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Letter from the Secretary of War, transmitting, in response to resolution of February 11, 1887, report of Colonel Carrington on the massacre near Fort Philip Kearny.

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L E T T E R

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

TRANSMITTING,

*In response to resolution of February 11, 1887, report of Colonel Carrington
on the massacre near Fort Philip Kearny.*

FEBRUARY 21, 1887.—Referred to the Committee on Military Affairs and ordered to be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington City, February 19, 1887.

The Secretary of War has the honor to transmit to the United States Senate a copy of the report of Col. Henry B. Carrington, U. S. Army, of the massacre of December 21, 1866, near Fort Philip Kearny, Dakota Territory, with accompanying list of casualties, together with a transcript from the return of that post for the month of December, 1866, giving a list of the officers and enlisted men killed in action with Indians December 21, 1866, the same being transmitted in response to Senate resolution of the 11th instant calling for these papers.

It may be added that the list of casualties marked "A," referred to in Colonel Carrington's report, does not appear to have been received in the Department.

WM. C. ENDICOTT,
Secretary of War.

The PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE UNITED STATES SENATE.

HEADQUARTERS MILITARY DIVISION OF THE MISSOURI,
Saint Louis, Mo., January 29, 1867.

SIR: I have the honor to transmit the inclosed communication of Col. H. B. Carrington, Eighteenth United States Infantry, dated Fort Philip Kearny, January 3, 1867, reporting "the facts of fight with Indians on the 21st ultimo," with the indorsement thereon of Brevet Maj. Gen. P. St. George Cooke, for the information of the War Department.

I have to request that, if any remedial measures are deemed necessary, the investigation of the matter be left entirely with Brevet Major-

General Augur, the department commander, who is, by law, vested with authority to ——— order general courts-martial whenever necessary.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

W. T. SHERMAN,
Lieutenant-General.

The ADJUTANT-GENERAL, U. S. ARMY,
Washington, D. C.

ADJUTANT-GENERAL'S OFFICE,
Washington, February 4, 1867.

Respectfully submitted to General Grant, commanding Army of the United States.

E. D. TOWNSEND,
Assistant Adjutant-General.

Respectfully forwarded to the Secretary of War for his information.

U. S. GRANT,
General.

HEADQUARTERS ARMY UNITED STATES, *March 9, 1867.*

HEADQUARTERS POST,

Fort Philip Kearny, Dak., January 3, 1867.

I respectfully state the facts of fight with Indians on the 21st ultimo. This disaster had the effect to confirm my judgment as to the hostility of Indians, and solemnly declares by its roll of dead, and the numbers engaged, that my declarations, from my arrival at Laramie in June, were not idle conjecture, but true.

It also declares that in Indian warfare there must be perfect coolness, steadiness, and judgment. This contest is in their best and almost their last hunting grounds. They cannot be whipped or punished, by some little dash after a handful, nor by mere resistance of offensive movements. They must be *subjected* and made to respect and fear the whites.

It also declares with equal plainness that my letter from Fort Laramie, as to the absolute failure of the treaty, so far as related to my command, was true.

It also vindicates every report from my pen, and every measure I have taken to secure defensive and tenable posts on this line.

It vindicates my administration of the Mountain District, Department of the Platte, and asserts that the confidence reposed in me by Lieutenant-General Sherman has been fully met.

It vindicates my applications so often made for re-enforcements, and demonstrates the fact that if I had received those assured to me by telegram and letter, I could have kept up communications and opened a safe route for emigrants next spring.

It proves correct my report of 1,500 lodges of hostile Indians on Tongue River, not many hours ride from this post.

I no less declare that while there has been partial success in impromptu dashes, the Indians, now desperate and bitter, looks upon the rash white man as a sure victim no less than he does a coward, and that the United States must come to the deliberate resolve to send an army equal to a fight with the Indians of the Northwest.

Better to have the expense at once than to have a lingering, provoking war for years. It must be met and the *time* is just now.

I respectfully refer to my official reports and correspondence from Department headquarters for verification of the foregoing propositions, and proceed to the details of "Fetterman's massacre."

On the morning of the 21st ultimo, at about 11 o'clock a. m., my picket on Pilot Hill reported the wood train corralled and threatened by Indians on Sullivant Hills, about a mile and a half from the fort.

A few shots were heard. Indians also appeared in brush at the crossing of Piney by the Virginia City road.

Upon tendering to Brevet Major Powell the command of Company C, United States Cavalry, then without an officer, but which he had been drilling, Brevet Lieut. Col. Fetterman claimed by rank to go out. I acquiesced, giving him the men of his own company that were for duty and a portion of Company C, Second Battalion, Eighteenth United States Infantry. Lieut. G. W. Grummond, who had commanded the mounted infantry, requested to take out the cavalry. He did so.

In the previous skirmish Lieutenant Grummond was barely saved from the disaster that befell Lieutenant Bingham by timely aid.

Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Fetterman also was well admonished as well as myself that we were fighting brave and desperate enemies, who had sought to make up by cunning and deceit all the advantage which the white man gains by intelligence and better arms.

My instructions were therefore peremptory and explicit. I knew the ambition of each to win honor; but being unprepared for large aggressive action through want of adequate force now fully demonstrated, I looked to continuance of timber supplies to prepare for more troops as the one practical duty. Hence, two days before, Major Powell, sent out to cover the train under similar circumstances, simply did that duty, when he could have had a fight to any extent.

The day before, viz, the 20th ultimo, I went myself to the Pinery and built a bridge of 45 feet span to expedite the passage of wagons from the woods into open ground. Hence my instructions to Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Fetterman, viz: "Support the wood train, relieve it, and report to me. Do not engage or pursue Indians at its expense. Under no circumstances pursue over the ridge," viz, Lodge Trail Ridge, as per map in your possession.

To Lieutenant Grummond I gave orders to "report to Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Fetterman, implicitly obey orders, and not leave him."

Before the command left I instructed Lieut. A. H. Wands, my regimental quartermaster and acting adjutant, to repeat these orders. He did so.

Fearing still that the spirit of ambition might override prudence, as my refusal to permit 60 mounted men and 40 citizens to go for several days down Tongue River Valley *after villages* had been unfavorably regarded by Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Fetterman and Captain Brown, I crossed the parade, and from a sentry platform halted the cavalry and again repeated my precise orders. I knew that the Indians had for some days returned each time with increased numbers to feel our strength and decoy detachments to their sacrifice, and believed that to foil their purpose was actual victory, until re-enforcements should arrive and my preparations were completed. I was right.

Just as the command left, five Indians reappeared at the crossing. The glass revealed others in the thicket, having the apparent object of determining the watchfulness of the garrison, or cutting off any small party that should move out. A case-shot dismounted one, and developed nearly 30, who broke for the hills and ravines to the north.

In half an hour the picket reported that the wood train had broken corral and moved on to the Pinery. No report came from the detachment. It was composed of 81 officers and men, including 2 citizens, all well armed, the cavalry having the new carbine, while the detachment of infantry was of choice men, the pride of their companies.

At 12 o'clock firing was heard towards Peno Creek, beyond Lodge Trail Ridge. A few shots were followed by constant shots, not to be counted. Captain Ten Eyck was immediately dispatched with infantry and the remaining cavalry, and two wagons, and orders to join Colonel Fetterman at all hazards. The men moved promptly and on the run, but within little more than half an hour from the first shot, and just as the supporting party reached the hill overlooking the scene of action, all firing ceased.

Captain Ten Eyck sent a mounted orderly back with the report that he could see or hear nothing of Fetterman, but that a body of Indians on the road below him were challenging him to come down, while larger bodies were all in the valleys for several miles around. Moving cautiously forward with the wagons, evidently supposed by the enemy to be guns, as mounted men were in advance, he rescued from the spot where the enemy had been nearest 49 bodies, including those of Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Fetterman and Capt. F. H. Brown. The latter went out without my consent or knowledge fearlessly to fight Indians with any adverse odds, and determined to kill one, at least, before joining his company.

Captain Ten-Eyck fell back slowly, followed but not pressed by the enemy, reaching the post without any loss. The following day, finding general doubt as to the success of an attempt to recover other bodies, but believing that failure to rescue them would dishearten the command and encourage the Indians, who are so particular in this regard, I took 80 men and went to the scene of action, leaving a picket to advise me of any movement in the rear, and to keep signal communication with the garrison.

The scene of action told its own story.

The road on the little ridge where the final stand took place was strewn with arrows, arrow-heads, scalp-poles, and broken shafts of spears.

The arrows that were spent harmlessly from all directions show that the command was suddenly overwhelmed, surrounded, and cut off while in retreat. Not an officer or man survived. A few bodies were found at the north end of the divide over which the road runs just beyond Lodge Trail Ridge.

Nearly all were heaped near four rocks at the point nearest the fort, these rocks inclosing a space about 6 feet square, having been the last refuge for defense. Here were also a few unexpended rounds of Spencer cartridge.

Fetterman and Brown had each a revolver shot in the left temple. As Brown always declared that he would reserve a shot for himself as a last resort, so I am convinced that these two brave men fell each by the other's hand, rather than undergo the slow torture inflicted upon others.

Lieutenant Grummond's body was on the road between the two extremes, with a few others. This was not far from 5 miles from the fort, and nearly as far from the wood train. Neither its own guard nor the detachment could by any possibility have helped each other, and the train was incidentally saved by the fierceness of the fight in the brave but rash impulse of pursuit.

The officers who fell believed that no Indian force could overwhelm that number of troops well held in hand.

Their terrible massacre bore marks of great valor, and has demonstrated the force and character of the foe; but no valor could have saved them.

Pools of blood on the road and sloping sides of the narrow divide showed where Indians bled fatally; but their bodies were carried off. I counted sixty-five such pools in the space of an acre, and three within 10 feet of Lieutenant Grummond's body. Eleven American horses and nine Indian ponies were on the road, or near the line of bodies; others crippled were in the valleys.

At the northwest or farther point, between two rocks, and apparently where the command first fell back from the valley, realizing their danger, I found citizen James S. Wheatley and Isaac Fisher, of Blue Springs, Nebr., who, with "Henry rifles," felt invincible, but fell, one having one hundred and five arrows in his naked body. The widow and family of Wheatly are here. The cartridge shells about him told how well they fought.

Before closing this report, I wish to say that every man—officer, soldier, or citizen—who fell received burial, with such record as to identify each.

Fetterman, Brown, and Grummond lie in one grave. The remainder also share one tomb, buried, as they fought, together, but the cases in which they were laid are duly placed and numbered.

I ask the general commanding to give my report, in the absence of the division commander, an access to the eye and ear of the General-in-Chief. The department commander must have more troops, and I declare this my judgment solemnly and for the general public good, without one spark of personal ambition other than that to do my duty daily as it comes; and whether I seem to speak too plainly or not, even with the purpose to declare the whole truth, and with proper respect to my superior officers, who are entitled to the facts, as to scenes remote from their own immediate notice, I was asked to "send all the bad news." I do it so far as far as I can.

I give some of the facts as to my men, whose bodies I found just at dark, resolved to bring all in, viz:

MUTILATIONS.

Eyes torn out and laid on the rocks.

Noses cut off

Ears cut off.

Chins hewn off.

Teeth chopped out.

Joints of fingers cut off.

Brains taken out and placed on rocks, with members of the body.

Entrails taken out and exposed.

Hands cut off.

Feet cut off.

Arms taken out from socket.

Private parts severed and indecently placed on the person.

Eyes, ears, mouth, and arms penetrated with spear-heads, sticks, and arrows.

Ribs slashed to separation with knives.

Skulls severed in every form from chin to crown.

Muscles of calves, thighs, stomach, breast, back, arms, and cheek taken out.

Punctures upon every sensitive part of the body, even to the soles of the feet and palms of the hand.

All this does not approximate the whole truth. Every medical officer was faithfully aided by a large force of men and all were not buried until Wednesday after the fight.

The great real fact is, that these Indians take alive when possible, and slowly torture. It is the opinion of Dr. S. M. Horton, post surgeon, that not more than six were killed by balls. Of course the whole arrows, hundreds of which were removed from the naked bodies, were all used after the removal of the clothing.

I have said enough; it is a hard but absolute duty. In the establishment of this post I designed to put it where it fell heaviest upon the Indians, and therefore the better for the emigrants. My duty will be done when I leave, as ordered to my new regimental headquarters, Fort Conger. I submit herewith list of casualties marked A.

I shall also, as soon as practicable, make full report for the year 1866 of operations in the establishment of this new line.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

HENRY B. CARRINGTON,
Colonel Eighteenth United States Infantry, Commanding Post.

ASSISTANT ADJUTANT-GENERAL, DEPARTMENT OF THE PLATTE,
Omaha, Nebr.

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF THE PLATTE,
Omaha, January 22, 1867.

Official copy respectfully furnished for the information of the Lieutenant-General commanding Military Division of the Missouri.

This report put off for thirteen days, until notice of his being relieved was received. That seems to have given color to it. An officer of high rank, in letter of January 4, from Phil. Kearny, gives the following version: "The men, as usual, when the wood train was known to be corraled by the Indians, rushed out helter-skelter, some leaping over the stockade, which is in no place over eight feet high. What probability there is of their having had with them a proper supply of ammunition you can judge."

No reinforcements ever "assured" to Col. C. failed to be sent. Before the Platte was put formally under my command, two companies of cavalry were ordered from Fort Laramie, but only one turned out to be disposable; an additional company of infantry was afterwards sent. November 25 he wrote he would "make the winter one of active operations in different directions, as best affords chance of punishment." December 19 telegraphed he was "preparing for active movements."

P. ST. GEO. COOKE,
Brevet Major-General, Commanding.

[Transcript from post return of Fort Philip Kearny, Dakota, for the month of December, 1866.]

Names of officers and enlisted men killed in action with Indians December 21, 1866.

OFFICERS.

Name.	Rank.	Command.
William J. Fetterman	Captain and brevet lieutenant-colonel.	Company A, second battalion, Eighteenth Infantry.
Frederick H. Brown	Captain	Company E, first battalion, Eighteenth Infantry.
George W. Grummond	Second lieutenant	Company C, second battalion, Eighteenth Infantry.

ENLISTED MEN.

Name, &c.	Company.	Battalion.	Regiment.
Augustus Lang, first sergeant	A	Second	Eighteenth Infantry.
Hugh Murphy, sergeant	A	Second	Do.
Robert Lennon, corporal	A	Second	Do.
William Dute, corporal	A	Second	Do.
Frederick Ackerman, private	A	Second	Do.
William Betzler, private	A	Second	Do.
Patrick Shannon, private	A	Second	Do.
Charles M. Taylor, private	A	Second	Do.
Joseph D. Thomas, private	A	Second	Do.
Daniel Thorrey, private	A	Second	Do.
Michael Harten, private	A	Second	Do.
Thomas Burk, private	A	Second	Do.

Names of officers and enlisted men who were killed in action with Indians, &c.—Continued.

ENLISTED MEN—Continued.

Name, &c.	Company.	Battalion.	Regiment.
Henry Buchanan, private	A	Second	Eighteenth Infantry.
Maximilian Dohring, private	A	Second	Do.
George E. R. Goodall, private	A	Second	Do.
Martin Kelley, private	A	Second	Do.
John Thompson, private	A	Second	Do.
Albert H. Walters, private	A	Second	Do.
John M. Weaver, private	A	Second	Do.
John Woodruff, private	A	Second	Do.
Francis S. Gordon, private	A	Second	Do.
Francis Raymond, sergeant	C	Second	Do.
Patrick Rooney, sergeant	C	Second	Do.
Gustave A. Bauer, corporal	C	Second	Do.
Patrick Gallagher, corporal	C	Second	Do.
Michael O'Garra, private	C	Second	Do.
Facol Rosenburg, private	C	Second	Do.
Frank P. Sullivan, private	C	Second	Do.
Patrick Smith, private	C	Second	Do.
Henry E. Aarons, private	C	Second	Do.
William Morgan, sergeant	E	Second	Do.
John Quinn, corporal	E	Second	Do.
Timothy Cullinaue, private	E	Second	Do.
John Maher, private	E	Second	Do.
George W. Burrell, private	E	Second	Do.
George W. Waterbury, private	E	Second	Do.
Alexander Smith, first sergeant	H	Second	Do.
Ephraim C. Bissell, sergeant	H	Second	Do.
George Philips, corporal	H	Second	Do.
Michael Sharkey, corporal	H	Second	Do.
Frank Karston, corporal	H	Second	Do.
George Davis, private	H	Second	Do.
Perry F. Dolan, private	H	Second	Do.
Asa H. Giffin, private	H	Second	Do.
Herrman Keil, private	H	Second	Do.
James Kean, private	H	Second	Do.
Michael Kinney, private	H	Second	Do.
Delos Reed, private	H	Second	Do.
Thomas M. Madden, unassigned recruit		Second	Do.
James Baker, sergeant	C	Second	United States Cavalry.
James Kelley, corporal	C	Second	Do.
Thomas Horrigan, corporal	C	Second	Do.
Adolph Metzger, bugler	C	Second	Do.
John McCarty, artificer	C	Second	Do.
Thomas Amberson, private	C	Second	Do.
Thomas Broglin, private	C	Second	Do.
William L. Bugbee, private	C	Second	Do.
William L. Cornoy, private	C	Second	Do.
Charles Cuddy, private	C	Second	Do.
Patrick Clancy, private	C	Second	Do.
Navy S. Deming, private	C	Second	Do.
U. B. Doran, private	C	Second	Do.
Robert Daniel, private	C	Second	Do.
Nathaniel Foreman, private	C	Second	Do.
Andrew M. Fitzgerald, private	C	Second	Do.
Daniel Green, private	C	Second	Do.
Charles Gumford, private	C	Second	Do.
John Gitter, private	C	Second	Do.
Ferdinand Houser, private	C	Second	Do.
Frank Jones, private	C	Second	Do.
James P. McGuire, private	C	Second	Do.
John McKelley, private	C	Second	Do.
Franklin Payne, private	C	Second	Do.
James Ryan, private	C	Second	Do.
George W. Nugens, private	C	Second	Do.
Oliver Williams, private	C	Second	Do.

Official.

J. C. KELTON,
Assistant Adjutant-General.

ADJUTANT-GENERAL'S OFFICE, February, 19, 1887.