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Article Summary: John Colby Griggs, a Galvanized Yankee (a former Confederate who chose frontier military service under Uncle Sam rather than internment in a prison camp), kept a diary of the Sawyers Wagon Road Expedition of 1865. This account greatly enhances understanding of this expedition and the new wagon road west.

Cataloging Information:

Names: James A Sawyers, George W Williford, Thomas G Stull, Michael McCann, George W Bailey, James W Marshall, Daniel W Dana, John Colby Griggs, John R Wood, Richard H Sneath, James E Wilson, H P McGinnis, Henry D Marshall, Homer Worden, John Swan, Baptiste Defond, William F Raynolds, Uriah J Breshears, George Bent, Nathaniel D Hedges, Patrick E Connor, James Harvey Kidd, Lucyann Griggs, Cora Bradish

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Photographs / Images: John Colby Griggs; Confederate prisoners of war at Camp Douglas, Illinois, where several companies of the Fifth and Sixth US Volunteers were recruited in 1865; James A Sawyer; Map with dotted line marking the route of the Sawyers Wagon Road Expedition of 1865; Niobrara River, Cherry County, near Valentine; George Bent with his wife, Magpie, a niece of Black Kettle, 1867; Drawing of Fort Reno, late 1867, by Anton Schonborn



John Colby Griggs. (NSHS-MS3942)

A GALVANIZED YANKEE ALONG THE NIOBRARA RIVER

Edited by R. Eli Paul

INTRODUCTION

In 1865 a new wagon road west seemed like a good idea to the businessmen of Sioux City, Iowa. Gold had been discovered in Idaho Territory, which included what is now Montana, in 1864. Money was to be made not only in the gold fields, but also at the Missouri River supply depots hundreds of miles to the east. Sioux City felt it could offer the most

direct overland route, at the expense of Council Bluffs and Omaha. The proposed route was to follow the Niobrara River westward, then turn north to the Powder River country of Wyoming to meet the Bozeman Trail to Virginia City in present-day Montana. The advantage seemed obvious on a map: a route hundreds of miles shorter than the Platte Valley route to Fort Laramie. The disadvantages were less apparent: a relative unfamiliarity with the territory; resistance by Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho Indians who frequented the Niobrara Valley; and

the lack of support facilities (road ranches, military forts, telegraph lines) comparable to those found along the Platte. Despite these factors, the United States Congress appropriated \$50,000 to outfit the Sawyers Wagon Road Expedition for 1865.¹

Led by Sioux Citian James A. Sawyers, formerly an officer in the Iowa Northern Border Brigade, the civilian party consisted of fifty-three road builders or "pioneers" with fifteen wagons, five emigrant wagons, and a freight train of thirty-six wagons formed by enterprising Sioux City

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merchants. Vital to the expedition's success was its military escort. Assigned to this duty were Companies C and D of the Fifth United States Volunteers, about 150 infantrymen commanded by Capt. George W. Williford. Other officers included 1st Lt. Thomas G. Stull and 2d Lt. Michael McCann (Company C) and Capt. George W. Bailey, 1st Lt. James W. Marshall, and 2d Lt. Daniel W. Dana (Company D).² The Fifth U.S. Volunteers were no ordinary Union soldiers. A significant portion of the regiment was composed of "Galvanized Yankees," Confederates who had chosen frontier military service under Uncle Sam rather than internment in one of his prison camps. They had enlisted in the United States Army and were expected to abide by its rules and regulations. Loyal Union officers commanded them. Galvanized Yankees saw duty throughout the Plains, trying to wrest back the initiative seized by several Indian tribes after the departure of regular army units to the eastern

Civil War battlefields.³

One such Galvanized Yankee, late of the Confederate Army and the Alton, Illinois, prison camp, was John Colby Griggs. Born February 14, 1837, in Jackson County, Missouri, Griggs enlisted in May of 1861 in a volunteer regiment of the Confederate Missouri State Guard. He was wounded and taken prisoner at Newtonia, Missouri, in October 1864 and spent the next several months in Union hospitals. Agreeing to join the United States Volunteers, he was released from confinement in March 1865. His date of enlistment on company muster rolls is given as April 3; the Civil War ended a few days later. Griggs was assigned to Company D, Fifth U.S. Volunteers, and sent west.⁴

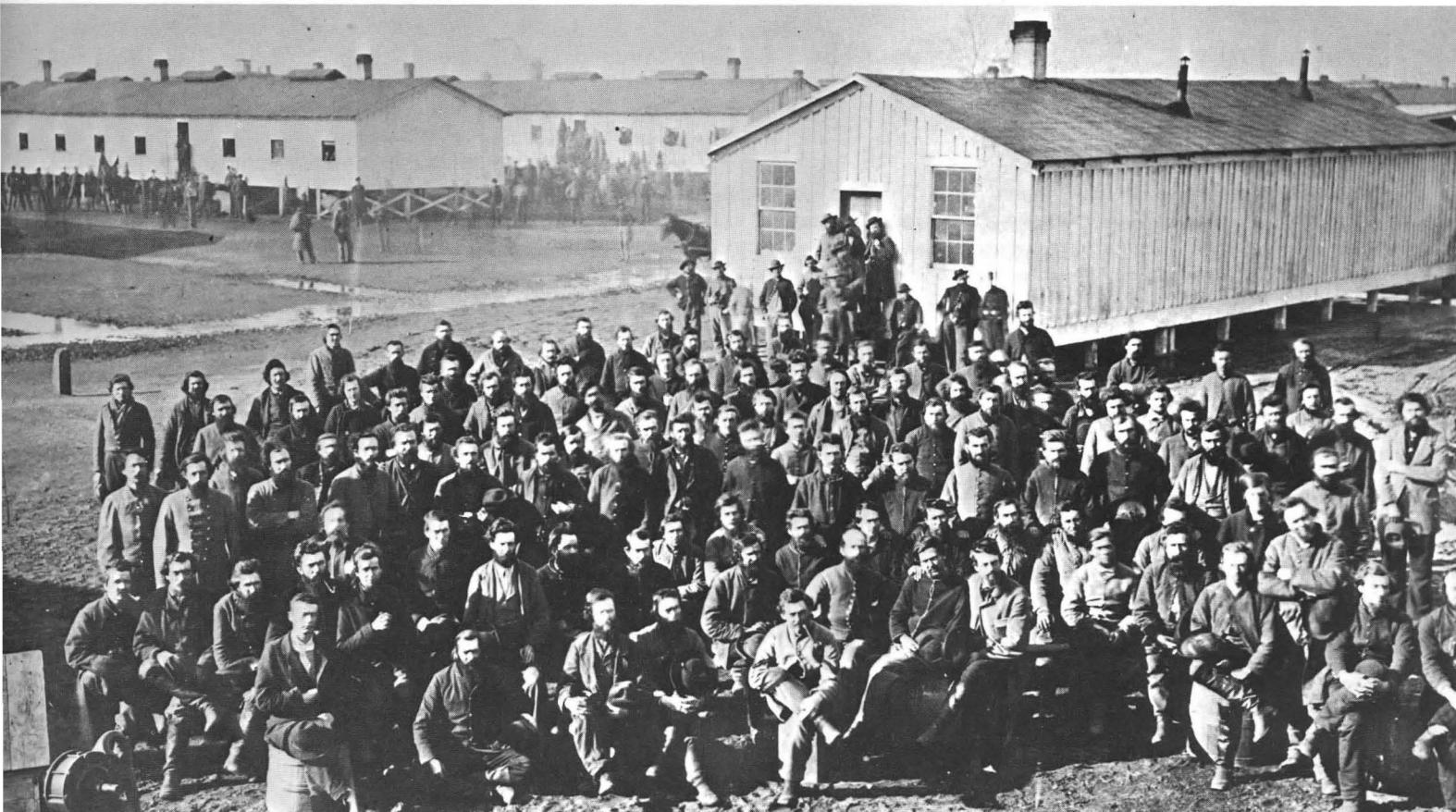
Few written accounts exist for the Sawyers Wagon Road Expedition of 1865.⁵ A daily journal kept by an anonymous participant and published soon after the expedition's conclusion appeared in the *St. Louis Missouri Republican*.⁶ John Colby Griggs kept a

diary, too, a typescript of which can be found in the Nebraska State Historical Society Archives.⁷ Comparison reveals that the two documents are nearly identical, Griggs being the author of both. The typescript, transcribed directly from his original diary and less prone to a newspaper editor's heavy hand, contains added details — some of which may have been considered uncomplimentary to the expedition.

Discrepancies between the two versions were resolved by checking the typescript against the newspaper version and a copy of the original journal. Griggs's spelling and punctuation had been corrected by previous editors; additional corrections were made by the editor of the following account.

Griggs's account enhances understanding of the Sawyers Expedition. It is a terse counterpoint to Sawyers's ebullience. Sawyers, like any successful government contractor, had to be a good salesman. His official report was a soapbox for extolling the virtues of his road. Griggs had no such vested

Confederate prisoners of war at Camp Douglas, Illinois, where several companies of the Fifth and Sixth U.S. Volunteers were recruited in 1865. Courtesy of Chicago Historical Society.



interest. For him, the expedition was probably a typical one for a frontier soldier: long stretches of monotony punctuated by moments of terror.

All these efforts and the government's \$50,000 went for naught. Although Sawyers successfully retraced his route in 1866 and brought another train to Virginia City, his road was already obsolete. The Union Pacific Railroad was relentlessly pushing west across Nebraska. Unfortunately for Sawyers and Sioux City business interests, a wagon road paralleling its route was unnecessary and impractical.

The Griggs account — and the expedition — began on June 13, 1865. Companies C and D had been transported from Sioux City to the mouth of the Niobrara River by the *J. H. Lacey*, a Missouri River steamer, reaching the town of Niobrara on May 11. Also included in the escort were two small artillery pieces and a twenty-five-man detachment of Company B, Dakota Calvary, a volunteer unit commanded by 1st Lt. John R. Wood. Together with Sawyers's road builders they broke camp and headed west.

THE ACCOUNT

Tuesday, June 13, 1865. Broke camp at Niobrara, N[ebraska]. T[erritory], and marched 4 miles, encamping on the Niobrara River, with abundance of wood and grazing [was] good.

Wednesday, June 14. Started on the march about 7 o'clock, a.m., and marched about 3 miles, camping on Verdigris Creek [in present-day Holt County].⁸ Several of the Puncas accompanied us through the march today. Very good grazing for cattle, wood and water plentiful.

Thursday, June 15. Struck camp about 7 o'clock a.m. and marched 5 miles, camping on a small creek where there was excellent grass for cattle, and wood and water in abundance.

Friday, June 16. Marched early in the morning, and proceeded this day about 8 miles, camping about 2 miles from the Ponca [Ponca Indian] agency, in a good



James A. Sawyers. Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa — Special Collections.

grazing bottom.⁹ During the march we were visited by a heavy shower of rain, accompanied by hail; notwithstanding, the sun came out immediately after, oppressively hot, and the dust blinded men and animals. Today we lost two men by desertion, R[ichard H.] Sneath and J[ames E.] Wilson, both belonging to Company D.¹⁰ A few of the Puncas came into camp trading moccasins for tobacco and begging provisions.

Saturday, June 17. Broke camp early and marched through a fine country, 13 miles, camping on Louse Creek [in present-day Holt County].¹¹ Several of the Puncas accompanied us through the march today. Very good grazing for cattle, wood and water plentiful.

Sunday, June 18. Remained in camp throughout the day for the double purpose of resting animals and men and the proper observance of the Sabbath.

Monday, June 19. Broke camp about 7 o'clock a.m. and marched through a very pretty prairie country about 15 miles. The early part of the day was pleasant, but the afternoon was rendered very disagreeable by clouds of dust in the rear of the train. A few buf-

falo was discovered at a considerable distance today.

Tuesday, June 20. Started on the march early, and after passing two branches, which detained the train three or four hours, encamped on a beautiful creek; marching about 13 miles. There were quite a number of deer and antelope in sight during the day. Two or three run directly through the train. Several shots were fired at them by the marksmen of Company C, but without effect.

Wednesday, June 21. Struck camp early and marched about 13 miles. Struck the Niobrara (or Running Water) about 2 o'clock but was unable to cross in consequence of the depth of water and quicksand. Countermarched and encamped on a small stream in an excellent grazing bottom about 4 miles from last encampment. A few antelopes in sight today but no buffalo.

Thursday, June 22. Struck camp about 7 a.m. and marched about 20 miles. The day was oppressively hot, and it being the longest march we had had, a few of the men gave out the last few miles. Encamped in a fine grazing bottom on a small creek, but no wood.

Friday, June 23. Broke camp early, and marched about 14½ miles, encamping in a fine grazing bottom on Long Pine Creek [in present-day Rock County]. There was abundant evidence of Indians having encamped here recently. This has also been a very warm day.

Saturday, June 24. Broke camp about 8 o'clock and crossed the creek marching only about five miles. Pitched tents on the finest campground since we started, close to the Running Water. Today was the first time we had to take off the ammunition chests to cross the creek.¹² The march today did not exceed six miles.

Sunday, June 25. Laid over for the benefit of man and beast. The day was a fine one and was spent partly in fishing and washing clothes. The religious element in the whole party appears to lie

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dormant if really any ever existed in their composition.

Monday, June 26. Was on the march at the usual time and passed through a rolling prairie, about 18 miles, camping on a very fine creek in a good grazing bottom. The day was cool with a good wind and a fine day for marching.

Tuesday, June 27. Struck camp at the usual hour and continued the march through a rolling prairie about 12 miles, camping on a small stream not worth the appellation of river, creek, or run, and not very good grazing for cattle. Today two of the mule teams gave out. Sun very hot but a cool breeze throughout the day.

Wednesday, June 28. Got under way later than usual in consequence of rain, which returned at intervals throughout the day. Camping in a valley totally devoid of wood, buffalo chips providing a substitute. Tolerable grazing. The march extended about twelve miles and a half.

Thursday, June 29. Broke camp about 7 o'clock. Marched through a fine country 22 miles, camping in an excellent grazing bottom on Niobrara River. Nothing disturbed the monotony save the appearance of two antelopes, which passed within about 100 yards of our harmless marksmen without injury. The day was cool and very good weather for traveling.

Friday, June 30. Previous to leaving camp we buried some provisions in order to relieve the mules of a portion of their burden. Marched 21½ miles, camping on Snake Creek [in present-day Cherry County], a very fine stream but little or no wood or grass for cattle. During the day we passed unmistakable traces of Indians being recently about; towards the afternoon we came upon where the redskins had encamped within two weeks to the number of one or two hundred. Mules and cattle want rest.

Saturday, July 1. Struck camp some-

what later than usual and had proceeded but a short distance when the cattle and mules gave token of failing. Marched 14 miles when we were compelled to abandon the wagons and with the men and mules and cattle made camp for the night on the Niobrara River, 8 miles from the wagons, making on the whole march 22 miles. The sun was oppressingly hot, the road heavy as the march ran through a sandy country, and there was considerable suffering among the men for want of water.

Sunday, July 2. A platoon from each company left camp about 7 o'clock for the wagons to accompany them on the march. The remainder of the two companies, with the artillery and three or four wagons, left camp about 9 o'clock to form a junction with the balance of the train. After proceeding about 3 miles halted and received information that a portion of the train were slowly advancing, the balance having to remain in consequence of mules and cattle

Dotted line marks the route of the Sawyers Wagon Road Expedition of 1865.



playing out. Marched about 8 miles and encamped again on the Niobrarah River on a good grazing bottom. The day was very hot. The thermometer ranged from 101 to 104 degrees. Sergeant H. P. McGinnis was brought in late in the evening having been sun struck during the day.

Monday, July 3. The remainder of the train was brought into camp today. The sun was very hot; and one of the principal events of the day was the spilling of two barrels of whiskey by order of the commanding officer in consequence of two or three men being intoxicated. Sergeant [Henry D.] Marshall and Corporal [Homer] Warden were reduced to ranks on the charge of drunkenness.

Tuesday, July 4. Laid over again today to recruit the exhausted animals belonging to the train. The sun excessively hot. One of the escort

named [John] Swan distinguished himself by shooting and bringing into camp an antelope which he had the generosity to distribute among his Co. D. This was the first capture made by our gallant marksmen.¹²

Wednesday, July 5. Broke camp earlier than usual, about 4 o'clock. Took up the line of march through a rolling sandy prairie country. Proceeded about 8 miles, and camped close to a small stream formed by the junction of three or four springs of water. Although the march was short and the weather not excessively hot, the ox train was considerably behind in reaching camp. Shortly after we pitched tents, we were favored with quite a refreshing shower of rain which continued at intervals throughout the night.

Thursday, July 6. In consequence of continued wet weather, the march was delayed until about 8 o'clock. For about

3 miles, we passed through a succession of hills or what is termed here as rolling prairie, such as we have for the last ten or twelve days, when we reached a beautiful level valley which was welcomed by man and beast. Marched up the valley about 9 miles and encamped on the Niobrarah River, making in all today 12 miles. The morning was very cool and delightful for traveling, but towards noon the sun came out oppressively hot.

Friday, July 7. Reveille earlier than usual, about 2 o'clock, but did not leave camp till about 7 o'clock; marched over a rolling prairie about 5 miles when we struck again a level plain which we continued up ten miles, making 15 miles during the day, and encamped on the Niobrarah River about 2 o'clock in the p.m. The day was quite pleasant, being somewhat cloudy with a cool breeze. Grazing here was very good. About sun-

Niobrara River, Cherry County, near Valentine. (NSHS-C521-05D2)



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down we was visited with a heavy shower of rain accompanied with heavy thunder and vivid lightning.

Saturday, July 8. Start on the march about 8 o'clock. The road on the whole today was good, interspersed with hills and valleys; the day was pleasant, a good breeze blowing from the northwest. No wild animals in sight today. About 2 o'clock encamped in the immediate [area] of Niobrarah River, having added 12½ miles on our journey; another shower about sundown accompanied with thunder and lightning.

Sunday, July 9. Remained in camp again to rest the animals; good grazing and water. Occasionally sprinkling rain during the day; about 6 p.m. there was one of the most beautiful rainbows. There was several young American eagles captured here by one of the teamsters. The day passed quietly as usual without religious exercises.

Monday, July 10. Broke camp somewhat earlier than usual and marched about 8 miles to the Niobrarah River which we crossed and immediately struck the road made by Lieutenant [Gouverneur Kemble] Warren in 1855 from Fort Randall to Fort Laramie, which continues very distinct;¹³ following this road 4 miles we encamped on the Niobrarah about 2 o'clock, making 12 miles in all. Very poor grazing for cattle.

Tuesday, July 11. Started rather late, and marched 15½ miles encamping on a small branch close to the Niobrarah. Several antelopes in sight today, but none were bagged.

Wednesday, July 12. Broke camp about the usual hour, and after proceeding about a mile halted for the purpose of procuring a supply of wood for the next encampment. Today the guide encountered a few Indians in front, and, after exchanging shots with them, captured two ponies when they left.¹⁴ Camped in a very pretty level with a small supply of standing water and very good grazing, making 6 miles. Quite a large number of antelopes in sight today, two or three were shot by the horsemen of the train.

Thursday, July 13. Was on the march about the usual hour. The road on the whole might be said to be very good; the sun very hot. Many antelopes in sight again today; much ammunition was expended upon them, but without effect. Encamped on a hill in the vicinity of some pools of water, making a march of 14 miles. Grazing very good.

Friday, July 14. The march today distinguished by being one of the most circuitous we have had; scarcely a point of the compass but we followed during the day in consequence of insurmountable barriers in front. The sun oppressively hot, and the whole march up and down hills. Two or three men were sun struck. After making 14 miles, we encamped in a very pretty valley close to a most excellent spring of water and good grazing. The country through which we passed today were partially studded with pine trees. Fourteen miles traveled today but only 5 on our way towards Virginia City.

Saturday, July 15. This day was milder in all respects to yesterday's traveling. About 5 o'clock encamped on White River in a valley with good grazing and an abundant supply of water strangely tinctured with white mud. The sun very hot but an excellent breeze during the day. A heavy shower of rain in the night. The Indian guide [Baptiste Defond] captured several articles, moccasins, a quiver of arrows, etc., belonging to an Indian in quest of an antelope but preferred leaving said articles when called. About 12 miles was made today but not more than six on our course.

Sunday, July 16. Again laid up for the benefit of man and beast. The forenoon was cloudy with threatened rain; about noon the weather cleared, and a fine breeze sprang up which continued throughout the remainder of the day. Today Company D divided into messes.

Monday, July 17. Struck camp earlier than usual; crossed White River without much difficulty and marched 9½ miles, camping in a small valley with

tolerable good grazing, wood and water. Crossed Lieut. Warren's wagon road again today. Quite cool with a strong breeze. Showery during the night.

Tuesday, July 18. The morning cloudy. Started on the march at the usual hour, and proceeded over hills about 14½ miles, when we encamped in the vicinity of some standing water, with wood and tolerable grazing. Rain again at night.

Wednesday, July 19. Broke camp about the usual time and proceeded over a most excellent road and about 1 o'clock when the rain commenced falling in torrents and continued for three hours; this rendered the road almost impracticable in consequence of the mud sticking to wheels and the feet of the travelers; therefore we were compelled to encamp without wood or water and very poor grazing in 15 miles of the Cheyenne River. Decidedly the worst day's march we have had — 14 miles.

Thursday, July 20. Proceeded about 4 miles and encamped on a level with the view of dispatching the Quartermaster [Lt. Dana] to Fort Laramie for shoes and other articles necessary for the men.¹⁵ Very poor water and tolerable grazing.

Friday, July 21. Laid over to rest. This morning the Quartermaster, with one escort of cavalry and three negro laundresses, proceeded to Fort Laramie on business for the command. (They left the negroes at Laramie.)¹⁶ The sun very hot with a very cool breeze, rendering the weather very pleasant during the day but quite cool at night.

Saturday, July 22. The morning broke cloudy, but the sun dispelled the appearance of rain, and the day was pleasant throughout. Several reports were current in camp today of the close proximity of Indians, but all of them lacked confirmation.

Sunday, July 23. A beautiful clear [day] in the forenoon. During the afternoon the weather became cloudy, and about 6 o'clock a storm of hail and rain broke on camp which had to be seen and felt to be appreciated. The horses,

mules, and cattle stamped, several men were injured by the hail, and altogether there were a lively time. The storm lasted near half an hour, and the hail was two or three inches deep. All the horses, mules and cattle were found during the night.

Monday, July 24. Started on the march about 10 o'clock, and marched 2 or three miles, encamping on Hat Creek on a very fine level with good water and grazing. The sun was very warm which served us well as it enabled us to dry our clothing and bedding.

Tuesday, July 25. Moved on the march about 7 o'clock. Passing through a very deserted part of country. Encamped on a level, poorly supplied with wood and water and very poor grazing. The country for the past two days abounds with wild sage and prickly pears. Rattlesnakes, though small, but in abundance. About 5 o'clock we were visited with a storm of wind and rain which lasted only a short time. The sun was very hot. 16 miles was added to our journey.

Wednesday, July 26. Struck camp and proceeded about 5 miles to a deep ravine which had to be bridged; after crossing we camped.¹⁷ Wood and water poor and miserable grazing. Sun very hot.

Thursday, July 27. Started on the march about the usual hour. Morning cloudy and cool, threatening rain. About noon encamped without wood and very poor grazing, having marched about 8 miles. Rattlesnakes, cactus, and wild sage are three of the intolerable nuisances that beset the road.

Friday, July 28. Broke camp rather earlier than usual, and after marching 10 miles encamped on the Cheyenne River with good grazing, plenty of wood and water. The guide [Baptiste Defond] shot a buffalo today, which was the first killed since we started. Inasmuch as we had been living on fat bacon for some time, it was quite a treat to partake of buffalo steak. The nights and mornings are very cool, but the sun comes down oppressively hot in the middle of the day.

Saturday, July 29. Moved camp about 2 miles to a creek. The day was very warm. The return of Quartermaster Dana from Laramie is daily looked for. Signal fires are nightly made for him.

Sunday, July 30. Remained in camp to rest. The sun shone oppressively hot, and the day was spent without interest save the appearance of whiskey which exhibited its hydra head in the person of a member of Company D, which attracted Lt. Marshall and Capt. Bailey; he was ironed for safe keeping.

Monday, July 31. Broke camp about the usual hour, and proceeded over a very broken country with wild sage and cactus in more than abundance. Passed some fresh buffalo tracks, and encamped in a bottom on what had been a considerable stream, but now dry. Some tolerable good water, plenty of wood, and tolerable grazing, making 20½ miles. The sun was very hot, but the march was rendered agreeable by a cool wind that blew throughout the day. Scarcity of water again on the march.

Tuesday, August 1. Struck camp about the usual hour and marched over an old wagon road said to have been made in 1859 by Lieutenant [William F. Raynolds] Reynolds from Laramie to Powder River.¹⁸ The country through which we passed were better wooded than had been before, and considerable pools of water were visible. After 11 miles encamped in a small bottom with plenty of wood, water and grazing. Near midnight there were an alarm given by the pickets, and the camps were aroused and under arms in a few minutes; some confusion previously, but resolution was predominant. The fact was soon known that Lieutenant Dana had returned from Laramie with tidings of the increased hostilities of the Indians. He had left the wagon with clothing with the 16th Kansas Regiment till an escort could be sent for it.¹⁹

Wednesday, August 2. Proceeded over the same excellent road most of the march; about noon left the road to

the right, and after marching 14 miles encamped on a height in the vicinity of some standing water. Plenty of wood but no grazing at all. This morning the cavalry escort with Lieutenant Stull were dispatched for the wagon that Lieutenant Dana left. The day was cool and most agreeable for marching.

Thursday, August 3. Broke camp about the usual hour, and marched 5 miles, camping on the open prairie; water within 4 miles, scarce wood, and bad grazing.

Friday, August 4. Morning cloudy and threatening rain. Broke camp later than usual, and after marching about 12 miles halted during a heavy rain. After proceeding 5 miles farther encamped on a small stream called the Cheyenne River, without wood and poor grazing. The day was showery throughout.

Saturday, August 5. Struck camp about the usual hour, and marched over a very hilly country 6 miles. Encamped on an eminence with good water, wood and grazing. Sun hot with a gentle breeze.

Sunday, August 6. Laid over to recruit the exhausted energy of men and animals. Several of the command were granted permission to go hunting; they returned as usual without any game, having again escaped the bite of an antelope. The day was very warm.

Monday, August 7. Broke camp about the usual time, and traveled over a very broken country about 8 miles, encamping in the vicinity of what had the appearance of being in wet weather a considerable stream, but [only] a small quantity of water was left. The country still abounds with wild sage and prickly pears, the latter an intolerable nuisance to horses and cattle. Signal fires were made in the evening on a high mountain about 2 miles from camp. The day were excessively hot and very little air stirring. Pioneers were kept busy today as there were more crossings than usual.

Tuesday, August 8. Was on the march about the usual time, and marched over a very broken country 8 miles, camping on the Little Missouri River [?]. After

reaching camp we were favored with a storm of wind and rain, mostly the former.

Wednesday, August 9. Broke camp about the usual time, and proceeded over the same broken country, abounding with wild sage, cactus, and rattlesnakes, 10 miles. On a very pretty level [we encamped] in the immediate vicinity of good clear water; no wood, sagebrush supplied the place, and good grazing. Lieutenant Stull came in [to] camp late in the afternoon and reported the cavalry escort in the rear, an unsuccessful account of the wagon, not having come up with it.

Thursday, August 10. Pursued our route which led through even [more broken] country than the past few days; passed some high buttes, encamping on the open prairie without wood or water and tolerable grazing. The day was very warm, and, as the march extended 20 miles, several of the men played out. Today is the first time buffalo came in sight of the train, and several of them were shot, also quite a number of antelope and rabbits; considerable suffering for water.

Friday, August 11. Struck camp about the usual time, and proceeded over the most uneven country and horrible road that it has yet been our lot to fall in with. After marching 8 miles discovered in front of us great smokes, supposed to be Indians. We advanced three miles farther, and encamped on the open prairie in the vicinity of some standing water, no wood and tolerable grazing. Reports innumerable in regard to the Indians in front. The sun was excessively hot, and there was much suffering among men, horses, and cattle for water. Before leaving camp this morning a sad affair occurred between two men, one of Company C, the other of D. The name of the one of [Company] C was H. P. McGinnis and U[riah]. J. Brashear [Breshears] of [Company] D, in which the latter was badly injured by a blow with a gun on the head in the hands of the former. Buffalo plenty in sight today.

Saturday, August 12. Early this



George Bent (who led Cheyenne warriors against Capt. George W. Williford's forces) with his wife, Magpie, a niece of Black Kettle, 1867. Courtesy of Colorado Historical Society.

morning the cavalry with 20 or 30 of infantry mounted on mules, were dispatched in quest of water. The cattle belonging to Colonel Sawyers' outfit accompanied them. The Colonel returned about 3 o'clock in the afternoon and reported water 15 miles [the Powder River], but the road impracticable for wagons, also about 75 warriors

in front, peaceable. (The last report was false for the writer of this journal was himself with the exploring party.) He also said that the escort and cattle could not return before afternoon tomorrow. The sun all day has been very hot and considerable suffering for water inasmuch as the little that remained near camp is very strongly

impregnated with oxen and mules' "refuse[d] water" — not fit to drink nor is it any better to cook with. About midnight we returned with the stock to camp.

Sunday, August 13. Struck camp very early and counter-marched, having proceeded on our old road about 5 miles; halted when there were some water in a small creek for the purpose of laying over till next morning to recruit the mules and cattle. Before, however, the rear had reached camp, we were startled with the cry of "Indians." "Fall in" was the cry, and the order[s] were obeyed as soon as said. It was discovered that they were making a raid on the cavalry horses, which were

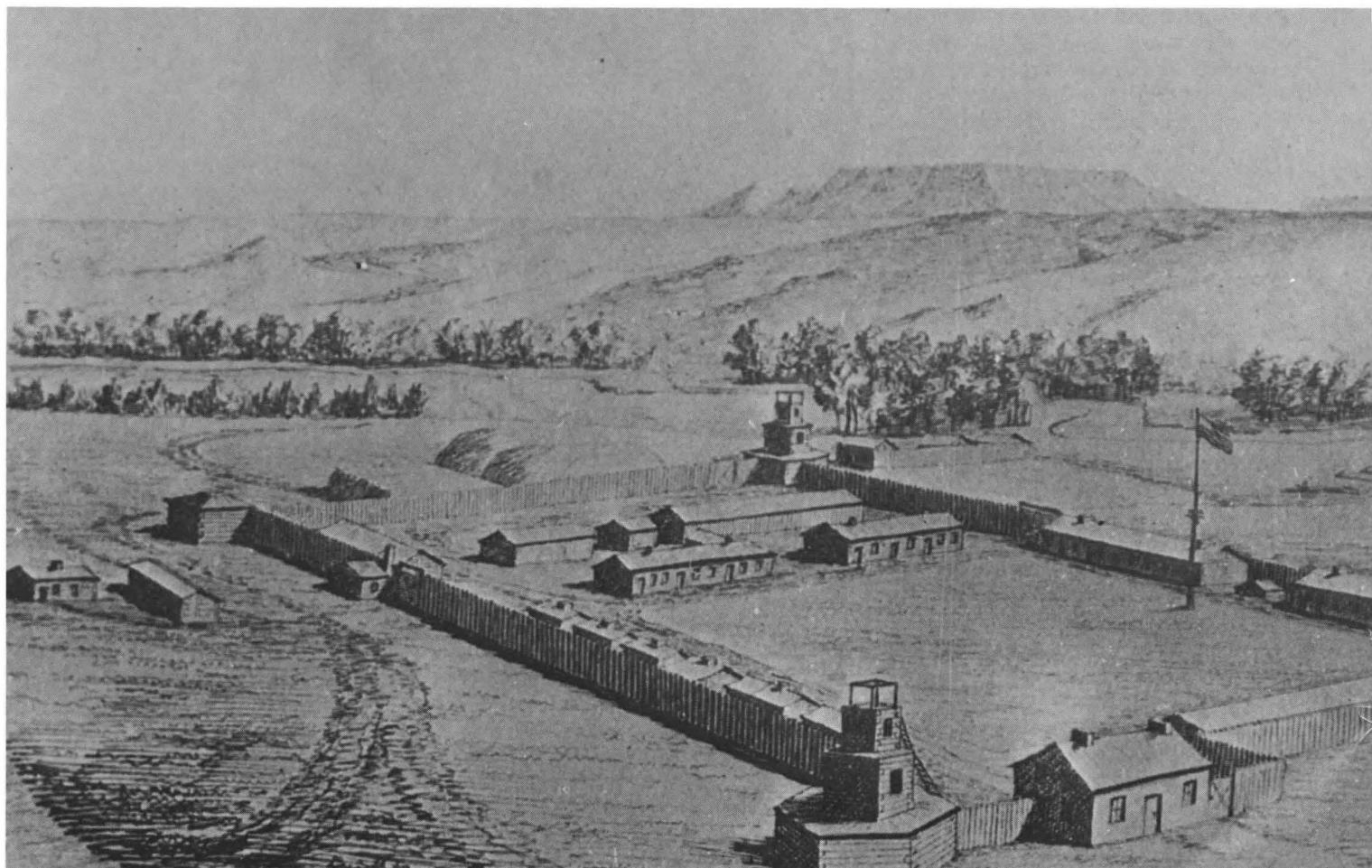
herding close to camp. They captured and drove off seven of them. One of the Indians was thought to have been wounded in the affair. Mr. Nat[haniel D.] Hedges, a merchant from Sioux City accompanying the expedition with goods for the Virginia City market, was encountered a short distance from camp by the redskins, and, after shooting him, they scalped and horribly mutilated his body.²⁰ Shortly after, they left in the direction of Powder River, when we again struck camp and proceeded about 10 miles farther, encamping on an eminence after night. No one allowed to sleep tonight.

Monday, August 14. Broke camp about sunrise, and made about 3 miles

farther on our backward course, when we pitched camp with good water and grazing. The sun was very hot with a good breeze during the day. About 5 o'clock p.m. the Indians made another rush close to camp for horses, but they were driven off without booty of any kind. They continued around in considerable numbers as long as we could see, and we had to pass another sleepless night. The nights are very cold. There were some fighting without injury on our side. The loss of the Indians is not known.

Tuesday, August 15. After passing through the night without alarm, we were poorly prepared for what awaited us during the day. Early in the morning

Drawing of Fort Reno, late 1867, by Anton Schonborn. Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration.



the Indians showed themselves in considerable numbers all around us upon every mound and accessible point out of danger of our muskets. Several of the brave warriors dashed past us upon their fleet ponies at full gallop, giving vent to their war whoops and brandishing scalps. Quite a number of shots were fired upon both sides of small arms; artillery was used alone by us. After continuing their harmless amusement for three or four hours, they proposed a parley which we had through two or three Indians belonging to the expedition and which resulted in their procuring a small supply of provisions and tobacco. During the parley the men (in consequence of being barefooted)

was allowed to exchange tobacco for moccasins. During the parley the leading chiefs admitted the loss of 10 killed. None killed on our side in the fight. The trading was suddenly terminated by the shooting of one of our cavalry named Anthony Nelson by the cowardly redskins as he was returning to camp, and, strange to say, he was left without being scalped or otherwise mutilated by the Savages.²¹ As soon as the shot was fired, a report gained circulation that it was a disobedient Indian shot by the chief, and the report was generally credited until the men all returned to camp and the man was missed. His body was recovered and buried. At the same time another of the cavalry named Luse (who was a Mexican) was absent, but there were no doubt entertained by the cavalry that he had deserted to the enemy.²² The Indians withdrew immediately after the above brutal murder and did not trouble us with their presence again during the night.

Wednesday, August 16. No sign of Indians this morning. Struck camp about 7 o'clock, and proceeded on our backward march. After leaving camp ten of the savages was discovered ransacking our camp, but they did not attempt to disturb us on the road. About noon we reached the camp we had on the 9th instant where we had water and tolerable good grazing. Late in the afternoon a few redskins again attempted a raid on our stock but without success. The night passed away without any alarm.

Thursday, August 17. Previous to daylight in the morning four men were sent with dispatches, probably in the direction of Fort Laramie.²³ There were no Indians in sight today although there were several alarms given. They did not attempt another raid on camp or come in view. In the afternoon there were a large smoke discovered in a westerly direction, supposed to be the Indian camps, and thought to be for the purpose of collecting and breaking camp. The day was very warm, but we had a slight rain during the evening and night.

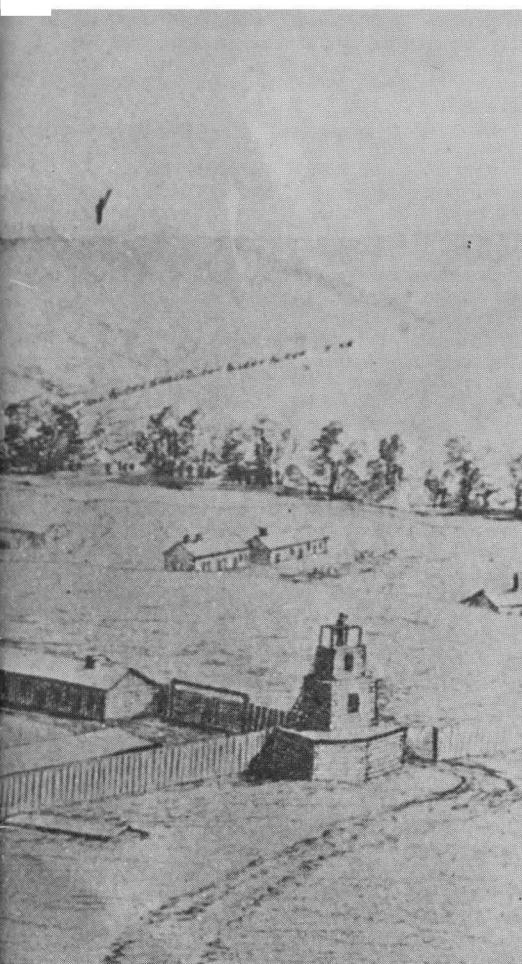
Friday, August 18. The morning broke clear with no Indians in sight. The sun was oppressively hot, and but two Indians was seen during the day, and they at a considerable distance. The night passed off quietly, and no alarm was given.

Saturday, August 19. Fine morning again, not even tainted with the pestiferous breath of Indians. About 8 o'clock the men that was dispatched on Thursday morning returned to camp, and reported having discovered General [Patrick E.] Connor's trail (who had been dispatched from Fort Laramie in quest of redskins) near Powder River 46 miles from camp.²⁴ Immediately broke camp, and took up the line of march. The sun was excessively hot. A few Indians were discovered at a distance. Encamped near a tributary of Powder River, having marched 13½ miles. About midnight an alarm was given by one of the sentinels shooting and killing a mule.

Sunday, August 20. Laid to rest animals and men preparatory to a long march, without water. The sun was very hot, and the day passed without molestation from the natives. Filled a barrel with [water] to carry for each company.

Monday, August 21. Broke camp about the usual hour, and marched over a broken country 11½ miles when one of the [government] mule wagons lost a tire off wheel which occasioned a halt for two or three hours. During the time the barrels of water were served out to the companies for coffee and drinking. Near sundown again took up the line of march and had proceeded about 6 miles when the same wagon wheel compelled another halt. No natives in sight today.

Tuesday, August 22. Took up the line of march about daylight. Marched on a continuation of hills the entire day, reached the Pumpkin Buttes [in present-day Campbell County, Wyoming] in about 6 miles, passed through a gap between them, and, instead of the country becoming better for traveling as we had anticipated, it was far worse. Nothing but a succession of hills as far



as the eye can see, and to add to our misery the sun was very hot and not a drop of water in the train. A considerable number of mules played out, and two wagons had to be left on the road side. As the animals of the train had no water for two days, much of their suffering were relieved by a good breeze throughout the day. The day, on the whole, has been the most severe one on the whole outfit. Near sundown struck Gen. Connor's trail at the little dry fork of Powder River with water scarce and poor grazing. Some fires were seen in the vicinity of Powder River ahead. Supposed to be Indian camp fires. The whole march to 22 miles.

Wednesday, August 23. Remained in camp to rest men and animals. The whole equipment needed it before another march. Before noon some of Gen. Connor's command came into camp and acquainted us with the intelligence that the fires that we had discovered yesterday was their camp at Powder River where they were erecting a fort [Fort Connor]; only a part of the command remained under Colonel [James Harvey] Kidd.²⁵ The rest had proceeded forward with Gen. Connor. In the afternoon a dispatch was received from the fort ordering us to report there immediately.

Thursday, August 24. In obedience to orders struck camp early and followed General Connor's trail to Powder River. And encamped in the vicinity of the fort early in the afternoon. The sun was very hot, and, as there had been a heavy wagon train over the road yesterday, the dust was almost suffocating. The men and animals are more than jubilant at again seeing a river where they can quench their thirst and have enough left to wash human faces. The march today reached 13½ miles.

Friday, August 25. Remained in camp, and during the day received orders from Gen. Connor to report to the fort for duty. As our detachment was without shoes and clothing, there was an escort of cavalry detailed from the fort to accompany Col. Sawyers on his circuitous route to Virginia City.

About noon a few Indians made their appearance near camp, but took care to keep out of range of our guns.

Saturday, August 26. Preparations were finished today to dissolve our connection with Sawyer's expedition, and a few cavalry, together with our cavalry and one of our pieces of artillery, accompanied him on his pleasure excursion to Virginia City in the afternoon. At the same time Sawyers' wagons started, we struck camp and removed just on the outside of the stockade of the fort, where we encamped for the present.

EPILOGUE

Of course, John Colby Griggs's service to the United States did not end with his arrival at Fort Connor. He continued his diary only through September 11, 1865, probably because he felt there was little to report. "Nothing unusual to disturb the monotony of garrison life," reads one entry. He and his comrades settled down for a long winter. Griggs left the fort with his company in the following summer and was mustered out of service at Fort Kearny on the Platte on October 11, 1866. He settled the next year in nearby Hall County, Nebraska, with his wife, Lucyann, and his two children. He took up his pre-war occupation, farming. Four more children arrived. About 1883 Griggs moved his family to a Cherry County homestead. Mrs. Griggs died the following year. John remarried in 1886 to Cora Bradish. Four more children came from this marriage. In 1892 he moved his family again, this time to Spearfish, South Dakota. His later years were spent in Rapid City. Here John Colby Griggs died on December 14, 1914. He is buried in the Mountain View Cemetery. His obituary is entitled, "After Serving Both Sides of Civil War, Veteran Passes Away."

NOTES

¹The standard source on federal road-building expeditions is W. Turrentine Jackson's *Wagon Roads West: A Study of Federal Road Surveys and Construction in the Trans-Mississippi West, 1846-1869* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of

California Press, 1952). Chapter 17 of this study is devoted to the Sawyers Wagon Road Expedition. Biographical information on James A. Sawyers and his report of this effort, along with other first-person accounts by participants, are published in Leroy H. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, editors, *Powder River Campaigns and Sawyers Expedition of 1865: A Documentary Account Comprising Official Reports, Diaries, Contemporary Newspaper Accounts, and Personal Narratives* (Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1961).

²Muster rolls, Companies C and D, Fifth United States Volunteer Infantry, Records of the War Department, Office of the Adjutant General, Record Group 94 (Washington: National Archives and Records Service, 1962).

³Dee Brown's *The Galvanized Yankees* (Champaign: The University of Illinois Press, 1963) remains the best history of these regiments. The actions of the Fifth U.S. Volunteers are detailed in chapter 6 of this book. The editor wishes to thank Mr. Brown for generously loaning a microfilm copy of the regimental muster rolls. This was vital in the identification of several of the participants.

⁴Biographical information on John Colby Griggs comes from the following: muster rolls for Company D, Fifth U.S. Volunteers; veterans service records, military and pension files for John Colby Griggs, National Archives; and his obituary in the *Rapid City Daily Journal*, December 16, 1914.

⁵Accounts of the expedition include those of James A. Sawyers, Dr. D. W. Tingley, Capt. George W. Williford, and Albert M. Holman, all published in Hafen and Hafen, *Powder River Campaigns*. An account, penned by a correspondent named "Montana" and published in the *Sioux City Journal*, is credited to Lewis H. Smith, an engineer working for Sawyers. His "Journal of the Wagon Road" is almost identical to Sawyers's official report. *Sioux City Journal*, December 23, 1865; January 6, 13, 27, February 10, 17, March 3, 1866; reprinted in Harvey Ingham, *The Northern Border Brigade: A Story of Military Beginnings* (Des Moines: Des Moines Register, 1926).

⁶"Journal of Sawyers Wagon Road Expedition from Niobrara, Nebraska Territory, to Virginia City, Montana Territory, by a Private of the Escort," *Missouri Republican*, October 30, 1865.

⁷Diary of John Colby Griggs, MS 3942, Nebraska State Historical Society Archives. The typescript was loaned for copying by a descendant, Clayton Whitney of Huron, South Dakota. Accompanying the transcript are further biographical details on Griggs's life and military service. Griggs's original diary is in the possession of his granddaughter, Cora Corneliuson of Rapid City, who transcribed it in 1962. A special thanks goes to Mrs. Corneliuson, who allowed the editor to examine the original account.

⁸The Ponca Indian Agency, established in 1858, was located in present-day Knox County, Nebraska. James H. Howard, "The Ponca Tribe," *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin* 195 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1965), 30-39.

⁹The identifications of deserters Sneath and Wilson, as well as other enlisted men mentioned by Griggs, are found in the company muster rolls. Sneath is listed as a member of Company C, not D. Desertions are not mentioned in the edited *Missouri Republican* account.

¹⁰Sawyers's report for the same date names "Big Coulter" Creek as the camping site. Such discrepancies between the two accounts appear when matching Griggs's stream appellations, as well as the miles covered each day, with those listed in Sawyers's itinerary, published in Hafen and Hafen, *Powder River Campaigns*, 276-81. To add to this confusion, some of the streams have since endured additional name changes. All this makes matching either report to a modern map a frustrating undertaking.

¹¹The "ammunition chests" to which Griggs refers are the boxes placed on a field limber that contain cannon ammunition. Edward S. Farrow, *Farrow's Military Encyclopedia* (New York: The Author, 1885).

¹²The Fourth of July was honored by the escort with an artillery salute fired at noon. Sawyers entry for July 4, Hafen and Hafen, *Powder River Campaigns*.

¹³Lieutenant Gouverneur Kemble Warren, United States Army Topographical Engineers, was a prior explorer of the lands through which Sawyers passed. Griggs, though, has mixed his facts about Warren. In 1855 Warren accompanied General William S. Harney's Sioux Expedition from Fort Laramie to Fort Pierre. Two years later Warren led a party through the Nebraska Sandhills to Fort Laramie, then along the Black Hills, ending at Fort Randall. Interestingly Warren's explorations convinced him of the impossibility of wagon road construction in the Niobrara Valley. "Explorer on the Northern Plains: Lieutenant Gouverneur K. Warren's Preliminary Report of Explorations in Nebraska and Dakota, in the years 1855-'56-'57," introduction by Frank N. Schubert, *Engineer Historical Studies, Number 2* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1981); and James A. Hanson, "A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail," *Nebraska History*, 68 (Spring 1987), 8-9.

¹⁴Sawyers refers to Ben F. Estes as his chief guide and Baptiste Defond, a Yankton Sioux mixed blood, as the "Indian guide." Estes had been an 1857 member of Warren's exploration party, later a sergeant in the First Dakota Cavalry; Defond was the son of an American Fur Company trader of the same name. Sawyers

entry for June 14, Hafen and Hafen, *Powder River Campaigns*; A. M. English, "Dakota's First Soldiers: History of the First Dakota Cavalry, 1862-1865," *South Dakota Historical Collections*, 9 (1918), 309-10; and Charles Edmund DeLand, editor, "Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre Journal and Letter Books," *South Dakota Historical Collections*, 9 (1918), 237.

¹⁵Quartermaster Dana's arrival at Fort Laramie was reported soon thereafter. Dana reported the route as being "impracticable for a wagon road." Dispatch from Major Grenville M. Dodge, Fort Leavenworth, July 26, 1865, to Major General John Pope, St. Louis, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, volume 48, part 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1896), 1123-24.

¹⁶Company laundresses were apparently not uncommon attendants to expeditions of this time. A soldier who accompanied Colonel Nelson F. Cole's column along the Loup River to the Powder River country wrote of a laundress who had an affair with one of the officers during the journey. Charles H. Springer, *Soldiering in Sioux Country, 1865* (San Diego: Frontier Heritage Press, 1971), 14-15.

¹⁷This camp site was along Sage Creek in present-day Fall River County, South Dakota. Sawyers entry for July 26, Hafen and Hafen, *Powder River Campaigns*.

¹⁸Lt. William F. Reynolds led an exploration party, known as the Yellowstone Expedition, to determine, among other things, a direct route between Fort Laramie and the Yellowstone River. Jackson, *Wagon Roads West*, 266-68; William H. Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West, 1803-1863* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 417-21.

¹⁹This was the Sixteenth Kansas Cavalry, a volunteer regiment commanded by Colonel Samuel Walker. Hafen and Hafen, *Powder River Campaigns*, 92-100.

²⁰Nathaniel D. Hedges had charge of the private freight train, owned by C. E. Hedges & Co. of Sioux City, that accompanied the expedition. The next day Hedges's body was placed in a coffin made from an abandoned wagon and

buried in an unmarked grave in the center of the corral. On Sawyers's 1866 trip he recovered the body and reburied it at Fort Reno. Sawyers entries for August 13 and 14, Hafen and Hafen, *Powder River Campaigns*; and *Sioux City Journal*, January 12, 1867.

²¹Anthony Nelson, Company B, First Dakota Cavalry, was born in Norway before coming to Dakota Territory to farm. He enlisted in 1862 at Vermillion. English, "Dakota's First Soldiers," 330.

²²The deserter was John Rouse, born in Santa Fe in Mexican territory. He had moved to Dakota Territory and enlisted in 1862 at Yankton. Though his body was not found, he was listed in the records as being killed in action, not as having deserted. Griggs's account in the *Missouri Republican* adds that Rouse had found an old friend and countryman among the Indians during the truce. This is undoubtedly one of the few instances on the Plains when a soldier deserted to the Indians. English, "Dakota's First Soldiers," 332; and Lewis H. Smith entry for August 15, Ingham, *The Northern Border Brigade*.

²³These four men were J. C. Godfrey and Charles W. Sears, who were employed as scouts for the expedition, and the two guides, Estes and Defond. Sawyers entry for August 17, Hafen and Hafen, *Powder River Campaigns*.

²⁴Gen. Patrick E. Connor had overall command of the Powder River Campaign, which consisted of three columns of troops set to converge on the heart of Indian country. Connor himself led a column, which left Fort Laramie on July 30 enroute for the Powder River and the hostile Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho.

²⁵Col. James Harvey Kidd's garrison at the new post consisted of his own Sixth Michigan Cavalry. The post was initially called Fort Connor, later renamed Fort Reno. A Bozeman Trail fort, it was abandoned after the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. Hafen and Hafen, *Powder River Campaign*, 109; Robert A. Murray, *Military Posts in the Powder River Country of Wyoming, 1865-1894* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), 13-27.