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A WINTER CAMPAIGN:

General Philip H. Sheridan's Operations on the Southern Plains, 1868-9

by

WAYNE M. SARF

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2001

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Nov. 8, 2000
Date

Chair of Examining Committee

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Abstract

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Advisor: Professor David Syrett

The treaties made in 1867 between the United States and the Indian tribes of the Southern Plains failed to secure peace; the Comanches and Kiowas continued their traditional pattern of raids against Texas, and in the summer of 1868 Cheyenne and Arapaho warriors began a wave of attacks against Kansas frontier settlements. The nomadic Plains Indians' skill in eluding pursuit, and their habit of avoiding any fight at unfavorable odds, frustrated conventional military responses, and Major-General Philip H. Sheridan resolved to nullify the tribesmen's superior mobility with a winter campaign, unprecedented in scope.

Sheridan employed three powerful columns. The main force, led by Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer, achieved the campaign's greatest battlefield success by destroying the snowbound Cheyenne village of chief Black Kettle, though this victory inspired charges that Custer had massacred women and children -- and had in fact attacked a friendly village. While the soldiers' ability to wage a sustained campaign in the harshest of climates influenced most of the so-called "hostiles" to submit to reservation life, some bands continued to resist,

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and military operations extended well into the summer of 1869.

Sheridan's philosophy of total war resulted in a campaign waged against his foes' entire population, as his soldiers slaughtered Indian horses, burned villages, and carried off noncombatants as prisoners. Its success offered a pattern for subsequent operations against Indians. But while it received praise for its audacity, the campaign was also damned by humanitarians, and produced both minor mysteries and major controversies. No comprehensive narrative of the winter campaign, attempting to address fully its many unresolved questions, has appeared. This dissertation will fill the scholarly gap, exploring the controversies surrounding the campaign -- dissecting the options available to U.S. Army and Indian leaders, the question of the Army's ability (or inability) to distinguish "friendly" from "hostile" Indians, the campaign's military lessons, and its effect on Indian resistance and subsequent Army policy.

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This dissertation could not have been completed without the assistance of many individuals. In drawing on the resources of many archives and historical institutions during the research process, the author relied heavily on the knowledge and experience of the staff members consulted; worthy of particular mention are Kitty Belle Deernose, museum curator, and John A. Doerner, chief historian, of the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument; Dr. Richard J. Sommers, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks; and Michael E. Pilgrim, Senior Reference Archivist, Archives I Reference Branch, National Archives and Records Administration.

Other individuals who generously provided clues, guidance, or other assistance include the Reverend Vincent A. Heier; Major General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, U.S.A.F. (ret.); Neil Mangum, superintendent, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument; Mr. William Menig; Mrs. Margaret Custer; Oklahoma residents Arthur Shoemaker and Dr. Stan Hoig; Mr. Tom O'Neil; Mr. Brian Pohanka; the late Major Jay Smith, U.S.A.F. (ret.); Dr. David Dixon; and Dr. Paul Andrew Hutton. Dr. William B. Lees, Director, Historic Sites Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, furnished a copy of his archeological report on the Washita battle site, while Mr. Jerry F. Meyers of Virginia provided not merely useful comments on the Battle of the Washita, but also his own map of the battlefield.

Mr. Robert M. Utley, premier historian of the United States Army on the frontier, offered invaluable advice on the structure of this work, while Dr. Kathleen Williams

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graciously reviewed the entire manuscript and adorned it with many penetrating comments. Thanks should also go to my advisor, Dr. David Syrett.

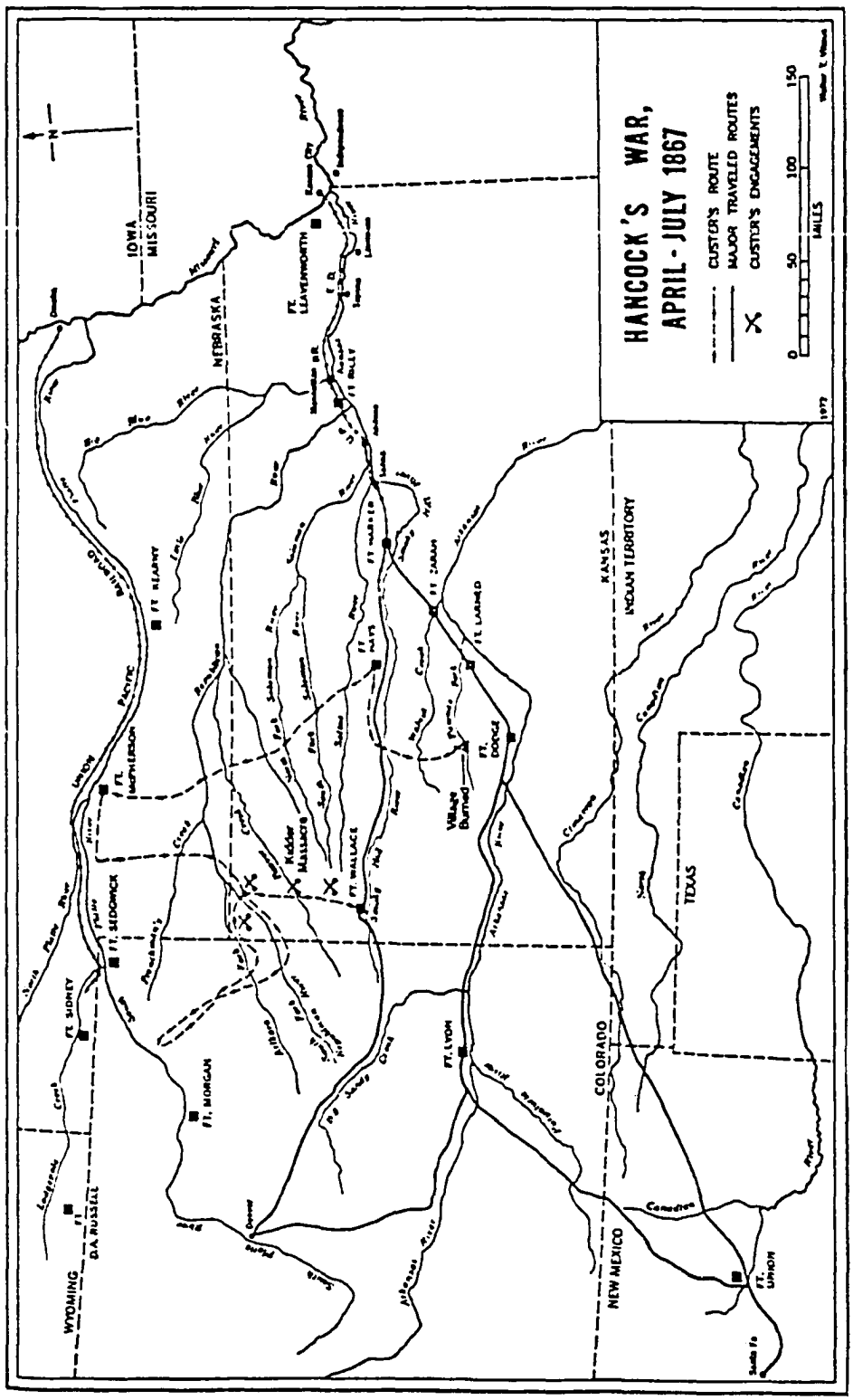
As ever, I must express gratitude to my parents for their support throughout this lengthy process, and also thank my brother Peter, who initiated me into the mysteries of the computer on which the present work was composed.

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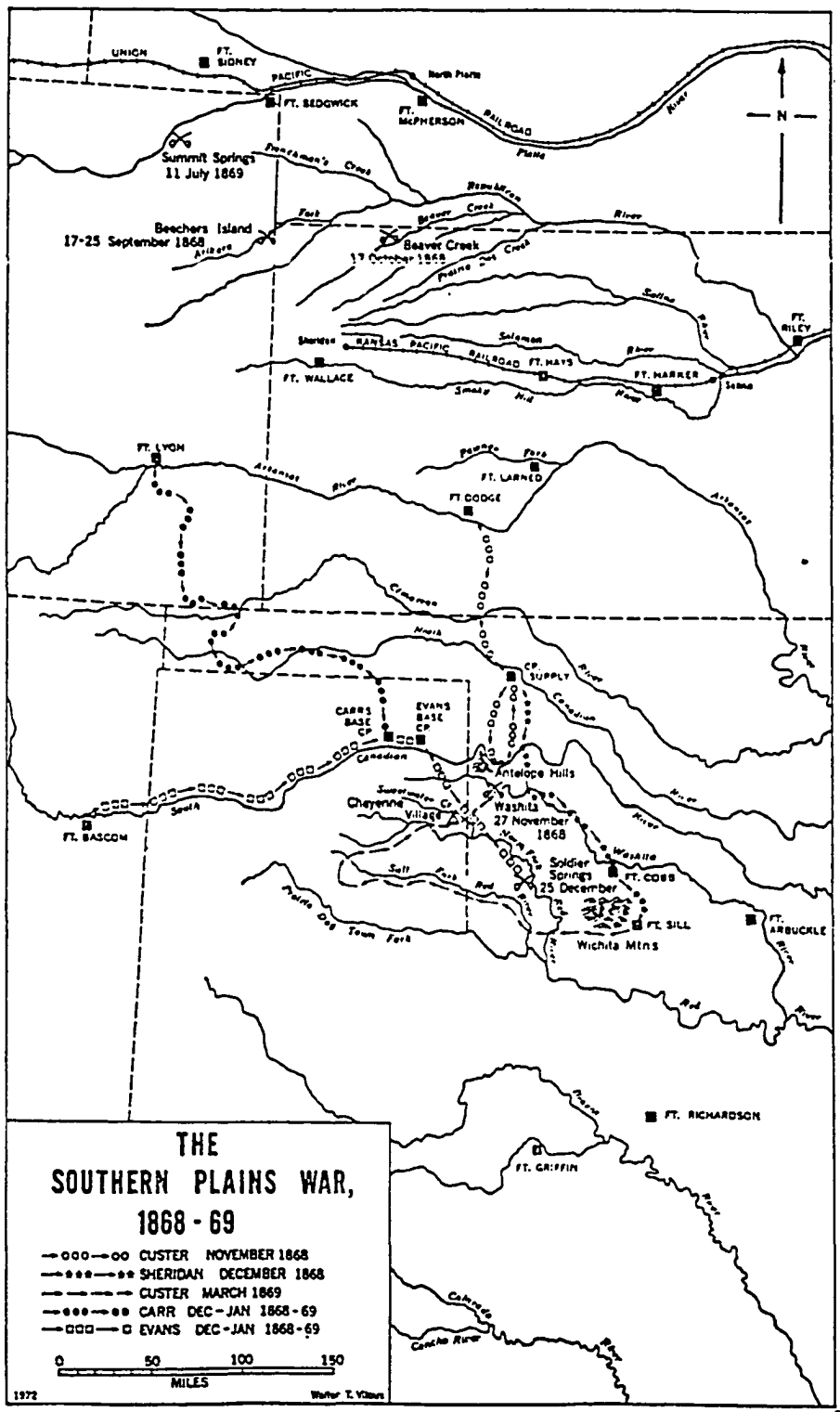
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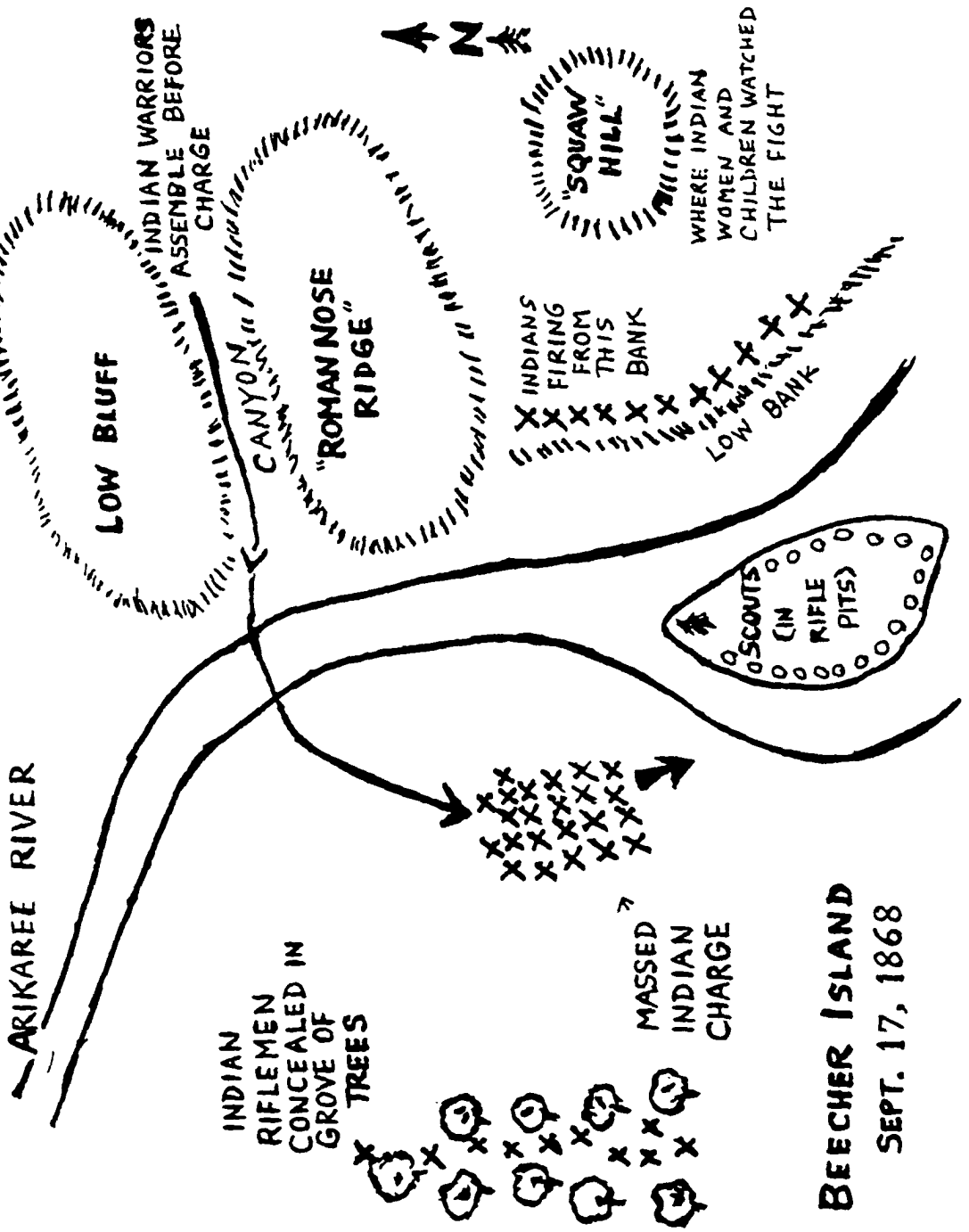
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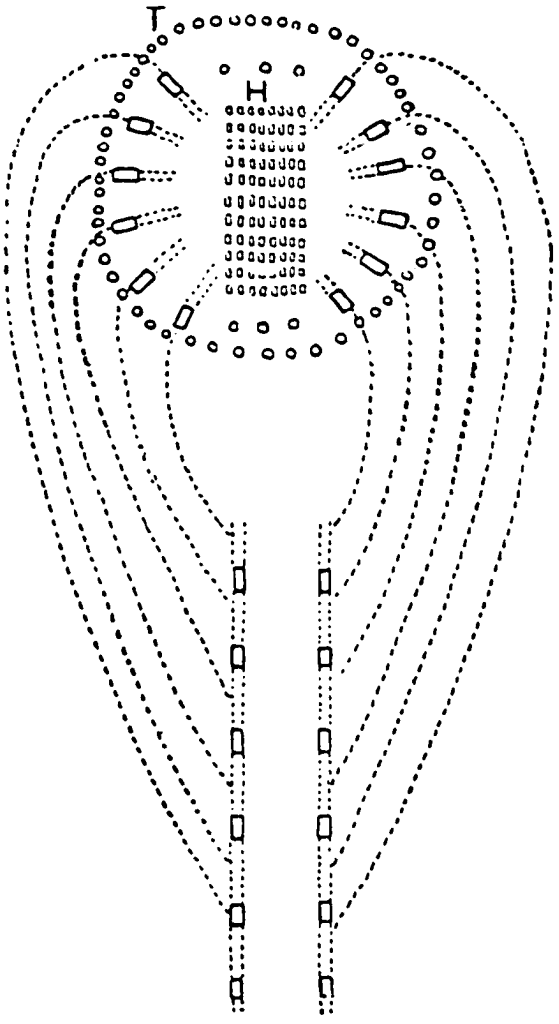
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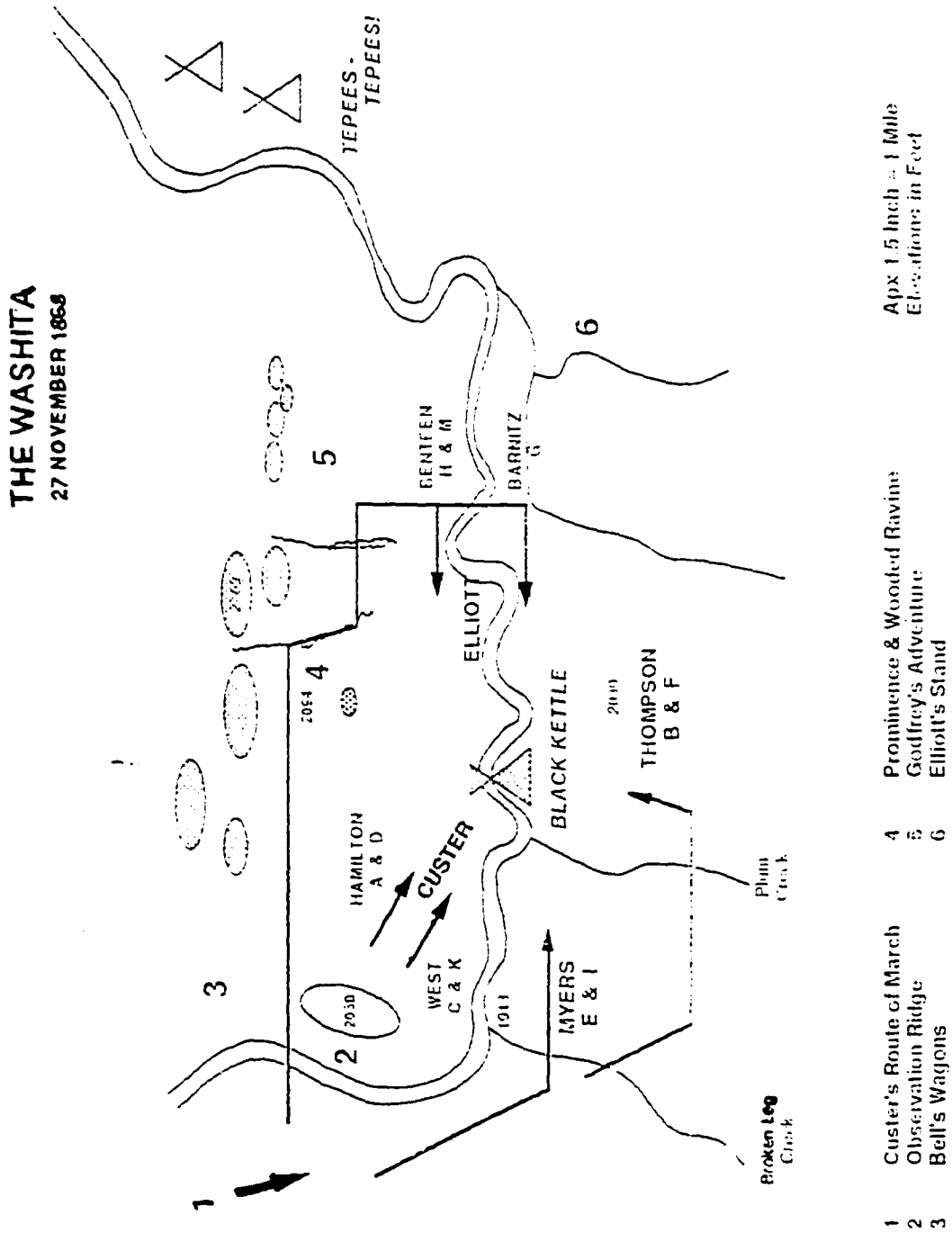
Position of Wagons and Soldiers in Beaver Creek Fight

T, Troopers Surrounding Wagons; H, Horses Inside the Inclosure

Drawn by General Carpenter

Map No. 4 (from Cyrus T. Brady, Indian Fights and Fighters, p. 130)

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Map No. 5 (adapted from a map provided by Jerry F. Meyers)

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INTRODUCTION

"The struggle has come," wrote the journalist De B. Randolph Keim in 1870, "to solve, for all time, the question whether the white or the red man shall prevail in the vast intermediate region between Eastern and Western civilization." And while the post-Civil War frontier would soon see the climax of Indian resistance to white encroachment, Keim himself had already borne witness as Major-General Philip H. Sheridan led a shrunken U.S. Army's first successful campaign against the warriors of the Southern Plains. Looking back, Keim correctly observed that "The campaign was an exceptional one. There was much in it that had never characterized any previous undertaking . . . "

Launched into the face of a harsh winter, Sheridan's campaign marked a new theory of response to a problem which had long frustrated normal Army methods: the elusive Plains Indian raiders whose distinctive style of warfare -- indeed, whose very concept of warfare -- was completely contrary to that of a conventional nineteenth-century military force. The horseback Indian warrior, trained in the warlike arts and equitation since childhood, and imbued with a martial spirit which valued distinction in battle above all other earthly glories, had already proven himself not only the white soldier's superior as an individual fighter, but also in traveling, in living off the land -- and in eluding pursuit.

Striking where they pleased and avoiding combat whenever the odds seemed poor, Plains warriors could easily make fifty miles a day in fleeing infantry or heavily-laden cavalry, their trail splitting up and petering out as a war party scattered. Even entire villages, made up

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of portable buffalo-hide tipis, could literally "pull up stakes" and break up while outdistancing military columns. A winter campaign promised to nullify these nomadic advantages -- if such a campaign could be carried out without crippling the forces attempting it.

Both praised for its audacity and condemned by humanitarians, Sheridan's campaign proved a turning point in Regular Army methodology -- an apparent success in overcoming all too familiar problems with relatively untried means. And in an era when few thought any specialized doctrine of Indian warfare necessary, due to the transitory nature of such conflict -- as opposed to the sort of "real" warfare familiar to Civil War veterans -- it offered a pattern for subsequent operations. Thus it cannot be dismissed as an obscure or isolated frontier adventure.

An event's strictly military significance may be obscured when it transcends mere fact -- even disputed fact -- to enter the dangerous realm of symbol and legend. This was sadly true of the campaign's climactic "Battle of the Washita," perhaps due to the fate of its two best-known participants. One of these was Black Kettle, a prominent "peace chief" of the Southern Cheyennes, whose death in this attack by U.S. troops seemed to many a grim sequel to the massacre of his band at Sand Creek four years before. The other was Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer, for his enigmatic death at the Little Bighorn eight years later would seal in blood his role as a symbol of the Indian-fighting soldier. Popular iconography cannot be our concern; yet symbolism and its uses, in a historical field where passions can still run high a century after the event, have had their corrosive effect upon the literature of the winter campaign. Custer's pivotal role, and the tragic fate of Black Kettle, have led some writers to narrowly emphasize the struggle on the Washita, slighting or

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ignoring other facets of a campaign which unfolded over a vast theater of operations.

Yet more than any other Indian campaign -- save for that which had as its climax Custer's disastrous last fight in 1876 -- Sheridan's winter campaign gave birth to minor mysteries and major controversies. Some of these involved not military effectiveness, but questions of morality and honor. Had Sheridan's men attacked peaceful Indians rather than "hostile" raiders? Had they deliberately slain noncombatants? Was Custer's celebrated "Battle of the Washita" in fact a massacre of unsuspecting Indians? Addressing such questions requires determining just what happened -- and the context of events. But whereas the campaign climaxing in Custer's death has been "written up" seemingly to exhaustion, no comprehensive narrative of the winter campaign of 1868-69, attempting to address fully its many unresolved questions, has appeared.

It will be the object of this dissertation to fill this scholarly gap, exploring the controversies surrounding the campaign, its prelude, and events following its official "conclusion." It will dissect the options available to government and Indian leaders, the campaign's military "lessons," and its effect on Indian resistance. Finally, it will demonstrate how the apparent success of Sheridan's operations, despite the great hardships and dangers encountered by his troops, influenced the course of subsequent operations aimed at breaking the power of the great Plains Indian tribes.

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CHAPTER ONE

Prelude: 1864-67

"...it will soon be a burning brand...."

The seeds of the winter campaign conducted in 1868 and 1869 by the United States Army on the Southern Plains were sown by the strife of previous years, by the grievous blunders of the government's Indian policy, and by the basic nature of the conflict between white and red in the American West. The wars of this period would prove to a large degree merely sequels to earlier wars, and part of the last phase of a long process of settlement. An old pattern was accelerated by the unprecedented and unexpected pace of westward emigration, and the technology of the railroad, steamship, and telegraph.[1]

Despite the widespread belief that the Indians' final subjugation was not merely inevitable, but imminent, some of the most warlike tribes known to the North American continent remained unconquered at the end of the Civil War. Nomadic horsemen, ranging in quest of migrating buffalo herds, still dominated the vast expanses of the Great Plains, and white settlers, many of whom had never seen an Indian, could remain within striking distance of raiders from villages hundreds of miles away. The warriors of such Plains tribes as the

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[1]For the best military overview of these final Indian wars, see Robert M. Utley, Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891 (New York: Macmillan, 1973). The same author's The Indian Frontier of the American West 1846-1890 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1984) provides a narrative summarizing issues of war, diplomacy, settlement, and cultural assimilation.

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Cheyenne, the Sioux, the Comanche, and the Kiowa would present a formidable military problem to the small Regular Army confronting them.

Theirs was a warrior culture, celebrating prowess in battle and prizing physical bravery as the supreme virtue in a perpetual quest for horses, captives, glory, and revenge. Enemies were always available in abundance, for outside the warrior's basic identifying unit of tribe, sub-tribe, clan, or band, most outsiders not viewed as allies were classed as foes.[2] Individual distinction was the primary goal in war, as emphasized by the Plains custom of "counting coup," a term derived from the French word signifying a blow; most recognized acts of merit required that the warrior touch an enemy or his corpse, or physically seize a prize such as a horse or gun, rather than merely kill with a missile weapon.[3]

While the Homeric exaltation of the individual encouraged aggression and the cultivation of warlike skills, it tended to discourage strategic and sometimes even tactical thinking, though not the pains normally taken to avoid casualties. Army captain William Clark, while believing that the Indians lacked tenacity in the attack and were easily repulsed by determined or unexpected resistance, dismissed the common belief in Indian cowardice, and

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[2]"To the Plains Indians of early days," wrote a careful student of their customs, " the terms 'stranger' and 'enemy' were almost synonymous." Not only was a man or small group not recognized likely to be attacked, but on occasion one war party might be attacked by another of the same tribe, and losses inflicted before the combatants recognized each other. George Bird Grinnell, The Fighting Cheyennes (1915; Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1958), p. 97.

[3]Like other methods of recognizing valor, this system was necessarily imperfect. An anthropologist, citing one Plains warrior's rise in prestige for killing a woman he had found urinating outside an enemy camp, found that the coup was "interpreted in so conventional a way that often it bore no relation to true bravery whatsoever." Robert H. Lowie, The Crow Indians (1935; New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 229.

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recognized as their vital principle of strategy the infliction of "the greatest possible amount of damage to the enemy with the least possible loss." In practice, minimizing casualties usually took precedence.[4] But while under most circumstances the Plains Indian would prove a frustratingly elusive foe, expert in forcing a fight on his own terms and in breaking off action when it suited him, his anxiety to preserve life did not always lead to logical defensive measures, even in his own camp:

> Indians take every precaution against a surprise except keeping awake. Their arms are placed within reach, usually near the head of the bed, and everything is as carefully arranged as though they full expected to be (as the frontier word has it) "jumped" before daylight: but they do not keep sentries posted to give warning of the approach of the enemy.[5]

A later analyst found this lack of security measures "frankly incomprehensible" in view of the Plains Indians' own emphasis on ambuscade and stratagem: "It would seem that the aggressor who so completely relied on surprise would take pains to see that he himself was not surprised, but this seldom occurred...They never learned the value of posting sentinels, although both the defenders and attackers relied entirely upon surprise and shock."[6] This

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[4]W.P. Clark, The Indian Sign Language (1885; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), pp. 395-96. Captain Clark's book, originally written as a guide for Army personnel on the frontier, contains an immense amount of information concerning the customs, dress, morality, and mentality of the Plains tribes.

[5]Clark, Sign Language, p. 405.

[6]Harry Hobert Turney-High, Primitive War: Its Practice and Concepts, 2nd ed. (1949; Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1971), p. 118. While these nomadic hunters enjoyed excellent security while on the march, the "clever scouts of the Plains" were the worst in guarding against surprises while encamped, and only more sedentary, agricultural Indians seemed able to adequately guard themselves at home, inspiring the author to speculate on economic factors: "Could it be that men with only their lives to save are unwary, while those will full bins are cautious?"

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flaw would repeatedly produce disastrous consequences in wars against conventional forces.

The Cheyennes, who called themselves the Tsĭs tsĭś tăs, and were the people with perhaps the greatest fighting reputation of all on the Plains, would prove the primary opponent of United States forces in the campaign of 1868.[7] Like their neighbors, most of whom were also their foes, the Cheyennes' spurs toward warlike action included prestige, the economic goal (itself connected to status) of obtaining horses, and the duty to avenge slain Cheyennes.[8] A party might consist of from one to three men, or run into the hundreds, with younger men generally gaining experience under middle aged "pipe-bearers." Raised to believe that it was better to perish gloriously than live to a decrepit old age, such young men, as a white admirer wrote, fought not only to gain their peers' approval "but for pure enjoyment of the struggle."[9]

Constant intertribal warfare did not require a chain of command, nor even leaders able to give specific orders with some confidence that they would be obeyed. Like other Plains

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[7]Believing that the word "Cheyenne" itself was derived from a Sioux term meaning "people speaking language not understood," the naturalist George Bird Grinnell explained that the term Tsĭs tsĭś tăs had various translations, including "similarly bred", and thus resembled many other tribal names "explained to mean variously, 'the people,' 'the real people,' etc., and perhaps actually mean 'the people,' i.e., 'the folks,' 'our folks,' 'us.'" Since the Cheyennes, like other Plains Indians, frequently intermarried with their captives, this sense of superiority did not rely upon race. Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 4. See also George Bird Grinnell, The Cheyenne Indians: Their History and Ways of Life (1923; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972, 2 vol.), I, pp. 2-4.

[8]Many war expeditions were made simply as horse-stealing raids, and there were supposedly many reputable Cheyennes who went to war solely to capture horses, boasting that they had never slain a man, or perhaps even counted coup. Grinnell, The Cheyenne Indians, II, pp. 2, 6.

[9]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 8, 12-13.

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tribes, the Cheyennes possessed military or "soldier" societies, such as the Red Shields and Dog Men (or "Dog Soldiers"). But these were chiefly concerned with the preservation of domestic order: a village's various lodges took turns policing the camp and enforcing the discipline of communal hunts, while leaving the individual's behavior in warfare regulated largely by public opinion.[10]

Nor did the Cheyennes possess a political organization well-suited to direct, or to restrain, warlike impulses. With both northern and southern divisions of the tribe living in scattered hunting bands, to unite for ceremonies and communal hunting during the summer, it was only for a brief season that truly tribal institutions could operate, and the chiefs of the tribal council did not act as generalissimos.[11] Save through force of personality or public opinion, there was no power to compel obedience, and while Washington's representatives might desire a single "chief" able to speak for the tribe and make agreements binding its

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[10]Of all the Plains tribes, the Kiowas appear to have placed the most value on obedience to a war party's leader, at least while that party remained in the field. However, membership in such parties, recruited by the leader, remained voluntary. For a study of Plains warfare centering on a detailed analysis of the Kiowa military structure, see Bernard Mishkin, Rank and Warfare among the Plains Indians, 2nd ed., Monographs of the American Ethnological Society, 3 (Seattle and London: University of Washington, 1966).

[11]John Stands in Timber and Margot Liberty, Cheyenne Memories (1967; Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1972), pp. 36, 42, 51. The Cheyennes' Council of Forty-four, deemed the most elaborately structured of such institution among the Plains Indians, included four chiefs elected decennially from each of the tribe's ten bands, and four others retained from the previous decade, while the keeper of the tribe's most sacred talismans, the Sacred Arrows, held the rank of "Old Man Chief." A man could not be both a council member and a military society leader simultaneously. The whites, of course, tended to expect of such Indian "chiefs" either substantial civil authority or military leadership, if not both.

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members, among the Cheyennes no such leader existed.[12]

Nevertheless, the government would make treaties with chiefs of both the Cheyennes and their allies the Arapahoes, tribes so closely allied that the federal government chose to treat their southern divisions as a single body for treaty purposes, with the ultimate goal of consolidating both Southern Cheyennes and Southern Arapahoes to a comparatively small reservation, with its agency on the Upper Arkansas River. During the Civil War, a period of intensified Indian warfare throughout much of the West, many Cheyennes and Arapahoes continued to range between the Platte River and the Arkansas, and increasing tensions between the Indians and the encroaching whites in the Colorado Territory resulted in minor engagements and in scattered raids against stage stations, wagon trains, and other targets. However, the Indians' hostile actions, for the most part, appear to have been provoked by Colorado volunteer troops acting under the assumption that a full-scale war was imminent or had already broken out, and indiscriminate in their violence against Indians.[13]

The soldiers' attempts to locate and strike "hostile" Indians proved indecisive. Largely

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[12]Stands in Timber and Liberty, Memories, p. 54. One historian of the Indian Wars, even while admitting that no word had been so abused as "chief," did not seek a narrower definition in addressing the argument that such men as the Cheyenne Roman Nose and the Apache medicine man Geronimo were not, technically, chiefs of their tribes: "They were, however, leaders of war parties, and 'chief' means that, if it means anything." Don Russell, "Indians and Soldiers of the American West," in Jay Monoghan, ed., The Book of the American West (1963; New York: Bonanza, n.d.), p. 196.

[13]As one historian ironically phrased it, "The origins of the plains war that broke out in the spring of 1864 lay largely in the prevailing belief of Colorado officials that the Plains Indians intended to go to war in the spring of 1864." Robert M. Utley, Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian, 1848-1865 (1967; New York: Macmillan, 1973), p. 285.

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through the efforts of Major Edward W. Wynkoop of the 1st Colorado Cavalry, who had come to sympathize deeply with their plight, the Indians were convinced to parley, and the Cheyenne chief Black Kettle led a delegation of Cheyennes and Arapahoes to Denver that September. Black Kettle was convinced of the futility of fighting the whites, and at a meeting at nearby Camp Weld, the Indian emissaries agreed to all of Governor John Evans' terms for peace. But some military officers, believing that severe punishment must precede any lasting peace with Indians, feared that such treaty-making was premature.[14] Black Kettle's village eventually camped forty miles to the northeast of Fort Lyons, Colorado Territory, on the upper reaches of a tributary of the Arkansas known as Sand Creek.

At this stage, however, the territory's ranking military officer, Colonel John Minton Chivington, commanding the Army's District of Colorado, proceeded to march on the Cheyenne-Arapaho encampment. A warlike Methodist minister who had played a major role in defeating the Confederate invasion of New Mexico, Chivington contemptuously rejected protests by various officers that attacking Black Kettle's camp would violate the government's guarantees, and surrounded the village on November 29 with a force of almost seven hundred men. These included the 3rd Colorado Cavalry (men who had enlisted for one

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[14]Such reluctance to make peace naturally assumed that it would be the Indians who would be chastised, though their success in terrorizing large portions of Kansas and Colorado, even to the outskirts of Denver, inspired the observation that it was in their power "to inflict far greater loss of innocent blood on the whites than the whites could inflict on them." Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 166. For Wynkoop's career and relationship to the Cheyennes during this period, see Louis Kraft, "Edward W. Wynkoop: A Forgotten Hero," Research Review: The Journal of the Little Big Horn Associates, 1.1, second series (June 1987): 2-11; and Louis Kraft, "Ned Wynkoop and Black Kettle," Research Review, 9.2, second series (June 1995): 7-17.

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hundred days specifically to fight Indians, and whose enlistments were soon to expire), a detachment of the 1st Colorado Cavalry, and four mountain howitzers. Lying in a wooded bend of the creek, the village numbered perhaps 100 or more tipis, populated by perhaps five hundred Cheyennes, in addition to a much smaller number of Arapahoes. It was later reported that Black Kettle had actually raised both the Stars and Stripes and a white flag of truce in front of his lodge, and George Bent, half-Cheyenne son of the well-known Indian trader William Bent, recalled: "All the time Black Kettle kept calling out not to be frightened: that the camp was under protection and there was no danger."

But the soldiers opened fire, deliberately slaughtering men, women and children and mutilating their bodies, sometimes sexually, as recorded in testimony which still retains its power to appall -- though some troops of the First Colorado had refused to participate in the action. Against their well-armed attackers the warriors could offer no effective defense, and some of those who escaped the butchery may have frozen to death, driven out without adequate clothing into a harsh winter. Among the dead lay chief White Antelope, whose ears, nose and testicles were cut off, his scrotum apparently taken for a tobacco pouch, and George Bent would claim that over 150 had died in the slaughter, over three-fourths of these being women and children. But Black Kettle, and his wife Medicine Woman (bearing nine wounds), escaped.[15] The attack had devastated both tribes involved: while nine chiefs had been lost to the Cheyennes, an estimated 47 Arapahoes died, out of ten lodges under Left Hand, with

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[15]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 177-79.

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perhaps only four Arapahoes escaping.[16]

Chivington returned with his militiamen to Denver as a conquering hero. But three governmental investigatory bodies subsequently condemned the Sand Creek massacre, while in 1896 the United States Army's commanding general (who had gained his greatest military fame as an Indian fighter) would characterize the volunteers' work as "perhaps the foulest and most unjustifiable crime in the annals of America."[17]

Though a terrible blow, Chivington's attack failed to bring even a Carthaginian peace, and a captain of Iowa volunteer cavalry who declared that Chivington's victims had "all needed killing" recognized as much: "The only difficulty was that there were about fifteen

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[16]For a list of the slain Cheyenne chiefs, see Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 173. Though the Arapaho chief Left Hand was also thought to have been slain at Sand Creek, a chronicler of the tribe argues that he instead died of natural causes a short time later. Virginia Cole Trenholm, The Arapahoes, Our People (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), xii-xii.

[17]Nelson A. Miles, Personal Recollections and Observations of General Nelson A. Miles (1896; New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), p. 139. Stan Hoig, The Sand Creek Massacre (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1961) provides the standard account. Chivington's contemporary and more recent defenders are reduced to arguing that his unsuspecting victims had not -- technically -- surrendered to the government, or were somehow duplicitous in their peace professions. The most notable rationalizations include Reginald S. Craig, The Fighting Parson: The Biography of Colonel John M. Chivington (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1959) and, in strange contrast to the strong pro-Indian sympathies evident throughout the rest of this nineteenth-century history, J.P. Dunn, Massacres of the Mountains: A History of the Indian Wars of the Far West 1815-1875. (1886; New York: Archer House, 1965), pp. 342-382. The controversy is examined in Raymond G. Carey, "The Puzzle of Sand Creek, The Colorado Magazine, 41 (Fall 1964): 279-98. Vital primary material from government publications, including much shocking testimony concerning the atrocities committed by ostensibly civilized men, is reprinted in John M. Caroll, ed., The Sand Creek Massacre: A Documentary History (New York: Sol Lewis, 1973).

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hundred warriors that didn't get killed."[18] The Southern Cheyennes took the unusual step of sending a ceremonial pipe north to the Teton Sioux as well as to the Northern Arapahoes, then camped on the Solomon and Republican Rivers, with an invitation to a general war against the Americans. The initial blows, sweeping along the South Platte Valley, involved a large combined village capable of fielding just such a host as fifteen hundred warriors, and while the Indians' war against the whites followed the usual raiding pattern, the raiding was done on an unusually large and costly scale, and with a hitherto unseen willingness to engage large bodies of troops. Plunder in previously unseen quantities was brought back to Indian camps: Denver was virtually cut off from the east for several months, and even the small town of Julesburg, Colorado, was ransacked and burned on February 2.[19]

Efforts to come to grips with the raiders generally failed. In January, 1865, as the initial revenge raids were launched along the South Platte, Brigadier General Robert B. Mitchell, commanding the District of Nebraska, launched a winter campaign from Nebraska. With a force drawn from state volunteer cavalry regiments and mounted militia, accompanied by six artillery pieces, Mitchell searched along the Republican River, crossing into Kansas and marching over three hundred miles. But he failed to engage the enemy, and the bitter weather led an aide to the general to inform a later generation: "An Indian campaign in the winter is

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[18]Eugene F. Ware, The Indian War of 1864 (1911; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1960), p. 309.

[19]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 181-203; Donald J. Berthrong, The Southern Cheyennes. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), pp. 224-32; Utley, Frontiersmen, pp. 300-302.

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anything but pleasant. There is absolutely no fun in it."[20]

The campaign had injured the health of many soldiers and animals, inflicted no damage on the Indians, forced the abandonment of six wagons, and given General Mitchell frostbitten ears. On the return march, the general, doubting his own ability as an Indian fighter, proved distressingly melancholy, "and all he could say was: 'Well, what more could we do? What more could we do?' and he seemed disconsolate over the fact that there was not an Indian less..." On January 27, the day after the expedition's return to Fort Kearny, Nebraska, Mitchell attempted to make the country uninhabitable for the Indians by giving them "ten thousand square miles of prairie-fire." Wiring telegraphic instructions to men positioned at various points, from Fort Kearny west to Denver, he ordered the country set ablaze at sunset.[21] But the scattered fires, converging into a rolling sheet of wind-blown flame, could not deter the vengeful raiders, who continued to display a level of coordination never seen before or afterward. Attempting an expedition against the Indians that March from Fort Laramie, Wyoming Territory, Mitchell found the movement of troops and supplies confounded by high water and snow, and judged the elements "evidently partial to the Indians."[22]

Major General John Pope, commanding the Division of the Missouri, planned a grand campaign to subdue the hostile tribes of the Plains, concentrating on the areas south of the Arkansas and north of the Platte, since the area between the two rivers had by this time been

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[20]Ware, Indian War, p. 347.

[21]Ware, Indian War, pp. 353, 355-56.

[22]Utley, Frontiersmen, p. 303.

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virtually abandoned by "hostiles." While one column under Brigadier General James H. Ford attempted to engage the Kiowas, Kiowa-Apaches, and Comanches south of the Arkansas, along with whatever Cheyennes and Arapahoes might be with them, a second force under Brigadier General Alfred Sully would march across Dakota and establish a fort on the Powder River. A third force of about two thousand cavalrymen, under Brigadier General Patrick E. Connor, would attempt to seek out and destroy the Powder River encampments of the Cheyennes, Sioux, and Arapahoes.

However, bad weather, insufficient transport, and a lack of supplies prevented Pope from commencing operations in April or even May. The plan to strike the tribes south of the Arkansas was also hampered by diplomatic initiatives, and these finally led to the suspension of operations and a truce, concluded that August with most of the leading men of the southern Plains tribes, including Black Kettle and Little Robe of the Cheyennes. General Sully's column was diverted by a clamor to march against Santee Sioux thought to menace settlers in Minnesota. Pope's third column, under Connor, would provide a harsh lesson in the perils of campaigning on the Plains.

In organizing his grand Powder River Expedition, itself broken down into three distinct columns, Connor sought to overcome blocked roads and shortages of horses and forage before setting out from Fort Laramie on July 30. His Indian opponents, unhindered by unreliable civilian contractors or any need for supply trains, had no great opinion of the soldiers' fighting ability, and the first serious blow of the campaign would be struck by a detachment of Pawnee Indian scouts rather than white troops. On August 16 the Pawnees, from a company in Nebraska state service commanded by Major Frank North, attacked and

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annihilated a war party of Cheyennes in a running fight: North himself claimed 27 Cheyennes slain, though General Connor officially reported only 24, with the loss of four of the Pawnees' horses.[23]

Connor's personal "Left Column" had been in the field for almost a month before its commander learned from his scouts of an Indian village near the head of the Tongue River, and made a rapid night march to attack it. Connor's intended target, an Arapaho camp of two to three hundred lodges under Black Bear, was warned by a Cheyenne family rushing in to tell of the approaching soldiers they had seen on the trail. But the Arapahoes dismissed the warnings, and delayed moving their camp until the next morning, August 29, 1865. Women were just starting to pull down the tipis as Connor's horsemen debouched from a ravine and attacked: "The utter heedlessness of [Plains] Indians, even in time of war, could hardly be better shown."[24]

Connor's reckless assault, made against unknown odds with a picked detachment of only 135 cavalrymen and 90 Indian scouts, was characteristic of an era in which actually fighting Indians was considered a less formidable task than locating them. Also characteristic was the infliction of noncombatant casualties, though apparently these were not inflicted with the same deliberation seen at Sand Creek. "Unfortunately for the women and children, "

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[23]The Cheyennes' low opinion of Army prowess is suggested by their behavior in fleeing only after they saw their advancing foes (riding in a military-style column) strip off their blue uniform coats, and heard the Pawnees' war-cry. George Bird Grinnell, Pawnee Hero Stories and Folk-Tales, With Notes on The Origin, Customs and Character of the Pawnee People (1889; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893); Connor to Major-General G.M. Dodge, August 19, 1865, in Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 206-207.

[24]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 210-211.

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claimed Captain H.E. Parker. "our men had no time to direct their aim..." Though driven from the village, the Indians returned in an attempt to retrieve their stock; repelled by bursting howitzer shells, they withdrew, leaving the soldiers to pile up and burn the Indians' captured property.[25]

But while Connor had achieved a substantial victory, reporting about 35 villagers killed and twenty women and children captured (to be released several days later), his expedition's other two columns, under Colonel Nelson Cole and Lt. Col. Samuel Walker, were unable to force the Indians to battle. Staving off harassing attacks, their artillery pieces able to destroy or disperse groups of warriors at great distances, the soldiers were ultimately defeated by short rations, scurvy, a scarcity of grass, and even a lack of water for their horses. A "norther" followed by sleet and snow helped kill off hundreds of already weakened animals, and hungry soldiers hurriedly stripped the flesh from newly fallen horses. The soldiers' confidence in their own fighting ability, if not their logistical situation, apparently remained unshaken; even while expressing bitterness over the campaign's course, and complaining after a September 5 engagement that rations were "getting devilish short," one of Cole's officers professed his willingness "to give the Idaho Militia [the Indians] every day a turn with our Spencers [repeating carbines], if I only get enough 'grub' and clothing...."[26] But these were

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[25]U.S. Army Recruiting News, Sept. 15, 1928. Palmer, who commanded Co. E of the 11th Kansas Cavalry, also asserted that "many of the female portion of this band fought as bravely as their savage lords," and that, as both sides were equally brave, the soldiers' main advantage was their superior weaponry.

[26]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 212-213; Charles H. Springer, "Campaign Against the Sioux Indians While Commanding Co. B, 12th Missouri Cavalry, 1865," ed. Benjamin Franklin Cooling III, typescript, Springer Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute,

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not to be forthcoming, and the ability of Cole's and Walker's columns to wage effective war had been destroyed. By September 28 all three columns had returned to Fort Connor, Wyoming, and Connor, finding that the state of his command would not permit a renewed effort, concluded 1865's operations by disbanding the Powder River Expedition.

Thus the Plains tribes had yet to receive the desired thrashing when peace treaties were concluded that October on the Little Arkansas River between the federal government and signatory chiefs theoretically representing the Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Comanches, Kiowas, and Kiowa-Apaches. In exchange for government rations, annuities and, for the first two tribes, an apology for the Sand Creek massacre, the Indians agreed to cede their lands, other than certain specified areas to the east of New Mexico and to the south of Kansas. But such agreements were necessarily inconclusive, if only because the chiefs who agreed to them could not compel their followers' obedience, and did not represent all bands then at war. The Cheyenne Dog Soldiers, who normally camped as a separate band, naturally declined any agreement, as the treaty would have denied them their favored lands on the Republican and Smoky Hill roads.[27]

With the disbanding of the state volunteer and militia regiments which had assumed much of the burden of Indian warfare during the Civil War, the tiny Regular Army would

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Carlisle Barracks, PA, pp. 53, 58-59. While Grinnell thought it possible that Cole's artillery may have saved his whole command from being annihilated, he also attributed the Indians' failure to press home the attack to their own shortage of firearms.

[27]Texts for the treaties of 1865 are reprinted in Charles J. Coupler, comp., Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties (4 vols., Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), II, pp. 887-895.

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resume its pre-war role of policing the frontier, while assuming the added burden of policing the defeated South. In 1866 Congress increased the Army's "Military Peace Establishment" by authorizing four new cavalry regiments to join the existing six, and raising the number of infantry regiments from nineteen to forty-five: two of the new mounted regiments and four of infantry would consist of black enlisted men and white officers. With authorized personnel at 64 privates per company, the U.S. Army's paper strength became 54,302 officers and men.[28]

Revisions to the existing system of geographical commands left Lieutenant General William Tecumseh Sherman's vast Division of the Missouri divided into the Department of the Platte, including Iowa, Nebraska, Utah, and part of Montana and Dakota territories: the Department of Dakota, made up of Minnesota and the rest of Montana and the Dakotas: the Department of Arkansas, coupling that state with the Indian Territory: and the Department of the Missouri, including the states of Kansas and Missouri and the territories of Colorado and New Mexico.[29] South of the Platte, the year proved relatively quiet, with only a few scattered and indecisive clashes between Indians and regulars. But there was no assurance that this relatively peaceful state would endure, and if such Kansas military posts as Fort Riley remained unfortified, it was not through faith in the treaties of 1865, but simply through a long-standing confidence that Plains Indians would not attack an Army post of any size.[30]

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[28]For details on postwar military adjustments, see Utley, Frontier Regulars, pp. 11-14. Cavalry regiments included twelve companies or "troops" (a term which, while unofficial at the time, was often used), and infantry regiments ten companies. In 1867 an increase of company strength to 100 permitted a theoretical peak strength of 56,815.

[29]Utley, Frontier Regulars, pp. 14-15.

[30]An officer's wife quartered at Fort Riley questioned the military's nomenclature: "This is not a fort tho' called so. It is a garrison. For there are no walls enclosing it."

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Fearing that large-scale raiding would resume in the spring of 1867, General Sherman authorized a large expedition, led by Department of the Missouri commander Major General Winfield Scott Hancock, to set out from Fort Larned, Kansas to overawe the Indians of the Southern Plains. Hancock's was not, strictly speaking, a punitive expedition, for it was to leave past offenses for what its commander termed "adjustment" by civilian officials. But Hancock also insisted that no "insolence" would be tolerated from the bands encountered, and was ready for war should the Indians not be properly disposed toward the soldiers.[31] If the Indians failed to be either intimidated or thrashed, Hancock could not plead a lack of resources; in his column marched some fourteen hundred soldiers, including a battery of the Fourth Artillery, seven companies of the Thirty-seventh Infantry, and eleven troops of the new Seventh U.S. Cavalry. Commanding the cavalry was twenty-seven-year old Lieutenant Colonel (Brevet Major General) George A. Custer, who had earned a brigadier's star at age twenty-three and emerged from the Civil War as the Northern cavalry's most colorful hero, a long-haired hotspur with a divisional command and the rank of major general of volunteers. Reverting to his Regular Army rank of captain in 1866, he had secured a promotion to lieutenant-colonel in the Seventh, one of the new regiments intended for frontier service.[32]

Elizabeth B. Custer, letter to Rebecca Richmond, December 6, 1866, microfilm reel 1, Elizabeth Bacon Custer Collection (hereafter EBCC), Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument.

[31]Utley, Frontier Regulars, pp. 119-20; Henry M. Stanley, My Early Travels and Adventures in America and Asia (2 vols., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), I, p. 87. Prior to his own conversations with the general, journalist Stanley shared the "common belief out west" that Hancock had undertaken simply to punish the Indians.

[32]Recent biographies added to the immense literature surrounding this legendary figure include Robert M. Utley, Cavalier in Buckskin: George Armstrong Custer and the Western

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Like Hancock, Custer understood that the expedition was not to punish any past sins, but rather to "check or intimidate the Indians from a repetition of their late conduct." Yet Hancock appears to have succeeded simply in antagonizing the Indians, and his actions were denounced by agents of the Department of the Interior's Indian Bureau, including Edward W. Wynkoop, now agent for the Cheyennes and Arapahoes. With a large mixed village of Cheyenne Dog Soldiers and Oglala Sioux encamped on Pawnee Fork, a mere thirty-five miles upstream from the post, Wynkoop spent several days arranging a meeting with Hancock at Fort Larned. But only fourteen Indians appeared as scheduled on April 13, including Tall Bull, a prominent Dog Soldier who impressed Custer as 'a fine, warlike-looking chief."[33]

Compounding his social error of holding the council at night without regard to Indian custom, Hancock showed himself oblivious to Cheyenne fears of a second Sand Creek

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Military Frontier (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), Jeffry Wert, Custer: The Controversial Life of George Armstrong Custer (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), and Louise Barnett, Touched by Fire: The Life, Death, and Mythic Afterlife of George Armstrong Custer (New York: Holt, 1996), the last offering a dual biography of Custer and his wife Elizabeth. For the often confusing system of brevet rank, see Utley, Frontier Regulars, pp. 14, 21-22, 38, n. 13, and James B. Fry, "The Brevet System in the United States Army," Taunton, Francis, ed. The English Westerners' Brand Book 1971-72 (London: English Westerners' Society, 1972): 1-19. While awarding brevets was a popular (and inexpensive) method of recognizing merit in an army where promotion was governed almost entirely by seniority, under certain circumstances officers could be called upon to serve in their brevet rank. Officers were normally addressed by their highest brevet rank in social situations, and sometimes officially as well.

[33]George Armstrong Custer, My Life on the Plains; or, Personal Experiences with Indians (1874; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), p. 28. Despite Hancock's blustering attitude toward their Indian charges, Stanley asserted that the department commander had "been very kind and courteous to the agents, but everything that he has done, so far, as been met by them with acrimonious censure." Stanley, My Early Travels, I, pp. 46-47.

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massacre, and proclaimed his intention of marching toward the village for further talks. When the column was confronted the next day by hundreds of warriors, drawn up in what seemed a line of battle across his line of march, he ordered his own men to deploy, and a battle seemed imminent. But the crisis passed, and the Dog Soldier leader Roman Nose, asked by his comrades not to endanger the village's women and children, abandoned his initial plan to kill Hancock in front of his troops.

At a final parley, several chiefs requested that the next council be held that night, perhaps to even the score. But, in Custer's view, this "did not accord with General Hancock's ideas of display," since postponing matters until daylight would permit him to better reveal his force and so intimidate the Indians, who instead became convinced that such a delay, and so large a force, could only be "intended to effect their annihilation."[34] That night the Indians deserted their camp, and Agent Wynkoop, understanding that Hancock planned to destroy the village, urged him to refrain, and blamed the villagers' fear alone for their flight. But while Custer concurred in this assessment (and would later blame his superior's "rage at finding himself baffled and outwitted" for the destruction of property which would take years of hunting and labor to replace), Hancock restrained his initial impulse

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[34]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 250; George Armstrong Custer, "On the Plains," Turf, Field and Farm, November 9, 1867, rpt. in Brian W. Dippie, ed., Nomad: George A. Custer in Turf, Field and Farm (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980), pp. 21-23. Custer's initial account of the confrontation puts the Indian force at about five hundred, describing the line as formed "with much more precision and regularity than one would expect," and the warriors as mounted partly on large "American" horses suspiciously branded "U.S." Custer's first articles (or letters) in the New York-based sporting journal Turf, Field and Farm appeared, under the title "On the Plains" and the nom de plume "Nomad," soon after the Hancock campaign, and present events in a manner often at variance with that found in his later memoir. See also Custer, My Life, pp. 32-34.

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to burn the village, and left the deserted lodges standing.[35]

Hancock ordered Custer to bring the fugitives back as they fled north, splitting up into small parties and leaving no trail large enough for the cavalry to follow. But on reaching the Smoky Hill Road, Custer found stage stations deserted or burned, and at Lookout Station, only some fifteen miles from Fort Hays on the Union Pacific railway route, the remains of three station employees whose bodies had been burned, seemingly before death. On receiving a dispatch from Custer blaming the fugitives for the Smoky Hill attacks, Hancock ordered the village burned; but in a second dispatch, received after the destruction, Custer cast doubt on the villagers' guilt in the light of new information.[36] Green to Indian campaigning, Custer was both impressed and frustrated by the elusiveness of the Plains Indian, and concluded that no cavalry in the world, even if unencumbered by supply wagons, could outmarch him. Even the white man's horse, it seemed, had to yield to the Indian's pony when forced to subsist solely on grass.[37]

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[35]House Exec. Docs., 41st Cong., 2 sess., no. 240, p. 27; Custer, "On the Plains," Nov. 9, 1869, in Dippie, Nomad, pp. 25-26. Custer's harsh criticism in his 1867 magazine pieces displays a personal antagonism toward Hancock absent from his later memoir; but it also seems to reflect more reliably his initial reaction to events. By the 1870s, with Custer's attitude possibly tempered by his subsequent frontier experiences, any grudge had apparently so cooled that he could defend Hancock without irony against unnamed critics who, Custer charged, had unjustly waged "an extensive pen and ink war" against him. Custer, My Life, p. 58.

[36]Custer, "On the Plains," Jan. 4, 1868, in Dippie, Nomad, pp. 38-39; Custer, My Life, p. 57.

[37]George Armstrong Custer, "On the Plains," Nov. 23, 1867, in Dippie, Nomad, p. 28; Custer, My Life, pp. 48-52. Despite Custer's failure to overtake the villagers, the young soldier's appreciation of Indian ability was not confined to his quarry. His Delaware Indian scouts displayed such trailing skill that, in reviewing claims that whites could possess equal ability, he declared himself "forced to give my decision in favor of the red man."

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Hancock's torching of the standing lodges and their contents (carefully inventoried prior to burning) was a terrible blow, and Mr. Stanley, noting the difficulty of replacing even the lodgepoles used to support the tipis' hide frames, also estimated that 3,000 buffalo would have to be killed simply to replace the 251 lodges burned.[38] Custer, anxious to avoid a full-scale Indian war, still chose to dismiss the raids as "the work of small groups of irresponsible young men, eager for war," and the villagers' flight as inspired by fear. Should war be declared, he assure his wife Elizabeth, "none would be more determined than I to make it a war of extermination...but I consider we are not yet justified in declaring such a war."[39]

Yet General Hancock's actions had evidently touched off the very strife his show of force had been intended to prevent, and while government might attempt to conquer a peace, its troops, faced with a vast frontier, could do little even toward protecting the innumerable targets which the Indians might strike. Arriving on May 3 at Fort Hays with the Seventh Cavalry's Colonel Andrew J. Smith, (commanding the District of the Upper Arkansas in his brevet rank of major general), Henry Stanley found Lt. Col. Custer bivouacked near the post

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[38]The reporter's assessment of the campaign was wildly incorrect: "Kansas is now free from all hostile Indians, and is open to the emigrant. Briefly, that is all that the expedition has accomplished." Stanley, My Early Travels, I, pp. 45-46, 88; Custer, "On the Plains," Nov. 23, 1867, in Dippie, Nomad, p. 27. Custer explained that for Indians dwelling on a relatively treeless prairie, "the abandonment of the lodge-poles alone was a serious and almost irreparable loss."

[39]G.A. Custer, letter to Elizabeth B. Custer (hereafter GAS to EBC), May 2, 1867, in Marguerite Merington, ed., The Custer Story: The Life and Intimate Letters of General Custer and His Wife Elizabeth (New York: Devin-Adair, 1950), p.199. Unfortunately, Mrs. Merington, the literary executrix for Mrs. Custer, was not above altering the wording, if not the essential meaning, of letters she excerpted for publication -- a habit she shared with Mrs. Custer herself. Quotations from letters published by either woman, and no longer available in manuscript form, must therefore be read with caution.

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on Big Creek, a branch of the Smoky Hill Fork of the Kansas River -- with a command tormented by mass desertions, scurvy, and a critical shortage of forage, which would oblige him to wait until the new grass appeared before commencing active operations against the Sioux and Cheyenne.

Stanley evoked an image of wool-clad, infantrymen sweating under a broiling sun as they tried to overtake swift-moving Indians; despite the daily deaths of malnourished animals, using cavalry seemed the only practical means of campaigning against the Indians, and Stanley proclaimed Custer "precisely the gentleman for that job. A certain impetuosity and undoubted courage are his principal characteristics. From all we hear from people qualified to judge, he must be a first-rate cavalry officer, and will no doubt perform any task allotted to him to the entire satisfaction of the western people."[40] Despite Stanley's praise, Custer, now commanding the Sub-District of the Smoky Hill, was hesitant to take the field and move north against the Indians, and pessimistic concerning his chances of success.[41] Custer also seems to have become depressed and frustrated, and much given to placing officers under

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[40]Stanley, My Early Travels, I, pp. 86. During the summer of 1867, "Old Fort Hays" would be abandoned due to the overflow of Big Creek and the site for a new Fort Hays chosen on June 22, 1867, fifteen miles to the east, by Major (Brevet Major General) Alfred Gibbs, Seventh U.S. Cavalry. John S. Billings, Assistant Surgeon United States Army, Report on the Barracks and Hospitals of the United States Army, Surgeon General's Office, Circular No. 4, 1870, rpt. in Circular No. 4 and Chapter on "Arrow Wounds" from Circular No. 3 (New York: Sol Lewis, 1974), p. 304.

[41]Expressing doubt that Indians could be caught even if mounted on tired ponies, Custer lamented to a subordinate that if they could not now be overtaken, with their horses "famished," it would be hopeless to attempt pursuit after the new grass had strengthened them. G.A. Custer to Capt. Thomas B. Weir, April 19, 1867, cited in Rev. Blaine Burkey, Custer, Come at Once! The Fort Hays Years of George and Elizabeth Custer 1867-1879 (Hays, Kansas: Thomas More Prep, 1976), p. 8.

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arrest on seemingly capricious grounds, while his harsh treatment of enlisted men was blamed by a company commander for the high desertion rate.[42]

As the Cheyennes killed Kansas settlers and harried stages and railway employees along the Platte, General Sherman decided to order bands of presumably friendly Sioux, previously granted permission to hunt between the river and the Smoky Hill road, either to report to the Army posts along the Platte, or go north of it to escape chastisement in any pending war. Proving uncharacteristically slow, Custer finally marched out on June 1 with six companies of the Seventh Cavalry. Custer vainly pursued a large war party, and held council on the Platte, near Fort McPherson, Nebraska, with a force of Sioux under Pawnee Killer, optimistically distributing presents and privately expressing his hope that a settlement would soon leave the Army with "only" the Cheyennes to deal with.[43] On June 24, after his camp was attacked by Indians, Custer took the unusual step of seeking a parley, and found that the attackers had been led by Pawnee Killer, whose bold request for coffee, sugar, and ammunition Custer declined.[44]

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[42]Captain Albert Barnitz, letter to Jennie Barnitz, May 6, 1867, Box 1, Series I, Albert Barnitz Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (hereafter Barnitz Papers, YU). Extensive excerpts from Captain Barnitz's private writings, as well as those of his wife, are linked engrossingly in Robert M. Utley, ed., Life in Custer's Cavalry: Diaries and Letters of Albert and Jennie Barnitz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). Custer's exploits and misadventures during this period are covered in detail by Minnie Dubbs Millbrook, "The West Breaks in General Custer," Kansas Historical Quarterly 36.2 (Summer 1970): 113-148, and "Custer's First Scout in the West," Kansas Historical Quarterly, 39.1 (Spring 1973): 75-95.

[43]GAC, letter to EBC, June 12, 1867, in Lawrence Frost, The Court-Martial of General George Armstrong Custer (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), pp. 46-47.

[44]Custer, My Life, pp. 80-81.

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Subsequent operations proved frustrating, as the more peacefully inclined elements of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes went south of the Arkansas while the war factions stayed north of that river. Cavalry was the arm best suited to intercepting raiders; but of the scarcely more than 4000 officers and men available to cover Kansas, Colorado, and the Indian Territory, General Hancock, had only a single mounted regiment, the Seventh; the Tenth Cavalry, one of the two new black regiments, had yet to be fully organized, though eight companies would ultimately take the field that summer.[45] In late July Custer would embark on a bizarre scout which exhausted his command to no good purpose, while a party of eleven men under Lt. Lyman Kidder, 2nd Cavalry, dispatched with orders for Custer, was surrounded and annihilated by a mixed party of Sioux and Cheyennes under Pawnee Killer.[46]

Custer was subsequently tried by court-martial at Fort Leavenworth for various actions during this march, which had included misusing government animals for private business, ordering deserters pursued and shot down without trial (one man being mortally wounded), failing to take action against Indians who had killed one of his men and wounded

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[45]The Tenth Cavalry's organizational difficulties are recounted in William H. Leckie, The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), pp. 12-18. Major E.L.N. Glass, ed., The History of the Tenth Cavalry 1866-1921 (Fort Collins: Old Army Press, 1972) provides a regimental history.

[46]Confessing that memories of the scene could still make his "very blood curdle" years later, Custer vividly describes the discovery of the remains by his command in Custer, My Life, pp. 107-112. Only Kidder's guide, a Sioux chief named Red Bead whose scalp had been removed but left at his side, was identifiable. According to George Bent, other prominent men at the Kidder fight included Bear-Raising-Mischief for the Sioux, and for the Cheyenne, Howling Wolf, Big Head, and Tobacco. George E. Hyde, The Life of George Bent, Written From His Letters, ed. by Savoie Lottinville (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), pp. 274-275.

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another during a march, and going on an unauthorized trip to Fort Riley to visit his wife. Sentenced to a year's suspension from rank, command and pay, Custer declared the trial an attempt by General Hancock to cover up his own failures, and showed no signs of repentance: he even declined to have his friend, Major General Philip H. Sheridan, attempt to have a portion of the sentence remitted, "as I would not accept it."[47] Sheridan himself suggested a possible explanation of Custer's erratic behavior: "He held high command during the Rebellion and found some difficulty in adapting himself to his altered position."[48]

Certainly frontier warfare would offer few opportunities for the sort of large-scale fighting familiar to Custer and other Civil War veterans; even brisk skirmishes loomed on the Western horizon as major combats. On June 26, with its lieutenant-colonel still on his vain scout, the Seventh U.S. Cavalry, as represented by a detachment under Captain Albert Barnitz, had its first significant Indian engagement near Fort Wallace, Kansas -- "quite a desperate little fight...which our citizen [civilian] friends persist in dignifying by the name 'battle,'" according to Barnitz, who added that even the men of Fort Wallace's garrison were

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[47]GAC, letter to "My dear Friend," Dec. 2, 1867, Marguerite Merington Collection, New York Public Library (hereafter Merington Collection, NYPL). General Sheridan informed Custer that he hoped to be able to look into his case "a little more -- even against your will," and had not had any reason to believe that Custer would receive such punishment. P.H. Sheridan, letter to GAC, Dec. 12, 1867, cited in Frost, Court-Martial, p. 256. While Frost's book provides a transcript of the trial testimony, the facts revealed therein seem less flattering to Custer's judgment than its author would prefer to believe.

[48]P.H. Sheridan to Brevet Major General John A. Rawlins, April 15, 1868, cited in Barnett, Touched by Fire, p. 143. For a modern analysis of Custer's talent for self-exculpation by way of "reshaping facts and observation to produce pleasing results," see Utley, Cavalier in Buckskin, pp. 54-55.

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very much "impressed with its magnitude."[49] The post had been in a state of loose siege that June, as raiders killed men and ran off stock in the vicinity, and after an attempt by Indians to run off stock from Pond Creek Station three miles to the west, Barnitz rode to give battle with forty-nine men, including his own G Company and a few men from companies I and E.

But the would-be stock thieves, joined by others who had hidden behind a ridge -- apparently to attempt the common Plains tactic of decoy and ambush -- overcame their habitual reluctance to receive a charge, as both white and Indian accounts make clear. Some close combat pit war club and lance against saber and pistol, and one warrior was even seen to pick up a wounded bugler, scalp him and strip him while on horseback, and then release his dead body.[50] The outnumbered soldiers were forced to withdraw, but a portion of the command was for a time cut off, the Indians killing or mortally wounding six bluecoats. While six other wounded men survived, Barnitz estimated that at least as many Indians had been slain.

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[49]Albert to Jennie Barnitz, June 29, 1867, Box 1, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU. For a detailed reconstruction of this sharp though indecisive engagement, see Gary Thomas and Ralph Heinz, "Quite A Desperate Little Fight," LBHA Research Review, second series, 5.1 (January 1991): 24-31.

[50]One reporter accounted for the desperation of the fighting by the fact that on this occasion "the Indians abandoned their old style of circle-fighting, formed in line, and charged after the manner of a squadron of cavalry." Theodore R. Davis, "A Summer on the Plains," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 36 (Feb. 1868): 303. See also "Sketch of the Military History of Captain Albert Barnitz, 7th U.S. Cavalry," Albert Barnitz file, reel 503, M1064, Letters Received, 1863-1870, Commission Branch of the Adjutant General's Office, NA. Presenting a slightly incomplete version of events, Barnitz referred to this as "a desperate engagement (in which I lost one fourth of my command in killed and wounded), routed and drove from the vicinity with great loss, a force of Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Sioux warriors, many times outnumbering my own, and led by their most distinguished chiefs..."

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Barnitz was impressed by the marvelous horsemanship of an Indian who after firing several shots at the captain, "turned and rode parallel with me, on my right side, lying lengthwise on his pony, his left arm being thrown over the pony's neck, and grasping his rifle! The shots came very close!" The well-known Roman Nose was credited with a prominent role, and even --wrongly -- said to have received a possibly fatal wound after lancing a trooper from the saddle. An amateur photographer, Dr. William Bell, deeming the dead soldiers a handful of men "with enough wounds upon them to have slain a company, if evenly distributed," produced a striking image of English-born Sergeant Frederick Wyllyams (who had promised to help Bell prepare some photographic plates shortly before the fight) as he lay gashed and arrow-riddled, a portion of his scalp placed near the body, his tattoos cut away.[51]

Barnitz had already learned a basic problem of Indian warfare: "When you go after Indians in any force they of course run away from you if they can, and they always can unless you are able to move very rapidly, and know just where they are, or unless you are very cautious..." Such caution might at least make it possible to occasionally see an Indian, but "Regimental Commanders in these latter days are not much wiser than Braddock of the older times, and refuse to fight Indians or even follow Indians in Indian fashion..." Barnitz accused Custer in particular of not suppressing bugle calls in the interests of stealth, of marching on

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[51]"Sketch of the Military History ": Albert to Jennie Barnitz, June 29, 1867, Box 1, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU; William A. Bell, New Tracks in North America, (1869, Albuquerque: Horn and Wallace, 1965), p. 63; Thomas and Heinz, "Quite A Desperate Little Fight": 30. The photograph reveals five of the seven arrows noted by Bell still in Wyllyam's person after the body was brought back to Ft. Wallace. The sergeant's tattoos, of the British lion and unicorn and an American "Miss Liberty," were preserved by the Indians and later secured by an officer stationed at Fort Hays.

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high ridges rather than in ravines, and of camping "where camp-fires would look gorgeous from afar!" -- all unpardonable when supposedly pursuing Indians in marches so relentless that exhausted horses were abandoned and shot.[52]

Indians could sometimes be overtaken immediately after making a raid. On August 1, after Cheyennes attacked a railway camp to surprise and kill unarmed workers, while other Cheyennes made an almost simultaneous stock raid on nearby Big Creek station. Captain (Brevet Major) George A. Armes was sent with a detachment of his F Company, Tenth U.S. Cavalry, then bivouacked near Fort Hays, to the camp. The next day, still following the camp raiders' trail up the Saline River, Armes' force of less than forty men, several of them sick with the cholera then sweeping the frontier posts of Kansas, was attacked by about seventy-five Cheyennes. Dismounting his men and forming them into a hollow square, Armes eventually began a fighting retreat toward Fort Hays over a distance of some fifteen miles, the Indians finally withdrawing. Sergeant William Christy, the Tenth Cavalry's first combat fatality, had been killed by a bullet through the head; but Armes, himself shot through the hip, claimed six Indians killed.

Despite his wound, on August 20 Captain Armes rode out from Fort Hays with forty men of F and ninety Kansas volunteers under Captain George Jenness -- part of the new Eighteenth Kansas Cavalry. Governor Samuel J. Crawford had applied to the War Department for arms and ammunition, informed Secretary of War Edwin Stanton that it would be necessary to abandon both frontier settlements and railroad construction unless

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[52]Albert to Jennie Barnitz, Sept. 3, 1867, Box 2, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU.

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decisive measures were promptly taken, and offered state volunteers to the government. Permission to raise troops was given, then revoked, then finally granted again when Crawford appealed to General Sherman, and 358 officers and men were formed into four companies and mustered into federal service at Fort Harker under Major Horace L. Moore, suffering deaths and desertion as a result of the terrifying cholera epidemic then sweeping the region.[53]

The next day, two elements of the command, under Armes and Jenness, became separated and were forced to fight defensive actions, which continued until nightfall and were renewed the next day. Jenness's 29 men were especially hard-pressed, and made a desperate stand in a hollow square against encircling Indian -- whose numbers they estimated at from 300 to 500 warriors, though these were later joined by hundreds of others. Armes, stating that he had fought the Indians for six hours until 9 P.M., reported that the Kiowa chief Satanta, "in full uniform on a beautiful grey horse, sounded the charge with his bugle at least a dozen times, whooping and yelling and endeavoring to get his men to charge into the ravine, but only getting them near enough to have at least twenty of his saddles emptied at a volley, or a dozen or so ponies killed and wounded." This apparently did not quell the Indians' spirit; on August 22, Armes added, warriors approached his command under a white flag, one of them firing on a scout he sent out to meet them and others "singing out in plain English, come here, come here you sons of bitches, we want to fight you, we dont want to fight the negroes

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[53]George A. Armes, Ups and Downs of an Army Officer (Washington: privately printed, 1900), p. 277. Four companies, rather than the planned eight, were organized, resulting in the unit sometimes being referred to as the 1st Battalion, 18th Cavalry. Details on its service are provided in Forrest R. Blackburn, "The 18th Kansas Cavalry and The Indian War," Kansas City Posse of the Westerners Trail Guide 9:1 (March, 1964): 1-15.

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we want to fight you, white sons of bitches &c."[54]

The Indians inflicted total losses on the soldiers of 3 dead and 36, including Jenness, wounded, while allegedly suffering about 50 dead and 150 wounded themselves. Various claims were made that Satanta of the Kiowas, the "half-breed" Charlie Bent (George's brother), and even Roman Nose had been among the Indians seen fighting, and it may have been a combined force of Kiowas, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes. While both "buffalo soldiers" and Kansans had fought well, this two-day engagement, ending the Army's offensive efforts for 1867, had failed to chastise the Indians; in fact, it had concluded, like so many other fights between soldiers and Plains Indians, with the latter fighting or breaking off contact as they pleased.[55]

Although Indian raids continued for the rest of that summer against both military and civilian targets in Kansas, as well as Nebraska and Colorado, there was apparently no coordinated attempt to scour the countryside clean of whites, or any strategic goal that

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[54]Capt. Geo. A. Armes, 10th Cavalry, to Capt. H.C. Carlin, 38th Infantry, Aug. 21 (sic), 1867, Letters and Telegrams Received, Fort Hays, Kansas, 1867-1889, Record Group 393, Records of United States Army Continental Commands, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter NA). Armes opined that Satanta considered himself "to be in command of the District."

[55]Published accounts of these engagements include Armes, Ups and Downs, pp. 242-246; Lonnie J. White, "Warpaths on the Southern Plains: The Battles of the Saline River and Prairie Dog Creek," Journal of the West 4.4 (October, 1965): 485-503; Forrest R. Blackburn, "The 18th Kansas Cavalry," and George B. Jenness, "The Battle on Beaver Creek," Kansas State Historical Society, Transactions 9 (1906): 443-452. While Armes and Jenness placed the fight on Beaver Creek, on the Solomon River's North Fork, others placed it to the north, on Prairie Dog Creek. Despite scouts supposedly recognizing Satanta, Roman Nose and Bent, the identity of the attacking Indians has remained somewhat uncertain.

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would be appreciated by conventional military minds.[56] As work proceeded on the Kansas Pacific railway route running west from Fort Riley to Denver City, Colorado, and thence in a northwesterly direction to the Union Pacific, work parties were sometimes struck and men killed, leading to complaints of inadequate protection by company officials, and requests that Kansas provide details of infantry militia for that purpose. But the Indians did not try to concentrate a force large enough to seriously impede the construction then being carried out on the Smoky Hill route.[57] On the night of August 6, Cheyennes led by Spotted Wolf, from a camp under the Northern Cheyenne chief Turkey Leg, did succeed in derailing a locomotive near Plumb Street Station, Nebraska, with spectacular results. But even here there was no objective admitted beyond a general desire for retaliation and a desire to see whether the "big wagons" on the iron road might yield up valuable booty if broken open. After a rail was pried up and a train derailed, the Indians killed the crew and began a search.

The next morning, the plundered cars were burned, the white men's corpses were tossed into the flames, and warriors galloped festively across the plain with long bolts of cloth tied to their ponies' tails. But this wild scene of carnival was interrupted when another locomotive halted short of the wreck, disgorging from its cars Major Frank North and some forty Pawnee scouts of his Pawnee Battalion, along with their horses. These quickly routed the Cheyennes, including women and children who had returned with packhorses for

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[56]For details on Kansas raids, see Samuel J. Crawford, Kansas in the Sixties (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1911), pp. 253-55.

[57]John D. Perry, letter to Hon. S.J. Crawford, June 24, 1867, Crawford, Kansas in the Sixties, p. 255. Perry was president of the Union Pacific Railroad's eastern division.

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additional plunder, and took several noncombatant prisoners.[58]

Despite their success in destroying the train, neither the Cheyennes nor their allies organized any similar wrecking attempts that year; and despite the government's spectacular response to the Plumb Creek raid, a Cheyenne historian's explanation for the Indians' subsequent inaction -- that the trains were too well guarded after this incident -- is clearly inadequate from any conventional military viewpoint. But adopting such a viewpoint, and recognizing that the railroad was a strategic target, with long stretches of vulnerable track running through a mostly unpopulated landscape, was not important to warriors with their own philosophy of military benefits and losses.[59]

With the Army's failure to either overawe or punish made obvious, a strictly military solution promised to be both difficult and expensive. Accordingly, a Peace Commission was authorized by Congress, its members charged with acting so as to remove the causes of war on the Plains, secure the frontier settlements and railroad construction, and establish a system for "civilizing" the tribes. But the causes of war,

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[58]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 264-66; Stands in Timber, Memories, pp. 173-176. While the scouts claimed 17 Cheyenne warriors slain, Cheyenne testimony conceded only two (or perhaps four) noncombatant prisoners taken, save for one old man mentioned by Grinnell as being killed.

[59]Stands in Timber, Memories, p. 176. Despite lax protective measures that led the railroad's legal counsel to urge that $9,000 in lost-property claims be settled at fifty cents on the dollar, the Cheyennes' Sioux allies also gave the builders less trouble than such a threat to the Indians' way of life might seem to merit. Robert G. Athearn, "The Firewagon Road," Montana: The Magazine of Western History 20.2 (Spring, 1970): 6. One volunteer officer, recognizing the railroad's possibilities, concluded his summary of post-Civil War developments quite simply: "Soon the Pacific Railroad was built, and the Indian problem was solved." Ware, Indian War, p. 405.

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being inextricably bound up with the process of establishing settlements and railroads, were not to be so easily removed, leading a sarcastic twentieth-century historian to portray the commission as seeking "to end the Indian wars by giving the Indians whatever they wanted: to make peaceful farmers of them; and to get their permission to build railroads across the Plains -- three mutually contradictory propositions."[60]

After a meeting with various representatives of the northern Plains tribes, including the powerful Teton Sioux and the northern bands of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, the peace commissioners turned to the southern tribes. But while General Sherman desired their work disturbed as little as possible by the actions of his troops, General Smith had other ideas. On August 12 the Seventh Cavalry's Major Joel Elliott left Fort Wallace with a force of eight companies, to make a series of wearisome scouts in search of presumably hostile Indians. Captain Barnitz, fearing that any treaty would be followed by a repetition of "the pleasant little farce of a Big Indian War, and a handful of men to carry it on," offered the common argument that chastisement must precede negotiation: "The Indians must be thoroughly whipped before they will respect us, or keep any peace, and they haven't been whipped yet very much to speak of."[61] Nor were they likely to be; Barnitz found Elliott, like the absent Custer, too fond of bugle calls and camping on hilltops to catch any Indians, and also guilty of neglecting to take forage with him -- in the vain hope of subsisting his horses on dry buffalo grass. With the Indians unlikely to show themselves save to a force of soldiers small

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[60]Russell, "Indians and Soldiers," p. 228.

[61]Albert to Jennie Barnitz, Aug. 13, 1867, Box 2, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU.

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enough to be easily wiped out. Barnitz contended that such scouts as Elliott's were doomed to fail -- besides being in "positive violation" of Sherman's orders suspending hostilities.[62]

At an assembly at Fort Larned preparatory to the grand council, roughly 850 lodges housed an estimated 5,000 Indians from the Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Comanches, Kiowas, and Kiowa-Apaches. Some speeches were made by both sides, and here, as during subsequent proceedings, the commissioners would show virtually no interest in the subject of discouraging Kiowa and Comanche raids into Texas, almost as though its status as a former Confederate state placed it outside federal concern.[63] While the commissioners' stance was conciliatory, the ineffectiveness of the military's operations in Hancock's department made it difficult for the "Great Father" to pose as a powerful yet forebearing authority. Nor could the commissioners offer the Indians substantial concessions, being content to promise gifts and future aid in the natives' contemplated assimilation to the white man's culture. The Indians, however, had no plan to change their way of life, nor apparently to cede their lands; men who had attended these councils later admitted that they had done so "because they were promised food, and for no other reason."[64]

The caravan of commissioners, gift-laden wagons, and Indians, with a military escort,

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[62]Albert Barnitz journal, Aug. 24, 1867, Box 4, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU. The captain characterized Company G's own troopers as mostly raw recruits, unable to "hit a barn door at 300 yards" firing a carbine..

[63]James Mooney, Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians (1893; Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979), p. 184

[64]Wilbur Sturtevant Nye, Plains Indian Raiders: The Final Phase of Warfare from the Arkansas to the Red River (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), p. 106. Colonel Nye was a diligent interviewer of Indians with memories of the pre-reservation period.

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arrived near the treaty grounds at Medicine Lodge Creek on October 14, and the next day a preliminary council was held, rations being issued. Black Kettle, who served as the principle spokesman for those Cheyennes actually present, explained that the others required several days to complete their annual ceremony of renewing the tribe's Sacred Arrows. While their arrival was rather fearfully awaited, chiefs speaking for the Kiowas, Kiowa-Apaches and Comanches made clear their disdain for the proffered blessings of civilization. Even Ten Bears, leader of the Yapparika Comanche band -- who, having visited the East, knew more than most Plains Indians could even imagine of the whites' power and numbers -- stood firm against the "civilizing" process, and reminded the commissioners that he had been told by the "Great Father" in Washington that the Comanches could be secure in their lands: "You said that you wanted to put us on a reservation, to build us houses and make us medicine lodges [churches]. I do not want them. I was born upon the prairie, where the wind blew free and there was nothing to break the light of the sun. I was born where there were no enclosures and everything drew a free breath. I want to die there and not within walls."[65]

But despite repeated statements rejecting the cession of more lands or assimilation to white man's ways, the representatives of both tribes, including such inveterate raiders as the Kiowa chiefs Satanta and Satank, signed a treaty on October 21, and by doing so ceded over 60,000 square miles of their hunting grounds between the Arkansas to the Pecos River, while agreeing to confinement to a 48,000-square-mile reservation in the southwest of the Indian

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[65]Nye, Plains Indian Raiders, p. 109. The proceedings are most fully covered in Douglas C. Jones, The Treaty of Medicine Lodge: The Story of the Great Treaty Council as Told by Eyewitnesses (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966).

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Territory. They signed despite their own protests that they did not want agencies, schools for their children, farm implements and seed (and white farmers hired to teach them their use), or any restriction which would threaten their way of life.

Why had they done so? Some white observers were sure that the tribal delegates had no idea of what they were signing, and Henry Stanley claimed that the treaty had never even been read to the Indians in its entirety. With no apparent plan to surrender their freedom or lands, many of the chiefs may have affixed their marks simply to get the government's presents, including quantities of arms and ammunition, or to please the whites, or to make a vague sort of friendship pact which they could observe by refraining from war.[66] On Friday, October 25, Poor Bear led the Kiowa-Apache delegates in signing.

When the arrival of the long-delayed and much-feared Cheyennes was finally announced, both Indians and whites wondered whether they might disrupt the negotiations by force. But the hundreds of painted, magnificently accoutered warriors, including the fierce Dog Soldiers, made no attack after splashing across the creek, but merely a mock charge toward the camp, firing and shouting. These new arrivals, coming armed with revolvers and bows, struck an admiring journalist, George C. Brown, as "proud, haughty, defiant, as should become those who are to grant favors, not beg them .... They acted their character. They are

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[66]Captain Barnitz, present with a contingent of Seventh Cavalry, wrote, "The distribution of presents was quite amusing!" -- although the presents to the Indians included 65 new revolvers and hundreds of new butcher knives. Albert Barnitz journal, Oct. 21, 1867, Box 4, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU.

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the masters of the Plains."[67] The Cheyennes initially protested the treaty's restrictions on their movements. But since the treaty had already been drawn up, the Cheyennes were apparently told, unofficially, that they were not immediately obliged to become reservation Indians, and could continue to hunt buffalo north of the Arkansas so long as they could find them there -- and kept clear of white settlements. Since the buffalo's disappearance was still impossible for most Plains Indians to conceive, this promise might have given the Cheyennes the impression that they would reign in perpetuity over these lands.[68] When some chiefs proved reluctant, interpreter John Simpson Smith told them that affixing their mark was "only a matter of form," and in the end both Cheyennes and Arapahoes would do so.[69]

Since the treaty bore the signatures of men with such different views as Black Kettle and Tall Bull, it could not be said that the boldest spirits had been ignored in favor of more accommodating chiefs, and in a world made of paper, the Medicine Lodge treaties would have been a triumph for the government's policy of concentration. Yet viewing it as such

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[67]Cincinnati Commercial, Nov. 4, 1867, cited in Stan Hoig, The Battle of the Washita: The Sheridan-Custer Indian Campaign of 1867-69 (1976; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979) p. 34.

[68]Despite their justifiable protests over the wanton slaughter of buffalo by white hunters -- including whites hunting just prior to the Medicine Lodge council meetings -- the Plains Indians were far from being the prescient environmentalists of modern mythology, likely to credit the imminent extinction of their sacred animal. Seventh Cavalry captain Frederick Benteen recalled that in response to his comments on their own wasteful hunting practices, the Indians "invariably replied, 'We have always had the buffalo with us, and shall always have them,' giving me to understand the Great Spirit had the whole charge of that matter, and that they felt safe in leaving it in His hands." Frederick W. Benteen, Cavalry Scraps: The Writings of Frederick W. Benteen (n.p: Guidon Press, 1979), p. 35.

[69]Stan Hoig, The Western Odyssey of John Simpson Smith: Frontiersmen, Trapper, Trader, and Interpreter (Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark, 1974), p. 190.

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required the premise, or fiction, that even the most bellicose chiefs present had signed the treaty in good faith, while aware of its contents. Stanley, citing the stance of two Cheyenne chiefs, more accurately termed the agreement a "mock treaty":

> The Chiefs have signed it merely as a matter of form. Not one word of the treaty was read to them. How, therefore, can the treaty have been a success? Bull Bear and Buffalo Chief, even while they signed, said: "We will hold that country between the Arkansas and the Platte together. We will not give it up yet, as long as the buffalo and elk are roaming through the country." Do the above words seem anything like giving up all claims to that country? And yet, if a white man, acting under the knowledge that all that country belongs to the whites, will go and make a home for himself, it will soon be a burning brand -- a signal for war. If war is once thus commenced who are to blame? The commissioners.[70]

Barnitz, who had taken down the speeches at the council, found the chiefs "superstitious in regard to touching the pen," or perhaps fearful that they would be signing away their rights; like Stanley, he insisted that the Indians had no idea that they were giving up their country north of the Arkansas. "The treaty all amounts to nothing," he wrote, predicting a war, at least against the Cheyennes and probably with the other tribes, due to misunderstandings over its terms.[71] Barnitz might have added that some important chiefs, such as Roman Nose, had not agreed to any terms of peace, and that prominent men of each signatory tribe, save perhaps for the Arapahoes and Plains Apaches, had remained openly hostile during and following the conferences.

Congress did not ratify the Medicine Lodge treaties until July 25, 1868. However, despite similar delays in making even normal appropriations for the tribes, the treaties were

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[70]Kansas Weekly Tribune, Nov. 11, 1867, in Hoig, Battle of the Washita, p. 37.

[71]Barnitz journal, Oct. 28, 1867, Box 4, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU.

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regarded by both civil and military officials as binding, and annuities were issued sporadically to southern bands at Fort Larned and Fort Zarah, Kansas. When Congress finally made a new appropriation on July 27, it charged General Sherman with the responsibility for disbursing the money. He was also to select special Indian agents who would aid in relocating and civilizing the natives, while bypassing the existing Indian Bureau bureaucracy, the agents of which would remain at their posts. Given the option of selecting either soldiers or civilians, Sherman chose only Army officers, and on August 10 he appointed "special commanders" to administer two new military districts. The Northern District, for the Sioux, was given to retired brigadier general William S. Harney, while for the Southern Indian Military District, bounded on the east by the state of Arkansas, the west by the 100th meridian, the north by Kansas, and the south by Texas, Sherman selected Colonel (Brevet Brigadier General) William Babcock Hazen[72]

With a Comanche bullet fired in 1858 still in his chest, Hazen entertained views on the Indian question that were both unromantic and pessimistic. With the "ideal Indian of the popular mind" to be found only in poetry and James Fenimore Cooper's novels, Hazen characterized the actual Plains tribesman as "a dirty beggar and thief," and predicted: "All efforts to better his condition have and will but add to his debt of ingratitude, and prove

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[72] At the time of his appointment Hazen was in command of the Thirty-eighth U.S. Infantry, a newly organized black regiment. Prior to his distinguished Civil War service, during which he would attain the rank of major general and command a corps, he had seen considerable frontier service, including action against the Kickapoo, Comanche, and Mescalero Apache tribes. For details on this controversial figure, see Marvin E. Kroeker, Great Plains Command: William B. Hazen in the Frontier West (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976).

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unproductive of any good. The fact that one in a thousand have been civilized proves nothing, neither does it that our people can sometimes become so low and deceitful and murderous as the Indian." The native, "in the way of the evolutions of progress," was owed nothing by the white man, and when the government paid for his title to a territory, or for privileges therein, the debt was "as perfectly cancelled as when a corporation pays the assessed value of the site of a public school."

More optimistically, at least in a military sense, Hazen argued that the government's reservation policy could be enforced through expeditions, preferably composed of infantry, aimed at destroying all villages found outside the reservation. These columns would use no "lumbering wagon trains," or even artillery, but only pack mules for supplies; if cavalry had to be used, "half-breed" horses would replace full-blooded "American" mounts, to avoid hindering the necessary forced marches. But Hazen warned that such expeditions would be useless unless led by officers willing "to carry them out under circumstances the most discouraging and laborious, without tents, with a single blanket, and often on insufficient food, and who will fight on every occasion and attack at the instant." A few years of such a policy would leave on the government's hands "a peaceable pauper, in place of a thieving, murdering one, and at half the cost."[73]

Hazen would not learn of his appointment until September 2, 1868, by which time a new Indian campaign had already begun to unfold on the Southern Plains. Although

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[73]W.B. Hazen to Bvt. Major H.G. Litchfield, Oct. 16, 1866, House Exec. Docs., 39th Cong., 2 sess., no. 45, pp. 3-6.

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the Army would, contrary to his prescriptions, rely heavily on mounted troops and wagon-borne transport, the campaign was largely marked by the spirit of dogged aggressiveness which Hazen deemed essential to success.

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CHAPTER TWO

The Outbreak of 1868

"....these Indians require to be soundly whipped..."

Although white negotiators had swept important issues beneath a carpet of oratory while harvesting Indian signatures, scepticism concerning the treaties of Medicine Lodge would ultimately prove justified. But the spring of 1868 did not result in the grand raiding season predicted by such doubters as Captain Barnitz, despite the memories of Sand Creek and the torched village at Pawnee Fork, the inevitable friction caused by white settlement, and the Indians' discovery that the "mock treaty" could not reliably deliver the annuities promised. In February the Southern Cheyennes, already believing themselves cheated by the failure to receive supplies that winter, their time of greatest need, discovered omens of further white encroachment -- surveying parties working south of the Arkansas; reporting this, Indian trader and interpreter John S. Smith, known as "Uncle John" also warned that whisky peddlers were active among these already volatile warriors.[1] A subsequent issue of rations in late April failed to appease; when agent Wynkoop delivered beef, flour, bacon, coffee, sugar, and salt to Indians camped along the Arkansas (one of the four bands of Cheyennes present being that of Stone Forehead or "Medicine Arrow," a prominent non-signer of the Medicine Lodge treaty), he distributed no firearms or ammunition, which the Indians claimed as their due. It was a

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[1]John S. Smith, letter to Thomas Murphy, Feb. 5, 1868, reel 879, microfilm publication M234, Letters Received, Upper Arkansas Agency 1865-69, Office of Indian Affairs (hereafter OIA), NA.

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reasonable assumption, since Wynkoop himself had issued them munitions previously.[2]

While Kansas enjoyed a season of general peace which would last well into the summer of 1868, this peace was marred by seemingly isolated attacks, the targets including soldiers, the railroad or its construction crews, and white settlers. In one especially ambitious May 8 strike, a party of perhaps ten unidentified Indians set fire to two box cars and a flatcar at a Union Pacific side track, then fastened some 300 feet of telegraph wire across the main track in the vain hope of derailing an engine. A subsequent skirmish with railway workers at a water tank three miles to the east ended with the Indians circling the site completely and then withdrawing to the south, "nobody of either party being hurt."[3]

Dealing with such attacks was the responsibility of Major General Philip H. Sheridan, commander of the Department of the Missouri. Following his removal by President Andrew Johnson as commander of the Fifth Military District on July 31, 1867, Major General Sheridan had spent considerable time in Washington, performing less controversial duties

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[2]One 1866 issue to the Cheyennes and Arapahoes included 57 rifles, 98 "Navy Pistols" with holsters and belts, and 20 kegs of gunpowder, as well as percussion caps and bar lead for the molding of bullets. Receipt for goods to David A. Butterfield, Nov. 15, 1866, reel 879, M234, Letters Received, Upper Arkansas Agency, 1865-69, OIA, NA. General Sherman's position on such issues was ambiguous; doubting that any promise to provide munitions had been made at Medicine Lodge, and believing the arrow better for hunting in any case, the divisional commander stated that while he had no objection to providing ammunition provided the Indians stay "inside their own country," if they insisted on pursuing buffalo under the treaty provisions "they should be made to understand that there is danger of them coming into collision with other Indians and whites and that the military fear if they are armed trouble may result to their prejudice." Telegram, Sherman to Secretary of the Interior, June 24, 1868, reel 879, M234, Letters Received, Upper Arkansas Agency, 1865-69, OIA, NA.

[3]J.W. Clous, 38th Infantry to 1st Lt. J.M. Kelly, 38th Infantry, May 8, 1868, Letters and Telegrams Received, Fort Hays, Kansas, 1867-1889, RG 393, Records of United States Army Continental Commands, NA.

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while enjoying the pleasures of the capital. But on February 29, 1868, ready to take up his new post, "Little Phil" arrived with his staff at Fort Leavenworth. Captain Barnitz, stationed there with his troop, remarked that "his arrival was quite unannounced, and was unattended with any formal demonstration, although we are all duly sensible of his merit."[4]

Sheridan's merit was widely recognized as considerable. After graduation from West Point in 1853 and frontier service including campaigns against Indians on the Pacific Coast, the short, feisty Sheridan had entered the Civil War as a thirty-year-old infantry captain, and had earned his brigadier general's star in September 1862, displaying his valor and tenacity in the war's Western theater. Taken east by General Grant in 1864 to command the Army of the Potomac's cavalry, he would wage a famous -- or infamous -- campaign in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, which his men systematically despoiled in denying its bounty to the Confederacy. At age 34, Sheridan's defeat of General Jubal Early at Cedar Creek led to the rank of major general in the regular army. Together with Grant and Sherman, who shared his thoroughly modern and unromantic approach to waging war, Sheridan was included in a trinity of the Union Army's preeminent heroes.[5]

In the immediate post-war period, Sheridan's stern and undiplomatic approach to

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[4]Albert Barnitz journal, Feb. 29, 1868, Box 4, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU. Sheridan received the the order from the Adjutant General's Office reassigning him, dated August 27, on September 1, 1867. P.H. Sheridan, "Report of Operations in the 5th Military District, November 14, 1866 to September 5, 1867," November 21, 1867, container 72, reel 76, Philip H. Sheridan Papers, Library of Congress (hereafter Sheridan Papers, LC).

[5]Sheridan's frontier activities are best chronicled in Paul Andrew Hutton, Phil Sheridan and His Army (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), and with more uncritical admiration in Carl Coke Rister, Border Command: General Phil Sheridan in the West (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1944).

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"Reconstruction" in Texas and Louisiana as commander of the Fifth Military District had alienated many citizens -- as well as President Johnson. Despite the incursions of Kiowas and Comanches into Texas, Sheridan had been more preoccupied with his distasteful political duties than with any Indian menace; at a time when black freedmen were being shot down with impunity and with less excitement than that aroused by a single death at Indian hands, Sheridan had angrily argued against moving troops from the interior to the frontier.[6] As a result of Johnson's displeasure, Sheridan was replaced as commander of the Fifth Military District by General W.S. Hancock, while "Little Phil," after a period of congenial duty in Washington compiling a code of articles of war and military regulations, would go west to assume Hancock's former command. On March 2, Sheridan assumed permanent command of the Department of the Missouri, relieving General Smith, who had temporarily commanded in Hancock's absence.

After arriving at his new area of responsibility, Sheridan chose to embark on a tour of the Army's "line of military posts on the Arkansas." Arriving at Fort Dodge, Sheridan found many Indians of the Kiowa, Comanche, Arapaho, and Cheyenne tribes assembled in camps nearby, awaiting their annuities. But while their chiefs requested an interview, Sheridan declined, explaining "that I was simply visiting the military posts to learn their condition and that of the soldiers, and that I was not authorized to talk to them." However, Sheridan found

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[6] Sherman to Sheridan, October 15, 1868, Report of the Secretary of War (1868), House Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3d sess., no. 1, I, p. 53. For a summary of Sheridan's activities in post-war Texas and Louisiana, see Hutton, Phil Sheridan and His Army, pp. 20-27. Hancock appears to have been "fired" into Sheridan's former command because he seemed a less abrasive choice for that post, rather than because of any failure in mastering the Indians of the Plains.

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outspoken dissatisfaction with the idea of removing to the reservation assigned them by the Medicine Lodge treaty, and told Sherman of having learned "that all the tribes considered the treaty of no importance, save to get the annuities promised them in it, and that they did not intend to remove to their reservation."

The Indians' manner impressed Sheridan as insolent and overbearing. But in his desire to maintain friendly relations, he proceeded to engage three civilians, "good men familiar with Indian language and well known in the tribes, so that any misunderstanding or accidental circumstance might be explained at once, and under my own immediate directions."[7] With the peace in western Kansas uncertain, though not yet decisively broken, each man of this small group of civilians was assigned his special duty. William Comstock and Abner "Sharp" Grover were given all Indian west of Fort Wallace's site near the Colorado border, and on the headwaters of Walnut and Pawnee Creeks. To Richard Parr were assigned all Indians on the Solomon and Saline Rivers, to the north of the Army's string of posts on the Smoky Hill road.

Sheridan's term of "mediators" for this trio complemented his concept of Indian-wise scouts with a diplomatic function, beyond merely gathering intelligence on the tribes' condition and temper. To direct the activities of Comstock, Grover and Parr, Sheridan chose

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[7]Sheridan to Sherman, "Report, In the Field, Fort Hays, Sept. 26, 1868," container 83, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC. It was during Sheridan's stop at Fort Larned on this tour that, according to George Bent, Major Wynkoop asked Sheridan if he could issue the Indians arms. The general replying, "Yes, give them arms and if they go to war the soldiers will kill them like men." Hearing these remarks translated, the prominent Cheyenne chief Stone Calf "replied to Sheridan, 'Let your soldiers grow long hair, so that we can have some honor in killing them.' Sheridan smiled and said he was very sorry but he could not accommodate him as the soldiers would get lousy." Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 290.

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First Lieutenant Frederick Beecher, Third U.S. Infantry, who was to report directly to the department commander -- and use every effort to maintain peace with the Indians. But Beecher was not content simply to accept information from Sheridan's seasoned plainsmen (and another, Frank Espy, later added to the group), and made it a point to take the field with them, despite a Civil War wound that had left him painfully lame.[8] Sheridan thought that much good was accomplished by the small band, "who traveled constantly and kept me well-posted on the location of the Indians and their movements."[9]

General W.T. Sherman's Division of the Missouri, of which Sheridan's command formed such a large and troublesome part, was relatively peaceful that spring, and in May Sherman prepared to visit the overcrowded reservation of the Southwest's populous Navajo tribe: four years before, the Navajos had been marched into grim New Mexican exile, largely due to a campaign waged in winter by Brigadier General Christopher "Kit" Carson. But Sherman recognized the combustible nature of Sheridan's department, and thought it best that his old comrade not accompany him on his visit to the demoralized Navajos at the Bosque Redondo, instead remaining "any where along the Line of the Railroad" of the Kansas Pacific, or perhaps at Fort Larned. As for any current difficulty in keeping such tribes as the Cheyenne clear of the railroads, Sherman recognized that so long as buffalo ranged on the Republican Indians would go there, and jokingly suggested inviting the sportsmen of England

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[8]Philip H. Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, 2 vols. (New York: Charles L. Webster and Co., 1888), II, pp. 286-87. Lt. Beecher was a nephew of the famous clergyman Henry Ward Beecher. For information on this officer, see Orvel A. Criqui, Fifty Fearless Men: The Forsyth Scouts & Beecher Island (Marceline, Missouri: Walsworth Publishing, 1993), pp. 12-29.

[9]Sheridan to Sherman, Sept. 26, 1868, container 83, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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and America to a "grand Buffalo hunt," which in one great sweep would clear out the buffalo -- for until they, and consequently the Indians who depended on them, had been cleared out from between the roads, there would be "collisions and trouble."[10]

But there was no general Indian war that spring, and, as an official summary of operations admitted, only "a very few minor engagements with Indians" reported, chiefly in the District of New Mexico, perhaps partly because raiders preferred to strike civilian targets and flee before troops could make contact. In the worst raid noted, on March 11, Apaches killed and mutilated eleven men and two women, captured a child, and drove off stock including some 2200 head of sheep; the Apaches were pursued by men of Company H, Third Cavalry, but, "but having the advantage of three days' start," escaped into the mountains, "abandoning some of the sheep, which were recovered." In a bloodier engagement on April 17, a Company H detachment had a soldier wounded, while ten Indians were reported killed and twenty-five wounded -- the precise method of determining Indian casualties, especially those wounded, not being recorded.[11]

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[10]Sherman to Sheridan, May 10, 1868, container 80, reel 85, Sheridan Papers, LC. Though he felt that providing fertile land would insure the industrious Navajos' self-support, Sherman initially opposed ending their dismal exile, lest they be placed within raiding distance of the Kiowas and Comanches and thus be obliged to become "thieves and murderers" in turn. But he would ultimately agree to their return home, despite his expressed sentiment that a good reservation might be found somewhere between the Arkansas and the Canadian -- the further east the better. For a revealing collection of primary documents relating to the tribe's subjugation, see Lawrence C. Kelly, Navajo Roundup: Selected Correspondence of Kit Carson's Expedition Against the Navajo, 1863-1865 (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1970).

[11]Record of Engagements with Hostile Indians within the Military Division of the Missouri, From 1868 to 1882, Lieutenant General P.H. Sheridan, Commanding (1882; Bellevue, Nebraska: Old Army Press, 1969), p.7.

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In early June a major "Indian scare" overtook Kansas, inspired by the passions of intertribal warfare. A force of roughly three hundred Cheyenne warriors produced panic by their appearance in the region of Marion City, and although they announced to frightened whites that they had merely come to fight the local Kaw Indians, and bypassed major towns, they did not abstain from killing livestock and plundering outlying farmhouses. On June 5, at the Kaws' reservation at Council Grove, the Cheyennes, led by such prominent leaders as Little Robe, Tall Bull, and Whirlwind, engaged their foes in Plains-style circling, feinting, and countercharging. After a fight put at three hours in duration -- with casualties numbering one Kaw with a scratched hand and a Cheyenne with a foot wound -- a Cheyenne bugler sounded for a withdrawal. Retreating through Council Grove, the Cheyennes set fire to two buildings housing Kaw mixed-bloods, robbed three settlers' homes, and shot some cattle and dogs, despite the fact that white militiamen present had taken no part in their fight with the Kaws.[12] Governor Crawford himself was informed at Topeka by messenger of the fight sixty miles away; having no troops to dispatch, he headed for the field himself virtually alone. But he and the three men with him arrived too late. With the Cheyennes already gone, Crawford had to content himself with "viewing the battlefield and reviewing the victorious Kaws."[13] It would not be the first time that the passions, or frustrations, of strife between Indians threatened to engulf white settlers.

While the Cheyenne headed west, armed but undisciplined and unorganized bands of

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[12]Marvin H. Garfield, "Defense of the Kansas Frontier 1868-1869," Kansas Historical Quarterly 1 (November 1932): 454; Stan Hoig, Battle of the Washita, pp. 43-44.

[13]Crawford, Kansas in the Sixties, pp. 288-289.

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citizens collected in Morris, Lyon and Chase counties to defend the eastern and central portion of the state, while the Cheyennes' Kaw adventure also inspired state and federal authorities to cooperate in tightening frontier defenses. General Sheridan, using his discretion as department commander, authorized Governor Crawford to release 15,000 rounds of federal ammunition for defense against Indians; Kansas adjutant general J.B. McAfree distributed the munitions to settlers and also organized a company of reserve volunteer cavalry. Sheridan ordered patrols and details of federal troops placed in temporary camps in Kansas, the better to screen the state's exposed frontier.[14]

However, the Cheyenne incursion's most serious effect was perhaps not the reaction of the Army, but that of the Interior Department. On June 25, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Nathaniel G. Taylor relayed to Thomas Murphy, head of the Indian Bureau's Central Superintendency, an order from the Secretary of the Interior explaining that due to their "recent raid on the white settlements," no arms nor ammunition were to be given "at present" to either Cheyennes or Arapahoes.[15]

The Indians reacted strongly to the news, and the Acting Assistant Adjutant General for the District of the Upper Arkansas warned that Cheyennes then headed north were "not contented with the refusal to let them have arms and some of them may possibly do mischief: therefore commanders will be on their guard for fear of a surprise," while at the same time said commanders "must still recollect their orders are to act strictly on the defensive, and only

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[14]Garfield, "Defense...1868-1869": 454-55.

[15]N.G. Taylor to Thomas Murphy, June 25, 1868, Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, (1868], House Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3d sess., no. 1, II, p. 66.

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attack such parties as commit depredations."[16] On July 20, an estimated 1200 to 1500 Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians converged on Fort Larned to receive their annuities, only to hear their agent confirm that arms and ammunition would be withheld. Major Wynkoop reported that the chiefs, though disappointed, "gave no evidence of being angry." But Brigadier General Alfred Sully had a different impression, stating that the Indians had threatened war.[17] General Sully had deemed it advisable to concentrate at Larned what troops he could from nearby posts, including six companies of the Seventh U.S. Cavalry from Ellis Station, west of Hays, and two more troops he brought with him from Fort Harker. Informed by Sully that if the Indians did not receive rations war would result, Sheridan permitted small issues of rations by the military, and the Indians "were thus, and by the presence of a large force of Cavalry, kept quiet."[18]

If not truly angry, in Wynkoop's opinion, the Cheyennes were sufficiently indignant over the government's rebuke to have their goods sent back by wagon to Larned rather then accept them without the expected munitions. Although they expressed the belief that "their white brothers were pulling away from them the hand they had given them at Medicine

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[16]Bvt. Major E.A. Belger to Commanding Officer, Fort Harker, Kansas, July 14, 1868, Letters and Telegrams Received, Fort Hays, Kansas, 1867-1889, RG 393, NA.

[17]Edward W. Wynkoop to Murphy, July 20, 1868, reel 879, M-234, Letters Received, Upper Arkansas Agency 1865-69, OIA, NA; Sheridan to Sherman, Sept. 26, 1868, container 83, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC; Garfield, "Defense...1868-1869": 455. Except for Indians occasionally stopping traffic on the road to demand coffee, sugar, and food before they would permit the wagons to proceed, Sheridan thought that matters had been going "pretty well" until the arrival of the Kiowas and Comanches at Fort Larned early in July -- though "the most menacing reports of their intentions" had previously reached him.

[18]Sheridan to Sherman, Sept. 26, 1868, container 83, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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Lodge," they assured the agent that would try to hold on to it, patiently waiting for their "Great Father" to pity them and permit them the promised arms and ammunition.[19]

Believing that the Cheyennes and Arapahoes were still willing to keep the peace established at Medicine Lodge, Wynkoop also expressed hope for the Kiowas and Comanches. Despite several recent difficulties, including a confrontation between troops and warriors resulting from a wagonmaster's false claim that warriors had robbed his train, these Indians were evidently anxious to remain at peace -- "or these mistakes to speak mildly, on the part of the whites would have caused a general war ere now." Even Satanta of the Kiowas, who at Medicine Lodge had poured eloquent scorn on the notion of reservation life, had helped to patch over these difficulties.[20] But while the Kiowas and Comanches refrained for the most part, from raiding within the boundaries of Sheridan's command, the Medicine Lodge treaty had little effect on their traditional policy toward Texas.

At the Kiowa-Comanche agency, acting agent S.T. Walkley had succeeded Colonel Jesse Leavenworth on May 26, after receiving his predecessor's verbal instructions "to stay here if I could, and do that which I might think best, and that I should hear from him soon." At one point, according to Walkley, 297 lodges were camped near the Eureka Valley agency near Fort Cobb, Indian Territory, many having arrived from the Staked Plains of Texas, a region commonly thought untraversable -- at least by whites. Despite being advised to join

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[19]Wynkoop to Murphy, July 20, 1868, reel 879, M234, Letters Received, Upper Arkansas Agency 1865-69, OIA, NA. Wynkoop had these goods stored for later distribution.

[20]Wynkoop to Murphy, Aug. 10, 1868, reel 879, M234, Letters Received, Upper Arkansas Agency 1865-69, OIA, NA. (Emphasis in original.)

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traders and other whites in the "general stampede" from the vicinity following Leavenworth's hasty desertion. Walkley refused to abandon his agency; aside from the abandonment of government property such a course would entail, he had been assured by some of the Indians that there was nothing to fear.

But Walkley had ample evidence of the Indians' traditional summer raiding. On or about June 10, a party of Comanches of the Cocheteka and Noconee bands returned from Texas with their spoils, including the scalp of a young man "about 18 years of age," three children stolen from the McElroy family of Montgomery County, and "also a number of horses." On July 14, Noconee Comanches arrived fresh from a raid on the Brazos with a few horses, but with four scalps belonging to a murdered family. Powerless to prevent his charges from raiding, the agent did succeed in recovering five captives from the Comanches, including, on July 24, the three McElroy children, while Fort Dodge trader John Tappan and even Major Wynkoop also had successes in redeeming captives from Kiowas or Comanches.[21]

Walkley considered himself quite successful in keeping his charges on the reservation, and even fed them, in the absence of any funds for that purpose, by finding citizens willing to advance rations against the hope of government reimbursement. But his inability to apply coercion left his agency a base for raiding parties. Perhaps precisely because the warfare against Texas followed the usual Comanche-Kiowa pattern of regarding -- or affecting to regard -- the Americans and Texans as two separate peoples, one of whom could be warred against while peace was maintained with the other, it failed to shock the federal authorities

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[21]S.J. Walkley to W.B. Hazen, Oct. 10, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3rd sess., no. 18, pp. 28-31.

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into launching an offensive.

Hoping to stave off future hostilities, Major Wynkoop urged that the ban on arms to the Cheyennes and Arapahoes be rescinded as soon as possible. After discussions at Fort Larned with the Arapahoes and Kiowa-Apaches, during which Little Raven promised that his people would never use the arms issued against the whites, Colonel Thomas Murphy, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Central Superintendency, authorized their release. (Believing that the Indians would use their weapons to hunt buffalo, Murphy minimized the danger of war.) On August 9 Wynkoop completed the issue of supplies to the Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and Kiowa-Apaches, including Lancaster rifles, pistols, and quantities of powder, lead, and caps, and reported on August 10 his confidence that this would not disrupt the peace. The first of the raids which would initiate a renewed Indian war would occur that same day, supporting Wynkoop's claim that the participants had left Ft. Larned before he made the issue, angered precisely because they had not yet received arms.[22]

War began in a sudden explosion of large-scale raiding which came as a complete surprise to both military and civil officials. A government account tersely summarized the initial drama:

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[22]Wynkoop to Murphy, July 20, 1868, and Murphy to Taylor, Aug.10, 1868, reel 879, M234, Letters Received, Upper Arkansas Agency 1865-69, OIA, NA; Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs (1868), pp. 66-69. Wynkoop was subsequently accused of arming the very Indians who had engaged in the raids, an accusation safely dismissed in Hoig, Battle of the Washita (notes to p. 25), p. 224. General Sheridan was careful to inform Sherman that Wynkoop had "issued the annuities and arms, and ammunition, but without knowing that the Indians had commenced hostilities. There was not the slightest provocation offered by the soldiers or civilians for the commencement of this war by the Indians." Sheridan to Sherman, Sept. 26, 1868, container 83, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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> Early in August a body of two hundred and twenty-five Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and Sioux appeared among the advanced settlements on the Saline River, north of Fort Harker, Kans. On August 10, after being hospitably fed by the farmers, the Indians attacked them, robbed their houses and brutally outraged four females until insensible. Six houses were attacked, plundered, and burned.[23]

Sheridan, detailing the initial atrocities, wrote that the Cheyennes were kindly received by two farmers, "and given coffee, &c. After throwing the coffee in the faces of the women serving it to them, because it was given to them in tin cups, they then commenced the robbing of the houses, and violated the women until they were insensible."[24]

Indians gave a different version to Colonel Hazen, recounting that a party of Cheyennes had ridden north from Ft. Larned (having enjoyed "abundant access" to whiskey) to fight the Pawnees. Returning defeated, they reached the settlements on the Saline River, and here they were provoked when a citizen shot at a warrior approaching his door to seek food. Giving the Indians the benefit of the doubt, Hazen thought it "evident that it was not premeditated, as the Cheyennes were trading away their arms, just issued by their agent, in large numbers, up to the day of the outbreak." Though Hazen's details and logic might be misleading, his assertion that the war had broken out spontaneously appears correct.[25]

While individuals from nearly all the different bands of Cheyennes were allegedly with

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[23]Record of Engagements, p. 7.

[24]Sheridan to Sherman, Sept. 26, 1868, container 83, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

[25]Hazen to Sherman, Nov. 10, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3rd sess., no. 18, pp. 14-15. Hazen did not explain why men intent on a war expedition would "trade away" large number of their weapons, nor why alcohol would be necessary to explain an attack on their traditional Indian foes. To Hazen the results of their expedition clearly illustrated the "paramount importance of keeping these people at home," the agents and other functionaries staying with them. For a dissenting view, which assumes that the settlers were the original target, see Nye, Plains Indian Raiders, p. 119.

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the war party, it was drawn chiefly from Little Rock's, Black Kettle's, Medicine Arrow's, and Bull Bear's bands, and its leading men were a Dog Soldier, Red Nose, and a warrior of Black Kettle's band, The-man-who-breaks-the-marrow-bone.[26] The members of the original party apparently left their camps in Kansas above the forks of Walnut Creek on or about August 3, crossing the Smoky Hill route near Fort Hays. They had ridden to the Saline River accompanied by about 20 Sioux warriors and four Arapahoes from among those in the camps.

While various raids prior to August 1868 might be seen as the isolated acts of irresponsible young braves, this was no small war party, and among the few Arapahoes was a son of chief Little Raven. The Cheyennes alone numbered about two hundred, for apparently nearly all of that particular village's young men had chosen to go. Twenty warriors, fearing the consequences of heading toward the white settlements, instead kept riding north toward Nebraska and the Pawnees' villages upon reaching the Saline. The others continued downstream, making camp after coming within sight of a white settlement, which they chose not to avoid.

According to the Cheyenne chief Little Rock, two Cheyennes, one brother to the White Antelope killed at Sand Creek, surprised their comrades by returning from a settler's house with a female captive, whom they had already raped. The other warriors returned the woman to her home in an attempt to repair the damage done, and the party headed for the South Fork of the Solomon, where, as Little Rock conceded, "they were kindly received and fed by the white people."

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[26] Affidavit of Edmund Guerrier, Feb. 9, 1869, House Exec. Docs., 41st Cong., 2nd sess., no. 240, p. 167.

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However, he added that as they rode on toward the settlements on the Solomon's North Fork, they were fired on by a party of settlers. Suffering no casualties, the Indians chose to retaliate violently, though not against the men who had fired. While they avoided the armed Kansans by circling around them, it was only to approach a nearby house, a white man being ridden down, felled with a war club, and shot to death. Little Rock's explanation of their subsequent course reveals that the warriors valued unified action over all; the majority, he claimed, opposed further violence, but finding it useless to do so "without bringing on a strife among themselves, they gave way and all went in together."[27] They would be generally successful in their efforts, though at times driven off by settlers, and would suffer no losses: isolated by the great expanses over which their homesteads and small settlements were scattered, the Kansans had little chance against quick-moving raiders who could strike at will against the most vulnerable of available targets.

On August 12, the big war party struck settlements on the Solomon River, where, though again "kindly received and fed by the people," they proceeded to plunder and burn five houses, steal ten head of cattle, kill fifteen people, and rape five women, two of whom they also shot and badly wounded.[28] Settlers in the region had taken few precautions against the possibility of Indian attack, possessing no fortifications and little in the way of armaments. Many were equally ill-prepared for flight, having insufficient transport to hurry their large

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[27]"Report of an Interview between Col. W. Wynkoop U.S. Indian Dept. and Little Rock, a Cheyenne Chief held at Fort Larned, Kansas August 29 1868 in the presence of Lieut S.M. Robbins of U.S. Cav, John S. Smith U.S. Indian Interpreter, and James Morrison Scout for Indian Agency," and Wynkoop to Murphy, July 20, 1868, reel 879, M234, Letters Received, Upper Arkansas Agency 1865-69, OIA, NA.

[28]Record of Engagements, p. 8.

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families to safety as an exodus began toward the town of Minneapolis, Kansas.[29]

Some hoped for safety in numbers, and in anticipation of Indian trouble had moved in together for mutual protection. But even this measure proved futile in the case of Bracken Bell, whose cabin housed both his own family and that of his son, as well as a young couple. On the morning of August 12 the war party struck; Bell and the young husband were killed, a child speared to death, and Mrs. Bell (who ultimately died of her wounds) raped and shot. The raiders then rode off with Bell's two small daughters after tying them to ponies.[30]

While a small party lingered to kill two more whites after crossing the Republican, the main party turned south toward the Saline, with the Bell children. On the 13th, as the Indians engaged a settler defending his homestead, they were intercepted by a detachment of Seventh Cavalry under Captain Frederick Benteen, who had set out with a squadron, his own Company H and Captain Owen Hale's M, after word of the Saline raids reached Fort Larned.

Riding ahead with a small party for greater speed and leaving Hale to catch up as soon as possible, Benteen reached Fort Harker in two days, sending forth a guide and sergeant to scout the Saline while he organized a forty-man force from his own troops and whatever men the Harker garrison could spare. Early the next day, August 13, scoffing at his scouts' claim that the river was too high to ford, Benteen rode to the Saline and crossed anyway. That afternoon, near Elk Horn Creek, Benteen was riding in the lead with two scouts when he topped a rise -- to face a group he later put at fifty warriors. The captain quickly ordered his

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[29]Olive A. Clark, "Early Days Along the Solomon Valley," Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society 17 (1926-28): 723-4, 729.

[30]Charles Duncan and Jay Smith, "The Captives," Research Review: The Journal of the Little Big Horn Associates 7.2 (June 1993): 121-22; Hoig, Battle of the Washita, pp. 46-47.

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ten pack-mules corralled and left back with ten men under a sergeant, then led the rest, in column of twos, "into that gang of astounded reds before they were aware of it."

The "gang" was but the leading element of the big war party. Yet it was the superior Indian force which fled, whether through sheer surprise, or, as Benteen guessed, because his boldness had made the Indians think it was they who were outnumbered. "We were almost tied to them," he later wrote of the Seventh Cavalry's first blow in the new Indian war. "Whoop, la! Down the precipitous bank of the Saline go my bunch of reds, and my brave '7's' almost trampling on their 'gee-strings.'"[31] During the pursuit the Indians abandoned the two Bell girls: "There were just thirty-one all told with me, and we drove the Indians...till the sun went down behind them, killing Porcupine Bear...the pipe-bearer, i.e., leader of the raid. No Indian returned to look after children they were made to drop -- not that year at least...I gave them very little time to do anything but hustle away as lively as they could."[32]

Finding the two children, "whom the Indians had not been given time to kill," at the top of the river bank, Benteen told them to follow the river downstream. He continued the chase, pausing periodically to have his command dismount, pump carbine slugs into the bunched fugitives, reload, and remount spelled horses to renew the pursuit -- while guarding

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[31]Benteen, Cavalry Scraps, p. 3. In writing of this bold response to superior Indian numbers, Benteen suggested that at the fatal Little Bighorn encounter eight years later Lt. Col. Custer "was applying this cavalry audacity spirit, which just then perhaps was in advance of the demand for it."

[32]Frederick Benteen, marginal notes to Wild Life on the Plains, John M. Carroll, ed., Custer: From The Civil War to The Little Big Horn (Bryan, Tex: n.p., 1981), p. 9. In his retirement, Benteen annotated his copy of an 1891 pirated edition of Custer's memoir with generally acerbic comments. Benteen put the number of Indians in the grand war party at 300 rather than 200, and thus stated that he had been confronted by this number.

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against any flanking movement which would have forced the soldiers to fall back on the reserve ammunition with the mules. Despite second thoughts about the efficacy of such tactics, Benteen was satisfied that the Cheyennes, finding their medicine "a trifle mouldy," and suffering three men killed and ten wounded, had fled out of fear.

Benteen finally broke off pursuit near dark, his mounts exhausted. The skirmish, he thought, had made his entire squadron better cavalrymen, for the two troops "sat their chargers more proudly, and began to think of themselves as invincible, just exactly the spirit to inculcate in them." While Benteen's post-retirement assertion that his little force had "saved all the settlers of Upper Saline River, Solomon & the Forks of the Republican" might seem boastful. General Sheridan would report that the Indians had commenced their attack on the Saline "evidently with the intention of cleaning out the whole valley" prior to Benteen's timely arrival.[33]

Yet the war party had not completed its raids. On August 14, six warriors, after looking through the windows and seeing that no men were within, burst into the cabin of Benjamin White. Two of them bore off White's seventeen-year-old daughter Sarah into captivity, though her mother and four siblings managed to escape as the remaining four raiders

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[33]Benteen's troops did not return to recover the two girls, who were reportedly found by settlers only the following morning: "A night alone on the prairie in those days was enough to frighten a grown person," wrote a child of Kansas settlers, who wondered "how these small children escaped with sound minds." Clark, "Early Days": 725; Benteen's notes, Carroll, From the Civil War, pp. 9-10; Sheridan to Sherman, Sept. 26, 1868, container 83, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC. Sheridan notes that Benteen had heard firing and arrived to the relief of a settler fending off an attack on his house, a detail not mentioned by Benteen himself.

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were distracted by plunder.[34] These four men then rode to a hay camp seven miles away, where Benjamin White and his three sons were stacking hay for winter fodder, and shot down the father while slightly wounding thirteen-year-old Martin White.

The two warriors who had ridden off with Sarah White soon halted to rape her before moving on to join their comrades, and she would be the subject of repeated gang-rapes before the party reached the Cheyennes' village on the headwaters of the Republican. Here she became the exclusive property, sexual and otherwise, of the warrior who had originally claimed her as a captive. Her ordeal reflected standard Plains Indian practice, as summarized by mountain man James Beckwourth when asked by a military commission in 1865 how the Cheyennes and Arapahoes customarily treated captured women and children: "The children are treated kindly; the women are generally violated."[35] In a highly personal way, knowledge of these customs affected military planning, one chronicler of the frontier army holding it "commonly agreed among the officers and men of regiments accompanied by women -- and

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[34]Duncan and Smith, "The Captives": 7. See also "Sketch of the Life of Sarah C. White." David L. Spotts, Campaigning with Custer and the Nineteenth Kansas Volunteer Cavalry (1928; New York: Argonaut Press, 1965), pp. 211-212.

[35]Duncan and Smith, "The Captives": 6-7; Carroll, The Sand Creek Massacre, p. 264. That the Plains warriors, unlike their counterparts in earlier Indian wars, customarily raped female prisoners -- sometimes after they were literally "staked out" on the prairie -- was a fact often mentioned by contemporary observers: "The Eastern aborigines, although they put their victims to tortures of the most appalling character, seldom, if ever, violated the chastity of the females; while, on the contrary, the prairie Indians do not put their prisoners to death by prolonged tortures, but invariably compel the females to submit to their lewd embraces." Randolph B. Marcy, Thirty Years of Army Life on the Border (1866; Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1963), p. 4. Another officer expressed certainty that no woman captured by Plains Indians had escaped becoming "a victim to the lust of every one of her captors." Richard Irving Dodge, The Plains of the Great West and Their Inhabitants (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1877), p. 395.

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fully understood by the women as well -- that in the last extremity the women were to be shot by their own friends, rather than to be allowed to fall into the hands of the savages..." [36] Such atrocities could also serve a propaganda purpose, as when General Sheridan, with an almost pornographic crudity unusual in the Victorian era, would use their horrific details as a lash against critics of Army aggressiveness.[37]

Since other, smaller war parties were active at the same time as that routed by Benteen at Elk Horn, they were able to strike at widely separated points nearly simultaneously, even if their efforts had not been coordinated. On the day of Benteen's fight, it was reported that Cheyennes had robbed a white man's camp near Fort Dodge of arms and two horses, and that at Pawnee Fork a Mexican train had lost no fewer than 132 horses and

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[36] Cyrus Townsend Brady, Indian Fights and Fighters (1904; Garden City: Doubleday, 1916), p. 11. After an Indian attack on a wagon train under his command in 1867, the Seventh Cavalry's Lt. W.W. Cooke informed Mrs. Custer that had she been present, he would have ridden up to her ambulance and shot her, to fulfill a promise made to General Custer -- giving her no chance to survive even had the fight been going in the soldiers' favor, because "I should have been unnerved by the thought of the fate that awaited you, and I have promised the General not to take any chances, but to kill you before anything worse could happen." Elizabeth B. Custer, Tenting on the Plains, or General Custer in Kansas and Texas (New York: Charles L. Webster, 1887), pp. 628-29. For a discussion of Army families' views on the possibility of capture, and widespread acceptance of a suicidal solution, see Chap. 13, "Save the Last Bullet for Your Wife," in Barnett, Touched by Fire, pp.167-185.

[37] Report of the Secretary of War (1869), House Exec. Docs., 41st Cong., 2d sess., no. 1, II, pp. 47-48. Suspicious of such precision, an Interior Department official who had been the object of Sheridan's criticisms would later ask: "How did he know that the Indians ravished women forty and fifty times in succession?" George Manypenny, Our Indian Wards (1880; New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), p. 247. But Captain Benteen, writing privately and without obvious partisan purpose, was even more precise in placing, beside Custer's reference to fourteen women outraged during the Kansas raids, the notation "one, 55 times." Perhaps, since it was customary for each member of a war party to rape the victim, Benteen's figure was simply based on the number of warriors thought to constitute a specific party. Benteen's notes, Carroll, From the Civil War, p. 2.

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mules.[38]

Such a large-scale outbreak had not been anticipated by the military, and as late as August 8, two days before the first attacks on the settlements, Sheridan had ordered Lieutenant Beecher to discharge his "mediators," save for William Averill "Medicine Bill" Comstock, by September 1; Beecher was to report to Washington to study flag signaling. But on August 15, Will Comstock, charged with investigating the recent raids, rode out with Amos Grover; Beecher, hearing that there was trouble on the Solomon and Saline, but not knowing its nature, desired the two men to visit the Cheyenne camp of Turkey Leg, camped on the Solomon, "to be ready to explain in case the white people were at fault," as Sheridan put it.[39] Comstock, a young Plains counterpart to the eastern woodland frontiersmen whose image had been shaped by his famous grand-uncle, James Fenimore Cooper, was highly esteemed by Sheridan, Custer, and other officers such as Captain Myles Keogh, who praised him as "an eccentric genius and an ardent admirer of everything reckless and daring."[40]

On Sunday, August 16, the scouts reached the village, some 50 miles east of Fort Wallace. But while the Plains code of hospitality apparently prevented any violence inside the village, that night a rider arrived with word of the recent raids and of casualties inflicted by

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[38]Record of Engagements, p. 8.

[39]Sheridan to Sherman, Sept. 26, 1868, container 83, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

[40]M.W. Keogh to Custer, Jan. 21, 1867, John S. Gray, "New Light on Will Comstock, Kansas Scout," Paul Andrew Hutton, ed., Custer and His Times (Bryan, Texas: n.p., 1981), p. 198. Comstock's usefulness had led the military to overlook certain peccadilloes; after concluding an altercation by fatally shooting a man in the back, then fleeing the authorities, he had been rehired as a scout, though allegedly only a visit from Sheridan himself sufficed to coax Comstock out of seclusion.

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Benteen's fight. Comstock and Grover left camp, and after proceeding some distance a party of apparently friendly Indians overtook them, riding with them for a time before shooting both men in the back. Comstock was killed and Grover, badly wounded, survived either by hiding in the grass or, according to Sheridan, "lying on the ground and making a defense of Comstock's body" until the Indians withdrew. The next night Grover managed to walk some twenty-five miles to the Union Pacific line.[41] While George Bent later attempted to justify the attack on the scouts by charging that they had been sent to spy, news of the Cheyenne fatalities seems a more likely explanation, as such losses would require repayment in blood.[42]

"From this time out and almost before information could be communicated by Indian runners," reported Sheridan, "people were killed and scalped from the Cimarron River south of the Arkansas, to the Republican, and from the settlements on the Solomon and Saline west to the Rocky Mountains; stock run off, trains burned, and those accompanying them, in some cases, thrown into the flames and consumed. The most horrible barbarities were perpetrated on the dead bodies of these victims of savage ferocity." The department commander argued that there had been "no provocation on the part of the white people during the whole

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[41]Record of Engagements, p. 9; Sheridan to Sherman, Sept. 26, 1868, container 83, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC. Grover's reputation evidently left something to be desired, for despite his severe wound, and the era's readiness to credit stories of Indian treachery, some of Grover's contemporaries doubted his story that Indians had killed Comstock. White scout Ben Clark later asserted that Grover had brought in Comstock's pistols, which was considered "suspicious," and Tenth Cavalry trooper Reuben Waller went so far as to claim that "Sharp" had murdered his companion, then faked numerous Indian pony tracks later observed at the scene. Benjamin H. Clark interview transcript, Box 2, Folder 4 Camp Mss. Field Notes, Manuscripts Department, Lilly Library, Brigham Young University; Reuben Waller, "History of a Slave Written by Himself at the Age of 89 Years," Robert Lyman, ed., The Beecher Island Annual (Wray, Colorado: Beecher Island Battle Memorial Association, 1930), p. 117.

[42]Hyde, Life of George Bent, pp. 294-295.

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summer" for these raids, and pointed out that issues of rations had been made by military posts to Indians visiting them, and larger issues of rations and goods made by the civilian Indian Department.[43]

Three days after the killing of Comstock, Wynkoop, having earlier asked the chief to discover the facts, interviewed chief Little Rock about the precise identity of the raiders on the Saline and Solomon. He learned that after going some distance up the Saline following its initial raids, the grand war party had divided, most of the warriors going north toward the Solomon settlements -- where, the chief feared, they had already committed "a great many depredations" -- while thirty started back toward their village, which they supposed to be now some distance northwest of Fort Larned. Another small party had returned to Black Kettle's village, from which group Little Rock had received his information. Little Rock identified four "principal men" of the party by name, including Red Nose, one of the original rapists, and Tall Wolf, eldest son of Stone Forehead.

Asked if he would, in conformity with the Medicine Lodge treaty, deliver up the men whom he had named as being the party's leaders, Little Rock expressed the view that only the original rapists should suffer, and told the agent that he thought they would be surrendered. Wynkoop, however, stated that he considered the whole party guilty, though conceding that it was impossible to punish all of them: "They had no right to be led and governed by two men. If no depredations had been committed after the outrage on the woman, the two men whom you have mentioned alone would have been guilty." Little Rock then vowed to use his best efforts to have the leaders surrendered, but added: "I am but one man, and cannot answer for

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[43]Sheridan to Sherman, Sept. 26, 1868, container 73, reel 86, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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the entire nation." In truth, no Cheyenne could do so.

Wynkoop desired Little Rock to tell his fellow leaders that they could "save their entire nation from a long and destructive war" only by complying with his demand to surrender the ringleaders. He promised the chief safe conduct and assured him that his services would lead the government to consider him a "Great Chief," one in whom they could have confidence. But Little Rock seemed caught between two fires: "I am here in your service, at the same time I am a Cheyenne and want to do all I can for the welfare of my nation. If the chiefs and head men refuse to comply with your demands, I want to know if I can come with my wife and children (whom I love) and place myself and them under your protection, and at the same time act as a runner between you and my people?" Wynkoop agreed.[44] However, Little Rock, whatever the extent of his actual effort to satisfy the agent, would neither place himself under Wynkoop's protection nor return to Fort Larned. Instead he chose to head south, with Black Kettle's following.

Perhaps no Cheyenne leader could have accomplished the surrender of the wanted men, especially since most of the war party's members -- who had preferred acquiescing in a new war rather than risk division among themselves -- were still raiding as chief and agent held council. Nor were the Indian raids of August the work of a single large war party, as their range and timing made clear; while the Solomon and Saline raids of August 10-14 accounted for eighteen murders and nine rapes, on August 12 attacks also occurred near Fort Dodge, as well as at Pawnee Fork, where 132 horses and mules were stolen. Indian raids were recorded

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[44]"Interview between Col. E.W. Wynkoop, U.S. Indian Dept., and Little Rock," reel 879, M234, Letters Received, Upper Arkansas Agency 1865-69, OIA, NA.

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for almost every day from August 18 until August 31, the targets including a wagon train kept "corralled" on Pawnee Fork by its attackers for two days before troops from Fort Dodge dispersed them, with five soldiers wounded to an estimated Indian loss of five killed and ten wounded. Indians also attacked the Denver stagecoach between Pond Creek and Lake Station and ran off stock at Bent's Fort while attacking three stages and a wagon in its vicinity, and on August 27 acting governor Frank Hall of Colorado telegraphed that the Arapahoes were killing settlers and destroying ranches in all directions.[45]

On reaching Larned from Ft. Leavenworth on August 20, General Sheridan was told by Wynkoop that the latter knew of no cause for the Indians' hostility, unless it was the refusal by the government to issue arms and ammunition; but the agent suspected that an influential (though unnamed) Sioux "medicine man" might have influenced the Indians to think that they could compel the whites to abandon the Smoky Hill country. Wynkoop insisted to Sheridan that many of the Indians were guiltless, especially Little Rock's own band of Cheyennes, and that Little Rock ought to be protected. Sheridan therefore consented to Little Rock "being

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[45]"Interview between Col. E.W. Wynkoop, U.S. Indian Dept., and Little Rock," reel 879, M234, Letters Received, Upper Arkansas Agency 1865-69, OIA, NA; Record of Engagements, p. 9. No raids were reported for August 19 or 29-30. From August 10 through November 25, according to data compiled by Sheridan's headquarters, Indians killed 102 civilians within the Department of the Missouri; in addition, eleven women had been outraged, seven whites wounded, 41 scalped, three Army scouts murdered, and four women captured. Eleven stages had been attacked and "impeded" and four wagon trains destroyed, while only eleven Indians were claimed as killed and one wounded during these attacks. Including depredations in Northern Texas during the same period, a total of 154 whites had been killed, fourteen women raped, and 669 horses and mules stolen, along with 958 stock cattle. (Of twenty-two children stolen in Texas, fourteen taken in January were all reported "frozen to death while in captivity.") "Tabular Statement of Murders, Outrages, Robberies, and Depredations Committed by Indians in the Department of Missouri and Northern Texas, 1868 (Exclusive of Military Engagements), and Officially Reported to Headquarters Department of the Missouri," Custer, My Life, pp. 126-27.

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brought into Larned and taken care of. He did not come in, however." General Sully invited Little Raven and other Arapaho chiefs into Fort Dodge under a flag of truce, and in an interview with these men Sheridan similarly agreed to provide for them through the winter if they would surrender. The Arapahoes agreed, but did not come [46]

Even before the chiefs held council with Sheridan, Wynkoop had professed himself "sorry to admit that the Cheyennes are guilty" and fearful that the surrender of the responsible parties would not be possible. Feeling that Little Rock and most of the other chiefs deprecated war, and would try to keep their people out of it, Wynkoop termed them "powerless to restrain their young men when once they fairly enter into it." He suggested that those deserving punishment be isolated, and the innocent congregated in the vicinity of Fort Larned: there the peaceful Indians could be provisioned by the government until the present trouble was over. Thus, "if war takes place, which I consider inevitable," the government would be able to discriminate, something which would otherwise be impossible. Urging haste, he asked acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs C.E. Mix to do likewise.[47]

Superintendent Murphy was disillusioned. Agreeing with Wynkoop that innocent Indians should be protected, he informed Mix that those guilty of "these gross outrages" should be turned over to the military and severely punished, and wrote as a man betrayed: "When I reflect, that at the very time these Indians were making such loud professions of friendship at Larned, receiving their annuities &c., they were then contemplating and planning

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[46]Sheridan to Sherman, Sept. 26, 1868, container 73, reel 86, Sheridan Papers, LC.

[47]Wynkoop to Murphy, Aug. 19, 1868, reel 879, M234, Letters Received, Upper Arkansas Agency 1865-69, OIA, NA.

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this campaign. I can no longer have confidence in what they say or promise. War is surely upon us..."[48]

Officials in Kansas did not have to wait for such assessments from federal officials. News of the first Kansas raids reached Topeka on August 15, and Governor Crawford and Colonel McAfee hurried to the endangered region, to find that a shipment of the arms distributed by McAfee had enabled the settlers at Ash Creek to drive off attacking Indians. While McAfee spent several days touring the settlements, relieving the destitute, and organizing and arming settlers, the frontier still seemed inadequately defended.[49] Governor Crawford, who had taken a special train to Salina to hurriedly organize a volunteer company and move, too late, to provide relief to the settlers, returned to Topeka and portrayed in his despatch to President Johnson a frontier naked to attack:

> I have just returned from Northwestern Kansas, the scene of a terrible Indian massacre...The settlements, covering a space sixty miles wide, and reaching from the Saline to the Republican, were driven in, the country laid in ashes and the soil drenched in blood. How long must we submit to such atrocities? Need we look to the Government for protection, or must the people of Kansas protect themselves? If the Government cannot control these uncivilized barbarians, while they are under its fostering care and protection, it certainly can put a stop to the unbearable policy of supplying them with arms and ammunition...The savage devils have become intolerable, and must and shall be driven out of this State....

Believing that General Sheridan was "powerless for want of troops" despite his best efforts, the governor offered to furnish the government all the volunteers needed to secure "a

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[48]Murphy to Hon. C.E. Mix, Aug. 22, 1868, reel 879, M234, Letters Received, Upper Arkansas Agency, OIA, NA.

[49]Garfield, "Defense....1868-69": 456.

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permanent and lasting peace."[50]

Crawford, former volunteer officer and "War Governor of Kansas," had already demonstrated his energy in defending the state against both Confederate invaders and Indian marauders prior to Medicine Lodge. He now commenced the process of raising state troops for systematic frontier defense. Crawford, who tended to credit the Plains tribes with too great a capacity for conspiracy and unity of purpose, envisioned a grand Indian war; he requested of President Johnson not merely that Cheyennes and Arapahoes be banished from Kansas, but also the Kiowas, Comanches and Kiowa-Apaches.[51] On August 21, General Sheridan wrote from Fort Harker to assure Crawford that he was ordering the Cheyennes, Arapahoes and Kiowas out of Kansas "and will compel them to go by force. We will not cease our efforts until the perpetuators of the Solomon massacre are delivered up for punishment. It may take until the cold weather to catch them but we will not cease until it is accomplished."

Sheridan thus gave an early hint that he was willing to conduct winter operations if other means to "catch" the raiders failed. In another despatch the same day addressing defensive measures, he informed Crawford of his plan to erect small block-houses on the Saline and Solomon and on the Republican, garrisoning them with a small infantry force and keeping cavalry scouting between the different points.[52]

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[50]Crawford to President Andrew Johnson, Aug. 17, 1868, Crawford, Kansas in the Sixties, pp. 291-292.

[51]Crawford, Kansas in the Sixties, p. 290.

[52]Sheridan to Crawford, Aug. 21, 1868, Crawford, Kansas in the Sixties, pp. 292-93.

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General Sherman was in Omaha when he received word from Sheridan of the Kansas raids, and proved all too willing to have his troops compel the Indians' removal south of the Kansas line, "and in pursuing to kill if necessary. This amounts to war; but I hope on a small scale, confined to that locality."[53] But despite his expressed hope of localizing the conflict, Sherman's war would be carried not only to the Cheyennes, who had contributed the bulk of the raiders, but also the Arapahoes. Superintendent Murphy, in authorizing such warfare, reasoned that the two tribes "being confederated," each should be held responsible for the acts of the other -- and that even though he was satisfied that the Arapahoes, as a tribe, disapproved of the last outbreak, many of their young warriors were still on the war path with the Cheyennes.[54]

If Murphy's notions as to what constituted "confederated" tribes were contradictory, they also clashed with the known inability of Plains chiefs to compel even their own tribesmen to obedience -- making it possible for virtually any Indian to honestly disclaim responsibility for others' actions. However, having already embraced the convenient premise that such chiefs could sign treaties binding their nations, government officials would now execute collective punishment. Sheridan's thoughts as to the method of such punishment reflected the philosophy of war he shared with his superior Sherman: "I am of the belief that these Indians require to be soundly whipped, and the ringleaders in the present trouble hung,

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[53]Sherman to Adjutant General Edward D. Townsend, Aug. 22, 1868, Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs (1868), II, p. 74.

[54]Murphy to Mix, Sept. 19, 1868, reel 879, M234, Letters Received, Upper Arkansas Agency 1865-69, OIA, NA.

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their ponies killed, and such destruction of their property as will make them very poor."[55]

He would attempt to put this belief into practice as soon as possible.

[55]Sheridan to Sherman, Sept. 26, 1868, container 73, reel 86, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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CHAPTER THREE

A False Start: The Indians Confound Sully

"...those sand hills are interminable."

In his eagerness to strike a blow, and despite his suspicion that the Indians might not be caught until winter, General Sheridan would order a large column of regular troops into the field as soon as possible. But Sheridan's offensive plans would also include a tool of his own creation -- a band of civilian scouts, enrolled and paid by the army's Quartermaster Department, and intended not merely to locate hostile Indians, but also to attack them.

The scout force would thus resemble a ranger company or band of anti-partisans, a highly mobile and independent command able to seek out and fight a nomadic foe in his own territory. During the Civil War, Sheridan had employed similar unconventional units against Confederate guerrillas, sometimes operating behind enemy lines dressed as civilians or rebels; in his determination to destroy Colonel William Mosby's guerrilla command in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, he had requested 100 Spencer repeating rifles to arm a unit ready to "take the contract to clean out Mosby's gang," though most of its members would themselves be captured by Mosby.[1] Despite their mixed record during the Rebellion, Sheridan remained receptive to the possibilities of such unorthodox units.

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[1]Virgil Carrington Jones, Ranger Mosby (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), pp. 200-201. The exploits of such anti-partisans were of course less renowned than Sheridan's scorched-earth campaign and reprisals against the valley's civilian population, which led one biographer to characterize him as "completely brutalized" by the frustration of guerrilla warfare. Hutton, Phil Sheridan and His Army, p. 17.

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To lead the scouts, Sheridan selected one of his wartime staff officers, 31-year-old Major (Brevet Colonel) George Alexander "Sandy" Forsyth, Ninth U.S. Cavalry, who during a varied Civil War career had displayed a zest for battle notable even in a Sheridan protegé: Sheridan's brother Michael thought that Forsyth, willing to risk his life even when unnecessary, "seemed to take joy in entering a fight."[2] After the war he had served as Sheridan's inspector general in Louisiana, and gone west with him as an aide.

Possessed of youth, vigor, and courage, Forsyth lacked only Indian-fighting experience, and while Sheridan may have felt aggressiveness more important than a knowledge of plainscraft which others could supply. Forsyth later admitted that while he had "assimilated, or tried to," all that he had seen or heard regarding the Indians, his knowledge of his intended foes was meager. He had, however, learned they took no needless risks, that they were unwilling to attack in the open save in overwhelming numbers, and that defeat at their hands "meant annihilation, either in the field, or by torture at the stake."[3] But Forsyth apparently gave little thought either to the possibility of overwhelming numbers or to his own annihilation.

Forsyth's desire for action was perhaps the greatest influence on Sheridan's choice of a scout commander, as implied by Captain Benteen's comment: "There wasn't any choice

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[2]Criqui, Fifty Fearless Men, pp. 9-10. For Forsyth, see David Dixon, Hero of Beecher Island: The Life and Military Career of George A. Forsyth (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994). The "colored" line regiment in which Forsyth held his majority was then still serving in the Department of Texas.

[3]Forsyth, George A. Thrilling Days in Army Life (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1900), p. 7.

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about the matter. Forsyth wanted to go, and Sheridan let him do it."[4] But this does not mean that Sheridan, despite a tendency to grant his favorites chances for glory that might extend to the point of shuffling assignments, had contrived to create a special unit to suit the ambitions of a "conspicuously junior major." Forsyth's account revealed an awareness that such a junior could not hope to replace any of Sheridan's more senior commanders, and a willingness to take what he could get; having resolved upon the outbreak of war to seek a field command, he had requested (after "several days' cogitation") that Sheridan consider him for the first available vacancy. Sheridan had accordingly offered the scouts, while expressing the view that the opportunity was not commensurate with Forsyth's rank. But Forsyth accepted immediately, even after learning that his new command would consist of civilians.

As second in command, Sheridan had already selected an officer with considerably more frontier knowledge than Forsyth: Lieutenant Frederick H. Beecher, Third U.S. Infantry. "Energetic, active, reliable, brave, and modest," wrote Forsyth, "with a love of hunting and a natural taste for plainscraft, he was a splendid specimen of a thoroughbred American..."[5] The scouts themselves, allegedly adopting the informal title of "The Solomon Avengers" in anticipation of carrying the war to the Indians, were quickly recruited.[6] Captain Benteen, remembered by the settlers for his successful fight and rescue at Elk Horn, claimed to have helped secure many of Forsyth's men, including Hudson Farley and his father Louis, buffalo hunters with a homestead claim in the Saline Valley; Forsyth himself judged the Farleys his

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[4]Benteen's notes, Carroll, From the Civil War, p. 8.

[5]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, pp. 12, 13.

[6]New York Herald, Oct. 12, 1868.

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troop's "two best shots...men of great coolness and unsurpassed bravery."[7]

Not all the volunteers had homesteads to defend. "Love of adventure," explained mule driver John Hurst, "which is inherent in all American frontiersmen and becomes kind of a second nature, prompted me to go."[8] Sheridan had wanted rugged men for this mounted unit, preferably Civil War veterans (recruits from either side being acceptable), and as the men of his command were to serve as soldiers. Forsyth organized it as a troop of cavalry.[9] But the prospective recruits, who would receive no drill or training before setting out, were interrogated with unusual care as to their qualifications and backgrounds, so that "by the time Forsyth and Beecher were through questioning, I think they knew more about us than we did ourselves."[10]

Not all were men of the proper experience, however. Young Sigmund Schlesinger, having knocked about the Kansas frontier for two years in a variety of jobs, mostly in towns, was no plainsman, and embarked cheerfully on this adventure -- "perhaps because I did not

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[7]Benteen's notes, Carroll, From the Civil War, p. 15; Forsyth, Thrilling Days, pp. 18-19, 75-76.

[8]John Hurst, "Scout John Hurst's Story of the Fight," Lynam, Beecher Island Annual: 68.

[9]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, p. 17.

[10]Arthur Woodward, ed., Man of the West: Reminiscences of George Washington Oaks 1840-1917 (Tucson: Pioneers' Historical Society, 1956), p. 29. In his biographical compendium on the scouts, Dr. Criqui suggests that Forsyth's men might be broken down into three distinct groups, the first being settlers from the Saline Valley, mostly "farmer-hunters" destined to remain in the area after serving. A small second group consisted of professional scouts, while most of the others were "seeking employment and/or adventure." Of those whose later careers could be traced, over one-third died violently, with thirteen homicide victims. Criqui, Fifty Fearless Men, pp. 2-3.

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know what was coming."[11] He had joined because he badly needed a job, and Forsyth admitted enrolling him at Fort Hays at the last moment simply to raise the full complement of fifty.[12] Regarding him as valiant if somewhat "dissipated," Forsyth chose as first sergeant William H.H. McCall, whose Civil War gallantry while a lieutenant colonel had earned him a brevet as brigadier general of volunteers.[13]

Despite their cavalry-style organization, the scouts generally wore the rough garb of frontiersmen, and only their two officers, Sergeant-Major McCall, and possibly contract surgeon John H. Mooers wore Army uniforms. Forsyth carried a saber, not because close combat was likely, but rather "to emphasize my authority with my volunteer command." For business he would be armed as a scout, with a Spencer repeating carbine and a Colt's .44 revolver.[14] Besides 140 cartridges for his carbine and 30 for his pistol, each scout was to carry a canteen, butcher knife, and a haversack with a week's rations. A four-mule pack train carried extra salt and coffee, along with camp equipment, medical supplies, shovels with

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[11]Sigmund Schlesinger, "Scout Schlesinger's Story," Lynam, Beecher Island Annual: 76, 77. Schlesinger himself credited his enlistment to the influence of a scout who desired to loan Schlesinger a horse and receive in turn the extra $25 Schlesinger would earn by not drawing an Army mount.

[12]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, p. 40. Schlesinger allegedly begged with Forsyth so tenaciously after Lt. Beecher rejected him as too young and green that the colonel finally ordered, "Oh, hell, Beecher, sign him up." Woodward, Man of the West, p. 29.

[13]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, pp. 17, 19.

[14]George A. Forsyth to Mr. Luther P. Stover, May 6, 1914. (Copy courtesy Dr. David Dixon.) Forsyth provided details of costume and accouterments to Stover in assisting the production of a silent film based on the Beecher Island fight, and released in 1915 under the title When We Were Young. One eccentric scout, according to George Oakes, sported a sailor's bellbottomed uniform and pancake hat. Woodward, Man of the West, p. 29.

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which to find ground water, and reserve ammunition.[15] As far as was possible, Forsyth would break free of the restraints of supply trains by living off the land.

On August 29, Forsyth received his instructions from Sheridan's acting adjutant general, Colonel J. Schuyler Crosby. Sheridan suggested that Forsyth move across the head-waters of the Solomon River to Beaver Creek, and thence down that creek to Fort Wallace; on arriving at that post, he was to report back to Sheridan at Ft. Hays by telegraph.[16] The scouts rode out for Hays that morning from their camp on Big Creek, the pale, delicately moustached Beecher at their head, and galloped toward the post a mile away. They broke into a loud cheer as they rode past post headquarters and saw Sheridan standing with Forsyth on the portico, and some even sped across the sacred parade ground in their enthusiasm. Shaking hands with Sheridan and Crosby, Forsyth "sprang into the saddle with a light heart, and no little elation, at the thought of having a field command and a roving commission -- a state of affairs that any true cavalry man can appreciate." The slightly built major gave the command to march, and in less than ten hours the command had penetrated well into country considered hostile. But even some quarter-century later, remembering the fresh Plains air, the herds of buffalo and elk, and his own fascination with the danger of campaigning, Forsyth found it "almost impossible not to rhapsodize over the freedom of the

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[15]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, p.11.

[16]Col. J. Schuyler Crosby to G.A. Forsyth, Aug. 29, 1868, in Forsyth, "Report of the Organization and Operations of a Body of Scouts Under My Command from August 29 to September 30th," reel 642, M-619, Letters Received, Adjutant General's Office (hereafter AGO), 1780s-1917, NA.

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life we led..."[17] Marching until 11 P.M., the command camped among the hills.

It rained all the next day, the scouts vainly searching for Indian sign as they marched toward Wallace; a fleeting hope of action, stirred by a report of Indians a few miles away, proved a false alarm. The drenched scouts camped on the south fork of the Solomon River.[18] Crossing the Saline River and the Solomon's south fork on August 31, Forsyth found a large, deserted Indian camp, with signs indicating a great sun dance. However, it was not until September 5, while still en route to Ft. Wallace, that he saw his chance for action against hostile natives, as a band of Indians became visible ahead. Forsyth quickly ordered his mounted command to charge the enemy. But the "Indians" were actually a party of haymakers from Fort Wallace, who in turn believed themselves under Indian assault. Fortunately the charge produced only one casualty -- a scout badly injured by being thrown from his horse.[19] At about midnight the command rode into Fort Wallace, where Forsyth secured replacements for several scouts admitted to the hospital. "Sharp" Grover, sufficiently

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[17]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, pp. 19-20. The descriptions of Forsyth and Beecher are from Forsyth to Stover, May 6, 1914.

[18]Chauncey Whitney journal, Aug. 30, 1868, "Diary of Chauncey B. Whitney, A Scout with Forsyth at Beecher Island, with letters from General George. A. Forsyth and General Louis H. Carpenter," Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society 12 (1911-1912): 296.

[19]Forsyth's biographer remarks that this near-tragedy emphasizes his "inexperience in plains warfare and also indicates that the major was ready to pitch into any Indians he found, regardless of their disposition towards the whites." However, it may better illustrate Forsyth's general impetuosity, since he ordered his attack before discerning that the "enemy" were Indians of any kind. Dixon, Hero of Beecher Island, p. 72.

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recovered from his recent wound, was recruited as chief guide.[20]

While Sheridan had succeeded in getting his band of civilian scouts into the field, launching a large military column into a hostile country, complete with its impedimenta of supply and baggage wagons, was a more elaborate affair. Seventh Cavalry private Winfield Scott Harvey, farrier of Company K, camped near Fort Larned, concluded a typically laconic journal entry for September 2 by observing, "R.M. West is drunk," a fact which perhaps merited recording because West was Harvey's company commander. On September 4 Private Harvey reached Fort Dodge as a member of General Alfred Sully's mounted escort. General Sheridan was expected to arrive at Dodge soon, as was Little Raven of the Arapahoes, to talk of peace. Harvey was apparently not reassured: "I am afraid that we will have to go on a campaign after those Indians....R.M. West drunk."[21]

But with no Army offensive thus far, the soldiers had to be content with responding as best they could to the Indians' attacks. At times they themselves would be the targets: on the night of September 2, a war party attacked a mail party of four Third Infantry soldiers at Little Coon Creek, near Fort Dodge. As his comrades defended themselves behind their wagon and its dead horses, the only man not wounded rode for help on the last horse left alive, and brought a detachment of the Seventh Cavalry to the rescue. Three Indians were reported

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[20]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, p. 10. Forsyth obviously valued Grover's skills highly, though later terming him taciturn and at times "apt to be somewhat moody."

[21]Winfield Scott Harvey journal, Sept. 4, 1868, George H. Shirk, "Campaigning With Sheridan: A Farrier's Diary," The Chronicles of Oklahoma 37 (Spring, 1959): 73.

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killed, and one wounded.[22] While Harvey suspected, or perhaps feared, that he would be a minor part of a "big campaign" south of the Arkansas River, the cavalrymen also took precautions against any Indians striking first, tired troopers picketing their equally tired horses close to hand in a ravine just above camp. Camped across the river with a flag of truce, the Arapahoes under Little Raven waited for General Sheridan's arrival -- reportedly looking for him "every day and moment."[23] But while the Arapahoes hoped to avoid his sword, Sheridan planned an energetic and tenacious military campaign against those Indians designated "hostile."

Still waiting out the sentence of his court-martial after his troubled performance on the Plains, the twenty-eight-year-old George Custer, one of Sheridan's most warlike and tenacious captains, was still absent from the field. Sheridan was thus unable to exploit qualities of youth, seemingly boundless energy, and formidable endurance for a type of campaigning which he, and others, would come to see as too strenuous for elderly or even middle-aged commanders.[24] Some of those officers still available to the department

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[22]Harvey journal, Sept. 4, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 73; Chronological List of Actions, &c., with Indians from January 15, 1837 to January, 1891 (1891; Fort Collins, Co.: Old Army Press, 1979), p. 35; David K. Strate, Sentinel to the Cimarron: The Frontier Experience of Fort Dodge, Kansas (Dodge City: Cultural Heritage and Arts Center, July 1970), pp. 76-78. A visiting Englishman composed a spirited but deservedly obscure poem, "The Battle of Little Coon Creek," praising the besieged soldiers for having "fought with a wit and precision."

[23]Harvey journal, Sept. 5-6, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 73-74.

[24]This assumption is discussed in Barnett, Touched by Fire, pp. 389-390. Captain Benteen, after recalling winter operations in 1877-78, asserted, "Were I a Czar -- to which elevation truth compels me to say I haven't the slightest aspiration -- I would have no regimental officer in the cavalry beyond the age of 45 years." Benteen stated that by that age, and perhaps before, they were too "stale" for the work the cavalry was capable of doing --

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commander were perhaps ill-suited, and perhaps even unwilling, to pursue an elusive enemy to the death.

"As the F.F.V's down in Virginia say Genl Gibbs has gone and done it now," Second Lieutenant Myles Moylan wrote from Ft. Leavenworth, informing the exiled Custer that the Seventh's current commander, Major (Brevet Major General) Alfred Gibbs, comfortable at that post, had asked to command his regiment in the field, only to find that, much to his surprise and disgust, his wish had actually been granted: "He has been swearing all day and I believe got good and drunk this evening." Moylan, who declared his preference for serving as a line officer in "some good Company" rather than being "stuck at some dirty One Company Post" with the Seventh's headquarters, was so sure Gibbs would be unable to endure active service that he had even considered resigning as regimental adjutant.

"I wish to God you were back in Command of the regiment," wrote the Custer loyalist, surmising that Gibbs, if not already sick of active service, certainly would be after being put up in a "dog hole" after arriving at Dodge: "I will not stay with him a day if I can help it."[25] The Seventh's colonel, grey-haired, slightly statured General Andrew Jackson Smith, though born in 1815, might have seemed more adaptable, with no fear of campaigning

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and that he had come to this conclusion during the Civil War. Frederic F. Benteen, letter to Theodore W. Goldin, Mar. 23, 1896, John M. Carroll, ed., The Benteen-Goldin Letters on Custer and His Last Battle (New York: Liveright, 1974), p. 295.

[25]Lt. Myles Moylan, letter to G.A. Custer, Sept. 6, 1868, Brice C.W. Custer Collection. Moylan declared that in making his request Gibbs had no more idea of being ordered out to Fort Dodge under Sully "than he had of flying." For Gibbs' military career and role in shaping the newly organized Seventh Cavalry, see Utley, Life in Custer's Cavalry, pp. 259-260.

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even in a harsh winter.[26] But Smith, currently on detached service, had recently received approval for a leave extension of six months, and he would resign on May 9, 1869. Major Joel H. Elliott, a year younger than Custer, would lead the Seventh Cavalry out on campaign the next day.

Sheridan's first offensive column would be commanded by Brevet Brigadier General Alfred Sully, veteran of the Mexican War, lieutenant-colonel of the Third U.S. Infantry, and commander of the District of the Upper Arkansas. An army officer since 1841, he had spent nearly all of the intervening twenty-seven years on the Indian frontier, including Florida, and even Sully's service against Confederate rebels had been interrupted for Indian-fighting. In the wake of the bloody 1862 Minnesota uprising, he had enjoyed the rare experience of commanding thousands of troops against Indians, waging successful expeditions against the Minnesota Sioux and their Teton allies -- and campaigning with some vigor despite being forced by rheumatism and dysentery to ride in a wagon rather than bestride a horse.

But whatever Sully's illnesses or eccentricities (he had allegedly once remedied a short count of military animals by promoting surplus mules to the rank of "brevet horses"), his earlier campaigns suggested an understanding of the nature of Indian warfare, and the Plains' warriors vulnerable points. After his 1864 victory in Dakota at Killdeer Mountain left him in possession of Sioux lodges and foodstuffs, Sully commented: "I would rather destroy their supplies than kill fifty of their warriors." (He could also campaign with a ruthlessness considered inappropriate to "civilized" warfare; after three Sioux had killed an officer who had

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[26]"He has a grey head, but is active as any young blood in the command. He is a tough old soldier; laughs at the 'dandified young bucks' who wear [officers'] shoulder straps and are afraid of a little snow." Stanley, My Early Travels, I, p. 25.

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strayed from a column and been slain themselves. Sully had ordered the warriors' severed heads placed on poles as a warning.) Like Hazen, he had concluded that cavalry was too expensive and of dubious utility in prolonged campaigns; earlier that year he had submitted to the Quartermaster Department plans for an "Infantry Wagon" seating eight passengers (facing outward in case of attack) and permitting the rapid transport of foot soldiers whose rifles would outrange the carbines of dismounted cavalry.[27]

To Governor Crawford, Sheridan acknowledged that the only proper policy was "to make war on the families and stock of these Indians, and to break them up completely and effectually...To attempt to follow the small raiding parties who have committed depredations at isolated points on the plains would bring no satisfactory results." With the Cheyennes' and Arapahoes' stock and families currently south of the Arkansas River, Sully's movements would, Sheridan believed, draw back all their raiding parties operating north of the river, to protect the warriors' own families. Certain bands of Sioux, whose raids would be in violation of the 1868 Fort Laramie treaty rather than those signed at Medicine Lodge, were also embraced in Sheridan's plan. Pawnee Killer, "and the bands connected with him," presumed camped on the headwaters of the Republican and operating in Colorado, were the targets of

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[27]Utley, Frontiersmen in Blue, pp. 270, 275-78. Sully's grandson has produced an unsatisfactory biography in Langdon Sully, No Tears for the General: The Life of Alfred Sully, 1821-1879 (Palo Alto, CA: American West Publishing Co., 1974). Employing animals that (unlike cavalry mounts) could be reassigned to draft purposes when not on campaign, Sully's wagon could carry rations and forage for five days. Since a single wagon driver would suffice to manage these animals, the wagon's eight passengers could also put more men on a firing line than a like number of cavalrymen, two of whom would normally be detailed as mounted "horse holders" when the others deployed to fight on foot. The wagon, featuring a tarpaulin which when unrolled would form a tent under the vehicle's rear, apparently never went beyond the prototype stage. Thomas Lindmier, "General Sully and His Wagon," Military Collector and Historian, 37 (Winter 1985): 168-171.

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troops under Captain (Brevet Lieutenant Colonel) Henry C. Bankhead, as well as Forsyth's scouts.

Sheridan still hoped to succeed by relying on federal troops, and with the important exception of Forsyth's small fighting unit -- organized and commanded by U.S. Army officers -- he was not yet willing to authorize the raising of Western volunteers; such men were seen by regular officers as ill-disciplined and likely to bring about Sand Creek-like excesses. But Sheridan promised Crawford that he would promptly notify both the governor and the proper military authorities if he believed the means at his command insufficient for his task, "so that there may be a good reason for the expense which may occur in calling out troops."[28] But as letters and petitions from constituents pleaded to him for protection, Crawford telegraphed Sheridan on September 11 to ask for five hundred stands of Spencer carbines, so that he might at once form and arm a battalion -- of "picked men, well mounted" -- to guard the border from the Republican to the Arkansas. Sheridan wired back his agreement the same day, admitting that such an arrangement would "give me seven good companies [of regulars] now on duty on the frontier."[29] If state troops were available for guard duty and similar defensive tasks, Sheridan would have so many more mounted regulars available for offensive operations.

Citing the recent atrocities against Kansas citizens and declaring a "general Indian

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[28]P.H. Sheridan, letter to Samuel J. Crawford, Sept.10, 1868. Crawford, Kansas in the Sixties, p. 296.

[29]Crawford to Sheridan, Sept. 11, 1868, and Sheridan to Crawford, Sept. 11, 1868. Crawford, Kansas in the Sixties, p. 296. A "stand of arms" would normally include the rifle or carbine itself and appropriate accouterments.

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war" inevitable. Crawford issued a call for volunteer cavalrymen, to be armed and equipped by the federal government though obliged to furnish their own mounts. Crawford thought that only sixty days' service would be needed. But the five cavalry companies, each to include from a minimum 80 to a maximum authorized strength of 100 enlisted men, were to be enlisted for three months rather than two. First assembling at the town of Salina to be supplied and provisioned, the men of this "Frontier Battalion" were dispersed to their stations, one company apiece going to the towns or vicinities of Lake Sibley, Salina, Marion Centre, and Topeka -- the last, perhaps, held in reserve to reinforce those at other points if needed -- and one to the Solomon Valley. Though denied a chance for offensive operations, the Frontier Battalion, commanded by Major George B. Jenness, would serve to deter raiders.[30]

On September 7, General Sheridan arrived at Ft. Dodge, followed that afternoon by Major Elliott's force of cavalry.[31] By frontier standards, Sully's command was a large one, including nine of the Seventh Cavalry's twelve companies. But, as was customary on the frontier, where a regiment's companies were generally parceled out among a number of far-flung posts, assembling such a force had required significant reshuffling. Having scouted the country between Walnut Creek and the Arkansas River near Fort Zarah, Elliott had taken the five troops under his immediate command to Fort Dodge, where they were united with Company B, stationed at the post, as well as companies C from Fort Lyon, Colorado, F from Fort Leavenworth, and K, which had arrived from Wichita. Captain John H. Page would command Company F, Third U.S. Infantry, and besides some thirty wagons, the column

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[30]Garfield, "Defense ...1868-1869": 461; Crawford, Kansas in the Sixties, pp. 421-422.

[31]Harvey journal, Sept. 7, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 74.

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would include a mountain howitzer. Civilian scouts would include Ben Clark, John Smith, and Amos Chapman, all experienced plainsmen, and all linked to the Cheyennes by marriage.[32]

The column began its march at about 4:00 P.M. on Sept. 7, crossing the Arkansas about two miles to the west of the post, the supply wagons containing Page's infantrymen. Sheridan saluted the troops as they passed, and, thought Captain Barnitz, "was undoubtedly very anxious to accompany us," though compelled by other duties to remain behind.[33] Sully, watching from the south bank, remarked after seeing the supply train and rear guard leave the river behind them, "Now we have crossed the Rubicon." At Dodge, Sheridan would hold council with Little Raven and the other Arapaho chiefs the next day, offering the Indians food throughout the winter. But the Arapahoes did not come in, and Sheridan would afterwards claim that they had been the first to attack Sully's column.[34] They had agreed, he charged, only to secure time to place their families beyond reach, and, predicted that after obtaining enough plunder and "a sufficient number of scalps for the young men to glory over," they

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[32]Brigadier General E.S. Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences, including an Account of General Sully's Expedition Against the Southern Plains Indians, 1868," The Cavalry Journal, 36 (July 1927): 420-421; Albert Barnitz, letter to Jennie Barnitz, Sept. 16, 1868, Box 3, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU; Bvt. Brig. Gen. Alfred Sully to Bvt. Brig. Gen. Chauncey Mckeever, Assistant Adjutant General, Department of the Missouri, Sept. 16, 1868, reel 642, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870, NA.

[33]Albert Barnitz, letter to Jennie Barnitz, Sept. 6, 1868, Box 3, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU.

[34]Sheridan to Sherman, Sept. 26, 1868, container 73, reel 86, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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would be able to make another treaty and obtain more goods and food.[35]

As described by Edward S. Godfrey, on that first day the cavalry was ordered to regulate its march on that of the wagon train, which was formed two wagons abreast. Sully, followed by his mounted escort, rode in an ambulance at the head of the train, and the remaining cavalrymen rode in four squadrons of two troops each -- two in advance, two on each flank, and two serving as a rear guard. Though such a column was perhaps too large and cumbersome for much stealth, especially given the assessment of Indian intelligence he would later express, Sully prohibited bugle calls and ordered the greatest possible silence observed on the march -- and even banned smoking. After two hours' march, Sully sent word to the advance squadron, led by Captain William Thompson, to halt for a rest. Thompson, a former Iowa politician who "rather prided himself on his lung-power," commanded, "Battalion, halt!" -- loudly.

"Then a mule brayed. The General was very angry; he said he was satisfied the Indians had been watching our preparations from hidden lookouts and he had moved after dark and in silence to outwit them, but Balaam's Ass had thwarted his scheme! Thereafter, silence was observed as far as practicable, and commands were given in low tones."[36] After resting, Sully continued the march south until after midnight, finally halting on a branch of Crooked Creek, 25 to 30 miles from Ft. Dodge. But the general declined to pitch camp, and instead ordered his men to rest on their arms till dawn, the cavalrymen holding their horses' reins

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[35]Sheridan to Sherman, Sept. 23, 1868, reel 642, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870, NA.

[36]Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences": 421. Godfrey did not indicate whether Sully was angry only at the mule, or at Thompson for employing his "stentorian" voice.

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rather than picketing them with pins. Thus ready, in theory at least, to fight or pursue Indians at a moment's notice, the troopers got little rest as their mounts tugged at the reins in their attempts to graze. Whether discouraged by Sully's precautions or simply absent, the Indians did nothing to further disrupt the soldiers' repose.

Private Harvey, at the evening's camp on Goose Creek, Kansas, briefly summarized the column's movements on September 8: "Marched all day and saw no Indians." However, Sully's scouts reported signs of Indians headed south, into the Indian Territory.[37] The lagging supply train failed to reach camp during the night, and arrived on September 9 only at about 8 A.M., delaying the column's departure. Finally able to draw supplies, Major Elliott marched toward the Cimarron to reconnoiter with four companies of the Seventh, while Sully, unsure as to the Indian trail's direction due to obliteration by recent rains, led the rest of his command to the southwest for about five miles. Encamped again on Goose Creek, he awaited the arrival of a courier from Elliott. Private Harvey felt that the Indians could not be very far ahead: "We will overtake them soon."[38]

After Sully learned from Elliott's dispatch on September 10 that he had found a trail leading to the east, he took up a line of march south by west and reached the Cimarron, where Elliott waited. The united command moved downriver, and for the first time saw action. As reported by Sully, a party of Indians attacked and drove back his scouts, surrounding them before a detachment of cavalry rode to their relief and in turn drove the

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[37] Harvey journal, Sept. 8, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 74.

[38]Harvey gives no precise time, but states that the scouting by Elliott on September 9 was done after dinner. Harvey journal, Sept. 9, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 74.

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Indians "in every direction," killing two warriors as well as a pony. Barnitz, however, recorded that the fighting began when Indians fired upon a party of surprised buffalo hunters from the column, "and quite a lively chase of the Indians ensued." It proved but a brief interruption, and the march continued down the river, the soldiers camping at the foot of some bluffs within a mile of the confluence of the Cimarron and Crooked Creek.[39] Signs revealed that Indians had recently grazed many animals along the stream.

That night harassing arrows whizzed through campfires and into tents where lights burned. While cries went out to "douse the glim" and troops formed up to charge the bluffs from which the harassing bowmen had already fled, other warriors tried to steal some horses in a rare night attack. Private Harvey shrugged off the encounter, writing that the attackers (whom he placed with baffling precision as numbering twenty-five) did no harm and "stopped off proceedings for the day," while Barnitz, perhaps because only a few men of his company were engaged, made only brief mention of the day's skirmishes. But thereafter, observed Godfrey, "our camps were selected more carefully."[40]

September 11 would see more serious combat. The day began normally enough.

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[39]Albert Barnitz, letter to Jennie Barnitz, Sept. 16, 1868, Box 3, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU; Harvey journal, Sept. 16, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 74; Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences": 423. While Harvey referred to a band of Indians who were themselves surprised while hunting buffalo, Godfrey, writing long after the event, places the incident shortly before reaching the Cimarron, and states that the column's own hunters shot at a single Indian hunter as he reversed direction and fled. Godfrey identified the Nimrods as a couple of officers granted permission to chase buffalo seen on the bluffs south of the river, which suggests that Sully had modified his ideas on the need for silence.

[40]Harvey journal, Sept. 10, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning With Sheridan": 74; Albert Barnitz journal, Sept. 10, 1868, Box 4, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU; Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences": 423.

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with reveille at five and the men breaking camp at six. But just as the command started out, the Indians struck. Captain Louis McLane Hamilton had paused at one end of the camp, near a deep, dry arroyo, to tell two soldiers to join their company as soon as they could mount. But after riding on several hundred yards, Hamilton heard behind him the cries of mounted Indians who had dashed out to seize four horses -- and the terrified screams of the two soldiers as they were borne off at full speed, each trooper thrown across a warrior's pony.[41]

While Hamilton gave chase, the acting regimental adjutant, Lieutenant A.E. Smith, ordered a flank guard company to follow in support. Their determined pursuers pressed the Indians so closely that they dropped one wounded captive, F Company private Alexander Kenedy.[42] But even as Hamilton galloped to rescue the other man, an officer overtook him with an order from General Sully -- "furious," asserted Godfrey, "when he received the word in his ambulance at the head of the train" -- to break off the chase and return immediately. According to Custer, Hamilton paused to await the arrival of an ambulance for the wounded Kenedy; then both he and Smith were relieved of their sabers, summoned before Major Elliott,

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[41]Harvey journal, Sept. 11, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": p. 74; Custer, My Life, p. 160. Custer, in commenting second-hand on this action, adds that the Indian force, which he put at from two to three hundred warriors, had "evidently in some inexplicable manner contrived to conceal their approach until the proper moment."

[42]Henry Lippincott, Assistant Surgeon U.S. Army, Surgeon in Charge, "List of Wounded in General Sully's Command in the Field...engaged with Indians on the 11th day of September, 1868, Near north Fork, Canadian River, Indian Territory," Medical Records, 1814-1919, File F412, Records of the Adjutant General's Office 1780s-1917, RG 94, NA. Kenedy had suffered a severe flesh wound from a .36 pistol ball somehow identified by Dr. Lippincott as a "Colts," the projectile passing around in the anterior wall of the abdomen without entering the abdominal cavity, and being cut out at a point about two inches above and two inches to the left of the navel.

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and arrested after "a second-hand reprimand."[43] Charged with pursuing without proper authority -- though they would have thrown away any chance of effecting a rescue by pausing to request it -- both officers were later released. The soldier, F Company's Private Louis Curran, was left to his fate.[44]

For Sully, the event would have no official existence: he reported merely that the Indians had "charged upon two stragglers, killing one and wounding another," after which "troops were sent to the rear" and drove the Indians back. No mention was made of a rescue attempt, or of the fact that Sully had "sent" nobody with the intention of fighting. But the Seventh Cavalry's regimental records would place a brief, chilling notice opposite the missing man's name: "Captured by Indians."[45]

"The episode had a demoralizing effect on the command," Godfrey admitted. "We of the Cavalry had been imbued with the principle to take any risk to attempt the rescue of a

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[43]Custer, My Life, pp. 160-161; Benteen's notes, in Carroll, From the Civil War, p. 10. Captain Benteen dismissed Custer's account of Hamilton's arrest and reprimand by Elliott as a "lie out of whole cloth," and his attack on Sully and Elliott (whom Custer identified only as the Seventh's commanding officer) as unwarrantable. However, Benteen did not indicate whether or not he thought more might have been done to rescue Curran.

[44]Custer's own 1867 court-martial, which had discussed charges that he had failed to rescue several soldiers who had been attacked by Indians after falling behind his column (one of whom was killed), did not inhibit his criticism of Sully: "The General, as was his custom on the march, being comfortably stowed away in an ambulance, of course it was impossible that he or his staff, from their great distance from the scene of actual attack, could give the necessary orders in this case." Custer, My Life, p. 160.

[45]Post Return, "Detachment 7th U.S. Cavalry commanded by Major Joel H. Elliott, 7th Cavalry," September 1868, reel 71, M744, Returns from Regular Army Cavalry Regiments, 1833-1916, NA; Lippincott, "List of Wounded in General Sully's Command," Medical Records, 1814-1919, File F-412, RG 94, NA. Lippincott listed Curran as "Captured and Supposed to have been Killed."

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comrade in peril."[46] The soldiers could not even console themselves with the idea that Curran had died a swift, soldierly death, Captain Barnitz believing that "if he lived long enough they doubtless had a war dance around and tortured him to death."[47] While actually reserving captives for torture was seemingly rare among the Plains Indians, the loss of a man under these circumstances confronted Sully's men with the fate feared above all others in Indian warfare, and Hamilton was apparently "never reconciled to the abandonment of the pursuit."[48]

Perhaps emboldened by their success, warriors continued to harass the column, and after it had proceeded five miles from camp an engagement that Sully termed a "general skirmish" began along its entire line, and continued for several hours. Sully stated the Indian loss as certainly eight killed and wounded, and thought there were "no doubt a great many more. We had to fight in the hills by detachments. Officers and men report having seen several more than I report as having dropped from their horses." Sully's opponents were well-armed, apparently well-supplied with ammunition, and were splendidly mounted -- "much better than our troops." Sully even reported one squad of roughly 100 warriors drilling with a bugler, though he who used non-regulation calls. His guides told Sully that these were the Cheyenne Dog Soldiers, though one of them, recognizing and conversing with

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[46]Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences": 424.

[47]Albert Barnitz, letter to Jennie Barnitz, Sept. 16, 868, Box 3, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU.

[48]Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences": 424. While Curran's comrades simply assumed the worst at the time, Custer was to write of "the consummate coolness and particularity of detail" with which some Indian participants later told him of the missing man being bound to a stake, mutilated, and burned with brands thrust into the wounds before the younger braves were permitted to dispatch him with knives. Custer, My Life, pp. 161-162.

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an Arapaho, learned that the tribe's northern branch was also represented. The spectacular side of such warfare seemed to impress Private Harvey more than any danger: "They followed us all day, and every time that we undertook to fight them, they would run away. They did some very bold riding and what a sight it was to see them ride and shoot. Sometimes they would shoot at us a mile off, but not any good."[49] Perhaps the Indians' reluctance to close accounted for the fact that the two soldiers reported wounded were hit by spent shot.

Exchanging shots with the Indians for ten miles eastward along the stream, the column reached a deserted Indian village at a tributary stream's juncture with the Cimarron, where a prolonged engagement ensued. Several hundred Indians repeatedly charged, but were driven off among the bluffs with apparent loss, a result Barnitz attributed to the superior range and accuracy of the soldiers' firearms. Sully resumed his march, and when his troops were within six miles of the North Fork of the Canadian the Indians attacked his rear guard, but were "handsomely repulsed, with considerable loss," as Barnitz put it. Skirmishing constantly, still following the Indians' trail, the column finally crossed the Beaver or North Fork of the Canadian and camped on its right bank. That night the Indians fired into the encampment, inflicting no casualties.[50]

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[49]Sully to McKeever, Sept. 16, 1868, reel 642, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870, NA; Harvey journal, Sept. 11, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 74. Sully wrote that some of the warriors possessed the "latest patent inventions" of firearms, perhaps meaning repeating rifles or carbines.

[50]Barnitz journal, Sept. 11, 1868, Box 4, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU; Lippincott, "List of Wounded in General Sully's Command," Medical Records, 1814-1919, F-412, RG 94, NR. Of the three men (other than Private Kenedy) listed as wounded that day, two required no treatment for slight contusions, caused by spent shot of unknown type. One man fractured his clavicle when his horse fell during the fighting.

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On September 12, after reveille, the Indians attacked the camp, but with no ill effects from the troopers' standpoint. They then followed the column until roughly noon, as Sully's men marched nearly due east, through northeastern Texas, to arrive three miles above the fork of the Beaver and Wolf Creek. A large band of warriors waited at Wolf Creek to take a stand against the column's progress, but, Private Harvey assured his journal, "we let them know that we were running the machine." A dismounted cavalry troop firing from the crest of a ridge repelled an Indian charge, and the warriors dispersed among the sand hills, only to reappear on the soldiers' flanks and to their front. The action became general, the Indians resisting from a well-chosen defensive position. Then Sully put Page's infantrymen and eight dismounted cavalry companies into a skirmish line, and ordered a charge on foot when the troops had approached within about two hundred yards. This inspired the Indians to mount their ponies and flee into the sand hills, and after the column's howitzer was finally brought into play, the Indians took their leave. They had wounded one cavalryman of Company G, but Sully claimed that after roughly two hours of skirmishing, his own men could claim at least twelve Indians killed and wounded.

Sully also boasted that the soldiers had "succeeded in driving them in every direction." But merely routing the Indians from sandhills neither they nor the Army had any desire to possess was no substitute for decisive results, and Godfrey thought his regiment ill-employed, accusing Sully of making no attempt "to use the Cavalry for mounted charge and pursuit."[51] The command crossed the North Fork of the Canadian and encamped on its bank, where at

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[51]Harvey journal, Sept. 12, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 74-75; Sully to McKeever, Sept. 16, 1868, reel 642, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870, NA; Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences": 424-25.

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dark. "We had some bother with our cook fires, as they shoot at them some, but doing no harm."[52]

In their marches down the Cimarron and Beaver, the soldiers had found Indian trails which grew larger and fresher, suggesting that camps of various bands, pitched in scattershot fashion along the streams, had joined in a flight from Sully's column. The abandoned property found at the old campsites in the soldiers' path suggested to Godfrey "something of a panic on the part of the Indians in their haste to escape. There was no indication of haste in the pursuit."[53] By implication, Sully had set too slow a pace for the column, or at least its cavalry, to overtake and pounce upon the fugitives. But perhaps Godfrey, though he wrote with the benefit of much subsequent campaign experience, gave too much credit to an Army column's ability to overtake Plains Indians determined to escape.

On Sunday, September 13, the command marched toward the main Canadian or "Middle River." Sully, aware that the fighting thus far had given the Indians three days to get their families out of his way, found that the lodge-pole trail had become "very much confused," and that by tying lodge poles to ponies and dragging them in different directions the Indians had succeeded in making blind trails. These fresh trails now led into a succession of sand hills "where no one the least acquainted with the country would ever think of going." However, "Not having any one acquainted with the country, we crossed the Middle River, and got into the trap the Indians laid for us." An anonymous participant in the expedition, agreeing that the trail followed was merely a decoy, held that venturing into the hills was

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[52]Harvey journal, Sept. 12, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 74-75.

[53]Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences": 424.

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useless. The sandhills were impassible to wagons and Sully's guides "perfectly at sea" in a country allegedly untraversed by white men, presenting a difficulty "which no amount of bravery could overcome."[54]

When the troops struck the river at about noon, there commenced a lengthy engagement with the Indians, who dismounted and occupied the hills. Sully felt obliged to keep his wagon train with his main body due to the broken country and the Indians' "vigorous" attack, and managed to withdraw it from what seemed an ambuscade.[55] Captain Barnitz observed that the sand hills where the Indians sought refuge constituted a tract probably ten miles square, their coarse sand overgrown by sage, bunch grass, an occasional wild plum bush, and even some stunted cottonwoods; some of the hills, shaped like inverted tea cups, and topped by depressions capable of screening the Indians and even their ponies against fire from any direction, were well-suited to defense.[56] Barnitz advanced with his company directly through the sand hills. His men forded a stream and had proceeded for some distance before Captain George Yates' Company F was ordered to cross and advance as

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[54]Sully to McKeever, September 16, 1868, reel 642, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870, NA; "General Sully's Expedition," Army and Navy Journal 6 (Oct. 3, 1868): 102.

[55]Sully to McKeever, Sept. 16, 1868, reel 642, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870, NA; Harvey journal, Sept. 16, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 75. Private Harvey considered the day's action a small fight, the Indians having "stopped for us and thought that they would do something, but they were much mistaken to see that we did not care very much for them."

[56]Albert Barnitz, letter to Jennie Barnitz, Sept. 6, 1868, Box 3, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU.

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dismounted skirmishers.[57]

Like Private Harvey, Captain Barnitz was struck by the picturesque side of Indian warfare, and despite the danger, or perhaps because of it, emphasized to his wife the spectacular entertainment it afforded:

> ...I only wish you could witness the Indian mode of fighting: it really is amusing sometimes! The Indians maneuver so much like wolves! They always ride at full speed, whooping, and with their tall war bonnets (of feathers) careening from right to left, like the mast of a ship in a storm, and they are no sooner driven from one sand hill, than they pop up on another, always passing around its base, and ascending it from the far side, and always watching for a chance to make a dash, and cut off some straggler, or drive through some thin part of a line![58]

This quicksilver quality was evident as Barnitz, keeping a platoon in reserve, advanced a line of skirmishers. He dislodged the Indians from several hills to his front, but roughly a hundred warriors moved to occupy a hill to his right and slightly to his rear, and killed one of Yates' men before a crossfire from Barnitz's skirmishers drove them from their latest position. The Indians' defense impressed one observer as less than tenacious, since they had "delayed us only so long as was necessary to halt and deploy, when, after a few

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[57]Harvey journal, Sept. 16, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 75. It was apparently during this day's fighting that Sully's expedition made its contribution to Western myth. Captain Keogh's horse being wounded in the rump and subsequently dubbed "Comanche" by his rider. While Keogh would die at the Little Bighorn in 1876, his mount, wounded seven times, would survive to be recovered on the field by the Seventh Cavalry and misleadingly celebrated as the lone survivor of "Custer's Last Stand." Godfrey, "Reminiscences": 424. For a biography of the horse, who has attracted considerably more popular attention than his rider (and whose stuffed remains can be seen on display at the University of Kansas), see Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence, His Very Silence Speaks: Comanche -- The Horse Who Survived Custer's Last Stand. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989).

[58]Albert Barnitz, letter to Jennie Barnitz, Sept. 16, 1868, Box 3, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU.

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desultory shots, they gave up a position that 100 men could have held against us for at least a day."[59] But from the Indian viewpoint, a sustained defense was not necessary, and perhaps not even desirable.

Unable to proceed on with his train through the hills, Sully re-crossed the stream, and marched three miles northward, camping on the North Fork of the Canadian. It was still possible to put a good face on the situation: "We keep them from hunting, and when we get some guides we have sent for, we will have their families, which to them will be a disheartening blow. Mutual confidence exists between the troops and General Sully, who has convinced us all that his experiences and wisdom will eventually carry us to success."[60] But any interruption in the army's attempts at pursuit and harassment would necessarily be to the Indians' advantage.

That evening, the column buried the day's fatality, F's Private Cyrus W. Corbett, on the picket line, so that horses' trampling hooves could obliterate any sign of a grave.[61] Several officers were seated around the headquarters campfire as Sully emerged from his tent to declare that the column would begin a return march to Dodge, there to request

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[59] Army and Navy Journal 6 (Oct. 3, 1868): 102.

[60] Army and Navy Journal 6 (Oct. 3, 1868): 102.

[61] Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences": 425. While Godfrey apparently felt this ploy effective against Indians, when he and others came upon the site again two months later, they found that wolves had burrowed down to the remains and scattered them: "Then we understood why the Indians placed the remains of their dead on scaffolds or trees." Corbett, shot in the head in the sand hills action, lived three hours, the surgeon recording the place of interment as the south bank of the North Fork of the Canadian, about three miles above the mouth of "Middle River." Surgeon Henry Lippincott to Adjutant General, Sept. 21, 1868, surgeon's letter book, p. 40, Records of U.S. Regular Army Mobile Units, 7th Cavalry, 1866-1917, RG 391, NA.

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reinforcements and refit for the next expedition. "Later in the evening," wrote Godfrey, "when he and I were alone, I asked him why he gave up the pursuit. He replied: 'Oh, those sand hills are interminable.' The expedition was a failure."[62] Barnitz, despairing of a short campaign after hearing of this decision, recorded that Sully planned to request not only additional troops, but also a pack train "and supplies for say two months," before returning to follow the Indians into the Wichita Mountains -- "to which point they will doubtless retreat, after a protracted fight in the sand hills."[63] As Sully asserted that all of the Cheyennes and nearly all of the Arapahoes were now engaged in the war, and probably some young Kiowas also, perhaps reinforcements seemed necessary, though his men had been neither outfought nor overwhelmed by numbers during their various engagements.[64]

Pursuing the Indians had already taken his column to a part of the Indian Territory far below the northern border of Texas, and Sully believed that their families had already fled to the Witchita Mountains. However, he stopped short of (officially) conceding failure: "Being satisfied that their families had the start of me, and that the present style of driving Indians

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[62]Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences": 425.

[63]Albert Barnitz, letter to Jennie, Sept. 16, 1868, Box 3, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU. Unlike Godfrey's memoir, which implies that Sully resolved to end his expedition after solitary brooding, Barnitz's letter refers to Sully coming to his decision "after consultation" -- with whom, Barnitz did not specify.

[64]Sully to McKeever, Sept. 16, 1868, reel 642 M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870, NA. George Bent denied Cheyenne involvement and described Sully's opponents as Kiowas and Comanches, driven to war by Sheridan's policy of forcing them onto the reservation. But Sully's best-known scouts, with Cheyenne family connections, would have had no more reason than Bent himself for bearing false witness against the tribe, and Bent's own editor, Savoie Lottinville, suggests that Sully may have faced a mixed force, with Kiowas and Comanches allied to Cheyennes and Arapahoes, or to Cheyenne Dog Soldiers. Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 293, n. 12.

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with a wagon train through a broken country of sand hills, would only result in wearing out my stock, and pushing of the Indians further south I concluded it best to halt, send for supplies, and more troops to take care of my supply train, and furnish another column to act in concert."

Sully suggested that the Army strike as soon as possible to prevent the Kiowas and Comanches from being further drawn into the war, using sufficient force to crush the hostile Indians, and envisioned a multi-pronged alternative to reliance on a single expedition. Five columns of troops, he suggested, even if they failed to fight a decisive action, would keep the Indians moving and so uncomfortable that they would be glad to make peace on any terms. Certainly it would have a greater chance of effectiveness than a campaign broken off after scarcely a week in the field."[65]

On September 14 Sully's men crossed the Canadian's north fork with no enemy in sight. But as they marched north through a country of mountainous beauty, the soldiers witnessed an Indian display which, if not a humiliation, was surely intended as such. Godfrey emphasized the triumphant mood of the warriors, who appeared only when the troops left the valley for higher ground -- first a few scouts, most of whom soon left, and then larger forces. "A few shots were exchanged. Then, at a distance from the flanks of the train, they rode in groups for several miles as if giving safe conduct. Finally, about noon, the groups approached near, 'thumbed their noses,' spanked their buttocks, and made other contemptuous

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[65]Sully to McKeever, Sept. 16, 1868, reel 642, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870, NA.

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manifestations, then rode rapidly away."[66] Having continually harassed the column's rear for ten miles, the Indians "made a great smoke" on a summit and apparently withdrew.[67]

Private Harvey put the best face possible on the retreat. "The Indians followed us until about noon, thinking they had given us a big thrashing, but it was not the case," he told his journal. "We were out of rations and could not help ourselves." The soldiers managed to supplement their rations by killing some of the plentiful buffalo encountered, but that night's camp on the south bank of Buffalo Creek was without wood, and offered only dirty, reddish water.[68] In any case Barnitz had another view of the expedition's supply problem, confessing himself

> quite mortified to find that it was determined to retreat 'for rations' as it was said -- though we had enough to last us till the end of this month -- of everything except forage, and I was very sanguine, from all indications, that within two or three days more we should have overhauled their villages, and ended the campaign -- whereas to retire then was only to protract the matter and render it more tedious as well as difficult.[69]

At daybreak on the 15th Private Charles Krieger -- "a nice sober man, well thought of by the Company" -- wandered out too far while on picket duty and was mistaken for an Indian by the corporal of the picket post, who shot him through the body. The march continued. A few Indians appeared as the column's last files descended from the bordering

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[66]Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences": 425.

[67]Albert Barnitz journal, Sept. 14, 1868, Box 4, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU.

[68] Harvey journal, Sept. 14, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 75.

[69]Albert Barnitz , letter to Jennie Barnitz, Sept. 22, 1868, Box 3, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU.

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bluffs of gypsum, and withdrew after an exchange of shots.[70]

Under a cloudy, drizzling sky, a cold wind blowing unceasingly into their faces, Sully's men continued northward through sage-covered sand hills and along the high divides of mountains scarred with deep gullies and ravines, as buffalo grazed on the summits; no fewer than 75 of the animals were shot down. The cold wind continued to chill the soldiers even after they had crossed the Cimarron (a party of seven Indians being driven off after an attempt to gobble up some stragglers) and built large fires on Bluff Creek, a tributary containing more sand than water. There they feasted that evening on buffalo humps, tongues, and marrow bones.[71]

That same day, with no news of the expedition command since its departure, and the weather on the Kansas plains already uncomfortably cold, Lt. Moylan wrote from Fort Dodge to express doubts about his own prospects of rejoining his regiment in the field. To the absent Custer, Moylan surmised that the troops would face the unpleasant prospect of being out nearly all winter, and noted ironically (or in an allusion to Gibbs' drinking habits) that General Gibbs had been in very good health, having had only "three chills" since leaving Fort Hays three days before. Moylan could not of course know that bad health would keep that

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[70]Harvey diary, Sept. 15, 1868. Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 75. If the wounded man was transported in one of the column's ambulances, it was in spite of the opinion Dr. Lippincott expressed in a letter dated that same day. Judging the ambulances "entirely unfit for service," the surgeon requested that they be turned in at some depot and eight new ones be secured, and warned that if they continued to be used without thorough repair, "our sick and wounded must suffer." Lippincott to Lt. J.F. Weston, Acting Assistant Adjutant General, District Upper Arkansas, Sept. 15, 1868, surgeon's letter book, p. 39, Records of U.S. Regular Army Mobile Units, 7th Cavalry, 1866-1917, RG 391, NA.

[71]Albert Barnitz, letter to Jennie Barnitz, Sept. 16, 1868, Box 3, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU.

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officer at Fort Leavenworth as the winter campaign was launched, or that on December 26, 1868, Gibbs would suddenly die of what was termed "congestion of the brain."[72]

For Sully's column, September 16 proved a day of rest, though Captain Keogh, Private Krieger's company commander, caused an explosion of unseemly laughter after inviting his brother officers to the soldier's picket line burial; after reading the burial service and thanking them for attending, he carelessly remarked that he "hoped soon to return the compliment."[73] With time to reflect on his recent experiences and Sully's remarks, Captain Barnitz conceded that "the unmitigated evil of a protracted campaign" might indeed take up two months, even though the soldiers would doubtless have no difficulty in finding the Indians' trails when they returned.[74] Sully himself, camped at a point only about fifty miles

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[72]Moylan to Custer, Sept. 5, 1868, Brice C.W. Custer Collection; Albert Barnitz, letter to Jennie Barnitz, Sept.22, 1868, Box 3, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU. Still encamped on Bluff Creek on September 22, Captain Barnitz applied skeptical quotation marks after hearing that Gibbs was at Dodge "sick" and was to assume command of the Seventh Cavalry in the field when he recovered; though the prospect displeased him, Barnitz thought that Gibbs would take the field for only a few days before bad weather or hardships sent him back to Dodge. An obituary moderately observed that, "Though not a brilliant officer, in the popular sense, General Gibbs was a thorough soldier, and possessed those sterling traits of character which commanded the confidence of the officers and men who served under him, as well of his superiors." Army and Navy Journal 6 (January 2, 1869): 313.

[73]Harvey journal, Sept. 16, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 75; Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences": 425; Albert Barnitz Journal, Sept. 15, 1868, Box 4, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU. Dr. Lippincott reported that Krieger, shot through the body, "lived fourteen hours after receiving the wound" at the Buffalo Creek camp about twelve miles south of the Cimarron River, being buried on the North bank of "Elliotts branch" of Bluff Creek, in the camping ground, at a spot marked by two trees. Lippincott to Adjutant General, Sept. 21, 1868, surgeon's letter book, p. 40, Records of U.S. Regular Army Mobile Units, 7th Cavalry, 1866-1917, RG 391, NA.

[74]Albert Barnitz, letter to Jennie Barnitz, Sept. 6, 1868, Box 3, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU.

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from the Indian trail he had abandoned, was likewise confident that he could again take up the trail "after we are properly fitted out."[75] Leaving the bulk of the command encamped on Bluff (or Chalk Bluff) Creek, where it would remain under Elliott's command until September 23, Sully left with his escort and train for Fort Dodge on September 17. During the return march, the general commanding

> would at times relieve his mind by talking of his problems at the headquarters mess and campfires. One of the problems was a commander of his cavalry. For some reason he had come to the conclusion that Major Elliott, then in command of the troops of the 7th Cavalry, had not had sufficient experience to trust him with an independent command. He mentioned the various field officers of cavalry within his jurisdiction as district commander and finally eliminated all of them. He, several times, mentioned the 'Triumphirate of S's' -- Sherman, Division Commander; Sheridan, Department Commander; and Sully, District Commander -- and seemed satisfied with the results of the expedition. For future operations he intended to ask for a larger force, operate against the Indians till he chastised them, and then return to winter quarters.[76]

Though ultimately a beneficiary of this elimination process, Lt. Col. Custer would prove a harsh critic of Sully's seemingly aimless marching, even while acknowledging Sully's long frontier experience and previous distinction as an Indian fighter.[77] Captain Benteen dismissed such compliments as damning Sully "with faint enough praise," though in his marginal-note war with Custer's memoirs, he himself offered only the charitable (for Benteen) explanation that Sully "did what he could, but it must be remembered he had few troops to do

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[75]Sully to McKeever, Sept. 16, 1868, reel 642, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870, NA.

[76]Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences": 481. Elliott was apparently thought unsuitable because his largest wartime command had been two troops in a volunteer cavalry regiment.

[77]Custer, My Life, p.160.

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anything with -- and was an old man and a heavy drinker."[78] Having had at his disposal some 600 well-armed fighting men -- whose only anxiety, according to Sully, "appeared to be to get into action" -- the expedition leader had less excuse than Benteen's comment implies. But a younger, healthier, and less intemperate officer might have been less easily discouraged, and more energetic in running the Indians to earth.

Sully was unable to boast of villages captured, of significant amounts of property destroyed, or of great losses inflicted on the enemy, and even his actual claims of Indian casualties, while not immodest, appear too hopeful. Recognizing that it was "too much the custom to report a large number of the enemy killed," Sully nevertheless claimed the ability to report safely that "20 or 30" had perished, he having personally seen that many fall from their horses. (That this imprecision in numbers might undercut confidence in his eyewitness claim apparently escaped him.)[79] Captain Barnitz disclaimed exact knowledge in his unofficial estimate of "probably not less than 10 or 15" Indians killed in the various engagements, with twice as many wounded.[80]

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[78]Benteen's notes, Carroll, From the Civil War, pp. 8, 10. To be classified as a "heavy drinker" in the frontier army apparently required some effort. According to Barnitz, who was disgusted by the excesses and seeming predominance of the "drinking class" in the peacetime army (as well as its evident prejudice against officers who abstained), Captain West "was drunk all the time that we were on the late expedition, and had to be hauled in an ambulance." Albert Barnitz, letter to Jennie Barnitz, Oct.28, 1868, Box 3, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU.

[79]Sully to McKeever, Sept. 16, 1868, reel 642, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870, NA. Sully also stated that while he had seen many fall and be carried off, "other officers have reported what they saw. Our different affairs happened at the same time, and some miles apart."

[80]Barnitz candidly wrote of one engagement at "point blank range" that his command of "ready! aim! Fire!" produced "a lively tumbling among the Indians! -- but as they all clung to their ponies -- or were fastened to them they were carried swiftly around a sand hill, out of

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Back at Ft. Dodge, Pvt. Harvey found "no news of where we are going to, some say to winter quarters and some say on a campaign; not knowing yet which."[81] However, Sully requested new recruits for the 7th Cavalry to the maximum authorized strength of one hundred enlisted men per company -- and also asked that Lt. Col. Custer be restored to duty to command the regiment. On September 21, the day after General Gibbs arrived at Dodge from Fort Hays with the Seventh's splendid mounted band, and with the expectation of taking command of the Seventh, Farrier Harvey told his diary, without necessarily drawing a connection between the two facts: "The news is that G.A. Custer is coming to take command...Old R.M. West is drunk and in a mad spell."[82] West had been one of Custer's prominent enemies within the Seventh Cavalry, and had brought charges against Custer for shooting deserters prior to his court-martial.

Custer himself, having spent the previous winter at Fort Leavenworth, had moved to his onetime home town in Michigan, and would later jest that while Sully's troops were attempting to kill Indians, "I was studying the problem of how to kill time in the most agreeable manner." He had no reason to believe that his "constant longing" to be in the field with his comrades would be satisfied before his sentence expired. But on the evening of September 24, Custer received a telegram from Sheridan's headquarters "in the field" at

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view -- but we shortly afterwards killed two that we know of, and one pony." Albert Barnitz, letter to Jennie Barnitz, Sept. 16, 1868, Box 3, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU.

[81]Harvey journal, Sept. 17, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 76.

[82]Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences": 425; Harvey journal, Sept. 21 and Sept. 26, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 76, 77. In his September 26 entry, Harvey commented of his company commander: "I think old West is on the warpath a little tonight. He is an old drunkard and a fool, I think."

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Fort Hays:

General G.A. Custer, Monroe, Michigan:

> Generals Sherman, Sully, and myself, and nearly all the officers of your regiment, have asked for you, and I hope the application will be successful. Can you come at once? Eleven companies of your regiment will move about the 1st of October against the hostile Indians, from Medicine Lodge creek toward the Wichita mountains.
>
> (Signed)
>
> P.H. SHERIDAN, Major General Commanding[83]

A second telegram from Sheridan informed Custer that transportation from Leavenworth had been arranged for himself and his horses: "I will not move the column until you arrive, but make no delay." Confident that the applications for reinstatement would be approved, Custer took the first available train the next day. The expected confirmation overtook him by telegraph the next day: he was to report at once for duty with Sheridan.[84] After spending several days with Sheridan at Ft. Hays, Custer joined the Seventh Cavalry at their current camp eighteen miles to the north of Bluff Creek.

According to one officer, Custer's arrival "seemed to infuse new life in the command. We had unconsciously fallen into a state of inertia, and appeared to be leading an aimless sort of existence, but with his coming, action, purpose, energy, and a general strengthening of the loose joints was the order of the day."[85] The Indians did their part by attacking the cavalry's

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[83]Custer, My Life, p. 183.

[84]Custer, My Life, p. 183: Telegram, Sheridan to Custer, Sept. 24, 1868, reel 2, EBCC.

[85]Francis M. Gibson, "The Washita," Melbourne C. Chandler, Of GarryOwen in Glory: The History of the 7th U.S. Cavalry (Annandale, VA: privately published, 1960), p. 12.

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camp that evening, and Custer sent four mounted detachment into the field in pursuit, with no success in making further contact.

Though active campaigning had already commenced, complete with shooting, the process of separating hostile from friendly Indians was still incomplete. General Sherman, anxious to identify and isolate potential targets, commented on September 19 that "I now regard the Cheyennes and Arapahoes at war, and that it will be impossible for our troops to discriminate between the well-disposed and the warlike parts of those bands, unless an absolute separation be made." He preferred that the Indians' agents collect all of those considered "well-disposed" for provisioning at reservations within the Indian Territory and south of Kansas, possibly near the abandoned post of Fort Cobb. But he objected to their congregation near Fort Larned, believing that as long as Major Wynkoop remained there as agent "the vagabond part of his Indians" would cluster about him for support, and to beg from the Army: "The vital part of their tribes are committing murders and robberies from Kansas to Colorado, and it is an excess of generosity, on our part, to be feeding and supplying the old, young and feeble, whilst their young men are at war. I do not pretend to say what should be done with these, but it will simplify our game of war, already complicated enough, by removing them well away from the field of operations."[86]

With the Cheyennes and Arapahoes declared hostile, there remained the Comanches and Kiowas, and a small tribe or band associated with the latter, the Kiowa-Apaches. Maintaining peace with these tribes had always been an uncertain affair, largely due to their

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[86]W.T. Sherman to Assistant Adjutant General, Sept. 19, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3rd sess., no. 18, pp. 11-12.

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anomalous relationship with the Texans as opposed to those they recognized as "Americans." Following the Medicine Lodge treaties such peaceably inclined chiefs as Kicking Bird and Stumbling Bear had some apparent success in restraining potential raiders, and aged Kiowa informants, questioned in the twentieth century, would recall no war parties going out during the summer and fall of 1868, "at least north of the Canadian," with but one possible exception, connected with intertribal warfare. That June the Kiowa warrior Heap of Bears had led a large war party of Kiowas and Comanches against the Utes, with horrific consequences for the Kiowa tribe, for the Utes had not only killed seven warriors, but also captured two of the Kiowas' Tai-me idols, which the warriors had imprudently taken with them. Stumbling Bear himself had led a few warriors back to the site of the disaster, and the party wrapped up and brought home the skeletal remains of Heap of Bears and his followers; but the idols were never recovered.[87]

South of the Canadian, there was no peace, and while that summer had featured some gruesome (though hardly novel) raids into Texas, the onset of autumn actually seemed to witness an escalation. The irrepressible Satanta had ridden on a raid to the Brazos River against the Texans, and he would not rejoin the Kiowa villages until after their departure for Fort Cobb. But the agency there had already seen results from such incursions. On September 2 a party came in fresh from raiding on the Red River, near Spanish Fort, Texas.

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[87]Nye, Plains Indian Raiders, p. 127. Hazen instead wrote that the Kiowas had "sent a small war party under Kicking Bird to fight the Utes, and a small raiding party under Satanta into Texas." Gen. W.B. Hazen, U.S.A., Colonel, Sixth Infantry, "Some Corrections of Life on the Plains," in Custer, My Life, pp. 389-90. It seems implausible that only one war party would have gone out in the summer; perhaps this was the only one which was memorable. Though virtually a band of the Kiowa tribe, the Kiowa-Apaches retained their own language and customs, and were also known as the Plains or Prairie Apaches.

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bringing in eight scalps, one a woman's, and "a good many, horses and mules." Their agent recorded that the party included not only Nonocee and Penneteka Comanches, but also others, including members of the normally less bellicose Wichita tribe. The raid, Walkley said, was made by the son-in-law of Tosawi, a Comanche chief:

> I will give their own account of the raid. They said they came in sight of a fine house, put out their sentinels -- one reconnoitered. He said that the windows had curtains which were put back on each side; he saw a woman through the window, sitting in a rocking chair. He signaled to his comrades that all was right, and thirteen entered the house with a whoop -- some through the windows and some through the doors. The woman was afraid and fell on the floor. The thirteen ravished her, Tosawi's son being the first, and Horseback's son the last, who killed her by sticking his tomahawk into her head. Tosawi's son-in-law then scalped her, and killed three or four of her children. The party then started up the river -- killing and stealing as they went. They also say that they had two white squaws whom they ravished as much as they pleased, and then threw them away.

The supposedly tractable Wichitas soon proved that they could raid on their own. On September 20, a party of thirteen rode in to the Comanche and Kiowa agency at Eureka Valley with ten captured horses, openly reporting a fight with "citizens."[88] But there was still little apparent interest in actually punishing Kiowas, Comanches, or other Indians for any raids into Texas. At a point between forts Larned and Harker, Sheridan and Hazen met Wynkoop, and Sheridan, wrote the agent, "stated to me that he was going to see the Kiowas and Comanches for the purpose of ordering them to proceed immediately south to the country that belongs to them." Claiming that the major parts of both tribes were at Larned in a "very destitute condition," Wynkoop still painted a rosy picture of peaceable inclinations, with even Satanta claiming that the Indians were anxious to go upon the reservation -- and raise corn! --

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[88]Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 52; S.T. Walkley, Acting Indian Agent, to General W.B. Hazen, Oct. 10, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3rd sess., no. 18, pp. 18-21.

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in the recently acquired conviction that agricultural was their ultimate destiny.[89] Wynkoop requested a leave of absence for twenty days to attend to personal business, which Superintendent Murphy granted on the condition that, in Wynkoop's opinion, his departure would be detrimental to neither the public service nor the Indians in his charge.[90]

On the 19th and 20th of September Sheridan and Hazen held talks near Larned with the principal Kiowa chiefs and Ten Bears of the Comanches -- "with a view," Sheridan explained, "to their coming to their own reservation, near this point, and keeping them out of the war." At first the Indians, their villages then camped along the Arkansas, refused to come in. But they then reluctantly consented to go to Fort Cobb, it being agreed that before doing so, they would range over the prairie hunting buffalo, and thus give the soldiers time to draw rations from the stores at Fort Larned and Fort Arbuckle for the Indians' journey to Cobb. Sheridan, explaining his motives to Hazen, declared the presence of so many professedly friendly Kiowas and Comanches in the vicinity of Larned to be "very embarrassing to me" and a great drawback in prosecuting the war, "as it is impossible to distinguish friendly from unfriendly Indians, and in consequence a large portion of my force is required to guard against the strong probability that the Kiowas and Comanches may themselves become hostile..." He proposed to provision the Indians until October 31 if they could immediately return to Fort Cobb, conditional on Hazen's ability to furnish enough food for them afterward until spring, perhaps into April or May. Hazen planned to accompany the Indians personally, "using what

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[89]Wynkoop to Murphy, Sept. 20, 1868, reel 879, M234, Letters Received, Upper Arkansas Agency 1865-69, OIA, NA.

[90]Murphy to Wynkoop, Sept. 21, 1868, reel 879, M234, Letters Received, 1824-80, Upper Arkansas Agency, 1865-70, OIA, NA.

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influence I may have to keep them permanently upon their Reservation."[91]

The departing Indians were to return to Larned after ten days, before beginning the trek toward Cobb. But by the time this time had elapsed, no Indians had appeared at Larned as agreed, though afterwards some of those expected did appear at Cobb. This led Sheridan to doubt their good faith, and charge that they had agreed to settle at Cobb only as a decoy, to get their families out of the way. But Hazen argued that during their absence raids near Fort Zarah and at other points had created the impression that the Kiowas and Comanches had gone to war, and surmised that they would head directly for his reservation simply to avoid suspicion.

The migrating buffalo had actually led the Indians so far south that they had decided against going to Larned at all, in favor of bypassing that post and proceeding directly to Fort Cobb. Hazen delayed his own departure for Cobb so that he might gain a better idea of the route taken by the Indians. But then, realizing that they would reach the post ahead of him, he arranged to have an officer sent to Cobb from Fort Arbuckle, to receive the Indians as they arrived. (In the event, Hazen would not actually leave for Fort Cobb until October 11, and by the time he appeared there, the Kiowas had already arrived, and then left for the Washita river on a second hunting trip. The Comanches, camped on the Canadian River, were expected to arrive shortly.) In charge of those Kiowas and Comanches already gathered at the Eureka Valley agency, and lacking definite instructions, Mr. Walkley tried to keep them there by issuing rations, encouraged by the military to continue feeding the Indians if he could while

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[91]Sheridan to Hazen, Sept. 19, 1868, and Hazen to Sheridan, Sept. 20, 1868, in Custer, My Life, pp. 388-389.

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impressing upon them the necessity of their remaining at the agency, since Hazen would doubtless come prepared to care for them.[92] Punishing the raiders among the Kiowas and Comanches was not yet a matter of urgency.

However, while regarding the Cheyennes and Arapahoes as his primary adversaries, Sheridan also desired to protect the Platte country while neutralizing or driving off any "hostiles" to be found in the northernmost regions of his command. Despite the treaty signed at Fort Laramie earlier that year, these included certain bands of Sioux. The outcome of Red Cloud's War had resulted in the abandonment of military posts along the Bozeman Trail, and since this had followed the annihilation of eighty men under Captain William Fetterman, Sheridan feared that the Indians believed that Army had abandoned the Powder River country "because we were compelled to." Such a belief could presumably encourage the more warlike factions to new acts of hostility.[93] In order to scour the countryside, Sheridan would employ an officer he held in high esteem, Lieutenant Colonel (Brevet Brigadier General) Luther P. Bradley of the 27th U.S. Infantry, commanding at Fort D.A. Russell, Wyoming.

Thus on September 12, Lieutenant Colonel Bradley learned that his current orders had been altered. Rather than serve on a court martial convening in two days at Ft. Russell, he was to proceed to Fort Sedgwick, Colorado with six companies of the 27th, which regiment was temporarily transferred to the Department of the Missouri. (Unlike most frontier regiments, all ten companies of the 27th Infantry had been concentrated at D.A.

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[92]Walkley to Hazen, Oct. 10, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3rd sess., no. 18, p. 21.

[93]Sheridan to Sherman, Sept. 23, 1868, reel 642, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870, NA.

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Russell.)[94] Bradley confided to his journal that he was to take his infantrymen and two companies of the Second Cavalry, rationed for thirty days, to the Forks of the Republican "to make permanent camp & scout east and west after Indians: to Kill all the buffalo we find, & drive the Arapahoes & Cheyennes south, & the Sioux north. Sent love to the ladies home tonight, to stay 'till we get settled at a Post again."[95]

Even as Bradley began his march, Sheridan dispatched a letter reiterating his original directions to make camp on Thickwood Creek or some point nearby for one month, and requesting Bradley to scout to the west -- and to communicate with him as often as possible. If Bradley received no further orders before the end of September, he was to march his infantry some eighty-eight miles from the Forks of the Republican to Fort Wallace, letting the cavalry return to Fort Sedgwick. Sheridan professed himself "exceedingly anxious" to clear out the Indians between the Forks, and also to maintain a force in the area long enough to prevent them from occupying it that winter. With Sully's large force then operating south of the Arkansas, and his new scout force seeking action in Bradley's section, Sheridan revealed

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[94]Regimental Return, Second Cavalry, Sept. 1868, reel 18, M744, Returns from Regular Army Cavalry Regiments, 1833-1916, NA; Regimental Return, Twenty-seventh Infantry, Sept. 1868, reel 627, M665, Returns from Regular Army Infantry Regiments, NA. While Company H of the Second Cavalry left D.A. Russell on September 14 and traveled by railroad from Cheyenne City to Platte City, Nebraska before marching overland to join Bradley's command near the South Platte River on September 18, Company B joined him in camp on Medicine Creek two days later, having marched overland from Ft. McPherson, Nebraska.

[95]Luther P. Bradley, Private Journal, Box 1, Luther P. Bradley Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute. For an examination of the frontier army's role in encouraging the slaughter of bison for military purposes, see David D. Smits, "The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo:1865-1883," The Western Historical Quarterly 25 (Autumn 1994): 313-338.

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that campaigning in bad weather was already on his mind, and predicted: "If I can keep the country clean north of the Railroad we can get the Indians in the winter south of the Arkansas."[96]

Bradley did not reach the Republican until September 24. The next day, his command marched along the river and crossed above the forks at about noon, going up the Thickwood, but finding no water. Making camp on the South Fork at 3 P.M., Bradley had not yet found an enemy, nor any buffalo to kill.

While Sully's and Bradley's relatively large commands marched across the Plains, small units and detachments did patrol and escort work, protected railroad workers, pursued raiders, and occasionally made contact with the enemy. In August men of the Tenth U.S. Cavalry had ridden over one thousand miles in their various duties, seeing no action. But on September 15 Captain George W. Graham's Company I, green at Indian-fighting, won its spurs. Operating out of Fort Wallace, Graham had struck and followed an Indian trail westward along the Denver road until he reached Big Sandy Creek, where a war party estimated at 100 Cheyennes pounced upon Graham's smaller force with unusual ferocity. Graham's thirty-six men, in close-quarters fighting, held off the Cheyennes force until nightfall. They suffered seven troopers wounded, 17 horses killed, and one horse missing, but claimed to have killed eleven warriors and wounded fourteen.[97]

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[96]P.H. Sheridan, letter to Bradley, Sept. 22, 1868, Box 2, Bradley Papers.

[97]Chronological List of Actions, p. 36; Leckie, The Buffalo Soldiers, p. 33; Glass, The History of the Tenth Cavalry, p. 16; Nye, Plains Indian Raiders, pp. 125-26. Although Colonel Nye terms this action "typically indecisive," and the Tenth's regimental historian modestly regarded it as a drawn battle, it was certainly bloodier than the average Indian engagement or pursuit.

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Six days later Captain Louis H. Carpenter led H Company of the Tenth out of Fort Wallace to vainly search for more Indians. Finding none, he lingered in the area of Sandy Creek to secure the road, and sent out small scouting detachments, all of which failed to discover hostile Indians. But on September 23 Carpenter received dramatic news of a spectacular Indian battle, in the form of dispatches from Fort Wallace, 45 miles away. There two strange, disheveled figures -- two white men, tired, hungry, and footsore -- had made their appearance. Their names were Jack Stilwell and Pierre Trudeau, and they had an amazing tale to tell.[98]

[98]James J. Peate, "J.J. Peate Tells of the Relief," Lyman, Beecher Island Annual: 89.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Engagement at Beecher Island

"My God! Have you deserted us?"

Having arrived at Fort Wallace on the night of September 5-6, Colonel George Forsyth found waiting a message from Governor Crawford of Kansas, urging him to assist beleaguered settlers in Bison City. Forsyth discussed the matter with the post commander, Captain (Brevet Colonel) Henry C. Bankhead, Fifth U.S. Infantry, and prepared to move to their assistance on September 10. But on the night before his planned departure, a message arrived from Denver, written by acting Colorado governor Frank Hall. Having learned of Forsyth's departure from Hays "with a strong force of Cavalry," Hall asked that he hasten to the aid of hard-pressed Coloradans settlers near Bison Basin, east of Denver -- and even advised that one or more companies of Forsyth's imaginary host be detached for this purpose, while the "main force" struck the Indians' presumed rendezvous on the Republican, recapturing (and delivering to settlers if possible) their stolen stock. "My force was nothing like as large as the Governor imagined," reported Forsyth. But, believing nonetheless that a diversion in favor of the Coloradans might be effected (and perhaps hoping to find action), he resolved to ride at once toward the headwaters of the Republican; Captain Bankhead would despatch Company I of the 10th Cavalry up Cedar Point, the two commands to cooperate as far as practicable.[1]

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[1]Forsyth, "Organization and Operations," reel 642, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1780s-1917, NA.

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Before Forsyth left, however -- and as though to emphasize the Indians' ability to strike as they pleased beyond a thinly spread army's ability to respond -- Fort Wallace received word from the town of Sheridan, thirteen miles to the east, of a raid on a nearby wagon train. Despite a hasty march to the scene, Forsyth predictably made no contact, finding only burned wagons, the scattered carcasses of oxen, and two slain Mexican teamsters. Gazing on the corpses, Sigmund Schlesinger's greenhorn mind "seemed on the brink of the infinite, and to still the flutter of the heart required the greatest self-control." [2] The tracks of perhaps thirty to thirty-five different ponies seemed visible; but as Plains war parties normally traveled with extra mounts, Forsyth estimated a smaller force of twenty to twenty-five warriors, possibly scouts who had earlier cut his own trail and followed it, then chanced upon the less hazardous target presented by the wagons.[3] The command vainly followed the Indians about thirty miles before making camp in a ravine.

Resuming the chase in the hope of intercepting the raiders, Forsyth pushed directly for the headwaters of Beaver Creek, "that being the general direction taken by the savages." He was well served by his lieutenant's frontier experience, as Beecher joined Grover in scanning the ground, the two men leaning forward in their saddles and picking up a trail where others could see nothing. But the next morning it began to peter out, as warriors found ground hard enough to mask their individual trails and dropped out one by one. Finally even Grover could

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[2]"Scout Schlesinger's Story,"Beecher Island Annual: 78.

[3]Forsyth, "Organization and Operations," reel 642, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1780s-1917, NA.

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find no trace.[4]

The war-council which Forsyth immediately held with Beecher, Grover, and McCall did not breed timidity -- at least not in Forsyth. All agreed that the Indians knew they were being pursued, were likely at some point to rejoin a larger party, and were attempting to throw the whites off the scent rather than provide them with a trail to the main band. But Forsyth thought that if he managed to pick up this trail and locate band's rendezvous, the scouts could successfully "give battle" to the Indians. After Grover and McCall warned that the main force might be able to mass against the scouts before they could overtake the raiding party, Forsyth "cut short the discussion by saying that I had determined to find and attack the Indians, no matter what the odds might be against us. If we could not defeat them, we would show them that the government did not propose that they should escape unpunished for want of engaging in their pursuit. That I thought, with fifty-one men, even if we could not defeat them, they could not annihilate us. Furthermore, it was expected that the command would fight the Indians, and I meant it should do so..."[5]

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[4]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, pp. 22, 23, and "Organization and Operations," reel 642, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1780s-1917, NA; Criqui, Fifty Fearless Men, p. 24.

[5]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, p. 23. While Forsyth's willingness to embrace unknown (and, as it happened, quite fearful) odds dismayed Hurst and other scouts, commanders of frontier army detachments were presumed capable of dealing coolly with a reasonable Indian superiority in numbers. Although Captain Louis Hamilton was posthumously brevetted a major for "gallant and meritorious" service in engagements with Indians, particularly at the Washita, an earlier appeal was met with the argument that an engagement such as that of June 24, 1867, in which Hamilton's detachment of 25 men held off 45 Indians and reported killing two, "cannot be regarded as an achievement entitling the commander of the detachment to a brevet." J.C. Kelton, Assistant Adjutant General, Oct. 19, 1868, endorsing letter of recommendation, G.A. Custer to W.T. Sherman, July 6, 1867. Louis M. Hamilton file, reel 435, M1064, Letters Received, Commission Branch, AGO, 1863-1870, NA.

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If Forsyth's arguments, and his confidence in being able to stave off annihilation, revealed a failure to acknowledge the mettle of his foes, they also made it possible for him to carry out the mission given him -- a simplistic attempt by Sheridan to implement his (wholly defensible) belief that "the only way a progressive frontier can be defended is by taking the offensive against such tribes as commit depredations."[6] Thus, less than two years after Fetterman and his eighty men had been annihilated, a unit smaller by just thirty, and with no friendly force within supporting distance, was plunging on into the wilderness to chastise an enemy whose strength was unknown, and who gave no quarter.

Scouting between the North Fork of the Republican and the main stream, the scouts pushed on to Short Nose Creek, and on the morning of September 14, just five days out from Fort Wallace, Indian "sign" was discovered in the form of an abandoned "wickiup" carefully concealed in a willow copse on the Republican's north bank; the temporary shelter of bent willows had apparently been used the previous night by two Indians traveling on foot. Now possessing a trail to follow, Forsyth soon found the fresh camp of three mounted Indians, then the tracks of a small war party, leading up to the forks of the Republican, and across to its north side. The trail grew, fed by tributaries from north and south, until at last a "broad beaten road" showed the marks of driven cattle and horses and the deep ruts of travois, dragging lodge-poles.[7] Finally, at the Arikaree Fork of the Republican (though the party

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[6]Sheridan to J.W. Throckmorton, Jan. 18, 1867, container 5, reel 2, Sheridan Papers, LC.

[7]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, p. 25. Such wickiups were commonly cornered with hides or swamp grass during use. The travois was formed by two poles, placed behind a horse or mule to form a V-shape, across which were placed one or more pieces of hide. On the hide was laid the property to be dragged behind the animal.

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believed it at the time to be Delaware Creek), the scouts found that the trail led up the stream, on its southern bank. The next day, Forsyth crossed from Kansas into Colorado.

But if the broadening trail stirred Forsyth's hopes, its very size, and the belief that the warriors would fight desperately to defend the families slowing their flight, inspired some of the scouts to reflect on what might actually happen should they overtake the Indians -- and to conclude that, in the candid words of scout John Hurst, "we would likely get whipped." Nineteen-year-old Simpson E. "Jack" Stilwell, already rich in Plains experience, supposedly told Beecher, "I feel like we are marching into the mouth of hell."[8]

Deciding, in the best citizen-soldier tradition, that it was indeed theirs to reason why, a number of scouts approached Forsyth to insist that if they followed the Indians to their villages they would be wiped out. Forsyth countered "that they were assuming no risk that I was not taking myself, that they had enrolled to fight Indians, and that, in my opinion, there was less danger to advance and attack than there would be now to attempt to return." Having entered their protest, the men fell back into column. The fact that so many were ex-soldiers had led them, thought Forsyth, to recognize the value of "implicit obedience without discussion, a truth that emphasizes the difference between an army and a mob."[9] But perhaps something else was at work: an unwillingness to fall short of the manly example set by even an imprudent commander. John Hurst recalled that when Forsyth asked the scouts if they had not hired with him to fight Indians, it ended the matter without convincing them of the

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[8]John Hurst, "John Hurst's Story," Beecher Island Annual: 69; John H. Monnett, The Battle of Beecher Island and the Indian War of 1867-1869 (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1992), p. 125.

[9]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, pp. 25-26.

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wisdom of his course, "but we went on in silence...."[10]

The scouts saw no game over the next two days, but articles dropped along the trail attested to the villagers' hasty flight. On the afternoon of the 16th, finding horse manure of comparative freshness convinced Forsyth that he had been seen, and even he, at least in retrospect, hinted at some misgivings. "We were nearly out of supplies, save salt and coffee: the Indians were an unknown quantity, and, from indications, were likely to prove rather a larger known quantity than I had expected to meet; but I felt the necessity of fighting them, and decided to do so, even though I doubted my force to be strong enough to do more than partially cripple them for the time being."[11] In dispatching fifty scouts to chastise such an "unknown" quantity -- only half the number of men employed in Blazer's Scouts in their disastrous attempt to hunt down Mosby -- Sheridan had perhaps expected too much.

After the sinuous Indian trail opened out upon a small well-grassed valley perhaps two miles long and almost as wide, a second expression of concern apparently proved more persuasive. Scouts Stilwell and Louis McLoughlin implored him to halt the pursuit, and Forsyth had the scouts make camp -- "much earlier than usual," Schlesinger noted. According to McLoughlin, the scouts had known for two days "that we were biting off a chew that we could not get away with," and without their protest, the command would have ridden into a fatal trap.[12] Forsyth, though recognizing the danger in hindsight, contended that he had

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[10]"John Hurst's Story," Beecher Island Annual: 69.

[11]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, p. 27.

[12]"Scout Schlesinger's Story," Beecher Island Annual: 78; Monnett, Battle of Beecher Island, p. 126. Schlesinger's account states that an ambush had been prepared a half-mile farther down the line of march, and even Forsyth would write of being told long afterward, by

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stopped simply because of the area's good grazing for his fodder-starved horses, intending to refit and resume his march early the next morning in the conviction that he would encounter Indians before the day ended.[13]

Opposite the camp chosen that Wednesday on the bank of the Arikaree, in the main stream's mostly dry bed, lay a small island or overgrown sandbar, perhaps seventy-five yards from the bank on each side. The island was estimated at some thirty yards wide by seventy-five yards long, its sparse vegetation included some willow and plum trees, and a lone cottonwood standing at the downstream end. Across from the island, just under the bank of the river, grew a patch of tall grass.[14]

Forsyth did not ignore the possibility that the Indians he hoped to strike might attack him first. He ordered that before bedding down for the night, each man must insure that his hobbled mount's picket pin was driven firmly into the sandy soil; if attacked, he was to seize his weapon and lariat, standing by his horse to prevent a stampede. Perhaps because Forsyth gave priority to securing the horses against stampede and theft, he apparently made no plan

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an Indian then with the forces opposing him, that had he continued the march for another hour "every man of us would have been slaughtered." Forsyth, Thrilling Days, p. 74;

[13]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, p. 28. A modern historian suggests that the scouts may unwittingly have been marching away from nearby Indian villages by the time Forsyth was urged to reconsider his pursuit. Monnett, Battle of Beecher Island, p. 214, n. 51.

[14]The island, later destroyed by flooding, was apparently never measured precisely by any participant. Forsyth would give this estimated size over a quarter-century later, but reported soon after the fight that it was roughly 100 by 40 feet, while scout Louis Loughlin recalled it as 150 feet by 40 feet wide, and Alison J. Pliley as 275 paces long by 70 wide. Forsyth, "Organization and Operations," reel 642, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1780s-1917, NA, and Thrilling Days, p. 28; Louis Loughlin, "The Forsyth Scouts at Beecher Island," Beecher Island Annual: Eli S. Ricker, interview with Allison J. Pliley, Eli S. Ricker Tablets, microfilm reel 2, Nebraska State Historical Society.

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either to entrench, or to have his scouts fight on foot in standard cavalry style, with one man in four acting as a mounted horseholder.

Fire arrows could be seen in the night sky, first to the south and then to the east.[15] Forsyth's recollection of that night was not one of eager anticipation, but of pacing the ground along the riverbank in front of the line of sleeping men, concerned over a possible attack at daybreak. "Several times during the night I rose and visited the sentries, for I was restless, anxious, and wakeful."[16] Forsyth might have been even more anxious had he known that, lying a mere twelve miles from his own bivouac, were not one but three large Indian camps. According to Grinnell, two of the villages were of Sioux, under the well-known Pawnee Killer, while a third consisted of Cheyennes, chiefly Dog Soldiers, and a few Northern Arapaho. Among the prominent Cheyennes present were three Dog Soldier leaders: White Horse, Tall Bull, and, best-known to the whites, Roman Nose.[17] While the Cheyenne warriors Two Crows and Good Bear estimated the village's warrior force as between 300 and 350 fighters -- a comfortable six to one margin against Forsyth's fifty -- George Bent doubted if there were more than two hundred Cheyennes among these.[18]

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[15]"Story of the Beecher Island Battle as Told by Scout Eli Zigler," Beecher Island Annual, p. 61.

[16]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, p. 30.

[17]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 281. Of Roman Nose, Grinnell comments: "He was a brave, possessed great influence, and was an acknowledged leader in war. He was not a chief."

[18]Though he was an important informant for Grinnell, George Bent describes the Indian force somewhat differently, as having been made up of Dog Soldiers led by Tall Bull, White Horse, and Bull Bear, with some Sioux lodges under Bad Yellow Eyes and Two Strikes (or Strikes Twice) and some young Arapahoes who had friends among the Cheyenne

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Returning from a raid on the South Platte, a party of Sioux had discovered the scouts on September 15; after keeping watch for some time, they brought news to the village later that day. (Presumably it was their fresh traces which Forsyth had discovered, as Indian accounts mention neither an effort by the village to elude pursuit, nor the possible purpose of any signal arrows.) Messengers rode to the nearby Dog Soldiers' camp, and by the time two Cheyenne buffalo hunters rode in, to report whites going into camp upstream, the warriors had already dressed and painted themselves for war. But men rode through the camp to declare that anyone trying to sneak out would be severely punished. No small party would be allowed to mar the surprise by attacking prematurely.

Roman Nose asked the camp crier to tell the Cheyennes to ride toward the enemy without him, as he would come on when ready.[19] By the time the assembled fighting men had set out, Forsyth's men had moved roughly twenty miles from the point where first seen, and by nightfall on the 16th the Indians had not yet located their new position. The chiefs decided it was too dark to travel and called a halt, telling their warriors to hold their horses

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camps. Like Bent, who claimed not to have been present at this fight, Roman Nose belonged to the Crooked Lance or Bone Scraper Society, whose leaders carried crooked lances and, during dances, made noises by scraping lizard-shaped pieces of elkhorn. Forsyth, while admitting the difficulty of forming an estimate, lists Indians encountered in the fight as Northern Cheyennes, Brule and "Ogallalah" Sioux, and about 120 Dog Soldiers; reflecting a common misconception of the latter as outlaws, Forsyth termed them "the banditti of the various Indian tribes on the plains." None of his men, he stated, had put their numbers at less than 750, with Grover estimating the warriors participating at between eight and nine hundred. But Forsyth explained that out of fear that he might exaggerate the Indians' numbers, he had reported only 450 warriors to Sheridan, though subsequent information convinced him that Grover's had been the correct estimate. Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 298; Forsyth, "Organization and Operations," Letters Received, AGO, 1780s-1917, NA.

[19]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 282.

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rather than stake them out. They were to be ready to ride forth at the morning star's first appearance. But the lure of personal glory proved too strong for two Cheyennes, Starving Elk and Little Hawk. After sneaking out of camp with six Sioux comrades, "these wild young men spoiled everything" by hunting in the dark for the white men's campfires, and finding them just before daybreak.[20] It was the old story: a plan conceived by mature warriors wrecked by selfishly overeager braves, who had heedlessly dashed in pieces that most important Indian weapon, the element of surprise. There would be no repetition of the victory over Fetterman.

The first attack came at about two o'clock on the morning of September 17, just as dawn began to break. George Oakes recalling Forsyth's cry of "Indians! Turn out! Turn out!" There was some initial confusion, perhaps even disbelief: one man shouted that a herd of buffalo was coming into camp, while Eli Ziegler, who had bedded down close to the river expecting a peaceful morning, mistook a war-whoop for the honk of geese. But then the sentries fired: "As we were all dressed and our revolvers and cartridge boxes all buckled on and our carbines lying by our sides we were ready for action as soon as we raised up..." He and scout G.W. Culver made for their horses as warriors rode by, so close "we could see [the Indians] by the flash of their guns..."[21]

Despite the scouts' quick response, the small band of riders, waving blankets,

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[20]Hyde, Life of George Bent, pp. 244, 298-99. Bent, mistakenly believing that the whites had already packed and saddled their animals, implies that the overeager youngsters ruined a fine chance to catch the small command on the fly.

[21]"Story of the Beecher Island Battle as Told by Scout Eli Zigler," Beecher Island Annual: 61.

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succeeded in running off some animals. But other horsemen quickly became visible, and Whitney saw that in a matter of moments "the bottoms were completely filled with red devils."[22] The young Schlesinger, seeing this host seemingly "spring from the ground like Roderick Dhu's Highland Scots," found himself "frightened almost out of my senses," and in the absence of anywhere to run, moved toward Forsyth, reassured by his chief's coolness and self-possession. But even Forsyth, who had quickly ordered his men to saddle and pack up and stand to horse, was awed by their appearance: "The ground seemed to grow them...On foot and on horseback, from over the hills, out of the thickets, from the bed of the stream, from the north, south, and west, along the opposite bank, and out of the long grass on every side of us, with wild cries of exultation, they pressed towards us."[23]

John Hurst realized that the scouts would be "no match for that army of red men" in the open.[24] So did others. Quickly abandoning their camp, along with such baggage as their medical supplies and salt, Forsyth's men rode or led their horses to the sandbar island. But was it their commander, as his own account suggests, who deserved credit for conceiving this

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[22]Whitney journal, Sept. 17, 1868, "Chauncey B. Whitney": 297. Even the number of animals taken has produced clashing testimony. Whitney, whose count of eight warriors in this initial party complements Bent's account, recorded that they "got seven horses," while Thomas B. Murphy ("The First Day of the Battle of the Arikaree," Beecher Island Annual: 67) stated that nine Indians ran off with seven horses and two mules. Forsyth initially conceded seven animals lost, but later described the Indians (who sheered off after a "scattering volley" dropped one warrior from the saddle) as capturing two of the command's four mules and two horses, none securely picketed as he had ordered. Forsyth, "Organization and Operations," reel 642, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1780s-1917, NA, and Thrilling Days, p. 31.

[23]Monett, Battle of Beecher Island, p. 32; Forsyth, Thrilling Days, p. 32.

[24]"John Hurst's Story," Beecher Island Annual: 69.

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move and then ordering it? Schlesinger told of how Forsyth and his "advisors," including Beecher, Grover, McCall, and Stilwell, at once chose the island as the best possible defensive position.[25] But John Hurst refuted this in two accounts. In one, he recalls hearing no command to move, and the scouts instinctively follow Jack Stilwell after he announces that he was going there; in the other, Forsyth does give an order, but at Stilwell's suggestion.[26] Hurst's partner, Thomas Murphy, would credit himself and Stilwell with impulsively crying "Go on to the island!" at the critical moment, adding that some of the men did not take the time to mount -- and protesting that while Forsyth claimed credit for everything, he knew nothing about the frontier, Indians, or Indian warfare.[27] This question of credit was not a minor point, for the move saved Forsyth's command from annihilation -- and the consequences of his own headstrong folly.[28]

The white men took up impromptu fighting positions, and five men, Stilwell and Louis

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[25]"Scout Schlesinger's Story," Beecher Island Annual: 79.

[26]Hurst was among several scouts who suggested that the movement was more a disorderly scramble than the orderly shift of position recalled by Forsyth; he described the scouts making "a grand rush for cover like a flock of scared quail and immediately we were pretty well scattered over the island." John Hurst, "The Beecher Island Fight," Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society 15 (1919-1922): 532; "John Hurst's Story," Beecher Island Annual: 69. See also Forsyth, Thrilling Days, pp. 32-33.

[27]Monett, Battle of Beecher Island, p. 215; Forsyth, "Organization and Operations," reel 642, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1780s-1917, NA. Without citing the source of the idea, Forsyth officially stated merely that "it was at once determined to make a stand on the adjacent island." However, as he was the detachment's commanding officer, it would be natural for a reader to assume that Forsyth had made the decision -- and given the necessary orders.

[28]Forsyth himself recognized the importance of the move: "My occupation of the island was a surprise to them all [the Indians], and it was the only thing that saved us." Forsyth, Thrilling Days, p. 74.

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Farley among them, ran across the river channel to take shelter behind a bank on the northern side. Indians crept up through the tall grass and fired with what Forsyth sportingly termed "capital effect," making the position "decidedly uncomfortable." He had ordered his men to entrench quickly, but there was little time to prepare, one scout putting the interval between the initial horse raid and the Indians' first real assault at only ten minutes. In a roughly circular defensive perimeter, the scouts scraped out shallow rifle pits as best they could with bare hands, boot-heels, tin cups, plates, and butcher knives. Some soon found additional cover: Forsyth had ordered them to tie their horses to trees and bushes near their positions on the perimeter, but this apparently served to expose them to the Indians, who proceeded to shoot down most of the animals early in the fight. Carcasses and saddles did service as breastworks.

None of the Indians appear to have anticipated the scouts' move, but they advanced intent on overrunning the island and riding down their enemies. But as they galloped nearer, Forsyth's men opened fire with their Spencers. Each scout had only to work his carbine's lever in order to eject a spent casing and chamber a fresh cartridge from the removable seven-shot tubular magazine before thumbing back the hammer for the next shot.[29] The fierce repeating fire repelled the attack.

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[29]Forsyth, "Organization and Operations," reel 642, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1780s-1917, NA. The scouts do not appear to have carried spare magazines for the Spencer, though these would have greatly accelerated reloading. The 1860 Henry and its successor, the 1866 Winchester, were at the time of the fight the fastest-firing rifles available, since working the lever cocked the hammer in addition to ejecting and chambering cartridges. Not Army issue at the time, these were sometimes privately purchased by military men; an officer believed to be Lt. Beecher may be seen holding a Henry in a photograph taken at Fort Wallace on June 26, 1867, but he is not mentioned by participants as having used one during the fight. See Utley, Life in Custer's Cavalry, p. 66.

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Though the scouts told of inflicting serious losses, Bent and Grinnell would assert that no Indians died in the initial charge, and that it was only afterwards that they suffered their first fatality -- a man named Dry Throat, slain while circling with some comrades around the island. The second to die was thus White Weasel Bear, who rode forward after the first repulse, shaking his buffalo-hide shield overhead, unaware of the few white scouts who had crossed the river channel and now lay concealed in tall buffalo grass across from the island. White Weasel Bear was shot as he rode almost over their rifle pit, the slug exiting his upper back. When his nephew White Thunder saw him fall, seemingly shot from the island itself, he rode to within about ten feet of the concealed scouts, and was also shot and killed. White Thunder's father, White Horse, then rode up to his brother Two Crows, who had been looking on at the fight after his mount was shot, to tell him that his nephew had been killed, adding: "You will do well to get his horse and go into the fight."[30]

Two Crows did so, the Indians massing for another charge toward the island, but this time halting farther away as the scouts opened fire. Hurst thought the Indians dazed and puzzled by the fusillade: Bent, calling the scouts' fire continuous and "unlike anything the Indians had ever before experienced," blamed it for breaking the first charge and killing a number of ponies, but did not think it especially damaging to the Indians themselves.[31]

Despite the scouts' fire, Indians continued to ride about the island, whether to shoot at

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[30]This warrior's name was also translated as White Bear or Ermine Bear, while his nephew (whose name of White Thunder was also rendered as Gray Thunder or Painted Thunder) was also known as Old Lodge Skin. Hyde, Life of George Bent, pp. 301-302.

[31]Hurst, "Beecher Island Fight," Beecher Island Annual: 533; Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 301.

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their foes or simply to display their valor. Since the surrounding hills were too far away to provide ideal positions for marksmen, many warriors adopted a more effective tactic, concealing themselves in the grass as close to the island as seemed prudent before opening fire. The rain of Indian bullets proved so furious that the scouts on the stream's north bank soon attempted a rush back to the island. Only Tom Murphy managed to gain the sandbar, while the others, three of them wounded, were forced to wait until nightfall.

The firepower of the scouts' repeaters had offset their foes' superior numbers. But Schlesinger termed both sides "about equally armed," and Forsyth -- in contrast to later claims that only a small proportion of the Indians had owned even muzzle-loading firearms during this period -- gained an impression of warriors as well armed as his own men; he even reported that despite the Indians' custom of carrying off expended shells for reloading, they had left at their positions hundreds of casings from Henry, Remington, and even Spencer cartridges.[32]

Whatever the weapons used, Indian firepower sufficed to inflict heavy losses on the scouts, who knew that no man still able to fight could be spared. Howard Morton -- who thought the Indians managed to wound fifteen men in the fight's first hour -- wrapped a

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[32]"Scout Schlesinger's Story," Beecher Island Annual: 79; Forsyth, "Organization and Operations," reel 642, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1780s-1917, NA; Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 282; Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 300. While Grinnell claimed that the Indians' few guns were all old muzzle-loaders, Bent stated that some had "old-model" Sharps single-shot breech-loading rifles, perhaps meaning that they used linen rather than metallic cartridges. Much physical evidence on the subject of Indian armament may have been lost to the floods which would eventually wash away the island itself, or been absorbed into the collections of those picking over the field in later years. For a modern researcher's scanty findings, see Fred H. Werner, The Beecher Island Battle, September 17, 1868 (Greeley, Colorado: Werner Publications, 1989).

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handkerchief around his head and fought on despite a bullet that had destroyed the sight in one eye and lodged in his nose.[33] When an arrow imbedded itself above his left eye and defied efforts to remove it, Frank Harrington also kept fighting, covered with blood from head to foot, the arrow still jutting weirdly from his head. Then a warrior, riding almost over Harrington, fired at him: the bullet struck the arrowhead, knocking the missile from his skull.[34] Still another wounded man, Louis Farley, employed his marksman's skill throughout this first day, and to such advantage that a comrade praised him for having "done more to save the day than any other man." That night, carried by his comrades from the north side of the river, he told them that they could find three dead Indians at the head of the island, and that they were "his" Indians if shot in the head.[35]

The Indian fire made any exposure hazardous. Henry Tucker had his left arm broken by a bullet; another struck John Haley in the hip as he was binding Tucker's wound, and Eli Ziegler was attempting to complete Haley's task when an arrow went through Tucker's leg. Ziegler found himself unable to pull out the shaft, and so "I pushed the arrow on through and finished tying up his arm."[36] Warned that the scouts would be overrun if he and others did

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[33]Howard Morton, letter to his brother, n.d., Beecher Island Annual: 99; Forsyth, Thrilling Days, pp. 68-69. Morton thought the Indians numbered at least five hundred, "well armed with hunting rifles, Spencers, carbines and revolvers."

[34]Harrington felt sure that he had succeeded in shooting his unintended benefactor. "John Hurst's Story," Beecher Island Annual: 70-71; Forsyth, Thrilling Days, pp. 68-69; Criqui, Fifty Fearless Men, pp. 111-112.

[35]Criqui, Fifty Fearless Men, pp. 112-113.

[36]"Story of the Beecher Island Battle," Beecher Island Annual: 63; Criqui, Fifty Fearless Men, pp. 237-238; "List of Wounded in Colonel Forsyth's Independent Co. of Scouts, at the Battle of Republican River, Kansas, on the Seventeenth Day of September,

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not drive them off. G.W. Culver was killed after rising up to fire, and the fatal bullet sped on to graze First Sergeant McCall in the neck. John Hurst, who had inadvertently buried his cartridge pouch while digging in, prudently secured the dead Culver's pouch rather than pull down his new breastwork. And while Forsyth praised the marksmanship of "the little Jew," Schlesinger himself testified to the suppressive effect of the Indians' fire; he was unable, he explained, to say whether he had actually killed anyone -- since he had not lingered to view the effects of his shots.[37]

The Indians were apparently unaware that their fire had already inflicted such severe casualties.[38] One bold effort to secure better firing positions failed tragically, after a chief called out for warriors to advance on foot. Two Cheyennes and an Arapaho crept through brush and then dashed to get close to the scouts' rifle pits, desperately heaping up sand before them as a breastwork. But two of them were shot through the head, while the surviving Cheyenne, Good Bear, ran zig-zagging to safety.[39] After the whites managed to improve

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1868." Oct. 2, 1868, Medical Records, 1861-1889, File F411, RG 94, NA. Perhaps because it was treated prior to a surgeon's arrival, Tucker's arrow wound goes unmentioned on the official list of casualties. The ranges at which most of the shooting was done may account for the fact that only two scouts were hit by arrows.

[37]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, pp. 40, 41; "Scout Schlesinger's Story," Beecher Island Annual: 41. With bullets striking the sand heaped up before him, Schlesinger's "plan of observation" involved sawing his carbine barrel down to form a loophole in his breastwork and occasionally leaping up for quick looks before dropping back. Without naming him, Forsyth branded one scout, who had previously delighted in teasing young Schlesinger, as "an absolute failure and a coward" who lay paralyzed with fear in his rifle-pit.

[38]Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 299.

[39]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 285-86. For a slightly different account, which has a feinting attack by mounted warriors assisting in Good Bear's escape, see Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 302.

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their defenses, their losses were small.

But Forsyth had already become a casualty, though it would not seem that he "fell at the first fire," as a fellow officer wrote afterward.[40] Despite entreaties to lie down, he strode upright among his men, urging them not to waste ammunition and -- after hearing an anxious proposal to try for the opposite bank rather than stay to be "shot down like dogs" -- threatening to shoot down any man who tried to leave the island. When Forsyth did decide to adopt a less dangerous posture, he had scarcely lain down when a bullet struck his right thigh and ranged upward to make a wound he thought "by far the most painful" of his eventful career. Soon a bullet struck his other leg, and shattered the bone between knee and ankle. Pulled down into a rifle pit at the island's lower end, Forsyth retained command, though he was admittedly something of a spectator as he pulled himself into a seated position for a better view.

Most of the picketed horses had already fallen to the Indians' fire, but the scouts could spare no bullets for wounded beasts still plunging and straining at their lariats. Forsyth thought it was perhaps eight o'clock in the morning when an Indian finally shouted in clear English: "There goes the last damned horse, anyhow!"[41] Rashly exposing his head for a better view of the scene, Forsyth was knocked back to the bottom of his pit by what he could not resist praising as an "excellent line shot," which struck a piece from his skull despite the

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[40]James B. Brisbin, letter to a friend, Sept. 26, 1868, Harry H. Anderson, "Stand at the Arikaree," Colorado, 16 (Fall, 1964): 339.

[41]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, p. 44. This comment was first reported as "There, their last d_____d horse is gone." New York Herald, Oct. 12, 1868. Having previously heard the sound of an artillery bugle, Forsyth was reinforced by the speaker's good English in his belief that a white renegade, or one of the half-Cheyenne Bents, was present during the fight.

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blunting effect of his forage cap's doubled-down crown; as the skin was barely broken. Forsyth only later learned the extent of his injury. Soon afterward Dr. Mooers was also shot in the head; he would linger for three days, never fully regaining consciousness.[42]

It was not yet noon when the Indians began to mass for their first all-out frontal attack -- a direct charge by mounted warriors quite uncharacteristic of Plains Indian warfare. As most of the mounted warriors had disappeared from sight, Forsyth suspected that they were forming up under cover for a charge around the river's bend; he ordered his men to brace for the attack, to fire only on command, and to ignore the dismounted marksmen to aim only at the attacking horsemen.

In a dense mass, the warriors came into sight, glorious in their warlike array. Earlier, Sharp Grover had identified an Indian of near-gigantic stature, riding up and down the line of turbulent horsemen, as Roman Nose. Now Forsyth saw the same man riding in the van. Perhaps, as with other matters, his later recollections of the fight were colored by melodrama, or his very perceptions affected by the trauma of his head wound. But he described a man riding bareback, near-naked, face "hideously" striped in red and black paint, the feathered train of his black-horned war bonnet borne on the wind -- "and as he came swiftly on at the head of his charging warriors, in all his barbaric strength and grandeur, he rode proudly that day the most perfect type of a savage warrior it has been my lot to see." Forsyth even wrote of the great chief waving to women and children encouraging him from the bluffs, and shaking his fist in defiance at the distant whites before striking palm to mouth for a war-cry of

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[42]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, pp. 44-45.

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unequaled power and intensity, echoed by warriors and onlookers alike.[43]

Unfortunately, his identification of the charge's leader as Roman Nose appears mistaken. While not strictly speaking a "chief," Roman Nose was certainly a leader of the Dog Men, and it might be natural even for a man of Grover's experience to place him at the forefront of this wild charge. Yet Indian testimony indicates that at this point Roman Nose had not yet arrived on the battle-ground. Instead, leading the massed warriors was the breechclouted Wolf Belly, or Bad Heart, half-Cheyenne and half Sioux, a panther skin thrown over one bare shoulder, and, according to George Bent, armed not with a Springfield rifle twirled effortlessly overhead, as Forsyth wrote, but with lance, shield, and his bullet-proof medicine.

But the spectacular nature of the Indian charge seems unquestionable. With songs, war-cries and the shrill of eagle-bone whistles aimed at warding off bullets, with the Lakotas' eagle-plumed war bonnets and the tailless crow-feather headdresses peculiar to the Dog Soldiers, they rode toward the island. Even Forsyth confessed that "for an instant or two I was fairly lost in admiration of the glorious charge...for it was far and away beyond anything I had heard of, read about or even imagined regarding Indian warfare." He waited until the Indians on foot ceased firing on the scouts to avoid hitting their charging comrades. "Sitting upright in my pit as well as I was able, and leaning backward on my elbow, I shouted, 'Now!' and 'Now!' was echoed by Beecher, McCall and Grover."

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[43]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, pp. 48-50. Forsyth's biographer puts this massed attack at about 2 o'clock P.M. Dixon, Hero of Beecher Island, p. 80. The other participants' accounts do not support Forsyth's characterization of a solid, European-style formation of warriors, and it would be more characteristic of Plains Indians to spread out for charges in a more individualistic manner, even if the combatants displayed unusual boldness in the attack.

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With the shock of the scouts' fire -- by unified volleys, according to Forsyth -- the charge broke on the island like a wave against a rock, splitting in two as the Indians galloped not over but past the island, riding off to either side and down the two branches of the river bed. As George Bent later acknowledged, "their hearts failed them, and they passed around on either side." Only one man, Wolf Belly, appears to have actually ridden through the island perimeter, trusting to his medicine as he rode up onto a hill beyond the scouts' position, then paused, only to turn and again charge back unscathed over the island.[44]

Forsyth asserted that both Roman Nose and an (unnamed) medicine man fell, along with many warriors.[45] But Lieutenant Beecher was apparently also hit at some point during this charge, the bullet entering Beecher's abdomen and fracturing his spine; he would die after hours of suffering, and Forsyth would give his name to the battleground. Surveying the dead ponies and warriors stretched out before his position, Forsyth asked his chief guide anxiously,

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[44]Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 301; Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 284. Bent and Grinnell both write as though this large-scale charge was made as soon as the Indians arrived on the scene. But the scouts' narratives indicate that this it took place only after a lengthy exchange of fire. It would appear that both men conflated an impromptu dash, made by Indians on first approaching the scouts, with this more deliberate charge later in the morning. Bent, assuming that Forsyth had confused Wolf Belly with Roman Nose, bluntly averred that the former was "bullet proof" -- and that as Wolf Belly repeatedly charged up to the scouts' breastworks, the whites thought him insane.

[45]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, p. 53. Whatever Forsyth's confusion, a warrior of impressive stature was apparently slain, his body left on the field, so that scout Barney Day could secure his war bonnet as a trophy: "From all I can learn that was the medicine man. Barney said he looked 10 ft. long stretched out dead, as they found him after Barney shot him. I stood 6 ft. 1 then in my cow heels, and [when I wore it] the end of the bonnet dragged several inches on the floor, though it showed no signs of wear." Chauncey Thomas, letter to Everette Sutton, Nov. 24, 1940, Criqi, Fifty Fearless Men, pp. 93-94. The New York Herald's account of October 12, 1868, composed after talks with surviving scouts, describes a medicine man riding about before the attack, beating a drum and explaining to the warriors that the white man's bullets would melt before them.

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"Can they do better than that, Grover?" Told that Grover had never seen the like in thirty years on the plains and thought the Indians had "done their level best," Forsyth felt reassured that "we are good for them."[46]

A lull in the action was broken that afternoon by a second Indian charge, in which Roman Nose would indeed take part. But he would be forced to act without the protection of his feathered war bonnet, which had already been proved in battle. (Among the Cheyennes, such a headdress might either have its own inherent powers, or have attached to it the owner's peculiar "medicine," and could come with its own distinctive tabus.)[47] The owner of this particular bonnet could not eat food taken from a dish with an iron implement; if he did, purification rites were essential lest he be struck by a missile in his very next fight. Shortly

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[46]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, pp. 54-55. Perhaps in deference both to Beecher's family and to contemporary notions of decorum, Forsyth minimized Beecher's sufferings, portraying him as being unconscious or semi-conscious until the end; a similar sentimental embroidery is provided in George A. Forsyth, The Story of the Soldier (New York: Appleton and Company, 1900), p. 226. Yet Grover revealed that Beecher was able to give Grover his "equipments," and put the lieutenant's death at about two o'clock a.m: "His wounds were painful, and he seemed perfectly willing to die." Criqui, Fifty Fearless Men, p. 26. Major Brisbin's letter went even farther, stating that Beecher had died after several hours "in great agony. Before he died he repeatedly begged to be shot and put out of his misery." Brisbin to a friend, Sept.26, 1868, Anderson, "Stand at the Arikaree": 339. A newspaper dispatch datelined September 23, telegraphed from Fort Wallace, also reported that Beecher "begged his men to kill him." New York Herald, Sept. 24, 1868.

[47]Some form of supernatural protection was virtually mandatory among Plains warriors, and "bullet-proof" medicines quite common, as the inquisitive Capt. Clark discovered: "Many Indians place the most implicit confidence in the medicine, which may be only a dirty little bag given them by their magician or medicine-man, and are firm in the belief that it turns aside all the missiles of their enemies." Asked how he had avoided injury during an intertribal fight in which bullets had carried away his bonnet's every feather, the Southern Cheyenne chief Whirlwind "replied, 'My medicine was on my head,' and seemed to express from his manner that this was a full, complete, and perfect explanation." Clark, Indian Sign Language, pp. 397, 398.

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before learning of the scouts' proximity. Roman Nose had eaten some "fry bread," unaware that a Sioux woman had removed it from the pan with a metal fork. On learning of the mishap, he had observed that this broke his medicine, and Tall Bull had advised his fellow Dog Soldier to purify the bonnet at once. But the discovery of Forsyth's command soon afterward had prevented this.[48]

Roman Nose supposedly rode to the scene of action with the other warriors, only to decline an active role, observing the fight while sheltered by a hill, though it is also alleged that he stayed in camp and rode out only after runners had arrived with the news that many warriors had been already been killed.[49] Reaching the scene, Roman Nose explained his broken medicine, but an elderly Cheyenne named White Contrary, as quoted by Grinnell, responded: "Well, here is Roman Nose, the man that we depend on, sitting behind this hill. He is the man that makes it easy for his men in any fight." Noting that some of these men had already been killed, he added: "All those people fighting out there feel that they belong to you, and they will do all that you tell them, and here you are behind this hill." This appeal to a renowned warrior's honor struck home. Though he insisted that he would be killed, Roman Nose, in what may stand as the greatest act of courage in a valorous career, painted himself and prepared to don his war bonnet.[50]

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[48]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 286-287.

[49]Stands in Timber, Memories, p. 177-78; Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 286.

[50]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 286-87; Stands in Timber, Memories, p. 178. In Stands in Timber's version, Roman Nose similarly yields to his followers, and dons a borrowed bonnet, not having troubled to bring his war clothing to the battleground. Both accounts assume that Roman Nose could not hope to avoid bad fortune simply by not wearing the profaned headdress.

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He mounted his horse and galloped forward, at the head of a large force of warriors. Forsyth saw the charge as one in open order, curving to partly envelope the scouts as the Indians advanced. But it broke under the Spencers' fire before the Indians got within 100 yards of the island, with no losses among the scouts, and Forsyth judged eight or ten Indians hit. Riding almost over the scouts hidden in the high grass at the island's north end, Roman Nose was shot in the back just above the hips by a hidden rifleman. He fell from his horse and lay on the sand at the edge of the grass, but soon began to crawl toward the stream bank, before some young warriors finally managed to sneak down and carry him away. He died at about sundown.[51]

Between five and six o'clock, as Forsyth judged it, the Indians again formed up and charged, but broke and retreated just as the boldest warriors reached the foot of the island. This left him satisfied that there would be no further attempt to overrun the island with charging horsemen.[52] Nightfall, though disturbed by wails from the hills where the Indians had collected their dead and wounded, saw an end to the Indian sniping. The scouts, succored by (or suffering under) that evening's cooling rain, used the lull to dress wounds, improve their defenses with saddles from dead horses, and cut steaks from the carcasses,

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[51]Stands in Timber has Roman Nose passing the scouts' position twice, being shot the second time, and also credits warriors Star, White Thunder, and Weasel Bear with crawling through the long grass and pulling Roman Nose out by a rope attached to his feet, as bullets whizzed overhead. However, this curiously resembles Grinnell's story of Two Crows and other Cheyennes retrieving the dead Weasel Bear and the mortally wounded White Thunder. Stands in Timber, Memories, pp. 178; Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 288-90.

[52]Forsyth, "Organization and Operations," reel 642, M619, Letters Received, Adjutant General's Office, 1780s-1917, NA; and Forsyth, Thrilling Days, p. 58. Forsyth put this charge at about 2:00 P.M.

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burying some of the meat unsalted in the sand.

"Our situation was a little precarious," Forsyth wrote, rather an understatement given the circumstances. However, there seemed to be enough ammunition, plentiful horse and mule meat, good water to be had "for the digging," and the possibility of aid arriving in time -- if Forsyth could get word to Fort Wallace, eighty-five miles away.[53] From those scouts who volunteered to risk bearing his message past the surrounding Indians, Forsyth selected Jack Stilwell and a middle-aged trapper named Pierre Trudeau. As Stilwell spoke Sioux, and Trudeau Cheyenne, they agreed to answer any Indian challenge in the tongue not used by the challenger. After improvising moccasins from their boot-tops and donning blankets as a disguise, they said their farewells and began crawling in the dark to the river.

Slowly crossing, at times partly submerged in water, they reached the long grass without detection and made their way through the hills.[54] The two men hid for the first day in a grass-grown depression, then struck the south fork of the Republican the next morning. But they were soon forced to conceal themselves again, since in the darkness they had wandered dangerously close to a Sioux village. Hearing lamentations, and seeing groups of

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[53] Forsyth, "Organization and Operations," reel 642, M619, Letters Received, Adjutant General's Office, NA. In his 1900 account, Forsyth revealed himself as less sanguine, portraying a rare moment of self-doubt -- and admission of frailty -- in confessing that "it was all I could do to pull myself together and set about getting out of the dangerous position into which I had led my command." See Forsyth, Thrilling Days, p. 58.

[54] Although artist Frederic Remington, who interviewed Stilwell, asserts that the two were frequently accosted by Indians (and thus forced to employ their opposite-language ploy), another account attributed to Stilwell claims they went unchallenged. Frederic Remington, "How Stilwell Sold Out," Peggy and Harold Samuels, eds., The Collected Writings of Frederic Remington (Garden City: Doubleday, 1979), p. 397; Criqui, Fifty Fearless Men, p. 208.

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men enter camp without the acclaim merited by victorious Plains warriors. Stilwell and Trudeau concluded that the island's defenders had thus far escaped annihilation. Again moving by night, they apparently took refuge by crawling into an old, wolf-gutted buffalo carcass, where (or so runs the glorious tale) Stilwell, unable to shoot a menacing rattlesnake as an Indian scouted within earshot, spat and routed the snake with a well-aimed charge of tobacco juice to its head.[55] On the third day of their ordeal, the hungry, exhausted scouts found themselves on the old Denver stage road some fifteen miles west of Fort Wallace, and by sundown on September 22, after walking 110 miles on a horsemeat diet, they had delivered Forsyth's message. Captain Bankhead telegraphed Colonel Crosby at Fort Hays, and dispatched couriers west to Captain Louis Carpenter, then leading his troop on a scout of the Smoky Hill road, urging him to go to Forsyth's relief. The orders would reach Carpenter on the 23rd.[56]

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[55]Brady, Indian Fights and Fighters, pp. 97-100. The snake incident appears in no source directly based on testimony from either of the two couriers, including Frederic Remington's highly dramatic article. The latter, however, uniquely tells of Trudeau urging Stilwell to shoot an apparently solitary warrior riding toward the carcass so that both men could mount the Indian's pony and make a dash for the nearest timber -- Trudeau even offering to make a stand on foot if necessary so that Stilwell might escape. As the Indian did not discover them, Stilwell declined to risk the noise of a gunshot -- though regretting, as the warrior turned and rode away, that the warrior "would never know what a good story about himself he had missed." Remington, "How Stilwell Sold Out," Collected Writings, pp. 399-400.

[56]According to Jack Peate, one of the scouts with Carpenter's command, Carpenter had already learned of Forsyth's fight the day before -- from four Fort Wallace dispatch riders who had accidentally encountered Trudeau and Stilwell on the stage road. However, he does not claim that Carpenter altered his march before receiving Bankhead's orders. Jack Peate, "J.J. Peate Tells of the Relief," Beecher Island Annual, p. 89. Carpenter mentions no dispatch rider other than the one bearing Bankhead's instructions. Louis H. Carpenter, "The Story of A Rescue," Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States 17 (Sept. 1895): 268.

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In the meantime Forsyth had been forced to hold out as best he could. At daybreak on September 18, the second day of siege, a party of Indians advanced toward the island, into the open, but a scout's premature shot spoiled, to Forsyth's mind, a good chance of "crippling them badly."[57] Forsyth conjectured that the Indians had exposed themselves because they believed that all of the whites had somehow sneaked off the island overnight, though scout Whitney thought this "slight charge" aimed merely at recovering three dead warriors, who lay near the island.[58] When a party of Indians later approached the scouts' position with a white flag, John Hurst (who wrote that the scouts had "quite a controversy over recognizing it") similarly thought that recovering the dead might be their aim, though Forsyth suspected a ruse aimed at spying out his position. The Indians were warned away (with the reported cry of "Keep off: this is no Indian peace commission") and then fired on, with Louis Farley credited with a successful shot.[59] For the rest of the 18th, warriors sniped prudently from hills and ravines, or crawled along in the grass to shoot at their entrenched foes. They scored no hits, but compounded the misery of men sheltering among rotting carcasses, the wounded among them without benefit of surgeon or medical supplies (though with the grim comfort of boxes

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[57]Forsyth, Thrilling Days, pp. 62-63.

[58] While Chauncey believed that about "fifty of the red devils" were killed or wounded at this time, his disappointed commander modestly (albeit colorfully) reported that "several reckless braves received through tickets to their happy hunting grounds." Whitney journal, Sept. 18, 1868, "Chauncey B. Whitney": 297: Forsyth, "Organization and Operations," reel 642, M619, Letters Received, Adjutant General's Office, NA.

[59]"Organization and Operations," reel 642, M619, Letters Received, Adjutant General's Office, NA; "Scout John Hurst's Story," Beecher Island Annual: 71: New York Herald, Oct. 12, 1868. The Herald reported an Indian party of twenty-five, and orders to shoot the first person coming within range.

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containing 4000 Spencer cartridges, hastily thrown onto horses before the rush to the island). Not knowing if Stilwell and Trudeau had escaped the Indians' loose perimeter, Forsyth asked scouts Whitney and A.J. Pliley to take another message to Wallace that night. But they returned, unable to get through.[60]

On September 19 the Indians made another attack, easily driven off. This third day, wrote Forsyth, was fortunately "slightly cloudy, and consequently the wounded had something of an easier time of it: besides, we had begun to get used to our injuries." Helping to keep the Indians at a respectful distance were at least three marksmen with single-shot Springfield military rifles, their .50 slugs, backed by seventy grains of powder, able to kill at distances far beyond the range of the Spencer carbines.[61] That night Forsyth sent scouts A.J. Pliley and John "Jack" Donovan to Fort Wallace. The message they bore, addressed to "Col. Bankhead or Comndg Officer Fort Wallace,"described a "critical condition," as Forsyth told of being left with ten men wounded, eight of them badly, his second in command slain, all his animals dead or stampeded, and his surgeon unlikely to survive the night, while he himself had been twice wounded. (Presumably not realizing the severity of the bullet to his skull, Forsyth neglected to mention it.) But Forsyth seemed to think that the enemy had had the worst of it, and even

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[60]Forsyth, "Organization and Operations," reel 642, M619, Letters Received, Adjutant General's Office, NA. Here Forsyth mistakenly reports the attempt being made on the third night.

[61]On the third day, according to Forsyth, he had three men with Springfields site them at 1200 yards, then aim well over the sites at a far-off warrior taunting his men with "exasperating" gestures -- the scouts feeling "intense satisfaction" after the Indian sprang up with a cry and fell dead. Forsyth, Thrilling Days, 69-70. This tale is treated skeptically by Grinnell (Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 290-91), who doubts that the warrior's death-cry could have been heard at such a distance.

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his call for help mingled anxiety with hope and defiance:

> Mr. Grover says they never fought so before...We killed at least Thirty-Five of them and wounded many more, besides killing and wounding a quantity of their stock. They carried off most of their killed during the night. But three of their men fell into our hands. I am on a little island and have still plenty of ammunition left. We are living on mule and horse meat and are entirely out of rations: If it was not for so many wounded I would come in and take the chances of whipping them if attack[ed]. They are evidently sick of their bargain.
>
> I had two of the members of my company killed on the 17th namely Wm Wilson and George W. Calver (sic). You had better start with not less than seventy-five men and bring all the wagons and ambulances you can spare. Bring a six pounder howitzer with you. I can hold out here for six days longer if absolutely necessary, but please lose no time.
>
> Very respectfully
> Your obt servt
>
> Geo. A. Forsyth
> Bvt. Col. U.S.A.
> Comdg Co Scouts
>
> P.S. My Surgeon having been mortily (sic) wounded none of my wounded have had their wounds dressed yet - so please bring out a surgeon with you.[62]

Exchanging their boots for dead Indians' moccasins to lighten their trail, Pliley and Donovan crawled down along the island's north side, and finally stood erect only after getting well clear of the Indians' cordon.

"Sunday and all is quiet," wrote Whitney in his entry for the fourth day. "No attack this morning. Last night I slept for the first time in three nights...We have twenty men killed and wounded; four dead." Aside from some ineffective sharpshooting, the Indians left the besieged to their suffering. Some of the wounded were delirious, the horse carcasses stinking, and the

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[62]Forsyth to Bankhead or "Comndg Officer Fort Wallace", Sept. 19, 1868, container 6, reel 3, container 6, Sheridan Papers..

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meat already cut from them putrefying in the heat, while the men, shelterless, were afflicted both by rain and by about an inch of snow. Forsyth lay in agony from the slug in his thigh, but it lay so close to the artery that he could find no man willing to run the risk of extracting it. Fearing that the artery might break anyway, Forsyth, as two scouts pressed back the surrounding flesh, cut the bullet out himself with his razor.[63]

For September 21, Whitney recorded: "No Indians seen to-day: all dined and supped on horse meat." The scouts found that they could move more freely about their position, including Sigmund Schlesinger, who in his own journal recorded: "scalpt 3 Indians which were found about 15 feet from my hole consealt in Grass."[64] Forsyth thought that the Indians had withdrawn to the distant hills at noon, though not disappearing entirely until two days later.[65] On September 22, with most of the horse meat gone or inedible, the men gathered some prickly pears, and Schlesinger's diary entry read simply: "Killt a Coyote & eat him all up." Starvation seemed imminent, and the question of whether or not to leave the island --

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[63]Whitney journal, Sept. 20, 1868, "Chauncey B. Whitney": 297; Forsyth, Thrilling Days, pp. 67-68.

[64]Schlesinger journal, Sept. 21, 1868, Merrill J. Mattes, ed., "The Beecher Island Battlefield Diary of Sigmund Schlesinger," The Colorado Magazine 29 (July 1952): 169. Lacking a subject, this incomplete sentence might refer either to Schlesinger himself or to the scouts as a group. In a later account, placing the incident less certainty on "about the fifth day," Schlesinger portrayed himself as squeamish and "not quite ripe for such a cutting affray, even with a dead Indian," while describing the grisly mutilation as the work of other scouts. See Sigmund Schlesinger, "A Scout's Story of the Defense of Beecher's Island," Brady, Indian Fights, p. 118.

[65]Forsyth, "Organization and Operations," reel 642, M619, Letters Received, Adjutant General's Office, NA; Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 305. Apparently the Indians left the field to the scouts, taking with them the bodies they were able to recover, after word came that troops were approaching.

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and what to do with those men too badly wounded to travel on foot -- had to be confronted.

Forsyth would later remember calling the able-bodied men around him that evening, to admit to them that his messengers might not have gotten through. But he added that by moving out by night and in force, those who could walk might make their way to Wallace. As for the disabled, including himself, Forsyth thought a renewed attack unlikely: "If relief came in time, well and good; if not, we were soldiers, and knew how to meet our fate. For a few seconds there was a dead silence, and then rose a hoarse cry of 'Never! Never! we'll stand by you, General[sic], to the end!' and McCall voiced the sentiment of the men by saying, 'We've fought together, and by heaven, if need be, we'll die together.'" John Hurst found Forsyth's speech "very touching and soldier-like, so much so that I never heard another word about leaving the wounded."[66]

Bound by honor to stay the course, the scouts could only search the immediate vicinity in the vain hope of killing game. "Still looking for relief," wrote Whitney on the seventh day. "Starvation is staring us in the face; nothing but horse meat." On the eighth day his journal burst out in despair:

> All fresh horse meat gone. Tried to kill some wolves last night but failed. The boys began to cut putrid horse meat. Made some soup tonight from putrified (sic) horse meat.

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[66]Schlesinger, "Battlefield Diary": 169; Forsyth, Thrilling Days, p. 71; Hurst, "Battle of the Arickaree," Beecher Island Annual : 537. While Hurst's and Forsyth's stories of this incident agree on essentials, the scout has Forsyth call the meeting in response to talk of abandoning the wounded; he then tells his men that he expects them to stay together at least until the messengers have had time to reach Fort Wallace -- after which he will have no claim on them. Forsyth's published account, however, suggests that it was he who broached the subject of the able-bodied men striking out on their own, in response to the scouts' desperate plight.

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My God! Have you deserted us?[67]

But by then help was well on the way, and from more than one source, since Forsyth's second pair of messengers had also made their way through: Donovan's knowledge of the Republican River country had enabled the pair to cut cross-country toward Fort Wallace rather than follow trails or creeks. Forced to hide in a buffalo wallow for an entire day, their wet moccasins pierced by cactus, Donovan and Pliley finally struck the Smoky Hill stage route and reached a ranch. There, sick from rotten meat and warm water, feet grotesquely swollen, they rested, and finally caught the stage to Wallace on September 22.

On September 23, Colonel Bankhead left Fort Wallace with a mixed force of 105 men, including scouts, a company of the 38th U.S. Infantry, a detachment of the 5th U.S. Infantry, one 10th Cavalry company, and an assistant surgeon, plus two field pieces. (Riding with them, in an ambulance for most of the trip, were Stilwell and Trudeau.) Taking every horse, Bankhead left behind Lt. Hugh M. Johnson to command the post with a garrison of seven enlisted men. After receiving Bankhead's dispatch, Colonel Carpenter set out the same day with a number of scouts from Fort Wallace, 70 troopers, 13 wagons, an ambulance, and a surgeon, whom he retained despite orders to send him back to Fort Wallace to replace the doctor sent with Bankhead. Carpenter ordered his eager command, moving at a rapid gait of alternate walk and trot, to leave mules and even wagons behind if they impeded his march, but in the event, testified scout Jack Peate, "Not a man, horse or mule, but did all that was

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[67]Whitney journal, Sept. 22-23, 1868, "Chauncey B. Whitney": 298.

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required of him."[68]

Bankhead had ordered that the rescue party proceed to a point on the "Dry Fork" of the Republican, about seventy-fie or eighty miles north, north-west from For Wallace. Since Carpenter had an inadequate map, and found on inquiry that none of his scouts was familiar with the country to the north, he decided to take a course about north 10° west from his present position, "hoping for something favorable to turn up." He was compelled to waste precious time scouting along the river, unsure of whether Forsyth lay besieged on the northern, the Arikaree, or the south fork of the Republican.[69] Jack Peate, with the column, later complained that a forced march should have brought Bankhead -- who had not bothered sending Stilwell or Trudeau to Carpenter as a guide -- at least as close as Carpenter to Forsyth's position, and it was even claimed, long after the campaign was over, that Bankhead "got drunk every day" and became so drowsy that he would order halts simply to facilitate his own naps.[70]

General Sheridan had already set a third rescue column in motion on the 22nd with a telegram by way of Fort Wallace to Lt. Col. Bradley. Telling him that Forsyth was "in a bad

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[68]"J.J. Peate Tells of the Relief," Beecher Island Annual: 90.

[69]"J.J. Peate Tells of the Relief," Beecher Island Annual: 90; Brady, Indian Fights and Fighters, p. 104; Carpenter, "The Story of a Rescue": 268-270. Peate and eight scouts with him had originally signed with Forsyth, but through a misadventure had failed to report in time for the final muster at Fort Hays, causing others to be recruited in their stead. Because he had been sent no guide, and because obeying Bankhead's orders would have left his relief column without a surgeon, Carpenter was driven to suspect that Bankhead really did not expect him to succeed in rescuing Forsyth -- but had issued his instructions simply to carry out the general directions Bankhead had received from Sheridan.

[70]"J.J. Peate Tells of the Relief," Beecher Island Annual: 89; F.M. Lockard, "A Version of a Famous Battle," Chronicles of Oklahoma 5 (September 1927): 304.

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fix." Sheridan ordered Bradley to move his cavalry rapidly to the scouts' assistance "and follow up with your command."[71] On September 25, Bradley, who had reached the Republican the day before, dispatched a squad to investigate a fresh trail; they rode back at 6 P.M. with Sheridan's message, brought from Wallace by Allison Pliley. Bradley quickly sent two companies of the Second Cavalry under Major James Brisbin "with orders to ride hard 'till he reached Forsyth, and the gallant fellow did it, for they made the 50 miles by morning, though they had just come off a long days march."[72]

Despite their inability to locate Forsyth, Captain Carpenter's men had already found substantial Indian "sign" on the 24th, including the fresh trail of at least 2000 ponies, and, wrapped in skins and with freshly slain horses beneath them, five bodies on burial scaffolds -- warriors who had died recently of bullet wounds. Close by stood the scaffold of an impressive-looking and evidently important warrior, shot in the breast; his body was examined and then re-covered. Carpenter then followed the pony herd's back trail in the hope of finding a living Forsyth, or at least the site where he had made his stand.

Early on the 25th, while breaking camp on the Republican's south fork, Carpenter's troops saw five horsemen approaching from the south; they were scouts led by Jack Donovan, who on arriving at Fort Wallace had found First Lieutenant Hugh Johnson in command and Bankhead already gone. Johnson, receiving Forsyth's second message, telegraphed to Sheridan, who urged him to spare nothing in rescuing the scouts. Promising them $100 each,

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[71]Sheridan, telegram to Bradley, Sept. 22, 1868, Box 2, Bradley Papers.

[72]Luther P. Bradley, letter to Mrs. Bradley, Sept. 26, 1868, Bradley Family Papers.

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Johnson got four citizens of nearby Pond Creek to ride with Donovan. Captain Carpenter, under the impression that Donovan had stumbled into his camp by accident while looking for Bankhead, left his wagons to follow as best they could, but took his surgeon and an ambulance to hasten on with about thirty of his black troopers.[73]

Chauncey Whitney, feeling starvation approaching, had arisen at daylight on September 25 to secure a "light breakfast" of rotten meat as other scouts wandered away in search of food. But at about 10:00 a.m. he heard an alarm raised as two riders, galloping down a steep hill toward the island, were taken for Indians. The starving men almost fired on James Peate and Jack Donovan before realizing that help had finally come. As Donovan stopped to share rations with friends, Peate "put spurs to my horse and rode into that blood-stained island alone."[74]

"Shouts of joy and tears of gladness were freely commingled," testified Whitney. "Such a shaking of hands is seldom witnessed." Soon Carpenter's regulars arrived to share their hardtack with their famished white comrades, so generously that some became sick from overeating. "We were not aiming to hurt the boys," insisted an apologetic Private Reuben Waller, who declared: "God bless the Beecher Island men. They were a noble set of men."[75] When Captain Carpenter rode up to Forsyth's position, the scouts' thrice-wounded leader,

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[73]Hugh Johnson to Cyrus T. Brady, Aug. 5, 1904, Brady, Indian Fights, pp. 111-112; Criqui, Fifty Fearless Men, pp. 96-97.

[74]Whitney journal, Sept. 25, 1868, "Chauncey B. Whitney": 298; "J.J. Peate Tells of the Relief," Beecher Island Annual: 91.

[75]Whitney journal, Sept. 25, "Chauncey B. Whitney": 298; "History of a Slave," Beecher Island Annual: 116.

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lying in a rifle pit, his leg maggot-ridden, seemed to be coolly reading an old novel that a scout had found in a saddle-bag. "It was only affectation, though," he confessed later, "for I had all I could do to keep from breaking down..."

"The day passed off in joy and gladness among friends who condoled with us over our hardships and shouted for joy at our success against the enemy," recorded Whitney. Carpenter had the wounded, including both Farleys, moved from the carrion-laden island to his new camp a short distance away, and there Louis Farley died early the next morning, after his leg was amputated. Major Forsyth, rejecting the surgeon's advice, declined a similar operation -- and kept his leg, though a day's delay in the relief might have proved fatal.[76] Having linked up with Brisbin's two companies at about 3 the previous morning, Bankhead's command arrived at about noon -- Brisbin, despite what he termed "a most fatiguing march by day and night," returning the next night at Bradley's order. On the basis of Brisbin's information, Bradley thought that Forsyth had "made a very successful fight," punishing the Indians severely while suffering considerable loss himself.[77]

The combined rescue forces and Forsyth's men began the march toward Fort Wallace on September 27, leaving five dead buried on the island, though the bodies of Beecher, Mooers,

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[76]While the elder Farley is generally regarded as the fifth and final death among those scouts present at the fight, Thomas O'Donnell's death on November 8 at the Fort Wallace hospital, to which he had been admitted on October 1, was attributed to wounds received in action on the "Dry Fork River," though he was at first found to have suffered only a slight flesh wound of the left knee. Criqui, Fifty Fearless Men, pp. 170-171;"List of Wounded," Oct. 2, 1868, Medical Records, 1814-1919, File F 411, RG 94, NA.

[77] Brisbin to friend, Sept. 26, 1868, "Stand at the Arikaree": 338; Bradley journal, Sept. 27, 1868, Box 1, Bradley Papers.

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and William Wilson were later dug up and removed by Indians.[78] Before leaving, Sigmund Schlesinger, a greenhorn no longer, discarded his worn-out shoes and pulled on Beecher's boots, which had lain discarded since Schlesinger had helped remove them from the dying man.[79]

Coming upon the same Indian burial site examined by Carpenter, some of Forsyth's men, by contrast with their Regular Army comrades, took grisly souvenirs. The body found in the white tipi with a tall burial scaffold inside it, which Peate judged to be that of a medicine man, was rolled over the edge of a canon, and other bodies pulled down, Schlesinger explaining that this "may seem like a wanton sacrilege, but not to those who have suffered bodily torture and mental anguish from these cruel savages." Rolling one corpse out of its blood-soaked blankets, Schlesinger took the one that was "least wet," along with such items as earrings, a maggot-ridden war bonnet with a single polished buffalo horn in front, and finger rings, their owner being "so far decomposed that when I took hold of the rings the fingers came along, and these I shook out!" The stench from Schlesinger's plunder was so great that others would not tolerate his presence near them.[80]

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[78]Despite the fact of this desecration, certain Indian veterans of the fight would profess ignorance as to whether or not their side had killed any of the scouts. Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 281.

[79]Brady, Indian Fights, p. 120. Schlesinger stated that he continued to wear the boots even after returning to New York City.

[80]"Scout Schlesinger's Story," Beecher Island Annual: 81. The war bonnet was later stolen from Schlesinger's tent. It has been argued (Monnett, Battle of Beecher Island, p. 180) that this headdress could not have been taken from the body of Roman Nose, as his protective war bonnet could not include metal components, or the glass beads recalled by Schlesinger. However, Schlesinger had the bonnet in his possession only briefly, and could conceivably have been mistaken in recalling its appearance, especially as traditional woven

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Revenge also extended to the living that day, according to Jack Peate, who wrote of a group of scouts in advance of the column spotting and pursuing four Indians, three of whom rode away across the Republican. A fourth man fled on foot, the scouts shooting at him as he zig-zagged. "The sport," Peate admitted, "to us, was now becoming exciting." Finally a shot from Trudeau's rifle broke his leg, and the young man, "arrayed in the lovely simplicity of nature and a breech cloth," sat down to face his enemies, firing and then discarding his jammed revolver.

The scouts held their fire and continued to ride toward him: "He was a chanting a weird song and did not offer any resistance. He knew what his fate would be and showed no fear." After killing and scalping the defenseless man, the scouts examined his Colt's Navy revolver and found it jammed. The scouts prudently departed after seeing other warriors at a distance in the hills. But the next morning, riding by the site where they had left the "good Indian," Peate found that the wolves "had held a banquet there and a few bones were all that remained of the warrior of yesterday."[81]

On September 30 the column reached Fort Wallace, and while the wounded were helped to the hospital the able-bodied scouts drew and set up tents. They had survived a battle against fearful odds, and at least one scout became convinced of God interposing in "the

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patterns of dyed, flattened porcupine quills might have a beadwork-like appearance. More persuasive is the alternate identification of this prominent warrior as Killed by A Bull, of whom Grinnell remarks that "on him much imagination and many adjectives were expended, under the impression that he was Roman Nose." Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 291.

[81]"J.J. Peate Tells of the Relief," Beecher Island Annual: 91-92. Peate asserted that a bullet from Jack Donovan's revolver had actually gone through the barrel of the Indian's weapon and partly entered the cylinder before stopping..

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Battle of the Arikaree" as a sign that men should believe.[82] But what of its practical effects?

As a rule the whites had more interest in recording the Indians' precise losses than the Indians themselves, who gave nobody the particular responsibility of compiling a list of slain from what they termed "The Fight Where Roman Nose Was Killed" -- or any other battle. In this case, though Forsyth's attempt to strike the Indians had resulted in an Indian attack that had temporarily crippled his command, heavy enemy losses might enable the Army to claim a clear-cut victory. Some early white chroniclers accepted or even created extravagant figures, one actually claiming that the Indians had lost between 700 and 800 braves.[83] But a later assumption that Indian tallies were necessarily more accurate may have produced drastic undercounting that is scarcely more creditable. George Bent asserted that only eight Indians had been killed, five Cheyennes, one Arapaho, and two Sioux, while Grinnell listed nine: one Arapaho, two Sioux, and six Cheyennes, with similar but not identical names to those on Bent's list.[84]

If one considers both the scouts' repeating firepower and the Plains Indians' customary anxiety to keep losses small, the mere fact that the Indians failed to overrun such a small band can neither prove nor disprove a high toll in human life. Major Forsyth, though he attributed

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[82]Whitney journal, Sept. 30, 1868, "Chauncey B. Whitney": 299; "John Hurst's Story," Beecher Island Annual: 73.

[83]Winfield Freeman, "The Battle of the Arikaree," Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society 6 (1897-1900): 357.

[84]Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 305; Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 291. Grinnell thought that probably six hundred Indians were involved in the fight. For comments concerning this trend toward giving greater credence to Indian accounts, and the problems presented by the versions of Bent and Grinnell, see Dixon, Hero of Beecher Island, p. 247.

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to personal observation his own belief that the Indians had lost at least 32 killed and roughly three times as many wounded, cited several arguments in his favor. His scouts, mostly "good marksmen firing coolly and at short ranges," had fired an average of sixty rounds during the fight, and the Indians had fought boldly, while even the "reckless manner in which the Indians exposed themselves to get their dead was the subject of general remark."[85] There was also physical evidence in the form of bodies. While Carpenter's command had found thirteen dead warriors formally prepared at one site, Forsyth's own men apparently found seven in another, and two were also discovered dead in bushes about a half mile from the island. If not miscounted, these 22 bodies alone, plus the three the Indians were unable to rescue during the fight, would have justified Sheridan's initial impression that the scouts had "given the Indians a salty dose."[86]

But if a victory for the Army, it was one which had little or no apparent effect on the Indians' determination to resist, and also offered no clear-cut strategic advantage, despite its

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[85]Forsyth, "Organization and Operations," reel 642, M619, Letters Received, Adjutant General's Office, NA. Forsyth apparently came to regard this official count as cautious, stating in 1900 that while his men claimed to have counted far more, "these were all that I saw lying dead, and I have made it a rule never to report a dead Indian I have not seen myself." He also told of a subsequent interview with a Brule Sioux chief, who informed him that 75 Indians had been killed. Forsyth, Thrilling Days, pp. 73, 75.

[86]Forsyth, "Organization and Operations," reel 642, M619, Letters Received, Adjutant General's Office, NA; Sheridan to Sherman, Sept. 23, 1868, container 6, reel 3, Sheridan Papers. Dr. Dixon, suggesting that in recalling battle losses the Cheyennes may have been simply unaware of the total number of Sioux deaths, terms it "highly unlikely that the Indian casualties were as light as the Indian accounts claim." Dixon, Hero of Beecher Island, p. 224, n. 73.

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impact on the public's imagination even before it was learned that Forsyth had been relieved.[87] Without the consoling mitigation of seemingly heavy Indian losses (losses made possible only by the Indians' own unusual willingness to seize the initiative and attack), the fight on the Arikaree, which left Forsyth's command dismounted and temporarily crippled as a fighting force, could only have been considered a disaster.

If raw courage and stoic endurance could redeem an error of military judgement, no man was more worthy of redemption than Major George A. Forsyth. But Forsyth, having rebuffed warnings of potential dangers and led his men to what might easily have been their doom, cannot even be safely credited with the life-saving decision to seek a more defensible position. Had the island not been available as a refuge, Forsyth's entire command might have been overrun and annihilated so quickly that the Army could not even have enjoyed the solace of a heroic but doomed defense, as it would following the death of Forsyth's friend Custer at the Little Bighorn. Even the scouts' final rescue may have owed much to the besiegers' inability to maintain a tight perimeter and so bottle up their enemies, though the plainscraft of Forsyth's messengers surely played a part.

It remained only to honor the brave. Calling the attention of officers and men to the

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[87]As early as September 25, before the suspense had been relieved, a New York Herald editorial, entitled "The Indian War -- A Disastrous System," used the fight as an occasion to assail both President Johnson and his Secretary of the Interior (though not Sheridan or his decision to dispatch the scouts); it described Forsyth simply as a staff officer on a scout with a small band "wholly inadequate for the service, as the result proved." However, on September 26, under its frequently-used heading "The Indian War," the Herald proclaimed "Colonel Forsyth and Party Still Holding Out," and in a stirring and detailed October 12 account of the fight, a reporter predicted: "The expedition of Colonel Forsyth and his trusty band will ever be remembered, and the annals of the frontier will not fail to record their almost supernatural bravery." New York Herald, Sept. 25-26, Oct. 12, 1868.

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scouts' gallantry and energy. General Sheridan also gave the name of "Camp Beecher" to a short-lived post at the mouth of the Little Arkansas River, while requesting that Forsyth be breveted a brigadier general for his conduct during the fight. The nature of his request reflected the ambiguous official status of Indian warfare; as a form of insurance, Sheridan suggested to the Chief of Staff that if the War Department did not feel authorized "to give brevets for such service," the brevet should instead be credited to Forsyth's Civil War gallantry at Five Forks on April 1, 1865.[88] A later move to have Forsyth presented with a Medal of Honor, despite the recommendation of the current commanding general, was rejected with the claim that the award had never been intended to honor mere defensive actions, no matter how gallantly conducted. (However, their "civilian" status did not ultimately prevent the granting of pensions to scouts wounded in action.)[89] Forsyth himself could play no further active role in Sheridan's campaign; but despite the removal of nearly three inches of his left tibia, he was walking with the aid of crutches after less than a year, cartilage having grown to fill the gap between bones. He would even see later active service against Indians; but Forsyth was forcibly retired in 1888, after a court-martial for duplicating pay vouchers to feed a monomania for stock speculation. This mental disorder was blamed on

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[88]Sheridan to Bvt. Brig. Gen. John A Rawlins, Nov. 6, 1868, container 6, reel 3, Sheridan Papers.

[89]J.M. Schofield to Secretary of War, Mar. 26, 1894, and Sheridan to Secretary of War, Nov. 4, 1872, reel 642, M619, Letters Received, Office of the Adjutant General, 1861-1970, NA. Sheridan emphasized that the scouts had been "raised from the absolute necessity for the services of such men," that they had been sworn to obey the officers set over them and abide by regulations made by the Armies of the United States, and had done invaluable work: "If it is possible to give the poor fellows who were wounded a pension it would be but an act of justice."

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his unhealed skull wound.[90]

Other participants sensed that they had been part of an epic event; in fact, so striking was the story that for a time after Sigmund Schlesinger's return to New York he stopped telling it, simply to avoid ridicule:

> I told my old friends and former playmates the story of Beecher Island. They listened as to a fairy tale, but their looks and demeanor plainly indicated that I must be an awful story teller. The narrative was so extraordinary in character, so seemingly improbable from a standpoint of my participation, that only the most intimate were charitable enough to insinuate that I must be exaggerating. When I showed some of the relics of the battlefield I was asked, "How much did they cost?"[91]

The Army could not so easily dismiss the reality of the battle, or the failure of the premise which had resulted in such a fight. One of the action's natural casualties was, or should have been, the notion that a small command, with no friendly force within easy supporting distance, should be dispatched with the expectation of defeating independently whatever Indian hosts it might encounter. Even General Nelson A. Miles, after himself becoming a celebrated Indian-fighter, seemed puzzled: "Why so small a body of civilians should have been permitted to go into a country known to be occupied by a large body of hostile Indians instead of sending out a large body of regular troops to engage them, is not clear."[92] Henceforth, Sheridan would adopt more conventional means, and larger forces.

Apparently not everyone in his command grasped the lesson immediately. About a week

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[90]Dixon, Hero of Beecher Island, p. 184. Forsyth was found to have a piece of bone one inch by one-half inch wide by three-eights of an inch deep missing from his skull.

[91]Brady, Indian Fights, p. 119.

[92]Miles, Personal Recollections, p. 146.

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after their return to Fort Wallace, John Hurst and Tom Murphy asked Lieutenant Silas Pepoon of the Tenth Cavalry, now commanding the scouts, whether he planned to have the scouts accompany troops, only to be told that the refitted unit would again go out on an independent expedition. "He asked us how many Inds [Indians] we could handle," according to Hurst, "& we told him perhaps 60 or 75 & he said he thout we should be able to take care of 500 We told him we had just had experience with such a band & did not want any more of it." Rather than sign up again, Murphy and Hurst returned to Fort Harker and hired out to drive teams for the Army.[93] Yet even as reorganized under Pepoon, Forsyth's scouts, whether acting as an escort for the department commander or as part of larger forces, would never again take the field as an independent command.

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[93]Criqui, Fifty Fearless Men, p. 126.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Indecisive Actions

"...we had about one hundred colored soldiers."

After the long fight costing the life of Roman Nose, the great Indian force that had battled on the Arikaree dispersed. Most of the villagers moved up the Republican, until there remained in the area only the Dog Soldiers, with a few Northern and Southern Cheyennes and a half dozen lodges of Sioux. While on his forced march to relieve Forsyth, Captain Carpenter had duly marked a large Indian trail on the Republican's south side -- made, he thought, by the very warriors who had engaged Forsyth's scouts.[1] His scouts found that this trail left the stream's valley a short distance below, the Indians having struck across country in the direction of Beaver Creek. Sheridan would act on this intelligence.

The department commander was by now keenly aware of his foes' advantages in the style of warfare thus far waged -- and struck a pessimistic note in describing them. The Indians, he acknowledged to Sherman, were rich in horses, stock (most of it acquired in war), and other property that could keep them comfortable in their nomadic life, the Cheyennes and Arapahoes apparently averaging from twenty to two hundred horses for each lodge of six persons. "They are now so independent," he complained, "that whether we shall have our people murdered, our mail lines and lines of communication interrupted, our soldiers living in

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[1]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 292-93. Captain Louis H. Carpenter, "Carpenter and His 'Brunettes': The Fight on Beaver Creek," Brady, Indian Fights, p. 123.

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dugouts from Hays to Denver and from the south of the Little Arkansas to Pueblo [Colorado], and large expense periodically incurred by the Government, without any adequate chastisement, seems to depend on the mere whim of the savages."[2]

Upon Carpenter's return to Fort Wallace on October 1, Sheridan dispatched orders for seven companies of the Fifth U.S. Cavalry, under Major (Brevet Colonel) William B. Royall, to move north from Fort Harker and, if possible, deal out such chastisement by striking the Indians on the Beaver. Royall's force paused at Fort Hays on the 4th to receive Sheridan's instructions and pick up its scout, William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody. Then the column continued on along the Kansas Pacific railway toward Prairie Dog Creek, where Forsyth had seen the remains of an Indian camp on his march toward the Arikaree.

In desperate need of mounted troops, Sheridan had only recently managed to transfer companies A, B, F,H, I, L, and M from Reconstruction duty. But they assembled quite quickly with the aid of river boat and railroad, and all seven were present at Fort Harker by September 27.[3] Colonel Royall, his face bearing the scars of Confederate sabers, was a

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[2]Sheridan to Sherman, Sept. 26, 1868," container 83, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC. Sheridan's list of casualties and depredations, ranging from 10 August to 17 September of that year, was admittedly incomplete, though it cited an impressive total of 64 killings by the Indians during this period.

[3]For details on troop movements see Regimental Return, Sept. 1868, Second Cavalry, reel 52, M744, Returns for Regular Army Cavalry Regiments, 1833-1916, NA; George F. Price, Across the Continent with the Fifth Cavalry (1883; New York: Antiquarian Press, 1959), pp. 131-32. Though on Reconstruction rather than frontier duty, the Fifth had been spread quite thin, and extensive travel was required to bring the scattered companies together. Companies H and L, for example, went by railroad from Aiken, South Carolina to Columbia, Kentucky, then traveled by river boat to St. Louis, and again rode the train to Omaha before finally arriving at Fort Harker on September 23. Company F had been stationed in Richmond, M in Gallatin, Tennessee, and B in Nashville, while troops A and I, the last to arrive, had left Raleigh, North Carolina on September 13.

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Mexican War veteran who had been the Fifth Cavalry's senior lieutenant upon its organization as the (old) Second Cavalry in 1855, and had remained with the regiment ever since.[4] Sheridan had actually planned to have Major (Brevet Major General) Eugene A. Carr replace Royall at the head of this command, and had arranged to have Carr transferred from his post as Acting Assistant General of the Department of Washington. But Sheridan refused to wait for Carr's arrival to field his new force of cavalrymen.

Though just under forty, the bearded Carr had acquired much experience of potential value in a border campaign, having been graduated from West Point in 1850 and spent his pre-Civil War career in frontier and Indian duty. Severely wounded in a fight with Mescalero Apaches in 1854, he had also participated in operations against Sioux, Kiowas, and Comanches. During the Civil War he had served as brigadier general of volunteers and divisional commander, and been awarded the Medal of Honor for gallantry at Pea Ridge. But neither this experience of large-scale carnage nor the amenities of staff duty in the capital city had dimmed Carr's ardor for warlike service on a desolate frontier.

Carr himself admitted that upon learning that most of his old regiment had been ordered to the Indian country, he had considered applying to join it in the field. But this had seemed inappropriate, as three field-grade officers had already been assigned to the detachment. When one of these fell fortuitously ill, Carr was ordered out anyway, "much to my gratification," and he left Washington on September 30. But he appeared before Sheridan

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[4]For Royall, see Price, Across the Continent, pp. 292-298. The Second Cavalry of 1868 had been the Second Dragoons until the Civil War reorganizations of 1861, which abolished both Dragoons and Mounted Infantry for a uniform "Cavalry." The original Second Cavalry, organized in 1855, was thenceforth designated the Fifth.

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Ft. Hays only after Royall had already left Harker with the Fifth.[5] Sheridan waited several days, hoping to hear news of the detachment, then ordered Carr on to Fort Wallace. From there he was to proceed to Beaver Creek, where he was expected to find Royall and assume his new command. The eager Carr arrived at Wallace on October 12 and left the very next day with an escort of about 110 men of companies H and I, 10th Cavalry, under Captain Carpenter.

While Sheridan's frustrated soldiers yearned for a battle of decision, the "hostiles" generally confined their own attacks to sudden strikes against small bodies of troops, or luckless individuals; when engaged against more formidable targets, they avoided great loss, and tempered audacity with a readiness to give ground whenever prudent. On October 2, about a hundred warriors attacked Fort Zarah; repelled, but apparently suffering no loss, the Indians then struck a provision train, killed a teamster, stole four teams of mules, and proceeded to a ranch eight miles away. They left it poorer by 160 head of livestock. An attack on the route between Fort Larned and Dodge was also reported, resulting in three civilians killed, three wounded, and over fifty mules captured.[6] Seventh Cavalry private

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[5]"Report of Brevet Major General E.A. Carr, Commanding Expedition from Fort Lyon, of the Operations of his Command during the late Campaign against hostile Indians," April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC. For Carr's life and career, see James T. King, War Eagle: A Life of General Eugene A. Carr (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963).

[6]Record of Engagements, p. 12; "Tabular Statement," in Custer, My Life, pp. 126-27; Armes, Ups and Downs, pp. 276-277. Also camped near Fort Dodge with a battalion of the Tenth Cavalry, Captain Armes dates the attack as occurring on October 1 and puts the number of stolen mules at only forty-four. His description perhaps explains the lack of casualties inflicted: fifty or sixty Indians actually dashed through Sully's camp while the men were at breakfast, achieving such a surprise that the raiders all escaped unhurt despite "five hundred or more shots" fired at them. Armes states that, after pursuing with two troops for

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William Johnston, of Company G, was killed the same day while on a buffalo hunt with a party sent out from Sully's camp. A surgeon arriving at Johnston's death site about two and a half hours later provided his dry medical epitaph: finding that the soldier had been shot through the head and in the right leg, he recorded that his skull "was extensively fractured, and I think the fracture was produced by a blow dealt by the Indians after the head was pierced by the ball. The Indians also scalped him."[7]

Captain Armes complained: "War parties of Indians are all around us and committing all kinds of depredations possible, and not one of the Indians has been caught or killed in spite of the large number of troops at the different points in the Department."[8] Nor could the defensive measures taken by Governor Crawford entirely deter raids against civilians. On October 12, Indians striking near Ellsworth killed one victim, while several other men were reported missing, and on October 23 a war party, perhaps including veterans of the Beecher Island fight, struck the settlements of the Solomon Valley, and again proved these scattered homesteads easy targets.

The initial series of Kansas raids that had ignited the war had ended barely more than two months before. Yet the fear of Indian attack had seemingly so faded in the mind of Civil

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thirty miles, he was about to charge into a village, only to halt on orders sent by General Sully. Later, ordered to renew the pursuit with only forty men, Armes declined to press it home after reinforcements failed to arrive.

[7]Assistant Surgeon Henry Lippincott, Form 55, "List of Wounded, Det. 7th Cavalry in the Field by Indians on the second day of October, 1868." File F419, Records of the Office of Medical Records, 1814-1919, RG 94, NA. Lippincott was unable to state how long Johnston had lived after receiving his wounds, but thought "the time was not more than a few minutes."

[8]Armes, Ups and Downs, p. 277.

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War veteran James Morgan that on this morning he neglected his usual precaution of taking a gun into his fields. Shot in the hip, the young farmer fled through his cornfields. He hid along a stream bank while his three attackers, perhaps more concerned with booty than with avenging any recent battle losses, neglected to ride him down in favor of chasing his bolting plough horses.[9] But the Indians did seize Morgan's bride of one month, Anna Bell, and she was soon tied to a horse headed toward Cheyenne camps in eastern Colorado, on the Republican River. Employing the usual safeguard of putting as many miles as possible between themselves and any likely pursuers, the Indians did not linger to look for James Morgan, found by neighbors after he crawled back up onto the prairie.[10]

At their evening camp the raiders were joined by several other groups of warriors, a contemporary hinting at the unspeakable as he drew a discreet veil over Mrs. Morgan's first night of "mental agony and physical torture."[11] After several days' travel, the new captive arrived at the main camp, and inside a Cheyenne lodge found Sarah White; each woman was overjoyed at finding a kindred soul in her ordeal of repeated rapes and beatings, and the pair

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[9]Record of Engagements, p. 12. A detailed narrative of Anna Morgan's capture and subsequent rescue, along with the experiences of captive Sarah White, is provided in Duncan and Smith, "The Captives": 2-21, 31. A former Kansas cavalryman suggested that Morgan, thinking that the day's dampness and fog would render bowstrings useless, and not knowing that the Indians had been issued guns and ammunition, had reasoned that there was no danger -- which certainly credits him with remarkable naivete, or at least the odd assumption that only government largesse could account for firearms in Indian hands. Spotts, Campaigning With Custer, p. 208.

[10]Smith and Duncan, "The Captives":10; Spotts, Campaigning with Custer, pp.208-09; Custer, My Life, p. 278. Spotts and Custer present the capture of Mrs. Morgan with conflicting details. The latter placed the war party's strength at about fifty, mostly Cheyennes together with some Sioux and Arapahoes.

[11]Spotts, Campaigning with Custer, p. 209.

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were to make several joint escape attempts, only to be ridden down and recaptured each time. The fact of their grim captivity was destined to play an important role in the outcome of the campaign.

The day after Mrs. Morgan's capture, raiders near the mouth of Sand Creek, Colorado -- their leadership attributed to the famous Kiowa chief Satanta, though Arapahoes were more likely involved -- attacked a Kansas-bound wagon train on the Santa Fe trail and captured a Mrs. Clara Blinn and her son Willie.[12] A more audacious attack struck a portion of Royall's Fifth Cavalry command. Establishing his camp at Prairie Dog Creek, Royall had left it guarded by a single company, while he scouted with the rest of his battalion toward Beaver Creek and the Republican. On October 14 a band of Cheyennes, reportedly under Tall Bull, attacked the camp, killed one Company L man, wounded another, and ran off 26 of Royall's horses. The returning Royall found the camp in what civilian scout William F. Cody termed "a state of great excitement," and warily pursued the Indians with his united command to a water source at Buffalo Tank, where he arrived on October 22.[13]

While Royall searched for Indians, Carr rode in search of Royall. The command struck north so as to reach the Beaver and locate his regiment, or at least its trail, by following that creek. Carr would subsequently report that the escort under Carpenter had not been ordered by Colonel Bankhead to report to him, "but I of course assumed to give orders."

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[12]Record of Engagements, p.12; Danita Ross, "The Indian Captivity of Clara Blinn," American West 25.3 (June 1988): 45-46.

[13]Record of Engagements, p. 12; Price, Across the Continent, pp. 132; W.F. Cody, The Life of Hon. William F. Cody, Known as Buffalo Bill (Hartford: Bliss Publishing, 1879), pp. 208-214.

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Furthermore, on the second day out, "Brevet Colonel Carpenter requested me to assume command, as he said he feared the loss of animals from my mode of marching, and did not wish to be made responsible."[14] In an account composed many years later, Carr added that some of Carpenter's officers might also have remonstrated with him for keeping a tough pace over rough terrain, before asking him, when he proved obdurate, "to take command and be responsible."[15] Carr agreed to do so, he wrote, on condition that Carpenter attend to such mundane matters as guard assignments and stable duties.

Carr did not reveal how he could have previously set the pace, or given orders, without already exercising de facto command, and thus unavoidably bearing responsibility for the results. That the method actually evolved was irregular was stressed by Carr's later wish, after controversy had arisen, that he had appointed a Fifth Cavalry officer then traveling with him as his adjutant "and taken formal command." Perhaps Carr was content to leave the "details" to Carpenter due to his own doubts about the utility of black troops -- though Carpenter was to insist that he, and not Carr, had commanded the escort throughout.[16] Thus the detachment's imminent fight with the Indians would, unlike so many other military engagements, provoke a controversy not over the conduct of a force's commander, but over his very identity.

Reaching the Beaver at about 1 P.M. on October 15, the column proceeded

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[14]Carr's report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

[15]Carr's account, Brady, Indian Fights, p. 136.

[16]Carr's account, Brady, Indian Fights, p. 137; Leckie, Buffalo Soldiers, p. 8. See also Eugene A. Carr typescript, p. 30, Box 3, Eugene A. Carr Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute.

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downstream and, as expected, found Indian sign. Some 2000 ponies had been ridden or driven over the trail some two weeks before, headed southeast from the Republican.[17] Passing old Indian campsites, apparently numbering about 1000 lodges, Carr sent an "express" back to Wallace with word of this discovery, though not without difficulty: "My messenger was very much afraid to go through alone, and I was obliged to make it alternative with him, to go, or take his discharge."[18]

The soldiers clung to the trail, following the creek the next day until they discovered a Cheyenne warrior's grave scaffolding, lodged in a tree. However, finding Royall took precedence over finding Indians, and even knowing that the trail struck toward Short Nose Creek, a stream about twenty miles to the south, the cavalry continued down the Beaver, covering roughly thirty miles. With no pack train "outfit" available at Wallace, mules pulling heavily laden supply wagons over rough terrain were forced to trot, to match the brisk pace set by the cavalry. The column had gone down Beaver Creek for roughly 45 miles, but had still seen no sign of the Fifth Cavalry.[19]

Had Royall gone in another direction? A scouting party, sent south to strike the Short Nose and see if the Fifth's column had passed up that stream, returned that night after seeing only an abandoned Indian pony, evidently ridden to its limit.[20] Carpenter suspected not merely that Royall had never reached Beaver Creek, but that his own "buffalo soldiers" would

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[17]Carpenter, "Brunettes," Brady, Indian Fights, pp. 124-125.

[18]Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

[19]Carpenter, "Brunettes," Brady, Indian Fights, p. 125.

[20]Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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probably be attacked by the Indians in the vicinity. On October 17, the command crossed the Beaver again to avoid the bluffs and ravines that hampered the wagons, and while the cavalry and wagons marched on the valley's less rugged north side, Indian buffalo hunters spotted the escort. They returned to their village to announce their discovery, and their fellow warriors, mostly Cheyennes of both the northern and the southern bands, prepared for battle.

Among them was a Cheyenne known as Bullet Proof, who had apparently made his name at Beecher Island, after a bullet had entered his chest and exited his back, by appearing to seal up the holes simply by rubbing dirt over them. He now proposed to employ a special medicine which would make its users invulnerable to the soldiers' guns, until the weapons finally failed to fire at all; then the Indians, seeing the bullets roll from their muzzles and fall harmlessly to the ground, could ride up and safely dispatch the bluecoats. Bullet Proof had instructed a number of young men in the proper way to dress and behave, and now chose seven for a demonstration of his power. Two put on shoulder sashes fashioned from the head and forelegs of four-year-old buffalo bulls, while each of the other acolytes donned a deerskin sash with a tiny mirror attached.

Apparently these warlike preparations took some time, for although the Cheyennes rode rapidly toward their foes' campground -- Bullet Proof's chosen seven riding apart and to the right of the main force -- they were unable to strike the troops until the day after they had learned of their presence. Bullet Proof had instructed his followers to ride around the troops four times; at the end of their fourth circuit (provided none had been shot), any of them might

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charge in among the troops in perfect safety.[21]

On the morning of the 17th Lieutenant Myron T. Amick, ten troopers, and scout Sharp Grover (who had impressed Captain Carpenter with an ability to read tracks "as if they had been books") were sent to ride across country as quickly as possible to the Short Nose, looking for any sign of either the Fifth Cavalry or hostile Indians. Carr was now satisfied that Royall was not coming up the Beaver, and that the column should abandon its original objective and start its return march the next morning -- marching downstream one more day, just to be sure.[22] However, Captain Graham volunteered to instead make a scout with a small party. By riding downstream the next morning, he could spare the column's hard-pressed animals some needless marching, should he find nothing.

After selecting the next morning's crossing and cutting its banks down to the creek bed to ease the passage of animals and wagons, the "Brunettes" bedded down for the night, within an "oxbow" bend of the creek for protection.[23] Although Amick's patrol returned just

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[21]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 293-94. George Bent gives the man's alternate name as Wolf Man, stating that he was sometimes called Bullet-Proof because in a fight with Col. Cole's troops on the Powder River, he had been struck by two bullets, which failed even to break the skin. While Wolf Man had sent a crier through the camp calling on the warriors not to attack the soldiers until he and his chosen men had demonstrated the impotence of the enemy's guns, the impatient Cheyennes would not wait for those they referred to as "Young Bull Robes." Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 309.

[22]Carpenter, "Brunettes," Brady, Indian Fights, pp. 126-27; Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

[23]Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC. Carr reported learning subsequently that some of the warriors had spent the night within half a mile of his camp, but were prevented from capturing any animals due to "my invariable custom" of using such an oxbow bend, with tents and wagons across the opening, and sentinels posted on the creek's opposite bank.

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before nightfall to report no sign of Royall's command, Grover had seen a single pony's track between Beaver and Short Nose creeks. The pony's rider was presumed to be a hunter, who after crossing the column's trail had galloped to warn nearby camps, somewhere to the soldiers' front.

At 7 a.m. on Sunday, October 18, Graham rode out with only two troopers to search for Royall. In the Indian country, Carr explained, "I always had my commands up and under arms before daylight, which is the most dangerous time," and the men had already breakfasted, struck their tents and packed the wagons when Graham's little scouting party came galloping back -- pursued by some twenty-five Indians. Graham had been surprised perhaps less than a mile from the camp.

Other troopers under Lieutenant Amick sallied forward to cover their retreat and launch a quick pursuit as the trio rode over the creek to safety, though a trooper's horse fell wounded and Graham's saddle girth burst or slipped off. Despite several bullet holes through his clothes, the bold Graham insisted on going out again to recover his lost saddle and pistols -- and to lead his company in an inconclusive chase for some five miles. A trumpeter was sent to recall the pursuing troopers, who had narrowly avoided being drawn into a trap by spotting large groups of warriors massed in ravines.[24]

According to Carpenter, it was only during this initial phase of actual combat that he offered command to Carr -- with Carr declining, "stating that he considered himself simply as

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[24]Carr's account, Brady, Indian Fights, p. 137, and Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC. Grinnell's account has the Indians reaching the top of a hill and charging down upon the soldiers only after seeing them climb another hill with their wagons. See Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 294.

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a passenger to be escorted, and I therefore continued to direct the operations."[25] But it is not implausible that Carr, even if he actually declined command at what he would grandly dub the "Battle of the Beaver," might have retained a Lear-like urge to exercise its privileges. Perhaps it was information from Carpenter which led the Reverend Cyrus T. Brady to claim in a popular account that while General Carr used a rifle efficiently throughout the action, he avoided interfering with Carpenter, and "with rare self-restraint" declined even to offer suggestions -- despite the belief that "he was in the tightest box in which he was ever caught in his life, and that there was nothing left for them all to do but sell their lives as dearly as possible."[26]

Indians fired on the troops from the stream's south side, exploiting every chance for cover offered by ravines, trees, and bluffs. To avoid the continuous harassment after crossing at the ford prepared, the column marched out onto higher ground and away from the Beaver, its wagons formed into two parallel columns, and Carpenter's own Company H making up the rear guard. Warriors followed to skirmish cautiously at long range, harassing the column's rear and flanks and ready to cut off any straggler.[27]

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[25]Carpenter, "Brunettes," Brady, Indian Fights, p. 131.

[26]While stating that he had displayed "plenty of nerve," Brady also ascribed to Carr, who had never served on the plains with black troops, an anxiety over the performance of the Tenth Cavalry, though Brady did not link this to Carr's supposed reluctance to take command. Such anxiety seems plausible, irrespective of Brady's additional claim (which overlooked previous actions by the black cavalry) that Carr "had no knowledge as to how they would behave against Indians -- nobody had, for that matter." Brady, Indian Fights, pp. 131-132.

[27]Carpenter recalled two columns of six and five wagons, though Carr reported only ten wagons with the detachment. Carpenter, "Brunettes,"Brady, Indian Fights, footnote, p. 129; Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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Carr was particularly impressed by Captain Graham, whom he later proclaimed one of the bravest men he had ever seen. Keeping well behind the column, alone or with a few men to lay traps and kill several Indians after luring them within range, the daredevil Graham would "amuse himself with the Indians by concealing men in hollows, taking away their horses till the Indians came up for them to shoot at, then charging up with their horses, mounting and bringing them off."[28] (Carr ventured no opinion as to whether or not the troopers dismounted to act as bait shared in their eccentric captain's amusement.)

With the column now on comparatively level ground, Carr could see two bodies of Indians, each "of about the size of half a Regiment," marching by fours over the prairie.[29] His description, like that of Captain Carpenter, suggested an uncharacteristic degree of organization for Plains warriors. Duly struck by the warlike appearance of half-naked foemen, the sun glinting from metal ornaments on their bodies and equipment with the motion of their war-ponies, Carpenter also noticed that the whole Indian force "seemed to be more or less governed" in its movements by a single leader, flourishing a red flag with a white device. Carr reported chiefs riding between the heads of their columns, and employing a bugler as the warriors rode steadily onward, increasing their gait so as to gradually close in on their outnumbered foes: "I estimated them at seven hundred warriors; we had about one hundred colored soldiers."

But with his first chance to observe the black regulars in action, Carr thought most of

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[28]Carr, Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC; Carr's account, Brady, Indian Fights, pp. 138-39

[29]Carr, Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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them sufficiently cool during a brisk exchange of lead which produced a single military fatality -- a soldier's dog who became fatally "interested in the shooting." The troopers managed to drive back attacks on the rear and flanks even as the wagons rolled on, without stopping the column's progress.[30] When warriors opened fire on the passing column from a deep ravine, a reserve platoon under Graham charged, halting at the ravine's edge to pour in a volley at close range and rout out their opponents.[31]

At about one o'clock the Indians broke off the action, leading Carr to believe that the fight was over. But they reappeared, and Carpenter recognized that the rush of warriors toward the column's front, flanks, and rear made things "look rather serious." The command pressed on to still higher ground, the teamsters urging their mules toward a small knoll. There they quickly corralled them into a bulwark, the mules facing inward, with roughly twenty feet between wagons.[32] The cavalrymen galloped inside the corral, dismounted, and tied their horses together in fours. Save for those detailed as horse-holders, Carpenter's "Brunettes" initially formed outside the wagon corral's protection in open order before the Indians came in range. They began firing, and the reports of their repeating carbines gratified their captain

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[30]Carpenter, "Brunettes," and Carr's account, Brady, Indian Fights, pp. 129, 139.

[31]Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

[32]Carpenter, "Brunettes," p. 39, and Carr's account, p. 132, in Brady, Indian Fights; Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC. Carpenter described the corral as "half a circle on either side," and his diagram, on Page 130 of Brady's book, resembles a circle of wagons open at the front and rear. Carr variously described it as resembling a flat-iron and a horseshoe.

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with a sound "like the fire of a line of infantry."[33]

Cheyenne accounts of this engagement are strangely deficient from the military historian's viewpoint, for they remain silent with regard to any combat prior to the corral's formation. It is as though matters of supernatural import had eclipsed all other events of that day, and to such a extent that Cheyenne witnesses felt no need to preserve more conventional battle details.

Thus their presentation begins with a charge against the soldiers' wagons which, almost as though in repetition of the Beecher Island fight, splits off on either side of the corral. But the soldiers' rapid firing inflicts no loss as the warriors ride into a dry stream bed -- purportedly for the sole purpose of waiting to witness the planned display of Bullet Proof's power.[34] However, Carpenter painted the charge as a more critical affair, with warriors surging about the wagons and driven back "in wild disorder," leaving the ground littered with weapons, slain ponies, and the bodies of three men lying within fifty feet of the corral.[35] General Carr praised the black troopers' great bravery as Indians rode to within fifteen or twenty paces, the troopers withdrawing into the corral and rushing from side to side, to fire at warriors as they appeared. But he nevertheless thought it proper to reprimand their officers

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[33]Carpenter, "Brunettes," Brady, Indian Fights, p. 132. Dog Soldiers informed George Bent that the wagon corral was formed just in time to prevent the stronger Indian force from causing considerable damage to the column. Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 310.

[34]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 294. See also Hyde, Life of George Bent, pp. 310-311, and Stands in Timber, Memories, p. 179.

[35] Carpenter, "Brunettes," Brady, Indian Fights, p. 133. The regiment's historian would later write of a volley which threw the Indians back "as though they were thrown from a cannon." Glass, History of the Tenth Cavalry, p. 16.

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for "not commanding their men" and keeping them in their places.[36]

Accounts from both sides testify to a demonstration of supernatural "medicine" made at some point during the fight. But the details differ so dramatically that reconciling the two perspectives appears impossible -- though at least one person inside the corral apparently shared the Indians' belief in the efficacy of such medicine. While Carr used a new carbine (sent him by the Spencer company for "trial") to shoot down a warrior within thirty yards of the corral, he and Grover both missed another Indian boldly circling his pony within 50 to 100 yards, until the scout -- who, in Carr's indelicate explanation, "was a squaw man and had imbibed some of their [the Indians'] superstitions" -- began to think the man possessed of truly "big medicine." Only then did Grover notice that he had mistakenly set his sights for 500 yards. Taking one man, riding forward as though displaying his invulnerability, to be a "medicine man," Carpenter ordered several troopers near him to aim carefully, and was rewarded by seeing the man go down, "accompanied by a howl from the more distant Indians..."[37]

As Bullet Proof did not expose himself to such risks during the action, perhaps the unfortunate "medicine man" was one of his acolytes, though the Indian accounts do not clarify the point at which he began to dispatch them, one by one, to test his power with their lives. Two of the seven took no part in the test; they had expended their horses in the rapid ride to meet the enemy.

Even before any of their five comrades had completed a circle around the soldiers, two

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[36]Carr's account, Brady, Indian Fights, p. 140.

[37]Carpenter, "Brunettes," Brady, Indian Fights, p. 133.

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men were killed. Breaks the Arrow by a bullet to the spine and Bobtailed Porcupine by a shot over the right eyebrow. His horse felled when he had almost completed a circuit, Feathered Bear managed to walk away unhurt. White Man's Ladder, his horse thrice wounded, broke his ride short and retreated, while Little Hawk's horse fell, also hit three times. Little Hawk hit the ground running, only to be jerked back by the rope tied to his pony and his belt. He cut himself free and escaped.[38]

After the Indians retired to a slope about a mile away, they seemed to Carr to be "engaged in consultation. We could then get a good view of them and estimate their numbers." The lowest reckoning being 400 warriors. Carr used it in his initial telegraphic report for fear of exaggerating, though personally satisfied in the accuracy of his own count of at least seven hundred.[39] With the seemingly disheartened Indians temporarily out of range, the soldiers rearranged the wagons and hauled out such items as cracker-boxes with which to construct breastworks. Though ready to admonish the Tenth's officers for failing to control

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[38]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 295; Stands in Timber, Memories, p. 179. Stands in Timber states that all seven men were sent; the two men with robes, Bobtailed Porcupine and Breaks the Arrow, were to lift them in the air four times when they passed the soldiers, then gallop back to their starting point. But the soldiers killed both men before they could escape.

[39]Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC. Dr. Brady indignantly accused Lt. Graham, then deceased, of violating protocol after this repulse by approaching General Carr directly (rather than through Carpenter) to propose that the command abandon all wagons, mount the teamsters on the mules, and retreat as quickly as possible. Told by Carr of this suggestion, Carpenter rejected it, confident that as he had defeated the Indians once, he could do so again. Carr replied to Brady's claim by conceding that there had been talk of leaving the vehicles and heading straight for the line of the railroad, instead of confining the command to routes accessible to wheeled traffic. But he declared himself unable to recall if Graham had advocated such a course. Carr insisted that there would have been no impropriety in approaching him: "Any officer can talk to his commander, and I had been giving orders from time to time directly to him and his men." Brady, Indian Fights, footnote, p. 133, and Carr's account, p. 141.

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their men, Carr admitted of this lull: "Our soldiers wanted to scalp the dead Indians, of whom about ten were lying too near the corral for their friends to carry off. We prevented this till, while we were going around the corral rearranging, the soldiers got the chance to scalp them." But two of the fallen warriors survived long enough to shoot at the approaching soldiers, wounding one with an arrow and another with a pistol shot.[40]

While the defenders ate their lunch, and waited for the Indians to renew the attack, Carr conversed through Grover with a young Cheyenne whom he had shot, and who lay too close to the corral for rescue. An acquaintance of Grover, he apparently knew of no other troops in the country save Bradley's, then on the Thickwood, and told Carr that the Indians' camp, some eight hundred lodges of Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapahoes, was located at Chalk Bluffs, on a fork of the Solomon, where the Indians obtained material for whitening robes. They had come, he said, "to drive us out of that country, and that they would fight us as long as we remained on Beaver Creek, which belonged to them."[41]

Watching the clusters of distant Indians, Carr thought he discerned movements and "pow-wowing" indicating preparations for a renewed attack, and later acknowledged unofficially that he "really did not expect to get out of that fix. If the Indians had had

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[40]Carr's account, Brady, Indian Fights, pp. 140-141. According to one reporter, "One reason why the Indians have such an aversion to fighting against negro troops is because of the penchant which the darkeys have for taking their hair. One scalp will meet with nearly as great a pow-wow in a negro camp as it would among the tepes of the Indian." The blacks, he added, "make admirable Indian fighters, and seem to enjoy the sport." Davis, "A Summer on the Plains": 305.

[41]Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC. At a conservative estimate of two fighting men per lodge, such a camp should have been able to field a force of warriors much greater than Carr's figure of 700.

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sufficient resolution, being seven to one, they ought to have used us up." Even the impression that their numbers were diminishing only made Carr think that the Indians were seeking a point where they would have a better chance in attacking. But when the wounded brave finally motioned with his hand toward Carr, he was reassured by Grover's explanation: "'He wants you to go away; says his heart is bad.' This pleased me very much."

Carr was now satisfied that the Indians had given up, and that those who remained were merely friends of the dead, waiting for the soldiers to depart. With perhaps eight hours gone since the first shots, the soldiers moved toward the Beaver for some badly needed water, with wagons again in double column, the cavalry horses now sheltered between them, and the men walking in the open. They left the Indians to possess the field and, wrote Carpenter, "set up a mournful howl over the remains."[42]

Carr did not report the fate of his Indian informant, whom Grover identified by the name Little Crow, save to term him "mortally" wounded. But one of the slain victims recovered by the Indians, identified by Grinnell as Breaks the Arrow, was not judged by them to have been fatally shot: his corpse was found with a small cut on the neck, and Carpenter's soldiers allegedly admitted killing the wounded man before departing, by the novel cruelty of opening his vein, so that he would die more slowly.[43]

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[42]Carpenter, "Brunettes," Brady, Indian Fights, pp. 134, and Carr's account, p. 141. Bent states that the soldiers pulled out quickly, leaving a number of ration boxes behind them; the Indians took the hard bread, but disliked the bacon. Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 311.

[43]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 246; Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 311. Grinnell, without citing his source, also states that the troopers claimed to know of at least two Indians killed, but could not tell the total dead, and that they expressed "surprise that the Indians showed so little fight" -- quite a different impression than those conveyed by Carr and Carpenter. Bent identified the soldiers' post-battle victim as Bobtail Porcupine, and stated

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Both Carr and Carpenter had noticed individual warriors exposing themselves in defiance of Army firepower, and both conveyed the impression that at Beaver Creek the soldiers were hard-pressed to stave off an earnest Indian bid to overrun and annihilate them. But George Grinnell later claimed that the Indians never actually charged the troops, and even that the engagement was "not a fight at all but the testimony of Bullet Proof's power," during which only two Cheyennes died. It is true that -- whatever the Indians' intentions -- displays of personal daring, as well as the protracted fighting portrayed by military accounts, could be quite consistent with light casualties. Yet to accept the Grinnell version uncritically one must reject utterly the officers' report of a lengthy fight, and of heavy Cheyenne casualties -- ten warriors killed, their bodies actually left on the field, at a cost of three troopers wounded. Perhaps the Indian version of events -- apart from any tendency to minimize, conceal, or simply forget casualties -- simply stressed that which seemed most worthy of preservation in memory. A culture which links spiritual power to martial success may remember most keenly the drama of a shaman's tragic failure.

But if the fight was indeed conceived in the desire to prove one man's spiritual power, that truth might escape even the Indian-wise Grover: the Cheyennes' abrupt termination of an action which exposed them to the repeating firepower of well-prepared foes would not have seemed unusual, even if their casualties had been light. Carpenter, however, reflected that such Indian losses, compounding those of Forsyth's recent fight, "must have had a sobering

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that he was not yet dead when examined by his comrades. No warrior named Little Crow is mentioned as a casualty in the Cheyenne accounts; but it was common for warriors to bear more than one name. For the resultant historical problems in identifying participants in battles on the Plains, see Gregory F. Michno, Lakota Noon: The Indian Narrative of Custer's Defeat (Missoula, MT: Montana Press, 1997), p. 200, n. 364.

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effect."[44]

The Cheyennes returned to camp with their dead slung across the backs of horses, and placed Bullet Proof's two slain followers on a bed inside a lodge, while Bullet Proof had recourse to the usual excuse of a holy man faced with evidence of a bloody failure. His disciples, he said, had neglected to follow his instructions in every detail: rather than circling the troops at a distance and only gradually moving closer, they had ridden in close from the beginning. Though Bent states that some warriors had begun leaving the field after the first two acolytes were shot, "disgusted" by the failure of his promises, this argument was apparently accepted. The father of one slain youth urged Bullet Proof not to feel badly -- and offered in consolation the typical Plains sentiment that it was better for a man to die in battle than of natural causes. Thus acquitted of blame, Bullet Proof tried to bring the dead men back to life. While it was said that Bobtailed Porcupine moved his hand, or perhaps even raised it over his head and drew up his leg slightly, the attempted resurrection failed, and Bullet Proof (hardly in a position to foist this latest failure on his subjects' disobedience) conceded defeat.[45]

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[44]Brady, Indian Fights, p. 134. Later, remembering with slight advantages, Carr observed with satisfaction that despite the odds against him he had "only two wounded and killed more than a dozen Indians and got the information which took me to Chalk Bluffs." E.A. Carr, letter to W.F. Cody, July 2, 1906, typescript copy, Box 3, Carr Papers.

[45]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 296-297; Stands in Timber, Memories, pp. 179-180; Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 31. After a better-known supernatural fiasco, a violation of procedure was similarly cited by the Comanche medicine man Isatai, whose "bullet-proof" medicine proved inadequate against buffalo-hunters' rifles during the Second Battle of Adobe Walls (1874). The explanation's utility has endured; thus, in the 1960s, Congolese shamans (whose rules included never looking backward before going into battle) similarly rationalized their "Simba" followers' failure to ward off bullets. Anthony Mockler, The Mercenaries (New York: Macmillan, 1969), p. 200.

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Followed by Indians content to observe from a distance, the cavalrymen camped on Beaver Creek. They dug rifle pits for outlying pickets who would warn of any attack. But despite howling noises heard around the camp that night, no attack came, a failure Carpenter ascribed to the Indians' inability to find a weak point in the position. On October 18, only a few warriors followed the column as it took the shortest wagon route to Fort Wallace, and even these disappeared from sight at about noon. During a halt at Sheridan City, at the terminus of the Kansas Pacific railway, Carr was able to report by telegraph to Sheridan. As Carpenter's black troopers rode through town, their captain saw the inhabitants, including a "rather tough lot of citizens and desperadoes," crowd into the streets -- "and when they saw the troopers and their horses decorated with the spoils from the Indians whose dead bodies we had captured, they knew that we had been in a successful fight and they gave us a perfect ovation."[46]

Having marched 214 miles in nine days, the buffalo soldiers arrived at Fort Wallace on October 21, and in response to Carr's praise of both officers and men, General Sheridan issued a departmental order, calling attention to the fight made by an escort "under the command of Brevet-Lieut.-Col. Louis H. Carpenter, Tenth Cavalry," and tendering Sheridan's own thanks for "the gallantry and bravery displayed by this small command against so large a body of Indians."[47] On February 11, 1869, Sheridan, from his departmental headquarters "In

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[46]Carpenter, "Brunettes," Brady, Indian Fights, p. 134.

[47]J. Schuyler Crosby, A.A.A. General, General Field Orders, No. 4, Headquarters Department of the Missouri, Oct. 27, 1868, in Brady, Indian Fights, p. 145. Carr's praise for the black troops' conduct at Beaver Creek, whether at the time or almost forty years later, apparently was not connected to his opinion regarding their actual recruitment, as he later declared that "I have always been opposed to the enlistment of Indians and negroes, although

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the Field" at Medicine Bluff Creek, I.T., recommended that Carpenter be brevetted as colonel specifically for the Beaver Creek fight. In 1898 Carpenter received a Medal of Honor -- for both the Beaver Creek affair and his own zeal in relieving Forsyth.[48]

And there the matter might have rested. It had been a colorful little fight against superior numbers, and its importance lay not in any dramatic Indian defeat, but in giving General Carr intelligence on which he based subsequent operations. The issue of just who had actually commanded the troops at Beaver Creek, apparently never an issue in military circles, was unwittingly raised in 1904, when Captain Carpenter's narrative of the fight, solicited and annotated by Episcopal priest Cyrus T. Brady, was published in Pearson's Magazine. Carr objected to the article's portrayal of him as, at first, a mere passenger, then as a senior officer limiting himself to the role of rifleman. He had not, he insisted in his reply, declined the command. Nor had Carpenter offered it to him, since he been exercising command the entire time.

It was, Carr argued, a role he could not avoid, regulations dictating that when troops combined and did duty together the highest-ranking line officer was to command the whole -- although on this occasion, excluding civilian employees, Carr's "combined" troops consisted of two companies from the same cavalry regiment, assigned to escort duty under an

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I loyally carried out the policy of the Government when declared." Carr typescript, p. 30, Box 3, Carr Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute.

[48]Sheridan to Bvt. Major Gen. J.M. Schofield, Feb. 11, 1869, Louis H. Carpenter file, reel 435, M1064, Letters Received, Commission Branch, AGO, 1863-1870, NA. Sheridan also recommended in the same document that Captain Bankhead be brevetted for the "prompt, energetic, and meritorious services rendered by him during the present campaign; and especially in the prompt relief of Colonel Forsyth's beleaguered party...."

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officer of that regiment. Carr conceded that he had doubtless described himself a guest, and had not interfered "unnecessarily." But he still maintained that his long experience on the plains and with Indians "rendered it incumbent on me to exercise my judgement."[49]

Even while publishing both officers' versions, Brady could not quite suppress his view that Carr's own letter had twice "practically admitted" that he had not exercised command -- first by wishing that he had done so formally, and then by admitting to his guest status and lack of interference. But, anxious to pour oil on the waters he had inadvertently stirred (and avoid alienating a potential source of valuable Indian wars material), Brady purported to see no serious discrepancy between the accounts. He even admitted that his own note, accompanying Carpenter's magazine piece, was probably misleading: "I did not suppose that any one thought that General Carr sat around and twiddled his thumbs while the fighting was going on."[50]

Perhaps, in Carr's eyes, Brady merely compounded his original offense by publishing a reply from Carpenter, in the professed belief that this would satisfy the friends of both men. Carpenter was quite positive that he had vainly offered command to his superior; argued that many senior officers had been similarly escorted without taking command; and, while admitting that Carr had naturally been consulted on the route of march and other details, denied that he had at any point taken formal command. Therefore it would have been

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[49]Carr's account, Brady, Indian Fights, p. 142. Carr added to the signature on his reply the words "Brevet Major-General and Congressional Medallist."

[50]Although he attempted to placate Carr, Brady's comments on Beaver Creek had so estranged the old soldier that he could not secure his account of the far more important Summit Springs fight, despite writing to Carr several times with questions regarding the action. Brady, Indian Fights, p. 172.

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"manifestly improper" for Carr to give orders directly to either officers or men. An apparently surprised Carpenter, offering his own brevet and Sheridan's congratulatory order to support his position, avowed that in thirty-five years he had never heard of any question regarding the commander of the troops engaged.[51]

Carpenter had the weight of evidence on his side, including Sheridan's order describing him as escort commander, which was not only circulated within Sheridan's command, but was made easily available to officers throughout the Regular establishment by its appearance in a semi-official service publication.[52] General Carr was apparently alone in his belief that he had assumed command, and even his own narrative is unclear regarding the point at which he supposedly did so. One might charitably assume that Carr, after almost four decades, was simply impaired in his recollections. However, the report which Carr submitted scarcely six months after the fight had made claims identical to his twentieth-century assertions -- though in the matter of assigning credit for leadership at Beaver Creek, the senior officer's report had apparently carried no weight with his own superiors.

Despite this, in 1869 he had not protested against a junior officer receiving credit for what he claimed as his own combat leadership. Yet Carr certainly had a penchant for controversy, the premier chronicler of the frontier army lamenting of his distinguished military career that "a generously proportioned and highly sensitive ego also made it a tedious chronicle of invidious comparison and petty contention."[53] The world of the army's peacetime

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[51]Louis H. Carpenter, "General Carpenter's Reply." Brady, Indian Fights, p. 144

[52]Army and Navy Journal 7 (Nov. 7, 1868): 186.

[53]Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 161.

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officer corps, chronically short of military glory, but rich in petty and sometimes inane bickering, was an ideal greenhouse in which to nurture real or fancied grievances, and the feisty Carr had even managed to take offense at the famously pro-Army illustrator Frederic Remington, who (or so Carr believed) had publicly ridiculed him. If at the time Carr failed to publicly question the honors bestowed on Carpenter, perhaps, increasingly jealous of his own laurels in retirement, he was provoked into belated objections by Brady's challenge to his memories.[54]

But it is possible that Carr's reply to Carpenter contained not merely the truth as the old soldier saw it, but a large measure of objective truth as well. The two officers' stories of requests for Carr to take command are of course incompatible. But Carr's story, suggesting that the ranking officer present, habitually addressed as "General," might simply "assume to give orders," could easily reflect the reality of rank as experienced by those under him. Carr might have misconstrued a request by Carpenter that he take responsibility for some particular action into a request that he take command, with Carr's later regret that he had not taken "formal" command hinting at the spontaneous nature of this arrangement.

If Carpenter's own memory erred in his claim that he vainly offered Carr command during the fight itself, it might still be possible that a captain's deference to his superior led to

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[54]Remington, in an article for Harper's Weekly of January 16, 1892, had unwittingly offended by emphasizing Carr's administrative concern, as colonel of the Sixth Cavalry, with "bacon and forage." Frederick Remington, "The Galloping Sixth," Samuels, Collected Writings, pp. 91-93, While he evidently intended a humorous contrast to romantic visions of a cavalryman's martial preoccupations, two modern editors allege that Remington's comments were provoked by his host's failure to provide "the usual 'great man' reception" the famed artist had come to expect among the troops. See Samuels, Collected Writings, pp. 605-606.

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consultations with Carr, and even concessions to his opinion, reinforcing Carr's own impression that he had been in command all along.[55] Even if Carpenter formally retained command, Carr could easily have given orders which subordinates would tend to obey, especially if these orders did not clash with previous instructions from Carpenter; and in the heat of action, Carpenter might easily overlook the fact that his "passenger" was actually doing so. However, Carr's claim that he was unambiguously in command does not seem plausible.

At midnight on the evening of October 21, a telegram from Sheridan (delivered to Fort Wallace by courier due to a break in the wire) instructed Major Carr to join the Fifth Cavalry on the Saline, north of Buffalo Tank, by the next day's train. With him would go fifteen days' forage and rations for his new command, as well as "Forsyth's Scouts," now refitted and under the command of Lt. Silas Pepoon. Carr was to lead the Fifth in marching against the Indians who had attacked him on the Beaver, following their trail wherever it might lead.[56] Disembarking at the Buffalo Tank station and catching sight of a buckskin-clad horseman, Carr initially judged him one of the "so-called scouts" who might be found hanging about frontier railroad depots, drawing the long bow for the benefit of gullible tenderfeet. But as the man rode over and politely offered to inform Colonel Royall of Carr's presence, his "splendid physique, nonchalant manner, promptness to act and superb horsemanship drained, as regarded him, my prejudices...and thus was my first and very business-like meeting with

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[55] "General Carpenter's Reply," Brady, Indian Fights, p. 143.

[56] P.H. Sheridan, telegram to E.A. Carr, Oct. 21, 1868, in Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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'Buffalo Bill.'" Judging Cody's eyes "as good as a field glass," Carr would later deem him the best white trailer he had ever seen.[57]

Royall's force had just returned from a twenty-day scout, with spent horses "leg-weary" and the men expecting time to rest and refit. But Carr did not delay. The three miles' distance from the railroad line made it impossible to transfer the needed supplies to the detachment's camp in less than a day and a half. But by constant labor Carr was ready to march in two, and made 36 miles on October 24 before camping on the Solomon's south fork. Foregoing a Sabbath rest, Carr continued his march on October 25 north by northwest, acting on the information gained on the Beaver and finding a creek on which Indians had recently camped. Carr followed their trail up the creek for eight miles, according to Mr. Cody, only to see mounted warriors suddenly appear on hills to the south and west.[58]

The column's advance guard, Company M and Pepoon's scouts, charged the Indians "handsomely," as did Company H, sent in support. The Fifth's officers won Carr's praise by driving the Indians some six miles and out of sight of the column, despite a visible enemy strength which reportedly grew to some four to five hundred warriors. But while the warriors continued to give ground until nightfall, the soldiers exhausting many of their ponies in the pursuit, no army commander could hope to measure victory in conquered prairie. As evidence of achievement, Carr could report capturing three Indian ponies, killing five others, and slaying no fewer than ten warriors, at a cost of one Company M man and five horses

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[57]Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC; Carr typescript, pp. 3-4, Box 3, Carr Papers.

[58]Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC; Cody, Life, p. 212.

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wounded.[59]

Still clinging to the trail, Carr took the rest of the column into camp at dark. But on finding that the troopers he had dispatched in pursuit, having exhausted many of their horses, were now being pressed by the Indians in their turn, Carr himself led five more companies out on foot to cover their return to camp. Indians remained in the area all night, emitting wolf-howls, and at one point firing down at Carr's camp from a bluff. They inflicted no casualties, though an officer dubbed one Indian bullet a "crack shot" after it broke the plate from which he was eating.[60]

Since his supply train of some seventy-six wagons seemed incapable of maintaining the pace he had set for his horsemen, Carr moved out at daylight on October 26 -- after ordering his men to abandon and burn fifteen of the vehicles, as well as all tents and "Camp and Garrison Equipage." The extra mules were hitched to the remaining wagons, making eight-mule teams.[61] Following the trail up the creek 42 miles, first to the west, then to the south and east, the soldiers passed at about noon an Indian campsite used the previous night. Two

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[59]Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC; Regimental Returns for September and October, 1868, Fifth Cavalry, reel 52, M744, Returns for Regular Army Cavalry Regiments, 1833-1916, NA. Carr estimated the number of Indians who "showed themselves" that day as only about 350, and gave the more precise casualty figure, while the regiment's returns vaguely recorded killing or wounding from twenty-five to thirty Indians, besides "a good number of their Ponies."

[60]Price, Across the Continent, p. 132;Cody, Life, pp. 210-214.

[61]Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC; Carr to Sheridan, Oct. 27, 1868, in copy book, Military Department of the Missouri Reports 1869-75, p. 178, Military Division of the Missouri Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute; E.M. Hays, "Story of An Indian Campaign," typescript, Order of the Indian Wars file I-3, U.S. Army Military History Institute. Hayes states that Carr went so far as to burn his excess forage.

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hours later Carr's men found about two hundred warriors disputing their advance, and Company M of the Fifth "skirmished constantly" throughout the day.[62]

Carr knew that capturing the Indians' village was the most desirable objective, and ignored their apparent attempts to lure him from the trail. Instead, he hoped to follow it to "their train of lodges, families, &c. and thus bring them to bay." While the wagons rolled forward in two columns, covered on front, flanks, and rear by troops who threw out skirmishers and flankers, "we paid no attention to Indians, except to shoot at them when they came close enough, as I knew it would be idle to chase them, and would only delay the march."[63] Nor was Carr deterred by a woman's scalp found "stuck up on a ramrod in our path, apparently for some superstitious reason," or by the Indians' afternoon tactic of firing the luxuriant buffalo grass at short intervals to the windward of his line of march. Despite the terrible discomfort of marching into the midst of smoke and flame, the burning grass did not grow so thickly as to prevent Carr's troops from passing through it.

After Carr found an oxbow bend and had his troops bed down only a short distance from his first night's camp, Indians again fired a few nocturnal shots, "but my men, having

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[62]Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC; Carr to Sheridan, Oct. 27, 1868, copy book, p. 178, Military Division of the Missouri Papers.

[63]Carr to Sheridan, Oct. 27, 1868, copy Book, p. 178, Military Division of the Missouri Papers; Hayes, "Story of an Indian Campaign," Order of the Indian Wars file I-3, Carlisle Barracks. According to General Hayes, Carr's wagon train, afflicted by inexperienced teamsters and mules in poor condition, was lagging some three miles to the rear of the cavalry when three or four hundred warriors suddenly materialized. The train closed up and fought off the Indians as it continued to move; its escort of some forty dismounted men, including convalescents, screened an open space of roughly one hundred yards between the two wagon columns, while civilian teamsters "did good service" with muzzle-loading Springfield rifles until Carr sent three troops to the train's assistance.

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become somewhat accustomed to them, slipped out and drove them away." On October 27, the twisting trail, which had turned north to form a quadrilateral pattern, actually led the troops to a point near that where Carr had first struck it. This obliged the column to make dogged crossings of the Solomon's North Fork, of the Short Nose, of the Prairie Dog, and of the Beaver. But Carr's persistence was having a corrosive effect on his quarry; only a few Indians were seen on the march, and these kept at a great distance, "but they commenced to drop their property," while setting the grass ablaze once more in the hope of stopping the soldiers.[64]

The report which Carr dispatched to Sheridan that afternoon was pessimistic. The Indians appeared "to be marching as fast as we do, and I doubt whether we shall catch them; but we will try our best." Still, Carr had found hopeful signs in the form of burned or abandoned lodges and camp baggage, and had thus far killed seventy of the Indians' abandoned ponies.[65] Even keeping pace with such a rapidly fugitive village, and that while still encumbered by some sixty wagons and a half-dozen ambulances, was far more than some commanders would have achieved. Carr finally halted "at dark on a naked prairie, where we remained without water till daylight."[66]

Satisfied that henceforth any wagon would be a handicap, Carr had his men eat breakfast and put rations in their haversacks. He then marched them north, and left his train

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[64]Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

[65]Carr to Sheridan, Oct. 27, 1868, copy book, p. 178, Military Division of the Missouri Papers.

[66]Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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to follow as best it could. Sticking to the Indians' trail by day, and even by moonlight until it could no longer be discerned, Carr finally made a dry camp. He found that abandoning the train had done no good, for the Indians' "sign" proved so difficult that his trailers could not follow it if they moved faster than the wagons he had left behind. Yet even at this slower pace, Carr's sheer persistence -- one of those qualities which Col. Hazen had deemed vital in the effective Indian fighter -- seemed to be having its effect, as the Indians abandoned to him still more camp equipment, and more played-out ponies.

But on the 29th the trail seemed to give out entirely. The scouts lost about twenty miles on two false scents as they vainly scoured the surrounding country, and Carr returned to the Republican, making camp long after dark. Heading back to Fort Wallace, he managed to flush a few "small squads" of Indians, and even found a substantial trail headed south. Sending two companies in pursuit, he wrote to Sheridan while they were still out, with the news that he would be back at Wallace by November 3. "I could not overtake the Indians," he informed his chief, "but drove them beyond the Republican, and away from the Buffaloes."

Aware of his function as a "beater" even while hoping to press home for a kill by his own command, Carr had in the course of his harassment obliged the Indians to abandon about 130 ponies, most of whom he had killed, as well as 2000 lodgepoles and fifty lodgeskins, together with dried meat, half-dressed robes, camp kettles, spades, axes, crowbars, and picks. Even a carbine and revolver had been jettisoned, along with thirty pounds of gunpowder. Carr himself had been obliged to abandon many horses and no fewer than 40 mules, and any renewed effort would require fresh animals as well as a "general refitting." The Indians had apparently scattered in every direction, with only a small number left on Carr's side of the

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Republican.[67]

The pursuing companies returned, having trailed the Indians to a point near the line of the railroad without managing to overtake them. Despite their escape, Carr seemed relatively satisfied with the results of his operations. In eighteen days he had marched 527 miles, killed "say twenty" or more Indians, "some of them chiefs," captured a large quantity of camp equipment, lodges, and "destroyed" scores of ponies -- as well driving all of the hostile bands "out of the State of Kansas."[68] This, at any rate, was his claim.

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[67]Carr to Sheridan, Nov. 1, 1868, in copy book, p. 179, Division of the Missouri Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute.

[68]Carr's Report, April 7, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC. In light of later events, Carr modified his immediate observations as to his command's effect on Cheyenne movements: "We hustled them, (there were about 700 warriors) out of Kansas; but some came back and the Dog Soldiers staid (sic) there all winter. Carr to Cody, July 2, 1906, Box 3, Carr Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute. Sheridan's departmental compilation credited Carr's men with killing thirty Indians in the fighting of October 25-26, with about 130 Indian ponies lost and "mostly killed." Record of Engagements, p. 13.

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CHAPTER SIX

General Winter

"He was impatient to proceed rapidly..."

Following the return of Carr's column, which had fought or pursued Indians throughout October with no conclusive results, Sheridan prepared to resume his offensive operations. He was intent, according to New York Herald reporter DeBenneville Randolph Keim, on "making this the end of the Indian wars in this section if he is let alone," and the journalist attempted to define for his readers the issues at stake: "A few chicken-hearted, so-called philanthropists, may have something to say out of ignorance of the question; but economy, humanity, as well as the future security of our great thoroughfares of travel, and the settlements which will naturally spring up along them, demand a vigorous war, a rigid punishment of offenders and a durable peace."[1]

As Keim admitted, Sheridan's troops could not yet boast of important victories. Nor had they inflicted significant punishment upon the Indians, despite Carr's dogged pursuit and his hopeful report of having driven his foes beyond the Republican. But Sheridan publicly expressed confidence, even as he quietly conceded a shortage of men, and particularly of

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[1]New York Herald, Nov. 8, 1868. In dispatching to the frontier the twenty-seven-year-old Keim, a veteran of Civil War reporting presumably responsible for his paper's exciting accounts of the Beecher Island fight, the Herald had initiated regular press coverage of the nation's Indian wars. For this post-Civil War development, see Oliver Knight, Following the Indian Wars: The Story of the Newspaper Correspondents among the Indian Campaigners (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960).

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precious mounted troops. Thus Sheridan professed to Colonel Bradley that he would be "very much delighted" if it were possible to have that officer join him, but frankly explained that General Sherman had given him the choice of Bradley's Twenty-seventh Infantry or the Fifth Cavalry being permanently assigned to his Department: "Well, of course under the existing state of things I asked for the 5th Cavalry..."

Sheridan's plans for Bradley were modest. Without suggesting that he expected his force to strike a smashing blow, Sheridan declared: "I want the Indians cleared out of the Republican country & I hope you will stir them up lively...if Possible I hope to worry the Red Skins before long."[2] However, Bradley seems to have failed in agitating the Indians; a scout made on November 1, fifteen miles to the east and south, discovered no "sign," and the following day Bradley began marching "home" toward camp on the forks of the Republican, hoping for a speedy return to garrison life. It was desolate country, and after sending Major Brisbin and a supply train ahead to Fort McPherson, Bradley termed the older man "quite out of patience...He says if he had his way, the Indians should keep this country, for he 'dont believe its included in the plan of salvation.'"

No Indians appeared to contest possession of the landscape, and the only gunshot casualty was the column's surgeon, who made "a fine surgical case for himself" with a carelessly placed bullet during a hunt. ("This chasing buffalo is a break-neck business," Bradley decided, "and requires a cool head, and steady hand.")[3] After taking two troops to

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[2]P.H. Sheridan, letter to Luther P. Bradley, [no day indicated], Nov. 1868, Box 5, Bradley Papers.

[3]Luther P. Bradley, letter to Mrs. Bradley, Nov. 6, 1868, Box 2, Bradley Papers.

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Beaver Creek for a two-day hunt, he started for "home" through the season's first snow, with four tons of buffalo meat. His command had neither thrashed the Indians nor made any great inroads into the buffalo population.

But Bradley seemed, if perhaps not satisfied, then at least sanguine over the expedition's results -- believing, like Sheridan, that "we have got the Indians out of this country at last," with the Sioux having gone north to the Powder river country and the Cheyennes and Arapahoes south to the Arkansas. Bradley thought that if this was true, it would "let us off sooner than we expected," though after six weeks of campaigning, much of it spent in the saddle, Bradley proclaimed himself "as strong, and hard, as an old frontiersman, and as brown as a russet apple." He had found the routine of constant scouting and hunting fatiguing, yet enjoyable.[4]

Sheridan was by now fully committed to the concept of a winter campaign, which promised to be not at all enjoyable. Indeed, he seems to have thought it unprecedented, apparently not being aware of previous Army efforts, including "Kit" Carson's successful winter operations against the Navajos during the Civil War. As early as October 19 he had told Sherman that "I cannot promise you much success until the cold weather comes on," since the current situation was much like chasing the the Confederate commerce raider Alabama. But he hoped that "so many troops moving" might have some success.[5] Sheridan's object in launching such a winter campaign was to strike the Indians a hard blow

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[4]Bradley to Mrs. Bradley, Nov. 10, 1868, Box 2, Bradley Papers.

[5]Sheridan to Sherman, October 19, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3d sess., no. 18, p. 3.

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and force them onto the reservation; "or, if this could not be accomplished, to show to the Indian that the winter season would not give him rest; that he, with his villages and stock, could be destroyed, that he would have no security, winter or summer, except in obeying the laws of peace and humanity." Although there was apparently no objection to fortuitous clashes with other "hostile" bands, active prosecution of the campaign was to be confined to the Cheyennes and Arapahoes.

Toward this end, Sheridan would employ three columns. The first, marching from Fort Bascom, New Mexico, under the command of Major (Brevet Lieutenant Colonel) A.W. Evans, was to operate along the main course of the Canadian River, establish a forward depot at Monument Creek, and remain out as long as it could be supplied. Major Carr's column, of seven Fifth Cavalry troops, was to leave Fort Lyon, Colorado, and unite with a force under Captain (Brevet Brigadier General) William H. Penrose, 3rd U.S. Infantry. Their troops would establish a depot on the headwaters of the the North Canadian, then operate south toward the Antelope Hills and the headwaters of Red River.

These two columns, it was officially admitted afterward, "were really beaters in and were not expected to accomplish much." It was the third and largest column, under General Sully, which was expected to strike a major blow, after first establishing its own new supply depot in the Indian Territory and marching from this advanced base to strike the Indians, either in the Indian Territory on the headwaters of the Washita, or still farther south on the branches of the Red River. This "main column" was to consist of eleven troops of the Seventh Cavalry under Custer and a full mounted regiment of newly raised Kansas volunteers, along with several companies of the Third and Fifth Infantry, the whole being organized by

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Sully at Fort Dodge.[6] The new Kansas regiment would have as its colonel none other than Samuel J. Crawford, who had resigned as governor in order to wage war on the Indians raiding his state.

While three troops of the Tenth Cavalry stayed at Fort Cobb, where so many Indians had already gathered, another was based at Fort Arbuckle, and four troops did duty protecting the Kansas frontier. The four remaining troops, B, F, G, and K, joined by Company L of the Seventh Cavalry, marched toward Lyon from their camp near Fort Dodge, to make up Captain Penrose's column. Such a mounted force might have a better chance than a column of infantrymen to overtake fugitive Indians. However, its commander planned a further refinement, and Penrose informed his officers on October 20 that they would have to set out in five days on a sixty day's expedition, without wagons -- or forage for their animals. The wagon train already brought from Fort Dodge was turned in to the post quartermaster, and preparations begun, troopers firing at targets in the knowledge that the command might have to take the field on very short notice. Despite Penrose's Civil War successes as a divisional commander and Sheridan's apparent confidence in him, the irascible Captain Armes was skeptical of his ability to march without grain through country where grass was so scarce.

The well-known plainsman James B. "Wild Bill" Hickock was among the scouts who accompanied the column departing on November 10, 1868. A heavy snowstorm came up on November 15, and 25 horses gave out that day already broken down by the lack of forage. They were shot so as to leave no living animals for the Indians, and Armes feared that Penrose's command would be placed afoot if it attempted to march much farther. On the

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[6]Record of Engagements, pp. 14-15.

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morning of November 17, fourteen more horses were shot.[7] Penrose's command had been out just eight days.

Fresh signs of buffalo and Indians were found, and thirteen horses shot, on November 20. During the march a snow storm obliged the men to seek what shelter they could under large rocks while the animals fed on cottonwood bark. With no dry wood for cooking fires, buffalo soldiers who had managed to kill rabbits for that evening's meal were forced to eat them raw.

When the column turned onto an old trail, some recognized it as that made by Lt. Col. Joseph E. Johnston's column during a survey of Kansas's southern boundaries in 1857. (Armes, however, received the impression that Johnston had somehow made the trail during his service as a Confederate general.) Ostensibly rationed for over forty days, the command was already on less than half rations after roughly two weeks -- though this was supplemented by mule meat, from pack animals deemed disabled and accordingly condemned to slaughter.[8]

Still in the field, and more adequately supplied, Bradley's command had suffered no such loss of animals. On November 11 Bradley left the Thickwood to head down the Republican, and four days later scouts reached him with Sheridan's orders to have his command in on the last day of the month. Though the river froze over that night, Bradley found himself tolerably comfortable while keeping to his tent and fire, as snow fell hard

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[7]Armes, Ups and Downs, p. 280.

[8]Armes, Ups and Downs, p. 281; Utley, Frontiersmen in Blue, p. 122. Johnston's column had been charged with what Utley terms the "impossible dual mission" of exploring the area while simultaneously cooperating with forces under Col. Edwin Vose Sumner, then engaged in warlike operations against the Cheyennes.

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outside. With time to read John Lothrop Motley's popular history of the Dutch Republic, Bradley laid it down at night "with increased respect for the stout old Dutchmen, who fought so long and well for the right to think." What he thought of the current war, Bradley did not confide.

November 23 saw the ground covered with renewed snow, and Bradley (whose comparatively well-provisioned animals would escape the devastation to befall other forces that winter) ordered cottonwood cut as forage, to supplement that being carried. He also sent two Second Cavalry troops on a scout up the North Fork, another effort which found no Indians. The command finally broke camp on the 26th, a day later than scheduled, with weather so cold and dry that two men fainted on the morning's march. Bradley reached the Platte on November 29, and on the last day of the month held morning inspection before moving his camp to within two miles of Fort McPherson. He dined at the post that evening.[9]

Sheridan's main column would not set out until well into November. Despite his abortive October expedition, the command was to be General Sully's, and Sheridan was willing to secure for him howitzers "and everything else you ask for; but it will not do to wait or delay your movement for any consideration." Having learned that ex-governor Crawford and the newly raised 19th Kansas Volunteer Cavalry had reached Camp Beecher on November 9, Sheridan thought it essential that Sully meet him with supplies at Beaver Creek, as Crawford's own would be entirely exhausted when they reached that point. As for Sheridan's young protegé, Sully was admonished: "Custer should be allowed to regulate the

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[9]Bradley journal, Nov. 11-30, 1868, Box 1, Bradley Papers.

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affairs of his regiment and should be sustained in doing so."[10]

Custer had thrown himself into the task of preparing the Seventh Cavalry for the campaign with his customary energy and zeal. But not all of his adjustments were strictly necessary, or even harmless. He devoted some time to the common cavalry practice of "coloring" the regiment's Seventh Cavalry's horses, shuffling the available mounts so that each company could ride horses of a single color. Even Custer admitted (at least in retrospect) that many troopers, "who by long service and association in times of danger had become warmly attached to their horses," received the proposal badly, before going on to argue that the same factors ultimately rendered the new acquaintances "fast friends."[11] But such new bonds would have very little time to cohere before the Seventh faced a major engagement. Nor were sentimental enlisted men the only subordinates displeased.

Captain Benteen not only termed switching mounts on the eve of the campaign "the simplest rot," but, less plausibly, claimed that it was done because Benteen's was the best mounted troop. Thus Custer's spite, rather than an undue emphasis on display, robbed

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[10]P.H. Sheridan, letter to Bvt. Brig. Gen. A. Sully, Nov. 1868, Box 1, Series I, Alfred Sully Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

[11]Custer, My Life, pp. 208-09. See also GAC to EBC, Nov. 2, 1868, Mrs. Custer's transcript, reel 4, EBCC; John Ryan, Ten Years With General Custer (and other writings by John Ryan), ed. John M. Carroll (Bryan, Texas: n.p., 1980), pp. 44-47; E.S. Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences, Including the Washita Battle, November 27, 1868," The Cavalry Journal 37 (October, 1928): 483. The assembled troop commanders were allowed, in order of their seniority, to select the color they preferred, with the juniormost officer receiving the "brindles," or odds and ends. The band, non-commissioned staff, and all trumpeters were mounted on grays. In preparation for winter nights, the mounts were supplied with caparisons or "horse covers" of condemned government canvas, which in Corporal John Ryan's view did "not amount to much...we used them as long as they would hold together."

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Company H of its finest horses in Benteen's absence.[12] Captain Barnitz made no such accusation, but complained, "All my old horses were well trained, and very carefully trained, and the men were much attached to them, and now, just as we are to march on the campaign, every thing is to be turned topsy turvy!" Barnitz even predicted that the men's dissatisfaction would produce numerous deserters, though Private Harvey seemed more philosophical in recording the exchange, perhaps because he retained his old mount: "We got some very good ones and some bad ones too."[13]

In writing to Sheridan from the bivouac he had named "Camp Sandy Forsyth," Custer speculated that the hostile bands were probably all busy preparing their meat supplies for the winter, and that those who had recently battled Carr on the Republican might either head south of the Arkansas or flee to the Powder River country for the winter, it being "a favorite resort of theirs."[14] Having the command go into camp on the banks of the Arkansas would necessarily defer any movement against the tribes until winter had come in full force to the Southern Plains. But Custer saw that enlisting "so exacting and terrible an ally," almost as uninviting to the soldiers as to the Indians, had its advantages, and that success would dispel

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[12]Benteen's notes, Carroll, From the Civil War, p. 12. No novice himself at securing good horses at others' expense, Benteen even charged that excellent bay horses were taken from his own Company H and replaced with inferior horses of the same color.

[13]Barnitz journal, Nov. 10, 12, 1868, Box 3, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU; Harvey journal, Nov. 3, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 81. Enlisted man Harvey, presumably ill-acquainted with officers' nicknames, consistently recorded the name of the post as "Camp Andy Forsythe."

[14]Custer to Sheridan, 9 p.m., Nov. 2, 1868, container 6, reel 3, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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"the old-fogy idea" that winter was an insurmountable barrier to victory.[15] To his wife, Custer expressed grim confidence (and grimmer humor) in the prospect of finding "an abundance of Indians in the country to which we are going. If so, woe be onto Mr. Lo to say nothing of Mrs. Lo and the little Lo's." One effective blow, he thought, would intimidate the other Indians and lead to a peace more permanent than those concluded at Medicine Lodge.[16]

As Custer acknowledged, the Seventh Cavalry, which would soon have eleven of its twelve companies march together in the field, was a comparatively untested regiment. Each horse was ordered newly shod (with an extra fore and hind shoe fitted and carried in each rider's saddle pocket) and Custer would place unusual stress on marksmanship, holding two daily drills in target practice, with the farthest targets placed at 300 yards. The forty best shots were formed into a band of sharpshooters -- to march as a separate organization independently of the column, to be freed from guard and picket duty, and to enjoy "superior opportunities" for acquiring distinction.[17] Finding an adequate number of non-commissioned

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[15]Custer, My Life, pp. 204-205.

[16]GAC to EBC, Oct. 28, 1868, reel 4, EBCC. Custer's mention of "Mr. Lo" referred to a popular nickname for the Indian, derived from Alexander Pope's An Essay on Man: "Lo, the poor Indian! Whose untutor'd mind / Sees Gods in clouds, or hears him in the wind." Dippie, Nomad, p. 117, n. 2.

[17]Army marksmanship tended to be badly neglected. That spring, the department's Chief of Ordnance at Leavenworth Arsenal, with regard to the question of supplying infantry and cavalry companies with ammunition for target practice, had declared that 3000 cartridges annually, at an annual cost of $90.00, would be a "reasonable allowance" for each full company of 78 men, providing a total of only 38 practice shots per man, per year -- though this individual allowance, he added, would increase as the company diminished in strength. Copy of endorsement by Bvt. Lt. Col. J. McNutt, April 6, 1868, Letters & Telegrams Received, Ft. Hays, 1867-1889 RG 393, U.S. Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, NA.

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officers among the winning marksmen, Custer had only to select a commanding officer: he chose his friend Lieutenant (Brevet Colonel) William Winer Cooke.[18] Although Captain Benteen would later dismiss the sharpshooters as "a body-guard for Custer, simply a Hd. Qrs. Detail," with its existence deplored by all of Custer's captains, Lt. Godfrey remembered matters somewhat differently: "We youngsters named it the 'Corps d'elite' and the name stuck throughout the campaign."[19]

Perhaps Custer anticipated that Sully's column would be harassed on the march much as Carr's had been, as he wrote light-heartedly of expecting Cooke's sharpshooters "to do considerable good service in the way of picking off the Indians in our daily skirmish." Though combat was not their main function, he was also impressed by the marksmanship of the twelve Osage Indian guides who had joined his command -- "a splendid looking set of warriors," all superb horsemen, and well-armed with .50 Springfield breechloading rifles; provided with some white men and a few mixed-blood Arapahoes to act as scouts and guides. Custer planned to employ the Osages principally in trailing. On November 8, still encamped eight miles below Fort Dodge, he revealed to a friend his belief that he was to set out in three days: "The Indians have always considered that country as specially their own, but I hope to disabuse their minds of the idea." Custer assumed that he would probably

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[18]Custer, My Life, p. 207. Despite his friendship with the young Canadian, Custer repeatedly misspelled his name "Cook," an error also made consistently on official documents, and even perpetuated on the 1881 monument to the Seventh Cavalry's dead at the Little Bighorn. Steve Arnold and Tim French, Custer's Forgotten Friend: The Life of W.W. Cooke, Adjutant, Seventh U.S. Cavalry (Hamilton, Ontario: privately printed, 1993), p. 15.

[19]Godfrey, "Washita Battle": 483; Benteen's notes, Carroll, From the Civil War, p. 11. Benteen claimed that Cooke had been chosen because his uncle was a Washington lobbyist.

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remain out "until we can do the Indian considerable damage be it soon or late. I hope to find a village in two or three weeks, if I do, look out for scalps...." It struck him as probable that he would command a mounted force consisting of the Seventh Cavalry and the new regiment of Kansas Volunteers.[20]

But as he wrote, the process of transforming enthusiastic volunteers into a regiment ready for active service was still incomplete, though it had been intended that the unit take the field by November 1. The raw material was already in place, the first 140 recruits having been mustered in as early as October 19; on arriving at the 19th's camp near Topeka near sundown on October 27, David L. Spotts, one of a group of Johnson County recruits, passed ten encamped companies before finding his own.[21]

An eager 20-year-old whose next birthday would fall on February 15, Spotts was willing to enlist only if his recruiters omitted the oath's age requirement; they did so, agreeing with him that "a couple of months" would make no difference. In a little more than a week at "Camp Crawford," Spotts and his fellows elected their company officers, formed up to be sworn into federal service as L Troop of the 19th Kansas Volunteer Cavalry; and

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[20]G.A. Custer, letter to "My dear friend" (probably Detroit mayor K.C. Barker), Nov. 8, 1868, Merington Collection, NYPL. The Osages, headed by Little Beaver, had joined Custer the previous day, and impressed him by striking a stick of wood tossed on the ground with every shot they fired -- while galloping by at full speed on the untrained horses issued them. Keim confirms their skill: after General Sheridan gave the scouts the choice of Spencer repeating carbines or the single-shot "needle guns," they experimented with both. The decision "unanimously made by the Indians" favored the .50 Springfield: "In their trial they made some excellent shots and were greatly surprised at the long range of the weapons." New York Herald, Nov. 2, 1868.

[21]James Albert Hadley, "The Nineteenth Kansas Cavalry and the Conquest of the Plains Indians," Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society 10 (1907-08): 430; D.L. Spotts journal, Oct. 27, 1868, in Spotts, Campaigning with Custer, p. 39.

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drew uniforms, equipments, mounts, and finally their Spencer carbines.[22] On the evening of November 4 Companies D and G of the 19th Kansas, along with their horses, left Topeka on a special train bound for Fort Hays. These two troops were destined for escort duty between that post and the planned depot for Sully's column, soon to be known as Camp Supply.

The 19th's experienced and acerbic lieutenant-colonel, Horace L. Moore, seized what little time he had for drilling and disciplining the new soldiers. "Probably no like body of men, before or since, was so quickly whipped into shape," claimed a private, who attributed Moore's success to the large number of Civil War veterans in the ranks, many of them former cavalrymen.[23] Moore himself was faced with the imminent challenge of marching into the Indian Territory with a green regiment, rationed for only five days, and gathering (if possible) the necessary forage while on the move, as the 19th's miserly train of fifteen wagons precluded taking any grain. "This was the first experience of the regiment in making five days' rations do the work of ten," wrote Moore drily, "and, like all first efforts, it was not a complete success."[24] Fortunately the Kansans started out in good health; with only one man sick enough to leave behind in camp, the regimental surgeon believed that the troopers were

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[22] Spotts journal, Oct. 15, 18-19, 27-31, and Nov. 1-4, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, pp. 31, 32, 33, 39-45. On Tuesday, November 3 Spotts felt obliged to vote for President (casting his illegal ballot for U.S. Grant) after his comrades argued that he must have been 21 to have enlisted.

[23]Hadley, "Conquest of the Plains Indians": 432.

[24]Horace L. Moore, "The Nineteenth Kansas Cavalry in the Washita Campaign," Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society 6 (1897-1900): 38.

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"a fine lot of men physically; the best volunteer regiment I ever saw."[25] Colonel Crawford had not yet arrived, and so would miss the grand spectacle of the regiment's departure from camp on the morning of November 5, and its parade through Topeka, filling Kansas Avenue "from curb to curb" as its twenty-one buglers rode abreast as a platoon behind Lieutenant-Colonel Colonel Moore and his staff. Sidewalks, doors, "and even housetops were black with people to see the last of the men who were to be pitted against that hitherto unconquered terror -- winter on the plains."[26]

Having left behind bulky "A" tents in favor of each man carrying a shelter half (two of which would form a two-man "dog tent"), the Kansans marched southwards toward the designated rendezvous point, the site of the planned supply depot.[27] That Saturday, November 7, on the Neosho River and less than two miles from the small town of Emporia, the Kansans discovered that they were already running short of rations. Some quickly rose to the occasion, such as the trio who found on a nearby homestead "a tree (fruit tree) loaded with (feathered) fruit and we pick one each and go back the way we came."[28] Colonel Crawford, having arrived on horseback to assume command from Moore, now inherited his

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[25]Mahlon Bailey, "Medical Sketch of the Nineteenth Regiment of Kansas Cavalry Volunteers," Kansas Historical Quarterly 6 (Nov. 1937): 379.

[26]Hadley, "Conquest of the Plains Indians": 433. For a regiment which saw virtually no combat during its brief military career, the 19th Kansas is rich in recorded reminiscences. Of secondary works, that providing the most detailed description of the 19th's grueling march is Hoig, Battle of the Washita, pp. 98-111.

[27]Spotts journal, Nov. 5, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, pp. 45-46.

[28]Hadley, "Conquest of the Plains Indian": 434; Spotts journal, Nov. 7, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, p. 47. Hadley believed that "regulars or veterans" would have husbanded the available rations and thus found them ample.

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problems.

The country through which the Kansans marched became increasingly desolate. Passing on Sunday through Emporia, the regiment passed only occasional houses thereafter before reaching Elk or Cottonwood Creek. Here the men camped in the cold mud. That night came another deluge, which thwarted the previous night's successful trick of spreading rubber blankets on the ground beneath the "dog tents"; Private Spotts and comrades were awakened by rainwater coming up through the blankets -- provoking chattering teeth, a messy wade toward higher ground, and possibly Spotts' belated observation that his company's officers had retained their "A" tents.[29] On November 9 the men had no supper, for the rations had given out.[30]

Yet relief at the temporary post some men termed "Post Wichita" seemed at hand, and on November 12 the men cheered heartily as they came within sight of Camp Beecher, at the junction of the Big and Little Arkansas rivers. Here the bustling town of Wichita would eventually grow. But the Kansans found only a small garrison, of Co. H, Fifth U.S. Infantry, under Captain Samuel L. Barr, and a single adobe structure with a wooden "lean-to."[31]

Colonel Crawford, proud that his new regiment had managed to cover some 150 miles in a mere seven days, expected to find at Camp Beecher the ten days' rations and feed ordered by Sheridan from Fort Riley. But Barr's infantrymen had already consumed half the

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[29]Alfred Lee Runyon, "A. L. Runyon's Letters from the Nineteenth Kansas Regiment," Kansas Historical Quarterly 9.1 (Feb. 1940): 63; Spotts journal, Nov. 9, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, pp. 48-49.

[30]Spotts journal, Nov. 11, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, pp. 50-51.

[31]Spotts journal, Nov. 12, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, pp. 51-52.

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Kansans' food, and Lt. Thrasher, Crawford's quartermaster, received a mere three days' worth of forage. (A "board of survey" was quickly convened to examine the fate of the missing government property.) This logistical situation now forced upon Crawford an uneasy choice. He could either wait in camp and send back to Fort Riley for supplies, thus delaying his regiment's juncture with Sully's force, or load his wagons with the forage and five days' rations available, cross the Arkansas, and proceed as orders dictated -- "through an unknown country, with inexperienced guides" -- some 160 miles to Camp Supply. He decided to keep going, reasoning that the route to Supply had not yet been impeded by the snow, and the country was known to be rich in game.[32] Crawford transferred his command to the south bank of the Arkansas; horsemen pulled his wagons by rope cables across its wide, mostly dry bed, where vagrant currents alternated with sand-bars, "the whole a quaking, shivering quicksand."[33]

Having set out on November 14, the Kansans could expect a journey of at least a week. It was thought that buffalo killed en route would suffice to sustain the men, and on this first day the column's hunters met with some success.[34] But Crawford remained hampered by inadequate guides. As even the enlisted men knew, none of the column's scouts, including "Apache Bill" Simmons, Jack Stilwell, and his Beecher Island comrade Alison Pliley (now serving as Company A's captain) had been over the intended route -- and

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[32]Crawford, Kansas in the Sixties, p. 322. Thrasher ultimately refused to sign the transfers of forage submitted by Barr on the grounds that they were not accurate.

[33]Hadley, "Conquest of the Plains Indians": 436.

[34]Spotts journal, Nov. 14, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, p. 53.

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since it had long been federal policy to keep white men out of the Indian Territory, a region reserved for both displaced eastern Indians and other tribes, guides with such knowledge were rare.[35] Possessing only inaccurate maps of the country ahead, the guides would be forced to to rely on their plainscraft and general knowledge to feel out the way. A former trooper defended Crawford in the face of subsequent mishaps by citing the weather and the "absurd lack of stores" as causes, but added: "The universal ignorance of that country, including that of Sheridan himself, was at the bottom of it all." Under such unforeseen conditions, Crawford "manfully did his best, and left the worry and swearing to the general who gave the orders." [36]

Yet the journey started out well enough, and the first five days' marches would average a respectable twenty miles. Delays in improvising crossings over rivers and streams had been anticipated, and were met by Crawford's pioneer corps. The 19th Kansas camped that first night at Indian trader "Dutch Bill" Griffinstein's ranch on Cowskin Creek, or Cowskin Grove. Griffinstein himself was attempting to free two captives; having learned that that Cheyennes were holding a white woman and child, and had "sent her a few lines to her to find out who she was & to find out her wish." Griffinstein made attempts through

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[35]Spotts journal, Nov. 14, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, p. 52; J.R. Mead, letter to George W. Martin, Oct. 10, 1908, cited in Criqui, Fifty Fearless Men, pp.210-211. James R. Mead, a veteran trader among the Comanches headquartered at Towanda, near Camp Beecher, claimed to have offered to supply more suitable guides. But Crawford, according to Mead, refused, on the grounds that he lacked the authority and the money to hire additional men for his expedition. Though without supporting arguments, Mead branded Stilwell "the most overrated man" on the Plains (even belittling his role as a Beecher Island messenger on the grounds that it was safer to leave than to stay!), and in fact the man most responsible for the misfortunes which would overtake the 19th Kansas Cavalry.

[36]Hadley, "Conquest of the Plains Indians": 435-436.

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intermediaries to have her delivered up to him after receiving He received a plaintive letter, dated Saturday, November 4, 1868, from Clara Blinn, aged twenty-seven.[37]

Addressed to "Kind Friend," it began, "Whoever you may be I thank you for your Kindness to me and my child." Mrs. Blinn begged her reader to redeem the captives from the Indians "with Ponies or Any thing." The Indians had told her, "as near as I can understand they expect traders to come and they will sell us to them. Can you find out by this man and let me know if it is White Men If it is Mexicans, I am afraid they would sell me into slavery in Mexico...Cannot tell whether they killed my husband or not." In a postscript she added: "I am as well as can be expected But my baby is very weak."[38]

On the next day's march the Kansans witnessed a spectacle that would soon vanish from the West -- a prairie black for miles with herds of buffalo. Hunters again rode out to secure meat. But then, as the buffalo began to move toward the Kansans and seemed likely to overrun the column, the men began firing into the brown mass in sheer self-defense. The herd thundered past for nearly half an hour, and a few animals, bowling over at least one man and his unmanageable horse, forced the soldiers to open ranks and let them through. After an afternoon rain, the wind blew so fiercely through the Kansans' camp on the Ninnescah River that even the camp guards were called in lest they freeze to death. "We build a big

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[37]William Griffenstein to N.J. Taylor, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, n.d., reel 880, M234, Letters Received, Upper Arkansas Agency, 1868-70, OIA, NA. Mrs. Blinn had allegedly composed her letter with a pencil and paper smuggled to her in a pan of flour by a trader among the Indians -- presumably Griffenstein. Ross, Indian Captivity: 46.

[38]Clara Blinn, letter, Nov. 4, 1868, copy in reel 880, M234, Letters Received, Upper Arkansas Agency, 1824-80, OIA, NA.

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company fire," wrote Spotts, "but cannot get warm..."[39] No disaster resulted, though the night's exposure produced some frozen toes, some desertions, and a severe case of pneumonia.[40]

Such conditions demonstrated to Moore the shortcomings of the "dog" tent, made of thin ducking and barely longer than the average soldier, who in order to pitch his shelter

> must first hunt up a couple of sticks with a fork or crotch, stick them in the ground with the fork a couple of feet from the ground. Now he hunts another stick that will reach from one fork to the other, and then stretches the cloth over this, pinning the edges as close to the ground as he can. This leaves his tent open at both ends, with an open space of three or four inches between the cloth and the ground on each side. It always seemed to me that in zero weather this tent sacrificed a great deal in the interest of ventilation.[41]

In the morning the Kansans had to break the ice covering the creek to water their horses. With their hardtack all gone, they now lived entirely on buffalo meat, sans salt or pepper, and as they marched troopers lawlessly fired at any herd passing in range, despite the risk of being ordered to dismount and walk all day.[42] At that night's camp on the Chicaskia River, the horses were each given a quart of corn -- the last of their forage -- and permitted

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[39]Spotts journal, Nov. 15, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, pp. 53-54. Spotts presented an unflattering image of Kansas marksmanship: "Every man in the regiment fired on them but very few hit. In the excitement the men forgot to use the rear sight on their guns, so shot too high." Despite the poor shooting, the men had the luxury of cooking "only the choicest steaks" for Sunday supper, with enough left over for breakfast.

[40]Bailey, "Medical Sketch": 380.

[41]Moore, "The Nineteenth Kansas Cavalry": 43. Proving no respecter of persons, the wind also blew down every "A" tent used by the regiment's officers, as their stakes refused to hold in the sandy soil. Spotts journal, Nov. 16, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, p. 55.

[42]Spotts journal, Nov. 16, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, p. 55; Runyon, "Letters": 64-65.

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to graze as long as the men had light to see them. Now, like their riders, they would have to live off the countryside, or perish.[43]

By the 17th of November the command had passed beyond the timber, with no trees visible even along the creeks, though buffalo chips were still plentiful as a substitute fuel. Horses were not turned loose to graze; instead, one man in each "set of four" tied his lariat to those of three other mounts, and held on as the horses grazed in the best place available. On the 18th, after a 32-mile march to Medicine Lodge Creek, a spooked horse ignited a stampede among the grazing herd.[44] Several men were injured in the panic of hundreds of animals, and a day wasted. November 19 was devoted primarily to a search, which succeeded in recovering most of the herd.

With the Kansans now as dependent on the game they killed as any band of Plains nomads, even this slight delay was serious, though some men hunted for meat instead of for missing horses. "It will be buffalo meat or nothing from now on until we get to Camp Supply, or a train meets us," wrote Spotts. That it might be nothing had always been a hazard; the Indians themselves were opportunistic hunters, experienced in gorging when able and fasting when required. But planning to rely on game had been a risky procedure in executing the movements of ten troops of cavalry.

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[43]Spotts journal, Nov. 17, 1868, Spotts, Campaigning with Custer, p. 55; Bailey, "Medical Sketch": 380; Hadley, "Conquest of the Plains Indians": 437.

[44]Bailey, "Medical Sketch": 380; William E. Connelley, "John McBee's Account of the Expedition of the Nineteenth Kansas," Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society 1926-28 17 (1926-28): 361; Hadley, "Conquest of the Plains Indians": 437; Moore, "Nineteenth Kansas Cavalry": 38; Runyon, "Letters": 65. According to Lt. Col. Moore the stampede was confined to the mounts of troops B, I and K.

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When the march resumed almost a hundred men with horses still missing had to walk, though some were given rides by comrades who dismounted to take their own turn on foot. By now the hardtack hoarded by individuals had become a new currency, and Private Spotts bought a New Testament with six of his eight hoarded crackers. Men gazed hopefully at smoke to the west, thinking that it must be an expected supply train.[45]

But they saw only their own wagon train, arriving at their camp at Skunk Creek that morning. On Saturday, November 21, the command reached a creek where the supply wagons were expected, but Crawford's scouts found no signs of wagons or a trail. The men were left short of both food and tobacco, and Spotts wrote of "considerable grumbling," but added that the Kansans had not lost hope.[46] On Sunday, Captain Pliley and a detail of the ablest men and horses rode on ahead, into the falling snow, to search for Camp Supply. Most of those troopers left with the column were now walking -- slowly, so as to conserve energy. Orders forbade the men to mount to mount without permission, and their weakened horses gnawed at the green cottonwood trees cut down for them, or used their hooves to dig out what grass they could from beneath snow reaching a depth of fourteen inches. Men with frozen feet could ride their horses, if they still had them, or go in the wagons. Hunters feared to search for buffalo, lest they become lost.[47]

Throughout the day the snow continued to fall, "restricting vision to a radius of twenty

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[45]Spotts journal, Nov. 19-20, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, pp. 57-59.

[46]Spotts journal, Nov. 21, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, p. 58; Hadley, "Conquest of the Plains Indians": 438.

[47]Spotts journal, Nov. 22, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, p. 59. As Runyon quaintly put it, due to the men's weakness "we had to march very small." Runyon, "Letters": 65.

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yards and changing landmarks like magic. The column marched on in the gloom, suddenly appearing and disappearing, men and horses moving silently and white, like the sheeted ghosts of a long dead cavalry."[48] It was was at this camp, Hadley later declared, that a crisis was reached, and here, wrote a private, that the men, nearly starving and many almost barefoot, suffered more than at any other time: "I have seen five dollars offered for one small piece of buffalo meat, the size of a silver dollar. One man gave a good pair of buckskin gloves for one hard-tack. Many lay around the fires so nearly starved and frozen that they could scarcely move....The men began to talk of the good qualities of horse and mule meat...."[49]

The snow continued the next morning, to a depth of at least two feet, and made movement impossible; hunters venturing out into the blinding snow and biting wind soon returned empty-handed, and the hungry men huddled about their fires. "When some one begins to curse the Government or some one for our condition," wrote Spotts, everyone jumps on him, calls him a growler or tells him he will know how to appreciate a 'square meal' when we get to camp. The idea is to be cheerful under any circumstances and if we don't feel that way it is wise to keep still."[50] Among other worries, there was apparently

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[48]Hadley, "Conquest of the Plains Indians": 438.

[49]Hadley, "Conquest of the Plains Indians": 438; Runyon, "Letters": 65-66. While those of Spotts' company had apparently exhausted their own stores days before, Private A.L. Runyon praised the regimental officers' efforts to alleviate the men's sufferings, and singled out those of one troop in particular: "To my own knowledge, the officers of Co. 'M' gave nearly all their scanty stock of provisions to the men, and went without themselves."

[50]Bailey, "Medical Sketch": 380; Spotts journal, Nov. 23, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, p. 60.

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some anxiety that the wind might blow the snow into drifts that would trap the command and force the Kansans to eat their horses, "thereby defeating the object for which the regiment was raised."[51]

Unaware of the Kansans' difficulties, and perhaps without ever having anticipating their scale, Lt. Col. Custer prepared to march about 100 miles further south from his camp near Fort Dodge, and establish what was intended as a temporary supply depot, to be garrisoned by the infantrymen who had guarded the immense wagon train hauling stores toward that point. (While Dodge was the southernmost post in the direction likely to be taken by Sully, to use it as his column's base of supplies, while keeping open the lengthy lines of communication necessary, was deemed impractical.)[52] On November 11 the train of some 450 wagons -- formed up in four parallel columns, to guard against attack on the march -- crossed the Arkansas, with three companies of the 3rd Infantry, as well as one each of the 5th and 38th. That evening General Sully arrived from Fort Dodge to take command of the expedition. "We march tomorrow on the long contemplated expedition against the Indians," wrote Captain Barnitz in his journal, and speculated that General Sheridan would probably join Sully on the Canadian.[53]

Reveille was at 3 a.m. on November 12, and the Seventh Cavalry prepared to move out from its camp on the north bank of the Arkansas, and then ford the river to begin the

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[51]Hadley, "Conquest of the Plains Indians": 439.

[52]Custer, My Life, p. 210. This was true, as Custer recognized, save in the unlikely event that the Red River was crossed and the northwesternmost military posts of Texas reached.

[53]Barnitz journal, Nov. 11, 1868, Box 5, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU.

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march into the Indian Territory. At that night's camp on Mulberry Creek, where the Seventh was joined by the infantry and supply train, Sully took active command of the united expedition, and the next morning the men of the imposing Fort Dodge column began the tedious job of "crossing a prairie creek: steep, deep banks, doubling of teams, breaking of coupling poles, amid the shouting and cursing of wagon masters and teamsters."[54] Then, slowed by its ox train, the column headed south, Sully in the van, the Osage trailers riding near him. To an anonymous correspondent, the command seemed in good spirits, while the Seventh Cavalry, its horses arranged by colors, presented "a magnificent appearance in the bright sunlight of a clear, cool morning, with just enough breeze to display the flags and guidons to the best advantage, and to waft down the column the strains of music from the Seventh Cavalry band, which was mounted on fine greys in the advance." The combined noise of hundreds of moving wagons, laden with materials and tools for the construction of the new supply depot, made a roar which mingled with the rousing tune to "The Girl I Left Behind Me" -- the song a reference to "a period now quite too remote and obscure in the past, to excite any tearful regrets in this instance."[55]

The wagon train proceeded with two troops of the Seventh as advance guard, two as rear guard, and three, with flankers, on each side; infantrymen were distributed along the train, while the beef herd ambled inside the flanking troops. Marching to the head of the train, the leading cavalry troop on each flank would remain mounted and let its horses graze until the last wagon had passed it, the companies alternating position and keeping the flanks

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[54]Godfrey, "Washita Battle": 483.

[55]Army and Navy Journal 6 (Jan. 2, 1869): 310.

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protected; the advance guard of one day thus provided the rear guard for the next.[56] The flanking troops maintained a distance from the train of about one-quarter to a half-mile, each of them throwing out parties of mounted skirmishers.[57] On November 15 the command reached the Cimarron, and despite snowfall and harsh winds, Major Elliott marched out that afternoon to prepare a camp on the Beaver with three companies of infantry, one of cavalry, and the heaviest-laden wagons. The rest of Sully's command rested on the Cimarron's south bank.[58]

On November 18, as the march continued southeastwardly down the valley of Beaver Creek, the Indian guides reported that they had found a trail, and Custer ordered them to follow it a short distance, so as to determine the party's strength and direction. After examining fresh signs at the point where the trail crossed the Beaver, the scouts reported that it was that of a war party, headed northeast, evidently just having left a village within fifty miles to the south.[59] As the trail was not more than a day old when found, Custer judged that the raiding party was headed toward settlements in western Kansas. He therefore felt that attempting to overtake it would be useless. But as soon soon as the evening's camp was

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[56]Godfrey, "Washita Battle": 485. The fact that the wagons were four deep considerably shortened the column's flank, and rendered the train less exposed to any potential Indian attack. Ryan, Ten Years With General Custer, p. 46.

[57]Custer, My Life, p. 211. While Sully, as the advocate of the "Infantry Wagon," perhaps had no objection to foot soldiers on wheels, Custer later complained that infantrymen straggled from their companies and climbed into wagons rather than remain spread along the train's length ready for a quick response to attack -- and that there was "no determined effort to rout them" from these comfortable berths.

[58]Harvey journal, Nov. 15, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 83.

[59]GAC to EBC, Nov. 21, 1868, Mrs. Custer's transcription, reel 4, EBCC.

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reached, Custer asked Sully for permission to take his cavalry and the Indian scouts out the next morning; rather than chase the warriors, he would instead follow their trail back the way the war party had already come. In this way Custer -- sustained in his views "by the opinions of our Indian allies, who expressed confidence in their ability to take the trail and follow it back to the villages" -- hoped to find the expedition's true objective. But Sully insisted that any such effort would fail, on the grounds that it was absurd to supppose that his large column could have remained undiscovered by the Indians. To Godfrey, Sully seemed "obsessed with the idea that all our operations were under the constant surveillance of hostile scouts who kept the tribes fully informed," an unusual notion for a veteran Indian fighter.[60]

On November 19 Sully reached the North Fork of the Canadian where the Beaver and Wolf Creeks met -- at the point where he had abandoned his pursuit of the Indians some two months before. Here soldiers erected hospital tents and began construction of "Camp Supply," and Osage trailers looked on in wonder as Sully's quartermaster, Major Henry Inman, began to unload a vast array of tools and supplies from his train, including doors, window cases, and sashes. Now that the depot site had been reached, Custer again hoped to gain permission to ride back up the trail already discovered, taking nine mounted troops while leaving the other two behind to protect the infantry. Barnitz correctly predicted that the request would "scarcely be complied with," and a thwarted Custer would later point out that the resultant delay actually worked to the soldiers' benefit, since the weather grew

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[60]Custer, My Life, pp. 211-212; Godfrey, "Washita Battle": 485.

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worse.[61] But at the time he privately expressed disappointment at Sully's refusal:

> I was anxious, as all our officers are, to move at once and end the campaign by one quick blow and then 'Ho for winter quarters.' As it is I fear our delay will enable the Indians to discover our presence and enable them to get away with their village. If we could have moved at once I would have followed the back trail of the war party right to their village and would have found the latter in an unprotected state as their wariors had evidently gone north either to Larned or Zarah or to fight the Osage & Kaw Indians who are now putting up their winter meat. We did not encounter an Indian coming, which proves that our campaign is not expected by them and that we ought to have pushed on without delay.[62]

On November 20 the foundation logs were laid for "Fort Beecher," as Barnitz apparently thought the post's new blockhouse would be named, and the captain found himself seated on a log discussing the planned structure with General Sully. The war party and its village of origin were left unhindered, though intelligence came of at least one "hostile" casualty; Sully told Barnitz that an Osage trailer, having cursed, kicked at, and spat at a small whirlwind coming from the north, explained that it was actually the ghost of an Arapaho warrior, heading back to his village to inform relatives that he had been killed.[63] Soldiers dug trenches for the log stockade, mowing machines hummed, and wood parties,

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[61]Custer, My Life, p. 212. According to Captain Barnitz, the Osage judged that the northward war trail had recently been traversed by some four or five hundred warriors. Barnitz journal, Nov. 19, 1868, Box 5, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU.

[62]GAC to EBC, Nov. 21, 1868, Mrs. Custer's transcription, reel 4, EBCC. Custer lamented Sully's refusal to permit any search for the village until the Kansans arrived to reinforce the depot's infantry garrison.

[63]Barnitz journal, Nov. 20, 1868, Box 5, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU. Presumably Sully's overestimate of Indian intelligence capabilities did not extend to crediting such information.

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guarded by mounted troops, marched out to fell trees.[64]

The cavalrymen prepared for cold-weather warfare, some lining their overcoats with blankets, others making leggings from condemned government canvas; the Army issued warm if clumsy buffalo overshoes, fur side turned inward, and gloves equipped with thumb and trigger finger.[65] Expecting the 19th Kansas to arrive soon, Sully's men constructed a functional depot in a matter of days, complete with stockades for defense, a blockhouse, storehouse, wells, and winter quarters. While these last were mere semi-dugouts, incorporating pits and walls of cottonwood logs roofed with logs, straw and earth, the troops under Sully, or at least the cavalrymen, were content with their temporary discomfort, for they knew their own stay would be short.[66]

The absence of Crawford's regiment, which delayed the march for the Wichita Mountains, led officers to speculate as to whether they had become lost or had their horses run off.[67] However, what Custer termed "strong reinforcements" -- that is, Sheridan and his staff -- were soon to arrive. Despite having been warned of the winter's perils by the old mountain man Jim Bridger, or perhaps precisely because he had been warned, the department

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[64]Barnitz journal, Nov. 9, 1868, Box 5, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU; Godfrey, "Washita Battle": 485.

[65]Ryan, Ten Years With General Custer, pp. 47-48.

[66]According to one cavalry officer, these troops found the post's name humorous, "for while there was a partial supply of everything, there was not an adequate supply of anything." Gibson, "The Washita,"Chandler, Of GarryOwen in Glory, p. 14. For a history of the post, see Robert C. Carriker, Fort Supply, Indian Territory: Frontier Outpost on the Plains (1970; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990).

[67]GAC to EBC, Nov. 21, 1868, reel 4, EBCC.

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commander had resolved to take the field: "I deemed it best to go in person, as the campaign was an experimental one -- campaigns at such a season having been deemed impractical and reckless by old and experienced frontiersmen, and I did not like to expose troops to great hazard without being present myself to judge of their hardships and privations."[68]

Leaving his Fort Hays headquarters on November 15 with the intent of accompanying the main column into the field, General Sheridan had ridden to join Sully at the new camp. At his first night's camp he got some first-hand experience of what his soldiers might face, as a blizzard carried away the tents, rain and snow drenching his party to the skin. A shivering Sheridan took refuge under a wagon, "and there spent such a miserable night that, when at last morning came, the gloomy predictions of Old Man Bridger and others rose up before me with greatly increased force."[69] Though many mules played out on the 16th as sleet and snow continued to fall, Sheridan pressed on to Fort Dodge, and stayed there only one night before setting out with his staff (and correspondent Keim) on the 17th; Company C, Tenth Cavalry and Forsyth's scouts under Lt. Pepoon provided the escort.

Seeing some suspicious-looking objects moving off far to the east while approaching the camp, the party arrived at Bluff Creek on the 18th, and was joined by the two troops of the 19th Kansas originally detailed as Sheridan's escort. Though the scouts confidently declared them to be buffalo, it became apparent the next morning that the mysterious objects had been Indians, for after crossing Beaver Creek the party struck the trail of a band which had evidently left from the headwaters of the Washita River, headed northeast and intent on

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[68]Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, II, p. 308.

[69]Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, II, pp. 310-12.

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war. On the night of November 20 pickets fired shots after detecting the movements of Indians approaching the camp.

At three o'clock a.m. on the 21st, the general's camp prepared to move, and waited with the night's campfires left merely smouldering so as to prevent what Keim termed "an undue exposure." But no attack came at sunrise, and the march was resumed. At the noontime halt the soldiers found one of Sully's recent camps, with its fires still burning, and on reaching a high eminence, the men discerned the smoke of newer fires four miles away. Sheridan began a hurried march that would bring him to the depot site in little more than an hour.[70]

Sheridan's arrival came as a surprise, for the department commander had not been expected quite this soon. A gladdened Custer galloped out to greet his superior and patron, and soon Sheridan's party were pitching their tents in a nearby ravine.[71] Shortly after dark the Seventh Cavalry's commander assembled his officers, and requested those who so desired to join him (and the Seventh's band) in his informal call upon General Sheridan. Captain Barnitz thought that the genial "Little Phil," who received the officers around his large camp fire, resembled General Grant in being a man of few words,"but he always looks very animated, and although he really does not say much, you come away with the impression that you have had quite a prolonged and interesting conversation with him!" From what he did

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[70]Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, II, pp. 310-12; De B. Randolph Keim, With Sheridan's Troopers on the Borders: A Winter Campaign on the Plains (1870; Williamstown, MA: Corner House Publishers, 1973), pp. 99-100.

[71]Custer, My Life, p. 213; Godfrey, "Washita Battle": 487; Albert, letter to Jennie Barnitz, Nov. 21, 1868, Box 3, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU.

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say, Sheridan was evidently "a little disappointed with our failure to meet with Indians," and might have preferred it had Sully immediately released Custer's cavalry to pursue the warriors upon reaching Camp Supply -- rather than restrict it to aiding and protecting the infantry at what Barnitz considered "sort of a permanent fortification for their own security and comfort, quite as much as for the protection of our supplies." General Sully, Barnitz learned, had been relieved, and was to start toward Fort Harker with a wagon train the next morning.[72]

To his divisional commander, Sheridan gave no hint of disappointment, expressing pleasure with a new depot site conveniently located "in the very heart of the Indian country," only 35 miles from the Antelope Hills, and 25 from the eastern line of the Texas Panhandle. He explained his removal of Sully only briefly: "As this point is beyond the limits of the District of the Upper Arkansas, and as there was a conflict of rank, I let General Sully return to Harker."[73] Custer, publicly crediting Sully's departure to the question of jurisdiction, made no mention of any "conflict." But Lt. Godfrey attributed the crisis to the arrival of the Kansas troops escorting Sheridan. Army regulations provided that when regular troops and such state volunteers served together, brevet rank should take effect, and invoking such rank would ensure that Colonel Crawford could not outrank lieutenant-colonels Sully and Custer. But when Sully presumed to take command by citing his brevet rank of brigadier general,

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[72]Barnitz journal, Nov. 22, 1868, Box 5, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU. To Barnitz the infantry's advantages were evident even during the camp's construction phase, for while all the soldiers lived under canvas, only the foot soldiers employed "A" tents. The Seventh was limited to shelter or "dog" tents, a wall tent for the officers of each company, and one "A" tent for each company's first sergeant.

[73]Sheridan to Sherman, Nov. 23, 1868, container 72, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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Custer trumped Sully by invoking his own major-general's rank. This inspired Sully to protest that this method should not apply between officers of the regular army.[74]

By packing Sully off to his own district, Sheridan decided the question of command in Custer's favor without openly asserting a preference for the younger man, or hinting that he had found the ailing Sully's recent campaigning deficient. But Barnitz expressed pity for the older man, believing that whereas Sully had tried to hurry matters forward as fast as possible, "his being relieved just now appears to reflect discredit upon him.[75] Now Custer, recalled from suspension by Sheridan for the specific purpose of participating in the campaign, would have the privilege of leading its entire main column.

It was a premise, or a conceit, of the planned winter campaign that friendly Indians could be protected by the government even as its sword struck the "hostile," and General Sherman had explicitly directed in October that Colonel Hazen make provision at Fort Cobb for all Indians who might arrive there to keep out of the war. Sherman preferred "that no warlike proceedings be made from that quarter," explaining that both War and Interior Departments aimed to afford such peaceful Indians every possible protection, support, and encouragement -- while the Army proceeded against those outside the reservation. But Sherman also warned that General Sheridan might be forced to invade the reservation in pursuit of these latter; if so, Sherman would "instruct him to do all he can to spare the well-

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[74]Custer, My Life, p. 213; Godfrey, "Washita Battle": 487.

[75] Barnitz journal, Nov. 23, 1868, Box 5, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU.

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disposed; but their safety now is in rendezvousing at Fort Cobb..."[76]

However, there was little to keep the Indians at Cobb. Captain Henry E. Alvord, Tenth Cavalry, had been dispatched by Hazen in October to supervise matters at Fort Cobb until the latter's arrival -- and had reported himself unable to placate the Indians in the vicinity by issuing them beef alone. As for other staples, on November 5 Alvord reported to Major James P. Roy, commanding the District of the Indian Territory, that those Indians "certainly friendly and remaining quiet in this neighborhood" were all supplied up to the tenth of the month, and that -- contrary to earlier calculations based on incorrect figures -- there was enough for another 10 days' issue to them should it be necessary. Yet he warned that as more Indians came in to establish themselves as "certain" in Alvord's appraisal of their peacefulness (and thus become entitled to rations), the food would soon be gone. At present he had on hand only half a barrel of coffee -- "one of the most important items in dealing with the chiefs," -- and stated that it would be entirely exhausted by the time his report reached Roy. Although his most recent instructions from Hazen seemed to authorize only issues of beef, he doubted his own ability to "keep the Indians contented and here without breadstuffs," and was willing to take responsibility for making small issues if Hazen did not arrive before the next scheduled ration day.[77] But on November 7 the long-delayed Hazen, escorted by a squadron of cavalry and an infantry company, finally arrived at Fort Cobb, headquarters of the Southern Indian District, and relieved his emissary.

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[76]Sherman to Hazen, Oct. 13, 1868, Gen. W.B. Hazen, "Some Corrections of Life on the Plains," in Custer, My Life, p. 390.

[77]Captain Henry E Alvord to Major J.P. Roy, Nov. 5, 1868, in Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3d sess., no. 14, pp. 9-11.

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On that very day Hazen dispatched scouts to the Kiowas and Comanche bands with which he had held council at Fort Larned, to inform them of his whereabouts. The scouts also bore Hazen's instructions for the Indians to proceed to Cobb from their present camp near the Antelope Hills, lest the columns of Sheridan -- already convinced that both tribes were guilty of double-dealing -- attack any bands they might encounter. Hazen was unable to count on the aid of an Indian Bureau agent or representative, and reported to General Sherman that his duties would preclude him taking the active command he had previously requested.[78] He regarded the arrival of the Kiowas and Comanches as imminent, and stated that both tribes had "steadily" refused to join the Cheyennes and Arapahoes in war when invited to do so.

But while anxious that Sheridan not strike either tribe under the impression that they were at war, Hazen did admit that a war party of Kiowas under Satanta had recently gone to Texas -- and apprehended no trouble in managing them that winter "except it be in breaking off this old and pernicious habit of marauding in Texas," which would have to be checked at all costs. Recommending that the Army assume full responsibility for the Indians to avoid the shortcomings of the present Indian Bureau system, Hazen declared: "The government should dictate its own just terms, and it can only do so properly with these people by a military force behind its mandates. Old gray-headed men here laugh when told the government will punish, and say they have been told that since they were children."[79]

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[78]Hazen to Sherman, Nov. 7, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3d sess., no. 18, p. 13.

[79]Hazen to Sherman, Nov. 10, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3d sess., no. 18, pp. 14, 16.

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Hazen found his new tasks daunting even from a financial standpoint, estimating that simply to feed the "wild Indians" at his agency until next May 15 would require 1,440,000 rations at eight cents each, costing a total of $115,200.00 -- or just $65,200.00 more than Hazen actually had on hand.[80] Without insisting on the correctness of his estimate, Hazen calculated that there were roughly 700 Wichitas together with "affiliated bands" of such Indians as the Wacoes and Kichais, as well as 400 Caddoes, five thousand Comanches of various bands, 1500 Kiowas, and 500 Apaches, for a grand total of 8,100.[81]

A small group of Cheyennes under Black Kettle and Little Robe, and Arapahoes under Spotted Wolf, also appeared, though at the invitation of trader "Dutch Bill," who desired them to depart with the effects of his recently departed Cheyenne wife. At Griffenstein's urging, Black Kettle agreed to talk with Hazen about peace, and a council was held on November 20. Speaking first, Black Kettle not only professed friendship with the Indians already gathered around Fort Cobb, but added that he did not fear to go among the whites, "because I feel them to be my friends also." It was a remarkable sentiment, heard from the most prominent living victim of Sand Creek. But even as he insisted that the Cheyennes were neither making war south of the Arkansas nor troubling the Texans, Black Kettle

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[80]W.B. Hazen, "Estimate of Funds required to feed the Kiowa, Comanche, Apache, and small parties of wild Indians at Fort Cobb, Indian Territory for six (6) months, commencing November 15th, 1868, and ending May 15, 1869. -- say 180 days," Nov. 10, 1868, container 72, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC. Including salaries for clerks, an interpreter and storekeeper, scouts, a butcher, and a teamster, plus sundry expenses such as $300.00 for "Stationery and Postage," Hazen's anticipated bill for six month's would total $127,700.00.

[81]W.B. Hazen, "Estimated number of persons (of all ages and both sexes) in the various Tribes and Band of Indians located in or near the Witchita Valley, Indian Ter'y," Nov. 10, 1868, container 72, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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conceded that north of the river

> some young warriors were fired upon, and then the fight began. I have always done my best to keep my young men quiet, but some will not listen and since the fighting began, I have not been able to keep them all at home. But we want peace, and I would be glad to move all my people down this way. I could then keep them all quietly near camp. My camp is now on the Washita, forty miles east of Antelope Hills, and I have there about one hundred and eighty lodges. I speak only for my own people. I cannot speak for nor control the Cheyennes north of the Arkansas.[82]

Another Cheyenne, Big Mouth, also spoke in conciliatory terms, but was apparently unconvinced that the recent actions of Sheridan's troops were aimed solely at the "hostile"; he complained that although neither he nor his people wanted war, and had gone south of the Arkansas, "the soldiers follow us and continue fighting, and we want you to send out and stop these soldiers from coming against us." He desired Hazen to send a letter to that effect, informing the President that although "a chief, a kinsman of mine, has been killed, with others, we will forget it, for we wish for peace."[83]

Hazen, who told the chiefs that he had been brought by the Great Father in Washington from New Mexico "because I had been much with the Indians and like them," knew that Sheridan considered both the Cheyennes and Arapahoes to be at war, and had to consider his response in light of Sherman's own suggestion that troops might be "forced to

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[82]"Record of a conversation held between Colonel and Brevet Major General W.B. Hazen, United States army, on special service, and chiefs of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes of Indians, at Fort Cobb, Indian territory, November 20, 1868," Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3d sess., no. 18, p. 22. Black Kettle's count of his camp's lodges at the time was more than three times the size of that made by the military a week later.

[83]"Record of a conversation...November 20, 1868," Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3d sess., no. 18, pp. 22-23. Big Mouth did not specify who this relative was, or the engagement in which he was slain.

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invade" his Fort Cobb sanctuary. Therefore, despite their pacific professions, he could not grant the Indians the protection they desired:

> I am sent here as a peace Chief. All here is to be peace, but north of the Arkansas is General Sheridan, the great war chief, and I do not control him, and he has all the soldiers who are fighting the Arapahoes and Cheyennes. Therefore you must go back to your country, and if the soldiers come to fight you must remember they are not from me, but from that great war chief, and with him you must make peace. I am glad to see you, and glad to hear that you want peace and not war. I cannot stop the war, but will send your "talk" to the "Great Father," and if he gives me orders to treat you like the friendly Indians I will send out to you to come in; but you must not come in again unless I send for you, and you must keep well out beyond the friendly Kiowas and Comanches. I am satisfied that you want peace, that it has not been you but your bad men who have made the war, and I will do all I can for you to bring peace: then I will go with you and your Agent on to your reservation, and care for you there. I hope you understand how and why it is that I cannot make peace with you.[84]

The Indians asserted that they understood, and although Hazen said that he could not offer them rations, their friend Griffenstein gave them food and other goods. While his stance seemed to offer little to any member of Black Kettle's band hoping to avoid the strife, it was not a deceptive one. As Hazen explained his dilemma, "To have made peace with them would have brought to my camp most of those now on the war path south of the Arkansas; and as General Sheridan is to punish those at war and might follow them in afterwards, a second Chivington affair might occur, which I could not prevent." It was not, as Hazen understood it, his task to make peace, and he feared that to "make peace with these people would probably close the war, but perhaps not permanently. I would prefer that General Sheridan should make peace with these parties." (Presumably, in accordance with the widespread faith in the efficacy of a sound drubbing, making peace "permanently" would

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[84]"Record of a conversation...November 20, 1868," Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3d sess., no. 18, p. 23.

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require some chastisement by way of prologue.)

Hazen had not acquired the impression that the fighting men of Black Kettle's village shared their chief's pacific yearnings. Kiowas and Comanches then at Cobb claimed that the young Cheyennes were actually eager for more war because then they could get more mules; and as the chiefs left the agency, some of their young men were overheard expressing pleasure at the council's failure, for now they could continue raiding and join other bands next spring to "clear out this entire country." (As for the Kiowas and Comanches themselves, Hazen reported them all at peace, "excepting their old habit of thieving and murdering in Texas." He suggested that such raids could be prevented after the closing of the "Cheyenne war" by locating strong military posts at Cobb and at the Cheyenne reservation, and thought that the entire Tenth Cavalry might profitably be employed for this duty.)

Nevertheless, Hazen recorded his belief that it might be to Sheridan's advantage to make peace with the "distinct bands" of Black Kettle and Big Mouth, even though neither chief seemed to represent (or control) the majority of their tribesmen; doing so, he believed, would weaken those hostile bands still in the field. But he also struck a note of uncertainty; despite believing that he had acted in accordance with policy, Hazen requested that Sherman give him "definite instructions in this and like cases."[85]

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[85]Hazen to Sherman, Nov. 22, 1868, in Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3d sess., no. 18, pp. 24-25. Addressing the subsequent controversy over the attack on Black Kettle's camp, Hazen stated that allegations that the chief was then en route to the reservation, whither the government had invited him, were "all fabrications." But Hazen characterized Black Kettle himself as having made at Cobb "a fair and, no doubt, truthful talk. He said he deplored the war, and wanted peace. That the many of his people were on the war path above the Arkansas, and that his band had been at war all summer. They wanted the war confined to

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Even before receiving Hazen's request for instructions, General Sherman had sent a letter advising him that every appearance about Ft. Cobb "should be suggestive of an earnest desire to afford a place of refuge where the peaceable Indians may receive food and be safe against our troops, as well as against the hostile Indians who may try to involve them in the common war."[86] But these instructions came too late to apply to the case of Black Kettle, and the chief had departed Cobb with no choice but to avoid Sheridan's troops if possible, or somehow open a parley to prevent any threatened attack. Thwarting any attempt to isolate him from those presumed more warlike, Black Kettle had proved unwilling to seek safety for himself and a small following, and when Hazen "again asked him whom he represented, hoping to give him personally, with his families, the protection of the Government," Black Kettle replied that he spoke for all the Cheyennes.[87] If inaccurate in any political sense, the statement confirmed a chief's refusal to separate his own fate from that of people.

Sheridan decided that the increasingly bitter weather forbade delaying Custer's march in the hope of having the 19th Kansas arrive in time to join the Seventh Cavalry in departing Camp Supply, and even feared that a "snow blockade" might put a stop to active operations for weeks. He decided to send the Seventh Cavalry out at once, and a wagon train carrying

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Kansas, but we had brought it below the Arkansas, and he wanted it stopped." Manypenny, Our Indian Wards, p. 243.

[86]Sherman to Hazen, Nov. 23, 1868, in Hazen, "Some Corrections," My Life, p. 391. Gen. Sherman, observing that Hazen's presence at Fort Cobb had resulted from the action of an Indian Peace Commission aiming "to hold out the olive branch in one hand and the sword in the other," specifically advised him to notify Sheridan that some of his Kiowas were peaceful if he had not already done so -- "lest he pursue them and stampede your whole family..."

[87]W.B. Hazen, letter to James A. Garfield, New York Times Feb. 21, 1869.

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the necessary supplies was assembled the day after his arrival at Camp Supply. The cavalrymen would take few tents: "A pair of blankets, strapped to the saddle, and the clothes on their backs constituted the quota of baggage alike for officers and men."[88] Sheridan directed Custer to march south toward Fort Cobb before turning west through the Wichita Mountains, to the headwaters of the Red River, then finally turn north and return to Camp Supply. But he permitted his subordinate some flexibility:

> These directions are only general and may be varied by circumstances or by your own judgement. The object of this movement is to operate against hostile Indians. Should any be encountered they are to be attacked, their villages destroyed and stock killed. Should any surrender it must be unconditional, and some of the principal chiefs and head men should be hung; you will then conduct the remainder, with the women and children, to Fort Cobb..."[89]

Custer thus felt assured that he was "to be my own master as General Sheridan trusts to my judgment...He told me besides, that he would not restrict me by orders on the coming scout but would trust everything to my judgment." With his entire route not to exceed 250 miles, Custer resolved to push things forward at a rapid rate and hoped to return in three weeks, soon to be reunited with his beloved "Libbie." On the eve of departure, Custer, who had been presented by Sheridan and his staff with a pair of buffalo overshoes and a fur cap

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[88]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 102.

[89]J. Schuyler Crosby to Custer, Nov. 22, 1868, reel 2, EBCC. Keim's oft-cited rendition of Sheridan's orders, which conveys the impression of a direct quotation from the general (though not one to be found in his actual written instructions to Custer), ran as follows: "The instructions issued for the expedition were were brief and simple: 'To proceed south, in the direction of the Antelope Hills, thence towards the Washita river, the supposed winter seat of the hostile tribes; to destroy their villages and ponies, to kill or hang all warriors, and bring back all women and children." This, wrote Keim, "in a nut-shell, was the Sheridan policy towards refractory savages, not only to break their power, but also to afford them a salutary lesson of 'two parties playing at the same game.'" Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 103.

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with ear lappets, felt that the snow, already five or six inches deep and still falling, was to the soldiers' advantage, "for if we should start the Indians they never could conceal their trail or make their escape."[90]

The Seventh Cavalry rose at 4 a.m. on November 23 -- two hours before daylight. With a foot of snow already on the ground as the column and train formed up, Custer galloped through the darkness to Sheridan's headquarters tents to say goodbye. When Sheridan solicited his opinion on the weather, "I replied that nothing could be more to our purpose. We could move and the Indian villages could not." Custer promised Sheridan that if the snow only remained on the ground for one week, he would bring back satisfactory evidence that he had met the Indians.[91] To cheers and "The Girl I Left Behind Me," the Seventh moved out in the gray dawn, the column passing among the infantry's tents as "officers and men turned out to say a last word of cheer, and express a pious wish that 'they might kill plenty of red devils and have a speedy return.'"[92] Keim, choosing for some reason not to accompany the column, was among those who watched the cavalrymen and their long wagon train set out at 6 a.m.

They marched "through a blinding snow storm, with the wind in our faces, and through the soft snow a foot in depth...it was impossible to see more than a few hundred yards in any direction..." The densely falling snow cut off all view of the surrounding terrain,

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[90]GAC to EBC, Nov. 22, 1868, Mrs. Custer's transcription, reel 4, EBCC. Sheridan had apparently promised a winter in garrison for the couple after this "scout," as Custer disarmingly termed it, was completed.

[91]Custer, My Life, p. 215.

[92]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 103; Custer, My Life, p. 215.

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and left the Indian guides, the only men familiar with the command's anticipated route, unable to glimpse local landmarks and so locate the first camp site. Custer, "like the mariner in mid-ocean," used his compass to determine the line of march and strike Wolf Creek at the desired point.[93] The march of fifteen miles, he contended, "had been more fatiguing to our horses than an ordinary march of thirty miles would have been." Making camp, officers and men tried to clear the snow from beneath their tent sites even as more of it fell, and their clothes remained wet and freezing despite well-stoked fires. John Ryan was among those who shovelled away snow from ground that was then dried by building fires; heads pillowed by their saddles, troopers slept three or four together in "spoon" fashion, all being obliged to turn over when one desired to expose his other side to the warmed earth. The soldiers wore their boots rather than risk having them freeze so that they could not be donned again, and tried to protect their bridle bits from frost. The picketed horses suffered terribly, and at times stable guards would use whips to keep them moving, and thus prevent death by freezing.[94] Custer, having achieved a "state of comparative comfort" on a buffalo-robe bed placed atop a framework of boughs, his dogs lying nearby, watched smoke ascend through his tent's vent to mingle with descending snowflakes, and consoled himself by thinking of the blizzard as "an unpleasant remedy for the removal of a still more unpleasant disease. If the storm seemed terrible to us, I believed it would prove to be even more terrible to our enemies, the

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[93]Barnitz journal, Nov. 23, 1868, Box 5, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU; Custer, My Life, p. 216. Perhaps because he initially wrote his memoirs for serialization in a New York-based journal, The Galaxy, Custer chose to explain that the storm made it unsafe to wander from the column a distance "equal to twice the width of Broadway."

[94]Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 49.

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Indians."[95]

While occasional sleet and hail mingled with the snow, the march continued as planned on the 24th, though it was delayed by the supply wagons assigned to Barnitz's G troop. Awakening late, the drivers had failed to feed or even harness the mules until the "forward" had actually sounded, and the wagonmaster's tents had not been struck. Custer decided on a "a prompt cure" for this serious breech of discipline, forcing the wagonmaster and the guiltiest teamsters to march on foot through the heavy snow.[96] Over thirty years later, Custer's chief of scouts, Ben Clark (who stated that this punishment lasted all that day), would cite it as evidence of Custer's harshness: "He was impatient to proceed rapidly and harassed the men and his subordinates by his arbitrary conduct. He was a hard master, but his dash and cavalier bearing held the admiration of his troopers." Custer, it seemed, would brook no delays, even from his younger brother, Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Ward Custer. Clark told of how one morning, finding D company's first lieutenant lingering unconscionably over breakfast, an angry Custer repeatedly told "Tom" to finish his meal, then charged into the tent to kick over mess table, food, and dishes.[97]

The command continued moving southwesterly along the Middle River, going into camp on its right bank. After joining in a profitable hunt, Custer issued buffalo meat to the

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[95]Harvey journal, November 23, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan":84; Custer, My Life, pp. 216-217.

[96]Barnitz journal, Nov. 24, 1868, Box 5, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU; Custer, My Life, p. 218. See also Ben Clark's interview account, New York Sun, May 14, 1899.

[97]New York Sun, May 14, 1899. Clark's account must be used with due recognition of his confusion as to dates, as he places Custer in the field as early as September of 1868.

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command. The snow had begun melting quickly that day, but the soldiers and teamsters still found it necessary to cut down cottonwood trees for fodder. Teams had been doubled up repeatedly to deal with sandy stream crossings, and many mules were already exhausted; Barnitz, after ordering one horse abandoned after it "gave out," was concerned that the command's animals, nominally being issued two-thirds of the standard forage ration, were actually consuming only about half forage, or six pounds a day: "How horses & mules are to keep up at this rate is more than I can say."[98]

The weather was warmer and the march hard on November 25, and many more horses and mules gave out as the command made 22 miles on a course now almost due south, into the valley of the Canadian. Darkness overtook the soldiers before they could arrive on the river's north bank, and with little or no timber available at this point on the main stream, Custer chose to camp about a mile away, near a small tributary.[99] He thought it probable that if any war parties or "prowling bands" of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes should move across the Canadian in either direction, they would cross somewhere above his current camp, and not more than 10 or fifteen miles away. The winter was too far advanced for Custer to expect such bands to be this far away from their own village; the recent storm would likely drive the Indians away from the settlements, and back toward the camp, believed to be somewhere south of the Canadian. After discussing the matter with leading Osages Little Beaver and Hard Rope, and hearing the suggestions of other scouts, Custer decided that a

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[98]Barnitz journal, Box 5, Series II, Nov. 24, 1868, Albert Barnitz Papers, YU.

[99]Harvey journal, Nov. 25, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan":85; Custer, My Life, p. 221.

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scouting party of three troops under Major Elliott, plus some scouts, should ride up the north bank of the Canadian for fifteen miles, "without wagons or otro impedimiento," to see if any Indians had been in the area since the latest snowfall.

Elliott set out early on the morning of the 26th, each of his troopers carrying 100 rounds of ammunition, but only a day's rations and forage. If he found a trail, he was to pursue at once, sending white scouts back to Custer with information on the party's number, direction, and character; in this way Custer might intercept the Indians or at least strike the trail by a shorter route, rather than simply follow Elliott. For his part, Custer began crossing the remaining eight troops over the Canadian as soon as it was "fairly daylight." He planned, if he received no news from Elliott, to march up the bluffs forming the Antelope Hills and strike nearly due south, attempting to camp that night on one of the small streams forming the headwaters of the Washita River. There both portions of the command would unite, and continue their march to the south.[100]

Elliott, with troops G, M and H, moved through a dense fog. Simply to keep their feet from freezing as they hung in the stirrups, the soldiers were forced to dismount frequently and walk through foot-deep snow, its hard crust breaking beneath their tread. A few miles brought the Osage trackers to a trail made by a substantial body of Indians, and soon afterward, proceeding cautiously up the bank of a tributary of the Canadian, Elliott's soldiers found a campsite that had been used during the snowstorm. The bluecoats crossed the stream and continued up the Canadian for a mile, then came upon another trail, leading southeast. It had been made the previous morning by a party of from one to two hundred

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[100]Custer, My Life, pp. 221-222.

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Indians -- obviously bent on war rather than hunting, for no dogs accompanied them.

The detachment, which had marching by twos so as to more easily break its path through the snow, now formed up by fours, with "stoppers taken from the muzzles of the carbines, magazines loaded, levers tested, to see whether they were frozen fast, as was often the case..." Crossing the ice-filled Canadian, Elliott entered a strip of timber on its southern bank and found there a broken-down pack mule -- abandoned by Indians. The pursuit continued up a steep ascent, the men dismounting and leading their horses for a mile or more. At about 11:00 a.m. the soldiers halted to rest and build fires before moving on.[101]

Despite the Canadian's almost overflowing banks and its ice-filled water, Custer's men and horses could ford the river at most points. But a ford practicable for wagons had to be searched for, and even after they rolled into the water, some required double teams of mules to extricate them from treacherous quicksand. But all crossed in under three hours, and soon the Antelope Hills, a group of five separate sandstone hillocks visible from a distance of twenty miles, loomed to the column's front. Custer and a number of officers climbed one of these, and saw to their left the broad, winding bed of the Canadian. The horizon was "but an immense circle of snowy whiteness, of which the center is the point of observation," with a few scattered acclivities rising above the plains, divided by rows of stunted trees which on the dry Plains indicated ravines or brooks.[102]

Scout Jack Corbin soon reached Custer with word of Elliott's discovery, and his

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[101]Barnitz journal, Jan. 7, 1869 (including events of Nov. 26, 1868), Box 5, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU.

[102]Custer, My Life, pp. 222-223.

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pursuit of the Indians to the southeast. Custer sent the courier back on a fresh mount with orders for Elliott to continue the pursuit, while the main command moved so as to strike his trail at about dark. If the Indians changed their direction, Elliott was to inform Custer, and if Custer did not overtake him by 8:00 p.m., the major was to halt to await his arrival.[103]

Custer moved without wagon train, tents, or even extra blankets, taking only such supplies as a man or his mount could carry; each trooper carried 100 rounds of ammunition, some coffee and hard bread, and a small amount of forage. Eighty men with the poorest horses were detached from the various troops to guard the train, which would follow the command as rapidly as it could. The officer of the day was to command the guard for the train, and that morning the duty fell to Captain Louis McLane Hamilton, commander of Company A, and a grandson of Alexander Hamilton. "To a soldier of Hamilton's pride and ambition," wrote Custer, "to be left behind in this inglorious manner was galling in the extreme." But Custer could not gratify Hamilton's repeated requests to lead his men into the long-awaited battle without injustice to another officer -- unless he could find one willing to serve in his place, and thus leave him at the head of his squadron. Hamilton soon returned to Custer "overflowing with joy": Lieutenant Edward G. Mathey had been afflicted with snowblindness and felt himself unqualified to join in the pursuit.[104]

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[103]Custer, My Life, pp. 223-224; Barnitz journal, Jan. 7, 1869, Box 5, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU; Godfrey, "Washita Battle": 489. Barnitz notes instead that "a couple of couriers (from my troop,)" had been dispatched to General Custer with the news of the trail, but as Godfrey also writes of Corbin's appearance, perhaps Barnitz's men served as protection for the scout. According to Godfrey, Custer prolonged the suspense by remaining silent after identifying the approaching rider with the use of field glasses.

[104]Custer, My Life, pp. 226-227; Godfrey, "Washita Battle": 489. Capt. Benteen claimed that this "duty business is a lie of whole cloth. Hamilton had no trouble in getting

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Custer's march so fatigued the horses of the advance that they had to be alternated frequently, though the snow's upper surface eventually melted. The men pressed on with no pause for rest or meals, and without finding any sign that the snow had been disturbed by an enemy's trail. But a trail was finally found, the war party having passed the spot where it was discovered that very morning. The terrain offered a clear field of vision, establishing that the unseen Elliott was many miles ahead, and soon the command descended into a valley, timber visible to its front. Custer sent orders for Elliott to halt at the first favorable point where he could find wood and water, for he had decided to continue the pursuit that night after a brief rest, lest the slight thawing of the snow continue to the Indians' advantage. Not until 9 p.m. did Custer unite with Elliot, on a creek at a heavily timbered part of the valley.

Stealth was vital, and Custer forbade all further bugle calls. To safely permit the men to prepare a cup of coffee, he had them build small fires under the edge of the deep creek bank. Resting for an hour, he thought, would result in the additional benefit of more moonlight to guide the column when the night ride was resumed. But Lieutenant Gibson found that since much of this hour was first consumed with caring for the horses, who were fed and unsaddled, "Our repast consisted of hard bread washed down by boiling hot coffee, drunk out of red hot tin cups that blistered the lips every time they came in contact," while

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Lieut. Mathey to take his tour as Officer of the Day." Benteen's notes, Carroll, From the Little Bighorn, pp. 12-13. While this might have been meant to suggest that Mathey was not debilitated, or perhaps not zealous to see action, Godfrey also describes Mathey as snowblind. Benteen's own vision was apparently injured permanently by glare during this campaign, as he had loaned his protective goggles to surgeon Henry Lippincott. Karol Asay, Gray Head and Long Hair: The Benteen-Custer Relationship (Mattituck, NY: n.p., 1983), iv.

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hasty drinking required dilution with cold water "almost beyond recognition."[105] The Indian scouts were convinced that the village was close at hand, but to Custer's surprise the Osage spokesman, Little Beaver, strongly advised delaying pursuit, and instead remaining concealed in the timber until daylight. However, the chief could give no satisfactory reason for the course recommended.

Custer thus attributed Little Beaver's stance to "the natural reluctance shared by all Indians to attack an unseen foe."[106] Ignoring the advice, he moved the command out at ten o'clock, in column of fours. In the lead were two Osages on foot, seeming "to glide rather than walk over the snow-clad surface" as they cautiously followed the trail. Some three or four hundred yards behind these trailers, in single file, rode the remainder of the scouts, and with them Custer. Then came the cavalry, at a quarter or half mile behind, so that the noise of hundreds of hooves breaking the crust on the refreezing snow would not alert the village. The troopers, forbidden to speak above a whisper, placed their tin cups into haversacks to avoid noise, and smokers, unable to strike a match, were obliged to find comfort in unlit quids of tobacco.[107]

The Seventh Cavalry struck the Washita at about midnight, and arduously dogged the Indians' trail despite the need to frequently cross and recross that sinuous stream. The traces of dragged lodge-poles were seen to enter the trail, always from the left, evidence of a

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[105]Custer, My Life, pp. 229-230; Gibson, "The Washita," Chandler, Of GarryOwen in Glory, p. 17.

[106]Custer, My Life, p. 230.

[107]Custer, My Life, pp. 230-231; Ryan, Ten Years With General Custer, p. 51; Godfrey, "Washita Battle": 491.

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village moving in the same direction as the war party. At about 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning of November 27, Custer assembled his officers.[108]

The two trailers on foot had halted, and on reaching the Osages, Custer was told by one of the scouts that he smelled fire. Though several officers pronounced the guide mistaken and probably frightened, he proved adamant, and soon the discovery of a fire's embers bore him out. The Osages concluded that the fire had been kindled by Indian herder boys, and that the cavalry, having reached the very ground used to graze the Indians' herds, was within two or three miles of the village. Now Custer himself accompanied the two Osages, and was soon crouching low on the crest of a ridge. He looked where directed, and could vaguely discern, perhaps half a mile away, a large body of animals that might be horses or buffalo; but a barking dog and the tinkling of a pony's bell eliminated one possibility:

> I turned to retrace my steps when another sound was borne to my ear through the cold, clear atmosphere of the valley -- it was the distant cry of an infant; and savages though they were, and justly outlawed by the number and atrocity of their recent murders and depredations on the helpless settlers of the frontier, I could not but regret that in a war such as we were forced to engage in, the mode and circumstances of battle would possibly prevent discrimination.[109]

Briefing his assembled officers, Custer had them accompany him quietly on foot to study the topography, after which they could discuss plans for the attack. The snow's surface, still not softened by thawing, crunched noisily beneath their feet as they crept slowly to the top of a ridge, Barnitz recalling the officers "removing our hats, or caps as we neared

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[108]Barnitz journal, Jan. 7, 1869, Box 5, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU.

[109]Custer, My Life, pp. 230-233; Barnitz journal, Jan. 7, 1869, Box 5, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU. Judging by Barnitz's account, Custer mentioned only the tinkling bell, "distinctly heard," as evidence of a valley filled with ponies.

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the summit, and I could not help thinking that we very much resembled a pack of wolves, and that if the Indians should discover us they would very likely mistake us for wolves, and so take no notice of us." On the crest, they could see indistinctly to their right the course of the Washita, and what seemed to be tributary streams, but little else, though the tinkling of a little bell could be distinctly heard at times, and some of the officers who looked through a night glass believed that they could discern pony herds through the light-gathering binoculars.[110]

Returning to where the officers had left their mounts, Custer outlined his plan to completely surround the village by night, then make the attack from all sides at daybreak, or as soon as there was "barely light enough" to do so. He thus divided the Seventh into four detachments, two of which, required to make a circuitous march of several miles, set out at once, so as to arrive at their assigned points before dawn. The first column, consisting of Troops G, H, and M under Major Elliott, was to pass around the hills to the left of Custer's position, reaching the Washita below the village, and then move up the stream. The second, Captain (Brevet Lieutenant Colonel) William Thompson's squadron of troops B and F, was to countermarch and recross the stream, then proceed under cover of the bluffs skirting its right bank, to a point opposite the village. There it would await the signal to charge.

The third detachment, under Captain (Brevet Lieutenant Colonel) Edward Myers, consisted of his own Company E, and Company I under First Lieutenant (Brevet Captain) Charles Brewster. Myers was to move toward his position about an hour before daybreak,

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[110]Custer, My Life, pp. 233-34; Barnitz journal, Jan. 7, 1869, Box 5, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU.

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heading directly down the stream's right bank while keeping within the timber skirting it, and then halt when within sight of the village. The main or fourth column -- Hamilton's squadron of A and D, and Captain West's squadron of C and K, as well as Cooke's sharpshooters -- was stationed at the point from which the herd had first been discerned, enabling it to move under Custer's personal command directly toward the village. In this way, "it was hoped to prevent the escape of every inmate of the village."

All columns were to get as close as possible to the village, attacking without orders only if the Indians tried to flee or opened fire. Otherwise, the signal for attack would be sounded at daybreak by the Seventh's mounted band, "and instantly, at the appointed signal, or at the firing of a gun, the advance was to be made from all directions -- all were to go in with a rush and this was particularly enjoined upon all the officers, by Genl. Custer, as he fully realized the importance of concentration."[111] Lieutenant James Bell, in charge of the train, was to hold the wagons where they had halted until he heard the battle begin.[112]

The need for surprise conquered soldierly sentimentalism. Some dogs belonging to the command, innocently following Elliott's column as it moved out, were strangled, or muzzled with lariats so they could be killed with knives. But noise was unavoidable; as Elliott's men made their detour through the valley in order to take up position, their horses' hooves broke

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[111]Custer, My Life, p. 234; Barnitz Journal, Jan. 7, 1869, Box 5, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU. According to Barnitz, only about an hour remained until daybreak when the columns were ordered to move at once to their positions.

[112]Godfrey, "Washita Battle": 491-492.

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loudly through a frozen crust of snow.[113] During one halt, John Ryan and his comrades, ordered not to dismount, tried to improve their blood circulation by first letting their feet hang loose from the stirrups, and then kicking against the stirrups -- while their officers dismounted and sat in the snow, overcoat capes drawn over their heads.[114]

After Major Elliott's column had marched a few hundred yards toward the bluffs to the left of Custer's position, it crossed several well-beaten trails, leading to the point where the village was thought to be located. Attempting to ascend the bluffs, Elliott apparently feared that the village was so close that the Indians would either hear the snow being broken or see his troopers outlined against the sky, and therefore countermarched, so as to ascend at a point farther from the village. Elliott halted the column so that observations could be made from behind a tall bluff, presumed to be opposite the point on the stream where the village was located. But it was still so dark, even with the village no more than half a mile away, that Elliott and Barnitz, as they lay in the snow atop the bluff and gazed into the valley below, could see only the dark outline of timber along the stream. The barking of numerous dogs, however, suggested the camp's location.

Returning to the base of the hill after their observation, the officers were beset by half a dozen large fox hounds belonging to the villagers, and their baying, carried on the still air, seemed certain to alert the Indians to the soldiers' approach. Then came a further surprise:

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[113]Barnitz Journal, Jan. 7, 1869, Box 5, Series II, Barnitz Papers, YU; Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 51. Ryan was told that Custer had been obliged to kill two of his own hounds -- a detail not mentioned in Custer's own account -- and that one dog of his own company, despite having had an iron picket pin driven into his head, rejoined the command several days later.

[114]Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, pp. 51-52.

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the regimental band, instead of remaining with Custer, was following Barnitz's company, while Captain Benteen's squadron (Companies H and M), which was to accompany G, had not yet come up. The band was sent back, and soon Elliott's detachment was faced with a deep, rocky canyon that seemed to bar its path. But this was entered in single file, and followed toward the village until a steep trail was found, "where by holding firmly to our horses' manes, and applying spurs vigorously, we suceeded in climbing once more to the upper air."

Here Elliott's men beheld a large number of tethered ponies in a grove of white oak trees, seemingly so intent on pawing through the snow to find grass that they ignored the soldiers' presence. The troopers moved forward unchallenged -- "to our surprise," confessed Barnitz -- and reached a well-used ford below the village. Company G dismounted and faced the stream to fight on foot, except for ten expert marksmen on horseback commanded by a sergeant, whom Barnitz positioned on his left flank. With Benteen's squadron still absent, Elliott and Barnitz crossed the stream, trying to confirm the existence of other villages in the canyons from which the whinnyings of ponies were heard, "but our observations only confirmed our belief that the entire village lay above us on the stream."

Finally Benteen arrived, and with dawn fast approaching, Barnitz had his troop mount and ford the stream, then again put most of his men on foot. With his ten mounted marksmen on the left, Barnitz advanced with his right flank resting on the stream. At the same time Benteen advanced his mounted squadron on the right. Despite repeated knee-deep fordings through the crooked stream's icy water, Barnitz's men "preserved their alignment, as though on dress parade, and pressed forward with zeal, for day was breaking

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rapidly, and we were anxious to gain our position at the appointed time." They came upon tethered ponies and mules eating from piles of cottonwood logs set before them -- and a red-blanketed Indian warrior who fled, followed by other tribesmen. But when some men raised their carbines, Barnitz forbade firing.[115]

Custer's immediate command moved quietly into position facing nearly east, with Lieutenant Cooke's sharpshooters in advance on the left: they would fight dismounted. Custer and his staff were followed by the band, mounted on their gray horses. To the right was Captain West's squadron of his own Company K and Lieutenant Berry's C; to the left, Hamilton's, consisting of his Company A and Weir's D. With dawn the soldiers were ordered to remove overcoats and haversacks to give them greater freedom of movement, and men were left behind to load them into the wagons when the train arrived. Custer's men followed him over the crest of the ridge to a second, lower one. Waiting until sunrise, according to Lt. Godfrey, the command gradually advanced. Commanding a platoon of West's troop, Godfrey was ordered to charge through the village without stopping, and to round up the pony herd.[116]

Custer recognized that, though the men of his own and of Myers' column were permitted to dismount, "much intense suffering was unavoidably sustained....the men were even ordered to desist from stamping their feet and walking back and forth to keep warm." But he himself apparently had no difficulty in actually lying down and sleeping "soundly for

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[115]Barnitz, undated manuscript account of Washita fight, Box 10, Series III, Barnitz Papers, YU.

[116]Godfrey, "Washita Battle": 492.

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perhaps an hour." Then, with signs of approaching day visible, Custer gathered his officers, and as they stood near the head of the column they saw, beyond the crest of the hill screening them from the village, a strange light. It oddly resembled the glow of a rocket, inspiring the theory that it must be an Indian signal, and it seemed that the command was discovered.

But soon the strange signal resolved itself "into the brightest and most beautiful of morning stars" -- the planet Venus. Recognizing the tensions of the moment, Custer admitted that "in less perilous moments" the officers might have identified it correctly.[117]

Like Cooke's sharpshooters, half of Myers' detachment was ordered to fight dismounted. Though the distance to the valley's timber was greater than it had appeared, Custer's men soon reached the outskirts of the pony herd to their front. The increasing light, and the noise of breaking snow -- perhaps, surmised Custer, heard by the Indians but thought to be the sounds of their own ponies -- raised fears of discovery before the soldiers could all get into position.

Finally reaching the level of the valley, Custer's men advanced in line toward the heavy timber in which the village was situated, the band following immediately behind Custer and awaiting his signal. Now glimpses could be caught of tall white lodges pitched in irregular

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[117]Custer, My Life, pp. 238-39; New York Sun, May 14, 1899. Ben Clark asserted later that Custer "called it 'the Star of the Washita,' saying that it presaged victory for him." Perhaps herein lay the origin of Custer's well-known Indian name "Son of the Morning Star." The Osages associated the morning star with a "male slaying animal." Rev. J. Owen Dorsey, in J.W. Powell, ed., Tenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Society of the Smithsonian Institution, 1888-'89 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office,1893), p. 251.

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order among the trees, some producing faint columns of smoke.[118] Despite the presence of hundreds of men and their horses, despite the crunching of trampled snow, no noise had aroused the Indians. "The hour was so still," remembered Ben Clark, "that a man could hear his own watch tick."[119] The cavalrymen knew nothing of the identity of the village which lay below them, save that a war party had led them to the region where the hostile bands were surmised to be. In fact, it was the village of Black Kettle, Cheyenne chief, and the victim of the Sand Creek massacre just four years before.

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[118]Custer, My Life, pp. 239-240. According to Ben Clark, "Custer said that this air more nearly suggested the trampling and roar of a cavalry charge than any other he knew of." New York Sun, May 14, 1899.

[119]New York Sun, May 14, 1899.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

The Battle of the Washita

"...I was not at all sentimental about it..."

On the evening of November 26 Black Kettle's party returned to his village. One of a number of camps pitched along the Washita River, it was located on a level stretch of ground in a large bend in the stream. To the north lay sandhills and scattered timber, and a fringe of scattered trees along the creek granted the villagers partial shelter from the cold northern winds. Opposite the village, and parallel to the lower near bank, was an embankment perhaps fifty feet high, its face almost perpendicular. Though a few horses remained in the village itself to be used for emergencies or by herders, the Cheyennes' pony herds grazed in the valley, and on the slopes of hills to the south where snow had not hidden the grass.. Among the tipis, the snow on the ground had been beaten down by the villagers' mocassined feet.[1]

At least some Cheyennes apparently interpreted Hazen's words as a warning to move the camp, away from a region where the Army expected most of the designated "hostiles" to gather that winter. Then a girl of about fourteen living with Black Kettle's band, a Cheyenne woman named Moving Behind recalled in old age that the men planned to break camp. But they refused to do so at once, feeling unsure about the warning. This angered Black Kettle's wife: "She talked excitedly, and said, "I don't like this delay, we could have moved long ago.

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[1]For impressions of the village and its vicinity, see Daily Oklahoman, Nov. 23, 1930; New York Sun, May 14, 1899; Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 115.

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The Agent sent word for us to leave at once. It seems we are crazy and deaf, and cannot hear."[2]

To the Cheyenne warrior Magpie, those who gathered to discuss events over the crackers and other food brought back from Fort Cobb were "a troubled group," and he thought that the camp might actually have been moved had it not been for the deep snow.[3] While the harsh weather apparently led most of the villagers to think an attack on their camp a remote possibility, some precautions were taken, according to the future Cheyenne wife of the Kiowa chief Lone Wolf, then about sixteen years old; Black Kettle gave orders that anyone seeing soldiers must raise a pole to which a large white cloth had been attached. Apparently only one man, at any one time, would be assigned this specific duty in a village of perhaps several hundred people; but even this half-measure suggests some anxiety among a people who normally did not post sentries. In the event, no truce flag would be raised when the soldiers appeared. On the night that Custer's men surrounded the camp, the man who had come on guard after midnight, a warrior named Double Wolf, had simply come in due to the extreme cold, and had lain down to sleep.[4]

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[2]T.A. Ediger and Vinnie Hoffman, "Some Reminiscences of the Battle of the Washita," The Chronicles of Oklahoma 33 (Summer, 1955): 137-138.

[3]Daily Oklahoman, Nov. 23, 1930.

[4]Puckett, J.L. and Ellen. History of Oklahoma and Indian Territory and Homeseekekers' (sic) Guide. (Vinita, OK: Chieftain Publishing Co., 1906), p. 102. Even had the villagers believed that they were protected against all military attack, a lack of sentries might not be evidence of such a belief; the Cheyennes were still definitely at war with various Indian enemies, though these would generally disdain winter operations. Moving Behind, however, stated that just before daylight, "someone must have suspected that the soldiers were near the camp, for many awoke earlier than usual." Ediger and Hoffman, "Some Reminiscences," p. 139.

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But as his men moved into their final positions, Lt. Col. Custer could not be sure that he had escaped detection; even the village's dead silence, when almost the entire Seventh Cavalry had approached so close to it, led him to fear that the Indians had simply deserted their lodges. "I was about to turn in my saddle and direct the signal for attack to be given -- still anxious as to where the other detachments were -- when a single shot rang sharp and clear on the far side of the village from where we were. Quickly turning to the band leader I directed him to give us 'Garry Owen.'"[5]

As Custer led his men to the assault, the other three detachments charged in. Company G, advancing from the east on the stream's south bank, had just reached the edge of a shallow ravine, beyond which Captain Barnitz could see tipis clustered among the cottonwood trees; Barnitz heard the shot, the instant response of the band on the ridge beyond it, "and the answering cheers of the men, as Custer, and his legion came thundering down the long divide, while nearer at hand on our right came Benteen's squadron, crashing through the frozen snow, as the troops deployed into line at a gallop, and the Indian village rang with unearthly war-whoops, the quick discharge of fire-arms, the clamorous barking of dogs, the cries of infants and the wailing of women."[6]

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[5]Custer, My Life, pp.240-241.

[6]Albert Barnitz manuscript, Box 10, Series III, Barnitz Papers, YU. Ben Clark added that the mounted bandsmen lost control of their horses as the troopers thundered past them and were carried away into the fight, and Godfrey that "by the time they had played one strain, the instruments froze up." New York Sun, May 14, 1899; Godfrey, "Washita Fight": 492. In a subsequent interview Clark offered a more stirring version, adding that the bandsmen began their tune, "but they did not play much and drew their pistols and followed right along." Walter Mason Camp interview with Ben Clark, Oct. 1910, Camp Mss. Transcripts, p. 199, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

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White accounts agree that an Indian fired the first shot. Custer wrote that Black Kettle, leaping forth with rifle to utter the first war-whoop, had fired as a rally signal for his warriors, only to be immediately shot down by the cavalry's opening volley; Keim's account was even more dramatic, portraying the chief as firing and whooping after being awakened by the galloping horses of the already charging troopers: "Each warrior springing up as if by magic, seized his rifle and responded to the yell of despair which broke from the lips of the chief."[7] If Keim's account suggested that some overeager detachment had "jumped the gun" and attacked before receiving any signal, certain Indians also placed the cavalry's charge ahead of any gunfire heard. Magpie told of a woman running from the timber across the creek to warn Black Kettle, but giving him almost no time to send word for the women and children to save themselves before the soldiers poured in a volley and charged across the creek.[8]

Moving Behind, in her tipi, heard a woman warning someone in a low voice to wake up, for the soldiers were approaching: "We were frightened and did not know what to do. We arose at once. At that instant, the soldiers let out terrible yells, and there was a burst of gunfire from them." The sleeping Double Wolf, roused by a warning cry at about daybreak, allegedly ran outside -- not to raise a white flag, but to fire his gun, before being killed by

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[7]Godfrey, "Washita Battle": 492; Custer, My Life, p. 251; Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 115. Lt. Godfrey was told that the dogs' furious barking had roused a warrior from his lodge, and that the man fired after he had run to the stream's bank and seen a trooper with head raised to take aim.

[8]Daily Oklahoman, Nov. 23, 1930; Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 115. It is of course possible that some overanxious trooper's shot might have been mistaken for an Indian alarm, especially by men not belonging to that soldier's detachment..

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return shots. "Then the shooting stopped for a moment. We all ran out of our tepees and tried to run through the narrow entrance. We saw white men in front of us motioning us to go back. Then the battle began. I don't know which side began shooting first. I fell on my face in the snow and could hear nothing but guns."[9]

All four detachments charged toward the village. John Ryan described his company's orderly descent into the chaos of battle: "The command, 'Attention' was given and we advanced at a walk, then on a trot, then on a gallop, and charged when the command was given." Crossing the creek, M's troopers found their speed checked by the steep embankment before they managed to get across.[10] But while he conceded that two columns had been delayed by the long marches to their attack positions, Custer credited three of the four detachments with attacking "so near together as to make it appear like one charge," with the fourth only a few moments late; thus the soldiers reached the lodges before the Indians -- "caught napping for once" -- were aware of their presence.[11] Cooke's sharpshooter corps had taken up positions on the north side of the river, and some surprised Cheyennes rushed

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[9]Ediger and Hoffman, "Some Reminiscences": 138; Puckett, History of Oklahoma, p. 102.

[10]Ryan, Ten Years With General Custer, p. 52.

[11]Custer's report,Nov. 28, 1868, reel 717, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870. Company F's second lieutenant, in his own account of the fight, lamented that due to the lapse of years and participants' deaths it had become impossible to compile the necessary data on the columns' precise activities. He observed philosophically, however, that after the columns had converged upon and charged into the camp, the dangers confronted were the same and conditions so nearly identical in all parts of the field that "where all did so well, comparison would be not only odious but unjust." Gibson, "The Washita," Chandler, Of GarryOwen in Glory, p. 21.

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panic-stricken from their lodges to be shot down "almost before sleep had left their eyelids."[12] But resistance began immediately, as warriors rushed from their lodges to find cover behind trees or in ravines.[13]

Some women and children tried to flee, but others stayed in their lodges, or simply wanted to: Moving Behind's aunt called her to leave the lodge, "but as I started to go out, the girl with whom I had stayed all night grabbed me by the arm and pulled me back, saying, 'Don't go out, stay inside; the white men might see you outside, and shoot you.' My aunt called me again, and told me to hurry and come out. I became so frightened that I was trembling, but went outside."[14]

Black Kettle and his wife were last seen riding off mounted on a single horse, and it was apparently this sight which provoked the outburst of a warrior named Statue. He boldly trotted his horse back and forth in camp, saying in a loud voice: "That the is exactly how I always have felt toward you chiefs, that some day you would turn out to be cowards. Leaving

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[12]New York Sun, May 14, 1899; Walter Camp interview, Oct. 22, 1910, Camp Mss. Transcripts, p. 196.

[13]Custer's report, Nov. 28, 1868, reel 717, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870. There are few clues on the state of Indian armament, despite a recent archeological project exploring the apparent site of Black Kettle's village. Firearms identification analysis permits identification of ejected casings used in specific weapons, and the majority of such artifacts seemed related to a group of some 36 Seventh Cavalry troopers, the casings' position indicating not a formal skirmish line, but -- on a ridge to the south of the stream overlooking the village and Washita River floodplain -- an informal organization "characterized by fluid movement both on and off the ridge." This would seem too far south for the sharpshooters, unless subsequent shifting of the stream could account for the apparent discrepancy. See William B. Lees, "Archeological Evidence for the United States' 1868 Attack on Black Kettle's Village," typescript, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[14]Ediger and Hoffman, "Some Reminiscences": 138, 150.

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the poor, helpless women and children behind, and letting them suffer!" The Cheyenne warrior Magpie, partly dressed and of buckling on one of his father's pistols when he heard the first volley strike, rushed out from his lodge in time to see the couple ride into the timber. In any case, Black Kettle made no attempt to rally his followers.

Magpie's own tale illustrates the soldiers' deficiency in attempting to enclose their prey. At first he and two companions seemed hemmed in, as they headed west to seek the cover of the creek about a quarter-mile away and ran into soldiers sweeping down toward them. The Cheyennes turned south, dropping into a shallow depression and hiding in a thicket: "Creeping to the edge I pulled out my pistol ready for action. A shower of bullets told us our hiding place had been discovered." Despite a bullet through the leg, Magpie managed to escape. The cavalry had failed to seal up the bag.[15]

According to Ben Clark, Custer, permitting no one to get ahead of him in the charge, killed "only one Indian" with his pistol as the man prepared to fire at him from a few feet away, then bowled another warrior over with his horse.[16] Custer then rode to a knoll from which he could survey the action and issue orders as required. Here personal considerations may have mastered both his martial instincts and his usual style of leadership, for he afterwards assured his wife that he had not needlessly exposed himself: "In whatever direction my command prepared to charge I found myself gathering the reins and seating myself firmly in the saddle as if to lead each one, when a still small voice of warning came to me and from

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[15]Daily Oklahoman, Nov. 23, 1930.

[16]Walter Camp interview with Ben Clark, Oct. 22, 1910, Camp Mss. Transcripts, pp. 196, 199-200. Custer's account devotes little space to his own experiences during the actual fight, and at no point mentions him shooting (or even shooting at) any Indians.

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first to last bore myself as prudently as you could wish."[17]

Even before the village itself had been secured, Lieutenant Godfrey played his part toward destroying the Indians' mobility, an important objective. Advancing his platoon rapidly despite the brush and fallen timbers before him, Godfrey managed to locate a suitable ford and reformed his men on the stream's right bank. Then they galloped through the right of the village, though without making contact with a single warrior.[18] But as the men charged among the lodges, a sergeant prepared to shoot at a running figure; Godfrey saw that his target was a woman and cried out not to fire on the "squaw" -- too late to prevent her death. Captain Yates' Company F, apparently ahead of the rest of Thompson's squadron, had charged through the village at the same time as Godfrey's own K troop men, and after collecting the herd Godfrey turned it over to Yates.[19]

As Godfrey passed out of the village, Thompson's and Myers' squadrons came over a ridge to the right of K troop: Custer's plan to completely enclose the village had been thwarted because both squadrons had lost their bearings during the night march, and had not reached the desired position until after the attack began.[20] While some fugitives rushing from the village ran into Thompson's and Elliott's detachments coming from the south and east --

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[17]GAC to EBC, Dec. 6, 1868, Mrs. Custer's transcription, reel 4, EBCC.

[18]Godfrey, "Washita Battle": 492.

[19]Walter Camp interview with E.S. Godfrey, Oct. 10, 1918, Camp Mss. Transcripts, p. 445.

[20]Godfrey, "Washita Battle": 492-93; E.S. Godfrey, undated typescript, Box 16, Series III, Charles F. Bates Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale Univesity (hereafter Bates Papers, YU).

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and it was here, said Ben Clark, "that the greatest slaughter took place" -- others used the holes in Custer's trap to flee northward into the hills beyond, while half-clad women and children made their way down into the bed of the stream to seek cover, or a hiding place, or to scramble into its icy waters.

Wading waist or breast deep, keeping close under the banks, many escaped the soldiers who rode along the bluffs or on the bank above them, and made their way downstream under cover of the stream's timbered bank, while Spencer carbines filled the air with smoke and flying bullets. Warned that at a horseshoe bend, perhaps two miles below the village, the water would be too deep to walk in even if they stayed close under the banks, the fugitives left the river on reaching the beginning of the bend, cut across the point of danger, and re-entered the water below it.

A Kiowa warrior named Eonah-pah (Trailing the Enemy), who had spent the night in the Cheyenne camp, had joined these noncombatants in flight after emptying his quiver in combat, urging them not to bunch up.[21] Now he joined with Cheyenne chief Little Rock and the warrior She Wolf at the river bank in covering the fugitives as they were forced by the deep water to climb into the open. When Little Rock was shot and killed, Eoanah-pah seized the dead chief's quiver for its arrows, and managed to reach safety in some timber.[22]

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[21] Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 52; Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 302; Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 319. Eonah-pah was credited with helping twenty women to escape the troops. Grinnell asserted that most of the Cheyennes killed were shot in the valley of the stream, close to it, "and practically all the women and children who were killed were shot while hiding in the brush or trying to run away through it." See also Nye, Carbine and Lance, pp. 66-67.

[22]Grinnell (Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 302-303) renders the third warrior's name as "Packer"; he credits Little Rock with killing a soldier's horse with his muzzle-loading rifle,

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Still other Cheyennes, after climbing the steep embankment south of the village and gaining the open prairie, encountered Myers' two troops. Scout Clark recalled seeing a large number of women and children "pursued by Meyer's (sic) men who were firing into them. I called this movement to Custer's attention and asked him if it was his wish that these people be killed and he said (apparently with some reluctance): "No[.] Ride out there and give the officer commanding my compliments and ask him to stop it. Take them to the village and put them in a big tepee and station a guard over them which I did and the women seemed well pleased that I said so. When I rode out one of these women had been shot in the jaw and was standing on defense with a saber."[23] The woman was with some difficulty persuaded to lay down the raised weapon after being assured that her life would be spared.

The battle produced a number of individual combats as officers or soldiers became isolated from their fellows. Company G's line blocked Indians fleeing downstream, who were killed or driven back into a ravine to make a stand. When Captain Barnitz saw another large group fleeing across some sand hills to the left of his position and toward a herd of ponies, he directed a seemingly ineffective fire upon them, then ordered his mounted marksmen to head

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and an unnamed Kiowa with grabbing this rifle and its powder horn after the chief's death, loading and firing as he retreated.

[23]Walter Camp interview with Ben Clark, undated, and interview of Oct. 22, 1910, Camp Mss. Transcripts, pp. 16, 196-197. Perhaps the reason for Custer's apparent reluctance lay in some personal friction with the man who had brought the problem to his attention; although Clark was chief of scout's for Custer's column, Custer never mentions his name in his memoir, despite frequent references to other scouts. Clark states in his undated interview that when he approached Custer, the latter seemed to "consider it as a little officiousness," and "impulsively" denied that he wanted the women and children killed. In his interviews, Clark alternately represents himself as standing on the command knoll with Custer and riding to the south at the time when he first catches sight of the panic-stricken noncombatants.

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them off, hoping to drive the Indians to a point where he expected Thompson's detachment to come down the bluffs and enter the fray. Attempting to locate Thompson -- "and at the same time lay out a few of the Indians myself" -- Barnitz galloped into the midst of those nearest him. But he found that they were all women, some leading children or carrying them around their necks, and -- "not caring to waste ammunition on them, though to tell the truth, I was not at all sentimental about it, for they were always fiendishly cruel in torturing captives" -- Barnitz left them.

Planning to rejoin his company, he instead rode into the rear of a group of fleeing warriors and with revolver shots "quicker than I can tell converted two of them into very good and harmless Indians, though their feathered arrows just singed my neck," then killed a third on foot, but not before the warrior's bullet -- from the type of muzzle-loading Lancaster rifle frequently issued Indians by the Interior Department -- glanced off a rib, to cut through two more and pass out near the captain's spine.[24] Unable to call for help, even as two of his own men rode nearby, Barnitz finally dismounted and lay down, in the hope that his body would be found after his death.[25]

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[24]Barnitz Washita narrative, Box 10, Series III; Albert Barnitz, letter to Jennie Barnitz, Dec. 5, 1868, Box 3, Series I, Barnitz Papers, YU. Barnitz's story grew somewhat in the telling. Over forty years after the fight, and placing his own skirmishing on the upland about three quarters of a mile from the village, he claimed that he rode "alone and unattended into a crowd of about 400 warriors, running for their ponies...I rode into that crowd, with intent to prevent as many of them as possible from reaching their ponies..." Barnitz admitted that this was "no doubt a little imprudent," though the village's actual size should have restricted the number of warriors able to oppose his single-handed dash. Albert Barnitz, letter to J.B. Thoburn, Nov. 28, 1910, Box 16, Series III, Charles F. Bates Papers, YU.

[25]Barnitz, Washita narrative, Box 10, Series III, Albert Barnitz Papers, YU. Despite the seriousness of his wound, Barnitz later emphasized a lack of enmity, praising the enemy he had slain as "a brave and sagacious warrior, and no mistake." Letter to J.B. Thoburn, Nov.

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Even if every warrior had managed to secure a firearm, the Cheyennes would have had little hope of holding back a greatly superior force armed with repeating weapons; and many, having grabbed up the first weapon within reach, were said to have used only the bow. But John Ryan described defenders as having "welcomed us with a murderous fire," and the fight, however one-sided, apparently impressed military participants as a fierce engagement, at least by frontier standards.[26] (If Indian narratives tend to depict more running than fighting, perhaps it was partly because most of the fiercest fighters were trapped, and did not live to tell their stories.) Custer went so far as to report that, while the lodges and their contents were in the cavalry's possession ten minutes after the charge was ordered, "real fighting, such as has scarcely ever been equaled in Indian warfare, began when attempting to clean out or kill the warriors posted in ravines and under brush. Charge after charge was made, and most gallantly too, but the Indians had resolved to sell their lives as dearly as possible."[27] Custer paid an even more impressive tribute to his foes (and, obliquely, to their conquerors), in his memoirs, giving the Indians credit for fighting from the outset with "a desperation and courage which no race of men could surpass," springing behind trees or leaping into the nearly waist-deep stream, to use its bank as a makeshift rifle-pit. [28]

With the soldiers gaining the central portion of the village and finding themselves

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22, 1910, Box 16, Series III, Charles F. Bates Papers, YU.

[26]Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 52.

[27]Custer's report, Nov. 28, 1868, reel 717, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870.

[28]Custer, My Life, p. 240.

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among the tipis as warriors fired at them from behind cover, many were ordered to dismount and fight Indian style. Cheyennes, driven back from their positions, retreated to join others firing from the stream banks, while the soldiers destroyed isolated pockets of stubborn resistance. Custer cited as a measure of the fight's desperation a group of seventeen warriors who had resisted all attempts to dislodge them from a depression until each was picked off individually, as well as thirty-eight bodies found in a deep ravine near what he termed the "suburbs" of the camp.[29]

While Custer's faith in his sharpshooters' skill at "picking off" Indians was apparently confirmed, one former sharpshooter explained why he had no use for the detachment commander as either officer or man: "When the battle. . .farely (sic) began," he wrote, "we did not see anything more of Cooke until the fight was over."[30] This has led one modern researcher to portray Cooke as an essentially timid battlefield officer, though this truth, if such it was, presumably escaped Custer, who had not only given his friend this specially created force, but had earlier entrusted him with the vital duty of shooting Mrs. Custer should she be threatened with capture by Indians.[31]

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[29]Custer's report, Nov. 28, 1868, reel 717, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870; My Life, p. 244.

[30]Anthony C. Rallya, letter to Fred Dustin, Oct. 13, 1930, Dustin Collection, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument.

[31] For questions concerning Cooke's bravery, raised by his fellow Canadian George F. Kush, see Arnold and French, Custer's Forgotten Friend, pp. 13-14, 18-24. Benteen would also dismiss Lt. Cooke, so highly praised by Custer, as "not at all what Custer tries to show him up as. No, not at all." Benteen's notes, Carroll, From the Civil War, p. 12. But while he went so far as to privately impugn General Custer's well-known battlefield courage, Benteen's jibes at Cooke, and even a satirical ditty he composed about the sharpshooters, did not explicitly accuse the lieutenant of cowardice. His comments must be judged in the context of

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Black Kettle was killed during the fight, a fact seemingly known to Custer before the Seventh withdrew from the field. But apparently no Seventh Cavalry officer reported seeing his body or confirming the circumstances of his death, though a number, including Godfrey, would have known the chief by sight from the Medicine Lodge conference.[32] Cheyenne accounts suggest that he fell with his wife early in the fight, and George Bent portrayed the pair as starting to cross the Washita before being shot by soldiers -- both riders falling dead with their single mount, the bluecoats riding over the bodies and splashing them with mud.[33] Moving Behind said that after the soldiers' departure "we saw the bodies of Black Kettle and his wife, lying under the water," their horse lying dead beside them. She determined that the chief and Medicine Woman had been trying to escape across the river when shot.[34]

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writings composed in his declining years, which seldom had favorable comment for any Seventh Cavalry officer, and with respect to the fact that Benteen, as a critically admiring subordinate observed, "held a grudge eternally." "Summary of Talk with General [Hugh] Scott, November 17, 1935," Frederic F. Van de Water Papers, New York Public Library.

[32] Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 56. A modern writer, though he regarded the death of neither chief as having been specifically intended by the soldiers, comments that "since many of the officers had on previous occasions shaken hands with Black Kettle, and might be said to have been acquainted with him, the affair must be regarded with a certain distaste." Nye, Plains Indian Raiders, p. 136.

[33]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p 302; Hyde, Life of George Bent, pp. 316-317. For an overly imaginative version of Black Kettle's death, apparently based on the testimony of Magpie, see Charles J. Brill, Conquest of the Southern Plains: Uncensored Narrative of the Battle of the Washita and Custer's Southern Campaign (Oklahoma City: Golden Saga Publishers, 1938), pp. 155-156. Closely resembling Brill's description, the most widely read popular account of Black Kettle's death adds the wholly fictitious detail that the chief was shot while deliberately riding toward a line of cavalrymen, making a sign of peace. Dee Brown, Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970), p. 168.

[34]Ediger and Hoffman, "Some Reminiscences": 140. Moving Behind identified the site as a sharp curve in the river where the Cheyennes Indians had commonly watered their

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Seventh Cavalry participants provided more poetic alternatives to a death dealt out by anonymous marksmen -- though none mention how Black Kettle was recognized, or his body identified. John Ryan had Black Kettle (and his pony) "dropped" late in the fight, as the chief rode back and forth before the soldiers waving a black flag -- and even mentioned a claim that Captain Benteen had fired the fatal shot.[35] Another candidate for that melancholy distinction was Private Joseph Lemon of Benteen's troop H, who stripped trophies from the man he killed and gave a ring of hammered silver to messmate James P. Russell -- though Russell's story, as published, provided no details on how Lemon killed Black Kettle, the fate of Medicine Woman, or even how Lemon determined his victim's identity.[36]

But Company I's Joseph Bell also claimed to have killed Black Kettle, and he too took a trophy -- a medal supposedly presented by President Johnson -- while an Indian scout took the victim's scalp. The son of a Seventh Cavalry private stated that several officers sought to punish Bell so as to secure the medal for themselves, only to have Custer, "quite provoked" after learning the facts, proclaim that the medal belonged to Bell -- and that any further

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ponies.

[35]Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 56.

[36]Kankakee [Indiana] Sunday Journal, February 17, 1952. Of a conventional "scoop" type common on the Southern Plains, this ring is now in the hands of a private collector. It bears no marks which could link it to a particular owner, though in at least one case a similar ring was used as a possible guide to identification; one Fourth Cavalry officer, in describing a slain Comanche or possibly Kiowa warrior (and suspected chief), noted "a silver ring with oval plate nearly two inches long shaped like a scoop to fit the finger." Lt. Col. John P. Hatch to Assistant Adjutant General, Department of Texas, Dec. 29, 1873, Ernest Wallace, ed., Ranald S. Mackenzie's Official Correspondence Relating to Texas, 1873-1879 (Lubbock, Texas: West Texas Museum Association, 1968), p. 71.

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punishment would be inflicted on the officers by Custer.[37]

While warriors retreated or fought, some of the Cheyenne women who had attempted to flee were apparently driven back by Osage scouts who seized switches and gave them "a severe whipping."[38] But not all the noncombatants sought safety in flight. Others remained in their lodges, and according to Custer all such escaped injury -- though he admitted that as the fight raged they "gave vent to their despair" with death songs. After the warriors were driven from the village and the fighting pushed to a perimeter outside it, Custer directed his interpreter, Raphael Romero, to reassure those in the tipis that they would not be harmed, and assemble them in large lodges designated for that purpose -- "quite a delicate mission, as it was difficult to convince the squaws and children that they had anything but death to expect at our hands."[39] The village itself was a scene of carnage; a girl who had earlier left her tipi and hugged the ground raised her head, and "a soldier punched me with his gun and motioned to me to get up. There were several other women lying close to me. Men, women and children lay dead everywhere. I saw many of the warriors lying dead with their guns in their hands."[40]

Custer's command had suffered only lightly in securing the village. But he had already lost one troop commander, Barnitz, gravely wounded, and another killed outright. Captain

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[37]Charles M. Harvey, letter to W.J. Ghent, June 21, 1935, Box 31, W.J. Ghent Papers, Library of Congress. While the medal was described as a gift from President Johnson, perhaps it was simply a standard "Indian Peace Medal" bearing the image of the current chief executive, of a type often presented by federal officials. Indians commonly wore such medals as pendants, a hole being punched to accept a cord.

[38]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 117.

[39]Custer, My Life, p. 244.

[40]Puckett, History of Oklahoma, p. 102.

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Hamilton had been shot from his saddle in the initial attack, several participants acknowledging him as the first man killed.[41] Keim adds the gruesome detail that when struck Hamilton "gave one convulsive start, stiffened in his stirrups, and was thus carried a corpse for a distance of several yards, " falling from his horse and terribly lacerating his face.[42] Hamilton had previously cited a shot through the heart in battle as his preferred manner of death, but there was apparently no morbid death-wish about it; nor is there any evidence that his desire for action inspired a sense of foreboding in either his comrades or his commander. "Hamilton and Tom [Custer] were near each other charging at the head of their squadron when the former was killed by a rifle bullet through the heart. I had spoken to Hamilton but a few moments before in giving him directions concerning his command; little did I dream that I should next see him stretched cold and lifeless."[43] A Cheyenne named Cranky Man was said to have rushed from his lodge and shot Hamilton directly in front of it, before he himself died fighting where he stood, making no effort to get away.[44]

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[41]Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 53; E.S. Godfrey, "Notes on Chapter XXII of Col. Homer W. Wheeler's 'Buffalo Days'," typescript, Box 16, Godfrey Papers, U.S. Military History Institute.

[42]New York Herald, Dec. 24, 1868. Keim's horrific description was not repeated in his book's subsequent account of Hamilton's death. Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 116. For the unlikely theory that Hamilton was actually shot in the back by one of his own men see Hoig, Battle of the Washita, Appendix B, pp. 198-199; and Brill, Conquest of the Southern Plains, p. 160, n. 1.

[43]GAC to EBC, Dec. 6, 1868, Mrs. Custer's transcription, reel 4, EBCC. In his memoirs Custer would record that Hamilton "rode at my side as we entered the village," but perhaps did not intend to convey the impression that the leader of the squadron on Custer's flank literally rode stirrup to stirrup with the regimental commander. Custer, My Life, p. 246.

[44]Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 317.

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The regiment's greatest loss was not perceived until the worst fighting had passed. Major Elliott, having led his detachment into the village, had presumably planned to exercise command over it throughout the engagement. But the sight of Indians fleeing eastward on foot incited him to call for volunteers and gallop after the fugitives, with the cry, "Here goes for a brevet or a coffin!"[45] Sixteen enlisted men, from four different troops, followed him, along with the regiment's young sergeant major, former Confederate officer Walter Kennedy.[46]

Elliott had apparently spotted Little Rock's band of fugitives as they emerged from the stream bank onto the open prairie, Little Rock falling with a bullet to his forehead as the few warriors with the party fought a rearguard action. A soldier who had already had his horse shot was directed to take charge of one Buffalo Woman, who with three children had been overtaken as they sat on the ground exhausted.[47] But as the dismounted white man urged his prisoners by gestures back toward the village, the woman, seeing other warriors making their appearance from some timber to the south, stalled for time, tearing strips from her dress to bind her children's unprotected feet. The Indians charged, killed the soldier, and rescued the

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[45]It was Godfrey's recollection that this remark was made to Lieutenant Owen Hale. E.S. Godfrey, "Notes on Chapter XXII," Box 16, Godfrey Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute.

[46]New York Sun, May 14, 1899; Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 53. John Ryan, stating that Elliott had ridden by and called out to him to take some Indian women prisoners, thought it "very fortunate for me and my squad that we did not go with Elliott."

[47]Hyde, Life of George Bent, pp. 319-320.

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captives, the Arapaho Little Chief counting coup on the dead soldier with a hatchet.[48]

The remaining soldiers were soon forced to halt -- supposedly because, having retreated from a large Indian force until some of his men were wounded, Elliott was cut off when he attempted to take these men with him.[49] Surrounded, the cavalrymen dismounted and released their horses, to take up a defensive position, a force of fewer than twenty men with only discipline and repeating firepower to compensate for its small size. But the conditions which had made the scouts' survival possible at Beecher Island were not to be repeated. The fortuitous move to the island had saved Forsyth's command, whereas to one modern military man the decision to have the men lie down in a thicket of tall grass "was the worst thing Elliott could have done," for it violated the basic principle of defensive combat by sacrificing a good field of fire. Elliott's men could not see out of the thicket, and the high

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[48]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 303; Nye, Carbine and Lance, pp. 66-67. It has been suggested that this soldier was Sergeant Major Kennedy. A more colorful version of Kennedy's death, subject of an illustration by well-known military artist James E. Taylor, presented him as the last man of Elliott's group alive, who provoked the Indians into slaying him rather than submit to capture and torture. Charles G. Markantes, "James E. Taylor, Artist and Correspondent," Research Review, 12.1 (Winter, 1998): 8-9.

[49]E.S. Godfrey, "Cavalry Fire Discipline," By Valor and Arms: the Journal of American Military History 2.4 (1976): 34. While other sources (and the location of the bodies later found) indicate that most of Elliott's men stayed together until they were annihilated, Godfrey represents the party as having suffered considerable loss before the survivors mounted and made a doomed attempt to break through. Another interested military man with access to Indian informants received somewhat different data. General Hugh L. Scott, who joined the Seventh Cavalry in 1877, was told that Elliott, returning slowly toward Custer and fighting off Arapahoes as they arrived from their own camp downriver, could have escaped, but bravely preferred to fight, and was finally surrounded. Gen. H.L. Scott to E.S. Godfrey, July 2, 1931, Francis Hagner Collection, New York Public Library. For Ben Clark's claim that Elliott would have escaped had he been "less daring" and retreated, see New York Sun, May 14, 1899.

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banks of the nearby stream overlooked his position.[50]

To the Indians, it appeared that their white enemies depended too much on sheer concealment for safety, and shot too high. The warrior Touching the Sky crept to a vantage point above the soldiers' position, where he could see men lying prone and firing wildly, and signaled several comrades to join him and fire down at the defenders. The Indians on horseback apparently hesitated to press home their attack. Then one warrior charged single-handed toward the soldiers, inspiring his fellows to rush in -- and almost run over a number of dismounted Indians creeping forward to shoot at close range.

The soldiers were quickly wiped out, at a cost of two Arapahoes slain, and coup counted upon the bodies; each tribe limited the number of warriors who could score a "coup" on a single enemy, but as Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Kiowas and Apaches all took part, and coups counted by other tribes did not count, twelve coups might theoretically have been counted on each of Elliott's men.[51]

As it was Black Kettle's struck that Custer had struck, almost four years to the day after the massacre at Sand Creek, it was perhaps inevitable that many critics should come to regard Chivington's and Custer's attacks in the same light. However, the Cheyennes at the

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[50]Nye, Carbine and Lance p. 67; Walter Camp interview with Ben Clark, Camp Mss. Transcripts, p. 197. Elliott's opponents were apparently led by the eloquent Left Hand, later head chief of the Arapahoes.

[51]New York Sun, May 14, 1899; Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 320; Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 300, 304-305. While some later claimed that the Cheyenne Roman Nose Thunder was first to count coup on Elliott's men, Grinnell thought that opinion favored the Arapaho, Tobacco. As the owner of a particular type of flat war club, Tobacco felt obliged "to perform some great feat," and was hit -- by a bullet directed upward -- while riding immediately over Elliott's position, falling dead among the soldiers.

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Washita had been given no promise of immunity from attack, however unlikely the prospect may have seemed to them in such harsh weather. Nor can Custer be accused of either plotting or endorsing an indiscriminate massacre. That women and children were killed at the Washita was never denied. But military participants adopted the position that such tragedies were made inevitable by the very nature of such attacks, and that in any case conventional definitions of "combatant" and "non-combatant" did not apply in Indian warfare. To Sheridan Custer reported that "Many of the squaws were taken [captured] with arms in their hands, and several of my command are known to have been wounded by them." Later, writing for a primarily civilian audience, he stated that orders had been given to prevent the killing of "any but the fighting strength of the village," but added that in such a struggle it was "impossible at all times to discriminate," particularly when women could be as dangerous as warriors, while Indian boys between ten and fifteen years of age "were found as expert and determined in the use of pistol and bow and arrow as the older warriors."[52]

As an example, Custer described an encounter between his subordinate "Major Benteen" and a boy scarcely fourteen years old, who was among those trying to make their way through the soldiers' lines. Inspired by his opponent's youth (in Custer's version), Benteen tried to obtain his surrender; but after the boy shot his horse through the neck, he was forced to fire, albeit "with admiration for the plucky spirit exhibited by the lad, and regret often expressed that no other course under the circumstances was left him." In his report to Sheridan Custer credited Benteen (the only officer mentioned therein who was neither killed

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[52]Custer's report, November 28, 1868, container 83, reel 81, Sheridan Papers, LC; Custer, My Life, p. 241.

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nor wounded) with killing the son of Black Kettle.[53] But while Custer's vignette combined a tribute to Indian bravery with a brave yet merciful cavalryman, Benteen presented the incident in a less heroic light, writing that "Black Kettle, Jr." was fifteen or sixteen, on foot, and wearing two belt holsters, leading Benteen to believe he had two pistols: "I drew the six shots from his pistol, charged up on him and killed him. There was not the slightest monkey-business about it."[54]

A trooper of the 19th Kansas was apparently told that "because the orders were to spare women and children," many warriors escaped as well, by putting blankets over their heads so that they were mistaken for women.[55] But perhaps the inability to distinguish among fleeing, blanketed "enemy" figures led some participants to err in the opposite direction. Certainly Custer's premise -- that an attack on a general population might prevent "discrimination" -- was the accepted one in the frontier army. Raising the question of

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[53]Custer's report, Nov. 28, 1868, reel 717, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870; Custer, My Life, pp. 241, 243. Custer noted officially that Benteen "had his horse shot under him by a son of Black Kettle, whom he afterwards killed." Another participant's account has Benteen see the boy draw a second revolver before shooting him. Gibson, "The Washita,"Chandler, Of GarryOwen in Glory, pp. 21-22. See also Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p.116.

[54]Benteen's notes, Carroll, From the Civil War, p. 13. Benteen made no mention of his horse being shot, and did not explain why he let the boy fire six times (with a suspected second pistol in reserve) before replying, though he may have wanted to reserve his own shots for close range. While Benteen took exception to Custer referring to him by the incorrect brevet rank of "Major," Custer's account reveals no intent to belittle his subordinate; perhaps a single slip of the pen provided a mistake repeated by an editor of Custer's original serialized articles. In a June 12, 1870 diary entry, the future Mrs. George Yates made a similar error in referring to a "Maj. Benteen," though terming him a colonel in all subsequent entries. Brian C. Pohanka, A Summer on the Plains, 1870: From the diary of Annie Gibson Roberts (Mattituck, New York: J.M. Carroll & Co., 1983), p. 23.

[55]Spotts journal, Dec. 11, 1868, Spotts, Campaigning with Custer, p. 75.

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whether women and children would have been killed had a fight resulted as a result of a later confrontation with Cheyennes, a retired officer answered:

> I don't see what could have prevented it. Certainly those who were not disabled would have made themselves very active. If I had been shot through the legs I suppose some old squaw would have run in and ripped me up with a knife....Still soldiers dislike to kill squaws. I have known them to take care of Indian babies, whose mothers were killed, for days together, and keep them alive on sugar until they got into camp.[56]

The soldiers' apprehension that they might be killed and mutilated -- not necessarily in that order -- by women or even children was not simply a self-justifying fantasy, as the fate of many helpless Seventh Cavalry members at Little Bighorn would demonstrate.[57]

Whatever the self-restraint practiced by Benteen and other participants, soldiers at the Washita did commit acts not sanctioned by the laws of "civilized" warfare, and the prisoners brought away included no adult males. Ben Clark, citing a boy of about twelve as the only wounded male captured, explained that as a wounded Indian was known to be dangerous as long as he could "handle himself," any warriors found were promptly shot to death without discrimination as to the apparent danger.[58] Having shot down a warrior and then ridden past him, John Ryan rode back, "put two more shots into the wounded Indian," and then, strongly desiring to scalp him, rolled the body over. As a comrade named Eagen held his horse, Ryan

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[56]Brig. Gen. William H. Bisbee, U.S. Army (ret.), "Items of Indian Service," John M. Carroll, The Papers of the Order of Indian Wars (Fort Collins, Colorado: The Old Army Press, 1975), p. 92.

[57]Cheyenne women could also kill fellow "noncombatants" when the opportunity offered. For a slaughter including Kiowa women as victims, see Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 60.

[58]Walter Camp interview with Ben Clark, Camp Mss. Transcripts, pp. 12, 192.

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"put my left foot on his neck and raised his scalp. I held it up to Eagan saying, 'John, here is the first scalp for M troop." Ryan hung his trophy from his belt's saber hook, but threw it away after noticing his $14 overcoat stained with blood; his company commander, Lieutenant Hale, smilingly said that Ryan should have retained it "as it was considered an honor on that occasion," and then asked how he felt. Ryan recalled an Irish soldier who after shooting ten Confederates in battle following his brother's death in action, stated "that he did not know as it would help poor Tom any, but he felt a little relieved about the heart. That the was the way I felt."[59]

Ben Clark provides the only references to a prisoner's cold-blooded slaughter, that of an Mexican, presumed captured by the Cheyennes in childhood, found hiding with a baby by men of Myers' command. In response to the Mexican's pleas, a trooper took the little girl in his arms; the prisoner was then told to run and was shot down.[60] However, Clark insisted that no women were killed by the soldiers in cold blood -- though the Osage scouts, "bloodthirsty wretches," slew all they could until stopped, even severing women's limbs and breasts.[61] At least one of the Osages, with no inclination in any case to respect "civilized"

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[59]Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, pp. 53-54.

[60]Ben Clark interview, Camp Mss. Transcripts, p. 16.

[61]Ben Clark interview, Camp Mss. Transcripts, p. 201; New York Sun, May 14, 1899. Clark did not mention any women taking up arms, save the old woman attempting to defend herself with a saber. Certain clans or gentes among the Osages used a red "fire paint," to which an appropriate prayer was: "As the fire has no mercy, so should we have none." Mud was then applied to the cheek below the left eye, two or more fingers' width in thickness, while the horse was painted with mud on the left cheek, shoulder, and thigh. The Osages habitually renewed their paint before charging the foe, terming it the "death paint," and if a man died with this paint on him the survivors did not put on any other paint. Rev. J. Owen Dorsey, in Tenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Society of the Smithsonian

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standards of warfare, was specifically motivated by revenge. Both Keim and Custer provided bloody accounts of a trailer who had disdained to paint himself before battle, but proceeded to adorn himself after securing a Cheyenne scalp -- having avenged his wife's death at Cheyenne hands.[62]

Perhaps the Osages were also responsible for an atrocity not cited by Clark, though Moving Behind, learning that a dark figure lying near a hill had been the body of a pregnant woman "cut open," assumed that soldiers were culpable. But she and her party, hearing the strangely human cries of wounded horses and seeing other captives being rounded up, were shown unexpected mercy:

> The soldiers would pass back and forth near the spot where I lay. As I turned sideways and looked, one soldier saw us, and rode toward where we lay. He stopped his horse, and stared at us. He did not say a word, and we wondered what would happen. But he left, and no one showed up after that. I suppose he pitied us, and left us alone.[63]

Like Moving Behind, most of the women sought to flee or hide rather than fight, and one may safely dismiss a former trooper's claim that "every man, woman and child of the savages" had engaged in shooting at Custer's troopers.[64] However, Custer did report Indian women inflicting casualties, and one incident seemed to confirm the worst white suspicions

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Institution, 1888-'89 (Washington: GPO, 1893), p. 632.

[62]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, pp.116-17; Custer, My Life, p. 256. Keim's is the more spectacular account, with the vengeful Osage first scalping a severed Cheyenne head brought to him, then finding the body of his wife's murderer -- but with scalp already gone. Cutting the corpse's throat while "quivering with rage," he then severs the head, raises it high, and dashes it upon the ground.

[63]Ediger and Hoffman, "Some Reminiscences": 140.

[64]Milwaukee Journal, October 25, 1922.

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concerning homicidal Cheyenne womanhood -- the death of a white boy captive by a woman "who ripped out his entrails with a knife" before he could be rescued, and who was immediately shot to death.[65] But Ben Clark, portraying the killer as the last survivor of a group which had stood at bay under an embankment and refused Clark's calls to surrender, claimed even this as "a terrible example of a Cheyenne mother's despair," the trapped woman not only disemboweling her own baby, but also driving the knife into her own breast before the "needless cruelty" of a trooper's shot to the head.[66]

At about 10 o'clock in the morning, while the fight still raged, the soldiers were surprised to observe a small party of Indians on a knoll a little over a mile below the village, in the direction taken by those who had fled at the start of the attack. Custer at first thought that these Indians were themselves escapees, mounted on ponies seized from their own herd, and content to watch a fight which they felt themselves too weak to enter. But by using his field glasses Custer could identify them as mounted warriors, in war clothing, and thus too

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[65]Custer's Report, Nov. 28, 1868, reel 717, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870; Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 119. Keim describes how, with "demoniac fury," the woman vengefully fell upon the child "and, with one terrible gash, completely disemboweled it -- the warm, smoking entrails falling upon the snow." Perhaps out of deference to lay sensibilities, Custer omits the detail of disembowelment in his memoir. Custer, My Life, p. 243-44.

[66]New York Sun, May 14, 1899; transcript of Kansas City Star interview, December 4, 1904, and Camp's verification with Ben Clark, October 22, 1910, Camp Mss. Transcripts, p. 203. Clark ascribed the soldiers' error to the alleged fact that some Cheyenne babies were almost as fair as white children, though only he refers to the boy as a "baby." David Spotts, who was later shown a tree behind which the woman had supposedly tried to hide herself and the boy, gave the latter's supposed age as five years old. Despite the belief that he was a captive, the boy's body was apparently neither buried nor recovered by the soldiers. D.L. Spotts, letters to Gen. E.S. Godfrey, May 17, 1929 and April 31, 1929, Box 31, W.J. Ghent Papers, Library of Congress.

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well outfitted -- and too numerous -- to be mere refugees. Others joined them, with Ben Clark estimating the warriors at 1200, or perhaps even as many as 1500. "Constant accessions to their numbers were to be seen arriving from beyond the hill on which they stood." Custer wrote: "All this seemed inexplicable."[67]

These new and unexpected arrivals, riding toward the village, captured the overcoats of at least some of the soldiers who had removed them before action for greater freedom of movement.[68] But their own eagerness to fight apparently saved some horse holders from being gobbled up as they waited outside the camp with the mounts of men who had entered the fight dismounted. Private J.M. Pickens of Company M found himself with a poor view of the action below; but when it seemed from the noise that the fighting was over, the men began to clamor for a move "we men then began to clamor for a move down into the valley, the corporal in charge feebly objecting at first. By the time they had reached the village "the Indians were swarming the bluffs around us, and if we hadn't become restless our corporal might have held us there just a little too long." Only many years later did Pickens realize the narrowness of their escape.[69]

New information regarding Indian strength came to Custer from Lt. Godfrey. While

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[67]Custer, My Life, pp. 244-45. Ben Clark placed the appearance of these warriors in the afternoon. Walter Camp interview, Camp Mss. Transcripts, p. 198.

[68]Ryan mentions that two troops, having had these items captured, were forced during the rest of the campaign to resort to wrapping blankets around themselves. Not all the soldiers appear to have removed their overcoats; their own accounts indicate that both Ryan and Captain Barnitz wore theirs during the fight, the captain's being pierced by the ball which wounded him. Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 55; Barnitz Washita manuscript, Box 10, Series III, Barnitz Papers, YU.

[69]J.M. Pickens, letter to EBC, June 29, 1921, reel 3, EBCC.

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attempting to fulfill his mission of securing the pony herd, Godfrey had seen Indians attempting to escape on foot down the left side of the valley. Announcing to Second Lieutenant Law, leading K's second platoon, that he was going in pursuit, Godfrey turned the pony herd over to Law to be taken back to the captured village. He then crossed the Washita and hit the Indians' trail, but after about a mile the fugitives reached another herd of ponies; Godfrey came to the herd and realized "that my Indians had mounted." The chase continued with both parties on horseback. Finally, in the open valley beyond, Godfrey saw a large village, about four miles below that of Black Kettle. The Indians, aware of his platoon's presence, began circling as if to signal or rally, and warriors from this village rode to their rescue.[70]

Godfrey formed his men into two lines and began a retreat by alternate files, moving back from ridge to ridge and firing on the Indians. The line retreating often masked the fire of the line ordered to stand fast, and though the men of the rearmost line were clear to fire when the retreating line sank into the depression between two ridges, their uneasy comrades felt unsafe, "and the men naturally gravitated toward a flank, so that after two or three passings the men regrouped into two squads."[71]

Hearing heavy firing on the valley's opposite side, Godfrey came upon yet another

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[70]Godfrey, undated manuscript account, Box 16, Series III, Bates Papers, YU.

[71] Godfrey, "Cavalry Fire Discipline": 34. In his later article on the Washita battle, Godfrey added that the men "had apparently forgotten their numbers and there was some confusion, so that I divided the skirmishers into two groups, each under a sergeant, and thereafter had no trouble." He cited this experience as influencing the decision of a Tactical Board, of which Godfrey was a member, to adopt for the Army the retreat and advance of troops by alternate groups or units, rather than by odd and even numbers. Godfrey, "Washita Fight": 495.

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herd, of some two hundred ponies, as well as a riderless horse he recognized as Captain Barnitz's. He herded the animals back to the command, and reported to Custer that he had discovered another village: "'What's that?' he exclaimed, and then began a rapid fire of questions as to its distance, extent, etc." Soon Custer summoned him to undergo another flurry of questions. In the meantime Godfrey had heard of Major Elliott's absence, and now suggested to Custer that perhaps the firing he had heard was by Elliott's party.

But Custer did not think so, "because Capt. Meyers (sic) was down that way and had been fighting all forenoon -- ever since the capture of the village. A third time he sent for me to tell me that Romeo [Romero] had questioned the captive squaws and corroborated my discovery of the village below, and he then gave me orders to destroy all the captured property. I write this fully as I feel sure that the General did not know the direction Maj. Elliott had taken."[72]

Questioning his captives (including a woman named Mahwissa, who identified herself as Black Kettle's sister), a surprised Custer learned that downstream were located the winter camps "of all the hostile tribes of the southern plains with which we were at war," including Arapahoes, Kiowas, Cheyennes, Comanches, and some Kiowa-Apaches. The nearest village was about two miles distant, the one farthest off not more than ten miles.[73] Though the

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[72]Godfrey, "Notes on Chapter XXII," Box 16, Godfrey Papers, U.S. Military History Institute. For a slightly different account, which has Godfrey suggest specifically that the firing might have been an attack on Elliott's party, see Godfrey, "Washita Fight": 493-494. In his article, Godfrey also states that at the time Custer questioned him, "many warriors were assembling on the high hills north of the valley overlooking the ridge and the General kept looking in that direction."

[73] Later Sheridan, through a "close questioning" of Mahwissa, obtained what seemed to him correct information regarding camps on the Washita prior to the fight: first Black

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sounds of battle had by now almost died away, with only a few warriors still maintaining their position. Custer felt certain that he was about to be attacked by greatly superior numbers. Leaving a bare minimum of men to handle those still resisting, Custer hastily reformed his command to receive the anticipated attack, which came at about noon. "In their attack they displayed great boldness, and compelled me to use all my force to repel them; but the counter-charges of the Cavalry were more than they could stand, and by three o'clock we drove them in all directions, pursuing them several miles."[74]

While attacking the camps downstream might have compounded Custer's success, his command would be encumbered in doing so by his wounded, prisoners, ponies and other property, unless he divided his forces.[75] Now it was the soldiers who were surrounded, with cartridges running low. But the ammunition crisis was eased by the arrival of Major Bell. With a small escort and several thousand rounds, Bell came galloping into the village through the snow, tar-covered wagon wheels ablaze from friction. The Indians immediately attacked

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Kettle and other Cheyenne chiefs and a small party of Sioux, totaling 51 lodges, then "all the Arapahoes," and 70 additional Cheyenne lodges, plus Kiowas; and finally Apaches and Comanches. Sheridan to Bvt. Maj. Gen. W.A. Nichols, Dec. 3, 1868, container 72, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC. Clark expands the distances involved, placing the first camp five miles downstream, with others at intervals for some fifteen miles: first the Arapahoes, then a Cheyenne village under head chief Little Raven (with Left Hand and Powder Face as "active chiefs"), then Kiowas, Comanches, Mescalero (sic) Apaches, and even Wichitas. Ben Clark interview, Camp Mss. Transcripts, p. 190. Custer placed the Kiowas and Arapahoes six miles below Black Kettle's village. Custer's report, Nov. 28, 1868, reel 717, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870.

[74]Custer's report, Nov. 28, 1868, reel 717, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870. Custer credited the Arapahoes and the Kiowas under Satanta with attempting to recover the Cheyennes' women and ponies.

[75]Custer, My Life, p. 247.

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from the direction in which Bell had come, leading Custer to surmise that they had been completely absorbed in watching his own beleaguered force.[76]

By now Custer's line of battle had become "a continuous and unbroken circle of which the village was about the center." But despite their superior numbers, the Indians apparently hoped that they could draw the soldiers away from their position in the village. To Custer they seemed to fight with excessive prudence, which he credited to the ominous fate of the Cheyennes' village and the cover provided by timber and terrain, which enabled him to keep his soldiers concealed until actually needed.

Once Custer saw that the Indians did not intend to press an attack immediately, he spared about two hundred men to pull down the lodges and collect the captured property in huge piles.[77] Reporting a camp of 51 lodges -- 47 Cheyenne, two Arapaho, and two Sioux -- Custer furnished a remarkably detailed inventory of plunder:

> We captured, in good condition 875 horses, ponies and mules, 241 saddles, some of very fine and costly workmanship, 573 Buffalo robes, 390 Buffalo skins for lodges, 160 untanned robes, 210 axes, 140 hatchets, 35 revolvers, 47 rifles, 535 Lbs of Powder, 1050 Lbs of lead, 4000 arrows and arrow heads, 75 spears, 90 bullet moulds, 35 bows and quivers, 12 shields, 300 Lbs. of bullets, 775 lariats, 940 buckskin saddle bags, 470 blankets, 93 coats, 700 Lbs. of Tobacco. In addition we captured all their winter supply of dried buffalo meat, all their meal, flour and other provisions, and in fact everything they possessed, even driving the

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[76]John Ryan shared Custer's assumption that the Indians had simply failed to see Bell, though it was also asserted that Bell had so deployed his escort of 25 men that the Indians had overestimated his strength, and simply opened up their ranks to avoid him. Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 57; Albert Barnitz, excerpt from letter to Joseph H. Thoburn, Oct. 29, 1910, typescript, Box 16, Series III, Bates Papers, YU.

[77]Custer, My Life, pp. 247-248.

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warriors from the village with little or no clothing.[78]

Lt. Godfrey, placed in charge of the prisoners, first permitted the women to get what they wanted from their own tipis, then set his men to tearing down the lodges and piling several together on the tipi poles, with the Indians' property tossed onto the fires, and their gunpowder poured out and harmlessly "flashed."[79] As the Cheyennes' property passed through the hands of its destroyers, Godfrey, after examining an ornately decorated Indian bridal gown of soft antelope skin, with hundreds of elks' teeth sewn to it, "started to show it to the General and ask to keep it, but as I passed a big fire, I thought, 'what's the use, "orders is orders,"' and threw it in the blaze. I have never ceased to regret the destruction."[80] But John Ryan noted (without apparent resentment) that prior to the burning Custer himself selected a number of items, including saddles and bridles, the rest being destroyed "as the enlisted men were not allowed to take anything from the camp; it would encumber our horses,

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[78]Custer to Sheridan, Nov. 28, 1868, reel 717, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870. The fact that in a divisional order book a copy of this report mistakenly transcribes "women" for "warriors" has led one biographer to assume that an "interesting detail" was later omitted from Custer's memoir. However, while distorting what Custer intended to write, this clerical error inadvertently reflected a grim effect of his attack. Order Book, p. 103, Military Division of the Missouri Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute; Barnett, Touched by Fire, p. 449, n. 39.

[79]More dramatically, Sgt. Ryan recalled an explosion from almost every lodge destroyed as the flames reached stored gunpowder, and the soldiers using existing lodge fires to destroy the hides and poles pulled down on top of them. Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 54.

[80]Godfrey, "Washita Fight," p. 496. In an interview, Godfrey stated that it was "always strictly against orders for the soldiers to take anything in a captured village." Newark Sunday Call, September 13, 1925.

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and we expected to be engaged any moment with several hundred Indians."[81]

As Custer's list of captured property failed to include a number of items which General Sheridan would later cite to implicate the Cheyennes in raiding, a prominent Indian Bureau critic suggested that Sheridan was guilty of falsification, arguing that had Custer actually observed any of them, "he would not only have announced the fact, but preserved these relics as evidence against Black Kettle."[82] But it would have been imprudent for Sheridan to claim possession of imaginary evidence he might later be called upon to produce. Like other Indian-fighting commanders, Custer had drawn up not an indictment, but a list of materials denied to the enemy, and a measure of success.[83] Reporter Keim wrote of examining one of the items subsequently cited by Sheridan, a day-book containing Indian pictographs of war deeds against enemies which included U.S. soldiers: "The colored troops were indeed quite artistically colored, evidently with a burnt stick."[84]

Custer's captives furnished further information regarding their band's recent activities.

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[81]While Keim explained that most of the captures were destroyed due to lack of transportation, Ryan was able to keep his scalped victim's Lancaster rifle by concealing it in one of Bell's wagons. Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 120; Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 57.

[82]Manypenny, Our Indian Wards, p. 249.

[83]Four scalps, taken from white men and women, were cited by Ben Clark as evidence implicating the villagers, while John Ryan drew the same conclusion after seeing the scalps decorating pairs of men's leggings. Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 57; New York Sun, May 14, 1899.

[84]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 222. This day or ledger book was perhaps lost during the great Chicago fire of 1871, which in engulfing Sheridan's divisional headquarters destroyed his official and personal papers and his collection of Indian curiosities. Keim speculated that the pages missing from the book had "contained, quite likely, the business transactions of some luckless trader of the plains."

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Based on a subsequent interview with Mahwissa, Sheridan reported that three war parties had recently ridden north from various camps on the Washita, and that Sheridan's own party, en route to Camp Supply, had actually crossed the trail of one riding toward Fort Larned, composed of Cheyennes, Kiowas, and Arapahoes, which had not yet returned from the warpath. Custer's column had followed the trail of a mixed Cheyenne-Arapaho party which had brought back to camp three scalps, one of them that of a messenger killed and mutilated just before Sheridan had left Fort Dodge, along with his mail, also found in the camp. The third war party, also mixed, had left on foot (presumably for horse-raiding purposes) in the direction of Fort Lyon, and was still out. On the basis of this information, Sheridan would charge that Black Kettle's party had left for Cobb at about the same time the first war party had gone out, and that the last party, the trail of which Custer had found, had left either while Black Kettle was gone or about the time of his return.[85]

As the village was still in the process of being destroyed, the Indians outside Custer's perimeter took the initiative, Custer writing that their attack "soon became general along our entire line," with groups of mounted warriors pushing close to find a weak point. But after the property was in ashes and his own wounded collected, Custer decided to go on the offensive. He ordered several mounted squadrons, including Hamilton's (now commanded by Company D's Captain Thomas Weir), Benteen's, and Myers', to launch local attacks on exposed groups of Indians, while cautioning them to beware of ambuscades. These

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[85]Sheridan to Nichols, Dec. 3, 1868, container 72, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC; New York Herald, Dec. 26, 1868. Sheridan had dispatched two couriers to Fort Dodge on the morning of November 19 before leaving Bluff Creek. They were apparently ambushed and killed after a desperate running fight, bringing to four the number of messengers killed in that vicinity.

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squadrons were able to push the Indians back at any point attacked, yet Custer found that the Indians "would go no further than they were actually driven.[86] Captain Weir was thus credited with putting some of the Indians to flight and pursuing them "as far as prudence, and the necessity of co-operating with the rest of the troops, would admit."[87]

After dismounted fire repelled one Indian advance, as John Ryan would record, Custer ordered an unnamed captain to counterattack with two troops. This officer failed to fulfill these orders, however, and it was instead Captain Benteen who made the charge. Before recall was finally sounded, wrote Ryan, the warriors "were driven in great confusion, and I never saw troops in an engagement act in such a splendid manner or keep their line under such a fire as these men did."[88] Custer, finding fault with no officer in his account of the fight, would simply state that "Colonels Benteen and Myers with their respective squadrons, all mounted, advanced and engaged the enemy."[89]

But Benteen declared Custer guilty of "sending me with two companies to charge all the indians (sic)." and accused him of lying about the two squadrons: "Mine was not in it at all. I was ordered to take command of Myers' Squadron -- Myers being with it, thus disgracing Myers, the plan being, we thought, to get each of us killed. The balance of the 7th Cav. looked on at our evolutions in attacking the enemy." However, Benteen did not mention

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[86]Custer, My Life, p. 248.

[87]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 118.

[88]Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 55. Ryan, a man with considerable combat experience, termed Benteen's charge "the prettiest sight I have ever witnessed."

[89]Custer, My Life, p. 248.

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any failure by Myers leading Custer to relieve him, and wrote as though Custer had expected the squadron to battle a superior Indian force to the death, rather than make a local counterattack appropriate to an active defense.[90]

At about three o'clock, the soldiers dealt with the captured ponies, and the Indians could only watch helplessly. Custer was aware that Lt. Mathey and his small train escort of 80 men would attempt to follow his trail, and feared that if the Seventh lingered on the village site until the following day, Mathey would probably be detected, as the Indians could reconnoiter the country for miles from hilltop vantage points. As the train's loss would render his victory an empty one and leave the command "in the heart of the enemy's country, in midwinter, totally out of supplies for both men and horses," Custer would now march to rejoin it. But it was impractical, as he argued later, to attempt either leading or driving the ponies, disturbed by the smell of white men, back to Camp Supply, and such a herd would have inspired the warriors to continually harass the column.[91] Keeping the horses might also lead the foe to think that the expedition had been inspired by a desire for plunder, rather than to "impress upon his uncultured mind" that punishment had been its sole object. Thus, after Custer's prisoners selected enough ponies to carry them on the march, the remaining animals would be killed.

Custer detailed four troops as a dismounted firing party for "this seemingly -- like

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[90]Benteen's notes, Carroll, From the Civil War, pp. 10, 14. Benteen did not explain why Custer might wish to kill off two of his field officers, but alleged that in sending him on an earlier trip to secure recruits and horses for the regiment Custer had "given me a fair chance of getting scalped." Benteen to Goldin, Feb. 17, 1896, Carroll, Benteen-Goldin Letters, p. 267.

[91]Custer, My Life, pp. 248-49.

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most measures of war -- cruel but necessary act," and engaged in some interesting by-play with his new prisoners. Mahwissa attempted to ingratiate herself with the victorious soldier-chief, claiming that the warriors had brought their fate upon themselves, and that a war party had returned to the village the previous night, resulting in a victory celebration. The woman then selected an attractive Indian girl, perhaps seventeen years of age, and placed her hand in Custer's, conducting a ceremony in a language Custer could not understand. On asking its meaning, Custer was told by Romero that he was being married to the girl, and attempted to "extricate myself without giving offense" by explaining the peculiarities of the white man's law.[92]

Lt. Godfrey's task of killing the horses proved an awkward as well as a distasteful and bloody one. "We tried to rope them and cut their throats, but the ponies were frantic at the approach of a white man and fought viciously." His men grew tired, and Godfrey called for reinforcements to help complete the butchery.[93] "It was hard," admitted John Ryan, "but there was nothing else to do under the circumstances." The clumsy slaughter dragged on for nearly two hours, with ponies bunched against the steep embankment south of the village,

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[92]Custer, My Life, pp. 250-254. The captives' horses were not the only ones spared. Ben Clark stated that Custer gave about 50 to officers and picked out four fine mules for himself, while some officers had already captured some on their own, so that in all about 200 animals were taken by the combatants. Ryan states that each officer was permitted two ponies from the herd, while some captured mules were used to replace those exhausted in pulling the regiment's wagons. Clark interview, Camp Mss. Transcripts, p. 18; Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 57.

[93]Godfrey, "Washita Fight": 496.

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while infuriated warriors bore witness from the hills.[94]

With both the village and the pony herd destroyed, the mystery of Elliott's whereabouts remained, his continued absence having gone unobserved during the excitement of the fight.[95] Custer would write of interviewing officers and men, and of learning only that Elliott had been seen participating in the initial charge into the village: "I had previously given him up as killed, but was surprised that so many of the men should be missing, and none of their comrades be able to account for them. All the ground inside the advanced lines held by the Indians who attacked us after our capture of the village was closely and carefully examined, in the hope of finding the bodies of some if not all the absentees, but with no success." Parties were sent out with a scout who had seen Elliott disappear in pursuit of warriors escaping between Elliott's and Thompson's commands. But "after a search extending nearly two miles," these returned to report no trace of Elliott or his men.[96]

This failure would produce charges that the effort to locate Elliott was inadequate, and while much of the harshest criticism was produced by later generations, the fact that Custer's command left the field without ascertaining the fate of Elliott's party did generate some discomfort soon after the event. Thus, even while justifying Custer's actions as valid under the rules of war, Keim granted that the party's fate "would appear as a gross abandonment by Custer, particularly for not even recovering the bodies or making some effort to learn what

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[94]Clark interview, Camp Mss. Transcripts, p. 198; Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 58.

[95]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 118.

[96]Custer, My Life, pp. 257-258.

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had become of them, when found missing after the fight..."[97]

Yet few criticism of Custer's conduct in this matter can be found in statements by actual participants in the campaign. Even though seven of the missing men had been from his own company, including a tent mate, John Ryan forcefully rebuked a twentieth-century correspondent; the man had claimed that Custer had not looked for Major Elliott's party, "but I say he did and the parties that went in search were driven back."[98] Perhaps what some participants did not say was also significant: Winfield Harvey's son informed a researcher that he had never heard his father intimate that Custer had abandoned Elliott.[99] Following the Seventh's return to Camp Supply, Private Spotts recorded what was apparently the prevailing belief: "After hunting around where the fighting had taken place, their bodies could not be found, and the searchers had to leave them behind, knowing they had been killed at some place not far away."[100] Spotts later confirmed that he had "never heard a word of criticism of Gen. Custer" regarding the matter and pointed out that the Seventh had not left the field until

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[97]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 149. Perhaps the most severe criticism may be found in a ludicrous yet highly influential "debunking" biography, which envisioned Custer as having deliberately abandoned Elliott lest a search somehow mar his own victory. Frederic F. Van de Water, Glory-Hunter: A Life of General Custer (1934; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), pp. 197-200.

[98]John Ryan to W.A. Falconer, April 15, 1922, Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 210.

[99]Charles M. Harvey, letter to W.J. Ghent, June 21, 1935, W. J. Ghent Papers, NYPL. Private Harvey's overall opinion of his chief was a high one, according to his son: "I never heard my father say a harsh word of General Custer, but always spoke of him as a brave and fearless commander, and one who would not send his men into an engagement that he was afraid to go into himself."

[100]Spotts journal, Dec. 2, 1868, Spotts, Campaigning with Custer, p. 67.

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after dark, when it was certain that Elliott's party had been killed: conversing with Seventh Cavalry enlisted men, he had heard "only praise for their commander...Gen. Custer never deserted any one in danger."

Custer's entire regiment, Spotts insisted, believed Elliott dead -- though he did not explain how everyone could be so sure of this.[101] Such a seeming lack of discontent, in the face of a heavy loss of life, contrasts strongly with the demoralization produced by the Sully incident, as well as the resentment in the ranks (and among at least some officers) of Colonel Joseph Reynolds' command, following his abandonment of dead and wounded at the Powder River fight of March 17, 1876.[102]

Similarly, with one notable exception, the officers of the Seventh Cavalry left little evidence of having criticized Custer's conduct, though of course some criticism may have gone unrecorded, or been suppressed due to the tendency of regimental officers to "close ranks" in the face of outside scrutiny; one officer outside the regiment, famed as a novelist, was later convinced, as he informed then Brigadier General E.S. Godfrey, that "with the exception of two or three of General Custer's kith and kin," officers and enlisted men alike were almost united in condemning Elliott's abandonment, and that therein lay the origin of a rift within the unit.[103] But such a split into factions, at least among the officers of a regiment,

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[101]D.L. Spotts, letter to W.J. Ghent, May 26, 1933, Box 31, W.J. Ghent Papers, Library of Congress.

[102]Charles M. Robinson III, A Good Year to Die: The Story of the Great Sioux War (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 81-83; J.W. Vaugh, The Reynolds Campaign on Powder River (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), pp. 152-53.

[103]In his introduction to the first book devoted to the Little Bighorn battle, Brigadier General Charles King described "the dumb amaze of some of his best officers" as Custer

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was not peculiar to Custer's command, and in the Seventh Cavalry's case had predated the Washita fight.[104]

Godfrey himself, asked directly whether Custer had been blamed at the time for abandoning Elliott, replied, "No, as far as my knowledge goes. Of course my associates were the youngsters. We were 'betting' that we should find Elliot with the wagon train" -- on the theory that on returning from his pursuit of fugitives Elliott had seen Indians practically surrounding the village, and so detoured onto a back trail to rejoin Custer.[105] Godfrey even went so far as to suggest an ulterior motive for critics, writing that: "The so called 'Abandonment of Elliott' was a pretext to off-set the 'Glory of Washita' -- and has no merit."[106] But such theories had their appeal, and even members of Elliott's family apparently

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abandoned Elliott and his "flanking party." He subsequently explained the premise behind his remarks to a dissenting Godfrey, who seems to have been particularly perturbed by the word "dumb." While the book's author suggested to King that this might be altered to "silent," this was in fact not done in later editions. Charles King, letter to E.S. Godfrey, April 10, 1927, Francis R. Hagner Collection, New York Public Library; Charles King, Introduction to W.A. Graham, The Story of the Little Bighorn (1926; Harrisburg: Military Service Publishing, 1952), xxxi.

[104]E.S. Godfrey, "Custer and the Seventh Cavalry," typescript, Sept. 8, 1927, Hagner Collection, NYPL. Having applied to the Seventh Cavalry, young Godfrey learned -- while at Ft. Leavenworth in the winter of 1867-68 -- that such a schism existed, and resolved not to side with either faction: "The result was that I was not in the confidence of either side, but caught h___ from the anti-Custerites!" Godfrey added that he was personally never a "Custerite," his peculiar grievance being Custer's failure in his writings to credit Godfrey with discovering the "big hostile village" below the Washita battlefield, and with giving Custer his first information of this camp.

[105]Extract, E.S. Godfrey, letter to W.J. Ghent, Sept. 8, 1927, Hagner Collection, NYPL.

[106] E.S. Godfrey, letter to Frederic F. Van de Water, [1931], Van de Water Papers, NYPL.

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embraced the notion that Custer had deliberately sent the major to his doom -- doubtless preferring not to concede that the major's own actions had resulted in 18 of the battle's 22 Army fatalities.[107]

Whatever Ben Clark's own quarrels with Custer may have been, the scout's comments on the Elliott controversy favored that officer, as he told of how Captain Benteen, after the battle, had quietly inquired to see whether Elliott had gone off by Custer's order, or if Custer had known where the major had gone.[108] Clark addressed the controversy in greatest detail in his 1899 newspaper interview:

> The charge was made against Custer in after years that he gave the order which led Elliot (sic) to his death and then abandoned him to his fate. This accusation was false. Custer knew nothing of Elliot's going. Half an hour after Elliot and his men rode away Custer came up and asked me what had become of Elliot. The enmity between Custer and Col. Benteen, which afterward grew very bitter, showed itself a day or two after the fight. Benteen, anxious to weaken Custer's prestige, came to me after it was believed that Elliot and his men were lost and asked me if I would be willing to make the statement that Custer knowingly let Elliot go to his doom without trying to save him. I refused to have anything to do with the matter.[109]

Clark's accounts make it seem as though Benteen, at least during the actual campaign, was driven by personal malice to question Custer's behavior -- and perhaps it was only in his

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[107]Dodge City Daily Globe, March 6, 1930, typescript copy, Box 31, W.J. Ghent Papers, Library of Congress. Mrs. Fred Walton, Elliott's niece, was supposedly told "at her mother's knee" that a mysteriously prescient Custer had deliberately sent Elliott in search of the fleeing Cheyennes, knowing that he would never return. Yet, aside from the claim that as a volunteer officer Elliott was not popular with West Pointers, this story provides no motive; we are left with an Uriah and a David minus a Bathsheba.

[108]Ben Clark interview, Camp Mss. Transcripts, pp. 18, 202.

[109]New York Sun, May 14, 1899. Later Clark would state that Custer made this query about two hours after Elliott's departure. Ben Clark interview, Camp Mss. Transcripts, p. 18

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later years that Benteen actually came to believe in a commander so vengeful toward presumed enemies that he would seek to arrange their deaths in action. Such enemies, Benteen charged, included not merely Myers and himself, but also West and Elliott, two officers who had "in underhand ways been 'peppering' Custer," wrongly assuming that their target was unaware of their activities.[110]

Thus, in Benteen's view, Custer's relationship with his ranking subordinate was marked not by a mere professional or even personal friction, but by a positively lethal enmity: "Custer hated Elliott, and didn't care to know where he was, or find him." However, Benteen offered no reasons for this hatred other than Custer's knowledge that Elliott was "a double-faced man" who had somehow played him false in 1867. Perhaps it was simply another outgrowth of the delusional tendency which would also lead Benteen to the fantastic claim that he had defeated Black Kettle's band practically on his own.[111]

In one statement, Benteen seems to acquit Custer from the charge which he himself had apparently sought Ben Clark's help in pressing -- that of deliberately sending Elliott in harm's way: "Elliott, like myself, was "pirating" on his own hook; allowed himself to be surrounded and died like a man."[112] This in itself might not acquit Custer of negligence in

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[110]Benteen to Goldin, Feb. 12, 1896, Carroll, Benteen-Goldin Letters, pp. 252-253. Benteen did not reveal the specifics of the "peppering," or how he himself could have known that Custer was aware of it.

[111]Making claims supported by no other participant's account, Benteen contended that at the Washita "my Fort Harker squadron broke up the village before a trooper of any of the other companies of 7th got in, and we protected the fifty-five (sic) squaws and children we captured." Benteen to Goldin, Feb. 12, 1896, Carroll, Benteen-Goldin Letters, p. 252.

[112]Benteen to Goldin, Feb. 12, 1896, Carroll, Benteen-Goldin Letters, p. 252.

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failing to rescue Elliott. But Benteen's comments also raise the question of timing: "Perhaps Custer didn't care to hunt for his party, at least he did not. However, had party been found after fight of Washita, they would simply have been found dead, as they were two weeks later."[113] Thus even Benteen, whatever his machinations, appeared to believe that attempting to "save" Elliott's group could have achieved nothing beyond recovering their bodies.

But to question Benteen's logic or motives, or those of other critics, does not in itself justify Custer's course of action. It was undeniable that his command was surrounded, and outnumbered by perhaps more than two to one, this being the largest Indian force which Custer had met in action to date. But such odds did not mean that the Indians were likely to overrun the Seventh's defensive perimeter. A successful attack on Mathey's lightly escorted train was a more probable threat, and Custer had reason to fear the logistical disaster which would have resulted. The village site itself was of no strategic value, and a hit-and-run approach conformed to Sheridan's strategy.[114]

Searching for Elliott would have been the only reason for Custer to linger at the scene of the fight. But actually rescuing Elliott's party would have required not a prolonged effort,

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[113]Benteen's notes, Carroll, From the Civil War, p. 14.

[114]One student of his career has suggested that Custer, while not necessarily "guilty" of anything, might have made a better search than that actually made -- and observed that the approaches of pro- and anti-Custer writers regarding the Washita tend to reverse their positions surrounding the Little Bighorn fight. Thus, those who believe that Elliott's few men were able to resist long enough to be rescued should explain why Custer was wrong in attacking at the Little Bighorn with his entire regiment, while Custer's defenders "need to be asked why, if Custer's regiment was at risk if a thorough search was made, or even not made they cheer Custer on while he attacked about 2,000 warriors eight years later." Bob Tiernan, review of Louis Kraft's Custer and the Cheyennes, The English Westerners' Society Tally Sheet 42.2 (Summer 1996): 80.

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but rather locating its position much earlier -- and Custer appears to have known nothing, until it was too late, of why Elliott was absent, and of just how few men he had taken with him. It was not a situation which Custer was likely to have foreseen: his second in command, assigned three troops to lead into battle, had impulsively decided to lead a small ad hoc force in chasing a group of fugitives over a considerable distance, and had left his detachment to fend for itself. Perhaps Custer, even after learning that Elliott was missing, thought -- at least initially -- that the major had taken a substantial force with him, and realized the vulnerable nature of Elliott's new "command" too late.[115]

Perhaps realizing that Elliott was in such peril would have required officers who were less distracted by other events on the day of battle. Even Lt. Godfrey, who had heard firing and surmised it to have come roughly where the sad remains of Elliott's party were later found, confessed: "I had 'troubles of my own' and so had not been greatly concerned with this heavy firing on the opposite side of the Valley, but I did not understand at the time why the hostiles quit following my retreat. However, I now feel sure that Elliott's sacrifice was my salvation! He had 'stirred up the hornet's nest' and he became the object of their vengeance."[116]

In his initial report, Custer makes it appear that his objectives in departing the village

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[115]Even an admittedly harsh critic of Custer was moved to ask "Although Custer didn't actually say so, did he possibly feel that Elliot (sic) who had 3 troops under his command had no need of help? It hasn't been shown that Custer knew Elliot had left his command and with only 19 (sic) men had gone in pursuit of the bunch fleeing down the valley." Col. T.M. Coughlan, letter to Frederic F. Van de Water, March 29, 1935, Van de Water Papers, NYPL.

[116]Godfrey, undated typescript, Box 16, Series III, Bates Papers, YU.

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included an actual assault on the camps downstream, and even that he had specific Indians in mind; after pursuing the warriors for several miles, he writes, he then "moved my entire command in search of the villages of the Kiowas & Arapahoes, but after a march of eight miles, discovered that they had taken alarm at the fate of the Cheyenne Village and had fled." Custer was now three days' march from the point where he had left his supply train, and aware that its wagons could not simply follow him there, "as the trail had led us over a section of country so cut up by ravines and other obstructions that Cavalry could with difficulty move over it. The supplies carried from the train upon the persons of the men were exhausted; my men, from loss of sleep and hard service, were worn out; my horses were in the same condition for want of forage." He therefore began his return march at about eight P.M.[117]

However, his later memoir, as well as other participants' accounts, make it clear that Custer's movement toward the villages was a feint, his "main desire" being to draw off the Indians lingering in the hills from the direction in which the train might be approaching. Throwing out skirmishers to beat down any opposition to his advance, with his colors flying and his band playing, and his mounted prisoners placed under guard immediately in the rear of the advanced troops, Custer began the march "lacking but an hour of night." Moving down the left side of the valley, he sent for Lt. Godfrey to ride with him and show him the point

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[117]Custer's report, November 28, 1868, container 83, reel 81, Sheridan Papers, LC. Later Custer would also cite the loss of the men's overcoats, captured by Indians, as though the entire regiment had stripped them off for fighting -- though he would later refer only to a "portion" who had lost both haversacks and overcoats. Custer, My Life, p. 259. A less commonplace capture was mentioned by Kiowa Indians who, many years later, informed historian Don Rickey, Jr. that the Kiowas had secured on the battlefield a horn which struck them as being "backwards," and which Rickey judged from their description to have been a French horn. Author's conversation with Dr. Rickey, June, 1983, Billings, Montana.

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from which the big village had been seen -- Custer maintaining a slow pace, so that it would be dark when the command reached this point.

The surrounding Indians watched, but, whether through fear of hitting their own people now held as prisoners, or some other reason, offered little resistance; Custer asserted that "they never offered to fire a shot or retard our movements in any manner," but assembled as quickly as possible and then fled down the valley ahead of the soldiers, presumably out of fear that Custer intended to overtake their families and herds. Moving Behind recounted that after the soldiers' withdrawal she and her aunt ran to join Indians standing on a hill, as other men and youths, some mounted, converged on the spot. When it was suggested that they open fire on the soldiers, still visible across the river, others objected lest the prisoners be endangered. [118] Lt. Gibson, though he acknowledged that a few harmless shots were exchanged, believed that the troops had every reason to expect "a harder fight than the one just ended, but to our great surprise, as we approached the positions occupied by this overwhelming mass of savages, they disappeared like 'chaff' before the wind...'" He estimated their departure at four P.M. or perhaps somewhat earlier.[119]

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[118]Custer, My Life, p. 258; Godfrey, undated typescript, Box 16, Series III, Bates Papers, YU; Ediger and Hoffman, "Some Reminiscences": 141.

[119]Gibson, "The Washita," Chandler, Of GarryOwen in Glory, p. 20. Unlike most accounts, which portray Custer's march as virtually unopposed, Barnitz (perhaps conflating action witnessed earlier with his traumatic ambulance journey) recalled riding with curtains rolled up for better viewing, and seeing desperate charges repulsed by counter-charges, or by troopers who knelt to fire into the warriors and cause "such of them as were not killed" to gallop away. Barnitz thought the Indians' lavish use of red paint aimed at appearing more dreadful, and even wrote that "had it not been for the diverting actions of these stalwart red men -- who were literally red on that occasion," the dearth of amusement might have left him feeling "lonesome in the ambulance, and possibly grown despondent, from reflecting on the discomfiting nature of his wound." Albert Barnitz, letter to Joseph B. Thoburn (unsigned

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Darkness overtook the command "just before we reached the place from which the village would be in sight," and Custer then began his countermarch, away from the seemingly imperiled camps.[120] His feint made, he returned to his battlefield by ten P.M., but without halting pushed on, following the very trail he had made in approaching the village. With the soldiers gone, some of the Cheyennes rode to retrieve the bodies of Black Kettle and Medicine Woman:

> Clown, Afraid of Beaver, Scabby, and Roll Down got off their horses, and went down to get the bodies. They were too heavy to lift, so they had to drag them in the water, then bring them up. Clown got his red and blue blanket, and spread it on the ground beside a road a short distance from the river, and the bodies were laid on the blanket and covered with the same blanket. Clown got the saddle from the dead horse, and gave it to my aunt to use, saddling her pony with it.

The party was obliged to leave the bodies behind, and as they rode to the west, "we would come across the bodies of men, women, and children, strewn about. We would stop and look at the bodies, and mention their names." The survivors moved on in the bitter cold, the clothing that would have protected them through the winter now ashes.[121] With overwhelming force, Custer had struck the Cheyennes a heavy blow, leaving those who had escaped death or capture to mourn the death or disappearance of loved ones, and to confront a harsh winter without shelter. Black Kettle's village had been scoured and scorched from the face of the earth.

At about 2 A.M. Custer concluded that it would be prudent to have the main command

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typescript), Nov. 28, 1910, Box 16, Series III, Bates Papers, YU.

[120]Godfrey manuscript, Box 16, Series III, Bates Papers, YU.

[121]Ediger and Hoffman, "Some Reminiscences": 140.

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bivouac until daylight, though he sent West's squadron forward to reinforce Mathey's train. The men built huge fires, taking the fuel from the timber lining the valley of the Washita.[122] Private Harvey's journal entry was confident: "No rations tonight. The Indians captured them all from us by leaving it while charging. We will reach our train tomorrow by noon, then we will have plenty. I am very well so far. Plenty of snow."[123]

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[122]Custer, My Life, p. 259.

[123]Harvey journal, Nov. 27, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 86.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

Sheridan Follows Through

"I will take some of the starch out of them..."

The Seventh Cavalry had inflicted great damage on the Cheyennes, but had also suffered unusually heavy losses, at least by the standards of the post-Civil War, Indian-fighting Army. Apart from its second in command, Major Elliott, and the seventeen enlisted men missing and presumed dead with him, the regiment had lost a captain and one soldier killed, and two men mortally wounded. Ten enlisted men would survive their wounds, along with 1st Lt. Custer, 2nd Lt. Thomas J. March, and Captain Barnitz, the latter crippled for life.[1] Thus the Seventh could count a total of 20 enlisted men and 2 officers dead as a result of the fight, and a troop commander forced to retire due to wounds.

In return for these losses, which could be absorbed more easily by the Army than by its Indian foes, the Seventh could claim a village and pony herd destroyed, over fifty prisoners taken, and a number of warriors killed, though perhaps not the precise number claimed by

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[1]For casualties, see Assistant Surgeon Henry Lippincott, "Special Report of Enlisted Men Killed and Wounded at the Battle of the Washita, Indian Territory, November 27, 1868," and "Official Report of Officers Killed at the Battle of the Washita, November 27, 1868," F-421, "File F," 1861-1889, RG 94, Records of the Office of Medical Records, 1814-1919, NA. Of the 15 wounded, Marsh and two enlisted men were hit by arrows, with the remaining twelve struck by bullets, including the two men mortally wounded and two slightly injured by spent shot. For the Army, the Washita was the costliest Indian fight between the Fetterman disaster of December 21, 1866 (79 Army personnel and two civilians) and the action in California's Lava Beds on April 26, 1873, where Modoc Indians killed four officers and eighteen enlisted men while wounding one officer, sixteen enlisted men and one civilian. Chronological List, p. 54.

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Custer as being among the "fruits of our victory." Composing his initial report the day after the fight, Custer informed Sheridan that judging by "actual and careful examination after the battle," the Indians had "left on the ground and in our possession the bodies of one hundred and three of their warriors, including Black Kettle himself, whose scalp is now in the possession of one of the Osage guides."[2]

While this strongly implied that a systematic count had been made on the actual field before the regiment's withdrawal, the figure was apparently reached in camp afterward, the officers being assembled "and each one questioned as to the casualties of enemy warriors, locations, etc. Every effort was made to avoid duplications."[3] But Captain Benteen emphasized such over counting: "Custer assembled the officers to inquire of each how many dead indians (sic) each had seen, then what each had seen were added. They all had seen the same dead ones."[4] Yet Barnitz, while unable to inspect the battlefield after being wounded, thought that Custer's initial figure of 103 must have been too low, and Custer himself would amend this figure; stating that the Indians had subsequently admitted a loss of 140 killed, plus many wounded, he would conclude that, including prisoners, his attack had inflicted "an entire

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[2]Custer's report, Nov. 28, 1868, reel 717, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870. Although he reported the death of Black Kettle, Custer did not address the circumstances of his death. Nor did he explicitly credit any particular party with killing the chief -- not even the Osage who had claimed his scalp.

[3]Godfrey, "Washita Battle": 498.

[4]Benteen's notes, Carroll, From the Civil War, p. 14. Sheridan not only passed on Custer's figure, but (perhaps relying on information from prisoners) added that no fewer than sixteen "chiefs" had been killed: 13 Cheyennes, 2 Sioux and 1 Arapaho -- which would suggest that each Sioux and Arapaho lodge came supplied with its own chief. Sheridan to Nichols, Dec. 3, 1868, container 72, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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loss of the Indian in killed, wounded and missing not far from 300."[5]

Some of the accounts not originating with Seventh Cavalry personnel also indicated high casualties. Word was brought to Fort Cobb of Indian losses even before the troops returned, the Indians reportedly losing "five chiefs and distinguished braves" dead, including Black Kettle, as well as about 75 "ordinary fighting men."[6] Ben Clark likewise estimated a figure of 75 slain warriors -- but with as many women and children killed.[7] At least one regimental commander expressed unofficial doubts by accusing Custer of having exaggerated "as usual" in reporting Indian losses, and remarking that, discounting women and children, more soldiers than Indians had been slain.[8]

Some accounts from the Indian side would, if accepted uncritically, lead to the same conclusion. In his biography George Bent gave the names of 12 Cheyenne and 2 Arapaho warriors slain, while also stating that 12 women and 5 children had been killed. The dead men

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[5]Custer to Bvt. Lieut. Col. J. Schuyler Crosby, AAAG, Department of the Missouri, Dec. 22, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3d sess., no. 40, p. 9.

[6]Henry E. Alvord, Capt. 10th Cav., AAIG, District Indian Territory, "Summary of Information Regarding Hostile Indians," Semi-weekly report No. 5, Dec. 7, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3d sess., no. 18, p. 37. Despite this substantial count, Captain Alvord described Black Kettle's village as being "rather isolated" and numbering only about 30 lodges, while noting a report that the bodies of 29 soldiers (including three officers) and an Osage were found upon the field: "Thirty-seven Cheyennes, boys, women, and girls are missing, supposed to have been taken prisoners."

[7]New York Sun, May 14, 1899. Clark's breakdown of casualties is noteworthy, considering the number of noncombatants captured, Clark's own statement that the soldiers killed none deliberately, and his recognition of the fact that many escaped.

[8]Benjamin Grierson, letter to John Kirk, March 4, 1869, cited in William H. Leckie and Shirley A. Leckie, Unlikely Warriors: General Benjamin H. Grierson and His Family (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), p. 159.

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included White Bear, a Mexican captive -- perhaps the victim Ben Clark named Pilar. Another Bent account had 11 Cheyenne men, 12 women and 6 children killed, plus 2 Arapahoes killed by Elliott's men.[9] Colonel Nye, with many years' experience in talking with elderly Indians concerning frontier warfare, tended to credit Custer's numbers, especially since this "tally" seemed verified by General Sheridan's own visit to the battlefield. Nye did not ascribe the Indian accounts' low losses to a desire to deceive, or to play down casualties. Instead, he observed that the Indians tended "to state only what they saw themselves or were told by a close relative" and that inhibitions about mentioning the names of dead tribesmen had, over the years, made accurate tallying impossible.[10]

Dead warriors were, in the context of a winter campaign, perhaps less important than the crippling of the survivors through loss of herds and village, a principal General Sully had proclaimed after his victory over the Sioux at Killdeer Mountain: "I would rather destroy their supplies than kill fifty of their warriors."[11] Acknowledging that not all the dead were

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[9]Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 322; Dan Grinnell, letter to W.M. Camp, Oct. 3, 1916, cited in John M. Carroll, ed., General Custer and the Battle of the Washita: The Federal View (Bryan, Texas: Guidon Press, 1978), xiv. In a best-selling account of the fight, Bent's figure is seemingly conflated with Custer's own figure of 103 warriors to produce a statistical absurdity: "They killed 103 Cheyennes, but only eleven of them were warriors." Such historical sleight of hand inspired a disgruntled professor of anthropology to remark that "Massacres of Indians, according to the neo-nonsense of Brown and his confederates, were not indiscriminate, but rigorously discriminate, being limited to defenseless women and children." Brown, Bury My Heart, p. 168; John Greenway, The American Tradition: A Gallery of Rogues (New York: Mason/Charter, 1977), p. 38.

[10]Nye, Plains Indian Raiders, p. 136. Nye, perhaps misled by the wording of Custer's official report, wrote assuming that Custer had enjoyed ample opportunity to count the dead on the field. In the case of female casualties, there appears to have been a complete lack of interest on the part of Indian informants in providing names.

[11]Utley, Frontiersmen in Blue, p. 278.

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warriors. Custer, citing the wounding of several of his men by women, submitted no numbers for these other Indian casualties: "In the excitement of the fight, as well as in self-defence, it so happened that some of the squaws and a few children were killed or wounded. The latter I have brought with me, and they receive all the medical attendance the circumstances of the case permit."

Contrary to the conventions of "civilized" warfare, Custer had carried off all noncombatants with him, claiming "as prisoners of war, 53 squaws and their children," including the survivors of both Black Kettle and Little Rock. His initial report also made a mysterious mention of the troops securing two white children held captive by the Indians, and stated that (besides the slain white boy, whose age Custer put at about ten years), a white woman had been murdered by her Indian captors at the outset of the attack.[12]

Despite the potential value of such captives in justifying his attack -- particularly if the children were able to testify concerning their capture by the Indians -- Custer made no further mention of them. Nor did anyone else who was not simply repeating Custer's initial claim, and reporter Keim, though he wrote of two children "released from a fearful bondage" in his 1870 account, made no mention of seeing them after the Seventh's return to Camp Supply.[13] Perhaps Custer, realizing that his information was faulty, simply chose to ignore his initial statement. But one of the children taken to Camp Supply may indeed have been a redeemed

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[12]Custer's report, Nov. 28, 1868, reel 717, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-1870.

[13]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 119.

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captive.[14]

At daylight on November 28 Custer resumed his march, and at about 10 a.m. Mathey's corralled wagon train was finally located, having made only sixteen miles since Custer had left it. Custer, anxious to reach the point where his command had first struck the timbered Washita valley, "from which I intended sending scouts through with dispatches to General Sheridan," did not halt for breakfast, but had the wagons' teams hitched, and resumed his march with a reunified command, making camp that afternoon. He had his report ready by nightfall, which enabled scouts "California Joe" and Jack Corbin to ride toward Cobb in the darkness.[15]

Whatever his private thoughts on his subordinates' conduct, Custer's report made no mention of a failure by Captain Myers, or anyone else, and instead embraced all in his praise: "Every officer, man, scout and Indian guide did his full duty.... I only regret the loss of the gallant spirits who fell in the battle of the Washita. Those whose loss we are called upon to

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[14]In April of 1869 two boys would be separated from the other prisoners, then at Fort Hays. The return of a child identified as an Arapaho about twelve years old, blind in one eye, was demanded by chief Little Raven; the other boy, about two years old, was placed in the post hospital, his health impaired by abuse. From his light hair and features, post commander Colonel Nelson A. Miles thought him the son of white parents, and while the Indians themselves claimed him to be a "quarterbreed," from "their cruel treatment of him I judge he must have been one of their captives or the child of some settler...While he remained with the Indians he was placed in the most exposed part of their quarters and his food and clothing taken away from him and thrown away." Miles predicted that if he were compelled to remain with the Indians he would die from exposure and ill treatment. Miles to Assistant Adjutant General, Department of the Missouri, April 30, 1869, Burkey, Custer, Come at Once!, p. 68.

[15]Custer, My Life, pp. 259-260; Albert Barnitz, letter to Joseph B. Thoburn, Nov. 28, 1910, Box 16, Series III, Bates Papers, YU.

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deplore were among our bravest and best."[16] Custer listed Elliott and his men as killed rather than as simply missing and presumed dead. But he seemingly had no proof of their deaths, and while it was later alleged that Osage scouts had lingered behind to watch the "hostiles" before overtaking the command to tell Custer of Elliott's fate, neither Custer nor anyone else with the Seventh Cavalry mentions the Osages providing such an important revelation.[17]

But if Custer was presumptuous in "writing off" Elliott and his men as dead, his presumption was not exceptional; indeed, as the editor of Private Harvey's diary observes, "Arm chair theorists have long speculated on how everyone knew that Major Elliott and the others had been killed."[18] Perhaps it was merely a question of probabilities. But even with such a heavy loss acknowledged, there was no doubt as to which side had triumphed. In addition to his official report, Custer dashed off an exultant private note to Sheridan, apparently accompanied by at least one grisly souvenir:

> We have cleaned Black Kettle and his band out so thoroughly that they can neither fight, dress, sleep, eat or ride without sponging upon their friends. It was a regular Indian "Sailor's Creek"...I have pretty positive information about the Kiowas and Arapahoes. Nothing short of race horses will catch Indians now. Black Kettles sister says they will ask for peace. I killed all the ponies except a

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[16]Custer's report, November 28, 1868, container 83, reel 81.

[17]Puckett, History of Oklahoma, p. 102. Mrs. Lone Wolf's melodramatic account states that on hearing of the Osages' discovery, Custer's captives deputized Mahwissa to ask Custer how many Cheyennes would be slain in retaliation. Custer, covering his hands in grief, made no reply, and a soldier was starting to drive the woman away when Custer called her back, to have her informed that the white soldiers did not kill captives.

[18]Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 85, n. 42. Harvey's journal entry for November 27 indicates that the farrier took the deaths of Elliott's band for granted, and placed the Seventh's total losses at 23 killed and 11 wounded.

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> few I have given the Osages and guides and a few officers and some for you and staff. It took three companies an hour and a half to shoot them. We have lots of scalps a sample of which I send you. What do you think of this for a five days campaign? I found the remains of an immense village on the Canadian River from which a large part had gone and the trail of which I saw. It was within two days march of Beaver.[19]

The next morning the march continued at a more leisurely pace, without Indian harassment, despite a subsequent report which had the soldiers followed by two Cheyenne braves "whose relations were among the missing, and who announced their determination of rescuing their people or dying in the attempt." They apparently achieved neither objective.[20] Receiving Custer's dispatch on the morning of November 29, Sheridan penned a note to Libbie telling of "your husbands grand success in killing 103 Indians & capturing nearly 1000 horses & much property."[21] The success was not merely Custer's, of course. Such a blow would help vindicate Sheridan's belief that winter would not prevent him from fighting and defeating the Indians.

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[19]G.A. Custer, letter to P. H. Sheridan, Nov. 28, 1868, Mrs. Custer's transcript, reel 4, EBCC. Presumably these scalps were those of victims of Indian raids -- corporeal evidence of the village's hostility, rather than inventoried Indian property.

[20] Henry E. Alvord, Semi-weekly report No. 5, December 7, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3d sess., no. 18, p. 37; Godfrey, "Notes on Chapter XXII," Box 16, Godfrey Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute. In seeking to disprove a claim that many Indians had followed the column back nearly to Camp Supply, Godfrey cited an incident which incidentally revealed Cheyenne hardiness. The young lieutenant was asked by an older woman acting as spokeswoman (perhaps Mahwissa) to let a woman "fall out" of the march, assuring him that she would return: "Nearly an hour had passed, and I began to feel uneasy, but the old squaw laughed at my fears. Then, to my surprise and great relief, I saw the absent one coming in at a full gallop. She came up laughing, and on her back, slung in a blanket, was a pappoose! Instead of losing a prisoner I had gained one. The captives, who had sensed my worry, thought it a good joke. It seems to me that if Indians had been following us they would have picked up my squaw."

[21]P.H. Sheridan, letter to Mrs. Custer, Nov. 29, 1868, reel 2, EBCC.

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But winter would take its toll. Despite Sheridan's early hopes, the men of the 19th Kansas had played no part in the battle, and their progress had been halted by bad weather. But conditions cleared on November 24, and the starving Kansans led their horses through the snow and ice in a taxing march toward a small stream near the Salt Fork of the Cimarron. Here buffalo were killed, with what seemed to Private Spotts a resultant ration of "a few bites to the man or 1-1000th part of a buffalo," and the wagons, unable to cross one of the ravines encountered, were sent back toward the regiment's previous camp.[22] It was apparently at this point that the scout "Apache Bill" seemed bewildered -- though some volunteers believed that, with a wife among the Cheyennes, Bill was only pretending to be lost. Here the Cimarron's main and side streams had cut the country into seemingly impassible gulches. But there appeared no choice but to march on, keeping to the southwest as nearly as possible, until the Kansans left the natural labyrinth behind.[23]

The volunteers, who had not yet seen a hostile Indian, camped in a grove of hackberry trees and devoured their fruits -- seeds and all -- as the only alternative to whatever buffalo meat had been gathered, seasoned with salt water carried from the Cimarron in canteens; in a few cases this cure for hunger produced what the surgeon termed "rather serious results. The broken seeds, or stones, became impacted in the rectum, causing

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[22]Runyon, "Letters": 66; Spotts journal, Nov. 24, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, p. 60. Perhaps basing his impression on the smallness of his portion, Spotts recorded that only one buffalo had been killed.

[23]"McBee's Account": 362; Moore, "Nineteenth Kansas Cavalry":39. Doubts about Apache Bill's loyalty predated his behavior on this march. Early that September, according to Captain Armes, the scout was "looked upon with suspicion as inclined to aid the Indians." Armes, Ups and Downs, p. 274.

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complete obstruction, and could only be removed by using a scoop."[24] On Wednesday morning, November 25, the wagons arrived, and the only rations in them, forty pounds of sugar in officers' stores, were doled out three cubes to a man. While men who were sick, frozen, inadequately mounted, or simply too weak stayed in camp under the command of Major R.W. Jenkins, about 450 selected volunteers, with the best horses, marched out in single file. Private Runyon recalled the regiment's brave appearance on leaving Topeka in describing "our line strung out about 5 miles, with broken down horses, hardly able to walk. Some of the men almost barefoot, with clothes burned nearly off them, getting too near the fires on cold nights; and thus we left 'Starvation Hollow,' as some of the men called it." The Kansans slogged about ten miles before making camp in the snow.[25]

On November 28, a cheering broke out and traveled backward along the column, to men who joined in before they learned its cause -- clues that white men had recently preceded them. A messenger from the advance told them that Camp Supply was in sight not five miles away, and the Kansans quickened their pace, to reach a bluff overlooking a broad, timber-covered valley at about sundown, with white tents below them. It was Camp Supply, less than two weeks old. Captain Pliley had preceded them on November 25 with news of the regiment's plight, and Sheridan had quickly sent relief to "Camp Starvation." He had also ordered the snow cleared from the volunteers' future campground, tents erected, and hay

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[24]Spotts journal, Nov. 24, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, pp. 60-61; Bailey, "Medical Sketch": 381. Evaporating one half pint of this water, Dr. Bailey obtained ninety-four grams of salt. Hadley insisted that, while the camp might be officially named "Camp Hackberry Point," it "became 'Camp Starvation,' and has never been alluded to otherwise by members of the Nineteenth." Hadley, "Conquest of the Plains Indian": 439.

[25]Runyon, "Letters": 66-67.

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provided for bedding.[26] In true cavalry style, the Kansans first fed their horses, and then ate themselves -- many eating themselves sick, and some so impatient with hunger that they wolfed down their bacon raw.[27]

Colonel Crawford took pride in having come through without the loss of a man, and boasted of having marched over 225 miles, "over all obstacles," in only twelve days from Camp Beecher to Camp Supply. Indeed, according to Crawford, Sheridan himself had expressed pleasure upon the Kansans' arrival, and "and seemed to think that under all the circumstances we had made a wonderful march," while excusing himself for sending Crawford inadequate guides and denouncing Captain Barr for consuming Crawford's supplies at Camp Beecher. But Crawford took issue with Sheridan's posthumously published memoirs, for he felt that Sheridan had gone "out of his way to reflect on the officers of the regiment." Sheridan blamed Crawford for having undertaken to "strike through the canons of the Cimarron" rather than relying on his guides, with the result that he had been "floundering about for days without being able to extricate his command."

In his own defense, Crawford denied that he had taken the wrong road, on the grounds that none existed, "not even an Indian trail," but only a course southwest through an uninhabited country, with sun and compass as guides, and nothing from which to get lost: "There were no roads nor cross-roads to mislead us; and at the time General Sheridan

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[26]Hadley, "Conquest of the Plains Indians": 441. Hadley dramatically described the causes of the men's excitement as "first, a stump whence the tree had recently been cut by the white man's ax; second, a wagon track since the snow-storm; third, some fresh chips on the snow!"

[27]Spotts journal, Nov. 28, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, p. 64.

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understood that fact." Even the Kansans' forced reliance on buffalo meat was simply evidence that they had not been adequately supplied, while Sheridan, "knowing nothing of the country over which we marched, was laboring under a misapprehension of facts. He had been misinformed by his scouts and others, whose reputations and wages depended largely on their skill as liars."[28]

Perhaps Sheridan, writing almost twenty years afterward, was more inclined to belittle the difficulties of such a winter march, whatever his praise of the Kansans at the time. There had certainly been a failure to adequately supply and forage this large force of fresh volunteers, and delays caused by inadequate guides could not held solely responsible for the regiment's sufferings. Nor was Crawford incorrect in judging Sheridan ignorant of the country; he had never served on the Southern Plains, and his pre-war Indian Wars experience had been limited to the tribes of the Pacific Northwest. Whatever his relief at welcoming the safe arrival of the Nineteenth's starved men and emaciated horses, "Little Phil," expecting a full regiment of volunteer cavalry, had been handed a sword temporarily blunted.[29] In order

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[28]Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, II, p. 322; Crawford, Kansas in the Sixties, pp. 323-324. Crawford acknowledged that the distance was only two hundred miles in a direct line, but argued that a column "winding its way around hills, ravines and bad crossings necessarily had to deviate from the direct route." Runyon, sharing Crawford's pride in the volunteers' march over this "perfect desert," had a more generous, if not common, opinion of at least one scout: "Apache Bill is one of the best of guides, and he brought us straight through." Runyon, "Letters": 68.

[29]The Nineteenth's chief surgeon, while recognizing that the regiment had suffered less from sickness than was usual among troops, even on the Plains, also noted the more encouraging fact that men on sick report during the entire campaign, from October 30, 1868 to April 18, 1869, averaged but one man in every hundred. Dr. Bailey suggested that "the great 'bug-bear,' that active operations must stop on the Plains when winter sets in," had been thoroughly demolished by the campaign, and actually thought winter preferable to summer with regard to the troops' health and comfort. Baily, "Medical Sketch": 384-85.

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to be effective, men and horses would both require time -- precious time stolen from his chosen campaign season.

After their struggle to reach Camp Supply, the eager Kansans were sorely disappointed to learn that the Seventh Cavalry had left on November 23, "for they feared the enterprising Custer would strike so vigorously that the Indians would roar for peace."[30] After dispatching Custer, Sheridan had ordered the area scouted on the 24th for signs of the missing Kansans, but Pliley's small volunteer band would not appear until the 25th, and Major Jenkins' detachment, reached by Sheridan's supply column on the night of the 28th, only arrived to unite the regiment on December 1.

Custer reached "the climax of satisfaction" on perusal of return dispatches from Camp Supply, and as soon as camp was made that night he had the regiment form up and Sheridan's congratulatory order read aloud; it saluted the "almost total annihilation" of the celebrated Black Kettle's band, while regretting the loss of such officers as Elliott and Hamilton, "who fell while gallantly leading their men" -- rather a polite presumption in Elliott's case, considering the dearth of convenient witnesses. Sheridan offered special congratulations to the column's "distinguished commander."[31] On November 30, from his bivouac on Wolf Creek only about ten miles away from Camp Supply, Custer sent a message to Sheridan predicting the hour of his arrival the next morning and adding that officers and men would be pleased to finish their return march in review before the commanding general

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[30]Hadley, "Conquest of the Plains Indians": 441.

[31]Custer, My Life, pp. 265-266; "General Field Orders No. 6, Headquarters, Dept. of the Missouri, in the Field, Depot on the North Canadian, at the Junction of Beaver Creek, Indian Territory, November 29, 1868," in Godfrey, "Washita Fight": 498-499.

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and his staff. Receiving Sheridan's consent, Custer carefully arranged his column before it proceeded into the valley and into sight.[32]

The painted Osages were in the van, lances with fresh scalps slung upon their shoulders, rifles in hand, their very war-ponies decorated with scalp-locks. At their head rode Little Beaver, who despite his rigid countenance seemed to Mr. Keim swollen in his "inward self-glorification" by his followers' fusillades and war-songs: "In a moment of enthusiasm, the chief exclaimed, 'they call us Americans; we are Osages,' to which sentiment went up a responsive yell of approval." The young warrior Koom-la-Manche, or Trotter, bore an "artistically decorated" scalp supposedly that of Black Kettle. Unlike troopers Bell and Lemmon, later credited with the dubious honor of slaying the chief, Trotter was a contemporary claimant, having supposedly singled his victim out "under the impulse of the highest aspiration of Indian valor" and slain Black Kettle only after a severe conflict.[33]

Next came the scouts, riding four abreast, California Joe on his mule and clenching his familiar pipe, followed by Custer and his staff, and behind them the captive women and children, surrounded by guards. The prisoners wore scarlet blankets and other bright apparel, wrapping themselves so as to reveal only their eyes, and struck David Spotts, looking on with other Kansans anxious to behold the returning victors, as "the best dressed

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[32]My Life, pp. 267-268. Custer mistakenly places the date of the regiment's return as December 2.

[33]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, pp. 121-122. Keim dramatically, though perhaps not justly, termed the dead chief "the terror of all the Osages."

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of all the parade."[34] Awed and silent, the captives "awakened to conversation," according to Lieutenant Godfrey, only when the mounted band struck up "Garryowen."[35] The musicians who had heralded Custer's attack were followed by the sharpshooters under Cooke, and then eleven companies of the Seventh, the gratified Sheridan responding to the officers' saber salutes by lifting his cap.[36] The parade not only left the Kansans anxious to hear more about the fight (and to get a better look at Custer, who, "dressed like a scout," went unrecognized by them), but also eager for their own chance to "mix up with the redskins." [37]

Custer's men then pitched their tents on the borders of Beaver Creek, about a quarter of a mile from Sheridan's own camp.[38] That evening the Osages held a scalp dance to further celebrate the common victory, with Sheridan among the military spectators. Before a great log fire, the trailers, presenting an infernal appearance to reporter Keim, stripped off their blankets despite the harsh winds, the half-nude men dancing and yelling as they "distorted their bodies in every conceivable shape," recounted their war deeds, and vowed "to be buried deep under the ground before running from their enemies." For most of the night, after the representatives of "civilized" warfare had drifted away, Osage drumbeats and

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[34]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, pp. 122-123; Spotts journal, Dec. 1, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, p. 66.

[35]Godfrey, "Washita Fight": 499. Godfrey thought that the Osages' exhibitions of horsemanship, as well as the column's pageant and review, "rivaled and no doubt was the prototype of the modern Wild West Shows. It was the real thing."

[36]Custer, My Life, pp. 268-269.

[37]Spotts journal, Dec. 2, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, pp. 66-67.

[38]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 123.

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shouts were borne upon the air.[39]

During their first few days at Supply the Cheyenne captives, camped near the Seventh Cavalry, were apparently still fearful of being killed in retaliation, and even the wounded initially "rebelled against all offers of humanity," and refused to be taken to the hospital lest they be the first prisoners sacrificed. Giving his readers a view of war's inglorious side, Keim was impressed by several young patients. The children made no sound of suffering as their wounds were probed, "yet their distorted features, and the delirious glare of the eye, betrayed the physical anguish prevailing within their rigid exterior....One little girl, with a bullet-hole through her body on the left side, sat up as if in perfect health. The vigorous condition of their systems assisting nature, as well as human skill, in their efforts, soon found the sufferers able to join their friends in the camp, greatly to the delight of all."[40]

Now camped with regulars, the Nineteenth Kansas men were obliged to regulate their conduct by the various bugle calls, including 4 A.M. roll call. Speaking with some of Custer's troopers, Private Spotts did not find them alienated by their commander's recent actions: "His men say he is a fine fellow, kind to them and will share with a private who is in need."[41] On December 3 two men of B troop, one of Benteen's H, and Captain Hamilton

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[39]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, pp. 123-124.

[40]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, pp. 125. Keim recounts an incident at Camp Supply similar to that which the Lone Wolf account places on the march to the depot. The sister and niece of Black Kettle visited Custer's headquarters to ask "when they were all to be killed," and, on being reassured, conveyed the good news to their people, changing their sullen mood into a "high degree of contentment and satisfaction at their change of life, and particularly the abundance of food they enjoyed."

[41]Spotts journal, Dec. 2, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, p. 68.

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were buried on a small knoll near camp, the ceremonies including the Seventh and the garrison companies of the Third Infantry, Hamilton's first regiment in the regular service: "Eleven companies of cavalry and three of infantry followed his remains to the grave," Custer informed his wife. "The band played the dead march, his horse was draped in mourning carrying his boots sword &c. and followed the body."[42] The seven pall-bearers for the grandson of Alexander Hamilton included Sheridan, his aide Colonel Crosby, Lieutenant Cooke, and the two Custer brothers.[43]

Most of the Seventh's dead still lay unburied, their bodies unaccounted for. But if Sheridan offered Custer a severe rebuke for his actions regarding Elliott's detachment, or at any point suggested that he should have remained near the battle-ground until the men or their remains were found, it apparently went unrecorded. Only in his posthumously published memoirs did Sheridan briefly mention Custer's early suggestion that Elliott, if lost rather than slain, might eventually make his way to Camp Supply or Fort Dodge -- which Sheridan considered "a very unsatisfactory view of the matter," while the disappearance of Major Elliott and his party provided "the only damper upon our pleasure, and the only drawback to the very successful campaign."[44] Keim, of course, reasoned that, "there being hardly a doubt" of Elliott's fate at the time, the safety of the command outweighed the loss of a small fragment of it, while Private Runyon simply wrote of Elliott, "It is supposed he has 'gone

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[42]GAC to EBC, Dec. 6, 1868, reel 1, EBCC.

[43]Custer, My Life, pp. 269-270; Harvey journal, Dec.3, 1868, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 87.

[44]Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, II, p. 320.

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up.'"[45] Dr. Lippincott, with no physical remains to examine, simply listed under the "Remarks" column "Body not recovered" for the first missing enlisted man, with ditto marks for each one; and while Elliott's body was also missing, Lippincott reported, "There can be no doubt of his death."[46]

Neither Sheridan nor Custer professed the belief that the Washita victory alone would permit them to quit the field, though Custer still hoped for a relatively short campaign; on December 6, less than a week after his return to Camp Supply, and with wagons again filled with thirty days' supplies, he informed his wife that "tomorrow we set out again upon the war path," his command "doubled" by the addition of Kansas volunteers, "Sandy's scouts," and a party of Kaw Indians. A reunion with Mrs. Custer seemed imminent: "General Sheridan said to me 'Custer I'll ask this one more trip of you and then I'll march you to Leavenworth.'"[47] Captain Finch and the rest of the 19th had arrived that day, apparently even hungrier than their comrades despite the train sent by Sheridan to resupply them. Many of Finch's men had become so constipated that they dared not eat more of the hackberries, their only plentiful food, and after their arrival at Supply they were allowed only small meals,

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[45]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, pp. 149-60; Runyon, "Letters": 67-68. Pvt. Runyon stated that Elliott had been last seen "pursuing wounded Indians about four miles from the command." Keim observed that Elliott's conduct in pursuing fugitives, when he had his own command to look after, was "entirely exceptional," and had led "to the opinion that his horse ran away with him, and seeing him pass, a number of troopers not actually engaged in the fight, joined him and were the companions of his sad end."

[46]Lippincott, "Special Report of Enlisted Men Killed and Wounded," and "Official Report of Officers Killed at the Battle of the Washita," F-421, "File F," 1861-1889, RG 94, Records of the Office of Medical Records, 1814-1919, NA.

[47]GAC to EBC, Dec. 6, 1868, Mrs. Custer's transcript, reel 4, EBCC.

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spaced three hours apart. Some men feared to sleep, lest they miss their portions. But soon after the process of recovery began, Private Runyon was able to assure the folks at home: "Our camp presents a neat and picturesque appearance, and plenty reigns."[48]

While expressing his satisfaction with Custer's attack, General Sheridan also took care to provide justification for it: "The victory was complete, and the punishment just." Besides the evidence that a party from the village had killed one of the couriers carrying Army dispatches, Sheridan also cited mules stolen from a civilian train, and photographs and other items from houses robbed on the Saline and Solomon. He further charged that flour, sugar, and coffee found in the captured village had been furnished by General Hazen, even to the war party whose trail he had crossed before his own arrival at Camp Supply:

> Something should be done to stop this anomaly. I am ordered to fight these Indians, and General Hazen is permitted to feed them. All the Arapahoes were in the vicinity of the fight, and took part in it, and the women prisoners tell me that most of the depredations along the line of the Arkansas were committed by them: still they are now having flour, sugar and coffee issued to them, and even to war parties going out to depredate and kill. I simply wish to call the attention of the Lieutenant General to this complicated condition of affairs, so that he may at once see all the evils resulting from it.[49]

Sheridan also stated that Black Kettle and the other chiefs with him, after visiting Fort Cobb, had all brought back provisions from General Hazen "or some one else there," and that while they were gone, or about the time of their return, the last war party had been sent

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[48]Runyon, "Letters": 68.

[49]Sheridan to Nichols, Dec. 2, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3rd sess., no. 18, p. 43. While Custer himself reported 53 women and children captured, Sheridan reported Custer having taken " 57 squaws as prisoners, and a number of small children," the implication that only the adult prisoners had actually been counted. Sheridan to Nichols, Dec. 3, 1868, container 72, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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out. Furthermore, Black Kettle's sister, Mahwissa, had told Sheridan that three white women had been held captive in lodges below Black Kettle's camp.

However, the several Cheyenne women to whom he had spoken had professed to believe that the "hostiles" would sue for peace at Cobb as a result of Custer's blow, and that they would have come in at Camp Supply, had an opening at Cobb not been held out to them. Planning to start for the depot as soon as sufficient supplies arrived from Fort Cobb, Sheridan was optimistic, and even speculated that had the Kansans' horses been fit for duty on their arrival, "we would have closed up this job before this time. As it is I think the fight is pretty well knocked out of the Cheyennes." Sheridan was equally optimistic about the Indians' ability to sustain themselves once restricted to the vicinity of Fort Cobb. "The government makes a great mistake in giving these Indians any considerable amount of food under the supposition of necessity," he argued, since the whole country was literally covered with game -- so much so that during Custer's march herds of antelope and deer had dashed through his wagon train.[50]

Less optimistic after analyzing the effects of the Washita victory, with information gleaned from the Indian informants at his disposal, Captain Alvord credited Custer's fight with the apparent effect of causing the line between friendly and hostile Indians currently in the Indian Territory "to be distinctly drawn." While there was no doubt as to the status of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, the Quahadi Comanches had gone westward out of reach

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[50]Sheridan to Nichols, Dec. 3, 1868, container 72, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC. Though he had seen not fewer than 200,000 buffalo in one day among those ranging north of the Union Pacific railroad during the autumn, Sheridan seriously misjudged the power of white settlement to destroy the Indians' food supply, and claimed that there were "more buffalo than will last the Indians for 20 years."

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some time before, and had not been contacted by General Hazen; Alvord felt that the Kiowas and Kiowa-Apaches, and various bands of Comanches, even while professing friendship and frequently visiting Cobb, had kept their camps well up the Washita, and had been, until Custer's attack, "really 'on the fence.'" He was sure that some Comanches and Kiowas had participated in the fight itself, and that other Kiowas had lent the moral influence of their presence during the latter part of the action, and probably acted with the Cheyennes and Arapahoes; Kiowa involvement, he thought, was substantiated by the decision of three chiefs, including Satanta, to move south "with a full half" of the tribe, accompanying the Cheyennes and Arapahoes after they broke camp. The death of one of his young warriors had decided the Comanche chief Maowi and his band to move their camp south as well, along with members of other bands who had traveled with them that summer.

Three days after Custer's attack, all these Indians had their camps clustered on the North Fork of the Red River, at the mouth of Sweetwater Creek, and the next day the leading men held a "grand council," as Alvord termed it. The results were unusual, for here the Indians deeming themselves at war with the whites professed only friendly feelings toward the non-hostile bands, to such Indians as the Wichitas, Caddoes, and Chickasaws -- and, for reasons not given, even the white people, "soldiers included," to the south of them. They planned to wage war only against all the peoples of the west and north, including not only the soldiers, but also the customary Navajos, Utes, and Osages. Despite Custer's blow, morale had evidently not been shattered: "So far they feel the contest to be about equal, but they are determined to soon make a balance in their favor. They feel themselves secure in their present position, and not in need of re-enforcements." However, lest they cut

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themselves off from the white man's indispensable goods, the "hostiles" advised Indians who planned to camp near Fort Cobb to preserve friendly relationships, so that they could act as middlemen.

Not all the presumed "hostiles" would be hostile under all circumstances. At the council. Maowi stated that though he remained fond of his "white brothers" and would not take the war path against them, he had decided to remain on the prairie at least until that spring, and it was asserted that his Castcheteghkas would not join the Cheyennes and Arapahoes in any offensive, "but may be considered their allies in defending their homes."

Alvord knew of only two Indian camps west of Cobb and east of the Staked Plains, one composed of the combined "hostiles" and another of friendly Kiowas, Apaches, and Tanewa Comanches. As of the morning of December 2, the cluster of hostile villages on the Sweetwater was estimated at 180 lodges of Arapahos, 150 of Cheyennes, 80 of Kiowas, and 75 of mostly Caskhetgeka Comanches, or about 475 lodges in all. Most of the fighting men were currently at home, although Alvord broke with customary estimates of at least two warriors per tipi by stating that they averaged very nearly one to each lodge. The "friendlies" had moved down the Washita at the same time the hostile camp was established, and now camped on the stream's north side at the mouth of a small creek, half a day's ride from Cobb. Beyond their camp, the valley of the Washita was no longer occupied by Indians. [51]

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[51]Alvord, "Summary of Information Regarding Hostile Indians," Semi-weekly report No. 5, Monday, December 7, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3rd sess., no. 18, pp. 35-37. The Kiowa chiefs Kicking Bird and Little Heart., who had witnessed Custer's fight but whom Alvord did not class among the disaffected half of their tribe, had visited the hostile camp,"apparently from curiosity." At the principle hostile chiefs' request the two men had

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Despite the Army's attempts to divide hostile from friendly, Hazen's city of refuge at Fort Cobb was not a complete success. Hazen had overcome his financial difficulties by issuing a ration only to each Indian actually present, rather than follow the usual custom of bearing a much larger number of Indians on his returns, and declared himself surprised by how little money he was "getting on with."[52] But his own concept of his mission clashed with Sheridan's. Hazen thought he had largely succeeded in gaining the confidence of the Indians there, persuading them that the hostile as well as the friendly could come there "and find peace and friends when the war shall cease." Even the carnage on the Washita had apparently not affected his standing; the hostile camps had sent Hazen word "to fear nothing from them; that they understand my mission here, were pleased with the talk I sent them by Black Kettle, although he was killed the night after his return, and that they will neither molest my animals nor the peaceful people gathered here." He declared to Sherman on December 7 his belief that the Army should make no hostile movements from Cobb.[53]

However, planning to start south toward Cobb on the morning of that same day, Sheridan informed Sherman that if the hostile Indians had gone in to that post he would "demand of them the murderers of our people, or at least the ringleaders, and the captured

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conveyed their "talk" to Lone Wolf, Black Eagle, and the other friendly Kiowas then on the Washita. Black Eagle and Lone Wolf sent word to assure Hazen that they would "hold fast" to him and maintain control of the friendly Kiowas, as Black Eagle diplomatically attempted to sway the more bellicose.

[52]Hazen to Sherman, December 1, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3rd sess., no. 18, p. 44.

[53]Hazen to Sherman, Dec. 7, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3rd sess., no. 18, p. 39.

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stock. If these things are complied with, war will be over, and I will do all I can to aid and assist General Hazen in providing for them during the winter. If they do not comply with the conditions, I will compel them, if I can. I judge from your instructions to me that it is not intended to make peace and feed these Indians without holding them responsible for the murders and thefts they have committed." Reporting all war parties "drawn in" since Custer's fight, Sheridan nevertheless took note of recent Indian strikes at Fort Dodge and trains along the Arkansas, the Indians killing one man at a cost of five warriors dead. Despite "fearful snows," he assured Sherman that the command was "in high spirits and enthusiastic."[54]

On December 7, the morning was fine and bright as Custer's eleven companies of the Seventh set out with ten companies of the 19th Kansas for the south, along with Pepoon's scouts, and between twenty to thirty whites, Osages and Kaw guides acting as guides and trailers. Also with the command was young William Brewster, a civilian who had volunteered to serve in any capacity desired; he had asked of Custer not a chance for employment or adventure, but only arms and a horse, and permission to accompany the column. His sister was Mrs. Anna Morgan, a captive among the Indians.[55] That day Private Spotts and his 19th Kansas comrades got to see General Custer "at close range. He

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[54]Sheridan to Sherman, Dec. 7, 1868, in Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3rd sess., no. 18, p. 43. Initially blaming its members for the deaths of only two of his couriers, Sheridan now stated that the war-party followed by Custer to the village had killed three -- "one between Larned and Dodge, the other two between Bluff creek and Dodge. I think this war party was nearly all killed on the 27th ultimo."

[55]Custer to Crosby, Dec. 2, 1868, reel 812, M619, Letters Received, 1861-1870, OAG, RG 94, NA; Custer, My Life, pp. 279-280.

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is of medium size, light complexion, long curly golden hair, wears a light colored hat and buckskin suit, the same as the scouts wear, with leather fringe on the seams of arms and legs. His men all like him."[56]

Custer took with him three of the women captured at the Washita. These were the self-styled sister of Black Kettle, Mahwissa, a Sioux woman whom she had chosen to accompany her, and the daughter of the slain chief Little Rock, whose name Custer rendered as "Mo-nah-see-tah"; waxing eloquent over her beauty and cheerful disposition, the young general judged her "probably rather under than over twenty years of age." To his surprise, all three women had "evinced great delight" at his proposal that they accompany the expedition, as they believed that this would afford a better opportunity to learn of, or establish contact with, their own people. The rest of the prisoners would go to Fort Hays, conveyed there by a detachment of Kansans from Runyon's company, which had left in its trail so many horses and mules abandoned and shot. "Indian hunting is a very expensive business," concluded Private Runyon, "and we have not yet seen a hostile Indian."[57]

The object of the Sheridan-Custer column was to take a previously unused route and strike the Washita a short distance below the scene of Custer's late battle, then proceed on toward Fort Cobb. Here supplies would be renewed, and Sheridan make his new

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[56]Spotts journal, December 7, 1868, Spotts, Campaigning with Custer, p. 72.

[57]Custer, My Life, pp. 281-282, 284; Runyon, "Letters": 68-69. The Sioux woman's name was apparently recorded by nobody. Though modern Cheyennes "cannot make sense" of Custer's name of "Mo-nah-see-tah" for a woman also called Meotzi, it will be retained in the present work, minus Custer's hyphens. It is not known whether she was the same young woman to whom Custer was "married" by Mahwissa after the Washita fight. Peter Harrison, "The Eyes of the Sleepers: Cheyenne Accounts of the Washita Attack," English Westerners' Society Brand Book 31.2 (Summer, 1997, pub. 1998): 24, n. 43.

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headquarters "in the field." In his report to Colonel Crosby, Sheridan's acting assistant adjutant general, Custer referred to the column as "my command" and specified that he was acting "under the instructions of the Major General Commanding the Department, who, though not exercising command of the troops, accompanied the expedition."[58] Custer expanded on this comment in his later memoir, explaining that Sheridan had "decided to accompany my command, but generously declined to exercise any command of the expedition, merely desiring to avail himself of this opportunity of an escort without rendering a detachment for that purpose necessary; and, as he remarked when announcing his intention to accompany us, he simply wished to be regarded as a 'passenger.'"[59] But Sheridan was apparently under a different impression. He would prove an active passenger, and exert his authority whenever he felt so inclined.

The column reached the valley of the Washita shortly before dark on December 10, and camped some five or six miles above the battlefield. Sheridan concluded to let the troops remain there at least a day, giving the command a chance to rest and refit. He himself would visit the battleground with Custer and other officers the next morning, in the hope of discovering traces of Elliott's party.[60] Keim accompanied the Sheridan, Custer, and various other officers toward the field with 100 cavalrymen under Captain George Yates, an escort made up of men from each of the Seventh's companies. A few Osages and Kaws rode in the

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[58]Custer to Crosby, Dec. 22, 1868, reel 812, M619, Letters Received, 1861-1870, AGO, NA.

[59]Custer, My Life, p. 279.

[60]Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, II, p. 328; Custer to Crosby, Dec. 22, 1868, reel 812, M619, Letters Received, 1861-1870, AGO, NA.

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advance as trailers.[61]

Eventually the men reached the line of formation taken by Elliott's column in the battle; the horses' tracks were still visible where he had formed his squadron in the darkness, and the hoofprints of his charging horsemen could still be followed "in one extended front through tangled brush." Keim saw a blanket-wrapped bundle, the body of a slain warrior whose returning friends "had given him part of the rites of an Indian burial. As we moved along these evidences of the severity of the conflict became more numerous. Thirty bodies were found on one part of the field alone." Many dead warriors had been carefully tied up or placed in tree branches, or placed under brush, though Keim thought the bodies of the most important had been taken away and concealed. Several corpses were later found with lariats attached to them, apparently abandoned in the very act of being dragged off. By riding to the top of a ridge General Sheridan could see the fire-holes and circular rows of pegs which marked the sites of now-vanished tipis, and the carcasses of hundreds of ponies covered several acres.[62]

Captain Yates was directed to deploy his men in search of the bodies of Elliott's

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[61]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 142.

[62]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, pp. 143-144; Custer to Crosby, Dec. 22, 1868, reel 812, M619, Letters Received, 1861-1870, AGO, NA. Though Keim seemed satisfied with the number of bodies found, Custer wrote defensively that those of nearly all the warriors had already been concealed or removed, while women and children slain in self-defense or "in the excitement and confusion" of the first charge had been wrapped in blankets and bound with lariats for removal. But Custer also asserted that the troops found bodies which he had not previously reported, and which "went to prove what we are all well aware of now, that the enemy's loss in killed warriors far exceeded the number (One hundred and three) first reported by me." Custer took these "scores" of unburied or unconcealed bodies as evidence of the haste with which the Indians had abandoned the area.

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party, and the troopers rode down the south bank of the Washita over the route taken by the doomed men: "After marching a distance of two miles," reported Custer, "in the direction in which Major Elliott and his little party were last seen, we suddenly came upon the stark, stiff, naked, and horribly mutilated bodies of our dead comrades! No words were need to tell how desperate the struggle which ensued before they were finally overpowered."[63] But as Keim described it, this site was preceded by the discovery of a single white man's naked body, "covered with arrow and bullet holes," his skull broken in pieces, his brain partly in the skull and partly on the ground; at first it was assumed to be Elliott's body. Marking the spot, the party continued moving down stream, then saw distant objects lying in the grass, and spurred into a gallop, to find sixteen human bodies lying within an area of not more than fifteen yards -- "all that remained of Elliott and his party! The winter air swept across the plain, and its cold blasts had added to the ghastliness of death the additional spectacle of sixteen naked corpses frozen as solidly as stone." All lay face down, with bullet and arrow wounds covering the back of each. But only one dead cavalry horse was visible, and that lying dead fifty yards away. Examining the area, the men speculated as to the course of the fight. "The grass, where they lay, was much trodden, and numbers of cartridge-shells, scattered on the ground, testified to the valor of the defence, until some friendly, fatal bullet, afforded the only alternative of escape from the terrible torture awaiting them, if taken alive." Keim thought that the Indians had returned to the site after Custer's withdrawal, since the work of mutilation "was too effectively done" to have been executed in a short

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[63]Custer to Crosby, Dec. 22, 1868, reel 812, M619, Letters Received, 1861-1870, AGO, NA.

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time.[64]

After several more miles, the remains of what were judged the Kiowas' and Arapahoes' camps came into view, and here such abandoned items as thousands of lodge-poles (some still standing as when erected to form tipi frameworks), jerked meat, baled buffalo robes, and manufactured goods -- including several rifles -- indicated hasty flight, by no fewer than a thousand lodges in Keim's view. But Sheridan desired to leave behind no property that he could destroy without delay to his march, and soon had fires burning for miles along the line of the stream. Custer termed the timber along the Washita's banks, to a distance of more than twelve miles downstream, "one continuous Indian village." Seeing additional hundreds of dead ponies shot near the villages, Sheridan was sure that, too far weakened by cold and poor grazing to be driven with the Indians, they had been dispatched to prevent capture by soldiers: "The wholesale slaughter of these ponies was a most cheering indication that our campaign would be ultimately successful, and we all prayed for a couple of months more of cold weather and plenty of snow."[65]

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[64]Keim, With Sheridan's Troopers, pp. 145-147. Keim thought it unlikely that all the men were dead before the party was overpowered, but was unable to obtain satisfaction on this grim point: "Although the savages, with whom I afterwards conversed upon the subject, readily spoke of their first knowledge of the attack, upon the closing scenes attending Elliott's party, they were remarkably reticent. Every one disclaimed any participation in the killing of the soldiers, declaring that they merely went up to see the fight." But the Indians did admit the loss of many braves in fighting Elliott. Custer described the death site as a circle not more than twenty yards in diameter, and thought that some dead cavalry horses he saw were probably killed early in the fight. Custer to Crosby, Dec. 22, 1868, reel 812, M619, Letters Received, 1861-1870, AGO, NA.

[65]Custer to Crosby, Dec. 22, 1868, reel 812, M619, Letters Received, 1861-1870, AGO, NA; Sheridan, Memoirs, II, p. 330. According to Custer, those Indians downstream from Black Kettle had camped "in the following order: Arapahoes under 'Little Raven,' Kiowas under Satanta and Lone Wolf and the remaining bands of Cheyennes, Comanches and

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At a place identified by Custer's prisoners as the campsite occupied by Satanta and his Kiowas were found the bodies of a young white woman and a child -- Clara Blinn and her son Willie. Though their actual captors would later be identified as Arapahoes, Sheridan (perhaps misinformed by Mahwissa) blamed the Kiowas, asserting that Mrs. Blinn had been "reserved to gratify the brutal lust of the chief, Satanta; then, however, Indian vengeance [for Custer's attack] demanded the murder of the poor creatures, and after braining the little child against a tree, the mother was shot through the forehead, the weapon, which no doubt brought her welcome release, having been fired so close that the powder had horribly disfigured her face."[66] Custer had a somewhat different interpretation: from the several articles of white woman's wardrobe still retained by the woman, including a pair of "cloth gaiters but little worn," he deduced that she and her son had been recently captured, and that "her captors, fearing she might be recaptured by us and her testimony used against them, had deliberately murdered her and her child in her cold blood."[67]

A piece of corn-cake found upon the woman's breast, and the position of her hands, indicated to Keim that "the woman was eating when she, unexpectedly, received the fatal

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Apaches. Nothing could exceed the disorder and haste with which these tribes had fled from their camping grounds." It was estimated that over six hundred lodges had stood along the Washita during the battle.

[66]Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, II, pp. 330-331. Crawford, Kansas in the Sixties, p. 326; Ross, "Indian Captivity": 46-47. The woman's family later received from General Sheridan a beaded Arapaho bag, containing his letter of condolence and a piece cut from the hem of her calico dress -- supposedly to demonstrate that she had not been overworked, the hem still being tight and unfrayed.

[67]Custer to Crosby, Dec. 22, 1868, reel 812, M619, Letters Received, 1861-1870, AGO, NA.

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blow."[68] The captives' bodies and that of Elliott were brought in on horseback by Sheridan's party, to be taken to Fort Arbuckle for burial. That night wagons brought in the rest of the bodies, and as the march was to resume before daylight, the bodies of Elliott's men, after being examined for identification purposes by members of those companies with men missing, were wrapped in blankets and laid in a trench hastily dug on a knoll overlooking the valley. There, under the dim light of torches, they were buried without the usual military honors, perhaps due to the midnight nature of the interment, or a reluctance to draw attention to the site, lest any Indians still linger in the vicinity.[69]

Before the burial, however, Custer ordered Dr. Lippincott, the expedition's chief medical officer, to examine the bodies and report on the nature and number of wounds received by each, as well as any mutilations: Custer subsequently reproduced most of these grisly details in his own report, perhaps to emphasize the foe's barbarity: Although only seven had been scalped, no fewer than eight of the 17 bodies recovered (one man remained missing) had had their penises severed -- one detail Custer thought it best to censor, indicating the expurgations with asterisks -- and four had been beheaded, while in some cases limbs were removed, or throats cut. Three men, two of them decapitated, remained unidentified.[70] The severed heads were not with the bodies and, wrote John Ryan, "we

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[68]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 150.

[69]Custer to Crosby, Dec. 22, 1868, reel 812, M619, Letters Received, 1861-1870, AGO, NA.

[70] Lippincott made the following unexpurgated "Remarks" on the condition of Elliott's body: "Two bullet holes in head, one in left cheek, right hand cut off, left foot almost cut off; penis cut off, deep gash in right groin, deep gashes in calves of both legs, little finger of left hand cut off, and throat cut." Assistant Surgeon Henry Lippincott, "Special Report of

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were unable to find them."[71]

Following the party's return to camp, the captive women had explained the positions of the various bands encamped along the river, and according to Keim confirmed an estimate of one thousand lodges "as near as their primitive ideas of numbers could convey."[72] At daylight on the 12th, Sheridan pulled out from what he termed a "cozy camp" to push down the valley of the Washita in pursuit of the Indians, nearly all of whom were thought to have moved toward Fort Cobb in the belief that they would receive protection. The troops would spend the next seven days in following the trail over terrain Custer considered almost impassible, requiring two or three hundred men "almost constantly at work" with picks, axes, and spades before the train could advance.[73] During the pursuit, several more village sites were passed, willow lodge frames still standing, and trails leading to the southwest: "We are anxious to meet some of them," wrote Private Spotts.[74]

Sheridan found that the frequent deep ravines and canons delayed his wagon train,

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Recovery and Condition of bodies of Enlisted Men Killed at the Battle of the Washita, Indian Territory, on the 27th day of November, 1868," and "Special Report of Recovery and Condition of the body of an Officer Killed at the Battle of the Washita, Indian Territory, on the 27th Day of November, 1868," F421, "File F," 1861-1889, RG 94, Records of the Office of Medical Records, 1814-1919, NA. Sheridan, incorrectly, asserted, "None were scalped, but most of them were otherwise horribly mutilated, which fiendish work is usually done by the squaws." Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, II, p. 328.

[71]Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 63.

[72]Keim, With Sheridan's Troopers, p. 151.

[73]Custer to Crosby, Dec. 22, 1868, reel 812, M619, Letters Received, 1861-1870, AGO, NA.

[74]Spotts journal, Dec. 12, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, p. 76.

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and so moved out of the valley onto level prairie, to march his men on the divide. The column took a rapid gait until a morning fog, which obscured the local landmarks, yielded to snow, sleet, and a violent wind, "adding greatly to our embarrassment" and forcing the men to halt, unable to see fifty yards in any direction. Sheridan was now forced to choose between advancing and standing fast; one choice risked losing sight of the river, the other might cost men and animals lost to the elements. He ordered the column headed in the direction in which the river had been last seen, trying to reach it before dark. Despite obscured landmarks, Sheridan managed to reach the valley before nightfall, "though there was a great deal of floundering about, and also much disputing among the guides as to where the river would be found." The troops and wagons having kept close together, no one became lost in the storm. But Sheridan, "fearing that we might get lost or caught on the open plain without food or water -- as we had been on the Canadian," resolved to attempt no more short cuts involving such a risk of disaster to his expedition.

When darkness fell the chosen campground, a well-timbered bottom, was already covered with from twelve to fifteen inches of new snow.[75] A large detail was set to felling cottonwood trees and strewing large quantities of branches among the half-starved horses, who "vigorously applied themselves to this novel forage, and ate it with an air of satisfaction at least."[76] With frozen tents awkwardly struck and loaded into wagons, getting started the

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[75]Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, II, pp. 331-332. Taking due note of Sheridan's self-confessed difficulties, Governor Crawford offered an aggressive defense of his own men by pointing out that, "as will be observed, the floundering was not all done by the Nineteenth Kansas Cavalry, while en route to Camp Supply." Crawford, Kansas in the Sixties, p. 328.

[76]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, pp. 152-153.

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next morning proved "painful work," and many men froze fingers in the process. The column now followed the river rather than marching on the "divide," and sacrificed smoother traveling and a superior view of the countryside. But despite the frequent need for bridging and digging to surmount its ravines with wagons, Sheridan stuck to the trail along the Washita.[77] To Keim, the three Indian women traveling with the column seemed quite indignant that the other bands on the Washita had not given Black Kettle's village adequate aid, and frequently displayed hatred of the Kiowas and Arapahoes. Mahwissa charged that their friends had run like dogs, were worse cowards than women, and were in fact responsible for killing Black Kettle and the Cheyennes' warriors. If the white man fought the Kiowas and Arapahoes, she vowed, "I want a knife and will fight too, and kill all their papooses."[78]

On the morning of December 17, as pioneer parties cut yet another crossing for Sheridan's train, a number of Indians were seen ahead, signaling with a white flag. But the lone rider who reached the soldiers' lines was an Army courier, with a dispatch from Colonel Hazen at Fort Cobb.[79] Dated 9 p.m. on December 16 and addressed to "the commanding officer troops in the field," it had been inspired by an Indian report that troops had reached the Washita some 20 miles above Hazen's post the previous day, and Hazen was anxious to assure the reader "that all the camps this side of the point reported to have been reached are

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[77]Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, II, p. 332.

[78]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, pp. 153, 154.

[79]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 155; Spotts journal, Dec. 17, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, p. 79. Spotts asserted that despite the Indians' desire for a parley, "Gen. Custer was in favor of attacking them," though Sheridan desired to hear what they had to say.

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friendly, and have not been on the war-path this season."

Hazen advised communicating at once with Satanta or Black Eagle, who were nearby; these chiefs would "readily" provide information on the position of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, as well as of Hazen's camp. Despite this testimonial, the man bearing it told of having been seized with a comrade by a large party of Kiowas under Lone Wolf, Satanta, and other chiefs, who even now were holding his companion as what Custer termed "a prisoner of war."[80]

Sheridan, despite his own scepticism concerning the Kiowas' pacific nature and his belief that Mrs. Blinn had been Satanta's victim, hesitated to attack after reading Hazen's dispatch.[81] Instead, Custer and several officers galloped out with Pepoon's scouts and the Herald's reporter to meet the truce flag. A gallop of three miles brought them within six hundred yards of the Indians visible in the broad valley ahead, though Keim also discerned what seemed a reserve of mounted warriors among the trees along the Washita's banks, and, on the hills beyond, some five hundred warriors who "dashed about, brandishing their spears, and assuming various menacing attitudes." After the two sides arranged a parley, Custer, Colonel Crosby and Keim joined the interpreters to face Lone Wolf and Satanta --

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[80]Custer to Crosby, Dec.22, 1868, reel 812, M619, Letters Received, 1861-1870, AGO, NA. Keim, who preferred the term "hostage" for the man detained, states that after the couriers were taken to the Kiowas' village, a council of warriors determined to put them to death. But it was then decided to have one man deliver Hazen's letter, and then return. Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, pp. 155-156.

[81]"Of course, under such circumstances I was compelled to give up the intended attack, though I afterward regretted that I had paid any heed to the message, because Satanta and Lone Wolf proved, by trickery and double dealing, that they had deceived Hazen into writing the letter." Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, II, p. 334.

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the soldiers, remaining on horseback and with weapons handy, ready to fight or flee as circumstances dictated.[82] The reporter recalled:

> When we came up to them, the Indians opened negotiations. Satanta rode up, and with an air of arrogance exclaimed "how," simultaneously extending his hand. This civility, Crosby, to whom it was extended, refused to receive. The Indian drew back in anger, exclaiming "me Kiowa," striking his breast, and was about to signal his warriors, when noticing more troops approaching on a hill about a mile distant hesitated. Then advancing to Custer he offered his hand. The General said through the interpreter: "I never shake hands with any one unless I know him to be a friend." After some parley Satanta and Lone Wolf, and a Comanche, joined the column. During the day about sixty warriors also came in.

Despite this peaceful resolution, Keim shared Custer's suspicions of the Kiowas' intent, and believed that the Indians had come ready to attack a seemingly weak party, only to reconsider when they realized the actual situation.[83] The soldiers compelled the Indians to release their remaining prisoner, and the column continued toward Fort Cobb, together with a number of chiefs and warriors, mostly Kiowas. But Custer was convinced that the messenger they had sent toward the villages would serve to speed them not toward Cobb, but rather toward the headwaters of Red River. His suspicions excited by the chiefs'

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[82]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 156. This meeting is the subject of Charles Schreyvogel's well-known 1903 painting Custer's Demand. Frederic Remington, apparently sensing a rival for his own chosen role of delineator of the Indian-fighting army, termed the work "half-baked stuff" and challenged its authenticity. Despite several historical inaccuracies, the picture was defended by Colonel Crosby (depicted in the painting) as well as by Custer's widow and President Theodore Roosevelt. For details of the controversy, which had the beneficial effect of generating discussion regarding the clothing and accouterments used during the campaign, see James D. Horan, The Life and Art of Charles Schreyvogel: Painter-Historian of the Indian-fighting Army of the American West (New York: Crown Publishers, 1969), pp. 3, 6, 34-38.

[83]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, pp. 156-157. W.S. Nye, citing Kiowa informant George Hunt, states instead that Lone Wolf and Satanta attempted to withdraw, only to be taken prisoner by officers drawing pistols. Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 73.

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"sudden effusion of friendly sentiments," Custer nevertheless allowed them to dispatch a second messenger after the column halted to make camp, and distributed provisions to the Indians. He also issued a warning not to wander far from their campfires, lest they be mistaken for enemies and shot by the sentries: "This I knew would make them hug their fires closely until morning."[84]

On the next day's march, still more warriors were sent out as "messengers," until all had left the column but Lone Wolf and Satanta remained. Drawing their revolvers at a given signal, officers informed the two chiefs through Romero that they were prisoners. Later that day, Satanta's handsome young son appeared and was persuaded to ride with the command after Custer offered him freedom to come and go as he pleased.[85] He thus served as a messenger to inform the Kiowas, then moving to the southwest, to come in immediately and join the march to Fort Cobb. But on learning that their chiefs were in custody, they instead quickened their pace and made no halt for another twenty miles.[86]

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[84]Custer, My Life, pp. 294-295. Sheridan deduced that the warriors had accompanied the column solely "for the purpose of deceiving me while their families were being hurried towards the Washita mountains." Sheridan to Nichols, Dec. 19, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3rd sess., no. 18, p. 40.

[85]My Life, pp. 297-300. The son, Tsa'L-au-te or Cry-of-the-Wild-Goose, would become in Nye's phrase "a prime favorate at Fort Sill," retaining his popularity with the post's officers despite participating in a Kiowa revenge raid as late as 1879. In the 1890s he became a member of the all-Indian Troop L, Seventh Cavalry. Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 326.

[86] Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 73. As Spotts writes of Satanta making his attempt to ride away on the first day (being dissuaded by a threat to shoot him), perhaps more than one escape attempt was made. Keim offers a different chronology than either Custer or Sheridan, with all the warriors disappearing at nightfall, and Satanta, allowed to leave the column to talk with the departed warriors, returning about three hours later with his son. Only later does Satanta make an apparent attempt to gallop off, to be overtaken by several officers. Spotts

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At dark on the 18th the command reached Cobb, and while the arrival of some 1,500 troops alarmed the Indians already gathered there, it was met with relief by the small force sent from Fort Arbuckle -- men who were unable to make much impression on the proud warriors surrounding them.[87] On December 19, Sheridan found that not a single Kiowa had come in, and was confirmed in his suspicions. He informed Lone Wolf and Satanta that he "would hang them tomorrow if their families were not brought in to-day, and I will do so." Despite this unpleasant note, Spotts recorded that when the 19th Kansas (having readied itself for inspection despite an absence of boot polish) paraded that afternoon before Sheridan, Custer, and Hazen, Satanta and Lone Wolf, along with Satanta's son and the Comanche Ten Bears, also watched the review, seated on their horses about fifty feet to the officers' right. Spotts, like many other whites, was impressed by the large, strongly built Satanta -- "much more noble looking" than the other chiefs, who were "darker and just ordinary looking Indians, only finely dressed."[88] That day Sheridan, though "a little sorry"

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journal, Dec. 17, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, pp. 79-80; Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 157.

[87]Sheridan to Nichols, December 19, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3rd sess., no. 18, p. 40; Spotts journal, December 19, 1868, Spotts, Campaigning with Custer, pp. 80-81; Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 73. While Sheridan referred to his arrival at Cobb "with the command of Brevet Major General George A. Custer," this was evidently not meant to imply that he failed to exercise active command of the expedition when he so chose.

[88]Spotts journal, Dec. 19, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, p. 81. Custer was properly skeptical of Satanta's oratory, but was impressed by the man himself, as his later writings reveal: "Aside, however, from his character for restless barbarity, and activity in conducting merciless forays against our exposed frontiers, Satanta is a remarkable man -- remarkable for his powers of oratory, his determined warfare against the advances of civilization, and his opposition to the abandonment of his accustomed mode of life, and its exchange for the quiet, unexciting, uneventful life of a reservation Indian." Custer, My Life, p. 22.

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that he had not struck the Kiowas, explained, "I did not like to disregard General Hazen's letter, and perhaps we can do as well by other modes."[89]

Convinced that the Kiowas had been engaged in the war all along and had attempted to browbeat Hazen ever since his arrival at Cobb, Sheridan vowed retribution: "I will take some of the starch out of them before I get through with them." His men were in good health, and although they had already lost many horses in the campaign, the grass around Cobb would soon have those remaining in good trim for such an effort at chastisement. Sheridan also sensed that the Army had already achieved a moral advantage: "The Indians for the first time begin to realize that winter will not compel us to make a truce with them."

He now outlined his plans to Sherman. Planning to punish the Kiowas should they come in, and to hang their two chiefs if they did not, he would send Black Kettle's sister Mahwissa to the Cheyennes and Arapahoes to come in and receive their punishment, "which will be severe. She says they will come in, as they are now willing to beg for peace, and have done so already since Custer's fight." But Sheridan was prepared to march if his demands were ignored; with a strong force left at Cobb to prevent Hazen from being further "browbeaten," he would employ the Caddoes, the Wichitas, and a band of friendly Comanches under chief Asahabet against the government's enemies. (On the theory that they had associated too closely with the hostiles, he was also prepared to compel other Comanche bands to join his forces in the field or be declared hostile themselves.) "The

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[89]Sheridan to Nichols, Dec. 19, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3rd sess., no. 18, p. 41. Stung by references to his conduct in Custer's memoir, Hazen would continue to argue that the Kiowas had not, as a body, participated in the Battle of the Washita, and to stand on his decision to prevent Sheridan from attacking them while under his charge in promised security. See Hazen, "Some Corrections, in Custer, My Life, pp. 383-407.

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Comanches are now under my thumb, and the Kiowas will be, I hope; and I hope that the Cheyennes and Arapahoes may soon be in the same condition."[90]

Apparently there was a reprieve in Sheridan's sentence of hanging for Satanta and Lone Wolf, for they were not executed on December 20. The threat remained, however, and after Satanta's son was sent galloping off to the southwest with another message, the Kiowas began to arrive shortly after noon on December 21, though it was afterward learned that a band under chief Woman's Heart had chosen to stay out. But while the soldiers naturally assumed that Sheridan's threat had brought about the Kiowas' surrender, Colonel Nye's informants deflated the presumption that the tribesmen had acted out of fealty to their chiefs: "The Kiowas state today [1937] that the message delivered by Satanta's son contained no reference to the fact that the two chiefs were threatened with hanging...if they had known that Satanta and Lone Wolf would be hanged, they would not have come in at all." Satanta's son had instead told them that if they arrived at Cobb by sundown they would receive large quantities of rations.[91]

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[90]Sheridan to Nichols, Dec. 19, 1868, in Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3rd sess., no. 18, pp. 40-41. Sheridan's optimistic assertions extended to the unlikely claim that his soldiers now preferred the shelter tents, the only ones available due to lack of transportation, for winter use. Offering a different view from that of the departmental commander, Pvt. Spotts lamented of the new tents issued his regiment that "we do not like them at all as we have to get down on all fours to get inside," whereas the regulars had "A" tents like those of the 19th's officers. "It does not look to me that we Americans are all 'born free and equal,' but perhaps that does not apply to all soldiers." However, for even the Seventh's enlisted men, dog tents would be the standard while actually in the field. Spotts journal, Dec. 22, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, pp. 83-84.

[91]Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 75. Since hanging the chiefs was threatened as the consequence of the Kiowas not coming in, the Indians presumably avoided surrendering out of fear that something even worse would occur.

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Upon coming in, the Indians were forbidden from camping within a mile of the troops, and a double line of pickets separated their encampment from their captors' bivouac, though this did not prevent Private Spotts from visiting the Kiowa camp in the company of a half-dozen friends. He estimated that there were "at least three Indians here now to one white soldier," but the Indians were apparently in no position to intimidate with this numerical superiority.[92]

On Christmas Eve, President-elect Grant tendered to Sheridan his congratulations regarding his measures -- in so far as he understood them, he added -- and his hope that the Indians would soon be brought to realize the odds against them. Believing the Indian Bureau's mismanagement of affairs a cause of the war, Grant argued, "If the men who have to do the fighting could have the management in time of peace they would be more likely of any people to preserve peace, for their own comfort if no other reason."[93] On the same day, with Mahwissa having left on her diplomatic mission on December 20, along with a Plains Apache chief named Iron Tail, Sheridan again expressed optimism over the prospect of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes coming in, as they were "cut off from the actual and moral support" of the Indians already at Cobb. But even if they did not come in, the delay would benefit the soldiers, since it was essential to recuperate the horses and secure additional supplies from Fort Arbuckle in any event. With most of the Kiowas already at Fort Cobb, or en route to it, Sheridan found his earlier suspicions about the tribe verified, for his runners

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[92]Spotts journal, Dec. 22, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, p. 83.

[93]General U.S. Grant, letter to Sheridan, Dec. 24, 1868, container 39, reel 17, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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had found their fleeing bands on Otter Creek, near old Camp Razinimsky, on their way to the southern edge of the Llano Estacado; nearly the entire tribe, he charged, had been engaged in hostilities, "and even in the last fight on the Washita, by their own admissions." Should the Cheyennes and Arapahoes themselves not come in, Sheridan planned to outlaw them -- and order the hanging of any Indian who had even indirect communication with them.

This proposal was apparently not born of frustration, since Sheridan thought there was "a pretty fair prospect" of permanently ending the war. His movement of troops in winter, he believed, had made the dismayed Indians see that the whites could continue the war at all seasons: "They cannot now sleep at night; they cannot graze their stock without fear; they have no buffalo to eat, they will have no robes to trade, and are feeling very nervous and insecure."

But Sheridan's resources were not inexhaustible, and the problem of supply, particularly for the animals, would remain paramount. While he was at least able to increase his animals' forage ration to ten pounds of grain per head, from the six doled out daily since leaving Fort Dodge, he knew that on future marches the available transportation would not permit a greater allowance.[94] Under the right circumstances, the problem could be ameliorated, if not completely overcome, and Custer's force, with the help of an advanced supply base, had destroyed a village and returned with comparatively little attrition to men or

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[94]Sheridan to Nichols, Dec. 24, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs. 40th Cong., 3d sess., no. 40, pp. 1-2. Sheridan confessed to having done Hazen an injustice in reporting that he had supplied Black Kettle's band with flour and sugar, for the foodstuffs found in the Indian camp had in fact come from "Dutch Bill."

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animals. But the renewal of Lt. Col. Carr's eforts would ultimately present a more severe challenge to Sheridan's theories of winter campaigning.

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CHAPTER NINE

The Beaters: Carr and Evans

"The horses lost...died from starvation."

Following Major Carr's return to Fort Wallace, his command had spent a relatively peaceful three weeks at the post, though guide Bill Cody, if not the Record of Engagements, later told of a hunting party he had guided being "jumped" by about fifty Indians.[1] On November 25, two days after Custer's column began its march from Camp Supply, Carr led his column toward Fort Lyon, 140 miles away from Fort Wallace. So anxious was Carr to commence operations as soon as possible that, finding certain "necessary articles" delayed in transit, he simply left one cavalry company behind to bring them on while he proceeded with the rest of his men to Fort Lyon. Once there, Carr added a small detachment of Fort Lyon doughboys and an infantry lieutenant to his six Fifth Cavalry troops under Major E.W. Crittenden. Baggage, rations and forage would be borne by a supply train of 130 wagons as well as a "fine lot" of 100 mules -- though the mules' lack of training in such pack work, and a shortage of blankets to cushion the saddles supporting their loads, had left many of the animals sore-backed even before Carr reached Fort Lyon.

Slashing officers' and company baggage alike to a minimum, Carr still attempted to haul as much vital material as he could, and hoped to maintain his animals on half forage whenever he could find grass not buried by snow. He took only two days to load his supply

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[1]Cody, Life, pp. 214-217. Cody -- unofficially -- reported four Indians killed, and the rest routed.

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trains and complete preparations for the march, and left Fort Lyon on December 2 in the hope of effecting a rendezvous with Penrose's theoretically more mobile command, which had begun with its rations carried by its pack mules.

Hoping to furnish Penrose's troops with additional supplies before merging them with his own for subsequent operations, Carr estimated that he could reach Penrose's supply camp in time to leave his own column with half-forage for sixteen additional days, as well as thirty days' rations for the men of his combined command. Aware that Penrose had been informed of this plan, Carr considered establishing a base to the southeast of Lyon, on the North Fork of the Canadian. "Buffalo Bill" Cody led the column, anxious to see his old friend, James Butler "Wild Bill" Hickok, among Penrose's scouts.[2]

Carr presumed that as Penrose, rationed only until approximately December 20, was to be supplied by him, he would naturally supply "the best information by which to guide my operations after establishing my Depot," and he certainly had every reason to expect messengers who would guide Carr, by the shortest route, to the Penrose's latest camp. Providing such couriers was especially important, since Penrose had already taken with him those men thought familiar with the country to be traversed. This monopoly on expertise left Carr with no truly knowledgeable guides of his own, "extremely unreliable" maps, and no

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[2]Cody, Life, p. 218; Eugene A. Carr, Report, March 1, 1869, "Headquarters Expedition from Fort Lyon, Camp at Fort Lyon, CT," Order Book, pp. 127-128, Division of the Missouri Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute. Carr had proved willing to abandon and burn wagons if necessary for pursuit, but he did not attempt to completely supplant them with a pack train, a method which achieved its best-known successes during the Apache campaigns of General George Crook; thus the Fifth U.S. Cavalry "customarily traveled with full wagon train, despite which it made some amazing marches in pursuit of Indians." Don Russell, The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), p. 110.

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realistic choice other than to follow Penrose's trail. While keeping in mind his mission to succor Penrose, Carr remained alert to any opportunity to strike a hostile band, sending a troop to investigate a rumor from Fort Wallace of an Indian party crossing the stage road near Sand Creek Station and headed southeast. But he decided against changing his planned route of march in response to the meager evidence of such a party's existence, especially since it would take him in the same general direction anyway.

For three days Carr was able to follow Penrose's trail without difficulty, before a formidable snowstorm caught him in Sheridan Canyon -- termed "Freeze-Out Canyon" by Cody -- and forced him to make camp. Though the ravine's walls offered partial shelter, a mule froze to death, and others were saved only by rubbing and exercising them to restore circulation. The snow which fell that night, burying and freezing leather harnesses, also made it almost impossible to follow the trail, especially since Penrose had made no attempt to leave signs indicating the direction of his march. The command lay in camp all day on the 6th, while Carr sent five scouts south into the blinding storm to find some trace of Penrose, or one of his old camps.

The searchers reached Willow Creek, a tributary of the Cimarron, after a ride of twenty-four miles, and after further scouting along the stream finally found such an abandoned campsite. Bill Cody returned alone with the news, riding into camp late that night to relieve Carr's fears over Penrose's temporary disappearance. The overjoyed commander rousted out his cook, and Cody devoured a hot meal before resting that night in

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Carr's own tent, in preparation for the next day's rugged search.[3]

Snowdrifts in the ravines slowed Carr's progress toward the camp, as his teamsters cleared the way with shovels. Striking a southeasterly course toward the Cimarron, Carr found Penrose's trail heading down the river's valley, and later -- after learning that at one point Penrose had passed down a precipice impossible for his own wagons -- would deem it fortunate that he had lost the trail earlier. Penrose had marched on the river's west side, but Carr was unable to cross his own force over and still follow with his train. He decided instead to take the best wagon route to be found along the east bank, in the belief, or hope, that Penrose would also continue along the Cimarron's course.

The signs of Penrose's march led Carr down the Cimarron to the Santa Fe road, and finally out onto the level plain, where the trail turned eastward. At the foothills of the Raton Mountains, Carr faced the prospect of ordering his wagons to descend a dangerously steep bluff. When Buffalo Bill proposed locking the vehicles' wheels with chains, Carr reluctantly sanctioned the scheme, despite the drivers' fears that the vehicles would run over their teams. The plan worked, though at times it seemed even to Cody that the wagons "would turn a somersault and land on the mules."

Penrose had enjoyed a head start on Carr, and was unencumbered by wagons in his supply train. But his progress was slowed by the route he had chosen, and he had been

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[3]Cody, Life, p. 22; Carr's Report, March 1, 1869, Order Book, pp. 128-129, Military Division of the Missouri Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute. Subsequently Carr wrote of finding Penrose's trail surprisingly crooked, and in fact "the most remarkable one I have ever travelled to go anywhere....I had no guides, and could obtain none: the maps differ so much, and are so incorrect, that they are worse than useless, and it was supposed that Genl Penrose had good guides and knew where he was going." Carr to Sheridan, Dec. 20, 1868, Order Book, p. 139.

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forced to expend even more time by retracing his steps -- after marching onto a table-land and confronting a drop so steep that not even his mules could descend it.[4] Animals again proved more fragile than the men who took them on campaign; following Penrose's trail as it turned eastward onto Johnston's snow-covered path of 1857, Carr's men counted thirty-eight dead animals during a single day's march.

On the evening of December 11, encamped at Buffalo Springs, Carr observed an inexplicable light to his south. He sent two men to investigate, but these failed to return after that night's fierce snowstorm, and so Carr dispatched a company of cavalry with three of his best scouts, including Buffalo Bill, to find the first two men, as well as the source of the light. But the scouts, all but one of whom suffered frostbite, returned to report having found nothing. Carr started down the valley of the Cimarron's North Fork on the 13th with no trail to follow, then found the stream's water gave out; finally even tracing the stream's proper valley became impossible. On December 14 the snow had melted sufficiently to permit examination of Johnston's trail, and Carr decided to follow it, though without knowing what it was.

The evidence that Penrose had preceded him now included not only carcasses, but exhausted animals, simply left behind: the luckless commander, for whatever reason, "had now quit killing them." But Carr himself lost five horses on the first day's march alone. That night, with bad water, worse grass, and no wood at all, his men stoked their fires with sage weeds and whatever damp buffalo chips lay revealed by the melting snow. Carr lay over in this dismal camp for another day, but ordered one company to continue follow the trail,

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[4]Cody, Life, pp. 222-223.

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and to report on the terrain in advance of the main command's march.

On the 16th Carr secured news of both friends and foes. Scouts from Penrose's command finally arrived in camp, though by a roundabout route, having returned on Carr's trail only after reaching Fort Lyon; Captain Penrose, fearing that Carr might not find him in time to prevent starvation, had sent them along with his company of Seventh Cavalry to secure supplies from that post. To Carr's surprise, his own missing scouts, given up as "perished," turned up in camp on the same day, having spent five days without food or even a fire. They also revealed the secret of the mysterious light: a small party of Indians had set a prairie fire about twenty miles from Carr's December 11 camp.

Carr sent wagons with provisions and forage forward with an escorting company to relieve Penrose's "pressing wants," and, thinking it imperative to find the best possible location for his new supply depot, had Penrose's scouts guide him to the North Fork of the Cimarron, the command camping on San Francisco Creek. Carr's men found no sign of Penrose at the creek's mouth, but did observe a party of hunters and follow them on December 20 to Penrose's camp -- within a day's march from Carr's own camp and its badly needed supplies. It was, judged Buffalo Bill, a pitiful sight.[5]

Just how pitiful Carr would soon see for himself. But on December 21 it was Penrose who rode out to see Carr, and to assert that his own camp had the water, grass and timber that Carr's now lacked. Carr retained his weakest animals and sent his supply wagons

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[5]Carr's Report, March 1, 1869, Order Book, pp. 130-132, Military Division of the Missouri Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute; Cody, Life, pp. 224-25; Regimental Return, Dec. 1868, Tenth Cavalry, reel 95, M744, Returns for Regular Army Cavalry Regiments, NA. Cody believed that the rations delivered saved many lives.

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back to Lyon for replenishing, along with that portion of the Fifth Cavalry's baggage train still deemed able to travel, though even the baggage train's strongest animals were so frail that they slowed their wagons' progress and consequently the main train.[6]

With Penrose's camp only sixteen miles to the south, Carr planned to join him and establish a "permanent" camp from which he could scout to the southeast. While conceding about 40 men disabled by frostbite, Penrose optimistically told Carr that he was able to mount about 125, though Carr believed that many of these would have to ride on mules. Reporting to Sherman on December 20, Carr expressed his belief that Penrose would "with very little encouragement" return to Fort Lyon, though Carr proposed to leave this decision "entirely to his unbiassed wishes. From what I can learn the command is in a very demoralized and broken down condition."

His own situation did not inspire Carr to optimism, and he even admitted to imperfect knowledge as to his current location, for he had been able to employ "nothing but pocket compasses and poor watches" as tools for determining it, and been obliged to change his direction frequently on his march of 232 miles. Penrose's cavalrymen, with their broken-down animals, were unlikely to be of much use, and Carr was legally bound to send back ninety of his Fifth Cavalry troopers whose time of enlistment had either expired or would do so in a few days. This would leave his own force only 209 men strong: "I fear that my command will not be of as much assistance to you in this campaign as I would wish," he

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[6]Carr's Report, March 1, 1869, Order Book, pp. 133.

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confessed to Sheridan, "but we will do all in our power."[7]

Despite the weakened condition of both commands, Carr planned to go to Penrose's camp, "take what mounted men he had, and my own, and make an expedition with the pack mules." But when he arrived there on December 23, he found that Penrose had few mounted men left. Carcasses littered the camp, and starving animals stood tied to picket pins, eating their own dung. Many of the horses turned out for inspection were "tottering under the weight of their riders," frostbite was widespread, and Tenth Cavalry troopers displayed feet wrapped in buffalo hide or rags.

Mildly observing that Penrose had been "mistaken" about the sufficiency of grass, Carr judged it too sparse to permit even the most diligent animal to keep his belly full. Since many of Penrose's animals seemed unable to survived even the trip back to his own camp, Carr felt compelled to find a new site a short distance down the creek, where Major Crittenden could establish his supply base and give Penrose's animals, already too weak to run away, a chance for survival by turning them loose, to graze freely and around the clock. Carr's own forage was now exhausted, and he resorted to cottonwood, though some animals would not eat it, and those who did seemed to gain little strength from it.[8]

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[7] Carr to Sheridan, Dec. 20, 1868, Order Book, pp. 139-141, Military Division of the Missouri Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute. Carr did not explain why the particular timepieces available to his officers -- and presumably used in determining longitude -- were of such inferior quality.

[8]Carr's Report, March 1, 1868, Order Book, pp. 133-134, Military Division of the Missouri Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute. Carr observed that some of the animals would have slight attacks of colic after eating "very freely" of the bark, though these soon passed.

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It was obvious that in their present state Penrose's Tenth Cavalry troopers could form no part of any "mounted" expedition; even G, the only company with a majority of horses fit for duty at the end of December, had only thirty, the other twenty-nine having all died, and three troops of the Tenth would end the month entirely dismounted. Troop B reported all its horses "dead or unserviceable," while Troop B likewise had sixteen unserviceable and forty-three dead. Troop K's men had managed to survive on half-rations since December 3, but the company ended the month with 24 horses dead, 28 unserviceable, and none fit for duty, K's return explaining: "The marches of this Co have been those of the Expedition and merely to obtain grazing for the animals to sustain life...The horses lost during the month died from starvation." One might suspect that the frequent practice of palming substandard mounts, including worn-out nags from the Seventh, off on the "colored" cavalry had contributed to this horrendous wastage.[9]

On Christmas Day, Carr changed his camp in the face of a terrific snowstorm, moving it five miles up the creek toward Penrose. The enemy's location remained unknown; the only Indians seen by Penrose's command had been a small party engaged in stealing some of his mules, and both Penrose and "all his scouts who said anything about it," as Carr phrased it, claimed that the warriors had gone south. Carr himself believed that there were no Indians between himself and Camp Supply; therefore, rather than strike for the Antelope Hills, where both of Sheridan's other two columns were likely to go, he thought it best to march south, to the main course of the Canadian, scouting the intervening country and communicating with

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[9]Regimental Returns, Dec. 1868, Tenth Cavalry, reel 95, M744, Returns for Regular Army Cavalry Regiments, NA; Leckie, The Buffalo Soldiers, p. 51.

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Evans' New Mexico column. If able, he would take his combined column still farther south, to the head of Red River and the eastern border of the Staked Plains, where he suspected that the hard-pressed Indians would take refuge.[10] On the same day that Carr shifted his camp, apparently seeing no likelihood of an early success, Sheridan's other column of "beaters" inflicted the campaign's second notable defeat upon the Indians.

Major (Brevet Lieutenant Colonel) W.A. "Beans" Evans -- who impressed a journalist on a subsequent Indian campaign as "a melancholy, philosophically inclined officer, devoted to literature, suffering from an old wound, and having, to all appearance, registered a vow never to smile, in any sense" -- had been directed to assume command of Ft. Bascom and to lead an expedition in the general campaign against the "hostiles," proceeding down the Canadian as far as possible to attack all Indians he met.[11] Major Evans considered his orders "liberal" in leaving him sufficient freedom of action in the field. At Fort Union Depot, some fifty miles to the east of Santa Fe, he arranged the forwarding of supplies, including a 12-pound mountain howitzer from the arsenal -- the only one at that post in proper working order.[12]

Evans arrived on November 5, the same day that companies A and I of the Third Cavalry arrived from Fort Union. Lieutenant Howard B. Cushing's Company F had

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[10]Carr's Report, March 1, 1869, Order Book, pp. 134-135, Military Division of the Missouri Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute.

[11]John F. Finerty, War-Path and Bivouac: or, The Conquest of the Sioux (1890; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), p. 34.

[12]Bvt. Lt. Col. A.W. Evans to Acting Assistant Adjutant General, District of New Mexico, Jan. 23, 1869, container 76, reel 81, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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preceded Evans to Fort Bascom, and was encamped about a mile below the post. Though Bascom's garrison was supposed to consist of Company D of the Third and F of the 37th Infantry, Evans found it occupied by only fifty infantrymen under a lieutenant. Nor did the Indian allies Evans found already at the post satisfy him; instead of the roughly 200 warriors he had been led to expect, only between eighty and one hundred Ute and Apache auxiliaries had appeared, and these men, after having been rationed, clothed and equipped at Fort Union, had been permitted to come down to Bascom "under their own guidance with no responsible person in charge." But while many of the Indians had already left Bascom, those who remained seemed to Evans "dissatisfied that the Expedition did not start at once."

Before proceeding, Evans wished to locate and recall a substantial party (including a mounted detachment from Company F, 37th Infantry, troops C, D, and G of the Third Cavalry, and two howitzers), out on a thirty-day scout, which had not been heard from in several weeks. But no Indian could be persuaded to accompany his message, and Evans sent instead two soldiers and a "Mexican" civilian -- subsequently accusing the trio of misreporting the distance they had supposedly ridden in vainly hunting for the detachment. (Messengers bearing his warning against traveling in advance of his planned expedition also disappointed Evans when they failed to overtake a party of Pueblo Indians reported to be in search of buffalo.) The scouting detachment finally returned on November 9, most of its pack mules afflicted with sore backs; it had been gone for 21 days and had marched about 420 miles.[13]

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[13]Evans to AAAG, Jan. 23, 1869, container 76, reel 81, Sheridan Papers, LC; Post Return, Fort Bascom, Nov. 1868, reel 81, M617, Returns from United States Military Posts, 1800-1916, NA.

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With the arrival of the Thirty-seventh's Company I from Fort Stanton, the components of the planned expedition were finally concentrated at Bascom. Major Evans organized a battery of four mountain howitzers (not including the piece brought from Fort Union), manned by infantrymen and cavalrymen with previous artillery service, and zealously drilled by Lieutenant J.K. Sullivan of the 37th. Each piece would be drawn by four mules, and each caisson by two, while the ammunition taken would permit the choice of employing spherical case shot, shell, or canister against the Indian foe.[14]

In order to exploit the Army's potential ability to campaign for extended periods in a country barren of food or forage, Evans was obliged to rely on civilian contractors. Much of the grain received had to be rejected as being "much adulterated" and of inferior quality, and when a contract train (carrying mostly bacon) broke down, Evans sent government wagons to bring in the load, even though he considered none of the supplies essential and matters were delayed until the supplies' arrival on November 17th. To address the problem of inadequate transport for his column, Evans simply seized a train of sixteen wagons sent to carry corn between forts Sumner and Bascom. This gave him a total of 47, in addition to one mobile blacksmith's forge and three ambulances, only one with springs. Evans' drastic measures would enable his command to begin the march with forty days' rations carried by the train, as well as twenty days' worth issued to the companies. The district's general contractor provided a light wagon for two civilians, employed to drive -- and butcher -- the

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[14]The muzzle-loading mountain howitzer, a convenient weapon for an expedition faced with rugged terrain, could be either drawn by its small carriage or disassembled and packed onto two mules, with ammunition normally carried in boxes on a packsaddle. It was supposedly capable of being reassembled and fired within a minute. Jack Coggins, Arms and Equipment of the Civil War (New York: Doubleday, 1962), p. 75.

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herd of three hundred beef cattle available for consumption en route.

But Evans still thought it necessary to secure additional "citizen wagons" simply to carry an adequate supply of forage, even while recognizing the need to economize. He refused to hire an ox-train belonging to the post trader at a rate of $1.95 per 100 pounds per 100 miles, and later found that it was one of two ten-wagon trains contracted from another party at a rate thirty-five cents lower. Evans was verbally assured that the trader's train, to start out with 40,600 pounds of corn at roughly the same time as the expedition, would keep up with the troopers, with the second train setting out on or about November 25, with 60,500 additional pounds. But the first train failed to keep up, and the second did not even start until a month after the time agreed.[15]

Lest his supply wagons limit his mobility, Evans planned to establish his own version of Camp Supply, an advanced "sub-depot" from which his troops could make scouting forays supplied solely by pack mules. Hiring twenty "citizen" (civilian) packers, mostly Mexicans, he organized a pack train as best he could with the equipment available, and employed both the pack mules and wagon mules at his disposal. Nine of the recent scouting party's sore-backed mules would be driven along in the hope that they might recuperate sufficiently to be of some use, while over thirty more were used in wagon teams. Evans was fated to begin his march with neither "citizens" nor Indian auxiliaries familiar with the country he planned to cover, for while he hired five Americans as scouts and four

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[15]Evans to AAAG, January 23, 1869, container 76, reel 81, Sheridan Papers, LC; Post Return, Fort Bascom, Dec. 1868, reel 81, M617, Returns from United States Military Posts, 1800-1916, NA. An escort for this government train was provided by 31 men of Company H, 37th Infantry, who arrived at Fort Bascom only after Evans' departure, and left the post on December 10 along with three Third Cavalry privates.

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Mexicans as guides, he found that "the Expedition went beyond the knowledge of any of them," while the Indians who might have remedied this deficiency left the post en masse several days before the column set out -- though not before they had been armed, clothed and rationed at Uncle Sam's expense. The Indians resisted all messages urging them to return, and finally scattered, to Evans' regret; he had expected them to be an important part of his expedition, and would later conjecture that "although these people are difficult and troublesome to control, had they once gotten within reach of the enemy there would doubtless have been a more successful issue to the campaign."

The column which finally left Fort Bascom on November 18, 1868 included companies A, C, D, G, F and I of the Third Cavalry, Company I of the 37th Infantry (with a detachment of men from Company F), Lieutenant Sullivan's battery of four mountain howitzers served by 42 enlisted men, and 72 "citizen employees," including 20 packers. Left behind were Major Morris of the 37th, a few Third Cavalry troopers from Company D, and about 50 Company F infantrymen. "The condition of the Companies was not such in every respect as could have been desired," Evans admitted, and most, having left behind their company books and papers and muster rolls after being directed to report to Bascom for "temporary" field service, could not be paid off before the march; even Company D had been negligent in this respect, though it actually had Fort Bascom as its home station. Evans planned to forage his animals at the reduced rate of about six pounds daily, and for this purpose took with him 22,000 pounds of corn and 24,000 of oats.

There was no plan to charge the Indians with cold steel, and the cavalrymen's sabers were left behind. As heretical as this may have seemed to some old-time cavalrymen, a

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saberless expedition was not necessarily a sign of progressive thinking, or even of a growing willingness to concede that the blade was no longer the arm of decision, though a martial editorialist had boldly announced as much the previous month: "The day of the sabre is over...The horse in this era of modern breechloading fire-arms, becomes mainly a means of locomotion; the old idea of the shock given by a charging mass of horsemen is pretty nearly over."[16] Evans' decision was very likely inspired by the nature of his intended foe, and even his infantrymen, leaving behind their bayonets, would lack cold steel to meet the (presumably unlikely) threat of close combat against Plains horsemen.

Following a road made by soldiers under Kit Carson in 1864, Evans crossed to the left bank of the Canadian four miles below Ft. Bascom, then left the river only to strike it again about twenty miles above the adobe ruins of William Bent's old trading post at Adobe Walls, Texas. Here Carson had fought a desperate battle against Kiowas and Comanches, and here a small band of buffalo hunters would stand off hundreds of Southern Plains warriors in 1874. On November 22, at Navai's Spring, Evans' command endured the snow storm that Custer would hail as an ally; vainly hoping that his ox-train would overtake him with forage, Evans lay over in camp one day to wait out the storm. Most of his men had only ponchos, or what makeshift huts they could construct, with which to protect themselves.

The ox-train did not arrive, and at Canada Bonito, only eight days and a mere ninety miles from Fort Bascom, forage ran so low that Evans unloaded some of his wagons and sent them back to the train to fetch grain -- and thereby losing, he affirmed, five days' marching

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[16]Army and Navy Journal 6 (Oct. 31, 1868): 161. Regarding the modern cavalry as mounted infantry who could hardly even be called dragoons, the author respectfully mentioned the alternative concept of "velocipede" infantry straddling bicycles.

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time. Even with its load lightened by Evans' forage raid, the ox-train only managed to camp with the command for two days afterwards before again falling behind. At one camp, apparently through the guards' negligence, some 135 herd cattle, along some oxen from the train, strayed off, and only 62 were recovered.

Encountering several parties of Mexican buffalo hunters, Evans interrogated and searched them, finding nothing to prove them guilty of having conducted any trade with the "hostiles." But the hunters apparently had some indirect knowledge of these, telling Evans that they had heard -- from some Pueblo Indians -- that a camp including Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and Kiowas lay ahead, about 150 miles to the east of Ft. Bascom and on Wolf Creek, which united with Beaver Creek to form the Canadian's northern fork. Lacking information as to the schedules or routes of march followed by Sheridan's other columns, beyond the possibility that Sheridan had established his depot at or near Beaver Creek and 100 miles south of Dodge, Evans could only conjecture that their movements would drive the Indians down toward his own force on the Canadian, and that he should be concerned for his left flank. But as far down as the new sub-depot, his men could find no fresh sign of any sort, save a few new moccasin tracks on Monument Creek, and Evans considered the presence of buffalo, apparently moving north, as "rather a proof of the absence of Indians."

After considering several possible locations for his sub-depot, Evans finally established it on Monument Creek, and ordered his new base fortified with earthworks, revetted with logs and sand bags. This elaborate process, aimed at making the depot capable of defense by a small garrison, took about a week, during which Evans sent scouts out to the southeast and northeast. Those riding southeast (who Evans actually hoped could locate the

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Indians' camps and perhaps even enter them in the guise of Mexican traders), returned to report having seen, some 25 miles away, "smokes and fresh American horse tracks, which seemed to have scared them back."

Having established his depot, Evans prepared to take the field with his main force and pack train on a thirty days' scout, and sent back 22 wagons to Ft. Bascom on December 13 for an additional month's supplies -- apparently with little fear of Indians in his rear, since he provided only a ten-man infantry escort. Carpenter's infantry company and a small number of other soldiers and civilians would be left to man the depot. To compensate for a shortage of pack mules, Evans modified his plan for a wagon-free mission, and took four six-mule vehicles containing artillery and small-arms ammunition and his remaining 8000 pounds of forage, though he was prepared to abandon or hide the wagons if they could not keep pace. His force, able to unleash cavalry shock, infantry firepower, and even artillery against the Indians, thus consisted of 13 officers, 314 cavalrymen, 90 infantrymen, 42 temporary artillerymen, 9 scouts and guides, 33 packers and teamsters, 112 pack mules, five horses and 27 mules assigned to the battery, and 328 cavalry horses. Fifty of the cattle were driven along as well, but Evans permitted only one tent to be taken -- for use as a hospital.

The soldiers moved down the Canadian's left bank on December 15, and two days later, 42 miles from the sub-depot, they struck a trail approximately four days old. Some fifty or sixty Indian lodges had travelled south directly across the river, and smoke or signal fires were visible to the northeast. Up to this point Evans had been unsure whether to continue down the Canadian in the general direction indicated by his instructions, or march toward Wolf Creek in response to the meager information he already had regarding the

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Indians' whereabouts. But with these new discoveries, Evans decided to follow the trail in pursuit of the Indians; he doubled his pickets, forbade bugle calls and the slaughter of cattle by gunshot, and authorized fires (to be carefully buried when the camp was struck) only when they were kindled in holes.[17]

The trail led due south over a high rolling prairie country, crossing streams which Evans later learned were "heads" of the Washita, and then inclined toward the southeast. Heavy smoke, suggesting prairie fires, at first appeared ahead of the trail, but the troops left any such fires behind as they marched on. On December 20, the third day of pursuit, two scouts rode back to the column to tell of seeing three Indian horsemen, approaching from the direction of the North Fork of the Red River. Evans, however, thought that his command had escaped detection. Coming to the North Fork (which Evans at first mistook for the Washita River), the command made frequent crossings of the winding stream in following the trail, and passed several old Indian campsites.

Evans's forage was almost exhausted, and his animals weakened. Still believing that he could achieve a surprise, he cached a wagon on the North Fork on December 21, salvaging its harness and dividing its mules and cargo among his other three wagons. From that day on the soldiers found the signs mingled, indicating both new and old camps and trails, with a few tracks, quite fresh, indicating that hundreds of lodges had passed. On the 22nd, while the command advanced to a bluff and sought shelter from a severe "norther," a caisson's wheel shafts broke, forcing its abandonment. The next day, near the later town of

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[17]Evans to AAAG, Jan. 23, 1869, container 76, reel 81, Sheridan Papers, LC; Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 78. Nye identifies this trail as that of Cheyennes fleeing south after the Washita fight, though Evans was not destined to engage these.

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Granite, Oklahoma, the troops came in sight of the Headquarters Mountains (known to Evans' Mexican guides as the Cejas Sabinas), and the North Fork of Red River, running to the southeast toward the rough granite of the Wichita Mountains. Here the Army's scouts saw warriors making a signal fire near a ridge, shaking Evans' faith in his ability to maintain secrecy; though the Indians were apparently hunters, he was sure that the alarm had already been given -- and by now the trail, turning southeast into the canyon formed by the North Fork, showed signs of at least 1000 or 1500 lodges. Now Evans believed any surprise unlikely, and made camp for the night about two miles from the canyon.

After crossing the Red River on the morning of 24th, Evans gradually shifted his course to the southeast and east in the hope of again cutting the trail. Soon the column crossed a frozen stream of alkaline water, at first thought to be the North Fork, but actually one of its tributaries. But the ground proved so hard that the Indians' faint, broad trail went unnoticed by the bluecoats, and for some reason his scouts did not report this fact to Evans until that night. Three Indians, seen by the scouts to the column's right, were taken by Evans for "watchers," and he continued on his former course, believing that by doing so he would again encounter the trail.

Having arrived at a broad river bed, dry save for a few holes containing water too alkaline to drink, Evans followed it for several miles, then left it to head toward the northeast. The expedition camped in an oak grove, "without a drop of water" to cheer the troopers' Christmas Eve, having traveled 27 miles on December 24. Despite his hopes, Evans' route had not recrossed the trail, and in order to find it (or at least confirm the scouts' claim that the column had actually passed it), Evans sent them ahead. It was early on the

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morning of December 25, 1868.

The scouts returned at the moment of breaking camp, to say that they had found nothing. But Evans, perhaps because they had arrived back so soon, suspected that the scouts had not ridden out as far as ordered, and sent them back out. He also resumed his own march northwesterly toward the southern part of the gap, surmising that he could pick up the trail there. "The morning was bitterly cold," he wrote, " with a strong, piercing south east wind, blowing fortunately upon our backs."

Despite the soldiers' contact with the trail of the fugitive Cheyennes, the Indian camp they would soon encounter, pitched in a grove of trees, was made up of Nonocee Comanches, who had recently contributed warriors to raids in Texas near Gainsville and at Spanish Fort. While the band's principle chief, Horseback, had signed the Medicine Lodge Treaty and disapproved of the raiders, he appears to have been absent at Fort Cobb with his immediate family at the time of Evans' approach. This left as the dominating personality a prominent warrior named Arrow Point, though the village also may have contained chiefs Howea and Habby-wake. Nearby, at Sheep Mountain, was a village of Kiowas under Woman's Heart. The Comanches had indeed observed Evans' command on the march, but had hoped that the soldiers would not discover their village, and so had not moved camp.[18]

As he approached one of the Wichitas' peaks, Evans found a stream at its base -- the Red River's North Fork, running through a canyon-like gap formed by a high rock and the mountain itself. The command approached this stream from the south, and struck its right

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[18]Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 79, 81. Nye cites as his Comanche informants Poafebitty (son of Habby-wake), Yellow Fish, and Timbo; and for the Kiowas, Toyebo and Doyeto.

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bank. Two scouts reported having actually conversed with two Indians not far away, and Evans sent Major Elisha Tarlton's company in pursuit, as he moved up the stream with the rest of the command in search of a place to camp. Nye thought it probable that a cold morning fog, of a type common to the area, enabled Tarlton's men to approach the village before any Comanche sentry observed them.[19] But when the danger finally became apparent to the villagers, Arrow Point and his warriors mounted and rode to repel the anticipated attack -- and apparently fought Tarlton's force to a standstill.[20]

Major Evans seems to have acted under the assumption that, whether or not the Indians knew of his presence in the area, they would do nothing more aggressive than seek to avoid him -- and that Tarlton's single troop would suffice to maintain contact with the village. In view of the severe weather, the various rigors endured, and "the day being Christmas," he had planned to make a short march, resting in a spot upon the main trail and sheltered from the wind; then he would renew the pursuit all that night. But as camp was being made, with the animals nearly all unpacked and turned out, Evans received word from Major Tarlton that "he required assistance to whip those Indians" -- and that he could employ artillery against them to advantage. Evans sent another company to Tarlton's aid,

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[19]Evans to AAAG, Jan. 23, 1869, container 76, reel 81, Sheridan Papers, LC; Nye, Plains Indian Raiders, p. 140.

[20]Evans to AAAG, Jan. 23, 1869, container 76, reel 81, Sheridan Papers, LC; Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 80. Tarlton was the only officer with his troop, and aside from second lieutenants attached to companies C and I, none of the Third Cavalry's companies went into this action with any officers other than the captains or first lieutenants commanding them. Many officers were on leave, on special duty or detached service, or otherwise absent -- including one suspended from rank and pay. See Regimental Return, December 1868, Third Cavalry, "Regimental Returns, 1846-1919," 3rd Cavalry, RG 391, Records of U.S. Army Mobile Units, NA.

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and then granted his adjutant, Lt. Edward Hunter, his request to follow with a section of the howitzer battery under Lt. Sullivan, and Captain William Hawley's Company A troop in support. The animals were packed up again, and Evans moved with the rest of the command to join the action.

In the river's canyon, Major Tarlton and his 34 enlisted men had met a superior force of Indians who attacked "with the lance, rifles and pistols," but were repulsed with the alleged loss of four warriors and several ponies, while Tarlton's command suffered two horses shot. With the arrival of Captain Deane Monaghan's G troop, Tarlton counterattacked, though the Indians made what Evans described as "two vigorous charges upon him" before Tarlton managed to drive the warriors through the canyon's timber. The Indians, displaying "great courage and audacity," subsequently acknowledged, according to Evans, that at this point they lost a man shot through the head; Major Tarlton secured the man's weapons, including an old Spanish lance.[21] This warrior appears to have been Arrow Point himself, who received a gunshot wound to his mouth; he was borne away and later died.[22] But the fall of their leader did not shatter the Indians' will to resist.

The artillery and its support arrived, and together with Tarlton's force proceeded down the river. At a large bend, roughly two miles from the point where the fight had started, the soldiers caught their first sight of the village, on the edge of a grove at the base of the mountain. The villagers had already begun to remove their belongings as Hunter directed

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[21]Evans to AAAG, Jan. 23, 1869, container 76, reel 81, Sheridan Papers, LC.

[22]Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 80, citing informants previously named, plus Mumsukawa, Millet, Ay-tah, and Tone-mah.

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Sullivan to bring his pieces into battery. The little howitzers threw only two shells among the tipis, and the first failed to explode; but the burst of the second sufficed to cause an immediate flight from the village. Artillery shells, lobbed from distant guns, were a "medicine" against which the Indians had no effective defense.[23]

The Indians' pony herd had already been stampeded by the din of battle across the river, but the fleeing villagers seized what animals remained, three or four mounting a single horse, while those retreating on foot began to climb the rocky peak rising at the village's northern edge. The cavalrymen rode through the village, shooting as they went, and drove the Indians out of the grove and over a ridge below it, on the high ground to the northeast of the camp. Apparently no one was hurt in the exchange of gunfire, poor marksmanship being displayed by both sides.[24]

The ridge attained by the soldiers featured a broken line of large granite rocks, which formed a half-moon from the river bank on Tarlton's right to the mountainside on the left. Lt. Hunter sent word of this success back to Evans, but his eagerness to press the Indians still further was suppressed by Tarlton, who decided to hold the ridge while awaiting Evans' arrival. The cavalry now fought on foot, with its fighting strength necessarily reduced by one-fourth as the horse-holders took charge of the animals, against an Indian force presumed to number at least a hundred well-armed horsemen, though the timber made an estimate difficult.

Evans acknowledged the natural shelter of Tarlton's ridge to be an excellent position,

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[23]Evans to AAAG, Jan. 23, 1869, container 76, reel 81, Sheridan Papers, LC.

[24]Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 80.

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"but for the fact that the Indians commenced getting up among the rocks above and on his left, annoying his men and picking off the supports of the guns." Though in fact more annoying than "picking off" was done, and Tarlton's casualties were light, Evans thought that he acted quite properly in falling back from the ridge, and into the grove.[25] Indians crossing the easily forded river -- mostly Kiowas from Woman Heart's village to the east, who had been alerted by the sound of cannon and ridden to help their Comanche allies -- threatened to cut Tarlton off, approaching his right rear as well as riding toward his front.[26]

As Evans himself advanced to join the fight with the rest of the troops and the wagon train, he was ignorant of the ground to be covered, as well as the Indians' exact position. But he had assumed that by taking to higher ground, going over and around the southern point of the rock forming the canyon, he could come in on the enemy's rear, and he was nearly up to the top of the divide when he received Hunter's information on the Indians' true position. Realizing that it would delay matters too much if he retraced his steps, Evans simply ordered his train to break away and go straight through the canyon, in the belief that this easier route must be clear of enemies. But an orderly failed to deliver Evans' message, and the train, lagging behind the main command, did not reach the field until sunset.

Leaving his infantry and artillery to come up as best they could, Evans rode ahead with companies C and D of the Third. He reached the village in time to keep some of the

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[25]Evans to AAAG, Jan. 23, 1869, container 76, reel 81, Sheridan Papers, LC. As Evans' adjutant, and in his commander's absence, Hunter apparently "took a very active and independent part in directing movements" -- which suggests some conflict, in light of Tarlton's insistence on holding his position rather than renewing the attack.

[26]Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 81.

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Indians who had come in from the right, or south, from dashing into it, though Evans believed that some still managed to get back into the village, and there to attack men left by Hunter to guard the captured lodges. Evans deployed C and D, dismounted, on the river's high bank to cover Tarlton's right and rear, and some "rapid skirmishing commenced" at about the time that Tarlton fell back from the ridge. But Evans' account of the report struck a jaded Indian-fighter's note: "The Indians displayed their excellent horsemanship dashing round in circles, riding on the sides of their horses, waving their shields, &c, but did not attempt to cross in our immediate front. They seemed to be well and very fancifully dressed." As Plains Indians normally wore their best clothing to a fight when given sufficient time, perhaps such attire suggested to Evans foreknowledge of an imminent battle.

Evans' infantry eventually came up at the double quick and deployed on the line of the river bank, enabling him to extend the length of his line. The Indians had divided, some riding northwest along the tributary stream rising at a spring while others went southwest along the river bank. Both groups fell out of range in reaction to the soldiers' volleys. Indians along the river bank took cover among the sand dunes on its southern side, as others sheltered among the timber south of the spring or behind a large rock six hundred yards southeast of it.[27] Shots from among the trees and rocks at the mouth of the canyon harassed the soldiers, and mortally wounded an infantryman of Captain Gageby's Company F.[28] But the Indians' reluctance to close with their enemies, and their resort to flight

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[27]Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 81.

[28]Private George F. Van Clyf received a penetrating (and mortal) bullet wound in the right lung, for which he was treated by being placed in supine position, by the application of a dry dressing, and by "stimulants, Beef essence and anodynes." The projectile had entered one

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whenever the soldiers advanced, convinced Evans that using foot soldiers to pursue them would be useless. Nor could his worn-out horses sustain a successful chase.

Even as their comrades engaged in this half-hearted skirmishing, soldiers began to destroy the village, and at the end of the day Evans was prepared to withdraw his line and go into camp. But Captain Gageby stated that his men could not retire without many being picked off by Indian sharpshooters, and accordingly troops D, G, and I advanced dismounted under Tarlton to dislodge them. Moving over the ridge and around a large rock used for cover by Indian marksmen, the cavalrymen forced several hundred warriors to retreat quickly up the canyon. At a distance of about 150 yards, Tarlton's three companies poured repeated volleys into the exposed warriors, and Evans estimated that a half-dozen were hit, adding the almost formulaic comment: "Many were seen to fall, but they managed to carry them off."[29] But the Indians would later assert that the only man who fell during this phase of engagement was the Kiowa Mama-day-te -- bucked off by his horse, yet escaping uninjured.[30]

Evans claimed even more Indian casualties as a result of Company G, on Tarlton's left, managing to surprise a party of Indians in a ravine. These rode off rapidly, but in a

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inch to the right of the spinal column between the fifth and sixth ribs, passing directly through to emerge below the nipple. "List of Wounded in the Department of the Missouri, Canadian River Expedition at the Battle of Witchita Mountains on the 25th day of December, 1868," F422, "File F," Records of the Office of Medical Records, 1814-1919, RG 94, NA.

[29]Evans to AAAG, Jan. 23, 1869, container 76, reel 81, Sheridan Papers, LC.

[30]Nye, Carbine and Lance, pp. 82-83. These recollections of losses were consistent with an Indian claim which Evans addressed in his report; the Indians had asserted that their force numbered five hundred men and that "only one of them was hurt, and a few ponies killed, -- which are probably exaggerations." Evans reported that the warriors had at no stage of the fight used arrows, shooting only rifles and pistols at his men. Evans to AAAG, Jan. 23, 1869, container 76, reel 81, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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compact body; the Spencers' rapid fire was estimated to have felled twelve to twenty, "and from the blood on the rocks and ground, and the riderless ponies seen running around (none being found dead) it seems safe to presume that somebody was hurt." Tarlton's line then withdrew, though one soldier lingered too long and was subject to inaccurate pistol shooting by a Kiowa named Mam-day-te before allegedly suffering a severe lance wound inflicted by K'op-ah-hodel-te (Kills Enemy Near Mountain), who was then forced to withdraw under fire.[31]

As the soldiers lit fires to cook supper, the Indians, struck by their nonchalance under fire as they watched from a safe distance, feared to renew the attack, believing that the soldiers' indifference hinted at a superior force concealed in the grove they now held.[32] Evans made his camp in the bottom, forming it into a defensive square and stationing strong pickets about 200 yards in front of the village. But the men could not retire early for Christmas, for the task of utterly destroying the village took until eleven P.M. Evans learned that the camp's trail was not one of those which he had followed down the North Fork, and that the village had traveled from the Washita only a few days before. The warriors had apparently sent runners to the east and southeast, and this led Evans to expect that Indian reinforcements would attack him the next morning.

The camp, as reported by Evans, was slightly larger than that Custer had destroyed,

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[31]Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 81. As this particular (and atypical) wound was not recorded by the military, it is possible that the man wielding the lance mistook a near miss for a palpable hit. "List of Wounded....Canadian River Expedition," F422, "File F," Records of the Office of Medical Records, 1814-1919, RG 94, NA.

[32]Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 82.

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for it included roughly sixty lodges; these were nearly all new, and described by "old prairie scouts" as the finest they had ever seen -- their red cedar poles, long and straight, worth "about a pony to the half dozen,"and their skins clean and well-dressed. The villagers had escaped so hastily that the soldiers found a pot boiling on a fire, but Evans found that all appeared "very neat, comfortable, and in order" -- for an Indian camp. The captured stores, which included some unexpected items, seemed sufficient to supply the camp for six months or more, and Evans estimated their contents (in addition to items he did not record) as about 25,000 pounds of dried buffalo meat, 150 bushels of corn, "much of it Mexican," 200 sacks of corn meal, 200 sacks of white meal, considerable white sugar, coffee and soap, 1200 pounds of a "Killikinick Tobacco" mixture, one hundred pounds of gunpowder, 250 pounds of lead, 100 bullet molds, sixty butcher knives, sixty draw knives, 60 to 80 axes and as many hatchets, and an unspecified number of hammers, awls, rifles, pistols, shields, lances, assorted cooking utensils, toys and dolls. Evans (perhaps underestimating the Indians' mobility) believed that the villagers had probably known of his presence in the area as early as December 23, and had been swayed in their decision not to strike camp earlier by the inconvenience of bearing away so much property.

Though, like Custer at the Washita, Evans had captured lodges and their contents virtually intact, he had not deprived the Indians of their pony herd, nor succeeded in capturing many of the warrior's women and children as a means of influencing their future conduct; both noncombatants and warriors had escaped, and most of the two or three dozen Indian ponies Evans possessed were strays, picked up on the trail before and after the fight. By not capturing the Indians' animals, explained Evans (who apparently shared neither

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Custer's doubts regarding white men's ability to control Indian horses nor his concern that the Indians might misinterpret his attack as a plundering raid), "we were unable to carry off the larger part of the spoils." However, the troopers made use of much of the tobacco, meal and dried meat, feeding the corn to their horses. The rest was destroyed -- including, one assumes, any toys and dolls not borne away as keepsakes. Though burning was the only procedure Evans mentioned, the troops apparently disposed of the Noconees' dried buffalo meat --virtually their entire winter's food supply -- by dumping it into their drinking water, a spring at the head of the village termed by the Indians for many years afterward "Dried-Beef Pond."[33] In the 1880s, due to the fact that soldiers from Indian Territory posts camped there while patrolling along a cattle trail, the spring at the site would be termed "Soldier Spring," and thus belatedly give Evans' battle its name.[34]

The Indians were powerless to stop this systematic destruction, but that night warriors attempted to fire the grass, and shot at pickets before daybreak. At dawn Evans moved his men across the river and over the bluffs, and only then did a dozen or so Indians ride into the ruins of their old camp, to be "saluted" by a couple of howitzer shells before the troops departed. The villagers fled, some going on to Fort Cob to surrender. But others among

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[33]Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 82. Nye, strongly critical of Evans' explanation that he vetoed pursuit due to a supply shortage, termed him either "unreasonably fastidious in his diet or extremely shortsighted" in destroying so much food. But perhaps Nye failed to consider the state of Evans' animals, many of which had already been abandoned, and the absence of forage; of his men's rations, Evans merely noted that they were diminishing "by loss and wastage more rapidly than the time left at our disposal."

[34]Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 72. The two posts were Fort Sill and Fort Reno. The battle site was officially identified as "Elm Creek (salt fork of), Indian Territory." Chronological list of actions, &c., p. 38.

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the Comanches rode west, to join their Quohadi kinsmen on the eastern edge of the Staked Plains.[35]

Major Evans reported that the village had contained about five hundred people, with the Comanche warriors engaged variously estimated at from 75 to 150 warriors -- a number raised to perhaps 200 with Kiowa reinforcements. Though such casualties would have been severe in an Indian force of this size, Evans suggested a possible loss of from 20 to 25 killed, with wounded in proportion. His victory had cost him two soldiers wounded, one mortally. But only later did he discover that his enemies had been Comanches; initially, it had been supposed "from their work" (presumably Indian-crafted property) to have been Cheyennes, Kiowas, and "Wet Moccasin" prairie Apaches. These Indians, he thought, had apparently judged from the soldiers' circuitous route, and from their village being passed without notice, that the bluecoats were merely marching through the country, without seeking to find and attack them -- and even Evans' Christmas Eve camp, no more than five miles away, had been unknown to them. This knowledge left Evans to lament the opportunities lost to him through having had no trail leading to the village, or any previous knowledge of its presence. As he had learned too late, even the Indians' December 24 camp had been within striking distance, and Evans believed that had he known of this proximity the village might have been easily surprised and surrounded, "and everything belonging to it captured or killed."

With the country now alive to the column's presence and its hostile intentions, Evans judged that any bid to surprise other villages would be "very uncertain and difficult." Not knowing of any other troops in the area, and afflicted with weakened animals and rapidly

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[35]Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 82.

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depleting rations, he had but two choices. The first was to follow the large trail to the southwest and gradually sweep around to the north under the mesas of the eastern edge of the mysterious Llano Estacado ("known to afford places of resort to the Indians") while heading back toward his depot. Alternately, the command could head east toward the Canadian and then toward the Antelope Hills, where Evans expected to find hostile Indians -- still supposing that the village he had struck was actually on the Washita River, far to the east of his actual location near the Red River's North Fork.

As he had been directed to go as far down the Canadian as possible, Evans decided to head east, intending to cross over to Wolf Creek and then proceed to Monument Creek -- provided his supplies held out and he found no enemy in the Antelope Hills region. Assuming that new supplies had arrived at the depot, the expedition could then proceed on a scout to the south and down the eastern edge of the Staked Plains. Crossing the Red River on December 26, Evans went directly east, crossed the river again, and left it behind. A few Indians followed, with one or two going beyond the river to fire the prairie and raise smoke signals. Evans, who thought his weak horses would have little chance to intercept any Indians left behind him, supposed these signals were intended to warn other bands still up ahead.

On his march Evans encountered both old trails and extremely fresh signs of war parties, and on December 29, while in camp, the animals endured a severe rain and snow storm which "broke them all down terribly," and killed many. On December 30 two whites and two Indians caught up with the "Canadian River Expedition" and announced themselves as scouts from Fort Cobb, now only twenty miles away, and playing host to a large force

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under General Sheridan. In addition to learning that he was now actually on the Washita, Evans was also told of Custer's success on that river, and he dispatched Lt. Hunter along with the scouts and an escort on to Cobb, to inform General Sheridan "of our proceedings and condition." That night, at 9:50 P.M., Private Clyf died of his wounds; he would be buried on Thursday, January 1, 1869, the only fatality of the expedition.[36] Examining his command, Evans noted of Company D on December 31 that it had marched a distance of 600 miles since November 1, that its discipline and instruction were fair, its military appearance "Indifferent," its accouterments fair (with due note of "field conditions"), and its clothing bad. "This muster was made in the field, on a scout after Indians," the hard-bitten Evans pointed out, "+ the appearance of the company much affected thereby."[37] Company D had lost 40 horses starved to death -- more than any other company with the expedition.

His supplies running low, Major Evans felt that he could delay no longer, and made preparations to move. It was while actually crossing the river on January 2 that the command was intercepted by an "express" from Sheridan, promising eight days' rations and ordering Evans to stand fast for a time. In the aftermath of the Washita fight, Cheyennes and Arapahoes were coming in to Cobb, and Sheridan wished Evans to refrain from attacking these Indians should they pass him.

Sheridan's confident note to "My Dear Evans," dated an hour after midnight on

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[36]Evans to AAAG, Jan. 23, 1869, container 76, reel 81, Sheridan Papers, LC; "List of Wounded....Canadian River Expedition," F422, "File F," Records of the Office of Medical Records, 1814-1919, RG 94, NA. Two other soldiers survived their wounds.

[37]Record of Events, "In the Field Washita River,"Muster Roll, Co. D, 3rd Cavalry, Oct. 31-Dec. 31, 1868, Entry 666, Muster Rolls, RG 391, NA.

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January 1, explained his change in plans: while he had arranged to ride out to see Evans with Hunter (who would start out in the morning with bacon, flour, sugar and coffee), he had just learned that the Cheyennes and Arapahoes were on their way in to either make peace or fight, "the latter being brag, as the fight is pretty well knocked out of them else they would have attacked you while [you were] destroying the Comanche village in their vicinity...I want you to hold your command well in hand and let the 'Bucks' come in either for a fight or peace -- should any of them come near your camp, deny them admittance, and direct them here." Sheridan had sent word to the Indians that Evans would not attack them, but he was not to permit them near his lines:

> I think it best for you to hold on a day or two until we see what will come of this new state of things. I can by that time give you some forage, and plenty of rations, which we should have had now, but for the late rains and bad roads. I hope still to see you before you start back for your depôt. We are very strong here -- about 1800 carbines.[38]

Lt. Hunter soon returned, with no forage, but with rations that Evans issued to replace his previous losses. That evening a second messenger directed him to return to Monument Creek after resting his animals, and Hunter transmitted Sheridan's verbal assurance "that if we were needed again to take the field a messenger would be sent after us."[39]

Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson had returned to Fort Cobb from his examination of

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[38]Sheridan to Evans, Jan. 1, 1868, container 6, reel 3, Sheridan Papers, LC. Though the context makes the correct year obvious, the note was misdated 1868. Sheridan's use of "carbines" as a synonym for "cavalrymen" is in contrast to the more customary (and romantic) term "sabers."

[39]Evans to AAAG, January 23, 1869, container 76, reel 81, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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Medicine Bluff on December 29, and on the 30th, after hearing both Grierson's and Hazen's recommendations, Sheridan decided to abandon Fort Cobb and establish a post there as soon as the rains subsided. At noon that day Hunter arrived with news from Major Evans. But this was not Sheridan's first information regarding a recent attack by soldiers; he was already aware of reports by Indians camped near Cobb, who had received Comanche fugitives from the southwest. The Comanches stated that their village had been attacked by white men; unsure of their enemies' identity but thinking them either soldiers or Texans, the refugees observed that they had driven a herd of cattle with them. Despite the confidence with which white scouts greeted this story, Sheridan had been inclined to dismiss the reports as rumors until Hunter's appearance provided confirmation.[40]

Evans took up his return march on January 3, on the left bank of the Washita. With no grain, and with poor grass, he was able to go only fourteen or fifteen miles a day -- and an average day cost the lives of a dozen or more animals. Those who gave out on the march were shot, as per Sheridan's orders, until Evans came within a few days' journey of the sub-depot; both Carr's and Penrose's commands had been in the vicinity during the column's absence, but Evans had had no contact with them. The command reached Monument Creek on January 13, preceded there earlier that day by two wagon trains from Fort Bascom with rations and forage, and Evans was now free to refit his command as best he could. His loss in animals had been terrible, but to Evans such a result was perhaps inevitable given the hard marches, severe weather, and the lack of grass and forage. The old Indian expedient of cottonwood bark, provided liberally by the soldiers, had not proved an adequate substitute,

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[40]Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 78; Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, II, pp. 336-48.

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for "though eagerly devoured by the animals it did not seem to check their mortality." The number of horses lost by the expedition to actual starvation on the scout was a staggering 172, while Evans' makeshift battery had lost 12 mules and his wagon train 52, with many of the remainder becoming sore-backed.

Most of the animals that survived to reach the depot were saved. But the command's recovery from its exertions would be a long process. On January 19, Evans learned by messenger of the Southern Comanches' offer of surrender, and guessed their location to be under the eastern or southern edges of the Llano Estacado, perhaps not more than 150 miles away. But after contemplating the feasibility of making a scout after the Comanches, Evans abandoned the idea. To succeed, he would have to be sure of finding the Indians at not over than 150 miles' distance, a dubious proposition with animals still in poor condition, 114 Third Cavalry troopers dismounted, and only twelve days' rations of flour and hard bread. Even if he had chosen to abandon his depot, send an express for more flour, and make a circuit of the Staked Plains, which might possibly have been done by going without bread for perhaps three or four days, success would have depended "upon finding the Indians in a particular locality." Nor would it have been practical to accompany the Comanches to Fort Cobb. As Sheridan had sent no word regarding plans for his column to take the field again, Evans decided to abandon his "scout" and return to Fort Bascom.

Major Evans' official assessment of his expedition was remarkable in its humility. Giving the men actually under Major Tarlton's command almost all credit for the Indians' defeat and the capture of their village, he struck an apologetic tone: "I regret that the Expedition should terminate with so little success, due mainly, no doubt, to errors of

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judgment upon my part. The hardships and privations of the campaign were cheerfully borne by the officers and soldiers under me, and no lack of effort upon their part caused my failure in my plans."[41] Evans did not explicitly state why he felt disappointed, perhaps because the gap between what was done and what could have been done seemed obvious. Despite having captured the village and its contents intact, he had taken no noncombatant prisoners who could be held as an encouragement for the warriors to surrender. Nor had he succeeded in dismounting his enemies, or even capturing any large number of their horses, and his failure to achieve surprise or surround the village had given the Comanches an opportunity to evacuate.

This may have led Evans to underrate the importance of having cost the Comanches their supplies and shelter at a time when they would feel the loss most keenly, and of again demonstrating, as Custer's initial blow had less than a month before, that the soldiers could strike at a season when the Indian rarely chose to pursue the war-path. As Nye observes, the fight was a smaller affair than the Washita attack, with only about two hundred soldiers and perhaps an equal number of Kiowas and Comanches engaged, and with perhaps only one man killed on each side: "Yet the fight was not without significance. It was a successful part of General Sheridan's plan to converge on the Indians from several directions. It showed the hostiles that they were not safe from the troops, no matter which way they might turn. It caused the surrender of a number, including Mow-way, who might otherwise have remained out and defied the government for several years."[42]

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[41]Evans to AAAG, January 23, 1869, container 76, reel 81, Sheridan Papers, LC.

[42]Nye, Carbine and Lance, pp. 82-83.

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Perhaps Evans' fight should also be recognized for the negative virtue of escaping criticism by humanitarians -- despite that officer's own confession that he had attacked not knowing his opponents' true identities. By contrast, the Seventh Cavalry was accused of attacking a village of friendly Indians who believed themselves at peace with the whites. The death of Black Kettle in particular, though a subject left unaddressed or shrugged off by Custer and Sheridan, was in this view not simply an unavoidable tragedy, but a rebuke to the notion that Sheridan's campaign was effectively distinguishing between friendly and hostile bands (assuming, of course, that such clear-cut divisions existed). The chief -- the most prominent survivor of the Sand Creek massacre -- had died at the hands of U.S. forces four years almost to the day of Chivington's attack.

But a popular service journal expressed confidence that this was a minority view, and that public outrage posed no threat to Sheridan's approach to the campaign: "What we may congratulate ourselves on is the extreme smallness of the Indian 'peace party.' It has no popular existence, but only an official one: it is composed of a few place-holders, a few philanthropists, and a few plunderers; its head and front are at Washington, and not on the Plains; its nucleus is the Indian Bureau, its strength the horde of Indian agents, contractors, and pedlers, its boundary the magic circle of the "Indian ring."[43]

Citing the evidence of such casualties as Elliott, Hamilton -- and, mistakenly numbered

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[43]Army and Navy Journal 6 (Jan. 2, 1869): 312. Finding the general acquiescence in the military's policy a gratifying surprise, the Journal linked it to recent political events which had led the nation's leading soldiers to acquire "a *general* authority hardly less marked than their military reputation," as well as to the failure of the Indian Bureau's policy, which had been "one unbroken record of slaughter and swindle" despite the best efforts of several honest and patriotic men connected with it.

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among the "gallant dead." Captain Barnitz -- the Journal denied that Custer was a second Chivington, and presented a measured, unofficial argument in defense of his actions. Although the aging Black Kettle had abandoned the war-path, his camp had been a rendezvous for young warrior" returning with booty from their raids:

> If it is true, in the popular phrase, that 'the receiver is as bad as the thief,' BLACK KETTLE suffered a just fate. The most charitable judgment for him, and, we believe, also the most just, is that he was disposed to keep peace with the whites, but was unable to control his band...The Army has long enough let the guilty hide behind the backs of the so-called 'innocent,' and so escape for fresh depredations. It is rare to find a whole camp actually guilty of the act of robbery or murder; but, as in BLACK KETTLE's case, you find those who remain behind giving 'aid and comfort' and sharing the spoils. This ingenious dodge of crying, 'There is an innocent Indian in that camp,' will no longer serve."[44]

Such an argument was not calculated to please the tender-hearted. Nor would it suffice to satisfy later generations, less comfortable with the methods and results of westward expansion. But if this anonymous editorial acknowledged a more complex situation than that revealed in the department commander's official statements, it also reflected more accurately the dilemma facing a frontier army attempting to fulfill its charge of avenging Indian raids.

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[44]Army and Navy Journal 6 (Jan. 2, 1869): 313.

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CHAPTER TEN

The Diplomacy of the Victors

"The Indian war is over...."

"The year commenced with a very disagreeable day," noted Captain Simon Snyder, commanding the 5th U.S. Infantry's Company F. "Snowing, rain and sleet all day."[1] But what may have been merely disagreeable weather to Fort Riley's officer of the day would prove more critical elsewhere in Sheridan's sprawling department, and delay his plans to exploit the complete destruction of Indian villages by column leaders Custer and Evans. At Fort Cobb, the continued rains delayed Sheridan's planned move to the new fort site at Medicine Bluff, and made camp living a dreary experience, while the Washita overflowed and literally washed Colonel Grierson out of bed. However, Lieutenant Colonel Custer began the year writing in a more cheerful vein; after having been serenaded by the regimental band before daylight on January 1 -- starting, not surprisingly, with "Garryowen" -- he informed his wife that all was well and "everything is glorious." His "runners," Iron Shirt and Mahwissa, had just reached Cobb, "bringing with them all the Cheyennes and Arapahoes. We have not seen them yet but will do so today." But Custer's prediction proved too optimistic, as he would soon discover.[2]

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[1]Diary of Simon Snyder, Captain Co. F, 5th U.S. Infantry, typescript, U.S. Army Military History Institute.

[2]Leckie, Unlikely Warriors, p. 160, n. 7; GAC to EBC, New Years 1869, Mrs. Custer's transcription, reel 4, EBCC.

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Iron Shirt had in fact returned from his peace mission. But he had arrived without the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, and also without Mahwissa. The chiefs he had sought out had not only declined to come in -- preferring, wrote Custer, "the chances of war" -- on the grounds that the distance was too great and their ponies exhausted, but had also forbidden the woman from returning as she had promised to do. However, chiefs Little Robe of the Cheyennes, and Yellow Bear, second-ranking chief of the Arapahoes, had kept their own promise to Iron Tail to leave their villages after his departure, and they soon followed him into Cobb. While these chiefs stated that many of their people feared coming in, Custer suspected that the Indians hoped to delay moving until spring, when the grass would restore their famished ponies. His fears seemed confirmed when promised couriers never arrived to report the chiefs's decision.[3]

Later that New Year's Day, near his tent, with a line of sentinels keeping back curious white observers, Custer held council with 21 chiefs from five tribes. There was no defiance evident, and the chiefs' statements suggested that the winter campaign had already had a devastating effect. "We are poor!" proclaimed Little Robe, expressing his desire to take the white man by the hand, and explaining that no matter which way the Indians turned, they met troops marching through the country; he and others had come in on foot, he said, because their horses had given out: "I am in hopes that you will take pity on us and give us peace, so that we can see our children and families contented...."

Another Cheyenne chief, Ish-e-n-hish, proclaimed that he was "full of acting the fool, and wish to now cast it aside." He too was looking for peace -- and for the members of his family Sheridan now held as prisoners. Yet another Cheyenne, We-rum-ic, told Custer that at

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[3]Custer, My Life, pp. 314-316.

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the council of the different bands held in response to Iron Tail's appearance, the talk had been "all good," and he even claimed that the chiefs' arrival at Fort Cobb had given them "new life." In contrast to the usual argument of chiefs disclaiming responsibility for others' actions, he maintained that the men present were the rulers of the village, "and whatever we say the balance have to do." He hoped that the soldier chief would take pity on the Indians.

The Arapahoes also expressed contrition. Little Shield expressed his wish to "throw fighting to one side, and cut it off," while Big Mouth felt it useless to make a statement, as it would merely echo what others had already said. But the Kiowa, Black Eagle, was more dramatic: asked if he could tell anything of Kiowa chiefs who had not yet come in, he arose, called for his father to come forward, and through his father's words relayed to Custer the message that his people had abandoned war: "I am now looking towards you the same as though the Great Father was talking to me."[4] A moment of curiously grim humor ensued when Black Eagle requested the release of Satanta and Big Tree and Custer asked again for further information on the chiefs still out. Black Eagle replied, "Those soldiers came in on them, and we have not seen anything of them since" -- the government's transcript recording "Laughter by the Indians." Presumably this referred to Evans' December 25 fight, and when Black Eagle repeated that the soldiers had "pitched on to them and we have not heard from

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[4]"Interview of General Sheridan with 'Little Robe,' of the Cheyennes, and 'Yellow Robe' of the Arapahoes, representing the warriors of their tribes," container 72, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC. Black Eagle's father, presumably a village herald, is identified here as "the Haranguer of the Tribe." Black Eagle appears to have become carried away by his own rhetoric during the council, adding that his people were at peace with all other Indians save the Utes and that he desired "to make peace with them too; and then we would be at peace with everybody." It was a remarkable hope, since such a state of universal peace would have inevitably destroyed the Kiowas' warrior culture.

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them since then," the transcriber of the speeches noted "renewed laughter by the Indians." However, Black Eagle thought that they too would come in when the grass improved.

Custer told the assembled chiefs that he was glad to see them there, but observed that he had instructed his messenger to specify that all the Indians must come in, rather than merely their headmen, and bluntly laid down Sheridan's terms: "This Reservation is now the only ground left for the Indians; all the other is bad ground, and has war made on it." Since chiefs absent from earlier "talks" had refused to consider themselves bound by agreements made at them, Custer wanted one council that would "settle the whole matter." After leaving to consult Sheridan and other officers, Custer returned to request that Yellow Bear, Little Robe, and Black Eagle hear a few words from General Sheridan -- "the Chief from whom I get all my orders, and who commands all this region of country."

Sheridan announced that he had very few words to say; the only way that the Indians could make peace with him was to come in with all their property, and he did not want much talk on the subject, since those Kiowas still out had "talked a great deal, and most of the talk has been lies." As for the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, he affected not to care "one cent" whether or not they came in: "If they stay out, I will make war on them winter and summer as long as I live, or until they are wiped out. They cannot come in here and make peace with me now, and then commence killing white people again in the spring." Like Custer, he pointed out that a lasting peace required that all should be represented at Fort Cobb, lest those still out "may say, 'We didn't make a peace of that kind; we think differently.'"

If the Cheyenne and Arapaho chiefs were unwilling to make such a peace, offered Sheridan, "you can go back and we will fight the thing out." But Sheridan waved both carrot

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and stick. Informing the Indians that two large columns of his troops were now in the field (and might encounter the camps still out), and that his own troops would join them to stay until matters were settled, Sheridan added that the moment peace was made, he would be willing to return the women and children he now held. But he could not wait long; unable to communicate with the soldiers operating in the vicinity of the villages, he could not tell at what time they might be "down on them."

This, Sheridan concluded, was all he had to say. But when Little Robe replied humbly (and with perhaps unexpected brevity), "It is for you to say what we have to do," Sheridan was inspired to more reassuring words:

> I am not a bad chief; I am not a bad man. If you come in here and do as I say, I will not be a bad chief to you. I will probably be in charge of this country for a long time, and will have much to do with you. I have had charge and been with Indians before, and have always got along very well with them.

After a few more exchanges, it was Sheridan's own emissary, Iron Tail, who took the step of pleading for those who had not yet come in: "I went right out when sent as a courier; and my mule gave out, and I then went on foot." When Sheridan praised him, the Apache replied: "Will you not pity these people now?" Sheridan said, "I do pity them because I know they are in a bad fix; but I will make no treaty until they all come in together."[5]

"The Indian war is over," concluded Custer following this "grand council." The Indians now had "all their arrogance and pride whipped out of them, they no longer presume

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[5]"Interview of General Sheridan with 'Little Robe...'", container 72, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC. Iron Tail is here identified by the name The Crow. Apparently the Army "soldier chiefs" had been oddly negligent in observing proper council etiquette, for the Apache pointed out that the chiefs had come a long way and had had nothing to eat, as was the custom -- even adding, "I would like something for myself." Custer replied, "I will give you some food right away!"

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to make demands of us, on the contrary they have surrendered themselves into our keeping. We are left free to fix the terms upon which they may resume peaceful relations with the government." With runners already dispatched that day to bring in the Cheyenne and Arapaho villages, Custer expected that in about twelve days they would join those who had already arrived.[6]

While this would also prove too optimistic a prediction, Custer was not alone in feeling that events had passed their climax. In St. Louis, General Sherman seemed satisfied, or at least philosophical about what Sheridan could and could not accomplish: "If you [had] hung Satanta I will be glad he is out of the way. But if the Kioways come in I suppose you will have to spare his life. Whatever you may do on the spot will be right."[7] Former governor Crawford, considering that "the expedition, as such," had been brought to a close by General Hazen's intervention in the planned blow against the Kiowas, could see no reason why he should remain longer with Sheridan's command, though many Indians had yet to surrender, and the Cheyennes apparently still held two Kansas women captive. Crawford had the welfare of his regiment to consider, for no arrangement had been made for paying the volunteers when they were mustered out. Turning the 19th Kansas over to Lieutenant-Colonel Moore, "a worthy officer, preëminently qualified to subdue the Cheyennes and compel the surrender of the captives," Crawford resigned on February 14, leaving Medicine

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[6]GAC to EBC, Jan. 2, 1869, Elizabeth B. Custer, Following the Guidon (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1890), pp. 46-47.

[7]Sherman to Sheridan, Jan. 4, 1869, container 39, reel 17, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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Bluff the next day, bound for Washington by way of Fort Gibson and Topeka.[8]

Criticism of military action against Indians might result whether or not it produced a victory; Custer himself would later refer to warning his officers "in a casual manner," prior to setting out on the expedition to the Washita, that they must reconcile themselves in advance to denunciations from Westerners should they fail to defeat the Indians, and from humanitarians if they succeeded in punishing them.[9] But one critique of Custer's own conduct, from an unexpected quarterly, would prove dramatically disturbing, as would the identity of its author.

This critique came in an excerpt from a letter datelined December 22 from Fort Cobb, originally appearing in the St. Louis Democrat of Tuesday, February 9, 1869, and reprinted in the New York Times for February 14. The author was identified only as a participant at the Washita, and the letter described as throwing some light on the "secret history of that fight." No actual secrets were revealed. But the anonymous author did report on the discovery of Elliott's slain detachment as well as the men's mutilated condition, and state that they had been found "out of sight and hearing of the Seventh Cavalry" -- even while strongly implying that Elliott, abandoned to his fate by Custer, could have been rescued.[10]

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[8]Crawford, Kansas in the Sixties, p. 330. When he eventually called on the Secretary of War, Crawford was told that Congress had adjourned without making any appropriation to pay his regiment; but as General Sherman happened to be in the city, "he and I, after much argument and persuasion, finally prevailed on the Secretary to order the payment out of his Contingent Fund."

[9]Custer, My Life, p. 270.

[10]For comments on the letter and a complete text, see Colonel W.A. Graham, The Custer Myth (New York: Bonanza Books, 1953), pp. 212-213. Godfrey and Benteen's son, Major F.W. Benteen, Jr., both informed Graham that the letter, and its publication, were the moving cause of Custer's threat to horsewhip his unknown critic.

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A dramatic confrontation at Fort Cobb resulted, though the date is not unrecorded. The angry Custer called his officers to assemble in his headquarters tent, and read the offending text aloud. Declaring that the author was without doubt a member of his regiment, Custer demanded that he reveal himself, and threatened a horsewhipping. Captain Benteen dramatically shifted his holster to a convenient position, and then announced that he was the writer -- whereupon a surprised Custer dismissed his officers.

Benteen had sent the letter to his friend William J. DeGresse, formerly a captain in Benteen's wartime regiment, the 10th Missouri Cavalry.[11] Recalling the actual confrontation, Benteen described officers "squatted around" inside the Sibley tent as Custer walked about in the center with rawhide whip in hand, rambling and stammering of some one or parties belittling the Washita fight, "switching his rawhide the while," and threatening to cowhide them if he heard any more, or learned of who had been responsible:

> Being right at the door of tent, I stepped out, drew my revolver, turned the cylinder to see that 'twas in good working order, returned it lightly to holster, and went within. At a pause in the talk I said, "Gen. Custer, while I cannot father all of the blame you have asserted, still, I guess I am the man you are after, and I am ready for the whipping promised." He stammered and said, 'Col. Benteen, I'll see you again, sir!'
>
> Doubtless you can imagine what would have happened had the rawhide whirred! The 'call' broke up, sine die, in silence, but no tears from whipping!"[12]

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[11]Benteen to Goldin, Feb. 17, 1896, Carroll, Benteen-Goldin Letters, p. 266.

[12]Benteen to Goldin, Feb. 22, 1896, Carroll, Benteen-Goldin Letters, pp. 280-281. Benteen added that after the meeting he asked Randolph Keim to come with him to Custer's tent, "as a whipping was due somebody, and I didn't want a word I'd said omitted," but that Custer, facing both men, "wilted like a whipped cur." Keim, who defended Custer's actions regarding Elliott, makes no mention of witnessing a Benteen-Custer confrontation, despite Benteen's claim that Sheridan upbraided Custer after Keim informed him of it. For a slightly different account of the tent encounter, which first appeared in the Philadelphia Times of

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As Custer's thoughts on this incident apparently went unrecorded, one can only speculate as to why he chose to break off this dramatic scene: it has even been suggested that he was "rather non-plussed" because he had believed that an enlisted man had written the letter, though Custer could hardly have demanded, much less expected, such a culprit to reveal himself at a meeting of officers.[13] Curiously, Benteen would later write of Lt. Cooke and Lt. Custer approaching him prior to the meeting, "Tom with a newspaper in his hand, showing it to me, saying, 'Isn't that awful!' I looked at it, reading down a line or so, and said, "Why, Tom, I wrote that myself," and so I had." However, such a scene seems incompatible with Lt. Col. Custer's evident surprise at Benteen's authorship -- unless Tom somehow neglected to tell his brother of this shocking admission.[14]

The mere fact of this confrontation led at least one researcher to insist that Custer's role in the Elliott affair must have inspired debate within the Seventh Cavalry's officer corps, despite later denials.[15] But while questions were publicly raised concerning Elliott's fate,

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March 15, 1879, and for which Benteen may have served as a source, see Graham, The Custer Myth, p.213.

[13]Handwritten addendum to Francis Hagner typescript, "Benteen's Criticism of Custer, 1868," Hagner Collection, NYPL. In reconstructing this incident, Hagner used material from Gen. Godfrey, Benteen's son Fred, and Col. John F. Weston -- whereas Col. Graham had as informants the first two named, as well as Gen. King and Gen.Winfield Scott Edgerly. W.A. Graham, letters to Frederic F. Van de Water, April 2, 1934, and April 5, 1934, Van de Water Papers, NYPL.

[14]Benteen to Goldin, Feb. 17, 1896, Carroll, Benteen-Goldin Letters, p. 266.

[15]Specifically, the writer charged that "Old Man Godfrey lied like the devil when he told me there was no discussion about the Washita affair [within the officer corps] till years later." E.A. Brininstool, letter to Van de Water, Jan. 30, 1934, Van de Water Papers, NYPL. But it is possible that Benteen did not discuss Elliott's death with his colleagues -- at least not in such critical terms -- before the letter's appearance, and that Custer was not the only officer

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evidence of criticism by the Seventh's own officers -- other than Benteen -- is not apparent, and Benteen's own hostility toward Custer was such that he would even attempt to publicly dismiss the Washita as a Seventh Cavalry triumph, lest it also be credited to Custer as his first Indian victory.[16] One is drawn to suspect that, whatever Custer's actual failure regarding Elliott, and the misgivings expressed by Keim and even Sheridan, Benteen's own vision of an "abandoned" Elliott may have been inseparable from, if not a creation of, this deep antipathy. If his belittling of the Seventh's victory seems incompatible with his considerable pride in his regiment, it was quite consistent with his contempt for its lieutenant-colonel. In the vitriolic correspondence of his retirement years, Benteen expressed his animosity toward Custer with far greater freedom, detail, and single-mindedness than was recalled by officers who had served with him in the Seventh.[17]

Benteen himself boasted of his letter that he "wasn't ashamed of it; didn't care a d---n for Custer...and owned straight up that I was the miscreant who had given it to the world, though I hadn't the remotest idea it would be published...." But his critique read very much as though intended for publication, its florid style wholly unlike that typical of Benteen's private correspondence, though Benteen made no mention of his prose being

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surprised when he revealed himself as its author.

[16] F.W. Benteen, Bvt. Col. USA, letter to Army and Navy Journal 14 (January 20, 1877), typescript, Hagner Collection. Benteen's missive bore the headline "How 'History' is Manufactured."

[17] An officer who joined the regiment after Custer's death even denied ever having heard Benteen express a definite opinion of Custer, though it was "evident to me from his manner when his name was mentioned that there was no love lost between them." Brig. Gen. E.A. Garlington, letter to Frederic F. Van de Water, Nov. 4, 1933, Van de Water Papers, NYPL.

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reworked by other hands. Custer apparently decided to make no more of this incident, whatever its effect on regimental harmony during a campaign which would soon require the Seventh to resume active operations.

While General Sheridan had accurately informed the Indians in council that two of his columns were still in the field, neither was then actively engaged in harrying the enemy, and Carr's force was chiefly occupied in merely surviving, its commander unsure of his next move. Camped on San Francisco Creek, ten miles west of "Scull" Creek and four miles south of the Canadian's North Fork, Carr reported snow eight inches deep. This denied the grass beneath to his starving animals, already reduced to one-third the usual forage ration. Even the available firewood, taken from a wood camp six miles away, was apparently exhausted, and within a day or two Carr would be forced to move his camp higher up the creek. With his animals gradually weakening, Carr was anxious to hear just what Sheridan desired him to do; left to himself, he would have chosen to return to Fort Lyon, for there seemed to be no Indians in the region. But as the Indians had apparently gone southeast, this would mean moving still farther away from them, and he was unsure of Sheridan's desires regarding such an action. Car therefore reported that if the supply train he expected could not keep him adequately foraged -- as "that is the only safety for my animals" -- he would consider it his duty to return, unless instructed otherwise.[18]

Even as Carr struggled to maintain his expedition in the field, the Army and Navy Journal, as had Custer, declared the winter campaign over -- and eminently successful. The

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[18]E.A. Carr to Col. J. Schuyler Crosby, AAAG Dept. of the Missouri, in the Field, January 20, 1869, Order Book, pp. 145, Military Division of the Missouri Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute.

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only subsequent operations before spring, it predicted, would be those required by casual acts of Indian hostility, and even these seemed unlikely: "Somewhat experimental at the start, it has demonstrated the soundness of the theory of winter campaigning against the Indians...The attack on Indian villages implied pitched battle -- the only thing our troops demanded and which the Indian in summer successfully avoided." However, if the Indian preferred flight to fight, the result would be the destruction of his home, clothing, fuel, food, and forage, "and wandering at random into the bleak Plains, exposed to the biting storms of winter."[19]

The supply situation at Fort Cobb was eased somewhat on January 3, when a wagon train arrived from Fort Arbuckle loaded with flour and rations for both cavalry regiments: "You would be tickled to see us bake, making what we call 'slap jacks' and heavy cakes," wrote Private Harvey. A second supply train came in the next day: "Plenty of grub to eat. Some of the Indians will soon come now as they are getting hungry and out of rations."[20] On January 6, with the cessation of rain, the march began toward Medicine Bluff and the site of the new post, which some called simply New Fort Cobb -- with reveille at 3 a.m. Traveling through the Kiowa and Comanche camps that morning, Harvey observed "some very pretty Indian women; a very pretty sight for one, who has never seen an Indian," and at the next day's camp on Cash Creek he recorded his theories on the proper redistribution of the natural wealth he saw before him, which anticipated the opening of the Indian Territory to white settlement: "Plenty of wood and water and the very best of land, very rich. Too good to let

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[19]Army and Navy Journal 6 (January 23, 1869): 360.

[20]Harvey journal, Jan. 3-4, 1869, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 92.

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the Indians have. They ought to be driven off and the land given to the poor white man (sic) of different States."[21]

After the command arrived at Medicine Bluff Creek on January 8, Sheridan, who planned a permanent post instead of a simple stockaded fort, decided to shift its location about three hundred yards to the southeast of the site Grierson had already staked out. Alighting from an ambulance to hold the first stake driven for what some called "Camp Witchita," Sheridan disdained to make a speech, but did protest that he wanted ambulance driver Johnny Murphy to drive the stake, rather than one of the assembled officers.[22] Custer shared his commander's enthusiasm for the site, located on a high, level plateau. He declared it the finest location for a military post he had yet seen, with a view to the west "well worthy the pencil of a Church or a Bierstadt."[23]

Custer still wrote hopefully of the arrival of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, as well as the remaining Kiowas, while continuing to hold Satanta and Lone Wolf under strong guard, assuring his wife, "We will probably hang several of the Chiefs, but not the two we now hold." Everyone there from General Sheridan on down, he wrote, thought

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[21]Harvey journal, Jan. 6-7, 1869, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 93.

[22]Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 85. Col. Nye writes of this incident: "Whether this was an example of racial solidarity, or whether Sheridan thought that the frontier youth was less likely to mash his fingers than one of the uniformed gentlemen is not known." For the driver's own account of the war from a civilian employee's vantage point, see John Murphy, "Reminiscences of the Washita Campaign," Chronicles of Oklahoma 1 (June, 1923): 259-67.

[23]GAC to EBC, Friday, Jan. 8, 1869, 9 p.m., Merington Collection, NYPL. Custer shared with others the impression that Old Fort Cobb was to be completely "broken up" during the campaign, and that all troops not already at Medicine Bluff would be transferred there, along with the Indians who had congregated near Cobb.

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this the department's last Indian war; however, "None of us feel that we could or ought to leave here until we see the end of the Indian matter. And a few days more is all that is required to enable us to do this." However, as no one but Custer and Sheridan had any idea of the terms which would be laid down for the Indians, care was also required "for fear the latter might get a clue to our intentions and refuse to come in." The command was ill-equipped to take the field; the horses had done nobly, but having "done all that horses can do," they were now beginning to fail, and they could not be restored at the Medicine Bluff camp, where neither shelter nor adequate forage could be obtained. His original supply of rations had run out two days before.[24]

This supply problem could not be shrugged off as the inescapable result of fighting in winter, and Custer complained that the Commissary Department had treated the command shamefully, while General Sheridan himself was terribly enraged at Brigadier General M. R. Morgan, his chief commissary officer, cursing him "not a little." Despite orders to Morgan to dispatch a hundred thousand rations to Arbuckle in anticipation of just such a winter movement, no food had reached either Fort Cobb or Fort Gibson, and only four days' worth could be found from Arbuckle's own stock for the men of Custer's command.

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[24]GAC to EBC, Friday Jan. 8, 1869, 9 p.m. (letter continued to Jan. 9), Merington Collection, NYPL. Despite his determination to settle Indian matters, Custer believed that it would be possible to take a leave of twenty days to visit Washington, and to attend Grant's inauguration as President on March 4; he even took steps to have a room reserved for himself and his wife, at the same hotel (and on the same floor as his friend, Senator Zachariah Chandler). "I dare not trust it to paper what is planned but if everything works favorably Custer luck is going to surpass all former experience, and you will be as greatly surprised as my greatest enemy." Custer added mysteriously that only two other persons beside himself and Sheridan knew what was being planned, but exact nature of Sheridan's plans for Custer's advancement is not known.

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With hard bread the staple of the soldier's field ration, Custer had naturally relied upon being furnished with a proper supply. Instead he got flour -- which, according to Lieutenant Moylan, the befuddled Morgan had thought just as good as hard bread, despite the fact that the soldiers, in light marching order, had no facilities for baking. Custer was less lighthearted than the flapjack-making Harvey in describing how, to provide enough bread for their daily wants, "they have to sit up all night and bake unwholesome bread on shovels over a camp fire. We feel and so does Genl Sheridan & his present staff that troops undergoing the severities and unusual hardships of a winter campaign such as ours should receive every comfort the government can give. On the contrary we are the most neglected of any troops in the Dept." Because no officers' stores had been furnished, the officers themselves were "dining on soldiers fare," and Custer feared that his command might suffer greatly unless a train could arrive: "I wish Gen Morgan could hear the curses he has received from all the officers here from the highest to the lowest..."[25]

The rest of the command reached Medicine Bluff Creek on January 9, and Indians would soon appear at the camp in multitudes, to put a further strain on resources as they drew rations from the Army commissary. Private Harvey, still viewing them as potential foes, was not obviously shaken in his confidence by the warriors' appearance: "Lots of

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[25]With officers united in the belief that Morgan had "not one idea beyond running the Fort Leavenworth Post Bakery and keeping his own Com[missary] bill down to the lowest rate," Custer had been asked by a departmental staff officer to complain officially regarding the treatment of his command, "but I declined saying it would be interpreted as personal spite on my part, and it would be too late to do the command any good." According to Custer, some staff officers hated Morgan "most earnestly," while Sheridan described him as "the g--d--d--nst old gossip I ever saw [;] he can't keep anything to himself." GAC to EBC, Jan. 8, 1869, Merington Collection, NYPL.

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pretty squaws in along with old bucks. Oh! What savage looking men some of them are, but very big cowards. They will run."[26] Custer, however, feared that this running would take the form of a stampede caused by any further troop movements; this would, he felt, thwart hopes of an early settlement, and require a long and arduous effort to bring to bay those Indians who had not yet surrendered. To prevent such a stampede, Custer proposed to Sheridan an audacious scheme, which he later described as the "one expedient yet untried which furnished even a doubtful chance of averting war." As the Indians would fear punishment if approached with a large force, and were perhaps now too alert to be surprised, he would attempt to visit the Arapaho and Cheyenne chiefs with a small group and convince them of the government's good will.

But while too many men could frighten the Indians, too small a command "would tempt them to murder us, even though our mission was a friendly one." Custer would thus take with him forty soldiers, two officers (Lt. Robbins and Lt. Custer), a surgeon, and the cooperative chiefs Little Robe and Yellow Bear. In light of the risk involved, General Sheridan informed Custer that he would not order him to proceed on such a mission, but would sanction and assist it; others were apparently even more dubious, according to Custer, who wrote of an officer who presented him with a derringer pistol before he departed -- as a possible suicide gun if capture threatened.[27] But Custer, perhaps bearing in mind Forsyth's survival against fearful odds while seeking battle with fifty scouts, apparently thought that a force four-fifths as large, drawn mainly from Cooke's sharpshooters, would have a fair

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[26]Harvey journal, Jan. 16, 1869, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 94.

[27]Custer, My Life, pp. 316-318.

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chance if diplomacy failed.

Accompanied by interpreter Romero and the anxious Daniel Brewster, and guided by a Blackfoot Indian named Neva, Custer set out on January 15, 1869, and visited a nearby Apache village on the first day. Riding generally westward along the northern edge of the Wichita Mountains, Custer soon realized that his journey might take longer than anticipated, and had a trooper travel back by night to request more rations; he also asked that Lieutenant Cooke lead the escort.[28] But before he could be resupplied Custer had already located the village of the Arapahoes, complete with armed warriors "whose numbers exceeded ours more than ten to one." These seemed far from hostile. But Custer, acting throughout, he wrote, "in the belief that if proper precautions were adopted, the Indians would not molest us," was careful to camp within pistol range of the nearest lodge, thinking the Arapahoes less likely to initiate a fight that risked exposing their women and children to danger. Likewise, while finding head chief Little Raven receptive to his offers, Custer permitted no more than twenty Indians to visit the soldiers' camp at any one time, and cautioned the Arapahoes not to approach the camp at night lest they be shot. So as to reassure his hosts, Custer left his own firearms behind when visiting their village.

Despite Custer's regret over losing his services, Yellow Bear accompanied the Arapahoes when the village finally departed, leaving behind two warriors to act as guides. With Custer's limited supplies, he could not justify marching farther in search of the

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[28]Custer, My Life, pp. 319 -324; Harvey journal, Jan. 24, 1869, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 95. Harvey, helping pack mules with rations to be taken to Custer, was under the impression that Custer would "not be in for 18 days yet. He will try to bring in the Indians with him to make their treaty. If they do not come, he will make them."

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Cheyennes, and with little to do but wait in camp, the impatient Little Robe set off on his own to hunt for his compatriots. Three days after the Arapahoes' departure, some dozen men under Cooke, with California Joe as scout, appeared with the requested supplies; Cooke had not found Custer at the designated rendezvous point, and had anxiously followed the trail before learning the party's location from Yellow Bird, found riding in advance of his village.

While his animals began to fail under their diet of bark, Custer followed Little Robe's trail, until finally Neva, mule-mounted, pushed on ahead. He was accompanied on foot by the two Arapahoes and -- though Custer was reluctant to see him go on this dangerous mission -- the anxious Daniel Brewster. Custer was to follow until he reached a small tributary of the Red River, then wait, and give Neva three days to return before starting back with the main party.

But the lack of forage proved so desperate that Custer turned back after only two days. Neva was left to follow his trail, and that night, after a horse dead of starvation was butchered for meat, he arrived in camp, to tell of having found the trail of the Cheyenne village; Brewster struggled gamely in a few hours later, although the two Arapahoes had trudged on in search of the village. On the evening of January 28, three of Custer's men returned to Medicine Bluff with news, and W.S. Harvey concluded, "He has found the Indians at last. They will come into camp in a few days."[29]

In fact, Custer would not return to the new post for over a week, and then with his mission only partly successful. Preparations for a new expedition were being made in his absence, though Private Harvey seemed oblivious to the prospect of hard service in greeting

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[29]Harvey journal, Jan. 28-29, 1869, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 96.

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the arrival of a large wagon train loaded chiefly with rations: "It is very near time; we have been living on 2 hardtacks per day for some 8 or 10 days. We will live fine now. No work and plenty of fun." On February 5 all of the 19th Kansas's serviceable horses were transferred to the Seventh Cavalry, leaving the Kansans to march dismounted. David Spotts, forced to part with his mount "Billie," could only comfort himself with the fact that he now had no horse to feed and groom.[30]

Despite the belief of Sheridan and Custer that the Indians had been effectively chastened, those not yet under Sheridan's "thumb" could and sometimes did strike at the settlements of Kansas. This danger obliged portions of the undermanned frontier army to adopt a dubiously effective defensive posture, while much of its available strength -- particularly its mounted strength -- remained concentrated for a possible renewal of Sheridan's offensive. With orders to march to the Republican River to protect settlers, the twenty-nine-year-old Captain Snyder spent January 23 "getting ready to start upon the war path," then set out the next day with 24 Fifth Infantry doughboys, rationed for a month. Such foot soldiers, with their breechloading .50 Springfield rifles, were well-equipped to inflict casualties on Indian attackers, but mounted troops had a better chance of actually pursuing Indian raiders with success.

Though delayed by a severe "norther" which led him to avoid breaking camp on January 29 (and to spend most of this lost day in bed), Snyder and his little infantry command arrived at a Swedish settlement on January 30, in time for another storm setting in that

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[30]Harvey journal, Feb.4-5, 1869, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 97; Spotts journal, Feb. 4- 5, 1869, Spotts, Campaigning with Custer, pp. 118-119.

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evening and lasting for two days. "Tent full of snow," Snyder observed on February 2, admitting that he had spent the last two days in bed simply to keep warm. A week later he recorded the first threat -- or promise -- of action; three local men came in by night to report an Indian camp a short distance up the river, and Snyder sent a party the next day to investigate. He learned upon its return that the "Swedes' Indians" were but a herd of wild horses, magnified into a camp of presumably blood-crazed savages by panic: "The Swedes breathe fear." The detachment finally broke camp on the 15th, arriving at Lake Sibley the next day and receiving orders by express to return to Fort Riley.[31]

Not all settlers were content with simply seeking Army assistance On January 28, a party of about twenty Pawnee warriors, passing through Saline Valley on a horse raid, stopped at a settler's home and -- despite the Pawnees' reputation as friendly Indians and Army allies -- attempted to break in. The settler's wife barricaded the door and defended her window with a carbine until citizens arrived. Two of the Kansans then rode to an Army camp on the Saline, and Captain Edward Byrnes, fearing "a repetition of the outrages of last summer," set out with a detachment of Tenth Cavalry a little after two in the morning, arriving at the house attacked and taking five Kansans along as guides when he pursued the raiders. Officially, Byrnes reported that the Pawnees defied his command to lay down their arms and lost six warriors killed in the ensuing skirmish, while another surrendered, badly wounded; Byrnes had two soldiers wounded, one dangerously. However, accounts by Lincoln County civilians told a different tale, of an encounter which began with most of the Indians scattering, while four stood their ground to show the white men their Army

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[31]Diary of Simon Snyder, Jan. 23-Feb. 16, 1869, U.S. Army Military History Institute.

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discharges. Settler John Alverson then shot the Pawnees' apparent leader, and after the Indians had fled to a cave on Mulberry Creek, the Pawnees were burned out and then shot down by the civilians, two of whom had served in Forsyth's scouts. The soldiers took a survivor prisoner; but even he, released the next day, was killed in cold blood by the implacable Kansans on his way home from Fort Harker. In 1910 Thomas Alderdice, asked why there was no investigation of the slaughter, replied neatly that the government had in fact made one, "but no witnesses were found who knew anything about the matter."[32]

With Custer still not back from his quest by the end of January, Sheridan ordered ten days' rations and two thousand pounds of grain for forage. He wrote to inform Custer that if the Cheyennes did not come in "at once" Sheridan would move out against them without delay, even using the many dismounted cavalrymen of the Seventh and the 19th Kansas. He hoped that this would not be necessary, and did not think it would be, "but if necessary, let me know quickly....Carr (if it was not his Commd who struck the Indians lately) will be in prime condition to move with us." As for Custer's mission to the tribes, the department commander was "delighted with your good Spirits + will be more so if you succeed in hastening things along," but vowed that if the Kiowas or others harmed any of Custer's party Sheridan would make them feel that "lightning" had hit.[33]

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[32]"Report of Captain Ed. Byrne, 10th Cavalry, of engagement with Indians on the Saline River," Jan. 31, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC; Record of Engagements, p. 19; Criqui, Fifty Fearless Men, pp. 48-49, 198-199. Byrnes alleged that the settlers were "in continual dread of these Pawnees...and there is very little difference in their actions and those of the hostile tribes, during their raids through the frontier settlements."

[33]P.H. Sheridan, letter to GAC, Jan. 31, 1869, Merington Collection, NYPL. Sheridan, having last heard from Carr from his Skull Creek camp on the North Canadian, surmised that it was Evans who had lately struck the "Mountain Apaches"(sic) and

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Custer returned unharmed to Medicine Bluff on February 7, having taken a half-dozen men to ride on ahead -- eighty miles in sixteen hours, by his own account, and guided by his compass -- in his anxiety to surprise Sheridan with the results of his trip. He privately admitted that his party had had "what some people would term a rough time," having been gone sixteen days, without wagons or tents, and with officers and men forced to survive on parched corn and horseflesh roasted on forked sticks. Furthermore, the Cheyennes had so delayed their surrender that, as he told his wife, Custer could not take his hoped-for leave of absence.[34]

While Sheridan doubted the need for another expedition by his combined force of regulars and Kansans, Major Carr's men were still in the field. But that officer, who had scoured the region thoroughly without finding Indians or fresh signs, finally declared it impossible to keep his command adequately supplied from Fort Lyon -- adding that, "as near as I can learn, the work is done." Faced with animals growing weaker or dying, and with his transportation unable to keep them adequately foraged from Fort Lyon, Carr planned to return to the post, believing this course of action to be "their only safety." He expected to reach Lyon on about the 21st after commencing his march on January 9.[35]

The crippled command in fact arrived there on February 18, though the troops were preceded on the 17th by Captain Penrose and two other officers. Carr went into camp near

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Comanches."

[34]GAC to EBC, 11.30 P.M., Feb. 8, 1869, in Custer, Following the Guidon, pp. 49-50.

[35]E.A. Carr to S.J. Crosby, Feb. 8, 1869, Order Book, p. 146, Military Division of the Missouri Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute.

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the post, and the next day Captain Armes, who had accompanied Penrose's Seventh Cavalry troop back to Fort Lyon in December, was on hand that afternoon to see, straggling into the post, what was "left of the Tenth Cavalry...forlorn-looking specimens of humanity." When Armes rode out to the Tenth's encampment with Mrs. Penrose and another Army wife, the two ladies were confronted by what Armes termed "the most pitiful sight we ever saw. The men were partly frozen; their pants had been burned and worn off, and many had not changed their clothing for weeks and months."[36] On March 14, 1869, Captain Penrose was relieved of command, even before being given the opportunity to promulgate an official farewell. However, he did address to the officers and soldiers of the Tenth U.S. Cavalry an eloquent leave-taking. Praising the men's conduct, he conceded that it was "not your fortune to meet and engage the enemy, yet this movement was a part of a grand plan, emanating from that great soldier, Major-General Sheridan." His black troopers had thus been "instrumental in compelling a large force of the enemy to make a retrograde movement, and there appears to be no doubt that this was the identical force which Bvt. Major General Custer was thus enabled to encounter and destroy. Your efforts were therefore of material service in the winter campaign."[37]

While the evidence does not uphold Penrose's suggestion that the "beaters" had inspired Black Kettle's village to move toward the campsite occupied at the time of Custer's attack, the specter of several columns of soldiers marching through their country that winter

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[36]Armes, Ups and Downs, p. 286.

[37]"W.H. Penrose, Captain and Bvt. Brig. General U.S.A., Late Commander Indian Expedition from Fort Lyon, C.T., to Officers and Soldiers of the Tenth U.S. Cavalry, Ft. Lyon, C.T., Mar. 14, 1869," in Armes, Ups and Downs, pp. 287-288.

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had exerted its moral effect, as Indians admitted in submitting to Sheridan's demands. Whatever the severity of Custer's blow, it might have seemed an isolated disaster had it not been followed by the threat of further action, or if the soldiers had seemed unable to harry their foes or sustain winter operations after such an initial burst of activity. On February 8, the day after Custer's return to Medicine Bluff Creek, Captain Weir, with troops A and D of the Seventh and 100 picked men under Lt. Godfrey, was dispatched to expedite the arrival of the Arapahoes. The rest of Custer's men straggled in on February 9, their horses appearing so worn-out that they seemed likely to prevent the command from moving for a considerable time.[38]

A failure by the Cheyennes to come in as expected would place the troops in an awkward position: for at this point it was thought impossible, as Benteen put it, to obtain enough forage "to recuperate our horses before the Cheyennes would have their ponies in such a condition that to go in search of them would be futile."[39] Spring, producing the grass that could sustain the Indians' ponies (if not the Army's mounts), would negate an advantage which Sheridan had thus far exploited with some success, though at a terrible cost when forage proved inadequate. But as Keim explained it, "it was still necessary to make a movement toward the laggard tribes, to let them see that the 'white soldiers' were still able to fight. Such a contrast with their own forlorn condition could not fail to have a powerful

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[38]E.S. Godfrey, "Autobiographical Sketch"(1929), p. 4, photocopied typescript, Box 1, Godfrey Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute; Harvey journal, Feb. 9, 1869, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 97.

[39]Benteen's notes, Carroll, Cavalry Scraps, p. 25.

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effect."[40]

On February 15, Satanta and Lone Wolf were released by Custer from their Sibley-tent custody in the Seventh Cavalry's camp, and the departmental commander, who had previously disdained to talk with them, held his first conference with the Kiowa chiefs, noting his intent to "have an interview with you, and to tell you why I have kept you here as prisoners." Sheridan explained that despite the assurances of the various Kiowa chiefs that their people were coming in, he had heard nothing but lies. Sheridan revealed that he knew which Kiowas had been the leading spirits in Texas raids, stated that his first intention had been to "get these men and hang them," and even listed the names of potential victims so as to make his position clear. But he was willing to make a fresh start if the chiefs could pledge that such raiding would cease. Both chiefs agreed to abstain from war, and Sheridan, proclaiming himself the chief of both whites and Indians in the country, told them that he would take the guards from their tents.[41]

Speaking with the Nonocee Comanche chief Horseback, Sheridan explained why he had not allowed goods to be issued to Horseback's people, and his willingness to lift this ban on condition that Horseback cooperate in suppressing depredations. The chief agreed "to do

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[40]Keim, Sheridan's Troopers, p. 276.

[41]"Satanta and 'Lone Wolf,' Head Chiefs of the Kiowa Indians," interview transcript, Enclosure No. 2, Sheridan to Nichols, Dec. 27, 1868, "Communication from General Sheridan, endorsing a communication from General Hazen showing depredations of Kiowa and Comanche Indians, on the frontier settlements of Texas, since the treaty of 1867," container 72, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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as you say," and to inform Hazen of any future raids.[42] . At a council the next day with some fifty or more chiefs, including Satanta, Black Eagle, and others he had already spoken to, Sheridan disdained negotiations in favor of orders.[43]

While preparations continued for a renewed offensive against the free-roaming bands, attempts to resupply the troops at Medicine Bluff Creek were still hampered by bad roads, and the need to import forage meant so much less capacity to haul food for the men; on February 22, only two days after the arrival of a train from Arbuckle devoted to such forage, the men were placed on half rations.[44] The Kansans back at Camp Supply remained eager to see action. Amid rumors that they too were to be dismounted, or kept on escort duty, there remained a general assumption that they would rejoin their regiment, and both the officers and men of the detachment expected "to have a crack at the 'reds,'" before being discharged.[45]

On February 23, Sheridan, with much unfinished business, but anxious to leave for the northern posts of his department, left Medicine Bluff Creek after a farewell review by the Seventh Cavalry, which formed up along a line later occupied by brick quarters -- leading the symbolism-minded Kiowas to believe that the post's buildings were laid out according to

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[42]"Interview of Sheridan with Horse Back, Chief of the Noconee band of Comanche Indians, February 15th, 1869, at Medicine Bluff Creeks, I.T.," Enclosure No. 3, Sheridan to Nichols, Dec. 27, 1868, container 72, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

[43]"Proceedings of a Council Held with Chiefs of the Kiowa Nation, by General Sheridan and General Custer, at Medicine Bluff Creek, I.T., February 16th, 1869," Enclosure No. 4, Sheridan to Nichols, Dec. 27, 1868, container 72, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

[44]Harvey journal, Feb. 22, 1869, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 99.

[45]Runyon, "A.L. Runyon's Letters": 72.

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the deployment of Custer's troops at this event. Accompanied by reporter Keim and a small party including 38 of Pepoon's scouts, Sheridan's ambulance departed to a tremendous cheer from the ranks. As he had been during the Civil War, "Little Phil" was popular with his troops. The rigors of the campaign had not estranged his men, for as Spotts wrote following Sheridan's departure, the general had been with them since they had left Camp Supply "and had his headquarters with us, camping in a tent when the weather was fair or foul, marching at our head in snow and rain, enduring all the hardships of wind and weather. He is not a young man either, between thirty-five and forty years old."

On the afternoon of March 1, Sheridan's little group approached the stockaded post at Camp Supply, at first inspiring a false alarm of Indians. Here Sheridan received a dispatch from President-elect Grant: he was to go to Washington as early as possible. It was a message which negated Sheridan's original plan, for although nothing required him to remain in the field "but his own desire personally to see the troops return to their summer camps," he had intended to join Custer's column. The march to Fort Dodge began on March 3, and it was on the 6th, a day after leaving Fort Dodge, that a courier approached -- who "met the General, saluted, and, with unexpected wit, remarked, 'I have the honor to deliver a dispatch to the Lieutenant General.'" After Sheridan, seeming to Keim much affected by the news, read aloud the telegram announcing his promotion, a toast was drunk on the banks of the Smoky Hill to the health of the thirty-seven-year-old lieutenant general and the close of the campaign.[46]

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[46]Spotts journal, Feb. 23, 1868, Campaigning with Custer, p. 94; Keim, With Sheridan's Troopers, pp. 298-99, 304-307.

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Sheridan had left Custer free to act at his own discretion in bringing his portion of that campaign to a conclusion -- and Custer was anxious to act before the spring grass appeared. Early on the warm afternoon of March 2 Custer's partly dismounted force, including eleven troops of the Seventh and ten of the 19th Kansas, left the camp and marched five miles into the Wichita Mountains; the route followed, previously unknown to the command, dispelled the assumption that Custer was marching back to Camp Supply.[47] Custer had in fact struck a course for an abandoned pre-war post, Camp Radziminski, at the mouth of Elk Creek, to the east of the North Fork of Red River.

With both Sheridan and Custer gone, Colonel Grierson was left at Medicine Bluff with the task of constructing a new post. The available manpower consisted, as it normally did in the frontier army, of the soldiers themselves, in this case four companies of the Tenth Cavalry and two of the Sixth U.S. Infantry. Despite the desire of Seventh Cavalry officers that the post bear the name of their late comrade Major Elliott, Sheridan had decided that it would be officially dubbed Fort Sill, for his West Point classmate Brigadier General Joshua W. Sill, killed at Stone River in 1862. Wagon trains journeyed to Ft. Arbuckle for lumber and other building materials, and there the quartermaster sawmill was dismantled and brought to Medicine Bluff. But actual construction proceeded slowly.[48]

At old Camp Radziminski, where cut logs, long dead, and the remains of old dugouts were still visible, the cavalrymen endured freezing rain, wind, and the nocturnal howling of

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[47]Harvey journal, March 2, 1869, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 100.

[48]For the construction process, see Nye, Carbine and Lance, pp.100-105. Work on Sill's permanent buildings did not commence until early in 1870, when civilian artisans supplemented the troops' unskilled labor.

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wolves and coyotes. From this melancholy site Custer set his course west toward a point near the North Fork of Red River a few miles above the mouth of Salt Fork. On March 4, Ulysses S. Grant was inaugurated as President, while the men suffered from short rations, Private Harvey being obliged to borrow the hefty sum of $3.00 simply to "get some bread stuff," type unspecified. Establishing a camp near the North Fork, Custer divided his command on March 6, selecting about 800 of the most effective men from both regiments. He gave the remainder, plus his surplus wagons, to Captain Myers, who was to march up the North Fork and then north to the Washita, near the site of Black Kettle's camp, there to await further orders.[49] "I think General Custer will find the "red skins" before he comes back," predicted Harvey, who, perhaps regretfully, went with Myers' detachment.

Custer, "marching with his usual vigor and persistency," struck the Salt Fork after only a few hours' march, and at noon found a fresh trail -- apparently of a single Indian lodge, and fifteen animals -- leading up it. He took up the pursuit, following the trail for three days, and one night.[50] In the meantime, Myers' command, despite the misfortune of having its cattle herd stampede two days in a row ("bad luck to them," wished Private Harvey), arrived at the Washita battleground on March 10, the sky "snowing like thunder."

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[49]G.A. Custer, "Report of Operations of Troops operating South of the Arkansas, Brevet Major General George A. Custer, Commanding, from March 2nd, 1869, to March 21st, 1869," container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC; Harvey journal, March 3-4, 1869, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 100; Spotts journal, March 4, 1869, Campaigning with Custer, pp. 138-39

[50]New York Times, May 3, 1869. The correspondent who so characterized Custer is identified as an "intelligent non-commissioned officer" of the command, who stated that Myers was to camp on the Washita "at the point where we buried our dead." New York Times, May 3, 1869.

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Here a large supply train and rations awaited.[51]

On the march with Custer, Captain Benteen would later lament the lack of game and conditions in general: "There was absolutely nothing to hunt on this trip but Indians, and the finding of them was the most tiresome and hungry game that I ever played at."[52] But while such a pursuit might easily have evoked the frustrations and disasters of the 1867 campaign, Custer was apparently never thrown into depression or despair by its difficulties. At some point during this expedition Captain Yates and an officer new to the Seventh, Lieutenant John F. Weston, both commanding companies, branched off from the column to avoid some of the dust produced, while keeping parallel with the regiment. But Custer's adjutant ordered them to close up, and at an assembly of officers that evening, Weston, who would later rise to the rank of the army's Commissary General, attempted to explain how the deviation had improved conditions for both horses and men, by avoiding the alkali dust. "Indeed," said Custer. "I suppose, Mr. Weston, you think you could command the regiment better than it is commanded at present?" "No doubt about it," replied the lieutenant, "and I can get the affidavits of 450 men to prove it." According to Weston, "Custer laughed and so did the others and that ended the matter."[53]

Captain Benteen found the Salt Fork well-named, for mixed salt and gypsum could be

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[51]Harvey journal, March 8-9, 11, 1869, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 101, 102.

[52]Benteen, Cavalry Scraps, xviii.

[53]"General Custer's Widow," typescript of unidentified newspaper clipping, Hagner Collection, NYPL. According to Weston, "Custer was a man who invited repartee, and never became offended at replies to his sallies."

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seen on the banks, and in bars in the river, "in sufficient quantities to load trains of cars. The water everywhere was bad, very bad, and it seemed that the longer you boiled beans in it the harder the beans got. You could not drink coffee made from it; tea made from it was scarcely drinkable, but you had to drink it as you could not drink the water straight..."[54] Eventually the Indians' knowledge of the country led their pursuers to a stream of fresh water, where one trooper, who had seized his chance to collect huge cakes of salt, now broke them up with an axe -- before finishing the job with a coffee-mill.[55]

On the third day of the hunt, which had moved into Texas, Custer actually overtook the Cheyennes as they made camp to seek shelter from an approaching storm, on a fresh-water tributary of the Salt Fork. The Kansas volunteers, carbines held beneath their overcoats against the rain, were told to halt, still denied a chance for action, while Custer's mounted men made the attack; the regulars rode in with pistols at the ready, but captured only an empty camp. Custer later learned from the Indians that, after being alerted by two of the cavalry's dogs noisily quarreling, they had chosen to flee on foot, perhaps not trusting to their animals' poor condition.[56] The Kansans were amused by the Seventh's failure to catch Indians, and it was said that a woman with the party of eight men had left a meal cooking on

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[54]Benteen, Cavalry Scraps, p. 26; Custer, My Life, p. 347. Custer actually described the border of salt as from one to three feet in width, "and sufficiently thick to support the weight of a horse."

[55]Custer, My Life, p. 348.

[56]Custer, My Life, p. 349, and "Report of Operations," March 21, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC; Spotts journal, March 8, 1869, Campaigning with Custer, pp. 142-43. According to Spotts, only two of the eleven captured ponies were retained as mounts for the Seventh, the rest being killed.

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her fire, leaped on her pony, and escaped despite Custer's personal effort to head her off. The captured camp of only two lodges was a curiosity containing little of value, and was burned. Custer alleged that the party was among those which the Cheyennes had dispatched to the vicinity of Medicine Bluff Creek "to observe and report our movements," and that the Indians were then on their way to the main village to report that the soldiers were again on the move.[57]

There was good reason to believe this failure the end of the hunt, for with the scattering of the Indians, the soldiers, already short of provisions, had not even a trail to follow. Faced with this crisis, Custer took the uncharacteristic step of holding a council of war, including the officers of both regiments. It did not breed timidity, and Custer decided to push on: "We were now on the edge of a desert, with no wood or water west of us for two days' journey, and we all anticipated starting for Camp Supply at once, by going around the northern edge of the desert. But no! We still marched southwest..."[58] Custer's scouts surmised, from the quantity of partly cured meat in the captured camp, that the Indians were headed back to their village after a hunting trip, and that by proceeding in the same direction the soldiers could either run across that village, or strike a trail leading to it.

Though forced to make a dry camp on the prairie on March 9, the column resumed the march before daylight, shifted course toward the south, and reached a camp on the Red

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[57]Custer, My Life, p. 349.

[58]New York Times, May 3, 1869.

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River's Elm or Middle Fork, at a stream sometimes known as Gypsum Creek.[59] Having left the Indian Territory far behind on their march into Texas, the cavalry had advanced toward the 102nd meridian of longitude, and by this time, as even the optimistic Custer judged, nearly all hope of discovering the Indians "had vanished from the minds of the officers and men." But late in the afternoon on March 11, with the column in sight of the Red River, a trail was discovered -- the trail of a single lodge, leading northwest. Even this, as Custer reported, "did not give great encouragement," for it was judged roughly a month old. The chance was admittedly slight, but he gambled that this seemingly cold trail might lead to a spring assembly of the Cheyennes: "To the surprise of most of the command, I changed the direction of our march at once, and put the Osages on the trail, having decided to follow it."[60]

There were signs for hope before sundown, for upon a small stream the command discovered signs of a camp -- and it was evident that additional lodges had joined the trail, at roughly the same time. Custer asked Monahseetah to examine the campsite. "No detective could have set about the proposed examination with greater thoroughness than did this

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[59]Custer, "Report of Operations," March 21, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC; Spotts journal, March 10, 1869, Campaigning with Custer, p. 145. Spotts noted that after a mule fell into the well dug by the soldiers, a sulphur spring served for those able to tolerate the taste in their coffee.

[60]Custer, My Life, pp. 349-50. Spotts, who also states that the scouts put the trail's age at "about a month," asserts that the officers held "another consultation" that night to determine the best course of action, though presumably a mere enlisted man was not privy to their discussions. Spotts journal entry, March 12, 1869, Campaigning with Custer, p. 147. According to the anonymous NCO, the Osages, on being asked by Custer, claimed that the trail was at least two months old: "But the General chose to use his own judgment in the matter." New York Times, May 3, 1869.

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Indian girl," he wrote, describing how his captive scrutinized the campfires' ashes "with all the scrutiny of a chemical analysis." Her conclusion -- that the camp had consisted of twelve lodges, and that the Indians had left it no more than two weeks before -- reinforced Custer's own theories as to his chance of finding the main camp.[61]

Custer later explained that, knowing "the lazy manner in which Indians move when not pursued," he believed in his soldiers' ability to overtake or at least get very near the camp before being discovered, despite the Indians' head start. "Thanks to their superior geographical knowledge, I was not troubled by routes, water, nor camping grounds," since the Indians' trail led by easy marches to timber and the best campsites that could be selected. On March 12 Custer found this precious trail enlarged by no fewer than 42 lodges, with an equal number joining before nightfall, making it so plain that the troopers could have followed it at a gallop -- had their horses been able to endure the pace.

Despite his command's weakened condition, Custer tried to outpace the presumably oblivious Cheyennes, with one of his marches equaling "two or three" of his quarry's. As the signs grew fresher, and the trail warmer, he forbade bugle calls and the discharge of firearms. Fires were lit only after dark, and doused with earth before daylight: the errors of 1867 would not be repeated. To lighten the load, he burned his tents, along with all surplus clothing and blankets in excess of one per man.[62] Wagons, saddles, and even harnesses were also burned, so that the Indians would find nothing usable, and before leaving camp the rear

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[61]Custer, My Life, pp. 350-351.

[62]Custer, "Report of Operations," March 21, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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guard killed any animal too weak to keep up. Rations were desperately short (with the civilian teamsters faring best out of their wagons' mess boxes), and on March 14 Private Spotts and comrades found in their scavenging efforts only corn that had fallen from the mules' nosebags, which they roasted in a frying pan and ground with a coffee mill; relief came later when the men drew about three pounds each of "fresh meat." In defense against the freezing night, Spotts and two other soldiers, with but one blanket each, found it necessary to huddle together and "'spoon' all night -- faces one way, and when one of us wants to turn over he says 'Everybody, flop' and all turn, facing the other way."[63]

On the morning of March 15, the soldiers reached an Indian campsite on the North Fork, abandoned only two days before, and pressed forward, the advance making twenty miles by noon. Scouting ahead of the troops, Hard Rope discovered a herd of some forty or fifty grazing ponies. But their two herders apparently discovered the soldiers at the same time, and drove the herd toward a timbered stream.[64] Unsure as to whether the village was to his front, or whether the pony herd was merely on the move, Custer desired to capture the animals. He advanced with the few men then in front with him, and after two miles watchful Indians came into view, partly concealed behind sand hills.

Almost certain that it was the Cheyenne village which lay up ahead, Custer believed

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[63]Spotts journal, March 14, 1869, Campaigning with Custer, pp. 149-151. Spotts did not specify the source of the meat, but was told that no more of it, and perhaps nothing else, would be issued for three days.

[64]Custer, "Report of Operations," March 21, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC. According to Benteen, Custer's advance consisted of one troop, the Seventh's mounted band, and the Indian scouts: "The ponies of the Indians were in such poor plight for lack of food, and were so scattered to get what grass and weeds were in the vicinity, that the Indians could not pack and get away hastily." Benteen, Cavalry Scraps, p. 26.

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that the two white women he sought must be held there, and "to effect their release unharmed then became my chief study...I knew that the first shot fired on either side would be the signal for the murder of the two white girls." He therefore abandoned what he would later present as an unequaled chance to administer "well-merited punishment," and set out to establish a truce before his troops arrived.

He took only an orderly with him, and rode forward, then invited a parley by riding in a circle, and signaled one of the warriors to advance, as he would himself. With revolver in his left hand and right held aloft, Custer was careful to keep the warrior's person "between me and his friends" as he shook hands, and took the further precaution of requesting that the party of over twenty warriors not advance too closely. Custer asked for Medicine Arrow, the whites' common name for Rock Forehead.[65]

After eight more Indians had come forward, Custer learned that "the entire [free-roaming] Cheyenne tribe," to the number of 260 lodges, was camped at various points within ten or fifteen miles. Soon a larger party of thirty or forty warriors rode up, including "Medicine Arrow," whom Custer grandly, if misleadingly, dubbed "the Head Chief of the Cheyennes." In fact he was both less and more; as the name given him by the whites would indicate, Rock Forehead was the keeper and protector of the Sacred Arrows of the Cheyenne, and more famous among his own people than is suggested in military accounts.[66]

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[65]Custer, My Life, pp. 353-354.

[66]Stone or Rock Forehead, of the Aorta band, had become the keeper of the Sacred Medicine after the death of George Bent's grandfather White Thunder. During his warrior days he, along with White Antelope, had led in securing the largest herd of horses ever stolen by a Cheyenne war party. Hyde, Life of George Bent, pp. 41-42.

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Soon Custer, joined by Lt. Cooke and Dr. Lippincott, and surrounded by Cheyenne warriors, was asked to accompany the Arrow Keeper to the village, to assure his people that no attack would be made. Both Custer and Cooke did so, and left the surgeon behind with directions for the troops. Despite the evident risk, Custer felt it in the Indians' own interest to keep him safe, since if a fight broke out "it would be impossible for a great portion of the village, particularly the women and children, to escape. I considered all this before proceeding to the village."[67] He now knew that over 200 lodges were on the stream directly to his front, with the remainder of the Cheyennes under Little Robe, some ten or fifteen miles further down, including nearly all the lodges of the stalwart Dog Soldiers.

"My intentions were formed accordingly," Custer officially reported, "and, as I rode with 'Medicine Arrow' in the direction of the village, I made my plans for surrounding the village and attacking as soon as the troops came up." But, he added, he stayed his hand after learning en route that the two white women were indeed in the village: "It was then out of the question to assume a hostile attitude, at least until the captives were in our possession, or until every peaceable means for their recovery had been exhausted. The opening of our attack would have been the signal for their murder by their captors, as we very well knew." However, in his memoirs Custer would state that he learned of the women's presence from Monahseetah, and only after leaving the Cheyenne camp.[68] Custer also had to consider that

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[67]Custer, My Life, pp. 334-335.

[68]Custer, "Report of Operations," March 21, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC; My Life, p. 359. One historian (Hoig, Battle of the Washita, p. 248), noting the contrast, suggests: "The latter statement seems more logical, and the former an excuse for not attacking the village immediately." One must add that, judging by his own report, Custer would have had cause for restraint even without any disclosure en route to the village -- since,

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any attack on forewarned Indians, by a command with animals in such poor condition, might have been unable to inflicted any serious injury beyond capturing the lodges.[69] A flight took place even as Custer's command approached, for "like a herd of frightened sheep," the villagers started toward Little Robe's village, abandoning lodges, camp kettles, and other items.

In the village, the soldier chief entered the Arrow Keeper's lodge and was seated to the chief's right. The non-smoking Custer was obliged to accept the pipe prepared for him by Stone Forehead (though he feared sickness and consequent humiliation in the chiefs' eyes for one "so deficient in manly accomplishments"), and he avoided the subject of the two captive women despite his hope of obtaining their release.[70] Custer took no notice of, or at least made no subsequent reference to, the possible presence of a treasure valued more highly than any mere captive, and which the Cheyennes could not permit to fall into enemy hands. Normally the Sacred Arrows, four wooden shafts with finely shaped stone heads, would have been in a sacred tipi, perhaps in the very lodge where Custer was seated, wrapped in a piece

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although unsure as whether the Kansas women were held there, he already believed this to be the case.

[69]Others also felt the command in poor condition to strike at the Indians, as "we were nearly all dismounted, one-fourth of our wagons had been burned, and we were subsisting entirely on mule meat." The same account states that when the Cheyennes came forth to meet Custer, the general, his orderly, and another enlisted man were the only mounted men able to ride forward. The rest of the command, in its exhausted condition, was "utterly unable to follow, should the savages choose to leave, during the night." New York Times, May 3, 1869.

[70] Custer, My Life, pp. 335-37. The interpreter Romero having fallen to the rear of the column, Custer was presumably obliged to converse with the chiefs through his fluency in the Plains sign language.

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of fur cut from a coyote's back, kept from the gaze of women under all circumstances, and seldom exposed to view. The arrows were rarely carried to war, and when this was done the entire tribe accompanied them. But in this instance an enemy had come to the Cheyennes instead.[71] In later years the Cheyennes would attribute Custer's death at the Little Bighorn to bad faith. Stone Forehead having allegedly arranged for Custer to sit directly beneath the Medicine Arrows and telling him -- in Cheyenne -- that if he were acting treacherously he and all his command "would soon be killed."[72]

Custer had sent back word for the column, far in the rear, to close up at a moderate gait. But the troops, who had been proceeding dismounted and leading their horses, were hampered by the deep sand and their own exhaustion. Benteen recalled orders "to bring the regiment up at a walk as quickly as possible, Custer well knowing our horses were not physically capable of traveling at a more rapid gait." But, thinking it possible to maintain a faster pace for a few minutes, Benteen ordered a trot -- with perhaps fifty weakened horses and their riders thrown out of the column as a result. The troopers resumed a walk. Alerted to the approach of a large Indian force, Benteen formed a mounted line and advanced.

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[71]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 70-73. On an earlier occasion, considered the cause of the tribe's later hardships, Pawnees had captured the arrows, and the Cheyennes ultimately managed to recover only two of the four. Thus the set of four existing in 1869 included two of a substitute set, the other two substitutes having been destroyed after the Pawnees returned two originals.

[72]Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 325. Perhaps, since Custer's destruction in 1876 was brought about partly at Cheyenne hands, Medicine Arrow's "prediction" was one made in wishful hindsight. A similar account is found in Stands in Timber, Memories, pp. 82- 83, n. 12. The variety possible in oral tradition is suggested by Stands in Timber placing interpreter John Smith at the scene and setting the incident at a conference in Oklahoma held due to Custer's desire for a "peace talk."

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carbines at the ready: "One of my old chummies, Me-nim-ick, chief of the Cheyennes, rode up to 'How, How' and shake hands, and take in the situation as well as he could while General Custer was at the same time undergoing their mummeries and medicine-making...." But Benteen, anxious not to have the Indians ride toward the command's wagon train, signaled them to return to the village with him.[73]

Observing "the utmost consternation among the squaws," he halted the command a few hundred yards above the village, in a dismounted line with the "No. 4's" holding the horses, and was " inspected" at leisure by painted Dog Soldiers, amid the shriek of their eagle-bone whistles.[74] From the top of a bluff overlooking the valley, the soldiers could survey the large camp, along the near side of Sweetwater Creek. While the Seventh Cavalry moved toward its farther side, the Kansans, all on foot, formed in a line on its south side, in a bid to enclose the camp as far as the length of their line would permit.[75] Kansans eager to avenge the murder of Mrs. Blinn and the raids on their home state responded eagerly to the opportunity for action so long denied them. But then an officer arrived from Custer, ordering Moore not to fire on the Indians, and rendering his men "stupid with wonder." Another order arrived to dictate the disposition of the Kansans, and Moore marched his angry, frustrated men into the valley at the upper end of the village to rest in column:

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[73]Benteen, Cavalry Scraps, pp. 26-27. Captain Benteen credited this step with discouraging the Cheyennes from hostile action: "Now, had they caught me napping or off guard, what occurred to Custer in 1876 would have happened in 1869, without a shadow of a doubt." It was claimed that no horse in the command "was able to go faster than a funeral march." New York Times, May 3, 1869.

[74]Benteen, Cavalry Scraps, p. 27.

[75]Sports journal, March 15, 1869, Campaigning with Custer, p. 52.

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"Neither Custer nor Moore ever knew what a critical time it was for about ten minutes. It looked, at one time, like they could not be restrained. The line officers argued, begged and cursed. The accidental discharge of a carbine, or the shout of a reckless soldier, would have precipitated a killing that could not have been stopped, and would have entailed consequences impossible to estimate." What little the officers then knew of the captive white women was "seized as a diplomatic position and administered to the men, who knew that if those young women were in that camp the first shot would be their death signal."[76] The order not to fire, remembered Lieutenant-Colonel Moore, had come as "a wet blanket, saturated with ice-water," and the Kansans, ordered to rest, lay down on the ground or sat on logs, but with carbines in hand.[77]

This display of restraint, in a new, vengeful, and (whatever its leavening of Civil War veterans) half-trained regiment of volunteers, was perhaps more than Custer had any reason to expect, especially since it seemed to the Kansans that the Indians might seize this chance to escape. Spotts described a village alive with excited Indians who at first lacked mounts, only to be supplied by a large pony herd coming down the creek, followed by many horsemen: "Finally every pony had a rider and some had several women and children. They were ready to leave and we received no orders to stop them. Now was our chance for a real Indian fight, but no orders came."[78]

Following his council with Stone Forehead, Custer (according to his later memoir)

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[76]Hadley, "Conquest of the Plains Indians ": 450.

[77] Moore, "The Nineteenth Kansas Cavalry": 45.

[78]Spotts journal, March 15, 1869, Campaigning with Custer, p. 152.

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encountered Monahseetah, who had come up with the troops, and asked her whether the two women were in fact held in the village; she, according to Custer, "promptly replied in the affirmative, and at the same time exhibited a desire to aid as far as possible in effecting their release." Feeling that the Indians might slip away in the night, with his command camping on ground selected by Stone Forehead some three-fourths of a mile from the village (and out of sight of it), Custer decided to demand that the women be surrendered before nightfall. But his queries regarding the prisoners came to nothing.

Later, as Custer told the tale, a large number of warriors visited the cavalry's camp, among them Stone Forehead, who announced that some young men wished to serenade the soldiers. Custer acquiesced, but presumed a ruse aimed at covering the flight of the village, which had been reported to him as unusually active. Rather than resort to a display of force and precipitate "a terrible conflict," he planned to seize the principal chiefs then present and hold them hostage, permitting the village to depart if necessary.[79] Custer had officers direct reliable troopers to approach his campfire casually.

After the musicians left, and with his men now outnumbering the Indians by about 100 to 40, Custer sprang his trap; even while unbuckling his pistol belt and throwing it to the ground to show that he abjured bloodshed, he accused the Indians of trying to deceive him, and asked them to submit quietly. In the ensuing stampede, Custer and his officers called on the men not to fire, and all but four Indians made their escape -- disappearing, in Benteen's

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[79]Custer, My Life, pp. 359-360. Custer did not reveal whether Monahseetah acquired her information through an examination of "sign" traceable to the village, or by some unmentioned contact with the villagers.

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phrase, "like a dissolving view."[80]

Custer's new captives were persuaded with some difficulty to surrender their arms, and he released one of the men with gifts of sugar and coffee, as well as his demands: the Indians were to surrender the women without ransom or condition, and the villagers were to proceed at once to the reservation, pitching their tents near Camp Supply. To prevent the Cheyennes from breaking up into small parties, Custer promised that if they agreed to camp near Little Robe's band, he would protect their abandoned camp property from disturbance until they came to remove their lodges.[81] Custer also dispatched a runner to Little Robe, "who was well known to me, and whose influence with his tribe was great," with a request to come see him, promising him safe passport back to his village.[82] That night, the Cheyennes moved a reported six miles farther away from the soldiers' position, "not caring," as one participant wrote, "to trust themselves in such close proximity to the 'Creeping Panther,' as they call General Custer."[83] There was perhaps little danger of an effective escape attempt.

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[80]Custer, My Life, pp. 360-363; Benteen, Carroll, Cavalry Scraps, p. 28. Custer portrays a dramatic pause before the Indians made their rush, and downplays the warriors' escape by stating that those few detained "were those desired," being chiefs and warriors of prominence. Benteen, however, claimed that the only mounted warrior seized was lame, suggesting that others were able to secure their horses more quickly, and flee. "A cyclone couldn't have scattered the assembled warriors more thoroughly than this announcement did," he asserted, and blamed their flight on Custer announcing his intentions before giving his men time to get into position.

[81]Custer, My Life, pp. 363-364.

[82]Custer, "Report of Operations", March 21, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

[83]New York Times, May 3, 1869. Benteen put Little Robe's village on another creek, twelve to fifteen miles away. Benteen, Cavalry Scraps, p. 28.

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and Custer (seemingly at odds with his earlier suggestion that his command was too exhausted to inflict damage), would later explain that he had allowed some distance to separate the two camps because the Cheyenne village "was in no condition for rapid or extended flight, and could be overhauled by the cavalry whenever desired...."[84]

Having been invited by Custer to his camp on a friendly visit, the Indians felt his seizure of the chiefs a treacherous violation of Plains hospitality, and, according to George Bent, "ever after had a great hatred for him."[85] The Kansas volunteers also expressed disgust over the outcome, but for a different reason: they had apparently lost their only chance to avenge the raids on their state, and some branded Custer as a coward and traitor to the regiment, though Spotts merely lamented, "We had them prisoners and could have kept them without firing a gun." While the Seventh surrounded the camp, the Kansans were kept waiting for an hour or more, then ordered to form a line a few hundred yards above camp before they bedded down for the night, their weapons beside them.[86]

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[84]Custer, My Life, p. 368.

[85]Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 326. Bent, who was not an eyewitness, presents an oddly garbled account of the incident, in which Custer first secures the captive women, then springs his trap the next day, with most of the Indians escaping "in a storm of bullets." Despite Custer's allegations as to the importance of the three men he seized as hostages, even their names are disputed. Bent identified the men seized as Lean Face, Fat Bear, and Curly Hair -- Lean Face, about eighty years old, being the man called Dull Knife by officers and writers; John Stands in Timber, as cited in Bent's biography, identifies the trio as Little Bear, Hairless Bear, and Island, while Island's niece gave his companions' names as Younger Bear and Chief Comes in Sight. Ben Clark, characterizing them as prominent men of the Cheyennes but not chiefs, named them as Slim Face, Curly Hair (literally Tangled Hair) and Fat Bear sometimes called Big Head. Ben Clark interview, Camp Mss. Transcripts, Camp Notes. See also Burkey, Custer, Come at Once!, pp. 68-69.

[86]Spotts journal, March 15, 1869, Campaigning with Custer, p. 153.

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The next day Little Robe visited Custer's camp, admitted the presence of the white women, and in Custer's words "frankly admitted that his influence was not supreme." He had already vainly attempted to purchase the captives, and now informed Custer that compensation might be an obstacle.[87] But Custer was bent on securing them unconditionally, to discourage the long-standing custom of offering a "premium" for each captive.[88] Less impressed than Custer by Little Robe's apparent sincerity, Benteen thought that by showing up the chief had simply given Stone Forehead's band "ample time to shuffle out of harm's way," and added that after Little Robe had learned that Custer would march on his village to obtain a better campground (and move his command closer to the Indians' camp without invading its immediate vicinity), "We went to the indicated location of Little Robe's village, but 'tis scarcely necessary to tell anyone having a knowledge of Indians that there were no Indians there to welcome us."[89]

After another day, and aware that he had "almost exhausted the patience of the troops, particularly of the Kansas regiment," Custer finally gave an Indian delegation an ultimatum in the presence of the captive chiefs: if the two white women were not delivered by sunset on the following day, the three men would be hanged, the troops would resume hostilities, and the Indians would find escape impossible, due to their famished ponies. But Custer's own command was also hungry. On March 18, Private Spotts drew three-quarters

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[87]Custer, My Life, pp. 367-368.

[88]Custer, "Report of Operations," March 21, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

[89]Benteen, Cavalry Scraps, p. 28.

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of a pound of beef as his ration, though he had not had a hardtack for several days: "We are living on excitement now and our stomachs are getting so used to being empty that they have shrunk to fit the occasion." With no results from a continued exchange of messengers, Custer showed his prisoners the limb from which they were to be hanged.[90]

The command's food shortage naturally grew worse with each day of waiting. On the 19th the officers divided their own stores with the men, even to Lt. Col. Custer, who turned his private wagon over to the soldiers and told them to divide its contents among themselves.[91] The day, Custer reported, "was one of no little anxiety to all, and to none more than the captive Cheyennes, whom I certainly intended to hang if their people failed to accede to our demands. The ropes were ready, and the limb selected, when about 3 P.M., a small party of Indian warriors were seen approaching camp."

These men halted on a knoll about a mile away, and one of the warriors approached with the news that the women were with them, and would be surrendered -- coupled, according to Custer, with the proposition that the soldiers' own captives, or at least two of them, be handed over in exchange. But they reluctantly agreed when Custer insisted on an

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[90]Custer, My Life, p. 369; Spotts journal, March 18, 1869, Campaigning with Custer, p. 157. Col. Moore adds grim details not found in other accounts, with Custer having the "head chief" (presumably the most prominent hostage) taken down to the creek, a riata placed about his neck, and the other end thrown over a tree limb: "A couple of soldiers took hold of the other end of the rope, and, by pulling gently, lifted him up onto his toes. He was let down, and Romeo, the interpreter, explained to him that, when he was pulled up clear from the ground and left there, he would be hung." One imagines that this explanation was unnecessary. Moore, "The Nineteenth Kansas Cavalry": 45.

[91]Spotts journal, March 19, 1869, Campaigning with Custer, pp. 157-58. In a subsequent reminiscence, Spotts portrays Custer as telling the men "he could go without food as long as they could and 'we can all starve together.'" D.L. Spotts, letter to W.J. Ghent, May 26, 1933, Box 3, Ghent Papers, Library of Congress.

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unconditional release. Custer then diplomatically detailed Moore and two majors of the 19th Kansas to advance and receive the two redeemed captives, though he declined to let Daniel Brewster go with them lest his sister's condition provoke him into attempting revenge "in a manner not governed by either prudence or propriety."

Finally two figures were discerned, both on the same pony. Dismounting, both women, one noticeably taller than the other, began walking toward the lines. But before the Kansas officers could reach the captives, Brewster had bolted past them to embrace the taller woman. "Men whom I have seen face death without quailing," testified Custer, "found their eyes filled with tears, unable to restrain the deep emotion produced by this joyful event."[92] To Spotts, "The larger one [Mrs. Morgan] appeared to be 50 years old, although she was less than 25. She was stooped, pale and haggard, looking as if she had been compelled to do more than she was able. She was quite tall, with light hair that was bleached on top until it was dirty brown from exposure. Her clothes were made of three or four kinds of material, pieces of tents and blankets, all worn out and sewed together with strings." Miss White, although similarly dressed, seemed much younger looking, "and did not show the hard usage."[93]

When the three chiefs asked to be released, Custer argued that only one of his two conditions had been met, and that the Cheyennes must first proceed to the reservation.[94]

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[92]Custer, My Life, p. 371-72.

[93]Spotts journal, March 19, 1869, Campaigning with Custer, p. 159.

[94]Judging from Benteen's account, the Indians made their request quite publicly: "Of course the Cheyennes, through their extorter, chanted that the captive warriors be set free, but as it was not so nominated in the bond, we continued to exercise watchful care over them..."

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the general awareness of the rapes and beatings inflicted on the women, not even Custer's arch-critic Benteen questioned the propriety of his threat to hang the captive Indians, or his decision to retain them afterwards -- or even what to the nomadic Indians was a flagrant breech of the hospitality of the Plains. As the unused ropes still hung from their limbs, some Kansans continued to hope that the captive warriors would join them, and the women's own attitude toward their late captors presumably did nothing to allay such feelings: when the two were taken to see Custer's prisoners, Mrs. Morgan tried to seize Colonel Moore's revolver to shoot Big Head. Dan Brewster, according to Private Spotts, swore vengeance on the Indians "for the rough treatment of his sister. He looks as though he would do what he made up his mind to do."[95] Custer turned over the single "A" tent, brought along as headquarters and for sheltering records, to the women.[96]

Kansas newspapers would, indelicately, report that both women were pregnant, with Mrs. Morgan cited as expressing the hope "that her offspring may be white, and not of that fiendish race that glories in the murder of women and children." But in fact only Mrs. Morgan was pregnant.[97] Her boy Ira, born a few months after her rescue, had been sired by one of her assailants, and it was reported that her brother Daniel requested that she "give into his keeping this little boy after he had attained a certain age so that he could take him and go

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Benteen, Cavalry Scraps, p. 28.

[95]Spotts journal, March 20, 1869, Campaigning with Custer, pp. 160-161. According to Spotts, Mrs. Morgan claimed that Big Head was the worst Indian in the whole tribe.

[96]Moore, "The Nineteenth Kansas Cavalry": 334.

[97]Manhattan [Kansas] Standard, April 10, 1869 (reprinting account of Leavenworth Commercial), in Runyon, "Letters": 75, n. 29.

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to the haunts of the Indians, shoot and kill all savages sighted as long as both or either lived and thus gain a partial revenge for the crime committed." But if such a grotesque plan for retribution was made, it was never executed; the boy died when about two years old, while his mother ultimately lost her reason and ended her days in an insane asylum.[98]

While Custer found the captives' story "a recital of such barbarious cruelties and enormous indignities, that it is surprising that civilized beings could endure it and still survive," their testimony also reassured him regarding his decision not to attack -- for the Indians had declared to the women their resolve to kill them had he done so. Even his Washita fight, while bringing death to Clara Blinn, had been a boon to Anna Morgan and Sarah White, for while the Indians had frequently beaten them savagely prior to Custer's capture of Cheyenne women and children, "since that battle they have never given them a blow." Benteen would make a similar claim.[99]

The white women also provided information on the condition of his adversaries. Passing through the Indians' deserted camps, Custer had already found the remains of ponies and mules butchered as though for meat, and the absence of recent signs of buffalo along the Indians' route, since the Army's winter operations had forced them to move beyond the animals' range. Now he learned that the half-starved Cheyennes had eaten up nearly all their

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[98]Clark, "Early Days": 728-729.

[99]Custer, "Report of Operations," March 21, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC; Benteen, Cavalry Scraps, p. 28. George Bent would depict the results of the Washita as even more dramatic, with relatives of Custer's prisoners asking of their chiefs that no more war parties be sent out, lest they make the lot of these captives worse. Adhering to the incredible notion that Plains Indians treated female captives kindly, he makes no mention of the rapes or beatings inflicted on the Kansas women. Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 324.

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dogs, and had lived for weeks solely on mules and ponies dead from exhaustion. The surviving ponies were unusually underfed, for out of fear of a surprise attack, their owners had kept them tied close to their lodge, unable to graze properly. "These," reported Custer with satisfaction, "are some of the results of our winter campaign."

With the women redeemed, Custer moved his command up the stream twelve miles to the vicinity of the deserted village. There he enjoyed the luxury of burning -- for firewood -- lodge-poles from over 200 tipis, which the Indians had abandoned along with camp furniture, robes and ponies, and, most strikingly, armaments, even including shields and firearms. As for the Indians themselves, Little Robe and others had professed themselves "heartily sick of war," and declared their intention to travel to the point Custer designated. Custer reported that in freeing the women the men of his command, and particularly the Kansans, felt more fully repaid for their hardships "than if they had survived an overwhelming victory over the Indians" -- though he also maintained that had his supplies not been exhausted, he would have "moved against the Cheyennes after recovering the two women, but prudential reasons forbade it."[100]

Attacking the Indians' camp with his exhausted command might indeed have been an awkward thing. But attacking Indians who had already acceded to his demands would have surely been even more awkward -- and in radical contrast to Custer's earlier attempt, at considerable personal risk, to attain the surrender of both Cheyennes and Arapahoes with a force deliberately made too small for offensive purposes. Perhaps Custer was simply making

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[100]Custer, "Report of Operations," March 21, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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a gesture toward his chief's belligerence. But while Custer might be praised for his ultimate restraint, Benteen would later explain almost apologetically why the cavalry had caught up with the Indians without attacking. In doing so, he inadvertently made Custer's decision seem more pragmatic than humane:

> To the uninitiated it may seem strange that it was not possible for the cavalry to follow up and punish those Cheyenne Indians, but when 'tis known that we started from Medicine Bluff Creek with only one half rations which were very soon reduced to one fourth rations, and in but a little while to none at all, having to place our sole reliance on mule meat, through every fibre of which the odor of the saddle blanket seemed to have permeated and imbedded itself, our horses dying every day from lack of food... he can then see the fix we were in, to which he must add the fact Indians never get tired, and that the catching of them on foot if they do not wish to be caught is simply an impossibility on the plains.[101]

Accounts by military participants do not explain precisely why an admittedly half-starved and poorly mounted command could not at least hope to overtake a half-starved and poorly mounted camp of Indians. But perhaps it was believed that if the alerted Indians succeeded in scattering, even on foot, they could frustrate any hopes of following a strong trail (assuming that any further pursuit was physically possible) or of rounding up these holdouts.[102] Custer had, of course, already caught up with Stone Forehead's village despite the Indians' best efforts. But after negotiations had begun, he did not enjoy the element of surprise, and a decisive end to Sheridan's campaign required something more than merely inflicting casualties on fleeing Indians.

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[101]Benteen, Cavalry Scraps, pp. 29-30.

[102]Custer later explained his willingness, following his hostage seizure, to let the Cheyennes camp some miles from the cavalry by noting the Indians' exhausted condition, and stated that he called the Cheyennes' own attention "to the fact that in the famished condition of their ponies they could not expect to escape the pursuit of the cavalry." Custer, My Life, pp. 368, 369.

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Having recovered the women and extorted promises of submission, Custer was ready to march at daylight, though Indians under a white flag made a last effort to secure their chiefs from the unyielding officer. By the night of the 23rd the column had arrived at the Washita Creek and the waiting supplies, and many men became sick from overeating. As usual, the Seventh Cavalry took the lead in the arrival at Fort Dodge on April 2, the regiment's officers and the captive chiefs riding at the head of the command. On April 7 the dismounted volunteers marched into camp east of Fort Hays; ten days later the 19th Kansas was mustered out -- "and the boys are glad they are citizens again. They cannot keep still, but keep cheering. They have plenty of the crazy water, and the effect is seen in a good many of them."[103] Thus ended the career of a regiment which, in the opinion of one hardened regular, "would have made a record" had it ever clashed with the Indians.[104]

Though the volunteers remained disappointed in their failure to engage the enemy, Custer expressed only satisfaction with the results of his grueling march. In addition to procuring the release of the two captives -- "a result of itself more than compensating this command for all it has been called upon to endure" -- Custer's expedition had "penetrated every haunt frequented by the five (5) tribes which were lately hostile. We know their accustomed routes and hiding places. We have taught the Indians that they are safe from us in no place, and at no season, and also, what some of our own people may doubt, that the

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[103]Spotts journal, March 24, 1869, Campaigning with Custer, p. 166.

[104]Spotts journal, April 17, 1869, Campaigning with Custer, p. 189; Ryan, Ten Years with General Custer, p. 80. The veteran Ryan gave the Kansans a high compliment regarding their conduct on the campaign: "I have seen a good many regiments marching during my service in the army, and I don't know as I ever saw better marchers than the Nineteenth Kansas Volunteer Cavalry."

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white man can endure the inclemencies of winter better than can the Indians." The uncertainty about much of the country traversed had been dispelled, and Custer even claimed that many of his officers could now, without guides, conduct an expedition from the Red River to the Platte and camp on a freshwater stream every night while doing so.

Custer praised his men's conduct partly by emphasizing the hardships they had endured. Inadequately supplied, he had begun his march with all the rations and forage available, and had first been forced to reduce his men to half rations, before making a further cut -- "and tonight [March 21] most of my men made their suppers from the flesh of mules that have died on the march today from starvation. When called upon to move in light marching order, they abandoned tents and blankets without a murmur, although much of the march has been made during the prevalence of the severest winter weather I have experienced in this latitude." Custer was particularly generous, and diplomatic, in commending to Sheridan the officers and men of the 19th Kansas, who while serving on foot had "marched in a manner and at a rate that would put some of the Regular Regiments of Infantry to the blush. Instead of crying out for empty wagons to transport them; each morning every man marched with his troop, and, what might be taken as an example by some of the line officers of the Regular Infantry, Company officers marched regularly on foot at the head of their respective companies..."

With the Cheyenne chiefs still held as hostages for their tribesmen's good behavior and their promised surrender to Sheridan's demands, Custer -- again -- made bold to proclaim a termination of the conflict: "This I consider as the termination of the Indian

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war."[105] This was not quite accurate. It did prove the end of Sheridan's winter campaign, as the Kansas troops dissolved into civilian life, and the Seventh Cavalry, victors at the Washita, prepared to go into garrison, or performed the routine patrols and duties of the frontier soldier. But unconquered Plains tribesmen would prolong the fighting into the summer.

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[105]Custer, "Report of Operations," March 21, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Sequel at Summit Springs

"The Doctor could not find an unbroken skull..."

With Sheridan's departure from the theater of operations, Custer's return from the field, and the actual disbanding of the 19th Kansas Cavalry, a temporary halt came come to the Army's aggressive campaigning on the Southern Plains. If Evans' and Custer's fights, and the latter's recovery of the two Kansas women, had proved Sheridan's campaign a substantial success, the Indians' final surrender to the government would further validate his methods. But there were still bands of Indians who, in the absence of any immediate military threat, had not yet reported to military posts or agencies, whatever the promises made by their chiefs. The Arapahoes arrived at Camp Supply on April 1, while some of the Cheyennes would come in on April 7. However, Stone Forehead's Dog Soldiers, no longer confronted by Custer's threat to hang hostages, and rendered uneasy by his style of diplomacy, still hung back from coming in as they had agreed.[1]

Colonel Hazen had initially planned to send the Indians in his charge to the Medicine Lodge reservation only after all the relevant bands had assembled. But with various bands of both Cheyennes and Arapahoes camped in the vicinity of Medicine Bluff Creek, Hazen abandoned this initial scheme, and instead dispatched them piecemeal on to Camp Supply. There was, however, apparently no practical way of forcing them to stay there; on April 19

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[1]Carriker, Fort Supply, p. 30; Nye, Plains Indian Raiders, p. 145.

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the Cheyenne chief Red Moon fled the vicinity of the post, and with him 30 lodges. This left only 46 Cheyenne lodges, under Little Robe and Minimic. These Indians were scheduled to move north to Camp Supply on April 26, and Lt. Col. Anderson D. Nelson arrived at Supply that day with a detachment of Tenth Cavalry and Sixth Infantry for the purpose of escorting them to the assigned reservation at Medicine Lodge, once all the people had been gathered.

However, the day before this was to occur, a Cheyenne brave killed a civilian, and the incident inspired both chiefs to flee with their remaining tribesmen.[2] While only fifty Cheyennes reached Camp Supply prior to May 31, to join the 1300 Arapahoes already camped in 257 lodges within a mile of the post, 80 more Cheyennes under Lean Bear came in on June 1, and Stone Forehead himself paid a visit with 29 other Cheyennes on June 20, to examine the condition of their fellow tribesmen before making a commitment. Stone Forehead's party left the next day, and the man known to the military as "Medicine Arrow" would not ultimately slip back onto the reservation until September, followed by Dog Soldiers under Bull Bear.

Little Robe's flight did not mean that he had decided to renew the war, and it was reported that during the first week of May, the Cheyennes held a "big talk" on the Washita, thirty miles upstream from Old Fort Cobb, to decide on a course of action. Now the dominant chief among the Cheyennes, Little Robe denounced the Dog Soldiers as a cause of trouble with the whites, and declared his decision to take his own people back to the reservation. When the Dog Soldiers refused to join him, Little Robe actually ordered them to leave the area, lest he ally himself with the whites in driving them out. Dog Soldier leaders

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[2]Alvord to McKeever, April 29, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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Tall Bull and White Horse then announced their intention of going north to join the Sioux, saying "that they would never make any peace that would compel them to settle down, that they had always been a free nation, and would remain so or die." Throwing away the possessions that might slow their march, the Dog Soldiers left the camp, saying that they would make a big raid north of the Arkansas. Perhaps Little Robe's rhetoric was influenced by the presence in council of veteran plainsman and interpreter John Smith, and the news he conveyed from Captain Albert Gallatin Boone, who had arrived at Fort Sill to act as interim agent for the Kiowas, Comanches, and Kiowa-Apaches. Boone promised that if Little Robe led his people to the reservation, the Cheyenne women and children taken prisoner by Custer would be released.[3]

Within the Army's own ranks, there were those who remained skeptical of the campaign's moral effect upon the Indians, and of the notion that they had been decisively cowed, either by Custer's fight or the campaign as a whole. General Sheridan, complained a first lieutenant of the Sixth U.S. Infantry stationed at "Camp Wichita" in late March, had left with a "newspaper reputation" of having ended the Indian war:

> To those of us on the spot, these dispatches are highly amusing as they come back to us from the East, for to every officer in the district, it is an unquestioned fact that the expedition has been a failure in every feature, erroneously conceived and faultily executed. Custer's victory of the Washita is put by the Indians in a very different light, who are as haughty and insolent as ever. If they are restrained (and I greatly doubt it) from renewing their depredations upon the Kansas and Texas frontiers, immediately there is grass for their ponies, it will not be the result of military operations just terminated under the leadership of the popular (new) Lt.

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[3]Lt. Henry Jackson to McKeever, June 6, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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General...."[4]

This was the troublesome test of the theory that a determined winter campaign would humble the Southern Plains tribes, for with spring the conditions that had favored the Indians in previous years would be renewed. The eccentric Captain Armes was pessimistic in assessing the situation as of April 28, 1869, after a new series of raids had begun: "They will soon be on the warpath in full force."[5]

The end of the winter campaign by no means put an end to defensive preparations, or troop movements. With an unknown number of Indians still on the warpath, steps taken for the safety of the Kansas frontier included appropriation of $100,000 by the Kansas legislature for the purpose of raising 200 militiamen should the need arise, and Custer's decision to dispatch the Seventh Cavalry's G troop to scout the Saline and Solomon on May 27; other patrols would follow.[6] Perhaps the force of regulars obliged to conduct operations against Indians that spring was, as a modern writer suggests, "a somewhat demoralized army" -- for on March 3, Congress had cut its authorized strength from 54,641 to 37,313 effectives, and in doing so had slashed away twenty of the forty-five infantry regiments through abolition and consolidation, although all five regiments of artillery and the ten cavalry regiments were

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[4]Stephen P. Jocelyn, letter to Mrs. Stephen P. Jocelyn, March 23, 1869, cited in Stephen Perry Jocelyn, Mostly Alkali: A Biography (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1953), p. 109. According to Jocelyn, then first lieutenant of Company C, it was still expected at this date that the future Fort Sill would receive the name of Fort Elliott.

[5]Armes, Ups and Downs, p. 296.

[6]For a summary of the Seventh's movements, see Burkey, Custer, Come at Once!, pp. 75-76.

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retained. Luther Bradley, at Ft. McPherson, learned to his regret that his own regiment, the Twenty-seventh U.S. Infantry, was to be broken up.[7]

Never able to rely solely on Army vigilance against sudden attacks, some settlers tried to protect themselves, without neglecting to maintain or improve their claims. During the winter of 1868-69 the settlers built a fortification on Yockey Creek, near the town of Delphos, consisting of one-room buildings and a stockade of logs. Assembling early that spring at what became known as "Yockey Fort," local families lived in the cabins throughout the summer. While some of the men stayed as a guard, the others traveled from claim to claim, doing the planting and improving on one homestead before moving onto the next.

Postings of state militiamen at various points along the Solomon valley also helped discourage Indian raids, leaving the settlers better prepared than before against the danger.[8] It was still not enough, even though the raids of 1869, whatever their individual ferocity, were not on the scale of those that had touched off the war the previous August, and most of the Cheyennes had apparently redeemed their pledge to submit to reservation life. The process of freeing the Washita prisoners began under Sheridan's successor as departmental commander, Major General John M. Schofield. On May 29, Schofield directed Colonel Nelson A. Miles, commander at Fort Hays, to send the half-blind Arapaho boy Camp Supply, to be "delivered

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[7]Bradley journal, March 3, 1869, Box 1, Bradley Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute; Russell, The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill, p. 119. Bradley did, however, record "everybody glad" at the inauguration of Grant as President, perhaps due at least in part to Grant's military background.

[8]Clark, "Early Days": 725-26; Garfield, "Defense...1868-1869": 470-471.

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up to his tribe now encamped near that post."[9]

Two of the three Cheyennes Custer had seized on the Sweetwater would not live to be released. After Custer returned from his Sweetwater expedition and arrived at Fort Hays, he placed his three hostages inside the stockade erected for the Washita prisoners, later stating vaguely that it was also "deemed advisable" to place Monahseetah with the captives despite her own preference for the relative freedom she had enjoyed when encamped with the cavalry. On May 9, a detail of infantry soldiers attempted to transfer the three men to the guardhouse for better security, but in the absence of an interpreter apparently convinced the Indians that they were to be killed. Some drew concealed knives, and casualties in the ensuing melee included a sergeant badly stabbed, a woman and one of the Sweetwater hostages shot dead, a second warrior mortally pierced by a bayonet, and the third hostage, Fat Bear, felled with a musket-butt.

Custer, summoned to the scene, attempted to reassure the Indians, accepted the captives' claim that it had been a fatal misunderstanding, and termed the affair "a source of deep regret to all."[10] But he did not acknowledge any larger consequences of the incident, even though violent deaths had resulted for two of the three men whom the Cheyennes had hoped to save from hanging. While the killing of the chiefs cannot be proved

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[9]McKeever to Commanding Officer, Fort Hays, May 29, 1869, Fort Hays, Letters and Telegrams Received, 1867-1889 RG 393, NA.

[10]Custer, My Life, pp. 377-378; Undated Ben Clark interview, Camp Mss. Transcripts. Clark, who was not present at Hays during this incident (and had not taken part in Custer's Sweetwater march), represents the captives as trying to "break out," seemingly in a premeditated manner, a woman stabbing a corporal and then trying to run under a guard's bayonet toward the stockade's open gate.

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to have inspired any of the Cheyenne raids made later that May, the stockade fight could have removed a restraint on those free-roaming warriors who participated in them -- assuming that they learned of it before acting. In any case, it was not the sort of news likely to encourage surrender by those still holding out against the reservation system.

Sheridan's campaign, provoked primarily by the raids of Cheyennes and Arapahoes, had struck only one serious blow against either Comanches or Kiowas, in the form of Evans' Christmas Day attack -- and despite Sheridan's own bold words in council, and the Indians' apparent submission, the army had neither quelled the tribes' raiding into Texas nor brought them completely onto the reservation. But there would be no new offensive launched to thrash the Indians into obedience. Col. Grierson wrote from the new "Camp Witchita" and future Fort Sill on June 21 to explain his policy of restraint. A movement of 100 troopers, rationed for a month, had been planned in an attempt to block raiding parties from entering Texas, but Grierson had postponed the movement, as it risked failing to distinguish guilty parties from those who might be "coming in good faith to their Reservation." Although nothing further had been heard from the Kiowa Little Heart (or Woman's Heart) "and the few lodges with him," Grierson expected the other Kiowas and Comanches in two weeks.

While claiming that many past reports of Indian raids into Texas had proved groundless or greatly exaggerated, Grierson admitted that "small parties" had gone south from the Fort Sill reservation to make war. But he felt satisfied that "these wild Indians, many of whom have never been in to their agency, are now cautiously feeling their way," with the intent of coming in at the time specified. He would thus defer any movements of troops likely to cause a "collision" with the Indians or counteract efforts made to induce

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them to come in, so that they would have no excuse for breaking their promise to do so.[11]

Grierson suspected that Colonel Hazen (who had been made commander of the Sixth U.S. Infantry that May), was attempting to replace him as head of the District of the Indian Territory -- and vowed to leave the Army should this alleged attempt succeed. But it was Grierson who would welcome Lawrie Tatum, the new Kiowa-Comanche agent, to Ft. Sill that June, while Hazen, on the 30th, was appointed Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Southern Superintendency, headquartered at Fort Gibson. Tatum, a Quaker, represented an aspect of President Grant's new "Peace Policy" -- the selection of civilian agents from among various religious denominations, in the hope of avoiding the Indian Bureau's persistent corruption.[12]

However, some of Tatum's assigned charges, such as the small Kiowa bands of Woman's Heart and Big Bow, never came in for their rations, while the Quohada Comanches bid defiance to the reservation process from their Staked Plains refuge. One man connected with the Quohadas, Mow-way (actually a leader of the Kotchateka band), was among those Comanches who had come in to Ft. Bascom following Evans' attack, and who were later

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[11]"Report of Brevet Major General B.H. Grierson, in relation to Kiowa and Comanche Indians coming in, &c., Headquarters Camp Witchita, I.T., June 21st, 1869," container 76, reel 82, Sheridan Papers, LC.

[12]Kroeker, Great Plains Command, p. 91; Leckie, Unlikely Warriors, p. 164, n. 89. Despite its name, and rhetoric suggesting a fresh approach, the Grant administration's policy did not, save for its use of church officials, prove radically different from the previous strategy of reservation confinement and rapid assimilation. For an aptly titled assessment of its success, see Ch. 6, "Wars of the Peace Policy, 1869-1886," Utley, The Indian Frontier of the American West, pp. 157-201. The Quaker agent's own story may be found in Lawrie Tatum, Our Red Brothers and the Peace Policy of President Ulysses S. Grant (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1899).

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dispatched to Ft. Leavenworth before arriving at Ft. Sill.[13] Even his brief glimpses of frontier towns and posts, as he rode by wagon and by rail, supposedly convinced Mow-way -- at least temporarily -- that the whites were too numerous and powerful to resist. But even his band was to participate in later strife, and other war leaders would require more proof of government puissance than Sheridan's troopers had thus far provided.

Both the well-meaning Grierson and the devout Tatum appear to have underestimated the Indians' drive for warlike distinction, and the Ft. Sill agency was to become a city of refuge for Kiowas and Comanche raiders, who reached the climax of their 1870 raiding season by raiding the agency corral -- and Ft. Sill itself -- for livestock. Far from being permanently awed into submission by the threat of hanging, Satanta had recovered his old daring; at a July council with government peace commissioners, he professed to taking hold of that part of the white man's road represented by the breech-loading rifle. But as for the rest, Satanta claimed that the ration corn hurt his teeth, and pointed out that while the independent Indian was rewarded, the Indian who obeyed the white man got nothing. Tatum noted that, having raided in Texas that spring and summer, the Indians "seemed very sanguine that they could not be restrained."[14] They had good reason for so thinking; as Col. Nye observed, "It would have required thousands, not hundreds, of soldiers to restrain the Indians by measures of passive defense."[15] Not until the Red River War of 1874-75, when a raiding partly directed against white buffalo-hunters inspired Sheridan to elaborate troop

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[13]Nye, Carbine and Lance, pp. 104-105.

[14]Tatum, Our Red Brothers, p. 29.

[15]Nye, Carbine and Lance, p. 114.

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movements, would the raiding by Kiowas and Comanches into Texas be virtually halted, and the warriors be firmly pinned to the reservation.

In order to protect the Kansas frontier, the Department of the Missouri would continue to see units employed in a primarily defensive role, scouting and patrolling in a conventional manner. But with extensive field operations against the southern bands "having been relieved by the surrender of large numbers," and the escape northward of some who planned to join their allies or kin in the neighborhood of the Platte, the theater of large-scale offensive operations -- aimed at suppressing the remaining bands of Cheyennes, including many of the Dog Soldiers -- would eventually shift to the Department of the Platte.[16]

Despite having marched over 1200 miles in their recent, rugged scout southward from Fort Lyon, a column of seven companies of the Fifth Cavalry under Major Carr would proceed on a march from the Arkansas to the Platte River, searching the valleys of intermediate streams for any "bands of hostiles" he might find there. The command of 150 men left camp near Fort Wallace on May 10, 1869, and three days later Carr was able to launch a charge against Cheyennes led by White Horse and Tall Bull on Beaver Creek, at Elephant Crossing -- near a landmark called Elephant Rock and the site of Carr's fight the previous fall. The warriors fought a rearguard action and managed to get their lodges and families away, but Carr claimed a bloody score of 25 Indians killed and 50 wounded to six casualties of his own, including a sergeant and two privates killed.[17]

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[16]Record of Engagements, p. 20.

[17]Such casualties would be all the more remarkable if, despite Carr's belief that he had been fighting the Indians' main body, he had been checked only by a small body of warriors who had "put up the bluff" -- as George Bent contended. Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 328.

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Carr unburdened himself of his wagon train and sent it directly on to Ft. McPherson, to take up the pursuit the next day. The Indians, coming within fifteen miles of the Platte, turned east and then to the south, attempting to mask their trail, and on May 16 a force put at 400 warriors attacked Carr's advance guard at Spring Creek, Nebraska. The dismounted soldiers defended themselves from behind their horses and suffered three wounded before Carr's main column arrived and gave chase at the gallop for twelve miles, the Indians scattering at a point on Short Nose or Prairie Dog Creek. The fleeing Indians left behind lodge-poles, robes, and other property, including twelve ponies; Carr destroyed it, and in contrast to his sanguinary claims for the May 13 engagement acknowledged that, although numbers of Indians had been seen to fall, their casualties were, "as usual, unknown." Without forage or rations, and commenting that the country would be magnificent "if the Indians would allow it to be settled," Carr returned to Fort McPherson, where he refitted his command in preparation for a renewed hunt.[18]

Having broken up into small parties, the Indians turned to harrying the settlements on the Solomon. Mixed parties of Sioux and Cheyenne struck first on May 25 and killed sixteen whites in two days; their victims included buffalo hunters, homesteaders, and railway section hands near Fossil Creek Station, where the raiders seized the chance to cut the

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[18]Record of Engagements, p. 20; "Telegraphic Report of General Carr's Engagement with Indians, May 13, 1869 at Elephant Crossing, on the Beaver," May 20, 1869, container 76, reel 82, Sheridan Papers, LC; Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 329. According to George Bent, before the May 16 engagement Tall Bull was sheltering behind a nearby hill with two hundred Cheyennes waiting for the soldiers to come near so that they could be cut off from the main body and annihilated. But they proved too wary and gave up the chase, leading Tall Bull to make a charge against the prepared soldiers.

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telegraph wire in several places and derail a train approaching from the east.[19] The new raids were as brutal as those of the previous summer. On May 30, former Forsyth scout Thomas Alderdice returned from the town of Salina with supplies to his homestead, to find two of his children murdered, a son badly wounded -- and his wife Susannah and her eight-month-old daughter missing. Alderdice started in pursuit on June 1, traveling for the Saline River north by west. He eventually followed the raiders' trail to a creek whose name he did not know, and then headed north behind them to the Solomon, going up its North Fork. Seeing three Indians hunting farther up the creek, Alderdice presumed a large camp still farther up, and "secreted myself in ravine to watch movements. Could see nothing but Indians going out and returning to Creek. Returned back to settlement for help." Alderdice saw neither his wife nor his daughter.[20]

In the same area, a German-born woman, Mrs. Weichell, was captured and her husband killed. According to Major Carr, who secured her story through a German-speaking soldier of his command, the raiders killed her husband and cut off a finger to get his ring, then forced Mrs. Weichell to ride bareback with them "till they thought they were beyond immediate pursuit where they laid her on the ground and with four holding her arms and legs they all ravished her. She was then gone about three months in pregnancy." On reaching Tall Bull's Dog Soldier camp, she was turned over to the chief: "She said she was pretty well

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[19]Burkey, Custer, Come at Once!, pp. 75-76.

[20]Statement by Thomas Alderdice, in "Description of Mrs. Susan Alderdice, captured by Indians on Saline River, Lincoln County, Kas. My 30th 1869," June 21, 1869, Fort Hays, Letters and Telegrams Received, 1867-1889, RG 393, NA.

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treated by Tall Bull but that the squaws made her work and sometimes slapped her."[21] While taking no offensive action, Custer's command engaged in vigorous patrolling. After leading thirty men of the Seventh Cavalry on a twenty-mile ride on such a patrol out of the Seventh's camp near Fort Hays, Captain Myles Keogh admitted that he had seen nothing. But he nevertheless predicted: "We shall have a stirring summer up and away after Indians."[22]

But whatever some soldiers' suspicions that the winter campaign's results had been inconclusive, the release of the Washita captives would proceed. The women and children, along with the sole remaining Sweetwater hostage, left Fort Hays in wagons on June 13, and were escorted to their people at Medicine Bluff by a squadron of the Seventh Cavalry. Custer reported that Monahseetah, who had given birth to a son while in captivity, "although gladdened by the prospect of being restored to her people, exhibited marked feelings of regret when the time for her departure arrived."[23]

In releasing the captives, the military allegedly lost a means of influencing those Cheyennes still at war; George Bent's contention that husbands and relatives of Custer's prisoners had asked their chiefs that no further war parties be sent out, "as this would make the case of the prisoners worse," has already been noted.[24] However, if any such plea was

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[21]Carr to W.F. Cody, July 2, 1906, Box 3, Carr Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute. Carr recalled almost forty years later that the baby had been strangled with a bow-string, and even that Thomas Alderdice had found the child's body. However, this contradicts Alderdice's own statement.

[22]Myles Keogh, letter to Tom Keogh, June 1, 1869, Charles L. Convis, The Honor of Arms: a Biography of Myles W. Keogh (Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1990), p. 75.

[23]Custer, My Life, p. 378.

[24]Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 324.

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made, it had failed to prevent the spring raids, while it was the release of the prisoners which seems to have inspired an intermission in the attacks blamed on the Cheyennes. The last of these occurred on the very date of the captives' arrival at Camp Supply, June 22.[25]

Custer's alleged carnal relationship with his captive Monahseetah, the subject of much speculation, has been both enthusiastically debated and hotly denied. It has some support from both white and Indian primary sources -- though the allegation that Custer was the father of Monahseetah's child appears not merely untrue, but physically impossible in view of the time available between their first meeting and the child's birth.[26]

While, from the standpoint of military history, the significance of Custer's relationship with his captive may lie in the assistance rendered by Monahseetah during Custer's post-Washita operations, more than one officer apparently engaged in such an improper liaison: Ben Clark informed an interviewer -- specifying that this revelation not be published -- that many women captured at the Washita were "used by the officers," with Custer having "picked out a fine looking one."[27] But Benteen, confining the matter to his private correspondence, assigned guilt only to Custer, though stating that he had made an "informal

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[25]For raids prior to the transfer, see Burkey, Custer, Come at Once!, pp. 75-78.

[26]Even Capt. Benteen did not deign to attribute fatherhood to Custer, writing crudely that to "crown the marriage (?) the squaw 'calved'" while in captivity at the Fort Sill site: "The issue was, however, however, a simon-pure Cheyenne baby, the seed having been sown before we came down on their fold at Washita." Rather than represent Monahseetah as a victim, Benteen portrayed her as preferring Custer to her former Indian husband, and pleased to be "senior wife (present) of the two-starred big chief, with lots of 'chuck-away' [food] in the lodge, and wagon upon wagon-full outside!" Benteen to Goldin, Feb. 17, 1896, Carroll, Benteen-Goldin Letters, p. 271.

[27]Undated Ben Clark interview, typescript, Box 2, Folder 4, Camp Mss. Field notes.

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invitation" to his officers to select partners from among the women following the fight.[28] Charles Brill, writing in the 1930s, would cite Cheyenne sources to portray cowering victims, subjected at Camp Supply to their conquerors' unwanted attentions.[29] But the reminiscences of a Cheyenne woman, Kate Bighead, portray a more amiable relationship between Monahseetah and Custer, while Captain Keogh left a perhaps overly sunny (if exaggerated) portrait of relationships in general; remarking that some of the women were very pretty, he added, "I have one who is quite intelligent. It is usual for officers to have two or three hanging around."[30] Nor, apparently, was fraternization limited to officers during the campaign. Private Harvey mentioned a "big Apache Chief" with whom he supped on February 17: "He is a good Indian and fond of the white soldiers, and man; a nice squaw for me he has. I will go for her."[31]

The Seventh Cavalry, despite the laurels won at the Washita, would not play an

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[28]Benteen to Goldin, Feb. 17, 1896, Carroll, Benteen-Goldin Letters, p. 271. Benteen may strain the credulity of the average reader with his charge that an Army surgeon had -- repeatedly -- witnessed Custer in the very act of copulating with his Cheyenne mistress. Benteen to Goldin, "St. Valentine's Day," 1896, Ibid., p. 258.

[29]Brill, Conquest of the Southern Plains, pp. 22, 46. Brill did concede that a "mutual friendship" seemed to spring up between Custer and Monaseetah. Cheyenne historian John Stands in Timber, as recounted by his collaborator, dismissed the story of a relationship between the two. Stands in Timber, Memories, p. 199, n. 15

[30]"She Watched Custer's Last Battle," in Thomas B. Marquis, Custer on the Little Bighorn (Lodi, CA: Dr. Marquis Custer Publications, 1980), p. 35; Myles Keogh to Tom Keogh, May 9, 1869, cited in Hutton, Phil Sheridan, p. 389, n. 42. For skeptical comments on Kate Bighead's reliability, and other material on the Monahseetah-Custer affair, see Burkey, Custer, Come at Once!, pp. 65-68.

[31]Harvey journal, Feb. 17, 1869, Shirk, "Campaigning with Sheridan": 98.

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offensive role that spring. That burden would instead fall to the Fifth Cavalry under Eugene Carr, operating out of the Department of the Platte. While Kansas rather than adjacent Nebraska had borne the brunt of Indian fury, Brigadier General (Brevet Major General) Christopher C. Augur, departmental commander, explained to Nebraska's governor that "the only permanent safety for your frontier settlements is to drive the Indians entirely out of the Republican country. This is what I hope to do this summer."[32] His June 7 orders to Major Carr, from his headquarters at Omaha, reflected this hope. Carr, his force including eight companies of the Fifth Cavalry and three (one freshly raised) of Pawnee scouts under Major Frank North, would leave Fort McPherson supplied for twenty days, making sure that "no Indians are between you and the settlements in Nebraska" and marching to the headwaters of the Republican, while examining the country thoroughly on each side of his route for a distance of fifteen or twenty miles. He was then to take what seemed to him the most promising route to accomplish the expedition's purpose -- "to clear the Republican country of Indians."

Carr was to treat all Indians found in the vicinity as hostile, unless they were ready and willing to go to their reservations, in which case Carr was to disarm them, requiring "such hostages and guarantees of their good faith as you deem fully satisfactory" before bringing them with their families to Ft McPherson. Two companies of the Fifth left at that post would take a train with twenty days' supplies to meet Carr at Thickwood Creek or whatever point he might designate, after which Carr would send the wagons back for

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[32]Brig. Gen. Christopher C. Augur to Governor David Butler, June 1, 1869, cited in King, War Eagle, p. 100.

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additional supplies. Augur's instructions for the operation were "of course of the most general character," under the theory that if Carr was to achieve results, most details had to be left to his own judgement.[33]

It was not until July 5 that members of Carr's command would encounter the enemy. Following Indian "sign" to a point north of the Republican, three cavalry troops and a company of Pawnees under Major W.B. Royall struck a war party, claiming three warriors killed. Royall then returned to Carr's camp on the Republican. When Royall rejoined him, reported Carr, "I determined to take the whole command and follow the trail," though he thought that he had little hope of overtaking the Indians." [34] On July 8 a small skirmish resulted in two Indians badly wounded, or at least claimed as badly wounded, and at about midnight Indians attempted to stampede the soldiers' herd, charging into the camp: Mad Bear, sergeant of the Pawnee guard, ran out to kill an unhorsed warrior, but was shot and wounded by a bullet from his own side.[35] The Dog Soldiers and some Sioux had camped at the head of Cherry Creek, a small stream flowing into the Republican from the north, and it was from this camp that the raid had been launched.[36]

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[33]Bvt. Brig. Gen. Geo. D. Ruggles, Assistant Adjutant General, "Letter of Instruction to General Carr," June 7, 1869, container 76, reel 82, Sheridan Papers..

[34]Carr to Ruggles, "Report of Operations of the Republican River Expedition, Brevet Major General E.A. Carr Commanding, from June 30th to July 20th, 1869," container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers.

[35]Carr, "Republican River Expedition," July 20, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers. A subsequent official notice of this action observed coyly that "one of the Pawnee sentinels was wounded but the Indians were driven off without other loss to the command." Record of Engagements, p. 22.

[36]Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 329.

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While Carr kept to the Indians' trail, Tall Bull's Dog Soldiers, and the two villages traveling with them under Sioux chiefs Whistler and Two Strikes, planned to head north, putting the Southern Plains even farther behind them as they joined Red Cloud's Sioux and the Northern Cheyenne. But on reaching the South Platte, the Indians were surprised to find the water too high to cross. Tall Bull pitched his tipis among the hills of northeastern Colorado, at the head of the narrow White Butte Creek, at a place the whites termed Summit Springs. He sent scouts to the south, toward the direction of the Indians' most recent contact with the soldiers -- but none to the east, from whence no soldiers were expected. Rather than simply wait until the flooding had died down, Tall Bull also sent men to the South Platte to find a ford.

Yet despite the excitement in the camp after a party of Sioux reported soldiers on the villagers' trail, Tall Bull chose not to cross the river that evening, as many of the Sioux insisted on doing. Instead, he sent criers through the camp to proclaim that he would stay encamped for two more days. While the Cheyennes were to blame Tall Bull's poor judgement for not acting at once, a Fifth Cavalry officer later speculated that the camp was made at the suggestion of a camp medicine man, and against Tall Bull's own advice.[37]

The pursuing soldiers did not slacken their pace, and on July 10, leaving his wagon train behind and taking with him three days' rations on pack mules, Carr left his bivouac. The next day he cut loose from his train, with fewer than 300 fighting men possessing horses fit for service, including eight understrength companies of the Fifth and 50 Pawnees. The column made its way through the sandhills, and Carr finally decided to follow the fainter of

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[37]Hyde, Life of George Bent, p.331; Price, Across the Continent, p. 40.

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two Indian trails, as it led toward the Platte. After Buffalo Bill, again acting as guide, discovered the village's location, Carr, with his men now between the village and the river, made his final preparations to attack. His force circled through ravines and gullies -- and took the gallop for several miles -- to reach a point northwest of Tall Bull's camp.

Even after using high ground as a defilade to screen his horsemen, and thus get his command as close as possible without exposing it to view, Carr would be obliged to cross roughly a mile of open ground to reach the village -- and also to attack in broad daylight, perhaps as late as 3 P.M. Forming up his men into line, Carr ordered the charge -- the dramatic moment jarred by the trumpeter's apparent inability to remember how to sound the call; Quartermaster Hayes was even credited with seizing the trumpet and sounding it himself.[38] There ensued, in the words of a participant, "one of the most superb charges ever made by the Fifth Cavalry."[39] It was Sunday, July 11, 1869.

Despite their recent clashes with Carr's forces, the Indians had maintained a typically haphazard attitude toward security, and most of the villagers were apparently at their mid-day meal, or lounging on a small hill near camp, as the blue-clad horsemen approached. The day had been a misty one, and the Indians had also contributed to the haze by burning grass to obscure their trail; with the sounds of gunfire preceding the troops' arrival, Indians dashed to catch the horses herded close to camp or tied near the lodges before they could

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[38]As Russell notes: "The differences that occur in eyewitness accounts, particularly after a lapse of time, are well illustrated in variant accounts of this unimportant episode." Russell, Lives and Legends, p. 136.

[39]Price, Across the Continent, p. 139.

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stampede.[40] According to Bent, Tall Bull put one of his three wives on a horse along with the daughter of his first wife, while she and his youngest wife sheltered in a ravine -- the chief crying loudly, "All of you that are on foot and cannot get away follow me."[41]

The surprise was complete, and enemy horsemen were in the village before its inhabitants could offer an effective a defense; it is perhaps a measure of the confusion caused that some villagers thought the Pawnees they could now see riding up and down on a hillside -- to fire into their camp -- were friendly messengers from a Sioux war party, soon to return victorious. Villagers fled on foot or on horseback; young people, both Sioux and Cheyenne, moved over the prairie to the south, while old people ran to hide in a deep ravine. Cheyenne warriors unable to stem the Pawnees' advance would later tell awful stories of leaving women, children, and old people who could not keep up, and who were mercilessly butchered by North's scouts. Several other men could tell no such stories, for they died trying to hold off the Pawnees.[42] (Later the Cheyennes would attest that the Pawnees, besides capturing the largest share of the pony herd, "did most of the killing," even though

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[40]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 311-312.

[41]Hyde, Life of George Bent, pp. 332-323.

[42]Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 311-312. While the Pawnees' killing of noncombatants was typical for Plains intertribal warfare, their white allies apparently did not consider that any mercy they themselves extended to women and children need apply to warriors. Carr himself related to Cody an anecdote of Capt. George Price, who saw an Indian among the ponies: "The Indian said 'me squaw.' Price looked at him and said 'he is a buck' he then said 'Me good Indian talk heap' but the soldiers killed him." In his official report Carr had also mentioned the Indian's attempt at a parley, with a less explicit conclusion: "But, of course, it would not do to wait and let the others escape." Carr to Cody, July 2, 1906, E.A. Carr Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute; Carr, "Republican River Expedition," July 20, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers. No such anecdote appears in Price's own regimental history.

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their horses seemed tired after the lengthy gallop toward the village.)[43] At least one white participant remarked on the scouts' conduct with disdain: "The Pawnees did not fight well -- they skulked and killed the women and children. I have never seen Indians face the music like white men."[44] However, the fight was not without displays of Indian valor.

It was a custom among the Dog Soldiers that when hard pressed they must abandon their horses to fend off the enemy on foot. A young warrior named Wolf with Plenty of Hair now made his stand by staking himself out with a picket pin and a society "dog rope," a shoulder sash of quilled buffalo skin. He could not honorably release himself, and his body was found at the scene, the fighting about the ravine having been so fierce that no one else had had time to go to him and pull out the pin. It was the last time such a sash would be used.[45] Yet the general lack of resistance surprised Fifth Cavalry captain S.A. Sumner, who wrote to a friend that he had expected that the Indians would fight for their village, "but they made only a feeble effort to stop us," as the troops swept through the village to keep up the pursuit until their tired horses simply gave out: "There never was a more complete Indian triumph on the Plains...They left their lodges standing, with everything in and around them, and this was all accomplished without the loss of a single man on our side. We had great

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[43]Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 333.

[44]J.E. Welch, letter to Colonel Henry O. Clark, June 16, 1891, copy in Box 3, E.A. Carr Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute.

[45]Hyde, Life of George Bent, pp. 334, 338-339. According to Bent, there were only two such sashes in the Dog Men society, reserved for the bravest warriors. The ritual for "releasing" such a warrior included lashing him with a few blows from a quirt, as though compelling him to leave the field.

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times after our return, hunting up Indian curiosities, etc."[46]

It was in truth a more one-sided victory than any other major engagement of the winter campaign, and cost the whites no casualties save for a single soldier slightly wounded by an arrow -- and both of the Cheyennes' captives. On the verge of rescue, Mrs. Alderdice was killed -- her assailant "breaking her head in with a hatchet," according to Carr -- and Mrs. Weichell seriously wounded by a shot in the back.[47] Carr himself escaped injury, though a bullet went through his sword's scabbard.[48] But Tall Bull, the ranking Indian leader, was killed.

His foes apparently learned of his death only after the fight, and although it was an important event, it was not a decisive moment in the Battle of Summit Springs -- for Takonka Haska did not succeed in leading any organized resistance against the soldiers. Instead, he died fighting, seemingly alone, as disaster overwhelmed his village, and the identity of his slayer went unmentioned by any contemporary report. But the tales of his fall which later emerged were various.

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[46]Army and Navy Journal 6 (August, 1869): 802.

[47]Carr to Cody, July 2, 1906, Box 3, E.A. Carr Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute.

[48]St. Louis Republic, June 7, 1908, clipping in Box 3, E.A. Carr Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute. The fact that no damage to Carr's sword is mentioned suggests that Carr had drawn it from the scabbard prior to the action. However, some years later, Carr was described as confident that the saber had outlived its usefulness. Thinking little of the revolver as a cavalryman's weapon, he suggested that regiments be at least partially armed with the lance to provide greater range, and progressively envisioned the use of hollow aluminum lance shafts, in sections, to give the trooper a lighter and more convenient weapon than that of any other army's lancers. Unidentified newspaper, Nov. 19, 1892, clipping in Box 4, E.A. Carr Papers.

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Luther North, captain of the Pawnee Battalion's Company A, claimed long afterward that his brother Frank had shot the chief through the head, after Tall Bull had slain his own war-pony and looked out from behind the bank of a canyon.[49] But it seems to have been generally understood within the Fifth Cavalry that Buffalo Bill had (as he himself claimed) fired the fatal shot, with only Luther North claiming the role for brother Frank -- and with Frank himself making no mention of killing Tall Bull in his own diary's description of this "complete victory."[50] General Charles King, who joined the regiment in 1871, wrote in 1929, during an era in which debunkers were assailing Buffalo Bill's reputation as a scout, that he had never even heard Cody's role in Tall Bull's death doubted until that year.[51]

Cody's account actually has Tall Bull killed after the village had been captured, and while it was being burned, a number of warriors returning to begin a fight which took place all around the camp. One Indian appeared riding a large bay horse "and giving orders to his men in his own language -- which I could occasionally understand -- telling them that they had lost everything, that they were ruined, and he entreated them to follow him, and fight until they died." Observing the superb quality of the warrior's mount, Cody feared to fire at

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[49]For a humorous analysis of Luther North's various and contradictory versions of Tall Bull's death, see Russell, Lives and Legends, pp. 138-142, 147. North's jealousy of Cody, whether personal or on his late brother's behalf, reached such an intensity that he would come to deny that Buffalo Bill had been in the fight at all -- while giving the Pawnees rather than Cody the credit for locating Tall Bull's camp.

[50]Frank North journal, July 11, 1869, rpt. in Richard Weingardt, Sound the Charge: The Western Frontier: Spillman Creek to Summit Springs (Englewood, CO: Jacqueline Enterprises, 1978), p. 90. While Carr's biographer concluded that the weight of evidence seemed to tip the scales "slightly in favor of Frank North," all of this evidence seems to have originated with Luther North. King, War Eagle, p. 116.

[51]New York World, March 31, 1929, cited in Russell, Lives and Legends, p. 147.

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him "for fear of killing his horse." He instead decided to dismount and creep into a ravine that was being passed by the Indian as he rode around the soldiers' skirmish line; waiting until "Mr. Chief" approached within thirty yards distant. Cody fired, tumbling the rider from his saddle.

Riding his new prize to the place where the prisoners had been assembled, Cody found a woman who began crying hysterically at the sight of her husband's horse: "I gave her to understand that her liege lord had passed in his mortal chips and that it would be sometime before he would ride his favorite horse again, and I informed her that henceforth I should call the gallant steed 'Tall Bull' in honor of her husband."[52]

Unfortunately, Cody's friend and commander was contradictory in recalling the matter. His official report acknowledged the chief's death, but depicted Tall Bull as being killed while on foot, rather than shot off his horse as described by Cody:

> "Tall Bull," the Chief, finding how matters were going, determined to die. He had a little daughter on his horse, and one of his wives on another. He gave the daughter to his wife, and told her to escape and take the white woman who was prisoner, and she might use her to make terms for herself when peace was made. The wife begged him to escape with her, but he shut his ears, killed his horse, and she soon saw him killed, fighting. She then surrendered, and was saved, with her daughter of eight (8) and brother of twelve (12) years.[53]

Carr specified no individual killer in his report, but would later credit Buffalo Bill with having shot Tall Bull, essentially confirming Cody's own story. But in a letter of

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[52]Cody, Life, pp. 260-261. Cody stated that the bereaved widow was "the same squaw that had killed one of the white women and wounded the other."

[53]Carr, "Republican River Expedition," July 20, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers.

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recommendation for a Sergeant McGrath. Carr asserted that it was McGrath who had killed the chief.[54] Still more curiously, Carr -- in a letter to Cody himself! -- credited his Pawnee scouts with the killing, though the spirit he attributed to Tall Bull remained consistent with that revealed in Cody's memoirs and Carr's own official report: "My recollection is that Tall Bull's wife said they were escaping on foot when he looked back and saw the destruction of his village and the Dog Soldiers Band which had taunted the other Indians saying 'you call us dogs because we fight the whites you are squaws and we are Dog Soldiers."

Thus, telling his wife in this version that his "heart was bad" and that he could not live after this, Tall Bull advised her to treat the white captives well in the hope of good treatment from the whites, then "turned back and the Pawnees killed him."[55] But the Pawnees themselves could offer no candidate for the role of slayer, for according to George Bent, they stated that "no one knows who killed him, as they were all shooting at him." Bent himself stated that in desperate fighting at the ravine, Tall Bull's youngest wife was also killed and the other, White Buffalo Woman, allowed to come out and surrender -- though the others all died in the ravine.[56]

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[54]Brigadier General E.A. Carr, letter of recommendation for Sergeant Daniel McGrath, April 13, 1901, cited in Don Rickey, Jr. Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay: The Enlisted Soldier Fighting the Indian Wars (1963; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), p. 65 Another participant stated that a Fifth Cavalry lieutenant shot Tall Bull, his unlikely weapon being a derringer pistol. Welch to Clark, June 16, 1891, Box 3, E.A. Carr Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute.

[55]Carr to Cody, July 2, 1906, Box 3, E.A. Carr Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute.

[56]Hyde, Life of George Bent, pp. 333-334.

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Examining the devastation left by his raid, Carr viewed scenes of carnage that recalled verses of Biblical prophecy -- and frustrated his surgeon's hopes of decapitating Indians for the greater glory of anthropology:

> When we went through camp we found some dead Indians who had tried to cover themselves with sand and dirt as tho "calling on the rocks and mountains to cover them." some (sic) had their fists clenched and held up over them. Probably some had succeeded in covering themselves in ravines, but the Pawnees no doubt got most of them and broke their skulls. The Doctor could not find an unbroken skull to send to the Smithsonian.[57]

Carr appointed a board to count the dead Indians as well as to determine losses in property. The three-officer board, consisting of Major Royall, Major Crittenden, and Second Lieutenant Robert A. Edwards, found that Carr's men had killed 52 Indians (with no breakdown as to age or sex, unless "Indian" was meant to be synonymous with "warrior"), and captured seventeen women and children. Eighty-five lodges had been captured with their contents, as well as 274 horses and 144 mules, while the arms and munitions seized included no fewer than 56 rifles, 22 revolvers, 40 bows with arrows, and fifty pounds of gunpowder.[58]

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[57]Carr to Cody, July 2, 1906, Box 3, E.A. Carr Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute. Army surgeons seeking to enlarge the Smithsonian Institution's collection by exploiting Indian casualties would normally boil the flesh from the skull after beheading the owner. For a gruesome portrayal of this practice by "esteemed ethnological head-hunters," see R.G. Carter, On The Border with Mackenzie: or Winning West Texas From the Comanches (1935; Mattituck, NY: J.M. Carroll, n.d.), p. 200.

[58]"Proceedings of a Board convened by Special Orders, No. 17, dated Headquarters Republican River Expedition, Camp Cheyenne, July 11th, 1869," attached to Carr, "Republican River Expedition," July 20, 1869, container 73, reel 76, Sheridan Papers. Carr later recalled the dead found as numbering sixty-eight, and adding, implausibly given the circumstances, that "many others had been buried and the wounded had been carried away by their comrades." Welch put the total at an even more expansive "188 dead Indians," though adding that forty were women and children. St. Louis Republic, June 7, 1908; Welch to Clark, June 16, 1891, Box 3, E.A. Carr Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute.

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George Bent, while admitting ignorance of Sioux losses in the fight, named six Cheyenne warriors killed, while acknowledging that a large number of (unnamed) women and children had also died.[59]

The interesting plunder included greyhounds, a trumpet, and even a linked shirt of mail -- as well as certificates of good behavior, most dating back no further than 1866, issued on behalf of individual warriors by civilians or military men. Tall Bull himself had three, one dated as recently as June 19, 1868, though a more poignant one had been made out on October 28, 1867, signed by N.G. Taylor, "Prest of Indian Peace Commission and Commissioner of Indian Affairs," and testifying that Tall Bull was "a friendly Indian, to whom a Peace Medal has been presented by the Indian Peace Commission, and all persons -- citizens or soldiers are requested to assist, protect and respect him accordingly."[60]

Mrs. Alderdice was buried on the field, and the next day, July 12, Carr's command rode off, having invoiced the property. Carr recalled, perhaps poetically, "one hundred fires burning," left to consume whatever had not been taken away, while about fifteen dogs on a knoll "set up a howl as tho they had no friends left."[61] Perhaps confused by the mixed character of the village he had attacked, Carr revealed an imperfect knowledge of his foes' identities, for while acknowledging the (incorrect) belief that the Dog Soldier band was

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[59] Bent commented, "The Cheyennes say the surprise was so complete that they wonder why more people were not killed and give the Pawnees the credit for the damage done." Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 334.

[60]Eugene A. Carr file, Commission Branch, Letters Received, 1863-1870, reel 393, M1064, NA.

[61]Carr to Cody, July 2, 1906, E.A. Carr Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute.

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composed of "renegades" from among the Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho, he stated that the village was in his opinion made up mostly of Sioux, while "the chief was a Sioux named 'Tall Bull.'"[62]

The command started at noon for the Platte River and arrived at camp four hours later, finding "good grass and plenty of wood such as telegraph poles." The next day, the Fifth Cavalry's officers selected the best ponies for their own use, which still left Major North in charge of 180 ponies of whose ultimate fate he was unsure.[63] In the report he composed that day, Carr observed that his surprise had been "very complete for such an open country," and that, having failed to get away with a single pack, and left many of their saddles, the Indians would have "no shelter or food except horse meat till they can find buffalo..." However, the Indians still had many animals, and some of his own mounts had died after the ordeal of galloping "fifteen miles through hills of deep sand"; the surviving horses would require several weeks' rest.[64] On July 15 Carr's triumphant column arrived at Fort Sedgwick, where General Augur awaited, and where the captured ponies were divided up.

Carr's surprise had left a number of villagers still free. Some initially went farther north, to spend the winter among the northern bands, though the majority of these later returned south. Most of the fugitive Dog Men simply straggled toward the Southern

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[62]E.A. Carr to Washington Smith Esq., Feb. 23, 1887, Box 3, E.A. Carr Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute.

[63]Frank North journal, July 11, 1869, in Weingardt, Sound the Charge, p. 90.

[64]Carr to Ruggles, July 12, via Fort Sedgewick, July 13, 1869, New York Times, July 15, 1869.

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Cheyennes on the Canadian's South Fork, staying with this division of the tribe from that time on.[65] But the Battle of Summit Springs, the last major engagement against any Plains tribe in that section of the Plains, ensured that the feared Dog Soldiers would no longer threaten white expansion. George Bent admitting that with the destruction of Tall Bull's village and consequent scattering of the Dog Soldier band, "the power of this famous society was broken and never since have they been a factor in the wars of the Cheyenne tribe."[66]

After refitting at Fort Sedgwick, the victorious column, this time under Colonel Royall, went out to hunt for the escapees, and managed to strike Indians after its first day's march -- but they escaped as night fell. The pursuit was taken up the next morning, and finally abandoned after 225 miles, to the north of the Niobrara River. Here Royall was obliged to abandon the chase due to the roughness of the country and the exhaustion of his horses. He could claim as trophies only large quantities of abandoned camp equipment, as well as two mules, and forty horses and ponies.[67]

In the wake of Carr's spectacular victory, the divisional commander seemed confident that the military could permit stragglers to surrender at their own pace, without undue exertion or the infliction of draconian punishments; aware of one Northern Cheyenne band still at large in September, Sheridan suggested to General Schofield that in the event that the Indians tried to enter the reservation, the Army should "let them slip in family after family, as

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[65]Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 335.

[66]Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 340.

[67]Record of Engagements, p. 23.

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they will do if there is less talk on the subject."[68] That month Stone Forehead, who had declined to yield to Custer's peace mission or hostage-taking, finally slipped with his small following onto the reservation, followed by a remnant of the Dog Soldiers under Bull Bear.[69] Nevertheless, one last noteworthy clash remained for 1869; on September 26, a large column consisting of five troops of the Fifth Cavalry, three of the Second, and two companies of Pawnees struck a band of Indians on Prairie Dog Creek in Kansas, to report one Indian killed, one captured, and the entire village of fifty-six lodges destroyed with their contents the following day. The lone prisoner informed the soldiers that the band were Sioux under Pawnee Killer and Whistler, both escapees from the Summit Springs debacle -- and that the Indians, numbering a hundred warriors in addition to noncombatants, had abandoned all but weapons and animals, agreeing not to halt until they reached the Sioux reservation, north of the Platte River.[70]

Writing in October of 1869 to declare that the campaign had been "prosecuted to its conclusion with great energy, and developed a degree of fortitude and endurance on the part

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[68]Endorsement by P.H. Sheridan, Sept. 4, 1869, in connection with letter from Bvt. Col. Nelson, Commanding Camp Supply, dated August 14, 1869, container 76, reel 82, Sheridan Papers.

[69]Stone Forehead, with 29 other men, women and children, had made his first peace feeler in late June, making a preliminary visit to Camp Supply to satisfy himself as to how the reservation Indians were treated, and went so far as to display the sacred objects in his charge to Col. A.D. Nelson, in charge of the Tenth Cavalry detachment at the post. This was an honor accorded few non-Cheyennes. An apparently unimpressed Nelson, however, wrote merely that the Indians' assertions of peacefulness "were accompanied by various manipulations with arrows as if to add sanctity to them." A.D. Nelson to C.M. McKeever, June 22, 1869, Letters Received, Upper Arkansas Agency, 1868-70, OIA, reel 880, M234, NA.

[70]Record of Engagements, pp. 24-25.

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of the troops engaged which has never been equalled." Lieutenant General Sheridan stated that the Indians had been "severely punished," and cited their loss of animals, provisions and other property, as well as the two Kansas women whose release Custer had compelled. Sheridan compared the situation favorably to that he had inherited, noting that at the time of his assumption of divisional command on March 20, 1869, the "winter campaign" had terminated, with the troops en route to their ordinary stations. As for the future, Sheridan was moderately sanguine, expressing the belief that with uniform, just, and firm treatment of the Indians, general hostilities would be prevented, and the reservation would "in time become a complete success."[71] Unfortunately, no such treatment -- or at least none such dispensed in a uniform manner -- would be forthcoming.

But the Kansas frontier, at least, would remain comparatively quiet. Only a few scattered raids and combats were reported for 1870, as federal troops continued routine scouting and patrolling, or responded to sightings of real or imaginary war parties. Thus on the morning of June 5, Second Lieutenant T.F. Farber left Fort Hays with thirty doughboys of the Fifth Infantry to cooperate with a detachment of 34 Seventh Cavalrymen under Lieutenant Tom Custer "in pursuit of Indians" reported at or near the Saline. The infantrymen returned to Hays the next evening, "having discovered no signs of any Indian Encampment nor any indication that any Indians had lately been in that vicinity."[72] This

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[71]P.H. Sheridan, Oct. 23, 1869, Annual Report, Department of the Missouri, 1869, reel 717, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-70, NA.

[72]Record of Events, June, 1870, reel 469, M617, Post Returns, Fort Hays, Returns from United States Military Posts, 1800-1916, NA.

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emphasis, in the terse statement of the Fort Hays returns, might have indicated a sense of futility after a false alarm -- or, perhaps, a sense of accomplishment after a period of turmoil and a hard-fought campaign.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

Conclusions

"No general Indian war has prevailed...."

To gauge the military success of Phil Sheridan's winter campaign, as well as the operations of 1868 and 1869 which preceded and followed it, we must first consider its objectives. These included punishing Indians for recent "depredations," protecting the frontier settlements against war parties, and -- in an acceleration of the process envisioned by the Medicine Lodge treaties -- forcing the free-roaming bands onto reservations. The resultant peace, dictated to the Indians rather than negotiated, was to prevent a recurrence of such raiding. To what extent were these goals accomplished?

In his annual report for 1869, Sheridan himself, though believing that he had punished the Indians and bent most of them to the government's will, offered a perspective which was not blindly positive. He was frank regarding the Army's formidable task of frontier defense, and admitted that it had proved impossible to give adequate protection to all the settlements, even while asserting that many lives, and much valuable property, had been saved by his troops' "timely and efficient action." Nor did Sheridan suggest that the measures taken would deter all future raiding. He knew that a degree of Indian discontent could be expected as a matter of course, and "occasional acts of hostility," by small bands of young warriors, did not seem improbable.[1] Though Sheridan's assessment was not unreasonable, it proved overly

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[1]P.H. Sheridan, Annual Report for 1869, Department of the Missouri, Oct. 23, 1869, reel 797, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-70, NA.

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optimistic. Future "acts of hostility" would be more than occasional, and would include a full scale war less than five years into the future.

That the campaign did not secure a permanent peace may be laid to conditions outside Sheridan's control -- inadequate or unsuitable issues of food and other supplies for the Indians, the demoralizing influence of white intruders onto the reservations, and the continuous slaughter of the buffalo by white hide-hunters. But in the short term, Sheridan's forces, necessarily extending their operations well beyond the winter and even the spring of 1869, did succeed in forcing most of the Indians targeted onto the reservations.

During their winter operations , the soldiers may have exacted a considerable toll in lives on the Indians. However, the number of Indians who surrendered at various points could only be estimated at 12,000, and commanders' claims concerning enemy losses must not be accepted uncritically. From March 2, 1868 to February 9, 1869 there were reported within the Department of the Missouri 353 officers, soldiers and civilians killed, wounded or captured by Indians, to an Indian loss "reported, officially," of 319 killed, 289 wounded, and 53 captured.[2] (Most of the men killed or wounded by Indians had of course been civilians, though a society in which every man was a warrior was unlikely to credit such a distinction.) That the Army's figures may have erred on the side of optimism does not necessarily imply that Indian casualties were small; even Forsyth's scouts, despite the failure of their offensive mission, and at some cost to themselves, apparently managed to inflict heavy losses -- though the dose dispensed was perhaps less "salty" than Sheridan presumed.

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[2]Record of Engagements, p. 18. Noncombatant Indian losses at the Washita, not enumerated by Custer despite his acknowledgment that such casualties did occur, are not included in these figures.

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However, the campaign's success or failure cannot be measured simply in terms of Indians or soldiers slain. "The object of war is not to kill," as W.T. Sherman recognized, "but to produce results."[3] Like Sherman, famous (or infamous) for his army's march of destruction through the Confederacy, Sheridan believed in achieving results by waging warfare against the resources of entire populations, whether the enemy in the field was a Southern guerrilla or a defiant Indian warrior. To rationalize such severity, "Little Phil" argued that "the loss of property weighs heavy with the most of mankind; heavier often, than the sacrifices made on the field of battle" -- and thus that "reduction to poverty brings prayers for peace more surely and more quickly than does the destruction of human life."[4] He had sought to demonstrate the efficacy of such methods in the Shenandoah Valley.

But against peoples with no fixed habitations or fields of crops, a warfare of economic destruction could be waged only by locating their portable villages, or by striking at the Indians' mobile food supply, the buffalo. Sheridan's troops captured and destroyed two such villages before the end of 1868, and in the process created many homeless refugees. They also accounted for an abundance of property abandoned by camps in flight, and at the season when the Indians were least able to sustain or replace their loss. The war against the bison seems to have been consciously waged only by the men of Bradley's command, and none too effectively there; however, the most important food to be destroyed at such a season was probably not that still "on the hoof," but rather the stores of dried meat and pemmican seized at the Washita and Soldier Spring. Both during the winter and in follow-up operations and

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[3]W.T. Sherman, letter to EBC, Jan. 29, 1889, reel 3, EBCC.

[4]Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, I, pp. 487-99.

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pursuits, the Indians suffered great losses in horses, their principal units of economic status. In addition to hundreds slaughtered by Custer, others, half-starved or driven to exhaustion, were abandoned for capture or destruction by pursuing troops, while others retained by their owners were harried into a state of near-collapse.

The rhetoric of those Indian leaders who surrendered after Custer's return from the Washita, and made at least ostensible submission to Sheridan's demands, indicated that the winter campaign exercised a coercive psychological effect on at least some non-reservation bands. But further operations were needed to persuade other bands to come in, and even these efforts were not completely successful. The determined attitude of the Dog Men and others required the Army to campaign well into the summer of 1869, and Sheridan exaggerated the persuasiveness of Carr's efforts, made months after he himself had left the field to assume his divisional command: "The severe and well merited chastisement given to the savages by General Carr in July produced the most marked effect upon the conduct of the whole Cheyenne tribe. No sooner had the Cheyennes in the Indian Territory learned the ill fate of their brethren on the Republican than they made haste to Camp Supply and submitted to the government."[5]

Without benefit of hindsight, a number of frontier officers, including Colonel Grierson, expressed scepticism concerning the campaign, while both Captain Armes and Captain Keogh envisioned the Army's operations extending into that summer. But those of Sheridan's contemporaries who expressed their opinions some time afterward generally agreed that his

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[5]P.H. Sheridan, P.H. Sheridan, Oct. 23, 1869, Annual Report, Department of the Missouri. 1869, reel 797, M619, Letters Received, AGO, 1861-70, NA.

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bold winter effort had enjoyed a high degree of success. Even George Bent, not a man prone to credit the Army with Indian-fighting triumphs, attributed the settlement on reservations of his mother's people, and the other four relevant tribes, directly to this campaign.[6] Governor Crawford had a similar opinion, and declared that since the campaign his state's frontier settlements had been practically free from Indian raids, with a permanent peace assured and Central and Western Kansas left unhindered to become "a paradise for the homeseeker."[7]

The leader of Sheridan's main striking force presented a highly flattering, and perhaps self-flattering, assessment in concluding his memoir. Though Custer modestly portrayed the Kansas frontier as having enjoyed -- "from and after" the Washita campaign -- comparative immunity from Indian raids, he also offered a prediction: "No general Indian war has prevailed in that part of the country, nor is it probable that anything more serious in this way than occasional acts of horse-stealing will occur hereafter."[8] This prophesy did not anticipate the Indian outbreak of the spring and summer of 1874, when Cheyennes joined with Kiowas and Comanches to strike hide-hunters, ranchers, travelers, and whites in general.

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[6]Hyde, Life of George Bent, pp. 326, 327. Bent did of course recognize that there were hold-outs among some of what he termed the "wilder bands" of Kiowas and Comanches, as well as the Dog Soldiers. Bent even seems to have connected the fact that the Cheyennes did not again go to war again until 1874 with the government's release of the Camp Supply prisoners to their relatives.

[7]Crawford, Kansas in the Sixties, pp. 334, 336.

[8]Custer, My Life, p. 381. Perhaps the phrase "from and after" was Custer's oblique way of suggesting that the Army had engaged in operations following his own. However, Custer's personal narrative, written in the midst of preparations for his famous 1874 expedition into the Black Hills of the Dakotas, ends without taking account of Carr's subsequent movements, or of Summit Springs. The memoir might thus convey the impression that Custer's return from the Sweetwater had put an effective end to military operations.

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Custer's assertion that Sheridan's campaign had contributed to a period of relative peace was correct. However, the campaign of 1868-69 was not as decisive in its effects as General James H. Carleton's campaign against the Navajos, its unacknowledged (and perhaps, to Sheridan, unknown) predecessor. Unlike Sheridan's campaign, that of Carleton, which began in the spring of 1863, and continued throughout the winter to conclude in 1864, permanently ended a century and a half of intermittent warfare in the Southwest.

The more conclusive victory achieved by Carleton cannot safely be credited to greater military skill, or even to greater tenacity, than that displayed by Sheridan or his subordinates, for the two commanders had been faced with different problems and with very different opponents. The Navajo campaign, executed largely by volunteer troops under Colonel (later Brigadier General) Christopher "Kit" Carson, had been conducted not against nomadic hunters, but against Indians whose agricultural and pastoral resources (including grain fields, fruit orchards, and herds of sheep and goats) were as vulnerable as those of their white contemporaries in the Shenandoah Valley. Thus, while combat against the Navajos proved relatively infrequent, and even peripheral to the campaign's success, mass surrenders ensued as the Indians concluded that neither they nor their possessions were safe from Carleton's troops in their traditional strongholds. Ultimately some six thousand Navajos surrendered to troops under Carleton's command -- for the most part frequently ill-disciplined volunteers, under a decidedly motley gang of officers.[9] Sheridan, in demonstrating that he could launch

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[9]The majority of Carson's officers, as characterized by a leading historian of the campaign, "had serious personality defects which greatly limited their effectiveness... Although only one of his officers would be killed by the enemy, almost half of them would be forced to resign in disgrace or face court-martial proceedings before the campaign was over." Kelly, Navajo Roundup, p. 15.

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columns into the Indians' country at any season, initially achieved a somewhat similar moral effect, and accepted the surrender of many Indians who had not yet been struck by his forces.

Carleton's campaign, moreover, was also intensified in its effects by the Navajos' infamous "Long Walk," a grueling exodus from their homeland to the Bosque Redondo reservation. This was followed by a four-year exile so traumatic (albeit through government incompetence rather than through policy) that after returning to their traditional lands in 1868, the Navajos never again raided on the large scale which had played such a significant role in their economy; their ordeal had produced a permanent submission to the government's desires. By contrast, Sheridan's triumph did not produce such resignation among the Southern Plains tribes, and many southern Cheyennes went on to ally themselves with Kiowas and Comanches in the Red River War of 1874-75.

For some Kiowas and Comanches, the uprising which began in 1874 was merely an intensification of effort, for many of them had never given up raiding, whatever their pretenses of compliance with the reservation system. With the exception of the Soldier Spring fight, the two tribes' alliance had escaped severe punishment in the field, other than the loss of property and general discomfort produced by military harassment. Nor had Sheridan, despite his ferocious rhetoric, hanged any chiefs, or singled out raiders for post-surrender punishment. Thus their lot was little different from those of other Indians who had accepted the bleak reservation system -- and the bold Satanta had not erred in claiming that peaceful Indians could expect little attention from the government. War parties used the Fort Sill reservation itself as a base of operations, or source of supply, and the continued danger faced by the Texas frontier may be regarded as the campaign's most serious failure.

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But Sheridan had limited his own objectives (or at least the number of his potential foes) by putting aside the problem of Texas, and nominating as his initial targets only the Cheyennes and Arapahoes; the Kiowa-Comanche alliance would become a concern only as the campaign progressed. Nor can Sheridan's lack of punitive measures against vanquished Indians be judged more responsible for later raids than factors outside his control: these included a policy of divided authority, which left Indians outside the reservation the responsibility of the Army while those within remained the wards of civilian agents, and the frustration felt by proud, warlike men condemned to the miseries and boredom of reservation life.

In preparing for winter operations, Sheridan was well aware that a campaign on the Southern Plains at such a season would be a hazardous venture, and no less an authority than mountain man Jim Bridger had asked that he not undertake it. His plans therefore included measures, such as the construction of forward supply bases, aimed at overcoming its peculiar difficulties. Yet Sheridan may have seriously underestimated these difficulties. He was a newcomer to the region, and his own experience of Indian campaigning had been gained prior to the Civil War, against such less formidable Northwestern tribes as the semi-nomadic Yakimas. Even in postwar Texas, Sheridan had been preoccupied not with Indian raiding, but with the agonies of Reconstruction and Napoleon III's imperial adventure in Mexico. Accused of ignorance of the harsh countryside through which he demanded that soldiers march and Indians be pursued, Sheridan may have expected too much of men and animals alike.

While military fatalities were small, the theater of war and the season chosen for

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operations did exact a high toll -- in suffering among the soldiers, in abandonment of wagons and equipment, and, most seriously from a military standpoint, in the terrible destruction of animals. Entire companies of cavalry, as well as Forsyth's scouts, were crippled for purposes of mounted warfare, and only in the scouts' case were the heavy losses due to enemy action. Yet if Sheridan's knowledge was necessarily imperfect, some of the adversity was caused not by launching troops into the inescapable harshness of a Southern Plains winter, but rather by actions of subordinate officers. General Morgan failed to properly stockpile supplies, and even imposed upon troops in the field his conceit that they would find raw flour an acceptable alternative to ready-baked bread. Captain Penrose, even in the face of winter, sought to rely on grazing rather than forage to sustain his animals -- needlessly dooming many of them, and finally leaving most of his cavalrymen useless for mounted service. Fortunately, the temper of Sheridan's men remained adequate to the demands made of them, even as their persistent campaigning, as revealed by the statements of surrendering Indians, exacted a toll upon their opponents' morale.

While Sheridan wished to impress upon the Indians the Army's ability to campaign throughout the year, making his supreme effort amid the perils of winter had its distinctive risks. A failure to achieve definitive results might have left his forces physically degraded or exhausted, while facing enemies not yet run to ground. Perhaps much of Sheridan's success relied on the early, punishing victories of Custer and Evans, and column movements which so impressed the Indians with the soldiers' wide-ranging power and persistence that most would come in without requiring extended operations. Not all would be sufficiently impressed, of course, and the confident defiance of some bands would require troop movements stretching

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well into the summer of 1869. But perhaps the soldiers' tendency to operate at all seasons, to pursue trails tenaciously, and to appear at times when the Indians imagined they were safe, affected even the fiery Tall Bull at his last fight. We can never know if his apparent resignation to defeat and death lay solely in a sense of his own failure to save his village from Carr's cavalry, or whether he was possessed by a despair that went beyond the catastrophic surprise achieved that July day.

Sheridan's role in the campaign must be evaluated chiefly from a strategic standpoint, as he necessarily left his field commanders to manage their respective columns after setting out the campaign's broad parameters; Custer's depiction of Sheridan as essentially a "passenger" with his own command actually refers to the period when Sheridan played his most active part in the field, and presided over the Kiowas' surrender. Initially, and unavoidably in light of the situation's urgency, Sheridan responded to the Indian raids of 1868 in a conventional manner. His soldiers attempted to secure a vast frontier with inadequate forces, occasionally scored a defensive victory such as Benteen's at Elkhorn, and took the offensive in weather that still favored the Indians' superior mobility.

The troops made relatively little progress in forcing the Indians to battle under these circumstances, and even the persistent Carr fought his hottest action when Indians attacked the small cavalry escort attempting to locate his regiment. The ambulance-bound pessimism of Sully's operations presented the Army's standard methods at their least successful -- a heavy column, perhaps able to catch Indians through sheer persistence, with a commander unable to muster the essential celerity or determination to either overtake or wear down his foe. Sheridan's one innovation during this period -- departing from Army custom to form

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civilians into an independent fighting command -- also failed, although its flawed premise, and tacit depreciation of the potential danger presented by a Plains Indians opponent, were obscured by Forsyth's heroic defense. The scouts were attacked and crippled as an offensive force before they could strike any Indians, and only their narrow escape from obliteration prevented Sheridan from confronting the grimmest possible outcome of his scheme. Forsyth's miniature offensive was ill-conceived, with no obvious purpose other than the department commander's understandable desire to seize the initiative.

But if Sheridan's early, generally conventional attempts at an offensive appear in retrospect as a false start to a massive cold-weather campaign, perhaps this is because their failure made such a campaign seem inevitable, rather than a choice made in the face of knowledgeable objections. Once winter conditions set in, Sheridan's column commanders performed in a generally efficient and effective manner. Since Evans and Carr were expected to achieve little beyond acting as "beaters," their accomplishments, including Evans' destruction of a substantial village, did not disappoint from a strategic standpoint -- though their "beating" did not have a channeling effect on the Indians who camped on the Washita prior to the attack by Sheridan's main column. Both Carr and Penrose expended time and resources in battling the weather -- and the results of Penrose's incorrect decisions -- rather than Indians. But the Soldier Springs fight, following the Battle of the Washita, had echoed its signal that a blow against the Indians villages was possible at any season, however Major Evans might lament the incomplete nature of his victory.

The main column's strike at the Washita, facilitated by the construction of the advanced depot at Camp Supply, required no great feat of plainscraft; the general location of the Indian

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villages was already known, and this made possible Lt.-Col. Custer's feat of navigating by compass before he encountered a war party's trail. But the lessons of the abortive Hancock campaign had apparently not been wasted. Custer's stealthy approach, and the plan of encirclement applied upon locating Black Kettle's village, realized the desired surprise, which was marred only by the cavalry's failure to completely enclose the camp. In attacking an opponent of unknown strength on unknown terrain, Custer violated a "fundamental military precept," as the frontier Army's foremost historian has observed -- before sensibly adding that "the precepts of conventional warfare did not always apply to Indian warfare....Custer did not allow prudence to jeopardize surprise."[10]

In such warfare, against foes who could easily scatter once alerted, surprise was of supreme importance: officers and men tended, for the most part correctly, to doubt not their ability to defeat the Indians, but their ability to catch them. If the suggestion that Custer's scouting was deficient lacks credibility, it is because it implies certain knowledge of what an adequate reconnaissance would have been. For Custer, the battle's unpleasant surprise consisted of Indian villages located within an easy ride of Black Kettle's camp. But a reconnaissance capable of discovering such a fact might have required probing the area for several miles up and down stream from Custer's intended target -- a precaution unique in the history of Indian warfare. Furthermore, Custer's fellow commanders did not display noticeably greater prudence when alerted to an enemy's presence; they too attacked with little or no knowledge of their enemy's identity and strength.

Even though writing of Custer's disaster at the Little Bighorn, rather than the Washita

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[10]Utley, Cavalier in Buckskin, p. 76.

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victory eight years earlier. E.S. Godfrey argued that in such irregular warfare a commander's attack had to be "made with celerity," and generally with no knowledge of his foes' numbers other than that discovered or conjectured while on their trail:

> The dispositions for the attack may be said to be "made in the dark," and successful surprise to depend upon luck...In civilized warfare the hostile forces may confront each other for hours, days or weeks, and the battle may be conducted with a tolerable knowledge of the numbers, positions, etc., of the other. A full knowledge of the immediate presence of the enemy does not imply immediate attack. In Indian warfare the rule is "touch and go." In fact, the firebrand nature of Indian warfare is not generally understood. In meditating upon the preliminaries of an Indian battle, old soldiers who have participated only in the battles of "civilized" war are apt to draw upon their own experiences for comparison when there is no comparison.[11]

Custer's attack struck an Indian village of substantial size and virtually scoured it from the earth, killing many of its inhabitants, capturing hundreds of ponies, and destroying the Indians' food and shelter -- all at the season when the suffering caused by such losses would be most keenly felt. He also captured many noncombatants who, in keeping with Sheridan's total-war policy, would provide the Army with leverage over those Indians who had escaped the Washita fight, and perhaps their allies. This, and the battle's effect on the other camps which Custer chose not to attack -- including the Indians' abandonment of property and slaughter of ponies, so cheering to Sheridan on his inspection of the battleground -- makes the Washita fight the apparent key to the campaign's success in driving or coaxing Indians onto their reservations.

The Battle of the Washita cost the Seventh Cavalry heavily, and was marred by the loss

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[11]"General Godfrey's Narrative," Graham, The Custer Myth, pp. 136-137. This is the 1908 revision of Godfrey's important article "Custer's Last Battle," which first appeared in the January, 1892 number of the Century magazine. For a version of this article incorporating subsequent handwritten corrections by Godfrey, see J.M. Carroll, ed., The Two Battles of the Little Bighorn (Bryan and Mattituck: J.M. Carroll & Company, 1974), pp. 33-125.

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of Elliott's party. But this high price cannot be attributed to Custer's decisions; he had not ordered Elliott's men to their doom, and apart from these, only three soldiers and one officer were fatalities of the action. Custer's second-in-command, leaving his uninformed battalion to fend for itself, had abruptly split off to pursue fugitives; Elliott thus allowed himself to be cut off and destroyed, perhaps long before anyone with the main command realized that he was missing. In order to begin a search mission able to rescue Elliott, Custer would have required knowledge of this unauthorized departure, and an apprehension of his subordinate's danger, well before Elliott's fight was over. Simply delaying his departure until he had located Elliott's defensive site -- as even Captain Benteen believed -- would have resulted only in hastening the gruesome discovery which awaited the Seventh Cavalry's return to the battleground.

It is the failure to ascertain Elliott's fate, rather than any failure to rescue him, that may redound to Custer's discredit. But Custer's departure, and his assumption that Elliott had been killed (apparently tempered only by his hopeful conjecture, noted by Sheridan but not recorded in Custer's writings, that he had been cut off and might somehow rejoin the command) did not, given the state of his knowledge, equate to a decision to abandon living members of his command. Perhaps Custer might have made a greater effort in searching for the missing men (especially if Lt. Tom Custer had been leading the group); but to criticize as deficient the attempt actually made provokes the question of defining an "adequate" search -- other than as a search which simply would not stop, short of discovering Elliott's fate.

Furthermore, Custer's withdrawal from the battlefield seems neither unusually hasty nor irrational, if one considers his precarious logistical situation, the severe weather, the superior

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but unknown numbers of warriors from nearby villages, and his expedition's essential character. Striking against a nomadic foe possessing no fixed abode, and without the objective of seeking strategic points to occupy or hold, such an operation savored more of the raid than of a set-piece battle. One turn-of-the-century military man, in his widely read analysis of recent colonial wars and struggles against irregular foes, classed raids "such as the United States troops carried out so successfully against the Red Indians" with those that the French had employed against the Algerians, and the Russians against Central Asian peoples: such raids were largely or entirely aimed at destroying or carrying off the enemy's property, or forcing him to fight by threatening to do so.[12] For such an expedition, doing the maximum amount of damage deemed possible or prudent, and then simply withdrawing as Custer did, would not have been unusual. While Evans, and later Carr, would choose to camp overnight near the sites of captured villages, neither commander did so facing a serious threat of enemy reinforcements.

In addition to being the most dramatic demonstration of the winter campaign's advantages, the Battle of the Washita, sometimes regarded as little better than a massacre of helpless Indians, proved its most troublesome from a moral standpoint. The available evidence fails to establish that Custer sought an indiscriminate slaughter, or that General Sheridan desired him to execute one. Despite "Little Phil's" rhetorical ferocity -- and it was during this campaign that he supposedly endorsed to the popular frontiersman's view that "The only good Indian is a dead Indian" -- this was not a war of extermination, however

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[12]C.E. Callwell, Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice (1906; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, n.d.), p. 403.

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brutal the process of conquest.[13] Nor did the Washita attack differ in design from other village attacks in which those commonly deemed noncombatants were killed or wounded, for all such attacks were made in the knowledge that they would expose women and children to danger, even if commanders viewed their loss as simply unavoidable, rather than an end in themselves. Any condemnation of Custer on moral grounds must also embrace his contemporaries such as Carr and Evans.

While officers might attempt to restraint their troops, the participants in such village attacks often included Indian scouts or allies who, like Custer's small party of Osage trailers or Carr's larger force of Pawnees at Summit Springs, tended to view the killing of women and children as legitimate vengeance, or simply so much more damage done an equally merciless foe. "In all of our Indian wars," lamented a onetime commander of scouts, " it has seemed necessary to use Indian allies, and these have usually been permitted to perpetrate all kinds of savage atrocities, mutilating the dead in the most horrible manner, so that we have not taught the Indians by example any more civilized warfare."[14] Apparently no restraint of any sort was attempted (nor its absence lamented) against the Pawnees at Summit Springs. Instead, the scouts fought as they pleased, though the number and proportion of their noncombatant victims is unknown. Despite the wanton slaughter suggested by Cheyenne accounts (as well

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[13]More specifically, the Comanche leader Tosawi reportedly approached Sheridan at Fort Cobb in January of 1869, the chief declaring "Me, Toch-a-way; me good Indian" -- to which Sheridan replied with a quizzical smile and the words "The only good Indians I ever saw were dead." One biographer, while correctly defending the general against the charge of being an exterminationist or Indian hater, concedes that the quip had the "ring of typical Sheridan rhetoric." Hutton, Phil Sheridan, p. 180.

[14]Clark, The Indian Sign Language, p. 396.

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as by that of Welch and, less clearly, by Carr himself), this aspect of the Summit Springs fight has not attracted the same condemnation as the noncombatant deaths at the Washita.[15]

There are obvious reasons for this. If the Washita has continued to provoke, over a century afterward, a censure not directed at other attacks on Plains Indian villages, we may assign partial blame to Custer's posthumous status as a symbol of the Indian-fighting Army -- and, to many, of white perfidy and oppression.[16] If such a figure, whose immortality stems awkwardly from utter defeat at Indian hands, requires a connection with a symbolic atrocity, the attack on Black Kettle's band may serve. But the initial controversy was more closely linked to the identity of Custer's most famous victim. The fact that Black Kettle died four years almost to the day after the Sand Creek massacre sufficed to suggest ugly parallels, especially since both attacks had been prefaced by negotiations with government officials and declarations by Black Kettle of peaceful intentions. The chief could thus seem doubly the victim of white man's treachery.

Yet the circumstances surrounding these two attacks were by no means identical, and General Sherman, explaining in defense of Custer's attack that the case of Sand Creek had been "widely different," was correct to do so.[17] Whereas talk of peace preceding

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[15]Carr's own description of Pawnee mayhem is not necessarily inconsistent with other accounts, though it makes no explicit mention of indiscriminate slaughter, and by referring to slain "Indians" Carr may have intended to refer specifically to warriors. Carr to Cody, July 2, 1906, Box 3, E.A. Carr Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute.

[16]For the most comprehensive examination of Custer's changing status as symbolic hero, villain, and whipping-boy, see Brian W. Dippie, Custer's Last Stand: The Anatomy of An American Myth (Missoula: University of Montana, 1976).

[17]Sherman to Bvt. Maj. General E.D. Townsend, Dec. 12, 1868, Senate Exec. Docs., 40th Cong., 3rd sess., no. 18, p. 26. Sherman, even while expressing his own belief that

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Chivington's attack left Black Kettle's followers with an illusion of security. Col. Hazen revealed that he was influenced by his fear of another Sand Creek affair in denying the same band any assurances of safety. At worst, Hazen's understanding of his duty to separate peaceful from warlike left Black Kettle with no options other than to split off from the more warlike portion of his own band, or somehow avoid a clash with soldiers already operating on the Southern Plains. It was the obvious hostility of his band's young men, and their recent raids, that made sanctuary for the village impossible, and compounded the difficulty of drawing a reliable line between "hostile" and "friendly." Ironically, Hazen, an Army man seconded to a civilian Indian Bureau, would perpetuate the old problem of divided responsibility that had long bedeviled governmental relationships with the Indians.

On the Indians' side, the power to compel was not so much divided as simply nonexistent. George Bent explained, in contrast to the whites' notions of Indian chiefs, that while the tribes had no such office as "war chief," though leaders of the military societies usually had more power than the civil chief in important matters The Indian idea of a chief was thus "not a fighter but a peace maker."[18] Unfortunately for the premise that Custer should have spared Black Kettle's village simply because Black Kettle was its chief, no leader can make an effective peace unless he can restrain those who would make war. Furthermore, Custer, while aware that those Indians designated "hostile" were in the area to which he had marched, and that a war party's trail led into the village, could not know the names of

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Black Kettle himself "did not wish to be at war," emphasized that in the case of Sand Creek, Black Kettle's camp had been "under the protection of the commanding officer of Fort Lyon."

[18]Hyde, Life of George Bent, p. 324.

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particular village leaders. The government's process of separating Indians into peaceful and bellicose was presumed to relieve field commanders of that responsibility.

Rather than an intensified war, driven by the Indians' desire for retribution against the destroyers of Black Kettle, the Battle of the Washita apparently served as the initial "whipping" that produced (at least from the military's standpoint) a sufficient moral or psychological effect. Confidence that this was the case presumably lay behind Custer's subsequent attempts to bring the "hostiles" onto the reservation without fighting -- and at times without even the immediate threat of military force. In this, displaying extreme boldness, tenacity, and an attitude of conciliation rather than vindictive bloodlust, he was perhaps as effective as any officer could have been under the circumstances. Custer's restrained approach was marred by his undiplomatic seizure of hostages in his own camp, which, with his ruthless threats of hanging, left a legacy of mistrust; nevertheless, by managing to restrain even the most vengeful citizen-soldiers under his command, he rescued two captives from their hideous plight, and avoided an armed conflict in which the Indians would doubtless have been the chief sufferers.

While Custer may be complimented for concluding his operations without bloodshed, his overall conduct of operations, including the Washita strike, was quite in keeping with the philosophy of the superior who had authorized his peace missions. Sheridan's troops did not observe all the amenities of "civilized" warfare between the regular armies of two Victorian nation-states. Instead, they resorted to harsh methods more typical of a response to partisan or guerrilla activity. Villages were reduced to ashes, ponies slaughtered or carried off, and surviving noncombatants borne off as prisoners, or driven out to face hunger and the

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elements. While such methods had often been used by Americans or Europeans fighting tribal peoples, they also conformed with the grimly progressive theories of Philip H. Sheridan.

"His view of war was not romantic," as the most perceptive chronicler of his frontier years comments, "for Sheridan was a modern warrior."[19] This modernity, like that of a U.S. Grant or a W.T. Sherman, was not always pleasant or especially admirable, for it involved not merely an acceptance of new technology or abandonment of outdated tactics, but also, as noted, the conviction that war must be brought home to an entire enemy population, and not simply to its fighting men. The same unchivalrous philosophy which had animated Sheridan's burnings and destruction of property in the Shenandoah Valley also accepted ruthless methods against those he deemed savages, despite his sincere desire to see them bettered according to the ideals of white civilization.[20]

Sheridan bluntly rejected the idea that Indians could be successfully fought "on the principle of high-toned warfare," and argued to the like-minded Sherman that if a village was attacked and women and children killed, "the responsibility is not with the soldiers but with the people whose crimes necessitated the attack. During the war did any one hesitate to attack a village or town occupied by the enemy because women and children were within its limits? Did we cease to throw shells into Vicksburg or Atlanta because women and children were there?"[21] It was not an argument likely to win the hearts of humanitarians -- especially

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[19]Hutton, Phil Sheridan, p. 17. Hutton also remarks (Ibid., p. 8) on Sheridan's "consistent demonstration of cruelty toward those he designated as enemies."

[20]For Sheridan's approach to Indian policy, in war and peace, see Hutton, Phil Sheridan and His Army, pp. 180-200.

[21]Sheridan to Sherman, March 18, 1870, container 91, reel 88, Sheridan Papers, LC.

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those sure that Black Kettle's villagers could not be held liable for any crimes in the first place.

For Sheridan, the death of Black Kettle proved a more awkward matter than the loss of anonymous noncombatants. Yet he would not accept accusations that Custer's attack had been misdirected against friendly Indians, even if the village attacked had been headed by a victim of Sand Creek.[22] His characterization of Black Kettle as "a worn out and worthless old cypher," cruel as it was, summarized the chief's lack of relevance to the behavior even of his own band's young warriors -- men who had no intention of obeying their titular chief in matters of war and peace.[23] Col. Hazen was not illogical in fearing that granting sanctuary to his band would have sheltered some of the very men Sheridan hoped to chastise. But his policy left Black Kettle with only a choice of evils: he could abandon most of his people for the sake of personal asylum, stay with them and hope to avoid the troops in the field, or attempt surrender in the very shadow of military attack.

But no questions concerning Black Kettle's fate would prevent Sheridan from waging future campaigns in a style he had found effective. With the apparent triumph of his first southern Plains campaign behind him, he would maintain his faith in exploiting winter as an ally, despite the substantial costs of doing so. He would also retain a strategy of converging columns, capable of independent action, to strike at Plains Indian opponents, or to keep them

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[22]For one such assessment, see Grinnell, Fighting Cheyennes, p. 309: "Black Kettle was a striking example of a consistently friendly Indian who, because he was friendly and so because his whereabouts was (sic) usually known, was punished for the acts of people whom it was supposed he could control."

[23]Report of the Secretary of War [1869], I, p. 47.

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insecure and on the move through constant pressure. Sheridan's soldiers would again seek not merely to inflict casualties, but also to capture or destroy livestock and property -- and would wage a total war in which women and children, denied sanctuary at reservations while their fighting men continued to resist, would either be taken prisoner or flee into a refugee existence on the barren prairie.

Faced with the outbreak of 1874, Sheridan adopted a strategy which closely paralleled his campaign plan of 1868. However, unable in this case to delay operations until cold weather could limit the Indians' mobility, he was forced to begin that summer -- though the southern Plains were afflicted by high temperatures, a severe drought, and even a plague of locusts, which stripped the vegetation from vast tracts of prairie. Army columns were to converge on the Texas Panhandle from several directions, seeking out bands of Indians who still roamed free or who had "broken" from the agencies (including such previously surrendered leaders as Stone Forehead): these were to be fought or harassed into returning to the agencies, which were to serve no longer as "cities of refuge" for those engaged in raiding.

That the Red River campaign ultimately proved effective, despite its unavoidably premature start, suggests that the effects of winter were less crucial to a campaign's success than the Army's sheer persistence -- the willingness, and ability, to wage war for as long as necessary to achieve the desired result. Just as the campaigning of 1868-69 had to be extended well past the winter season before success was achieved, so did the Red River campaign grind on well into 1875. The troops endured rain, snow, and extremes of heat and cold as well as shortages of food and even water; at one point, troops under Colonel Nelson Miles opened veins in their arms, to moisten their lips with their own blood. But the Indians

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were also forced to endure these merciless conditions, and the campaign would permanently end the wars of the Kiowas and Comanches, as well as "pacify" most of the Southern Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and Plains Apaches. This result may be partly ascribed to the segregation of certain supposed war leaders and prominent raiders, selected to endure a long exile at Florida's Fort Marion prison.[24]

By 1876 Sheridan was prepared to meet even the greater distances and the climatic extremes of the Northern Plains with a variation on his strategy for 1868 and 1874. But despite his anxiety to catch the Sioux and Cheyenne "hostiles" before the early spring of 1876, circumstances delayed the initial field operations of what would become known as the Great Sioux War. A snow-hampered, indecisive expedition launched into the Powder River country that March was followed by operations extending into the spring and summer -- a grand if uncoordinated movement of three columns, which culminated on June 25 in the obliteration of five Seventh Cavalry companies under the immediate command of Lt. Col. G.A. Custer. Custer's losses, and casualties to the remaining seven troops of the Seventh on June 25-26, produced a horrific total of 268 Army fatalities.

In the wake of this disaster, troops vainly hunted for the victorious Indians, and the command of Brigadier General George Crook endured an infamous "Starvation March," butchering horses and mules for food, while men broke down physically and mentally under the strain. Even before this logistical nightmare, and the general failure of that summer's operations, Sheridan would secure effective Army control of the Sioux reservations in an

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[24]A fine history of this campaign is provided in James L. Haley, The Buffalo War: The History of the Red River Indian Uprising of 1874 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1976).

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attempt to disarm and dismount "hostile" and "friendly" Indians alike, and substantial success in the field would not occur until the winter of 1876-77 permitted a war of material attrition, fought and marched to the limits of the weaker party. Though most of the Sioux and Cheyennes were coerced onto the reservations within a year of their victory over Custer, many Indians sought sanctuary in Canada, until the destruction of their buffalo herds forced them toward the only source of government rations.[25] Sheridan's latest version of his converging-column strategy had proved inadequate to the greater distances and harsh, changeable climate of the northern Plains, and column commanders had received little overall direction from his Chicago headquarters.

However, the failures of 1876 must not be permitted to obscure the merits or successes of Sheridan's original 1868 strategy. Although the effect of Carr and Evans as "beaters" appears to have been more psychological than physical, Sheridan's use of multiple columns in this theater produced a degree of anxiety which resulted in many Indians surrendering without having been defeated militarily, or even struck. It is true that some of the most determined Indians, particularly the Dog Men, were not persuaded by winter operations, or Custer's efforts at armed diplomacy that spring. Only well into the summer of 1869 did the conquest of these bands approach completion -- though the Washita and Soldier Spring fights, and the seeming relentlessness of the Army's efforts throughout the seasons, may have taken their

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[25]Although the literature of the Great Sioux War is vast, most of it centers on Custer's spectacular end at the Little Bighorn. For a particularly acerbic critique of the 1876 campaign, see John S. Gray, Centennial Campaign: The Sioux War of 1876 (Fort Collins, Colorado: The Old Army Press, 1976). The present author's own views may be found in Wayne Michael Sarf, The Little Bighorn Campaign, March-September 1876 (Conshohocken, PA: Combined Books, 1993), pp. 285-286, 291-292.

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mental toll even before Carr's troops began their final operations. It is also true that not even a severe winter's punishment could suffice to keep discontented Indians on the reservation, unless perhaps they were deprived of leadership as in 1875, stripped of horses and weapons, or confronted by the specter of starvation should they be cut off from the government's food dole. Nor could the undermanned frontier army reasonably hope to contain such elusive bands should they decide to leave. Thus the operations of 1868-69 did not represent a permanent solution to the military "Indian problem."

Yet the outcome of Sheridan's campaign justified, from a military standpoint, the risks taken, and the great effort involved. If it failed to secure a permanent peace on the Southern Plains, this was largely due to the peculiar circumstances of the reservation system, the nature of Plains Indians society, and the straitened circumstances of a Regular Army too small to perform the necessary task of patrolling the Western frontier. While Sheridan later became too enamored of his multi-column strategy, and failed to adjust it for changing circumstances, perhaps this involved more than simple complacency bred by success. Perhaps it was also a case of incorrectly analyzing a successful operation -- overlooking such factors as the sheer tenacity which was the Army's best weapon

Certainly the conditions that permitted Sheridan's earlier triumph were not to be repeated. But we cannot judge a campaign by the mistakes later made in copying its methods, and in the specific context of the problem presented by a mobile enemy on an extensive frontier, Sheridan's response was -- at least from a military point of view -- a sound one. As for the moral problems posed by this response, these were not unique, but were linked to the greater issues of westward expansion, the dispossession of the American Indian,

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and the nature of war itself. The Army's pragmatic rejection of "high-toned" methods in this campaign, as in others, mandated waging war against entire populations, risking the lives of noncombatants, taking noncombatants prisoners, and employing vengeful native allies -- all as part of a struggle which, despite the particular provocation of a summer's terrible raiding, had its roots in white settlement, and in attempts to "civilize" and hem in the earlier possessors of the land. Perhaps it is this larger aspect which permitted so many individuals of later generations -- even in a century which seemed to accept total war and noncombatant deaths on a truly mammoth scale -- to regard the campaign's victories with an abhorrence less common in Sheridan's own day, when Custer had written sadly of the free Indian and the demands of a ruthlessly advancing civilization : "When the soil which he claimed and hunted over for so long a time is demanded by this to him insatiable monster, there is no appeal; he must yield, or, like the car of Juggernaut, it will roll mercilessly over him, destroying as it advances. Destiny seems to have so willed it, and the world looks on and nods its approval."[26]

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[26]Custer, My Life, pp. 22-23.

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