



Nebraska History posts materials online for your personal use. Please remember that the contents of *Nebraska History* are copyrighted by the Nebraska State Historical Society (except for materials credited to other institutions). The NSHS retains its copyrights even to materials it posts on the web.

For permission to re-use materials or for photo ordering information, please see:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/magazine/permission.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* and four issues of *Nebraska History News* annually. For membership information, see:

<http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/members/index.htm>

Article Title: The Republican River Expedition, June-July 1869: II. The Battle of Summit Springs

Full Citation: James T King, "The Republican River Expedition, June-July, 1869: II. The Battle of Summit Springs," *Nebraska History* 41 (1960): 281-298

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1960SummitSprings.pdf>
Date: 11/10/2011

Article Summary: The Republican River Expedition against the Cheyenne had to contend with elusive enemies, false alarms and weary troops. Despite all these obstacles the expedition ultimately changed the Republican Valley from an Indian-held wilderness to a region ready for settlement.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Frank North, EA Carr, Tall Bull, Maria Weichell, Susanna Alderdice

Place Names: Julesburg, Nebraska; Fort Sedgewick, Colorado Territory

Keywords: Frank North, Pawnee Scouts, EA Carr, Cheyenne, Dog Soldiers, Tall Bull, Maria Weichell, Susanna Alderdice

Photographs / Images: map of Republican River Expedition sites, Pawnee Scouts, Luther H North at site of battle (1933)

THE REPUBLICAN RIVER EXPEDITION, JUNE-JULY, 1869

II. THE BATTLE OF SUMMIT SPRINGS

BY JAMES T. KING

THE Battle of Summit Springs was one of the most celebrated conflicts between the white man and the Indian in the history of the American frontier. It received national notice at the time,¹ and its re-enactment was the climax of William F. Cody's Wild West Show in Madison Square Garden as late as 1906.² But little of the glamour of Buffalo Bill's show was to be seen in the tired little column pushing through the sand hills of northeastern Colorado early in the morning of Sunday, July 11, 1869.

Major Frank North's fifty Pawnee Scouts had moved out by five o'clock and were followed shortly by the cavalrymen Carr had selected the day before. The supply wagons and their escort quickly fell behind as the smaller

¹ *New York Times*, July 15, 1869, p. 1.

² C. Reckmeyer, "The Battle of Summit Springs," *Colorado Magazine*, IV (November, 1929), p. 218.

This is the second of two articles on the Republican River campaign, developed by Mr. King from a master's thesis completed at the University of Nebraska. The earlier article appeared in the September issue of this magazine.

detachment moved across the hills. By 7:30 a.m. Carr's column had splashed through the twisting Frenchman River "some six or seven times," and was heading directly west.³ During the early morning, there were two reports from the Pawnee that hostile Indians had been seen, and the command had taken up the gallop only to find that the "Indians" were just wild horses.⁴

At about 10:30 a.m., as the column reached the rough country at the breaks of the Platte bluffs, the Scouts again sent back a message, reporting that two horsemen had been seen and recommending that the entire command be taken into a concealing ravine.⁵ This, perhaps, was another herd of horses—but there was too much at stake to risk discovery by the Dog Soldiers. "Great caution" therefore, "was observed by the column, everybody dismounting and leading the horses quickly over the ridges, and down through steep ravines to the 'bottom'" to continue the march.⁶

Soon the hostiles' trail divided into two; one small one led to the right, toward the Platte, while the other, considerably larger, struck out across the hills.⁷ It was apparently a ruse. Carr reasoned that the Indians were as badly in need of water as was his own column, and that they would hardly set off across the dry sandhills to get it. Conse-

³ Journal of the March of the Republican River Expedition . . . , Bvt. Major General E. A. Carr, Commanding, entry for July 11, 1869. (This source will hereafter be cited as Journal of the March, with date of entry.) Records of U.S. Army Commands, Selected Documents, Hq., Dept. of the Platte, Letters Received, 1867-1869. National Archives and Records Service (NARS) Record Group (RG) 98. (This body of records is hereafter cited as NARS RG 98.) Microfilm at Nebraska State Historical Society.

⁴ Report, Bvt. Maj. Gen. E. A. Carr to Bvt. Brig. Gen. G. D. Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98. Hereafter cited as Report, Carr to Ruggles with appropriate date.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Journal of the March, July 11, 1869. NARS RG 98.

⁷ Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98. Both G. B. Grinnell and Luther North claim that there were three trails, and that the cavalry column was here divided into three parts. Cf. L. H. North, "Recollections of Captain Luther H. North," mss., in Letters and Papers of Luther Hedden North, 1874-1935, Nebraska State Historical Society; G. B. Grinnell, *Two Great Scouts and Their Pawnee Battalion* (Cleveland, 1928), p. 194. This same error is found in, among others, Reckmeyer, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

quently, the General gambled on the lighter trail leading to the Platte and "moved directly toward that stream." The column labored on for several more miles through deep, loose sand, nearing the vicinity of Summit Springs.⁸ The Scouts again sent in reports. One party had sighted "a herd of animals in the valley near the stream to the right, while at the same time came a report from the left of Indians seen."⁹

Either might prove to be the Cheyenne camp. Carr decided to detach three companies under Bvt. Col. William B. Royall, accompanied by Scout William F. Cody, to move toward the "animals." In the meantime, the General would lead the rest of the command along the main trail toward the point where the Indians had been reported. Now even pack mules were too great an encumbrance, and Carr sent them back to the wagon train, which was still barely visible in the distance.¹⁰

Both parties took up the gallop. In a few minutes the detachment of Scouts in advance of General Carr's group sent back word that tipis had been sighted. This would have to be the Cheyenne village.¹¹

Briefly, Carr halted. He seemed very pleased at the prospect of at last meeting the elusive Cheyenne for battle.¹² Any victory over the Cheyenne would loosen their hold on

⁸ Summit Springs is located about twelve miles south and four miles east of present Sterling, Colorado.

⁹ Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* This incident was recalled in garbled form by Luther North. He states that Carr, "with a part of the cavalry and five or six of our scouts under Sam Wallace took the trail toward the northwest. Col. Royal [sic] with the rest of the cavalry and Cody as guide took the righthand trail toward the northeast, and my brother with myself and Capt. Cushing and thirty-five of our scouts took the middle trail, leading straight north." (L.H. North, "Recollections . . .," p. 76.) Apparently Major North's advance column was a good distance ahead, and Captain North perhaps assumed that he was following a separate trail. This account is repeated by numerous secondary sources, especially Grinnell, *Two Great Scouts*, p. 194.

¹¹ Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98.

¹² A. Sorenson, "A Quarter-Century on the Frontier, or the Adventures of Major Frank North, the White Chief of the Pawnees," mss., Letters and Papers of Frank Joshua North, 1840-1885, Nebraska State Historical Society, p. 139.

the valley. But if this should prove to be the village of Tall Bull himself, the power of the Dog Soldiers perhaps could be broken with a single powerful blow. The General quickly sent a messenger to Colonel Royall to ask for a company "as soon as he could spare one." Royall immediately sent his strongest company. Again Carr's command set out on the gallop.¹³

For an hour the column travelled at a wearing pace through the hot, loose sand. Still nothing was to be seen of the hostiles. The old doubts began to creep into the General's mind: "I began to think the whole thing was a humbug, and that I would have to follow them across the Platte and across the Railroad to the north"—in which case the chances for a decisive victory would be small indeed. "With little hopes of finding anything," Carr moved his tired, thirsty command forward toward the place where the Scouts had reported seeing Indians. At about two o'clock in the afternoon several Pawnee Scouts signalled to the General to come up with them. Carr galloped up to the advance party. The Pawnee pointed out a herd of animals about four miles away among the hills. The Scouts were sure that they were horses belonging to hostile Indians, but Carr, "having been so often disappointed," was skeptical. "I thought it very possible," he later reported, "it might be buffalo, but, of course, [I] determined to go and see."¹⁴

Despite his doubts, the General could not risk a mistake. He ordered the command to prepare for battle. While the sweating cavalry tightened girths, the Pawnee began stripping for action, wearing only enough of their uniforms to identify themselves as soldiers. Colonel Royall's detachment rejoined the command as it was preparing for battle;

¹³ Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

after a difficult twenty-mile journey, he had found that the "animals" reported were only bushes.¹⁵

Their preparations made, the column moved on. Keeping well hidden in the depressions and ravines between the sand hills, the small command moved rapidly to a position northwest of the point named by the Pawnee. It soon became apparent that this time there had been no error. This was indeed Tall Bull's village.¹⁶

As the troops approached within about a mile of the Dog Soldier camp, concealment was no longer possible. Carr called the command to a halt and ordered a battle formation of two ranks. The General placed three companies in the first rank, and divided them into three parallel columns, double file, with the Pawnee on the left.¹⁷ As a rising wind stirred clouds of dust around the tensely waiting ranks, Carr directed Major Crittenden to take command of the first line, and ordered the bugler to sound the charge.¹⁸

Captain George F. Price, in command of Company A on the right in the front rank, describes that moment:

Only those who were near him could hear the short, sharp notes, but every man saw him going through the motions. That was enough. All knew that there was only one call to

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Grinnell, Vestal, Reckmeyer and others accept Captain North's statement that Colonel Royall and Cody did not return in time for the battle: according to North's recollections many years after the incident, Carr "said he would wait for a while for Colonel Royal to join him, before making a charge on the village. After waiting for perhaps half an hour the General said he would wait no longer . . . and we started." (Cf. L. H. North, "Recollections . . .," p. 77; Grinnell, *Two Great Scouts*, p. 201; S. Vestal, *Warpath and Council Fire* [New York:1948], p. 270; Reckmeyer, *op cit.*, p. 213.) However, there can be little question that, as General Carr states, Royall had rejoined the column before the battle.

¹⁶ Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Captain Price states that the Pawnee were in the center. (G. F. Price, *Across the Continent with the Fifth Cavalry* [New York, 1883], p. 138.)

¹⁸ Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98. According to Brady, the bugler was "so excited that he was unable to produce a note. Twice Carr gave the command. Finally, Quartermaster Hayes snatched the bugle from the agitated musician and sounded the charge himself . . ." (C. T. Brady, *Indian Fights and Fighters* [New York, 1923], p. 171.) Though this story also appears in many other secondary works, it seems to have no basis in contemporary records.

sound then; and away dashed the gallant troopers in one of the most superb charges ever made by the Fifth Cavalry. The spurs sunk deep in the flanks of the good but jaded horses, who, seeming to understand the necessity of the occasion, responded with a magnificent burst of speed.¹⁹

While the leading companies were traveling "at speed" the second rank was following at a fast gallop. Almost a mile had to be covered in the long charge, and the advance became ragged as some of the poorer horses fell behind. The irregular blue line was unnoticed almost until it burst into the long valley that held the Dog Soldier's camp.²⁰

The surprise was complete as the regiment "with ringing cheers" struck the village.²¹ Some of the cavalry "reached the village so quickly that the Indians had little time to saddle or bridle their horses, and many could not even get on horseback."²² Historian Carl Coke Rister presents this picture of the havoc caused by the charge:

... pandemonium reigned. The thunderous approach of the cavalry, screaming women and crying children running here and there to mount ponies or to save some treasured possession, the war whoops of the Cheyenne and the counter-challenges of the soldiers caused great confusion while dust from an approaching storm drove through the village.²³

Captain Price's unit, according to Price's own account, "turned the enemy's left flank, and, dashing to the rear, killed seven warriors and captured three hundred animals," while "Captain Walker, . . . endeavoring to turn the enemy's right flank, encountered an ugly side-ravine, which delayed his progress and permitted a number of the enemy to escape."²⁴

As the first line of cavalry spread destruction through the village, General Carr signalled in the remaining com-

¹⁹ Price, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-9. Even the usually sedate and factual Journal breaks into flowing prose to describe the charge: "All being ready, the trumpets rang out the 'charge' and with hurrahs the column and reserve dashed over the hill. . . ." (Journal of the March, July 11, 1869. NARS RG 98.)

²⁰ Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98.

²¹ Price, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

²² Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98.

²³ C. C. Rister, *Border Command, General Phil Sheridan in the West* (Norman, 1944), p. 150.

²⁴ Price, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

panies. The Cheyenne broke. Those lucky enough to have reached their horses streamed out of the camp in an effort to escape the vicious onslaught of the cavalry. The troops swept back through the camp; one detachment pursued the panic-stricken escapees for about four miles, with "some of their horses giving out at every step, until finally none were able to raise a gallop." Of the thirteen horses lost in this chase, only one was killed by the Indians—the rest died of exhaustion.²⁵

In the meantime, hot fighting still raged in the village. It was certain that there were white prisoners in the camp, and they must be found. The Pawnee Scouts were all over the village, fighting singly and in groups. They were joined by cavalymen to hunt down the hostiles firing from the ravines that led off from the valley.²⁶ The Cheyenne, though fewer in number than had been anticipated, put up a stout last-ditch resistance.

Tall Bull himself, though he could have escaped, determined to die with his tribesmen. "He saw," says Vestal, "that the day was lost—and through his own fault," and had decided to atone for his mistake.²⁷ According to General Carr, Tall Bull "had a little daughter on his horse and one of his wives on another. He gave the daughter to his wife, and told her to take the white woman who was prisoner, and she might use her to make terms for herself when peace was made. The wife begged him to escape with her, but he shut his ears, killed his horse, and she soon saw him killed, fighting."²⁸

The exact way in which Tall Bull met his death has long been a subject of controversy. Credit for killing the chief has been given to Scout Cody, Major North and Lieut. George F. Mason. Of the three, North's claim is the strong-

²⁵ Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98.

²⁶ Sorenson, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

²⁷ Vestal, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

²⁸ Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98.

est.²⁹ In all probability, the story related by Sorenson is essentially correct:

Upon reaching the ravine, [Tall Bull] placed his squaw and child inside where he thought they would be safe, and he then returned to the mouth of the ravine and shot his magnificent steed rather than see him fall into the hands of his enemies.

[The Cheyennes in the ravine] . . . kept Major North and his party at bay for some time. . . . While [the fighting] was still going on, one of the Indians climbing to the top of the bank nearest the soldiers, and raising his rifle slowly over the top of the bank he laid it down on top of the ground, and then poking it up sufficiently to take a sight along the barrell of the weapon he fired directly at Major North but missed him [and disappeared into the ravine] . . . Major North marked well the spot where the Indian had dropped his head out of sight . . . , dropped down on one knee . . . and awaited the reappearance of the Indian's head. Soon the Indian raised his head up to take aim. Major North instantly fired, and the Indian dropped dead without firing. . . . Later in the day the dead chief, Tall Bull, was found in the ravine, directly under the spot where he had climbed up to fire at Major North.³⁰

The importance of the incident lies not so much in who killed Tall Bull as in the significance of his death. There is considerable truth in Stanley Vestal's statement that "when Tall Bull's body fell backwards into that gulch, the power of the Dog Soldiers crashed down with him."³¹ The passing of their strong leader broke the back of the Dog Soldiers' resistance.

After Tall Bull had been killed, his wife and daughter came out of the ravine and surrendered themselves to Major

²⁹ Cody was first given credit for killing Tall Bull by the sensationalist writer E. Z. C. Judson, or "Ned Buntline," and the story was perpetuated by those who wrote under Cody's name. There is even a statement attributed to General Carr, published after his death, which says that Tall Bull, "firing as he charged, . . . [was killed] by Cody's unerring rifle fire . . .," and that when Cody led a horse into camp, "Mrs. Tall Bull said that was her husband's horse." (Quoted in E. J. Leonard and J. C. Goodman, *Buffalo Bill, King of the Old West* [New York, 1955], p. 196.) But the accuracy of Carr's recollection becomes dubious in light of the statement in his report of the battle that the chief had "killed his horse." (Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98.) Mason's claim is found in the highly questionable account in Brady, *op. cit.*, pp. 173-9. Sorenson's account, giving Major North the credit, is the only one that does not conflict with known facts. (Sorenson, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-1.)

³⁰ Sorenson, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-1.

³¹ Vestal, *op. cit.*, 173.

North, who ordered them to the rear where they would be out of danger. The Scouts continued to pour gunfire into the ravine until it was no longer returned; then, cautiously peering over the side of the little canyon, they found eighteen dead Cheyenne. All had fought to the end.³²

Meanwhile a search of the camp had revealed two white women, captured by the Dog Soldiers from the Kansas settlement they had raided in May. One was dead—murdered by the vengeful Indians during the heat of the battle. The other, Mrs. Maria Weichell, was painfully wounded.³³ Mrs. Weichell had been cowering in a lodge, fearing when she saw the Pawnee that she had been freed from the Cheyenne only to become the prisoner of another tribe.³⁴

General Carr posted pickets and made camp to include the entire village as the troops slowly returned from the hillsides and from the futile chase.³⁵ Captain North was among the exhausted soldiers who stopped for water at the little creek that flowed through the middle of the camp. "I will never forget that creek," recalled the Captain years later:

When we came to the village after the fight was over I sat down on the east bank and dipped up a cup of water and drank it. There was a storm coming up. This must have been about five or six o'clock, and just as I was drinking the sun shone through the clouds straight in my face. I dipped up another cup full, when one of my Pawnee boys said "Don't drink that," and pointed up the stream to my left and there about ten feet above me was a dead Indian. His head was crushed in and the water was running right through the wound and down to where I was dipping it up. If you ever saw a sick man I was one.³⁶

With the exception of one soldier slightly scratched by an arrow, the command had not suffered a single casualty. All men were present or accounted for.³⁷

³² Sorenson, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

³³ Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98.

³⁴ Sorenson, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

³⁵ Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98.

³⁶ L. H. North, "Recollections . . .," p. 82.

³⁷ Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869.

General Carr immediately organized his camp. He sent a courier to call in the wagon train and appointed a board to make a preliminary count of captured and dead Cheyenne. Mrs. Weichell was made as comfortable as possible in one of the ambulances.³⁸

The long-approaching storm finally broke in the late afternoon. The "terrible thunder and hail" and the "lightning striking frequently near the command" made a fitting climax to the chaos of the battle. Throughout the evening, troops straggled in through the raging storm; one bolt of lightning struck "a horse while a trooper was astride of him," killing the horse but leaving the rider unharmed. Rain still fell as the wagon train lumbered into camp late that night.³⁹ In his tent, Major North summed up the day in his diary:

Marched this morn at 6 a.m. with 50 of my men and 200 whites with three days rations followed trail till 3 p.m. and came up to the village made a grand charge and it was a complete victory took the whole village about 85 lodges killed about 60 Indians took 17 prisoners and about 300 ponies and Robes etc. innumerable. rained pretty hard tonight.⁴⁰

The rain of the previous night had turned to mist as reveille sounded early the next morning. At five o'clock a.m. a detachment was sent out across the hazy hills.⁴¹ to "see if any Indians were hovering about," while other units were detailed to "count dead bodies and drive in stray animals."⁴²

The warm morning sun had dispersed the mist by eight o'clock, when services were held for the dead captive. She had been identified by Dr. Louis S. Tesson, the command's surgeon, as Mrs. Susanna Alderdice, of the raided Kansas settlement. Mrs. Alderdice was wrapped in lodge skins and robes and placed in a deep grave—away from

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Journal of the March, July 11, 1869. NARS RG 98.

⁴⁰ F. J. North, Diary of the Year 1869, mss., Letters and Papers of Frank Joshua North, 1840-1885, Nebraska State Historical Society. Entry for July 11, 1869.

⁴¹ Journal of the March, July 12, 1869. NARS RG 98.

⁴² Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98.

wolves and coyotes—on the battlefield. The command was assembled at the graveside,⁴³ and an officer “who was a religious man”⁴⁴—there was no chaplain with the command—read the burial service. The grave was filled, and a wooden headboard “with an inscription stating what we knew of her” was placed over it.⁴⁵

After the conclusion of the service, Carr turned his attention to the disposition of the Indian camp. The village, of course, could not be left for further use by hostile Indians. Directing the troops to load everything moveable on the wagons, the General ordered that the torch be put to everything that remained. “There were,” reported General Carr, “160 fires burning at once to destroy the property.”⁴⁶

The proportions of General Carr’s victory became apparent as the work of destruction progressed. The command had seized a tremendous amount of supplies and equipment, of which the following is only a part: 274 horses, 144 mules, 9300 pounds of dried meat, 84 complete lodges, 56 rifles, 22 revolvers, 40 bows and arrows, 50 pounds of gun powder, 20 boxes of percussion caps, 17 sabres, 9 lances and 20 tomahawks. “The above,” Carr observed drily, “will materially reduce their means of killing white people.”⁴⁷

Besides these weapons, the soldiers also had found such things as scalps of white women, household furniture, clocks, quilts, and “papers captured which certify to the high character of certain Indians, who must have degenerated since they were written.” Perhaps the most grisly find was a necklace made of human fingers.⁴⁸

The General’s board reported that fifty-two Indians had been killed on the field, seventeen women and children

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Sorenson, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

⁴⁵ Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

captured, and twenty-five Indian horses killed.⁴⁹ The board's statement served to underscore a fact which by now had become obvious: the General's fears for the smallness of his command had been unnecessary. Even with half his column unable to make the charge, the element of surprise and the forcefulness of the attack had made the battle a complete rout.

Sending ten men off to Julesburg station with dispatches telling of the victory, Carr ordered the bugler to sound the "general call," and the troops assembled for their departure.⁵⁰ The General had little choice in his destination. The horses were in such poor condition that a march to a place as far away as Fort McPherson could hardly be considered. And he had captured so many Indian horses, mules and supplies that he had to reach the nearest point to turn them in. Consequently Carr determined to march for Fort Sedgwick, Colorado Territory, planning "to remain for two or three weeks to rest my animals and cure [their] sore backs."⁵¹

Moving in an easy four-hour march along the South Platte, the command halted for the day on the banks of the river, about sixty-five miles southeast of Julesburg.⁵² On the way, the hot-headed Captain North, for some unknown reason, had again "had words with Gen. Carr," and had decided that he would resign when the command reached the fort.⁵³ Marching slowly along the river, the weary Expedition at last reached Fort Sedgwick on July 15.⁵⁴

Here at Fort Sedgwick, Carr made out the last of his reports of the operations of the Republican River Expedition. The General sent in his list of captured goods, a report on the events of the past few days and the names of

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

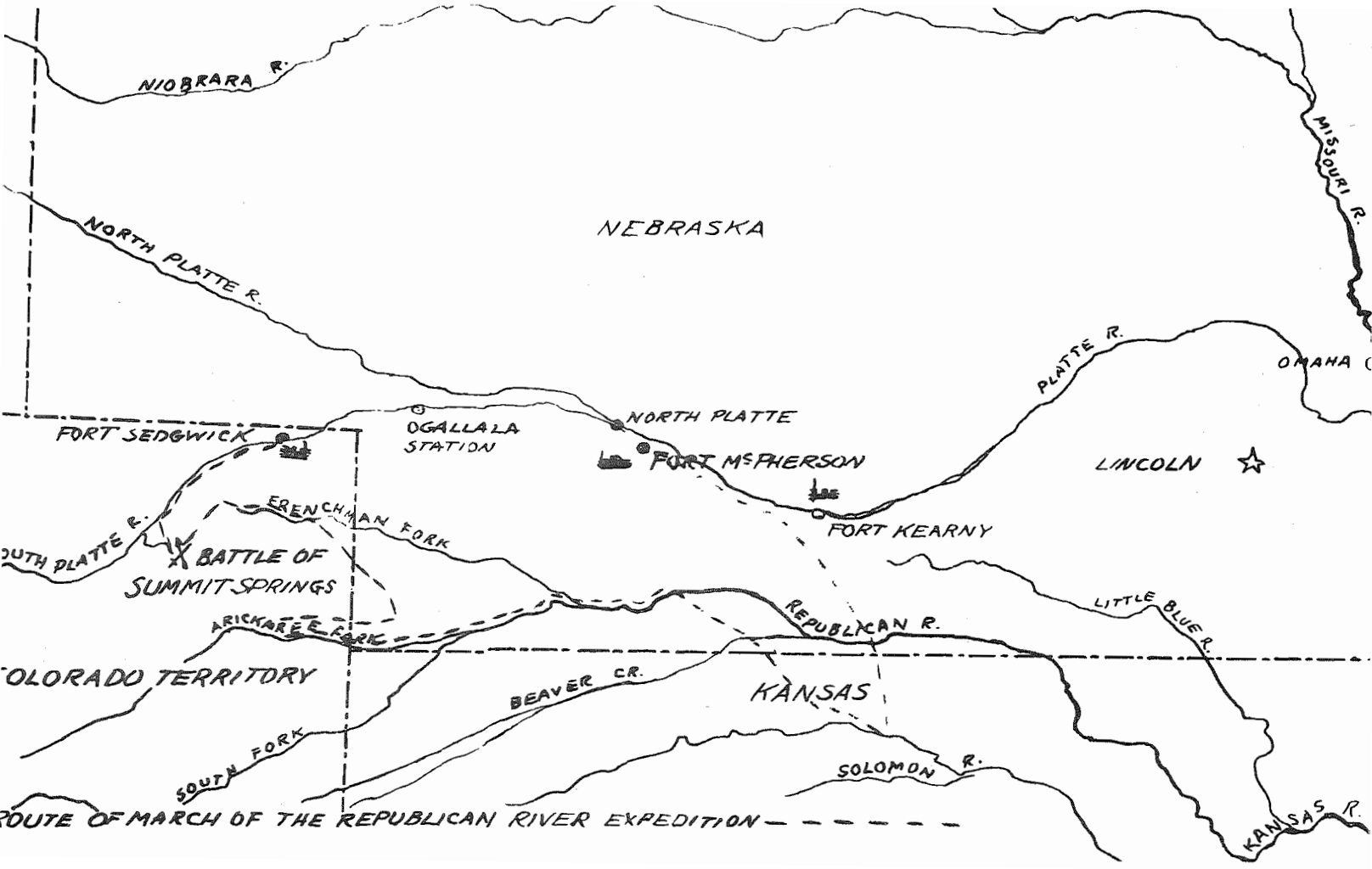
⁵⁰ Journal of the March, July 12, 1869. NARS RG 98.

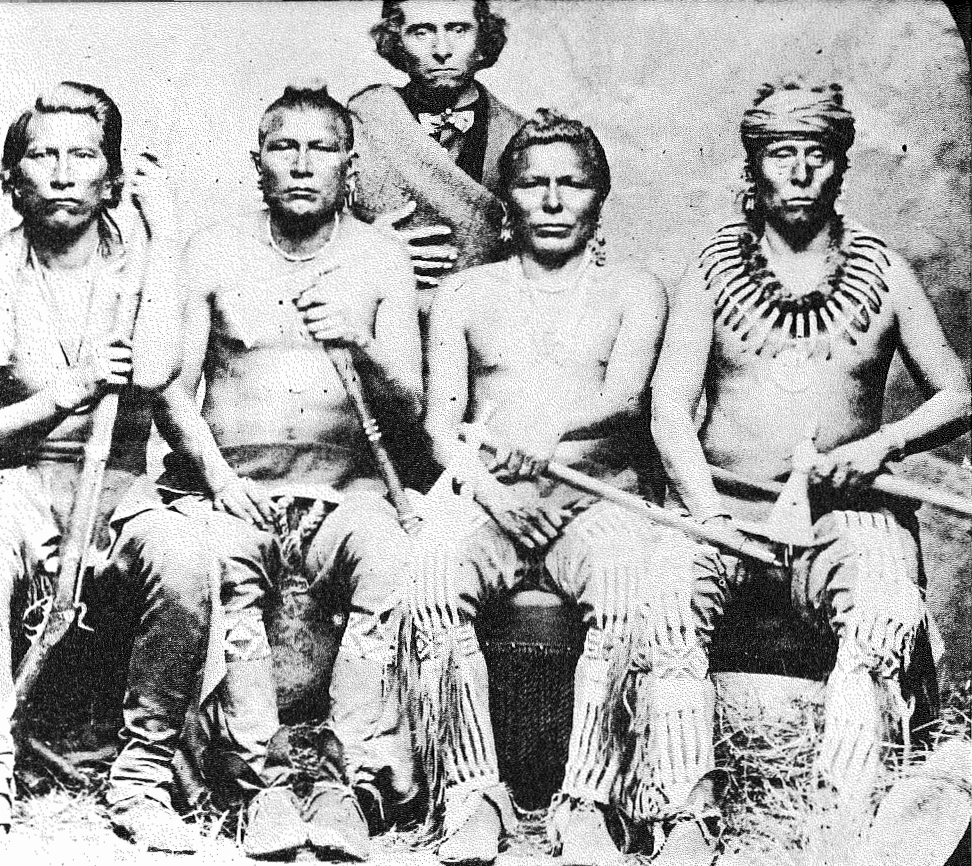
⁵¹ Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Letter, L. H. North to J. C. North, November 28, 1874. Ms. in Letters and Papers of Luther Hedden North, 1874-1935, Nebraska State Historical Society.

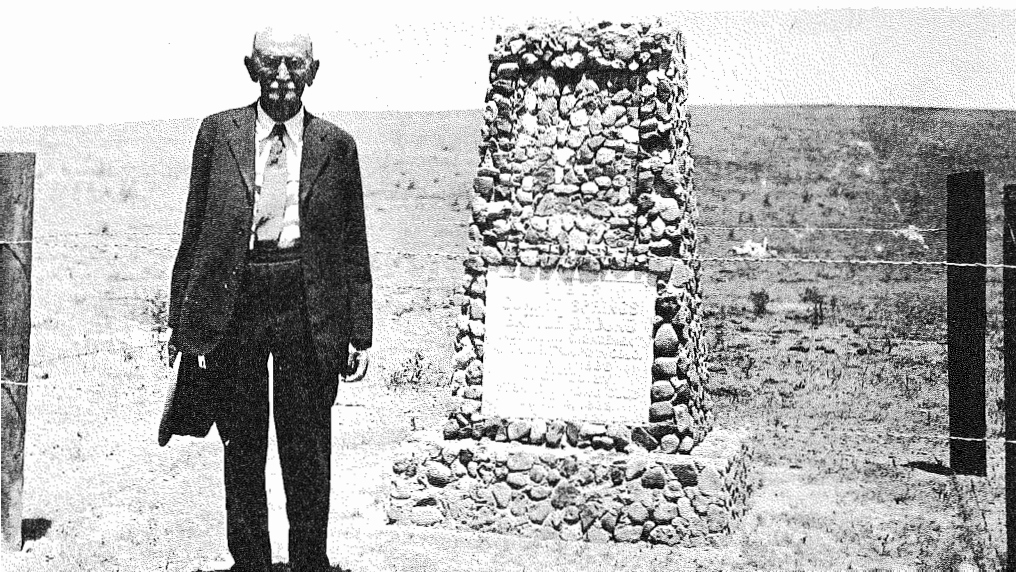
⁵⁴ Journal of the March, July 13, 14, 15, 1869. NARS RG 98.





Above—Pawnee Scouts
(W. H. Jackson photo, courtesy Bureau of American Ethnology)

Below—Luther H. North at Site of Battle (1933)



those men who had distinguished themselves in action: his adjutant, Lieut. Jacob Almy; Lieut. E. P. Dougherty, the acting quartermaster; Lieut. W. J. Volkmar, Cpl. John Kyle, Sgt. Mad Bear, and Major North.⁵⁵

The General's attitude toward Indian troops had changed in the past few weeks. He could now state that the Scouts had been "of the greatest service to us throughout the campaign . . . and the result has shown their value."⁵⁶

General Carr was the man of the hour. While the command was coming into Fort Sedgwick, the *New York Times* gave front page notice to the Battle of Summit Springs:

THE INDIANS
Operations of General Carr—A
Cheyenne Village Broken Up—
The Indians Routed.

"A dispatch from Omaha," said the article, "gives reports from General A. E. Carr of his operations against the Indians. On the 11th instant he surprised a village of 'dog soldiers' and Cheyennes, under command of Tall Bull . . ." Listing the amount of supplies captured, and the number of Indians killed, the *Times* noted that the Cheyenne "had murdered one [captive] whose first name is said to be Suzanna."⁵⁷

Carr's superior, General C. C. Augur, wrote "with great pleasure" of "my own sense of the importance of your success; . . . I add my own congratulations, and express my entire and perfect satisfaction with the whole conduct of your expedition."⁵⁸ Later, in his more official general orders, Augur again tendered "his thanks to General Carr and his command, for their patient endurance of the privations and hardships inseparable from an Indian campaign,

⁵⁵ Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *New York Times*, July 15, 1869.

⁵⁸ Letter, Gen. C. C. Augur to Bvt. Maj. Gen. E. A. Carr, July 17, 1869. NARS RG 98.

and for the vigor and persistency of their operations, so deserving the success achieved."⁵⁹

The commanding officer of the Fifth Cavalry, General W. H. Emory, penned a glowing endorsement on the outside of Carr's report to headquarters:

... I beg to express my highest appreciation of the gallant and brilliant services rendered by Bvt. Major General E. A. Carr, 5th U. S. Cavalry, and the troops under his command, ... and of the Pawnee Scouts under Major North. . . .⁶⁰

Plaudits came from sources other than the military. The purpose of the Expedition had been the relief of frontier settlements, and as soon as the legislatures of Colorado and Nebraska were in session, they passed resolutions of thanks.

By the joint resolution of the Nebraska state legislature, the "thanks of the people of Nebraska" were

tendered to Brevet Major General Carr and the officers and soldiers under his command, of the Fifth United States Cavalry, for their courage and their perseverance in their campaign against hostile Indians on the frontier of this State, in July, 1869; driving the enemy from our borders and achieving a victory at Summit Springs, Colorado Territory, by which the people of the State were freed from the merciless savages."

Thanks were offered also "to Major Frank North and the officers and soldiers under his command."⁶¹

The legislature of the Territory of Colorado was no less laudatory in its resolution of January 25, 1870. Pointing out that "the prosperity of this territory has been greatly retarded during the several years past by Indian warfare, preventing immigration; . . . defenseless women and children of our pioneer settlements have been murdered by savages, or subjected to captivity worse than death," the assembly resolved "that the thanks of the people of Colorado, through the Council and House of Representatives of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Colo-

⁵⁹ General Orders No. 48, Hq. Dept. of the Platte, Omaha, August 3, 1869. NARS RG 98.

⁶⁰ Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98.

⁶¹ Quoted in Sorenson, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-8.

rado, be extended to Brevet Major General Eugene A. Carr, of the United States Army, and the brave officers and soldiers under his command for their victory thus achieved."⁶²

General Carr, of course, was pleased by these expressions of gratitude for the end to Indian terrorism that had so long held back settlement. But the expedition and its victory held for him another significance:

It is a source of extreme gratification to the 5th Cavalry after all our hardships and exposures for ten months in the field, we have at last met with an undisputed success.

. . . We spent a most miserable and depressing winter on the Canadian River, watching our base, and we chased these same Indians in May and fought them twice, losing (4) four killed and several wounded. It may be imagination, but there is a general feeling that the services and hardships of the regiment have not been appreciated for want of any brilliant list of killed and wounded. We have, however, no pleasures in killing the poor miserable savages, but desire, in common with the whole Army, by the performance of our duty, to deliver the settlers from the dangers to which they are exposed.⁶³

Carr, then, viewed with disfavor such slaughter as the Sand Creek Massacre and the Battle of the Washita. Moreover, he felt that such spectacular operations gathered more than their share of credit for a general campaign in which many units had cooperated. The victory at Summit Springs was sweeter because recognition had at last been gained by work long well done but long unnoticed.

General Carr's hour of triumph was marred by personal tragedy. As the victory at Summit Springs was being greeted with commendation from all quarters, Carr received a telegram reporting the death of his child. The grief-stricken General turned his command over to Colonel Royall and left Fort Sedgwick on July 25 on the morning train.⁶⁴

⁶² Quoted in D. F. Krakel, *South Platte Country* (Laramie, 1954), p. 132.

⁶³ Report, Carr to Ruggles, July 20, 1869. NARS RG 98.

⁶⁴ Letter, Bvt. Col. W. B. Royall, Fort Sedgwick, to Lieut. W. C. Forbush, Acting Ass't. Adj. Gen., Dist. of the Republican, Fort McPherson, July 25, 1869. NARS RG 98.

General Emory, at Fort McPherson, had planned to visit the Expedition's camp at Fort Sedgwick to pay his respects to General Carr. When he received a telegram from Carr informing him of what had happened, Emory attempted to see him as the train from Sedgwick passed through, but arrived at the station just in time to see the cars moving off into the distance.⁶⁵

On this unhappy note, General Carr's Republican River Expedition came to an end. There would be two subsequent campaigns, one led by Colonel Royall, the other by General Emory. But the results of both would only emphasize the completeness of the victory at Summit Springs: the Dog Soldiers, now fled far to the north of their valley, no longer had stomach for battle.⁶⁶

The Republican River Expedition must be credited with two achievements. First, it was largely responsible for changing the Republican Valley from an Indian-held wilderness to a region ready for settlement. And second, it had succeeded in overcoming a multitude of difficulties—perhaps not unknown to many such operations—to achieve its goal.

The campaign of the Republican River Expedition was but one facet of the inexorable westward advance of the American frontier. White settlement in the fertile Republican Valley was inevitable—the Indians eventually would have been dispossessed had the Expedition never existed. But in the course of history, the causative factor always has some significance; and it was the Republican River Expedition that removed the Indian threat from the Republican country.

General Carr had been apprehensive of the dangers that might lie in the weaknesses of his command. But he

⁶⁵ Letter, Bvt. Maj. Gen. W. H. Emory to Bvt. Brig. Gen. G. D. Ruggles, July 26, 1869. NARS RG 98.

⁶⁶ Report, Bvt. Maj. W. H. Brown, commanding Company F, Fifth Cavalry, to Capt. G. F. Price, October 3, 1869; Report, Bvt. Brig. Gen. Thomas Duncan to Lieut. W. C. Forbush, District of the Republican, October 7, 1869. NARS RG 98.

accepted them—by no means gracefully—and hoped to make the best of it. As events were to show, however, Carr's greatest fear—that of too small a force for the task at hand—was unfounded, and it proved surprisingly easy to carry the day at Summit Springs.

Within a decade after the campaign had ended, the Republican country was no longer a frontier. The rapidly growing farms and cities of the Republican Valley stood as a monument to the weary little column of cavalry in the sand hills.