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**THE  
SAGEBRUSH  
SOLDIERS**

**Nevada's Volunteers  
in the Civil War**

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## CHAPTER X

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### OPERATIONS OF THE NEVADA VOLUNTEERS IN NORTHERN NEVADA, 1865

As the year 1865 grew into maturity and the snows of winter gave way to the green growth of spring, Indian depredations in Humboldt, Pershing and Churchill Counties continued to rise. Cattle and horses were stolen and the Piutes openly began to attack ranches and travelers.

There were, in this area, some soldiers, but not nearly enough to meet the Indians. California Volunteers were stationed at Dun Glen and the Smoke Creek Desert, operating from the Honey Lake Valley. Also, the opening of the Susanville-Boise road led Californians to patrol along the Nevada-Oregon-Idaho border.

Colonel McDermit, to help the settlers of the region, began to send the troops at Fort Churchill to aid the settlers in early April. First to take the field was Company D, Nevada Cavalry.

Forty-seven men of this unit arrived at Star City, Humboldt County, on April 1, 1865, bringing with them one hundred extra muskets to be issued to the local inhabitants to withstand Indian attacks. Lt. Joel Wolverton, commanding the expedition, listened and approved the plea of the settlers for a military post to be established in Northern Nevada.<sup>1</sup>

The local inhabitants were extremely alarmed at the Indian attacks upon them, letting the military authorities and other agencies know of their plight by many urgent letters and telegrams. One such letter, dated Star City, Nevada, April 4, 1865, was published in the California newspaper, *The Sacramento Union*. The letter informed Californians of the state of affairs in Nevada, and said in part:

For several months past the Piutes and Shoshones . . . have shown a disposition of mischief, driving away and killing stock, and in two or three instances falling upon and cutting off a single individual or isolated parties of whites. In this manner as many as five or six persons have already been killed, and fears are entertained that many more will fall victims to savage vengeance.<sup>2</sup>

By April 4, Colonel McDermit had reported to San Francisco that he had received three urgent letters from the residents of the Humboldt District, sent from Dun Glen, telling of Indian depredations in Northern Nevada and requesting that a military post be established in Paradise Valley.<sup>3</sup> This request he endorsed and forwarded to the Presidio where it found little warmth. General Wright, commanding the Military District of California, denied the request for a permanent military base in the area, stating that he believed a mobile cavalry force in the region would prove more effective.<sup>4</sup>

McDermit's answer to this denial was to put the mobile cavalry into the field. Half of Company D was already into the heart of the hostile

Indian territory and on April 6, 1865, Special Order Number 4, Sub-District of Nevada, ordered the remainder of Company D and Company E, Nevada Cavalry, to proceed to Star City. This force, one hundred strong, was commanded by Captain A. B. Wells, by now an able and seasoned campaigner.<sup>5</sup>

The following day the first blood of the campaign was spilled as Lt. Wolverton attacked a small band of Shoshones, killing five of the Indians. Twenty men of his command were sent to protect the ranchers in Paradise Valley, while he and a detachment of Company D headed northeast some forty-five miles to the Humboldt River, near the present-day village of Golconda, Nevada.<sup>6</sup>

Here they paused long enough to celebrate, as did all military posts in the West. All stations in the Department of the Pacific were ordered to parade all men not on duty and to fire a one-hundred gun salute. Richmond, Virginia, capital of the Confederate States of America, had fallen to the Army of the Potomac.<sup>7</sup> The Civil War was drawing to a close.

Stories of the Indian War still reached the military at Carson City and Fort Churchill. Mr. E. F. Dunne, a rancher in Paradise Valley, wrote to General John Cradlebaugh, the Adjutant General, requesting that the state militia aid the ranchers, and telling of an attack by the Indians on a ranch at Cottonwood Creek. Burning the ranch house, the Indians killed two men, Fearborne and Collins, while the third, a Mr. Barber, managed to escape. At nearby ranches he raised help, but by the time they could arrive at Cottonwood Creek the Indians had escaped.<sup>8</sup>

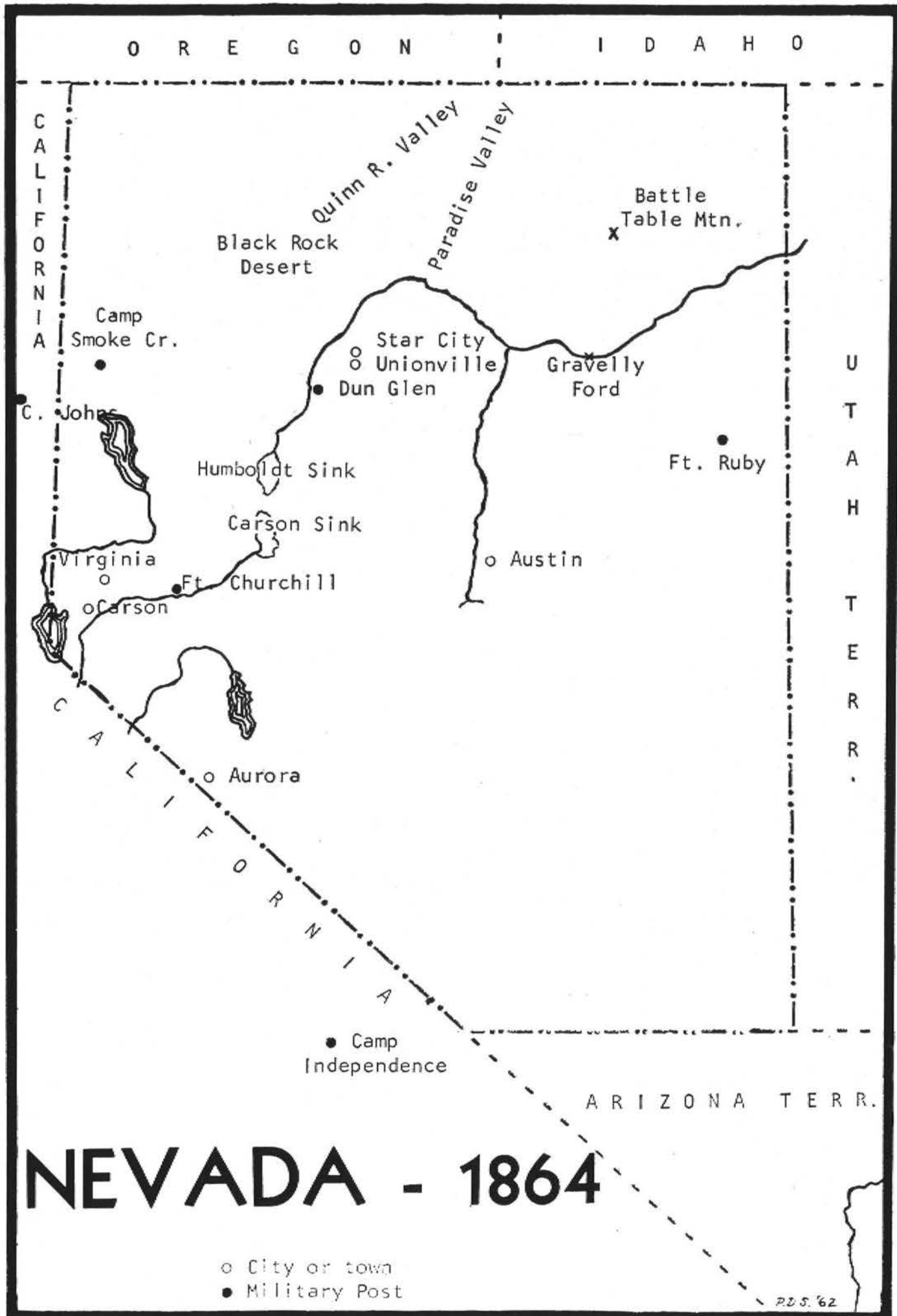
Crossing the Humboldt and arriving near Willow Creek, Wolverton and the only troops as yet in the field, found themselves in the midst of small bands of hostiles. One of these was met at a point twelve miles from Willow Creek and ten Indians killed in the ensuing action. Hearing of a large band camped at Martin Creek Gap near Paradise Valley, Wolverton turned west and pushed on. Reaching the Gap, the soldiers killed two Indians as they scouted the area, and then met the party of ranchers under Mr. Dunne. These civilians brought the welcome news that more soldiers were on the way.<sup>9</sup>

Mr. Dunne, the leader and spokesman of the ranchers, did not hesitate to call for aid. From Star City on April 6, he had telegraphed Colonel McDermit:

Massacre in Paradise Valley. Six women and two men killed. Send cartridges, caliber .58, and revolvers, and 200 men. There are 1,000 Indians on the warpath.<sup>10</sup>

Dunne also informed McDermit that Wolverton and the soldiers were pursuing this latest band of Indians along the Humboldt toward Gravelly Ford.<sup>11</sup> Before moving east the officer had visited the scene of the attack in Paradise Valley and the soldiers had buried the bodies of Fearborne and Collins, the men killed in the initial attack.<sup>12</sup>

Havoc created by the Indians continued to be widespread and by the second week in April most of the ranches from Fish Creek to Dun Glen had been attacked by a band of Indians under Buffalo Jim. In Austin, the largest town near this present trouble, there was talk of sending the local militia, the Lander Guard, into the field against this



band. The fact that the company had only twenty muskets was the prime reason in deciding this would not be a wise move, but the men were anxious to go.<sup>13</sup>

Another attack in Paradise Valley took the lives of a Mr. and Mrs. Doon and a Mrs. Stockham, who was burned to death, while Thomas Rapper lost an arm. On April 15 the *Reese River Reveille* reported that Granite Creek Station had been attacked and the Indians had raided Cunningham's Ranch in Grass Valley, Humboldt County, driving off seventy horses and one hundred and fifty head of cattle. Soldiers from Star City had chased the marauders but to no avail.<sup>14</sup> These men were local militia and a few days later Cunningham and his men managed to recover much of the stock.<sup>15</sup>

On April 23, 1865 an agreement was drawn up between the whites and the Indians that was completely unprecedented in Nevada History. On that day Captains John and Soo of the Piutes made an agreement with Captains Safford, Usher, Bonnifield, and Parkinson to move a portion of the Piute Nation from the Humboldt to the Carson. This would remove most of the friendly and peaceful Indians who wanted to avoid being caught up in the middle of an all-out Indian War. All Indians found in the Humboldt region one week after the agreement were to be considered as hostiles and would be killed by the whites.<sup>16</sup> On what authority this was done is a moot question; it was not done with McDermit's consent or knowledge. We will never know how many harmless Indians perished because, in remote regions, they had not heard of this contract.

Settlers in the Carson Lake area now began to notice unrest among the local Indians, and fearful that the Indian trouble had descended on them also, sent news of their alarm to Fort Churchill. Col. McDermit had, by this time, very few men left under his personal command at the fort, but he decided that the matter needed attention and for the first time personally took the field.

Accompanied by Lieutenants Vanderhof and Pine of the Nevada Cavalry with fifteen men of Company E, McDermit left Fort Churchill on May 5, 1865. By evening the party had reached Cottonwood Station, some twenty-six miles from the fort. Up early the next morning, they made their way to Carson Lake, arriving at nine-thirty, where they met with local settlers and Indians. In a three hour talk, McDermit found that the supposed Indian troubles were largely a misunderstanding, caused by the exodus of Indians from the Humboldt and the resultant stir as they arrived on the Carson. This large influx had alarmed both the whites and the local Indians, but unduly.<sup>17</sup>

Moving west to the Truckee River, the soldiers stopped long enough to arrest a citizen named Cook who had been openly exulting over the assassination of President Lincoln. He was sent with Lt. Pine and a trooper to Fort Churchill for punishment.<sup>18</sup>

On May 7 Col. McDermit met the Indian Agent at the Reservation House on the Truckee River. In a four hour investigation he found that the man had leased the Indians' land to the local ranchers for grazing and that \$25,000 appropriated for the Indians there had vanished without visible improvements. Orders were issued for the ranchers to remove their stock and the party returned to Fort Churchill the next day, convinced that the Indian scare in the region was over.<sup>19</sup>

The hostilities were progressively worsening and in settled areas of the state great alarm was felt among the population. Scarcely a day passed but the local newspapers carried accounts of Indian raids and attacks. In Austin the Lander Guard met to discuss the situation as the editors of the *Reveille* called for troops to come to that city's aid. In the past four days there had been three raids by the Indians, one as close as Italian Canyon, where twelve horses were stolen.<sup>20</sup> The result of the meeting was the dispatch of telegrams to Governor Bladell asking permission for the local militia to take the field, and another to Fort Ruby requesting troops be sent to Austin.<sup>21</sup>

On May 6 a reply was received from Lt. Tolles, Nevada Infantry, commanding Fort Ruby in the absence of Captain Thurston. He requested details of the Indian troubles and assured Austinites that troops would be sent to aid them.<sup>22</sup>

Austin recruited "Minute Men" and requested arms from the state government to equip them.<sup>23</sup> A few days later Capt. Thurston, himself, wired Austin that troops would shortly be on the way and asked how many citizens could take the field with him in a thirty-day Indian Campaign.<sup>24</sup> The city replied that he could count on fifty men.<sup>25</sup> Several days of false starts finally resulted in a column leaving Fort Ruby, commanded by Lts. Seamands and Tolles.

While the citizenry of Austin were busy calling for assistance, the few Nevada troops in the field were in need of help themselves. Lt. Littlefield and a detachment of Company D, Nevada Cavalry, were scouting for Indians to the east of Paradise Valley when they encountered a large band. Littlefield had only thirty-five men with him at the time and they met the hostiles in a small box canyon. Here the Indians, who numbered two hundred, had had ample time to fortify their position, digging twenty-five rifle pits, some of which would hold twenty or thirty men. The Nevadans would have to dismount to attack this strongly fortified position and Littlefield judged this would be unwise, as they were many times outnumbered. Thus the soldiers withdrew, taunted by the Indians who graciously invited the soldiers to come up for breakfast and waved a bloody scalp.<sup>26</sup>

Newspapers, rabidly anti-Indian, carried conflicting accounts of this episode. The *Humboldt Register* reported that Littlefield had sixty men, while the Indians numbered the same or a little less, and stated that the officer had made a hasty fifteen-mile retreat, camping without water. Their story had it that Littlefield was held to be a rank coward by the men of his command.<sup>27</sup> The *Reveille* stated it could scarcely believe this as Littlefield was held in high esteem.<sup>28</sup> Thus, it was with gladness that the *Reveille* was able to inform its readers on June 27 that the charges of cowardice leveled against Littlefield were "utterly false and without the slightest foundation."<sup>29</sup>

The same day that soldiers had belatedly left Fort Ruby for Austin, May 20, Captain Almond Wells and a detachment of Company D, Cavalry, met the hostile Piutes and Shoshones in force at Table Mountain in the Tuscarora Range, ten miles southwest of the spot that was in later years to be a boom mining town.

Here the Nevada Volunteers had one of their most serious engagements with the enemy and the largest scale action to date. Wells and sixty-five troopers found a large band of Indians under Zelauwick<sup>30</sup>

on top of the flat topped mountain. Here again they had displayed ingenuity in strongly fortifying their position by building stone forts on the summit. Taunting the whites, the Indians dared Wells to fight. More hasty than Littlefield in a somewhat similar situation, Wells took the offer. Estimates of Wells' strength differ. Myron Angel wrote that he had only thirty-six men,<sup>31</sup> while contemporary newspapers reported sixty-five.<sup>32</sup> It is definitely known that Wells had eighty-two men with him in June when he reported to Col. McDermit for duty near Paradise Valley.<sup>33</sup> A participant in the engagement accounts for fifty-six men and "a few" with the horses during the fighting. This would place the number near the sixty-five strength mentioned previously.

Also estimates as to the strength of the Indian band vary, but the lowest is five hundred. McDermit reported five hundred as did Angel, the historian. The *Reveille* says, "between five and six hundred."<sup>34</sup> Taking the maximum guess as to Wells' strength, sixty-five, and the Indian minimum of five hundred, it would still seem a one sided affair even if the Indians were not behind strong fortifications. Visiting the scene of the battle a month later, Col. McDermit estimated that twenty Indians could have held the mountain against two hundred soldiers, providing the soldiers had no artillery.<sup>35</sup>

Wells, nevertheless, decided to attack, perhaps thinking the Indians would panic and flee. At three in the afternoon of May 20 the charge was sounded and Company D assaulted the mountain. For four long hours the soldiers attempted to drive the Indians from the summit,<sup>36</sup> at times coming within thirty feet of the Indian fort.<sup>37</sup> Finally Wells sounded the recall, leaving Privates Isaac Godfrey and James Munroe dead in front of the Indian breastworks and finding four other men wounded too seriously to fight on.<sup>38</sup>

On May 30, just ten days after the battle, Captain Wells was interviewed by the *Carson Daily Appeal* and related the particulars of the engagement to the newspaper. He was in Carson City to obtain supplies and returned the next day to the Humboldt. Wells stated that he was convinced that some of the Indians had been equipped with repeating rifles.

The official account of the Battle at Godfrey's Mountain has been lost. Fortunately, one of the participants in the fight took the time to write an account of it for a friend and it was subsequently published in the *Carson Daily Appeal* on June 3, 1865. The author of this letter was one of the enlisted men of Company D, Nevada Cavalry, and his letter reflects the viewpoint of the soldier. It is quoted here in full since it not only paints a good description of the engagement itself but also of some of the hardships that the Nevada Volunteers endured campaigning in Northern Nevada.

Camp McDermit, Paradise Valley, May 26, 1865.

I have delayed writing from lack of an opportunity. We have been on the go most of the time since we reached this place. We have just got in from a ten days' scout through the mountains to the eastward of this place. After four days', or rather nights', travel, we came up with a large band of Indians strongly fortified, they having breastworks of rocks with loop-holes to shoot through. To convey to you the exact situation I will compare the point



that the Indians held to a peninsula, the sides being a rocky mass, perpendicular. The neck is intersected with ledges of high rocks; the top, as near as we could see, is nearly flat. We arrived on the ground about 3 o'clock P. M., but as soon as we got within gunshot of the bluff there was not an Indian to be seen. When within about eight hundred yards we dismounted, as it was not practicable to take horses any further. Captain Wells, with about twenty men, took the right, while Lieutenant Littlefield with the balance of the command went to the left. The whole number engaged could not have been more than thirty-five or six. There were about ten sent out as scouts, the day previous, and about ten with the pack train. A few remained with the horses. The scouting party did not join us until the fight was over, but they also had a fight with about a hundred Indians well mounted and armed with guns. Had they (the Indians) not seen the command in the distance, our ten men would have been handled pretty roughly, but as soon as they discovered our main body they retreated. The only casualty to our side was two horses wounded.

Now to return to the main command. As I said before, we could see no Indians, but as soon as we reached within seventy-five or a hundred yards of the bluff, they fired a volley at us. Strange as it may seem, no one was hit at the first fire. I think it was because we were too close, their shots passing over us. We then retreated behind some rocks and watched to see them stick their heads out, but they would seldom give us a chance to shoot. We fought them in this way until sundown, running from one rock to another to get a better chance. The party on the left fared a little worse than we did on the right; they had one man killed instantly and two wounded—both through the thigh, one in the right and the other in the left—only flesh wounds. They are both doing well. The saddest thing of all is about James Monroe, a member of our Lodge, who was last seen when the men were withdrawn from the hill. He was then making his way to where the horses were. Going farther down the hill than was necessary, it is supposed that he was caught while crossing a high point to reach the horses. It was then getting dark and not possible to go back and look for him. He was a young man of good morals and well liked by his comrades. Brother White will notify the Lodge of his probable death. Lewis B. Clark is wounded in the leg; he is doing well. Isaac W. Godfrey is the man's name that was killed. He was shot through the head. I can give no correct guess of how many Indians there were, but they must have had fifty or sixty guns, perhaps a great many more. They used no bows and arrows. Some of their guns are equally as good as ours. After retreating for about two miles we camped for the night. The next day we started back for this place.

I will not make comment about our officers, but will say that the men did all that was asked of them. It is useless to try to fight these Indians without artillery, for to surprise them in these mountains is next to an impossibility. They have to be taken on ground of their own choosing. They are well armed and mounted. It is

also my opinion that there are some degraded white wretches among them. I think I have already written more than you will be able to read, but I must say a few words more, and that is in regard to rations. For instance, on the 3d instant we started on a ten days' scout. The only means of transportation we had was deserters' horses and saddles. That being insufficient to carry ten days' rations, we took what we could, the balance we had to go without. All the meat we had for nine days was about one pound to the man. This last trip we fared a little better, for we had about four days' rations of pork; then the idea of going into the Indian country to hunt a fight without a surgeon or even a bandage, in fact no provision made for sick or wounded, it looks to me as though somebody was to blame. The nearest physician was at Star City, about eighty-five miles. We have an acting hospital steward with some medicine, but no surgical instruments. Someone is to blame.

During the night Wells' command was silently surrounded by the enemy and in order to make good his retreat the Captain sent ten men ahead to scout a path through the Indians. Carrying their wounded the remainder came more slowly, finally overtaking the advance guard who had been surrounded and were in danger of annihilation. At the approach of the main party of soldiers the Indians finally withdrew and Wells retreated in good order.<sup>39</sup>

Military and civilians alike were stunned by the defeat at Godfrey's Mountain. The name was changed in honor of one of the dead soldiers, although the new one never has become permanent. This was the first real defeat of soldiers in Nevada since the first disastrous battle of the Pyramid Lake War. Not only had Wells lost men but the Indians had captured many of his supplies.<sup>40</sup> The most shocking blow, however, was the news that now a large coordinated Indian force was opposing the troops. Heretofore the soldiers had only to deal with scattered bands of Indians, hardly ever numbering as many as twenty or thirty. Now, under Zelauwick, there were five hundred Piutes, Bannocks, and Shoshones<sup>41</sup> working together. This made the total Indian strength larger than the total forces of the Nevada Volunteers in the state.

McDermitt lost no time in calling for help. In a special telegram to Col. Drum at the Presidio he asked for two more companies of cavalry to be sent to him at once, stating, "Capt. Wells had a fight with 500 Indians who are strongly fortified. He failed to rout them."<sup>42</sup> The Department of the Pacific lost no time in ordering troops from Northern California to Nevada to help crush the Indians.

The citizens of Austin were saved from what they considered an immense Indian danger on May 24, when Lt. Seamands, Nevada Infantry, arrived in that city with news that a column under Lt. Tolles would arrive the next day.<sup>43</sup> The arrival of these men, forty infantrymen of Company B, Nevada Infantry, was hailed with great jubilation by the town as they went into camp at Upper Austin. A fine appearance they must have made, as the command was fully outfitted for a major and extended campaign. Each soldier carried a Springfield musket with bayonet and one hundred rounds of ammunition. An artilleryman attached to the unit manned a mountain howitzer which was

equipped with a complete supply of cartridge, shell, round shot, grape, and canister. Two six-mule teams pulled the cannon and a variety of supplies including forty days' rations, surgical equipment, entrenching tools, and pack saddles.<sup>44</sup>

Seamands investigated the Indian problem at Austin and announced that his command would proceed to Gravelly Ford where the Indians were supposedly gathered in force. The *Reese River Reveille* rather sarcastically remarked it was a shame that many men had volunteered to accompany him, but now that troops were on the way they were unable to volunteer.<sup>45</sup> Seamands did request that the Lander Guard be ordered into state service to aid him and telegrams were dispatched for that purpose.<sup>46</sup>



Fort Ruby

—Baneroft Library.

In reply, the Lieutenant was ordered by Captain Thurston to remain at Austin for further instructions, and Governor Blasdel denied permission to use the Austin militia, stating that he and McDermit would be in Austin the following week.<sup>47</sup>

The Governor of the State of Nevada, Henry G. Blasdel, had become quite concerned over the Indian problem and added his weight to McDermit's request for more soldiers. He wrote, on May 27, 1865, to General Irvin McDowell, now commanding the Department of the Pacific, informing him that the Indians had stolen more than fifteen hundred head of cattle from Humboldt County alone during the months of April and May.<sup>48</sup> The General heeded the pleas from Nevada and commenced moving troops to the state to be placed at the disposal of Col. McDermit. Companies A and H, Second California Cavalry, were ordered to Fort Churchill to replace Nevada troops now taking the field. Captain Doughty, in command of the post at Susanville, was instructed to cross the Applegate Trail to Humboldt County, while Companies D and I, Sixth California Infantry,

under Major O'Brien, were ordered to Nevada. Company B, Second California Cavalry, under Captain David McLean, was ordered from its camp at Fort Bidwell, on the Chico-Boise Road, into Northern Nevada.<sup>49</sup> California troops, under Lt. Penwell, were already occupying a small post at Dun Glen.<sup>50</sup>

More men were on the way to the Humboldt as Captain Wallace and Company A, Nevada Infantry, and a squad of cavalry were ordered to proceed to Northern Nevada on May 29.<sup>51</sup>

Now there were several parties converging on the region. Wallace from Ft. Churchill; California Volunteers from Susanville, Ft. Bidwell, and Chico; and Seamands at Austin. In addition, cavalry under Wells, Wolverton, and Littlefield, numbering about two hundred men, were actively fighting the Indians.

At Austin, Lt. Seamands had gone into permanent camp, awaiting the arrival of Col. McDermit and Governor Blasdel. Company B paraded through the main street of Austin from Upper Austin to Clifton (present-day Rodeo Grounds), pausing long enough to honor the offices of the *Reese River Reveille* with a military salute.<sup>52</sup> To mount some of his men, Seamands purchased sixteen riding animals while in Austin.<sup>53</sup>

News that McDermit was to take command of the large scale operations on the Humboldt was reported to the people of Austin by Sergeant J. D. Warfield, who informed the *Reveille* on May 29 that McDermit would soon leave Fort Churchill for Austin, and then would proceed north to the scene of action with one hundred and thirty additional men.<sup>54</sup>

A few days later the Governor's party arrived at Austin to try to placate the local Indians. The entourage consisted of Governor Blasdel, Col. McDermit, Lt. C. C. Warner, and Surgeon A. F. Meachem. They were escorted by thirteen troopers of Company E, Nevada Cavalry.<sup>55</sup> Arriving in Austin the evening of June 2, the Governor and McDermit met the local tribesmen at Half-Way House, below Clifton, on June 3. The following day McDermit and the soldiers headed north while Blasdel stayed to meet more Indians at Jacobsville.<sup>56</sup> Seamands with twenty men of his command, now mounted, with the cannon, accompanied McDermit. Lt. John Tolles was left with twenty men camped on Silver Creek a short distance north of Austin on the western slope of the Toiyabe Range. The following account of the travels of this party is taken from Lt. Tolles' report, submitted to his superiors upon completion of the trip.<sup>57</sup>

While camped at Silver Creek on May 29 a civilian ran into the soldiers' camp, informing them that several Indians were driving off cattle belonging to a Mr. Worthington. Tolles and fifteen men started on the double and encountered the Indians only three hundred yards away. Here three redmen, two of whom were mounted, were engaged in herding eight or ten cattle up a ravine toward the summit of the Toiyabes. The roughness of the terrain slowed down the horsemen and permitted the soldiers, on foot, to come within musket range. However the Indians made good their escape with the cattle and drove them over the mountains into Grass Valley. At this point the pass is an easy ride for an experienced horseman.

Tolles and his men broke camp on June 6 and headed north along the small stream known as the Reese River. Making sixteen miles the first day they camped at Tenant's Ranch, now a part of the large Racetrack Ranch holdings.

On June 7 the plodding foot-soldiers threaded their way through the Reese River Canyon and out onto the flat plain that stretches north to the Humboldt. They pitched their camp that evening at Warm Springs, now the site of Barium Incorporated's open-pit operations. The following day the men walked twenty-eight miles to the Hay Ranch, just eight miles from the Humboldt. On June 9 the men made the last few miles to the river and turned to follow the stream east along the emigrant trail.

As they followed the Humboldt the party was overtaken by a Mr. Klemp, owner of a small ranch just ahead. He had been fired upon by the Indians while out searching for lost horses about a month previously. Returning to the ranch he found that his hired man, Fred Anchor, had disappeared during Klemp's three-day absence. All that remained of the man were a few articles of clothing. Eight or ten shots at him hurried Klemp on his way to Austin where he remained until news of the soldier's journey prompted him to return home.<sup>58</sup>

The soldiers investigated the disappearance of the man and found from his clothing that he had apparently been shot in the left hip and the small of the back just above the belt. The body of Anchor was believed to have been thrown into the Humboldt.

Pushing on the next day, Tolles and his men made their way up the Humboldt to Gravelly Ford. From this well-known point the soldiers struck across three mountain ranges, the Cortez, Sulphur Springs, and Diamonds, in a south-easterly direction. This stage of their journey took five days and the men found themselves on the Overland Trail only five miles from Jacob's Well Station. From here it was an easy hour's walk to the welcome confines of Fort Ruby and a well earned rest. Tolles reported that the party had seen no Indians since leaving the Austin area except for the signs of their visit to Klemp's Ranch.

Meanwhile, Colonel McDermit was hurrying to the north to personally take charge of the campaign against Zelauiwick. Leaving Austin on June 4 he headed up the Reese River and was joined by Lt. Seamands and twenty mounted infantry at Boone's Ranch. Four days later the party reached the Humboldt some seventy miles north of Unionville (near modern Golconda). Unable to cross the river here as it was in flood they went down the river eighteen miles to where the stream was bridged, a crossing later to become Winnemucca. At the bridge the party encountered Company A, Wallace's, with seventy-three men enroute from Fort Churchill.<sup>59</sup>

Crossing the Humboldt River on June 10, 1865, McDermit's command proceeded eight miles up the Little Humboldt, traversing it in a small boat that Wallace had procured at Dun Glen. Now in Paradise Valley, heart of the Indian uprising, they rendezvoused with Captain Wells, eighty-two men, and Captain Payne, fifty men.<sup>60</sup> This now placed two hundred and thirty-seven cavalry and infantry with

two howitzers under the personal command of McDermit. This was in addition to the California Volunteers now converging on the area. The *Reveille* on June 7, 1865, gleefully informed its readers that there were between four and five hundred cavalry in the field against the Piutes.<sup>61</sup>

Leaving most of the men in Paradise Valley, McDermit took seven officers and fifty men of Company E, Nevada Cavalry, north and west scouting for Indians. On June 14 the party visited the spot where Littlefield had been beset by the Indians in early May. Here Littlefield's prudence was upheld by his brother officers, McDermit personally naming the spot Fort Redskin.<sup>62</sup>

Another twenty-five miles to the northeast brought them to the scene of Wells' defeat by Zelauwick. The bodies of Privates Munroe and Godfrey were found where they had fallen, scalped and mutilated. Godfrey had been killed instantly but Munroe had not been so lucky. Shot in the foot and torso he evidently had been scalped and had a fire kindled on his stomach while still alive as an examination of his body showed that he had almost bitten off his own tongue in agony.<sup>63</sup> Table Mountain was renamed Godfrey Mountain in honor of the fallen soldier.

The soldiers spent the next few days scouting for the Indians but to no avail. McDermit had heard rumors that the band of hostiles he was searching for was now camped at Owyhee Lake, still a considerable distance away. Accordingly, he sent for the remainder of his command and they went into camp while McDermit planned his next moves. Here he was also joined by some of the California Volunteers and learned that more were on the way to join the coming movements.<sup>64</sup>

Colonel McDermit decided to push for the Indians in force, splitting his command. The men were glad to see some impending action as they had now been idle for over a week. One of the Nevada soldiers wrote a letter to the *Virginia Union*, which that paper published, expressing his feeling of the campaign so far. From one hundred miles northeast of Star City the "Volunteer" wrote:

. . . This expedition is only a get up of officers, to keep in the service. It is the greatest boy's play that ever I saw; you can compare it to nothing else. . . . Those letters of Lt. [C. N.] Warner's in the papers, are not to be relied upon. They are nothing but braggadocio, and amount to nothing; they are the laughing stock of the company.<sup>65</sup>

McDermit's strategy called for a double thrust toward the Utah border in hope of catching the elusive band under Zelauwick. He, with one hundred men of Companies D and E, Nevada Cavalry, and fifty men of Company A, Nevada Infantry, headed across Northern Nevada for Thousand Springs Valley, headwaters of the Humboldt. At the same time Seamands with twenty men of Company B, Nevada Infantry (Mounted) and some Californians under Doughty made their way toward Gravelly Ford.<sup>66</sup>

Both of these columns were successful. The party under McDermit succeeded in surprising the Indians at Hot Springs. Attacking the more than two hundred Indians, they captured seventy and scattered

the remainder. The elusive chieftain, Zelauwick, made good his escape but was hotly pursued by Captain Wells and twenty-five men of Company D. Following so closely they wore out the Indian mounts, Wells captured the Indian supplies but the fugitives again escaped.<sup>67</sup>

Seamands, who had made his way south to Fort Ruby, immediately headed north again on July 25 accompanied by fifteen mounted men and an Indian guide. He was lucky enough to catch Zelauwick in Cottonwood Canyon, north of Humboldt Wells, at dawn of July 31, 1865. The Chief and eleven of his men were killed, while the only casualty on the part of the soldiers was Sergeant Skerill, badly wounded in the neck by a barbed arrow.<sup>68</sup>

Withdrawing back toward the center of the hostilities in Paradise Valley, the Nevada Volunteers again defeated the Indians at Willow Point. This action started while several members of the California Volunteers were gathering forage in the valley. They were surprised by a band of about fifty Indians. Keeping his head, the corporal in charge raised a white flag and talked to them while a Mr. Scott went for help. Luckily, he encountered Sergeant Thomas and eight men of Company D, Nevada Cavalry, herding stock only four miles away. These men hastened to the scene, cutting off the Indians' retreat to the mountains before letting themselves be seen. Thomas then charged the band, forcing them to withdraw into the nearby swamps.<sup>69</sup>

Aided by five or six civilians and the Californians, Thomas advanced his men as skirmishers and hand-to-hand fighting ensued. One man clubbed an Indian to death with his empty pistol, ruining the weapon. Five hostiles took refuge in an abandoned cabin. This was promptly ignited by the soldiers and the occupants killed as they emerged.<sup>70</sup>

Starting at 4 p.m., the fight lasted until dark and the remaining Indians made good their escape into the hills. Mr. Warfield, civilian, and Private Hereford, California Volunteers, were killed while another civilian and five Californians were wounded. Over an area of five miles, twenty-one Indians were killed.<sup>71</sup> This was the last Indian fight of the campaign, July 26, 1865, to be fought in Paradise Valley. The threat over, and peace established, McDermit removed his command and crossed the Santa Rosa Mountains, leading them into the Quinn River Valley for the last drive against the Piutes.<sup>72</sup> Here, on August 2, 1865, Lt. Littlefield and a party of troopers killed five Indians in a small skirmish.<sup>73</sup>

News of tragedy stunned Nevada with the dispatch of a terse telegram on August 8, 1865. Addressed to Col. R. C. Drum in San Francisco, it read:

Col. McDermit was killed yesterday afternoon within half a mile from Camp by Indians lying in ambush.

(Signed) G. F. LANSING, *2nd Lieut.*

*1st. Inf., Nevada Volunteers.*

Charles McDermit was dead, dying a short time after he was shot by a hidden Indian. The text of the telegram and of the letters and documents to follow were supplied to Mrs. Alice Addenbrooke by Mr. Charles Shepard of San Francisco, Colonel McDermit's grandson. If it had not been for Mrs. Addenbrooke's efforts this valuable contribution to Nevada History might well have been lost.



Lieutenant Colonel Charles McDermit, 2nd California Cavalry Volunteers,  
Commander of the Military Sub-District of Nevada



The campaign had been going well and was drawing to a close. Lt. W. Gibson Overend, 2nd. Cavalry Volunteers, wrote this description of the last few days of Col. McDermit. Unfortunately, only a part of his letter has been preserved.

In compliance with the request of the widow of my late and much beloved Colonel Charles McDermit, of the Second Regiment of California Cavalry, who was killed on the 7th day of August, A. D. 1865, by an Indian, I make the following statements of the incidents that transpired while I was with him on a Scout after hostile Indians in the Section of Queen's and King's River District Idaho Territory, five days prior, and up to within four hours of his lamented and untimely death.

On the 2nd day of August, 1865, the Colonel, Captn. Payne and myself started with 12 enlisted men and a Mexican Pack Mule Teamster from Queen's River Station (now Camp McDermit), at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and traveled in a westerly direction. We left the men go ahead in a northerly course while we explored the section of the valley on the west, and while we were doing so we discovered many fresh Indian tracks. We saw a species of grass, containing a pulp or seed, had been cut down and tied up in small bundles by squaws. It was then carefully heaped in stacks. In the streams which ran through this valley we found dams or weirs which intercepted the fish from getting into the main river. We came to the conclusion immediately that Indians dwelt in that section and the Colonel remarked he would make it warm for them on his return; as he intended not only to punish them but burn and destroy all of the grass that was stored for winter purposes. On his march this day he instructed me how to find and discern Indian trails and footsteps. He also advised me as to the best means of attacking Indians, as to time, place etc., etc. He ordered no fires to be lit at camp that evening. When we were in bed he told me he had written to Mrs. McDermit and told her she must kill one of her fattest turkeys and have it in readiness for dinner about the latter end of August. His conversation was of the most cheerful and animated kind, and he expressed his certainty of capturing some Indians on this trip, as from the indications we saw that day's march, the Colonel entertained hopes we would meet with some on the next day.

August 3rd, 1865, we started on march this morning at an early hour and went through the valley a distance of about 12 miles, following up a trail that we supposed was the same made by the Indians who attacked a party going to Boise and killed one of the number and wounded two or more. The man's name they killed was Jackson from Virginia City. We continued our course to the westward and the Colonel dispatched 3 enlisted men in an easterly direction to see if the trail ran across a mountain on that side. We arrived at the mouth of a canyon, still following the trail which ran that way, and was led by the same into a splendid fertile spot where Indians had camped about a month previous. We saw where they had killed a beef and left some of it after them, showing that they must have had a plentiful supply on hand. We took lunch and the Colonel and myself laid down under the shade

of a cotten tree and spoke about military matters, and he remarked to me that he was sorry to say that he had officers under his command he could not trust, and among them were two especially who failed to fulfill capturing an old Indian Chief who was within pistol shot of them. One of those he said, boasted of the qualities he attained, by being in the Regular service nine years. We remained there for about one hour for the men's return who were dispatched in another direction. We were making preparations to leave, when the three men made their way back. They showed us the trophy that is taken as a usual thing from Indians, the scalp, and we were all well pleased to be in possession of it. We continued our march and the trail which led us over an immense mountain some six or seven hundred feet high, the Colonel and myself on foot leading the van. We had to stop several times to take breath and give our horses a chance to do likewise. During one of these intervals I sat down and began to sing "Who will care for Mother now." The Colonel remarked that it was a beautiful song, and said he would like to learn it. I then told him I was going so high and near the firmament, I felt the next place we would march into if we followed the trail would be the firmament, and continued singing,

Soon with angels I'll be marching  
With bright laurels on my brow.  
I have for my country fallen,  
Who will care for Mother now.

He remarked that we sooner or later would, with the help of Almighty God wear those bright laurels that never fade in a world of immortality, and that it would be of such infinite pleasure for us to join with a band of angels in heaven, where wealth or rank would not divide us, in Unity of worship to the Giver of Life who had put us here on earth to love one another and to do justice to all men. Among other remarks on that day, he said, "Lieut., how good God has been so far to us on this march. It is true, we are deprived of the society of those we love next to God, our wives and our children; but see, even in this remote section, he supplies us with little luxuries that we can enjoy with contentment and good appetite, as does those who have the privilege of living in California." "Here," he said, "we have the wild currant and stream trout, while they have at this season the grape and peach. With contentment let's wish them to enjoy theirs and you and me thank God for the benefits we receive." "Even yet," he remarked, "These people in civil life have not that fine boast to make that we have. We are in pursuance of our military duties to our Government, We can . . ."

Here Lt. Overend's narrative ends. Four days later Charles McDermit was killed, returning from this scouting expedition. Although one must keep in mind that this account was written for the bereaved widow, and thus might tend to be written from this viewpoint, one can gather a good picture of McDermit, proud of his men as they displayed a bloody scalp and deeply religious and sentimental a short while later.

Hardened to the realities of life and warfare on the frontier, he was a sensitive and loving family man. It is no wonder that he was beloved by his men and all who knew him.

McDermitt's body was returned to Fort Churchill. His successor, Lt. Col. A. E. Hooker, Sixth California Infantry, paid him full military honors in General Orders: No. 2, dated August 19, 1865.

1. The remains of the late Lt. Col. Chas. McDermitt, 2nd Cavalry, California Volunteers, late commanding the district of Nevada, who, while in the noble performance of his duty, gallantly leading a portion of his command through a wilderness infested by a savage foe, was shot and killed by Indians, on the 7th instant, near Queen's River Station, Humboldt Co., Nevada, having been brought to Fort Churchill, will be interred with appropriate military honors, on tomorrow, Sunday, the 20th Inst. at three o'clock P. M. Major O'Brien, 6th Inf. Calif. Vols. will command the funeral escort.

The flags at Fort Churchill and all the Military Posts, Stations, and Camps in the District, will be displayed at half staff, from sunrise until sunset on the day of the funeral, or the day following receipt of this order—and the troops will be paraded at Ten o'clock, A.M., and this order read to them, after which all drills, fatigue duties, and operations will be suspended for the day, as far as practicable.

2. The Camp located near Queen's River Station, will be known as Camp McDermitt, subject to the approval of the proper authority.

The proper authority did approve and Camp McDermitt later became the more permanent Fort McDermitt, with the second *t*.

The command of the Military Sub-District of Nevada had fallen to Lt. Col. Hooker of the Sixth California Infantry, who was at Fort Churchill. Command in the field went to Major O'Brien of the same California regiment.<sup>74</sup> Fort Churchill was now totally garrisoned by California Volunteers except for the few men of Company F, Nevada Cavalry, who had been, until recently, the Provost Guard at Virginia City. They had been removed from this detail when the Indian outbreaks were at their height and sent as a stabilizing force to the Walker River area.<sup>75</sup>

In honor of Col. McDermitt, Queen's River Station was renamed Fort McDermitt and a permanent military post established there. A permanent fort was also built at Summit Lake by the Californians to protect the Applegate Trail across the Black Rock Desert.<sup>76</sup> Plans to set up posts in Paradise Valley and several other places to the east were abandoned.

Where there had once been a dearth of men there was now an abundance. Therefore, the men who had been in the field the longest, the Nevada Cavalry units under Wells and Wolverton, were ordered to Fort Churchill, passing through Unionville and finally arriving at the Fort on August 31, 1865.

Company E, Nevada Cavalry, had the dubious distinction of fighting the last skirmish by Nevada Volunteers in the state on the morning of

September 13, 1865. At daybreak that day Captain Payne and Lt. Littlefield, each with nine men, surrounded an Indian camp in the Quinn River Valley. Attacking the surprised Piutes, who retired well, the soldiers had an easy victory. Estimates of the Indian losses run from thirty-one to fifty.<sup>77</sup> The Indians were routed and left most of their supplies and equipment to the soldiers. Suddenly, there occurred a single incident that forever removed the doubts of "Big John" Littlefield's courage. A single mounted Indian appeared and rode straight for that officer, brandishing a spear. Littlefield calmly waited until his attacker was at close range and shot him from his horse.<sup>78</sup>

With this, the close of the fighting on the part of the Nevadans, they returned to Fort Churchill and eventual release from the service of the United States. As a direct result of the campaign, Privates Botell, Rafferty, and Dickerson were honorably discharged due to wounds received in Indian battles.<sup>79</sup> Upon arrival at Fort Churchill the Nevada Volunteers again settled down to a couple of months of garrison duty until they were mustered out. In four months of summer campaigning in some of the most barren country in the world, where Col. McDermit could truthfully report he had traveled sixty miles without seeing a stick of wood, they had quelled the hostile Piutes and brought a lasting peace to Nevada. For never again would Nevada have the bloody Indian uprisings on a scale to compare with 1865.

#### FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>*Sacramento Union*, April 1, 1865.
- <sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, April 4, 1865.
- <sup>3</sup>*Official Records*, Volume L, Part II, pp. 1177-1179.
- <sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1160.
- <sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1183.
- <sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1187.
- <sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1179.
- <sup>8</sup>*Sacramento Union*, April 18, 1865.
- <sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup>*Official Records*, p. 1181.
- <sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup>Myron Angel (ed.) *History of Nevada* (Oakland: Thompson and West, 1881), p. 171.
- <sup>13</sup>*Reese River Reveille*, April 12, 1865.
- <sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, April 15, 1865.
- <sup>15</sup>Thomas Wilson (Ad. Agency), *Pioneer Nevada*, Volume II (Reno: Harold's Club, 1956), p. 76.
- <sup>16</sup>*Reese River Reveille*, April 28, 1865.
- <sup>17</sup>*Official Records*, p. 409.
- <sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup>*Reese River Reveille*, May 4, 1865.
- <sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, May 5, 1865.
- <sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, May 6, 1865.
- <sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, May 8, 1865.
- <sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, May 12, 1865.
- <sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, June 28, 1865.
- <sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, May 22, 1865.
- <sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, June 27, 1865.
- <sup>30</sup>Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
- <sup>31</sup>Angel, *op. cit.*, p. 172

- <sup>32</sup>*Reese River Reveille*, May 29, 1865.  
<sup>33</sup>*Official Records*, p. 411.  
<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*  
<sup>35</sup>*Reese River Reveille*, June 28, 1865.  
<sup>36</sup>Angel, *loc. cit.*  
<sup>37</sup>*Reese River Reveille*, *loc. cit.*  
<sup>38</sup>Angel, *loc. cit.*  
<sup>39</sup>*Reese River Reveille*, *loc. cit.*  
<sup>40</sup>Wilson, *loc. cit.*  
<sup>41</sup>Angel, *loc. cit.*  
<sup>42</sup>*Official Records*, p. 1245.  
<sup>43</sup>*Reese River Reveille*, May 24, 1865.  
<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, May 25, 1865.  
<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*  
<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*  
<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, May 26, 1865.  
<sup>48</sup>*Official Records*, pp. 1246–1247.  
<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*  
<sup>50</sup>Wilson, *op. cit.* p. 74.  
<sup>51</sup>*Official Records*, p. 1250.  
<sup>52</sup>*Reese River Reveille*, *loc. cit.*  
<sup>53</sup>*Official Records*, p. 412.  
<sup>54</sup>*Reese River Reveille*, May 30, 1865.  
<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 410.  
<sup>56</sup>*Reese River Reveille*, June 3, 1865.  
<sup>57</sup>*Official Records*, *loc. cit.*  
<sup>58</sup>*Reese River Reveille*, May 18, 1865.  
<sup>59</sup>*Official Records*, pp. 410–411.  
<sup>60</sup>*Reese River Reveille*, June 28, 1865.  
<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, June 7, 1865.  
<sup>62</sup>*Official Records*, *loc. cit.*  
<sup>63</sup>*Reese River Reveille*, June 28, 1865.  
<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, July 8, 1865.  
<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, July 15, 1865.  
<sup>66</sup>*Official Records*, pp. 1274–1275.  
<sup>67</sup>Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 75.  
<sup>68</sup>*Reese River Reveille*, August 14, 1865.  
<sup>69</sup>Angel, *op. cit.*, p. 173.  
<sup>70</sup>*Reese River Reveille*, August 11, 1865.  
<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, August 1, 1865.  
<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, August 11, 1865.  
<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, August 7, 1865.  
<sup>74</sup>Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 101.  
<sup>75</sup>*Reese River Reveille*, August 17, 1865.  
<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, August 19, 1865.  
<sup>77</sup>Angel, *op. cit.*, p. 174; and Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 76.  
<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*  
<sup>79</sup>John Cradlebaugh, "Annual Report of the Adjutant General of Nevada," *Senate Journal*, 1865, *Second Session* (Carson City: Joseph Church, State Printer, 1866), p. 8.