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## Article Title: Forgotten Pageant--The Indian Wars in Western Nebraska

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Article Summary: King provides a survey of the military frontier in Nebraska, emphasizing the post-Civil War period when the Indian-fighting Army was most closely associated with the people of western Nebraska. By the 1880s Indian power on the Central Plains had been broken and the Army was abandoning its Nebraska forts.

Errata: The soldier identified as General Christopher C Augur in a Fort Robinson photograph is actually Colonel Jacob Arnold Augur.

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Photographs / Images: Ninth Cavalry at Pine Ridge, South Dakota, 1890; General Christopher C Augur at Fort Robinson (actually Colonel Jacob Augur); William F Cody as a scout; Cheyenne camp near Fort Laramie

# FORGOTTEN PAGEANT—THE INDIAN WARS IN WESTERN NEBRASKA

BY JAMES T. KING

THE dramatic conflicts between the Indian and the white man on the successive frontiers of the United States form a colorful chapter in the nation's history. As each new wave of white population moved westward, the attempts of the Indian to preserve his birthright resulted in a new Indian war. Early in the decade of the 1850's, it was Nebraska's turn to feel the impact of a conflict which would continue intermittently for a quarter of a century.

Although many other states have placed greater emphasis upon their participation in the Indian wars, Nebraska may claim a similar era in her history—one which was often as vivid and stirring as that of any other state. Notable expeditions marched through Nebraska's river valleys and over her plains, battles were fought on her soil, and military posts protected her burgeoning population. Yet the sites of these events are often unmarked and the names of the men who participated in them are often only

*James T. King is Associate Professor of History at Wisconsin State University at River Falls. He delivered this paper to the Spring Meeting of the Nebraska State Historical Society which was held at Ogallala on June 6, 1965.*

dimly remembered. Followed by other such dramatic events as the coming of the cattleman and the farmer and the rise of urban centers, the pageant of Nebraska's military frontier has been largely forgotten.

Any undue neglect is to be regretted, for these were years which—for all the violence and tragedy of Indian war—were both exciting and of significance to the developing state of Nebraska. It is not the purpose of this paper to re-fight these wars bullet-for-arrow, but rather to attempt a survey of the military frontier in Nebraska, with special emphasis upon that period when the Indian-fighting Army was most closely associated with the people of western Nebraska.

Nebraska's involvement in the Indian wars lasted just as long as the period of warfare in the entire Great Plains region—from 1854 to 1890. If the Indian Wars may be called a "pageant," then Nebraska arrived at curtain time and stayed for the whole show. But it was during the late 1860's and the early 1870's that the military frontier was most directly a part of Nebraska's life. And of the entire state, it was the western and southwestern sections that were most directly involved.

The Indian Wars in Nebraska may be conveniently divided into four periods—the first, beginning in 1854, when the primary concern was the protection of overland travel; the second, during the Civil War, when the purpose was to hold the line against Indian attempts to overrun weakened western defenses; the third, after the war, when the Indian-fighting Army began offensive operations to wrest the Central Plains from their Indian inhabitants and thus clear the way for the advance of white population; and the fourth, ending in 1890, when the last flickering embers of Indian resistance were snuffed out.

Before the 1850's, there seemed to be little reason to believe that the region later to become Nebraska might be disturbed by the violence of an Indian war. The region beyond the Missouri River, popularly assumed to be a "Great

American Desert" unsuitable for use by the white man, had been set aside as a permanent Indian domain, and a line of eleven military posts—including Fort Atkinson, Nebraska—was established from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico to protect the frontier.<sup>1</sup> But the Mexican War had given the United States a western coast; gold was discovered in California, Oregon was a region of potential wealth, and thousands of Americans undertook the hazardous journey to the Pacific. Now the Platte Valley had become one of the pathways to the West. With increasing travel over the Oregon Trail and the extension of military power to such new points as Fort Kearny, the first steps were taken towards the destruction of the "permanent" Indian frontier. The next step was the Treaty of Fort Laramie, in 1851, by which representatives of such tribes as the Cheyenne, Dakota and Arapaho were cajoled into permitting the construction of roads and forts in the Indian country. The end of the concept of a permanent Indian domain came with the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which provided for the organization of the Plains into white man's territories.<sup>2</sup>

Thus begins the first period of Nebraska's Indian wars. White population at this time was sparse and confined almost entirely to the Missouri River area. The Territorial boundary was large, extending west to the Rocky Mountains and north to the British possessions. The military frontier in Nebraska was still primarily one of punitive and scouting expeditions, rather than of permanent establishments.

The incident which began the hostilities occurred far to the west, in a part of Nebraska Territory which is now eastern Wyoming. A dispute over a cow belonging to Mormon travelers had brought death at the hands of the Sioux

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<sup>1</sup> Henry P. Beers, *The Western Military Frontier, 1815-1846* (Philadelphia, 1935), pp. 172-3. Other posts in the line were Forts Jesup, Towson, Washita, Smith, Gibson, Scott, Leavenworth, Des Moines, Snelling and Wilkins.

<sup>2</sup> See James C. Olson, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln, 1955), pp. 134-140.

to Lieutenant John Grattan and his small detachment. The Secretary of War, alarmed at the prospect of Indian hostilities, sent an expedition under Brevet Brigadier General William S. Harney into the Platte River Valley. Harney's victory over the Sioux at Ash Hollow, Nebraska, in September, 1855, ended organized Indian opposition for a time, but conditions remained unsettled throughout the decade. A second expedition penetrated into the Republican River Valley in 1858; led by Colonel Edwin V. Sumner—who earned his nickname "The Old Bull of the Woods" by his habit of removing his false teeth to bellow orders above the noise of his dragoon column—the expedition scouted the country as far north as Fort Kearny before returning to Fort Leavenworth.<sup>4</sup> In 1860, Captain Samuel Sturgis of the First United States Cavalry led yet another column into the Republican Valley, where he sparred with the Indians along Beaver Creek and the Republican River, and led a determined but inconclusive fifteen-mile running skirmish in the vicinity of present-day Cambridge, Nebraska.<sup>5</sup> There was not yet a general Indian war in Nebraska, however, the continued harassment of overland traffic and the Pony Express was enough to demonstrate the protest of the Plains Indian tribesmen.

The second phase of Nebraska's Indian conflicts came with the outbreak of the Civil War. Emboldened by the withdrawal of military forces to the east, the Plains tribes began to exert pressure on the line of white settlement. The military frontier now became a defensive one, relying on volunteers rather than regulars, intended to restrain the Indians until the national war had ended. Nebraskans heard with horror of the bloody Sioux uprising in Minnesota in 1862, and the Second Nebraska Cavalry was mustered in to participate with other regiments in a campaign in Dakota Territory. Fearing that Confederate agents were urging a similar uprising on the Central Plains, the Union

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<sup>4</sup> Col. E. V. Sumner, Report of Excursion into Indian Country. St. Louis, Mo., October 5, 1858. LR AGO NARG 94.

<sup>5</sup> Capt. S. D. Sturgis to Asst. Adj. Gen., Dept. of Texas. Hq. Ft. Kearny, Nebr. Terr., August 12, 1860. LR AGO NARG 94.

government strengthened the garrison at Fort Kearny, and sent the Seventh Iowa Cavalry to establish Camp McKean, which later was renamed Fort McPherson.<sup>6</sup>

Nebraskans of today might be surprised at the thought of soldiers from the Southern states fighting Indians in the Platte Valley. Yet former Confederates helped to defend Nebraska's frontier during two critical years of Indian war. By the third year of the Civil War it was clear that some sort of help was needed on the frontier, for the understrength Federal volunteers were becoming increasingly inadequate for the task facing them—late in the summer of 1864, the Cheyenne, Arapaho and Sioux had closed the Oregon Trail for a month, broken telegraph communications, halted mail service and driven white population in terror to the east. Every stage station from Fort Kearny to Julesburg had been attacked in one massive raid. In October, 1864, the desperate troops halted Indian raids for a few weeks by burning the prairie from Fort Kearny to Julesburg and south to the Republican River.<sup>7</sup> Colonel John M. Chivington's vicious attack upon peaceable Indians at Sand Creek, Colorado, only infuriated the hostile tribes more, and it appeared that 1865 might bring a general retreat of white population. Indeed, in January of that year, the Legislative Assembly of Nebraska in a joint resolution sent to the Secretary of War declared "the firm conviction of this body, founded on facts constantly within our observation, that without [increased military protection] everything must be given up to the control of hostile Indians."<sup>8</sup>

But in 1865, sagging frontier defenses were strengthened by six regiments of "Galvanized Yankees." Officially styled "United States Volunteers," these were units made

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<sup>6</sup> Harvey J. Zabel, "History of Fort McPherson," Master's Thesis, Colorado State College, Greeley, 1954; Louis H. Holmes, *Fort McPherson, Nebraska* (Lincoln, 1963).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the letters in *The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, Vol. 41, Part II, 626, 722, 734. Olson, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-2.

<sup>8</sup> *Official Records* . . . , Ser. I, Vol. 48, Part I, 568-9.

up of captured Confederates who were willing to swear allegiance to the Union and fight in the West upon the assurance that they would not be asked to fight their own brethren in the South. In Nebraska, the "Galvanized Yankees" were stationed at such points as Plum Creek (now Lexington), Fort Kearny, Fort McPherson and Camp Mitchell. Although they skirmished and fought with the Indians from the Little Blue River to the border, their signal service in Nebraska was the protection of stage and railroad stations in the valley of the Platte River.<sup>9</sup>

In the decade after the Civil War, the military frontier in Nebraska reached its full development. With the mustering-out of the last of the Volunteers, the Regular Army resumed the task of protecting the frontier, and the professional soldier became an integral part of Nebraska frontier society. Many new military posts were constructed; to the few lonely outposts previously located in Nebraska were added such new installations as Camp Sergeant at North Platte, Fort Sidney, Camp Ogallala at what was then Ogallala Station, Camp Red Willow just east of present-day McCook, Fort Hartsuff and Camp Sheridan. The Army's campaigns against the Indians increased in range and intensity until Indian power on the Central Plains was broken. The third phase of Nebraska's military frontier had begun.

The importance of this martial activity is underscored by the rapid economic and social growth of Nebraska as the territory reached statehood. The Union Pacific Railroad, publicized by the ebullient George F. Train and financed through the uncertain economic structure called the Credit Mobilier, was being rushed to completion. One traveler reported that "the *shibboleth*" of Omahans in 1868 was, "Great is Omaha, George Francis Train and the Credit Mobilier," and he added that "he who was not prepared to swear by this local trinity was jocularly advised to emi-

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<sup>9</sup> D. Alexander Brown, *The Galvanized Yankees* (Urbana, 1963), *passim*.

grate or make his will.”<sup>10</sup> To the west, the railroad had superseded the Oregon Trail as the pathway to the mountains and the Pacific, and Nebraska itself was beginning to beckon to westward-moving pioneers. The image of the Plains as a great “desert” was receding before the enthusiastic boomerism of Nebraska’s growing population. Early in the critical year 1869, the *Nebraska City News* cried a hearty “COME HITHER” to “all ye who seek a new and healthy prosperous home in the strong and sturdy west.”<sup>11</sup> But there were still many who would be unwilling to answer this clarion call until they were certain of safety for themselves and their families.

There was reason to worry. To be sure, for a time after the Civil War, Nebraska had escaped widespread violence. It had been so quiet, in fact, that General William T. Sherman believed Fort Kearny to be worth less than the money it would take to tear it down; “If a fire could accidentally burn up Fort Kearney,” he wrote, almost bordering on suggestion, “it would be a good thing.”<sup>12</sup>

It was another story, however, along the Bozeman Road in Montana, where the Army after enduring conditions of almost constant siege in 1866 and 1867, at last agreed to evacuate. In Nebraska the campaigns soon resumed, and they would last until the 1870’s. Once again, the Republican River Valley became the focal point for military operations. In 1867, for example, Bvt. Maj. Gen. George A. Custer led a detachment of the Seventh Cavalry from Fort Hays, Kansas, into the Republican Valley, then to Fort McPherson and then back into the valley again. He skirmished with Indians on several occasions and had a particularly sharp conflict with the Sioux near present-day Haigler, Nebraska, on June 24.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> J. H. Beadle, *The Undeveloped West; or, Five Years in the Territories* . . . (Philadelphia, 1873), p. 63.

<sup>11</sup> *Nebraska City News*, March 19, 1869.

<sup>12</sup> Asst. Adj. Gen., Div. of the Missouri to Gen. C. C. Augur. St. Louis, Mo., March 23, 1867. LR Div. Mo. NARG 98.

<sup>13</sup> George A. Custer, *My Life on the Plains* . . . (Norman, 1962), pp. 65-112.



Most significant to Nebraska history, however, were the campaigns of 1868 and, especially, 1869 in the Republican Valley. The work of a Congressional Commission had failed to bring peace to the Plains, and 1868 saw many bands of Indians once again on the war-path. In the fall of that year, Bvt. Maj. Gen. Eugene A. Carr led his Fifth Cavalrymen through the Republican Valley on a scout which developed into a five-day running battle with the Sioux and Cheyenne.<sup>14</sup> Presumably Carr had driven the Indians—or at least a fair number of them—to the south, where they were being awaited by General Philip H. Sheridan. Sheridan began his campaign against the Cheyenne and other Southern Plains tribes in the winter of 1868-1869, and ended it in victory at the Battle of the Washita in Indian Territory.<sup>15</sup>

Many of those Cheyenne who had escaped Sheridan's trap now retraced their steps to the Republican, joining several bands of Sioux in the valley which for so long had served as a refuge for Central Plains Indians. But the following summer, 1869, General Carr's Republican River Expedition wrested the valley permanently from the red man in one of the most shattering Indian defeats in the history of Great Plains warfare—the Battle of Summit Springs, Colorado, just west of the Nebraska border.<sup>16</sup> Several months later, in a joint resolution of thanks, the legislature of the State of Nebraska credited the expedition with "driving the enemy from our borders and achieving a victory . . . by which the people of the State were freed from the merciless savages."<sup>17</sup>

Although this was the last major campaign in the State of Nebraska, the 1870's brought both continued scouting and skirmishing and several noteworthy incidents. In

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<sup>14</sup> DeB. R. Keim, *Sheridan's Troopers on the Border: A Winter Campaign on the Plains* (Philadelphia, 1885), pp. 78-80.

<sup>15</sup> Secretary of War, Report 1869.

<sup>16</sup> James T. King, *War Eagle: A Life of General Eugene A. Carr* (Lincoln, 1963), pp. 94-119.

<sup>17</sup> Joint Resolution of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, copy in 467 ACP 1873, Records of AGO NARG 94.

1876, delaying their march to General George Crook's Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition, Bvt. Maj. Gen. Wesley Merritt's column struck the Cheyenne at War Bonnet Creek, near Montrose, Nebraska, where William F. Cody killed Yellow Hand. And in 1878, a wandering group of Cheyenne under Dull Knife, attempting to return to their traditional home, spread an Indian "scare" throughout western Nebraska. But such incidents occurred with less frequency by the end of the 1870's. As white population began to fill the prairies and valleys around the military posts, Nebraska's involvement in the Indian wars was diminishing.

The campaigns in western Nebraska were carried on by many military units—the Second Cavalry, the Eighteenth Infantry and the Seventh Cavalry, for example. But if there is any Regular Army regiment that deserves to be called "Nebraska's Own," it is the Fifth United States Cavalry. More than any other regiment, either regular or volunteer, the "Dandy Fifth" was identified with the pacification of western Nebraska. Usually headquartered at Fort McPherson, the men of this regiment, after ending organized Indian resistance on the high Plains, remained through much of the next decade as a police power to insure the safe and orderly settlement of the state.

The Fifth Cavalry, like many other frontier regiments, resembled a foreign legion in the cosmopolitan background of its personnel. There was Captain Thomas E. Maley, for example, born in Ireland and a veteran of the Civil War and of the Indian Wars of the 1850's.<sup>18</sup> There was Brevet Major Gustavus Urban, who was born in Prussia, served in the Civil War and the Plains Indian wars, and died on duty in Nebraska in 1871. The Fort McPherson cemetery is the last resting place of Captain Jeremiah C. Denney, born in Ireland. The list could be continued almost indefinitely—Captain Robert Sweatman, born in England; Captain John H. Kane, born in Ireland; Captain Emil Adam,

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<sup>18</sup> George F. Price, *Across the Continent With the Fifth Cavalry* (New York, 1883), pp. 404-414.

a stolid, good-humored German; Captain John M. Hamilton, a Canadian; and the remarkable Lieutenant Jules C. A. Schenofsky, a Belgian with French military training who was appointed a captain in the Union Army during the Civil War, accepted a reduced rank to engage in the Plains Indian wars, resigned to serve as a captain of French cavalry in the Franco-Prussian War, was captured by the Paris Commune, had a hairbreadth escape from death, and then retired to the quiet of his ancestral estate in Belgium. Schenofsky's service in Nebraska included posts at Fort McPherson, the Little Blue River, Meridian, the Republican River Expedition, and several battles with the Indians.<sup>19</sup>

The field-grade officers of the regiment—each of whom seems deserving of a niche in Nebraska history—could list impressive qualifications and experience. The colonel of the Fifth Cavalry during much of its time in Nebraska was Bvt. Maj. Gen. William H. Emory. Graduated from West Point in the Class of 1831, Emory was one of the best-known officers of the Civil War Army. In 1848 he completed the earliest reliable scientific account of the American southwest, based on his notes from the march of the Army of the West in 1846-1847.<sup>20</sup> After service in the Plains in the 1850's and a distinguished Civil War career, General Emory served several of his last years in the Army at Fort McPherson in command of the District of the Republican.<sup>21</sup>

A second noteworthy figure is Brevet Colonel William Bedford Royall, who served as a volunteer in the Mexican War, was a newspaper correspondent in the California gold fields, and then became an officer in the Fifth Cavalry when the regiment was organized in 1855. His service in Nebraska included the command of Fort Sidney in the 1870's and of an expedition known as the Niobrara Pursuit which followed the Battle of Summit Springs.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 517-518 and *passim*.

<sup>20</sup> Lt. Col. W. H. Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, House Ex. Doc. No. 41, 30th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington, 1848).

<sup>21</sup> Price, *op. cit.*, 210-223.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 292-298.

Nebraskans of the late 1860's and the early 1870's were well acquainted with the exploits of Bvt. Maj. Gen. Eugene A. Carr, who commanded at various times the District of the Republican, Fort McPherson and, as mentioned earlier, the Republican River Expedition. Like Royall and Emory a veteran of the Plains Indian wars, Carr had served on the early expeditions into the Republican valley in 1858 and 1860.<sup>23</sup>

And no list of figures of Nebraska's military frontier should fail to include the Fifth Cavalry's chief of scouts, William F. Cody. Although his involvement in show business and his numerous ghost-written "autobiographies" have led scholars to doubt much of the Cody legend, the fact remains that "Buffalo Bill" was one of the finest of the military scouts and evidently deserving of the high praise bestowed upon him by such commanders as General Carr and General Sheridan.<sup>24</sup> Cody was still practically unknown when Carr first met him in 1868. In a reminiscence found in Carr's papers after his death, the General described his first meeting with Cody; upon arriving at a Kansas Pacific station called "Buffalo Tank," en route to take command of the Fifth Cavalry, Carr caught sight of "a man in buckskin, with broad-brimmed hat, sitting on a horse on some rising ground not far from the station." In his years in the West, Carr had been exposed to the Nineteenth Century equivalent of the drug-store cowboy, or—as the General put it—"so-called scouts who masqueraded around railroad stations, mostly fakes and long-bow storytellers to tenderfeet," and he adds, "I thought to myself, 'There is one of those confounded scouts posing.'" But Cody behaved in a businesslike fashion, offered to report Carr's presence to the temporary commander Colonel Royall, and to have a horse sent back for him. Still entertaining some doubts, Carr answered "You may if you want to." Cody did. The General soon found that "Buffalo Bill"

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<sup>23</sup> King, *op. cit.*, pp. 26, 31.

<sup>24</sup> See Don Russell's excellent *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill* (Norman, 1960).

was the chief scout for his regiment, and in the months that followed, Cody earned his new commander's highest respect and admiration. In evaluating Cody's character and services, Carr wrote several years later that "He is a natural gentleman in manners as well as in character, and has none of the roughness of the typical frontiersman. . . . His eyesight is better than a good field glass; he is the best trailer I ever heard of . . . He is a perfect judge of distance, and always ready to tell correctly how many miles it is to water, or to any place, or how many miles have been marched."<sup>26</sup> Cody campaigned with the regiment until 1872, and the meeting at "Buffalo Tank" was the beginning of a friendship which was cemented in Nebraska, to last until the General's death in 1910.

Also deserving of mention is a unit almost unique in the annals of the military frontier—the famous Pawnee Scouts, recruited from the Pawnee Agency near Columbus, and officered by its major, Frank North, his brother, Captain Luther H. North, and other Nebraskans. The ethnologist and historian George B. Grinnell once stated that the North brothers "were in the class with Bridger and Carson, and the value of their services in the work of opening and developing the western country can hardly be overestimated."<sup>27</sup>

The Pawnee Scouts began their service towards the end of the Civil War, enlisted first as Nebraska volunteers, then as scouts for the Regular Army.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps their best-known service in Nebraska was with the Fifth Cavalry in Carr's Republican River Expedition. Carr shared the Regular Army officers' mistrust of Indian abilities and was appalled when the Pawnee Battallion was assigned to his command. During the expedition he complained that they were "lazy and shiftless." But by the end of the campaign,

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<sup>26</sup> Letter of Gen. E. A. Carr, Ft. McPherson, Nebr., July 3, 1878, reprinted in W. F. Cody, *The Life of Hon. W. F. Cody* . . . (Hartford, 1879), introd.

<sup>27</sup> In Donald F. Danker, ed., *Man of the Plains: Recollections of Luther North* (Lincoln, 1961), p. xx.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32-37; 40-41; 71.

Carr declared the Scouts to have been "of the greatest service to us,"<sup>29</sup> and in 1876, while assembling his command to march with General Crook, he attempted unsuccessfully to obtain the services of a detachment of Pawnee.<sup>30</sup>

The military men who were serving on the Nebraska plains, and their families, often found the country marvellous and strange. General Custer waxed almost poetic in describing the Plains, "this boundless ocean of beautiful living verdure."<sup>31</sup> Mrs. Eugene Carr used a similar metaphor, stating that until her arrival at Fort McPherson, she had not really "understood what that comprehensive word [Plains] meant. It was like the sea. As far as the eye could reach, vast stretches of vacant land, bleak and nothing in sight." She seemed especially impressed—as were many others—at the absence of trees, and by the air, which she found "clear and bracing."<sup>32</sup>

There were some, however, who were less appreciative. Mrs. Frances Carrington, for example, quoted with some approval J. H. Beadle's description of the Platte River. "The broad Platte," Beadle had written, "

[is] a dirty and uninviting lagoon, only differing from a slough in having a current, from half a mile to two miles wide, and with barely enough water to fill an average canal; six inches of fluid running over another stream of six feet or more of treacherous sand; too thin to walk on, too thick to drink, too shallow for navigation, too deep for safe fording, too yellow to wash in, too pale to paint with—the most disappointing and least useful stream in America."<sup>33</sup>

Somewhat more terse was the comment of General Sherman, who was told when he was serving on the Plains that

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<sup>29</sup> Bvt. Maj. Gen. E. A. Carr to Bvt. Brig. Gen. G. Ruggles. Hq. Republican River Expedition, June 17, 1869. Same to same, July 20, 1869. LR Dept. of the Missouri, NARG 98.

<sup>30</sup> Teleg. E. A. Carr to Asst. Adjt. Gen. Dept. of the Platte, June 4, 1876. LR Dept. of the Platte, NARG 98.

<sup>31</sup> Custer, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Mary P. M. Carr, "Memoirs of Gen. Eugene A. Carr," in Carr Papers, *loc. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> Frances C. Carrington, *Army Life on the Plains* (Philadelphia, 1911), p. 37; Beadle, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

"it was a fine country and all that it needed was plenty of water and good society"—and the General growled, "That is all hell needs."<sup>34</sup>

The fact remains, however, that as frontier military service went, Nebraska was one of the more desirable places to hold station. Even Sherman's comment, it might be noted, is at least a shade more favorable than Sheridan's similar indictment of Texas: "If I owned both hell and Texas," he asserted, "I'd rent out Texas and live in hell."<sup>35</sup> The Fifth Cavalry always welcomed a return to its Nebraska station, and Fort McPherson was palatial in its accommodations when compared to the ramshackle exile of Fort Apache or Fort Abraham Lincoln. Contrary to the Hollywood stereotype, the typical western post was not surrounded by a log stockade and high battlements; most frontier forts were rather more like Fort McPherson, with buildings gathered into a rude rectangle around a central parade ground. By 1869, Fort McPherson had become a substantial and attractive post. Homes for the officers were as comfortable and stylish as any to be found on the military frontier, and the native Nebraska red cedar woodwork—polished to a deep sheen—was the pride of many an Army wife.<sup>36</sup>

But military accommodations in Nebraska varied widely. Camp Mitchell, near Scottsbluff, was unenthusiastically described by one Army wife as "peculiar and compact." As a matter of fact, this particular fort would have pleased the Hollywood scenario writers, for Camp Mitchell was stockaded—true to the stereotype, it was a log rectangle with loopholes for defense, with quarters built against the wall, surrounding a small parade ground.<sup>37</sup>

Still less comfortable was the camp at Plum Creek, which held a small detachment—usually one company—in

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<sup>34</sup> Carrington, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>35</sup> Mody C. Boatright, *Folk Laughter on the American Frontier* (New York, 1961), p. 164.

<sup>36</sup> Carrington, *op. cit.*, 212.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.



Ninth Cavalry at Pine Ridge, South Dakota, 1890





COL. JACOB

General Christopher G. Augur at Fort Robinson



William F. Cody as a scout



Cheyenne camp near Fort Laramie

temporary structures of logs and sod.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps least attractive of all was Camp Ogallala, a one-company tent post near the railroad station. The wife of Major Andrew S. Burt, shortly after her arrival at Ogallala, was horrified to find "two soldiers carrying a tent pole from which was hanging a line of horrible rattlesnakes—yes, veritable rattlers that had been killed on the site where our tents were to be placed." Mrs. Burt added that the Major solved the snake problem at Camp Ogallala by surrounding their tent with a hair rope which, presumably, the snakes did not care to cross.<sup>39</sup>

There were many kinds of frontiers in the American west—including those of the cattleman, the farmer and the miner—but alone of all of them, the military frontier had its own extinction as its goal. It existed for the purpose of ending the conditions which made it necessary.<sup>40</sup> By the decade of the 1880's, those conditions had been ended in Nebraska, and the military frontier in the state was drawing to a close. One by one, the forts were abandoned and left to the elements—or to the settlers, who often used the materials for their new homes. There would be one more flurry of activity in 1890 at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, and for a few months the activity in Nebraska recalled the past years of the military frontier. Nevertheless, the military exodus continued. In post after post—whether Fort Sidney or Camp Ogallala or Fort Kearny—the scene was the same: the last retreat was sounded, the last salute was given, the flag was drawn down the staff for the last time. The garrisons marched out once again into the Nebraska prairies, but this time they would not meet the proud Indian warrior of the Plains—their rendezvous now was with history. Where the Pony Express had once carried the

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<sup>38</sup> Lt. Col. H. W. Wessels to Asst. Adj. Gen. Dept. of the Platte. Hq. Ft. Kearny, August 19, 1866. LR Dept. of the Platte, NARG, 98.

<sup>39</sup> Merrill J. Mattes, *Indians, Infants and Infantry* (Denver, 1960), pp. 176-177.

<sup>40</sup> James T. King, "The Military Frontier—What Was it?" *The Westerners' Brand Book* (Chicago), February, 1965.

mail there were now railroads and telegraph lines. Where columns of blue-coated soldiers had marched there were now cornfields, cities and cattle ranges. The Indian Wars in Nebraska had ended.