



The Military Career of Robert W. Furnas

(Article begins on page 2 below.)

This article is copyrighted by History Nebraska (formerly the Nebraska State Historical Society). You may download it for your personal use.

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

<https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/re-use-nshs-materials>

Learn more about *Nebraska History* (and search articles) here:

<https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/nebraska-history-magazine>

History Nebraska members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* annually:

<https://history.nebraska.gov/get-involved/membership>

Full Citation: Robert C. Farb, "The Military Career of Robert W. Furnas," *Nebraska History* 32 (1951): 18-41

Article Summary: Furnas served as an officer with the First Indian Regiment and later with the Second Nebraska Cavalry, demonstrating concern for the welfare of the enlisted men. The friends and acquaintances that he made in this stage of his life would prove valuable in his future political career.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Robert W. Furnas, William P. Dole, T. R. Fisher, T. C. Hacker, Henry W. Halleck, S. D. Sturgis, A. S. Paddock, Andrew S. Holladay, William Weer, Stephen H. Wattles, E. H. Carruth, H. W. Martin, Frederick Salomon, A. C. Ellithorpe, William A. Phillips, Alvin Saunders, Alfred Sully

Place Names: Leroy, Coffee County, Kansas; Fort Randall, Fort Pierre, and Crow Creek Indian Agency, South Dakota

Keywords: Robert W. Furnas, First Indian Regiment, Second Nebraska Cavalry, Tenth Kansas Infantry, William Weer, E. H. Carruth, H. W. Martin, Frederick Salomon, Sioux Indian uprising (Minnesota), Alfred Sully

Photographs / Images: officers of the Second Nebraska Cavalry

THE MILITARY CAREER OF ROBERT W. FURNAS

BY ROBERT C. FARB

From his arrival in the territory as a young man in 1856 to his death in 1905, Robert W. Furnas was intimately associated with the agricultural and political development of Nebraska. During the Civil War he also played an important role in the defense of the West, first as colonel of the First Indian Regiment and later as colonel of the Second Nebraska Cavalry.

Immediately upon the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Furnas began to promote the organization of home defense forces for the frontier territory of Nebraska. Yet from the beginning—though he was the father of seven children and had heavy home responsibilities—he longed for active participation in the war effort. An opportunity came with the arrival in April of a letter from William P. Dole, Commissioner of Indian Affairs.¹ Commissioner Dole had recommended to Secretary of the Interior Caleb Smith that two regiments of loyal Indian volunteers be organized in Kansas to accompany refugee Indians of the Five Civilized Tribes on their return to Indian Territory. The removal of federal troops from Indian Territory in 1861 had forced those Indians loyal to the United States to flee northward to Kansas for safety. About 9,000 Creeks, Seminoles and Cherokee Indians spent the winter of 1861-1862 on the Kansas prairies in destitute condition. The Office of Indian Affairs, the

¹ Annie H. Abel, *The American Indian as Participant in the Civil War* (Cleveland, 1919), p. 107.

United States Army, and resident Indian tribes offered as much temporary relief as possible. The refugees were anxious to return to their homes in Indian Territory in 1862. Many of their young men were anxious to render military service to the United States.²

The letter from Dole, dated April 5, ordered Furnas to report for duty to the United States mustering officer at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Turning the *Nebraska Advertiser* and the *Nebraska Farmer* over to the care of T. R. Fisher and T. C. Hacker, Furnas prepared to leave for Kansas. Fisher and Hacker published the *Nebraska Advertiser* every week without interruption, but discontinued the *Nebraska Farmer*. Upon arrival at Fort Leavenworth, Furnas was mustered in as Colonel, United States Army, on April 18. He awaited orders from Gen. Henry W. Halleck, Commanding General, Department of the Mississippi. Two days later, he received detailed instructions from Adjutant General Thomas in Washington, D. C., authorizing him to organize a regiment of infantry from the loyal Indians then in Kansas. Thereupon, he proceeded to Leroy, Coffey County, Kansas, and in a few days enrolled ten companies of infantry totaling 1,009. Agent Cutler for the Creeks and Agent Snow for the Seminoles assisted him in the recruitment process. In compliance with Thomas' orders, he informed Lt. Charles S. Bowman, mustering officer at Fort Leavenworth, of his action, but received no reply.

At this point, confusion and conflict of command in the military force in Kansas hampered the organization of the First Indian Expedition. General Halleck, being opposed to the arming of Indians, neglected to send on to Kansas the instructions to form the Indian expedition which he had received from Washington. Meanwhile, Brig. Gen. S. D. Sturgis took command of the District of Kansas. Sturgis, being unaware of Washington's orders to Halleck, ordered a stop to the recruitment of Indian troops and threatened arrest to anyone disobeying the order. William G. Coffin, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Southern Superin-

² *Ibid.*, pp. 79-89.

tendency, coolly informed General Sturgis that the Indians were being enlisted for military service under authority of the Interior, not the War Department!

This confused situation placed Colonel Furnas, with his ten companies of Indian troops at Leroy, in a very precarious position. On the day after the arrival of General Sturgis' order banning Indian recruitment, Major Minor, in command of a cavalry detachment at nearby Iola, Kansas, arrived at Leroy. He was at a loss as to what action to take. However, Minor did not arrest Furnas as he was authorized to do by Sturgis' order. In an attempt to clarify the situation, Furnas sent a letter to Commissioner Dole explaining what had occurred. Dole caused new instructions to be issued by the War Department. The Indian troops were to serve as a home guard force only, and were to be accompanied by white troops on their return to Indian Territory.³

After sending the letter to Dole, Furnas returned to Brownville for a few days to straighten out his business affairs. Being very short of cash he wrote to A. S. Paddock, Secretary of the Territory, for financial assistance. Paddock promised to send \$100 to Mrs. Furnas to tide the family over the summer months.⁴ Realizing that the duration of his military service was uncertain, and needing the money, Furnas sold the *Nebraska Advertiser* and the printing plant to Fisher and Hacker.⁵ Inasmuch as Dr. Andrew S. Holladay, his good friend, desired active military service, Furnas wrote to the Surgeon General's office, Washington, D. C., in an attempt to secure a commission for Dr. Holladay as surgeon of the First Indian Regiment.⁶ The matter was referred to the Medical Director at Fort Leavenworth for action.⁷ On his return to Kansas, Colonel Furnas signed a

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-109 ff.

⁴ A. S. Paddock to Furnas, June 9, 1862 (Unless otherwise indicated all letters cited are from the Robert W. Furnas papers in the Nebraska State Historical Society.)

⁵ *Ibid.*, June 12, 1862.

⁶ Indian Expedition Papers, Furnas Collection, May 25, 1862.

⁷ M. J. Asch to R. W. Furnas, May 25, 1862.

contract with Dr. Holladay engaging him as regimental surgeon for the total compensation of \$100 per month.⁸

The recruitment of the ten companies of the First Indian Regiment was easy to accomplish. With a view to an early return to their homes in Indian Territory, the braves readily enlisted. Unfortunately, only one company officer—Captain Billy Bowlegs, son of the famous Seminole chief—and a few enlisted men could either speak or understand English. All communication had to be done through interpreters. The only interpreters available were uneducated negroes who had been taken in and raised by the Indians. This made it very difficult for Colonel Furnas and his staff to issue orders and to rely upon their being understood and executed. Eight of the companies contained Creek braves and the other two were Seminoles.⁹ The outfitting of the First Indian Regiment was accomplished at Humboldt, Kansas, early in June. Uniforms and guns were issued to each soldier. Unfortunately, many of the guns would not shoot and were entirely worthless. Since 359 men had horses, about one third of the First Indian Regiment was mounted. Furnas was instructed to secure horses for the remainder from the enemy if possible.¹⁰

By the 10th of June, Col. William Weer, of the Tenth Kansas Infantry, arrived at Leroy, headquarters of the Indian Expedition, to take command. In an effort to inject some measure of military discipline and *esprit de corps*, Colonel Weer ordered a battery drill for the entire Indian command on June 13. After the drill, the Indians were to have "a grand Ball play in the daytime and a War dance at night."¹¹ However the dance was to break up early, so that the Indians could get plenty of rest for the commencement of the march the next morning. The chiefs of the various tribes and the soldiers' families were invited to attend the proceedings as spectators. The Indian soldiers bade farewell to their families, drank quantities of "bullet-proof" medicine

⁸ *Ibid.*, June 17, 1862.

⁹ Abel, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

¹⁰ Furnas to Col. William Weer, July 15, 1862.

¹¹ Hq., Indian Expedition, Special Orders No. 4, June 11, 1862.

and indulged in a grand war dance. On the next day, June 14, the entire command proceeded in ranks of four to Humboldt to join the white auxiliary troops that were to accompany them. The white troops consisted of the Sixth, Ninth, and Tenth Kansas regiments, all of whom were far short of their minimum number, the Ninth Wisconsin Regiment, which was above the minimum number, and Allen's and Rabb's artillery batteries.¹²

Finally, after many delays, the Indian Expedition left Humboldt for the march into Indian Territory. The white and Indian troops did not march side by side. Allen's artillery battery, containing "them wagons that shoot" for which the Indians had great respect, took the lead. Of the 1,009 Indian soldiers enlisted in the First Indian Regiment, 991 were present for the beginning of the march.¹³ The Second Indian Regiment, recruited by Col. John Ritchie, contained only about 500 Indian soldiers. In a letter to Commissioner Dole, Superintendent Coffin gave the following interesting description of the expedition:

I have just returned from Humboldt—the army there under Col. Weer consisting of the 10th Kansas Regiment 4 Companies of the 9th Kansas Allen's Battery of Six Tenth's Parrot Guns and the First and second Indian Regements left for the Indian Territory in good stile and in fine spirits the Indians with their new uniforms and small Military caps on the Hugh Heads of Hair made rather a Comecal Ludecrous apperance they marched off in Columns of 4 a breast singing the war song all joining in the chourse and a more animated seen is not often witnessed. The officers in command of the Indian Regements have labored incessantly and the improvement the Indians have made in drilling is much greater than I supposed them capabell of and I think the opinion and confidence of all in the effecency of the Indian Regements was very much greater when they left than at any previous period and I have little doubt that for the kind of service that will be required of them they will be the most efecient troops in the Expedition¹⁴

Whatever may have been Coffin's shortcomings in spelling and grammar, he gave a graphic description of this unique military force.

¹² Furnas' notes on Indian Expedition, Furnas Collection.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Coffin to Dole, June 25, 1862, in Abel, *op. cit.*, p. 123f.

The command proceeded southward by daily forced marches. Colonel Furnas went from company to company encouraging the officers and men. Nothing worthy of note occurred until they reached Cabin Creek in Indian Territory on July 2. Returning scouts reported that the Confederate Colonel Clarkson and his regiment, as well as a portion of the notorious Colonel Stand Watie's regiment, were encamped at Locust Grove, some thirty miles distant. Col. William R. Judson, in command of the Second Brigade to which the First Indian Regiment was attached, ordered the following details drawn up: 250 men from the First Indian Regiment, one company from the Second Kansas Regiment, one company from the Tenth Kansas Regiment, and a section of Allen's battery. Colonel Furnas was ordered to remain at Cabin Creek in charge of the troops not participating. Lt. Col. Stephen H. Wattles, his assistant, was placed in command of the troops detailed from the First Indian Regiment.

Shortly before the detail was ready to march, Colonel Weer arrived in camp. Desiring the honor of leading the attack, Weer ordered Colonel Judson to remain in camp and assumed command. By a forced night march, the detail reached the Confederate camp a little after daylight on the morning of July 3. As soon as the exact position of the enemy was determined, Colonel Weer ordered an advance to within 100 rods of the enemy camp. The detachment of the First Indian Regiment led the advance, followed by the section of Allen's battery and the white troops. Upon arriving opposite the hill upon which the enemy was situated, Wattles ordered his Indian troops to halt until further orders. No orders were received from Colonel Weer. Fortifying himself with liquor for the expected battle, Weer, with his bodyguard, followed the main road, by-passed the point of attack, and rode out into the open prairie beyond the enemy camp. Realizing the serious dilemma that he and his Indian troops were in, Wattles invited the commanding officer of the white troops to join in an assault on the Confederate camp. The invitation was judiciously declined. Wattles, with his 250 Indians, proceeded to charge

the enemy while the white troops stood nearby watching. Fifty enemy soldiers were killed and 116 taken prisoner. The captured contraband included 150 mules, 500 horses, 26 wagons, 100 head of cattle, 500 stand of arms and a large amount of other stores. While the Indian troops were fighting, Colonel Weer lay dead drunk in the ambulance, totally unable to give an order and completely unaware of what was occurring. He did not regain consciousness until the detail, with the prisoners and contraband, had proceeded ten miles on the return trip to the main force at Cabin Creek.¹⁵

The Second Brigade marched southward along the banks of the Grand River, and made camp fourteen miles north of Fort Gibson, located at the juncture of the Arkansas and the Grand rivers. Scouting parties were sent every day into the region between the Grand River and the Arkansas state line. During the two weeks encampment on the Grand River, the Confederate leaders moved their forces, livestock and other property south of the Arkansas River where they had greater strength. Many of the Cherokee soldiers who were captured by Wattle's forces expressed a desire to change their allegiance to the United States, so enough of them were enlisted in the Second Indian Regiment to bring it to full strength.¹⁶ The remainder were enlisted in a Third Indian Regiment and later recognized as a regular organization.¹⁷ Two hundred and five of the horses captured from the Confederates were used as mounts by the First Indian Regiment.¹⁸

During the southward march, relations between E. H. Carruth and H. W. Martin, the special Indian agents accompanying the expedition, and Colonel Weer had been strained to the breaking point. After the skirmish at Locust Grove, Weer, without consulting Carruth or Martin, tried to convince John Ross, chief of the Cherokee nation, to abandon

¹⁵ Furnas' notes.

¹⁶ Furnas to Weer, July 15, 1862.

¹⁷ Brig. Gen. F. Salomon to Brig. Gen. James G. Blunt, August 3, 1862, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1885), XIII, 531-532.

¹⁸ Furnas to Weer, July 15, 1862.

his alliance with the Confederacy. Needless to say, Ross refused. While Carruth and Martin may have been guilty of trying to magnify their own importance, Weer treated them very badly and often ignored their very existence.¹⁹ Weer was thoroughly incompetent and totally unqualified for military command. Despite frequent warnings from Brig. Gen. James G. Blunt, who succeeded Sturgis as commander of the Department of Kansas, he placed the entire Indian Expedition in jeopardy by failing to maintain contact with supply trains from Kansas. By the middle of July, the expedition had only three days' rations left, and Weer had no idea when or if supplies would arrive. As the situation became more desperate, three sets of couriers were sent northward to find the supply trains, but without success. The intensely hot and dry weather caused much suffering among the white troops from Wisconsin and Kansas. Worst of all, the only water obtainable was from stagnant pools that sickened both men and beasts. When it became necessary to issue only half rations, both white and Indian troops threatened to mutiny. Some of the officers threatened to resign.

Finally, on July 18, a council was held by the staff to determine future action. All of the officers, except Colonel Weer, favored an immediate march northward to meet the supply trains. Weer overruled his subordinates and declared his intention of remaining in camp. Thereupon, Col. Frederick Salomon of the Ninth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry boldly placed Weer under arrest and assumed command himself.²⁰ This unusual action disrupted the entire Indian Expedition. Colonel Furnas, like the other regimental commanders, was placed in a difficult position. Should he support the insubordinate action of Salomon, or should he risk insubordination himself by refusing to obey Salomon's orders? He decided to follow the former policy. Salomon determined to make a retrograde movement to Hudson's Crossing, a few miles south of the Kansas line. The com-

¹⁹ Abel, *op cit.*, p. 133.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

manders of the white regiments decided to join Salomon in the northward retreat.

Under orders from the new expedition commander, the First and Second Indian Regiments were left to guard the area near the Grand and Verdigris rivers and the ford across the Arkansas River. As ranking officer in the field, Colonel Furnas assumed command of all troops. After consultation with the other officers, he decided to make camp on the Verdigris River, twelve miles west of the old camp on the Grand River. Almost immediately, trouble broke out among the Indian troops. The water was bad, jerked beef was the principal article of food, and worst of all, the white troops had deserted them in the face of the enemy. Desertions and insubordination increased to such an extent that Furnas decided to return to the old camp on the Grand River, which was renamed Camp Wattles.

Special Agents Carruth and Martin were disgusted with the cowardly withdrawal of the white troops after the advance into the Cherokee country. They appealed to Furnas to use his troops to protect the loyal Cherokees from enemy intrusion. In describing the plight of the loyal Cherokees, they wrote:

The Rebels have already free access to about one third of the [Cherokee] Nation, and have destroyed the fences, and crops, and even the cooking utensils, belonging to the wives of the Cherokee soldiers lately enlisted in our army. The Country bordering on the Arkansas, Lee's Creek, and Sallison, which is the best producing section of the Nation and the families living there whose husbands and fathers are in our army, are gathering at Park Hill and are even now in a suffering condition.²¹

Moreover, many negro slaves who had been freed by the Indian Expedition had formed themselves into marauding bands and were pillaging freely among both Union and Confederate sympathizers.

During the next four weeks, Furnas sent frequent scouting parties into the country between the Grand and the Arkansas rivers. Being uneasy over Salomon's usurpation of command, he sent Lt. A. C. Ellithorpe to Hudson's Cross-

²¹ E. H. Carruth and A. W. Martin to Furnas, July 25, 1862.

ing to feel out the situation. There was no need for Furnas to worry, for the War Department had not only accepted Salomon's mutiny, but had promoted him to brigadier general. Soon after arriving at Salomon's headquarters, Ellithorpe wrote:

In my interview with the Genl I can but think that his plan of operations is in the main *good*. The Cherokee country will be held firmly and Genl Salomen [*sic*] will give you timely information on his (the enemy's) movements. You will find it best of policy to *adhere strictly* to his orders. . . . The Genl approves your plans of possessing Fort Gibson, Park Hill, Taliqua, the ford across the Arkansas, etc. But hold your present position as Genl Head Quarters. . . . Everything is tender footed and you must tread cautiously, but above all things *obey orders strictly*.²²

In order to facilitate speedy transportation and communication with Salomon, Furnas stationed two companies between his headquarters and Hudson's Crossing. Actually, Furnas was trying to hold for the United States all of the Indian Territory between the Arkansas River and the Kansas border with two uncertain regiments of Indian soldiers and an unorganized third regiment of Indians. From intelligence reports received from scouting parties, he estimated the total strength of the Confederates in Indian Territory at 6,000 men consisting of 2,500 Chickasaws and Choctaws, 2,000 "McIntosh" Creeks, 600 Cherokees, part of a regiment of Texans, and 300 white troops from Arkansas.²³ Gen. Douglas Cooper of the Confederacy was in command of all rebel forces. His subordinates were Colonels Drew, Stand Watie, and McIntosh. The white troops under General Salomon were garrisoned safely north of Hudson's Crossing at least three days march from the Indian troops under Furnas. In response to an urgent request from Furnas, Salomon finally ordered the sending of a supply train with ten day's rations as well as a section of Allen's battery.²⁴ Before Salomon's letter arrived, the situation at Camp Wattles was becoming serious. By July 30, the food supply was almost exhausted and the morale of the Indian troops was at

²² Lt. A. C. Ellithorpe to Furnas, July 27, 1862.

²³ Furnas' notes.

²⁴ Brig. Gen. F. Salomon to Furnas, July 29, 1862.

a low ebb. Col. William A. Phillips was engaged in a scouting expedition with a part of the Third Indian Regiment. In a dispatch to Phillips, Furnas wrote:

I hesitate to order you to fall back with all your force to these headquarters; but earnestly advise it. I am unable thus far to get from Genl Salomen [sic] either reinforcements or additional subsistence. You have about all the subsistence we have, and the 1st Indian Reg't will in my opinion stampede within 48 hours as well as a portion of the 2d Reg't. Genl Salomen's entire force is now distant from us at least 50 miles. We must concentrate our forces or fall back—perhaps both. The Creeks are afraid the Cherokees are leading them into traps, hence their great dissatisfaction. . . . We cannot hold the Indians here 48 hours longer, I am quite confident.²⁵

Some kind of action was imperative. After consultation with his staff, Furnas ordered the command to break camp the following morning for a march to Hudson's Crossing. Being unaware that another command had accomplished the deed, Furnas ordered Colonel Phillips to proceed to Park Hill to capture John Ross, the Cherokee chief, and the archives of the Cherokee nation.²⁶ Upon completion of that action Phillips was to gather all loyal Cherokees who wished protection, and to proceed with them to Hudson's Crossing.

Three days after Furnas' command broke camp, Salomon ordered the entire force to proceed to Hudson's crossing without delay.²⁷ General Hindman with his Confederate troops had captured Cassville in southwestern Missouri and nearby Neosho had been evacuated by Union forces. With his left flank exposed to the Confederates in Missouri, Salomon felt the necessity of gathering all available troops at his headquarters. Moreover, his white troops had never participated in any hostilities.

Characteristically, Agent Carruth disagreed with the necessity of evacuating the Indian Territory to the enemy. Only three months before, the Union military officers had guaranteed that the region would be held until the end of hostilities in the states. Inasmuch as there was no way of

²⁵ Furnas to Col. W. A. Phillips, July 30, 1862.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, July 31, 1862.

²⁷ Salomon to Furnas, August 2, 1862.

dissuading the military, he requested that Furnas allow twenty five Cherokee soldiers to return to the Cherokee country to recover their families and movable possessions.²⁸ Upon arrival at Hudson's Crossing, Furnas' command was detailed to guard the commissary stores of the expedition.²⁹ Chief John Ross, then in the custody of the Second Kansas Regiment, reviewed the Cherokee soldiers in Furnas' command.³⁰

The turn of events in the Indian Expedition thoroughly disgusted Furnas. Lack of planning, confusion of command, and downright incompetence on the part of the expedition's commanders had rendered it impossible to carry out a positive plan of operations against the enemy. Since he was detailed to serve at a general court martial at Fort Scott, he turned the command over to Colonel John Ritchie, commander of the Second Indian Regiment.³¹ General Blunt detailed Furnas to Nebraska Territory to raise another regiment of soldiers. Although Blunt was acting under instructions from the Secretary of War, Governor Alvin Saunders of Nebraska Territory resented such intrusion by the military. On August 18, he issued a proclamation ordering such recruiting officers to desist from their attempts at procuring enlistments in Nebraska.³² It seems that territorial governors were every bit as jealous of their authority as were state governors in the Civil War period.

The Sioux Indian uprising in Minnesota during 1862 had alarmed settlers in the northern counties of Nebraska Territory, and they appealed to Governor Saunders for military protection. It was thought that another regiment would be raised for protection against the Sioux. Hoping for a commission in the new regiment, Furnas realized that he must sever all connection with the Indian Expedition. In

²⁸ Carruth to Furnas, August 6, 1862.

²⁹ W. S. Cloud to Furnas, August 8, 1862.

³⁰ J. B. Jones to Furnas, August 7, 1862.

³¹ Hq. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Special Orders No. 84, July 28, 1862.

³² Executive Record, 1861-1867, Alvin Saunders, War Governor (Ms., Nebraska State Historical Society), p. 30.

the middle of September, he sent the following unusual letter to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton:

I hereby tender my immediate and unconditional resignation as "Colonel of the First Regiment of Indian Home Guards for the defense of the Indian Territory." My reasons for so doing are

First: I have always doubted the propriety and policy of arming and placing in the field Indians. Five months connection with an Indian Regiment only confirms me in the opinion that full-blood Indians cannot be made soldiers, and that to attempt it is a useless waste of both time and money.

But one company officer and but few of the men composing the 1st Regiment Home Guards, can speak or understand a word of English. All communication has been through *Interpreters*, all of whom are *ignorant uneducated Negroes*, who have been raised among the Indians and possess to a great degree their peculiar characteristics. The commander has but little assurance that they are understood or appreciated. They cannot be made to feel the obligations of a soldier, and especially the necessity of discipline. I could mention many instances in evidence of this opinion, but will content myself with a few only.

When in the enemy's country during the late "Indian Expedition", and when also in close proximity with the enemy, the entire Regiment unceremoniously left the train of *Baggage and Commissary wagons*, upon the open prairie, and went off, many of them, on a plundering expedition. Again: on our return to Ft. Scott, quite one half the Regiment deserted, going their own way to their refugee homes at Leroy. It has been no uncommon occurrence to find half the sentinel asleep at their posts, or leaving them entirely on stormy nights, and *Grand Guards and Pickets* deserting or leaving their stations to go hunting!

Under these circumstances, I can but feel fully convinced that it is folly in the extreme, to attempt or continue any efforts with such wild Indians as are the *Creeks, Seminoles and Utches* [*sic*], composing the *First Indian Regiment* and that I am accomplishing nothing comparatively in aiding to crush the rebellion and restoring the Union. I am anxious to do something in behalf of my country, Therefore

Second: I tender my resignation as Col. of this Regiment with the determination, if accepted, of entering the service immediately again in Nebraska under the new call for volunteers, where I hope to be more useful in this great and pressing emergency.³³

³³ R. W. Furnas to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, September 7, 1862.

Although the Indian Expedition had been a failure, Furnas had carried out his instructions as judiciously as possible. Under the circumstances, it is improbable that any officer could have achieved more success. Jealousy, lack of military experience and downright incompetence in the officers placed in command of the Indian Expedition rendered it impossible to succeed.

II

In the absence of Governor Saunders, Acting Governor A. S. Paddock asked the War Department for authority to organize a regiment of cavalry for home defense. Upon receipt of Paddock's request, Maj. Gen. John Pope, in command of the Department of the Northwest, St. Paul, Minnesota, sent Brig. Gen. W. L. Elliott, his Inspector General, to Omaha. After consultations with Acting Governor Paddock, General Elliott issued the following order:

For the protection of the settlers, one Regiment of Volunteer Cavalry will be immediately organized and mustered into service, to serve for nine months unless sooner discharged, for the defense of the frontier.⁸⁴

Twelve companies of three officers and one hundred enlisted men each were authorized for the regiment. Company officers, being elected by the enlisted men, were usually those men who recruited the group. The ten staff officers, including one colonel, three majors, two surgeons, one adjutant, one quartermaster and one commissary, were appointed by the Governor.⁸⁵

After making a short trip to Kansas to settle his accounts connected with the First Indian Regiment, Furnas went to

⁸⁴ Executive Record, 1861-1867, Alvin Saunders, War Governor, p. 38.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

work enlisting a second company of volunteers from Brownville for the new cavalry regiment. Capt. T. W. Bedford and Lt. Henry M. Atkinson recruited the first local company—Company C—and it was accepted for service October 30, 1862, Company A from Florence and Company B from Omaha had been accepted a week before.³⁶ By the second week in November, Furnas enlisted the necessary 100 men. It was much easier to raise a full company of 100 men in which everyone had a chance either to achieve non-commissioned rank or to assist their friends, than to enlist ten men for a company whose ratings were already assigned.

At a company meeting on November 15, Furnas was elected captain by acclamation. Lewis Hill, son of a prominent local merchant, was elected first lieutenant, and John H. Maun, real estate agent, received the second lieutenancy. William E. Furnas, age eighteen, oldest of the five sons, was elected first corporal of the company.³⁷ His military career was tragically short, for one month later, on December 17, he died of typhoid fever at a military hospital in Omaha.³⁸ Furnas' company journeyed to Omaha early in December to enter the service. Lieutenant Muckay, mustering officer, administered the oath to Captain Furnas on December 8, and the group was designated Company E.³⁹ By the end of December, the company contained three officers and ninety eight enlisted men, with ninety eight horses.⁴⁰ Company E was ordered to Nemaha City for duty soon after New Year's Day, 1863. They set up their tents outside of the town and constructed a hospital shelter for the sick and sheds for the horses. Two uneventful months were spent on military drill at Nemaha City.

While at Omaha, Furnas communicated with his close friend, Secretary Paddock, and with Governor Saunders on the possibility of securing the colonelcy of the Second Ne-

³⁶ A. T. Andreas, *A History of the State of Nebraska* (Chicago, 1882), p. 236.

³⁷ *Nebraska Advertiser*, November 15, 1862.

³⁸ Official Return, Second Nebraska Cavalry, December, 1862.

³⁹ Muster Roll, Second Nebraska Cavalry Regiment.

⁴⁰ Official Return, December, 1862.



OFFICERS OF THE SECOND NEBRASKA CAVALRY

From left to right: Col. Robert W. Furnas, Maj. John Taffe, Lt. Col. William F Sapp, Maj. John W. Pearman, Surgeon Aurelius Bowen, Reg. Adj. Henry M. Atkinson, and Maj. George Armstrong.

braska Cavalry, as the regiment soon came to be known. Because of his military experience with the Indian Expedition and his prominence in South Platte politics, he was given the coveted command. On March 24, he went to Omaha and was mustered in as colonel by Lt. John A. Wilcox. His staff included: Lt. Col. William F. Sapp of Omaha, Adjutant General of Nebraska Territory; Maj. John Taffe of Omaha; and Maj. John Pearman of Nebraska City.⁴¹ The first two companies—L and M—were accepted for service in March and the regiment was full. A regimental supply depot was established at Omaha in February. The total strength of the regiment was thirty-three officers and 1,105 enlisted men. The regiment had 1,081 horses. The twelve companies were stationed at various points along the Missouri River from Falls City to Dakota City and at Fort Kearny on the Platte River.⁴²

During April, six companies—E, F, D, H, L, and M—marched from Omaha to Sioux City, on the Iowa side of the Missouri River. Three companies—B, C, and D—were permanently detailed to remain as guards at Fort Kearny and Omaha. The remaining nine companies were ordered to participate in a campaign against the Sioux Indians in Dakota Territory. The Sioux threatened to continue the massacres and plunderings which they had started in southern Minnesota in 1862. Brig. Gen. Alfred Sully, in command of the First Military District at Sioux City, was the ranking officer in charge of the Indian campaign of 1863.

The nine participating companies of the Second Nebraska Cavalry Regiment rendezvoused at Camp Cook (renamed Camp Sully), located six miles west of Sioux City in Dakota Territory.⁴³ The following three weeks were spent in getting the outfit in shape for the Indian campaign. General Sully issued a general order containing detailed instructions for both officers and men. With respect to the enemy, he supplied the following information:

⁴¹ Muster Roll, Second Nebraska Cavalry.

⁴² Official Return, March, 1863.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, May, 1863.

Indians, as a general rule, do not attack at night, but frequently a small party endeavors to make a stampede for the purpose of securing some of the animals. . . . The Officers will instruct the men that not all the Indians they meet are to be treated as enemies. The Commanding General will designate what tribes, and in what sections of the country the Indians are to be considered hostile and so treated.

In conclusion, the Commanding General takes this opportunity to give the following advice in regard to fighting Indians in case of an action. Should the Indians be running and we pursuing, the officers will see the men keep near each other; beware of small parties straying away and getting ambuscaded. In attacking or pursuing an Indian, be careful not to get on his left side by getting on his right you deprive him of the use of his most formidable weapon for close quarters—the bow and arrow. And above all be careful how you approach a wounded Indian or one who may be pretending to be dead. An Indian fighting has no idea of mercy and he naturally thinks you have none either.⁴⁴

Company A under Lieutenant Clark was sent ahead to Fort Randall as advance guard. A few days later, Company I under Captain Leaming followed suit. The main body of the regiment, totaling seven companies, was made ready for the 150 mile march. The horses were all shod and military equipment was checked and packed. Vigorous activity replaced the inertia and boredom of garrison life.⁴⁵ General Sully's force for the expedition against the Sioux consisted of the Sixth Iowa Cavalry and the Second Nebraska Cavalry. Accompanying a commissary train, two companies—F and G—left Camp Sully at daybreak on June 20. On the following day, Companies H and L departed as escort to another supply train. Colonel Furnas, with the remaining three companies of the regiment and one battalion of the Sixth Iowa Cavalry, left at daybreak, June 22.⁴⁶

The first day's march was along the north bank of the Missouri River to Miles Hall Point, twenty two miles distant from Camp Sully. The lush grass provided excellent graz-

⁴⁴ General Orders No. 22, General Alfred Sully, June 6, 1863 (Furnas papers).

⁴⁵ Military Journal, Colonel R. W. Furnas, Second Nebraska Cavalry Regiment, June-September, 1862 (Furnas papers).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, June 22, 1863.

ing for horses and the country was very pleasant to travel through. The Vermillion River was crossed near its entrance into the Missouri on the next day. Scouting parties of two or three men were detailed every day to reconnoiter the surrounding countryside. The main body soon overtook the advance companies with the supply trains, and they proceeded together into Yankton, capital of Dakota Territory. Yankton was then a small settlement in which Furnas counted twenty houses.⁴⁷ The route of march followed the banks of the Missouri River as it turned northward. Only a few Indian stragglers were seen, and no unusual events occurred. On arrival at Fort Randall on June 28, Furnas ordered construction of a camp across the river from the fort. However, a heavy rain on payday, June 30, forced him to move the camp one mile away to higher ground.⁴⁸

As the command marched northward to Fort Randall, Furnas was much interested in the topography of Dakota Territory. Prior to this time, he had never traveled north of Omaha. In his daily journal, he speculated favorably on the agricultural possibilities of Dakota. Although he watched carefully for signs of fortifications or remains of the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804, none were visible. He did find some interesting Indian drawings on the sides of chalk bluffs together with indecipherable writing.⁴⁹ The Fourth of July holiday was celebrated by the firing of a national salute and a rush to the sutler's wagon for refreshments. On the following day, the command broke camp and started for Fort Pierre. Because of the rough, broken ground, several supply wagons overturned. The extremely hot weather had turned the grass brown and good grazing for the horses was difficult to find. Most of the creeks were bone dry because of the hot weather and lack of rain. The low stage of the Missouri River caused two steamboats supplying the expedition, the *War Eagle* and the *Belle Peoria*, to run aground on sandbars north of Fort Randall. All of the freight had to be unloaded before either could be refloated.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, June 25, 1863.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, June 30, 1863.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, July 3, 1863.

When the thermometer reached 110 degrees on July 7, Furnas decided that it was foolhardy to march in the heat of the day. Consequently, he ordered the day's march to begin at one or two o'clock in the morning and to terminate by ten or eleven in the morning. In describing the daily routine of march, he wrote in his journal:

The weather up to 7 or 8 O.C. was cool and comfortable, inspiring the horses into a rapid walk. But weariness, accompanied by the tramp-tramp over the hollow sounding prairie induced to drowsiness and a consequent cadenced nodding side and shifty shuffle through the whole column. Major Pearman taking the lead in this very graceful and ludicrous movement. . . . But little grass, no timber, no game and no water until we arrived here where a cesspool would be a luxury and the shade of a tent a necessity.⁶⁰

Large herds of buffalo were frequently seen grazing on the west side of the Missouri river. Otherwise, the game was quite scarce.

The Crow Creek Indian Agency was reached in a few days and a camp was made four miles north of the agency. There were about 1,500 Santee Sioux and about 2,000 Winnebagoes living at the agency. The latter had been driven out of Minnesota because of the Sioux uprising in the previous year. The Santee Sioux were nearly all women and children, for their men were engaged in hunting and war parties. During the three weeks stay at Crow Creek, Furnas made the acquaintance of Clark W. Thompson, the United States Indian Agent. This acquaintance was to prove highly useful a few years later. Moreover, the respite offered pleasant diversion for the officers and men. In his journal, Furnas noted:

While here the Indians particularly Isantee squaws (seeking substitutes for "Bucks," I presume, in which I opine they were quite successful) swarmed our Camp from "early morn to dewy eve," their dusky forms frequently seen flitting in the pale moonlight performing their "rites" among the shubbery and stumps to a much later hour;—filthy hags whose ugliness was equaled only by their want of anything like modesty or virtue.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, July 9, 1863.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, July 31, 1863.

The performance of a native dance by the Winnebagoes in front of Furnas' tent also helped to relieve the monotony.

The entire command broke camp at Crow Creek on July 31 and headed for Fort Pierre. Because all of the creeks were dry, the regiment frequently had to return to the Missouri for water. Many old Indian camping grounds were passed on the three day journey to Fort Pierre. Unfortunately, no sign of rain was present to break the terrible heat of the day. Upon arrival at Fort Pierre, a camp was made on a plateau near the river. General Sully and his staff, who were encamped four miles above the fort, visited Furnas' command and inspected the troops.⁵² Because of the parched condition of the grass and brush, many prairie fires broke out near the camp. Considerable time was spent by the entire command in extinguishing the fires. A terrific dust and windstorm flattened all of the tents a few days later.

The food supplies of the command were nearly exhausted, so the arrival of the steamer *Belle Peoria* was heartily welcomed by the troops. General Sully moved Fort Pierre from the west to the east bank of the Missouri and erected a large two story block house with a six pound cannon in the second story.⁵³ Preparations were made for departure of the entire brigade under General Sully farther up the Missouri in pursuit of the Sioux. The sick were left at Fort Pierre to recuperate. All surplus horses were left behind. General Sully's staff and the Sixth Iowa Cavalry proceeded one day ahead of the Second Nebraska Cavalry. From twenty to twenty five miles were covered every day. A little diversion came on August 25, when Furnas noted:

During the day Buffalo and Antelope were seen in abundance. Fine sport in hunting. 15 or 20 buffaloes were killed in sight of the command. W. M. McCormick killed 3. Command halted in sight of a large herd and a great many of the boys went in pursuit and were quite successful. One horse was shot and a matter of surprise that many more were not as most of those who went out were quite inexperienced.⁵⁴

⁵² *Ibid.*, August 3, 1863.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, August 9, 1863.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, August 25, 1863.

When another horse was accidentally shot on a hunting expedition, General Sully had to forbid such sport. Stray Indians were being picked up by scouting parties almost every day and General Sully ordered a close watch for a surprise attack. The captured Indians, mostly women, told conflicting stories of the whereabouts of the war parties. The trail of General Sibley's command was discovered but no contact was made.

On August 28, the Second Nebraska Cavalry arrived at Long Lake, east of Bismarck, present capital of North Dakota. The lake was at a very low stage and so full of alkali that many horses would not drink the water. The entire command was very anxious to engage the Sioux in battle. Under orders from Sully, Furnas sent a battalion led by Major Pearman to the outlet of Long Lake where 100 Indian lodges were presumed to be located. The Indians had vacated the site before the battalion arrived. However, burned and deserted wagons and white female wearing apparel were found in the vicinity.⁵⁵

The prolonged search for the elusive Sioux was rewarded on September 3 after the regiment went into camp near the head of the James River. Scouts reported at four o'clock in the afternoon that an Indian camp of 600 lodges was located eight miles away at Whitestone Hills. In compliance with Sully's orders, Furnas set out with eight companies of his command to assist Major House, commanding the Sixth Iowa Cavalry, in surrounding the encamped Indians. In his official report to Sully, Furnas gives the following description of the engagement:

On approaching the Indian encampment, I found House's battalion drawn up in order of battle on the north side, and on reconnoitering the enemy's position, perceived that the Indians were leaving as fast as possible. I immediately ordered Maj. House to pursue on the left flank of the enemy, while I with the Second Nebraska moved on their right flank. Arriving opposite that position, I perceived the Indians, at halt, formed in line of battle, apparently awaiting our attack. I immediately formed my men in line of battle. . . . As it was nearly dark, I felt that time was precious, and if anything was

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, August 29, 1863.

to be done that night, it must be done speedily, and made up my mind to attack the enemy immediately. I therefore changed my plan of operations. I ordered Maj. Taffe with his battalion to proceed to the head of the ravine in which the Indians were posted to cut off their retreat in that direction, which order was promptly executed, and his command formed in line awaiting further orders. I then ordered the Second Battalion to advance on the enemy which it did. Maj. Taffe, then, by my order, came forward, the line of the two battalions forming an obtuse angle. When within four hundred yards I ordered my men to dismount, and after advancing one hundred yards nearer, ordered the Second Battalion to open the battle by a volley from their Enfields, which they did with precision and effect, creating quite a confusion in the enemy ranks. At this time, I perceived what I supposed to be Major House's battalion, about a mile distant, advancing upon the enemy's rear. In the order in which my line was now formed, I advanced upon the enemy, pouring in upon him as I advanced a fire from my whole line, which was immediately and vigorously returned by the Indians The battle now raged with fury for some time on both sides. The enemy successively, by a desperate charge, attempted to turn my right and left flanks, but they were repelled with slaughter. . . . At this juncture, I became convinced that House's battalion, mistaking my command in the darkness for Indians, were firing into it. I therefore ordered my men to fall back, out of range of House's guns, and mount their horses, as the Indians were now in rout, and were fleeing out of range of my guns, up a ravine, some distance to the front.⁶⁶

There is no evidence that Furnas notified House of the change in plans. Perhaps it was not possible in the confusion of semi-darkness. At any rate, House's actions seemed to indicate that he had not been informed. Furnas' estimate of the enemy's strength at 1,000 was undoubtedly exaggerated. So were the estimated Indian casualties of 150 killed and 300 wounded. The actual casualties in the Second Nebraska Cavalry were seven killed, fourteen wounded, and ten missing in action. Five horses were killed, nine wounded, and nine missing.⁶⁷

The last firing occurred at about eight thirty in the evening in almost total darkness. Not receiving any orders from Sully, Furnas ordered his men to dismount and hold the

⁶⁶ Colonel Furnas' official report to General Sully on hostilities at Whitestone Hills, in *Andreas, op. cit.*, pp. 237-238.

⁶⁷ Official Return, Second Nebraska Cavalry, September, 1863.

battleground until daylight. In his journal he gives the following picture of the scene at dawn:

No Indians save dead were to be seen. The whole country for miles was covered with roving, howling dogs, and ponies. The Indians fled leaving everything, tents, meat, cooking utensils, and 15 or 20 small children. . . . We camped for the day on the ground occupied by the Indians when they were discovered.⁵⁸

A small force of men, sent back to camp for the ambulance, was attacked by the Sioux and four men were killed.⁵⁹ Among the enemy were reported to be many branches of the great Siouan family: Santees, Brules, Yanktons, and Blackfeet (the band). They escaped before the regiment could start in pursuit.

In a few days, the Second Nebraska Cavalry broke camp and marched to General Sully's headquarters near Farm Island on the Missouri. Sully ordered the regiment to proceed to Fort Randall to relieve the garrison at that place.⁶⁰ After a few weeks of garrison duty, the regiment left Fort Randall for the long march downstream to Omaha. The march was made at a leisurely pace, taking two weeks.⁶¹ Since no quarters were available at Omaha, all of the companies were sent to their respective places of enrollment to be mustered out of the service. In his last order to the regiment, Furnas said:

In parting with the 2d Nebraska Cavalry, by reason of the expiration of its term of service, it is a pleasant duty of the Colonel commanding to bear testimony to your good conduct in all essentials which constitute the soldier, in camp, on the march, and on the battlefield. . . . While congratulating you upon the results of the expedition, the Colonel commanding cannot fail to express his grief for the loss of those of his command who were killed in the engagement of September 3 and others who fell by disease during the campaign. . . . We now separate and go to our respective homes. The best wishes of the Colonel commanding attend you.⁶²

⁵⁸ Furnas Military Journal, September 4, 1863.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, September 5, 1863.

⁶⁰ General Orders No. 62, September 16, 1863.

⁶¹ Official Return, October, 1863.

⁶² General Orders No. 12, Second Nebraska Cavalry, November 30, 1863, in Andreas, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

The field and staff officers and men of the regiment were mustered out of the service on December 1, three weeks short of the nine months' enlistment.⁶⁸

Furnas was well satisfied with the part that his regiment had played in the Indian campaign against the Sioux. Although not a soldier by nature, he tried his best to follow orders faithfully and to keep his regiment in good trim. He had a better than average concern for the welfare of the enlisted men. The weather had proved a more difficult opponent than the Sioux who knew better than to make a frontal attack on a large mounted force. Probably the most important effect of this military experience was the large number of friends and acquaintances that he had made. Many of these were to prove extremely valuable in his future political career.

⁶⁸ Muster-Out Roll, Second Nebraska Cavalry Regiment.

