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Darrin F. Boehm

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"BILLY YANK" ON THE NORTHERN PLAINS:
THE LIVES OF UNION SOLDIERS
ON THE MINNESOTA-DAKOTA FRONTIER FROM
THE GREAT SIOUX UPRISING TO 1866

by

Darrin F. Boehm

Bachelor of Science, Valley City State College, 1989

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

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This thesis, submitted by Darrin F. Boehm in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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This thesis meets the standards for appearance and conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.

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And, last, to my father, Patrick Boehm, whose interest in history was the driving force in completion of this thesis.

ABSTRACT

This thesis will tell the generally forgotten story of the Civil War era soldiers on the Minnesota-Dakota frontier who fought in the Great Sioux Uprising from 1862 to 1865. It will also compare the frontier soldiers' campaign experience with the experiences of Bell Irvin Wiley's Civil War "Billy Yanks."

This thesis covers enlistment procedures, food, clothing, shelter, discipline, disease, boredom, combat, the "galvanized" Yankees, the Dakota landscape, and the role of the cavalry. This story of the frontier soldiers' expeditions against the Sioux on the northern plains is told using direct quotations from frontier soldiers' diaries and manuscripts, along with United States government records, the Fort Rice publication, *Frontier Scout*, and various secondary sources.

Most frontier "Billy Yanks" enlisted to fight in the Civil War; instead, they pursued the Sioux Indians across Dakota Territory on expeditions with generals Henry H. Sibley and Alfred T. Sully. In general, the experiences of these frontier soldiers were remarkably similar to those of Civil War soldiers. Subtle differences did exist, but for the most part, frontier soldiers shared common bonds with other Civil War era fighting men, such as life at military posts, boredom, and disease.

However, frontier soldiers experienced a pronounced difference from their Civil War comrades in the combat and landscape they faced, fighting Native Americans in the

INTRODUCTION

The major purpose of this thesis is to provide an intimate look into the lives of soldiers who fought the Native Americans on the northern plains during the Great Sioux Uprising from 1862 to 1865 and to compare the Western soldiers' campaign experience with those of Bell Irvin Wiley's Civil War "Billy Yanks" and "Johnny Rebs." Most of these Western "Billy Yanks" enlisted to fight in the Civil War; instead they pursued the Sioux across Dakota Territory on expeditions with generals Henry H. Sibley and Alfred T. Sully.

This thesis will tell the generally forgotten story of the Civil War era soldiers on the Minnesota-Dakota frontier. It will cover enlistment procedures, food, clothing, shelter, discipline, disease, boredom, combat, the "galvanized" Yankees, the Dakota landscape, the role of the cavalry, and the conclusion of the uprising. Direct quotations from soldiers' letters and diaries will allow them to express their own feelings.

There are over eighty thousand primary and secondary publications concerning the American Civil War. Most of these are diaries, letters, and manuscripts.¹ With three million Americans in the armies of North and South, a flood of personal recollections streamed forth, both during the Civil War and after.² The Great Sioux Uprising, 1862-1865, leaves a smaller, but still substantial store of soldiers' personal writings.

Bell Irvin Wiley's two studies of the common soldiers of the North and South, *The Life of Billy Yank* and *The Life of Johnny Reb*, originally published in 1952 and 1943, respectively, have become the standard source for historians interested in the lives of the common men who fought in the conflict that pitted brother against brother.³ When he wrote these books fifty years ago, Wiley researched manuscripts and unpublished writings of Northern and Southern soldiers. He had to be selective because of the large number of documents, so many primary unpublished sources were given only cursory treatment or were omitted altogether.⁴

In 1989, James I. Robertson published *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, which provided a new look at common soldiers in the Confederacy and Union. Robertson studied sources overlooked by Wiley, most notably regimental histories and collections of primary material issued by the Southern Historical Society and Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (MOLLUS).⁵ Robertson also made use of materials uncovered since Wiley published his work. *Soldiers Blue and Gray* provides background for the lives of common soldiers of the Civil War era. Through the use of letters and diaries, Robertson describes the routine of army life, the fighting, the daily struggle with boredom, and the presence of sickness and death on and off the battlefield. But soldiers on the northern plains are conspicuous by their absence, even though the Great Sioux Uprising was fought during the Civil War. Perhaps the soldiers in the Civil War are more romantic because they are part of our great national epic, but the soldiers who tramped across Dakota Territory at the same time are no less worthy of attention.

The campaigns of General Henry H. Sibley in 1863 and General Alfred T. Sully in 1864 stretched from eastern Minnesota to western Dakota Territory. The thoughts, reflections, and personal stories of these Northern soldiers are remarkably similar to those of the Union soldiers who fought in the Civil War. Most of them were from Minnesota and Iowa, but others were from Wisconsin, and by the end of 1866 they included soldiers raised in Dakota Territory and even former Confederate soldiers — the famous “galvanized” Yankees. Many of Sully’s “Billy Yanks” did in fact, fight against the Confederacy after the battle against the Sioux was won.

The hardship, boredom, fatigue, and death suffered by Civil War soldiers were also experienced by Western “Billy Yanks.” Yet, the personal reflections of these Union soldiers have a marked difference in several respects. For example, the cavalry played a greater role in the pursuit of an elusive and daring enemy in the Sioux Uprising than in the Civil War. The Sioux were remarkable horsemen, and the brunt of the Sully campaigns was borne by cavalry. The cavalry played an important role in the Civil War also, but served mainly as scouts, raiders, and mounted infantry. During their expeditions against the Sioux, General Sully’s force consisted mainly of cavalry.

The Civil War is a watershed event in American history. The 1850s had been a decade of distrust between the North and South, as Southerners accused the North of disobeying both the Constitution and established statutes. Northerners branded the South a “slave power,” in which a few large slaveholders prospered through the labor of black slaves.⁶ With the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860, the Deep South felt alienated from the rest of the nation. On 12 April 1861, Fort Sumter fell to South Carolina militia.

The first shot of the Civil War was fired and seven of thirty-three states had already seceded. All seven were in the Deep South: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas. Soon after Fort Sumter fell, the Confederate States of America were joined by Arkansas, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

While the common Civil War Yankee thought the Southerners started the war, the common Western Yankee thought the Native Americans started the war in Minnesota and Dakota. While many federal Civil War soldiers came from the city, almost all of their Western counterparts came from the farm. Whatever their differences and similarities, the Union enlistees clamored to fight for their country. As Robertson put it, “they were going off to war in enthusiastic expectations — in quest of excitement and accomplishment — never slowed down by any thoughts that war contains hardships and sufferings, and that soldiers often die.”⁷ The Western Yankees who fought in the Sioux Uprising were less enthusiastic about their mission, but no less ignorant about the experience of combat. Both Civil War and Western Yankees compared each other’s experiences; for example, one Yankee soldier engaged in battle in Virginia, late in the war, described Southerners as being “cover-conscious” like “the Red Skins of old.”⁸

There were parallels and there were differences; the hypothesis of this study is that the Western soldier may have fought in a different climate against a different enemy than his counterpart in the South, but his daily life — its boredom, danger, and fatigue — was much the same.

Notes

1. James I. Robertson, Jr., *Soldiers Blue and Gray* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), vii.
2. Ibid.
3. Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952); Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943).
4. Robertson, vii.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 3.
7. Ibid., 18.
8. Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank*, 349.

CHAPTER I

THE GREAT SIOUX UPRISING

As historian Kenneth Carley noted in his well-known history of the Sioux Uprising, “The Civil War had drained Minnesota’s energies and manpower for 16 months when in August, 1862, the four-year-old state became embroiled in a second war within a war in its own backyard.”¹ In the summer of 1862, the Sioux Indians attacked settlements at Acton, the Upper Sioux Agency, Lower Sioux Agency, Redwood Ferry, New Ulm, Fort Ridgely, Lake Shetek, West Lake, Birch Coulee, Fort Abercrombie, Forest City, Hutchinson, and Wood Lake. The attacks were led by Sioux Chief Little Crow. Before the bloodshed could be stopped, over 650 and possibly 850 settlers and soldiers were killed. The Sioux did not quit fighting permanently until 1890.

President Abraham Lincoln labeled the Great Sioux Uprising one of the nation’s top priorities and hoped to get at the root causes. “If we get through this war [the Civil War], and I live,” said Lincoln, “this Indian system shall be reformed.”² Lincoln did not live to see that day, but he did experience the frustration of having to fight a second war that distracted from the first.

By 19 August 1862, 350 people had been killed in Minnesota. Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune* called the uprising a “Confederate Conspiracy,” implying that the South had encouraged the Sioux.³ This was not so; nevertheless, the Civil War had a

definite effect. Some historians believe that Confederate victories in 1862 had convinced many Native Americans that the United States government was susceptible to defeat.⁴ Their quick strike tactics, the Native Americans believed, would enable them to fight successfully against the white man's makeshift defense.⁵ After all, most of the volunteer soldiers of Minnesota were off fighting the Civil War. Although Confederates were only interested observers, they had the effect of helping the Sioux cause because they tied up Union soldiers who might otherwise fight Native Americans. The Sioux jumped at the opportunity to inflict damage on the Minnesota frontier, in part as a repayment for mistreatment by the United States government before the war.

In July of 1851, the Sioux were left with two reservations: the Yellow Medicine Reservation (the Upper Agency) and the Redwood Reservation (the Lower Agency); the reservations were 1,400 square miles combined. Although 1851 treaties, signed at Traverse des Sioux and Mendota, called for cash payments to the Native Americans, little cash was ever received.⁶ Traders' claims were the main reason that the Sioux did not receive their payments. The immediate cause of the 1862 conflict, however, was a crisis of subsistence. The Sioux were hungry in 1862, because crops had failed in the fall of 1861 and starvation followed during the winter of 1861-62; in addition, in the summer of 1862, the cash annuities usually received in June were tardy and did not arrive until the middle of August.

The Native Americans who struck first in Minnesota were the Santee Sioux and their four subgroups: the Mdewakaton, Wahpekate, Sisseton, and Wahpeton. Starvation, withheld cash and annuity payments, and termination of credit by traders, along with the

severe winter of 1861-62, led to an increase of tension between the Native Americans and whites. Then, on 17 August 1862, four Wahpeton Sioux were returning from a deer hunt north of the Minnesota River, when they came upon the town of Acton. One of the Sioux stole some eggs from a white settler named Jones. Another of the four said that taking the eggs would get all of them in trouble. The Native American who took the hen's eggs then called the latter a coward. To prove that he was no coward, the Wahpeton youth threatened to go to the house and shoot Jones.⁷ The four went to the house and challenged Jones and other white settlers to a target-shooting contest. "After firing at a mark fastened to a tree, the Indians reloaded their guns, but the white men neglected to take this precaution."⁸ The Native Americans then shot the four whites involved in the contest, and another as well, starting the 1862 uprising.⁹

The attack on white settlers by the four Wahpeton youth was sure to provide punishment of the Santee by United States troops. Little Crow, who was the leader of the Santee Sioux, was opposed to a conflict at first, but, afraid of losing his authority, he agreed to lead the uprising.¹⁰ The Sioux then attacked the Upper and Lower Agencies and settlements at Redwood Ferry on 18 August. They attacked New Ulm the next day, and Fort Ridgely, Lake Shetek, and West Lake settlements the day after that. The main attack on Fort Ridgely came on 22 August 1862. Fort Ridgely was a United States Army post established in 1853 in the northwest corner of Nicollet County, where the Sioux could be watched.¹¹

Fort Ridgely managed to hold out until 27 August 1862, when Colonel Henry H. Sibley arrived with reinforcements. Colonel Sibley was appointed by Governor Alexander

Ramsey to command the volunteer soldiers who fought the Sioux; they had been friendly political rivals.¹² Sibley had been a fur trader, and he knew the Sioux language and customs. Despite his extensive frontier experience, he had no military experience; he learned quickly. For example, he lost nineteen soldiers on the march to reinforce Fort Ridgely, which taught him that his volunteer troops needed more training and that he needed more cavalry when pursuing mounted Native Americans.¹³

On 23 August 1862, the Sioux turned their attention once again to New Ulm, where they made a second attack. They then fought the Battle of Birch Coulee on 2 September 1862, followed by attacks on Acton and Fort Abercrombie on 3 September. The next day brought attacks on Forest City and Hutchinson, followed two days later by a second attack on Fort Abercrombie. These lightning strikes were made possible by the horsemanship of the attackers, so Governor Ramsey asked President Lincoln for 500 horses to pursue the elusive Sioux. Lincoln was hesitant to spare so many animals when his first priority was fighting the Civil War, but Governor Ramsey stressed the importance of the Sioux War, calling it "a national war."¹⁴ President Lincoln's response was to create the Military Department of the Northwest, headquartered in St. Paul, Minnesota. This command was given to Major General John Pope on 16 September 1862.¹⁵ Pope was fresh from a crushing defeat in Virginia and could easily be spared, but Pope also had extensive military experience and proved an able commander of the new department.

Shortly after the creation of Pope's command, Sibley offered to negotiate a peace settlement with Little Crow, but only after all prisoners were released. Chief Little Crow

showed interest, but no agreement was reached. Sibley then set out with 1,619 men to look for captives held by the Sioux. He made camp on the Upper Agency; Little Crow had set a trap there, but it was discovered before it was sprung.¹⁶ This was followed by the Battle of Wood Lake on 23 September 1862. Sibley's troops scattered Little Crow's warriors, who fled to Canada and eastern Dakota Territory. Sibley did not pursue the Native Americans because of a lack of cavalry.¹⁷

By October of 1862, over 2,100 Native Americans were rounded up in eastern Minnesota by Sibley's troops. A five-man military commission was set up to try the Sioux involved in the uprising. The trials concluded on 5 November 1862, when 307 Native Americans and mixed-bloods were sentenced to be hanged. The list of those sentenced to death was cut down to 303 before the results were sent to President Lincoln. The executions were delayed by Lincoln, so that the cases could be examined individually, and on 6 December 1862, Lincoln approved the death sentences for thirty-nine of the convicted Sioux.¹⁸ The death sentence of the thirty-ninth was commuted by Lincoln shortly before the execution, due to his accusers' youth. Most Minnesotans were enraged at Lincoln's deliberation and mercy. On 26 December 1862, thirty-eight Sioux and half-breeds were executed in Mankato by hanging. This hanging was the largest public mass execution in American history.¹⁹

The executions seemed to mark the end of the Indian campaigns in Minnesota, and as early as 22 October 1862, Governor Ramsey of Minnesota "informed President Lincoln that the conflict was virtually closed."²⁰

Although the threat of more violence in Minnesota was small, Governor Ramsey and General Pope decided not to withdraw all their troops from the frontier. For the time being, the only regiment sent south to fight the Confederates after the executions at Mankato was the Third Minnesota. Five Minnesota regiments remained “to restore confidence to a people panic-stricken by the awful outrages but recently perpetrated by the Sioux,” according to Pope.²¹ These remaining five regiments were the Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth. Sibley was the commander of the Minnesota Military District, and he distributed his five regiments among five forts: Fort Snelling, Mankato, Fort Ripley, Fort Ridgely, and Le Sueur. Other companies were scattered from Fort Abercrombie east and south to the Iowa border. The purpose of these garrisons was to protect white settlers from any further Native American raids and to prevent any large concentration of Sioux from gathering in Minnesota.

Most Wisconsin regiments were soon sent south to fight the Civil War, but the Thirtieth Wisconsin Infantry remained to shore up defense against the Sioux.²² The Sioux now roamed the Dakota Territory in large numbers, approximately 450 Lower Sioux and 5,000 Upper Sioux.²³ The Native Americans fled to Dakota Territory, because they felt that the soldiers and United States government would not be able to protect them if they surrendered to Sibley. The previous year’s fighting in Minnesota and the continuing Civil War were reasons for treaty abrogation and relocation of the Sioux to areas outside Minnesota. In February and March of 1862, Congress ordered the removal of the Santee Sioux from Minnesota.²⁴ About 3,300 Native Americans were relocated on the Missouri River in present-day South Dakota at Crow Creek. Of the Native Americans relocated,

2,000 were Winnebago, 1,300 were Santee Sioux,²⁵ and 1,100 were Yanktonai and Yankton Sioux. Crow Creek was little more than grassland, with no shelter or forage

By themselves, the Winnebago and Santee could only threaten the white population with a limited force. However, the possibility of a combined Sioux force, including the Teton Sioux of the Missouri River Valley, could add considerable threat to the white population. Pope feared just such a combination under the leadership of Little Crow. His fears were increased by a series of killings by Santee Sioux on the Minnesota frontier in early 1863.

Pope planned to end settlers' fears by driving the Sioux farther into Dakota Territory and punishing those still unpunished for their part in the 1862 uprising. He drew up plans to send in a "two-pronged punitive expedition in Dakota Territory."²⁶ One column of infantry numbering three thousand was headed by Sibley. It would march northwest from Fort Ridgely on the Minnesota River to push the Native Americans westward from Devils Lake and eastern Dakota to the Missouri River. The second column, made up of 1,200 cavalry and headed by General Alfred Sully, would travel the Missouri River Valley from Fort Randall, moving north to neutralize the Teton Sioux and to trap the Santee, Yankton, and Yanktonai Sioux forced west by Sibley. The two columns were to meet at the Missouri River at what is now Bismarck, North Dakota.²⁷

Sibley was prepared for the campaign in June of 1863; the regiments involved in his command were the Sixth, Seventh, and Tenth Minnesota Volunteers, along with the First Minnesota Rangers (mounted) and the Third Battery of Light Artillery.²⁸ All of these men had expected to fight rebels, not Native Americans, but they accepted their duty

because the latter threatened their homes; the Confederates did not. Sibley also employed over 65 scouts, most of whom were Native Americans, along with roughly one hundred men from the Ninth Minnesota. The Eighth Minnesota garrisoned forts from Fort Abercrombie to Sauk Centre and St. Cloud.

On 16 June, Sibley's force left Fort Ridgely and marched to a camp southeast of Devils Lake,²⁹ and from there he pursued the Sioux toward the Missouri River with 2,300 men.³⁰ Four days after departure, Sibley engaged the Native Americans in what is now Kidder County in North Dakota at the Battle of Big Mound. The Native Americans, who numbered 1,600, were routed there and at two subsequent battles at Dead Buffalo Lake on 26 July and 28 July, while only one soldier was killed.³¹ The Sioux fled to the west bank of the Missouri River. On 29 July 1863, Sibley reached the eastern bank at present-day Bismarck, North Dakota, and waited there for Sully. When Sully did not arrive, Sibley returned to Fort Snelling.³²

Sully's 1863 expedition was supplied from Sioux City, Iowa, and started from Fort Randall in present-day South Dakota. His column was made up of the Sixth and Seventh Iowa Cavalry, the Second Nebraska Cavalry, and a battery of light artillery.³³ He moved by steamboat, but because of low water in the Missouri River, his progress was slow. He finally arrived in the Bismarck area on the twenty-seventh of August. He learned that Sibley had already returned to Minnesota, so he turned to the southeast and followed the James River to Whitestone Hill. There he found a large party of Native Americans breaking camp, and he ordered a cavalry charge. The Battle of Whitestone Hill, which took place northeast of present-day Ashley, North Dakota, was a smashing

victory for Sully. The Native Americans were driven into a ravine, where many escaped after darkness, but roughly two hundred Sioux, including women and children, were killed and one hundred fifty were taken prisoner.³⁴ Sully's losses were twenty killed and thirty-eight wounded. Sully then returned to his base camp on the Missouri River with 158 prisoners.

The campaign of 1863 never fulfilled its purpose. Lincoln pressed Pope to make new treaties with the Sioux, but raids by the Native Americans continued.³⁵ The Santee Sioux population remained at large and, therefore, a threat to the people of Minnesota. Now, more Sioux were involved in the fight, the Santee having been joined not only by the Yankton and the Yanktonai, but also by the Teton, Hunkpapas, and the Oglala.

Sully led another expedition into Dakota Territory in 1864 to build four forts to "dominate Indian country, three of which were to be on the line of the trail to gold regions in the Northern Rockies." He also hoped to check the movement of the Sioux back to the eastern Dakota plains and the western Minnesota frontier and thus prevent another massacre such as the one of 1862 in Minnesota.³⁶

Sully's 1864 expedition consisted of two brigades. The First Brigade included three companies of the Sixth Iowa Cavalry, two companies of the Seventh Iowa Cavalry, four companies of Brackett's Battalion of Minnesota Cavalry, the entire Thirtieth Wisconsin Infantry, two companies of the First Battalion of Dakota Cavalry, and the Prairie Battery. The Second Brigade consisted of the Eighth Minnesota Infantry (mounted), six companies of the Second Minnesota Cavalry, two sections of the Third Minnesota Artillery, and one company of Native American scouts, numbering 68 men.

One hundred and six wagons and twelve ambulances, all mule drawn, accompanied the column, which was entirely a mounted force.³⁷

The Minnesota Brigade had the added task of escorting a group of gold-seekers to the Yellowstone River in Montana, again a duty that was a far cry from fighting Confederates. The expedition moved out of Fort Ridgely on 5 June 1864, reached Swan Lake on 28 June, and joined the First Brigade. Construction of the first of four forts was started immediately. Fort Rice was erected in nineteen days just south of present-day Bismarck. The fort was later garrisoned by “galvanized Yankees,” Southern prisoners of war who volunteered their services to fight Native Americans in exchange for release from Northern prisons. Fort Wadsworth was the second fort erected, but the other two forts were not built, due to insufficient wood supply.

Leaving a contingent to complete the fort, Sully led his remaining force to western Dakota Territory.³⁸ On 25 July, Sully’s expedition reached the mouth of the Heart River. There he left Captain Tripp of the Dakota Cavalry to guard a newly erected camp, plus the emigrant train. The next day he made a forced march, covering 80 miles in 43 hours, north to a Native American encampment at Killdeer Mountain southeast of present-day Watford City.³⁹ Sully found 1,600 lodges, inhabited by Hunkpapa, San Arc, and Teton, as well as Yanktonai and Santee Sioux.

Sully’s forces were prevented from making a cavalry charge by the broken terrain that surrounded Killdeer Mountain. The Sioux women and children delayed their withdrawal from the encampment, as did the Sioux warriors, who were apparently confident of victory. Sully’s men dismounted and formed a “huge square” with sides over

a mile long, and placed the horses and artillery in the center of their lines.⁴⁰ The Sioux attacked from all sides, but the soldiers held their positions, and the Native Americans withdrew to the wooded ravine to allow time for their women and children to escape. Sully then charged toward the wooded ravine prior to sunset and forced a Sioux withdrawal. The well-equipped soldiers overwhelmed the smaller number of Sioux. Sully lost five men killed and ten wounded. He claimed to have killed about 150 Sioux. Sully then escorted the emigrant train through the Badlands, garrisoned Fort Union, returned to Fort Rice, and, on 8 October 1864, returned to Fort Ridgely after marching over 1,600 miles. Further marches were made into Dakota Territory by the military in 1865, but no Sioux were encountered.

Pope's planned expeditions in 1865 were canceled. The government's problems with Dakota Territory and in the state of Minnesota had blended with, and were compounded by, difficulties with other tribes in the western United States. The problems with the Native American system, which Lincoln had wanted to reform but did not live long enough to change, caused the uprising in Minnesota. These difficulties with western tribes were aggravated by the Civil War and made the entire plains a battleground of that war. But it was an unexpected battleground, and soldiers who expected to fight Confederates in the South found themselves facing Native Americans on the Plains. What sort of military life did they experience, and was any different from "Billy Yank" in the South?

Notes

1. Kenneth Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1976), 1.
2. Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *The Civil War: War on the Frontier: The Trans-Mississippi West* (Alexandria, Va.: Time Incorporated, 1986), 72.
3. *Ibid.*, 74.
4. *Ibid.*, 75.
5. *Ibid.*, 74.
6. Louis H. Roddis, *The Indian Wars of Minnesota* (Cedar Rapids, Ia.: The Torch Press, 1956), 54.
7. Josephy, 78.
8. Carley, 8.
9. *Ibid.*, 9.
10. *Ibid.*, 10.
11. Paul Francis Prucha, *A Guide to the Military Posts of the United States 1789-1895* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1964), 102
12. Josephy, 84.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. Oscar Garrett Wall, *Recollections of the Sioux Massacre* (Lake City, Mn.: Home Printery, 1908), 135.
17. Josephy, 88.
18. Carley, 72.
19. *Ibid.*

20. Ibid., 87.

21. Ibid.

22. Frederick Henry Dyer, *Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (Des Moines: The Dyer Publishing Company, 1908; reprinted New York: National Historical Society, 1979), 1686.

23. Roddis, 197-198.

24. Josephy, 91.

25. Ibid.

26. Carley, 88.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 89.

29. Wall, 244.

30. Carley, 89.

31. Ibid., 90.

32. Ibid., 91.

33. Roddis, 205.

34. Josephy, 94.

35. Ibid., 95.

36. Roddis, 246.

37. Carley, 91.

38. Josephy, 98.

39. Carley, 91.

40. Josephy, 98.

CHAPTER II

ENLISTMENT AND MUSTERING IN

In 1861, 1862, and 1863, young men from Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin enlisted in the volunteer army in hope of fighting Confederates. Although there were one million men in the Union Army at its height in 1865, manpower was critical when the Sioux Uprising of 1862 created a need for soldiers in Minnesota and the Dakota Territory. Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin had already contributed heavily to Union troop strength by the time of the Uprising, but in 1862 newly formed regiments of Minnesotans were mustered in to fight Confederates and were sent to fight Native Americans instead. Most Western Billy Yanks believed that Native Americans existed outside the mainstream of American society. As an officer of the Eighth Minnesota Infantry, Major B. W. Brunson put it: "Mr. Indian acquired our immediate attention, but [was not] the country's larger concern."¹ During the American Civil War and the Great Sioux Uprising, both the Union soldiers and the Sioux believed the government had become the tool for the other side. Native Americans believed the government was attempting to starve them. Western Union soldiers believed they were only to be used against the uprising on the frontier. Hesitantly, they took up arms in what they considered a fringe conflict to the Civil War. One soldier assigned to frontier duty, Leonard Aldrich of the Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, stated to his brother and sister in October of 1862, "I expected to have gone

South long before this, but just as I was completing the company organization, this Indian trouble broke out”² The U.S. government now had to turn its attention to the frontier.

The total strength of the Union Army prior to the Civil War and the Sioux Uprising numbered sixteen thousand, mostly scattered throughout the West. This frontier force was insufficient to meet even the Indian threat, let alone the Civil War. The largest inducement to fight for most frontier volunteers was state pride. Bounties for enlistment were generally nonexistent early in the war, but were frequently offered by 1862. Enlistment for the purpose of defending the Constitution and for love of one’s country were also inducements for frontier Billy Yanks. Like their eastern counterparts, frontier soldiers overwhelmingly enlisted because of “enthusiasm so prevalent over the Northwest in 1862”; Midwesterners were fighting for the Federal Cause.³ As one soldier, Private Frank Myers of the Sixth Iowa Cavalry, put it, he enlisted to “tender my services and musket to the Federal Cause.”⁴ Another soldier, Leonard Aldrich, enlisted to “do my part in securing a rebel defeat.”⁵

The first companies of U.S. volunteers were under state jurisdiction. Once mustered into state service, companies were organized by regiment. Union muster rolls show over 109 different occupations of federal soldiers on the frontier, but nearly eighty-five percent of them were farmers.

The prospect of fighting Indians on the northern plains came as a disappointment to frontier soldiers who had enlisted in 1862 and 1863. Soldiers who had enlisted in 1864 had a more resigned attitude toward the Indian campaigns. Merrill G. Dwelle, a member of the Third Minnesota Light Artillery, noted that “the boys who joined up [in 1864]

seemed to do so with scant convictions.”⁶ By the summer of 1862, the Sioux Uprising had broken out in Minnesota, eastern Dakota Territory, and northwestern Iowa. By the spring of 1863, most frontier regiments knew their battle would be confined to the northern plains, but these Western Billy Yanks were disappointed that they could not “seek glory on the fields in the South.”⁷ But some Western Billy Yanks preferred the climate of the North to the climate of the South,⁸ and some were even so bold as to state that they preferred the prospect of fighting Indians, because they would fight in a climate “preferable to the malaria-laden swamps of the South.”⁹

The few soldiers from Dakota Territory were mostly enlisted at Yankton, Dakota Territory. Most Iowans were organized in Davenport, Dubuque, and Keokuk,¹⁰ and frontier soldiers from Wisconsin were mustered predominately in Madison.¹¹ Minnesota Volunteers were mustered at Fort Snelling, Fort Ripley, St. Cloud, and St. Peter. Enlistments ranged from one to three years. The majority of Western soldiers served two and one-half years.¹² In addition, in the autumn of 1864, the first regiment of United States Volunteers, or “Galvanized Yankees,” was organized by the Union for duty at western posts.¹³ These men spent a harsh winter at Fort Rice. They were harassed by the Sioux, decimated by disease, and numbed by the northern plains climate.

The typical Western Billy Yanks who enlisted during the Sioux Uprising were remarkably similar to their eastern counterparts. The majority were volunteers from eighteen to twenty-seven years of age with farming backgrounds. Most Western Billy Yanks were volunteer soldiers. They were recruited mainly through mass meetings and rallies. State pride was a common reason for enlisting. Other reasons for enlisting were

similar to those given by Eastern Yankees: political persuasion, because it was the proper thing to do, adventure, freedom, or the \$13 a month. Western Yanks who were immigrants often enlisted (as their eastern counterparts did) to help preserve the Union so democracy as an institution would survive. John Henry Strong, a member of the Eighth Minnesota Volunteers, stated that “there is scarcely a man enlisted who knows our Constitution but all know freedom.”¹⁴ Strong came from an immigrant family that settled in New Hampshire, and many of his reflections speak to the differences between European and American politics.

Some Western Billy Yanks who served during the Sioux Uprising went on to serve in the South in 1865 and 1866. The Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry, for example, was organized at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, from 5 December 1863 to 5 January 1864.¹⁵ It was on duty at Fort Snelling and at garrisons on the Minnesota frontier until May of 1864. But, after taking part in Sully’s expedition of 1864, many of these soldiers saw duty in Tennessee in 1865.¹⁶

In 1862 and 1863, most frontier Union soldiers shared the excitable sentiment of their eastern counterparts. Although disappointed with their assignment, most still felt they were contributing to the Civil War effort, which some of them justified by hinting at a Confederate conspiracy behind the Sioux Uprising. Captain Leonard Aldrich, who was originally from Vermont, put it casually that “our southern neighbors and Mr. Indian have similar sentiments about democracy.”¹⁷ By 1864, the elusiveness of the Sioux and the boredom on the Indian campaigns lessened enthusiasm, but not effort. Describing the

difficulty in fighting the Sioux, Aldrich said, "This seemed like sending an elephant to catch a fly."¹⁸

The persuasions used to recruit Western Billy Yanks were not unlike the persuasions that were used to entice their eastern counterparts, which is to be expected, because these soldiers were enlisting to fight in the Civil War, not the Sioux Uprising. Mass meetings were the common way for recruiters to capitalize on the enthusiasm for the war, and a number of Western Billy Yanks had been attached to organized militia units prior to their enlistments. Troops raised for the campaigns against the Sioux were mostly volunteers. Generally, community leaders such as mayors, law enforcement leaders, and businessmen were important in raising companies. Religious leaders and college professors also took a role in bringing western Union soldiers into the ranks.¹⁹

The process of volunteering and mustering into the service included a routine physical and swearing in. Most military physicals included verification of age and a token checkup. Andrew Fisk, Second Minnesota Cavalry, described his enlistment prior to his eighteenth birthday and the words of his examining physician. "'Young Man,' he said, 'how old are you?' 'Eighteen,' I replied. 'I think you are a liar, but you are a good chunk of a boy and I'll pass you.'"²⁰ Fisk promptly became a soldier in Uncle Sam's army. This was a common occurrence in the frontier army.

Once the soldiers were in camp, rumor abounded as to the duty that each regiment would be assigned. As already stated, many felt their duty would be in the South, and most frontier soldiers openly stated their preference to go south to fight. "Received order to march to Fort Snelling immediately, to go to New Orleans,"²¹ were Andrew Fisk's first

orders, received in his camp of rendezvous. Three days later he received news that “the report is now that we are not going south.”²² George W. Doud of Company F, Eighth Minnesota Infantry, was stationed at Camp Ridgely in late May 1864. “Supply train arrives from Snelling of one hundred wagons, all sorts of rumors, one is that the Indian expedition is thrown up.”²³ Doud speculated that the Sixth Minnesota would go south, and the Eighth would follow, but concluded, “None [no rumor] from a reliable source.”²⁴ Although speculation about Civil War duty in the South was commonplace, many Minnesota soldiers came to expect that they would serve on the frontier. Although they preferred duty in the South, they believed they would actually serve on the frontier even before their orders were finalized: “My opinion is we will go on the plains . . . for ev[e]ry preparation is being made.”²⁵

Most frontier soldiers volunteered and were organized into units of their own choosing. Some, like Private Frank Myers of the Sixth Iowa Cavalry, refused to join a German company because most of the men could not speak English; he asked for a transfer because he believed that as a volunteer, he should have the right to choose the unit in which he served.²⁶

Frontier soldiers generally accepted their duty against the Sioux without much hesitation, although, like their Civil War counterparts, they were skeptical as to the reasons for the fight. Many frontier soldiers believed the “government had done a great deal for the Indians in the way of improvements, building houses, fencing and opening fields, [and] their houses were of brick.”²⁷ It was difficult to understand why the Sioux would attack, when their situation seemed better than their previous condition. Constant

criticisms of the hierarchy of the government and its actions were commonplace in the reflections of both Civil War soldiers and frontier soldiers. More than one frontier soldier initially thought the war against the Sioux, and frontier duty itself, was at best secondary to the Civil War. "This whole thing is a confound-humbug, calculated to give command to a few men that could not get one if this expedition did not continue and a few speculators could not make money enough without it," wrote Leonard Aldrich.²⁸

The reflections of frontier soldiers changed greatly between the time of enlistment and mustering in and their assignment to duty on the frontier. Feelings went from Civil War excitement to frontier disappointment. In turn, attitudes again changed from the beginning of the frontier campaigns to the end. When the campaigns began, frontier soldiers were uncertain of their mission and of the ability of the government and army to carry it out. Catching Indians was a greater problem than fighting them, in the estimation of some. Leonard Aldrich stated that trying to find the Indians was "like going to the place where a rainbow came to earth, I don't believe we shall be able to find any that will fight."²⁹

Most frontier soldiers had enlisted to fight in the Civil War and were enthusiastic in their expectations. They were not thinking that war contains hardships or suffering, but knew that their task was great.

Notes

1. Benjamin W. Brunson, Sergeant, Company K, Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, entry for 10 October 1862, Diary 1862-1865, TMs (original), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
2. Leonard Aldrich, Captain, Company F, Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, Letter to brother, 8 October 1862, Diary and Letters 1862-1866, TMs and LS (photocopy), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
3. Ibid., Letter to brother, 12 June 1862.
4. Frank Myers, *Soldering in Dakota, Among the Indians, in 1863--4-5* (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 3.
5. Aldrich, Letter to brother, 12 June 1862.
6. Merrill G. Dwelle, Private, Third Minnesota Light Artillery, Letter dated 13 January 1863, Letters, 1862-1866, Papers, 1864-1865, LS (photocopy), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
7. Myers, 4.
8. Edwin Washburn, Private, Company D, Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, Diary, entry for 16 February 1864, Papers, 1864-1865, TMs (photocopy), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
9. Myers, 4.
10. Frederick Henry Dyer, *Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (Des Moines: The Dyer Publishing Company, 1908; reprinted New York: National Historical Society, 1979), 3:1016, 1158-1180.
11. Ibid., 1666-1689.
12. Ibid., 1162, 1163, 1293-1295, 1298-1300, 1345, 1686, 1717.
13. Ibid., 1717.
14. John Henry Strong, Private, Company F, Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, Diary, 28 May 1864, Diary, 1862-1865, TMs (photocopy), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
15. Dyer, 1293-1294.

16. Ibid.
17. Aldrich, Letter to brother, 12 June 1862.
18. Ibid., Letter, 8 October 1862.
19. Ibid.
20. Andrew Fisk, Private, Company A, Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry, Diary Preface, Diary, 1864-1865, TMs (photocopy), Minnesota State Historical Society, Saint Paul.
21. Ibid., 19 February 1864.
22. Ibid., 23 February 1864.
23. George W. Doud, Private, Company F, Eighth Minnesota Infantry, Diary, 31 May 1864, Diary, 1862-1864, TMs (original), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., 2 June 1864.
26. Myers, 3.
27. Aldrich, Letter to brother, 12 June 1862.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.

CHAPTER III

CAMP LIFE: FOOD, CLOTHING, AND SHELTER, LOVED ONES, BOREDOM, HARDSHIP, AND DISEASE

In service to their country, Union soldiers in the West would spend more time in camp than in campaigns and battle combined. The camp, whether on the frontier or in the South, was the place where Civil War era soldiers made the transition from citizen to soldier. Sometimes this was the camp at which the soldier was mustered in, but often the stay at this camp was so brief that he did not become a real soldier until he reached the next camp on his first campaign. In either case, the frontier Billy Yanks shared basically the same experience as their Civil War colleagues. The food, clothing, and shelter of the frontier soldier were remarkably similar to those of his Civil War counterparts.

One frontier soldier from Iowa, Peter Wilson, described army life as “very agreeable,”¹ and most frontier soldiers early in their enlistments seem to have been of the same opinion. However, active campaigning was generally preferred to boring life at frontier posts. A Minnesota soldier was pleased when “my regt., the Eighth had been ordered to cross the plains and join[ed] General Alfred Sully in his expedition against the Indians. I preferred the active duty in the field”² But frontier Billy Yanks spent a majority of their service time pulling garrison duty at small frontier posts. The differences

between these soldiers and those in the South in regard to food, clothing, and shelter were minimal.

Both Civil War and frontier soldiers supplemented their diets by foraging.

Frontier soldiers, however, had a greater abundance of and more opportunity to hunt wild game. Vast numbers of buffalo, antelope, deer, rabbits, and water fowl afforded frontier soldiers variety in their diet. The wide, open space of the northern plains and the constant movement of the Sioux gave soldiers ample opportunity to hunt a diverse mix of animals. Although the advantages of campaigning in the northern plains were few, the diet was a frontier soldier's pleasure. Food at garrisons west or south was bland and typically consisted of hardtack, bacon, baked beans, and coffee. But on the frontier, some relief from this uninteresting diet came from large amounts of wild game. On the campaigns through Dakota Territory soldiers found abundant buffalo, elk, and other game. The regulation rations of hardtack, bacon, and coffee were staples. Frontier soldiers were often amazed at their encounters with the animals of the northern plains. "Saw signs of elk and grizzly bear plenty. . . . Prairie chicken for breakfast," stated James Benton Atkinson on Sully's 1864 campaign.³ Andrew Fisk of the Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry "saw buffalo to the number of thirty or forty thousand at one time — they were so thick that the ground was scarcely visible, and this for a distance up and down the valley before us of many miles — as far as the eye could reach."⁴

Fisk and other soldiers on the Sully campaign often hunted buffalo. Fisk's account demonstrated the exhilaration and danger of hunting the large animals. "Polson and I went buffalo hunting, on foot. I wounded a bull and he turned and made for me. He kept

me dod[g]ing him for some little time. Assistance finally came in the shape of some Iowa soldiers, and the bull was killed. It was no fun for awhile."⁵ Besides wild game, campaigning soldiers supplemented their diet with wild berries, molasses, honey, and fish. Fishing was a common pastime for soldiers on the campaign trail or in frontier garrisons. Andrew Fisk "went fishing in the Minnesota River" and "caught a fish that weighed four pounds."⁶ The predominant drink of frontier soldiers was water. On furlough and special occasions, beer was the drink of choice, but on campaign whiskey was issued to the men,⁷ because "they say it neutralizes the bad effects of the alkali in the water."⁸

Civil War soldiers and frontier soldiers spent a great deal of time writing about the food they ate and the clothes they wore, and there was a great deal of difference between camp life and campaigning. The soldiers' experiences with food, clothing, and shelter were similar, even when comparing their experiences with home. As Private Frank Myers of the Sixth Iowa Cavalry explained:

We began getting things ready for winter with Major House in command. We were issued flour instead of hardtack, but had considerable trouble in finding anyone to bake for us. Finally I was induced to take hold of the bakery department and had much better luck than I expected. The boys had a good deal of sport over one batch of bread I made. They said they would use the loaves for cannon balls to kill Indians. But then we were soldiering and did not expect things as elegant as when at home.⁹

Often, the soldiers on campaign or near frontier settlements would buy food stuffs from settlers. In one particular instance, members of the Second Minnesota Cavalry on Sully's 1864 campaign were delighted that they were able to buy "some dried apple pies, paying 50 cents apiece for them."¹⁰ The price of sutlers' goods was expensive; the

aforementioned pies at 50 cents apiece were no bargain, as Private Fisk complained, "but they were pies and tasted good."¹¹ For the most part, food was abundant for all Union soldiers and, in comparison to European armies, even generous. The Union Army of the Potomac had an allowance of food one-fifth greater than the British army and two times greater than the French army.¹² Not until late 1862 and early 1863 did the Union Army suffer from a food shortage, due to officers not being acquainted with supply procedures, the rapid movement of the Union Army, the intensity of the fighting, and the untimely supply of troops.¹³ Union soldiers often supplemented their food supply by eating at the homes of private citizens: frontier soldiers at Minnesota settlers' farms, and Civil War soldiers at homes of Southerners.¹⁴ The staple foods of all Union soldiers were hardtack, salt pork (or "sowbelly"), salt beef (or "salthorse"), and coffee.¹⁵

The clothing of Western Billy Yanks was the same issue given to soldiers in the Civil War itself, and the heavy blue woolen uniforms that were standard were more suited to use in campaigns on the northern plains than in campaigns in the South. The typical frontier soldier was issued: "One GRT. Coat, one jacket, one pair of pants, one cap, one shirt, two drawers, one blanket, one blouse, one pair of boots, one pair of socks, and one belt."¹⁶ Cavalry soldiers were also issued two blankets, one saddle, one girth, one horse blanket, one halter, and a pair of spurs.¹⁷ All of the troops in the 1864 Sully campaign were mounted, including the Eighth Minnesota Volunteers, allowing effective pursuit of the elusive Sioux. The weaponry commonly carried by campaigning soldiers was one carbine, one colt revolver, one saber (if cavalry), one cartridge box, and one belt.¹⁸

Although campaigns generally started in the spring and ended in the fall, weather conditions on the northern plains made many frontier soldiers complain that “the extremes of climate in this region are one of its worst characteristics.”¹⁹ Andrew Fisk of the Second Minnesota Cavalry wrote about conditions on the northern plains in 1864, when the Sully Expedition crossed Dakota Territory. Fisk also made a special effort to state when “stone quarters” were available. In early January of 1864, the Minnesota Cavalry regiment was housed in stone quarters. Prior to the start of the ‘64 campaign, they were moved to log barracks.²⁰ Log barracks generally provided ample shelter from the harsh plains weather, but complaints about snow coming in were common. It “snowed all day,” complained Andrew Fisk; “I am going to sleep in the kitchen on account of the snow on my bunk.”²¹ Many entries in diaries focused on keeping dry. During a rainstorm in August of 1864, George W. Doud of the Eighth Minnesota Infantry complained not only of the rain, but also of the accommodations. He slept “on a gravelly bed and it was hard enough.”²²

There is little doubt that frontier soldiers preferred stone quarters and log barracks to the shelter they had when actively campaigning, when they slept in tents and on the ground. The tents used on both the Sibley and Sully campaigns were known as “shelter” tents and were only four feet high.²³ Tents provided limited protection from the elements, and frontier soldiers looked at them as the bare necessity the government would provide to stay dry on the northern plains. Andrew Fisk made a point of stating when the army-issued tents served him well; for example, “rained last night, but our small tents sheltered

us well.”²⁴ Fisk and a small percentage of frontier soldiers actually preferred tents to log barracks.

Whether in stone quarters or in log barracks, many soldiers attempted to make improvements in their living conditions. Prior to the 1864 Sully campaign, Fisk made a board floor under his bunk, and when he heard that the campaign might start soon, he commented that there was “some talk of our going into tents next week, hope so.”²⁵ Even though tents were preferred by a small percentage of frontier soldiers, one drawback was the fact that they did not withstand the heavy winds on the northern plains. A common complaint was that the men had to sleep in the rain after their tents blew over.²⁶

The frontier soldiers were lucky if they were housed in stone quarters, which were quite scarce. About the only mention of existing stone buildings refers to western Minnesota prior to the campaign. Most of the stone buildings used were homes or farmsteads that were vacated in the summer and fall of 1862 due to hostilities. Frontier soldiers’ accommodations were very similar to those of their Civil War counterparts. Stone quarters were used when available; log barracks were used as winter quarters when stone was unavailable, and tents were used during campaigns.

Life in the army camp of frontier soldiers often revolved around payday and a trip to the sutler. The sutler was the equivalent of today’s post exchange, or PX. Sutlers maintained profitable and engaging businesses, supplying a wide variety of foods, equipment, and services to the soldiers. Soldiers routinely spent their pay at the sutlers before they even collected it. Sutlers would give credit to frontier soldiers in certain circumstances, but most of the time an enlisted soldier would need to produce a signed

order from an officer. Andrew Fisk of the Second Minnesota Cavalry was faced with this dilemma almost every payday: "Sutler would not trust me, so will have to get an order from the Lieutenant for some things."²⁷ The next day, Private Fisk happily stated, "got an order on the Sutler for \$5."²⁸

The army commissary provided for the extra needs of the frontier soldier when the sutlers were too far removed from the army camp. Items such as molasses and dried beef (when available) and equipment such as blankets could be bought or acquired on credit at the commissaries. Frontier soldiers preferred the goods of the sutler over those of the army commissary, although both were put to use on payday.²⁹

In addition to discussing food, clothing, and shelter, soldiers' letters and diaries reported on combat, camp life, boredom, disease, discipline, the landscape, weather, and loved ones at home. An activity that took a large amount of the frontier soldier's time was writing letters home, although waiting for mail from home was reported more often. "Remained in camp today, wrote letters to the loved ones at home and sent one written a week ago,"³⁰ is typical of entries made in camp prior to the Dakota expeditions of 1863 and 1864. On campaigns, soldiers spent much less time writing because of the constant movement and lack of opportunity to mail the letters. Often, frontier soldiers' letters would have to be carried a great distance for mailing. Colonel Robert McLaren of the Second Minnesota Cavalry often mailed letters to his wife, Anna, while on the campaign trail: "I wrote to Anna this eve, and expect to send the letter by some squaws to Renville's Camp, a friendly scout now encamped at the head of the Coteau. He will

forward it to Fort Abercrombie.”³¹ Later, during the height of the 1864 campaign, Colonel McLaren sent a letter to his wife by messenger to Fort Rice.³²

The number of letters that frontier soldiers sent to family palls in comparison to the number written during Civil War campaigns. The proximity of the fighting and the lack of mail service may be the best explanations for this. As the Dakota expeditions came to a close and some frontier soldiers were sent South to fight the Civil War, letter-writing to wives, girlfriends, parents, and siblings increased.³³

Frontier soldiers, like their Civil War counterparts, thought of loved ones prior to battle. Before the battle at Kiildeer Mountain during the 1864 campaign, Private Frank Myers of the Sixth Iowa Cavalry explained how preparation prior to the battle reflected thoughts about friends and family:

Naturally thinking there would be a great many killed in this engagement a great many of the boys left their watches, pictures, and other valuables in the hands of our regimental soldier, Dwight F. House, while a few hurriedly scratched off a farewell letter to loved ones, if they should fall in the battle.³⁴

Most typical of entries in diaries were annotations about letters written to a girlfriend or wife, such as Scout James Benton Atkinson’s simple “wrote to Kate”³⁵ during the Sully campaign of 1864. Letters from frontier soldiers were just as scant when expressing emotion over missing a girlfriend at home.

Because the only contact with home came from letters, mail call was a central event in the frontier soldier’s daily life. Letters from friends and loved ones improved the morale of frontier soldiers. Private John N. Pettibon of the Sixth Minnesota Infantry noted: “Receiving a letter from my wife has made this week bearable.”³⁶ Failure to

receive mail from home often confused and angered frontier soldiers. Private Andrew Fisk of the Second Minnesota Cavalry, like many of his colleagues, made a special point of stating when he received “no mail this evening.”³⁷ After not receiving mail for two weeks, Private Fisk, although agitated, held out hope that he “must have some next mail [call] for sure.”³⁸

The mail that frontier soldiers received was often simple news from home; other times, the news was shocking and sad. “Received a letter from Brother Van tonight bringing sad news of father’s death. Father died on the 29 of January, 1864 at 7:00 p.m.”³⁹ Photographs, newspapers, and legal documents were also sent through the mail. Many frontier soldiers not only cherished letters for contact with loved ones or for news of home, but also to read for the purpose of relieving boredom. Frontier soldiers, like Civil War soldiers, read everything that they could get their hands on. Although mail was at the forefront of frontier soldiers’ minds, camp on the frontier consisted of a hodgepodge of duties and activities.

In camp on the frontier, soldiers were introduced to army life, equipment, discipline, orders, martial music, and weaponry. Organization of the troops was the first task of the United States Army in camp; this meant regulation, drill, inspection, dress parade, and guard duty. Frontier soldiers had the same basic opinion of drill as Civil War soldiers; at first, drill was looked on as a novelty, but later as a nuisance.⁴⁰ Drill was held at least once a day. Immediately prior to the campaign, they often “drilled twice” or even three times each day.⁴¹

Cavalry soldiers often drilled on horseback and with saber. “Had a good thorough drill on our horses, and expect to repeat it everyday that the weather will permit,”⁴² noted Private Andrew Fisk of the Second Minnesota Cavalry. Fisk and others took real pride in their dress uniforms and their ability to drill effectively. “Getting rather stylish” was Fisk’s comment after his first dress parade.⁴³

The normal day in the frontier camp was similar to the normal camp day for the Civil War soldiers. Reveille would sound at 5:00 a.m., and a large number of sounds would accompany the sound of the bugle. One such instance was recorded by Private Ebenezer Rice of the Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry:

A waking camp of troops is a musical medley which none of our musical professors have as yet been able to imitate, horses neighin[g], mules brayin[g], cocks crowing, bells atingling, bugles sounding, drums beating and men hollering. The combination are mostly natural as well as primitive. Some strains are musical to ears and some are more terribly annoyin[g] to a fellow who has just retur[n]ed from guard rounds and wants to sleep.⁴⁴

Troops would then respond to roll call and have a short drill before receiving a summary of their duties for the day. They would then be dismissed for breakfast. Shortly after 8:00 a.m., the morning duties would get underway — such activities as guard detailing, cleaning up camp, digging latrine ditches, gathering firewood, and replenishing the water supply. A noon bugle call then announced lunch. The regimental drill took place after lunch and lasted roughly an hour and a half. This drill was generally shorter than that of the Civil War camp. Following drill, time was spent cleaning weapons, doing laundry, or making other preparations for inspection. If a dress parade were held, it was

usually around 5:30 p.m. After this, the soldiers had supper and were free until 9:00 p.m., when the bugle sounded lights out.⁴⁵

The rules of the frontier army camp were less rigid than those of the Civil War camp, and drilling and dress parades were not held as consistently as in Civil War camps. However, one drill that frontier soldiers readily practiced was a “skirmish drill,”⁴⁶ which was to prepare frontier soldiers for combat with Native Americans. Drill and inspection took up a considerable amount of the soldiers’ time in camp. These soldiers quickly found out that combat was a small part of the Sioux War. With time on their hands in camp, frontier soldiers relieved boredom in many ways, such as reading, fishing, hunting, swimming, attending religious ceremonies, dancing, washing clothes, visiting adjacent Native American villages, going home on furlough, going to the sutler’s to purchase goods, or going out to dinner. Frontier soldiers, like their Civil War counterparts, also drank and gambled.

Visiting home and the surrounding Native American villages was an especially popular way frontier soldiers spent their free time. The ability of some soldiers from Minnesota to see family and friends before the expeditions against the Sioux began distinguishes their experience from that of most Civil War soldiers; the Sioux expeditions occurred in close proximity to the homes of a large percentage of frontier soldiers.

“Should like to go home a few days — just for fun,”⁴⁷ remarked Private Andrew Fisk, while in camp in January of 1864. Fisk made three trips home (to Minnesota) prior to the start of the Sully Expedition against the Sioux in 1864. His second trip home was prompted by receiving a “letter from Van [his brother]. Mother is very sick and not

expected to live long. Should like to go home."⁴⁸ Although many frontier soldiers were close to home, Private Fisk's trips were the exception, rather than the rule. Most frontier soldiers made it home infrequently during their service in the army.

More prevalent were trips to nearby taverns, breweries, or friendly Native American encampments. "Visited Indian camp with my partner,"⁴⁹ reported Private Ebenezer Rice of the Second Minnesota Cavalry. Soldiers went to Native American encampments for various reasons. Private Fisk was lured to visit a Native American encampment by "30 good looking" Native American women; he reportedly "attended their meeting and smoked a pipe of peace" with them.⁵⁰

Leaving camp for dinner or to drink or gamble was also popular with frontier soldiers. This happened before the expeditions, and occasionally when the soldiers were on expedition close to a fur trading post. "Went up to the fort by slipping the guard. The Indians and traders were on a big drunk, left George McLeod there drunk without a horse," confessed James Benton Atkinson, a scout on Sully's 1864 expedition.⁵¹ Forays to the taverns and breweries surrounding camp often included or led to dancing and gambling. Private Andrew Fisk visited the brewery regularly and noted that he "had a good time. The boys kicked up hob in the quarters until 12 o'clock."⁵²

Frontier and Civil War soldiers were notorious gamblers; they gambled on just about everything: horse racing, card games, and dice. Ebenezer Rice of the Second Minnesota Cavalry "made a bet with Major Rose of \$50.00 on distance Colonel Thomas was out yesterday on a hunt after buffalo."⁵³ He later had the bet settled in his favor. More often than not, gambling involved horse races. On more than one occasion, Scout James

Benton Atkinson gambled on pony races with half-breed traders and “some \$150.00 changed hands.”⁵⁴ Although gambling was against military rules, those rules were seldom enforced. Gambling was also considered a sin by many regimental chaplains. Private George Doud of the Eighth Minnesota Infantry was aware of the sinfulness of gambling and duly noted that in his camp “preaching and gambling [took place] only 20 rods apart.”⁵⁵

Doud’s religious sensibilities were not common, however. Indeed, the importance of religion in the frontier army is questionable. Although there are many personal writings, very few deal with religion. In contrast, Civil War letters contain frequent references to the presence and importance of religion among soldiers.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, most frontier soldiers appeared to exhibit some sort of religious belief at one time or another, in camp or on expedition.

Frontier soldiers noted when they attended religious ceremonies or church on Sunday. Regimental chaplains were present on the plains, but the same religious fervor that was present in the camps of Civil War soldiers was not evident in frontier camps. Colonel Robert McLaren of the Second Minnesota Cavalry noted on a Sunday in June of 1864 that “my regiment has no chaplain, and therefore we have no preaching.”⁵⁷ The absence of a chaplain in McLaren’s regiment was the exception rather than the rule, however.

For most soldiers of the frontier between 1862 and 1865, religion was a personal matter. Although religion was not mentioned specifically, there was much evidence of its presence in daily life. Sundays, however, were spent in a variety of ways. Reading,

hunting, fishing, swimming, washing clothes, and a trip to the sutler were a few of the ways in which frontier soldiers spent their Sunday afternoons.

Fishing and hunting excursions by frontier soldiers often replaced Sunday service. Private Andrew Fisk of the Second Minnesota Cavalry spent time fishing, swimming, and washing clothes while in camp. While fishing in the Minnesota River, Fisk reported that he “caught a fish that weighed 4 lbs.”⁵⁸ Fishing often turned into swimming or other related activities. It was common for frontier soldiers to wash their clothing in the river and have a swim at the same time; even on expedition this was a common practice. Two days after starting the 1864 Sully campaign, soldiers “did some washing, and had [a] good swim.”⁵⁹

One of the most reported activities to relieve the boredom of the frontier camp on the northern plains, whether in camp or on expedition, was buying or trading of goods with Native Americans, fur traders, the army commissary, the sutler, or each other. Frontier soldiers loved to spend their money on just about everything, including alcohol. Excessive drinking occurred. Quite often while frontier soldiers were in camp, they even received periodic rations of whiskey, and additional liquor was readily available at closely located “breweries.” Common entries in letters and diaries of frontier soldiers were their excursions to breweries: “Went down to the brewery today. . . . Had a bully dinner for 15 cents. . . . Lots of beer.”⁶⁰ Whiskey was also a common drink of frontier soldiers.

Most whiskey sold by commissary, sutler, or trader varied in its composition and strength. Many frontier soldiers were quick to note what they thought the ingredients of the whiskey might be. Ebenezer Rice of the Second Minnesota Cavalry called some

whiskey he had bought from a fur trader “nasty and rough” and complained that he would never forget its taste.⁶¹

Drunkenness was a problem among frontier soldiers as well as Civil War soldiers, and discipline problems were often the result of having too much to drink. Officers had limited control over enlisted men who drank. Officers themselves often participated in heavy drinking, sometimes even issuing whiskey to troops or buying beer for them. “Captain treated [us] to beer,” was the comment of Private Andrew Fisk prior to the start of the 1864 Sully campaign.⁶²

Frontier soldiers often spent large sums of money on alcohol, but the spending did not stop there; they also spent on trinkets designed to relieve boredom or the routine of everyday camp life. Purchases made by frontier soldiers showed that they had “extra” money to spend. Buying went beyond necessity. Extra money was a similarity between the Union Civil War soldiers and frontier soldiers. If a frontier soldier did not have cash for a purchase, he often traded something to the sutler for what he wanted. Credit was also given to many frontier soldiers by sutlers on the agreement that bills would be paid next payday. Andrew Fisk of the Second Minnesota Cavalry typically spent his pay before he received it: “we’re paid off today. . . . Received \$28.00.”⁶³ Fisk spent all but 25 cents of his pay on previous bills and looked to borrow money from the sutler until the next payday to buy a watch.

Soldiers spent money on all sorts of items, like knives, pocketbooks, clothing (non-issue), watches, reading materials, tobacco, and pipes. “Bought a new pipe for \$1.25,” reported Private Fisk, who then promptly quit smoking less than three weeks

later.⁶⁴ Private Ebenezer Rice of the Second Minnesota Cavalry “bought a knife and a few notions down at the fort” while on expedition.⁶⁵ Just as their Civil War counterparts, frontier soldiers enjoyed spending money at the sutler’s, trader’s, and the commissary stores.

Soldiers’ activities changed with season; winter activities were more mild than those of spring and summer. During the winter months in camp, reading was a popular pastime. Letters, newspapers, and novels were readily available, along with the Bible. “Bought a couple of novels to read,”⁶⁶ was the excited comment of Private Fisk, who, two days later, declared them to be “very dull.”⁶⁷

Dances and an occasional wedding played a part in relieving the boredom of camp life during all seasons. “Company ‘A,’ Infantry, is giving a dance to-night”⁶⁸ and “Dance tonight in convalescents quarters”⁶⁹ were entries made by Andrew Fisk, who always noted camp activities. Dances were a very popular form of frontier entertainment. Music was also a very popular form of entertainment on the frontier.

We had two bands of music with us, one silver and one brass band, and mornings and evenings, when not fighting Indians, those bands played several pieces, and I think I never heard music sound out so clear and beautiful as it did on those prairies.⁷⁰

Music was an integral part of the daily lives of both Civil War soldiers and frontier soldiers; it became the second most noted diversion, after letter writing. Less noted activities to pass time in camp were taking rides in the woods during the evening, studying the culture of Native Americans, and just plain childish fun.

An example of summertime childish fun was chasing any creature that ventured into the army camp. During the 1864 Sully expeditions, two antelope wandered on the fringe of the camp: "one was killed, and Bruno our camp dog gave one a good chase."⁷¹ Soldiers generally confined their chases to small mammals like squirrels, fox, and rabbits. During the winter months, snowball fights would sometimes erupt between large sections of the army. This was a common occurrence in Civil War camps also. The end result was an occasional broken bone, black eye, or bloody nose, but always there was a declared winner. Proudful, Second Minnesota Cavalryman Andrew Fisk declared, "Co. 'A' whipped Co. 'C' in a snowballing contest."⁷² Activities in frontier camps were mild compared to those of Civil War camps. And, like those of Civil War soldiers, those activities which were morally questionable were relinquished upon the end of the Indian expeditions.

Hardship and disease take their toll on every army, and frontier soldiers were not exempt. However, the conditions of frontier soldiers were more healthy than those of Civil War soldiers. "Disease and disability were constant companions of the men of blue and gray from the outset of the war," noted historian James Robertson.⁷³ Still, frontier soldiers suffered bouts with disease.

There are many explanations for the prevalence of disease on the northern plains. Most Midwesterners who joined the Union Army and ended up fighting the Sioux on the Plains could easily pass the physical examinations, which were all but a joke. If a soldier had both arms and legs intact, he was a viable candidate for the army. One of the more

prolific diary writers of these frontier "Billy Yanks" was Andrew Fisk, who was allowed to join the army at age fifteen.⁷⁴ He was large for his age and appeared considerably older.

The frontier soldier faced two of the same problems that Civil War soldiers faced. The conditions of camp life were likely to make them sick, and the lack of medical knowledge made recovery from illness difficult. The soldier on the frontier also faced the problem of a harsh northern plains climate. Most of these soldiers had experienced this climate before, because they were from the Midwest, although some, like the United States Volunteers, or galvanized Yankees, were numbed by the Dakota climate. Diseases, along with the climate of the northern plains, made the frontier soldiers' experience markedly different from that of Civil War soldiers.

Childhood diseases, malaria, and yellow fever killed a large number of Civil War soldiers, but few frontier soldiers. Camp illnesses brought on by filth, mosquitoes, impure water, and exposure killed large numbers of both Civil War and frontier soldiers. In fact, the leading killers on the 1863 and 1864 Dakota expeditions were typhoid fever, exposure, and dysentery, along with accidental drowning. Some of the lesser illnesses that were a constant problem on the frontier were colds, boils, poison ivy, diarrhea, rheumatism, and "swimmer's itch." Many soldiers followed the routine of reporting to "sick call" to ease their ailments. Hospitals were practically nonexistent when on campaigns, although Fort Rice was used as a hospital of substantial size after its completion.⁷⁵

The common remedy for many of the illnesses contracted on the frontier was cough medicine and a few days of "light duty." Private Andrew Fisk reported to sick call

seven times in four months.⁷⁶ In February of 1864, Fisk contracted a “rash” common to soldiers of the frontier: “Have sore eyes, doctor gave me some medicine for them.”⁷⁷ Private Fisk later found out that his “rash” was poison ivy: “. . . am sick and can’t go out. The sores caused by the poison ivy are coming out all over my face. Am taking sulphur [sic] for my blood. Look awful bad.”⁷⁸

Besides sulfur and cough medicine, salt seems to have been a common remedy given frontier soldiers. Although vaccinations were standard practice in the Union Army, most enlistees had theirs prior to the 1863 and 1864 campaigns; Private Fisk received his in April of 1864,⁷⁹ which was immediately preceding the Dakota expedition. Fisk was the exception, rather than the rule. Once soldiers were on the campaign trail, the harshness of the expedition did what the physical examinations failed to do: weed out those who could not handle the soldier’s life. Soldiers on the frontier faced less chance of death on the battlefield than Civil War soldiers, but all soldiers during this era lived in camp conditions (even during expeditions) that were prone to make them sick. In August of 1864, during the closing months of Sully’s campaign, Scout James Atkinson complained that “many men are sick.”⁸⁰

Poor medical care was a tremendous problem for Civil War soldiers, but much less of a problem for frontier soldiers. All medical care was woefully inadequate by today’s standards, but Civil War soldiers reported regularly that surgeons were available. Although frontier soldiers were quick to point out when there were massive amounts of sickness, they were also quick in pointing out treatment which worked in easing a soldier’s ailment. Captain Leonard Aldrich of the Eighth Minnesota Infantry was one

soldier who attested to the ability of his company's surgeons: "we have a first rate set of surgeons, very kind and attentive to the sick."⁸¹

Although many different diseases and sicknesses were prevalent on the frontier, diarrhea, typhoid fever, and accidental drowning claimed the largest number of lives. Civil War soldiers similarly faced battle with the sicknesses of diarrhea, dysentery, and typhoid fever.⁸² "Many of the boys are sick with diarrhea and dysentery, but I am feeling first rate,"⁸³ reported Private Andrew Fisk, who, two months earlier, had "had [an] attack of diar[r]hea."⁸⁴ Typhoid fever proved to be a more deadly frontier disease. George Doud of the Eighth Minnesota Infantry reported that "Edward Thomas died [at] 11 a.m. of typhoid fever."⁸⁵ Captain Leonard Aldrich of the Eighth Minnesota Infantry was more detailed in his description of Edward Thomas's illness and death: "Ed Thomas died on the 11th with Typhoid Fever, we buried him at Fort Rice. He complained of sniffles and sounds in the breast which caused him trouble to breath if walked a few steps even."⁸⁶ Andrew Fisk of the Second Minnesota Cavalry was more personal in his description of the loss of a friend to typhoid fever.

On a high hill near camp we saw a grave. I went up to see whose it was, and judge of my sorrow to find written upon the headboard, "Leslie D. Hamlin, Co. A. 2nd Min. Cav." — my old bunkmate, when I left last month so sick at Fort Rice. Poor boy — to die and be buried out in this wilderness, thousands of miles from his home in St. Lawrence Co., New York. He was a genial companion, a true brave comrade. We shed tears over his grave — tears of sympathy and sorrow. May he rest in peace.⁸⁷

Two months later, Fisk received a letter from Hamlin's mother and wrote a long reply, giving an account of his sickness and death. Fisk wrote the following:

L. D. Hamlin, died Sept. 20, 1864. L. D. Hamlin enlisted in St. Paul, in Oct. 1863, for the 2d Minn Cav. and was into Co. A. soon thereafter. During the summer campaign of '64 against the Indians he was taken down with that dread disease, typhoid fever. He died Sept. 20, and was buried on a high knoll on the eastern slope of the Coteau de Missouri. At the time I was with a detachment of 25 of our company, away on the Fisk Idaho relief expedition. He was a good soldier and a true friend. I felt his loss as I would a brother. May God help his dear mother and sister in their affliction. "When this cruel war is over, Praying that we meet again. But you'll not forget me Mother if I'm numbered with the slain."⁸⁸

Typhoid fever was a dreaded disease on the frontier; other serious diseases were also common on the northern plains. Besides diarrhea, dysentery, and typhoid fever, soldiers reported consumption, rheumatism, and heart disease. The extent of sickness and disease on the frontier was nowhere close to the suffering of Civil War soldiers in the South, who had to face cholera, malaria, and yellow fever, as well as the diseases the frontier soldiers faced. But, compounded by the rigors of campaigning on the northern plains, frontier soldiers faced other hardships.

The incidence of drowning was high on the frontier. Frequently, a frontier soldier's experience in crossing a swollen river on campaign was met with a close call. Andrew Fisk recorded such a case in December of 1864: "a man fell in the Mississippi and barely escaped drowning. I assisted in taking him to the hospital."⁸⁹ Such incidents were reported in a casual way in soldiers' diaries and letters. Private George Doud of the Eighth Minnesota Infantry reported that "at 8 p.m. 12 mules and 2 men drownded [sic],"⁹⁰ when crossing the Missouri River. Another private, Frank Myers of the Sixth Iowa Cavalry, on campaign near Fort Randall, reported that one soldier had fallen out of his boat and drowned.⁹¹

Camp life on the frontier was very similar to the camp life that Civil War soldiers experienced. The boredom that frontier soldiers experienced was much the same as Civil War soldiers. Frontier soldiers also faced similar hardships and debilitating diseases that Civil War soldiers endured, but on a level that was much less severe. Diarrhea, dysentery, and malaria were the most prevalent diseases among Civil War Union soldiers.⁹² One Midwestern soldier fighting the Civil War succinctly summed up the problem of disease in his camp: "There is but one kind of sickness here, and that is diarrhea, and everybody has it."⁹³ Likewise, frontier soldiers suffered greatly from diarrhea and dysentery. Most frontier soldiers, however, were better off than their Civil War counterparts when it came to health and the possibility of contracting diseases. The crowding in Civil War camps, the lack of surgeons, the extreme heat, and the lack of sanitary conditions made camps a breeding ground for disease. The climate on the northern plains, the smaller number of soldiers, and fewer problems with sanitation made the frontier soldier less likely to contract illness. Overall, the health of the frontier soldier was better than that of his comrades in the South.

Notes

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44. Rice, Diary, 9 June 1864.
45. Fisk, Diary, 4 March 1864.
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47. Ibid., 18 January 1864.
48. Ibid., 26 May 1864.
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52. Fisk, Diary, 20 February 1864.
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75. Dee Alexander Brown, *The Galvanized Yankees* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 83.
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90. Doud, Diary, 13 August 1864.
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CHAPTER IV

DISCIPLINE, COMBAT, AND THE ROLE OF THE CAVALRY

Historian James I. Robertson believed that “Civil War troops were the worst soldiers and the best fighters that America has ever produced.”¹ Most Civil War soldiers and frontier soldiers were volunteers. The frontier soldiers, like their Civil War counterparts, tended to remain more citizens than soldiers. They entered the army not knowing the routine and rules of military life and were indifferent to discipline. By the time these soldiers were on the campaigns, the rules and routine of army life were learned and accepted out of necessity; however, discipline was a problem throughout the enlistment of all Union soldiers, both those on the frontier and those in the Civil War.

Frontier soldiers were particularly proud of the discipline they learned in army camp. Captain Leonard Aldrich of the Eighth Minnesota Infantry remarked about his company: “They are learning the drill very fast, it is said to be the best company ever raised in Minnesota, I feel proud of the company and they all feel perfectly satisfied with me as their commander.”² Iowa General William W. Belknap noted: “Discipline is the basis of armies. Without it, they are but organized mobs.”³

Since they were recruited by locality, frontier soldiers as well as Civil War soldiers had longtime acquaintances with other soldiers in their ranks and even with a

number of officers. Once the Indian campaigns were over, they expected to return with their comrades to their friends and neighbors and their pre-war condition.

Disrespect for authority was the most prevalent offense committed by the men in the Union Army during the Civil War.⁴ This included the frontier soldiers, who showed a disrespect for the blind obedience required of soldiers in any army. Most frontier soldiers were accustomed to working independently as farmers. Add to this the large number of immigrants who filled the frontier ranks, and one expects the predisposition of the men to ignore discipline. Frontier soldiers had the same problems that Civil War soldiers had in adjusting to army regimentation. Private John Henry Strong of the Eighth Minnesota Volunteers noted: "The army is a place of regulation, always being told what I must not do or to go to a certain place."⁵ Another soldier during the campaign was more blunt in his disobedience of orders, as Private Frank Myers of the Sixth Iowa Cavalry recalled:

Still I concluded to take my chances in disobeying the spirit if not the letter of the order. So I tied one end of my lariat to my horse and wrapped the other around my wrist and laid down. I was awakened by a comrade shaking me and saying my horse had got away. As luck would have it I caught him again without being seen by the captain, so I did not have to walk all day and lead my horse, as I have seen others do for disobeying an order.⁶

Discipline in the Union Army during the Civil War was diminished by officers appointed due to political influence or elected because of their popularity. The frontier Union Army faced this same problem, and respect for officers was hampered. Frontier soldiers were quick to point out an officer who was drunk, and assumed that if officers were "absent from camp, the boys believed them to be engaging the body on a big drunk."⁷

Common soldiers were often punished for drunkenness. The punishment varied with both the violation and who committed the offense. The most common punishment was time in the guardhouse. Andrew Fisk of the Second Minnesota Cavalry explained one such instance: "Sergeant Holdship and Gil Nafey got drunk. Gill is in the guardhouse. Captain gave Tom [Holdship] a talking to."⁸ Fisk reported numerous accounts of colleagues being thrown into the guardhouse. "Four of our boys in the guardhouse for getting drunk,"⁹ he noted in his diary on one occasion, and on another, "Put two men in the guardhouse for drunkenness."¹⁰ Although the guardhouse served as the main punishment, Private Fisk was meticulous in recording other punishments. He noted that "for getting drunk, Lieutenant tied Boda up to a wagon."¹¹ Other soldiers might be required to pack forty pounds of sand or stand on a barrel all day.¹²

In addition to drunkenness, prevalent problems of discipline among frontier soldiers were neglect of duty, theft (including horse theft), selling army materials, absence without leave, desertion, making noise after "taps," fighting, desecration of a burial site, allowing one's horse to get away, and shooting wild game from the ranks. Conspicuously absent from the records of frontier soldiers are crimes such as spying, rape, and murder. Out of the executions of 267 Union soldiers for crimes during the Civil War, three were for spying, eighteen for rape, two for rape and murder, one for rape and theft, seventy for murder, and one hundred and forty-one for desertion.¹³ No sentences of capital punishment were carried out on frontier Union soldiers.

Many lesser crimes committed by frontier soldiers stimulated commentary by their colleagues. Private Ebenezer O. Rice of the Second Minnesota Cavalry described a

punishment he witnessed outside of army camp: "The first cer[e]mony was to walk a man of Co. 'B' in front of the Reg. with a placard on his breast marked 'Thief' for stealing from the Sutler, the band playing the Rogue's march."¹⁴ Rice had also visited General Sully's camp in July of 1864, where he witnessed a court martial of a teamster for the stealing of a sack of potatoes.¹⁵ Stealing was a common crime for both Civil War and frontier Union soldiers. Fighting, although common, was seldom punished by officers. One case that was punished was reported by Private Andrew Fisk, who stated that "Andy Blowers and Caleb Elphee had a fight, and Elphee was punished by being tied behind a wagon all day."¹⁶

Some cases of frontier crime and discipline fell out of the realm of the usual. One such instance, recorded by George W. Doud of the Eighth Minnesota Infantry, dealt with the desecration of a burial site. According to Doud:

We had not be[e]n in camp long before some graves of the Indians were found. Comp. H, 8th Minn. Vol. played a very conspicuous part, and most brutal w[e]re their acts, they dug up the bodies of the red man and woman. And kicked them around just as they pleased and left them above the ground, not yet has the commander taken any notice of their horrid acts.¹⁷

The men who perpetrated the act mentioned were not caught, but Private Doud noted that his Captain, Leonard Aldrich, "congratulated" Company F for not being involved with the "cruel acts."¹⁸ An especially peculiar crime was noted by Andrew Fisk of the Second Minnesota Cavalry. According to Fisk, "Corporal Blodgett under arrest. Had a fuss about cooking the grub."¹⁹ Corporal Blodgett was upset when the cook left a piece of "buffalo chip" (used for cooking fuel) in his plate of beans.

Desertions or absences without leave, although not common, were reported occasionally throughout the Sibley and Sully expeditions. Private Fisk "reported John Cross for absence while on duty."²⁰ Many frontier soldiers were reported absent without leave for traveling out of camp to trade or buy goods. In one such instance, Andrew Fisk noted that "Doc and Gil [were] under arrest for going to St. Anthony."²¹ Opportunity for desertion while on frontier duty was noted by many soldiers. One instance of a mass desertion was recorded on the Sully expedition by Scout James Benton Atkinson. According to Atkinson, "some thirty or forty deserted out of the two brigades and took one or two horses each."²² Speculation as to why the soldiers deserted led many of their colleagues to believe it was simply opportunity. After the completion of the 1864 campaign against the Sioux, Private Andrew Fisk noted the case of one desertion:

Dick Wilson enlisted in our squad from St. Paul in Oct. 1863. He was a very hard case. His home had been in the guard house and [he] deserted. He was caught, brought back, ironed and put in the guard house. Again he broke out and deserted, and this time succeeded in getting away.²³

Again, discipline on the frontier was much like that of the Civil War. Citizens thrust into service of their country found the rules imposed upon them as foreign as the enemy they were fighting. Disobedience, drunkenness, stealing, absence without leave, and desertion were crimes both Civil War soldiers and frontier soldiers committed.

As indifferent as frontier soldiers were to discipline, however, their bravery and fighting ability were admirable. One of the most striking differences between Civil War soldiers and frontier soldiers was the enemy and combat they faced. The tactics of the frontier campaigns in early 1862 were the same as Civil War tactics throughout the entire

war. "Fighting in the Civil War was an elemental and intimate thing. One side would usually line up to attack across an expanse of ground against the fortified position of the other side."²⁴ Union General John M. Schofield explained the problem of Civil War tactics in his personal writings: "To mass troops against the fire of a covered line is simply to devote them to destruction. The greater the mass, the greater the loss — that is all."²⁵ However, the tactics used on the frontier after the latter part of 1862 were slightly different. For instance, Sully's 1864 campaign was carried out by a completely mounted force. Cavalry and mounted infantry were used to chase the Sioux across the northern plains. But the Sioux were elusive, and once they were found, they did not always engage the soldiers in battle. On the other hand, operating like guerrilla fighters, the Sioux would attack the frontier soldiers when they least expected it. Employing hit-and-run tactics, they attempted to balance the odds, which were often in favor of the army. In this regard, troops on the northern plains often had a different experience than their comrades in the South.

Native Americans were quite different from Confederates, whose actions seemed understandable. But many frontier soldiers had a difficult time understanding why the uprising of 1862 occurred. The Native Americans "seemed determined to flat out every vestige of civilization that had been introduced among them."²⁶ Andrew Fisk thought the Native Americans "fools" to commit acts that would "forever" shut them out of "this beautiful and productive country."²⁷

At the beginning of the campaigns against the Sioux, frontier soldiers were dutiful in their reports. Andrew Fisk explained the purpose of Sully's 1864 expedition to his diary on the day his column broke camp:

Broke camp at Camp Pope this morning and joined main column expedition. We camped tonight on the prairie, a few miles distant from Camp Pope. We are starting Westward to hunt and fight hostile Indians.²⁸

Ebenezer Rice, also of the Second Minnesota Cavalry, described the excitement of impending combat of the expedition in July of 1864:

With 2 days cooked and 5 days uncooked rations go on a hunt after the savage foe. This will of course be not very pleasant service in the barren country but should we meet and rout the foe the excitement will relieve us of the monotony of the expedition.²⁹

Early in the 1864 campaign, Robert McLaren described the emotions of the soldiers more succinctly: "The men were somewhat excited at what they supposed was a prospect of a fight."³⁰ The purpose for the expeditions through Dakota Territory and the subsequent fighting came from Private Frank Myers of the Sixth Iowa Cavalry, who noted that: "During the early summer of 1864, while stationed at Sioux City, Iowa Co. B. received orders to join an expedition against the Indians in Dakota, to protect the frontier and open up a trail through to the Yellowstone country."³¹

Although fighting typically consumed very little of a frontier soldier's time in service, the prospect of fighting was never far from his mind, a situation similar to Civil War soldiers. The first problem in the minds of frontier soldiers was to find the Sioux, and the second was getting them to engage. Frontier soldiers, like their counterparts fighting the Civil War, were more afraid of the possibility of their own cowardice than

the probability of death on the battlefield. Frontier soldiers were duty bound in both routine and extraordinary situations. Fighting occupied only a portion of a soldier's army life, and yet the fear of death did not detract the vast majority of frontier soldiers from fighting.

Frontier soldiers spent most of their time in camp or on expeditions in which few Native Americans were encountered. Most instances of combat involved skirmishes rather than full-scale battles similar to those fought in the South. Skirmishes generally took place on the army's march to find the main body of the Sioux force or while the army was marching from one base camp to another.

Even prior to the start of Sully's 1864 campaign, signs of movement of the Sioux were evident. Private Fisk explained that the soldiers had become used to the constant fear of an Indian attack: "We're treated to [a] first class Indian scare last night. About 11 p.m. the guard shouted — 'Turn out! Turn out! The Indians are on us!' We have been 'sleeping on our arms' for some time."³² Skirmishes with Native Americans took place from the start of the 1864 campaign up to the only major battle, in the Killdeer Mountains, and resumed after the Killdeer Mountain engagement. Although there was only one major battle on the Sully Campaign of 1864, soldiers knew this was the central event of their campaign and wrote their diaries accordingly.

Typically, frontier soldiers on the campaigns against the Sioux used their mounted scouts to track down a quick-moving enemy. Once engaged in battle, Civil War era tactics were implemented against an unpredictable, mounted enemy force. For example, on the 1864 expedition that culminated with the battle of the Killdeer Mountains, the

army employed scouts numbering one hundred, mostly Indians, half-breed (French-Canadians), and American frontiersmen.³³ These scouts often skirmished with Native Americans, due to their forward position. One scout, Charles Dugas, explained that he “had the duty of fighting” on the same terms as the Sioux, often on horseback.³⁴

Sometimes this meant engaging in guerrilla warfare. Two days before the engagement at the Killdeer Mountains, Andrew Fisk noted that “scouts had a skirmish with the Indians,”³⁵ and the next day the signs of a battle to come were duly noted: “Indian signs numerous. Signal fires at night hieroglyphics by day. Sleep on our arms, and are constantly on watch.”³⁶ Another scout, James Eenton Atkinson, reported that “Nebraska scouts came in and reported Indians. There were some twenty-five or thirty.”³⁷ Private Fisk, on the day prior to the Battle of Killdeer Mountain, noted that the “Indians have gathered in great numbers,” the “tribes gathered are the Unk-pa-pahs, San Arcs, Blackfeet, Minnicanjous, Yank-ton-ais, and Santee Sioux.”³⁸ Scouts reported this huge force of Sioux on 28 July 1864, a few miles from the army camp. Sully’s expedition took up a position in the foothills of the mountains where the troops “could see them [the Sioux] by the thousands in their camp, mounting their horses and getting ready for battle.”³⁹

The most clear, concise account of the battle was written by Andrew Fisk of the

Second Minnesota Cavalry:

We dismounted, No. 4 holding the horses, and deployed, marching by the right flank. Finally the Indians started for us, on the dead run, yelling like mad. We halted and laid down. Orders were sent along the line not to commence firing until the order was given. Thousands of Indians were sweeping down on us, on a dead run. It looked to me as though they couldn’t stop if they wanted to, and that we

would be run over and have a hand to hand fight with the savages. The Indians, nearly naked, were laying along the sides of their horses, showing occasionally a head, leg, or foot. Ther[e]'s no use denying it — I was badly scared, but like my comrades, made up my mind to fight to the death. When the Indians had reached a point within 300 yards of us we were ordered to make good use of our marksmanship and fire at will. We gave it to them good. And with the sharp report of my carbine and the whiz of the bullets from the Indians in my ears, my "buck fever" or scare was gone. We stopped the charge, and soon had the whole horde on the stampede back to their camp, going as fast as they came. We killed many Indians — over a hundred, and lost several men killed and a number wounded. The Indians were tied to their horses, and we could see in the stampede many horses dragging away dead Indians. . . . And now on a gallop to the front came our mountain howitzer battery and we, mounting supported them on its rapid advance. Within a mile of the camp the battery unlimbered and threw many shells into the midst of the Indians. The greatest confusion was manifestly visible, and warriors, squaws and papooses ran for the high hills in fear of the camp and disappeared. We advanced and took possession of the camp, finding numerous bodies as the result of the exploding shells. Tonight we are camping on the outskirts of this great Indian camp.⁴⁰

Other accounts of the battle corroborate Private Fisk's version of what happened at the Killdeer Mountain Battle on 28 July 1864.⁴¹

One crucial aspect of the battle was omitted from Fisk's account — the charge made by "Brackett's Battalion" that dislodged the Native Americans from a ravine adjacent to the camp. This cavalry charge moved the Sioux from an important position that might have posed a serious threat to the army during the battle. This charge toward the wooded ravine held by the Sioux was executed prior to sunset, and was the crucial moment in the battle. Private Ebenezer Rice of the Second Minnesota Cavalry noted that "Major Brackett's Battalion made a brilliant charge on the right, killing some 25 or 30 dead on the spot, losing 13 men killed, 12 wounded."⁴²

The battle at Killdeer Mountain showed how frontier tactics had changed from 1862 to 1864. The cavalry was used mainly for transportation; the infantry, during the

battle, formed a large square with the cavalry, and artillery was placed in the center.⁴³ At strategic points in the battle, the artillery and cavalry would leave the protection of the infantry square and charge the Indians.

Many frontier soldiers noted the lack of effectiveness of the cavalry in battles against the Sioux. Like their Civil War counterparts, frontier soldiers saw that using a mounted force against infantry or other cavalry was for the most part ineffective. Colonel Robert McLaren of the Second Minnesota accordingly dismounted his cavalry companies to fight the mounted Sioux at the Battle of Killdeer Mountain. He thought that “the cavalry being dismounted could do but little,” but even so it “made a stand against the Indians”⁴⁴ Private Thomas Priestley of the Eighth Minnesota Infantry had a more positive opinion about dismounted troops during the Killdeer Mountain engagement: “The Indians came at us in large numbers on horseback, we held our ground it was to our advantage not riding.”⁴⁵ Soldiers were usually most effective when they fought dismounted.

Frontier combat was short-lived, and more time was spent waiting and maneuvering than shooting. Descriptions of small engagements and a few large battles dominate the frontier soldiers’ letters and diaries; combat was foremost in their minds. The difference between Civil War soldiers and their frontier counterparts was that the scale of the fighting and the amount of carnage on the frontier were much less than in the Civil War. Absent from the diaries and papers of frontier soldiers were descriptions of the carnage of battle, the resort to religion, and the physical symptoms of battle that accompany fear, such as dryness of lips and throat, heaviness of the limbs and vital

organs, difficulty breathing, and excessive perspiration. Not that some frontier soldiers did not experience these symptoms of fear, but if they did, they did not write about them.

The events that took place after the battle on the frontier were similar to post-battle duties of Civil War soldiers, including such tasks as collecting the wounded, policing the area for army equipment, and collecting supplies the enemy left behind. Private Andrew Fisk was bothered by both the destruction and waste laid to the Sioux camp following the battle at Killdeer Mountain: "1600 tepees were thus destroyed, together with thousands of buffalo robes and skins, hundreds of tons of dried meat and berries, and all sorts of traps and Indian camp equipment. What a pity it was that all this property could not be carried back to the states."⁴⁶

As stated before, the predominant combat on the frontier was the brief engagement with small numbers of enemy forces. The Sioux preferred hit-and-run tactics when numbers favored their success, although some skirmishes were initiated by the soldiers. Many of the small encounters took place at night, like the following, described by Andrew Fisk, two days after the Battle of Killdeer Mountain:

I quickly wakened the boys, rose to a sitting position, with my carbine across my knee. Soon a mounted Indian was plainly visible between me and the sky. Taking the best aim I could I fired, and there was a hasty stampede from the top of the hill. Never will I know whether I hit the red devil or not. Almost simultaneous, a rapid firing was heard at the next picket on our right, a few hundred yards away, occupied by three men from Co. D. Two of the men were killed, and the third one escaped, making camp about two o'clock.⁴⁷

The actions of most frontier soldiers in combat were brave, but, in some instances, markedly strange. One such instance was recorded by Private Fisk in August of 1864:

When breaking camp this morning a soldier of the Iowa regiment, mad because he had been reprimanded by an officer, came to the rear and struck out to let the Indians kill him. On a knoll half a mile away were at least a hundred Indians. He made direct for them. As he neared them we could see by the dust that bullets were striking all around him. We mounted and waited for the order to charge out and bring him back. Finally his horse fell dead. The man then ran for the hill, in a zig-zag line, reached the hill and actually drove off the horde of savages. He reached the top of the hill, waved his hat and shouted defiance to the Indians, who had gathered on another hill. The Indians must have thought the man an evil spirit, but they recovered their courage and charged the lone soldier. He then came to his senses and started to run for us. We got the order, dashed out and rescued the man. He will probably not try such a foolhardy trick again.⁴⁸

In their diaries and letters, Civil War soldiers often showed a great disgust and abhorrence of the killing they had witnessed. In contrast, frontier soldiers wrote little of the carnage of the Dakota expeditions, possibly because they believed this conflict was outside the mainstream of the larger, more important war, or possibly because they had less respect for Native Americans than their comrades in the South had for their Confederate foes. There is a strong belief among historians that the Civil War is a “watershed” or at least a central theme in American history. Likewise, the Dakota campaigns were the central theme in the lives of the frontier soldiers. Even to those soldiers who went on to fight in the Civil War after the battle with the Sioux, the Sioux Uprising of 1862 remained a “lifetime experience.”⁴⁹

One of the marked differences between the Civil War and Sully’s 1864 campaign was that the frontier cavalry played a more prominent role in the pursuit of an elusive and daring enemy. The Sioux were excellent riders and horsemen, and the brunt of the Sully campaigns was borne by cavalry or mounted infantry. The cavalry also played an important role in the Civil War, but served mainly as scouts, raiders, and mounted

infantry. During their expeditions against the Sioux, General Sully's force consisted mainly of cavalry.

Sully's 1864 expedition consisted of two brigades. The First Brigade was made up of three companies from the Sixth Iowa Cavalry, two companies of the Second Iowa Cavalry, four companies from Brackett's Battalion of Minnesota Cavalry, four companies of the Thirtieth Wisconsin Infantry, two companies of the First Battalion of Dakota Cavalry, and the Prairie Battery. The Second Brigade consisted of eleven companies of the Eighth Minnesota Infantry, six companies of the Second Minnesota Cavalry, two sections of the Third Minnesota Artillery, and one company of Indian scouts, numbering about sixty-eight men.

The Civil War was an infantryman's fight.⁵⁰ The Union Army consisted of eighty percent infantry, fourteen percent cavalry, and six percent artillery; the Confederate Army consisted of seventy-five percent infantry, twenty percent cavalry, and five percent artillery.⁵¹ There were distinct rivalries among the branches on each side during the Civil War. Civil War cavalry took an enormous amount of criticism and was the brunt of many infantrymen's jokes.⁵² An officer of the 123rd Illinois Infantry complained that cavalrymen were not fighters and were always "in the way" of the infantry.⁵³ Artillerymen, like infantrymen, did not care for the cavalry in the Civil War ranks, and this feeling was shared by both Union and Confederate soldiers. Southern General Jubal A. Early, in one instance, threatened to put "the Cavalry in the Army,"⁵⁴ if they did not improve their conduct. Frontier soldiers provide no evidence of such rivalry. In fact, just the opposite seemed the case. Often, frontier soldiers would comment on how the soldiers

(mounted or not) would care for their horses. Private Andrew Fisk of the Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry often wrote about his horse and how “Smith took care of ‘Old John,’ and I visited around camp.”⁵⁵

The Thirtieth Wisconsin, which took part in the Sully campaign of 1864 and garrisoned both Fort Rice and Fort Union for a time, was often regarded as being neglected, due to the fact that the men had no horses. “Four companies of the 30th Wis. Vol. being with us and on foot,” remarked Private Ebenezer Rice of the Second Minnesota Cavalry, as the expedition reached Yellowstone, “we have to consult their sore feet some.”⁵⁶

Because the Sioux were excellent riders who ranged over a vast distance across the northern plains, horses were a more valuable asset to frontier soldiers than to Civil War soldiers, whose adversary did not have the mobility to equal the Plains Indians. Horses were of course a valuable asset to Civil War soldiers, and their war had a much higher priority than the Sioux Uprising. President Abraham Lincoln was hesitant to give generals Henry Sibley and Alfred Sully additional horses to fight the Sioux Uprising. Lincoln felt that he could not spare any animals which could be used for the larger conflict of the Civil War.

Civil War soldiers, like frontier soldiers, drilled from early morning to late evening in camp. Cavalry in both the Civil War and the frontier conflict drilled regularly on horseback with sabers. The Second Minnesota drilled with sabers from January 1864 to May 1864 while in camp, and it was not uncommon for frontier cavalrymen to have “drilled twice on horseback” in one day.⁵⁷ Frontier soldiers were careful to note the

training their horses had: "found out today that my horse lay down by merely touching his knees with my foot,"⁵⁸ reported Fisk. As the Sully expedition of 1864 traveled over 1,600 miles in pursuit of the Sioux, a cavalryman's mount was a friend, a distraction, and a necessity.

Once the Native Americans were found, the tactics used in fighting them varied. The principal advantage of cavalry to both Civil War and frontier soldiers was its use for rapid movement in pursuit of the enemy and its quick mobility on the battlefield. Civil War cavalry was used in a traditional style, as prescribed by the military theorist, Antoine Henri Jomini:

Its chief duty is to open the way for gaining a victory, or to render it complete by carrying off prisoners and trophies, pursuing the enemy, rapidly succoring a threatened point, overthrowing disordered infantry, covering retreats of infantry and artillery.⁵⁹

Civil War battles were fought with extremely large armies in which the cavalry was used to protect the flanks of the infantry. Few battles between frontier soldiers and Native Americans on the northern plains involved large numbers facing each other; in fact, most armed conflict came in the form of small skirmishes. When frontier cavalry and mounted infantry were engaged in large battles, they used tactics similar to those of Civil War cavalry.⁶⁰ By 1864, Civil War soldiers and frontier soldiers had learned that "a general attack of cavalry against a line in good order cannot be attempted with much hope of success, unless it be supported by infantry and artillery."⁶¹

Native Americans used the horse as an all-purpose animal, for travel, hunting, cultural and religious ceremonies, as an indication of status, and for fighting. Because

Native Americans were excellent horsemen, they had an advantage when engaging an enemy on horseback. The main reason for mounted troops in the Sully expedition of 1864 was to enable the soldiers to pursue the Sioux over a vast territory. Other reasons for an entirely mounted expedition were the roughness of the Dakota landscape, the lack of water, and the severe climate of the northern plains. The 1864 Sully expedition from June to October allowed cavalymen and infantrymen alike to gain an attachment to their horses that was not unlike a friendship with admiration for their animals.

To frontier soldiers, the horse was more than a mode of transportation; it was a constant attachment to a living creature throughout their enlistment. The expeditions created a feeling of striking off into the unknown, and a soldier's association with his horse was a constant. A cavalryman was introduced to his horse almost immediately upon entering the army, and new recruits were continually being mustered for service. "Drew 12 horses for our new recruits; arranged by platoons in the stable,"⁶² reported Andrew Fisk.

Frontier soldiers often noted the relationship of fellow soldiers or themselves to their horses. Private W. E. Seeyle of the Eighth Minnesota Infantry, after receiving a mount for the 1864 expedition, remarked "that I rec'd. a grand beast" to ride for the campaign.⁶³ The job of feeding and caring for the animals fell upon individual soldiers. "Big rations of oats for our horses today, I attended to the feeding,"⁶⁴ remarked one soldier. The care of horses was on the minds of both Civil War soldiers and frontier soldiers, and this, coupled with the fear of Indian raids and losing their horses, was often noted in diaries. Horses that strayed or were temporarily lost were often found, but the

soldiers who “lost” them were punished by having to lead their horses on foot for miles. “While going to water call my horse ran away . . . [it] nearly upset me.”⁶⁵ reported Private Fisk. Fisk had always made sure his horse, “Old John,” was guarded, if not by him, then by someone else. “One of the infantry-men got my horse last night,” he wrote.⁶⁶ Prior to the battle of Killdeer Mountain in July of 1864, as prior to most battles, frontier soldiers took “extra care” to “guard our horses while grazing,”⁶⁷ for fear of Indian attack.

As was the case in Civil War camps, gambling was also evident in frontier camps. The stake in many gambling games was the soldier’s horse or “friendly” Native American “ponies.” Scouts in the Sully expedition were prolific gamblers and horse traders. Scouts would often capture Indian ponies, and then gamble using them as collateral. Private Fisk noted that in August of 1864, the Minnesota Brigade’s “scouts captured 15 ponies,”⁶⁸ and the next day “captured more horses.”⁶⁹ Most exchange of animals took place at Native American encampments such as Fort Berthold and the trading post at Fort Union. Capturing horses could bring prosperity to some scouts; James Benton Atkinson reported that he “caught a nice 2 year old pony stud. . . . Can have \$175.00 for him but won’t sell.”⁷⁰

Mounted soldiers on the frontier often complained about their officers’ leadership and the effect it had on their animals; as stated before, this was a common occurrence in the Civil War, too. Private Ebenezer Rice of the Second Minnesota Cavalry leveled one such complaint in August of 1864.

It is cruel to see dumb beasts suffer in this way, but I sup[p]ose the excuse will be military necessity. Five dead horses and three oxen is the resu[l]t of these last 2 days, weak all by starvation and thirst.⁷¹

Soldiers and horses alike suffered physical hardship on the campaigns through Dakota Territory. Mixing objections to officers drinking and the severe toll exacted on the horses, Private George Doud of the Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry complained: "Horses' backs sore, some of the boys on foot and myself among the number."⁷² He went on to state that the "horses [are] fagged out, and some of the men [officers] have no mercy on the horses . . . but th[e]y rush them through then th[e]y lay in th[e]ir tents and drink the best of brandy and some very drunk."⁷³ Some soldiers blamed General Sully himself for the hardship on the animals: "This [is] one of the worst marches I ever made . . . [The] sufferings of the animals is fearful indeed,"⁷⁴ reported Ebenezer Rice, who claimed to "hear some bitter complaints against the managem[en]t of Gen. Sully."⁷⁵ Private Rice was even so bold as to write that if he were "to say anything it certainly would be strong language."⁷⁶

According to Jomini, "with cavalry even more than infantry, morale is very important."⁷⁷ This would be true in any army. The low point in the Sully expedition of 1864 came in August, after the Battle of Killdeer Mountain, when the conditions of the animals had deteriorated. Private Fisk of the Second Minnesota Cavalry echoed Rice's remarks about the deprivation of the animals: "our horses and mules are suffering . . . About 50 gave out and had to be abandoned during the day's march."⁷⁸ Private Fisk wrote consistently about his mount, "Old John." When Fisk started the trip back to Minnesota in October of 1864, he commented: "Poor, faithful John. He is nearly worn out. I doubt if he will see Fort Ridgely. I shall give him a little grain and try and pull him through."⁷⁹

Fisk, afraid of losing his horse to starvation and drought, showed his attachment to the animal in a report four days later:

Last night my faithful horse, "Old John," while picketed on a hillside, stumbled and fell, breaking his leg, and had to be killed. He was weak and worn out, but if I could have got him thro[ugh] to Fort Ridgely I could have built him up again. I feel badly at losing the intelligent, faithful animal.⁸⁰

Many diary entries of frontier soldiers indirectly commented on their horses and duties that included their animals. The mounted expedition in 1864 shared the experience of Civil War cavalry for the most part. Frontier soldiers almost always found something to write about, and their mounts served the purpose of filling the blank page. Colonel Robert McLaren, on a trip from Saint Paul to Fort Ridgely, noted that he "met with nothing worthy of note during [his] journey except foundering [his] fine horse, Prince."⁸¹

Although experiences of Civil War and frontier soldiers were in sharp contrast, the cavalry and mounted infantry played similar roles. Both Civil War and frontier soldiers used the cavalry for rapid movement, mobility, to support infantry (to a lesser extent on the northern plains), to capture strategic points, and to protect flanks. The greatest difference is that frontier cavalry was used predominately to travel great distances to track Native Americans. It is true that cavalry was used for mobility in the Civil War, but being mounted on the frontier was a necessity because of the lack of close supply and the elusiveness of the frontier soldiers' Native American enemies.

Notes

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3. "Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States — Iowa Commandery," *War Sketches and Incidents* (Des Moines: PC Kenyon, 1893), 1:163.
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5. John Henry Strong, Private, Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, Diary, 5 January 1863, Diary and Letters, 1862-1865, TMs (photocopy), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
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14. Ebenezer O. Rice, Private of Company F, Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry, Diary entry on 17 June 1864, Diary, 1864, TMs (photocopy), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
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22. James Benton Atkinson, Scout, 1864 Sully Expedition, Diary entry of 21 August 1864, Diary, 1864, TMs (photocopy), Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks.
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26. Aldrich, Letter to brother, 12 June 1864.
27. Fisk, Diary, 4 June 1864.
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29. Rice, Diary, 25 July 1864.
30. Robert N. McLaren, Colonel, Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry, Diary, 11 June 1864, Diary, 1864, TMs and LS (photocopy), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
31. Myers, 9.
32. Fisk, Diary, 2 June 1864.
33. Ibid., 30 June 1864.
34. Dugas, Letter to father, August 1864.

35. Fisk, Diary, 26 July 1864.
36. Ibid., 27 July 1864.
37. Atkinson, Diary, 26 July 1864.
38. Fisk, Diary, 27 July 1864.
39. Ibid., 28 July 1864.
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41. Rice, Diary, 28 July 1864.
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45. Thomas Priestley, Private, Company K, Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, Diary, 28 July 1864, Diary, 1864, TMs (photocopy), Special Collections, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks.
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69. Ibid., 2 August 1864.
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73. Ibid., 5 July 1864.
74. Rice, Diary, 11 August 1864.
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81. McLaren, Diary, 3 June 1864.

CHAPTER V

THE GALVANIZED YANKEES

“Galvanized Yankees” were former soldiers from the Confederate States of America who had worn gray before they accepted the blue uniforms of the Union Army in exchange for freedom from federal prisons, where many of them had spent much of the Civil War. They were sent to the West and to the northern plains, so they would not have to fight Confederate soldiers; instead, they would be fighting Native Americans.

The galvanized Yankees served in the United States Army from September of 1864 to November of 1866. These soldiers faced Indians, disease, boredom, and a harsh northern plains climate. The desertion rate was estimated to be only slightly higher in galvanized regiments than in state volunteer regiments of the Union Army.¹

The galvanized Yankees were formed into six regiments, known as the United States Volunteers. The regiment assigned to the northern plains during the Great Sioux Uprising and subsequent Dakota expeditions was the First U.S. Volunteer Infantry Regiment, predominately recruited from Point Lookout, Maryland.² The “point of destination” for the regiment was Milwaukee, Wisconsin.³ The First U.S. Volunteers were ordered on 9 August 1864 to the northern plains by General U. S. Grant, although he opposed using prisoners for “any kind of military action.”⁴

The idea for enlistment of Confederate prisoners to fight Native Americans on the northern plains and in the West came from Colonel Henry S. Huidekoper of the 150th Pennsylvania Volunteers and Judge S. Newton Pettis, although Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and General U. S. Grant disliked the idea.⁵ President Lincoln ordered the process of enlisting former Confederates, although these steps probably would not have taken place had it not been for the Sioux Uprising that began late in the summer of 1862. Many of the ex-rebel soldiers who took part in the struggle against Native Americans on the plains later realized this “Indian conflict” was the major reason for parole. One ex-Confederate soldier, in June of 1865, wrote that he “did not care much” for fighting Native Americans, and cared even less for the “Dacotah” landscape and weather.⁶

The process that President Lincoln ordered for the enlistment of the galvanized Yankees consisted of standard U.S. Army enlistment procedures, plus a questionnaire. In addition to answering the questions, the prisoners had to sign a blank book and reply to interrogation.⁷ The following questions were asked of Confederate prisoners of war who expressed an interest in fighting on the plains in return for release from prison.⁸

1. Do you desire to be sent South as a prisoner of war for exchange?
2. Do you desire to take the oath of allegiance and parole, and enlist in the army or navy of the U.S., and if so, which?
3. Do you desire to take the oath and parole and be sent North to work on public works, under penalty of death if found in the South before the end of the war?
4. Do you desire to take the oath of allegiance and go to your home within the lines of the U.S. Army, under like penalty if found South beyond those lines during the war?⁹

It took from January to March to interrogate enough prisoners to obtain a minimum number to constitute a regiment from Point Lookout Prison.

The First United States Volunteer Infantry left Point Lookout, Maryland, on 28 March 1864. The prisoners had enlisted in the United States Army for a three-year term; roughly one of every eight rebel prisoners at Point Lookout, Maryland, between January and March of 1864, had taken the oath of allegiance to the United States government. From Maryland, the First United States Volunteers arrived in New York on 15 August 1864; there, twenty men disappeared and were believed to have deserted.¹⁰ The next stop for the galvanized Yankees was Chicago; they arrived there on 18 August 1864, and were then split into two forces. Lieutenant Colonel William Tamblyn commanded Companies A, F, G, and I, which were sent to Milwaukee; Colonel Charles Dimon, the regimental commander, took Companies B, C, D, E, H, and J to St. Louis.¹¹ Colonel Dimon's force reached St. Louis on 22 August 1864, and was ordered to Fort Rice in Dakota Territory by General Pope. While in St. Louis, twelve men were reported missing; once again, it is likely they had deserted. The First U.S. Volunteers were to replace the Thirtieth Wisconsin and garrison Fort Rice; they were to report to Brigadier General Alfred Sully, who was in charge of that area. The six companies of ex-Confederates boarded an Indian trading boat, the *Effie Deans*, for the trip north.¹² They arrived at Fort Sully on 7 October 1864 and at Fort Rice on 17 October 1864.

Fort Rice, the destination of the First U.S. Volunteers, had been established in July of 1864 by General Alfred Sully and built by the Thirtieth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry. The fort was named for the late General James C. Rice. The layout of the fort

was a square, four hundred by five hundred feet, on a five-acre piece of land, one hundred feet above the Missouri River.¹³ The buildings at Fort Rice were cottonwood logs with an earth roof.

The First U.S. Volunteer Infantry regiment was made up of galvanized Yankees from all but two of the Confederate states: Texas and Arkansas. The state that contributed the most to the galvanized regiment was North Carolina (40 percent); the states of Georgia, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Tennessee contributed moderately, with additional soldiers (few in number) from Alabama, Florida, and the border states of Kentucky and Maryland (35 percent); Virginia contributed 15 percent, and foreigners made a considerable contribution (10 percent).¹⁴

The experience of the ex-Confederates was very similar to the experience of other frontier soldiers on the northern plains, although for men who had spent a long time confined as prisoners of war and were unaccustomed to the plains climate, garrison duty often gave them a different outlook on their situation. The reasons why many had decided to come to the northern plains to fight Native Americans were diverse, the most prevalent being to escape boredom and confinement. Other reasons were disillusionment with the war, determination to survive, a change of loyalty, religious conversion, despair, optimism, cowardice, the possibility they could desert, and the frustration of watching friends die in U.S. Army prisons.¹⁵ The Union soldiers with whom the ex-Rebels came into contact had a narrow range of comments as to the character, attitude, and job performance of the ex-Confederates while serving on the northern plains.

The total number of galvanized Yankees who reached Fort Rice on 17 October 1864 was 272. They were greeted by a small detachment of the Sixth Iowa Cavalry. Due to the timing of their arrival at Fort Rice, the contact that ex-Rebels had with the Sully expedition of 1864 was limited. Prior to reaching Fort Rice on 17 October 1864, Private Andrew Fisk of the Second Minnesota Cavalry noted, "Brackett's Bull train is here, Rebs' and Co. I for guard,"¹⁶ which indicated interaction with galvanized Yankees prior to their arrival at Fort Rice.

Although there was obvious contact between galvanized Yankees and troops on the Sully expedition of 1864, most observations by frontier soldiers were passing comments as to the duties of galvanized Yankees. "Co. G arrived from the stockades, they have been relieved by Co. A, ex-Rebs,"¹⁷ reported Private Fisk in his examination of the coming and going of troops around him. Even the officers on the Sully campaign made few comments about the galvanized Yankees regarding anything but post or campaign duties. Colonel Robert McLaren of the Second Minnesota Cavalry on Sully's 1864 campaign remarked that "a level of trust for the 'Rebel' soldiers has not yet been met."¹⁸ McLaren, as other frontier officers, was skeptical of the merit and performance of the galvanized troops. General Sully, however, did not hesitate to state his preference for galvanized troops: "many from Georgia and Alabama, are poor whites; they can't read or write. Yet they are intelligent and obedient, standing in the latter respect, as in efficiency much above the 'jayhawkers.'"¹⁹

Most of what is known about the galvanized Yankees who garrisoned Fort Rice has been learned through their own letters, diaries, and a fort publication: *Frontier Scout*.

The ex-Rebel soldiers garrisoned the fort from October 1864 to November of 1866; most of their correspondence and writing deal with the Dakota landscape, the physical and environmental conditions of their post, entertainment, discipline, and combat with Native Americans. By November of 1864, the galvanized Yankees were adapting to their new environment with relative ease. Two problems that were chronic for these transplanted Southern soldiers, however, were adapting to the harsh climate of the northern plains and the effects of disease at their frontier post.

The climate of the northern plains in the late fall and winter was something the Southerners had never experienced, and an editorial in the *Frontier Scout* compared Fort Rice to exile in Siberia.²⁰ “The climate of this country is less than desirable and as desolate as the eastern extent of Russia.”²¹ The vast majority of galvanized Yankees accepted their situation and the climate of Dakota Territory as a necessary evil; in this respect, their attitudes were similar to those of other frontier soldiers. “Although the temperature drops considerably at night, the day is hot and humid,”²² reported the *Frontier Scout*. The humidity of the northern plains was mentioned only once in the Fort Rice publication, and only then as a comparison to the climate of Alabama.

The publication known as *Frontier Scout* became the news organ of the upper Missouri Valley.²³ Poetry or verse occupied an unusually large amount of space in *Frontier Scout* issues.²⁴ Much of the verse dealt with the landscape and weather of Dakota Territory. One example of such verse appeared in the 22 June 1865 issue:

“What the American Eagle Thinks of Dacotah”

If this is the land of Dacotah, she cries
 I pity the 1st U.S.V. at Fort Rice.
 Then plumes her gay wings, and soars far from the scene
 To lands more delightful and skies more serene.²⁵

Southern soldiers also wrote about life at Fort Rice, not just the Dakota weather. An excerpt from the 7 September 1865 *Frontier Scout* illustrates an ex-Rebel's thoughts on Dakota:

“Life at Fort Rice”

Butter, cheese and woman's eyes
 Would make this a paradise . . .
 In this post we are like Adam
 Ere he had obtained his madam.²⁶

Besides commentary on the landscape and weather, disease and death were on the minds of frontier soldiers.

Disease took its toll of the galvanized Yankees on the Dakota frontier. This, more than anything else, was similar to the experience of Bell Wiley's Civil War “Billy Yanks” and “Johnny Rebs.” From the galvanized Yankees' release from Point Lookout to their arrival at Fort Rice, disease ravaged the Southern soldiers. By the time Colonel Dimon's six companies reached Fort Sully on 7 October 1864, eight soldiers were suffering from acute dysentery as a result of drinking stagnant water.²⁷ By the time the detachment reached Fort Rice, four soldiers had died from chronic diarrhea, including Private John Blackburn, a twenty-one year old from Pike County, Kentucky.²⁸ Diarrhea was a common ailment of Civil War soldiers, as it was of frontier soldiers, including ex-Confederates. Between May of 1861 and 30 July 1866, casualties due to dysentery and diarrhea in the

Civil War Union Army reached 57,265.²⁹ Two weeks after reaching Fort Rice, four more galvanized Yankees had died of chronic diarrhea, bringing the death toll from the disease to eight.³⁰ The only other casualty at this point was a drowning victim.

Health conditions for the ex-Rebels during their first few months at Fort Rice were difficult, and there was little improvement during the winter. In November 1864, less than a month after beginning garrison duty at Fort Rice, "Surgeon General H. W. Herrick reported seven deaths" from a combination of diarrhea, typhoid fever, and consumption.³¹ Winter was extremely hard on the Southerners; there were several injuries due to Indian attack, the mental torture of "cabin fever," and cases of scurvy. In April of 1865, fifteen deaths from scurvy were reported, and even Surgeon Herrick became ill.³²

General Alfred T. Sully knew the condition of the galvanized Yankees at Fort Rice:

Eleven percent of the command have died this winter. . . . The soldiers of that garrison are composed of Rebel prisoners; men who have been a long time confined as prisoners of war, and of course they are now predisposed to such sickness as scurvy and diarrhea. As soon as possible I will have a more thorough investigation of the causes. I have been obliged to order two of the companies to garrison Forts Union and Berthold. This with the great amount of sickness will weaken that garrison too much. . . .³³

Although sickness was prevalent during the winter months, spring brought improved conditions. "Wild onions" were planted and cultivated to aid the sick. Surgeon Herrick reported that "the sanitary conditions of the post is very much improved, the number on the sick list having decreased rapidly since the appearance of wild onions and the arrival of a few potatoes."³⁴

The arrival of ex-Rebel soldiers on the frontier brought assorted responses from the Union volunteers: "The monotony was broken by the arrival of four rebel companies. These rebel soldiers had been held as prisoners of war on the Island of Davenport and had enlisted in the U.S. service rather than be in prison, with the understanding that they were to be sent on the frontier."³⁵ "The detachment of Southern soldiers at Fort Rice look to be a worn and barbarous lot,"³⁶ stated Private Thomas Hunt of the Tenth Minnesota Infantry. "The ex-Rebel soldiers who garrison Fort Rice are homespun and lively, although their character has not been tested by the natives,"³⁷ reported Corporal John Robinson of the Second Minnesota Cavalry. The galvanized Yankees were seen in a different light after the newness of their stay at Fort Rice wore off. "They are much better horsemen than most, and they seem to have courage unlike their native enemies,"³⁸ reported Private Paul Rosendahl of the Seventh Minnesota Infantry, after witnessing a skirmish in which the ex-Rebels repelled attackers at Fort Rice. General Sully appeared to have shared the sentiments of this soldier; he not only thought the galvanized Yankees courageous, but "well disciplined troops," and requested more.³⁹ Officers who served as the leaders of galvanized troops at Fort Rice felt the ex-Rebels to be as good as frontier soldiers from the North, for the most part. In June 1865, Captain Enoch Adams, Captain of Company B, First Volunteer Regiment, felt that the ex-Confederates were "the first fruits of a reunited people . . . the link between the North and South."⁴⁰

Skirmishes and battles between "galvanized" troops and Native Americans on the northern plains were limited, because the Southern soldiers were on garrison duty.

Frontier soldiers on Sully's 1864 campaign did come into some contact with the ex-Rebels when skirmishes were taking place, but records of these contacts are scant. The first combat action that took place was on 21 November 1864, a small skirmish in which one Southerner, Private Edwin Durham, was wounded.⁴¹ From the time of their arrival in October 1864 until March of 1865, there were no real battles, except for minor skirmishes. Then, on 30 March 1865, Colonel Dimon, the commander of galvanized troops at Fort Rice, sent out a platoon of infantry to "disperse" a Sioux war party that had gathered outside of the fort.⁴² No casualties were incurred, but two Santee Sioux were captured.⁴³

The First United States Volunteers saw limited action in their garrison duty at Fort Rice. The first major engagement took place on 12 April 1865, when roughly two hundred Native Americans attacked Fort Rice from the surrounding hills.⁴⁴ The Native Americans were from the Cheyenne and Sioux tribes from Platte River country. Two ex-Confederates were killed in this first major battle, Private William Hughes and John Odum. In addition, thirty-six cattle, nineteen mules, and thirteen horses were lost.⁴⁵ On 12 May 1865, Lieutenant Cyrus Hutchins and ten men of Company H were dispatched from Fort Benton to "control the trade with Indians between that point and Fort Union."⁴⁶ This was the farthest north that the ex-Rebels traveled, leaving fewer than 300 soldiers to garrison Fort Rice.

During the summer of 1865, there were great numbers of both soldiers and Native Americans coming and going from Fort Rice. On 17 June 1865, Colonel Dimon discovered that the Cheyenne were holding a white woman captive and were willing to

trade her for “two good American horses.”⁴⁷ The woman, Sarah Morris, had been captured on 10 January 1865 in a Cheyenne raid along the Platte River in Colorado. Colonel Dimon immediately agreed to the trade, and on 21 June 1865, Sarah Morris was released to Fort Rice. A Native American presence was evident throughout the summer of 1865.

There were several attacks on Fort Rice during the summer of 1865, but the greatest problem for the galvanized troops was lack of pay. By the end of June 1865, the soldiers at Fort Rice had not been paid for ten months.⁴⁸ On 13 July 1865, General Sully arrived at Fort Rice with two companies of the Fourth Regiment of U.S. Volunteers to strengthen Fort Rice’s defenses. General Sully expected further engagements with Native Americans in late summer 1865.

On 22 July 1865, the commander of Fort Rice, Colonel Charles Dimon, was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel John Pattee of the Seventh Iowa Cavalry.⁴⁹ The reasons for Dimon’s dismissal were clear to General Alfred Sully; he asked General Pope for Dimon’s dismissal based on the alliance Dimon had formed with two Sioux chiefs, Two Bears (Yanktonai Sioux) and Bearrib (Hunkpapa Sioux). General Sully ordered Captain A. B. Moreland and Company G of the Sixth Iowa Cavalry from Fort Berthold to Fort Rice.⁵⁰ This move was to serve a double purpose: to shore up defense at Fort Rice and to secure more troops when Colonel Dimon left Fort Rice with an escort.

After Dimon’s dismissal, the largest engagement between ex-Confederate troops and Native Americans took place on 28 July 1865 in a three-hour battle with Sitting Bull

and more than one thousand warriors. Sitting Bull had launched an assault on Fort Rice, which was unsuccessful.⁵¹

During their time at Fort Rice, the galvanized soldiers, along with a small number of frontier soldiers, tried to survive the boredom of post life. The galvanized Yankees participated in the same activities as Civil War and frontier soldiers: letter writing, games, gambling, and drill. Many of the ex-Rebels' writings dealt with their perceptions of Native Americans and their way of life. Captain Enoch Adams described what he thought was a strange characteristic of Native Americans:

The way they stowed away the groceries in their human bread-baskets was a caution to beholders. As the camels drink water, so the Indian eats, laying in at once in his stomach enough to last him for a week.⁵²

In their first few days in Dakota Territory, Southern soldiers recorded and later published in *Frontier Scout* their impressions of Native Americans. "We were glad to see any human form, motley though they were, with robes, feathers, beads and fringes, and not a slight admixture of grease and dirt," reported the *Frontier Scout*.⁵³

Soldiers on garrison duty on the northern plains spent a substantial amount of time drilling. During the winter of 1864, Colonel Dimon held classes in military tactics and army regulations,⁵⁴ and on Christmas Day of 1864, the first U.S. flag was raised over Fort Rice. Colonel Dimon dedicated the flag to General Sully and gave the following speech:

Let Fort Rice stand as a monument of what soldiers once Rebel, now Union, can do for the cause they have espoused. In this inhospitable region, this desert sea of land, they have reared a light house whose beams shall conduct in safety the ship of state across the vast shoals into the broad and deep bays of the Pacific.⁵⁵

The command was then joined by Two Bears and other Sioux warriors for a Christmas feast.⁵⁶ The occasion of this feast and the dress of its native guests were described by Captain Enoch Adams: "Bears' claws, bears' teeth, feathers, fringes, beads and porcupine quills, and an abundant supply of red and yellow paints."⁵⁷ Although the scant writings of frontier soldiers who came in contact with the galvanized Yankees portray a camp life similar to Civil War camps, there is little hard, documented proof, other than what the ex-Rebels themselves published in the *Frontier Scout*.

The *Frontier Scout* was published on a small printing press that was left behind by the Thirtieth Wisconsin Infantry when it left Fort Rice. The press had been used by the Thirtieth Wisconsin to publish a newspaper in the summer of 1864 at Fort Union.⁵⁸ Captain Enoch Adams was the editor of the *Frontier Scout*, which contained poems, stories, weather reports, recipes, news from the east, and general camp information. *Frontier Scout* was truly a post newspaper, and everyone was expected to contribute to it. The first issue was printed on 15 June 1865 (Volume 1, Number 1).⁵⁹

As stated before, verse consumed a great deal of space in volumes of the *Frontier Scout*. One poem stated a Southerner's view of the different life he was living in Dakota Territory and gave a commentary on the natives of the area:

O bury me not in obscurity,
 But bury me up in the top of a tree,
 When my spirit goes to the land of souls
 Set me up on two bean poles
 Where I cannot be eaten by wolves and foxes
 That eat "them" fellows they put in boxes.
 Fix round my head a feathery wreath
 Round my throat bear's claws like harrow teeth

Bring me a bow and bring me an arrow
 And plenty of "toro" that's made of marrow.
 Set me a feast and light me my pipe,
 Each is a sign, and emblem and type
 Of something I was never able to tell,
 But do it all, and it will be well.
 Farewell squaw! Farewell papoose,
 From life my spirit is cutting loose,
 My eyes grow dim, I cannot see,
 I have left this world, and climbed a tree.⁶⁰

In addition to rhyme and verse, the *Frontier Scout* carried reports of Indian activities, military matters, and deaths; the paper carried lighter sketches, also, on such subjects as the post's numerous pets.⁶¹ The *Frontier Scout* played a prominent role in the lives of Southern soldiers at Fort Rice, helping to ease the pain of homesickness and boredom that accompanied garrison life.

The galvanized Yankees served at Fort Rice from October of 1864 to October of 1865, when they were replaced by the Fiftieth Wisconsin Regiment. They were mustered out of the United States Army on 27 November 1865. The point of contact between galvanized troops and U.S. Volunteer soldiers was generally limited to the garrison duty of the ex-Rebel soldiers. However, the Second Minnesota Cavalry, the Sixth Iowa Cavalry, and members of the Seventh, Eighth, and Tenth Minnesota Infantry Regiments did have limited contact with the ex-Rebels. More often than not, the writings and letters of frontier soldiers noted a contact with galvanized soldiers, but barely anything else about them. Both frontier soldiers and galvanized frontier soldiers wrote about home, the landscape, the weather, the Civil War, their daily routine, disease, discipline, food, and what was happening back east. Ex-Confederate soldiers appeared to be accepted by the

majority of frontier officers and common soldiers as a necessary force to help maintain control of the Native American situation. Colonel Robert McLaren of the Second Minnesota Cavalry, after returning from Sully's 1864 expedition, commented that "the forts in Indian country are maintained by both Minnesotans and ex-Rebels, and this force is necessary to secure future emigration to the west."⁶²

Notes

1. Dee Alexander Brown, *The Galvanized Yankees* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 2.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 71.
4. Ibid., 69.
5. Ibid., 12-13.
6. *Frontier Scout*, 15 June 1865.
7. Brown, 66.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 72.
11. Ibid., 73.
12. Ibid., 80.
13. Ibid., 81-82.
14. Ibid., 72.
15. Ibid., 2.
16. Andrew J. Fisk, Private, Company A, Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry, Diary entry on 16 October 1864, Diary, 1864-1865, TMs (photocopy), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
17. Ibid., 31 October 1864.
18. Robert Neil McLaren, Colonel, Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry, Diary, 24 September 1864, Diary, 1864, TMs and LS (photocopy), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
19. Brown, 35. General Sully's reference alluded to troops from Kansas.

20. Ibid., 108.
21. *Frontier Scout*, 7 September 1865.
22. Ibid.
23. Brown, 96.
24. Ibid., 95.
25. *Frontier Scout*, 22 June 1865.
26. Ibid., 7 September 1865.
27. Brown, 80.
28. Ibid.
29. Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952); Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943), 136.
30. Brown, 82.
31. Ibid., 83.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., 92.
34. Ibid., 90.
35. Frank Myers, *Soldering in Dakota, Among the Indians, in 1863-4-5* (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 57.
36. Thomas J. Hunt, Private, Company B, Tenth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, Papers, 1862-1865, TMs (photocopy), Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks.
37. John E. Robinson, Corporal, Company B, Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry, Papers, 1859-1865, L and D (photocopy), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
38. Paul H. Rosendahl, Private, Company K, Seventh Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, Diary, 1862-1865, TMs (photocopy), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.

39. Brown, 5.
40. Ibid., 7.
41. Ibid., 83.
42. Ibid., 88.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., 89.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., 91.
47. Ibid., 97-98.
48. Ibid., 99.
49. *Frontier Scout*, 27 July 1865.
50. Brown, 93-94.
51. Ibid., 101.
52. *Frontier Scout*, 22 June 1865.
53. Ibid., 29 June 1865.
54. Brown, 84.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., 94.
57. *Frontier Scout*, 29 June 1865.
58. Brown, 94.
59. Ibid., 94-96.
60. *Frontier Scout*, 22 June 1865.
61. Brown, 95.

62. McLaren, Diary, 5 October 1865.

CHAPTER VI

DAKOTA LANDSCAPE, WEATHER, AND WILDLIFE

The weather and landscape of the northern plains were different from what most Western Billy Yanks had ever experienced. These differences became the topic of many diary entries and letters. Western Dakota Territory was rough-cut and barren. The water supply throughout Dakota Territory was both scarce and foul. Frontier Billy Yanks on Sully's 1864 campaign had a profound and pronounced commentary on the landscape surrounding them. The soldier of the northern plains had a great deal of time to write at length about the hills, trees, streams, and wildlife that inhabited the northern plains. Civil War soldiers appeared to have more duties and distractions, which may have limited their writings about the land, or perhaps the Southern landscape did not seem so strange to them.

The pursuit of Native Americans across the northern plains in 1864 started in June, and was completed in October. Campaigns during the Civil War were similar in that they were begun in the spring; a temporary halt usually came in the late fall or early winter. The severe changes in weather were more pronounced on the northern plains, and therefore might help explain the extensive writing devoted to the landscape and weather on the Dakota and Minnesota frontier by the soldiers of the Sully expedition and by the galvanized troops at Fort Rice. It is clear that Union soldiers of the Civil War did write

about the people and landscape of Dixie,¹ just as frontier soldiers wrote about the Native Americans and the Dakota landscape; the approach was only slightly different.

With the passing of the winter months came the time for the spring and summer campaigns. Along the campaign trail, soldiers described the differences between Minnesota and Dakota Territory landscapes. Private Andrew Fisk of the Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry noted the signs of the Sioux massacre in 1862 and the lay of the land:

Abundant signs on every hand of the terrible Indian massacre of '62. Farms and farmhouses everywhere, but not a living soul in sight. Beautiful country, rich soil. Much cultivated foliage. Thousands of trees — wild plum trees in countless numbers. Outside of a few trappers, I am told that our little party are the first ones in here since the great Sioux massacre.²

Although it lacked evidence of destruction seen in Minnesota, Dakota Territory was not given glowing descriptions early in Sully's 1864 expedition. Colonel Robert N. McLaren, Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry, described eastern Dakota Territory as desolate: "the prairies seem to be burning in advance of us; the grass is poor."³ Others shared McLaren's view. Private Frank Myers of the Sixth Iowa Cavalry identified the Dakota Territory as part of what was commonly known as the "Great American Desert."⁴ When the Second Minnesota Cavalry crossed the line into Dakota Territory, Private Fisk remarked that the landscape of Dakota had "very little wood and not much grass."⁵

It was common for frontier soldiers to comment negatively on the landscape of Dakota on their initial entrance into the territory. Likewise, Union soldiers of the Civil War were negative in their initial report of the Southern landscape. Some Civil War soldiers believed that the South was a land that was antiquated in its ideas and showed a

general “backwardness.”⁶ Other Union soldiers went so far as to call the South a “land of sin.”⁷ Both Civil War and frontier soldiers often changed their views of the landscape after spending a considerable amount of time in their new surroundings. Although reviews of the land and weather would be both negative and positive during both conflicts, individual soldiers enthusiastically described land or scenery that appealed to them. Frontier soldiers were acutely adept at comparing the wood and water supply of Minnesota and Iowa to that of Dakota. Whether in eastern or western Dakota Territory, soldiers remarked on the lack of trees and the shortage of water. Traveling through western Dakota, Scout James Benton Atkinson claimed, this is “one of the most hilly countries ever seen, no water, no wood; the Devil’s own country.”⁸ Private Fisk, while stationed in western Minnesota prior to the 1864 Sully expedition, enjoyed the serenity of the Minnesota countryside: “Took a ride to a small lake, two miles up the Minnesota [River] — a beautiful spot.”⁹

Generally, the longer the stay in Dakota Territory, the more positive the comments about the landscape. Some frontier soldiers “admired a striking evidence of the power and greatness of the Great Creator of all things,”¹⁰ at the outset of the 1864 campaign. Private Ebenezer Rice of the Second Minnesota Cavalry attested to “the superiority of American Plain or Desert and in the beauty of their scenery and richness of the soil,” as he entered Dakota Territory.¹¹ George Doud, a private in the Eighth Minnesota Infantry, stated that northwestern Dakota consisted of “raising and falling hills; a more beautiful [sc]enery I never saw before.”¹² While campaigning near the Cannonball River, Private Frank Myers

showed a knowledge of the northern plains: "The grass was all buffalo, scenery [sic] the wonderful and fantastical shaped buttes of which so much is written."¹³

By early August, the Sully expedition had reached the area known as the "Badlands" in present-day western North Dakota. Andrew Fisk, whose company was in the advance ranks, noted that the "country [is] very much broken and marching difficult."¹⁴ Frontier soldiers' reactions to the rough, broken Badlands were strong and heartfelt, with either a distinctly positive or negative assessment; there was little indifference to this western Dakota landscape. "The brightest genius would fail hopelessly should he hope to attempt to spread upon canvas the subject here spread out by Nature before him by the only true and great artist," was the description Private Ebenezer Rice gave of the Badlands in August of 1864.¹⁵ Frank Myers of the Sixth Iowa Cavalry described the landscape of western Dakota Territory in 1864:

Traversing a country diversified and beautiful as the sun ever shone upon, presenting at every turn pictures of natural beauty, such as no artist ever represented on canvas.¹⁶

Not all frontier soldiers welcomed the Badlands with as much enthusiasm. General Alfred T. Sully himself referred to the Badlands as "Hell with the fires burned out."¹⁷ Many common soldiers on the northern plains shared Sully's sentiments:

The expedition at last struck the "mauvis Terra," or Badlands, a region of the most widely desolate country conceivable. No pen of writer, or brush of painter, can give the faintest idea of its awful desolation.¹⁸

Although most of the landscape on the northern frontier was unoccupied by a white population with buildings or fortifications, soldiers were quick to write about the forts or encampments of Native Americans that were new to their experience. The Sully

expedition of 1864 spent time at three such places on the western frontier of Dakota Territory: Fort Rice, Fort Berthold, and Fort Union. In each of these places, the frontier soldier came into contact with Native Americans.

Fort Rice was located on the western side of the Missouri River south of present-day Mandan, North Dakota. The soldiers crossing the Missouri River noted the distinct, yet subtle differences in the landscape: “some of the bluff[s] at a high point furnish the finest specimens of Brick Clay; this certainly is a most extraordinary country,” stated Private Ebenezer Rice of the Second Minnesota Cavalry, as he rode to the base of what are today the Sugar Loaf Mountains, hills located south of Mandan.¹⁹ This area had become a place of importance because of the building of “Fort Rice [which] is well situated.”²⁰ It “commands a fine view of the river and high lands on the east side of the river; four companies of the Thirtieth Wisconsin Volunteers built the post.”²¹ Fort Rice was first garrisoned by the Thirtieth Wisconsin, then by the Sixth Iowa, and eventually by the First United States Volunteer Infantry of galvanized Yankees. The ex-Confederate soldiers did not reach Fort Rice until 17 October 1864,²² and Sully’s expedition had already started its march back to Minnesota. Although there were companies of frontier soldiers still in the area at the time, this is why there was such scant contact between frontier soldiers and the galvanized soldiers. One soldier who was in contact with the ex-Confederate troops was Private Andrew Fisk. Fisk and part of Company A (and there were others) were involved in the relief of an emigrant train in Yellowstone Country. The members of the emigrant train were bound for the gold fields of Montana and Idaho. On

his trip back to Fort Ridgely, Fisk noted that his company had “two ex-reb prisoners along with [them].”²³

As the 1864 Sully expedition moved north along the Missouri River, the soldiers of the frontier stopped at Fort Berthold; here most of them had their first encounter with the Mandan Indians. The countryside around Fort Berthold was reported by frontier soldiers as being “a beautiful country . . . they call this the Big Bend of the Missouri.”²⁴ Describing the Native Americans whom he encountered at Fort Berthold, Minnesota Brigade Scout James Benton Atkinson stated, “they are good looking Indians, much fairer than any I have seen . . . some of them have light hair and very fair skin.”²⁵ Atkinson later described Fort Berthold’s Native American population as “Red Mandan Indians,” and noted that they grew “some 7,000 acres of corn planted and are the cleanest and neatest I have ever seen.”²⁶ Private George W. Doud of the Eighth Minnesota Infantry was also struck by the difference in the Mandan tribe at Fort Berthold: “they trade horses with the boys and the boys buy many other trinkets . . . some of the Mandan women have blue eyes.”²⁷ Andrew Fisk was impressed by the grass and water supply around Fort Berthold; he called the terrain “a level [sic] country” with “good grass.”²⁸ After the Sully expedition of 1864 left Fort Berthold, “Co. G of the Sixth Iowa Cavalry was left to garrison the fort.”²⁹

Fort Union was the farthest northern extent of the United States Army in Dakota Territory. Scout James Atkinson noted that Fort Union was “not a bad institution, [which] belonged to the American Fur Co.; and built some thirty-two years ago.”³⁰ The same regiment that built Fort Rice garrisoned Fort Union during the 1864 campaign through

Dakota Territory: "Co. I, Thirtieth Wis. Vol. are stationed here [Fort Union]." ³¹ During the time the Minnesota Brigade passed through and camped at Fort Union, Private

Andrew Fisk wrote about a scene that was seldom witnessed on the frontier in the 1860s:

Marched 12 miles to Ft. Union, our Co. on rear guard. The woods on the opposite side of the river are on fire. It is a pretty sight. Visited the fort, which is an Indian trading post. ³²

Along with ready commentary on the landscape and terrain came a great deal of writing about the weather of the northern plains. The climate was not predictable, nor were campaigns conducive to obtaining the best weather afforded frontier soldiers, because campaigns generally started in the spring and ended in the fall. Spring and fall on the northern plains could bring a variety of weather conditions, from extreme heat to thunderstorms and snow. Civil War soldiers also faced unpredictability of weather in the South. Although there was little chance of snowfall most of the year, the soldiers of the Union Army faced a difficult adaptation to the heat and humidity of the Deep South, and often the clothing worn by Union soldiers was heavy and unsuited for Southern campaigns. Frontier soldiers mentioned weather, as did their Civil War counterparts, and for soldiers of both conflicts, the complaints outweighed the positive statements. Many soldiers on the Sully expedition of 1864 mingled reports and writings about wildlife with comments about the weather.

The winter of 1864 was mild compared to typical conditions on the northern plains. In January of 1864, Private Andrew Fisk stated that the "weather [was] as warm as Indian Summer." ³³ But the temperature on the plains was very unpredictable, and the wind was the subject of frequent complaint. Only a month later, Private Fisk did not

complain about the temperature, which was sixteen degrees, but instead complained that the “wind is blowing a hurricane.”³⁴ While in garrison at Fort Ridgely, soldiers of the northern plains waited with real eagerness for spring to come. Since campaigning took place in late spring, February, March, and April were looked to for a break in the harsh weather and an increase in post activity. In April of 1864, to break the monotony of garrison duty, Private Fisk “worked on setting out trees on the grounds inside of the fort.”³⁵ Once the campaign against the Sioux began in June 1864, reports of landscape, wildlife, and weather were abundant. At the beginning of the expedition, Private Ebenezer Rice of the Second Minnesota Cavalry complained about the extreme wind: “rains at 7 p.m. light with a few hail stones, the Col[onel]’s buggy blew through the sutler’s tent endangering not only property but life and limb, I have seldom if ever seen as heavy wind.”³⁶ Thunderstorms were events that were sure to be recorded, such as the following by Colonel Robert McLaren:

Last night we had a western thunderstorm, with a high wind; the lightning flashed, and such thunder is only heard on these plains. It rained for two hours in perfect torrents.³⁷

Frontier soldiers who had never been to Dakota Territory and were not from western Minnesota were puzzled by two aspects of the climate of the northern plains: the first was the often quick change in weather patterns, and the second was the severe cold and barrenness of the land. Sixth Iowa Cavalry Private Frank Myers stated that “one of the peculiarities of that northern climate” was the cold nights with the absence of any dew, “the grass being as dry in the morning as the evening before.”³⁸ Severe changes in the weather usually meant heavy winds, and galvanized troops were not accustomed to

the winter's cold or the summer's dust storms. The editor of the *Frontier Scout*, Captain Enoch Adams, described the conditions and thoughts of Southerners in a poem written for press:

In this region, magnificent, chilly and gloomy,
I sit all alone like discrowned Montezuma.
O roll round ye months with a swift revolution
That brings from celibacy glad absolution.
The habits of anchorites, others may choose them,
But give me my wife to repose in my bosom.³⁹

By several accounts, a severe windstorm in late June of 1864 was the worst of the entire Sully campaign. According to Colonel Robert McLaren:

A most fearful tornado passed over camp, leveling almost every tent, sending my carriage "pell mell" through the sutler's tent. The air was full of rubber blankets, hats, shelter tents, and equipment. My tent stood. I never saw such wind. Wagons were overturned, etc.⁴⁰

One of the most popular diversions on campaign on the northern plains was looking at, chasing, or hunting game. Galvanized troops at Fort Rice regularly went out on excursions to hunt, often bothered by the weather, as illustrated by a comment in the *Frontier Scout*, which stated that the landscape was like "a Libyan desert when a simoon is raging."⁴¹ Frontier soldiers on campaign recorded the existence of many different forms of wildlife which included buffalo, prairie dogs, rattlesnakes, owls, bears, eagles, wolves, elk, and antelope.

Shortly after the start of the 1864 Sully expedition, Private Fisk saw "buffalo signs."⁴² Later in the campaign, Fisk described an incredible sight:

Saw buffalo to the number of thirty or forty thousand at one time — they were so thick that the ground was scarcely visible, and this for a distance up and down the

valley before us of many miles — as far as the eye could reach. The number simply is guess work — one cannot estimate them.⁴³

Buffalo were not the only wildlife reported; if animals strayed into camp, they were also the object of comment. On one occasion a “large pack of wolves invested our camp . . . and kept up one continual howl; they were drawn there by the dead cattle.”⁴⁴ Scout James Atkinson often reported the existence of animals on his forays prior to the army’s movement; he even claimed to have sighted an occasional “grizzly bear.”⁴⁵

In southwestern Dakota Territory, Private Ebenezer Rice nicknamed his temporary campaign surroundings “Camp Dog Town,”⁴⁶ due to the presence of prairie dogs:

Our camp should be named Camp “Dog Town” as the Prairie Dogs have a large village here, we have found one of the villages of these singular animals before on this side of the Missouri among there [sic] very singular habits is that of cohabiting with rattlesnakes and owls all three living in perfect peace and harmony in the same hole or house. Their barking is said to imitate dogs.⁴⁷

Frontier soldiers spent time hunting, but also wrote when others hunted. Private George Doud commented on one such day when “Cap[tain] F[isk], aristocracy goes a hunting, kills one antelope”; Doud himself was upset because he was on guard duty.⁴⁸

Besides the weather, especially the wind, frontier soldiers complained about insects that disrupted their daily routine or ruined the landscape. Fearing that the lives of horses and other livestock would be endangered, Ebenezer Rice noted that “as soon as we reached the elevated land the ravages of the grasshopper show again, the grass is literally crop[p]ed to the earth, the root[s] sear[e]d and sunburnt, starvation for the stock seems to stare us in the face.”⁴⁹ On one of the many hunting trips by galvanized Yankees, the

Frontier Scout reported “chasing antelope over the Plain.”⁵⁰ The *Frontier Scout* commented on the common problem of the ex-Rebels when hunting: “mosquitoes, misery with a big M. [and] we were skinned if not scalped.”⁵¹

The topic of diaries and letters, the landscape, weather, and wildlife of the northern plains were major concerns of frontier soldiers. Like Civil War soldiers, frontier soldiers had a mixed opinion of the beauty and serenity of the landscape. The weather was often too hot in summer and too cold in winter; very much like Civil War soldiers, western Billy Yanks were seldom satisfied, the windy condition of the northern plains being their main complaint. Private Andrew Fisk of the Second Minnesota Cavalry summed it up best: “My how the wind blows and howls!”⁵² The wildlife of the northern plains was plentiful and provided food, recreation, and distraction from campaigning, as it did with both Northern and Southern Civil War soldiers. Overall, there is little difference between the way frontier soldiers and Civil War soldiers observed and commented on their surroundings. As Bell Irvin Wiley stated in his *Life of Billy Yank*, unfavorable Southern land and the “backwardness” of the South “could be overcome by northern energy and enterprise,” according to Union soldiers.⁵³ Likewise, frontier soldiers, including galvanized Yankees, made the best of their situation while longing for home, although they were not anxious to recommend the northern plains or beyond to settlers. “I have only to say that all of the fine talk of Yellowstone Country is romance and should not be believed. . . . Stay at home white folk . . . at least women and children,” pleaded Private Ebenezer Rice.⁵⁴

Notes

1. Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952); Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943), 185.
2. Andrew J. Fisk, Private, Company A, Second Minnesota Cavalry, Diary entry of 13 May 1864, Diary, 1864-1865, TMs (photocopy), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
3. Robert N. McLaren, Colonel, Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry, Diary entry of 13 June 1864, Diary, 1864, TMs and LS (photocopy), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
4. Frank Myers, *Soldering in Dakota, Among the Indians, in 1863-4-5* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 1.
5. Fisk, Diary, 14 June 1864.
6. Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank*, 96.
7. *Ibid.*, 102.
8. James Benton Atkinson, Scout, Minnesota Brigade, 1864 Sully Expedition, Diary entry of 5 August 1864, Diary, 1864, TMs (photocopy), Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks.
9. Fisk, Diary, 10 April 1864.
10. Ebenezer O. Rice, Private, Company F, Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry, Diary entry of 7 July 1864, Diary 1864, TMs (photocopy), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
11. *Ibid.*
12. George W. Doud, Private, Company F, Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, Diary entry of 7 July 1864, Diary, 1862-1864, TMs (original), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
13. Myers, 12.
14. Fisk, Diary, 6 August 1864.
15. Rice, Diary, 5 August 1864.

16. Myers, 38.
17. Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *The Civil War: War on the Frontier: The Trans-Mississippi West* (Alexandria, Va.: Time Incorporated, 1986), 99.
18. Myers, 38.
19. Rice, Diary, 6 July 1864.
20. McLaren, Diary, 8 July 1864.
21. Ibid.
22. Dee Alexander Brown, *The Galvanized Yankees* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 81-82.
23. Fisk, Diary, 1 November 1864.
24. Ibid., 31 August 1864.
25. Atkinson, Diary, 28 August 1864.
26. Ibid., 29 August 1864.
27. Doud, Diary, 29 August 1864.
28. Fisk, Diary, 28 August 1864.
29. Doud, Diary, 29 August 1864.
30. Atkinson, Diary, 20 August 1864.
31. McLaren, Diary, 18 August 1864.
32. Fisk, Diary, 18 August 1864.
33. Ibid., 27 January 1864.
34. Ibid., 7 February 1864.
35. Ibid., 21 April 1864.
36. Rice, Diary, 28 June 1864.
37. McLaren, Diary, 19 June 1864.

38. Myers, 26.
39. *Frontier Scout* (Fort Rice), 22 June 1865.
40. McLaren, Diary, 28 June 1865.
41. *Frontier Scout* (Fort Rice), 22 June 1865.
42. Fisk, Diary, 18 June 1864.
43. *Ibid.*, 7 October 1864.
44. McLaren, Diary, 3 August 1864.
45. Atkinson, Diary, 10 August 1864.
46. Rice, Diary, 24 July 1864.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Doud, Diary, 14 July 1864.
49. Rice, Diary, 11 August 1864.
50. *Frontier Scout* (Fort Rice), 27 July 1864.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Fisk, Diary, 21 September 1864.
53. Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank*, 96.
54. Rice, Diary, 12 August 1864.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION TO THE FIGHTING

The experiences of frontier soldiers who fought Native Americans on the northern plains during the Great Sioux Uprising, 1862 to 1865, were very similar to those of Bell Irvin Wiley's Civil War "Billy Yanks," especially those in the western theater of the Civil War. Frontier soldiers and Civil War soldiers shared a remarkably similar experience, from enlistment, food, clothing, shelter, discipline, disease, combat, the role of the cavalry, and campaigning, to daily life at military outposts. Although the soldiers' experiences were much the same, frontier soldiers underwent and met challenges that were subtly different from those of their Civil War counterparts.

The Great Sioux Uprising was a conflict that arose out of the mistreatment of Native Americans by the United States Government. From 1862 to 1865, the United States Army was charged with the task of suppressing the uprising and checking the movement to eastern Dakota Territory of those Native Americans who posed an immediate threat to the white population of Minnesota. Generals Henry Sibley and Alfred Sully were given the task of carrying out the United States government's Indian policy on the northern plains from 1862 to 1865. General Sibley's 1863 expedition into Dakota Territory was unsuccessful; it did not eliminate the Native American threat to the population of Minnesota. General Sully's 1864 expedition into Dakota Territory was only

partially successful and precipitated the need for further expeditions in 1865, which were ineffective because they failed to encounter and engage significant numbers of Native Americans. The United States government's problems in Dakota Territory and Minnesota had blended with and were compounded by difficulties with other tribes in the western United States.

Sully's expedition, which was the most successful of the 1860s punitive expeditions, took place from 5 June 1864 to 8 October 1864.¹ This campaign covered 1,602 miles and accomplished two goals. First, it checked the movement of the Sioux back to the eastern Dakota Territory, and, second, two forts were built (Fort Rice and Fort Wadsworth) on the trail to the gold regions in the Northern Rockies.² The largest share of personal writing about military life on the northern plains between 1862 and 1866 came from the 1864 Sully Expedition.

Many historians believe that the Civil War was the central event of American history.³ By the same token, many frontier soldiers who served on the northern plains during the Civil War believed that this was the central event of their lives. At the very least, most frontier soldiers recognized that their fight against the Native Americans of the northern plains was linked to the greater conflict of the Civil War. For example, the commander of Fort Rice, Colonel Charles Dimon, underlined the importance of his "galvanized Yankees" to the northern plains conflict, contending that "the Rebels now engaged in support of the cause they espoused" were securing future generations safe passage through Indian Country.⁴

Frontier soldiers were assigned a variety of duties following General Sibley's 1863 expedition and General Sully's 1864 expedition. The majority of soldiers involved in the fight against the Sioux on the frontier ended up serving on frontier duty in Minnesota and Dakota Territory until they were mustered out of the service in 1865 or 1866. A smaller number entered the ranks of Union soldiers on post or patrol duty in Missouri or Kansas. Some frontier soldiers were sent south to fight the Civil War after the 1864 Sully expedition and other 1865 excursions into Dakota Territory. The regiments that were assigned to frontier duty on the northern plains after 1864 were the Sixth Iowa Volunteer Cavalry, the Seventh Iowa Volunteer Cavalry, the Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry, Brackett's Battalion of Minnesota Cavalry, the Third Minnesota Light Artillery Battery, and the "Galvanized Yankees" of the First United States Volunteer Infantry Regiment. All these regiments were mustered out of service in 1865 or 1866.⁵ The regiments that were sent south to fight the Civil War were the Sixth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry (Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Alabama), the Seventh Minnesota Volunteer Infantry (Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama), the Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry (Tennessee and North Carolina), the Ninth Minnesota volunteer Infantry (Missouri, Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Alabama), and the Tenth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry (Missouri, Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama), and the Thirteenth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry (Missouri and Kentucky).⁶ Many of the regiments that went south to fight Confederates were moved frequently from state to state, and there was one detachment of cavalry, Brackett's Battalion, that served in Kentucky, Tennessee, and

Alabama, prior to being moved to the northern plains to join the Sully expedition of 1864.⁷ The frontier soldiers who went to the South following the Indian campaigns were mustered out of service in 1865.⁸

The frontier soldiers who remained on the northern plains following General Alfred Sully's 1864 expedition wrote little about patrol and garrison duty. Occasionally, a soldier would note the landscape or the conditions that were found on campaign. "I have often made the remark since coming home from the army, that I never knew until after I had been through the war, what men or horses could endure and live through,"⁹ commented Frank Myers, who had been attached to the Sixth Iowa Cavalry during the Sully expedition. The soldiers from Minnesota regiments returned to Minnesota to be mustered out of service, predominately at Fort Snelling. Likewise, Iowa and Wisconsin soldiers were predominately mustered out of service in Davenport, Iowa, and Madison, Wisconsin, respectively. The Dakota Volunteer Battalion, which had two companies, was organized in Yankton, Dakota Territory (Company A) and Sioux City, Iowa (Company B).¹⁰ These Dakota Volunteers men mostly from Iowa and Dakota Territory, and they were assigned duty in Iowa and the northern plains in 1862 and 1863.¹¹ The Dakota Volunteer Battalion also took part in the 1864 Sully Expedition and afterward garrisoned forts in both northern and southern Dakota Territory.¹² The Dakota Volunteers were attached to the Sixth Iowa Cavalry for much of their service. While on duty on the northern plains, Private Frank Myers of the Sixth Iowa noted that "we had one company of Dakota soldiers called the Dakota Scouts, in which there were about twenty Indian soldiers."¹³ The Dakota Volunteers were mustered out of the army on 9 May 1865

(Company A) and November 1865 (Company B).¹⁴ The frontier soldiers who were assigned duty on the northern plains following 1864 spent most of their time guarding the frontier outposts. While an expedition was made by General Sully in 1865, it was short, and few Native Americans were encountered.

The regiments of frontier soldiers who were sent south during or after the 1864 Sully expedition were prolific in their writing to relatives about events of the Civil War. Captain Leonard Aldrich, Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, was stationed at Murfreesboro, Tennessee, in late 1864, and wrote letters to both his father and brother, comparing Minnesota to the surroundings of the South and describing weather, battles, and the character of Confederate soldiers. In November of 1864, Captain Aldrich gave his brother an idea of where and what Murfreesboro looked like:

Murfreesboro, where we are now is a place where the Third Regiment was surrendered by Cd. Lester. It is a town as large as St. Paul, I should think, south west from Nashville about 35 miles. Pleasantly situated on the Nashville and Chattanooga railroads. It was before the war a thrifty business place, but is now like a large portion of the South, desolated by war and its attended evils. I think the [conditions] must be as healthy here as in Minnesota or Iowa.¹⁵

The frontier soldiers who served in the South after the great Sioux Uprising shared a bond with those frontier soldiers who fought in the South prior to their involvement in the Sibley and Sully expeditions. Although the number of frontier soldiers who were transferred from Civil War duties to frontier duty was small, they sometimes would comment about their days in Dixie. Private Ebenezer Rice of the Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry was one such soldier, and on 4 July 1864, while on the Sully expedition, he noted:

One year ago today was a glorious one to us who were fatigued and worn by toil in the ditch and breastwork around Vicksb[u]rg, twas a day long to be remember[e]d by us there, today is all quietness.¹⁶

And this was not just a passing comment made by Private Rice; he wrote several times during the summer Indian Campaign of 1864 about his service in the Civil War. At the start of the 1864 Sully expedition, he stated, “[I] partook my first soldier repast for six months, many reminis[c]ences of the past are now recalled of the days in Dixie Land.”¹⁷ Rice, who was part of the Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry, served with the Fifth Regiment in Mississippi prior to moving to the northern plains to fight the Sioux.¹⁸ He recalled that service in September of 1864, while on the Sully expedition: “Today being the 23rd I found is my birthday 45 years being born [in] 1819. One year ago today I was in Black River, Mississippi with the Fifth Reg.”¹⁹ Only a very few soldiers had served in the Civil War before the Sully expedition, but frontier soldiers were very aware of what was happening in the South while they were fighting the Sioux. Many frontier soldiers felt that they were victims of the political leaders, just as Civil War soldiers did.²⁰

Therefore, it was logical for them to follow the news of politics and, of course, the military. Private Andrew Fisk of the Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry would frequently note political and military news that he felt was important: “‘Old-Abe’ is re-elected President, sure; Hurrah! Cleaned up my arms and had my clothes washed.”²¹

The victories of the Union Army also affected the morale of frontier soldiers, as they did Civil War soldiers. After hearing of General William T. Sherman’s march through Georgia and the start of his march through the Carolinas, Private Fisk wrote, “Good news from Sherman and Thomas.”²² Occasionally, the reports of frontier soldiers

about involvement in the Civil War came after the death of a fellow soldier. Private George Doud of the Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry reported on the death of a colleague from disease in July of 1864:

Mr. Andrew Doud of Co. H 8th Minn. died in the morning [of] disease — bilious colick. And with muffled drums his friends marched away and deposited his remains in the tomb. Mr. D[oud] was of a respectable family and just in the prime of manhood; past 22 [years old] a few days. He was in the Siege of Vicksburgh [sic] and was wounded in the knee and discharged. He reinlisted [sic] again in the 8th Minn. And now his frail body rests on the west banks of the Missouri on a Pleasant Prairie.²³

The amount and frequency of comment about frontier soldiering or about the Civil War were slight in comparison to the writing that streamed forth after these soldiers were sent south. The few soldiers who wrote of their Civil War experience after fighting Native Americans did so at length and at regular intervals. Captain Leonard Aldrich of the Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry wrote to his brother about his Civil War experience in November and December of 1864.²⁴ Aldrich described a battle against Confederates on the outskirts of Murfreesboro, Tennessee in December of 1864; in his letter, he commented on both the battle and “the rebels”:

Last Sunday the reb[e]ls commenced an attack on a small party stationed in a blockhouse about 5 miles from here, on the railroads to Nashville. [After the battle was over] some of the prisoners say, as soon as they learned that it was the Minnesota Indian hunting regiment and we had gained the timber, they would be obliged to leave, for we were more used to that kind of fighting than they. They must have had 3 or 4 times our number. From the report the prisoners give, . . . our regiment lost 90 killed and wounded, in not more than 50 or 60 minutes at the longest. The statement made by some that rebs fight as bravely as our men is not true, if our regiment had been where they were in the beginning of the fight, five times our numbers could not have driven us out.²⁵

Bell Irvin Wiley's studies of Union soldiers (*The Life of Billy Yank*, 1952) and Confederate soldiers (*The Life of Johnny Reb*, 1943) are the definitive works on the lives of Civil War soldiers. Wiley wrote in detail about the experiences of the soldiers of North and South, how both sides lived from day to day, battle experiences, equipment, backgrounds, and much more. There are many similarities between Wiley's "Billy Yank" and "Johnny Reb," and there are also differences. The frontier soldier on the northern plains had experiences that were very similar to those of both "Billy Yank" and "Johnny Reb." The soldiers of the northern plains also shared many of the differences that Wiley's Civil War Union soldiers had with the soldiers of the Confederacy. The frontier Union soldier had more provisions and a stronger interest in politics, and was less religious, more materialistic, not as imaginative or humorous in letters, and more stubborn in resolve than the Southern soldiers described by Wiley. These characteristics they had in common with Wiley's "Billy Yank."²⁶

Even though frontier soldiers shared common ground with Union Civil War soldiers, it seems that they also shared similarities with Confederate soldiers, more than Civil War "Billy Yanks" did. Frontier soldiers, as revealed in letters, manuscripts, and available documents, were less educated and less urban than Wiley's "Billy Yanks." The majority of frontier soldiers who fought the Sioux on the northern plains between 1862 and 1866 seemed to be closer in experience to "Johnny Reb" in that respect. In addition, the concern that frontier soldiers showed for their fight against the Sioux was similar to the concern many Confederate soldiers showed with the Civil War; the cause was important, but defeat of the Sioux, like defeat of the Union, was for home and family, not

for government. Captain Leonard Aldrich of the Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry fought in both the Great Sioux Uprising and the later stages of the Civil War. Aldrich's first impression of "rebels" was not favorable; he questioned their bravery.²⁷ However, in several letters to his brother, Aldrich identified with Confederate soldiers and stated, "I should like to try my hands in raising cotton for a few years if everything works right."²⁸ Overall, the experience of frontier "Billy Yanks" was comparable to that of both Union and Confederate soldiers and, for all practical purposes, the soldier in any United States army, taking time period into consideration.

Due to a significantly smaller amount of information, there are areas in which comparison is difficult to make. For instance, little information exists on the literacy of frontier soldiers, and a question remains as to how many of the soldiers on the northern plains were immigrants. Another uncertain feature of the frontier soldiers' experience is the magnitude and quality of the martial spirit they possessed. What was evident from their documents, letters, and diaries was similarities between them and their Civil War counterparts in enlistment, pay, food, clothing, shelter, camp life, discipline, combat, the role of the cavalry, and their reflections on the landscape.

Frontier soldiers and Civil War Union soldiers were fighting for the same reasons and enlisted for the same reasons, among them being state pride, thirteen dollars a month, and love of one's country. Wiley described Civil War "Billy Yanks" as fighting for the "soundness of the democratic experiment," and, as soon as the war was over (Great Sioux Uprising or Civil War), "getting home as soon as possible."²⁹ Most frontier soldiers were farmers, volunteers who were recruited at mass meetings and rallies and who were critical

of the government's handling of the Sioux Uprising. Private James Woodbury of the Ninth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry was critical of President Abraham Lincoln's Indian policy and Civil War policy.³⁰ After his return from the Sully Expedition of 1864, Private Doud of the Eighth Minnesota Infantry complained that only "one lady waived her handkerchief as a token for us at Chaska, the rest of the way th[e]y were silent as death."³¹ Doud was also critical of President Lincoln's policies. Civil War soldiers shared these experiences with the soldiers of the northern plains.

In regard to pay, food, clothing, shelter, camp life, discipline, combat, and landscape, the experience of frontier and Civil War soldiers was that they spent more time in camp than on campaign or in battle combined. All Union soldiers shared the same clothing and shelter, and often spent their money before they were paid.

A central time in both Civil War and frontier camps was payday; all activities revolved around it. A problem that was shared was that soldiers were almost always paid late.³² Because pay was often late, credit was used to purchase goods from both sutlers and the commissary. Regardless of the late pay, Civil War Union soldiers always seemed to have extra money, and their frontier counterparts did also.

The clothing and shelter of frontier soldiers were much the same as that of their Civil War comrades. The greatest difference in supply was the abundance of good food. Frontier soldiers had a plethora of wild game, including buffalo, antelope, rabbit, deer, and elk. The soldiers of the northern plains often supplemented their diet by eating at citizens' homes, just as Civil War soldiers did. Regarding food, all U.S. soldiers faced the problem of "distribution not stock."³³ On the northern plains, frontier soldiers never

experienced a severe shortage of food, and supply lines were never cut. Frontier soldiers did not have to deal with Confederate generals Nathan Bedford Forrest or Earl VanDorn.³⁴

Reading, letter writing, and music were the most popular distractions in army camps, both Civil War and frontier. The regimentation, drill, and many camp activities were the same. To fight the boredom that often accompanied camp life, soldiers in the Civil War and on the frontier fished, hunted, danced, attended religious meetings, washed clothes, visited surrounding communities, made trips to the sutlers, drank alcohol, and gambled. Camp conditions for frontier soldiers were less crowded and more sanitary, with less chance of disease and more readily available medical treatment. Although frontier soldiers still faced disease and antiquated medicine, they were better off than Civil War soldiers. In Civil War camps, the existence of disease always loomed; the most prevalent ailment was diarrhea. Disease was also prevalent on the northern plains. Frontier soldiers suffered from typhoid, exposure, diarrhea, and dysentery. Remedies for their ailments were the same as for other soldiers.

The frontier soldier, like those in the South, was more citizen than soldier. Thus, discipline was a problem, but frontier soldiers seemed less sarcastic about discipline in their diaries and letters. The most common offense in the U.S. Army was disrespect for authority, and officers were commonly the object of complaint. Sleeping on duty, drunkenness, stealing, fighting, and being absent without leave were common offenses in the frontier army, just as in the Civil War army. The most noticeable difference in the frontier army was the desertion rate, which was lower than in the Civil War. The

hardships that soldiers faced on the frontier were not as extreme as those faced by soldiers in the South. Frontier soldiers faced less disease (their camps were cleaner and smaller), no shortage of food, and proximity to family. Therefore, they seemed to have a feeling that their fight was for their own families; at least, this seemed evident from the soldiers from Minnesota, and in this respect, their attitudes were similar to those of Confederate soldiers.

Although there were many more similarities between Civil War Union soldiers and frontier soldiers, the differences, though subtle, were important. After enlistment, many frontier soldiers did not share the enthusiasm their Civil War counterparts had for fighting. Most frontier soldiers were disappointed that they had to fight Native Americans rather than Confederate soldiers. Still, even fighting the Sioux, a majority of frontier soldiers felt that they were contributing to the Civil War effort.

The difference between what soldiers on the frontier faced in battle and what Civil War soldiers on both sides faced was the most striking contrast. The enemy that frontier soldiers were fighting would not always engage in combat when confronted. This was not a common occurrence in the Civil War. Native Americans used "hit and run" tactics, and frontier soldiers very seldom found themselves outnumbered. Most battles on the northern plains were skirmishes, and very seldom did frontier soldiers engage Native Americans in Civil War-style, large-scale battle. The carnage and horror, observed so often by Civil War soldiers and discussed in Wiley's *Billy Yank* and *Johnny Reb* and in James Robertson's *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, were conspicuously absent from frontier

soldiers' letters, diaries, and manuscripts. Battles on the frontier were markedly different than Civil War battles.

The role of the cavalry in both the Civil War and the Great Sioux Uprising was vital to military success. In both conflicts, the speed and mobility of horses were their greatest assets. Frontier soldiers and Civil War soldiers both faced enemies that were excellent horsemen. Frontier campaigns were carried out almost completely by mounted forces. Other than the Thirtieth Wisconsin and those troops garrisoning forts, both the Sibley and Sully campaigns had a predominance of cavalry and mounted infantry. The Civil War was a foot soldier's fight. The battles on the northern plains against Native Americans were generally small skirmishes in which an element of surprise played an important role. Additionally, the use of horses was an absolute necessity because of the distances traveled and the elusiveness of the Sioux. The 1864 Sully Expedition traveled from Fort Ridgely, 385 miles to Fort Rice, while most frontier soldiers, later involved in the Civil War in Tennessee, would have traveled a shorter distance from Nashville, 242 miles to Atlanta, Georgia. A disproportionate number of Civil War battles took place in Virginia, and the distance from Washington, D.C., to Richmond was 95 miles. The Sully Expedition covered 1,602 miles.³⁵

Cavalry used during the Civil War was primarily used as flank support for infantry in large battles, for raids and communications, and to cut supply lines; on the frontier, cavalry played a far more important role. Both Civil War cavalry and frontier soldiers revered the horse for the most part. There was considerable cooperation between cavalry and infantry in caring for soldiers' animals on the frontier. A large portion of camp leisure

time revolved around the horse on the northern plains, and gambling for horses and horse trading were popular in frontier camps and at trading posts. Frontier soldiers often leveled complaints about the mistreatment of their horses by officers. The role of the cavalry on the frontier campaign was essential, and soldiers treated it as such.

A striking difference on the northern plains was the presence of “galvanized Yankees.” Although the Confederacy did use a small number of “galvanized Rebels” at the end of the Civil War, the contribution of those troops is disputed.³⁶ The First United States Volunteer Infantry garrisoned Fort Rice from October of 1864 to October of 1865, when they were moved to Saint Louis, Missouri. The galvanized Yankees’ experience at Fort Rice was both typical and in sharp contrast to the experience of frontier soldiers during the Great Sioux Uprising. Fort Rice was built by the Thirtieth Wisconsin and lay on the west bank of the Missouri River. The experiences of the galvanized Yankees were typical of those of other frontier soldiers in mission, food, clothing, shelter, combat, camp life, disease, and desertion. The ex-Rebel soldiers were to keep Fort Rice operating as a supply post, hospital, and protective base for emigrants. Disease claimed a greater portion of their regiment than other frontier regiments. The desertion rate of galvanized troops was only slightly higher than that of other frontier regiments, and fairly equal to Civil War regiments. The two greatest differences experienced by galvanized Yankees were the harsh northern plains climate, which was a severe change for Southern soldiers, and a publication they produced at Fort Rice, the *Frontier Scout*. The printing press had been left at Fort Rice by the Thirtieth Wisconsin, and the First U.S. Volunteer Infantry published sixteen issues from June of 1865 to October of 1865. The *Frontier Scout*

included contributions from a majority of soldiers at Fort Rice. The subjects most frequently covered included the Dakota landscape, the weather, and thoughts about loved ones. The Dakota landscape and weather were not well received by the ex-Rebel soldiers or by frontier soldiers in general.

Early in the experiences of frontier soldiers, reports of Dakota Territory were unfavorable; however, as forts were built and campaigns continued, some frontier soldiers wrote of the beauty of the territory. The most rugged place in the Dakota Territory was the “Badlands,” and frontier soldiers either loved the beauty of the area or despised its harshness. Landscape and weather preoccupied many frontier soldiers, and there are an abundance of writings on the topic. The extremes of weather on the northern plains were a noted difference in the experiences of Civil War soldiers. For example, Private Ebenezer Rice of the Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry, who had fought in the Civil War (in the South) preferred the Dakota landscape to that of the South.³⁷ Frontier soldiers complained of humidity, extreme cold, and heavy winds. The lack of fresh water was also a constant complaint, along with the lack of grass and trees. Even Private Rice, entering the Badlands and Yellowstone Country, warned, “Stay at home white folk!”³⁸ Overall, the landscape and weather were a major discomfort to frontier soldiers and a pronounced difference from the experience of Civil War soldiers, who found a different sort of discomfort in the extreme heat of the South.

If there is a broader meaning in the experiences of frontier soldiers on the northern plains, it is directly linked to the American Civil War. The experiences of frontier soldiers were very similar to those of Civil War soldiers. Frontier soldiers truly believed they were

contributing to the Union cause. The Great Sioux Uprising and subsequent expeditions by generals Sibley and Sully were brought about by government neglect of the Sioux and by starvation, but because of the timing of the uprising, frontier soldiers generally regarded it as parallel to the Civil War.

Due to the Civil War, the military force that the government was able to assemble to meet the Native American threat was undoubtedly larger than it would have been if there had been no Civil War. Frontier soldiers were volunteers. They enlisted for Civil War duty, and were on hand when the need for frontier service developed. They came from Nebraska, Iowa, Wisconsin, Dakota, and Minnesota. In addition, galvanized soldiers from the South were mustered for service. These soldiers protected the Minnesota frontier and emigrants on the trail to gold fields in Idaho; this, in itself, was a formidable task. The opening of Dakota Territory might have come much later without them. The galvanized Yankees and the Thirtieth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry played a particularly conspicuous role in the establishment and garrisoning of Fort Rice, the first real protective U.S. Army post on the western side of the Missouri River in northern Dakota Territory. Under harsh and cruel weather, Native American attack, and debilitating disease, the galvanized soldiers were able to create a publication that was truly unique, a blend of the frontier, Civil War, and homespun South: the *Frontier Scout*. The broader meaning of the frontier soldiers' experiences, whether Minnesotan, Iowan, or galvanized, involves the fact that they shared an experience of the Civil War era with few, yet subtle differences. Much less was written about the Great Sioux Uprising and subsequent Dakota expeditions than about the Civil War, but the same type of citizen-soldiers who

answered the call to arms for the Civil War also fought in the Great Sioux Uprising. The citizen-soldiers of the Sioux Uprising were less enthusiastic about their mission, but no less arrogant in the belief that they would prevail in the fight. Simply put, Civil War soldiers, whether Confederate, Union, frontier, or galvanized, were remarkably similar. Historian James Robertson, Jr., wrote in *Soldiers Blue and Gray* that the lasting realization of the Civil War is “that when the great challenges come, this nation’s common people can and will show that they value some ideals more than they value their lives.”³⁹

The soldiers of Minnesota regiments have left a considerable amount of personal writing, while Iowa and Wisconsin soldiers left fewer personal writings. The expeditions of generals Henry Sibley and Alfred Sully can be readily reconstructed through soldiers’ writings and United States government records. The Fort Rice publication, *Frontier Scout*, written by galvanized Yankees, gives an insight into the lives of ex-Rebel soldiers who served on the Dakota frontier. But, the personal reflections of galvanized soldiers are incomplete. The untapped microfilm resource of the National Archives, including the Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, 1780’s-1917, and the Compiled Service Records of Former Confederate Soldiers Who Served in the 1st Through 6th U.S. Volunteer Infantry Regiments, 1864-1866, could shed light on the personal recollections of galvanized soldiers on the northern plains. Unfortunately, these records were not available for interlibrary loan.

Although the Dakota expeditions against the Sioux from 1862 to 1865 were not completely successful, they did protect the Minnesota frontier and open the Dakota

Territory to white settlement. Frontier soldiers, although fighting in a fringe conflict to the Civil War, experienced much the same as Civil War soldiers. Some frontier soldiers then had the added duty of fighting in the Civil War. Frontier soldiers more often than not rose to the occasion and effectively dealt with the hardship, fatigue, and battle of the campaigns against the Sioux.

Notes

1. Ebenezer O. Rice, Private, Company F, Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry, Diary entry of 8 October 1864, Diary, 1864, TMs (photocopy), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
2. Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *The Civil War: War on the Frontiers: The Trans-Mississippi West* (Alexandria, Va.: Time Incorporated, 1986), 95.
3. James I. Robertson, Jr., *Soldiers Blue and Gray* (University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 227.
4. *Frontier Scout* (Fort Rice), 22 June 1865.
5. Frederick Henry Dyer, *Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (Des Moines: The Dyer Publishing Company, 1908; reprinted New York National Historical Society, 1979), 1162, 1293-1295, 1717.
6. *Ibid.*, 1298, 1300, 1686.
7. *Ibid.*, 1294.
8. *Ibid.*, 1299, 1300, 1686.
9. Frank Myers, *Soldering in Dakota, Among the Indians, in 1863-64-65* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press), 25.
10. Dyer, 1352.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. Myers, 10.
14. Dyer, 1352.
15. Leonard Aldrich, Captain, Company F, Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, Letter to brother, 7 November 1864, Papers, Roll #895, 1862-1866, TMs and LS (photocopy), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
16. Rice, Diary, 4 July 1864.
17. *Ibid.*, 1 June 1864.

18. Ibid., 23 September 1864.
19. Ibid.
20. Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952); Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943), 350.
21. Andrew J. Fisk, Private, Company A, Second Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry, Diary entry of 10 November 1864, Diary, 1864-1865, TMs (photocopy), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
22. Ibid., 21 December 1864.
23. George W. Doud, Private, Company F, Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, Diary entry of 16 July 1864, Diary, 1862-1864, TMs (original), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
24. Aldrich, Letter to brother, 11 December 1864.
25. Ibid.
26. Wiley, *Life of Billy Yank*, 358.
27. Aldrich, Letter to brother, 11 December 1864.
28. Ibid., November 1864.
29. Wiley, *Life of Billy Yank*, 40.
30. James Woodbury, Private, Company A, Ninth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, 1862-1865, *Lincoln Herald*, Leonard Pastile, editor, Part 1, Summer 1980, 387-392; Fall 1930, 438-446, TMs (photocopy), Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.
31. Doud, Diary, 14 October 1864.
32. Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank*, 99.
33. Ibid., 62.
34. Ibid., 227.
35. Rice, Diary, 8 October 1864.
36. Dee Alexander Brown, *The Galvanized Yankees* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 211-216.

37. Rice, Diary, 15 June 1864.
38. Ibid., 12 August 1864.
39. Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, 228.

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