali, but were repulsed by the soldiers' fire. During the latter part of October, the war party operating in the area skirmished with soldiers cutting wood near Midway Station, and soon afterward attacked a stage company haying crew working nearby. In an attempt to deprive the raiders of forage and hiding places, Colonel R. R. Livingston, commanding the sub-district, had his men set fire to the Platte Valley all the way from east of Fort Kearny to a point twenty-five miles west of Julesburg—a distance of some 200 miles. The prevailing winds drove the flames all the way south to the Republican River in Kansas. The fire also consumed the prairie vegetation for approximately 150 miles north of the Platte. Selected areas of grassland were burned farther east of Kearny, though adequate grazing had to be left intact for the friendly Pawnees. Livingston reported:

> Universal consternation has spread among the Indians, to whom this mode of warfare is apparently new, and their presence along the road through this sub-district need not be apprehended during the winter. Officers from Fort Laramie

> tell me that already the effect of this grand burning of the prairie is manifest among the Indians, and that they are anxious to make peace, but whether their propositions are induced by fear of starvation, the game being driven off by fires, or only to check the process of burning until they can renew hostilities in he spring, I am not prepared to say, and would simply suggest a continuance of the work as a punishment for past misdeeds and a warning to them of what may occur in the future should they persist in their unfriendly conduct. One thing is certain, this burning of the prairie has produced a marked effect on the Indian tribes along the road and they begin to dread the white man's power.[59]

These retaliatory measures indeed had a beneficial effect on some of the Indians by convincing a few hundred Sioux to come into Fort Laramie during November. In an amicable mood and professing peaceful intentions, the Indians held talks with the sub-district "supervisor," Lieutenant Colonel Collins, and were treated to an entertainment by the garrison. While attempting to be cordial to the Indians, however, Collins again blundered in the eyes of his men.

> The Boys had a show for the Indians the other knight [sic] their was about 100 Indians in it was by the order of the Colonel the soaldiers [sic] did not like it

[59] Events in the Eastern Sub-District of Nebraska, condensed herein, are detailed in Colonel R. R. Livingston to Adjutant General, U. S. A., November 1, 1864, *O. R.*, I, 41-1, p. 825.

> mutch [sic] the old Colonel let the Indians have the seats and made the Boys stand up. He thinks more of an Indian than he does of a white man.[60]

The Cheyennes and most of their Sioux allies, however, remained intractable. Raiding gradually diminished with the approach of winter, as much as from the effect of charred plains, yet the middle portion of the road between Fort Kearny and Julesburg continued to be hazardous. Indians attacked Sand Hills Station on November 9, and ten days later a hundred warriors descended on a train three miles west of Plum Creek. When a fifteen-man detachment rode out of the station to assist the beleaguered civilians, the tribesmen defiantly formed in a line of battle and charged. Captain Thomas J. Majors, commanding a detachment of the First Nebraska, spotted reinforcements coming to his assistance, so launched a counter-attack, driving the Indians several miles and killing five warriors in a running fight. Later that month, raiders intercepted the westbound stage five miles from Plum Creek, wounding three passengers, and the next day attacked a train at the same place. Majors led sixty men in pursuit of the war party, catching up with them within fifteen miles. The troopers engaged the Indians until darkness compelled both sides to withdraw.

Livingston advised the Overland Mail Company to run its coaches only during daylight, as a precaution against further ambushes. He also provided cavalry escorts for

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[60] Tubbs to Father, November 15, 1864, Tubbs letters.

the stages running on the dangerous stretch between Forts Kearny and Cottonwood. And, even though the emigration had subsided measurably from its summer peak, numerous freighters were still operating over the roads to Denver and points farther west. Livingston directed all trains to have a sufficient number of armed men to defend them against attack, and if their numbers were too few, he insisted that trains be held up and combined at Fort Kearny before they were permitted to proceed west.[61]

Farther south, along the road to Santa Fe, the summer had passed with comparatively little violence, nevertheless the populace of Colorado had lived in a state of terror for months. Some Arapahoes had accepted Governor Evans' June summons for peacefully inclined Indian bands to congregate on the reservation near Fort Lyon. But by August, few Cheyennes had yet come in to surrender. The lack of any meaningful response to his invitation, combined with loud public outcry for retaliation to the heavy raiding on the Platte, had influenced Evans to alter his former peace policy to a stance of unrelenting war. Meantime, the adjutant general had approved the governor's request to form another regiment of cavalry to assist in restoring commerce and protecting the populace. It took time, however, to arm, equip, mount, and train the unruly mob

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[61] Livingston to A. G., U. S. A., December 1, 1864.; Livingston to William Reynolds, Overland Stage Line, November 27, 1864, ibid.; First Lieutenant F. A. McDonald to commanding officers at Fort Kearny, Fort Cottonwood, and Plum Creek Station, Mullahla's Station, Dan Smith's Ranch, and Gillman's Station, November 28, 1864, ibid.

designated as the Third Colorado Volunteers. The new regiment was commanded by Colonel John M. Chivington, ex-Methodist preacher and the hero of Glorieta Pass, who by that time had developed political aspirations for his post-war career. Chivington's men, who could hardly be classed as soldiers, were enlisted for only one hundred days and much of that time had already passed without any field service. The members of the "Bloodless Third," as the unit was dubbed, craved a chance to kill Indians, and their colonel desperately needed another military victory on his record.

While Chivington impatiently sat out the war in Denver, department commander Curtis organized a 600-man expedition at Fort Kearny to drive the raiders away from the Platte. His command drove south into the haven of the Cheyennes until the column arrived on the Solomon. There, Curtis divided his force, one battalion under Mitchell scouting west, with his own moving east toward Fort Leavenworth. However, the comparatively small and fleet war parties could easily evade detection and neither group saw a single hostile.

Brigadier General James G. Blunt, commanding the District of the Upper Arkansas, launched his own campaign from Fort Larned soon thereafter. Blunt planned to move along the Cimarron Cutoff of the Santa Fe Trail to break up Comanche and Kiowa bands raiding in that area. However, when he reached Cimarron Crossing, just west of present Dodge City, Kansas, Blunt learned that a force operating from New Mexico had

already accomplished that mission. He therefore turned north in an attempt to encounter the Cheyennes in their favorite haunts along the Smoky Hill and Republican Rivers. On September 25, Major Scott J. Anthony, leading an advance guard of the First Colorado Cavalry, happened upon a Cheyenne village situated on Walnut Creek. The Indians sighted Anthony at almost the same time and soon had his small force on the defensive. They probably would have decimated his detachment had Blunt not arrived on the scene just in time to route the encircling tribesmen.

While Blunt and Curtis were campaigning in Kansas, Black Kettle and a delegation of Cheyenne leaders unexpectedly arrived at Camp Weld seeking the government protection extended earlier by Evans. As evidence of their sincerity, the chiefs turned over four white captives. The appearance of the Cheyennes placed the governor in an awkward position. Allowing the Indians to surrender would cause Washington officials to question the seriousness of the situation in Colorado, and would undermine the governor's justification for more troops. Conversely, he could hardly decline a peace overture. The governor therefore arranged for the chiefs to meet with Chivington, Major Edward W. Wynkoop, the commanding officer at Fort Lyon; and himself.

Even though Curtis and Blunt failed to achieve any significant results with their offensives, their activities are important to understanding subsequent events. That fall,

Confederate General Sterling Price moved his forces into Missouri and northwest Arkansas, a circumstance that drew both commanders away from the frontier and the Indian situation. As a result, operations in the district fell to Chivington, who relished the opportunity for independent action in the short time remaining before his regiment would be disbanded. Moreover, Governor Evans saw his chance to extricate himself from the political dilemma in which he found himself by simply delegating responsibility for the Indians to the military—namely Colonel Chivington. At the council, Evans curtly informed the Indian leaders that their delay in taking advantage of his offer now prohibited him from making peace. While the Cheyennes were welcome to go to the reservation at Fort Lyon, their fate would rest in the hands of the army. He incidentally added several conditions to their surrender, one of which was they would assist the army in subduing the recalcitrant bands, perhaps in the hope they would decline his offer. Black Kettle and the others, however, agreed to abide by all the terms, thus Evans had no choice but to allow them to proceed to Fort Lyon. Using wording that was vague at best, if not outright deceptive, the governor assured the Indians they could report whenever they decided to lay down their arms. The confused Cheyennes were under the impression they had just done that, but Colorado officials made certain that the press presented a story denying a peace had been concluded.

In military circles, Chivington was not alone in his desire to chastise the Indians. Even Major General Halleck, recently commanding the army, had questioned whether they might be able get a fight out of the Indians during the coming winter. Curtis also supported such a move, though he was too preoccupied with rebel forces in Missouri to provide more than moral support. He did, however, express his view that he thought the Indian Bureau was too lenient with the Indians, and too ready to hand out supplies every fall to subsist them through the winter.

A band of over one hundred Arapahoes, led by Little Raven, camped near Fort Lyon in October, while Black Kettle remained on the plains attempting to convince other Cheyenne bands to also surrender. The Indians who went to Fort Lyon may have been under the impression that they were at peace with the whites, but Chivington remained determined to grant his men a fight, and boost his own reputation, before their term of service expired. Major Wynkoop, one of Chivington's subordinates, took a lenient attitude toward the Indians by favoring a peaceful solution, a position that put him at odds with his commander. To ensure that he would face no opposition in his plan to punish the Cheyennes, Chivington removed Wynkoop from command at Fort Lyon and replaced him with Major Anthony, man who could be relied upon to do the colonel's bidding.

When Black Kettle and his people arrived in early November, Anthony instructed them to camp on Sand Creek, northwest of the post until he received permission from

General Curtis to issue them provisions. A few lodges of Arapahoes followed the Cheyennes, but the majority elected to move about fifty miles down the Arkansas to Camp Wynkoop. Unbeknown to Black Kettle, Anthony still technically considered the Cheyennes to be hostile until Curtis consented to allow them to camp at the post. Chivington took advantage of the trumped-up delay to march the Third Colorado to Fort Lyon, where it arrived on November 28. When Chivington exposed his intention to conduct a surprise attack on the unsuspecting village, Anthony, predictably, concurred with the plan. Other officers, however, strenuously opposed the colonel by pointing to promises made to Black Kettle by both Wynkoop and Anthony, not to mention Evans' original pledge. They argued that the invitation extended to the Indians to camp on the reservation without fear of attack until government rations could be issued was ample proof of their prisoner status. Ignoring their protests, Chivington marched his troops to Sand Creek that night to be in position to attack at dawn.

In the ensuring massacre, the Third Colorado swept down on the sleeping village, slaughtering some two hundred men, women, and children in a wild melee lasting several hours. Afterward the troopers scalped and mutilated most of the bodies, some even collecting severed body parts as grisly souvenirs of their handiwork. Back in Denver, the atrocity was initially hailed as a great victory, but the truth soon came out. A congressional investigation would follow, and the name Chivington would forever be

synonymous with the heinous affair. Nor would the Cheyennes and other plains tribes forget.[62]

[62] The foregoing discussion of events occurring in Colorado during fall 1864 is synthesized from Robert M. Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian 1848 – 1865*, (New York: 1967), pp. 284-99; Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre*, (Norman:1961); Hyde, *Life of George Bent*, pp. 139-63; Grinnell, *Fighting Cheyennes*, pp. 153-80.

Chapter 10

"We Are Going to Have a Warm Time Here This Summer"

The Cheyennes lost no time in exacting revenge for Chivington's treachery at Sand Creek. Those who had survived the massacre fled eastward to the headwaters of the Smoky Hill where they joined their relatives in December. A council of the leaders led to a quick decision to wage all-out war against the whites. Pipe-bearing runners sought out the Sioux camps on the Solomon, as well as a village of eighty lodges of Northern Arapahoes, who happened to be in the area, to enlist their aid. The Arapahoes had journeyed far south of their usual territory in present-day Wyoming for the purpose of wintering with their southern kinsmen on the Arkansas. However, word had just reached them that because of the threat of military reprisal, their southern relatives had receded

into the sand hills beyond the river. The northern bands, consequently, elected to remain where they were until spring, before returning to their homeland in the mountains. The news of Sand Creek galvanized most, though not all, of the Indians. Strangely enough, Black Kettle himself remained a peace proponent, despite the outrage recently perpetrated on his band.

Among those incensed by Chivington's actions was Major E. W. Wynkoop, then commanding the First Colorado Veteran Cavalry and appointed as designated agent for the Southern Cheyennes and Arapahoes. Wynkoop accurately predicted that Sand Creek was the harbinger of renewed hostilities unlike anything yet witnessed on the plains. Writing from Fort Lyon on January 15, 1865, he recounted recent events:

> . . . up to the date of the massacre by Colonel Chivington, not one single depredation had been committed by the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians. The settlers of the Arkansas Valley had returned to their ranches from which they had fled, had taken in their crops and had been resting in perfect security under the assurances from myself that they would be in no danger for the present . . . Since this last horrible murder by Colonel Chivington, the country presents a scene of desolation; all communication is cut off with the States except by sending large bodies of troops, and already over 100 whites have fallen as victims to the fearful vengeance of these betrayed Indians. All this country is ruined; there can be no

> such thing as peace in the future, but by the total annihilation of all the Indians on the plains. I have the most reliable information to the effect that the Cheyennes and Arapahoes have allied themselves with the Kiowas, Comanches, and Sioux, and are congregated to the number of 5,000 or 6,000 on the Smoky Hill.[1]

Even then, the combined tribes were moving west to Cherry Creek to await the return of small war parties that had been probing along the South Platte. Once all the leaders were present, a second council convened to plan strategy for the general attack. Taking advantage of the approximately 1,000 warriors in the combined camps, it was decided to launch a raid on the principal settlement, Julesburg, where there were not only stage and telegraph stations, but massive stockpiles of supplies, and a troop of cavalry at adjacent Camp Rankin.[2]

The Indian force moved north from their camps and arrived in the hills south of Julesburg on the night of January 6. The plan was to send forward a small decoy force to

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[1] Major E. W. Wynkoop to Lieutenant J. E. Tappan, acting assistant adjutant general, District of the Upper Arkansas, January 15, 1865, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, (Washington, D. C.), Series I, vol., 48-1, p. 959 (hereinafter cited as *O. R.* with series and volume).

[2] George Bent, who was with the Cheyennes at the time and participated in the raids, described the settlement: "Julesburg stood some distance from the river bank, out in the level sandy valley, which at this point was several miles broad, closed in on the north and south by low sand hills and bluffs. . . . here the company had a large station house or 'home station,' with an eating house, a big stable, blacksmith and repair shop, granary, and storehouses, and a big corral enclosed by a high wall built of sod. Besides the stage company's property, there was a large store selling all kinds of goods to travelers and emigrant trains, and the Overland Telegraph Company also had an office at this point. Altogether, Julesburg Stage Station was quite large place for the Plains in those days and there were at the place forty or fifty men—station hands, stock tenders, drivers, telegraph operators, etc. The buildings here were partly built of cottonwood logs and party of sod." George E. Hyde, *Life of George Bent Written from His Letters*, (Norman: 1968), p. 169 (hereinafter cited as *Life of George Bent*).

lure the Iowa cavalrymen across the river, then surround and annihilate them. The following day, seven selected warriors allowed themselves to be seen by the garrison, whereupon Captain Nicholaus J. O'Brian mounted most of his company, along with a few civilian volunteers, and rode out after the party. The Indian leaders intended to draw the whites into an ambush, but a few young warriors eager to distinguish themselves foiled the plan by charging out before the soldiers were well within the trap. Realizing the ploy, O'Brian ordered his men to turn tail and ride for their lives. The decoys, being nearest the troops, closed with them and managed to kill a few during the pursuit. The Indians caught up with the soldiers just short of the stockade, but were too few to overwhelm them. A few troopers managed to get inside the gates before the main body arrived. The captain and fourteen of his men, plus four citizens, were killed in the running fight.

During the course of the skirmish, stage company employees at the nearby station observed the larger Indian force approaching about two miles behind the others. They, along with the driver and passengers aboard a stage that arrived at the same time, fled to the fort for safety. Some Indians encircled the stockade and opened fire to keep the whites contained, while the rest of the warriors sacked the buildings at the settlement. The warriors, joined later by those who had been at the fort, spent the rest of the day looting the village before returning to their camps that night.

Rich with plunder from Julesburg and flushed with success over the soldiers, the Indians held yet another council in their camp on White Butte Creek to determine their next move. The portion of the South Platte Valley west of Julesburg had become heavily populated with ranches and stage stations every ten to fifteen miles apart. It was an enticing target affording livestock, arms, ammunition, and other booty; moreover, severing communications and supply would seriously jeopardize Denver. The chiefs decided to divide their forces, the Sioux striking the valley below Julesburg and the Arapahoes raiding in the immediate vicinity of the settlement, while the Cheyennes would attack the valley to the northwest above Julesburg. Afterward, the bands would reunite and travel north to join the Northern Cheyennes and the rest of the Sioux in the Powder River country. The great movement north began about January 26, the same day that Black Kettle and his peace faction broke camp to go their own way in the opposite direction.

During the following week, from January 28 through February 2, war parties conducted simultaneous and constant attacks all along the valley in the northeastern Colorado, burning stations and ranches, destroying the telegraph line, and ransacking every wagon train they encountered on the road. In the process, one band captured and killed nine white men discovered to be ex-soldiers from the Third Colorado. The villagers, meantime, moved northward and crossed over the frozen river at Harlow's

Ranch, west of Julesburg, killing all the men and burning the buildings. One woman was taken captive. At Washington's Ranch, fifty miles upstream from Julesburg, the Indians stole five hundred cattle and set fire to a hundred tons of government hay. A cavalry detachment guarding nearby Valley Station prudently chose not to interfere with them. For the Cheyennes, the daily victories, celebrated with nightly scalp dances, did much to raise spirits after the tragedy of Sand Creek.

The final day of the great raid witnessed a second attack on Julesburg. As the village moved toward the North Platte, the warriors again swept down on the place. Although they attempted to induce the soldiers to come out and fight them, the troops had learned their lesson and remained inside the safety of the stockade. Some of the Indians harassed the bluecoats by firing into the fort, but most went on to Julesburg to revisit the store and warehouse. After taking what they wanted, the warriors fired the buildings in a last unsuccessful attempt to draw cavalrymen into to fight.

Two days later, the combined villages camped on a tributary east of the Fort Laramie route, near one of the stations abandoned by the mail line in 1863. Ten miles west was Mud Springs Station, which by 1865 was the only place then inhabited by whites in the whole distance between the north and south forks of the Platte. Mud Springs, previously known as McArdle's Ranch, was one of the stage stations established by John M. Hockaday when he took over the central overland mail route in 1858.

Hockaday declined using the old emigrant road, which crossed the South Platte at what was variously known as "Upper Crossing," "California Crossing," or "Laramie Crossing," located near present-day Big Springs, Nebraska. The surveying expedition led by Lieutenant Francis T. Bryan in 1856, discussed earlier in this study, had discovered a better crossing farther upstream near the mouth of Lodge Pole Creek that later became the site of Julesburg. From there, Bryan's trail followed the creek west approximately seventy miles before turning directly north, passing over the divide to enter the North Platte Valley a few miles below Courthouse Rock. Although Bryan's new trail was not immediately popular with travelers, the need for more direct mail service to Denver in later years made Julesburg the logical point at which to divide the mail bound for Salt Lake City, from that going to Colorado. Russell, Majors, and Waddell later utilized Mud Springs Station as a relay for their short-lived Pony Express venture. In 1861, the Pacific Telegraph Company became a tenant, sharing the station with Ben Holladay's mail line until the central route was shifted two years later. Considered a "home" station, Mud Springs afforded meals and lodging, such as they were, though one passenger described the station as, "a dirty hovel, serving tough antilope [sic] steaks, fried on a filthy stove, with wooden boxes serving as chairs at a bench like table." Although coaches ceased plying the "Jules Stretch," as it was known, the telegraph office remained at Mud Springs, and army couriers from Fort Laramie continued to use the place as a stopover

while conveying mail to and from the main line. A detachment of soldiers from the post guarded the still-vital station, comprising two sod buildings with pole-and-earth roofs. One housed the telegraph office and quarters for the soldiers, the other serving as a combination storehouse and stable, with an adjacent corral.[3]

An advance party of Indian scouts sent out to reconnoiter the station on February 4 succeeded in running off a nearby beef herd belonging to the Creighton & Hoel ranch before the civilians could stop them. They did not, however, attack the station itself. Fully aware of what had recently transpired at Julesburg, the telegraph operator transmitted a frantic message to both Forts Mitchell and Laramie requesting immediate assistance. Any confusion as to the course taken by the Indians after their departure from the South Platte was suddenly dispelled. Mud Springs and its tiny garrison of nine soldiers and five civilians lay directly in the path of the Indian juggernaut.

Captain Shuman at Fort Mitchell, responding to orders from Collins, immediately dispatched Lieutenant William Ellsworth and thirty-six men of the Eleventh Ohio to Mud Springs. Riding all night without stopping to rest, Ellsworth's detachment covered the fifty-five miles to arrive at the beleaguered station just at dawn the next morning. Soon after their arrival, the Indians began gathering about the station in large numbers, but

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[3] Mud Springs is located a few miles north of present-day Dalton, Nebraska on the west side of U. S. 385. Paul Henderson, "The Story of Mud Springs," *Nebraska History*, (June 1951), pp. 109-14; Martin Hogan was the telegraph operator at Mud Springs. Lieutenant Colonel William O. Collins to Captain John Pratt, A. G., Dist. of Nebraska, February 15, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-1, pp. 92-98 (hereinafter cited as Collins report).

maintained a safe distance when they discovered there were more soldiers present than the scouts had reported initially. The warriors, some of whom crept down a ravine on the east until they were quite close to the station, exchanged fire with the soldiers for several hours. George Bent, who accompanied his Cheyenne relatives, later recalled the scene:

> The soldiers were all inside the buildings (which were very strong) and were firing out through loopholes. It was a hard place to attack successfully. . . . It was not very interesting, as neither side cared to come into the open, and no one could tell what effect was being made by the shooting, as you could not tell whether anyone had been hit or not.[4]

The Indians broke off the skirmish at midday when the whites released the horses and mules from the corral as a diversion in hopes of drawing off the Indians. The ruse was only partially successful. Most of the young warriors chased after the animals, but a few others stayed behind to watch the station.[5]

Meantime, Collins had received the telegram at Fort Laramie at about 4 o'clock in the afternoon of February 4. Anxious to salvage his reputation before the regiment's term of service expired, he formed a relief column composed of about 120 men from the

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[4] Hyde, *Life of George Bent*, p. 188.

[5] George Bent assumed the soldiers were running out of ammunition and therefore released the animals hoping the Indians, who prized horses above all else, would chase them. He stated that no warriors were killed in this action. Hyde, *Life of George Bent*, p. 189.

Eleventh Ohio and the Seventh Iowa. Three hours later, Collins and his command filed out of the post bound for Mud Springs, 105 miles away. It was a bitterly cold night and by the time the column reached Camp Mitchell the following morning, several troopers were so incapacitated they had to be left behind. Collins himself paused only briefly before going ahead with a picked detachment of twenty-five men, determined to reinforce the station as quickly as possible. He assigned Captain William D. Fouts, commanding D Company, Seventh Iowa, to follow with the rest of the battalion.

The colonel and his men arrived at Mud Springs at about 2 o'clock on the morning of the sixth; Fouts bringing in the rest of the command about six hours later. Shortly after daylight, just as Fouts and his men showed up, the Indians appeared in large numbers on the surrounding hills around the station and began firing. "It was evident," Collins wrote later, "that they had come to take the post and expected to do so."[6] The troops found themselves at a distinct tactical disadvantage because the station was situated on a flat terrace just outside the mouth of a long canyon opening to the northeast. A slow, natural seepage emerged on the surface near that point, hence the name Mud Springs. Curving below the terrace just a few yards east of the station was a dry streambed. Hills commanded the site on the north, west, and south sides, creating gullies across the terrace

[6] Collins report, p. 93.

that provided natural concealment for the tribesmen. Being the first real Indian engagement most of the soldiers had experienced, they had to become accustomed to taking advantage of the terrain. According to Collins, it did not take long.

> We found it necessary to imitate the Indians, get under banks and creep up to favorable positions, watch for an Indian's head, shoot the moment it was shown, and pop down at the flash of his gun. The men got quite handy at this game and soon made any ground occupied by the Indians too hot for them. It was common to see a soldier and an Indian playing bo-peep in this maneuver for half an hour at a time.[7]

A group of approximately two hundred warriors massed behind a nearby hill and in ravines only seventy-five yards south of the station. While the archers remained secluded, they launched showers of arrows high into the air to descend on the troops, wounding a few men and a number of animals inside the corral.[8] Collins telegraphed Major Thomas L. Mackey at Fort Laramie to send down a mountain howitzer to assist in dislodging the Indians, but he had no sooner sent the message than the Indians severed the telegraph line a mile west of the station. Collins subsequently organized a counter-attack to break up this concentration, one party advancing on foot while a mounted

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Collins recorded that there were 500 to 1,000 warriors present, all armed with rifles, revolvers, and bows. They also had plenty of ammunition following their raids on the South Platte. ibid., p. 94.

detachment outflanked the Indian positions. The warriors immediately withdrew in the face of the opposition. The troops occupied the height and fortified the summit with a rifle pit commanding the surrounding area. By early afternoon the Indian fire slackened as the soldiers drove the tribesmen from their vantage points in immediate vicinity of the station. However, groups of warriors lingered on the bluff tops in the distance until nightfall. Collins estimated the Indian losses at thirty, while his own command suffered seven wounded. However, Collins may have over-estimated the accuracy of his men's fire because George Bent asserted that no Indians were killed in either of the fights at Mud Springs.[9]

Collins dispatched a detachment to repair the telegraph line at about 3 o'clock, but the Indians cut it again shortly thereafter. A second repair party sent out just before dark discovered the line cut at about the same place, but this time the Indians had chopped down two poles and taken away a few hundred yards of wire. With insufficient wire on hand at the station to splice the break, the soldiers took material from the line east of the station to restore communication with Fort Laramie. The rest of the troops, meanwhile, fortified the station and made preparations for an offensive the next day.

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[9] Hyde, *Life of George Bent,* p. 190.

No Indians were in sight as dawn broke on the seventh. Leaving Captain Fouts and a strong detachment to hold the station, Collins led a reconnaissance in force to determine their whereabouts. The numerous trails on the prairie all led toward Rush Creek, a tributary of the North Platte about ten miles distant, where indeed the Indian village had moved the day before during the fight. Collins and his men returned to the station later that day to lay plans for pursuing the tribesmen.

Early the next day, following a thirty-four hour forced march, Captain William H. Brown arrived with the howitzer and fifty Ohio troopers to augment the force already at Mud Springs. Leaving Fouts in charge of a guard over the station, Collins took up the Indian trail with the main body, the howitzer, and a few supply wagons. As he anticipated, Collins discovered the site of the village at Rush Creek Springs a few miles distant, but to his disappointment the inhabitants had already departed. It had been a huge camp several miles in length. Collins found the ground thickly littered with empty tin cans, flour sacks, and other debris plundered from wagon trains, ranches, and the warehouse at Julesburg. Also present were the remains of nearly one hundred beef cattle that had been butchered during the three days the Indians occupied the village. The sudden approach of the troops had caused the Indians to leave behind large quantities of meat, as well as hides still pegged to the ground for drying.

Now hot on the fresh trail, Collins hurried down Rush Creek. As the column entered the valley, about a mile from the river, he sighted hundreds of warriors scattered across the flood plain on the opposite side. Since there was no sign of the women and children, and no lodges, Collins quickly concluded that the non-combatants had proceeded toward the distant bluffs, while the warriors stayed behind as a rear guard.[10]

Collins and his men were awed at the sight of the Indians, as well they should have been for it was a spectacle few white men ever witnessed—and lived to describe. The officers observed the scene through their binoculars. Arrayed on the prairie, calmly grazing their horses while they awaited the soldiers' arrival, were 1,500 – 2,000 plains warriors in full fighting regalia. "It was now clear we had underestimated the numbers against us" Collins later conceded. "It was evident that all the hostile Indians that had been committing depredations and holding the country along the South Platte were concentrated here."[11] The troops did not have long to contemplate the precarious

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[10] Actually, the entire village had marched about ten miles that day, crossing the North Platte by sanding the ice to prevent the horses from slipping, and had camped in the bluffs north of the river. The leaders concluded that the troops were not pursuing them, therefore they would camp for four days on a small stream among the bluffs. However, a Sioux lookout atop a bluff spotted Collins' column moving down Rush Creek and signaled the alarm to the village. All of the fighting men then rounded up their ponies and rode out to meet the soldiers. Confronted by over 1,000 warriors, Collins corralled his train and dug in. ibid., pp. 190-91.

[11] Ibid. Although Collins maintained in his report that 2,000 warriors opposed him, the post return for that month recorded 1,500 – 2,000. It was, in any event, an impressive number of hostiles concentrated in one place. Post Return, February 1865, Fort Laramie, Post Returns, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives, microfilm and paper copies available in library, Fort Laramie NHS; For a more detailed treatment of these events, see John D. McDermott, "We Had a Terribly Hard Time Letting Them Go: The Battles of Mud Springs and Rush Creek, February 1865," *Nebraska History* (summer 1996), pp. 78-88.

situation in which they suddenly found themselves. Just as Collins began scanning the river for a suitable crossing, the Indians arose almost as one, swung onto the backs of their ponies, and swarmed toward the command. To Collins' amazement, the warriors divided into two groups as if by order and rapidly crossed over the ice on the frozen river both above and below his position. The troops were both heavily outnumbered and in immanent danger of being outflanked on both sides at once. Collins described the action:

> We had barely time to corral our train before they were upon us on every side. The position chosen was the best we could get, but there were many little sand ridges and hollows under cover of which they could approach us. A very great change had come over the men since the morning of the fight at Mud Springs. They were rested and free from excitement, had confidence in their officers, obeyed orders, and went to work with a will. Sharpshooters were pushed out, and the hillocks commanding the camp occupied, and rifle-pits dug upon them. The Indians of the plains are the best skirmishers in the world. In rapidity of movement, sudden wheeling, and hanging over steep and difficult ground, no trained cavalry can equal them. Hunting buffalo is the best possible school.[12]

The volunteers took advantage of whatever cover the terrain afforded and opened fire on the attacking tribesmen, some of them dashing almost into the lines. After

[12] Collins report., p. 95.

their initial charge, and failing to route the troops, the Indians resorted to sniping at the soldiers from more distant positions. The troops, meantime, improved their defenses using tools from the wagons. A dozen or so warriors crept along and under cover of the river bank to occupy a strategic knoll about four hundred yards from Collins' men. Although the howitzer detachment attempted to shell the position, the ammunition was so old that most of the projectiles failed to explode. The warriors soon began delivering such accurate fire that a detail of sixteen mounted troopers from both the Eleventh Ohio and the Seventh Iowa under the command of Lieutenant Patton was sent out to dislodge them. Following Collins' specific instructions, Patton's men formed in line and charged round the hill, dispersing the sharpshooters. But dozens of other warriors, previously unseen on higher ground back of the hill, in turn engaged the detachment in hand-to-hand fighting before the soldiers could extricate themselves. Privates John A. Harris and William H. Harstshorn were killed in the brief melee, though Patton and the rest of the men returned safely under covering fire that drove back the pursuing warriors. Harris's body was near enough to the lines that it and his weapons could be recovered immediately, but Hartshorn's corpse was not found until the next day, nearly a mile distant, mutilated and pierced with ninety-seven arrows.[13]

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[13] Harris was a member of D Company, Seventh Iowa and Hartshorn belonged to C Company, Eleventh Ohio. Both bodies were brought back to Fort Laramie for burial. ibid.; Bent claimed that Private Hartshorn, mounted on a very fleet horse, rode through the Indians heading west. Several warriors pursued and finally

Both sides kept up desultory long-range fire throughout the rest of the day, but as darkness approached, the Indians withdrew behind the hills and began re-crossing the river. At sundown, Collins sent a detail to water the animals, a few at a time, but rather than going to Rush Creek as he had instructed, the men moved down to the Platte. This alarmed the Indians, fearing the soldiers intended to molest the corpse of a warrior that still lay on the ice about half a mile from the corralled train. A number of Indians rode out on the opposite side to confront the cavalrymen, but before any shots were fired, Collins had a trumpeter sound recall and the troops withdrew. The next morning, the warrior's body was gone. After watering the stock, the command spent the rest of the night improving their deployment and digging rifle pits to be better prepared to continue the fight the next day.

As dawn broke on the ninth, approximately four hundred mounted warriors crossed to the south side of the river and began exchanging a few shots with the soldiers,

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killed the trooper a long way from the scene of the fight. According to Bent, a message was recovered from Hartshorn's body and was brought to him for interpretation. It was an appeal from Collins to Fort Laramie for further assistance to extricate him from his situation. Although Collins failed to mention the dispatch, Bent said that a Sergeant MacDonald, who was in the fight, verified the information to him many years later. Hyde, *Life of George Bent*, p. 193; Collins later stated that the howitzer ammunition was defective because it had been in storage at Fort Laramie for eight to ten years. Collins report, p. 97.Bent was apparently one of several white or mixed blood men with the Indians in these encounters. Collins mentioned "there were white men or Mexicans among them." Collins report, p. 94. This soon became common knowledge among the enlisted men and their resentment is reflected in Private Hervey Johnson's statement, "Woe be to the white man that is ever taken by soldiers in an indian [sic] fight, his 'hide wouldent [sic] hold shucks." William E. Unreau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire: A Buck Soldier's View of Indian Country 1863-1866*, (Salt Lake City: 1990), p. 216 (hereinafter cited as *Tending the Talking Wire*).

while the rest posted themselves in view out of range on the north bank. According to Bent, the Indians hoped to stampede and capture the army's stock. The village, meantime, continued its trek northward toward the Black Hills. The party on the south side remained only a short time before re-grouping and, joining their kinsmen, disappeared on the trail of the villagers moving toward the Niobrara River. To discourage the troops from following, the Indians set fire to the dry prairie grass. Collins observed eight scouts left behind to keep an eye on his command.

Loading nine wounded men and the bodies of the two dead troopers aboard the wagons, Collins chose not to continue the chase. "Further pursuit would have been injudicious and useless," he later wrote. With their numbers they could at any time compel our small party to corral and fight. We could drive them off and follow again with the same result but could not afford to give them the least advantage."[14] Collins was probably correct in his assessment. His losses thus far stood at twenty-eight men, ten of them severely frost-bitten. Continuing the pursuit into unfamiliar territory, in the middle of winter, with a force that was ill equipped for such an expedition and overwhelmingly outnumbered by the Indians, portended disaster. The only realistic choice was to return to Fort Laramie. The column broke camp at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon and marched up the North Platte about fifteen miles, where Collins detached Lieutenant Brown with

[14] Ibid., p. 96.

part of the command, and the injured, to proceed directly to the post. Collins led the remainder back to Mud Springs. Leaving there on the tenth with seventy-five troopers, he moved south to Pole Creek in an attempt to open communication with Julesburg. The Indians had utterly destroyed the telegraph line for a distance of over ten miles south of Mud Springs and had burned the buildings at Pole Creek Station. Arriving at the charred ruins of the station, Collins met a line repair crew of the Seventh Iowa working their way north from Julesburg. The Fort Laramie troops thereupon turned toward home, cutting cross-country to Camp Mitchell and arriving back at the post on February 14.

The situation had been tense at Fort Laramie during Collins's absence. In his zeal to strike a decisive blow on the enemy, he had left behind only a hundred men at the post. Major Mackey took steps immediately to bolster his defenses should the Indians outmaneuver Collins and turn up-river. Since the Sioux and Cheyennes had shown no reluctance to overrun Julesburg, not to mention standing up to Collins' column, Mackey was confident they would not hesitate to attack Fort Laramie. Problem was, the post was difficult to defend, especially with so few soldiers. His first step was to relieve all the men not on some essential duty, and ensure that every man was armed and supplied with ammunition for immediate use. The situation became even more acute when Lieutenant

Brown was called out on February 6, taking with him another fifty men and one of the twelve-pound howitzers.

A stockade planned in the early 1850s to enclose the parade ground area had never come to fruition.[15] During the years of military occupation, the fort had been expanded to meet the needs of increasingly larger garrisons, with no thought of defense. A hospital stood northwest of the enlarged sutler's store, and nearby was a new gingerbread cottage for the manager. East of the store, near the Laramie River, were frame warehouses and a number of huts for civilian teamsters and laundresses. Cavalry stables and corrals were located some distance northeast of the sutler's store and on the same terrace. Now sorely missed was old Fort John, the last vestige of which had been razed in 1862. Mackey, like the traders before him, probably considered the river winding around the east and south sides of the fort as a fairly effective barrier against Indian attack. Riflemen posted in the officers' houses could command the lowland to the west, behind Old Bedlam. The major authorized Post Quartermaster H. E. Averill to furnish sacks of corn "to form suitable barricades" at strategic points within the garrison. One of those breastworks presumably connected the officers' quarters with the magazine by

[15] A plat of Fort Laramie, drawn by the Corps of Engineers February 12, 1851, showed a proposed wall connecting the magazine with the guardhouse, thence running south to a proposed blockhouse on the riverbank near old Fort John. The trading post was to be incorporated into the defenses, forming a bastion on the south side. The stockade was to continue west to a point on the bench south of Old Bedlam, where it turned north to the magazine to complete the enclosure. All of the main buildings at that time, including the officers quarters, barracks, stables and storehouses, would lie within. Plat of Fort Laramie in files, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

filling some of the intervening gaps between the buildings. If not actually manned, the barricades might at least prevent mounted warriors from entering the interior garrison. Mackey also erected makeshift parapets of sacked corn atop some of the buildings.[16]

The north perimeter of the fort was clearly the most vulnerable to attack. A low plateau, rising about twenty feet above the level of the parade ground, stood hardly more than a hundred yards north of the sutler's store. The post cemetery occupied the point of the plateau nearest the fort, affording a near-perfect position for Indian sharpshooters within easy range of soldiers anywhere in the fort.

The day after Collins and the first relief column departed Fort Laramie, Mackey directed Ordnance Sergeant Schnyder and Quartermaster Sergeant J. C. Cummings to oversee the construction of two hasty field fortifications on the plateau for two of the three remaining guns at the post. The emplacements, appropriately christened, "Battery Schnyder" and "Battery Cummings," were situated near the west and southeast edges of the elevation, respectively. The sergeants and their men worked feverishly and within a day, the batteries were ready and manned. Mackey positioned the third howitzer in a lunette constructed on the gentle slope descending toward the Laramie River. "Battery Harrington," as it was designated, would command the flood plain between the two

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[16] *Orders No.* (unidentified), February 7, 1865, Fort Laramie, N. T., Post Orders, Fort Laramie, R. G. 393, N. A., copy in library, Fort Laramie NHS; Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire*, p. 218; The upper verandah along the west side of Old Bedlam was likely one of the fortified points. Author's note.

streams. That Mackey ordered all teamsters to report with their mules for duty suggests that rifle pits, to shelter supporting riflemen, were probably excavated at the same time to prevent the gun emplacements from being outflanked. Still, Mackey was at a distinct disadvantage for ten days by having only about a hundred men to defend such a long perimeter. He was undoubtedly relieved to see Collins and the command return to the post.[17]

As the combined Indian bands moved northward, by-passing Fort Laramie, local traders feared that the appearance of Cheyennes and the southern Sioux, with their captured plunder, would incite their kinsmen in the Powder River country to join them. G. P. Beauvais, who still occupied the former American Fur Company post below Fort Laramie, sent one of his men with three wagonloads of goods to the Sioux village in a desperate attempt to dissuade them from joining the hostile factions. At about the same time, William G. Bullock, manager of Seth Ward's store, also dispatched Nick Janis with

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[17] A detailed treatment of this topic, based on Fort Laramie primary sources, is found in Gordon S. Chappell, "The Fortifications of Old Fort Laramie," *Fort Laramie: Visions of a Grand Old Post* (Fort Collins, Colo.: 1974), pp. 69 - 71. Mackey instructed the post quartermaster to have all teamsters, with their teams but without wagons, to report to Sergeant Powell, C Co., Eleventh Ohio on February 6. The author concurs with Chappell's deduction that their only purpose would have been to operate "slips," animal-drawn scoops for moving earth. Hasty entrenchments, known either as shelter trenches or rifle pits, could have been constructed easily and rapidly across the flat tableland, and perhaps down to the Laramie River, using such equipment. The most basic type rifle pit was made by scooping out earth to form a shallow trench five feet wide and to a depth of approximately one foot at the rear of the trench. The excavated soil was carried forward and heaped on the side toward the enemy to form a breastwork approximately fifteen inches high and two feet thick. This defense would adequately protect a rifleman in the prone position from small arms fire. J. B. Wheeler, *The Elements of Field Fortifications for the Use of the Cadets of the United States Military Academy at West Point, N. Y.,* (New York: 1882), pp. 200-03. The subsequent improvement of these hasty entrenchments in fall 1865 is discussed later in this chapter.

goods to Powder River. Beauvais' representative was intercepted en route by the Cheyennes, who promptly killed him and appropriated all the goods. Janis was more fortunate, perhaps because his wife was related to the Sioux. Even though the Indians were implacable and refused to trade with him, neither did they molest him. A party of Spotted Tail's Brule's escorted him all the way back to Deer Creek to ensure his safety. Writing to his employer, Bullock blamed "Old Collins" and Agent Loree for the recent and ominous change among the Sioux:

> Their [sic] is such a want of discipline and judgment that I deem it unsafe for even myself to remain here. But after the departure of Col. C we will feel much more secure as his imbecility and total want of judgment with Loree's peculation of the indian goods is the whole cause of the disatisfaction [sic] of the Sioux . . . nearly all the old men in the country are moving over to 'Cache La Poudre,' and Denver. Bordeau [sic] is going to the former place and we will be left alone. It is the impression of Bordeau & Bissonette that this will be a general combination of the Sioux and Cheyennes in the spring.[18]

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[18] Bullock's displeasure with both Collins and Loree, not surprisingly, was seated in business. First, Agent Loree had used an order issued by the District of Colorado, prohibiting unlicensed sutlers from trading with Indians, for denying one to Ward. By excluding his principal competitor from the trade, Loree forced the Indians to bargain with him for their own annuity goods. Moreover, Ward failed to renew his appointment as post sutler when it expired in March 1863. Collins apparently discovered the oversight and allowed Herman Kountz to serve as sutler for the Eleventh Ohio, under the authority granted by Army Regulations. That provision allowed regimental commanders to appoint a sutler for "troops in campaign, on detachment, or on distant service" at the rate of one per regiment, corps, or detachment. Accordingly, Collins did not have to seek approval by the secretary of war, a legal requirement for post sutlers, though Kountz's

Just a few days after Collins returned from his expedition, welcome news arrived announcing that five companies of Nebraska Volunteer Cavalry and two more from Iowa were on their way to relieve the First Battalion. The disgruntled Ohioans, retained in federal service for over three months after their enlistment had expired, finally received orders to proceed to Omaha to be mustered out. Bullock, for one, had no regrets over their departure:

> I felt some apprehensions for a while that an attack would be made on the Fort as Col. Collins when [he] left here with the Old Battalion left only about 100 men all told here. He took all the transportation with him but the water wagon, and the discipline here was so imperfect that the Indians could have come in at any time without resistance. In fact, no mob could be worse. Sentinels sleeping on their post was not infrequent. Major Mackey has improved discipline somewhat . . . I know I would have to defend the Store for my personal safety. The Cheyennes

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appointment was upheld by the assistant secretary of war. Joseph H. Burbank also secured an appointment as sutler on January 6, 1865, but Ward, taking advantage of political influence in Washington, managed to get the appointments of both Kountz and Burbank revoked in March 1865, and to reestablish his own place as the legitimate post sutler at Fort Laramie. William G. Bullock to Seth E. Ward, February 20, 1865, Seth E. Ward Papers, Western History Collections, Denver Public Library (hereinafter cited as Ward Papers); ibid., March 10, 1865; ibid., March 25, 1865; *Revised United States Army Regulations of 1861*, (Washington, D. C.: 1863), p. 37; William P. Dole, commissioner of Indian affairs, to John Loree, November 9, 1863, Box 1, Letters Received, Records of U. S. Army Continental Commands 1821 - 1920, R. G. 393, National Archives, Washington, D. C.; S. F. Chalfin, A. A. G., U. S. A., to Joseph H. Burbank, March 6, 1865, ibid.; Register of Post Traders, Box 1, volume 1, ACP Branch, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N. A., Washington, D. C.

have had and still have small war parties around here for the last two weeks and have run off all the Government horses and many other persons in the country.[19]

Shortly after Collins left, Lieutenant Colonel William Baumer, First Nebraska Veteran Volunteer Cavalry, was assigned to head the sub-district, though Mackey remained in charge of the Fort Laramie garrison. Baumer and five companies of cavalrymen arrived at the post in March. Bullock characterized the new commander as "a very pleasant gentleman," but was hardly more impressed with his three hundred rough-hewn troopers than he had been with the Ohio volunteers. And, hundreds of Kansas troops were expected to arrive at Fort Laramie in the near future. "I do not know how things are going to result here," Bullock complained to Ward. "There is no order or discipline, and [I] would feel much better with the hostile Indians than the friendly troops."[20] Baumer nevertheless distributed his Nebraskans in small detachments along the roads east and west of the post in an effort to maintain telegraphic communications with Denver, Salt Lake City, and the West Coast.

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[19] Companies A, B, C, and D, Eleventh Ohio received the muster out order on February 17, and lost no time in leaving Fort Laramie the very next day. Post Return, February 1865, Fort Laramie; The First Battalion was mustered out of service at Omaha on April 1, 1865. Whitelaw Reid, *Ohio in the War: Her Statesmen, Generals, and Soldiers*, (Cincinnati: 1895), p. 820; Bullock was so concerned that he sent "Eliza," presumably his wife, to a safer locale. Bullock to Ward, March 10, 1865, Ward Papers.

[20] Bullock to Ward, March 25, 1865, Ward Papers.

With Confederate forces in retreat in the South, and the outbreak of a full-blown Indian war on the frontier, the army implemented significant organizational changes to better cope with the situation on the central plains. A general order promulgated on February 17, 1865 altered the boundaries of the Department of the Missouri to include Missouri and Kansas, as well as the territories of Nebraska, Colorado, Utah, and western portion of Dakota.[21] By unifying this enormous geographic area under a single commander, army headquarters hoped to achieve a greater concert of action and effectiveness against the Indians, who freely crossed the military's invisible jurisdictions.[22] Major General Grenville M. Dodge, commanding the department since late 1864, immediately implemented his own internal changes to facilitate field operations. The most significant of these was his authorization of a huge new District of the Plains encompassing all the territory outside Kansas and Missouri. Dodge selected an aggressive and no-nonsense Irish immigrant, Patrick E. Connor, to command the troops

[21] Because Idaho Territory was of such immense size, the growing population in the gold camps of western Montana petitioned for improved representation in Congress. Montana Territory was carved out of Idaho by legislation enacted on May 26, 1864, and by the same stroke most of what we know today as Wyoming, including Fort Laramie, was encompassed within Dakota Territory. Raphael P. Thian, *Notes Illustrating the Military Geography of the United States 1813 – 1880*, (Washington, D. C.: 1881), pp. 120-21 (hereinafter cited as *Military Geography*).

[22] The antebellum Department of the West had been abolished and merged into the Western Department on July 3, 1861. Four months later, the army again adjusted its administrative boundaries by creating the Department of Kansas embracing that state, as well as the territories of Nebraska, Colorado, Dakota, and the Indian Territory. The Department of Kansas became a part of the Department of the Missouri as a result of General Orders No. 11, Adjutant General's Office, January 30, 1865. Major General Dodge commanded the department from December 9, 1864 until July 21, 1865, when he was replaced by Major General John Pope., ibid., pp. 67, 75, 106-07.

in that sector. Connor's experience included an enlistment in the U. S. Dragoons in the early 1840s, followed by service during the Mexican War commanding a unit of Texas volunteers. He later joined the gold rush to California and settled in Stockton, where he became a leader in civic, military, and fraternal affairs. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Connor was appointed colonel of the Third California Infantry. Having spent his entire adult life on the frontier, Connor acquired an uncompromising attitude toward Indians, and a keen understanding of the independent westerners he commanded. Two years later, he gained the stars of a brigadier in recognition of his vigorous activities against the Indians in his District of Utah, particularly for his decisive winter victory over the Shonshonis at Bear River.[23]

Connor reorganized his command into new geographical sub-districts, designating Fort Laramie as headquarters for the North Sub-District. Dodge had previously ordered the Eleventh and Sixteenth Kansas Cavalry Regiments, recuperating at Fort Riley following the campaign against Price, to march up the Platte to reinforce the garrisons weakened by the withdrawal of Collins' battalion. Colonel Thomas Moonlight of the

[23] Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army 1789 – 1903*, (Washington, D. C.: 1903), I, pp. 321-22; Leroy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen (ed.), *Powder River Campaigns and Sawyer's Expedition*, (Glendale, Calif.: 1961), p. 23 n. 10 (hereinafter cited as *Powder River Campaigns*).

Eleventh Kansas, and now the ranking officer in the sub-district, was to relieve Baumer.[24]

Meantime, the Cheyennes and the warlike Sioux bands did not observe their usual winter hiatus. Most of the Sioux were Oglalas from the South Platte, but by this time they had been joined by Little Thunder's Brule's, the same people Harney had overhauled on Blue Water Creek a decade earlier. Bullock became so concerned for the safety of the firm's sizeable ox herd that he sent Ward's wagon master, Gillespie, with the firm's train and all the cattle back to Leavenworth. Indians attacked the train, despite precautions, near Alkali Station east of Julesburg. With the help of troops stationed nearby, the teamsters were able to recover most of the stock before continuing on their way.[25]

Shortly after that incident, a war party fell on two soldiers driving a wagon loaded with supplies en route to Sweetwater Crossing. Near Poison Creek, warriors professing friendship got close enough to the wagon to open fire, killing one of the men outright. The other held them off until nightfall before making his escape. About the first of April, Indians swooped down on the E Company herd grazing near Camp Marshall, on La

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[24] Connor organized the District of the Plains into four sub-districts. In addition to those mentioned in the text, the South Sub-District encompassed Colorado Territory, plus Fort Halleck in Dakota, headquartered in Denver. The West Sub-District comprised Utah Territory, with headquarters at Camp Douglas near Salt Lake City. General Orders No. 4, April 8, 1865, District of the Plains, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, p. 54.

[25] The exact date of this attack was not determined, though Bullock stated that Gillespie left Fort Laramie on April 6, 1865. Considering the time necessary to travel to the South Platte, and Bullock had instructed him to move slowly so as not to wear out the cattle, the raid probably occurred around the 20th. ibid.

Bonte Creek approximately fifty miles above Fort Laramie. Almost before the soldiers realized what was happening, the Indians escaped with nearly half the troop horses and captured one of the herders. A few days later, they brought the man back, still alive. Then, in full view of the cavalry camp, they shot numerous arrows into his legs, and as the man screamed in agony, one of the warriors scalped him. After continuing the torture for a while longer, the Indians finally killed the hapless trooper and rode off. Indians also raided a government supply train approximately seventy miles above Fort Laramie and managed to run off all the stock, including a dozen beef cattle intended for the company messes. Two other soldiers, driving a wagon to Camp Marshall on April 21, were ambushed and killed on LaPrele Creek, a stream flowing into the North Platte twenty miles below Deer Creek Station.[26]

Indeed, Little Thunder confided in Bullock that four hundred lodges of Sioux had been involved in the recent conflicts along the South Platte, but he claimed that the Brules did not intend to support the rampaging hostiles. He sent word to the sutler that

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[26] The soldier killed at La Bonte Creek was a member of E Company, Eleventh Ohio. Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire*, pp. 233, 238-39; The graphic description of his death was related to Sutler William Bullock, who in turn told it to his employer. Bullock to Ward, April 30, 1865, Ward Papers; John D. McDermott, *Frontier Crossroads*, (Casper:1997), pp. 43 – 44. Some sources also list a skirmish between Sioux and a detachment of the Eleventh Ohio in which Captain Levi M. Rinehart was killed. However, contemporary accounts agree that Rinehart and his men were drunk when they attempted to arrest some Sioux accused of stealing horses in the vicinity of Deer Creek. When Rinehart emerged from a tepee he had entered a few moments before, one of his own men accidentally shot him. Rinehart was probably the officer to whom Ware referred as having bought a Sioux woman for one horse. The woman immediately ran away from him. ibid., 218, 222-23; Ware, *Indian War of 1864*, p. 213; Bullock to Ward, April 30, 1865, Ward Papers.

the Cheyennes had coerced him into joining them. At Bullock's behest, both Little Thunder and Spotted Tail brought their small bands to Fort Laramie for protection and food in mid-April. Mackey, concerned about the growing number of Sioux camped around the fort and the potential for a confrontation with his men, arranged with Agent Vital Jarrot, who replaced Loree that spring, to move the recently arrived bands--some sixty lodges, plus the Loafers--ten miles down-river to Bordeaux's Trading Post. Charles Elston, a Virginian described as "high-toned" yet charming, with three Indian wives and forty years' experience among the Sioux, was placed in charge of a sixty-man Indian police force to maintain order and act as a buffer in the event problems arose with the whites. The policemen, sometimes referred to as scouts, were uniformed, armed, and equipped by the army in exchange for rations.[27] Even though the chiefs professed their peaceful intentions, Bullock clearly had reservations. "The reason 'Little Thunder' came in is because he is old and very infirm and cannot fight or he would be at it now, as nearly all the Brules are for war."[28] Nevertheless, so long as they could be induced to remain there, the army would have fewer Indians to fight.

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[27] The name is found spelled in several ways, including Elston, Ellison, and Elliston. The author repeats the form found in Moonlight's official report of May 26, 1865, as well as Ware's *Indian War of 1864*, p. 201; George Bent and others spelled it "Elliston." Hyde, *Life of George Bent*, p. 208.

[28] Bullock to Ward, April 10, 1865 and May 8, 1865, ibid.; Bullock claimed to have been instrumental in convincing Moonlight to organize the Indian company. They were at least partially garbed in army uniform and may have been armed by the government as well. Bullock to Ward, May 22, 1865, ibid.; *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers in the War of the Rebellion Together With Historical Sketches of Volunteer Organizations 1861 – 1866*, (Des Moines: 1910), p. 1254 (hereinafter cited as *Iowa Soldiers*);

Dodge wanted to strike the hostiles near the Black Hills in early spring, before they could move south to again raid the Platte Valley. Connor prepared to amass provisions and forage at Fort Laramie in anticipation of such a movement, but the logistics of moving large numbers of troops from the East onto the plains and supplying them immediately frustrated the plan. Connor discovered to his dismay that there were no more than four hundred serviceable cavalry horses in the entire district. The Eleventh Kansas, for example, could mount only two-thirds of its members, the rest marched afoot as far as Fort Kearny before additional horses could be procured. The Sixteenth Kansas, for reasons an infuriated Dodge was unable to fathom, took two months reaching its destination. Other units released by General of the Army Ulysses S. Grant had to move long distances overland and by steamer to reach the rendezvous point at Fort Leavenworth. Most of the troops Dodge intended to use for his spring campaign failed to arrive on the Missouri until early June, still six hundred miles short of Fort Laramie. At that, most of the cavalry arrived without horses. Supply trains required an average of six weeks to cover the distance between Leavenworth and Fort Laramie, and the bureaucracy of the Quartermaster Department delayed letting the freight contracts until May 1. That the contractors were given until December 1 to deliver the goods only compounded Dodge's headaches. Barely able to conceal his anger in an official communication, he later wrote: "The supplies went forward slowly; trains loitered on their way, waiting for

grass, and in many cases requisitions for stores did not arrive until late, the staff officers not appearing to have appreciated the necessity for early action, careful estimates, and timely requisitions."[29]

The Eleventh passed through Fort Laramie during the first week in April en route to what the men anticipated would be a major expedition. The Kansans camped the night of the eighth on the flood plain below the post, drew rations at the fort the next day, and moved on to a new bivouac nine miles upstream. Late that afternoon news arrived that Lee had surrendered his Army of Northern Virginia. "What a time," one veteran remembered. "No sleep that night. Officers and men lost all control of themselves and did many foolish things."[30] No doubt there was a raucous celebration at the post, too, in observance of the war's end.

The Confederate capitulation notwithstanding, Connor faced insurmountable logistical problems that forced him to conclude there would be no spring campaign against the Cheyennes. The best he could do was re-open the lines of communications, with the hope the expedition could be launched during the summer. In the interim, Connor distributed his available troops along the roads, providing a guard detachment at

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[29] Major General G. M. Dodge to Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Joseph McC. Bell, A. A. G., Department of the Missouri, July 18, 1865, O. R., I, 60, p. 332; Connor also reported that "the troops at Laramie and vicinity are nearly out of ammunition." Connor to Dodge, May 1, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, p. 287.

[30] Charles Waring, "The Platte Bridge Battle," ms., typescript in vertical files, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

every stage station and sending escorts with the stages and supply trains. The Eleventh Kansas was assigned to take station at Platte Bridge and other camps along the road as far west as South Pass. A few weeks later, the Sixteenth Cavalry marched through Fort Laramie with instructions to reinforce their Kansas comrades.

Among the troops sent west for that purpose was the Third U. S. Volunteers, one of the so-called "Galvanized Yankee" regiments composed of ex-Confederates. Connor distributed most of the unit among key points along the South Platte route from Fort Kearny to Denver, but sent two companies to augment the volunteers at Fort Laramie. In the parade of state troops Bullock had seen at the post up to that time, he considered these the worst. The sutler noted their arrival on May 8 with vehement skepticism:

> We had another arrival of troops here today. Two companies of renegades called rebel prisoners who are to garrison the post. The next thing which will break the camels back will be I suppose a regiment of Niggers. However Niggers are preferable to renegades, a class of wretches whose souls would even be denied a place in Hell.[31]

[31] Many, if not most, troops in the west took a back seat to those in the eastern theaters of the war when it came to arms, clothing, and equipment. The Eleventh Kansas, for instance, following their participation in the campaign against Confederate forces under General Sterling Price in Missouri, marched up the Oregon Trail with a third of the men dismounted and half without proper clothing. S. H. Fairfield, "The Eleventh Kansas Cavalry at Platte Bridge," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1903 – 1904,* (Topeka: 1904), v. 8, pp. 353-54; Bullock's quotation is in his letter to Ward, May 8, 1865, Ward Papers.

Two weeks before, as Moonlight was making his way up the Platte to take charge his new command, Connor was incensed at learning of the deaths of the soldiers at La Bonte and La Parele Creeks. He was determined to exact vengeance, campaign or not, and one Indian happened to be handy at that very moment. Just before Collins left for Omaha in February, Big Crow, a Northern Cheyenne, was camped at Deer Creek Station.[32] Coincidentally, a Mrs. Morton, who had been captured on Plum Creek during the previous summer's raids and had recently been released, was making her way back to Fort Laramie.[33] Recognizing Big Crow as her captor, she reported him to the detachment commander, who disarmed the Indian and sent him in manacles to Fort Laramie. On February 8, Major Mackey confined the chief in the guardhouse until Collins returned to decide his fate. But, Collins no sooner returned from the field than the orders arrived

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[32] The man hanged at Fort Laramie should not be confused with a Southern Cheyenne by the same name. The latter was war chief of the Crooked Lance Soldier society and led the ambush party at Julesburg during January 1865 in which Captain O'Brian and a number of soldiers were killed. However, George Bent was well acquainted with the Southern Cheyenne and clarified the distinction between the two individuals. George Bent to George E. Hyde, May 30, 1905, George Bent letters, Colorado Historical Society, Denver (hereinafter cited as Bent letters); Grinnell, *Fighting Cheyennes*, p. 183;Two sons of Big Crow had been induced by Catholic missionaries and former-agent Twiss to attend school in the East. After their departure, Big Crow resided near the station, thus accounting for his presence there when Mrs. Morton passed through. William Garnett interview, Walter M. Camp Notes, typescript p. 651, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University (collection hereinafter cited as Camp Notes, BYU).

[33] Bullock stated that Mrs. Morton had been secured from the Cheyennes by local traders Jules Ecoffy and young Joe Bissonette, son of the senior Bissonnette, a Fort Laramie area resident since the fur trade days who had served as interpreter for Colonel Stephen W. Kearny during his 1842 visit. "Joe deserves great praise for getting this woman as he risked his life in going to the village after her as several attempts were made to get her before he succeeded. She is from Iowa, about twelve miles from Nebraska City." Bullock to Ward, February 20, 1865, ibid.; Jules Ecoffey (sometimes spelled Ecoffy, Ecoffe, or corrupted into "Coffey") was a guide of French descent who had been in the Fort Laramie area for many years. By the mid-1860s, he had established a ranch and saloon five miles below Fort Laramie on the south side of the North Platte River. In the early 1870s, Ecoffey formed a partnership with Adolph Cuny to run the Three Mile hog ranch on the Laramie above the post Ware, *Indian War of 1864*, p. 201; J. W. Vaughn, "The Fort Laramie Hog Ranches," *Westerners Brand Book*, (New York: 1966), p. 40.

directing his unit to proceed to Omaha for muster out. Big Crow, therefore, remained imprisoned for three months because no one quite knew what to do with him. Since the Indian was already charged with murder, kidnapping, and mistreatment of a white woman, Connor decided to make an example of him to demonstrate to the Indians that future violations would be dealt with harshly.

He immediately sent a stern telegram to Baumer instructing him to, "Take Big Crow to place where soldier was killed yesterday, erect a high gallows, hang him in chains, and leave his body suspended." Connor obviously did not appreciate the distance to La Parele Creek until Baumer informed him of the impracticality moving Big Crow that far. The general responded curtly: "Execute him where you please."[34] "Last first day [Sunday] . . . the 'religious ceremony' of hanging an indian chief was performed at Fort Laramie," wrote Private Hervey Johnson. In reality, that "ceremony" was a ghastly lynching. The gallows consisted simply of two uprights supporting a crossbeam, over which a harness chain was tossed and the end looped around Big Crow's neck. Big Crow strangled to death as his soldiers hoisted his body above the ground. The guards fired two volleys into his writhing body for good measure. The corpse was still "waving in the air"

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[34] Telegram, Brigadier General Patrick E. Connor to Lieutenant Colonel William Baumer, April 22, 1865, Robert S. Ellison Papers, Denver Public Library (hereinafter cited as Ellison Papers).

within view of the post when Sergeant Lewis Hull arrived from Fort Halleck two weeks later.[35]

Bullock knew full well that the execution of the Cheyenne man would only exacerbate the Indian situation. "We are going to have a warm time here this summer," the trader predicted. "All the Sioux and Cheyenne are going to war and are splitting up into small war parties and have commenced their depredations . . . information has reached me today that a large war party has started out from the Sioux village to

[35] On April 27, in a letter home, Johnson mentioned the hanging as having occurred on April 23, 1865, but he was at Sweetwater Station at the time, so it can be assumed he received his information second-hand. Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire*, pp. 218, 243; The date recorded by a Seventh Iowa officer present at the execution agrees. His matter-of-fact notation of the event stated: "I helped hang an Indian Chief today ('Big Crow')." Captain John Wilcox to Mary Wilcox Stalnaker (sister), April 23, 1865, copy in vertical files, library, Fort Laramie NHS; Walter M. Camp cited a Fort Laramie "Guard Book" containing notations that Big Crow was confined on February 8 and executed on April 24. However, Camp did not provide the location of that document. The author failed to locate the Guard Book at Fort Laramie NHS, the National Archives, the Wyoming State Archives, or elsewhere. Based on Camp's wide reputation as an exacting researcher, the author has no reason to question the validity of his claim to have examined it. Camp letter No. 1, Ellison Papers; Strangely enough, William Bullock made no mention of the incident in his April 30, 1865 letter to Ward; Big Crow led the ambush party to lure Captain O'Brian and his troops away from Camp Rankin in January 1865. Grinnell, *Fighting Cheyennes*, pp. 183, 185; The scaffold stood on the plateau north of the post. "Soldiering on the High Plains: The Diary of Lewis Byram Hull 1864 – 1866," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, (February 1938), p. 35; An aging Sixteenth Kansas Cavalry veteran repeated a second-hand story that the hanging was botched initially and Big Crow slipped through the chain noose. He then climbed overhand to the cross bar of the scaffold. A large, powerfully built soldier went after him and wrestled him to the ground, where he was tied up again and hanged a second time. The story has not been verified in other sources, though the man's company did arrive at Fort Laramie within a few days after the incident. Related by R. Bayles in "Adventures in Indian Country," *National Tribune*, January 26, 1911; The ex-Sergeant Major of the Eleventh Ohio added that Big Crow had been confined a short time before the Collins expedition to Mud Springs returned to Fort Laramie. He stated that Major Mackey had the chief chained by one leg to half of a wagon axle to prevent his escape. In a foul mood after being bested in the fights, some of the men went to the guardhouse, forcibly removed the Indian, and attempted to lynch him. Colonel Collins intervened and had Big Crow taken back to his cell. Credence is given to this story because a number of details, including names, throughout the account are accurate. The lack of discipline among the men also agrees with Bullock's observations. J. J. Hollingsworth, ibid; William Garnett, son of Lieutenant Richard Garnett, Sixth Infantry, who lived with his mother's people and acted as interpreter for them, witnessed the execution and saw a squad of soldiers fire at the body twice. Camp notes, typescript p. 652, BYU.

depredate upon the road and posts."[36] Connor had also received intelligence that the Cheyennes were then about two hundred miles north of Fort Laramie, actively coercing the northern Sioux to join in the war.

Colonel Moonlight arrived at the post shortly after the execution, relieving Baumer of command of the North Sub-District. Within days of his appearance, Moonlight assembled a force of about five hundred cavalry, supported by two hundred pack mules, at Platte Bridge for an offensive against the Cheyennes. He hired Jim Bridger, who had recently journeyed to Fort Laramie from Virginia City via his own preferred route, to serve as guide for the expedition. Moonlight had received information that the Cheyennes were camped in the Wind River Valley, an area familiar to the old mountaineer. It proved to be a cold, fruitless search. Unable to locate any signs of a village, and suffering for lack of water, Moonlight's column turned back to the North Platte. He reported to Connor that there were "no Indians nearer than the Bighorn and Powder River," yet he suspected the Cheyennes were breaking up into small parties in preparation for a movement south.[37] What he failed to realize was the Indians were

[36] Bullock to Ward, April 30, 1865, Ward Papers.

[37] A. A. G., Dist. of the Plains to Connor, May 20, 1865, Camp letter No. 1, Ellison Papers; Major General G. M. Dodge to Major General John M. Pope, June 3, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, p. 751; A pack train was sent to Moonlight from Camp Cottonwood. A. A. A. G., Dist. of the Plains, April 27, 1865, ibid., p. 227.

observing him at the same time and they dogged his trail to renew raiding all along the road west of Fort Laramie.

During Moonlight's absence in the field, Connor made further dispositions of the available troops to protect the old Oregon road, although Bullock was of the opinion that the new district commander cared less about that route than he did the southern trail used by the Overland Mail. "I fear Connor will prove a humbug . . . From all I can learn he will do nothing this summer except serve Ben Holladay," he wrote to Ward.[38] Bullock's principal concern, however, was not so much the safety of the country as it was the potential decline in business that would result from traffic being diverted off the Laramie road. Indeed, Connor had little choice. Without enough soldiers to adequately guard both routes, he quite properly gave priority to the transcontinental mail, instructing the officer at Julesburg to encourage emigrants to also travel via Fort Halleck as the safer of the two avenues. Connor nevertheless directed Moonlight to distribute one company of the Third U. S. Volunteer Infantry in fourteen-man detachments at La Bonte Creek (Camp Marshall), Horseshoe Station, Deer Creek, and Platte Bridge. The other company was to similarly guard the telegraph stations at Three Crossings, St. Mary's, and South Pass. Conner left four cavalrymen at each station to serve as line repair crews, while all the remaining mounted troops were withdrawn to Fort Laramie to be held in readiness for the

[38] Ibid.; Bullock to Ward, May 8, 1865, ibid.

coming campaign. Meantime, Dodge kept his quartermasters busy contracting for supplies and freighting them to Fort Laramie and other strategic points.[39]

Back at the post, events were unfolding that would further tarnish the record of the volunteers. In early May, Oglala sub-chiefs Black Foot and Two Face were moving southward through the sand hills of northern Nebraska with six lodges of their people when they encountered the Corn Band (Brules) on the Niobrara River. The Oglalas had with them a captive, Mrs. Lucinda Eubank, a large sandy-haired woman of German descent taken in a raid on Liberty Farm on the Little Blue River, thirty miles east of Fort Kearny, the previous August. When the Indians struck, they first killed Joseph Eubank, Lucinda's father-in-law, as he stacked hay near his house. A warrior grabbed ten-year old Ambrose Asher, who was with his grandfather, and rode off with the screaming boy in the crook of his arm. At the first shots, three of the Eubank sons sprinted off to help their father, while the fourth, William (Lucinda's husband), ran to his own home to protect his family. Lucinda, her infant son, three-year-old daughter, and a visiting neighbor, Laura

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[39] A. A. G., Dist. of the Plains to Colonel Thomas Moonlight, May 5, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, p. 326; A. A. G., Division of the Missouri to Bvt. Maj. Gen. Alfred Sully, May 5, 1865, ibid., p. 329; Colonel J. A. Potter to Dodge, May 15, 1865, ibid., p. 455; The Arapaho chief Left Hand turned over Laura Roper, Ambrose Archer, and another child to Major Edward Wynkoop at Fort Lyon in September 1864. Apparently, Black Kettle attempted to locate and secure the return of Mrs. Eubank and the other captives, but was unable to do so before the Colorado Volunteers attacked his village in November. Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre*, (Norman: 1987), pp. 106-07; George Bent to George Hyde, May 10, 1905, Bent letters; Grinnell, *Fighting Cheyennes*, p. 159.

Roper, concealed themselves in a dry well, while the men attempted to repel the Indians. Resistance was futile. The warriors quickly cut down all the men. Then, as the Indians looted the premises, the panicked daughter's stifled screams attracted them to the hiding place. The crying child was quickly killed and scalped while Mrs. Eubank looked on helplessly. The four surviving captives were taken to the camp, where they joined Mrs. Morton and another white woman.[40]

During following months, Mrs. Eubank and her son became separated from the other prisoners in the course of being traded from one warrior to another. In spring, probably during the month of April, Two Face and Black Foot purchased them from the Cheyennes.[41] Word had circulated that the whites were offering a ransom for a white

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[40] Lucinda Eubank has been consistently misidentified as the wife of Joseph Eubank, who was actually her father-in-law. Apparently, Joseph was a widower at the time of the raid. The family members killed in the attack were sons William, Frank, James, Henry, daughter Dora, and Belle, the granddaughter whose crying attracted the Indians to the family's hiding place. A fifth son, George, was employed by a government freighter and was not present at the time of the attack. Mrs. Eubank's son, William, was about three months old when he was captured. William Eubank [jr.] to W. M. Camp, June 5, 1917, letter No. 86, Ellison Papers; Minnie Hough (niece) to Camp, July 26 [1917], letter No. 87, ibid..

[41] The war party that perpetrated this raid was composed of Cheyennes, Northern Arapahoes, and Sioux. Heap of Birds, a Cheyenne, was credited with capturing Mrs. Eubank. He later gave her to his sister, then living with the Sioux, who in turn gave her to Black Foot. Bent to Hyde, May 5, 1905, Bent letters; Bent to Camp, September 1, 1917, letter no. 89, Ellison Papers; A highly suspect version of the Lucinda Eubank story was given by O. H. P. Wiggins, who claimed to have spoken to Lucinda Eubank at Alkali Station following her release at Fort Laramie. The author recognizes that Wiggins's story contains elements of fact, but considers it largely apocryphal. Walter M. Camp Papers, Lilly Library, Indiana University (hereinafter cited as Camp Papers, Indiana University); Another even more fictionalized account is in Robert B. David, *Finn Burnett, Frontiersman*, (Glendale, Calif.,: 1937), pp. 30 – 43; See also Frank A. Root and William E. Connelley, *The Overland Stage to California*, (Columbus, Ohio: 1950), pp. 353-56; Charles Gereau had clerked for the American Fur Company at least as early as 1854 at their post five miles east of Fort Laramie on the North Platte. He may have been employed at Fort John prior to the army's purchase of the place. In any event, he had been in the Indian country for some time and was accepted among the Sioux. Frank Salaway interview, November 3, 1906, Tablet no. 27, Ricker Collection (hereinafter cited as Salaway interview).

woman, and the Indians assumed her identity was of no consequence. The Oglalas were unaware that the reward was specifically for the return of Mrs. Fanny Kelly, who had been captured when Miniconjous raided a train west of Horseshoe Station during July 1864. Family members had deposited the cash equivalent of nineteen horses with the commanding officer at Fort Laramie, and publicized the fact through the Loafers in hope she might be returned alive.[42]

The Brules informed their kinsmen that Little Thunder and Spotted Tail were already camped near the agency at Fort Laramie for protection. Black Foot and Two Face, also desirous of staying out of harm's way, saw an opportunity to curry favor with the officials at Fort Laramie by surrendering Mrs. Eubank and the child. To convince the whites of their sincerity, it was agreed that Two Face and the captives would go to the post in advance of the rest of the band. Once it was safe, the others would come in. Swift Bear and his Corn Band decided they, too, would go to the agency.[43]

Early on the morning of May 15, Two Face arrived on the North Platte a few miles below the mouth of the Laramie, opposite the camps of Spotted Tail and Little Thunder. After making his intentions known to the Brule inhabitants, they quickly

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[42] Fanny Kelly, *Narrative of My Captivity*, (Cincinnati: 1871), pp. 224-25; McDermott, *Frontier Crossroads*, p. 36.

[43] Black Foot was also known as Thunder Bear, according to his son. It was not uncommon for Plains Indians to have more than one name during their lifetimes. Unclassified Envelope No. 9 (typescript p. 264), Camp Papers, Indiana University.

constructed a crude raft and floated it across the swollen river. Once on the south bank, Two Face proceeded to Bordeaux's trading post, where a woman gave Mrs. Eubank, clad only in sparse Indian garb, a dress and other items with which she could properly attire herself before going to the fort. As a precaution, Two Face prevailed upon Big Mouth, sergeant of the agency police force and now head of the Loafers, to accompany them. Big Mouth, in turn, consulted with Agent Jarrot and James Beauvais, expressing his reservations about going to the fort alone. Both men agreed to go along and talk to Colonel Moonlight. The over-reactive commanding officer, however, relieved Two Face of his hostage, and peremptorily confined the Indian in the guardhouse.

Mrs. Eubank, now liberated and eager to avenge her family, informed Moonlight that Black Foot and his band were not far from the fort, awaiting word to come in. The officials agreed that Big Mouth and a detachment of police should be sent to assure Black Foot that all was well and that he would be welcome at the fort. But, when the Indians reached Platte ferry on May 24, they were met by post interpreter Charles Gereau, along with a number of policemen and soldiers. Gereau informed the Sioux that Moonlight had deceived them and that they had been lured into a trap. The soldiers then arrested Black Foot, his son Thunder Bear, and five other males. The women and children were ordered to remain on the north side of the river, while the men and teen-aged boys were escorted

to the post. Speaking through Gereau, Black Foot attempted to convince Moonlight of their honorable intentions with regard to Mrs. Eubank. In fact, contrary to the colonel's impression, he and Two Face had rescued her from the hostiles and were now returning her to her own people, a deed they thought would benefit them. Moonlight ignored Black Foot's plea, ordering the officer of the day to place the Indians in irons, except for the two youngest members, whom he released. The colonel assured them that the men would be released in a few days, meantime the remainder of the band should move down to Bordeaux's and camp with the Brules.[44]

"We have caught Mr. 'Two Face' and his five lodges who run off our cattle and killed 7 head, and shot 20 more full of arrows," wrote Sutler Bullock in reference to the attack on Gillespie's train back in April. "He and his warriors are now sweeping the

[44] Those individuals taken into custody at the ferry were: Black Foot (a.k.a., Thunder Bear), his two half brothers, Standing Cloud and Red Dog; Calico (nephew), Long Legged Wolf (stepson), Yellow Bear, and young Thunder Bear (son). Gereau informed Moonlight that the latter two were only eighteen years of age, whereupon Moonlight had them weighed on a platform scale. Convinced of their youth, the colonel provided them some rations and sent them back to the band; This account combines later statements by Black Foot's son, who was present at the time, and Frank Salaway, the same man of French-Sioux ancentry who witnessed the Grattan fight in 1854. Salaway obtained his information directly from Big Mouth, his brother-in-law and chief of the Indian police at the Upper Platte Agency in 1865. Thunder Bear interview, MSS 57, box 2, Camp Collection, BYU (hereinafter cited as Thunder Bear interview); Frank Salaway interview, November 3, 1906, Tablet No. 27, Ely Ricker Collection, Nebraska Historical Society (hereinaftercited as Salaway interview); The Indian testimony differs on several key points from Moonlight's official reports. Significantly, Moonlight stated that Indian police were sent to the village, where they discovered Mrs. Eubank and her son, and subsequently arrested Two Face. Upon learning the whereabouts of Black Foot and the rest of the band, Moonlight claimed that he ordered Indian soldiers "to bring them in dead or alive." The commander gave no hint that the Indians had presented themselves at the fort with professions of friendship. Telegram, Moonlight to Captain George F. Price, A. A. A. G., District of the Plains, May 26, 1865, Letters Received, vol. 93, Records of the Department of the Platte, R. G. 393 N. A.

parade ground with a Ball & Chain to their heels. And I think ere long will be dancing between heaven and earth."[45]

Indeed, Moonlight staged an informal trial to legitimize his plan for executing the men, "as an example to all Indians of like character and in retaliation for the many wrongs and outrages they have committed on the white race . . . ."[46] Lucinda Eubank, the only witness for the prosecution, provided grim details of her captivity. Some of her statements no doubt reflected her treatment by the Cheyennes, with whom she had been for eight months, yet most of the offenses against her were attributed to the culprits at hand, Two Face and Black Foot. Mrs. Eubank recounted that the Cheyennes had taken her to the Arkansas River, where "the whole village ravished her" and treated her in a "beastly manner." In the spring, when Black Foot's band of Oglalas crossed trails with the Cheyennes, Two Face offered three horses for the white woman, expressing his desire to keep her "for sensual use." By that time, however, she was already pregnant "by the Cheyenne [Big Crow] who had slept with her," according to Woman's Hair, a Sioux woman.[47] While Mrs. Eubank could not say that Two Face had been particularly cruel to

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[45] Bullock to Ward, May 22, 1865, Ward Papers; Moonlight also claimed that Blackfoot's band had in their possession "a number of Government mules and horses, also some private mules stolen last winter," implicating their involvement in the raids along the Platte road some months earlier. Telegram, Moonlight to Price, May 26, 1865, Dept. of the Platte Records.

[46] Special Orders No. 11, North Sub-district of the Plains, May 25, 1865, transcribed in Camp letter no. 1, Ellison Papers.

[47] John Farnham reportedly came to Fort Laramie in July 1867 as a soldier in Company E, Fourth U. S. Infantry. He later married an Oglala Sioux woman, Win Pelim ("Woman's Hair), and remained on the

her, the officers at Fort Laramie concluded from her statements that she had been forced to perform hard labor (which, it should be pointed out, was normal for all women in Indian society), was at one time dragged across the Platte River at the end of a rope, and was kept nearly naked for the entire time she was in Indian hands. "When they [Black Foot and Two Face] got ready to bring her back they all went into the river with her swimming, and all ravished her," a Sioux man later admitted. If the accused were permitted to speak in their defense, the testimony was not recorded.[48]

Northern Plains for the remainder of his life. In 1874, he was employed at the Red Cloud Agency near Camp Robinson and during the Sioux War, he served as post guide and interpreter at Fort Laramie. Walter Camp determined that Farnham was present at the Reynolds Fight on Powder River in March 1876, and was a member of General Crook's Big Horn Expedition later that spring. The Farnhams resided on the Pine Ridge Reservation when Camp interviewed them in 1917. Farnham interviews, unclassified envelope No. 10 (typescript p. 270), Camp Papers, Indiana University; R. Eli Paul, *The Nebraska Indian Wars Reader 1865 – 1877*, (Lincoln: 1998), p. 117.

[48] This description of Lucinda Eubank's treatment is based on and quoted from Thunder Bear interview; Salaway interview; Mrs. John Farnham interview, (1917), unclassified envelope No. 10 (typescript p. 269), Camp Papers, Indiana University; Moonlight to Price, May 27, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-1, pp. 276-77; A month after the execution, a story was circulating among the soldiers at Fort Laramie that Mrs. Eubank had submitted to having sexual relations with Two Face after another captive woman had refused. The woman was allegedly tied between two horses and dismembered. The tale may have been factual, since that the trial proceedings were public knowledge at the post. However, it must also be considered that Mrs. Eubank's virtue as a white woman had to be defended with an explanation for her presumably unwilling conduct and resulting pregnancy. Cyrus C. Schofield, Sixteenth Kansas Cavalry, to Mary E. Schofield, June 25, 1865, vertical file, library, Fort Laramie NHS (hereinafter cited as Cyrus C. Schofield letter); The author has been unable to determine whether the half-Indian baby survived. Her niece, who certainly should have known, made no mention of the child, though she stated that Lucinda returned to her native Illinois and resided there for about five years after her release. Mrs. Eubank was subsequently married twice more in later years. One can only speculate how her experience may have affected those relationships. She eventually moved to Vernon County, Missouri, where she died in 1911. Hough to Camp, July 26 [1917], no. 87, Ellison Papers.

The evidence, such as it was, was compelling enough for Colonel Moonlight to pronounce sentence on Two Face and Black Foot, while the other four prisoners were kept in confinement. Moonlight specified that the two leaders were to

> . . . be hung tomorrow at 2 PM . . . The execution will be conducted in a sober, soldierly manner and the bodies will be left hanging as a warning to others. No citizen or soldiers nor Indians will be permitted to visit or touch the dead bodies without permission from these headquarters or that of the post.[49]

At the appointed hour on May 26, guards removed Two Face and Black Foot, still manacled with ball-and-chain, from the guardhouse and placed them in a wagon that would transport them to what became known as "the gallows ground." Moonlight had erected a second gallows on the bench land approximately three-fourths of a mile northwest of the post, just to the right of the road, beside the one from which still hung the putrid, bullet-riddled remains of Big Crow.[50]

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[49] S. O. No. 11, Ellison Papers.

[50] Most eyewitness accounts place the execution site three-fourths to one mile west-northwest of the fort. Thunder Bear remembered it as "a high hill about a mile N.W. of the fort." Camp notes, MSS 57, box 2, BYU; An officer passing through Fort Laramie fifteen years later, described the remnants of the gallows. "After a walk of three-quarters of a mile west of the post, and a little to the right of the old Fort Fetterman road, we reached the gentle eminence on which the gallows stood in plain view of the post. We could see from the rotten debris that the scaffold consisted of two ordinary uprights about ten feet apart, connected with the usual cross-piece on the top. On this gallows three Indians were hung at the same time, and, it would seem, in a most barbarous manner—by means of coarse chains around their necks, and heavy chains and iron balls attached to the lower part of the naked limbs to keep them down. There was no drop. They were allowed to writhe and strangle to death . . . We could see their bones protruding from the common grave under the gallows. We were glad to leave this gloomy spot and wind our way, by clamoring steep bluffs, to the highest point overlooking the Platte and the beautiful valley of the Laramie." First Lieutenant James Regan, "Military Landmarks," *The United Service,* (August 1880), pp. 159-61; "I remember seeing

Earlier that day, an Oglala had ridden from the post to inform the villagers at Bordeaux's that the soldiers were going to execute Black Foot and Two Face. Black Foot's son, Thunder Bear--one of the boys Moonlight had released--concealed a revolver beneath his shirt and started toward the fort to try to gain his father's release. Along the way, Spotted Tail joined him and accompanied him to the fort. When the two arrived on the bluffs overlooking the Laramie, they observed a crowd of people gathered on the highlands beyond. They were too late; the execution was already underway. Thunder Bear was determined to ride to his father's rescue, but the older and wiser chief persuaded him not to go. "Don't go any further," Spotted Tail counseled. "These people must pay for this. Go back. You cannot do anything to prevent it. It is a great wrong to us and we will some time go to war and avenge it."[51]

In his haste to curry General Connor's favor by setting another harsh example, Moonlight committed a grievous error that did nothing to deter the hostiles on Powder River. In truth, it turned peaceable Indians against the army. William Bullock was more

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the cruel savages hanging by the neck on one of the hills north of the fort." Fairfield, "Eleventh Kansas," *Transactions*, p. 354; Additional references to the site were provided by Captain B. F. Rockafellow, Sixth Michigan Cavalry, who saw it on June 25, 1865, and R. Bayles, a member of Company D, Sixteenth Kansas. LeRoy R. and Ann W. Hafen, *Powder River Campaigns and Sawyers Expedition of 1865*, (Glendale, Calif.: 1961), p. 167 (hereinafter cited as *Powder River Campaigns*); *National Tribune*, January 26, 1911. See also John Davidson interview, Camp notes, envelope no. 10 (typescript pp. 278-79), Indiana University.

[51] Thunder Bear interview, typescript p. 650, BYU.

keenly attuned to Sioux reaction than the inexperienced officers at the post. Two days after the event he lamented, ". . . we have now the Indians hanging in sight of the post. This barbarity is only calculated to make them more vicious and determined, and no stock is safe in the country. As soon as Conner arrives I presume their [sic] will be another hanging as they have four more Indians in the Guardhouse."[52] In accordance with Moonlight's order, the corpses remained suspended from the gallows for weeks after the execution. Private R. Bayles, Sixteenth Kansas, remembered seeing "two scaffolds with two bodies hanging on one—Two Face and another Indian—while the other had but one, all hung with chains. We understood the hanging took place at two separate times."[53]

Her revenge complete, Lucinda Eubank prepared to leave the post and return to relatives in Illinois. At the time of Two Face's arrest, members of the guard had found $220.00 in greenbacks on his person, while a search of the others disclosed a total of $50.00. Colonel Moonlight confiscated the money, and later donated it to Mrs. Eubank as a measure of compensation for her suffering.

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[52] Bullock to Ward, May 28, 1865, Ward Papers.

[53] *National Tribune*, January 26, 1911; Another soldier observed the corpses still hanging from the gallows a full month after the execution. Cyrus C. Schofield letter.

Chapter 11

"They Must Be Hunted Like Wolves"

The warring Indian factions, meantime, had not been idle. The northern Sioux bands had joined the Cheyennes in a rampage extending all along the central portion of the emigrant trail from Fort Kearny to South Pass. On May 20, a force of two hundred warriors descended on the station at Deer Creek with the intent of stealing the stock there, but the Kansas veterans put up a determined resistance. The raiders managed to kill one soldier and escape with twenty-two horses, but the raid cost them seven warriors killed and one wounded. Lieutenant Colonel Preston B. Plumb gave chase with thirty troopers, but was unable to ford the river. Demonstrating their contempt for the soldiers, another party stole several mules within just eight miles of Fort Laramie. A detachment of forty cavalrymen took up their trail and recaptured the animals. A few days later, Indians

interrupted communications when they tore down sixteen miles of telegraph line between Horseshoe Station and La Bonte Creek, and shortly afterward a war party attacked and burned St. Mary's Station. Indians stampeded the herd at Sweetwater Crossing on May 26, though they were prevented from getting away with the animals when troopers of the Eleventh Ohio opened a brisk fire on them with their Spencer rifles. That same day, warriors boldly attacked a government supply train, escorted by an entire company of soldiers, nine miles below Platte Bridge. Farther east, Indians stole a number of animals from the Overland Stage Line near North Platte.[1]

Connor renewed his requests for additional troops to enable him to guard the transcontinental routes, and simultaneously launch an expedition northward into the heartland of the Sioux and Northern Cheyennes, who were now "spoiling for a fight." Even Major General John Pope at Division of the Missouri Headquarters in St. Louis was convinced that Connor had to move against the hostiles as soon as possible. "Connor must finally deal with these Indian this summer," Pope declared.[2] The general promised

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[1] Bullock to Ward, May 22 and May 28, 1865, Seth E. Ward Papers, Denver Public Library (hereinafter cited as Ward Papers); The soldier killed at Deer Creek was Private Silas Henshaw, Company A, Eleventh Kansas Cavalry. The (Oskaloosa) *Independent*, July 8, 1865; Price to Connor, May 22, 1865, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, (Washington, D. C.), Series I, vol. 48, pt.2, p. 554 (hereinafter cited as *O. R.* with series and volume); Connor to Dodge, May 29, 1865, ibid., p. 670; Price to Connor, June 5, 1865, ibid., p. 718; Lieutenant Colonel P. B. Plumb to Lieutenant I. L. Taber, June 1, 1865, ibid., p. 724; William E. Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire: A Buck Soldier's View of Indian Country 1863 - 1866*, (Salt Lake City: 1990), pp. 249-51 (hereinafter cited as *Tending the Talking Wire*).

[2] Pope to Dodge, May 29, 1865, O. R., I, 48-2, p. 665.

to commit all the troops necessary for such an operation, but insisted that the movement had to be done prior to August, lest the column be caught in the field at the onset of winter.

Moonlight, meanwhile, made use of the forces available to him by distributing the Eleventh Kansas in battalions at critical points between Fort Laramie and Platte Bridge. But, the lack of sacked corn at Fort Laramie, along with a dry winter resulting in a critical shortage of natural forage for the horses, threatened the removal of all cavalry from the road. Sutler Bullock recorded that "Their [sic] is no forage here a tall. Not fifty bushels [of] corn and not men enough at the Post to guard a train, and the Indians thick around here, with a determination to take all the stock in the country and they will certainly succeed."[3] Connor nevertheless requested four additional regiments of cavalry, as well as two of infantry. He also requisitioned hundreds of extra horses and tons of supplies, including grain, to sustain a lengthy campaign. Connor stressed that the cavalry had to be sent immediately, making forced marches from Fort Leavenworth, so that the expedition could take the field before their terms of service expired. Connor also summoned two available companies of the Second California Volunteer Cavalry, then posted at Fort Bridger, to join the expedition at Laramie. He informed Dodge that he would move his district headquarters to Fort Laramie by about June 10 to enable him to personally

[3] Bullock to Ward, May 28, 1865, Ward Papers.

oversee final preparations. Bullock, however, still resented the incompetence of the volunteers when it came to handling Indians. He admittedly looked forward to the day when they would be withdrawn "and we will once again be blessed with Regular Soldiers."[4]

Bullock's lack of faith was not unwarranted. Connor took the precaution of ordering Moonlight to conduct the local Brule and Oglala bands, now virtual prisoners of war in the wake of the execution, to Fort Kearny to prevent them from joining the hostiles. At the same time, the Sioux already on the warpath would be unable to take refuge with their more peacefully inclined relatives at the agency. Moonlight directed Major Mackey to organize an escort consisting of a reinforced company of the Seventh Iowa Cavalry, 139 men in all, under the command of Captain William D. Fouts, a veteran of the Mud Springs fight. They were to accompany the 185 lodges of friendly Sioux, including Brules of Spotted Tail and Little Thunder, Black Foot's Oglalas, and the resident Loafers. Bullock privately feared that the hard-nosed district commander might decide to murder them all, including women and children. The Sioux, especially the Loafers, who considered Fort Laramie to be their home, were understandably reluctant to

[4] Connor to Dodge, June 6, 1865, *O. R.* I, 48-2, p. 777; Connor to Major J. W. Barnes, A. A. G., Dept. of the Missouri, May 28, 1865, ibid., p. 646; Richard H. Orton (comp.), *Records of California Men in the War of the Rebellion, 1861 to 1867*, (Sacramento: 1890), p. 171; Bullock to Ward, May 22, 1865, Ward Papers.

leave because Fort Kearny lay squarely in the territory controlled by their mortal enemies, the Pawnees. Nevertheless, the leaders realized it would be folly to resist in such close proximity to Fort Laramie.

The cavalcade that set forth down the North Platte on June 11 was a memorable sight. The cavalry led the column, followed by the wagons and a contrasting mixture of traditional free-roaming Sioux, the long-dependent Loafers, and the attendant menagerie of ponies, barking dogs, and travois loaded down with all impedimenta of an Indian village. The Indians numbered 1,500 – 2,000 people. The company of Indian police led by Elston and Sergeant Big Mouth were to maintain order during the journey. In one of the wagons near the head of the column rode Fouts's wife and children, along with the family of Lieutenant Triggs, Lucinda Eubank, and her infant son. Mrs. Eubank was only too happy to be leaving the plains to return to her family home in Illinois, and the officers were equally anxious to remove their families from the war zone. The old French traders, too, sensed danger after the recent outrage perpetrated on the Sioux. In the crowd were James Bordeaux and his family, with several hundred head of loose cattle and ponies, as well as some wagons loaded with goods. The trader appreciated that with the Indians also went his trading business. Nor was Bordeaux the only white man leaving the confluence area. James Beauvais abandoned his ranch at the old American Fur Company post, more recently the headquarters for the Upper Platte Agency. He loaded everything he owned in

twenty-one large freight wagons, each drawn by six yoke of oxen, and drove another fifty head of loose cattle. Several other old resident mountaineers bound to the Sioux by marriage and commerce also decided it was time to clear out and joined the procession with their Indian wives, children, and ponies. Bringing up the rear, under guard, were the four Oglala prisoners, each still bound in chains and weighted down with a twenty-four pound iron ball. The magnitude of the exodus is reflected in Bullock's observation that, "All the people of the country have left except [Joseph] Bissonette & Jules [Ecoffy] and they speak of leaving in a few days . . . . We now have no Indians at the fort."[5] Indeed, for the first time in more than thirty years, there were no Sioux villages near Fort Laramie, and in the void an uneasy stillness descended over the valley.

Fouts allowed easy marches down the North Platte for the first two days to establish order and allow everyone to become accustomed to the routine. When Sioux boys did the natural thing of racing their ponies along the column, Fouts ordered them to stop, threatening to tie any offender to a wagon wheel and lash him with a whip. But while Fouts's attention was focused on discipline, the Indian headmen quietly formulated a plan of escape. The third day's journey brought the assemblage to Horse Creek, familiar site of the 1851 treaty council. While the soldiers, including the rear guard with the

[5] Bullock to Ward, June 12, 1865, Ward Papers.

prisoners in tow, crossed to the far side of the creek before going into camp, the Indians halted on the west side. The leaders directed some of the younger warriors to slip away and locate a crossing above the mouth of the tributary by which the women and children could ford the Platte.

Fouts intended to increase the pace the next day by making the twenty-eight miles to Scott's Bluff by nightfall. He had reveille sounded at three o'clock on the morning of fourteenth, and announced that the march would commence at five. Fouts also instructed Captain John Wilcox, in charge of the advance guard, to proceed down the road two miles just at sunrise. There he was to pause and await the train, with the Indians closing up behind. The officers had inadvertently committed several grievous errors. Not only were the warriors permitted to keep their arms and horses on the march, but Fouts allowed the Indians to camp on the opposite side of Horse Creek, thus placing an obstacle between themselves and the troops. He also voiced no objection when the guards consented to allow the prisoners to ride horseback, rather than be compelled to ride wagons with their balls-and-chains. Even more difficult to understand was Fouts' decision not to issue carbine ammunition to the men of his own Company D in the certainty they would not need it. Wilcox was less confident, and made sure his mixed detachment of A and B Company men had sufficient ammunition when they departed Fort Laramie.

All went as planned, until Fouts looked back to see the Indian tepees still standing beyond the creek. As the wagons continued down the road toward Scott's Bluff, the captain rode back to hurry the Indians along. Just as he crossed the stream and entered the camp, awaiting warriors fired two shots, knocking Fouts from his saddle. That was the signal for the three mounted prisoners with the advance guard to make their escape. The fourth man, who had become lame and was riding in a wagon carrying the tentage and equipment for the guard detail, had to be left behind.[6] Just then, a messenger reached Wilcox, informing him that Fouts had been killed and the Indian factions were fighting among themselves.[7] The captain ordered his drivers to corral the wagons, with the teams turned to the inside, and the men to prepare a defense. At the same time, he dispatched a messenger to Fort Mitchell, eighteen miles away.

As the men of the rear guard caught up, Wilcox asked Lieutenant Heywood why he had not made a stand where he was. It was only then, and much to his consternation,

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[6] The fourth prisoner was reportedly killed by the soldiers during the fight. Antoine Bordeaux interview, envelope no. 72 (typescript p. 442), Walter M. Camp notes, Lilly Library, Indiana University; Wilcox may have had this in mind when he later wrote that some of his men "acted badly" during the fight. Captain John Wilcox to A. A. G., District of the Plains, June 21, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-1, pp. 324-26.

[7] There was by no means unanimity among the Sioux for this breakout. During the march down the Platte, the leaders met secretly at night to debate what to do. Apparently, Elston and a few dozen other white men in the camp cautioned the Indians not to resist the troops. Some of the peace chiefs were killed by their own people when they tried to quell the outbreak. Wilcox recorded that his messenger informed him that the Indians were fighting among themselves. Connor also stated that they killed four of their own chiefs "who refused to join them." And, yet another contemporary account reported that Little Thunder himself had been killed in the fray. Wilcox report, p. 1255; Telegram, Connor to Dodge, June 15, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, p. 895; Cyrus C. Schofield, Sixteenth Kansas Cavalry, to Mary E. Schofield, June 25, 1865, vertical files, library, Fort Laramie NHS (hereinafter cited as Cyrus C. Schofield letter); letter; George E. Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk: A History of the Oglala Sioux Indians*, (Norman: 1987), p. 1209 (hereinafter cited as *Red Cloud's Folk*).

that Wilcox learned they had no ammunition. Wilcox quickly directed them to draw a supply from the wagons, then divided the command into two platoons, one of which would form a skirmish line outside the perimeter of the wagon corral. He also directed Lieutenants James G. Smith and Jeremiah H. Triggs to have some of the men begin digging a protective trench just outside the corral. Wilcox and Heywood, meantime, would lead the other seventy men, mounted, back to the now deserted camp. There they found Fouts' naked and mutilated body lying on the prairie.[8] The villagers had fled down the creek approximately four miles and were swimming the Platte when the soldiers arrived on the scene. On the plain between the troops and the river, mounted warriors were riding back and forth, winding their ponies in anticipation of combat. Captain Wilcox, assuming that some of the Indians might still be friendly, advanced his command to within about six hundred yards before sending Elston forward to communicate with them in hopes of inducing some to return. But, the warriors suddenly charged, prompting the soldiers to dismount and deploy to the front in skirmish order. The Indians opened fire at about three hundred yards, and the troops responded with a volley that broke up

[8] An Indian witness credited Charging Shield and Foam with killing Fouts. Thunder Bear interview; George Bent said that the Sioux always claimed the soldiers had taken some of their women and slept with them during the march down from Fort Laramie. This infuriated the warriors and did much to fuel the outbreak. Bent to Hyde, June 1, 1905, George Bent letters, Colorado Historical Society; A soldier in the Sixteenth Kansas Cavalry alluded to this, though he was not with Fouts, when he wrote: "The prisoners may have had a very good reason for doing as they did. I will not pretend to say, only to guess at it, for many of them were women, & soldiers were with them on the Plains. What restraint had they?" Cyrus C. Schofield letter.

their advance. Meanwhile, however, other tribesmen were passing around the flanks of the soldiers in an attempt to envelop the command. Still more Indians poured down "like an avalanche" from the hills rising to the left of their position. Wilcox assessed the situation and estimated he was now confronting at least five hundred warriors. Heavily outnumbered and standing in the open, Wilcox prudently decided to mount his men and retire to the wagon corral. At that, the soldiers were compelled to fight a rear guard action the entire distance, while skirmishing with Indians on their flanks and to the front as well. Only when they got within range of the other platoon did the Indians break off the engagement. By that time, several troopers had expended all their ammunition.

Wilcox assumed the Sioux would attack his defenses, but they remained at a safe distance from the wagons. He therefore mounted fifty men on the best horses and again advanced, hoping to detain the Indians long enough to allow reinforcements to arrive and defeat them. The cavalry, with the Sioux falling back ahead of them, moved about three miles down the creek. When large numbers of warriors appeared on the hills west of the creek, with still more forming in his front and rear, it became apparent to Wilcox that the Indians were luring his little force into a trap. He again retired to await reinforcements from Fort Mitchell.

Captain Jacob Shuman and a detachment of the Eleventh Ohio arrived at the corral at about nine o'clock that morning. Determined to prevent the Sioux from escaping,

Wilcox mounted every available man and again advanced toward the Platte. By the time he reached the river, however, the Indian non-combatants had already forded and disappeared over the bench lands on the north side. A rear guard of warriors stood atop the hills, taunting the soldiers to follow, but Wilcox was wise enough not be baited into the trap. The most he could do was destroy the lodges and other camp equipage left behind by the Indians. Wilcox estimated that his men had killed between twenty and thirty of the hostiles. Besides Fouts, the Seventh Iowa had lost Privates Edward McMahon, Richard Grogen, Philip Alder killed and four other men wounded. Wilcox had the enlisted men buried on the field, but took Fouts's body to Fort Mitchell for interment in the post cemetery.[9]

Wilcox's plea for assistance spurred Colonel Moonlight to action. Hastily forming a punitive expedition composed of 234 cavalrymen of from the Kansas, Ohio, and California regiments, Moonlight set off down the north side of the Platte on the fifteenth in an attempt to intercept the fleeing Indians. Before departing, he telegraphed Wilcox at Fort Mitchell requesting him to cross the river and follow the trail north in hopes the two forces working in concert could bring the Sioux to bay. However, high water and

[9] This account of the affair at Horse Creek draws from the Wilcox report and the Frank Salaway interview, Frank Salaway interview, November 3, 1906, Tablet no. 27, Ricker Collection (hereinafter cited as Salaway interview) and the Wilcox report; Connor reported that five of the Indians who escaped from Fouts later turned themselves in at Fort Laramie and were incarcerated in the guardhouse. Their fate is not known. Connor to Dodge, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, p. 1086.

quicksand cost Wilcox two horses drowned, and very nearly claimed Captain Shuman's life, causing him to abandon any further attempts to form a junction with the Fort Laramie column. In his enthusiasm to catch up with the Indians, however, Moonlight pushed his under-nourished mounts too hard, causing his men to straggle by the time he discovered the Indian trail leading from the valley. But, unbeknown to him, Sioux scouts acting as a rear guard were observing his movements waiting for an opportunity to strike. Their chance came on June 17 as the cavalry halted for a mid-morning breakfast on Dead Man's Creek, about 120 miles northeast of Fort Laramie. Earlier that day, Moonlight had sent back 103 troopers because their horses were unable to maintain the pace, leaving him only 131 men. The colonel allowed his men to unsaddle their horses and turn them loose to graze. Warriors suddenly swooped down from the adjacent hills, shouting, firing guns, and waving blankets to stampede the animals. The Indians cut out seventy-four prime mounts, all belonging to the newly-arrived California companies, and drove them directly down the creek and out into the connecting White River Valley, where more warriors waited. During the lightning-quick raid, a furious Moonlight had jumped to his feet and begun firing wildly at the Indians with a brace of revolvers, but of course to no avail. With most of his men suddenly afoot, the thoroughly chagrined colonel was compelled to burn the useless horse equipment and hike back to Fort Laramie. News of the blunder was the final straw for General Connor. "Colonel Moonlight has been

unfortunate in his dealings with Indians . . ." Connor informed the department commander. "I have relieved him, and will further investigate his conduct."[10]

Preparations for Connor's long-anticipated Powder River offensive began to take shape in June. Government trains and some commercial freighters were finally reaching Fort Laramie to amass the stockpile of supplies necessary to support the expedition. In late May, Dodge had moved his own headquarters west to Fort Leavenworth to be in a more advantageous position to see that both troops and supplies were pressed forward from that point. "We settle the Indian troubles this season," Dodge emphasized to Connor, " . . . they should be made to feel the full power of the Government and severely punished for past acts."[11]

Guided by Pope's strategy, plans were laid to penetrate the Indian heartland on the headwaters of Powder and Tongue Rivers from the east, southeast, and south using four converging columns simultaneously. Brigadier General Alfred Sully was to strike west

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[10] Colonel Thomas Moonlight to Price, A. A. A.G., Dist. of the Plains, June 21, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-1, pp. 325-28; Envelope no. 8 (typescript p. 261), Camp notes, Indiana University; Envelope no. 10 (typescript p. 271), Camp notes, ibid.; Salaway interview; George M. Walker, "The Eleventh Kansas Cavalry, 1865, and Battle of Platte Bridge," *Kansas Historical Collections*, vol. 14, p. 334; S. H. Fairchild, "The Eleventh Kansas Regiment at Platte Bridge," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1903 – 1904*, vol. 8, p. 355; Rami Nadeau, *Fort Laramie and the Sioux*, (Lincoln: 1982), pp. 185-86; Connor to Dodge, June 20, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, p. 950; Connor to Dodge, June 19, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, p. 938; In a subsequent telegram, Connor acknowledged that Moonlight's "administration here was a series of blunders." Connor to Dodge, July 6, 1865, ibid., p. 1059; Dodge to A. A. G., Military Division of the Missouri, July 18, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-1, p. 332.

[11] Dodge to Connor, June 10, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-1, pp. 348-49.

from Fort Rice, on the Upper Missouri, toward the mouth of Powder River, but that plan was foiled when Santee Sioux made a surprise raid into Minnesota. Army Headquarters was furious that commanders had become so complacent that Indians could move right through its defensive line without being detected. Pope had little choice but to divert Sully's troops to counter the Indians and protect the northern frontier. He therefore aborted the expedition to the west, ordering Sully instead to strike the Santees at Devil's Lake. Moreover, a few bands of Teton Sioux had recently come to Fort Rice to talk peace, thus diluting the justification to make war against them. Connor would have to assume full responsibility for dealing with the combined tribes, thought to be camped east of the Bighorn Mountains.

Another, column commanded by Colonel Nelson Cole, Second Missouri Light Artillery, would march up the Loup Fork River to the eastern side of the Black Hills, where a large number of hostiles were reported to be congregating. From that point, Cole would swing northwest around the hills to the plains beyond to link up with other forces moving north from Fort Laramie. Even if Cole failed to come in contact with the Sioux, it was hoped his presence in that region would drive them westward into the path of the other troops.

The Right Column was composed of eight companies of Cole's own regiment, equipped as cavalry, and eight companies of the Twelfth Missouri Cavalry, numbering

about 1,400 men in all. A few of the artillerymen were assigned to serve a section (two guns) of three-inch ordnance rifles. The troops rendezvoused on the Missouri in mid-June, with a planned departure on July 1. The memory of Moonlight's folly still fresh in his mind, Connor admonished Cole to habitually side-hobble his animals under the close protection of sentries, and throw out scouts on his flanks to prevent a surprise attack while on the march. In his final instructions to Cole, the general made clear this was to be a no-holds-barred campaign: "You will not receive overtures of peace or submission from Indians, but will attack and kill every male Indian over twelve years of age."[12]

As Cole finalized preparations at Omaha, other troops were moving up the Platte Road to flesh out the Center Column then assembling at Fort Laramie. Dodge had put the Sixteenth Kansas Cavalry in motion from Fort Leavenworth toward that point, despite the unit's ill-equipped condition. The horses of the command were under-nourished as a result of the logistical problems, compounded by the near absence of grass on the high plains, and Connor noted that the men's clothing was threadbare. Since the regiment's term of enlistment would not expire for two more years, he intended to use the Sixteenth as one arm of the expedition, and afterward to employ it along the Bozeman Trail until regular troops became available. Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Walker, would lead the 600-

[12] Connor to Colonel Nelson Cole, July 4, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, pp. 1048.

man regiment directly north from Fort Laramie along the western base of the Black Hills before turning toward the Powder.[13]

Connor chose to lead the Left Column personally, sensing it had the best chance of striking the decisive blow. His command consisted of 90 men of the Seventh Iowa, 90 of the Eleventh Ohio, the two companies of the Second California Volunteers, plus a battalion of Pawnee and Omaha scouts under Captain Frank North. Augmenting the strike force was the Sixth Michigan Volunteer Cavalry, only recently dispatched to the frontier by General Dodge. The regiment had previously been a component of the famed Michigan Cavalry Brigade of the Army of the Potomac. The fighting qualities of the Michiganders had in fact done much to polish the star of brigade commander, George Armstrong Custer, during the Battle of Gettysburg and subsequently in the Shenandoah Valley. Having the longest time remaining in their enlistments, Connor intended to use the Michigan troops to construct and garrison a new post situated along the Bozeman Trail. The Sixth did not arrive at Fort Laramie until July 25, and even then Connor discovered they were only half armed.[14] Were that not discouraging enough, he found the

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[13] Connor to Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Walker, July 28, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, p. 1128.

[14] The Michigan Cavalry Brigade was composed of the First, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Regiments. John Robertson (comp.), *Michigan in the War*, (Lansing: 1882), pp. 569-70, 575-77; Dodge was surprised to learn about the lack of arms among the Sixth, since no one mentioned any shortages when the regiment passed through Fort Leavenworth. The arsenal at that point could have readily supplied any kind or number. Connor to Dodge, July 25, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, pp. 1122-23 **;** Dodge to Connor, July 26, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, pp. 1124-25.

men in a decidedly surly mood over their frontier assignment. Seeing the post for the first time, after a tedious march across the plains, Captain B. F. Rockafellow commented:

> Fort Laramie is much the finest station we have seen, One nice Gothic cottage, large H'Q'rs buildings, Bakery, Shops. Quarters for men built of sun dried bricks . . . which buildings Adobes pronounced Dobys. Capt. T. & me called on Mr. Bullock the post sutler who invited us to his house and treated us to ice and sugar etc . . . Laramie River comes in here. Fort like other western so called forts.[15]

Not directly related to Connor's operations was another expedition that nevertheless played a role in events on the Northern Plains that spring. In March, Congress had authorized a road to be surveyed from the mouth of the Niobrara River (on the Missouri) to Virginia City. Despite the popularity of the Bozeman route to Montana, army surveys conducted during the 1850s indicated that a logical avenue to the gold fields lay across northern Nebraska. Steamboats could consistently navigate the Missouri River as far north as the Niobrara during most of the year, thus reducing the distance to be traveled overland. Sioux City businessman and former militia officer James A. Sawyers was contracted to supervise the expedition, which began its journey on June 15.

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[15] The "Gothic cottage" was the sutler's residence, situated a few yards northeast of the store. No doubt "Old Bedlam" was the large headquarters building identified by Rockafellow. His observation that Fort Laramie was like other "so called" western forts was a reference to its lack of any sort of defensive stockade, LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Powder River Campaigns and Sawyer's Expedition of 1865*, (Glendale, Calif.: 1961), pp. 167-68 (hereinafter cited as *Powder River Campaigns*).

Sioux City, not coincidentally, stood to profit as the most convenient supply and departure point for the proposed trail. Although Sawyers eventually reached Virginia City, his "road," in name only, never became popular with emigrants. His desire to take a large train of personal goods through to the miners, while being subsidized by the government and escorted by troops, proved to be a stronger incentive than making improvements to benefit future travelers. In any event, emigrants bound for western Montana preferred to use the time-honored and more easily traveled Platte Road as far as Bridger's Ferry, where the Bozeman Trail diverged northwest.[16]

The Third U. S. Volunteers, along with another of the "galvanized" regiments, the Sixth Infantry, marching up from Fort Leavenworth, would guard both branches of the road to Salt Lake City, thereby relieving the cavalry to join the coming expedition. Four companies of the Sixth were to accompany Connor as supply train and depot guards. Connor himself left Julesburg, en route for Fort Laramie, on June 24, though his progress was somewhat retarded by 600 head of remount horses herded by his men. He promised

[16] For a more thorough discussion of the Sawyers Expedition, including his official report, see Hafen and Hafen, *Powder River Campaigns*, pp. 219-281; Development of the Bozeman Trail was also subsidized through an appropriation by Congress. ibid., p. 35; Dorothy M. Johnson, *The Bloody Bozeman: The Perilous Trail to Montana's Gold*, (Missoula: 1983) pp. 168-70; Price to Dodge, August 15 [16], 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, p. 1189; An officer of Sawyer's escort arrived at Fort Laramie on July 26 to report they had met no Indians thus far and that the that the Niobrara route was impractical as a wagon road. Connor to Dodge, July 26, 1865. *O. R.*, I, 48-2, pp. 1124-25.

to keep Dodge informed of his movements once the command was in the field through a system of vedettes carrying dispatches to and from the post[17]

Dodge sent additional state units to Connor as quickly as they arrived in the Department of the Missouri. But the volunteers, with few exceptions, resented being held in service beyond what they considered to be the end of the war, regardless of the justification. They argued that their enlistments had been "for three years, or during the war," but Lee's surrender in April 1865, did not require President Andrew Johnson to formally declare an end to the insurrection, nor would he do so until mid-1866 after some semblance of law and order had been restored in the southern states. The army could ill-afford losing all of the volunteers at once with scattered elements of Confederate forces still at large and a resentful southern population to be policed. Then there was the escalating Indian situation. Reestablishing peace on the plains was vital to restoring reliable transcontinental communications. The Regular Army needed time to regroup and refit before its troops could resume duty on the frontier. Accordingly, the government had

[17] Connor to Dodge, June 10, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, p. 849; Connor noted that over 4,000 emigrant wagons had passed west through Fort Kearny during the month of May and the mails were running again beyond Denver, indications that conditions along the Overland route via Fort Halleck had improved somewhat. However, raiding parties of Arapahoes and Utes continued lurking about the stage stations watching for opportunities to steal mules. Connor instructed his officers to treat all such Indians as hostile. ibid, June 24, 1865, p. 988; Colonel C. H. Potter to Price, June 27, 1865, ibid., p. 1010; Connor to Dodge, June 29, 1865, ibid., p. 1018.

the legal option to retain in service many of the volunteer units up to the full term of their enlistments.[18]

Dissention spread rapidly through the ranks of the regiments bound for the Powder River Expedition. After the debacle on Deadman Creek, Connor had ordered Moonlight to be banished to Fort Kearny simply to get him out of the way. Having nothing better to do there, the recalcitrant officer created as much trouble as possible for Connor by feeding his men false information, assuring them that they were entitled to be mustered out. The frequent Indian raids along the routes of travel only aggravated the situation by making the men even more reluctant to risk their lives. On July 4, the commanding officer at Fort Collins ordered Company F to relieve detachments of the Eleventh Ohio as stage station guards on the Overland Stage Road. The Kansans stubbornly refused to comply, arguing that since the South's capitulation, they were no

[18] Another of the incongruous units sent west was a combat-experienced outfit that had been reorganized in July 1864 as the Sixth West Virginia Veteran Volunteer Cavalry. After engaging Confederates on several occasions, the Sixth went into winter quarters near Washington, D. C. and remained there until spring. When President Lincoln was assassinated in April, the West Virginians were called out to pursue the conspirators, some of whom they surrounded and captured in the Maryland countryside. A sergeant of the Sixth was credited with shooting John Wilkes Booth in that encounter. When the men stood guard duty along Pennsylvania Avenue during the Grand Review a short time later, they no doubt had visions of an early discharge and homecoming. However, they, like some of the other volunteer organizations sent to Dodge for service on the plains, were legally bound to federal control for up to three more years. An officer described the mood when the men learned they were being re-deployed to Dakota Territory to fight Indians. "The boys of the Sixth had fought many severe battles, endured long marches and untold hardships for Uncle Sam without a murmur. Now, the civil war having ended, many believed their duty was done. They declared they had not sworn to do duty against the savages and refused to move from Leavenworth." About a third of the men were coerced to do their duty and proceed to Fort Kearny, while the rest negotiated terms at Fort Leavenworth before finally agreeing to go to Julesburg to guard the mail line. Theodore F. Lang, *Loyal West Virginia from 1861 to 1865*, (Baltimore: 1895), pp. 228-32.

longer soldiers. The men of another company offered to join the rebellion, but F Company finally consented to go out on the trail for two weeks, no longer. A detail of Kansas cavalrymen at Platte Bridge refused to obey when they were ordered to escort the operator to Sweetwater Station to repair a severed line near there. Even after their officer doubled the number of men in the detachment, they stood firm. Only when an additional ten men volunteered to augment the detachment, making a total of thirty-four soldiers and four civilians, did they consider it safe to proceed. Connor developed a correspondingly low opinion of the regiment, stating they "are not worth their salt . . .but I cannot punish them because they are scattered and I cannot dispense with their services at present." When Connor attempted to lever the disgruntled Moonlight out of the service, however, the colonel stalled by refusing to provide the proper information to complete the paperwork. Undeterred by such details, Connor summarily dismissed him anyway--with General Dodge's blessing.[19]

Insubordination and desertion became rampant in the District of the Plains. Writing to his wife, a soldier in the Sixteenth Kansas, then camped a few miles above Fort Laramie, reported rumors were afloat that Connor intended to have them garrison a new post far to the north following the campaign.

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[19] The quotation is from Connor to Dodge, July 21, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, p. 1113; Potter to Price, July 6, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, p. 1060; Connor to Dodge, July 15, 1865, ibid. p. 1084.

> If the report in regard to this plan on Powder River is correct, it is probably concocted by the Col. & General, in order to give them a fat office a while longer. . . they will fail of their plan for wherever I go from one end of camp to the other the talk is the same, nearly every one believes that our Officers are going against orders. It is said that Capt. Ames & Co. will go no farther and if he goes back it is my candid opinion that a majority of the Regt. will follow him. It is bad to be driven to this desperation . . . I believe some things are too bad to be endured, and if they cannot be cured in one way they will be in another. If we are kept here much longer, and it is known that we are kept against orders, then in that case, vengeance is sworn on many an officer if we ever get into a fight . . . I would not be in their place for all the world.[20]

Word reached Connor that discontented members of the First Nebraska Cavalry were also in a rebellious state at Fort Kearny, but he was in no mood to argue the point. He unequivocally authorized the commanding officer there to "suppress it with grape and canister, and bring the leaders to trial."[21] The incident was quelled without bloodshed, but Connor became even more determined to prosecute his campaign to a successful conclusion, even if the troops had to stay in the field all winter. Yet, with a desertion rate

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[20] Cyrus C. Schofield letter.

[21] Connor to Dodge, July 21, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, p. 1112.

of nearly twenty-five percent, there was a serious question whether he would have any troops left by that time.

Fort Laramie bustled with activity during July as supply trains arrived almost daily, and troops came and went. Private Hervey Johnson wrote:

> Fort Laramie reminds me of some of the towns along the Missouri where they are loading and unloading steamboats every day. All around the Quarter Masters Store the big 'bull wagons' (ships of the desert) are thronged from morning til night loading and unloading coming in and going out. The Sutler store is crowded all day long with soldiers, citizens, mexicans, half-breeds, and Spaniards trading."[22]

Bullock was pleased with the upsurge of business that summer, but found it difficult to manage the stocks of merchandise in the store " . . . as the troops are passing up and down the road all the time and every twenty-four hours we have a change. Sometimes five hundred men at the fort and in [a] few days only about seventy-five."[23] Traffic was so heavy in the vicinity of the post that virtually no grass existed within five miles, and no adequate grazing for the animals within ten.

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[22] The reader should note that Johnson did not mention Indians being at the fort at that time because the Loafer band was still absent. Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire*, p. 270.

[23] Bullock to Ward, June 21, 1865, Ward Papers.

The summer was fast slipping away, however, and still Connor's troops had not moved against the Indians. The question of enthusiasm aside, there was no lack of soldiers, though Connor wanted still more troops to be hurried up from Fort Leavenworth. Continuing Indian depredations made it necessary to siphon off larger numbers of troops as escorts for coaches and wagon trains.[24] At the same time, he inundated the Quartermaster Department with requisitions for more supplies. The logistical situation was improving, but the freight contractors, pausing to graze their teams on scant forage along the trail, were still moving too slowly to suit the district commander. Late summer rains were also turning the Platte Road into a quagmire, retarding their progress even more. General Dodge and his headquarters staff had done everything within their power to support Connor by expediting men, horses, and provisions to the front. Excuses were wearing thin and Washington was now pressuring Dodge to produce results. In a missive of July 21, Dodge impatiently urged to Connor to,

[24] Units ordered from the East and South to the Department of the Missouri included: three regiments of Illinois infantry, the Third Massachusetts Cavalry, Fourteenth Pennsylvania Cavalry, Twelfth Tennessee Cavalry, Eleventh Indiana Cavalry, Seventh Kansas Cavalry and the Fifth Michigan Cavalry. Even though these regiments were ordered to march to Fort Laramie, the enlistments of nearly all expired before they reached Fort Kearny. They simply turned around and marched back to Fort Leavenworth to be mustered out. Such inefficiency and wasteful expenditures of funds brought Dodge in for his fair share of censure at the close of the campaign, yet the fault lay outside his authority. The administration had begun bending to political pressure from Congress to discharge the volunteers. Dodge to Bvt. Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Mc. Bell, A. A. G., Dept. of the Missouri, November 1, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-1, pp. 335-48; Dodge expressed his views on mustering out volunteer troops in an interesting letter to Pope, August 2, 1865, ibid., p. 1156.

"Get your columns off as soon as possible. We have got these Indian matters now in our hands, and we must settle them."[25]

The Cheyennes, Sioux, and Arapahoes likewise kept up the pressure. The allied tribes held a council on Powder River concurrent with the usual summer gathering for sun dance ceremonies. The chiefs reached a consensus to strike Platte Bridge Station, a strategically important point where the wagon trains separated, some going on to South Pass, others diverging to follow Bridger's Trail to Montana. Just a day after Dodge penned his letter, warriors appeared in large numbers in the vicinity of the bridge. By cutting the telegraph line below the station, they lured out a repair party and killed one man before the detachment could retreat to safety. Then, on July 25 warriors showed themselves on the hills across the river from the station. A detachment of men sent out to drive them off would have been cut off and destroyed had they not been recalled to the station just when the Indians were set to spring the trap.

The following day, Second Lieutenant Caspar Collins, the popular son of the Eleventh Ohio's regimental commander, led twenty troopers out of the station to support an approaching supply train on its way back from Sweetwater. His little command had not gone far beyond the bridge when Indians completely surrounded them. Having no

[25] Dodge assured Connor that the mutinies at Fort Leavenworth had been put down and additional troops, including the Michigan and West Virginia regiments, plus the Seventh Kansas Cavalry, were en route to join him. Dodge to Connor, July 21, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, pp. 1112-13.

other choice, Collins boldly charged through the warriors in a desperate attempt to get back to the station. Fortunately, the Indians were so close together that they were unable to fire their weapons without hitting their own men, so they employed bows, lances, and tomahawks instead. Some of the Ohio cavalrymen escaped, however the lieutenant and four others were killed in the engagement.

The train approached to within about five miles of the station a few hours later. The Indians, who had been watching its progress for some time, attacked when the train drew near, forcing Sergeant Amos Custard and his men to corral the wagons for defense. Troops from the station attempted to affect a rescue, but were unable to break through the Indian lines. After fighting bravely for several hours, Custard and his men were finally overwhelmed by a large number of warriors who crawled near the corral, then charged. After their victory at the Battle of Platte Bridge, the Indians considered the war to be over and began making their way back the headwaters of Powder River.[26]

Dodge's prodding finally inspired Connor to give orders for the columns to march out of Fort Laramie on July 30. But, Walker's Kansans—to a man--refused to budge from their camp above the post. Connor's quartermaster described the mutiny: "They alleged that their terms of service would be up before the expedition could be terminated, and that they had not enlisted to fight Indians—had not lost any red devils and were not

[26] A detailed description of the Battle of Platte Bridge is in McDermott, *Frontier Crossroads*, pp. 61 – 76.

disposed to hunt for any." Connor was furious! He quickly assembled his two loyal companies of the Second California, along with the Eleventh Ohio "battery," and boldly marched to Walker's camp. Deploying his men in line of battle flanking the two howitzers, Connor announced to the Kansans that they had five minutes to obey his orders, or be shot down where they stood. The demonstration of force, accented by the gaping muzzles of two cannons, gave the mutinous men pause to reconsider. "The Kansas boys were smart enough to smell danger and to take the general at his word," an officer recalled. "They fell into line and went out upon the dismal, unprofitable, inglorious hunt after 'scalp lifters.'"[27] Walker and his reluctant troopers departed for the Black Hills on August 5.

In light of the numerous attacks along the Platte route above Fort Laramie, Connor had become increasingly concerned that the hostiles perpetrating those raids were taking refuge west of the Bighorn range. While the main body of the Left Column proceeded directly up the Bozeman Trail, Connor detached Captain Albert Brown and 116 men of the Second California, plus 70 Omaha and Winnebago scouts, with orders to move up to Platte Bridge, then march northward along the west flank of the Bighorns.

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[27] All quotations here are from Captain Henry E. Palmer in Hafen and Hafen, *Powder River Campaigns*, p. 107.

Connor hoped these "beaters," like Cole and Walker on his right, would drive the Indians toward his planned rendezvous in the vicinity of Rosebud Creek.

Conner arrived on the upper reaches of Powder River on August 11. Nearby, he found a suitable place to construct the new post, which he modestly named Fort Connor.[28] With axes ringing in the clear air, Connor left the Michigan woodsmen to their work while the rest of the troops marched northwest, still approximating the course of the Bozeman Trail. Brown caught up with him ten days later to report finding no Indians during his reconnaissance beyond the mountains. The reunited column continued to Tongue River, following that stream northward nearly to its confluence with the Yellowstone before countermarching south again. Conner was increasingly perplexed at finding no signs of Indians.

Then, on the twenty-eighth, a group of Pawnees rode into camp to report their discovery of a village of about 250 lodges farther up Tongue River. It was later identified as that of Black Bear and his band of Arapahoes. Connor immediately readied a strike force of 125 cavalrymen and 90 scouts to make a night march and attack the village the following morning. At about 9 o'clock on August 29, just as the Indians were breaking

[28] Fort Connor, renamed Fort Reno on November 11, 1865, was situated on table land overlooking the Powder River, approximately twenty-two miles northwest of present Kaycee, Wyoming. It was the first of the three forts eventually established by the army on the middle portion of the Bozeman Trail. It was active for only three years. The terms of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 mandated that it be abandoned. Robert W. Frazer, *Forts of the West*, (Norman: 1977), pp. 183-84.

camp, the troops thundered down on the unsuspecting tribesmen, driving them ten miles in a running fight. By that time, however, only three officers and ten troopers had managed to keep up with their commander. When the Indians saw how few soldiers were in pursuit, they turned the tables and chased Connor's party back five miles until they met some of the stragglers. The troops returned to the village, where they continued skirmishing until nightfall. Fortunately, the mountain howitzers of the Ohioans kept the warriors at a respectable distance while the rest of the command destroyed the contents of the camp.[29]

More determined than ever to engage the Indians in a decisive fight, Connor once again led his men down the Tongue, and back again. Not only was he unable to locate the main Indian camp, he could find no sign of either Cole or Walker, who should have shown up by that time. His scouts examined both the Tongue River Valley and Rosebud Creek, but failed to find as much as a hoof print belonging to either command. Meantime, the weather had turned bad with rain and snow making life miserable for the weary troops.

[29] Connor's official report is reproduced in Hafen and Hafen, *Powder River Campaigns*, pp. 46 – 48; Although Connor claimed to have killed about thirty-five warriors during the engagement, Captain Henry E. Palmer placed the number at sixty-three. ibid., p. 135; An unidentified Indian woman, perhaps a member of the band, came to Fort Laramie later that fall and reported only three men killed, plus twenty-five women and children. Bullock to Ward, December 6, 1865, Ward Papers.

Back at Fort Connor, Major Kidd was surprised at the appearance of Sawyer and his survey party limping in from the east. Sawyer informed him that things had gone well until he reached the badlands between the Belle Fouche and Powder River during the second week of August. There a large force of Sioux and Cheyennes had attacked his train destroying most of the supplies. He and the military escort commander were debating whether to turn south to Fort Laramie, or try to push on to Virginia City, when they stumbled on to Fort Connor. Kidd agreed to provide a cavalry escort for the expedition in exchange for the two companies of the Fifth U. S. Volunteer Infantry, which would remain at the post to assist with construction work.

By mid-September, with Cole and Walker still nowhere to be found, North's scouts came upon the bodies of several hundred dead cavalry horses in the valley of the Powder. They also found the remnants of saddles and other horse equipment that had been placed in piles and burned. It was an ominous sign that something had gone terribly wrong.

Cole, retarded by his plodding supply train, had followed his instructions to reconnoiter the plains along the eastern base of the Black Hills. Discovering no Indians there, he proceeded on to Bear Butte and the Belle Fouche. He and Walker had joined forces there on August 18, agreeing to cooperate closely with each other, though their

commands would remain separate. Couriers would provide communications between the two columns.

Cole and Walker moved northwest up the Belle Fouche, then crossed over the divide and descended into the valley of the Little Missouri. A wide, well-beaten trail along the river indicated that the hostiles were in the vicinity. Many of the horses in both commands had not been in optimum condition for field service at the time they set out weeks before, and by this time the animals were unfit to allow the troops to take up the chase. Making matters worse, there was little water and even less grass in that region. With rations running dangerously low, Cole elected to return to Powder River, in accordance with Connor's instructions, and in the event he failed to find the main column, he would march back to Fort Laramie. Scouts fanning out to the west found no evidence of Connor's presence on either Tongue River or Rosebud Creek. Cole had no more than made his choice to fall back, when 400 – 500 Indians appeared near his camp and attempted to run off his herd. His men responded quickly, however, and were able to drive off the attackers.

Continuing their trek southward along the Powder, Cole and Walker sighted smoke rising from the valley ahead. They assumed it was Connor attempting to signal them, but they were unable to close the distance that day. That night temperatures plummeted, decimating his already weakened mounts. The next morning his officers

reported that 225 animals had died during the awful night. A like number of his troopers were now afoot.

On September 4, with the Sixteenth Kansas about fifteen miles in advance of Cole's column, Walker stumbled upon the principal village of the combined hostile tribes. Approximately one thousand warriors advanced to meet the soldiers, initiating a skirmish that lasted for three hours. Again, artillery saved the day. Three days after that fight, on September 8, the troops again engaged the Sioux on the Little Powder. Walker's men absorbed the brunt of the attack, while Cole corralled his train and advanced the Twelfth Missouri and the 3-inch rifled guns to support the Kansans. Artillery fire finally broke up the Indian concentrations, clearing the way for the troops to advance.

The death of so many horses a few days earlier was but a precursor to a disaster that befell the troops on the night of the ninth. An early winter storm blew in, killing over 500 more horses and mules, the carcasses of which were found later by Connor's Pawnees. That loss convinced both Cole and Walker to give up the campaign; there was no choice but to return to Fort Laramie. As the troops wearily made their way up the Powder, Sioux warriors harassed them by taking pot shots at them from the surrounding hills. When they drew too near, the artillerymen would unlimber their pieces and throw a few shells into the Indian lines. The troops, now practically starving on scant rations, waited for horses to drop in their tracks so they could be butchered and eaten on the spot.

Connor's scouts finally intercepted the destitute commands on September 13, only eighty miles north of Fort Connor. A week later, the troops limped into the fort. Connor and his men arrived on the twenty-fourth, finally forming the junction of the columns, but not at the place nor with the union of purpose Connor had planned.

The outcome of the campaign was a far cry from the way Connor had envisioned it. Once the troops had some time to recover, and horses were reconditioned or replaced, he proposed commencing a second expedition against the Sioux and their allies. But, higher command had already scuttled his designs. Army Headquarters had run out of patience with Connor, and had succumbed to political pressure to discharge his volunteer forces. Word reached him at the fort that his District of the Plains had been abolished effective August 22, and that he had been re-assigned to his old district in Utah. Brigadier General Frank Wheaton, a most capable regular officer with pre-war cavalry experience, was already in place at Fort Laramie commanding the restored District of Nebraska.[30] The Power River Indian Expedition came to an end as abrupt as it was abysmal when Connor left for Salt Lake City. Lieutenant William R. Belnymer, an Eleventh Ohio officer at Fort Mitchell, probably spoke for many when he commented: "I am well

[30] *General Orders No. 20*, Department of the Missouri, August 22, 1865 dissolved the District of the Plains and reinstated the District of Nebraska, encompassing the territories of Nebraska and Montana, as well as that portion of Dakota lying west of the Nebraska border. Fort Laramie became headquarters for the new district. *O. R.*, I, 48-2, p. 1201.

satisfied with our new commander and I am of the opinion that he is the best commander we have had in the dist since the commencement of the Indian trouble . . . .[31]

The failure of Connor's campaign was as much the result of his administrative blunders as those in the field against the Indians. General of the Army Grant, as well as Pope, became particularly disenchanted with Connor when they learned of his orders to reject peace overtures and to kill all male Indians over twelve. Were that not reason enough to fire him, the costs of the campaign had reached such astronomical proportions that the secretary of the treasury complained to the president that his department would be hard pressed to meet the unanticipated financial obligations. Both Dodge and Connor remained convinced that the Indian war should either be prosecuted to the fullest extent of national resources, or the West should be surrendered to the Indians. The Johnson administration, however, had a less black-and-white view of the situation. The nation was already burdened with the costs of the Civil War, and members of Congress were clamoring for state troops to be released and allowed to go home, A reasonable compromise was to protect the lines of travel, leaving the Indians to roam the uninhabited regions. On the positive side, the invasion of the Powder River country had alarmed the Indians to such a degree that most of the Sioux, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapahoe bands

[31] Lieutenant W. R. Belnymer to Father, October 17, 1865, Belnymer Papers, Wyoming State Archives; Trader William Bullock was also pleased with Wheaton's appointment. "Capt. Frank Wheaton is capt in the now 4 Cav and one of the old set. You can imagine how I set up to him when he arrived." Bullock to Ward, September 15, 1865, Ward Papers.

temporarily withdrew from the Platte Road. Connor also made a significant contribution to geographical knowledge of a part of the Northern Plains few whites had seen. That information led to the production of the first maps of the area, something that would prove extremely useful to the army in coming years. And, the establishment of Fort Connor, renamed Fort Reno in November 1865, firmly secured the Bozeman Trail as the only viable route to Virginia City.

Pope's instructions to Wheaton reflected a broad change in policy regarding the Indian situation in the West. He recognized the futility of attempting to retain so many state troops. It was clear that most of them had no dedication to the army's frontier mission and actually caused more problems than they were worth. Surprisingly, Pope considered the "galvanized" U. S. Volunteers to be the most highly disciplined and trustworthy troops then available. Unlike northern troops, they had less incentive to return to war-ravaged homes and a decimated economy. Pope therefore limited Wheaton to one cavalry and two infantry regiments for his district, cautioning him to select only those units whose enlistments would not expire until the following spring or summer. Once he had done so, Wheaton was to send all the others back to Fort Leavenworth as soon as possible to be mustered out. Moreover, strict attention to economy was to guide his every decision. The excessive quantities of supplies Connor had amassed at Fort Laramie were to be protected during the coming winter, then distributed to Fort Connor

(Reno) and other posts, or returned to the general depot at Leavenworth. The army was returning immediately to a peacetime footing. Rather than engaging in offensive operations against the Indians, Pope informed the new district commander, ". . . it is the purpose to return to a purely defensive arrangement for the security of the overland routes to Salt Lake."[32]

Wheaton followed his superior's recommendations by assigning one company each of the Third and Sixth U. S. Volunteers to serve as the infantry garrison at Fort Laramie. The choice of cavalry was not so easily made. With the most time yet to serve, the experienced and long-suffering Eleventh Ohio was doomed to remain on the frontier. It was business as usual for the Ohioans when Wheaton assigned three companies to the post, with others stationed at various points along the overland roads. Other state units held over at Fort Laramie that fall included a few companies of the Sixth Michigan, Seventh Iowa, and the Sixth West Virginia. Trader Bullock, still anxious for the regulars to return, opined: "The 7th Iowa Cavl. a great set of thieves and the 6th [West] Virginian who can beat any Regt. in Kansas."[33] He no doubt rejoiced when orders arrived sending both units home during September and October.

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[32] Pope to Bvt. Major General Frank Wheaton, August 23, 1865, *O. R.*, I, 48-2, pp. 1206-08.

[33] Bullock to Ward, December 9, 1865, Ward Papers.

The ragged survivors of the Powder River Expedition hobbled in to Fort Laramie in early October and bivouacked below the post on the usual campground along the Laramie River. The most footsore men in the column had been allowed to ride from Fort Connor in empty supply wagons, while the rest walked. Believing in the adage that an "idle mind is the devil's workshop," Wheaton immediately detailed the emaciated Missourians, along with the formerly mutinous Sixteenth Kansas, to improve the earthworks around the northern perimeter of the fort. "The total absence of tools naturally caused some speculation as to the cause of the detail," Cole later wrote. "As the mystery was transparent, it is well enough to add that the ragged and barefooted veterans spent the allotted time at the designated place, tools or no tools."[34] The irksome job was short lived however. Within only a few days, orders arrived for Cole to march the Second Missouri Artillery to Fort Leavenworth to be mustered out.

Wheaton obviously wanted to keep the troops occupied, however he did not single out Cole's men for fatigue details. Connor's excess supplies still had to be sheltered before winter set in. Private Frank Tubbs of the Eleventh Ohio wrote to his father:

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[34] Colonel Nelson Cole to General U. S. Grant, February 10, 1867, Folder no. 10, Camp Papers, BYU, copy at Little Bighorn Battlefield; Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire*, p. 294; William Bullock said of the defenses: "Gen'l. Wheaton is enclosing the post with a heavy work & ditch which will ensure the safety of the post for ages to come either from savage or civilized foes." Bullock to Ward, October 21, 1865, Ward Papers.

> I am on detail in the Carpenter Shop we raised a building last week 30 by 120 it is a quarter Master Building we have lots of work to do there is 7 of hand working we having fine weather to work out doors.[35]

Tubbs and his comrades were also assigned to add an underground medical storeroom to the hospital, to prevent the medicines from freezing, though he admitted that the quality of their craftsmanship left something to be desired. "I wish you could see of our work I bet you would laugh at it for we build our work the easiest [sic] way we can put every thing up rough."[36]

With the men of the Sixth West Virginia and Sixth Michigan occupied largely with guarding the mails, the new sub-district commander, Colonel Henry E. Maynadier, Fifth U. S. Volunteer Infantry, complained to Wheaton that he had only eighty-one men present for duty at Fort Laramie.[37] The artillerymen were overjoyed at the prospect of leaving the isolated post, and the plains for that matter, but three companies of the Twelfth Missouri Cavalry had to resign themselves to staying behind for the winter. In

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[35] Frank Tubbs to Father, November 11, 1865, Frank Tubbs letters, University of Wyoming, typescript copy in vert. files, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

[36] Tubbs to Father, December 3, 1865, ibid.

[37] Henry E. Maynadier attended the U. S. Military Academy and upon graduation in 1851 was assigned to the First Artillery. Four years later, he was promoted to first lieutenant in the Tenth Infantry, and later became regimental adjutant. He was serving in that capacity when the Tenth marched to Utah as a component of General Johnston's army. It will be recalled that the regiment was afterward distributed to posts along the Platte road, including Fort Laramie, until the outbreak of the Civil War. Thus, this was familiar ground to Maynadier when he returned to the area as commander of the Fifth U. S. Volunteer Infantry in 1865. Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army, 1789 – 1903*, (Washington, D. C.: 1903), I, p. 699.

addition to guarding the stations and patrolling the road, the troopers, six men at a time with one pack mule, functioned as mail parties to and from the junction of the Overland Road at Julesburg. The additional troops enabled Maynadier to alter the timetables to provide more regular service, reducing the schedule by eight hours in the same stroke. The new plan coordinated the parties' arrival at Fort Mitchell and Mud Springs by nightfall so they could be sheltered from the frequent storms.[38] Cavalry detachments also carried the "up" mail from Fort Laramie to Horseshoe Station, where it was handed off to the detail posted there.

Travelers on the overland roads enjoyed only a brief respite from Indian depredations. Connor's troops were barely out of the field before raiding parties once again began harassing wagon trains and mail carriers. Sioux raiders hit the stations at La Bonte Creek and Horseshoe within a matter of days after the columns rendezvoused at Fort Connor. During late September war parties audaciously struck in the immediate vicinity of Fort Laramie, making off with about fifty head of horses and mules from the post quartermaster's herd, along with about eighty horses belonging to local civilians. On the very day the Sixth West Virginia arrived, warriors fired on a Mormon train only nine

[38] Colonel Henry E. Maynadier to A. A. A. G, Dist. of Nebraska, October 23, 1865, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie, Records of U. S. Army Continental Commands 1821 - 1920, R. G. 393, N. A. Microfilm copy in library, Fort Laramie NHS (hereinafter cited as LS, Fort Laramie); Maynadier to Colonel C. H. McNally, Fort Sedgwick, October 25, 1865, ibid.; Fort Laramie became headquarters for the West Sub-District of Nebraska. Author's note.

miles below the fort, killing two men and wounding seven others. They also carried off two women belonging to the emigrant party. And again the next day, as the West Virginia troopers looked on,

> . . . in a twinkle a painted band of Sioux filed out of a ravine and succeeded by a bold dash in cutting off a few straggling cattle from a small herd belonging to a transportation train in camp below the fort. There was not the usual war whoop, but the thing was done in five minutes and in a very systematic way. In an instant all was in confusion about the Fort and everybody watched the new Cavalry camp to see what would be done there.[39]

Without awaiting orders, the men mounted and rode toward the Indians, causing them to flee with the captured oxen. The soldiers chased the Indians for five miles, forcing them to abandon the cattle, "some shot full of arrows and others crippled in various ways." The raiders, meanwhile, split up into small groups and made good their escape.

Corresponding to a peace initiative with the Southern Plains tribes, known as the Little Arkansas Treaties, government representatives met with Sioux chiefs at Fort Sully during October. Most of the bands were represented, but the commissioners failed to realize that only those groups already favoring peace were represented at the council. The

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[39] Bullock to Ward, September 24, 1865, Ward Papers; George H. Holliday, *On the Plains in '65*, (Washington, D. C.: 1883), pp. 62; This attack was also mentioned by Bullock to Ward, September 24, 1865, Ward Papers.

views of those bands involved in the recent war, and still roaming freely between the Platte and Powder River, were by no means reflected in the meetings. The treaties concluded, consequently, had no influence on bringing peace to the region.[40]

Proof of this came at Fort Laramie on November 9, just a day after General Wheaton and his staff departed to move his headquarters back to Omaha. Private Johnson recorded the incident:

> We had a big Indian scare in the Fort a few days ago, we were all sitting around our fires enjoying ourselves perfectly oblivious to everything without when were suddenly started by the shrill blast of the bugle sounding 'to arms.' Every fellow sprang for his 'shooting irons' wondering what could be in the wind. Were out in line in nearly no time. The artillery was flying about over the parade and being got into position, and 'there was mounting in hot haste the steed' by those who had steeds, and while were yet in line and awaiting orders, we were informed what the rumpus was about. One of the infantry boys was up the river shooting ducks, he was surprised and fired upon by a party of five Indians which his fertile imagination magnified to a hundred.[41]

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[40] General Wheaton planned to invite leaders of the hostile factions to a council at Fort Laramie, but the plan never came to fruition. Trader Bullock, however, praised his good intentions by stating, "he will succeed as he is pursuing a different course from Connor, who was nothing more than a murderer of women & children." Bullock to Ward, October 21, 1865, Ward Papers.

[41] Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire*, pp. 302-03.

As the terrified ex-rebel ran full-tilt back to the post, the Indians followed him directly to a small train camped just a quarter of a mile from the fort. The muleskinners at the camp opened fire, diverting the warriors toward the bluffs. A mounted detachment pursued them for fifteen miles, but was unable to catch up to the swift Indian ponies. Later that month, hostiles attacked a party on the road about forty miles west of the fort. Colonel Maynadier himself led the chase, but accomplished nothing more than wearing out his horses. The Indians were long gone.[42]

During the first week in December, Spotted Tail sent two women and a boy to the post with professions of peace, asking if the band would be allowed to return to their old agency. They assured Maynadier that the women of the band were even then tanning buffalo robes to renew trading at the sutler's store. The gesture was negated, however, when a war party again stole all the stock from the detachment at Horseshoe Station. A dismayed Bullock wrote to his employer:

> . . . as long as cavalry is kept in this country the Indians will never make peace they can steal the cavalry horses to [sic] easy to ever make peace – and then the commanders that are sent out here are so unfit and worthless as soon as we got

[42] Post Return, Fort Laramie, November 1865, Records the Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N. A., microfilm copy in library, Fort Laramie NHS; A party of Brules also attacked one of Seth Ward's trains near Alkali Station, on the South Platte approximately 225 miles from Fort Laramie, on December 2. They stole his bell mare and 159 head of mules for which he later filed a claim against the government. *House Executive Documents*, No. 233, 42nd Cong., 3d Sess., 1873 (Serial 1569).

one [Wheaton] commander out here who thought of the interests of the Government instead of his pocket he was ordered to Omaha. Are the people of Omaha so turbulent that it takes a General to keep them in subjugation?[43]

[43] Bullock to Ward, December 11, 1865, Ward Papers.

Chapter 12

"Poor Indian Finds Himself Hemmed In"

In accordance with the new peace initiative, Wheaton had dispatched the chief of the Loafers, Big Mouth, along with Big Ribs, Whirlwind, and two others as messengers to the Powder River tribes in an attempt to induce them to come to Fort Laramie for talks. Corporal Hervey Johnson, who had witnessed the violent deaths of several comrades during the previous two years, and had just returned from two months of utter misery in the field with Connor, was skeptical.

> I am neither glad nor sorry to say that the Indian war is about to be wound up by a treaty of peace. Several of the principal chiefs came in a few days ago with a white flag, an order was issued from Head Quarters, announcing their arrival, also

> stating that they were on an important mission and commanding the men of the garrison to pay them due respect and offer them no violence. I thought I would like to be out somewhere in gunshot of where they would pass. I think I know what respect is due them, and they would get it too.[1]

Connor's withdrawal from the plains, coupled with an unusually harsh winter that was already exacting a toll on the Indians, influenced Swift Bear and Standing Elk, chiefs of the peacefully inclined Corn Band, to return to the post in mid-January. They had been among the Southern Brules camped at the Upper Platte Agency the previous spring to avoid being caught up in the war, but had been forced to fall in with the hostile elements after the breakout on Horse Creek. Colonel Maynadier, like his predecessor William O.Collins, believed that treating the Indians with respect accomplished more than could be done with armed force. Certainly, Connor's dismal performance suggested a different approach. Maynadier gave the Indians a cordial reception at post headquarters and discussed in general terms the government's desire for peace. Convinced of Swift Bear's sincerity, the colonel invited him to bring in more of the chiefs so that formal talks might begin. The arrival of a larger delegation on February 1 inspired Johnson to speculate on the proceedings.

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[1] William E. Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire: A Buck Soldier's View of the Indian Country 1863-1866*, (Salt Lake City: 1990), p. 296 (hereinafter cited as *Tending the Talking Wire*).

> About fourteen Big Indians came in this morning and have been holding a council all day with the Officers. I hope we find out sometime the result of these councils, they have been holding them and talking about them for a long time but we don't get to hear what conclusions they come to.[2]

The Brules left the post, promising to spread the word that the government wanted to end the war and officials would now welcome the Indians back to the Platte on peaceful terms. But, with the plains firmly in the grip of unprecedented winter storms, travel was difficult and it would take time for the others to come in.

With little else to break the monotony of garrison routine at that time of year, the men turned to their favorite pastime—drinking. One soldier reassured his parents that he was among a minority who did not imbibe in alcohol.

> Drinking as far as I am concerned whiskey don't bother me. I have not baught a sents worth of whiskey in this country . . . thair lots of men in this Post that drinks an auful site of whiskey but they [are] men that could not let whiskey alone before they left [the] states.[3]

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[2] Ibid., p. 315; Post Returns, January 1866, Fort Laramie, Dakota Territory, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, D. C., copies in library, Fort Laramie NHS; George E. Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk: A History of the Oglala Sioux Indians*, (Norman: 1987), pp. 137-38 (hereinafter cited as *Red Cloud's Folk*). Hyde states that a copy of the Fort Sully treaty was sent to Maynadier and that these chiefs signed it when they visited Fort Laramie in early 1866.

[3] Frank Tubbs to Father, January 30, 1866, Frank Tubbs letters, University of Wyoming.

Having a monopoly on the business, Trader Bullock had other ways of tempting his captive clientele to spend their meager pay. Johnson bemoaned the high prices, yet Bullock had the soldiers at his mercy.

> Our post sutler has just received a new stock of goods from St. Louis. It almost breaks a man up to patronize him. He sells hats at from seven to ten dollars. Boots, sixteen to twenty dollars. I paid him five dollars for a military cap. Letter paper $1.00 per quire, envelopes fifty cents pack, lead pencil twenty-five cents, canned fruits $1.50 per can, ten cent bottle of ink, one dollar steel pens fifty cents a dozen, gloves from three to five and seven dollars raisins candies and nuts one dollar a pound.[4]

Indian runners arrived at the post early in March with word that Spotted Tail and his band were coming in, but that his seventeen-year-old daughter, Mini-aku (Brings Water) had become seriously ill at the big combined camp on Powder River. The young woman had spent much time at Fort Laramie during her youth and grew to enjoy the company and customs of whites. She specifically remembered, and liked, Colonel

[4] Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire*, p. 303; During the war years some confusion existed over the sutlership at the post because both the Ohio and Kansas volunteers units had regimental sutlers who accompanied the troops to the frontier. Seth Ward and his manager, William Bullock viewed these men as interlopers in the trade monopoly they formerly enjoyed. They pulled as many political wires as possible to protect their business by eliminating what they viewed as unfair competition. Ward's license as post sutler was renewed by the secretary of war on March 6, 1865 for a period of three years. Box 1, Vol. 1, Register of Post Traders, ACP Branch, R. G. 94, N. A.

Maynadier from antebellum days.[5] Perhaps sensing her own death, or wanting the services of a white doctor, Mini-aku had asked her father to take her to the post. Spotted Tail wanted to comply with her request, but by doing so he would lose a voice in the important councils then underway among the tribes. Moreover, since the Sioux were at war with the army, he could hardly go there alone to conclude a treaty. At length, however, the councils ended and his band broke camp to start south toward Fort Laramie. But, the delay, combined with the mid-winter conditions, were too much for the girl to endure. She died en route from "exposure and inability to sustain the severe labor and hardship of the wild Indian life," Maynadier sadly recorded.[6] Prior to her death, the girl asked her father to take her body to the fort for burial, a request he pledged to fulfill.[7]

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[5] Maynadier stated that he knew Mini-aku as a twelve-year old girl in 1861. Colonel Henry E. Maynadier to D. N. Cooley, commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 9, 1866, Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior, *House Executive Documents*, 39th Congress, 2nd Sess., 1867 (Serial 1284), pp. 207-08 (hereinafter cited as Maynadier report); Lieutenant Ware also encountered the girl at Fort Laramie in 1864 and his recollection of her demeanor are worth noting. He also recorded that Charles Elston, mentioned previously in regard to the hanging of Two Face and Black Foot, informed him that Mini-aku had been in the Loafer camp for two or three years as a young child. Eugene F. Ware, *The Indian War of 1864*, (New York: 1960), p. 212, 407-18; For a thoroughly researched expose of the Mini-aku legend, contrasted with the actual events surrounding her burial at Fort Laramie, see Wilson O. Clough, "Mini-aku, Daughter of Spotted Tail," *Annals of Wyoming*, (October 1967), pp. 187-216 (hereinafter cited as "Mini-aku"), also available in off-print format. The author considers Clough's analysis to be highly credible, therefore the version presented herein closely follows his work. Any significant departures or additions based the author's own research are cited as appropriate; The young woman's name has been debated over time, but Clough presents a cogent argument for it being, "Mini-aku," He also mentions another variation, "Monica," but was unable to trace the origin beyond George Hyde, noted historian of the Sioux. Clough speculated that it may have come from army officers or their wives. ibid., pp. 23 – 24, 29 – 31; The author has found that Maynadier, in fact, referred to her by that name, the only instance in which he mentioned the girl's proper name, in a letter to wife April 8, 1866, vertical files, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

[6] Maynadier to Cooley, ibid.; The actual cause of death may have been tuberculosis. Clough, "Mini-aku," p. 6.

[7] Ware maintained that Mini-aku insisted on marrying a white officer, which may have been true. At the time of her death, however, she apparently was pledged to a half-blood known as Tom Dorio. George W. Colhoff to John Hunton, October 28, 1898, John Hunton Papers, Wyoming State Archives.

The circumstances of Spotted Tail's appearance at the fort were different from those Maynadier had originally anticipated, yet he immediately saw this tragic new development as a serendipitous opportunity to make a favorable impression on the Sioux, thereby enhancing his chances to win their confidence. When the chief arrived at the Platte ferry on March 8, Maynadier and several other officers rode out with great pomp to conduct him to post headquarters. In the conversation that followed, Maynadier invited the grieving father to bring the body of his daughter to the fort for burial at sunset that evening, a gesture of friendship that pleased Spotted Tail and quickly put him at ease. Immediately after the chief left the post to return to his camp, the colonel set men to work hastily constructing a coffin and a scaffold in the cemetery overlooking the fort. At the appointed hour,

> . . .the coffin was carried to the graveyard followed by Pegaleshka [Spotted Tail], his wife, two sons brothers, and sisters. The parapet of the fort, which is run near the graveyard, was covered by Indian braves, squaws, and papooses, and in the graveyard were a large number of soldiers, citizens, and others led by curiosity to attend the ceremony. When all was ready, the coffin was opened and the corpse placed in it, with several articles as presents to sustain her on her journey . . . Then occurred the most impressive scene of all, Rev. Alpha Wright, chaplain of

the post advanced towards the open coffin. On one side stood Pegaleshka, and around the coffin the mother, sisters, and brothers of the deceased, Col. Maynadier, and the interpreter. Mr. Jott [Agent Jarrot] stood near the chaplain. As the chaplain commenced his prayer every hat in the large assembly was removed, and all assumed an attitude of devotion. The reverend chaplain's prayer was translated by the interpreter, and as it was a plain and most appropriate one, there is little doubt the Indians understood it perfectly. Taking the whole view, it presented an appearance naturally beautifully, and in view of the extraordinary ceremony going on, very remarkable. Surrounded by the Black Hills, and conspicuously in view the tall front of Laramie Peak, bathed in the glow of the setting sun, the fort presented an aspect of sadness appropriate to the occasion. Within the enclosure of the graveyard stood those engaged in the solemn office of the first Christian burial of an Indian in that place. All around were others of her tribe, wondering at the scene. The prayer was ended, the coffin raised upon the scaffold, and all slowly withdrew. Thus was the daughter of Pegasleshka consigned to her last resting-place.[8]

[8] Article by "Tarsha-Otah," who was probably Maynadier writing under a pen-name to conceal his identity. *St. Louis Republican*, April 2, 1866, copy in vertical files, library Fort Laramie NHS. Mayndadier obviously wanted to make as much political hay for himself as possible, as he disclosed in a letter to his wife: "The enclosed account of the burial of Pegaleshka's daughter will answer for a letter, as it has been the important event of the last week . . . if you can get this one published it will be of advantage to me and to the object for which I am striving." Maynadier to wife, March 10, 1865, copy in vertical files, library, Fort Laramie NHS. That "object" was revealed in a subsequent letter in which he posed the question to his

Maynadier evinced his personal condolences by placing a pair of ornately beaded gauntlets in the coffin before it was nailed shut, an act of respect that met with the universal approval of the Indians. The following day, he wrote to the commissioner of Indian Affairs expressing his confidence that the burial of Mini-aku augured well for securing peace on the Northern Plains.

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wife, "How will you like to be Mrs. Bv't. Maj. Gen'l[?]" Maynadier to wife., May 12, 1866, ibid. The citation read: "For distinguished service on the frontier while operating against hostile Indians, and accomplishing much toward bringing about a peace with hostile tribes." Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the U. S. Army 1789- 1903*, (Washington, D. C.: 1903), I, p. 699 (hereinafter cited as *Historical Register*). The author notes that the date for the action, as given by Heitman, was March 13, 1865 [1866?], which almost certainly is a misprint in view of his service record and that he informed his wife on May 12, 1866 that he had just received the official notification. The colonel indicated that both Chaplain Wright and the post surgeon, as yet unidentified, submitted draft articles to the press. Maynadier to wife, April 8, 1866; Alpha Wright replaced Rev. William Vaux, who had served as post chaplain at Fort Laramie until spring 1861, when he took leave to his home in London, Tennessee. Because his family was reluctant to return to the frontier, Vaux applied for an extension of his leave, with an option to resign at the end of the year. Meantime, the outbreak of war prevented him from leaving the Confederacy, which eventually led to the termination of his appointment. William Vaux to Seth E. Ward, April 19 and March 19, 1861, Ward Papers; Alpha Wright, a Vermont native living in Missouri on the eve of the Civil War, served as chaplain with both state and federal volunteers from spring 1863 until he was appointed post chaplain at Fort Laramie on December 11, 1865. Wright retained his position until his retirement in 1879. He died November 30, 1888. Heitman, *Historical Register*, I, p. 1061; Colonel William O. Collins had the cemetery fenced in late winter 1864. The earthworks constructed in February and October 1865 lay outside the fence, but, as indicated by this article, near enough that spectators had a clear view of the funeral ceremony. Entry for March 22, 1864, "Journal William Henry Cowell, Civil War Soldier 1862-63-64-65," typescript in vertical files, library, Fort Laramie NHS; A superb watercolor executed by artist Anton Schonborn in 1868 depicts the burial scaffold standing in the extreme northwest corner of the cemetery. The presence of the earthworks along the west and north perimeters of the cemetery, just outside the fence, correspond to Maynadier's description. The scaffold was undoubtedly moved when a new hospital was erected on the site of the old cemetery in 1872-73. John S. Collins, who served as post trader during the 1870s, recorded that Spotted Tail returned to Fort Laramie on the eve of the Great Sioux War to reclaim the remains of his daughter. According to Collins, the bones were placed in a *new* box lined with calico and wool. "The box was placed in the wagon and they drove away to the agency [near Fort Robinson]." This raises a question about the validity of an 1883 photograph [file no. A-28] of a scaffold burial, purportedly that of Mini-aku, standing a few hundred yards northwest of the New Hospital. Apparently, this or some other scaffold on the plateau was still being identified as Mini-aku's grave when Lieutenant James Regan, Seventh Infantry, saw it "worn and faded" in 1880. James Regan, "Military Landmarks," *United Service*, (1880), pp. 155-57. It may be that the scaffold and original coffin remained at the second location as a curiosity after the bones were taken away by Spotted Tail, or through time and retelling, another scaffold burial became known as hers. That the scaffold caught the attention of a photographer indicates that it had became a local attraction, although it was certainly not the only one in the immediate vicinity of Fort Laramie. Others are depicted in a photograph published in Paul L. Hedren, *Fort Laramie in 1876: Chronicle of a Frontier Post at War*, (Lincoln: 1988), p. 117.

> I can hardly describe my feelings at witnessing this first Christian burial of an Indian, and one of such consideration in her tribe. The hour, the place, the solemnity, and the restrained weeping of her mother and aunts, all combined to affect any one deeply. I attach great importance to this ceremony as rendering beyond a doubt the success of efforts I have made to restore peace. It satisfied me of the entire trustiness of Pegaleshka, who's always with Red Cloud, and they two rule the nation. A man of Pegaleshka's intelligence and shrewdness would never have confided the remains of his child to the care of any one but those with whom he intended to be friends always. The occurrence of such an incident is regarded by the oldest settlers, men of most experience in Indian character, as unprecedented, and as calculated to secure a certain and lasting peace.[9]

Even though the colonel's self-satisfaction with "the event of the week" at Fort Laramie could hardly be ignored, the usually newsy correspondent, Corporal Johnson, made no mention of the funeral to his kinfolk in Ohio. That it was no mere oversight, and that the lowly Johnson was not alone in his reaction, was reflected in a comment by Maynadier to his wife: "Many persons have ridiculed the whole affair, but I pay no attention to them, except I have made up my mind, to send them out of my district as

[9] Maynadier report, March 9, 1865.

soon as I can get troops on whom I can rely."[10] He clearly was as anxious for the early departure of the volunteers as was Trader Bullock.

Three days after the funeral, following a customary period of mourning, Spotted Tail, Brave Bear, and Standing Elk, with about 150 men, arrived on the Platte at about one o'clock in the afternoon. Of particular significance was the unanticipated appearance of Red Cloud, Oglala leader of the notorious Bad Face band and one of the foremost proponents of the recent war. Red Cloud was implacable in his resolve to keep the whites out of the Powder River country. Johnson observed the arrival of the Oglalas:

> The Indians could be seen crossing the river about a mile and a half from the fort, and forming a line along the bank. About a dozen men, including officers, mountaineers, and the chaplain went down with a small flag to escort them up. When they reached the Indians [about halfway between the post and the river] the latter set up a yell that we could hear distinctly. The Indians then separated themselves into three divisions, and started towards the fort advancing like a regiment in line of battle, the officers in advance of the center division. They marched this way till they came to the breastworks, when they drew in from the right and left and filed through the passage, then spread out again till they reached the entrance to the parade, where the main body of the warriors halted, while the

[10] Maynadier to wife, April 8, 1866.

> officers and chiefs rode on in, to the front of Headquarters . . . They all went into headquarters, then at a word from Col. Maynadier the warriors dismounted and followed in, leaving their ponies in charge of the squaws, of whom there were thirty or forty.[11]

The principal chiefs, followed by a capacity crowd of officers and tribesmen, entered the warm, flag-bedecked rooms of the adjutant's office (now serving as headquarters) to talk with Maynadier, post commander Major George M. O'Brian, and Agent Jarrot. Red Cloud, who claimed he had never before been in a white-man's building, was at first reluctant to go in, but was gently coerced by Maynadier. A canvas-over-frame "pavilion," erected nearby as a theater for the "Laramie Varieties," was pressed into service as a shelter for the scores of excess Indians. Scores of soldiers congregated on porches and elsewhere around the perimeter of the parade ground, quietly speculating among themselves about the proceedings. Many of the men were irked, feeling that Maynadier had gone too far in appeasing the Indians by hoisting a white flag, "the emblem of humiliation," over the post in place of the Stars and Stripes for the duration of the council. Regardless of their commander's confidence in the peaceful disposition of the Indians, the edgy troops made certain their weapons were at hand and

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[11] Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire*, pp. 322-23; Three other contemporary accounts fix the date as March 8. See Maynadier report, as well as an article written by Chaplain Alpha Wright and published in the *St. Louis Democrat* under the date March 8, in Clough, "Mini-aku," pp. 5 – 6.

ready for use instantly in the event of trouble; many even carried revolvers concealed under their coats.[12]

This preliminary meeting took the form of an early-day conference call with a direct telegraphic connection to Nebraska Indian Commissioner E. B. Taylor sitting in Omaha. The Sioux chiefs expressed their firm desire for peace, while enumerating their grievances, most of which pointed directly to failures by the agents assigned to the Upper Platte District. Both Twiss and Loree had been infamous for swindling the Indians out of their annuities, at times even trading them to the Indians and pocketing the proceeds for themselves. Later, the army had the rations withheld in an ill-advised attempt to deprive the recalcitrant bands. Even Jarrot had to admit that during a year as their agent, he had never spoken with the Sioux leaders prior to this time. In Jarrot's defense, however, he had arrived on the scene just as his charges were being forcibly removed to Fort Kearny, and the Horse Creek outbreak had compelled them to accompany the hostile Oglalas and Cheyennes to Powder River. Nevertheless, Red Cloud exhibited his distrust of Jarrot by insisting that his trusted friend, Antoine Janis, who had accompanied him to the conference, serve as his personal interpreter "for very often the interpreter does not tell you what the Indians say, but this man will tell you all that I am going to say." Jarrot was permitted to speak for Spotted Tail and the other Brules. The conversation focused on the

[12] Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire*, pp. 321-22.

fact that the Sioux had not received their goods and their people were starving. Large numbers of emigrants and other travelers on the overland roads had both reduced the number of buffalo and driven away the remainder, making it even more difficult for the Indians to subsist by hunting. Spotted Tail summarized their plight.

> You know that we are very poor, and have nothing to eat. The buffalo is far off, and our horses are weak, and we have nothing to feed them; we cannot go after the buffalo. We have nothing for our women and children to eat. We hope you will let us have some powder and ball to kill deer and antelope.

Brave Bear pledged that if only the government would allow them to trade for ammunition for hunting purposes, "From this time hereafter everything shall be good, and there shall be no more treachery nor no more tricks from any of us." [13] Even Red Cloud acknowledged that both sides had been at fault, and he was willing to sit down with the commissioners with the confidence that all the differences could be settled. With that, the council adjourned and Maynadier conducted the Indians to the commissary storehouse, where rations were doled out, along with a special gift of eight beeves from the quartermaster herd.

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[13] Both quotations are from the *St. Louis Republican*, March 12, 1865.

The meeting thus concluded on a high note of good will on both sides. The Indians agreed to return by June 1, at which time special commissioners would meet with them to conclude a formal treaty aimed at reconciling the differences between the two races. Meantime, the Indians would spread word to the other bands, and the officers at the fort would attempt to ameliorate relations. Overnight, the Sioux again became a fixture at Fort Laramie. In a letter of March 19, Corporal Johnson noted the homecoming of the Loafers and their mountaineer in-laws:

> The Sioux are in here every day buying notions and selling robes and moccasins to the soldiers. A small villag[e] came here a few days ago from the south, they have got their 'teepes' stuck up just across the Laramie south west of the Fort. They are getting more familiar every day, and already the squaws smiling countenances are to be seen about the kitchen doors and windows at meal-times.[14]

Momentous changes were in the wind at Fort Laramie. Just as the Sioux seemed inclined to abandon the warpath, the state volunteer units that had come west to fight them were at last being released and sent home. The Twelfth Missouri Cavalry bade goodbye to the garrison just days before the arrival of the Sioux leaders, and my mid-March the last elements of the Sixth Michigan, Sixth West Virginia, and Seventh Iowa followed down the trail to Fort Leavenworth to be mustered out. The veterans of the last

[14] Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire*, p. 324.

battalion of the Eleventh Ohio were counting the days until June 20, when they too could "get out of that God forsaken Country," as one Michigan trooper put it. But, not everyone felt that way; some veterans found they liked the West and decided to stay. Another soldier told a friend,

> For my part I am sure I do not regret the time I made the contract to ride with Uncle Sam to the west . . . I am very well satisfied I do not know but I will stay out here awhile if I can get my papers here from Uncle Samuel. I have been in the west long enough that I like the place pretty well and think I would prefer this for my home rather than go back to the States where it is so thickly settled.[15]

For the Ohioans, the sudden reversal in Indian relations did nothing to erase the memories of their sacrifices, the bloodshed, and fallen comrades of the recent Indian war. In preparation for their return to the States, a detachment disinterred the remains of Lieutenant Collins at Platte Bridge Station, which had been re-named Fort Caspar in his honor the previous fall, and brought them to Fort Laramie for temporary burial until they could be transported to the family plot at Hillsboro.[16] When the detachment arrived on

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[15] The first quotation is from Charles Ebertstein to Jay Bliss, Chugwater, Wyoming, June 27, 1936, Wyoming State Archives, and the second is taken from a letter by Private Urban Foreacre, Eleventh Ohio, to Isaac Brickersham, April 20, 1866, copy in vertical file, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

[16] General John Pope ordered the post to be designated Fort Caspar in honor of Lieutenant Caspar W. Collins on November 21, 1865. Frazier, *Forts of the West*, p. 180.

March 20, tempers among the men simmered when Maynadier permitted the Sioux to continue a dance on the parade ground in front of Old Bedlam.

> While they were dancing and going on with their powwowing, the body of Lieut. Collins arrived at the Post. They continued their dancing and noise as if in mockery while the remains were being conveyed to Head Quarters. The very same scamps had a war dance over his body once before, and no doubt they remembered it, when they saw the corpse yesterday and knew who it was.[17]

A funeral with full military honors was scheduled for the following morning, with all members of the Eleventh at the post ordered to attend. Promptly at ten o'clock, the flag-draped coffin, accompanied by the Chaplain Wright and Colonel Maynadier, was conveyed to the cemetery on a hand-litter borne by six lieutenants. The band and an escort of sixteen men, in two ranks with arms reversed, led the procession up the hill to the open grave. Between the ranks of the escort, two color bearers carried the regimental banner and national colors. To the rear of the coffin came the members of the Eleventh Ohio in column, and behind them an unorganized group of other soldiers and civilians. Wright offered brief remarks and a prayer at the graveside, after which the escort fired the customary volleys and the crowd dispersed to resume their activities.[18]

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[17] Unrau (ed.), *Tending the Talking Wire*, p. 325.

[18] This description is taken from the one given by Corporal Johnson, who witnessed the ceremony. It was conducted in strict accordance with the ceremony prescribed in the army tactics manual. ibid.

The busy war years, coupled with lean congressional appropriations and a parade of indifferent volunteer commanders, had not been kind to Fort Laramie. Major William H. Evans presented a dismal picture of the place after conducting an inspection in May 1866. "The Storehouses, quarters, and other buildings . . . are old and worn out," he reported. "No repairs of consequence have been made for several years much improvement could be made in a new arrangement, and reconstruction of the post . . . The storehouses are built of yellow pine lumber, very combustible and although sufficient to protect their contents against rain, utterly useless against the decay and destruction produced by the excessive cold of winter and the ardent heat of summer."[19] Indeed, many of the buildings constructed in the early 1850s, and not very well built at that, had suffered the consequences of weather, abuse, and neglect. Contributing to the post's dilapidated appearance were tumbledown fences and accumulations of refuse and excess material about the grounds.

Evans was particularly concerned about the water supply, which he considered inadequate as well as expensive and time consuming. That essential service alone

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[19] Major W. H. Evans to Major Roger Jones, Assistant Inspector General, Division of the Mississippi, May 21, 1866, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie, Dakota Terr., Records of U. S. Army Continental Commands 1821 - 1920, R. G. 393, N. A. Washington, D. C. (hereinafter cited as LS, Fort Laramie); Additional information relating to the condition of the post is found in Post Returns, June 1866, Fort Laramie, copy in library, Fort Laramie NHS (hereinafter cited as "Inspection Report" with date).

required the full-time labor of ten to fifteen men using a six-mule team to deliver water-filled barrels from the Laramie River to all of the inhabited buildings on the post. He was particularly distressed that the available water would be of little use in combating a structural fire. Wells, he noted, did not answer the need because sandy soil at the depth of the water table made for a decidedly gritty drink. He suggested that river water might be diverted above the post and brought down to the garrison via a canal, but the army was reluctant to adopt this relatively simple concept.[20]

By the end of the Civil War, Fort Laramie was more than ever a hub of western transportation routes. "The main road of travel up the North Platte and thence via Salt Lake City and Landers Cut-off to California and the Northern mines passes the post," Evans noted. "Another road from the South comes from Denver following the valley of the Laramie River. There is every probability that a new road to Montana will be opened this year, which will give increased importance to this Post."[21] That new road to Virginia

[20] John Hunton, the last post trader who subsequently lived at the fort for many years, formed the Fort Laramie Ditch Company to bring irrigation water to fields at the old post. This topic is discussed in a later chapter of this study. Author's note.

[21] "Inspection Report," May 21, 1866; Although the development of travel routes across the western U. S. is traditionally viewed in east-west terms, the opening of the Bozeman Trail completed a continuous wagon road all the way from El Paso, Texas to the Pacific Northwest, via western Montana, had a traveler been so inclined. The ancient Camino Real from Mexico City to Santa Fe had been in use by Americans as a freight and mail route since about 1850, and the old Taos Trail, used by trappers to travel to the Upper Missouri, developed into a highway, albeit a primitive one, to Denver and Fort Laramie. The north-south route thus intersected the Santa Fe, Smoky Hill, and Overland Trails leading from the East. Author's note.

City, the Bozeman Trail, was destined to become the focal point of events on the Northern Plains for the next few years.

Also unleashed by war's end was the effort to construct a transcontinental railroad. After considerable debate in Congress, not dissimilar the controversy surrounding the mail routes to California during the previous decade, a decision was made to use the central route across the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada. The seasonal advantages afforded by a southern passage notwithstanding, the government was not yet inclined to reward the South with a transcontinental terminus. By May 1866, track had already been laid eighty miles west of Omaha and General William T. Sherman, commanding the Division of the Missouri, predicted that by December end of track would be several miles beyond Fort Kearny. He anticipated that the railroad would largely overcome the persistent difficulty the army experienced supplying western military posts. No longer would the Quartermaster Department have to rely upon slow-moving wagon trains that were subject to the dictates of weather and were often managed by unreliable, if not unscrupulous, contractors. When Sherman inspected the proposed line of the railroad that spring, he observed, "At the north side of the Platte I found no trains of heavily loaded wagon, but a good many emigrants. The great bulk of travel this season evidently leaves the Missouri river at Atchison and Nebraska City, and follows the old military road by the south side of the Platte." Emigrant trains continued to follow the

so-called "Fort Laramie Route" from Julesburg via Scott's Bluff because of the reliable and usually abundant supply of water and forage along the way. As much could not be said for the Overland Mail Route, but the stage company did not require such large quantities of either, and it could contract for forage to feed its comparatively less numerous animals when necessary. In any event, the railroad was destined to replace them both, but a decision had not yet been made as to which route it would follow beyond the forks of the Platte.

With the welcome mat extended at Fort Laramie, the Sioux flooded back to the Platte in droves to meet with the new peace commission. By the middle of May, Evans was astounded to see thousands of Indians camped in the vicinity of the post. There had been nothing like it since the great gathering in 1851. Although the Indians seemed to be peaceably disposed, both Evans and Maynadier were alert to the potential for trouble. It came on the night of May 28 when the sentry at the Magazine fired a shot just after taps had signaled "lights out." The entire garrison immediately tumbled out of their bunks and fell in, partially clad but under arms. Soon . .

> . . .the rattle and flash of rifle and pistol became generally promiscuous, mixed up with shouts of 'halt! they're Indians! Shoot the red skins!' We could see them making for the breastworks on the east side of the Fort and as they would near the 'beat' of a sentinel, we could hear him open on them with his repeater. It sounded

> like a regular skirmish. The Indians ran into a lodge a short distance from the fort and the firing ceased. They were followed into the lodge by the Provost Guard and brought out, they brought them up on the parade, and sent for the interpreter. There were four or five of them, one was killed in the skirmish and two wounded.[22]

As it turned out, a few Indians had been visiting relatives at one of the circles above the fort and had taken a direct route through the post as they returned to their own camp below. The Indians were unaware that they were prohibited from crossing through the garrison after dark. When challenged by a sentry, they became frightened and bolted toward camp, prompting the guards to open fire. A child was killed and a woman wounded in the incident. Maynadier attempted to diffuse the situation by sending for his friend Spotted Tail, who soon arrived with a number of warriors in full battle array. The colonel explained to the chief that the sentries were under orders to challenge anyone walking about after dark. If an intruder were unable to respond with the proper countersign, he was either held at bay, or fired upon if he failed to stop. The Indians demanded that the guilty soldier be turned over to them for punishment, but Maynadier, wisely following Indian custom, offered substitute restitution in the form of two horses, ten head of cattle, and a quantity of rations. Spotted Tail, already in a conciliatory mood,

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[22] Unrau (ed.), Tending the Talking Wire, p. 339.

accepted his apology for the accident and the matter was dropped. Maynadier's adroit handling of the situation prevented what could have turned into a general melee and any hope of a peace treaty would have instantly gone up in smoke.[23]

It was in this tense atmosphere that the first regulars, a company of the Second Cavalry, returned to garrison Fort Laramie after an absence of more than three years. After Lee's surrender, the regiment had been recruited up to full strength and stationed at forts along the Santa Fe and Smoky Hill routes in Kansas. But, after spending a hard winter constructing new buildings at those posts, orders diverted the Second to Dakota to protect the anticipated heavy migration over the Virginia City road. Following close behind this vanguard were B, E, and G Companies of the First Battalion, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, veterans of numerous actions, including the Battles of Nashville, Chickamauga, Chattanooga, and Sherman's notorious "March to the Sea." Like the Second Cavalry, the Eighteenth was being consolidated on the emigrant routes to Utah and Montana. The regulars made an impressive showing as they paraded smartly into Fort Laramie on the first day of June, though the solemn ex-rebels of the U. S. Volunteers probably eyed them with some resentment.[24]

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[23] *Montana Post*, July 7, 1866; Article by former Eighteenth Infantryman William Wilson, "Army Life in the Rockies," *National Tribune*, June 22, 1899.

[24] Company H, Second Cavalry actually arrived at the post on May 29. Post Returns, May and June 1866, Fort Laramie; The Eighteenth Infantry was one of the new three-battalion regiments authorized in 1861. Each battalion was composed of eight companies, nearly equaling the strength of a normal ten-company

The commissioners, escorted to the post by the regulars, arrived just two days after the shooting incident. The most prominent member was E. B. Taylor, editor of the Omaha *Republican* as well as Indian commissioner for Nebraska. Taylor was an ambitious personality with an oversimplified view that it would be an easy matter to negotiate a treaty to end the costly war of the previous three years, thereby promoting the peaceful settlement of western Nebraska. Accompanying him were R. N. McLaren of Minnesota and Thomas Wistar from Pennsylvania, both presidential appointees. Charles E. Bowles, an employee of the Indian Bureau who would serve as recorder, with Frank Lehmer, an Omaha resident, assisting him. Maynadier, now commanding the new District of the Platte, headed the commission.[25] The talks would be interpreted by Charles E. Gereau, long-time Fort Laramie resident and confidant of the Sioux, along with Leon Pallardie, a Frenchman who had formerly worked as an agent for Pierre Bissonette.[26]

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regiment. Theophilus F. Rodenbough, *The Army of the United States*, (New York: 1966), pp. 179, 643-53 (hereinafter cited as *Army of the United States*).

[25] In the army's transition to a peacetime footing, the Department of the Platte was reconstituted and attached to the Military Division of the Mississippi effective March 26, 1866. An old dragoon officer, Brigadier General Philip St. George Cooke, was placed in command of the department, headquartered in Omaha. The department initially embraced the states of Minnesota and Iowa, Montana Territory, part of Nebrasaka, and that portion of Dakota Territory lying north of the Platte and Sweetwater River, exclusing Fort Caspar. Raphael P. Thian, *Notes Illustrating the Military Geography of the United States 1813 - 1880*, (Austin: 1979), p. 88 (hereinafter cited as *Military Geography*).

[26] Although the phonetic spelling "Pillday" was used by *Montana Post* correspondent, the author considers M. Simonin, a French mining engineer, to be a more reliable source. When Simonin met Leon Pallardie at Fort Laramie in 1867, he related that both Pallardie and James Beauvais had been employed by Joseph Bissonette during the fur trade days. M. Simonin, "Fort Russell and the Fort Laramie Peace Commission in 1867," *Sources of Northwest History*, No. 14, p. 7; Lieutenant Ware also became acquainted with Palladie, and used that spelling, while stationed at the post in 1864. He described Palladie as having blue eyes, curly hair, and "the happiest disposition of any frontiersman." Eugene F. Ware, *The Indian War of 1864*, New York: 1960), p. 202; As previously cited, Charles Gereau also worked as a clerk in the store at the

The council convened on the morning of June 6, with hundreds of Indians present at the fort, while several thousand others remained in camp about twenty miles south where the grazing was better for the large herds of ponies. At one side of the parade, Maynadier had prepared an arbor of evergreen boughs laid over a framework to shade a large circle of pine board benches. All the principal men were in attendance, headed by Red Cloud, Man Afraid of His Horses, Red Leaf, Spotted Tail, and Standing Elk. Small numbers of Cheyennes and Northern Arapahoes were also present, though they did not include the influential leaders. Following the usual preliminaries, the Indians got down to business by reiterating their desire for new, trustworthy agents and the delivery of the annuities that had been promised them. They also demanded that whites be prohibited from trespassing across lands east of the Big Horns, an area formerly controlled by the Crows, but which the Sioux now considered as their own by right of conquest. It was a delicate and volatile issue that Maynadier had carefully, and intentionally, circumvented in previous conversations. The chiefs demanded adequate compensation if they were to drop their opposition to the Bozeman Trail. During the two days of talks, the government representatives continued to evade that point because they knew full well that the new

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American Fur Company post. Later, the government often employed him as "post interpreter" at Fort Laramie. These men knew each other well and formed an important societal element at Fort Laramie. All of French descent, they had drifted to the Platte Valley during the 1830s and '40s, and were still living in the area in the late 1860s. It can be safely assumed that all of them had Indian wives. Both the army and the Indian Bureau relied heavily on these individuals as a ready source of interpreters and intermediaries with the Indians at Fort Laramie. There can be no doubt they contributed in a unique way to culture and local color that characterized the post.

road was about to be officially opened and occupied by army regulars. The entire Second Battalion, Eighteenth Infantry, under the command of Colonel Henry B. Carrington, was in fact already on the march from Fort Kearny, where it had spent the past winter.[27] The two parties failed to reach a clear consensus on the issue, yet the talks were conducted in an atmosphere of "moderation and good feeling." The session concluded when the chiefs announced that they were going to defer signing a treaty until a few other bands had been collected so their views might be represented at the council. These other family groups, they claimed, either had not received notification of the council, or they had misunderstood the date. Closer to the truth is that Carrington's arrival gave the Oglalas pause to reconsider. Whatever the reasons, the move frustrated the commissioners' efforts and dashed any hope for a speedy agreement. Maynadier and Taylor were left no choice but to adjourn the talks for another two weeks. While delegates from the tribes went to inform the scattered small bands, the army continued to placate the Indians by issuing them excess food left over from Connor's abortive campaign.

Carrington's arrival in camp below the post on the thirteenth could not have been worse timing. It was obvious to Red Cloud's Sioux that so large a force did not bode well

[27] As a part of the Regular Army's reoccupation of the plains, the First Battalion, Eighteenth Infantry, was sent initially to posts in Kansas and Colorado in late 1865. Some of those companies were later moved to the Mountain District in present day Wyoming. The headquarters staff and the Second Battalion were stationed at Fort Kearny for the winter, while the Third Battalion was still being organized at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. It, too, marched up the Oregon Trail to Fort Kearny in early spring. Colonel Carrington was given command of the new Mountain District, Department of the Platte, in May 1866. Rodenbough, *Army of the United States*, pp. 652-53.

for their interests. Word quickly spread through the camps that these soldiers were going to build forts along the Bozeman Trail. There are several versions of the chief's reaction to this development, none of which are considered reliable, but his anger cannot be understated. William Rowland, who lived among the Indians and served as an interpreter at the fort from time to time, was one of the messengers sent to invite the Cheyennes to the council. But, even he met with fierce resentment when he attempted to ride to the village some miles beyond the Platte. Oglala warriors intercepted Rowland, knocked him from his horse, severely beat him, and sent him scurrying back to the fort. "That is the feeling of the Indians when whites want to go through their country at present," wrote a correspondent to the Salt Lake City newspaper.[28] A brooding Red Cloud now refused to resume negotiations.[29] On June 28, Spotted Tail and the other Southern Brule chiefs, who never claimed an interest in the Powder River country anyway, readily signed the new

[28] (Salt Lake City) *Daily Union Vedette*, June 29, 1866 quoting a story filed under a dateline of June 14; this incident is corroborated in Henry B. Carrington, *Absaraka, Land of Massacre*, (Philadelphia: 1878), p. 80. The basic narrative of the book is that of his first wife, Margaret. After her death, Carrington married Frances Grummond, whose husband, Lieutenant George W. Grummond, had been killed in the Fetterman fight, December 21, 1866.

[29] The stories about Red Cloud's reaction are examined in James C. Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*, (Lincoln: 1965), pp. 35 – 37. Olson points out that Taylor and Maynadier were well aware of the approach of Carrington's command and apparently were not concerned about the effect it might have on the negotiations. This suggests that they were confident that the chiefs, including Red Cloud, were willing to sign the treaty, so long as the Sioux were compensated for use of the Bozeman Trail; That Red Cloud may not have even been present at Fort Laramie at the time is suggested in Taylor's statement that, "A band numbering perhaps three hundred warriors, headed by Red Cloud, a prominent chief of the Ogalallahs, refused to come in." He made it clear that this was two weeks after the June 6 council. E. B. Taylor to Cooley, October 1, 1866, Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior, *House Ex. Doc*., 39th Cong., 2d Sess. (Washington, D. C.: 1867), p. 211.

agreement allowing the whites a right-of-way through the northern hunting grounds. In return, the Indian Bureau would issue annuity goods at Fort Laramie every six months, rather than annually. Taylor had assurances from some of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes that their leaders would sign the treaty as well, but the treaty was worthless without Red Cloud's cooperation.

Alluding to Sioux complaints about dishonest agents, Taylor suggested their salaries be increased, so that they would not be "compelled to resort to some other means of making a living." Indeed, within a few months, M. T. Patrick would replace Jarrot at the Upper Platte Agency. [30]

Upon his arrival, Carrington assigned Major James Van Voast to assume command of Fort Laramie, signaling an end to the Eleventh Ohio's long exile on the frontier.[31] The Ohio troopers immediately vacated their dilapidated quarters and moved to the old bivouac ground a mile downstream. They would spend another day there preparing for

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[30] "Report of the commissioners appointed by the President of the United States to treat with the Indians at Fort Laramie," ibid., p. 209; Patrick relieved Jarrot on September 18, 1866. M. T. Patrick to Taylor, September 20, 1866, ibid.; As an interim measure, the army agreed to store the Indian goods that had not been distributed by the end of June. This suggests that Jarrot may have resigned his position during the conference, otherwise the goods would have been placed at the agency five miles down the North Platte. Moreover, it better protected the supplies from being pilfered. Major James Van Voast to Taylor, June 26, 1866, LS, Fort Laramie.

[31] James Van Voast's army career dated to his attendance at West Point 1848-52. After graduation, he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Third Artillery. Nearly two years later, he transferred to the Ninth Infantry and served with that unit as a first lieutenant and captain until 1863, when he was promoted to major in the Eighteenth. He eventually retired as colonel of his old Ninth Infantry in 1882, and died just a year later. Heitman, *Historical Register*, I, p. 984.

the homeward march. Carrington and some of his officers, meanwhile, took up temporary residence at the post. In stark contrast to the mood of the departing volunteers, the wife of an Eighteenth Infantry officer expressed her initial reaction to the post:

> With all deference to its historic character, Fort Laramie, in my observation and experience, did not impress me as particularly interesting . . . at that season its glory had departed. The parade ground was bare of sod, but in its center 'the flag was still there.' The adobe houses of gray appearance imparted their somber hue to the whole surrounding. The scenery, however, beautiful or otherwise, affected me but little, except in general depression, so great was my concern to escape the ambulance and plant my feet on any kind of earth whatever.[32]

After the arduous journey up the Platte Road, even the simple amenities afforded by a frontier post were appreciated by the new arrivals. Mrs. Margaret Carrington I. described the scene that greeted her in the Sutler's Store:

> The long counter of Messrs. Bullock and Ward was a scene of seeming confusion not surpassed in any popular, overcrowded store of Omaha itself. Indians, dressed and half dressed and undressed; squaws, dressed to the same degree of completeness as their noble lords; papooses, absolutely nude, slightly not nude, or

[32] Frances C. Carrington, *My Army Life and the Fort Phil Kearney Massacre*, (Philadelphia: 1911), p. 53 (hereinafter cited as *Army Life*).

> wrapped in calico, buckskin, or furs, mingled with soldiers of the garrison, teamsters, emigrants, speculators, half-breeds, and interpreters. Here, cups of rice sugar, coffee, or flour were being emptied into the looped-up skirts or blanket of a squaw; and there, some tall warrior was grimacing delightfully as he grasped and sucked his long sticks of peppermint candy. Bright shawls, red squaw cloth, brilliant calicoes, and flashing ribbons passed over the same counter with knives and tobacco, brass nails and glass beads, and that endless catalogue of articles which belong to the legitimate border traffic. The room was redolent of cheese and herring, and 'heap of smoke;' while the debris of mounched [sic] crackers lying loose under foot furnished both nutriment and employment for little bits of Indians too big to ride on mamma's back, and too little to reach the good things on counter or shelves.[33]

The Second Battalion did not stay long at Fort Laramie. Carrington broke camp within a few days to continue his march up the Bozeman Trial. Mrs. Carrington lamented her sadness at the departure from the relative comfort of the fort, knowing they were bound for an inhospitable land: "We surrendered our 'dobey' house, our hospital cots, our sombre blankets, even our tin mirror, unmolested, and with packed mess-chest boarded the everlasting ambulance." Leaving part of his force to man Fort Reno, Carrington

[33] Carrington, *Absaraka*, pp. 76-77.

proceeded northward into the Sioux and Cheyenne heartland. On mid-July he would establish Fort Phil Kearny on Piney Creek at the eastern base of the Big Horn Mountains, and a month later his men would begin construction of a yet third post, Fort C. F. Smith, on the Big Horn River in Montana Territory.

Red Cloud's Bad Faces and their Cheyenne and Arapahoe allies rejoined the other Sioux bands on Powder River to prepare for the coming invasion. Spotted Tail avoided trouble by moving off with his band toward the Republican River to hunt, while Big Mouth and the Loafers, now almost totally reliant on the government, went only as far as the agency at Horse Creek. Some of the Brules, as well as the Loafers, remained near the fort throughout the summer living on government rations and getting drunk on the white man's firewater. Things seemed to be retuning to normal again. "There were plenty of Indians of the friendly sort visible at any hour of the day, but there was a feeling of perfect security at Fort Laramie itself," wrote an officer's wife.[34] There was, however, a more tragic side that she failed to mention. Major Van Voast noted that the old "Squaw Camp" was back near the Platte ferry. It contained, he estimated, about 180 souls--mostly women and children--"the deserted wives of white men who with the Volunteers have left the Country—and have abandoned their children to the mercy of such charity as might be

[34] Carrington , *My Army Life*, p. 54.

bestowed."[35] He was saddened to see that the women were reduced to eking out a living by selling moccasins and doing odd jobs around the fort. Even their own tribes exhibited little concern for their welfare. No doubt many continued to resort to prostitution for survival because, as one old-timer recalled, "The having of Indian women for mistresses and propagating half breeds was such a common thing by nearly all the men of the country at that time that no person thought of taxing his memory with such a thing . . . ."[36] Somber evidence of the price paid by the Loafers was seen in the so-called "Papoose Tree," standing just across the Laramie River from the fort. It bore "no less than forty bodies of Indian children wrapped in skins and robes, and lashed to the limbs of the tree with buffalo thongs, at that time the mode of Indian burial."[37]

Within a month after the council broke up, Van Voast observed an increasing number of inebriated Indians coming to the post. He suspected they were trading for liquor at one or more of the "ranches" that were becoming more numerous up and down the valley. Two fixtures were Jim Beauvais' old place five miles down the Platte, and

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[35] Van Voast to Major H. G. Litchfield, October 9, 1866, LS, Fort Laramie.

[36] John Hunton to Mrs. C. F. Byrd, September 24, 1910, Book 21, Box 12, Hunton Papers, University of Wyoming. Hunton knew of what he spoke because he himself had an Indian "wife" for a few years during the early 1870s.

[37] John S. Collins, post trader at Fort Laramie in the 1870s, described the location of the Papoose Tree as being on the Laramie River, above the bridge into the post. It was "a big box elder that stood three hundred yards from and opposite the quarters called "Dobie Row," its branches covering a space of at least seventy-five feet in diameter." Dobie Row refers to the 1866 adobe barracks on the southeast side of the parade ground, evidenced today only by its foundation. John S. Collins, *Across the Plains in '64*, (Omaha, Neb.: 1904), p. 39. The tree may have been cut down when a cavalry barracks (used as laundress quarters) was erected on that side of the river in the late 1870s. The fate of the human remains is unknown. Author's note.

Bordeaux's post just beyond that. Old Joe Bissonette, now down on his luck and nearly destitute, maintained a farm above the mouth of Deer Creek, and no doubt still kept some whiskey for sale. More recently, Jules Ecoffey had established a saloon and gambling den on the Platte near Beauvais' house. Six miles up the Laramie, near one of the frequently occupied army campgrounds, was a new dive owned by John Hunter.[38] Yet another, known as "Nine Mile Ranch," lay northwest of the fort on the Platte. Lewis Richard also ranched in the Laramie Valley several miles above the post. Faced with the impossible task of trying to single out guilty parties, Van Voast requested permission to simply prohibit the sale of liquor anywhere within fifteen miles of Fort Laramie. Department of the Platte commander Brigadier General Philip St. George Cooke readily approved his suggestion and on July 27 Van Voast promulgated an order giving the locals ten days to cease their activities, or be subject to arrest. At the same time, he expelled all the Indians from the military reservation.[39]

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[38] The Six Mile Ranch was established at a point where the road to Cheyenne diverged from the Laramie River. It was at or near "Camp on Laramie River," a bivouac first used by the dragoons in 1851. "Camp Maclin, " as it was dubbed at that time, was described by a soldier as "Fit for the gods—one of the most lovely spots I have ever seen." Percival G. Lowe, *Five Years a Dragoon*, (Norman: 1965), p. 46; Stansbury's surveying expedition probably camped there as well the next year. *Exploration and Survey of the Valley of the Great Salt Lake of Utah*, (Philadelphia: 1852), p. 52; This bottomland location was used at various times by the volunteers during the Civil War, as referenced previously in this study, and was the scene of the mutiny by the Sixteenth Kansas Cavalry on the eve of the Powder River Campaign. Cyrus C. Scofield to Mary E. Scofield, June 25, 1865, typescript copy in vertical files, library, Fort Laramie NHS; The place is also referenced Post Returns, October 1858, June, July, and August 1873, Fort Laramie. The placement of the ranch was probably influenced by the presence of troops from time to time and the business opportunities they brought with them.

[39] Van Voast to A. A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, July 25, 1866, LS, Fort Laramie; Orders No. 18, July 27, 1866, Fort Laramie, Orders, R. G. 393; General Orders No. 9, Dept. of the Platte, July 24, 1866, ibid.

Red Cloud's followers lost no time in displaying their contempt for the army. On August 1, a war party of fifteen to twenty men suddenly showed up at the Government Farm about fifteen miles north of the fort. The warriors scooped up five mules a short distance from the house at dawn, before the five-man detail recovered from their surprise. The soldiers fired a few shots at the fleeing tribesmen and gave chase, but managed to recover only one of the animals.

At about ten o'clock the same morning, the warriors struck again--this time on the horse herd belonging to their erstwhile friend, Antoine Janis, who at that time was operating the ferry over the Platte just north of the post. This was an unusual act, considering that Janis was married into the Sioux Tribe and had traded among them for many years. Because the horses were grazing three or four miles beyond the river, the Indians may have mistakenly thought they belonged to emigrants, nevertheless, they got away with twenty-five head. Several friendly Sioux, probably Janis's relatives, later caught up with the raiders and persuaded them to give up some of the horses. Troopers of the Second Cavalry followed the trail more to ascertain the general direction taken by the warriors than with any hope of catching them. However, just five days later the raiding

party returned, and made up for its loss of Janis's horses by stealing livestock from Jules Ecoffy's ranch.[40]

Van Voast prudently increased security for the twice-weekly mails to Fort Sedgwick. In lieu of the pack mules previously used, the new commander employed an ambulance carrying one or two infantrymen as guards, in addition to the driver, with two cavalrymen as outriders to guard against ambush. He posted two troopers at Cold Spring Station (near present Torrington, Wyoming) to serve as the mounted escort between that point and Fort Mitchell. In this manner, the mail could be conveyed to the main line, 170 miles distant, in 36 hours. Detachments of twenty mounted men would continue to carry the mail to Fort Caspar, connecting en route at Bridger's Ferry with couriers from Carrington's Mountain District headquarters at Fort Phil Kearny.[41]

On the trail behind Carrington were numerous trains loaded with tons of supplies needed for the new forts. Some of the trains, those coming directly from Omaha, followed the old Mormon Trail on the north side of the Platte, while those originating at Fort Leavenworth stayed on the south bank. With only two companies of cavalry at his disposal, and those recently filled with new recruits having no horses or arms, Van Voast

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[40] Post Returns, July 1866, Fort Laramie; Van Voast to Captain Edward Ball, August 1, 1866, LS, Fort Laramie; Van Voast to A. A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, August 8, 1866, ibid.

[41] Post Returns, July 1866, Fort Laramie; Van Voast to Lieutenant S. W. Porter, August 2, 1866, LS, Fort Laramie; Van Voast to Porter, August 4, 1866, ibid.

was unable to provide escorts that wagon masters began requesting as a result of the recent depredations. He in fact claimed that his supply of ammunition was so low the garrison would be unable to defend the post in the event of an attack.[42] Van Voast therefore advised four trains from Omaha, two hundred wagons in all, to cross the Platte at Fort Laramie and join other government trains for mutual protection. He assured the contractors that they would be safe enough, if they remained on the south side of the river until they reached the fork of the Bozeman road at Bridger's Ferry. From that point northward, he admitted, travel could be hazardous. Reports had recently arrived that two dozen men, most of them civilians, had been killed by Indians between Brown's Springs and Tongue River. There was little more he could do, except to station a company of the Sixth Volunteer Infantry at the ferry to offer whatever protection it could.[43]

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[42] The volunteer officers in charge of Fort Laramie had apparently been lax in keeping the post adequately supplied with arms and ammunition. Carrington later recalled that while he was encamped at the post in June, he requisitioned 100,000 rounds of musket ammunition for his command, but was informed that less than 1,000 were on hand. The following month, Van Voast officially verified that the Magazine contained only 1,100 rounds of .58-caliber cartridges. He laid the blame directly on Maynadier, who claimed that he was expecting to be re-supplied at any time, yet Van Voast was unable to find a copy of the requisition in the files. He had expected the First Battalion, coming up from Colorado, to bring extra ammunition, but they had failed to do so. Carrington, *Absaraka*, p. 75; Van Voast to A. A. A. G., Dept. of the Missouri, July 18, 1866, LS, Fort Laramie; When Fort Laramie received a supply of ammunition in September, but Carrington's command had not, Van Voast gained permission to forward 30,000 rounds of musket ammunition and 5,000 howitzer shells to Fort Phil Kearny, with the understanding the department ordnance officer would replace it in-kind as soon as possible. Van Voast to A. A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, ibid.; Litchfield to Van Voast, September 11, 1866, ibid.; Van Voast to Litchfield, September 26 and 27, 1866, ibid.

[43] Van Voast to Halse, Treadwell, Hall, and Wood (wagon masters), August 1, 1866, ibid.; Van Voast to Lieutenant P. W. Harrington, [no date], ibid.; Van Voast to A. A. A. G., Dept of the Platte, August 9, 1866, ibid.; The Eighteenth Infantry suffered the first Indian combat death among its officers when First

If the Galvanized Yankees along the road harbored any resentment against the Eighteenth Infantry, they were undoubtedly more perturbed to learn that the devil himself, Lieutenant General William Tecumseh Sherman, planned to visit Fort Laramie in August. Sherman had recently been named commander of the Military Division of the Missouri, an enormous area encompassing the entire plains region north of Texas to Canada and from the Mississippi River west beyond the Rocky Mountains. Sherman wanted to inspect critical portions of his new domain. Traveling by wagon with a ten-man escort from Fort Sedgwick, Sherman arrived on the Laramie on the morning of the twenty-ninth. That he was a bit taken aback by what he found is reflected in his report:

> Though originally built by the engineer corps, there is no sign of a block-house or defense, but a mixture of all sorts of houses of every conceivable pattern, and promiscuously scattered about, The two principal buildings of two stories [Bedlam and the 1850 barracks] originally constituting the post, are now so damaged and so rickety in the high wind that the soldiers of a windy night sleep on the parade. Low buildings of adobe, with good roofs and not too large, seem better adapted to the climate and circumstances; and the commanding officer, Major Van Voast and Quartermaster Dandy, are proceeding in all new structures

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Lieutenant Napoleon H. Daniels was killed on Powder River July 21, 1866. Post Adjutant to Bvt. Colonel G. B. Dandy, August 8, 1866,ibid.; Heitman, *Historical Register*, I, p. 353.

> on that hypothesis. Adobes, or sun-dried brick, are being made by contract, lime has been burned twelve miles off; a saw mill is erected fifty miles off [at Laramie Peak], and wood for the use of the post is cut by soldiers and hauled fifteen miles.[44]

On his way up the North Platte Valley, Sherman noted that the area held great promise for agriculture. He foresaw a day when irrigation would enable farmers to produce a bounty of wheat, barley, and other crops in the rich soil fringing the river but, he thought, "the government will have to pay a bounty for people to live up here til necessity forces them." He recognized that despite the extremes of weather and harsh living conditions, homesteaders would eventually settle in the area as land grew increasingly scarce elsewhere in the West, and that inevitability did not bode well for the free-roaming life of the Indians. "Ever since the California emigration this road has been traveled as common as the old national road and the Indians kept clear of it," wrote Sherman, "since then all the Sioux have been driven from Minnesota and the Missouri river, and the mountain region of Montana, Colorado, and Utah is being settled up with gold miners and rancheros, so that poor Indian finds himself hemmed in." [45]

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[44] Lieutenant General W. T. Sherman to General John A. Rawlins, August 31, 1866, LS, Fort Laramie.

[45] Both quotations here are also in ibid.

Sherman concluded his two-day visit to the post by also penning a letter to his old comrade-in-arms, Ulysses S. Grant, now general-of-the-army. Sherman reported that, true to his prediction, the transcontinental railroad had been completed to Fort Kearny and if progress continued at a similar pace, the tracks would undoubtedly reach the forks of the Platte by the end of the 1866 construction season. No determination had yet been made as to whether it would follow up the North Platte, or down the South Fork, or if it might go directly west over Cheyenne Pass to Fort Bridger. That the northerly route was under serious consideration was revealed when a Union Pacific survey party examining the valley paused at Fort Laramie that same month. Sherman considered the telegraph system then in use as unnecessarily duplicative, with the main line to Utah going by way of Fort Laramie and South Pass, while a branch paralleled the South Platte to Denver, then continued along the Overland Stage Road to Fort Bridger and Salt Lake. It seemed to him that a single route, the one selected for the railroad, would afford the opportunity to finally consolidate transcontinental transportation and communication. Regardless of the route selected, Sherman opined that a fort on the rail line would be the only logical place from which to conduct future military operations against the Indians. While no one had yet challenged the importance of Fort Laramie in that regard, its fate nevertheless hung on Sherman's visionary comment.[46]

[46] Sherman to Grant, August 31, 1866, ibid.

The general, with his entourage and baggage loaded in five ambulances, accompanied by a twenty-man cavalry escort, left the post on the first of September bound for Fort John Buford [later named Fort Sanders] and Denver. Sherman's visit had not only expedited the discharge of the U. S. Volunteers, thereby leaving Indian matters soley in the hands of his beloved regulars, his inspection of Fort Laramie gave impetus to the construction program that Van Voast had started shortly before Sherman's arrival. The men were already laying up the lower story walls of a new stone guardhouse near the river and the major proposed to erect four new barracks, three additional sets of officers' quarters, two cavalry stables, and two more storehouses. Van Voast also had Quartermaster Dandy detail men to whitewash and repair the old barracks as a stopgap measure until new quarters could be built. Eighteenth Infantryman William E. Kenney, remembering the barracks they had built, but never occupied, in Kansas wrote that the men went to work on the new buildings at Fort Laramie "thinking it would be our turn in the quarters next winter."[47] In coming months the ramshackle two-story dragoon barracks would be razed, before it collapsed of its own accord, and replaced on the same site by a 286-foot long frame building housing three companies. Another two-company barracks, constructed of adobe, was constructed on the southeast side of the parade ground.

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[47] Post Adjutant to First Lieutenant Thomas S. Brent, August 8, 1866, ibid.; Van Voast to A. A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, September 1, 1866, ibid.; William E. Kenney, *National Tribune*, November 4, 1909.

Captain Dandy, echoing Major Evans, recommended that a water system be constructed that would take water from the Laramie about one and three-quarters of a mile south and transport it either by pipeline or ditch to reservoirs on the terrace near the cemetery. Dandy prevailed on the visiting railroad engineers to accurately determine the elevations and the point where a diversion dam might be constructed. He emphasized to Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs, that fire posed a serious danger to the fort, especially during winter, since the river and the water barrels always froze at that season. Meigs, always the conservative, could not justify the expenditure.[48]

Recent Indian depredations caused Van Voast to reconsider the number of men detailed to the extensive construction activities underway on the post. Dandy, however, convincingly countered that reducing the number of laborers would only retard completion of the new buildings, perhaps beyond the onset of winter. More important, the quartermaster designed two of the structures to augment the post's defenses. The stone guardhouse, well underway by that time, would provide a stronghold near the river on the southeast perimeter, while a quarter-mile downstream an adobe quartermaster's corral was also rapidly taking shape. Often mistaken in later years as old Fort John, the corral

[48] Dandy to Meigs, August 30, 1866, Consolidated Correspondence File, Records of the Quartermaster General's Office, R. G. 92, N. A.; Regarding the water supply in 1866, Frances Grummond Carrington wrote, "The water used at Laramie was that time hauled from the river for all purposes and was abundant and clear, and yet there was consciousness that you were limited in its use, perhaps on account of the process of conveyance." Carrington, *Army Life*, p. 56.

had walls two feet thick and ten feet high, surrounding an area approximately 160 feet by 200 feet. Around the inside perimeter of the corral yard were shed-roof stables to shelter the mules. At opposing diagonal corners, northeast and southwest, were hexagonal "blockhouses" with firing embrasures in the walls. Under normal circumstances, the corner bastions served as kitchens for civilian teamsters. The wisdom of Dandy's reasoning convinced Van Voast to suspend all military duties, except for guard, and to assign every available man to expediting the construction. Despite these additions, Van Voast recognized that the fort's rambling layout still posed a problem in view of his limited forces. He wrote on October 6: "This Post is very large and covers ten times to [sic] much ground—but it will be in a better state for defence [sic] soon than it ever has been."[49]

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[49] Post Adjutant to Captain George B. Dandy, September 13, 1866, L S, Fort Laramie; All of the new buildings constructed in 1866 were undoubtedly designed locally by Quartermaster Dandy, who began his military career as a private in the Tenth Infantry during the Mexican War. He afterward was selected to attend the U. S. Military Academy, which he entered just as the army was moving into Fort Laramie. Three years later he failed in his studies and left West Point during summer 1852. Determined to be a soldier, he re-enlisted in the ranks and served as a private, sergeant, and first sergeant with the First Artillery from 1854 to 1857, when he secured a lieutenancy in the Third Artillery. Dandy transferred to the Quartermaster Department for a few months in 1862, then obtained a commission as colonel of the One Hundredth New York Volunteer Infantry, a position he held until the regiment was mustered out in August 1865. At that time, he resumed his former rank as a quartermaster and was sent to Fort Laramie in response to Maynadier's request for a full-time professional to handle related affairs. Dandy received promotions to major in 1875 and lieutenant colonel in 1887. He retired from the army in 1894, with brevets (including brigadier general) for gallantry and meritorious service at the Battles of Fort Wagner, Deep Bottom, and Fort Gregg. Heitman, *Historical Register*, I, p. 352; Captain John Bourke, who came to Fort Laramie with General Crook in 1877, mistook the corral for "the old sod redoubt that constituted Fort Laramie when it was the post of the American Fur Co., 35 years ago." He did, however, provide a useful description of the structure. He noted that the "lunettes" were "pierced for small field pieces." John Bourke Diaries, v. 22, p. 1844, transcribed copies at Zimmerman Library, University of New Mexico; In 1868, the post surgeon wrote: "It has strong bastions at two diagonal corners and would serve as a stronghold in case of an attack by Indians." Medical History, Fort Laramie, bound typescript copies in library, Fort Laramie NHS.

The major was also keenly aware that many of the men were new recruits, enlisted to replenish the wartime losses incurred by Second Cavalry and the Eighteenth Infantry. They had received only the most rudimentary training at the depots before being sent to the frontier. The major consequently "managed to drill all the men as skirmishers and at target practice many of the recruits recently received being totally ignorant of the use of the musket."[50] The post was in fact so destitute of arms that Van Voast was forced to issue infantry rifle-muskets to many of the cavalry troopers until they could be re-supplied with first-class carbines. Inexperienced troopers, armed with single-shot muzzle-loaders, hardly made for an effective fighting force, but there was no alternative. In addition to routine mounted patrols, he also ordered out a company of infantry on a forty-mile reconnaissance to Rawhide Creek, via the Government Farm. While he thought it might be possible for the detachment to come in contact with small war parties ranging in that area, he urged the lieutenant in command to take advantage of the opportunity to condition his men to rapid cross-country marching and to coach them in firing drill along the way. Van Voast expressed his concern about the seriousness of the situation by

[50] The Eighteenth Infantry, for example, suffered the loss of 39 officers and 929 enlisted men killed, wounded, and captured. So serious were its losses, and regular army recruitment so slow during the conflict, that the First and Third Battalions were temporarily dissolved in 1864 and not reconstituted until late the following year when the regiment was ordered to the Plains. Rodenbough, *Army of the United States*, p. 652; Van Voast to A. A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, September 1, 1866, LS, Fort Laramie.

advising Commissioner Taylor that all signs pointed to an all-out war with the Sioux and Cheyennes by winter.[51]

Trouble struck close-by when on the evening of September 30 a ten-man war party rode through a civilian camp only six miles south on the Laramie. The occupant, a man named Lee, was under contract by the telegraph company to cut and prepare replacement poles for the line. The Indians fired a few shots into the camp itself, wounding Lee's friendly Sioux helper, and escaped with twenty-two mules and horses. First Lieutenant William S. Starring, commanding a detachment of scouts recruited from the Loafer band, along with Lieutenant Horatio S. Bingham, the post guide, determined the probable route of the raiders and managed to intercept and surprise them in camp. In a brief skirmish, the scouts killed one hostile and successfully recovered all the stock. It was an important lesson that pointed up the value of using Indian auxiliaries.[52]

The Sioux scouts also informed the post commander that the incident was a harbinger of things to come because the hostiles were running out of stock to steal on the Montana road and were even then returning to their old haunts along the Platte. Two parties, reportedly Cheyennes, had been seen within five miles of the fort. As a

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[51] Van Voast to Mr. Lithgow, Telegraph Office, Fort Laramie, September 13, 1866, LS, Fort Laramie; Van Voast to A. A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, September 4, 1866, ibid.; Van Voast to A A. A. G., Dept of the Platte, September 26, 1866, ibid..

[52] The commanding officer requested permission to recruit spies or scouts from among the friendly Sioux in late July. Some of these men were undoubtedly the same ones who had served the army prior to the outbreak the previous year. Van Voast to A. A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, July 30, 1866, ibid.;

precautionary measure, Van Voast dispatched mounted patrols to occupy certain vantage points to scan the countryside just at dawn when the enemy might be moving, but all appeared quiet.

The warnings were borne out on the night of October 3 when Indians approached the picket guard at Bridger's Ferry. Sergeant C. H. Gunther, in charge of the station, challenged the intruders, who ignored his warnings. His men opened fire, but the hostiles "seemed not to care." After withdrawing temporarily, they soon returned displaying the same disregard. This time Gunther fired a round of canister from the mountain howitzer emplaced at the ferry. A sheet of flame pierced the darkness as the balls of the shotgun-like charge whizzed across the prairie. When the smoke cleared, not an Indian was to be seen, dead or alive. Gunther later suggested that his stock of canister rounds, quite effective at close range, but useless beyond a few hundred yards, be supplemented with some shells. Van Voast commended the plucky sergeant for his conduct, and rewarded him with a quantity of explosive case shot.[53]

In early October, about a hundred lodges of Cheyennes—those who had earlier promised to sign the treaty—arrived on the North Platte and went into camp near Bordeaux's place. Chiefs Bull Knife, White Clay, Red Arm, and Turkey Leg, along with

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[53] Sergeant C. H. Gunther, Company C, Second Cavalry, to Van Voast, October 3, 1866, ibid.; First Lieutenant William S. Starring to Gunther, October 9, 1866, ibid.

a retinue of warrior leaders, came up to the fort a short time later and in a three-hour meeting "conducted with dignity and formality," signed the document. Van Voast then gave them provisions and other presents before they left the fort. The band subsequently left the area, heading south toward the Republican, ostensibly to hunt buffalo.[54]

Despite the conciliatory mood of that band, conditions in the area worsened with each passing day. Van Voast learned there were an estimated 200 – 400 hostiles then operating on the road between Forts Laramie and Casper, with numbers increasing rapidly to the south along the road to Fort Sedgwick. Mail parties traveling that section of the route sometimes more frequently encountered war parties that forced them to seek the protection of the nearest station. "Mud Springs is a dangerous place—always has been," Van Voast informed department headquarters. He recommended posting twelve-man detachments at each of the seven relay stations on the road to Sedgwick to bolster security. The noncoms in charge were instructed to keep one man on lookout at all times. Noting that Indian spies had also been seen within just two miles of Fort Laramie, he added, "This post is constantly watched--the hostile Indians all considering it the great source of all their trouble." Word had reached him that the hostiles looked upon the Loafers as traitors and that they would rather kill "soldier scouts" than regular troops,

[54] Van Voast to A. A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, October 12, 1866, ibid.; These Cheyennes turned hostile the very next spring. Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *House Exec. Doc.*, 40th Cong., 2d Sess., (serial 1326), p. 289.

though they would delight in giving the soldiers a fight as well. Given the opportunity to attack the Loafer camp, the Sioux swore they would not spare even the women. Van Voast gave enough credence to the threat to move the Loafers from the plain north of the ferry up to the fort itself. Well aware of the temptation a feminine presence would present in such close proximity to his men, however, the major prohibited any whites from visiting the village without permission, and posted guards to enforce his order. He also took advantage of the opportunity to require the Indian children to attend school on the post.[55]

True to scout reports, depredations became general all along the line during October as Sioux and Cheyenne war parties increasingly made incursions into the area along and beyond the North Platte. On the ninth, raiders stole mules from Nine Mile Ranch, just above Fort Laramie, and appeared in large numbers in the vicinity of Horseshoe Station. Only the timely arrival of the mail escort prevented the station from being sacked. During the following week, Indians surprised the herders at the government sawmill at Laramie Peak and got away with several animals. After Indians burned a haystack within half a mile of the post, Van Voast was spurred to take even further

[55] Van Voast to A. A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, October 6, 1866, LS, Fort Laramie.; Several sources refer to the Loafer camp being situated along the north bank of the North Platte, near the ferry, i. e. the extant historic iron bridge. For example, an emigrant passing by in 1864 recorded: "Arrived at the Ferry. On the banks near the Ferry is situated a Sioux Indian village." "Joseph Warren Arnold's Journal of His Trip to and from Montana," *Nebraska History*, (Winter 1974), p. 480.

precautions by sending out special patrols along both sides of the North Platte to protect Fort Laramie's hay fields in the valley near Fort Mitchell. He urged Dandy to get the hay cut and delivered to the post as soon as possible, lest the Indians destroy their supply of winter forage. He further instructed his quartermaster to ensure that all men accompanying the vital lumber trains were well armed and to recall the isolated detail from the limekiln before the Indians preyed on another easy victim.[56]

By the latter part of October, Indian raiders had extended their strikes all the way to the South Platte. They tore down several miles of the telegraph line between Forts Laramie and Sedgwick, then swept off a few hundred head of animals from the herd at the latter post. A detachment of the Second Cavalry caught up with them north of the Platte the next night, surprised them in camp, and killed or wounded nearly all the unwary tribesmen. Van Voast advised General Cooke, based on intelligence received from his scouts, that the hostiles were driving most of the stock stolen in the area to a point near the Black Hills. He requested permission to organize a small expedition for the purpose of recovering the animals, a proposal Cooke approved. On November 3, Van Voast ordered Captain John Green--having just arrived at the fort with the headquarters, band, and two additional companies of the Second Cavalry--to try to locate the Indian

[56] L. F. Harwood, Horseshoe Station, to Van Voast, October 9, 1866, Letters Received, Fort Laramie, R. G. 393.; Van Voast to A. A. A. G., Dept of the Platte, October 10, 1866, LS, Fort Laramie; Post Adjutant to Dandy, October 8, 1866, ibid.; Starring to Captain Edward Ball, November 3, 1866, ibid.

rendezvous. Green returned empty-handed almost two weeks later, nevertheless he and his men had gained some familiarity with the area to benefit future operations.[57]

As winter approached, the hostiles, except for small raiding parties, withdrew to the villages in the north. It came as no surprise to Van Voast when two emissaries from Red Leaf's Brules arrived at Fort Laramie asking to know if the band could come in. It was a threadbare ploy: fight in summer, repent in fall—and draw government rations all winter. Aware that Red Leaf was allied with Red Cloud, Van Voast told the chief he could do as he pleased, but he preferred that Red Cloud and the others "stay and fight this winter—that I wanted him to fight till he was satisfied . . . that the Soldiers had given them all summer to make peace but they had no ears—that soon the Soldiers would give them ears."[58]

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[57] Lieutenant George A. Armes, commander of the detachment from Fort Sedgwick, was later cited in General Orders No. 20, Dept. of the Platte, November 26, 1866 for his conduct in this affair. Annual Report of the Secretary of War, *House Exec. Doc*., No. 1, 40th Cong., 2d Sess. (Washington, D. C.: 1867), p. 478; Post Returns, November 1866, Fort Laramie.

[58] Van Voast to A. A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, October 16, 1866, LS, Fort Laramie.

Chapter 13

"This Is Their Last Flicker"

Preparing his annual report for 1866, General Sherman informed the secretary of war that the transcontinental railroad had progressed some 275 miles up the Platte by the end of the season, and Sioux resistance notwithstanding, the army had gained a foothold on the Bozeman Trail. The human cost thus far had been twenty-five soldiers and a score of civilians killed, but Sherman was resolute that, ". . . this road is necessary to Montana, and must be finished and made safe," adding his conviction that "these deaths must be avenged next year."[1] He suggested that it might be easier to control the hostile elements

[1] "Annual Report of the Secretary of War," *House Executive Documents*, 39th Congress, 2d Session (Washington, D. C.: 1866), pp. 21, 32.

if the commissioner of Indian Affairs would restrict them to the area north of the Platte, west of the Missouri, and east of the road to Virginia City. Any Indians found outside those boundaries without a pass issued by a military commander would be dealt with harshly.

Red Cloud, however, was just as determined to prevent the whites from trespassing through the region. Even though depredations subsided on the Platte and Overland Roads with the onset of another unusually harsh winter, the Oglala leader continued to attack anything that moved on the route to Virginia City. By that time, he had already formed coalition of tribes consisting of all the western Sioux bands, plus the Northern Arapahoes and even some Grosventres and Nez Perce. The hostiles were reportedly gathered in an enormous village containing as many as 5,000 warriors about eleven day's journey north of Fort Laramie. The Crows remained independent, however, and with good reason. While they, too, would have been justified in resisting the white interlopers, more justified in fact since the trail went directly through their homeland, the Sioux posed a more immediate danger to their existence. Continuing Sioux encroachment, made worse by the expulsion of the eastern Sioux from Minnesota, threatened to drive the Crows out of the Big Horn and Powder River country altogether.[2]

[2] Lieutenant Colonel Innis N. Palmer to A. A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, January 2, 1867, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie, Records of U. S. Army Continental Commands, Record Group 393, National Archives, microfilm copies in library, Fort Laramie NHS (hereinafter cited as LS, Fort Laramie).

The Sioux and their allies deprived Carrington of the initiative by laying siege to the new forts on the Bozeman, even as they were being constructed. Unlike most western posts, the principal buildings were surrounded by log stockades because of the imminent danger of attack. At that, the troops could hardly go beyond rifle shot of the walls for fear of being ambushed. The Indians attempted several ploys to draw the soldiers out of the forts, and finally succeeded at Fort Phil Kearny on December 21. Captain William J. Fetterman led a combined force of infantry and cavalry out of the post on an ill-fated mission to rescue a wood train returning from the pinery a few miles distant. Violating Carrington's instructions, Fetterman allowed Sioux and Cheyenne decoys to lure him beyond the range of any immediate assistance. His eighty-man command was quickly surrounded and annihilated.

Having no faster means to transmit news of the disaster, Carrington induced prospector John "Portugee" Phillips, one of several miners wintering at Fort Phil Kearny, to carry a message to the telegraph line on the North Platte.[3] Phillips and a companion, Daniel Dixon, left the post the same evening bound for Horseshoe Station, the nearest

[3] The Phillips episode has been highly fictionalized over the years. The best available analysis is Robert A. Murray, The John "Portugee" Phillips Legends, A Study in Wyoming Folklore," *Annals of Wyoming*, (April 1968), pp. 41 – 56 (hereinafter cited as "Phillips Legends"). John Phillips' true name was Manuel Felipe Cardoso. Born April 8, 1832 near Terra, on the island of Pico in the Azores, he apparently left home about 1850 to join the crew of a whaling ship, which took him to California. There he became a miner in the Gold Rush, an occupation he followed to Oregon and Idaho. By 1862, he was prospecting in the Boise Basin and moved from there to the strikes in western Montana. When those deposits too began to dwindle by 1866, he migrated with a party of men to the Big Horn Mountains in search of gold.

telegraph office. Bridger's Ferry, oddly enough, did not support an operator since the buildings were situated on the north bank of the river, the line being on the south side. When Phillips paused briefly at Fort Reno, the commanding officer, Colonel Henry W. Wessells, drafted a second note, which he requested Phillips to deliver directly to his counterpart at Fort Laramie.[4] Lieutenant Colonel Innis N. Palmer, Second Cavalry, had replaced Major Van Voast just two weeks earlier. Phillips rode into Horseshoe Station on Christmas morning and handed Carrington's dispatch to the telegrapher, who immediately put it on the wires. Phillips and Dixon rested and warmed themselves at the station for a few hours, then struck out on the last forty-mile leg of their journey to Fort Laramie. Arriving at the fort between ten and eleven o'clock on Christmas night, Phillips was taken by the sergeant of the guard to Old Bedlam, where an officers' party was underway. Phillips conveyed the tragic news to Palmer, "and this created such a gloom over all that the dancing party dispersed early."[5]

The following day Palmer transmitted to Cooke his own version of the events at Fort Phil Kearny based on Wessells' note and his conversation with Phillips. In response

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[4] Two questions seem to have escaped even Murray's careful analysis. Why did Phillips carry the message all the way to Fort Laramie, when he could just have easily sent a second one from Horseshoe Station to Palmer? And, since the telegraph was a "party line" passing through Fort Laramie, why did the operator there not get the news of the Fetterman disaster at the same time, long before Phillips arrived? A plausible, though not convincing, answer to the latter is that no operator was tending the key on Christmas night, though presumably the operator lived in the same building. At that time, the telegraph office stood adjacent to Old Bedlam. Author's note.

[5] Palmer to Brigadier General C. C. Auger, February 2, 1867, LS, Fort Laramie.

to Wessells' request for reinforcements, Palmer suggested that Van Voast be given command of a relief column from Laramie. He thought troops from elsewhere might be sent to reinforce his own garrison. Cooke adopted the plan and wasted no time in setting troops in motion. The men of the Eighteenth Infantry, having moved into their new quarters just before Christmas, were again thrust into the cold. This time, the weather, averaging more than twenty degrees below zero, promised to be as hazardous as the Indians. Sergeant Kenney recalled the hasty preparations:

> As I was Quartermaster Sergeant it meant much work for me. Our officers remembering the suffering the Winter before, for want of proper preparation, allowed the transportation for two blankets each and one buffalo robe to the man. We had to buy the robes at fancy prices from the post trader's store at our own expense and our company's funds were soon exhausted. The company tailors were put to work cutting them up and making gauntlets for the men.[6]

With men swathed head-to-foot in all the clothing they could put on, the column trudged out of the post on January 3 to begin a punishing 235-mile march across the bleak snow-blanketed plains. The force was composed of Companies B, C, E, and G, Eighteenth Infantry, and D and L Companies, Second Cavalry. Palmer was clearly under no delusions that the army's job would be an easy one. "This is their last flicker," he

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[6] *National Tribune*, November 4, 1909.

observed, "but this will take a good fellow with them as their power goes out forever." [7] Meantime, Cooke moved quickly to fill the void left in the Fort Laramie garrison, rushing forward three companies of cavalry from Forts Sedgwick and McPherson, along with one company of the newly authorized Thirty-sixth Infantry.[8]

When Cooke made known his intentions to launch a campaign against the Sioux in early spring, Palmer was hesitant. He assured his superior that while he had faith in the troops . . .

> At present, however, the great mass of our men are new to the service, never before served in the Army, and during the short time they have been in the Service they have been at labor working at building Quarters &c. and they are generally totally without any confidence in themselves, their horses or their arms. Half of our Cavalry men would fall off their horses in a charge and more than half the horses would run away with the men at a firing drill. Few or none of them have ever been drilled at firing the pistol from the horse and as for the sabre its proper use is entirely unknown to them.[9]

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[7] Palmer to A. A. A. G, Dept. of the Platte, January 2, 1867, LS, Fort Laramie.

[8] Post Returns, January 1867, Fort Laramie; The Eighteenth Infantry underwent another reorganization in December 1866 when the army elected to dissolve the three-battalion regiments. Accordingly, the First Battalion became the Eighteenth Infantry, while the companies of the Second Battalion were designated as the Twenty-seventh Infantry, and those of Third Battalion were numbered as the Thirty-sixth Infantry. Theophilus F. Rodenbough, *The Army of the United States 1789 - 1896*, (New York: 1966), p. 653 (hereinafter cited as *Army of the United States*).

[9] Palmer to Brevet Major General Phillip St. George Cooke, January 18, 1867, LS, Fort Laramie.

Palmer added that he expected snow to remain on the ground until April, and as an indication of conditions, he cited an entire train loaded with corn was at that moment buried in drifts only ten miles from the fort. "It would take an army to shovel it out," he told Cooke. Grimmer still was Nick Janis' estimate that the opposing warrior force now stood at about ten thousand fighting men, based on rumors circulating among the local Sioux. "They will give us a stand-up fight if they think they can whip us . . . ." Palmer warned.[10] As a precaution against having the fort infiltrated by hostiles, he issued an order evicting all Indians, except the enlisted scouts, from the military reservation, and he gave three-days' notice for civilians not employed by the government to also leave.[11]

Cooke, a seasoned old dragoon who had seen much service on the plains, was undeterred in his plans, assuming he had Sherman's full support. But, he had unknowingly been targeted already to bear part of the blame for the debacle at Fort Phil Kearny. Colonel Carrington may have been an able administrator, but he had not proven equal to the tense situation then existing on the Bozeman Trail. His vacillating responses to the Indian threat had stressed relationships with his subordinates as well as his superiors. Even Grant had become aware of Carrington's failings as a field commander. When politics dictated that heads must roll, Sherman sacked Carrington and Cooke in the

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[10] Ibid.

[11] *General Orders No. 4*, February 22, 1867, Fort Laramie.

same stroke, since the latter's bent for an immediate campaign was at odds with the division commander's desire to remain on the defensive until the regulars had more time to train and rebuild their numbers on the frontier. Palmer's more conservative views, in fact, were in accord with the stance Sherman had been forced to adopt. Carrington was whisked away to command the re-organized Eighteenth Infantry, then headquartered at Fort Caspar, while Wessels took his place at Fort Phil Kearny. And with Cooke gone, Sherman installed Brigadier General Christopher C. Augur at Department of the Platte headquarters in Omaha.

One of Augur's first actions was to distance Carrington even farther from the front lines by establishing his regimental headquarters at Fort McPherson, now considered to be a rear area. The colonel had no hint of this new order, having bypassed the courier, until he arrived at Fort Caspar. He and his staff immediately retraced their steps back down the North Platte. Three days out of Fort Laramie, the hapless officer's revolver discharged accidentally, the ball entering his groin and passing down the left femur. Fortunately for Carrington, the bullet narrowly missed both his femoral artery and the sciatic nerve, but the wound was intensely painful. The regimental surgeon examined the wound, with hands frost-bitten on the trip down, and determined that the bullet had rebounded off the femur before exiting the body. The wounded colonel was not so certain, however, as he endured a torturous wagon ride to Fort Laramie. When the party

pulled in there on February 9, the train corralled on the bottom below the post and Carrington was immediately carried to Sutler Bullock's house to be examined by Post Surgeon Henry Saylor Schell. He, too, thought the bullet was no longer in the leg, and in deference to the opinion rendered by his medical colleague, declined to conduct a more thorough examination. But the colonel finally convinced him "by asking the loan of the surgeon's finger, which he placed upon the flattened ball that rested under the nerve on the opposite side of the limb. Then he demanded the immediate removal, watching the process with interest, and when the ball was removed the limb was relieved and restored to its normal functions."[12] Bullock and his wife hosted the wounded colonel for the next twelve days until he was able to continue the journey to Fort McPherson.

Accompanying the headquarters group was Mrs. Frances Grummond, wife of Lieutenant George W. Grummond, one of those killed with Fetterman. She was homeward bound with the butchered body of her husband, which Palmer had "tenderly borne to a little house where it remained under a 'guard of honor' during our temporary stay at the post," Mrs. Grummond recorded.[13] Palmer extended the meager courtesies of the post to the grief stricken widow, and when the headquarters party was ready to depart, he proffered her a wagon for herself and another for the remains. The commander also

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[12] Frances C. Carrington, *My Army Life and the Fort Phil Kearney Massacre*, (Philadelphia: 1911), pp. 204-05 (hereinafter cited as *Army Life*).

[13] Ibid., p. 204.

lent Carrington additional wagons to transport unit records, band instruments, and other regimental property to his new station.[14]

Having received no word to the contrary, Palmer still anticipated that a campaign would be launched into the region of Powder and Tongue Rivers that spring. He therefore renewed training his men despite snow and freezing temperatures. "The companies are all full and we are drilling as hard as we can and I think we will be in good shape when we come to leave," he wrote to an officer friend in the East, adding, "We have not had a very gay time here this winter."[15]

Less than a week later, a four-man party carrying the mail from Fort Laramie to Fort Reno was pounced upon and killed about twenty miles from their destination. A hunting party was also wiped out near Fort Reno at about the same time. As winter turned to spring, Indian raiding parties again ventured southward to wreak havoc at any opportunity. Near Fort Mitchell warriors struck a civilian train and ran off its entire herd of mules, and in April they stole a team from the detachment at Bridger's Ferry. Palmer advised Augur that with the improved weather the Indians were making "rather lively times along the whole route from Fort Sedgwick to Fort Phil Kearney [sic]." With most of the migration now turning off at Bridger's Ferry, Palmer questioned if it might not be

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[14] First Lieutenant A. E. Bates to Bvt. Lieutenant Colonel Camp, February 10, 1867, LS, Fort Laramie.

[15] Palmer to Lieutenant Colonel T. F. Rodenbough, February 20, 1867, Theophilus F. Rodenbough Papers, Denver Public Library.

prudent to abandon Fort Caspar in favor of transferring the garrison to the ferry, a more logical position to protect the main road to Montana. His suggestion would lead to the establishment of a new post, aptly named Fort Fetterman, near there the following October.[16]

Sherman still yearned to strike a hammer blow on the Sioux and Cheyennes in the disputed territory east of the Big Horns, and in March he directed Augur to prepare a two thousand-man expedition against them as soon as weather permitted. But, Washington proponents of finding a peaceful solution to the Indian problem complicated his plans for a spring offensive. Both Grant and Sherman had lobbied hard to have the management of Indian affairs transferred from Interior to the War Department. They cited numerous examples of conflicting lines of authority and poor communication when both civilian and military officials attempted to deal with the same Indian nations. The generals were convinced that a consolidation of authority over the tribesmen was the only feasible solution. Failing peaceful means, or if Indians left their agencies to take the warpath, the army should have full and immediate power to subdue them, thus avoiding the confusion and frequently lengthy delays that occurred when an Indian problem arose. A bill to affect the change passed the House of Representatives early in 1867, but was scuttled in

[16] Annual Report of the Secretary of War, *House Ex. Doc*., No. 1, 40th Cong., 2d Sess., (Washington, D. C.: 1867), pp. 54-55; Palmer to Augur, April 20, 1867, LS, Fort Laramie.

the Senate. Peace advocates within and outside the Johnson Administration prevailed on the president to send forth yet another commission to treat with the Indians.

Sherman had nevertheless set things in motion to launch the campaign, and he would have had not the commission arrived in Omaha before the troops could take the field. He could hardly allow Auger to send out troops until the commissioners had attempted what Sherman considered to be a fruitless chore. Brigadier General Alfred Sully, who had actively campaigned against the Sioux in Dakota just a few years earlier, now served a contradictory role as head of the delegation. Others included: Judge J. F. Kinney, old-time Fort Laramie trader George P. Beauvais, Colonel Ely S. Parker, John B. Sanborn, and Napoleon B. Buford. Both Sanford and Buford had served as senior volunteer officers during war. Sherman could perhaps find some consolation in the knowledge that four of the six commissioners were army officers, yet he had little hope for reviving his campaign anytime soon.

Speeding across Nebraska on the new railroad, the commissioners planned to first confer with Spotted Tail at North Platte, and interview Colonel Carrington at the nearby post. Afterward they would travel to Fort Laramie where they would hold a council with all the Indians in the area. Moving on, they would secure a strong military escort to Fort Phil Kearny in hopes of meeting there with Red Cloud himself. They, in fact, were so confident that a peaceful solution could be reached that they dispatched a message from

Fort McPherson inviting the Oglala leader to rendezvous with them at one of the very posts he was endeavoring to destroy. It should have come as no surprise when Red Cloud spurned the proposal, but Man Afraid and Red Leaf, with some three hundred followers, elected to give up the war and go to Fort Laramie for treaty goods. When other small bands began to straggle in during early May, Palmer granted the commissioners permission to hold a council within the reservation, a mile or two north of the fort beyond the Platte. Man Afraid showed up within a week, but he was disappointed to discover that because army provisions had dwindled to only a thirty-day supply for the garrison, Palmer had ceased issues to the Indians until the Interior Department could feed them.[17]

Red Cloud made clear his intentions to resist the whites by attacking the whole line of travel from Fort Sedgwick to Fort C. F. Smith. "The Indians are at every point in parties varying from ten to some hundreds disputing the roads" Palmer reported. He noted that several soldiers had been killed by carelessly straying too far from their commands. It seemed that the hostiles were everywhere, never missing a chance to strike. Even a lumber train coming from Laramie Peak was surrounded until a detachment of the Second Cavalry was sent to rescue them. Virtually every party of civilians moving

[17] Palmer to Brigadier General Alfred Sully, May 9, 1867, ibid.; Apparently, Judge Kinney was sent up the Bozeman Trail, while the rest of the commissioners remained at Fort Laramie. Palmer made arrangements for a 150-man cavalry escort, but when Kinney found that he could coordinate his trip with a troop movement of the Twenty-seventh Infantry, Kinney decided to accompany them. Palmer to Sully, May 8, 1867, ibid.; Palmer to Judge I. F. Kinney, May 12, 1867, ibid.

through the country prevailed on the army for an escort. Palmer complied to the extent possible, but could not send troops with all of them. However, he did find cavalrymen enough to meet four hundred head of cattle being driven up from Denver as beef on the hoof for the garrison. Visiting artist Anton Schonborn heard reports that horses had been stolen from several local ranches around Fort Laramie, and that travelers were frequently chased on the roads, but he doubted the veracity of most of them. "A good many of these Indian stories about chasing people are made up by frightened men, who suppose an Indian behind every bush," he scoffed, "besides it is hardly considered fashionable to come to the fort without having some Indian story to tell." He conceded, however, that five persons had been killed and scalped in the area.[18]

The presence of the Sully Commission on the Platte, coupled with diverting troops to protect railroad construction crews, prevented the army from going on the offensive during summer 1867. Still, Sherman and Augur were not idle. Sherman had been a vocal proponent of creating permanent Indian reservations with defined boundaries. Not only would reservations restrict their movements, but it would be easier for the army to identify and punish bands bent on making trouble. Aware that the peace

[18] Anton Schonborn, May 25, 1867, copy in vert. file, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

commissioners also were inclined toward a reservation system, Sherman used the time to ring the Sioux country with a chain of forts to contain the Indians in that eventuality.

In addition to establishing a line of posts extending from the Missouri to the Yellowstone in central Montana, he directed General Augur to increase the number of forts in the Department of the Platte. Pertinent to the focus of this study were two in the vicinity of Fort Laramie. In June, Augur instructed the commanding officer to examine both sides of the North Platte in the vicinity of La Prele Creek, where the Bozeman Trail diverged northward from the river. Palmer ordered Major William McE. Dye, Fourth Infantry, to conduct a reconnaissance for this purpose, and to establish a camp at the best available site. Augur himself would come out to make a final decision.[19]

Augur left his headquarters later that month, following the chosen survey line for Union Pacific Railroad directly west from the forks of the Platte. He was familiar with the recommendations Sherman had made as a result of his own familiarization tour the previous summer. Sherman had stipulated that were the railroad to take the shortest route to Salt Lake City, Camp Collins and Fort Morgan should be abandoned and the supplies at those posts transferred to a new one situated in the vicinity of Lodge Pole Creek. In addition to a central station for as many as 2,500 men, he envisioned a quartermaster and

[19] For a complete history of this post, see Thomas A. Lindmier, *Drybone: A History of Fort Fetterman, Wyoming*, (Douglas, Wyo.: 2002).

ordnance depot on the railroad that would supply all the other posts in the region. Augur met former general Grenville M. Dodge, now the chief engineer for the railroad, at the proposed crossing of Crow Creek on Independence Day. While the escorting troops, eight companies in all, celebrated the national holiday, Dodge and Augur determined the site would be not only a logical one for a military installation, but an obvious division point for the railroad as well. The city of Denver, having grown to sizeable proportions since its humble beginnings as a gold camp, would require a spur line. Moreover, the two envisioned the day when a major north-south line would supply communities all the way from Santa Fe to Montana. Plans, in fact, were already well underway for another transcontinental railroad across the northern tier of territories to link the Great Lakes with the Pacific Northwest. Augur wired Sherman the next day recommending that the post and supply depot be situated fourteen miles west of the town site, closer to timber, water, and abundant grazing—and a safer distance from the hell-raising boom town that even then was taking shape along a tent-lined main street. Dodge, however, saw the military as an underpinning of the future town's economy and argued that the post should be nearer the town to afford both protection and economic benefit to the merchants. In the end, Dodge prevailed and on July 31, 1867 Army Headquarters sent down an order fixing the location of the fort at the junction of Crow Creek and the railroad. The new post would be named for Brigadier General D. A. Russell, killed in action at the Battle of Winchester,

Virginia. A company of the Thirtieth Infantry remained in the camp on Crow Creek for three weeks before moving three miles west to the location finally selected for the depot. A military survey team marked the boundaries of a two-by-three mile military reservation, while railroad surveyors plotted a town land claim named "Cheyenne" after the nearby pass over the mountains.[20]

Palmer concurrently sent out a company of the Second Cavalry from Fort Laramie to explore the shortest practicable wagon route between the two posts. With grading crews already working west of Julesburg, it would be only a short time before the old Oregon route through Scott's Bluff would be abandoned in favor of shipping military supplies via rail to Cheyenne Depot. That installation would serve as the primary distribution point for commissary, ordnance and quartermaster materiel to troops in the Department of the Platte. Never again would Fort Laramie be threatened by a shortage of ammunition, or anything else for that matter. When end of track reached Cheyenne late that fall, converging army work crews from Forts Russell and Laramie completed a spur telegraph line between the two posts, at once eliminating the old mainline up the North Platte and the need for Camp Mitchell. The Union Pacific would henceforth operate transcontinental communications. The combination of these momentous developments

[20] For a more thorough account of the founding of Fort D. A. Russell, the reader is referred to Gerald M. Adams, *The Post Near Cheyenne: A History of Fort D. A. Russell, 1867 – 1930*, (Boulder: 1989), pp. 3 – 7; Wyoming Territory was constituted on July 25, 1868.

swiftly redirected the long-established patterns of travel and communication at Fort Laramie, ending its days as a remote, albeit important, station along the western emigrant trail. The Union Pacific would inaugurate passenger service to and from Cheyenne in November, with the army establishing a connecting stage line "for mail and military purposes" to Fort Laramie. No longer would it be necessary to operate the system of military couriers in use since the Overland Mail Company shifted its route four years earlier. Soon, twice-weekly mail runs and deliveries of *The Cheyenne Daily Leader* would keep the inhabitants in timely contact with the world, without having to await weeks-old letters and ageing newspapers to reach them by ox-train and pack mule. The garrison would enjoy previously unknown comforts provided by comparatively easy access to all sorts of commercial goods, including furniture, clothing, and foods that heretofore had been nonexistent, or at best, rare luxuries.[21]

Troops also began constructing Fort Fetterman that summer on a barren plateau bordering the south side of the Platte near where Dye and his men had bivouacked. There

[21] Palmer to Captain E. R. Wells, July 11, 1867, LS, Fort Laramie; A detail began constructing the telegraph line toward Cheyenne in December. The officer in charge was directed to proceed until he met the crew working northward from Fort Russell. Lieutenant Colonel A. J. Slemmer to Lieutenant J. R. Mullikin, December 15, 1867, ibid.; The old route to Fort Sedgwick was officially abandoned effective November 13, 1867, even though communications via Cheyenne did not become fully functional until the following month. The telegraph operator at Fort Mitchell was transferred to Fort Russell as a government employee for the Military Telegraph. Major George W. Howland to commanding officer, Fort Laramie, November 13, 1867, ibid.; Palmer to A. A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, November 23, 1867, ibid.; *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, November 16, 1867; The mail line was initially operated by the army, probably with ambulances because of their light weight. When enterprising civilians began running stages between Fort Russell and the Chugwater Valley, Post Commander Slemmer suggested it would be more efficient to have the army stage meet them there to exchange the mail. Slemmer to A. A. A. G., Dept of the Platte, January 5, 1868, LS, Fort Laramie.

being no longer any need for Fort Caspar, the garrison moved downstream to the new site. The troops had hardly vacated the little post at Platte Crossing when warriors arrived on the scene to burn both the post and the bridge. The smoke plume rising over the North Platte Valley was a symbolic funeral pyre marking the end of the Oregon Trail as the great emigrant highway to the Pacific Coast.

The railroad and the creation of new forts resulted in an even shorter link with the Bozeman Trail. Government contractors hauling materials and supplies to build Fort Fetterman followed the old Denver Road north along Chugwater Creek to a tributary later known as Hunton Creek. At that point, traffic bound for Fort Laramie diverged northeastward, crossing the Chugwater, and intersected the Laramie about six miles above the post. However, guides familiar with the area knew that a viable wagon road could trace the Chugwater Valley to the Laramie, then diverge on a northwesterly course, skirting the foothills surrounding Laramie Peak, to arrive at Fetterman. Supply trains and troops going to any of the Bozeman Trail posts had no reason to go to Fort Laramie, a considerable distance out of their way. It was now off the formerly well-beaten path and although few may have recognized the subtle change during those hectic days, the oldest post in the region had turned the last corner toward its ultimate demise.

James Bordeaux, who had operated his main trading post on the Platte below Fort Laramie since the 1840s and had figured prominently in government-Indian relations for

more than two decades, was one of those possessing the foresight to see the effect of these changes. When one of the guides, Antoine Ladeau, informed him of the proposed Fetterman Cut-off, Bordeaux, ever the astute businessman, realized that his loss in trade might be offset by new economic opportunity on the Cheyenne Road. He lost no time in packing up a wagonload of goods and driving to the Chugwater. There, at the strategic fork in the Cheyenne Road, he built a small store-ranch, this one designed to cater to white travelers, rather than the Indians. Leaving his employee, Hugh Whiteside, in charge of the new ranch, Bordeau returned to his old place in the Platte Valley to continue trading with the Loafers and other friendly Sioux still in the area.[22]

The region around Fort Laramie was comparatively quiet during the summer as the Sioux and Cheyennes concentrated their efforts against the forts on the central portion of the Bozeman Trail. War parties were reported lurking in the vicinity of Laramie Peak and elsewhere, but army detachments scouring the area were unable to find them. While troops farther north fought pitched skirmishes with the Indians, the boys-in-blue at Fort Laramie often turned their attention to the growing number of "hog ranches" and other drinking establishments near Fort Laramie. William H. Brown, an ex-lieutenant of the

[22] Virginia Cole Trenholm, "The Bordeaux Story," *Annals of Wyoming*, (July 1954), pp. 121-22; Whiteside operated Bordeaux's store until he was killed during the winter of 1867-68. Following his tenure, two unsavory characters, Cy Williams and one Swalley, lived at the place for a few months. John Hunton developed a cattle ranch on the site in the early 1870s and maintained property and business interests there until the early twentieth century. John Hunton, "Reminiscences," *Annals of Wyoming*, (January 1930), p. 262.

Eleventh Ohio, cashed in on the lucrative market by building a log hotel and saloon just across the Laramie River from the post.[23] Increased traffic on the road to Cheyenne afforded John Hunter more promising economic opportunity at the Six Mile Ranch, situated where the road left the Laramie Valley. Its effect became evident almost immediately when a mail party from Fort Phil Kearny dallied there and drank themselves into a stupor. Shortly thereafter, a cavalry sergeant appropriated an ambulance from the post and drove to the ranch for a spree that later cost him a fine and his stripes.[24] Jules Ecoffy's place at the old American Fur Company post five miles down the Platte had already earned a reputation for being "a vile den, the resort of the worst characters in the country . . . a grog shop, faro bank, and billiard saloon."[25] A half a dozen murders there bore grim testimony to his statement. When a soldier was killed in a row with "hangers on about the place," on July Fourth, the post commander sent an officer and a detachment to investigate. Those implicated in the affair had vacated Ecoffy's and gone farther

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[23] A Mr. McGamber applied to sell beer on the reservation at fifteen cents a glass in competition with William H. Brown, proprietor of "Brown's Hotel." See Simonin's description in the narrative. William H. Brown had formerly been a lieutenant with the Eleventh Ohio Cavalry at Fort Laramie. His entry in the official unit history states simply that he was "mustered out," rather than "with the regiment," which suggests he did not accompany his comrades back to Ohio. Notwithstanding repeated orders to close his bar in subsequent years, Brown continued to sell liquor on his premises until at least 1871. Whitlaw Reid, *Ohio in the War: Her Statesmen, Generals, and Soldiers*, (Cincinnati: 1895), p. 818; See also the comments of Eugene F. Ware, *The Indian War of 1864*, (New York: 1960), pp. 213-14; Slemmer to A. G. U. S. A., September 10, 1868, LS, Fort Laramie; Post adjutant to Brown, June 27, 1868, August 19, 1868, October 27, 1868, November 20, 1868, January 18, 1871, July 26, 1871, ibid.

[24] First Lieutenant A. E. Bates, to Captain D. S. Gordon, February 26, 1867, ibid.; Larry K Brown, *The Hog Ranches of Wyoming*, (Douglas, Wyo.: 1995), pp. 57 - 58.

[25] Palmer to A. A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, July 7, 1867, LS, Fort Laramie.

downriver hoping the army would not follow, however the officer detached three noncoms and twenty men to continue the chase after the culprits. On their way back, with one suspect in custody, the detail took out their revenge for the soldier's death by pillaging and burning Ecoffy's saloon.

Although no official mention was made of prostitutes, they were undoubtedly plying their profession at the local dives. Railroad construction crews and the resulting easy access to the territory, attracted "all the scum of society"--some six thousand people by that first winter--to "The Sodom of the West," as one newspaper dubbed Cheyenne.[26] It did not take some of them long to recognize the economic potential afforded by the garrison at Fort Laramie. Palmer, however, took grave offense when Chaplain White, by then posted at Fort Phil Kearney, wrote to the adjutant general of the army claiming that Fort Laramie was "a perfect whore house."[27]

Palmer did what he could to distract the men, and prepare for a campaign that might still come, by instituting regular target practice with the new breech loading fifty-caliber Springfield rifles that arrived in mid-summer.

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[26] Johanna Nel, "A Territory is Founded: Political, Social, Economic, and Educational Conditions in Wyoming 1850 – 1890," *Annals of Wyoming*, (fall 1989), pp. 2 – 4 provides a useful overview of the topic. The quotation originally appeared in the *Wyoming Tribune*, October 8, 1870.

[27] Palmer to Bvt. Brigadier General H. K. Wessels, July 19, 1867, LS, Fort Laramie.

In the nation's capital, summer 1867 witnessed the passage of legislation authorizing yet another peace commission. Although Sherman had prudently refrained from taking an offensive on the Northern Plains, he had sent General Winfield S. Hancock on a campaign against the southern tribes. Hancock's burning of a Cheyenne village on Pawnee Fork west of Fort Larned, while allowing the occupants to escape and go on a rampage throughout northwest Kansas and southern Nebraska, reinforced in the minds of peace advocates that military measures only fueled Indian wars. Sherman remained skeptical that the likes of Red Cloud could ever be coerced into surrendering by any measures short of total war. Still, the administration and Congress realized that something had to be done to control the Indians in the interests of developing the country, and restoring the national treasury so depleted by the Civil War. Historian Robert M. Utley has summed up the revised Indian policy:

> In its latest version the 'concentration policy' contemplated the establishment of two vast reservations, one north of Nebraska, the other south of Kansas, on which all the roving tribes would be persuaded to gather. Except for government administrators, no whites would be permitted. Here the tribes would no longer threaten the travel routes and settlements. Here they could be insulated from the kind of interracial contact that in the past had infected them with so many of the white man's vices and that had produced so many incidents leading to hostilities.

> And here, ultimately, they could be 'educated,' 'civilized,' and endowed with the privileges and obligations of United States citizenship."[28]

The army considered the Bozeman Trail vital to those national interests, notwithstanding criticisms in some political circles that it, and the forts, should be surrendered to the Indians. General Augur addressed the issue, prophetically as it turned out, in his annual report:

> . . . the question is not a new one. The posts are established, and large sums haven been expended upon them for storehouses and quarters for troops, It cannot be supposed that the present Indian troubles along it can continue for any very great length of time. They will be terminated, either by treaty or the subjugation of the hostile tribes. When this time arrives, unless this country is abandoned to the Indians, this route substantially must become the great highway between Colorado, Nebraska, and Montana.[29]

Members of the new commission included a pious ex-congressman from Tennessee, Nathaniel G. Taylor, the recently appointed commissioner of Indian Affairs. He would be aided in the endeavor by Samuel F. Tappan, who had gained national attention for his

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[28] Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian 1866 - 1891*, (New York: 1973), pp. 130-31.

[29] Annual Report of the Secretary of War, *House Ex. Doc.*, No. 1, 40th Cong., 2d Sess. (Washington, D. C.: 1867), p. 58; It is worth noting that present-day Interstate 25 traces the Bozeman Trail quite closely.

investigation into the Sand Creek Massacre; Senator John B. Henderson of Missouri, and former general John B. Sanborn, a member of the Sully committee. Military members of the commission included Sherman himself, Brigadier Alfred H. Terry, then commanding the Department of Dakota, and no less a figure than retired General William S. Harney, whose heavy hand had smitten the Sioux back in 1855.

Setting out from St. Louis in August, the commissioners first traveled to the upper Missouri to meet with the tribes under Terry's jurisdiction. They found the Sioux there in a conciliatory mood and coaxed them into signing the treaty. The prospects for an early end to hostilities seemed bright as they passed back through Omaha and took the cars bound for Cheyenne and eventually Fort Laramie. The troops in the region had previously been instructed to avoid trouble, if possible, while Indian messengers attempted to coerce Red Cloud into a meeting at the post during September. When their entreaties evoked no response from the chief, the commissioners decided to try again later, after they returned from a planned council with the Southern Cheyennes, Kiowas, Southern Arapahoes, and Comanches on Medicine Lodge Creek in Kansas.

By November the peace commission was back at Fort Laramie, their confidence bolstered by the recent success in getting the southern tribes to accept reservations. Meantime, both Sherman and Henderson had been recalled to attend urgent business in Washington. Augur filled in for his commander. A French miner and adventurer

accompanying the commissioners up the trail from Cheyenne left a graphic description of his impressions of Fort Laramie:

> Seen from the route we followed, the fort more resembled a Spanish-American village than a military post of the United States. The barracks, the warehouses, the offices, the officers' quarters, are all constructed of stone and whitewashed with lime On one side of the large manoeuver [sic] ground is the residence of the general of the fort. With its two-story veranda or outer gallery, one would take it for a hotel in Panama or Central America. Not far off is a building of a style still stranger for this country, a sort of Swiss chalet, which the sutler, or supply merchant of the post, has built from his profits. This elegant dwelling put to shame the mean appearance of the low, gloomy canteen. By the chalet is the only tree to be seen about the fort. The new barracks and storehouses are built of wood. Along the Laramie river is the corral, a large square enclosure surrounded by a fence. There the hay is kept and the mules enclosed. The angles of the corral on the side away from the river are each defended by an octagonal structure of adobe, or bricks burned in the sun. These defenses were originally built to resist the incursions of the Indians, who usually surprised emigrant trains or military posts by first seizing the mules and horses, so highly prized by them. Today the Indians are far away and the corral forts have been transformed into mess halls for

> the mule drivers. Instead of weapons there are only kitchen utensils. A wooden bridge connects the two banks of the river, the piles joined by swaying planks. On the left bank is the fort with all its outbuildings; on the right, the one hotel of the country [Brown's], where the officers eat their meals. . . The hotel is built of adobe and large logs, like the log-house of the American pioneer. There is but one story, but it is most comfortable . . . Beside the hotel is the indispensable saloon, where ale and whiskey are chiefly sold. As if to temper the effect of these drinks, the dealer also sells books, though his customers apply themselves more frequently to his casks than to his library . . . Fort Laramie is a fort only in name. No ditch or wall surrounds it. On the side away from the river is a sort of ditch where the dirt dug out is thrown in a heap, with a large circular outline, as if for the foundations of a tower. That is the only work of defense raised against the Indians. Since the fort has never been attacked since its founding, the defense has never been kept in repair.[30]

The commissioners were disappointed to find that Red Cloud had not come to meet them. He had acknowledged them only to the extent of sending a message declaring his intent to make war until the army gave up the forts on the Bozeman. Consequently,

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[30] M. Simonin, "Fort Russell and the Fort Laramie Peace Commission in 1867," *Historical Reprints*, No. 14, (Missoula, Mont.: no date), pp. 6 – 7.

only a few Crows were on hand to discuss the treaty, but their consent to use the Powder River country hardly mattered since the Sioux were already firmly in possession of it. Nevertheless, Palmer made a meeting place available in an empty quartermaster storehouse that normally served as a theater for the garrison. Also sitting in on the debates were the Laramie Loafers. The two-day council was filled with the usual ceremonial songs, lengthy introductions, the solemn passing of pipes around the circle, and protracted oratories recounting past grievances and demands for the future. Although the commissioners, speaking through interpreters Pierre Chene and John Richard, tried hard to convince the Crows that the whites wanted only to use a portion of the land--that part already on its way to settlement--the leaders rejected the notion, reminding the commissioners of the Horse Creek Treaty. Instead, they echoed the demands of the Sioux by insisting that both the forts and the trail be abandoned. In the end, the Crows refused to sign until the Sioux first "touched the pen" to the treaty. Having utterly failed in their attempts to bring peace to the Northern Plains, the disheartened commissioners were left no choice but to distribute gifts to the Indians and return to the States.[31] It was becoming

[31] Simonin stated: "The hall where the pow-wow was held was of considerable dimensions. It was built of wood, and could easily hold 250 – 300 people; it had *previously* [italics added] served as the quartermaster's storehouse." He added that those in attendance were seated on benches. In the author's opinion, the building most likely to have been used for this meeting was storehouse no. 43, as indicated on an 1867 plat of the fort. Apparently, this building was converted for use as a theater after the new warehouses were constructed nearer the river. Situated only a short distance nearly due east of the sutler's store, would have been more convenient as a council chamber than those more distant, which were probably filled with goods anyway. ibid., p. 8.

frustratingly apparent that the army's occupation of the Bozeman Trail was tenuous at best, but the commissioners were determined to attempt negotiations again in the spring.

Chapter 14

"We Want to Eat"

In December, with the Fort Laramie garrison settled in for the winter, Sioux leaders Blue War Club, Red Leaf, and American Horse came in too late to meet with the commissioners and receive their presents. Winter was always a hard time for the Indians and relying on the white man's seemingly endless supplies at that season had become a way of life. Post Commander Adam J. Slemmer accommodated them to the extent possible in view of their peaceful disposition, knowingly violating the letter of Sherman's orders. Soon afterward, Red Cloud's son and nephew showed up on the chief's behalf to gain the army's assurance that he would be accorded safe treatment if Red Cloud came to talk to Agent Patrick. Slemmer assured them that his men would take no action, so long

as the warriors behaved themselves by not committing any depredations. Red Leaf's band, still wary, went into camp on Rawhide Creek, some fifteen miles north of the post during February. About fifty of Red Cloud's own Oglalas soon joined them, but the chief and his principal lieutenants, along with eight hundred lodges of their people, remained on Powder River waiting for the army to abandon Forts C. F. Smith and Phil Kearny. Only then would Red Cloud consider making a treaty.[1]

The countryside in proximity to Fort Laramie was becoming somewhat more settled in the wake of the Civil War and coincident with the arrival of the railroad. John Hunton, an ex-Confederate soldier who came to Fort Laramie in 1867 to clerk in the store, recalled that about ten whites had settled on three ranches along the North Platte Valley southeast of present-day Guernsey, with another family located at Bridger's Ferry. Other hardy souls had established primitive "road ranches" on Horseshoe Creek, Little Bitter Cottonwood, and on the old emigrant trail at Twin Springs.[2]

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[1] Lieutenant Colonel A. J. Slemmer to A. A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, January 16, January 22, February 19, February 27, and March 5,1868, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie, Records of U. S. Army Continental Commands 1821 - 1920, Record Group 393, National Archives, Washington, D. C. Microfilm copies in library, Fort Laramie NHS (hereinafter cited as LS, Fort Laramie).

[2] John Hunton, "Reminiscences," *Annals of Wyoming*, (January 1930), p. 262; In October 1867, Hunton was joined by famed mountaineer Jim Bridger in the bunkroom used by Bullock's employees. Bullock invited Bridger to stay the winter, and he did. They shared the room with John Boyd, a porter for the firm, and clerk Hopkins Clark. Hunton stayed at the post until early spring, when he was sent to Fort Fetterman as a guide for troops going to Fort Fred Steele, on the Platte far to the south. Hunton to Robert Bruce, May 30, 1923, Hunton Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

The railroad and the need for additional civilian employees at Forts Russell and Fetterman also attracted an unsavory element of men with little ability to discern one side of the law from another. Their presence in the area further complicated the army's already difficult task of fixing the blame for recurring thefts and killings. In March, at the same time it was rumored that Red Cloud had moved south of Fort Reno, two teamsters were killed on the road below Fort Fetterman, and only days later a team of mules was stolen near the sawmill. Slemmer received intelligence through his Indian allies that a small party of disaffected Sioux, operating independently, had committed the deeds, yet Slemmer was not so sure. "There are a large number of white men refugees and outlaws all through this Country and their thieving acts are oftentimes laid to the Indians," he explained to Augur.[3] His theory was shaken, however, on March 18 when about sixty Oglalas and Minneconjous, allegedly led by Crazy Horse, attacked Horseshoe Station, killing three civilians and some livestock. Four men survived the encounter.[4]

By the time the peace commissioners assembled at Fort Laramie on April 10, the army had already shown its hand—Grant had yielded Forts Reno, Phil Kearny, and C. F. Smith. The Bozeman Trail would be closed within ninety days, when the change of

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[3] Slemmer to Bvt. Lieutenant Colonel John Green, March 1, 1868, LS, Fort Laramie; Lieutenant Colonel H. W. Wessels to A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, March 13, 1868, ibid., Slemmer to A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, March 19, 1868, ibid.

[4] A first-hand account of this incident, perhaps embellished in the retelling, was published in the *Wheatland Times*, August 14, 1952; Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army 1789- 1903*, (Urbana: 1965), II, p. 430 (hereinafter cited as *Historical Register*).

season permitted the troops to be removed. The withdrawal would commence at Fort Smith and move southward, each successive garrison joining the column en route. All excess equipment and supplies that could not be transported were to be sold at auction to any emigrants who might take it. The financial loss would be terrible, considering the only alternative was to abandon the material. Fort Fetterman, standing on the south side of the river, would be maintained in accordance with the 1868 treaty.

The defeat was a blow to Sherman's ego, but he consoled himself in the knowledge that he had won a strategic victory in at last corralling the Indians on defined reservations. So long as they remained there, the army's job would be easy; if they broke out, there could be no question about taking punitive action against them. Besides, it was now clear that the Bozeman Trail probably would have been short-lived in any event, and certainly not worth the blood and money it would have taken to keep it open. The westward progress of the railroad opened a shorter alternative route from Salt Lake City to the Montana gold fields, making the Bozeman Trail a mute issue. And, as the pragmatic Sherman pointed out, "The great advantage to the railroad is that it gives us rapid communication, and cannot be stolen like the horses and mules of trains as of old . . . ."[5]

[5] Annual Report of the Secretary of War, *House Executive Documents*, No. 239, 40th Cong., 2d Sess., (Washington, D. C.: 1868), p. 3 (hereafter cited as ARSW, *HR* with respective serial vol.).

Having won his victory, albeit a hollow one, Red Cloud had only to consent to the treaty. But, just what was it the Indians were agreeing to? An examination of the document is worthwhile because it proved to be the single most powerful influence on Plains Indian affairs during the following decade, and is frequently cited even to the present day. Unlike the Horse Creek Treaty, the 1868 accord was designed to channel free-roaming, buffalo culture natives onto the road of European-style civilization. The Indians could hardly have imagined, much less comprehended, the long-term impact of the Fort Laramie Treaty.

While it contained the usual provisions binding the government to give the Indians food and white man's clothing, as well as mutual justice and reparations for offenders against either side, the significant distinction was the creation of defined reservations, as opposed to the failed hunting territories. The Sioux were to be lumped together on an enormous tract of land comprising the western of half of present-day South Dakota. The disputed region lying north of the North Platte, and between the Black Hills and the Big Horn Mountains, was designated "unceded Indian territory," upon which the Indians would not permanently reside. The Sioux were permitted to hunt there, "and on the Republican Fork of the Smoky Hill River, so long as the buffalo may range thereon and in such numbers as to justify the chase." So far as the Indians were concerned, that would be forever; they simply could not envision a day when buffalo

would not roam the plains. The concept was been clear enough to the commissioners, however, because they knew that hide hunters, with Sherman's blessing, were already beginning the slaughter that would eventually drive the Indians to complete dependence on the government for their existence. That no northern boundary was fixed for the hunting lands, only deferred conflicts in that region.

Sherman and Tappan were delayed in getting to the council until the first week in May, but Red Cloud had yet to appear anyway. The committee now complete, meetings immediately got underway with the Brules. Twenty-five chiefs and headmen, including Spotted Tail, Red Leaf, and Swift Bear, were the first to sign on April 29. A week later, the Crows, attached their names to the document granting them a reservation between the Big Horns and the Yellowstone. However, Sherman revealed a surprisingly limited understanding of intertribal relations when he predicted that, "in due time, they, too, will find it to their interest to go down the Missouri river and settle among the Sioux."[6] The two nations had been bitter enemies for most of a century since the Sioux had elbowed them from the Black Hills, and in subsequent decades the Crows had resolutely contested their invasion of the Powder River region.

The other bands were on their way to the Platte, but they would not arrive for two or three weeks. Sherman, Tappan, Augur, and Terry, impatient to attend other matters,

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[6] Ibid., p. 2.

boarded the military coach for Cheyenne, while Harney and Sanborn stayed behind with authority to conclude the treaty with the rest of the Indians as they came in. Near the end of the month, a large delegation of Oglalas and Minneconjous, including the influential Man Afraid of His Horses, met with the commissioners to sign the documents. Red Cloud, however, was not among them. According to the Indians, he would not make peace until he had personally witnessed the soldiers' exodus from the Bozeman Trial.[7]

Presuming the rest of the Sioux to still be some distance away and hesitant to commit to the treaty, the last two commissioners departed on the twenty-eighth. They assigned Charles Gereau to serve as "Special Sioux Interpreter," and vested the post commander with authority as the government's signatory in their absence. A copy of the document was left for the others to sign upon their arrival.[8] Oddly enough, Harney and Sanborn had been gone only a few hours when about forty-five lodges of Bad Faces, led by Yellow Eagle and Small Hawk, showed up. Slemmer rolled out the red carpet at headquarters, after which the chiefs signed the treaty and the people were lavished with gifts of food, blankets, cloth, cooking utensils—even some guns and ammunition. Word

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[7] An examination of the treaties reveals the familiar names of Joseph Bissonette, Nicholas Janis, his son Antoine, Lefroy Jott, Charles E. Gereau, and Leon Pallerdie as interpreters for the various tribes and bands. Their involvement confirms once again the living link these men of French decent provided to the fort's fur trade heritage. Charles J. Kappler (comp.), *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, (Washington, D. C.: 1904), II, p. 1004.

[8] John B. Sanborn and William S. Harney to General A. J. Slemmer, May 27, 1868, Records of Sioux Treaty at Fort Laramie, November 6, 1868, Fort Laramie, Wyoming, R. G. 393 (hereinafter cited as Sioux Treaty records).

quickly spread to the camps that things seemed safe enough at Fort Laramie and that the whites were being most generous. A few days later, Tall Wolf arrived with twenty-six more lodges, and later still 119 lodges of Arapahoes stopped by on their way to join their southern relatives on the Arkansas. When they left on the twenty-ninth of June, Slemmer sent Peter Richard as an escort to see them safely through the settlements along the railroad and across Kansas. Tensions still ran high on both sides and it would take only a single spark to ignite another war.

Red Cloud by that time was aware of the army's intentions to abandon the northern forts, yet he did not relax the pressure he had exerted from the outset. He still had the bulk of his warrior force intact and was able to maintain the virtual state of siege on the Bozeman Trail until the forts were finally vacated in August. Only then did he move toward Fort Laramie.

Meantime, in accordance with the orders of the Indian Commission, agency operations ceased at Fort Laramie effective June 5. Agent Patrick thereupon relocated the Upper Platte Agency at North Platte to be nearer Spotted Tail's Brules, who had gone off to their familiar hunting grounds on the Republican. Red Leaf and his band were on the Niobrara that summer for the same purpose. Many of the Loafers and the white "squaw

men" associated with them also followed the agency.[9] But, the young warriors were always difficult to control and a few depredations occurred along the lines of the Union Pacific as well as the Kansas Pacific route to Denver. Patrick did not admit that his charges had committed any violations of the treaty, if in fact he was aware of them, but complained to Nebraska Indian Superintendent H. B. Denman that so long as they remained outside the permanent reservation, there could be no farming, no schools, no acculturation into a European society. Spotted Tail and others had come to discuss these matters with him, he related, at the same time voicing their complaints that no annuity goods had been forthcoming. Both Denman and Patrick knew why—the contract for the soon-to-be eliminated Upper Platte Agency had already been cancelled. The Indians subscribing to the treaty would be concentrated on the Missouri, rather than being scattered from the Big Horns all the way to Nebraska and Kansas, and changing the distribution point for rations was a way to lure them there.

Sherman used his considerable authority to further hasten that process by closing the doors previously open to the Indians. In August, he directed his commanders to curtail the issue of any supplies "to Indians outside their reservations . . . unless actually

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[9] Patrick reported that approximately "600 half-breed white men married to Indian families" from Fort Laramie passed by North Platte on June 30. They were joined by about 150 "similar persons," whereupon the entire cavalcade moved off toward the new reservation on the Missouri. Patrick refers to a detached group as the "Laramie Snipes," a term the author has not encountered elsewhere, probably referring to the Sioux scouts formerly cooperating with the army. M. T. Patrick to H. B. Denman, August 22, 1868, LS, Fort Laramie.

in distress and en route to their proper homes."[10] The local effect of that edict was that Indians could no longer come to Fort Laramie, since it lay south of the North Platte and therefore was outside the boundaries of both the reservation and the unceded territory. As a temporary measure, Denman assigned J. P. Cooper to replace Gereau as special agent for the remainder of the Loafers—by then only about fifteen families that refused to leave their traditional home at the fort. Cooper soon learned through the Loafers that the Sioux and the Crows were already fighting on Powder River. He predicted the Oglalas and other rebellious factions would avoid going to the new reservation under any circumstances, and with buffalo already becoming scarce in the region, he felt certain the Indians would again turn to making their living by raiding.[11]

Clashes were frequent enough in the southern part of the department to prompt Augur to cut short the welcome of the Sioux there. He issued a circular on October 1 serving notice to his commanders that he was unilaterally nullifying Indian hunting rights

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[10] *General Orders No. 4*, Division of the Missouri, August 10, 1868.

[11] Cooper's arrival at Fort Laramie sparked a minor power struggle with Lieutenant Colonel Slemmer claimed the authority to deal with the Sioux because Sanborn had left him a copy of the treaty (on file in the National Archives) and a letter to that effect. Slemmer also exerted his authority as post commander to issue supplies to the Indians, since the Indian Bureau had none on hand of its own. The treaty stipulated that the army would oversee all issues to the Indians to prevent fraud. Apparently, the conflict was resolved without the need for official intervention from higher authority. J. P. Cooper to Denman, August 27, 1868, LS, Fort Laramie.; A few sporadic raids and other incidents continued in the vicinity of Fort Laramie into fall, 1868. On August 30, for example, Indians ran off seventy mules from a government supply train at Cooper's Creek. Troops followed their trail toward Laramie Peak, but eventually lost it and returned to the post. Just before Red Cloud's arrival, three Sioux boys professing friendship approached a herder over the post beef cattle eight miles above the post and mortally wounded him. Medical History, August 1868, Fort Laramie; Major William MeE Dye to Lieutenant Colonel George D. Ruggles, November 20, 1868, LS, Fort Laramie.

in that region, thereby expediting the concentration policy favored by Sherman. Since August, he recounted,

> "their conduct has evinced such general hostility that in the opinion of the proper authority, their further stay between the North Platte and the Smoky Hill rivers is inadmissible [sic]. The friendly Indians have withdrawn from that country and you are instructed that hereafter, until further orders, all Indians found there are to be regarded as hostile, and treated accordingly. Commanding officers at Forts Laramie and Fetterman should notify when practicable, the Indians to the north of them, of this determination."[12]

As a result, most of the Brule Sioux and the Loafers, as well as many small bands of Cheyennes and Arapahoes in the region migrated toward the proposed new agency at Fort Randall, in the extreme southeast corner of the Dakota reservation, thus dissolving the Upper Platte Agency.

Red Cloud, accompanied by Red Leaf, Big Bear, Grass, and his wife, finally made his long-awaited appearance at Fort Laramie on November 4. The chief, who had so recently been the terror of the Bozeman Trail, made an instant impression on some members of the garrison. "Red Cloud is a plain looking Indian about forty years old, and

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[12] *Circular to Commanding Officers*, October 1, 1868, Dept. of the Platte, copy filed in Sioux Treaty records, R. G. 393, N. A.

about six feet high and very quiet when spoken to," wrote an officer's wife, . . .[He] has a very pleasant smile, and no show or dash in any movement." Unable to resist a more womanly observation, she daringly noted that Big Bear had "the most splendid chest and shoulders I ever laid my eyes upon."[13] Sutler Bullock entertained the Indian delegation and the officers at his residence with a feast of coffee, soup, potatoes, and cooked rice, spiced with raisins and sugar. Post Commander William McE. Dye, however, looked with less favor on Red Cloud's cool demeanor. He "affected a great deal of dignity and disinterestedness while other chiefs arose, advanced & shook hands with the officers with apparent cordiality, he remained seated; and [illegible] gave the ends of his fingers to the officers who advanced to shake hands with him."[14] Red Cloud was obviously savoring his victory over the army and took full advantage of the opportunity to nettle his recent enemies. His was, in fact, the only strategic victory in which the western tribes compelled government forces to surrender both territory and forts. In a brief ceremony two days later, Red Cloud signed the treaty officially ending the war on Powder River.

Animosities over the treaty arose almost immediately when some of Brave Bear's Minneconjous rode in from their camp about twenty miles north of the river and were told they had no business being there. Dumbfounded, Brave Bear retorted that no one had

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[13] Donald K. Adams (ed.), "The Journal of Ada A. Vogdes, 1868-71," *Montana*, (July 1963), p. 3 (hereinafter cited as "Vogdes journal).

[14] Dye to Ruggles, November 20, 1868, LS, Fort Laramie.

told them they were no longer welcome to trade at Fort Laramie. With peace established, he was under the impression they could go anywhere they pleased. The Sioux did not comprehend, nor in fact did the document clearly stipulate, that they were prohibited from traveling south of the North Platte for peaceful purposes. The treaty stated only that they would "relinquish all right to occupy permanently the territory outside their reservation . . . .. " Conversely, it was the whites that were expressly banned from entering their territory.[15] Indeed, it begged the question how nomadic people might hunt over thousands of square miles without occupying the country? The Sioux were incensed with what to them was a senseless contradiction, perceiving it as more of the white man's duplicity. When Red Cloud signed, he obviously focused on the ouster of whites from the Powder River region, while giving little, if any, attention to the other treaty provisions requiring his people to live on the Missouri. They had always traded at Fort Laramie; it was their home. Red Cloud's refusal to abide by key points of the treaty were revealed during conversations with Dye in which the chief announced his determination never to go to the reservation on the Missouri and that he expected the traders to return to Fort Laramie. Now that the contest for the Powder River country was settled in his favor, he expected his people to resume trading at Fort Laramie, as they had in the old days. He

[15] "Treaty With the Sioux, "*Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, (Washington, D. C.: 1904), p. 1002.

further interpreted the document to mean that it would be the only fort north of the railroad—that Fort Fetterman would be abandoned along with the others.[16]

As the Fort Laramie garrison observed Christmas 1868 with a theatrical performance followed by cups of warm eggnog at Bullock's house, tempers simmered in the Indian camps. Dye reported in mid-January that while he had not seen any Sioux for more than a month, they had exhibited a decidedly surly attitude and he predicted gloomily, "war was probable, if not inevitable."[17] Concerned that the situation would boil over if some action were not taken, Dye repeatedly informed the Sioux in the vicinity that they were not permitted to cross the North Platte, although he did relent to the extent of allowing one Indian at a time to cross, so long as the individual proceeded directly to Interpreter Gereau's lodge to explain his business. Dye suggested that department headquarters send him some Pawnee scouts to help keep an eye on Sioux movements to the north because rumors indicated most of them were back on Powder River attending a large council. It was an ominous sign.[18]

Although no other incidents occurred in the depths of winter, Dye dared not relax his vigilance. At the first signs of spring, he advised the post quartermaster to warn his

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[16] James C. Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*, (Lincoln: 1965), pp. 80 – 84.

[17] Dye to Ruggles, January 14, 1869, LS, Fort Laramie.

[18] Ibid.

herdsmen to maintain a sharp eye at all times, and when soldiers were available, to post lookouts on high points near the animals. To prevent the theft of teams on the road, Dye insisted that all animals be side-hobbled at night, and that intervals between wagons on the march be kept short to reduce the chances of their being cut off and surrounded.

His precautions were well founded. As if my magic, Red Cloud suddenly appeared at the North Platte ferry with several hundred warriors to challenge the army's order not to cross. With the temperature standing at thirteen degrees below zero, the cavalcade moved slowly across on the ice. Ada Vogdes, wife of a Fourth Infantry officer, witnessed their approach.

> They came in two abreast, singing at the top of their lungs, and as they drew near the post, they formed themselves into a line of battle around one side of the garrison and remained on their ponies for some time. As the Colonel feared their intentions were evil, two companies of infantry were under arms for two or three hours, the artillery was brought to bear, and two cannons were mounted and manned. Everything had a warlike appearance for hours . . . Col. Dye ordered them off, as they had not permission to come in in such large numbers, and [he] told them if they did not go they would be fired into. Three times they were told

before they obeyed, and great was the excitement to see if the last order would be obeyed."[19]

During the standoff, the chief himself rode into the post to speak with Dye. As he passed the sutler's store, his old friend William Bullock came out to greet him. Red Cloud, proving his involvement in hostilities since the previous fall, refused his hand, saying, "Wait, my friend, until I have washed. My hands are bloody to the elbows. I want to wash them before I shake hands with anyone."[20]

His ablution completed, Red Cloud explained to Dye that his people were hungry; he had come to trade, not fight. Since most of the old French traders had already followed their in-laws toward the Missouri, Fort Laramie was their only recourse. The major, clearly outnumbered, found himself in a difficult situation. He had little room to contest the chief's arguments, yet he had recently received word that Sherman, appointed general of the army on March 8, had issued his own interpretation of the treaty in the form of an edict to contain the Sioux and their allies north of the North Platte. Threatened with the imminent prospect of a new war, in which the first blood would be spilled on his own parade ground, Dye consented to permit a few Indians at a time to come to the fort the next day to trade at Bullock's store. His stature further enhanced by this symbolic victory,

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[19] "Vodges journal," p. 7.

[20] R.Eli Paul, *Autobiography of Red Cloud: War Leader of the Oglalas*, (Helena, Mont.: 1997), p. 191.

Red Cloud strode out and "made a singular noise and they all mounted their ponies and rode out, scattering in all directions. It was a grand sight."[21]

Abiding by the agreement, small groups of Sioux came the next day, crowding into the small trade room at the store. Mrs. Vogdes was beside herself with excitement as she, "rushed around all day to get a blanket worked with beads, which I succeeded in doing for a bag of flour, twenty pounds of bacon, and some coffee and sugar."[22] That afternoon, in her husband's absence, she naively invited Red Cloud and others to dine at her quarters. The recent terrors of the Bozeman Trail not only conducted themselves with proper decorum, but showed their appreciation by presenting her with an arrow as they departed for more trading at the store. It was the best day's business Bullock had experienced in years. Risking Sherman's wrath, Dye concluded to strike a bargain with Red Cloud. If the chief would promise to keep his young men from depredating south of the Platte, a trader would be allowed to serve them on the Cheyenne River. Failing that, "swarms of soldiers" would be sent against the Sioux.[23]

Dye's threat notwithstanding, Sioux and Cheyenne bands remained in the vicinity during spring and summer. Sporadic raids demonstrated that even a respected leader like

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[21] Vogdes journal, p. 7.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Dye to A. G., U. S. A., March 25, 1869, LS, Fort Laramie; Dye to Louis Richard, March 31, 1869, ibid.

Red Cloud had limited influence in controlling the warrior societies, and especially those of other tribes. A war party crossed the North Platte early in April to attack the detachment of soldiers at La Bonte Creek, killing one or two. A few days later, two companies of cavalry left the post in an attempt to run down the party, rumored to be Minniconjous, who also stole fifty head of cattle between Forts Laramie and Fetterman. In September, Indians ambushed soldiers repairing the road to Fort Fetterman, seriously wounding one man and killing another.

Indians struck again on December 2 by attacking the mail ambulance bound for Horseshoe Station, where the Fort Fetterman mail was handed off to the coach en route from Cheyenne. Thirty-two miles from Fort Laramie, approximately a hundred Indians assaulted the detachment. Private Herbert Erne, a Fourteenth Infantryman, caught a bullet through his hip as he stood beside the vehicle. His comrades quickly tossed the wounded man in the ambulance and fought their way back to the post. When a second detail attempted the trip a few days afterward, another soldier was shot through the lungs in an ambush near the same place. He survived long enough to be brought back to the post hospital, but died two hours later.[24]

[24] Dye to G. Clark, April 7, 1869, ibid.; Colonel Franklin F. Flint to A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, December 3, 1869, ibid.; Flint to commanding officer, Fort Fetterman, July 29, 1869, ibid.; Flint to Ruggles, December 5, 1869, ibid.; Medical History, April, September, and December, 1869, Fort Laramie.

Were the Indians not troublesome enough, white outlaws began stealing stock on the road to Cheyenne. In an effort to combat both problems, Dye posted a company of infantry at Bordeaux's ranch to patrol the area, and he placed detachments at Chugwater and Horseshoe Stations to prevent the thieves from loitering about those places for the purpose of obtaining information and supplies. Late in August, troops arrested two horse thieves within the military reservation. Discovering the men were in possession of army animals along with some from ranches as far away as Colorado, the commanding officer turned the rustlers over the U. S. marshal in Cheyenne.[25]

Events in the southeastern part of what had recently become Wyoming Territory, along with others in the region farther south, made it clear that the Fort Laramie Treaty had virtually no effect in controlling the Sioux having no direct allegiance to Red Cloud. War parties belonging to the bands of Pawnee Killer and Whistler, who had refused to go to Fort Randall, were active in the region south of the South Platte. Augur reported his troops had found large elements of both the Sioux and Cheyennes willing to defy his orders prohibiting their presence on the Republican River. He had, in fact, sent Colonel Eugene A. Carr and his Fifth Cavalry to eject them and Carr had inflicted a telling defeat on the Cheyennes when he surprised a village at Summit Spring. Lieutenant General

[25] Second Lieutenant George O. Webster to Non-commissioned Officers-in-Charge, Chugwater and Horseshoe Creeks, April 1, 1869, ibid.; Flint to U. S. Marshall, Cheyenne, W. T., August 31, 1869.

Philip H. Sheridan, now commanding the Division of the Missouri, added his own bitter complaint about the inequities of making other outlaws account for their misdeeds, while the Indians "run riot along the lines of our western settlements and commercial lines of travel . . . if an Indian does the same [thing], we have been in the habit of giving him more blankets." Disgusted with civilian handling of Indian affairs, Sheridan characterized the Indian as "a lazy, idle vagabond; he never labors, and has no profession except that of arms, to which he is raised from a child, a scalp is constantly dangled before his eyes, and the highest honor he can aspire to is to possess one taken by himself."[26] The unyielding ex-commander of the Union Army's cavalry shared Sherman's view that only military force, aimed at complete subjugation of the tribes, could ever resolve the situation and clear the West for settlement.

[26] Report of Lieutenant General P. H. Sheridan, November 1, 1869, ARSW, *HR*, (1412), pp. 70 – 75.

Chapter 15

"Indians Have Great Respect for Authority"

Tensions with the Sioux went unresolved as the new decade opened, though a declining number of depredations offered encouragement that Red Cloud was exerting greater restraint over his own tribesmen, if comparatively little over other bands. The first few months of 1870 witnessed no incidents around Fort Laramie, perhaps because the Sioux and Cheyennes were ensconced in their winter camps away from the routes of travel. However, Agent Cooper's prediction that the Oglalas would not accept the reservation anytime soon proved correct.

The citizens of the new Territory of Wyoming were as dissatisfied with the Fort Laramie Treaty as was Red Cloud, and were as equally committed to abide by it.

Prospectors from Virginia City that had ventured southeastward from the Montana diggings spread word that gold was to be found in paying quantities in the Wind River Range, the valleys of the Big Horns, and on the Sweetwater. During the winter of 1869-70, prospectors with little else to do in the saloons of Cheyenne hatched a plan to launch a mining expedition to the Big Horns. That such a venture would clearly violate the treaty mattered little to the members of the "Big Horn Mining Association," who had come to the realization that the treaty placed the entire northwest section of the territory off-limits to whites. The group's chairman, W. L. Kuykendall, became convinced the government must have made a mistake! Certainly, he reasoned, the authorities would not impede such a venture "as it must have been the intention of congress in organizing this territory to secure its speedy settlement and development, that having been a consistent government policy in other territories."[1] He conveniently overlooked a significant difference—Wyoming Territory was bound by a pre-existing federal treaty at the time it was created. One Red Cloud biographer summarized the dilemma in these words.

> As General Augur observed after a hurried trip to Cheyenne to investigate the rumor that an expedition was being planned to go to the Big Horn country, the Government could hardly expect the citizens of Wyoming to acquiesce in a policy

[1] Originally appearing in the *Omaha Weekly Herald*, January 26, 1870 and quoted in James C. Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*, (Lincoln: 1965), p. 91 (hereinafter cited as *Red Cloud*).

> which cut them off from a third of their territory for the benefit of hostile tribes. Yet to allow the Big Horn expedition to start would mean the scuttling of the treaty even before it had been put into effective operation.[2]

The Grant administration proved to be of little assistance when the question was laid before the affected cabinet members. Purposefully vague guidance filtered down to Augur that provided him the latitude to allow the expedition to go forward, so long as it did not enter areas that might result in a collision with the Indians. Some particularly adventuresome, and probably equally inexperienced, souls clamored to be permitted free-run of the territory; they would take their chances with the Sioux. The prospect that anyone in the government would seriously entertain such a blatant invasion, with the ink hardly dry on the treaty, was preposterous enough, but even more absurd was the administration's directive that Augur allow the expedition to proceed, if *in his opinion* it would not intrude on lands addressed in the treaty. Augur knew full well that, once loose, the prospectors would go anywhere they pleased until the Sioux stopped them. The army would then be obligated to take the field to quell another "uprising." Whatever the outcome, Augur would be the scapegoat.

A harbinger of renewed trouble occurred when Indians shot and seriously wounded a civilian within a half mile of Fort Laramie during April. Post Commander

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[2] Ibid., p. 92.

Franklin F. Flint, having no cavalry at his disposal, sent out a mounted detachment of Fourth Infantrymen to try to catch the raiders. The soldiers pursued the war party for several miles up the Platte, but did not follow when the Indians turned north and crossed the river. About the same time, Indians attacked a camp owned by cattleman Benjamin B. Mills. Two drovers, John Boyd and William Aug, were in their tent when Indians ventilated it with several shots, narrowly missing both men because they happened to be lying on their blankets at that moment. The warriors then charged through the camp, killing some cows, and making off with four calves. The same raiders struck Louis Richard's camp at Point of Rocks a few days later. Familiar with Sioux habits after spending his whole life in close association with them, Richard boldly charged out mounted and surprised the party. He shot one dead and drove off the others. When the mail ambulance came along the next day, the driver saw the body of the warrior still lying near the road.[3]

[3] Medical History, April 1870, Fort Laramie, Records of the Surgeon General's Office, Record Group 112, National Archives, Washington, D. C., microfilm and printed copies available in library, Fort Laramie NHS (hereinafter cited as Medical History, Fort Laramie with month and year); John Hunton, "Reminiscences," *Annals of Wyoming*, (January 1930), p. 265-66. Hunton recalled that another drover, David Cottier, was absent from camp because he had driven a wagon to Fort Laramie for supplies. This represents one of the earliest documented instances of area cattlemen relying on the post for provisions. Likewise, during 1869-70, ranchers in the vicinity of the Cheyenne Road utilized the weekly army mail runs by bringing their mail to a ranch situated directly on the road. The driver was authorized to pick up loose mail at those points and transfer it to the coach coming up from Fort Russell or Cheyenne. ibid., p. 266.

Only Red Cloud's unexpected request to visit Washington, D. C. prevented a general clash that spring. His interpretation of the 1868 treaty remained unaltered, but he was now ready to debate his right to trade at Fort Laramie, and he indicated that he might be willing to discuss taking his people to a reservation, so long as it was not the one at Fort Randall.[4] The proposal could not have been better timed for it presented the Grant administration an opportunity to demonstrate the mollifying effects of its new peace policy on one of the most warlike Indian leaders. For years, the government had resisted pressure from religious organizations to assume a leading role in the management of Indian affairs. Although Grant's own military background biased him toward Sherman's stance that the army should have total control over all Indian matters, philanthropists successfully prevailed on the new president to allow the churches to take a hand in shaping and executing Indian policy. Bowing to their wishes, Grant established a ten-man U. S. Indian Commission vested with wide-ranging authority to jointly oversee the Indian Bureau's appropriation, formulate policy, and evaluate the performance of agents in the field in hopes of preventing the corruption that had plagued those offices. Known as the "Quaker Policy" because of that sect's close involvement in its creation, Grant's Peace Policy disrupted the old spoils system members of Congress had traditionally relied on to

[4] The impetus for Red Cloud's action may have come from John Richard, Jr., son of the former owner of Platte Bridge and the attendant trading post. Richard had killed a soldier at Fort Fetterman in a domestic dispute over a woman. There were implications suggesting he influenced Red Cloud to request the hearing, and in the process, secured a pardon for Richard. ibid., p. 98.

reward political cronies. His appointment of a significant number of churchmen, in addition to army officers, as superintendents and agents blunted congressional opposition to the plan.[5]

Man Afraid (the younger) happened to be at Fort Fetterman when the telegram arrived stating that the president and the secretary of the Interior would be pleased to have the now-famous chief of the Oglalas visit the nation's capital. At the same time, Grant, having become aware of the Big Horn expedition, instructed Augur to stop the miners at Cheyenne for fear such an intrusion would derail the proposed meeting. Augur undoubtedly breathed a sigh of relief to be off the hook.

About five hundred Sioux were on hand at Fort Fetterman in mid-May to bid farewell to Red Cloud and his delegation. It was planned that the chief and eleven others would proceed via Fort Laramie to Cheyenne, where they would board the wondrous iron horse for the East. But when their assigned escort, Colonel John E. Smith, met them at Fort Laramie on May 24, Red Cloud insisted that twenty of his chiefs and headmen be allowed to go, along with seven of their wives. Red Cloud was growing accustomed to getting what he wanted, and after some delicate negotiations, it was agreed that twenty-

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[5] A salient provision added to the Peace Policy through the Appropriations Act of 1871 eliminated the status of "domestic dependent Indian nations" that had been inaugurated by Chief Justice John Marshall early in the century. All treaties then in force would be honored, but henceforth no new treaties would be negotiated with Indians. Robert M. Utley, *The Indian Frontier of the American West 1846 – 1890*, (Albuquerque: 1986), pp. 133-34.

one Indians would go, in addition to Fort Laramie locals William Bullock, James McClosky, and Jules Ecoffey as interpreters. The entourage left the post two days later, but rather than going to Cheyenne, they cut cross-country to catch the train at Pine Bluffs, thus avoiding what was shaping up as an ugly confrontation with the residents of Cheyenne.

For several days following the arrival of the Sioux in Washington, officials spared no effort to impress the Indians with the might of the government and the splendor of the city. Meetings eventually got underway with Secretary of the Interior Jacob D. Cox, Indian Commissioner Ely S. Parker, himself a full-blood Seneca, and Felix R. Brunot, Pittsburg steel magnate and head of the Board of Indian Commissioners.[6] Red Cloud not only rejected the idea of taking his people to the reservation on the Missouri, but he stunned everyone when he claimed to have no knowledge of the Fort Laramie treaty. Since he had refused Dye's efforts to explain its provisions in November, he was therefore not bound by it. He knew only what his runner had told him at the villages, and besides, he was convinced the interpreters at Fort Laramie had been wrong.

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[6] The 1868 treaty placed the distribution of annuities in the hands of the army. The Interior Department, embracing the Indian Bureau, objected strenuously to that arrangement. In passing the Indian Appropriations Act of April 10, 1869, Congress bowed to the secretary's request to have that authority re-vested in his department. At the same time, however, Congress established the Board of Indian Commissioners as a watchdog over the bureau in an attempt to prevent the fraudulent practices many agents had engaged in during past years. ibid., pp. 132-33.

The chief's stance, and the new conciliatory attitude engendered by the Peace Policy, caused Cox and his cohorts to "reinterpret" the treaty, and on the eleventh they informed Red Cloud that he and his people would not have to go to Fort Randall after all. So long as they remained peaceful, they could live in the region generally north of Fort Laramie near the Black Hills. Cox further conceded that Red Cloud could submit names of men acceptable to him to serve as agents and traders in the region.[7] Before parting, the wily Oglala took full advantage of the situation by convincing the officials to give the chiefs a present of seventeen horses, and to have them available when they disembarked from the train so they could ride home in style. Warming to his celebrity status, Red Cloud consented to give a speech in New York City before returning to the frontier. The visit was not only a smashing success for Red Cloud personally, but he had demonstrated unexpected political prowess by unilaterally re-defining the Fort Laramie Treaty, after the fact and in his own favor. The only point he did not win was that of abandoning Fort Fetterman. Cox, knowing any attempt to bend the treaty that far would never get past Sherman, was resolute on that point--the troops must stay. The secretary promised to send his representatives to meet again with Red Cloud during summer, at which time the details of their agreement would be worked out.

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[7] It was probably no coincidence that Red Cloud named Ben Mills as his preference for agent, and Bullock and Ecoffey as traders. Olson, *Red Cloud*, p. 120.

When the train carrying the Sioux delegation pulled in a Pine Bluffs Station, they were pleased to find their gift horses waiting to carry them to Fort Laramie. A cavalry escort was also on hand, but Red Cloud declined the offer, saying it was a sign the whites did not trust him. By the time the head men arrived back at Fort Laramie on June 26, thousands of Sioux were camped in a village at Rawhide Buttes, forty miles north of the river, waiting for the signal to begin trading again, but Colonel Smith informed them through the interpreters that the president had granted an exception of only ten days during which they could cross the Platte. The free-trading days at Fort Laramie were no more. Despite that disappointment, Red Cloud announced that he would call a council of the combined tribes roaming between Powder River and the Black Hills in which he would exert his influence to bring a lasting peace with the whites. Although he admitted to having no authority over the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, he pledged his best efforts to persuade them to give up the warpath as well.

The great council probably convened in late July on Powder River and, coincidentally, Brunot left Washington about the same time. He was joined in St. Louis by Robert Campbell, a member of the commission whose stature among the Indians was legendary. His experience in the western fur trade could be traced to William Ashley's 1825 expedition and nine years later he joined William Sublette to found Fort Laramie. His intimacy with the Sioux and other tribes of the region also gained him a place on the

treaty commission of 1851. Since that time, he had maintained political connections the Interior Department and had kept abreast of Indian relations on the plains.

One can only imagine Campbell's impressions of the changes in the country he once knew when he and Brunot stepped off the train in Cheyenne during September. Two companies of the Fifth Cavalry had been sent from nearby Fort Russell to escort the commissioners to Fort Laramie. Messengers had been previously dispatched to the Sioux villages, but when Brunot and Campbell arrived there on the twenty-seventh, Red Cloud had not yet appeared. However, the massing of large numbers of both Sioux and Cheyennes during the following days pressaged the chief's arrival at any time. Massing at the Sutler's Store, meanwhile, was an increasingly well-oiled crowd "composed of soldiers off duty, bull whackers, frontier nondescripts, and some citizens from Cheyenne, attracted by the novelty of the expected 'pow wow . . . ."[8] Campbell thought that Red Cloud's delay was probably caused by his desire to insure that all of the appropriate leaders from the various bands were in attendance before starting such an important meeting, though it may just as well have been his penchant for making a grand entrance. At last, on October 5, an exceptionally large group of Sioux, including the chief himself, went into camp on the North Platte about three miles above the post. The commissioners made arrangements to begin the council the next day, while about two hundred warriors

[8] *Omaha Weekly Herald*, October 19, 1870.

made an impressive display by riding to the fort. Bullock laid out a feast for them in front of his store to reinforce the feeling of good will.[9]

The council got underway the next day in a large open tent that Colonel Flint had erected near the Platte ferry. But, Red Cloud immediately voiced his objection to the site, stating his preference to meet at the fort itself, ostensibly where his people could gather about and listen to what was said. His true motive, of course, was to achieve another symbolic victory by subtly muscling the government into holding the conference south of the river within the "forbidden zone." Bowing to the chief's wishes, Flint hurriedly made arrangements to move the meeting to the front porch of his own quarters, a frame house at the south end of the parade ground. When the council reconvened shortly after dinner, the porch was filled to capacity with the Indian delegation, composed of Red Cloud, Man Afraid, Grass, and Red Dog; the commissioners, Flint and his officers, the officers of the Fifth Cavalry escort, plus a few wives. In the surrounding yard stood scores of Indians, soldiers, and civilians, all straining to hear what was said.[10]

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[9] Medical History, September and October 1870, Fort Laramie; Olson, *Red Cloud*, pp. 121-22.

[10] Olson, *Red Cloud*, p. 123; The commanding officer's quarters at that time was a frame house, insulated with adobe, built in 1868. It stood immediately west of what is known today as Quarters A at Fort Laramie National Historic Site. It was sold at auction in 1890 and stood until sometime in the 1890s, when it was salvaged for the lumber. Today, only the foundation remains. Merrill J. Mattes, "Surviving Army Structures at Fort Laramie National Monument," MS, July 24, 1943, copy in archives, Fort Laramie NHS.

Following the usual prayers, Brunot and Campbell had the unenviable task of once again explaining and debating the stipulations contained in the treaty, tempering them with the modifications made during Red Cloud's recent visit to Washington. Red Cloud had only a few concerns, first catching Flint and the commissioners off-guard when he objected to the soldiers he had seen cutting hay on "his" land on the north side of the Platte Valley. There was little they could say, except to hope Red Cloud would not object to such a minor thing. Red Cloud responded that he would not go to war over it, but he was relying on the Great Father to keep his word and not allow white men in his country. The conference came to an abrupt end when Red Dog stood and demanded to speak, insisting that Leon Palladie interpret for him. The mostly Oglala audience loudly denounced Palladie as untrustworthy because he belonged to the Brules that had gone to the Missouri River. Some, in fact, accused him of misinterpreting the negotiations in 1868, a significant factor in all the problems occurring since then. The commissioners diffused the situation by declaring an adjournment until the next day, though they did hold an informal talk with Red Cloud and his principals at Bullock's house later that afternoon to prepare the way for the next day's meeting.

The question of a trading post proved to be particularly thorny. Red Cloud demanded not only ammunition, he was adamant that the Sioux trading post had always been on the North Platte and there it would be again. Brunot minced words by advising

him that the Great Father had promised only that their agency would be north of the river, not necessarily on it and that Forts Laramie and Fetterman were out of the question. Rather, Brunot suggested, Raw Hide Buttes would make an ideal location and the sooner the Indians agreed to it, the sooner the goods would begin to flow. Red Cloud stolidly replied that he would not go to Raw Hide Buttes. Seeing the meeting was at an impass, one of the other chiefs suggested they allow the matter to rest there; the Indians needed time to consider and to talk among themselves. Meantime, they wanted their presents. The leaders and the commissioners parted amicably, agreeing that the gift-laden wagon train would go to the village the following afternoon. Thus, another council ended inconclusively.

The commissioners proceeded to directly to Omaha where they reported their accomplishments to General Augur. Although the question of where to put the agency and trading post went unresolved, the commissioners were of the opinion that Red Cloud was now desirous of a true peace and was personally willing to negotiate toward that end. They were not so certain the young men shared his attitude, but so long as Red Cloud was able to maintain his position of near-universal respect and influence over the several bands, and even the allied tribes, the prospects for peace were favorable. Brunot and Campbell concluded the meeting by urging Augur to do everything possible to support

Red Cloud, now that he was in a cooperative mood. On him hung the best chance for securing peace on the Northern Plains.[11]

The efforts to appease Red Cloud paid off. Augur took great satisfaction in reporting that 1870 marked the quietest period on the plains in a long while. With the exception of a few isolated incidents near Fort Fetterman and scattered raids along the Union Pacific in southwest Nebraska, the Department of the Platte was quiet.[12] Augur wanted to keep it that way because he appreciated how vital that thread was to the fabric of the nation, ". . . and any interruption to the road by Indians involves also an interruption to the mail and to telegraphic communication, and the whole country, and in fact the world, is affected thereby."[13]

A year earlier, the only cavalry unit attached to Fort Laramie, Captain James Egan's Company K of the Second, had been sent to establish a camp in northwest Nebraska as a barrier to prevent the Sioux from raiding the Pawnees in the vicinity of old Fort Kearny. Their absence left only four companies of the Fourth Infantry at the post,

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[11] Annual Report of the Secretary of War, *House Executive Document*, 41st Cong., 3d Session,(Washington, D. C.: 1870), p. 31 (hereinafter cited as "Augur report").

[12] Company D, Second Cavalry engaged Indians in possession of stolen stock near Atlantic City, W. T. on May 4, 1870. Later that same day, a detachment under Lieutenant Charles B. Stambaugh had a fight with sixty to seventy Indians in which Stambaugh was killed. On May 5, a detachment of Company C encountered a war party on the Little Blue River in Nebraska. These were probably Sioux out to steal horses from the Pawnees in that area. Troops also intercepted large parties of raiders crossing the line of the Union Pacific in the vicinity of North Platte during June. Theophilus F. Rodenbough, *From Everglade to Canyon with the Second United States Cavalry*, (Norman: 2000), pp. 392-94.

[13] Augur report.

yet a sufficient number under the circumstances. While Egan's men endured the boredom of prolonged field duty, the decline in Indian trouble freed the garrison for other pursuits. But, as one soldier reported to the *Cheyenne Daily Leader*,

> . . . the moral condition is very poor, but better since the sutler has been prohibited selling whiskey, which as the worst I ever tasted; and at the moderate price of 25 cents per drink. The 'boys' however, get beer at the same price per glass at Brown's Ranche across the river, which I should judge was fully as poor as the 'Shoe Fly Beer' so graphically described in a late number of your paper.[14]

The Indians, too, were finding they had more time on their hands, and local road ranches eagerly took advantage of them as a market for rotgut liquor. Since the Sioux and Northern Cheyennes still had no designated agency, the men often migrated to the North Platte in search of whiskey. Red Cloud found the effect of this distressing; it was not what he wanted for his people now that the war was over. He complained to his friend Colonel Smith, now commanding Fort Laramie, that his men were obtaining whiskey along the river between Forts Laramie and Fetterman and sought his help to eradicate

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[14] *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, July 27, 1870; Brown stopped selling beer when it was impressed on him that he was violating the law granting exclusive rights to the post trader. The post commander issued an order prohibiting the men from thereafter visiting the place. *Circular No. 4*, January 28, 1871, Fort Laramie; W. H. Brown's establishment is clearly depicted in an 1870 watercolor executed by Anton Schonborn. It stood on the east bank of the Laramie River, only a short distance from the end of a wooden foot bridge leading from the fort's warehouse area; The Military Reservation was expanded southeasterly nearly to Scott's Bluffs by *General Orders No. 45*, July 21, 1871, Department of the Platte. It is not clear if this was done to protect the haying grounds against the influx of ranchers, or to better control the liquor traffic, or perhaps both.

what had been a destructive practice with local traders since the 1840s. Smith sent out patrols, but was unsuccessful in locating the responsible offenders. He advised Red Cloud that it required cooperation, and so long as the Indians themselves refused to identify the culprits in the interest of protecting their sources, there was little more the army could do.

Part of the cause was the lack of an established agency for the Indians where a licensed trader could provide necessary goods. The success of Red Cloud's peace efforts became increasingly evident the next spring when Smith estimated there were at least 700 lodges of Sioux, Northern Cheyennes, and Arapahoes drawing rations at Fort Laramie. More bands were coming in every day. The need for an agency more critical than ever, the Indian Bureau named Major Joseph W. Wham as agent for the Platte River Sioux.[15] He arrived at Fort Laramie on March 22 and arranged a council with the Indians the next day. Nothing significant was accomplished initially, except for Wham to become acquainted with Red Cloud and some of the other Indian leaders. They again touched on the question of an agency apart from the fort, but decided to set aside further discussions until officials of the Indian Bureau could participate. By May, however, most of the

[15] Wham served through the Civil War as an enlisted man in the Twenty-first Illinois Infantry. The regiment was one of those retained in service for several months, during which Wham was commissioned as a second lieutenant. He returned to civil life after being mustered out of the volunteer service at the end of 1865, but gained a position in the regulars a year and a half later. During the reorganization of the army in 1869, Wham was left without an assignment. He resigned his commission in 1871 to accept a job as Indian agent, a position he retained for six years. Years later, as an army paymaster in Arizona, he gained modest fame when robbers attacked his detachment in Arizona. Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army 1789 – 1903*, (Urbana: 1965), I, p. 1022.

Indians had not gone on their usual spring hunts and consequently, the army was issuing them 7,000 – 8,000 rations on a daily basis. Clearly, changes were in order.[16]

Chairman Brunot, and Thomas K. Cree, sent along to record the proceedings, came to Fort Laramie in early June to find Red Cloud and some thirty other chiefs awaiting them. At a meeting in the theater on the twelfth, Red Cloud, still undecided on a location for the new agency, informed the commissioner that he preferred to wait until he could consult with the leaders of the absent bands before making a decision. American Horse, Man Afraid, Red Dog and the other principal chiefs present at the time advised Brunot that they favored an agency on White River, south of the Black Hills, but they were willing to wait until Red Cloud returned before making a commitment. Brunot and Smith suggested that an agency some distance north of the Platte would reduce the chances of the Indians falling prey to the proliferation of whiskey in the area. Fearing that Red Cloud might procrastinate by not returning at all, Brunot presented the Indians with an ultimatum. He would hold another council in fifteen days, at which time they would be expected to select a site north of the river. If the Indians failed to do so, the government officials would make the decision for them. Acting on Smith's suggestion to apply some leverage, he surprised the chiefs by informing them that rations would no

[16] Colonel John E. Smith to A. A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, March 22, 1871, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie, R. G. 393, National Archives, Washington, D. C., microfilm copies, library, Fort Laramie NHS (hereinafter cited as LS, Fort Laramie); Medical History, May 1871, Fort Laramie.

longer be issued at Fort Laramie, rather they would be held at Cheyenne until a decision was made fixing the location of the agency. Continuing distributions at Fort Laramie would only reinforce the Indian tie to the place, and for practical reasons, it would be more costly to unload and store the supplies there, when they would eventually have to be freighted elsewhere. The meeting ended on that note, but Red Cloud afterward accompanied Smith and Brunot to post headquarters where he disclosed privately his personal support for an agency beyond the North Platte Valley. Nevertheless, he was obligated to consult with "the men of sense," a council comprised of twenty-nine Unkpapas and twenty-six Oglalas, before making a final decision regarding placement of the agency. Red Cloud confided that this council would have convened the previous fall, but when the arms and ammunition were withheld from their annuity, the leaders decided not to do anything about the agency. Applying some strategy of his own, the chief suggested that if he could assure the others camped on Cheyenne River that the guns would be delivered, a decision would be forthcoming. Referring to Conquering Bear, killed at the Grattan fight, Red Cloud expressed his reluctance to make such a decision on his own. "I do not want to be the only chief," he told Brunot. "At the treaty in 1851, we made one great chief, and the white men killed him. Would you want me to say I am the great chief?"[17]

[17] The account herein follows closely Brunot's June 14, 1871 report published in *Annual Report of the*

In a subsequent meeting at headquarters the next day, Brunot tried again to pressure Red Cloud for an answer, but the chief stalled him saying quietly, "The earth will not move away, it will be here for a long time, and there need be no hurry." While he acknowledged that the whites wanted the agency well away from the river and the evil influences there, Red Cloud's own eyes told him that the whites would come anyway. "Every place a white man goes whiskey goes. You can see them here drinking night and day," he exclaimed with a sweeping gesture of his hand. Smith and the others could not rebut the chief's observation, knowing it was all too true. They simply ignored his statement by reiterating that the guns would be delivered, but he must give an answer within fifteen days. Assuring them he would do his best to comply, Red Cloud shook hands all around and departed in a friendly mood. It would be the last time any whites would see him for months.

The final location chosen for the agency represented another compromise. While it was not at Fort Laramie, as demanded by Red Cloud and many of the Indians, neither was it at the government-preferred site on White River. Since Red Cloud had not responded, Wham selected a site approximately twenty-eight miles down the North Platte. This place, a short distance upstream from the old Horse Creek treaty grounds,

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Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1871. (Washington, D. C.: 1872), pp. 22-28 (hereinafter cited as *ARCIA* with year).

was acceptable to the leaders present. Wham laid out the agency buildings on the valley floor less than a mile north of the river, where they would be sheltered by low hills during winter. By fall, "Sod Agency," as it was known among whites, consisted of employee quarters, storehouses, a blacksmith shop, stables, hay yard, and a cattle corral.[18] He also rescinded the moratorium on issuing rations, fearing that if the Indians were not fed, the seven thousand then present and disposed to remain at the new agency, would scatter and begin raiding.

Spotted Tail, meantime, had drifted back to the familiar Platte country. Although he expressed his satisfaction with the temporary agency and his intention to settle on White River, he ran afoul of Wham when he revealed that he was taking his people to the Republican to hunt awhile. Spotted Tail knew that a train of goods for his Brules had arrived at Fort Laramie and insisted they be distributed before he left. Wham refused to release the supplies on the Platte, rather he would send the train to White River and Spotted Tail could receive them there. Wham calculated that once the Brules were on White River with an abundance of supplies, they would remain there. The Oglalas, however, objected to the white man's train passing over what they considered to be their

[18] The site is approximately two miles above present-day Henry, Nebraska, on the north side of Highway 26. The land was later incorporated into the huge Pratte & Farris Ranch, one of the early cattle operations in the area. Accounts of the site by contemporaries who saw it are found in Unclassified envelope No. 8, Walter M. Camp Collection, Lilly Library, University of Indiana, with typescript copies at Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument (pp. 255, 258).

lands. Their attitude extended in large degree from a widening breech between the two bands. During the past several years, Spotted Tail and Red Cloud had emerged as arch rivals as a result of the former's close relationship with the whites, and Red Cloud's successful showdown with the army. Both chiefs had visited the Great Father in Washington on separate occasions and by the early 1870s, both wielded considerable power within the tribe, establishing a pattern of factionalism within the Sioux. With Spotted Tail adamant about returning to southwest Nebraska, Wham refused to issue the rations. Instead, he had them held at Fort Laramie for the Oglalas. He further angered Spotted Tail by imposing on him a white chaperone, trader Frank Yates, to serve as his personal representative while the Brules were on the Republican.

Indian Commissioner Parker had for the most part remained on the sidelines during the debate over Red Cloud's agency, and during that time Parker himself became the subject of an investigation into alleged irregularities associated with Indian annuity contracts. Even though the charges had not been proven, Parker resigned his post rather than suffer continued denigration in the press. Francis A. Walker was appointed to take his place in fall 1871.

Grasping the delicacy of the Sioux situation, Walker made arrangements to meet with Spotted Tail at North Platte on October 25. As was his habit, Spotted Tail spoke frankly about the recent problems with Agent Wham. He afterward learned from Smith at

Fort Laramie that Wham had largely created the situation that resulted in the Oglalas rejecting the wagon train of supplies. Smith was of the opinion that it could have gone to White River without a confrontation, but that Wham had magnified ill feelings between the two bands for the purpose of gaining more control over them. The new commissioner took quick action to get the supplies into the hands of the Oglalas at Sod Agency, and to have a like quantity rushed forward by rail to North Platte for Spotted Tail, thus temporarily satisfying the needs of both bands until more permanent arrangements could be worked out.

Disgusted with Wham's handling of the situation, and now suspicious of his motives, Walker subsequently developed enough evidence against the agent to have him dismissed. The commissioner subsequently selected Dr. J. W. Daniels, an Episcopal agent posted in Minnesota, to replace Wham. Walker's dealings with Spotted Tail convinced the commissioner that the chief was thoroughly reliable and that the government should make every reasonable concession to reinforce its relationship with him. Walker further observed that Spotted Tail's influence seemed to be growing among the Indians, while Red Cloud's was declining. In any event, Red Cloud remained in the unceded territory north of the North Platte.

Agent Daniels did not arrive at Red Cloud Agency until February 1, 1872. There he found a mixed group of various Sioux bands because Spotted Tail and his Brule's were

still in southwestern Nebraska and most of the Oglalas were with Red Cloud on the Powder. Daniels, joined by Colonel Smith, took the train to North Platte, then rode overland to Spotted Tail's village on Frenchman's Fork to confer with the chief. From everything Daniels could determine, Spotted Tail's people had not been involved in any depredations during their stay on the Republican, yet it was time for them to move to White River. The Brule's stalled in the usual fashion by saying they needed more time to decide, but Daniels cut the discussion short, telling them that if they did not designate their preference for a site by early spring, the government would do it for them.

Smith's intimacy with the Indians enabled him to recognize the developing intra-tribal jealousies among the Sioux. They were, in fact, becoming so pronounced that he thought the most practical solution was to establish separate agencies for the Brules and Oglalas, and perhaps even a third one for other bands.[19]

Perhaps sensing some loss in influence, and with the confidence that he could continue to manipulate the whites through his tactics of stalling, deferring decisions, and making only token concessions, Red Cloud appeared with about thirty lodges at Fort Laramie on March 12. He announced that he was there to meet with the new agent. Knowing full well that Daniels was not present, it was Red Cloud's way of showing that he refused to recognize any agency that was not at Fort Laramie. Smith should have

[19] Smith to Francis A. Walker, March 9, 1872, L S, Fort Laramie.

established a precedent by directing him to the agency, but keeping in mind the Peace Policy, he was hesitant to call the chief's bluff. Accordingly, Daniels made the trip to Fort Laramie to see what was on the chief's mind. His previous statements notwithstanding, Red Cloud had again decided that he wanted his annuities to be delivered to the post, and he wanted the agency to be moved upstream to be more convenient. It was the all-too-familiar diatribe that the government was weary of hearing. Smith and Daniels reminded him that he had not come back with a council decision, therefore the agency had been placed according to the wishes of the chiefs present at that time. There was nothing more they could do.[20]

On the nineteenth, Daniels alerted Smith that young warriors who had come down with Red Cloud were making trouble at the agency. They had insulted and threatened the employees, and had broken windows in the buildings. Smith immediately put Captain Elijah R. Smith and his company of the Second Cavalry on the road toward the agency. Smith took along a mountain howitzer as additional persuasion. Two days later the agent reported, "The presence of Captain Wells and Company have had a salutary effect, and all is quiet now at the agency."[21]

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[20] Smith to Adjutant General, U. S. A., March 21, 1872, ibid.

[21] Ibid.

The agency may have been quiet enough, but it was difficult to ignore the resurgence of depredations coincident with the presence of Red Cloud's band. The body of Levy Powell, bearing three bullet wounds and a crushed skull, was discovered lying in Fish Creek, a tributary of the North Laramie, on the eighteenth. Powell had driven a herd of Texas cattle to the region the previous fall, but had decided to sit out winter near Laramie Peak before moving on to Montana in the spring. Indian raiders also attacked two herders at Three Mile Ranch, west of the Fort Laramie, on the afternoon of the twenty-first and a party of a dozen warriors fired on cowboys in Chugwater Valley the next day, wounding one man. Confronted by Smith about these incidents, Red Cloud promised to return to Sod Agency in an attempt to identify Powell's killers. Whatever his intentions may have been at the time he spoke with Smith, Red Cloud turned his visit into a public display of defiance by drawing rations for his people, "and to carry his point had them brought on south side of the Platte for distribution to his followers." Smith, angered with the attacks and Red Cloud's vacillating behavior, recommended to Brigadier General Edward O. C. Ord, who had replaced Auger as commander of the Department of the Platte, that the army assert its power by curtailing supplies to the Indians. "I deem it my duty to inform you," he wrote to Ord, "that the temper of many of the Indians is decidedly hostile and that no time should be lost in preparing for any emergency." [22]

[22] Ibid.; Smith to A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, March 23, 1872, LS, Fort Laramie.

Yet, it had become obvious even to Red Cloud that having the agency so near the routes of travel was not a good thing. As the officials had warned him long before, it put his people in immediate contact with the growing throng of disreputable whites that were only too willing to sell whiskey to Indians as well as soldiers. Recent experience had demonstrated that the army was largely impotent in curtailing the burgeoning liquor traffic spawned in Cheyenne and Laramie City.[23] Moreover, decades of human presence in the Platte Valley had practically stripped it of all mature timber, consequently finding adequate quantities of firewood was becoming a problem. In a meeting held at the agency on April 10, Red Cloud and the other chiefs reached a consensus that some of the headmen would accompany Agent Daniels to White River to find a suitable place for the permanent agency. Red Cloud maintained an uncharacteristic silence on this occasion, but American Horse and three other chiefs attempted to coerce Smith into making some sort of concession, otherwise they would not be able to convince their young men to go. Smith did not back down, however, and to reinforce his point, he told them curtly that their warriors had better get back on the north side of the Platte, or troops would punish

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[23] Three known whiskey vendors operating in the area were "Curley Jim" Converse, "Jack Nasty Jim" Wright, and Charles Allen. However, the Indians refused to testify against these men for fear of losing their source of liquor. Compounding the problems and further confusing the situation, these whites often stole Indian stock, whereupon the Indians would take revenge on whites other than their liquor suppliers. Smith to A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, February 12, 1874, ibid.

them.[24] A few weeks later, several of the headmen accompanied Daniels to White River to survey the area, but Red Cloud was not among them. The reason for his earlier silence had become apparent soon thereafter when he arranged yet another trip to Washington, probably as much to bolster a sagging influence among his own people as to wring further concessions from the government at a level he considered appropriate to his stature.

The area remained relatively quiet all that summer, even though the Sioux continued to put off making any decision about the agency. Small bands continued to spurn the treaty by frequenting the region south of the Platte, sometimes to graze their horses, other times to create mischief. Ord had previously designated a temporary "District of the Black Hills" embracing both Forts Laramie and Fetterman to better coordinate patrols. Smith, as the senior officer, became commander over the new district. The range of foothills between the North Platte and Laramie Peak was always a haven for

[24] Smith to A. G., U. S. A., April 13, 1872, ibid.; John Richard, Jr. son of John Baptiste Richard of Platte Bridge fame and sometimes interpreter at Fort Laramie, was killed in a domestic dispute about this time. It was well known that Richard played both sides of white-Indian heritage to his best advantage. He was indicted for wantonly murdering a Second Cavalryman at Fort Fetterman early in 1870, but was never tried for the crime. When the victim's company was transferred to Fort Laramie two years later, Richard avoided going to the fort, knowing the man's comrades were out to avenge his death. Richard apparently took up temporary residence with an infantry detachment camped about ten miles above Sod Agency as a safeguard during the trouble that spring. In a nearby Indian camp, he became embroiled in an argument with a Sioux over two girls Richard had purportedly lived with. It ended with Richard shooting the man to death with his Winchester. A friend of the slain man then jumped into the lodge and stabbed Richard to death. He was buried adjacent to the military cemetery at Fort Laramie, near where the Janis brothers were later interred. John Hunton interview, Camp Papers, Lilly Library, typescript copy at Little Bighorn Battlefield, pp. 258-60; Upon learning of Richard's death, no less a figure than Robert Campbell wrote to his friend Seth Ward: "We have yours of 16th inst. announcing the death of our favorite Richard. The sad news was not unexpected – yet we very sincerely deplore the loss of one, who while a boy endeared himself to us, and to all that knew him." Campbell to Ward, April 19, 1872, Seth E. Ward Papers, Denver Public Library.

lurking war parties, therefore Smith directed Lieutenant Colonel George A. Woodward at the sister post to station a company of cavalry on the Laramie near the crossing of the Cheyenne Road. The unit was to continually scout east and north, all the way to Bridger's Ferry, and to intercept any Indians attempting to pass through the region.[25] Late in the season, army hay contractors complained to the acting commander of the fort that young warriors were becoming increasingly aggressive in their intrusions on the grasslands south of the river. Troops sent to expel them confronted the warriors in a tense standoff, broken only by Red Cloud's intervention.[26]

Only in October was there any other serious confrontation. Smith had earlier withdrawn his cavalry from the agency, but when one of the whiskey traders killed an Indian, the tribesmen again threatened the agent and his men. Responding to Daniels' urgent plea for help, two companies of cavalry marched to the agency, where they found the employees barricaded inside one of the buildings. The Sioux congregated about were obviously agitated, but tensions soon subsided. One company returned to the post, while the other went into camp near the agency as a safeguard against further trouble.[27]

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[25] Smith to Lieutenant Colonel George A. Woodward, May 8, 1872, L S, Fort Laramie.

[26] Smith to Sec. of War, October 5, 1872, ibid.

[27] Annual Report of the Secretary of War, *House Executive Documents*, Doc. 1, Pt. 2, 42nd Cong., 3d Sess., (Washington, D. C.: 1872), pp. 51-53.

Although winter passed quietly enough along the Platte, the Indian situation deteriorated into complete disarray politically. The Red Cloud faction still waffled over exactly where to place the agency, or whether to submit to an agency at all. Other elements of the Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes began withdrawing their former allegiance to Red Cloud as it became increasingly apparent to some that he was giving in to the whites, perhaps for his own aggrandizement. In March, a sizeable number of Sioux were seen going south in the vicinity of North Platte, Nebraska. They were assumed to be a war party, but later intelligence indicated the Indians were Spotted Tail and his men going south to hunt. When Sioux were reported on the river between Forts Laramie and Fetterman, Smith telegraphed his counterpart to send a cavalry detachment down the north side to work in concert with patrols from Fort Laramie that would operate along the south bank as far as Elk Horn Creek. No Indians were encountered; nevertheless, Smith remained uneasy and watchful all summer as the hostiles focused most of their attention on the expedition escorting the Northern Pacific Railroad survey crew to the Yellowstone. With Red Cloud and Spotted Tail inclined to take the white man's road, the recalcitrant factions found new leadership in a figure destined to become a household word in America—Sitting Bull.[28]

[28] Smith to Ruggles, March 7, 1873, LS, Fort Laramie; Smith to Ruggles, March 25, 1873, ibid.; Smith to Lieutenant Colonel Cuvier Grover, March 25, 1873, ibid.; Smith to Ruggles, April 12, 1873, ibid.

Agent Daniels, meanwhile, had expended his patience in coercing the Sioux—as well as Northern Cheyenne and Arapaho bands that had been accorded treaty privileges--to relocate on White River. He telegraphed the commissioner of Indian Affairs early in August 1873 that the agency was at last being moved to the new site, and with that accomplished, he was tendering his resignation. His replacement, Dr. John J. Saville, an Episcopal Church appointee then in charge of the Sisseton agency in Minnesota, arrived in Cheyenne on the eighth and went directly to the new agency. There, on a low plateau at the confluence of Soldier Creek and White River, he found 7,000 – 8,000 Indians gathered, along with "the commissary stores and building material of the agency . . . piled on the ground, covered with paulins." As soon as the necessary property transfers were signed, Daniels and his clerk made a hasty departure for Cheyenne.[29]

Saville found his charges in a foul mood, complaining that the guns and horses that had been promised in return for their consent to move the agency had not been delivered. He did his best to placate them, but the situation worsened late in September when the arrival of the annuity goods attracted bands of Ukpapas, Minneconjous, Sans Arcs, and Oglalas that had not been party to the treaty. The arrival of these bands more than doubled the number for which Saville had rations. Of his dilemma, he wrote:

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[29] *ARCIA*, 1874, p. 251;

> Many of these people had never been to an agency before, and were exceedingly vicious and insolent. They made unreasonable demands for food, and supplemented their demands with threats. They resisted every effort to count them, and as their statements of their number were frequently exaggerated, it became necessary to arbitrarily reduce their rations . . . This caused a constant contention with them."[30]

Saville labored through the winter to convince the Indians of the necessity for taking an accurate census, often risking his own life in the effort. Finally, late in January, the bands that had lived under the agency system for some time agreed with his reasoning that rations could only be determined by an accurate census. Rejecting the plan, the hostiles immediately broke up into war parties, and rode south to prey on any whites they might find.

Indeed, the region immediately south of the unceded hunting lands had become an increasingly tempting target for raids with each passing year. The combination of the 1868 treaty, ostensibly confining the Indians beyond the North Platte, and the penetration of the railroad through Wyoming, had attracted an influx of cattlemen to the vast grasslands in the watershed of Laramie Peak. The commissioner of the General Land Office had, in fact, extolled the virtues of that area in his annual report that same year.

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[30] Ibid.

Before long, Denver banks were lending huge sums for the purchase of Texas cattle to stock the ranges paralleling the railroad both east and west of Cheyenne. Towns like Cheyenne and Laramie, as well as Sidney, Nebraska, were destined to serve as shipping points for cattle bound for eastern markets.

By the early 1870s, the corridor along Chugwater Valley, already the common route of travel from Denver to Forts Laramie and Fetterman, had become a magnet for ranchmen because of its lush grazing and reliable water sources. Its proximity to the lines of communication, especially the Union Pacific Railroad, and the availability of supplies at the army posts represented significant advantages. Not to be overlooked in those unsettled times was the protection the military afforded such operations. The area east and north of Laramie Peak boasted some forty ranches by 1871, most of them small concerns running a few hundred head of cattle, though two claimed to be grazing 9,000 and 12,000 head, respectively.[31] Among those settling in that area was none other than John "Portugee" Phillips, Carrington's messenger for the perilous ride from Fort Phil Kearny, who had since married and settled on the Chugwater. Phillips had given up prospecting in favor of more promising ventures as a government contractor, small rancher, and operator of one of the "road ranches" that marked the way to Cheyenne.

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[31] Edward Everett Dale, *The Range Cattle Industry: Ranching on the Great Plains from 1865 to 1925*, (Norman: 1960), pp. 65, 68-69; Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior, *House Executive Documents*, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., (Washington D. C.: 1871), pp. 294-95.

Jules Ecoffey, Adolf Cuny, and Louis Richard, all formerly linked with the Indian trade (not to mention the whiskey business), adapted to changing times by combining their resources in a legitimate cattle ranch on the Laramie in 1871. Richard apparently tended the cattle ranch, while the other two partners generated working capital at the Three Mile "hog" ranch just upstream from Fort Laramie. F. M. Phillips, who had purchased the late Levy Powell's large herd, established a ranch farther up the Laramie at the mouth of Chugwater Creek. And, when the corrupt spoils system of the Grant administration ousted Seth Ward from his long sutlership at the fort that year, his faithful manager, William Bullock, turned to cattle ranching in partnership with Ben Mills. Apparently, Mills, who had profited as an Indian trader, shared with Bullock a common vision of the future potential of the region because they combined their resources to purchase cattle soon after the treaty had been signed. Bullock's place lay on the north side of the Laramie, below the Phillips Ranch. Other hardy souls also brought cattle to the ranges along Sybille and Horseshoe Creeks.[32]

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[32] Hunton, "Reminiscences," pp. 262-63; Robert A. Murray, "The John 'Portugee' Phillips Legends, A Study in Wyoming Folklore," *Annals of Wyoming*, (April 1968), pp. 48-49; Robert A. Murray (ed.), *Fort Laramie: Visions of a Grand Old Post*, (Fort Collins, Colo.: 1974), pp. 40, 52 n.85; J. W. Vaughn, "The Fort Laramie Hog Ranches," *The Westerners New York Posse Brand Book*, (New York: 1966), p. 40; General Augur renewed Ward's license on August 2, 1867, but it was revoked in favor of J. S. McCormick's application on May 20, 1871. McCormick, incidentally, was fired from the position December 28, 1871 on the basis of Colonel John E. Smith's charges of "drunkenness and disorderly conduct." John S. Collins was appointed in his stead on same date. Register of Post Traders, ACP Branch, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

A series of attacks began in the vicinity of Fort Laramie on January 24, 1874 when tribesmen first pounced on Callahan's ranch, nine miles up the North Platte, taking several animals. Then, showing no partiality for their mixed-blood relatives, they stole some cattle from Louis Richard as they passed through the Laramie Valley. The renegades also swept through Antoine Renaud's camp the same day, getting away with four horses and two mules. Richard and two companions later caught up with the thieves and convinced them to surrender the stock. The Sioux claimed that since they were not getting the food promised to them, they would take it from the whites.

A few days later, a party of soldiers out hunting exchanged fire with four warriors, but no one on either side was hit. Raiders also ran off several animals from a small ranch on Cottonwood Creek. Caught aware by the suddenness of these depredations, Colonel Smith requested that the Indian agent be compelled to report Indian movements before they reached the settled areas, and that military officers needed to be apprised of current Indian policy in order to take appropriate action. It was the usual frustrating lack of coordination between the civilian and military branches of government. Having no other recourse, Smith prepared to send out cavalry patrols in a belated attempt to head off some of the war parties rampaging through the country.

The raids turned deadly early in February when the remaining hostiles at Red Cloud Agency rebelled. They murdered the clerk, Frank Appleton, on the eighth and

threatened to destroy the agency itself. Only intervention by more stable Oglala and Brule factions prevented them from doing so.

While the majority of the hostiles moved back toward Powder River, some again crossed the North Platte, probably hoping to steal horses from the ranches before rejoining their kinsmen. Unaware of any immediate danger, a trainload of lumber left the sawmill at Laramie Peak on February 9, en route for the post. The heavily laden train pulled out of the lumber camp at about daylight, intending to reach the halfway point to the fort by nightfall. With it was one of the detachments from the two cavalry companies at Fort Laramie that had been routinely escorting the trains back and forth. First Lieutenant Levi H. Robinson and Private Frank Noll, Fourteenth Infantry, along with Second Cavalry Corporal James Coleman, all assigned to the train escort, delayed their departure by about two hours.[33] Robinson had decided to take a shortcut through the foothills in hopes of shooting a deer along the way, rather than accompany the train on the more circuitous wagon road along Cottonwood Creek.[34]

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[33] A native of Vermont, Levi H. Robinson served as a sergeant in the Tenth Vermont Volunteer Infantry from 1862 until February 1865. At that time, he secured a commission as a second lieutenant with the U. S. Colored Troops, and served with them until spring 1866 when he transferred to the Fourteenth Infantry. He was promoted to first lieutenant August 11, 1866. Heitman, *Historical Register*, I, p. 839.

[34] This account of the attack on Robinson's party is a synthesis of information contained in Smith to Ord, February 11, 1874, LS, Fort Laramie; Smith to A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, February 12, 1874, ibid.; Post Returns, January and February 1874, Fort Laramie; Return of Fourteenth U. S. Infantry, February 1874, Returns From Regular Army Infantry Regiments, 1821 – 1916, Records of the A. G. O., R. G. 94, microfilm copies at Main Library, University of Arizona; Hunton, "Reminiscences," pp. 267-68; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 11 and 12, 1874; James N. Connely, "An Old Campaigner of the 2nd and 4th U. S. Cavalry," *Winners of the West*, July 30, 1928; A questionable account, recalled from memory years later and perhaps embellished to elevate the roll of the witness, was told by Harry (Sam) Young, *Hard Knocks:*

A combined party of forty or more Minneconjou, Uncpapa, and Sans Arc Sioux, purportedly led by half-breed renegade Tousant Kensler, was moving southward when they spied the train about twelve miles from the lumber camp. Farther out, they spotted Robinson and his two companions moving across the snowy landscape. The warriors, concealed by intervening hills, circled in a wide arc to get ahead of Robinson's party and lay an ambush. When the soldiers were separated from the train by approximately five miles, the Indians confronted them and opened fire. Private Noll, dismounted at the time, returned fire, according to his own account, but Robinson and Coleman inexplicably abandoned him and made for the sawmill. Noll apparently stalled the warriors long enough to gain the summit of a small hill, from which he continued to fire. He later stated that he last saw his two companions bent low over their saddles with their horses at a dead run. Finding himself alone, Noll remounted and spurred his horse toward the safety of the train. Most of the warriors had gone off in pursuit of Robinson and Coleman, while only four or five had stayed behind to deal with Noll. The private managed to stay ahead of the tribesmen, until a bullet felled his horse just half a mile from the train. Hesitant to approach any closer, they allowed Noll escape on foot.

A Life Story of the Vanishing West, (Chicago: 1915), pp. 103-04; Presumably, Robinson should have been with the train escort, rather than taking a shortcut. He was likely unaware of the present Indian danger, since the outbreak had only recently manifested itself.

With Robinson and Coleman nowhere in sight, the train moved on to Cottonwood Spring, where it corralled for the night in anticipation of a dawn attack. Meantime, Private James N. Connely, mounted on the fleetest horse in the command, rode to Fort Laramie to summon reinforcements. He arrived there about 8:30 in the evening with news of the attack, whereupon Captain James Egan was dispatched with all the available troopers of Companies E and K.

Egan's command rode steadily through a windy, moonless night to arrive at the spring shortly before daylight on the tenth. He immediately went in search of Robinson and the corporal. Following the trail of the two riders, Egan found the bloody corpses about half a mile apart along the alternate road to the sawmill. Both were riddled with numerous gunshot wounds and had several arrows in them, yet neither body was mutilated. The corpses were taken back to the train to be transported to the post for burial. The train reached the fort the next afternoon without further trouble. Although Egan took up the trail of the attackers, he found they had crossed to the north side of the Platte well ahead of him. Prohibited from entering the Indian hunting territory, he had no alternative but turn back to the fort. Another company scouting down the North Platte from Fort Fetterman likewise came up empty-handed.

Circumstances at Red Cloud Agency were now beyond Saville's control. The Indians had seized complete control of his operation, and another wood party was

reportedly attacked near Fort Fetterman. During past months, the Indian Bureau had prevailed on the army to establish a military post near the agency, but Sheridan had declined to reduce his buffer of troops protecting the transportation corridor and the settled regions farther south. However, recent events in the vicinity of Fort Laramie caused him to reconsider. It was now clear that the army would have to mount an offensive in a belated effort to contain the outbreak. On February 18, Sheridan telegraphed Ord in Omaha directing him to use troops from Fort Laramie to restore order at Red Cloud as soon as possible. Upon receiving those instructions, Smith estimated that the army would face at least two thousand warriors. That in mind, he requested an additional eight companies of cavalry, and half a million rounds of ammunition, for the operation.[35]

Aware that matters could quickly get out of hand, Sheridan and an aide promptly boarded a train for "the front" to make a personal assessment of the situation. He was joined en route by Ord, who had meantime issued orders for a number of units at Fort D. A. Russell to assemble at Fort Laramie as the "Sioux Expedition." Sheridan and Ord, accompanying the vanguard of troops, arrived at the post on February 22 to confer with Smith. Demonstrating the benefits wrought by the railroad, just as General Sherman had

[35] Ordnance Sergeant Schnyder had only 54,000 rounds of rifle ammunition, and 16,000 of carbine, on hand. Smith to Ord, February 12, 1874, LS, Fort Laramie; Smith to Ord, February 14, 1874, ibid.

foreseen back in 1866, companies from Fort Sanders, Fort Fred Steele, Fort McPherson, and even as far as away as Omaha, along with their horses, were rapidly marshaled at Cheyenne. The column was augmented there with five companies of the Eighth Infantry and one of the Third Cavalry, making a total of approximately one thousand men ready to take the field within a matter of a few days. With the necessary supplies already on hand at Cheyenne Depot (Camp Carlin), and more readily obtainable from points east, the operation was a stark contrast to the days of '65 when Connor had struggled for months to field his army.

Marching by battalions up the road to Fort Laramie during freezing weather, the expedition went into camp near the post during the closing days of the month.[36] Agent Saville, notwithstanding wild newspaper reports that he had fled his post, offered encouraging news that all the hostiles were gone and that Red Cloud's Oglalas were now protecting the agency. The Cheyennes and Arapahoes who had been drawing rations there had also sent back runners to inform Saville that they had fled merely to avoid becoming involved, and they intended to return. Likewise, some of Spotted Tail's men, as a demonstration of their loyalty, had found and executed Appleton's murderer. They were now guarding their own agency, about thirty miles northeast, in the event any of the

[36] Post Returns, February 1874, Fort Laramie; Thomas R. Buecker, *Fort Robinson and the American West 1874 – 1899*, (Lincoln: 1999), pp. 11-12 (hereinafter cited as *Fort Robinson*); Gerald M. Adams, *The Post Near Cheyenne: A History of Fort D. A. Russell, 1867 – 1930*, (Boulder: 1989), pp. 51-52.

hostiles attempted to return. Despite those assurances, Smith had his cavalry intercept a large shipment of guns and ammunition bound for the Indians to fulfill one of Red Cloud's most ardent demands.[37]

As elsewhere in the West, civilian business interests were ever quick to seize upon and magnify any Indian threat, real or perceived. Local rancher and saloon proprietor Adolph Cuny exclaimed to the editor of the *Cheyenne Daily Leader* that "the Indians are red-hot—as bad as in 1865," though his alarm was probably motivated more by the profits to be made from a large influx of troops than from any fear of the Indians.[38] In fact, the farther one happened to be from the epicenter of the trouble, the less serious it appeared. The members of the Omaha Merchants Club soon concluded publicly that the depredations resulted from conditions peculiar to Red Cloud Agency and were not indicative of a general uprising. The distant *Chicago Tribune* offered an even more considered view.

> It is a strange, but stubborn fact, that the Territorial citizen has a peculiar knack of augmenting trivial matters; and, in anything relating to Indian affairs, he is sure to make the most of it, especially if he can gain anything by it . . . Next to a stolen horse, nothing rejoices the heart of a 'Sage-Brusher' like a breech-loading musket,

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[37] Smith to Ord, February 12 and 16, 1874, LS, Fort Laramie.

[38] *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, February 15, 1874.

> and, if he can only get ammunition with it, he is in the seventh heaven. There is nothing that he won't do to get one and while he could send East and buy the same kind for $15, he prefers to pay a deserter $75 for one.[39]

As an added precaution against false or inflammatory reporting, the army took possession of the telegraph line from Fort Laramie to Cheyenne. There would be no sensitive information "leaked" to the press, where educated mixed-bloods might read it and pass troops strengths and other vital military information to the hostiles.[40]

Smith divided the expedition into two columns for the march to White River. Major Eugene Baker, the same officer who had led the infamous and much publicized attack against a Piegan village on the Yellowstone in 1870, was delegated command of the cavalry. A veteran Eighth Infantry officer, Captain Henry M. Lazelle, would lead the infantry battalion. Smith sent along a Gatling gun as added muscle. His troops clad in overcoats, fur caps, and gauntlets, Baker broke camp on March 2, followed the next day by Lazelle's doughboys trudging northward following in the trail the horsemen had broken through wind-drifted snow.[41]

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[39] *Chicago Tribune*, March 13, 1874.

[40] *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, March 4, 1874; Buecker, *Fort Robinson*, p. 14.

[41] The troops followed the old Fort Laramie – Fort Pierre Trail, once recommended by the Quartermaster Department as an alternative supply route. It will be recalled that this was a segment of the longer trappers' trail from Taos, New Mexico to the Missouri. Author's note.

The appearance of troops had an immediate effect in tranquilizing the Indians. The northern Sioux still in the area hastily disappeared to join their relatives, while those with personal allegiance to Red Cloud and Spotted Tail sullenly viewed the blue-coated soldiers with uncertainty. Whatever their feelings, Agent Saville found the Indians suddenly most cooperative with his requests, including submitting to a census. Smith placed part of his command in proximity to the Oglalas, and took the remainder downstream to Spotted Tail's agency.

Two weeks after the army's arrival on White River, the Indian Bureau sent a four-man commission to investigate Sioux grievances, and to resolve the internal bickering that had immediately arisen between Saville and Smith. Again, it was the familiar dispute over whose authority was supreme, civilian or military. Whereas the agent was satisfied at having gained the Indians' cooperation, albeit at gunpoint, he attempted to employ the troops as his personal police force. Smith rejected Saville's attempts to exercise authority over him by continually impressing on the good churchman that the army was there only to protect life and property, not to carry out the policies of the Indian Bureau. In that, the commission failed. Although the members supported a continued presence by the army to prevent further outbreaks, differences between the two departments would have to be reconciled by the president. Incredibly, the sanctimonious Saville failed to give the army more than passing credit for its role in quelling the uprising. Ignoring the influence the

troops exerted by their very presence, not to mention they may have very well saved his life, he claimed whole credit for himself. "The excitement, however, soon subsided," he later wrote, "and I commenced a registration of the people . . . since this has been accomplished there had been little or no difficulty, as they readily comply with almost any request I make." He did concede, however, that "Indians have great respect for authority . . . ."[42]

The commissioners recommended that another separate agency for the northern Indians be established within the Great Sioux Reservation to segregate the malcontents from those presently inclined to abide by the treaty. That, at least, would reduce the possibility that hostile factions would continue to stir up trouble among the Platte River bands. Disappointing to military authorities was the commission's avoidance of relocating the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail Agencies somewhat farther north. The army had contended for some time that the sites selected actually lay within Nebraska, but the northern boundary of the state had not yet been surveyed to verify that claim. The Indian Bureau was just as convinced that the Sioux agencies were already situated north of the

[42] *ARCIA*, 1874, p. 251.

line, within the designated reservation. The official survey completed that summer was to prove the army correct.[43]

Nevertheless, Sheridan complied with the Interior secretary's request that the army maintain a strong presence at the agencies. In consideration of the season and the additional expense of moving a new garrison there, Ord simply cut orders on March 24 acknowledging the permanent transfer of some of the troops—four companies of infantry and one of cavalry--already on the ground. Whatever they had left behind at their former stations, including families, would be sent to them. Initially called "Camp at Red Cloud Agency," five days later Colonel Smith renamed it Camp Robinson, in honor of his recently killed lieutenant.[44] Forage was at a premium at that time of year, therefore Baker and the rest of the troops were sent back to Fort Russell to reduce expenses. Sheridan's decisive response with a display of overwhelming force had narrowly averted another war. At last, Red Cloud and Spotted Tail had been convinced to stay at their agencies, and the army was there to make certain they did.

[43] The agencies would remain on White River, much to the displeasure of Nebraska citizens and politicians, until the Sioux were forced to move to a new location on the Missouri in October 1877. Thus, compliance with the 1868 treaty was finally achieved. Buecker, *Fort Robinson*, pp. 118-20.

[44] A more detailed account of initial activities at the agencies, the conflicts between Smith and Saville, and the accomplishments of the special Indian commission is found in ibid., pp. 14-19.

Chapter 16

"As Old and Dirty As It Is Ancient"

By the mid-1870s, Fort Laramie had grown to sizeable proportions, but its age and a long succession of post commanders were reflected in its rambling amalgamation of buildings. A visitor to the post in 1874 remarked:

> It is an old post . . . It is as old and dirty as it is ancient, piles of refuse matter are found everywhere, and in warm weather aromatic savors are inhaled everywhere. It is not only old, dirty, and sweet-scented, but very peculiarly built. There are wooden houses, and adobe houses, and concrete houses. There are new pretentious looking houses, and good, substantial looking houses, and tumbledown, dilapidated looking houses . . . I suppose the greatest combination of

> the grotesque, the filthy, and the ill-arranged in the department is here at Fort Laramie. They talk of cutting a canal through it. It would be well to run both rivers, the Laramie and the Platte, over its site and wash the whole mess from the plains.[1]

He might have also mentioned, as Post Surgeon Hartsuff noted in an inspection report, that the aromas of the post were made all the more pungent by "the very offensive condition of the Company Sinks [toilets], besides being liable to produce disease are disgusting to all who are brought into proximity to the same."[2]

In the army's defense, no one in the service in 1849 ever imagined that Fort Laramie would still be occupied by troops a quarter century later. At that time, the low plateau above the river appeared to be more than adequate to accommodate foreseeable military needs, and Fort John provided a ready-made facility that could be supplemented with a few additional buildings. However, changing needs during following years resulted in an evolutionary process that continued throughout the entire military era. By the third decade of the fort's military occupancy, nearly fifty buildings crowded the flood plain and the two terraces above the Laramie River. Added to those were several dozen

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[1] *Omaha Weekly Herald*, October 20, 1874.

[2] Major Albert A. Hartsuff to Post Adjutant, June 30, 1875, Letters Received, Fort Laramie, Records of U. S. Army Continental Commands 1821 - 1920, Record Group 393, National Archives, (hereinafter cited as LR, Fort Laramie). Copy in vertical file, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

privies, chicken coops, officer's stables, sheds, fences, and other minor structures, causing the post to appear more like a frontier village than a military installation.

"Old Bedlam," constructed during the first year of the army's occupancy, still presided over the parade ground, though a coat of dark red paint diminished its former splendor. On its flanks were the more modest adobe officers' houses built later in that first decade, but now suffering from the ravages of time and exposure to the elements. With the exception of the stone magazine, most of the other early buildings had disappeared from the perimeter of the parade ground. In their places stood the substantial frame and adobe infantry barracks, along with the stone guardhouse erected by the regulars after the war. A frame two-story officer's quarters, designed for the post commander, but converted at the last moment to house two families, stood at the south end near the site of old Fort John. Next to that, alongside the river, was the frame headquarters and on the other was the adobe-lined frame commanding officer's quarters where some of the meetings with Red Cloud had been hosted. An assortment of quartermaster and commissary storehouses, mechanics' shops, and rude quarters for laundresses and other civilian employees were arrayed on the low plain east of the parade. A substantial wagon bridge, constructed by the army in the early part of the decade, spanned the Laramie just above the adobe quartermaster corral. Ward's old toll

bridge, in use from 1853, had been salvaged by William Bullock in 1871 and the planking used to construct his ranch buildings a few miles upstream.[3]

By the time John S. Collins acquired the license as post trader, the original adobe store had been expanded by several frame, stone and log additions. The store itself formed the south corner of a rectangular complex comprising a post office, soldiers' billiard room, storage areas, and a yard, or corral, in back with wagon sheds and repair shops around its perimeter. A separate officers' clubroom, constructed during the war, stood a few feet southwest of the store.[4]

The larger garrison, averaging five companies of infantry and two to six companies of cavalry by the mid-'70s, had demanded that more barracks be constructed. To meet that need, an additional frame quarters for cavalry was built just across the Laramie River early in the decade, while an imposing two-story concrete barracks was erected a few yards northeast of the sutler's residence. The old hospital, standing behind the gingerbread sutler's cottage, was converted to other uses after a new concrete hospital and steward's quarters were completed atop the plateau on the former site of the post

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[3] John Hunton, "Reminiscences," *Annals of Wyoming*, (January 1930), p. 263; Merrill J. Mattes, "The Historic Approaches to Fort Laramie,"typescript, National Park Service, 1947, pp. 42, 48-49; The skeletal remnants of "the bridge on the old California trail" were destroyed by a flood in June 1884. *Army & Navy Journal*, June 4, 1884, p. **??**.

[4] Merrill J. Mattes, "The Sutler's Store at Fort Laramie," *Visions of a Grand Old Post*, (Fort Collins, Colo.: 1974), pp. 20-52 (hereinafter cited as *Visions*) presents a useful chronology of the trader's complex.

cemetery. That had caused the burial ground to be moved a few hundred yards farther north.

Fort Laramie was indeed not a pretty place at that time. Another visitor, Laura Winthrop Johnson, one of a party of half a dozen ladies out on a lark that summer, was as taken aback by its desolation as she was the face of its oldest resident, Ordnance Sergeant Schnyder.

> No grass, no gardens, no irrigation, no vegetables nor anything green is here. One good sized cottonwood, perhaps coeval with the post, seemed as much of a veteran as the old artilleryman, a character always pointed out to strangers, who has lived at the post ever since it was a post, and is distinguished as the ugliest man there . . . . Another distinguished character is the pet elk . . . who abuses his privileges by walking into houses and eating up hats, shoes, window-curtains, toys—anything to satisfy his voracious appetite.[5]

What seemed an inhospitable region to some, held rich agricultural potential for others. Years earlier, Post Quartermaster Dandy had been one of the first to point up the feasibility of supplying water to the garrison, and to vegetable gardens, by diverting it

[5] Laura Winthrop Johnson, "Eight Hundred Miles in an Ambulance," *Lippincott's Magazine*, (June 1875), p. 693.

from the Laramie. When *London Field* correspondent E. A. Curely visited the post in 1874, he observed that despite the prevailing arid conditions,

> . . . there is a large amount of fine valley land, which can be brought under cultivation at a very moderate expense. A dozen small farmers with L500 each could make themselves snug little fortunes in a very short time by settling here, irrigating, and raising vegetables, cereals, and fruit. The local market at the fort, the ranches, etc, would take at high prices all they could raise for quite a number of years. Other settlers coming in would also require supplies for one year or more, and finally a railroad towards Montana now projected, or the opening of mines, or both, would come in to prevent a possible glut of the market.[6]

It was to be some time yet before homesteaders would seek lands in southeastern Wyoming, but find it they would, and eventually Curely's prophecy would be realized.

The new army bridge over the Laramie was yet another sign that the axis of travel and development had shifted from east-west to south-north. Ward's bridge, just above the confluence, was badly decayed by the time Bullock razed it, and he knew it had outlived its usefulness as a toll bridge. While it had been ideally situated to serve the traffic on the old Oregon Trail, it was too far off the beaten path to Cheyenne. For the first few years

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[6] Excerpts taken from *The Territory of Wyoming: Soil, Climate, Resources, Etc.* (Laramie: 1874). Typescript in Agnes W. Spring Papers, Norlin Library, University of Colorado.

after the establishment of a rail connection at Cheyenne, only military traffic—troops, military mail, and government supply trains--plied the road to Fort Russell and the territorial capital. It was only logical that a bridge over the Laramie should directly access the fort.

During his brief visit to the post in February, Sheridan's keen military eye had perceived the need for another bridge at Fort Laramie—one spanning the Platte. It was obvious that with the Sioux agencies established on White River, Cheyenne would be the most convenient and economical supply point. Troops, also, would be at the agencies for some time to come, perhaps permanently. The antiquated ferry at the crossing of the North Platte, having been in service continuously since the early 1850s, had to be replaced by a reliable, all-season means of getting men and supplies to the agencies. Sheridan broached this to the editor of the *Daily Leader* upon his return from Fort Laramie. It was just the support needed for an idea that had already caught fire among town leaders, who feared that Sidney, Nebraska might usurp Cheyenne as the Union Pacific supply terminus for the Black Hills. A bridge over the Platte at Fort Laramie would secure the Cheyenne Road as the primary route. Accordingly, territorial delegate W. R. Steele introduced a bill in Congress to provide an appropriation of $15,000 for that purpose. When Secretary of War William W. Belknap and his subordinate generals strongly supported the bill, Congress passed it almost without challenge on June 23.

Belknap directed Sheridan to have the Quartermaster Department prepare plans and estimates immediately.

In his desire to develop the connection with the Union Pacific, Sheridan was motivated by broader strategic considerations than he revealed to the press. For the past few years, in fact, he had been pressing Sherman and Grant for permission to ring the Sioux reservation with military posts to serve as a buffer against further outbreaks, and to prevent whites from encroaching on Indian lands. The attacks on the Northern Pacific Railroad crews, coupled with those south of the Platte, had done much to strengthen his argument that the Indians needed to be tightly confined to their assigned areas so that the development of the West could continue unimpeded. The so-called "unceded lands," as the government knew from the outset, were hardly of any importance because the plan had always been to confine the Sioux and Cheyennes on a reservation where they would necessarily be dependent on the Indian Bureau for their subsistence. Continuing depredations during the years since the treaty only proved the need to abolish the hunting territory once and for all. Sheridan wanted to do anything within his power to encourage settlement of the Bighorn and Powder River country, thereby curtailing its use by the Indians and achieving the army's goal of Indian concentration.

By 1874, he had several new stations in place, including Fort Abraham Lincoln on the Missouri north of the reservation, Forts Randall and Sully on the east, and Camp

Robinson on the southern border. Older posts like Forts Laramie and Fetterman now formed an outer line of defense, but were disadvantaged by their distance from the reservation. To fulfill his plan, Sheridan wanted to establish two forts in the Yellowstone country, northwest of the reservation, and another near the Black Hills "to better control the Indians making these raids toward the south . . . so that by holding an interior point in the heart of the Indian country we could threaten the villages and stock of the Indians, if they made raids on our settlements."[7]

Having secured the blessings of the Grant administration in fall 1873 to conduct a reconnaissance of the Black Hills, Sheridan looked to Fort Laramie as the logical base for such an operation, since it lay only about a hundred miles away. However, after his visit to the post in February, he second-guessed himself, considering the situation at Red Cloud Agency too volatile at the time. Instead, he selected Fort Abraham Lincoln, at

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[7] Annual Report of the Secretary of War, *House Executive Documents*, 43rd Cong., 2d Sess., (Washington, D. C.: 1874), p. 24 (hereafter cited as Sheridan report); Sheridan's purpose in establishing forts in eastern Montana Territory was three-fold. They would offer protection to the Northern Pacific Railroad as soon as construction resumed in the wake of the Panic of 1873, and they would bar the northern Sioux from hunting in the last great buffalo range. Additionally, they would segregate the Sioux from the Crows and other traditional northern enemies. One might speculate that had Sheridan been granted permission to build those posts early-on, the Great Sioux War of 1876 might never have happened. Certainly, conditions would have been different because the army would not have had to launch the several over-extended columns sent to penetrate the Sioux stronghold during in spring, summer, and fall 1876. Only after Crook's repulse on the Rosebud and the Custer disaster at Little Bighorn did the army establish those posts. The year 1877 saw three forts established to guard the western side of the Sioux reservation, Fort Keogh on the Yellowstone at the mouth of Tongue River, Fort Custer at the confluence of the Bighorn and Little Bighorn, and Fort McKinney at the foot of the Bighorn Mountains, near the site of old Fort Reno. Sheridan would also be granted his wish to place a fort at the Black Hills, Fort Meade, in 1878. Paul A. Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and His Army*, (Lincoln: 1986), pp. 289-91; Jerome A. Greene, *Yellowstone Command: Colonel Nelson A. Miles and the Great Sioux War 1876-1877*, (Lincoln: 1991), pp. 5-8.

three times that distance, because of the presence of the Seventh Cavalry—and Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer, proclaimed by Sheridan as "especially well suited for such an undertaking."[8]

The summer's expedition produced more than military intelligence. In addition to the geologists and cartographers accompanying Custer, two miners also went along. Rumors of gold had filtered out of that region for many years and the 1874 reconnaissance confirmed its presence in paying quantities. Although Sheridan played down the report, someone--perhaps Custer himself—claimed that one could simply pluck nuggets from the grass roots. When that news reached the public in late summer, a new rush of prospectors immediately descended on the area.[9] This time not even the lateness of the season delayed them, as it would have in the years of the overland trails. They could now take the train, from either east or west, or make the short trip up from Denver, and get fitted out in Cheyenne. Many of those traveling from eastern towns disembarked

[8] The legality of Custer's entry into the Black Hills has often been questioned and just as often has been attributed to a whim of Custer's own discretion, which it clearly was not. The expedition was conceived by Sheridan, and approved by higher authority in accordance with Article 2 of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. As noted here, Custer, with his uncanny luck, just happened to be in the right place at the right time to be assigned command of the expedition. Sheridan report, p. 24.

[9] Custer dispatched his trusted scout, Charlie Reynolds, to carry the mail and his message revealing the presence of gold in the Black Hills. Custer left his base camp on French Creek on August 3 and proceeded south with five companies of the Seventh Cavalry to explore the south branch of the Cheyenne River. Reynolds accompanied the troops for two days, then struck out on his own on the evening of the fourth to continue the ninety-mile journey to Fort Laramie. A soldier noted that Reynolds applied "boots" to his horse's hooves to muffle the sound and that he rode only at night until he was three-days' ride from the fort. John M. Carroll and Lawrence A. Frost (ed.), *Private Theodore Ewert's Diary of the Black Hills Expedition of 1874*, (Piscataway, New Jersey: 1976), pp. 55-56; Bruce R. Liddic and Paul Harbaugh, *Custer & Company: Walter Camp's Notes on the Custer Fight*, (Lincoln: 1995), p. 60;

the train at Sidney, taking an alternate route promoted by businessmen there as shorter and more direct. Tent camps began springing up throughout the Hills as prospectors began searching every stream and canyon for easy riches.

More urgent than ever was the need for a bridge across the North Platte at Fort Laramie. Having received fifteen bids for the project, Department of the Platte Quartermaster Daniel H. Rucker recommended the one submitted by the King Iron Bridge Company of Cleveland, Ohio. The company promised to supply all of the materials necessary for a prefabricated three-span bridge at a cost of $10,500.00. The proposal wound its way through the army hierarchy and was finally approved by the War Department on November 12. The bridge materials arrived in Cheyenne by rail early in 1875, though construction was not completed until December, and the bridge was not approved for public use until February 1876.[10]

It seemed that suddenly everyone was interested in the Black Hills once the floodgates opened, the 1868 treaty notwithstanding. Professor Othniel C. March, a pioneer Yale University paleontologist, expressed scientific curiosity in the region. Custer was still in the Hills when Colonel T. H. Stanton informed his friend Marsh that in the course of traveling to Camp Robinson as paymaster, he had seen abundant evidence

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[10] The complete story of the army iron bridge is related in John D. McDermott, "Fort Laramie's Iron Bridge," *Visions,* pp. 133-40; Primary materials are found in Letters, Report and Graphic Materials Received, Department of the Platte Records, Records of the Topographical Engineer Departments, Records of the Corps of Engineers (Chicago Dist.), R. G. 77, National Archives, Chicago.

of fossils and suggested he investigate. Marsh was occupied with other business at the time, but applied to General Sherman for an army escort that fall. Marsh and his fellow scientists arrived at Fort Laramie in early November, where they were greeted by Stanton and Post Commander Luther P. Bradley, lieutenant colonel of the Ninth Infantry. Bradley assigned Captain Andrew Burt to command the escort, a combined force of infantry and cavalry. When the expedition paused at Red Cloud Agency to secure what Burt and Marsh were confident would be perfunctory permission to enter the reservation, the Oglalas saw no reason for whites to go fossil hunting on their lands. With negotiations at a sudden impasse, the troops made camp for the night while Marsh and Burt discussed what to do. In an ill-advised move, Burt decided to slip his men out of camp that night and proceed north before the Indians realized where they had gone. The ploy was successful, though the Sioux quickly caught up and kept the expedition under close surveillance. That they did not attack was a high tribute to Red Cloud's newfound forbearance. Marsh did show his gratitude to the chief by meeting with him on the way back to Fort Laramie and documenting Sioux grievances about the quality of rations being issued to them. Marsh promised to convey them to influential friends in Washington, and indeed he did.[11]

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[11] Merrill J. Mattes, *Indians, Infants, and Infantry: Andrew and Elizabeth Burt on the Frontier*, (Denver, Colo.: 1960), pp. 193-97 (hereinafter cited as *Indians, Infants, and Infantry*); James C. Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*, (Lincoln:1965), p. 179.

The frenzy over the discovery of gold in the Black Hills quickly hit fever pitch. With the nation still in the throes of a financial depression, thousands of unemployed men, supplemented by the usual throng of footloose adventurers lured to the latest craze, saw the strike as their salvation. Mining "companies" formed for mutual support and protection in towns as far away as Yankton, Sioux City, Omaha, and even Chicago. Though his personal sentiment lay with the miners, Sheridan was compelled to uphold the treaty rights of the Sioux. In September 1874, he wired orders to Generals Ord and Terry, in the Departments of the Platte and Dakota, respectively, directing them to use every means at their disposal to halt the miners before they got to the Hills. If they had to burn the wagon trains and jail the leaders to break up the parties, they were authorized to do so. Bradley subsequently sent out Captain Guy V. Henry with a detachment of the Third Cavalry to try to locate a group of miners rumored to be in the southern part of the range during December. Sub-zero temperatures and blinding snowstorms soon forced Henry to return empty handed. However, when Captain John Mix was ordered out on a similar mission the following March, he finally found and arrested the men. The members of the so-called Gordon party were marched back to Fort Laramie before being released, with a stern warning not to return.

During the intervening months, public debate ensued over whether or not Custer had really found gold in the region. The chief geologist with the expedition later denied

its existence, as did Samuel D. Hinman, a missionary serving the Sioux. Grant, already plotting a strategy to appropriate the riches of the Black Hills as a solution to the nation's financial woes, demanded confirmation. To that end, he instructed the secretary of the interior to form another official scientific expedition to settle the question. The party would comprise a number of qualified geologists, topographers, astronomers, and experienced prospectors who could verify the quality of any deposits found.

The eighteen scientists, headed by geologist Walter P. Jenny, assembled at Fort Laramie for that purpose on May 25, 1875. The escort was composed of eight companies from the Second and Third Cavalry, and two companies of the Ninth Infantry, a total of four hundred men commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Richard I. Dodge. The new iron bridge not yet completed, Dodge was compelled to cross his command, and its seventy-five wagons, over the North Platte using the old rope-drawn ferry barge. At length, the column formed on the north bank and was set to move, when it was discovered that one member was still back at the fort. Dodge was vexed to learn that the march had to be temporarily delayed until Horace P. Tuttle, a Cambridge astronomer, finished making celestial calculations of latitude and longitude at the flag staff.

Jenny and Dodge remained out all summer, but in late June the officer sent a dispatch to Omaha substantiating that gold had been found, and in paying quantities. The five newspaper correspondents accompanying the expedition quickly filed their own

reports. Even as the column wound its way through the scenic beauty of the Black Hills, small parties of miners followed along at a discrete distance for protection and although Dodge knew of their presence, he was not inclined to arrest them.[12]

It seemed the Grant administration was unable to make up its mind whether to abide by the 1868 treaty, or bend to economic winds. Just a month prior to Dodge's departure from Fort Laramie, Brigadier General George Crook had replaced Ord as commander of the Department of the Platte. Upon reaching Cheyenne in July, Crook expressed his intent to issue a new directive to field commanders to expel any unauthorized persons found within the limits of the Sioux reservation. The *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, echoing local reaction, dared Crook to try to keep them out of the Black Hills. Mirroring his superiors, Crook's sentiments actually lay with the miners, but at the moment he was duty-bound to enforce the treaty. The general and his aides thus loaded themselves into ambulances and drove to Fort Laramie, where they stopped only briefly en route to the Black Hills. Arriving at his destination, Crook posted public notices evicting the miners, but tempered the order with a stage whispered suggestion that they assemble in public forums to secure their claims, in the now likely event the Black Hills

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[12] Dodge's own fascinating account of the Jenny Expedition is published as Wayne R. Kime (ed.), *The Black Hills Journals of Colonel Richard Irving Dodge*, (Norman: 1996); See also Sheridan's report in ARSW, *House Ex. Docs*., (Washington, D. C.: 1875), p. 71 and Mattes, *Indians, Infants, and Infantry*, pp. 200-02..

were opened to white settlement. A stream of disheartened miners began flowing back to Cheyenne during following weeks.

Grant attempted a new ploy to resolve his dilemma; the government would offer to buy the Black Hills from the Sioux. In September yet another special commission arrived at Fort Laramie on its way to negotiate with the Indians. Among the members were Senator William B. Allison, Brigadier General Alfred H. Terry, A. G. Lawrence, Congressman Abram Comingo of Missouri, Reverend S. D. Hinman, and W. H. Ashby from Beatrice, Nebraska. Once again, the government called upon one of the old former traders, G. P. Beauvais, then retired in St. Louis, to assist as an interpreter and one attuned to the Indian psyche. Post Trader John S. Collins went along as secretary. The Allison Commission and its cavalry escort arrived at Red Cloud Agency on September 4 to find several thousand Indians awaiting them. Notably absent, however, were the Minneconjous, Sans Arcs, and the Unkpapas. The powerful spiritual leader, Sitting Bull, who had steadfastly rejected the Fort Laramie Treaty, declared that he would never meet with the whites and would roam where he wished so long as game enough existed to support the people.

The meetings took place throughout September on White Clay Creek about eight miles east of the agency. The commissioners proposed that the government would either purchase the Black Hills outright for six million dollars, or would lease the mining rights

for an annual payment to the Sioux of four hundred thousand dollars. The chiefs present, including Red Cloud and Spotted Tail, showed little interest in striking a bargain, though Red Cloud and a few of the others indicated they might sell, if the Sioux were promised generous annuities for seven generations. Some witnesses believed that an agreement might have been reached, had the commissioners been more adept and had they paid appropriate homage to the influential Red Cloud. Others claimed there was misinterpretation of the amount being offered, and the Indians had no comprehension of the meaning of a million. In any event, after a few meetings, some of the Indian leaders declined to participate any further and the talks soon fizzled out.

Professor Jenny and his escort arrived back at Fort Laramie in mid-October. During the summer, he had dispelled any doubts about the presence of gold in the Hills by sending messengers back to the post bearing dispatches to be telegraphed to the States. During those several months of tramping through the heart of the Sioux reservation, Dodge claimed he opened 1,500 miles of trail passable by wagon, along with another 6,000 miles of horse trails. The miners, when they came, would welcome that.

Meantime, back in Washington, the administration was growing ever more desperate after the failure of the Allison Commission to peacefully negotiate control of the Black Hills. Something had to be done to ease the economic depression still gripping the nation, and satisfy the growing political pressure to open the region to mining. Grant

called a special meeting of selected officials at the White House on November 3. Present were Secretary of War Belknap, Generals Sherman and Crook, the newly-appointed secretary of the interior, Zachariah Chandler; and Assistant Secretary Benjamin R. Cowen. Grant, now resolved to go to war, had been planning such a conference for a month and had carefully chosen his confidants. The plan to achieve that end, and hatched during this meeting, was two-fold. First, the existing order prohibiting entry into the Black Hills would remain on the books, ostensibly to satisfy the treaty, but the army would quietly stop enforcing it. That would get the public, and the press, off Grant's back once word got out that no one was guarding the entry routes. A flood of miners into the Hills, taking de facto possession of them, might influence the Sioux to negotiate after all. If, on the other hand, they reacted by mounting raids on the settlements in the Hills themselves, as well as in the Platte River country, public support would mount quickly for withholding Indian rations and using military force to quell the uprising.

The second, and secret, phase of the strategy was to start a war—then blame it on the Indians. The concept was by no means novel in the West. The refusal of Sitting Bull and several thousand warriors to adopt the government dole was making it all the more difficult to coerce the reservation Sioux into parting with the Black Hills. Many men at the agencies were drawn to the hostile camps in summer, but slipped back to the comparatively easy life of the reservation for the winter. Sitting Bull, consequently, had a

reserve of warriors to augment his already formidable force on Powder River. Chandler, therefore, would issue an edict for all the northern bands to report to the reservation by the end of January 1876, thereby nullifying the concept of the unceded territory. If, as expected, they did not comply, they would face military action. The timing of this order would come in winter, when it would be most difficult for the Indians to travel, even if they were inclined to obey. When they failed to come in, the secretary would hand over the situation to the War Department, and the army would launch a campaign, forcing the Indians to comply. Thus, all the desired outcomes were wrapped in one neat package. The Black Hills would be taken as spoils of war; national economic needs would be served; the unceded territory would be abolished; and the Sioux would be confined to a smaller reservation on the Missouri, where they would be out of the way and totally dependent on the government.[13] The "Sioux problem," would be resolved at last.

The first phase went off smoothly enough when miners discovered the doors open to the Black Hills, and getting there was made that much easier with the completion of the government bridge at Fort Laramie. Soon mining camps with names like "Custer City" and "Deadwood" began to take shape along streams in the Hills. The Cheyenne road, with mail and telegraph connections as far north as Fort Laramie, became the

[13] A more detailed account of the political maneuvers preceding the Sioux War is found in John S. Gray, *Centennial Campaign*, (Fort Collins, Colo.: 1976), pp. 24-32.

principal avenue for the surge of prospectors. By February 1876, a new commercial coach line—the Cheyenne-Deadwood Stage--connected the mining camps with the Union Pacific and within three months coaches were making runs each way every other day, a schedule that was soon increased to daily trips. The company established its headquarters in a new log hotel, "The Rustic," that J. S. Collins had just erected at Fort Laramie, which happened to be the halfway point. [14]

The January 31 deadline for the winter roamers to repair to the reservation having come and gone, Crook prepared to send an expedition north from Fort Fetterman to strike the Indians before they scattered. When he and his staff passed through Fort Laramie in late February, they were among the first to enjoy the luxury of crossing over the iron bridge. During his brief layover at the post, Crook ordered two companies, I and K, Second Cavalry, to join his column at Fetterman. Three weeks afterward, his forces surprised and attacked a Northern Cheyenne village on Powder River. Although the charging troops initially stampeded the inhabitants, the warriors soon reorganized and counterattacked. At the end of the five-hour engagement, the mismanaged cavalry under

[14] *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, November 17, 1875; January 21, 1876; February 3, 1876; March 24, 1876; April 5, 1876; The Rustic Hotel stood on the plain below the Post Hospital, and approximately 200 yards north of the Post Trader's Store.

the command of Colonel J. J. Reynolds, was forced to withdraw, leaving a number of its dead on the field.[15]

By April the Indians at the agencies were nearly destitute, partially because so many people belonging to the northern tribes had come to the agencies to be fed during the winter, and because Congress delayed in passing an emergency appropriation to make up the shortage. Predictably, the Indians began venting their frustrations on any whites they encountered. The body of H. E. Brown, an employee of the stage company, was brought to the post on April 25. He had been mortally wounded two days earlier when Indians attacked his coach near Hat Creek. The *Daily Leader* reported a few days later:

> The starving Indians from Red Cloud agency, having been supplied recently with a sruveit of flour, sugar, and coffee, have recovered sufficient strength to go on their annual horse stealing expedition, and in their last excursion south of the Platte have visited Col. Bullock's and John Hunton's ranch on the Chugwater and relieve these gentleman of thirty-one horses.[16]

The raiders also killed and scalped James Hunton near the Goshen Hole rim as he rode to a neighboring ranch. A cavalry detachment sent out in search of the war party failed to catch up with them before they re-crossed the Platte. A week later, tribesmen ran

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[15] For a thorough account of the Reynolds Fight, see Jerome A. Greene (ed.), *Battles and Skirmishes of the Great Sioux War 1876 – 1877*, (Norman: 1993), pp. 3-19.

[16] *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, May 7, 1876.

off stock from Hiram B. Kelly's ranch, also on the Chugwater south of Hunton's place. As a preventative measure, troops from Fort Russell began regular patrols of the road north of Cheyenne, while Egan's Company K plied the trail twice monthly from Fort Laramie to Custer City.

Sheridan's grand strategy for the summer campaign called for three strong columns to converge on the vicinity of Powder and Tongue Rivers, the suspected haunt of Sitting Bull's northern Sioux and allied Cheyennes. Colonel John Gibbon would proceed eastward from Fort Ellis down the Yellowstone, while General Terry would jump off from Fort Abraham Lincoln and march west. Despite his earlier repulse, by May Crook had assembled a second force, soon christened the Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition, at Fort Fetterman to press the hostiles from the south. While Sheridan intended no particular concert of action by the three columns, he hoped their simultaneous movements would force the Indians into a decisive fight, where they could be bested, and compelled to go to the reservation. He considered any of the three expeditions strong enough to defeat Sitting Bull.

Crook's demands for additional troops imposed a heavy draft on garrisons throughout the Department of the Platte, including Fort Laramie. In late May, three companies of the Ninth Infantry and one company of the Second Cavalry marched off to join the expedition forming at Fort Fetterman. Their departure left only Companies E and

F, Ninth Infantry, along with Egan's troop to guard the Cheyenne-Black Hills Road, and perform the necessary garrison duties. Soldiers at Camp Robinson patrolled the alternate route from that point to Red Canyon, where a company of infantry established a temporary camp at the southern entrance to the Hills. Crook augmented the depleted garrison at Fort Laramie by ordering one company of the Fourth Infantry and another of the Twenty-third at Omaha Barracks to be posted along the road to the Black Hills.[17]

By spring, large numbers of warriors were reportedly slipping away from the White River agencies and going north to join the hostiles. In an effort to curb those defections, and to better protect the road, Crook requested that the Fifth Cavalry be transferred from its stations in Kansas to his department. Sheridan approved, and early in June the Fifth was on the cars of the Kansas Pacific bound for Denver, where they would transfer to a connecting line to Cheyenne. On the subsequent march to Fort Laramie, a trooper in the Fifth noted how settled Chugwater Valley was becoming. "This valley is full of stockmen, their ranches stringing along its entire length, and only three or four miles apart, Hundreds of cattle could be seen grazing on the side hills."[18]

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[17] Company H, Twenty-third Infantry established a supply camp on Hat Creek in June, and K Company, Fourth Infantry occupied the camp at Red Canyon. *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, June 25, 1876; The author's abbreviated record of events during the Sioux War relies heavily on the thorough treatment presented in Paul L. Hedren, *Fort Laramie in 1876: Chronicle of a Frontier Post at War*, (Lincoln: 1988) (hereinafter cited as *Fort Laramie in 1876*).

[18] Ibid., p. 111; For General Sheridan's annual report relative to these events, see ARSW, *House Exec. Docs.*, 44th Cong., 2d Sess., (1742), pp. 35-36.

General Sheridan himself was also bound for the front at that very moment. Concerned about the reports of Indians fleeing the reservation, Sheridan determined to make a personal inspection of the agencies. He arrived in Cheyenne by train on June 13, two days after the Fifth Cavalry had started its northward march. After conferring briefly with Lieutenant Colonel Wesley Merritt, soon to command the Fifth, Sheridan hurried on to Fort Laramie. There he found the regiment bivouacked at the traditional campground on the floodplain below the fort. After an overnight visit, including a dress parade to render the customary honors due a general officer, Sheridan rose early and pressed on to Camp Robinson on the fifteenth.

Sheridan was only one of the distinguished visitors at the post that month. He had narrowly missed meeting Spotted Tail, the dignified leader of the peaceful Brule's residing on the reservation. The fifty-three year old chief had passed through Fort Laramie on June 6 en route to Denver. During his layover at the fort, he recovered the bones of his daughter from their resting place atop the weathered scaffold still standing on the plateau near the hospital. Since the Sioux were now prohibited from trading at Fort Laramie, and confinement on the reservation seemed certain, Spotted Tail wanted his daughter's remains to be near him during his advancing years.

The news of Custer's defeat at Little Bighorn, received at Fort Laramie on July 6, electrified the tiny garrison, now reduced to only one under-strength infantry company.

Crook's draft on the garrison had left Major Townsend with an alarmingly diminished force at this disposal. Company E of the Ninth had just left the post as escort to a supply train bound for the intermediate camp at Sage Creek, and Egan's cavalry, kept almost constantly in the field on one mission or another, was presently out scouting for Indians rumored to be in the vicinity of Chugwater Creek. Thus only a single company of infantry defended Fort Laramie. Cynthia Capron, whose officer husband was in the field with Crook, expressed her fear that "the Indians could very easily take the post."[19]

Although there was little likelihood of that happening, the Indians still at the agencies became noticeably restless after runners brought news of the great victories over Crook and Custer. Fifth Cavalry detachments patrolling the Powder River Trail from their new bivouac on Sage Creek, observed an increasing number of small parties traveling through the country. That important route was known to be the main avenue between the hostile camps and the White River agencies. Officers at Camp Robinson now feared the reservation Sioux would bolt in a wholesale exodus to join their northern kinsmen.

The events at Little Bighorn provided Crook the justification he needed to persuade Sheridan to add the Fifth Cavalry to his personal command. Crook felt certain that the presence of that experienced regiment would virtually ensure victory over the

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[19] Originally quoted in Hedren, *Fort Laramie in 1876*, p. 131.

hostiles. Crook had only redirected the regiment to join his expedition when an alarming number of Cheyennes left the agency. When that word reached Merritt, who had just arrived to take command of the Fifth, he positioned his troops on War Bonnet Creek to intercept them. The Cheyennes, unaware of the troops' presence, ran headlong into the Fifth and after a brief skirmish, peremptorily retraced their trail back to the agency.[20]

With the columns in the field pursuing Sitting Bull across eastern Montana, an unprecedented number of miners streamed through Fort Laramie on their way to the Black Hills. A civilian present at the time attempted to describe the menagerie:

> There are many outfits going from here to the Black Hills gold country and an immense train leaves here tomorrow. They travel in larger companies on account of Indians. Saw Cap. Egan's Co. of Cavalry start this morning—it was a hard looking mob and with no fuss & feathers but looked like business . . . Was up town this morning and saw the miserable mob about the sutler store. Every man has either a gun & two revolvers strapped to him or a revolver & knife—all go well fixed for any emergency. Saw a drove of sheep driven from New Mexico to here and on their way to the gold fields.[21]

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[20] This event is chronicled in Paul L. Hedren, *First Scalp for Custer: The Skirmish at Warbonnet Creek, Nebraska, July 17, 1876*, (Glendale, Calif.: 1980); See also Hedren, *Fort Laramie in 1876*, pp. 132-34.

[21] Anon., "Diary of a surveying trip from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Laramie, 1876." Wyoming State Archives.

A visiting officer went on to write that he considered Fort Laramie to be "the center of all the business, and fashion, and gossip, and mentality of the North Platte country; the cynic may say that there wasn't much, and he may be right, but it represented the best that there was to be had."[22] Contributing to that reputation was a new telegraph line following the stage road from Fort Laramie to Custer City, thence to Deadwood. Hibbard offered to build a line to the agencies, if the army would only supply escorts for his men cutting and hauling the poles, but nothing came of it, probably because there simply were not soldiers enough to go around. Army dispatch riders made twice-weekly trips between the telegraph station at Fort Laramie and Camp Robinson until March 1877, when troops completed the construction of a military line between that post and the nearest station on the main line at Hat Creek.[23]

Even with the large number of troops in the region that summer, small parties of Sioux drifted in and out of the reservation, some blending with Sitting Bull's free roamers, others committing depredations south of the North Platte. On August 1, a party of about thirty warriors attacked a government contract train hauling supplies from the depot at Fort Russell to Fort Fetterman. The owner, A. H. "Heck" Reel, was an

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[22] John G. Bourke, *On the Border With Crook*, (Lincoln: 1971), p. 249.

[23] *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, July 2, 1876; August 6, 1876; November 4, 1876; Major E. F. Townsend to A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, August 24, 1876, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie, R. G. 393 (hereinafter cited as LS, Fort Laramie); Thomas R. Buecker, *Fort Robinson and the American West 1874 - 1899*, (Lincoln: 1999), p. 50.

experienced freighter in the area and had taken the precaution of arming his men with both Colts and Winchesters before leaving Cheyenne. When the Indians ambushed the train on a segment of the old Oregon Trail between Coffee and North Elkhorn Creeks, Wagon master George Throstle was killed instantly. Sylvester Sherman and the drivers quickly corralled the wagons to form a defense and skirmished with the Indians for the remainder of the day. There were no other casualties among the freighters, though the Indians did capture one unit of three wagons in tandem that had straggled and been abandoned a few hundred yards from the corral. Taking as many kegs of beer as they could carry away, the warriors set fire to five tons of bacon still aboard. By morning, the Indians were gone and the train resumed its journey.[24]

The campaigns of 1876 were by no means the U. S. Army's finest hour. Sheridan had been firm in his conviction that heavy, converging columns would be as successful on the Northern Plains as they had been in the Texas panhandle and Indian Territory a few years earlier. But, Crook had been repulsed at Powder River in March, and stopped cold at the Battle of the Rosebud in June. Much to the displeasure of both Sherman and Sheridan, Crook had retreated to Goose Creek, where he occupied himself with hunting and fishing until August while awaiting reinforcements. Custer and the Seventh Cavalry,

[24] For more on this incident, see J. W. Vaughn, *Indian Fights: New Facts on Seven Encounters*, (Norman: 1966), pp. 167-83.

meantime, were mauled by the very same bands at Little Bighorn a week later. When Crook finally did move again in August, he encountered Terry on Rosebud Creek and the two combined their forces, under Terry's command, in a huge, unwieldy army entirely unsuited for Indian campaigning. The command relationship was strained to the breaking point until the two generals agreed to go their separate ways, finally recognizing that such a large force had no chance of catching Sitting Bull. Terry kept his forces in the Yellowstone country of eastern Montana, while Crook struck east on a trail leading toward the Missouri. His expedition, degenerating into what became known as the "Starvation March," slogged through rain and mud for weeks, existing on reduced rations until the men were forced to eat horses and mules as they dropped from malnutrition and exhaustion. Only on September 9 did the troops score a modest success when some of Crook's emaciated cavalry stumbled into an Indian village near Slim Buttes, some distance north of the Black Hills. Saved only by wagonloads of food sent out from Deadwood, Crook's men finally staggered to Camp Robinson, where the expedition broke up.[25]

At the time Crook and Terry were conducting their stern chase in Montana, Congress passed special provisions in conjunction with its annual appropriation for Indian annuities. Custer's death had galvanized the legislators to take a firm stance in

[25] This engagement is detailed in Jerome A. Greene, *Slim Buttes, 1876: An Episode of the Great Sioux War*, (Norman: 1982)

dealing with the Indians. A resolution passed in mid-August did much to abrogate the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. Significantly, the ultimatum declared that the Sioux reservation no longer included the Black Hills. Likewise, the unceded lands no longer existed so far as the Sioux were concerned. They would live on a much smaller reservation, they would stop fighting forever, and they would submit to having several new roads built across their reservation to access the Black Hills. In turn, they would be fed, clothed, and schooled as wards of the government. Even though things had not gone according to plan so far as the military campaign was concerned, the government nevertheless realized the goals outlined in the plot of November 3.

A seven-member commission, headed by George W. Manypenny, was sent out on behalf of the president to deliver these terms to the Sioux at the White River agencies. Major Edwin F. Townsend, in command of Fort Laramie during that turbulent summer, extended the hospitality of the post to the commissioners when they arrived on September 2. All took rooms at the Rustic Hotel, except Bishop Henry B. Whipple who accepted an invitation from one of the officers to be a guest at his quarters. Two days later, escorted by the weary members of K Company, Second Cavalry, the commissioners moved on to Camp Robinson to meet with the Sioux. The approximately 150 Oglala and Brule headmen in attendance were firmly informed of the congressional edict, and,

moreover, in the future their annuities would be delivered at the Missouri River agency. There would no equivocation on that point as there had been following the 1868 treaty.

Sheridan had his own plans for handling the Sioux problem. To make certain there would be no misunderstanding with his field commanders, the division commander once again journeyed to Fort Laramie, arriving there while the commissioners were still in council with the Sioux. With him were the commander and two representatives of the Royal Japanese Army, sent to the United States on a familiarization tour. Sheridan had previously notified Crook and Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie to meet him at the post after summoning Mackenzie's veteran Fourth Cavalry from its stations in Texas to further reinforce the troops in the Department of the Platte. The three met on September 21 to plan a strategy for bringing the Sioux War to a quick conclusion. Sheridan fell back on his earlier success, when Custer had hounded the Southern Cheyennes in Indian Territory during the winter of 1868-69. Crook would prepare for a similar campaign aimed at striking Cheyenne villages reported to be gathering on Crazy Woman Fork. The cavalry brigade under Mackenzie would deliver the blow when the expedition was within striking distance. In the meantime, Crook would disarm and dismount the Indians at the White River agencies to preclude their involvement. This time, Sheridan wanted to make certain they would not assist the hostiles, and that the agencies would not serve as refuges for the recalcitrant bands. Proof of this was in Red Cloud's refusal to camp near the agency

during the previous summer, and it was suspected his people had been supplying guns and ammunition to the hostiles, the very arms that Red Cloud had previously insisted were vital for hunting and survival. The next day, Sheridan departed to catch the train at Cheyenne, while Crook prepared for another hunting expedition, this time to Laramie Peak, with Egan's well-worn company as his escort.

Mackenzie, surrounding Red Cloud's camps with eight companies of cavalry and a battalion of Pawnee scouts, carried out the disarmament of the Sioux and Cheyennes at the agencies without opposition on October 23. It was none too soon. During the week of October 10, the bodies of no less than three white men had been brought to Fort Laramie for burial. Two were civilians, the other was that of Private W. C. Tasker of Egan's troop. All had been killed in the vicinity of the Chugwater.

Crook temporarily established his field headquarters at Fort Laramie on the twenty-sixth while he awaited initial elements of his expedition to assemble. Two days later, Merritt arrived with five more companies of the Fifth Cavalry and two companies of the Ninth Infantry. While camped there, the troops were outfitted with special fur caps and overcoats to make the coming campaign as endurable as possible. That done, the column moved on to Fort Fetterman where more troops would join them, eventually totaling eleven companies each of cavalry and infantry, plus four companies of the Fourth Artillery, sent from the Pacific Coast to serve as infantry. Mackenzie's Fourth Cavalry,

the last large contingent to pass through Fort Laramie, camped below the post on November 4 before crossing over the Platte bridge en route for Fort Fetterman.[26]

As Crook advanced northward for the third time that year, his Indian auxiliaries discovered Dull Knife and Little Wolf's Cheyennes camped on Red Fork of Powder River, near the south end of the Big Horn Mountains. In a dawn attack on the twenty-fifth, the cavalry surprised and routed the villagers, who subsequently took up positions at one end of the camp and on bluffs to the north, putting up a stiff resistance while the non-combatants fled to a safe distance. After a stiff fight lasting several hours, Mackenzie's men finally dislodged the warriors and took possession of the village. In the lodges, they found plunder taken from the bodies of Custer's men offering proof of their involvement at Little Bighorn. The destitute Cheyennes struggled northward, eventually finding a haven with Crazy Horse's Oglalas. Crook, meantime, made a fruitless attempt to run them down, but plagued with supply shortages and with his men exposed to sub-zero temperatures, he finally gave up the chase a few weeks later. The expedition was dissolved and the troops sent back to their home stations for the winter.

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[26] The strategic importance of the iron bridge at Fort Laramie was measured not only for its value in moving traffic to the Black Hills and Camp Robinson, but for facilitating large troop movements during the campaigns north of Fort Fetterman. With only a ferry available there, columns could cross to the north bank of the North Platte at Fort Laramie with considerably less effort and in less time. From that point, they followed the old emigrant trail paralleling the river. Tom Lindmier, *Drybone: A History of Fort Fetterman, Wyoming*, (Douglas, Wyo.: 2002), pp. 38-40.

The close of the campaign brought the largest garrison Fort Laramie had seen in nearly three years as six companies of cavalry and five of infantry crowded into the barracks. For the remainder of the season, most of the troops enjoyed the comparative comforts of routine garrison duty. Colonel Nelson A. Miles and his Fifth Infantry were by then posted in a cantonment on the Yellowstone, in the heart of the region occupied by the hostile remnants, while many of their number had commingled with their brethren back at the agencies. Miles' aggressive activities in the north, meantime, kept the roamers off-guard through the winter. In a particularly hard-fought engagement on January 8, Miles found and struck Crazy Horse's combined Sioux and Cheyenne bands in the Wolf Mountains.[27]

That winter, the troops at Fort Laramie were called upon to mount only occasional patrols in response to reports of Indians passing through the area, though few of the rumors could be verified. The only noteworthy incident, in fact, occurred when Corporal C. A. Bessey and four men of A Company, Third Cavalry were sent out to repair the telegraph line to Fort Fetterman. When they encountered a small band of Indians near the mouth of Elk Horn Creek on January 12, the warriors immediately attacked. In the skirmish that followed, Bessey and Private Featherall were seriously wounded, but the

[27] A comprehensive treatment of Mile's activities is Greene, *Yellowstone Command.*

plucky corporal organized such a determined defense that the Indians finally withdrew. Bessey was later awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions.[28]

The majority of purported Indian sightings may have actually been white outlaws, who were more actively preying on ranches and the Black Hills coaches since the Indian danger had subsided. And, in a contradiction of roles, numerous bands of white horse thieves began actively stealing stock from the Indians at the White River agencies. Some of the Indians seen were undoubtedly parties attempting to recover their own stock. When thieves ran off thirty ponies from Red Cloud Agency on February 2, Lieutenant H. R. Lemley and a detachment of twenty-five troopers from Fort Laramie were ordered to patrol down the Platte in an effort to intercept them. Lemley caught up with the outlaws, arrested two of them, and recovered most of the stolen ponies. The other member of the gang managed to escape on a fast horse.[29] For the soldiers that had so recently fought the Indians, it must have seemed odd to suddenly be protecting them from white raiders.

By spring 1877, due largely to Miles' relentless pursuit of the dwindling number of northern Sioux and Cheyennes, culminating in their defeat at Lame Deer in May, many of the staunchest hostiles followed Sitting Bull to find sanctuary in Canada. The rest

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[28] Post Returns, January 1877, Fort Laramie, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, National Archives, copies in library, Fort Laramie NHS; Medical History, January 1877, Fort Laramie.

[29] Major A. W. Evans to Lieutenant W. S. Schuyler, A. D. C., Headquarters in the field, Dept. of the Platte, February 2, 1877, L S, Fort Laramie.

would give up at Camp Robinson, and Crazy Horse would be killed there shortly thereafter in a botched attempt to arrest him. The remnants of Dull Knife's Cheyennes would soon be sent to Indian Territory to join their southern kinsmen on the reservation at Fort Reno. The Indians had actually scored the greatest victories on the battlefields of the Great Sioux War, but the army's doggedness, punctuated with a few decisive skirmishes in which large amounts of their supplies were destroyed, eventually wore down the tribesmen until there was no place to hide, and no point in further resistance. The Sioux War simply sputtered out.

Chapter 17

"The Entire Quiet . . . Has Not Been Broken"

The Fort Laramie garrison soon settled into the familiar routine of post life. While most of the men had eagerly anticipated field service the previous year, those not already veterans learned soon enough that Indian campaigning on the frontier could be a miserable, frustrating, utterly exhausting experience with few rewards. At least the humdrum of guard, drills, and fatigue were compensated by regular meals, the relative comfort of a barracks, an occasional bath—and the solace found in warm beer. But, the regular army was never a soft touch, and officers and noncoms moved swiftly to restore discipline, and prepare the men for whatever might come. First Lieutenant John G. Bourke, who had been Crook's adjutant during the recent campaign, wrote in April:

> Every morning, the troops of these two garrisons [Fort Laramie and Camp Robinson] have been put through the school of the Company, dismounted, Manual of Arms, Skirmish drill, and in afternoon mounted drill, besides an occasional setting up exercise and target practice. This severe training is having a very marked effect upon the physique of the recruits.[1]

The officers found life less regimented than did the enlisted men. For the most part, reliable first sergeants supervised the companies on a daily basis. Many line officers only checked in to sign the morning reports and perform other essential duties required by orders or regulations. Bourke painted a picture of life on officers' row that contrasted sharply with that of the rank-and-file.

> The daily routine of our lives at Fort Laramie was rather monotonous. We arose and dressed about 7:30, breakfasted, listened to the music of the Band at Guard Mounting, then visited the Hd Qrs. stables to see that the horses were properly groomed . . . Returning from the stable, the opening hours of the morning were devoted to whatever business was contained in the mail of the preceding evening; then resumed our books, which were not relinquished until dark, except during the moments that the music of the afternoon open-air concert tempted us to

[1] John G. Bourke Diary, vol. 22, p. 1837, John Gregory Bourke Collection, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

> promenade the broad veranda encircling the house. In the evening, the mail was delivered and read, after dinner, which was served at retreat, if we did not pay any visits or receive any callers, the allurements of our book engaged us again until the hour for bed-time, 11 o'clock, approached.[2]

The army may have done its best to maintain the discipline and health of the troops, but other elements at work in the neighborhood proved counterproductive. The "hog ranches" just outside the military reservation experienced a booming business as a windfall of Fort Laramie's large garrison. Lieutenant Bourke described some typical establishments:

> Three miles out there was a nest of ranches, Cooney's and Ecoffy's [sic] and Wright's tenanted by as hardened and depraved a set of wretches as could be found on the face of the globe. Each of these establishments was equipped with a rum-mill of the worst kind and each contained from three to half a dozen Cyprians, virgins whose lamps were always burning brightly in expectancy of the coming bridegroom, and who lured to destruction the soldiers of the garrison. In all my experience I have never seen a lower, more beastly set of people of both sexes.[3]

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[2] Bourke diary, pp. 1844-47.

[3] Ibid., pp. 1848-49; According to an old-time resident, Cuny and Ecoffey continued to operate their old saloon at what had formerly been Beauvais' Ranch, five miles down the North Platte, in addition to the

Adolph Cuny himself fell victim to some of those very characters later that summer when he assisted U. S. Marshal Charles Hays from Cheyenne in the arrest of Duncan Donald and Billy Webster, two members of an outlaw gang suspected of murdering a stage driver. Cuny, who was apparently a local deputy, joined Hays and his partner on their way to the neighboring Six-Mile Ranch, where the outlaws reportedly had been seen. After making the arrest, Hays and his partner pursued other gang members, while Cuny stayed behind to guard the two prisoners. McDonald apparently attempted to overpower him, and at the same time one of the absent outlaws entered through a side door, shooting Cuny to death.[4]

Outlaws, in fact, replaced the Indians as the major source of trouble in the region. Many of the coaches coming from the Black Hills carried large amounts of gold and other valuables, thus posing tempting and easy targets for bandits. In a particularly noteworthy robbery, a gang of fifteen road agents waylaid a special treasure coach and made off with $30,000.00 in gold. A soldier at Hat Creek Station recorded that the bullet-

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Three Mile. John O'Brien interview, June 18, 1946, transcript in library, Fort Laramie NHS; Jules Ecoffey reportedly died in 1874. Following Cuny's murder, Posey Ryan purchased the log building at the Three Mile and moved it to his ranch up the Laramie. (For more concerning Ryan, see subsequent chapters in this study.) Charles Charleson reportedly married Cuny's widow and thus became owner of the hog ranch for a short time. John Owens subsequently bought the place, then sold it either to Bob Osborne or Henry Ritterling about 1880 or 1881. Typescript copy of "Minnequa Historical Bulletin No. 8," (1934) in library, Fort Laramie NHS; J. W. Vaughn, "The Fort Laramie Hog Ranches," *New York Westerners Brand Book*, (New York: 1966), p. 41.

[4] Ibid.

riddled vehicle was later brought there on its way to Cheyenne for repairs. When holdups became fairly frequent during 1877-78, the garrison provided guards to ride aboard the stages between the post and Deadwood. Cavalry detachments from Fort Laramie, acting in the capacity of posses comitatus, were sometimes sent out to try to catch the robbers, even though the army's authority for doing so was, at best, vague.[5]

In the span of only a few months, Fort Laramie had slipped from a post at war to a quiet station where the solitude was disrupted only occasionally by an incident of outlawry or an altercation between soldiers at one of the local road ranches. A correspondent to the *Army & Navy Journal* reported the nearest thing to an attack when a wild elk ran out from the river bottom and "charged" across the parade ground. The ever-present menagerie of dogs lying around the post immediately counterattacked and chased the frightened elk among the buildings until the animal turned on his pursuers and gored

[5] The use of Federal forces to enforce civil law was rare and closely restricted prior to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. With the passage of that bill, Attorney General Caleb Cushing authorized the army to enforce that law on those occasions when troops were summoned by civil officials. Over time, and especially in the West where few if any civilian law enforcement officers were available, the law became a loosely interpreted policy. Technically, officers who chose to act under that authority risked becoming the targets of lawsuits, but few were actually charged. The Army Appropriation Act of 1878 included a much more restrictive definition of the posse comitatus provision. It prohibited the use of troops in civil matters, except when specifically directed by the president or Congress. This was promulgated to the army as *General Orders No. 49*, July 7, 1878, A. G. O., although a subsequent order, *G. O. No. 71*, issued in October, gave officers wider discretion in that regard. Most post commanders, it would seem, simply applied common sense in responding to civilian requests for assistance. This topic is fully examined in Michael L. Tate, *The Frontier Army in the Settlement of the West*, (Norman: 1999), pp. 80-110; For specific references to Fort Laramie's involvement in combating banditry, see Commanding Officer to A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, June 30, 1877, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie; First Lieutenant J. B. Johnson t anon., July 20, 1877, ibid.; Major A. W. Evans to commanding officer, Camp on Hat Creek, November 25, 1877, ibid.; Medical History, August 1878, Fort Laramie; Private George W. McAnulty to Lillian, September 29, 1878, typescript copy in vertical files, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

three or four of them. As the dogs engaged the intruder, several officers saddled their mounts and took up the chase, firing a considerable amount of ammunition at the fleeing beast. The elk eventually outdistanced them, whereupon the officers ". . . returned to the fort, leaving the elk to seek some quiet grazing spot on the boundless plains."[6]

Life became increasingly more relaxed as months passed. The *Daily Leader* commented that the first Christmas following the Sioux War was observed with,

> Every window in the post . . . brilliantly illuminated with a dozen candles each, the quarters were decorated with evergreen, and in the old band quarters were as merry a set of dancers as ever tripped the 'light fantastic toe.' All went merry as a marriage bell. Wine flowed freely, and many a hearty toast was drank to the happiness of old friends in Cheyenne.[7]

The resolution of the Sioux situation, along with the redefinition of their reservation, negated the army's need for the extensive Fort Laramie Military Reservation authorized in 1872. The Indians no longer posed a threat to the critical hay fields near the present-day Wyoming-Nebraska border, and at the same time the dissolution of the

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[6] *Army & Navy Journal*, October 6, 1877, p. 138 (hereinafter cited as *ANJ* with date of issue); One wonders if this might have been the same pet elk, come home, that Post Trader J. S. Collins kept at the fort in 1874. The commanding officer complained to Collins that the elk had the run of the post and that he should confine the animal in some way. Post Adjutant to J. S. Collins, October 10, 1874, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie, Records of U. S. Army Continental Commands, 1820 1921, Record Group 393, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (hereinafter cited as LS, Fort Laramie).

[7] *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, January 19, 1878.

unceded hunting territory encouraged a further influx of ranchers to take up lands in southeastern Wyoming.[8] A survey taken in 1876 recorded no less than sixty-eight cattle ranches in the area. Many of the owners, for example John Hunton, were only too happy to secure lucrative contracts for supplying hay and wood to Fort Laramie. Some, like the burgeoning Pratt & Ferris operation, working through political channels, influenced the government to cede a large area of prime land they considered no longer vital to the army. A congressional act approved on August 14 of that year therefore reduced the military reservation to its1869 boundaries, an area of fifty-four square miles. The six-by-nine mile tract lay on a north-south axis with its northern boundary a short distance north of the river.[9]

Notwithstanding the cessation of open hostilities, the tribes gathered at Red Cloud and Spotted Tail Agencies continued to be an unresolved problem. Sheridan complained openly that their presence in the extreme southwest corner of the reservation left them

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[8] Nick Janis had settled at Little Moon, a small lake in the North Platte Valley near where the first Red Cloud Agencies had been located. He established a successful haying operation there, which he sold to John Hunton on July 25, 1880. Hunton's diary suggests that Janis finally left the Platte at that time. Hunton sold Little Moon to the burgeoning Pratt & Farris Ranch just three months later for a handsome profit. *John Hunton's Diary*, vol. 4, 1880 – 1882, (Lingle, Wyo.: 1963), pp. 64, 68, 88 (hereinafter cited as Hunton Diary with volume number).

[9] The Pratt & Ferris Ranch eventually encompassed almost the entire Platte Valley from present-day Lingle, Wyoming to Scottsbluff, Nebraska. ibid. p. 71; *G. O. No. 90*, August 22, 1876, A. G. O.; By 1879 ranches threatened to overrun the Laramie Peak area, where the army had obtained its lumber for many years. The army scouted the area that year to delineate a suitable area that could be protected from encroachment. A timber reserve was authorized by executive order on February 9, 1881 and published to the army as *G. O. No. 5*, February 28, 1881, A. G. O.

entirely too close to the travel routes, particularly the road from Sidney, to the Black Hills. He confided that the only reason for keeping the agencies there was to benefit the traders and freighting contractors, who made huge profits supplying the Indians. Placing them on the Missouri, as originally planned, would enable the Indian bureau to ship their goods more economically by steamer. Were that not justification enough, Sherman doubted that "if in the present frame of mind of the Red Cloud Indians the two races can live so closely together without fighting."[10] The crux of Sherman's objection was rooted in his long-held obsession with exiling the Indians to the wastelands of Dakota, far removed from white settlements and travel routes. Once that was accomplished, he could advance his strategy for consolidating most of his forces in large posts along the rail lines, leaving only a few stations active near the reservations in the event of trouble. The army could dispense with many of the older more remote forts, like Laramie and Fetterman, which were at once becoming increasingly expensive to maintain and less useful.

The State of Nebraska lent its full political weight to Sheridan's argument, but for its own reasons. The citizens of the state objected strenuously to having the Sioux and its affiliated tribes residing within its borders. The state based its objections on the grounds

[10] Annual Report of the Secretary of War, *House Executive Documents*, 45th Cong., 3d Sess., (1843), (Washington, D. C.: 1878), p. 34 (hereinafter cited as ARSW with pertinent year).

that as a legally constituted territory at the time the treaty was signed in 1868, unlike Wyoming, Nebraska had not agreed to the concept of the hunting territory, nor had it consented to assume a portion of the Sioux reservation within its boundaries. The attitude of the governor and the congressional delegation was enough to finally sway the Interior Department to move the Sioux to the Missouri in late October 1877. The Arapahoes, who had no designated reservation, agreed to make peace with their old Shoshone enemies and live in the Wind River country.

The Northern Cheyennes, who had been removed to the foreign environment of Indian Territory, did not long remain there. Their people sick and malnourished, Dull Knife and Little Wolf led the survivors on an epic journey all the way back to northwest Nebraska, with troops in hot pursuit the entire way. Even though they were finally arrested near Camp Robinson in early 1879, the determined Cheyennes eventually won a concession to live in their traditional homeland on Rosebud Creek.[11]

The busy years following the post-war renewal of Fort Laramie had been hard on the old post. The continual demands of the Indian situation had once again left little time, and few soldiers, to maintain and repair the buildings and other structures. Troops had been kept in the field patrolling the roads from Cheyenne to the Black Hills and to Fort

[11] A thorough treatment of this remarkable story is presented in, John H. Monnett, *Tell Them We Are Going Home: The Odyssey of the Northern Cheyennes*, (Norman: 2001); See also Thomas R. Buecker, *Fort Robinson and the American West 1874-1899*, (Lincoln: 1999), pp. 125-48.

Fetterman, repairing telegraph lines, escorting mail coaches, and guarding key points along the trails. Crook's successive drafts on the garrison to support his thrusts into the Sioux country so seriously depleted the number of men available for duty at the post that much of the time the commanding officer was hard-pressed to carry out essential duties.

The wagon bridge over the Laramie had seen considerable service during those years carrying virtually all traffic to and from the post. The structure had additionally borne the immense flood of traffic to all points north, including the Cheyenne-Black Hills Stage, trains of annuity goods and supplies bound for Camps Robinson and Sheridan; large numbers of troops and their trains, not to mention the stream of gold rushers. By 1878, the rickety bridge posed a serious danger for heavy vehicles. Even the abutments were being eroded away by the current and periodic floods. Only a year earlier, the army had constructed a make-shift diversion dam upstream using several old wagons filled with stone and scrap iron to anchor them in place. Major Julius W. Mason, Third Cavalry, proposed to the department quartermaster that the bridge be replaced as soon as possible by a new one somewhat farther upstream. Mason recommended a site about one-half mile southwest of the post, near the existing road. Because the channel narrowed at that point, the bridge would be shorter and less expensive to build. Moreover, redirecting the main access into the fort would circumvent the crossing of Deer Creek, a small but sometimes troublesome tributary flowing into the Laramie. Mason's plan was approved

and in record time troops were hauling timbers and planking from the sawmill at Laramie Peak. The structure was completed in late summer, with thru traffic being diverted over the river at that point to enter the fort from the west. The new route conveniently brought the coaches on the Cheyenne-Deadwood line directly to the station at the Rustic Hotel before coursing past the post trader's store and the two-story cavalry barracks toward the Platte bridge.[12]

First Lieutenant James Regan, Ninth Infantry, first saw Fort Laramie as a member of the Eighteenth Infantry in 1866. Visiting the post again in 1880, he recorded perhaps the most graphic and completed description of Fort Laramie during its military occupancy. Regan's keen appreciation of the fort's remarkable history made his comments all the more poignant:

> The modern Fort Laramie is built in the form of a rectangle; the men's barracks, six in number, in long buildings occupying the north and east sides, post headquarters and officers' Quarters the south side, and officers quarters the west side. On the last mentioned side is old 'Bedlam,' which was sent out in finished parts with the first troops from Fort Leavenworth, a distance of six hundred and

[12] Bourke diary, v. 22, pp. 1838, 1849; Medical History, June 1877, Fort Laramie; Major J. W. Mason to A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, April 17, June 20, and August 27, 1878, LS, Fort Laramie; The old wagon bridge continued in use as a convenient service access across the river, and likely carried the quartermaster trains from Cheyenne Depot because of its proximity to the storehouses. Author's note.

seven hundred miles. The episodes connected with this old building, were they well known and properly told, would form a volume in themselves. We have ourselves seen every room from lower to upper story brilliantly lighted and filled with card-parties, composed of Officers, some of whom have since become distinguished. This old building is still used as officers' quarters, but it is hardly habitable, owing to its dilapidated condition, its warped boards affording shelter for bats and swallows. An officer's wife, writing to her friends or relatives in the East, who were concerned about her being so far away on the frontier, informed them that she was in less danger, and was dwelling in a $40,000 house, meaning 'Bedlam,' that being the original cost of the house.

The magazine is also located on this side, and although standing by itself in early days, it is now wedged between Officers' Quarters. Some people might be nervous being so near to tons of powder and ammunition, but the people here treat it with the greatest indifference.

The Quartermaster's store-houses, workshops, corral, stables, commissary store-houses, hospital, and a long log building, 'River Side' or 'Venice' which is used as Officers' Quarters, are all on the north side of the post. There are two new buildings on this side of the post, which are built of concrete, a conglomeration of gravel and lime and water. One is a hospital two stories high, with wings

extending north and southeast. The other, a long building designed for two companies of cavalry, is two stories. The upper story is divided into sleeping apartments; the lower, into kitchens, dining-room, reading-rooms, orderly and other rooms. Both of these buildings are superior edifices, and reflect credit upon the Government. They are a step in the right direction, it being full time for mud roofs and dingy quarters for troops in garrison to pass from existence. These buildings, however, like most army quarters, are minus the grand essential of bath-rooms and bathing facilities for the men.

We strolled to the grave-yard on the hill, and there saw the elevated grave of Spotted Tail's daughter [sic], which was very much worn and faded . . . Around this old grave-yard, which is now utterly demolished, some of the graves being moved a quarter of a mile further north, can be traced the line of a breastwork, which of old was thrown up to resist the attack of Indians.

The Trader's Establishment was the next place of note. We visited it. It is one of the very oldest adobe and stone buildings at the post. It was in existence long before the arrival of the military [sic]. It is now in the possession of a Mr. Collins, a business man of Omaha, and is used as a trading establishment for the military, civilians living in the vicinity of the post and Black Hillers . . . .

> From the post-trader's it is but a few steps to the post-office, which is in one of the primitive adobe buildings. The interior is divided into two rooms, one of which was used as the postal-room, and the other as the abode of Postmaster and Ordnance Sergeant Leodegar Schnyder, who marched here with the first troops in '49, and has been in this one isolated post ever since . . . .[13]

In a tragic coincidence, Post Trader Gilbert H. Collins died by his own hand on July 10, 1880, shortly after Regan's visit. John London, brother of First Lieutenant Robert London, Fifth Cavalry, immediately secured a temporary license to serve as post trader while he followed political avenues to take over the business. A post council of administration was convened to fix the value and prices of goods in the store, and allowed John S. Collins, brother and former trader, until October 1 to have the buildings appraised. In the interim, London was appointed permanent post trader to take effect February 1, 1881. Collins, who was occupied with running a saddlery in Cheyenne after

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[13] James Regan, "Military Landmarks," *The United Service*, (August 1880), pp. 151-59; Regan began his army career in 1858 as a musician in the Second Infantry. He served through the Civil War as an enlisted man, rising to the rank of sergeant. In 1866, he won a commission as a second lieutenant in the Eighteenth Infantry and passed through Fort Laramie shortly afterward. He transferred to the Ninth Infantry in 1870 and nine years later became the quartermaster for that regiment. Promoted to captain in 1886, he remained with the Ninth until 1899, when he was promoted to lieutenant colonel of the First Infantry. Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army 1789-1903*, (Urbana: 1965), I, p. 822; Regen apparently did not realize that officers had indeed complained about the storage of munitions so near their quarters. In 1876, upon completion of a new concrete guardhouse, the munitions were moved to the old stone guardhouse near the Laramie River. The "arsenal," comprised of the old magazine, a frame gun shed, and an adobe storage building, all joined under a common roof, housed small arms, artillery pieces, accoutrements, and other equipment belonging to the Ordnance Department. Douglas C. McChristian, "Special Report: Magazine (HS-14), Fort Laramie National Historic Site," ms., (August 1997).

his own stint as post trader, negotiated an extension of a few months to settle his brother's business affairs, and allowed him to retain the use of the adjacent officers' club room until that time. During a meeting with Collins in January, Major Verling K. Hart, Fifth Cavalry, expressed his desire to have the buildings razed and a new complex erected at a more distant location, away from the officers' quarters. However, he refrained from doing so because he realized such a decision would depreciate Collins' estate to nothing more than the auction proceeds from the salvageable building materials. Hart nevertheless demanded that London make improvements to the exterior of the main building, and that he remove the collection of unsightly sheds and shanties that had proliferated around rear of the store. The Rustic Hotel, the trader's cottage, and the manager's residence could remain as they were, but London was to maintain them in good repair.[14]

By 1880, Cheyenne was both the territorial capital and the unchallenged commercial center in the region. A Union Pacific branch line building northward from Denver had recently linked those two cities, and survey crews were already at work in the Chugwater Valley staking a route leading toward Montana, with a spur to the Black Hills.

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[14] Medical History, July 1880 and January 1881, Fort Laramie; John London to Captain Hayes August 10, 1880, LS, Fort Laramie: Post adjutant to J. S. Collins, January 21, 1881, ibid.; Register of Post Traders, Box 1, vol. 3, A.C.P. Branch, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N. A., Washington, D. C.; Collins subsequently formed a partnership with John Morrison, who had formerly managed store under the Collins name. The Collins & Morrison Saddle and Harness Shop in Cheyenne turned into a lucrative business supply harness to the Cheyenne-Black Hills Stage and Express Company, as well as saddles and all kinds of leather equipment to area cowboys for many years. Ernest A. Logan, "Fort Laramie in 1877," typescript in collections of Wyoming State Archives; Hunton Diary, v. 4, p. 91.

Concurrently, a competitive line, the Chicago & Northwest Railroad, was rapidly laying track toward the Hills from the east. And, with the Indians finally out of the way, the Northern Pacific was advancing west across Montana to connect the Great Lakes region with the Pacific. General Sherman took great satisfaction in the knowledge that his army had done much to make that progress possible. With a network of railroads in the West becoming a reality, Sherman reiterated his desire to consolidate troops along the railroads, and to abandon many of the frontier forts.

> These railroads have completely revolutionized our country in the past few years, and impose on the military an entire change of policy. Hitherto we have been compelled to maintain small posts, along wagon and stage routes of travel. These are no longer needed, because no longer used, and the settlements which grow up speedily along the new railroads afford all the security necessary, and the regular stations built for storage at convenient distances afford the necessary shelter for stores and for the men when operating in the neighborhood. We should now absolutely abandon many of the smaller posts hitherto necessary and concentrate at strategic points . . . where railroads intersect, so as to send out detachments promptly to the districts where needed.[15]

[15] ARSW, 1880, *House Ex. Doc*., No. 1, 46th Cong., 3d Sess., (1952), p. 5.

Sherman thought the time had come for the army to begin designating those strategic points and urged Congress to authorize the army to start divesting itself of posts it considered no longer of any appreciable military value. Fort Laramie now lay well off the transcontinental railroad, Fort D. A. Russell having long since replaced it as the largest and most strategic post in the region. Fort Robinson, promoted from "camp" status in 1878, and its new sister post, Fort Niobrara, stood watch over the southern perimeter of the Sioux reservations to prevent any incursions into the settlements sprouting across central and western Nebraska. The appearance of surveyors for the Fremont, Elkhorn, & Missouri Valley Railroad along the Niobrara River in 1882 presaged a direct east-west rail connection for both of those forts. After the completion of that line in 1886, their supplies would no longer have to be freighted overland from the Union Pacific.

These developments served as a strong influence for Sherman and Sheridan to place Fort Laramie high on their list for abandonment, and to give it a correspondingly low priority for repairs. The post commander lamented , "Indeed there is not a set of quarters here, that does not need a thorough overhauling, and repairing, in order to make them last a few years longer."[16] The question was whether Fort Laramie had a few more years. Even to a casual visitor, it was obvious the post had gone to seed by the early '80s. "Of all the garrisoned military posts that I have seen," wrote Professor William Berryman

[16] Colonel A. G. Brackett to A. A. G., Department of the Platte, January 7, 1880, LS, Fort Laramie.

Scott during a western paleontological trip in June 1882, "Fort Laramie was the most neglected and ill-kept and I saw there a striking illustration of the incredibly foolish way in which the army administration at Washington mismanaged its affairs."[17]

If frontier forts were kept active longer than they should have been, the fault was not Sherman's. In his 1883 annual report, he had declared the Indian Wars virtually over: "I now regard the Indians as substantially eliminated from the problem of the Army. There may be spasmodic and temporary alarms, but such Indian wars as have heretofore disturbed the public peace and tranquility are not probable."[18] Counteracting his efforts were congressional representatives who, then as now, resisted all efforts on the part of the military to eliminate stations within their districts. Needed or not, forts were always a boon to the local economy. Army pay filtered out to area businesses, and contracts to supply the posts with wood, beef, and hay were staples of local enterprise. Nor, was it uncommon by the 1880s for small ranchers or homesteaders to sell vegetables, milk, and eggs to company messes.

That Fort Laramie was living on borrowed time became clear as other posts in the region fell victim to Sherman's budget knife. He lopped off Fort Hartsuff, in central Nebraska, and Camp Sheridan near the old Spotted Tail Agency, in 1881. Forts

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[17] William Berryman Scott, *Some Memories of a Palaeontologist*, (Princeton: 1939), p. 151.

[18] Report of the General of the Army, October 23, 1883, Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1884, *House Exec. Doc*., 48th Cong., 1st Sess. (2182), p. 125.

Fetterman and Sanders in Wyoming Territory were ordered closed the following year. In accordance with Sherman's consolidation plan, most of the Fifth Cavalry was transferred to Cheyenne, leaving only two troops of the Fifth, and one company of the Fourth Infantry at Laramie. The diminutive garrison carried out the usual garrison duties and continued periodic patrols of the Black Hills road to discourage bandits, since the daily coaches remained the principal link from the railroad to Custer City and Deadwood. Even though the Union Pacific Railroad had secured a franchise for the line to Montana, unforeseen delays stalled construction of that northern link.

When Crook was sent back to Arizona to contend with the Apache situation, Brigadier General Oliver O. Howard was assigned to replace him at the Department of the Platte Headquarters in fall 1882. The following spring, he conducted a personal inspection of the posts under his jurisdiction to become familiar their situations and with the country in which troops might conceivably operate. By the conclusion of his tour, Howard had become convinced that Fort Laramie should be maintained, for a while at least. Although he considered Forts Robinson and Niobrara to be the first line of defense in responding to problems within the reservations, "still posts like Robinson and Laramie, the former for observation, for settling small troubles, and as a nucleus on which to form in case of a more general disturbance, are still too necessary to be dispensed with."[19]

[19] Ibid., p. 125.

Howard backed his decision to maintain Fort Laramie by stationing most of the Seventh Infantry, along with its headquarters, there when that regiment was transferred from Fort Snelling, Minnesota to his department. Four companies were assigned to Fort Laramie in late 1882, and three more arrived in the spring following Howard's inspection. The Fifth Cavalry, meanwhile, was posted at Forts Robinson and Niobrara, closing the curtain on Fort Laramie's days as a cavalry post.[20] Elements of the Seventh would garrison the post for the remainder of its military occupation.

Colonel William P. Carlin had served at Fort Laramie as a young lieutenant in the Sixth Infantry back in the 1850s. When he took command of the Fourth Infantry at Fort Russell thirty years later, he was awed with how the region had evolved since he had last seen it.

> In the meantime everything had changed. The railroad had been built, Denver was a great city. Cheyenne had grown up. The buffalo had disappeared and tame cattle had taken their places. The Indians had been limited to narrow reservations. Civil government had been established. The country in short had become the home of

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[20] On only one occasion after that did Fort Laramie see any large numbers of cavalry. Near the end of May 1885, nine troops of the Fifth Cavalry from Forts Robinson and Niobrara prepared for a general change of station by concentrating at the post before marching to the railroad at Cheyenne. The Fifth was replaced by the Ninth Cavalry in late July and early August. One troop arrived on July 28 and departed for Fort McKinney two days later. It was followed by the headquarters and eight troops, which arrived at Fort Laramie on August 4. The black cavalrymen camped near the post for a few days before moving on to their new stations at Forts McKinney and Robinson. Post Returns, July and August 1885, Fort Laramie; Medical History, August 1885, Fort Laramie.

> civilized and refined people with all the arts, comforts, and appliances of civilized life.

One of those conveniences was an electric light system, which first illuminated the territorial capital in January 1883.[21] Wyoming Territory was rapidly coming of age.

Carlin's observation that cattle had supplanted the buffalo was hardly an overstatement. By 1883, raising livestock had become Wyoming's chief industry, with at least 800,000 head of cattle and nearly as many sheep being pastured in the territory. Old fears that the severe winters would preclude cattle ranching had given way to successful practical trials, the earliest of which were credited to those hardy souls that had settled along the Chugwater and the Laramie in the early 1870s. They discovered that the Texas cattle they brought there to winter not only survived, but actually gained weight by spring. Once the Indian danger subsided, cattlemen from as far away as Oregon, and western Montana drove increasingly larger herds to the territory to take advantage of the vast open ranges east of the Rocky Mountains. The railroad even made it economically feasible to ship large numbers of cattle from Iowa and Missouri to fatten in Wyoming before being transported to lucrative eastern markets.[22]

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[21] Colonel William P. Carlin to H. H. Bancroft, San Francisco, Calif., November 14, 1884, typescript in vertical files, Fort Laramie folder no. 4, Wyoming State Archives; *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, January 13, 1883; Oddly enough, the *Leader* did not acquire a telephone until 1886. ibid., January 29, 1886.

[22] Report of the Governor Wyoming , 1883, Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior, *House Exec. Docs*, 48th Cong., 1st Sess., (2191), p. 576 (hereinafter cited as Wyoming Governor's Report).

Drovers, ignoring the unfenced boundaries of the military reservation, sometimes allowed their stock to graze near the fort, and at other times brought herds there to take advantage of the old emigrant fords across the rivers. On one occasion, an unusually large herd from Oregon, en route to the Sioux agency at Pine Ridge, was driven to South Pass, then along the old Oregon Trail to Fort Laramie. When the herd arrived at the post, the cowboys cut out a thousand head of steers, which were then driven to nearby Goshen Hole to fatten over the winter. That portion of the herd, under the care of two drovers, crossed the Platte just below the fort. In another instance, cowboy John Thompson, drowned while fording the Platte with a herd. His comrades brought his body to the post hospital, where it was kept on ice until it could be sent to his family in Cheyenne on the next southbound stage.[23] Colonel John Gibbon, who had figured prominently in both the Sioux and Nez Pearce Wars, particularly the Battle of the Big Hole in 1877, expressed his concern about roaming cattle soon after taking command of the post late in 1882. Gibbon wrote:

> I find this reservation overrun with cattle and I am told by Officers who have spent the winter here that during the winter season, and especially during stormy

[23] Joh K. Rollison, Wyoming Cattle Trails, (Caldwell, Idaho: 1948), pp. 104-09; Medical History, June 1882, Fort Laramie.

> weather thousands of cattle flock into the post to pick up remnants of food thrown out from the stables.[24]

Gibbon was especially concerned about cattle fouling the open ditch that had finally been constructed to supply water to the post from farther up the Laramie. He therefore proposed to erect a fence connecting the North Platte and the Laramie Rivers to keep out wandering cattle, and to preserve some grazing land for army animals.

Prospectors, desperate to find another rich strike before the frontier and free land disappeared entirely, discovered modest deposits of silver in the hills along the North Platte above Fort Laramie and at Rawhide Buttes. When John Hunton stopped by the post on August 1, 1881, he found there was "big mining excitement about the fort" created by the discovery of a promising copper ore deposit in the hills about fifteen miles northwest.[25] Within a short time, a camp named "Hartville" had been established and miners flocked to stake claims in the area. Before long, the thriving little community arranged for mail service via a star route connecting with the main line at Fort Laramie. A little more than a year after the first inhabitants arrived at the mines, Hartville was included on a military telephone line strung between Fort Laramie and Fort McKinney. Prospectors had also found iron in the Laramie Range and elsewhere during the early

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[24] Colonel John Gibbon to Major J. H. Taylor, Dept. of the Platte, December 6, 1882, LS, Fort Laramie.

[25] The quotation is in *John Hunton's Diary*, v. 4, p. 152.

1880s, as well as large quantities of petroleum, inspiring the governor to rightly proclaim: "Wyoming is about to enter upon a new era of progress."[26]

While new communications links were being developed, the commercial telegraph line to the Black Hills, now several years old, had fallen into "wretched condition," according to Captain D. W. Benham, post commander during summer 1884. The company avoided the costs of maintaining the line by requesting the army to do it for them, though there was no formal agreement in that regard. "Working parties from the post have been out nearly every week for the past year in the interest of this private enterprise," Benham grumbled in a letter to department headquarters. That the line between Hat Creek Station and Fort Robinson had been destroyed and never rebuilt only added to his frustration. Benham pointed out that the line to the Hills was of no benefit, except in the unlikely event he might need to communicate with Fort Meade. The captain concluded his remarks by stating that, if Howard had no objections, he intended to cease making line repairs northward. Rather, he suggested, it would be better to establish a

[26] A brief history of Hartville is in Philip J. Mellinger, "Frontier Camp to Small Town: A Study of Community Development," *Annals of Wyoming* (Fall 1971), pp. 259-69; Oddly enough, the author failed to discuss the origins of the name "Hartville." Journalist and lay historian L. G. Flannery was of the opinion that Hartville was the namesake of B. A. Hart, chief clerk at the post trader's store as early as 1877 and later postmaster and clerk for John Hunton. That may have been because, according to Flannery, Hart had many business dealings in the area. However, Colonel Verling K. Hart, Fifth Cavalry and post commander at various times from 1880 to 1882, cannot be overlooked as another possible origin for the town's name. It is well-known that army officers often invested privately in business ventures that might secure their financial futures. This aspect of military life is addressed by Michael L. Tate, *The Frontier Army in the Settlement of the West*, (Norman: 1999), pp. 282-303; *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, September 21, 1882; December 19, 1882; Wyoming Governor's Report, 1883, pp. 560-61.

government line to Fort Robinson. Were the Signal Corps to provide the materials, his men would perform the necessary labor. Howard approved Benham's proposal and construction commenced in late fall with crews from both forts working toward each other. Winter weather temporarily interrupted progress in late December, however Company A, Seventh Infantry made the final connection the following April.[27]

If Professor Scott thought Fort Laramie reflected Washington mismanagement in 1882, he would have been dumbfounded to see it a few years later. Despite official indications at the highest levels that Fort Laramie's days were numbered, the mid-'80s witnessed another building spree. That circumstance was probably attributable to a combination of factors, rather than a single conscious decision by the army. At the head of that list was Howard's decision to quarter seven companies of the Seventh Infantry at Fort Laramie. His choice, in turn, was probably based on the existence of the number of barracks at the post, many of which were standing empty at that time. Too, during the early 1880s, the post commanders included two influential personalities—Colonel Wesley Merritt and Colonel John Gibbon. Both were antebellum graduates of West Point, both had distinguished Civil War records, both had attained the rank of major general of volunteers during the war, and both commanded their respective regiments at the time

[27] Captain D. W. Benham to A. A. G., Dept. of the Platte, August 15, 1884, LS, Fort Laramie; Post Returns, December 1884, March and April 1885, Fort Laramie; ARSW, 1885, *House Exec. Docs*., 49th Cong. 1st Sess., (2369), p. 142.

they came to Fort Laramie. In the absence of any decision to abandon the post, each did his best to improve the living conditions. Also to their advantage were the large garrisons with nothing better to do now that the Indians were corralled. The first priority, not surprisingly, was to erect three sets of officers' quarters along the west side of the parade to replace the old adobe units that had stood on that site for decades. The new houses, one designed for the commanding officer and the others as double-quarters for captains, were built of formed concrete with stylish mansard frame roofs. In 1884, troops completed a new bakery, a commissary storehouse, and quarters for staff non-commissioned officers, all of concrete. The following year, they constructed a large L-shaped administration building to house headquarters, the post school, and a theater. The perimeter of the parade ground was now lined with trees, while picket fences, board walks, and street lamps graced Officers' Row. A water system, relying on a steam engine to pump water from the river to a reservoir on the plateau, from which it was gravity fed to the garrison, added a touch of luxury heretofore unknown at the old post. That made possible the construction near the river of a large communal privy serving the band, four companies, and the guardhouse. Flushed by running water piped into the building, it was "a marked sanitary improvement" over the pit toilets formerly used. If any further evidence were

needed, birdbaths at the corners of the parade confirmed that Fort Laramie in its waning years was no longer a frontier post.[28]

Almost as if in acknowledgement of that, Ordnance Sergeant Leodegar Schnyder left the post on October 13, 1886. He had established an unchallenged record for longevity—thirty-seven years at the same fort. Schnyder had arrived there as a member of G Company, Sixth Infantry during summer 1849, the very first year of the army's occupancy, and he had been a resident there continuously since that time. He had witnessed the pageant of all that had happened at Fort Laramie, yet to the everlasting detriment of history, the "silent soldier" never recorded a single word about his experiences there, nor did anyone bother to interview him with that in mind. Honoring Schnyder as "the oldest resident in Wyoming" at that time, the *Daily Leader* reported that the sergeant was accorded a serenade by the Seventh Infantry band as he and wife Julia left the post. The entire garrison turned out to see the couple off and wish them well in their new assignment. When Schnyder was contacted by a reporter as he passed through Omaha, the grizzled old sergeant assured him that he had not been transferred and he was not retiring—it was his own choice to stay or move to abandoned Fort Rodman at Clark's Point, Massachusetts. There his only duties would be to watch over some ordnance

[28] Post Commander Benham also proposed building a bathhouse for the men in 1885, but the request was disapproved. Medical History, December 1885, Fort Laramie.

supplies stored there, "make out the reports and take care of the cannons—or rather let them take care of themselves . . . and all I have to do will be haul up the colors in the morning and haul them down again at night. Besides, I don't want to retire. They have codfish and oysters at New Bedford, don't they?" The correspondent assured him they did, and at cheap prices, whereupon "the old gentleman nodded his head in pleased approval" and went on his way.[29]

With the absence of Indian campaigning everywhere in the West by the mid '80s, save the Apache campaign in Arizona, the army was forced to create alternatives to keep the men physically fit and to teach the growing numbers of inexperienced recruits how to get along in the field in the event something did happen. To that end, the service instituted annual "camps of instruction" where the troops from several posts in a given region were schooled in battalion tactics, drills, and field maneuvers. The units involved marched overland to the designated rendezvous to condition the men and provide practical field experience before arriving at the camp. The Seventh Infantry participated in camps held at Pine Bluffs in 1885, near old Fort Casper in 1888, and at Fort Robinson in 1889.[30] Colonel Henry Clay Merriam, who followed Gibbon as regimental commander

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[29] *ANJ*, October 30, 1886 and November 13, 1886.

[30] Camps of instruction were inaugurated by *G. O. No. 9*, May 26, 1885, Department of the Platte. The order directed troops to participate "for the purpose of military instruction and practice in practical field engineering, outpost duty, escort and defense of convoys, defensive and offensive maneuvers, and, generally, the minor operation of war . . . ."; In one instance, Merriam marched the entire garrison of five companies, along with the headquarters staff, band, and medical detachment, 150 miles to a camp near old

of the Seventh Infantry, recognized the value of conducting his own practice marches in the absence of a formal rendezvous. In fall 1886, he instructed each of his companies to conduct a ten-day march to Laramie Peak and back, with full field equipment, "in the event of any unpleasantness with Mexico . . . ."[31] General Crook, who resumed command of the Department of the Platte after Geronimo's surrender, also required his post commanders to conduct target practice at some point at least fourteen miles distant from their respective stations. He specified that they were to camp there for at least six days, again to familiarize the men with caring for themselves in the field.[32] An officer who served under Merriam at Fort Laramie remembered that the colonel paid,

> . . . close attention . . . to the details of post administration, [but] he never allowed anyone to forget that the purely military side of life in a garrison was of the first importance. He paid great attention to close order drills and formal parades and was himself a very good drill master. Under his direction the regiment became very proficient and officers and men came to have a great pride in making a good appearance.[33]

Fort Caspar in August 1888. They did not return until October. Post Returns, August and October 1888, Fort Laramie; *ANJ*, July 21, 1888.

[31] Ibid., October 9, 1886.

[32] Post Returns, August 1887, Fort Laramie; ARSW, 1887, *House Exec. Docs*., 50th Cong., 1st Sess., (2533), p. 134.

[33] G. W. McIver, "Service at Old Fort Laramie, Wyoming, June, 1887, till April, 1890," typescript in vertical files, library, Fort Laramie NHS (hereinafter cited as "McIver account").

He added, however, that Merriam, like many older officers, was unable to see the need for changes in tactics as a result of breech-loading arms. Influenced by his experience in the Civil War, Merriam focused on battalion close order drills, and largely ignored skirmish drills and minor tactics. That was symptomatic of the army as a whole, and by the end of the decade, it was neither fish nor fowl—no longer an Indian fighting organization, nor a force fully prepared for conventional warfare.

Most of the time, however, the usual garrison routine continued with little deviation. The Cheyenne & Northern Railroad, formed in 1886 to replace the Union Pacific's failed effort to lay track northward from the capital city, reached John Hunton's place at Bordeaux, twenty-eight miles from the post, during summer 1887. It spelled the end for the Cheyenne-Black Hills Stage and Express Company. After that, only a short line ran from the railway station at Bordeaux to Fort Laramie and a few points beyond.[34] Significantly, this third railroad to be laid through the region had also bypassed Fort Laramie. The effect of that was inescapable. Now well off the new lines of communication in both directions, it had become a metaphorical island within a rapidly developing region. Lieutenant George W. McIver attempted to put the best face on the situation when he wrote:

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[34] *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, June 13, 1886; February 20, 1887; June 23, 1887.

> I found the social life of the post very pleasant. There were more people to associate with than I had known before and the number was increased by occasional visitors. I rather think that the isolation of the post tended to greater sociability among the members of the garrison. Lacking the distractions of a nearby town, the people were more inclined to depend on each other for amusement and recreation and a social atmosphere prevailed there that I had never seen before and have never seen since.[35]

He had to admit, however, that the place was only suited for quartering troops. At that, recreational opportunities were few. McIver noted that there was no longer any wild game in the vicinity, nor any trout in the Laramie River, only a few Pike to offer any sport to the anglers of the garrison.

A Seventh Infantry recruit arriving at Fort Laramie in May 1888 had a contrasting reaction to his new home.

> So drear and desolate was the country by which it was surrounded that in any direction but few habitations would be encountered within a radius of 30 miles. Aside from the yearly visit of a Roman Catholic priest, the appearance of a distant

[35] McIver account.

> squatter or cowboy, the sight of a white man, except the soldier in uniform, was indeed so rare a thing that he was absolutely looked on as a novelty.[36]

The long anticipated directive to abandon Fort Laramie finally came down in late summer 1889, when most of the garrison was away attending the camp of instruction at Fort Robinson. It was welcome news, and as soon as the four companies and Hospital Corps detachment returned to the post in late September, they immediately began packing company property for the trip to their new station at Fort Logan, near Denver. Most of the residents were glad to be leaving. Lieutenant Daniel Robinson wrote to his wife on October 20: "All the families left here last Thursday without any apparent regret . . . ."[37] McIver, however, took a more nostalgic view of the old fort's demise when he later wrote of his departure:

> The date of establishment in 1849 then seemed far back in the remote past. The span of years between 1890 and to the present time about equals the period of occupancy; but the later period, while full of history and tragedy, somehow lacks the glamour and the romance associated with the more distant years.[38]

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[36] Michael M. O'Sullivan, "Army Posts On the Plains," *Winners of the West*, May 30, 1927.

[37] Daniel Robinson to wife, October 20, 1889, Robinson collection, copies in vertical files, library, Fort Laramie NHS.

[38] McIver account.

During the previous forty years, Fort Laramie had indeed been at the center of more excitement, glamour, and tragedy than any other frontier post. It had truly witnessed "the pageant of the West."

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