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Article Summary: On one day in 1864 Indians attacked along a line that stretched two hundred fifty miles. Fifty victims died. This raid caused a panic on the Nebraska frontier.

See also the first part of this article, published in an earlier issue:

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Indian Raids Along the Platte and Little Blue Rivers, 1864 - 1865

Leroy W. Hagerty

III

On August 7, 1864, the Indians made a concerted attack upon stage coaches, emigrant trains, freight wagon trains, stations and ranches.¹ Altogether over fifty lives were taken. The line of attack extended from near old Julesburg on the South Platte and reached east down to Kiowa station on the Little Blue River, a distance of about two hundred fifty miles.² The raid was planned and executed with clever military precision. The Indians had assembled in an immense camp on the Solomon River. Here were gathered the Southern Cheyennes, the Arapahoes, and the Sioux, under Spotted Tail and Pawnee Killer. Small war parties were sent out from this camp for the attack on the Overland Route. For several days before August 7, the Indians had been seen moving eastward in small parties. On the day of the attack the Indians passed along the road in small groups, their ponies usually at a walk; the settlers mistook them for friendly Otoes and Pawnees, who often came through the country. Because of this feigned friendliness, many rode up to the savages when otherwise they might have escaped in fright.³

¹Accounts differ as to the date of this general outbreak. Official reports of the military officers give the date as August 8. However, contemporaneous writers state that the attack occurred on Sunday. A calendar for the year 1864 shows August 7 to fall on Sunday.

²Kiowa station was located near the present town of Kiowa, western part of Thayer County.

³F. A. Root and W. L. Connelly, *Overland Stage to California*

The Indians made their first attack at Plum Creek on the Overland Route.⁴ More Indian troubles had occurred here than at any other place along the road. Just east of the station the road ran near the bluffs and the canyons. These afforded concealment for the Indians. When an emigrant wagon or freight train passed, they would rush out, attack them and retreat into the bluffs, where it was almost impossible to pursue and capture the Indians. This was the plan of attack followed in the raid which took place about seven o'clock on the morning of August 7. Two wagon trains, which had been in camp for the night, were the objects of the raid. One of these trains belonged to E. F. Morton of Sidney, Iowa. It consisted of ten four-mule teams, carrying dry-goods, clothing and household goods. The other, a six-wagon train, loaded with corn and machinery, belonged to Michael Kelly of Saint Joseph, Missouri.⁵

Lieutenant Bowen of the Seventh Iowa Cavalry was at the Thomas Ranch, three-quarters of a mile west of the place of the massacre. He saw about a hundred Indians attack the train, completely encircling it. Revolvers were the only weapons that the men had, and very little resistance was offered. Of the Morton train, every man, including

(Topeka, 1901), p. 353; George B. Grinnell, *Fighting Cheyennes* (New York, 1915), p. 149; A. T. Andreas, *History of Nebraska* (Chicago, 1882), p. 1180; John G. Ellenbecker, *Indian Raids of 1860-1869* (Maryville, Kansas, 1929). James Green of Schuyler, a freighter on the Overland Route, states that prior to August 7, the Indians were friendly but were making plans for a general attack. In support of this theory Green states that he was camped eighty miles west of Fort Kearny on August 6, 1864. "Nine of the biggest, blackest war-painted Indians," on good horses, appeared about him. They began bargaining for his "squaw," raising their bids from one to four ponies. He did not think that the Indians would have attacked him that day, for the general attack was premeditated, and this small party would not have started the trouble before the time planned for the general raid.—James Green, "Incidents of the Indian Outbreak of 1864," in *Nebraska State Historical Society Publications*, XIX (1919), 1-7. When one of the settlers on the Little Blue inquired why they were moving eastward, they replied that they were going to Saint Joseph.—Root and Connelley, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

⁴The site of this massacre was a half mile east of Plum Creek station, which was situated on the Platte River Road, about a mile west of the mouth of Plum Creek and thirty-five miles west of Fort Kearny. This place is now in the northwest corner of Phelps County.

⁵Green, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

Mr. Morton, ten drivers and a colored cook, was killed. Mrs. Morton was taken captive by the Indians. All but three of the wagons were burned, and fifty mules were driven away. The men belonging to the Kelly train were all massacred.⁶ The telegraph operator at Plum Creek station telegraphed to Fort Kearny for protection soon after the massacre occurred. Colonel Summers left Fort Kearny at eleven o'clock that night. *The Nebraska Republican* severely criticized Colonel Summers for unnecessary delays at this time. For instance, a two-hour stop was allowed for dinner. And, in spite of the fact that his command was cavalry mounted on fresh horses, eleven hours were consumed in making a thirty-two mile march.⁷

The Indians traveled down the road from Plum Creek until they came to a place known as Fred Smith's Ranch. At about eleven o'clock, sixteen of them attacked the ranch, killed the hired man, burned the store and drove off all but five head of the stock. Two hours before the attack Smith and his wife had gone to Kearny City.⁸

On this and the following day every stage station and ranch between Fort Kearny and Julesburg was attacked and many destroyed. However, few lives were lost, as notice had been telegraphed to all the stations along the line,

⁶*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part II, 612; Andreas, *op. cit.*, 616; James Green, *op. cit.*, p. 5; Ellenbecker, *op. cit.* Writers differ as to the number of people killed in this attack. Lieutenant Flanagan of the Sixteenth Kansas Cavalry, reported that on September 1, 1864, he counted eleven graves of those killed in the massacre.—*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part I, 244. Lieutenant Charles F. Porter stated in a letter to *The Omaha Nebraskan* of August 17, 1864, that Colonel Summers and Lieutenant Comstock made, on August 9, a thorough search of the locality where the attack was made and found the bodies of thirteen men. Many were scalped and horribly mutilated and their clothing stripped from their bodies. Five men were thought to be still missing, also three women and several children, it was thought, had been carried away prisoners. It is doubtful if any of these reports are entirely authentic. It is not known for certain how many people were with the trains, or how many were taken prisoner by the Indians.

⁷*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part II, 722.

⁸Green, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

and the settlers had fled to Fort McPherson or had taken measures to defend themselves.⁹

Between Fort McPherson and Plum Creek several men were killed and scalped. A few miles east of Cottonwood Springs, at the Gillette Ranch, the two Gillette brothers were killed some distance from the house. Their father, in searching for them, was also surprised and scalped. Near Fort McPherson a settler was killed while working in the hay field.¹⁰ At Gilman's Ranch, seventeen miles east of Cottonwood Springs, three men were killed. They were scalped, their bodies badly mutilated and shot full of arrows.¹¹ At Hook's station, a short distance east of Fort Kearny, a train was destroyed.¹²

The attacks along the Little Blue River were even more severe than those made along the Platte. There was no telegraph line through this country to warn the settlers of the Indian outbreak. These attacks centered on the Overland Stage Company's route along the Little Blue River in what is now Thayer, Nuckolls and Clay Counties.

The rich soil, the fine grass and timber of the river bottom had attracted many settlers. Kiowa station was situated on the Little Blue in the western part of Thayer County. Two miles above Kiowa was the Joseph Eubank's Ranch. Four miles farther up was the E. S. Comstock Ranch, then called Oak Grove Ranch, which was near the present town of Oak, Nebraska. Two miles above Oak Grove Ranch was the William Eubank, Sr. Ranch near what was called the "Narrows."¹³ Still farther up was the Kelly or Ewing Ranch, and two miles west of it was the Little Blue station. Liberty Farm station was thirteen miles above Little Blue station. On up the river, at the mouth of Pawnee Creek,

⁹Andreas, *op cit.*, p. 616.

¹⁰Idem.

¹¹"An American Enterprise," *Harpers Weekly*, LI (August, 1875), 324.

¹²*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part II, 613.

¹³The "Narrows" is a mile and a half northwest of Oak, Nuckolls County. This place was so called because a projection of the bluff on the east side of the Little Blue River was so close to the river as to leave a very narrow space for the road.

was Pawnee station. These settlements were all on the north side of the river.¹⁴

The attacks were general along this valley extending east to within a mile of Kiowa station. They took place on the same day as the Plum Creek massacre.

At about four o'clock in the afternoon, twenty Indians surrounded the house at Comstock's Ranch and acted in a threatening manner. Mr. Comstock was not at home, but his family was there with several other people who had gathered at the ranch for protection. One of the Indians who could speak English called to Mr. Kelly to come out of the house. Kelly did not go out but asked the Indians to come to the house and tell him what they wanted. "Oh," said the Indian, "we friendly; no hurt white man; we had fight with Pawnee on Republican, and whipped them; but we lost our provisions and come over to see white man and eat bread."¹⁵ Mr. Kelly and a Mr. Butler went outside, but seeing the Indians were unfriendly, turned, and as they entered the door both were shot in the back and killed. A boy, George Hunt, and a man, William Oberstrander, were near the ranch herding horses for Mr. Comstock. The Indians attacked them and left them for dead; but while the Indians were running off the horses, they ran to the river and escaped under cover of the bank. Oberstrander died three weeks later of his wounds in Seneca, Kansas, but George Hunt recovered, having only a flesh wound. He was recently living at Crete, Nebraska. The next day Mr. Comstock removed his family and a few household goods, thinking the Indians might return; the Indians did return later, and burned the house with all its contents.¹⁶

At Little Blue station was camped a train of about eighty wagons. It consisted of several smaller trains travelling together. One was made up of nine wagons

¹⁴Root and Connelley, *op. cit.*, p. 102; Ellenbecker, *op. cit.*

¹⁵*Nebraska Advertiser*, August 11, 1864.

¹⁶C. W. Wells, *A Frontier Life* (Cincinnati, 1902), pp. 110-113; Albert Watkins (ed.), "Massacre at Oak Grove Ranch" from memorandum of Edward B. Murphy, in *Nebraska State Historical Society Publications*, XIX (1919), 14; Andreas, *op. cit.*, p. 1180; John G. Ellenbecker, *Indian Raids, 1860-1869*.

which belonged to Simonton and Smith. It was loaded with crockery and hardware consigned to George Trich of Denver.¹⁷ It represented a value of over \$22,000. Another mule team of twenty wagons was loaded with liquor. George Constable of Saint Joseph, Missouri, was the wagon master of the entire train. The men had camped for dinner on August 9. The cattle were turned out upon the grass to graze. While the men were preparing their meal the Indians suddenly appeared, killed nine men who were herding oxen and drove off over one hundred fifty head of oxen. They attempted to drive away a herd of eighty mules grazing near the camp but failed. The men unloaded a few of the wagons, hitched some mule teams to them and made their escape, leaving behind their entire stock of goods. During the night the Indians returned and burned the wagons, destroying all the goods which they could not carry away. They broke into cases of liquor goods and scattered the bottles over the ground. They split the heads of kegs and barrels and spilled the contents; opened many cans of coal oil with hatchets and, not knowing what it was, left it undisturbed. Boxes containing dry-goods were also opened, and great bolts of calico and other cloth were carried off or scattered about over the prairie.¹⁸

Another severe attack was made on the afternoon of August 9, on Pawnee Ranch, where some settlers had gathered for protection. Two days previous, a Mr. Burke had been killed and scalped a short distance from this ranch. He was approaching the place with a load of corn, when three Indians met him. They shot him and then scalped him while he was still alive. The people at the house saw the Indians approaching and placed guards in an

¹⁷Root and Connelley, *Overland Stage to California*, 353.

¹⁸*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part I, 241; Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 108; Watkins, *op. cit.*, p. 12; Morton and Watkins. *History of Nebraska*, II, 177, 198. Writers do not agree as to the number of wagons in this train at the Little Blue station. George Constable, the wagon boss of the train, declared them to be two hundred. Ellenbecker gives the number as seventy; also Captain Palmer of the Eleventh Ohio Cavalry who passed the scene of the attack a few days later, states the train consisted of seventy wagons.

upper story of the house, and in the barn. The savages circled about the house and tried to gain entrance to the barn, that they might have some sort of a fortification. They were kept away by the guards in the barn. When they failed, they retreated and took refuge behind a low bank which ran from near the river up close to the house. In this manner they hoped to get within range of the men who defended the house. On raising their heads above the bank, the guards who were in the upper story of the house opened fire and forced the Indians to retreat. After about three hours the Indians withdrew. Realizing that they could not gain entrance and that further attack would be futile, they went out onto the prairie and shot the cattle with arrows. The Indians then went west to Spring Ranch, where they burned the house and a large amount of hay and corn.¹⁹

On the first day of the raid, August 7, the Indians attacked the Eubank family. This attack constitutes the most horrible tragedy perpetrated in all the history of the Indian outbreaks upon the Nebraska frontier.

At the Eubank Ranch, located a short distance east of the "Narrows," there lived two families. They were William Eubank, Sr.; his wife; two daughters, Hannah, twenty, and Dora, sixteen; two sons, James, thirteen, and Henry, eleven; and William, the oldest son; his wife and two children. The elder Mrs. Eubank and daughter, Hannah, were visiting in Iowa at the time of the raid.²⁰

About a mile west of Kiowa station lived the second son, Joe, and a third son, Fred, who was staying with him. These two brothers and John Palmer, brother-in-law of Joe Eubank, were making hay across the river from Kiowa station. Fred was raking hay; Joe had gone down the river in search of more grass, while Palmer had returned to the house. The Indians met Joe, shot him and took his pony, then came up the river, killed Fred and took his horse also.²¹

¹⁹Wells, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-89.

²⁰Watkins, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

²¹Ellenbecker, *op. cit.*

A man named Kennedy, who had lived above Kiowa station, was also killed. When Palmer returned to the meadow he found both brothers dead. They had been scalped and their bodies shot full of arrows. William Eubank, Sr. and his son James had been down to Joe Eubank's ranch.²² The Indians attacked them on their return a little west of Oak Grove. They shot them with arrows and scalped the boy. The ox-team was shot with arrows but went on home, going on down to the river until the hind wheels ran astraddle of a tree. Here the oxen were found seven days later, still alive.²³

In the meantime the Indians had visited the William Eubank, Sr. home at the "Narrows." That day Miss Laura Roper, whose father owned the ranch a mile and a half above the "Narrows," had come down to spend the afternoon with the Eubank family. She had ridden down with Mr. Kelly and the Mr. Butler who were killed at the Comstock ranch.

About four o'clock William Eubank, Jr., with his wife and two children, left to take Laura Roper home, while the daughter, Dora, and two boys remained at home. When they had gone about fifty yards around the bluff, at the "Narrows," the women stopped to wait for Mr. Eubank, who had stopped to remove a sliver from his foot. Just then they heard yells, and believing it to be Indians, they hurried back to Mr. Eubank. He had started toward the house, where the Indians could be seen chasing his sister Dora. Eubank realized he could not reach the house, turned,

²²Watkins, *op. cit.*, p. 21. Laura Roper Vance of Enid, Oklahoma, in a letter to J. G. Ellenbecker of Marysville, Kansas, states that the boy with William Eubank was not the son of James, but a nephew, and that he and Mr. Eubank were killed before reaching Joe Eubank's place. Laura Roper was at the Eubank home when Mr. Eubank and the boy started for the Joe Eubank ranch. On the other hand John Gilbert, an early settler on the Little Blue, declares he helped bury the Eubank family, and states that Henry was the only boy at home at the time of the attack, but that James, and not a nephew, was with his father at the Joe Eubank ranch. Wells, *Frontier Life*, states that there was only one boy at home when the attack occurred; the other was with his father.

²³Watkins, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

and ran toward the river. The Indians pursued and attacked him. When he reached the river, he jumped down the bank and crossed to a sandbar, where he soon died from the effects of his wounds. The Indians returned later and scalped him. According to a letter which Laura Roper Vance wrote to J. G. Ellenbecker, the two boys at the Eubank's home, James and Henry, tried to escape up a small gully but were killed.²⁴ However, John Gilbert, an old settler of Nuckolls County, makes no mention of finding the body of Henry Eubank.²⁵ The Indians attempted to take the sister, Dora, prisoner, but she resisted; so they struck her on the head with a tomahawk and killed her.

By this time Mrs. Eubank, Laura Roper and the two children, Isabelle, age four, and a baby boy about six months old, had hidden in a buffalo wallow. The Indians, having killed everyone at the house, now started west toward the Roper Ranch. In all probability the women would have escaped if the sight of the Indians and the fearful screaming had not frightened the little girl so that she cried out. The Indians, whirling their horses about, went directly to the hiding place of the women. They picked them up, put them on horses, and returned to the house. On the way back they passed the body of Dora Eubank lying in the weeds by the roadside. When they had been at the house but a short time, an Indian rode up with this girl's scalp on a spear, yelling at the top of his voice.²⁶ The Indians proceeded to destroy everything in the house. They broke the stove, dishes, gun; emptied the feather beds and took the ticks with them. At about six

²⁴Ellenbecker, *op. cit.*

²⁵Watkins, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

²⁶Ellenbecker *op. cit.* John Gilbert, who helped bury the Eubank family, states that the girl was not scalped. — Watkins, *op. cit.*, p. 22. *The Omaha Nebraskan* of August 17, 1864, contains a letter from Lieutenant Charles F. Porter of the Second Nebraska Cavalry, written from Fort Kearny, dated August 14, 1864, in which he gives information concerning the Little Blue raids. This information he obtained from the Overland Stage coach bound west from Atchison. Regarding the Eubank girl, the letter states: "Two hundred fifty feet away from the 'Eubank's' ranch was the body of a young woman, stripped of clothing, scalped and horribly abused and then mutilated. She appeared to be about seventeen years old."

o'clock the women were again placed on horses behind the Indians, and they started south. They travelled in this direction all night. At one time a half-breed rode up to Miss Roper and asked her if she was afraid the Indians would kill her. She replied that she was not because she thought if the Indians had intended to kill her, they would have done so at the start. The half-breed then said: "No, I don't think they will kill you; I don't think they will keep you long before they will give you up."²⁷ He also told her that these Indians were Arapahoes and Cheyennes. They rode all the next day; in the afternoon they were joined by a second band, at which time the women were given horses for themselves. The second night the horse on which Laura Roper was riding fell, and Miss Roper's nose was broken. The Indian who had captured her wiped the blood from her face, painted it with a red paint, and then took her on his horse. The party continued southward for two more days and nights. During this time, they made only a few short stops to rest. The only food they had with the exception of one wild turkey which they had killed, was dried buffalo meat. At the time they were captured Laura Roper was carrying the little girl, Isabelle. This gave the Indians the impression that Isabelle belonged to her, and they would not allow the little girl to go to Mrs. Eubank when she cried for her mother.

On the fourth day at about three o'clock they met a second band of about fifty Indians. The Indians donned war regalia and entered the main camp.²⁸ Here the women were turned over to the Indian squaws, who nearly beat them to death. This was the last time Laura Roper ever saw Mrs. Eubank. The baby was allowed to remain with

²⁷Ellenbecker, *op. cit.* Laura Roper afterwards learned that this half-breed was Joe Beralda, and that the Government had hired him as a scout to spy upon the Indians.

²⁸This camp was on the headwaters of the Smoky Hill River in eastern Colorado. One Eye, a Cheyenne, stated that the camp contained two thousand Cheyennes and Arapahoes, and forty lodges of Sioux Indians.—*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part 1, 965.

its mother, but the little girl Isabelle was kept with Laura Roper.

Miss Roper was kept by these Indians for more than a month. They travelled practically all the time and never stayed in the same camp more than two days. These Indians were under the leadership of the Cheyenne chief, Black Kettle, and the Arapahoe chief, Left Hand. During this time Miss Roper was traded by the Cheyennes to the Arapahoes. She remained with the Arapahoes about a week and then she was sold back to the Cheyennes. In another week the Cheyennes sold her a second time to the Arapahoes, with whom she stayed until she was liberated.

On September 11, 1864, Major Wynkoop, commanding at Fort Lyon, held a council with the Cheyennes and Arapahoes on Hackberry Creek, a south branch of the Smoky Hill River. At this council Laura Roper, Isabelle Eubank and Connie Marble, who was captured at Plum Creek, were brought in by the Indians and turned over to the soldiers.²⁹ The rescued prisoners were then taken to Denver. Laura Roper returned to Nebraska Territory and is now Mrs. Laura Roper Vance of Enid, Oklahoma. Little Isabelle Eubank was never returned to her relatives.³⁰

Mrs. Eubank and baby were not so fortunate as Laura Roper. They were held by a band of Cheyennes, who were not present at the council, and thus were not released at that time. During the next nine months they were carried from camp to camp, all the while being treated in the most brutal manner.

About the middle of May, 1865, some Indians were discovered on the north side of the Platte near an Indian village, which was ten miles east of Fort Laramie. Mr. Elston, who was in charge of the Indian village, took a party of Indian soldiers and captured the Sioux chief,

²⁹*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part III, 243 gives the names of the prisoners surrendered by the Indians as: Laura Roper, Isabelle Eubank, Ambrose Asher and Danial Marble.

³⁰Ellenbecker, *op. cit.* gives an interesting and authentic account of the Eubank tragedy. The information was secured from Laura Roper Vance; see also, Grinnell, *op. cit.*, p. 153; Wells, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-108.

Two Face. With them was found a white woman prisoner, who proved to be Mrs. Eubank. During the winter she and her little son had been brought north by the Cheyennes and sold to Two Face and Black Foot. These Indian chiefs had compelled her to labor as their squaw. She was in a wretched condition when she was brought in, having been dragged across the Platte with a rope. She was almost naked and told some horrible tales of the barbarity and cruelty of the Indians.³¹ Mrs. Eubank gave information concerning the location of Black Foot and his village. A party of Indian soldiers went out to capture him. They found the village about one hundred miles northeast of Fort Laramie, and compelled its surrender. The two chiefs, Two Face and Black Foot, were executed.³²

Mrs. Eubank left for her home in Nebraska with a detachment of soldiers who were escorting one hundred eighty-five lodges of supposedly friendly Sioux down the river to Julesburg. The Indians were all well armed with bows and arrows, and most of them had firearms also. On the morning of the fourth day of the march, these friendly Indians, with others who had crossed from the north side of the Platte, attacked the train. In the skirmish which followed four soldiers were killed and four wounded. The Indians lost about twenty. The Indians escaped across the river, and from the hills beckoned the soldiers to follow them.³³

³¹A statement of Mrs. Eubank made at Julesburg, June 22, 1865, giving an account of her captivity among the Indians is printed in the Report of the Joint Special Committee, *Senate Reports, 39th Congress, second session*, p. 91.

³²*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLVIII, Part I, 176. When Colonel Thomas Moonlight sent a telegram to General Connors at Julesburg, that he had captured these chiefs, General Connors answered, "Where are those villains now?" The answer was sent back, "In chains." General Connors in his second wire gave the order, "Hang them in chains." After his message, however, General Connors sent another wire to Colonel Moonlight, "I was a little hasty; bring them to Julesburg and give the wretches a trial." Colonel Moonlight replied, "Dear General: I obeyed your first order before I received your second."—Hebard and Brininstool, *The Bozeman Trail*, I, 150.

³³*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLIII, Part I, 322.

Mrs. Eubank went to her relatives in Laclede, Missouri. She died on April 4, 1913, in McCune, Kansas. Her son, who was taken captive with her sixty-three years ago, now resides in Pierce, Colorado.

Not far from Oak Grove Ranch Theodore Ulig, a boy of seventeen, was killed. He had been down to Kiowa station. On his return, about four hundred yards from his home, he was stopped by four Indians. They shot him and took his pony.³⁴

David Street, a paymaster of the Overland Stage Line, was the first to reach Fort Kearny and give news of the massacre on the Little Blue. The commander at Fort Kearny immediately ordered Captain Murphy, of the Seventh Iowa Cavalry, to go east on the Overland Stage road and investigate affairs.³⁵ Captain Murphy left at once with one hundred forty-five men. The first day out he traveled fifteen miles, the second day, twenty-five miles. He reported no trouble with the savages, but spies watched him continually from the nearby hills. On the third day out they came to a place where eight wagons were encamped. Apparently Indians had surprised the train, for no corral had been formed with the wagons for protection. The savages had killed and scalped the eight men and taken their stock, arms and ammunition. Their bodies were lying in the hot sun, and from appearances they had evidently been dead for some days. The soldiers buried the bodies and went on to Pawnee Ranch. At Pawnee Ranch they found the house pierced with bullets. Several wagon loads of goods were scattered around on the ground. Indians watched them all night and fired at the guards. The next morning Captain Murphy's command was joined by a company of militia. This company was interested in halting the Indian advance eastward. In this group there were two men of particular interest. One was Joe Roper, father of Laura Roper, whose capture has been previously related; and

³⁴Watkins, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 6.

George Constable, who was wagon master of the train which was destroyed near Little Blue station. Captain Murphy placed a strong guard around the camp. The Indians, posted behind trees and mounds, fired intermittently all during the night. Early the next morning about four hundred Indians went south toward the Republican River. Later in the morning the whole command started south in search of the Indians. They encountered about five hundred well armed savages, just south of the place where the old Fort Riley wagon road crossed Elk Creek. Captain Murphy formed a skirmish line, two men in a place and fifty steps apart and ordered an attack. The Indians were driven back about eight miles, but as Captain Murphy had only three days' leave from Fort Kearny and rations for the same length of time, he gave up the pursuit and returned to Little Blue station. The Indians followed the soldiers as far as Elk Creek crossing. Ten Indians and two soldiers were killed in the skirmish. George Constable, wagon master, was one of the men killed. In his eagerness for revenge he had gone too far in advance of the command.³⁶

After the raid, the country along the Platte and the Little Blue, which had been the scene of so much activity, became a desolate region. The Indians retired to their camps on the Solomon River and proceeded to celebrate their recent victories.

George Bent, a half-breed Cheyenne Indian, gave a description of the camps:

At this time, as I rode from one camp to another in this great village, I saw scalp dances constantly going on; the camps were filled with plunder taken from the captured wagon trains; warriors were strutting about with ladies' silk cloaks and bonnets on, and the women were making shirts for the men out of the finest silk.³⁷

³⁶*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part II, 713-765; Root and Connelley, *op. cit.*, p. 354; Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 115; Watkins, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-15, 21-26.

³⁷Grinnell, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

This raid caused a panic on the Nebraska frontier. The residents along the Platte from Omaha to the mountains were terror-stricken. Nearly all of the settlers in the valley of the Platte and Little Blue fled eastward. On August 13 and 14 an almost continuous procession of these fugitives passed through Junction City.³⁸ In their haste people crowded each other on the road. Heavily-loaded wagons, herds of cattle and horses, people on foot and people on horseback crowded down the valley in one solid mass of confusion and hurry. At Junction City the people decided to remain and fortify themselves. The settlers gathered at a log house which William Stolley had built some time before for the protection of his family. A militia organization was formed and guns and ammunition were collected. A cattle guard was erected and fortified, and an underground stable was constructed. At the O. K. store another fortification was also made.³⁹ A wall of sod was laid up around the buildings. At each corner there was constructed a tower of green cottonwood logs, which projected out over the wall, so that those within the fort could observe anyone crawling up under cover of the breastworks on the outside. Sixty-eight men and one hundred women gathered here for protection. Armed parties were sent out each day to scour the country for Indians.

Immediately after the raid on the Little Blue the settlers began to flee south and eastward. The women, children and older men were placed in wagons with the few household belongings they could hurriedly gather together. Within a few days there were over one hundred camped at Marysville, Kansas. People also gathered at Beatrice and Oketo. The people living on homesteads near these towns were afraid to stay on them during the night. The fright of the women and children was intense, and few dared to leave their homes even in the towns.⁴⁰

³⁸Junction City was located at the present site of Grand Island.

³⁹This store was established in 1862 by Koenig and Wiebe. It was located a mile and a half southeast of the present court house of Hall County.—Andreas, *op. cit.*, p. 933.

⁴⁰Ellenbecker, *op. cit.*

Through August the raids grew more numerous along the South Platte in Colorado Territory. General Curtis was besieged with dispatches which complained of the Indian outbreaks and asked for protection. On August 9, Alvin Saunders, Governor of Nebraska Territory, sent the following dispatch to General Curtis:

The difficulty with the Indians in the Platte valley is growing worse every day. . . . General Mitchell demands more men to save emigrants. I understand that the First Nebraska Veterans can be retained, but they have no horses. Could you not authorize a few companies to be supplied with horses? The horses can be had if you say so, and just as soon as our other veteran cavalry battalion is filled, they will want horses, and these, if not longer needed by the First, could be turned over to them, and by thus managing not a single dollar would be lost to the Government.⁴¹

On August 11, George K. Otis, general superintendent of the Overland Stage Line, notified General Curtis that he had stopped mail and passengers and had ordered all stock off the road.⁴² The Overland Route was completely closed by the Indians for over a month. The mail for Denver had to be sent to Panama, across the Isthmus and up the Pacific coast, and from San Francisco by Overland stage to Denver. Freight trains continued to make trips for some time after the stages had ceased to run. But about the middle of the month conditions were such that they had to stop their outfits and wait for better times. This caused a scarcity of food in Colorado, since no supplies were moving westward. Prices rapidly ascended. Flour jumped from nine dollars to sixteen dollars per hundred-weight and then to twenty-five dollars. At the same time the crops on the South Platte and its tributaries were destroyed by a plague of locusts.⁴³ On August

⁴¹*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part II, 626.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 661.

⁴³Grinnell, *op. cit.*, pp. 149, 150; Root and Connelley, *op. cit.*, pp. 330-340; *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part II, 661.

18, Governor Evans of Colorado Territory sent to General Curtis the following dispatch:

The Indians attacked the settlements thirty miles south of this place yesterday, burning ranches and killing families of settlers. We are in danger of starvation, as our sparsely settled population cannot gather their crops, and both lines of our communication are cut. We look to you to keep the Platte line open; otherwise our condition is hopeless. We are doing all we can for defense.⁴⁴

On August 12, 1864, Governor Saunders ordered out the First Nebraska Cavalry. They had been on furlough since June 28. On August 18, the regiment left for Fort Kearny.⁴⁵

Soon after the outbreak General Curtis, with a small force, left Fort Leavenworth for the Platte valley to investigate Indian affairs. At Fort Kearny he met Brigadier General Mitchell, and they organized an expedition against the Indians. On September 1, the command left Fort Kearny for Plum Creek. From here they started south to the Republican. By September 7, they had reached the forks of the Solomon River, where the command was divided. General Curtis with a detachment marched east, and General Mitchell went west. After parting with General Curtis, Mitchell sent out scouting parties to look for the Indians at their favorite camping grounds. Plenty of Indian signs were found, but no Indians were seen. On September 17, the command reached Cottonwood Springs on the Platte and two days later moved up the North Platte River with the intention of finding a band of Brule Sioux in that neighborhood. At the old California crossing they met a small band of Oglala Sioux under the leadership of Two Face. The Indians were friendly, and General Mitchell sent them to Fort McPherson under the protection of a squad of soldiers. From Ash Hollow the soldiers marched north and crossed the North Platte. They scouted up Blue Water Creek, but were too late, for the Indians had fled north-

⁴⁴*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part II, 765.

⁴⁵*Ibid.* p. 671.

west through the sand hills to the headwaters of the Loup forks and Niobrara Rivers. General Mitchell then marched the troops down the river, arriving at Cottonwood Springs September 24. The company had traveled two hundred miles since September 17 and had seen no hostile Indians.⁴⁶

As a result of the Indian raids and of the repeated calls for protection, the military fortifications were greatly strengthened and improved along the Little Blue and Platte Rivers. On September 29, Colonel Robert L. Livingston, of the First Nebraska Cavalry, was ordered to command the eastern sub-district of Nebraska. The reorganization was made under the direction of Colonel Livingston after consultation with General Mitchell.⁴⁷

At this time, 1864, Forts Kearny and McPherson were the only military posts existing along this line of communication. Consequently new posts had to be established. The construction of these new defense stations was accomplished with great difficulty. At each new post quarters and defenses had to be erected; hay and fuel had to be collected. Public transportation was inadequate for hauling these provisions. In some cases fuel and logs for building purposes had to be transported seventy-five miles.⁴⁸ Freighters returning from the west were pressed into service for long-distance hauling. Mowing machines belonging to local citizens were used for cutting hay for winter consumption. Most of the actual labor was done by soldiers. Contracts for the work could not be let because of the fact that laborers had to be guarded against the immediate peril of Indian attack.

Besides the work of constructing new military posts, Colonel Livingston had to supervise the activity of the

⁴⁶*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part II, 691; see also Part I, 243-247; Grinnell, *op. cit.*, p. 149. During the time that General Mitchell was making this campaign, the Indians were in camp south of the Republican River. They undoubtedly knew the location of the troops at all times.

⁴⁷*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part I, 825.

⁴⁸*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part I, 825.

soldiers in protecting the Overland Mail Company's stages, from Little Blue station, Nebraska, to Julesburg, Colorado Territory. The Indians sometimes became so audacious in their raids that a mounted escort of one sergeant and ten men had to be furnished to each stage from Plum Creek to Cottonwood Springs. In addition to this guard duty and to the ordinary patrol work along the Overland road, detachments of soldiers constantly scouted the territory sixty to a hundred miles on either side of the Platte valley for hostilities.⁴⁹

During the fall of 1864 there were no actual raids. The Indians hesitated to attack the soldiers unless they outnumbered them; and there were not enough soldiers to send an expedition against the camps of the hostile Sioux and Cheyennes. But the Indians did make continuous petty war. Late in the afternoon they would make a raid; the soldiers would start to follow them, but darkness would enable the Indians to scatter and avoid a conflict. These night raids were severe enough to cause Colonel Livingston to issue the following order to William Reynolds, General Superintendent of the Overland Stage Lines, on November 27, 1864:

In view of the frequent ambuscades by hostile Indians between this post (Fort Kearny) and Fort Cottonwood, and the fact that nearly all these hostile demonstrations occur after darkness, I deem it essential to the safety of the U. S. Mail and the lives of the passengers in your coaches that you make it incumbent on your division agent to run the coaches between this post and Fort Cottonwood by daylight. I respectfully suggest the hour of four A.M. as a seasonable hour for departure of the coach from this point for the west, and three A.M. for the departure of the coach going eastward from Cottonwood.⁵⁰

Following is a resume of the more important Indian

⁴⁹*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part I, 826, 829.

⁵⁰*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part I, 837.

attacks and of the military operations against the Indians in the fall of 1864:

On September 20, a party of soldiers from Fort McPherson were sent out to gather plums for the sick in the hospital. About three miles from the fort they were surprised by a band of about seventy Indians. Four soldiers were killed; the rest succeeded in escaping to the fort. Troops in wagons were at once sent out to follow the trail. They found the bodies of the four soldiers. They had been scalped, and their bodies were mangled in a horrible manner. The soldiers were unable to find any signs of the Indians and returned to the fort.⁵¹

On September 29, a train of emigrants returning from the west, while encamped two miles west of Plum Creek, was attacked about eight o'clock in the evening. One white man was killed and two wounded. Captain Weatherwax, with forty men, immediately pursued the Indians. They followed them across the Platte, then the Indians scattered, and the trail was abandoned.

On October 2, Captain Stevenson, of the First Nebraska Militia, with thirty men, started in pursuit of hostile Indians reported on the Little Blue west of Pawnee station. He found the trail leading southwest and followed it. He was unable to overtake the Indians so returned to the post. Again on October 6, Captain Stevenson moved up Elk Creek, expecting to join Lieutenant Bremer from Little Blue station. The Indians had ambushed Lieutenant Bremer, killed him, and wounded one of his men. On the approach of Captain Stevenson's force the Indians fled, scattering in such a manner that pursuit was impracticable.

On October 12, the Overland Mail Company's westward-bound coach was attacked about nine o'clock in the evening, by twenty-five Indians secreted in a deserted ranch eight miles west of Plum Creek. The first volley fired by the Indians killed one stage horse instantly. The coach stopped; the guard and the passengers used the

⁵¹Andreas, *op. cit.*, p. 1092; *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part I, 246.

coach as protection and opened fire upon the Indians. After a desperate fight, which lasted two hours, the savages fled. There were two Indians killed and two white people wounded. A detachment of forty men, under Captain Ivory, was immediately sent out from Plum Creek. Captain Ribble, at Mullahla's station, also sent out fifteen men to join Captain Ivory at Plum Creek. Captain Ribble's detachment met sixty Indians; two soldiers were killed instantly; seven succeeded in reaching Plum Creek; the other six were cut off by forty warriors. They dismounted and fought their way back to Mullahla's station, sheltering themselves behind their horses. The Indians lost three killed, one of them a chief who spoke broken English, and several others wounded. The soldiers' loss was two killed, two wounded, two horses killed and ten disabled by wounds.

On October 20, a band of two hundred Indians crossed the Platte River, about fifteen miles west of Alkali station. On the Overland Route they attacked a train, killed one emigrant, and ran off fifty head of oxen. Captain E. B. Murphy pursued them to Ash Hollow. His horses were in such poor condition that he had to return to the post. The Indians followed Captain Murphy back to Alkali station and attacked his post. They were repulsed.

On October 22, Colonel Livingston ordered the prairie south of the Platte valley to be simultaneously fired from a point twenty miles west of Julesburg to a point ten miles east of Fort Kearny. The grass was destroyed in a continuous line of two hundred miles and extended south to the Republican River. This deprived the hostile Indians, south of the Platte, of forage for their stock and drove all the game south of the Republican. The prairie on the north side of the Platte valley was also burned from Mullahla's station to a point twenty-five miles west of Julesburg. The fire extended north in some instances one hundred fifty miles. This for a time checked these small attacks of the Indians, but in the month of November they were again committing depredations upon the Overland Route.⁵²

⁵²*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part I, 829-833.

On November 19, a band of one hundred Indians attacked a train four miles west of Plum Creek at five o'clock in the evening. Captain Majors with twelve soldiers went to the scene of the attack. At the approach of the soldiers the Indians drew up in line of battle across the road and awaited the soldiers. When the troops arrived within one thousand yards, the Indians charged them. The soldiers dismounted and by steady fire repulsed the attack, but not until the Indians had extended their line so as nearly to surround the soldiers. At the approach of Captain Weatherwax, with twenty-five men, the Indians retreated. The soldiers pursued them for seven miles into the bluffs, when it became so dark they could no longer follow the trails.

On November 25, at nine o'clock in the evening, a west-bound coach was attacked four miles east of Plum Creek. Three passengers were wounded. Thirty mounted men were at once sent out from the post. The night was intensely dark, and no signs of the Indians could be found.

Again on November 26, a train of five wagons and twenty men was attacked five miles east of Plum Creek by about seventy-five Indians. The men were poorly armed; they left the wagons and retreated to the post. Two of them were killed and six wounded. Thirty soldiers followed the savages to Spring Creek, a distance of sixteen miles. The Indians sheltered themselves in the deep ravines. A sharp fight ensued, but the Indians could not be dislodged from the canyons. The Indians' loss was three killed, a number wounded and two horses killed. The soldiers had one man wounded and two horses killed. In their retreat the Indians abandoned one horse, a number of spears, and the two scalps they had taken from the murdered men.⁵³

⁵³*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLI, Part I, 839, 840.