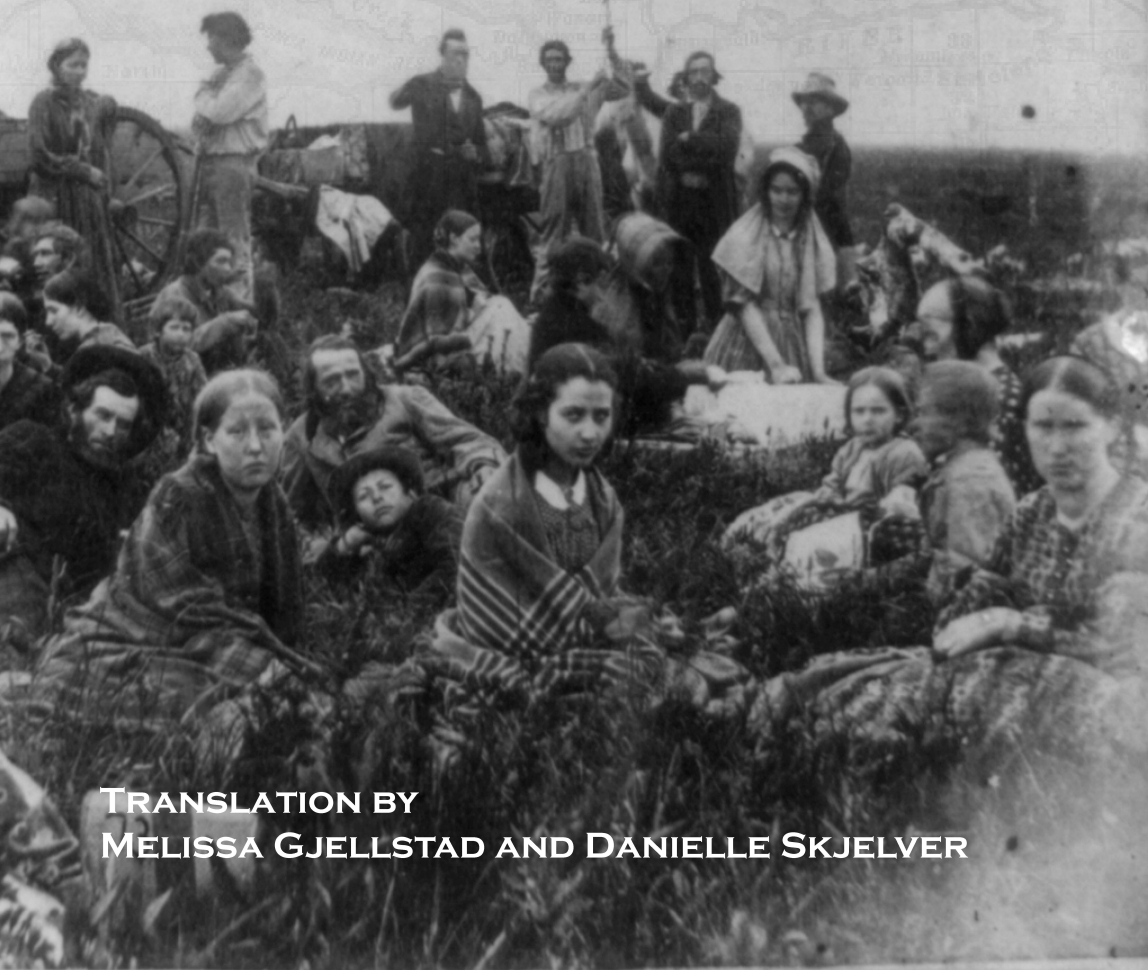


KARL JAKOB SKARSTEIN

**THE WAR WITH THE SIOUX  
NORWEGIANS AGAINST INDIANS  
1862-1863**



TRANSLATION BY  
MELISSA GJELLSTAD AND DANIELLE SKJELVER

The Dakota War (1862-1864) stands among the most overlooked conflicts in American History. Contemporary with the American Civil War, the Dakota War featured significant fighting, tactical brilliance, and strategic savvy set in the open plains of Minnesota and North Dakota.

Karl Jakob Skarstein's *The War with the Sioux* tells the story of the Norwegian immigrants, American soldiers, and Lakota and Dakota Indians as they fought to protect their families, communities, and way of life.

Translated from Norwegian and supplemented with new introductions by Melissa Gjellstad, Richard Rothaus, and Dakota Goodhouse, this work draws upon the diaries, letters, and newspapers of Norwegian immigrants for a new perspective on the Northern Plains during these tumultuous years. Skarstein's work makes an important contribution to the growing body of scholarship on this conflict and offers an accessible and surprisingly intimate view of the conflict through the eyes of Norwegian settlers in the region.

**Karl Jakob Skarstein** studied history at the University of Bergen, Norway. He has written several books and articles on the history of war. His first book, *Til våpen for det nye land* (2001) told the story of Norwegian immigrants who served as soldiers in the American Civil War. Since then he has written about the development of warfare and revolutions in military affairs from ancient times to the present in the book *Store slag* (2009), and is currently working on a book about Napoleon and the battle of Leipzig. He lives in Bergen, on the west coast of Norway.

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**THE WAR WITH THE SIOUX:  
NORWEGIANS AGAINST INDIANS  
1862-1863**

Translation of Karl Jakob Skarstein *Krigen mot siouxene: nordmenn mot indianerne 1862-1863*.

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The book is set in Janson Font by Linotype except for Dakota Goodhouse’s contribution which is set in Times New Roman.



# THE WAR WITH THE SIOUX

NORWEGIANS AGAINST INDIANS  
1862-1863

KARL JAKOB SKARSTEIN

TRANSLATED  
BY  
MELISSA GJELLSTAD  
AND  
DANIELLE MEAD SKJELVER

THE DIGITAL PRESS @  
THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA





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## TRANSLATORS' PREFACE

*Danielle Mead Skjelver*

Karl Jakob Skarstein's *Krigen mot siouxene: nordmenn mot indianere, 1862-1863* is a riveting read and has proven popular in Norway. An important work for its previously untapped Norwegian sources on the US-Dakota War, this book examines the conflict through a unique lens – that of a 21<sup>st</sup> century Norwegian analyzing the experience of 19<sup>th</sup> century Norwegian emigrants.

Bringing this book into English presented a number of welcome challenges for the translators. Sometimes the challenges were a matter of specificity, such as the word *avtale*, which means all of the following in English: agreement, arrangement, pact, and contract. There were also instances when singular and plural were not clear, such as with *løsnet skudd*, where someone fired (literally loosed) a shot or shots. Perhaps most fundamental to the tone of the translation is the word *opprør*, appearing throughout the text. This word can mean rebellion, revolt, uprising, insurrection, riot, uproar, or commotion. Clearly the Dakota War was not a riot, uproar, or commotion. However, the other terms all appeared valid to us in translation. Ultimately we chose to alternate, using “uprising” most often because terms like “insurrection,” “rebellion,” and “revolt” can carry assumptions such as, for example, that the Dakota saw themselves as subject to the United States government, something that may not have been a settled question at all. These challenges shaped our rendition of the book. They required us to puzzle out Skarstein's intent within the historical context.

Interestingly, the range of Skarstein's descriptors for firearms and their projectiles is fairly small. There are numerous Norwegian terms for specific hand held firearms and their projectiles. Yet Skarstein keeps his range primarily to *gevær* and *haggle*, meaning

“gun” and “shotgun”, while using *musket* and *rifle*, “musket” and “rifle” rarely. (“Rifle” at this time usually referred to a rifled musket. Since this was a period of technological transformation, the term “musket” still may have referred to smooth-bore barrels.) Sometimes the projectile mentioned could help us determine if a shotgun were the weapon. *Kule* was the term Skarstein used for projectiles. This word can mean either “ball” or “bullet.” From a musket, one would see a single ball; from a shotgun, one would see many balls. When the kind of weapon used was not clear, *kule* did not narrow down the possibilities. We generally translated this as “rounds”, “balls of shot”, or simply “ball” to be on the safe side, since modern bullets, conical in shape, would be associated with rifles. Many times it was wise for Skarstein not to differentiate because, as in Mikkel Olsen Slaabakken’s experience, it may well have been shotgun pellets, musket balls, and bullets all at once. At other times, differentiation would have been helpful to us and to the English reader. Certainly not all people in the period differentiated between the two. Skarstein’s conflation of handheld firearm projectiles into *kuler* was a matter of audience and flow. His goal was to eliminate details that had limited significance for the narrative, which was more human than technical.

Similarly problematic was the expression *streife omkring*, which means “wandered around” or “roamed around.” Skarstein used this term with the idea of living from the buffalo hunt. Because “wandered” and “roamed around” can imply a kind of aimlessness that does not accurately describe Indians living on the prairie, we chose to translate this as simply “roamed” without the preposition.\*

For one event, we chose to translate the word *slag* as “strike” rather than as “battle.” The word can mean, “strike,” “hit,” “blow,” or “battle.” In military matters, *slag* is generally translated as “battle,” and we followed this custom for all but one event. That one event is Whitestone Hill which we chose to translate as “The Strike at Whitestone Hill” rather than the Battle of Whitestone Hill. The event is arguably more a massacre than a battle.\*\*

Curiously for a book on this topic, Skarstein uses the term *pioner*,

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\* My thanks to Dave Flute for his insight here.

\*\* My thanks to Dakota Goodhouse for his suggestion of considering other definitions of *slag* for Whitestone Hill.



“pioneer,” only once, when referring to “rugged pioneer-types,” which is barske *pionertyper*. As a result, we chose to avoid it as well. While he certainly spins a good tale, going so far as to wrap his figures in drama and some stereotypes, he does not use this value laden term,\* opting instead for *innvandrere* and *nybygger* meaning “immigrant” “settler/colonist.”

Another set of challenges emerged in determining Skarstein’s intended literary effect. For example, in his consistent use of *bvitene* or *de hvite* and *indianerne*, “the whites” and “the Indians,” to describe the two sides, we explored whether it would be best to use modern, scholarly terms such as Euro-American and indigenous or Native. In the end, we decided that Skarstein’s choice of terms was useful for its stark, racist dichotomy. Thus, the reader sees the terms in their literal meaning as Skarstein wrote them. Skarstein’s use of the term *bvitene* or *de hvite* is also helpful to the reader in the discussion of what was going on in the United States at the time of the Dakota War. The American Civil War was raging, but because Skarstein’s audience is not American, he does not assume that the Civil War is central to his reader’s thinking or to Native Americans’ thinking. He refers to it as *de hvites borgerkrigen*, “the white’s civil war” as often as *borgerkrigen*, “the Civil War.” This paints the Civil War for the reader as a distant event just as it was for the Dakota participants in the US-Dakota War.

Our view that Skarstein is aiming to highlight the racial or ethnic tension in this conflict is supported by his analysis of a soldier who shot fleeing warriors. Skarstein notes, “The soldier who related this episode did not give any indication that he thought there was anything wrong with this brutal murder of fleeing enemies. Had anything similar happened in the Civil War, where the enemies were white soldiers like themselves, the soldiers would most certainly have attempted to take those fleeing as prisoners.” While there were instances of retreating Civil War soldiers shot by the opposing side, Skarstein’s statement gets to the core of his view. He also observes that, “the Indian uprising had presented an outlet

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\* My thanks to Cynthia Culver Prescott for her guidance with the term pioneer versus settler. See also Cynthia Culver Prescott, *Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier* (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2007), 188, note 3.

for a bitter ethnic conflict where none of the parties cared very much about showing either mercy or compassion.” Comments such as these indicate that Skarstein intentionally chose two starkly simplistic terms to highlight the tension.

Skarstein uses the term ethnicity rather than race, and his startling description of the U.S. reaction to approaching Native riders draws out other comparisons. He uses the term *fremmed rytterne*, which we translated as “foreign riders.” *Fremmed* could also mean “alien” or “strange” or “unfamiliar.” Given the author’s interest in the tension of ethnicity and the Other, we chose the first definition, which was “foreign.” While alien, strange, and unfamiliar all carry with them the idea of the Other, foreign also conveys the notion of nation or tribe. Further reinforcing the foreignness of the Dakota to the U.S. troops, Skarstein uses the word *horde*, meaning precisely what it appears to mean, “horde,” to describe mounted Native forces but never to describe the cavalry. There are in this text what appeared to us to be stereotyping of both sides, but being American scholars, we may be more sensitive to this than Europeans.

There were a few instances where Skarstein translated an original English quote into Norwegian in a way that might not have been optimal. For example, “knocked away from my mouth” became “knocked away from my hand” in the Norwegian text with Mrs. Krieger’s quote. This was likely an oversight. In another instance, Skarstein adds a non-existent quote “Suddenly he called, ‘Cramp!’” to the description of the drowning of John Marsh. The original source includes no cry from Marsh. In two of perhaps the most important instances, Skarstein softens the English, as for example, in his use of “they” instead of “the savages.” In another instance, an original English quote “It was hard to keep from smiling to see how they were used by these poor savage creatures; they looked more like a troop of monkeys than anything human” became “It was difficult not to smile at the sight” in Skarstein’s translation for the Norwegian audience. We know from communication with Skarstein that he did not intentionally soften the language but rather chose words for stylistic reasons. By no means does Skarstein soften every potentially inflammatory quote. He does this only twice, and I have noted it in the text. There seems to

be no connection between the two quotes, neither in terms of the gender of the speaker or the words themselves.

Occasionally Skarstein's choice of words allows English readers to imagine a moment in a new way. For example, in this book, bullets "whine" by the ears of participants in the conflict, rather than whiz or buzz or zip. The word *hvinte* can be translated as whine, squeal, squeak, screech, or whistle. To the American English ear, this is a curious but certainly accurate description that provides the English reader with a new audio tool to imagine a scene.

Skarstein's choice of phrase for recruiting also offers the English language reader an unexpected perspective. In Norwegian, there are two ways to state that one has joined the military: *verve seg* and *la seg verve*, "recruit/enlist oneself" and "allow oneself to be recruited/enlisted." These terms both indicate signing up for military service. They are often used interchangeably in Norway. However there is a subtle difference in meaning that cannot be boiled down to conscription versus volunteering, particularly in this book, where volunteering is the norm. The difference between the two terms is that *la seg verve* can indicate that the person is responding to pressure from any number of sources: internal, familial, national, religious, financial. This is a mildly nuanced shift in meaning, and Skarstein's use of the phrase *la seg verve* was a personal preference. The phrase does appear in situations where there is pressure to join, e.g. public pressures of nationalism and gender, as with the case of Ole Paulson, or internal and financial as with Mathias Fjelhaugen.\* Thus, while it is important not to make too much of this, we chose a literal translation of *la seg verve*, "allow oneself to be recruited."

The greatest challenge of working with this text was also its most delightful aspect – the variety of 19<sup>th</sup> century dialects. There were a number of instances where neither translator could find a definition for a 19<sup>th</sup> century Norwegian term. In such events as in others, native speakers were indispensable. This was the case with Ole Paulson's description of 19<sup>th</sup> century ethnic clothing on the

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\* Sjur Høgberg was particularly instrumental in explaining the difference between these two expressions and in the example of Mathias Fjelhaugen as illustrative of the difference.

ship as well as with the terms *Cand*\* and *ballingkast* which we ultimately had to leave in the Norwegian and provide explanation by way of an asterisk because there is no English equivalent.

Likewise where Skarstein translated the English term cut-hair into Norwegian, we had to rely on American Indian Studies scholars for bringing it back into English. The term refers to Indians who cut their hair and adopted Euro-American ways. Skarstein translated this into Norwegian as *kortklippet*, which is in English “short clipped.” Indian Studies scholars\*\* helped us get to the customary English term, “cut-hair.”

Unless otherwise noted, all quotes that were originally in English have been reproduced in the original English from the sources which Skarstein references. He chose a limited form of citation based partly on the publisher’s thought that citations might be off-putting to some readers. This meant that numerous quotes were not cited. Also, there were a few errors in citation, resulting in obstacles to finding the original English quotes. Some of the lack of citation or combination of several sources into a single citation intended to support several paragraphs or even pages may come from a different view of the purpose of citation. In this book, citation serves to establish credibility rather than serving as a finding aid.

An additional resource for the reader is the maps. All maps conform as closely as possible to Skarstein’s originals. Bill Caraher recreated these new maps, for which we heartily thank him.

*The War with the Sioux* holds value for an English audience for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it opens the door to the study of Scandinavian language primary sources on the Dakota War. These are important sources to expanding the web of exploration in the conflict itself, and into racial and ethnic relations in the U.S. in this period. This book also provides one European’s view of an American conflict.

It is intriguing as an American to watch Europeans follow their countries’ emigrants. A continued attachment to those who left the old country is apparent in films and books on emigrants who came

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\* Ottar Dahl provided great assistance here.

\*\* Dakota Goodhouse, Tamara St. John, and Dave Flute worked out the answer for us.

to America. There is something of identity in these interests. Articles on the Dakota War have appeared in Norwegian newspapers over the last century and a half, attesting to the need to remember those who have left. Historical memory and identity are linked, and thus this book is of as much value for its contribution to Norwegian historical memory and cultural identity as it is for the sources it uncovers. This raises important questions for further research, such as how did representations to and by 19<sup>th</sup> century Europeans vary with regard to immigrant experience in the new U.S.? In what ways and why has this changed in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries?

Skarstein's work in English will surely add much to the cultural identities of Americans who claim Norwegian ancestry. Because American History is ideally the history of everyone in America, this work also has the power to shape American cultural identity through a European view of US-Native relations and of the American immigrant experience.

The desire to translate this book first struck me in 2007. *The War with the Sioux* merits translation on scholarly and public interest grounds alone. However, it was also a joy to translate. An engaging text, this book has afforded me the chance to work with Melissa Gjellstad, to learn from her mastery of the translation process, as well as to build and strengthen ties with Norwegian kin. Countless hours chewing on words with colleagues and collaborators, working with language in such a way that transcends the words themselves, and the thrill of making accessible what was inaccessible behind the barrier of language – these were the joys of this project.

Rugby, North Dakota  
February, 2015



## HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

*Richard Rothaus*

The northern plains were at war from 1862 to 1864. A conflict sparked in the small communities of the Minnesota River valley, quickly escalated and spread to its culmination at the Battle of Killdeer Mountain, the largest military encounter between Native American and U.S. forces in the history of the nation. 150 years after that battle, this translation of Karl Skarstein's *Krigen mot Siouxene: Nordmenn mot Indianere 1862-63*, gives English language readers a much needed of those events. Skarstein's well-considered overview and carefully traced stories of Scandinavian families and communities combine to create a powerful historic narrative. Both professional historians and interested readers will join in thanking Gjellstad and Skjelver for providing this translation.

The size and significance of the 1862 to 1864 U.S. - Dakota War has long been overshadowed by the nearly simultaneous experiences of the U.S. Civil War. In the summer of 1862, many of the Dakota people had been concentrated into an impossibly small strip of land along the south side of the Minnesota River. With most of the hunting lands lost, social structures in chaos, treaty obligations ignored, hunger and suffering widespread, and predatory traders and Indian agents amplifying every ill, few were surprised when the violence began. In these early days of the conflict, the Dakota warriors who chose to go to war dominated the battlefields, deciding when and where to fight.

The attack of four young warriors upon white settlers in Acton on 17 August 1862 is our proxy for the cause of the war, similar to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand as the cause of World War I. The killing did, however, precipitate a war council

among Little Crow's people that organized an attack on the Lower Sioux Agency the following day. Once the Lower Sioux Agency had been attacked, there was no turning back. At first, some from the Mdewakanton and Wahpekute bands took the lead in spreading the warfare, while some from the Sisseton and Wahpeton bands struggled to find a neutral position. The creation of the reservations and forced resettlement of many Dakota bands, combined with a willingness of the U.S. Government to fail to differentiate between the Dakota bands set the stage, however, for a conflict that soon would involve not only the Dakota but all the Sioux.

As the attacks spread, they focused first on local communities, farms, and homes, and the immigrant families fled, fought and raised the militias to respond. While we tend to simplify the events into the 'Army' versus the 'Sioux,' the reality was more complex. In the early days, local attacks on immigrant families and their responses are the whole story. Even as the militias and then the Union Army join in, the local attacks continued. While the eyes of the historians are quickly drawn to the larger troop movements, the fighting between settlers, travelers and Dakota continued. Even within the organized troops, the soldiers, many of whom were recent immigrants, clustered in ethnic groups. Skarstein's focus on Scandinavians is not just a point of interest; it is an appropriate and much needed framework to help us understand these events.

For all the combatants, the predicaments and actions of small communities and clusters of friends, neighbors and fellow countrymen dominate the fighting of 1862. On 18 August 1862, Dakota warriors defeated Minnesota militia and volunteer forces at the Battle of Redwood Ferry. Major Dakota attacks were made against Fort Ridgely on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of August, forcing the 5<sup>th</sup> Minnesota Infantry into a posture of defense and preventing them from coming to the aid of the local communities. Some towns, like New Ulm, organized, and that German community withstood, albeit barely, heavy attacks on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of August. Other communities, like Milford and Sacred Heart, could not mount defenses and thus suffered great casualties. The violence quickly spread, and even Fort Abercrombie, deep in the wilderness of Dakota Territory, found itself under siege. A militia force sent out to assist and



bury the dead in Minnesota was handed defeat by Dakota at the Battle of Birch Coulee on 2 September 1862.

The Dakota successes were reversed only after President Abraham Lincoln formed the Department of the Northwest on 6 September 1862, and better armed troops, some with experience, were sent in. Forces under the leadership of Col. Henry Hasting Sibley delivered a decisive defeat to the Dakota at the Battle of Wood Lake on 23 September 1862. Within three days, many of the Dakota had surrendered, prisoners had been released, and the first campaign season came to an end. In November a series of military tribunals were held, and 303 Dakota were condemned to death. After a series of commutations by Pres. Lincoln, that number was reduced to 38, who were publically hanged in Mankato, MN on 26 December 1862 in the largest mass execution in U.S. history.

The Battle of Wood Lake and the executions did not, however, end the conflict. Little Crow and many supporters fled into Dakota Territory and Canada to seek support and supplies to continue the war. The Euroamerican settlers and citizens drew upon the Mankato execution to keep their anger and desire for revenge strong. The Dakota were expelled from Minnesota, and placed in internment camps and reservations in Dakota Territory, Iowa and Nebraska, where likely more than ¼ of them perished from the harsh conditions in the subsequent few years. The immigrant communities were faced with difficult choices, as the threat of continued violence was real, and the government's ability or willingness to protect the settlers uncertain. Much of the Minnesota River Valley was emptied. Despite the victory at Wood Lake, many immigrant families decide the risk was simply too great to remain. Some men volunteered to serve in the military, knowing that the coming campaigns against the Sioux would decide whether they could stay on their farms.

The summer of 1863 saw a dramatic and deliberate expansion of the war. Ostensibly seeking out the remaining Dakota responsible for the attacks in Minnesota, Col. Sibley and General Alfred Sully took armies into the Dakota Territory. This action and the subsequent battles ensured that the war would now involve not only all the Dakota, but also the Yankton, Yanktonai and Lakota. After over a month in the field, Sibley's forces fought the Sioux in

four encounters. The Sioux, travelling with their women and children and gathering meat for the winter, made every effort to limit engagement, while Sibley attempted to force pitched battles and, more importantly, destroy the Sioux food supplies.

At Big Mound (24 July), Sibley was successful in forcing the Sioux to abandon winter supplies that he then burned. At Dead Buffalo Lake (26 July), the Sioux attempted unsuccessfully to raid Sibley's cattle and mules. At Stony Lake (28 July), the forces grappled, but neither could gain an upper hand and the fighting quickly faded. The 1863 campaign ended with the 3 September Battle of Whitestone Hill, where General Alfred Sully's forces encountered an encampment of mostly families previously uninvolved in the war. Sully's attack turned into a massacre of women and children, and included the burning of winter food stores.

The culminating battle of the war came in 1864. Gen. Sully once again pursued the Sioux in the Dakota Territory. On 28 June 1864 more than 4000 of Sully's soldiers engaged a large force of Lakota, Yankton, Yanktonai and Dakota in what was the largest military encounter between Euroamericans and Native Americans ever. Killdeer Mountain was a notable battle for many reasons. Perhaps, first and foremost, Sully attacked, and knew he was attacking, groups who had almost nothing to do with the events of Minnesota in 1863. Killdeer was a long-standing gathering place, frequently used by the Hunkpapa, Sihasapa, Miniconjou and Sans Arc bands of Lakota. The 1864 expedition was a definitive act of hostility and less than subtle foreshadowing of the war of extermination that would be brought upon all the peoples of the northern plains. Sully was not, however, the only leader with a plan, and the Lakota leaders carefully lured Sully to a fight at the location of their choosing. After resorting to shelling noncombatants, Sully was able to scatter the Lakota forces and burn supplies, but his men paid dearly for this "victory" with heavy casualties as they travelled through the Badlands. The stage for further warfare was set, and leaders at Killdeer Mountain, like Sitting Bull, began to prepare for a difficult future.

And this leads us to back to Skarstein, whose work, now available in translation, is I think the best history of the U.S. Dakota War available. While the reader will find that the interpretation of

events in this introduction does not necessarily match his, that is immaterial. The importance of Skarstein's work is that he provides a detailed, accurate and focused narrative that flows the experiences of the participants into a larger whole. Despite the importance of the events, there is no equivalent work in English. The existing histories can actually be clustered into three groups: hyperbolic 19<sup>th</sup>-century histories (and their imitations), traditional heavily-detailed chronological histories, and balancing works that revise the standard narratives.

The hyperbolic 19<sup>th</sup>-century histories would certainly be the most entertaining of the lot, were not the subject matter so horrible and the authors focus unvaryingly on atrocities, real, perceived or fabricated. No one had an eye for sheer brutality like that of Harriet E. Bishop McConkey (1863), whose *Dakota War Whoop* sets the standard for the enthusiastic propagation of tales of scalping, decapitation and mutilation. McConkey, the first teacher at the first mission school house in Minnesota, was rather horrified by the living conditions of her Dakota and Ojibwe pupils, and she saw civilization as salvation. While not a participant in any of the events, McConkey knew participants, and the fear of a frontier woman, not fully rational, but fully understandable, comes through strongly in her work. McConkey, like her two rival authors of the period, sought out and collected eyewitness accounts, and thus her work cannot be ignored, for within the Victorian verbosity are unique primary sources.

Isaac V.D. Heard (1864) published his *History of the Sioux War and Massacres of 1862 and 1863* less than a year after returning from his service with the Sibley expedition. Unlike McConkey, Heard had personal experience in the conflict, and he served as the official recorder of the 1862 tribunals of the Sioux prisoners. Heard's narrative was not, however, a personal narrative, but an attempt at a comprehensive history of the events. Heard provides a greater context of the conflict than McConkey, including an acknowledgment of the role of harsh mistreatment of the Dakota in causing the outbreak of violence. While Heard gives the Dakota a voice

in his work, it is full of racism, justification, and a focus on lurid details.

The third historical work published immediately was Charles S. Bryant and Abel B. Murch's (1864) *A History of the Great Massacre by the Sioux Indians, in Minnesota, Including the Personal Narratives of Many who Escaped*. Bryant learned much while representing the damage claims of settlers before the Board of Commissioners. Their work is perhaps the most detailed of the 19<sup>th</sup> century accounts, and contains numerous accounts of settlers involved in the events of 1862 and 1863, presented in their own words. While racism and a focus on atrocities appear as strong themes, the work of Bryant and Murch is far less heavy-handed and lurid than that of McConkey and Heard.

None of these 19<sup>th</sup> century histories of the war come close, however, to providing solid history or even an acceptable narrative for readers today. This is not unexpected, as the goal of all these works was not merely to record events, or even to make money, but to inspire continued military intervention on the frontier. With the Civil War still waging, the commitment of the necessary troops was far from a given. All three of these books had a goal and a vested interest in seeing the frontier secured not only for the immediate safety, but also to insure the financial future of the region.

Lumped in with these 19<sup>th</sup>-century histories can be, I suppose, the popular histories, as well as historical fiction, more recently published. These are not worth much attention, but simply can be noted by their uncritical use of McConkey, Heard, and Bryant and Murch, often filtered through the elder brother of these works, C.M. Oehler's (1959) *The Great Sioux Uprising*. These books tend to string together the same sensational stories from the three 19<sup>th</sup> century sources into a chronological chain, and the desire to produce them peaked, let us hope, with the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war.

The second group of works, the traditional chronological histories, are not all that many in number. For many years, K. Carley's (2002) *The Dakota War of 1862: Minnesota's Other Civil War*, first published in 1961, remained the standard, and it has been reissued periodically with edits to keep it non-controversial. Carley's work

pigeonholes the Minnesota events, however, and is not much use as a full overview.

R. Jones' (1960) *The Civil War in the Northwest* and M. Clodfelter's (2006) *The Dakota War: The United States Army Versus the Sioux, 1862-1865* are works of military history. With their focuses on politics, strategy, leaders and troop movements, they are of greatest interest to the military historian or aficionado. Neither serve, however, as a history of the war that meets the needs of the general reader.

The third group of works, the balancing works, provide the best scholarship. G. Anderson's (1988) *Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862*, gathers together Dakota accounts of the events, and arranges them in chronological order, creating an important source book. D. Chaky's (2012) *Terrible Justice: Sioux Chiefs and U.S. Soldiers on the Upper Missouri, 1854-1868* is a deeply researched and detailed work that investigates the many Sioux bands involved, and the complexity of their changing roles and experiences. P. Beck's (2013) *Columns of Vengeance: Soldiers, Sioux and the Punitive Expeditions, 1863-1864* is an addition to the military history of the understudied 1863 and 1864 campaign seasons, but its scope is much broader than just military details. Beck's work is also notable for placing the actions and the Sioux into a more detailed and realistic context.

Perhaps not unexpectedly, foreign language sources for the events of the U.S.-Dakota War have been scarcely touched upon. This is a shame, as much of the fighting was between peoples who did not speak English as their first language. Other than Skarstein's work, I am aware of only four others that have used and made these non-English sources accessible. Don Tolzmann has presented three books of translated sources, all of which focus on New Ulm: Jacob Nix's (1994) *The Sioux Uprising in Minnesota, 1862*, Rudolph Leonhart's (2005) *Memories of New Ulm*; and *German Pioneer Accounts of the Great Sioux Uprising of 1862* (Tolzmann, 2002). As Tolzmann notes, there are numerous other German language sources, including newspaper accounts that have not been used. The other work of translation is Clifford Canku's (2013) *The Dakota Prisoner of War Letters: Dakota Kaskapu Okicize Wowapi*, which presents

letters from Dakota prisoners being held at Crow Creek after the outbreak of violence in Minnesota.

Skarstein thus performs a great service by bringing forward numerous new sources of events during the war, and he breaks free of the tyranny of the 19<sup>th</sup> century trio whose stories dominate accounts of the war. From Skarstein we learn of Ole Paulson, who came to Minnesota, witnessed firsthand the flight of his neighbors, desperately wanted to stay with his family and become a pastor, upon the insistence of his fellow Scandinavians joined the 9<sup>th</sup> Minnesota Infantry Regiment as an officer, witnessed the hanging in Mankato, marched with Sibley into Dakota Territory, guarded the captured Wowinape, son of Little Crow, and returned to become a Pastor and help found Augsburg College. Paulson's short account of the Sibley expedition is occasionally cited, but Skarstein elevates him from witness-to-be-quoted to an individual worthy of our attention, and an example of the personal struggles the war created. Similarly, only in Skarstein do we learn of the Rykkje and Foot family, fighting off attacks from the Rykkje cabin.

But Skarstein's strength is not that he brings us new tales previously unavailable in English. These are, of course, important, but I think more important is that Skarstein, by doing the hard work of research, offers an alternative to the Anglocentric interpretive framework for the U.S.-Dakota War. There is little doubt that the State and Federal officials new that the cluster of tightly crowded Dakota peoples on treaty land surrounded by energetic settlers from German and Scandinavian countries was a tinderbox. And after that happened, it has been a useful Anglocentric approach to look primarily at the larger picture, and the official military response. This approach has largely been played out, and it denies the reality of the chaos of 1862. The German settlers of New Ulm clustered for defense; the Sisseton Bands pulled back and attempted to stay neutral, and Skarstein shows us how Scandinavian settlers joined with their neighbors to fight or flee, occasionally even making a little time for rivalry between Swedes and Norwegians.

Skarstein writes about the U.S. – Dakota War, but he approaches it in part through the social and cultural realities and practices of the Scandinavian peoples involved. His work is not an encyclopedic overview. It is not exhaustive in its use of every possible source. But

rather, it focuses on one group of people and one group of sources to provide an interesting and coherent framework to understand some rather chaotic and incoherent events. This approach reflects the experience of the participants, whose knowledge, experience, and survival depended almost entirely on their family, friends and relatives. While we may wish to think of the war in larger terms, the on-the-ground reality remained, all the way through 1864, the actions of small groups, sometimes working in concert, sometimes against one another.

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## BECOMING AMERICAN: A BRIEF HISTORIOGRAPHY OF NORWEGIAN AND NATIVE INTERRELATIONS

*Melissa Gjellstad*

There are many accounts detailing the immigrant story of the Norwegians who settled in the United States, particularly those who migrated to the Midwestern states of Minnesota and North Dakota. There are also many accounts detailing the colonization story of the Native Americans who were dispossessed of their land by the United States, particularly the Dakota nations who lived on the land that lay between the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers just south of the Canadian border. There are few accounts that interweave these two complex narratives together, and furthermore entwine them with accounts of the U.S. military campaigns and the American government, busy fighting the Civil War in the east with little time to focus on Indian Wars on the western prairie frontier. Norwegian scholar Karl Jakob Skarstein has woven together these narrative threads in this volume, *The War with the Sioux: Norwegians against the Indians 1862-1863*.

Both peoples were ethnic minorities with strong ties to the land. The Dakota had been severed from their beloved homelands through a series of treaties while the Norwegians were attempting to acclimatize to a foreign landscape they were desperate to call home. Both peoples needed to negotiate their identity and ethnicity with a monolingual population of Anglo-Americans who viewed them as inferior to the majority. Skarstein's book examines the U.S.-Dakota War as a catalyst for the triangulation of power struggles between non-Anglo American settlers, indigenous peoples, and the American government and military. It is an overdue recognition of the role of Norwegian immigrants in a tumultuous

period for the Midwest. In the words of Swedish scholar Gunlög Fur,

The Dakota conflict itself clearly had no winners. Newly arrived homesteaders were caught in a situation not of their own making, but for which they had become vehicles through their very presence, and cultural differences exacerbated the conflict. Desperate Dakotas faced destruction in every direction, and found no allies among the new arrivals. The aftermath spelled an even greater distance between Indians and immigrants and ensured that Swedes and Norwegians supported policies to have all Dakotas removed from the state (Fur 2014, 65).

Fur investigates the interactions between Swedish immigrants and Native Americans, contributing to broader picture of Nordic peoples' encounters with indigenous populations in North America, complementing the work of other scholars who have focused on the Norwegian immigrants' exchanges.

Betty Ann Bergland and Karen V. Hansen rise to the fore as two of the leading voices on this scholarship; both have integrated gender in their critical views of the interrelations between immigrant women and indigenous people. Bergland asserts "historians of Norwegian migration render Indians and women essentially invisible" and traces early scholars' treatment of the Indians as dangerous threats (1999). In another work, Bergland gathers and interprets a comprehensive catalogue of key sources that provide a glimpse of the interethnic relationships and encounters between Norwegian immigrants and Native Americans, including texts by historians of the Norwegian migration as well as journalists, authors of travel literature, and authors such as O.E. Rølvaag, who created fictional accounts of the immigrant experience.<sup>1</sup> Discussing

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<sup>1</sup> Nobel laureate Knut Hamsun wrote in the 1880s of his encounters with Native Americans in Wisconsin. Although he returned home to Norway after some years in the U.S., he is noteworthy to mention here because of the work scholar Monika Žagar has done on his views on Indians. Žagar reads Hamsun's letters and essays from his time in the Mid-

the proliferation of accounts of the U.S.-Dakota War in general, Bergland underscores the impact of the uprising and its aftermath. “Norwegian-American newspapers retold these events on each anniversary of their occurrence, and letters from America continued to detail the ‘tale of terrors of ’62,’ as Rølvaag referred to them” (Bergland 2000, 345).

Karen V. Hansen focuses on the land taking in the 1900s at the Spirit Lake Nation in North Dakota, particularly the story of Norwegian women who homesteaded on an Indian Reservation a generation after the uprising.

Here we confront the human face of expropriation: the land takers and the dispossessed. Spirit Lake attracted Dakotas and Scandinavians from Minnesota who had engaged in armed conflict with one another. Scandinavians anticipated struggles with Native Americans – although for the most part they had not fought in the 1862 war, they had read about it in Norwegian newspapers and in the Scandinavian American foreign-language press. [...] Four decades following the U.S.-Dakota War, this stigmatized space was the site where dispossession and immigration faced off (Hansen 2014, 3).

Hansen’s compelling history weaves perspectives from many voices among the neighbors at Spirit Lake. “The history Scandinavians tell about themselves does not include the social cost of land taking on the reservation. Norwegians like my great-grandmother did not come to be settler colonialists or to usurp the place of others. They deeply resented having been colonized by Danes

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west as an element of his colonial ambivalence and rhetorical conquest. This is one component of her larger project to probe Hamsun’s lifelong views on gender and race, including his views on Norway’s indigenous Sámi people, and as she clarifies the relationship between Hamsun’s art and his politics. A Norwegian court convicted Hamsun in 1947 for his membership in the Nasjonal Samling party, and therefore as punishment for his collaboration and support of the Nazi occupation.

and Swedes and could not conceive of themselves as occupying an oppressive position in a foreign country” (Hansen 2014, 235). The research done by these scholars is relatively new, as disciplinary boundaries have begun to be dismantled around the turn of the millennium.

Some Norwegians’ accounts of the U.S.-Dakota War are available in English. Most prominent are narratives of Ole Paulson and Guri Endresen Rosseland, published in Helmer Blegen’s translation of *Norwegians in America – The Last Migration: Bits of Saga from Pioneer Life* by Hjalmar Rued Holand. The full volume was first published in 1908, but the translation was made from the condensed second edition that Holand reissued in 1938. Holand later became invested in the controversy surrounding the legitimacy of the Kensington Runestone, another intriguing event with Scandinavian-Americans in Minnesota’s history. Holand’s perspective varies widely in the text, vacillating from objective to subjective, as in this summary of the fates of the pioneers forced to leave Kandiyohi County in the wake of the uprising.

Out on the prairie their grainstacks stood unthreshed, if they had not already been burned. Their beloved pioneer homes were destroyed, and their herds of cattle, their pigs and their chickens were spread all over the silent wilderness, where now and then could be seen a band of victory-intoxicated Indians, galloping over the blood-drenched plains (Holand 1978, 164).

This is the most hyperbolic of the passages; in general, Holand argues that the Indians’ revenge for their obvious mistreatment was justified. However, it was not focused exclusively on the guilty parties, including the “thieving traders, the crooked agents and the bungling bureaucrats” but came rather at the expense of the “innocent pioneers [and] honest, hard-working and peaceful settlers” there to make a new life (Holand 1978, 171).

Historian Orm Øverland reads the archived letters of other Norwegian immigrants for traces of the ethical ambiguities in their first-person impressions of Native Americans. In selecting a variety

of perspectives from immigrants in Wisconsin, Minnesota, New Mexico, and North Dakota, Øverland chronicles a broad spectrum of opinions in narratives of what he calls immigrant homemaking.

The way of exclusion has been the more common; Guri Rosseland's sense of having a home, in Minnesota as in Heaven, depended on the exclusion of the Indians. [...] Most Norwegian immigrants seem to have been quick to adopt the prejudices European Americans had developed since their first arrival in the early seventeenth century. This helped make them like other white Americans and thus their denial of the humanity of the people they had displaced had a homemaking function. That is, it helped the Norwegian immigrants to be accepted as white Americans (Øverland 2006, 120).

Øverland attempts to balance the scale to illuminate not only the exclusion featured here, but also ways of inclusion as well. In these accounts, letter writers embraced the humanity of the Native Americans they encountered in their new life. His contrasting example was from Norwegian immigrant Iver Lee, who arrived in North Dakota in 1882. He wrote to his family back home in 1891 of a visit to a Native American family's house, drawing parallels to the fireplace's position as nucleus of their home, just as in his family home back in Norway. Øverland concludes, "[Lee] would not be carried away by rumors nor would he condemn the actions of desperate people, explaining that it was 'quite reasonable that they would rather fight for survival than die of starvation'" (Øverland 2006, 120).

Scandinavian immigrant voices are not the only ones narrating encounters with Indians. Through the lens of literary criticism, Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola reads captivity narratives told from perspectives of other European Americans and Native Americans in the years following the U.S.-Dakota War. The overtones to Skarstein's work reside in the attention she gives in the volume to German immigrants' narratives, specifically those of Mary Schwandt Schmidt and Jacob Nix. These historical, first-person

accounts give voice to another underrepresented ethnic group that participated in the conflict but has often been drowned out by more mainstream interpretations. As Øverland also argues, Derounian-Stodola reads these immigrants' narratives as an opportunity for them to construct their whiteness as they negotiated a place in their new communities as patriotic American citizens. "Certainly both the Anglo white and the Dakota populations in Minnesota tended to see the German immigrants, for example, as less empowered – and thus less white, in a way – than the settlers of English descent" (Derounian-Stodola 2009, 11-12).

In his *History of the Sioux War* from 1863, historian Isaac Heard characterized the townspeople of New Ulm, a German settlement, as scared animals waiting to be rescued by the confident American military. Nix, a German immigrant with a military background who led the defense of New Ulm during the first attack, refutes that sentiment in his account of the battles that were published in German twenty-five years later. The volume was not translated to English until 1994; in the introduction, editor and co-translator Don Heinrich Tolzmann argues that a state's history is fragmented by overlooking primary and secondary source materials published in immigrant languages. "In the case of Minnesota, where the German-American element is the single largest ethnic element, German-American sources are not only significant and important, they are absolutely essential to Minnesota history" (Nix 1994, xii). The same logic necessarily extends to Scandinavian voices in this watershed moment. In a similar vein, Fur argues that to separate "concurrent Indian and immigrant histories in the American Midwest [...] is detrimental to an understanding of the processes of migration, ethnicity, and colonialism" (Fur 2014, 55).

The value of Skarstein's book is that it presents a cohesive summary for his Norwegian audience of the events of the U.S.-Dakota War and the extended campaigns into Dakota Territory in the months that followed. He distills the complex and traumatic happenings into a well-ordered arc that foregrounds individual voices against the backdrop of the larger national narrative. This is not unfamiliar territory for Skarstein; in 2001, he published a book on Norwegian immigrants' experiences as soldiers in the American Civil War. As such, his focus on the common soldiers' experiences

of the U.S.-Dakota War is not surprising. Ole Paulson's story illustrates the depths of the immigrant experience, blending the tensions of his entrepreneurial spirit, opportunity, religion, and patriotism with a sense of loyalty and duty. Skarstein skillfully interweaves Norwegian and Native stories, contextualizing the conflict for all parties and emphasizing the tensions people faced during the extended campaign. The voices of Paulson and others add to the polyphonic discussions in the United States about war, memory, ethnicity, identity, and belonging.

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## THE APPLE CREEK FIGHT AND KILLDEER MOUNTAIN CONFLICT REMEMBERED: Dakota Conflict In Dakota Territory\*

*Dakota Goodhouse*

KILLDEER, N.D. - “Four Horns was shot in the Killdeer Battle between Sioux and General Sully’s troops...some time after the fight, his daughter cut out the lead bullet,” One Bull said to Colonel Alfred Welch on a hot July day in 1934 at Little Eagle, S.D. “The report [that] the soldiers killed hundreds of Indian dogs is untrue,” said One Bull, “because Indian dogs, half wild creatures, would follow the Indians or run away long before soldiers would come up within range.”<sup>1</sup>

The Killdeer Mountain conflict occurred on July 28, 1864. Sully was under orders to punish the Sioux in another campaign following the September, 1863 massacre of Dakǰóta and Lakǰóta peoples at Pa ÍpuzA Napé Wakpána (Dry Bone Hill Creek), also known as Whites-tone Hill.<sup>2</sup>

The Lakǰóta and Dakǰóta knew Killdeer Mountain as Taǰćá Wakútepi (Where They Hunt/Kill Deer), Killdeer. The hunting there was good and dependable, and the people came there regularly, not just to hunt but to pray as well. The plateau rises above the prairie steppe allowing for a fantastic view of the landscape, and open sky for those who came to pray.

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\* This article appeared on IndianCountryToday.com on July 16th, 2014: <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2014/07/16/native-history-general-sullys-bloody-1864-campaign-155864>

<sup>1</sup> “One Bull Interview,” Welch, Col. Alfred, Welch Dakota Papers.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Corbin Shoots The Enemy (Húnkpathi, Ihánkthūwajna; Crow Creek Indian Reservation), in discussion with the author, September 2013.

Mathó Wathákpe (Charging Bear; John Grass), led the Sihásapa (Black Sole Moccasin; Blackfeet Lakǰóta) on the defensive at Killdeer. The Sihásapa had nothing to do with the 1862 Minnesota Dakota Conflict. “In this surprise attack the Indians lost everything... soldiers destroyed tons of food, etc.,” Mathó Wathákpe told Welch, and added that great suffering followed the fight and hatred against the whites grew.<sup>3</sup>

The Lakǰóta and Dakǰóta saw General Sully’s approach from miles away, his march put a great cloud of dust into the sky. Sully formed his command into a large one-mile square, and under his command was a detachment of Winnebago Indian Scouts, traditional enemies of the Oǰhéthi Šakówiŋ (Seven Council Fires; Great Sioux Nation). A war party of thirty warriors had tussled with the Winnebago two days before Sully’s arrival.

Historian Robert Larson describes July 28, 1864, nearly perfectly, “...Sully’s five mile march to reach the large Sioux village was a tense and uncomfortable one. Even though it was morning, the day would be hot and dry; the tense summer heat had already thinned the grass and muddled the water holes. On every hill along the valley at the south end of the village were clusters of mounted warriors.”<sup>4</sup>

The Dakǰóta under Įŋkpaduta (Scarlet Point) had been engaged with soldiers since the Minnesota Dakota Conflict of 1862. They had fled west towards Spirit Lake when General Sibley and his command caught up to them at Big Mound. The Huŋkphápha Lakǰóta under Phizí (Gall) had crossed the Mníšoše (Missouri River) to the east in search of game; the heat and drought had driven game from their traditional hunting grounds. Sibley’s arrival and pursuit of the Dakǰóta and Lakǰóta towards the Mníšoše marked the first U.S. military contact against the Huŋkphápha.

Taǰhánǰhi Lúta (Red Tomahawk), infamously known for his part in Sitting Bull’s death years later, recalled the Sibley Campaign, “There was a shallow lake south of the hills and about where Dawson now stands. That was fine buffalo country. The buffalo would get into this lake and mire down so they could not get out. We went there that

<sup>3</sup> “John Grass Interview,” Welch, Col. Alfred, Welch Dakota Papers.

<sup>4</sup> Larson, R., *Gall: Lakota War Chief* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 45.

time to drive them into the lake and get meat and hides. While we were there the Santees came along.”

Many of the Iháŋkthūwəŋna, who were already dwelling in their traditional homelands, advanced west at General Sibley’s approach and “went directly to the Missouri River opposite the Standing Rock and occupied the country between Beaver Creek [Čhápa Wakpána; Emmons County] and Blue Blanket Creek [Šíná Thó Wakpána; Walworth County].”<sup>5</sup>

Tačháhŋpi Lúta referred to the Isáŋyathi (Santee) as “hostile,” but that the Huŋkphápŋa camped with them and joined together in the hunt. He didn’t detail how the fight began at Big Mound, only that Sibley pursued them to the Mníšoše. The warriors held the attention of the soldiers, which allowed the Lakhóta two days to cross the river. The Isáŋyathi under Íŋkpaduta and Wakhéye Ská (White Lodge) broke off upon their approach to Tháspánla Wakpála (Apple Creek) and turned north.

The Isáŋyathi moved their camps in an arc, first northerly, then back east and south, and kept a respectable distance between them and Sibley’s retreat.<sup>6</sup> Šákpe (The Six) and his Bdewákhaŋthuŋwaŋ Dakhóta broke from the main body of Isáŋyathi and crossed the Mníšoše with Hé Nūŋpa WaníčA (No Two Horns) and his band of Huŋkphápŋa. Then they journeyed to Pa ÍpuzA Napé Wakpána to make camp and hunt with the Iháŋkthūwəŋna the following month. Gen. Sully found the camp that and slaughtered as many as 200 and took over 150 captives, mostly women and children in both cases.

After the Dakhóta split from the Lakhóta, “we went to cross the river. We were not afraid,” explained Tačháhŋpi Lúta, “We did not lose any of our people when we crossed.”<sup>7</sup> He admitted to being a part of the party who waited the night through and then attacked and killed two soldiers.

The late Delma Helman, a Huŋkphápŋa elder from Standing Rock, recalled the story of the Mníšoše crossing, “The soldiers chased us

<sup>5</sup> Waggoner, J., *Witness: A Huŋkphápŋa Historian’s Strong-Heart Song of The Lakotas* (University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 41.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. pp. 599. Šíná Dúta Wiŋ (Red Blanket Woman) account places Šákpe and his band of Bdewákhaŋthuŋwaŋ at the Apple Creek conflict, and this fight.

<sup>7</sup> “Red Tomahawk Interview,” Welch, Col. Alfred, Welch Dakota Papers.

into the river. We cut reeds to breathe underwater and held onto stones to keep submerged until nightfall.” After sunset, they emerged from the river safely onto Burnt Boat Island (later called Sibley Island) and crossed the Mníšoše.<sup>8</sup>

Mike McDonald, a Dakhóta elder from the Spirit Lake Oyáte, shared the oral tradition of the Wanéta Thiyóšpaye (The Charger’s Band) when they reached the Mníšoše, “The Wanéta band moved north and easterly in wide arc and settled near present-day Rugby, N.D. at Pleasant Lake. There they stayed until they were invited unto the Spirit Lake Indian Reservation.” The Dakhóta call this lake Wičib-deza Mní, Pleasant Lake.<sup>9</sup>

Three days after Gen. Sibley’s departure from Thaspáŋla Wakpála, Šákpe (The Six) and his band of Isányathi came back across the Mníšoše, accompanied by Hé Nún̄pa WaničA and his band of Huŋkpháp̄ha,<sup>10</sup> and made camp at Čhán̄gu Wakpála (Burnt Wood Creek). Six days later, a mackinaw descended the Mníšoše with miners from Fort Benton and landed on a sand bar. A Dakhóta wičháŋčala (an elder Dakota man) they called Ištá Sapá<sup>11</sup> (Black Eyes; father of Hé Nún̄pa WaničA) tried to warn the miners away, they shot him. The Dakhóta retaliated and killed all the miners, and cast their gold dust into the river, thinking perhaps it was gun powder which had gone bad.<sup>12</sup>

The Sibley campaign was the first military campaign against the Huŋkpháp̄ha, Sully’s assault at Killdeer was the second. Sitting Bull’s own pictographic record testifies to his own portrayal, not as a warrior but as a medicine man, counting coup and stealing a mule from Sibley’s wagon train in July, 1863.<sup>13</sup> Sitting Bull’s pictograph testifies

<sup>8</sup> Mrs. Delma Helman (Huŋkpap̄ha, Thithuŋwan; Standing Rock Indian Reservation), in discussion with the author, Mobridge, S.D., July 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Mr. Mike McDonald (Dakhóta; Spirit Lake Oyate), in discussion with the author, Fort Yates, N.D., Nov. 2014.

<sup>10</sup> “No Two Horns [Hé Nún̄pa WaničA ] Interview,” Welch, Col. Alfred, Welch Dakota Papers, July 7, 1915.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Waggoner, J., *Witness: A Huŋkpháp̄ha Historian’s Strong-Heart Song of The Lakotas* (University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 599.

<sup>13</sup> Vestal, S. (Campbell, W.), *Sitting Bull: Champion Of The Sioux* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1957).

that the Huŋkphápħa were east of the Mníšoše and present at the Big Mound fight against Gen. Sibey's command.

Historian Robert Utley estimates that there were perhaps as many as 1400 lodges at Taħčá Wakútepi. It was a sizable village consisting of Huŋkphápħa, Sihásapa, Mnikhówožu, Itázipčho, Iháŋkthunwaŋna, and Isáŋyathi. Utley paints the Lakhóta and Dakhóta in overconfident tones: "they did not order the lodges packed," explains Utley, "nor did they order the village moved, The women, children, and old men, in fact, gathered on a high hill to watch."<sup>14</sup>

But the camp was moved. At least the Lakhóta camp was, from the west side of Taħčá Wakútepi to the southeast side, below Medicine Hole the day before Sully's arrival,<sup>15</sup> in a movement which placed a fresh water creek between them and the approaching soldiers. The Lakhóta had learned the previous summer that water slowed or stopped the soldiers' advance.

Ernie LaPointe, Thátháŋka Íyotake's (Sitting Bull's) direct lineal descendant, a great-grandson of the Huŋkphápħa leader, offers this retrospective, "If it had been possible, Thátháŋka Íyotake might have accepted peace terms that simply allowed his people and him to continue to live their traditional lifestyle." As it was, Sully's assault left one hundred Lakhóta dead,<sup>16</sup> though Sully's reports have the count closer to 150.

The Lakhóta camp had moved in a position which faced Sully's left flank; Íŋkpaduta's camp faced Sully's right. A hunting party, possibly a war party though all the men were as much prepared to fight as to hunt, skirmished with Sully's Winnebago scouts earlier that day. Sully's command, five miles away, approached Taħčá Wakútepi for a showdown.

When the soldiers got closer, a lone Lakhóta warrior, Šúnka Waŋžíla (Lone Dog), decided to test the fighting resolve of the soldiers and boldly rode his horse within range of fire. The soldiers fired three times at him. Thátháŋka Ská (White Bull) believed that Šúnka

<sup>14</sup> Utley, R., *The Lance And The Shield: The Life And Times Of Sitting Bull* (Henry Holt And Company, 1993), 55.

<sup>15</sup> White Bull, box 105, notebook 24, pp. 1-6, Walter S. Campbell Collection, University of Oklahoma Library, Norman, OK.

<sup>16</sup> LaPointe, E., *Sitting Bull: His Life And Legacy* (Gibbs Smith, 2009), p. 49.

Waŋžila lived a wakḥáŋ life, charmed some would say in English. “Šúŋka Waŋžila,” explained Thátháŋka Ská, “...was with a ghost and it was hard to shoot him.”<sup>17</sup>

Lt. Col. John Pattee, under Sully’s command that day, said of Šúŋka Waŋžila riding, waving, and whooping at the soldiers, that an aide from Sully approached him, “The General sends his compliments and wishes you to kill that Indian for God’s sake.” Pattee ordered three sharpshooters to bring down Šúŋka Waŋžila. One shot, according to Pattee, sent Šúŋka Waŋžila from his horse, though Sully claimed the warrior fell from his horse.<sup>18</sup>

According to the pictographic record of Šúŋka Waŋžila, he was riding, armed with bow and arrows, carrying black shields as much for practical protection as for spiritual protection, and received one wound.<sup>19</sup>

The fighting continued north for the five miles it took for Sully’s command to reach the encampments. For those five miles, the Lakḥóta held the soldiers’ attention, at times in brutal hand to hand combat. The Lakḥóta managed to outflank Sully’s men, which threatened the wagons and horses, so Sully ordered artillery to open fire. When the fight approached the encampments, the women hastened to break and flee. Frances “Fanny” Kelly, a captive of the Lakḥóta said that as soon as soldiers were sighted, the women withdrew into the hills, woods, and ravines, around Taḥčá Wakútepi, for protection.<sup>20</sup>

On the Iháŋkthunwaŋna and Isáŋyathi side of the conflict, the fight for the Dakḥóta became a stubborn retreat back to the encampments at the base of Taḥčá Wakútepi. There the soldiers broke into heavy fire into the Dakḥóta protectors until they finally broke. White Bull told Stanley Vestal that the Iháŋkthunwaŋna and Isáŋyathi were as

<sup>17</sup> White Bull, box 105, notebook 24, pp. 1-6, Walter S. Campbell Collection, University of Oklahoma Library, Norman, OK.

<sup>18</sup> Pattee, J., *Dakota Campaigns* (South Dakota Historical Collections 5, 1910), 308.

<sup>19</sup> “No Two Horns [Hé Núnpa WaničA ] Interview,” thípi with pictographic records, Welch, Col. Alfred, Welch Dakota Papers, July 7, 1915.

<sup>20</sup> Kelly, F., *Narrative Of My Captivity Among The Sioux* (Mutual Publishing Company, 1871), pp. 274-278.

strangers to the Lakǰóta, and that they lost thirty when their line of defense broke.<sup>21</sup>

In a dialog with Mr. Timothy Hunts In Winter, there was a woman, an ancestor of his, Ohítika Wiŋ (Brave Woman) who fought at Killdeer. “She was only 14 on the day of the Killdeer fight but she fought alongside her até (father). Her até was killed that day in battle,” explained Hunts In Winter, “she was named Ohítika Wiŋ because she was a woman warrior.”<sup>22</sup>

From the Lakǰóta camp there came a singer escorting a man known as The-Man-Who-Never-Walked, a cripple since birth. His limbs were twisted and shrunk and in all his forty winters, he had never once hunted nor fought. When the soldiers came to the camp, The-Man-Who-Never-Walked knew that this was his one chance to fight. He was loaded onto a travois and a creamy white horse pulled the drag. The singer led him to where Thǎthǎŋka Íyotake was watching the fight.

When the singer finished his song, he called out, “This man has been a cripple all his life. He has never gone to war. Now he asks to be put into this fight.” Thǎthǎŋka Íyotake replied, “That is perfectly all right. Let him die in battle if he wants to.” White Bull later said of Thǎthǎŋka Íyotake, “Sitting Bull’s heart was full that day. He was proud of his nation. Even the helpless were eager to do battle in defense of their people.”<sup>23</sup> The horse was whipped and drove The-Man-Who-Never-Walked straight into a line of soldiers, who shot the horse then him. They called him Čhaŋte Mathó (Bear’s Heart) after that because of his great courage.

Íŋkpaduta engaged in a counter-attack on Sully’s right flank to stall his approach and lost twenty-seven warriors in hand to hand fighting. The Isǎnyathi broke just as Sully’s artillery began to fire upon the encampment.

Women and children who hadn’t retreated into the hills and ravines west of Taǰčǎ Wakútepi were suddenly in the fight. The women

<sup>21</sup> White Bull, box 105, notebook 24, pp. 1-6, Walter S. Campbell Collection, University of Oklahoma Library, Norman, OK.

<sup>22</sup> Mr. Tim Hunts In Winter (Húŋkpathi, Ihǎŋkthunwanǵa; Crow Creek Indian Reservation), in an e-dialog with the author, March 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Vestal, S., *Sitting Bull: Champion Of The Sioux* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1932), p53-54; White Bull, box 105, notebook 24, pp. 1-6, Walter S. Campbell Collection, University of Oklahoma Library, Norman, OK.

gathered what they could before abandoning camp, and young boys shepherded the horses to safety. “Children cried, the dogs were under everybody’s feet, mules balked, and pack horses took fright at the shell-fire or snorted at the drifting smoke behind them,” according to Frances Kelly.<sup>24</sup>

The Lakǵóta and Dakǵóta turned west into the Badlands, and there evaded capture.

The smoke cleared and over a hundred Lakǵóta and Dakǵóta lay dead. Sully ordered troops to destroy everything left behind. Lodges, blankets, and food were burned. Dogs were shot. Children inadvertently left behind in the confusion were chased down by the Winnebago scouts and killed.

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<sup>24</sup> Vestal, S. (Campbell, W.), *New Sources Of Indian History* (Gayley Press, 2008), p. 56.



## *Glossary*

Čhánġu Wakpála: Burnt Wood Creek, Burleigh County, ND.

Čhápa Wakpána: Beaver Creek, Emmons County, ND.

Čhaŋte Mathó: Bear's Heart (The-Man-Who-Never-Walked), a forty-year-old disabled Lakḥóta man who fought his first and last fight at Taḥčá Wakútepi.

Hé Núnpa WaničA: No Two Horns, a warrior, artist, and historian of the Huŋkphápḥa; fought at the Little Bighorn

Huŋkphápḥa: Head Of The Circle, also known as "Hunkpapa," one of the seven Thítḥuŋwaŋ tribes.

Iháŋkthŋwaŋna: Little End Village (Yanktonai), one of the seven tribes that make up the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ, their language is Wičhíyena.

Íŋkpaduta: Scarlet Point, war chief of the Waḥpékhute band of the Isáŋyathi.

Isáŋyathi: the general name of the four eastern tribes (Sisítḥuŋwaŋ, Waḥpéthuŋwaŋ, Waḥpékhute, and Bdewákhaŋthuŋwaŋ), their language is Dakḥóta.

Mathó Wathákpe: Charging Bear (John Grass), a war chief of the Sihásapa, one of the seven Thítḥuŋwaŋ tribes.

Mníšoše: Water-Astir (Missouri River).

Očhéthi Šakówiŋ: Seven Council Fires (The Great Sioux Nation), the confederation is made up of the Thítḥuŋwaŋ, Iháŋkthŋwaŋna, Iháŋkthŋwaŋ, Sisítḥuŋwaŋ, Waḥpéthuŋwaŋ, Waḥpékhute, and Bdewákhaŋthuŋwaŋ.

Ohítika Wiŋ: Brave Woman, she fought at Killdeer Mountain alongside her father when she was fourteen years old.

Oyáte: a tribe, a people, or a nation.

Pa ÍpuzA Napé Wakpána: Dry Bone Hill Creek (Whitestone Hill Creek), Dickey County, ND.

Phizi: Gall, a war chief of the Huŋkphápḥa (Hunkpapa), one of the seven Thítḥuŋwaŋ tribes; led the Huŋkphápḥa at the Little Bighorn, later became a judge.

Sihásapa: Black Sole Moccasins (Blackfeet) one of the seven Thítḥuŋwaŋ tribes.

Šákpe: The Six, a chief of the Bdewákhąthųwą (Dwellers At The Sacred Lake), one of the four Isąnyathi (Santee; Eastern Sioux) tribes.

Šiná Thó Wakpána: Blue Blanket Creek, Walworth County, SD

Šųjka Waųžila: Dog Only-One (Lone Dog), a Huųkphápha warrior and a Waniyetu Wowápi (Winter Count) keeper.

Táchąhpi Lúta: Red Tomahawk, a Huųkphápha warrior known more for being a Bureau of Indian Affairs police officer and his role in the death of Sitting Bull.

Tahčá Wakútepi: Where They Kill Deer (Killdeer Mountain), Dunn County, ND.

Tšaspąla Wakpála: Lit. Thorn-Apple Creek, Burleigh County, ND.

Tšathąka Íyotake: Sitting Bull, a great leader of the Huųkphápha.

Tšathąka Ská: White Bull, nephew of Sitting Bull, and a famous warrior.

Thíthųwą: Dwellers On The Plains (Teton), the Thíthųwą is made up of the Huųkphápha, Sihásapa, Mnikhówožu, Itázipčo, Oglála, Oóhenųpa, and Sičhąngu, their language is Lakhóta.

Wakhąj: With-Energy, often translated as “Holy” or “Sacred.”

Wakhéye Ská: White Lodge, a chief of the Sisíthųwą.

# THE WAR WITH THE SIOUX

KARL JAKOB SKARSTEIN



## FOREWORD

Guri Endresen Rosseland was known as *Minnesota's Heroine*, or *The Heroine from Kandiyohi County*. But, she only wanted to forget the terrible August days in 1862 when Indians killed her husband and son. She spoke little about the fact that she had managed to escape into the wilderness with her little daughter, or that later she had saved the lives of two men who lay seriously wounded. It was said that she did not know how to read and write. So, four years later, she probably dictated these lines in a letter to family in Norway: "To be an eyewitness to [the killing of husband and son], and to see many others wounded and shot to death was almost too much for a poor woman to stomach." The letter's account of these dramatic events was unclear and disjointed. Among other things, she says that the men she found were unharmed, and that it was they who helped her. However, comparing what she said in an interview the year after the Indian attack to the accounts of other eye-witnesses, shows that she acted with endurance and a spirit of self-sacrifice that undoubtedly rendered her deserving of the title of heroine.

The story of Guri Rosseland has only appeared in a local history and a few old publications. Further, it has virtually always been presented as a freestanding narrative, detached from the great drama of which it was a part. Therefore, there are few who know anything about the background of how Guri and her family ended up in the middle of one of the most brutal conflicts in America's history between Indians and whites. The history of countless other Norwegians affected by the war is also little known. This book will rectify that.

There is no complete and collected account of these events in Norwegian, only small fragments reported in newspapers or local history books. Thus my book recounts a forgotten history. There are very few thorough accounts of the Indian rebellion in Minnesota and the ensuing war in the Dakota Territory available in

English. Therefore, this book offers the most detailed and exhaustive account of this event issued in modern times.

The histories of the Indian War as a whole are often one-sided, for the events are seen generally from the whites' point of view. Among the few exceptions are Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* and James Wilson's *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America*.<sup>1</sup> The one-sidedness results principally from the fact that nearly all authors have been white and that Indians have left few written eyewitness accounts. In this book, I have attempted to present the events from both the white and Indian viewpoint, but the sources from the Indian perspective set obvious limitations. For example, no Indian account exists of the attack on settlers such as Guri Rosseland and her neighbors. Since this book is first and foremost a work concerning Norwegians involved in the war against the Indians, it is natural that this book has a Norwegian perspective.

By 1860, roughly 60,000 Norwegian immigrants had settled in the United States. Of those, a little over 8,000 lived in Minnesota. The Norwegians who had contact with the Sioux before the war were most likely on good terms with them. When the Sioux visited their farms, it was not unusual for the Norwegians to trade with them or give them a little food. Despite the friendliness, there were many Norwegians who had a condescending attitude toward the Indians and saw them as inferior idlers and beggars. No good sources have been found that tell us what the Sioux thought of the Norwegians.

When the war started, the Norwegian prejudices came to the surface. In a letter to the newspaper *Emigranten*\* [*The Emigrant*], Ole Knudsen Storebraaten from the Sigdal valley in Norway called Indians "cruel heathens." Guri Rosseland used the same term in the letter about the Indian attack to her relatives in Norway. Other Norwegians wrote that Indians were untrustworthy or murderous.

Yet in the wake of the Sioux attack on settlers in Minnesota, there were also Norwegians who felt sympathy for the Indians. In a serial on the Indian War that was printed in the North American

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\* Translators' Note: A Norwegian language newspaper published in Wisconsin.

newspaper *Fædrelandet*\* [*The Fatherland*] in 1864, J. Schrøder wrote that the white authorities and dishonest traders had oppressed and impoverished the Sioux. Schrøder put the following question to his readers: "What would you do in similar circumstances in the Indians' place, fellow countrymen?"

In the spring of 1864, a Norwegian who served in the cavalry unit of Hatch's battalion wrote a letter to *Fædrelandet*. He wrote that two Indians on their way to negotiate with the whites were brutally murdered. "How can one honestly expect peace with the Indians, when one shoots and abuses their messengers who come to negotiate and contract peace?" asked the Norwegian cavalryman.

Now a few practical bits of information: I have chosen to use the majority of the Indian names in English, such as Little Crow and Sitting Bull, because these names are most familiar to Norwegians and Americans. In a few instances, such as Mankato and Inkpadduta, the Indian name appears more frequently, and there I have done the same.

Terms such as "Indians" and "Sioux" are not unproblematic. Some hold that the most correct option is to write respectively "Native Americans" and "the great Sioux nation of Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota." I have nevertheless chosen to use the better known, and less cumbersome forms "Indians," "Sioux," or "Sioux Indians." Sioux is now the most used and accepted term among American scholars. Both the recently published *Handbook of North American Indians*,<sup>2</sup> written by some of the foremost experts on the North American Indian culture, and *The Earth Shall Weep*, by James Wilson, use the terms Sioux and Indians.

### *Concerning the Maps*

I have made a number of maps in order to make the story easier to follow. The American books about this war contain only a few maps, which give quite limited information. I have not found any book with a map showing the attack on New Ulm or the Battle at Wood Lake. Good maps of the battles at Fort Ridgely, Birch Coulee, Big Mound, and Whitestone Hill are also few and far

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\* Translators' Note: Also a Norwegian language publication of Wisconsin.

between. Thus, this is the first collection of detailed maps of these events.

The maps are made based on several different sources. In order to understand the terrain, I have used both modern, topographic maps and old map sketches. Then, I compared these with written sources. In some instances, the terrain has changed significantly since 1862. The Battle of Wood Lake was waged at the shores of Lone Tree Lake which was drained away long ago. No one is certain precisely where it lay. Fortunately, the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul include an old map sketch drawn based on information given by veterans who participated in the battle. In concert with the written sources, this sketch enabled me to create the map in this book.



## Notes

1. Translators' Note: Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston [1970] 1981); James Wilson, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America*. (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press 2003).
2. Translators' Note: William C. Sturtevant and Raymond J. DeMallie, eds., *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 13 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2001).



# 1

## TWO PEOPLES

### *The Sioux*

They came from the land where the Mississippi River begins its long journey south to the Gulf of Mexico. They hunted game in the endless forests, fished in still rivers, and gathered wild rice in the lakes. Dressed in long shirts, leggings, and loincloths, all made from tanned animal skins, their skin was bronze, their hair usually long, straight, and raven black. For warmth, they wrapped themselves in blankets. On special occasions, they wore headdresses of feathers, hides, and horns from deer or bison. In arraying themselves for war, they bared their chests, painting their torsos in striking colors. They called themselves Dakota, meaning union or alliance, but they came to be better known by the name of Sioux, an abbreviated French version of *na-towe-ssiwak*, as the Ottawa Indians called them.\* One of the largest and most powerful Indian nations in North America, the Sioux were a proud, martial people feared by their enemies.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Sioux comprised three primary groups. Farthest east, in what is today the state of Minnesota, the forest tribes were commonly called the Santee Sioux. In the borderland between the forests lived the Yankton and Yaktonai, while the numerous Teton tribes roamed farthest out on

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\* There is a widespread view that *na-towe-ssiwak*/Sioux originally meant enemy or snake. More recent research shows, however, that this is probably incorrect. See William C. Sturtevant and Raymond J. DeMallie, eds., *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 13 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2001), 749. The actual meaning is uncertain; it could be that it means “they who speak a foreign language.”

the open prairie west of the Missouri River. The prairie nomads also called themselves Lakota, which was their dialectical variant of Dakota. Even though the dissimilar tribal groups generally lived independently of one another, they considered themselves all one people with a common language, history, and culture.

War was a central part of this culture. Young men earned standing and social status through their achievements in combat against other Indian tribes. This was so essential that it was rare for young men to marry without first having demonstrated their skill in war. Likewise the warrior's right to wear the eagle feather on his head depended on valor displayed in battle.

The wars between the Sioux and their neighbors were not characterized by massive campaigns, bloody combat, and subsequent occupation of conquered territory. Rather, war consisted of sporadic engagements, raids, and plunder. In the summer, when hunting was limited, small bands of Sioux warriors often waged war against their greatest enemies, the Chippewa (also called Ojibwa) in the north, and Sauk and Fox Indians in the south. The purpose of such small expeditions was often only to take horses and give young men an opportunity to gain recognition as warriors. When battle actually broke out, performing certain rituals that demonstrated bravery was nearly as important as taking the life of an opponent. It was considered more honorable, for example, to touch an enemy than to kill him. This non-lethal physical contact was called *coup*. It was closely tallied and celebrated when warriors returned home. Since these battles were generally limited in scope, they could last for generations without anyone "winning" or "losing." When stronger tribes drove out weaker adversaries in order to gain control over better hunting areas, the expulsion was almost always gradual, occurring over a span of several years.

Even though such acts of war were limited in extent and in large part characterized by ritual, they could still be brutal and merciless. After having touched an enemy and registered *coup*, the next step was to take his life. As a rule, a conquered enemy warrior was killed on the spot. In some instances, so too were women and children. Afterwards, the dead were scalped. This was a process by which the scalp and hair were scraped off and kept as valued trophies. Killing enemies and taking scalps were seen as a natural part of life, and

for the men, it was a way to gain standing and recognition among their kinsmen.

In addition to war, hunting was also central in the life and culture of the Sioux. Slaying animals such as deer and bison was ritualized in a manner similar to warfare. The Indians believed that powerful spirits lived in the animals, and that it was essential to remain on good terms with these spirits. Such spirits might cause the game to disappear or might spread illness in camp if not treated with the proper respect. Therefore it was critical to show respect for the animals' spirits. Thus, hunters would make offerings of their most prized objects, food, or sometimes treasured animals. Ideally, these offerings were precious or objects in which the giver took great joy.

The hunt underscored the unity of the tribal group as well. Those who killed the most and the largest animals shared them with those who were not as fortunate in the hunt. The best hunters invited everyone to a great feast so that the entire community could enjoy the fruits of the hunt together. Generosity was seen as one of the foremost virtues among the Sioux. It was a central characteristic of anyone who wanted to build his influence in the tribe. The tribe's leaders were usually not wealthy in terms of material goods because they constantly gave away what they possessed as gifts to other tribe members. It was also expected that those who had more than they needed would share with those who had less.

The middle of the seventeenth century saw the appearance of the first white men in the Sioux's land. They were almost exclusively French traders, explorers, or missionaries. Arriving in small groups, they seldom stayed for long periods. White men were little more than a curiosity - peculiar people with pale skin, strange clothes, and amusing customs. More interesting than the newcomers were the wares they brought with them. They had good blankets, sharp steel knives, axes, and many other useful things that they would gladly exchange for tanned skins and furs. Particularly, the white traders' firearms and liquor would come to have great impact. Increasingly requested by the Indian warriors, both contributed over time to the permanent transformation of Indian society.

These white men came and went - first the French, then the English, and finally the Americans. Now and then the French, English, and Americans waged war on each other. Sometimes the

Sioux took part in these wars, but the battles were mostly fought far from the Sioux's land, and had little bearing on their daily lives. It meant little to the Indians which flag flew over the nearest fort.

Slowly but surely the whites' presence began to generate problems for the Sioux. At first, the impact was indirect. Archenemies of the Sioux, the Chippewa lived closer to the whites and had easy access to guns. In contrast, the Sioux generally had to manage with bows and arrows. This gave the Chippewa a military advantage that they used to drive the Sioux from the forests near the headwaters of the Mississippi. Reluctantly, the Sioux had to give up their old hunting lands. Some relocated to the open prairies far to the west while others remained in the southern region of the Sioux's former territories along the Minnesota River, one of the Mississippi's major tributaries.

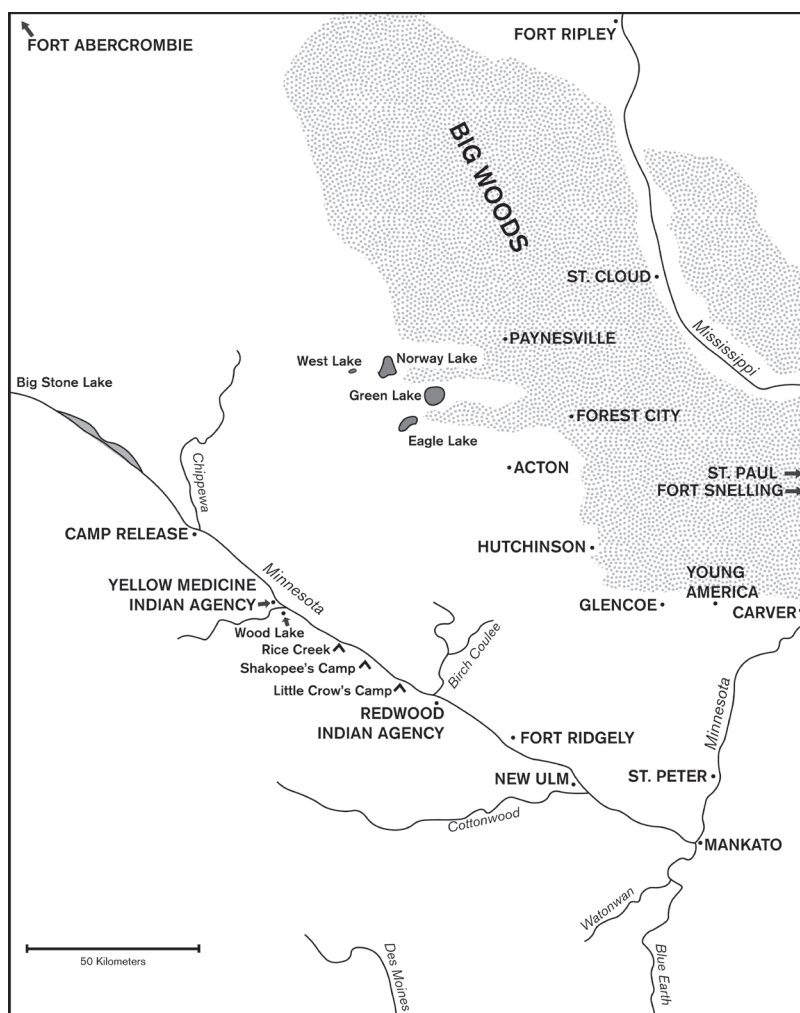
Early in the nineteenth century, the whites began to create other serious problems for the Sioux. With white traders came increased demand for furs and tanned hides. This resulted in overhunting in forests where Sioux had hunted for generations. Depletion of game by both Indian and white hunters lead to a food shortage for the Sioux. Compounding the situation, increasing numbers of white immigrants settled in these hunting areas and frightened away remaining game. White people called the land where the Santee-Sioux lived Minnesota and viewed it as a part of the new nation, the United States of America. Throughout the nineteenth century the U.S. experienced intense economic and population growth. A burgeoning stream of immigrants crossed the ocean from Europe in pursuit of farmland. And, since the best soil in the eastern U.S. had long been occupied, many whites looked to the West where the land still lay free and uncultivated.

In time, American authorities decided to buy land from the Indians as more and more whites arrived to settle in the Santee-Sioux's land. The Sioux were persuaded to enter into a series of agreements concerning sale of their hunting lands. By the time the last contract was signed in 1858, the Santee-Sioux were left with a narrow strip of land along the southern bank of the Minnesota River in the southwestern corner of what had by then become the state of Minnesota. Since the game had abandoned the forests, the Sioux could no longer sustain themselves through hunting,

and they needed money in order to buy food. Thus, by the time the Sioux were asked to sell their land, they had few alternatives. Moreover, if the Sioux would not sell, the whites threatened to take their land by force. In many ways, the whole transaction reeked of blackmail and swindle. The price set by the authorities in Washington, D.C. was far lower than the area's actual fair market value as agricultural land. In addition, the whites decided that the payment would be made in yearly installments. Rather than providing a cash payment for the full bill, large portions of the payment went toward building schools and various land development projects that would make the Indians more "civilized" in the eyes of the whites. Often, money left from these projects was still not paid in cash. Instead, the Sioux were paid with poor quality food and tools. Any money that was ultimately dispersed went directly into the pockets of white traders who sold merchandise to Indians on credit to subsequently demand repayment at high interest.

It was no wonder that many of the Sioux were extremely dissatisfied with this treatment. The lack of game meant that they often had to beg for food while they waited for the annual payments from government authorities. Among Indians, it was regarded as customary for those who had food to share with those who had none. But, many of the white people who had settled near the Sioux's remaining hunting lands believed that those who did not farm and work for their food should not expect to receive it from others. Therefore, they were not prepared to give food to the Indians. On the other hand, Sioux warriors, saw it as beneath their dignity to dig in the ground. Hunting and war were their duties as men; so it had been from time immemorial. As a result, the Sioux often starved when game was scarce.

During the 1850s, the situation rapidly degenerated for the Sioux. Dishonest white traders continued to con them out of money remaining from the sale of the hunting lands, and settlers chopped down forests driving away game. Rumors circulated that white men raped Sioux women with no consequences or punishment from authorities, and many whites were patronizing toward the Indians which was extremely difficult for proud Sioux warriors.



Map 1.1: Western Minnesota in 1862



Eventually, factions emerged dividing the Sioux. Some bowed to pressure and tried to assimilate to white society. They cut their hair, dressed in the same clothing as the whites, moved into houses, and began to farm. These “farmer Indians,” as they were called, were exposed to threats and slander from those who maintained the old mode of living. Increasingly, arguments and brawls grew out of these divisions.

One of those seeking to adapt to the new era was a young chief who called himself Wamditanka (“Big War Eagle”) but who would become better known as Big Eagle. He was born in 1827 in a village on the shore of the Minnesota River, not far from where the city of St. Paul would later spring up. In his early youth, he participated in many raids against the Chippewa and won the right to wear six eagle feathers as a sign that he had taken six scalps.<sup>1</sup>

Big Eagle’s world was dramatically changed as the inexorable flow of whites streamed north to the Minnesota River to settle on the Sioux’s land (Map 1.1). By 1857, when he took over from his father as chief of a small band of a few hundred Santee-Sioux, the clashes with the Chippewa had lost their importance. The whites became his primary concern. Big Eagle understood that the whites had come to stay, and they were too numerous for the Sioux to drive away. He participated in the negotiations in 1858 when the Santee-Sioux gave in to pressure and consented to an agreement requiring the sale of their last remaining land on the north side of the Minnesota River. The same year Big Eagle traveled with a delegation of chiefs to Washington to discuss the details of the agreement. The journey by train into the whites’ territory made a powerful impression on Big Eagle and the other chiefs. More than the magnificent buildings and the technological wonders, such as the train in which they rode, the sheer size of the white population overwhelmed the Sioux leaders. They could scarcely have imagined that there could be so many people in the whole world.

Convinced that resistance to the white civilization’s advance was futile, Big Eagle made up his mind to give up the Indians’ traditional way of life and instead become a “farmer-Indian.” But, this proved to be a difficult and complex transition, and pressure from

white authorities and missionaries made it no easier. Big Eagle later said:

Then the whites were always trying to make the Indians give up their life and live like white men – go to farming, work hard and do as they did – and the Indians did not know how to do that, and did not want to anyway. It seemed too sudden to make such a change. If the Indians had tried to make the whites live like them, the whites would have resisted, and it was the same way with many Indians. The Indians wanted to live as they did before the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux [before they had to sell their land] – go where they pleased and when they pleased, hunt game wherever they could find it, sell their furs to the traders and live as they could.<sup>2</sup>

Simultaneously, the internal strife among the Sioux was growing. “The ‘farmers’ were favored by the government in every way,” explained Big Eagle. “They had houses built for them, some of them even had brick houses, and they were not allowed to suffer. The other Indians did not like this. The other Indians were envious of them and jealous, and disliked them because they were favored. They called them ‘farmers,’ as if it was disgraceful to be a farmer.” Tensions ran high in the Sioux villages at this time. Since game was gone and opportunities to wage war against other tribes had diminished, many warriors had little to do. These restless, frustrated men were easy targets for whiskey sellers. Drunkenness and rioting became commonplace.

Then the American Civil War began. Southern states broke away from the United States to protect their idiosyncratic traditions, primarily slavery. Seeing this as a rebellion, the government in Washington called in troops to force the South back into the Union again. On April 12, 1861, the war became a reality. In the months that followed, both sides sent hundreds of thousands of young men onto the battlefield. Soldiers waged bloody battles

without either side gaining the upper hand, and the war quickly expanded in scope.

The Sioux also heard news of the whites' civil war. They noticed that ever-increasing numbers of Minnesota's white men were sent off to reinforce the Northern units at the front. Rumors spread that the South was making great headway and that the North was about to lose. In the summer of 1862, the Indian agent Thomas J. Galbraith traveled around to the reservations attempting to recruit Indians to the Northern army. Almost none of the full-blooded Indians allowed themselves to be recruited, but Galbraith did manage to enlist one company of half-blood Indians. "The Indians now thought the whites must be pretty hard up for men to fight the South or they would not come so far out on the frontier and take half-breeds or anything to help them," explained Big Eagle.

Some Sioux began to whisper among themselves that this was an opportune time to go to war against the whites and reclaim the old hunting lands. Big Eagle distanced himself from such talk of war. He explained to his warriors that what he had seen on the journey to Washington had convinced him that the whites were too powerful for the Sioux to drive them out. But, many of Big Eagle's warriors disagreed with their chief and believed that it was high time to launch a campaign against the whites.

As the whites' civil war moved into its second year, it began to affect the Sioux's existence more directly. The enormous financial costs of war lay heavy pressure on the Northern states' budget, and the disbursements to Indians were assigned a low priority. In the summer of 1862, large groups of Sioux met with the white Indian agents to receive their yearly disbursement of money and food. But the authorities in Washington were occupied with the Civil War and had postponed disbursements to the Indians. As a result, when the Sioux arrived to receive the food and money they were owed for the sale of their land, they received instead the message that they must wait.

Before long, the situation was precarious for many Indians who had delayed hunting in anticipation of disbursements from the white agents. But the traders and agents showed little sympathy toward the Indians, who were literally starving. As the summer progressed, the mood at the Indian Agency steadily grew more

tense. Arrogant and contemptuous traders told the starving Sioux that they could eat grass.

### *The Immigrants*

The year was 1850. Far to the east in Norway, near Grue Finnskog along the Swedish border, the Vaalberg family toiled to make ends meet. They lived at a small, family farm called Lintorpet. They had previously owned a better farm, but the father, Paul Vaalberg, bartered it away in an unsuccessful attempt to improve their situation. Too small and with poor soil quality, Lintorpet was incapable of supporting the whole family. Their only income came from logging, the local cash crop, but low timber prices provided insufficient income to pay down their debt.

Ole, the oldest son in the house, described the situation many years later.<sup>3</sup> His father Vaalberg had searched despairingly for a solution. One late winter evening he paced the floor for what seemed like an eternity, puffing intensely on his pipe. At length, he said: "Mother, do you know what has got me pacing and pondering?"

"How can I know what you have in your thoughts?" answered his wife.

"Well, Mother, I am considering taking you all to America!"

The woman was not very enthusiastic. "Why, I've never heard such nonsense! You, travel to America with the entire family? It's ludicrous!"

The discussion continued until Vaalberg threatened to go alone if his family did not want to go with him. Then his wife began to cry.

Later that winter Ole was outside working in the forest. He was only eighteen years old and slightly built, so it was difficult for him to load the heavy logs onto the timber sled. He was taking a short break when his brother Henrik came running. Out of breath, his brother explained that their father had sold the farm and that they were going to move to America. Both brothers were thrilled over

their father's decision. Henrik said he was so happy that he could do a *ballingkast*\* from sheer joy.

It took time to complete the necessary preparations for the journey. Vaalberg had to travel to Christiania\*\* to reserve tickets on a ship across the Atlantic, and an auction had to be announced in order to sell everything they could not take with them. When the magistrate in Grue heard of Vaalberg's plans, he said, "You are doing the right thing, my friend. It is far, far better there than here." The magistrate gave him a letter written by a man named Rynning, who described the conditions in America. Because he was the most skilled at reading, Ole read the letter aloud to the family. "I read that remarkably long letter over and over again, so I almost knew it by heart. Everyone who came to our house had to have the chance to hear Cand.\*\*\* Rynning's letter," explained Ole. Later published as a book, Rynning's letter stated:

*The United States* covers a very large landscape [...] the majority of the land is flat and arable; but given that its expanse is so great, there is also great variation with regard to the weather's mildness and the soil's goodness. In the easternmost and northernmost states the climate and soil are no better than in southern Norway; in the western states on the other hand the soil is so fertile that it brings forth all imaginable kinds of grain without manure [...]

Here one can travel two to three Norwegian miles\*\*\*\* over natural meadows that are covered with the lushest grass, without encountering a single tree. Here such native meadows are called the

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\* Translators' Note: *ballingkast* is a twirling high kick in the regional dance that comes from Hallingdal.

\*\* Translators' Note: Christiania, also spelled Kristiania, was the name of Oslo before 1925.

\*\*\* Translators' Note: This designation does not translate well. *Candidat* is an academic title accorded to a person who has achieved what would be loosely comparable to a master's degree.

\*\*\*\* Translators' Note: 1 Norwegian mile is 10 kilometers, roughly 12 – 18 American miles.

prairies. From the earliest point in spring until the latest part of autumn, the prairies abound with various kinds of flowers. Every month they don a new costume. The majority of these plants and grasses are unknown in Norway or are found only here and there in grand people's gardens.

The prairies are a great splendor to immigrants. It costs them nothing here to provide for their livestock and gather winter fodder for them. In under two days a capable worker can mow and rake winter fodder for a cow [...] The soil on the prairies is usually fertile, and free from stones and tree roots [...]

*The Indians* have now moved far to the west [...] Furthermore these people are quite good-natured and never start hostilities when they are not insulted.<sup>4</sup>

Ole and his family trusted the contents of Rynning's letter completely and were eager to start a new life in the fertile land on the other side of the ocean. On May 17, Norwegian Constitution Day, they left their hometown of Grue. They had not received all the money from the auction, and could not afford passage for the whole family. Therefore, Ole's mother and youngest sister had to stay behind to wait for the money still coming from the auction, and follow the next year. The others traveled by horse and cart to Christiania. There, they boarded an old ship that took them to Kragerø where the immigrant sailing ship *Colon* stood ready for the crossing to America.

For Ole, the journey was already full of strange and remarkable sights and experiences. He had never been so far from home. Kragerø was a picturesque little city with white wooden houses that pressed up against the cliff wall. "It was almost as though they were built one on top of the other," he later recounted. In the harbor, clustered sailing vessels from many countries formed a forest of masts. Despite all that, it was the people who most captured his attention. "In Kragerø I saw a Negro for the first time," wrote Ole. "[I]t was Shopkeeper Henrik Bjørn's Negro. The Negro was standing in the woodshed and chopping wood. A group of us

emigrant boys stood in the door and stared at the Negro. He got angry, swore in Norwegian, gripped the axe, and came at us with it as if he wanted to use it on us. We were so scared! We thought the devil incarnate himself was after us. We barreled away using all of life's powers to escape the dangerous, otherworldly man."

A group of people from Telemark who were also traveling to America on the *Colon* made almost as powerful an impression as the black man. Ole wrote:

We were struck with astonishment at the appearance of these people. We had never dreamed that in Norway such peculiar looking people could exist as these Telemark peasants [...] The men were all identically clothed like uniformed soldiers. All had black knee britches; silver buttons at the knees; long white stockings with embroidered roses at the ankles; low, artfully made shoes; an odd, ugly, white jersey decorated with red and blue; and waistcoats similarly decorated with silver buttons and embroidered in an artistic style with red and blue; a hat that looked much like what the railway employees had in America except that a large pompom hung from the crown of the hat just over the right ear.

Evidently, Ole had little appreciation for the Telemarkers' attire. The women were "vilely dressed," he wrote.

All had a thick black vadmél woolen homespun shirt that drew up under the arms. Around the waist they had a long wool scarf that wrapped all the way around the waist. They had a short vadmél overcoat. The stockings were immensely big shafts with embroidered roses visible at the ankles, low decoratively sewn shoes. The head covering was just a headscarf or kerchief.

These Telemarkers created life and excitement on board, and so it did not take long before they had to have a dance. "The fiddler

[...] came forward with his most remarkable version of a fiddle\* inlaid with mother of pearl at the edges and eight strings,” recalled Ole. “Once he had tuned up and struck a melody, the girls began to tap their toes to the rhythm. The young fellows could not stand by and watch; they came running and asked for a dance,\*\* and there was so much chaos that the dust kicked up, floating around our ears like smoke.”

On June 15, 1850, the *Colon* sailed from Kragerø. The ship passed Arendal and Kristiansand with good wind, and soon Ole watched as Norway’s cliffs vanished into the horizon. It did not take long for seasickness to start rampaging through the landlubber emigrants. “From all quarters one heard misery and moaning,” wrote Ole. He avoided seasickness by remaining on deck with the crew late into the night. The ship passed through the English Channel and began the long journey across the Atlantic Ocean. Week after week there was only ocean to see in all directions. The weather was relatively good, but time passed dreadfully slowly for the emigrants who had little entertainment on board. Every Sunday, they gathered on deck for devotions. They sang hymns and the captain preached. The emigrants were god-fearing people and did their best to conduct themselves as good Christians. Ole was pleased to find that “there was no foul language or blaspheming on board, nor card games or strong drink.”

After eight weeks and two days at sea the *Colon* finally sailed into the harbor at New York. Ole was impressed by what he saw:

A beautiful, big city with many sights. The most distinctive was the harbor where there were hundreds of ships from all parts of the world. The many masts looked like a thick spruce tree forest in Solør. In the evening it was a particular spectacle to see the great steamships going to and fro, illuminated as they all were with hundreds

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\* Translators’ Note: This would likely be a Hardanger fiddle.

\*\* Translators’ Note: Paulson specifically says “gangare” or “springare,” which are Norwegian folk dances.



of lamps. They appeared to our eyes like floating castles of light.

But New York was not the goal of their journey. The Norwegian immigrants had to travel farther west to Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota where there was still land for all who wanted to farm it. The captain of the *Colon* was helpful in obtaining cheap passage going on, but Ole soon realized why the tickets were cheap: "In those days in transportation, they shipped emigrants more or less as they shipped cattle." First the family traveled by steamship up the Hudson River to Albany in upstate New York. Here they switched over to a canal boat that would take them through the Erie Canal, which connected the Hudson River with the Great Lakes. It was on this leg of the journey that Ole felt that they were hauled like livestock. "First crates were packed down in the boat, with the tarps over that, and the people last of all on top." They had no shelter against the elements, but fortunately the weather was good the whole time. Only the mist that descended on the canal at night made the trip "a little unpleasant," Ole remembered.

After nine days on the canal, they came to the town of Buffalo on Lake Erie. Here, they transferred to a steamship that carried them over the great American inland lakes to Milwaukee in Wisconsin. From there, they traveled inland to Muskego, which was the first stopping place for the majority of the Norwegian immigrants. Many Norwegians had settled in the area, and this was the site of the first Norwegian church in Wisconsin. In Muskego, Ole and his family lived with Mrs. Berthe Skofstad. During this time, Ole worked in a sawmill in Michigan, but because all of his income was spent on the family's room and board, he was never able to save money.

After two years in Muskego, Ole traveled westward to Iowa to find land for the family. In Turkey Creek Valley, he found a suitable place with open prairie land to farm and a small forest to supply firewood and building material. His family followed a year later, but Ole was a restless young man and was not fully content with the land he had found in Iowa. So, in 1854, he traveled northward to Minnesota to see if conditions were better there. He traveled by

steam ship up the Mississippi River to St. Paul where the Minnesota River flows into the Mississippi.

Ole Paulson, having changed his last name (since his father was named Paul), had arrived at one of the outposts of American civilization. At this time, Minnesota was not yet a state in the Union, and St. Paul was only a small town with a couple of thousand settlers. To the west, the land was mostly open wilderness where Indians roamed on the hunt for bison and other game.

On the pier in St. Paul, Ole Paulson encountered a man by the name of Jørgensen who explained that he was forming a settlement about fifteen miles farther west along the north bank of the Minnesota River, and that he would like to have more settlers there. Ole joined other Norwegian and Swedish immigrants in search of land and traveled with Jørgensen up the river. Because Jørgensen's old flat barge had to be pushed with a long pole, the trip was arduous. When they finally came to the settlement, they felt a little swindled. Jørgensen had led them to believe that a small village with a hotel already existed there, but the only thing they saw was a little log cabin.

Otherwise the place was empty.

"Where is the town?" asked one of Ole's traveling companions.

"This is the beginning," answered Jørgensen.

"But where is the hotel?"

"Upstairs," said Jørgensen.

It was too late to turn back. After they had spent the night on the dirt floor of little cabin, Ole and another Norwegian went out to find farmland to claim. Ole found a piece of open land between two streams. The soil was black and rich, with fine maple trees growing along the banks of the streams. He wanted to live here. After making a careful survey so that he could register his claim, Ole returned to Iowa to fetch his family.<sup>5</sup>

As they had at the beginning of the journey in Norway, Ole's family sold their farm and land, and set out on a long journey to begin anew a better life. They traveled now as traditional American settlers with all they owned packed together in a covered wagon, a so-called prairie schooner, pulled by oxen. Traveling over the flat prairie landscape under the hot sun, they found the journey a laborious and protracted ordeal. "The boredom is

exceedingly great when one creeps forward by oxen transport over 200 miles of empty landscape. We traveled and traveled day after day for about two weeks in the desolate emptiness,” recalled Ole.

Finally, they came to the Minnesota River near St. Paul and crossed the river by ferry. From there they drove westward through a rough landscape, in many places hacking their way through dense forest. At last, they arrived at Carver, the name of Jørgensen’s settlement, and located Ole’s claim. However, the land was not quite as inviting as it had been when Ole had laid claim to it. “It was so lovely a few months ago. It was so ugly now. [...] The weeds had grown up and mosquitoes wanted to devour us alive. This was not the place for decent people to be,” wrote Ole. Again, he wanted to find another place to settle, but his mother was fed up with moving. “No, I am traveling no more,” she said, “I have traveled enough.” It was useless to protest. Ole’s mother got her way, and they stayed in Carver.

The settlement quickly grew into a thriving community, and eventually Ole’s family were content to stay. Everywhere, virgin land was being cleared and plowed. Norwegians, Swedes, Germans, and Americans came by the dozens to settle in this fertile land quickly transforming what a few years earlier had been forested wilderness into tilled farmland. Swedish immigrants eventually dominated the area around Carver, and Ole found many friends among his Scandinavian “brother folk.” Three years after he came to Carver, Ole married a young Norwegian woman named Inger Løberg. Now, he could look forward to a good life as a farmer and the father of a family. Still, he was not content.

Ole was strongly influenced by the religious revivals sweeping American settler communities in the 1850s, and during his stay in Iowa,\* he participated in many prayer meetings. Later, he described a revival experience this way:

There I too was challenged to pray. Yes, absolutely I wanted to. I fell on my knees in a dark corner and prayed a few words. I do not remember the prayer

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\* Translators’ Note: Specifically Decorah, Iowa. Paulson entitles Chapter Six “The Revival around Decorah.” Paulson, 56-62.

itself, but I remember that I became so happy, as if I had just entered paradise. I took this overwhelming joy as the evidence of the Holy Ghost, that I was born again and was a child of God.

However, this joy was fleeting, and soon, Ole began to doubt that he had experienced a true awakening. According to him, it was faith in Jesus that was missing.

After he settled in Carver, Ole continued to brood over religious questions. "Despite the fact that I had strayed from the path and had gotten a taste of the earthly life and its pleasures, I still bore a strong conviction in my conscience," he wrote. "I waited for a long time and expected that God would shatter my poor heart and open my eyes so that I could fully both feel and see my great wretchedness in sin."

When a new revival reached Carver at Christmas time in 1857, Ole again joined in many prayer meetings. Finally, he found what he had been seeking. During one of the meetings, he read the following passage in a book entitled *Come to Jesus*: "Just as I am, without an inch of my own ground to build on, but with the foundation that you suffered and died, and sacrificed yourself for me. I come, O Lamb of God! [...] Just as I am in this hour so cold and dead and evil in my inmost self, to seek all that I lack, in blessed abundance with you. I come, O Lamb of God!" After having read this, "a veil seemed to fall from my eyes," wrote Ole. "I said to myself: how stupid you have been that you did not see it before! That all that you lack is waiting to be found solely and alone in Jesus [...] The darkness that had enveloped my soul was scattered, and there was light."

A couple of years later, Ole began to work as a traveling preacher of sorts and a seller of Christian books. He had decided to dedicate his life to spreading God's word. At the end of 1860, he traveled to Chicago to study at the newly established Augustana College and Seminary. But, his sojourn in Chicago was not what he expected, for in April 1861 the Civil War broke out in the United States.

There had long been conflict between the Southern and Northern states. Most conspicuous was Southern states' authorized use of black people as slaves. This was forbidden in Northern

states. They also had dissimilar views on states' rights. Southern states wanted greater freedom for individual states within the Union than Northern states were willing to give. There were also great economic disparities. In the North, the industrial revolution was in full swing while the South primarily produced raw materials, chiefly cotton, for export to European markets. After the Northern politician and abolitionist Abraham Lincoln was elected President in November of 1860, eleven of the Southern states resolved to secede from the Union and form their own federation, the Confederate States of America. The Northern states understood such a withdrawal to be unconstitutional, and in April 1861, the two sides reached for their weapons. War had become inescapable.

The conflict swiftly made its mark on Chicago. In a great wooden hall called The Republican Wigwam, there were mass meetings in support of the Union and President Lincoln. Ole was present at many of these meetings where the nation's best speakers rallied the crowd to strike down the Southern states' rebellion. Chicago was also a real center for many of the newly created regiments of volunteer soldiers on the way to the front. Ole watched one regiment after the other pass through the streets in tight formation under waving banners. One cold and rainy evening at the beginning of March 1862, he saw Colonel Hans Christians Heg's 15<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Infantry Regiment march by. About ninety percent of the soldiers in that regiment were Norwegian immigrants.

Ole had no plans to join the volunteers. As a theology student, he considered it "obvious to remain at home." But many of his fellow students allowed themselves to be infected with war and left school, weapon in hand, to champion the Union. At the close of the school year in May of 1862, Ole went home to Minnesota to work on his farm. Meanwhile, the scope and magnitude of the war were constantly expanding. Even though the Southern states had a much smaller population and poorly developed industrial resources, they defeated the Northern armies time after time. It was clear that the North needed to mobilize many more soldiers if they were going to subdue the Southern states.

In the summer of 1862, President Lincoln asked for 300,000 volunteers, and all across the Northern states, an intensive

recruitment campaign began to form new regiments. Again, large meetings were held to drum up support for the Union, and the newspapers were full of recruiting announcements and stirring reports from the front. In the midst of all this, there were few who cared what was happening with the Sioux Indians on the remote reservation along the Minnesota River.

*Notes*

1. Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth, *Through Dakota Eyes* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988), 22-23.

2. Anderson and Woolworth, 23.

3. Ole Paulson, *Erindringer*, (Minneapolis: Free Church Book Concern, 1907), 8-9. All of the following information about the family is taken from Ole Paulson *Erindringer*, if not otherwise noted.

4. Ole Rynning, *Amerikabog*. (1838; repr., Madison, WI: Wis. Nordmandens' Boktrykkeri, 1896), 10, 28.

5. Paulson, 67-75; Hjalmar Rued Holand, *De Norske Settlementers Historie* (Ephraim, WI: Forfatteren, 1908), 470-475.





## 2

### THE UPRISING

*Monday, August 4*

Hundreds of Sioux rode across the sun-scorched prairie in the slanting morning light. The surging throng set course directly for the camp of the white soldiers near the buildings of the Indian Agency. Before they knew what had happened, the soldiers were surrounded by a raucous multitude of Sioux warriors. It was clear that the Indians were ready for a fight. Many of them wore war paint, rode bare-chested with feathers on their heads, and had bows at the ready and guns primed to fire.

The soldiers grabbed their weapons and prepared their defense, but the Indians did not attack. They continued to ride, circling the soldiers in blue, shooting into the air, and making shrill war cries. It appeared as though this was only a demonstration of the Indians' power. They had done this before to make it clear that they were prepared to fight if the whites went too far in their atrocities. But the blue coats' leader, Lieutenant Timothy Sheehan, soon discovered that this time was more than a mere power display, for while the majority of the Indian contingent surrounded the soldiers, others had broken into one of the agency's warehouses and were hauling away grain sacks.

Many weeks earlier several thousand Sioux had set up camp around Yellow Medicine Indian Agency in order to ensure that they received the American government's annual payment installment from the purchase of the Sioux's land in Minnesota. A significant portion of the total was paid out in foodstuffs, so in place of relying on their own hunting and trapping, the Indians traveled to Yellow Medicine to live on food from the American authorities. This seemed a much more secure course of action for the

Indians than an uncertain hunt from a steadily decreasing game population. But when they went to the Indian Agency to collect their food, they were told that they had to wait. One portion of the installment was to be paid in cash, and this money had not yet arrived. For administrative reasons, the agent wanted to make the payment of food and money at the same time. Therefore, he postponed making the foodstuff portion of the payment until the money arrived. The weeks passed, but the money did not come. The Indians had almost nothing to live on and were becoming more desperate every day. Death by starvation threatened the great concentration of tipis around the agency, and the Indians knew that all this time the agent and white traders had food in their warehouses. Time and time again, the Sioux leaders made inquiries about the food that was theirs as part of the fee for their land. And yet, the whites arrogantly refused them, with the agent requesting that the white soldiers guard his buildings to ensure that the Indians could not take any food.

Eventually, the Sioux saw force as their only option, causing them to surround the soldiers and break into the agency's warehouse. Lieutenant Sheehan understood that the Sioux were desperate, and he wanted them to have the foodstuffs, but as an officer, he had a clear order. He had to help the agent and prevent the Indians from taking the food without permission. The young lieutenant acted decisively. He gave the order to prepare the cannon and aim it at the warehouse. When the Indians saw this, they rushed out of the cannon's line of fire so that an open path appeared between the soldiers' camp and the warehouse. Sheehan marched into this opening with sixteen of his soldiers. It was a daring move. With enraged Indian warriors on both sides, the soldiers walked straight down the path to the warehouse and threw out the Indians who were inside.

But the crisis was not over. The Sioux warriors continued their menacing ride, circling the soldiers and calling threats and vitriol. Some chiefs pressed for battle and urged their men to seize the food by force. With the sides standing at point-blank range, weapons loaded, a little spark was all it would take to trigger a terrible bloodbath. Lieutenant Sheehan sought out the Indian agent Galbraith and asked him to share a little food in order to get the

Indians to withdraw. At first, Galbraith refused to allow the Indians' show of force to pressure him, but at last he was persuaded and gave them a little sustenance in order to calm the situation. Therefore, the Indians received ham and some flour sacks, but it was a paltry offering and far from enough to mollify the infuriated horde of warriors. But when the soldiers lined up in attack formation in front of the warehouse with two cannons primed and ready to fire, the Indians pulled back. Sheehan invited the chiefs to come back the next day to negotiate a solution to the conflict.

*Wednesday, August 6*

On the second day of negotiations, Chief Taoyateduta spoke. The whites called him Little Crow. He had long been one of the Santee-Sioux's leading chiefs, but he had lost prestige in recent years because of his refusal take an open stand in the conflict between "the tipi Indians" who wanted to hold fast to the old ways, and "the cut-hair Indians" who wanted to learn to cultivate the earth and live as the whites wanted them to do. (When the Indian warriors went over to live as the whites, it often meant that they cut their hair short.) Little Crow hailed from the Redwood Agency,\* which lay twenty-five miles farther down the Minnesota River. He had traveled up to Yellow Medicine in order to reassert his leadership by playing a primary role in the negotiations with the Indian agent.

At roughly fifty years of age, Little Crow had sharply chiseled features including a strong nose and broad, full lips. His raven hair was cut at the shoulders. Accounts of this man emphasized his proud, stately bearing and clear, eloquent speeches.

Little Crow began his speech by stressing that the remuneration from the white authorities was already late, and that this created substantial problems for the Indians who now lived with famine, on the very precipice of starvation. He said he fully understood that the agent Galbraith did not have enough food supplies in his storehouses to feed all the Indians at Yellow Medicine. The traders who lived at the agency, on the other hand, had ample food stores. Therefore, Little Crow proposed that Galbraith make an

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\* Translators' Note: The Redwood Agency is also known as the Lower Sioux Agency.

arrangement with the traders so that food could be disbursed to the starving Indians. While this was reasonable enough, Little Crow destroyed his conciliatory tone by concluding with a threat: "When men are hungry, they help themselves."

The translator declined to translate Little Crow's threat, but another man told the whites what the chief had said. Rather than responding directly, Galbraith avoided taking responsibility. He turned to the traders and said, "Well, it's up to you now. What will you do?" None of the traders took the floor to speak for the group. The only one who clearly voiced his opinion was Andrew J. Myrick. Calling attention to his actions, he stood demonstratively and left the meeting.. Galbraith shouted after him and demanded that he give Little Crow an answer. Obviously disgusted, Myrick turned and said: "So far as I am concerned, if they are hungry, let them eat grass."

When Myrick's words were translated, the Indians sprang up and hurled furious war cries in response. The trader's sarcastic remark was a scorching affront to Little Crow and all the other Indians present. It seemed that full-scale war could erupt there and then.

At the last moment, Captain Marsh averted the crisis. The commander of the soldiers at Fort Ridgely, Marsh had arrived at the Indian Agency that very day. He was able to persuade the Indians to agree to a new round of negotiations and ordered Galbraith to give them food from the agency's stores. It was enough to ease the tension for the moment. The famine was over for the Sioux at Yellow Medicine Agency. In the days that followed, most of them left for the prairie to hunt for bison in the west. Little Crow made Galbraith promise that he would also distribute food at the Redwood Agency where Little Crow's tribe lived.

The food disbursement had averted an Indian uprising at Yellow Medicine, but Myrick's mocking remark was not forgotten. Little Crow and his proud Sioux warriors had experienced many similar indignities from the whites. Increasing numbers of the tribe's young warriors spoke of revenge. In this environment, even the

smallest spark could ignite the tinderbox of a gruesome war.

*Sunday, August 17*

North of the Minnesota River lay an elongated forest area called Big Woods. Before the whites came, this had been one of the Indians' best hunting areas. The whole forest had been full of game, but the new presence of many white settlers in Big Woods had frightened much of the game away. Still, some of the Sioux continued to hunt there. The white settlers were accustomed to seeing Sioux warriors passing in small hunting parties along their old trails. If the hunts were unsuccessful, the warriors would often ask settlers for food. Many of the whites regarded the Indians as simple beggars and treated them accordingly.

August 17th was a peaceful Sunday with blue skies and sunshine. On the way home after an unsuccessful hunt in Big Woods, four young Sioux warriors passed the home of Robinson Jones in the settlement of Acton. Big Eagle later wrote about what happened. One of the hungry Sioux found some hens' eggs next to Mr. Jones' fence. When he picked them up, one of the other warriors said that he should set the eggs back down because they belonged to the white man who lived there. This made the warrior angry. Throwing the eggs at the ground, he said, "You are a coward. You are afraid of the white man. You are afraid to take even an egg from him, though you are half-starved." The other answered, "I am not a coward. I am not afraid of the white man, and to show you that I am not I will go to the house and shoot him. Are you brave enough to go with me?" At that, all four walked up to Mr. Jones' house.<sup>1</sup>

The Sioux did not kill Jones right away. First, they demanded food or whiskey, but Jones refused. Then, Jones walked to the home of his neighbor, Howard Baker. The Sioux followed him, and at Mr. Baker's house, the Sioux challenged the white men to a shooting contest. The white men agreed to this, and a man by the name of Webster joined them. Using a block of wood that sat on a stump for a target, they each took their turns shooting. While the white men waited to reload, the Indians reloaded immediately after they fired. As soon as the whites all stood with empty guns, the Sioux turned abruptly toward them and shot, killing Baker,

Webster, and Mr. and Mrs. Jones. The wives of Baker and Webster managed to hide, and in doing so preserved their lives. When it was over, the Indians hastened away, but as they passed the Jones' house, they shot his fifteen-year-old, adopted daughter.

The four Sioux understood that their actions would have grave consequences. Therefore, they stole a wagon and some horses and drove at full speed to their camp at Rice Creek on the south side of the Minnesota River. Rice Creek Camp lay roughly midway between the Indian Agencies at Redwood and Yellow Medicine and was primarily populated by the families of young warriors who refused to farm and live as white men. That summer, the warriors in Rice Creek Camp had held many meetings and had discussed the potential for rising up against the whites, but so far more prudent leaders had managed to dampen the warriors' fervor.<sup>2</sup>

Late that night, the four warriors arrived at the camp and reported the killings at Acton. There was great commotion among the tents, for everyone understood that if the four were not immediately surrendered to the whites' authorities, the whites would come and take gruesome revenge. In spite of this, the sense of solidarity was strong. No one wanted to surrender the four killers. Instead, there were many who believed that the time had finally come to go to war against the whites.

None of these young warriors had any idea what vast resources the whites had at their disposal. Therefore, they believed they had a good chance to win a war. This seemed especially true since the Civil War had started, and many of the white soldiers had left Minnesota. The Indians did not think that the white settlers were in a position to give them any serious resistance. Thus it seemed the perfect moment to rise up and drive the whites out of the Sioux's land. The warriors at Rice Creek Camp quickly agreed. They would no longer allow the whites to oppress or dominate them. The time for retaliation had come.

But the warriors of Rice Creek knew that their numbers were not enough to go to war on their own. All together they had scarcely more than one hundred men. If they were to have any hope of defeating the whites, they would need support from the entire tribe, and in order to gain such support, they would need a leader of great prestige. Later that same night, the warriors from Rice Creek

rode down along the river to find one such leader. First, they came to Shakopee's camp. (Shakopee was called Little Six by the whites.) Shakopee was a young chief who had little love for the whites, and he did not hesitate long before giving his support to the warriors from Rice Creek. But even Shakopee did not have enough prestige to unify all of the Santee-Sioux. Therefore, he recommended that they seek Little Crow and persuade him to lead the uprising.<sup>3</sup>

*Monday, August 18*

Little Crow was attempting to live in both white and Indian worlds at the same time. He had agreed to live in a house, but he had set up his tipi nearby and preferred to sleep there. He had cut his hair to shoulder length and wore a jacket and trousers as a white man would, but he refused to farm. He went to church on Sundays but still held fast to his belief in the religion of his youth.

The first rays of dawn were breaking on August 18 when Shakopee and the warriors from Rice Creek came to Little Crow's house. The chief lay resting in his tipi after a short hunting trip. The young warriors woke him and explained what had happened at Acton. At first, Little Crow was unsympathetic when the warriors asked him to lead them in a revolt against the whites, but he quickly realized that he had little choice. The young men had long been determined to go to war, and Little Crow could risk being killed if he tried to stop them.

His son explained later that after this, Little Crow painted his face black and wore a blanket over his head as a sign of grief. Then, one of the warriors accused him of being a coward. No chief could accept such an insult, and Little Crow leapt up, tearing the feather headdress off the warrior who had called him cowardly. "*Ta-o-ya-te-du-ta*\* is not a coward," he shouted. Then he reminded them of the feats he had performed in war against the Chippewa Indians and pointed to the scalps that hung from his lodge poles. "*Ta-o-ya-te-du-ta* is not a coward," he repeated, "and he is not a fool! Braves,

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\* This was Little Crow's real name and supposedly meant something akin to: "His red nation." He was called Little Crow after his father, and this was what the whites all called him

you are like little children; you know not what you are doing.”

He continued to explain to them that it was lunacy to go to war against the whites:

You are like dogs in the Hot Moon when they run mad and snap at their own shadows. We are only little herds of buffaloes left scattered; the great herds that once covered the prairies are no more. See! – the white men are like the locusts when they fly so thick that the whole sky is a snowstorm. You may kill one – two – ten; yes, as many as the leaves in the forest yonder, and their brothers will not miss them. Kill one – two – ten, and ten times ten will come to kill you. Count your fingers all day long and white men with guns in their hands will come faster than you can count.

But Little Crow knew that he spoke to deaf ears: “You cannot see the face of your chief; your eyes are full of smoke. You cannot hear his voice; your ears are full of roaring water [...] You will die like the rabbits when the hungry wolves hunt them in the Hard Moon (January). *Ta-o-ya-te-du-ta* is not a coward: he will die with you.”<sup>4</sup>

And so it was settled. Little Crow would lead the Santee-Sioux to war even though he had little hope of victory himself. Now, there was no time to lose. If they were to have any chance at all to succeed, they must strike before the whites realized what was afoot. With this in mind, Little Crow made ready for battle and led the warriors to the Redwood Agency in order to kill the hated traders and the other whites living there.

That morning Big Eagle too received the news of the deaths at Acton. Like Little Crow, he attempted to speak for peace, but the young warriors refused to listen. Big Eagle later recalled that the advocates of war began to cry, “Kill the whites and kill all these cut-hairs who will not join us!” At this, he felt that he had no choice but to join the warriors who rode off for the agency. Many years later when he was interviewed by a white man, he stressed that he did not lead his warriors that morning, and that he had not intended to kill anyone. The only thing he wanted was to rescue a few friends who lived at the agency, and he had the impression that



many others went along because they shared the same motive.<sup>5</sup>

The Redwood Agency lay just above the bluff where high lying prairie terrain sloped down to forested flat lands along the Minnesota River. With over twenty buildings, the agency looked like a town, but the houses were widely scattered. The traders' stores formed the northwest periphery. One of these stores belonged to Andrew J. Myrick, the man who had told the hungry Sioux to eat grass. About 110 yards to the southeast lay the agency buildings themselves: a barn, a carpentry workshop, warehouses, and many residential houses belonging to the whites who worked at the agency. A short distance away stood two churches – one Presbyterian and one Episcopalian – and down by the river was a ferry launch and a forge. A flat bottomed ferry barge carried travelers across the Minnesota River to a road that followed the north bank of the river to Fort Ridgely, a little over twelve miles away. On August 18, there were around eighty people, both whites and half-blood Indians, living at the Redwood Agency.

It was still early in the morning when Little Crow and his warriors rode out of the forest above the agency. The majority of them rode half-naked, wearing only loincloths and feather ornaments, as was the custom in battle. Their bodies were painted in bold colors, and they were all armed, many with rifles, others with bows and arrows, lances, tomahawks or clubs. A young girl who saw them coming later described spotting a dark mass that moved like an enormous python. It was only as it came closer, that she realized it was a dense column of Indians.<sup>6</sup>

The white traders had just begun to eat breakfast when the Sioux surrounded their houses. Yet, no one knew what was brewing until gunshots abruptly shattered the morning stillness. In the blink of an eye, the traders were struck down. Myrick tried to hide on the second floor of his store, but the Indians knew that he was there and threatened to burn down the building if he did not come out. In a desperate attempt to slip away, Myrick climbed out of a window and lowered himself to the ground along the lightning rod. He did not get far. A bullet felled him as he began to run toward the river. Then, several furious Indians came and shot his body full of arrows. Finally, they impaled him with an old scythe. Big Eagle explained that some Sioux with a flair for macabre irony

stuffed the mouth of his corpse with grass.<sup>7</sup>

The first carnage had been well-organized, but after having killed the agents, many of the Indians were more concerned with plundering than killing. Thus the majority of those who lived at the agency managed to escape down to the river. Their only hope was to ford the river, flee to Fort Ridgely, and seek protection with the soldiers there. The ferryman proved to be a courageous man taking many trips back and forth across the river to help those fleeing to safety. However, he paid a high price for his valor. While he was rowing to save himself, the Indians came and killed him. Even those who had reached the north bank were not fully out of danger, for many Indians had already crossed the river. The agency doctor, his wife, and their children were killed during the escape to Fort Ridgely, but the majority of those who fled, nearly fifty people, made it to safety.

All told, more than twenty people were killed at Redwood Agency that morning, and an additional ten were taken prisoner. The massacre's extent was limited because many Indians protected friends and relatives during the attack. There had been much intermarriage between the Sioux and the whites who lived at the agency and bonds of kinship carried great weight among Indians.<sup>8</sup>

Big Eagle arrived at the agency after the majority of the killing was over. Yet, according to his own account, he managed to save the life of a white man who was already gravely wounded and managed to protect a family of half-blood Indians from their more bloodthirsty tribe members.<sup>9</sup>

As the Indians celebrated the successful attack by burning many of the houses, the first terrified refugees reached Fort Ridgely. The fort housed the only white soldiers for many miles around; therefore, it was primarily their responsibility to stop the Indians' devastation of the area. Since the Civil War had begun, most of the soldiers had been sent away to fight against the South. Now only two companies of the Fifth Minnesota Infantry Regiment, scarcely 150 men, constituted the garrison at Fort Ridgely. With less than six months of service, these soldiers had no combat experience. The day before the start of the Sioux uprising, these forces were further diminished when Lieutenant Sheehan was sent off with about fifty men to reinforce the garrison at Fort Ripley, almost 125

miles farther north. Hence on August 18, there were fewer than eighty men remaining at Fort Ridgely.

When the first refugees from the agency arrived at the fort, the soldiers initially found it difficult to believe their reports of a massacre. But doubt quickly vanished as many evacuees arrived, some of them wounded. The commander of the fort, twenty-eight year old Captain John Marsh, wasted little time. He assembled forty-five of his soldiers plus an interpreter by the name of Quinn and led them to the agency. Now under the command of nineteen-year-old Lieutenant Thomas P. Gere, only twenty-nine soldiers remained to defend the fort. Marsh dispatched a courier to recall Lieutenant Sheehan, but Sheehan was already nearly halfway to Fort Ripley and could not return to Fort Ridgely until the next day.<sup>10</sup>

Marsh hurried toward the agency with his small force. Perhaps there was still hope that they could smother the Indian uprising in its infancy. According to what he had heard, it was doubtful that all of the Santee-Sioux had gone to war. It was possible that this was only a bunch of wild young men out causing trouble. Regardless, it was wise to hurry. The task was best suited for cavalrymen, but Marsh had to manage with his infantrymen. Only he and the translator rode mules. The rest of the soldiers were transported by horse and wagon. Among Marsh's soldiers was the Norwegian immigrant Ole Svendsen from Ringebu.<sup>11</sup> It is also probable that a soldier referred to as Christian Torger in the records was actually named Torgersen and hailed from Norway.

Marsh's small force began the trek toward the agency early in the morning. Throughout the journey, they encountered terror-stricken refugees and the first tangible proof that the Indian uprising had spread.

Barely six miles from the fort, they passed a little log house that stood blazing, fully consumed with fire. A dead man lay at the threshold. Nearby, the soldiers found a dead woman with a dying baby at her breast. They all appeared to have been struck down with tomahawks.

Marsh found it safest now to order his soldiers down from the wagons since it would be easier to fight on foot. They continued toward Redwood in closed ranks. Less than two miles from the ferry dock, the road swung down from the swung down from the

prairie into the valley. The soldiers could see the broad river valley ahead. On their side of the river lay a flat floodplain with tall grass and scattered clusters of dense, river brush. At the ferry dock on the opposite shore, a steep incline covered in hazel bushes and small trees rose up from the river to meet the higher prairie land. Beyond this, the ruins of the agency were still smoking.

As the soldiers moved forward over the river plain toward the ferry, they came across many corpses, among them the body of the ferryman. The mood became steadily more ominous. Anyone could be hiding in the tall prairie grass along the road and among the trees on the hillside behind the ferry dock. They passed the ferryman's house and arrived at the riverbank. The tranquil, dark water glided by them. The Minnesota River was not much more than 100 feet across and not particularly deep. The Indians and other locals knew of many places shallow enough to wade across. The soldiers, however, lacked such knowledge and therefore had to gamble on using the ferry. Marsh and his men were growing uneasy as they pressed on. If the Indians lay in ambush, the soldiers would be terribly vulnerable and exposed while they stood tightly packed on the ferry without cover.

They spotted an Indian who stood on the opposite bank. It seemed as though he was waiting for them. He had shoulder length hair, that indicated he was a farmer-Indian. The Indian called across the water in the Sioux language, and the interpreter told Marsh that the Indian wanted the soldiers to cross the river and negotiate with the Sioux up at the agency. Marsh was suspicious, and he would not go aboard the ferry until he was fully certain that the farmer-Indian was not attempting to lure him into a trap. With the help of the interpreter, Marsh tried to interrogate the Indian and gain a better overview of the situation.<sup>12</sup>

While the interpreter and farmer-Indian called back and forth across the river, some thirsty soldiers went down to the riverbank to drink. When nineteen-year-old Sergeant John F. Bishop bent down with cup in hand, he noticed that the water was cloudy and that small branches and leaves floated downstream. This suggested that someone had crossed the river farther upstream. The sergeant immediately notified Marsh and ran up to a little sand knoll in order to get a better view. In a low spot on the other side of the

river, he saw several horses standing and swishing their tails in the summer heat. These seemed to be the Indians' horses, but the owners were not in sight. Some of the soldiers believed they could vaguely make out Indians lying hidden among the bushes on the opposite bank. Everything indicated that the Sioux lay in ambush.

All of a sudden, a gunshot sounded. In the next moment, gunfire broke loose from all sides. Bullets whizzed and arrows hissed through the air. The first salvo came from the hillside behind the ferry dock on the other side of the river. The interpreter was hit so many times that his body quaked violently before crumpling down dead. Marsh's mule was shot out from under him, but the captain was unharmed and quickly got back on his feet. At that moment, the soldiers heard strident war cries behind them. They spun around in time to see the Sioux spring up from the high prairie grass. Several of them had double-barreled shotguns that they blasted, all barrels firing right at the soldiers. Young Sergeant Bishop described the Indians as "the terrible looking mob around us. They were all painted and naked except breech-clouts." In a mere instant, nearly half of Marsh's men lay dead on the riverbank. Among the dead was Christian Torger.<sup>13</sup>

The Sioux were overwhelming in number; the soldiers had no chance to defeat them. Captain Marsh and the other survivors now fought to save their lives. After a chaotic struggle at close quarters around the ferryman's house, the soldiers managed to sever the ring of Indians. Marsh led sixteen men into a thicket of brush along the river bank just south of the ferry dock. With better cover and intense fire, they managed to keep the Sioux at a distance. This could only be a temporary solution, however, because they would soon run out of ammunition. For this reason, Marsh led his men down the riverbank under the cover of bushes. The Indians pursued them. Firing continuously, they let fly a fusillade of shot that whizzed past the soldiers' ears and sliced through the surrounding leaves and twigs.

The twenty-one year old Norwegian immigrant Ole Svendsen was one of the survivors Marsh managed to gather. The young Norwegian was hit by an arrow and so badly wounded that his

comrades had to carry him.

Finally, the soldiers came to the thicket's end. Not wanting to take the chance of resuming the fight against the superior Indian force on open ground, Marsh decided to attempt a river crossing. A good swimmer, the twenty-eight year old captain waded into the water himself to find a suitable place. Soon, the river became so deep that he had to rely on his swimming skills. "Suddenly he called, 'Cramp!' and went under."\* Three soldiers threw themselves into the river in order to help their captain, but they were unable to save him. John Marsh met his end by drowning in the Minnesota River.

At this point, young sergeant John Bishop took command. Later, Bishop wrote, "I [...] will never forget how dark the next hour seemed to us, as we crouched underneath the bank of the Minnesota River, and talked over and decided what next best to do." After a while, the soldiers discovered that the Indians were gone. The Sioux likely thought that the whites had crossed the river and waded over to the opposite bank to ambush the soldiers there.<sup>14</sup>

It was now late in the afternoon. Bishop and his men ventured out from the safety of the thicket. Concealed by the twilight, they continued their retreat down the river to Fort Ridgely. Among the remaining fifteen men was Ole Svendsen who carried the entire way back to the fort. Eight others had managed to stay hidden after the attack at the ferry dock, each finding his own way back to the fort. Twenty-three men lay dead back on the bank of the Minnesota.

The Indians' losses were small, and for them the attack at Redwood was a triumph. Some of the Sioux said that killing white

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\* Translators' Note: Skarstein's text reads, "Suddenly he called, 'Cramp!' and went under." However Bishop's account makes no mention of a shout: "He entered the river first, and swam to about the centre, and there went down with a cramp. I ordered two of the best swimmers to try and help him; one reached him when he came to the surface a second time, only to be drawn under. I will never forget the look that brave officer gave us just before he sank for the last time..." The balance of the quote is in the Bishop quote Skarstein provides next.

soldiers was as simple as shooting sheep.

Ole Svendson received good care at Fort Ridgely and returned to his unit after treatment. In time he would resume his duties as a soldier in the Fifth Minnesota Regiment.

While the battle at Redwood was raging, many small groups of Sioux warriors set out to attack whites across the region. This came as a complete surprise to the settlers, who had no idea that the Indians had risen in resistance. On the north bank of the Minnesota River, not far from Fort Ridgely, Sioux warriors turned up at the farm of Norwegian immigrant Ole Samson. A husband and father, Samson was killed immediately. His wife and children managed to run and hide in a nearby wagon, but it was not long before the Sioux found her and the children. She explained later that the Indians filled the wagon with dry hay and set fire to it before they left. At least one of the children died in the flames. Mrs. Samson was badly burned but managed to save herself and rescue her small child. She arrived at Fort Ridgely that same evening.<sup>15</sup>

Terrified white refugees streamed into Fort Ridgely throughout the day. Many of them told terrible accounts of the Indians' cruelty. Such stories were embellished and overdramatized until it was nearly impossible to discern fact from fiction. The descriptions of the Indians' atrocities were often strongly exaggerated. At the same time, it is beyond doubt that the Indians killed and abused men, women, and children, and that they willingly played a slow, tormenting game of cat and mouse with their victims. One should not attempt to reduce this to cultural differences. In any culture, when human beings with weapons in hand have free rein to do as they please, there are always some who will commit loathsome abuses. Perhaps more than anything else, it is this that makes war so terrifying and incalculable.

The mood among the whites at Fort Ridgely grew increasingly tense as they grasped the magnitude and extent of the Indian uprising. There was no doubt that hundreds, maybe thousands of Sioux were on the warpath. Moreover, Fort Ridgely could hardly be called a secure stronghold. Apart from the name, there was little about the place that resembled a fort. On a rise about a mile from the Minnesota's north bank, it consisted only of a cluster of buildings around a parade ground. Nothing had been done to safeguard

the buildings against attack. There were no palisades or protective earthworks – the buildings did not even have gun slits. Further, the site was not ideal for a defensive battle. To the east, south, and west of the fort, the surrounding ravines were overgrown with scrub brush and there were low spots in the terrain where attackers could approach without being seen until they were close at hand. The forest to the east came within 100 yards of the fort. Only to the northwest did the defenders have a good open line of fire.

The fort was so badly prepared for attack that it required many soldiers to defend it, but the evacuees who came to the fort on the afternoon of August 18 found only the twenty-nine soldiers whom Captain Marsh had left behind when he marched to Redwood. Their commander was Lieutenant Thomas P. Gere, a young and inexperienced nineteen-year-old. On top of it all, Gere had caught the mumps and was not in a position to exert effective leadership. The situation did not appear to be particularly bright for the whites at Fort Ridgely, and morale sank further when the first survivors from Marsh's command arrived with the news that Marsh and half of his men were dead. Still, the refugees remained in the fort, for they had nowhere else to go.

While the refugees at Fort Ridgely waited in dread for the Sioux's attack, the Indian uprising expanded both up and down the Minnesota River valley. Among the first casualties were German immigrants in the area around Milford, which lay on the south bank of the Minnesota River downstream from Fort Ridgely. Here the Sioux traveled from house to house and killed nearly all the whites they found. Nearly fifty German immigrants were struck down before the Indians rode back to their camps to celebrate their triumph over the white invaders.

Eventually, as the rumors about the uprising spread, settlers streamed in from the south side of the Minnesota River to New Ulm, the largest town in the area. The majority of those who had settled there were Germans, but there were also one or two Scandinavian families. Among those who sought refuge in New Ulm were Jan Tomsen as well as Ole, Nels, og Tork[i]ld? Olson. They probably came from the area near Leavenworth in the Cottonwood Valley and were Norwegians, but sources provide nothing



more than their names.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the day, more and more terrified and shocked refugees came to New Ulm with harrowing accounts of the Sioux ravaging of the area. New Ulm was as ill prepared for an attack as Fort Ridgely on the opposite side of the river. The houses stood scattered over the open hills down toward the Minnesota's bank, and there were no defense works. Moreover, they were short of both weapons and military experience. A request for help was sent to the cities of Mankato and St. Peter farther east, but it could all end in a horrific massacre if help did not arrive before the Sioux attacked. For, in addition to the small number of defenders, there were nearly 1200 vulnerable people in New Ulm.

That night the Sioux gathered at Little Crow's camp. Where before merely a handful of tipis had stood around the chief's house, now there were over 200 clustered together. Boisterous crowds of elated warriors were steadily arriving back from their harrying campaign heavily loaded with booty and with terror-stricken prisoners in tow. Drumbeats thundered rhythmically across the tent coverings while the Indians celebrated their triumph in the age-old manner of singing and dancing. Young warriors proudly recounted descriptions of the whites they had killed as they displayed their scalps. To have killed one of the enemy was a great honor. Regardless of whether the casualty was a man, woman, or child, it merited the right to wear an eagle feather. Yet many of the Sioux preferred to take women and children as prisoners for it was a tempting opportunity to procure an extra wife and some children who could help with the daily chores. After all the humiliations to which the whites had exposed them, the Sioux enjoyed the sensation of power over the whites they had abducted. The hostages also comprised a possible trump card in future negotiations with the whites.

It was a traumatic experience to be a captive in Little Crow's camp. The prisoners were constantly menaced and tormented. In some cases, they were also exposed to abuse and sexual violation. For many, the fear and suspense were the worst because the Indians could decide to kill them at any time. Some of the Sioux were staggeringly drunk from the alcohol they had taken from the whites, and they found terrifying their prisoners greatly amusing. Most terrifying was Cut Nose, one of the leaders of the young

warriors. He is said to have boasted that he had struck down whites until his arm was exhausted. One of the prisoners, the half-blood Indian Samuel J. Brown, described Cut Nose as a “fiend in human shape.” During a fight with one of his victims, Cut Nose had been bitten on the thumb, which now was bloody and mangled. He had used the blood to paint the whole of his body. “[W]ith his blackened face and long bushy hair like a Zulu’s, and a half nose (one of his nostrils was missing) he was by far the ugliest looking and most repulsive specimen of humanity I had ever seen,” wrote Brown. But not all shared the opinion that Cut Nose was ugly. One white woman who met him before the war described him as “one of the finest specimens of manhood I have ever seen, tall, straight and with agreeable features in spite of the small piece gone from the edge of one nostril.”<sup>17</sup>

When Big Eagle returned to his camp after the attack on the Redwood agency, he discovered that the majority of his people now were in favor of war. Personally he still had little desire to get involved in a hopeless struggle with the whites, but he felt that he must follow his tribe’s fate. He said to his men that he would lead them in the war, and that they must all conduct themselves as brave Sioux and fight as best they could.

There could have been many reasons why Big Eagle now made up his mind to take part in the war. Later, he explained that Little Crow had advised some of his men to shoot him like a traitor who would not take action for his people if he refused to lead them. They would then choose a new leader to replace him.<sup>18</sup>

### *Thursday, August 19*

On the morning of the uprising’s second day, the Sioux rode out to continue the attacks on the whites. However, Little Crow wanted to attack Fort Ridgely first and kill all the soldiers in order to secure total freedom of movement in the Minnesota River valley. But since many of the Sioux were still out to kill settlers, the chief only managed to recruit a few hundred warriors willing to follow him to Fort Ridgely. Little Crow also had great difficulty getting his warriors to follow a clear and focused war plan, for even though he was by far the Santee-Sioux’s foremost chief, he could not control his men in war. It was not part of Sioux culture to blindly obey their

leaders. The only thing a chief could do to get men to execute his plan was to urge and embolden them as he attempted to go in front and lead by example. Each individual warrior decided for himself if he would follow his chief, and many preferred to obtain simple booty by raiding the settlers rather than meeting the white soldiers in open battle.

Little Crow and his men crossed the Minnesota River in the morning hours and rode along the north bank toward Fort Ridgely. On a ridge just north of the fort, the Indians stopped to consult with one another. The white soldiers and refugees in the fort could see Little Crow's warriors clearly in the distance. Margaret Hern watched the Sioux through a telescope and described them as a "cavorting throng of challenging devils." With fewer than fifty armed men to defend themselves, the situation looked bleak for the whites; they waited nervously for the outcome of the Indians' deliberations. Mrs. Hern wrote: "We watched them breathlessly as they sat in council knowing that if they came then we were lost. The council was long, but finally after giving the blood curdling war whoop, they rode away."<sup>19</sup>

Little Crow had not succeeded in persuading his warriors that they must attack the fort. Instead, many of the young Sioux wanted to ride down and attack New Ulm, which they expected would make for an easier and more profitable target with only the settlers to defend it. In the town, there were shops to plunder and beautiful young women to carry off. The majority of Little Crow's force crossed the river and rode against New Ulm. Too few remained with the chief to have any hope of taking the fort.

The first crisis was over for the whites at Fort Ridgely. Immediately afterward, their courage rose dramatically when Lieutenant Sheehan and his fifty men came back from the aborted march to Fort Ripley. Sheehan took command of the fort, and later that day the Indian agent Galbraith also arrived with approximately fifty recruits who had been on their way down the valley to enlist for the Civil War.

Including some male refugees who had been issued weapons, Sheehan now had a force of about 180 men to defend the fort. But even though the situation at Fort Ridgely looked much brighter, the danger was far from over. If Little Crow could manage to

gather all the Sioux warriors in the Minnesota Valley to fight in a decisive battle, then it was doubtful that Sheehan's men would be able to stand their ground.

While the soldiers at Fort Ridgely did what they could to improve their defensive positions, over a hundred Sioux rode down the Minnesota River's south bank toward New Ulm. Smaller groups hunted the white settlers in the surrounding area.

The initial panic among the refugees in New Ulm had decreased somewhat by the morning of August 19, and sixteen men from Cottonwood Valley made up their minds to go out and bury the Indians' victims and rescue survivors. Six of the men rode on horseback and the rest were in wagons; Nels, Tore and Ole Olson, as well as, Jan Tomsen were among the group. In the area southwest of New Ulm, they found many dead and some wounded who had managed to hide. Among these were four children who were immediately sent to town.

Late in the afternoon, the sixteen men traveled back to New Ulm. Dark, heavy clouds spread across the sky, giving clear signs that a storm was on the way. A violent thunderstorm soon began. The white men neared the outskirts of the town as the rain poured down on them, already feeling fairly safe from the Indians. They were probably preoccupied with getting inside and drying their clothes. At once, the Sioux attacked from all sides. It was an uneven fight, for the Indians were too numerous for the poorly armed white men. Eleven of the white men were killed in the course of a few minutes, including the three Olsons and Jan Tomsen. Five men barely managed to flee into town.

Meanwhile, another group of warriors had begun an attack on the town itself. Roughly 100 men dismounted on the heights above and began shooting down into the town. Many of the whites were killed or wounded. The first who fell was a thirteen-year-old girl attempting to cross the main street while the battle was underway. Some of the houses on the outskirts were set on fire and for a while the situation appeared perilous for the refugees and residents at New Ulm. The Indians did not have a large enough force to take the town, and the thunderstorm dampened their desire for battle. The attack was already waning when reinforcements began to arrive from the towns farther down the valley. At once,

the newcomers began the counterattack and drove the Sioux away.

Thus ended the first battle of New Ulm. During the evening many newly-formed militia units came to help the white defenders. A company with more than 120 men under the command of Charles E. Flandrau came from the town of St. Peter. On the rolls of this company were many Norwegian-sounding names: H. Monsen, Jens and Nels Nielson, John Petersen, Ole Rendel, K. Torgeson, Nels Torrison as well as three men with the last name of Olson.<sup>20</sup>

Assuming command of New Ulm's forces, Flandrau immediately organized the defense in case the Indians should attack again.

News of the Indian insurrection had still not reached the settler villages along the lower part of the Minnesota River. In Carver, which lay nearly 60 miles northeast of Fort Ridgely, Ole Paulson was still happily unaware of what had taken place. The thirty-year-old theology student had returned to the family farm for the summer months and would soon travel south to Chicago to resume his studies at Augustana College.

Life on the farm in a remote part of Minnesota was calm and peaceful compared to the bustling big city where the Civil War steadily incensed the public. But as late summer approached, the Civil War's long shadows reached even the quiet hamlet of Carver. At the end of August, a pair of recruiting officers came to seek volunteers for the 9<sup>th</sup> Minnesota Regiment. Paulson described the recruiting method as follows: "The recruiting officers traveled around with drums and pipes in cities and the countryside, calling people to gather at meetings where rousing speeches were given with the intent to raise enthusiasm and war intoxication in young men's hearts." And, even though he believed that as a theology student he was "obviously meant to remain at home," Paulson went to hear the recruiters' patriotic speeches.<sup>21</sup>

Since large portions of the population in Carver were of Swedish or Norwegian extraction and understood English poorly, the recruiting officers had great problems in getting their message across to their audience. They asked Paulson for help since he spoke both English and Scandinavian languages. Paulson thought that it was the least he could do to contribute to the war effort. "I went with them and held roaring speeches full of gushing love for

the fatherland,” wrote Paulson later. “The effect was that many of my friends, kinsmen, and neighbors allowed themselves to be recruited. But wait a minute! While I spoke to others, I also spoke to myself and was infected by war fever; but I was not supposed to allow myself to be taken, surely not! I was obviously meant to stay at home!”

Late on the afternoon of August 19, Paulson and a neighbor by the name of Sørensen walked about three miles to a farm where a recruiting meeting was to be held. But, when they arrived, no one else had shown up. The people who lived there said that they had not heard of any meeting. While they stood there talking, suddenly a man ran toward them gasping for breath. It was Mr. Henning, a German settler who lived in the area. “Hurry home!” he said, “The Indians are upon us! They murder and kill all in their path.” The German spoke in a cascade like a waterfall. He explained that the cities of Mankato and St. Peter already lay in ashes, and that the citizens at New Ulm fought a desperate battle against a superior enemy. Henderson, a town scarcely twelve miles away, stood in flames, and Henning said that he had seen the smoke with his own eyes. According to the German, there were at least twenty thousand Indians marching down the Minnesota Valley intending to kill all whites. Hundreds of people were already evacuating. Henning urged Paulson and Sørensen to hurry home quickly, gather their loved ones, and flee to St. Paul while there was still time, for soon the Indians would be upon them.<sup>22</sup>

The others were quite skeptical of the German’s story. It all seemed too unbelievable to be true. On the other hand, he had indeed said that he had seen the smoke from Henderson for himself. Paulson and Sørensen did not quite know what they should believe. They decided to visit a Swede living nearby to hear what he knew. The Swede had already gone to bed and opened the door in only his nightshirt. He had heard the rumors about the Indian uprising, but gave them little mind and saw no reason to flee before it became necessary.

Paulson and Sørensen went back to the farm where they had met Mr. Henning. It was now in unparalleled chaos. “The farm was chockfull of women and screaming children,” wrote Paulson. “There was an indescribable lamentation!” Everyone was prepared

to flee, but they had to wait for the men who were fetching wagons and ox teams. At the sight of all these terror-stricken soon-to-be-refugees, Paulson and Sørensen were also gripped with fear of the Indians, and they ran homeward to save their loved ones.

Having come a piece up the road, we met a woman with a child in her arms and a six or seven small children following her, wading in the mud; it had rained so much that the mud was deep. The women moaned and wept and the children cried all in unison. "God comfort and carry me for my little ones!" she suddenly prayed. I knew the woman well, but she was so terrified that she did not recognize me. I tried to console her, but it was of little help. She slogged along pleading her prayer.

When they had to go their separate ways, Paulson took Sørensen's hand and said, "Thank you, brother, for being a good neighbor, for friendship, and happy times together. God grant that if we should not meet again on this earth, that we will meet where there are no hostile Indians and rebels\* to disturb the blessing of peace! May God grant it! Farewell!"

When Paulson came home to the farm, his old friend Pastor Carlson was waiting with the family. They had heard about the Sioux uprising and thought it was best to stay together. After discussing the situation, they agreed that it was safest to travel into Carver the next morning. They watched refugees stream past the entire evening. "There were all sorts of makeshift modes of transportation," wrote Paulson:

lumber wagons, *kubberruller*,\*\* light wagons, buggies, and sleds; the majority drove, but many rode on horse and ox. There was a ceaseless line of terrified people who were fleeing as though the Devil were close on their heels. The refugees drove their animals hard, sometimes pushing them nearly to

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\* Author's Note: Confederate soldiers

\*\* Translators' Note: A *kubberruller* is a cart of sorts with log wheels.

death in order to get away quickly enough. If one tried to speak to them, they would not take the time to answer. If an exhausted refugee lay on the roadside and asked for help to flee, there was no one who took the time to listen to him. So it went on all the roads leading to the towns of Carver, Chaska, and St. Paul.

It was a grim night for the people at Paulsons' farm. After a while, the road emptied, and around the house, they heard the mooing of agitated cattle and the barking of dogs. Now and then shots cracked back and forth in the distance.

The next morning, Paulson and Carlson traveled to Carver with their families. On the way, they encountered neighbors who were already on their way home, and they saw no sign of the panic from the previous day. When they came into the little town on the bank of the Minnesota River, Paulson learned what had happened there the night before:

As night drew in, all the houses, storehouses, stables and outbuildings were filled with refugees. The men had organized self-defense, getting ahold of all the guns that they could find. Some armed themselves with axes and pitchforks. The streets were barricaded with boxes and wagons. The bravest were sent out on the heights as lookouts. In short, they made ready to give the redskins a pretty warm reception when they came.

The women and children did not have to come out on the battlefield, but remained safely indoors.

Down by the dock lay a small steamboat ready to serve when it might become necessary.

At sunrise, a rider burst forth at a furious gallop through the town and shouted at the top of his lungs: "Indians! Indians! Look out for Indians! They have burnt Glencoe and Young America and



are only five miles away! Look out for Indians!

No one knew who he was or where he came from or where he went; he vanished out of sight toward Chaska.

Now there was a clamor among the women and children. The mothers shrieked, got ahold of their children and stormed down to the river on the steamboat in such an ungovernable number that the boat began to sink and would surely have sunk if the captain had not grabbed an axe and cut the line that held the boat secure. The boat now drifted out into the river, and the captain steamed away to St. Paul with his precious cargo of terrified women and children. In an hour or two, there was word that the Indians had not been any closer than Glencoe and around St. Peter. There were tall tales that Mankato, St. Peter, and Henderson lay in ashes. [...]

When the frightened people now heard the true status, they turned home again to their occupations. Thus ended the panic in Carver.<sup>23</sup>

Later, Paulson thought it was curious how people could become so overwhelmed with fear of the same Indians among whom they had lived for several years. He himself had dealt with them many times and traded for moccasins, gloves, and hides for flour and pork. "They were quite fond of pork," he recalled. But, even if the Indians had never done him any harm, he felt that deep down they were evil and untrustworthy. "The Indian's character is treachery," he wrote. "In one instant he can be a good Indian, the next instant a devil who lies in wait, lurking to shoot his arrow through you."

It was not only in Carver that rumors of the Indian uprising created panic. In nearly all of southern Minnesota and even parts of Wisconsin and Iowa, people were deathly afraid that the Indians would come and take them. "If you have ever seen a flock of cranes or other large birds on the prairie, then it was that many Indians on horseback. It was as though the Indians swarmed out of the earth,"

remembered Paulson.

Little Crow was disgusted with what the Sioux warriors had accomplished on the war's second day. Apart from the abortive attack on New Ulm, they had only traveled around in small groups plundering settlers' farms. Furthermore, without a chief to lead, the attack on New Ulm had been planned badly and carried out haphazardly. When the warriors came home to the camp that evening, Little Crow met them with reproach. He said that they should not have wasted their strength on killing women and children. If they were to have a chance to win the war, they must kill the white soldiers. "Hereafter make war after the manner of white men," he said. The chief knew that the Sioux could never win a protracted war. Back when he went to Washington, D.C., he had traveled for days through areas where the whites lived densely packed together. Against such a mass of people, the Sioux were only as a drop in the ocean. Still, Little Crow harbored some hope. If the Sioux could win a few substantial victories over the white soldiers, it might be possible to get the whites to the bargaining table. The Civil War still raging, the leaders in Washington were hardly willing to use great resources to battle the Sioux. A couple of losses would perhaps be enough to get them to enter into a peace agreement.<sup>24</sup>

That evening, Little Crow gathered the chiefs and leading warriors in consultation. The discussion lasted far into the night, but in the end, Little Crow was able to convince them to support an attack on Fort Ridgely the next day. When the soldiers in the fort were wiped out, the Minnesota Valley would lie open for the Sioux.

*Wednesday, August 20*

At sunrise the Sioux readied themselves for battle. "The young men were all anxious to go," related Lightning Blanket. "[W]e dressed as warriors in war paint, breechclouts and leggings, with a large sash around us to keep our food and ammunition in." Led by Little Crow on a white horse, 400 Sioux left the camp, some on horseback, others in wagons that also could be used to carry home plunder. They crossed the Minnesota River close to the burned

agency and continued toward Fort Ridgely.<sup>25</sup>

On a hill about two and a half miles from the fort, they stopped to eat and rest before the attack. Little Crow and the other chiefs informed the warriors about the plan they had all agreed to follow. Approximately 200 men would approach the fort on foot from the northeast and using the forest and ravine as cover, get as close as possible without being detected. In order to conceal the maneuver, Little Crow was going to attract the whites' attention to the west side of the fort. At the same time, the rest of the warriors would slip forward through the ravines from the south and west. On a set signal, they would all storm forward and overpower the defenders.

Inside the fort, the whites waited nervously for the attack that most of them knew was coming but did not know when. Space was tight, and Lieutenant Sheehan had made up his mind to concentrate his efforts on defending the buildings around the parade ground. The majority of the 200 to 300 evacuees were accommodated in the large two story brick barracks on the fort's north side, where they would be reasonably safe from the Indians' bullets. The refugees had to bear somewhat wretched conditions. Food and water were scarce, and the fort lacked a decent sewage system. Moreover, many were still in shock after fleeing their farms and homes with merciless Indians at their heels. Some had seen relatives and neighbors tortured and killed.

Among the evacuees at Fort Ridgely, there were seven who registered Norway as their birthplace. Mrs. Samson, described earlier in this chapter, was able to evacuate with her newborn when the Indians killed her husband. In addition, there were two young married couples: Alex and Julia Peterson and John and Ellen Holverson (Halvorsen) together with their five children. All of the children were born in Minnesota. There was also a second man with the name of John Holverson and a forty-six year old woman by the name of S. Halter (Holter?).<sup>26</sup>

There were also a handful of Norwegians among Sheehan's soldiers: Ole G. Wall, Halvor Ellefson, Martin Ellingson, Andrew Gulbrandson, Peter Nissen, and Andrew Peterson. Ole Svendsen was in the infirmary receiving treatment for the wounds he had

sustained in the battle at Redwood two days earlier.<sup>27</sup>

Late in the afternoon, the whites caught sight of something odd out on the open prairie to the northwest. A small group of Indians rode back and forth waving blankets in the air. A sergeant with binoculars believed that he recognized Little Crow. It appeared that the Indians wanted to negotiate, but they remained in the distance even though the whites tried to signal that they should come closer.

Suddenly a shout was heard from one of the sentries on the fort's northeast corner: "Here they come! The ravine is full of them!" Then, rifles, muskets, and shotguns thundered. The Sioux warriors had snuck right up to the fort before they were detected, and they now stormed forward to overpower the defenders. The Indians were a formidable sight with half naked, war-painted bodies and headdresses with eagle feathers. Their ringing war cry also struck fear in the defenders. Many of the civilians, who had been given weapons, panicked and left their posts. But just enough of them held their ground to thwart the Indians' attack right outside the large brick barrack.<sup>28</sup>

One of the defenders, a youth named Ezmon Earle, recalled, "[...] the Indians [...] fired rapidly and each time they fired they uttered the war whoop. The noise from the shooting with the crashing of bullets thro [sic] doors and windows was bad enough but the war whoop was worse yet, for it was simply blood curdling and I really think that I dodged oftener [sic] for the war whoops than for the bullets."<sup>29</sup>

In the meantime, Lieutenant Sheehan had gathered his soldiers on the parade ground. He wanted to battle in closed ranks in full accordance with regulations. But, the soldiers stood fully exposed on the open parade ground, and when the Indians fired a salvo through the opening between the buildings in the northeast corner, one man was killed and another wounded. The soldiers quickly sought cover, and Sheehan understood that it was hopeless to fight according to regulations. Instead, he let the soldiers take position in and around the buildings and defend themselves as best they could.

A soldier by the name of McFall recalled: "The bullets from The indian [sic] forces on the East were Sweeping the parade

ground like a hale [sic] storm. The squad I was with Made a dash for The Stone quarters and went into The 2<sup>nd</sup> Story and Took up our Position on The north Side. We did not Stop to Shove The windows up but beat Them out with The butts [sic] of our muskets. Pandemonium and hell now reigned. Three hundred women and children had Taken refuge in The Stone building and about 200 of them were in The room with us. [...] There was Singing and Praying and Crying and Screaming [sic] and about 50 children cam [sic] in with Their Corus [sic].”<sup>30</sup>

The Indians were close at hand. They had already passed a row of log buildings that lay on the perimeter of the fort, and had almost managed to get in through the fort’s northeast corner.

But the defenders had a final trump card. When Fort Ridgely’s original garrison of artillerymen went east to take part in the Civil War, they left behind many cannons of various models and caliber. They had also left behind an artillery sergeant by the name of Jones to take care of the artillery. When the fresh recruits from the Fifth Minnesota Artillery came to the fort, Jones had taught them to use the cannons in order to add a little variety to the usual exercises. Now, this training proved useful. Two howitzers were rolled out from the parade ground’s northwest and southeast corners. From here, the two cannons could provide effective crossfire against the Indians attacking from the northeast.

The violent shell explosions were too much for the Sioux. Against such weapons, they had little answer. Reluctantly, they retreated through the ravine to the forest’s fringe east of the fort.

“As we were running in, we saw the man with the big guns, whom we all knew, and as we were the only ones in sight, he shot into us,” related the Sioux warrior Lightning Blanket. “Two of our men were killed and three hurt, two dying afterward [...] The plan of rushing into the buildings was given up, and we shot at the windows, mostly at the big stone building, as we thought many of the whites were in there. We could not see them, so were not sure we were killing any.”<sup>31</sup>

Simultaneously, Little Crow’s men attacked from the southwest. Here, Sergeant Jones directed the defense and held the Sioux at bay with a six-pound field cannon. A large, powerful man, Jones had a thick beard and a calm, steady military bearing. For the defenders,

he was the right man in the right place. Though the Indians leveled heavy fire against Jones and the artillerymen, the valiant sergeant remained at his post until the Indians were driven back.

The Sioux's attempt to storm the fort had failed. Taking cover, they shot at the fort from the ravines. Some of the warriors tried to set fire to the fort's buildings with flaming arrows, but each time, the whites were able to remove the arrows and squelch the fire before the flames took hold.

The battle continued through the afternoon. Thick smoke from gunpowder enveloped the fort. All the while, the short, sharp crack of gunshots resounded amidst the Indians' war whoops and the hiss of arrows lodging in the walls of wooden buildings. Occasionally, the cannons' violent boom and the thunder of exploding shells reverberated through the battle scene.

At twilight, the shooting died down. The Indians realized that they would not be able to take the fort. The disappointed and frustrated Sioux warriors returned through the ravines, retracing the path along the river toward Little Crow's camp. The wagons that should have carried booty instead carried the wounded home. While the whites' claim that they had killed or wounded over 100 Sioux was a vast exaggeration, there was no doubt that the attack on the fort cost the Indians dearly. Lightning Blanket related that two warriors were killed and two others mortally wounded on the east side of the fort. How many were wounded on the west or south side he did not know.<sup>32</sup>

In the fort, the whites were relieved that the Indians' attack was repelled. Even though their own losses were relatively small, a few killed and a handful wounded, they knew that the Indians had been just a hair's breadth from storming the fort. They were also well aware that it was too early to celebrate any victory; the Sioux could attack again at any time.

While Little Crow chose to lead the attack on Fort Ridgely, many of the Sioux warriors preferred to attack simpler targets. Several smaller groups from the camps of Shakopee, Red Middle Voice, and Sleepy Eyes rode northward toward the vast forests called Big Woods to kill settlers who had homesteaded there.

On the western edge of Big Woods lay an area of rolling prairies, scattered groves, and innumerable lakes. This beautiful and

fertile land was known as the Lake Park region, and it had attracted a stream of settlers in the previous four to five years. There were many Norwegians among those early settlers who had dared to move to this seemingly untouched wilderness. The Norwegians quickly made their mark on the region. One of the largest lakes was named Norway Lake, and the surrounding land was known as the Norway Lake Settlement (Map 2.1).

The majority of the Norwegians thrived, for in this region they found everything they needed: timber for building and fuel, abundant water, and large fruitful swaths of land that were well suited for both cultivation and pastures.

The farms at Norway Lake lay somewhat scattered, and it was a good distance to the closest town. Because of this, the settlers here received little news from the outside world, and on August 20, 1862, they were unaware that the Sioux had risen up two days earlier. Farm families went about their habitual, daily chores, and many of the men went out haying in the fields.

In the middle of the day, a group of Indians came to West Lake, about six miles west of Norway Lake. The Swedish families Broberg and Lundborg lived here, and the unsuspecting Swedes had no chance when the Indians began to shoot. The Sioux spared no one; all men, women, and children were shot or struck down with tomahawks. Of the large Broberg family only two children managed to hide successfully and survive. All together thirteen members of the two families perished.<sup>33</sup>

Some miles farther east lived the family of Ole Knudsen Storebraaten from Sigdal. It was a lovely late summer's day, and Storebraaten, like the majority of his neighbors, took advantage of the marvelous weather to work out in the fields haying. The rest of the family was at home when a panic-stricken Swede came and told them about the massacre at West Lake. The Swede said that they must hide immediately because the Indians were in the vicinity. Then he ran out to the field to warn Storebraaten. When Storebraaten heard that the Indians were on the warpath, he rushed home to get his family to safety, but the house was empty and there was no one in sight. He called many times, but heard no answer. And so he ran to his nearest neighbor, Evan Railson Glesne who originally came from Krødsherad. But, his wife and children



*Map 2.1: Farms at Norway Lake*



were not there either, and he became gravely afraid that something dreadful had happened. He hurried home again in order to continue searching. At last he found his loved ones hiding from the Indians in a thicket. They had been so afraid that they dared not answer him when he called <sup>34</sup>

Storebraaten and his family walked eastward to the large Norway Lake together with several Norwegian and Swedish neighbors. There they all decided to seek refuge on a small island. The crossing took time because their only boat was a hollowed out log that could only take two passengers at a time. Despite the inefficient transportation, they eventually ferried everyone over to the island, which lay safely out of reach of the Indians' guns.

Later that evening, Storebraaten and some other men went back to the mainland to search for family and friends who had been left behind in the evacuation. A cold wind blew, and soon it began to rain. Some of the men wanted to give up and turn back to the island, but Storebraaten and some of the others persuaded them to continue the search. At last they found the pregnant wife of one of the Swedes. Soaking and freezing, she had concealed herself in the tall reeds along a little lake, but at least she was alive. They also found another pair of refugees whom they took back with them to their refuge on Norway Lake.

The news of the Indians' attack spread quickly among the settlers around Norway Lake. In addition to those who went out to the island, many fled eastward eventually reaching safety in the towns of Paynesville and Forest City. But not all were warned in time. A man named Johannes Iverson from Hurdal lived roughly two miles southwest of Norway Lake at Crook Lake. As so many others, Iverson was busy haying when the Indians surprised and killed him. The rest of the family was more fortunate. Both his wife and their large brood of children managed to escape. In their flight to safety, five of the children were separated from their mother, but they were later found by the rescue expedition from Paynesville. <sup>35</sup>

While the settlers around Norway Lake were attacked from the west, other Indians approached from the south to attack the farms around Foot Lake, Eagle Lake, and Solomon Lake. The first victim was Berger Thorson, a young man from Hardanger who lived on the south side of Foot Lake. He was struck down with

a tomahawk while out working in the fields. Soon afterward, the Indians attacked the farm of Thorson's neighbor Olaf O. Haugen from Biri by Lake Mjøsa. Haugen was also killed while out haying. The Indians then took the lives of his wife and son.

Asbjørn Eriksen Rykkje lived with his family a little farther north, near Eagle Lake. (He called himself Oscar Erickson in America.) Rykkje was thirty-eight years old and originally from a farm near Fykkesund in Hardanger. There was little in the landscape around Eagle Lake that resembled the steep cliffs that plunged down into the Hardanger Fjord at the Rykkje farm in Norway, but by all appearances, Asbjørn had become comfortable in his new surroundings. In 1860, he had married Gjertrud Larsdatter who came from the farm Rosseland in Stiensdalen, a short six miles from Rykkje. The following year, the couple had a daughter, but in 1862 their idyll was brutally shattered.<sup>36</sup>

On the evening of August 20, many settler families came to Rykkje's log house at Eagle Lake. They explained that they had fled their homes after a rider from Forest City warned them that the Sioux were on the warpath. One of the refugees was Rykkje's neighbor, Solomon Foot.\* He was among the first who had settled in the area, and both Foot Lake and Solomon Lake were named after him. Foot was known as a frank man and an excellent shot. Therefore, it was natural that he played a leading role among the settlers who gathered at Rykkje's farm. In addition to the families of Foot and Rykkje, there were two Swedish families at the farm.

Even though Foot had fled his farm, he was not fully convinced that the Sioux really were on the warpath. In his considerable contact with the Indians, he usually got along with them. It was difficult to imagine that they suddenly had turned into bloodthirsty fiends. Even so, he believed it was best to be on guard because when he was on his way to Rykkje's house, he had heard a cow lowing and noted that this was the same way the cow tended to behave when Indians were nearby. As night fell, there was rain in the air. Foot thought it best that they remain inside overnight, and the others agreed. If the Indians attacked, it would be easier to defend

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\* Translators' Note: Most sources, including Holand, refer to this person as Solomon Foote. We have chosen to remain true to Skarstein's spelling.

themselves behind Rykkje's log walls than in open terrain.

Foot kept a lookout to the south and west while the others fetched water and moved the wagons inside the fence around the house. Suddenly, Foot saw something move on the other side of the stream below the house. It was too dark for him to make out anything other than some dark shadows that crossed the stream and came up over the hill. Foot instantly realized that the shadows were Indians on horseback. He warned the others, and they all hurried into the house. Foot demanded that the door be shut and bolted and the lights put out. The women protested, not wanting to sit in darkness. But Foot did not give in. If the house were lit, it would be easy for the Indians to peer in and evaluate the opposition, and if the Indians opened fire, the lights would also make it easier for them to aim. Foot had the men extinguish the lights while the women and children cried loudly.<sup>37</sup>

When the house was completely dark, Foot hung his coat as a curtain over the window. Then he pulled a small flap to the side and called out in the night: "Who is there?"

"How, How!" answered the Indians in their usual greeting. Foot could speak enough of the Sioux language to communicate with the Indians. He told them that he had heard that they were on the warpath and told them not to come closer to the house because they were frightening the women and children. The Indians answered that they came in peace. They said that it was another tribe that had killed some settlers some days earlier, and that Foot and the others need not be afraid. Foot did not allow himself to be persuaded. While this conversation was happening, some noticed that an Indian sprang across the fence on his horse. Foot went to the door and peered out through a crack. He could see the Indian sitting on his haunches close against the wall of the house. Foot asked him to move, but received no response. Then, Foot threatened to shoot. This prompted a reaction, and the Indian hopped on his horse, jumped over the fence, and vanished into the night with the other Indians.

But the Sioux warriors did not go far. They made camp nearby, close enough that their campfire was fully visible from Rykkje's house. Foot kept watch all night while the other settlers tried to sleep. He could see the Indians sitting around the campfire, and he

heard them singing. War cries reverberated back and forth through the darkness: “Hiya ya, hiya.”<sup>38</sup>

Late in the evening, it began to rain. This was a relief for the settlers because it would at least make it more difficult for the Indians to set fire to the house. Foot still feared the morning because it was impossible to say what the Sioux would decide to do. If it came to a fight, the responsibility would fall to him, for Rykkje and the Swedes had little experience with weapons.

*Thursday, August 21*

The heavy rain that had begun during the night in the Minnesota Valley continued throughout the next morning. In Fort Ridgely, the noise of the raindrops whipping against the roof and walls was received as a blessing because the whites had feared the Indians’ flaming arrows. Still, the soldiers and evacuees understood that they were in great danger of a new Indian attack, and they used the time as well as they could to prepare themselves. They built barricades of grain sacks and logs in the openings between the houses around the parade ground, and they brought an additional cannon out from the arsenal. The new cannon, a stout twelve-pound field cannon, was placed in the fort’s southeast corner. Thus, one cannon stood in each of the fort’s four corners. During the first attack, the defenders had used up much of the ammunition for their guns. The garrison solved this problem by collecting the bullets that the Indians had shot against the fort and refashioning them to fit the soldiers’ guns.

In Little Crow’s camp similar preparations were underway for the next stage of battle against Fort Ridgely. The Indians had also used up much of their ammunition in the first attack and had to cast new bullets. They found more gunpowder in the ruins of the Indian Agency at Redwood.

Later on that evening, Little Crow received welcome reinforcements, approximately 400 warriors from Sioux bands near Yellow Medicine Indian Agency. Thus far, these bands had only taken part in the uprising in a minor way because their primary chiefs, men

like Standing Buffalo and Red Iron, were against the war.

But many of the young warriors defied their leaders and rode to the valley to help their countrymen in the fight against the whites.

With these reinforcements, Little Crow and the other chiefs could begin to plan a new attack on Fort Ridgely the next day.

Near Eagle Lake, the rain stopped early in the morning, and slanting beams of sunlight glimmered on the wet grass and on the tree leaves. Inside Asbjørn Rykkje's log house, the men began to make preparations to protect themselves and the people in their care. They covered the windows on the west side leaving only a little opening at the top that could serve as a lookout and gun slit.

Meanwhile, the Indians had added more wood to their campfire and started to dry their guns. A while later, Solomon Foot thought it looked as though they were getting ready to leave. Foot still found it difficult to believe that these Indians had murderous intentions. He knew many of them and had always been on good terms with them. So when some of the Sioux came close to the house, Foot went out to talk with them. All the Indians gave Foot a friendly greeting except for one who stayed a little in the background. Foot noted that the Indian who stayed in the background had painted his face red and black and appeared quite menacing.<sup>39</sup>

After a short talk with the Indians, Foot went back into the house. It did not take long before one of the Sioux came up to the door and asked for bread. Then another came and asked for potatoes and a pot in order to cook them. Foot was willing to give them the pot but said that they must dig up the potatoes themselves. Then one of the Swedes protested. It was Carl Johan Carlson, known as "Swede-Charley." He was worried that the Indians might be provoked if they did not get what they wanted and offered to go out and get the potatoes. Foot warned him against doing that, but the Swede grabbed a hoe and went out.<sup>40</sup>

After Swede-Charley had gone down to the potato patch, an Indian appeared by the fence and signaled that he wanted to speak with someone in the house. Mrs. Foot was concerned. She said she had seen two Indians with guns in their hands following the Swede, and she did not want her husband to go out. But Foot no longer believed that there was any particular danger. He thought that the Indians would long since have opened fire if they had plans

to kill them.

In spite of his wife's protests, Foot went out to speak with the Indian by the fence. As far as he could see, they were unarmed. But when Foot was just a few yards from the fence, he noted an ominous glint in the Indian's eyes. Suddenly Foot understood that he had walked into a trap. He whipped around and bolted toward the door. At the same time, an Indian whipped out a shotgun he had hidden under a blanket that he wore over his arm. In front of him, Foot saw another Indian blocking the way back to the house. Then a shot exploded from behind him. Two crudely calibrated buckshot pellets hit Foot in the back and knocked him down. This may actually have saved his life because the Indian in front of the door shot in the very next instant, but his bullets flew over Foot, missing him as he fell. The Indian who blocked the way was only a young boy, and he ran away after firing. Thus Foot had a clear path and was able to make his way back to the house. He pulled himself up onto his feet and staggered to the door. His wife raced out to help him inside.

Now they heard shots fired in the potato patch and everyone understood that this meant the end for Swede-Charley. Foot lay on the floor but called to the others to use the guns and shoot. They had to show the Indians that it could cost them dearly to come too close to the house. Asbjørn Rykkje and Mrs. Foot fired immediately. When his wife had reloaded, Foot got to his feet and grabbed the gun. He knocked out some chinking out from between the logs in the wall and peered out. One of the Sioux stood just a few yards away. Foot lifted the gun and fired. The Indian fell to the ground. The Indians had not counted on such resistance. They were standing flabbergasted in front of the house. One of the settlers handed Foot a new gun. He aimed quickly, firing at the torso of the nearest Sioux warrior. The Indian's arms flew out and he fell down as Foot called, "There goes another of the red devils!"\*

Foot managed to load his gun by himself and propped himself up at a window, but this time, one of the Indians shot first. The bullet slammed straight through Foot's shoulder and threw him down. Blood flowed from the open wound. It was clear that Foot

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\* Translators' Note: This quote from an English language source could not be verified in the original English.

could fight no more. His wife helped him up into the bed and got him to drink a little water, but he vomited immediately.

With Foot out of action, others had to take responsibility. Mrs. Foot and Asbjørn Rykke each grabbed a gun and took up positions by the windows. The remaining Swedish patriarch, a man by the name of Swen Swenson, also had a gun, but he was too terror stricken to use it. The Sioux were more careful now, and it was difficult for the settlers to get them in their sights. As long as shooting from the house continued, the warriors kept just out of range. The Indians shot several times, their bullets exploding against the walls, splintering the logs. At once, Rykkje screamed. He dropped to the floor and lay writhing in pain. A bullet had hit him in the groin, causing Rykkje to groan and cry out.

After helping Rykkje up into a bed in the loft, the women took the guns and positioned themselves at the windows. As the battle continued, Mrs. Foot too was hit and knocked to the floor, but she quickly got up again. The bullet had only grazed her breast and arm, and while she was bleeding, the wound was not terribly serious. She grabbed the gun and took her place at the window again. Mrs. Foot was clearly a tough woman.

Later, when the Sioux tried to set fire to the house, Mrs. Foot and Mrs. Rykkje knew what to do. They poured water out through cracks in the walls and managed to quench the fire. The Indians realized that it would be extremely difficult to finish off the settlers in Rykkje's house, and in the end they decided to give up the fight. They climbed on their horses and rode away to seek easier plunder elsewhere.

When the Indians were gone, the Swedes decided that it was high time to leave the house, feeling that it would be safer to hide in the forest. The Swedes gathered their things and hurried out, but Mrs. Foot, Mrs. Rykkje, and their children remained in the house with the injured because their wounds were too serious to risk relocation.

The mood in the house was bleak after the Swedes had gone. The adults knew that the injured men might not survive if they did not receive medical care soon, and if the Sioux returned, it would

probably mean the end for everyone in the house.

Lars and Guri Endresen Rosseland, Rykkje's in-laws, lived with five of their children five miles west of Asbjørn Rykkje's farm, near Solomon Lake. It was their eldest daughter Gjertrud who was married to Rykkje.<sup>41</sup>

The Rosseland family originally came from the farm with the same name that lay on a little plateau above Steinsdalsfossen at Norheimsund. Among the first settlers in the area, they came to Solomon Lake in 1857. By the shore of the lake, they found a piece of land that suited splendidly for farm land, and in 1862, they had seventeen cattle, eight sheep, eight hogs, and some hens.

On the afternoon of August 21, it was the Rosseland family's turn to receive a visit from the Sioux. The mother of the house, fifty year-old Guri, related later: "[W]e were all outside of the house, except my oldest son, who had gone to a neighbor's, when four Indians, whom we used to know, and who had often been in the house before, came through the gate at the front of the house." The Indians shook hands politely as they usually did, and no one in the Rosseland family suspected anything. The father of the house, sixty year-old Lars Rosseland, stood chopping wood while his fifteen year-old son Ole was out in the field digging up potatoes for the evening meal.<sup>42</sup>

Suddenly, the Indians raised their guns and let fire. Lars was hit many times and fell dead on the chopping block. Ole was the next victim. Struck in the shoulder, the young man collapsed on the ground. While the Indians were occupied with shooting the male family members, Guri grabbed her three year-old daughter, Anna, and escaped unnoticed to an earthen cellar behind the house. There was nothing she could do to rescue her two other daughters. "I saw, from the cellar, which had an outside entrance, the Indians dragging off my eldest daughter, aged seventeen years [who still lived at home], and heard my other daughter, ten years old, screaming for me to save her, as two of them were dragging her away," related Guri.

The eldest son Endre came home precisely as the Indians began to shoot, and was instantly killed. From her hiding place in the cellar Guri saw how the Indians plundered the house before they rode away with the two girls sitting in front of them on horseback.



The Indians also took some of the livestock with them.

Guri did not see that Endre was killed, but she witnessed everything else. In the blink of an eye, a peaceful afternoon was transformed into a gruesome tragedy. Guri was all but undone from shock and despair. She hid in the cellar until darkness fell. Then, taking her little daughter in her arms, she hurried into the forest.

The refugees on the island in Norway Lake had spent a wretched night. In addition to the terror of the Indians, a raging tempest with sharp, crackling lightning and reverberating thunderclaps interrupted their sleep. The island provided almost no shelter from the elements, and they were short of food because in their haste, no one had thought to bring any food.

Later the next morning, the courageous men went out to look for more survivors. Sigdølen Ole Knudsen Storebraaten was among them. They saw many signs of the Indians' rampage but found no surviving settlers. Yet, the journey was not in vain, because in the abandoned farms, they found food to take to their hungry women and children. Since everything indicated that the Indians were still in the area, they decided that it was safest to spend another night on the island.<sup>43</sup>

### *Friday, August 22*

When the sun rose on the fifth day of the Indian uprising, nearly 800 Sioux warriors departed from Little Crow's camp and set out down the valley toward Fort Ridgely. With almost twice as many warriors as in the first attack, Little Crow had good reason to hope that he would be able to overpower the fort's defenders. The 300 to 400 young warriors from the Sioux band at Yellow Medicine who had joined Little Crow's force the previous day were eager to prove their prowess against the whites. In contrast to their tribal brothers farther down the Minnesota River valley who traveled less, the bands from Yellow Medicine often encountered each other out on the prairie when hunting for bison. This meant that they also had less contact with the whites and held more closely to the traditional way of living and their distinctive attire. They were an imposing sight as they rode down the valley on their fleet-footed

horses in colorful war paint and with eagle feathers on their heads.

Little Crow and the other chiefs chose to follow nearly the same plan they had used in the first attack (Map 2.2). Dismounting a short distance from the fort, the Sioux warriors split off into two groups that would approach the fort from opposing angles. One group was going to use the ravines north and east of the fort to sneak as close as possible while the other group would move forward through the river valley and ravines south and west of the fort. At an agreed upon signal, all of the warriors would storm forward simultaneously and overpower the fort's defenders.<sup>44</sup>

The Indians camouflaged their headbands with grass and flowers and crept forward to get as close to the fort as possible before they were detected. But the soldiers were on the alert and spotted the Sioux in time. In the blink of an eye, hundreds of guns blasted as both parties opened fire. Just afterward, the cannon's heavy thunderclap sounded. The Indians sprang forward from their cover to storm the fort, but the fire from the defenders' guns and cannons quickly caused them to take cover again. In response, the Sioux sought to neutralize the defenders with a sustained fire from the edge of the forest around the fort.

The Indians also tried to shoot burning arrows to set fire to the fort's buildings. Flaming arrows traveled in a fiery red arc across the sky before battering roofs and walls. This was a terrifying sight for the defenders. However, the buildings were still damp after the previous day's storm making them more difficult to light. Most of the arrows burned out on their own, and the few that continued to burn, the defenders doused with water.

The fight continued for several hours. The fort was shrouded in thick, foul smelling gun smoke. One of the white refugees, Margaret Hern, related later that she laid eyes on "vast numbers of the Indians with grass and flowers bound on their heads creeping like snakes up to the fort under cover of the cannon smoke." She shouted a warning to the soldiers, and the Indians were driven back by some well-directed volleys of fire.<sup>45</sup>

At one point, the Sioux warriors stormed the large stable that lay on the south side of the fort just outside of the central square of buildings around the parade ground. Their intent was to capture the soldiers' horses and mules, but the stable also gave them a good

position where they could take cover and fire at will. The intense shooting from the stable rendered the situation gravely perilous for the soldiers on the fort's south side.

The Indians' shotgun pellets peppered the barricade so that chips of wood splintered explosively. But the artillery sergeant Jones knew what to do. He shifted the aim of his howitzer toward the stables and peppered it with shells. Before long, the stable stood in flames, and the Indians fled back to the forest and ravines. The same thing happened when a group of Sioux took position in a building outside the fort's west side.

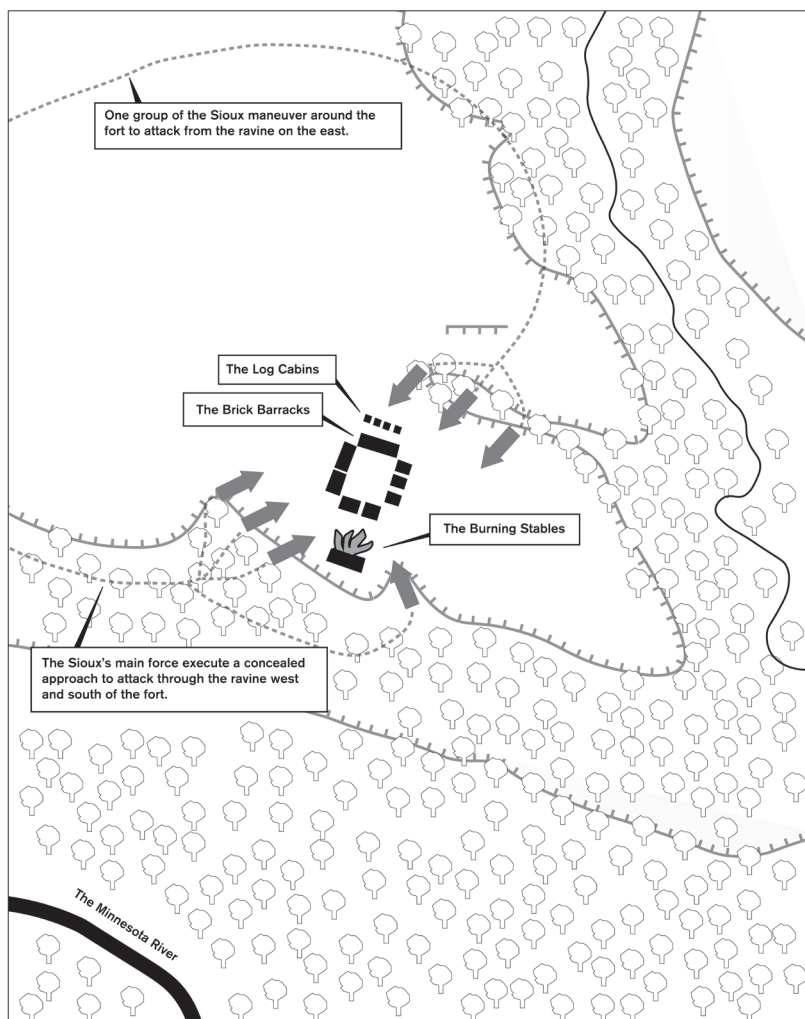
Most likely, many Indians were already killed or wounded, but the sources are too incomplete to provide a precise number. Some assert that Little Crow was injured when the force from an exploding shell threw him to the ground, and that he had to turn command over to a chief by the name of Mankato.<sup>46</sup>

Big Eagle took part in the attack on the fort's south side. "But for the cannon I think we would have taken the fort," he said later. "The soldiers fought us so bravely we thought there were more of them than there were. The cannons disturbed us greatly, but did not hurt many."<sup>47</sup>

The battle had been going on for nearly three hours when the defenders noticed that the Sioux had begun to withdraw toward the southwest side of the fort. All signs pointed to the Indians rallying for a final assault from this direction. The ravines came closest to the fort here, so the attackers only had to cross a short stretch of open ground before they could storm the barricade and overpower the defenders in close combat.

But the soldiers understood what was afoot, and Jones loaded his cannon with a double portion of grapeshot. As the Indians were ready to attack, Jones fired the cannon and a shower of iron shrapnel swept into the knot of Indians in the ravine. The effect was so horrific that the Sioux immediately lost courage and retreated. With this, the second strike on Fort Ridgely was over.

The Sioux warriors gathered some distance north of the fort and discussed what they should do next. According to Lightning Blanket, some suggested going back to Little Crow's camp and gathering more warriors, but Little Crow said that there were no more warriors to gather. Then some thought they should attack



*Map 2.2: The Attack on Fort Ridgely, August 22, 1862*

the fort again the next morning, but the majority had little desire for yet another meeting with the fort's cannons. Instead it was decided that they would go farther down the valley and attack New Ulm. The town ought to be an easier target because, as far as the Sioux knew, there were no cannons there.<sup>48</sup>

The situation did not appear particularly bright for the people in Asbjørn Rykkje's house. Rykkje and Solomon Foot would most likely die if they did not receive medical attention. Moreover, the Sioux could come back any time. Even though the two women had already demonstrated that they could fight bravely to protect their children and husbands, it was doubtful that they could repel the Indians if they decided to storm the house.

In the middle of the day, they heard hoof beats approaching from the north. The Sioux came riding with a herd of cattle and a wagon they had plundered from settlers in the area. Through cracks in the walls, the Foot and Rykkje families watched carefully what the Indians did. The battle the previous day had obviously given the Sioux warriors respect for the shooting skill of the whites in the house, because they stayed at a safe distance and drove the wagon in a wide arc around the building.<sup>49</sup>

Some of the warriors rode up behind the house and took cover behind the stables and a haystack. From there they let fire, the bullets slamming into the Rykkje's log walls. Foot, who lay on the floor, asked his wife why she did not answer the fire to show the Indians that the people in the house were still armed. She answered that she only had two shots left. She probably had not wanted to mention this earlier because she did not want to sap the courage of the others, but Foot was able to reassure her. He still had abundant ammunition in his coat pocket.

Immediately thereafter, the Sioux rode toward the south and disappeared. Foot believed that the superstitious Indians had left because they concluded that the Rykkjes' house was protected by evil powers and that it was best to let it be.

After the Indians were gone, Foot believed they must take action because at least some of the people in the house could save their lives. It was impossible to know whether the Indians had given up or if they would come back with reinforcements. Therefore, he said to his wife that she should take Mrs. Rykkje and the children

with her and go northward to Green Lake where Foot hoped that some of the other settlers were safely entrenched. There they could get someone to come back and fetch the two wounded men. This could be a chance to save all of their lives.

The two women were hardly enthused about abandoning their husbands, but in the end they allowed themselves to be persuaded to do as Foot said. The wagon belonging to one of the Swedes stood just outside the house – the Indians had not dared to come close enough to steal it – but Foot advised the women to let it stand. He said there was less chance that the Indians would detect them if they went on foot in the forest along the lakes.

Each of the women took her own child in her arms and led Foot's six year-old daughter by the hand. They said farewell to their men in full knowledge that it might be the last time they would ever see them. They climbed down through a hatch in the floor and went out through the cellar, allowing the main door to remain barred from the inside. Foot's wife had positioned the gun at the side of her wounded husband so that he could easily reach it if someone tried to break in.

Now the two men were alone. Foot lay in the living room while Rykkje lay in a bed in the loft. Both were weak from loss of blood, so they spoke little. For the most part they, lay still and listened to the flies buzz around their wounds.

Some miles farther west, Guri Rosseland had wandered around in the forest the whole night with her little daughter. In her grief and hopelessness, she had lost her way and wandered wildly. It must have been a wretched night out in the dark forest, in constant fear of the Indians who had shot her husband and son. And as if that were not enough, her three year-old daughter had received so many mosquito bites that her face swelled up until she became almost unrecognizable.<sup>50</sup>

Guri discovered that morning that she had wandered in a circle, and that she was close to her farm. In spite of the fact that she was worried that the Indians were still in the vicinity, she decided to take the chance to go inside the house to see if she could find some food for her daughter. Her home was a sad sight. "Everything in it almost had been either carried away or destroyed. I could only find a little milk for my child," Guri recalled. But then she detected

that something lay hidden behind the oven. It was her son Ole whom she believed had been killed. The fifteen year-old had taken a shotgun pellet between the shoulders and according to Guri, was, "nearly crazy with fever and pain," but the most important thing was that he was alive. After the Indians shot him, Ole had lain lifeless on the ground, and not even when one of the Indians flipped him over on his back had he shown signs of life. The Sioux believed that they had killed him, and this is how he saved his life.

Guri went out and found a couple of oxen the Indians had not taken with them. Since the family's cart was full of hay and could not be quickly emptied, she harnessed the oxen to a light sled and put her children in it. Then she set course eastward toward the farm of her son-in-law Asbjørn Rykkje, where she hoped to find a workable wagon. Before she left the farm, she laid a pillow under the head of her dead husband. She likely felt that it was the least she could do, since she had neither the time nor strength to bury him.

It was closing in on evening when they came to Rykkje's house. Ole had regained some of his strength, so to be on the safe side he went ahead in order to see if there were Indians in the house while Guri waited in the forest with the sled. Outside Rykkje's log house Ole saw an unfamiliar wagon, but there were no oxen there. He also noticed some burned down haystacks. As Ole snuck toward the house, he heard an unfamiliar voice from inside. This alarmed him enough that he did not dare peek inside. He hurried back to his mother and told her what he had seen and heard. Guri agreed that it was safest to stay away from Rykkjes' farm. So, they went around to other farms in the neighborhood to see if there were wagons or people, but all the farms were abandoned. Finally they drove into a small forested area to stay the night.

Refugees from the farms around Norway Lake had spent another night out on the island. When it was morning, the men were able to undertake a new expedition to the mainland. This time, they intended to go the six miles west to the farms at West Lake. It was their aim to bury two Swedish immigrant families, Broberg and Lundborg, who had been killed by the Indians two days earlier.

Ole Knudsen Storebraaten explained: "We found thirteen dead. These we laid in a grave. The Indians had taken everything they

could carry away among the household goods, and what they were forced to leave behind was completely destroyed." According to another source, old Andreas Lundborg, originally from Västergötland, Sweden, had to help bury three of his sons. One of the sons would soon have married. When they were finished with the burial, Lundborg opened a bottle of wine and passed it around. "Drink," he said, "It should have been the wedding toast for my boy who now lies there in the pit."<sup>51</sup> Later on that evening the men returned to their families on the island in Norway Lake.

Sixty miles farther east in Carver on the Minnesota River, the Indian uprising had died down enough to allow the recruiting campaign for the Civil War once again to attract the greatest attention. According to the deadline set by the authorities, the apportioned number of recruits had to be prepared to muster in before midnight on August 22.

Ole Paulson had assisted recruiters with translating their patriotic speeches for the Scandinavian immigrants, and now that the day had come when the recruiters would leave, Paulson decided to go into town and say goodbye to his friends and acquaintances who were about to make the journey to war. His wife did not want him to go. She feared that he would allow himself to be carried away by patriotic appeals to honor. "You must not go to war," she said. But Paulson soothed her. "You know," he reminded her, "it is obvious that I am supposed to stay at home with you, my dear girl. I have a higher goal than to be a warrior."<sup>52</sup>

In town, recruiting was in full swing. The mood was at once inflamed, angry, and grave. To the sounds of flutes and drumrolls, one young man after another enlisted for duty in the war. Yet, all at once it was over. No more were willing to go to war, and fourteen men were still needed for a complete company from Carver.

Paulson stood with a group of grave young men from his congregation. They expressed their willingness to enlist if Paulson were with them. Paulson protested and said he was "obviously" supposed to remain at home. He appealed to their consciences as Christian men and asked if they thought it was right for a man who would be a pastor to go to war. But the others stood firm in their argument. They believed that he had the same duty to defend the country as they had. Paulson tried again to wrench himself away



and said that he was supposed to return to seminary in only one month, but the others would not be persuaded. In the end, some accused Paulson of cowardice. "You have stood night after night preaching to others of their duty to rush to the aid of their bleeding country and their embattled brothers," they said. "We have realized there is truth to what you say, and now we are here, and we are prepared to go, but we want you with us. Yet, you come with empty excuses that show that you are a coward; you are scared!"

Paulson was angry. Such accusations were more than he could tolerate, and he made a quick decision: "How can I know that if I go first to present my allegiance, that you will do the same?" he asked. They said that he could depend on it, but Paulson did not want to take the chance that some of them might sidle away afterwards. Therefore, he suggested that they should all step forward and declare their loyalty at the same time. The suggestion was met with a cheer, and with that it was settled. Paulson raised his hand together with fourteen others and swore loyalty to the United States.

In the frenzied blink of an eye, the theology student Ole Paulson had become a soldier in the United States Army. He harbored powerful doubts that he had done the right thing. In addition to the guilty conscience about his wife, he suffered great agony because he felt that he had distanced himself from God and had given in to temptation. But after having thought carefully through the situation, he concluded that perhaps what had happened was God's will and that there was purpose in it. Thus, he found peace in his soul.

Already the next morning, the recruits were to travel down the river to St. Paul to muster into the Army as part of the 9<sup>th</sup> Minnesota Infantry Regiment. Hence, Paulson had to stay the night in Carver, leaving him with no opportunity to tell his wife what he had done.

*Saturday, August 23*

Ever since the Sioux's first attack, the inhabitants and refugees in New Ulm had gazed nervously up the valley in fear that a horde of bloodthirsty Indians would suddenly surge toward the town. Indeed, they had received reinforcements from the town further

down the Minnesota River Valley, but these were just hastily assembled companies of ordinary citizens without notable military experience. Moreover, their weapons varied widely in quality. If the Indians attacked with full force, it was uncertain if these amateur soldiers would stand their ground. And, with upwards of 1,200 refugees in the town, if the defense broke down, it could all end in a terrible massacre.

On the evening of August 19, Justice Charles E. Flandrau had taken command in New Ulm. At the age of thirty-four, Flandrau was already one of Minnesota's most well-known and respected men. He had gone to sea for some years as a teenager before studying law and becoming a lawyer in his home state of New York. When he was twenty-five, he headed west to Minnesota and played a prominent role in the development of the new state. After having been an Indian agent for some years, he was appointed as a justice in Minnesota's Supreme Court, an office he held when the Indian War broke out. One of his contemporaries described him as stately, sinewy and supple, and active as an Indian. He was an outstanding example of the men who led the spread of American civilization westward across the prairie. With such a background, he was the natural leader for the defenders of New Ulm.<sup>53</sup>

Flandrau's force comprised a little over 300 men armed with everything from hunting rifles and muskets to revolvers and shot-guns. The majority of the weapons were in poor condition, but the men had to make the best out of the little they had. Flandrau did what he could to strengthen the defense. He gave orders that the central part of the town should be barricaded with wagons, barrels, furniture, and other materials. They also made gun slits through the buildings' walls. In this way, a few city blocks were transformed into a makeshift fort that could constitute the defenders' tough nucleus. Here, the women, children, and the unarmed men could seek refuge if the Indians attacked. Flandrau also made an attempt to give his inexperienced civilians a little basic training, but there was not time to make true soldiers of them.

New Ulm's defenders had heard the cannon thunder from Fort Ridgely, but they did not know if the fort had been able to withstand the Indians' attack. At dawn on the Indian uprising's sixth day, Flandrau and his men saw something burning on the north

bank of the Minnesota River in the direction where the fort lay. Dark pillars of smoke rose in silhouette against the red morning sky.

What they saw were farm buildings and hay stacks that the Indians had set ablaze (Map 2.3). It was likely a deliberate strategy intended to trick the men at New Ulm into believing that the fort had fallen, and that the Sioux now rampaged freely on the north side of the river. If it was a strategy, it worked, for Flandrau decided to send seventy-five men across the river and to investigate the cause of the fires. When this force came across the river, it soon encountered a large number of Indian warriors who blocked the way back to New Ulm and drove them eastward toward St. Peter. With that, New Ulm's defense force was reduced to fewer than 250 men.<sup>54</sup>

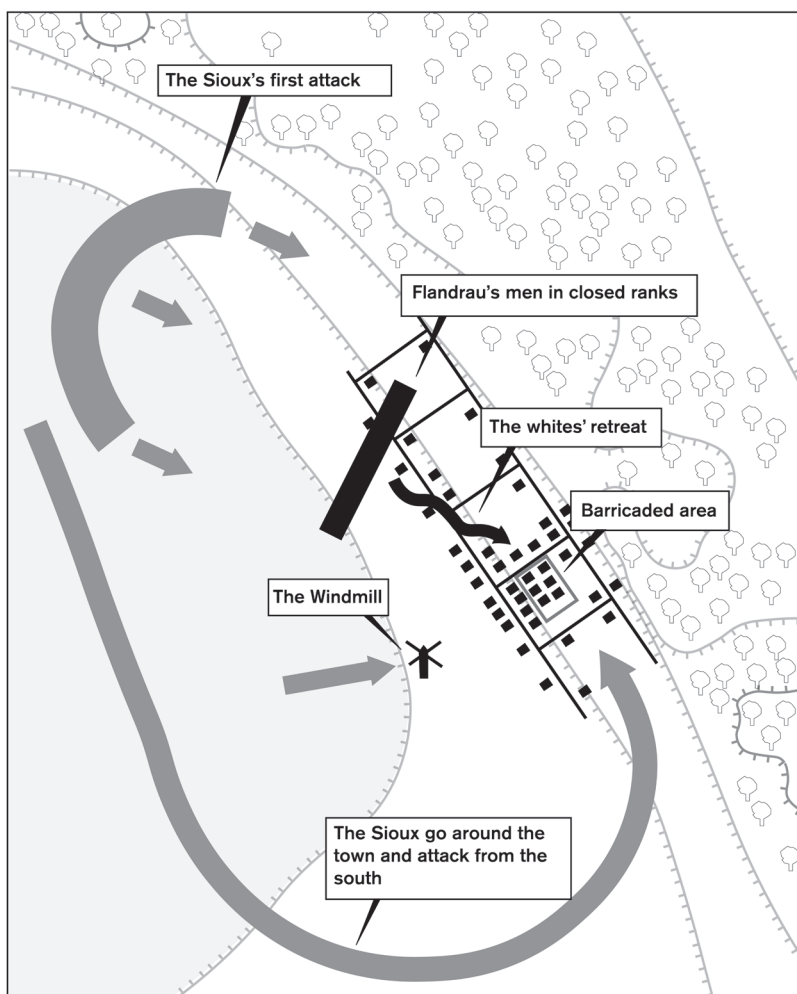
Shortly after this, the Sioux began to gather on the high area in the north and west. In all probability, the Indians numbered at least twice as many as the defenders. They were led by chiefs such as Little Crow, Mankato, Wabasha, and Big Eagle.\*

The Sioux warriors were a fear-inspiring sight as they emerged from the forest and positioned themselves on the open prairie hills above the town. Some rode, but others advanced on foot. Flandrau gave an artistic account of the Indian's attack in his report to Minnesota's governor:

Their advance upon the sloping prairie in the bright sunlight was a very fine spectacle, and to such inexperienced soldiers as we all were, intensely exciting. When within about one mile and a half of us the mass began to expand like a fan, and increase in the velocity of its approach, and continued this movement until within about double rifle-shot, when it had covered our entire front. Then the savages uttered a terrific yell and came down upon us like the wind.<sup>55</sup>

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\* The Sioux's number has been estimated at anywhere from 350 to over 1,000. The most common estimate is 650. (Folwell, 143-144; Carley, 37.) It is argued several places that Little Crow was not present, but this is refuted by Anderson, 146.



*Map 2.3: The Attack on New Ulm, August 23, 1862*

Flandrau had positioned his men in closed ranks on the open prairie just outside town, because he calculated that the whites' discipline and order would function more effectively on open ground than among the houses. But it soon became apparent that he had overestimated his men's ability to fight as experienced soldiers. The Sioux's fierce war cries shocked and terrified them, and just after the first gun shots were fired, they began to retreat. Seeing their opportunity, the Indians pressed forward. Since the Sioux outnumbered their opponents, their front line was much longer and quickly began to envelop both flanks of the whites' battle line. The sight of the Indians as they surged toward them from the front and both sides was too much for Flandrau's men. They turned and fled in disorder toward the center of town seeking cover behind the barricade. The Indians followed right on their heels. None of the whites dared to stop to defend the houses on the town's fringes. Not hesitating to take advantage of this, the Sioux stormed the deserted houses where they could take cover and shoot the whites' position.

The defenders did not stop until they made it safely behind the barricade or into the surrounding houses. Fortunately for them, the Sioux did not complete their assault, but split into smaller groups and began to fire from a distance, taking advantage of the cover in and among the houses.

At this point, the fight reached a new phase. Flandrau described it as follows: "The firing from both sides then became general, sharp and rapid, and it got to be a regular Indian skirmish, in which every man did his own work after his own fashion." Both Indians and whites shot at each other from windows, doors, and house corners while gun smoke drifted through the streets. Sometimes the balls of shot found their mark. Many were killed or wounded on both sides.

The majority of the buildings in New Ulm lay on the middle of three broad terraces where the prairie sank down toward the Minnesota River, but there were also houses along the edge of the uppermost terrace. Occupying some of these, the Indians used their position to lie and shoot toward the town's center. But, on the highest terrace stood a windmill with thick oak walls. Twenty

of Flandrau's best men had taken up position there. Gunfire from the windmill prevented the Sioux from taking full control over the high part of the town.

The battle raged on hour after hour. Dense gun smoke wafted through the streets mingled with the smoke from the many buildings the Indians had set on fire. Later on in the afternoon, many of the Sioux gathered on the river plain southeast of town. Here they could conceal themselves in the tall grass while they inched toward the whites' position. Adding to the defenders' challenges was a fresh breeze that blew from the south. This caused the smoke from the burning houses on this end of town to blow right in the faces of the defenders, functioning as a smoke screen. The Indians fought their way forward from house to house and approached slowly but surely, ever closer to the whites' barricades.

Flandrau recognized that the Indians on the south side of the town posed a serious threat. He remembered how his men had fled in the morning, and was afraid that the defense would break down if the Sioux south of town were to make an assault.

The attack Flandrau feared was not long in coming. At once, about sixty Indians came into sight as they rounded the corner of a little grove with oak trees near the south side of the barricades. Some were on horseback, others on foot, and according to Flandrau, they attacked with great intensity. "This was the critical point of the day," wrote Flandrau later, "but four or five hours under fire had brought the boys up to the fighting temperature, and they stood firmly, and advanced with a cheer... They received us with a very hot fire, killing Houghton and an elderly gentleman whose name I did not know." But the whites' counterattack did not flinch, and the Sioux turned around and fled. "As they fled in a crowd at very short range we gave them a volley that was very effectual and settled the fortunes of the day in our favor," wrote Flandrau, "for they did not dare to try it over."

Although the shooting continued long into the evening, in reality the battle was over. The Sioux had suffered a new grave defeat, and the attempt to gain control over the upper region of the Minnesota River Valley had failed.

This victory cost New Ulm's defenders dearly. At least twenty-six of them were likely killed and about fifty wounded that day.<sup>56</sup>

The Indians' loss is impossible to estimate, but there is much to suggest that they lost fewer men than the whites.

When the fighting died down, Flandrau gave orders that the few buildings outside the barricade that had not been set on fire by the Indians, should now be burned down in order to give the defenders open field of fire around their positions. One of the buildings that thus went up in flames was the windmill. An eyewitness recalled that the mill burned long into the night. When the flames had consumed the exterior wooden planks, the interior framework stood burning as a twenty-yard high column of flames against the night sky.<sup>57</sup>

Guri Rosseland was still on the run from the Indians with her two children, Anna and Ole. They had spent the night in the forest near the farm of Guri's son-in-law Asbjørn Rykkje. Ever since Ole had heard unfamiliar voices from inside Rykkje's house the prior evening, they had not dared to go in, but when morning dawned, Guri decided to go back because she wanted the wagon that Ole had seen in the farmyard. Designed for use on snow, the sled she had been forced to use was not a practical vehicle on bare ground.

Foot and Rykkje had spent a grim night in Rykkje's house. They were scarcely in any condition to move, and the flies plagued them incessantly. Daybreak brought little cheer. As the sun climbed and the temperature in the house became warmer, the flies grew more active. They swarmed thickly over the helpless men. Foot also found maggots crawling over him. He shivered and wondered if he would be consumed like a corpse even though he was not yet dead.

While Foot lay and writhed in desperation, he heard someone approaching outside. "No Indian makes as much noise as that," he thought. Soon he saw a face through a chink in the door. Two blue eyes peeked in. "Who is there?" asked Foot. The face vanished, and Foot understood that his voice had scared the stranger. He asked Rykkje to call out something in Norwegian. When Rykkje called, an answer came from outside. It was Rykkje's young brother-in-law, Ole Endresen Rosseland.

Rykkje told Ole how he could get into the house through the cellar. After having seen the situation inside the house, Ole hurried away to fetch his mother who had waited at the edge of the forest. Guri went immediately to help Foot and her son-in-law.

"No mother could have given her child more tender care than Mrs. Endreson gave us," recalled Foot later. She washed and bandaged the two men's wounds as well as she could with the cloth she found in the house, and then dressed them in clean clothes. After dressing the two wounded men, she went out and hitched the oxen to the wagon, because she had resolved to take the injured men with her.<sup>58</sup>

It was not easy to haul the two men up in the wagon. They were too weak to get into the wagon on their own, and Ole could not be of much help since he was wounded in the shoulder. But Guri was strong, and with a powerful exertion she was able to get the wounded men in place in the wagon. "I took my son-in-law on my back and carried him out of the house. Then, I lay a plank up against the wagon, lay him on the plank and pushed him up," explained Guri. With good support, Foot barely managed to get on his feet, and then it was much easier to help him up into the wagon. Guri laid many blankets and pillows under the men so that they could be as comfortable as possible. Foot sat half upright with the gun in his lap, able to shoot if the Sioux should turn up. Ole sat on the driver's seat with his little sister in his arms, while Guri walked in front of the wagon, leading the oxen eastward toward Forest City.

It was an agonizing journey for the wounded because there were no real roads, and the wagon bumped and shook horribly. Toward evening, they came to the Diamond Lake settlement. There, the farmhouses were empty because all of the settlers had fled. After having traveled a little bit farther, they stopped for the night. Both the oxen and the wounded needed rest.

The refugees on the island in Norway Lake had decided that it was time to leave the island and travel eastward to Paynesville. While the others made ready, Sven Borgen of Numedal and his son-in-law Thomas Osmundsen from Hardanger ventured to Borgen's farm to collect those belongings that were too valuable to abandon. While they stood outside the house and packed the belongings in the wagon, an Indian suddenly came out of the hazel bushes nearby and fired off a shot at Osmundsen. The shot slammed into the wagon frame next to the head of the young man from Hardanger.

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\* Translators' Note: This quote from an English language source could not be verified in the original English.



The Norwegians immediately grabbed their guns and aimed at the Indian, but he slipped into the bushes before they could shoot. Osmundsen and Borgen also caught a glimpse of a few other Indians concealed in the thick brush.<sup>59</sup>

The other settlers were not far off, and when they heard what had happened, they came at full speed to chase away the Indians. The burial of the victims at West Lake the previous day had probably stirred up desire for of revenge among the settlers. When they discovered nine Indians at Borgen's farm, they set off after them without hesitation. Some of the whites had horses; the others followed as well as they could on foot. The Indians were chased a good distance south before the whites gave up the pursuit and went back to their families at Norway Lake.

Before they managed to reach the lakeshore, they detected a large group of people in wagons and on horseback coming toward them from the west. They feared that it was more Indians, and prepared for the worst. In order to get a closer look at the newcomers, Even Railson Glesne from Krøsherad in Buskerud rode up a little rise. To his relief, he was quickly able to ascertain that it was white men who were approaching. It was a rescue expedition sent from Paynesville to look for survivors in the areas the Indians had ravaged. With these men as escorts, the settlers from Norway Lake could safely leave for Paynesville.

Once they reached the little settlement, there were many scenes of joy as family members who had been separated during the Indian attacks were reunited. Nearly all the settlers from the Norway Lake region were now safe.

Ole Paulson was on board a steamboat traveling down the Minnesota River along with the other men who had enlisted for service in the 9<sup>th</sup> Minnesota Regiment, Company H. Their official muster in the army would occur at Fort Snelling near St. Paul, Minnesota's capital. While the boat steamed down the river, Ole conversed with an Englishman. This man had not enlisted, but he was clearly very familiar with the process for how the organization of the company would take place. He asked Ole if he was interested in becoming a lieutenant. Ole admitted frankly that he scarcely knew what a lieutenant was, but the man assured him that there were no others in the company who knew any more about military organization. The

Englishman had noted that half of the new recruits were Scandinavians, and he believed that they ought to insist upon filling at least a third of all the officer positions in the company. Then, he proposed that Paulson should gather the Scandinavians to an election meeting to find candidates for the officer posts they wanted to request.<sup>60</sup>

Ole did as the Englishman suggested. They held a meeting to vote, and the Scandinavians nominated Paulson for second lieutenant, the company's third in command after captain and first lieutenant. Additionally, the Scandinavians nominated one of their own to each third post in the ranks from second lieutenant down to the lowest corporal.

The Scandinavians' solidarity paid off when the whole company was assembled to vote for officers. While there was competition for the other posts, Paulson was without a rival candidate and was elected to second lieutenant. The other Scandinavians as well received the posts for which they were nominated.

*Sunday, August 24*

In New Ulm, over one hundred houses lay in ashes after Saturday's big battle. Little Crow's warriors began to fire on the city again in the pre-dawn hours, but the defeat the previous day had weakened their will to fight. After a while, they began to pull back into the valley and disappear. Later in the day, the defenders received welcome reinforcements when Captain Eugene Saint Julien Cox arrived with 150 men from the new settlers' farms north of the river, brightening the outlook for the whites of New Ulm. In spite of this optimistic outlook, Flandrau decided during a war council the same afternoon that the city should be evacuated, and that the residents and refugees should be brought to safety farther east.

In his report to the Governor, Flandreau explained his decision as follows: "...the confined state of the town was rapidly producing disease among the women and children, who were huddled in cellars and close rooms like sheep in a cattle car, and we were fast becoming short of ammunition and provisions. I feared the result of another attack by a larger force, and all the people decided that

they would abandon the town the first opportunity, as residence there was impossible under the circumstances.”<sup>61</sup> Flandrau gave the order to evacuate at dawn the next day.

As dawn broke, Guri Rosseland and the others prepared to continue their journey to Forest City. Now that their rescue was almost at hand, Solomon Foot began to see the brighter side of life. “The sun rose bright and warm, the sky clear and the day pleasant,” he later wrote. Because of his injuries, Foot had not been able to eat any solid foods for several days, but when they arrived at yet another abandoned farm, they found some eggs which he ate raw along with a ripe tomato. “This food seemed in a degree to revive and give me strength,” he remembered.

But the danger had not yet passed. Soon, they came across two shapes lying motionless in the grass. They were the bodies of the two Swedes, Andreas Lorentson and Sven Backlund, who had been killed by the Indians a few days earlier. They were in tough shape. One had been scalped such that his skin was ripped off far down on his face.<sup>62</sup>

Guri and the others constantly surveyed the desolate plains in fear of spotting more Indians. Late in the afternoon, they received a real shock when they thought they saw two feather-clad heads hiding in the grass before them. Ole began to turn the wagon, but Foot said that there was no point in trying to escape. In a wagon pulled by slow, lumbering oxen, they would never manage to outrun the Indians. Ole knew that Foot was right and allowed the oxen to continue trudging forward. Terrified, they waited for the Indians to spring up from the grass, and suddenly the feather-clad heads rose and flew into the air. They were not Indians, but two hawks. Guri and the others had to laugh.

It was late in the day when they arrived in Forest City. Finally, they were safe. As they drove into town, they were welcomed by the wives of Foot and Rykkje. To Guri’s great joy, her daughters were also there. The two young girls had managed to escape from the Indians and had navigated their way through the forest on their own, until they were finally found by two Americans who took them to Forest City.

Foot was full of gratitude and admiration for all that Guri had done, describing her as, “Our good Samaritan mother, in whose veins flowed the blood of the Norse vikings, [sic] and who had so skillfully and bravely brought us to safety.” Guri’s fine feat received much praise and attention. In time she became known as “the heroine from Kandiyohi County,” but Guri never liked to be reminded of what had happened. The sorrow over losing her husband and son, Endre, overshadowed her own heroic deeds, and she would always remember these August days as a deep tragedy. Guri Endresen Rosseland died in 1881.

Ole Estensen Lunås (also called Lunåshaug)\* was one of many Norwegian immigrants who had settled along the Des Moines River near the southern border of Minnesota. At first sight, this area appeared quite uninhabitable, with naked prairies that stretched as far as the eye could see, but in the hills down by the river, trees grew densely and the soil was fertile. Ole Estensen and the other Norwegians had only lived there for a year or two. Before that, the area had been more or less untouched wilderness.

The majority of the Norwegians came either from the rural communities in the Voss area and Eksing Valley in Hordaland, or from the region around Tynset and Tolga in Hedmark. Estensen emigrated from a little farm near Tynset. He had first settled down near Hesper in Iowa, but later moved farther west to the Des Moines Valley in Jackson County, Minnesota (Map 2.4). Later, he wrote that it was not need but “desire”\*\* that pushed him to move

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\* Ole Estensen Lunås is considered to be the same person as Ole Estensen Nygård (also called Fådalén), who also came from Tynset and immigrated to the USA at about the same time as Lunås. See the Tynset *bygdebok* or county history book, volume 3, 506-507, and volume 4, 23-24. However, the Tynset county history book, volume 2, 112 and 234 and the American folk narrative for 1860 (See York Township, Green County, Wisconsin, and Spring Grove Township, Houston County, Minnesota) show that they were two different people. One transcript from a letter found at the Norwegian American Historical Society in Northfield, Minnesota, shows that it was Ole Estensen Lunås who lived by the Des Moines River in 1862.

\*\* Translators’ Note: This does not appear to be a quote. If it is a quote, it did not appear in the sources recently referenced.

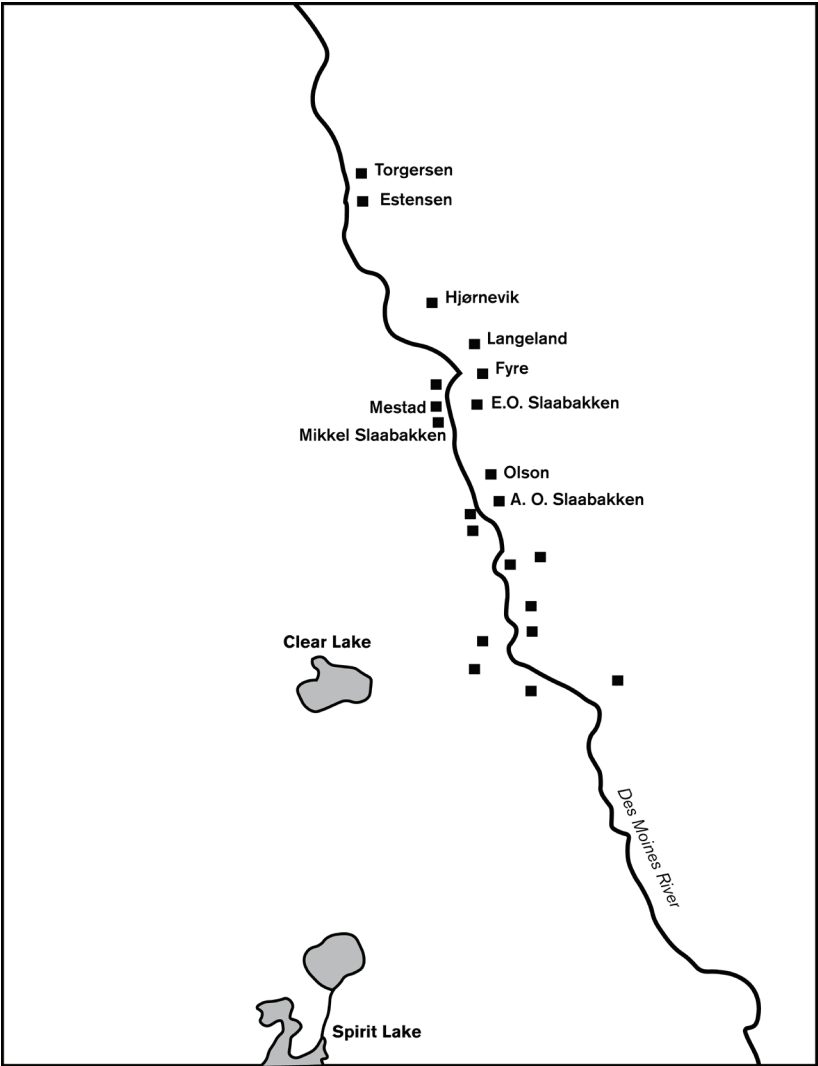
farther west. By the time of the Indian uprising, he had built his family a little log cabin some hundred meters east of the river and had a good start cultivating the land near them. Estensen was married to Anne Pedersdatter, and they had a little daughter by the name of Ingeborg.<sup>63</sup>

The Norwegians in the Des Moines Valley heard about the Sioux uprising on August 22, but early on they did not take the news very seriously. The reports said that the Indians had devastated New Ulm. Since it was over 50 miles away, the settlers in the Des Moines Valley did not think that danger was imminent for them.

Still, the Norwegian immigrants decided that it was safest to take a few precautions. They agreed to gather at individual farms where they could either defend themselves or flee south along the river if necessary. The Estensens and one neighboring family agreed to go down the valley to Ole Fyre's farm, but they saw no reason to make haste. "On the 23<sup>rd</sup> we packed up our most important possessions and loaded them in the wagons, [...] but we tarried a good while before we managed to gather the animals," Estensen said. By the time they finally managed to leave, some of the animals had escaped and run back home. It was now getting dark, so they decided to turn back to the Estensen farm and spend the night there.

The next morning was Sunday, and while the women made breakfast, Estensen took his rifle and walked down to the river. There were usually quite a few wild geese and ducks here, and he wanted to try to scrounge up a few extra provisions for the trip. As he arrived at the river bank, he suddenly heard five shots in immediate succession. The sound was amplified down in the narrow river valley, and Estensen thought the earth shook. The shots had come from his own house, as far as he could judge, and he ran back to find out what was happening. Yet, everything was quiet by the house. None of the others had heard the shots.

Regardless Estensen demanded that they leave as quickly as possible. While the others packed their things, he walked to the barn to feed the pigs. Just as he was about to enter the barn, four new shots went off. He hurried up to the house again. Now everyone hurried to prepare the wagons. When they were about to



Map 2.4: Norwegian Farms in Jackson County

set off, they caught sight of four figures on the other side of the river. From so far away it was difficult to see who they were, but Estensen believed they must be Indians out scouting.

Estensen and the others became even more frantic, but before they could travel down the river valley to the agreed upon meeting place by Ole Fyre's farm, they had to go up the valley a bit in order to pick up Estensen's neighbor, Ole Torgersen. Everything was quiet at Torgersen's place. He had also seen the figures on the other side of the river, but thought they were some of their neighbors. Estensen protested. He said that they could not have been their neighbors for they had seen Estensen clearly but had neither waved nor shown other signs of recognition. Torgersen doubted this and thought the shots were nothing to worry about. He believed it must have been some soldiers who had been shooting, for a message had come that a company was headed this direction. Estensen would not allow himself be convinced otherwise and remained confident that there was danger afoot. Since the shooting must have taken place farther down the river valley, they did not dare to travel in that direction. "There was no other way we could travel," Estensen recalled. Therefore, they agreed that it was safest to stay with Torgersen for the time being.

Late that afternoon, they began to tire of staying put. Moreover, Estensen was worried about his livestock, and so they walked as a group down to Estensen's farm. Once they had safely arrived, Torgersen and Estensen went over to check on the animals while the others waited in the house. "We had not gone far before we were able to see two people [on the other side of the river]," Estensen said, "but they were a good 600 ells\* away from us. We signaled to them immediately and walked towards each other, but when we came nearer so that nothing more than the river separated us, then we were able to see that they were two Indians, and they fled as quickly as they could, and we headed home as quickly as we could."

Now there was no longer a doubt that the Indians had come to the Des Moines Valley. It was an unpleasant night for the people in Estensen's house. Everyone knew that the Indians could attack

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\* Translators' Note: 1650 feet

at any time. "The women nearly died of fright," Estensen wrote. But the two men had good rifles and were determined to put up a strong fight if the Indians showed up.

The shots Estensen heard had come from the farm of Ole Fyre (also called Førde). Many Norwegian settler families had gathered there when they received the news that the Indians were on the warpath: Knut and Brita Mestad, Johannes and Brytva Ekse with their children, Lars and Anna Hjørnevik with their children, Lars Furrenæs (also called Furnes), not to mention Fyre himself, his wife Kari and their children. Apart from Furrenæs, who likely hailed from Askøy outside of Bergen, all of the families came from the area just west of Voss in Hordaland. Fyre, Hjørnevik, and Mestad were from Evanger and Ekse from Eksing Valley.<sup>64</sup>

Sunday morning, Lars Furrenæs, Knut og Brita Mestad, and Lars Hjørnevik apparently went home to their own farms in order to tend their animals. Ole Fyre also left his house and went to feed the pigs. Therefore, the only grown man left in the house with all the women and children was Johannes Ekse.

Around ten in the morning, the Sioux attacked. There may have been as many as fifty of them, but when they arrived in the Des Moines Valley, they spread out in smaller groups in order to attack several farms at the same time. The Indians showed no mercy. They killed almost all of the whites they found with little consideration for gender or age.

Knut and Brita Mestad were killed near their farm. Lars Hjørnevik and Lars Furrenæs suffered the same fate. Ole Fyre was shot and killed in the forest beside his house. When the corpse was found, it was evident that he had been hit by five bullets. Then, the Sioux surrounded Fyre's house. They appeared not to be in any rush. Some of them leaned up against the fence that surrounded the house while others began to investigate a fully-loaded wagon that the settlers had left standing at the ready in case they should need to flee. In the wagon, the Indians found a bottle of spirits that they passed around. While the Indians were thus occupied, the people in the house had time to prepare. The women took the children with them and went down to hide in the cellar. Johannes Ekse and Ole Fyre's twelve year old son, who was also named Ole, remained in the living room.



Soon, the two-year-old son of Anna Hjørnevik began to scream. It was impossible to quiet the little child. Anna then made a brave decision. So that the cellar would not be discovered because of the screaming, she took the child with her and went up into the living room again. Then, they lay a straw mattress over the cellar trap-door in order to conceal it.

While they did this, the Sioux got ready to attack. There were four or five rifles standing in the living room. Young Ole Fyre asked Johannes Ekse if they should try to shoot the Indians, but Johannes Ekse said no. He thought it was meaningless to defend themselves. It would just provoke the Indians and make them even more gruesome.

The Sioux had an easy time of it because of that choice. Four to five warriors lined up one after another and pressed against the door. The door flew open, and the Indians stormed in. Johannes Ekse attempted to run up to the loft, but was shot in the loft stairwell and killed. Fyre junior ran out through the back door. There were several Indians standing by the fence outside, but before they realized it, the boy slipped through an opening in the fence and sprinted down towards the forest along the river. He ran without looking back. Once he was on the edge of the river bank, a shot rang out. The bullet smashed his elbow to pieces. He looked back and saw that one of the Sioux warriors had followed him. The Indian stood a little ways away and was busy reloading his rifle. Even though blood was streaming from the destroyed elbow, the boy did not lose his composure. He continued as quickly as he could over the edge of the bank, and threw himself down in the thicket along the path. Shortly thereafter, the Indian passed the hiding place without discovering the boy. The Indian searched a while along the riverbank, but then he rejoined the others.<sup>65</sup>

Inside the house the Indians had killed Anna Hjørnevik, but her little child was left unharmed. This brave woman had thereby offered her own life so that those who hid in the cellar would not be revealed.\*\* Her sacrifice was not in vain. The Sioux warriors never discovered the cellar under Fyre's house, and soon, they moved on in order to attack other farms.

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\* Sometimes this woman is identified as Anna Furnes/Furrenæs, but the most reliable sources never state that Lars Furrenæs was married. No

Just north of Fyre's farm lived Knut Langeland with his wife Anna and their six children. When the Indians came, the father was down by the river gathering his cows. The Sioux warriors began the slaughter without hesitation, sparing neither mother nor child. The father heard the shots and hurried home. By the time he arrived, it was all over. The Indians were gone, and the sight that met him was gruesome. The lifeless bodies of his wife and children lay strewn around. But when he investigated more closely, he discovered that two of his children were still alive, and that his eight-year-old daughter Martha was gone. He took one child under each arm and headed south to find help. He later learned that the missing daughter had managed to hide when the Indians came, and had fled to Ole Fyre's farm.

Mikkel Olsen Slaabakken from Tolga in Østerdalen Valley and his thirteen-year-old nephew Anders were on the way to Ole Fyre's farm when they heard the shots. They thought it was just their neighbors out hunting birds, so they continued at a steady pace. This was a fatally incorrect assessment of the situation, for just afterward the Indians appeared from the forest along the path and let fire with their rifles. The two Norwegians sprinted into the forest, but Mikkel was hit and yelled to his nephew that he could not run any longer. Almost immediately, he was hit again and killed. The balls of shot whined around Anders; one pierced a hole in his hat; another hit his scalp. Scared out of his wits, the boy tripped and remained lying with his face down. Immediately, one of the Indians came and stuck a knife in the boy's side and twisted it around. Anders passed out, and the Sioux believed him dead.

When Anders regained consciousness, the Indians were gone. Despite the knife wound in his side he managed to move slowly back to his father's farm. The farm was abandoned because his family had gone to a prayer meeting at another farm. Anders could not manage to go any farther and so lay down and fell asleep in a stall in the barn. There he was found a few days later by some soldiers.

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Anna Furrenæs exists on the lists of casualties after the Indian attack. (See Gourley 2004, 15-32.)

In the meantime, young Ole Fyre had ventured out from his hiding place in the bushes near the river and hurried down the valley to find help. He did not know that his mother and the other women and children who had hidden in the cellar had also escaped the Indians. Ole finally arrived at a farm where the majority of other Norwegian immigrant families in the area had gathered for a prayer meeting. There was great terror when the breathless young boy with the bleeding arm told them what had happened on his father's farm. In all haste, they left for home to gather their most important possessions before they fled down the valley to Spirit Lake, a community just over the border in Iowa.

Knut Langeland also made it safe and sound to Spirit Lake after a day or two, but one of the children that he had been carrying died along the way. Soon Langeland departed for the north again, this time with a troop of soldiers in order to search for his daughter and other survivors.

About an hour after the Indians had disappeared from Fyre's farm, the women and children ventured out of the cellar. Outside, they met the eight-year-old Martha Langeland, who had barely managed to escape the Indians who had killed her mother and siblings. Shortly thereafter, they heard the Indians approaching again. This time, the women took the children and hid them all between the high corn stalks in the cornfield. While they lay there, the Sioux warriors investigated the house and discovered the cellar, but this time there was no one there.

The women and the children remained lying in the cornfield until nightfall. Then, they began the walk south to Spirit Lake. It was a strenuous journey through the wilderness, but after a few days, they were found by Knut Langeland and the soldiers, who transported them to safety.

### *Monday, August 25*

The barricades in New Ulm were pulled to the side in the morning and the wagons rolled out. They had only 153 wagons to carry between 1,500 and 2,000 residents and refugees, so space was limited. Regardless, many attempted to take as many possessions with them as they could, including their own belongings and things they had

found in abandoned houses. One eyewitness stated that some of the wagons were so heavily loaded that the teams could not budge them. In addition there were many injured who did not find a place in the wagons. Flandrau had sympathy for the poor refugees who attempted to horde what they could, but in order to have space for the injured and make the wagons lighter, he gave his soldiers orders to remove all unnecessary cargo. The scene that played itself out was both sad and comical. Despite desperate protests, the soldiers began to empty the wagons of furniture, heating stoves, beds, and much more. The belongings were left strewn out across the plains so that people who later passed thought it reminded them of an enormous warehouse.<sup>66</sup>

Around nine, the march east began. The wagons were now full of women, children, the sick, and the injured, but many still had to walk. Flandrau's soldiers spread out along the column in order to provide the best possible defense in case of an attack. Still they knew that it would be difficult to defend all of the refugees if the Sioux came at them with full force. Therefore, many stared nervously out over the prairie in fear of catching a glimpse of feather-ornamented heads in the grass.

In his report, Flandrau wrote that it was "a melancholy spectacle to see 2,000 people, who a few days before had been prosperous and happy, reduced to utter beggary, starting upon a journey of thirty miles, through a hostile country, every inch of which we expected to be called upon to defend from an attack, the issue of which was life or horrid butchery."

But no Indians came, and the journey down through the Minnesota Valley occurred without incident. Already that same night, Flandrau led the refugees into the city of Mankato, where they felt somewhat safe. This is how the citizens of New Ulm escaped the wrath of the Sioux.

In the Des Moines Valley everything was quiet. The entire morning passed without the people of Ole Estensen's house seeing a single Indian. But the silence would not last. Estensen sat on his front step around midday when his dog suddenly began to bark "so uncommonly." Estensen stood up quickly and simultaneously caught a glimpse of "5 of the Reds pretty close to the house." He ran in and grabbed his rifle, but then he discovered that his little

daughter Ingeborg and Torgersen's son Martin were standing outside the door. "I abandoned the rifle in order to save them, and it worked," he later wrote.<sup>67</sup>

Estensen closed the door and grabbed the rifle again. Then, the Sioux opened fire. For about two hours, they fired shots at the house's two windows. The shots whined through the living room and hit the walls so that splinters flew. Several things were shot down from the shelves. "A ball flew a mere inch above my head," Estensen recalled. Later, it was said that Ole Torgersen, who otherwise was rumored to be a fearless man, lost his courage completely and remained lying terror-stricken and helpless on the floor. But in a letter written the following year, Estensen mentions nothing of this. On the contrary, he stated that both he and Torgersen kept guard in case the Indians would attempt to storm the house. The two men also answered the Sioux's fire to the best of their ability. "After they began to shoot, it was as if all fear disappeared," Estensen wrote. And they were quite determined to give the Indians a warm welcome if they began an assault. "I believe that they would have become pale before they had made it inside the door, for we had enough weapons," Estensen maintained.

But the Indians were not willing to risk great losses in order to do away with the people in Estensen's house. Finally, they gave up and left in order to search for easier prey. On the way, they plundered Torgersen's farm. Then, they continued up over the valley and disappeared.

Estensen and the others could breathe more easily. Few settlers had escaped as unscathed from an Indian attack. Estensen and Torgersen had reason to be proud of their resolute defense.<sup>68</sup>

It was impossible to know if the Sioux would return, so the people in the house found it safest to sit tight and wait for help. A troop of soldiers came the following day to lead them to safety. Estensen was very lucky compared to many other settlers who lost everything they owned in the Indian attacks. With the soldiers' help, he left home with all of his livestock and household possessions. As a good farmer, he still thought it melancholy to be forced to leave "all kinds of crops [...]" and the worst was that we left our hay, which was later burned."

1. Anderson and Woolworth, 35-36; Kenneth Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862: Minnesota's Other Civil War* (1976; repr., St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001), 7; Gary Anderson, *Little Crow, Spokesman for the Sioux* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986), 130; Michael Clodfelter, *The Dakota War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1998), 35-36.
2. Carley, 10; Anderson, 130-131; Anderson and Woolworth, 36; Clodfelter, 36.
3. Anderson, 130; Carley, 10; Clodfelter, 36; William Watts Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, vol. 2 (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1924), 240.
4. Anderson and Woolworth, 39-42; Anderson, 131-132.
5. Anderson and Woolworth, 36, 55.
6. Anderson and Woolworth, 45; Anderson, 135-136.
7. Johann C.H. Schröder, "Krigen med Sioux Indianerne," *Fædrelandet*, 25 February 1864; Anderson and Woolworth, 56.
8. Carley, 12-14; Anderson, 136-138.
9. Anderson and Woolworth, 56.
10. Chester M. Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 75-76; Carley, 15; Board of Commissioners, *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, vol. 1 (St. Paul: Pioneer Press, 1890-1893), vol. 1, 248, vol. 2, 167.
11. Holand, 572; Martin Ulvestad, *Nordmændene i Amerika, deres Historie og Rekord* (Minneapolis: History Book Company's Forlag, 1907), 332; Board of Commissioners, vol. 1, 285-286.
12. Carley, 15-16; Board of Commissioners, vol. 1, 248-250, vol. 2, 166-171, 179-181.
13. Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 168.
14. Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 169. (Translators' Note: Erroneously noted as 168 in the original.)
15. Oehler, 51; Lucy Leavenworth Wilder Morris, ed., *Old Rail Fence Corners* (1915; repr., St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1976) 150-151; Norman K. Culver, et al., *List of Persons*

*Who Sought Refuge at Fort Ridgely on the Outbreak of the Indian War, 1862*, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collections, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

16. Holand, 515; Satterlee, Marion P. *The Indian Massacre in Brown County, in August 1862*. No Place of Publication or Date; Clarence Stewart Peterson, *Known Military and Civilian Dead during the Minnesota Sioux Indian Massacre in 1862: Known Dead during the Great Blizzard in Minnesota in January 1873* (Baltimore: C.S. Peterson 1958).

17. Anderson, 139-143; Anderson and Woolworth, 77; Morris, 95. [Translators' Note: The reference to Cut Nose as a demon in human form is in the original English "fiend in human shape." (Anderson and Woolworth, 77) This was not quoted but paraphrased in Skarstein's Norwegian text. Rendering it back into English, it seemed safest to return to the original source's words. The Zulu quote is from Anderson & Woolworth, 77. The final quote is from Morris, 95.]

18. Anderson and Woolworth, 26, 56.

19. Morris, 149; Board of Commissioners 1890-1893, vol. 1, 251.

20. Board of Commissioners 1890-1893, vol. 1, 754-756; It is possible that some of these men originally belonged to another

22. Paulson, 146-147.

23 . Paulson, 151-152.

24. Anderson, 141-143; Isaac V.D. Heard, *History of the Sioux War* (New York: 1864), 143-144.

25. Anderson and Woolworth, 154.

26. Culver.

27. Holand, 574. Adjutant General of Minnesota, *Annual Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Minnesota*. (St. Paul, MN: Pioneer Printing Company, 1866), 241-243.

28. Oehler, 98-99, Board of Commissioners, vol. II, 183-184. Carley 2001 (1976), 28-29, Folwell, 129-130.

29. Ezmon Earle, *Ezmon W. Earle Reminiscences*, 1907, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collections, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

30. Orlando McFall, *Narrative of the Sioux Indian Massacre in 1862*. 1909, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collections, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN, 39-40.
31. Anderson and Woolworth, 155.
32. Anderson and Woolworth, 155-156.
33. Holand, 544, 545; Emory Johnson, *A Church Is Planted: The Story of the Lutheran Minnesota Conference, 1851-1876* (Minneapolis: Lund Press, 1948), 171-172.
34. "Om Indianerulighederne i Minnesota' Brev fra Ole Knudsen Storebraaten," *Emigranten* 10 October 1862; Holand, 545-546; Per Asbjørn Holst, *Norsk Emigrantlitteratur*. Del 2: Erindringer (Stavanger, Norway: Per A. Holst, 2000), 119-120.
35. Holand, 542, 548-549; Johnson, 173. (The latter confused Johannes Iverson with Lars Iverson.)
36. Nils Kolle, *Bygdebok for Kvam*, Bind II (Øystese: Kvam Herad, 1999), 306, 311-312; Holand, 550.
37. Kolle, *Bygdebok for Kvam*, 311-313. Holand, 550-551.
38. Victor E. Lawson, and Martin E. Tew, *Illustrated and Descriptive History and Biographical Review of Kandiyohi County, Minnesota* (St. Paul: The Pioneer Press Manufacturing Departments, 1905), 108.
39. Kolle, *Bygdebok for Kvam*, 313.
40. Holand, 551. Lawson and Tew, 23.
41. Kolle, *Bygdebok for Kvam*, 309.
42. Charles S. Bryant, and Abel B. Murch, *A History of the Great Massacre by the Sioux Indians in Minnesota* (1864; repr., Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint Company, 1977), 399; Kolle, *Bygdebok for Kvam*, 310.
43. Holand, 546-547; "Om Indianerulighederne i Minnesota' Brev fra Ole Knudsen Storebraaten," *Emigranten* 10 October 1862.
44. Folwell, 131-134; Anderson, 145; Oehler, 120-124; Anderson and Woolworth, 156-157, 160-161; Brown 1981 (1970), 48; Coldfelter 1997, 42; Carley, 29-30; Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 171-173, 184-186.
45. Morris, 152.
46. Carley, 30; Oehler, 124; Folwell, 132 (note); Anderson, 146, 225-226 (note).



47. Anderson and Woolworth, 149.
48. Anderson and Woolworth, 157.
49. Lawson and Tew, 109-110; Kolle, *Bygdebok for Kvam*, 314-315.
50. Bryant and Murch, 400. Kolle, *Bygdebok for Kvam*, 310.
51. "Om Indianerurolighederne i Minnesota' Brev fra Ole Knudsen Storebraaten," *Emigranten* 10 October 1862; Holand, 547.
52. Paulson, 136-138.
53. Heard, 93; Folwell, 134-135; Carley, 34-37.
54. Folwell, 138-139; Bryant and Murch, 166-167; Board of Commissioners 1890-1893, vol. 2, 204; Carley, 36-37.
55. Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 204.
56. Folwell, 142-143 (note); Peterson; Oehler, 132; Carley, 39; The latter writes that 34 were killed and 60 wounded, but that likely includes the losses from August 19th.
57. "New-Ulms Ødelæggelse. En Begivenhad fra Indianerkrigen in Minnesota, fortalt af et Øjenviden," *Skilling-Magazin*, 17 January 1863.
58. Lawson and Tew, 24, 110; Bryant and Murch, 400-401; "Guri Endresens Daad," *Minneapolis Tidende* 19 January 1933; "Hundre år siden indianerne herjet," *Aftenposten uketillegg* 18 August 1962; Kolle, *Bygdebok for Kvam*, 315.
59. Lawson and Tew, 27, 280-281; "Om Indianerurolighederne i Minnesota' Brev fra Ole Knudsen Storebraaten," *Emigranten* 10 October 1862; Holand, 548-549.
60. Paulson 1907, 140.
61. Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 206.
62. Kolle, *Bygdebok for Kvam*, 315; Lawson and Tew, 24, 26, 110.
63. Ole Estensen Lunås, *Brev til E. Embretsen Lunåshaug*. (Copy) 1863 America Letters and Articles 1860-1899, Norwegian-American Historical Association at St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN; Arthur P Rose, *An Illustrated History of Jackson County, Minnesota* (Jackson, MN: Northern History, 1910)., 105-106; Ivar A. Streit.

64. K.A. Rene, "Fra Indianerkrigen i 1862," *Issingen* nr. 3-4, 7. Årgang 1925, 33-38; K.A. Rene, *Historie om Utvandringen fra Voss og Vössingerne i Amerika*, Madison, WI: 1930), 641-643; Rose, 101-109; Holand, 519-521; Fillmore County Historical Association 16-161; Ulvestad, 99; Deb Nelson Gourley, *Astri, My Astri: Norwegian Heritage Stories* (Waukon, IA: Astri My Astri Publishing, 2004), 15-32.

65. Rene, "Fra Indianerkrigen i 1862," 35-36; Fillmore County Historical Association, *Fillmore County, Minnesota* (Dallas, TX: Taylor Publishing Company, 1984), 160-161; Rose, 103; Gourley, 15-32.

66. Carley, 39; "New-Ulms Ødelæggelse. En Begivenhad fra Indianerkrigen in Minnesota, fortalt af et Øjenviden," *Skilling-Magazin*, 17 January 1863; Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 206.

67. Lunås; Rose, 105-106; Streitlein and Østigard, 506-508.

68. Rose, 105.

### 3

## THE WHITES STRIKE BACK

*Colonel Sibley*

A diplomatic courier rode into Fort Snelling early on the afternoon of August 19 with a message for Minnesota Governor Alex Ramsey. The courier was near exhaustion; having ridden the entire night. He was sent off from Fort Ridgely the night before, and had covered over 125 miles in 18 hours. The letter written by Lieutenant Thomas P. Gere informed him of Captain Marsh's catastrophic loss at Redwood Ferry. It ended thus: "Captain Marsh is killed, and only thirteen of the company remaining. The Indians are killing the settlers and plundering the country. Send reinforcements without delay."<sup>1</sup>

Governor Ramsey had already received word that the Sioux had attacked the Indian Agency at Redwood, but the letter from Lieutenant Gere was the first clear confirmation that this was an extensive revolt and not just a few young, desperate warriors who had set out on a looting foray. The worst-case scenario would be all the Sioux in Minnesota were participating in the uprising, which would mean that over 1,500 warriors were on the warpath. If they got help from their brothers on the prairies in the west, the numbers would increase to many thousand.

The Governor understood that it was critical to act quickly in order to gain control of the situation. First, reinforcements must be sent to Fort Ridgely; then a larger military force needed to be assembled in order to quell the uprising. Ramsey did not take much time to decide who should receive the assignment to lead the battle against the Indians. The obvious choice was Henry Hastings Sibley, a personal friend and former political rival of Ramsey.

The Governor quickly crossed to the south bank of the Mississippi River to speak personally with Sibley.

The Sibley House sat on a hill with a view of the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers. One of the oldest and most famous buildings in the state, the two-story limestone house was built in 1836 and had originally been Sibley's bachelor's pad. At that time, when most of the state of Minnesota was wilderness, the Sibley House functioned as a kind of hunting lodge where hunters, traders, and adventurers could find accommodations and advice along the way. Once Sibley got married, the house was expanded and now more closely resembled the grand residence of a socially prominent family.

Sibley House reflected Henry H. Sibley's position as one of the state's most prominent men. Upon his arrival in Minnesota as a twenty-three year-old, he established himself as a fur trader, and the big and powerful American Fur Company soon made him their main representative in the northwest. Sibley was tall and strong, a big burly specimen of a man who had been a feared fighter in his younger days. Hardy, persevering, and an outdoor enthusiast, it was as if he had been created for life in the west. In addition, he got along well with the Indians and often went on hunting trips with them. Little Crow was among his previous hunting partners. Sibley understood the Sioux language and could speak the local French *patois* dialect that often was used at trading stations. The Indians had even given him his own name – "Long Trader" – the tall businessman.

Sibley's interests were many and his drive ostensibly boundless. In addition to administering the fur trade and participating in negotiations with the Indians, he wrote articles about life in the wilderness for magazines and journals back east and engaged deeply in Minnesota's political development. When Minnesota was accepted into the Union with full status as a state in 1858, Sibley was elected as the state's first governor, a political office he held for two years.<sup>2</sup>

It was his knowledge of the Indians and his experience with political leadership that made Sibley a natural choice for the leader of the army in the battle against the Sioux. Specific military qualifications were another matter. He had never actively participated

in large-scale war tactics and operations and had no military education. But in August 1862, it was not easy to find anyone in Minnesota who had extensive experience leading military ventures, since the state's leading officers had long since left to fight in the Civil War. Therefore, Sibley received the command. Governor Ramsey appointed him colonel and gave him all powers necessary to assemble a force to quell the Indian uprising.

Sibley was now fifty-one years old, but still vigorous and robust, and accustomed to making decisions. The role as commanding officer suited him well. He looked good in uniform with his erect carriage and characteristic walrus moustache.

It was no simple assignment that confronted him. At the onset of the Civil War, almost all of the military units in the state were sent away to the front in the Southern states. The only armed forces at Fort Snelling were four newly recruited companies of the 6<sup>th</sup> Minnesota Infantry, about 400 men who had barely begun their training and who were not yet officially mustered for service. Sibley was initially inclined to manage with these men, for he was not yet convinced that the Indian uprising was as comprehensive as it was rumored to be. In addition, he hoped to gather temporary units of local volunteers on the way up through the Minnesota Valley.

The day after assuming command, Sibley ordered his four companies onboard some of the steamboats that he had requisitioned and started the journey upriver. More than half way to Fort Ridgely two days later, Sibley learned alarming news in the little town of St. Peter. Jack Frazer, one of his old hunting buddies, had managed to sneak out of Fort Ridgely after the first attack with a pessimistic message from Lieutenant Sheehan. Frazer informed Sibley that all the Sioux in the Minnesota Valley were on the warpath, and that there was great danger that the Sioux tribes farther west would also join the uprising. If this was true, Sibley could risk meeting many thousand Sioux warriors on his march to Fort Ridgely. In view of this, he found it safest to stay in St. Peter for a few days while he waited for more soldiers and supplies. He was particularly concerned that his soldiers needed better rifles, for many of them had only Austrian rifles of poor quality and outdated caliber. In his

letters to Governor Ramsey, Sibley constantly repeated that it was imperative that he receive American Springfield rifles for his men.

In St. Peter, Sibley also met Asgrim K. Skaro, who originally came from Hol in Hallingdal. After he emigrated from Norway in 1846, Skaro had made a name for himself as one of the leading citizens of St. Peter. The thirty-three year old Skaro could provide considerable military experience. He joined the United States Army during the war with Mexico in 1846-48 and had then served as an enlisted man at Fort Snelling until 1852. Later, he had been an officer in Minnesota's civilian militia. When the Civil War started, he became a captain for a company in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Minnesota Regiment, which for some time did garrison service at Fort Ridgely. Skaro became sick and had to resign from his position when the 2<sup>nd</sup> Minnesota was sent to the front in the Southern states. He did not give up on his military ambitions in spite of this. Just prior to the outbreak of the Indian uprising, he was active in recruiting one company to the 9<sup>th</sup> Minnesota Regiment.

Sibley had good use for a man with Captain Skaro's experience. He gave the Norwegian the responsibility for leading the defense of St. Peter and the surrounding areas against the Indians, while he himself continued his march to Fort Ridgely. Skaro's primary force was a company with Swedish and Norwegian volunteers called "The Scandinavian Guards" led by the Swede Gustaf A. Stark.

Sibley received substantial criticism for lingering so long in St. Peter before he marched to Fort Ridgely's aid. Many thought that he was much too careful, and some even accused him of being cowardly. As long as the Sioux could at any time overpower Fort Ridgely's defenses, Sibley's critics believed that it was unforgivable not to march immediately to the fort. Sibley felt that he had good reasons to wait. He thought it was irresponsible to risk a battle with over one thousand Indians before he had gathered more troops with better rifles. One of his greatest worries was that his forces primarily contained foot soldiers, while almost all of the Indians had horses. This could prove to be a serious handicap in the field.

On August 26th, after four days in St. Peter, Sibley was finally ready to march to Fort Ridgely. During his stay in the city, he had received considerable reinforcements in the form of six new

companies from the 6<sup>th</sup> Minnesota Regiment armed with Springfield rifles, and around 300 voluntary riders. All together Sibley now commanded over 1,400 men, a force that ought to be sufficient to engage in battle with the Indians.

On the march west, the soldiers were able to see the unpleasant results of the Indians' devastation. They passed charred remains of burned down farm houses and saw disfigured corpses that lay rotting in the sun. Sibley gave his men orders to bury the dead, a heavy burden that almost certainly fueled their increasing anticipation to reach the Indians.

Some of Sibley's riders rode on ahead and reached Fort Ridgely on the morning of the following day. They were greeted with great happiness by the defenders and the settlers who had sought refuge in the fort. Once the Indians' second attack had been beaten back on August 22nd, the whites in the fort had lived in constant fear that the Sioux would come back and attempt a final, decisive assault. Now, they could finally breathe more easily.

Sibley's main force arrived on August 28th. After having lived confined for ten days in cramped and miserable conditions, the refugees could now travel farther east safely escorted by troops from Sibley's army. This ended the siege of Fort Ridgely. From now on, it was the whites who took the initiative.

### *The Split among the Sioux*

By the time Sibley reached Fort Ridgely, the Sioux had long given up hope of taking the fort and pushing the whites out of the Minnesota Valley. The Indians knew full well that the whites would soon send many soldiers to avenge the murders of the settlers. Therefore, Little Crow and the other chiefs decided to move the camp up the valley, farther away from the soldiers.

The Indians departed on August 25th. With them they had almost 300 prisoners, of whom 100 were white women and children. The remaining individuals were half-blood Indians who had attempted to live as white people. The Sioux constituted a motley procession as they slowly moved up over the Minnesota's southern bank. The warriors had taken great quantities of booty in their plundering among white settlers. They loaded these spoils

of war onto the hodgepodge of vehicles they had procured, including elegant wagons from upper class homes, everyday ox carts, light two-wheeled wagons, and primitive carts. Some hauled their plunder in the traditional Indian way with a few poles connected to the back of an ox, so that it became a simple sled called a travois.

One of the white women who was taken captive, later remembered that the Sioux were dressed in all possible combinations of clothing that they had stolen from the whites.

[...] the more ridiculous the better...women's bonnets, considered great ornaments were worn by men altogether. White crepe shawls were wound around their black heads; gold watches were tied around their ankles, the watches clattering while they rode. The squaws were dressed in silk gown, with earrings and breastpins taking from the whites. [...] It was hard to keep from smiling to see how they were used by these poor savage creatures;\* they looked more like a troop of monkeys than anything human.<sup>3</sup>

The warriors rode on either side of the long procession so that none of the prisoners could escape. They also drove large herds of cattle with them. Curious children ran back and forth between the wagons, and their enthusiastic cries blended in with braying mules, neighing horses, mooing cows, and barking dogs. In between, the Indians' song could be heard and their crying shout, "Hii, hii." An entire people were on the move in order to escape the vengeance of the whites.

Little Crow had long understood that his warriors needed allies if they were going to have any chance whatsoever against the white soldiers. He hoped that the Winnebago tribe in the southeast and the Sioux's old enemies, the Chippewa in the north, would want to join forces with the Sioux in the war against the whites. His hopes were fulfilled to some degree. A handful of Winnebago

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\* Translators' Note: It is worth observing that Skarstein softens the original words, translating the last line as, "It was difficult not to smile at the sight."



participated in the first battles, and even the Chippewa began to behave so threateningly that many of the settlers who lived near their reservation sought refuge in the nearest fort. Furthermore, Governor Ramsey had been compelled to send troops north. Yet, none of these tribes began open warfare.

Little Crow had greater expectations of receiving help from his tribal brothers, the Sisseton and Wahpeton Sioux, who lived near the Yellow Medicine Indian Agency. Shortly after the uprising started, warriors from these tribes killed some traders at the Yellow Medicine Agency and set fire to several of the buildings. Some hundred young Sisseton and Wahpeton warriors later rode down the valley to participate in Little Crow's second attack on Fort Ridgely. But the leading chiefs from the tribes at Yellow Medicine were opposed to the war and encouraged their men to stay away from the battles, meaning Little Crow did not receive the support for which he had hoped. Even the young warriors who defied their chiefs and joined the battles at Fort Ridgely and New Ulm lost their enthusiasm for the war after the loss at New Ulm and instead headed west to hunt bison on the prairie far away from the soldiers.

Without the Sisseton and Wahpeton Sioux, Little Crow's strength was severely weakened. This was one of the reasons why he now led his people up through the valley. By making camp near Yellow Medicine, he would put pressure on the tribes living nearby and perhaps be able to persuade their chiefs to support the uprising. But the Christian spokesman of the Wahpeton tribe, Paul Mazakutemani (also known as Little Paul), refused the demand to participate in the war. Instead, he chastised Little Crow's men for killing innocent white people, and demanded that they release their prisoners. The divide between the Sioux intensified quickly. Supporters and opponents of the war formed polarized camps, and many times battles nearly broke out between them. Little Crow was forced to abandon the hope of gathering all the Santee Sioux into one powerful alliance against the whites.

Thus, Little Crow and his war chiefs could not assemble many more than 500 men for the next phase of the war. They decided anyway to attempt to recover the initiative by beginning a new offensive before the whites were able to attack them. They had heard that Sibley had arrived at Fort Ridgely with a large number

of soldiers, and knew that it was just a matter of time before that force began to march toward the camps at Yellow Medicine. There is much to suggest that the Sioux now planned something that resembled a targeted strategy to stop Sibley's advance by threatening his supply lines. At the same time, their plans were also influenced by the desire to plunder. Little Crow rode away with 110 warriors in a northeasterly direction toward Big Woods to attack the small cities of Forest City and Hutchinson. Presumably, they were going to swing south afterward and attempt to cut the connection between Fort Ridgely and St. Peter. At about the same time, there were perhaps as many as 350 warriors down through the valley led by the chiefs Mankato, Gray Bird, and Big Eagle. This force had first considered going to New Ulm in order to plunder the abandoned city, and then they intended to cross the river and threaten the supply lines between Fort Ridgely and St. Peter. If everything went well, the two groups would be able to meet east of Fort Ridgely and perhaps attack the fort together if the opportunity presented itself.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Battle of Birch Coulee*

Fort Ridgely was now swarming with activity. Sibley's small army had made camp around the fort and preparations were in full swing for the continued advance against the Indians. The officers worked against time to give their fresh recruits an introduction to fundamental military training and weapon use. This was no simple task, for in military terms many of the officers were about as fresh as the soldiers they were supposed to train. Despite the challenges, they did as well as they could, and with patient repetitions, the military skills began to improve. Hour after hour Sibley's blue-clad lads marched back and forth on the parade ground under a baking sun while the dust whirled around them.

Sibley took his time, precisely as he had before marching out from St. Peter, and showed no haste to depart. He refused to advance farther up the Minnesota Valley before he received more soldiers, enough horses to establish a real cavalry force, and more Springfield rifles. But the relatives of those who were killed in the massacre at the Redwood Indian Agency persisted in their requests

to Sibley that he ought to send someone to bury the bodies that now had lain rotting in the summer heat for ten days. Since his scouts had not yet seen any sign that the Sioux were in the vicinity, Sibley finally agreed to send out an expedition to bury the bodies.

The burial expedition consisted of seventy-five foot soldiers from Company A, 6<sup>th</sup> Minnesota regiment,\* fifty-five riders from the citizens' militia company Cullen Guards, twenty armed grave diggers, seventeen drivers and horse caretakers, and a few civilians who wanted to search for dead or missing relatives, bringing the expedition's composite force to about 170 men. In addition to burying the dead, they were supposed to scout up through the valley and attempt to discover where the Indians were staying.

Sibley gave Major Joseph R. Brown command of the expedition. The fifty-seven year old Brown was a former Indian agent with good knowledge of the Sioux. He had lived among them for over thirty years and had married a Wahpeton Sioux. Therefore, his nine children were half Sioux Indian. Brown lived by the Redwood Agency, but he had been away on business travels when the uprising started. This likely saved his life. He did not know how the rest of the family had fared; most likely, they had been taken as captives. He, therefore, had a personal interest in discovering where the Sioux had relocated.

Brown's men marched out from Fort Ridgely early on the forenoon of August 31. The sun shone on polished rifle barrels. Wagon wheels creaked and the saddles jangled. Now and then a horse nervously cast its head as the rider led it to the correct place in the column. The infantrymen's blue uniforms created a contrast to the golden brown prairie grass while the majority of the riders were dressed in civilian clothes. The wagons were loaded with tents, food rations, and other necessities.

The weather was good, and the soldiers were in good spirits. "The men had confidence in Old Joe Brown. It was supposed he could smell Indians afar off. He knew the country thoroughly, and we felt no special alarm," said one of the riders. But on the way up

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\* In this company there were two Norwegian immigrants: Hans P. Oleson from Kragerø and a Rasmus Oleson. (Board of Commissioners, vol. 1, 331. Ulvestad, 316).

the valley toward the Redwood Agency, they soon began to encounter burnt down farmhouses and rotting corpses. To move the more-or-less decomposing bodies into the ground required physical work, which started their minds running, spreading a mood of desolation among the soldiers.<sup>5</sup>

That night they made camp not far from Redwood Ferry. The camp was down in the river valley, dominated by the heights around it. Given what they had seen during the day, many of the soldiers were scared that the Indians were in the vicinity. They peered nervously out into the night darkness and feared each second that a horde of bloodthirsty Sioux would storm out from the shadows. But nothing happened.

A new day dawned with blue skies and sunshine, and the soldiers soon forgot the fear that they had felt during the night. At Redwood Ferry, the expedition split up. Major Brown and the riders crossed the river and rode up along the south bank in order to bury the victims from the massacre at the agency. Then they were supposed to continue in the direction of Little Crow's camp to see if they could find any trail of the Sioux. Captain Hiram P. Grant led the infantrymen and wagons up over the opposite bank to bury the settlers who had been killed in that area.

Having buried the corpses they found at the agency, Brown's riders continued the journey along the river. The clear autumn weather and the beautiful landscape lightened the mood among the soldiers. Their spirits rose exponentially when they arrived at Little Crow's camp and saw that the Indians had abandoned the place. "Here a number of the men dismounted, entered Little Crow's deserted house and many of the tepees, and began searching for mementoes to bring home as trophies of prowess. One man had an Indian drum, another a flag, others feathers, and a small molasses keg was proudly tied to the pommel of a saddle, to tell the story in after years that Little Crow had been bearded in his lair," recalled one of Brown's riders.<sup>6</sup>

Major Brown and a few other men with good knowledge of the Indians investigated the place carefully and studied all of the tracks.

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\* Translators' Note: This is a reference to Little Crow's prowess. The Oxford English Dictionary gives the following explanation, "*to beard the lion in his den* or *lair*." It is also worth noting that the same paragraph

Finally, they came to the conclusion that the Sioux had abandoned the camp four days prior, and that they had probably moved up to Yellow Medicine.

With this knowledge, the expedition's assignment was complete. Brown's riders crossed the river and rode eastward to join up with Grant's foot soldiers. "Merrily marching along, crushing the wild flowers in our path, dismounting to gather plums on the wayside, and drink of the brooks that laughed as they glided along, we reveled in the sensuous wealth of nature, and resembled a picnic party more than soldiers in an enemy's country," wrote one of the riders.

But Major Brown and his men were not the only ones who were out riding along the Minnesota that warm autumn day. Gray Bird, Mankato, and Big Eagle led 350 Sioux warriors north through the valley to sack New Ulm. And when they came to Little Crow's former camp, they found the tracks of the whites who had been there just a few hours earlier. Some scouts who rode off ahead caught sight of Brown's riders on the north side of the river. "There was, of course, a little excitement, and the column halted," Big Eagle later remembered. "Four or five of our best scouts were sent across the valley to follow the movements of the soldiers, creeping across the prairie like so many ants. It was near sundown, and we knew they would soon go into camp and we thought the camping ground would be somewhere on the Birch Coulee [sic], where there was wood and water."<sup>7</sup>

The Sioux had not seen Captain Grant's infantry and thought that those roughly sixty riders were the only white soldiers in the area. With their superior numbers, the Indians felt confident that they would easily overpower Brown's riders. They decided to surround the whites' camp in the middle of the night and attack at dawn.

The Indians were correct when they guessed that the soldiers would make camp at Birch Coulee. A "coulee" (a derivative of the French word *couler*, "to flow") is a creek bed that has dug out a ravine through the prairie down to the river. Dense forest grew along both sides of the creek. Since it was difficult to find water

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states, "With a clear sky overhead, beautiful scenery all around, we forgot or became familiar with the scenes of slaughter, and cantered slowly and merrily along until we reached Little Crow's village."

and firewood out on the open prairie, it was tempting for the soldiers to make camp near Birch Coulee. Sibley had surely warned them about making camp in an indefensible place where the Indians could lie in ambush, but during the entire expedition they had not seen a glimpse of the Sioux. Therefore, the officers did not think that they took any great risk when they made camp on the prairie not 200 yards from the trees along Birch Coulee.

Captain Grant chose the campsite. He and his infantrymen had had a tiring day. First, they had buried the soldiers who had been killed at Redwood Ferry on the first day of the uprising. Then they had marched farther up along the north bank of the Minnesota River, all the way to Beaver Creek, where they had to bury the corpses of many settlers. "It was another day of horror; burying putrid bodies exposed for ten days in the August sun," wrote Joseph Coursolle.<sup>8</sup> To their great surprise, the soldiers also found a young woman who had survived the Indians' ravaging. She was of German decent and was called Justina Krieger. She had been together with a group of over thirty other refugees on August 19th, when the Sioux suddenly attacked them. Almost all of the others were killed; only a few managed to flee. Justina was seriously injured, but her life was spared because the Indians believed she was dead. She had wandered around groggy from pain, shock, and sorrow while she lived on the berries and roots that she found in the forest until the soldiers found her almost two weeks later. The expedition's physician washed Justina's wounds and made a bed for her in one of the wagons. Grant's men then marched eastward, back to Fort Ridgely. Late in the afternoon, they reached Birch Coulee, where they made camp and waited for Brown's riders.<sup>9</sup>

Militarily speaking, Grant had chosen a very poor place to make camp. Towards the east the trees along Birch Coulee were well inside the range of fire, so that eventual attackers could lie hidden among the trees and shoot at the camp. To the north and west were ridges that blocked the view and made it impossible to see if enemies approached from those directions, and in the south there was a depression in the terrain where the attackers could sneak up. Grant thought that the Sioux were far away, so it did not matter. The soldiers still took simple, routine precautionary measures: they placed the wagons in a horseshoe formation, creating a kind

of wagon fortification. They then pitched their white tents on the inside of the wagon ring. Between the wagons, they hung up rope to which the riders could tether their horses.

Major Brown and the riders arrived a few hours later. The major is said to have been dissatisfied with the camp site that Grant had chosen, but since he also figured that the Sioux were far away, he did not think it worth the effort to give the order to move the camp. The soldiers then ate an evening meal and settled down for the night. Those who did not end up with a place in the tents slept under the wagons. Ten sentry sites were placed around the camp at a thirty-yard distance. In reality, the guard posts were too near the camp to be able to discover an attack in time, but no one felt that there was any reason to worry over such small details.

When darkness fell, the Sioux began to prepare their attack. Since they had seen only Brown's riders, they calculated that they would have an easy game. "We felt sure we could capture it, and that 200 men would be enough for the undertaking," Big Eagle recalled. The remainder of the Sioux stayed on the south side of the river. "Nearly all the Indians had double-barreled shotguns, and we loaded them with buckshot and large bullets called 'traders' balls.' After dark we started, crossed the river and valley, went up the bluffs and on the prairie, and soon we saw the white tents and the wagons of the camp. We had no difficulty in surrounding the camp. The pickets were only a little way from it. I led my men up from the west through the grass and took up a position 200 yards from the camp, behind a small knoll or elevation. Red Legs took his men into the coulie [sic] east of the camp. Mankato ('Blue Earth') had some of his men in the coulie [sic] and some on the prairie. Ray Bird and his men were mostly on the prairie."<sup>10</sup>

Dawn had just broken in the east. A new, warm autumn day was underway. The majority of the soldiers slept peacefully with no idea that their camp was surrounded by battle-ready Sioux (Map 3.1). One man noticed that the horses were restless and woke an officer to give him the message. At the same time, one of the guards saw something moving in the grass. He lifted his rifle and

shot. Immediately, the Sioux jumped up from the grass on all sides and stormed forward, filling the air with their piercing war cries.

Young Ezmon Earle slept just inside the entrance to one of the tents. "With the first war whoop I was wide awake and at once rolled on my face in order to get up. Immediately the commotion began. Sergt. Baxter, a big, noble fellow, sprang up and said, 'C'mon boys, don't be afraid,' and started for the tent door. Just then he clasped his hands to his chest and cried, 'My God boys, I'm shot in the breast' and he fell across my legs. He was so heavy that it took quite a few seconds to get out from under him..."<sup>11</sup>

The Indians ran forward until they were less than 110 yards from the camp. Then, they let fire. The buckshot charges exploded through the camp and pierced holes through the tent canvases. Horses and men fell on all sides. Instantly, the riders began to seek cover, but Grant's infantrymen attempted to create a skirmish line. Luckily, the captain quickly understood that this would only make them an easier target for the Indians, and yelled that they ought to spread out and find cover. The soldiers needed no more encouragement to seek immediate shelter from the shower of shot. They threw themselves down behind any cover they could find; both dead horses and the corpses of friends served as shields against the shots of the Sioux.

The soldiers shot back as fast as they could, and even though their shots were not very accurate in their fear and confusion, they were persistent enough to keep the Indians at bay. "Both sides fought well," said Big Eagle. "Owing to the white men's way of fighting they lost many men. Owing to the Indians' way of fighting they lost but few. The white men stood up and exposed themselves at first, but at last they learned to keep quiet. The Indians always took care of themselves."<sup>12</sup>

The battle was hardest in the first minutes. Many of the soldiers were killed or injured before they managed to take cover. In the violent shower of bullets, it did not take very long before nearly all the horses were shot too. Once the first confusion had settled, the whites began to organize a defense. The officers took responsibility for each section of the camp, and the dead horses were placed along the entire line of defense as small entrenchments. The soldiers also began to tip the wagons over on their sides in

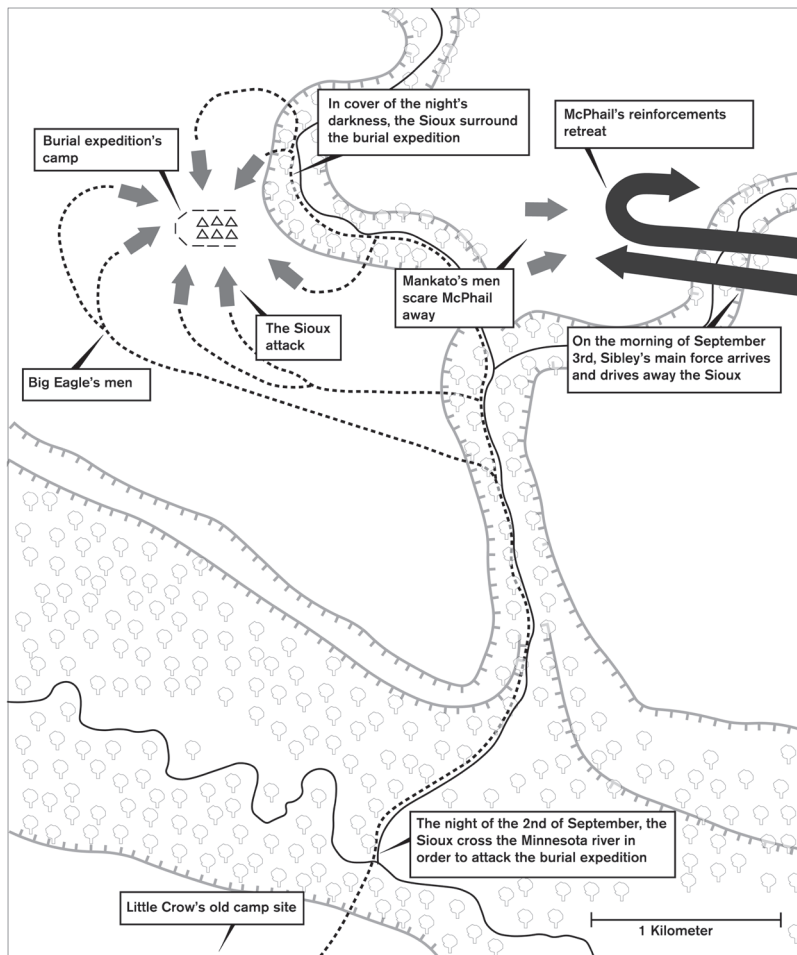


order to gain better protection from the shots. The only wagon that remained standing on its wheels was the one in which Justina Krieger lay. She was still quite exhausted after her trials and had to remain prone in the wagon while the battle raged around her. "I was, too, in the most exposed position," she later recounted. "The wagon was a fine mark; standing up, as it did, above everything else on the open prairie, it afforded the best possible target for savage marksmen. The wagon was literally shot to pieces. Some of the spokes were shot off. The cover was completely riddled with ball-holes. The cup in which I attempted to take my medicine, during the fight, was knocked away from my mouth by a passing rifle-ball. The smell of gunpowder almost took my breath from me." Incredibly enough, Mrs. Krieger escaped almost uninjured from the battle; she received only a few light surface wounds.<sup>13</sup>

Nearly one third of the soldiers were either dead or injured after the first hour. Brown's men had woken to the shots from hundreds of weapons, horses and men who screamed in pain, officers' shouts, and the nauseating sound of balls of shot piercing human flesh. (One soldier in the Civil War described the sound thus: "sluck!"<sup>14</sup>) It must have been the most brutal and traumatic experience of their lives. Still there were few who lost their self-control and panicked. Captain Grant wrote in his report that only two men lost their courage – one half-blood Indian who defected to the Indians and one man by the name of Martin Nelson, who "was panic-stricken at the commencement of the engagement, and remained so throughout the whole action."<sup>15</sup>

The fact that they were surrounded and did not have anywhere to flee undoubtedly sustained the whites' desire to fight. They knew that they were fighting for their lives. The officers strengthened the morale with brave and controlled conduct. "I lay along side of the Captain [Anderson] and I soon found that he was as cool and unconcerned as an iceberg. That helped me and others to keep cool," recalled Ezmon Earle.

Even though the Sioux had failed in their attempt to storm the camp before the soldiers awoke, the Indians felt that they had firm control of the situation. They pulled back a bit after a while, but continued to surround the camp and maintain sporadic firing against the soldiers in order to force them to stay under cover. "We



*Map 3.1: The Battle of Birch Coulee, September 2-3, 1862*

had an easy time of it,” said Big Eagle. “We could crawl through the grass and into the coulie [sic] and get water when we wanted it, and after a few hours our women crossed the river and came up near the bluff and cooked for us, and we could go back and eat and then return to the fight.”

The whites fared much worse. After a while as the sun rose in the sky, they became steadily thirstier. “There was not a bucket of water in the camp,” wrote Ezmon Earle, “and we soon began to suffer intensely from thirst...” When the Indians’ shooting diminished, the soldiers began to improve their positions by digging trenches. They had only four spades, so the majority of them had to dig with bayonets, knives, pewter plates, or just their bare hands. Nonetheless they managed to make decent protection, preventing nearly all the Indians’ shots from reaching their targets.

The day wore on, and the thirsty soldiers had little hope of being rescued. They did not know that help was already on the way. The direction of the wind and acoustic conditions were such that the sound of the intense shooting at dawn had carried all the way to Fort Ridgely. Immediately, General Sibley understood that Brown’s expedition was in trouble and sent off a troop of reinforcements under the command of General McPhail. The troop consisted of about 240 men total: fifty riders, three companies with infantrymen from the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota regiment, and a small artillery unit with a few cannons.

McPhail’s force began to approach Birch Coulee late in the afternoon, but the Indians had spotted them much earlier. According to Big Eagle, Chief Mankato took fifty warriors with him to scare away the newly arrived soldiers. The success of Mankato and his men surpassed all expectations. “... [H]e scattered [his warriors] out and they all yelled and made such a noise that the whites must have thought there were a great many more, and they stopped on the prairie and began fighting. They had a cannon and used it, but it did no harm. [...] Mankato flourished his men around so, and all the Indians in the coulie kept up a noise and at last the whites began to fall back,” recalled Big Eagle.

In his report, McPhail wrote that he met “a large force of Indians” that had “almost completely surrounded” his men. The cannons were hauled into position and shells were fired upon the

Indians. This made the Sioux stay at “a more respectful distance.” Nonetheless, McPhail thought that he was facing a numerically superior enemy and found it safest to give orders of retreat to a “commanding position” where he could wait for reinforcements. Additional couriers were sent back to Fort Ridgely to ask General Sibley for help.<sup>16</sup> Big Eagle remembered that thirty Sioux warriors were positioned to keep an eye on McPhail’s soldiers, while the rest returned to participate in the battle around Major Brown’s camp. “The Indians were laughing when they came back at the way they had deceived the white men, and we were all glad that the whites had not pushed forward and driven us away,” said Big Eagle. In Major Brown’s camp, they heard the sounds of McPhail’s cannons and celebrated that help was on the way, but the happiness soon turned to confusion as the sound of the battle on the other side of the coulee became more distant before it died out completely. Many years later, one of Brown’s men wrote, “We knew [McPhail] was there and cursed because he stopped. Perhaps he didn’t know what torture that night meant to us; the nauseating stench of death, the desperate thirst for water, the gnawing pangs of hunger, the death rattle in the throats of dying men.”<sup>17</sup> When Sibley got the message that McPhail had failed in his attempt to rescue Brown’s expedition, he immediately gave the order that nearly his entire force should prepare to march. He left behind only a small garrison to guard the fort. Sibley himself took charge over the main force that marched to Birch Coulee. In total, he had almost 100 men, the majority of them from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota infantry regiment, as well as two cannons.

There were strains of Norwegian immigrants spread across several of Sibley’s divisions. In Company G, 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota, there was an entire dozen of Norwegian-born soldiers. They hailed from Toten, Hallingdal, Sogn, and many other places, and had all settled in Goodhue County, Minnesota, before they agreed to enlist for war duty.

One of the Norwegians in 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota’s Company G was Ole Tovsen Berg. He was twenty-one years old and came originally from Rollag in Numedal. After a long march, Berg’s company had joined Sibley’s troops at Fort Ridgely that very afternoon, but they did not get any rest. They were immediately ordered to march

with Sibley's main forces. "We had marched twenty-two miles that day and hadn't eaten since breakfast," Berg remembered. There was not time to make any real meal before they had to march away to Birch Coulee. "We received just two crackers for each man before we left Fort Ridgely. This would have to hold us over until we arrived."<sup>18</sup>

The sun was about to set behind the prairie in the west when Sibley's forces marched out of the fort. Soon, the soldiers had to grope their way in the pitch dark. By signaling with cannons, they were able to locate McPhail's position around midnight. Here, Sibley stopped to wait for daylight. In the camp at Birch Coulee, Brown's men did not know that rescue was near. The corpses of many of the men and horses had begun to stink after a long day in the baking sun, but it would have been insanity to attempt to bury them as long as the Sioux lay ready to pick off anyone who left his cover. Thirst and hunger also plagued the soldiers through the night, as well as the gnawing fear that they would fall into Indian hands and suffer a gruesome death. The soldiers knew that they could not hold out much longer. In addition to the shortage of water and food, they had nearly exhausted their ammunition supply. Many of the soldiers had barely a handful of bullets or balls\* left. If the Indians attempted a new assault at the break of dawn, it was highly unlikely that Brown's men would be able to hold them back.

At dawn, Sibley made ready to advance toward Birch Coulee. He took no chances and was careful to place the troops in actual battle formation before he started the march forward. This took time, but finally the long rows of blue-clad soldiers began to move slowly across the prairie towards the coulee. One of Sibley's soldiers described it thus:

As we neared the head of Birch Coulee tents could be seen through the trees, and speculations were rife as to whether it was Brown's camp or that of the Indians, as they have tents very similar to our own.

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\* Translators' Note: *Kuler*; "balls," is the term here. It is difficult to know whether this is bullets for rifles or balls for smooth bore muskets. Rounds includes all of these definitions.

The Indians were soon seen swarming through a belt of woods toward our column from the direction of the tents, and quickly scattering along the line, waving their blankets and shouting defiance, as if to entice us into the woods in pursuit. Some were mounted, and one on a white horse was especially conspicuous, riding up and down the line, and encouraging his comrades. Failing to draw the forces into the wood, they advanced nearer, and, throwing themselves down behind eminences which would afford protection, poured a rapid fire into the column. Nearly all the balls\* flew too high or were spent, and only one of our men was wounded. Skirmishers were at once thrown out, who, with quick discharges, drove them back, and the bursting shells from the cannon soon put them to rout. They retreated rapidly down Birch Coolie, and crossed the river at the agency.<sup>19</sup>

The Norwegian Ole Tovsen Berg gave a much shorter description of the battle. "The Indians, who saw our troop coming, and who moreover are too cowardly to fight an open battle, did not put up any effective resistance." When the Sioux were dispersed, Sibley's troops marched over to Major Brown's camp. Having battled for their lives for over twenty-four hours, Brown's men could finally crawl up from their primitive trenches. "Their happiness over being saved from a gruesome death at the hand of the Indians can more easily be imagined than described," wrote Berg.

The camp was a horrendous sight. Dead people and horses lay strewn everywhere. "When I walked through the camp, I had to quicken my pace because of the stench of all of those dead bodies. [...] The seriously injured, who lay in those tents shredded by rounds, \*\*\* had not had a drop of water to slake their thirst, since the

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\* Translators' Note: It may be worth mentioning that this is from an English language source.

\*\* Translators' Note: We have this only as *kuler*, which can mean musket balls, bullets, or shotgun shells in Skarstein's usage. Again, rounds encompasses all of these terms.

Indians had cut them off from water supplies at the onset of the battle,” Berg related.

At least thirteen of Brown’s men were killed and around fifty were injured. The number of dead may have been higher. Some sources say that twenty-four were killed, but this cannot be confirmed with certainty. The Indians’ loss was likely much lower. Later the Sioux said that they could remember the names of only two warriors who had fallen in this battle, but the Indians were usually very reserved when speaking about their own losses.<sup>20</sup>

Once the dead were buried, the soldiers marched the roughly fourteen miles back to Fort Ridgely. It was late in the night when they finally arrived, “sleepy, tired, and hungry. Now we had gotten a foretaste of being soldiers, and many wished that they instead had been at home with mother,” Berg wrote.

### *The Battle of Big Woods*

While the warriors of Mankato, Gray Bird, and Big Eagle battled at Birch Coulee, Little Crow and his 110 warriors were on the way in to Big Woods, a good thirty miles farther north. Little Crow’s leadership position was weakened after the loss at Fort Ridgely, and many of the warriors began to criticize the chief’s plans already the day after they had left the camp at Yellow Medicine. Open arguments broke out, and in the end, the troop split into factions. About 75 warriors would no longer accept Little Crow’s leadership and headed their own way led by the war leader Walker Among Sacred Stones. Only thirty-five warriors remained with Little Crow. But the two groups continued in approximately the same direction, and that night they made camp about two miles apart, near Acton, where the uprising had begun.<sup>21</sup>

Many smaller groups of Indians had ravaged this area earlier, so the majority of white settlers had already fled eastward or sought refuge in various towns where they had built small forts for protection. Eventually the authorities in St. Paul had begun to send minor forces to help the residents of Big Woods. Among the departments that had gotten orders to support the settlers was

Company H of 9<sup>th</sup> Minnesota Regiment, where Ole Paulson was a second lieutenant.

After he had allowed himself to be recruited, Ole Paulson had traveled down to St. Paul in order to be officially mustered in the United States Volunteer Army, and when the company chose officers, the Scandinavians in the company saw to it that he was elected as second lieutenant. On September 1, he assumed his officer commission from Governor Alex Ramsey. Thereafter, he received the entire company's permission to travel home to say farewell to his family. "An odd change had come over me," Paulson later wrote. "I came home with a military hat on my head and my lieutenant's epaulettes on my shoulders." How his wife reacted when she learned that he had broken his promise to pursue his seminary training, Paulson never mentioned.<sup>22</sup>

Paulson's company was actually recruited to participate in the Civil War against the Southern states, but when the extent of the Indian uprising became known, they were instead reassigned to go to war against the Sioux. And because of the crisis situation, the stay at home was short for Paulson and his friends. They had just barely arrived at their homes around Carver when they received orders to prepare to march westward to protect the settler city of Glencoe.

Company H left Carver in two groups. The first was under the command of Lieutenant Weinmann. The second group, led by Ole Paulson, left the following day. "We were ordered forthwith to march, even though we had neither weapons nor ammunition nor rations," Paulson recalled. In order not to be totally defenseless, each man cut himself a large staff in the forest before they marched west. Paulson wrote that the governor had not "thought of the necessity that the soldiers needed equipment and provisions," but in reality it was hardly a case of forgetfulness from the authorities' side. The fact was that the state of Minnesota lacked sufficient supplies of weapons and equipment for such a large force to be deployed to fight the Sioux. Because of this, the soldiers often had to manage with the equipment that they could procure locally until the authorities managed to acquire what was needed.

Even though they lacked weapons, Paulson and his men were in good spirits during the march west. "We resembled the



Birkebeiners, whom King Sverre made himself leader of when he made his invasion of Norway,” Paulson reflected later. “We were poorly equipped to (go to) war with the Redskins. But we were a rather jovial group [...] we sang and made jokes about ourselves as warriors.” Late in the day, they arrived at the little town of Young America. Almost all the residents had fled in fear of the Indians. According to Paulson, there was just one man left. This man was a trader and ran a guesthouse where the soldiers were able to take shelter for the night. He also supplied them with provisions and ammunition and showed them a pile of rifles that had been left behind by other residents when they fled. The weapons were of varying caliber and kind but in any event, were much better than the staffs that Paulson’s men had been forced to use up to this point. “We immediately became fierce men, who shouldn’t be trifled with,” Paulson later wrote, probably ironically. “I received an incredibly heavy beast of a gun, a rifle, that was probably a pretty good weapon. I carried it to Glencoe.”

The next day they arrived in Glencoe and went straight to work preparing the defense of the city. Paulson received the responsibility to erect an earthen fortress on the outskirts of town. But the fortress was never put to use, because the Indians stayed away from Glencoe.

Paulson and his men were fortunate that they did not meet Little Crow’s warriors during the march to Glencoe, since the Sioux were just over twelve miles farther west. Poorly armed and with minimal training, Paulson’s company would have suffered had they met the Indians. This was clearly demonstrated when another company from the 9<sup>th</sup> Minnesota encountered the Sioux near Acton.

Captain Richard Strout marched from Glencoe on September 2 with the 9<sup>th</sup> Minnesota, Company B and a division of civil militia, totaling about seventy-five men. A handful of them rode on horseback and the rest had to walk. They also had a few wagons that carried extra ammunition, equipment, and provisions. Strout’s small force was supposed to head northwest to Forest City in order to protect the settlers there. In the evening, they made camp by the farm of Robinson Jones, the site of the first killings of the Sioux uprising two weeks earlier. Late that night, Strout’s soldiers were suddenly awakened by three riders from Forest City who arrived

with a message that a large force of Indians had been observed in the area. The day before, local volunteers had been in a brief skirmish with the Sioux near Acton. (This must have been an additional group of Sioux warriors to those who had followed Little Crow from Yellow Medicine.) Immediately, Strout began to prepare his men for battle. Their weapons were old Belgian muskets of dubious quality, and it turned out that they had been issued bullets that were too big to fit into the gun barrels. Thus, they quickly began filing down the bullets so that they could be used.

At dawn, Strout's men set their course southeastward toward Hutchinson, where they knew that recently constructed entrenchments could provide refuge. Without suspecting it the soldiers marched right by the rebels from Little Crow's expedition, and the Sioux did not discover them. Shortly thereafter, as Strout's force passed just west of a lake, the scouts reported that they could see the Sioux in front of them. This was Little Crow's thirty-five warriors. The Indians had already seen the whites and were ready for battle.<sup>23</sup>

Strout gave the order that the soldiers should form a skirmish line and advance over a grass hill towards a wheat field where the Sioux waited. Strout's men could see the sun reflecting on the barrels of the Indians' rifles between the shafts of wheat. Then the first shot went off, "the bullet passing uncomfortably close to our heads," one of Strout's soldiers remembered. "This was followed by waving blanket and yelling, and as we continued to advance, the ball (firing) soon opened in earnest. Little Crow had about 100 Indians [...] well mounted and hideously painted."<sup>24</sup>

Both sides fired at each other, causing gunpowder smoke to lie heavily over the grassy hillside. One soldier was killed when a bullet ripped through his brain. Many others were injured. This type of stationary battle did not suit the Sioux well, and they soon began to fall back. Strout's men followed them. Then, a new Indian troop of around 70 warriors suddenly appeared out of the forest from the north, behind the soldiers. This was the group of rebels led by Walker Among Sacred Stones, who had heard the shots and wanted to help his tribal brothers. They came riding at full speed, "like a cyclone," wrote one of the whites. But luckily for the soldiers, the newly arrived men hung back and instead of attacking

directly rode around and joined Little Crow's forces. Only a few warriors remained to threaten the whites from behind.

Even though the soldiers were lucky that the majority of the Sioux gathered in front of them, it was still a very difficult situation. The Indians could easily block all escape routes by pressing them to the east, up toward the lake. Therefore, Captain Strout decided to attempt to break through in the direction of Hutchinson. He yelled out orders to attach the bayonets, and the soldiers stormed ahead. The Indians yielded, and the road to Hutchinson was opened.

But the battle was not over. "We discovered that we could not drive them away everywhere, but since they were fleet-footed and many of them had horses, they could continue to fight as they retreated,"\* one soldier remembered. And when the soldiers began their march to Hutchinson, the Indians pressed them from the sides and behind. Some of the Sioux warriors ventured close to the soldiers before they fired their weapons. The whites' losses grew. One soldier fell dead from a bullet to the heart, the arm of another soldier was shattered, and a third was shot in the thigh. The unarmed drivers of the supply wagons had had enough of being shot at and attempted to flee with the wagons, but the captain and his handful of riders stopped them. The drivers were not the only ones who began to lose courage. The untrained soldiers' discipline also gave signs of dissolving, which made it increasingly difficult for the captain to keep his men together and to carry out an orchestrated retreat.

The whites' retreat increasingly resembled a pure flight. Some of the men hopped up in the wagons in order to escape more quickly. Captain Strout gave up and called out the now unnecessary order of retreat. As the soldiers' discipline deserted them, the Indians ventured even closer. Mr. Stone, one of the civilian volunteers from Minneapolis known as a respectable businessman, fell over from a bullet to the chest and died quickly. The number of the injured increased.

The situation so far looked incredibly dark for the whites, but after a while the Sioux's pursuit began to die down. One of

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\* Translators' Note: This quote from an English language source could not be verified in the original English.

the soldiers later recalled that while he was sitting in one of the wagons, he got the bright idea of throwing provisions to the Sioux in the hope that they were hungry enough to stop pursuit in order to pick up the food. He believed this tactic contributed to curbing the pursuit.

Having hunted down the whites for several miles, the majority of the Sioux were satisfied. In the end there were three or four daredevils who pursued the soldiers before they too gave up. The whites still continued at full speed, and did not breathe easily until they were safely behind the entrenchments of Hutchinson later that afternoon. Strout's men had received rough treatment. At least three were killed; three others were fatally wounded; at least fifteen more were injured (some sources say that the number of wounded was as high as twenty-three). Indian casualties are difficult to ascertain, as is common, but by all accounts they fared much better than Strout's soldiers.<sup>25</sup>

That same night the Indians divided their forces again. A smaller group headed north in order to attack Forest City. Little Crow planned to lead the rest to Hutchinson. In the course of the night or the next morning, they likely met other groups of Sioux, who were ravaging in the area, and joined forces with them.

Some hours before dawn on September 4, twenty Sioux warriors rode into Forest City at a full gallop. They filled the air with fear-inspiring war cries and shot in all directions. The local militia company and the residents in the town considered themselves fortunate, having just completed the construction of a fort in which they could seek refuge. Before the Indians could catch them, everyone made it safely behind the palisade. Then, the battle began in earnest.

The twenty riders had only been a vanguard. Several Sioux soon began firing at the fort from all directions. Even though the shooting was fairly heavy for a while, the losses were minimal. It was too dark for anyone to see clearly. Among those who made a name for themselves during the defense were Asbry or Aslog (Aslak?) Olson and Nels Danielson.

The Indians likely followed a conscious tactic where a small contingent of their force kept the whites in the fort while the rest of the warriors sacked the town. Regardless of the strategy, the

Indians burned down many houses and took sixty horses and much other loot. When the first rays of light appeared, the defenders could see that the Indians had attempted to drive away a herd of cattle. Some of the men in the fort launched an attack to retrieve the animals. Asbry/Aslog Olson was injured during this attack. Soon after this, the Sioux retreated and disappeared into the forests south of the city.<sup>26</sup>

Simultaneously, Little Crow led his force of nearly 100 warriors toward Hutchinson, thirty miles southeast of Forest City. The defenders in Hutchinson had built a fort similar to the one in Forest City, with a blockhouse surrounded by a palisade built of tall logs with openings in the wall, or parapets, for shooting. The fort was positioned at the edge of town. The whites' armed forces were probably equal to the Indians; in addition to the local militia company, Captain Strout's men had sought refuge here after their battle with the Indians the previous day. So, now the place now was defended by 125 armed men.<sup>27</sup>

The Sioux attacked early in the morning, but all of the whites safely gathered behind the fort's palisade. The Indians had realized after the battles at Fort Ridgely that it was practically impossible to oust the whites once they were entrenched. Therefore, Little Crow pulled his warriors out of effective shooting range and concentrated on plundering and burning. Hutchinson Academy, an educational institution that was the town's pride, was among the buildings that went up in flames. In an attempt to stop the plundering, the whites marched out from the fort in order to repel the Indians, but the Sioux were not tempted into open battle. Instead they spread out and shot at the whites from hidden positions at a safe distance. The white officers realized that they would gain little from their counterattack and pulled their men back into the fort.

The Sioux ended their attack late in the afternoon and rode west, taking many wagons fully loaded with plunder as well as a large number of horses and cattle. Little Crow's great raid at Big Woods was over, and the following day the Sioux returned to their camp at Yellow Medicine. Ole Paulson did not participate in any of the battles in Big Woods. Perhaps, he heard the shooting in the distance when the Indians attacked Hutchinson, but he never came any closer. Nonetheless, he was able to see some of the gruesome

results of the Indians' devastation. Some weeks later, when men from his company were on reconnaissance about six miles from Glencoe, the soldiers encountered the remains of a family by the name of White that had been killed by the Indians. In his memoirs, Paulson described what the soldiers saw:

Shot and carved up with a knife, the body of Mrs. White they found lying in the door of her house. The knives they had left stuck in her body. They found Mr. White and his severed head between the stacks of wheat. The son, a twelve year-old boy, had been thrown alive down into the well, where he died. They brought the daughter, a seventeen year-old girl, onto the prairie and satisfied their satanic desires on her until she died. The skeleton was found on the prairie the following spring.

Not being among soldiers who found the dead at the White farm, Paulson based the details of this event on the accounts of others. Nonetheless, he was able to see the bodies with his own eyes when they were brought to Glencoe for burial. This certainly made a strong impression on him and fueled his burning hatred towards the Indians.<sup>28</sup>

### *Fort Abercrombie*

Farther west, at the border between Minnesota and the vast Dakota Territory, was Fort Abercrombie. Established by the United States Army just prior to the Civil War, this distant outpost was intended to protect trade along the Red River, to ensure that the prairie Indians remained peaceful, and to encourage white settlement in the area.

As at Fort Ridgely, little at Fort Abercrombie resembled the common conception of what a fort should be. There were no palisades or other fortifications; the fort consisted solely of a few buildings around a parade ground on the west bank of the Red River. The garrison was eighty-four men from Company D, 5<sup>th</sup> Minnesota, commanded by the German-American John Vander

Horck.\* The majority of the Vander Horck soldiers were also German-Americans. Some of them had military experience from their homeland and among other things, had learned to use cannons. This would turn out to be advantageous because three howitzer cannons had been left behind by the regular troops assigned to guard the fort prior to the Civil War.<sup>29</sup>

Vander Horck received word of the Sioux uprising on August 23rd and immediately began efforts to make the fort easier to defend. He informed area settlers that the Sioux were on the warpath and encouraged them to seek refuge at the fort. Several of the settlers who followed that encouragement were rugged pioneer-types and provided a sound fortification of the garrison. The settlers brought cattle and horses to graze with the soldiers' cattle outside the fort.

The defenders built a barricade around the fort's core buildings and established firing positions for the three cannons. Once that was complete, there was nothing to do but wait. The days passed, and even though they continually heard rumors that the Sioux were in the area, they spotted no Indians on the open prairie to the west or in the scrub forest along the river valley banks.

In the middle of the day on August 30th, a large group of Sioux suddenly appeared on the prairie horizon west of the fort. They set their course for the grazing herd of cattle and horses. Vander Horck thought that it would be too dangerous to march out and attempt to drive the Sioux away; the most important thing was to hold the fort and defend the settler families who had sought the soldiers' protection. Therefore, the whites stood powerless and watched while the Indians drove away their herds. Later, Vander Horck was criticized for having shown excessive caution, but this criticism was by all accounts unfair. With solely foot soldiers at his disposal, there was little Vander Horck could have done to stop the Sioux on their fast, agile horses. The days that followed were quiet around the fort, but occasionally the guards on post thought they saw Indians hiding in the scrub forest along the river. A reconnaissance patrol found forty cattle that had strayed from the

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\* Translators' Note: For some reason, Skarstein uses a Dutch format: van der Horck. We have reverted to the historical figure's spelling on his grave and in the sources to hand: Vander Horck.

Sioux; otherwise, there were no clear signs that the Indians were in the area.

The hard work to build entrenchments and long hours round the clock on watch began to wear on the soldiers, and the officers routinely made rounds to ensure that the guards on post stayed awake. One hour before dawn on September, Vander Horck was out inspecting the line of guards. In the dark, one of the guards mistook Vander Horck for an Indian; the guard fired and hit the captain in the arm. The despairing guard explained that he shot because he had seen the Indians sneak around the perimeter of the guard line earlier that night.

One hour later, while Vander Horck sat in the officers' quarters as the doctor treated his wound, heavy fire and wild war cries were abruptly heard on the south side of the fort. The Sioux had snuck through the forest along the riverbank and then stormed the stables that stood outside the barricades. Some of the Indians were on horseback and advanced as a whirlwind. The whites' outposts were driven back to the barricades, but it quickly became apparent that the Sioux had not intended to make a serious attempt at storming the fort. Their main goal was to enter the stables and steal the horses.

The shooting was intense, and the gunpowder smoke thickened in the pale morning light. Soon, two haystacks stood in flames, casting an ominous light over the fighters. When the settlers understood that the Sioux were outside the fort and after their horses, many of the most courageous attempted an attack. It is said that two of the settlers entered one end of the stable while two Indians stormed in on the other end. Both parties fired. One Indian collapsed dead and one of the whites was hit in the shoulder. The injured man apparently managed to shoot the other Indian and finish him off with the bayonet. The battle for the stables continued for several hectic minutes, and in addition two more whites were injured before the Indians were beaten back. Even though they were driven out of the stables, the Sioux continued their attack. They hid in the scrub brush along the riverbank and shot at the fort from there for several hours. This shooting had little effect, and the fire from the whites' cannons prevented the Sioux from rallying to a new attack. Late in the afternoon, the Indians



gave up on the attack and disappeared. The fort's defenders found two Indians who had been killed during the attack, and they estimated they had disposed of four more that the Indians had taken with them.

Vander Horck's men had won the first round, but they feared that the Indians would make a second attempt. The lack of ammunition was a particular worry. Vander Horck's company had been issued ammunition of incorrect caliber, as had so many other companies established in haste to join the Civil War, and now, there were only 350 functional bullets left in the fort. With a little innovation, they found a solution. The grape shot charges for the cannons contained large quantities of bullets of the proper caliber, so by opening the charges of ammunition and removing the bullets, the soldiers were able to procure the ammunition necessary to face a new attack. The bullets in the grape shot charges were replaced by iron scraps and other scrap metal.

Fort Abercrombie was relatively quiet for two days, but the Indians were clearly in the vicinity for they occasionally shot at the fort from the scrub brush along the opposite side of the river. The people in the fort must have felt rather isolated. The nearest white settlement was about 150 miles away, so reinforcements would take time to arrive. In the meantime, they must fend for themselves.

Early on the morning of September 6th, the posted guards spotted a large force of Indians out on the prairie. The whites estimated several hundred Sioux, but it was likely no more than 150 warriors, probably the Sisseton and Wahpeton Sioux from the upper agencies, led perhaps by the Sisseton Chief Sweet Corn.

When the Indians were less than a mile from the fort, they spread out in a fan formation before they continued their advance. The riders kept to the open prairie in the west, while the warriors on foot snuck forward through the scrub brush along the river both above and below the fort. "In no time at all we were completely surrounded, and then the air was filled with the frightful

shrieks that only the wild ones are capable of emitting,” wrote a correspondent for the newspaper *St. Paul Press*.<sup>30</sup>

The Sioux made a new attempt to storm the stables and steal the whites' horses, but after ten minutes of intense battle they were driven back. From that point on, the Indians attacked from all sides, but the defenders' shooting kept them at a distance. Again, the cannons played an important role. At one point the defenders caught sight of a group of riders gathered on one of the heights about half a mile from the fort. They seemed to be preparing for a new attack, and the artillerymen pointed one of the howitzer cannons toward the rise and fired. The cannonball landed in the middle of the riders and exploded a few seconds later. The air was filled with dust, sand, and other particles, and when this dissipated both the horses and the riders had disappeared. Whether or not the explosion had killed any of the Sioux was impossible to say, but the attack was averted.

The correspondent from the *St. Paul Press* stated that another shell hit one of the log cabins where some of the Indians had sought cover. “Their hasty flight from the house and the blood-spattered floor clearly proved that the shell had claimed many victims.”\*\*

The battle lasted until midday, at which point the Sioux retreated to the forest along the river. Two whites were killed and one injured during this attack. The defenders claimed later that they had managed to dispose of at least twenty Indians, but this was likely an exaggeration. Still, the Indians' losses must have been considerable, and this was possibly the reason that they did not attack anew.

In the days that followed, some of the Indians hid in the forest and shot at the soldiers when they walked down to the river to fetch water. Even though it made gathering water a rather frightful experience, the soldiers escaped unharmed. Little else happened

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\* Translators' Note: The *St. Paul Press* quotation has been translated from Norwegian back into English, so this is the spirit of the original English but likely not verbatim the original English.

\*\* Translators' Note: This quote from an English language source could not be verified in the original English.

during the next two weeks. The people in the fort could do nothing but wait and hope that a rescue mission was on the way.

Vander Horck lost his patience on September 23rd and decided to send yet another courier in order to request help from the authorities in St. Paul. The courier was assigned an escort of twenty men to follow him part of the way. Vander Horck had no way of knowing it, but it was the irony of fate that he lost his patience precisely when a rescue mission was only a day's march away. On their way back, the escort was less than a mile from the fort when they rode into an ambush. The Sioux opened fire from their hiding places and killed two of the whites. The others escaped in fear and hastily fled to the safety of the fort.

The rescue mission arrived that same afternoon, to the great relief of the soldiers and the settlers who had been in isolation for a month. This ended the siege of Fort Abercrombie, and the whites again had control over the land along the Red River. The war would be decided down in the Minnesota Valley.

### *Negotiations*

When Little Crow arrived at the camp at Yellow Medicine after the raid in Big Woods, he quickly discovered that the rift between his tribal brothers was stronger than ever. The opponents of the war were encouraged by the fact that the powerful Sisseton Chief Standing Buffalo had returned from a bison hunting trip on the prairie farther west. Standing Buffalo did not want a war against the whites and expressed strong opposition to the actions of Little Crow's warriors. During a large council meeting, he accused those on the warpath of having put all Sioux in great danger without even asking them first. He said that he and his Sisseton warriors would stay out of the war, and that they wanted to protect the other opponents of war.<sup>31</sup>

The white captives in Little Crow's camp were also a hot topic of conflict. Those who wanted to make peace thought that the captives ought to be set free in an attempt to pacify the whites, so that negotiations could get underway. Paul Mazakutemani, the spokesman for the Christian Wahpeton-Sioux, was the one who spoke most vehemently for freeing the prisoners. He received

support from other influential chiefs such as Red Iron and Standing Buffalo.

Little Crow's warriors had no faith in the utility of negotiations or freeing the prisoners. A warrior by the name of Rdainyanka argued well for the continuation of the war. Two years later, the white historian Isaac Heard repeated the speech of Rdainyanka. It is impossible to comment on the accuracy of the account, but regardless, it provides a good impression of how the more reflective of the war supporters might have thought.

I am for continuing the war, and am opposed to the delivery of the prisoners. I have no confidence that the whites will stand by any agreement they make if we give them up. Ever since we treated with them their agents and traders have robbed and cheated us. Some of our people have been shot, some hung; others placed upon floating ice and drowned; and many have been starved in their prisons. It was not the intention of the nation to kill any of the whites until after the four men returned from Acton and told what they had done. When they did this, all the young men became excited, and commenced the massacre. The older ones would have prevented it if they could, but since the treaties they have lost all their influence. We may regret what has happened, but the matter has gone too far to be remedied. We have got to die. Let us, then, kill as many of the whites as possible, and let the prisoners die with us.<sup>32</sup>

Such attitudes received support from many of the young warriors, and it was clear that the war would continue. The fate of the prisoners was as yet unknown.

While the Indians argued amongst themselves, General Sibley was also concerned about the fate of the prisoners. He had left a message fastened to a stake on the battlefield at Birch Coulee, knowing full well that that Indians would find it. The message read as follows: "If Little Crow has any proposition to make to me, let

him send a half-breed to me, and he shall be protected in and out of the camp.” When Sibley’s message was translated and read aloud for the Sioux during a council meeting, it caused a good deal of excitement. The young warriors first wanted to deny Little Crow the opportunity to send an answer, but finally they went along with the plan to send a letter to Sibley in which they explained their reasons for going to war. They placed special emphasis on the Indian agents’ negligence and the traders’ insults, something of particular concern to the proud young warriors. Both Myrick’s belittling comments that they “could eat grass” and a Mr. Forbes’ comments that they “were not men” were included in the letter as justification for the war. Finally they informed Sibley that they had taken a large number of women and children prisoners, a clear sign that they wanted to use the prisoners as a trump card during eventual negotiations.

The answer from Sibley was not exactly what the Sioux warriors wanted. “You have murdered many of our people without sufficient cause. Return me the prisoners, under a flag of truce, and I will talk with you then like a man.” This was completely unacceptable to the young warriors, who were now more or less controlling Little Crow’s actions. They would not under any circumstance release the prisoners without getting anything in return. Thus the negotiations came to a standstill.

Unbeknownst to Little Crow and his warriors, Sibley simultaneously conducted secret negotiations with the peace advocates Wabasha and Taopi. These chiefs asked Sibley how they might come under his protection. Sibley wrote back that he would soon arrive with his troops, and that the peace advocates and prisoners ought to gather a group out on the prairie under a white flag at a conspicuous place where the soldiers could see them clearly.

The letter exchange with the Indians gave Sibley important information about the divide among the Sioux. This was clearly

something he could exploit when he led his soldiers to Little Crow's camp.

*"Exterminating or ruining"*

The battle at Birch Coulee had given Sibley much to think about and was by all accounts an important reason that he postponed his offensive against Little Crow's warriors. The Indians fought "like devils" he wrote in a letter to his wife. Sibley had evidently gained great respect for the abilities of the Sioux warriors, and he had little desire to march against them without more time to prepare his fresh recruits. Beyond this, the loss of over ninety horses at Birch Coulee had amplified one of Sibley's biggest problems: the lack of cavalry. Since the majority of the Indian warriors had horses, it would be difficult for Sibley to reach them without a real cavalry, but Sibley had a hard time procuring both horses and riders. The only cavalry he had were some loosely organized companies of civilian volunteers, and many of these had decided to go home after the battle of Birch Coulee. Sibley had twenty-five riders left, and the majority of these were required to tend the cattle herd intended to keep the soldiers fed with meat. Finally, Sibley had very little remaining of the ammunition and other equipment that he felt was necessary for an expedition against the Indians.<sup>33</sup>

There is little doubt that Sibley had good reasons for postponing the march from Fort Ridgely, yet he had to tolerate great criticism for his caution. Sarcastic newspaper editors called him a publically employed funeral director since the only thing that Sibley's troops had achieved so far was burying the Indians' victims. Some went so far as to question his courage. The criticism was so harsh that Sibley sought leave on September 4th, but the Governor would not accept his leave of absence request.

In St. Paul, Governor Ramsey also experienced strong pressure from an impatient public that believed that the Sioux needed to be punished immediately. Ramsey sent a stream of telegrams to the authorities in Washington, D.C. with pleas for help to keep up with the Indians. President Lincoln's government currently had their hands full figuring out how they were going to stop General Robert E. Lee's Southern army. Lee's forces had recently won a

significant battle just outside Washington D.C.\* and were preparing to invade Maryland. In other words, the Sioux uprising had come at the worst possible time for the hard-pressed Northern states. Ramsey's desperate telegrams eventually provoked a reaction, and Lincoln made time to set initiatives in motion that would expedite the war with the Indians. On September 6th, General John Pope received orders to assume the command of the newly established "Northwestern Military District."

One week earlier, Pope had commanded the Northern states' army that was defeated outside of Washington. His new assignment in remote Minnesota was interpreted as the exile of an incompetent general. This was not too far from the truth, for it was reasonable to believe that Lincoln's government really wanted to get rid of him. John Pope had a swagger and self-satisfied way of being that made him many enemies, and he had a habit of uttering bombastic proclamations that in no way matched his actual accomplishments. In addition, it slowly became clear that he lacked an understanding of the strategic realities that characterized the war at the main front in Virginia. Once his army suffered a crushing defeat on August 28-30, it was no surprise that the government relieved him of command and sent him far away.

On the other hand, Pope's new assignment was in no way insignificant, and he clearly had abilities that qualified him for the assignment. His new military district encompassed not just Minnesota but also Wisconsin, Iowa, the Dakota territories, and the Nebraska territory. It demanded a man with considerable energy and courage to press forward in order to coordinate the military activities in this enormous area. Energy and courage were precisely among Pope's most developed traits, and even though he initially considered the assignment an insult, he quickly forgot his reservations when he arrived in St. Paul. He threw himself into the assignment with great zeal with the hope that by crushing the Indian uprising as quickly and effectively as he could, he would win back his lost prestige and get a new chance on the main stage of the Civil War. Pope's assignments as head of the military district were first and foremost administrative. It was still General Sibley

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\* Translators' Note: The Battle of Second Manassas, also known as The Second Battle of Bull Run.

who would lead the troops in the field, so Pope's success was dependent upon Sibley defeating the Sioux as quickly as possible. Therefore, one of the first things Pope did when he arrived in St. Paul was send a letter to Sibley stating that he was prepared to provide Sibley with all the necessary troops to end this Indian uprising in the shortest time possible. Pope wanted to conduct an "active and vigorous campaign" against the Sioux, and he asked Sibley to march as quickly as he could. Finally, Pope wrote that they ought to once and for all end the Indian problems "by exterminating or ruining all the Indians engaged in the late outbreak."<sup>34</sup>

### *The Battle of Wood Lake*

Fort Ridgely was abuzz with hectic activity. Sibley trained his soldiers hard in order to prepare them for battle against the Sioux. Soldiers were meticulously taught to advance in ranks arrayed for firing volleys, since this was viewed as the formation best suited to do battle against the Indians.

Sibley began to see improvement in the situation, when at last some of the requested reinforcements and supplies arrived. On September 11, he received 50,000 cartridges of the correct caliber and was thereby well equipped with ammunition. More provisions and uniforms arrived for his troops in the following days. What Sibley probably appreciated most was the supplement to his forces; 270 men from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota Infantry regiment arrived at Fort Ridgely on September 13. In contrast to the fresh recruits that made up the lion's share of the troops under Sibley's command, the soldiers in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota could be called veterans. They had been in uniform for almost one year and had served on the front of the Civil War. Their time at the front was humiliatingly interrupted on July 13, 1862, when they were surrounded by the Southern states' cavalry at Murfreesboro in Tennessee; they received orders from their general to put down their weapons and surrender without having been given the opportunity to fight. The Southern states' cavalry captured the regiments' officers as prisoners, while the enlisted troops and noncommissioned officers were released on their word of honor. This meant that they promised not to lift a weapon against the Southern states before they



were exchanged with an equal number of imprisoned soldiers from the Southern states. While they waited to be traded, the soldiers from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota were sent to a military base in Missouri. They were there when the Indian uprising started in their home state. The authorities in Minnesota quickly perceived the chance to engage the soldiers from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment in the battles with the Sioux. As long as the officers sat in prison, the regiment would be of little use in the Civil War. The top commander in Washington, D.C. agreed to send the men from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota up the Mississippi River to fortify Sibley's army. The enlisted soldiers and noncommissioned officers were formally exchanged on August 27, 1862, the day before they were sent north to fight the Indians. (By going to war with the Sioux, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota contributed to the Northern states' total war efforts because they could replace other companies that then became available to send to the front in the Southern states. Therefore, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota ought to have been traded before they warred with the Indians.)<sup>35</sup>

The capitulation at Murfreesboro left its mark on the morale of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota. The soldiers were hungry for revenge and eager to prove that there was nothing failing in the morale of the troops in battle; yet, they had lost great respect for the officers after their general had handed them over without a fight. This led to mediocre discipline, and their interim leader, Major Welch from the 4<sup>th</sup> Minnesota, had his hands full keeping control of them. Still Sibley was relieved when the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota arrived at Fort Ridgely. In a letter to the Governor he wrote, "The men [from 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota] are hardy and eager for action. [...] Their presence here will inspire much confidence among the raw material of the other regiments, and render the whole command much more reliable and effective."<sup>36</sup> Now Sibley finally felt strong enough to march against the Sioux. Although he lacked cavalry, he knew that in the best-case scenario, it would take several weeks to organize a proper cavalry, and he could not afford to wait that long. He must manage without.

Sibley's small army marched out of Fort Ridgely in a long column on September 19. All told, Sibley had a total of 1,619 soldiers: almost the entire 6<sup>th</sup> Minnesota regiment, parts of the 7<sup>th</sup> and

9<sup>th</sup> Minnesota, the 270 men from 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota, sixty voluntary riders, and sixteen artillerymen with cannons.

There were probably around 100 Norwegian immigrants among Sibley's troops, evenly spread among the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota. Company D of 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota was almost exclusively Scandinavian and consisted originally of about thirty Norwegians and seventy Swedes, but it is difficult to know how many were present when the company marched from Fort Ridgely on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September.<sup>37</sup>

The march went slowly. The first day was primarily used to ferry the entire force over the Minnesota River. Since there was only one boat, this was a time-consuming process. The following days the column marched slowly and cautiously up the Minnesota River's southern bank toward Yellow Medicine. Initially, the soldiers saw no signs of Little Crow's warriors, but the second night a house was set on fire less than half a mile from the soldiers' camp. The flickering light from the flames was a disturbing sight, and everyone understood that the Indians had set the house on fire. Now there was no doubt that the Sioux had discovered that they were on their way.

The march resumed after dawn, and the vanguard could now see the Indians off in the distance. One eyewitness described them thus:

All that day about a dozen of the enemy, well mounted, were seen two or three miles ahead. They were scouts from the camp above Yellow Medicine. Our route lay over a rolling prairie. Up every high hillock before us these scouts would gallop, watch our movements until we approached near, and then scud away. All objects on a prairie seem larger by reason of the absence of standards of comparison, and are more distinctly limned against the sky than elsewhere. The picturesque appearance of these horsemen – the knowledge that they were foes – the mystery associated with a different race, and the fact that they were probably possessed of

secrets of movements of vital importance, invested them with strange and romantic interest.<sup>38</sup>

Some days earlier, Little Crow and the Sioux who wanted war with the whites had moved their camp farther up the Minnesota Valley to the mouth of the Chippewa River. Open battle nearly broke out between the Sioux during the move when Red Iron, an opponent of the war, and his Wahpeton warriors blocked the way and denied passage to Little Crow and his followers. Red Iron finally gave Little Crow permission to make camp on the south bank of the Minnesota opposite the mouth of the Chippewa River, but the incident displayed plainly how great the divide was now among the Sioux.

Little Crow's followers split into two factions that constituted separate camps. One faction consisted of opponents to the war, advocates of peace, who had been coerced to follow Little Crow up the valley. The other faction, which held the clear majority, wanted to continue the war; they also had control over the bulk of the prisoners. New arguments and confrontations arose constantly between Little Crow's two factions, and the danger of an armed riot loomed. Those who opposed the war did not hesitate to grab their weapons to defend themselves against their tribal brothers. They received support from the Sisseton and Wahpeton Sioux in the area. The conflict was primarily over the fate of the prisoners. Those opposed to the war were afraid that all Sioux would be struck by the whites' revenge, whether or not they had participated in the uprising. Therefore, they wanted the prisoners to be freed in an attempt to pacify the whites and subsequently increase the chance that those Sioux who had not assaulted the whites would receive just treatment when the war was over.<sup>39</sup>

On September 22, Sibley's soldiers made camp about three miles south of Yellow Medicine River, by a body of fresh water called Lone Tree Lake. The news that the soldiers were on the way created a great to-do among the Sioux. Some wanted to flee west out onto the prairie, while others wanted to surrender and trust in the mercy of the whites. The young warriors who wanted to continue the war still had the greatest power, and they made it very clear that there would be no talk of surrender. They threatened

to kill those who spoke in favor of brokering an agreement with Sibley.

Little Crow sided with the young warriors. He knew that the whites' primary objective was to punish the Sioux. Those who had participated in the uprising could hardly expect mercy if they surrendered. Little Crow expected to be hanged if the whites captured him. From this perspective, he had little to lose. For a Sioux warrior, it was much better to die an honorable death than to be executed or rot away in the whites' prison.

With Little Crow's support, the young warriors decided to resume the battle with the whites. Allies to his cause rode around between the tipis and challenged all able-bodied men to join the battle. Great rewards were promised for the one who took the scalp of Sibley or the hated traders who followed him. Those not tempted by rewards, were in many cases forced to join. Over 300 Sioux warriors left voluntarily to fight against the soldiers, and there was likely an equal number who left under pressure. The Indians assembled a combined force of more than 600 men. (According to one source, the precise number was 738, while others believe it was over 1,000.)<sup>40</sup>

Big Eagle rode at the head of his small band of about thirty warriors. Despite the fact that he had been against the war and was convinced that in the end the Sioux would lose to the whites' superior force, pressure from his tribal kinsman and his pride as a Sioux warrior drove him to participate in the battles at Fort Ridgely, New Ulm, and Birch Coulee. Now, he could no longer imagine anything other than supporting his people and leading his men in battle as was fitting a true Sioux chief.

The Sioux had arrived at Sibley's camp on the evening of September 22. The chiefs and the leading warriors walked up onto a bluff in order to study the soldiers' positions on the other side of Lone Tree Lake (Map 3.2). Then, they began to discuss a battle plan. Little Crow suggested that they should sneak around under the cover of darkness and catch the whites off guard. An attack like this could cause serious problems for Sibley and perhaps create panic among the fresh recruits who comprised the largest portion of his army. Some of the Sioux protested against this plan. They claimed that the soldiers had guard posts on the perimeter that

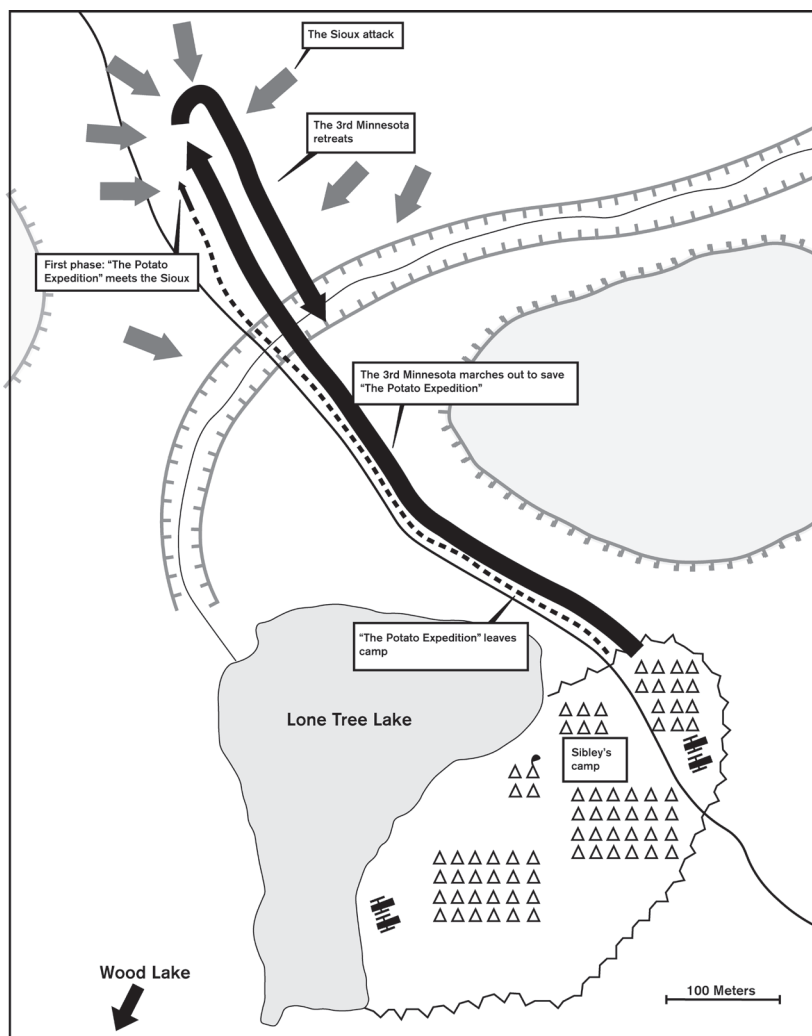
would be difficult to take by surprise and that they had already dug trenches around parts of the camp. Others thought that there was little honor in attacking at night. Perhaps those who first protested against Little Crow's plan actually were opponents of the war; this was their way of hindering Sibley's loss and thereby preventing the continuation of the war. In any case, the young warriors allowed themselves to be persuaded, and it was decided that they would lie in wait just north of Sibley's camp and attack when the soldiers marched by.

Big Eagle described the plan as follows:

At the point determined on we planned to hide a large number of men on the side of the road. Near the lake, in a ravine formed by the outlet, we were to place another strong body. Behind a hill to the west were to be some more men. We thought that when Sibley marched out along the road and when the head of his column had reached the farther end of the line of our first division, our men would open fire. The men in the ravine would then be in the rear of the whites and would begin firing on that end of the column. The men from behind the hill would rush out and attack the flank, and then we had horsemen far out on the right and left who would come up. We expected to throw the whole white force into confusion by the sudden and unexpected attack and defeat them before they could rally.

Big Eagle thought that the plan was good, for the ravine and the tall grass were good hiding places. Furthermore, the Sioux had noticed that Sibley did not send out many scouts to investigate the terrain properly before he advanced.<sup>41</sup>

Big Eagle spent the entire night positioning his warriors. Little Crow, Mankato, and many other chiefs also did what they could to ensure that the ambush would succeed. "... [A]ll our chiefs were present and all our best fighting Indians," Big Eagle recounted. "We felt that this would be the deciding fight of the war.



*Map 3.2: The Battle of Wood Lake, September 23, 1862:  
First Phase: "The Potato Expedition" Exposes the Sioux Ambush*

The whites were unconscious. We could hear them laughing and singing.” When the preparations were completed, Big Eagle, Little Crow, and a few other chiefs walked up the ridge west of the road together. From here, they had a good view over the battlefield; they waited until sunrise.

The soldiers woke to the clear trumpet sounds of reveille and readied for the march while the sun climbed up over the horizon in the east. All signs indicated that it would be a clear and beautiful autumn day. Sibley was in no rush to depart. It is possible that he still had doubts about the best manner to advance in order to prevent the Sioux from killing his prisoners. He had no clue that hundreds of Sioux lay hidden along the road just north of his camp.

Although Sibley hesitated, some of his soldiers decided that they wanted to depart in advance. The hardened Civil War veterans from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota had been accustomed to doing what they pleased. They were hungry. Potatoes were their primary target because they had learned of the possibility of unharvested potato fields around the ruins at the Yellow Medicine Indian Agency, roughly two miles north. Approximately twenty men left in four or five wagons in order to procure the potatoes. They were not worried that they lacked permission to abandon the camp, and no one attempted to stop them.

Somewhere between seven and eight in the morning the wagons rolled out of the soldiers’ camp just north of the little body of water of Lone Tree Lake. After a few hundred yards, they crossed the creek bed, or the ravine, which started at the lake’s northern end and arched towards the north and east down toward the Minnesota River. On the other side of the ravine, the road continued over open fields with tall prairie grass. The soldiers drove through the tall grass rather than following the road.

This foiled the Sioux’s plan. The wagons rolled directly at the warriors hiding in the grass and nearly drove over them. The Sioux had no other option than to start their attack. When the wagons were less than forty-five yards away, the Indians jumped up and began firing. In the first wagon, one man was killed and another seriously injured in the leg. Many others were injured, but the soldiers did not panic; they jumped down from the wagons and answered the Sioux’s gunfire. The civilian wagon drivers did not have

similar courage. They decided that this was no place to stay, and drove off at full speed back to camp. The small group of soldiers stood alone in the open prairie surrounded by several hundred furious Sioux.

About a half mile away back at Sibley's camp, the other soldiers in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota could plainly see that their friends were in serious trouble. Half-naked war-painted Sioux warriors sprang up from the grasslands surrounding them and attacked the little potato expedition. The morning tranquility was punctured by rifle shots and shrill war cries. For the soldiers in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota there was no talk of waiting for orders from Sibley – their friends needed to be rescued immediately. "Fall in all who want to fight" yelled Major Welch, and in record time the men had grabbed their rifles and lined up in battle formation, one half in a skirmish line and the other in closed ranks. They then moved forward with the ranks in front. They crossed the ravine to the right of the road and soon arrived where their friends were.<sup>42</sup>

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota was too primed to stop (Map 3.3). The ranks continued to drive the Sioux back over the prairie hills. The battle increased in intensity. More and more Indians streamed toward the battleground. The regiment's historian wrote later that the horizon was a "lively and colorful sight" because of all the Indians that rushed at them. One of the men who belonged to the reserves behind the skirmish line described the battle thus: "The savages formed a semicircle in our front, and to right and left, moving about with great activity, howling like demons, firing and retreating, their quick movements seeming to multiply their numbers."<sup>43</sup>

Sibley observed the battle from his camp and began to worry. The farther back the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota managed to push the Sioux, the farther the regiment separated itself from the rest of Sibley's forces. This introduced the danger that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota could be isolated and defeated by the numerically superior Indian force. Sibley sent a staff officer to Major Welch with orders that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota should pull back to camp, but Welch had no desire to

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\* Translators' Note: This quote from an English language source could not be verified in the original English.

\*\* Translators' Note: As elsewhere, Skarstein softens the language of the source. Rather than "The savages," Skarstein writes, "They."



give his men the order of retreat. Firstly, he thought that his soldiers were in full control of the situation, and secondly, a retreat was a complicated maneuver to execute right under the nose of an active enemy. It could prove to be much more dangerous than continuing the advance. Welch sent his staff officer back to Sibley with the message that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota could hold their position, and asked Sibley instead to send out reinforcements. But Sibley did not entirely trust the battle skills of the fresh recruits in the other regiments. He wanted to keep them in the vicinity of the fortified camp, where it was easier to defend themselves. Therefore, he sent Welch a new order to pull back, and this time Welch was forced to obey.<sup>44</sup>

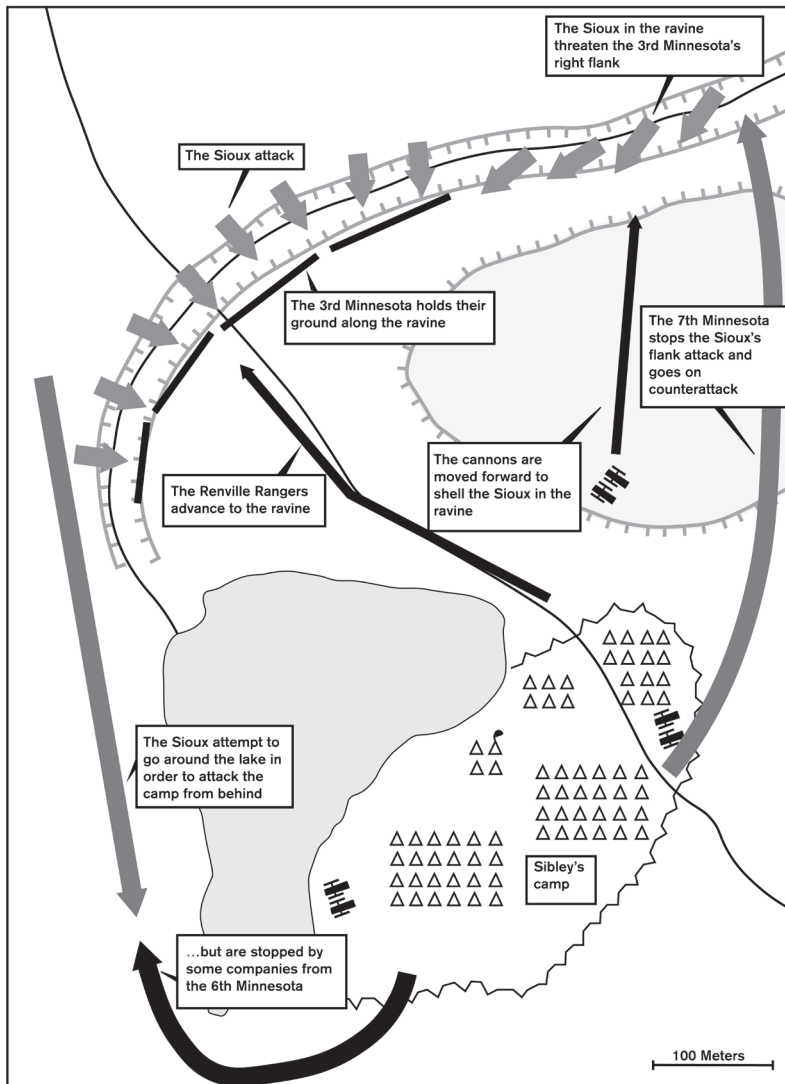
Things began to go wrong for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota as the retreat sounded. It was later said that the staff officer who brought the order from Sibley called out to, “positively fall back”. Then, a bugler reportedly blew the wrong signal. Confusion spread among the ranks. Some began to retreat while others remained where they were. The well-ordered formations began to dissolve. The Sioux saw their chance and attacked with renewed energy. They streamed in from all sides, and some of them attempted to sever the soldiers’ retreat. “Hereafter the battle was [...] unorganized and individual,” one of the soldiers recalled. “Every man did his best to hinder the overwhelming horde from coming too close. [We] rained sustained fire in to their crowded ranks.”\*

Sibley’s two cannons opened fire and helped prevent the Sioux from cutting off the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota’s retreat, but the regiment was still hard pressed. When Major Welch and his men arrived at the ravine, the Indians were right behind them. It was at the ravine, on the way down the creek bed and up the incline on the other side, that the men from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota suffered their greatest losses.

Perhaps it was here that Tollef Myrick from 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota’s Company H was hit in the ankle. The twenty-three year old Tollef was born in Setesdal. His parents were Anund Tollefsen Strømme and Gunhild Rystad. Both of his parents died after they immigrated to America in the mid-1840s; little Tollef and his siblings were adopted by the American couple Samuel and Fidelia Myrick.

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\* Translators’ Note: This quote from an English language source could not be verified in the original English.



*Map 3.3: The Battle of Wood Lake, 23 September 1862  
Second Phase: Sibley's Troops Give Counterattack*

(It is uncertain if the foster father was a relative of Andrew Myrick, the trader who told the Sioux to eat grass.) Tollef had enlisted for Civil War service in October 1861, and was sent to fight the Indians with his regiment following the surrender at Murfreesboro. The wound he received in the ankle was luckily not serious, and he was soon back in service. After the war, he lived in Minnesota until his death in 1900.<sup>45</sup>

Several others were killed or injured while the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota crossed the ravine. As Major Welch climbed up from the ravine, he was hit by a bullet that broke his leg. Two soldiers arrived quickly, carrying their injured leader back to the camp. Lieutenant Rollin C. Olin took over the command of the regiment.

The majority of the men from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota made it through the ravine alive, and on the top of the incline on the opposite side, they formed a front against the Indians. They had now received support from the Renville Rangers, a smaller militia unit, and saw no reason to continue the retreat.

The Sioux's attack had come to a standstill in front of the ravine. Sibley sent out reinforcements so that the number of soldiers soon equaled the Indians. The front line quickly became quiet because the opponents sought cover on their respective sides of the ravine. One of the soldiers from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota gave the following description of how the battle developed: "The men from the 3<sup>rd</sup> regiment and the Renville Rangers hid in the tall grass and behind small outcroppings. They fastened grass on their hats and fought like Indians. Their shooting forced small groups [of Indians] to steadily carry wounded and dead outside of our range."\*

While the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota stabilized their front, Sibley noticed that one group of Indians threatened to go around the soldiers' right flank by crossing the ravine farther down. These were the Sioux who had lain hidden in the ravine the entire morning in order to participate in the planned ambush. Sibley immediately gave the order that the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota should march out to the right of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota and secure the flank. "We advanced forward gradually," wrote one of the regimental leaders in his report, "the

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\* Translators' Note: This quote from an English language source could not be verified in the original English.

men kept their heads low and shot as they crept forward.” Assisted by a company from the 6<sup>th</sup> Minnesota, the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota prohibited the Indians’ flank attack and extended Sibley’s front along the ravine.

A Swede in the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota described the advance in a letter to the newspaper *Hemlandet*:

The enemy’s bullets buzzed and whizzed around our heads, but only one [man] in this comp. [Company G], John Olson, received a light wound to the foot. Then we suddenly ran up toward another hill, where we had to discharge a few volleys. Thereafter we came to a ravine farther down, where there is a slope, onto which the cannons were moved.<sup>46</sup>

Big Eagle said that the Sioux suffered because their plan had failed. “The Indians who were in the fight did well, but hundreds of our men did not get into it and did not fire a shot. They were out too far. The men in the ravine [...] did most of the fighting. Those of us on the hill did our best, but we were soon driven off.”<sup>47</sup>

It became evident that the Indians were on the verge of losing their initiative. A smaller group of Sioux attempted to go around the south end of Lone Tree Lake in order to threaten Sibley’s camp from behind, but companies from the 6<sup>th</sup> Minnesota pushed them back. The artillery contributed to giving the whites the upper hand. One cannon was rolled forward in order to shell a section of the ravine lengthwise. Other cannons shot at the hill where the Sioux chiefs observed the battle. “Mankato was killed here,” Big Eagle remembered. “We lost a very good and brave war chief. He was killed by a cannonball that was so nearly spent that he was not afraid of it, and it struck him in the back, as he lay on the ground, and killed him.”

Several of the white officers now realized that it was high time to launch a counterattack. Lieutenant Olin led about fifty men from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota and the Renville Rangers in a wild assault down in the valley. This attack reportedly came so unexpectedly

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\* Translators’ Note: This quote from an English language source could not be verified in the original English.

on the Indians that it was all they could do to get away before the soldiers were upon them, and more of the Indians were killed.

At the same time, the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota attacked father down. Here too the Sioux were caught off guard and forced to flee. One of the men from the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota recalled:

The firing was heavy for a short time; many of the Indians escaped down the ravine to our right. When the firing had about ceased a few Indians were discovered still in the tall grass in the ravine; a few shots started them out on the run, one trying to carry off another, but he was soon shot down and both were found dead. One Indian started to run up a small ravine leading out from the main ravine on the opposite side from us. There was a storm of bullets sent after him; he was hit and fell several times, but ran to near the high ground before he finally fell. I fired two shots at him and was about the first to get to him; he was still alive and had a fierce look, but soon gasped his last. He had nothing on but his breech-clout and a powder horn strung over his shoulder; he had dropped his gun. We found that he had been pierced with seventeen balls...<sup>48</sup>

The soldier who related this episode did not give any indication that he thought there was anything wrong with this brutal murder of fleeing enemies. Had anything similar happened in the Civil War, where the enemies were white soldiers like themselves, the soldiers would most certainly have attempted to take those fleeing as prisoners. But the Indian uprising had presented an outlet for a bitter ethnic conflict where none of the parties cared very much about showing either mercy or compassion. Many of the white men thought that all Sioux deserved to be punished for the massacres of the white settlers, even though the majority of the Sioux had nothing to do with the killings.

The battle was decided. The soldiers stormed forward along the entire line and hunted the Sioux several hundred yards over

the prairie. Sibley did not want to risk any long-lasting pursuit and ordered his men back to the camp. He was satisfied with what they had accomplished. The Sioux had taken a hard hit. He wanted to wait and see how the situation developed. He feared that a rash act from his side could result in the Sioux killing their prisoners, and it would be difficult to engage in any effective pursuit since Sibley lacked cavalry.

Sibley's scouts mistook Lone Tree Lake for Wood Lake, which lay a few miles west. Therefore, the battle became known as the Battle of Wood Lake. Measured by this war's standard, it was a rather bloody skirmish. Seven soldiers were killed or fatally injured while thirty-four were seriously injured. There was no doubt which unit had fought the hardest; five of the dead and at least over twenty of the injured were from 3<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota. The Indians' loss was greater. The soldiers found at least fourteen dead Sioux warriors on the battlefield, plus one who was so seriously injured that he died shortly thereafter. Big Eagle recalled that the Sioux took with them "many" injured and that some of them later died of their wounds. Sibley's soldiers scalped all of the dead Indians found on the battlefield. "One person, in his eagerness, tore off the entire skin from the face with the scalp, and carried it to his tent," Isaac Heard said. The officers thought it shameful that their soldiers would do such a thing. Sibley announced that if this was repeated, the guilty ones would be severely punished. "The bodies of the dead, even though we are mortal enemies, shall not be subjected to disrespectful treatment by civilized and Christian men,"\* Sibley wrote. But Heard had a partial understanding for what his fellow soldiers had done.

It seemed a hard thing to exult over the dead, but the soldiers could not help feeling satisfaction that the hunt after the miscreants who had committed so many murders with impunity was having a practical result. The sensation experienced was very much like that felt by the hunter when he proves that he has succeeded in killing some wily animal by an

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\* Translators' Note: This quote from an English language source could not be verified in the original English.

exhibition of the animal itself, or by the fisherman, who produces the fish to listeners who would otherwise be dubious as to the reception of bites. So many large stories about the killing of Indians had been told, without any person having actually seen their natural confirmation – the bodies – that the people were getting very incredulous on the point.

### *Camp Release*

The Battle at Wood Lake was a bitter disappointment for Little Crow; his hope of vanquishing Sibley's soldiers was crushed. The Sioux's battle plan had completely failed, and barely half of the warriors who had followed Little Crow down the valley had participated in the battle. It was clear that the Sioux had lost their faith in the war.

When the defeated Sioux warriors made it back to their camp, they were confronted with a new setback. While the warriors were away, those Sioux opposed to the war had taken the opportunity to assemble and transport the majority of the prisoners over to their camp. After this, they dug trenches in and around their tipis in case Little Crow's warriors attempted to take the prisoners back with force. It was later said that Little Crow, in anger and despair over all the opposition, first considered attacking those who had opposed the war and taking the prisoners back. He quickly realized that there was little to gain by using weapons against his own people. Many of the opponents of war were his relatives, and the Sioux put great weight in the family ties. The Sioux were faced with the choice of leaving in exile for the prairie in the west or surrendering to the white soldiers. The half-blood Indian Antoine J. Campbell stated later that he had encouraged Little Crow to give himself up. Little Crow had laughed contemptuously and answered, "...Sibley would like to put the rope around my neck, but he won't get the chance." Campbell answered that he did not believe that the whites wanted to hang any of the Indians. Little

Crow was not easily persuaded and said that he would never allow the whites to capture him alive.<sup>49</sup>

Many of the other Sioux had greater faith in the whites. They had heard that Sibley promised just treatment to those who surrendered. Only those who had killed defenseless civilians would be punished. Therefore, many Sioux warriors chose to wait for the soldiers instead of leaving in exile for the prairie.

The day after the battle, Little Crow's followers began to take down their tipis and prepare to flee. They were a small group, totaling about 200-300 men, women, and children. Little Crow had lost much of his influence after the defeats, and many of his former followers would no longer follow him. It must have been a lamentable experience for the sixty-year-old chief when he abandoned the land where he had lived his entire life. He had hunted in the forests and along the lakes of Minnesota, and now he was forced to travel out to the meager prairie in order to start a new life on the run from the whites.

Two days after the battle, Sibley led his troops up over the valley toward the Indian camp at the mouth of the Chippewa River. He had postponed the advance in order to give the opponents of war among the Sioux time to gain control of the white prisoners. Not until the Indians sent word that they wanted to surrender and assured that the prisoners were in safety, did Sibley give the order to march. Still, he was cautious and stopped the march at the ruins of Hazelwood Mission Station in order to hold a large military parade. The intent of this parade was likely to show the Indians the scope of the forces that Sibley commanded and to convince the Indians that they had made the right choice in surrendering. The next morning, Sibley marched slowly and methodically toward the Indians' camp and made camp just a few hundred yards from the Sioux's tipis. "No one has ever seen a more impressive sight than these troops that marched with bayonets that shone in the clear sunlight under a variety of banners, to the sound of drum rolls and flutes,"\* said Antoine J. Campbell. The cannons were placed so that they could bombard the Sioux camp if necessary. At the sight of the cannons and the long columns of blue-clad soldiers, the Indians

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\* Translators' Note: This quote from an English language source could not be verified in the original English.



began to wave all the white pieces of fabric that they could find, in order to show that they intended to surrender. One of the imprisoned half-blood Indians remarked sarcastically that all Indians suddenly became “good Indians.”

In the afternoon, Sibley was ready to retrieve the prisoners. Escorted by two companies of soldiers, he walked on foot toward the Indian camp. Red Iron, Paul Mazakutemani, and other prominent opponents of war in camp received Sibley with ceremonial handshakes and effusive declarations of their friendship with the whites. They confirmed that they had not in any way been affiliated with the uprising. Sibley then made a speech in which he underscored that the Indians who were guilty in the whites’ murders must be apprehended and brought to trial. In addition, he demanded that they hand over all of the white prisoners immediately so that he could accompany them to the soldiers’ camp. The Sioux obeyed without hesitation and released the prisoners.

It was a gripping moment when the prisoners, who had been in the Indians’ power for up to five weeks, were finally freed. Many had feared for their lives every single day, and some had been subject to violence and tyranny. Therefore, it was natural that intense moments of happiness occurred when Sibley retrieved them. “Their happiness at this release from their inhumane keepers exceeded all bounds,” wrote Ole Tovsen Berg from the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota regiment. “Tears and laughter and the wildest outbursts of emotion succeeded each other. The soldiers did everything in their power to care for these half-naked and starving poor wretches in the best possible way.”

After this, the soldiers’ camp became known as Camp Release – liberation camp. A total of 107 whites and 162 half-blood Indians were liberated by the Sioux. Almost all of the whites were women and children.

### *The Whites’ Revenge*

As soon as the prisoners were rescued, Sibley could concentrate on what he considered one of his most important assignments: to punish the Sioux. Even though he had previously enjoyed a good relationship with the Indians and knew many of the Sioux

personally, he had no plans to show any mercy. In the days after the prisoners' release, he did what he could to reach as many as possible of the Sioux warriors who had taken part in the war. He was less concerned about the methods. Many Sioux warriors were enticed to surrender with a promise that only those who had taken part in killing unarmed settlers would be punished. But as soon as the Sioux had surrendered, such promises were forgotten.

Just two days after he arrived at Camp Release, Sibley established a five-man military commission tasked with judging the Sioux warriors who had taken part in the uprising. They did not waste time. In the course of the first week, they had handled no fewer than twenty-nine cases, and almost all of the accused were sentenced to death. Standard judicial procedure meant little to the military commission. The Indians were not granted legal counsel to represent them; they were not able to call in their own witnesses, and they were given no time to prepare their defense. In a letter to General Pope the day the trials began, Sibley explicitly stated his top priority: "If found guilty they will be immediately executed [...] An example is, however, imperatively necessary."<sup>50</sup>

General Pope was even more intent on punishing the Sioux. On September 28, he wrote to Sibley: "horrible massacres of women and children and the outrageous abuse of female prisoners, still alive, call for punishment beyond human power to inflict. There will be no peace in this region by virtue of treaties and Indian faith. It is my purpose utterly to exterminate the Sioux...." Yet the executions of the sentenced Sioux were continually postponed and after a while both Sibley and Pope realized that they did not have the authority to order executions without approval from the President. The court cases continued throughout this time.

One of the Sioux who had surrendered was Big Eagle, and he grieved bitterly about that fact.

Robinson [Robertson] and the other half-breeds assured us that if we would do this we would only be held as prisoners of war a short time, but as soon as I surrendered I was thrown into prison. [...] On my trial a great number of the white prisoners, women and others, were called up, but not one of

them could testify that I had murdered any one or had done anything to deserve death, or else I would have been hanged. If I had known that I would be sent to the penitentiary I would not have surrendered [...] I surrendered in good faith, knowing that many of the whites were acquainted with me and that I had not been a murderer or present when a murder had been committed, and if I had killed or wounded a man it had been in a fair, open fight.

The soldiers stayed at Camp Release for several weeks. Sibley thought that it was futile to attempt to pursue Little Crow out onto the prairie. Provisions were scarce and he still lacked a cavalry. Moreover, it was not long until the first nights of frost would render the prairie grass unusable as food for the horses. Sibley was content instead to send out small expeditions to arrest some disparate groups of Indians that his scouts discovered. In addition, many Indians came and turned themselves in voluntarily, both because they had heard that Sibley would give them just treatment and because it was almost impossible for them to find enough sustenance on the prairie this late in the year. Several who had followed Little Crow out onto the prairie also chose to surrender.

By the middle of October, Sibley held over 2,200 Indians in custody at Camp Release and in a camp a little farther down the valley. Sibley decided to move the camps to Redwood Indian Agency since it was difficult to feed both his own soldiers and all the Indians so far removed from the supply depots. Here, the cases against the Sioux warriors continued.

Many of the accused gladly pleaded guilty that they had participated in the battle against the white soldiers. The Sioux had clearly gotten the impression that it was only those who had attacked unarmed civilians who would be punished. After a while, when they understood that the whites planned to punish anyone who had taken up weapons against the whites, regardless of whether or not they were soldiers or civilians, some of the Sioux attempted to come up with excuses that often seemed involuntarily comical. One admitted that he had fired off his rifle during a battle, but maintained that the weapon was so short that it had certainly not

managed to harm anyone. Another said that his weapon was so poor that he only aimed at buildings. Another underscored that he was a member of a church, but that the devil had taken residence in him during the uprising.<sup>51</sup>

Without knowledge of the whites' judicial system, there was little the Sioux could do to defend themselves. Very few of them understood English and therefore were forced to trust the translators, who probably were most concerned with making a good impression on the military commission. And since the Indians' names were often difficult for the whites to recognize, the wrong men were sentenced in many instances. The trials continued at a tempo that clearly indicated that the whites did not care about giving Indians a fair legal procedure. In the course of one day, forty cases were said to be decided. Sometimes the military commission used just five minutes to review a case and pronounce a damning sentence.<sup>52</sup>

When the trials finished on November 5, there had been 392 Indians brought to trial. Of these, 307 were sentenced to death and sixteen received imprisonment. Later, the number of those condemned to death was reduced to 303. The trial documents were sent to Washington D.C. in order for the death sentences to receive the President's approval.

After the court cases, there were still about 1,700 Sioux in the camps at Redwood who could not be charged with having participated in the uprising. The vast majority of them were women, children, and elderly people. On September 7, Sibley decided that these people should be moved to a camp near Fort Snelling and St. Paul, where it would be easier to feed them.

The march east to Fort Snelling was a miserable experience for the Sioux. They had too few wagons, so many had to walk the entire way on foot. They had lost most of their possessions, and they were poorly clothed. Food was also scarce. The once so proud Sioux were now totally dependent upon the soldiers in order to receive food and protection, but that protection was not always good enough.

In the town of Henderson, the long procession was attacked by an angry mob that wanted to take revenge for the Sioux's ravaging. No one cared that Henderson had never been exposed to attack

and that these Sioux hardly could have done any whites harm. "Men, women, and children, armed with guns, knives, clubs, and stones, rushed upon the Indians as the train was passing by," said the half-blood Samuel J. Brown, "and, before the soldiers could interfere and stop them, succeeded in pulling many of the old men and women, and even children, from the wagons by the hair of the head and beating them, and otherwise inflicting injury upon the helpless and miserable creatures." Brown also recounted that he saw a furious white woman jump up on one of the wagons and "snatch a nursing babe from its mother's breast and dash it violently to the ground." Soldiers came rushing, but the damage was already done. The child died a few hours later. The little child's corpse was put into a hollow tree outside of Henderson. According to Brown, this was the last time that a Sioux Indian was buried in keeping with the tribe's ancient customs within the borders of Minnesota.<sup>53</sup>

Upon their arrival in St. Paul, the Sioux were placed in a fenced-in camp on the north bank of the Minnesota River. They had to set up their tents wall to wall under incredibly unhygienic conditions and sickness claimed the lives of many that winter. They continually heard rumors that the authorities planned mass executions or wanted to send them to a place where they would die of hunger and sickness. The half-blood Indian Gabriel Renville described the mood in the camp. "We had no land, no homes, no means of support, and the outlook was most dreary and discouraging."<sup>54</sup>

### *The Hangings in Mankato*

Public opinion of whites in Minnesota indicated they waited impatiently for President Lincoln to approve the executions of the 303 sentenced Sioux warriors. The newspapers were full of articles encouraging the President to allow the Sioux to die. Many also sent their encouragement to Washington D.C. directly. One argument that was continually repeated was the danger that the people would take the law into their own hands if the Indians were not executed as soon as possible. On November 10, Governor Ramsey wrote to Lincoln. "I hope the execution of every Sioux Indian condemned by the military court will be at once ordered. It would be wrong

upon principle and policy to refuse this. Private revenge would on all this border take the place of official judgment on these Indians." General Pope appealed with the same argument the following day. "... [I]f the guilty are not all executed I think it nearly impossible to prevent the indiscriminate massacre of all the Indians – old men, women, and children."<sup>55</sup>

Few dared to defend the Sioux against the fury that prevailed in Minnesota. Despite this, there were individual, brave voices that dared to speak against the revenge-crazed public opinion. One of them was Bishop Henry B. Whipple who had visited Lincoln in Washington, D.C. earlier that same autumn and told him about the reasons for the Indian uprising. After their conversation, Lincoln supposedly said that the bishop "talked with me about the rascality of this Indian business until I felt it down to my boots." Likely, the bishop's account was an important reason that President Lincoln took the time to investigate the fate of the 303 sentenced Sioux warriors even though he was in the middle of a violent civil war where thousands died on the battlefields almost every month. Lincoln made it clear that only the Indians who had raped white women or killed unarmed civilians should be executed, and insisted that his staff comb through the court documents. Despite the fact that politicians from Minnesota had stood on the floor of Congress and said that the Sioux had raped almost all of the captured white women, the trial documents showed that only two of the sentenced could be accused of rape. An additional thirty-seven were convicted of murder of unarmed civilians. The remaining individuals were only convicted for lesser attacks or for having participated in the battles. Lincoln decided therefore that only those thirty-nine who were sentenced for rape or murder should be executed. The date for the execution was set for December 26th.<sup>56</sup> The authorities in Minnesota were extremely concerned that the thirty-nine Indians should be hanged without risk of riot from the civilians. Constant threats that people wanted to take the law into their own hands, and several attacks on innocent Indians such as those in Henderson, meant that the authorities did everything they could to prevent riots in conjunction with the executions. Large forces

of troops were sent to Mankato, where the executions were to take place.

Among the companies that had received orders to march to Mankato was the 9<sup>th</sup> Minnesota Company H, where Ole Paulson was a second lieutenant. He had spent the entire autumn in Glencoe without seeing anything more of the Indians. There was never a need for the fortifications that he had helped construct around the city.

Paulson's company marched out from Glencoe with three other companies on December 23. The march went slowly, for they had to wade through heavy, wet snow, which according to Paulson was knee deep. In the afternoon, it started to rain as an ice-cold north wind blew up. "Residents of the prairie know what it means to say that the wind blows from the north. It rained and froze simultaneously. Our clothes were covered with ice. After a short period of time, we looked like living ice people," Paulson recounted.<sup>57</sup>

As night fell, they arrived at a little cluster of houses. Paulson's entire company had to crowd together into one house in order to find protection from the elements. It was so crowded that everyone had to stand "like herring in a barrel." It was impossible to sleep under such conditions, but the soldiers kept their spirits up with "merry conversation and song."

The next day the sun shone, and the snow melted quickly. The soldiers marched past St. Peter, crossed the Minnesota River, and continued up over the valley to the small town of Kasota, where they celebrated the first day of Christmas (Christmas Day). Even though he now was an officer and had to postpone his plans for becoming a pastor, Paulson had an outlet for some of his desire to preach by functioning as a religious leader for the Scandinavians in the company; he held sermons for them when the opportunity arose, such as on this Christmas Day in Kasota.

The following day, the Sioux were scheduled to hang. Paulson and his fellow soldiers had to get up early because it was still over six miles to the execution site in Mankato, and the hangings were set to begin at 10:00 a.m. that same day. The reveille sounded at 3:00 a.m. in the morning, "the most unpleasant music a soldier can hear," Paulson wrote. After rubbing the sleep out of their eyes and donning their blue uniforms, the soldiers marched quickly away

through the winter's darkness. By sun up, they were making their entry into Mankato.

"Seldom have I been witness to such a magnificent sunrise," Paulson wrote many years later. This he meant to be an expression of a higher power's will. "The weather was mild and the sky cloud-free. Every blade of grass, every branch of the trees, glistened with crystal-clear ice droplets in the sunshine. It was as if nature itself approved of this, that these wild, blood-thirsty barbarians should have the chance to endure the punishment they so rightly deserved."

The soldiers marched in to the city "in the very best order with flying banners and the drummers' 'rappeta tap'," wrote Paulson. As many as 1,400 soldiers were sent to Mankato to ensure that everything went according to plan. A state of emergency was declared in the city and the surrounding areas, and there were restrictions placed on the sale of alcohol. Paulson wrote that the city was "chockfull" of people, and that many had come from far away in order to witness "the spectacle." In the middle of the town square, a large scaffold was built where thirty-eight ropes hung (one of the Sioux had been pardoned in the last minute). The base of the scaffold had a square frame and was constructed so that all the Sioux could hang at the same time, nine or ten per side. With ropes around their necks, the sentenced would stand on trapdoors that were also secured with a thick rope. At the instant that that rope was cut, the trapdoors would open, and the Sioux would fall down until the nooses tightened around their throats and killed them.

The foot soldiers lined up in a large square around the perimeter of the scaffold with bayonets turned outward in order to keep the mass of people at bay. Around the soldiers' square, the cavalry rode with drawn sabers as an extra security measure. Colonel Wilkin, the leader of Paulson's regiment, rode back and forth along the lines on his majestic steed and shouted out some final orders. An enormous throng of people stood around the soldiers. The anticipation was palpable.

The door to the prison opened, and out came Major Joseph Brown followed by the condemned Sioux. Paulson described the thirty-eight Indians as "ragged, impure criminals," while other eyewitnesses said that the Indians had dressed as best they could, and



that some of them had painted their faces. All had rolled up white hoods on their heads. Their hands were bound in front of them.<sup>58</sup>

As they stepped out of the jail, the Sioux began to sing. Some of the bystanders described the sound as, “Hi-yi-yi, hi-yi-yi.” This was the Sioux’s death song. By singing in this way, they showed that they wanted to meet death as was fitting for real Sioux warriors. Paulson thought it was “an infernal song, so dreadful as is possible to sing, even for a wild Indian.”

The Sioux walked up onto the scaffolding and were led to their places. Then, a noose was placed around each neck. Thereafter, Major Brown walked around and pulled the white hoods down over their faces. The Indians continued to sing, and even though they were bound, some managed to grab the hand of a neighbor.

Beside the thick rope that held the trapdoors closed, stood a man with an axe in his hand. This man was chosen as the executioner because he had barely escaped one of the worst massacres that the Indians had performed and had watched as many of his family members were killed. Now, he was about to have his revenge.

Major Brown gave a signal, and a slow drumroll interrupted the Indians’ song. Then a second drumroll sounded. When the drumroll was heard for the third time, the executioner swung his axe. The rope was cut and the trapdoors dropped. There was a moment’s silence as the Sioux hung in the open air, but then, a powerful roar of jubilation came from the soldiers and the mass of people. One of the ropes broke so that one of the condemned fell to the ground, but he was not alive. The rope had likely broken his neck before it snapped. As a matter of form, they hung him up again with the thirty-seven others.

Paulson stood behind his company with his back to the scaffolding as the rope was cut. Then he heard his Colonel’s resounding voice giving them the order to turn and face the scaffold. All the soldiers did an about face and got to see “the unpleasant spectacle, 38 [37] Redskins dangling in the air in death’s convulsions.” Paulson stood quite near the scaffold, and even though he had little sympathy for the Indians, the sight made a strong impression on him. “I had a strange feeling as [...] I watched so many wretched

heathens flung into eternity at once. The scene swam before my eyes.”

Thus the whites got their revenge. There were few who cared that the majority of those hanged were sentenced on the basis of extremely vague and uncertain testimony, and that some in all likelihood ended up on the gallows as a result of a misinterpretation of names. The most important thing for the whites was to get revenge for the Sioux’s killings and attacks on the white settlers.

The hangings in Mankato marked the end of the Sioux uprising in Minnesota. Almost all of the Sioux were either run out of the state or interned in prisoner-of-war camps. The imprisoned Indians were soon expelled from Minnesota. The condemned warriors whose sentences Lincoln reversed were sent to a prison in Davenport in Iowa, where the majority remained imprisoned for over three years, and where 120 of them died. In the spring, the over 1,700 Sioux who were forced to winter in the camp by Fort Snelling were sent to a reservation near Crow Creek in the southeastern corner of Dakota Territory. This was a dry and miserly place where many of the Sioux became sick and died. Three years later the survivors were given permission to move to the Niobrara River in Nebraska, where the living conditions were better.

Big Eagle remained in prison for two years and was understandably quite bitter about the way the whites had treated him. He also strongly disliked living on a reservation where the white Indian agent decided everything about his life. Being a chief no longer had any meaning. After some years on the Santee Reservation, he moved back to Minnesota and settled down near Birch Coulee. With time his bitterness subsided. In 1894, he met a white reporter who wanted to hear about the Sioux uprising of 1862. With the help of an interpreter Big Eagle told his story. Finally, he said, “... all feeling on my part about this has long since passed away. For years I have been a Christian and I hope to die one. My white neighbors and friends know my character as a citizen and a man. I am at peace with every one, whites and Indians. I am getting to be an old man, but I am still able to work. I am poor, but I manage to get along.”<sup>59</sup>

But the war was not over, even though the Sioux had been cast out of Minnesota. Little Crow and his followers still roamed the

prairie and attempted to build alliances with the tribes there in hopes of being able to resume the battle against Sibley's soldiers.

### *Little Crow Returns Home*

In the days following the battle of Wood Lake, Little Crow traveled up to Big Stone Lake, farthest north in the Minnesota Valley, and made camp there together with Chief Standing Buffalo's Sisseton Sioux. Little Crow tried time and time again to persuade the Sisseton to join him in a new attack against the whites, but was brusquely refused. Finally, he was told to leave camp with his followers, for Standing Buffalo feared that Sibley's troops would attack the camp if Little Crow was there.

At the same time, Standing Buffalo received a courier from Sibley, who encouraged the Sisseton to surrender; Standing Buffalo did not trust that the whites would give them just treatment, especially since many of his young warriors had taken part in the battle against the white soldiers at Fort Abercrombie and other places. Therefore, he refused to surrender. Most of all he wanted to keep his people out of the war without giving in to any of the parties. The Sisseton Indians moved in late winter to Devils Lake, far out on the prairie in the northern portion of the Dakota Territory.

Turned away by Standing Buffalo, Little Crow led his followers west over the vast prairie all the way to the Missouri River. There they made camp in the vicinity of the Yankton and Yanktonai Sioux and attempted to persuade them to join in a war with the whites. But even though the Yankton and Yanktonai belonged to the Sioux people, they did not feel any common destiny with Little Crow and the Santee Sioux, and they believed that they had a great deal to lose by becoming involved in the war. There were few whites out here on the open prairie, and those who had come up the Missouri River were mostly traders who provided the Yankton and Yanktonai with valued wares such as food, weapons, clothes, and sometimes whisky. Unwilling to risk destroying this trade, the Yankton and Yanktonai sent warriors to protect the traders and asked Little Crow and his people to leave the area.

Little Crow continued traveling up the Missouri's eastern bank to ask for support from the other Indian tribes living there. The

Mandans, the Hidatsas, and the Arikaras had often been attacked by the Sioux and regarded them as enemies; nevertheless, Little Crow hoped that they would be persuaded to participate in an alliance against the whites. But the discussions never started, for Little Crow's envoys were shot at as they neared a Mandan camp. Before they managed to get away, a group of Arikara warriors came and killed eight of them. These tribes were clearly not interested in any alliances with Little Crow's Sioux.<sup>60</sup>

In April 1863, Little Crow arrived at the border with Canada, where he wanted to try to win support from the British authorities. Little Crow's forefathers had helped the British during a war with the Americans fifty years earlier, and Little Crow hoped they would now show their thanks by helping the Sioux in their war with the Americans. Likely, he knew that the chance was slim that the British would go to war for the sake of the Sioux, but perhaps they would be able to give the warriors weapons, food supplies, or at the very least, a site of refuge outside the Americans' reach.

The British also disappointed Little Crow, for they did not wish to risk entering a war with the Americans. Moreover, the British were afraid that a war might break out in Canada between the Sioux and their traditional enemies, the Assiniboine and the Chipewewa. A war of this kind could be very damaging for the lucrative fur trade. The British were therefore unsympathetic toward Little Crow and made it clear that they preferred to see him return to the American side of the border.

Little Crow began to understand that he would not succeed in his plan to gather a large alliance. In reality, his force was steadily shrinking because several of his own warriors had left. When he decided to carry out a raid in Minnesota in the middle of June 1863, he was only able to gather seventeen warriors to go with him, one of whom was his fifteen or sixteen year old son Wowinape.

It is impossible to know Little Crow's motive for returning to Minnesota with such a small band. Perhaps, he wanted to steal some horses in order to start a new life as a prairie Indian. Regardless, they needed horses. Apparently they had lost their horses in the course of the winter. Little Crow and his men walked on foot over the prairies and into Minnesota. It may be that Little Crow had a more personal goal with this trip. According to his son Wowinape,

his father had given him his medicine bag, a pouch filled with holy objects. This pouch contained leather from different animals, fish bones, body paint, and other objects that were supposed to bring the bearer luck and a long life. It was common for older warriors to give up their medicine bags when they prepared to die. Therefore, that Little Crow gave Wowinape his medicine bag can be taken as a sign that he wanted to return to Minnesota in order to die in the country where he had grown up and experienced the happiest days of his life.

Little Crow and his warriors passed through the upper part of the Minnesota Valley, heading for Big Woods. When they came to the forests, an argument broke out resulting in the division of the group. One half of the group walked north to Canada, while the other half walked south. Little Crow and his son did not want to follow either group, and so, they stayed behind alone in Big Woods.

On July 3, 1863, Little Crow and Wowinape were walking and picking berries just north of the town of Hutchinson. Suddenly a shot was fired, and Little Crow lurched forward as a bullet ripped into his abdomen. The shot came from the rifle of a settler who, with his son, had snuck up on the two Indians. Despite the injury, Little Crow was able to shoot back and injured the settler in the shoulder. Little Crow reloaded and shot once again but missed. He was then shot in the chest by another bullet from the settler or his son. This shot was fatal.<sup>61</sup>

The settler's son ran to Hutchinson to get help while Wowinape crept up to his father. The injured settler lay right beside him and could hear the two Indians speaking quietly together until Little Crow died. Then Wowinape took out a new pair of moccasins and put them on his father's feet so that he was well shod for the journey to the kingdom of death. Then, he took his father's rifle and disappeared to the west.

Little Crow's corpse was carried in to Hutchinson the following day. Even though the settlers did not yet know that the dead man was Little Crow, there was great happiness over the fact that one of the despised Indians was dead. The corpse was scalped so that the killer would be able to display the scalp as proof and collect the reward of seventy-five dollars for having killed an enemy Indian.

Afterward, the corpse was left lying in the main street. It was July 4<sup>th</sup>, and some boys put firecrackers in the ears and nose of the dead man as part of the celebrations. The disfigurement of the body continued until far into the night when it was thrown into a garbage dump outside of town.

### *The Killings in the Watonwan Valley*

Some months prior to Little Crow's death, another group of Sioux warriors carried out a raid in the area south of the Minnesota River. On April 16, 1863, they came to the settlers' farms along the Watonwan River's southern arm, near St. James. Several Norwegian families lived there, mostly from Gausdal, Ådalen, Telemark, and Stavanger. The 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota's Company E, which had over twenty Norwegians in its ranks, was also stationed in this area. The soldiers had built a little fort with palisades and earthen embankments that they called Fort Union.

Salve Torgersen, the man from Telemark, left on an important errand the day before the attack, but he did not want his wife, Marthe Thorsdatter from Hurdal, to be alone on the farm at night. So he had traveled to Fort Union to ask the commander if some of the soldiers could watch over his wife while he was away. The commanding officer agreed to this and sent two of his Norwegian-born soldiers, Ole Eriksen Bekkedalen, who was supposedly from Odalen in Hedmark, and Mons Hansen from Nannestad.<sup>62</sup> Bright and early the following morning, while the settler wife and the soldiers still slept, the Indians came to the farm. They snuck up to the house with their rifles raised and arrows ready in the bowstrings. Two of them ran in through the door and shot Ole Eriksen with both bullets and arrows while he still lay in bed. Mons Hansen lay right beside him, but he managed to throw himself out of the range of fire at the last second. In the next moment, a battle for life and death started in the settlers' small living room. There was too little space for the Sioux to be able to use their bows and arrows, and so they tried to stab Hansen with the arrows. One source says that Hansen and the settler wife both were injured. Finally, Hansen managed to grab his gun, and then the Indians ran for the door. It

must have been a great relief to Hansen when the Indians ran, for his gun was not loaded.

When the Sioux were out of sight, Hansen and the settler wife hurried away to Fort Union and arrived there safely. The Indians that Hansen had fought were a part of the larger group that attacked several of the farms along the upper Watonwan. The commanding officer at the fort sent two of his men to retrieve Simon Roland and his family (in a letter the family is referred to by the name of Christensen), who lived approximately one mile from the fort. Roland likely hailed from Gausdal. He and his wife had three children, two sons, ages twelve and three, and an infant.

As soon as the soldiers arrived and warned them that the Indians were in the vicinity, Roland grabbed his two guns, took the infant in his arms, and set off to the fort with the rest of the family and the two soldiers. About half way there, they spotted seven Sioux warriors headed their way to stop their flight. Losing their courage, the two soldiers ran at full speed back to the fort. Mr. and Mrs. Roland and their small children lagged behind. Soon the Sioux were upon them. Simon Roland was shot in the leg, but with the infant in his arms he was unable to return fire. The only thing he could do was to hurry to the fort. The oldest son was shot and killed with arrows and bullets. The Sioux caught up with them and began to hit Mrs. Roland in the head and breasts with their guns. Several of her ribs were broken, and she collapsed in the grass. The three-year-old son was hit in the head, toppling him.

Back in the fort, the soldiers had seen what had happened and the commanding officer immediately sent out a troop to rescue the family. The soldiers reached them in time to scare away the Sioux before they were able to do more harm, allowing all to escape with their lives except for the twelve-year-old son.

The soldiers in Fort Union were too few to manage much more than to hold the fort. In the morning hours, the Sioux continued to ravage other places in the valley. Many of the Norwegian immigrants' cattle were either stolen or shot. From the stable of Salve Torgersen, the man from Telemark, the Sioux stole one horse and shot another.

Despite their modest forces, it appears that the soldiers left the fort at one point on a campaign to battle with the Indians. One or

two skirmishes occurred where one or two soldiers were injured. It was difficult for the soldiers to catch up to the Sioux warriors without horses, and they did not manage to retrieve the stolen cattle. Finally, the Indians rode away west and disappeared.

Many Norwegians lost their lives during the Indians' raid in Watonwan Valley. Lars Lee, the postmaster in the town of South Bend, wrote a letter four days later to the newspaper *Emigranten* and spoke about the murders of the Norwegians.

Gulbrand Palmesen [from Ådalen, also called Gilbert Palmer] had gone to a lake in the vicinity [Long Lake] to fish and had a hayfork along as a fishing spear. He had run approximately one [English] mile north of the fishing hole when he was shot in the chest with 2 bullets; he was found with his throat cut and the hayfork stabbed in his stomach. He was also scalped. Gabriel Ellingsen [from Stavanger] and Ole Palmeson Kjella [from Ådalen] were out hunting, and they were presumably killed as they had not returned yesterday.

The bodies of the two hunters were later found four miles from the fort.<sup>63</sup>

As soon as word of the Indian attack reached the military headquarters in Mankato, forces were sent out to attack the Indians who had plundered in the Watonwan Valley. Both the infantry and the cavalry were sent up from Mankato, but it was soon clear that the foot soldiers had no chance to capture the Indians. Peder E. Fladland, the man from Sogn in Company G, 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota, recalled, "We left Mankato on April 17 and marched [to Madelia] in hopes of getting a little brawl with the Indians, but when we arrived they had already left for the west." Likewise, the cavalry was unable to capture the Sioux. Fladland wrote: "Lieutenant Colonel Marshall from our regiment set off after them with two companies of cavalry, found and followed their tracks to Lake Shetek, which is about 60 [English] miles west of Watonwan, but then his provisions began to run out, and he was forced to turn back again."<sup>64</sup> The attack on the farms at Watonwan, as well as many other killings



and horse thefts in the spring of 1863, showed that the war with the Sioux was far from over. Therefore, the whites felt that it was necessary to take drastic actions to bring an end to the threats from the Indians. Large forces of troops were already positioned in the borderlands in the west in an attempt to repress the Indian attacks and protect the settlers. The military leaders in Minnesota and Washington, D.C. had also decided to set in motion large-scale offensive operations. The war would now move out onto the prairie.

## Notes

1. Oehler, 89, 134; Carley, 26.
2. Folwell, 147-148; Clodfelter, 49-52; Oehler, 134-136.
3. Oehler, 160-161.
4. Anderson and Woolworth, 149; Folwell, 157; Clodfelter, 53; Carley, 43; Anderson, 153-154; Heard, 136.
5. Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 219.
6. Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 220.
7. Anderson and Woolworth, 150.
8. Anderson and Woolworth, 161.
9. Heard, 134; Folwell, 152; Carley, 42-43.
10. Anderson and Woolworth, 150.
11. Earle; Oehler, 171.
12. Anderson and Woolworth, 150-151.
13. Bryant and Murch, 320, 440-442; Carley, 44.
14. John J. Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run: The Campaign and Battle of Second Bull Run* (1993; repr., Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 369.
15. Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 213.
16. Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 214.
17. Anderson and Woolworth, 164.
18. Numedalslaget i Amerika. *Aarbog for Numedalslaget nr. 3*. Minneapolis: 1915-1917, 53-54.
19. Heard, 132-133.
20. Folwell, 154, 155 (note); Carley, 44; Clodfelter, 54; Bryant and Murch, 444; Anderson and Woolworth, 151, 165; Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 213-214, 218, 222. It is possible that some of the dead were civilian volunteers who were not registered in the military roll books.
21. Carley, 45; Folwell, 158; Heard, 138.
22. Paulson, 138-141, 156.
23. Folwell, 154; Heard, 139; Carley, 45; Bryant and Murch, 212-214; Oehler, 164; Lowell, William R. *William R. Lowell Reminiscence*. 1937, 1945, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collections, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN; Roger

Avery Stubbs. *Milton Aurelius and Elizabeth Eleanor Turnham Stubbs* (Long Lake, MN: 1938).

24. Stubbs.
25. Carley, 45; Folwell, 160-161 (note); Clodfelter, 53.
26. Folwell, 162; Bryant and Murch, 209-211; Board of Commissioners, vol. 1, 773.
27. Folwell, 163; Heard, 140; Bryant and Murch, 214-216.
28. Paulson, 158-159; Bryant and Murch, 217-218.
29. Board of Commissioners, vol. 1, 255-256; Folwell, 164-167; Carley, 53-58; Bryant and Murch, 233-256; "Fra Fort Abercrombie" *Emigranten* 06.10.1862.
30. "Fra Fort Abercrombie" *Emigranten* 06.10.1862.
31. Anderson, 155; Heard, 159-160; Anderson and Woolworth, 200-201.
32. Heard, 151-152; Ron W. Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 122 (note).
33. Anderson, 154; Carley, 59-61.
34. Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 222-234; Clodfelter, 45-49.
35. Board of Commissioners, vol. 1, 158.
36. Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 230.
37. Skarstein, 45; Vesterheim Civil War Database, *Vesterheim, the National Norwegian-American Museum and Heritage Center*.
38. Heard, 168.
39. Anderson and Woolworth, 168-215; Anderson, 155-158; Carley, 61.
40. Anderson and Woolworth, 223; Anderson, 159; Carley, 62; Folwell, 432.
41. Anderson and Woolworth, 235-236.
42. Minnesota Commission on the Wood Lake Battlefield. *Report on the Battle of Wood Lake*. ca. 1907, 4-7; Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 240-247, vol. 1, 158-160, 351; Folwell, 179-182; Carley, 62-63; Heard, 173-175.
43. Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 245.
44. Folwell, 180; Board of Commissioners, vol. 1, 159.
45. Vesterheim Civil War Database; Ulvestad, 311.
46. "Korrespondens från Col. Sibleys expedition mot indianerna," *Hemlandet*, 22 October 1862.

47. Anderson and Woolworth, 236-237.
48. Board of Commissioners, vol. 1, 351.
49. Anderson, 160-161; Anderson and Woolworth, 253.
50. Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 256-270; Clodfelter, 57-58; Folwell, 190-211.
51. Folwell, 196; Carley, 69-70.
52. Carley, 69; Folwell, 197-198.
53. Folwell, 200; Anderson and Woolworth, 226.
54. Anderson and Woolworth, 234; Folwell, 252-254.
55. Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 289; Folwell, 202-211.
56. Folwell, 207-209.
57. Paulson, 169.
58. Paulson, 173; Bryant and Murch, 475-476; Carley, 73.
59. Anderson and Woolworth, 21, 237.
60. Anderson, 169-170.
61. Carley, 84; Anderson, 7-8, 178.
62. "Indianerulighederne. Overfald paa de Norske ved Watonwan River, Minnesota," *Emigranten*, 4 May 1863; Bryant and Murch, 486-490; Holand, 513; Ulvestad, 279, 288; Folwell, 281.
63. "Indianerulighederne. Overfald paa de Norske ved Watonwan River, Minnesota," *Emigranten*, 4 May 1863 Bryant and Murch, 488; Holand, 513.
64. "Norske Soldater ved Watonwan River," *Emigranten* 25 May 1863; Bryant and Murch, 489.

## 4

### THE WAR ON THE PRAIRIE

#### *Hunting Lands*

The sunburned prairies stretched over vast distances all the way to the Rocky Mountains, over 600 miles from Minnesota's western border. In these enormous plains, one could walk for days without seeing anything but sky and grass. The monotony was interrupted only by a few rivers with thin belts of forest along the banks and a few smaller mountain ranges, such as the Black Hills, several days' walk west of the big Missouri River.

The prairie appeared a lifeless, harsh land – burning hot and desiccated in the summer, snowing violently with ice-cold winds in the winter. Still, it contained a good deal of life. Most conspicuous were the herds of bison that could number up to the hundreds of thousands, undulating through the landscape like enormous brown rivers. There were also large deer, antelope, wolves, coyotes, rabbits, rodents, snakes, and birds.

People had also found their way out to the prairie. It was first and foremost the bison that attracted them. The massive herds constituted the foundation of life for many Indian tribes, where the majority lived as nomads and followed the bison in their migration. Most famous of these tribes were the Comanche, the Kiowa, the Cheyenne, the Arapahoe, the Crow, and the Teton Sioux (also known as Lakota) with the subgroups Hunkpapa, Oglala, Brule, Sans Arcs, Minneconjou, Two Kettles, and Blackfeet. The Teton were easily the largest and most powerful people on the prairie. They could gather several thousand warriors on fast, tough, and hardy horses, and frequently terrorized the tribes around them with attacks and raids. The Teton's primary land was the prairie west of the Missouri, around the Black Hills. At the beginning of

the 1860s, there were very few whites in this area, and the proud Teton warriors felt confident that they would be able to manage all of the unwanted intruders.

On the prairie between the Missouri's eastern bank and the Minnesota border lay the land of two other Sioux tribes: the Yankton and the Yanktonai. Some of the Santee Sioux had also fled here after their defeat against the whites in Minnesota. In the winter of 1863, Little Crow made a failed attempt to unite all the Indians in this area to do battle against the whites. Later he traveled home to Minnesota where he was killed. Meanwhile, a chief by the name of Inkpaduta had taken over the leadership role among the Santee Sioux, who refused to surrender.

About fifty years old, Inkpaduta was perhaps the most infamous of all the Sioux chiefs. He and his closest followers had been expelled by their tribal kinsmen after his father had killed another chief. Since that time, they had mostly kept to themselves out on the prairie west of Minnesota and in northeastern Iowa. Long before the extensive Sioux uprising in 1862, Inkpaduta was often in conflict with both the whites and his own tribal brothers. After repeated provocations from both sides, Inkpaduta and his men killed wantonly early in the spring of 1857 in what became known as the Spirit Lake Massacre. In the course of a few days' time, they killed over thirty white settlers – men, women, and children – near Spirit Lake in northern Iowa. Some weeks later, they attacked the small, rural town of Springfield, near Jackson in Minnesota and took the lives of even more. All together Inkpaduta's posse killed as many as forty-two white people in the course of the two attacks. In the days and weeks that followed, the whites made several attempts to capture Inkpaduta. They even pressured Little Crow and other Sioux to participate in the hunt. But Inkpaduta tricked his pursuers and disappeared out onto the prairie.

Inkpaduta did not play a leading role during the Sioux uprising of 1862. Most likely, he was on a bison hunt far out on the prairie when the uprising started, and it is quite uncertain whether he participated in any of the battles before the uprising was quelled at Wood Lake.

In any event, he became the natural leader for the Santee Sioux who fled out to the prairie after their defeat. Whereas Little

Crow had negotiated with the whites, built himself a house, and sometimes dressed as a white man, Inkpadata stood out as an uncompromising defender of the Sioux's traditional values and ways of life. Many young warriors looked up to him because he had escaped unpunished from the massacre at Spirit Lake.<sup>1</sup>

Even though in the spring of 1863, Inkpadata appeared to be the Santee Sioux's foremost leader in the struggle against the whites, he likely did not intend to gather a sizeable force in a large-scale offensive to avenge the losses in Minnesota. Instead, it appears that he chose to lead smaller attacks and raids, in traditional Sioux warfare. In the early summer of 1863, Inkpadata and his followers are believed to have stolen horses and killed some whites in southwestern Minnesota and along the Missouri at the border of Dakota Territory and Nebraska. After that, they traveled north to hunt bison.

Farther north, on the prairie around Devils Lake, the chief Standing Buffalo had made camp with a large group of Sisseton and Wahpeton Sioux. Above all, these Indians wanted to avoid being involved in the war with the whites. All they wanted was to hunt bison without being attacked or pursued. By remaining far out on the prairie, they hoped to stay at peace. Standing Buffalo was resolute in his decision to do whatever he could to keep his people out of the extensive conflict that had led to the Sioux's ruin in Minnesota.

Over the course of the summer of 1863, there were many who hunted the bison herds east of the Missouri. Standing Buffalo's people traveled south from their winter camp by Devils Lake, while Inkpadata's group had ended their plundering along the border with Nebraska and rode north with some Yanktonai. A fair number of Teton Sioux had also crossed the Missouri from the west in hopes of procuring enough food for the winter on the good hunting lands east of the river.

What these hunters did not know was that they were also being hunted. A long column of blue-clad soldiers moved slowly but inexorably up the Minnesota Valley and west out onto the prairie. In the south, another column of blue coats prepared to march up along the Missouri to the middle of Sioux Country.

*Sibley's Soldiers*

It was the beginning of June 1863. In the Minnesota Valley, near what had been the Redwood Indian Agency, there was now a large military camp called Camp Pope. Less than one year earlier Little Crow's people had lived here, but by this time the Sioux's tipis had been replaced by white military tents erected in orderly rows. On the open plains on the banks of the Minnesota, hundreds of soldiers drilled while long wagon trains fully loaded with supplies came rolling through the valley. A large American flag in the middle of the camp waved in the warm summer wind.

Increasingly, large numbers of soldiers marched in to Camp Pope from outposts across Minnesota. In all, there were well over 3,000 soldiers in the camp. 2,300 of them were foot soldiers from the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> Minnesota Regiments, together with a contingent from the 9<sup>th</sup> Minnesota. There were 800 additional cavalymen from a newly established regiment called the 1<sup>st</sup> Minnesota Mounted Rangers as well as seventy scouts, the majority of them half-blood Indians. The artillery consisted of a battery with howitzers and field cannons attended by 150 artillerymen under the command of John Jones, the hero from the battles at Fort Ridgely, who had newly been promoted to Captain.<sup>2</sup>

The Norwegian immigrants were well represented at Camp Pope. At least 240 of the soldiers were born in Norway. One could hear soldiers from Gudbrandsdalen, Voss, Numedal, Sogn, Telemark, Hallingdal, Hardanger, Stavanger, Sunnhordland, and many other places in Norway, talking in their own dialects as they sat around many of the camp bonfires. Some had come to the United States so recently that they had not yet had time to learn the language and needed help translating the officers' commands.

In the cavalry regiment Mounted Rangers, there were four brothers: Kristian, Hans, Nils, and Petter Pettersen (Peterson) from Grindheim at Moster in Sunnhordland. The youngest at nineteen, Kristian had lied about his age\* in order to go to war with

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\* Translators' Note: This is unclear. Perhaps Skarstein means that he was not truly nineteen, or perhaps they had joined when Kristian was younger.



his brothers. Mathias Johannesen Fjellhaugen served in the same company. He had likely also lied about his age, for the roll books say that he was forty-four years old, while other sources state that he was over fifty. Fjellhaugen was born and raised on a mountain farm near Matrefjorden in Kvinnherad. An acquaintance described his birthplace thus:

The river that began in the Folgefonnen glacier flowed fast and cold, steely grey past the farms. The oats often froze up here, but the barley was a fairly certain bet. The mountain grass thrived and grew fine and strong, and they had extensive mountain pastures so the farms were a kind of kingdom of their own.

When he was old enough to leave home, Mathias attempted to support himself for a while by transporting goods up and down the fjords of Sunnhordland, but after his shipping vessel sank, he gave up the sea life and settled down near Valestrand in Sveio, where he was able to lease a place on the Enstabøvd farm. He married and had several children. In addition to farming he also worked as a postal carrier.<sup>3</sup>

In the mid-1850s there was much talk of America among the people in Sunnhordland, and Mathias was among those who caught the “America Fever.” He did not have the money to pay for the trip for himself, his wife, and their five children, but his brother-in-law also wanted to emigrate, and he helped Mathias with the money so that the two families could travel together. They sailed from Bergen in the spring of 1856. The journey took between five and six weeks, and the majority of the time the weather was fine, but one night they encountered a storm. “It was horrible,” Mathias recounted. Women and children screamed in fright, others wailed. All hatches were battened down to hold out the water that washed over the deck. In the ship’s cramped steerage where the emigrants stayed, the air was stuffy and nauseating. While the ship was cast about on the frothing sea, the emigrants sat holding on for dear life in the weak light from the few lanterns that hung and swayed from the ceiling beams. Mathias recalled that he and one other man sat

down on a case of supplies and sang hymns through the entire night. He believed that this helped calm their fellow passengers.

Some years after their arrival in America, Mathias Fjellhaugen and his family traveled west to Minnesota and found land just north of Norway Lake in Kandiyohi County. He was living here in 1862 when the Sioux began their uprising. He and his neighbors first learned about the uprising when a terror-stricken Swedish woman came and told them about the massacre of the Swedish family at West Lake. The neighbors wanted to head east immediately, but Mathias felt that they first had to warn the Pettersen brothers from Moster, who lived on the shore of Norway Lake a little farther southwest. Presumably, Mathias was a good friend of the four brothers. It is possible that they knew each other in Norway, for the brothers Pettersen lived on the Bomlafjord just opposite Valstrand where Mathias had settled. Whatever the reason, Mathias decided that he had to warn the Pettersen brothers that the Indians were on the warpath. He and another man headed for Norway Lake. There was no doubt that this was a brave deed because they knew full well that they could come upon the Sioux warriors at any moment. Many years later, when Mathias was asked if he had been afraid when he went to warn the Pettersen brothers, he answered, "I could not dwell on that; it was a matter of life and death. But we didn't let the grass grow under our feet either."

Mathias found the Pettersen brothers in fine shape, and together they set off east again to seek refuge in the little town of Paynesville. In opposition to many others who fled from the Sioux, these men from Sunnhordland did not panic and leave at break-neck speed. They took their livestock and all the possessions they could load on their wagons. The Pettersen brothers lived up to their reputation as bold and steady men.

A wild rumor circulated in Paynesville that hordes of bloodthirsty Sioux were heading that way. The families from Sunnhordland decided it therefore safest to continue traveling east to the big trading town of St. Cloud along the banks of the Mississippi. But in St. Cloud, there was no pastureland for their animals, and therefore, they traveled even farther east to the area around St. Francis. Even though this was far from where the Sioux were ravaging, many of the settlers at St. Francis had panicked and fled

from their farms. The men from Sunnhordland moved in to the empty houses and allowed their animals to graze. They waited for the Indian uprising to end so that they could return home to their own farms near Norway Lake.

Late in the autumn, the authorities called for recruits and asked for volunteers to join the war against the Sioux. The Pettersen brothers signed on immediately for service, and Mathias Fjellhaugen decided to join them. It was quite surprising that Mathias joined the war effort. He was fifty years old, newly widowed for the second time, with five children to care for alone. When he allowed himself to be recruited, despite these things, it was likely first and foremost because of money. This was his rationale for enlisting.

The Indians had to be driven away so that we could live there in peace, and the government had plenty to do down south [Civil War], so we got to go [...] I was able to send home 13 dollars per month. I personally got food and clothing. Should anything have happened to me, well Our Father probably had a reason for that too.

His brother-in-law promised to take care of the children and the animals while Mathias was away.

So, Mathias Fjellhaugen and the Pettersen brothers became soldiers in Company D, 1<sup>st</sup> Minnesota Mounted Rangers. After garrison duty in Sauk Center during the winter, they marched south to Camp Pope to participate in the large military campaign against the Indians on the prairie.

Also among the Norwegians in Camp Pope were Hans H. and John Danielson, two brothers from Drammen who belonged to the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota Company G. They had spent the winter in Mankato and had witnessed the hanging of the thirty-eight Indians on the second day of Christmas. The youngest brother Hans kept a little diary where he explained the Company's movements and different actions. On June 9, he wrote that Henry H. Sibley, who was now promoted to general, came to Camp Pope to assume command of the military expedition against the Sioux. The general's arrival was supposed to be a formal ceremonial occasion with salutes, parades,

and military music, but it did not quite go as planned. The blasts from the cannon salute terrified the forty to fifty teams of mules, which scrambled away in all directions, “stampeded by the artillery salute to Comm’g officers and ran away, shooting right and left over the river bottoms like a wild ricocheting of rockets trying to get skyward, making a fine and laughable entertainment for the whole camp,” wrote Hans Danielson.<sup>4</sup>

Second Lieutenant Ole Paulson and Company H from 9<sup>th</sup> Minnesota were also in place at Camp Pope. After the executions in Mankato, the former theology student had returned to garrison duty in Glencoe and remained there for the rest of the winter. The orders came in April for the company to join the force assembling at Camp Pope. Since the captain was ill and the first lieutenant had received another assignment, Paulson assumed command when the company marched into the big camp, a moment that clearly made him proud.<sup>5</sup>

It took several weeks before Sibley’s soldiers would be able to begin the march out onto the prairie, for there was much that needed to be prepared. On the miserly and sparsely populated prairie, they could not count on the opportunity to replenish their supplies during the journey. Therefore, they had to take almost everything they needed for food and equipment. Over 300 wagons, each pulled by six mules, would carry provisions, ammunition, tents, medical supplies, assorted tools, and other necessities. In addition, a herd of over 400 head of cattle was sent to ensure access to fresh meat during the expedition. The mules, cattle, and horses that would pull the cannons, as well as the over 1,000 cavalry horses also needed food. Therefore, the departure of the march was postponed until the prairie grass had grown enough for the animals to have sufficient grazing.

The animals’ need for grass caused considerable concern for Sibley, for the summer of 1862 had been one of the driest in the prairie’s history. The summer of 1863 looked to be just as bad; the prairie lay withered and brown, scorched in many places. Even though this was a sensible reason to postpone the march, Mathias Fjellhaugen recounted that the delay created discontent among the soldiers, since many of them were settlers who had been hunted from their houses and homes during the Indian uprising

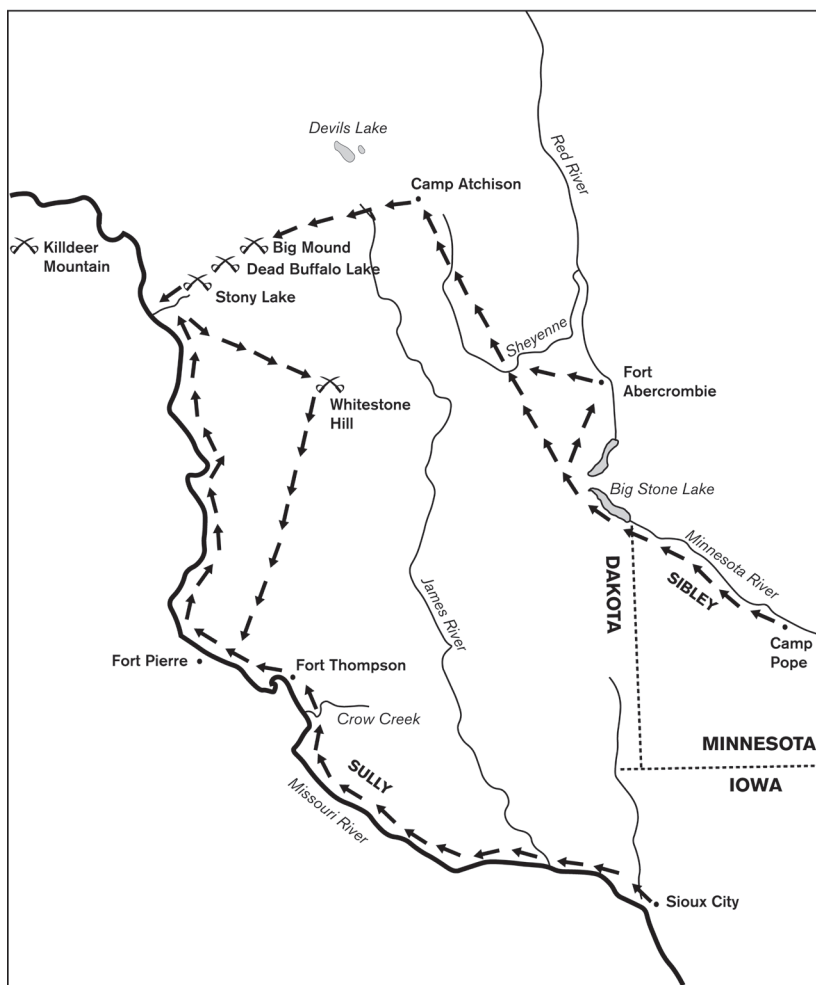
in Minnesota, “and many of their people had been killed, and as expected, hated the Indian as the devil himself, and chomped at the bit that they were unable to go to war with him, so they could put an end to him.”

In the grey early morning hours of June 16, Sibley’s soldiers finally marched from Camp Pope. They headed northwest up the valley. Whips cracked in the air, wheel axles and saddles creaked as the long rows of wagons slowly began to roll out. The wagons’ white tarps wove through the landscape like pearls on a string. The cattle drovers yelled and made a ruckus to make the cattle start moving. Sabers and stirrups jingled as the cavalymen swung up in the saddles and rode out of camp. The artillery’s mules pulled the lead-heavy cannons away while the artillerymen walked alongside them. Evenly distributed between the vanguard, middle, and rear guard, the blue-clad foot soldiers marched in closed ranks. They carried rifles on their shoulders and had heavy packs on their backs. In its entirety, the column is estimated to have been over four miles long. It must have been an awe-inspiring sight when Sibley’s blue jackets passed through the valley with weapons glistering in the morning sun. As the column disappeared on the flat horizon to the west, it was visible only as a narrow, dark stripe on the endless plains.

### *Big Plans*

Sibley’s military campaign was a part of the larger offensive against the Sioux on the prairie. General Pope, the commander of the Department of the Northwest, had as usual ambitious plans. He probably still hoped that an impressive triumph over the Indians would make the government in Washington forget his fiasco in the Civil War and repair his reputation as an able leader of an army. His main goal with the offensive was to rid the prairie of Sioux between the Missouri River and Minnesota. It made little difference to him whether the Sioux were killed or taken prisoner. The most important thing was to attain the clearest and most tangible success.

Pope was not driven solely by his own ambitions; he was also under sharp pressure from public opinion in Minnesota, which



*Map 4.1: Sibley and Sully in Dakota Territory*

demanded that the Sioux be driven so far away that they could no longer constitute any threat to the settlers. Many still thirsted for revenge for the Sioux's devastation of Minnesota the previous year. Strong commercial interests were also involved. If "the Indian problem" was removed, larger areas could be opened for white settlement, something that would cause trade to flourish and bring good times for those who speculated in buying and selling land. Gold too had been found farther west, at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, in an area that later became a part of the states of Montana and Idaho. The best route to these gold fields went up along the Missouri River, right through the Sioux's land. The Teton Sioux had repeatedly attacked the riverboats that carried optimistic prospectors. Such attacks worried more than just the gold miners, for the gold from Idaho and Montana could contribute to strengthening the Northern states' economy and make it easier to finance the war against the Southern states. Thus, it was also in the authorities' interest to stop the Teton Sioux's attacks and secure connections to the gold fields. All of this influenced Pope's plans for the offensive against the Sioux in the summer of 1863.<sup>6</sup>

In his characteristic style, Pope decided to think big. The plan was to send out two columns to trap the Sioux in an enormous pincer maneuver (Map 4.1). The strongest column was the one that one mustered in Camp Pope under General Sibley's command. Sibley's assignment was to lead his troops to the northwest, in the direction of Devils Lake, where rumor had it that many of the Sioux could be found. From there, Sibley's men were to drive the Sioux in a southwesterly direction toward the Missouri River. The second column was commanded by General Alfred Sully and consisted almost exclusively of cavalry. Sully's riders were to ride from Sioux City in the northwestern corner of Iowa and follow the Missouri north and west. If everything went as planned, Sibley's column would drive the Sioux right into the arms of Sully's men. "I do not doubt that a very large part of them will come on and deliver themselves up," wrote a self-confident Pope in a letter to the commander of the army in Washington, D.C. He wrote in the same letter that he hoped to be able to send the lion's share of his troops south to participate in the Civil War by early fall since there

would no longer be a need for them in the war with the Indians. His habit had always been to take his successes in advance.<sup>7</sup>

When the offensive against the Sioux began, approximately 3,000 soldiers were left behind as a garrison to protect the settlers in a series of forts and outposts along Minnesota's western border. From a military perspective, Pope believed it was unnecessary to use such a large force, but he realized that it was important to give the settlers a feeling of safety in order to prevent a mass exodus such as they had experienced the previous year. In a letter to the army leadership, he wrote, "I have left them [these troops] in order that the timid, spiritless population of foreigners along the frontier (Norwegians and Germans) may not abandon their villages and farms and pour into the river towns." Evidently, Pope did not have a particularly high opinion of his country's newest citizens. The plan for the robust offensive on the prairie might have looked good on paper, but in reality, Pope's plan proved very difficult to execute. Once Sibley's and Sully's columns left their bases, it would be practically impossible to coordinate each other's movements. Out on the prairie, messengers on horseback were the only means of long distance communication available, but this was time consuming, and there was always the danger that the messengers would be attacked or hindered in some other way from reaching their destination. If one of the columns did not manage to reach the meeting point at the agreed upon time, it would hardly be possible to get the message to the other column. In a letter to his commanders in Washington D.C. Pope wrote, "After the columns have left the border [...] we will hear little from them."

*"The march was rather tough going"*

"At first the boys became footsore, as the summer was rather warm and the prairie as dry as dust. The grass on the prairie burned up in June, that is how dry it was," Ole Paulson recalled. The march up the Minnesota Valley moved slowly, but even this slow pace was taxing for the foot soldiers who had forty pounds to carry with their large packs and heavy Springfield rifles. "The march was

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\* Translators' Note: This quote from an English language source could not be verified in the original English.



rather tough going and extremely strenuous," Paulson wrote. "The heat could be up to 110 degrees in the shade."<sup>8</sup>

Two days after leaving Camp Pope, the long column moved at a snail's pace past the site where the battle at Wood Lake had been fought the year before, and it took an additional two days before Sibley's men had passed Camp Release. In addition to the heat, the soldiers were plagued by the oppressive dust clouds that the column stirred up from the bone-dry prairie. The dust made it difficult to breathe and increased the need for a drink to quench the dry throats, but good water was in short supply. "The worst was the water," recalled Mathias Fjellhaugen, "because it had been so dry that summer, and [the water was] so full of alkali that it was completely undrinkable, and many became sick." But Mathias and his comrades knew what to do. "We made sure to be first in line to get coffee, and then we poured our first ration into our canteen and got in line again and got one more cup of coffee. That water had at the very least been boiled so it was okay."<sup>9</sup>

It took ten days for Sibley's troops to reach the north end of Big Stone Lake and make camp at the watershed between the Minnesota River and the Red River (often called the Red River of the North in order to differentiate it from the river of the same name in Louisiana and Texas). The daytime marches had been shortened in the hot and dry weather. To avoid the worst heat, they usually started long before sunrise, but by early afternoon, they started to look for places to make camp near a marsh where they could dig wells, or near a lake with water they could drink.

They were far from the area where they believed they would meet the Indians, but so many of the provisions had already been eaten that Sibley found it necessary to send part of his force straight north along the Red River to Fort Abercrombie in order to procure more supplies. The main body of troops marched in a northwesterly direction toward the Sheyenne River.

Ole Paulson's company was among the units that were sent to Fort Abercrombie. The march along the river to the fort went fairly well; at least there it was not difficult to find water. They arrived at the fort on July 4, but the celebrations were not much to write home about. "We celebrated July 4 by lying completely still,

without even firing a shot in honor of the country's freedom. It was scorching hot that day," wrote Paulson.

The next day they escorted the provision wagons west to the Sheyenne River, where they were supposed to meet Sibley and the main force of troops. The march was a trial because the heat was almost unbearable. Late in the afternoon, they made camp by the Wild Rice River, but there was little water. The only water sources they found were some deep pools and puddles with dirty, muddy water. The next day they needed to march about twenty miles over the flat prairie to the Sheyenne River. "The heat was violently oppressive," Paulson wrote, "over 100 degrees in the shade. In the morning we had dirty, muddy Wild Rice River water in our canteens. That quickly disappeared in the heat. Our thirst was almost too much to endure." Finally, they arrived at the edge of the river valley and saw the Sheyenne River below them. "At the moment the command order 'Halt!' was given, the men broke ranks and plunged down to the river in order to quench their burning thirst. There was spring water in a large pool that flowed out of the ground. For some it was not enough that they drank until they were sated; there were some men who lay down in the stream that flowed out of the spring."

Some days later, they rejoined the main body of troops, and after a day of rest, the march continued northwest to Devils Lake. "Each day was identical to the next; you saw only the sky above and the prairie below. The sun shone mercilessly," Paulson wrote. With the exception of some thin belts of forest along the few rivers, there were no trees to be seen. Wood for cooking food and making coffee was in short supply; the solution was to do as the Indians did and use dried bison manure as fuel. Mathias Fjellhaugen recalled, "Just before we made camp for the evening, we cavalrymen got the order to spread out over the prairie to collect buffalo chips. That was accomplished by stabbing them with our sabers, and then when you had as many as you could fit hanging on there, you rode up to the lines at the cook wagon, where we slid them off on the wagon edge. It didn't take us long to stack them and get a cooking fire started that way."

The food was neither varied nor exciting. Ole Paulson could recount: "The meager fare consisted of hardtack (a kind of cracker)

and salt pork. Every other day we got fresh meat." Once a week they got a few vegetables, so it was not a surprise that the soldiers looked with hungry eyes at anything that could add variety to the fare. Hans Danielson, the young man from Drammen, said that they had stopped by a lake before they left the Minnesota Valley where nearly all of the soldiers fished "bull trout" (an American char). Later, they passed an area where there were many hares, something that led to comical scenes when the soldiers attempted to capture the small animals. One time they came to a lake swarming with geese and ducks, but to their great disappointment, the soldiers were not allowed to use their weapons for bird hunting. The rules were not as strict for the officers and the cavalrymen, who rode off to hunt for bison or deer when the opportunity arose. But these were the exceptions; usually the prairie lay empty and lifeless as far as they could see, so they had to manage with the usual rations of salt pork and "hardtack."<sup>10</sup>

On July 17th, the column met three bison hunters. The three belonged to a larger hunting party of half-blood Indians from the Red River Valley. Since they were of Chippewa ancestry, they were not fond of the Sioux and willingly told Sibley where he could find them. Just one week earlier the hunting party from the Red River had seen a Sioux camp with approximately 600 tipis about sixty miles to the west. These were Standing Buffalo's Sisseton and Wahpeton Sioux who had headed south from Devils Lake. This large party was tempting prey for Sibley, and he decided immediately to set his course west. The goal was either to force the Sioux to surrender or to conquer them in a battle.

The next day, Sibley's men marched twelve miles west with the three hunters as pathfinders. They made camp in the middle of the day by a lake in the most idyllic landscape they had seen since they left Minnesota. "There is wood on these hills," Hans Danielson wrote. "The water here is good and grass abundant. This is the finest of buffalo regions. Their wallows or pawing holes are at every hand."

Here Sibley gave the order to establish a base ringed by defense parapets and trenches. The base was named Camp Atchison. There Sibley planned to leave behind the soldiers and animals that were too weak to continue, as well as the wagons and supplies that

were not necessary for a swift campaign. Two companies from each regiment would remain behind to guard the base. The remaining 2,000 soldiers would attack the Sioux. By reducing his forces in this way, Sibley hoped to increase the tempo of their march, a necessity if they were to reach the Indians. After one day's preparations in Camp Atchison, Sibley's men marched west on July 20th. "A hot dry fatiguing march with no good water to be had," wrote Hans Danielson. Late in the afternoon, after the soldiers had made camp, about 200 riders came at them from the west. Riding in a wide front silhouetted against the sunset, they were a majestic sight; it was easy to see that they were exceptional riders. Some wrote that they reminded them of Arabians from the desert. One of the riders carried an American flag that waved in the wind, and signaled that they were not enemies. Sibley's men understood quickly that the foreign riders were the hunting party of half-blood Indians from the Red River Valley. The riders reigned in their horses just in front of Sibley's camp and greeted the soldiers by shooting into the air.

The hunting party was led by two white Americans and a French Catholic priest. They also had a white boy who had been taken prisoner by the Sioux the year before, but whose freedom the priest had managed to purchase. The half-blood Indians were a lively troupe. They told the soldiers that they had killed over 1,000 bison. They attempted to sell the bison pelts and ornate moccasins, but trade was slow going; they wanted to have payment in tobacco and gold pieces, which the soldiers did not have in much supply. Sibley, who had learned to understand French in his time as a trader, spoke with the priest and learned the latest news about the Sioux's movements. The priest could tell him that Standing Buffalo's Sioux were just a few days' march to the southwest.<sup>11</sup>

Many of the half-blood Indians said that they would gladly join and fight against the Sioux if they were given soldiers' food rations, but Sibley turned down the offer. Likely, he feared that they would be difficult to control.

Having said farewell to the hunters from the Red River Valley, Sibley's men marched southwestward for three days. Anticipation grew in the ranks, and all knew that the Sioux were near. They passed over the Coteau des Missouri, a wide-reaching plateau that

lay about 100 yards higher than the prairie around them. "The surface of the couteau [sic] is knobby and stony," wrote young Hans Danielson. "Immense numbers of granite hard-heads and sometimes large buried boulders half buried and weighing many tons. Among the knobs are many fine little lakes, which seemed strange for such an altitude, 200 to 300 feet above the vast plain stretching waterless below." The rugged landscape was the result of a fault in the earth's crust that stretched from the border with Canada and several hundred miles south.

### *The Battle of Big Mound*

Sibley's soldiers had little indication that July 24th would differ from any other day since they had marched from Camp Pope more than a month earlier. The Sioux were rumored to be on the way to the Missouri River, and it would take several days more to catch them. Many of the soldiers began to doubt that they would find the Sioux at all.

The march started in the grey morning light. Initially, the paths crossed some stony hills where it was hard to walk, but soon they came back down to a nice, flat prairie. There the colonel of the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota showed his skills as a hunter by downing an antelope; otherwise, the march continued as usual. Only the dark clouds gathering over the hills in front of them presented anything to unsettle the men. In the middle of the day, the column of troops passed some small, salty lakes. In the distance lay a series of hills and ridges. Suddenly, scouts rode in, reporting that they had seen a great number of Indians. Soon after this, a message arrived explaining that there was a large Indian camp just a few miles away on the other side of the hills.

Soon, Sibley's soldiers themselves could make out the Indians up on the crests of the ridges before them. The soldiers who expected to receive the order to attack were disappointed. With customary caution, Sibley decided to establish a fortified camp on the bank of a salty lake, and then, assess the situation. The camp layout formed a square. The lake created the northwest side, while the soldiers built breastworks of earth and sod on the other three. "While we were engaged in this work, the hills around us turned

black with Indians. We were literally encircled by our red-skinned enemy," wrote Ole Paulson.

The half-blood Indians who were scouts for Sibley rode up to the Indians and spoke with them in their own language. This clarified that it was not just Standing Buffalo's Sisseton and Wahpeton Sioux they now faced. During the bison hunt, Inkpaduta's considerably more warlike band with his companions, the Yankontai, had made camp near Standing Buffalo. There may have been a few Teton Sioux in the camp as well. This was a dangerous combination. Standing Buffalo did not wish to fight with the whites, but neither would he surrender. A number of his young warriors had taken part in the war in Minnesota and knew that they risked being imprisoned or hanged if the whites captured them. Inkpaduta's warriors were eager to fight; the same was presumably true of their friends, the Yanktonai, and the proud Teton Sioux were not opposed to teaching the white invaders a lesson. All together the Sioux numbered well over 1,000 warriors.

The mood was threatening and tense. The weather was sultry, and dark thunderclouds towered up over the hills. Many of the Sioux who surrounded Sibley's camp rode with naked chests, war paint, and feather ornamentation, clearly ready for battle. The soldiers knew that if it came to a fight, a defeat would have catastrophic consequences for them all. Out here on the prairie, they were completely alone, and they had no place to seek refuge. Even though many were probably nervous, the majority felt confident that they would manage to conquer the "primitive wild ones" and were impatient to get started. They wanted to finish the job and set their course home again.

On a hill just a few hundred meters from the soldiers' camp, Sibley's scouts talked with friends and relatives among the Sioux. Both parties exchanged warm greetings, and some of the scouts gave the Sioux bread. Trade negotiations began. The Sioux gave the impression that they wanted to talk to Sibley and attempt to reach a peaceful solution, but the scouts simultaneously learned unofficially that some of the Sioux warriors planned to lure Sibley out of the camp in order to murder him. When Sibley got word of this, he asked the scouts to tell the Sioux that he would negotiate only with Standing Buffalo in the soldiers' camp. But Standing

Buffalo was still in the Indian camp, where he was in counsel with the tribe's elders. It would take time before he would be able to come and negotiate with Sibley.

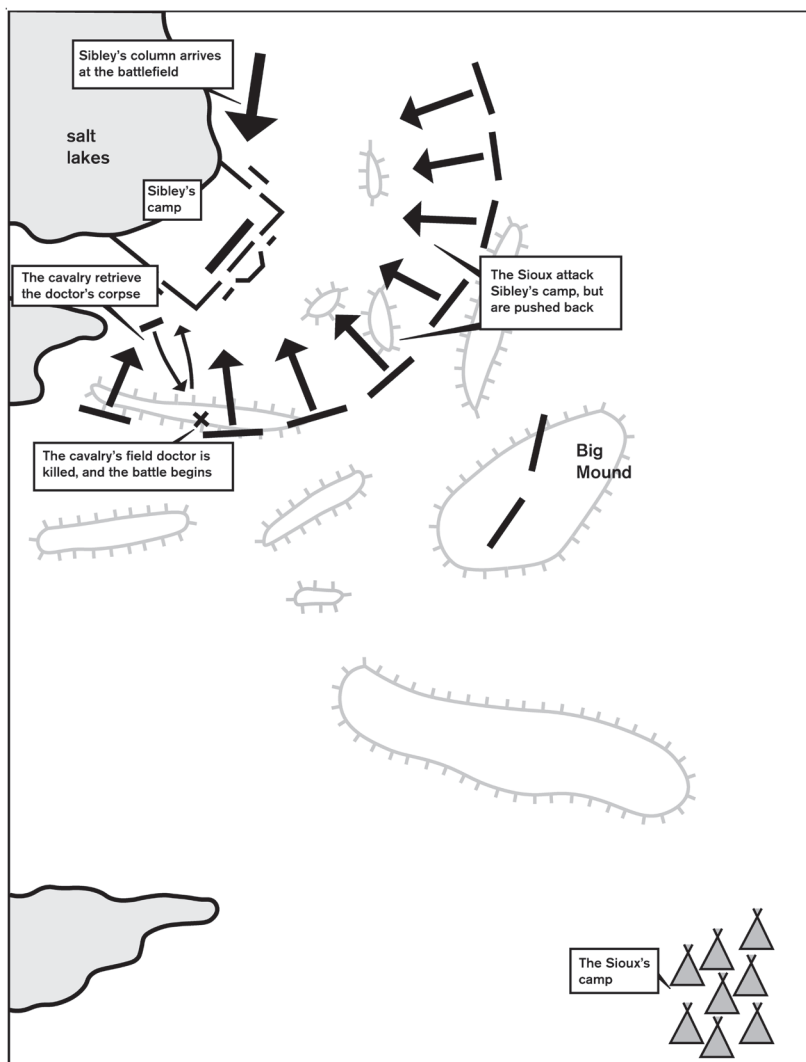
Meanwhile, the cavalry field physician had spotted some old acquaintances among the Sioux who spoke with the scouts on the hill. Having had a fair amount of interaction with the Sioux in Minnesota, the physician could speak a little bit of their language. He decided to ride up on to the hill and greet them. His friends tried to talk him out of his plan, arguing that many of the Indians appeared belligerent and that they would hardly appreciate meeting a white man. The physician did not heed their warnings and rode up the hill to greet some of the Sioux he knew from Minnesota. He also gave them bread and tobacco and had friendly conversation with them.

Then all hell broke loose. One Sioux warrior, perhaps one of Inkpaduta's men, walked up to the physician from behind, shot him in the back, and killed him. In shock and confusion, the scouts and Indians ran from each other and opened fire. The battle was underway (Map 4.2).

Down in the camp the soldiers had watched events unfold. Immediately Sibley gave the order that two of the companies of cavalry should storm the hill and recover the physician's body. Mathias Fjellhaugen and the brothers Pettersen belonged to one of these companies. The stony slope was so rugged that some of the cavalry had to dismount and continue on foot, but they had few problems driving away the Indians and getting the body back to camp. A few of the companies from 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota supported the cavalry.

By this point, there was fighting on all sides. The Sioux streamed down from the ridges on their fast horses. Piercing war cries reverberated through the hills, and rifle shots exploded. Soon, the odd shot began to whine around the soldiers working to fortify the camp, but no one was hit. The majority of the Indians' bullets did not reach their targets, but fell short outside the camp, spraying dust and stones.<sup>12</sup>

The Indians were met by the soldiers' fire before they came near enough for their shots to have real effect. Muzzle flames flashed along the entire line, then the many hundreds of weapons



*Map 4.2: The Battle at Big Mound, July 24, 1863*  
*The First Phase: The Field Physician is Killed and the Sioux Attack*



roared. The Sioux turned and rushed to get away. They had little to match such firepower.

Comparing weapons, this battle was a game of raw technology. The majority of Sibley's soldiers had .58 caliber Springfield rifles, relatively precise weapons that could kill an enemy at well over 500 yards' distance. Even though these rifles were muzzle-loading weapons that required reloading after every shot, they were quite easy to reload allowing the soldiers to fire two to three shots per minute. The Indians were generally much more poorly armed than Little Crow's warriors had been in Minnesota the year before. Many were prairie Indians who had little contact with the whites, and therefore, had not been able to procure as many firearms. What they had managed to acquire were often antiquated muskets, hunting rifles, or shotguns with short range. One of Sibley's officers estimated that just half of the Indians in this battle had firearms. The rest had to manage with bows and arrows, lances, battle clubs, and tomahawks.<sup>13</sup>

The soldiers soon began to advance (Map 4.3). On the right, the cavalry pressed the Sioux back down from the ridge where the physician was killed. On the left, the 6<sup>th</sup> Minnesota sent out a small detachment that had no difficulty driving the Indians away on this front. In the middle, Sibley ordered a six-pound howitzer cannon forward to a ridge just in front of the camp. Sibley himself followed along in order to show the artillerymen where they should shoot.

The Danielson brothers lined up with the rest of the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota. In the oppressive heat, many of the soldiers had cast off their jackets. Armed with rapid firing Colt rifles with revolver magazines, one company had already been sent out to protect Sibley's advanced cannon position. Two other companies assisted the cavalry on the right. Then, the five remaining companies of the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota began to march through the rugged little valley toward a larger ridge that was called Big Mound. It was this high point that gave the name to the battle.

Ole Paulson and his company received orders to stay and defend the camp with the 10<sup>th</sup> Minnesota. Thus, Paulson did not participate actively in the battles, but he had a good view of everything that happened on the hills around him.

Sibley gave the artillerymen orders to fire shells at a large group of Sioux that had gathered on top of Big Mound. “The Big Sugartop [Big Mound] was black with Indians. The artillerymen threw some shells in among them, and wiped the hill clean,” Paulson recalled.

The Danielson brothers participated in the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota’s advance through the little valley up to Big Mound. The Indians offered little effective resistance – only scattered shots that either missed or fell short of the target. The soldiers’ shooting had no particular effect either, for the Sioux held themselves at a respectful distance and cleverly hid in the terrain. “We drove them from ridgeback to ridgeback without injuring anyone and without getting injured ourselves” one of the soldiers reported. According to the Danielson brothers’ assessment, the artillery was quite a bit more effective. “Shells were sent up there [Big Mound] as fast as the guns could be worked, leaving quite a spatter of dead Indians lying on the hill top, while those who yet had live legs under them got under way to the south with all speed.”

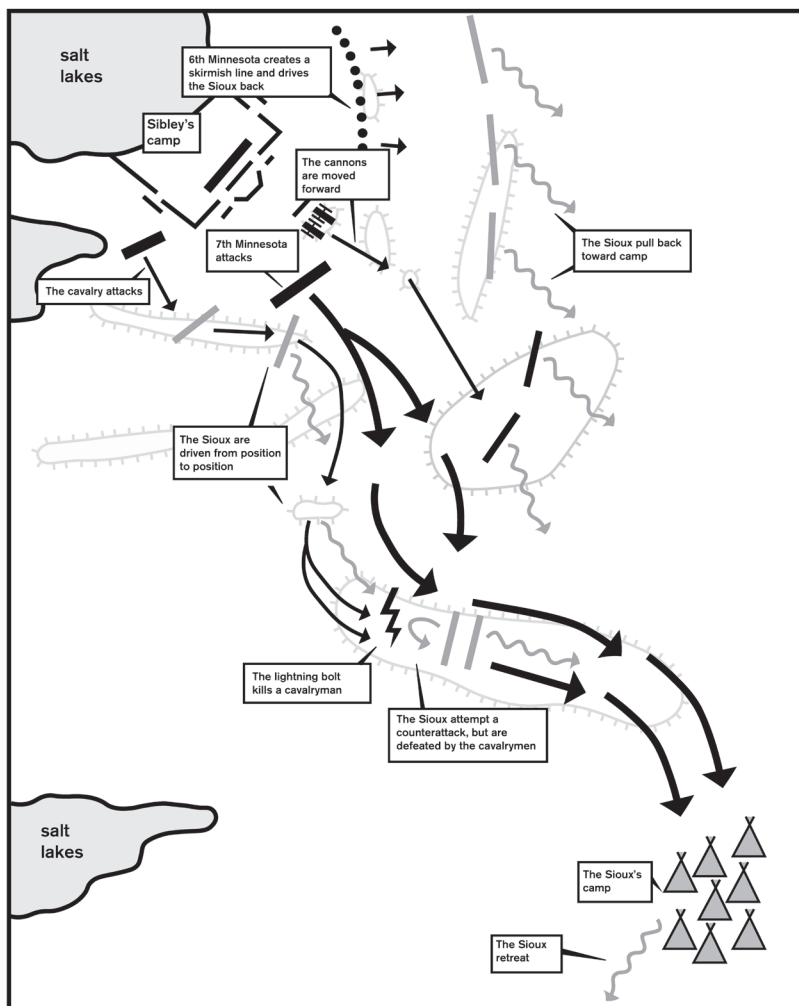
The outcome of the battle had long been decided. Sibley’s men pursued the Indians on every front. Down in the soldiers’ camp, Paulson saw how the cavalry “swept up the long hill ridge and wiped it clean.” In no time, the whites stormed up over the top of Big Mound. From there, they could see down to the Indians’ camp on a large plain a few miles away. Sibley rode up with his staff in order to get a better overview of the battlefield. “I discovered the whole body of Indians, numbering from 1,000 to 1,500, retiring in confusion,” the general wrote in his report. “One dark stripe that moved over some distant hills showed where their families were to be found.”\*\*<sup>14</sup>

When it became clear that the Sioux warriors were going to lose the battle, their families hurried to escape. The tipis were taken down at full speed and loaded onto wagons or travois (simple sleds) with any possessions people managed to gather quickly. Then, they fled to the south, away from the battlefield. The Sioux warriors’

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\* Translators’ Note: This quote from an English language source could not be verified in the original English.

\*\* Translators’ Note: This quote could not be verified in English. The preceding quote, however, was found.



*Map 4.3: The Battle of Big Mound, July 24, 1863  
Second Phase: Sibley's Soldiers Chase the Sioux from the Battlefield*

most important objective became the impediment of the whites' pursuit in order to give their families time to get to safety. So, some of the warriors gathered on a lower ridge southwest of Big Mound in order to continue the battle there.

Lieutenant Colonel William Marshall and Colonel Sam McPhail of the cavalry waved their swords and urged their men of the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota to advance anew. The foot soldiers attacked along the east side of the high ridge while the cavalry attacked along the top and the west side. Battling to protect their families, the Sioux gave harder opposition. A short bout of hand-to-hand combat occurred when McPhail's cavalymen rode in attack. A corporal was shot in the shoulder and several Indians were said to have been cut down by the cavalry's swords. The bullets whizzed more thickly around the foot soldiers from 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota. Marshall reported that one man took a bullet in his hat, and that another bullet hit a gun stock.

While the battle raged, the life inside the dark clouds that hung over the battlefield awakened. Bright flashes of lightning slashed the air followed by violent thunderclaps. On the top of the ridge, a flash of lightning hit one of the cavalymen, killing both him and his horse. At least one more cavalryman was thrown to the ground but was not seriously injured. The shock wave is said to have thrown Colonel McPhail's saber out of his hand. The lightning strike created confusion among the cavalry. For one moment, McPhail believed they had been hit by a shell from their own artillery. Immediately afterward, another lightning bolt struck nearly making Lieutenant Colonel Marshall fall from his horse. The attack ceased, giving the Sioux warriors time to put distance between themselves and the soldiers, but it was not long before the whites regrouped and continued the advance.

The Indians withdrew to the plains where their camp had been, and the soldiers followed right behind them. Since the Sioux warriors all had horses, the infantrymen in the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota soon fell behind, but the cavalry followed close on the heels of the Indians. Soon they reached the abandoned campsite. There the Sioux attempted to make a stand behind some primitive fortifications, but they were quickly chased away over the prairie. The soldiers saw clear signs that the Indians had fled camp in a hurry. Lodgepoles

and tent coverings for the tipis, bison pelts, cooking pots, dried meat, and many other things were strewn along the Sioux's path of flight. On the way past, Lieutenant Colonel Marshall and several of the soldiers picked up a little meat for provisions.

The cavalry gained quickly on the fleeing Sioux families, but the warriors did their best to hold the pursuers at a distance. They skirmished intensely at least twice. The whites told later of a heroic Sioux warrior who shot twice while the cavalry rode right at him. His first shot hit the jacket and the saddle of a soldier, and the second hit the rubber rug\* that lay tightly rolled over the saddle of another. When the Sioux warrior loaded for the third time, he got the gunpowder in but not the bullets so when he fired directly at the breast of one of his attackers, the shot had no impact. The cavalymen were now at close range, but the Sioux warrior did not give up. He swung the rifle like a club, and a soldier by the name of Andreas Carlson, probably a Swedish immigrant, was nearly knocked off his horse. The soldiers let fire with their carbines and shot the Indian several times before someone cut him down with a saber.<sup>15</sup>

Another cavalryman was also killed in these skirmishes, the Swedish immigrant Gustaf Stark. This was by all records the same man who the previous year had served as the captain for the militia company "Scandinavian Guards" from St. Peter, Minnesota. One more cavalryman was seriously injured and died a month later.

The Sioux's losses were likely much greater. The cavalry claimed that they killed at least twenty-one Sioux in the last attack. Almost all of the dead Sioux warriors were scalped by the whites, even though Sibley earlier had forbidden scalping and said that such behavior was not fitting for "civilized and Christian men." One cavalryman gave the following explanation for his fellow soldiers' conduct: "The taking of these [scalps] was not noticed by the officers in the heat of the conflict. They were in every instance in the possession of these some member of whose family had been murdered by the savages, or who had been trappers and hunters, and acquainted with Indian habits and customs. They knew how much the Indian felt the disgrace of having any members of the

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\* Translators' Note: Gum rubber coated sheets of canvas served as rugs, ponchos, blankets, and shelter halves as protection from the elements.

tribe start scalpless to the happy hunting grounds, and the savage superstition as to the improbability of a bald man's success in the next world."<sup>16</sup>

Even though they suffered considerable losses, the Sioux warriors achieved what they wanted. The white cavalrymen's pursuit was sufficiently impeded so that the warriors' families escaped. In the twilight, the battles faded away. The soldiers made ready to spend the night where they were, confident that they could resume the chase and capture the Sioux the following morning.

Those soldiers who had thrown their jackets before the battle and fought in only their shirtsleeves now regretted it bitterly. The temperature had fallen after the thunderstorms, and at dusk it became even colder. Both the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota and the cavalry were now more than fifteen miles from the tents, blankets, and jackets at Sibley's camp. The fact that they lacked water did not improve the situation. They had passed several small lakes, but all consisted of salty, undrinkable water.

An icy wind swept over the prairie and made life bitter for the lightly clad soldiers. Moreover, the infantry of the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota were exhausted after the extended pursuit on foot. Some attempted to make the best of the situation and tucked in to the bison pelts cast aside by the fleeing Indians, but Matias Fjellhaugen reported that many of those pelts were full of lice.

Men of the cavalry and infantry assumed they would spend the night there, continue the advance the following day, and give the Sioux the coup de grace, but they soon received an unpleasant surprise. Late in the evening a dispatch rider came to Colonel McPhail to deliver an order from Sibley. The exact phrasing of the order is unknown, but McPhail interpreted it as a command to return to camp with his cavalrymen. As he passed by the place where the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota had settled in for the night, McPhail convinced Lieutenant Colonel Marshall that the foot soldiers should also march back. The message that they had to walk the entire way back to camp was very poorly received by the foot soldiers; however, it was not a request, it was an order.

The Danielson brothers thought that Sibley ought to have moved the camp forward as soon as the battle was won, for it would have been easier to deliver supplies to those in pursuit so that the

hunt for the Indians could continue the next day. Others' criticism was more scathing. Mathias Fjellhaugen recalled rumors that Sibley was in league with the Indians. "Sibley knew the Indians in and out, and he had interacted with them for several years, and was a personal acquaintance of the Indian chiefs, and had been on friendly terms with them. So he was in no hurry, you see [...] We were only allowed to go fast enough for the Indians to escape..." Another soldier summed up the battle in this way: "The Indians got away. Sibley was completely out maneuvered."\* Similar negative interpretations of Sibley's leadership were repeated in the soldiers' letters and diaries.<sup>17</sup>

For the men in the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota, the march back to the camp was a terrible trial. With heavy, stiff legs they trudged over the prairie and up the hills where they had fought just hours before. They were thirsty, hungry, and angry. Many collapsed and remained horizontal for the rest of the night, utterly exhausted. Not until the break of dawn were the majority back at camp where the battle had begun. There, they finally found food and drink and a chance to rest.

It was obvious that both the men and the horses who had participated in the pursuit needed to rest before the hunt for the Indians could resume. Therefore, the day after the battle, Sibley had to be content with moving the camp a few miles forward to a place with better water and good pastures. This gave the Sioux welcome breathing room, offering them the opportunity to put even greater distance between themselves and the soldiers.

### *The Teton Ride in Attack*

Standing Buffalo's people abandoned the other Sioux the night after the battle. By setting their course north to Canada, they hoped to avoid additional clashes with Sibley's troops. The remainder of the Sioux, Inkpaduta's people and the Yanktonai, traveled southwest in the direction of the Missouri River and met up with a large group of Teton Sioux who were on a bison hunt in this area. The Tetons were valuable reinforcements that more than replaced the loss of

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\* Translators' Note: This quote from an English language source could not be verified in the original English.

Standing Buffalo's men, for the militant Tetons placed great value on martial honor and were eager to demonstrate their prowess in a battle against Sibley's soldiers.

Among the Tetons there was by all accounts a warrior chief by the name of Sitting Bull. He was around thirty years old and had garnered a reputation as a bold and skillful warrior in battles against other Indian tribes. Now it was his chance – perhaps for the first time – to show his mettle against the white invaders.<sup>18</sup>

Sibley resumed the hunt for the Sioux early on the morning of July 26. The soldiers now pursued Inkpaduta and the Yanktonai. Bison pelts, dried bison meat, bison tallow, and other things the Sioux had discarded during their flight made the trail easy to follow.

In the middle of the day, the soldiers spotted something moving off in the distance. They understood quickly that it was a horde of Indians on horseback, over 1,000 of them. The united war party of Inkpaduta, the Yanktonai, and the Tetons were on their way to distract the soldiers and give their families time to flee farther west.

Sibley's troops neared a little lake called Dead Buffalo Lake for the many carcasses of dead bison strewn along the banks. The water was potable there, and Sibley determined that it was best to make camp since the next source of drinking water was likely far off. Meanwhile, the Sioux were getting closer, riding up onto some hills and ridges west of the campsite. They did not attack immediately but waited expectantly while the soldiers took their positions exactly as at Big Mound with their backs to the lake.

When the camp was established with trenches and cannon positions, Sibley sent some hundred foot soldiers and two cannons out in order to begin the battle with the Sioux. Some companies with cavalry followed right behind them. Less than a mile west of the camp, the two cannons were positioned on a ridge and the soldiers began firing shells at the Indians. After a while, the Sioux learned to avoid the cannon fire. Every time a shell shrieked towards a cluster of warriors, they quickly spread out so that very few were injured by the shell explosions.<sup>19</sup>

The battle lasted for several hours with considerable action, smoke and tumult, but almost no one was injured. Now and then, the Indians rode near enough to exchange shots with the soldiers' ranks, but the Sioux warriors were difficult to hit since they kept



their swift horses in constant motion. The cavalry company to which Mathias Fjellhaugen and the Pettersen brothers belonged played a prominent role as they parried many of the Sioux's offensives, something that was duly discussed in Sibley's report. Despite this, none of the confrontations were particularly fierce. The company did not lose a single man.<sup>20</sup>

Late in the afternoon, the battle began to subside. Many of the soldiers who had remained in camp figured that the Sioux were on the retreat. The cavalrymen swung down from their horses and loosened their saddles; the tents were set up; and some of the men began to make dinner. One section of the civilian drivers and cattle drovers took some wagons with them and drove out of camp to fetch grass for their animals. Remarkably enough, many of them felt so secure that the battle was over that they did not even take along their weapons. The civilians set their course north along the bank of the lake.

Shortly, the soldiers in camp discovered that a large group of Sioux was riding right toward the careless drivers and cattle drovers. It appeared that the civilians would lose their lives, but a cavalry company that still sat astride their horses rode immediately to their rescue. One other company hurried to saddle up again and followed them.

When the Sioux saw the cavalrymen approach, they changed course and rode directly at them. The two groups of riders met at close range in the day's most powerful skirmish. The cavalrymen and the Sioux warriors whirled around each other while they screamed and shot and yelled. The horses soon stirred up dense clouds of dust, making it difficult to distinguish friends from enemies. A daring Sioux warrior rode right down to the soldiers' camp. This may have been Sitting Bull. The infamous chief later drew a picture of himself where he performed a coup on a civilian driver. Often considered more honorable than a killing, a coup was a bravery ritual that consisted of touching an enemy in battle. Sitting Bull also took the opportunity to steal a mule out from under the nose of the enemy. It is likely that this event took place during the battle of Dead Buffalo Lake.<sup>21</sup>

The battle was hardest on the Sioux, but the whites also suffered losses. It is said that a cavalryman rode out with his revolver

drawn in order to kill an injured Indian who had fallen from his horse. But the revolver misfired, and before the cavalryman managed to rein in his horse, he was at close range with the Sioux. The Indian lifted his rifle and shot the cavalryman through the thigh and kidney – a fatal injury. At the same moment, one of Sibley's scouts came and shot the Indian. The friends of the fatally injured cavalryman were said to have been so incensed that they scalped the Indian before he was dead. Ole Paulson wrote that this Indian was a chief. It may have been Gray Eagle, who according to other sources was killed in this battle. "Although naked, he was finely painted, and his head profusely decorated with feathers. He was a splendid looking fellow, and fought bravely and was soon killed," wrote the cavalry's historian about Gray Eagle.<sup>22</sup>

The Indians realized after a while that they did not stand a chance against the whites' carbines and revolvers. Finally they rode away and disappeared over the hills. Sibley's men were too tired to take up pursuit, and it was also late in the day. The Battle of Dead Buffalo Lake was over. One soldier in the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota stated that the cavalrymen took five scalps, and that one of the scouts took two. The whites lost only the one cavalryman who was fatally wounded during the hand-to-hand combat.<sup>23</sup>

Sibley called his troops back to camp and gave orders to firmly secure their position in case the Indians should attempt a new attack in the cover of night's darkness. But the Sioux did not return. The soldiers had a peaceful night. At the crack of dawn the next morning, the march continued west. The tracks made by the Indians formed a broad trail that was easy to follow. Sometimes the soldiers could also glimpse the Sioux in the distance. This day Sibley's column covered about twenty miles before they made camp by Stony Lake where the water was drinkable.

The soldiers were now just a few days' march from the Missouri River. Sibley hoped that Sully's column would be in place so that they could trap the Indians between them, and even if Sully was not in place there was still a chance that Sibley's men would be able to overtake the Indians before they crossed the river.

When the reveille sounded on the morning of July 28, dawn had barely begun to break. The soldiers had gotten little sleep the last few days and were in a daze as they collapsed their tents and

prepared for the departure march. On this day, Ole Paulson's company was set to march in the front with the 10<sup>th</sup> Minnesota. They rounded the south end of the little lake and began to trudge up a long, gentle hill while the sun peeked out from over the horizon in the east. "The sunrise was magnificent," Paulson wrote, but the majority of the soldiers were too sleepy to bother with nature's beauty.

Sibley and his staff rode in front with some scouts and the wagons that carried the General Headquarters' baggage. When they neared the top of the hill, Sibley stopped to give orders to the 10<sup>th</sup> Minnesota colonel while the scouts disappeared over the crest. The first segment of the wagon train followed a few hundred yards behind the 10<sup>th</sup> Minnesota. Down by the lake, the last companies and wagons had not yet left camp. The 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota should have marched on either side of the wagon train to protect the flanks, but had not yet had time to assume their positions. One of the scouts came riding back at a full gallop and yelled, "They are coming! They are coming!" In the next moment the soldiers caught sight of their enemies. A great host of war-painted Sioux warriors surged toward them. The ground rumbled from the many thousand horses' hooves pummeling it. Creating chaos in the foot soldiers' ranks, some of the scout's horses became uncontrollable as they rode at a gallop down the hill beside the general headquarters' wagons. It was a critical moment for the whites. Many of the soldiers almost panicked when they saw the awesome horde of Sioux coming right toward them.<sup>24</sup>

Ole Paulson and his company were in the first line. "Our boys were struck with fear and could not move," he stated. "I said to my superior: Shouldn't we retreat? *'No Sir!'*" he answered; but then he too stood there like a lifeless statue. Then we ought to fight, I said, and gave the command: 'Form ranks!' I got the boys into battle lines and gave the command: 'Fire at will!' Then they woke up as from a trance and fired so that it echoed across the hills." The 10<sup>th</sup> Minnesota also promptly formed ranks and opened fire.<sup>25</sup>

The soldiers' answering salvo stopped the Sioux's attack. "The Indians became as terror-stricken as we were. They appeared to have arrived at the jaws of death." Likely the Sioux had planned to storm Sibley's camp at daybreak and were surprised by the fact that

the soldiers were already on the march. But the Indians quickly regrouped and spread out in a broad front so that they could surround the 10<sup>th</sup> Minnesota's flanks and attack the vulnerable wagon train. It was now clear that the Indians had gathered an even larger force than in the previous battles. They created a massive half circle around the soldiers. Their front was said to have been several miles long. In his report, the colonel of the 10<sup>th</sup> Minnesota wrote that the Indians presented in such large numbers that it was almost incomprehensible. Sibley estimated the Sioux's force to be no fewer than 2,200 warriors and wrote in his report that calculating by the number of participants, this was the biggest battle his troops had fought.

Despite their superior numbers, there was little the Sioux could do against the soldiers' rifles and cannons. According to the soldiers, the Indians made several courageous drives in attempt to exploit weak points in the whites' lines. But when they tried to get behind the 10<sup>th</sup> Minnesota and attack the wagon train, they were stopped by heavy fire from Sibley's cannons. Soon, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota were in place protecting the wagon train's flanks. The soldiers eventually formed a large square with the wagons in the middle so that it was impossible for the Sioux to penetrate.

The battle was fiercest along the front of the 10<sup>th</sup> Minnesota and Paulson's company. One soldier in the 10<sup>th</sup> Minnesota described it thus: "We opened fire, but at long range. They did not harm us, and we did very little to them, since they stayed away at a distance and were in constant motion. Sometimes they rode toward us at full speed as if they wanted to ride us down, then they turned quickly and pulled back. They did this several times. Our regiment was situated with a view out over the entire battlefield. It was a dramatic sight. Our shells irritated them and killed a few."

Once the soldiers had positioned themselves in a square around the wagons, Sibley gave orders that the advance should continue. The Sioux realized then that the battle was lost. They had managed neither to surprise the soldiers while they were still in their camp, nor to prevent Sibley's advance. Soon, they rode over the crest of the hill and disappeared.

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\* Translators' Note: This quote from an English language source could not be verified in the original English.

The whites had not lost a single man in the battle. The Sioux's losses were impossible to confirm with confidence. The 10<sup>th</sup> Minnesota's colonel reported that his men had seen at least three Sioux warriors shot off their horses, but their fellow warriors carried them away. In addition, the colonel believed that the artillery must have killed "a considerable number" of Sioux. One soldier wrote in his diary that three Indians were found killed on the battlefield.<sup>26</sup>

Sibley thought that he had won a great victory. "These wild prairie warriors had never met American troops in battle, and they had boasted that no enemy army – regardless of size – would dare to set foot in the part of the country where they reigned as uncontested kings. Now they have met an army that has challenged them, beaten them back, and soundly conquered them. This will be a valuable lesson, not just for those Indians we have met here, but for all tribes in the entire Northwest."<sup>27\*</sup>

The battle had not lasted long. It was still early in the morning when the Indians rode away. Sibley gave his men a few hours of rest before the march continued west.

### *Turned Back at the Missouri*

The day after the Sioux were defeated at Stony Lake, the soldiers arrived at Apple Creek, one of the Missouri's tributaries. For the first time in several weeks, they saw trees, a welcome sight after the long days of marching over the monotonous prairie. "The sun gilded the forest's tops and the mountains' sides," wrote Paulson. "Not since we left the Sheyenne River had we seen forest; now it smiled kindly at us." Here the country began to slope downward, and soon the soldiers could see the Missouri River Valley below them.

Sibley's men had hoped to end the campaign by attacking the Sioux with their backs to the river with no possibility for escape. Therefore, it was a great disappointment for the soldiers when they saw the Sioux in dense groups on the opposite riverbank. The Indians had crossed the river the night before. Children, elderly, and others who could not swim had been transported in small

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\* Translators' Note: This quote from an English language source could not be verified in the original English.

boats made of bison leather stretched tightly over a framework of supple branches. The warriors swam over with their horses. With the river between themselves and the pursuers, the Sioux could finally feel some degree of safety, for it was doubtful that the soldiers would manage to transport their wagons and cannons across the wide Missouri.

Sibley's column stopped on the top of the last hill before the river. A belt of dense forest separated the soldiers and the riverbank. With the cannons in position, they began to bombard the forest in case some of the Sioux hid there. Then the 6<sup>th</sup> Minnesota began to march toward the river in ranks. The advance was an extremely unpleasant experience. "The heat was almost unbearable. It was 110 degrees in the shade," Ole Paulson wrote. While the sweat poured off them, the soldiers had to bushwhack through dense scrub with thorny branches. The forest gave fantastic cover for any Sioux warriors potentially waiting in ambush, but the soldiers saw nothing of their enemies. The only thing they found was a large number of wagons and various goods that the Sioux had to abandon when they crossed over the river. They left everything from primitive carts to a fine stagecoach.<sup>28</sup>

When they reached the riverbank, the thirsty soldiers headed straight for the water to fill their canteens. As they did so, a volley of shots came from the rushes and the scrub brush on the opposite bank. The Indians had lain hidden in order to shoot at the whites when they came down to drink; however, the distance over the broad river was too great for the shots to have any effect, and none of the soldiers were injured.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Minnesota had accomplished their mission, and Sibley soon called them back. It was high time to find a campsite for the night. When the 6<sup>th</sup> Minnesota returned to the main forces, they discovered that two men were missing. One was an enlisted man and the other was Lieutenant Frederick Beaver, an Englishman who served as a staff officer for Sibley. The sun had begun to set, so an eventual search party would need to wait until the following day.

The soldiers made camp by Apple Creek, ensconced by trenches and low earthen breastworks. It was a restless night. The guard posts opened fire several times because they thought they saw

Indians sneaking around toward the camp. Some maintained that the fire had been returned. Twice the roll of drums woke the entire camp because the guard posts thought that the Sioux were about to attack, but both times turned out to be false alarms. The guard posts were not completely wrong. There were most likely quite a few brazen Sioux warriors who sneaked around the camp that night, for several mules were stolen.

In the morning, Sibley sent a force of 700 men back to the place where the Sioux had crossed the Missouri. The men's assignment was to burn the wagons and other possessions that the Indians had left behind and search for the two missing men. It did not take long before the men were found. Both had clearly chosen the wrong path on their way back from the riverbank the day before and had been separated from the other soldiers. This had cost them their lives, for there were still some Sioux in the forest on this side of the river, and these Indians had attacked and killed the two whites.

Lieutenant Beaver was found with three arrows in his body. He was also shot with a rifle. Empty cartridges from his revolvers lay around him, a clear sign that he had resisted when assaulted. His hair was too short for the Sioux to see any value in scalping him; instead they had cut off his well-maintained sideburns. The enlisted man was scalped in a standard manner. The two corpses in the forest gave the soldiers an uncomfortable reminder that the war against the Sioux was far from over.

The soldiers were not able to rest peacefully the next night either. The guard posts frequently saw motions in the darkness and fired at them. Late in the night, the Indians set fire to the prairie. The flames shot up from the tinder dry grass, but the soldiers were able to extinguish the fire with wet blankets.

Sibley allowed his men to stay in camp by Apple Creek one more day in the hope that Sully's troops would arrive. With the extra reinforcements Sully was supposed to deliver on the riverboats, the two columns could continue the pursuit of the Indians on the west side of the Missouri. But Sully was clearly delayed, and Sibley confronted the reality that he had no other choice than to turn around and lead his troops back to Minnesota without achieving his objective. If he waited any longer, they risked running out of provisions on the way home.

The soldiers were lined up ranks, and a long order from their commanding general was read to them. Sibley declared that the campaign had come to an end, and that it had been a great success. He praised the soldiers for their bravery and perseverance and listed everything they had achieved.

Sibley's men were undoubtedly glad for the opportunity to turn home, but they were skeptical of the claim that the campaign had been a success. Some thought that Sully's absence was to blame for the Indians' escape. "Had Gen. Sully been prompted to join us anywhere at any time, the wotk [*sic*, work] of the summer would not heve [*sic*, have] needed to be announced a success in order to make (it) so. [...] (So talked the rank and file)" the Danielson brothers recalled.<sup>29</sup>

The final night in the camp by Apple Creek was even more unsettled than the previous ones. Sibley's scouts had reported in the course of the day that many Sioux had crossed the Missouri. Into the night, the soldiers could hear the Sioux signaling to each other around the camp. "We received strict orders to lay on our weapons out in our entrenchments," Paulson wrote. "No one was allowed the luxury of sleep. Ah, how nice it would have been to catch a wink of sleep." For several nights, the soldiers had gotten very little sleep, and Paulson felt sorry for his men. Therefore, he gave them permission to sleep while he himself kept watch with one of the soldiers.

"At about midnight, when the boys were sleeping heavily and I sat and drooped behind the earthen breastworks, which were not particularly high, a shot was heard just in front of our entrenchment, and thereafter a salvo of about 100 shots followed. The bullets whistled over my head, and the grains of sand whipped me in the face. The bullets bored through the tents and killed a mule inside the camp," Paulson recalled.

The Indians' war cries reverberated through the night. But as soon as the soldiers returned the fire, the Sioux turned their horses and disappeared into the darkness. Full chaos broke out in the camp anyway, because the shots had scared the livestock, and the animals broke out of their fence. "The cattle dashed out of the corral utterly wild with fright, and making the ground tremble," Colonel Marshall said. Luckily for the whites, the fence was in the



middle of the camp, surrounded by the regiments' positions. In order to escape the camp, the livestock would have needed to break the soldiers' lines, but Sibley's men maintained their composure when the livestock came rushing at them. They formed a living wall and made the animals veer off course. Finally, the livestock settled down enough to be driven back into the fence. Marshall wrote in his report that this was the only time during the entire campaign that he had felt scared and ill-at-ease. "But for the living wall that confronted them, the animals would have escaped or stampeded the mules and horses, with great destruction of life in the camp."<sup>30</sup>

Early in the morning of August 1st, the soldiers turned their backs on the Missouri and began the long march home.

*"The splendid boy was taken from us"*

The return march was a difficult, new trial for Sibley's soldiers. Day after day, they trudged under a burning sun. Hans Danielson described the march in his journal.

Aug. 2. Made 18 miles. Camp Bankson the south side of a long reedy bog hole. [...] A warm, sultry day, the men suffering much from the overpowering heat abd [*sic*, and] scant water [...]

Aug. 3. 15 miles. Camp Kennedy [...] On north side of a low bottom lake. Wayer [*sic*, water] in lake like dilute sof [of] soap. Got good water by setting barrels in springy places on side of lake. [...] Been a heavy wind from the southwest and the air hot to suffocation. No rain as yet and the prairie is as bare as a closely cropped common. Today and yesterday saw places in the low grounds where buffalo have grazed lately. A thunderstorm at sunset lasting into the night -- refreshing.

Aug. 4. 7<sup>th</sup> Regt. in front. [Marched] 18 ,iles [*sic*, miles] [...] At 11 o'clock this morning passed the ground of Camp Sibley (July 24, Big Hill fight) [...] A heavy thunderstorm struck us in the night causing the greatest confusion in camp. Tents

were blown down and torn, and animals got loose and seemed likely to run over everything [*sic*, everything] and everybody. A wild, uncomfortable night.<sup>31</sup>

On August 10th, Sibley's men were finally back at Camp Atchison, where three weeks earlier they had left behind all the sick soldiers and animals as well as the excess supplies under the protection of a robust force. The soldiers in Camp Atchison had been active during the main forces' absence, and during a reconnaissance expedition northward toward Devils Lake had captured a young Indian who turned out to be Little Crow's son Wowinape.

After his father had been shot and killed near Hutchinson one month before, Wowinape had wandered alone westward. He had walked over 250 miles through the wilderness with no other food than what he could procure along the way, and that was not much. South of Devils Lake he was so hungry and exhausted that he almost could not walk anymore; after eating a little bit of a wolf that he had shot with his last bullet, he managed to continue until the soldiers captured him.

The first day after the arrival at Camp Atchison, Ole Paulson was assigned the responsibility for guarding Wowinape and a few other Indians who had been taken prisoner. Paulson later gave a less than flattering description of Little Crow's son: "He had eaten like a hungry wolf [since he had come to the camp] and looked like a fattened pig."

On August 12, Sibley's troops broke down Camp Atchison and continued the march homeward. Oppressive heat and lack of good water were continual challenges. Many soldiers became sick because they drank water from alkali lakes. On August 13, many soldiers wrote in their journals that the water they found was bad. The cavalryman Kristian Pettersen, the youngest of the four brothers from Moster, had fallen sick the previous night and died in the dawning light of August 13. The cause of his illness was presumably a combination of the strenuous marches and the alkali-laden drinking water. He was just nineteen years old.<sup>32</sup>

Soldiers who died during the march were generally wrapped in a blanket and buried, but Kristian's three brothers and their friend

Mathias Fjellhaugen saw to it that Kristian received a more dignified burial. They used a damaged wagon to make a casket, "so we were able to properly bury him," recounted Mathias Fjellhaugen.

The funeral took place on a little ridge with a sweeping view out over the prairie around it. According to Paul H. Rosendahl, another Norwegian-born cavalryman, the young Norwegian was buried with "military honors," which meant that a troop of soldiers shot a rifle salute over the grave. "It pained us all that this splendid boy was taken from us. Both the officers and everyone else in the company thought so highly of him," said Mathias Fjellhaugen later.

When the funeral was over, the men of the cavalry mounted their horses and rode off to the east with the remainder of Sibley's soldiers.

### *The Strike at Whitestone Hill*

That very day Sibley left the Missouri and led his men back to Minnesota, Sully's column was 125 miles farther south along the river. Sully had been delayed because the water level in the Missouri was abnormally low that year, creating huge problems for the riverboats that transported the majority of the supplies for his column.

Sully had to wait over two weeks at the little outpost of Fort Pierre for the supply boats to catch up with him. Eventually, he realized that the original plan to meet Sibley was untenable, yet he remained confident that he would find and conquer the Indians on his own. He knew that his career depended on a victory over the Sioux. Pope had already sent several letters expressing strong displeasure with Sully's languid advance.

Finally, Sully decided that he could no longer allow the riverboats to restrict the column's freedom of movement. When one of the boats finally caught him again just north of Fort Pierre, Sully gave the orders that all unnecessary baggage be loaded onboard the boat. All of the soldiers who were sick or had injured horses were to board as well in order to accompany the boat down to Fort Pierre. At the same time, the wagons were filled with twenty-three days worth of food rations including the equivalent amount of

animal feed. With this decision Sully hoped to enable the column to move stealthily and to close the distance to the Indians.

At this point, Sully's troops consisted of a battery of light cannons and about 1,000 cavalymen from three divisions: 2<sup>nd</sup> Nebraska, 6<sup>th</sup> Iowa, and 1<sup>st</sup> Dakota. The latter two contained a number of Norwegian immigrants. One of the Norwegians, Nils E. Himle from Voss, wrote letters to the newspaper *Emigranten* with lists of all the Norwegians in the 6<sup>th</sup> Iowa and 1<sup>st</sup> Dakota, a total of forty-five men, twenty-seven of whom served in the 6<sup>th</sup> Iowa Company D. With nine men in two units, Sogn was particularly well represented. There were also eight men from Voss, five from Land, and four from Vadsø. The remainder came primarily from the valleys of Østlandet [eastern Norway], including Hakadal, Hallingdal, Valdres, and Sigdal.<sup>33</sup>

Having sent the supply boat back to Fort Pierre, Sully led his men up along the eastern bank of the Missouri. When they neared the place where Sibley had chased the Sioux over the river, Sully's men captured an old Indian. This Indian had visited Sioux City in Iowa several times, and some of the soldiers knew him. Since he was inclined to be friendly to the whites, they referred to him as a "good Indian." Sully placed a degree of confidence in what he could tell them about the Indians' movements.

The old Indian was well informed. He explained that the Sioux had fought several battles against Sibley's column four weeks earlier, and that about fifty-eight Sioux warriors had died in these battles. After Sibley had turned around and marched back to Minnesota, the majority of the Sioux had crossed the Missouri River again in order to hunt the abundant bison herds further east. The half-blood Indians who scouted for Sully believed the old Indian's information. They knew that the Sioux preferred to hunt east of the Missouri when they needed to procure sufficient food stores to prepare for the winter. At this time of year, there were always many Sioux who made camp on the Coteau des Missouri Plateau, where sufficient lakes and underground springs provided fresh grass and good pastures. This region had large numbers of bison, and the rivers and lakes were full of fish.<sup>34</sup>

These reports caused Sully to lead his column away from the river and set his course for the Coteau des Missouri. For three

days, the blue-clad men of the cavalry rode southeast over the naked, sunburned prairie. Soon, they found clear signs showing that many Indians had passed by. The tracks were relatively fresh, so the Indians should not be too far away.

On the morning of September 3rd, Sully sent out a vanguard of 300 men from the 6<sup>th</sup> Iowa to ride in advance and search for the Sioux's camp, while the main force followed behind with the wagon train. The vanguard was led by Major Albert E. House. Around three o'clock in the afternoon, one of the vanguard's scouts discovered an Indian camp in the small, shallow valleys or ravines near a hill known as Whitestone Hill. When House received this message, he gave the soldiers orders to load up their carbines and revolvers. Then, he led them toward the Indian camp at a gallop. They rode quickly through the undulating prairie landscape dotted with white, glacial erratic boulders, the stones that had given the name to Whitestone Hill.

When the cavalry neared the camp, Major House gave orders to form a battle line. Behind the ridge of a hill about 250 yards from the Indians' tents, the soldiers came to a halt while House sent a few men out on reconnaissance. House received an unpleasant surprise, for the two scouts quickly returned and reported that there were over 400 tipis in the small, shallow valleys in front of Whitestone Hill. This meant that there were at least 3,000 Sioux in the camp, of which nearly 1,000 were warriors.<sup>35</sup>

Judged merely by the numbers, House's 300 cavalymen faced a significantly superior force. If all the Sioux went on the offensive, it could be a catastrophic ending for the white cavalymen. As large groups of Sioux warriors came riding out of the camp and spread out across the hills in front of them, many of House's men began to think that their last hour had arrived. House immediately sent a scout and two soldiers to retrieve Sully and the main force, but it would take at least two hours before Sully could reach them. In the meantime, House could only wait and hope that the Sioux would not go to battle.

In reality, the situation for House's cavalymen was hardly as dangerous as it at first appeared. The Sioux warriors formed no coordinated force. The camp House had stumbled upon likely consisted of many of the same Indians that Sibley's column had

fought against: Inkpaduta's Santee and Yanktonai Sioux, a few Yankton Sioux, and various groups of Teton. Much indicated that several of these Sioux had little desire to fight. The Yanktons had never been particularly militant against the whites, and the same was true for many of the Yanktonai. Surely, some had also lost spirit after the battles against Sibley's soldiers, where they had no chance against the whites' firepower. These Indians prepared to evacuate the camp in fear that the soldiers would attack. Some Sioux elders came out to negotiate with Major House. They said they were willing to deliver some chiefs as hostages if House promised not to attack the camp, but the major said the only thing he could accept was immediate surrender of all the Sioux. Therefore, the negotiations fell apart. The whites later stated that the Sioux attempted negotiations only to buy time for their families to escape and in order to prepare for battle. But it is equally probable that the older chiefs who had initiated the negotiations truly wanted peace. The problem was that they did not represent the entire camp because many of the Sioux warriors had clearly made up their mind to fight.<sup>36</sup>

It is likely that the belligerent Inkpaduta and his men had no plans to give up without a fight. Also, the proud Teton would not have turned away from a fight. Even the Sioux, who in theory attempted to avoid battles, were prepared to fight in order to defend their families' flight if the soldiers attacked.

Hours passed but none of the parties took the initiative to begin fighting. The whites later maintained that Inkpaduta wanted to give his men time to apply war paint and perform certain rituals that would bring them luck in battle, while their squaws prepared a big victory party, but there is little reason to believe that this is anything more than a myth. Regardless, the Sioux warriors behaved rather threateningly. They rode back and forth before the soldiers and emitted shrill war cries. Whether this was preparation for an attack on House's troops or just an attempt to cover the families' flight, it is impossible to say.

Meanwhile, House's messengers reached Sully and reported that the vanguard had found the Indians. Sully's men had just made camp, and the horses were grazing unsaddled. A trumpeted signal roused the cavalry. They ran to their horses and saddled them. "In

under 15 minutes we were on our horses at full gallop with a shout of hurrah,” remembered the man from Voss, Nils Himle.\* Sully’s cavalymen rode as fast as they could to come to House’s rescue. They are reported to have traveled the nearly ten miles to White-stone Hill in less than an hour.<sup>37</sup>

It was late in the afternoon when Sully’s main force arrived at the battlefield (Map 4.4). Later, the whites tended to portray the scene as Sulley’s men riding in at the last second to save House’s troops from certain death, but this is overly dramatic. The Sioux had likely not fired a shot against House’s men before Sully arrived. Moreover, Sully wrote in his report that the first thing he saw was the Sioux abandoning their camp.<sup>38</sup>

The whites did not hesitate to attack. The 350 men of the Nebraska regiment rode away to prevent the Indians from escaping through the shallow, low valleys and ravines at the foot of White-stone Hill. One section of the 6<sup>th</sup> Iowa was sent to surround the Indians from the opposite side. Sully himself led the remainder of his men in an attack against the center of the Sioux camp. To the sound of clamoring bugle signals, the soldiers rode over the ridge top and down into the camp while the horses churned up great dust clouds from the dry prairie.

As he rode among the tipis, Sully met little resistance from the Indians who had not managed to leave the camp. He encountered two smaller groups of Sioux, led by the chiefs Little Soldier and Big Head. They surrendered without a struggle, even though Sully reported that “the infamous chief” Big Head and his men were “dressed for battle.”\*\*\* Around 120 Indians were taken captive, but only thirty of them were warriors; the rest were women and children.

Simultaneously, the 6<sup>th</sup> Iowa and 2<sup>nd</sup> Nebraska pursued the fleeing Sioux. The sergeant of the 6<sup>th</sup> Iowa, C. W. Fogg, wrote many years later that the soldiers encircled the Indians as if they were a herd of cattle. Under such conditions, it is not surprising

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\* Translators’ Note: This quote from an English language source could not be verified in the original English.

\*\* Translators’ Note: Neither of the quotes from English language source/s could not be verified in the original English.

that the Sioux felt compelled to resist in order to escape the soldiers' threatening guns.<sup>39</sup>

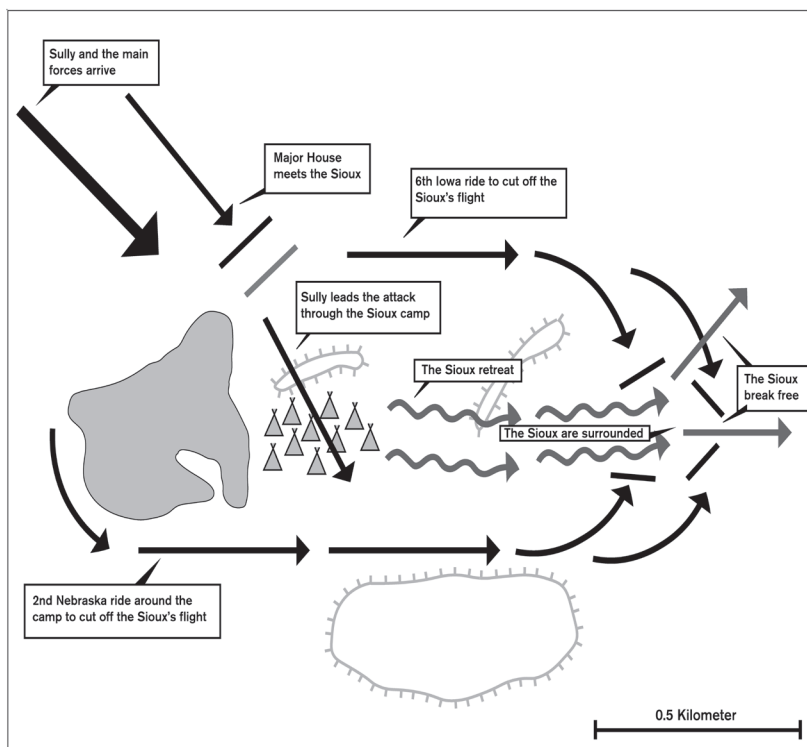
Heavy shooting sounded abruptly from the hollows where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Nebraska blocked the Sioux's departure. The Nebraska regiment's colonel had seen a band of Sioux warriors preparing to meet the cavalry's attack. Therefore, he gave his men orders to dismount and advance in a skirmish line. When they were within firing range of the Indians, the Nebraska cavalry opened fire with their Enfield rifles. The colonel wrote that the shooting was precise and effective and created confusion in the Sioux's ranks, but the Sioux rallied quickly and returned the soldiers' fire "vigorously."<sup>40</sup>

The battle had begun in earnest. The men of the cavalry advanced from several fronts while the Sioux bravely defended themselves. "The air was filled with a loathsome noise of buzzing bullets, the whistle, the wail of the Indian women, children, and dogs, and the Indians' wild war cries," wrote Nils Himle.

Men fell on both sides. The Sioux battled desperately to save their families, and fought back better than they had done in any of the battles against Sibley's column. Both bullets and arrows found their targets among Sibley's blue-clad men, yet the Sioux suffered the larger loss. Several dozen Sioux warriors were killed or injured by the soldiers' bullets. Women and children were also hit. Some of the Sioux said later that it was a massacre.<sup>41</sup>

The soldiers fought primarily on foot, and every fourth man attended to the horses. The 6<sup>th</sup> Iowa's colonel decided suddenly to try a good, old-fashioned cavalry assault with a portion of his regiment. He gave the men orders to mount their horses; they rode out, first at a walk, then at a trot, and finally at a full gallop. It was undoubtedly impressive to see nearly 300 riders race over the battlefield in long, surging lines, but the attack was no great success. The Indians let fire and killed many of the cavalrymen. The men from the 6<sup>th</sup> Iowa were probably also shot by their own men. In the dust and gun smoke, it was not easy to differentiate between friend and foe. The riders in the 6<sup>th</sup> Iowa answered the Sioux's fire as best they could. According to Major House's report, his soldiers shot with terrible power such that the dead Indians and horses lay strewn across the plains. The attack ended quickly, because in the tumult and confusion, the soldiers' horses became so difficult to





*Map 4.4: The Strike at Whitestone Hill, September 3, 1863*

control that the soldiers could hardly shoot from horseback. Parts of the 6<sup>th</sup> Iowa had to pull back in order to dismount from their horses.

As the confusion rang in the cavalry's ranks, The Sioux seized the opportunity, and started a powerful counterattack to break through the ring of soldiers. They threatened both flanks of the Nebraska regiment but were quickly driven back by the soldiers' salvo. The Sioux had better luck against the 6<sup>th</sup> Iowa and managed to create an opening so that the majority of Indian families managed to escape while the warriors battled to keep the cavalrymen at a distance.

The Sioux's flight was aided by the fact that the sun had sunk into the prairie in the west. The combination of dust, gunsmoke, and growing darkness made it increasingly difficult to know who or what one shot at. Many men in the 6<sup>th</sup> Iowa and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Nebraska were hit by bullets from other cavalrymen. Sully soon decided that there was little sense in continuing the battle in the dark and gave his buglers the order to blow the rally signal to regroup. Several bonfires were lit so that it would be easier for the cavalrymen to find their way back. The soldiers made camp beside the battlefield. While the horses were unsaddled and the camp organized, smaller patrols went out to look for missing and injured men who had been left on the battlefield. The field physicians were busy, for there were many injured. Between twenty and twenty-two soldiers are said to have fallen at Whitestone Hill. At least 38 were injured, and some of them died afterward from the injuries they incurred.<sup>42</sup>

Sully wrote in his report that with an extra hour or two of daylight, his troops would have "annihilated" the enemy. Nils Himle agreed. "Had we had two more hours of daylight, we would without a doubt have killed the majority of them." Regardless, Sully thought that his troops had won a great victory. "As it was, I believe I can safely say I gave them one of the most severe punishments that the Indians have ever received," he wrote. According to the whites' estimation, approximately 150-200 Indians – men, women, and children – were killed or injured in the battle. Several Sioux admitted later that they had suffered great losses. Sully's men took an additional 156 Sioux as prisoners, the majority of them women, children, and elders.<sup>43</sup>

The next day Sully sent out reinforced patrols to comb the area and kill or capture as many Indians as possible. One injured Sioux warrior managed to shoot arrows into two soldiers before he was killed, so the soldiers found it best to kill all of the injured Sioux warriors they found, perhaps as many as ten and fifteen individuals.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, Sully made sure to gather and destroy anything of value that the Indians had abandoned when they fled from the camp at Whitestone Hill. "I do not think I exaggerate in the least when I say that I burned up over 400,000 to 500,000 pounds of dried buffalo meat as one item, besides 300 lodges, and a very large quantity of property of great value to the Indians," he reported. Thus, large portions of the Sioux's winter supply went up in flames. Those who had managed to escape the cavalry at Whitestone Hill had a difficult winter ahead of them.

It turned out that the Sioux were far from cowed. Two days after the strike, Sully sent out twenty-seven men to search for a missing unit. About twelve miles from camp, these cavalrymen were suddenly attacked by several hundred Sioux. The soldiers attempted to make a controlled retreat, but when the furious Sioux warriors sprang after them with wild war cries, the soldiers' discipline broke, and they fled back to the camp in a panic. The Indians pursued the cavalrymen until they were just three miles from Sully's camp, killing six of them.<sup>45</sup>

Sully's column left the battlefield at Whitestone Hill on September 6th, and rode southwestward toward Fort Pierre. None of the Norwegian-born cavalrymen had been injured or killed, but Peder Knudsen Ryke from Nes in Hallingdal had contracted pneumonia. He was a bugler in the 6<sup>th</sup> Iowa Company D. Nils Himle recalled, "I can remember, during the night after the battle, that we rode beside one another and he said that he was so happy he was able to be with us and do his duty in the war just like all the others." Peder Knudsen Ryke died at Fort Pierre two weeks later. He was twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old.<sup>46</sup>

The 156 prisoners that Sully took at Whitestone Hill were sent south to the reservation at Crow Creek. Almost all of these prisoners belonged to groups that had peaceful relations with the whites, and they had surrendered without a fight. There were only thirty-two warriors among them; the remaining individuals were

women and children. Even though these Indians could hardly be called “hostile”, they were forced to make a terrible march across the scorched prairie in the burning sun. Several died on the way to the reservation, and the Sioux later referred to the episode as a “death march.”<sup>47</sup>

The same autumn, the half-blood Indian Samuel J. Brown spoke with some of the Sioux who had been present during the Strike at Whitestone Hill. In a letter to his father, Brown retold the Indians’ version of what had happened.

I hope you will not believe all that is said of Sully’s successful expedition against the Sioux. I don’t think he ought to brag of it at all, because it was what no decent man would have done:

he pitched into their camp and just slaughtered them, worse a great deal than what the Indians did in 1862, he killed very few men and took no hostile ones prisoners, he took some but they were friendly Yanktons [...] It is lamentable to hear how those women and children were slaughtered, it was a perfect massacre...

There is reason to believe that there was a kernel of truth in what the Sioux told Brown. The Strike at Whitestone Hill was hardly the glowing military triumph the white officers attempted to portray in their reports. It was a chaotic battle at dusk, with whirling clouds of dust and gunpowder smoke. Under such conditions, it is reasonable to presume that the majority of soldiers fired every time they saw something they thought was an Indian, without regard for age or gender.

The Strike at Whitestone Hill ended the great campaign against the Indians in 1863. Both Sibley and Sully claimed that they had inflicted a decisive defeat upon the Sioux, but what they actually had achieved was uncertain. Sully felt compelled to warn settlers in remote places that there still may be danger of Indian attacks. In time, it would become apparent that the Sioux proved to be focused on fighting the white invaders.

*The Soldiers' Fates*

While Sully's cavalrymen rode away from the battlefield at White-stone Hill, Sibley's column had long since returned to Minnesota. The men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Minnesota Mounted Rangers had only been recruited for one year's service and were discharged after they returned to St. Paul. Mathias Fjellhaugen and two of the Pettersen brothers traveled up the Mississippi to St. Francis, where they were reunited with their families. In St. Francis, they made a living from various small jobs. Among other things, Mathias earned good money by selling wagon wheels that he made himself. A few years later, they returned to their farms by Norway Lake. By that time, the Indians were long gone, so the settlers felt safe on their farms. In the years that followed, the areas around Norway Lake became a flourishing settlement.

Mathias Fjellhaugen settled down contentedly on his farm. He married for a third time and had another child, but the happiness was not meant to last. One day, his oldest son Johannes was accidentally shot during a hunting trip and died after a few days. "It was painful to sit and see the boy lying there, wrestling with death [...] but Our Lord helped me over that too," Mathias later said.<sup>48</sup>

Some years later, during a terrible snowstorm, a fire started in the chimney at Mathias' house in the middle of the night. The family managed to escape in time to save their lives, but Mathias' wife wore only thin nightclothes, and it was a long way to the nearest neighbor. She also carried their young infant in her arms. In fear that the child would freeze to death, she hurried through the driving snow to the neighbor. The child survived, but the mother "took a blow that put her too-early in a grave."

Mathias was now a widower for the third time. He felt terribly lonesome, for apart from his little daughter, his children had grown and moved away from home. Sometime later he was struck by yet another tragedy. A message came that the youngest son Arne, who had left home and found new land farther west, had died from pneumonia.

All of these sorrows were still not enough to drain Mathias' courage for life. "God has given me strength to bear this," he said. Someone who met him in his older days, described Mathias as

“always jovial, clever in his replies, and always original.” After the Civil War, many new immigrants arrived from Sunnhordland and the counties in Kvinnherad where Mathias had grown up, and he was always glad to hear the stories they told from the old country. Even though he was well along in years, he married for the fourth time. His bride was Ingeborg Olsen, “an old gal” from Ringerike. It was said that “she was a sharp and sensible woman who had saved up a good deal of money and took charge of Mathias’ somewhat clumsy affairs.” She is also said to have been a good mother to his youngest daughter. And so it appears that Mathias lived well in his older days, dying on April 2, 1880. He was seventy-six years old.

Sibley’s cavalrymen fulfilled their period of service when the campaign was over, but for the infantrymen the war with the Sioux merely postponed what they originally had been recruited for, namely the war against the Southern states. In October, just two months after returning from the Indian campaign, Ole Paulson’s company was sent south for garrison service in Missouri with the rest of the 9<sup>th</sup> Minnesota regiment.

Paulson no longer enjoyed life as an officer. His health was in decline; he wrote that his digestive organs were “ruined.” Moreover, he disliked the strict military regulations and had come into conflict several times with his superiors. He was once chastised by his captain because of his “unbecoming” conduct with enlisted soldiers in the company. According to Paulson the captain said:

You spend time with them [the enlisted soldiers] as if you were their equal. You relax with them in the tents, sit together in confidential groups. You must remember that you are an officer and in no way their equal. With that kind of fraternization, the soldiers lose respect for you and they thereby also gain control.

Paulson protested. He thought that when they were off duty, the enlisted soldiers were his equals, and he wanted to behave accordingly. But as soon as they were on duty, he became an officer again and they enlisted soldiers. He assured his captain that he had full control over the company when it was required. Paulson

thought that one acquired as much respect from the soldiers by behaving as their equal as one did by emphasizing the distance between officers and enlisted soldiers. "An officer, once he has won his soldiers' good will and good graces, can drive them through fire and water, if necessary," he wrote. The captain knew that he was not going to get anywhere, and said that Paulson could do whatever he wanted.

In the spring of 1864, the company's first lieutenant was struck down by a soldier and was so seriously injured that he could not accompany them on the campaign. Since the captain struggled with health problems too, Paulson was next in line to serve as the company commander during the coming campaign in the Southern states. Paulson disliked the idea of being a company commander in part because of the great effort this role would require, and also because he had problems with his health. Luckily, the captain understood Paulson's situation and suggested that he should resign his commission on account of his poor health. "If you want [to seek resignation] I will help you. There are other healthier bodies who can fill your place." Paulson followed the captain's advice, and thus ended his military career. He had been well liked by his soldier peers by all accounts. In a letter to the newspaper *Chaska Valley Herald*, Paulson's captain wrote, "[A]ll who are acquainted with him greatly regret his departure."<sup>49</sup>

Relieved over having been released from the army, Paulson traveled north to his home in Minnesota. He was now determined to settle down as a farmer. He used the money he had earned as an officer to fix up the farm and buy several animals. "I embraced farming with 'head and hands' as best I could and with a clean conscience," he wrote. He had given up his plans of becoming a pastor. "I was fully convinced that it was not God's will for me to become a pastor."

Yet he was unable to completely stop providing religious edification for his neighbors. The year after his return, he outfitted a section of his house to serve as a schoolhouse and began a Norwegian religious school. There were reportedly upwards of forty students at the school, the majority Norwegian but also some Swedes. He served as the sexton in the congregation. After a while, he saw that life as a farmer was not the right fit for him, and in

1866, he resumed his theological studies at Augustana College and Seminary. Two years later he became a pastor for the Norwegians in Minneapolis. In time, Paulson became a leading figure in the Norwegian American church to which he belonged. He deserved much of the credit for the establishment of the famous theology school Augsburg College in Minneapolis and was known to some as “Augsburg’s Father.” He also became famous as a temperance advocate. He died in 1907.<sup>50</sup>

Many of the other Norwegian immigrants who had participated in the war against the Sioux later fought in the Civil War. Asgrim K. Skaro, the man from Halling who was the commandant in St. Peter during the Indian uprising, traveled to the front in Tennessee as a captain for Company D, 9<sup>th</sup> Minnesota. He distinguished himself in the Battle of Brice’s Crossroads against General Forrest’s feared Southern states’ cavalry, and died a hero’s death on December 15, 1864, during the great Battle of Nashville. The 7<sup>th</sup>, the 9<sup>th</sup>, and the 10<sup>th</sup> Minnesota regiments participated in the decisive attack that crushed General Hood’s Southern states’ army. Hans, the youngest of the Danielson brothers from Drammen, was injured in the leg and had to endure a painful amputation at a field hospital. Several Norwegian-born Indian War veterans fell in the battle: Steingrim Benson, Christ Nelson, Ole Nielsen Eltun (from Valdres) and Hans Oleson, all from the 10<sup>th</sup> Minnesota.

The majority of the soldiers survived both the Indian War and the Civil War and were able to return home to the settler life in Minnesota when the guns fell silent in the Southern states. Many who had done garrison duty in the distant outposts during the Indian War had scouted out uninhabited areas where they wanted to settle down and cultivate the soil. After the Civil War, they found their way back to these places and made claims in keeping with the Homestead Act ratified in Congress in Washington, D.C. in 1862. According to this law, anyone who settled down and cultivated state-owned isolated wilderness, received ownership of the land after five years. Veterans from the Northern states’ army could apply their time as soldiers toward those five years, enabling them to receive ownership earlier.

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\* Translators’ Note: This title could not be verified in English.



Once the Sioux had been driven away, the white settlements spread west at a tremendous speed. In the course of just a few years, the Indians' old hunting lands in western Minnesota were converted to agricultural land; Dakota Territory also received streams of new settlers. Norwegian immigrants were well represented when the whites came and dominated the prairie. Norwegian-born war veterans and newly arrived families from Norway found new homes on the vast plains. Many places in Dakota Territory were clearly influenced by Norwegian Americans, something that is noticeable still today. One can say with a certain degree of certainty that it was these new settlers who conquered the prairie, not the soldiers with their weapons and cannons. When the farmer fenced in his land and set the plow to the soil, the Prairie Indians' world disappeared forever.

### *The Demise of the Sioux*

The Strike at Whitestone Hill was the last significant engagement between Indians and whites east of the Missouri River, but the war with the Sioux was far from over. The proud and free Teton Sioux west of the river had no plans of yielding to the white invaders.

In 1864, General Sully led a new campaign against the Sioux. The goal was to subdue the Tetons west of the Missouri. Sully had many of the same troops who had battled at Whitestone Hill, including the Norwegians in the 6<sup>th</sup> Iowa cavalry. On July 28, the soldiers advanced toward a large Indian camp at the foot of Killdeer Mountain. This time, there was no doubt that the Indians were hostile. They had formed a large camp with well over 1,000 tipis and could muster at least 1,600 warriors who were adamantly resolved to give the white soldiers a warm welcome. Four Horns and his later infamous nephew Sitting Bull were among the chiefs in the camp, as well as the notorious Inkpaduta.

The sun blazed in a clear blue sky as Sully's blue-clad soldiers rode forward over the undulating prairie towards the Sioux camp. The terrain turned so rugged that Sully gave his men orders to dismount and continue on foot. The Indians had long known that the soldiers were on their way and therefore, had plenty of time to prepare for battle. The Sioux warriors must have been an impressive

and colorful sight as they rode out to meet their enemies. Some had long feather ornamentation that hung far down over their backs; others carried headdresses made of animal skins and bison horn with fewer feathers. Their bodies were painted with colorful symbols. Many of the horses were also painted. Some of the Sioux had rifles; others were armed with lances, bows, clubs, or tomahawks. Two of Sully's Norwegians, Niels Jacobsen and S. O. Wilson (Sjur Olsen Vike from Voss), described the battle in a letter to the newspaper *Emigranten*:

These Indians, who are extremely wild and persistent, swarmed around us from all sides on their swift, small horses, in their best ornamentation and painting with bows and arrows as well as better weapons. Sometimes they furiously advanced in a group or also spread out, depending on the signals their chiefs gave. Our cannons and exceptional rifles gave us superiority over them, however. Time after time they made an attack, but were roughly punished and could not accomplish anything against us. A large group of Indians made a detour around a hill and attacked our train from behind; but a section Artillery [2 cannons] [...] traveled in that direction, and the first shell they fired killed 5 Indians and their horses. The right flank was seriously threatened by a large group of Indians; Major Brackett promptly received the order to attack them with his battalion. This he did in a well-organized way, pursuing them for about 2 miles and killed 27 of them; 11 fell to our saber blows alone. The Indians now began to flee, and by sundown there was not an Indian to see on the battlefield.<sup>51</sup>

The Battle at Killdeer Mountain was a searing defeat for the Indians. Over 100 dead Sioux are reported to have been found on the battlefield; the Sioux probably took several additional fallen with them as they fled. The soldiers stormed the Indian camp and

burned the tents, food supplies, and other things the Sioux had left behind. Only two white men fell in the battle.<sup>52</sup>

Even though the whites judged the victory at Killdeer Mountain as a great triumph, it quickly became apparent that it would require a good deal more to break the Sioux's will to resist. In the years that followed, the American army leadership sent a series of expeditions into the heart of Teton Sioux territory, but the Indians had now become more cautious about meeting soldiers on open battlefields and preferred instead to attack isolated outposts and smaller units. The Sioux's resistance was so effective that the army's attempt to establish several permanent forts in the middle of Sioux country in 1866-68 ended in a fiasco. In 1868, the whites determined that it was too expensive to send additional expeditions against the Sioux, and entered into a peace agreement instead. According to the terms of the peace agreement, the army would leave the Sioux's country, and a large area around the mountains in the Black Hills would belong to the Indians for all time.

The peace agreement of 1868 implies something as rare as that the Indians had won a war against the whites. With the famous chief Red Cloud at the helm, the Sioux managed to dispel the soldiers. But it was hardly a lasting victory. Gold was found in the Black Hills in 1874, and the whites' thirst for gold was much stronger than their will to honor the peace agreement. Two years later, new columns of blue-clad soldiers advanced into the Sioux's land.

Under such leaders as Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, the Sioux battled more fiercely than ever to defend themselves against the intruding whites. In the Battle of Little Big Horn on July 25, 1876, they killed General Armstrong Custer and 263 of his men. This was the Sioux's largest victory over the whites, and among those able to experience it were old Inkpaduta and a small group of Santee Sioux from Minnesota. The Santee surely savored this victory as revenge for the fact that the whites had driven them from their homeland.

But the Battle of Little Big Horn was the beginning of the end for the Sioux. The humiliating defeat meant that the American army's prestige was at stake, and large forces were deployed in the hunt for the Indians. One by one, the Sioux's chiefs were forced to lead their people to the reservations and surrender. Among the

last were Crazy Horse and his men, who lay down their weapons in 1877. The same year, Sitting Bull fled to Canada with some of his faithful followers. Sitting Bull remained in Canada until 1881 when he returned to the USA and surrendered.

The Sioux's land was undergoing rapid transformation. Forts, cities, and farms sprang up everywhere. Railroads and telegraph lines crisscrossed in all directions. The open prairie plains where the Indians had hunted were fenced in, and the nearly-eradicated bison were replaced by cows and sheep. The Indians were squeezed together onto small reservations and told to learn to cultivate the meager soil they were allotted.

In 1890 the Sioux made one last desperate attempt to escape the unfree life on the reservation. Actually, it was a non-violent uprising. Instead of fighting the whites with weapons, the Indians aspired to dance themselves into a trance where all the whites disappeared and the Indians' old world was resurrected with open prairies and enormous herds of bison. This was the so-called Ghost Dance religion that had spread across the prairie in the past year, and had become particularly popular among the Sioux.

By autumn, some Sioux began to give the new religion a more martial tone. They made special leather shirts that supposedly made the wearers immune to the whites' weapons. The assertion that a judgment day would come where all whites would be annihilated could be seen as a threat that could lead to an armed uprising. Therefore, the white authorities found it safest to initiate efforts to stop the dancing. The consequences were tragic.

An attempt to arrest Sitting Bull led to an exchange of shots that ended with the killing of the famous chief and his 14-year-old son. The murder of Sitting Bull made the followers of the Ghost Dance religion afraid, and many of them fled the reservation. On December 28, 1890, some of the refugees were surrounded by white cavalymen near Wounded Knee Creek. The Indians surrendered without a fight. But the next day, when the soldiers began to collect the Sioux warriors' weapons, suddenly someone fired a shot. In the confusion that followed, both parties began firing at each other at will. The Sioux fought with the courage of desperation, and killed twenty-five cavalymen, but the Indians had no chance against the whites' superior weapons. Several cannons had

been placed around the camp in advance, and the camp was soon bombarded with shells. By the time it was all over, at least 150 Sioux lay dead in the snow, many of them women and children.<sup>53</sup> The massacre at Wounded Knee is often considered the end of the Indian wars. Thereafter the Sioux had to try as best they could to survive in a world controlled by the whites. For a long time, the American authorities did their best to obliterate the Indians' culture. And only recently in our own era have the Sioux been able to seriously begin the work to save what remains of their cultural identity, and demand compensation for all of the acts of tyranny to which they have been subjected. This work continues.

## Notes

1. Clodefelter, 23-34; Folwell, 400-408; Meyer, 97-98; Anderson, 83-85.
2. Folwell, 266-267; Clodefelter, 90-91; Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 300.
3. Sunnhordland Folkemuseum og Sogelag, *Årbok* (Stord, Norway: 1986), 29-34; Nils Kolle, *Bømlo Bygdebok, Bind 6* (Bømlo: Bømlo Kommune, 1989) 272; Board of Commissioners, vol. 1, 530. (Mathias Johannesen Fjellhaugen appears in the rolls by the name of "Mosier Johnson.")
4. John Danielson, *History of Company G of 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota Volunteers*, no year, Manuscripts, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN, 2.
5. Paulson, 177.
6. Clodefelter, 80-81, 88-90.
7. United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, series I, vol. XXII, part 2, 305-306.
8. Paulson, 177.
9. Sunnhordland Folkemuseum og Sogelag, 34; Kolle, *Bømlo Bygdebok*, 275.
10. Danielson, 3; Anonymous, *Diary of the Sibley Expedition*, 1863, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collections, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN, 6-8; Thomas Jefferson Hunt, *Observations of T.J. Hunt in the Civil War*, n.d.. Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collections, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN,, 5-6; Loren Warren Collins, *Memorandum of Sibley's Expedition 1863*, 1863, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collections, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN, 4-5.
11. Folwell, 268-269; Clodefelter, 94.
12. Heard, 321-327; Folwell, 270-272; Clodefelter, 94-101; Board of Commissioners, vol. 1, 354-355, 521, vol. 2, 297-321; Danielson, 5-6; Anonymous, 11; Hunt, 6-7; *Memorandum of Sibley's Expedition 1863*, 6-7; Loren Warren Collins *Sketch of Sibley's Expedition 1863*, 1888; Dakota Conflict of 1862

Manuscripts Collections, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

13. Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 253, 317; Folwell, 271; Davis, 54-57.

14. Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 298-299.

15. Heard, 325.

16. Board of Commissioners, vol. 1, 521; Heard, 326.

17. Danielson, 6; Sunnhordland Folkemuseum og Sogelag, 34; John Nelson Pettibone, *Diary*. 1863, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collections, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN; Hunt, 7; Oscar Garrett Wall, *Diary of the Indian Expedition of 1863*, 1863, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collections, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN, 34-35.

18. Robert M. Utley *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull*. (1993; repr., London: 1998), 14-25; 52-53.

19. Heard, 327-330; Clodfelter, 101-104; Folwell, 272-273; Board of Commissioners, vol. 1, 522-524 (note), vol. 2, 298-299; Paulson, 186-187.

20. Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 300; Clodfelter, 103.

21. Utley, *The Lance and the Shield*, 52; Board of Commissioners, vol. 1, 534 (note).

22. Board of Commissioners, vol. 1, 522; Heard, 328; Paulson, 187.

23. Collins, *Memorandum of Sibley's Expedition*, 8; Danielson, 7; Clodfelter, 104.

24. Board of Commissioners, vol. 1, 354, 457-459, 522, vol. 2, 300-301, 322-323; Heard, 329-331; Clodfelter, 104-106.

25. Paulson, 187-188.

26. Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 323; Pettibone, 5; Board of Commissioners, vol. 1, 301.

27. Board of Commissioners, vol. 1, 301.

28. Paulson, 191; Board of Commissioners, vol. 1, 354.

29. Danielson, 9; Heard, 332-335; Clodfelter, 110.

30. Board of Commissioners, vol. 2, 320; Paulson, 193; Clodfelter, 110.

31. Danielson, 9-10.

32. Pettibone, 6; Anonymous, 21; Paul D [H] Rosendahl, *Diary* 1863, Manuscripts, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN,

16; Collins, *Memorandum of Sibley's Expedition*, 12; Sunnhordland Folkemuseum og Sogelag, 34-35; Kolle, *Bømlo Bygdebok*, 276; *Minneapolis Tidende*, 27 June 1929.

33. *Emigranten*, 19 January and 26 October, 1863.

34. Sully's Report in United States War Department, series I, vol. 22, part I, 557; Clodfelter, 127-129; Folwell, 278.

35. House's Report in United States War Department, series I, vol. 22, part 1, 564; Clodfelter, 128; Robert M. Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indians, 1848-1865* (1967; repr., Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 274; Frances H. Kennedy, ed. *The Civil War Battlefield Guide*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 1998), 223.

36. Clodfelter, 4, 130-132; House's Report in United States War Department, series I, vol. 22, part 1, 564.

37. *Emigranten*, 26 October 1863; Sully's Report in United States War Department, series I, vol. 22, part 1, 558.

38. Clodfelter, 4, 133; Sully's Report in United States War Department, series I, vol. 22, part 1, 557.

39. C.W. Fogg, *C.W. Fogg Letter*, 7 December 1883, Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collections, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN,

40. Furnas' Report in United States War Department, series I, vol. 22, part 1, 565-568.

41. Carley, 91.

42. Thom Hatch, *The Blue, the Gray, and the Red: Indian Campaigns of the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003), 114; Alvin M. Josephy, Jr. *The Civil War in the American West*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 145; Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, 274; McDermott 1999, 183; Bryant and Murch, 498; King; Whitestone Hill Battlefield State Historic Site, *State Historical Society of North Dakota*.

43. United States War Department, series I, vol. 22, part 1, 560, 565, 567; Carley, 90-91; Clodfelter, 145.

44. Josias Ridgate King, *Letter to North Dakota Historical Society*, In "Biographical Data on Josias Ridgate King, 1863-1916," Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collections, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.



45. Clodfelter, 142; United States War Department, series I, vol. 22, part 1, 568.
46. *Emigranten* 26 October 1863.
47. Clodfelter, 142.
48. Sunnhordland Folkemuseum og Sogelag, 37.
49. Chaska Valley Herald 11 June 1864.
50. Paulson, 197, note; O.N. Nelson, *History of the Scandinavians and Successful Scandinavians in the United States* (Minneapolis: 1889) part 2, 268-269; Clifford E. Nelson, and Eugene L. Fevold, *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), 218.
51. Letter to *Emigranten* quoted in *Aftenbladet* 2 December 1864.
52. Utey, *The Lance and the Shield*, 55-57; Clodfelter, 166-175.
53. Utey, *The Lance and the Shield*, 281-309; Robert M. Utey, and Wilcomb E. Washburn, *Indian Wars* (1977; repr., New York: 1985), 294-301.
54. Brynjar Lia, and Rolf-Inge Vogt Andrésen, *Asymmetri, asymmetrisk krigføring, asymmetriske trugsmål: bruken av asymmetriomgrepet i tryggingspolitisk og militærteoretisk litteratur* (Kjeller, Norway: Forsvarets Forskningsinstitut: 2000), 8.



## 5

### AFTERWORD

My goal has been to present a clear and well-documented narrative. I have chosen to emphasize the chain of events rather than embark on analytical considerations. In this way I hope to have given the reader a good introduction to undertake his/her own analyses and draw his/her own conclusions. Much can be learned from a thorough knowledge of the actual events, and it is this that ought to form the foundation for any serious analysis.

Many of the themes this book raises are quite current today. The prelude to the Sioux Indians' uprising give insights in to some of the problems that ensue when one group of people attempts to force their culture on another group of people. The outset of the war in 1862 showed the gruesome consequences that come when the parties in a war use ethnic arguments to justify acts of tyranny and have dissimilar conceptions of the rules of war. Warfare between the Indians and the whites showed considerable signs of being "asymmetrical warfare," a concept that is well known to today's military, not the least in Iraq.

Asymmetrical warfare is a complex concept. A report from The Norwegian Defense Research Establishment from 2000 reads: "The asymmetry concept is particularly intended to portray situations where the parties are extremely dissimilar with regard to organization, resources, legal status, as well as self-imposed restrictions for warfare."<sup>1</sup> This perfectly describes the war between the Sioux and the whites in Minnesota and Dakota, and many of the problems that accompany asymmetrical warfare are clearly evident in this war.

Both in Vietnam and Iraq, the Americans have experienced how difficult it is to attain measurable results in an asymmetrical war. In Vietnam, this difficulty manifested itself in the infamous

concept “body count,” which is the attempt to measure success by the number of killed enemies. The problem was precisely to define “enemies” and to determine whether the dead really belonged to that category.

In the Americans’ war against the Sioux, we see the same phenomenon. With the lack of fortresses to conquer or armies to annihilate, the American generals constantly emphasized how many Indians they thought they had killed in the various confrontations. But precisely as in Vietnam, a problem emerged with defining the enemy. For, how could they know for sure that the dead Indians had in fact belonged to the “hostile” category? The Americans did not take this problem very seriously in the 1860s; there were few who cared if too many Indians had been killed. For the American military authorities, it was worse that the numbers of killed Indians was unknown (because the Indians took their dead with them off the battlefield), and it was therefore difficult to say what had actually been achieved through the expensive expeditions on the prairie.

The Indians suffered most for the problems that the asymmetry created during the Indian wars. In European wars, where the parties recognized each other as sovereign states, wars could often end in peace agreements that had lasting effects. But since the whites did not recognize the Indian peoples as sovereign nations, the peace agreements did not have the same meaning and permanence. In their hunt for tangible results, the whites continued warfare until – practically speaking – all of the Indians were either dead or completely banished from their old hunting lands and confined to reservations.

*Notes*

1. Brynjar Lia, and Rolf-Inge Vogt Andréén, *Asymmetri, asymmetrisk krigføring, asymmetriske trugsmaal: bruken av asymmetriomgrepet i tryggingspolitisk og militærteoretisk litteratur* (Kjeller, Norway: Forsvarets Forskningsinstitut: 2000), 8.



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