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SOME CHAPTERS IN THE HISTORY OF FORT BUFORD

by

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PREFACE

In the study of the great westward movement, which has occupied such a major share of our American history, much attention has been given to those hardy pioneer civilians who blazed their way through the Indian country in search of gold, furs, or homes. A great deal has also been written about those great Indian campaigns led by Clarke, Harrison, Jackson, Sibley, Sully, Terry, Custer, Miles and scores of other famous Indian fighters who harried the red man into subjection.

While we should in no way seek to minimize the contributions of those courageous trail-blazers, we might well be reminded of the equally important, though less spectacular, contributions to the westward progress made by the common soldier of the frontier forts. His was not a glamorous task; his everyday contacts with the Indian were taken as a matter of course, and his skirmishes received little publicity. Nevertheless, these stalwart men who went into the savage-infested regions, hewed logs to build defenses and living quarters, stood at their posts to ward off the ferocious Indians, and escorted the white settlers as they pushed westward, are deserving of a generous consideration.

This treatise is devoted to a study of one of these sentinels of the westward migration. It is in no sense a

chronological and complete account of the history of Fort

Buford, Such a treatment would be possible only upon a study of the post records of the fort. These records are located in the National Archives at Washington, D.C. and consist of some 115 volumes.

The author made an effort to gain access to these records but was informed by the Reference Division of the National Archives that each item had to be examined by a representative from the War Department before it could be photostated and sent out. With our nation at war it was impossible for this department to provide the personnel to perform this examination. Undoubtedly at some future date, when national conditions again assume normalcy, these records will be available.

Meanwhile, the author has endeavored to present such chapters of the history of that fort as could be gleaned from the published sources and such photostatic post records as he was fortunate enough to receive through the earlier efforts of Miss Geneva Combes of Sidney, Montana. An effort has been made to present a true account of the establishment and abandonment of the post, the everyday life, struggles and hardships of its inhabitants, and some of the major incidents and movements that were related to its history.

It is the hope of the author that this treatise may aid

in preserving the record of some of the historic events that took place at Fort Buford, and that it may in some small measure contribute to a clearer understanding and a keener appreciation of the work of these intrepid soldiers who stood watch at that lonely sentinel of the Dakota frontier.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I. PORT BUFORD'S PREDECESSORS

Many years before the United States government began establishing military posts on the Missouri river as far west as the Yellowstone, the vicinity of the junction of these two rivers was the scene of extensive activity on the part of the fur traders. As early as 1828 Kenneth Mackenzie came up the Missouri river and began building Fort Union a few miles above the mouth of the Yellowstone. For almost 40 years this fort was the most important trading post in the Dakotas. It was here that Kenneth Mackenzie ruled supreme over a vast domain and majestically entertained the numerous dignitaries that ventured up the Missouri.

But the power of this mighty "Czar" of the Missouri fur trade did not go unchallenged. Opposition posts by rival companies were established from time to time only to find competition of the unscrupulous Fort Union traders too severe. Of all these opposition posts that were built in this area, the one that made the most spirited challenge to the Astor fur monopoly was Fort William, founded in 1833 by William Sublette and Robert Campbell.¹

¹ Charles Larpenteur, Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri, Ed. by Elliot Coues. (2 volumes, New York: Francis B. Harper, 1898) I, p. 51.

It was 150 by 130 feet with a stockade fifteen feet high made of cottonwood logs.² It was complete with a warehouse, carpenter shop, blacksmith shop, ice house, meat house, and other buildings necessary for a well-established trading post.³

As soon as the post was completed, the men put in an immense stock of goods, hired popular clerks and interpreters who had formerly worked for Mackenzie, and energetically set about seeking to divert some of Mackenzie's half-a-million dollar fur trade. A period of bitter and vicious rivalry followed during which time the price of beaver skins soared to twelve dollars.⁴ But before long the established renown of Fort Union prevailed and at the end of the year the post was abandoned.⁵

Ten years later the firm of Fox, Livingstone, and Company took possession of the post and built some adobe houses farther from the river bank, which they called Fort Mortimer. The buildings of Fort William were used as store houses. Soon the name of Fort William came to be applied to

² Colonel Clement A. Lounsberry, Early History of North Dakota (Liberty Press, 76 New York Ave. N.E., 1919)p.179

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. p. 178

⁵ Ibid.

all the buildings and the name of Mortimer was dropped. However, being convinced by three years of business that it was a losing venture to oppose the American Fur Company, the firm sold out to its competitor in 1846.

The subsequent history of Fort William is obscure and relatively unimportant. By 1863 it had been abandoned completely as is noted by the fact that Henry Boller, on a journey up the Missouri in that year, observed that nothing remained of the fort except "a chimney or two and portions of the adobe walls".

Fort Union, in the meantime, had also deteriorated with the decline of the lucrative fur trade. After changing hands a number of times it was finally taken over in 1865 by Hubble, Hawley, and Company, of which A. B. Smith of Chicago was the head. This firm became known as the Northwest Fur Company.

Such was the situation at the junction of the Missouri and the Yellowstone, when in the spring of 1864 Captain W. B. Greer and a company of the 30th Wisconsin Infantry arrived at

6 Washington Matthews, O.R.D. of the Adjutant Generals Office, Record of the Medical History of the Post (Copy of the U.S. War Dept. typed by Dr. Osgood of the Univ. of Minn.)p. 8

7 Frank Harper, Fort Union and Its Neighbors (Great Northern Railway) p. 18

8 Henry A. Boller, Among the Indians. Eight Years in the Far West. 1858-66. (Philadelphia: T. Ellwood Zell, 1868)p.369

9 Charles Larpenteur, op. cit., 11, p. 366.

Fort Union to take station at the post.¹⁰

II. EVENTS LEADING TO MILITARY OCCUPATION OF THE UPPER MISSOURI

The establishment of military control of the Upper Missouri can be properly said to have begun with the cession by the Sioux Indians to the United States government in 1858 of most of their land lying between the Missouri and the Big Sioux rivers.¹¹ After this event, several major developments contributed to the necessity of such military occupation.

First of all the opening up of this territory to the white occupation gave impetus to an influx of settlers who immediately began to agitate for territorial status. The result of this agitation was that the territory of Dakota was established in 1861, an event which in turn attracted still more settlers. The Dakota territory was indeed getting a fair start toward a relatively speedy settlement when the whole movement came to an almost abrupt standstill by a sudden outburst of Indian activity.

The Indians had watched the penetration of the settlers into what they still considered their hunting ground with growing concern. When the discovery of gold in Montana and Idaho brought countless numbers of gold-seekers scurrying across the

¹⁰ "General Alfred Sully to Headquarters", Aug. 18, 1864, The War of the Rebellion; Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Washington: Government Printing Office Series I, Vol. XLI, Part I, p. 148.

¹¹ C.J. Kappler, Indian Affairs, Laws, and Treaties, (2 volumes. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904) II, 776-80

plains and invading territory which they rightfully claimed as their own, they became duly alarmed. The first serious blow fell in 1862 with the frightful massacre of the settlers along the upper Minnesota river. Then, as had occurred after every Indian uprising throughout the history of the westward movement, the hue and cry arose for retaliation and military protection against the brutal savages.

In the second place, with the Civil War in progress, the attention of the War Department was attracted to the Upper Missouri by reports that the employees of the Fur companies in that region were largely Southern sympathizers.¹²

Thirdly, alarming suspicions were circulated concerning alleged activities by the Canadians in inciting the Indians to resist the white man's invasion of their land.¹³

Thus, the need for protection of the settlers, the demand for protection of gold-seekers to Montana, together with a desire by the War Department to investigate the alleged activities of Southern sympathizers and Canadians prompted the United States government to take steps to place the northern plains under military supervision.

¹²M.G. Burlingame, The Montana Frontier (State Publishing Co., Helena, Mont., 1942) p.110

¹³ Ibid.

A new military area, known as the Division of the Northwest, was organized with General John Pope in command.¹⁴ In 1866 still closer supervision was made possible by the establishment of the Department of Dakota with General Alfred H. Terry in command.¹⁵

Military activity was also begun. Generals Henry H. Sibley and Alfred Sully were sent on their expeditions in 1863 and 1864 to sweep the hostile Indians off the plains. A special company of Wisconsin volunteers was stationed at Fort Union in the spring of 1863 under the command of Captain W. B. Greer.¹⁶

While these temporary steps were being taken, the question of permanent Indian policy was being worked out. The problem of protecting the settlers along the eastern parts of Dakota was comparatively easy. The chief concern of the War Department was what to do about the immigrants to the Montana gold fields, who were passing through territory that the Indians held by right of treaty. After a careful study of the situation, both General Pope and General Sherman

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 112.

¹⁵ "Report of Lieutenant General W. T. Sherman", Annual Report of the Secretary of War, Ex. Doc. 1, 39th Cong., 2d sess., pp. 18-23.

¹⁶ See footnote 10.

were convinced that, while the policy of protecting these migrants would involve serious difficulties, it was nevertheless necessary.¹⁷

In accordance with this opinion, General Pope, in letters to Sully and Sibley in 1864, outlined his plan for the construction of forts along the northern plains. One was to be located at Devils Lake, one on the James river, one on the Missouri, and a fourth on the Yellowstone.¹⁸

As soon as spring came in 1864, Sully began to carry out a portion of this plan. He built Fort Rice to guard the Upper Missouri and made plans to build one on the Yellowstone during his summer campaign. His plan, however, was disrupted when upon reaching that river, he learned that the steamer Island City, which carried the major share of the equipment for building the fort, had been wrecked.¹⁹ The remainder of the material that he had planned for this post he deposited at Fort Union with the obvious intention that it would be used for the construction of a fort near that point at some future date.²⁰

¹⁷ "Pope's Letter to Col. J.C. Kelton," The War of the Rebellion; Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I, Vol. XXXIV, Part II, p. 256, 64.

¹⁸ The War of the Rebellion; Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I, Vol. XXXIV, Part II pp. 109-

¹⁹ "Report of General Alfred Sully's Expedition of 1864", The War of the Rebellion; Official ... Armies, Series I, Vol. XLI, Part p. 147.

²⁰ Ibid ... 140

As time went on plans were made for the building of more posts. In his report of March, 1866, General Pope proposed a number of other forts, among them being one near Fort Union.²¹ The policy of the War Department in respect to the extension of military control of the Upper Missouri area is reflected in General Sherman's Annual Report of 1866, in which he stated: "In the Department of Dakota, I propose that General Terry shall make the Missouri river as safe to boats as possible, and that he shall open and protect the new route from Minnesota to Montana, and afford the stages and wagons that travel that long route all assistance in his power".²² In accordance with this policy Fort Wadsworth had been built in 1864, Fort Dakota in 1865, and in the years 1866-67 the four forts, Ransom, Totten, Buford, and Stevenson were established as lonely sentinels in the heart of the Indian country to guard the westward migration across the Dakota plains and to witness the gradual but certain dissolution of those proud and savage rulers of the plains.

²¹ House Ex. Doc. 76, 39th Cong., 1st sess., p. 9.

²² "Report of Lieutenant General W. T. Sherman, Nov. 5, 1866", Report of Secretary of War, H. Ex. Doc. 1, 39th Cong., 2nd. sess., pp. 18-23.

CHAPTER II

SELECTING THE FORT BUFORD SITE

When General Alfred Sully arrived at Fort Union on August 17, on his return from his military expedition of 1864, he found the fort "an old dilapidated affair, almost falling to pieces".¹ After repairing it enough to make it habitable, he had Major Van Winder of the Minnesota troops, who had been assigned as topographical engineer, survey and mark out the military reservation for a fort which was later built and called Fort Buford.² He then left Fort Union again in charge of Captain William H. Greer and his company of 30th Wisconsin Infantry until the next summer.³

Although General Sully is generally given the credit for selecting the site of Fort Buford, his survey at the time does not appear to have received much official recognition. This is evident from the fact that Colonel D.B.Sackett, while on a tour of inspection of the upper Missouri region in 1866, devoted some space in his report⁴ to pointing out that Fort

¹ "General Alfred Sully's Letter to Headquarters", Aug. 18, 1864, The War of Rebellion; Official...Armies, Series I, Vol. XLI, Part I, pp. 148-49.

² Lieutenant Colonel John Pattee, "Dakota Campaigns", South Dakota Historical Collections, (20 Volumes, Pierre, S. Dak.) Vol. V, p. 318

³ "Report of General Alfred Sully's Expedition of 1864", op. cit., p. 149.

⁴ House Ex. Doc. 23

Union would be a poor location for a military post and giving a number of advantages of the site of old Fort William. The reasons he expressed for recommending Fort William were that it was on high table land, it was closer to abundant sources of hay, firewood, and building timber, it had a good steamboat landing nearby, and it was within three miles of a place where there was soft, yellow sandstone for building purposes.

Furthermore, Captain W. G. Rankin, who built the fort, does not seem to have been instructed to build it on a previously selected site. When he in accordance with General Order Number 26 arrived at Fort Union on June 12, 1866 with Company C, 13th U. S. Infantry, he began a survey immediately. The next day he moved down the river eight or ten miles and disembarked his men and stores. On June 15 he selected the site, laid out the ground-plan, and began work on the fort.⁵

The site selected was in Latitude 48°, longitude 1040.6 It was "one-third of a mile from the Missouri River, on the east bank, about two miles by land, and ten by river from the trading Post Fort Union, Montana Territory, nearly on the site formerly occupied by Old Fort Williams and nearly

⁵ Capt. W. G. Rankin, Letter to Brgd. Gen. Lorenzo Thomas, Dec. 31, 1866, Records of the War Department (Photostatic Copy, See Appendix) p.1.

⁶ Gen. P.H. Sheridan, Outline Descriptions of the Posts in the Military Division of the Missouri commanded by Lieut. Gen. P.H. Sheridan (Chicago, Ill., 1872) p.22.

opposite and a little below the mouth of the Yellowstone River".⁷

The fort was surrounded by a well-timbered plain covered with a dense undergrowth of willows and shrubs. The principal timber for building purposes was cottonwood. North of this plain, which extended out from the river about two miles, was a one to four mile strip of prairie which abounded in sage brush and cactus. This prairie extended back to what was called the "bad lands", consisting of a succession of barren hills, or "buttes", averaging from two to three hundred feet in height. These hills extended about 6 miles north, beyond which there was a rolling prairie.⁸

It is interesting to note that the official reports from this fort and vicinity generally observed that the land was not arable. General P.H.Sheridan made the following observation in that respect: "The surrounding country of Fort Buford is not arable and is badly watered. Occasionally along the river strips of land are found capable of producing corn and vegetables. Garden at the post, and good vegetables

⁷ Capt. W. G. Rankin, op. cit. p. 1.

⁸ Gen. P. H. Sheridan, op. cit., p. 23.

can be raised if properly watered. Soil alkaline."⁹

The fort was named Buford in honor of Major General John Buford, who served in many major engagements during the Civil War.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid. D. B. Sackett expressed a not too favorable opinion of Dakota in general when he wrote: "The more I see of Dakota the more I am convinced the government should donate every foot of it to the Indians, and the Indians should be well recompensed in addition, if they agree to remain and live within its borders." House Ex. Doc. 23, 39th Cong., 2nd. sess., p. 46.

¹⁰ Capt. W. G. Rankin, op. cit. John Buford saw frontier service in Texas, New Mexico, and Kansas. He distinguished himself as regimental quartermaster in the Sioux campaign of 1855 and in an expedition into Utah a few years later. Through the efforts of General John Pope he was appointed Brigadier General in 1862 and took command of a brigade of cavalry. He performed effective service during the Civil War in the Manassas Campaign and at Gettysburg. At one time he was severely wounded and at first reported dead. While engaged in maneuvers in Virginia, his health failed and he died shortly after in Washington in 1863 with the commission as Major-General. (Dictionary of American Biography, II, pp. 372-3.)

CHAPTER III

BUILDING THE FORT

The site had no sooner been selected than the men, armed with axes, set about constructing the fort. Except for the necessary guards, all the troops were put to work in order to get the quarters completed before the arrival of winter. Within a few days the shrill whir from the sawmill echoed through the woodland and across the prairies as the troops were busily preparing the cottonwood logs for the buildings. It was soon found that the water from the muddy Missouri contained too much sediment to be used for engineering and general purposes. For this reason and for the sake of convenience, a well some 35 feet deep was dug close to the saw-mill. Steadily throughout the months of June and July the soldiers toiled "without the variety of interruption or incident".¹

¹ Capt. W. G. Rankin, Letter to Brigd. Gen. Lorenzo Thomas, Dec. 31, 1866, Records of the War Department, p. 1-2. It is interesting to observe in this connection that while Rankin mentions nothing whatever about the presence of Indians during the first two months, J. M. Hanson in his The Conquest of the Missouri, page 32-3, makes the following observation about the soldiers that built Fort Buford: "The second night after their arrival the Indians attacked the camp, but after a sharp fight, in which one soldier was wounded, they were repulsed. The next day the Indians unsuccessfully attempted to stampede the cattle herd, and throughout the summer scarcely a day passed when there

On August 1 the first building, the storehouse for the commissary and quartermaster's stores, was completed. By the middle of the same month the Commanding Officer's quarters were occupied. So intent was Rankin upon strengthening his defenses and gathering in his winter supply of firewood that he made no attempt to finish the buildings beyond that of making them barely habitable.² From his almost feverish haste to strengthen his defenses, it is evident that Rankin was anticipating Indian hostility, if he had not already experienced it. Nor did he have long to wait. On the 18th of August occurred the first Indian skirmish concerning which he reported.³ On that day the Indians attacked and attempted to drive off the cattle-herd. Although repulsed by the herds-men, they succeeded in getting away with two horses. Two

was not a skirmish with the hostiles. The men kept their rifles constantly beside them as they worked, ready to drop their axes in an instant and turn to defend their lives from a yelling horde of savages who swept down as swiftly as shadows from the uplands, circling close enough to fire a scattering volley and perhaps pick up a few head of stock, and then vanishing as they had come. The men cutting and rafting building logs at the mouth of the Yellowstone were so frequently attacked that a heavy guard had to remain with them constantly and, even thus protected, three wood cutters lost their lives before the winter.*

² Ibid., p. 4.

³ Ibid., p. 3.

days later a James Finley was killed by the hostiles while chopping wood three or four miles from the fort.⁴ On September 5 two men from Fort Union were killed while hunting on the opposite side of the river. A third man in the same party succeeded in escaping by concealing himself in the brush.⁵

In the early part of September Captain Grant Marsh stopped at Buford on his return trip from Fort Benton in the steamer Luella.⁶ As the arrival of a steamboat was an exciting event at such an isolate^d place, Mrs. Rankin, a young and beautiful Cuban lady, rode down to the river bank on horseback to meet the boat. The post was but a short distance from the bank and as there were soldiers between it and the boat, there was apparently no danger. But a lurking party of Indians discovered her as she was riding back toward the fort, and sweeping down, endeavored to surround her. She urged her horse forward and after a short but desperate race succeeded in reaching her husband and the soldiers who

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ J. M. Hanson, The Conquest of the Missouri; Being the Story of the Life and Exploits of Captain Grant Marsh (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1910) p. 84.

had snatched up weapons and were rushing to her rescue.⁷

By the end of August the lieutenants' quarters were completed and a month later the company quarters and bakery. During October and November the laundresses' and mechanics' quarters, the stables, the carpenters' and blacksmiths' shops, the stockade, and the bastions were completed, thus ending the seasons building program on November 25.⁸

All the buildings were constructed of cottonwood except the interpreter's and mechanic's quarters, which were built of adobes taken from the ruins of old Fort William.⁹ Surrounding the buildings was a rectangular stockade, 320 feet by 300 feet and twelve feet high. On the southwest and the northeast corner were two blockhouses, each twenty-one feet square and pierced with four portholes for artillery and fourteen for musketry. The southwest blockhouse was furnished with a second story to be temporarily used as a guard-house, surmounted by a look-out thirty-one feet high which commanded an excellent view of the surrounding country. The stockade was also pierced with holes for musketry and provided with

⁷ J. M. Hanson, op. cit. p. 84.

⁸ Capt. W. G. Rankin, op. cit. p. 8.

⁹ James P. Kimball, O.R.D. of the Adjutant General's Office Record of Medical History of Post, Vol. 188, Fort Buford (Copy of Document from the files of the U.S. War Dept. typed by Dr. Osgeod of the Univ. of Minn. Copy at Montana Historical Library, Helena) p. 1.

platforms upon which the soldiers could observe and defend the fort without exposure.¹⁰ On the north side within the stockade were the Commanding Officer's quarters 45 by 22 feet and the lieutenants' quarters 36 by 20 feet. On the south were the stables and carpenter's and blacksmith's shop, while on the west were the interpreter's and mechanic's quarters, the bakery, ware-house and store-sheds. Immediately outside the fort on the east side was a cattle corral surrounded by another stockade. About 550 yards east of the fort was the saw-mill and near that the ice-house.¹¹

In spite of the toil and hardship involved in their construction, the buildings as a whole were not very habitable. This was generally true of all the forts along the Missouri in the early days. Colonel E. B. Sackett, on a tour of inspection along the Missouri in the summer of 1866 reported all of them above Fort Randall in a horrible condition.¹² The buildings had dirt floors, dirt roofs, and no windows due to the lack of glass and casings. Being erected close to the

¹⁰ Rankin, op. cit., p. 8.

¹¹ Kimball, op. cit., p. 1.

¹² "Report of D. B. Sackett, Inspector-General" Letter of Sec. of War. H. Ex. Doc. 23, 39th. Cong., 2nd. sess., pp. 21-55.

river on the bottoms, they were liable to be flooded in high water, while the rains soaked through the mud roofs and turned the floors to puddles. The snows drove in between the loosely-laid logs, covering the contents of the buildings. The cottonwood timber decayed rapidly, necessitating frequent repairs, and also harbored swarms of bedbugs, fleas, and other insects in spite of measures taken by the inhabitants to exclude them. Probably the most menacing scourge of these early forts was the rat infestation. It was impossible to keep either provisions or forage from these rodents except in metal containers. The destruction they wrought was enormous to say nothing of the personal discomfort their continual presence brought to the soldiers. Living under such adverse conditions the soldiers often grew disheartened and careless of their personal appearance. 15

15 Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

THE PEACE COMMISSION OF 1866

During the month of August, 1866 while the building operations at Fort Buford were in full progress, Rankin was somewhat provoked by the arrival of the Peace Commission of 1866, officially known as the Northwest Peace Commission. Being very unsympathetic with the pacific endeavors of these commissioners,¹ Rankin reluctantly complied with their request for an armed escort even though he was at a loss to understand why it was needed on a steamboat within the range of the guns at Buford, "unless to strike terror to the souls of evil disposed Indians by the formidable display of half-a-dozen armed men".²

This peace commission was an outgrowth of the commission that had been appointed in August of the previous year

¹ W. B. Rankin, "Letter to Brig. Gen. Lorenzo Thomas, Dec. 31, 1866, Records of the War Department Office of the Adjutant General, (photostatic copy, see appendix) p. 2.

Rankin in his letter has this to say about the Commission: "... that Peace Commission which by its energetic endeavors in the wrong direction, by its extraordinary promises and measures, totally at variance and sometimes in direct opposition to the published and established rules and regulations of the War Department, has succeeded in creating more disturbance, dissatisfaction, and finally outright hostilities, than all the alleged depredations and outrages by the whites since Gen. Sully's expedition".

² Ibid.

by the President and comprised Governor Newton Edmunds, Major General S. R. Curtis, Superintendent M. B. Taylor, General Alfred Sully, and Orrin Guernsey.³ It is significant to note that in that year, while, as we have observed in an earlier chapter, the War Department was completing plans for military occupation of the Upper Missouri, the Department of Interior was arranging for a tremendous peace offensive.⁴ This department's solution to the problem of protecting the migrants to Montana was to negotiate a series of treaties with the Indians granting a "right of way" across the plains. This

³ D. N. Cooley, "Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Oct. 31, 1868," Report of the Secretary of Interior, H. Ex. Doc. 1, 39th Cong., 1st sess., p. 196.

⁴ The military authorities energetically opposed the proposed peace negotiations. Pope argued that these treaties by the Interior Department were merely a form of bribery wherein the Indians were paid to cease molesting the white people. In a report to General Grant he states, "It is a common saying with the Sioux, that whenever they are poor and need powder and lead, they have only to go down to the overland routes and murder a few white men, and they will have a treaty to supply their wants. No country ever yet preserved peace either with foreign or domestic enemies, by paying them for keeping it." (Report of Secretary of Interior, H. Ex. Doc. 1, 39th Cong., 1st sess., p. 361)

was the avowed purpose of the Northwest Peace Commission,⁵ which, armed with a Congressional appropriation of \$20,000.00⁶, set about its negotiations with the Sioux and Minnecegas during the summer at Fort Sully.⁷ But owing to the lateness of the season it did not get very far up the Missouri.

In the spring of 1866 the Commission was divided into two parts and some alterations made in its personnel by the President. Edmunds, Curtis, Guernsey, and a new member, Rev. Henry W. Reed, an Indian agent, were delegated to proceed up the Missouri and complete negotiations with the Indians along that route.⁸

⁵ The theory of the Interior Department is well stated by Commissioner W. P. Dole to Governor Newton Edmunds (letter, April 6, 1865) as follows: "In order to secure the peace of the Territory and remove the Indians from contact with the whites, a primary object in view will necessarily be to stipulate for their relinquishing forever the country where such contact would be inevitable and to remove and occupy exclusively such other tract remote from the lines of travel and settlement, as may be fixed upon, within which may be consummated whatever stipulations the government may make in their behalf...." (Report of Secretary of Interior, H. Ex. Doc. 1, 39th Cong., 1st. sess., p. 376-77)

⁶ W. P. Dole, "Letter to Gov. Edmunds, April 6, 1865", op. cit. p. 376-77.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Oct. 22, 1866", Report of Secretary of Interior, H. Ex. Doc. 1, 39th Cong. 2nd sess., p. 13. ("the other branch of the commission comprising Supt. Taylor, Colonel Maynadier, Thomas Wister, and Colonel McLaren, conducted negotiations at Fort Laramie")

They contracted Captain Joseph LaBarge to carry them up the river at \$300.00 a day.⁹ Armed with presents and supplies for the Indians, they started up the river in the steamer, Ben Johnson, on what seemed to be more of a pleasure excursion than a business trip. They stopped at all the interesting points along the way, and whiled away the time playing cards as the boat moved leisurely along, making early stops at night and late starts in the morning.¹⁰

At the mouth of the White Earth river they stopped to negotiate with a tribe of Yanktonais Sioux. Against the protests of Captain LaBarge, they permitted the Indians to come aboard the vessel. Immediately all was confusion. The Indians overran the boat from stem to stern, elbowing the passengers around and making themselves obnoxious in an effort to provoke hostility. After futilely attempting to bring the Indians to order for the negotiations, the commissioners, becoming frightened, slipped away to their rooms and locked the doors. In desperation, LaBarge, who was left to cope with the situation, cut the anchor lines and steamed out from shore. Frightened by this movement, the savages

⁹ H. M. Chittenden, History of Early Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri River. Life and Adventures of Joseph LaBarge, Pioneer Navigator and Indian Trader. (IN TWO VOLUMES, Francis P. Harper, New York, 1903) Vol. II, p. 397. (Chittenden adds that one of the commissioners wanted LaBarge to hire his son as clerk at five dollars per day. Since LaBarge had already hired his crew, he did not want to go to that additional expense. Upon the insistence of the commissioner, LaBarge's price was raised to \$305.00 a day and the son employed to

leaped from the boat and swam to shore.¹¹

When the party arrived at Buford,¹² the post trader there asked LaBarge for a yawl to cross the river and pick up some furs which some Indians had brought there. Against his better judgement the Captain complied with the request. The traders crossed to where the Indians were waiting and proceeded to buy several hundred robes. Just as they were about to leave, however, the Indians jumped upon the occupants of the boat and would have massacred all of them had not LaBarge hastened to the rescue with his steamer. One white was killed and one wounded.¹³

At old Fort Union the commissioners found Charles Larpenteur waiting for them. He had been appointed interpreter for the Assiniboines. Having arrived there before the commissioners, he had everything arranged for the treaty

enjoy the trip with pay.)

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 397-98.

¹¹ Chittenden, op. cit., p. 403.

¹² Strangely enough Chittenden makes no mention of Rankin and his soldiers working on the fort at Buford.

¹³ Ibid., p. 404.

with these Indians when the Ben Johnson made its appearance.¹⁴

Negotiations were immediately begun with the Assiniboines, the Crows, and the Gros Ventres. The two latter tribes had come to Union on the steamer Miner, under the promise they should be taken back to their camp on the Musselshell by boat.¹⁵

After considerable bargaining, the commissioners succeeded in obtaining a cession including all the land lying north of the Yellowstone and south of the Missouri as far west as a line drawn from the mouth of the Powder river northward to the Milk river.¹⁶ The Indians also ceded a smaller tract of land opposite the junction of the Yellowstone and Missouri on the north side of the latter, which included the sites of Forts Union and Buford. In addition to this they granted a right of way for the whites along both the rivers to the west.¹⁷ In compensation for his

¹⁴ Larpenteur, op. cit., II, p. 380. Charles Larpenteur was a fur trader on the Upper Missouri. He was employed for a number of years by the American Fur Company at Fort Union. He also worked for William Sublette at Fort William and was later an independent trader at Fort Buford. He kept a journal of his activities which has been edited by Elliott Coues.

¹⁵ Chittenden, op. cit., p. 404.

¹⁶ Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Oct. 22, 1866", op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁷ Ibid.

services as interpreter, Larpenteur was to get for his children a section of the Assiniboine land wherever he chose to take it.¹⁹

With the negotiations ended the question arose as to what to do with the Crows and Gros Ventres who had been promised passage up the Missouri. As the Ben Johnson was too large a boat to go farther up the river, it was finally decided to send them up on the Amanda,² small government boat which was on its way to pick up Colonel I. V. Reeve, who was establishing a post on the Judith river. This seemed to be a satisfactory arrangement and all went well until the Amanda was boarded by Colonel Reeve at the mouth of the Milk river. He immediately put the Indians ashore with all the property and goods they had received from the commissioners, turned the boat around, and sailed down-stream. Much to their anger and disgust the Indians found themselves in the wilderness with no alternative but to walk the remaining distance to their camp on the Musselshell.²⁰

So incensed were they at this treatment that they tore up their treaty, destroyed their presents, and vowed

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Chittenden, op. cit., p. 405. See also "Report of the Northwestern Treaty Commission to the Sioux of the Upper Missouri, Aug. 25, 1866", Report of the Sec. of Interior, H. Ex. Doc. 1, 39th Cong., 2nd. sess., p. 170.

that they would "fire on every boat going up the river."²¹

In the meantime a number of hostiles had congregated across the river from Fort Union. With the permission of the commissioners the traders from Union had gone to them to carry on trade. During the barter the traders experienced considerable difficulty in keeping the Indians under control. As the trading continued the Indians became bolder and began to help themselves to what they wanted. When they had been satisfied they sent a volley of arrows among the traders and left. A man and a boy were wounded.²² After docking for a day at Buford, the Ben Johnson started down the river. On July 21 the commissioners reached Fort Berthold where they stopped to negotiate with the Indians there.

Pierre Garreau was the interpreter for the Gros Ventres there, but as he did not speak good English, Larpenteur had to interpret his French into English.²³ After

²¹ Chittenden, op. cit., p. 405. (Chittenden also writes in this connection that Agent George B. Wright, who was on the Amanda, wrote a report of how he had seen the Indians tear up their treaty at the Milk river. The report conflicted with the glowing reports submitted by the Commission. The Commission finally prevailed upon Wright to modify his report.)

²² W. B. Rankin, op. cit., p. 2 (Larpenteur, op. cit., p. 382, mentions the same incident but says nothing of a boy. He mentions one man being wounded and the other one being hit by a ball which glanced off his belt.)

²³ Larpenteur, op. cit., p. 383.

lengthy negotiations, the Arikara, Gros Ventres, and the Mandans agreed to cede a portion of land along the Missouri and grant the right of way for white traffic along that route, in return for which they were to receive specified annuities.²⁴

There is little evidence to substantiate the claim that the labors of the Northwest Peace Commission materially improved the relations between the Indians and the whites. As a matter of fact none of the agreements entered into were ever ratified by the Senate.²⁵ Consequently, the promised annuities were never sent to the Indians. The failure of the arrival of these annuities was another forceful proof that the promises and agreements made by the white man were worthless. This element of "bad faith" which characterized this treaty negotiation as well as that of many others was in no small part responsible for the continued hostility of the red man. Thus, perhaps Rankin was correct in his caustic accusation²⁶ as was Larpenteur when he said, "... the Great Peace Commission was a complete failure".²⁷

²⁴ Charles J. Kappler, Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties, 2 volumes, (Government Printing Office, 1904) II p. 1052-1056.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ See footnote 1.

²⁷ Larpenteur, op. cit. p. 383.

CHAPTER V

THE WINTER OF 1866-67

As the soldiers were completing the defenses of the fort the Indian attacks began to grow more menacing. It was fortunate for the little garrison that during the summer months while the fort was in the process of construction, most of the Sioux Indians had been occupied with the events leading up to the Fort Phil Kearny massacre in an effort to stop the migration of the whites along the Bozeman road.¹ If such had not been the case, it appears extremely doubtful that such a handful of men could have withstood the savage attacks without the protection of a fort. As early as October, the Sioux hostiles had begun to arrive on the scene in ever increasing numbers, including that relentless foe of the white man, Sitting Bull, who immediately proclaimed uncompromising hostility.

In the latter part of November, Rankin learned from a Gros Ventres chieftain that from 2500 to 3000 hostile Sioux were encamped about 37 miles below the fort. Well knowing that it would soon be unsafe to venture out into the nearby

¹ G. R. Hebard, The Bozeman Trail, (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clarke Company, 1923) two volumes. See also M. G. Burlingame, "John M. Bozeman, Montana Trailmaker", reprinted from the Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXVII, No. 4, March 1941.

woodland, the soldiers hastened to gather fire-wood for the winter.² In December hostilities began in earnest. A citizen from Union was attacked, the sawmill was tampered with, and the soldiers were ambushed as they drove their cattle-herd to water.³ In order to avoid unnecessary exposure, a well was dug inside the stockade walls which fortunately supplied ample water for the needs of the garrison and the stock.⁴

On Sunday morning, December 23, the hostiles had taken possession of the saw-mill, which was about 500 yards from the fort, from whence they started firing at the fort.⁵ They were soon dislodged by the artillery but on the following morning appeared in the same position, this time making

² Maria Brace Kimball, A Soldier-Doctor of our Army, James P. Kimball, Late Colonel and Assistant Surgeon-General, U. S. Army (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1917) p. 42.

³ Ibid.

⁴ James P. Kimball, O.R.D. of the A.G.O. Record of the Medical History of Post. Vol 198, Fort Buford, p. 2.

⁵ Joseph H. Taylor in his Frontier and Indian Life and Kaleidoscopic Lives, (p. 81) has enlarged upon this episode as follows: "On one occasion he [Sitting Bull] sallied out with a force of warriors and captured the saw mill near the landing and vigorously beat time on the huge circular saw as a drum, adding his own sonorous voice, while his young braves danced sprightly around on fast time, to the disgust of the bad gunners [Rankin admits the gunners were inexperienced] at the fort who vainly endeavored to turn a corner on their mirth by dropping around them whistling, fuseless shells".

an attempt to set fire to the hay-stacks near the stockade. Rankin immediately put the cannon into action and sent a few men to encircle the marauders around the left. This procedure soon dislodged them and they hastily retreated with their dead and wounded to the cover of the gullies.⁶

While they were carrying out their retreat, they stopped long enough to set fire to the piles of wood which the soldiers had so painstakingly gathered to supply their winter needs. Upon sight of this Rankin vainly fretted that the lack of cavalry made it necessary to stand helplessly in the fort and watch the destruction. There seems to have been lack of foresight in not providing these posts with cavalry. Rankin states in his report:

"With 2 companies of well mounted men, I could not only have prevented all the mischief and punished the audacious offenders, but could have struck at them in their camp; a defeat in winter, in camp is destruction to them. I could have so destroyed their lodges and carried off or killed their horses, as would have crippled them in their raids for many a day. As it is, they are hovering around, out of reach, watching for small parties or individuals, and so far from being alarmed, they are simply cautious, and laugh to derision all the efforts of the soldiery to keep them quiet, or prevent their marauding excursions, withersoever they choose to go".

After this December assault on Fort Buford, which was of sufficient importance to be recorded in Heitman's

⁶ Rankin, Op. cit. p. 9.

⁷ Rankin, Op. cit. p. 12. Rankin often misspelled words, sic "withersoever".

Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army,⁸ the Indians went to Fort Union where they had a parley with the agent of the Northwest Fur Company. They informed the agent that they had no hostility toward the traders, but if the commander at Fort Buford did not allow them to trade for ammunition, they would either destroy the fort or freeze out the garrison by cutting off its supply of wood.⁹ Sitting Bull then went to the Assiniboine camp about thirty miles away and endeavored to enlist the aid of that tribe in an assault upon the fort. But the Assiniboines refused upon the ground that they had a treaty of peace with the whites which they did not want to break.¹⁰

Throughout the long winter months the soldiers had to stand vigil to protect the fort against the savage attacks led by those dauntless and able warriors, Gail and Red Cloud. It is reported that on one of these charges, Gail was wounded and left for dead on the field.¹¹ So hostile were the Indians during this and the succeeding two years that

⁸ Francis B. Heitman, Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1891) II, p. 310.

⁹ Rankin, op. cit. p. 12.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 12.

¹¹ DeLorme W. Robinson, "Editorial Notes on the Historical Sketch of North and South Dakota", South Dakota Historical Collections, (In 21 volumes, Pierre, S. Dak, 1902-1940) I, p.150.

Major General W. S. Hancock in his report on October 20, 1869 stated: "So frequent have been the assaults upon herds and people in the vicinity of the post, and at times, the post itself, that it may be considered constantly in a state of siege".¹² But the undaunted soldiers maintained a heroic and successful defense without the loss of a soldier except one who died of chronic bronchitis.¹³

¹² Report of the Secretary of War, House Ex. Doc. 1, part 2, 41st Cong., 2nd. sess., p. 48.

¹³ J. P. Kimball, op. cit., p. 3. Leeson states that eleven months after the establishment of the fort, the entire garrison was wiped out by the Indians. He also mentions a report that Rankin shot his own wife rather than permit her to be captured by the Indians. Trobriand, a French soldier who served in the frontier army in Dakota during the years 1867-69 and wrote a book recounting his experiences, asserts that these reports were all false rumors. According to his account, communication with the fort had been so disrupted during the first winter that no word was heard from any of the soldiers for many months. Consequently, the rumor spread in the East that the garrison had been annihilated. When Spring came, the friends and relatives of the soldiers at the fort happily learned that the post was still standing and that its occupants were very much alive. M. A. Leeson, History of Montana, 1739-85. (Chicago: Warner Beers and Company, 1885) pp. 199-200. Comte Regis De Trobriand, Vie Militaire Dans Le Dakota. (Paris Librairie Ancienne Honore Champion, 1926) p. 48.

CHAPTER VI

POST ACTIVITIES 1867-69

When at last spring came to relieve the severe winter of 1866-67, welcome reinforcements arrived in the form of Companies B, E, F, and G¹ of the 31st Infantry accompanied by Assistant-Surgeon General James P. Kimball.² With the command increased to five companies it was necessary to build a new fort. After setting up temporary quarters in tents beside the fort, work was immediately commenced under the continued command of Captain Rankin. Considerable material was obtained from the remains of Fort Union, which Rankin purchased from the Northwest Fur Company.³ Timber was also obtained from the river bank thirteen miles above. Most of the buildings, however, were built of adobes which were made near the fort and were of good quality.⁴

The men, while working in the woods getting timber,

¹ James P. Kimball, O.R.D. of the Adjutant General's office Record of Medical History of Post, Vol. 198, Fort Buford, p. 2. (a typed copy of a document from the files of the U.S. War Dept. typed by Dr. Osgood of Univ. of Minn.)

² Ibid.

³ Charles Larpenteur, Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri (2 volumes, New York: Francis B. Harper, 1898) II, p. 399.

⁴ "Report of the Steamer Miner on a trip from Sioux City, Iowa to Fort Benton, Montana Territory", North Dakota Historical Collections (In 8 volumes, State Binders and Printers, Bismarck, N. Dak., 1906-1925) II, p. 401.

were constantly annoyed by Indians who lurked in the thickets and the gullies. In November, Private Cornelius Coughlin was killed and Corporal Edward Monaghan was wounded while in the woods in company with three other soldiers. In the skirmish Coughlin succeeded in killing two Indians and wounding a third before he fell.⁵

Among the many duties performed by Captain Rankin, it appears that on one occasion he also assumed the role of an undertaker. During the summer when Joseph LaBarge was bringing the Octavia up from St. Louis, a tragedy occurred on board the steamer. Seemingly without provocation, although claiming to be acting in the line of duty, William Barry, while on sentinel duty, shot and killed Captain W. E. Spear, 79th Royal Rifles, an officer of the British Army who had boarded the steamer on his way to Salt Lake. The body of the unfortunate officer was put off at Fort Buford to await the return trip from Benton. Naturally the problem arose as to how to preserve the body. Upon Rankin's recommendation the body was placed in a large box and covered with green cottonwood bark which served satisfactorily as an embalming agent. Thus the remains of Captain Spear were preserved and taken back to St. Louis by the Octavia on its

⁵ Kimball, op. cit. p. 3.

return and subsequently shipped to Europe.⁶ On December 12, 1867, Bv't Major Francis Clarke relieved Captain Rankin of his command of the fort.⁷

The ensuing winter was an unusually mild one. Strangely enough the Indians made no attacks, although frequently sending in notification of their intention to do so.⁸ The monotony of garrison life under such circumstances was relieved by the constant labor of getting fuel and by hunting. For entertainment during the winter months, a group of men organized a troupe which gave a theatrical performance once a week.⁹

In the spring Commander Clarke was relieved by Lieutenant Colonel A. W. Bowman. From July 25 to September 25, however, Bowman was absent from the post on detached service, leaving Bv't Major C. J. Dickey in command.¹⁰ The summer was accompanied by the usual Indian hostilities. In May, two men, who were hauling hay, were killed and

⁶ H. M. Chittenden, History of Early Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri River, (In two volumes, Francis P. Harper, New York, 1903) II, 411-13.

⁷ James Kimball, O. R. D. of the A. G. O. p. 3.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ J. P. Kimball, "Description of Military Posts", Circular No. 4, Dec. 5, 1870, Records of the War Dept., Office of the Surgeon General (photostatic copy) p. 405.

¹⁰ J. P. Kimball, O. R. D. of the A. G. O. p. 4.

scalped and their team of mules stolen.¹¹

One day in August the herd of 250 cattle was grazing some distance from the fort under the guard of twenty-five cavalry men. Suddenly with hideous yells a large group of Indians swept down upon them from the ravines, taking the men by surprise and stampeding the cattle. The guards tried to withstand the onslaught until help could arrive from the fort. The alarm had been sounded by the look-out at the fort upon the first appearance of the savages. The infantry hastened to the rescue as fast as they could run. But by the time they had covered the mile and a half distance, the cattle had been driven at top speed into the hills. The Indians charged the advancing infantry a number of times but were repulsed by musket-fire. In the meantime the mounted men had not been idle. Lieutenant Cornelius Cusick with eight mounted men made a gallant charge. He soon found himself surrounded by Indians who, in their eagerness to kill an officer, had singled him out for their particular attention. For almost half a mile he rode at break-neck speed with the savages riding neck and neck shooting arrows all around him and striking at him with clubs. By a miracle he escaped injury from the barrage of arrows and received

¹¹ Larpenteur, op. cit., p. 391.

only a few bruises from a club. The Indians gave up the chase when they got within range of the infantry. Between fifty and sixty cattle were re-captured but the other 200 were driven off, leaving the garrison "to face a winter with meat once a week only, and scant supplies of milk and butter".¹²

In the same month another tragedy occurred. Four men, who had arrived from Fort Peck, were on their way down to the hay camp eight miles below the fort. As they were riding along in their wagon they were suddenly ambushed by a group of Indians lying in wait in a ravine. Upon the first fire by the attackers, the horses were killed. The men jumped from the wagon and ran for cover in a buffalo wallow and attempted to hold off the Indians. After a brief skirmish they were all killed and their bodies were found a short time after by the hay haulers.¹³ Later in the summer a soldier was killed while he, together with a

¹² Maria Brace Kimball, A Soldier-Doctor of our Army, James P. Kimball, late Colonel and Assistant Surgeon-General, U. S. Army. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1917) p. 49-50.

¹³ Joseph Henry Taylor, Frontier and Indian Life and Kaleidoscopic Lives. (Republished by Washburn's Fiftieth Anniversary Committee, Washburn, N. Dak., 1932) p. 79.

company of soldiers, was hunting prairie chickens.¹⁴

Some time after the cattle raid, a Sioux warrior boasted in camp at the fort of what he had done in the raid. His boast being reported, he was arrested and put in the guard house to await trial. A few days later in an attempted escape, he was shot by the guard.¹⁵

One death occurred during that busy summer which was not caused by the Indians. A soldier who had been placed in the guard-house committed suicide by cutting his throat. The reason given for this act was that he was receiving ill treatment from the officer in charge.¹⁶

¹⁴ Larpentour, op. cit., p. 391.

¹⁵ Larpentour, op. cit., p. 391.

¹⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER VII

THE NEW FORT

By the end of the summer of 1867 the new fort had been completed sufficiently to furnish comfortable quarters for the command.¹ Building operations were continued during the succeeding summers.

The new fort covered an area 383 feet in length and 200 feet in width. A 18 foot stockade was built around it on the west, north, and east sides. The south side, facing the river, was left open. In the center of the enclosure was the parade ground, 460 by 350 feet. The five buildings used as officers' quarters were located along the north side of the parade ground. Two of these buildings were the wooden structures that had been set up during the first summer. The other three were made of adobe, each containing six rooms and a hallway through the center. These buildings were well warmed, lighted, and ventilated.²

Along the west side were the hospital, guardhouse, and a building containing both the adjutant general's office

¹ J. P. Kimball, C.S.D., of the Adjutant General's Office Record of Medical History of Post, Vol. 193, Fort Buford. (Copy of a document from the files of the U. S. War Department in Washington, D. C. typed by Dr. Osgeod of the University of Minnesota) p. 3.

² J. P. Kimball, Descriptions of Military Posts, Fort Buford, Dakota Territory, Records of the War Department Office of the Surgeon General, Circular No. 1, Dec. 5, 1870. p. 400-405.

and the library. This latter building had formerly been used as a hospital. It was composed of three rooms one of which was vacant. The hospital building had been converted from a company barrack. It contained a dispensary, store-room, ward, bathroom, messroom, and a kitchen. In the ward were twelve beds, two large fireplaces, and two stoves which furnished an ample supply of heat. The ward was lighted with four windows which proved to be insufficient. The guardhouse was partly wooden and partly adobe. The wooden part was used for prisoner's quarters while the other half served as the guard-room. Lack of sufficient ventilation and light made it ill-adapted to comfortable habitation.³

The south side of the parade ground was bordered by four company barracks, all built of adobes with walls seventeen inches thick. The roofs were made of boards covered with dirt. Each barrack was 124 feet long and 24 feet wide. With only three small windows in each, the buildings were dark and gloomy places with the bunks arranged in three tiers, each tier accomodating two persons. To add to the discomfort of the soldiers, there was no bath room or bath facilities of any kind except a basin outside the barrack and the muddy Missouri. The kitchens adjoined

³ Ibid.

the sleeping quarters and consequently communicated all the cooking odors, augmenting or distracting from the comfort of all the occupants in accordance with the particular menu for the day. Each barrack was divided into four parts: the first sergeant's room, the quarters, the mess room, and the kitchen.⁴

Immediately east of the parade ground were the fifth company barrack, the commissary storeroom, and the quartermaster's storeroom. Along the east side of these buildings was a street twenty feet wide. Bordering this street on the opposite side from the storerooms were the corral, stables, granaries, blacksmith shop, butcher shop, bakery, and magazine. The stables were large, well-constructed, wooden buildings of which there were two in number. Next to the stables was a corral 250 feet square. The magazine which was built of stone⁵ had one window and a door made of iron. It was undoubtedly the best constructed building at the fort since it is the only one remaining today in its original form. All the buildings except the magazine were poorly constructed. This is evident from the fact that in 1869 some of the buildings were already cracked and falling down.⁶

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Colonel Samuel B. Holabird, "Report of a Reconnaissance made in the Department of Dakota, Oct. 15, 1869", Letter of the Secretary of War, Ex. Doc. 8, 41st Cong. 3d sess., p.9.

⁶ Ibid.

New Officer's quarters and storehouses were needed. The granaries were in disrepair with no roof except canvas.⁷

Three wells had been dug at the fort. Although they produced an abundant supply of water they were used only to supply the stock. During the winter of 1866-67 the garrison had used the water from these wells for the drinking purposes, but when it was discovered that this water was the cause of an epidemic of diarrhea, its use was discontinued, and river water used exclusively. The river water contained a great deal of sediment, but by adding a few grains of alum and allowing it to stand for several hours, it developed into very excellent drinking water. After the use of water from the wells was forbidden, the diarrhea epidemic immediately abated.⁸

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ J. P. Kimball, Circular 4, p. 406.

CHAPTER VIII

TRADERS AT FORT BUFORD

As noted in an earlier chapter, the interests of the old American Fur Company had been taken over by the Hubble, Hawley, and Company in 1865, after which time it was called the Northwest Fur Company. Shortly thereafter another transaction took place wherein the holdings were acquired by the firm of Durfee and Peck, who placed Charles Larpenteur in charge of the post.¹

¹ Ethel A. Collings, "Pioneer Experiences of Horatio H. Larned", Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, (In 8 volumes, State Binders and Printers, Bismarck, N. Dak., 1906-25) VII, p. 29.

Also "Biography of Old Settlers", Collections...
Dakota, I, p. 346.

Also, M. A. Leeson, History of Montana, 1739-85,
(Warner Beers and Co., 1885) p. 194.

Concerning this there is disagreement with Larpenteur's account. His version is as follows: "In the spring I went to St. Louis and made arrangements with the firm of Durfee and Peck to take charge of Union, in opposition to the Northwest Company. We reached that place on June 19, 1867. According to the request of the gentlemen of this company and contrary to my knowledge of the affairs of the concern, I erected an adobe store, 90 feet by 20 feet." During the summer Rankin purchased Fort Union. The Northwest Company moved down and built at Buford. Finding that all the business would be at Buford, Larpenteur abandoned his store August 10. "At this place I had to oppose the military sutler and the Northwest Company. In spite of this I traded...." He makes no mention of Durfee and Peck taking over the Northwest Company.

During the summer of 1867, while building of the new fort was in progress at Buford, it became evident that that site would henceforth be more suitable for trading. Accordingly, Larpenteur abandoned his store at Fort Union and moved his supplies to the new post where he built a new store of logs. According to his own report he conducted a \$5000 business for the company during the ensuing year, trading "2000 buffalo robes, 900 elk hides, 1800 deerskins, and 1000 wolves".² However, in spite of completing what he considered a successful year of business, "jealous, and malicious reports" were circulated about him with the result that he was discharged by the company in the following spring.³ Nothing daunted, he immediately set out for the States, where he purchased a complete trading outfit of his own and on the 18th of August returned and set up an independent business.⁴

In the meantime the United States government had made a number of changes in the regulations concerning the traders at the military posts. It had been customary for every army camp or post to have an army sutler who conducted a trade of miscellaneous articles among the soldiers. These

² Charles Larpenteur, Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri, (2 volumes, New York, Francis P. Harper, 1898)II, p. 389. Ed. by Elliot Coues.

³ Ibid., p. 390.

⁴ Ibid., p. 390.

sutlers soon found the Indian trade so profitable that they attempted to monopolize it by claiming exclusive right to carry on all the trade within the limits of the post. In some instances they succeeded in getting the regularly licensed traders to give up their business.⁵ Complaints concerning these irregularities soon reached the halls of Congress. Consequently, when the army appropriation bill was passed in July 28, 1866, a section was inserted abolishing the office of army sutler in the army and at military posts and authorizing the subsistence department "to furnish such articles as may from time to time be designated by the inspectors-general of the army".⁶ By its own provision this act was not to go into effect until July 1, 1867.

On March 30, 1867, before this law had become effective, a resolution was adopted by Congress authorizing the Commanding General of the Army to permit traders to remain at certain posts as he saw fit. These traders were not, however, to sell any goods to the enlisted men. They were

⁵ "Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs", Report of the Secretary of Interior, House Ex. Doc. 1, 39th Cong., 2d sess., p. 17-18.

⁶ George P. Sanger, Statutes at Large and Proclamations of the United States of America, (Boston: Little Brown and Co. 1371) XIV, Chapt. 299, Sec. 25, 39th Cong., 1st sess., p. 340.

to provide solely "for the accomodation of emigrants, freighters, and other citizens", and were under protection and military control as camp followers.⁷ When this act went into effect on July 1, 1867, Charles Larpenteur succeeded in getting a trading license from General W. S. Hancock. As an independent trader he soon attained popularity with the soldiers by using the old technique of price cutting. He had such a flourishing business that in the spring he again went east and brought back a still larger supply of goods. All went well with him until February of 1870 when he broke his thigh bone. In spite of this misfortune, a few months later he went to Omaha and bought out the firm of Richard Whitney and Company. Being a regularly licensed trader with a prosperous business, Larpenteur permanently established himself and his family at Fort Buford and prepared to enjoy his prosperity.⁸

But his good fortune was short-lived. In its army appropriation bill of July 15, 1870, Congress had inserted a section which authorized the Secretary of War to appoint one or more traders to carry on the business at the military posts. The resolution of 1867 granting power to the commanding general to issue permits to the traders was repealed.⁹

⁷ Ibid., XV, No. 33, 40th Cong., 1st sess., p. 29.

⁸ Larpenteur, op. cit., p. 389.

⁹ George P. Sanger, op. cit., XVI, Chapt. CCXCIV, Sec.

In accordance with this new power, Secretary of War, William Belknap, appointed Alvin C. Leighton, a representative of Durfee and Peck, as the post trader at Fort Buford.¹⁰ This act brought disaster to Larpenteur and to F. F. Gerard, another independent trader who had set up a store at Buford,¹¹ as well as all the other traders except the firm of Durfee and Peck.

Matters were made worse by the fact that Major General Alfred H. Terry, Commander of the Department of Dakota in General Orders No. 21 had on July 16, 1868 declared

¹⁰ "Biography of Old Settlers", op. cit., p. 346.

This bill proved to be the undoing of Secretary Belknap. In March 1876 he was impeached for having received \$24,450 during 1870-76 for appointing a certain John S. Evans to the post-tradership at Fort Dill. The vote in the Senate came short of conviction largely because some of the members believed him to be out of their jurisdiction because he had resigned before the impeachment. There seems to be conclusive evidence that payments were made by Evans to secure immunity from removal but it is believed by many that Belknap's wife had demanded and received the money without his knowledge.

It is suggested by Leeson that Durfee and Peck influenced the passage of this bill and also the extension of the military reservation in order to gain a monopoly of the trade. (Leeson, op. cit., p. 199)

¹¹ "Biography of Old Settlers", op. cit., p. 346.

a military reservation of thirty miles square surrounding Fort Buford.¹² The central point of this reservation was to be the intersection of the 104th degree of longitude west from Greenwich and the 48th parallel of north latitude.¹³ Thus the area included the Fort Union post and consequently forced all the traders at that point out of business together with those at Buford.

In January, 1871 the official notice came ordering the traders off the reservation. However, through the consideration of Lieutenant Colonel Charles C. Gilbert, the commanding officer of the fort, they were permitted to remain in business until the arrival of the regularly appointed trader. When Leighton arrived in the spring, the stores were closed and Larpenteur, who had figured so prominently for forty years in the fur trade of the Upper Missouri, left Fort Buford a broken man.¹⁴ Thus came to an end that long and lucrative era of independent fur trading on the junction of the Missouri and the Yellowstone.

Soon after he had set up his business at Buford,

¹² General Orders No. 21, Headquarters Department of Dakota, July 16, 1868, St. Paul, Minn., Records of the War Department, Military Departments and Divisions. (Photostatic Copy)

¹³ See Appendix B.

¹⁴ Larpenteur. op. cit., p. 394.

Alvin Leighton was joined by W. B. Jordan forming the Leighton and Jordan firm,¹⁵ which, with minor changes was destined to remain as the post trading establishment throughout the entire history of Fort Buford. Joseph Leighton, a brother of Alvin, was bookkeeper for the firm.¹⁶ In 1871 Leighton and Jordan bought out the interests of Dunfee and Peck.¹⁷ In addition to their store at Buford, they also had trading posts at Glendive and Miles City.¹⁸

When the Custer expedition took place, John Smith, the post trader for that expedition, did not have sufficient goods or capital to supply his needs. He made arrangements to get a consignment from Jordan and Leighton. When the steamboat stopped to pick up the supplies advanced by the Buford partners, Robert Mathews¹⁹ was sent with the expedition to look after the interests of the firm.²⁰

In order to supply their expanding business, Jordan

¹⁵ Usher L. Burdick Tales from Buffalo Land, The Story of Fort Buford, (Baltimore: Wirth Brothers, 1940)p. 20.

¹⁶ "Biographical Sketches of North Dakota Pioneers", Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, VII, p. 100-101.

¹⁷ Leeson, op. cit., p. 194.

¹⁸ Burdick, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁹ Robert Mathews was employed in the Jordan and Leighton store from 1872 to 1877.

²⁰ "Biographical Sketches of North Dakota Pioneers", op. cit., p. 100.

and Leighton had to have tremendous supplies freighted up the Missouri in steamboats. For the sake of economy they decided to get a steamboat of their own. Accordingly, in the winter of 1877-78 they had a boat built at Pittsburg which they named the F.Y. Batchelor. In the following spring they employed that noted steamboat captain, Grant Marsh, to command the boat, and carry supplies from Bismarek, which at that time was the western terminus of the Northern Pacific Railway.²¹ On the first journey from Bismarck to Buford in the new boat, Marsh was accompanied by Alvin Leighton. Upon arriving at Buford, Leighton learned that rustlers had stolen fifty of his fat steers which he had been grazing between the Missouri and Yellowstone river. Since the firm had a government contract to furnish the soldiers with beef, Leighton was very much upset about this loss. Shortly thereafter Captain Marsh overheard a conversation which led him to suspect a group of "wood-hawks".²² When Leighton was informed of this, he immediately accosted the suspected rustlers and bursting with indignation he roundly abused them with a tirade of invectives mingled with threats of arrest. If he had expected them to cower upon suggestion of action by the law enforcers, he was

²¹ Joseph Mills Hanson, The Conquest of the Missouri, (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Co., 1910) pp. 388-89.

²² "Wood-hawks" were men who chopped wood and stacked it into piles along the river to be sold to the steamboat captains.

disappointed. The "wood-hawks" merely laughed in scorn. Captain Marsh, who had witnessed this rash move on the part of Leighton, drew him aside and told him that he was making a mistake. He then outlined another plan of action which involved getting the suspects on board to play a game of poker. Marsh's plan was to give quietly these men fifty dollars in one dollar bills as they, upon invitation, came aboard to engage in an evening of card-playing. Leighton reluctantly followed the suggestion and a few days later found the fifty steers back in his herd.²³

In 1789 George Hedderick of Evansville, Indiana came to Fort Buford and began working as bookkeeper for Leighton and Jordan. In the following year he became a partner in the firm, which became known as Leighton, Jordan, and Hedderick. Upon the death of the two previous partners, Hedderick became the sole owner of the company.²⁴ At the time of Hedderick's death in 1894, he was reported to be worth \$200,000.00, which was left to his two brothers, Clint and Gus.²⁵ When Fort Buford was abandoned the old trading post was moved to Williston, where it is still in operation by Byron Lyons, a nephew of the Hedderick's.²⁶

²³ Hanson, op. cit., 389-392.

²⁴ Burdick, op. cit., p. 22.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 22.

²⁶ Burdick, op. cit., p. 24.

CHAPTER IX

GENERAL W. B. HAZEN AT FORT BUFORD

On January 28, 1869 Lt. Col. A. W. Bowman had been succeeded in command by Captain Thomas Little.¹ Four months later the command was assumed by Bv't Brig. General H. A. Morrow.² In the year 1871 Lieut. Colonel C. C. Gilbert served a term as commander and was succeeded by General W. B. Hazen in 1872.³

With the arrival of General Hazen, the fort assumed the unprecedented dignity of having a high ranking military officer in command. Hazen was a well trained, stern, conscientious, professional officer. His conception of discipline is well reflected by his own words: "The iron hand which is just but always firm can alone make soldiers that can be relied upon".⁴ A conscientious application of this principle soon brought new life and vigor to the fort which

¹ J. P. Kimball, C.R.D. of the A.G.O. Record of Medical History of Post. Vol. 198. Fort Buford. p. 8.

² Ibid.

³ Usher L. Burdick, Tales from Buffalo Land. The Story of Fort Buford. p. 16.

⁴ Dictionary of American Biography. VIII, p. 478-79.

at that time was in a somewhat decadent condition. Most of the buildings, having been constructed of adobes, were in a state of serious disrepair.⁵ Hazen set about constructing new ones and removing the stockade.⁶

But Hazen and Fort Buford were not brought to the attention of the public as much by the material renovation of the fort as by the political controversies the commander became involved in. Hazen was a man who could not stand idly by while things were being done that he did not think were honest, fair, and just. Moreover, he was not afraid to air his convictions publicly, a quality which caused him to become involved in a number of difficulties. One of his first targets of attack was the post-trader system that had prevailed since 1870.⁷ He published his comments on the corruption of this system in the New York Tribune, February, 16, 1872. Although little notice was taken of it at the time, four years later it was referred to in the impeachment proceedings of Secretary of War Belknap, and

⁵ Gen. P. E. Sheridan, Outline Descriptions of the Posts in the Military Division of the Missouri Commanded by, (Headquarters Military Division of Missouri, Chicago, Ill.) p.23.

⁶ Burdick, op. cit., p. 18.

⁷ George P. Sanger, Statutes at Large and Proclamations of the United States of America, (Boston: LITTLE Brown and Co. 1871) XVI, Chapt. CCXXV, Sec. 22, 41st Cong., 2d sess.

Hazen himself was called to testify in the trial.⁸

While he was at Buford, his anger was aroused by the false statements published by the Northern Pacific Railroad Company. In its effort to sell more bonds, this company was circulating reports of a "productive paradise" in the Dakota territory where "the climate was genial, and the soil admirably adapted to the cultivation of grain..."⁹ Unable to remain silent while "thousands of poor and needy of the country, who had put by the little earnings of a lifetime in safe securities", were being led by false propaganda to invest in questionable railroad bonds, he published in the New York Tribune, February 27, 1874 a letter pronouncing a large proportion of the lands of this company worthless, both for agriculture and as a security.¹⁰

⁸ Congressional Record containing the Proceedings of the Senate Sitting for the Trial of William W. Belknap, IV, p. 7, 44th Cong., 1st sess., House Report No. 136, pp. 1-11

⁹ W. B. Hazen, "The Great Middle Region of the United States and its Unlimited Space of Arable Land", North American Review, No. CCXLVI, Vol. CXX, pp. 1-34. (James R. Osgood and Co., Boston, 1875)

¹⁰ W. B. Hazen, Our Barren Lands, the Interior of the United States West of 100th Meridian and East of the Sierra Nevadas, (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke and Co. 1875) p. 5

This letter brought General George A. Custer into the controversy, who immediately wrote a protest to this pronouncement saying that the land was luxuriantly productive. His article was highly featured by the railroad company in the Minneapolis Tribune and the Bismarck Tribune as the "vindication" of this land of paradise.¹¹

General Hazen counter-attacked with an article in the North American Review, January 1875 and with the publication of a book entitled Our Barren Lands. The Interior of the United States, west of 100th meridian and east of the Sierra Nevadas. In these publications he described in detail the climate of this area. He accused General Custer of basing his rash conclusions on merely one year's observation during the rainy seasons of 1872 and 1873, whereas he, Hazen, had spent eight years in this region and recalled that only 57.06 inches of rainfall fell during a six-year period. Further to substantiate his condemnation of the "barren land" he quoted letters from General Alfred Sully, Lieutenant W. H. E. Crowell, and other noteworthy individuals corroborating his own conclusions. He severely castigated all the railroad companies of the west and the Press for trying to ensnare the unwary people by publishing glittering

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 12-53.

and false reports of a productive paradise.¹²

General Hazen left Fort Buford in 1877.¹³

¹² Ibid., pp. 6.

¹³ Three years later Hazen was appointed Chief Signal Officer by President Hayes. In that capacity he became involved in another controversy which resulted in his court-martial because this time his criticism was directed against his superior, Secretary of War Lincoln, whom he accused of neglect in the matter of sending rescue parties to A. W. Greeley at Lady Franklin Bay in 1881. He was reprimanded by the President for "unwarranted and captious criticism".

CHAPTER X

THE SURRENDER OF SITTING BULL AND THE ONCPAPA SIOUX

While a number of events of military importance occurred at Fort Buford, they were completely overshadowed in the public mind by the events of 1890-91 which led to the surrender of the hostile Oncpapa Sioux, and particularly of that famous Sioux chieftain, Sitting Bull. Undoubtedly the fort's strongest claim to notoriety lies in the part it played in that noteworthy event.

There appear to be as many versions of the story of Sitting Bull's surrender as there were people who witnessed the event. Almost every one who was at Fort Buford or in its vicinity claims to have had some part in influencing Sitting Bull to give himself up. However, it is well to remember that no amount of human coercion, either by word or by deed, is likely ever to have succeeded in causing that indomitable chieftain to throw himself at the mercy of his most hated foe, the white man, if the forces of nature had not intervened.

After these final and devastating Indian campaigns of 1876 and 1877, which brought Crazy Horse and other prominent chieftains to their knees, Sitting Bull and Gall

had escaped into Canada with a large group of followers.¹ There they found refuge from the United States army and for a time lived in comparative security. But before long the game became scarce and it became necessary from time to time to venture back across the boundary to seek better hunting grounds. For, while the Canadian government did not molest them, neither did it give them food and other supplies as some of them were accustomed to receiving at the American Agencies. As time went on, more and more frequent hunting excursions were made to the States. The United States army, keeping an ever watchful eye on these movements, tried a number of times to catch Sitting Bull on American soil but without success.

In the meantime occasional reports filtered through to the military posts regarding the destitute condition of the renegade Indians which was growing more and more serious by the hour. Endeavoring to rid the Dakotas of this ever constant threat to the security of the settlers, the United States army began sending emissaries to Sitting Bull to coerce him into surrendering.

In September 1880, Major D. H. Brotherton, the

¹ Dr. DeLorme W. Robinson, "Editorial Notes on the Historical Sketch of North and South Dakota", South Dakota Historical Collections, (In 20 volumes, Pierre, S. Dak., 1902-40) I, p. 129.

commander at Fort Buford reported to General Terry that there was an interpreter at the post by the name of E. H. Allison who possessed a great deal of influence with the hostile Sioux and proposed that he be sent to urge Sitting Bull to surrender.² Allison had had many dealings with the Sioux as an Indian agent and talked their language fluently. From his frequent mingling with that tribe, he had acquired the somewhat dubious reputation of being a "big liar", and for that reason received the name of "Fish".³ So notorious had he become in the art of untruthfulness that, it is reported, on one occasion the Oncpapa Sioux sponsored a contest between him and an Indian to see who could tell the biggest lie. So stupendous were the tales of both of them that the contest was declared a tie.⁴

² Report of Brigadier General Terry, Oct. 9, 1831", Report of Secretary of War, H. Ex. Doc. 1, pt. 2, 47th Cong., 1st sess., p. 100.

³ Stanley Vestal, New Sources of Indian History, 1850-91, (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1934) p. 245.

⁴ Ibid. (Allison seems to have had a not too envious reputation even among the whites. Burdick gives an incident in this connection as follows: "David H. Barry, noted Indian photographer, who had a small studio at Buford in 1878 to 1881, says of Allison, "He was a bad actor and treacherous. I took many unusual Indian pictures at Fort Buford in 1880-81. The old Sioux chiefs demanded money before they would sit. I paid them what they asked (usually a dollar) and several times after I paid them, they would demand more. I could not understand this situation, but finally Gall told me it was Allison who put them up to this work. I hunted up Allison and told him to keep out of my business or he would furnish the next funeral...Allison was well versed in the Sioux language but was unscrupulous, cunning and altogether bad." Burdick, op. cit., p. 28.

The role that Allison played in influencing Sitting Bull to come to Buford is being questioned more and more as new evidence is uncovered. The reputation that he once had as "the man who brought Sitting Bull in", was established by a book which he wrote entitled, The Surrender of Sitting Bull.⁵ Since Allison was known to be an egotist, it is not unlikely that he gave himself more credit than was his due and minimized the efforts of such men as Louis Legare,⁶ Gus Hedderick,⁷ Captain Walter Clifford, and others.

⁵ Burdick's comment on this book is as follows: "It has always been a mystery to me how Allison who was not a writer, could have written the story about the surrender of Sitting Bull. It was published in newspaper form in the fall of 1891 and it is now so scarce that it commands a sum close to \$150.00. The mystery has been solved as Mrs. Hedderick[Gus] says Gus wrote the story for Allison and had it published for him. Allison sold copies here and there for whatever he could get. Mrs. Hedderick had a copy for several years, but she cannot locate it now. There is more proof of this fact than the word of Mrs. Hedderick. Gus used to write frequently for magazines and papers at the time, and samples of his writings seem identical in style to the Allison story." Ibid., p. 27.

⁶ Legare, an illiterate French trader seems to have had some influence with Sitting Bull. He was somewhat disgruntled when Allison received all the credit for bringing that chief to Buford. (see Vestal, p. 262). That he was instrumental in accomplishing that feat is evident from the fact that he furnished from 20 to 30 carts at his own expense to help transport the party to Buford. Burdick, op. cit., p. 38.

⁷ "At all events Gus Hedderick knew more about the negotiations of this surrender than any one else, because it was Gus who first persuaded Sitting Bull to come in. That was the natural consequence of the friendship that existed

Upon receiving the requested authority, Allison set out from Buford on November 1, 1890 to go to Sitting Bull's camp at the mouth of Frenchmen's Creek on the Milk river.⁸ When he arrived there he was extended gracious though meager hospitality by Sitting Bull in the chieftain's own crowded tent. The leading chiefs met in council and discussed the feasibility of going to Buford. Without food or clothing they were in a desperate situation. Only one ray of hope remained and that was the possibility of obtaining a reserve from the Canadian government. Sitting Bull wished to learn the decision of that government in respect to this proposal before making further plans.⁹

between the two." (Ibid, p. 26) "While at Woody Mountain Sitting Bull wanted to give Gus Hedderick some present for the many favors and courtesies shown to him and asked Gus what he would like to have.... Accordingly, Sitting Bull shot a large buffalo bull, had the skin tanned with the hair on, and delivered it to his friend Gus. It is still a magnificent robe, although almost sixty years have now passed since it was presented to Gus. Mrs. Gus Hedderick still lives at Williston and prizes this possession". Burdick, op. cit., p. 27.

⁸ Vestal, op. cit., pp. 246-49.

⁹ Ibid.

When it was finally learned that the reserve would not be granted, Gall set out for Buford with about 400 Indians.¹⁰ On the way the band stopped at Camp Poplar and pitched camp. By this time many Indians had drifted into that camp with the avowed intention of going to Buford to surrender. However, as their numbers grew, so did their courage, and before long they had lost their submissive attitude and grown arrogant and turbulent. So threatening did they become that it became necessary to send re-inforcements to the camp. Accordingly, Captain James Bell with his own company and 30 men of the 7th Infantry from Fort Buford, and Major Guido Ilges with five companies from Fort Keogh were dispatched to Camp Poplar. The weather was cold and the snow was deep making travel difficult. Bell arrived on December 15 and Ilges nine days later. Upon his arrival Ilges assumed command and established his camp about two miles from and across the river from the Indian camp.¹¹

In the meantime, about December 11, 1880, Allison, Sitting Bull, and his followers had at last started out for Fort Buford.¹² They had barely enough horses left to pack

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ "Report of Brigadier General Terry, Oct. 9, 1881", op. cit., p. 100-01.

¹² Charles DeLand, "The Sioux Wars", S. Dak. Hist. Collections (In 21 volumes, State Pub. Co., Pierre, S. Dak) XVII, p. 403.

the camp. Their supplies were exhausted, and they were suffering dreadfully from hunger and cold. It is small wonder that when they found game along the mouth of the Milk river, they pitched camp and started to hunt. At that point Sitting Bull sent Crow King with Allison to Buford to see how the Indians that had surrendered were getting along.¹³

While this was taking place, all was not going smoothly at Camp Poplar. On Christmas Day Gall had an interview with Commander Ilges in which he stated that he himself was ready to surrender but his people wanted to wait until spring on the plea that it was too cold to travel. Furthermore, by that time they would have decided whether to go to Fort Buford or Fort Keogh. Gall asked Ilges for transportation and an escort to take him to Buford, where he wanted to visit the post. Ilges, however, refused the request telling Gall he should take his people to Buford without delay and granting three days for deliberation.¹⁴ The Crow then asked for an interview and stated that he and his people wanted to await the action of Sitting Bull, but

¹³ Vestal, op. cit., p. 256.

¹⁴ "Report of Brigadier General Terry, Oct. 9, 1881", op. cit., p. 101.

Ilges urged him also to go to Buford immediately.¹⁵

On December 31, Ilges' uncompromising attitude was further strengthened by the receipt of instructions from the Department commander authorizing him to compel the surrender of Gall if necessary. He immediately sent for Gall, Crow, and all the headmen of the hostile camp. They arrived, sixty in number and fully armed, at the agency building. Crow King and Allison, who had returned from Buford also attended the conference. Crow King gave an account of what he had seen and done at Buford. He reported the situation to be favorable and advised that they all go to Buford at once. Ilges then issued the ultimatum that Gall and Crow should get their people ready to move to Buford by January 2, promising them rations and assistance.¹⁶

This move on Ilges' part apparently antagonized the Sioux for on the evening of January 1, Crow went to interpreter Joseph Culbertson and imparted the message to Ilges that "he, Crow and his people would not move until spring; that he was tired of talking with me [Ilges;] that the soldiers were cowards and afraid to fight; that they

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 102.

cried in winter and could not handle a gun, and that if I [Ilges] attempted to interfere with his people, there would be trouble; and he was ready to fight me if I wanted to fight".¹⁷ On the same day, Gall advised the post trader and his employe^s to leave the agency at once as he did not want to see them killed. He boasted that "Tomorrow we will fight and wipe out the soldiers and kill everybody in the soldier camp".¹⁸

Upon hearing these reports, Ilges prepared for action. On the morning of January 2, he crossed the river and attacked the Indian camp and forced the surrender of 305 Indians.¹⁹ The next few days were spent in rounding up hostiles by sending detachments into the surrounding country. As quickly as they were gathered in, they were sent under guard to Buford.²⁰

Realizing Ilges drastic action on January 2 would probably frighten Sitting Bull back into Canada, Allison sent Crow King to calm his fears.²¹ But as soon as Sitting Bull

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Vestal, op. cit., p. 252.

heard the news from Camp Poplar, he crossed back into Canada and thus evaded the force under Colonel T. H. Ruger that had been sent to cut off his retreat. Not all the Sioux went with their chieftain, however. Over half of them (sixty lodges) started off for Buford with Crow King. The starving, half-naked party made slow progress in the excessive cold. It is doubtful if they could have reached their destination, had not Ilges sent rations and all the transportation facilities he could spare. When they finally arrived at Buford, Major Brotherton supplied them with food, clothing, and shelter.²²

By this time a considerable number of Indians had been assembled at Buford. Practically all of the Sioux except Sitting Bull and his band of forty lodges had surrendered. That incorrigible renegade refused to go any farther than Woody Mountain, Montana. By spring the On-cpapa prisoners at Buford numbered 1,125.²³ These Indians were deprived of their horses, guns, and ammunition and placed under guard in a camp about two miles from the post.²⁴ It was no small task to keep these hostiles under control during the long winter months. Not being accustomed to captivity they became restless and at times unruly. Their

²² "Report of Brig. Gen. Terry, Oct. 9, 1881" *op. cit.*, p. 104.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Burdick. *op. cit.* p. 43

chief grievance was the refusal of the Commander to let them go on buffalo hunts. Only by the very skillful diplomacy of Captain Walter Clifford, who was placed in charge of them, were serious hostilities averted. Captain Clifford was aided in his endeavors to keep peaceful relations by a close friendship with Chief Gall.²⁵

One night the Indians seized the guards at the camp and tied them up in a tent. One of the guards succeeded in untying his bonds and escaping to the post with the alarm. The post was immediately aroused and all the soldiers lined up for action. After considerable deliberation it was decided that in view of the fact that the Indians outnumbered the soldiers, it would be wise to attempt peaceful negotiation. Captain Clifford, accompanied by another officer and an interpreter went to the hostile camp and had a conference with the chiefs which continued until morning. Clifford succeeded in getting five of the chiefs including Gall to sign a pledge to keep peace and conform to the laws of the white men. This pledge was never broken and consequently brought an end to the hostility of the Sioux Camp.²⁶

In the meantime attempts were being made during

²⁵ Ibid., p. 44.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 42-44. (See Appendix B for pledge)

the winter months by Allison and Gus Hedderick to get Sitting Bull to leave Woody Mountain. Gus Hedderick was operating a trading post at that point for Leighton and Jordan. Sitting Bull frequently came to the store to talk with Hedderick. On those occasions Hedderick availed himself of the opportunity to encourage Sitting Bull to take his starving band to Buford. Allison also visited Woody Mountain several times for the same purpose.²⁷ But the wary chieftain with his characteristic caution, meanwhile, sent some of his own warriors to Buford to see how the surrendered Sioux were faring.²⁸ Seemingly satisfied with the reports of these emissaries and driven to desperation by his destitute straits, he finally started out for Buford on July 15, 1881,²⁹ accompanied by Hedderick, Allison,³⁰ and Gerard.³¹

²⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

²⁸ Vestal, op. cit., p. 256.

²⁹ Burdick, op. cit., p. 25.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Walter Clifford, "Letter to Sentinel, July 28, 1881", Burdick, op. cit., p. 31.

Upon being informed of the coming of Sitting Bull, Major Brotherton on July 16 ordered Captain Clifford to set out to meet the party.³² Six wagons loaded with rations were immediately sent out under guard of five soldiers. On the following morning Clifford started out with one white soldier, four scouts, and one Indian.³³ Upon meeting the straggl^Eing party fifty-five miles from Buford, every precaution was taken to prevent the crafty chief from slipping away. But little difficulty was encountered and Sitting Bull with his 200 ragged and starving followers were brought safely to the post on July 19, 1881. Some of the squaws and children were carried in the army wagons while the baggage was hauled in carts which had been provided by Louis Legare. Only Sitting Bull and the head men had ponies.³⁴

Although the event was a momentous one for the little fort, the capitulation ceremony was simple. Major Brotherton greeted them and received their arms. Sitting

³² Burdick, op. cit., p. 30

³³ Walter Clifford, "Letter to Sentinel, July 28, 1881", op. cit., p. 31.

³⁴ Walter Clifford, "Letter to St. Paul Pioneer Press, July 19, 1881", Burdick, op. cit., p. 38.

Bull sat stoically on his pony while his son handed over his gun. They were then placed in custody to await their transportation to a reservation. ³⁵

On July 29, 1881 the Sioux party, escorted by Captain Clifford and twenty men, left on the steamer Sherman enroute to Fort Yates where Sitting Bull was temporarily stationed. ³⁶

³⁵ An interesting account is given by Captain Clifford's son concerning the fate of Sitting Bull's horse: "During Captain Clifford's services in charge of the Agency at Fort Berthold, he became quite well acquainted with Sitting Bull, as did Mrs. Clifford, and the Chief thought quite a lot of them. At the time of his surrender at Fort Buford, he made a nice little speech to Mrs. Clifford, saying that some years before he had shaken hands with her picture, and that now he would shake hands with her, and present her with his horse. The horse (not a pony) was, I think, a dark bay, or chestnut; Mrs. Clifford was too stout to ride any more, so I, Walter, her son, sort of took possession of him and rode him every day. He was a very fast horse and was trained for buffalo hunting. Could be ridden without saddle or bridle, guided by a pressure of the knee left or right. I soon learned that a quick pressure of the knees would bring him to a halt at once....Walter Jordan, the Post Trader, offered Mrs. Clifford \$500.00 for the horse the day after it was given to her. She refused the offer and he asked her as a favor to let him know in the event she was offered more by anyone else, to let him know, and he would give more. The horse was eventually stolen by Capt. Clifford's striker or soldier servant, who together with one of the cavalry officer's striker, who had stolen a cavalry horse, deserted". Burdick, op. cit., pp. 47-8.

³⁶ "Report of Brigadier General Terry, Oct. 9, 1881", Report of Secretary of War, H. Ex. Doc. 1, pt. 2, 47th Cong., 1st sess., p. 105.

CHAPTER XI

EVERYDAY LIFE AT FORT BUFORD

During the first years at Fort Buford the daily life of the men was strenuous. When the soldiers were not fighting Indians, they found themselves on "fatigue duty", cutting logs building barracks, gathering fire-wood, working in the hay-meadows, or hauling water from the river. As there were not enough civilians at this work, it fell to the lot of the soldiers to do it in order to preserve the existence of the garrison. It does not appear that the performance of these civilian duties was undesirable from the standpoint of upholding the morale of the troops. Assistant-Surgeon General J. P. Kimball, who was stationed at the fort during the early years, viewed this "fatigue duty" as having a wholesome effect on the soldiers if not carried to extremes. Writing in 1870, he commented on this procedure as follows:

"The fatigue duty performed by the troops has been hitherto extremely onerous, but with the exception of the exposure of the workmen in the adobe yard during a few excessively hot days in the summer of 1868, from which several cases of disease resulted, and once or twice the moral depression produced by being hard driven, I have seen no injurious effect produced upon the men of the command, but on the contrary I consider a reasonable amount of fatigue duty performed in the open air during pleasant weather as beneficial to them. Especially is this the case during the winter, when the labor of getting fuel in good weather not only gives needed and healthful exercise, but furnishes an agreeable relief to the monotony of sitting and standing around a fire in crowded quarters, and, by

occupying the mind and attention, does much to prevent that enmity and nostalgia which frontier life is apt to generate."¹

As the personnel of the post increased, these burdensome duties were taken over by civilians or prisoners. Contractors were employed to furnish wood² and hay³ and civilians employed to work in the gardens. In 1869 hay was contracted for at \$21.00 per ton and wood at \$9.40 per cord.⁴ The prisoners were used to perform even some

¹ J. P. Kimball, "Descriptions of Military Posts", Records of the War Dept., Office of the Surgeon General, Circular No. 4, Dec. 5, 1870, p. 404.

² Gen. P. H. Sheridan, "Outline Descriptions of the Posts in the Military Division of the Missouri commanded by Lieutenant General P. H. Sheridan, Headquarters Military Division of the Missouri, Chicago, Ill. 1872, p. 23.

³ W. B. Hazen, "The Great Middle Region of the United States and its Limited Space of Arable Land", North American Review, No. CCKLVI, Vol. CKX, pp. 7-8 (James R. Osgood and Co., Boston, 1875)

⁴ Col S. B. Holabird, Letter of the Secretary of War communicating in compliance with the Resolution of the Senate of June 13, 1850, a copy of the report of Lieutenant Colonel Samuel B. Holabird, of a Reconnaissance made by him in the Department of Dakota in 1849, Ex. Doc. 8 41st Cong., 3d sess., p. 9.

of the household tasks such as filling the ice-boxes and carrying wood.⁵ Consequently, the soldiers and officers found themselves with^a great deal of leisure time after they had finished their daily drills and occasional troop maneuvers. During these leisure moments they engaged in a number of pleasantries such as baseball, cricket, hunting, fishing, and dancing.⁶ The territory around Buford was a hunting paradise. Doctor Kimball speaks of the buffalo chase as the most thrilling experience of his life. "A helter-skelter race of miles; a yell and we're off,---who that joined in such a chase can ever forget it!"⁷ For those of the garrison with an artistic bent, there was the weekly theatre performance to participate in or to observe.

With the weekly laundry being taken care of by the laundresses, the women also found time for leisure. They whiled away their hours entertaining one another with luncheons, dinners, card-parties, and dances.⁸

⁵ Usher L. Burdick, Tales From Buffalo Land; A Story of Fort Buford, (Baltimore: Wirth Brothers, 1940)p.63.

⁶ J. P. Kimball, Circular No. 4, p. 405.

⁷ Maria Brace Kimball, A Soldier-Doctor of Our Army. James P. Kimball, Late Colonel and Assistant Surgeon-general, U. S. Army, (Houghton Mifflin Co. Boston, 1917)p.45.

⁸ Burdick, op. cit., p. 69.

The most serious problem in the early days was that of securing the proper food. Ample quantities of vegetables was especially hard to obtain. Owing to lack of rainfall, gardens were not always successful. Consequently, the garrison was dependent in a large measure upon transportation of these products from the East by steamboat. Nor was this at all times a reliable means of securing these products. It was difficult to transport such perishable goods for such a great distance. Moreover the steamboat season was short. Boats rarely were able to make more than one trip from St. Louis to the Upper Missouri in one summer. Those that ventured a second attempt were often "frozen in". Even that skillful steamboat captain, Grant Marsh, was on more than one occasion caught in the fall "freeze-up".⁹

That the arrival of a supply of vegetables was highly prized by the garrison is indicated by an incident in the steamboat career of Captain Marsh. As late as October in 1869, Marsh against his better judgement consented to make a trip to deliver vegetables to the forts along the Missouri as far west as Fort Buford. His steamer Alabama reached within twenty-five miles of Buford when it was closed in by ice. The Captain, knowing how urgently the

⁹ Joseph Mills Hanson, The Conquest of the Missouri. Being the Story of the Life and Exploits of Captain Grant Marsh. (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1910) p. 103.

garrison was in need of these vegetables during the long winter ahead, took precautions to keep them from freezing and sent word to the post that if they wanted them, they would have to come and get them. It did not take the soldiers long to decide how to save the precious cargo. Soon they arrived in wagons equipped with stoves, loaded the vegetables from the boat, and brought them safely the twenty-five miles to the post. The soldiers and officers were everlastingly grateful to Grant Marsh for venturing upon this hazardous trip so late in the year in order to provide for their winter needs.¹⁰

For its meat rations, the garrison was in some measure supplied by the cattle herd, but, as has been recounted, this source was often made non-existent by Indian raids. Therefore, wild game was very frequently part of the daily menu as is indicated by Dr. Kimball's record of one day's menu at officers' mess as follows:

Breakfast..antelope chops¹¹
 Dinner.....Missouri River catfish
 prarie chicken (grouse)
 roast buffalo
 Supper.....Elk steak

In connection with the everyday life at the fort, the following is an interesting record of a typical day in the life of Dr. Kimball as he gives it in one of his letters to

¹⁰ Mary Brace Kimball, op. cit., p. 45.

¹¹ Mary Brace Kimball, op. cit., p. 45.

his wife:¹²

"I rise about eight A. M., and finish breakfast at nine o'clock. The next hour is spent in the hospital and from that time until one P. M. I am busy writing my reports, reading or studying. At one o'clock we have lunch, a bowl of bread and milk and a piece of pie, and the afternoon is then usually spent with my horse, dogs, and gun, and other hunters on the prairie or in the woods. At five P. M. we have dinner to which I bring an appetite that would do honor to a wolf-and by the way, we have a good cook. The evening is spent in reading, writing, and visiting."

On January 16, 1870 a fire occurred during the night which destroyed the residence of Second Lieutenant Thomas Newman, 13th Infantry. As acting commissary of subsistence at the post, Thomas Newman had \$3,893.50 of public funds deposited in a leather trunk at his house. A lengthy and thorough investigation was held to determine the cause of the fire and to determine if Thomas Newman should be held responsible for the funds that were lost. Although there was considerable suspicion on the part of some of the soldiers that the fire had been set, there was not sufficient evidence to place the guilt on anyone. After considerable questioning and deliberation the investigating board reported the fire to be of accidental origin but charged Newman with neglect in not keeping the funds in a safe place.

¹² Ibid.

The board did not recommend court-martial, however, and the case resulted in Newman's discharge from service.¹³

Mail delivery at the fort was very uncertain and irregular. During the spring and early summer when the river was navigable, it was brought by steamboat. But during the fall and winter months when the boats no longer plied the Missouri, it had to be brought overland. There were generally two routes by which the mail was thus carried. The one route was by way of Forts Stevenson, Totten, and Abercrombie to St. Paul. The other was via Forts Stevenson, Rice, and Sully to Sioux City, Iowa. Mail by the latter route was the slower of the two.¹⁴ To carry mail over either of these routes was an exceedingly dangerous undertaking during the earlier days. Very rarely would anyone venture to run the gauntlet of the plains-infested Sioux without an escort of soldiers. Since such soldiers could not well be spared from the garrison, these journeys were infrequent. The fort oftentimes was isolated from the outside world for three months at a time.

¹³ Letter from Secretary of War Relative to the Loss of Government Funds by fire at Fort Buford, Ex. Doc. 90, 42d Cong., 2d sess., pp. 1-23.

¹⁴ Linda B. Slaughter, "Fort Randall", Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, (State Printers and Binders, Bismarck, N. Dak., 1906-25) (In 8 volumes) I, p. 424.

Whenever individuals in desperation sought to carry communications single-handed they often met with disaster. In 1868 five mail carriers were killed on the route between Abercrobie and Totten.¹⁵

One individual that seems to have been unusually successful in making the perilous journey without escort was that famous scout, Luther S. Kelly. It is recounted that on one occasion to the astonishment of the soldiers, he volunteered to carry the mails from Buford to Stevenson alone. With much misgivings on the part of the garrison, he started out one night on a spirited mustang and made the journey without incident. On his return, however, he encountered two Indians, both of whom he killed, and completed the journey safely.¹⁶ For this remarkable accomplishment he gained enduring notoriety among the whites and Indians alike, the latter of whom called him "The Little Man With the Strong Heart".¹⁷

Attempts were made from time to time to carry the mail on a commercial basis. In July 1867, Charles A. Ruffee of

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ M.M. Quaise, Yellowstone Kelly, The Memoirs of Luther S. Kelly, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926) pp. 40-49.

¹⁷ Joseph Mills Hanson, The Conquest of the Missouri, (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1909) pp. 155-56.

Minneapolis, secured a government contract for a pony express between Fort Abercrombie and Fort Benton, Montana. The plan of the Ruffee company was to have temporary camps or stations at intervals of fifty miles. Two men were to be stationed at each camp to carry the mail to the adjoining camp. Frank Palmer was placed in charge of the line from Benton to Buford. He established the camps along the routes with rations for a month and provided each man with a horse. But in spite of the best he could do, only a few straggling carriers could be maintained along the route. East of Buford the situation was even worse. Not once did the company succeed in carrying the mail over the entire route. The venture ended when the company went into bankruptcy.¹⁸ Not until the Indian menace was dealt with was mail service established on anything approaching a regular delivery basis.

Being thus isolated from the outside world, it is little wonder that the most thrilling event in the humdrum life of the fort was the arrival of the steamboat. This was an event which was looked forward to with eager anticipation for weeks in advance. When lookouts reported a boat

¹⁸ Charles DeNoyer, "History of Fort Totten", Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, (8 Volumes. State Printers and Binders, Bismarck, N. Dak., 1906-25) III, p. 212.

steaming around the bend all the regular fort activity ceased as the inhabitants thronged to the landing to await its arrival. Some of them even sailed down in canoes to meet the steamer as it puffed around the endless curves and bends. When it finally came within sight of the fort, a salute was fired.¹⁹ One can imagine the clamor and joyous exclamations that accompanied the boat's docking as the oftentimes much needed supplies were unloaded and the long awaited mail was examined, not to mention the arrival of friends and visitors.

The daily routine of the soldiers at the forts was often interrupted by necessary troop movements. The soldiers were often called out to participate in Indian campaigns or to provide escort for various expeditions. In 1873 when Captain Grant Marsh carried General George A. Forsyth up the Yellowstone river as far as the Powder tributary in the steamer Key West, two companies of the sixth infantry under Captains M. Bryant and D. H. Murdock were picked up at Buford to accompany the expedition.²⁰ Captain Stephen Baker and First Lieutenant John A. Carlin with company B of the sixth infantry were taken up the Yellowstone to take part in the ill-fated Indian campaign of 1876.²¹ In 1879

¹⁹ Burdick, op. cit., p. 75.

²⁰ Hanson, op. cit., p. 160.

²¹ Ibid. p. 241.

four companies of infantry from Fort Buford served as guards for the workers who started the construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad west of Bismarck.²² When the Northern Boundary Survey Commission passed through Buford on its surveying expedition an escort of two companies from that fort joined it.²³ The troops were also periodically moved from one fort to another.

Many and varied, indeed, were the duties, the trials, the tribulations, and the heartaches of these frontier folk as they pursued their everyday tasks. Most of them have never been recorded and will ever be enmeshed with the secret annals of the past.

²² Ibid., p. 335.

²³ Ethel J. May, "Location and Survey of the Northern International Boundary Line", Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, IV, 193.

CHAPTER XII

FRIENDLY INDIANS AT FORT BUFORD

A great deal has been mentioned about the Indian hostilities with which the inhabitants of Fort Buford had to contend. While these attacks were oftentimes made by parties in which several tribes were represented, the cause of most of the depredations can be placed at the door of those particularly irreconcilable foes of the white man, the Uncpapa Sioux, who were hated and feared by other Indian tribes and the whites alike.

At all times the fort maintained friendly relations with the Assiniboines, who claimed the land north of the Missouri from the White Earth river to the Milk river.¹ These friendly Indians frequently rendered valuable service to the garrison by conveying information concerning the movements and intentions of the hostile Sioux.² At the time of that disastrous capture of the government herd

¹ J. P. Kimball, Descriptions of Military Posts, Circular No. 4, Records of the War Department, Office of the Surgeon General, Dec. 5, 1870, p. 404.

² W. G. Rankin, Letter to Brigadier General Lorenzo Thomas, December 31, 1866, Records of the War Department, Office of the Adjutant General, p. 9.

by the Sioux, they sent a messenger to the garrison to inform the soldiers of the direction in which some of the cattle had strayed, and some time after brought to the fort a number of head that they had found nearly a hundred miles away.³ For this aid to the white man they were severely punished by the vengeance wreaking Sioux who continually and relentlessly waged war against them.⁴

The officers of the post frequently visited the Assiniboine camp. Upon such occasions they were received with great dignity and conducted to the chief's lodge. There they smoked the peace pipe and were served dried buffalo meat after which they were entertained by an Indian dance which lasted for several hours. Upon their departure they were "poorer as to tobacco and cigars but with their scalps where they belong".⁵

Although the Assiniboines laid claim to a large territory north of Buford, their hunting ground was constantly being encroached upon by the neighboring tribes. Consequently game became scarce and the tribe was many times

³ J. P. Kimball, op. cit., p. 404.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Maria Brace Kimball, A Soldier-Doctor of our Army. James P. Kimball, late Colonel and Assistant Surgeon-general, U. S. Army. (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1917) p. 48.

on the point of starvation. "During the spring of 1868", Dr. Kimball reported, "a camp of 30 or 40 lodges near the fort chiefly subsisted themselves for several weeks upon the offal from the butcher's shop and corn picked out of the dung heaps."⁶ For that reason the Assiniboines were anxious to have an agency established among them in order that they could learn how to cultivate the soil and raise food. While this was not accomplished for a number of years, the Assiniboines did receive annuities from the government in accordance with treaty stipulations.⁷

There were other friendly tribes in the neighborhood of Buford. The Gros on the west and the Rees, Mandans, and Yanctonnais on the east were all more or less kindly disposed toward the whites in varying degrees. The Gros Ventres were generally friendly but were not always to be trusted, while the Yanctonnais were oftentimes treacherous.⁸ When Robert Mathews first arrived at Buford in 1870, he found the Hidatsa chief Crow-Fly-High living at that post with a small tribe of Indians.⁹

⁶ J. P. Kimball, op. cit., 404.

⁷ Capt. Walter Clifford, "Letter to Governor of Indian Affairs, Aug. 1, 1870", Report of Secretary of Interior, H. Ex. Doc. 1, pt. 4, 41st Cong., 3d sess. p. 638.

⁸ Gen. P. H. Sheridan, Outline Descriptions of the Posts in the Military Division of the Missouri commanded by Lieutenant General P. H. Sheridan, Headquarters Military Division of the Missouri, Chicago, Ill., 1872, p. 23.

The most dreaded scourge of the Indians was the small-pox disease. While Gerard was transferring his goods farther up the Missouri after being driven out of his trading post at Buford by the army bill of 1870,¹⁰ he discovered near that fort a deserted camp of the Assiniboines. Upon noticing that no smoke was rising from any of the twenty tipis, he investigated the camp and found that "every one of the inhabitants including the dogs had died of that dreaded disease. Some of the dead had been placed in trees, after the usual burial custom, but so suddenly had they been attacked by the disease that most of them lay in the tepees or outside the snow."¹¹

⁹ "Biographical Sketches of North Dakota Pioneers", Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, (In 8 volumes. Bismarck, N. Dak.: State Binders and Printers, 1906-25) VII, p. 97.

¹⁰ George P. Sanger, Statutes at Large and Proclamations of the United States of America, (Boston: Little Brown and Co. 1871) Vol. XVI, Chapt, CCXCIV, Sec. 22, 41st Cong., 2d sess.

¹¹ "Biography of Old Settlers", Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, I, 1906, p. 347.

CHAPTER XIII

LATER DAYS AT BUFORD AND VICINITY

After the disposal of the last hostile Indians around Buford in 1881, the fort and its vicinity enjoyed comparative safety and security. But it appeared that the work of the military was not yet at an end. There were cattle rustlers, highway robbers, half-breed Indians, and other desperadoes that needed constant attention.

On November 4, 1883 a detachment of twenty men under command of Lieutenant J. M. Bell was sent from Buford to arrest some Canadian halfbreeds who had killed some cattle and stolen some horses from the settlers in the neighborhood. Advancing toward the White Earth River, they discovered two encampments about one and a half miles apart. The occupants, consisting of ten men, thirteen women, and thirty-eight children (all half-breed Indians) were arrested without resistance. They, together with their ponies and camp equipment, were taken to Fort Buford. A few days later Bell took the Canadian half-breeds to the boundary line and sent them into Canada. The others were released at Buford after the owners of the stolen cattle had been compensated.¹

¹Report of Brigadier General Terry, Oct. 6, 1884;
Report of Secretary of War, H. Ex. Doc. 1, part 2, 48th Cong.,
2d sess., pp. 196-114.

Among the most lawless and fearless men in the neighborhood were the highway robbers. While no-one was immune from their depredations, the most tempting prize for their particular attention was very naturally the pay-master's stage which was sometimes despatched overland to bring to the soldiers their periodic pay.

Before the coming of the railroads the soldiers at the various forts along the Missouri were usually paid off by men who came up the Missouri by steamboat, but after the Great Northern Railway reached Glendive, the money was sent in boxes by express to that point and carried from there to Buford and Fort Peck by stage.

On such an occasion, May 10, 1884, Major General Charles H. Whipple started out from Glendive with two ambulances, the rear one of which contained \$10,000 in cash with which to pay off the soldiers at Fort Peck and Buford.² The ambulances were drawn by mules and were escorted by six soldiers. While on the journey the Major became uneasy concerning the possibility of a "hold-up". He knew that there were many places along the way where bandits could spring upon the soldiers before they had a chance to resist.³

² The Sidney Herald, April 2, 1942, p. 1.

³ Ibid.

When evening came they pitched camp about thirty-five miles from Glendive. Still being uneasy about the money in his possession, Whipple got up during the night and while the others were sleeping secretly moved the money boxes from the rear ambulance to the front one, where he customarily rode.

The next morning they started out for Buford. They had not proceeded far when suddenly, as they were nearing the top of a hill, they were attacked by seven masked bandits, who began firing wildly. At the first shots, Sergeant Coonrod, who was riding with the driver in the front ambulance, was hit and fell backwards into the ambulance. Another shot wounded the driver, Eph Parent, causing him to fall off the first ambulance and leaving the mules driverless. One of the mules was also hit by a bullet, which fact together with the noise of the shooting, caused the mules to start off down the hill at top speed. The bandits, believing the money was in the rear ambulance, did not attempt to stop the run-away mules. By the time they had discovered that there was no money in the rear ambulance, the other one was far down the road. For eight miles the mules ran wildly, drawing the lurching ambulance which contained Major Whipple, the money, and the body of Coonrod. They did not stop until they came to the Dundee postoffice,

where either due to exhaustion or custom they came to a standstill. At that point Whipple hastily removed the money boxes to the postoffice and together with John Hefferman, the employes there at the time, he prepared to start off the robbers. But these men had apparently given up the pursuit and taken to their heels. A short time later the second ambulance came along carrying Eph Parent, who was recovering from the wound in his forehead. Meanwhile, word having been dispatched to Buford, soldiers arrived from that fort and escorted the paymaster the remainder of the journey. Although troops were sent in pursuit of the bandits, they were never found.⁴

While the soldiers were thus engaged in police duties, the inhabitants of Buford had discovered the possibilities of ranching on the extensive Dakota Plains. Those energetic traders, Leighton and Jordan, started a ranch on the reservation in the later seventies, where they ran horses and cattle for a number of years. In 1881 when the Government confiscated the horses owned by Sitting Bull, Gail, Crow King, and their followers and sold them to the highest bidder, Leighton and Jordan purchased 120 head and placed them on their ranch. In 1883 they sold a number of their cattle

⁴ Ibid. Also Usher L. Burdick, Tales from Buffalo Land, The Story of Fort Buford, (Baltimore; Wirth Brothers, 1920) p. 250-56.

to Marquis De Mores who slaughtered and dressed them in his new packing plant at Medora. The remainder of the stock they sold to Charles Baldwin, who established his home on the Neeson Flats and operated the ranch for the remainder of his life.⁵ Two years prior to this Leighton and Jordan had started another ranch about twelve miles north of Williston on the Little Muddy river. This ranch was later taken over by the Hedderich brothers, George, Clint, and Gus.⁶

Robert C. Mathews, who had been employed for a number of years as bookkeeper for Leighton and Jordan, established the first ranch outside the reservation about a mile and a half east of Williston.⁷ Mathews not only raised cattle but also began raising grain. He was particularly successful in raising oats which was the first time the production of that crop had been attempted in that region. One year his oats crop averaged ninety-six bushels to the acre. In order to thresh it, Leighton and Jordan ordered a separator from St. Louis which they propelled by the use of the

⁵ Lewis S. Crawford, History of North Dakota, (In 3 volumes, Chicago: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1931)I, 492-93.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "Biographical Sketches of North Dakota Pioneers", Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, (in seven volumes, Bismarck: State Binders and Printers, 1906-25)VII, 96,104.

wood-sawing engine. After the grain had been threshed, Mathews sold 8000 bushels to Fort Buford.⁸

The vast herds of buffalo which had roamed the plains were rapidly disappearing as is indicated by an experience of Robert Mathews. In 1883 he and his neighbor George Grinnell decided to go on a buffalo hunt. After buying about \$10,000 worth of goods, such as food, blankets and ammunition, they set out in the summer with eight wagons bound for Fort Peck. When they reached that place they crossed the Missouri and followed the Dry Fork river for about twenty miles. Here they built their winter camp.⁹ For a number of years buffalo hunters had made fabulous profits from buffalo hides secured in this region. But, unfortunately for Mathews and Grinnell, in this particular year the buffalo began to leave. By early spring the last herd crossed the Missouri and entered Canada. The two men returned to Buford on the Missouri ice in the spring with barely enough hides to break even on the venture.¹⁰

Thus the Indians and the buffaloes were rapidly being displaced by ranchers and farmers. The territorial census

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

of 1885 revealed that in Buford County which included the fort there were 524 inhabitants of which 306 were soldiers and officers while 218 were civilians. Of this total there were only 78 women. Colonel J. N. G. Whistler is listed as commander of the fort.

11

11 Census of Buford County, June 1, 1885, Original Document. (The original copy is in the State Historical Library, Bismarck, N. Dak.)

CHAPTER XIV

FORT BUFORD ABANDONED

The frontier was moving ever westward. It pushed on and beyond those lonely sentinels that had stood guard over the west-bound migration from the time that movement was a mere trickle until it grew to a tempestuous stream. As the valleys and plains became dotted with settlers and the remnants of the Indians were securely tucked away in reservations, the time came when the sentinels were no longer needed.

In recognition of this fact, the United States Congress passed on July 5, 1884 an act which provided for the disposal of the military reservations that were being rendered useless by the land settlements. The act empowered the President to turn over to the Secretary of Interior such military reservations which in his judgment were no longer of military value. Whenever it was in accordance with public interests, the Secretary of Interior was to survey this land and divide it into suitable sections which were to be appraised and sold at public auction at a price not less than the appraised

value or less than \$1.25 an acre.¹

Acting upon this authority, the President and the Department of Interior began to liquidate a number of old military reservations. The time also came when the old fort at Buford had outlived its usefulness. The beginning of the end of that post came when the President turned over a small portion of the reservation upon which it stood to the Interior Department by General Orders Number 68 issued on July 20, 1891.² This portion, however, did not include any of the land upon which the buildings stood,

In 1895 Brigadier General R. Brookes, the commander of the Department of Dakota, recommended that the fort itself be abandoned for the two-fold reason that the buildings were in such a "dilapidated condition that it would require a large sum to put them in repair" and that it was in his estimation no longer of any military value.³ The recommendation was acted upon. Thus, on October 1, 1895, the

¹ The Statutes at Large of the United States of America, XLIII, Chap. 214, 48th Cong., 1st sess., (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1885) p. 103.

² R. H. Bachelder, "Report of the Quartermaster General, October 1, 1892", Report of the Secretary of War, House Executive Document 1, Part 2, 52d Cong., 2d Sess., p. 557.

³ George D. Ruggles, "Report of Adjutant General, October 7, 1895", Report of Secretary of War, House Executive Document 2, 54th Cong., 1st sess., p. 134.

garrison consisting of Troops D and H, Tenth Cavalry, companies C and E, twenty-fifth Infantry, and a detachment of hospital corps, under the command of Major Theodore J. Wint, stood at attention as taps were played and the American flag, which had flown proudly over Fort Buford since the day Captain W. G. Rankin first raised it in a desolate savage-infested land twenty-nine years before, was lowered. The troops marched out and boarded a train which was bound for their new post, Fort Assiniboine. Only Captain H. R. Ritzius and fifteen enlisted men remained to supervise the disposal of the property.⁴ A public auction was held and as much of the property and buildings as could be sold was disposed of. Whatever remained was turned over to the custodianship of John Mercer.⁵ On November 7, Ritzius and his soldiers left for Fort Assiniboine, thus ending the closing chapter of this history of Fort Buford as a military post.⁶

⁴ "Report of Brigadier General John R. Brooke, Sept. 10, 1896", Report of Secretary of War, H. Doc. 2, 54th Cong., 2d sess. p. 136

⁵ Usher L. Burdick, Tales from Buffalo Land. The Story of Fort Buford. (Baltimore: Wirth Brothers, 1940)p.20

⁶ "Report of Brigadier General John R. Brooke, Sept. 10, 1896", op. cit., p. 136.

After abandoning a fort it was customary to remove the soldier dead and their families. At Fort Buford no exception was taken and in 1905 the United States government contracted an undertaker from St. Paul to remove all the bodies and bury them in the national cemetery south of Billings, Montana. In this task the undertaker was assisted by John Mercer, who was able to identify some of the unmarked graves.⁷ A peculiar incident is reported in connection with this work. The body of George Fleury, one-time famous scout and interpreter, was preserved in its natural state. Upon investigation it was discovered that it had turned to stone.⁸

Three hundred bodies were disinterred, the old caskets opened and the remains placed in new caskets. The headstone inscription was written on the top of each new, rough box and the old casket and headstones or markers were replaced in the grave and covered. After the bodies were placed in the new caskets, they were hauled to the railroad station and shipped to Billings. At the request of the relatives, twenty bodies were left and still remain in the little deserted cemetery.⁹

⁷ The Great Falls Tribune, Sept. 4, 1932, (Great Falls, Montana) p. 9.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Acting in compliance with the Congressional Act of July 5, 1884, the Department of Interior surveyed the land in the abandoned reservation and offered it for sale. It was soon found, however, that it could not be disposed of at \$1.25 an acre as the Act stipulated. Finally Congress passed another act on May 19, 1900 which provided that the land should be subject to disposal under the "homestead, townsite, and desert land laws."¹⁰ With the reservation land thus thrown open to homesteaders, the way was paved for a speedy settlement. What was once a military domain was soon dotted with ranchers, grain farmers, towns people busily engaged in their respective pursuits.

¹⁰ The Statutes at Large of the United States of America, XXXI, Chapter 484, 56th Cong., 1st sess. p. 180.

CHAPTER XV

POST MORTEM

As time went on most of the sixty-five¹ buildings that once graced the reservation were torn down and moved. The only buildings that remained were the ammunition arsenal, the building known as General Hazen's headquarters, and the officers' quarters. The latter building was purchased by John Mercer. In this twenty-room mansion he, his wife and three children, John Jr, Sarah, and Kate established their home. Because of the many memories enclosed within its walls it became known as the Villa Militaire.² It was a well-constructed building, which was an unusual feature as far as most of Fort Buford's buildings were concerned. While the other buildings, except the magazine, had been constructed of adobes or of cotton-wood timber, which was not very durable, this building was constructed of eastern pine which had been shipped up the Missouri by steamboat.³

¹ Hermann Binger, "Report of the Commissioner of General Land Office, Oct. 4, 1897", Report of Secretary of Interior, H. Doc. No. 5, 55th Cong., 2d sess., p. 119.

² The Great Falls Tribune, Sept. 4, 1932, (Great Falls, Montana) p. 9.

³ Ibid.

It was two and a half stories high and was furnished with fireplaces and seven exceptionally large chimneys.⁴ On the second floor was the Sacred Heart Chapel with its old worn kneeling benches and the beautifully colored altar.⁵

Here the Mercers entertained visitors from near and far, showing them through the many rooms which were preserved in their historic setting even to the rugs on the floor. The building abounded in pictures, relics, and books. John Mercer could recount the history of the fort from the time he came there with General Hazen in 1872. He and the general had been close friends even to the point of being married on the same day at the same place on Fort Smith, Arkansas. He had come to Fort Buford only upon the request of Hazen who wanted Mercer to accompany him to his new post. There he served as clerk in the government store until the fort was dismantled.⁶ In 1915 John Mercer died, to be followed fourteen years later by his wife.⁷ John Jr., Sarah, and Kate continued to live in the

⁴ The Williston Herald, June 23, 1927, (Williston N. Dak.) p. 6.

⁵ The Great Falls Tribune, Sept. 4, 1932, p. 9.

⁶ Usher L. Burdick, Tales from Buffalo Land. The Story of Fort Buford. (Baltimore: Wirth Bros., 1940) p. 19.

⁷ Ibid.

Villa Militaire until 1936 when the building was burned to the ground. In this dreadful disaster all the contents were destroyed except a few relics.⁸

Today the three Mercers live in a small hut nearby. They are the last living witnesses of the army life of Fort Buford. The old ammunition magazine with its stone walls, barred window, and iron door still stands well-preserved. A few yards south of it is the old headquarters building of General Hazen's which has been recently renovated. These two buildings, surrounded now by a waving field of grain, and the twenty deserted graves nearby are the last material vestiges of that once active military post which had served long and well as a frontier outpost guarding the advance of white civilization.

⁸ Williston Herald, May 21, 1936, p. 4.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

RECORDS OF THE WAR DEPARTMENT, Military Departments and Divisions

Department of Dakota

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF DAKOTA

St. Paul, Minn., July 16, 1868.

General Orders,
No. 21.

Subject to the approval of the Secretary of War, the public lands inclosed by the hereinafter described survey are hereby reserved to the United States for military purposes, and declared to be the Military Reservation of the post of Fort Buford, Dakota Territory.

The initial point is at the intersection of the 104th degree of longitude west from Greenwich, with the 48th parallel of north latitude; thence run south fifteen miles, thence east fifteen miles, thence north thirty miles, thence west thirty miles, thence south thirty miles, thence east fifteen miles; at the apex of each of the angles of the square thus described, a square cut stone one foot on the edge, and three and one-half feet in length, will be firmly imbedded eighteen inches in the ground. On the inner face of each stone will be painted the words, "Military Reservation".

The Post Commander will cause the lines, as herein described, to be run without delay, by an officer of his command, and the inclosed area platted with as much accuracy as the circumstances will permit. A copy of the plat will

be forwarded to these Headquarters as soon as made, for the information and action of the War Department.

The Chief Quartermaster of the Department will purchase a compass and chain and forward, with the least delay practicable, to the Commanding Officer of Fort Buford, for use in making the survey herein required.

BY COMMAND OF BVT. MAJ. GEN. A. H. TERRY.

G. D. Greene,
Assistant Adjutant General.

Official:

Assistant Adjutant General

APPENDIX B

The following is a pledge given by the Uncapapa Sioux chiefs, who with their followers were encamped under guard near Fort Buford following their surrender during the winter of 1881. The agreement was entered into with Captain Walter Clifford during the night in which there was a display of hostility. It is copied as accurately as possible from a replica of the original as it appears in none too legible script in Burdick's Tales of Buffalo Land

Fort Buford, D. T. Feby 1881

We the undersigned Uncapapa Chiefs and officers. We hereby give our parole to the United States of America and do solemnly promise that we will never again take up arms against the United States or its people. And do further promise that we will do all we possibly can to reconcile our people the Uncapapa Sioux to their present condition and also to the new life that is opening before them namely the adoption of an agricultural life and its pursuits. And that we will observe and obey the laws which govern white people and conform to them as strictly as we find it possible to do. In witness whereof we have hereunto set out hands and seals the day and date above written. And I, W. Clifford Capt. U. S. Army do become your bond.

The Gall

Chase-The Thunder

Crow

Fool Heart

Great Bear

W. Clifford
Capt. of Infy.

Witness
Baptiste P. Shane

APPENDIX C

The following is the section of an act of Congress which led to the appointment of Alvin Leighton as the post-trader at Fort Buford and forced all the independent traders including Charles Larpenteur and F. P. Gerard out of business in 1871. Its misuse later led to the impeachment of Secretary of War Belknap.

Statutes at Large and Proclamations of the United States of America by George P. Sanger. Volume XVI.

An act making appropriations for the support of the army for the year ending June thirty, eighteen hundred and seventy one, and for other purposes. July 15, 1870. Chapt. CCXCIV. 41st Congress 2d sess., pp. 315-21.

Sec. 22.

And be it further enacted, That from and after the passage of this act the Secretary of War be, and he is hereby, authorized to permit one or more trading establishments to be maintained at any military post on the frontier not in the vicinity of any city or town, when in his judgement, such establishment is needed for the accomodation of emigrants, freighters, and other citizens; and the persons to maintain such trading establishments shall be appointed by him; Provided, That such traders shall be under protection and military control as camp followers. The joint resolution approved March Thirty, Eighteen Hundred Sixty Seven, to authorize the commanding general of the army to permit traders to remain at certain military posts is hereby repealed.

APPENDIX D

The Statutes at Large of the United States of America, XXII, chapter 484, 56th Cong., 1st sess., p. 130.

CHAPTER 484. An Act to provide for the disposal of the Fort Buford abandoned military reservation, in the States of North Dakota and Montana.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,
That all public lands now remaining undisposed of within the abandoned military reservation in the States of North Dakota and Montana, formerly known as Fort Buford Military Reservation, and which are not otherwise occupied or used for any public purpose, are hereby made subject to disposal under the homestead, town-site, and desert-land laws: Provided, That actual occupants thereon upon the first day of January, nineteen hundred, if otherwise qualified, shall have the preference right to make one entry not exceeding one quarter section: Provided further, That any of such lands as are occupied for town-site purposes, and any of the lands that may be shown to be valuable for coal or minerals, such lands so occupied for town-site purposes or valuable for coal or minerals shall be disposed of as now provided for lands subject to entry and sale under the town-site, coal, or mineral-land laws, respectively: Provided further, That this Act shall not apply to any subdivision of land, which subdivision may include adjoining lands to the amount of one hundred and

sixty acres, on which any buildings or improvements of the United States are situated, but such lands shall be appraised and sold as now provided by law.

Approved, May 19, 1900.

APPENDIX E

RECORDS OF THE WAR DEPARTMENT, Office of the Surgeon General, Circular No. 4, December 5, 1870. The National Archives, Washington, D. C. (taken from a photostatic copy in the Montana University Library, Missoula, Montana)

DESCRIPTIONS OF MILITARY POSTS

FORT BUFORD, DAKOTA TERRITORY

REPORT OF ASSISTANT SURGEON J.P. KIMBALL, UNITED STATES ARMY

Fort Buford, located in latitude 48° north, longitude from Greenwich 104° west, is on the north bank of the Missouri River, near the mouth of the Yellowstone.

The reservation has not been declared. Thirty miles square is held reserved, as described and announced in General Orders No. 21, Headquarters Department of Dakota, dated July 16, 1868.

The Missouri River averages in this vicinity about one-half mile in width in its usual channel. It has a flood plain which is from forty rods to several miles wide, and which is covered with water in the occasional great floods that occur once in several years. This flood plain or bottom land is generally well timbered, and covered with a dense undergrowth of willows and shrubs. Above this is a grassy plain from one to four or five miles in width, extending back to the hills or "bad lands," and abounding in sage-

brush and cactus. The structure of this plain, as observed in digging wells, consists, for the first eleven feet from the surface, of a porous clay; then for about three feet, a fine gravel; next is white sand for fifteen feet, and black sand for two feet, below which is a stratum, about twenty-two or twenty-three feet in thickness, of a very tough, grayish blue clay. As soon as this layer of clay is perforated water in large quantity rises through the opening and affords an unfailing supply. The average depth of the three wells at the post is 52 feet. The surface of the ground in which they are located is 38 feet above the river at the ordinary stage of water. Through this plain, at distances of one-half to two or three miles apart, are ravines, or "coolies," as they are called here, running from the hills to the bottom lands of the river, constituting an excellent system of drainage. But few of them contain water, however, except in very wet seasons. The water of the few small streams that do run through them is intensely alkaline, containing sulphate of soda in large quantity. These coolies are generally of sufficient depth to conceal from observation a party of horsemen until the observer approaches to within a few yards of them, and are invaluable to the Indian for purposes of secret approach and ambuscade.

The striking feature of this vicinity lies in the "Mauvaises terres," or "bad lands," which consist of a succession

of barren hills, or "buttes," averaging from two to three hundred feet in height. These buttes are chiefly composed of compact clay, very tough and elastic, considered to be a tertiary deposit. They bear abundant evidences of erosion by water, some having been molded into a conical form, while others have assumed a pyramidal shape, and others again have been worn away on one or more sides until they present a perpendicular face hundreds of feet in height. At this point these lands extend back from the plain for five or six miles, beyond which is a rolling prairie. Their general course here is from west to east along the Missouri River, which approaches them closely at some points. Near the bases of these buttes there not unfrequently crops out a seam of lignite, averaging from four or five inches to as many feet in thickness. It is of fair quality for fuel, and the indications are that the deposit is sufficiently extensive to render it of great value for local uses should the population of the country ever be sufficient to require it. It is, however, so prone to crumble to a fine powder upon exposure to the air, that it would probably be impracticable to transport it a long distance to market.

The only stratified rock that has been observed in the vicinity is a calcareous sandstone tertiary, free from fossils, which crops out abundantly among the clay hills. This stone is valuable for building purposes, hardening by

exposure to the weather. It contains too much carbonate of lime to be used in the construction of ovens, since it crumbles after long-continued exposure to heat. Metamorphic rock occurs only in the granite and mica schist of boulders, which have been brought to their present places in the drift.

Deserving of notice are the numerous and beautiful specimens of petrified wood, entire logs and stumps of which, supposed to be chiefly cedar, are frequently found in the hills of a pearly white color, finely tinted with various shades of red and crimson.

The country around the post is not arable. The plain just described would produce crops if it could be irrigated. The country is badly watered. Occasionally along the river strips of land are found capable of producing corn and vegetables. Some of the more common representatives of the vegetable kingdom are the ash-leaved maple or rose alder, (*Megundo aceroides*), sparsely scattered along the banks; the red osier dogwood, (*Cornus stolonifera*) is plentiful in the same locality. The kinnikinnik, which the Indians smoke is the inner bark of this shrub scraped off and dried. They call it "shah-shah-shah." The green ash is found in varying quantities on the wooded river bottoms. Red cedar is sparingly found on the hills and in the rocky ravines, usually of a small

stunted character. A species of the willow family finds a place in the low moist grounds. It is a shrub from 5 to 8 feet high, and is probably the low bush willow, (*Salix humilis*.) The cotton wood (*Populus monilifera*) constitutes the bulk of the forest in this vicinity, and is the only wood available in any quantity for fuel or building purposes. The low bottom lands along the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers are for the most part covered with cottonwood forests. The wild yellow or red plum (*Prunus Americanus*) is found in the ravines and on the prairie side of points of timber located on the river lands. It is edible, and of good flavor, being the best fruit the vicinity affords. The number of trees, however, are limited and the supply consequently scanty. The choke cherry (*Prunus Virginiana*) is found in much the same places and quantities. A variety of service berry (*Amelanchier Canadensis*) is abundant along the streams as a shrub. The smooth, wild gooseberry (*Ribes hirtellum*) is sparingly found in ravines. The Missouri currant (*Ribes aureum*) is more common in the same locality. The buffalo, or bull berry, (*Shepherdia argentea*), an edible, acid red fruit, ripening late in the season, occurs abundantly, usually in the bottom lands. It is very valuable to the Indians, who often subsist on it almost entirely for several weeks during the fall, at times when there happens to be great

scarcity of game. The pomme blanche, or Indian turnip, (*Psoralea esculenta*), is abundant in the high grounds and sandy soil. It is much used as food by the aborigines. The prickly pear (*Opuntia Missouriensis*) is extremely abundant in the prairie, and by its sharp stiff spines is rendered a very annoying obstacle to the traveler, whether mounted or on foot. Lambes'quarters (*Chenopodium album*) grows plentifully in the low moist bottoms, and is highly prized and much used during the spring and early summer for greens. The wild onion (*Allium stellatum*) is common upon the hill-sides and steep banks. A species of wild mint finds a place on the moist banks of streams in the vicinity.

Some of the more important animals are the American bison or buffalo, mountain sheep, white and black-tailed deer, elk, antelope, Canada lynx, wild cat, American gray wolf, coyote, common red fox, swift fox, prairie fox, silver gray fox, Indian dog, grizzly bear, black bear, long-tailed ermine, mink, badger, common skunk, American otter, fisher, American sable, Canada porcupine, jack hare, gray rabbit, beaver, gopher, and muskrat.

The climate is one of extremes, being excessively hot in summer and extremely cold in winter. The extreme heat of summer is of short duration, and the nights are always cool. Winter sets in early in December, and lasts

until near the let of April. The cold is continuous and severe. Wind and snow storms are of common occurrence. Snow sometimes falls to a depth of two feet, which is the greatest depth ever known here. The atmosphere is dry, and the variations in temperature are not as observed as in more humid climates. The fall of rain is very small, the annual average for two years being about nine and a quarter inches.

Fort Buford was first established as a one company post in 1806, and increased to five companies in 1807, since which time the work of building the fort has been in progress. It is built upon a rectangular plot of ground, 335 yards in length by 200 in breadth. This plot is inclosed on three sides by a wooden stockade, 12 feet in height. The south side, facing toward the river, is not stockaded. The parade ground, 100 by 350 feet, is bounded on the north side by the officers' quarters, on the east by the commissary store-room and office, quarter-master's store-room and office, and one company barrack; on the south by four company barracks, and on the west by the hospital, post library, adjutant's office, and guard-house. East of the buildings forming the eastern boundary of the parade ground, and separated from them by a street twenty feet in width, are the granaries, stables, corral, butcher shop, blacksmith shop, bakery, and magazine.

The barracks, five in number, are rectangular adobe buildings, each 124 feet in length, by 24 feet wide, and 10 feet high to the eaves, not ceiled. Walls 17 inches thick. Roofs of boards and slabs, covered with dirt. Each barrack is divided into a first sergeant's room, 12 by 24 feet; men's quarters, 70 by 24 feet; mess-room, 30 by 24 feet, and kitchen, 12 by 24 feet. The natural illumination of the quarters is insufficient. In the dormitory there are but three windows, each 2 feet 6 inches wide, by 4 feet 8 inches high, not affording sufficient light to read by except in their immediate vicinity. The quarters are at all times dark and gloomy, the exact reverse of what they should be were the health and comfort of the occupants considered. The ventilation of the quarters by means of flues immediately beneath the eaves, and the large open fireplaces, is sufficient in this climate, if the rooms are not overcrowded. The air space in the men's quarters is 18,480 cubic feet, and the average occupancy sixty men, allowing, therefore, but 308 cubic feet of air to each man. The quarters are well warmed by fireplaces and stoves. A serious fault in these buildings^s is the entire absence of a room for bathing purposes; the only facilities the men now have for washing being a basin of water out of doors, and the Missouri River, which last is so rapid and dangerous at this point that but few avail themselves

of the opportunity it gives during a few months in the summer. The bunks are badly arranged in three tiers one above the other, each bunk holding two men. The company sinks, two in number, are situated 110 feet distant from the fort, each consisting of a ditch, 30 feet in length by 3 feet wide and 12 feet in depth, with a building erected over it.

The kitchens are of ample size, but their location is objectionable, as, being in the same building and in close proximity to the men's quarters and communicating with them, much of the steam and effluvia pass in, frequently rendering the quarters very disagreeable. The same objection of locality might be raised against the mess-rooms. The fact that there is no store or lumber-room connected with the barracks is made evident by the accumulation of sundry articles in the kitchens, mess-rooms, and sleeping-rooms, to the great detriment of the good order and neatness of the quarters.

The laundresses occupy an adobe building, 20 by 100 feet, which is divided into five rooms, each 20 feet square. On a line with this building are the quarters of the citizen employes, an adobe building, 20 by 50 feet, divided into three rooms each 15 by 20 feet. In rear of the laundresses' quarters is an adobe building, 12 by 20 feet, now occupied by the interpreter.

The officers' quarters consist of three adobe buildings and two wooden ones. The adobe buildings are each 45 by 48 feet, and 10 feet high to the eaves, and, divided by a hall through the center into two sets of quarters of three rooms each, each room 14 by 15½ feet. The wooden buildings were built in 1866, when the fort was first established. One building is 45 by 22 feet, the other 36 by 20 feet. Each one is divided into three rooms and a hall. The officers quarters are all well warmed, lighted, and ventilated.

The adjutant's office and the post library are in an adobe formerly used as a hospital, 54 by 22 feet, divided into three rooms of equal size, one of which is vacant.

The commissary store-rooms and office are contained in one adobe building, 24 feet wide by 200 feet long, and 10 feet high to the eaves. These rooms are well warmed and ventilated, and are kept in admirable order and police. Extending in a line with the commissary building is the quartermaster's store-room and office, contained in an adobe building, 24 by 124 feet, and 10 feet high to the eaves.

The guard-house, 40 by 22 feet, and 10 feet high, consists of two rooms, each 20 by 22 feet; one built of adobe used as the guard-room, and one built of logs for the prisoner's quarters. The building is well warmed by stoves. The illumination, both natural and artificial, is

bad. Ventilation very bad. The present guard-house is intended to be used only temporarily until a good one can be built.

The hospital was originally erected in the summer of 1867, for a company barrack, and was used as such until June, 1868. Its dimensions and structure are similar to those of the barracks already described. It is divided into a dispensary, 12 by 24 feet, store-room, 16 by 12 feet, ward, 33 by 24 feet, bath-room, 10 by 8 feet, mess-room, 16 by 24 feet, and kitchen, 12 by 24 feet. The ward is furnished with twelve beds, giving to each 136 square feet of superficial area, and 1,488 cubic feet air space. The ventilation of the ward is excellent. It is effected by numerous small openings in the walls immediately beneath the eaves, and by two large open fireplaces. The room is well warmed by these fireplaces and two wood-stoves. The natural illumination of the ward by means of four windows, each 2 feet 6 inches wide, 4 feet 3 inches high, is insufficient. The kitchen, of sufficient size and accommodations, is badly located in too close proximity to the ward. The hospital sink is built twenty feet from the hospital.

The post bakery is an adobe building, 30 by 45 feet, with walls $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet thick. It contains two ovens, each 13 by 18 feet, well constructed.

The stables are two wooden buildings, one 32 by

250 feet, and one 17 by 213 feet. They are well constructed and adapted to the purpose for which they were built. The corral is 250 feet square, including a shed, 18 by 250 feet, built for the cattle. At the east side of the corral, and near the center of the east side of the fort, is the butcher's shop, a wooden building, 20 by 24 feet. Near the corral and stables are three temporary wooden buildings, two of them roofed with tarpaulins. One is 30 by 35 feet, and used as an additional commissary store-room; one 30 by 30 feet, and one 30 by 260 feet, both filled with grain.

The library consists of 73 volumes.

The post is chiefly supplied with water from the Missouri River. There are, however, three wells within the fort, one of which was dug in the winter of 1866 and 1867, at a time when the garrison was surrounded and besieged by hostile Indians. The other two were sunk in the fall of 1867, near the corral, for the supply of the cattle and horses, and to serve in case of emergency. The water from these wells is hard, clear, and transparent, and has a slightly saline taste. It contains a small amount of lime and chlorine. A small amount of organic matter is present. The water from these wells is now used only for the cattle and horses, the entire supply for the command being daily brought in carts from the river, 750 yards distant. The river water contains a large amount of suspended matter,

principally clay and sand. A careful measurement in the month of September, at a season when the water of the river is comparatively clear, gave eighty-four grains of suspended matter in one gallon of the water. In the spring and during the early part of the summer, when the river is high, the amount of suspended matter is at least doubled. The addition of six grains of alum to the gallon of water renders it perfectly clear and transparent after standing twelve hours. Cleared of the suspended matter, it is excellent water, much superior to that of the wells. During the winter of 1866-'67, when the well water was used exclusively by the garrison, the records show that diarrhoea was the prevalent disease. In the fall of 1867 a sudden increase in the number of cases of diarrhoea was charged to the use of the water from the well, which was used on account of being colder than the river water. The well was closed, and the epidemic immediately abated. During the summer and fall of 1868 the river water was used exclusively. The daily amount of water furnished the troops averages about eight gallons per head.

The natural drainage of the post is excellent. In front the ground slopes gently to the river, and on both the east and west ends it descends gradually to shallow ravines running parallel with, and emptying into the river. Gardens are cultivated, producing lettuce, radishes, cucumbers, and green corn in sufficient amount to furnish a fair

supply to the entire garrison during the season; also a limited amount of green peas, cabbages, turnips, and beets. Tomatoes have not done well, the season being too short. Potatoes have proved a failure during the last two years, producing only big tops. The corn raised is a variety cultivated by the Kee Indians, which comes quickly to maturity.

Rations, procurable from the commissary, are of good quality and sufficient in quantity. During the fall of 1868 and the winter of 1868-'69, after the supply of vegetables from the garden was exhausted, the following articles of food, in addition to the regular ration issued from the commissary department, in the quantities stated, were found effectual in preventing scurvy and maintaining the command in excellent health, viz: For 100 rations, ten pounds of dried fruit and five gallons of kroat or curried cabbage twice a week; one gallon of molasses, twenty-five pounds of corn meal, and two and one-half gallons of pickles once a week.

The nearest supply depots are at St. Louis, Missouri, 2,235 miles distant. The route of supply is by the river, which closes for navigation early in the fall. Supplies should be sent early in the spring, as many articles spoil later in the season. Fresh vegetables are always needed, and some means should be devised to supply potatoes at least.

Communication between the post and nearest town is by the Missouri River. There is no public land conveyance. Mail communication is very irregular and uncertain. The post has twice been nearly three months without receiving a mail. During the past year a mail has been received about once a month. It is carried on horseback, via Forts Stevenson and Totten, Dakota Territory, 490 miles, to Fort Abercrombie, Dakota Territory, the nearest mail station. The length of time required for a letter to go to department headquarters is about thirty days.

The territory on the north side of the Missouri River is claimed by the Assiniboine Indians, from White Earth River, 65 miles east of the post, to Milk River, about 170 miles west of it. The Assiniboines were originally a part of the Yancton tribe of the great Dakota or Sioux Nation, and, according to tradition, split off from that tribe and became a separate people through some difficulty that arose about a woman. They call themselves Hokes, and claim to be Dakotas. The name "Assiniboine," meaning stone-boilers, was given to them by the Crees, their neighbors on the north, on account of a singular method practiced by them of boiling meat by holding in the water heated stones. Catlin states that in 1832 the Assiniboines numbered 7,000. At present they do not exceed 2,000. Small-pox and war have been their destroyers. The Assiniboines

are athletic well-formed, fine looking Indians, and since the establishment of this post have been uniformly friendly to the whites, and have frequently rendered valuable services to the Government. During the winters of 1856-'67 and 1867-'68, they kept the command apprised of the movements of the hostile Sioux, and during the past season, (1868), after the capture of the Government herd of beef cattle from this post by the Sioux, they sent a courier between 60 and 70 miles to give information of the direction in which some of the cattle had strayed, and afterward drove into the fort several head which they had found upon the prairie nearly one hundred miles distant. The Assiniboines are very anxious to have an agency established among them, similar to those among the Indians lower down the river. They are poor in horses and few in number, and consequently unable to pursue the buffalo, their chief source of subsistence, to any great distance from home, and their hunting grounds are constantly encroached upon by other tribes, the Crows on the west, the Crees and British half-breeds on the north, the Yanctonais, Gros Ventres, Rees, and Mandans on the east, and the Tetons (Sioux) on the south. Owing to the inroads of these tribes on the lands of the Assiniboines, game is becoming scarce, and they are at times almost in a state of starvation. During the spring of 1868, a camp of 30 or 40 lodges near

the fort chiefly subsisted themselves for several weeks upon the offal from the butcher's shop and corn picked out of dung heaps. They are keenly alive to the fact of the increasing scarcity of game, and are anxious to learn to cultivate the soil before they shall be overtaken by starvation. Their poverty in horses arises principally from their traffic with the British half-breeds from the Red River of the North, who make frequent trading expeditions into their country with powder and whisky. The Assiniboines are now mostly encamped on the Missouri River, from 60 to 100 miles west of the post. In the immediate vicinity are the Gros Ventres, Mandans, and Yanctonais on their winter hunt. All these Indians are friendly.

On the opposite or south side of the Missouri is the country of the Teton Sioux, who, since the establishment of the post, have proved as uniformly hostile as the Assiniboines have friendly. The band of the Sioux that most infest this vicinity is the Onkpapas, although in some of their raids other bands have been recognized. Since the establishment of this fort in 1865, they have killed at the post, or in its immediate vicinity, eleven men-five soldiers and six citizens. Six of these men have been killed since May, 1868. On the 20th of August, 1868, they made an attack in force

upon the Government herd of beef cattle at this post, and captured over 200 of them. In this fight two men were killed and four wounded, one mortally. In addition to their relentless war upon the whites, the Sioux are constantly harassing the Assiniboines, killing men, women, and children because of their friendship for the whites.

The health of the locality is excellent, and there are no prevailing diseases. The most common diseases are venereal and acute rheumatism. The fatigue duty performed by the troops has been hitherto extremely onerous, but with the exception of the exposure of the workmen in the adobe yard during a few excessively hot days in the summer of 1868, from which several cases of disease resulted, and once or twice the moral depression produced by being hard driven, I have seen no injurious effect produced upon the men of the command, but on the contrary I consider a reasonable amount of fatigue duty performed in the open air during pleasant weather as beneficial to them. Especially is this the case during the winter, when the labor of getting fuel in good weather not only gives needed and healthful exercise, but furnishes an agreeable relief to the monotony of sitting and standing around a fire in crowded quarters, and, by occupying the mind and attention, does much to prevent that ennui and nostalgia which frontier garrison life is apt to generate. Amusements of the soldier consist of base

ball, cricket playing, and hunting. A theatrical performance is given once a week by a troupe composed of men in the command. Situated on the west side of the parade ground is a wooden building, 75 by 30 feet, originally erected for a store-room, now used as a theater.

APPENDIX F

Taken from a document from the files of the United States War Department in Washington, D. C., which was typed by Dr. Osgood of the University of Minnesota. This typed copy is in the Montana Historical Library, Helena, Montana.

HISTORY OF FORT BUFORD

O. R. D. of the Adjutant Generals' Office Record of History of Post. Vol. 198. Fort Buford. pp. 1-8.

LOCALITY AND HISTORY OF POST

Fort Buford is located in Dakota Territory in latitude 48° north, longitude 27° west, being in the extreme north-western portion of the Territory, but a few rods east of the boundary line between Dakota and Montana territories, and about sixty miles from the British Possessions on the north. It is situated on the left bank of the Missouri River, two miles below the mouth of the Yellowstone, 2269 miles from St. Louis by river, and 907 miles from Fort Benton, the head of steam-boat navigation of the Missouri. The Missouri at this point runs nearly due east. The fort is built upon the prairie, 780 yards from the river, and 38 feet above it, at the medium stage of water, the plain gently sloping to the river bank which rises abruptly 12 to 15 feet above the water's edge.

In April, 1865, Company "C", 3rd. Battalion, 13th Infantry (afterwards Co. "C" 31st. Infantry) was assigned to Fort Union, M. T. (then owned and occupied by the N.W. Fur Co.) with instructions to erect and establish a new

military post near that place. On the 12th of June, 1866, the Company under the command of Captain and Brevet Lieut. Col. W. G. Mackin, arrived at Fort Union, N. T. and after a brief survey, dropped down the river 8 or 10 miles near the location of the future fort. June 15th, the site was selected, the ground plan laid out, and the Post named Fort Buford in the memory of the late Major General Buford.

The work of building the fort was at once commenced, and Nov. 25th was completed. The Fort as it then stood was a rectangular stockade, 320 by 300 feet, 12 feet in height, with two block-houses or bastions, each 21 feet square, pierced with four portholes for artillery and fourteen for musketry, and standing, one on the southwest and the other on the northeast corner of the stockade. The one on the southwest corner was furnished with a second story to be temporarily used as a guard-house, surmounted by a "look-out" 31 feet high commanding an excellent view of the surrounding country. The Stockade was also pierced with numerous loopholes for musketry and provided with platforms affording abundant means of ^{ob-}ervation and defense without exposure. The buildings within the stockade were the Commanding Officer's quarters 45 by 22 feet and the Lieutenant's quarters 36 by 20 feet, on the north side. On the east side the company's quarters 120 by 22 feet. On the south were the stables and the carpenter's and

blacksmith's shops and on the west side of the enclosure were the Interpreter's and Mechanic's quarters, the bakery and the magazine, a ware-house and store-sheds. No hospital was erected. Outside the fort on ^{the} east side was a corral for the cattle, 60 by 60 feet, surrounded by a stockade. East of the fort 380 yards was the saw-mill and near that an ice-house. The buildings were constructed of cottonwood except the Interpreter's and Mechanic's quarters, which were built of adobe which were taken from the ruins of Fort William, formerly a trading post, located about midway between the present site of Fort Buford and Missouri River.

Hostile Indians annoyed the command more or less during the summer and fall killing three citizens and stealing two horses. At the beginning of winter, they began to assemble in larger numbers than they had hitherto done, and December 23rd, 1866, under the leadership of "Sitting Bull" a notorious Sioux chief, they occupied the saw-mill and the ice-house in force, from whence they kept up a desultory firing until dislodged by the fire of the twelve pounders of the fort. The next morning, they were again in position, and again dislodged. This sort of siege, with occasional intervals, was sustained for nearly three months. A well within the stockade 82 feet deep, was completed January 4, 1867, affording to the garrison an abun-

dant supply of water. During the winter, three Indians were killed and several wounded, and a white man, a citizen, was killed. The health of the command during the summer and fall of 1866 and the winter of 1866 and '67 was generally good. The most common disease was acute diarrhea. There were two deaths by disease during this time. Private William Hallam, Co. "C", 13th Infantry, died July 15th, 1866 of acute dysentery. Private Adam Dunn, Co. "C", 13th Infantry, died March 13th, 1867 of chronic bronchitis.

June 28th, 1867, Companies "B", "E", "F" and "C", 31st. Infantry arrived at the post, permanently assigned to it, increasing the command to five companies and necessitating the building of a new fort. The entire command went into camp in tents in front of the old fort, and the work was at once commenced under the charge of Captain and Ev't Lieut. Col. W. G. Rankin, he being the senior officer continuing in command. The new fort was built of adobes. November 1st, 1867, it was sufficiently completed to furnish comfortable quarters to the command, when work upon it was suspended for the season, the labor of the garrison being required in cutting wood and preparing for winter. No hospital was built this year. A building 54 by 21 feet, the quarters during the preceding winter and spring of the interpreter and Mechanics, was occupied as

a hospital, June 30th, 1867, and continued to be used as such until September 1868. No guard-house was erected, the temporary one of the preceding year continuing in use. On the 2nd of August, the Indians endeavored to run off the herd, but were repulsed by the guard. November 6th, 1867, five men belonging to Co. "C" 31st Infantry while in the woods three or four miles from the post, were attacked by Indians and Private Cornelius Coughlin killed and Corporal Edward Henaghan severely wounded. Private Coughlin was the first soldier belonging to the command killed by Indians since the establishment of the Post. The body was found next day scalped and mutilated. It has since been learned through the Indians that he was not captured until he had expended all his ammunition and had killed two Indians and wounded a third. The Indians captured four mules belonging to the government. December 12th, 1867, pursuant to Special Orders, Sv't Major Francis Clarke, Captain 31st, Infantry, relieved Sv't Lieut. Col. S. G. Rankin, Captain 31st Infantry in command of the Post. The winter of 1867 and 68 was an unusually mild one for this locality. The lowest the thermometer stood was thirty degrees below zero at 7 A. M. January 7th, 1868. Indians made no attacks during the winter, although frequently sending in notification of their intention to do so. The health of the command was usually excellent.....A theatre

was organized during the winter by the men and weekly performances given, which did much to afford amusement and relieve the monotony of garrison life on the frontier. May 13th, 1868, two men, citizens in the employ of the N.W. Fur Co. were killed near the Post by Indians. May 14, 1868, Lieut. Colonel A. W. Bowman, 31st Infantry relieved Br't Major F. Clarke, Captain, 31st Infantry in command of the Post. July 28th, 1868 Lieut. Col Bowman left the post on temporarily detached service. Br't Major C. J. Dickey, Captain 31st Infantry, being the senior officer present, took command ad interim. August 20th, 1868, a large body of Indians made an attack on the government herd of beef cattle while grazing about one mile and a half from the Post, and captured over 200 head. In the fight two men were killed and four wounded, one fatally, September 13th, 1868, a soldier while out hunting was killed by the Indians. September 25th, 1868, Lieut. Col. Bowman returned from his temporary absence and resumed command of the Post. Co. I, 31st Infantry joined the Command in October 1868, to replace Co. "F" 31st Infantry, which had been transferred during the summer to Fort Stevenson D.T. A Yantonnais Indian (hostile) was arrested at the Post in December 1868 and shot by the guard while attempting to make his escape December 23rd, 1868. On the 13th of January 1869, a small war party of Indians made an attack, riding up to the south-

east corner of the fort and firing into the men's quarters. They were driven off without loss to either side. (January 28th, 1869 Lt. Col. A. W. Bowman, 31st Infantry was put in arrest) the command of the Post assumed by Bv't Major Thomas Little, Captain 31st Infantry. Ten Indians attacked the herders but were repulsed, with loss of one killed and several wounded. We lost one Indian scout killed. May 24th, 1869 Bv't Brig. General H. A. Morrow, Lt. Col. 13th. Infantry took command of the Post.

James P. Kimball

Asst. Surgeon, U.S.A.

Post Surgeon.

APPENDIX G

RECORDS OF THE WAR DEPARTMENT, Office of the Adjutant General, The National Archives, Washington, D. C. (taken from a photostatic copy in the State University Library, Missoula, Montana.)

Fort Buford, Dakota T.
December 31, 1886

General:

In compliance with the provisions of Par. 468 Rev. Army Reg. I have the honor to respectfully submit the following

"Annual Return"

of the troops stationed at this Post, which force consists of Company C. 3rd Battalion 13 U. S. Infantry. This company was organized at Jefferson Barracks Missouri January 22d 1866 and remained at that Post until April 21st 1866, when in accordance with a letter of instructions from Ev't. Col. T. V. F. Whistler, Major Commanding 3rd Bat. 13th U. S. Infantry, dated Jefferson Barracks Mo. April 21, 1866 it together with Co. D of the same Bat. was embarked on the Steamer Mary McDonald, with orders to proceed to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and report to Col. T. V. D. Reeve, 13th U. S. Infantry Comdg. District of the Upper Missouri for assignment to permanent Posts.

Upon arrival at Fort Leavenworth, I found I had

been assigned by Gen. Order No. 26 Hd. Quar's 13 U. S. Infantry Fort Leavenworth Kansas April 18, 1866 to Fort Union Montana T. with instructions to establish and erect a new Military Post near that place.

We arrived at our destination June 12th 1866 and after a brief survey we dropped down the River some 8 or 10 miles and landed near the location of the future Fort, and on the 13th of June disembarked the men and stores. June 15 selected the site, laid out the ground plan, and began work upon the Fort.

Fort Buford (that being the name selected and approved for the new Fort in honor and memory of the services of Maj. General John Buford) is situated in Dakota Territory about one third of a mile from the Missouri River, on the East bank, about two miles by land, and ten by river, from the trading Post Fort Union Montana Territory, nearly on the site formerly occupied by Old Fort Williams and nearly opposite and a little below the mouth of the Yellowstone River. All the troops except the necessary guards were put upon fatigue, and every exertion made to get our defences and quarters up before the bitter winter of this country should set in. On the 22nd of June I had the saw mill in good running order, and commenced getting out the necessary timber for the Fort. A well ~~some 35 feet deep was sunk close to the saw-mill, both~~

for its convenience and because of furnishing better water for both engineering and general purposes than the muddy and foul water of the turbid Missouri.

Steadily we pursued the "even tenor of our way" without the variety of interruption or incident until on the 5th August. I was applied to for a guard by the Indian Peace Commission, that Peace Commission which by its energetic endeavors in the wrong direction, by its extraordinary promises and measures, totally at variance and sometimes in direct opposition to the published and established rules and regulations of the War Department, has succeeded in creating more disturbance, dissatisfaction, and finally outright hostilities, than all the alleged depredations and outrages by the whites since Gen. Sully's expedition.

I, of course, sent the required escort, though of what use it was to be to them on board their Steamboat, under the guns of either Fort Buford or Fort Union I could not then and cannot now, see, unless "to strike terror to the souls of evil disposed Indians" by the formidable display of half-a-dozen armed men. On the 11 or 12 of August a considerable number of hostile Indians of the west bank having congregated on the opposite side of the river, under the auspices of the said Peace-Commissioners under their sanction a delegation of traders came down from Union to trade with the Indians on the opposite shore.

The trade went on very peaceably, since the Indians had it all their own way, helping themselves frequently to two or three times the quantity of goods agreed upon as the rate of exchange, or even taking such articles as struck their fancy, the traders submitting in silence as they were so much in the minority as to be comparatively defenseless. Finally, their barter being over, by way of gratification of their trade, and to evince their adherence to and compliance with their peaceful contracts and agreements with the aforesaid Peace Commission, they (the Indians) let fly a volley of arrows among the traders, wounding one man and a boy - and then departed on their ways.

All this almost in sight of the Peace Commission boat.

On the 18th of August the Indians attacked and attempted to carry off the cattle herd; they were repulsed and failed in their endeavor, however, by the bravery and vigilance of the herdsmen, but succeeded in making off with two horses, which were grazing with the cattle.

August 20 some Indians surprised and killed a man named James Finley, who was chopping wood some 3 or 4 miles from the Fort. September 5 three white men from Fort Union who were hunting on the opposite side of the River, just above the mouth of the Yellowstone were attacked by the Indians, and two of them killed, the third escaping by concealing himself until a favorable opportunity for

Getting away.

Immediately after killing the two men, the Indians gathered in great numbers on the bluffs on the opposite side, with fierce gestures, wild cries and warlike demonstration.

I opened on them with the Artillery, but my Guns (Brees 12 pdr) being smoothbore, I could not reach them, the one or two shot fell near enough to make them disperse.

I have thus gone into what may seem to be unnecessary detail of these transactions, because I am satisfied that the remoteness of this Post from Headquarters of Bureau and Departments, has rendered it difficult to convey an explicit knowledge and understanding of the difficulties of administration, where we have to deal with lawless and treacherous savages, who totally ignore any and all obligations arising from treaties, and who will make peace with you today, and stealthily and treacherously shoot you from ambush to-morrow; when we are hampered by the action of Commissioners who profusely make promises they are not able, and are forbidden to fulfill; when for want of Cavalry, or least a mounted force, we have not the means of pursuing and punishing the offenders, but must sit in forced inactivity in the Fort, and witness, and hear of the devilry in every direction. Our force is too small to admit of weakening the defense of the Post

and at any rate, infantry would be worthless to pursue mounted Indians. And so we are powerless to prevent, protect, or punish.

Everything went on quietly from this time, disturbed only by vague rumors of impending hostilities, in which a general uprising of the Indians was to make a clear sweep of all the whites on the Missouri River, which becoming stronger and more authentic each day, we bent our every energy towards finishing our stockade and other defenses, upon which it was now evident would depend the safety and security of the entire Company. As rapidly as the various buildings were advanced to such a stage as admitted of their being occupied, they were taken possession of for the uses for which they were intended. The Store-house for Commissary and Quartermasters stores Aug. 1, the Comd. Officers Quarters Aug. 16; Lieut. quarters Aug. 28th, Comp. quarters Sept. 30, Bakery Sept. 30, laundresses and citizen-mechanic's quarters Oct. 15, the stockade and lower story of the two Blockhouses Oct. 30, stables, carpenters and blacksmith's shops by Novbr. 15, upper part of S. W. Bastion Novbr. 25. There was no attempt made to finish the quarters of the officers, or indeed any of the buildings, beyond what would make them barely inhabitable, all our attention being turned to strengthening our defenses, and in getting in such a supply of firewood as would render it unnecessary to expose ourselves when danger should come upon us. In the latter part of October 2nd Lieutenant H. H. Ketchum, Post Adjutant was granted seven days leave of absence in order to apply in

person at Dist. Hd. Qurs. for extended leave. His place was supplied by 2nd Lieut. H. T. Elliott Co. B, Bat. 13 U. S. Inf. who being unable to reach his command for want of transportation after making the attempt to go up the River, returned and in compliance with Gen. Order No. 35 Dept. Hd Qurs, reported to this Post for duty and being assigned, is now serving as Post Adjutant.

The Fort as it now stands is a quadrangular stockade 300 by 320 feet, with two blockhouses or Bastions each 21 feet square, pierced with four port-holes for artillery and fourteen for musketry and standing on the S. W. and the other on the N. E. corners of the stockade; the one on the S. W. corner is finished with a second story temporarily used as a guard-house, surmounted by a lookout; the whole structure being some 36 feet high and giving an excellent view of the surrounding country. The stockade is also pierced with numerous loopholes for musketry and platforms affording abundant means of observation without exposure.

The inside buildings are Cmdg. Officer Quarters, 45 x 22 feet; Lieutenants Quarters 36 x 20 feet; Company Quarters 120 x 22 feet; Warehouse 75 x 30 feet; Storeshed 120 x 12 feet; Laundresses, Interpreters and Mechanics Quarters and Bakery 71 x 19 feet, stables 140 x 12 feet; ~~Carpenters and Blacksmith shops 54 x 13 feet; and the store-~~

cellar, besides the necessary outbuilding attached to the Quarters.

Outside the Fort is a stockade around the cattle yard 60 x 60 feet; a shed enclosing the sawmill 64 x 22 feet; and an ice house 20 x 30 x 15 d. feet; all this the work of one Company of men since the 1 of July.

In addition to all of which we manufactured ninety tons of hay and hauled it from a distance of 8 miles.

In the latter part of November, I was informed by Crows Breast, a chief or headman among the Gros-Ventres that a large party of the different tribes of the Sioux nation, were on the war-path, and were encamped about 37 miles below, on the other side of the River; that they numbered eleven camps, (afterwards increased to 17) and were gathered from every direction and even as far off as from the Platte, and would probably muster from 2500 to 3000 warriors. I immediately urged on my preparations to receive them, sending all my available spare force into the timber to get in enough wood to last through the winter, well knowing as long as they remained about my teams would not be safe in the thick undergrowth and willow thickets.

The first intimation we had of the actual presence of hostile Indians, was the cutting of the large band on the sawmill. A few days afterwards, as the men were taking ~~the stock to water, they were fired on by Indians in ambush;~~

they returned the fire, but not knowing the strength of the concealed foe, retreated to the Fort. I at once went out with a force, but the Indians fled upon seeing us approach. On the 20 of December they attacked a citizen coming from Union 400 or 500 yards from this fort, and killed his horse, having taken advantage of a gully to approach undiscovered from this Fort. On the 21 they attacked a working party at the saw-mill, but were driven off without having accomplished any damages; that night, however they broke the forcepump at the mill and carried off some of the tools belonging to the mill.

Sunday morning, Decbr. 23 they were discovered in possession of the saw-mill and ice-house, which are between 400 and 500 yards distant from the fort, towards the river, from which they kept up a desultory firing. A few shots from my 12 Pdrs. soon drove them skulking away to the cover of the gullies, willows and woods. Just before daylight, on the morning of the 24 I was aroused by 5 or 6 musket-shots in rapid succession. I found four Indians had attempted to approach and after getting tolerably near, had started towards the hay-stacks, doubtless to burn them, and then the guard fired on them, knocking one off his horse, who was carried off by the others.

Daylight discovered them in possession of the saw-mill and ice-house in considerable numbers. I deployed a

number of men to the left, and then opened on them with 2 - 12 pdrs. as the distance was too great for effective musketry, protected as they were.

They stood their ground very staunchly for a while returning our fire, and shouting taunting and derisive challenges. Shortly however, my artillerist's got their range better (they were almost totally inexperienced) and soon made it too warm for them. One shot killing two men, one of whom was a head-man Black-Bear, brother to One-papa Chief, Pretty Bear, several others were wounded, either by musketry or grape. Finally, as the artillery drove them into musket range, and as the men deployed to the left, made a rush towards the mill, they made a precipitate retreat under cover of the gullies, bearing off their dead and wounded and went off hurriedly towards Union. Here they called for a talk and the Agent of the North-West Fur Company talked with them. The expedition seemed to have been principally instigated and directed by Sitting Bull, Four-Horns and Red Horn (all proscribed in Dist. Orders) and some other noted chiefs of the Sioux Nation. They said, they had been deceived, and promises made them which were not fulfilled; that they had no hostility to the traders, but that the Peace Commission had promised them plenty of ammunition, but the military would not let them have it, and unless the officer at Fort Buford gave

them, or allowed them to trade for ammunition, they would wipe every soldier in the Missouri River out of existence, and if they could not take the fort, they could keep us from getting wood and so freeze us out. A part of them under Sitting Bull then went to the Camp of the Assiniboins, some 50 miles up, and endeavored to get that tribe to join them, but the Assiniboins "to their honor be it said" steadfastly refused to listen to them, saying they had a treaty of peace with the whites and should keep their faith. The Assiniboins deserve great credit, as being a marked exception to the general rule and have been of considerable benefit, in conveying to us valuable information of the movements and intentions of the hostile Indians.

The remainder of the attacking party went out into the point of woods between us and the Yellowstone and set fire to our piles of wood which we had been all the fall accumulating. How I vainly fretted at the sight, and at my inability to prevent or punish them it boots not to tell. With 2 companies of well mounted men, I could not only have prevented all the mischief and punished the audacious offenders, but could have struck at them in their camp; a defeat in winter, in camp is destruction to them. I could have so destroyed their lodges and carried off or killed their horses, as would have crippled them in their raids for many a day. As it is, they are hovering round,

out of reach, watching for small parties or individuals, and so far from being alarmed they are simply cautious, and laugh to derision all the efforts of the soldiery to keep them quiet, or prevent their marauding excursions, whithersoever they choose to go.

This Post is situated very nearly the centre of a large area of country, which is a kind of neutral territory as it were, where all the Indians from every direction come to hunt, to trade, or more frequently, to fight. Hence the suggestion I had advanced, that a larger proportionate force is needed here than at other Posts not so unfavorably stationed.

The climate is remarkably healthful, being for the most part exceedingly dry. We have lost but one man by disease since we have come here and have had no other serious sickness.

Trusting this record of the post may meet your approbation and that you will overlook the length with which I have expressed my views.

To

gd. General Lorenzo Thomas
Jt. Genl. U. S. Army
Washington, D. C.

I remain General

Very respectfully

Your obdt. servt.

W. G. Rankin

Capt. 13 Inf. Bvt. Lt. Col. U. S. Army

Cmdg. Post