Massacre, memoir, and myth: The 1866 Fetterman Fight, a reconstruction

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MASSACRE, MEMOIR, AND MYTH: THE 1866
FETTERMAN FIGHT. A RECONSTRUCTION

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1968

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

Massacre, Memoir, and Myth: The 1866 Fetterman Fight, A Reconstruction

By

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Myths permeate histories of the 1866 Fetterman Fight, or Massacre. Thesis foci include myths of the 1866 Fort Laramie Treaty, the July 1866 Skirmish at Crazy Woman’s Fork, Jim Bridget’s role from May 1866 to spring 1867, and the December 1866 Fetterman Fight. Beginning in 1867, Colonel Carrington, Captain Fetterman’s commanding officer, shifted blame from himself to Fetterman. Based upon Carrington’s allegations, historical consensus indicts Captain Fetterman for arrogantly disobeying orders, foolishly leading eighty men into a fatal ambush by 1,800 Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe warriors, and committing mutual suicide with Captain Brown when hope was gone. In his 1991 article “Price of Arrogance,” John D. McDermott reaffirmed Carrington’s accusations. This thesis debunks the myths, challenges the consensus version, reconstructs the fight with soldier and Indian memoirs, and Army documents, and offers a new interpretation of the Fetterman Fight.
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CHAPTER 1

MASSACRE, MEMOIR, MYTH

On 21 December 1866, in what is now north central Wyoming, hundreds of Lakota Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe warriors ambushed and killed three U.S. Army officers, seventy-six enlisted men, and two civilian volunteers on a narrow ridge between three and four miles northwest of Fort Philip Kearny. Not one man of the detachment survived. Official reports of that day called it the Phil Kearny Massacre. Subsequent publications often label it the Fetterman Massacre, memorializing Captain William Judd Fetterman, commander of the eighty-man detail, who has long been blamed for the disaster.

Historical treatments of the Fetterman Massacre commonly display at least three weaknesses. First, ethnic bias consistently colors the writing. Accounts of the action are usually polarized, painted from either an Army or Indian viewpoint. These narrow approaches either ignore or minimize sources from the other side, leading to both errors of fact and unbalanced interpretation of the events around Fort Phil Kearny in 1866. Second, many authors have borrowed uncritically from secondary sources and even some primary materials, lengthening an extensive historiographical trail heavily muddied by myth. Some of the purported primary documents and memoirs are so distorted by faded memory and deliberate fabrication that key events have been "smothered in folklore." Third, blame for the disaster has focused

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almost exclusively on Captain Fetterman. As the proximate cause for the Army catastrophe, historians have charged Fetterman with arrogantly and deliberately disobeying Colonel Carrington’s orders.\(^5\)

In response to these three weaknesses, this thesis has three objectives. First, provide a more balanced description of the events leading to the Fetterman Massacre by drawing upon official government and military documents, participant memoirs, and Native American history and oral accounts recorded by ethnographers. Second, reconstruct important events leading to 21 December 1866, and the actions of that day. Third, challenge the traditionally accepted notions of causality, especially Captain Fetterman’s role in the events of November and December 1866. In the process, the thesis will correct some chronology from June through December 1866, question the veracity of important memoirs, explode some century old myths, elucidate some less known and forgotten accounts, and propose a new interpretation of that day in western American history. Achieving these objectives may contribute to a new understanding of what really happened near Fort Phil Kearny on 21 December 1866.

By the way of introduction, a definitional treatment of the words *massacre*, *memoir*, and *myth* is essential. The Fetterman Massacre was the second of three military disasters inflicted on the United States Army by hostile northern plains Indians during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Writers of that time used the epithet *massacre* to describe each of these three episodes.

The Army’s first northern plains catastrophe was the 1854 Grattan Massacre. Bands of Brule’ and Oglala Lakotas had gathered near Fort Laramie to receive annuities promised in the 1851 Horse Creek treaty. Responding to a Mormon immigrant’s complaint over a lost cow, Lieutenant John L. Grattan led a thirty man infantry force with two cannons to Conquering Bear’s camp. When Grattan’s men opened fire during the attempted arrest of a visiting Miniconjou brave, angered warriors wiped the entire Army detachment out.\(^6\)

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Fetterman’s downfall tallied casualties more than double Grattan’s loss. The annihilation of Fetterman’s command prompted commissions and investigations by both the Federal government and the Army, and it triggered new debates over Indian affairs for years afterward. Almost ten years later, the Fetterman Massacre was overshadowed by the most famous Army blunder on the northern plains, Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer’s crushing defeat at the Little Bighorn by Lakota and Cheyenne warriors. That afternoon in June 1876, Custer’s Seventh Cavalry lost more than double the combined dead of the Grattan and Fetterman commands. This third disaster quickly superseded the Fetterman affair in the public interest. Controversy over causes, and a certain mystique about Custer himself, have combined to keep Little Bighorn publications in the forefront of western Americana ever since. Limited polemics have not kept the Fetterman bibliography from also growing large. As to causes, however, there has been little debate for more than a century.

The Grattan, Fetterman, and Custer disasters were all labeled massacres because the detachments commanded by those officers were each entirely destroyed by their Indian opponents. The word massacre is loaded with nineteenth century sensationalist baggage, conjuring up scenes of unnecessary violence, capture, torture, and mutilation. Modern dictionaries infer that massacre victims are defenseless, one source defining massacre as the “killing of usually helpless or unresisting human beings.”

Each of these three events, however, could be called a fight because both sides were armed, fighting did occur, and both parties sustained casualties. In addition, combat was initiated by the Army detachments in both the Grattan Fight and the Battle of the Little Bighorn. In the case of the Fetterman Fight, the Indian alliance employed the old guerilla tactic of ambush, a common feature of northern plains

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7 See for example, Senate Ex. Docs., No. 13, 40th Cong., 1st Sess., Serial 1308, Indian Hostilities.
8 Edgar I. Stewart, “Custer. George Armstrong.” Howard R. Lamar, ed., The New Encyclopedia of the American West (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1998), 280-281. Custer’s defeat has been microscopically detailed in the pages of a voluminous bibliography, and attracts an annual crush of visitors to the federally administered battlefield site in south central Montana. Wyoming’s Fort Phil Kearny State Historic Site, only about seventy miles south of Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, hosts far fewer quests. In June 1998, the writer and his wife spent nearly six hours visiting the Fort Phil Kearny site, and the nearby Fetterman and Wagon Box battle sites. We encountered fewer than twenty other visitors, and had the Fetterman battle site entirely to ourselves for more than an hour. Perhaps one reason for the disparity in popular interest is the lack of controversy about the Fetterman Fight.
intertribal warfare. The objectives of plains Indian ambushes did not include the capture and torture of enemy fighting men. Those ambushes did seek the complete destruction of the enemy force. Captain Fetterman’s command came out on the short end of this tactic when they were completely outnumbered and outmaneuvered by plains warriors. Such a mismatch in manpower would likely have led to Fetterman’s surrender under the norms of conventional Euro-American warfare. Plains intertribal warfare did not follow those conventions. Surrender was not an option; a trapped enemy could only escape or die in combat.

Although capture and torture were not part of the Fetterman Fight, the victorious warriors did mutilate the dead soldiers’ bodies at the conclusion of the fighting. However barbaric we may consider this practice today, it was the logical expression of complex Native American cosmologies and afterlife beliefs, not simply malicious violence.

In simple language, a memoir is “a narrative composed from personal experience.” A wider definition of the word includes official notes or reports, biographies, autobiographies, diaries, letters, and other personal narratives from memory. Discussing memoirs of the Fetterman Fight means turning initially to the work of the venerable Dee Brown. Probably best known for his 1970 work Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee, Brown earlier produced a monograph still in print and still considered a standard text on the Fetterman Fight. Robert Hannon of the St Louis Post-Dispatch praised Brown’s book as a “meticulously documented book” using both “Army records and firsthand reports,” or memoirs, resulting in a “definitive” work which was “the best account yet of Fort Phil Kearny and the stirring events that took place” in 1866. In other words, Hannon credited Dee Brown with assembling the most valuable memoir material in the definitive book on the subject. This 1962 publication by G. P. Putnam’s Sons was first

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13 McGinnis, “Strike and Retreat.” 38. The subject of mutilation will be treated more completely in the next chapter.
14 Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 725.
15 Ibid.
17 Brown, Fetterman Massacre, back cover.
innocuously titled *Fort Phil Kearny: An American Saga*. Since 1971, the University of Nebraska Press has kept the book in print as a Bison Book with the more provocative and marketable title, *The Fetterman Massacre*. With in-print longevity of more than three decades, referring to Brown's book as *definitive* seems appropriate. However, despite its historiographical importance and simple readability, perhaps the time has come to challenge that opinion.

Although *The Fetterman Massacre* has been praised as a seminal work, it exhibits one-sided bias, relies heavily on myth-laced memoirs recorded long after the events, and dutifully blames Fetterman for the disaster, the three weaknesses mentioned earlier. Brown has a reputation for writing Native American history, but *The Fetterman Massacre* is remarkable for its lack of Indian sources. He took only a half dozen footnotes and background entries from Grinnell's *The Fighting Cheyennes*, Doane Robinson's *A History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians* and Stanley Vestal's *Warpath, the True Story of the Fighting Sioux.*

Apparently as a substitute for absent Indian source material, Brown gave his book Indian flavor by titling ten of eleven chapters for Lakota lunar months. Brown introduced his investigation of the Fetterman Fight by querying, "why were Fetterman and his men there in that lonely, uncharted wilderness, 236 miles north of Fort Laramie, in a country which only one year earlier had been ceded by treaty to the tribes as inviolable Indian territory?" Brown did not openly ask or adequately answer the equally crucial questions, "which Native American people were interested in that same wilderness, and why?"

Virtually all of Brown's meager Indian source material appears in his December 1866 chapter dealing with the actual Fetterman Fight. The rest of his narrative is based on official Army documents and non-Indian participant memoirs. As a result, *The Fetterman Massacre* typifies the ethnic bias usually found in the long list of books dealing with the subject.

A careful analysis of Dee Brown's bibliography, endnotes, and background sources reveals *The Fetterman Massacre*'s dependence on non-Indian participant memoirs. At least half of his sixty-four...
bibliographic sources are memoir material. However, nearly all of these memoirs are used only a few times. Two critically relevant officer diaries, one by Captain Tenodor Ten Eyck, and another by Lieutenant George M. Templeton, were not used at all. These two diaries correct memoirs composed much later by other participants. Additionally, Templeton’s diary is essential for knowing the Crow tribal involvement in the events of late 1866.

Further analysis of Brown’s sources indicates that five sources authored by four members of the Carrington family provide about half the documentation. Colonel Carrington was the regimental commander of the Eighteenth U. S. Infantry in 1866. He personally led the Second Battalion of that regiment into the Powder River country to garrison three forts along the Bozeman Trail to Montana, including the company commanded by Captain Fetterman. Of the 313 endnotes in The Fetterman Massacre, 91 came from Colonel Carrington’s official defense before a congressionally appointed committee in 1867, testimony unpublished by the U. S. Senate until 1888. Four more notes came from his two addresses on “The Indian Question” in 1875 and 1881. His two wives, Margaret and Frances, account for another 66 in their separate memoirs, and the Carrington’s son Jimmy, age six in 1866, was the source of four more notes from his six page Scribner’s Magazine article in 1929. More than 52% of the endnotes come from the Carringtons! Admittedly, the story cannot be told without the Carrington sources, but Dee Brown’s heavy and largely uncritical dependence on them introduced several myths into his narrative.

Before turning to the subject of myth, it is useful to become better acquainted with the Carringtons and the historiographical legacy of their memoirs. Prior to his officer’s commission in the United States Army, Henry Beebe Carrington was a highly educated Ohioan with enviable and timely political connections. Born in 1824 in Connecticut, Carrington cultivated an early interest in military affairs that could have propelled him to West Point. Susceptibility to tuberculosis channeled him instead to Yale in 1840, where he graduated with the class of 1845. While teaching for the next few years, he studied law at Yale. Carrington moved to Columbus, Ohio in 1848, where he began twelve years of law practice and became a law partner of William Dennison. Carrington was an active abolitionist. He helped organize the fledgling Republican Party in Ohio, becoming a friend and supporter of Salmon Chase in the process.

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21 Brown, Fetterman Massacre, 231-244.
22 Tenodor Ten Eyck, diary, Ms 82, Special Collections Library, University of Arizona, Tucson. George M. Templeton, diary, typescript copy on microfilm, Manuscript Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago.
After Chase became governor of Ohio in 1857, he invited Carrington to reorganize the Ohio state militia. Chase then appointed him adjutant-general. William Dennison replaced Chase as governor in 1861. He appointed George B. McClellan to command the nine regiments of Ohio militia organized by Carrington. McClellan used this force to save western Virginia for the Union. Dennison's gratitude for Carrington's organizational assistance brought Carrington a colonel's commission in the Regular Army on 14 May 1861. Carrington was given one of the newly authorized three battalion regiments, the Eighteenth U. S. Infantry.

An able organizer, Carrington filled the ranks of the new regiment with Ohio recruits, but he never led them in the campaigns of the Civil War. Junior officers commanded the regiment through the ordeals and battle laurels won in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Georgia. Colonel Carrington was ordered to Indiana where he became Brigadier General of Volunteers on 29 November 1862. In Indiana, he continued forming new regiments for front line duty, while suppressing disloyal elements in the civilian populace. On 24 August 1865, he resumed his Regular Army colonelcy over the Eighteenth Infantry, a smaller reduction in rank than many of his contemporaries endured. In the fall of 1865, having no combat or frontier experience of his own, Carrington returned to command the battle hardened remnants of the Eighteenth Infantry preparing to march west.²⁴ Carrington's service from late 1865 to the end of 1866 will be discussed in the thesis.

In the aftermath of the Fetterman Fight, General Philip St. George Cooke, Carrington's immediate superior, made Carrington the scapegoat for the disaster. In January 1867, Carrington was relieved of command at Fort Phil Kearny and replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Henry W. Wessels. It was a move already planned as part of the Army's regimental reorganization, but the timing made Carrington appear culpable, and that reputation dogged Carrington within Army circles for the next three years. General Sherman supported Cooke's move, but General Grant replaced Cooke with General Christopher C. Augur without even consulting Sherman. Grant also believed formal charges should have been brought against Carrington, but an official Army inquiry came to nothing. The spokesman for the Interior Department

²³ Brown, Fetterman Massacre, 235-244.
investigation. John B. Sanborn, exonerated Carrington and blamed higher authorities for not providing sufficient support to Carrington.25

By 1870, Carrington had had enough of the Army. Suffering from ill health and the effects of an accidentally self-inflicted gunshot wound in January 1867, Carrington retired from the military at the end of 1870.26 Outside Army circles, his military experience and reputation garnered him ten years as professor of military science at Wabash College.27

After he left the service, Carrington spent his remaining forty-two years vindicating his leadership of the Bozeman Trail fortifications. Among his most important achievements, Carrington finally persuaded Congress to rescue his official defense before the Sanborn Commission at Fort McPherson in the spring of 1867 from the dustbin of government documents, and had this published in the Senate Executive Documents in 1888. Titled “Indian Operations on the Plains,” this official government publication is Carrington’s memoir of his service from spring 1866 to January 1867.28

Henry B. Carrington was married twice. In 1851, he married Margaret Irvin McDowell Sullivant, a young woman from a distinguished Ohio family with important colonial ancestry. She gave birth to seven children between 1852 and 1864; five of them died before reaching age three. Two surviving sons, Jimmy and Harry, accompanied their parents on the trek west in 1866. When General Sherman visited Fort Kearny in May 1866, he advised officer’s wives to keep a diary. Margaret Carrington took the advice. Her diary was the basis for a book. Absaraka, Home of the Crows. First published in 1868, Margaret’s book served as an emigrant guide and a defense of her husband when an Army investigation of the Fetterman disaster threatened Henry Carrington’s reputation and military career. Colonel Carrington probably influenced or even wrote important portions of his wife’s book. Margaret died 11 May 1870, the year after the 1869 reprint edition of Absaraka. Later, Henry Carrington took advantage of a revived national interest in the plains Indian wars following the 1876 Custer debacle. He resurrected, revised, and enlarged his wife’s book, shepherding it through five more editions from 1878 to 1896.29 After Margaret’s death.

26 Quaife, introduction, Absaraka, xxxviii-xxxix. Heitman, Historical Register, I, 286.
28 Utley, Frontier Regulars, 111-112.
correspondence between Carrington and Frances (Fannie Courtney) Grummond, the widow of an officer killed in the Fetterman Fight, led to their marriage in April 1871. It lasted forty years.³⁰

Henry Carrington was a prolific writer. He contributed to many periodicals and published nine books from 1849 to 1898 on military and patriotic subjects. Some organizations regarded him as an expert on Indian affairs, and extended invitations to the former colonel to discuss his experiences in the West. Reflecting his reputation as an Indian expert, he also negotiated a federal treaty with the Flathead nation in 1889.³¹

Frances Carrington also became an author. Just three years before her death in 1911, she began recording a “narrative of [her] life on the Plains in 1866.”³² The inspiration came from a July 1908 Independence Day celebration in northern Wyoming. Local and state officials dedicated a monument at the site of the Fetterman Fight south of Sheridan, Wyoming. They invited Henry and Frances Carrington and several surviving enlisted men of the old Eighteenth U. S. Infantry to speak and otherwise participate in the festivities. Frances Carrington then produced My Army Life and the Fort Phil. Kearney Massacre, With an Account of the Celebration of “Wyoming Opened” in 1910. It recalled some of her 1866 experiences, recycled parts of Margaret Carrington’s book, recounted the 1908 celebration activities, and included some memoirs from the gathered enlisted veterans.³³ Current historical interest in her personal experiences as an Army wife, in addition to the veteran memoirs she included in her book, have kept this memoir in print into the 1990’s. The memoirs by the three adult Carringtons, Henry, Margaret, and Frances were major sources for Dee Brown. They will also be major sources for this thesis, both as factual references and as targets for mythmaking.

Among the several definitions of myth, “an unfounded or false notion” fits the meaning intended in the title of this thesis.³⁴ A number of myths are associated with key events prior to the Fetterman Fight. Three in particular stand out as important enough to receive attention in the coming chapters. Hereafter

³¹ Ibid. Two examples of his Indian expert speeches can be found in Henry B. Carrington, The Indian Question (Boston: Charles H. Whiting, 1884). 1-14, 15-20.
³³ Quaife, introduction, Absaraka, xlv-xlv.
³⁴ Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 770.
they will be known as (1) the June 1866 Treaty Myth, (2) the Battle of Crazy Woman’s Fork Myth, and (3) the Winter 1866 Jim Bridger Myth.

Historical accounts of the actual Fetterman Fight have cultivated a unique set of myths. With some inferences appearing as early as Colonel Carrington’s first official reports of the event in 1866, four of these myths have persisted into the 1990’s. These four myths will be known as (4) the Fetterman Myths, since they are all adjectives applied to Captain Fetterman’s character. The adjectives are (A) Arrogant; (B) Disobedient; (C) Foolish; (D) Cowardly. An abbreviated description of each of these myths follows below.

(1) THE JUNE 1866 TREATY MYTH. Writers have long maintained that Red Cloud, an important Oglala Lakota war chief, was present at Fort Laramie during treaty negotiations in mid-June 1866 when Colonel Carrington’s Eighteenth Infantry column arrived and camped nearby. As the story goes, Carrington’s introduction at the treaty council proceedings elicited a famous speech by Red Cloud, followed by a personal confrontation between the two men, then concluded with Red Cloud’s angry exit from the council to go on the warpath. This myth has survived so long that it was recently (1997) included in Robert W. Larson’s new biography of the celebrated Lakota leader.35

(2) THE BATTLE OF CRAZY WOMAN’S FORK MYTH. On 20 July 1866, at Crazy Woman’s Fork of the Powder River, a battle lasting several hours pitted a small Army wagon train against a numerically superior force of Lakota warriors. Dee Brown said this action was typical of the classic Indian surround, with the circled wagons and circling warriors now part of western folklore. According to an incredibly detailed memoir by a participant enlisted man, S. S. Peters, this casualty-filled Indian fight finally ended when the famous scout Jim Bridger brought a second Army detachment to the rescue.36

(3) THE WINTER 1866 JIM BRIDGER MYTH. Besides his part in the Battle of Crazy Woman’s Fork Myth, Jim Bridger also figured in another popular and long held myth. His major biographers recorded, and other writers have believed, that after Bridger returned to Fort Phil Kearny in October 1866 from an extensive scouting trip to Montana, he spent the winter of 1866-1867 at Fort Phil Kearny. The

Carrington memoirs of this period were especially condemnatory about the Indian fighting capabilities of Carrington’s officers, especially Captain Fetterman. Their recording of Jim Bridger’s observations about these officers were used to support their criticism. These Carrington memoirs infer that Bridger was still at Fort Phil Kearny from late October through the winter of 1866-1867, and still advising Colonel Carrington through the Fetterman Fight and its aftermath.37

(4) THE FETTERMAN FIGHT MYTHS. Stories told about William Judd Fetterman center around both his actions and his alleged attitude before the Fetterman Fight, and his performance during the fight on 21 December 1866. Historical consensus has been that Captain Fetterman was guilty of four specific charges. Each has become an oft-repeated component of the story, and this thesis argues that each has mythical elements. (A) ARROGANT. Fetterman was consistently arrogant and contemptuous of the fighting abilities of plains Indian warriors. This attitude never changed, was expressed in the famous eighty-man boast attributed to him, and was the underlying cause for the disaster. (B) DISOBEDIENT. On the day of the Fetterman Fight, Fetterman ignored the direct orders of his commanding officer. Colonel Henry B. Carrington. These orders specifically forbade him from crossing Lodge Trail Ridge. Carrington and his adjutant repeated them three times to Captain Fetterman before his detachment left Fort Phil Kearny that morning. Fetterman deliberately disobeyed the orders, and led his men over the ridge to their deaths in an ambush. (C) FOOLISH. Fetterman did not learn from previous experiences in Indian fighting during November and December 1866, and was therefore a tactical fool, allowing his command to be drawn into a fatal ambush by Indians! (D) COWARDLY. Fetterman proved to be a coward in defeat when he committed cooperative suicide with Captain Frederick Brown near the end of the fighting.38

Together, these four charges against Fetterman are Colonel Carrington’s official position, blaming the disaster entirely on Captain Fetterman.

When James T. King wrote his article "Fetterman Massacre" for Howard Lamar’s 1977 work, *The Reader’s Encyclopedia of the American West*, he selected only two secondary sources as worthy of mention for the Army’s side of the story. One was Dee Brown’s *Fort Phil Kearny: An American Saga* (1962). King concluded, “Historians have tended to accept Carrington’s assertion that Fetterman had disobeyed orders and therefore was to blame for the catastrophe; that viewpoint is well presented in Dee Brown, *Fort Phil Kearny: An American Saga.*”

Carrington’s version is only one of several possible scenarios revolving around Carrington’s orders to Fetterman. They all attempt answering the critical question: Why did Fetterman cross Lodge Trail Ridge? At least four potential answers have been proposed over the years, including Carrington’s. If indeed the Carrington version is mythical, what are the other three possible reasons for the successful Indian ambush of Fetterman’s command?

Two other possibilities were suggested in King’s other important secondary source, J. W. Vaughn’s *Indian Fights: New Facts on Seven Encounters* (1966). According to King, Vaughn argued “that Fetterman instead was probably following an order by Carrington to make an offensive movement against the small group of Sioux that had ridden out to decoy the soldiers into a trap, and that Carrington’s story was an attempt to shift the blame from himself.” In addition, Vaughn speculated that the cavalry became separated from Fetterman’s infantry and in the excitement “dashed after the decoy Indians without Fetterman’s consent.” Vaughn’s chapter on the Fetterman Fight is the single most significant exception to the standard charges against Fetterman as causes of the disaster.

When King updated the same article for the 1998 version of Lamar’s encyclopedia, the only work he added was the significant 1973 monograph by Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891*. Utley devoted one chapter (“Fort Phil Kearny, 1866”) to the Fetterman Fight. Near the end of that chapter, Utley noted that after Carrington left the Army in 1870, his contemporaries were indifferent to Carrington’s efforts at vindication. However, “with historians of later dates..."
generations he largely succeeded, for it is his version that until recent years has colored most account of the events culminating on Massacre Ridge on December 21, 1866.\textsuperscript{45} His final conclusion on Fetterman was that “it has been customary to place sole blame on Fettermen for flagrantly disobeying orders and leading his men into an ambush. The weight of evidence still supports that conclusion.”\textsuperscript{46} But Utley recognized that the two alternative causes suggested by Vaughn were still possibilities. Reiterating Vaughn’s second proposal, Utley observed, “Fetterman may have intended to go no further than the Lodge Trail crest, but found himself drawn beyond it when the cavalry made an unauthorized charge.”\textsuperscript{47}

Remi Nadeau postulated a fourth possible cause for Fetterman’s crossing of Lodge Trail Ridge. In his 1967 work, \textit{Fort Laramie and the Sioux Indians}, Nadeau believed the topography and notations on Carrington’s own maps of the Fetterman Fight showed that Fetterman did not disobey Carrington’s orders, at least in letter. Nadeau proposed, “Technically, Fetterman had not disobeyed Carrington’s order against going over Lodge Trail, but he had violated the spirit of it by going past Lodge Trail by the road to a point more than four miles from the post.”\textsuperscript{48}

One valuable source ignored by King in his updated 1998 “Fetterman Massacre,” was an article by John D. McDermott published in 1991. In addition to providing primary research on the early life of William Judd Fetterman, McDermott recited a list of events during November and December 1866 involving Captain Fetterman. Entitling his article “Price of Arrogance: The Short and Controversial Life of William Judd Fetterman,” McDermott interpreted these events to support what this writer has labeled the \textit{arrogance thesis}. McDermott’s answer to the question, Why did Fetterman cross Lodge Trail Ridge? In fact, McDermott’s article is basically a reinstatement of the old Carrington version, with McDermott choosing the \textit{arrogant} characteristic as the dominant factor. As an extension of his \textit{arrogance thesis}, McDermott closed his article by lumping Fetterman together with his predecessor Grattan, and his successor Custer in a triumvirate of arrogance and ignorance. “In history’s perspective, [Fetterman] stands a decade after John Grattan and a decade before George Custer, as an embodiment of the best and worst of

\textsuperscript{44} Utley, \textit{Frontier Regulars}, 97-114.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Ibid.}, 111.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Ibid.}, 113.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Ibid.} Vaughan’s comments about the cavalry are found in \textit{Indian Fights}, 83.
the military personality, brave beyond question, brash beyond dispute. Later in this thesis, we will dispute this inequitable bunching of the final actions of Grattan, Fetterman, and Custer, which glosses over important differences among them.

McDermott did make an important contribution to the list of four possible reasons why Fetterman led his men into the ambush north of Fort Phil Kearny. He directly attacked J. W. Vaughn’s proposal that Fetterman was following verbal orders from Carrington for an offensive against the Indian forces, and so was ordered to his death by Carrington. Vaughn probably based his conclusion on information provided by William H. Bisbee, who quoted a conversation with F. M. Fessenden, in which eyewitness Fessenden denied Carrington had ever specified where Fetterman could not go. McDermott provided both circumstantial evidence and a list of seven other eyewitnesses who left correspondence affirming that Carrington’s orders to not cross Lodge Trail Ridge were given to Fetterman as recorded in the written copy Carrington included in his official report of the Fetterman Fight. McDermott’s article does appear to narrow the choices down to three possible reasons why Fetterman crossed the ridge. However, part of Vaughn’s contention about an offensive move being planned can still be argued within the restrictions of the Carrington orders.

In summary, there are four possible scenarios answering the simple question, Why did Fetterman cross Lodge Trail Ridge? Each can be identified with a simple title, brief description, and named historian advocates. All four proposals are actually varied interpretations of Colonel Carrington’s orders to Captain Fetterman.

(1) FETTERMAN DISOBEDIENCE or ARROGANCE. Captain Fetterman deliberately and flagrantly disobeyed Colonel Carrington’s direct orders, leading his men over Lodge Trail Ridge to their deaths. This is Carrington’s official position, and the received text or consensus of most historians. In 1991, John D. McDermott reinstated the dominance of this view newly embodied in his Arrogance Thesis.

(2) CARRINGTON ORDERED OFFENSIVE. The officially reported written orders by Colonel Carrington were not the actual orders given verbally to Captain Fetterman. These verbal instructions

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49 McDermott, “Price of Arrogance,” 42-53. The quote is on page 53.
authorized Fetterman to pursue the Indian forces in an offensive movement designed to achieve maximum loss to the Indians. Carrington composed these official written orders later to deflect blame for the disaster from him to Fetterman. This is one of J. W. Vaughn’s 1966 proposals, and the position attacked and at least partially refuted by John D. McDermott in 1991.

(3) UNAUTHORIZED CAVALRY CHARGE. Carrington’s orders did limit Fetterman from taking his command beyond Lodge Trail Ridge, but plans went awry when the cavalry component made an unauthorized charge from the crest of Lodge Trail Ridge, and Fetterman followed in support with the infantry. Vaughn also advanced this idea, and Robert M. Utley repeated it in 1973. McDermott’s Arrogance Thesis does not permit this interpretation.

(4) CARRINGTON MAPS. Carrington’s officially reported written orders were given to Captain Fetterman, but the Lodge Trail Ridge restriction applied only to the terrain west of the saddle where the Bozeman Trail crossed the ridgeline. Fetterman may have violated the spirit but not the letter of Carrington’s orders by crossing the ridge on the Bozeman Trail. Remi Nadeau suggested this idea in 1967.

This writer believes that the Carrington-McDermott version is a myth, one part of the western folklore that has long buried the true story of the Fetterman Fight. However, none of the three alternatives can provide a stand-alone creditable explanation. A new version, combining ideas from the three alternate scenarios, more accurately fits the known facts and likely probabilities, and may represent what really happened on 21 December 1866. This writer also believes that the Fetterman Disobedience and Arrogance position is fundamentally a racist interpretation of the Fetterman Fight. Seen primarily from the Army’s viewpoint, the Disobedience and Arrogance interpretation clearly assigns blame for the disaster on an incompetent Fetterman rather than crediting the Native American allies and their leaders for daring, courage, or excellence in executing a large scale ambush. For those allied chieftains and warriors, there is not much glory in besting an arrogant fool. If, however, a competent Army officer, employing regular forces and using lessons learned over nearly two months, was defeated by the strategic planning of the war chiefs, the boldness of the decoys, and the exceptional execution by allied warriors, that would be a singular achievement in northern plains warfare of the nineteenth century.

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Since there were no white survivors in the Fetterman Fight, finding the truth of the matter requires using Army sources, memoirs from both sides, and evidence on the field of battle itself. We will begin by investigating the importance of the northwestern plains and the Powder River country to several Native American peoples from the early eighteenth century into the early nineteenth century. Early Euro-American interest in this geographic region follows, bringing the story into the mid-1860's. Then we will move to the specifics of the year 1866, from the controversial Fort Laramie treaty in June to the tragic fighting of December. Finally, this writer will propose a new interpretation of the Fetterman Fight, one that can be shared by modern Americans of all ethnicities.
CHAPTER 2

PLAINS PARADISE

About 1830, the River Crow chieftain Arapooish (Sore Belly) described an earlier time when the Crow tribal homeland proffered the best of nature's stores in the valleys of the Yellowstone, Bighorn, and Powder Rivers. It was their plains paradise.

The Crow country is a good country. The Great Spirit has put it exactly in the right place; while you are in it you fare well; whenever you go out of it, whichever way you travel, you will fare worse . . . The Crow country is exactly in the right place. It has snowy mountains and sunny plains; all kinds of climates and good things for every season . . .

The land Arapooish extolled was part of the northern plains, a variegated topography north of the Platte River. The north flowing tributaries of the upper Missouri, bisected the grassy tablelands of the Missouri Plateau, forming coulees that fingered down from hills and ridges. These rivers watered corridors of cottonwoods, willows, and limber pines lining their banks. These corridors had served since ancient times as arteries of travel and oases for both people and the animals they hunted.¹

The northern plains region was deceptive. Outsiders who came there saw only vast stretches of forbidding terrain. The openness did not mean emptiness; the region was rich in natural resources. Those who became experienced plains dwellers had to risk the wildly changeable weather conditions. In a single day the temperature could rise or fall over fifty degrees; winds could blow dust or deliver deluge. The western high plains averaged only about twelve inches in annual rainfall. The soil was relatively poor, but the scanty rainfall watered an abundance of grasses. These were rich sources of nourishment for vast herds of bison, elk, deer, antelope and other game.²

Between 1500 and 1850, the Great Plains had a carrying capacity of about twenty-two to twenty-five million bison, with perhaps five to six million of those on the northern plains. These huge bison herds attracted Indian peoples to the plains. The buffalo became central to their cultures and prominent in their cosmologies and ceremonies. Indians ate, wore, traded, slept in, played with, fought with, and worshiped various bison parts.

Although each of the northern plains peoples had unique social and political organizations, religious ceremonies, languages, crafts, and customs, the nomadic groups shared a common annual economic cycle shaped by hunting and gathering from nature's seasonally changing store of resources. These pastoral nomads began their annual cycle in spring. Small extended family groups left their winter camps along sheltered waterways and began to reassemble at a prearranged location. There they formed a tribal circle with their skin lodges.

From June through September, access to water crowded the bison herds into the valleys of the most reliable rivers. By June, the gathered tribe, numbering several thousand individuals, had completed a communal buffalo hunt and attended to the appropriate annual ceremonies. The warriors may have participated in large scale war parties to secure territorial claims or seek revenge on rival tribes. During the summer, the tribal circle broke up into village bands, each of several hundred people under recognized leaders; these bands then returned to river valleys claimed for their annual use. Until autumn, the village bands conducted smaller scale hunting of non-migratory game. They gathered buffalo-berries, elderberries, chokecherries, and starchy roots like breadroot, Jerusalem artichokes, and Indian potatoes.

From October to May, the bison herds moved to the northern and western edges of the northern plains seeking shelter in the parklands and more broken country to the west. From late September to early October, there was time for horse raiding, traveling, and trading with other bands and tribes; the bands also conducted additional bison hunts to store up food for the winter. By late November to early December, the larger bands dispersed into extended family groups who again sought their sheltered winter sites. For the

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5 West, Contested Plains, 69.

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next several months, the families enjoyed visiting, playing games, and storytelling. They weathered out the
cold months with carefully husbanded food resources supplemented by limited hunting.²

Despite, or perhaps because of similarities in economic lifestyles, northern plains tribes
continually fought each other. Intertribal warfare was fueled by competition for natural resources,
maintaining access to trade, the cultural requirements of revenge, and the social benefits of war honors.
Shifting rivalries and alliances complicated these conflicts. Plains warfare was also ambivalent. Tribal
need for survival limited the loss of skilled hunters in battle, and truces for trade often interrupted the
fighting.³

Plains intertribal warfare had elements of a dangerous and oft times lethal game. Warriors kept
counting coup by their systems varied somewhat by tribe. For example, the Crows used theirs to define
chieftainship. For that purpose, they distinguished four types of coup. (1) Touching an enemy, whether he
was hurt or not, counted as a coup proper. Four men could count coup on the same enemy, but the honor
decreased with each touch. In addition, in any single fight, only one man could claim the honor of striking
the first-coup for the entire action. (2) Taking an enemy’s bow or gun in personal combat gave a warrior
another type of coup. (3) Cutting loose and stealing a tied horse from a hostile camp, was the third type of
Crow coup. (4) The last deed for honor and chief status required a warrior to demonstrate leadership by
planning and conducting a raid.⁴

Counting coup gained individual honors, but most fighting was done in the company of friends
who belonged to the same military or warrior society. All of the plains tribes had these organizations, and
similarities among the tribes may be attributed to cultural borrowing from the Mandan system during the
eighteenth century as people moved out onto the plains. Examples from the Cheyennes will illustrate
warrior societies. There were three levels of membership, regular, little chiefs, and big chiefs. A typical
Cheyenne society had from one to four big chiefs, four to sixteen little chiefs, and a set of special emblems.


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songs, weapons, and war techniques. Within a society there was a wide variety of special medicines and clothing, making each warrior unique.\textsuperscript{11}

As a young man reached his teens, he joined a society, often his father's, but there could be competition for members. Society membership waxed and waned in accordance with society achievements, proof of good medicine. Although names changed over time, Cheyenne warrior societies included the Bowstring Soldiers, Wolf Soldiers, Crazy Dogs, Red Shields, Dog Soldiers, Fox Soldiers, and Elk Soldiers.\textsuperscript{12}

Scalping had important symbolic meaning to the peoples of the northern Great Plains. The scalp simultaneously represented honor, victory, and life itself. These people believed the human spirit was related to human hair.\textsuperscript{13} The men of plains tribes grew scalp locks as symbols of their own souls. A warrior earned honor by taking a dead enemy's scalp. His family could then adopt the soul represented by the scalp as if it were a living captive as a replacement for a dead family member or as revenge to bring rest to the dead family member's restless spirit.\textsuperscript{14} The scalp thus symbolically represented both the spirit of the dead enemy and the spirit essence of the dead relative.\textsuperscript{15}

Mutilation was the ultimate revenge on defeated enemies. Plains warriors expected to encounter old enemies in the afterlife, where the dead enemy took his physical condition at death into that world. A victorious warrior could have a decided advantage in that world by dismembering a dead enemy in this world. The mutilated body arrived in the hunting grounds of paradise blind, without arms or legs, etc.\textsuperscript{16}

Intertribal warfare had been ongoing for centuries before European contact, but the Euro-African introduction of horses and guns to plains tribes impacted their economic lifestyles and altered intertribal warfare. Equipped with horses, Indian families could transport more goods, range greater distances, and hunt more efficiently. Possession of horses often defined family wealth. Horses were also a

\textsuperscript{11} Moore, \textit{The Cheyenne}, 126-129.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} Hassrick, \textit{The Sioux}, 90.
\textsuperscript{15} Hassrick, \textit{The Sioux}, 90, 333.

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medium of exchange, traded with friends and adopted kinfolk, or raided from enemies. Plains societies
developed horse raids into a form of art, an essential part of their lifestyle.\textsuperscript{17}

Together, horses and guns also brought changes in the tactics and weaponry of intertribal
warfare.\textsuperscript{18} Horses gave warriors mobility. Mounted, warriors could make hit-and-run strikes offensively.
Defensively, they could cover the flanks of a moving camp, and respond quickly to any threat. Mounted
raids on enemy villages, occasional cavalry battles, and horse raid skirmishes replaced large scale infantry
battles fought between two simple line formations. Light cavalry actions fostered both a decrease in the
size of fighting formations, and more individualism in warfare.\textsuperscript{19} Infantry bows, spears, clubs, and large
leather shields gave way to cavalry bows, lances, lighter war clubs, trader knives, and smaller shields.\textsuperscript{20}

Small shields were useful in deflecting blows, and their owners considered them the loci of
individual "defensive magic." Appropriately adorned with designs, colors, and markings, the shields called
for supernatural interference to protect the owner. Mounted warriors abandoned leather armor, and
replaced the Spanish style saddle with a simpler stuffed leather pad. The simple design allowed the rider
freedom to stay aboard his horse while performing acrobatic feats, shifting from side to side, using the
horse as protection from enemy projectiles.\textsuperscript{21}

There were three basic types of actions in intertribal warfare: horse raids, revenge expeditions, and
ambushes. The most common offensive actions were horse raids. These were intended to eschew combat,
limiting the loss of valuable hunters, while demonstrating bravery and cunning by capturing wealth in
horses.\textsuperscript{22} A successful leader used stealth and careful planning to avoid enemy warriors, capture a large
number of horses, and return home without losing any of his companions. Usually an experienced man in
his thirties independently organized and led a small group of younger men in their teens and twenties on a

\textsuperscript{17} Darrell Robes Kipp, "Horses and Indians," Frederick E. Hoxie, ed. \textit{Encyclopedia of North American
\textsuperscript{18} John C. Ewers, introduction. Frank Raymond Secoy, \textit{Changing Military Patterns of the Great Plains
Indians} (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1953; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Book
edition, 1992), xi.
\textsuperscript{22} McGinnis, \textit{Counting Coup}, 12.
horse raid. The raiders usually numbered less than a dozen men; these either volunteered or were invited to join the raid.\(^3\)

Expeditions for revenge were usually a response to the death of important leaders or warriors at the hands of an enemy tribe. A prominent chief with war experience and a record of success in battle led these expeditions.\(^4\) These large-scale raids often included several hundred warriors. They were preceded by elaborate preliminary ceremonies prior to departure seeking help from the unseen world of spirits. The warriors traveled with highly trained war ponies, wore special clothing and carried shields. After a successful raid there were post-raid scalp dances in the home camps.\(^5\)

Targets of the horse raids or revenge expeditions included both portable skin-lodge camps, and the more permanent earth-lodge villages located along major waterways. These riverine earth-lodge villages were easier to locate, because their occupants could not move them as easily or as often as the fully nomadic tribes moved their camps. In that sense they were like the permanent Army installations in the west. Fort locations were relatively permanent, as well. An unexpected dawn attack by several hundred mounted warriors constantly threatened large, walled earth-lodge villages like those of the Pawnees along the Loup. The attacking warriors might achieve war honors quickly by catching a few outliers working or gathering near the village and counting coup on men, women, and children. Village warriors usually reacted to these attacks, riding out to meet their enemies. Casualties were relatively small for both sides unless one side tried to retreat or there was a great disparity in numbers. “at which time a massacre might occur.”\(^6\) As will be shown later, the Fetterman Fight outside Fort Philip Kearny was much like these earth-lodge village raids.

Ambush was the third type of action common to plains intertribal warfare. This tactic was common in both small and large-scale operations; revenge war parties often employed the ambush. The following Crow-Cheyenne clash from the 1820s illustrates this old plains warfare trick, and its place in intertribal warfare.\(^7\)

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\(^4\) Ibid. 136-137.


Dangling Foot's small band of Crows had camped on the headwaters of the Cheyenne River near the Black Hills. A party of Cheyennes spotted them, attacked them during the night, and wiped out nearly the whole Crow camp. A few Crow men escaped, fled westward to the main Crow camp, and reported the disaster to Sore Belly, Crow Chieftain. Urged to action by relatives of the dead, the Foxes, Big Dogs, and Lumpwoods soldier societies gathered six hundred warriors for a revenge war party. After individual and tribal ceremonial preparations were complete, Sore Belly led the warriors out of the Crow camp in search of the Cheyennes.  

They first returned to the ravaged campsite of Dangling Foot's band where they cared for the remains of their slain relatives. Then they followed the Cheyenne trail south. After ten days, Sore Belly's scouts found Striped Elk's Cheyenne village nestled between two creeks in the valley of the Arkansas. The next night, Sore Belly concealed his warriors in two long lines among the growth and trees of the creek beds about a mile from the Cheyenne camp. Sore Belly led one line; Little White Bear the other.

Early in the morning, seven chosen Crow decoys went down each creek to the Cheyenne village. The decoys slowly drove the Cheyenne horse herd away from the lodges toward a big hill at the junction of the two creeks. Their route took them between the two lines of hidden Crow warriors, now spaced from ten to twenty paces apart. Seeing what appeared to be a few horse raiders, many of the young Cheyenne warriors gave chase on foot.

Striped Elk tried to call them back, but his young men continued chasing the small Crow party. By the time the decoys were near the big hill, they had lured between sixty and eighty Cheyennes into the ambush. Some Crow warriors then cut off the Cheyennes at the rear and the hidden Crows attacked the Cheyennes caught in the trap, and killed all of them. The Crows also attacked and killed warriors who sallied from the Cheyenne camp.

When the Crows moved on the Cheyenne Camp, Sits in the Middle of the Ground toppled Striped Elk with a well-aimed musket shot. The remaining Cheyenne warriors fled. Crow warriors scalped and mutilated the body of Striped Elk. Others plundered the Cheyenne camp, captured over two hundred women and children, and collected over one thousand horses. Before they withdrew, the Crows counted

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more than one hundred dead Cheyennes. The Crows lost five dead and from ten to fifteen wounded. Sore
Belly's warriors were elated with victory. After they reached their camp, they celebrated their revenge
with singing and dancing. 32

This story illustrates the essential elements of an ambush by a large revenge war party. To prepare
for the expedition, the ambushers participated in appropriate warrior ceremonies. Then the war party
leaders carefully planned the ambush. The war party chief assigned leaders to control the two lines of
hidden warriors. He also selected decoys who could attract the attention of those to be ambushed, and then
lead them into the ambush kill zone. The decoys used a topographic feature to trigger the actual fighting,
in this case, the arrival of the decoys near the big hill was the signal to attack. Additionally, the elements of
surprise, numerical superiority, and coordinated execution insured victory in the ambush. A successful
ambush often annihilated the trapped party. In this example, even the presence of an experienced
Cheyenne chief did not prevent disaster for his band.

A followup attack on the enemy camp was possible if the protecting warriors were defeated and
fled. The spoils of the battlefield went to the victors, including horses, camp baggage, and captives.
Having won war honors in the actual fighting, warriors followed up the victory by taking scalps and
mutilating enemy bodies. Finally, upon returning to their home camps, the victors celebrated their
successes, and completed their revenge with song and dance.

For many years, the tribes of the northwestern plains had fought each other in intertribal warfare
like the Crow-Cheyenne confrontations above. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Mountain Crows, the
Northern Arapahoes, the Northern Cheyennes, and the westernmost Teton Sioux, or Lakotas, emerged as
the major competitors for Sore Belly's plains paradise, the hunting grounds later disturbed by the Bozeman
Trail. The country south of the upper Missouri River in modern Montana and Wyoming, bounded to the
west by the Bighorn Mountains, and to the east by the Black Hills, and the Platte River on the south,
became contested ground. Intertribal warfare, trade relations, losses to epidemic disease, and changing
bison ecology, brought leaders of these tribes to make historic decisions affecting their futures. Their

31 Lowie, Crow Indians, 235. Denig, Five Indian Tribes, 168.
32 Lowie, Crow Indians, 235-236. Denig, Five Indian Tribes, 168-169. I have followed Denig's account of
the casualties. Lowie reports only one lost Crow warrior. Lowie was interested in the ceremonial aspects
of the Crow warrior societies. The only warrior death he recorded was related to the breaking of a taboo by
the lost warrior's sister.
competing claims to the Powder River country can be traced through a complex of rivalries and alliances extending back more than a century.

Among the early arrivals on the northern plains was a Siouan speaking group who left the headwaters of the Mississippi in the sixteenth century. Later known as the Hidatsa, they migrated west and built earth-lodge villages on the upper Missouri River. Soon thereafter, a related group called the Awitixas either joined the Hidatsa briefly before moving west, or actually separated from the parent Hidatsa people in a migration still recalled in tribal rituals. Later, the Awitixas became known as the Mountain Crows.

While the Hidatsa remained semi-nomadic horticulturalists along the Missouri River, while the Mountain Crows chose a nomadic life, eventually ranging south of the Missouri to the Platte River, west to the Yellowstone drainage, and east beyond the Black Hills. About 1700, another group separated from the Hidatsa and settled in the region north of the Yellowstone and along the Musselshell River, these were known as the River Crows.

Crow bands, numbering upwards of a thousand people, included several maternally related clans led by chiefs, “good men” selected for merit and demonstrated courage. Chiefs were assisted in policing the camps by the warrior societies including the Lumpwoods, Foxes, and Big Dogs.

During the 1700’s, Crow expansion to the northwest was blocked first by the Shoshones, and then by the Blackfeet. By 1800, the Blackfeet, assisted by the Cree, Sarsi, Atsina, and Assiniboin tribes had pushed the Shoshones back to the Rocky Mountains. (See Map 1 for tribal locations about 1800.) For the Crows, the Blackfeet replaced the Shoshones as the rival power north of the upper Missouri River. South of that river both the Crows and the Arapahoes challenged the Shoshones. As competing rivals, Crow and Arapahoe warriors pressured the Shoshones westward toward the Rocky Mountains. Crow bands then ranged through lands vacated by the Shoshones, especially those drained by the upper Yellowstone system.

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34 Hoxie, Parading, 37, 39-42. Lowie, Crow Indians, 5, 172-173.

35 McGinnis, Counting Coup, 9-10.

36 Ibid., 10.
During the latter part of the eighteenth century, the Crows were decimated by a devastating series of epidemic diseases that reduced their strength by eighty-five percent. By 1805, they only numbered about 2,400 people. By that time, the Mountain Crows had hived into two groups living south of the Yellowstone River. The more populous Mountain Crow bands roamed along the upper Yellowstone, south along the Bighorn Mountains as far as the Platte, and east beyond the Powder River into the Black Hills. The Kicked In The Bellies band found hunting grounds south of the Bighorn Mountains near the Shoshone River, and east to the Little Bighorn, the Tongue, and the Powder.\(^{37}\)

During the first half of the nineteenth century, Crow bands participated in the beaver pelt trade with French traders from Montreal. By the 1830's, the Crows were trading buffalo hides with American traders, bringing Crow hunters into competition and conflict with the Cheyennes and Lakotas east of the Powder River and south of the Platte.\(^{38}\) The Crows, weakened by diseases and having few allies, experienced increasing pressure to hold their hunting grounds and keep their trade connections free from interference by their powerful neighbors.\(^{39}\)

By the mid-nineteenth century, Crow bands hunted within reach of trading posts, a choice that regularized their movements and locations. The Mountain Crows ranged the Bighorn basin south of the Bighorns to the Wind River Mountains, and north to the Yellowstone Valley, trading at the Green River rendezvous and at Fort Laramie. Kicked In The Bellies bands still ranged east of the Mountain Crows, trading at Fort Laramie and occasionally at Fort Union. River Crow hunters moved between the Yellowstone, Judith, and Musselshell Rivers; their trading contacts were usually at Fort Union.\(^{40}\) By the 1850's, Crow population had increased to roughly 2,800; the Mountain Crows and Kicked In The Bellies totaled 1,800.\(^{41}\) The Crows also defended their plains paradise against the Northern Arapahoes. By the 1700's, the Algonquian-speaking predecessors of the Arapahoes came into the plains from the Great Lakes region. Before the nineteenth century, there were five groups called Nakasinena (sagebrush people), Nawunena (southern people), Aaninena (white clay people), Basawunena (wood-lodge people), and Hanahawunena (rock people). The Aaninena settled north of the others in what is now Montana and were

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 53-55.
\(^{39}\) Ibid. 65.
\(^{40}\) Ibid., 68-72.
\(^{41}\) Denig, *Five Indian Tribes*, 142-143.
known as the Gros Ventres of the Prairie. Atsinas, or A'ani'. The Nakasinena absorbed most of the Basawunena and Hanahawunena to form the Northern Arapahoes; most of the Southern Arapaho bands descended from the Nawunena.\textsuperscript{42}

Arapahoe bands included both bilaterally related kin and unrelated individuals, but no clan system. Arapahoe males were organized into peer group age-sets who progressively went through seven ceremonial grades. Sets articulated tribal social cohesion across the bands. There were two grades for youth, and five for adults, with elders of the seventh grade serving as priests and having final authority in religious matters. Band headmen normally came from the sixth grade, men in the late forties and fifties, although the Arapahoe age-grade system did not define political or economic power but the hierarchy of ceremonial authority.\textsuperscript{43}

About 1795, when the Shoshones had been pressed westward toward the Rockies, the Arapahoes ranged near the Black Hills and along the Cheyenne River.\textsuperscript{44} By 1806, the Arapahoes moved west of the Black Hills into the Powder River country and south to the Platte with a few as far south as the Arkansas River. Incentives for the southward migration included pressure from the more powerful Lakotas, and Arapahoe involvement in a central plains trade alliance with the recently arrived Cheyennes. Northern Arapahoe bands ranged north from the parklands of the Colorado Rockies, the southern Arapahos ranged south from central Colorado, one band as far as modern Texas.\textsuperscript{45}

In the mid-1820's the more populous Lakotas dominated the plains north of the lower Platte; they assisted the Cheyenne-Arapahoe alliance in driving the Kiowas and Comanches south of the Arkansas, and the Crows west toward the Powder River country. Arapahoe warriors also clashed with Pawnees in the Platte region and the Utes in western Colorado. In 1829, an estimated two thousand Cheyennes lived in present-day eastern Wyoming and southwestern South Dakota. They were associated with four thousand


\textsuperscript{43} Fowler, \textit{Arapahoe Politics}, 3, 8, 14.

\textsuperscript{44} McGinnis, \textit{Counting Coup}, 10. Fowler, \textit{Arapahoe Politics}, 15.
Southern Araphos and two thousand Northern Arapahoes living in what are now Wyoming and Colorado. Both tribes needed the alliance to hold hunting grounds against pressures from the Pawnees, Crows, and their erstwhile allies, the Lakotas.  

During the 1830’s and 1840’s, survival became more difficult for both divisions of Arapahoes. The advent of American trading posts on the Platte and Arkansas between 1834 and 1839, increased trade but also brought more American travelers and epidemic diseases. After the westernmost Lakotas moved into the forks of the Platte during the 1840’s, hard pressed Arapahoe bands became increasingly dependent on trade goods for basic needs. Intermediary chiefs who were friendly to Americans, gained new importance in trading relationships. But by 1850, the Arapahoes were thinned by disease and intertribal warfare; the northernmost bands held only the parklands along the foot of the Rocky Mountains.  

For much of the nineteenth century, the Cheyennes were the most reliable allies of the Arapahoes. Like the Arapahoes and Blackfeet, the Cheyennes’ ancestors were Algonquian speakers from the Great Lakes area. About 1680, three small “proto-Cheyenne” bands known historically as the Chienatons, Chongasketons, and Oudebatons, lived in the headwaters of the Mississippi where they were allied with the Dakotas against the Crees, Chippewas and Assiniboins.  

Seeking escape from intertribal warfare, these three bands left the upper Mississippi, initially moving west and north to the Minnesota River area, then to the James River. About 1760, they shifted west to the middle Missouri River valley where they established three farming villages near the Mandans and Hidatsas. Within twenty years, the three bands abandoned the villages after suffering both epidemic disease and Chippewa attacks. Between 1780 and 1800, the Chientons and Oudebatons began a transition to nomadism by crossing the Missouri, then drifting south to do some planting in the Black Hills and hunting along the Grand and Cheyenne Rivers. The Chienatons became known as the Tsistsistas, Cheyennes proper; or Aorta People; the Oudebatons were known as the Omisis or Eaters.  

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46 Fowler, Arapahoe Politics, 15-16.
47 Ibid., 22-25.
Very early in the 1800’s, the warrior societies from the Aorta and Eaters bands gathered ceremonially with their prophet-leader Sweet Medicine near the Black Hills at Bear Butte, called Noahavose by the Cheyennes. At this gathering, the loose confederation of bands organized to become the Cheyenne nation. Sweet Medicine gave the warriors two sacred arrows to kill bison, two arrows to defeat enemies, the Sun Dance and the Arrow Ceremony to solidify their people, and a Council of Forty-four Chiefs to lead the people in peace, unified as the Cheyenne nation.50

Traditional Cheyenne bands were confederations of extended families related matrileneally, or through their mothers. However, membership in the Cheyenne military societies, and places on the Council of Forty-four Chiefs, tended to be passed on patrilineally, from father to son. There was no quota of chiefs for each band. Duties of the Forty-four Council Chiefs included deciding external questions of peace and war, making alliances and treaties, and internal judicial or peace-keeping functions. They also directed the communal buffalo hunts, and specialized in the rituals and procedures to aid success in the hunts. Soldier Chiefs led the military societies; they guided the horse raiding and revenge warfare. Before 1840, when a Soldier Chief was invited to join the Council, he was expected to resign from the warrior leadership. After 1840, tensions between matrilineal and patrilineal chief systems fractionalized the Cheyenne nation.51

Soon after the ceremonial birth of the Cheyenne nation, the third proto-Cheyenne group, known as Chongasketon. Sutaios, or Dog People, migrated across the Missouri in two separate groups. The first joined the Cheyennes east of the Black Hills, the second in what is now Montana. When Lewis and Clark mapped the early Cheyenne people in 1804-1805, they recorded five groups or bands around the Black Hills. In addition to the Aortas or Tsistsistas, and the recently arrived Sutaios, the Eaters had split into three bands: the Omisis proper, and the smaller Totoimanas and Wotapios. The Wotapios had already migrated south to the North Platte River where they had established a friendly relationship with the Kiowas. Later, the Omisis and Totoimanas constituted the bulk of the Northern Cheyennes.52

Sometime after Lewis and Clark, a group known as the Sheo, who had been associated with the Lakotas, began affiliating with the Cheyennes. Following some disagreement with their Lakota brethren,
this hybrid Chienaton-Dakota band migrated west to join the Cheyennes as the Masikota band. With their arrival, the Cheyenne nation had grown to include six bands by 1825: Omisis, Totoimana, Wotapio, Tsistsistas, Sutaio, and Masikota. Despite their growth, the Cheyennes only numbered about two thousand in the 1820's. As noted earlier, in addition to expanding their own tribal circle, the Cheyennes also made a trade and military alliance during this period with their Algonquian-speaking neighbors, the Arapahoes.

During the 1820's, the new Cheyenne nation struggled with the Kiowas. With their allies, the Arapahoes, and some help from the Lakotas, the Cheyennes drove the Kiowas south from the Black Hills across the Platte River. Then the expanding Lakotas began pushing the Cheyennes south as well, despite their alliance with the Arapahoes. Pushed by the Lakotas, and attracted by trade networks of the central plains, most of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes ventured south of the Platte and into the forks of that river. The Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes then became occasional allies in fights with the Kiowas, Crows, and Pawnees.

Trade opportunities and the environmental limits of horse nomadism pulled the Cheyenne nation apart after 1825. Migrations geographically polarized them into two tribal divisions, as the bands gradually became more discrete and dispersed. Before 1825, the Wotapios had already moved south to the Arkansas, probably drawn by their close relations with the Kiowas. By 1825, the main body of Cheyennes, or Tsistsistas, migrated to the forks of the Upper Platte. In 1828, a group of the Tsistsistas negotiated a move to the Arkansas River valley for trade relations with William Bent. Led by Yellow Wolf, this band was called the Hevhaitaneos or Hair Rope People. In the early 1830's, about the time Bent completed his fort on the Arkansas, the Oivimana (Scabbies) also broke off the Cheyennes and traveled south to join the Hevhaitaneos.

In 1837, Porcupine Bear and the Dog Soldiers warrior society decided to camp together as a separate band, the Hotometaneos. This began a major alteration in tribal custom and organization in the Cheyenne nation. Instead of the man going to live with his wife’s family, the traditional matriarchal and matrilocality pattern, the wife came to live with him and his warrior society companions, a patrilineal, and

53 Ibid., 117-123.
54 West, Contested Plains, 76-77.
55 Ibid., 83-84. Moore, Cheyenne Nation, 210, 234-235.
patrilocal pattern. This change to a patrilocal system eventually altered how the Council Chiefs were constituted and made decisions about warfare. The Sutaio band had used the patrilineal system before they joined the Cheyennes. So the Sutaio may have further complicated patterns when they split north and south; the southern group possibly influenced the Hisiometaneo to separate from the Hevhaitaneos. Finally, the Masikota band was decimated by cholera in 1849. The remnants fled south to merge with the Dog Soldiers.56

By mid-nineteenth century, there were ten major Cheyenne bands. North of the Platte River, the Northern Cheyennes had migrated the least: the Omisis and Totoimana bands ranged from the Black Hills west into the Powder River country. The northern Sutaio were north of the Black Hills along the Little Missouri. Those who remained with the Tsistsistas or Heviksnipahis still camped in the forks of the Platte. The Hisiometaneo were southeast of the Black hills along the Niobrara near Pine Ridge; the associated southern Sutaio were nearby south of the Platte. Also south of the Platte were the Hotametaneo, Masikota, Wotapios, Hevhaitaneos, and Oivimanas. By 1847, the total Cheyenne population was about 2,500, of whom 1,600 were Southern Cheyennes. Of the 900 Northern Cheyennes, the Omisis band constituted two-thirds of the division.57

The advent of the Teton Sioux, or Lakotas, in the Black Hills region, was a major contributing factor to band migration and division of the Cheyenne nation. The Lakotas were the last major tribe to arrive on the northern plains. For nearly a century, they dominated the heartland of the northern plains. They were powerful enough to make no concessions, needed few alliances, and made many enemies.58

The Lakotas developed a formidable and fluid society on the northern plains. By the nineteenth century, they sought to preserve their society through strong kinship ties, metaphorically seen as the sacred hoop (cangleska wakan). Lakota subtribes (ospaye) each consisted of two or more bands (tiyospaye); each band included ten or more bilaterally extended families. Larger bands were subdivided into several camps (wicoti). Tiyospaye were led by head chiefs (italcans), good men who exhibited the Lakotas' four cardinal virtues of bravery, fortitude, generosity, and wisdom. These chieftainships were somewhat hereditary, leaving room for at least some of the politically ambitious to rise to leadership. Residence in a tiyospaye

57 Moore, Cheyenne Nation, 131, 194-195, 207-239.
58 Hassrick, The Sioux, 61.
was based on personal choice and acceptance of the \textit{itancan} leadership. "Prereservation Lakota society was fluid and dynamic, characterized by the recurrent fusion and fission of bands."\textsuperscript{59}

There was no centralized political power in the \textit{tiyospaye}. \textit{Itancans} did not lead by command, but by persuasion and coercion. Other \textit{tiyospaye} leaders were included in a Chiefs Society or Council where decisions were made by consensus, not majority rule. Leaders included the senior male of each extended family (headman), the war party chiefs (\textit{blotahunka}), warriors, and holy men (\textit{wicasa wakan}). The Chiefs Council filled the offices of camp administrator (\textit{wakiconza}), often from among the headmen, and camp policemen and messengers (\textit{akicita}). The \textit{wakiconza} functioned as an executive committee of two to six men who organized communal hunting and camp movements, and settled disputes. The \textit{akicita} came from one of the warrior societies; they enforced the decisions of the \textit{wakiconza}. Once a consensus decision had been made, they had authority to punish insubordination.\textsuperscript{60}

When the \textit{tiyospaye} gathered in a multiband camp as constituent parts of an \textit{ospaye}, the leaders of all the \textit{tiyospaye} met in a large council to choose camp leaders. On special occasions they also selected four head shirtwearers for the \textit{ospaye}. Their responsibilities included preserving tribal land and people, feeding and clothing the poor and orphans, and serving as supreme peacemakers. Symbols of their office included a special fringed shirt and a pipe of peace. Head shirtwearers resolved internal conflicts, while the \textit{blotahunka} led resistance to external threats. The annual Sun Dance, usually held in June, reaffirmed the relationship of the Lakota people with the Great Mystery. For this ceremony, the bands gathered in a sacred village overseen by \textit{wicasa wakan}. All were important in preserving the hoop.\textsuperscript{61}

Long before they dominated the northern plains, the Dakota ancestors of the Lakotas lived far to the east in what is now Minnesota. About 1685, they left homelands contested by the Crees, Assiniboins, and Ojibwas in the headwaters of the Mississippi River, to pursue fur trade and bison hunting on the prairie. Armed with French trade guns, they advanced west in three stages. First, in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries, the Lakotas and their Yantonais brethren pushed the Omahas, Otos, Cheyennes,

\textsuperscript{59} Catherine Price. \textit{The Oglala People, 1841-1879} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 2-5.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 5-13.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 16-18.
Missouris, and Iowas to the south and west. By the 1750's, the Lakotas had crossed to the west bank of the Missouri River, had obtained some horses, and were becoming an equestrian, nomadic plains society.62

During the second stage, from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, they gradually claimed the middle Missouri River region from the White River to above the Cheyenne. About 1775, the Lakotas reached the Black Hills, a geographic center in their complex cosmology. But the powerful Arikara confederacy blocked further advance west on the plains or up the Missouri River. Then a series of smallpox epidemics struck the earth lodge villagers. The Lakota nomads moved away from the epidemic, avoiding the catastrophic losses suffered by the Arikaras, Mandans, and Hidatsas, leaving them vulnerable to attack. The Lakotas defeated the remnants of the confederacy in 1792, sweeping the disease decimated riverine tribes into enclaves along the Missouri while extending Lakota control along the upper Missouri nearly to the mouth of the Yellowstone.63

In 1804, Lewis and Clark found the three Lakota groups, the Miniconjous (Those Who Plant by the Stream), Oglalas (Scatter One's Own), and Sicangus (Burnt Thighs, or Brule's), east of the Black Hills and straddling the Missouri River from north of the Cheyenne to south of the White. Another Lakota division, the Saones, were further north along the Upper Missouri. From this strategic position, these Lakota ospaye began the third stage that lasted until midcentury.64

As they pushed west along the Missouri River, the Saones fissioned into three new ospaye. known as the Hunkpapas (End of the Horn or Entrance), Itazipcos (Without Bows or Sans Arcs), and Sihasapas (Black Feet). The Crows resisted the westward advance of the Saones south of the Missouri River. In 1822-1823, the Lakotas were victorious over the Crows, driving them west to the Yellowstone and Powder River country, which became a buffer, or neutral ground between them.65

Concurrently with the Saones' drive west along the Missouri, the Oglalas and Sicangus advanced southwest of the Missouri onto the buffalo plains. By 1825, the Oglala and Sicangus took the plains

between the Black Hills and the Missouri River for their own. They drove the Kiowas south, and pushed
the Crows west to the Powder River; after pressing the Arapahoes and Cheyennes south and west from the
Black Hills, the Lakotas formed an alliance with them. By the 1830's, Oglala warriors were sharing
hunting grounds and competing for trade with the Arapahoes and Cheyennes along the Upper Platte and in
the Platte forks region; they clashed with Crow and Pawnee warriors hunting on the same ground. Sicangu
warparties also contested control of the Lower Platte with the Pawnees, pushing them south.66

The Miniconjous pushed west on a line north of the Oglalas and Sicangus. They also pressed the
Crows back to the Powder River. The seventh Lakota ospaye formed during the 1840's, separating from
the Miniconjous. Known as the Oohenunpa (Two Kettles), they were the smallest Lakota subtribe. By the
late 1840's the seven Lakota ospaye boasted a total population of about 13,000.67

Lakota incentives for expansion during the first half of the nineteenth century included the
pressures of increasing population, an increasing demand for bison and horses, the decline of bison
populations, and an attempted domination of the riverine villagers who could be raided or traded with as
necessary. What drew the Lakotas south to the Platte and west to its forks was a rich game area formed
where animals retreated to the nebulous borders between tribes. In these border areas, the animals were not
disturbed as often by hunters. In the 1830's, the Oglalas and Sicangus fought the Pawnees and Crows for
the region below Fort Laramie between the forks of the Platte, and in the 1840's, for the Medicine Bow-
Laramie plains country above Fort Laramie. Lakota hunters and warriors successfully dominated both
regions against the Pawnees and the once formidable Crows.68

In the fall of 1841, the Oglala Bear people and Smoke people gathered at Fort Laramie to trade.
Led by their Itancan Bull Bear, the Bear group were composed of four tiyospaye: the True Oglalas, Sharp
Tail Grouse, Kiyuksa (Breaks His Own or Cut-Off), and Ghost Heart's band. The Smoke group under their
Itancan Old Smoke, included three tiyospaye: the Hunkpatila, Ite Sica (Bad Face), and Oyuhpe (Thrown

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65 Lone Hill, "Sioux," 491. Hassrick, The Sioux, 1-6, 68. White, "Winning the West," 335. To avoid the
inconsistency of using English, French, and Lakota names for the ospaye, this writer has used the Lakota
titles exclusively throughout.
67 Kingsley M. Bray "Lone Horn's Peace: A New View of Sioux-Crow Relations, 1851-1858," Nebraska
68 White, "Winning the West," 328-337.

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Down or Unloads). A quarrel between the Bear and Smoke peoples later led to a drunken fight in which Bull Bear was reportedly killed by Red Cloud, a young relative of Old Smoke. The murder generated a consequential schism in the Oglalas that had long term implications clear into the reservation era. Most of the old Bear faction became Southern Oglalas who hunted south of Fort Laramie on the Republican and Smoky Hill Rivers and allied with the Southern Cheyennes. Soon after the split, the True Oglala tiyospaye joined the Northern Oglalas; this division of the ospaye began wintering north of the Upper Platte in the Powder River country in association with the Miniconjous and the Northern Cheyennes.69

When the Northern Oglalas began moving north of the Upper Platte in the 1840’s, they challenged the Crows for control of their plains paradise. The Yellowstone drainage of the Powder, Rosebud, and Big Horn Rivers, long held by the Crows, gradually became a border area between the tribes in the 1840’s and 1850’s.70 Game animals, including bison, concentrated there. The concentration coincided with another phenomenon, the contraction of the northern plains bison herds.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the bison herds of the northern Great Plains were in decline. There were at least three reasons for the shrinking bison population. A major drought on the plains began about 1846, reducing the grasses bison consumed. At the same time, bison herds had fewer safe retreats. American emigrants were homesteading the tall-grass prairies and the parks of the Rockies where the herds had long found refuge from drought. In addition, the spread of domestic cattle diseases contributed to the decline. Finally, the worldwide market economy had drawn the northern plains tribes deeply into the robe trade. Their annual slaughter of animals far exceeded their needs. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the northern plains bison herd was depleted. As the northern herd shrank westward, intertribal competition and warfare intensified. By the 1860’s, the Montana and Wyoming plains were the last, best hunting grounds north of the Platte River.71

In the two decades from 1846 to 1866, the neutral ground between the Crows and Lakotas was the subject of treaties, a route for a contested trail, and troubled geography for both native nomads and migrant whites.

70 White, “Winning the West,” 334-335.
CHAPTER 3

TRAILS, TREATIES, TROUBLES

By 1848, there were three major emigrant routes to the Pacific Coast across the western United States: the Missouri River route to the north, the Santa Fe Trail to the south, and the central route up the Platte River Road, the primary highway for migrant wagon trains headed to Oregon, California, and Utah. That part of the Platte River Road from Fort Kearny to Fort Laramie was the primary thoroughfare for westward expansion from its earliest use by fur trader wagon trains in 1830 until the Union Pacific superseded it in the late 1860's. By mid-century, the central route through Fort Laramie concentrated "migratory, military, and communications" traffic along this riverine corridor.¹

The Platte River road was not a single trail, but a miles-wide scar of wagon tracks both north and south of the river.² Heavier use of the route following the 1849 California gold rush disrupted the natural migrations of the bison herds; it also altered the nomadic travels of the native peoples who followed them. Roaming bison herds, frightened by the wagon trains and deprived of grass and water by emigrant stock, divided north and south of the Platte River Road. The northern herd concentrated in the Powder River country; the southern herd foraged south of the Platte to the Republican and Arkansas Rivers.³ By the early 1850's, the annual emigrant traffic through the Platte River valley had made the division permanent. Hastily dug graves of Asiatic cholera victims, rotten animal carcasses, and abandoned emigrant possessions, littered the trails and polluted the water. Emigrants had turned the trail "into a swath of stinking refuse."⁴

While affecting plains ecology, these grand movements of population irreparably altered the economic and political balances on the plains. Tribes were forced to seek new hunting grounds.

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¹ Merrill J. Mattes, The Great Platte River Road (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 4-7.
² Nadeau, Fort Laramie, 62-63.
³ Moore, Cheyenne Nation, 56. Nadeau, Fort Laramie, 63.
⁴ Price, Oglala People, 30.
aggravating intertribal competition. 5 Emigrant travel along the Platte Road intersected with the movements of tribal war parties crossing the river. Especially of concern to Indian agents during the 1840's was the decimation of the once powerful Pawnees. The Platte Road corridor cut right through the middle of their villages, driving game animals away. Trade with passing wagon trains introduced epidemic diseases. Weakened Pawnee villages suffered attrition in constant warfare with raiders from neighboring plains tribes, especially the Lakotas. War parties repeatedly crossed the Platte River Road, frightening emigrants and occasionally stripping them of stock.6

In the past, Indian problems had been solved by pushing the tribes further west. Now the emigration had leapfrogged to the Pacific Coast and the Great Basin, in effect surrounding the plains tribes. Some officials of the federal government believed the solution to the problem in the Platte River valley was to create two great "colonies" for Indian populations. South of the Platte Road, Indian Territory was already well established. Proposals for a similar island on the northern plains had been developing slowly since Commissioner of Indian Affairs T. Hartley Crawford suggested an Iowa location in 1841. The humanitarians married the colonization idea to their plans for preserving and "civilizing" the Indians, "a kind of panacea for the Indian problem."7 By mid-century, the federal government believed they could control intertribal warfare with a combination of permanent forts along the Platte Road and a new treaty. By establishing tribal boundaries, the treaty could initiate a future northern plains Indian colony.8

The U. S. Army obliged by establishing the first military posts along the Platte Road. Troops built Fort Kearny in 1848, between Fort Leavenworth on the Missouri River and an old fur trading post on the Platte River. After purchasing the fur post in 1849, the army renamed it Fort Laramie. It became an important stop on the way west.9 From 1849 to 1851, Thomas Fitzpatrick used his position as the first Indian agent for the new Upper Platte Agency to secure the new treaty offer for the plains tribes. He

6 McGinnis, Counting Coup, 80-84.
7 Prucha, Great Father, 116-117.

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believed the treaty would decrease the danger of intertribal warfare and compensate the tribes for losses in game and grass.\footnote{Trennert, \textit{Alternative to Extinction}, 181-186.}

After some delays, Fitzpatrick and his superior, Superintendent Mitchell, finally convened their "big talk" at the end of August 1851. Over nine thousand Indians camped along Horse Creek to the east of Fort Laramie, feasting, dancing, visiting, and receiving government gifts while leaders discussed the treaty. The majority of the native participants were Lakotas, and their allies the Cheyennes and Arapahoes. Distrust of the Lakotas and the Crows kept the Comanches, Kiowas, and Plains Apaches from attending.\footnote{Ibid., 188-190.}

Lakota threats deterred the Pawnees from sending a delegation, and minimized the contingents of Crows, Arikaras, Hidatsas, and Assiniboines.\footnote{White, "Winning of the West," 340.} Mormon political pressure sent a small delegation of Shoshones; enroute they were attacked by Cheyennes. Most of the Shoshones returned home, and the few who arrived at Horse Creek received little recognition for their trouble since they were out of Fitzpatrick's jurisdiction.\footnote{Ibid., 340-341. Trennert, \textit{Alternative to Extinction}, 186-187.}

Richard White declared "the whole conference can be interpreted as a major triumph for the Tetons."\footnote{White, "Winning of the West," 340.} While that may be true, federal agents managed to get "head chiefs" appointed and tribal boundaries mapped. Chief appointments were an early stage of congressional interference in plains tribal political organization; the 1851 boundaries began the federal reservation system for plains tribes.\footnote{Trennert, \textit{Alternative to Extinction}, 181-186.}

During the treaty negotiations, the time came for symbolically centralizing tribal leadership. Representatives of the federal government believed that only if each tribe had a recognized "head chief" could there be clear communication and accountability for violations of the treaty. An age-graded social system allowed the Arapahoes to quickly selected Little Owl as their head chief.\footnote{Fowler, \textit{Arapahoe Politics}, 32-33.} Walks With His Toes Turned Out, a priest with questionable leadership ability, was a more dubious choice by the Cheyennes.\footnote{Ibid., 33. Powell, \textit{People of the Sacred Mountain}, I, 105.}

The Mountain Crows picked Big Robber, a Kicked-in-the-Bellies chieftain.\footnote{Hoxie, \textit{Parading}, 86-87.} Twenty-four Lakota band
leaders finally agreed on Brave Bear (Conquering Bear) of the Wazaza tyospaye, the choice of Indian superintendent David D. Mitchell: Brave Bear reluctantly agreed to represent all of the Lakotas.19

Father Pierre Jean De Smet, a Jesuit missionary who had worked with the tribes from Oregon to the northern plains since 1840, joined his friend, Jim Bridger,20 and Fitzpatrick in drawing tribal boundaries which recognized the territorial dominance of the Lakotas.21 (See Map 2 for tribal boundaries in 1851.) Obvious in the lines of demarcation was the Lakotas' westward movement north of the North Platte. Without comment, the Crows abandoned any claim to former lands east of the Powder River.22 Troubling to the Lakotas' allies, the Northern Cheyennes and Northern Arapahoes, this formalized tribal cartography ignored completely their claims to hunting grounds north of the Platte.23

Black Hawk, an Oglala spokesman, objected to the new boundaries. "You have split the country and I do not like it." Black Hawk outlined the Oglala territory as "What we live upon we hunt for, and we hunt from the Platte to the Arkansas, and from here up to the Red Butte and the Sweetwater." Speaking of the lands adjoining the Platte River, he continued, "These lands once belonged to the Kiowas and the Crows, but we whipped these nations out of them, and in this we did what the white men do when they want the lands of the Indians."24

Black Hawk's rhetoric symbolized the dissatisfaction of all the tribes in arbitrary lines drawn on the ground. That dissatisfaction even showed up in the language embodied in the treaty. A provision in Article 5 acknowledged that the tribal signatories did not "abandon or prejudice any rights of claims they may have to other lands," nor did they "surrender the privilege of hunting, fishing, or passing over any of the tracts of country" described in the tribal boundaries.25 There was little deterrence to intertribal warfare in that language.

The original treaty stipulated the distribution of federally funded annuities for fifty years. By the time the Senate ratified the treaty on 24 May 1852, political debate had trimmed the period to ten years plus

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19 Price, Oglala People, 34-35.
21 Trennert, Alternative to Extinction, 190.
22 Hoxie, Parading, 87.
23 Powell, People of the Sacred Mountain, 1, 109.
24 Quoted in Fowler, Arapahoe Politics, 32. See also Price, Oglala People, 34.
a presidential option for five more years. Leaders of the tribes agreed to the change soon after the ratification. That meant the 1851 Fort Laramie treaty expired in 1866.\textsuperscript{26}

During the fifteen-year life of the amended Horse Creek Treaty, each of the signatory tribes pursued strategies and courses of action thought best for their own people. Survival was paramount to the Arapahoes. During the 1850’s distribution of treaty annuities through the intermediary chiefs was problematic. Arapahoe chiefs accused their agent, Thomas Twiss, of diverting their annuities to his wife’s Lakota relatives between 1855 and 1861. In 1854, and again in the 1860’s, Indian agents used Indian-white hostilities as official excuses for withholding annuities as well.\textsuperscript{27}

Discovery of gold in Colorado in 1859 drove a further wedge between the southern and northern branches of the Arapahoe tribe. When settlers overran Southern Arapaho land between the South Platte and the Arkansas, chiefs from the southern bands were left with little choice but accommodation with the settlers. In an act deeply resented by their northern relatives, the Southern Arapahos ceded their land in the Fort Wise Treaty of 1861. Disaster soon followed in 1864 when Colonel Chivington’s Colorado volunteers attacked both Black Kettle’s peaceful Cheyennes and a small Arapaho band under Left Hand. By 1865, the remaining Southern Arapahos chose to survive by accepting a small reservation in Indian Territory. The northern bands were on their own.\textsuperscript{28}

Chiefs of the Northern Arapahoes, or Sage People, had more choices than did their southern counterparts during the 1850’s. Their bands ranged from the sources of the South Platte River north to Red Buttes; they hunted and wintered to the foot of the Bighorn Mountains. Three bands accounted for about 180 lodges, roughly 1,100 people. Friday’s band camped along the Cache la Poudre between the forks of the Platte. Medicine Man’s “Long Legs” chose the North Platt-Sweetwater region. Black Bear’s people followed him between the North Platte and the Black Hills.\textsuperscript{29}

The outbreak of serious Indian-white hostilities in the 1860’s did not unite the tribal bands in a common defense. Contrarily, the warfare tended to fracture band loyalties into war and peace factions. Band chieftains accumulated followings based not just on family relationships. More significantly, band

\textsuperscript{26} Harry Anderson, “The Controversial Sioux Amendment to the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851.” \textit{Nebraska History}, 37, No. 3 (September 1956): 201-220.
\textsuperscript{27} Fowler, \textit{Arapahoe Politics}, 35. Twiss replaced Fitzpatrick who died in 1854.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 35. 39, 43-44. Robert M Utley, \textit{The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846-1890} (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 86-93.
leadership was decided by perceived ability to keep their followers out of harm's way, or demonstrated warfare skills. Among the Northern Arapahoes, the intermediary chiefs who earlier enabled valuable trade relationships, now had to deal with questions of war or peace. Friday remained a peaceful intermediary chief. He was not seen as the best leader for troubled times, so most of his band defected to the other two bands. When he moved south to the Denver area for safety, only eighty-five people went with him. The bands of Medicine Man and Black Bear chose to avoid the 1864 fighting in Colorado by going north to hunt buffalo in the Powder River country. There they had the defensive advantage of being closer to their Lakota and Northern Cheyenne allies. They were still there in 1865.

Like the Arapahoes, the Cheyennes suffered additional tribal fractures in the 1850's. Even before the disaster at Sand Creek, "the polarization of the Cheyenne nation between a peace faction and a war faction was far advanced" among the Southern Cheyennes. The militant Dog Soldiers continued to draw marginal groups away from the peace chiefs from about 1838 to 1856. "As the Dog Soldiers gained strength, they carved out a new territory for themselves east of the other Cheyenne bands, on the Republican and Smoky Hill headwaters between the Platte and the Arkansas." Only immediate family loyalties kept the core matrilocal faction tied to the peaceful band chiefs. Hostilities with whites in the early 1860's accelerated this shifting of band loyalties. By 1864, the peaceful southern bands had lost so much population to the war faction that they were easy targets for Denver whites with no interest in differentiating the allegiances of Cheyenne bands.

The 120 Cheyenne lodges at Sand Creek included people from the Wotapios (Black Kettle's band), the Heviknipahis, Hevhaitaneos, Oivimana, Hisiometaneo, and a few southern Sutaios. After being brutalized there in November 1864 by Chivington's forces, the peace faction counted only eighty lodges. By 1865, the rest of the southern Cheyennes aligned themselves with the patrilocal Dog Soldier-Masikota band, the Hotametaneos. The Southern Cheyennes had mobilized for war "largely by a switch of allegiance on the part of the marginal bands." That is, the groups of Cheyennes who had previously been

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29 Fowler, Arapahoe Politics, 43.
30 Ibid., 42-43.
31 Moore, Cheyenne Nation, 192.
32 Ibid., 198.
33 Ibid., 193.
34 Ibid., 193-194.
35 Ibid., 196.
satellite camps to the families of peaceful council chiefs, gave up the old marriage rule of a man going to live with his wife's band. Instead, they became satellites of the military societies like the Dog Soldiers. Warfare allowed the Dog Soldiers to reverse Cheyenne social structure in the south. Unwilling to accommodate white expansion, the military societies followed their traditional lifestyle; they survived by raiding.36

Unlike their southern cousins, the Northern Cheyennes never produced a distinct peace faction; they maintained their political unity under unique circumstances. By 1840, "the Northern Cheyennes considered the schism between themselves and the southerners to be permanent, so they organized a complete [matrilocal] political system among themselves, with forty-four chiefs."37

Additionally, there were three other reasons why the northern branch of the tribe maintained unity. First, ecological pressures for division were not as strong, one reason the Omisis consistently remained the most populous Cheyenne band, totaling about 900 in the mid-1860's. With a smaller population than the southerners, the Northern Cheyennes located on better buffalo hunting grounds and horse grazing lands north of the Platte. This allowed them to stay together most of the year. Second, the northern chiefs were usually more militant, often reflecting the belligerence of their Lakota allies. Third, when pressures for militarism and patrilocal residence with the military societies developed by the mid-nineteenth century, the old rule requiring Soldier Chiefs to resign to become Council Chiefs was abandoned in the north.38 This meant the same Northern Cheyenne chiefs could decide for peace or war, make alliances and treaties, and mobilize the warrior societies. The northern council of forty-four combined both roles of the old dual chief system. Important leaders who apparently had this dual role in 1866 included Little Wolf and Two Moons.39 Decisions for war or peace were critical in the Powder River country in the 1860's. The Northern Cheyenne solution made some of their choices in 1866 uniquely fascinating.

While the southern branches of the Arapahos and Cheyennes struggled with survival and factionalism, the northern branches fared better, in part due to the proximity of their powerful Lakota allies. Immediately following the Horse Creek Treaty, however, something rare occurred on the northwestern

36 Ibid., 196-197.


38 Moore, "Cheyenne Political History," 345-346

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plains, a Crow-Lakota truce. Richard White criticized the Horse Creek Treaty as “irrelevant,” because the “boundaries it created and its prohibition of intertribal warfare were ignored from the beginning by the only tribal participants who finally mattered, the Sioux.”

While White’s criticism is generally true, at least one of the Lakota *ospaye* was exceptional. For about six years, the westernmost Miniconjous enjoyed a successful rapprochement with part of the Mountain Crows. For the year 1851, several Miniconjou winter counts recorded “Peace with the Crows.” Chief Red Fish and his son Lone Horn made peace with Big Robber and his Kicked-in-the-Bellies band of the Mountain Crows in which they agreed to share the neutral grounds in the Powder-Belle Fourche area. For the Miniconjous, the chief motivation was access to bison herds; the Crows needed safe travel to the trading posts on the upper North Platte.

Northern Oglala bands apparently participated to a limited extent in Lone Horn’s peace initiative. The other *ospaye* exercised their political independence with typically varied reactions. The Oohenonpas and Sicangus were too far east to be interested; the Itazipacos were ambivalent. For the Hunkpapas and Sihasapas along the northern end of the Lakota-Crow boundary, raiding continued as usual against Crow camps along the lower Yellowstone.

Despite some challenges to this fragile equilibrium in the neutral ground, peaceful relations lasted from late 1851 until the spring of 1857. By the latter date, Lone Horn had been drawn into closer cooperation with the more militant Hunkpapas. The peace came to an abrupt end when a Miniconjou warrior named White Robe killed a Crow woman near a Miniconjou camp. In the summer of 1866, the Northern Oglalas attempted another truce with the Mountain Crows. The success of Lone Horn’s peace with the Kicked-in-the-Bellies, though short-lived, was one reason why Oglala leaders believed they could repeat the truce.

In midsummer 1857, the Lakota *ospaye* gathered at Bear Butte, where the chiefs made major decisions in a grand council. Consensus was reached on five key resolutions. (1) All whites, other than traders, would be excluded from Lakota lands north of the North Platte River. (2) Emigrant and military
roads would not be permitted to cross Lakota territory. (3) Intruding whites would be forcibly driven out. (4) If the Yankton Sioux ceded their lands east of the Mississippi, and tried to move west onto Lakota land, they would also be expelled. (5) The Crows were to be driven out of the abundant game lands west of the Powder River. 45

Lakota war parties move quickly to achieve the expulsion of the Crows. The Oglalas angled north across the upper Powder into the Wind River country; Miniconjou warriors raided west across the middle Powder; the Hunkpapas and Sihasapas occupied the lower Powder River area. In just two raiding seasons from late 1857 to the end of 1859, the Lakota offensive forced the Crows to withdraw into the Bighorn Mountains. 46 Big Robber lost the support of his own band and the respect of the other Mountain Crows as early as 1856. 47 He and thirty of his warriors died fighting the Lakota invaders in 1858. 48

Crow-Lakota warfare closed the last of the Yellowstone trading posts in 1859. It was too dangerous for trading except at Fort Union and Fort Laramie. Mountain Crow bands now faced poverty from loss of trade, undistributed annuities, and possible annihilation from constant warfare. 49 In early 1860, the Crows evacuated the Powder River hunting grounds, moving their lodges north of the Yellowstone and east of the Bighorn. The Powder River country was now Lakota domain, shared only with the northern bands of Cheyennes and Arapahoes. 50 Within a few years. American emigrants were seeking to cross these newly won hunting grounds. Their rush to reach the Montana goldfields challenged the Lakota hegemony established in the late 1850's.

To the southeast, the Sicangu ospeye struggled to hold sufficient hunting land. During the 1830's, the Sincangus had divided into two groups. One, known by whites as the Lowland or Lower Brule's, stayed along the game-depleted White River. Their more daring relatives migrated south to fight the Pawnees for control of the Platte River valley. These Highland or Upper Brule's included four ospeye. Little Thunder's camp was later led by Spotted Tail, when trader G. P. Beauvais knew them as the Ring Band. After 1845, Swift Bear led the Corn Band, referring to their earlier attempts at farming. Named for

44 Ibid., 37-42.
46 Ibid., 44.
47 Hoxie, Parading, 88.
48 Bray, "Lone Horn's Peace," 44.
49 Hoxie, Parading, 74, 78.
50 Bray, "Lone Horn's Peace," 44.
their disastrous defeat by the Shoshones in 1844, the Orphans replaced their dead leader Big Raven with Grand Partisan. The Wazazas were an associated, unrelated band of mixed ancestry. Their itancan in the early 1850's was Brave Bear, and after his death in 1854, Red Leaf.¹¹

When white emigrants came west on the Platte River road during the late 1840's and early 1850's, they trampled right through the contested Pawnee and Sicangu hunting grounds. At first, the Sincangus regarded the emigrants with disdain. Most of them had no horses, using ox teams to pull their wagons. Even the soldiers who garrisoned Fort Laramie were infantrymen who had few horses. "What could walking soldiers do in a fight against mounted warriors?"²² The Sicangus attitude toward unhorsed whites probably reflected memories of ancestral warriors armed with a few trade guns, but no horses. That attitude toward foot soldiers was likely shared by other Lakotas, and could be one reason that the Northern Oglalas did not hesitate to raid the Bozeman Trail caravans and army post herds in 1866.

By the late 1850's, however, emigrant traffic had pushed the Southern Sicangus south of the Platte. They hunted with the Southern Cheyennes and the Southern Oglalas on the Republican and Arkansas, traded on the Platte, and continued fighting the Pawnees. In the early 1860's, the Corn Band divided: Grand Partisan led the traditional hunting camps; Swift Bear led those who were willing to try some farming. Iron Shell was chief of the traditionalist Orphans, while Red Leaf now guided the Wazazas. The Orphans and Wazazas were now more closely affiliated with the Powder River Lakotas, both Miniconjous and Oglalas.⁵³

Beginning in 1846, another band of western Lakotas chose a different strategy for survival. Amenities available at a fur trading post on the Platte River attracted Old Smoke and a mixed following of Lakotas to make the area their home camp. Around what became Fort Laramie in 1849, the old chieftain gathered an amalgam of Oglalas, Sicangus, and Lakota women intermarried with traders, soldiers, and army officers. Numbering several hundred, this band preferred the life around the army post to the more dangerous and difficult hunting camps north and south of the Platte River. In the late 1850's, other Lakotas

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¹¹ George E. Hyde, Spotted Tail's Folk: A History of the Brule Sioux (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961; new edition, 1974), 29-30, 36-37, 43-44, 128. On page 44, Hyde said Grand Partisan was head of the Orphans after 1845. On page 98, Hyde had Grand Partisan leading part of the Corn Band, and Iron Shell as chief of the Orphans. This inconsistency may be due to problems in Hyde's sources, a compositional error in Hyde's writing, or actual shifting band loyalties between 1845 and 1865. This writer has deliberately left the inconsistency in place as found in Hyde.

²² Ibid., 41, 48-49.
scornfully named them *Waylukhe* or Loafers. The Laramie band considered themselves "the sophisticated Sioux at the fort." \(^{54}\) Old Smoke kept his band quietly aloof from the troubles assailing other Lakota bands until his death in 1864. Big Mouth replaced Old Smoke as leader of the Laramie Loafers. During the 1860's, his band chose peace and the availability of trade goods at Fort Laramie over the troubles north and south of the Platte River. \(^{55}\)

Meanwhile, American-Lakota relationships along the Platte River road began to deteriorate. In 1853, a small incident at a ferry across the Platte brought a detachment of soldiers to a Miniconjou village and cost the Lakotas six casualties. The next summer, a Miniconjou warrior visiting relatives in Brave Bear's Wazaza camp, while waiting for annuity distributions near Fort Laramie, butchered an emigrant's cow. Lieutenant Fleming, commanding at Fort Laramie, sent an inexperienced West Point graduate, John L. Grattan, with twenty-nine men, two artillery pieces, and a drunken interpreter to arrest the Miniconjou. Grattan boldly marched his men into Brave Bear's camp, trained the artillery on the lodges, and demanded the surrender of the offender. After a forty-five minute parley, during which Brave Bear tried to peacefully resolve the situation by offering compensation, Grattan lost patience and ordered his men to fire. Brave Bear was mortally wounded. When Grattan ordered the artillery set off, the pieces were aimed too high, and the rounds tore ineffectually through tepee tops. There was no time for another volley. Rather than fleeing in panic, angry Sicangu and neighboring Oglala warriors chased and slaughtered Grattan's entire command. It was the first major military disaster for the U.S. Army at the hands of the Lakotas. After the Lakotas dispersed, Brave Bear miraculously survived nine days before succumbing to his wounds. Oglala and Sicangu war parties then conducted revenge raids along the Platte River road, prompting an American military response the following year. \(^{56}\)

In 1855, the U.S. Army dispatched Colonel William S. Harney to retaliate. In early September, his command found Little Thunder's Sicangu camp along Blue Water Creek just north of Ash Hollow and the Platte Road. While sustaining twelve casualties of their own, Harney's men destroyed Little Thunder's camp, killing eighty-five, wounding five, and capturing seventy, losses amounting to more than half the

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camp population. Harney then led his forces on a campaign through the heart of Lakota lands north of the Platte River. After moving along the Black Hills, down the White River, and around the Badlands, his column arrived at Fort Pierre on the Missouri in October. Forewarned by Little Thunder's disaster, the other Lakotas avoided Harney's forces entirely.57

Harney's message of retribution was clear, however. He demanded the surrender of warriors responsible for an earlier deadly attack on a stagecoach. Sicangu leaders feared further losses if they refused. They delivered Spotted Tail, Red Leaf, Long Chin, Standing Elk, and Red Plume to placate Harney. Colonel Harney had the five warriors incarcerated at Fort Leavenworth over the winter of 1855-1856. Fortunately, Agent Twiss had the five men pardoned before their scheduled hanging.58

Harney then called for a peace council with the Lakotas in March 1856 at Fort Pierre. In complete disregard of Lakota tribal polity, Harney insisted that the gathered bands choose new chiefs recognized by the army; he expected these appointed leaders to control their warriors. Harney's imposition of new Lakota head chiefs went unrecognized by other government officials so it died as a peace plan for the northern plains. However, the specter of Ash Hollow and the threat of a future Harney campaign kept the Oglalas and Sicangus away from the Platte River Road for eight years.59

After Harney's campaign, the Southern Sicangus and the Bear Oglalas (Kiyuksas, and True Oglalas) under Bad Wound, Little Wound, and Whistler hunted on the Republican, while continuing raids on the Pawnees. The Smoke people (Ite Seca, Oyuhpes, and Hunkpatilas) ranged north to the Cheyenne River and west to the Powder River Country, where they fought the Crows.60

Harney's campaign brought a more peaceful interlude in Lakota-American relationships on the northern plains, although intertribal rivalries continued. Far to the east, however, war had been brewing for many years. A war of words between representatives of the northern and southern states soon became a war of weapons and blood. Following Lincoln's election in the fall of 1860, eleven states in the southeast seceded from the Union, plunging the United States into a costly civil war.

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57 Utley, Frontiersmen, 115-118.
58 Hyde, Spotted Tail's Folk, 75-80
59 Utley, Frontiersmen, 118-120.
60 Price, Oglala People, 44.
At the beginning of 1861, the 16,000 officers and men of the Regular Army were spread across the continent; 183 of the 198 companies were scattered in seventy-nine posts in the West. Winfield Scott, the Commanding General of the Army, recommended early in 1861 to keep the regulars together in units, rather than spread their talent and experience as military instructors among volunteer organizations. Lincoln took Scott's advice, and moved to quickly create additional armed forces to deal with the new Confederacy, while the regulars were collected from their western posts and transported east. After the evacuation of Fort Sumpter in April 1861, Lincoln called state militias into federal service, volunteer units were formed to replace the regulars out west and serve in the east, and the Regular Army was expanded.61

The basic building block for Army manpower during the American Civil War was still the regiment. Volunteer regiments were patterned after the existing organization of the First through Tenth U. S. Infantry regiments. Each of these old regiments consisted of ten companies, designated in alphabetical order from A through K, omitting letter J. Each company mustered a captain, a first lieutenant, a second lieutenant, a first sergeant, four sergeants, eight corporals, two musicians, one wagoner, and from sixty-four to eighty-two privates. This authorized strength of 101 was the upper limit for each company. Regimental staff consisted of a colonel, a lieutenant colonel, a major, an adjutant (documents and paperwork), a quartermaster (equipment, quarters, food), a surgeon, two assistant surgeons, a chaplain, a sergeant major, a quartermaster sergeant, a commissary sergeant, a hospital steward, two principal musicians, and a twenty-four member band. Each regiment had a minimum authorized strength of 869 officers and men, with a maximum of 1049.62 In practice, companies and regiments rarely reached their authorized manpower. Constant attrition from detached service, death, discharge, and desertion, drained both officers and men away from their assigned companies. Gains from new officer appointments, and an irregular influx of recruits and enlistments, never provided sufficient manpower to keep the aggregate present and absent very close to authorized strength.63

Responding to the secession crisis, President Lincoln issued a proclamation in early May 1861, calling for nine new regiments of Regular infantry. Congress answered with acts in July and August 1861

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63 Boatner, Civil War Dictionary, 612.
authorizing the Eleventh through Nineteenth Infantry Regiments, as well as other changes. The Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, whose destiny in 1866 lay along the Platte River Road and the Bozeman Trail, was one of these nine new regiments. Like the eight other new regiments, the Eighteenth U. S. Infantry reflected organizational innovations recently favored in Europe, theoretically creating greater flexibility and recruiting capacity. Unlike the ten old ten-company regiments of infantry, the nine new regiments were authorized twenty-four companies each. The companies were organized under the regimental headquarters into three battalions of eight companies apiece.  

A major commanded each battalion. Two lieutenants detailed from the company officers in the battalion assisted the major as battalion adjutant and quartermaster-commissary. Battalion enlisted staff included a sergeant major, a quartermaster sergeant, a commissary sergeant, and a hospital steward. The aggregate authorized strength of each battalion was a maximum of 813. Each of the new three battalion regiments could have a maximum strength of about 2500 officers and men. None of the new regiments, including the Eighteenth, ever reached authorized strength because potential recruits preferred the looser discipline and enlistment bounties in the volunteer regiments. 

A detailed chronology of the Civil War service of the Eighteenth U. S. Infantry is not critical to analyzing their 1866 experiences on the plains. What is of value here, because it becomes an issue in the Fetterman Fight, is a brief look at William Judd Fetterman's background and early career as a commissioned officer in the Eighteenth.

William Judd Fetterman was born into a military family. His father, Lieutenant George Fetterman, was a West Point graduate serving with the Third U. S. Artillery; his mother was Anna Marie Judd of New London, Connecticut. The couple met and married in 1831 while Lieutenant Fetterman was assigned to Fort Trumball, Connecticut from 1829 to 1833. William was born in April 1835, his mother died soon afterwards. Thirteen months later, his father resigned his commission and returned to civilian life. After rearing William for nine years, George Fetterman died in June 1844. Now an orphan, William Judd  

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64 Weigley, United States Army, 226.  
65 This meant that the old regiments had three field grade officers, a colonel, a lieutenant colonel, and a major. The new regiments had five field grade officers, a colonel, a lieutenant colonel, and three majors, one for each battalion.  
Fetterman was taken into the home of his maternal uncle, Henry Bethel Judd, also an officer in the Third Artillery. He apparently remained there until his late teens.68

Given his upbringing in a military family, it is not surprising that in July 1853, eighteen-year-old William applied for admission to West Point while working as a bank teller in Rochester, New York. This first bid to enter military service was unsuccessful. Eight years later, William Judd Fetterman was among the first commissioned officers assigned to the Eighteenth U. S. Infantry. His date of commission as a first lieutenant was 14 May 1861, the same commission date as Henry Beebe Carrington, colonel of the new regiment. Lieutenant Fetterman reported for duty on 6 July, and was soon involved in recruiting and organizing companies at Camp Thomas, just north of Columbus, Ohio. His abilities must have been apparent early on, because he was promoted to captain on 25 October 1861, commanding Company A, Second Battalion, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry. In early December, the regiment left Ohio for duty with General George H. Thomas' Army of Ohio.69 As has been discussed earlier, Colonel Carrington was detailed from his regiment at the outset, his Civil War career consisting entirely of desk duty, while other officers led the Eighteenth in campaigns in the American Civil War's Western Theater between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River.

Captain Fetterman led his company during the siege of Corinth, Mississippi in April and May 1862, and was present for actions in Kentucky during October. At the end of December and early January 1863, Fetterman performed bravely during the four-day Battle of Stone's River, Tennessee, during which the Eighteenth Infantry lost three hundred men, half of the regiment's strength. Captain Fetterman regarded Stone's River as his most important service during the Civil War. He was later honored with a brevet of major for gallantry and meritorious conduct at Stone's River.70

At the end of April 1863, Fetterman was detailed on regimental recruiting service in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. By choice, he returned to his company in March 1864 in time to participate in Sherman's

67 Weigley, United States Army, 226-227.
68 McDermott, “Price of Arrogance,” 43.
69 ibid.
70 Ibid., 44. Heitman, Historical Register, 1, 418. Before Army leadership rewarded performance and bravery with medals, they bestowed brevet ranks on officers. The brevet was a rank higher than the officer's actual commissioned rank. This honorary title usually had no authority, rights, or pay of full rank. However, officers sometimes served in positions corresponding to their brevet ranks, controversies and confusion often followed. By the end of the Civil War, the system had been so abused, the Army finally discontinued it. See Boatner, Civil War Dictionary, 84.
Atlanta Campaign." By the first week of May, Sherman began moving his forces south toward Atlanta. Sherman's army included a very under strength Eighteenth U. S. Infantry. Only 653 officers and men were available for duty in two battalion groups. Officers were so scarce that Captain George W. Smith commanded the combined eight companies of First and Third Battalions, and Captain William J. Fetterman led the Second Battalion's total of ten officers and 373 men. Fetterman commanded the Second Battalion from 2 May until 11 July. His superior officers commended him at least three times during that period in their reports. Captain Kellogg, commanding the regiment, recommended Fetterman for another brevet for his actions on 4 July. On 15 July, General John H. King appointed Fetterman acting assistant adjutant general for Second Brigade, First Division, Fourteenth Corps, Army of the Cumberland. He served as a brigade adjutant for the remainder of the war. However, during the Battle of Jonesboro on 1 September, Fetterman was again in the thick of the fighting. His division commander, General W. P. Carlin, reported his efforts in his divisional after action report. Fetterman received his second brevet, as lieutenant colonel, for his service during the Atlanta campaign and the Battle of Jonesboro.

In mid-July 1864, the 210 men of the Eighteenth U. S. Infantry were consolidated into a single battalion. At the end of September 1864, Sherman had them sent to the rear for occupation duty at Lookout Mountain near Chattanooga, Tennessee. Along with the remnants of three other regular regiments, they remained there through July 1865. Captain Fetterman returned to his company briefly in early June. At the end of the month, he left on regimental recruiting service. He did not return to his company until early November 1866, seven weeks before the Fetterman Fight.

In summary, William Judd Fetterman's Civil War service was exemplary. He was a combat officer with two brevets for courage and gallantry to his credit. His leadership, consistent performance of duty, and loyalty to his superior officers earned him numerous commendations. His skills with reports and orders were recognized in his appointment and service as brigade adjutant. A careful reading of

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71 McDermott, "Price of Arrogance," 44.
73 Ibid., 578-581.
74 Ibid., 527, 559, 581.
75 Heitman, Historical Register, I, 418.
77 Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry. Annual Record of Events, June 1865.
Fetterman’s report of the two months he commanded the Second Battalion in May and June 1864, and his after action report of Jonesboro in September, reveal a man not enamored of his own position, and appreciative of others. Fetterman referred to the Second Battalion as “the command,” not “my command” common in other officers’ official reports. He closed his report of operations from 4 May to 5 July with kind words. “[To] the officers and men of the command. I tender my warmest thanks for their untiring attention to their duties, the ever-conspicuous gallantry, and the patient, unmurmuring devotion with which they toiled and fought and endured during this the severest campaign of the war.” These words do not suggest to this writer the attitudes and sentiments of an arrogant fool. They do portray a skilled, professional officer, appreciative of those he served with in the crucible experiences of military campaigns.

While Fetterman and the regulars of the Eighteenth U. S. Infantry were learning early combat lessons in the South, events in Minnesota brought war back to the northern plains. In 1862, the eastern Sioux, or Dakotas, responded to bad conditions on their Minnesota reservation by ravaging white settlements nearby. The U. S. Army replied with the 1863 Sibley-Sully campaign east of the Missouri River. Sully’s 1864 campaign continued the army offensive west of the Missouri. During these operations, some militant Dakotas fled west to escape the soldiers. When Sully’s forces followed them, the fighting spread westward to previously uninvolved Lakota bands, a deadly domino effect that shattered the fragile peace achieved by Harney. Punitive expeditions against the Dakotas in Minnesota had now spread hostilities westward across a major portion of the northern plains; fighting involved Lakota bands all the way to the Platte River. These military campaigns increased westward pressure on Lakota population. Lakota leaders sought to protect the newly won Powder River hunting grounds. Those resources were essential to preserving the Lakota way of life, and stood between their people and starvation.

While the army pressured the Dakotas and Lakotas from the east, a new threat to the Powder River game lands came from the west in the early 1860’s. Migrant prospectors had reversed their westward trek to California and found new bonanzas in Colorado (1858), Nevada (1859), Idaho (1860), and Montana (1861-1862). Land that earlier emigrants had once believed was useless geography was now the land of opportunity. That Native American people already occupied that ground was simply inconvenient. The

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79 Ibid., 588.
miners, settlers, and business interests who supplied them, clamored for military protection of their new communities and the roads connecting them.®

The Montana gold rush began at Bannock in the summer of 1862, continued at Alder Gulch (Virginia City) in 1863, and added the Helena area in 1864. Congress created Montana Territory in May 1864, carving out boundaries on Indian lands for the 20,000 white emigrants who had flocked to the gold fields. To reach Montana, travelers had to follow expensive and roundabout routes. The costly steamboat trip up the Missouri also required an overland trek to reach the mining districts. A longer, slower route followed the Platte Road to Utah and Idaho, then turned back east to Montana. Impatient argonauts demanded a shorter trail to Montana.®

Native Americans had long known and often used a natural route east of the Bighorn Range connecting the Yellowstone drainage and trails along the Platte River. Father De Smet had been over it in 1851 with an Indian delegation headed to the Fort Laramie council.® This natural trail went through Indian lands east of the Bighorn Range, lands unknown to the rest of the United States until an 1859-1860 expedition sponsored by the U. S. Topographical Engineers made the route public knowledge. Guided by Jim Bridger, Captain F. W. Raynolds and Lieutenant Henry E. Maynadier led their detachments over alternate routes.®

In 1863, a luckless Montana miner named John Marion Bozeman decided to try his hand at guiding emigrants over the recently publicized Raynolds route. Miners and their suppliers could save weeks of hard travel by following the new trail. They turned north off the Platte River Road just a few miles west of Fort Laramie, then angled their wagon trains northeast along the eastern edge of the Bighorn Mountains to the Bighorn River, and finally turned west to Virginia City and the gold fields. Bozeman’s wagon route went right through the heart of the Lakotas' hard won Powder River hunting grounds; in some places his road overlapped long-used native lodgepole trails.®

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® Utley, Indian Frontier, 71-72.
® Ibid., 59.
® Utley, Life Wild And Perilous, 277-279.
Named for the famous mountain man who made it public, the Bridger Trail was a safer, but longer route. Bridger’s alternate road left the Platte River Road at Platte Bridge Station (Fort Caspar), ran northwest to the south end of the Bighorn Mountains, crossed into the dry Bighorn Basin west of the mountains, then joined Bozeman’s Trail at the Yellowstone River. Both trails were used in the 1860’s but, Bozeman’s shorter route attracted the impatient.

Bozeman’s first attempt at emigrant guiding was in July 1863 with a train of forty-six wagons. A large body of Cheyennes led by Spotted Cow, with a few Lakota warriors, turned them back at Lodge Pole Creek. They were the only train to make the attempt that year. In 1864, only three trains made the trip. Bozeman led the first train of 156 wagons safely through to Montana in early summer. A. A. Townsend captained the second train of 150 wagons. Spotted Cow’s Cheyennes attacked them at the Powder River on 7 July. The wagon train lost four men dead and one wounded, but pushed on to Montana without further trouble. Cyrus C. Coffinbury’s train of 68 wagons made the final 1864 trek over Bozeman’s route; their late July run to Montana encountered no hostile warriors. Although the three trains of 1864 had only mixed success traversing the trail, their arrival in Montana presaged an active travel season in 1865. Events south of the Platte River postponed that.

What began as a minor affair in the spring of 1864, grew into a major disaster by November. On 12 April 1864, near Fremont’s Orchard on the South Platte, fifteen volunteers of the First Colorado Cavalry under Lieutenant Dunn, engaged a small band of Cheyenne Dog Soldiers headed north to fight the Crows. The warriors had with them four mules claimed by a Colorado settler. In the running firefight both sides sustained several wounded. Raids and reprisals followed until the central plains were in turmoil. The climactic event of the year was the infamous November action where troopers from Chivington’s Third Colorado Cavalry slaughtered two hundred peaceful Cheyennes along Sand Creek in Colorado.

Cheyenne messengers spread the tragic news and offered war pipes to Oglala and Sicangu bands along the Platte and further north, soliciting cooperation in revenge raids. Concerned that Sand Creek would be repeated, Sicangus, Cheyennes, and Arapahos south of the Platte moved north in December

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seeking safety for families and more secure bases of operations near their militant Powder River cousins north of the Platte. From January until July 1865, war parties of Northern and Southern Cheyennes, Northern Arapahoes, and several Lakota ventured conducted revenge raids for 150 miles along the Platte River Road. The raids began and ended with two large ambushes similar to the trap set for Fetterman's command at the end of 1866. As perspective for the Fetterman Fight ambush, these two affairs call for special emphasis. They illustrate the two major ways a carefully planned ambush could fail: (1) premature execution by the ambushing party, and (2) refusal by the party to be ambushed.

In December and January 1865, the large movement of native peoples necessitated survival supplies, available by raiding settlements along the Platte River Road. Chiefs and warriors targeted the warehouses and stores at Julesburg, Colorado in January. Near Julesburg was Camp Rankin, a small military post garrisoned by a company of Iowa volunteer cavalrmen. Soldiers from Rankin could interfere with plundering the stores, so the war leaders planned an ambush to eliminate that threat. On 7 January, a combined force of one thousand Cheyennes, Sicangus, and Arapahoes set the ambush two or three miles south of the fort. Several decoys drew out about sixty cavalrmen and some armed civilians toward the ambush site along some sand-hill bluffs. The plan worked well until some of the younger warriors broke through the restraining lines of the soldier societies. They had sprung the ambush prematurely, allowing most of the cavalrmen to escape into the fort, although the Iowa volunteers lost fourteen soldiers and four civilians in the retreat.

The fighting not only drove the cavalry back into the post, but most of the nearby civilians as well. Indian women and warriors then systematically looted the stores and warehouses at Julesburg and gathered livestock without further forays by the settlers and soldiers bottled up inside the post. Following a second raid on Julesburg on 2 February, the booty-laden camps continued their flight north.

The January ambush near Camp Rankin illustrates several aspects about that tribal warfare tactic. With a thousand warriors involved, it was large scale. Decoys numbered about seven to ten, and performed their job well, getting over sixty mounted men to pursue them. While the cavalry did suffer casualties, the ambush could have been disastrous to the Iowa company had the younger, more impetuous warriors not

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89 Utley, Frontiersmen, 294-297.
90 Ibid., 302.
91 Hyde, Spotted Tail's Folk, 106-107. See also Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, 175-179.

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prematurely sprung the trap before the cavalry actually got into the sand hills south of Camp Rankin. The Iowa cavalrymen had a chance to escape being surrounded and retreat, although even the retreat was dangerous on winded animals, as the loss of eighteen men testifies. Finally, the warriors had no interest in taking severe casualties by charging the stockade. That would have been a senseless thing to do in guerilla style plains warfare.

Before the second ambush in July, two other significant developments occurred which had repercussions in the fall of 1865. The first involved army plans for major operations against the plains tribes in 1865. Second, army mishandling of friendly bands gathered near Fort Laramie increased tensions even more north of the Platte River.

Just one day after Sand Creek, General Grant informed General John Pope that he was to command a new Division of the Missouri intended to bring all the plains departments under one head. Between December 1864 and the end of March 1865, Grant ordered major changes in leadership and force assignments in Pope's new geographical division. Of import to the northern plains tribes in the Powder River country, was Grant's enlargement of the Department of the Missouri under Major General Grenville M. Dodge, which included a new District of the Plains commanded by Brigadier General Patrick E. Connor. By late March 1865, Generals Pope and Dodge had devised a strategy for punishing the plains tribes. As part of the grand strategy. General Connor was to march against the hostile camps in the Powder River country, and cooperate with another thrust by Sully's column north of the Black Hills. Plans called for offensive operations to begin in April or May. Logistical problems, delays engineered by committees investigating the Sand Creek affair, and mutinous troops wanting to go home, postponed a watered-down version of the plan until the end of the summer. The Connor Expedition had three goals. First, the troops would punish the bands conducting the raids along the Platte River valley; second, they would secure the communications routes along the Platte Road; and third, a new emigrant route would be cleared from Sioux City, Iowa westward through the Powder River region to Virginia City.93

As part of securing the communications routes, a new fort was envisioned on the Powder River near one of the Bozeman Trail crossings. Suggested in February by Lieutenant Colonel Collins of the Eleventh Ohio Volunteer Cavalry, the new fort was approved by General Dodge in March. In June, Major

92 Hyde, Spotted Tail's Folk, 107-108.
General Pope ordered it built by Connor's soldiers. The fort's future garrison was expected to protect travelers to Montana, and provide a check to free movement by the Indians.94

The new emigrant road added a consequential wrinkle to Connor's plans. Sponsored by merchants in Sioux City, and funded by the Department of Interior, James A. Sawyer's expedition was expected to map and improve a road westward along the Niobrara River, eventually intersecting the Bozeman Trail and its connection to the Montana mining camps. General Dodge ordered a military escort for Sawyer's train. Companies C and D of a new regiment, the Fifth U.S. Volunteer Infantry, organized in March and April from Confederate prisoners of war ("galvanized Yankees") at Alton, Illinois. West Pointer Henry E. Maynadier, a veteran of western service including Raynold's topographical exploration of the Powder River country, was appointed colonel of the Fifth.95 He would later figure prominently in the treaty negotiations at Fort Laramie in June of 1866.

While plans for the Connor Expedition inched forward, some bands of Lakotas sought to avoid the fighting and raids along the Platte River valley. They joined the Loafers near Fort Laramie for safety.96 In April, Little Thunder and Spotted Tail came there with sixty lodges of southern Sicangus. Swift Bear's Corn Band came in as well.97 Unfortunately, the temporary commander at Fort Laramie, Colonel Thomas Moonlight, was not disposed to treat the pacifist bands well. In mid-May, some of Moonlight's Indian police brought in to Fort Laramie two small Oglala bands led Two Face and Blackfoot. Two Face had ransomed a white captive woman, Lucinda Eubank, from some Southern Cheyennes now north of the Platte, believing that returning her would demonstrate his pacifism. Instead, Colonel Moonlight peremptorily ordered both Two Face and Blackfoot hanged.98 The friendlies at Fort Laramie were shocked by Moonlight's injustice. Although their sense of security had been seriously compromised, they stayed put.99

93 Utley, Frontiersmen, 304-308.
94 Murray, Military Posts, 13.
97 Hyde, Spotted Tail's Folk, 118.
99 Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, 120.

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In early June, Major General Dodge forced the issue of continued pacifist residence at Fort Laramie. Dodge knew little about the Lakotas. He thought the bands at Fort Laramie were surrendered hostiles, prisoners of war. Fort Laramie figured prominently in Connor’s planned campaign into the Powder River country. Dodge saw Lakota bands at Laramie as a potential threat, or at least an embarrassment to his offensive. In early June, he telegraphed Washington for directions concerning the Lakotas at Fort Laramie. Secretary of War Stanton instructed him to treat them as prisoners and send them all to Fort Kearny, Nebraska. That would put these Lakotas in the heart of enemy Pawnee land.

On 11 June, 135 Seventh Iowa cavalrymen and a few Indian police began moving 185 lodges of Sicangus and Oglalas, and the 700 Loafers down the Platte River toward Fort Kearny. Three days later, at Horse Creek, the Lakotas refused to go any farther. To escape, the Lakotas killed several guards, and the entire Indian camp, Indian police included, bolted north of the Platte River. When Moonlight attempted pursuit with cavalry, Lakota warriors ran off his horse herd. His command limped back to Fort Laramie on foot. General Dodge promptly relieved Colonel Moonlight and had him mustered out of the service. About a month later, the Loafers began drifting back to the fort. The other Oglala and Sicangu escapees remained north of the Platte until early 1866.

Soon after the Moonlight-Dodge blunders, the Powder River allies launched the second massive ambush of 1865. In July, three thousand Cheyennes, Oglalas, Sicangus, and Arapahoes set out from Crazy Woman’s Fork of the Powder River to attack the volunteer soldiers at Platte Bridge Station west of Fort Laramie. Camping and moving as warrior societies, the immense formal war party arrived near the bridge in late July. Famous war chiefs like Red Cloud and Roman Nose joined with other alliance leaders in organizing this ambush. An attempt on 25 July failed when a cavalry column stopped following the decoy scouts into the ambush site north of the Station. This failed ambush on 25 July, illustrates refusal, the other major way a large-scale ambush could be frustrated. If those to be drawn into the ambush refused to follow the decoys, the ambush could not develop or be sprung successfully.

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100 Hyde, Spotted Tail’s Folk, 118. Utley, Frontiersmen, 317-318.
101 Hyde, Spotted Tail’s Folk, 118-122. Utley, Frontiersmen, 318.
102 Hyde, George Bent, 213-217.
The following day, a second attempt was devised, with the warriors divided into three groups. Major Martin Anderson, Eleventh Kansas Cavalry, commanded the 119 men at Platte Bridge Station that day. Knowing that Indians were about, and that a small military wagon train with a twenty-five-man escort was coming from the west, Anderson sent Lieutenant Caspar W. Collins, an officer of the Eleventh Ohio Cavalry temporarily at the Station, with twenty of the Kansas cavalymen to bring the train in safely. The Crazy Dogs society kept the warriors from prematurely springing a trap laid by the three separate hidden war parties until Collins detail was in the ambush. Then the thousands of warriors were turned loose. Collins wheeled his men about and they all dashed into the massed warriors between them and the bridge. Aided by covering fire from Lieutenant Britney’s detachment at the bridge, most of the Collins detail escaped back to the safety of the bridge. Collins and four men were killed. All the others were wounded, eight of them seriously. Escape from an ambush of this size required speed and determination on the part of the soldiers and support from others outside the ambush.

Sergeant Amos Custard’s oncoming wagon train ran into the massed warriors further west near Red Buttes. Over several hours, in a surround of Custard’s corralled wagons, Cheyenne and Lakota warriors succeeded in killing the sergeant and twenty-one of his men; only three soldiers escaped across the Platte River before the train was surrounded. The Cheyennes lost eight warriors; the Lakotas and Arapahoes lost some as well, but the exact number is unknown. Estimates vary from sixty to just over two hundred.

Having completed their mission of revenge, the combined war party split up the following day. Some continued small raids along the roads; the majority returned to band camps on the Powder River. Most of the warriors and their leaders believed the season for war and fighting was over for the year.

They did not know that General Connor was finally ready to set his northern plains campaign in motion. His plan called for three columns to push into the heart of Lakota territory from jumping off places along the Platte road. By the first of September, all three columns were expected to converge at Rosebud.

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103 Ibid, 217.
105 Hyde, George Bent, 217-218.
106 Utley, Frontiersmen, 320. McDermott, Crossroads, 63-64.
Creek, between the Tongue and Bighorn Rivers. Colonel Nelson Cole's 1400 men of the Right Column left Omaha on 1 July to attack the bands reported at Bear Butte; they would then continue north of the Black Hills to the planned rendezvous. The Center Column, 600 men under Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Walker, did not leave Fort Laramie until 5 August. They marched northeast for the Black Hills; from that point Walker was supposed to go north to the headwaters of the Little Missouri, then to the Rosebud. Connor personally commanded the Left Column, 500 cavalry troopers plus nearly 200 Pawnee and Winnebago scouts. They were to strike north up the Bozeman Trail headed for the Rosebud, leaving behind 200 Michigan cavalrmen to construct a new fort on the Powder River. Finally, operating separately, the Sawyer Train left the mouth of the Niobrara River on 13 June, headed west along the river, surveying and pioneering the new wagon route linking Sioux City to the Bozeman Trail and the Virginia City mining camps.

As it developed, Connor's Powder River Expedition failed in most of its objectives. The three converging columns never converged anywhere near Rosebud Creek. Cole and Walker had no Indian scouts with them. After getting lost, their forces nearly self-destructed, lost most of their animals and equipment, suffered constant harassment from Cheyenne and Lakota warriors, and sustained twenty casualties. North's Pawnee scouts found Cole's and Walker's lost columns, directing them back to Connor's new fort on the Powder River.

Sawyer's train struggled as well. Escort by the two companies of U. S. Volunteers, and a small detachment of First Dakota Volunteer Cavalry, the expedition proceeded slowly and without incident until they reached the Pumpkin Buttes. During the second week of August, Cheyenne and Lakota warriors repeatedly attacked them until Sawyer bought the warriors off with a wagonload of supplies. Sawyer finally reached Camp or Fort Connor on the Powder River in late August. That same month General Dodge transferred the rest of the Fifth U. S. Volunteers to Connor's District of the Plains. That moved

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110 Utley, *Frontiersmen*, 323-327.
Colonel Maynadier and his regimental headquarters to Fort Laramie, and assigned Companies C and D as the garrison for Fort Connor.\textsuperscript{112}

Connor’s column had the services of Jim Bridger, the experienced mountain man and scout, and two Indian scout companies, Captain Frank North’s ninety-five Pawnees, and Captain E. W. Nash’s eighty-four Winnebagoes, recruited from the Omaha reservation in Nebraska. Connor’s Indian scouts brought his column the only success in finding Lakotas, Arapahoes, or Cheyennes on the army’s own terms. In mid-August while operating from the new fort site on the Powder River, Pawnee scouts killed and scalped a party of twenty-seven Cheyennes. On 29 August, Pawnee scouts found Black Bear’s Northern Arapahoe camp on the Tongue River allowing Connor to surprise the camp. At a cost of several soldiers wounded, Connor’s men killed thirty-five of Black Bear’s band.\textsuperscript{113}

Both chastisements were serious losses to the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, but they were far less than what had been expected for such a large campaign. The Sawyer Train built no road up the Niobrara because Dull Knife’s Cheyennes and Red Cloud’s Oglalas constantly harried them. Sawyer’s men survived to find Connor’s new fort on the Powder. They finally reached Montana with additional military escort. In sum, Cole’s and Walker’s columns had been harassed by the Lakotas and Cheyennes they were supposed to punish. Sawyer’s people had built no new road, and even Connor’s column had missed the big Lakota and Cheyenne camps despite having Indian scouts. Connor’s multi-pronged offensive had been blunted by alerted warriors, and defeated by northern plains weather and terrain.\textsuperscript{114}

When Connor pulled his exhausted forces back to the Platte, he left behind three legacies. First, the Michigan cavalrymen had built Fort Connor on the Powder River. Dodge had ordered Companies C and D of the Fifth U. S. Volunteers to remain there as the garrison. The Winnebagoe scouts were dropped off during Connor’s withdrawal to perform cavalry service for the new fort. Temporarily known as Fort Connor, the Army officially designated the post Fort Reno in November 1865. Second, although the 1865 emigration season had been cancelled by the campaign, public awareness of the Bozeman Trail had increased. Additional knowledge of the terrain and the perceived security of the new fort, guaranteed


\textsuperscript{114} Utley, \textit{Frontiersmen}, 325-330.
renewed interest in the trail the next year. Third, concern for future use of the Bozeman Trail generated public demands that the Army send additional forces into the Powder River country to finish the job begun by Connor’s columns. 

With the withdrawal of Connor’s forces from the Powder River country, the Native American bands put war away for the year and prepared for winter. Black Bear’s band had to seek support from the other Northern Arapahoe band under Medicine Man. The two bands probably combined their 180 lodges (about 1,050 people) in the fall and wintered on the branches of the Powder River.

After a large tribal gathering at Bear Butte, the Northern Cheyenne Omisis band and the Northern Sutaios went west toward the Powder River, accompanied by Black Shin’s Southern Sutaios who had come north earlier in the year. Black Shin’s people wintered with some northerners along the Little Missouri. The remaining Northern Cheyennes camped between the Tongue and Powder Rivers for the winter of 1865-1866. These northern bands totalled about 1,250 people. After the Northern Cheyennes left Bear Butte, the Southern Cheyennes broke camp and moved off to the south. In mid-October, they reached the Platte where they conducted some raids along the road. Continuing south, the Dog Soldier-Masikota band stopped to camp along Solomon’s Fork. Still moving south, the remaining Southern Cheyennes finally reached safety in December near the Cimarron River and Black Kettle’s people. The Southern Cheyennes were home again south of the Platte.

Lakota band locations north of the Platte in the winter of 1865-1866 are more problematic. In consequence of the Platte River valley raids and Colonel Moonlight’s mishandling of the Fort Laramie pacifist bands, the Southern Sicangu bands split and scattered. The peace faction included the Ring Band of Little Thunder and Spotted Tail and part of the Corn Band under Swift Bear and Standing Elk. They fled north to Bear Butte in June along with the mixed Loafer band. After Dodge removed Moonlight from command at Fort Laramie, most of the 700 Loafers drifted back to their camps near that post. Spotted Tail’s Ring Band and Swift Bear’s Corn Band stayed near Bear Butte for a time; then they moved west toward the Powder River country. They probably stopped short of joining the hostiles there since there is

116 Fowler, Arapahoe Politics, 43-44. The population estimate is slightly less than six persons per lodge, accounting for the losses of Black Bear’s band in their fight with Connor.
117 Powell, People of the Sacred Mountain, 1, 388. Hyde, George Bent, 243. Northern Cheyenne population estimate from Moore, Cheyenne Nation, 195.
no evidence they participated in the Lakota defense against Connor's columns. The fugitive Southern Sicangus probably numbered fewer than 850 people.\textsuperscript{118}

The Southern Sicangus war faction joined their Northern Oglala relatives in the Powder River country in 1865, probably wintering there as well. Grand Partisan's part of the Corn Band, Iron Shell's Orphans, and Red Leaf's Wazazas were all known to be north of the North Platte that year, although some of them may have been as far east as the White River. Their numbers can be estimated at about 1,000.\textsuperscript{119}

In the Powder River country, the Northern Oglalas or Smoke People were resident in three major bands. Man-Afraid-of-His-Horse was the iancon of the Hunkpatilas, "those who camp at the horn," referring to their honored position in the Lakota camp circle. Red Dog was the rising leader of the Oyuhpe. The Ite Sica band included blatahunka Red Cloud, Crazy Horse, Big Road, and Little Hawk. In 1865, these three bands had about 300 lodges, roughly 1,800 people. The Bear People Oglalas were pacifists and stayed south of the Platte. In 1865, their bands of True Oglalas and Kiyuksas numbered 150 lodges, about 900 people. They remained along the Republican Fork\textsuperscript{120}

Lone Horn's Miniconjous also occupied the Powder River country, roaming from the headwaters of the Powder River to the Tongue River.\textsuperscript{121} In concert with some of the Itazipco they remained aloof from the Platte River valley trouble.\textsuperscript{122} Since the end of Lone Horn's peace in 1857, the Miniconjous had concentrated on keeping the Crows west of the Bighorn River.\textsuperscript{123} In 1865, these western Lakotas counted over 1,700 in about 275 lodges.\textsuperscript{124} The Miniconjous did not participate in the Fort Laramie treaty negotiations of 1866, but late that year, they were major participants in the Fetterman Fight.

While Connor's campaign was winding down and the tribes of the northern plains prepared for the winter of 1865-1866, the Regular Army regiments began relocating and refitting for their anticipated return to the west. Among the first to move was the Eighteenth U. S. Infantry. In August 1865, the Eighteenth left Chattanooga, Tennessee for Louisville, Kentucky. Colonel Carrington joined them there in October. In

\textsuperscript{118} Hyde, Spotted Tail's Folk, 118-119, 122. Price, Oglala People, 61.
\textsuperscript{119} Hyde, Spotted Tail's Folk, 119. Price, Oglala People, 60, 70-71. See Bray, "Teton Sioux Population,"
\textsuperscript{120} Hyde, Spotted Tail's Folk, 119. Price, Oglala People, 61.
\textsuperscript{121} Hyde, Spotted Tail's Folk, 115.
\textsuperscript{122} Hyde, Spotted Tail's Folk, 132.
\textsuperscript{123} Bray, "Lone Horn's Peace," 44.
\textsuperscript{124} Bray, "Teton Sioux Population," 174.
November, the regiment moved to St Louis, Missouri. On 10 December 1865, Carrington established the Eighteenth in winter quarters at Fort Kearny, Nebraska Territory. By the end of December, the Eighteenth sorely needed an infusion of both officers and men. The entire regiment mustered less than one thousand men. At the end of December, the depleted Second Battalion reported an aggregate, present and absent, of 16 officers and 279 enlisted men.  

By the end of 1865, the woes of reconstruction had replaced ruinous military campaigns in the eastern United States. On the northern plains, soldiers, civilians, and Indian bands hunkered down to endure a harsh winter.

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125 Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events, August to December.
CHAPTER 4

TRUNCATED TREATY

Even as General Connor was gearing up for his 1865 punitive expedition, peace advocates persuaded the federal government to pursue a policy of negotiation with the plains tribes. In the spring of 1865, Senator J. R. Doolittle went west at the head of a congressional committee investigating the Chivington affair. Military planners called off a campaign on the southern plains to help Doolittle's efforts. Before Connor could follow up his minor successes north of the Platte, the government halted his military operations to allow peaceful negotiation.¹

To the north, Governor Newton Edmunds of Dakota Territory had long opposed the military option in handling the tribes. Having obtained the support of the President, the governor secured authority for a commission to deal with the upper Missouri Lakotas.² Edmunds' peace offensive, proposed in the spring of 1865, finally got underway in the fall. The Edmunds Commission included the Governor, Generals Curtis and Sibley, Superintendent of Indian Affairs Edward B. Taylor, and two other civilians, Henry Reed and Orrin Guernsey. From the tenth through the twenty-eighth of October 1865, the commissioners negotiated nine treaties with tribal leaders at Fort Sully on the upper Missouri.³ Chiefs from bands of Miniconjous, Lower Sicangus, Oohenunpas, Sihasapas, Itazipcos, Hunkpapas, Oglalas, and Upper and Lower Yanktonais signed similar treaties. They agreed to "cease all hostilities" against American citizens and their property, and to "withdraw from the routes overland already established, or hereafter to be established through their country."⁴ None of the Lakota signers came from bands involved in the Platte and Powder River hostilities.⁵

¹ Olson, Red Cloud, 1965), 12-13.
² Ibid. 13-14
⁵ Olson, Red Cloud, 14.
Father De Smet sent chiefs to Fort Sully from camps within twenty miles of the river. Most of the Upper Missouri chiefs were friendly from near Fort Rice. Some tiyospaye were not represented at all. The nine treaties did little for ending hostilities and nothing for opening the Montana road. While the Upper Missouri Lakotas were signing the peace treaties, the westernmost Lakotas in the Powder River country celebrated their successes against the Army columns under Colonels Cole and Walker. The hostiles were now determined to resist any further encroachment on the lands disturbed by the Bozeman Trail. Emboldened by their triumphs with Connor’s expedition, Lakota raiding parties harried travelers on the Platte River Road. Nevertheless, the Commission and the Bureau of Indian Affairs prematurely announced peace on the northern plains and the availability of roads through Indian lands. After the 1865 hiatus had interrupted civilian traffic on the Bozeman Trail, the news from Fort Sully gave potential emigrants hope for a peaceful travel season in 1866.

While treaty negotiations were underway at Fort Sully, General Frank Wheaton visited Fort Laramie in October 1865. He instructed post commander, Colonel Henry E. Maynadier, to send messengers inviting the hostile chiefs to sign a copy of the treaty. Maynadier finally persuaded Big Ribs, Big Mouth, Eagle Foot, Whirlwind, and Little Crow of the Laramie Loafers to accept the dangerous mission. They were gone three months during the severest winter weather in years. The messengers finally returned in January. They brought Swift Bear and Standing Elk with their destitute Sicangu Corn band, and a report that Red Cloud would soon follow with his Bad Faces people. After receiving good treatment at Fort Laramie, the Sicangus sent runners out to other camps inviting them to Laramie for peace talks. A confident E. B. Taylor of the Northern Superintendency came to Omaha to complete plans for the Fort Laramie peace council scheduled for early summer.

Early in March 1866, Spotted Tail asked the permission of Maynadier to bring his Sicangu band to Fort Laramie. His daughter had died of disease and exposure. She had begged burial near old Chief Smoke, buried at the fort in 1864. Colonel Maynadier not only consented to Spotted Tail’s request, but he turned the occasion to a talk of peace. On 12 March, four days after the funeral of Spotted Tail’s daughter.

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9 Hyde, Red Cloud’s Folk, 136-137.
7 Olson, Red Cloud, 14.
6 ibid., 28-29. Hyde, Spotted Tail’s Folk, 123.
Red Cloud came to Fort Laramie. Colonel Maynadier and the new Upper Platte Indian agent Vital Jarrot persuaded the Oglala leader to talk with Commissioner Taylor in Omaha via the telegraph. Taylor and Red Cloud exchanged messages of peace over the talking wires. Taylor telegraphed:

"The Great Father at Washington has appointed Commissioners to treat with the Sioux, the Arapahoes and Cheyennes of the Upper Platte, on the subject of peace. He wants you all to be his friends and the friends of the White Man. If you conclude a treaty of peace, he wishes to make presents to you and your people as a token of his friendship. A train loaded with supplies and presents cannot reach Fort Laramie from the Missouri River before the first of June and he desires that about that time be agreed upon as the day when his commissioners shall meet you to make a treaty."

Maynadier sent Red Cloud’s translated reply. “Red Cloud says now our horses are very poor and the Indians are scattered and will take some time to gather up all the Indians. Will do it as soon as possible. He will stay and hear what we have to say for two months and all will be quiet and peaceable.” After Taylor again targeted a June 1866 date for the negotiations, Maynadier sent Red Cloud’s agreement to the meeting. “Red Cloud says he will be five or six days going to his village but he will tell them how he has been received and will assemble all the Indians to come in here at the time the commissioners will be here. He knows now that everything is right and they can be better to wait and get traps and beaver between now and the first of June.” Apparently, Red Cloud and other Lakota leaders were not just interested in talking; they also had a real need to trade for necessaries.

Maynadier gave his Lakota visitors a little powder and lead for hunting, and Red Cloud left Laramie to make his plans for the coming council. A jubilant Taylor wrote D. N. Cooley, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, “There is every reason to hope and no cause to doubt that a lasting peace will be easily effected with the hitherto hostile tribes of the Upper Platte, including the Sioux, Arapahoes, and Cheyennes.” Taylor believed thinning buffalo herds and a hard winter would bring quick capitulation by the chiefs. The treaties would be a simple exchange of tribal agreement to the Montana road for presents and subsistence. Hopes for peace on the plains were high but Taylor’s “lasting peace . . . easily effected” proved difficult and elusive.

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10 Olson, Red Cloud, 29. Hyde, Spotted Tail’s Folk, 124.
11 Olson, Red Cloud, 30-31. Olson quotes Taylor’s telegram from National Archives and Record Service, RG 75, LR, Upper Platte Agency.
12 Ibid., 31-32.
13 Ibid., 32-33.
14 Ibid., 32.
Meanwhile, the Army reorganized its western geographical commands. Lieutenant General William T. Sherman took command of the Division of the Missouri. Headquartered in St. Louis, Sherman's dominion included most of the west from the Mississippi River to the Continental Divide. Sherman split General Pope's single plains department into three new departments. With headquarters at Omaha, Brigadier General Philip St. George Cooke's Department of the Platte included Iowa, Nebraska, Utah and the westernmost parts of Montana and Dakota territories. Cooke was responsible for the old Platte Road from Nebraska to Utah, and the Bozeman Trail branch line to Montana.15

Sherman wanted a year of peace in 1866. The Army needed time to organize fully recruited, equipped, and trained Regular cavalry regiments ready to "visit these Indians where they live."16 His strategy for the year was defensive. The Regulars would secure lines of communication including roads, telegraph lines, and the route of the transcontinental railroad just begun from Omaha. Sherman's soldiers were also expected to safeguard the season's emigrant traffic, and avoid incidents that could open new hostilities.17

In Cooke's Department of the Platte, Sherman's strategy rested upon two battalions of the Eighteenth United States Infantry. General Cooke ordered the Third Battalion to garrison posts along the Platte Road to Utah. The regimental commander, Colonel Henry B. Carrington, would take his headquarters staff and the Second Battalion to protect the Bozeman Trail. No one expected Carrington to face combat. The peace commission would have Indian permission for the Montana road early in June.18 "Colonel Carrington was not a fighting officer, but just the man to build posts and organize a system of road patrols, and his orders and the make-up of his force clearly indicate that this was all that he was expected to do."19

On 13 April 1866, Cooke created the Mountain District, the official title of Carrington's Bozeman Trail command. Near the end of April, General Cooke delayed the Eighteenth's departure from Fort Kearny, Nebraska, until new recruits arrived.20 The Second Battalion sorely needed a personnel infusion before they marched west. At the end of April 1866, the total enlisted strength barely topped 260 men.

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16 Ibid., 97-98.
17 Ibid., 97-99.
18 Ibid., 102.
19 Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, 140.
Battalion officer cadre included only sixteen men: nine of them were absent from the regiment. The battalion commander, Major Charles R. Woods, left in 1865 to command the Department of Alabama, doing postwar Reconstruction duty. He never returned to the battalion. Of the company officers, five of the eight captains were absent, leaving only Captains Haymond, Ten Eyck, and Kinney present for duty. Three of the seven first lieutenants were absent, and there were no second lieutenants.

With Major Woods on duty in the South, battalion command fell to the senior captain present for duty. This seniority became an issue during the latter half of 1866. Captain Chambers left on detached service the first week of January, so Henry Haymond commanded the Second Battalion until the end of July. Table 1 lists the captains by date of rank, noting their highest brevet (honorary) rank, company assigned, and dates of detached service or return for duty with their companies in 1866.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Captain</th>
<th>Brevet</th>
<th>Co</th>
<th>Dates 1866</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chambers, Alexander</td>
<td>14 May 1861</td>
<td>Brigadier General</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Detached 04 January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fetterman, William</td>
<td>25 Oct 1861</td>
<td>Lieutenant Colonel</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Returned 03 November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>26 Oct 1861</td>
<td>Lieutenant Colonel</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Detached 31 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten Eyck, Tenodor</td>
<td>19 Feb 1862</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Present all year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinney, Nathaniel</td>
<td>25 Nov 1862</td>
<td>Lieutenant Colonel</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Present all year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proctor, Joseph</td>
<td>15 Jan 1863</td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Returned 15 May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burrowes, Thomas</td>
<td>13 Nov 1863</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Returned 15 May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powell, James</td>
<td>09 Sep 1864</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Returned 03 November</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In early May, General Sherman paid a visit to Fort Kearny on his tour of western posts. On 12 May, Sherman had a reception for fifty to sixty Civil War veterans of the Second Battalion. Three days later, Captains Proctor and Burrowes arrived at Fort Kearny. They brought 481 fresh recruits for the companies in Second Battalion. Horses collected at Fort Kearny from discharged volunteer cavalrymen were sufficient to convert two hundred men to mounted infantry. On 16 May, Carrington moved his command into camp near the fort and consulted with General Sherman about his new assignment. Both men were confident of Taylor's peace initiative. Sherman permitted, even encouraged, the officers and men to bring their dependents along for the expected quiet garrison duty. At 10:00 A.M. on 30 May, Carrington marched his westbound column away from Fort Kearny. The procession included Second Battalion, now mustering over seven hundred officers and men in eight companies, Carrington's regimental headquarters staff and Spencer-armed band, Jim Bridger and other civilian scouts, a few dependents, and more than two hundred loaded wagons. Someone dubbed them “Carrington's Overland Circus.”

While Sherman made plans for guarding the western roads, the tribes of the northwestern plains tried to feed their people. After Red Cloud's telegraphic council with Taylor, most of the Lakotas left the Fort Laramie area to hunt. Many were back by 8 May, still in need of provisions. Colonel Maynadier, now appointed as a member of Taylor's peace commission, encouraged Taylor to hurry along or the opportunity would be lost. Maynadier and Jarrot managed to keep the Lakotas near Fort Laramie with some rations and promises.

Peacemaking was not the only attraction for the Lakotas. Fighting since the spring of 1864 had interrupted normal trade channels on the northern plains. Both friendly and hostile leaders came to Laramie expecting treaty gifts and trade. For the assembled chiefs, filling these needs was vital, but they would also listen to what the peace commissioners planned to discuss. Friendly bands gathered at the fort included some Upper or Southern Sicangus, the Laramie Loafers, and the Bear people or Southern...
Oglalas. Hostiles from the Powder River country came from the Northern Oglala bands of *iitancan* Old Man Afraid (Hunkpatilas) and *blotahunka* Red Cloud (Ité Sica), and probably the Oyuhepes as well. The Northern Cheyennes and Northern Arapahoes were in camps hundreds of miles away, too distant to gather in May at Fort Laramie.

Before moving to a new chronology of the June 1866 Fort Laramie peace treaty council, we need to consider the vital contribution made to this story by John S. Gray in his 1991 book *Custer's Last Campaign: Mitch Boyer and the Little Bighorn Reconstructed*. Readers have been most interested in the second part of Gray's book dealing with the Battle of the Little Bighorn. In the first part of his book, Gray focused on what happened at Fort Laramie in June 1866. Ignored by many historians, the early pages of Gray's book are a biographical treatment of Jim Bridger's protégé Mitch Boyer, the part Lakota scout who died with Custer at the Little Bighorn. During Gray's research of the Bridger and Boyer story, he followed Bridger's arrival at Fort Laramie in June 1866 as scout for the Carrington column. Gray's primary sources included the Denver *Rocky Mountain News* reports of the council proceedings reported by Captain Ewell P. Drake of the Eleventh Ohio Volunteer Cavalry. Gray's chapter (pages 35-48) on the peace treaty negotiations supplemented by this writer's treatment of the Olson and Carrington source material should finally put to rest the lingering June 1866 Fort Laramie Treaty Myth.

In Omaha, Taylor, Robert E. McLaren, and Thomas Wistar, the other three members of the Taylor Commission, were held up by a bureaucratic delay in delivery of the treaty provisions and presents, the "indispensable lubricant for Indian negotiations." Without the shipment, which arrived the following day and followed by ox train, they left Omaha by railroad on 22 May, covered the eighty miles to end of track, then caught the stagecoach to Fort Laramie. They caught up with Carrington's slower marching column on 29 May about twenty-five miles below Julesburg, Colorado. If the commissioners were not aware of the army's plans for the Powder River country when they left Omaha, they certainly were then. Margaret

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30 ARCA. 1866., 208.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 43.

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Carrington recorded a meeting with "some gentlemen of the Peace Commission, who, with agreeable presents for the red men, were on their way to the Laramie council." 34

When they arrived at Fort Laramie on 30 May 1866, the commissioners found many Oglalas and Sicangus gathered for the council. 35 After the commissioners planned their strategy on 1 June, and a few days of necessary preliminaries were complete, the meeting formally opened on 5 June. At 10:00 A.M. the commissioners met with a circle of nineteen Lakota chiefs. Captain Drake acted as a correspondent for the Denver Rocky Mountain News during the council. He named the nineteen chiefs for his newspaper readers.

Man that Walks Under the Ground, White Eyes, and Bad Wound came from the Southern Oglalas. Red Cloud, Man Afraid of His Horses, Tongue, and Sitting Bear represented their Northern Oglala cousins. The Upper Sicangu or Southern Brule' chiefs were Spotted Tail, Standing Elk, and Red Leaf. Big Mouth sat in the circle for the Loafers. Completing the circle were Bad Hand, Trunk, Fair Day, Sharp Nose, Two and Two, Man that Looks to the Bottom, Fresh Beef, and Greasy Nose, whose band affiliations were less clear. 36

After smoking the pipe of peace, post chaplain Wright and Red Cloud offered prayers. Red Cloud then presented Taylor with a redstone pipe and a tobacco pouch. The symbolic kinship necessary to treaty negotiations was formed. Red Cloud opened through the interpreter with "We have come to hear our Great Father." 37 Taylor's carefully worded reply included the generalization that the "Great Father desires to be at peace with you, also to make a treaty." 38 Moving finally to the real issue at stake, Taylor made clear his government's demands of the Lakotas. Taylor said, "We do not ask you to give up your country or sell it. We only ask for roads to travel back and forth, so as not to disturb the game, and whatever damage is done by the roads would be paid by the Great Father." 39 At the conclusion of Taylor's address, Red Cloud shook

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34 Margaret Carrington, *Absaraka*, 47.
36 Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign*, 38. Gray quoted Drake's 10 June dispatch from Fort Laramie. Band identification for most of the named chiefs can be found in Price, *The Oglala People*, 39. 44. 47. 58-60. 62. 77. 80. 98. 187. 189. 193.
38 Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign*, 38. Gray quoted Drake's 10 June dispatch.
hands with the commissioners, then said "he wished to get all the Indians together and have a talk." which effectively adjourned the council for 5 June.\textsuperscript{40}

What Taylor was asking the gathered Lakotas to do was simply "commit peaceful suicide."\textsuperscript{41} The federal government wanted peace, did not want to buy their land, but did want the right to build and protect roads through it with a minimal armed force. Making an offer to pay for damage done by travelers on the roads was laughable. The Lakotas knew they would never collect on such a promise. The Powder River buffalo grounds were the last and best north of the Platte. Risking the destruction of this final resource area threatened the western Lakotas very existence.\textsuperscript{42}

In his 10 June dispatch, Drake reported the 10:00 A.M. council meeting of 6 June. Red Cloud was brief: "Yesterday we talked about small matters, and today we want to talk about big matters. My people on both sides of the road have [only] bows and arrows, and we came in here and told you all we wanted. We are 21 bands. All we want is peace. We have come here for you to give us instructions that we may live." Spotted Tail spoke words similar to Red Cloud's; Standing Elk added short remarks. The commission did not respond to this clear request for survival; they simply adjourned the meeting. Further discussion appeared fruitless, so the gathered chiefs chose to council with their own bands. Taylor invited them to return by 12 June so that the treaty negotiations could reconvene on 13 June. By 8 June, most of them were gone.\textsuperscript{43}

Taylor's commission sent out messengers by 9 June to invite the Northern Cheyennes and Northern Arapahoes to join the postponed treaty council. Either the messenger or the message appears to have reached some Arapahoes, because a few of them arrived at the end of the month. William Rowland, an interpreter of the Cheyenne language, was apparently sent to the Northern Cheyennes. He never made it. Red Cloud's band had already opted for war, and some Bad Faces intercepted Rowland, roughed him up, and sent him back to Fort Laramie with a clear declaration of Red Cloud's hostility. A bruised and battered Rowland was back at Laramie by 14 June, about the time Carrington's command arrived there.\textsuperscript{44}

When Drake sent his second dispatch on 16 June, the council remained adjourned. "Since I last wrote you.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 39.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 40-41.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 41, 45-46.
matters have to an extent remained in status quo, so far as peace is concerned. On the adjournment of the
conference . . . the chiefs present had nothing to say in reply to the commissioners, and wanted to have a
consultation with all their people. They left the post and have been anxiously looked for this week."

By 12 June, some of the chiefs had returned to Laramie. loafers, perhaps some southern oglalas
and upper sicangus like standing elk were on hand. spotted tail was still debating actions with his
people, and the northern oglalas were conspicuously absent. Taylor had planned on reconvening the
council on 13 June, but there were only a few friendly chiefs available, and the hostiles were gone. By 16
June, when captain drake sent his second dispatch, the council was still adjourned. drake also noted
the presence of the second battalion: "a battalion of 18th inf., under col. carrington, is now camped four
miles down the platte." captain drake sent his last dispatch on 19 June. two days after the second
battalion left the Laramie area, the council still had not reconvened. drake reported, "since my last [his
dispatch of 16 June], nothing has occurred except the arrival of Indian goods. But few Indians are here to
have a distribution, and we look anxiously for them, as their coming in peaceably will determine whether or
not the white man can peacefully occupy and make roads through the country."

As captain drake's dispatches make clear, the fort Laramie council adjourned on 6 June, and had
not reopened by 19 June. during that two weeks, Carrington's men had come and gone. commission
secretaries left no official minutes; Taylor's report is obscure on details during this waiting period. and
drake's reports have been ignored. What filled this historical vacuum is a collection of fanciful fables
about a reconvened council underway when colonel Carrington arrived at Fort Laramie on 13 June.

Historians have circulated a variety of stories and "writers have accepted uncritically one or
another of the yarns." All of the versions depict a militant Red Cloud delivering a dramatic speech full of
hostile threats, then departing the council tent in a rage to go on the warpath. James C. Olson discussed
five of these stories in Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem. The stories are: (1) the 1904 Cyrus Townsend
Brady version; (2) an allegedly official version in Frances C. Carrington's 1910 memoir; (3) William
Murphy's 1908 memoir featured in Frances C. Carrington's book; (4) Margaret Carrington's 1868 memoir;
and (5) a singular version recorded by Doane Robinson in 1928. Without an official version available,

46 Ibid., 41.
47 Ibid., 46.
Olson decided that "Murphy's story seems to be the most viable." Olson offered no explanation for his choice. It appears that he too has uncritically swallowed this purported eyewitness account which is the most detailed of the five versions.

As we have seen earlier, a fatal flaw in all these stories is that Red Cloud was not at Fort Laramie on 13 June 1866. In addition to the material in Gray's *Custer's Last Campaign*, Remi Nadeau concluded in *Fort Laramie and the Sioux Indians* that Red Cloud and Man Afraid left on 8 June headed to White River to confer with their bands. They did not return for the planned resumption of the council on 13 June. Nadeau based his interpretation on a letter from Commissioner Taylor dated 9 June, in which he reported that the two Oglala chiefs left Fort Laramie on the previous day. In his annual report for 1866, Taylor said "a band numbering perhaps three hundred warriors, headed by Red Cloud, a prominent chief of the Oglalas, refused to come in." 

Peter John Powell, in his history of the Northern Cheyennes, *People of the Sacred Mountain*, bluntly challenges the Taylor version: "Taylor deliberately lied about Red Cloud's leaving the council." The supporting document for Powell's accusation is the William Murphy memoir.

Who is the liar. Taylor or Murphy? This discrepancy reflects some serious historiographic inconsistencies in the stories Olson identified. Except for the Doane Robinson version, the stories are all connected to the Carringtons. Olson made an effort to deal with the problem; most other writers have simply accepted one or more of these stories. William Murphy's account of the 1866 Fort Laramie treaty council was favored by James C. Olson and touted by Peter John Powell. It is one of several soldier memoirs preserved in Frances Carrington's 1910 book *My Army Life and the Fort Phil. Kearney Massacre. With an Account of the Celebration of "Wyoming Opened."

Before evaluating Murphy's 1908 memoir, it will be helpful to examine four documents recorded soon after the June 1866 Fort Laramie council. First, the Second Battalion's annual record of events for

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48 Olson, *Red Cloud*, 35.
49 Ibid., 35-37.
51 ARCIA, 1866, 211.
52 Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain*, 1, 661.
53 See for example, Brown, *Fetterman Massacre*, 37-44. Despite Gray's important contribution in his 1991 book, the Murphy version persists in modern scholarship. See Robert W. Larson, *Red Cloud*, 93 where Larson not only repeats the Murphy version of the Red Cloud speech, but he labels "this kind of forceful presentation" as "almost vintage Red Cloud."
1866 provides a basic daily calendar. Second, Captain Tenodor Ten Eyck kept a daily diary in 1866 with some entries of value. Third, in March 1867, Colonel Carrington reported his experiences during his defense before the Sanborn Commission at Fort McPherson, later published by the U. S. Senate as *Indian Operations on the Plains*. Fourth, in 1868, Margaret Carrington published *Absaraka*, memoirs based on her 1866 diary.

The 1866 Annual Record of Events for the Second Battalion provides a simple chronological outline for their bivouac in the Fort Laramie area in June. Wednesday, 13 June, the battalion marched from Cold Springs "to 4 1/2 miles east of Fort Laramie." They "remained in camp" from Thursday 14 June through Saturday 16 June. On Sunday, 17 June, the battalion marched over ten miles to about six miles west of Fort Laramie. Building on this simple framework, a likely reconstruction of each day's events is possible by pairing extracts from *Absaraka* and Colonel Carrington's 1867 testimony before the Sanborn Commission, with some additional insights from Ten Eyck's diary.

Mrs. Carrington wrote that on 13 June they completed an eighteen-mile march and "encamped about Jules Coffee's ranche [sic] four miles east of Laramie." The battalion campsite was "located close enough for business, but far enough away to prevent the mingling of the troops and Indians for any purposes..." She does not mention anyone going on to Fort Laramie that day. Captain Ten Eyck's diary entry for 13 June is silent on that subject as well. Following a tiring march, the officers and men still needed to set up an organized, secure camp. It is not likely that anyone made the nine-mile round trip to Fort Laramie on 13 June.

Of course, the Indian camps were aware of the battalion's arrival, and the Sicangu Corn Band leader Standing Elk came to investigate that evening. Margaret Carrington recalled, "Just about sunset, 'Standing Elk'... called to pay his respects, receive a present of tobacco, and have a talk." When Standing Elk asked where they were going, the officers "very frankly told [him the] destination of the command." She recorded Standing Elk's response, "He then told us that a treaty was being talked about at Laramie with a great many Indians, some of whom belonged in the country to which we were going: but that the

54 *Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events, 1866.*
55 Margaret Carrington, *Absaraka*, 72.
56 *Ibid.,* 75.
57 Ten Eyck, diary, 13 June 1866.
fighting men of those bands had not come in. and would not: but that we would have to fight them, as they
would not sell their hunting-grounds to the white men for a road."

Captain Ten Eyck recorded on Thursday, 14 June, what appears to be a reciprocal visit to Standing
Elk’s lodge the following day. Ten Eyck stayed at the battalion camp that day, so the Com Band camp was
probably nearby. In Colonel Carrington’s March 1867 testimony, he claims Standing Elk’s visit was on
16 June. This makes little sense. Carrington had already been into Fort Laramie by that date, which
would have made Standing Elk’s query unnecessary. More likely was an immediate investigation by this
concerned chief on the evening of their arrival. Carrington may have dated Standing Elk’s visit on 16 June
to match exactly with two official reports he sent on that date.

This confused dating can also be seen in Absaraka. In the paragraph immediately preceding her
story of Standing Elk’s visit, Margaret Carrington recorded the accidental drowning deaths of two sergeants
in the Platte River. Sergeant Scott and Sergeant Barnes of C Company drowned on 16 June 1866. Although
these two events are not related, by placing them back to back in her narrative Margaret
Carrington’s account is misleading. However, the most logical scenario dates Standing Elk’s visit to the
battalion campsite on 13 June. In addition, Standing Elk’s warning clearly indicates that at least some
hostiles from the Powder River country were not at Fort Laramie on 13 June. This evidence supports
Captain Drake’s dispatches and Taylor’s claim that Man Afraid and Red Cloud left on 8 June and did not
return.

Standing Elk’s report to the other Lakota camps did not create a positive environment for the next
day at Fort Laramie. Thursday, 14 June, is likely the day Carrington first met some Lakota chiefs at the
Fort. Margaret Carrington says a wagon detail went to Fort Laramie that day to pick up some additional

58 Ibid., 72.
59 Ten Eyck, diary, 14 June 1866.
60 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 5. Colonel Carrington’s version of Standing Elk’s warning
differs slightly from his wife’s, but not in any essential details. See Hyde Red Cloud’s Folk, 139. George
Hyde’s narrative had the Second Battalion arriving at Fort Laramie on 16 June. He may have followed
Colonel Carrington’s faulty dating, and ignored the other sources.
61 Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 72.
63 Gray dated Carrington’s visit on 16 June, probably following Colonel Carrington’s inaccurate dating of
Standing Elk’s visit. See Gray, Custer’s Last Campaign, 45. Gray placed Carrington’s first visit with the
Lakota chiefs after the ladies shopping visit to Fort Laramie on 15 June. Given the urgent curiosity behind
Standing Elk’s visit to the battalion campsite, it seems very unlikely that two full days passed by without
Carrington meeting any of the other Lakota leaders.
rifle ammunition. There was none available. Twenty-six wagons filled with other supplies had been
collected for their use, but they had to provide their own teamsters to drive them back to camp. This is
the day that Colonel Carrington and other officers rode into the fort to join in the council proceedings. His
16 June report to General Cooke specifies Thursday as the day "I reached this post." In his March 1867
testimony, Colonel Carrington referred to this report when he told the Sanborn Commission: "Upon
reaching Laramie, in advance of my command, I was introduced to several chiefs, who were presented to
me by Colonel Maynadier and Mr. Taylor, of the commission. Without exception, every chief to whom I
was thus introduced as the 'White Chief going up to occupy Powder River, the Big Horn country, and the
Yellowstone' treated me coldly . . . ." **

When she wrote about events that likely fell on 14 June, Margaret Carrington remarked, "Some of
the chiefs, however, were seen by the officers, and when they knew that the command was going to the
Powder River country in advance of any treaty agreement, they gave unequivocal demonstrations of their
dislike." She added quotations from two unnamed chiefs that have become famous. One warned, "in two
moons the command would not have a hoof left." Another decried federal dishonesty, "Great Father sends
us presents and wants new road, but white chief goes with soldiers to steal road before Indian say yes or
no!" ** She did not credit Red Cloud with either statement.

Captain Ten Eyck finally rode into Fort Laramie on 15 June, where he "saw several officers &
spent a few hours pleasantly." ** Margaret Carrington makes it clear that her first visit to Fort Laramie
was also on 15 June, a day of shopping with other women from the Second Battalion camp. Following her
description of the sutler's store with its collection of goods and Laramie Loafers, she says the "council
chamber was of course the first object of interest to us ladies after the shopping had been completed." **
She described what was obviously a site empty of both commissioners and chiefs. The ladies had
"anticipated with more or less pleasure an attendance upon some of the deliberations . . . ." Instead the
"gentlemen were busy at quartermaster and commissary details," while the ladies visited the empty council

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** Margaret Carrington, *Absaraka*, 75-76.
** Margaret Carrington, *Absaraka*, 79-80. The Italics are in the original text.
** Ten Eyck, diary, 15 June 1866.
** Margaret Carrington, *Absaraka*, 76-78.
chamber. Colonel Carrington "hurried everybody up, kept his men to the camp, and our stay was cut down to the actual necessities of a marching command." There was "nothing to see therefore but loafing Indians." The hostiles were gone. She also noted, "It seemed that during the little time we did stop some Indians had been sent for other Indians, and the Indians who actually held possession of the route in dispute were not on hand when they were wanted." This language confirms messengers were sent out in a failed attempt to invite the hostile Lakotas and the Northern Cheyennes to Fort Laramie. Rowland's return to the Fort on 14 June was fresh news of this failure when the women of the Second Battalion came in for their shopping visit.

During her description of the days at Fort Laramie, Mrs. Carrington only briefly mentioned Man Afraid and Red Cloud at all. She said the two Northern Oglala leaders had "made no secret of their opposition, and the latter, with all his fighting men, withdrew from all association with the treaty-makers, and in a very few days quite decidedly developed his hate and his schemes of mischief." The preceding quotation is the fourth version from James C. Olson's list discussed earlier. It remained the same in both the first (1868) and last (1890) editions of *Absaraka*. In her book, Margaret Carrington never suggested that Colonel Carrington ever personally met Red Cloud, or that Red Cloud and Man Afraid left the treaty council during the Carringtons stay at Fort Laramie in June 1866. Margaret Carrington's original work reflects the real truth; these two Oglala leaders were not there.

Saturday 16 June was Second Battalion's final day at Fort Laramie. Colonel Carrington sent a report that day addressed to General Cooke's adjutant, Major Litchfield, Department of the Platte, which included a prophetic statement: "All the commissioners agree that I go to occupy a region which the Indians will only surrender for a great equivalent . . . ."

On 17 June, the Second Battalion broke camp and continued their march westward. Margaret Carrington observed, "Just as the troops left, one of the commissioners came to our ambulance and advised

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72 *Ibid*. The italics are in the original text.
73 Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign*, 41, 45-46.
74 Margaret Carrington, *Absaraka*, 79. These comments almost certainly refer to events that occurred before the Second Battalion encamped at Fort Laramie, with the possible exception of the Lakota treatment of Mr. Rowland. This may be Red Cloud's only "scheme of mischief" that occurred while Second Battalion was there.
that very little dependence should be placed upon the result of the deliberations so far as the new road was concerned, for a messenger sent out to the Indians had been whipped and sent back with contempt. This seems to be yet another reference to William Rowland’s experiences at the hands of Bad Face warriors. But the Colonel’s wife was resolute. As they renewed their march to the Mountain District, Margaret Carrington confidently “bade farewell to Laramie with great composure and no regrets.” On Sunday, 17 June, Colonel Carrington led the Second Battalion up the Platte River Road beyond Fort Laramie. They camped for the night at “Nine Mile ranche [sic], on the Platte.”

If the foregoing revised chronology for the June 1866 Fort Laramie council is accurate, where did the popular versions reviewed by James C. Olson in Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem originate? We must turn again to the Carrington historiography for two additional publications. In 1904, Cyrus Townsend Brady produced Indian Fights and Fighters. Brady devoted his first two chapters to the 1866 events at Fort Phil Kearny and the Fetterman Fight. He based his narrative primarily on Margaret Carrington’s Absaraka and Colonel Carrington’s defense before the Sanborn Commission. Indian Operations on the Plains, Henry Carrington “read and corrected” Brady’s text. “Brady’s presentation, by any interpretation, remains a clear and cogent statement of Carrington’s point of view.”

The Carrington-Brady story of the Fort Laramie council is the first of the five versions reviewed by James C. Olson. Brady said that Carrington “was introduced to the members of the council. Red Cloud, noticing his shoulder straps, hotly denounced him as the ‘White Eagle’ who had come to steal the road before the Indian said yes or no. In full view of the mass of Indians who occupied the parade ground he sprang from the platform under the shelter of pine boughs, struck his tepees, and went on the warpath.”

Here we have an intermediate stage between the earlier records made at the time (1866-1868), and the stories in Frances Carrington’s 1910 publication. Brady and Carrington made Red Cloud the previously unnamed chief who accused Carrington of stealing “the road before the Indian said yes or no.” Brady’s account also added a personal confrontation between Red Cloud and Colonel Carrington. This was a more

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75 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations on the Plains, 6.
76 Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 80.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 James T. King, introduction to Brady, Indian Fights, xv-xvi.
80 Brady, Indian Fights, 8.

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exciting story than Carrington’s own official report of unnamed chiefs (probably Southern Oglalas) who had simply treated him “coldly” at Fort Laramie.

The final stage of the Carrington versions came just before their deaths in 1911 and 1912. When Frances Carrington’s My Army Life came out in 1910, she added three more stories to the bibliography. Two of these are in Olson’s list of five. Olson ignored the third account, but Dee Brown used it in The Fetterman Massacre.

In the second story treated by Olson, Frances Carrington implied this version was part of the “Government Official Records of ‘The History of Indian Operations on the Plains during the Campaign of 1866,’” a source we have used with the Senate Executive Document title Indian Operations on the Plains. It will be recalled that this is Carrington’s defense in March 1867 before the Sanborn Commission. Frances Carrington says, “The leading chiefs withdrew from the council,” and that some unnamed chief said “in two moons the command would not have a hoof left.” These statements are not in Indian Operations on the Plains. They sound like recycled Margaret Carrington text from Absaraka.

Next, Frances Carrington boldly declares another story as part of the official record. “Red Cloud himself, it is officially reported, when he saw Colonel Carrington at his visit to the council, upon his arrival threw his blanket around himself, refused an introduction, and left with this announcement of his views. pointing to the officer who had just arrived, ‘The Great Father sends us presents and wants us to sell him the road, but White Chief goes with soldiers to steal the road before the Indians say Yes or No.’” No such officially reported statements can be found in Indian Operations on the Plains. This version is a Carrington fabrication, pure and simple.

Dee Brown accepted and James C. Olson ignored an even more dramatic Carrington-Red Cloud personal confrontation than appeared in Brady’s book. Frances claimed that the first Mrs. Carrington gave her this story. She quoted Margaret as follows:

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front of Post Headquarters where about some tables, placed on a extension of the porch, the Commission and several chiefs were seated, or standing. In front, seated upon extemporized benches, for protection from the sun, were hundreds of the warriors and hundreds more of squaws. I could not hear what was said but there was evidently some trouble which caused a sudden adjournment of the conference for the afternoon. Henry soon left the platform, walking rapidly towards his horse, which an orderly was lightly holding by the rein near the ambulance, and at his left were two Indians, one of them Red Cloud, who had his right hand upon a large knife at his side, and looking at Grey Eagle [Carrington's horse]. I thought the Indian was going to stab Henry in the back, and perhaps jump on Grey Eagle and ride off. I called out in my fright, "Oh! Henry." He caught my warning, and motion with my hand, and slackening his step so the Indians would come within range drew his revolver belt to the front, keeping his hand upon it, then slowed his step, looking side-wise at the Indians and allowing them to pass. Whatever their first plan, they stolidly passed on as if they did not notice him. and when once clear of the parade ground, or plaza, went to work and made the squaws take down and pack their tepees.85

Since the peace council was in recession during the Second Battalion’s stay at Fort Laramie, this alleged story from Margaret Carrington via Frances Carrington does not fit the probable chronology reconstructed earlier in this chapter. If there were even a remote chance it was true, the story is strangely missing from Absaraka and Colonel Carrington’s official testimony in 1867. Further it is very unlikely such a story could have remained unknown before 1910. This whimsical yarn can’t even be ascribed to faded memory. It appears to be another Carrington-authored myth. By creating a personal confrontation between himself and Red Cloud, Carrington increased the commercial value of the story. Not only did Red Cloud’s warriors attack his soldiers. Red Cloud even threatened him in person! Stories like this one helped sell Frances Carrington’s book in their day and have kept it in print in ours. Such stories have long been the stuff of western mythmaking.

The final story in My Army Life, and the one favored by Olson, Powell, and others, is William Murphy’s 1908 memoir. A careful reading of his account reveals that Murphy never said that he was personally present at the Fort Laramie council. What he did recount is the battalion arrival at the fort. “Our expedition reached Fort Laramie on June 13, in time for Colonel Carrington to participate in the council being held with Red Cloud, Man-Afraid-of-His-Horses, and the other Indian Chiefs to secure the Indians’ consent to the construction of a road and the erection of the promised forts, the Indians protesting vigorously against this.”86 Note that Murphy said Colonel Carrington participated in the council, not Private Murphy.

85 Ibid., 124-125.
86 Ibid., 291-292.
Beginning a new paragraph, Murphy continued. "Red Cloud made a dramatic and effective speech," which Murphy then summarized in the next three paragraphs. Peter John Powell postulated that Murphy was at Fort Laramie as an observer. Although it's possible this "observer" went in with the ammunition detail of 14 June, it is difficult to imagine how Private Murphy, a new recruit in Company A, ended up in the peace council tent (which was empty in recess anyway), taking precise minutes of Red Cloud's interpreted speech. If there was any truth in this story, why did it not become public until Murphy's 1908 speech in Sheridan, Wyoming?

Much more credible is Murphy's own later memoir published in 1930. Of the Fort Laramie experience, Murphy simply says: "At this time, at Fort Laramie, army officers and Red Cloud and his warriors held a council but came to no agreement. The report that we men got was that Red Cloud had issued an ultimatum to the officers that he would kill every white man that crossed the North Platte." Second hand rumor or scuttlebutt ("The report we men got") is a more likely source of information for new recruit William Murphy in June 1866. He was not there in person; he just heard something about the council, including talk that the famous Red Cloud had been there. The Oglala ho-tahunka had indeed been at Fort Laramie in 1866, but not after 8 June. Murphy's 1930 memoir makes better sense than the 1908 story because Colonel Carrington deliberately located the Second Battalion camp four miles east of Fort Laramie to keep his enlisted men from contact with the Indians.

The question remains, if Murphy did not personally hear Red Cloud's dramatic declaration, where did he get the text to share in his Fourth of July speech? There could have been only one source available in 1908 Sheridan, Wyoming, namely Henry Beebe Carrington. Where did Carrington get this text? As we have previously demonstrated, Red cloud was not there, so Murphy's speech appears to be based on coached text invented by Carrington for the occasion. It is possible that portions of the speech may have come from the lips of other chiefs still gathered at Laramie on 14 June, but Red Cloud was not one of them.

Clearly, the Carringtons financed at least part of their retirement from publications and his reputation as an expert in military and Indian affairs. To maintain that reputation, and to support continued

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87 Ibid., 292.
88 Powell, People of the Sacred Mountain, 1, 661. See also Olson, Red Cloud, 36.
90 Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 72-75.
sales of Carrington family publications, the colonel probably created this myth of personal confrontation with Red Cloud at Fort Laramie. Again, in western history, it's often the myth that sells.

The final story from Olson's list is the one from Doane Robinson's 1928 composition on the Sioux Indians. In this version, when Red Cloud was informed of the Carrington column, he “leaped from the platform, caught up his rifle, saying, ‘In this and the Great Spirit I trust for the right.’” Remi Nadeau suggested this story recorded a threat made by Red Cloud before he left on 8 June. Since we have established Red Cloud's absence from Fort Laramie when Carrington and the Second Battalion arrived, at least part of this final story also appears mythical. The most likely scenario is that on 8 June Red Cloud and his people simply packed up their camp and left for the Powder River country without dramatic oratory and little fanfare. They had seen and heard enough of the Great Father's latest peace offer.

Following the departure of the Second Battalion on 17 June, Taylor finally resumed negotiations with the friendly chiefs still at Fort Laramie. Officers and other observers reported “that Commissioner Taylor repeatedly asserted that he was sent here by the government for the purpose of making a treaty, and it should be accomplished if made with but two Indians.”

Which Lakotas left the council permanently, and which returned to participate in the treaty? When the federal commissioners made clear their intransigence over the Bozeman Trail, Red Cloud and Man Afraid of His Horses left on 8 June. Iron Shell of the Sicangus, and Red Leaf of the Wazazas joined Red Cloud in the war faction. They all rejected the treaty gifts, thereby shattering “the symbolic kinship relationship formed between the two sides for the purpose of negotiation.” The commissioners were now strangers and enemies, as were the men of Carrington's regiment. Having chosen a strategy of war early in June, the hostile Oglalas and Sicangus had already ridden north into the Powder River country to prepare for the new Army invasion force.

After the war faction departed, about one thousand Lakotas remained near Fort Laramie. These peaceful bands normally ranged the White River region north of the Platte, and the Sand Hills to the south. Although they disapproved of Army troops moving into the Powder River country, they had chosen in their

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91 Olson, Red Cloud, 37.
92 Nadeau, Fort Laramie, 209.
93 Indian Hostilities, 12. Italics in the original document.
94 Price, The Oglala People, 60-61. Price accepted the standard story of Carrington's arrival stampeding the hostiles, including Red Cloud and Man Afraid.
band councils to avoid war and accept the Great Father's treaty. After all, the Northern Oglalas had not helped them during their troubles in 1864. Why should they be concerned with what happened in the Powder River country in 1866? The Montana road did not threaten their hunting grounds.

On 27 June 1866, Taylor's peace commission met with the Lakota leaders for the formal treaty signing. These chiefs chose a treaty strategy, and accepted the Great Father's gifts and annuities. Southern Oglala leaders who marked the treaty papers were Man Who Walks Under the Ground, Big Head, Black War Bonnet, and Standing Cloud. Big Mouth and his brother Blue Horse agreed for the Laramie Loafers. Signing for the Sicangu were Spotted Tail of the Ring Band, Swift Bear and Standing Elk of the Corn Band, Dog Hawk from the Orphan Band, and three other chiefs and warriors named Thunder Hawk, Tall Mandan, and Brave Heart. The symbolic act of "touching the pen" had a different meaning for the signers than for the commissioners. To the Lakota leaders what was said during the council was important, not what was written in the treaty text.

A Lakota leader's signature on treaty paper did not mean he could guarantee the cooperation of every member of his band, especially the warriors. Many of these bands lost their young men to the war faction north of the Platte during the summer and fall of 1866. Within two weeks of the signing day, Spotted Tail and Standing Elk were on their way to the safety of the Republican River hunting grounds. They warned ranchers and traders they knew that many of their young men were headed for the Powder River country. These Sicangu chiefs advised those going that way to "go prepared, and look out for their hair."

Taylor reported that a treaty similar to the Lakota version was prepared and read to "some chiefs and head soldiers of the Cheyennes" who signed it with the understanding that their remaining leaders had until 1 November to sign a treaty copy left with Colonel Maynadier at Fort Laramie. However, this signing did not happen before the end of June 1866. Taylor admitted that fact when he added that Arapahoe messengers came in on 28 June, "the treaty made with the Sioux and that waiting for the Cheyennes, were

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95 Ibid., 61.
96 Hyde, Spotted Tail's Folk, 131-132.
97 Hyde, Spotted Tail's Folk, 130-132. Price, The Oglala People, 61, 187. It should be noted that only three men, Spotted Tail, Standing Elk, and Big Mouth, were among the original nineteen chiefs at the opening council session on 5 June.
98 Price, The Oglala People, 36.
99 Indian Hostilities, 12.
read and fully explained to them . . .” There was no treaty with the Northern Cheyennes until October, when a few of them signed the treaty copy left for them at Laramie. After the friendly Oglalas and Sicangus signed on 27 June, Taylor reported that six Arapahoe messengers arrived on 28 June. Their main village was too far away to come, but they had been sent to accept the treaty on behalf of their people. Apparently no later signing ever took place. The unsigned Arapahoe treaty was still at Fort Laramie in January 1867. As the council adjourned, the commissioners distributed treaty gifts to the friendly Lakota leaders for their bands, retained some goods for the Arapahoes and Cheyennes, and set aside a reserve for two absent Oglala chiefs.

Taylor had his treaty. On 29 June, he wired the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, “Satisfactory treaty concluded with the Sioux and Cheyennes. Large representations. Most cordial feeling prevails.” Certainly more than “two Indians” had agreed to the Montana Road, but it ran through land the signing chiefs did not control. Although the Southern Oglalas, Laramie Loafers, and Southern Sicangus did not like what the commissioners and Army had done with the Powder River country, their councils had chosen peace. The lure of treaty gifts after a bad winter may have also eased the discomfort of giving away their northern cousins’ land.

Without the signatures of the Northern Cheyennes, and major portions of the Oglala and Sicangu ospani, Taylor’s treaty was truncated in a fatal way. Before Taylor arrived back in Omaha, the western press had already condemned his treaty as a “farce, fraud, and failure.” Taylor defended the treaty in a telegram and public statements on 16 and 19 July, misleading potential emigrants to believe “there will be no trouble on the plains, unless begun by whites.” As late as his annual report of 1 October, Taylor still proclaimed his lasting peace included “at least seven-eighths of the two bands (the Brule’s and Ogalallas

100 ARCIA 1866, 208. Gray, Custer’s Last Campaign, 48.
101 Gray, Custer’s Last Campaign, 47.
102 ARCIA, 1866, 208.
103 Indian Hostilities, 11. Special Agent Chandler reported “A treaty prepared and signed by said commissioners for the Arapaho Indians is in possession of Agent Patrick, and said to be identical in terms with the Sioux and Cheyenne treaties, with the only variance of different amounts of annuities to each.” “Ibid. Were the reserve gifts held for Man Afraid and Red Cloud in hope of their return? Taylor’s report did not specify.
105 Ibid., 48.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
... who would "faithfully observe" the treaty provisions. By that time the northern war faction had turned the Montana Road into the Bloody Bozeman.

106 ARCL. 1866, 211.
CHAPTER 5

FORTS AND FIGHTS

When Colonel Carrington marched the Second Battalion away from Fort Laramie in mid-June 1866, his agenda in the Powder River country had already been decided three months earlier by Major General John Pope, commanding the Department of the Missouri. The northern plains tribes who occupied that same country determined their own agendas during the latter half of 1866. Bands of Lakotas, Northern Cheyennes, Northern Arapahoes, and Mountain Crows chose to fight or not, and on which side. From mid-June through mid-August, when Army decisions establishing the three Bozeman Trail forts were made, the intersections of emigrant travel, U. S. Army orders, and tribal choices brought fighting along the trail from Bridge's Ferry on the Platte to the trail crossing of the Bighorn River. Among the early clashes before mid-August, the July skirmish at Crazy Woman's Fork is worthy of special attention. S. S. Peter's detailed memoir, preserved in Frances Carrington's My Army Life, included a legendary story of Jim Bridger, guaranteeing the skirmish at Crazy Woman's Fork a place in Wyoming folklore.

From his headquarters in Saint Louis, Major General John Pope issued a lengthy order on 10 March 1866 organizing five new districts in his Department of the Missouri. The new Mountain District included the route of the Bozeman Trail to the mining districts of Montana. Command of the district went to Colonel Carrington; and Pope designated the Second Battalion from Carrington's regiment as the district garrison force. General Pope's original plans did not include Fort Reno, the Powder River post established the previous year during Connor's campaign. It was to be abandoned after Carrington's wagon train moved cached military stores forty miles up the Bozeman Trail to the proposed site of a new Fort Reno. Where the trail crossed the Bighorn River, Carrington would establish another new post, Fort Ransom. To complete the Mountain District, Pope planned a third unnamed post for the upper Yellowstone River.¹

¹ Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 51.
All of General Pope's plans were based on an assumption that the Fort Laramie council proceedings would bring a peace treaty with the hostile tribes north of the Platte River. He assigned Carrington a planned line of operations extending 545 miles along the Bozeman Trail from near Bridger's Ferry on the North Platte River to Virginia City, Montana. Along that line, the Second Battalion would construct the three new forts, secure their lines of communication with mounted infantry, and provide protection for emigrant and supply trains to Montana. It was an awesome agenda for an officer with both frontier and combat experience. Carrington had neither.

Approximately one thousand Montana-bound argonauts traveled the Bozeman Trail in 1866, the last year of emigrant travel over the road. Many of them had clashes with plains warriors. Carrington's forces were sent to protect travelers. In fact, the arrival of the Second Battalion column in the Powder River country appeared to make matters worse. Beginning with the first train which left Fort Laramie on 12 May, the early season travelers who made the trip prior to Carrington's departure from Fort Laramie, had friendly encounters and traded with the Mountain Crows and Northern Arapahoes. These early trains also met some friendly Northern Cheyennes. After two years of fighting and a severe winter on the northern plains, the Northern Cheyennes, Northern Arapahoes, and Mountain Crows were eager to barter for necessities. Emigrant diarists especially remembered Neva's band of Northern Arapahoes who camped and traded until early July at the Bighorn crossing of the Bozeman Trail.

As Carrington's column left Fort Laramie on 17 June, hopes for a peaceful military occupation of the Bozeman line ebbed away. A few miles west of Laramie, the Second Battalion met Captain Nash and his company of Winnebago scouts headed to Laramie for mustering out. According to Margaret Carrington, Jim Bridger had earlier reported a Sioux demand for the Army to remove the Winnebagoes from Fort Reno as a condition for the peace council. Telegraphically ordered out of the Powder River country on 4 June, Nash led the seventy-nine scouts out of Fort Reno on 6 June, just as the treaty negotiations began. When the eastbound Winnebagoes met the west marching Carrington column, the scouts learned the Second Battalion was bound for Fort Reno and beyond. Nash's scouts wanted to join

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2 Ibid., 2-3, 52-53.
3 Doyle, "Journeys," 63-64.
4 Gray, Custer's Last Campaign, 31.
5 Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 94.
with the Second Battalion and return to Fort Reno. Carrington had no authority to retain them. As Margaret Carrington later recalled, the men of her husband's regiment would sorely miss having "a few soldiers who knew the Indian styles of warfare, and were up to their tricks."

Although Carrington would have two more opportunities to employ Indian auxiliaries before the Fetterman Fight, he missed this last chance to retain the Winnebagoe scouts. Lakota pressures cost Carrington a vital asset to his future operations without changing the outcome of the peace process at Laramie. Strategically, that was a real coup for Lakota leadership. It meant the men of Second Battalion were on their own. In addition to being led by an inexperienced colonel, they were left blind without Indian scouts.

About noon on 20 June, the Second Battalion reached Bridget's Ferry. The previous day, three Lakota warriors raided the Ferry ranch livestock, relieving the current proprietor, Mr. Mills, of some horses. Mill's Lakota employee gave chase, recovered part of the lost stock, and identified the raiders as Lakotas from Red Cloud's Bad Faces. Here was early evidence of the extent of Northern Oglala hostility. Not only was the ferry at the southernmost end of the Montana road, but Mills was married to a Lakota woman, and thought himself safe from harassment by her kinfolk. The breakdown of the Laramie peace talks meant that neither geography nor fragile family ties were protection from raiding warriors.

After spending two days in ferrying the battalion across the Platte River, Second Battalion resumed their march toward Fort Reno. Twenty-six miles west of the ferry, they turned north on the Bozeman Trail. Fort Reno was nearly ninety miles and five days away. (See Map 3, the Powder River Country in 1866.) On 24 June, the military column passed the temporary shed of Louis Gazzous, an itinerant trader hoping to make a living from Indian trade and the summer's emigrant traffic, while

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7 Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 94-95.
8 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 8. Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 84-85.
9 Traditionally, the beginning of "Red Cloud's War" is 17 July 1866, the date of the first skirmish near Fort Phil Kearny which resulted in Army fatalities. See Brown, Fetterman Massacre, 77. This view reflects an Army historical bias of what constituted warfare. The 19 June stock raid on Bridger's Ferry is as likely a beginning date from a Lakota perspective, since stock raids on enemies were common in plains Indian warfare.
10 Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events, June 1866. Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 84-87.
enjoying the protection of his marriage to a Lakota woman. Like Mills, in less than a month Gazzous would know how fleeting that protection was.

By noon on 28 June, one day after Taylor's treaty signing ceremony at Fort Laramie, Carrington and his procession arrived at Fort Reno on the Powder River. There had been no signs of Indians along the trail from the ferry to Fort Reno. Lakota warriors made their presence known the following morning when seven Lakota raiders ran off stock belonging to A. C. Leighton, the post sutler. Carrington sent ninety mounted men in pursuit. They didn't return until the following day, having covered over fifty miles. They recovered none of Leighton's stock; their only trophy was one abandoned Lakota pony laden with Fort Laramie treaty gifts. The Lakotas were not deterred from striking even with Carrington's entire battalion of soldiers camped nearby. Nash's Winnebago scouts had been the real deterrent at Reno. Now they were gone.

By the end of June, Carrington had decided not to abandon Fort Reno altogether. There were three probable reasons why. First, his survey of the stores housed at Reno showed there was too much to easily move. Second, three civilian trains waiting at Reno for military escort, were ill prepared for the trip north. Third, the distance from Fort Laramie to the planned fort site on the Piney Creeks was too great. On 30 June, Colonel Carrington issued instructions requiring all trains using the Bozeman Trail to stop at the post, now designated Reno Station. The station personnel would insure the citizen trains were properly organized, armed, and warned of relationships with the Indians they might encounter. In this 30 June General Order No. 4, Carrington's assurances to the emigrants reached to boasting: "the new route is short and will be made perfectly secure." For a man who would later criticize Fetterman for making exaggerated statements, Carrington's language at this early date certainly overestimated his abilities and underestimated the Lakotas' capabilities.

On 1 July, Captain Proctor, Lieutenant Kirtland, and Company B were ordered to garrison Reno Station. Carrington relieved the remaining Reno volunteer garrison. Companies C and D of the Fifth U. S. Volunteer Infantry Regiment. The "Galvanized Yankees" gladly departed Fort Reno on 6 July, leaving the

11 Margaret Carrington. Absaraka, 87-88.
Bozeman Trail to the Regulars. What the Second Battalion inherited was chiefly an open post. A simple cottonwood stockade, about 120 feet square, surrounded two storehouses. The other buildings for officers and enlisted men's quarters, and the sutler's store were on open ground nearby. Over the next five months, Proctor and the Reno garrison would reconfigure and improve the post.

Eight days later, the remainder of Second Battalion and their loaded wagon train resumed the march north. Included in the column were five of the six pieces of artillery left at Fort Reno in 1865. Carrington left Proctor one of the mountain howitzers for his use. After wagons broke down around Crazy Woman's Fork, Colonel Carrington left four companies under battalion commander Captain Haymond to assist with repairs while Carrington and three companies pushed on. On 13 July, near Rock Creek, they found messages on cracker-box pieces stating that two civilian trains preceding them had been attacked on 6 July and 10 July, losing stock to Indians. A few hours later, Carrington's companies reached the Piney Creeks, tributaries of the Powder River. The advance party camped on the Big Piney Fork on 13 July. That afternoon, Colonel Carrington surveyed the natural resources and terrain west toward the Bighorn Mountains. Adequate supplies of water, grass, and construction timber supported his belief that the forks of the Piney Creeks were ideal for the new post.

The next day, Carrington led a thirteen-hour, seventy-mile round-trip reconnaissance to the Tongue River Valley. Jim Bridger had recommended Tongue River as a viable alternative to the forks of the Piney Creeks. While Carrington's party was gone, seven soldiers deserted and fled north up the Bozeman road. A detail sent after them passed Gazzous's trading outfit about seven miles north of the battalion camp, and then ran into a party of Cheyenne warriors who blocked further pursuit. One of Gazzous's teamsters was pressed into delivering a message to Colonel Carrington. The Cheyenne leaders

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15 Returns, Eighteenth U.S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events, 1866.
16 Brown, Galvanized Yankees, 133-137.
17 Murray, Military Posts, 15-20.
18 Ibid., 20-24.
21 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 9, 14.
22 Ibid.
23 Ten Eyck, diary, 14 July 1866.
24 Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 103-104.
wanted to know, "does the white chief want peace or war?" 25 Lieutenant Adair, officer of the day, detained the messenger until Colonel Carrington returned that evening. Carrington composed a reply to the Cheyennes, inviting them to come to the Second Battalion camp in two days for a parley. The messenger and Jack Stead, Carrington's Cheyenne speaking interpreter, were dispatched with Carrington's invitation. Stead found the Cheyenne camp nearly thirty miles away on Tongue River; they were apprehensive of being attacked. Stead delivered the message and received assurances that the Cheyennes would come in on Monday, 16 July. 26

After rejecting the Tongue River Valley as too far from construction timber, the colonel selected a site on a low bluff in the angle between Big and Little Piney Creeks. It was sixty-five miles northwest of old Fort Reno, four and one half miles east of the foot of the Bighorn Mountains, and directly on the route of the Bozeman Trail to Virginia City, Montana Territory. 27 Sunday, 15 July, Carrington had the site staked out, the parade grass mowed, and ordered logging and construction begun. In his monthly report to General Cooke, Carrington described the location and the reasons for his choice: the natural defensibility of the plateau, access to nearby timber for construction and fuel, and proximity to good water in the Little Piney. In addition to the availability of natural resources, Carrington saw his fort site in strategic terms. First, it was in the "heart of [Indian] hunting grounds." Second, it was on ground favored by the "Crows, Snakes, Cheyennes, Sioux, and Arapahoes." Third, it interdicted a major travel route for the tribes. "their lodge trails cross in great numbers from north to south between Piney Junction, near the post, and the mountains that lie behind." 28 Carrington gave the ridge immediately north and west of the post site his wife's maiden name, Sullivant Hill. Another imposing ridge some two and one half miles further north was traversed by the Bozeman Trail and by so many of those travois trails that it was named Lodge Trail Ridge.

Carrington was so proud of his site selection that he bragged in his July report to General Cooke: "In thirty days this post can be held by a small force against any force, giving me the means of more offensive measures." 29 For the Lakotas, having Carrington's fort in their best hunting grounds and astride

26 Ibid. Margaret Carrington, Ahsaraka, 104-105.
28 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 14.
29 Ibid.
their north-south travel routes led them to concentrate many of their war parties and stock raids on this most hated of the three Bozeman Trail forts.

On Monday, 16 July, leaders from the Omisis band of Northern Cheyennes came to the Second Battalion camp on the Pineys to parley with the “white chief” Carrington identified eleven of them by name. Black Horse, Pretty Bear, Dull Knife, Red Arm, Little Moon, Man That Stands Alone On The Ground, Wolf That Lies Down, Rabbit That Jumps, Bob Tail, Dead White Leg, and The Brave Soldier represented 176 lodges, between eight hundred and a thousand Cheyenne people.30

In a four-hour council with the Cheyennes, Carrington learned that from the time his column had left the Platte River, his every move had been seen by Lakota and Cheyenne scouts. The Cheyennes also reported the Lakotas had held a Sun Dance recently. Red Cloud’s Ite Sica band and the Hunkpatilas of Man Afraid Of His Horses were camped a day’s march apart on the lower Tongue River. Red Cloud had five hundred warriors gathered and insisted the Northern Cheyennes join them in fighting any soldiers who ventured west of old Fort Reno. Some of Red Cloud’s Oglalas had already gone south to the Powder River to interrupt travel on the Montana Road. The Cheyenne chiefs represented the majority of the Northern Cheyennes who had split away from a more militant band now east of the Powder River in the Black Hills. Black Horse’s band promised Carrington they would be peaceful and stay away from the Lakotas and the road, if Carrington would give them some provisions.31

As the council drew to a close, Black Horse made a surprise offer. The old council chief revealed that about 125 of their young men had been gone two months, hunting between the Platte and the Arkansas. They were expected back soon. In the meantime, the Omisis were concerned about the Lakotas attacking their people. Black Horse offered one hundred of his absent warriors as allies against the Lakotas, as soon as these young men returned. Carrington declined the offer, telling them he “had enough men to fight the Sioux, but if they kept good faith with the white men and had trouble with the Sioux nearby [he] would help them.”32 Black Horse’s unexpected offer demonstrated just how onerous and fragile the Lakota-

30 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 10. Ten Eyck recorded there were eight chiefs and attendants, twenty-seven Cheyenne visitors in all. See Ten Eyck, diary, 16 July 1866. Margaret Carrington’s list of Cheyenne leaders included eight names, omitting her husband’s last three. Since Bob Tail was almost certainly absent, Margaret’s list may be more accurate and would agree in number with Ten Eyck’s eight chiefs. See Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 110-112, 116.
31 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 10. Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 116-117.
32 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 10.
Omisis alliance was in 1866. Carrington’s response demonstrated just how overconfident he was in his ability to handle the Lakotas. He had now passed by his second chance to employ Indian scouts and auxiliaries.

Before the council broke up, Captain Haymond arrived from Crazy Woman’s Fork with the rest of the battalion and the wagon train. They went into camp northwest of the fort site, near the trail creek crossing. The Cheyenne council chiefs became nervous, so Carrington closed the parley by issuing the chiefs “papers indicative of their good behavior,” and presents of clothing, tobacco, army rations, flour, bacon, sugar, and coffee. With the council concluded on a cordial basis, Carrington must have been pleased to subtract this band of Northern Cheyennes from the potential list of hostiles he had to face.

Over the next two years the hostile list became lengthy. By 1868, bands of Oglalas, Sicangus, Hunkpapas, Miniconjous, Itazipcos, Oonenonpas, and some Yanktonais, Santee. Northern Cheyennes and Northern Arapahoes had allied to fight what historians have dubbed Red Cloud’s War. In July 1866, however, the hostile tribal alliance in the Powder River country was still relatively small.

For the Lakotas, those who had chosen to stay out of the fighting at Fort Laramie did so. Big Mouth’s Laramie Loafers and other peaceful Oglalas, camped in various locations around Fort Laramie. They probably numbered about six hundred people, most of them women and children. Southern Oglala bands led by Big Head, Man That Walks Under the Ground, Little Dog, Pawnee Killer, Standing Cloud, and Black War Bonnet, joined with the Ring and Corn bands of Southern Sicangus under Spotted Tail, Swift Bear, Two Strike, Standing Elk, and Fire Thunder on the Republican River. Altogether the peaceful Southern Oglalas and Southern Sicangus numbered about eight hundred; they were predominantly old men, women, and children. At the end of June, when the Sicangus moved from Fort Laramie to the Republican River, they warned ranchers and traders they knew of the warfare to come. The chiefs said their own young men had chosen to go to the Powder River country and join the war faction. They advised anyone traveling in that direction to go prepared.

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33 Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 117-118.
34 Price, Oglala People, 63.
35 Chandler to Denman, Indian Hostilities, 11-12. ARCLA, 1866, 268.
join the Northern Oglala war faction in June. They moved north to the Powder River country where the three major bands of Northern Oglalas made their home. 36

The Northern Oglala war faction included the Ite Sicas, the Oyuhpes, and at least part of the Hunkpatilas. When Black Horse held his council with Carrington on 16 July, the Cheyenne leader reported Red Cloud's Ite Sicas and Man Afraid's Hunkpatilas camped on the Tongue River, but did not mention the Oyuhpe Band. 37 Led by Brave Bear, Trunk, Red Cloud, and Black Twin, the Ite Sica, originally numbered only about forty-five lodges. Of the five hundred warriors reported by Black Horse, probably only one hundred were from Red Cloud's own band. The others likely included about two hundred warriors from the Sicangu bands south of the Platte, and may have either counted another two hundred from Iron Shell's Orphans and Red Leaf's Wazazas, or more likely, the warriors of the Oyuhpe Band. Under Flying Feather, Red Fox, Shaker, and Red Dog, the Oyuhpes numbered some one hundred lodges and two hundred warriors. 38

The disposition of the Hunkpatilas is more enigmatic. George Hyde found that "the Sioux of Powder River were not united for war," and at the outset of the fighting in 1866, Man Afraid Of His Horse's Oglalas and Lone Horn's Miniconjous "drew away from Red Cloud and did all that they could to stay out of the war." 39 Price, referencing Indian agent reports in 1867, said that in June 1866, Man Afraid immediately joined "the northern Oglala-Brule' war faction" which renewed alliances with "bands of Miniconjous and Northern Cheyennes." 40 Probably, by July 1866 the Hunkpatilas split into two factions, a peace group following their iianca, Old Man Afraid, at least until September when fighting accelerated. A war faction, perhaps led by Young Man Afraid, recently chosen as one of the four Lakota shirtwearers, joined the Ite Sica in hostilities, setting up another camp on the Tongue River in July. 41

Hyde is probably correct that Lone Horn's Miniconjous initially stayed out of the fighting. According to the Crows, some Miniconjou warriors may have joined the raids in September of 1866. That

36 Price, Oglala People, 60.
37 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 10.
38 ARCA, 1866, 268.
39 Hyde, Spotted Tail's Folks, 132.
40 Price, Oglala People, 60-61.
is also true of the Hunkpapas. There is no evidence that any of the Itazipcos, Sihsapas, or Oohenonpas joined in the July and August raids along the Bozeman Trail. In September, the Crows reported these other Lakotas camped near the Bighorn River; all were now hostile toward use of the Bozeman Trail.

In sum, by 16 July 1866, when Black Horse’s Omisis Cheyennes chose to stay out of the fighting, the Powder River hostile alliance was still small. Consisting of most of the three Northern Oglala bands, the Orphan and Wazaza bands of Southern Sicangus, and younger warriors from the Sicangu Ring and Corn Bands, the entire alliance probably mustered no more than one thousand to twelve hundred warriors.

At 5 A.M. on 17 July 1866, Lakota warriors began their attacks on the new post in the forks of the Piney Creeks. Several Lakotas slipped through Captain Haymond’s picket lines and into Wagon Master James Hill’s mule herd. One daring warrior took the bell mare and rode this mule away to the north, knowing the others would follow. One hundred seventy four mules stampeded across the Piney and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

The response from the post was not well organized. Captain Haymond told his mounted infantry contingent to saddle up and follow him, while he and one orderly galloped after the stock raiders. They were joined by some of the wagon teamsters. Haymond’s men became strung out in the chase; they stopped after running into about three hundred Lakota warriors. Haymond sent for reinforcements. First to arrive were Captain Kinney and fifty mounted men. The Lakotas surrounded the Haymond and Kinney command. Although two companies of infantry also came to their support, they were too late to offer much help.

After skirmishing with the Lakota warriors for several hours, Captain Haymond finally abandoned the pursuit. His command had three men dead and eight wounded by arrows. One of those believed to be dead, whose body could not be found, was Private Livilsberger of Company F. He and three of the

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43 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 29.
44 This writer’s estimate matches well with Kingsley Bray’s estimates for Lakota band populations in 1865. If all Oglalas and Sicangus had joined the war faction, Bray’s estimates of 3430, and 3300 total population for the two ospeye, and a twenty per cent ratio for warriors, yields a Oglala-Sicangu warrior total of 1346 as a maximum. See Bray, “Teton Sioux Population History,” 169, 174.
45 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 10.
46 Ibid. Murphy, “Forgotten Battalion,” 386-387. Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry. Annual Record of Events, 17 July 1866 said only eighty head were taken. Ten Eyck, diary, 17 July 1866. Ten Eyck recorded a loss of one hundred mules.
wounded were soldiers; all the rest were civilian teamsters who joined in the pursuit. The Lakotas successfully got away with seventy mules; their casualties were unknown.  

Haymond led his men back toward the new fort site. When they reached Peno Creek Valley, they discovered Gazzous’ trading camp had been sacked by the Lakota war party. Warriors had killed six men: Gazzous, his partner Arrison, and four employees. Gazzous’ Lakota wife and five children had hidden in the brush. Haymond and his men brought Gazzous’ family and possessions back to the post. When Gazzous’ wife was questioned, she told the Army officers that Black Horse and his Cheyennes had been trading with Gazzous until late the previous night, after the Cheyennes left their council with Carrington. Early in the evening, a party of Lakota chiefs approached Black Horse, asking him about his visit with the soldier chief, Carrington. Black Horse had told the Lakotas that the soldiers were going to stay, and that the Cheyennes had been fed and offered an opportunity to go to Laramie and sign the peace treaty. Then Gazzous’ wife saw the Lakotas unsling their bows and whip Black Horse and his chiefs on their backs and faces, a humiliation for the Cheyennes. After the Lakotas left, Black Horse warned Gazzous to return to the new post for protection. Gazzous had waited until the next morning. The traders had traveled several miles toward new Fort Reno when they were attacked and killed.

Captain Ten Eyck recorded that late on 17 July, apparently after the morning skirmish with the Lakotas, 135 Cheyenne warriors came into the area from the east. They camped in the river bottom about a mile from the post. If they came in to show support for Carrington’s men, or were seeking protection, that was not reported. Lakotas were still about later that day. They fired on Sergeant Peters’ detail sent to retrieve some wagons. Captain Phisterer took Company A out to guard and bring back the wagons. To the north, a freighting outfit owned by C. Beers had reached the Bighorn crossing of the Bozemen Trail. Also on 17 July, a combined party of Lakotas and Northern Arapahoes attacked and stripped the Beers train of their stock, stranding them there for a month. It had been an eventful day. The Lakotas had won their first fight near the Piney Creeks fort site. The Omisis Cheyennes managed to avoid the fighting.

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50 Ten Eyck, diary, 17 July 1866.

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Carrington's men had learned an expensive lesson about uncoordinated pursuit of a Lakota war party. At least part of the Northern Arapahoes had allied with the Lakotas in their opposition to the Bozeman Trail, and for control of the Powder River hunting grounds.

The following day, a cemetery location was selected near the fort construction site, and the first burials completed. About noon, a large wagon train arrived at New Fort Reno; they reported having no trouble on the road. With probably a third of the Lakota warriors concentrated nearby, the road to the south was left unmolested for several days.

At noon on 19 July, about forty Cheyennes approached new Fort Reno from the east. The companies destined for the other two new posts were camped outside the fort site. Their soldiers turned out in a line to welcome the friendly Cheyennes. Led by Bob Tail, these warriors had returned from the Askansas and called at the post to exchange greetings. Bob Tail left his robe with Colonel Carrington "as a pledge of his friendship." Captain Haymond led a party back to the site of the skirmish on 17 July searching for the body of Private Livilsberger. Mortally wounded in the fight, Livilsberger was not dead when they found him, but he expired thirty minutes later. He was the first of Carrington's soldiers to die fighting for the Bozeman Trail. By the end of December, there would be many more.

Early on 20 July, Carrington sent Captain Burrowes with a military train of eighty wagons and his Company G as escort back to Reno Station for another load of provisions. Burrowes did not know it, but his command was headed into a skirmish with Lakota warriors and a rescue of another train coming north from Reno Station. Both events linked the Burrowes command with another famous myth of the Bozeman Trail.

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52 Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign*, 31-32.
53 Ten Eyck, diary, 18 July 1866.
55 Margaret Carrington, *Absaraka*, 122.
56 Ten Eyck, diary, 19 July 1866.
MYTH (2) BATTLE OF CRAZY WOMAN'S FORK. Five days after Carrington established new Fort Reno, a skirmish occurred at Crazy Woman's Fork. This 20 July action has become part of Wyoming folklore. In his monograph The Fetterman Massacre, Dee Brown devoted nine full pages of text to this action. Brown's account is almost exclusively based on memoirs left many years later by two enlisted men involved in the engagement, F. M. Fessenden and S. S. Peters. Fessenden's memoir of this event is short, about two pages from his biographical account preserved in Volume II of The Bozeman Trail, by Grace Hebard and E. A. Brinninstool. Peters was one of the Second Battalion survivors who joined the Carringtons in the 1908 Sheridan celebration. Peters penned his account on 6 July 1908, after returning to Omaha, Nebraska. His memoir was solicited by the Carringtons, since it added an action story to Frances' My Army Life. The Peters memoir runs to over eight pages of small type in that book. Biographers of Jim Bridger have also made use of the Fessenden and Peters memoirs. In Jim Bridger, J. Cecil Alter used the Peters account exclusively in his version of the Crazy Woman's Fork action. Like Dee Brown, Stanley Vestal used both memoirs in Jim Bridger, Mountain Man.

Brown, Alter, and Vestal all ignored two primary sources recorded immediately following the action of 20 July 1866. One source was the daily diary of Lieutenant George M. Templeton, in command of the small Army train attacked by a Lakota war party at Crazy Woman's Fork. The second source was the official after action report by Captain Thomas B. Burrowes, commanding the detachment of Company G who rescued Templeton's beleaguered party. Combining the Templeton and Burrowes sources makes possible a new account of the Crazy Woman's Fork skirmish, an account somewhat different from the stories told by Brown, Alter, and Vestal. What follows is a newer version of the action that will then be compared with the more mythical Peters-Fessenden stories.

On 19 July 1866, Lieutenant George M. Templeton's small military train of ambulances and wagons arrived at Reno Station on the Powder River. Besides Templeton, the personnel included four

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58 This military event appears on both the Heitman list of nineteenth century Regular Army actions, and on the Adjutant General's Office list of Indian actions from 1 January 1866 to January 1891. See Heitman, I, 426. See also Joseph P. Peters, Indian Battles and Skirmishes on the American Frontier, 1790-1898 (New York: Argonaut Press, 1966), 2 of appended list.
59 Brown, Fetterman Massacre. 82-90.
61 Frances Carrington, My Army Life, 73-81.
other officers assigned to the Eighteenth Infantry Regiment (Lieutenants Wands, Bradley, Daniels, and Link), an escort of about ten enlisted men, a few dependents, regimental chaplain David White, and at least two civilians, a man named Marr, and photographer Ridgway Glover.

Headed for new Fort Reno on 20 July, Templeton led his train twenty-six miles north from Reno Station to Crazy Woman’s Fork. In the late afternoon, Templeton and Daniels rode ahead to the stream to find good grass and a camping site. Before they found a place for the night, a Lakota war party found them. The two officers galloped desperately back toward the train chased by fifty to sixty warriors. After the fleeing officers had covered about two hundred yards, one Lakota hit Daniels in the back with an arrow, and the mortally wounded lieutenant fell from his horse. Templeton got away unscathed, despite a fusillade of arrows and one carbine round fired at close range.

Finding the ambulances and wagons of his train along the creek, Templeton corralled them, and hastily prepared a defense against the war party. Many nearby ravines rendered this first position untenable. After Templeton sent out an armed party to collect some water, he led the train in a dash to a nearby hill, skirmishing with Lakota warriors the entire way. They corralled the train again at the top of the hill, and some of the soldiers quickly dug rifle pits for protection. A few Lakotas tried getting into this new position from other ravines. When Templeton’s men wounded one warrior, the rest withdrew to some nearby woods. During this lull in the action, the Lakotas held a council while a few warriors watched the corralled military train. About dusk, Templeton saw dust rising to the north on the Bozeman Trail. Templeton’s field glasses revealed another military train coming south.

Captain Thomas B. Burrowes commanded the train Templeton saw arriving at sundown. Forty-seven men from Company G escorted Burrowes’ thirty-four wagons. They had left new Fort Reno early that morning, nooned near Clear Fork, and then had pushed south to camp at Crazy Woman’s Fork. As Templeton watched the Burrowes train approach, he could see in front a single soldier on foot, out of sight of the train. When the Lakotas saw the dust, they rode away from Templeton’s corral headed directly for

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64 Templeton, diary. 8-20 July 1866. Burrowes to Bisbee, 28 July 1866.
65 Templeton, diary. 20 July 1866.
66 Ibid.
67 Burrowes to Bisbee, 28 July 1866.
the isolated soldier. Templeton fired a warning shot with his revolver, but the warriors killed the infantryman before he could escape.68

At the same time, Burrowes had seen Templeton's corralled train and the Lakota war party. When he urged his men forward, they found the dead soldier, Lance Corporal Terrence Callery. Callery had left the train to hunt without authorization.69 He paid the ultimate price for isolation from the rest of his detachment.

Templeton rode over to meet with Captain Burrowes. While he was gone, and without Lieutenant Templeton's permission, Chaplain White and another man rode back toward Reno Station for assistance. Their ride was now unnecessary, but they left before Templeton returned with the Burrowes train. Captain Burrowes took command of both trains and corralled them for the night. A check of Templeton’s men found that several had had close calls during their encounter with the Lakotas, but no one had been wounded. In the moonlight, the combined command solemnly buried the corporal's body in one of the rifle pits.70

They spent a quiet night. At daybreak the next morning, Lieutenant Kirtland and thirteen mounted infantrymen arrived as relief from Reno Station. Burrowes then sent out a detail under Lieutenant Link to find Lieutenant Daniels body. When they found him, his body had been “stripped of its clothing, scalped, mutilated, and pierced with twenty-two arrows.” Captain Burrowes decided that everyone should move together back to Reno Station. They collected a civilian train of thirty-nine wagons under Wagonmaster Ettinger about twelve miles north of the fort. Burrowes determined their nine-man military escort was too small. By mid-afternoon, the combined command was safely back at the post on Powder River.71 That night, Lakota raiders tried unsuccessfully to stampede some oxen from another train camped at Reno Station, one captained by Hugh Kirkendall. The Lakotas did succeed in running off one of Captain Proctor's mules.72

Sunday, 22 July, was a busy day at Reno Station. In the morning, Chaplain White conducted a military funeral for Lieutenant Daniels. During the day, details loaded Burrowes' wagons with supplies for

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68 Templeton, diary, 20 July 1866.
69 Burrowes to Bisbee, 28 July 1866.
70 Templeton, diary, 20 July 1866.
71 Burrowes to Bisbee, 28 July 1866.
72 Templeton, diary, 22 July 1866.
the return trip to new Fort Reno. About 5:00 P. M., Lakota raiders attempted to stampeded Burrowes' mules. Their efforts failed, and the infantrymen at Reno Station quickly drove them off.  

At daybreak on Monday, Captain Burrowes led two combined military trains of more than one hundred wagons north from the old post. When the Burrowes' train reached Crazy Woman's Fork, they overtook two civilian trains; they had left Reno Station the previous evening. Kirdendall's train of forty-two mule teams, and Dillon's train of thirty-five oxen teams camped for the night with Burrowes' train.  

On the morning of 24 July, Captain Burrowes' military train started up the Montana Road at daylight, with the two civilian trains following some distance behind them. As Burrowes' train arrived at the crossing of Clear Fork, they saw a large band of Indians approaching. Burrowes quickly corralled his train for defense, only to discover the Indians were friendly Northern Cheyennes who displayed the protection papers signed a week earlier by Colonel Carrington. The Cheyennes numbered about three hundred men, women, and children, about one third of the Omisis band whose leaders had parleyed with Carrington on 16 July. Templeton identified their leaders as Pretty Bear, Dull Knife, and Black Horse. When the chiefs asked for food, Captain Burrowes agreed to issue them some hardtack, flour, sugar, and coffee, if they would leave his camp. His distrust of the Cheyennes was obvious. They took the food and withdrew. Apparently concerned about additional Indian threats, Burrowes kept his train corralled the rest of the day.

The Omisis band also visited the Kirkendall and Dillon trains that morning. Before most of the band moved away from the area, Black Horse and Little Moon warned both Kirkendall and Dillon that the Lakotas were on the war path, were in the area, and would probably arrive there soon. The Cheyenne warning was ignored, and the Lakotas attacked both civilian trains shortly after the Cheyenne visit.  

Three of the Cheyennes who had earlier visited Burrowes' corralled train rode south toward the civilian trains. They soon returned to Captain Burrowes bearing a note from Thomas Dillon. Intended for Carrington, it read, "Sir: We have received the papers from you through 'Black Horse,' and we would inform you that about 3 miles from this watering place [Clear Fork] Mr. Kirkendall's train has been

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*Burrowes to Bisbee, 28 July 1866.
*Burrowes to Bisbee, 28 July 1866. Templeton, diary, 23 July 1866.
*Templeton, diary, 23 July 1866.
*Ibid.
engaged all this afternoon. Troops should be sent immediately, as we are not in position to leave this bull outfit and they can not come in by no means." About 7:15 P. M., Captain Burrowes added his own dispatch to Carrington on the reverse side of Dillon’s note. He reported, "There is a train engaged 3 miles from here. I can not [sic] send them any help. The Sioux are very numerous. Send a force at once." Burrowes sent Mr. Marr and several others bearing the notes to Carrington at new Fort Reno.

While they waited for reinforcements from Carrington, a Mr. McGhee from Kirkendall’s train came into Burrowes’ corral with news that Dillon had been wounded. Captain Burrowes sent an ambulance with a sergeant and fifteen men back to the Dillon train. Later, the ambulance and escort returned bearing Dillon’s dead body. He had paid the price for ignoring the Cheyenne chiefs’ warning. The civilians claimed killing one or two Lakotas, including one probably involved in Templeton’s fight on Crazy Woman’s Fork. The Lakotas had done well enough, having attacked the two civilian trains and threatening Burrowes' military train much of the afternoon and early evening. Leaving the three trains still corralled near Clear Fork, the Lakota warriors disappeared into the night.

Burrowes’ messengers reached the new fort on Big Piney Fork about 1 A. M. Carrington immediately organized and dispatched a relief force under Captain Kinney. With sixty men, a howitzer, and additional wagons, Kinney headed south in the predawn darkness of 25 July. After traveling several hours, Kinney’s column reached Clear Fork about 5:30 A.M. As senior captain, Kinney took command of the combined military train. Together with the two emigrant trains Kinney’s train retraced the sixteen miles from Clear Fork back to new Fort Reno. So ended the Crazy Woman’s Fork affair. It had been a series of events stretching over six days, involving Lakota warriors and U. S. soldiers, emigrant civilians, and peaceful Northern Cheyennes. Daniels, Callery, and Thomas Dillon were dead, and the Lakotas probably several dead companions from the field as well.

Although the Fessenden and Peters memoirs agree generally with the Templeton diary and the Burrowes report, Fessenden’s story is a good example of faded memory at best, and the Peters version is

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78 Templeton, diary, 24 July 1866.
79 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 11.
80 Burrowes to Bisbee, 28 July 1866. Templeton, diary, 24 July 1866.
81 Burrowes to Bisbee, 28 July 1866.
82 Templeton, diary, 24 July 1866.
83 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 11. Carrington gives the date as 24 July 1866.
fabricated myth at its worst. Fessenden’s short memoir about the skirmish at Crazy Woman’s Fork ran to four paragraphs in *The Bozeman Trail*, first copyrighted in 1922. Fessenden remembered the death of Lieutenant Daniels and apparently helped find his body. He also recalled Lieutenants Link and Wands being in the party, but completely forgot Templeton and Bradley. Memoir references to the train forming two separate corrals during the fighting are chronologically hazy. His memory of the Lakota war party numbered them at 160. Fessenden recollected that he accompanied Lieutenant Link during the 20 July fight when Link, armed with a Henry rifle, killed or seriously wounded the Lakota chief leading the warriors, and it was that event that caused the war party to withdraw into the woods.\(^5\)

Fessenden had no memory of Burrowes train arriving or Corporal Callery’s death, his fuzzy recollection substituting instead Kirkendall’s outfit as the rescuing train whose dust was seen on the Bozeman Trail. He does remember messengers were sent south for help, and Lieutenant Kirtland’s relief column responded from old Fort Reno the next day. When he called to mind the trip to new Fort Reno, Fessenden did not differentiate the friendly Cheyennes, only remembering “Indians” coming to trade with their train, one warrior offering to trade five ponies for his Colt revolver.\(^6\) Overall, Fessenden’s memoir is spotty and inaccurate in places, but does contribute the significant possibility that Lieutenant Link killed a Lakota war chief on 20 July.

On the other hand, the Peters version of the 20 July fight is more than muddled memory. It is outright mythmaking masquerading as factual memoir. Peters’ account is so long and full of specific detail that readers, and some historians like Dee Brown, have accepted it as authentic.\(^7\) When compared with the Templeton diary and Burrowes report, Peters’ memoir is filled with inaccuracies, telescoped events, misnamed individuals, and fabricated details. There are so many of these mistakes that it seems best to concentrate on the two most glaring errors in Peters account, his recollection of military casualties on 20 July, and the appearance of Jim Bridger ahead of Burrowes’ column.

All of the sources agree that Lieutenant Daniels was killed, but casualties multiply in Peters’ 1908 memoir. He invented a real western shoot-em-up to be published in Frances Carrington’s book. At the


\(^7\) *Ibid.*, 92.
outset of the skirmish. Peters has Lieutenant Templeton hit in the back by an arrow while he was fleeing
with the unfortunate Daniels, a wound severe enough to put Templeton out of action for the remainder of
the fight. As he continued his narrative, Peters recounted detailed events adding wounded men to the
casualty totals. By nightfall, this version of Crazy Woman’s Fork had Daniels dead. Templeton seriously
wounded, a Sergeant Terrel killed, and at least nine other enlisted men wounded, all from the Templeton
train, which Peters incorrectly has commanded by Lieutenant Wands. Templeton’s diary, Burrowes’
report, and the annual record of the Eighteenth Infantry Regiment list only two soldiers killed. Lieutenant
Daniels from the Templeton train, and Corporal Callery from the Burrowes train. Although others
experienced close calls and near misses, there were no more dead or wounded soldiers. Peters’ memoir
grossly exaggerated the losses in the skirmish at Crazy Woman’s Fork. Did he embellish the story to
appear more heroic himself, or did the Carrington’s encourage this tall tale to fuel future sales of Frances
Carrington’s book? The truth probably includes both, given the circumstances under which Peters
composed the memoir.

Peters also contributed another mythical episode to the biography of Jim Bridger. He correctly
identified Captain Burrowes as commander of the train coming south from new Fort Reno, but his
description of their arrival after sunset is pure myth. Peters recalled:

Finally a solitary horseman was observed coming over the little ridge to our left. Before he
reached the ravine he was ordered to halt. He did so and shouted back that he was a
friend.

“What’s your name?”
“Jim Bridger.”
And so it was. He was shown a crossing through the ravine and came on up to the
corral.

“I knew there was hell to pay here to-day [sic] at Crazy Woman,” said he to a group
of officers. “I could see it from the signs the Indians made on the buffalo skulls. But cheer
up, boys, Captain Burroughs [sic] and two hundred soldiers are coming down the road there
about two miles away.”

Jim Bridger was not at Crazy Woman’s Fork on 20 July 1866. He did not accompany Burrowes’
train on their run to the south, because he was still needed at new Fort Reno. Neither Templeton nor

87 S. S. Peters’ memoir of the Crazy Woman’s Fork skirmish runs to over eight pages in Frances
Carrington, My Army Life, 73-81.
88 Ibid., 73-79.
89 Templeton, diary, 20 July 1866. Burrowes to Bisbee, 28 July 1866. Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry,
Annual Record of Events, 1866.
90 Templeton, diary, 20 July 1866.
91 Frances Carrington, My Army Life, 80.
Burrowes reported Jim Bridger in their accounts, and as we have seen earlier, Templeton initiated contact between the two trains. It was not until 26 July that Lieutenant Templeton first met Bridger after the combined Templeton-Burrowes train finally arrived at new Fort Reno. Templeton recorded simply, "Met 'Old Jim Bridger' one of the very few relics of the mountaineers of former days."92 Peters' story about Bridger was a great finale for his memoir, but it never happened. Again, an account published in Frances Carrington's *My Army Life* was enhanced with spectacular tidbits, mythical attractions to sell books and confuse later historians.

In addition to the actions of Crazy Woman's Fork, the last eleven days of July were eventful. Lakota raiders got away with seven mules from an emigrant train camped near new Fort Reno, on 20 July, despite pursuit by a mounted soldier detail.93 On 22 July, Lakota warriors attacked a civilian train at Buffalo Springs, seventeen miles south of Reno Station. They killed one citizen and wounded another. On the same day, raiders stole a government mule from the Reno Station herds.94 On 23 July the Sawyer train left new Fort Reno after a two-day stop, accompanied by a twenty-two man Army escort. That afternoon, twenty Cheyennes came in to trade at the post on the forks of the Pineys.95

On 28 July, Lakotas attempted a surround and ran off stock from Reno Station. Mounted pursuit failed to catch the warriors, but recovered the cattle lost by John B. Sloss. On 29 July, eighty warriors used a friendship ruse to get close to another civilian train at Brown's Spring. Eight citizens were killed and two others wounded, one mortally. These attacks by Lakota war parties near and below old Fort Reno were serious threats to Carrington's line of communications. Carrington used them to support his requests for additional officers and "Indian auxiliaries."96

Near the end of July, General Cooke altered the configuration of the Bozeman Trail forts. Reno Station was retained as a two-company post, reverting to its previous designation as Fort Reno. New Fort Reno, now being built on the bluff between the Piney Creeks, was renamed Fort Philip Kearny. With a four-company garrison, Phil Kearny was headquarters for Carrington's Mountain District, the Eighteenth

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92 Templeton, diary, 26 July 1866.
93 Ten Eyck, diary, 20 July 1866.
95 Ten Eyck, diary, 23 July 1866. Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events.

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Infantry Regiment, and the Second Battalion. Army orders renamed the two-company post to be built on the Bighorn River, Fort C. F. Smith, and cancelled the Yellowstone post.\(^7\)

With the Mountain District reduced to three posts, Carrington made changes in garrison assignments. Newly arrived Lieutenant Link relieved Captain Haymond in command of Company F. Carrington ordered Link and his company back to Fort Reno to join Company B as the two-company garrison there under Captain Proctor. Fort Phil Kearny boasted the district, regiment, and battalion headquarters, along with Companies A, C, E, and H. Captain Ten Eyck, commanding the post, was now also senior captain; he replaced Haymond as battalion commander at the beginning of August. On 1 August, Captain Haymond and Lieutenant D'Isay left on recruiting service, and Lieutenant Phisterer left to become General Cooke's adjutant. They accompanied Link and Company F on their march south to Fort Reno.\(^8\)

In August 1866, most of the Bozeman Trail traffic was northbound for Montana. It was the peak month of emigrant travel that year, with trains passing up the trail almost daily.\(^9\) On 2 August, three trains were camped five miles north of Phil Kearny waiting to be escorted by the two companies of soldiers headed north to establish Fort C. F. Smith.\(^10\) With Captain Kinney in overall command, at 5 A. M. on 4 August, the combined military and civilian train departed for the Bighorn River. Kinney's column included his Company D, Captain Burrowes and Company G, a military train of 36 wagons and ambulances, a mountain howitzer, and a mounted infantry escort of thirty men.\(^11\) Jim Bridger guided Kinney's column. Carrington had sent Bridger to meet with the Mountain Crows, find out their intentions, and gather intelligence about the other tribes.\(^12\) With the addition of the three civilian trains, Kinney's combined train

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\(^7\) Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry Annual Record of Events, 27 July 1866.
\(^8\) Ibid., 31 July and 1 August, 1866. Ten Eyck, diary, 1 August 1866.
\(^9\) Brown, Fetterman Massacre, 98.
\(^10\) Ten Eyck, diary, 2 August 1866.
\(^12\) Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 20. Because Carrington said he sent both Jim Bridger and James Beckwourth to meet with the Crows, Dee Brown assumed that both men went with the Kinney column in early August. See Brown, Fetterman Massacre, 97-98. Beckwourth did not leave Fort Phil Kearny until the end of August, as scout for the Hazen inspection party. See Templeton, diary, 1 September 1866.
was an imposing sight. Except for one early morning alarm the first day out from Phil Kearny, there was no interference from hostile warriors during their nine-day march.\(^{103}\)

At Fort Phil Kearny, two government trains and 190 civilian wagons arrived on 5 August. A week earlier, they all had serious Indian trouble below Fort Reno, losing as many as a dozen men killed.\(^{104}\) Kinney's command camped on the Tongue River the night of 6 August. For the next two days, their march took them through immense bison herds, numbering many thousands of animals. On 9 August, the Fort Smith garrison reached Rotten Grass Creek. Bridger rode on to the Bighorn River ferry site. Beers' stranded train was still there, waiting for their new stock to be brought from Virginia City. Although they were unseen, the soldiers believed many Indians were in the area.\(^{105}\)

On that same day, Fort Phil Kearny experienced the first attack on the logging operations. About 10 A.M., a small party of warriors struck a train four miles west of Phil Kearny on the logging road to the Pinery. The warriors took four mules, but the animals were recaptured by Corporal Phillips' mounted infantry detail, who rode to the rescue from the post. At least one of the warriors was killed or mortally wounded; he had to be carried away by his companions.\(^{106}\) To the south, on 12 August, Lakota raiders ran off stock from a civilian train camped along the Powder River near Fort Reno. A mounted infantry pursuit recovered some cattle, but the warriors got away with horses and mules.\(^{107}\)

Over ninety miles north of Fort Phil Kearny, Kinney's command had reached the Bighorn River on 10 August. For the next two days, Kinney surveyed the area for a good location. On 13 August, he moved his men four miles to a location he had selected near the Bighorn River. In his first post return from Fort C. F. Smith, Kinney reported, "The Site selected for the Fort is on an elevated plateau, 300 yards from the River Bank, 8 miles above the mouth of Rotten Grass Creek and 2 miles below the debouchment of the

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\(^{103}\) Templeton, diary, 5 August 1866.
\(^{104}\) Ten Eyck, diary, 5 August 1866.
\(^{105}\) Ibid., 6, 7, 8, 9 August 1866. See Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign*, 31-32.
\(^{107}\) Colonel Carrington, *Indian Operations*, 16.
River from the mountains. The ferry, by which all trains cross the river, is within 800 yards of the Fort. With Kinney's decision on the site for C. F. Smith, the three Bozeman Trail forts were now in place. Much remained to be done in construction and improvements at all three posts. That labor would last until the end of the year.

By mid-August, most of the patterns for forts and fights were in place for 1866. All three Bozeman Trail posts had been established. At the end of August, Carrington made a foolhardy attempt to change that arrangement. When he reported the location of the new Bighorn River post to General Cooke, he also recommended going forward with the Yellowstone post in the fall. In connection with that, he outlined a grandiose plan that only required five more companies! One company would garrison a sub-post at the South Fork of the Cheyenne, halfway between Bridger's Ferry and Fort Reno. A second company would be split with one half at Crazy Woman's Fork, and the other half on Dry Fork of the Cheyenne, between Fort Reno and Fort Phil Kearny. Carrington wanted the third company on the mouth of Goose Creek where it emptied into the Tongue River, between Phil Kearny and C. F. Smith. The other two companies could then establish the Yellowstone post. Carrington's ambitious plan failed to garner any support from his superiors. In the summer of 1866, Carrington's scheme was pure fantasy. Forts Reno, Phil Kearny, and C. F. Smith were all the protection the Army was going to provide on the Bozeman Trail. That configuration remained in place for the next two years.

The locations of the three forts also created patterns for fights with the Lakota alliance for the rest of 1866. Carrington's grander plan would simply have given the Indian warriors more targets of opportunity. They had plenty as it was. Forts Reno, Phil Kearny, and C. F. Smith already attracted hostile attention. In addition, there were multiple targets moving along the trail itself in both military and emigrant trains. By mid-August, the war parties were conducting three basic types of offensive strikes against the invaders of their hunting grounds. First, and foremost, were stock raids. Horses and mules were especially useful to plains nomads. Second, tactics never included a direct attack on strength, such as the forts themselves. Soft targets, like individuals separated from the main groups of emigrants or soldiers, were sought out. Third, if warriors were threatened in either of the first two actions by pursuit, short defensive

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108 Returns, Fort C. F. Smith, August 1866 Returns, Record of Events. Lieutenant Templeton recorded 12 August as the day the command moved the four miles to the post site. See Templeton, diary, 12 August 1866.

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stands, or ad hoc ambushes were staged. But these were quickly abandoned if serious losses were likely. These patterns were northern plains guerilla warfare at its best; they continued into the fall and early winter. In December there would be a shift from small pinprick attacks to something on a much grander scale.

CHAPTER 6

COUPS, CROWS, AND CHEYENNES

With the three Bozeman Trail forts established by mid-August, and the emigration traffic along the trail peaking in the same month, the Lakotas continued their harassing tactics against the Army garrisons and passing wagon trains. Besides counting coups against their enemies, the Lakotas sought to expand their Powder River alliance. Having added Neva's band of Northern Arapahoes to the alliance in July, the Lakota leadership invited the Mountain Crows to join them against Carrington's soldiers. Black Horse and his Omisis band faced new threats to their practical neutrality over the next few months. By fall, the council chiefs made another decision about their participation in the hostile alliance.

At Fort C. F. Smith, the newest post on the Bozeman Trail, the week after the post was located was filled with resource identification and early construction. Mr. Marr decided to take a hay cutting contract rather than risking the mining camps of Montana. Soldier details cut timber in the nearby woods. By 18 August, Templeton had the men hewing logs for quarters.¹ There was no interference from hostile Lakotas until September, although scouting and hunting parties saw pony tracks and other signs indicating there were Indians about.²

Near Fort Reno, Lakota warriors were busy. On 14 August, they killed two civilians from a wagon train about four miles from the post. Three days later, a large raiding party boldly got into the government herd at the fort, and got away with seven horses and seventeen mules.³ Other warrior raids during the month collected additional animals in the Fort Reno area.⁴

At Fort Phil Kearny, progress was being made on the fort stockade. Daily runs of the timber trains to and from the Pinery, nearly eight miles away, kept a constant flow of logs available for the construction

¹ Templeton, diary, 14-15 August 1866. It is noteworthy that Captain Kinney and Lieutenant Templeton chose to build housing first. They may have felt less threatened in the tribal borderlands along the Bighorn River. Stockade construction was Carrington's first priority at Fort Phil Kearny.
² Ibid., 17-26 August 1866.
³ Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 16. Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 126.
Carrington's security measures for the trains included placing a permanent mounted picket on Pilot Hill, across Little Piney Creek to the east of the fort site. He also had a system of flag signals implemented with which the Pilot Hill pickets warned the fort of approaching war parties, giving relative size and direction, or reporting attacks on the timber trains.\(^5\) About mid-August, a war party made another attempt on the wood train, but they were driven off without success.\(^7\) From mid-month to the end of August, warriors made more appearances around the post, but did not attack.\(^8\) Although the heavy emigrant traffic on the trail appeared to offer more raiding opportunities, larger well-armed trains also were deterrents to the warriors. As the three posts improved their defenses, there were too many rifles to risk direct assault on the posts. War parties limited their activities during the last half of August, probing for softer, safer possibilities to count coup and steal stock.

During this lull in action around Fort Phil Kearny, wagon trains continued to rattle up the Bozeman Trail on almost a daily basis. Large trains arrived at Phil Kearny on 20 and 24 August.\(^9\) Several civilians who had important roles in the Fetterman Fight probably arrived at the post with these August trains. Quartermaster Brown hired James Wheatley, Isaac Fisher, and John "Portugee" Philips as civilian employees in the supply network at Phil Kearny. Wheatley brought his young wife and two small sons with him. They built a cabin and ran a civilian mess for other employees just outside the main gate of the fort.\(^10\)

In the mail that arrived on 22 August, Colonel Carrington received three important communications. A note from General Cooke dated 9 August, indicated General Sherman had announced a regiment coming from St. Louis to the Fort Laramie area. Cooke's note inferred that additional manpower could be forthcoming for Carrington. Second, a telegram from General Cooke dated 11 August, advised Carrington that two companies of the Second Cavalry had been ordered to join the Second Battalion in protecting the Montana road. Cooke also authorized Carrington to enlist up to fifty Indian scouts to be paid

\(^5\) Ten Eyck, diary, 3 December 1866. Captain Ten Eyck measured the distance from the fort flagpole to the creek crossing to the Pinery at 7.83 miles.
\(^9\) Ten Eyck, diary, 15-24 August 1866.
as cavalry soldiers. The final communication was just two days old. Brevet Brigadier General William B.
Hazen informed Carrington that he had arrived to inspect the Bozeman Trail posts.  

By the time Carrington got Hazen's letter, the Assistant Inspector-General of the Department of
the Platte was already at Fort Reno. Hazen recommended to Captain Proctor the realignment of the
cottonwood stockade, and other improvements to the post buildings.  

By the end of the month, Proctor had already begun changes that continued until late that year. He recorded in the post returns for August
that his troops were "building stockade, repairing and building quarters" to prepare for winter, and "placing
the garrison in a fit condition for a small force to repel any attack of hostile Indians."  

At Fort Phil Kearny, work on an elaborate stockade was moving forward. Ten Eyck's Company
H completed their assigned portion of the eight-foot-high log wall by 23 August, while Hazen was still at
Fort Reno.  

Indian interference at the post was slight; it was so quiet at Fort Phil Kearny that the officers
held a picnic at Lake De Smet on 26 August. The next afternoon, Hazen's party arrived to begin three
days of inspection at Fort Phil Kearny. Hazen's report was both complimentary and critical. On the one
hand he called Carrington's engineering marvel, "the best he had ever seen, excepting one in British
America, built by the Hudson Bay Company." Conversely, Hazen criticized the extensive log wall
surrounding the post; he believed such a stockade was not as essential to the garrison as well crafted
quarters and other buildings, necessary for the coming winter.  

On the same day the Hazen party arrived at Fort Phil Kearny, the Mountain Crows made their first
visit to Fort C. F. Smith. About 6 A. M., seven Crow warriors road up to the Bighorn River bank opposite
the C. F. Smith site. Lieutenant Templeton greeted them, then crossed the river in a boat kept by the ferry.

By the time he had arranged to bring three warriors back with him in the boat, about sixty Crow warriors
and women had collected on the riverbank. While Templeton and the three warriors returned to the east
bank of the Bighorn, the remaining Crows crossed the river with their horses. Although understanding was

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11 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 17.
12 Murray, Military Posts, 15-23.
13 Returns, Fort Reno, August 1866, Record of Events.
14 Ten Eyck, diary, 23 August 1866.
15 Ibid., 26 August 1866.
16 Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events, 27 August 1866. Returns, Fort Philip
Kearny, August 1866, Record of Events. Ten Eyck, diary, 27-29 August 1866.
17 Hebard and Brinninstool, Bozeman Trail, I, 286.
18 Murray, Military Posts, 43.
spotty and difficult. Captain Kinney held a council with his Crow guests. It was understood this Crow party was part of a larger band camped a short distance down river. They wished to be friendly, wanted papers from Kinney to make that clear, and hoped to be fed as friends and adoptive kin of the soldier chief. Templeton described them as "well dressed and the finest looking Indians" that he had ever seen. After the council, Kinney gave the Crow visitors some Army rations. Their first visit to C. F. Smith concluded, the Crows forded the river again and disappeared.¹⁹

In the afternoon, ten miners came down from the mountains to visit the post. They were part of a thirty-four-man party prospecting and panning for gold in the streams of the Bighorns.²⁰ The miners represented one of the twin threats to the Crow people. Crow country, officially recognized in the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty, was "simultaneously being overrun by white prospectors and invaded by the Sioux."²¹ As the Crows tried to maintain their autonomy and continue their nomadic lifestyle, they were being pushed into enclaves of survival, and driven to seek the help of men like Captain Kinney and Lieutenant Templeton.²² That reality was made very clear the following day.

The morning of 28 August, Lieutenant Templeton and a few other men went down to the riverbank to hunt bison from a small herd that had moved along the Bighorn River. Templeton dropped one with a rifle shot, while the other men broke the hind leg of another with their shooting. Just then, a party of Crows rode up and noisily gave chase to the wounded bull, finally bringing it down with arrows and gunshots. These Crows were from the same village as the previous day’s visitors. They crossed the Bighorn to the post, bringing with them a French Canadian trader, Peter Chien, as interpreter. Kinney gave the Crows papers and some food. Then the post sutler traded beads and blankets for their well made buffalo robes.²³

After the trading was complete, the Army officers invited Chien and the band chiefs to participate in a council. Crow leaders who came to Fort C. F. Smith that day included White Mouth, White Horse, Long Horse, Iron Bull, Shot In The Face, a small, older man named Boy Chief, and a young warrior known as Pretty Bull. With Chien doing the translating, Kinney and Templeton met with the Crow delegation.

¹⁹ Templeton, diary, 27 August 1866.
²⁰ Ibid.
²¹ Hoxie, Parading, 97.
²² Ibid., 98.
²³ Templeton, diary, 28 August 1866.
During the exchange of information, Iron Bull did most of the talking for the Crows. The officers learned that about 1,500 Lakotas were camped on Tongue River. Both the Lakotas and Arapahoes had sent runners to the Crow camp inviting the Crows to join their alliance and stop all white travel on the Montana road. Iron Bull quickly made clear the Oglala invitations had not tempted the Crows. They did not trust the Oglalas and still wanted to take back the Powder River hunting grounds.

Captain Kinney advised the Crows not to make peace with the Lakotas until the Lakotas made peace with the whites. He promised the Crow leaders that the Army soldiers would be good friends, would live in peace with the Crow people, and intimated that Kinney’s men would back them against any Lakota threats. The Crow leaders were pleased; they stood up and began shaking hands with the officers. Boy Chief then took Templeton’s hat off, and put his arm around the lieutenant’s neck. With Chien translating, the elderly Crow leader told the young officer that he loved him and wished Templeton to reciprocate that feeling. Boy Chief repeated this ceremony with each of the officers.

Having completed trading with the sutler, and meeting with the officers of Fort C. F. Smith, the Crow leaders left for their own camp. It was apparent the Crows looked to Kinney and his soldiers to police the white prospectors, and be their allies against the Lakotas. In addition, the fort would provide a trade outlet, replacing those lost because of the recent hostilities on the northern plains. Perhaps Fort C. F. Smith could even become a source of guns and ammunition, and even employment as Army scouts. Potential opportunities from these two days in late August were important to both the U. S. Army and the Mountain Crows.

On 29 August, the day after the Crow council adjourned at Fort C. F. Smith, Brevet Brigadier General Hazen completed his inspection of Fort Phil Kearny. That same day, Colonel Carrington prepared a lengthy report for General Cooke. After informing Cooke that the Bighorn River post had been established, Carrington boasted again that Phil Kearny was “a perfectly secure base,” a post “well located,” and already “of substantial value to emigration.” Although the post on the Piney Creeks may have been valuable to emigrants, the garrisons along the trail had not prevented thirty-three whites from being killed up to that time. Carrington inaccurately concluded that the current quiet along the trail (“they now avoid

24 Ibid.
25 Hoxie, Parading, 97.
26 Templeton, diary, 28 August 1866.
it") was the result of Indian casualties over the previous two months. He estimated thirty-seven Lakotas had been killed or wounded. He also proved himself a poor prophet concerning the Lakota alliance in the Powder River country: "The hereditary chiefs are no more, and there is no possibility, as it seems to me, of any Indian alliance that will bring on a general war." Within a few days, Lakota warriors were back in strength along the Bozeman Trail. Within a few weeks, the impossible Indian alliance became a reality.

Early on 30 August, Hazen's inspection party left Phil Kearny headed north to Fort C. F. Smith and beyond to Fort Benton. Lieutenant James H. Bradley, scouts James P. Beckwourth and James J. Brannan, and twenty-seven of Carrington's mounted infantrymen went with them as protective escort. Bradley's detail was gone for two months.

The last day of August, a train of forty-two wagons carrying supplies for Fort C. F. Smith and more Montana-bound emigrants, passed by Fort Phil Kearny. About noon, the Pilot Hill pickets signaled an Indian alarm. Twenty mounted infantrymen rode out in response. They saw many warriors in the vicinity, but they had no fight and returned three hours later with only an abandoned pony for their efforts.

That same day, Private Gilchrist of E Company went out hunting without permission; he had not returned by nightfall. The lack of warrior activity had lulled some into fallacious feelings of security. Lakota warriors would never attack strength. Heavily armed wagon trains were too risky, as were the forts. Real vulnerability came when individuals chose isolated activities away from other well armed men.

The relative quiet in warrior activity continued into the first week of September. In the evening of 1 September, Jim Beckwourth rode into Kinney's Fort Smith camp on the Bighorn River. Beckwourth heralded the approach of the Hazen's inspection party, who arrived soon after the scout's announcement.
Hazen stayed three days inspecting the troops and the post, then left with Bradley's escort. Beckwourth guided them as far as the Yellowstone River, and then returned on 9 September to Fort C. F. Smith.31

In the meantime, on 2 September, men in a hay-cutting party found Private Gilchrist's rifle. A search party from Fort Phil Kearny found no other signs; he was still missing. Over the next two days, Ten Eyck's labor details began work on barracks buildings for A, C, and H Companies. On 5 September, the work parties also started a commissary building.32 That same day, fifty-three wagons, in four government supply trains, stopped at Fort Phil Kearny. They were escorted by a detachment of the Second Cavalry, the first appearance of the long promised cavalry support.33 It had been so quiet, that on Thursday, 6 September, Colonel Carrington, most of the other officers, and their wives spent the afternoon on a picnic in the woods. The next day, the government trains continued up the Bozeman Trail for Fort C. F. Smith.34

That same day at C. F. Smith, raiding warriors made their first strike near the post. Lakotas took five of sutler Leighton's mules. Marr led a pursuit by civilian employees lasting twelve miles before they ran into a war party numbering about one hundred. Faced with a numerical mismatch, Marr abandoned the pursuit, leaving the mules to their Lakota captors.35

Although it had begun slowly, September was the highpoint of warrior activity before the December Fetterman Fight. By this time the akicita from Red Cloud's Ite Sica band, the Hunkpatilas, and the Oyuhpes, had invited the other Lakota bands to join the Oglalas and Sicangus already fighting along the Bozeman Trail. Even the Mountain Crows had been invited to the Lakota camps. The Lakota war chiefs envisioned a grand alliance of northwestern plains tribes against the white invaders of the Powder River country.

For at least several weeks in September, and probably part of October, the hostile alliance peaked in the number of warriors committed to the fighting along the Montana road. When Special Indian Agent E. B. Chandler tried to identify those tribes involved in the Fetterman Fight, he reported those he could remember in mid-January 1867. His Indian source claimed to have left the hostile camps on the day of the

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31 Templeton, diary, 1, 4, 9 September.
32 Ten Eyck, diary, 2-5 September 1866.
34 Ten Eyck, diary, 6-7 September 1866.
35 Templeton, diary, 7 September 1866.
Fetterman Fight. The informant identified Miniconjous, Sicangus, Oglalas, Hunkpapas, Oohenonpas, and Itazipcos from the Lakotas, plus Arapahoes, and part of the Cheyennes.  

When Mitch Boyer asked the same question of another Lakota warrior who was in the December fight, he was told the participants included Oglalas, Miniconjous, Hunkpapas, and Sicangus, and the Arapahoes and Cheyennes. What seems likely is that by early September, the alliance was at its manpower zenith for the year. At this point, the alliance included most of the Northern Arapahoes, perhaps a few adventurous Northern Cheyenne warriors, the majority of the Northern Oglalas, the Sicangu war faction, perhaps a few Southern Oglala warriors, and some warrior contingents from the Miniconjous, Hunkpapas, Oohenonpas, and Itazipcos. However, of the last four, only the Miniconjous ever committed as a band to the conflict, and that was not until late November or early December. With their warrior power at a maximum, the tribal alliance escalated their attacks on the wagon trains, animal herds, and post work parties outside the forts.  

On 8 September, warriors struck twice near Fort Phil Kearny. At 6 A.M., Lakotas ran off twenty mules belonging to a government contractor, after the frightened animals stampeded from their corral during a storm. Pursuit failed to catch them. In the afternoon, another attempt to steal stock failed.  

Ten Eyck recorded that the Fort Phil Kearny stockade and artillery blockhouses were completed on 9 September, leaving only the gates to be hung. While the post walls made the soldiers feel more secure, the raiders targeted the stock kept outside. At 3:30 A.M. on 10 September, a party of twenty warriors attacked ten government herders a mile south of the fort, driving off seventy-eight mules, and thirty-three horses. Despite prompt pursuit by a mounted detachment, darkness and weary horses caused the pursuers to give up. At 4 A.M. that day, Arapahoes took twenty-two mules belonging to a government contractor. Captain Adair led the chase for about twenty miles without success. During the day, one of the details sent out from Phil Kearny discovered bloody clothing apparently belonging to  

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36 Chandler to Denman. *Indian Hostilities*., 13.
39 Ten Eyck, diary. 9 September 1866.
Private Gilchrist. Although his body was never found, the adjutant officially declared him dead on 10 September, ten days after he turned up missing.\(^{42}\)

With these latest Indian successes fresh on his mind, on 10 September, Colonel Carrington sent a dispatch to General Cooke permitting the bearer, W. B. C. Smith, to organize the Indian scouts authorized by Cooke. Instead of giving Beckwourth time to enlist the Mountain Crows, or even taking up Black Horse’s offer of Omisis Cheyennes, Carrington sent Smith after the Winnebagoes.\(^{43}\) Although the Winnebagoes were experienced and well armed, re-enlisting, organizing, and transporting them back to the Powder River country would take some time, time Carrington did not have. Carrington’s preference for importing the Winnebagoes rather than enlisting locally available Crows or Cheyennes may have been his most costly mistake.

Carrington’s superiors never acted on his plans for W. B. C. Smith’s Indian scouts. The Winnebagoes never returned to the Bozeman Trail. Carrington was left without Indian allies at the time of the Fetterman Fight in December. Had Carrington sent a few Crow or Cheyenne scouts with Fetterman, they could have prevented the massive ambush of 21 December.\(^{44}\) Based on the assumptions of his Arrogance Thesis, John D. McDermott would probably argue that Fetterman would have ignored Crow advice for the same reason he argued Fetterman deliberately ignored Carrington’s direct orders, that is, Fetterman’s alleged arrogance. It is probable that one of the lessons Fetterman would have learned in the seven weeks before the Fetterman Fight was the value of Indian scouts. Since Carrington missed opportunities from June until September to provide the scouts, Fetterman never had the chance to know.

During a two-day respite from warrior ventures, a mounted mail party, fifteen men under Sergeant Murphy, left Fort C. F. Smith under cover of evening darkness for Phil Kearny.\(^{45}\) At Phil Kearny, the garrison attended the funeral and burial of Bandmaster Samuel Curry, who had died of typhoid pneumonia, one of the few deaths at the Bozeman Trail forts that year due to natural causes.\(^{46}\)

\(^{42}\) Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events. Both Colonel Carrington and Margaret Carrington reported Gilchrist’s death date as 14 September. See Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations. 22. See also Margaret Carrington, Absaroka, 127. Considering the number of forays from the fort on 10 September compared to a quieter 14 September, the earlier date appears more likely for someone finding the clothing.

\(^{43}\) Ibid.

\(^{44}\) Dunlay, Wolves, 38-39.

\(^{45}\) Templeton, diary, 11 September 1866.

\(^{46}\) Ten Eyck, diary, 11 September 1866. Brown, Fetterman Massacre, 110.
September 13 was an eventful day. At Fort C. F. Smith, twenty Indians came down from the hills west of the Bighorn River, a few of them riding down to the ford, where the Bozeman Trail crossed the river. Beckwourth, Templeton, and four armed men crossed in a canoe to parley with them. The old mountain man had thought they were Crows but soon whispered to the lieutenant that they were Lakotas. When it was clear who they were, the Lakotas told Beckwourth they had been to see the Crows, and had invited a Crow chief to come to the Lakota camp on the Tongue where they claimed 1,200 lodges were gathered. After ten nervous minutes of talk, Templeton cut the conversation off. As his men returned to their canoe, the Lakotas rode off about two hundred yards and killed a miner who had just arrived towing two horses loaded with game. Two other miners drove the Lakotas off before they could take the dead man’s horses. The warriors then rode downstream along the river, crossed over and took sutler Smith’s horse, then threatened the wood choppers before they finally left.47

That day at Fort Phil Kearny, Indian warriors struck twice. The first incident had actually begun the previous day when several hundred warriors attacked an eighty-man civilian hay cutting operation at Goose Creek, even though they were guarded by an eleven-man soldier detail. The war party had burned hay, set fire to six mowing machines, run off 209 cattle into a nearby buffalo herd, and killed one civilian worker, a straggler left alone during the action. A courier from the hay party had gotten through to the fort about 1:30 A. M. on 13 September. At 5 A. M., Ten Eyck sent Lieutenant Adair and forty-four men in wagons to relieve the men at Goose Creek. Six miles out, Adair’s detail ran into a small war party; they retreated when he deployed his infantrymen for battle. Thirty miles out of the fort, Adair’s men relieved the hay contractor’s party later that day.48

About four hours after the Adair force pulled out of Fort Phil Kearny, another warrior party attacked a post mule and horse herd, stampeded the animals, and wounded two of the herders. Privates Donivan and Rineau. Captain Ten Eyck, Lieutenants Bisbee and Wands, and some mounted men chased the raiders until nightfall, then returned empty handed.49

In the afternoon of 14 September, Sergeant Brown reported Private Johnson, riding point too far in front of the hay party, had been cut off by Indians and probably killed. Captain Ten Eyck sent out a search party under Lieutenant Brown. They returned at 10 P.M., having found no sign of Johnson. Some ninety miles away near Fort C. F. Smith, a war party of fifteen warriors fired on the wood cutting detail. Templeton quickly responded to the alarm with twenty-five men, but the warriors were gone. They had taken a horse belonging to one of the woodcutters. During the day, a wagon train had trouble with another war party before they reached Fort C. F. Smith.

On 15 September, the northbound mail party rode into Fort Phil Kearny in the early afternoon. Two doctors and Lieutenant Matson came with them, and reported for duty. Lieutenant Adair and his rescue party returned to the post, having skirmished with war parties several times after leaving the hay fields. Sunday, 16 September, appeared to be quiet. Ridgway Glover, the civilian photographer who had spent the previous two months making plates of the scenery for a magazine, decided to walk into the post from the woodcutters camp at the Pinery where he usually stayed. He never made it. Monday morning. Lieutenant Bisbee's detail found Glover's scalped, naked body on the timber road less than two miles from the stockade. Glover was the latest to pay the price for being alone when war parties were operating nearby.

The discovery of Glover's body on Monday, 17 September, was just the beginning of an event filled day at Fort Phil Kearny. About 10 A.M., ten mounted warriors dashed suddenly out of the ravine at the junction of the Piney creeks, then galloped toward Pilot Hill and the lookout pickets stationed there. Carrington personally fired two shells from the field howitzer, driving the warriors back toward the creeks with the first, and dismounting one rider with the second. The others rode back to the hills after retrieving the body of their fallen comrade. Simultaneously with the attack on Pilot Hill, another fifty warriors appeared north of the fort within two miles of Big Piney Creek. Carrington repeated his efforts with the

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50 Ten Eyck, diary, 14 September 1866. The Carringtons reported this incident on 16 September. See Colonel Carrington, *Indian Operations*, 22, 24. Margaret Carrington, *Absaraka*, 127. Returns. Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events. 16 September 1866. Johnson's official death date was 16 September 1866, but the Ten Eyck diary recording was closer to the actual event.

51 Templeton, diary, 14 September 1866.

52 Returns. Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events. 16 September 1866. Ten Eyck, diary, 15 September 1866. Ten Eyck’s diary date was recorded closer to the event.

howitzer, bursting two shells above this party, the second shell dismounting a second warrior. His companions also carried him off as they rode westward toward a third war party that now appeared along the Big Piney near the timber road.\(^{53}\) Fearing an attack on the timber trains, Ten Eyck sent out a detail to protect them. With the additional guards, the wood trains came in safely, and that war party disappeared.\(^{54}\)

A fourth group of warriors conducted a stock raid on the government cattle being guarded by the hay contractors near the fort. After taking forty-eight head, the warriors tried to run off the slow moving animals. A vigorous pursuit by mounted men from the fort recovered all the cattle, while their Indian captors got away without casualty.\(^{55}\)

One bright spot in the day for Colonel Carrington was the arrival of a party of miners, about forty in number, led by an experienced westerner named William Bailey. Lakotas had killed two of their party while they were hunting in the Tongue River Valley. They were well armed, mounted, and when Carrington offered them quartermaster employment, they accepted. As they pitched their tents north of the post along Big Piney Creek, Colonel Carrington gained the equivalent of nearly a company of cavalry.\(^{56}\)

Carrington’s report to General Cooke for 17 September included some preliminary intelligence gathered from the Crows at Fort C. F. Smith that Captain Kinney sent by messenger with Murphy’s mail run from that post. Five hundred Lakota lodges were in the Tongue River Valley, and another smaller village was probably southeast of Phil Kearny, towards Powder River. Additional information indicated the Indians were well armed including revolvers and rifles. There were also reports of white men with the Indians.\(^{57}\) Within a week, warrior actions near all three Bozeman Trail forts would confirm the accuracy of Kinney’s intelligence; the rumors about whites operating with the Indians would become fact.

During this hectic day, Captain Ten Eyck also sent out newly arrived Lieutenant Matson with a twenty-man detail to protect and bring back Levi Carter’s contractor party still working at the hay fields on


\(^{55}\) *Ibid.* Carrington had two versions of this event; one placed the threatening Lakota party at the angle of the Piney Creeks, the other placed them on Lodge Trail ridge.


Goose Creek. They stayed out five days. During their absence, on 20 September a raiding party attacked the miners' camp near Phil Kearny intending to run off their stock. With help from the post, the civilians repulsed the raiders, killed one warrior, and wounded another.

At the hayfields, Matson's men faced repeated harassing attacks by a strong war party of Lakotas and Arapahoes. Finally forced to withdraw, Matson led his combined soldier-civilian force back toward Fort Phil Kearny. About eleven miles north of the post, they found the bodies of three civilians lying in the road. Part of a contractor train destined for Fort C. F. Smith, the three men had run into a large body of warriors on the Bozeman Trail. After burying the dead, Matson's men resumed their march to the post. About five miles from the fort, some three hundred Lakota and Arapahoe warriors forced them to corral for defense and send for help. While Matson waited for relief from the fort, a mountain man dressed as an Arapahoe Indian approached the corral. He identified himself as Captain Bob North. Suspicious of the stranger, Matson kept him outside his perimeter. Probably warned of Carrington's relief column, the warriors pulled out, and the mysterious Captain North disappeared. Matson then brought his command safely into the post about 4 P. M.

While Matson's men were still at the hayfields, other Lakota warriors forayed far to the south around Fort Reno. On 17 September, a raiding party attacked the herders near the post and took two government horses. Four days later, another war party surprised a work detail and the post herders. This time they captured five horses and two mules from the government herd. That afternoon, warriors targeted a civilian wagon train eight miles north of the post in the dry fork of the Cheyenne River; they wounded two men from the train during the fight. In the final action of that week, Indians drove off cattle from

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60 Brown, Fetteman Massacre, 119-120. Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 22. Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events, 17, 23 September 1866. Ten Eyck, diary, 17, 22 September 1866. Both Carrington and the regimental returns reported Matson's return as 23 September. Ten Eyck's diary specifies Matson's return at 4 P. M. 22 September. This writer chose to use Ten Eyck's date, because of Carrington's penchant for misdating events.

61 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 22, 25. Carrington's habit of getting the dates wrong is clear here. In his defense before the Sanborn Commission in 1867, Carrington dated this event on 20 September, a date corroborated by Ten Eyck's diary. In his report of 25 September, Carrington dated the same event on Wednesday, 19 September 1866. Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 127. Ten Eyck, diary, 20 September 1866.


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another civilian train on 23 September. A civilian pursuit party recaptured the cattle, but a warrior killed Casper H. Walsh, one of the pursuers.63

During that same week, Lakotas from the Tongue River camps were active around Fort C. F. Smith. Thursday, 20 September, Corporal Staples and Private Fitzpatrick left a hay cutting detail to hunt some nearby buffaloes. A short time later, others in the detail heard firing, then saw a group of warriors ride away. Private Whalen reported the incident to Lieutenant Templeton, who promptly took volunteers out to locate the missing men. Templeton’s men could not find them. Next morning, a larger search party found the bodies. Warriors hiding behind a large rock had ambushed the two soldiers. They killed Staples near the rock, then chased Fitzpatrick about a hundred yards before killing him and mutilating his body.64 The deaths of the two Fort C. F. Smith soldiers provided fresh warnings against being isolated from others outside the post.

Saturday, 22 September, Sergeant Murphy’s mail party returned to C. F. Smith after an eleven-day round trip to Fort Phil Kearny. The trip there was peaceful; the ride back was not. A day out of Fort Phil Kearny they found the hay fields north of the post on fire and stopped to extinguish the blaze. The following day the soldiers ran into a Lakota war party of about two hundred warriors. For the next two days, Murphy’s men skirmished several times with the Lakotas. Before the mail party finally arrived back at Fort C. F. Smith, the Lakotas took four horses and severely wounded Private Hackett in the leg and head. Two soldiers managed to bring in the wounded man by holding him in his saddle.65

Sunday, 23 September, the morning was cold and very stormy.66 Carrington expected trouble that day, and had Ten Eyck put Fort Phil Kearny on alert. A Lakota and Arapahoe raiding party dashed into contractor Chandler’s cattle herd, cut out ninety-four of them, and drove them away at a gallop. Lieutenant Frederick H. Brown quickly started in pursuit out the east gate, leading a force of eight mounted infantrymen and fifteen volunteer miners. After a chase of over ten miles. Brown’s detail overtook the warriors, now numbering nearly 150, and began a skirmish with them lasting about an hour. Brown’s men were surrounded at one point, so the lieutenant dismounted his infantry. Repeated attacks by both sides

63 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 22. Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 128.
64 Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events, 20 September 1866. Returns, Fort C. F. Smith, September 1866, Record of Events. Templeton, diary, 20-21 September 1866.
followed. In one charge led by Brown, he and his men fired revolvers at the Indians, doing serious damage. During the fighting, Brown believed they wounded sixteen warriors, killed five others, and killed a white man fighting with them, possibly Bob North, the mountain man Lieutenant Matson had seen the previous day. Among the Indian casualties carried from the field by their companions, was a chief wearing an elaborate headdress. Brown’s losses were slight. An arrow grazed the temple of one civilian, and six horses sustained wounds. All were brought back to the fort, as were all the stolen cattle, abandoned by the war party in their retreat from the field. As Brown’s men left with the recaptured cattle herd, the warriors silently gathered on a nearby hill, demonstrating none of their usual bravado.67

For the Lakotas and Arapahoes, this stock raid was a disaster. If Brown’s count of their casualties is even close to accurate, this action was an abrupt reversal of the successes the warriors had been enjoying. Warriors returning to camp without the stock, and with more than a dozen casualties, was a misfortune of great magnitude. There would be no celebrations in their camps that night.

Within a few weeks, one Northern Arapahoe band of seventy-six lodges had withdrawn from the fighting along the Bozeman Trail and was camping with the Mountain Crows.68 Their losses during the action on 23 September probably motivated that decision. For Carrington’s men this skirmish was a victory. Carrington was still praising Lieutenant Brown’s achievement in official dispatches over two months later.69 Exulting that the Indians had “felt the blow,” the colonel observed that the skirmish of 23 September “inspired my men with new courage.” 70 In his official report three days later, this success apparently also inspired Carrington to clarify that the government’s reasons for sending the Second Battalion to the Powder River country included more than just providing safe emigrant passage up the Bozeman Trail. After a lengthy description of the mineral resources, agricultural possibilities, and his meteorological observations in the region, Carrington summarized, “This country is susceptible of the highest development.” Such a possibility meant that the nomadic tribes had to be displaced from the

66 Ten Eyck, diary, 23 September 1866.
67 Ibid. Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 22, 25. Ten Eyck, diary, 23 September 1866. Ten Eyck recorded that his men thought “they killed or wounded six of the enemy.” Even if this smaller number is more accurate, it still qualifies as a catastrophe for the Indians. He also noted four horses shot instead of six.
68 Templeton, diary, 19 November 1866. Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 35.
69 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 38. Carrington once again got the date wrong, referring to Brown’s success on 25 September instead of 23 September.
70 Ibid., 25.
Powder River country. Carrington thought his efforts on the Bozeman Trail made permanent white settlement likely in the near future. As he saw it, the Indians could not win: "But the occupation by the troops has so far advanced this fall, the defenses are so stable, and the purpose of the government is so decided, that they must yield." By January, it was Colonel Carrington who had to yield.

In the meantime, the effects of the 23 September skirmish included two days of quiet along the entire Bozeman Trail line. It was peaceful around all three posts until Wednesday, 26 September. While the Arapahoes withdrew because of their losses two days earlier, the Lakotas did not. Lakota war parties made a major effort against outliers around Fort Phil Kearny that day. The morning was disarmingly quiet. In the afternoon, fifteen Lakotas caught Private Patrick Smith away from other workers in the Pinery. They mortally wounded him with several arrows, scalped him, and left him for dead. He managed to break off the arrow shafts and drag himself to the safety of one of the Pinery blockhouses. Two doctors rode out to the Pinery, found Smith still alive, and tended to his wounds. They decided he could not be moved. Soon afterward, a larger party of one hundred Lakotas tried to cut off, surround, and kill two other workers in sight of their comrades. The two woodcutters managed to break through the woods and escape.

Meanwhile, the fifteen Lakotas who had attacked Smith continued to the east, crossed the Big Piney, moved through the brush along the Little Piney just south of the post, and then were seen riding hard directly for the mounted pickets near Pilot Hill. The four pickets dismounted, sent their horses toward the fort, and then waited for reinforcements. Lieutenant Brown led a force of twenty mounted infantrymen out

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72 Ten Eyck, diary, 26 September 1866. Colonel Carrington, *Indian Operations*, 22-24. Margaret Carrington, *Absaraka*, 128, 157-159. Margaret Carrington's memoir appears to run together events from 17 September and 26 September, as did Colonel Carrington's defense. Frances Carrington, *My Army Life*, 87-88. Returns, Eighteenth Infantry, Annual Record of Events. Colonel and Margaret Carrington both dated this event on 27 September. Ten Eyck clearly dated it on 26 September. The Regimental Annual Record of Events dated Smith's wounding on 28 September. Ten Eyck again appears the most reliable source. Frances Carrington spoke of Smith's experience as an event "which had occurred but recently" that she discussed with Margaret Carrington after she arrived at the post as Mrs. Grummond. At least ten days elapsed between 26 September and this discussion following the Grummond's 6 October arrival. Frances' memoir suggests that Dee Brown misdated the Grummonds' arrival on 16 September. See Brown, *Fetterman Massacre*, 115-116
of the fort to support the pickets, and the warriors veered away. Brown and his men began a pursuit of this Lakota party that extended for several miles.\textsuperscript{74}

During Brown's pursuit of the Lakota war party, Brown saw them pass by and briefly talk with another party of Indians coming from the east toward the fort. These were a group of Northern Cheyennes, eight men and one woman. Lieutenant Brown broke off the pursuit to escort the Cheyennes back to Fort Phil Kearny. It was nearly dark when Brown's detail arrived at the fort with the Cheyennes. Three of the Cheyennes were chiefs who had visited the post in July. Black Horse and White Head had sent Little Moon, The Rabbit That Jumps, and The Wolf That Lies Down to parley with Carrington. After the colonel issued the Cheyennes some bacon and coffee, they set up camp on the Little Piney.\textsuperscript{75}

When the men came in from the timber train and heard how the Cheyennes had come into the post, rumors quickly spread that the Cheyennes had been involved in the day's fighting, and in scalping Private Smith. About 9 P.M., Chaplain White informed Ten Eyck and Carrington that some of the soldiers were planning to take revenge on the Cheyennes camped on Little Piney. Ten Eyck sent a guard detail to stop about forty soldiers from attacking the Cheyennes. Colonel Carrington also intervened in person, firing two pistol shots to dissuade the men from their plans, and drove them back to the fort. Colonel Carrington identified the men as some of the best soldiers in the garrison. They were sent back to their barracks with a verbal scolding from the colonel and a warning about future conduct.\textsuperscript{76}

Ten Eyck had a talk with four of the Cheyennes the next morning. Considering the events of the previous evening, the talk went well. The Cheyenne chiefs shared intelligence confirming the early information received from the Crows. Red Cloud and Man Afraid were in the Tongue River Valley. Buffalo Tongue was the Lakota \textit{hlotahunka} on the Powder River. At least four other small Lakota bands located along the Bighorn River below Fort C.F. Smith had recently joined Red Cloud in hostilities against the whites. They confirmed that in August, Medicine Man's Arapahoe band of twenty-five lodges had

\textsuperscript{74} Colonel Carrington, \textit{Indian Operations}, 22. Ten Eyck, diary, 26 September 1866. Margaret Carrington, \textit{Absaraka}, 159-160.
\textsuperscript{76} Colonel Carrington, \textit{Indian Operations}, 29. Ten Eyck, diary, 26 September 1866. Margaret Carrington, \textit{Absaraka}, 162-163. Mrs. Carrington incorrectly identified the soldier casualties as Oberly and Wasser, two men killed 6 October 1866, more than a week later.
joined the Lakotas, bringing with them their mountain man friend, Bob North. Recent experiences with
Bob North and the Arapahoes validated that part of the Cheyenne story. Even if some Arapahoes had since
decided to move away from the fighting, the Lakota alliance was still growing.

The post commander issued some more rations, and the Cheyennes left for their own camp. Friday afternoon, 28 September, seven more Cheyennes came to Fort Phil Kearny. Carrington did not
participate in this meeting. Ten Eyck and some other officers did meet with the elderly White Head and the
other unnamed Cheyennes. In view of the near massacre two days earlier, the Cheyenne leaders were
likely concerned about their welcome at the fort, and the future of their neutrality. Exactly what was said
was not recorded, but apparently the Cheyennes were warned to stay away from the Bozeman Trail because
the soldiers could no longer discriminate between the tribes. Such counsel could have been interpreted as
an affront that broke the bonds of friendship begun only two months earlier. How these three days of
visits were interpreted by the Cheyennes became clearer over the next ten weeks. White Head and his
people rode away on their ponies and never returned to trade or visit at the fort again. One can only
wonder how differently events might have been had Carrington taken Black Horse up on his offer of
Cheyenne scouts back in July. The near tragedy of 27 September would have been unthinkable against
allies. As it was, the Cheyennes did not return to Fort Phil Kearny until December. By then some had
chosen to join the Lakota alliance.

Private Smith succumbed to his wounds about 10 A. M. the day of the last friendly Cheyenne
visit, and a detail brought his body into the post for burial. The following day, Jim Bridger and Henry
Williams rode into Fort C. F. Smith bringing John and Louis Richard, Big Bat Pourier, Mitch Boyer and
three wagonloads of potatoes to sell to post quartermaster Templeton. Along the way, they had stopped at
Clark's Fork to extract some news from the Mountain Crows camped there.

The Crows were divided into three band camps, one about seven miles from Fort C. F. Smith,
another on Pryor's Fork, and a third village on Clark's Fork. The band chiefs, White Mouth, Black Foot

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28 September 1866.

80 Ten Eyck, diary, 28 September 1866.

(Kicked-In-The-Bellies), and Rotten Tail were at peace with the whites. They had exchanged visits with Red Cloud's people, but had declined their invitation to join the Lakota alliance. They said it took half a day's ride to go through the war party camps in the Tongue River Valley, and there were Lakotas from many bands gathered there, but Man Afraid was considering going to Fort Laramie to sign a treaty. Armed with this new information, James Beckwourth and a soldier from D Company named Thompson set out to visit with the Crows. Carrington hoped to use the Crows as intermediaries between himself and Red Cloud.

The last day of September, some Lakotas appeared near Fort Phil Kearny. Lieutenants Brown, Adair, Wands, and Matson with fifteen mounted infantrymen chased them for a few miles, and then returned to the post. That morning, the rest of the garrison attended the funeral and burial of Private Smith. The post adjutant recorded six buildings nearing completion inside the stockade, a commissary, four company barracks, and an officers' quarters. Despite all the raids, during the month both Phil Kearny and C. F. Smith were taking on a more permanent appearance.

Frances Grummond (writing four decades later as Frances Carrington) recalled travelling up the Bozeman Trail to her husband's new post at Fort Phil Kearny. She had not yet arrived at the end of September, but her later summary of chats with Margaret Carrington led her to list the tactics used by Indian warriors just before she reached the post. "The evident plan of the Indians was to harass the fort constantly by running off stock, to cut off any soldier or citizen who ventured any distance from the gates, and also to entice soldiers from the protection of the stockade and then lead them into some fatal ambush." So far, these three tactics summarized nearly every action taken against the Bozeman Trail forts since June. Stock raids, attacking isolated outliers, and ambushing individuals or small details were standard plains warfare activities. When engaging the emigrant and government trains moving along the trail, warriors used the same tactics. These strikes promised maximum gain and recognition for minimum risk.

82 Colonel Carrington, *Indian Operations*, 20-21. The half-day's ride does not indicate a contiguous Lakota megapolis along the Tongue River. Camps had to be separated by some distance to have enough wood, water, and grass resources to support the band and their animals.

83 Templeton, diary, 29 September and 1 October 1866.


85 Ten Eyck, diary, 30 September 1866.

86 Returns, Fort Philip Kearny, September 1866. Record of Events.
Frances Carrington continued. "As yet it was perfectly certain that the leading chiefs had not settled upon any plan to attack the fort itself in mass. Why they did not do so earlier and before the fort was completed is still a mystery." To those acquainted with plains warfare, there was no mystery. Plains warriors did not attack in mass. enemies armed with that many guns, with or without stockades for protection. The risks of loss were too high. A large-scale ambush was the only way to take on well-armed enemies with good chances for success. That had not yet happened along the Bozeman Trail.

October began quietly. To the south at Fort Reno, regular mail escort duty, work details, and drill occupied the garrison. Captain Proctor reported no hostile actions during the entire month. There were fewer opportunities for warriors to demonstrate their prowess around the Army post on the Powder River. The civilian emigration season was waning, and Proctor had lost nearly all of his stock to raids. At Fort C. F. Smith, Lieutenant Templeton started the stockade on 3 October. The following day, Private Hackett finally succumbed to the wounds he had received in September. He was the last fatality from the Fort Smith garrison in 1866.

It was even peaceful around Fort Phil Kearny early in October. That did not last. On 5 October, Ten Eyck sent a sergeant and twenty men with a hay cutting detail to Peno Creek. That night the hay party used a cabin built for protection from Indian attack. Lakota warriors surrounded the place during the night but were driven away at daylight. The warriors wounded Private Wilson of H Company slightly.

Saturday, 6 October, a war party of nearly one hundred, probably Lakotas, ambushed a wood detail near the Pinery, about five miles west of the fort. In the first attack, the warriors killed and scalped two soldiers, Privates Christian Oberly and John Wasser of Company A, and they wounded another man. Ten Eyck sent a relief party, but the warriors had already left. Carrington later left a gunnery detail and a howitzer on duty with the logging operations. There was no more trouble there until December.

88 Ibid.
89 Returns, Fort Reno, October 1866, Record of Events.
91 Returns, Fort C. F. Smith, October 1866, Record of Events.
92 Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Returns, 1866.
93 Ten Eyck, diary, 5 October 1866.
94 Returns, Fort Philip Kearny, October 1866, Record of Events. Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events, 6 October 1866. Ten Eyck, diary, 6 October 1866. Colonel Carrington, *Indian Operations*, 32. Carrington claimed that he personally "went out with thirty men and howitzer, cleaned the woods and ravines, and no trouble has occurred since." Dee Brown interpreted Carrington's story to mean
That same day, Lieutenants Thomas Counselman and George W. Grummond arrived with the mail party. Carrington had assigned Counselman to Company D at Fort C. F. Smith, the only change in officer assignments at the Bighorn post in 1866. Grummond remained at Fort Phil Kearny with Company C. Counselman was single; Grummond brought his wife Frances to Fort Phil Kearny. Ten weeks later, Lieutenant Grummond died in the Fetterman Fight, widowing Frances, expectant with their first.

After the action at the Pinery on 6 October, relative quiet returned to the Phil Kearny area until the end of the month. It was the season for the fall buffalo hunts. There were so many Lakotas hunting near Goose Creek and in the Tongue River Valley that two couriers riding from Phil Kearny to C. F. Smith had to turn back on 11 and 12 October. On 13 October, Colonel Carrington reported to General Cooke, "The change to fine weather fills the valleys with Indians, who are getting winter provisions, and I expect some trouble with them, but can meet it."

During the same period, a Northern Cheyenne peace chief delegation made their way to Fort Laramie. Despite the treatment he had received on 28 September at Fort Phil Kearny, old chief White Head was among a small party of chiefs who chose to sign the treaty offered at Fort Laramie in June. Led by Morning Star (Dull Knife), the contingent included White Head, Red Arm, White Clay, Old Spotted Wolf, and Turkey Leg. Agent Patrick distributed the goods left for them at Fort Laramie by Taylor's peace that Carrington personally led the relief party to the Pinery on 6 October. See Brown, Fetterman Massacre, 131-132. Ten Eyck recorded from his sick bed that Carrington took out a party of twenty mounted men, with the mountain howitzer, on 7 October, the next day. Ten Eyck said they "shelled the woods but did not see an Indian." See Ten Eyck, diary, 7 October 1866.

References:
- Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events, 6 October 1866.
- Quaife, introduction to Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, xlv.
Following the distribution, the Cheyennes left for the Republican River country to hunt. A few weeks later, Morning Star returned to the Rosebud River, where most of the Omosis were camped.\textsuperscript{102} The stage was set for a split in the Northern Cheyennes, a peace faction who followed the council chiefs who chose the treaty, and a war faction whose council chiefs reversed roles, became war chiefs, and recommended joining the Lakotas against Carrington’s soldiers.

Carrington took advantage of the lull by making some organizational changes. He had often ignored Captain Ten Eyck’s positions as Second Battalion commander and post commandant of Fort Phil Kearny; the colonel gave direct orders to subordinates without consulting with him. On 7 October, Colonel Carrington resolved this vague and uncertain chain of command issue by relieving Ten Eyck as Fort Phil Kearny commandant. Captain Ten Eyck retained command of the battalion and his own Company H.\textsuperscript{103} Carrington’s decision appeared to provide more efficient response to Indian attacks, but it actually muddled command even more. Colonel Carrington commanded the regiment, and was Captain Ten Eyck’s superior in Ten Eyck’s capacity as battalion commander. Second Battalion companies garrisoned Fort Phil Kearny, technically placing Ten Eyck in command over the post, now commanded directly by Colonel Carrington. Carrington in turn commanded Fort Phil Kearny and its garrison including Company H, commanded by Captain Ten Eyck.

Ten Eyck knew the real reason for the change was not combat response efficiency. He recorded the “reason assigned that the Mountain District was broken up by orders from [General Cooke].”\textsuperscript{104} Actually implemented on 13 October.\textsuperscript{105} Cooke’s order discontinuing Carrington’s district command simplified the paperwork, but it reduced Carrington’s military importance, essentially leaving him nothing to command locally except his own regimental staff, and through Ten Eyck, the Second Battalion. Assuming command of his engineering marvel, Fort Phil Kearny, must have returned a sense of military vitality to the aspiring regimental colonel.

Carrington’s clumsy arrangements created problems from the start. On 14 October, Captain Ten Eyck found himself detailed for the next day like an ordinary lieutenant as post officer of the day. Ten Eyck vigorously protested that Carrington had no authority to put the Battalion Commander on the duty

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{102} Powell, People of the Sacred Mountain, I. 450. \textit{ARClA}, 1867, 289.
  \item \textsuperscript{103} Colonel Carrington, \textit{Indian Operations}, 32. Ten Eyck, diary, 7 October 1866.
  \item \textsuperscript{104} Ten Eyck, diary, 7 October 1866.
\end{itemize}
roster without his consent. \textsuperscript{106} Ten Eyck finally acquiesced to the new arrangement. On 15 October, he was "officer of the day by [his] own request. All went well." \textsuperscript{107}

Another change affected Lieutenant Frederick H. Brown, regimental quartermaster. Recently received Army mail informed Carrington of Brown’s promotion to captain, effective 15 May 1866, a change ending his duty on regimental staff, and returning Brown to his company. On 13 October, Carrington appointed Lieutenant Alexander H. Wands as regimental quartermaster and Brown began training his replacement. \textsuperscript{108}

Sometime in October, after he assumed command of Fort Phil Kearny, Colonel Carrington reorganized the timber trains for defense against Indian attack. Trains included from twenty-four to thirty wagons; they were driven in two parallel lines about three hundred feet apart along roads on the south slope of Sullivant Hills. Mounted infantry rode along both flanks, the northernmost pickets moving along the crest of Sullivant Hills. When warned of impending attack by warriors, the teamsters of the front wagons turned toward each other, left and right. The remaining wagons ran their mules inside the wagon ahead of them in sequence until the rear wagons finished the protective corral. Then the teamsters and their military escort prepared to defend themselves \textsuperscript{109} Two months later, these arrangements were implemented prior to the Fetterman Fight.

While Fort Reno and Fort Philip Kearny enjoyed a respite from the actions of September, the Lakotas struck around Fort C. F. Smith. On 19 October, a party of miners left the fort during the day. About 11 P.M., hostile warriors attacked their camp. The miners had no casualties, but they lost their resolve to continue up the Bozeman Trail. Next day the miners were back at Fort Smith. \textsuperscript{110}

Further north, Lieutenant James H. Bradley was returning from Fort Benton with the mounted escort Hazen had borrowed from Carrington at the end of August. On 19 October, sixty Lakota warriors caught surgeon McCleary and scout James Brannan ahead of Bradley’s column. They killed Brannan, chased McCleary, and wounded one other trooper in a short skirmish before they rode off. Bradley’s force limped into C. F. Smith the evening of 20 October. Bradley reported that he had met some Crow warriors

\textsuperscript{102} Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry. Annual Record of Events. 13 October 1866
\textsuperscript{106} Ten Eyck, diary. 14 October 1866
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Ibid.}, 15 October 1866.
\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Ibid.}, Historical Register. 1. 251.
\textsuperscript{109} Colonel Carrington, \textit{Indian Operations}. 44.
who told him that two men from the fort, probably Beckwourth and Thompson, were in their village, evidence the council with the Mountain Crows was still underway.¹¹¹

Two days later, forty warriors attacked a wood cutting party near the fort, capturing two horses Two other daring warriors rode out of a creek east of the post camp, nearly cutting off a man out hunting without permission. Corporal Thomas and a miner rescued him.¹¹² That same day, Lieutenant Counselman led fifteen men out of Fort Phil Kearny escorting mail to his new post at C. F. Smith.¹¹³

About 4 A. M. on 23 October, Captain Kinney and a large mounted detail left Fort C. F. Smith for Fort Phil Kearny. With him were twenty mounted infantrymen, Lieutenant Bradley’s escort party, three miners, and scouts Jim Bridger and Henry Williams, returning from their fact finding mission in Montana and Crow country.¹¹⁴ Early the next afternoon, two Crow warriors and a Crow youth appeared across the Bighorn River from Fort Smith. They were on foot, a typical horse raiding party looking for Lakota herds. Lieutenant Templeton talked with them using his meager Crow vocabulary. The Crows said their village was coming to the fort, and would be there in five nights. Captain Burrowes, commanding in Kinney’s absence, decided to detain the three Crows at the post until the situation became clearer. Late that evening, three miners arrived. A war party of twenty-five Lakotas had attacked them. The hostiles took five of their horses and killed a Bannock Indian traveling with them.¹¹⁵ Although the Bighorn River was the natural boundary between the western Lakotas and the Mountain Crows, horse raiders and war parties did not hesitate to cross that boundary to steal stock and count coup.

At 10 P. M. on 26 October. Kinney’s mail party wearily rode into Fort Phil Kearny. Bradley’s party, aboard very tired horses, did not arrive until 4 P. M. the following day.¹¹⁶ It is not known which party included Jim Bridger, but in either case, Bridger had returned to Fort Phil Kearny by 27 October 1866.

¹¹⁰ Templeton, diary, 19-20 October 1866.
¹¹² Templeton, diary, 22 October 1866. Returns, Fort C. F. Smith, October 1866, Record of Events.
¹¹³ Ten Eyck, diary, 22 October 1866.
¹¹⁴ Templeton, diary, 23 October 1866.
¹¹⁵ Ibid, 24, 30 October 1866.
¹¹⁶ Ten Eyck, diary, 26-27 October 1866. Returns, Fort Philip Kearny, October 1866, Record of Events. The post return recorded Bradley’s return with twenty-six men on 27 October. Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events, 28 October 1866. The regimental record gave 28 October as the date of Bradley’s arrival.
On 26 October, Captain Burrowes let one of the Crow warriors take an Army horse back to his village to report what had happened to them. Four days later, over fifty Crow men and women came to Fort C. F. Smith. Peter Chien and Thompson were with them. The three-man Crow raiding party who had come six days earlier had been trying to tell Templeton that Beckwourth was dead. The venerable mountain man became ill on the way to the Crow camp. Despite his illness, Beckwourth counseled with the Crows and obtained a commitment from them to send one hundred warriors to fight the Lakotas next spring. Iron Bull took Beckwourth and Thompson into his lodge while they spoke with the Crows. After being a guest in Iron Bull's lodge for two to three weeks, Jim Beckwourth died; his final days had been among the Crow people, his adopted family for much of his frontier life.

The last day of October, Captain Burrowes and Lieutenant Templeton sat in council with the Crow leaders who had come to the fort. Weeks earlier, the Lakotas had invited them to join their northern plains coalition. The Crows had no love for the Lakotas, but felt themselves too weak to resist them alone. If the Army committed sufficient troops to a spring offensive, the Crows would send warriors to fight against the Lakotas. Following the council, the post sutler offered to trade with the Crow delegation; later he would bring trade goods to their village. The visiting Crows were "much pleased."

While Burrowes and Templeton counseled with the Crows, the garrison at Fort Phil Kearny celebrated the completion of the stockade and major post buildings. The post was now a six hundred feet by eight hundred feet rectangle, with a quartermaster yard being added along the east wall. Carrington conducted a grand garrison review on 31 October, followed by a Carrington speech, a flag raising on the new post flagpole, and a cannon salute. The celebration attracted the attention of nearby warriors. About 3 P.M., a small party of Lakotas swept out of Big Piney Creek and along the west wall of the post, in an attempt to capture horses grazing nearby. They were turned away without success. Other warriors appeared on the surrounding hills flashing mirror signals for nearly an hour. They then vanished into the terrain as quickly as they had appeared.

During the two and one half months after Fort C. F. Smith was established, tribal and Army leaders made decisions that altered the balance of power along the Bozeman Trail. Lakota war parties had

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117 Templeton, diary, 26-30 October 1866.
118 Ibid., 31 October 1866.
continued the tactics used successfully earlier in the summer. Northern Arapahoe warriors had allied with the Lakotas, but with mixed results. Gains from stock raids did not balance well with their losses in late September. Sometime between the end of September and early November, a major part of the Northern Arapahoes moved west to Crow country and away from hostilities. Some Arapahoe warriors stayed in the alliance, but with dampened enthusiasm. The Northern Cheyennes were peaceful neutrals a few months earlier, but as a consequence of the bad treatment at Fort Phil Kearny in September, some of their council chiefs assumed their alternative roles as war chiefs, and a quick transition to alliance in the Lakota coalition began. Morning Star, White Head, and other council chiefs chose to stay at peace, signed a treaty, and also moved west to Crow country to avoid the fighting. Some of the remaining Omisis joined the Lakota alliance in December. For the Crows, the Lakota offer of alliance had been too troubling to accept; a possible switch from apprehensive neutrality to active cooperation with the Army depended on the extent of the Army's commitment against the Lakota alliance.

For the men of the Second Battalion, they now had three posts established along the Bozeman Trail. Emigrant traffic had slowed along the road, making the posts the more specific targets of warrior forays. Cooke had discontinued Carrington's district command. Carrington reacted by muddying the command structure at Fort Phil Kearny. One officer and ten enlisted men had been killed in action in addition to several dozen civilian casualties. Future events depended on what the Lakota alliance decided, and how Carrington, his officers, and men reacted to those decisions. As October 1866 came to a close, another Second Battalion officer was enroute to Phil Kearny. Captain William Judd Fetterman, now senior captain of the battalion, would help decide that future.

120 Margaret Carrington. Absaraka. 156.
CHAPTER 7

FETTERMAN RETURNS

The last civilian wagon train of the year reached Phil Kearny about 1 November. Before continuing up the Bozeman Trail they camped near the fort. That night, a Lakota war party attacked some of the emigrants carelessly playing cards around a campfire. Warriors wounded three men, one mortally. It was a violent end to the 1866 emigrant season.¹

During the next five weeks, from early November through the first week of December, a period of intermittent peace set in along the Bozeman Trail. In his report to General Cooke for the week ending 14 November, Colonel Carrington remarked the "whole line" was "quiet."² Although, that week was exceptional, there were reasons for the relative quiet. No emigrant trains meant Carrington’s soldiers were left with only military traffic to shepherd along the Montana road, and that meant Lakota raiding parties had fewer targets of opportunity. It was also the late fall buffalo hunting season for the nomadic bands. Stock raiding and war parties were curtailed during November while necessary stores were gathered for winter.³

Each of the three post garrisons experienced the intermittent quiet somewhat differently. To the south, the more open country around Fort Reno was ignored by Lakota war parties. For the month of November, the post adjutant simply recorded, "The troops at this post have been engaged during the month doing the regular garrison duty guarding Government stock and putting up additional buildings for the accommodation [sic] of another company."⁴

Only two events of any import changed the daily routine. On 23 November, Carrington’s mail courier had to detour "around an Indian war party below [Fort] Reno," evidence that the Lakotas were still

¹ Brown, Feteteman Massacree, 146. Returns, Fort Philip Kearny, November 1866, Record of Events.
² Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 35.
³ Ibid., 36. Hyde, Red Cloud’s Folk, 145.
⁴ Returns, Fort C. F. Smith, November 1866, Record of Events.
around. Six days later, Brevet Brigadier General Henry W. Wessels, lieutenant colonel of the Eighteenth Infantry, arrived with a military column at Fort Reno. Wessels had come to relieve an ailing Captain Proctor as commander of the post. Arriving with him were Companies I and K, newly recruited and designated for the new Twenty-Seventh Infantry. Company remained as part of Reno's regular garrison and became occupants of the new barracks building. Lieutenant Wilbur F. Arnold continued north with the forty-three men of Company K, stopping at Fort Phil Kearny on 2 December.

To the north around Fort C. F. Smith, there was another reason for quiet. In late October, fifty to sixty Mountain Crows came into Fort C. F. Smith to trade with sutler John W. Smith. The visitors were probably from Black Foot's band; their main camp was some twenty miles west of the post. On 2 November, after most of them returned to their village west of the Bighorn River, some hunters drove a bison herd close enough to the post that the soldiers could witness a Crow buffalo hunt which netted about thirty cows and calves for robes. It was the beginning of a symbiotic relationship between the Mountain Crows and the garrison of Fort C. F. Smith lasting well into the next year.

Two days after the Crow buffalo hunt, the last emigrant train for the year arrived at Fort C. F. Smith in company with a military stores train, all commanded by newly assigned Lieutenant Counselman. While enroute, they had no trouble from hostile Lakotas. Some Cheyennes and Arapahoes approached the train as friendly, but were not allowed to come into their camp. On 9 November, Captain Kinney returned to the post, bringing with him Paymaster Almstedt and the mail escort. They saw no Indians, hostile or friendly.

During a round trip that consumed the entire day, Captain Kinney, the two post surgeons, and another fifty mounted men rode to the Crow village on 11 November with an invitation for band chiefs to come to C. F. Smith for a council. Two days later, the Crow leadership reciprocated. As an unexpected

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5 Brown, *Fetterman Massacre*, 158. Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events. 29 November 1866. Templeton, diary, 1 December 1866.
7 Templeton, diary, 30, 31 October, 1 November 1866.
9 Templeton, diary, 19 November 1866.
bonus. arriving with the Crows were two unidentified Arapahoe leaders from a band who had "left the Sioux." 13 They were probably from Medicine Man's band of Northern Arapahoes, nearly five hundred people in seventy-six lodges.14 These Arapahoes were likely from the same band as those who approached Counselman's train earlier. Like the Crows, they were trying to stay out of the fighting, and were interested in trade. Moving away from the Bozeman Trail, they crossed the Bighorn River, traveled west to contact the Mountain Crows, and used the Crows as intermediaries to open a friendly trade channel with the sutler at Fort C. F. Smith.

Talks lasted two days, after which the tribal leaders left for their camps to discuss peace, trade, and relocation of their villages.15 On 19 November, Jim Leighton, with the sutler company, came back to the post with a few more Crows. He reported a small Northern Cheyenne band was also at the Crow camp. The Cheyennes did not come to the fort either out of fear, or because the Crows blocked their access to the traders.16 Exactly which Northern Cheyennes joined the Crows, and sought peaceful trade, is not known for sure. They were probably from the Omisis bands whose six leaders signed the Fort Laramie treaty in October.17

The Crow village twenty miles west of the fort, broke up on 21 November. Two thirds of the Crows and the Arapahoes camping with them headed west to trade horses with a small Nez Perce camp of twenty lodges on the Yellowstone River.18 Two Nez Perce men came to Fort C. F. Smith on 22 November to council about future trading at the post. White Mouth's band, the other third of the large Crow village, arrived across the Bighorn River on 23 November; they set up a new camp opposite the fort.19 They remained in the vicinity until the first week of January 1867. Their presence so completely discouraged Lakota raiding parties that Lieutenant Templeton, post adjutant, recorded simply for the month of

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12 Ibid., 4, 9 November 1866.
13 Ibid., 11, 13, 19 November 1866.
14 Fowler, Arapahoe Politics, 43-44. Powell, People of the Sacred Mountain, 1, 449. Powell said Medicine Man's band joined the Lakotas in August. They are probably the band who lost severely in the 25 September skirmish with Lieutenant Brown's pursuing party. By early November, at least some members of the band wanted out of the Bozeman Trail fighting.
15 Templeton, diary, 13-15, November 1866.
16 Ibid., 19 November 1866.
17 Powell, People of the Sacred Mountain, 1, 450. The six treaty signers were Morning Star (Dull Knife), White Head (Gray Head), Red Arm, White Clay, Old Spotted Wolf, and Turkey Leg.
18 Templeton, diary, 23 November 1866.
19 Ibid., 22-23 November 1866.

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November. "The Indians have committed no depredations during the month." Unlike the Fort Phil Kearny area, the Bighorn crossing of the Bozeman Trail was very quiet.

With relative tranquility around Fort Reno, and the proximity of White Mouth's band bringing calm near Fort C. F. Smith, the hostile Lakotas on Tongue River now concentrated their attention in the center around the hated post on Big Piney Creek, Fort Philip Kearny. In the first week of November, Captain William Judd Fetterman came back to the battalion from recruiting duty in Ohio. Fetterman's return embroiled the garrison in events over the next seven weeks culminating in the Fetterman Fight. Fetterman's return also embroiled historians of those events in a search for explanation and cause.

Historians have consistently charged Fetterman with arrogant contempt for plains Indian warriors and deliberate disobedience of his commanding officer, Colonel Henry B. Carrington, an attitude heralded as the proximate cause of the Fetterman Fight catastrophe. Typical of this view, McDermott proclaimed, "William Judd Fetterman lived a warrior's life and died with his boots on, arrogant and ignorant to the end, a man destined to be remembered for destructive self-will and the lessons he refused to learn."

Supporting evidence for Fetterman's alleged arrogance has come from eleven incidents involving him at Fort Phil Kearny after his arrival there on 3 November and before his death on 21 December. The eleven Fetterman incidents fall into two unequal groups. Eight of them were in November prior to the 6 December action near Peno Creek. From these eight events we can infer Fetterman's early views of Plains Indians and their fighting abilities. Fetterman's experiences on 6 December were pivotal in molding his future actions. The two incidents after 6 December demonstrate the lessons Fetterman learned that day. Taken together, the three December events point to the Fetterman Fight, providing key clues to why it happened and how.

In his 1991 article "Price of Arrogance: The Short and Controversial Life of William Judd Fetterman," John D. McDermott restates the earlier indictments of Fetterman. This writer has termed his position, McDermott's Arrogance Thesis. His article, after a brief biographical sketch of Fetterman's life, provides a useful vehicle for analyzing ten of the arrogance charges. The other incident comes from Dee Brown's *The Fetterman Massacre*.

Listed in probable chronological order, the eleven incidents proposed as evidence for McDermott’s Arrogance Thesis are as follows:

1. Fetterman’s command expectations, 3 November.
2. The hobbled mules decoy, 5 November.
3. The pinery inspection ambush, 7 November.
4. The eighty man boast, early November, probably soon after Fetterman’s arrival.
5. The Fetterman/Brown Tongue River proposal, probably before mid-November.
6. The Garrett/Burke confrontation, 11 November.
8. Fetterman’s letter to Dr. Charles Terry, 26 November.
9. The Peno Valley pursuit and skirmish, 6 December.
10. The Fetterman/Brown offensive plan, early December after the 6 December action.
11. Fetterman led Company A in daily musketry drill, immediately after 6 December.

McDermott and Dee Brown propose these eleven incidents as evidence of Fetterman’s unchanging arrogant attitude toward Indians, and disregard for Carrington. Is there any evidence Fetterman changed his opinion of plains warriors over the seven weeks from his arrival at Fort Phil Kearny to his death at their hands on 21 December? The answer is assuredly, yes. What follows is a careful examination of each listed event, presenting evidence for alternative interpretations of those same events.

(1) FETTERMAN COMMAND EXPECTATIONS. When Fetterman returned to the Second Battalion in November 1866, the Regular Army establishment anticipated major organizational changes at the end of the year. The Army Reorganization Act of 28 July 1866 salvaged the three-battalion regiments created in 1861 by converting their battalions to the older ten-company type. This three-regiments-from-
one plan was an economy move, increasing the number of regiments in the Regular Army by simply adding two new companies (I and K) to each of the old battalions. The Eighteenth Regiment’s First Battalion retained the old number, while the Second Battalion became the Twenty-Seventh U. S. Infantry Regiment, and the Third Battalion was designated the Thirty-Sixth U. S. Infantry Regiment. Although the reorganization was dated 21 September 1866, the change did not become effective until 1 January 1867.  

By summer, Colonel Carrington was aware of the reorganization bills before Congress. On 30 July he informed General Cooke that he deserved and desired to elect the Second Battalion for his future command, since most of the regiment’s veteran enlisted men had been transferred into those companies before the trek west. Staying with the Second Battalion would also keep Carrington with his post construction project in the Powder River wilderness, Fort Philip Kearny. Cooke took no action on Carrington's request. By the time Fetterman returned, the field grade officers for the Twenty-Seventh Regiment had already been assigned, and company grade officers like Captain Fetterman had received orders transferring them from Second Battalion to the new regiment. By early November, the officers and men all knew Carrington was leaving Fort Phil Kearny at the end of the year.

McDermott asserts that command expectation was part of Fetterman’s arrogance pattern, noting that as the senior captain in Second Battalion he could expect command of the Twenty-seventh Infantry effective on 1 January 1867. McDermott also claims that as “the heir apparent to command the 27th Infantry,” Fetterman would have had extraordinary power and influence over the junior officers and noncommissioned officers at Fort Phil Kearny, especially “in matters of tactics and strategy.”

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12 Ibid., 49.
13 Weigley, History of the United States Army, 266. Heitman, Historical Register, I, 115, 127, 133.
14 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations on the Plains, 16.
15 Heitman, Historical Register, I, 127. With appointments dated 28 July 1866, the field grade officers for the Twenty-seventh Infantry were Colonel J. E. Smith, Lieutenant Colonel L. P. Bradley, and Major B. F. Smith. Company grade officers (captains, first and second lieutenants) received appointments dated 21 September 1866.
16 McDermott did not footnote sources for this assertion. He may have read it in Margaret Carrington’s Absaraka, 245. In her “Memoriam” of Fetterman, she said, “As the senior officer serving with the 2d Battalion, just taking the new style of the 27th Infantry, it was naturally expected that he would take command of it whenever the colonel should join the 1st Battalion, which was to retain the old number but had its companies on the lower route.” See also Vaughn, Indian Fights, 222. Colonel Carrington, responding to damaging testimony by Captain Powell, asserted when Powell and Fetterman arrived, “they expected the respective commands of Fort C. F. Smith and Fort Phil Kearney.”
There are three serious flaws in McDermott's declarations. First, the command change for Second Battalion was initiated simply by Fetterman's return from recruiting duty. Second Battalion's nominal commander, Major Charles R. Woods, was on detached service in the South. Woods never returned to the regiment. His transfer to the Twenty-seventh Infantry was planned, but a 28 July promotion to lieutenant colonel assigned him to the new Thirty-Third Infantry. As shown earlier in Table 1, with Major Woods and Captain Alexander Chambers both on detached duty, command of the battalion fell to the next senior captain present. In November 1866, that was William Judd Fetterman. Captain Fetterman officially replaced Captain Ten Eyck as commanding officer of the Second Battalion on 1 November 1866.

As to Fetterman's influence with junior officers and noncoms, any future role in the Twenty-seventh Infantry had little to do with it. Fetterman already had that kind of influence with the veteran officers and enlisted men at Fort Phil Kearny. He had consistently proved himself as a capable and caring combat officer during the Civil War, and he had previously commanded the battalion during the first two months of the Atlanta campaign. There can be little doubt that when Captain Fetterman returned in November, the veterans and the recruits who listened to those veterans, all looked to Fetterman for combat leadership. His past record and his current position as battalion commander demanded that of him.

Second, Fetterman could not have expected future command of the Twenty-Seventh Infantry after 1 January 1867, except on an interim basis. The field grade officers for the newly designated regiment had already been assigned, and Fetterman would only have commanded until one of them arrived in 1867. Until 1890, U. S. Army regulations and traditions permitted promotion through captain only by seniority within their assigned regiment. Transfers were rare. Promotion to major took an officer into the field

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38 Heitman, *Historical Register*, 1, 1058.
39 See Table 1 in Chapter 4. Chambers also did not return to the regiment. He was promoted major and transferred to the Twenty-Second Infantry early in 1867. See Heitman, *Historical Register*, 1, 293-294.
40 Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry Annual Record of Events, November 1866.
41 With Fetterman dead, and Ten Eyck staying with the Eighteenth Infantry, regimental command fell to Captain (Brevet Major) James Powell on 1 January 1867. In February, Powell received notice of Lieutenant Colonel Luther P. Bradley's appointment as lieutenant colonel of the new regiment. In mid-May, mail brought news of Benjamin F. Smith's appointment as major for the Twenty-Seventh. On 3 July, Colonel John E. Smith arrived at Fort Phil Kearny, relieving Captain Powell of command. Lieutenant Colonel Bradley and Major Smith joined the following day. Returns from Regular Army Infantry Regiments, Jun. 1821-Dec. 1916, National Archives Microfilm Series M665, Roll 267, Twenty-Seventh U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events, January, February, May, July 1867.
grade level and normally included a transfer to another regiment. Fetterman knew the realities. There was no promotion to major coming; that fact would have been known by November. As senior captain, Fetterman was already Second Battalion commander at his return. He already had the respect of veteran officers and enlisted men. Fetterman had little to prove and could only expect temporary battalion command for a few months. It is apparent the men at Fort Phil Kearny looked to him for combat leadership. Colonel Carrington could not offer that.

Third, friction between Carrington and Fetterman was almost unavoidable. The matter of combat experience was obvious. But more importantly, Fetterman inherited Carrington's awkward command structure at Fort Phil Kearny, in place since the first week of October. Although separated by geography and sluggish communications, the eight companies of the Second Battalion manned the three Bozeman Trail forts. Fetterman commanded the battalion. Carrington commanded the regiment, and since 7 October, Fort Phil Kearny. In November, Captain Proctor was still senior officer commanding Fort Reno. Captain Kinney was in charge at Fort C. F. Smith, and Fetterman had battalion headquarters at Fort Phil Kearny because Fetterman's Company A was stationed there. Since Colonel Carrington also had his regimental headquarters at Phil Kearny, he had the authority to command there, but by personally taking charge of daily affairs at the fort, he muddied the command structure, and made friction almost inevitable.

A regulation chain of command would have recognized Captain Fetterman as commander of all eight companies in the battalion assigned to the three Bozeman Trail posts, with Colonel Carrington exercising his regimental authority through Fetterman, not around him. Carrington's arrangements allowed a man with no combat experience to impose his leadership over officers who did, including Captain Fetterman. Colonel Carrington could be accused of arrogance in this matter. centralizing authority to himself at the expense of the battalion commander. He had, in effect, reduced the position of battalion commander to an administrative figurehead, concerned only with paperwork, ignored for daily decisions

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42 Edward M. Coffman, *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986; paperback edition, 1988), 230-233. For example, all three of the Twenty-seventh Infantry's new field officers were transferred into those appointments.

43 It should be recalled that Carrington's original garrison plans called for battalion headquarters at the Yellowstone post (later cancelled), because Captain Henry Haymond, commanding battalion, was to take his Company F and Company E to build and garrison that post. That would have separated battalion and regimental headquarters. See Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events, 29 June 1866.
for combat, pursuit, and defense. This cumbersome command arrangement at Fort Phil Kearny contributed to a Carrington/Fetterman confrontation on 21 December 1866.

(2) THE HOBBL ED MULES DECOY. Within two days of his arrival at Fort Phil Kearny, probably on the morning of 5 November, Fetterman apparently planned and conducted an attempted ambush of Lakota stock raiders using hobbled mules as decoy bait. The only sources for this event are the memoirs of Margaret and Frances Carrington. Each of them presented her version immediately following a treatment of Fetterman's eighty-man boast, number (4) in our list. The placement of the mule decoy event in both memoirs is to support the boast story, probably not to suggest that it followed the boast chronologically.

Margaret's 1868 version seems straightforward. Fetterman "was permitted to make the experiment of lying in the cottonwood thickets of Big Piney from two o'clock until ten o'clock in the morning, using hobbled mules for live bait to decoy the aborigines." The hobbled mules failed to attract the desired attention from any Lakotas, even though the ambush was well hidden. No warriors were seen that morning until a small raiding party rushed toward a wagon driven by Mrs. Wheatley (whose husband later died in the Fetterman Fight) and a Mr. Reid. They escaped after brandishing a rifle, but the warriors drove off the Wheatly cattle herd grazing a mile away from the decoy site.

Margaret uses this incident to laud the prowess of the Lakota raiders. "The Indians may or may not have known the plan for their surprise; but their sagacity and suspicion, their keen sight, and knowledge of woodcraft are seldom at loss; and while they were often foiled and disappointed, or repulsed with loss, they were always innocent of being surprised, and shrewdly made their own advances so covered that they were near the desired object before their presence was known."

Frances Carrington's 1910 rendering differs in some details from Margaret's version. Significantly, she says the Lakota raiders ran off the herd some three hours after Fetterman returned from

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44 Margaret Carrington dated this event "two days" after Fetterman arrived. (Saturday 3 November) which would have been 5 November; then she said it was on a Sunday morning (4 November). What is probable is Fetterman spent Saturday after his arrival getting settled in his quarters and renewing acquaintances. By Sunday, discussions with officers and enlisted men had encouraged Fetterman to come up with a plan for tricking the Lakotas. Organized that day, the mule decoy was executed from 2 a.m. to 10 a.m. Monday morning, 5 November.

45 Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 171. Frances Carrington, My Army Life, 119-120.

46 Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 171.

47 Ibid.
the failed early morning decoy. That strongly suggests the Lakotas never saw the mules. Whether they would have fallen for the trap is pure conjecture.

She then expressed "wonder that Fetterman's own select party were not surprised and massacred through taking such a risk." This comment was obviously designed to further embarrass Fetterman. Margaret's statement that Fetterman obtained permission to try the decoy, points the finger at Colonel Carrington. He had to have approved the idea before Fetterman tried it. Frances not only wanted to disparage Fetterman's memory; she had another reason for including this story in her narrative. By emphasizing her views of Fetterman's failings she could more easily impress her readers with Colonel Carrington's claimed professional military skills. She says the Indian party avoided the hobbled mules because they were placed within howitzer range of the fort. For Frances this event "certainly illustrates the fact that the possession of the mountain howitzers by Colonel Carrington, in the handling of which he was an expert, practically assured security from attack during the building of the stockade, as well as attack upon the stockade itself."

Both versions were intended to belittle Fetterman. Both were inserted as immediate sequels to their renditions of his reputed boast. McDermott concludes: "Being made a fool undoubtedly strengthened Fetterman in his resolve to punish the Sioux." We do not really know how Fetterman reacted to this failed decoy attempt. We can just as reasonably conclude that he learned something about Indian warfare from the experience, because he never tried it again.

(3) THE PINERY INSPECTION AMBUSH. Two days after the mule decoy episode, Fetterman had his first experience with a plains Indian ambush. As the battalion commander, Fetterman needed to become acquainted with the vicinity. Riding ahead of the daily wood train, he went out to inspect the Pinery logging operations in company with Captain Ten Eyck, Lieutenants Bisbee and Link, and a mounted escort of about six enlisted men.

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48 Ibid 171-172.
49 Frances Carrington, My Army Life, 129.
50 Ibid.
51 Frances Carrington, My Army Life, 129. Italics are the author's. She seems to have conveniently forgotten Carrington's panic after the Fetterman disaster, regardless of his proclaimed expertise with artillery.
53 Ten Eyck, diary, 7 November 1866.
Margaret Carrington's second-hand description of the event was used in her book to prove the superiority of the revolver over the rifle. She had the officers out in front of their escort on the wagon road. Suddenly, fifteen to twenty Indians fired on them with rifles resting on a fallen tree. From a measured distance of only fifty paces, the shooters missed everyone. A second volley was also unsuccessful. A bugler brought word back to the fort that all in the party were killed. As she heard it, the officers "were compelled to skirmish down the island before they could extricate themselves from the dilemma." A support detail went out, met the officers returning, and both parties returned safely to the post.24

Three of the officers left personal memoirs of this experience. Captain Tenodor Ten Eyck recorded in his diary "we got off unharmed by a miracle." He says they escaped through help from the escort. Returning with reinforcements, they scoured the woods without success. The ambushers were gone.25

As Lieutenant Bisbee recounted for his grandson decades later, the officers had stopped to water their horses near the edge of the timber, when the warriors fired a volley "from behind a huge log 50 yards away." He remembered the inspection party seeking cover along the creek bank; while waiting for reinforcements, they saw larger war parties in the trees. He also recalled one young warrior who "came into the open, plainly a decoy tempting us to a trap." Bisbee claimed he tested the warrior's mettle by charging him, and was rewarded with "several shots from concealed Indians in the woods to which [the young warrior] scampered in great haste."26

We also have Fetterman's own memory set down in his letter of 26 November to Dr. Charles Terry: "I, with three other officers, while riding out to view the country a few days since, fell into an ambuscade of Indians who fired a volley at us. Our escape was a very narrow one. Returning with a few

54 Margaret Carrington, *Abasaraka*, 191-192. See also Frances Carrington, *My Army Life*, 122. Frances' version of this episode appears to be condensed, recycled Margaret Carrington text, in which Frances identified Colonel Carrington as the leader of the rescuers. The "Colonel with a relieving party dashed out at a fierce gallop, but soon returned with the party, when they met not far from the fort, thus relieving our minds of the fear of an anticipated tragedy."
55 Ten Eyck, diary, 7 November 1866.
56 Bisbee, *Through Four American Wars*, 172-173. If this story is true, it may be that the scattered shots aimed at Bisbee constituted the second volley reported by Margaret Carrington.
Infantrymen who happened to be near guarding some wood choppers, we scoured the woods but the Indians had decamped."57

After presenting a Carrington version of this episode, McDermott concluded, "No experience could have been more supportive of a deprecative view of Indian competence in arms."58 This interpretation simply does not match the memoirs. Only Bisbee’s recollection is even mildly "deprecative." Both Ten Eyck and Fetterman considered the event a close call.

Dee Brown, who incorrectly dated this event on 22 November, used Bisbee’s memoir as his source. He speculated that perhaps Bisbee had “restrained the overconfident captain from dashing on into the woods.”59 That is a real twist of the memoir evidence. Even Bisbee does not suggest anything like that. Brown concludes, “Fetterman must have received the lesson with skepticism, or soon forgot it.”60 Fetterman’s actions on 6 December do not support Brown’s conclusion. For Brown to equate the Pinery ambush with what happened on 21 December is an inaccurate oversimplification.

(4) THE EIGHTY-MAN BOAST or THE FETTERMAN MYTHS. (A) ARROGANCE This famous boast is usually attributed to William J. Fetterman. But some accounts also connect the boastful language to Frederick H. Brown, the regimental quartermaster of the Eighteenth Infantry. Before considering the historiographical trail of those celebrated words, it is useful to know a little about Fred Brown.

After joining the Eighteenth Infantry, Brown’s prior business experience at Toledo, Ohio helped him rise quickly from private to quartermaster sergeant by July 1861. Commissioned second lieutenant at the end of October 1861, Brown was made regimental quartermaster the following week. He held that assignment until 1866. Promoted first lieutenant in March 1862, Brown saw enough combat action during the 1864 Atlanta campaign to be breveted captain for “gallant and meritorious service.”61

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57 Letter from William J. Fetterman to Dr. Charles Terry, 26 November 1866. Everett D. Graff Collection, the Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.
59 Brown, Fetterman Massacre, 155-156.
60 Ibid., 156.
61 Heitman, Historical Register, I, 251. Margaret Carrington, Ahsaraka, 246-247. Mrs. Carrington accused Brown of being “impatient, eager, and reckless,” because “he felt a deep sense of neglect that the flood of brevets which rolled over the regiment omitted his name.” However, Heitman found official army records awarding a captain’s brevet to Brown, dated 1 September 1864, for gallant and meritorious service during the Atlanta campaign.

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There are two reasons Frederick H. Brown figures so prominently in events leading to the Fetterman Fight. First, as quartermaster he was responsible for housing, supplies, and stock for the regiment, including those at Fort Phil Kearny. Every successful warrior raid on government herds required quartermaster accounting, and reflected on his performance of duty. Brown viewed leading or joining in pursuit of Lakota and Arapahoe raiding parties as part of his job, and Colonel Carrington expected that of him as well.62

Second, early in November, Brown received notice of his promotion to captain with orders to rejoin his company in First Battalion at Fort Laramie. He was relieved of his quartermaster chores on 8 November by Lieutenant Wands, but remained at Fort Philip Kearny for several weeks on a casual or temporary basis to train Wands and complete paperwork.63 With some time on his hands and a lengthy list of losses to redress, Captain Brown still joined the pursuit forces as a volunteer. When he and Fetterman shared the same fate on 21 December 1866, their names were forever linked in the history of the American West.

Turning from some specifics for Frederick H. Brown to Western army officers generally, they all drew conclusions about the fighting abilities of Indian warriors based on experiences. Edward M. Coffman observed, “For officers, the Indian was an object of curiosity and, depending on the man and the situation, of fear and contempt.”64

During the Civil War, combat experienced officers had demonstrated their ideals of courage, manliness, duty, and honor by marching with their comrades into the teeth of opposing firepower despite serious losses.65 Indian warriors “tended to avoid set-piece battles except on their own terms. They preferred guerilla tactics, an ambush or a hit-and-run raid. Small in numbers, these war bands moved fast, struck hard, and disappeared.”66 These warriors had their own ideals. Cunning, an affinity with the natural environment, and fearlessness were the honorable qualities necessary to outwit adversaries and impress other warriors, both friend and foe. A plains warrior fought because he enjoyed it, and because it brought personal glory. He only fought when he chose to do so. Power in warfare was available through

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62 Vaughn, Indian Fights, 211-213.
63 Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry Annual Record of Events, November 1866.
64 Coffman, Old Army, 254.
65 James M. McPherson, For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4-6, 30-31, 142.
dreams or medicine. If on a given day a warrior’s medicine was not strong, or an enemy’s medicine appeared overpowering, staying to fight was foolhardy. Resisting the spirits in nature was senseless. Retreat was the reasonable choice. “with or without dignity.”

Most army officers with Indian fighting experience “recognized their foe as a master of guerilla warfare. Their writings abound in admiring descriptions of [warrior] cunning, stealth, horsemanship, ability and endurance, skill with weapons, mobility, and exploitation of the natural habitat for military advantage.”68 Those officers inexperienced in Indian fighting were left to learn these facts on their own. The Army had no military school or training manuals to pass the knowledge on to the uninitiated.69 Consequently, contempt for plains Indian fighting men was a common early reaction by many officers based on a misunderstanding of their guerilla style of warfare. Lieutenant George Templeton’s evaluation of his Lakota foes at Crazy Woman Fork is typical of officers who mistook a warrior’s retreat as cowardice. “They are great cowards, for if you point a gun at them they will drop down and not raise their head as long as you keep it pointed.”70 Fetterman’s reported comments after his arrival at Fort Philip Kearny were probably examples of this common barracks bravado spoken by other officers with no frontier experience.

Fetterman’s reputation for arrogance toward plains Indian warriors centers on a famous line attributed to him, an undated boast about riding through the Sioux nation with eighty men. John D. McDermott suggests the “first to quote the officer as stating he needed only eighty men to chastise the Sioux was Colonel Carrington,” and that he did so “in a speech delivered at the dedication of the Fetterman Monument in 1908.”71 Henry B. Carrington is almost certainly the source of this statement, but 1908 was not the first articulation. In 1904, Cyrus Townsend Brady included that phrase in his Indian Fights and Fighters. His chapters on the 1866 events at Fort Phil Kearny, including the Fetterman Fight, were “read and corrected” by Colonel Carrington.72

66 Asprey, War in the Shadows, 1, 167-168.
69 Ibid.
70 Templeton, diary, 20 July 1866.
71 McDermott, “Price of Arrogance,” 47.
72 James T. King, introduction to Cyrus Townsend Brady, Indian Fights and Fighters. xv-xvi.
Speaking of the officers at Fort Phil Kearny, Brady wrote, "Some of them, including Fetterman and Brown, 'offered with eighty men to ride through the whole Sioux Nation!'" When he later described the Fetterman command marching out of the fort on 21 December 1866, Brady repeated the boast, "The total force, therefore, including officers and citizens, under Fetterman’s command, was eight-one—just the number with which he had agreed to ride through the whole Sioux Nation." It is noteworthy that Brady’s version of the boast story says some officers including Fetterman and Brown made such statements. That at least suggests that Fetterman may not have been the first to phrase the famous rhetoric. What did Fetterman, or Brown, or others actually say? What did they mean? And just as significantly, when were those statements made?

Probably the earliest recording of the boast is found in Margaret Carrington’s *Absaraka.* She proposed the 5 November hobbled-mule episode as an illustration of Fetterman’s low opinion of Indian warriors. This linkage does not necessarily date the boast on 5 November, but it does suggest that these statements were made as early as Fetterman’s first week at Phil Kearny. Before recalling the hobbled-mules episode, she first claimed Captain Fetterman had "the opinion, to which he had often given language, that 'a company of Regulars could whip a thousand, and a regiment could whip the whole array of hostile tribes.'" In this early form, the boast consists of two phrases, the first about a company, the second about a regiment.

In her 1910 book, Frances Carrington revised Margaret’s 1868 version. "Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Fetterman, recently arrived from recruiting service, with no antecedent experience on the frontier, expressed the opinion that 'a single company of Regulars could whip a thousand Indians, and that a full regiment, officially announced from headquarters to be on the way to reinforce the troops, could whip the entire array of hostile tribes.'" This rendering of the first phrase is nearly identical with Margaret’s account. Frances’ version of the second phrase about a regiment, however, adds detail almost certainly referring to General Cooke’s 9 August 1866 telegraphic response to Colonel Carrington’s requests for reinforcements. Cooke informed Carrington that he had received a telegram from General Sherman which

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74 Margaret Carrington, *Absaraka*, 170-171.

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"announces a regiment coming from Saint Louis," inferring that help was on the way. The regiment never came, but that promise likely still persisted among the Fort Phil Kearny officers in early November. If so, Fetterman and/or Brown probably believed that the addition of an extra regiment to the Second Battalion was sufficient to handle the current alliance ("the entire array") of hostile tribes harassing the Bozeman Trail.

How did the first phrase "a company of regulars could whip a thousand," become "offered with eighty men to ride through the whole Sioux Nation!" John D. McDermott commented. "It seems a bit too neat to believe that Fetterman ever named exact numbers, as his commanding officer suggested a half-century later, but rather that he simply called for a company ...." Margaret Carrington's early version of this story supports McDermott's conclusion, because a company was what she recalled.

As previously seen, Congress had authorized an 1866 regular army infantry company one hundred officers and men, but companies usually operated below that strength. Referring to a 30 July 1866 letter from Carrington to the Department of the Platte, McDermott noted that the colonel reported average company strength at Fort Phil Kearny was eighty men. The end of July 1866 report for the four companies at Phil Kearny, showed an average 81.75 enlisted men present. Companies A, C, E, and H reported 87, 77, 81, and 82 respectively.

A more interesting statistical coincidence can be found in the fort returns for November 1866, the last report prior to the Fetterman Fight. The average of the same four companies had dropped to 75.75 enlisted men per company. Fetterman's Company A had exactly 79 enlisted men present at the end of November, plus one commissioned officer, Captain Fetterman, for an aggregate present of precisely eighty men.

By 1904, an inexact 1868 "company of regulars" became the exact "eighty men." Brady's text, read and corrected by Carrington, began another western myth. An eighty man boast was perfectly matched with the eighty dead soldiers and frontiersmen commanded by Captain Fetterman on 21

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77 McDermott, "Price of Arrogance," 47.
December. It made such a good story! Brady’s narrative provided a self-fulfilling prophecy, the kind of myth likely to sell books.

It is now evident how the “company of regulars” became “eighty men.” How did the rest of the boast, “whip a thousand,” become “ride through the whole Sioux Nation”? A link can be found in the next of the eleven Fetterman episodes, the Fetterman/Brown Tongue River proposal.

**The Fetterman/Brown Tongue River Proposal, and Myth**

1866-1867 Jim Bridger Myth. Carrington’s 1908 speech probably referred to an early plan generated by Fetterman and Brown. In this speech, Carrington specified Fetterman alone as the source of the boast. “He said, ‘I can take eighty men and go to Tongue River.’”

The earliest reference to a proposed Tongue River expedition is found in the May 1867 Carrington testimony for the Sanborn Commission. Carrington’s memory on that occasion included both Fetterman and Brown. “When Fetterman and Brown asked for 50 mounted men to go with 50 citizens on a trip to Tongue River to destroy Indian Villages, I showed them my morning report, for which I sent in the person of Adjutant Bisbee, that I should thereby break up my mail parties and my pickets, and then lack 8 horses to supply the number desired.” After rejecting their proposal, Colonel Carrington testified that he also refused a similar one from some civilian haycutters. He pointed out to them that a detail of fifty-one soldiers had not been able to protect them during the haying operations “and was therefore unequal to the punishment of their enemies and the destruction of Indian villages.” That Carrington was correct in denying permission for a Tongue River expedition is almost certain. What is of interest here is that the number of men in the proposed expeditions was one hundred total, half of them military, half civilian.

Margaret Carrington’s *Absaraka* furnishes the next reference to the Tongue River plan. In a reflective comment after the Fetterman disaster, she claimed that Captain Brown “had inspired Captain Fetterman” in pursuit of tribal raiders, “and together they planned an expedition of a week’s trip to Tongue River valley, with a mixed party of ninety citizens and soldiers, to destroy the Indian villages.” Her recollection also trimmed the proposed manpower by ten men. Henry Carrington’s 1867 testimony of one hundred men fell to Margaret Carrington’s 1868 recollection of ninety men in the expedition.

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82 Colonel Carrington, *Indian Operations on the Plains*, 47.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
 Returning to Henry Carrington's 1908 speech at the Fetterman Fight monument dedication, he quoted Fetterman alone as saying, "I can take eighty men and go to Tongue River." From 1868 to 1908, the number of men dropped another ten. What we appear to have in the 1908 version is a convergence of the company of eighty men boast and the one hundred man Tongue River proposition, neatly dovetailed into eighty men going to Tongue River.

We now have the eighty-man boast, but no Sioux Nation. In late 1866, Tongue River was where the camps of the Lakotas extended for miles. All of the Lakotas were not there, but enough of them were to make the meaning of Brady's 1904 initial expression and Carrington's 1908 rhetoric "I can take eighty men and ride through the Sioux Nation on the Tongue River." With mythical efficiency this formulation has endured in the form given it by Brady. Fetterman "offered with eighty men to ride through the whole Sioux Nation!" 86

When were the statements about a company, a regiment, and the Sioux Nation on Tongue River made? Margaret Carrington first mentions the company and regiment boasts in connection with the hobbled mule episode, which we have dated on 5 November. When recounting the Tongue River scheme, she recalled that Fetterman "had been but a short time in the country, and already had great contempt for our adversaries ..." 87 These two memories strongly suggest that both occurred within the first two weeks of November.

However, in his 1908 speech, Henry B. Carrington linked his recollection of Fetterman's statement "I can take eighty men and go to Tongue River." to a comment by chief guide James Bridger. Carrington declared, "To this boast my Chief Guide, the veteran James Bridger, replied in my presence, 'Your men who fought down South are crazy! They don't know anything about fighting Indians.'" 88 If Carrington's memory of this exchange is accurate, Jim Bridger had to be at Phil Kearny when Fetterman and Brown recommended the Tongue River idea. In addition, Margaret Carrington mentions Bridger's advice in her discussion of the Fetterman Fight aftermath. "This massacre proved the value and integrity of

84 Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 209.
86 Brady, Indian Fights, 23. See for example Hebard and Brininstool, L 305. Vestal, Jim Bridger, 270.
87 Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 170-171, 208-209.
88 Frances Carrington, My Army Life, 253.
Major Bridger and his statements... The positioning of this statement in her memoirs after the Fetterman Fight has been interpreted to mean Jim Bridger was at Fort Phil Kearny in December 1866.

MYTH (3) THE WINTER 1866-1867 JIM BRIDGER MYTH. Biographers of Jim Bridger have asserted that he was at Fort Phil Kearny during the winter of 1866-1867, and was therefore present during the Fetterman Fight. As we have seen earlier, Bridger left the Fort Phil Kearny site on 4 August as the chief scout for Captains Kinney and Burrowes when they took Companies D and G ninety miles north to establish Fort C. F. Smith. With fellow scout Henry Williams, Bridger joined the Kirkendall train on 15 August and headed west on a fact-finding mission to the Montana gold camps and a Crow village on Clark's Fork. On 29 September, Bridger was back at C. F. Smith. He and Williams left there on 23 October in an escorted party, arriving back at Fort Phil Kearny on 27 October. He was there when Fetterman, Powell, and Bingham's cavalry arrived on 3 November. Colonel Carrington included Bridger's assessments of tribal intentions in his regular report to General Cooke on 5 November.

Carrington then sent Bridger back to Fort Smith with an escorted mail party about 26 November. Lieutenant Templeton recorded Bridger's return to Fort Smith in his diary entry for 28 November. Soon thereafter, Fort C. F. Smith was snowed in, cut off from communications with the rest of the battalion until one army mail party got through in February. Lieutenant Counselman, new quartermaster at Fort C. F. Smith, added James Bridger to his rolls as a guide at ten dollars per day. He carried him on the quartermaster records through May 1867. Due to the continued heavy snows of that winter, from February until May only Crow couriers made the trip to Fort Phil Kearny. An aged and rheumatic Jim Bridger did not return to Fort Phil Kearny until June 1867.

89 Margaret Carrington. Ahsaraka. 209.
91 Gray, Custer's Last Campaign. 51-53.
93 Gray, Custer's Last Campaign. 53-54. Gray's chief sources for the Bridger story are the Templeton diary and post returns for Forts Phil Kearny and C. F. Smith. This writer made the same discovery in those documents before reading Gray's account in his monograph. For this refutation of the Winter 1866-1867 Jim Bridger at Phil Kearny Myth, this writer will defer to Gray's earlier scholarship. Returns, Fort Phil Kearny, November 1866. Record of Events. The returns reported Bingham's mail party departure as 27 November. Templeton's diary records their arrival on 28 November. That is probably too fast for a ninety-one mile run. A more likely departure date from Phil Kearny would be about 23 or 24 November.
Dee Brown portrayed Fetterman and Brown proposing the Tongue River expedition on the night before the Fetterman Fight, 20 December. His sources for this dating came from Margaret Carrington's *Absaraka* and Stanley Vestal's *Jim Bridger*. As we have earlier noted, a careful reading of *Absaraka* makes it clear Dee Brown has misread her memoir. A 20 December evening visit by Captain Brown to the Carringtons only *recalled* the earlier Tongue River plans by Fetterman and Brown. Vestal included the Tongue River proposal in *Jim Bridger* following the hobbled mule event of 5 November, thus placing it within the week after Fetterman arrived. It is very clear then, if Jim Bridger was with Colonel Carrington when Fetterman and Brown proposed the Tongue River scheme, that meeting must have been *after* the hobbled mule decoy episode on 5 November, and *before* Bridger left for Fort C. F. Smith on about 26 November.

It now seems safe to conclude that sometime in the first three weeks of November, Fetterman, Brown, and perhaps some other officers at Fort Phil Kearny made some generally boastful statements about a company and a regiment of regulars verses the warriors opposing the Bozeman Trail. Probably by mid-November, Fetterman and Brown also tried unsuccessfully to get Carrington's approval for what was probably a risky venture against the tribal alliance villages in the Tongue River valley.

It also appears that Henry B. Carrington and Cyrus T. Brady later took those early overconfident statements, common to officers newly arrived on the plains, and recast them in the notorious phrase now attributed to Fetterman alone. Another myth was born.

(6) THE GARRETT/BURKE CONFRONTATION. McDermott did not include an 11 November event in his article, but Dee Brown gave attention to it in his book, without adequately footnoting his sources for the story. Frances Carrington alone recorded this episode, "the brutal striking of a soldier by his sergeant and some profane endorsement of the sergeant by his own lieutenant." She did not identify the lieutenant. This event took place on Sunday while the women at Phil Kearny were heading to church services. Frances recalled, "The ladies of the garrison were horrified when this incident... occurred in their full view one morning."

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95 Margaret Carrington, *Absaraka*, 208-209.
97 Frances Carrington, *My Army Life*, 111.
Colonel Carrington's response was official. General Order Number 38, a six-paragraph bulletin admonishing the participants and threatening repercussions for future violations. One paragraph was aimed at the officer involved. "Officers at this post will communicate and carefully enforce this order seeking to inspire among non-commissioned officers, by precept and example, that calm and steady habit of command which will surely secure implicit obedience, and no less augment respect for the authority requiring obedience."99 Frances Carrington recalled some disdain for the order among the officers, who called it "Bully 38."100

According to Dee Brown, both of the enlisted men, Sergeant Garrett and Private Burke, were in Fetterman's Company A.101 Brown believed the official reprimand in General Order Number 38 was directed at Captain Fetterman and widened a growing rift between him and the colonel. Brown's analysis appears to be based on faulty information. There was a Private Thomas Burke in Company A. He died in the Fetterman Fight. There was also a Private John Burke in Company E.102 This incident involved John Burke.

Robert A. Murray cited this story as evidence of how poorly Carrington enforced discipline at Fort Phil Kearny. The offending officer was Lieutenant Bisbee, not Captain Fetterman. Private John Burke straggled getting into formation for guard mount that morning, delaying the entire company. Lieutenant Bisbee ordered Sergeant Garrett to discipline Private Burke. After Garrett pulled Burke out of the formation, Burke made an insolent remark, and Garrett hit him with a musket butt, actually fracturing Burke's skull. Carrington had Garrett arrested, personally reprimanded Bisbee, and followed up with General Order Number 38.103

What Sergeant Garrett did was in fact illegal, but it illustrated a rift between the company officers and NCO's, and Colonel Carrington. The colonel produced a steady stream of restrictive orders and then did not support their enforcement. Considering himself a gentlemen, Carrington was too patient, too optimistic, and too paternalistic with the enlisted men.104 Company officers were left to find their own

99 Brown, Fetterman Massacre, 153.
100 Ibid. Frances Carrington, My Army Life, 111.
101 Brown, Fetterman Massacre, 152. The name of Thomas Burke appears on the list of men from Company A who died in the Fetterman Fight. See Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 282.
102 Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events, 1866.
103 Murray, Military Posts, 81-82.
104 Ibid., 81.
solutions in maintaining order. What Fetterman thought of General Order Number 38 was not recorded, but combat experience had taught him the importance of military discipline. Carrington was playing a dangerous game by appearing too soft on enlisted men. Some of them came from unsavory backgrounds; they were only kept in line by tough sergeants.

In mid-November, Carrington ordered a change in officer assignments that had crucial consequences in the future. Second Lieutenant George W. Grummond, originally assigned to Company C, was moved to command of the Mounted Infantry Detachment, formed with details from the companies earlier in the year. Grummond appeared to be an excellent choice. Having served during the Civil War as a sergeant and captain in the First Michigan Infantry, Grummond moved on to serve as major and lieutenant colonel in the Fourteenth Michigan Infantry, where he had some experience with mounted infantry. Grummond’s new assignment had important implications on both 6 and 21 December.

By the middle of November, Fetterman appeared to be a typical new officer on the plains. His only encounter with Lakota warriors was his narrow escape from the Pinery ambush. Confident in his combat experience, he still saw Indian tactics as inferior to his regular army training. He was anxious to do something offensively, and the men expected leadership from him. His first two attempts (the mule decoy and the Tongue River plan) had come to naught, but he was learning and he had not disobeyed Carrington’s orders. What came next were two more encounters with plains warriors, one a stock raid pursuit on 25 November and the other a significant ambush and skirmish experience on 6 December, a turning point in Fetterman’s adaptation to plains Indian warfare.

(7) PURSUIT OF LAKOTA STOCK RAIDERS. Two weeks after the Pinery ambush, warriors ended the lull in their harassment activities. They struck again, three times in five days. On 21 November, a stock raid near Fort Phil Kearny was foiled with no loss. On Friday, 23 November, Lakota raiders got away with nine government mules despite the efforts of a thirty-man pursuit party led by Captain Brown and Lieutenant Bisbee. Two days later, another raiding party ran off sixteen cattle. Colonel Carrington led the chase assisted by Captains Fetterman and Brown, and Lieutenants Grummond and Bingham.

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105 Heitman, Historical Register, I, 482. War of the Rebellion, I, 30, Pt. II, 712.
106 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 35. Ten Eyck, diary, 21 November 1866.
107 Ten Eyck, diary, 23 November 1866.
pursuers mustered seventy-five cavalry and mounted infantry. After splitting into separate groups, the force under Fetterman recovered some of the stolen cattle, after the raiders abandoned them.108

(8) FETTERMAN’S LETTER TO DR. CHARLES TERRY. The following day, 26 November, Fetterman shared his experience in his letter to Dr. Terry. “The Indians are very hostile and barbarous, and annoy us in every way they can. Yesterday with about 30 mounted men I chased a band of them who had run off some stock. Rode 40 miles and recovered all the cattle but five, which the Indians shot with arrows to prevent them from falling into our hands.”109

In this letter, Fetterman recognized the Indian skills in guerilla warfare when he called them hostile, barbarous, and annoying. While not complimentary, Fetterman’s description is not contemptuous either. He appears to be saying that this experience taught him new lessons about stock raids and pursuit. He now knew that it was possible to successfully chase stock raiders, especially ones slowed trying to drive cattle. He also had recognized one characteristic of plains style guerilla warfare; it annoyed the victims.

A final significant quotation from the letter expressed Fetterman’s dissatisfaction with Carrington. “We are afflicted with an incompetent commanding officer viz. Carrington, but shall be relieved of him in the re-organization, he going to the 18th and we becoming the 27th Infantry.”110 Dee Brown suggested that by mid-November, the officer cadre at Fort Phil Kearny were polarized into two factions. Brown’s anti-Carrington camp included Captains Fetterman, Brown, and Powell, Lieutenants Bisbee and Grummond and contract surgeon C. M. Hines. Dee Brown’s only Carrington supporter was Captain Ten Eyck.111

If Dee Brown had used the Ten Eyck diary, he would have known that Captain Ten Eyck’s attitude toward Carrington could not be classified as anything better than tolerant. Carrington had him in house arrest on 18 November over a minor matter. Carrington did not release him until six days later.112 Of the remaining four officers at the post in November, two left the post before month’s end. Lieutenant Adair resigned on 14 November and Lieutenant Bradley left on 19 November to join his company in the

108 Returns, Fort Philip Kearny, November 1866, Record of Events. Ten Eyck, diary, 25 November 1866. Carrington personally led this pursuit, perhaps spurred to action by a telegram he received that day from Cooke ordering offensive action.
109 Letter, Fetterman to Terry, 26 November 1866.
110 Ibid.
111 Brown, Fetterman Massacre, 153-154.
112 Ten Eyck, diary, 18, 21, 25 November 1866.
Fourth Battalion.113 Dee Brown made no mention of Lieutenants Wands and Matson, but they do not appear to have been strongly pro-Carrington.

This officer roll call suggests Carrington was no more than tolerated by some of his officers, and the majority would have agreed with Fetterman's evaluation of Carrington as "incompetent." Historian Robert Utley assessed Carrington as "inept, tolerant of insubordination, lenient toward offenders against discipline, hesitant when opposed, excitable under pressure, and defensive about his lack of command and combat experience."114

There was no thought of mutiny, however. As Bisbee said of him many years later, "Fetterman was an ideal soldier, thoroughly disciplined in the importance of obedience, making it unthinkable that he would flagrantly disobey."115 There was too much of Regular Army discipline in William Judd Fetterman for that. His letter inferred only that the dissatisfied officers would simply wait out the few weeks until the reorganization took effect.

The officers and men of Fort Phil Kearny did not have to wait long for a more serious encounter with a Lakota war party. In the mail that arrived from Fort Laramie on 25 November, was a telegram from General Cooke. As early as 27 September, Cooke had "intimated" ideas for an attack on the hostile Indians in their winter camps. Bearing the date of 12 November, Cooke's newest telegram made it an order.

COLONEL: You are hereby instructed that so soon as the troops and stores are covered from the weather, to turn your earnest attention to the possibility of striking the hostile band of Indians by surprise in the winter camps as intimated in telegram of September 27 ultimo from these headquarters . . .

Four companies of infantry will be available, besides some cavalry. You have a large arrear [sic] of murderous and insulting attacks by the savages upon emigrant trains and troops to settle, and you are ordered, if there prove to be any promise of success, to conduct or to send under another officer, such an expedition.116

Carrington's immediate reply was clear. "I will, in person, command expeditions when severe weather confines them to their villages, and make the winter one of active operation in different direction as best affords chance of punishment."117

113 Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events, November 1866. Returns, Fort Philip Kearny, November 1866, Record of Events.
114 Utley, Frontier Regulars, 103.
115 Bisbee, "Items," 82.
117 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 36.
In addition to Cooke's telegram ordering offensive action, two other events motivated Carrington to finally move away from a purely defensive strategy to taking the action that led to a skirmish in early December. As noted earlier, on 2 December, Lieutenant Wilbur F. Arnold and Company K arrived at Fort Phil Kearny.\footnote{Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events, November, December 1866. Ten Eyck, diary, 2 December 1866. Colonel Carrington, \textit{Indian Operations}, 35. Returns, Fort Phil Kearny, December 1866. Record of Events. The returns incorrectly gave the date as 3 December.} The following day, Lieutenant Bingham returned with the cavalry mail detail from Fort C. F. Smith.\footnote{Ten Eyck, diary, 3 December 1866.} Carrington now had five companies of infantry at the post, A, C, E, H, and K, plus Bingham's cavalry. Although Company K was only half strength and made up of recruits, they did constitute manpower capable of defending the fort. Cooke's order to do something, and the arrivals of Company K and Bingham's troopers, probably led Carrington to commit his mounted forces in what was for him, his first real combat experience.

(9) THE PENO CREEK VALLEY PURSUIT AND SKIRMISH. On 6 December 1866, a small action took place north of Fort Phil Kearny in the same general locality as the Fetterman Fight two weeks later. Official U. S. Army sources called it the Indian skirmish at Goose Creek, Dakota Territory.\footnote{Heitman, \textit{Historical Register}, II, 427. "Chronological List of Actions, &c., With Indians, from January 1, 1866, to January 1891." in Joseph P. Peters, \textit{Indian Battles and Skirmishes on the American Frontier}.} Most of the action occurred along the forks of Peno Creek in a valley between the northwest end of Lodge Trail Ridge and the Fetterman Fight spur. (Since Peno Creek is still on modern maps, this writer has named the action the Peno Creek Valley Pursuit and Skirmish. See Map 8, which is J. W. Vaughn's sketch map of the 6 December fight.)

Although the fight began as a reaction to a Lakota attack on the wood train, it was a departure from previous defensive relief operations with the train. General Cooke had been prodding Carrington for an offensive against the Indians since September. By taking offensive action, Carrington could discourage further operations by raiding parties and placate General Cooke. It was the colonel's first and only personal combat experience while he was at Fort Phil Kearny. His basic idea was to pin and destroy a warrior raiding party between two mounted detachments led by Fetterman and Carrington.

Military plans often go awry when the opposition refuses to cooperate. What actually evolved was a rather confused affair. Three overlapping actions spread over some distance in the Peno Creek area. one
involving Fetterman's detachment, another engaging Carrington's force, and a third unplanned pursuit by Lieutenants Grummond and Bingham and stragglers from the other two groups who rode into a fatal ambush.

This watershed event was a valuable learning experience for Captain Fetterman, and a precursor to the Fetterman Fight. Because of its significance, what follows is a detailed reconstruction of this Indian fight using after action reports by Colonel Carrington and Captain Fetterman as the basic documents, supplemented with later memoirs by other participants. Map 8 is J. W. Vaughn's depiction of the 6 December skirmish.

On the morning of 6 December, the wood train made the usual trip to the Pinery to cut construction timber. About 1 P.M., a messenger reported to Colonel Carrington picket signals from Pilot Hill indicated the returning wood train was corralled several miles away, under attack by a large war party. They were part of more than three hundred Lakota warriors led by a Hunkpatila chief Yellow Eagle. At the same time, Lakota scouts appeared along Lodge Trail Ridge and watched the movements of the garrison from about two miles away. Carrington ordered all serviceable horses readied by Lieutenant Bingham's cavalry and Grummond's mounted infantry. Dividing the assembled detachment into two mounted companies, Carrington took Lieutenant Grummond and the mounted infantry and ordered Fetterman to lead Bingham and the cavalry. Fetterman would take the road to the wood train, relieve it, and then drive the attackers northeast past Sullivant Hills and across Lodge Trail Ridge. Carrington would go north on the Montana Road, cross Lodge Trail Ridge, then turn west to cut off the Indian retreat with his blocking force, catching the war party between them.

Fetterman took Lieutenant Bingham and about thirty cavalrmen of Company C, Second U. S. Cavalry to the wood train corral, four miles from the post. They joined Captain Brown and two mounted infantrymen, who had gone out earlier to investigate and decided to join the train. Lieutenant Wands, armed

1790-1898. 4. Returns, Fort Phil Kearny, December 1866, Record of Events. Peno Creek was also called Goose Creek.

121 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 37. This writer has followed Colonel Carrington’s timetable. Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 194. Frances Carrington, My Army Life, 130. Both wives said the action began at 9 A.M. That is probably the time the wood train left that morning. Ten Eyck, diary, 6 December 1866. Ten Eyck recorded 1 P. M. as the time Lakota scouts first appeared on the hills.

with a Henry repeating rifle. was too late to join Carrington’s force, and joined Fetterman instead. As Fetterman’s mounted force arrived, the one hundred Lakotas attacking the train retired to the northeast for several miles, with Fetterman’s cavalrymen in close pursuit.

At the same time, Carrington personally led the second detail, including three of his own regimental orderlies. Lieutenant Grummond, and twenty-one mounted soldiers; they rode north to frozen Big Piney Creek. Delayed by having to break the ice to cross Big Piney, Carrington and Grummond led the mounted infantrymen up the Bozeman Trail, over the spine of Lodge Trail Ridge, then ascended the eastern slope of the ridge, and headed for Peno Creek.

A few Lakota scouts along the ridge fell back as Carrington’s men approached. Carrington noticed four more scouts to the east on the road, and he quickly counted a party of thirty-two in a nearby ravine. Apparently, Lieutenant Grummond saw them too, and began pulling away from Carrington toward the Lakotas. Carrington sent a soldier, D. Harman, to summon him back with orders to “keep with me and obey orders or return to the post.” Having recalled Grummond, Carrington turned his attention back to Lodge Trail Ridge. He saw over one hundred warriors descending to Peno Creek, followed by Fetterman’s troopers. Fetterman had arrived at the intercept area first. Carrington spurred his men at a gallop westward along the ridge. Then he heard firing as Fetterman’s party closed with the Indians now in the valley undergrowth on the west fork of Peno Creek.

Shooting started because Fetterman had to bring his pursuit up short when Yellow Eagle’s warriors, not yet threatened by Carrington’s force, turned about to make a stand. Inexplicably, Lieutenant Bingham and most of his troopers retreated. Fetterman, Brown, and Wands tried to check the fleeing cavalrymen but managed to stop only a third of them. Lieutenant Bingham and the other troopers rode eastward into the brush. The one hundred Lakota warriors closed in on the three officers and the two

123 Ibid., 37.
124 Captain Fetterman, Indian Hostilities, 37-38. This is Captain William J. Fetterman’s after action report of the 6 December 1866 skirmish. Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 196. Claiming her story came directly from Lieutenants Wands and Grummond, she said Wands was delayed in exchanging his horse, then joined Fetterman by mistake. He was fortunately armed with a Henry rifle. Vaughn, Indian Fights, 34.
Carrington’s sketch map indicated the coralled train was only one to two miles away. Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 38. Carrington said Brown had gone to check on the train and then joined it without authorization.
125 Captain Fetterman, Indian Hostilities, 38.
126 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 37.
127 Ibid., 37, 50.
mounted infantrymen. As Fetterman recalled, "it was plain the retreat, if continued, would be a rout and massacre." so they dismounted and formed a horseshoe shaped defensive position, joined by enough cavalrymen to total fourteen men. During this forty-five minute skirmish, Wands made good use of his Henry repeater, helping save Fetterman’s hard pressed men armed with revolvers.\(^\text{129}\)

While Fetterman’s dismounted detail fought the war party trying to surround them, Carrington’s mounted infantry descended the ridge to the main valley of Peno Creek. Sometime during the descent into Peno Creek Valley, Lieutenant Grummond and a few men broke away from the Carrington detachment for the second time. Responding to motions by Lieutenant Bingham, apparently seen by Grummond but not by Carrington. Grummond, Sergeant Bowers, and Private Donovan joined Bingham and three troopers in pursuit of another Lakota party, thirty warriors strong.\(^\text{130}\) Carrington was unaware of Grummond’s departure until later.

Moving along a spur between branches of the east fork of Peno Creek about a half mile west of the road, Carrington was surprised to find fifteen cavalrymen, dismounted and without Lieutenant Bingham. Passing through them, Carrington ordered them to mount and follow him. Apparently, none did.\(^\text{131}\)

The approach of Carrington’s mounted infantry in their rear induced the warriors opposing Fetterman to withdraw eastward. Fetterman’s men mounted up and followed. When Carrington’s men did not attack the retreating Lakotas, many of them returned to fight Fetterman. This second skirmish lasted for about twenty more minutes. The warriors then withdrew down the valley too quickly for Fetterman to stop them.\(^\text{132}\)

While Grummond, Bingham, and their small mixed force of mounted infantry and cavalry pursued the Lakotas east of the road, and Fetterman’s force was surviving their second skirmish, Carrington’s group had become spread out. When Carrington turned north and east toward the road crossing of Peno Creek he only had a cavalry bugler and five other men with him. They then ran into warriors retiring from fighting

\(^{128}\) Ibid., 37.


\(^{130}\) Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 195. Frances Carrington, My Army Life, 131. Dr. C. M. Hines, Indian Hostilities, 14. Senate Document 13 quoted a letter from Dr. Hines to his brother John, dated 15 December 1866.

\(^{131}\) Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 37. Vaughn, Indian Fights, 38.
Carrington tried moving his men back toward the road. One of his men fell and his horse with him. In his report, Carrington said he rescued the fallen soldier from a scalping attempt by “the principal chief operating during the day.” He then dismounted his men, and with one man to hold horses, he formed a defensive position, while about one hundred warriors circled them. During this surround, Carrington claimed his first combat achievement, “one saddle emptied by a single shot fired by myself.”

The Carrington group held that position near the road for about twenty minutes. It may be that at this point the fifteen cavalrymen, joined by some stragglers from the mounted infantry moved to join Carrington. That movement and Fetterman’s, threatened the Lakotas around the Carrington position. The warriors scattered to the east. Carrington’s force then withdrew eastward a short distance to the Bozeman Trail.

After Fetterman aborted further pursuit of the war party his detachment had been fighting, he followed the road and joined Carrington’s men, now close by. By this time, Fetterman had one man wounded; he had also lost one horse killed, and two others wounded in the fighting. His men had shot three Lakota ponies, and had seen the warriors carry two of their comrades from the field.

With Fetterman’s detachment united with his own, Carrington’s attention turned to finding the missing men of both groups, including Lieutenants Grummond and Bingham. Carrington’s combined force

132 Captain Fetterman, Indian Hostilities, 38.
133 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 37. Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 196. Margaret’s version of this story suggested the recall summoned Corporal Baker, who rode back over a hill to the north of Carrington’s position, and it was the corporal who informed Carrington where Bingham had gone. Baker said Bingham had rode over that same hill to the north, where over eighty warriors were in sight.
134 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 37.
135 Ibid., 38.
136 Ibid. Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 196. Margaret’s version of this episode named Private McGuire as the fallen soldier who “gratefully” told her his story. Her chronology also has the bugler’s recall ordered after Carrington had rescued Private McGuire. See also, Frances Carrington, My Army Life, 131-132. Her rendering of this same set of events, cast Carrington in the roles of leader and hero, who had the bugle sounded “to guide Fetterman in joining [him].” She says Fetterman took a circuitous route to get to Carrington, while the Colonel followed the “original plan,” until he met the larger Indian force and avoided being caught in an ambush. She also quoted his official report on the fallen soldier, (which did not name him), and changed Margaret’s Private McGuire to Private Carnahan. See also Vaughn, Indian Fights, 38-39.
137 Captain Fetterman, Indian Hostilities, 38.
moved to the east in search of Bingham. They had not gone far when they saw Grummond and three men racing toward them up a ravine, hotly pursued by seven warriors. The size of Carrington’s force discouraged the warriors’ pursuit and they turned away.138

After Grummond’s small party joined Carrington’s, apparently Grummond expressed anger toward Carrington. Grummond’s anger was not recorded in any of the Carrington sources, including Frances’ memoir, and was not in any of the official reports. Lieutenant William H. Bisbee, just finishing his duty as regimental adjutant at Fort Phil Kearny, later recalled a conversation with Grummond the night of 6 December, after the soldiers returned to the post. According to Bisbee, Grummond “hotly asked the Colonel if he was a fool or a coward to allow his men to be cut to pieces without offering to help.” If true, Carrington would not want such a disparaging comment about himself reported. Indirectly, however, Carrington’s official after action report does hint that Grummond may have made such a statement. When a commanding officer composed an after action report, it was normal military practice for him to specifically mention good performances by junior officers who participated in the action. With but few criticisms, Carrington’s report speaks well of Captains Fetterman and Brown, and Lieutenants Bingham and Wands. Grummond is conspicuously absent from the report. Despite Grummond’s demonstrated courage and harrowing personal combat with the Lakotas, Carrington may have rebuffed Grummond by ignoring him in the report. Considering the friendship between Grummond and Bisbee, Grummond likely knew about the slight.

Grummond informed Carrington what had happened to him and Bingham while Carrington and Fetterman had been engaged west of the road.140 When Grummond and a few mounted infantrymen separated from Carrington’s detachment during their descent along Lodge Trail Ridge, they joined Lieutenant Bingham and a few cavalrymen in pursuit of thirty Lakota warriors. After following them northeast for some distance, Lieutenant Bingham wounded one warrior’s horse with a pistol shot. The dismounted warrior began running. Spurring their horses forward, the two officers and five enlisted men tried to stop him. Excited by the pursuit, Bingham lost one pistol, and after emptying another, threw it away. He and Grummond then noticed two larger bodies of Indians flanking their small party of soldiers:

138 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 38. Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 194, 196-197. Margaret said Grummond gave her his story.
139 Bisbee, “Items,” 81.
they were being led into an ambush. Drawing their sabers, the two officers cut at the warriors to the right and left in an attempt to escape.141

In the retreat, Lieutenant Bingham failed to keep up with the rest and was cut off by pursuing warriors.142 Private Donovan managed to shoot his way out with a brace of pistols, claiming two warriors shot on either side.143 Grummond, three cavalrymen, and Sergeant Bowers ran a gauntlet of Lakotas wielding spears.144 After slashing his way out with his saber, Grummond was successful in leading the three cavalrymen back to Carrington’s position.145 All three of the troopers were wounded in the action. Bowers did not escape.146

With directions from Lieutenant Grummond and Private Donovan, Carrington initiated a search for Bingham and Bowers, despite the risks from Lakotas still in the area. It took an hour to find both men.147 They found Bowers nearby. He had killed three Lakotas with his revolver before another warrior hit him with an arrow. After Bowers fell to the ground, a warrior split his skull above the eyes with a hatchet. The search party had found him still alive and not scalped, but in great pain.148 Carrington sent for an ambulance and reinforcements from the post. Bowers died before Lieutenant Arnold and forty men arrived with the ambulance.149

By the time they found Bingham’s body, Yellow Eagle’s three hundred warriors had taken their dead and wounded comrades and left the valley: some had lost ponies and were seen leaving on foot

141 Dr. C. M. Hines, *Indian Hostilities*, 14.
142 Ibid.
143 Murphy, “Forgotten Battalion,” 388-389. Murphy said Donovan was a Civil War veteran who bunked with him and told him his story.
144 Dr. C. M. Hines, *Indian Hostilities*, 14.
145 Hebard and Brininstool, *Bozeman Trail*, II, 99-100. F. M. Fessenden’s memoir of his service at Fort Phil Kearny, included a conversation with Grummond about his saber slashing escape from the ambush; Grummond may have killed or wounded several Lakotas in the running fight.
149 Colonel Carrington, *Indian Operations*, 38. Margaret Carrington, *Absaraka*, 197. See also Frances Carrington, *My Army Life*, 133-134. Frances’ version of the Grummond, Bingham, and Bowers episode is basically recycled Margaret Carrington, except for accusing Captain Powell of deliberately ignoring Carrington’s “written order” to bring the reinforcements himself. She alleged Powell remained in his quarters and sent Lieutenant Arnold in his place. Colonel Carrington previously made the same accusation in 1867 during his replies to Powell’s disparaging testimony to a member of the Sanborn Commission. See Vaughn, *Indian Fights*, 212.
Carrington estimated Lakota losses at "not less than 10 killed, besides wounded." Bingham's body was found about a mile east of the Bozeman Trail at the north end of the next ridge. The Lakotas had crippled him for the afterlife. He had been stripped, scalped, and riddled with about fifty arrows.

With the dead gathered, Carrington's exhausted command reached the post about 7 P.M., having spent six hours in action. Carrington lost two men killed and five wounded in his only real skirmish with Indians. Three dead and five wounded horses diminished future mounted response. It had not been a sterling performance. In Dee Brown's telling of this tale, he erroneously concludes his narrative with reference to Jim Bridger. Using Stanley Vestal's account, Brown says Bridger was "growing more melancholy every day ...." After the 6 December action, Vestal's Bridger told Carrington, "Your men who fought down south are crazy. They don't know anything about fighting Indians." If Bridger made such a statement, it had to have been at least two weeks earlier. On 6 December, Bridger was at Fort C.F. Smith. In fairness, Carrington's men did not know much about Indian fighting. He could not teach them, and he had let fort construction completely push aside military training. But men and officers were learning just the same, including their battalion commander, William J. Fetterman.

As Carrington reported to General Cooke the events of the day, he first focused on officer performance in the skirmish. With the glaring exception of Lieutenant Grummond, he had compliments for all of the commissioned officers. Fetterman "carried out his instructions promptly," but "the result would have been a good fight if he had retained Lieutenant Bingham's command." Lieutenant Wands "joined the wrong party," but still "did good service." Brown received special marks from Carrington. "Captain Brown, always quick after an Indian skirmish, and whose operations September 25, 1866, deserve public attention, went as volunteer and greatly contributed to the success of Captain Fetterman's movements." Even Lieutenant Bingham was praised for "his manly qualities and professional spirit." Bingham's sergeant explained the lieutenant's retirement from Fetterman's command. Carrington noted that "his

130 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 38.
132 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 36. Both Margaret and Frances Carrington reported the return at 9 P.M. See Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 194, and Frances Carrington, My Army Life, 134.
133 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 36.
134 Brown, Fetterman Massacre, 166.
horse ran away with him." While mildly chastising Fetterman for not retaining Bingham's cavalry, Carrington ignored the fact that he had not retained Grummond under his control. The unauthorized Grummond-Bingham pursuit into ambush had led to six of the seven casualties during the fight.

Carrington also tried to put a positive spin on the results in his report to General Cooke. "Much was done. The loss of Lieutenant Bingham makes all seem loss; but the winter campaign is fairly open and will be met." Knowing the department commander expected offensive operations, Carrington offered the 6 December skirmish as proof that he was complying with his order, and future offensive action would be forthcoming. Almost prophetically, Carrington excused and praised the cavalrymen. "It is due to the cavalry to say that they were mostly recruits and are all ready to take the next chance." Company C, Second Cavalry had born the heaviest losses on 6 December. Their commanding officer was dead, and five enlisted men were wounded. Indeed, they had a score to settle with the Lakotas when the "next chance" came.

What did Fetterman learn from this key event in his life? Immediately after the skirmish, Margaret Carrington recorded, "Captain Fetterman has been in, and says, 'he has learned a lesson, and that this Indian war has become a hand-to-hand fight, requiring the utmost caution,' and he wants no more such risks." There is not much arrogant contempt in that language. It does reflect subdued respect for the Lakotas he had fought on 6 December, and his resolve to be better prepared for the next encounter with plains warriors.

John D. McDermott brushed aside Fetterman's comments, concluding, "Whatever his professed intention to caution, Fetterman had not lost his obsession for punishment, and now the desire for personal revenge fired his resolve." Dee Brown, like most other historians who have dealt with Fetterman, decided, "Unfortunately, Fetterman forgot this lesson, the last he would learn from the Indians."

Contrary to the latter two opinions, Fetterman did not forget the lessons, and his actions from that day through 21 December provide evidence that he had learned a great deal. Some of the lessons learned

155 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 36, 38.
156 Ibid., 38.
157 Ibid.
158 Margaret Carrington, Ahsaraka, 195.
159 McDermott, "Price of Arrogance," 49.
160 Brown, Fetterman Massacre, 166.
from the 6 December skirmish pertained to military use of the terrain, the training and discipline of the
enlisted men, and the composition and tactical deployment of detachment manpower.

MILITARY USE OF THE TERRAIN. The rugged terrain around Fort Phil Kearny affected
military operations in ways understood only after walking the ground. Sullivant Hill, Lodge Trail Ridge,
the Fetterman Fight spur, and most of the other hills around the post have abrupt, steep slopes and simple
vegetation. They are essentially bare, grassy ridges with no trees, few shrubs and only occasional rocky
outcrops for cover. In contrast, the Peno Creek Valley is crowded with ravines, dense brush undergrowth,
and some scrub trees.

The Peno Creek Valley environment offered ideal ambush locales because hiding both warriors
and ponies in the ravines and vegetation was relatively easy. That is what Yellow Eagle’s Lakota war party
did on 6 December. Both Fetterman and Carrington ran into tough resistance in this terrain. Grummond
and Bingham led their small party into fatal ambushes east of the road, which ran down the Fetterman Fight
spur ridge to Peno Creek. Undergrowth and high grass in that area were excellent sites for concealment as
well. The terrain lesson Fetterman learned from his personal experiences of 6 December discouraged
chasing mounted Indian war parties over bare Lodge Trail Ridge into the forbidding undergrowth of Peno
Creek Valley or anywhere else like it.

The old military adage of staying to the high ground, gave a commander greater visibility and
potentially more defensible terrain against attack. Ambushes were less likely when your men held the
highest ground, which in the areas north of Fort Phil Kearny meant staying along the tops of the ridges.
Yellow Eagle’s three hundred warriors never attempted an attack on Carrington’s sixty men while they
were together on the ridge road above the valleys and ravines east and west of that spur. Fetterman knew
from personal experience that the safest place for sixty soldiers facing some three hundred Lakota warriors
that day was on ridges and spurs above the tangled valley growth below.

TRAINING AND DISCIPLINE OF THE ENLISTED MEN. Poor performance by the enlisted
men in the 6 December operations was a major reason why Carrington’s operation did not go as well as
planned. In particular, the lack of discipline among the cavalrmen nearly brought Fetterman to an earlier
demise that day. Only Fetterman’s steady, combat experienced leadership, buttressed by Lieutenant
Wands’ Henry rifle, kept the fourteen men who stayed with them alive. Carrington’s own mounted
infantry force disintegrated on the way into the blocking position. Carrington only had six men when they finally began their skirmish with the Lakotas. He had crossed Lodge Trail Ridge with Grummond and twenty-four enlisted men.

"Above all, commanders fear disintegration in combat. When tactical stability disintegrates, commanders lose the power to maneuver subordinates and maintain control." Both Carrington and Fetterman lost control of their men after the unauthorized departure of an officer with part of the command. Fetterman had done a better job of not losing his men to straggling as they rode down the northern slope of Lodge Trail Ridge. Carrington's detachment was so spread out that he almost rode into an ambush with only a handful of men.

For Civil War trained officers like Captain Fetterman, avoiding disintegration and instilling disciplined responses to orders were achieved by drilling soldiers in formation maneuvers and firing on command. Two benefits of such training were (1) "tactical articulation," or movement in predictable ways during the approach to combat, and (2) "esprit de corps" once the serious killing had begun." In the post-Civil War army, military drill was designed to expedite orderly movement, build unit cohesion, insure quick response to orders, and coordinate firepower. After the 6 December skirmish, it was clear to Carrington and Fetterman that both infantry and cavalry needed drilling to prepare for future actions.

COMPOSITION AND TACTICAL DEPLOYMENT OF DETACHMENT MANPOWER. The Napoleonic deployment of cavalry envisioned their use as shock forces to break a wavering enemy. For a variety of reasons, during and soon after the American Civil War, most cavalry and mounted infantry rode into battle, and then fought dismounted like infantrymen. Both fulfilled the same roles. They performed "reconnaissance, screened army advances, and strategic raiding," but "their true contribution rested with [the] novel combination of mobility and firepower." With only sixty poorly trained cavalry recruits and mounted infantry, Carrington risked a maneuver requiring better coordination and communications than were available to him in December 1866.

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For the 6 December action, Carrington created two detachments for the train relief and flanking movement he envisioned. He sent Fetterman with Bingham and the less experienced cavalrymen to relieve the train and make the pursuit over Lodge Trail Ridge, probably the simpler task. Carrington took Lieutenant Grummond and the more experienced mounted infantry with him to block the retreating warriors long enough to cost them some casualties. Delay in getting Carrington's column in place on time, plus the defection of most of the cavalry, quickly doomed the planned maneuver. Additionally, Yellow Eagle had another two hundred warriors already in the Peno Creek area. They did not fight conventionally, choosing to make a stand or scattering for later attacks in a very fluid, individualistic style of guerrilla warfare. That made it doubly difficult for Carrington to have pulled off his plan successfully.

Once engaged, both Fetterman and Carrington fought their skirmishes dismounted. One of the disadvantages of both cavalry and mounted infantry fighting in a dismounted role was the loss of as much as one-fourth of their firepower from soldiers designated as horse-holders. In addition, cavalrymen were usually armed with short-range carbines and pistols, less accurate for distance shooting than infantry rifles.¹⁶⁴

Having an all mounted force gave Carrington the speed and mobility necessary for his plans, but they quickly got out of his control, as Grummond twice pulled away from his column and Bingham and most of the cavalry got away from Fetterman. Fetterman learned an important lesson from the helter-skelter break up of Carrington's mounted force on 6 December. What he prepared for and actually did on 21 December, demonstrated that he adapted his conventional Civil War combat skills in light of his Indian fighting experiences, especially those from the 6 December skirmish.

By using a combined arms force made up of both regular infantry and cavalry, the commanding officer of a future relief mission could bring together the best functions and features of each type of soldier. With most of the manpower regular infantry, speed and mobility would suffer. However, rifled muskets and no horse-holders gave the infantry arm the advantage in long range firepower.¹⁶⁵ The potential of

¹⁶⁴ Douglas C. McChristian, The U. S. Army in the West, 1870-1880 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 33. For example, the breech-loading Spencer carbine, with which Carrington's regimental band was armed, had an effective range of less than two hundred yards. Jack Coggins, Arms and Equipment of the Civil War (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1962), 32. Civil War Springfield rifles, with which the Second Battalion infantry were armed, had an effective range of five hundred to six hundred yards; they were deadly at two hundred to three hundred yards.

attacking Indian opponents beyond arrow range, and then keeping warriors from closing to hand-to-hand combat, made a well-drilled regular infantry force potentially very effective against raiders. To protect the infantry from mounted warriors, an auxiliary force of cavalry could be attached. Cavalry employed in their traditional roles of reconnaissance, and screening the flanks of infantry movements would make best use of their speed and mobility, discourage unauthorized expeditions, and by keeping them close to the infantry, give the cavalry a base of fire support for short distance raiding tactics.

(10) THE FETTERMAN/BROWN OFFENSIVE PLAN. According to McDermott, the 6 December skirmish gave Fetterman "the desire for personal revenge" which "fired his resolve," and "Fetterman and Brown were soon plotting to meet the Sioux and their allies in force." McDermott reached that conclusion from Carrington's testimony in 1867. Carrington told the Sanborn commissioners that H. Schiebe, Captain Brown's clerk, could testify that the two captains previously planned to move directly to attack Indian parties whenever those officers were outside the fort with sufficient men.

It should be remembered. Carrington was a trained lawyer, and his defense before the Sanborn commission is rife with legalisms as well as documents. Lawyers build cases by collecting supporting evidence for their legal argument, while ignoring facts detrimental to their case. Just when Schiebe heard such plans and what was actually said, is not made clear. Suggesting that moving on the Indians with force was "plotting" ignores the fact that such had been daily practice and policy since the Second Battalion left Bridger's Ferry in June. Virtually every Indian attack and stock raid since had elicited a response in force.

Since 1 November, Fetterman had been the battalion commander. For him to plan responses to Indian threats does not constitute mutinous plotting, but responsible and prudent preparation for the next Indian incursion. And there was surely going to be a next time. And no matter what Fetterman and Brown did or did not plan, with Carrington still personally commanding Fort Phil Kearny, any commitment of force would require his permission.

(11) FETTERMAN LED COMPANY A IN DAILY MUSKETRY DRILL. As further evidence that Fetterman was plotting to attack the Indians at the next opportunity. McDermott found that Fetterman "began drilling his company at retreat in loading and firing by file and by numbers, and continued to do so

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166 McDermott, "Price of Arrogance," 49.
167 Ibid.
until the fateful day." Fetterman was not the only one interested in training. Despite their differences, Carrington retained Grummond in command of the mounted infantry, with orders to keep about fifty horses saddled for pursuit from sunrise to sunset. After losing Lieutenant Bingham on 6 December, Company C. Second Cavalry was without an officer. Carrington assigned Captain Powell to drill the cavalry "in such basic elements as mounting and dismounting, forming columns of twos and fours, and firing carbines and pistols by command." Powell was a logical choice to train the cavalrymen. He had come up through the ranks from private to sergeant in the old First Dragoons and First Cavalry, before his commission in the Eighteenth U. S. Infantry.

It is clear then, that Carrington was as concerned as Fetterman about the skill levels demonstrated on 6 December. By drilling Company A, Fetterman was doing what Carrington should have been doing all along. Fetterman's drills at retreat every day were remedial correction to deficient training, not proof of McDermott's charge of "personal revenge."

John D. McDermott, like most historians before him, found Fetterman guilty of all charges against him, charges summed up as his Arrogance Thesis. In his judgement, Fetterman came to Fort Phil Kearny as an arrogant combat officer, and never learned anything about fighting Indians for the next seven weeks. Then he "died with his boots on, arrogant and ignorant to the end, a man destined to be remembered for destructive self-will and the lessons he refused to learn." We have completed reviewing McDermott's list of ten Fetterman episodes, plus one from Dee Brown. They do not provide incontrovertible support for his Arrogance Thesis as ultimate cause for the Fetterman Fight. Every point listed has an alternative explanation just as likely, or more likely than the interpretation proposed by McDermott.

Some of the evidence is so masked by myth, it is difficult to know the complete truth. The alternative interpretation of the Fetterman episodes put forward in this chapter finds a William Judd Fetterman very different from his current image in Western history. Captain Fetterman came west in 1866

168 Ibid. Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 46. Carrington mentioned this fact in his testimony, not in a disparaging way, but as support for Carrington's belief that the Fetterman command ran out of ammunition on 21 December.
170 Heitman, Historical Register, 1, 802-803.
with an attitude of contempt toward Indian guerilla tactics common to combat officers trained and experienced in conventional warfare. Frontier experiences changed that attitude.

By early December, the real William Judd Fetterman had experienced enough of actual frontier combat to have new respect for plains Indian tactics and fighting skills. He now understood the dangers of ambush and the risks of hand-to-hand combat with Indian warriors, and he knew that his men were ill prepared to meet those dangers and handle those risks. After 6 December, he set out to teach them the skills he believed they needed to survive in future fights with Indian warriors. From the early November bravado about “a company of regulars could whip a thousand,” he had learned by early December “that this Indian war has become a hand-to-hand fight, requiring the utmost caution.”¹⁷² In the five weeks from 3 November to 6 December, whatever arrogance and ignorance Fetterman may have had, was disappearing. In their place, Captain Fetterman had added new knowledge and personal experience in plains warfare to the considerable professional soldiering skills he gained during the Civil War. What remained to be seen was whether all of that background would be sufficient to handle his biggest test two weeks later on a grassy ridge north of Fort Phil Kearny.

¹⁷² Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 171, 195.
CHAPTER 8

THE HUNDRED IN THE HANDS

In early December, changing weather and the relocation of the Mountain Crows brought some tranquility around Fort C. F. Smith. On 4 December, a major snowstorm extending for miles had cut off travel between Fort Phil Kearny and Fort C. F. Smith. Later heavy winter weather then completely isolated the garrison from any communication with the rest of the Second Battalion for over two months. With no mail in or out, Fort C. F. Smith's garrison gleaned news from the outside world through Crow runners who still had some peaceful contacts with the Lakota camps along the Tongue River.

Trader John Smith, sutler at C. F. Smith, spent the early days of December among the Crows. On 5 December, he sent a letter to Captain Kinney reporting the latest information he had just heard from some Crow leaders just back from visiting the Lakotas. The Crows reported large war parties returning to the Lakota camps, bringing horses, mules, cattle, and dry goods they had captured. Lakota warriors tried to frighten the Crows with claims they had captured Fort Reno and Bridger's Ferry, and were planning to attack Fort Phil Kearny with two thousand warriors, and then come to C. F. Smith. When the Crows discussed these latest Lakota threats with Smith, many Crow warriors spoke out in favor of fighting the Lakotas as allies of the white soldiers.

Two days later, Smith sent additional news about the Crows. The large Mountain Crow village on the Yellowstone had divided. A few chose to trade with John Richard in the Gallatin Valley. The majority of the Mountain Crows and some visiting Nez Perces were coming east to camp near C. F. Smith.

At Fort Phil Kearny, Lakota scouts maintained daily observation from the hills, but they made no offensive movements for nearly two weeks after the 6 December skirmish in Peno Creek Valley. A

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1 Ten Eyck, diary, 4 December 1866. Templeton, diary, 4 December 1866.
2 Templeton, diary, 7 February 1867.
3 Ibid., 5 December 1866.
4 Templeton, diary, 7 December 1866.
5 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 39.

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Cheyenne warrior named Two Moons told George Hyde many years later that he was a member of one of these scouting parties. Two Moons said his party was sent to spy on the fort and determine if it could be captured without serious losses. They saw it was too strong, and reported that fact to the chiefs. Then the leaders decided use a decoy force and set a large ambush at some distance from the fort.  

While Frances Carrington was writing her narrative after the 1908 Sheridan celebration, her husband received a letter from "a competent author" who was writing a history of the Indian Wars. The unnamed author sent the Carringtons Two Moons' account of the Fetterman Fight. Two Moons claimed to have visited Fort Phil Kearny with a small party of friendly Cheyennes when Jim Bridger showed them the defenses of the fort. The Cheyennes decided the place was too strong to be captured without great loss, so the chiefs decided to draw the garrison out into ambush. In *My Army Life* Carrington responded to this story by saying that Bridger was present at this council with the Cheyennes. Carrington said that after Bridger and the post officers had shown the visitors the "impregnable" defenses of the post and the cannons, the friendly Cheyennes had offered to send one hundred of their warriors to fight with the white soldiers against the Sioux.  

Two Moons account compressed time so that the meeting with Bridger seems to occur just before the Fetterman Fight. As we have already seen, Jim Bridger was at Fort C. F. Smith in December. The friendly Cheyenne visits began on 16 July and ceased on 27 September. At the end of September, Bridger was returning from visiting the Crows; he did not reach Fort C. F. Smith until 29 September. Bridger could not have been at Fort Phil Kearny for a friendly Cheyenne visit after 4 August, when he left Kearny as scout for the Kinney column headed to establish Fort C. F. Smith. Between 16 July and 4 August, friendly Cheyennes came to Fort Phil Kearny on 16, 17, 19, and 23 July. Two Moons visit at the fort when Jim Bridger was there had to have occurred on one of those four days. Carrington's "impregnable" fortress only existed on paper plans he had drawn up two months earlier. The line of the stockade was not even laid out until 25 July.  

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6 Hyde, *George Bent*, 343-344.
8 Ten Eyck, diary, 16 July, 27 September 1866.
9 Templeton, diary, 29 September 1866.
10 Ten Eyck, diary, 4 August 1866.
and nothing but rows of tents to mark out where the future fort would be. Carrington's memory of this event is hazy at best. Two Moons' memory appears to have telescoped a friendly visit to the post in July with a hostile scouting experience in early December, when it was obvious that an assault on the stockade was too risky.

It snowed again on 8 December, and stayed very cold for several days. Despite the cold, Lieutenant William H. Bisbee, his wife, and young son, prepared to leave Fort Phil Kearny for Omaha, Nebraska where Bisbee would serve as General Cooke's adjutant. On Sunday evening, 9 December, Bisbee had his last visit with "a brave friend," Captain William J. Fetterman. Fetterman expressed "his feeling of unrest and humiliation over the prevailing trend of affairs in service under an officer who had not served in the field or been acquainted with hostile rebel shots during [the] Civil War." Having expressed those feelings, however, Fetterman, left no impression on Bisbee that he had any thoughts of disobeying Colonel Carrington's orders while they waited for the regimental reorganization.

With farewells said, the next morning Bisbee and his family joined the mail detail, a corporal and eight men of the Second Cavalry, on the eastbound mail run. That same day, six Nez Percé came into Fort C. F. Smith to see Captain Kinney. They had come over the Rocky Mountains to trade with the Crows, their horses and blankets for Crow robes and lodges. Calling Kinney "father," the Nez Percé also wanted a family trading relationship at the fort. Lieutenant Templeton called them "the best dressed Indians" he had ever seen. They apparently stayed nearby to trade for a few days.

While traveling south toward Fort Reno, Bisbee saw in the distance many small parties of Indians watching their movements on the Bozeman Trail. When the mail party arrived at Fort Reno, Bisbee met with Lieutenant Colonel Henry W. Wessels, Carrington's regimental second in command, who recently replaced the ailing Captain Proctor in command of Fort Reno. Wessels gave Bisbee a message for General Cooke, and then informed him of the death of Private William Bear. On 11 December, Lakota warriors had caught the Civil War veteran alone while he was gathering dead wolves less than half a mile from the

13 Ibid., 8-10 December 1866.
14 Returns, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, Annual Record of Events, 9 December 1866.
15 Bisbee, "Items," 82.
16 Ibid.
17 Returns, Fort Phil Kearny, December 1866, Record of Events. Ten Eyck, diary, 10 December 1866.
18 Templeton, diary, 10 December 1866.
Bear was the only fatality from the Reno garrison in 1866. On the same day warriors killed Private Bear, the garrison at Fort Phil Kearny laid Lieutenant Bingham and Sergeant Bowers to rest in the post cemetery. They would not be the last fatalities from Phil Kearny for the year.

By early December, the tribes and bands making up the Lakota coalition were in their first winter camps. The grand coalition that camped together during the warfare season of summer, from about mid-August to about mid-October, had dissipated. The non-Lakotas were a mixed group, relatively small in number. Putting aside their differences, the Omisis Cheyenne treaty faction had left Crow country and rejoined the rest of the band; they camped for the winter in the valley of the Rosebud River. Together, the Omisis band probably numbered less than one thousand, with no more than two hundred warriors. Camped nearby were two small bands of Northern Arapahoes, not led by chiefs, but by two warriors, Black Coal and Eagie Head. It is likely these Northern Arapahoes were those camped with the Crows in mid-November. When the Cheyenne peace faction left the Crows in late November or early December, these Northern Arapahoes went with them. They probably numbered no more than eighty lodges, less than five hundred people, and under one hundred warriors. Back in September, Crow visitors to the Tongue River camps had reported a few Atsinas, relatives of the Arapahoes. By early December, the Atsinas had returned to their own people’s camps; there were none known to have been in the Fetterman Fight. Altogether the Northern Cheyennes and Northern Arapahoes camped near the Rosebud had less than three hundred warriors available in December.

Still camped in the Tongue River Valley, the much larger Lakota wing of the summer grand alliance had lost some groups and gained others. Gone were the small contingents of Sissetons and Oglalas

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20 Ten Eyck, diary, 8-11 December 1866. Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 197-198. Mrs. Carrington dated the funeral on 9 December. Given Ten Eyck’s record of a “furious storm of snow & wind” on 8 December, a 9 December burial was unlikely. The weather cleared over the next two days making a 2 P. M. funeral and burials possible on 11 December.
22 Moore, Cheyenne Nation, 195. See also, Bray, “Teton Sioux Population History,” 169 for an estimate of men of military age, or warriors, at one-fifth of the total population.
from the Missouri River bands; the summer fighting was over for them. Also gone back to their winter
camps east of the Black Hills, were two of the smallest Lakota ospaye, the Oohenunpas, and Itazipacos. Some of the Hunkpapas remained, led by hłatahunka Red Horn. How many there were is not specifically known, but likely less than half of the approximately four hundred warriors in the Hunkpapa ospaye.

By now, all three bands of Northern Ogalalas (Ite Sica, Hunkpatila, and Oyuhpes) were committed to the fighting. There were also some Southern Oglala warriors who had left their own bands to join their northern cousins. Despite some losses, the Oglalas could still field about six hundred warriors in December. Having been in the alliance since June, the Southern Sicangu warriors still included Red Leaf’s Wazazas, Iron Shell’s Orphans, and the warriors from the Ring and Corn bands who deserted their chiefs to fight with the Northern Oglalas. Altogether, Sicangu warriors probably numbered about five hundred. Camped separately, but remaining in the Tongue River Valley, the Oglalas, Sicangus, and Hunkpapas could mobilize perhaps 1,200 to 1,300 fighting men in early December 1866.

One other Lakota ospaye had not yet fully committed to the alliance, the Miniconjous. Their involvement in the conflict along the Montana road was initially limited. From neutrality in June, July, and August, this Lakota ospaye gradually became engaged when groups of warriors may have chosen to participate in some raids and actions in September and October. By early December, internal changes in Miniconjou leadership brought deeper commitment.

It is likely that the Miniconjous did not enter the fighting under the leadership of their chiefs until the death of White Swan. In 1866, White Swan was one of the six hereditary chiefs of the Miniconjou ospaye, along with Brave Bear, Makes Room, White Hollow Horn, Black Shield, and Lone Horn. When White Swan died is not known with precision, but considering the decisions made because of his death, it

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26 Ibid. See Colonel Carrington, *Indian Operations*, 29 where the Cheyennes identified these Lakota ospaye in the Tongue River Valley in September.
28 Bray, “Teton Sioux Population History,” 169, 174. This writer estimated total Hunkpapa warriors at one-fifth of a 2,100 total population.
29 Ibid. This writer estimated total Oglala warriors at one-fifth of a 3,400 total population.
30 Ibid. This writer estimated total Sicangu warriors at one-fifth of a 3,300 population, less about one-fourth (160 warriors) for the Northern Sicangus who were not involved.
was probably very late in November, or early in December, but too late for them to have participated in the 6 December action north of Phil Kearny. 32

White Swan had strong feelings of hatred toward whites because his lodge had once been looted and defiled by some drunken soldiers. His deathbed wish was for the leaders and warriors to protect themselves by killing the soldiers in the Powder River country before they came to kill the Miniconjou people. After his death, the other hereditary chiefs decided to organize a large war party against the Army soldiers on the Bozeman Trail. Miniconjou messengers soon reached the other Lakota camps and the camps of the Northern Cheyennes and Northern Arapahoes. The messengers carried pipes inviting the other bands to join an unusually large winter war party. 33

With band population only half that of the Ogalalas, the Miniconjou ospaye mustered only 350 warriors. 34 Their chiefs knew they needed the warriors who had flocked to Red Cloud, Man Afraid, and the other Northern Oglala war leaders. As the Lakota camps gathered along the Tongue River, the Lakota war party reached impressive proportions. Man Afraid’s Hunkpatilas, Red Cloud’s Ite Sica, and the Oyuhpes brought 600 fighting men. The Sicangus added another 500, while the 150 Hunkpapas, and 350 Miniconjous swelled the total Lakota numbers to about 1,600. 35 Now gathered in response to the Miniconjou invitations, the Lakotas prepared for the coming fight and waited for their Cheyenne and Arapahoe allies to join them.

Recalling how the invitation came to the Cheyennes, White Elk, then a youth of sixteen to eighteen years, joined Plenty Camps and Rolling Bull in planning a raid against the Shoshones. Soon after they left their camp on Muddy Creek, four other Cheyennes warned them about getting too close to the soldier fort on the Piney Creeks because of what happened to the last Cheyenne party camping there. Apprehensive that the warning was a bad omen, the three men continued south for two days. On the third day, four Lakota warriors rode up to the Cheyennes’ camp. They were in advance of a Lakota war party gathering against Fort Phil Kearny. The Lakotas revealed their plans to use decoys to lure some soldiers

32 Vestal, Warpath, 51. See also McDermott, “Wyoming Scrapbook,” 72 for Mitch Boyer’s 1867 testimony that White Swan “had died just before the [Fetterman] massacre . . . .”
33 Vestal, Warpath, 51.
34 Bray, “Teton Sioux Population History,” 169, 174. This writer estimated Miniconjou warrior strength at one-fifth of a probable total population of 1,700 in 1865.
35 These estimates are based on earlier calculations, a total of 1,800 in the war party, and a Cheyenne-Arapahoe total of about 200.
out of the fort. Invited to camp with the Lakotas that evening, White Elk and his companions joined the Lakota war party. At the Lakota camp council that night, the Lakota chiefs selected four akicita, messengers to the Cheyennes and Arapahoes. They saddled their horses and rode into the night. Near sundown the next day, the akicita returned. The Cheyennes and Arapahoes would come to fight as soon as they were prepared.\(^{30}\)

While the Cheyennes and Arapahoes talked about war, a Lakota party tested the soldiers' responses at Fort Phil Kearny, the first action in two weeks. On the morning of 19 December, about fifty Lakotas attacked the wood train going out to the Pinery.\(^{37}\) The picket on Pilot Hill reported the wood train corralled and threatened by a large Indian party.\(^{38}\) Four Lakota scouts came down Big Piney Creek, stopped opposite the fort, and watched what the garrison would do. Carrington dispatched Captain Powell, Captain Brown, and Lieutenant Matson with forty infantrymen, and twenty-five cavalrymen to reinforce the wood train.\(^{39}\) Powell took his command to the train, and then pressed the retreating Lakotas toward the ridge. Seeing more warriors on the ridge, Powell returned to the wood train and escorted them back to the post.\(^{40}\)

John D. McDermott put forward Powell's actions on 19 December as "the best circumstantial argument" to support his allegation that Captain Fetterman flagrantly disobeyed his orders on 21 December.\(^{41}\) Did Captain Powell's orders specify his not crossing Lodge Trail Ridge with his command, or did he simply make a prudent decision at the time? And was this 19 December action a completely staged ambush, like that of 21 December, which failed only because Powell refused pursuit? None of the Native American accounts mention it. The most complete accounts by Cheyenne warrior White Elk, and Lakota warrior White Bull leave little room in their stories for a large ambush on 19 December. In these accounts the combined war party moved south for several days, apparently reaching a final campsite a short day's ride north of the post on 19 December. The White Elk and White Bull accounts suggest that on 20

\(^{30}\) Grinnell, *Fighting Cheyennes*, 225-227.
\(^{37}\) Ten Eyck, diary, 19 December 1866.
\(^{39}\) Ten Eyck, diary, 19 December 1866.
\(^{40}\) Colonel Carrington, *Indian Operations*, 39. Ten Eyck said there were Indians in sight across the creek. It is not clear if these were those across from the fort, or those seen by Powell. Ten Eyck, diary, 19 December 1866.
\(^{41}\) McDermott, "Price of Arrogance," 52.
December, there was a planning council, and then the ambush was set the following morning, the day of the Fetterman Fight.\(^{42}\)

Having nothing available from the Indian accounts, what clues can be seen from Army sources in answer to both questions? When Carrington telegraphed General Cooke later that day, he reported this action as a minor affair. “Indians appeared to-day [sic] and fired on wood train, but were repulsed.”\(^{43}\) The post returns for Fort Phil Kearny, recorded “Indians appeared near post and attacked wood party. Relief afforded without loss to garrison.”\(^{44}\) In his 3 January 1867 official report of the Fetterman disaster, Colonel Carrington mentioned Powell’s actions on 19 December. He briefly reported, “Hence two days before Major [brevet rank] Powell, sent out to cover the train under similar circumstances, simply did that duty when he could have had a fight to any extent.”\(^{45}\) Do the “similar circumstances” prove Carrington gave similar orders to Powell, or just refer to the similar situation, an attack on the wood train? Carrington did not specify in this report two weeks after the actions.

Later accounts tend to amplify the importance of 19 December. During his defense before the special commission in 1867, after the Fetterman disaster was threatening his future military career, Carrington said that Powell had “peremptory orders not to cross [Lodge Trail Ridge].” He also said that Powell reported the Indians were in “large force;” and “that if he [Powell] had crossed the ridge he never would have come back with his command.”\(^{46}\) During that same commission investigation, Powell said little about his orders but claimed facing 2,500 Indians.\(^{47}\) Carrington later rebuffed Powell’s testimony, recalling that Powell reported the Indian force threatening the wood party numbered from 300 to 500.\(^{48}\)

In 1868, Margaret Carrington referred only briefly to Powell’s performance on 19 December in a flashback from her account of the morning of 21 December. She said Captain Powell “had been sent out to relieve a train, and obeyed his orders literally, although, as he afterward said, he was sorely tempted to pursue, but became afterward convinced that certain destruction would have been the result.”\(^{49}\)


\(^{43}\) Carrington to Cooke, *Indian Hostilities*, 38.

\(^{44}\) Returns, Fort Philip Kearny, December 1866, Record of Events. The returns incorrectly recorded the date as 18 December.


\(^{47}\) Vaughn, *Indian Fights*, 213.

\(^{48}\) *Ibid.*

Over forty years later, Frances Carrington said Carrington’s orders to Captain Powell were “not to pursue the Indians but to heed the lesson of the sixth.” She also claimed Powell reported Indian strength at two to three hundred warriors in sight. In this version, differing from both Colonel and Margaret Carrington’s stories, Frances made an important connection between Carrington’s orders to Powell and the lessons learned from 6 December. That connection may also be seen in the orders given to Fetterman on 21 December.

In answer to the two questions about 19 December, what is probable is that a large scouting party of from one to three hundred warriors, probably all Lakotas, went to Fort Phil Kearny on 19 December. Their apparent purpose was to test the garrison response to an attack on the wood train, a key element in the planned ambush. A few warriors went to watch the fort, while a larger party of fifty or more attacked the wood train. Another fifty to two hundred warriors remained on Lodge Trail Ridge ready to strike if Powell’s relief force had attempted to follow the attackers too closely. Since Powell refused to follow, perhaps because of orders, but just as likely because the opposition looked too numerous, the action ended without loss to either side, but with valuable information for the Indian leaders. When the big ambush was set, the decoys were not sent to draw the post relief force into Peno Creek Valley, as on 6 December, since Powell refused that route. Instead the decoys were sent to lead the relief detail up the Bozeman Trail, over Lodge Trail Ridge, and down the road into Peno Creek Valley. A spur ridge running north from Lodge Trail Ridge was how the Bozeman Trail descended to Peno Creek from the ridge. That was where the big ambush could be set.

Totally unaware of the crushing blow about to befall his command, Carrington closed his 19 December telegraph with another boastful comment about the Indians: “They are accomplishing nothing, while I am perfecting all details of the post and preparing for active movements.” The following day, Carrington did something that had to be considered ill timed to many of those involved. He built a bridge.

At 9 A.M. on 20 December, Carrington took sixty infantrymen, twenty cavalrymen, and the regular wood train guard to the wood road crossing of Big Piney Creek. They spent the day constructing a bridge across the Piney, forty-five feet long and sixteen feet wide. His men also made improvements to the

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51 Carrington to Cooke, *Indian Hostilities*, 38.
road channels to facilitate movements of the wood train. Carrington reported to General Cooke that his purpose was "to test the animus and force of the Indians." As a practical matter, access to additional firewood and construction timber during the winter months were more logical reasons for building the bridge. That practical purpose makes it harder to fathom why this project was not completed back in late July, or August, when huge quantities of timber were logged and transported across Big Piney Creek.

Frances Carrington recalled later that by 20 December all the fort buildings were complete except the hospital, and they needed just one more train of logs to finish it. Her fuzzy memory struck again on this story. It does not make much sense for the wood detail to build a bridge, if all they needed was one more load of logs to complete the last building. Margaret Carrington recorded that on the day of the Fetterman Fight, they still needed "a few more trains of saw-logs [to] furnish ample lumber material to complete the office building and a fifth company quarters, already well under progress." Ten Eyck entered in his diary for 12 December, said that the work details laid the foundation for the post headquarters offices that day. That building was probably still not complete by January, when the Carringtons left Fort Phil Kearny.

Carrington returned to the post at 6 P. M. having seen no Indians; there were not even fresh tracks in the snow that day. Instead of testing the Indians, Carrington had unprofitably spent time doing something that should have been done weeks earlier. The warriors ignored the bridge, being busy with their preparations for the ambush next day.

Meanwhile, when the Cheyenne council chiefs considered the Lakota request, they could not come to a consensus for war. Finally, they decided to let the warriors choose for themselves. About 150 young men chose to go if Crazy Mule went with them. He was an important medicine man; the Cheyenne warriors expected his powers to protect them from death. Crazy Head (Bull Head) led this band of warriors. There is no record of the Arapahoe council on the Lakota invitation. None of their chiefs chose to come. Probably given individual choice like the Cheyennes, about sixty Northern Arapahoe warriors

52 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 39-40.
53 Frances Carrington, My Army Life, 136.
54 Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 201.
55 Ten Eyck, diary, 12 December 1866.
56 Murray, Military Posts, 43.
chose to join the Lakota war party. Black Coal and Eagle Head, experienced fighters, led the small Northern Arapahoe contingent.\(^9\)

It did not take the Cheyennes and Arapahoes long to get ready. Late in the morning after the Lakota akicita returned to their own camp, the two hundred Cheyenne and Arapahoe warriors announced their arrival with a friendly charge on the Lakota camp. After visiting with the Lakotas, the Cheyennes rode in parade around the Lakota camp and stopped on the river below. They camped there overnight.\(^60\)

Next morning, while Carrington was building his bridge, the Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes moved as far as Prairie Dog Creek (Peno Creek) and camped again. (See Map 4, Grinnell’s map of the Fort Phil Kearny area.) After leaving this camp, the war party followed one fork of the creek to a flat prairie. The Lakota warriors spread out in a long line on the prairie; the Cheyennes and Arapahoes stayed to the side, watching. From among the Lakotas a lone rider appeared, a man dressed as a woman.\(^61\) Known as a winkte, such a person was regarded as having special supernatural powers and insights.\(^62\) On that day, this man rode over a hill on a zigzag course, blowing a whistle, his sight obscured by a black cloth over his head. He was searching for the warriors’ enemies. Four times he rode out and then rode back to the warrior gathering. Each time he returned to offer from his hands the number of dead enemies the warriors could expect in their planned ambush. Ten was not enough for such a large war party. Twenty was not enough. Fifty was not enough. At the end of his fourth circuit, the winkte rode up fast, dropped to the ground, and announced he had one hundred or more in his hands. The warriors yelled their approval. Some struck the ground near his hands, counting the coup.\(^63\) Among the Lakotas, the Fetterman Fight was known as the One-Hundred-White-Men-Killed, or the Hundred-In-The-Hands.\(^64\)

The experience with the winkte’s prediction inspired the warriors with confidence in their medicine for the upcoming fight. It also had practical value in controlling warrior impulses to spring the

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\(^60\) Grinnell, *Fighting Cheyennes*, 227-228.

\(^61\) Ibid., 228.


\(^63\) Grinnell, *Fighting Cheyennes*, 229-229. John Stands in Timber, *Cheyenne Memories*, 171. John Stands in Timber’s step-grandfather Wolf Tooth was in this war party. Stands in Timber recalled his family memory of the Sioux medicine man in woman’s clothing. He threw himself repeatedly on the ground and then came up each time with the number of dead enemies in his hands. He continued doing this until the chiefs were satisfied with “many white men...killed.”

ambush too early. They were to wait until the decoys had brought a large number of soldiers into the ambush, not just a few. On 21 December, this plan worked to perfection.

As the warriors camped that night, war leaders called out the names of ten men who would start out early to be in place near the fort the next day. These were men known for their bravery, men who could be trusted to be the decoys, a dangerous honor. There were two Cheyennes, two Arapahoes, and six Lakotas. Not all of their names have been preserved for history. The Cheyennes initially chose Little Wolf and Wolf Left Hand. Little Wolf offered the honor to his brother Big Nose. Given Little Wolf’s horse and Bull Hump’s war clothing, Big Nose took his brother’s place. From the Oglalas, the war leaders selected Crazy Horse.

Red Cloud’s role in the Fetterman Fight has been shrouded in controversy. American officials of that day regarded Red Cloud as the “head chief” of the Lakotas, disregarding Oglala polity and the influence of other important Oglala leaders like Man Afraid of His Horse, Red Dog, Blue Horse, and Little Wound. That image of Red Cloud has persisted in works by George Hyde and James C. Olson. Recent historical consensus recognized the Miniconjou High Back Bone as the war chief who directed the warriors’ efforts on the field on 21 December 1866. However, Red Cloud claimed into his old age that he was involved. Born in May 1821, Red Cloud would have been forty-five in 1866. He had reached an age when experienced Lakota warriors ceased actively participating in war parties, confining themselves to planning and inspiring the younger warriors, while staying behind to guard the camp against marauding enemies. Red Cloud probably joined with the other Lakota chiefs in planning the ambush, but either stayed at the camp on Prairie Dog Creek, or accompanied them to the battle site in the formal warrior parade, but did not join in the actual fighting.

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65 Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, 229.
67 Larson, Red Cloud, 99.
68 Price, Oglala People, ix. See Hyde, Red Cloud’s Folk, and Olson, Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem.
70 Larson, Red Cloud, 99. Olson, Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem, 51.
71 Larson, Red Cloud, 30.
72 Robert M. Utley, The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), 3, 151-160. Sitting Bull, probably born in 1831, was forty-five at the Battle of Little Big horn. His role in the actual fighting was confined to defending the camp against Major Reno’s attack.
SETTING THE TRAP

At Fort Phil Kearny, Captain Ten Eyck rose to a cloudy, overcast day with the threat of snow in
the air. Although there was still snow in the mountains, and patches of snow and ice in the ravines and on
the hills surrounding Fort Philip Kearny, it became warm enough for soldiers to work without coats as the
sun rose higher in the sky.

About ten miles to the north, the chiefs and headmen had the warriors moving early. By
daybreak, the men had painted themselves, donned their war clothing, and prepared their horses and
weapons. Few had firearms. They mounted up and formed a column, warriors riding together by band
and in warrior societies. Led by Black Shield, the Miniconjous were first: the other Lakotas followed.
Then came the Omisis Cheyennes, and finally the Arapahoes. Altogether there were about 1,800 warriors
gathered for the fight: 1,600 Miniconjous, Ogalas, Sicangus, and Hunkpapas, plus 150 Northern
Cheyennes, and sixty Northern Arapahoes. From the campsite the procession moved steadily south along
what the Cheyennes called Crow Standing Off Creek, or Prairie Dog Creek. On Carrington's map (and on
modern topographical maps) it was called Peno Creek. Band chiefs and head men led their warriors to
where the fighting would take place. Then the war chiefs and heads of warrior societies would lead the
warriors in the actual combat.

The Bozeman Trail ran east of the fort, passed the east slope of Sullivant Hill, crossed Big Piney
Creek, then continued northward in a valley to the southern slope of Lodge Trail Ridge. After it climbed
over Lodge Trail Ridge, the road banked eastward along the northern slope of the ridge, then turned north
again along the crest of a spur or hogback from Lodge Trail Ridge. Once on the spur the road descended
for a mile and a quarter over a series of slopes to ford Peno Creek about five miles from the post.
Fire Thunder was a sixteen-year-old Hunkpatila warrior from Big Road's band. As the war party rode up Peno Creek, he remembered them stopping where the Bozeman Trail came down the steep, narrow spur and crossed Peno Creek.\footnote{82 Neihardt, \textit{Black Elk Speaks}, 11. Price, \textit{Oglala People}, 83. Price identified Big Road as a Hunkpatila band chief} White Elk, a sixteen-year-old Cheyenne, heard the Lakota chiefs call out to the Cheyennes to choose which side of the spur they wanted to be on for the ambush. One of the Cheyenne chiefs said his people would take the upper or west side, where the Arapahoes joined them. Both were well mounted, so they moved farther south of Peno Creek, secreting themselves in the same ravines where Fetterman and Carrington had first fought on 6 December.\footnote{83 Grinnell, \textit{Fighting Cheyennes}, 229-230. \textit{Ibid.}, Vestal, \textit{Warpath}, 58.}

The Oglalas also chose the west side of the ridge. Those who were on foot positioned themselves near the north end of the spur, close to the stream.\footnote{84 \textit{Ibid.}. Vestal, \textit{Warpath}, 58.} To the east of the Bozeman Trail spur, the other Lakotas found cover in the ravines and grassy slopes that fell away steeply from the narrow hogback. Sicangu and Hunkpapa warriors hid to the south of the Miniconjous, opposite the Cheyennes and Arapahoes.\footnote{85 None of the Native American memoirs located the Sicangu (Brule') and Hunkpapa warriors said to be there by Mitch Boyer's informant in 1867. Since the memoirs account for everyone else, this writer has concluded they had to be east of the spur ridge, south of the Miniconjous.}

White Bull was among the Miniconjous who hid behind another ridge about half a mile east of the north end of the spur ridge. Armed with a lance, a bow, and forty arrows, he held his gray war-horse, waiting with the others for the time to prove his valor. Wrapped in a red Northwest blanket, he tried to stay warm. Hidden nearby were White Bull's companions, Fine Weather, Long Forelock, Little Bear, Thunder-\-With-\-Horns, and Runs-\-Against. Straight ahead to the west, where the Oglalas had hidden in the grassy flats near Peno Creek, they could see no one. Clearly visible was the ford where the road crossed the stream and climbed up the spur to the left disappearing toward the fort five miles away. Hundreds of warriors quietly, patiently waited for the decoys to signal the time to spring the trap.\footnote{86 Vestal, \textit{Warpath}, 58.}

Not all of the warriors were hidden along the spur north of Lodge Trail Ridge. At least three other groups had already gone south of Lodge Trail Ridge as part of the ambush plan. Two Moons said a small party of warriors went to attack the wood train.\footnote{87 Hyde, \textit{George Bent}, 344.} Private O' Brien, who was with the log train that day,
remembered this war party numbering about fifty or sixty. Probably hidden somewhere north of Sullivant Hill, this party waited for the wood train to make its daily run west to the Pinery. Ten men, six Lakotas led by Crazy Horse, two Cheyennes, and two Arapahoes, constituted the specially selected decoy party. They had the challenging assignment of drawing any relief detail from the fort over Lodge Trail Ridge and into the ambush. Another twenty to thirty warriors and scouts supported the decoys by watching the fort and signaling the others about soldier movements. While the decoys waited behind the hills across the creek to the north of the post, the scouts hid in the thickets along Big Piney Creek, near the Montana Road crossing.

**THE LOG TRAIN**

At Fort Phil Kearny, the garrison had moved through the morning routine: reveille, sick call, and guard-mounting to music played by the regimental band. After 10 A.M., later than usual, the wood train moved out of the post north gate and turned west on the wood road that ran along the southern face of Sullivant Hill. Private Timothy O'Brien of Company E recalled seventeen wagons in the train, each with a civilian teamster and one soldier, all well armed with rifles and ammunition. Carrington reinforced the wood train's "armed teamsters," and "ax-men (soldiers)," with an additional guard led by Corporal Legrow, bringing the total armed manpower to nearly ninety men. Carrington's avowed reason for the additional guards was that "the Indians might have seen his work," meaning the previous day's bridge-building enterprise. He may have anticipated trouble that day, and wanted to make the train strong enough to defend itself.

About 11 A.M., Margaret Carrington's children ran into her quarters shouting "Indians!" The soldier pickets on Pilot Hill could be clearly seen signaling that many Indians were on Sullivant Hill above

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90 Frances Carrington, *My Army Life*, 142.
92 Vaughn, *Indian Fights*, 47-48. See also, Frances Carrington, *My Army Life*, 253. In Colonel Carrington's 1908 speech at the monument on Massacre Hill, he said there were forty wagons.
the wood road threatening the wood train. Soon the garrison heard some gunshots to the west, confirming the attack. About a mile and a half from the post, the train had corralled and Legrow’s men had begun shooting at the war party. Several miles to the north, across Lodge Trail Ridge. White Bull and his Miniconjou companions also heard the noise. From the southeast, the frosty air bore the faint sound of gunfire; it lasted just a few minutes. While the garrison began organizing a response. Corporal Legrow’s detail easily repulsed the warrior attack. The Lakotas pulled out quickly; their attack was a simple feint, designed to draw out a pursuit force from the post, without risking loss to their party. This attack was closer to the post than those of 6 and 19 December, suggesting that the warriors did not want to draw the relief column too far west. The real purpose of the attack was to allow the decoys to draw the relief force up the Bozeman Trail to the prepared ambush site.

EIGHTY-ONE MEN

Carrington and the officers and men of the garrison reacted to the alarm with dispatch. Buglers called the troops into company ranks, preparatory to forming a relief force. As the garrison turned out for the inspection, two Lakotas appeared across the stream north of the post. They dismounted, wrapped their red blankets around themselves, and sat down near a tree to watch the fort.

As had been his privilege since he took command of the post on 7 October, Carrington chose the relief force and their commander. Captain Powell had been drilling Company C. Second Cavalry following the death of their own officer, Lieutenant Bingham, in the action of 6 December. Carrington tendered Powell command of the cavalry as the relief force.

95 Ibid. Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 200.
96 Vaughn, Indian Fights, 48. The Cheyennes may have heard the shooting during the short log train attack. Grinnell recorded that they heard what sounded like a single shot, then a long silence and more firing for a few minutes. This is likely the sounds of the log train fight, and the later howitzer rounds before Fetterman left the post. See Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, 230.
97 Vestal, Warpath, 59-60.
100 Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 202. Vaughn, Indian Fights, 44. F. M. Fessenden in Hebard and Brinnistool, Bozeman Trail, II, 100.
101 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 39.
Captain Fettermn. who had been walking back and forth in front of his quarters, decided to find out for himself what instructions Colonel Carrington had begun giving to Captain Powell. Fettermn was again being ignored as commanding officer of the Second Battalion. Carrington, the officer with the least combat experience at Fort Phil Kearny, was making all the decisions in potential combat situations. Fettermn apparently decided that on this day Carrington's continued disregard for proper military protocol had to stop. Fettermn went to Carrington's headquarters, reminded Colonel Carrington that as battalion commander, he outranked Powell both by senior captaincy, and by brevet. He was a lieutenant colonel; Powell was a major. By rank and command position, Fettermn had the right to form the relief force and take them out. Carrington knew Fettermn was right. The colonel "acquiesced" and ordered Fettermn to take men from his own Company A, and some from Company C, Captain Powell's infantry company. 

Within fifteen minutes of the first alarm, Captain Fettermn had organized his infantry detail. After a quick inspection, he had selected twenty-one men of his Company A, nine men of Company C, six of Company E, and twelve of Ten Eyck's Company H. All of the regular infantrymen were armed with the standard Civil War Springfield muzzle-loading rifles. Official records and memoirs are not clear on this, but the men from Companies E and H probably went out as mounted infantrymen. They were armed with Spencer carbines and pistols. F. M. Fessenden recalled that after the alarm sounded, about "fifty saddle horses were mounted." With the cavalry taking twenty-seven, that left about twenty others for the officers and the eighteen men from Companies E and H. There were two first sergeants in the Eighteenth Infantry detail. Augustus Lange of Fettermn's Company A, which provided nearly half the infantry manpower, and Alexander Smith, of Ten Eyck's Company H, which added the next largest contingent, twelve men. Organizationally, it makes sense that a first sergeant would lead the mounted infantry detail.

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102 Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 200.
108 Hebard and Brininstool, *Bozeman Trail*, IL, 100.

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Carrington had originally ordered Powell to take out a detail of Company C. Second Cavalry. Powell was no longer going, but the cavalrymen were, twenty-seven in all. Just a few days before, Carrington had ordered his regimental band to surrender their Spencer breechloaders to the cavalrymen, replacing the cavalry’s less serviceable Starr carbines. They were now the best armed men in the garrison. Lieutenant Grummond, who had been commanding the mounted infantry detachment, asked Lieutenant Wands about the cavalry. Carrington ordered Grummond to take them out in support of Fetterman.

Four other men became part of the relief party. Captain Frederick Brown, due to leave shortly to join his company, was eager to have one more chance at fighting the Lakotas. Margaret Carrington recorded in her memoir, that the previous night, 20 December, Brown called at the colonel’s quarters dressed for service, and expressed regrets that he must leave Fort Phil Kearny without “Red Cloud’s” scalp. He still wanted one more fight, then said “he knew it was impossible, but he just felt that he could kill a dozen himself.” Brown attached himself to the mounted party, riding Calico, the mottled pony he borrowed from Carrington’s son, Jimmy. Two civilians, who had been working for Brown as employees of the regimental quartermaster, came along for the adventure. James S. Wheatley and Isaac Fisher were both experienced frontiersmen, were armed with Henry repeaters, and were good shots. The fourth man to join the party was Thomas M. Maddox, Carrington’s regimental armorer, an experienced gunsmith who wanted to see some action. At Maddox’s request, Carrington permitted him to go with the detail from Company H.

Some publications about the Fetterman Fight infer that Fetterman’s command was composed of mostly untrained recruits. James C. Olson averred that Company C, Second Cavalry “consisted entirely of raw recruits,” who “did not even know how to mount!”

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117 Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*, 45.
Two different views of the men in the composite company reveal some striking facts about the combat worthiness of Fetterman's men. A comparison of rank distribution provides one view. Individual enlistment data gives another.

Table 2 looks at rank distribution. Each company detail has been broken down into the enlisted ranks of its men. The normal rank distribution for an infantry company (INF) can be compared with each infantry detail and the entire infantry component in the composite company. Likewise a regular cavalry company (CAV) can be matched with the cavalry detail.

### TABLE 2. Enlisted Rank Distribution of Fetterman’s Composite Company

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<th></th>
<th>Rgt</th>
<th>Co</th>
<th>1st Sgt</th>
<th>Sgt</th>
<th>Cpl</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Pvt</th>
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<th>% NCO</th>
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<td>76</td>
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</table>

*Source: Colonel Carrington, *Indian Operations*, 42-43. Sgt = Sergeant; Cpl = Corporal; Pvt = Private; Other = Musician, Artificer; R HQ = Regimental Headquarters.*

Some surprises can be observed in the table. At 35.5% and 64.5% respectively, the composite company was about one-third cavalry and two-thirds infantry. Of the infantry company details, the rank distribution of Company A is very close to normal. Fetterman probably chose the best squad from his company, and added Company A's First Sergeant Lange. Details from Companies C, E, and H are all top heavy with non-commissioned officers. This reflects Fetterman's choices during the inspection, and the probable inclusion of a mounted infantry group from these three company details. Company H contributed the other first sergeant to the detail. That was Alexander Smith. Margaret Carrington later praised him as
"the pride of the mounted infantry."

The cavalry component rank distribution is very close to a normal cavalry company, but light on privates. Fetterman's composite company exhibits rank distribution heavier with experienced soldiers. 26.3% non-commissioned officers and specialists, and only 73.7% privates.

Table 3 looks at the composite company by enlistment date. For each company detail, individual date of enlistment data distribute the men into Civil War Veterans (1861-1864), end of war enlistees (1865), and the most recent recruits (1866). Not all 1866 recruits lacked military experience. Two columns for 1866 divide those with no earlier military experience (Raw) from those that had been soldiers or had other military background (Exp). As an example of the latter group, Thomas Maddeon was an 1866 recruit, but was detailed as the regimental armorer because of his experience with firearms.

Table 3. Date of Enlistment Distribution in Fetterman’s Composite Company

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>1861-64</th>
<th>1865</th>
<th>1866 Raw</th>
<th>1866 Exp</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</table>


Table 3 makes clear that Fetterman’s command was not mostly raw recruits. Overall, only 42.1% of those men could be considered that inexperienced. The cavalry component does not fit Olson’s description at all. Nearly two-thirds (63.0%) were either veterans or experienced cavalrymen. When we consider that Powell had been training the cavalry, and Fetterman drilling the infantry constantly since the debacle of 6 December, even the untrained had received at least some basic training in maneuver and manual of arms. Carrington considered Fetterman’s eighty men among the best from the Fort Phil Kearny garrison. In March 1867, during his testimony before the Sanborn Commission, Colonel Carrington called

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118 Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 214.
these men "nearly 80 of the choice men of my command." The detachment of infantry, in particular, "was of choice men, the pride of their companies."^{199}

Fetterman's detail included seventy-six enlisted men, making it the equivalent of the average company at Fort Phil Kearny in 1866. This force was a nineteenth century combat team combining two of the three basic types of combat organizations of that day: infantry, cavalry, and artillery. To be sure, Fetterman's composite company was not a crack force of combat experienced veterans. However, short of stripping the companies of the non-commissioned officers and veteran privates, Fetterman's amalgam of veterans and dedicated recruits was the best led, trained, motivated, and armed composite company that Fort Phil Kearny could have fielded on 21 December 1866.

All told, Fetterman's command included forty-nine infantrymen from the Eighteenth Infantry, twenty-seven cavalrymen from Company C, Second Cavalry, three officers (Fetterman, Brown, and Grummond), and the two civilians, Wheatly and Fisher. There were probably fifty-one men on horseback: three officers, twenty-seven cavalrymen, nineteen mounted infantrymen, and the two frontiersmen. Company A and Company C details added thirty men on foot. Altogether Fetterman's composite company numbered eight-one, just the number Carrington later used to create his now famous myth.

ORDERS

It was now approaching 11:15 A.M.^{120} While the sergeants and corporals readied the composite company, Fetterman received his orders from Colonel Carrington.

In Carrington's official after-action report dated 3 January 1867, he characterized Grummond and Fetterman as both ambitious to win honor. Because of that, he reported, "My instructions were therefore peremptory and explicit." His "instruction to Brevet Lieutenant Colonel [Captain] Fetterman" was "Support the wood train, relieve it, and report to me. Do not engage or pursue Indians at its expense. Under no circumstances pursue over the ridge, viz. Lodge Trail Ridge, as per map in your possession."^{121} Since Fetterman's command was wiped out after crossing Lodge Trail Ridge, Carrington charged

^{120} Ibid., 46.
^{121} Ibid., 40.

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That charge, based on those orders, has remained the verdict of historians for over a century.

When J.W. Vaughn published Indian Fights: New Facts on Seven Encounters in 1966, he challenged the standard Carrington version of the orders. Vaughn declared, "we do not know definitely what Carrington's orders were to Fetterman because no one overheard them." He then proposed that Carrington may have ordered Fetterman out on an offensive against the Indians, and therefore what befell the eighty-one men was not anyone's fault, but simply the fortunes of war. Vaughn admitted that Carrington gave orders about Lodge Trail Ridge to Grummond, but questioned that they ever got to Fetterman, or that they conflicted with earlier verbal orders Carrington may have given to Fetterman.

Finally, Vaughn accused Carrington of fabricating a bad map and coloring his accounts of the Fetterman Fight "in his efforts to clear himself." Essentially, Vaughn inferred that Carrington concocted the official version of his orders to Fetterman after the disaster in order to save his military career.

Vaughn did not note where he got the idea that no one overheard Carrington give the orders to Fetterman. He may have been aware of a speech by retired Brigadier General William H. Bisbee at the 1928 meeting of the Order of Indian Wars. A close friend of Captain Fetterman, Bisbee was the regimental adjutant at Fort Phil Kearny, who left the post on 10 December to join General Cooke's staff in Omaha.

Bisbee used his speech to defend his deceased friend. He disclosed that Alson B. Ostrander had sent him a letter the previous year about Carrington's orders. Once a clerk for General Cooke, Ostrander had joined his Company B at Fort Reno at the end of November 1866 and spent some time at both Reno and Phil Kearny. When he wrote his memoir of those experiences, An Army Boy of the Sixties, he included the standard disobedience to orders story in that memoir. As Bisbee related the story, soon after his book was published, Ostrander met an old comrade from Fort Phil Kearny, F. M. Fassendan (Fessenden), at a Grand Army of the Republic encampment. Ostrander sent Fessenden a copy of his book. Fessenden wrote back to Ostrander that he had the story of Carrington's orders to Fetterman all wrong. Fessenden recalled being detailed as headquarters orderly that day. He was there when Powell and Fetterman came in, heard Fetterman ask to command the relief force, and heard Carrington's orders to Fetterman. According to

122 Ibid., 49.
123 Ibid., Indian Fights, 81-82.
124 Ibid., 82-90.
Fessenden. Carrington told Fetterman. "Colonel, go out and bring in that wood train." Fessenden recalled that "not a word was said about how, or route, or where not to go."  

Whether or not Fessenden’s story was behind Vaughn’s version, John D. McDermott disposed of both of them in his 1991 article “Price of Arrogance.” McDermott deflated Fessenden’s story by pointing out that Carrington gave Fetterman his orders in front of Carrington’s quarters and repeated them on the parade ground, not at headquarters.  127 He then dealt a blow to Vaughn’s theory by producing abundant eyewitness documentation. McDermott’s list of those who heard Carrington’s orders not to cross Lodge Trail Ridge included Sergeant Alexander Brown, Private Thomas Lewis, and Lieutenant Alexander Wands. Letters from surgeon C. H. Hines on 1 January 1867, Chaplain David White on 2 January 1867, and an unidentified sergeant on 28 December 1866, all supported Carrington’s claim.  128 McDermott put Vaughn’s theory to rest in a footnote. “J. W. Vaughn in his study of the battle suggests that Fetterman may not have disobeyed orders, mistakenly noting that there were no eyewitnesses to substantiate Carrington’s claims.”  129

With no other reasonable alternative than to accept Carrington’s official version of his orders to Captain Fetterman, what did his orders mean? Support the wood train, relieve it, and report to me. Carrington specified the mission was to assist the wood train by relieving it of the Indian attack, and when that was done to report that fact back to Carrington. Do not engage or pursue Indians at its expense. This did not enjoin Fetterman from engaging Indians or pursuing them, unless those actions left the wood train vulnerable to danger or loss. Carrington had already reinforced the wood train that morning with Corporal Legrow’s detail, which gave the train the equivalent of an infantry company. With nearly ninety men, the train could mount a capable defense while the relief force maneuvered to support. Under no circumstances pursue over the ridge, viz, Lodge Trail Ridge, as per map in your possession. Carrington said that if

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125 Ibid., 59, 86.
127 McDermott, “Price of Arrogance.” 52. Frances Carrington, My Army Life, 144. Frances said the orders were given within her hearing and repeated on the parade ground. Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 201. Margaret said the orders were given in front of Gummond’s house, next to the Carrington quarters, and Lieutenant Wands repeated them once. From Margaret’s account it is not clear if this Wands repetition was directed at Fetterman, or is the repetition that Wands gave Grummond. See Vaughn, Indian Fights, 46.
129 Ibid., 52.
Fetterman did engage or pursue Indians without risking the wood train, he was constrained from going over the crest of Lodge Trail Ridge, defined according to a map in Fetterman’s possession.

Carrington’s last phrase, as per map in your possession, is a curiosity. If, as John D. McDermott contended, Fetterman was simply ordered to do what Powell did on 19 December, go straight down the wood road to the corralled train, there was no need for a map. Fetterman had been down the road before, was familiar with the area, and on the morning of 21 December, the train was only one and one-half miles from the post. That Carrington included the map phrase in his official version of his orders infers that something else referring to that map had been discussed verbally between him and Fetterman, that did not end up in the language of the orders.

Before discussing what that something else probably was, there is another oddity evident in the historiography of the last phrase, as per map in your possession. Beginning with Colonel Carrington’s official report of the Fetterman Fight on 3 January 1867, Carrington’s orders to Fetterman were included five times in records that he or his two spouses authored and influenced. The official 1867 report, including the map phrase, also appeared in an 1884 publication by Henry B. Carrington titled The Indian Question, a short collection of Carrington miscellany. In this 1884 version of his official report, Carrington added a parenthetical reference following the phrase as per map in your possession. He inserted “(For map, see page 204, “Absaraka.”) into the body of his report. The Absaraka map is reproduced as Map 5. See also Map 6, Remi Nadeau’s version of the same map.

The map phrase is conspicuously missing from the other three Carrington sources. Margaret Carrington left it out in Absaraka in 1868, as did Cyrus Townsend Brady in his Carrington-corrected Indian Fights and Fighters in 1904, and it is missing in Frances Carrington’s My Army Life, 1910. Colonel Carrington could not have omitted the map phrase from his official report if that is what he actually ordered Fetterman to do. But it is peculiar to find the phrase nonexistent in the three unofficial Carrington publications. That omission also found its way into Dee Brown’s The Fetterman Massacre. Even though his footnote reference was to the official report as found in the Senate Document Indian Operations on the Plains, Brown dropped the map phrase in conformity with the three unofficial Carrington versions.

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130 Ibid.
131 Henry B. Carrington, Indian Question, 21-26. The insertion is on page 22.
the phrase unimportant, or did Carrington try to conceal something? Is this innocuous-looking phrase a clue to something else discussed verbally between the two officers that did not make it into the orders? This writer believes the phrase *as per map in your possession*, when connected to what Fetterman actually did after 11:15 A.M., helps explain why the Fetterman Fight happened at all, and why it occurred where the Indians set the ambush.

The following scenario is what this writer believes probably took place before Fetterman left the fort that morning. Captain Fetterman knew that Carrington would not approve a grand scheme like the earlier Tongue River proposal, and he knew after the near disaster of 6 December, that the Fort Phil Kearny garrison was not trained well enough for anything like that. The second wood train attack in two days offered a chance for something simpler and less risky.

When Fetterman came to Colonel Carrington insisting on his right as battalion commander to take out the relief force in place of Captain Powell, both knew General Cooke had repeatedly ordered Carrington to do something offensively. Carrington had touted the 6 December skirmish as an offensive operation. Fetterman offered his own company, now trained for two weeks in the manual of arms. He probably said in effect, “let me add some infantry to the cavalry you were going to send out with Powell, and I will strike the Indians hard enough to keep them away from the post for awhile.” Carrington had some misgivings about the idea, but recognized the possibilities in what Fetterman had proposed. If he let Fetterman and Grummond at least try something offensively that morning and it was successful, Carrington would look good in his next report to General Cooke. If the Indians got away, like they usually did, then Carrington could stop his officers from pressuring him to try such tactics in the future, and he could peacefully stay in his defensive shell until the regimental reorganization came at the beginning of the year. Carrington acquiesced, and Fetterman had his chance.

Carrington was not going to give Fetterman and Grummond carte blanche to do whatever they pleased, however. Lessons from the recent 6 December skirmish were still fresh in Carrington’s mind, and following that action, Fetterman had acknowledged the dangers of getting into an ambush and hand-to-hand fighting with plains warriors. Carrington and Fetterman briefly glanced at a copy of Carrington’s topographically inaccurate sketch map of the Phil Kearny area. Knowing that Carrington had reinforced the wood train that morning, Fetterman proposed to take his infantry and the cavalry detail, go north of
Sullivant Hill and take the attacking Indian warriors from the rear. His infantry would have an opportunity to fire volleys at the Indians fleeing from the wood train before they crossed Lodge Trail Ridge into Peno Creek Valley. The cavalry would protect his flanks, make sure the wood train was secure, and provide short distance pursuit. It was similar to the 6 December plan, but on a smaller scale geographically since part of Fetterman's command would be on foot.

Carrington wanted the lessons of 6 December made clear in his orders to Fetterman. With that in mind, Carrington's curtly phrased orders included an understanding of their verbal exchange. *Support the wood train, by threatening the Indians from the rear, relieve it from attack, and report to me that the train is safe. When you take your infantry north of Sullivant Hill, do not engage or pursue Indians at its expense. If the Indians attacking the wood train cross Lodge Trail Ridge, Under no circumstances pursue over the ridge, viz. Lodge Trail Ridge, because that will take you back into Peno Creek Valley where we were ambushed on 6 December, as per map in your possession.*

(4) FETTERMAN FIGHT MYTH (B). DISOBEIDENT—ORDERS REPEATED Part of the disobedience myth is built on the belief that before Fetterman left Fort Phil Kearny he was reminded at least three times of Carrington's orders not to cross Lodge Trail Ridge. Various versions of repeated orders sprinkle secondary accounts of the Fetterman Fight. This belief is so persistent that it appeared recently (1997) in a popular western history magazine article. According to B. F. McCune and Louis Hart in their article "The Fatal Fetterman Fight," Carrington "apparently had repeated the orders three times."  

In his official report of the Fetterman Fight, Colonel Carrington said he first gave his orders, discussed above, to Captain Fetterman. He then ordered Lieutenant Grummond to "report to Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Fetterman, implicitly obey orders, and not leave him." Carrington next reported that "before the command left I instructed Lieutenant Wands, my regimental quartermaster and acting adjutant, to repeat these orders." Finally, Carrington, "fearing still that the spirit of ambition might override prudence . . . I crossed the parade and from a sentry platform halted the cavalry and again repeated my precise orders." What is not made clear in the official report is who heard what. The impression has

been that both Fetterman and Grummond had the orders repeated to them at least three times before they left the post.

Margaret Carrington mentioned the original orders given to Fetterman, and one repetition by Wands, but did not specify to whom Wands repeated the orders. Frances Carrington further muddied the water in her memoir *My Army Life*. She said Carrington first gave Fetterman his orders "within my hearing" (probably near her quarters) while the detail was forming. Next, Carrington's instructions "were repeated on the parade-ground when the line was formed." A third mention was directed at her husband, Lieutenant George W. Grummond. "Report to Captain Fetterman. implicitly obey his orders, and never leave him." Fourth, Frances then solicited the assistance of Lieutenant Wands to remind Grummond "for his family's sake to be prudent and avoid rash movements, or any pursuit." Finally, Frances recalled, "with these orders ringing in their ears they left the gate." Before they were out of earshot, Colonel Carrington climbed upon the sentry walk inside the stockade. "halted the column, and in clear tones, heard by everybody, repeated his orders more minutely, 'Under no circumstances must you cross Lodge Trail Ridge:' and the column moved quickly from sight." With that, Frances had the total repetitions up to five.

Frances Carrington's litany of repeated orders, composed over forty years later, reads like a attorney's brief, listing witnesses against Fetterman and Grummond. Given Henry Carrington's legal background, he may have provided the necessary assistance with this story. In 1910, the Carringtons were probably more interested in historical vindication than historicity.

If Carrington distrusted Fetterman and Grummond so much, why did he send them out with the relief column? Fetterman's position as battalion commander and his combat experience made it difficult for Carrington to refuse him. Grummond, despite his faults, was the only officer besides Powell who had experience with mounted soldiers, albeit mounted infantry. They were the logical choices to go.

Who ordered who to do what? Colonel Carrington's official report clearly indicated that he had given the original orders to Fetterman. Fessenden's memoir suggests that the first discussion about relieving the wood train took place at post headquarters. After they left the headquarters there would have

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Fetterman the orders later recorded in Carrington's official report. The probable location was in front of either the Grummond or Carrington quarters, which stood next to each other. Frances Carrington's memory of a repetition to Fetterman in front of the formed detail, may be the Wands repetition mentioned by Margaret Carrington, but that is not clear.

After Fetterman received his orders from Carrington, and they had been reviewed once more by the adjutant, Lieutenant Wands. Captain Fetterman led his slower infantry command out the mill gate at the southwestern corner of the post around 11:15 A.M. This infantry detail, under the direct command of Captain Fetterman, numbered thirty men, including Fetterman. Lieutenant Wands remembered the departure of the cavalry in his testimony before the Sanborn Commission on 4 March 1867. Fetterman had his orders, but Grummond had not yet received his. Grummond asked Wands to find out from Carrington who was going to take out the cavalry. Carrington directed Wands to order Grummond to take the cavalry detail of twenty-seven men, report to Fetterman, already a quarter mile from the fort, and follow Fetterman's orders. Wands included Carrington's reminder that the command was to relieve the wood train, bring it back if necessary, or if Fetterman thought it best, take it to the woods and bring it back, and "under no circumstances were they to cross the Bluff in pursuit of Indians." Carrington expected Fetterman to follow his orders, but was concerned that Grummond might do something independently as Grummond had done on 6 December. Carrington's words to Grummond made it clear he was to follow Fetterman's orders, relieve the wood train, and not cross Lodge Trail Ridge.

After Wands gave Carrington's instructions to Lieutenant Grummond, and while the Corporal of the Guard was opening the gate, Wands returned to Grummond and repeated the orders, and asked if Grummond understood. This repetition may be Wand's response to Frances' request, recorded in her memoir, and not one ordered by Colonel Carrington. Grummond said he did understand and would follow his orders "to the letter." Lieutenant Grummond then took his cavalry detachment out of the post. They had gone about two hundred yards when Colonel Carrington, on the sentinel’s platform, called out to

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138 Frances Carrington, My Army Life, 144.
139 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 46. Vaughn, Indian Fights, 45.
140 Vaughn, Indian Fights, 46.
Grummond in a loud voice, repeating the same instruction given to Grummond by Lieutenant Wands. Asked if he understood them, Grummond replied, “I do.”

Wands’ testimony clears up the repeated orders myth considerably. Carrington gave Fetterman his orders, apparently had Lieutenant Wands review them on the parade ground, and then Fetterman took his infantry detail out of the fort. Carrington ordered Grummond to take the cavalry out and join Fetterman. His orders actually delivered by Lieutenant Wands. Grummond’s wife Frances then petitioned Wands to caution Grummond about following orders, and to avoid doing something rash. Carrington delivered the final reminder to Grummond personally from the stockade wall. After Grummond had demonstrated his penchant for chasing Indians into ambushes on 6 December, Carrington worded his orders to Grummond to insure he stayed with Fetterman and followed Fetterman’s orders implicitly. This suggests that Carrington’s real worry was Grummond not Fetterman.

Before the cavalry had gone very far, Wheatly and Fisher, civilians armed with Henry repeaters, had ridden off to join them. Apparently without Carrington’s authorization, Captain Frederick H. Brown, astride a borrowed pony belonging to Jimmy Carrington, had also slipped out the gate to join the cavalry and mounted infantry. In two details, Fetterman and eighty other men set off to relieve the wood train.

As the command left, Carrington turned his attention to a small group of Lakotas who had emerged north of Big Piney. About ten mounted warriors appeared on the hills across Big Piney Creek; they rode down to the road crossing below the fort. Four warriors shouted obscenities and challenges at the garrison while the others watched the relief force leave the stockade. Carrington, assisted by Captain Powell and a few men, loaded the field howitzer with case shot, and fired three rounds at the small party at the road crossing. The shells dropped near enough to dismount one warrior, and flushed about thirty more out of the brush along the creek. Both parties rode hastily out of range and disappeared.

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141 Ibid. Frances Carrington, My Army Life, 144.
143 Ten Eyck, diary, 21 December 1866.
144 Vaughn, Indian Fights, 44. Lieutenant Arnold and Private George C. Mackey recalled the four swearing Indians at the Sanborn Commission hearings in 1867.
north end of the ridge spur. White Bull heard the case shot explosions. The muffled sounds were nearer, but did not last long. The Cheyennes also heard the noise. Those waiting in ambush did not know what was happening over the ridge, but they knew they must wait. The akicita continued keeping the younger warriors in place. They must be patient; wait for the hundred in the hands.

FETTERMAN OBEYS ORDERS

In 1991, John D McDermott proclaimed “the story of December 21, 1866, is quite simple.” After Carrington gave Fetterman his orders, McDermott asserted that Fetterman simply and deliberately disregarded them. “Fetterman pushed over Lodge Trail Ridge and down the other side, where he followed decoys into an ambush.” What happened is that simple, if one ignored the Native American sources and other eyewitness accounts. Those challenge the simplicity of McDermott’s Arrogance Thesis. What did Fetterman actually do after he left the fort? The answer is not as simple as McDermott’s thesis demands.

At the very outset, it is clear that Fetterman had not been ordered to do precisely what Powell did two days earlier. Everyone watching from the fort could see his infantry column headed north toward Big Piney Creek, not westward along the wood road. Lieutenant Wands saw Grummond’s cavalry join Fetterman about a mile from the post. Private John Guthrie, Company C, Second Cavalry said Fetterman took the old Holiday Coach Road, which ran west of the post a short distance, then joined a new cutoff road at the Bozeman Trail crossing of Big Piney Creek. Private William Murphy, from Fetterman’s Company A, saw “the men start on a double quick and go up over Sullivant’s Hill.”

In March 1867, Carrington added detail about Fetterman’s movements that were not in his official report of 4 January. He testified that about the time Grummond joined Fetterman’s infantry, the pickets on Pilot Hill reported the wood train wagons had broken corral and were on their way to cut timber. Carrington “entertained no apprehension of further danger.” Private O’Brien, a guard with the wood with small metal balls, a bursting charge, and a timed fuse to explode the shell at a calculated distance from the gun.

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146 Vestal, Warpath, 60.
147 Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, 230.
149 Vaughn, Indian Fights, 47.
151 Murphy, “Forgotten Battalion,” 389.
152 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 44.
train, recalled, "after repulsing the Indians, we held a consultation and decided to go on to the mountains for our load of logs." They never saw Fetterman's relief column, and were not even aware the column had left the fort, until the train returned later in the day. Carrington's extra guard had done their job, and signals from the Lakota scouts to the wood train war party pulled those warriors back from their decoy assignment as soon as Fetterman's command was clear of the fort.

Carrington remarked that Fetterman's command had "moved in good order" and Grummond's mounted men quickly covered the 1,300 yards to Big Piney Creek, and joined Fetterman "just west of the ordinary ferry crossing." They had gone north along the cutoff road, over the east shoulder of Sullivant Hill, and down to cross Big Piney Creek. Carrington's testimony on Fetterman's movements after reaching the creek, is enlightening. "I remarked the fact the he had deployed his men as skirmishers, and was evidently moving wisely up the creek and along the southern slope of Lodge Trail Ridge, with good promise of cutting off the Indians as they should withdraw, repulsed at the train, and his position giving him perfect vantage ground to save the train if the Indians pressed the attack." Carrington was complimenting his best combat officer, Fetterman, for executing the maneuver they had likely agreed on before Fetterman left that morning! If that was not what Carrington had wanted Fetterman to do, he could easily have dispatched a mounted orderly to recall the relief force and send them in another direction.

Lest he be accused of ordering Fetterman to his death, Carrington hedged his testimony with a legalistic statement. It was designed to distance him from culpability in the disaster that followed. "It is true that the usual course was to follow the road directly to the train, but the course adopted was not an error, unless there was then a purpose to disobey orders." Carrington was really saying, Fetterman's maneuver on the southern slope of Lodge Trail Ridge was what he had ordered, as long as he did not cross the ridge. So far, by Carrington's own testimony, Fetterman had obeyed orders.

**DECOYS**

By the time Fetterman's composite company had crossed Big Piney Creek and turned west, Colonel Carrington realized they had not taken a surgeon with them. As combat and casualties were

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155 Ibid.
possible. Carrington sent two of his orderlies with Dr. C.M. Hines, to find the wood train. Carrington instructed Hines that if he was not needed at the train, to join Fetterman and return with him.  

As Fetterman’s command moved west on the south slope of Lodge Trail Ridge, they disappeared from view by Fort Phil Kearny observers. The eastern end of Sullivant Hill interrupted the line of sight. Margaret Carrington recalled, “We had all watched Captain Fetterman until the curve of Sullivant Hills shut him off, and then he was on the southern slope of the ridge, apparently intending to cut off the retreat of the Indians from the train.” Carrington was satisfied that Fetterman’s force was “moving westward along the slope of Lodge Trail Ridge, and apparently in good order, with no indication that it would pass over it.” With both Hines and Fetterman out of view. Carrington returned to his headquarters. It was about 11:30 A.M.

Where Fetterman’s command went during the next thirty minutes is controversial, with Carrington’s version apparently not matching other eye witness testimony before the Sanborn Commission. Carrington believed or claimed Fetterman continued westward on Lodge Trail Ridge, crossed the ridge crest into Peno Creek Valley, and then retreated up the spur ridge into the ambush. If Carrington’s original orders to Fetterman. Under no circumstances pursue over the ridge, viz. Lodge Trail Ridge, as per map in your possession, meant avoiding Peno Creek Valley, then Carrington could charge Fetterman with “gross disobedience” only if that is where Fetterman went. (See Map 7. Carrington’s map of the Fetterman Fight drawn for Brady’s 1904 book. Carrington showed Fetterman’s route much farther west than the other officers reported. See also Map 9, J. W. Vaughn’s map comparing the different routes recalled by Carrington and other officers at the fort.)

After the composite company disappeared from view behind Sullivant Hill, where did Fetterman lead them? Lieutenant Wilbur F. Arnold testified in March 1867. “When next I saw Colonel Fetterman’s command the infantry were deployed as skirmishers along Piney Fork in an entirely different direction from that which the wood train had taken. He then crossed Piney Fork, still diverging from the wood train.

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157 Ibid.
158 Ibid., 44. C. H. Hines to John Hines, No. 16, Massacre of Troops, 9. Dr. Hines wrote that only one man accompanied him.
159 Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 203–205. Measured on a modern topographical map, Fetterman would have gone less than a mile before he disappeared behind Sullivant Hill.
160 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 45.
161 Ibid. Brady, Indian Fights, 28.
and took road towards Peno Valley . . . ." 161 The road towards Peno Valley was the Bozeman Trail, which crossed Lodge Trail Ridge well to the east of where Fetterman had crossed the ridge on 6 December.

Captain Tenodor Ten Eyck testified on 5 July 1867, that after Fetterman arrived near the road ford at Piney Creek, they "marched a short distance above this ford [west], then countermarched and crossed the Creek at the ford, on the ice." Ten Eyck continued. "The infantry marched up the Virginia City road which follows up a ravine for some miles, being flanked by the cavalry on the ridges. Soon after this the command disappeared from the sight of those in the fort at a point about three and one half or four miles distant and where the road descends into the valley of Peno Creek." 162

Captain James Powell witnessed on 24 July 1867, that Fetterman’s command “filed to the right and went on the Big Horn road.” He observed, the “command passed out of sight of the garrison in about two miles, nothing was seen in his front or on his flanks at that time.” 163 On 4 March 1867, Lieutenant Wands gave his version of Fetterman’s movements from Piney Creek. “[T]he command crossed Piney Creek to the other bank, and proceeded up a long ridge on the opposite side of the creek from the wood train, and about three miles from the crossing, to a point about two miles from where the wood train was corralled.” 164 So far this sounds like Carrington’s version. Although Wands’ description is vague, J. W Vaughn identified the point two miles north of the wood train corral. This would place Fetterman at the point where the Bozeman Trail crossed the ridge, or slightly west of that point 165 Clearly, Wands’ testimony does not support the Carrington version, but matches the Arnold, Ten Eyck and Powell testimonies, placing the Fetterman command on the Bozeman Trail.

There is some disagreement about Fetterman’s precise movements after reaching Big Piney Creek. He appears to have marched west along the creek. Either before or after fording that stream, his composite company continued west far enough to see that the Lakota war party attacking the wood train from Sullivant Hill, had already withdrawn, and crossed the creek to Lodge Trail Ridge. Before about 11:45, he had counter marched the command back to the Bozeman Trail and turned north toward Lodge Trail Ridge. With an infantry skirmish line centered on the trail and cavalry and mounted infantry protecting his flanks.

161 Vaughn, Indian Fights, 54.
162 Ibid., 55.
163 Ibid., 55-56.
164 Ibid., 53.
165 Ibid., 53-54.
and rear, the entire command moved toward the crest of Lodge Trail Ridge in the vicinity of the trail crossing, less than a mile and a half away.

What had drawn Fetterman north along the Montana road to Lodge Trail Ridge? The Fetterman/Carrington operation that day was planned to inflict enough Indian casualties that the warriors would leave the post alone for a while, just like the lulls in late September and early October following Brown's pursuit and skirmish with the Arapahoes. When Fetterman was too late to damage the wood train war party, he sought new targets for his composite company. After he reversed direction back to the east the only Indians available to attack were the decoy and scout parties that had fled from Carrington's shelling. They were still south of Lodge Trail Ridge.

Numbering perhaps three dozen men, the decoy and scout parties were mounted on the best and swiftest war ponies. Their original plan to draw the soldier relief force after them into the ambush had been foiled when Carrington's artillery detail shelled them out of concealment in the brush along Big Piney Creek. They retreated north to wait. If they were still visible, Fetterman ignored them when he marched west between Sullivant Hill and Lodge Trail Ridge. However, they were as patient as the ambush warriors. When Fetterman turned about and came east to the Bozeman Trail, they made themselves available as tempting targets, that dangerous function of decoys.

To draw Fetterman north, the ten decoys under Crazy Horse stayed in front of the soldiers, just out of rifle range. The remaining scout warriors flitted about the flanks of the moving company, teasing the cavalry and mounted infantry with sudden charges and abrupt retreats. As Lieutenant Wands had observed, "There were about forty or fifty Indians riding around the command, firing at them during the march from the crossing at the creek, up the ridge, and the command was returning the fire." This sporadic gunfire probably began a few minutes before noon.

Renewed gunfire could also be heard by waiting warriors hidden across the ridge. The cavalry would fire, and then stop following the decoys. Then the decoys had to return and attack again, be shot at, retreat, and be followed again. They took turns charging, whooping, and waving blankets at the soldiers' horses, letting the other decoys move away. One Lakota was especially remembered for his role in the

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166 Two Moons in Hyde, George Bent, 344.
167 Vaughn, Indian Fights, 53.
168 Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, 230.
decoy party. Crazy Horse dismounted several times, pretending to tie a rope, to look at the hoof of his horse, and once even sitting down to build a little fire behind a bush, letting the others leave him behind.169

In the meantime, Dr. Hines had ridden three miles out the wood train road, and found that the train had moved on, without casualty. As he had been ordered, Hines now attempted to join Fetterman in the valley between Sullivant Hill and Lodge Trail Ridge. As they rode north around the west end of Sullivant Hill, they ran into a large number of warriors on the south slope of Lodge Trail Ridge, probably the wood train war party and some others who joined them. There was no sign of Fetterman’s command, which had already reversed course. Seeing that reaching Fetterman from that direction was impossible, the Hines party returned to the post by the wood road and reported the safety of the wood train to Carrington. Hines then set out to the north with four men to find the composite company.170

By that time, Fetterman had led his command in good skirmish order, up the Bozeman Trail incline to the saddle crest of Lodge Trail Ridge. Fully aware of his orders, Fetterman halted the command.171 At Fort Phil Kearny, an officer with field glasses could see Fetterman’s company stopped on the crest of Lodge Trail Ridge. Lieutenant Wands testified, “They were seen to halt on the crest of the ridge, about four miles from the post.”172

Although crossing Lodge Trail Ridge as per map in [his] possession technically referred to crossing that portion of the ridge farther west where he had gone on 6 December. Fetterman knew he had gone far enough. The actions of the decoys looked too much like those he had seen two weeks earlier in Peno Creek Valley. Despite the size of his company compared to the decoys he could see, Fetterman was suspicious.173 The winter sun was high overhead. It was nearly noon.174

169 Sandoz, Crazy Horse, 199-200.
171 Appleman, Great Western Indian Fights, 124.
172 Vaughn, Indian Fights, 53. Measured on a modern topographical map, the distance “as the crow flies” from the fort site to the saddle where the trail crossed the ridge is less than two and one half miles. Even on the Bozeman Trail, it was certainly less than three miles.
173 Nadeau, Fort Laramie, 223, 227. Nadeau discussed the technicality on 227. He found it difficult to believe Fetterman, Brown, and Grummond did not recognize the decoy patterns. This writer believes that at least Fetterman did, and that is why he stopped on the crest of the ridge.
174 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 46.
What happened to Fetterman’s command after they crossed Lodge Trail Ridge and disappeared from Wand’s field glass view must be reconstructed from battlefield evidence recorded after the fight, and from Indian accounts. There are at least twelve informants who contributed to the Indian accounts; eight Cheyennes and four Lakotas. Cheyenne accounts include Two Moons and Little Wolf (through George Bent); Wolf Tooth, White Elk, and Little Sun (through John Stands in Timber); White Elk (through George Bird Grinnell); Wooden Leg, Iron Teeth, and “a Cheyenne old man,” possibly Sun Bear, (through Thomas B. Marquis). Lakota accounts include White Bull, a Miniconjou, (through Stanley Vestal); Black Elk and Fire Thunder, both Oglalas, (through John G. Neihardt); and an unnamed Lakota informant (through Mitch Boyer).  

When using the Indian accounts, two things must be noted. First, what was remembered is related to where the informant was geographically during the fight (his perspective), and what information may have been recalled from others retelling stories afterward. Second, these Indian accounts have all come through interviewer filters. This is especially important in the two longest accounts, White Elk’s through Grinnell, and White Bull’s through Vestal. Grinnell’s recording is somewhat clearer, because White Elk walked the battlefield with Grinnell pointing out locations on the ground where events occurred. Grinnell published White Elk’s version in 1915. Vestal’s work with White Bull lasted from 1928 to 1930, and Vestal published the memoir in 1934. Vestal’s account did not benefit from the same kind of walking tour Grinnell’s did. As a consequence, Vestal tends to embellish White Bull’s story with inaccuracies, adding inappropriate details, and telescoping geography. Because of their length, the White Bull and White Elk accounts will form the basis of the Indian version presented here, with the other accounts included for additional details.

With the Fetterman command halted along the crest of Lodge Trail Ridge, the question was, what would Fetterman do now? Would he retreat back down the Bozeman Trail toward Fort Phil Kearny, or continue north after the decoys? Since the rest of the story comes chiefly from Indian accounts, it is obvious what happened. How it happened is not so clear. McDermott would like us to believe Fetterman

175 Footnoted references will be found through the narrative that follows, rather than being listed as a group here.
simply ordered his men after the decoys, deliberately disobeyed his orders, and marched his men into a fatal ambush from which none of them returned alive. The most likely story is not that simple.

(4) FETTERMAN MYTH (B). DISOBEIDENT—CROSSED THE RIDGE. Hidden Cheyennes and the decoys also saw Fetterman stop on the ridge. Was he going to refuse like Powell had done two days earlier? The decoys could not allow that to happen. The Miniconjou *winkte* had promised them a hundred in the hands.

After they had crossed Lodge Trail Ridge, some of the decoys continued down the Bozeman Trail. Big Nose, a Cheyenne decoy mounted on a black horse, rode back and forth in front of the soldiers as they bunched up on the crest of the ridge. He appeared to be trying to hold the soldiers back while the other warriors got away. The soldiers had stopped following, but continued shooting at this Cheyenne decoy. With boldness running to recklessness, Big Nose then charged back into the mounted soldiers. Riding in from the right (west), Big Nose disappeared among the soldiers, came out again to the left (east), wheeled his horse about, and repeated the charge in reverse. Big Nose’s bold sally worked. Exactly who moved first is not known for sure, but some of the mounted men broke the stalemate on the ridge and chased down the ridge after Big Nose.

Some confusion in the Indian memoirs stems from translators converting any reference to mounted soldiers to mean *cavalry*. Remembering that all three officers, both civilians, and about nineteen infantrymen were also on horseback, as were the twenty-seven cavalrymen, helps clear up some misunderstandings. With that in mind, there are several candidates for the first to move after the daring Cheyenne warrior.

Some of the cavalry troopers may have charged. The cavalrymen had been waiting for the next action to redeem their reputations after their poor performance on 6 December. This was the next time, and the decoys had worn the mounted soldiers’ patience thin. Either Captain Brown or Lieutenant Grummond could have pursued Big Nose. Captain Brown’s mount Calico was killed on the northwest slope of the spur ridge not far from Peno Creek. So Brown was part of the vanguard group who got closest to the decoys.

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180 Appleman, *Great Western Indian Fights*, 124.
181 Ibid., 125.
Brown was eager for one last chance at combat, and Grummond's headstrong disposition had been demonstrated on 6 December. However, this writer believes the most likely candidates were either Wheatley or Fisher, or both. They were along for adventure and a chance to use their Henry rifles on the Indians. As civilians they were not used to military discipline and taking orders from Fetterman or anyone else. Most importantly, they ended up fighting at the bottom of the hill. That means they were in the group of mounted men who chased the decoys nearly to Peno Creek.

Whoever it was, some of the mounted men reacted to Big Nose's taunting, and soon the entire mounted force was galloping down the trail after the decoys. There was no "gross disobedience" by Captain William Judd Fetterman; he did not arrogantly and deliberately march his command over Lodge Trail Ridge into disaster. He simply lost control of the situation due to the bravado of Big Nose and the other decoys, and the reactions of some of his men. Crossing the ridge was more reaction than decision.

Lieutenant Wands saw Fetterman's men cross over the crest. "Colonel Fetterman's command suddenly moved over the ridge and the firing increased." Fetterman's mounted section rode down the northern slope of Lodge Trail Ridge, still following the Bozeman Trail. They pursued the decoy party out onto the hogback, and began the descent to Peno Creek. Fire Thunder, a sixteen-year-old Oglala warrior, recalled seeing the mounted force ride down the ridge spur; "the men we had sent ahead [the decoys] came running down the road between us, and the soldiers on horseback followed shooting." Waiting for the signal to attack, hidden warriors readied their weapons and pinched the nostrils of their ponies to keep them from whinnying to the soldier horses.

(4) FETTERMAN MYTH (C). FOOLISH—LED HIS MEN INTO AMBUSH. When his mounted men surged down the Bozeman Trail, Fetterman may have felt like Striped Elk, the Cheyenne chief whose young warriors chased Crow decoys into a disastrous ambush. Striped Elk knew it was a bad move, but he stayed to fight anyway, forfeiting his own life in the fighting. Fetterman did something similar. After 6 December, Fetterman knew that separating his command invited disaster. He did not want Grummond to accuse him of abandoning the horse soldiers to their fate. Militarily, Fetterman had little choice but to follow with the infantry in support.

182 Vaughn, Indian Fights, 53.
183 Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks, 11-12.
184 Vestal, Warpath, 60.
As it was, they appeared safe enough. The only Indians in sight were the decoys, now fleeing down the hogback toward Peno Creek. None of his men had left the ridge for the ravines east and west of the trail. Even though Fetterman’s foot soldiers were the only cohesive force still under his command, they were on the high ground, the Bozeman Trail route down the spine of the spur ridge. Brown, Grummond, and most of the mounted force, however, were now strung out, scattered individuals and small groups intent on getting down the ridge to Peno Creek.

By the time the decoys dropped off the ridge and crossed Peno Creek, the mounted soldiers had nearly reached the bottom of the ridge, and the infantry had ventured far enough out onto the hogback that they were within the Indian trap. The decoys divided into two parties, separated, rode a short distance in opposite directions, then turned and rode back across each other. That was the signal to spring the ambush. The hundred were in the hands.

The Fetterman Fight can be best understood as three separate but related actions whose duration in time somewhat overlapped. Fighting started initially at the north end of the spur, near Peno Creek, and coalesced into an action around some large boulders there, now referred to as the Wheatley-Fisher Rocks. Very soon after the first shots were exchanged at the north end of the ridge, the fighting began at the south end of the hogback a few hundred yards north of its intersection with the north slope of Lodge Trail ridge. Here was another group of large surface boulders, now marked by the Fetterman Fight monument. Because Fetterman moved his men into position around these rocks for protection and the main body of infantry fought there, they will be referred to in this narrative as the Fetterman Rocks. Between these two rocky extremes, the hogback sloped steadily, and occasionally steeply, for about one mile down toward Peno Creek. In this area Grummond’s mounted men fought a running battle back up the slope. Their movements were visible to the warriors near Peno Creek.

White Bull remembered the beginning of the fighting at the north end. When they saw the decoy signal, White Bull cried out, “We must start!” Indians from both sides of the trail leaped on their horses and rushed out of hiding yelling their war cries. White Bull’s Miniconjou comrades were closest to the soldiers and reached them first. Thunder Hawk was out front and was first to strike a soldier, counting

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185 Appleman, Great Western Indian Fights, 124-125. Vestal, Warpath, 60.
coup. Fire Thunder, with the Ogalas, ran to his sorrel horse as the fighting began. Armed with “six- 
shooter” and his bow and arrows, he joined the other Lakotas attacking the retreating troopers.

Shocked by the sudden appearance of hundreds of warriors, the soldiers abruptly halted. Then as 
“arrows began to fly and one or two of the soldiers were shot down,” the vanguard group retreated quickly 
back up the hill to the Wheatley-Fisher Rocks. About ten men stopped, dismounted, and flung 
themselves down behind the rocks. Included in this group were Wheatley, Fisher, Bugler Metzger of the 
cavalry, and about six or seven others, most of them mounted infantry. Wheatley and Fisher were armed 
with sixteen-shot Henry rifles, and the cavalry and mounted infantry were carrying Spencer breechloaders, 
all easily fired from a prone position behind the Wheatley-Fisher Rocks.

It was now just past noon. Meanwhile at Fort Phil Kearny, a sentry reported to Carrington’s office 
orderly that firing could be heard to the north. Carrington went to the lookout on top of his house. He 
heard “a few shots” in the direction of Peno Creek, probably shooting directed at the decoys during the 
chase down the hogback. Carrington’s glasses showed “neither Indian nor soldier.” After hearing several 
scattered shots, then more rapid firing, Carrington knew Fetterman was in a fight.

If Fetterman faced a large force like the three hundred Hunkpatilas in the 6 December skirmish, he 
would need reinforcements. Carrington sent the orderly to the officer of the day, and the sentry to the 
corporal of the guard to call out the men of the guard. He also sent a man working on his house, to have 
wagons and ambulances hitched, and to notify the quartermaster employees to report to the post magazine 
for arms. Carrington directed Captain Ten Eyck to prepare to move immediately with some infantry. 
After telling Wands to watch the ridge, Carrington personally went to organize a relief detail. Dr. Hines

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187 Vestal, Warpath, 60. 
188 Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks, 12. 
189 Vestal, Warpath, 60. Vestal says these men were infantry. From White Bull’s narrative it is apparent 
that this group of men included Wheatley, Fisher, Bugler Metzger of the cavalry, and about six or seven 
other men, mostly mounted infantry. They all became foot infantry when they jumped from their horses. 
This cannot be the Fetterman infantry group. 
190 Ibid., 60-61. Vestal had these men firing muzzle-loading rifles because he had interposed his 
knowledge of Fetterman’s infantrymen using Springfields on top of White Bull’s narrative. Vestal 
telescoped the two actions around rocks into one, garbling White Bull’s story. 
191 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 46. 
192 Ibid., 45. The scattered shooting probably occurred while the mounted soldiers made their downhill dash 
after the decoys. The rapid firing Carrington heard, may have been the beginning of the ambush fighting at 
the north end of the ridge near Peno Creek. 
193 Ibid.
heard the shooting as well, and realized it was probably impossible for him to reach Fetterman. He halted his small party and sent one of his four men back to the post for reinforcements.\textsuperscript{194}

While Hines waited, and Carrington began organizing his second relief detail of the day. Lieutenant Grummond and the remaining cavalry and mounted infantry stopped on the slope above the Wheatley-Fisher Rocks. They made no attempt to join the others at the rocks but stayed at least a hundred yards above the Wheatley-Fisher position.\textsuperscript{195} Captain Brown was probably part of the vanguard group, and his horse, Calico, may have died in the initial onslaught. Since Brown later died at the Fetterman Rocks, he had to have made his way south up the ridge. He may have caught one of the horses discarded by the defenders of Wheatley-Fisher Rocks, and joined the cavalry and mounted infantry at Lieutenant Grummond’s position.\textsuperscript{196}

The attack on the Wheatley-Fisher position was the most costly to the warriors. Carrington found a large number of expended cartridge shells there and counted sixty-five pools of clotted blood in the snow inside an acre around the rocks, when he surveyed the site on 22 December.\textsuperscript{197} John B. Sanborn reported later that fifty expended Henry casings were next to one of the dead citizens who had been using a Henry. There were also ten dead Indian ponies found within a few hundred yards of the position.\textsuperscript{198}

White Bull recalled the bravery of Eats Meat, a Miniconjou warrior who rode his horse right through the soldiers at the rocks. They shot him down after he passed through. Eats Meat was the first Lakota killed. Mounted Oglala warriors swept north and east, and Miniconjou warriors rode south and west, circling around this position that was closer to the flats along Peno Creek, where they could better maneuver their war ponies. There were so many warriors that despite the excellent weaponry and accurate shooting of the two civilians and veteran soldiers, the fight at Wheatley-Fisher Rocks did not last long.\textsuperscript{199}

After the Lakotas had killed most of the men behind the rocks, three survivors jumped up and ran up the slope to join the cavalry. When the Lakotas saw them running, they rushed to cut them off. Bull Eagle, on foot, got to the soldiers first. He raised his bow to strike one of them and count coup, but another fired at Bull Eagle\textsuperscript{199} dropping him with a bullet wound in the thigh. Bull Eagle could not move. While the

\textsuperscript{194} C. H. Hines to John Hines, No. 16, \textit{Massacre of Troops}, 10.
\textsuperscript{195} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{196} Vaughn, \textit{Indian Fights}, 77-79.
\textsuperscript{197} Colonel Carrington, \textit{Indian Operations}, 41.
\textsuperscript{198} John B. Sanborn report, \textit{Indian Hostilities}, 65.
three soldiers apparently got away to the cavalry. White Bull, remembering his responsibilities as Drum Keeper of the Fox Soldiers, ran to help his friend. Grasping him by the wrists, he dragged the wounded man over the edge of the ridge to safety, leaving him to the care of Bull Eagle’s uncle. White Bull returned to his horse and joined in the final charge. As he circled around he was knocked from his horse by the impact of a bullet through his blanket. Unwounded, he remounted and joined the warriors as they killed the rest of the men at Wheatley-Fisher Rocks.

Meanwhile, at the point highest on the spur ridge, but furthest south in Fetterman’s scattered command, Captain Fetterman and his regular infantrymen had tried to keep up with the mounted soldiers’ charge. They had just passed a group of large boulders, a few hundred yards north of where the road angled up from leaving Lodge Trail Ridge to begin its run down the hogback. Nearest them to the west were the mounted Cheyennes and Arapahoes, and some of the Oglalas. From the south and the east, more Lakota warriors isolated Fetterman’s infantrymen from possible reinforcement. Fetterman’s foot infantry were caught in the ambush as well.

Little Horse, a Cheyenne Contrary, signaled the Cheyennes to attack. When he shifted his contrary lance from his left hand behind his neck to his right hand, they all sprang up, mounted their war ponies and charged. Fetterman’s infantrymen fell back quickly to the only natural protection on the bare ridge, that group of large flat surface stones they had just marched past, where the 1908 monument stands today. During the ensuing fight at Fetterman Rocks about one dozen mounted infantrymen and Captain Brown joined Fetterman’s circled defensive position. Brown probably collected these men as he galloped up the ridge on his borrowed horse. There were eventually a total of forty-nine men who fought for their lives at the Fetterman Rocks. It is probable that some of the cavalrymen whose bodies were found here died in a separate action a short time after the Cheyennes and Lakotas overran and eliminated the infantry position at Fetterman Rocks.

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199 Vestal, Warpath, 61.
200 Ibid., 61-62.
201 Ibid., 62.
202 These are the writer’s conclusions based on the Indian accounts, and a personal visit to the site.
203 In combat, contraries did things opposite of what was expected, such as charging when everyone else retreated. Here, shifting the lance from one hand to the other symbolized contrariness. See John Stands in Timber, Cheyenne Memories, 58, 101.
204 White Elk in Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, 232. Stands in Timber, Cheyenne Memories, 171.
205 Vaughn, Indian Fights, 76-79.
First to reach the infantry position were the Lakotas. Around the rocks, Fetterman circled his men of Companies A and C into lines on the narrow ridge. They stood up in rank to fire their muzzle-loading Springfields just as a lone Lakota on horseback charged up the road from the south. His swift, bold attack took him right through the infantry position, but after he passed, the riflemen killed him. A second Lakota on foot also came down the road shooting at the infantry. When the soldiers rose up to fire at him, other warriors began loosing arrows at the infantrymen. The young warrior on foot died in the second fusillade, but arrows now began to rain upon Fetterman's position. Having surrounded the Fetterman Rocks, warrior bowmen targeted the infantrymen. Many found their marks, and soldiers began to fall, some dead, some wounded. Other arrows missed their targets and hit other warriors. One Lakota died when an arrow penetrated his forehead just above his nose.\footnote{Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, 232-233. Stands in Timber, Cheyenne Memories, 172. Thomas B. Marquis' “Cheyenne old man, ” then a twenty-three year old warrior, remembered the shooting at long range before the Cheyennes closed in.} Wolf Tooth, John Stands in Timber’s grandfather, had gone to borrow arrows from his friend Sap and was nearly wounded by arrows that had missed.\footnote{Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, 232-233.}

Having closed in on Fetterman's rocky defensive position, the Lakotas and Cheyennes charged, and another errant arrow wounded a Lakota warrior. Their charge brought the massed warriors into hand-to-hand fighting with the soldiers.\footnote{Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, 232-233. Stands in Timber, Cheyenne Memories, 172.} Not out of ammunition, but having difficulty rapidly loading their muzzle-loading Springfields, the infantrymen huddled together and fought to the last.\footnote{Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, 232-233.} It was short and bloody, but in just a few minutes, Cheyenne, Arapahoe, and Lakota warriors slaughtered the last of the infantrymen at Fetterman Rocks. Not one was left alive.

Dr. Hines, who arrived too late with Ten Eyck, reported the bodies around Fetterman rocks were all “in an area of ten or fifteen yards in diameter.” They were “stripped of everything, their heads apparently radiating from a common [sic.] centre [sic.], with the appearance of having died there.” Hines further noted, “I think they fought in a circle, being attacked on all sides.” The circle was “ordered” and “in ranks.”\footnote{Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, 232-233. Stands in Timber, Cheyenne Memories, 172.} White Elk’s memories of soldiers standing up and firing in the first minutes of fighting supports Hines’ observations.
Richard J. Fox, Jr., in his analysis of the 1876 Custer Fight, asserted that the destruction of the Fetterman infantry position was an example of tactical disintegration, the crowding and bunching of soldiers due to fear and stress. Support for this conclusion came from John B. Sanborn’s report of 8 July 1867. Sanborn described the bodies found at the Fetterman position as lying in “a space not exceeding thirty-five feet in diameter.” He further said, “No empty cartridge shells were about, and there were some full cartridges.” Finally, Sanborn believed “there were no indications of a severe struggle.”

However, Hines’ ordering also suggests that Captain Fetterman held his men together in relatively good order for firing by ranks, at least for the first few minutes, but they were too close together. The narrow ridgeline constricted skirmish line distancing, and contributed to the bunching. Fetterman may also have let his Civil War experience influence the ordering of his troops. Shoulder to shoulder Civil War ranks gave him good control of the men, but condensed the target area for Indian arrows. With a more spread out skirmish line, Fetterman may have been able to keep fighting for a little longer, but probably not long enough for Ten Eyck to come to his rescue. The ridge was too narrow, there were not enough rocks to hide behind, and simply too many warriors for the infantrymen to handle, even with the help of the mounted men.

All twenty-one regular infantrymen from Company A, and the nine from Company C, were in this group. Seventeen other enlisted men were also found around the rocks. They were a mixed group of mounted infantrymen and a few cavalrymen. Captain Fetterman and Captain Brown were among the forty-nine dead.

(4) FETTERMAN MYTH (D) COWARDLY. In his official report of the Fetterman Fight, Colonel Carrington implied cowardice in his statement that “Fetterman and Brown each had a revolver shot in the left temple. As Brown always declared he would reserve a shot for himself as a last resort, so I am convinced that these two brave men fell each by the other’s hand rather that undergo the slow torture inflicted upon others.” Carrington is sending mixed signals by calling Fetterman and Brown brave men in one breath, and reporting they took the easy way out in the other. Sanborn also reported that Fetterman and Brown “no doubt inflicted this death upon themselves, or each other, by their own hands. For both were shot through the left temple, and powder burnt into the skin and flesh about the wound. These

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211 John B. Sanborn report, Indian Hostilities, 65. See Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 267.
officers had also oftentimes asserted that they would not be taken alive by Indians. The earlier statement attributed to Brown, about saving the last bullet for himself was now connected also to Fetterman. Margaret Carrington recorded in her memoir, "Captains Fetterman and Brown were at the point nearest the fort, each with a revolver shot in the left temple, and so scorched with powder as to leave no doubt that they shot each other when hope had fled." It is doubtful she ever examined the bodies, so her knowledge came from Colonel Carrington.

Samuel M. Horton, chief surgeon at Fort Phil Kearny, did examine the bodies. He concluded that no more than six soldiers died from gunshot wounds. All the rest were either killed by arrows or died from warclub or knife wounds during close combat. When Horton testified before the Sanborn Commission, he reported a bullet hole in Brown’s left temple, but said nothing about a gunshot wound to Fetterman’s head. Instead, Horton said, “Col. Fetterman’s body showed his thorax to have been cut crosswise with a knife, deep into the viscera, his throat and entire neck were cut to the cervical spine, all around. I believe mutilation caused his death.” Actually, Fetterman died from the knife wound, not mutilation. In 1906, Eli S. Ricker interviewed American Horse. The Oglala chief recalled the Fetterman Fight and told Ricker of his role in that fight. Ricker wrote of American Horse that he “ran his horse at full speed directly on to Col Fetterman knocking him down! He then jumped down upon him and killed the colonel with his knife.” Fetterman did not commit suicide; he died in hand-to-hand combat with American Horse, the very kind of fighting that had sobered him after the 6 December skirmish. It appears, however, that Brown did take his own life. His suicide, with perhaps a few others, gave rise to an Indian memory of the soldiers killing themselves, or dropping dead from the gaze of the Cheyenne medicine man, Crazy Mule.

After the Lakotas had silenced soldier resistance at the Wheatley-Fisher Rocks position, but probably before the fighting had concluded at the Fetterman Rocks. the Lakotas and Cheyennes turned their

217 Ibid., 56.
attention to Lieutenant Grummond’s mounted men on the slopes in between. When the Lakota warriors first charged out of hiding from the northeast, the mounted soldiers had stopped abruptly and retreated up to a hill near the end of the ridge. They could not help the men pinned down at Wheatley-Fisher Rocks. Grummond gathered his men and hesitated, not knowing which way to go. Within a few minutes, it was obvious there was no hope to join the soldiers below. When the three survivors got away up the hill before the final attack that ended resistance at Wheatley-Fisher Rocks, Grummond began moving his mounted contingent up the ridge.\(^{219}\)

The cavalry and mounted infantry fell back up the ridge line in good order. Some men on foot led their horses. After the fighting at Wheatley-Fisher Rocks was over, some of the Cheyennes and Lakotas tried rushing up to reach the cavalry. Ice and snow made the ground slippery, and the hillsides were too steep for horses. Little Horse got behind some rocks and began shooting arrows from there, about forty feet away from the cavalry. As he came up, White Elk could see warriors shooting arrows at the cavalrymen. The arrows flew thick, like many grasshoppers flying across a field.\(^{220}\)

White Bull joined in fighting the retreating mounted soldiers. He saw one trooper on foot running backward, and yelling loudly. He threatened the pursuing Indians with his carbine. White Bull decided to charge him on horseback. Ten feet away, White Bull drew his arrow to the head, then shot the soldier in front through the heart. As the dying man fell to the ground, White Bull cracked him across the head with his lance, a first coup. Other Lakotas followed White Bull up the hill shooting arrows. White Bull killed a trooper horse with another arrow. Some warriors hit their own people with arrows; Thunder Hump and King were wounded that way.\(^{221}\)

Fire Thunder was also in the fighting during the cavalry retreat. Using his six-shooter, he began killing soldiers as they came close to him. Some warriors fired guns, but most filled the air with arrows, again hitting their own allies as well as fleeing troopers.\(^{222}\) As Grummond struggled to get his mounted

\(^{219}\) Grinnell, *Fighting Cheyennes*, 222-223. This writer has projected what Grummond probably did, based on White Elk’s account and knowing where his body was found.

\(^{220}\) Grinnell, *Fighting Cheyennes*, 233.

\(^{221}\) Vestal, *Warpath*, 63.

\(^{222}\) Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 12.
command up the ridge, the warriors constantly swept in to attack the men. It was the very thing the veterans down at Wheatley-Fisher Rocks wanted to avoid.\footnote{Ibid. Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, 233.}

During the retreat, some mounted men turned their horses loose to fight on foot, while Grummond’s mounted group continued up the hill. Some of the Oglala warriors stopped fighting and chased the horses, hoping to capture a prize.\footnote{Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks, 12. Hyde, George Bent, 344. Two Moons account in Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, 234. Vestal, Warpath, 64.} Other soldiers may have killed their own mounts, using them as protection on the bare hillsides. There were eleven Army horses and nine Indian ponies found on the road and near the line of bodies going up the road slope. All the soldiers’ mounts were headed south, toward the fort.\footnote{Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 41. John B. Sanborn report, Indian Hostilities, 65.}

When the soldier horses got loose, Big Nose, the Cheyenne decoy who had begun the fight with his charge, went after two horses west of the ridge, touched them to take possession, and then turned to get back to the attack. His exhausted horse refused to move, and one of the soldiers shot him off his horse. White Elk came to help him; he turned his wounded friend uphill so that he could breathe. The wounded brave lasted only one or two days after the fight.\footnote{Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, 234.}

Among the first to reach the dismounted soldiers was Swift Hawk (Inois), the twenty-year-old brother of Little Wolf. Little Wolf had given him his white war horse, and his scalp shirt, war bonnet, and lance to fight with, and a warrior’s charge, “With all these brave warriors looking on, it is a good time to show how a Cheyenne brave can die.” Swift Hawk was first to ride in among this group of soldiers. Both he and the war horse were killed. The other Cheyenne warriors charged in after Swift Hawk, beginning the last assault on this position.\footnote{Hyde, George Bent, 346.}

In the final attack on the remaining dismounted troopers, the Oglalas crawled up the steep slopes of the ridge. There were not many soldiers left, and they had no place to hide. When the warriors were close enough for the final rush, one of the leaders called out “Let us go! This is a good day to die. Think
of the helpless ones at home!”

With that they rushed the last of the dismounted soldiers. Fire Thunder was young and fast; he was among the first to get among the soldiers. The troopers jumped up, and fought hard, but they were overwhelmed quickly. Not one was left alive.

When Grummond finally reached a point about one-half mile from Fetterman Rocks, he had only six to eight men left, still on horseback. The rest were strung out in a trail of carnage that ran down the hill to just above Wheatley-Fisher Rocks. Grummond and his cavalrymen reached a flat on the ridge about half way between the two rock positions at the north and south ends of the hogback. There was no cover for the approaching warriors, but they kept calling to each other, closing in on the last of the mounted men. During the final rush against this last group of soldiers, several Lakotas were killed. White Bull and his friend Charging Crow joined in this fighting. As they attacked, Charging Crow fell to the ground, shot dead. Flying Hawk also died, shot in the left breast. Hand to hand fighting finished off the troopers.

Grummond’s body was found alone a short distance from the last group of cavalrymen. He may have tried to escape with a few other cavalrymen who may have gotten as far as the Fetterman Rocks. White Elk recalled that the last of the cavalrymen were killed there. Dr Hines identified some of the dead around the rocks as cavalrymen, and there were two dead or dying horses nearby to the south. The few cavalrymen found at this position probably died there after the infantrymen were already dead. If so, they were the last to die in the Fetterman Fight.

One of the soldiers brought a dog. It began to run back up the road toward the fort, howling as it fled. It was the last survivor. Fire Thunder did not shoot at it because he thought it was a nice dog.

Some of the Lakotas wanted to catch the dog and take it home. A warrior named Big Rascal said, “Don’t let the dog go.” and another warrior killed it with an arrow.

The fighting was over. Now the victorious warriors stripped the dead of their clothing, equipment, weapons and ammunition. The fight did not last long, over so quickly that half the ammunition carried by

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229 Ibid.
230 Grinnell, *Fighting Cheyennes*, 234.
234 Vaughn, *Indian Fights*, 68.
236 Stands in Timber, *Cheyenne Memories*, 172.
the soldiers was still unused. White Bull, like many others, collected arrows found on the ground. Then the Lakotas scalped, and mutilated the bodies. These soldiers would be handicapped in the next life. They would never trouble the Indians again. Fire Thunder looked back down the spur ridge toward Peno Creek. "Dead men and horses and wounded Indians were scattered all the way up the hill . . . ."  

**TEN EYCK**

The fighting on the spur ridge lasted less than an hour, probably between thirty-five and forty-five minutes. During that time, while Fetterman's scattered command struggled to survive, Carrington hurriedly tried to assemble, organize, and dispatch reinforcements. Within a few minutes after noon, Ten Eyck was on his way north to reinforce Fetterman with thirty-six infantrymen. At Ten Eyck's request, Carrington also allowed him to take Lieutenant Matson along.  

Ten Eyck moved his men out of the post gates, and following the same route as Fetterman did an hour earlier. Urging his men at a double-quick pace, he could hear heavy firing to the north, some of it sounding like volleys. (Fetterman's infantrymen had engaged the Cheyennes and Lakotas at their rock position on the hogback.) By the time his men had covered the 1,300 yards to Big Piney Creek, the heavy firing dissipated, and the sounds of gunfire began fading away. At the creek, several civilians joined Ten Eyck's relief party. As they moved north, Ten Eyck also collected Dr. Hines and his few men, bringing this force to about forty soldiers, and a few civilian volunteers. Ten Eyck took the road, knowing that he could get to Lodge Trail Ridge sooner, with less fatigue for his men. There was less snow on the road, the ascent up the ridge was more gradual, and the ravines near the ridge were partially filled with snow.  

Ten Eyck was scarcely gone out the gate when Carrington organized another relief force from the nearly thirty remaining cavalrmen of Company C, Second Cavalry, now armed with Spencer carbines. Carrington was so short of horses that these men went out on foot, pockets full of extra ammunition, rushing to catch up with Ten Eyck's infantry. By that time, the wagons Carrington had ordered hitched up

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241 *Vaughn, Indian Fights*, 60-61, 65. This narrative summarizes Ten Eyck's July 1867 testimony before a member of the Sanborn Commission. The civilians included J. B. Weston, J. Fitch Kinney, Mr. Welch, and Mr. Blodgett.

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began to arrive at the post magazine. In the first wagon, men loaded three thousand rounds of Springfield ammunition, and two cases of Spencer rounds. With two other wagons, an ambulance and forty civilian employees, master of transportation Henry Williams rolled north to join Ten Eyck. ⁴²

While Ten Eyck was out, Colonel Carrington began planning for defense of Fort Phil Kearny. With only 119 soldiers left inside the post, he sent couriers to call in the wood train. Carrington recalled, “At the same time the garrison was so organized that every officer and soldier, every citizen or citizens, employé [sic], and teamster, and every clerk in the sutler’s store had his loop-hole, or place at which to report at a general alarm by night or day.” ⁴³

In less than one hour, Ten Eyck’s relief party “reached the crest of the hill where the road descends into Peno Creek Valley.” ⁴⁴ Although Ten Eyck used the road until he reached Lodge Trail Ridge, he apparently was concerned about crossing the ridge on the road, in the event warriors might be waiting for him. So he took his party east, off the trail several hundred yards to some higher hills. Here they halted. They were some distance away from the rocks where Fetterman’s infantry had been fighting. From this viewpoint, Ten Eyck “could see a distance of several miles along the valley of Peno Creek.” ⁴⁵

For the first time, Ten Eyck realized the size of the coalition war party. Sprawled from the rocks at the south end of the hogback, down that ridge into the valley, and on the hills beyond were what he estimated to be 1,500 to 2,000 mounted warriors. ⁴⁶ His estimate later correlated well with Mitch Boyer’s Lakota informant, who told Boyer in the spring of 1867 that there were 1,800 tribesmen in the area of the Fetterman Fight that December day, but that only about half of them actually engaged in the fighting along the ridge. ⁴⁷

Ten Eyck could see no sign of Fetterman’s party. He thought they were surrounded some distance to the north, or had retreated to the west and joined with the wood train. What he could see at the end of the hogback nearest him, were about one hundred mounted warriors watching him. ⁴⁸ Some of them

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²⁶ McDermott (ed.), *Wyoming Scrapbook*, 72.
²⁸ Vaughn. *Indian Fights*, 61.

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shouted at Ten Eyck's men gesturing for them to come down and fight. Ten Eyck declined, turning instead to Archibald Sample, one of Colonel Carrington's orderlies who had accompanied Ten Eyck to Lodge Trail Ridge to serve as a courier. Ten Eyck sent Sample back to the post with a message for Carrington, requesting reinforcements and artillery. It was about 1 P.M.

On the way to Phil Kearny, Sample passed Williams' armed teamsters moving up the trail to support Ten Eyck. The courier arrived at the post about 1:30 P.M. Carrington read Ten Eyck's dispatch, wrote one of his own, and quickly sent Sample galloping north again on Carrington's own fast horse. Carrington declined to send a cannon because he thought Ten Eyck had no one who could handle it. He had also stripped the post down to 119 men by about noon. There were forty armed civilians coming to Ten Eyck's aid in the Williams detail. There could be no more until the wood train returned to the post.

Carrington's message had long term consequences for Ten Eyck. It read, "Captain: forty well-armed men, with 3,000 rounds, ambulance, etc., left before your courier came in. (You must unite with Fetterman, fire slowly, and keep men in hand; you could have saved two miles towards the scene of action if you had taken Lodge Trail Ridge. I order [sic.] the wood train in, which will give 50 more men to spare.)" Carrington's criticism of Ten Eyck's route suggested that if he had been more direct, Ten Eyck might have saved Fetterman. It was also interpreted in Army circles as implied cowardice. Neither was true, but the rumors dogged Ten Eyck until he was honorably mustered out in 1871.

When Ten Eyck's men stood their ground, some of the warriors began moving off to the north. The victors picked up their dead and wounded and started the trek back to the camp at the mouth of Peno Creek. It was very cold. Many of the wounded died on the way. Others died after reaching camp. Indian casualties are not known with precision, but close estimates are possible. The Cheyennes probably lost four men. Their names were Swift Hawk, Big Nose, Strong Wind Blowing, and Bull Head. One Arapahoe warrior, unnamed, died. Lakota casualties are more problematic. Estimates of their dead range from eleven to fifty or sixty men. White Bull listed fourteen men by name. Killed or mortally wounded were Bear Ears, Little Crow, Yellow White Man, Lone Bear, Clown Horse, Male Eagle, He Dog, Eats

249 Colonel Carrington, Indian Operations, 46.
251 Ibid., 45-46.
252 Ibid., 45-46.
253 Vaughn, Indian Fights, 63-64. Heitman, Historical Register, L 950.

When the warriors began withdrawing, Ten Eyck did not wait for instructions, but marched his men west along the crest of the ridge toward the road. As he moved, most of the mounted warriors near the rocks rode away. By the time he approached to within six hundred yards of the rocks, only four were left. Then he could see a large number of naked bodies lying around the rocks. His men fired at the four remaining warriors, who wheeled about and dashed down the ridge to join their companions.

About 1:45 P.M., Henry Williams arrived with his forty armed civilians, three wagons and one ambulance. Although warriors could still be seen in the valleys and on the hills farther north, Ten Eyck and Williams pushed their combined force down the slope of Lodge Trail Ridge, and up the quarter mile ascent to the rocks where Ten Eyck had seen the bodies. There were forty-nine of them, “all of whom had been massacred and mutilated.”

Ten Eyck knew the dead around the rocks on the south end of the hogback were not the entire command. But it was getting late in the afternoon, and there were still hundreds of Indian warriors visible to the north. Ten Eyck’s soldiers and Williams’ civilians brought up the wagons and ambulance and spent some time collecting the forty-nine bodies and body parts strewn about the rocky defensive position. They stacked them as carefully as possible like cordwood in the wagons, while keeping a wary eye out for Indian warriors. There were no threats; the warriors were satisfied. They were going back to their camps to celebrate. They had nearly one hundred in their hands.

Ten Eyck retired from the battlefield in good order. Lieutenant Arnold remembered their arrival at Fort Phil Kearny “about dusk,” bringing with them the forty-nine bodies from Fetterman’s party. Lieutenant Wands also recalled that “Captain Ten Eyck and party returned about sunset, with the wagons loaded with the dead bodies of the officers and soldiers of Colonel Fetterman’s command . . . . The wood

254 Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks. 13.
256 Ibid., Indian Fights. 62.
257 Ibid., 67. The words are Lieutenant W. F. Arnold’s to the Sanborn Commission.
258 Ten Eyck, diary, 21 December 1866.
train came in loaded with timber about the same time that Capt. Ten Eyck's party arrived. The day began and ended with the departure and return of the wood train. Disaster for the garrison of Fort Philip Kearny and triumph for the tribal coalition had filled in the hours between.

PANIC, CELEBRATION, MOURNING

A dark, cold night settled Fort Phil Kearny. Jim Bridger was ninety miles away at Fort C. F Smith. Without Bridger's advice Carrington was vulnerable to all sorts of imagined atrocities at the hand of the victorious Indians. Carrington did not know that the Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes were headed home. He feared the worst, and panic struck the garrison, affecting virtually everyone from the post commander to the smallest child.

Musician Frank Fessenden remembered, "That night was the most exciting one I have ever experienced. All was hustle and bustle. We expected they would attack the fort that same night." Men hauled wagons into a corner of the parade ground where the ammunition magazine had been constructed. Carrington had wagons and wagon beds laid end to end in three concentric circles around the magazine. "The colonel gave orders that as soon as the Indians made the expected attack, the women and children should enter the magazine, and the men should hold the fort as long as possible. When they could hold it no longer, they were to get behind the wagons that surrounded the magazine, and when the colonel saw that all was lost, he would himself blow up the magazine and take the lives of all, rather than allow the Indians to capture any of the inmates alive."  

While his men prepared for the expected holocaust, Carrington penned an erratic, disjointed, almost hysterical telegram to General Cooke. Besides reiterating his requests for more officers, men, and arms, Carrington expressed his feelings in panic-filled phrases. "I risk everything but the post and its stores... I have had to-day [sic.] a fight unexampled in Indian warfare:... Depend upon it that the post will be held so long as a round or a man is left... the Indians are desperate; I spare none and they spare none."  

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259 Vaughn, Indian Fights, 67.
260 Ibid., 67-68.
261 Hebard and Brininstool, Bozeman Trail, II, 101.
262 Ibid., 102.
263 Carrington to Cooke, Indian Hostilities, 30-31.
At 7 P.M., Carrington hired two civilians to take copies of his dispatches to Fort Laramie.\textsuperscript{264} The famous was John "Portugee" Phillips. His heroic ride is to western folklore what Paul Revere's ride is to colonial folklore.\textsuperscript{265} A monument to Phillips' still stands today just outside the entrance to the Fort Phil Kearny State Historical Site. However, like Revere, Phillips did not make the ride alone. William Bailey appears to have been the other man Carrington hired to risk the winter trek to Fort Laramie. They probably rode alone, increasing the odds that at least one would get through. Fort Laramie was 236 miles away across dangerous terrain and through freezing winter weather.\textsuperscript{266} After Phillips and Bailey slipped out of the post, the garrison endured a sleepless night.

In the morning, the officers held a council. Carrington wanted to go back to the ridge and bring back the remaining bodies. There was disagreement. Most wanted to defend the fort, and leave the dead on the field. Frances Grummond, whose husband's body was still out on the ridge, remembered Colonel Carrington making the final decision. "If we cannot rescue our dead, as the Indians always do at whatever risk, how can you send out details for any purpose . . .".\textsuperscript{267}

After Carrington promised Mrs. Grummond they would retrieve Lieutenant Grummond's remains, he personally led a special detail out to the scene of the previous day's battle.\textsuperscript{268} Carrington left instructions to implement the desperate measures around the magazine if they did not return.\textsuperscript{269} He took Captain Ten Eyck, Lieutenant Matson, and eighty men up the Bozeman Trail, over Lodge Trail Ridge, and out onto the hogback.\textsuperscript{270} Strung out behind them, he left a picket line of men stretching from the post to Lodge Trail Ridge to pass signals in case of Indian attack.\textsuperscript{271}

Recovering the dead was an exacting, tedious task that consumed the rest of the day. They collected the remaining thirty-two bodies including those of Grummond and Wheatley. Wheatley's body

\textsuperscript{264} Colonel Carrington, \textit{Indian Operations}, 44.
\textsuperscript{265} Brown, \textit{Fetterman Massacre}, 193.
\textsuperscript{266} \textit{Ibid.}, 193-194.
\textsuperscript{267} Frances Carrington, \textit{My Army Life}, 151.
\textsuperscript{268} \textit{Ibid.}, 152.
\textsuperscript{269} \textit{Ibid.}, 153-154.
\textsuperscript{270} Ten Eyck, diary, 22 December 1866.
\textsuperscript{271} Frances Carrington, \textit{My Army Life}, 153.
had sixty-five arrows in it. "Long after dark, the wagons and command returned with the remaining dead, slowly passing to the hospital and other buildings made ready for their reception."  

While the garrison at Fort Phil Kearny prepared for the funeral and mass burial of their dead, there was celebration and mourning in the camps along the rivers to the north. Wooden Leg lost an older brother in the fight, Strong Wind Blowing, age sixteen. He remembered the Cheyennes "rejoicing in [their] camp on account of the victory. But our family and all relatives of the three dead Cheyennes were in mourning. [They] wept and prayed for the spirits of [their] lost ones." Iron Teeth, a Northern Cheyenne woman, recalled when her husband, Red Pipe, returned from the Fetterman Fight. "One day my husband and other Cheyennes who had been away came back to our camp and told us that the Sioux and Cheyennes had killed a hundred of the soldiers at the fort. We built big bonfires and had a general celebration." Although the Cheyennes had a victory dance around the fires, their warriors had taken no scalps. They left that to the Lakotas.

Many Lakota families did not celebrate. They had lost men in the fight. Black Elk was three years old; he remembered one of the wounded returning to camp that night. He was Black Elk's father, also named Black Elk. He came back to camp with his leg broken. "From that wound he limped until the day he died."  

The Fetterman Fight, the Hundred in the Hands, had become history, remembered as disaster by the Army, honored as victory by the Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes. While the warriors recounted tales of individual bravery around the campfires that winter, the Army reorganized the defenses of the Bozeman Trail, and investigators looked for a scapegoat.

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272 Ten Eyck, diary, 22 December 1866. Ten Eyck recorded forty-one bodies found on this day. The correct total was thirty-two.
273 Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 208.
274 Marquis, Wooden Leg, 15.
275 Limbaugfi, ed., Cheyenne and Sioux, 16.
276 Stands in Timber, Cheyenne Memories, 173.
277 Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks, 7-8, 13.
CHAPTER 9

AFTERMATH, CONCLUSIONS, FUTURE

Historical events as momentous as the Fetterman Fight do not just end. They reverberate for some time afterward. The Fetterman Fight was debated in social, political, and military circles for the next decade, until the Battle of the Little Bighorn superseded it in the national interest. That is still true today. Custer’s debacle is in the forefront of western Americana; Fetterman’s disaster is now a backwater. As the final look at the Fetterman Fight in this treatise, we will consider the immediate aftermath over the next few weeks, and two key events in 1887 and 1908. Conclusions follow the aftermath, and finally the potential future significance of the Fetterman Fight.

AFTERMATH

It took some time for the world outside the Powder River country to learn of the tragedy known then as the Fort Phil Kearny Massacre. Fort Reno’s garrison learned of Fetterman’s defeat when one of the two couriers Carrington sent out the night of 21 December briefly stopped there two nights later. The courier continued through the snow to the south, headed for the telegraph station at Horseshoe Creek.

The day before Christmas, the bodies of Captain Fetterman, Captain Brown, and Lieutenant Grummond were buried at 1:00 P. M. without services or military honors. Captain Ten Eyck was “shocked at this proceeding, but it appeared necessary in the opinion of Col. Carrington.” Late on Christmas morning, John “Portugee” Phillips, George Dillon, and William Bailey rode into Horseshoe Station, on the Platte River. Phillips handed Carrington’s two dispatches to John Friend, telegraph operator. Friend began breaking the news of Fetterman’s debacle to the military. Not content with Friend’s telegraphy, Phillips rode on the last forty miles to Fort Laramie. Just before midnight Phillips reached his destination. Exhausted, he asked to see the commanding officer. General Palmer received Phillips messages in person.

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1 Ostrander, An Army Boy of the Sixties, 164-165.
confirming the garbled telegram he had earlier received from Horseshoe Station. Rumors from Indian sources were true. There had been a disaster near Fort Phil Kearny.¹

Fort Laramie telegraphers sent Carrington’s full telegram to Cooke in Omaha the next morning. Cooke, in turn, sent the War Department their first telegraphic news of the disaster.² In the same telegraph, Cooke reported ordering four companies of infantry and two of cavalry to move from Fort Laramie to Fort Phil Kearny. Cooke had ordered Carrington to Fort Caspar where the new headquarters of Carrington’s downsized Eighteenth Infantry would be located. He also recommended moving Lieutenant Colonel Wessels from Fort Reno to Fort Phil Kearny to command the Bozeman Trail forts.³ Both changes were done in the dead of winter with further tragic consequences.

Constant cold made digging the mass burial trench for the enlisted men difficult. Margaret Carrington remembered that on 26 December, “the dead were buried with a sad and solemn stillness” in a fifty feet long, seven feet deep pit.⁴ Their comrades in arms, snowed in at Fort C. F. Smith, heard frightful rumors filtered through the Crows from their Lakota sources. On 28 December, a Crow came from a visit with the Lakotas to inform Captain Kinney of the fight. His story was that the Lakotas had dashed up to the fort, fallen back, and 113 soldiers had followed them out of Fort Phil Kearny into an ambush by 1,500 warriors. All 113 soldiers were dead. The Lakotas told their Crow visitor they had seen wagons leave the fort, that Phil Kearny had been abandoned, and their scouts found Fort Reno abandoned as well. C. F. Smith’s garrison did not learn the truth until 7 February, when two sergeants braved the weather to carry dispatches from Phil Kearny to C. F. Smith. They confirmed the deaths of Captains Fetterman and Brown, Lieutenants Grummond and Bingham, and about ninety men.⁵

General Cooke wasted no time after the 26 December telegraphic confirmation of the Phil Kearny Massacre. He telegraphed to Fort Laramie directing Palmer to send two companies of cavalry and four companies of the First Battalion, Eighteenth Infantry to Lieutenant Colonel Wessells at Fort Reno. Cooke ordered Wessells to move north with the reinforcements and take command of Fort Phil Kearny, with

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² Ten Eyck, diary, 24 December 1866.
⁴ Cooke to Rawlins, Indian Hostilities, 24-25.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 211-212. Ten Eyck, diary, 26 December 1866.
⁷ Templeton, diary, 28 December 1866, 7 February 1867. The C. F. Smith garrison had not known until February about Bingham’s death on 6 December.
authority over Fort Reno and Fort C. F. Smith. The general also relieved Colonel Carrington from command of Fort Philip Kearny and ordered him to the new headquarters for the Eighteenth Infantry at Fort Caspar. Extremely cold weather at Fort Laramie kept Palmer from immediately responding to Cooke's orders.

Their party already underway before the weather got worse, three officers and an escort of twenty-two enlisted men arrived at Fort Phil Kearny on 27 December. Captain George B. Dandy had been assigned to replace Captain Brown. Lieutenant Thomas J. Gregg was Lieutenant Bigham's replacement for Company C, Second Cavalry. Reporting for duty with the new Twenty-Seventh Infantry was Lieutenant Alphonse Borman. The long awaited reorganization was underway.

In the mail pouch carried by the escort, Carrington received Cooke's orders sending him to Fort Caspar. This move had been planned for some time, but doing it now in the winter was not only unhealthy, but it looked like Carrington was being relieved of command because of the recent debacle. It cast him in the role of scapegoat. Carrington could not wait for spring; his orders required him to be gone before the end of January.

While operations continued at the Bozeman Trail forts, news of the Fort Phil Kearny massacre affected others outside the Powder River country. Sherman's reaction to the disaster was blistering. On 28 December, he telegraphed General Grant. "I do not yet understand how the massacre of Colonel Fetterman's party could have been so complete. We must act with vindictive earnestness against the Sioux, even to their extermination, men, women, and children. Nothing less will reach the root of this case." Sherman could not fathom how plains Indian warriors could have inflicted a major defeat on his modern armed forces. And, in the heat of anger, Sherman sounded more like Chivington (Sand Creek Massacre) than he really was. However, there were probably others in the west who wished to do just that. Although General Pope vetoed his order, General Connor had said much the same thing in 1865. "You will not receive overtures of peace or submission from Indians, but will attack and kill every male Indian over twelve years of age."

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8 Special Orders No. 126, *Indian Hostilities*, 28.
9 Returns, Fort Philip Kearny, December 1866, Record of Events.
10 Brown, *Fetterman Massacre*, 204-205.
11 Sherman to Grant, *Indian Hostilities*, 27.
By New Year’s Day, 1867, it was clear that the tribal coalition was not going to attack the forts. It was that time of year when winter survival meant breaking up the big camps on the Tongue River. Red Cloud, Man Afraid, and the other Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapahoe leaders also knew that a retaliatory winter campaign was possible. Avoiding potential military expeditions also spurred splitting up into winter bands. The Arapahoes went to the Yellowstone, the Cheyennes into the Bighorns, and the Lakotas scattered into the valleys of the Powder and Tongue Rivers.  

On New Year’s Day, 1867, the Second Battalion, Eighteenth Infantry officially became the new Twenty-Seventh Infantry. That day, Major James Van Voast led the four companies of First Battalion out of Fort Laramie. Two days later, the two cavalry companies under Lieutenant Gordon followed the infantry, overtaking the foot soldiers on 5 January. At Fort Reno, the reinforcements came under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Wessells. He pushed the column north through the snow. They reached Fort Phil Kearny on 16 January, having lost one man frozen to death.  

One week later, General Augur replaced Cooke at Omaha. That same day Carrington took his regimental headquarters staff including the regimental band, his family, and an expectant Frances Grummond out of Fort Phil Kearny, headed south for Fort Caspar. They lost two men to amputations by the time they reached Fort Reno. Several days later, Carrington’s party rolled into Fort Caspar, only to find that the Eighteenth Infantry’s regimental headquarters had been changed to Fort McPherson. While riding his horse on the eastward trek to McPherson, Carrington’s revolver accidentally discharged, wounding him in the thigh. It was the only wound Carrington suffered during his western service.  

Although even the War Department did not yet have all of the details of the fight near Fort Phil Kearny, the eastern press did. Or at least they filled in the details with invented stories and innuendo to feed a public demanding to know how plains Indians could have inflicted such a complete disaster on a modern army fresh from victory in the Civil War. Uninformed journalists began pointing the finger of blame at Henry Beebe Carrington. One portrayed a climactic scene at the gates of Fort Phil Kearny.

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"[W]hen the last band of survivors were driven to the gates of the fort, knocking and screaming in vain for admission; when the last cartridge from revolver, carbine, and rifle was expended; when the sabers and butts of muskets were broken; and when, leaning against the gates, weary and bleeding and all resistance fruitless, all fell in one heap of mangled humanity, unsupported and uncared for." Carrington looked guilty in the press.

After Cooke relieved Carrington of duty at Fort Phil Kearny, General Sherman had no quarrel with the decision. "I know enough of Carrington to believe that he is better qualified for a safe place than one of danger," he later wrote to General Christopher Columbus Augur. "The fact that he was a Colonel of the Regulars all the war, and yet never heard a hostile shot was enough, but last fall we had no choice." In January, when General Grant relieved General Cooke of command of the Department of the Platte, Sherman was puzzled. He could see no connection between Cooke's leadership and the Fetterman disaster. Nevertheless, Grant's classmate at West Point, C. C. Augur, replaced Cooke as commander over the Department of the Platte.

Lewis V. Bogy, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, added his own strange twist to the growing list of theories explaining the Fort Phil Kearny Massacre. "[T]he Indians, almost in a state of starvation, having made repeated attempts at a conference, that they might make peace and obtain supplies for their families, and the rescinding of the order prohibiting them from obtaining arms and ammunition, were rendered desperate, and resorted to the stratagem which proved too successful." Speaking of Fetterman, Bogy then surmised. "It seems as if the officer commanding could have avoided the catastrophe; and it seems also that men thus armed could have repelled an attack by all the Indians in Western Dakota." Bogy, like Sherman, overestimated the capabilities of the United States Army to handle Indians armed chiefly with weapons powered by human muscle.

By the time the six members of the Sanborn Commission met in Omaha, Nebraska on 2 March 1867, Carrington was fighting for his military life. Commissioners Sanborn, Sully, Buford, Parker, Beauvais, and Kinney began taking testimony two days later. Then they moved to Fort McPherson, Nebraska where Carrington was post commander. From 20 March to 27 March, Carrington told his story, a

20 Ahearn, William Tecumseh Sherman, 99.
21 Ibid. 99-100.
report the United States Senate later named *Indian Operations on the Plains*. The commissioners then split up to collect other testimony from military, civilian, and Indian witnesses. Kinney was the last commissioner to take testimony. He finished at Fort Phil Kearny on 29 July. Carrington later complained the July witnesses were illegal because Kinney may have overstepped his authority in taking additional testimony after the commission had adjourned. Kinney disliked Carrington and his July witnesses included Captain James Powell, whose accusatory and wildly inaccurate testimony was very damaging to Carrington.\(^3\)

On 8 July 1867, John B. Sanborn submitted the final report of his commission experience with conclusions and recommendations. In assigning blame for the Fetterman disaster, Sanborn was reluctant to point a finger. “In the critical examination we have given this painful and horrible affair, we do not find of the immediate participants any officer living deserving of censure, and even if the evidence justifies it, it would ill become us to speak evil of or censure those dead who sacrificed life struggling to maintain the authority and power of the government, and add new lustre [sic.] to our arms and fame.” \(^4\)

Sanborn attached no culpability to Carrington, and stopped short of blaming Fetterman for the disaster. Sanborn then added, “The difficulty in a nutshell was, that the commanding officer of the district was furnished no more troops or supplies for this state of war than had been provided and furnished him for a state of profound peace. In regions where all was peace, as at Laramie in November, twelve companies were stationed, while in regions where all was war, as at Phil. Kearney, there were only five companies allowed.” \(^5\) Blame for troop assignments had to fall higher up, at least with General Cooke.

General Grant and his staff blamed Carrington for allowing Fetterman to march north into ambush, when his orders appeared to have sent him west to the wood train.\(^6\) Grant, as directed by President Johnson, appointed a military Court of Inquiry consisting of General John Gibbon, Lieutenant Colonel Luther P. Bradley, and Major James Van Voast, with Captain Alexander Chambers as recorder. Organized at Omaha, Nebraska in April 1867, the court finally met on 9 May. They listened to witnesses at Fort McPherson, including Colonel Carrington, and others at Fort Phil Kearny. Carrington’s defense

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23 Bogy to Browning, *Indian Hostilities*, 16.  
25 Ibid., 66.  
26 Ibid., 66.  
27 Vaughn, *Indian Fights*, 84.
before the Court of Inquiry reprised his March testimony before the Sanborn Commission. Carrington testified again that Fetterman had disobeyed his orders on 21 December, and Captain Ten Eyck had also disobeyed his orders in going to rescue Fetterman. After hearing testimony and reviewing the documentary evidence, the military Court of Inquiry could attach no blame to Carrington. After leaving the door open to make Fetterman the scapegoat, the court adjourned.27

As an unintended affront to Colonel Carrington, the Army made some changes along the North Platte in the summer of 1867. General Augur closed Forts Mitchell and Caspar on the North Platte River; he replaced them with a new post where the Bozeman Trail curved away from the Platte on the way north to Forts Reno, Phillip Kearny, and C. F. Smith.28 Continuing official policy of naming forts after deceased officers, the new post was called Fort Fetterman. It stood for fifteen years, perhaps most remembered as the base for General George Crook’s three 1876 expeditions into the Powder River country.29

Despite the rulings by the Sanborn Commission and the military Court of Inquiry, Carrington’s reputation was tarnished. Whether he was to blame or not, the Fetterman Fight ruined his career. There would be no brigadier generalship for Henry Beebe Carrington. Instead, he spent the next twenty years seeking vindication. Carrington directed his legalistic diatribes at Commissioner Kinney, Captain Powell, Captain Ten Eyck, General Cooke, and anyone else who disagreed with him.30

Carrington’s insistence that his innocence be made clear to the public finally brought action by the United States Senate in 1887. When the Senate required the Secretary of the Interior to produce Colonel Carrington’s 1867 defense before the Sanborn Commission, employees of the Secretary found it in some rubbish in the basement of his office building. Over twenty years after the Fetterman Fight, the Senate published in Senate Document Number 33, Indian Operations on the Plains, the official title of Carrington’s defense.31 That document, along with new editions of his expanded version of Margaret Carrington’s Ahsaraka, got the public’s recognition of his claims about Fetterman’s disobedience and Carrington’s innocence.

28 Utley, Frontier Regulars, 125.
30 Vaughn, Indian Fights, 84-85.
31 Ibid., 197.
In 1890, Carrington and Cooke were reconciled after Cooke’s apology congratulating Carrington “that in the end you were fully vindicated.” In 1904, Brady’s *Indian Fights and Fighters* increased public awareness of Carrington’s version of the events.

In 1908, just four years prior to his death, Henry and Frances Carrington went to Sheridan, Wyoming as invited guests for the 3 July dedication of a new government monument at the sight of the Fetterman Fight. Carrington gave a new version of the Fetterman Fight that he entitled “Equal Justice to Both Living and Dead.” One of his chief purposes for going to Sheridan was to clear the name of Captain Ten Eyck. Correspondence with Ten Eyck’s family brought him to revise his accusations against Ten Eyck over the route he chose to reach Fetterman’s command. Carrington even timed the forty-nine minute ride from the old Phil Kearny site to the monument to convince everyone that Ten Eyck could not have rescued Fetterman even if he had gone straight up the Bozeman Trail. Carrington even included Captain Powell and General Cooke in his speech of reconciliation. But there was no forgiveness, no mercy. no new justice for William Judd Fetterman. Carrington’s speech pounded home his constant cry that Fetterman was at fault; he was the cause of the disaster through disobedience of orders. Carrington left a collection of his legal documents, now housed in the Sheridan library, supporting his version of events. With the 1910 publication of Frances’ book, *My Army Life*, Carrington completed his documentary legacy to historians, intended to exonerate him and condemn Fetterman.

CONCLUSIONS

First, this study has attempted to bring ethnic balance to the story of the Fetterman Fight. The most important contribution to balance should be evident in Chapter 8, “The Hundred in the Hands.” The Fetterman Fight was a complex affair. That complexity only became visible, and a reconstructed chronology clearer, when the Indian accounts, Army records, and soldier and civilian memoirs were spliced together. Indeed, as is often the case, the Indian accounts appeared to contradict each other and the Army versions, until they were all put together like a picture puzzle. Not all of the pieces are there, but there is enough to recreate what likely happened on that hogback north of Lodge Trail Ridge.

34 Ibid.
Second, when it comes to stripping away layers of myth and legend, not all primary documents were created equal. Critical evaluation of historical sources, and cross-referencing with other documents, are essential, albeit challenging and sometimes exasperating. The results are worth the effort, however. After the details of the June 1866 Fort Laramie council presented here become more well known, hopefully future scholarship which includes that event will finally stop repeating the Red Cloud speech myth. Use of the Templeton and Ten Eyck diaries have made possible new, more accurate versions of the Battle of Crazy Woman’s Fork, and have helped rewrite an important part of Jim Bridger’s biography. Future historians should know better than to picture Bridger advising Colonel Carrington during the crisis created by the Fetterman tragedy.

Third, the evidence presented in Chapters 7 and 8 seriously challenges the standard interpretation of causality in the Fetterman Fight catastrophe. Fetterman was not the arrogant, disobedient, foolish, cowardly man the Fetterman Myth has painted him as being.

FETTERMAN MYTH (A). ARROGANCE. Fetterman did not demonstrate a character flawed thoroughly by arrogance, either toward plains warriors or Colonel Carrington. In none of his official documents, or personal letters, do we find consistent evidence of an arrogant attitude. His early feelings about Indian warfare were typical of officers with his experience, and it is quite clear that from early November through the 6 December skirmish, he had learned a great deal about that warfare. What he did on 21 December demonstrated what he had learned. What he could not do was extricate his men from the largest ambush any of them had ever seen.

FETTERMAN MYTH (B). DISOBEDIENCE Fetterman did not disobey his orders. He maneuvered his command within the limits of Carrington’s instructions until he reached the crest of Lodge Trail Ridge. However, he did take his obedience to those orders to a point where reaction, not decision, took control of the command out of his hands.

FETTERMAN MYTH (C). FOOLISH. Fetterman was not a fool. Before 21 December 1866, he had learned lessons about ambushes and hand-to-hand combat so prevalent in plains Indian warfare. He combined those lessons learned with his Civil War tactical experience. Employing infantry skirmish lines and protecting his flanks with cavalry, were effective tactics until the mounted contingent rushed down the hogback to Peno Creek, and broke up his control of the command. Even given the size of the ambush, if
Fetterman had been able to keep the command together, but spread out in skirmish line order, some of them may have survived until Ten Eyck arrived. The effectiveness of the decoys, especially the charge of Big Nose, must be credited as a major reason why the ambush worked.

**FETTERMAN MYTH (D). COWARDLY.** Fetterman was not a suicidal coward. He died in hand-to-hand combat with American Horse. Captain Brown may be charged with suicide, but he did not cooperate in that action with Captain Fetterman. Since Carrington alleged Fetterman’s suicide in his official report of the Fetterman Fight, this erroneous statement questions Carrington’s veracity. Access to Surgeon Horton’s report should have kept Carrington from extending what Brown did to Fetterman. Did Carrington deliberately allow this error to stand uncorrected all those years to strengthen his case against Fetterman? That cannot be known with surety. Thankfully, at least this piece of the Fetterman Myth has been laid to rest over a hundred years later.

**WHY DID FETTERMAN CROSS LODGE TRAIL RIDGE?** Having rejected the Carrington and McDermott charges of arrogant disobedience, this writer has offered a new, more complex answer to the question. Vaughn’s theory about verbal orders authorizing an offensive over the ridge cannot be supported. However, if we acknowledge the orders Carrington later reported as those actually given to Fetterman, there has to have been a deeper meaning to those orders than is readily apparent.

Fetterman had much more freedom of movement than McDermott’s thesis allows. The strongest evidence of this can be found in Carrington’s reference to a map, and what he drew on that map years later. If the orders were intended to keep Fetterman out of the broken country around the headwaters of Peno Creek, then even after Fetterman crossed Lodge Trail Ridge and marched down the hogback, he was not in violation of Carrington’s orders.

Although it cannot be determined with certainty who moved first, the command’s movement off the crest of Lodge Trail Ridge was reaction and not decision. An unauthorized charge by part of the mounted contingent, reacting to the decoy challenge, took control of the situation out of Fetterman’s hands. The answer to the question is not simple, but is a sequence of dependent actions and reactions. Carrington’s orders and map instructions to Fetterman allowed him the freedom to maneuver to the crest of Lodge Trail Ridge without disobedience. Fetterman led his infantry across Lodge Trail Ridge to support the mounted men who had made an unauthorized charge down the spur ridge after some very effective
decoy warriors. Once Fetterman had crossed Lodge Trail Ridge and moved down to the hogback, there was no turning back. It was too late.

Finally, there are a number of conclusions that fall into the categories of lessons learned and what might have been. (1) When the military closed the Bozeman Trail in 1865, despite public pressure, it should have stayed closed. Saving lives, emigrant, soldier, and Indian, could have been the result.

(2) The Taylor Commission was overconfident to the point of ignoring the other side’s needs. That is a dangerous position to take in any negotiation process.

(3) Government leaders need not look farther than summer 1866 for an example where coordinated efforts could have led to better results. When the peace negotiators and Army officers were not working for the same goal, tragedy followed. The right hand must know what the left hand is doing if government agencies are to be effective.

(4) Once the decision had been made to commit the military to protect the Bozeman Trail, men like Sherman and Cooke sent the wrong man for the wrong job. Given the past history of tribal resistance to encroachment, they should have known better.

(5) Carrington made several key mistakes along the way. First, failure to secure the services of Indian scouts was a serious error. It is not known if Fetterman would have listened to the advice of Indian scouts, who could have warned him away from the ambush before Fetterman reached the crest of Lodge Trail Ridge. Since Carrington had failed to obtain scout services at all, Fetterman never had the choice to listen or not.

Second, he was overconfident in his own abilities. Carrington appears to have had his own dose of arrogance. McDermott’s charge against Fetterman. However. Carrington’s repeated boasts probably did not impress General Cooke. Carrington did impress himself, enough to be convinced he was doing better than he really was.

Third, if he really wanted Fetterman to only go out to the wood train on the Sullivant Hill road, that is what he should have specified in his orders to Fetterman. If that was in fact the intent, which this writer does not believe, Carrington had ample opportunity to have sent couriers to call Fetterman back.

Fourth, although his lack of western experience made Carrington dependent on the advice of Jim Bridger, he was probably too dependent. After the Fetterman Fight. with Bridger over ninety miles away at
Fort C F Smith. Carrington did not seek the advice of other experienced frontiersmen at Fort Phil Kearny like Henry Williams, but ordered actions which demonstrated his panic to everyone else at the post.

(6) For his part, Fetterman tried to do too much too soon. His men needed more training than he had been able to give them in a few weeks. He also went too close to the edge of his orders. If he had not taken his command to the top of Lodge Trail Ridge, there would have been no ambush.

John D. McDermott closed his article by positioning Fetterman between Grattan and Custer in a three-layer arrogance sandwich. “In history’s perspective, he stands a decade after John Grattan and a decade before George Custer, as an embodiment of the best and worst of the military personality, brave beyond question, brash beyond dispute.” 35 By lumping these three men together, McDermott has leveled the important differences among them and their situations to add additional support to his Arrogance Thesis.

First is the matter of experience. Grattan was not only inexperienced in plains warfare, he was inexperienced, period, fresh from military academy training. Fetterman and Custer both had Civil War combat experience. Fetterman had several weeks experience in fighting Indians; Custer had several years.

Second, the tactical situations were all different. Both Grattan and Custer initiated the fighting by moving on Indian encampments. They had taken the offensive. Fetterman was reacting to an offensive move by the tribal alliance. Only in his attempt at a flanking movement north of Sullivant Hill did Fetterman really do something offensively. Everything else was reaction to Indian initiatives.

Third, the available intelligence for military decisions was radically different in these three events. Grattan could see with his own eyes the size of the Lakota villages gathered near Fort Laramie. He knew what he was up against. Custer had enough information from his Indian scouts and field glass observation to know he was facing a large village. Among his mistakes were dividing his command to take on a village too large for the entire regiment to handle, allowing the warriors to defeat him in detail. Fetterman, on the other hand, had no reason to believe there was any Indian force in the area larger than the one he had seen on 6 December. Even Jim Bridger would have been surprised to find an ambush force that large in winter. That usually happened in the summer, like the Platte River Bridge Fight the previous year.

In sum, the Fetterman Fight is different from both the Grattan and Custer Fights in many important ways. The only significant similarity they really share is all three Army units were annihilated by the Indian warriors they fought.

FUTURE

In 1908, government funding helped erect a monument near Fetterman Rocks on what is still called Massacre Hill. Monuments are symbolic. They point to the past. They are built to teach or remind visitors of the historical significance of the site. That is why Red Cloud, the Carringtons, and the veterans were invited to participate in the dedication there 3 July 1908. Red Cloud declined due to ill health, but the others were living reminders of what the monument commemorated. Does the monument have any value for future generations?

For more than a century, Fetterman has been regarded as an arrogant, disobedient, foolish man who took his own life when hope was gone. In McDermott’s trilogy of foolish failures, Fetterman stands as the second figure in that pitiful group, a human bridge between Grattan and Custer. If he is nothing more than that, then the tribal victory over him reinforces the perception that the only time northern plains Indians ever defeated Army opponents was when the soldiers were led by arrogant fools. This thesis is not about Grattan or Custer. What has been shown is that at his death on 21 December 1866, Fetterman was not an arrogant, disobedient, foolish, suicidal coward. If that is the truth, and this writer is convinced it is, then the monument on Massacre Hill takes on new meaning and interpretation for the future.

The tribal victory on the cold, snowy ridge near Peno Creek can no longer be seen simply as Indians besting an arrogant fool. Instead, the Fetterman Fight can take on a perspective preserved on many Civil War battlefields in the eastern United States. On those hallowed grounds, visitors celebrate the courage, endurance, and heroism of men and women from both sides, regardless of who won the battle.

The Fetterman Fight monument could symbolize a military action where northern plains people employing superior numbers, planning, and execution, defeated a capable Army officer leading the best men available to face them. Both can celebrate their heroes and remember the dead without apology. Perhaps even the name should be changed to remove personal designation. Maybe in the future we will call this consequential event the Battle of Lodge Trail Ridge.
APPENDIX I

KNOWN DEAD IN THE FETTERMAN FIGHT.
21 DECEMBER 1866
KNOWN DEAD IN THE FETTERMAN FIGHT, 21 DECEMBER 1866

Commissioned Officers, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry

Captain William J. Fetterman, Second Battalion
Captain Frederick H. Brown, First Battalion
2nd Lieutenant George W. Grummond, Second Battalion

Company A, Second Battalion, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry

1st Sergeant Augustus Lange
Sergeant Hugh Murphy
Corporal Robert Lennon
Corporal William Dute
Private Frederick Ackermann
Private William Betzler
Private Thomas Burke
Private Henry Buchanan
Private Maximilian Dihring
Private George E. R. Goodall
Private Francis S. Gordon
Private Michael Harten
Private Martin Kelly
Private Patrick Shannon
Private Charles M. Taylor
Private Joseph D. Thomas
Private David Thorey
Private John Timson
Private Albert H. Walters
Private John M. Weaver
Private John Woodruff

Company C, Second Battalion, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry

Sergeant Francis Raymond
Sergeant Patrick Rooney
Corporal Gustave A. Bauer
Corporal Patrick Gallagher
Private Henry E. Aarons
Private Michael O'Garra
Private Jacob Rosenberg
Private Frank P. Sullivan
Private Patrick Smith
Company E, Second Battalion, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry

Sergeant William Morgan
Corporal John Quinn
Private George W. Burrell
Private John Maher
Private George H. Waterbury
Private Timothy Cullinane

Company H, Second Battalion, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry

1st Sergeant Alexander Smith
Sergeant Ephraim C. Bissell
Corporal Michael Sharkey
Corporal George Phillips
Corporal Frank Karston
Private George Davis
Private Perry F. Dolan
Private Asa H. Griffin
Private Herman Keil
Private James Kean
Private Michael Kinney
Private Delos Reed

Regimental armorer, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry

Private Thomas M. Maddeon

Company C, Second U. S. Cavalry

Sergeant James Baker
Corporal James Kelley
Corporal Thomas F. Herrigan
Bugler Adolph Metzger
Artificer John McCarty
Private Thomas Amberson
Private Thomas Broglin
Private William L. Bugbee
Private Patrick Clancy
Private William L. Comog
Private Charles Cuddy
Private Robert Daniel
Private Harvey S. Deming
Private Hugh B. Doran
Private Nathan Foreman
Private Andrew M. Fitzgerald
Private Daniel Green
Private Charles Gamford
Private John Gitter
Private Ferdinand Houser
Private Frank Jones
Private John McColl
Private James P. McGuire
Private Franklin Payne
Private James Ryan
Private George W. Nugent

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Private Oliver Williams

Civilian Volunteers

Isaac Fisher
James Wheatley

Northern Cheyennes

Big Nose
Bull Head
Strong Wind Blowing
Swift Hawk

Northern Arapahoes

(Name unknown)

Lakotas

Bear Ears
Broken Hand
Charging Crow
Clown Horse
Eagle Stays In Air
Eats Meat
Eats Pemmican
Fine Weather
Flying Hawk
He Dog
Iron Goggles
Little Crow
Lone Bear
Male Eagle
Yellow White Man

APPENDIX II

MAPS
MAP 1
NORTHERN PLAINS CIRCA 1800


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SCENE OF THE FORT PHIL KEARNY FIGHT, 1866.
The town of Sheridan, Wyoming, is about at the juncture of Big Goose Creek and Little Goose Creek, about 25 miles north of Fort Phil Kearny.

FORT PHILIP KEARNEY AND SURROUNDINGS, FROM ORIGINAL SURVEYS.

* Indicates block-houses in woods for working parties.

Dotted line, roads to Pine Island and Mountain.

Broken line, road to Virginia City, crossing narrow divide where bodies of Fetterman's command were found.

C, cemetery at foot of Pilot Hill.

□ Corral, on road to woods, where train was attacked December 21st, 1866.

Source: Margaret Carrington, Absaraka, 204.
In this Carrington map, A represents Fort Phil Kearny; B, where wood detail was attacked on December 21, 1866; C, where Fetterman's force crossed the Big Piney pursuing Indian decoys; and D, ridge where massacre


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Indian Skirmishes of December 6, 1866

The Fetterman Massacre of December 21, 1866


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