Army frontier in Montana

Harold Lewis McElroy

The University of Montana

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THE ARMY FRONTIER
IN MONTANA

by

Harold Lewis McElroy

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The army has always played an important part in the opening of new territories in American History. It is the one to open up these new areas, to explore and to map them and then to make them safe for occupation. In what is now the state of Montana this was entirely true. From the very beginning of Montana history, there is a record of the army's activity. Lewis and Clark opened Montana for the army when they crossed the area in 1805, and in the following years many expeditions were sent out to investigate and map the territory.

The army did not plan out any strategy to facilitate the settlement of Montana and the surrounding territory until about 1860, for there was no necessity of doing so. During the period immediately preceding the Civil War, the idea of setting aside the west for the use of the Indian forever, disappeared. Settlers, trappers, and miners had been moving into the west to the Pacific Coast since 1840 and had discovered its potentialities. Gold was discovered, first in California, then in Colorado, and around 1860 in the Northwest. Streams of emigrants flowed into the country and trouble arose with the Indians who resented the intrusion of the whites on their lands. It was under the impetus of Indian massacres and uprisings that the army took the matter
into hand and tried to work out some sort of a plan to settle
the Indian problem forever.

At first the plan seemed to be to strike with all the
force the army could muster against the hostiles in the hope
that in one mighty battle the Indians could be forced to vow
to the will of the white Father. In 1863, 1864, and in 1865,
the army tried out this policy but failed to put an end to
the trouble with the red man. The effect of the sharp thrusts
at the Indian, especially the Sioux, simply drove him to the
west until he could retreat no further.

The wall which stopped the retreat of the Indian was the
mining camps of Montana. Between 1862, and 1865 the diggings
at Bannack, Virginia City, Butte, and Helena had lured thou-
ousands of people into the area and as the towns grew up around
the diggings they formed a barrier to the Indian tribes. The
main point of attack for the savages was then concentrated on
the lines of emigration into the mining regions.

These lines of emigration became part of the army's next
policy and this policy lead the soldiers directly into Montana.
The first line of forts along the emigrant routes was estab-
lished in Minnesota and extended west to the mouth of the
Big Horn River in Montana. This line soon faded in its im-
portance as another more direct route into the mines was
founded by John Bozeman along the famed Bozeman Trail. The
line of forts along this route brought the first fort into
Montana with the establishment of Fort C. F. Smith. However, the Sioux vigorously resisted the effort of the army to keep this line open, and forced its closure in 1869. The Indians refused to sign a treaty of peace to end the hostilities that had existed as long as the Bozeman Trail was open. They would not even consider negotiating with the white officials until the line of forts along the trail was abandoned. In the end, the federal government gave in to their demands forcing the army to leave the Powder River country. The treaty which followed with the Sioux gave them entire control of the disputed area and forbade any white the right to enter.

The mining centers of Montana continued to grow as the trouble over the Bozeman Trail was in progress. Virginia City reached a population of almost 10,000 until new diggings were discovered and the population shifted to these new lodes. Helena grew into prominence with the discovery of gold in Last Chance Gulch, and the population took on a permanency that was lacking in other gold camps such as Montana City, Jefferson City, Silver City, and Diamond City. The steamboat landing of Fort Benton became a thriving metropolis. In the Gallatin Valley, Bozeman City assumed the form of a sturdy farming town as over 3,000 settlers took up their homes in the valley. Other ranchers and farmers began moving out from the mining towns to the rich farm lands of the Sun and Dearborne River areas.
This growing population soon came into conflict with the Indian tribes that roamed the Territory. The Indians deeply resented the intrusion of their lands by the whites. They grew angry as they watched the destruction of the buffalo and other game upon which their very existence depended. Trouble also arose from the great differences in the white and red man's modes of living. Neither party could understand the ways of the other. The Indians considered it a mark of distinction to be able to steal horses, while the white man considered horse stealing a great wrong. He punished the Indian the same way as any criminal by inflicting the death penalty in rough western fashion. In retaliation, the Indian believed in an eye for an eye and would kill any white man he came in contact with.

At Fort Benton in 1866, trouble arose that illustrates this point very well. Two members of the Blackfeet nation were killed by irate citizens for stealing horses, and in retaliation, ten white men were killed by the aroused Indians. As a result, unrest spread over the area forcing the Indian agent to ask for military protection for the Fort Benton agency.

Other conflict spread over the Territory. To the south of Benton, near Helena, the Clarke family were killed by the Indians because they refused to accede to the red man's wishes. In the Yellowstone Valley, John Bozeman was killed by the
Indians as he rode down the valley with a companion. These and other instances of the growing tension between the Indians and the settlers brought the army into Montana.

It was not the duty of the army to determine whether the policy that it was to follow was morally right or not. The army did not decide who had the rightful claim to the land, it was sent into Montana to protect the American citizens and to open the territory to settlement. This thesis is written to cover the military policy laid down and followed by the army in entering and opening central Montana to settlement.

The line of forts that led to the settlement of Montana began with the construction of forts along the other main artery of traffic into the territory, the Missouri River. This line originated when Camp Cooke was built at the mouth of the Judith River. It was extended to Fort Benton, and then to its western terminus, Fort Shaw. From Shaw, the line curved to the south, then east, into the Gallatin Valley where Fort Ellis was built. To clear the central portion of Montana, the line from Ellis proved to the north when Fort Logan was erected. The line ended with the establishment of Fort Maginnis in the heart of Montana.

After the line of forts had been constructed, the final phase of the army program was put into operation, the laying of military roads to connect the posts and to serve as lines
of defense against Indians wandering into central Montana.  
With the protection furnished by the army, by 1880 the Judith  
Basin of central Montana was dotted with farms, ranches, and  
settlements.  By 1885, there was no longer a need for the  
army to remain to protect the people of the region, and the  
army abandoned its posts, leaving the fertile land for the  
cultivation by the white man.
CHAPTER II

INDIAN UPRISINGS AND ARMY PUNISHMENT

By 1860, the Indians could look back on a long line of removals from east to west as the full force of civilization pressed against them.¹ For a time it looked as if they would still be able to retain enough of the Trans-Mississippi West for a suitable home of their own to hunt and fish, and to roam over as they pleased, but that hope dwindled and died soon after 1850.

The so-called 'Indian Country,'² which had been set aside for the Indians exclusive use forever, had lasted scarcely fifteen years before the crush of civilization again pressed irresistibly at their borders.³ Trappers, miners, adventurers,

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¹ Frederic L. Paxson, *The Last American Frontier*, (New York, 1910), p. 12. "...many frontiers had been created and crossed in the westward march; the seacoast, the falls line, ..., the Ohio Valley, the Mississippi...."

² Hafen and Wister, *Western America*, (New York, 1941), p. 233. "...a solid wall of Indian Country from the Red River to Green Bay and Lake Michigan faced the Mississippi Valley white settlements." Paxson, *op. cit.*, p. 31. "The Indian frontier, ...had by 1840 been carried into fact and existed unbroken from...Texas to the lakes."

³ Robert Riegel, *America Moves West*, (New York, 1930), pp. 400-402. "A treaty in 1851 took land from the Sioux of Minnesota for white settlement. In 1851, the north plain Indians, Cheyenne, Assiniboine, Crow, Gros Ventres, Shoshone, Arapaho, and Sioux, gave the United States the right to build roads across the continent. In 1853, Kansas and part of Nebraska were purchased from the Indians."
and settlers, pushed farther and farther across the Mississippi into their homelands, roughly brushing aside the red man as they came in contact with him. It became increasingly clear to the Indian that some final solution must be reached soon or his cause would be hopeless.

As the situation became more and more pressing on the Indians of the frontier, the influence of the younger Indians, who were more than willing to fight to remove the intruders, gained in strength. Also, the idea that they must make a stand for the recognition of their rights became more and more apparent to the Indians.

But, it was not until the beginning of the Civil War that the Indians saw their chance. The main areas of the conflict were limited to the more settled parts of the border states and the area of the Northwest was ignored to a great extent. The Indians soon found that they could commit their raids and depredations without much fear of punishment or reprisal.

This attitude gradually spread over the frontier. The government and the army did little to correct the situation until their attention was drawn sharply and violently to the problem by the Indian uprisings in Minnesota. Then, a department of the Northwest was added to the army command to bring the upper Mississippi and Missouri River areas under military
protection. General John Pope was placed in command of the department.4

General Pope's first assignment was to solve the situation created by a drunken band of Sioux Indians who had massacred a group of white settlers at Acton, Minnesota, on August 18, 1862, and had fled to a tribe under Little Crow for protection. Realizing that retribution would probably include all of them, the whole group decided to continue the butchery, and soon hundreds of savages were on the warpath, scalping men, violating and killing women, eating out the brains of infants, and committing all the hideous cruelties practiced in Indian warfare. Terror and despair reigned throughout Minnesota until regulars under Pope gained control, and either drove the hostiles from Minnesota or removed them peacefully to lands outside of the state. Many of the Indians were imprisoned and tried. Finally, in December, 1862, thirty-eight of the leaders were hanged on a single scaffold at Mankato.5

Thus, the army program of gradually driving the Indians to the west and north, out of the path of the frontier of

4. Edwin M. Stanton, "Letter to John Pope,” War of the Rebellion The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, (Washington, 1885), Series I, Vol. XIII, p. 517. All further references to these records will be noted simply as Official Records.

settlement was inaugurated. In the years that followed, an annual program of warfare was planned to hold the Indians in check and to push them farther and farther west, until the mining frontier and the frontier of settlement hemmed them into a small corner of Montana, where the final stand of the Sioux was made.

At the same time that the Sioux were driven from Minnesota, reports began reaching the army that there were large numbers of southern sympathizers among the employees and officers of the fur companies of the Upper Missouri, that the Indians were securing arms and supplies from the Metis of the Red River country, and the British traders were urging the tribes to resist the advance of the white settlers. To investigate these reports, and to establish routes of travel with protection for the emigrants who were beginning to stream in ever-larger numbers into the mining regions of the Northwest, the army started its campaign in the Northwest which ultimately brought it into Montana with an era of permanent establishments through the construction of Fort C. F. Smith.

To investigate the reports coming in from the Northwest and to secure a foothold in the area, the army sent Captain W. B. Greer and Company I, 30th Wisconsin Infantry, to Fort Union in the spring of 1863. The following spring, they were relieved by Captain Amery Upton with Company B, 1st Volunteers, who had orders to turn the fur company people out of the fort. All were removed except Charles Carpenteur, and the army remained in control of the fort until it was abandoned in the fall.

Indian unrest continued following the Minnesota massacre, and in 1863, another campaign was mapped out which drove the Sioux farther to the west and north. General Sully and General Sidley marched separate columns into the upper Missouri region, Sully from Sioux City, and Sidley from southern Minnesota. Their plan to combine for a decisive campaign against the Indians above Fort Pierre was wrecked by Sully's column being delayed for lack of supplies, and only individual


11. Sidley was in command of the 2nd Military District, with headquarters at Fort Snelling, Minnesota. Sully was in charge of the District of Iowa.

12. Fort Pierre was located at the present site of the city of Pierre, South Dakota.
operations were accomplished. Both met and defeated bands of Indians before they were forced to return at the end of the season. Sully was able to establish Fort "Sully, though the Indians were not decisively defeated.13

More detailed plans were worked out during the winter for a campaign into the upper Missouri to once and for all meet and defeat the hostile Indians. These plans were only part of a greater policy, however, a policy which pointed the army's movements directly toward Montana. This policy was one to establish military posts along the northern routes of emigration into the Northwest mining regions.

By January, 1864, plans had been worked out which called for the establishment of four posts to be constructed on a line of travel from Minnesota to the mines. One post was to be on the south side of Devil's Lake, as near as convenient to the western extremity of the lake, to accommodate three infantry companies and five companies of cavalry. The second post was to be built on the James River, nearly straight west of Fort Abercrombie, to accommodate three infantry and five cavalry companies. The third, a four infantry company and a battalion cavalry post, was to be located on the Missouri River at, or near, the mouth of Long Lake. The fourth, and

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post was to be somewhere on the Yellowstone River, not more than fifty miles above the trading post of Alexander. Well marked trails were to be laid out between these posts and were to be opened as soon as possible. 14

In connection with the new plan for the posts, the army continued the one of pushing back the Indians. A campaign was mapped out against the combined tribes of the Yanktonais and Teton Sioux, and the other tribes who were planning on blocking all Missouri River traffic to the goldfields of the Northwest. The combined cavalry force of the Northwest Department was to be concentrated under Sully's command. The Iowa force of Sully's about 1300 strong, was to move up to Fort Pierre and then up the Missouri to the mouth of Bourdache Creek, while four companies of infantry were to follow up the river by boat with supplies. At Bourdache Creek, the cavalry from General Sully's command from Minnesota, about 1600 men who were to travel across country to that point, were to join Sully and move from there according to General Sully's plan. 15

These plans were well on the way to perfection by March. However, on March 14, H. H. Halleck, Secretary of War, wrote General Pope stating that reliable sources had informed the

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War Department that the main emigration from the western states to the northwest mining region in the spring would move by a new route. This emigration would move from Fort Kearney past Fort Laramie, thence north crossing the Powder River near the mouth of Willow Creek, striking the Yellowstone and its tributaries where gold was found in largest quantities. Hallack also stated that in all probabilities this emigration route would require military protection through the Indian country from the vicinity of Fort Laramie to the Yellowstone. He was quite correct in this statement, for the Bozeman Trail, as the route was named, was under continual attack by the Indians.

In regard to the movement of the emigrants, it had been proposed to the War Department that part of Sully's expedition, which was now being organized, move up the Niourara or North Cheyenne River and establish a post on the Powder River and one at the mouth of the Big Horn River. The Big Horn post was to be supplied by steamer, which was reported, could navigate the Yellowstone that far, and perhaps above. Hallack made it clear that he did not want to make any changes in the planned expedition, but that he felt due consideration should be made to the matter. 16

General Pope immediately wrote Sully of this development, enclosing the letter from Hallack, and adding a few of his

own ideas on the subject. Pope pointed out that the matter of the fort on the Yellowstone was already taken care of in the original plans, for if it were practicable for boats to travel to the mouth of the Big Horn, perhaps it would be better to locate the Yellowstone post at that point. However, on the matter of the Powder River post, Pope left the problem to Sully to judge for himself after he had examined the country. He added that whatever protection Sully could give to the emigrants, either from Laramie, or any other point within his district without jeopardizing the success of the campaign and the establishment of the military posts should be given them.\(^\text{17}\)

Both Pope and Sully finally agreed that the post on the Powder River could best be located and supplied from Fort Laramie, and informed Hallack of their decision. The post on the Yellowstone would still be established by Sully, but it would not be built above the head of navigation on that river.\(^\text{18}\)

Having settled the problem of the necessity of dividing his command, Sully returned his attention to the final preparations for the trip against the combined tribes of the

\(^{17}\) Major General John Pope, "Letter to Sully," \textit{ibid.}, p. 713.

Dakota Nation, who had allied their scattered tribes for a final effort against the whites. During the winter, these Indians had combined and now, they began concentrating their whole force on, or near, the upper Missouri to resist all navigation on the river, to prevent the passage of emigrants across the great plains, and to deliver with their combined forces a final battle against the United States troops under General Sully. The Indians had anticipated that the troops would be sent against them. Their combined forces were estimated to be about 6,000 warriors, and was later confirmed as such.19

General Sully collected his forces from the various posts and stations in his district early in the spring, and commenced to move up the Missouri, leaving only small detachments here and there to cover the frontier from the minor Indian raids, which could be expected. At the same time, General Sibley collected his men and sent them across the plains to Goshache Creek. The junction of the two columns was made on June 30. However, the spring rise of the Missouri River did not come until later, and the command encountered trouble passing supplies up the river. It was not until July 7, that they reached the mouth of the Cannon Ball River and established

a strong post as a depot for supplies, named Fort Rice. The post was garrisoned with five companies of the 30th Wisconsin Volunteers.20

In the meantime, the Indians who had concentrated only fifty miles above the site of Fort Rice moved back and across the Missouri to the west, taking up a strong position in a very difficult country near the Little Missouri River.

General Sully arranged his command for the march into the Indians' choice of battleground. His command consisted of 2,200 men, including the 2nd Minnesota Cavalry, eleven companies 6th Iowa Cavalry, 8th Minnesota Volunteers (mounted), three companies 7th Iowa Cavalry, two companies Dakota Cavalry, one small company of scouts, and four mountain howitzers. A large party of emigrants had followed the soldiers who had come from Minnesota. They were allowed to follow the column as Sully could not furnish them with supplies and an escort to take them back into settled country.

On the 26th of July, the location of the hostile Indian camp was found, and the emigrant train was corralled at the head of Heart River with an adequate guard. The fighting column then prepared for a rapid march with only pack mules with supplies to accompany them. Here one of the blunders

20. "Expedition Against the Sioux Indians in Dakota Territory," op. cit., pp. 133-155. All of the remaining information in this chapter is taken from this report.
the army quartermaster is noted for occurred. First no saddle blankets could be found for the mules. When finally this problem was remedied with gunny sacks, it was found that instead of the regular six-inch webbed pack cinch there were only three-inch hard leather belts. These galled the mules so badly that they went wild and pitched supplies over acres of prairie. Light wagons were finally put into use, and the expedition traveled rapidly toward the hostiles' camp. On the 28th, they reached the camp which proved to be composed of Unkicas, Sans Arca, Blackfeet, Minneconjou, Yanktonais, Sioux, and Santee Sioux. The camp was located in a wooded country, much cut up with high, rugged hills and deep, impassable ravines. For about an hour a council was held with some of the Indian chiefs of the group, but they proved so defiant and unmanageable that the council was abandoned and preparations were made for the coming battle.

As it was impossible for cavalry to charge over the rough terrain, the men dismounted, each fourth man taking charge of that many horses, while the rest began to advance on foot. Sharp and severe action ensued, but the artillery and long-range small arms of the troops proved too destructive and the Indians soon began to give way. They were so closely pressed that they were forced to abandon their extensive camp, leaving all their robes, lodges, colts, utensils of all description, and all their winter's supply of
provisions. So sure were they of defeating the whites, they had not even bothered to strike their camp, even though they had at least a day's notice of the approach of the column.

The action continued in a running fight of nine miles, when the Indians finally scattered completely and escaped with nothing but their wounded, which, according to the Indian custom, they carried off with as many of their dead as they could. One hundred twenty-five Indian dead were left on the field of battle for a loss of five killed and twenty wounded for the soldiers. By nightfall the Indians had disappeared, and the column rested. The next morning, while part of the cavalry remained to destroy the Indian camp by fire, the remainder attempted to catch the fleeing Indians.

Having only a small supply of provisions and little means of carrying what he did have, and ascertaining that the retreat of the Indians was to the southwest, Sully returned with his men to the train at the head of Heart River and resumed his march through the unexplored badlands of Dakota to build the fort on the Yellowstone.

The guides for the expedition informed Sully that it was impossible to cross straight west toward Fort Alexander, and that it would be necessary to detour far to the south and then cross over, hitting the Yellowstone near the mouth of the Powder River. This, however, would take several weeks, making it impossible to contact the boats which were to meet
the expedition at the head of navigation on the Yellowstone about the 10th of August. It was also discovered that an error in comissary supplies left them now with only about six days rations. A Sioux guide was finally found who had been through the region on several war expeditions and thought that he could lead a wagon train over the route.

On August 5, the command came in sight of the bad lands of the Little Missouri, the impact of which caused Sully to write;

.... It was grand, dismal, and majestic. You can imagine a deep basin, 600 feet deep and twenty-five miles in diameter, filled with a number of cones and oven-shaped knolls of all sizes, from twenty feet to several hundred feet high, sometimes by themselves, sometimes piled up into large heaps on top of one another, in all conceivable shapes and confusion. Most of these hills were of a gray clay, but many of a light brick color, of burnt clay; little or no vegetation. Some of the sides of the hills, however, were covered with a few scrub cedars. Viewed in the distance at sunset it looked exactly like the ruins of an ancient city.

The badlands bordered the Little Missouri on both sides. The country was so exceedingly rough and so cut up with deep perpendicular ravines, that it was with utmost labor and loss of time that a narrow winding way between the ravines, in places only ten feet wide, was found for the wagon train.

While still in the badlands Sully encountered the Indians that had been defeated on the 26th, and scored another striking victory. The Indians again fled, leaving
over 100 dead on the field. Sully reported that this battle broke the spirit of the combined tribes, and they split into small groups, some heading into Canada, but the greater part heading southwest.

Leaving the badlands, the expedition traveling on 1/3 rations through a grasshopper denuded prairie, where many of the animals died, finally reached the Yellowstone on the 12th of August. Very fortunately they found two of the three small stern-wheel steamers, each carrying 50 tons of supplies, waiting for them. The boats, the Chippewa Falls and the Alone, found that the river was falling rapidly, and it became necessary to lighten them by loading wagons with their cargo before they were able to return to the Missouri. A third boat, the Island City, had hit a snag near Fort Union and had sunk, carrying with it much corn for the animals and some material for the post to have been established on the Yellowstone River.

Sully found that the building of the Yellowstone post would not be practicable and reported, "The loss of one of my boats, the impossibility of getting boats this late up the river, and the want of grass preventing me from hauling stores several hundred miles up the river will show you the reason." Crossing the Yellowstone, the command spread out in an unmilitary manner to glean as much of the sunburnt
grass for the animals as possible, and moved down the river toward the Missouri.

On the 20th of August, they reached Fort Union and crossed to the north side of the Missouri. At this point, the emigrant train turned to the west and left the expedition, however, not before stealing part of the horses, mules, and arms of the troops.

Although finding Fort Union in a dilapidated condition—almost falling to pieces—Sully left the stores intended for the Yellowstone post there in charge of Company I, 13th Wisconsin Infantry, who were to remain there all winter.

The boats were sent down the river with the sick and the wounded aboard, and the cavalry column moved east toward Fort Berthold. They reached it on the 28th, and Captain Moreland and Company G, 6th Iowa Cavalry were left to garrison the fort, as it proved to be a likely place to supply the fort to be established near Devil's Lake. Leaving the river, the party traveled toward the lake in search of the Yanktonais who, reports stated, might have been camping there. However, after spending several days in the Maison du Chien Butte country and finding that the Indians had probably gone into Canada, the expedition continued on down to Fort Rice, reaching there on September 8.

It was at Fort Rice that Sully began securing evidence of the success of his expedition, for several chiefs of
tribes who had met defeat under his command came in asking for peace. Some reported the Yanktonais Sioux were in Canada in a starving condition, and that they desired to make peace. Others pointed out that they realized it was futile to fight any more, and that they would never go to war again. All of this pleased Sully no end, and he wrote that it would never be necessary for another expedition to go into the Northwest, for the Indians were entirely subjugated. However, he went on, if the river had been higher things would have gone even better, and it would have been possible to establish the post on the Yellowstone. It was a problem to decide where to place the post there, for, from a military point of view it was probably best to put it at the mouth of the Powder River, but from what he had seen and heard of the Yellowstone Valley, it would be exceedingly hard to get hay for any command posted there. Yet, Sully pointed out, the post on the Yellowstone should be built as soon as possible.

Before Sully could disband his men and send them back to their posts, he received word that Captain Fisk and a party of emigrants were surrounded by Indians and in need of assistance to continue on their way towards Idaho, and was forced to send 550 infantry and 300 cavalry to bring Fisk back to Fort Rice. The Fisk party had attempted to follow the path laid out by Sully on his way to the Yellowstone and had been attacked just before reaching the badlands by about 300 savages.
The Indians abandoned the attack before the rescuing party arrived, and though Fisk was firm in his stand that he was going to keep on toward the west, when the greater part of his train started to return with the escort, he was forced to accompany them. The party reached Fort Rice on the 30th of September, and the 1864 Northwest Indian Expedition came to a successful conclusion and disbanded. Some returned to Minnesota via Fort Wadsworth escorting part of the Fisk emigrants. Some were ordered south to fight in the Civil War. The rest traveled overland to Sioux City escorting a government train and the remainder of the Fisk emigrants. General Sully was convinced that everything had been a success except the construction of the fort on the Yellowstone, which still remained in the planning stage.

But General Sully had failed to take into consideration the plight of the Indians he had driven to the southwest, concentrating them in the lands of the Cheyennes and Crows, directly in the path of the main route of emigration to the gold fields of Montana. Here, it seemed, was the last hunting ground and home left for the Sioux. To the west the mining frontier was rapidly filling up and overflowing into the fertile valleys east of the mountains. To the east the agricultural frontier was slowly creeping up on them, preceded by the army. Now, even this final sanctuary of the Indians was being threatened by the steady
flow of emigrants over the new Bozeman trail. Small wonder
the Indians gave notice that they would resist any attempt
to keep this short route, via the Platte, Big Horn, and
Yellowstone Rivers, open to emigration.
CHAPTER III
THE POWDER RIVER EXPEDITION

Thus, it came to pass that another military expedition had to be planned for early in 1865 to again, finally and forever, put down the threat of a general Indian uprising. This expedition was known as the Powder River Indian Expedition, and was made necessary because the Sioux were again desperately trying to keep the whites from invading their homeland.

At the same time that the army was planning on a final attempt to crush Indian resistance in the Northwest, Congress was showing an interest in opening new routes of travel into the mining regions. On March 3, 1865, it authorized an expedition to survey and lay out a route from the mouth of the Niobrara River in Nebraska Territory, west into the Platte and Yellowstone valleys to Virginia City. Colonel James A. Sawyer was assigned the task of surveying this route.¹

While Sawyer was making his preparations for the trip and gathering his men at the mouth of the Niobrara, it became exceedingly clear that the surveying expedition could not

¹. "Wagon Road From Niobrara City to Virginia City," House Executive Documents, Number 58, First Session, 39th Congress, (Washington, 1865), Volume 8, p. 11.
proceed until the planned expedition into the Powder River, Tongue, and Rosebud River, had cleared the way.

The Powder River Indian Expedition was under the command of Brevet Brigadier General P. S. Connor, who had been in command of the District of the Plains. He had moved his headquarters from Utah to Fort Laramie to plan for the expedition. Pope notified Connor in the spring of 1865 that he should rush his preparations so that his expedition could precede the Sawyer surveying group.²

Originally, the army had planned to conduct two expeditions into the southern portion of Montana. General Sully was to take an expedition up the Missouri River to Fort Pierre, then cross over into the Black Hills and continue on to the Powder River, where he was to establish a post. This post was to be about 150 miles north of Fort Laramie. In conjunction with this plan, General Connor was to take his men from Fort Laramie and travel north and west into the Yellowstone Valley near the mouth of the Rosebud River. Thereby, the two commands could work a pincher movement on the hostiles who were known to be concentrated in the Black Hills region.³

However, trouble arose in Minnesota, with the Indians raiding the settlements in a manner similar to the raids committed in 1862. Major General S. R. Curtis kept pleading with General Pope for men to hit at the seat of the Indian trouble—their camp at the north end of Devil's Lake in Dakota—until he agreed to send General Sully to put down the uprising. Although Sully argued that an expedition into that country, where the Indians could retreat a few miles into Canada where they were safe, was useless, he was forced to change his plans and move with his men toward Devil's Lake.

Of a necessity, the change in General Sully's plans made it mandatory for General Connor to revise his campaign plans. It now became his duty to establish the post on the Powder River, and also, to conduct the campaign into the Yellowstone Valley, clearing the way for the Sawyer survey.4

Numerous troubles beset the expedition from the start. Many of the troops mutinied, supplies were delayed, some never arriving, and it was a half prepared campaign that eventually got under way.5

The plans for the Powder River Indian Expedition called for four columns to march into the Indian country around the Black Hills and then converge on the Rosebud River near its

confluence with the Yellowstone. The right column was to be commanded by Colonel N. Cole of the 2nd Missouri Light artillery, with 797 men and officers of the same command, and 311 men and officers of the 12th Missouri Cavalry, making a total for that column of 1,108 officers and men.

This column was to proceed to the east base of the Black Hills in Dakota Territory, move along its east base to Bears' Peak (northeast point of the hills) where a large force of hostile Indians were supposed to be camped. From Bears' Peak, the column was to proceed around the north base of the Hills to the Three Peaks, then move across country to the north base of Panther Mountain where they were to find a supply base and part of another command. If the Indians were encountered near Bears' Peak, General Connors' orders were to attack and kill every male Indian over 12 years of age and not to receive any overtures of peace or submission. 6

The center column was under command of Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Walker of the 16th Kansas Cavalry, with 600 officers and men of the same command. Walker's instructions were to proceed via Rawhide Creek through the Black Hills, and cross the headwaters of the Upper Missouri while traveling in a northwesterly direction to the Powder River. Then, moving

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down the river to a point nearly opposite to the north end of Panther Mountain, cross in a westerly direction to the general rendezvous of the four columns on the Rosebud River. Colonel Walker also received orders to kill all male Indians over 12 years of age.

The third column was called the left column and was commanded by Colonel J. H. Kidd, 6th Michigan Cavalry, with 90 officers and men of the 7th Iowa Cavalry, 90 officers and men of the 11th Ohio Cavalry, 200 officers and men of the 6th Michigan Cavalry, and 95 officers and men of the Pawnee Scouts, making a total of 475 men and officers in all. The last column was to be known as the west column, and was in command of Captain Albert Brown, 2nd California Cavalry, with 116 officers and men of the same command, and 84 officers and men of the Omaha Scouts, making a total of 200 officers and men.7

Each of the columns was furnished with its own artillery. All the supplies by wagon transportation were sent with the left column which General Connor traveled with. The center column took forty days supplies on pack mules. The coordinated movement of the columns was to be accomplished by the use of smoke signals.

7. Ibid., pp. 329-389. All of the information up to footnote 8 is taken from this report of the expedition.
General Connor reported that he expected to establish a post on the headwaters of either the Tongue or Powder River, near the road to Virginia City, and that if the columns reached the general rendezvous without encountering the Indians, he would pursue them "even as far as the Heart River." If necessary, the columns would be distributed to thoroughly scour the country around the Rosebud, so that just punishment could be meted out to the hostile and guilty Indians. If Connor had known just how little scouting he needed to send out to find the Indians, the results of his expedition would have been entirely different.

The west and left column started from Fort Laramie together, and traveling up along the general route of the Bozeman Trail, they passed up the south side of the North Platte to La Bonte Fort. Crossing the Platte, the columns moved up the north side of the river to a point where eventually Fort Fetterman was located, then struck northwest to the sources of the Powder River. From the point where the trail left the Platte, Captain Brown and his west column were sent to the Platte Bridge to help the men stationed there fight the Indians for a short time. They were to travel to the south slope of the Big Horn Mountain as soon as they could and then to the Wind River Valley, where they were to make a thorough reconnoiter of that country, before joining the other commands near Crazy Woman's Creek, a fork of the Powder River.
General Connor and his column found it easy going and made an excellent road to the point on the Powder River where he decided to make his post. He reached a point 160 miles from Fort Laramie on August 11 which looked like a suitable location and put Colonel Kidd in charge of a group of soldiers to construct the post. Connors then hurried on toward the Rosebud River.

Fort Connor, as the post was named, was on the left bank of the Powder River, about four miles below the mouth of Dry Fork. It was an excellent site for a post with only one drawback, and that was the lack of hay. Timber for the construction of the stockade was nearby. The ground was almost as level as a floor for a distance of five miles. This level ground was on a mesa which was about 100 feet above the river, and extended back to high bluffs in the rear.

Construction on the post progressed at a rapid pace and in the middle of August when General Dodge visited the site he stated that the stockade was finished and work was well progressed on the construction of the quartermaster's buildings.

However, one thing stood in the background that the army had either ignored or failed to take into consideration, that was to lead to the loss of hundreds of lives in the Powder River area, and the ultimate abandonment of a line of posts which cost the government thousands of dollars. The fort,
named in honor of the general who led the expedition to establish it, was erected on land which according to treaty was only to have a road traverse it, but on which no fortifications or soldiers were ever to be placed. This fact gave the Indians the excuse they needed to gather all of the dissatisfied Indians in the Northwest under one cause—to close the Bozeman Trail and to prevent the erection of a line of forts along it.

Connors' column continued on from the site of the post, and soon hit the trail of a large band of Indians heading north toward the Yellowstone. On the 16th, the Pawnee Scouts found a straggling party of the group, and in a running battle killed the entire party of stragglers, taking 24 scalps, 24 horses, and all the paraphernalia the Indians had. On August 28, the column surprised Medicine Man's band of Indians on the Tongue River and charging into the village just as the Indians were breaking camp, drove them from the village. The Indians regrouped however, and kept up a fierce counter-attack until midnight, while the soldiers stacked the buffalo robes, furs, and winter's supplies on the lodge poles and covers of the teepees in huge mounds, placed their dead on top, and fired the whole mass.

In the battle over fifty of the Indians were killed. The entire village of about 250 lodges and all the winter's

supplies were destroyed, while 600 horses were captured.
No record is given of the soldiers killed.

The column continued down the Tongue the next day, toward the point of rendezvous on the Rosebud. On September 1, the roar of a cannon was heard and presumed to be from Colonel Cole's command, already at the rendezvous 80 miles to the north. Major North and some Pawnee Scouts were sent on ahead to the relief of this column. On September 4, scouts from Colonel Walker's center column reached Connor's group and reported an attack on their column by the Indians, supposedly the same group that Connor had routed. No news was received from Cole's right column and rumors spread throughout the ranks as to their safety. When, on the 5th, scouts returned with the news that there was no one at the mouth of the Rosebud, fears for the safety of Cole's men were intensified. Hope for them was almost abandoned, when on the 11th, Major North returned from the Powder River with the report that he had found five to six hundred dead cavalry horses there, which undoubtedly belonged to Colonel Cole's command.

General Connor's column had turned back on the 6th to return to good grazing grounds, and when the news of the serious situation of Cole's column arrived, Connor immediately sent a force to follow Cole's trail and furnish them with relief. On the 7th, scouts located the missing column and lead it to Fort Connor as General Connor had directed them to do.
Gradually, General Connor's column worked back toward the fort and while camped on Crazy Woman's Fork, probably waiting for Captain and his west column, Connor received the message which removed him from command of the District of the Plains, and ordered him to report for duty in Utah. At the same time that this disheartening news arrived, scouts reported that the command of Colonel Cole had arrived at the fort in a destitute and exhausted condition.

General Connor slowly returned to his post on the Powder River, arriving there on September 24. Thus, the Powder River Indian Expedition for General Connor came to an inglorious end. General Frank Wheaton assumed control of the District of the Plains, and Colonel Cole took charge of the remainder of the Expedition on its' return to Fort Laramie.

Colonel Cole had earned the right to take over the expedition, for the record of his east column is one which vividly portrays the privations and hardships which the soldiers had to struggle through before the army could finally establish a post in Montana.

Colonel Nelson Cole of the 2nd Missouri Light Artillery organized his column at Omaha City, Nebraska Territory, and after suffering the same delays that Connor did, mutinies, and the lack of supplies, left there for Columbus on the Loup Fork of the Platte on July 1. Besides the already mentioned men of his command, his column contained 14 rifled, three-
inch guns for artillery. Three companies of soldiers had to be left in Omaha to gather up stragglers, and wait for supplies to arrive. The stragglers caught up with the main group before it reached Columbus.  

From Columbus, the column marched up the north branch of the Loup Fork. It was not until they reached the head of this stream that they received their final instructions from Connor. He had planned to keep everyone in the dark as to the destination of the columns, so as to deceive the Indians. However, the deception worked both ways, for as little was known of the exact geography of the region they were heading toward, and no conference of the leaders of the columns was allowed, it was only natural that conflicting ideas would prevent a well coordinated plan of attack by the columns.

From the head of the north branch of the Loup, a passable route was found almost directly north to the Niobrara River. Another good route was found from here to the South Fork of the Cheyenne River. As bear's butte was their first destination, this is where they headed. No trace was found of the Indians, and the column wound its way north again, following the North Fork of the Cheyenne to its head, over to the Little Missouri, and west to the Powder River.

The route had been passable to this point, but now, they were faced by almost impenetrable bluffs, sloping down to the river far below. At last a trail was made into the depths, and while the men strained on ropes tied to the rear and sides of the wagons to keep them from overturning into the chasms on either side or shoving the mule teams to their death, the slow grind to the river bed was made.

The point that the column hit the Powder River was about 50 miles from its mouth. Immediately scouting expeditions were sent out searching for Connor's column on the Tongue River, as supplies were already running low. A few days later these men returned from scouting the Tongue and Rosebud Rivers and Panther Mountain with no results.

Indians began to raid the mule herds of the column, and on August 30, ran off a bunch. In the resulting running fight, the mules were recaptured, and 25 Indians killed. The command suffered quite severely also, for 4 men were killed and 2 mortally wounded. From this time until the expedition left the country Cole's column was continually harassed by Indian attacks.

Smoke signals were seen in the direction of the Yellowstone River, and as Cole thought that it would be easier to get buffalo there than to hunt for Connor's column, they moved in that direction. But disaster after disaster struck in lightning like fashion. On the second of September a severe
A sleet and hail storm suddenly struck, killing about 225 horses and mules, which were in a famished condition from lack of feed. Many of the wagons and supplies had to be destroyed, and the column turned around to move back up river to where there was better grazing.

On the 5th, about 1000 Indians intensified the fighting around the column, but Colonel Cole slowly led his men farther up the river. The route taken by Colonel Walker and his column was found and hope was aroused that they might be able to join his command. On the 8th, news came from Walker that he had met between three and four thousand warriors, and was fighting fiercely. Cole pushed on ahead to assist Walker, but again nature interfered with another severe pre-winter storm during the night. Over 400 animals perished, and again, wagons, harness, and supplies had to be destroyed, leaving the force in even more desperate straits.

Imagine the morale of these men, who had been virtually forced to make the expedition, here in the midst of hostile Indian country, under constant attack. They had been out 72 days on 60 days rations, twenty percent of which had been lost on the way. Fatigue, and starvation haunted them. They had no real idea of where they were, nor where they must go for supplies. Horse meat was their regular diet, and that almost unpalatable.
The only reason the column was not entirely destroyed, was that as they slowly moved up the valley, the Indians showed less and less inclination to fight, until only a few scouts followed in their wake. On the 13th, their luck changed, for contact was made with some Pawnee scouts of Connor's column, who gave them Connor's instructions to either join him on the Tongue, or retreat back to where Fort Connor had been constructed. As there was no possibility of moving the train over into the Tongue, over the rugged country between the two rivers, they continued on up the Powder River with guides to lead them to Fort Connor. The ragged, footsore, exhausted column reached the fort on the 20th, but their troubles were not over yet, for there were no quartermaster stores to refit them with clothing, nor shoes to wear. It was not until they reached Fort Laramie that they received new outfits. The first ten miles of the march to Fort Laramie, started on the 25th of September, was made on foot before wagons could be secured to carry the men.

If Colonel Cole's reports are correct, he escaped from a rather precarious situation with little loss. He reported that he had lost twelve men killed, two missing, and several wounded. He estimated that his command had killed between two and five hundred Indians beside the large number of horses captured. In any conclusion, it must seem that Cole
had handled his column in an admirable manner. It is true that he had not reached the rendezvous, but with as little knowledge as the army had of the area of the Powder River, it is small wonder that his attempt failed.
Although the Niobrara Expedition under Colonel Sawyer left its base at the mouth of the Niobrara River long before the columns of the Powder River Indian Expedition were able to get under way, their movement was so slow, that the timing of the two expeditions was fairly well coordinated. The Connor’s expedition preceded the Sawyer group into the Powder River country and furnished them with enough support so that they could successfully complete the survey through the hostile Indian country to reach Virginia City.

The purpose of the Niobrara River survey, authorized by an act of Congress, March 3, 1865, was to survey and lay out a road from the mouth of the Niobrara River in Nebraska Territory, to Virginia City in Montana Territory. A branch road from Omaha was to intersect the other road at some point on the Niobrara. In connection with the proposed Niobrara road, another route was to be surveyed from the mouth of the Big Cheyenne River, west to the Powder River, there to connect with the Niobrara to Virginia City road. However, the surveying expedition for this line only went as far west as the forks of the Big Cheyenne where they turned back due to lack of military protection, and began
surveying the eastern end of the road from the mouth of the
Big Cheyenne to the Minnesota border.¹

The Niobrara expedition under Colonel James A. Sawyer
was beset by delays due to lack of supplies and suitable
military escort, and did not get away from its base at
Niobrara City until June 13. Colonel Sawyer had asked for
an escort of 200 cavalry with six months rations, and was
highly displeased to receive only two companies of the 5th
U. S. Volunteer Infantry (118 men) with three months rations.
His next request to headquarters brought 25 men of Company
B, 1st Battalion, Dakota Cavalry, with additional rations
to bring the total for the rations up to the six months
minimum desired. With this escort and rations, Colonel
Sawyer decided to attempt the survey.²

The expedition proper consisted of 53 men, including
an engineer and clerk, a physician, guides, pioneers, scouts,
herders and drivers, with 45 yoke of oxen, 5 saddle horses,
5 mules, and 15 wagons with equipment and supplies for six
months. The escort consisted of the 143 men already mentioned,
and 25 wagons drawn by 6-mule teams. Also, accompanying the

¹ "Wagon Road from Niobrara to Virginia City," op. cit., p. 2.
² The story of the Niobrara survey has been taken from
Colonel Sawyers official report to Secretary of Interior
James Harlan, which is document 58 in: House Executive
expedition were 5 emigrant trains and a private freight train of 36 wagons coupled together so as to be drawn by 18 teams of 6 yoke oxen each. To prove the practicality of the route which he followed, Sawyer pointed out on his return that not once on the journey to Virginia City did this wagon have to be uncoupled for passage of any obstacle en-route.

It was evident from the start that the escort would be insufficient for the journey because of the special travel plans for the expedition. To mark out a plain trail, all of the wagons were arranged in a single file, and were to follow that plan almost all of the way, making them particularly vulnerable to Indian attack. Many of the emigrants realized this, and soon turned back, accompanied by several herders and drivers, who also deserted. However, to make the best of the situation, Colonel Sawyer split his escort into platoons and interspersed them at regular intervals throughout the trains. This way they provided a minimum of protection to all parts of the column. General Sully had provided forty extra army Springfield rifles when he had sent the final 25 cavalry, and these were distributed among the civilians, which added considerably more protection for the train.

The route was slowly marked out up the South Cheyenne River and across to the North Cheyenne, then northwest in the direction of the Powder River, with minor improvements such as grading down to a ford or through a deep ravine,
or bridging a stream being made as they moved along. Little occurred to disturb the movement of the expedition until July 20, when they approached the South Cheyenne River again. At this point, Captain Williford, who was in charge of the escort, decided that his men would need quartermaster supplies before the survey was concluded, and decided to send a detail to Fort Laramie for these supplies. A wagon was fitted out with six of the best mules to pull it, and with the 15 men as escort Lieutenant Dana left for Fort Laramie. So that the wagon sent to Laramie could find the expedition on its return, Colonel Sawyer decided to move very slowly up the South Cheyenne until they returned. However, on August 1, Lieutenant Dana and his men returned with no supplies. They had encountered a detachment of soldiers moving from Laramie to join General Connor on the Powder River and returned with them, leaving the wagon to continue on from Fort Laramie alone. This necessitated another delay, for cavalry had to be sent out looking for the wagon. The cavalry returned on August 9 with no news of the wagon, so Sawyer concluded it had returned to Laramie. Two weeks at least were wasted with no results in trying to secure the supplies.

The expedition had camped near Pumpkin Butte while waiting for the cavalry to discover the wagon, and Sawyer had sent out scouting parties along the north side of the butte to see if a passable road could be worked out to the Powder River on
that side of the hills. The scouts returned and reported that there was little wood nor water on that route. While they were returning, Indians had suddenly struck at their camp one night, killing one of the soldiers and stealing some of the stock.

The expedition moved along the south side of Pumpkin Butte, and on the 13th of August it was also attack by between 500 and 600 Indians and forced to cerral. For three days the Indians continued the fight, but as they accomplished little, on the noon of the 15th they came up and asked for a parley. Colonel Sawyer was quite willing to oblige, and after presenting the Indians with a large number of gifts, was allowed to proceed. The Indians proved to be a band of Cheyenne and Sioux. During the peace negotiations, two soldiers were killed as they tried to barter with a group of the Indians.

The next day the expedition continued toward the north-west. However, on the 17th, the escort refused to proceed any farther, and wished to return to Laramie. A group of scouts, which the cavalry refused to accompany, was sent toward the Powder River to see if they could find any trace of General Connor’s column. On the 19th, they returned with the news that they had found a good road to Powder River, and that on the Dry Fork of that river they had found the two day old trail of General Connor.
With this news, the escort decided to continue, and the expedition soon reached the Dry Fork, where Captain Williford and his escort again decided that they would not proceed any farther. Sawyer was forced to send out another scouting expedition, this time under Colonel Godfrey. Only 13 miles below their camp they found Fort Connor, and related to Colonel Kidd the expedition's difficulties. Colonel Kidd ordered Captain Williford and his men to report to the Fort for duty, and detailed an escort to accompany Colonel Godfrey in search of Connor for further orders.

The surveying expedition moved up to Fort Connor and lay in wait for news from Connor. News arrived on August 25, when Colonel Godfrey returned with instructions for Captain Williford and his infantry to remain at Fort Connor. Colonel Kidd was ordered to furnish Sawyer with a cavalry escort to accompany him to the Big Horn River.

The surveying expedition again moved slowly toward Virginia City, this time straight through hostile Indian country. They followed the path of Connor's column to Crazy Woman's Fork, and to the Clear Fork. On the 29th, the column passed Father DeSmule's Lake, and moved across Piney Fork to a branch of the Tongue. On the 31st, when they reached the middle branch of the Tongue, Indians struck at the expedition. Captain Cole was killed while scouting ahead of the wagon train. On September 1, the column attempted to cross the
north branch of the Tongue, and swarms of Indians engulfed the column while it was half way across. Two men were killed and some horses lost.

On the 2nd, these Indians approached, this time to talk over peace terms. They were Arrapahoe, and wanted to recover their horses from General Connor, who had attacked them four days before and taken most of their horses. The Indians' proposal to contact Connor, in an attempt to recover their horses, fitted Sawyer's purpose admirably, for he desperately wished to secure more assistance from Connor. Consequently, three soldiers and three Indians were sent off in the direction of General Connor's column. On September 4, the three Indians returned, and reported that many white men were on the way. On September 5, early in the morning, Captain Kellogg and 27 men rode into camp. They had been sent to Connor's column with mail and on the way back had been attacked by Indians, and had not dared return to Fort Connor.

The men in the expedition decided not to continue on without further escort, as the ones they had could only travel to the Big Horn River with them. The expedition waited until the 13th for assistance from Connor, and Sawyer reluctantly turned back toward Fort Connor. On arrival at their camp the night of the 13th, the support sent by Connor caught up with them. It was composed of Company L, 2nd California Cavalry, and a company of Indian scouts under Captain A. Brown.
The Michigan troops under Sawyer returned to Fort Connor, as their term of service was nearly expired, and the expedition headed west again across the north branch of the Tongue. They crossed the Little Horn where the escort, except for 8 men returned to Fort Connor.

On the 21st, Sawyer continued on, hitting Pryor's Fork, and on the 22nd, the Yellowstone. The column moved up the river 19½ miles, where they camped on Rocky Fork. On the 27th, they crossed the east fork of the Rosebud River, then the middle fork, and moved back to the Yellowstone. While near the Yellowstone, they saw between 400 and 500 mackinaw boats of men and furs floating down the river on the way back to the States.

The column continued up the Yellowstone, after crossing to the north side, and moved into the mountains where a false lead took them astray. On the second attempt, on September 4, they crossed over into the Gallatin Valley, continued on up that valley, and finally reached their destination--Virginia City.

At Virginia City, Sawyer decided that the season was too far advanced to return over the route to straighten out the road, or to map out the side route to Omaha. He offered the equipment for sale and made a quick return trip to Sioux City. The forty rifles lent the expedition by the army were turned over to General Meagher.
Colonel Sawyer reported that he knew that the Niobrara City-Virginia City road, which he had made the preliminary surveys for, could be shortened, and should be shortened. He recommended that an additional $20,000 be appropriated for its completion. He summed up his report with this statement:

The importance of having this route more fully developed and kept open for travel by protection against the Indians can hardly be overestimated. It is at least 600 miles nearer than the route hitherto been traveled by many ... with wood, water, and grass, in abundance, and no mountain ranges of importance to cross, and upon the whole a first class route to travel over. If the route is protected against Indians, and some places on it relocated and marked in a more thorough manner, all travel to Montana and Idaho must necessarily pass over it, as by it much time and travel can be saved. The route is much better than an equal number of miles on the west end of any of the routes hitherto traveled and no alkaline water worth noticing was seen on the whole route.

The Niobrara survey showed the army that there was a shorter route into Montana and Idaho than the routes which had been used to the west and to the north. However, the work of Colonel Sawyer on the first part of his expedition was put to no use. The next year the army decided that the line of emigration would move along a route marked out by John Bozman which had easy access to the Oregon Trail. General Sherman recommended that the proposed road from Niobrara City to the Powder River be abandoned, and the army focused its attention on what was to be known as the Bozeman Trail.
CHAPTER V

THE BOZEMAN TRAIL AND FORT C. F. SMITH

Having completed the mapping of the Missouri route into the mining area of Montana in 1865, the army made plans in the next year to complete the route via the Powder River. General Pope, in command of the Department of the Missouri, which included most of the Northwest, pointed out that people in incredible numbers continued to throng across the Great Plains to the rich mining regions in Montana and Idaho. Undeterred by the hardships and privations they encountered, they plodded on. Not only did these emigrants and freighters travel during the summer months, but also during the winter. In their wake they left frozen animals and abandoned wagons, snow piled high about them, while post hospitals along the route were filled with frost bitten teamsters and emigrants.

Travel by winter was made necessary because of the large population of the mining regions, and because of a lack of transportation facilities to build up food reserves. Only


enough food was received during the summer months to maintain
the people for short periods of time, and unless goods con-
tinued to arrive throughout the winter months, they would have
starved. 3

Pope further pointed out that there were three routes into
the mining regions which the army must of necessity keep open.
However, as it did not have the necessary men to keep all three
open, the army must consider them as one, and keep the worst
bottleneck, the route through the Powder River area, secure.
Easy connections could be made by this route to all three other
roads, which were almost entirely safe from Indian attack most
of their length. 4

To further prove the necessity of keeping the Bozeman
Trail open, Pope pointed out the lack of dependence anyone
could place on traffic up the Missouri River. At any time
during the season navigation might fail due to low water.
In conclusion, Pope said; ".... In connection with the Mis-
souri River therefore, it is essential that there should be
some safe and sure means of transportation by overland route
which cannot fail under any circumstances." 5

3. Ibid., p. 2.

4. Ibid., p. 4. These three routes included two routes
from Minnesota, one from St. Paul and another from
Mankato, which issued from the south of the Black Hills
range in the N-

5. Ibid., p. 5.
With this conclusion, the army began planning for the completion of the line of forts along the Bozeman Trail, begun in 1865, with the erection of Fort Connor by General Connor.

A Mountain District in the Department of the Platte was organized especially to cover the route from Fort Connor westward to Virginia City via the Big Horn and Yellow. In charge of the Mountain District, on April 13, 1866, was placed Colonel Henry B. Carrington.7

Colonel Carrington was then in command of the East Sub-district of Nebraska, with headquarters at Fort Kearney. As he had only about 220 men in his command, he was forced to wait until recruits filled out his complement of troops before leaving. General Sherman arrived at Fort Kearney during this time, and final plans were made for the completion of the line of posts into Montana. On May 19, the recruits arrived and the march was begun toward their destination, Fort Connor.8

6. Hebard and Brininstool, The Bozeman Trail, (Cleveland, 1922), Vol. I, pp. 214-220. This road was named after John M. Bozeman, who in the winter of 1862-1863, left Bannack with John M. Jacobs to find a shorter route into the gold fields of Montana through the Yellowstone Valley and the Powder River country.


8. Ibid., p. 3.
The original orders from Headquarters, Department of the Missouri, issued March 10, 1866, called for the Second Battalion of the 18th U. S. Infantry to constitute the garrison of Fort Reno (Fort Connor was to be abandoned, moved 40 miles west, and renamed Fort Reno) on the Powder River, and the two new posts on the route between that place and Virginia City. The first of the new posts was to be placed near the base of the Big Horn Mountains, and the second on, or near, the upper Yellowstone River.9

However, a following general order from the Headquarters, Kansas and the Territories, called for two companies of the 18th Infantry to relieve the garrison at Fort Connor. Four companies of the same outfit were to establish a new post on, or near, the Piney Fork of the Clear Fork of the Powder River, to be known as Fort Reno. The other two companies were to establish a new post at the crossing of the Big Horn River at, or near, the mouth of Rotten Grass Creek, to be called Fort Ransom.10

Still further changes were made when the orders were issued from the Mountain District Headquarters on June 28. The plans called for Fort Connor to be temporarily garrisoned by a detachment of 30 men from Company B, 18th Infantry, under

10. Ibid., p. 54. General Order No. 40.
Colonel T. S. Kirtland. Fort Reno was to be garrisoned by four companies under Captain T. Ten Eyck. Fort Ransom was to be garrisoned by two companies under Brevet Lieutenant Colonel N. G. Kinney. The upper Yellowstone post was to be garrisoned by two companies under Brevet Major Henry Haymond. 11

The final orders, which were issued from the Headquarters, District of the Platte, and which were the ones put into effect, were also different. Two companies of the 18th Infantry were to garrison Fort Connor. Four companies were to establish a post about 80 miles north of Fort Connor on the new route to Virginia City, and on the waters of either the Powder or Rosebud River, to be known as Fort Phil Kearney. The two remaining companies were to establish a post at the crossing of the Big Horn River on the same road, and about 70 miles beyond Fort Phil Kearney, to be known as Fort C. F. Smith. 12

Behind this last change in plans for the erection of the line of forts lay the reasoning of Colonel Carrington. Although he had marched from Fort Kearney with his complement of recruits filled, he still considered that he had too few men to attempt to establish all the new posts desired by higher headquarters. He decided to use Fort Connor as a base

11. Ibid., p. 54. General Order No. 2.
for his advance along the route to establish the other posts. The garrisoning of Fort Connor made it necessary for him to give up all plans to establish the post on the upper Yellowstone, as he was already short of men. 13

Colonel Carrington and his men moved northwest from Fort Kearney, and arrived near Fort Laramie on June 14. A peace council was in session to secure the opening, by treaty, of the route of the Bozeman Trail. Special orders were issued to keep the soldiers from causing friction with the Indians who were in attendance at the council, 14 but trouble developed in spite of the precautions. Colonel Carrington was introduced to the chieftains as 'the White Chief going up to occupy the Powder River, the Big Horn country, and the Yellowstone.' 15 Standing Elk, a chief of the Brule Sioux, immediately informed Carrington that the Sioux were not all in attendance at the council, and that the Sioux not present would not give up to the road without a fight. 16 It is possible that the march of Carrington's men into the Powder River country in the midst of the peace council played a part in preventing its success, but it is also probable that such chiefs as Red Cloud

13. Ibid., p. 11.
15. Ibid., p. 6.
16. Ibid., p. 5.
would not have consented to the road's being opened on any consideration. The appearance of the soldiers merely gave them a good excuse to walk out of the council.

As Carrington had no authority to wait to hear the results of the peace council, he made preparations to move on to Fort Connor. His command was short of officers and men, but was to be filled out later as he expanded from Fort Connor. As no cavalry was assigned to him, he had mounted 200 of his infantry at Fort Kearney until cavalry could be sent. His supply of food and ammunition was also sadly lacking. Only 1000 rounds of ammunition could be found at Coramie for the old fashioned .58 caliber guns, and only four days rations of stale bread could be secured. To make matters worse, no utensils could be obtained to bake their own bread. However, Carrington felt that he could get assistance from an infantry post which was to be built at the feet of the Black Hills not far from his destination, and he moved northwest to Fort Connor. The plans for the post in the Black Hills were abandoned and Colonel Carrington was left to his own devices in solving the situation in which he found himself. 17

On June 28, the group under Carrington arrived at Fort Connor, (hereafter referred to as Fort Reno as it was renamed.

17. Ibid., p. 6.
by Carrington, and relieved the two companies of the 5th U.S. Volunteer Infantry who had been left there the year before by General Connor. The Indians did not wait long to begin the attack that was to harass Colonel Carrington and his men until the line of forts was abandoned. The day after the command arrived at Fort Reno, the Indians stole the stock of the sutler of the post. The men sent in pursuit returned with only a squaw's pony which was loaded with a few dresses and other feminine articles.

Carrington found a group of emigrants, in a highly disorganized and restless condition, camped near the post, awaiting escort. One of his first duties was to issue a general order regulating their conduct, and others to follow them, in passing over the Bozeman Trail. All groups traveling over the route had to report at each post along the way. No group with less than 30 armed men could proceed along the trail beyond Fort Reno. No one was to split from his party between posts, nor could anyone trade with Indians along the way.

18. Fort Reno was named in honor of General Jesse L. Reno, a hero of the Civil War, killed on September 14, 1862, during an act of bravery at the battle of South Mountain, Maryland.


The next job of Carrington was to pick the spot about 80 miles farther north along the trail where the next post was to be built. His guides, Jim Bridger and Brannan, told him that they knew of a good site on Tongue River, so, sending an appeal back to headquarters for more men, Carrington moved north. On July 13, he camped near the Piney Fork of the Clear Fork of the Powder River, and explored the country for miles around in search of an appropriate site for a post. While camped here, he received a message from a group of Cheyenne Indian chiefs, asking if the whites wanted peace or war. Carrington returned a cordial invitation asking the Cheyennes to come in and hold council with him soon.

On July 15, the site for the new post, Fort Phil Kearney, was surveyed and occupied on the camp site of the 13th, and preparations were made to begin construction. The next day, Black Horse and other members of the Cheyennes came into camp for a conference and offered to furnish 100 men to fight the Sioux with the soldiers. If Carrington had been able to accept this offer, the outcome of his work along the Bozeman Trail might have been different. But he could not, and the Cheyenne remained neutral in the fight with the Sioux.


22. Named in honor of General Philip Kearny, hero of the Mexican and Civil War, killed at Chantilly, September 1, 1862. Either Kearny or Kearney is correct for the Fort.

With the extension of the line of forts to Phil Kearney, the opposition of the Indians increased in intensity. Numerous attacks were made on supply and emigrant trains between Fort Reno and Phil Kearney, and in some instances on well armed columns moving along the route.24

After the establishment of Fort Phil Kearney, Carrington began making plans for extending his line of forts into the Big Horn Valley. His demands for assistance to carry on his work gained little recognition from Headquarters, District of the Platte, and they left it up to his discretion to establish the Big Horn post.25 Carrington felt that to refuse to advance to the Big Horn was to surrender the purpose of the entire movement, as the fort he had established, Phil Kearney, could furnish no protection to travel through the Tongue River country, or west to Virginia City. As there was a large force of miners from Virginia City working in the mountains near the proposed site, he felt that they would furnish able assistance in the fight against the Indians. Carrington also felt that as this fort would be near the western limit of the best hunting grounds, it would cover the outgoing trains and escorts, and put him in a more ready possession of facts pertaining to


25. Secretary of Interior, op. cit., p. 17.
the country above and beyond. In the last analysis, he wished to convince the Indians that this was no temporary expedition, but a substantial, fixed occupation.26

On August 3, 1866, Lieutenant Colonel N. C. Kinney with two companies of infantry left Fort Phil Kearney to establish the first army post in Montana, Fort C. F. Smith.27 With them they carried 300 tons of hay and a year's supply of provisions. On August 12, the two companies arrived at the site chosen for the new post—a bluff overlooking the Big Horn River, a few miles above the present site of St. Xavier, Montana—and began the construction of the post.28

Civilian labor was hired in constructing the post which was partially made of adobe or sun dried brick.29 On August 29, Carrington reported that the post was well established, and if he had five more companies of infantry available he would put sub-depots at various intervals between the three posts, and on the Yellowstone, to further protect the route. However, General Cooke felt that the protection had already been extended too far, and authorized the withdrawal of the

26. Ibid., p. 16.
27. Named in honor of General Charles Ferguson Smith, who was given three brevets for distinguished service during the Mexican War. Smith died on April 25, 1862.
29. Ibid., p. 135.
men from Fort C. F. Smith. Colonel Carrington protested this decision, for it would mean the destruction of a great deal of work, the abandonment of much of the hay and supplies that had been taken to the new post, besides removing from the western end of the route the protection which he so strongly believed was necessary. If it had not been for the support given Carrington by General Hazen, who was on an inspection tour in the region at the time, it is probable that Fort C. F. Smith would have been abandoned before it had actually been completed.

Carrington won in his fight to maintain the fort, and construction of the post continued. By November 14, the work on the defense of the fort was completed, and progress was well on the way to completion of quarters for the soldiers.

The post was situated in a very strategic position overlooking the crossing of the Big Horn River by the Bozeman Trail. From the stockade, lookouts could see anyone who approached within three miles of the fort. Game was abundant in the area, and from the top of the stockade could be seen buffalo, elk, antelope, and sometimes bear. Small game and

30. Secretary of Interior, op. cit., p. 17.
32. Secretary of Interior, op. cit., p. 35.
fruit were plentiful, while the streams were alive with trout. Food seemed a minor problem, yet the garrison lived on corn most of one winter because the post was in a state of siege by the Indians.

The stockade of the fort was 125 yards square, with the west and south side constructed of adobe, and the east and north side (the north side faced the river) made of upright logs. Part of the south wall was formed by the outer walls of three sets of soldiers' barracks. Between these three barracks two driveways entered the stockade. At the southeast corner of the area was a boulder tower which served as a lookout and a guard house. The central portion of the stockade served as a parade and drill ground. Near the north side stood three sets of officers quarters, with the flag pole directly in front of the middle one. Two more officers' quarters sat near the west wall, while near the east wall of the stockade sat an office building, a storehouse, and a quartermaster building.

Outside the stockade to the north, between the fort and the river, was constructed a saw mill, the teamsters' and employees' log cabins, and the stable and corral. To the east

close to the stockade sat the sutler's store. On the north and west side of the walls were placed rifle pits, just outside small gates leading to them. The Bozeman Trail ran past the west side to Virginia City, 281 miles away, and to Fort Phil Kearney, 91 miles away, placing the fort in an almost isolated position. It was impossible to maintain communication over the 91 miles to Phil Kearney through the heart of the hostile Indians' camping and hunting grounds. During one winter no word was received from the post, and it was thought to have been destroyed.

Only a month after the soldiers arrived at the fort the first casualty from Indian attack occurred when Charles Bowman, a civilian employee, was killed near the post. Six days later, two soldiers were killed just outside the fort. Supply trains between the fort and Phil Kearney were also under continual attack, and numerous instances of heroism were recorded.

Very little information can be found about the activity of the

38. Hebard and Brininstool, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 137. This is the story of Driscoll and the blind mule that escaped from a surrounded wagon train between Kearney and Smith, and rode through the night to Smith for help.
fort. One well known story, however, is the action which occurred only a few miles from the post known as the Hayfield Fight.\textsuperscript{39}

After two years of almost continual struggle, the army was forced to give up the fight for the line of forts along the Bozeman Trail. By a treaty of peace with the Indians in 1868, the government agreed that all the country lying east of the Big Horn Mountains should be regarded as the western extension of the Sioux reservation in Dakota. In this region, the Sioux were to hunt the buffalo as they had done for numberless years. The whites were neither to traverse nor occupy the area.\textsuperscript{40}

Thus, the first attempt of the army to move along a route of emigration into Montana with a line of forts failed. On March 2, General Grant gave the orders to break up the line of posts, but it was well towards August before the three forts, C. F. Smith, Reno, and Kearney, were abandoned.\textsuperscript{41} Fort Smith was burned to the ground by the Indians immediately after the soldiers had left.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., pp. 159-171.

\textsuperscript{40} Charles J. Kappler, \textit{U. S. Laws and Statutes}, (Washington, 1903), p. 998.


\textsuperscript{42} Hebard and Brininstool, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. II, footnote p. 257.
The army had not wished to abandon the line, since a great deal of time, effort, and money, as well as loss of life, had gone into the struggle to establish it. General Sherman argued, and he was correct, 43 that the Indians would look on the withdrawal as a sign of weakness and intensify their attack on other points. Not only that, Sherman warned, but the army would probably have to reestablish these forts within a few years to subdue the Sioux. 44

In the end the army was forced to adhere to the government's decision in the matter. The Secretary of War, J. M. Schofield tried to ease the disappointment of the army by stating that the road had ceased to be of any further value. The construction of the Union Pacific Railroad, whose terminus had been extended west of the Black Hills, made it easier for the wagons to travel by an older and better road into Montana west of the mountains. 45 This route and the Missouri River traffic had replaced the Bozeman Trail.

CHAPTER VI

THE MISSOURI RIVER ROUTE

At the same time that the army was marching into Montana from the south, and was constructing the posts along the Bozeman Trail, it was also beginning a program which was to lead it into central Montana following the other great artery of travel to the gold fields—the Missouri River. Much the same as the Bozeman Trail, traffic to the gold fields in Montana and Idaho increased in leaps and bounds during the early sixties. With the arrival of the first steamboat at the landing at Fort Benton, an era of tremendous river transportation began which had to be protected.¹

Trouble soon arose near Fort Benton, between the Indians and the whites, as almost always was the case when whites began encroaching in large numbers upon the Indians' lands. In this case, it was the Bloods and Blackfeet proper, who resented the crowding in of the white man. In 1865, trouble seemed so imminent that Upson, the Indian agent, demanded immediate army protection at Fort Benton.² Other reports of the tense


situation in northern Montana reached the army headquarters at St. Louis. General Sherman summed up the situation in a letter to General Grant, which stated that although he did not apprehend a general Indian uprising, for years there would probably be an unpleasant state of hostility in the area, which could be terminated only with the destruction of the hostile bands. To accomplish this, it would be necessary to put troops near where these troublesome Indians lived—along the base of the Rocky Mountains.³

Following this line of thought, General Sherman immedi-
etely put men into the field to map out the best course of action to follow in placing these troops. Inspectors were sent into the territory between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Coast, to investigate and report upon the actual conditions in this Indian country.

Among these men was Inspector-General D. B. Sackett, whose assignment was to explore and investigate the conditions along the Missouri River, and through Montana and Idaho. Sackett was to make recommendations to headquarters so that the best general plan could be worked out for stimulating the settle-
ment of Montana, and for protecting the people there, until they were strong enough to protect themselves from Indian

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³ "Protection Across the Continent," House Executive Doc-
ument, No. 23. Second Session, 39th Congress, (Washington,
1865), Vol. 6, p. 9.
attack. General Sherman figured that the mining settlements were able to protect themselves, and was primarily interested in the condition of the ranchers and settlers who had spread out from the mining areas into the Sun and Dearborn River areas, and east into the valleys of the Madison, Gallatin, and Jefferson Rivers. Sherman wished to know if Montana could produce grains and food stuffs in sufficient quantities to support her growing population. He also wondered if Montana could produce enough hay to winter animals, so that he could send cavalry into the region. 4

Inspector Sackett began his tour of inspection from Omaha early in May, 1866, and traveled up the river by steamer, stopping at the posts already established to protect the river route, Fort Randall, Sully, Rice, and Berthold. While moving up the river, Sackett encountered a group of men returning to the States from the vicinity of Fort Benton. He learned from them that there was imminent trouble anticipated with the Blackfeet near Benton. The whites in the vicinity feared that there might be a general Indian uprising, for already, there had been several Indians and whites killed in sporadic fighting.

From this point on, Inspector Sackett played an important part in forming the army's policy in penetrating Montana via

the Missouri River route. Sackett reported to headquarters the news of trouble in northern Montana, and recommended that all precautions should be taken to prevent a war with the Indians there. If a four to six company post could be located somewhere near Fort Benton, or at a point which could provide the best protection for northwestern Montana, it would probably settle the situation for the time. Sackett further recommended that some of the soldiers that were then on the way by steamer to already established posts along the Missouri should have their destination changed to Montana. Their places could be filled with soldiers from Fort Randall, which he thought could be abandoned. Sackett recommended that the army wire ahead of the boats, or send express messengers by land, to intercept the boats, and inform the troops of a change in destination. It is possible that his advice was followed, for troops reached Montana soon after he did.

After sending his reports to headquarters, Sackett continued his inspection tour by investigating the facilities at Fort Union. He found that the equipment and supplies left by Captain Greer and his men the preceding year were in good shape, but that the fort was not an ideal location for an army post. His choice for the post to be put near the mouth of the Yellowstone would be at the site of old Fort William, which was about three miles above Union and had a good landing, good timber, grass, and fertile lands, for constructing and
maintaining an army post. Soon after he entered Montana, Sackett was surprised to learn that the army had immediately followed his suggestion. Troops had arrived at Fort Union on June 13, and begun construction work on a fort, known as Fort Buford, on the site that he had recommended in his report.

Traveling up the Missouri to Fort Benton, Colonel Sackett gained first hand information and data on the country near the river. He found that there was fairly good timber along its course as far as the mouth of the Musselshell River, and some as far as the foot of Cow Island. However, from there on was little timber, except for a fairly large stand of cottonwood at the mouth of the Judith River. Sackett did not think that the Judith was the proper place for a post, even though there seemed to be a necessity for some protection between Cow Island and Dauphin's Rapids, where the steamers were forced to work slowly up along the river bank. Sackett recommended that the most appropriate site would probably be near the mouth of the Musselshell River.

At Fort Benton, Sackett investigated the trouble that had occurred with the Indians and found that it was caused from the hostility of the Blood and Blackfeet Indians, who had their camp near the head of the Sun and Bearworne Rivers. However, he did not think that Benton was a desir-able post site. There was no timber within miles, and it
was hard to get hay and other supplies necessary for a post. He reported that Fort Benton was not really the head of navigation on the Missouri, for it was almost impossible to reach, except by the lightest steamers or during excessively high waters. To prove his point, he noted that out of 24 steamers which started for Fort Benton in 1865, only two had reached their destination at Benton. Most of them did not even reach as far as Cow Island, but were forced to discharge their cargoes some distance below Fort Union. He concluded, that if boats could reach Fort Union, they could reach Cow Island or the mouth of the Musselshell. Near one of these points should be placed a post to protect river traffic.

While still at Fort Benton, Sackett was startled to read in a Montana newspaper General Order Number 5, Headquarters, Department of the Platte, designating the First Battalion, 13th Infantry Regiment to proceed to Fort Benton and establish a post somewhere in that vicinity.

Immediately, Inspector Sackett sent a letter to Colonel Isaac V. Reeves, who was in command of the Montana region, offering further advice on the proper location for the north Montana post. Sackett wrote:

.... Benton is certainly no place for a post. There is not a stick of timber or of wood even, within miles of it, nor is it in much danger from hostile Indians. My impression is the new post should be placed upon the Sun River near its junction with the Missouri—that is, near
the great falls of the Missouri. All accounts agree that it is a most beautiful spot with abundance of timber, plenty of grass, good water, and is the only place near Benton where grass grows high enough to make good hay. By going a short distance above the mouth of the Sun River on the Missouri any quantity of most excellent pine timber can be had and easily rafted down to the post. The point that I have designated appears to me to possess all the requisites necessary for a military post, besides being within short striking distance of the stronghold of the Boods, now in open hostility with the whites.

Then, in a report to headquarters at St. Louis, Sackett continued his argument that the Sun River location was the best site for a post. The Catholics had a mission there at one time, and it was well known that they never picked a bad location for a mission. This site would protect perfectly the road between Benton and Helena, besides all of the north-western part of Montana. Still another point in favor of the location was the fact that just about opposite the mouth of the Sun, on the east side, was the mouth of Deep Creek. This stream ran through a beautiful valley to the south-east, offering a most excellent natural road to the headwaters of the Musselshell, in the very heart of the Indian hunting grounds between the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers.

Sackett explained that this hunting ground should be opened to the miners, as the Crows who claimed the land, but had been driven out of it by the Sioux, were willing, according to Governor Meagher, to sell it and go on a reservation.

In conclusion, Sackett suggested that a post should be established early in the spring at some point on the Missouri
River between the mouth of the Musselshell and the rapids above. With this post, the one on the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone, and the one on the Sun River, and with the Indian title extinguished to the land between, it would render all the territory west of a line drawn from the mouth of the Musselshell to the mouth of the Bighorn comparatively safe for white settlement. "With this trio of posts," Sackett said, Montana will have all the military protection she will ever require. Cavalry she does not want. A number of California horses at each post is all that is required."

Inspector Sackett was entirely wrong in his last conclusion, as was proven in later years when cavalry were called for on many occasions. He was also wrong in his idea that Montana would only need the three forts he mentioned. Yet, his policy of enclosing central Montana with a ring of posts so that the settlement of this area could be obtained was followed almost exactly to the letter. The Indians did not give up the land in central Montana, as Sackett was informed they would do. Therefore, it was necessary for the army to expand its line of forts into the Judith Basin to ferret them out.

5. Ibid., p. 49. All of the information contained in the references to Inspector Sackett's ideas on the army in Montana are taken from the "Memorandum of the Continent" which...
The soldiers moving up the Missouri to establish the post in the vicinity of Fort Benton arrived in the autumn of 1866, and much against the better judgement of Major William Clinton, who was in command, established a temporary camp site at the mouth of the Judith River. Clinton agreed with Sackett's decision that the place was not an ideal location for a post, but it had enough timber for a temporary winter camp, so here he stayed all winter with his Battalion of the 13th Infantry.\(^6\) It is probable that one company of this group spent the winter at Fort Benton at the request of the Indian agent, for, though there is no mention of what troops stayed there, it is known that one company was present during the winter of 1866-1867.\(^7\)

Much has been said about the location of Camp Cooke, as Clinton's winter camp was named, for it took on the aspect of a more permanent post during the following year. Inspector-General Hazen, who made an inspection tour for the Department of the Platte in the fall of 1866 up the Bozeman Trail to Fort C. F. Smith and then across to Camp Cooke, reported: "The post at the mouth of the Judith River is at a point where neither white nor red men ever go, and the location is subject to ridicule wherever I go."\(^8\) Lieutenant Colonel Holabird, who


\(^7\) Coues, op. cit., p. 268.

\(^8\) "Inspection by General Husling," op. cit., p. 4.
made a reconnaissance through the area in 1869, reported: 9

This unfortunate post is situated on the right bank of the Missouri River, at the mouth of the Judith, upon sage bottoms, saturated with alkali. It is entirely overrun with rats, and may be said to be in process of demolition by them. The storehouses are in ruins; they were wretchedly constructed in the first instance, and nothing since has been done to remedy their shortcomings. General neglect and indifference characterize the post. The small garrison merely holds on in spite of the rats. The Indians have moved away and left it alone.

Camp Cooke was never of much use to the army in Montana, and after the first year of its existence, when it was used as a point of departure for other assignments in the area, it deteriorated rapidly and was abandoned in the spring of 1870. 10 The post was located in an out of the way place, and could only serve as a protection to boats passing up the river over Dauphin's Rapids. In this instance, the army policy laid down by Sackett was ignored and failed. If the army had established a post near the mouth of the Musselshell, as Sackett had recommended, and as was mentioned from time to time in other reports, the operations in northern Montana would have been carried out much more smoothly. As it was, the army did not know exactly where to place this post on the


Missouri, and made several half-hearted attempts, which accomplished very little.

One of these attempts was made at Fort Benton. The army had stationed men there in the winter of 1866–1867, but they were removed in the spring. Troops were stationed there for several years to guard the supplies which arrived by steamer, and in 1869, the army leased the old fort buildings and set up a military reservation of 324 square miles around it.\(^{11}\)

It was never more than a one-company post, however, and served only as a depot for goods coming up the Missouri. Benton was discontinued as a military post in 1881,\(^\text{12}\) although the old fort buildings had been abandoned in 1875, and a camp set up outside.\(^\text{13}\)

The other attempt was made by the army near the mouth of the Musselshell River. This point had been recommended as the location for a post both by Sackett and Hazen. Hazen had recommended that Cooke be moved in the fall of 1869 to the mouth of the Musselshell,\(^\text{14}\) but the goods were removed to Fort Benton instead.\(^\text{15}\) However, troops were maintained on the

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15. Major General Hancock, 1870, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 28.
Musselshell for some time after Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Nugent and 100 men of the 13th Infantry established a summer camp there in May of 1868. The only distinction that this site achieved was that of a summer camp, though it achieved some importance when a proposed military road was established between Carroll, the village near the mouth of the river, and Helena in 1874.

It was on the recommendation of Inspector Hazen that Camp Cooke was abandoned. It is interesting to note that besides agreeing with Inspector Sackett on the matter of Cooke, his investigations and suggestions on the army's policy in Montana are very similar to Sackett's.

Brevet Major General W. J. Hazen came into Montana about the same time that Sackett did, though he entered via the Bozeman Trail. Like Sackett, Hazen recommended the establishment of a post on the Sun River, pointing out that the road between Benton and Helena was an important one and could be adequately protected from that point. Because of the abundance of grass in the area, which suited the location for cavalry, Hazen advised headquarters to establish a two company


cavalry post there, but strangely enough, the post on the Sun River became one of the few entirely infantry posts in Montana. This greatly hampered its' efficiency in later years.

Both Sackett and Hazen recommended that, as the head of navigation was really near the mouth of the Musselshell, the government should construct a military road from this point into the mining areas of western Montana. However, they had different routes in mind.

General Hazen was primarily interested in the route of the Bozeman Trail, and wished to supply some of the Trail's posts via the head of navigation on the Missouri. He pointed out that a road from the Musselshell to Fort C. F. Smith could easily be constructed and would be only about 100 miles long. The road could fork upon reaching the Yellowstone, with one branch going on down to Fort C. F. Smith, and the other branch reaching up the river to the new post to be established there. The road could then continue on over the Bozeman Trail into the mining areas.

Inspector Sackett was more interested in following the most direct route to the gold fields. He recommended that a first class military road, starting near the mouth of the Musselshell and running southwest between the Musselshell

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River and the Judith basin, passing to the south of the Belt Mountains, then west and northwest along this range into the Missouri Valley, be constructed. After reaching the Missouri, this road could go straight west and hit the Mullan Road at a point about 15 miles north of Helena. Sackett pointed out that this route passed through the geographic center of Montana, as well as the mining center of the territory. From this route, roads could be constructed very easily along easy grades to all parts of the Territory.\(^\text{19}\)

Little was done at the time upon these recommendations, but a few years later, it is interesting to note, again the army followed the advice of Sackett, and constructed a road along the route he had recommended. Probably because of the abandonment of the line of posts along the Bozeman Trail, little was done on Hazen’s recommendation until the last post had been built in central Montana.

After the army had moved into Montana on Sackett’s advice, to furnish some protection for Benton and vicinity, little was done until the following summer. Companies A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and H, of the 13th Infantry spent the winter at the mouth of the Judith River, while two more companies of the same unit, I and K, waited in Fort Leavenworth for the spring thaw to open the Missouri River to traffic, so that they could join

\(^{19}\) "Protection Across the Continent," op. cit., p. 47.
their outfit. Two companies of the 30th Infantry, I and K, were also waiting to accompany them into Montana. 20

To cover the new territory they were moving into, the Department of Dakota was divided into two divisions in January, 1867. One was known as the District of Minnesota, and the other, to cover Montana, was known as the Upper Missouri District. 21

In June, 1867, Companies A, C, D, and F, of the 13th Infantry were detached from Camp Cooke, and ordered to Sun River to establish a new post. Company I and K were to accompany them, but did not arrive until later in the summer. When they did arrive, Company K was ordered to stay at the landing at Fort Benton to protect the stores and supplies which were unloaded there for the new post. Company I continued on to the new site, where it assisted the other four companies to construct the Sun River post. 22

21. Ibid., p. 49.
22. Ibid., pp. 48, 49.
CHAPTER VII

PROTECTION AND SETTLEMENT

The Sun River post was one of the key points in the army's plan to protect central Montana from the Indians of the Blackfeet nations. These tribes, the Piegan, Blackfeet, and especially the Blood, had their homes near the headwaters of the Dearborne and Sun Rivers and in northern Montana, and were continually slipping down into the settlements of the Gallatin Valley on raids. One of their favorite crossing places of the Missouri River was just above the mouth of the Sun. Here the Missouri became smaller and shallower, and therefore easier to cross. Rivers such as the Marias, Teton, Dearborne, and the Sun branched off the main stream near this point, while the Missouri reached to the south, getting smaller and smaller as it neared its headwaters. The shortest, safest, and most direct route for the marauding Indians was near the mouth of the Sun River. Therefore, the army felt that a strong post was necessary at this point.

As the location of the post had been chosen with care from information gathered from investigators sent into Montana, it would seem that the post was ideally located. Yet, it was reported later, the site would have been more perfectly situated if it had been placed on the Missouri near the
mouth of the Sun. At the time, however, it was thought to be more appropriate to locate the post between the Indians and the Fort Benton-Helena wagon road, so it was placed about five miles west of the Sun River crossing, and almost 15 miles west of the Missouri River.

Thus, it was placed, as General Sherman recommended, near the Rocky Mountains and the seat of the Indian trouble in the area—the home of the Blackfeet. Further extension to the west was unnecessary in the years following, for the pattern of settlement fell in the area which was east of the upper reaches of the Missouri, and north of the Yellowstone—the very heart of Montana.

The general location of the post seemed admirably situated. It was near the wagon road, which was a constant source of trouble, and was approximately a half-way camp between the head of navigation on the Missouri and the mining camps. The post was 60 miles from Fort Benton, and 80 miles from Helena. Only 15 miles from the Missouri River, it seemed to solve the problem of Indians crossing, while it was also within easy reach of Cadotte pass, the Indians' path across the mountains only 50 miles directly to the west. Still another point in favor of its location,

already mentioned in Sackett's report, was the post's access to the excellent road offered by Deep Creek into the very heart of the Indian hunting grounds in central Montana.

Major William Clinton established the post on June 30, 1867, with the four companies of the 13th Infantry who had spent the preceding winter at Camp Cooke, and named the site Camp Reynolds. This name was changed to Fort Shaw on August 1, when work on the post was well started. Part of the men were forced to live in tents during the first winter, as only three sets of officers quarters and half of the company's barracks were erected before cold weather set in. The buildings were made of adobe brick due to a lack of timber in the vicinity, and little use was made of lumber at first except for door and window frames and shingles.

From its' beginning, the Sun River post was one of the major posts of the army in Montana. It was regimental headquarters for the army in Montana, and was one of the most pretentious and costly. The fort was constructed around the usual 400 foot parade ground, but the buildings were larger than usual in western forts. Some idea of their size is given in the fact that the four company barracks were 102

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2. Fort Shaw was named in honor of Colonel Robert G. Shaw, 54th Massachusetts Volunteers, (colored) killed at Fort Wagner, July 18, 1863.

feet long, the hospital 83x33 feet with wings added, a guard	house and prison 68x31 feet, and a store house 90x34 feet
with wings 61x39 feet each.⁴

Although the post was well planned, the work on the
buildings was not done with care, for later, it was reported,
all of the buildings had settled out of shape, while some of
the roofs had caved in. The ceiling joists were too small
for the duty they had to perform.⁵

No record was kept of the cost of constructing the post,
as most of the work was done by the soldiers garrisoned there.
This seemed to be a common practice in western forts for
Inspector Sackett complained of this habit when he came into
Montana on an inspection tour. However, in the case of Fort
Shaw, an estimated cost of the post by 1869 was given as
$187,013.49.⁶

Located as it was, in such a strategic position, the
effect of the fort was spoiled by the fact that only infantry
were stationed there. This, in spite of the fact that reports
continually stated that it was the only spot near Fort Benton
where there was sufficient grass to maintain a cavalry post.
The Indians had little respect for the post and later, when

punitive expeditions were made against them, cavalry had to brought in from other posts to press the campaigns.

The post served some purpose in the immediate vicinity, for settlers moved into the Sun River with the army and soon dotted the valley with their homes. The patrols sent to guard the pass to the west also had some success in controlling the movement of the Indians from the western side of the mountains into central Montana. However, the Indians continued to raid the Gallatin Valley for years after the post was constructed. More than likely these raids were made by crossing the Missouri near Fort Benton and passing through the Belt Mountains into the Gallatin Valley.

With the establishment of Fort Shaw, the army carried out the second part of its encircling movement. Army control had been extended up the Missouri to the mouth of the Judith, now it stretched along the Missouri in northern Montana to the foothills of the Rocky Mountain. Posts had been based on the Judith, at Fort Benton, and now on the Sun.

In a very short time, the third part of the movement was completed. This move was in the establishment of a post at the eastern end of the Gallatin Valley. About 100 miles to the south of Fort Shaw, the Madison, Gallatin, and Jefferson, Rivers unite to form the Missouri. One of these three forks,

the Gallatin, flows sharply to the east. It was on the upper reaches of the Gallatin that Fort Ellis was built. Thus, the army extended its control in a sweeping circle around the fertile area of central Montana.

The history of Fort Ellis is closely related to the attempt of the army to extend its control into Montana along the Bozeman Trail. In that line of forts, the final post was to be constructed just east of Bozeman pass. This post would probably have been constructed even after the trail was abandoned, if trouble had not risen in the Gallatin Valley which rushed the army into building Fort Ellis on the western side of the pass.

After the abandoning of the line of forts which included Fort Reno, Fetterman, and C. F. Smith, the settlers of the Gallatin Valley were left without protection from the Indians, who had easy access to the valley through the passes at the eastern end. When the settlement's leading citizen, John Bozeman, was killed within 60 miles of one of these passes, terror spread throughout the valley. Homes and possessions were left unprotected as the settlers fled to the towns for

8. Fort Ellis was named in honor of Colonel Augustus Van Horne Ellis, who was killed while rendering a gallant service at Gettysburg.

9. See Chapter V, page

protection. Urgent requests were sent to the territorial government in Helena and relayed to the federal government at Washington D. C., asking for immediate aid in preventing an Indian invasion of the valley. Volunteer regiments were raised in Montana and rushed into the field to defend the settlers. However, the army did not entirely believe the reports as to the seriousness of the situation, and sent an army officer from Salt Lake City to investigate the affair. His reports confirmed headquarters' beliefs that the people had been unnecessarily alarmed, and the volunteers were asked to discontinue their plans of battle. 11

To further investigate the matter, General Terry, in command of the area, also came into Montana. After examining the situation, he agreed with the investigating officer and asked the volunteers to return, but they continued down the Yellowstone Valley and fought a rather undecisive battle with the Indians there before disbanding. General Terry also laid the groundwork for another extension of the army into Montana when he recommended that a fort be established in the Gallatin Valley to protect the agricultural element there.

Orders for the construction of Fort Ellis were issued from Fort Shaw on August 7, 1867. 12 The site was picked by

Captain E. W. Clift during the summer at the eastern end of the valley. It lay about 3 miles east of Bozeman City, almost at the foot of the pass into the Yellowstone valley. From its location, the fort had command of two passes at the southeastern end of the valley—Trail Creek, and Rocky Canyon—only five miles away. To the west, was Bridger Canyon, another easy pass through the mountains bordering the south side of the valley, also five miles away. Farther to the north were the Flathead and Blackfoot passes which were within easy patrolling distances.

Much the same as Fort Shaw, the army decided a few years later that the fort would have been on a much better site if it had been located only a short distance to the south, or on the other hand, if it had been moved into the Yellowstone Valley and located near the mouth of Shields's River. But, as it was already almost completed, nothing was done to correct the mistake.

Construction of the post began in the fall of 1867 by government contract, and by December, besides barracks, there were three buildings for officers quarters and a bakery finished. By January, a hospital, command house, guard house,

and a blacksmith house were completed, with an ice house being added in February. The second terrace of officers quarters and the stockade were completed in November of the same year.\[^{15}\] The stockade inclosed an area of 390x455 feet, and was ten feet high, inside of which were the main buildings of the post. An inspecting officer later reported that the stockade, besides cutting off all the air from the quarters, gave a person the impression he was in a prison rather than a fort.\[^{16}\]

When the construction work was completed, the barracks consisted of unhewn pine logs chinked with mortar and with pine board floors, the cavalry stables of four log buildings roofed with boards, and a log quartermasters stable roofed of sod.\[^{17}\]

The three companies of the 13th Infantry under Captain U. S. Lamotte, who occupied the fort during the first two years, proved ineffective in defending the settlers, and in 1869, Colonel A. G. Brackett and two companies of the 2nd Cavalry moved in to replace them.\[^{18}\] This number was increased


\[^{16}\] "Reconnaissance in Dakota," *op. cit.*, p. 2.


to four companies of the 2nd Cavalry in 1872, along with one company of the 7th Infantry, which remained the complement of the post for some time.

The work of the cavalry proved more effective than the work of the infantry, and in the following years many expeditions were sent out to pursue and punish the Indians attempting to raid the Gallatin Valley.

One of the most illustrative of these expeditions was one planned in 1869 to stop the members of the Blackfoot nation from making their periodic raids into the valley and escaping through the Little Belt Mountains to the north. Plans were made for this campaign in the summer of 1869, and were carried out the following winter. A treaty of peace and mutual friendship was offered to the Indians and a deadline set that they should meet. When the deadline was reached and passed without a treaty being signed, cavalry from Fort Ellis and infantry from Fort Shaw marched, in the dead of winter, after the recalcitrant Indians. On January 23, a Piegan camp was found in the lower Marias River area, and without warning, was attacked at dawn. One hundred seventy three Indians were killed and 100 women and children captured. Forty women were killed in the fight when the soldiers fired into the teepees. When the news of the fight reached the people, storms of protest swept over the country against such needless killing.
However, a crushing blow was dealt the Piegan tribe and no further trouble was caused by them in the Gallatin Valley.

Beside sending out expeditions to punish the Indians, Fort Ellis served many other purposes and could almost be said to be a truliy representative western fort. Some of the services it later gave included the building and patrolling of roads, furnishing escorts for railroad surveys, establishing telegraph lines, maintaining patrols and summer outposts, and serving as a headquarters for expeditions into the area of Yellowstone Park by high government officials. There seems little doubt that it accomplished a great deal in furthering the settlement of central Montana.

However, as the settlements continued to grow in central Montana, it was found that Fort Ellis could not furnish all the protection that was needed for the area between Ellis and Fort Shaw. Diamond City had grown up to a good sized mining town about midway between the posts. It was near the main passes that were used by the Indians to enter and leave the Gallatin Valley, and the continual appearance of the Indians, Blackfeet principally, caused the people of the area to fear for their safety. Under their solicitations a temporary camp was established November 30th, 1869, by one company of cavalry

for Fort Ellis. The cavalry were shortly relieved by a company of infantry. The post was known as Camp Baker.

In the spring of the next year, the camp was moved a short distance from its original site, about 13 miles east of Diamond City, to secure a more suitable location. The camp served its purpose so ably that the army decided to make it a more permanent camp and the troops were put to work erecting log barracks, storehouses, and sheds. Originally it had been intended to be an outpost attached to Fort Ellis, but on the first of May, 1870, it assumed the status of a separate and permanent post. By 1872, the buildings of the fort included, quarters made of logs for 100 men, three officers quarters—two of logs and one frame—, two storehouses, a block house, and a two story log building.

Several attempts were made by the army to discontinue the use of Camp Baker in following years, but local influence was strong enough to keep it activated until 1880.

The name of the post was changed to Fort Logan in 1877, in honor of Captain William Logan who was killed in the battle of the Big Hole. Fort Logan was quite successful in guarding the people around Diamond City, and the passes through

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20. Ibid., p. 28.
through the Belt Mountains, though the necessity of maintaining the post for so long is doubtful. In October, 1880, the post was finally dismantled and most of the effects and troops moved to establish the final fort in the line used to open and protect central Montana—Fort Maginnis.23

With the construction of the three named posts, Fort Shaw, Fort Ellis, and Fort Logan, and the use of the two Missouri River posts at Fort Benton and Camp Cooke, the army had almost furnished all the protection necessary for central Montana. The routes of transportation in the north and west, up the Missouri and over the Helena wagon road, were guarded and patrolled, forming a line of protection from the Blackfeet tribes. The Indians from the Yellowstone were held back by the post between them and the settlements of the Gallatin Valley, while the road from this post to Helena served as further protection for central Montana from the Indians to the west and south. The post at the base of the Belt Mountains served as an added protection against any Indians that might seep through the defense of the Fort Benton–Helena wagon road.

In order to increase the efficiency of the posts it had constructed in Montana, the army began a program of

military roads to expedite communications and the movement of supplies between them. Up until this time, the road from the head of navigation at Fort Benton, which ran west of the Missouri past Fort Shaw to Helena, had been used. Another leg had been added to bring Fort Ellis into contact with Fort Shaw and Benton by continuing the road east from Helena. Yet, this road was so long that most of the supplies for Fort Ellis came up from the south via the head of the railroad which had reached Corrine.

When Camp Baker was constructed, a road had been made to connect it with Fort Ellis, and this road was later extended to the northwest as far as Fort Shaw, bringing these posts into closer contact with each other. Later, General Hancock had suggested that a survey for a road to connect Fort Logan and Ellis with Fort Benton be made on the south side of the Missouri. He stated: "... Such a road, on the south side of the Missouri would be an additional defense for the settlements from that quarter." Hancock suggested that it might be a good idea to connect the posts in the Gallatin Valley with the true head of the Missouri river traffic at the mouth of the Musselshell River. 24

For some time the army had been told that the Musselshell was really the head of navigation on the Missouri, and

in trying to shorten the routes of travel overland, the army finally accepted this idea.

Settlers had tried to promote the growth of a landing at the mouth of the Musselshell, and over a period of years, the community had formed a small village known as Carroll. The army had furnished some protection for this area in 1868 when Brevet Colonel Hugent and 100 men of the 13th Infantry had established a summer camp there. Little was done about the actual construction of a road, however.

When General Hancock assumed command of the Montana District in May, 1869, investigations into the practicability of such a road were inaugurated. Hancock made an inspection tour of the area he was taking over and noted that such a road had advantages that should be looked into. He instructed Captain L. H. Giff of the 13th Infantry at Fort Ellis to explore the country between Fort Ellis and the mouth of the Musselshell, and the country between Helena and the same point, with the view of finding if a wagon road, with grass, water, and wood, would be found. Hancock had in mind the use of one road for a considerable distance from the Musselshell, to fork somewhere in the Judith Basin. One of these forks was to lead south to Fort Ellis, and the other westward to Helena. He

stated that such a road would facilitate traffic to the settled areas when the Missouri River was too low to allow boats to reach Benton. He also pointed out: "... such a road would be of great advantage to the commerce and people of the country, in enabling them to get their supplies more certainly, more promptly, and cheaper; besides, such a road would be a line in front of the settlements against Indians coming from the south."

Captain Clift and his cavalry escort completed explorations in two months and reported back to headquarters. Basing his ideas upon this report, General Hancock concurred with his first impression on the road and suggested that it might be advantageous to establish a post at the mouth of the Mussel shell and one at the fork of the road in the Judith Basin. He recommended that the two forts not be costly posts and should be erected by the troops sent to garrison them. When the line of the Northern Pacific railroad was determined, one of the posts could be made of a more permanent nature. 26 The army did not take up the matter of the road at this time and it was five years before anything resulted from Clift's survey.

In 1874, General Terry, who had again resumed control of the Dakota Department, was informed that an effort would be made that year to open a new route of communication with the

settlement portions of Montana by the construction of a wagon-road from Helena to a point on the Missouri River near the mouth of the Musselshell River. He was asked to provide military protection for the proposed depot at the mouth of the Musselshell, and for trains passing over the route. General Terry was convinced, as General Hancock had been, that to construct this road would be quite beneficial to Montana. Although the distance from Fort Benton to Helena was out 140 miles, while from the mouth of the Musselshell to the same point was 210 miles, yet the avoidance of the 350 miles of extremely difficult navigation between the two points on the river would make the new route by far the most economical. In addition to this, the season during which the steamers could carry freight into Montana would be lengthened two months.

General Terry cooperated with the parties inaugurating the road and had an escort furnished to the men opening the route. He also directed that a summer camp of one company of the 7th Infantry be posted at the village of Carroll, and that another company of the same regiment encamp at Big Spring Creek in the Judith Basin at a point intermediate between Carroll and Camp Baker. The work of protecting the road continued, for in the next year, during June, two companies of infantry were sent out from Fort Shaw, one company to take

station at the forks of the Musselshell River, and the other at Camp Lewis, as the summer camp on Big Spring Creek was named. 28

Increased protection was given to the Carroll-Helena road later in the year for in July, several recruits were killed near Camp Lewis by the Indians. Colonel Giauques commanded several scouting expeditions sent out to apprehend the Indians who had committed the crime. Giauques marched with his men to Camp Lewis and sent patrols out into the surrounding country, while other patrols were sent both up and down the road. 29

In the same year, 1875, Captain Ludlow, who was sent out to survey the region from Carroll to Fort Ellis, reported the protection of the road during the summer as follows: 30

At Camp Baker, fifty-two miles east of Helena, is a permanent garrison of two companies of infantry; at the forks of the Musselshell, fifty-six miles farther east, is a summer camp of two companies of infantry and one of cavalry; at the Judith gap, thirty miles farther, is a detachment of eighteen or twenty men; and at Camp Lewis, thirty miles farther and seventy-five miles out of Carroll, is another summer garrison of two companies of infantry, from which a small detachment guards the stage-station at Box Elder, forty miles out of Carroll.

During the next two years there were no reports of patrols being maintained along the road for during this period


29. Ibid., p. 63.

all of the available soldiers in Montana were engaged in another attempt to finally and forever settle the Indian problem.

In 1878, protection was again furnished the Carroll-Helena road. Four companies of infantry were gathered from the various posts in Montana and sent out to a summer camp at Carroll.31

During this time agitation had been growing for the extension of the line of permanent military posts farther to the east of Fort Logan to protect the growing population of central Montana. Although the Indian wars of 1876 and 1877 had destroyed the concentrated power of the main Indian tribes, roving bands of Indians in greater numbers continued to annoy the settlers.

General Terry had planned since 1875 to discontinue Fort Logan and establish another post farther to the east, but had been deterred by the people of the area. As the frontier of settlement moved on and the agitation of a new frontier—the Judith basin—grew in strength, Fort Logan was abandoned. Instead of placing the next fort at the forks of the Musselshell as had been advocated, the next and last fort to be established to protect Central Montana was located farther to the west. It was near the foot of the Judith Mountains and

only a few miles from Camp Lewis. This move was brought about largely through the efforts of Major Martin Maginnis, the Montana delegate to Congress, after whom the fort was named.

The location of this post, Fort Maginnis gave easy access to guarding the Judith gap, to the southwest, which was one of the gateways for the Indians moving north or south through central Montana. It was within easy patrolling distance of another north-south crossing place of the Indians, about an equal distance to the east, on Box Elder Creek. It also was near one of the main crossing places of the Missouri in north-central Montana, Cow Island.

On August 22, 1880, Captain Dangerfield Parks and the men and equipment from Fort Logan established Fort Maginnis. The post was located in the west pasture of Granville Stuart, one of the early settlers of the region. Work was delayed somewhat by the unexampled low water of the Missouri which stopped shipment of supplies up the river during the next spring and summer. By the fall of 1881, there were three storehouses, an issuing room, quartermaster and commissary of the subsistence officer, a hospital, three double sets of lieutenants' quarters, an administration building, two double barracks, a guard house, bakery, three stables, and a root house erected at the post.32

when the final work of construction at Fort Maginnis was finished, the buildings included a commanding officer's quarters, 7 officers' quarters, 3 barracks, a library, chapel, office building, bakery, guard house, store house, shops, employees quarters, 2 non-commissioned officers quarters, a saw mill, harness house, stables, and an ice house.33

With the construction of a new post, more roads had to be constructed to bring the post into closer contact with the posts of the surrounding territory. Rocky Point, fifty miles to the north, was the closest landing on the Missouri River, and soldiers were put to work immediately, building a wagon road to that point. Rocky Point became one of the summer camps for Fort Maginnis, for troops were stationed there as long as the Missouri River was open to steamships.34

Another road was mapped out to connect the fort with the Yellowstone River, to the south, and stages ran over the route three times weekly between Maginnis and Custer station.35 Still other roads were constructed and by 1882, connections had been made with White Sulpher Springs, Martinsdale, and Maiden.


35. Ibid., p. 95.
Fort Maginnis was a fairly good sized post with a mixed garrison of both cavalry and infantry. There were generally about 250 soldiers stationed there. In 1882, there were three companies of the 2nd Cavalry, and two companies of the 18th infantry, consisting of 242 enlisted men, 17 officers, and 7 scouts. This number varied very little until after 1887 when the number was decreased.

The post had already outlived its usefulness by that time, for the need for protection in the Judith Basin and central Montana had largely disappeared by 1885. The army had marched to destroy the concentrated forces of the Sioux in 1876. In the campaign which ensued, the Sioux were crushed except for a band under Sitting Bull that escaped into Canada. In this campaign the well known story of 'Custer's Last Stand' occurred, but this was only a small part of the campaign which destroyed the power of the Sioux. The threat of Sitting Bull and his group remained over northern Montana until 1881, when the last remnant of the group surrendered to the army.

Another group of Indians from the west caused excitement in Montana in the following year. Chief Joseph and his Nez Percé tribe moved through Montana in 1877 while trying to elude the armed forces trailing him. In his flight Chief Joseph led his band through central Montana on the way to

Canada, but was defeated and captured soon after crossing the Missouri River near Cow Island, by Colonel Miles. This removed another source of Indian trouble in the Northwest.

Another tribe, the Bannock Indians, caused further unrest in Montana in 1878, when they moved into Montana in search of buffalo. From their reservation in Idaho they moved into western Montana and followed the path of Chief Joseph of the year before. They did not reach central Montana when they moved north out of Yellowstone Park however, for Colonel Miles met them and forced them to surrender in southern Montana.

There were small outbreaks among the Indians of Montana after this period of Indian wars but the troops in Montana had increased to such an extent that they were easily able to handle the situation. With the surrender of Sitting Bull in 1881, the situation in Montana assumed a peaceful status. The Indians were placed on small reservations and were well guarded there by troops. The efforts of the soldiers in the forts became a routine affair, of patrol duty and drill. At Fort Maginnis, it was reported that the troops did little more than shoot 40 shots a day at tin Indians on the parade ground. 37

The ranchers endured the inefficiency of the army at Fort Maginnis as long as they could, then took matters into their

own hands. Any Indian caught stealing horses or killing cattle were treated the same as any white thief to rough western justice.

After 1887, the troops at Fort Maginnis were reduced in number and by 1889 there was only one troop of cavalry at the post. This troop was removed in July, 1890, and the army left the settlers of central Montana to fend for themselves. The other forts which had carried the frontier into central Montana were abandoned about the same time. Fort Ellis had been vacated in 1886, as the frontier moved north. The other main fort in the line, Fort Shaw remained in operation until 1891, when it too was abandoned.

Thus the protection of the settlements, the sparsely settled areas, and the routes of travel in and into Montana by the army ended. The army had accomplished its goal, for flourishing settlements had sprung up throughout the area. Ranching and farming of a more permanent nature had replaced the temporary mining population. The Indians no longer roamed as they pleased but were restricted to reservations and forced to stay there.

The policy the army followed was to a great extent the plan laid down by the people of the west. Not always did the army do what it had planned on doing, and which might have been more appropriate in the long run, for the influence of the people it protected was strong enough to dictate terms.
Even then the people were not always grateful for the protection they received. It was not with regret that the people of the Judith Basin watched the final exodus of troops from central Montana.
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