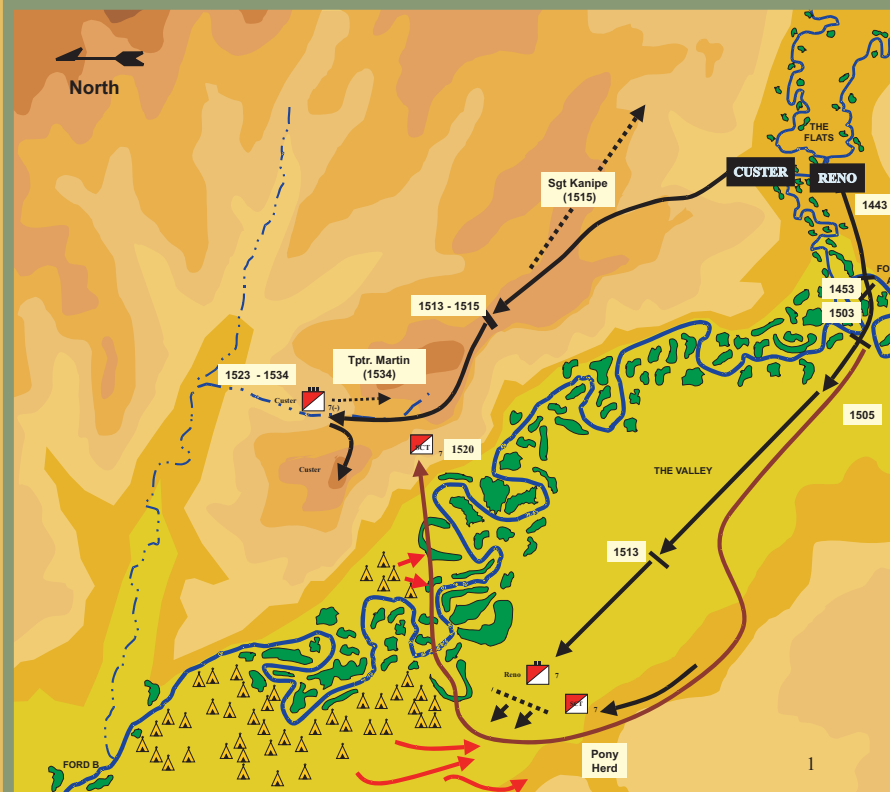


Atlas of the Sioux Wars

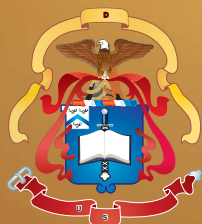
Second Edition



Charles D. Collins, Jr.



Dr. William Glenn Robertson, Consulting Editor



Combat Studies Institute Press
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027

Cover Photos: "Portrait of Maj. Gen. (as of 15 April 1865) George A. Custer, Officer of the Federal Army." Between 1860 and 1865. Selected Civil War Photographs, 1861–65, American Memory Collections, Library of Congress.
Portrait of Sitting Bull, National Archives, National Park Service website.

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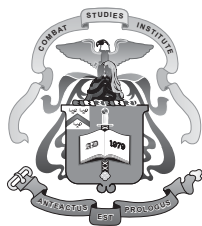
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by

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Foreword

In June 1992, the Combat Studies Institute (CSI) conducted the first Sioux Wars Staff Ride for Brigadier General William M. Steele, Deputy Commandant of the US Army Command and General Staff College. In September 1992, Dr. William Glenn Robertson, Dr. Jerold E. Brown, Major William M. Campsey, and Major Scott R. McMeen published the first edition of the *Atlas of the Sioux Wars*. Their work represented a modest effort to rectify the omission of the Indian Wars in the West Point atlas series by examining the Army's campaigns against the Sioux Indians, one of the greatest Indian tribes of the American West. The atlas has since served as an educational reference for hundreds of students of US Army campaigns against the Sioux during the conduct of dozens of Sioux Wars staff rides.

In 1992, CSI and the authors believed that soldiers serving in the post-Cold War Army could easily identify with the situation faced by soldiers of the post-Civil War Army. In both cases, the most serious threat to the nation's security had suddenly vanished, and the Army's very purpose was energetically debated. Meanwhile, many in political life and in the US Congress saw the change as an opportunity to reduce funding and other resources for a standing army—a longstanding trend in American political life. The Army's senior leaders, therefore, coped with the twin problems of mission definition and Draconian resource constraints. The Army's junior leaders of that era struggled to prescribe and execute proper training. Yet, conflict generated by civilian encroachment on Indian lands as part of America's rapid Westward expansion increasingly dragged the Army into conflict with the Indian tribes.

The Army found itself pulled in many directions as it was simultaneously directed to protect Indian lands from civilian encroachment while ordered to take strong measures to protect civilians against Indian tribes who desperately fought to maintain their land and culture. Combat veterans of the Civil War quickly discovered that finding and fighting Indian warriors was dramatically different from forming large battle lines across relatively confined battlegrounds. Having spent the past 4 years waging a conventional, high-intensity conflict, the Army suddenly had to learn techniques of warfare suited to an unconventional, low-intensity environment.

The relevance of the Sioux Wars for today's Army is even more evident in 2006 than it was in 1992. As with the campaigns against the Sioux from the 1860s

to the 1890s, early 21st century operations array the conventional forces of the US Army against the unconventional forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Sioux campaigns are replete with valuable lessons for the professional soldier. The operations were operationally and tactically complex, unfamiliar terrain and logistics dramatically affected the multiphase engagements, and every operation took place in a complex political and cultural environment of shifting priorities. A serious study of the campaigns offers today's officers the opportunity to compare, contrast, and, most importantly, to discover the threads of continuity linking the unconventional warfare of the 21st century with that of their 19th century forebears.

The *Atlas of the Sioux Wars, Second Edition*, could not have been completed without the diligence of the original authors. As with the *First Edition*, section I deals with the difficulties of using volunteer forces to quell the rebellion of a suppressed people in the 1862 Minnesota Campaign. Additional material has been added for the Grattan Affair of 1854 and the continuation of the Minnesota Campaigns in 1863 and 1864. Section II, as before, deals with the 1866–68 Sioux War in Wyoming and Montana. It is the story of securing a fixed route of travel through hostile territory with limited resources. In this section, we have expanded the discussion of the Connor Expedition and added new material on the Fetterman and Wagon Box Fights not available in 1992. Section III discusses the conflict of 1876 and encompasses one of the largest and most ambitious missions conducted by the Army during the Indian Wars. Again, new material which was not available to the 1992 authors has been added. A closing section was added to discuss the Army's final operations against the Sioux in 1890 and the tragic encounter at Wounded Knee. The most notable addition to the *Second Edition* of the atlas is the inclusion of 37 all new, color maps.

While historical analogies are always fraught with danger, many of the difficulties faced by US soldiers fighting today parallel the tactical and operational dilemmas faced by soldiers fighting during the Indian Wars. Our goal is to learn from the experiences of these 19th-century soldiers. Thus, reflecting on the words of respected Indian Wars Historian Robert M. Utley, "A century of Indian warfare should have taught us much about dealing with people who did not fight in conventional ways, and our military tradition might reasonably have been expected to reflect the lessons thus learned." *CSI—The Past is Prologue!*

Timothy R. Reese
Colonel, Armor
Director, Combat Studies Institute

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge many people who made the publication of this work possible and thank them for their efforts. First, because this is an update of the original atlas published in 1992, I thank Dr. William Glenn Robertson, Dr. Jerold E. Brown, Major William M. Campsey, and Major Scott R. McMeen for a strong foundation on which to build. I would also like to thank my two editors: first, my wife, Judy, who made the careful initial edit of my very rough first drafts and continually encouraged clarification and other needed improvements, and, of course, Ms. Betty Weigand, Combat Studies Institute editor, who diligently and good-naturedly combed the drafts of the text and remarkably improved the narratives and maps. I also thank Mr. Charles A. Martinson III, a graphic artist with the Fort Leavenworth Multimedia/Visual Information Service Center, who polished the final draft into a professional package for publication.

I would also like to thank Dr. Robertson for his years of mentoring me during my study of the Sioux Wars. Without his help and insights, I would not have been able to complete this work or, more importantly, successfully teach the Sioux Wars elective at the US Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC). In addition, I would like to thank all of the members of the Staff Ride Team for their

support and help in this project, especially Lieutenant Colonel Paul Gardner. Paul and I spent countless hours walking the rolling hills of Wyoming and Montana, reading the words of the battle participants, and discussing the events of the Sioux Wars. Likewise, I express my gratitude to all of the personnel involved in researching, interpreting, and preserving the various battlefields included in the ride. This group includes the members of the National Park Service (NPS), specifically those from the Little Bighorn Battlefield and Fort Laramie; the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Department for the Rosebud Battlefield; and the tremendously helpful professionals at the Fort Phil Kearny State Historic Site. Finally, I offer my special thanks to the many Wyoming and Montana ranchers who allowed us access to their land for this study and generously allow us each year onto their property for the conduct of the CGSC's annual Sioux Wars Staff Ride.

On a personal note, I offer my heartfelt thanks to my family, who have always supported me with my many staff rides to the Sioux Wars battlefields and other great battlefields. It has been such a great experience that it is hard for me to think of it as work.

Charles D. Collins, Jr.
Historian, Combat Studies Institute

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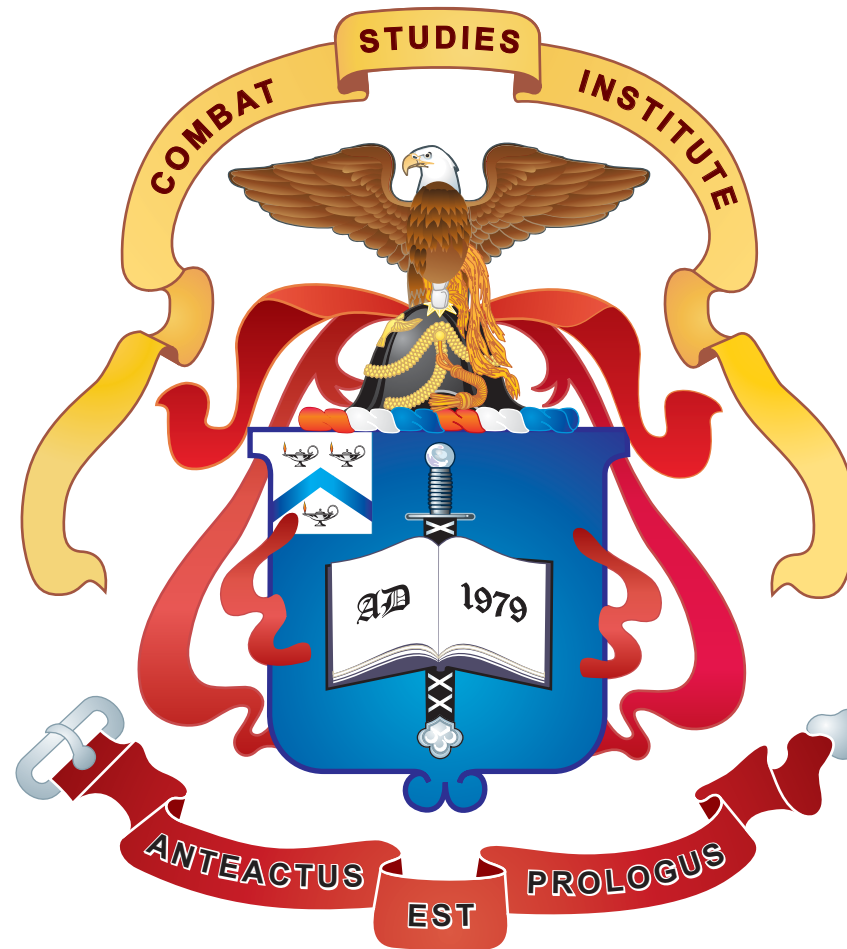
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Suggested Reading

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I. Introduction



Map 1. The Sioux and the Great Plains

One of the most recognizable of all Indian tribal names is the Sioux. Although numerous tribes spoke a Siouan dialect, the tribal name *Sioux* only applied to the largest of those tribes. The name originated with the Chippewa Indians who modified the French term *nadouessioux* meaning “little snakes” and applied it to their enemy—the Sioux.

The Sioux originally lived as Woodland Indians along the upper Mississippi River and dominated portions of present-day Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin. In the early 1700s, the Chippewa, armed with French guns, gradually pushed the Sioux further West. By the mid-18th century, many of the Sioux had migrated across the Missouri River both to avoid the Chippewa and to seek areas richer in fur and game. In their migration to the West, the Sioux separated into three major divisions: the Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota establishing three principal Sioux dialects, respectively: Santee, Yankton, and Teton. Each division name translated to mean “ally” in its own dialect.

The Dakota remained in the Upper Midwest and primarily lived in parts of present-day Minnesota. Because of their dialect, they are also referred to as the *Santee* or *Eastern Sioux*. It was the Santee Sioux who were primarily involved in the 1862 Minnesota uprising.

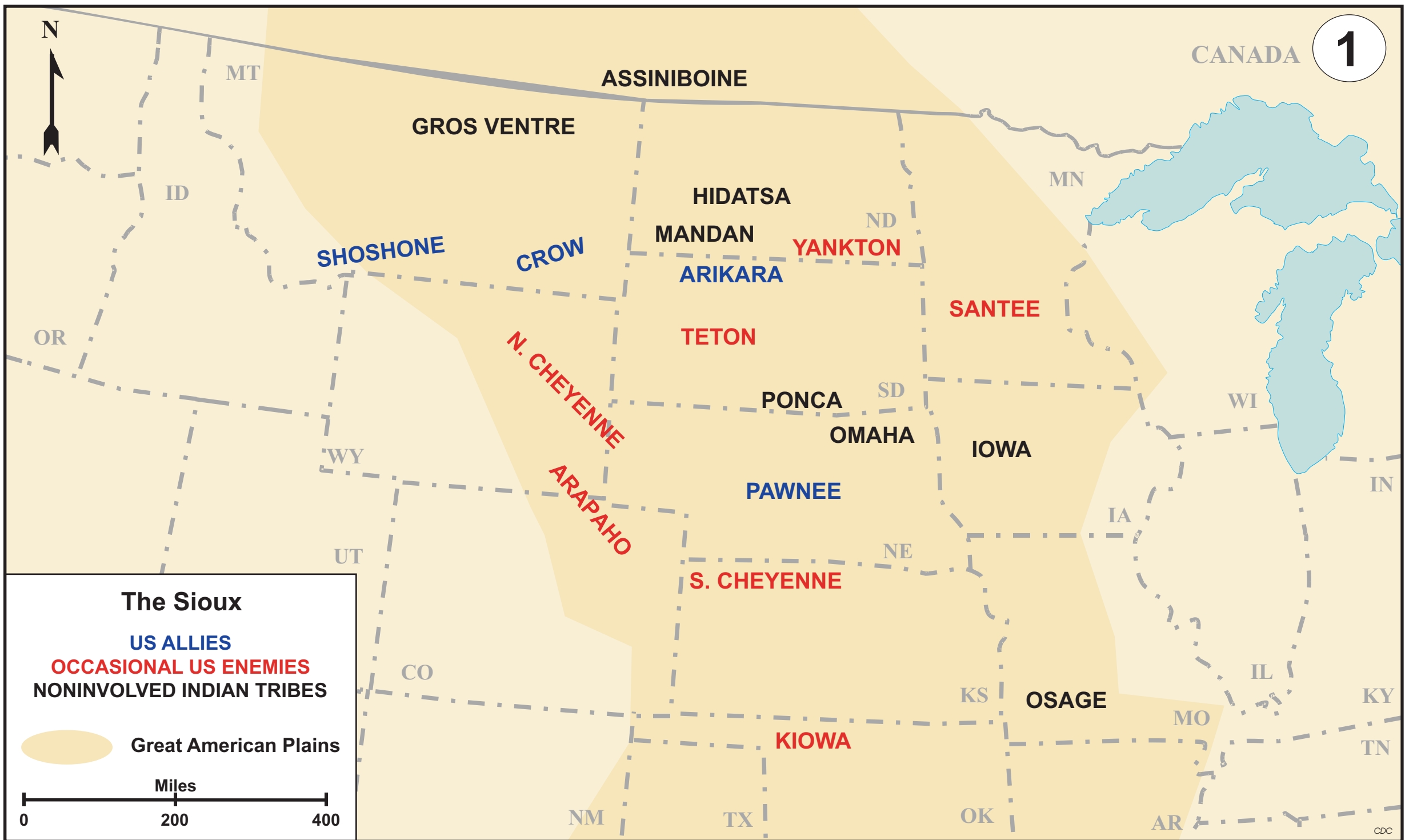
The Nakota occupied a territory farther west in the prairie country of western Minnesota and the eastern portion of the Dakotas. The Nakota divided into two major bands, the Yankton and the Yanktonai. In reference to their Yankton dialect, they are often referred to as the *Yankton* or *Middle Sioux*.

The Lakota branch, which was the largest and best known of the Sioux divisions, made its homeland in the Northern Great Plains. The Lakota division was composed of seven bands or council fires: Brulé, Sans Arc, Hunkpapa,

Oglala, Miniconjou, Blackfeet, and Two Kettles. All seven were bands of nomadic hunters whose primary food staple was meat, especially buffalo. All spoke a common Teton dialect and are commonly referred to as the *Teton* or *Western Sioux*. These bands made up a powerful confederation that, at first, did little more than harass the wagon trains passing over the Great Plains. Later, as the advance of white civilization increasingly threatened their way of life, the harassment escalated into fierce resistance. The Lakota were the US Army’s primary opponents in the Sioux War of 1866–68, the Sioux War of 1876–77, and again in the final 1890 tragedy at Wounded Knee.

Numerous other tribes, besides the Sioux, also occupied the Great Plains of North America. To establish some meaningful convention for this atlas, the Indian tribes have been grouped into three categories: those in the course of the Indian campaigns, specifically the Crow and Shoshone, who were allied with the US government (text in blue), those who at some point in the course of these campaigns were enemies of the US government (text in red), and those who did not participate (text in black). The term “Sioux” will be used as it was in the 19th century and will invariably refer to tribes in armed opposition to US government policies.

Since warfare was a central part of the Plains Indian culture, it is easy to understand their violent resistance. It took massive force of arms to seize and occupy their lands. As warfare was deeply imprinted in the American settlers’ culture as well, the stage was set for long periods of violence, broken only by intermittent lapses of peace, until one side finally achieved permanent dominance.



Map 2. The Grattan Affair, 1854–55

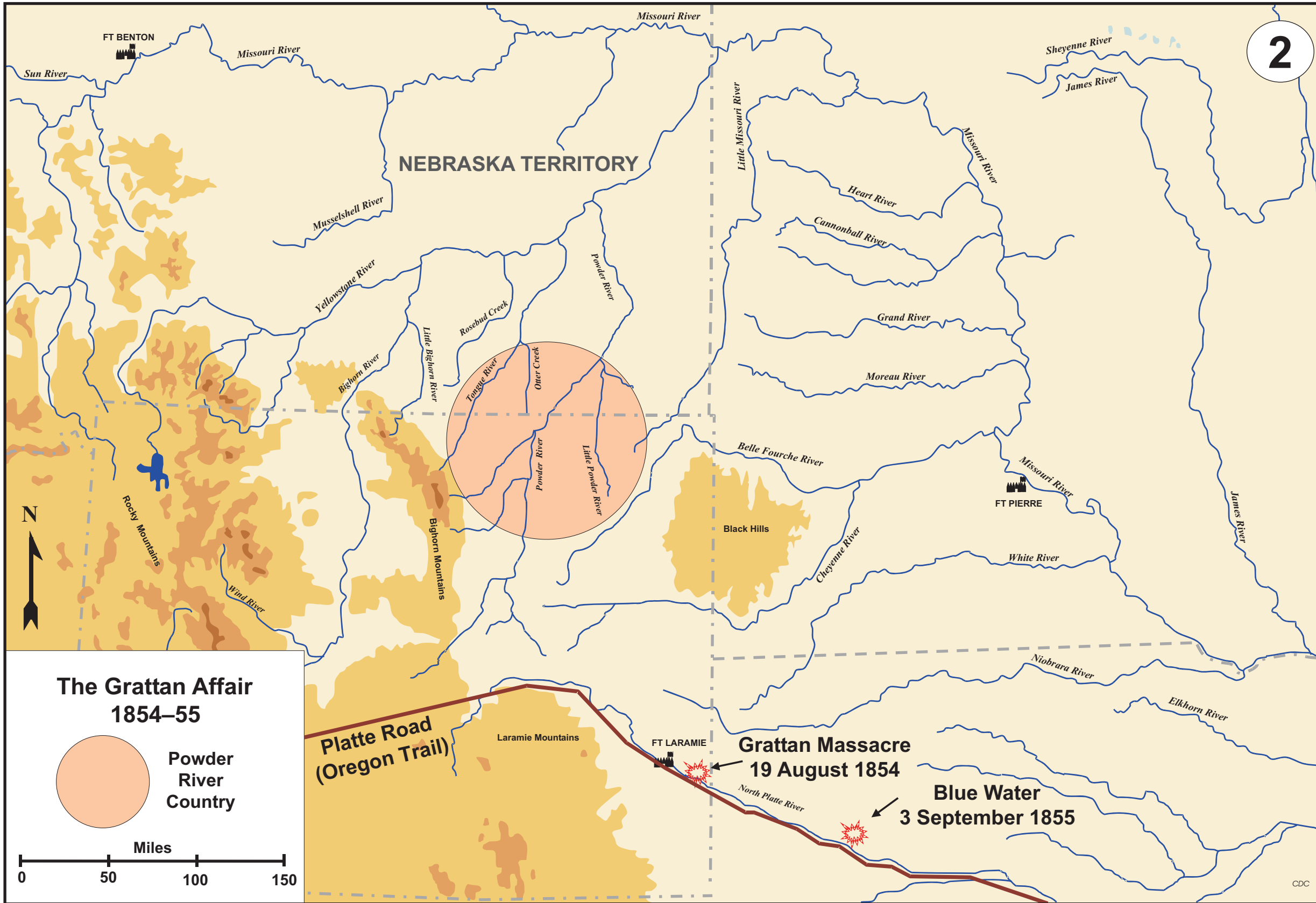
In 1851, the US government negotiated a treaty with the Sioux and their allies at Fort Laramie, Wyoming, to assure safe passage for emigrants traveling west along the Oregon Trail. The peace was tenuous, at best, by August 1854 when an emigrant reported to the commander of Fort Laramie that a Sioux warrior had stolen and butchered a stray cow. The inexperienced but enthusiastic Brevet Second Lieutenant John L. Grattan requested permission from his commander to take a detachment out to arrest the guilty warrior. The commander yielded to Grattan's request and authorized the young officer to take 29 men and 2 artillery pieces to a large Indian encampment where the violator was believed to be. The encampment the young lieutenant marched against consisted of a series of villages along the Platte River. Each year the Brulé, Miniconjou, and Oglala Sioux gathered near the fort to receive their annual annuity issue. The combined villages may have contained as many as 4,000 inhabitants.

Chief Brave (Conquering) Bear, the US appointed head chief of the Brulé, attempted to placate the over-eager lieutenant with an offer to buy the cow. However, Grattan demanded that the guilty warrior be handed over for punishment. At that point, it is unclear whether Grattan ordered his men to open fire or whether a nervous soldier panicked and fired into the gathering crowd. Regardless of how it began, the ensuing fight was brutally brief. Though the detachment's poorly sighted artillery caused little damage to the Indian village, it did mortally wound Brave (Conquering) Bear. The swift counterattack of the angry Sioux completely overwhelmed Grattan's small command killing the lieutenant and all but one of his men. Subsequently, over the next several months, the Sioux launched intensified retaliatory raids against emigrants along the Oregon-California Trail.

In retaliation for the massacre and attacks against emigrants, the US government ordered Brevet Brigadier General William S. Harney to punish the

Sioux. In August 1855, Harney led a 600-man force of infantry and dragoons out of Fort Kearny, Nebraska, toward Fort Laramie. On 2 September, he located the Sioux village of Little Thunder (Brave Bear's successor) on Blue Water Creek near present-day Ash Hollow, Nebraska. Harney rejected Little Thunder's offer to negotiate and demanded that all those who had participated in the attacks against Grattan and the emigrant trail be turned over to the Army. The next day the village attempted an escape, but the soldiers cut them off, and Harney ordered an immediate attack. Little Thunder's warriors attempted to fight a rearguard action to allow their women and children time to escape. Even so, the soldiers quickly overwhelmed all resistance and utterly destroyed the village. The Sioux suffered 85 killed and 70 women and children captured; less than half of the 250 Sioux villagers escaped. Harney lost only five killed with another seven wounded.

Having avenged the destruction of Grattan's command, Harney then commenced to secure safe passage along the Oregon Trail. Threatening a repeat of the heavy-handed methods used against Little Thunder, Harney pressured the other Sioux leaders into agreeing to meet at Fort Laramie to negotiate an end to the hostilities. At Fort Laramie, Harney demanded that the Sioux stop interfering with traffic along the Oregon Trail and insisted they surrender all individuals involved in the Grattan Massacre. At the time, the Sioux had very little recourse but to accede to Harney's demands. Nevertheless, the affair would not be forgotten; the Sioux left in bitter anticipation of a day to avenge Harney's actions. Many of the Sioux bands also decided to move further west into the Powder River country and away from the troublesome emigrant trails. Their Westward migration displaced the Crow from the rich hunting grounds in the Powder River Basin and set the stage for future conflicts between the Sioux and the white man.



Map 3. Minnesota Sioux Uprising, August 1862

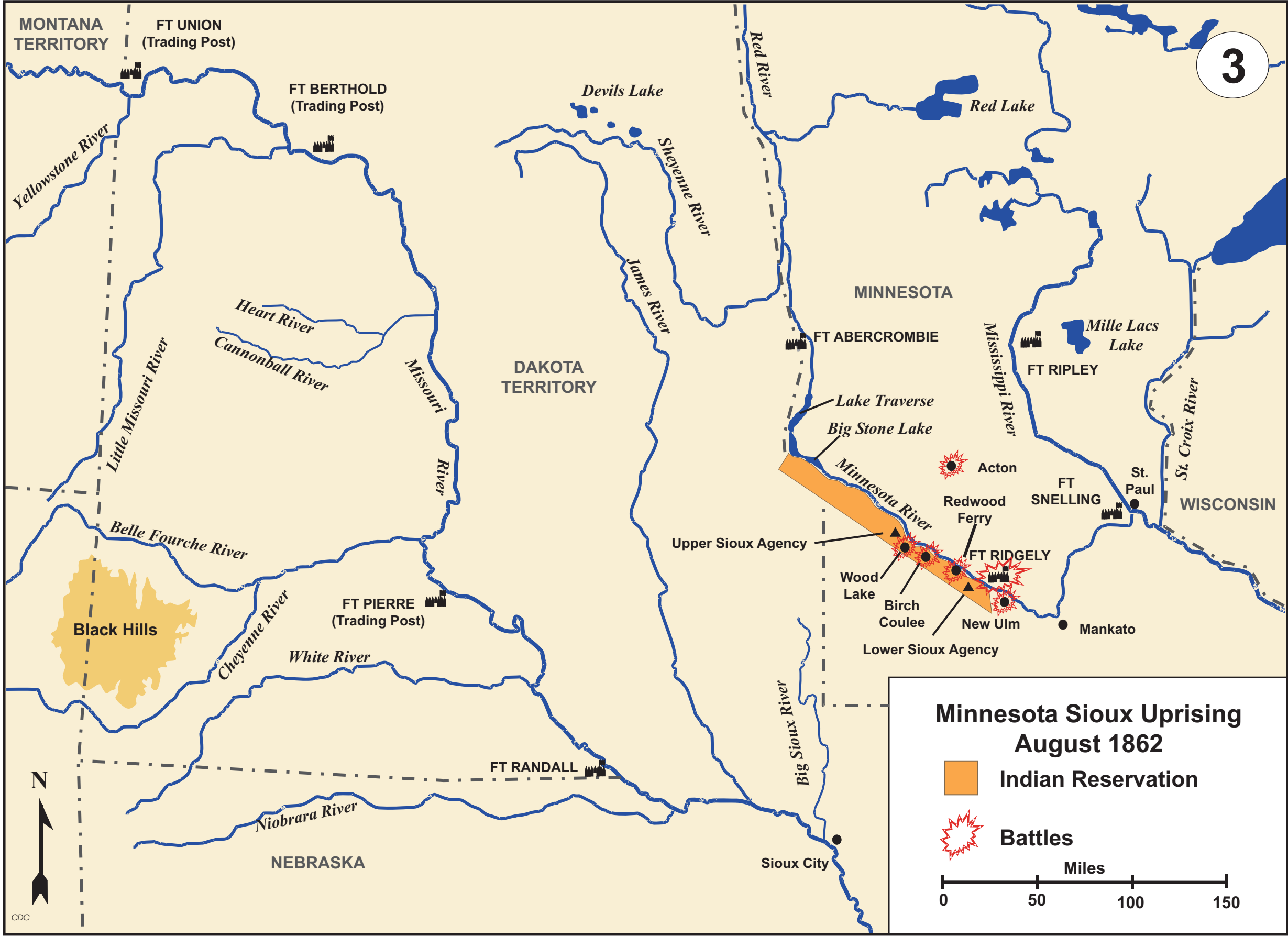
By 1862, the Santee Sioux had given up their traditional homelands, which comprised most of southern Minnesota, in exchange for a narrow reservation on the southern bank of the Minnesota River. As compensation for their lands, the Sioux were to receive cash annuities and supplies that would enable them to live without the resources from their traditional hunting grounds. Because of administrative delays, however, both the cash and food had not arrived by the summer of 1862. Crop failures the previous fall made the late food delivery particularly distressing to the Indians. Encroachment by settlers on reservation land and the unfair practices of many American traders also fueled Sioux suspicions and hatred. Furthermore, the Sioux were emboldened by the Minnesotans' relative weakness, brought on by the departure of many of their young men to fight in the Civil War. This combination of hunger, hatred, and the perceived weakness of the Minnesotans and the local military created an explosive situation that needed only a spark to bring on a full-scale war.

The spark came on 17 August 1862 when four Sioux warriors murdered five settlers near Acton, Minnesota. On 18 August, Indians at the Lower Sioux Agency rebelled, killing most of the settlers on their reservation. A few escapees managed to reach Fort Ridgely and warn its commander, Captain John S. Marsh, of the rebellion. Marsh and 47 men subsequently sortied from the fort only to be ambushed at Redwood Ferry, where half of them, including Marsh, were killed. Twenty-four soldiers managed to return to Fort Ridgely.

News of the rebellion spread quickly through the settler and Indian communities. For the Sioux, this was a catharsis of violence; for the settlers, a

nightmare had come true. Most settlers in the Minnesota River Valley had no experience with warring Indians. Those who did not flee fast enough to a fort or defended settlement were at the Indians' mercy. The Sioux killed most of the settlers they encountered but often made captives of the women and children. In response, the Army marshaled its available strength, 180 men, at Fort Ridgely, where well-sited artillery helped the soldiers fend off two Sioux attacks. At the town of New Ulm, a magnet for settlers fleeing the rebellion, defenders also repulsed two Indian attacks. The stout resistance of the settlers and soldiers effectively halted the spread of the rebellion.

Now, the military seized the initiative. A relief expedition under Colonel Henry H. Sibley arrived at Fort Ridgely on 27 August 1862. Sibley's command consisted largely of green recruits with second-rate weapons. The Sioux surprised and inflicted a tactical defeat on Sibley's men at Birch Coulee on 2 September. This minor setback, in any case, did not change the course of the campaign. From 2 to 18 September, Sibley drilled his soldiers and received supplies and reinforcements, including 240 veterans of the 3d Minnesota Infantry Regiment. On 19 September, Sibley resumed his advance. This time, the expedition encountered and defeated the Sioux at Wood Lake on 23 September 1862. Three days later, hostilities ended when some of the Santee Sioux surrendered and released their 269 captives. However, many of those that had participated in the uprising fled west into the Dakotas. Outraged over the uprising, state authorities executed 38 Indian prisoners and banished the other captive Sioux to reservations outside Minnesota.



Map 4. The Sioux Campaigns of 1863 and 1864

In late 1862, the Army lacked the resources to pursue the Santee Sioux who fled west into the Dakotas. It wasn't until the summer of 1863 that General John Pope, Commander of the Department of the Northwest, managed to collect enough resources to continue the campaign. He directed his subordinates to conduct a two-pronged campaign to find and punish the fugitive Santee Sioux and to threaten both the Yankton and Teton Sioux who had begun to support their Eastern brethren. Pope's overall goal was to secure Minnesota's western border from any Indian threat.

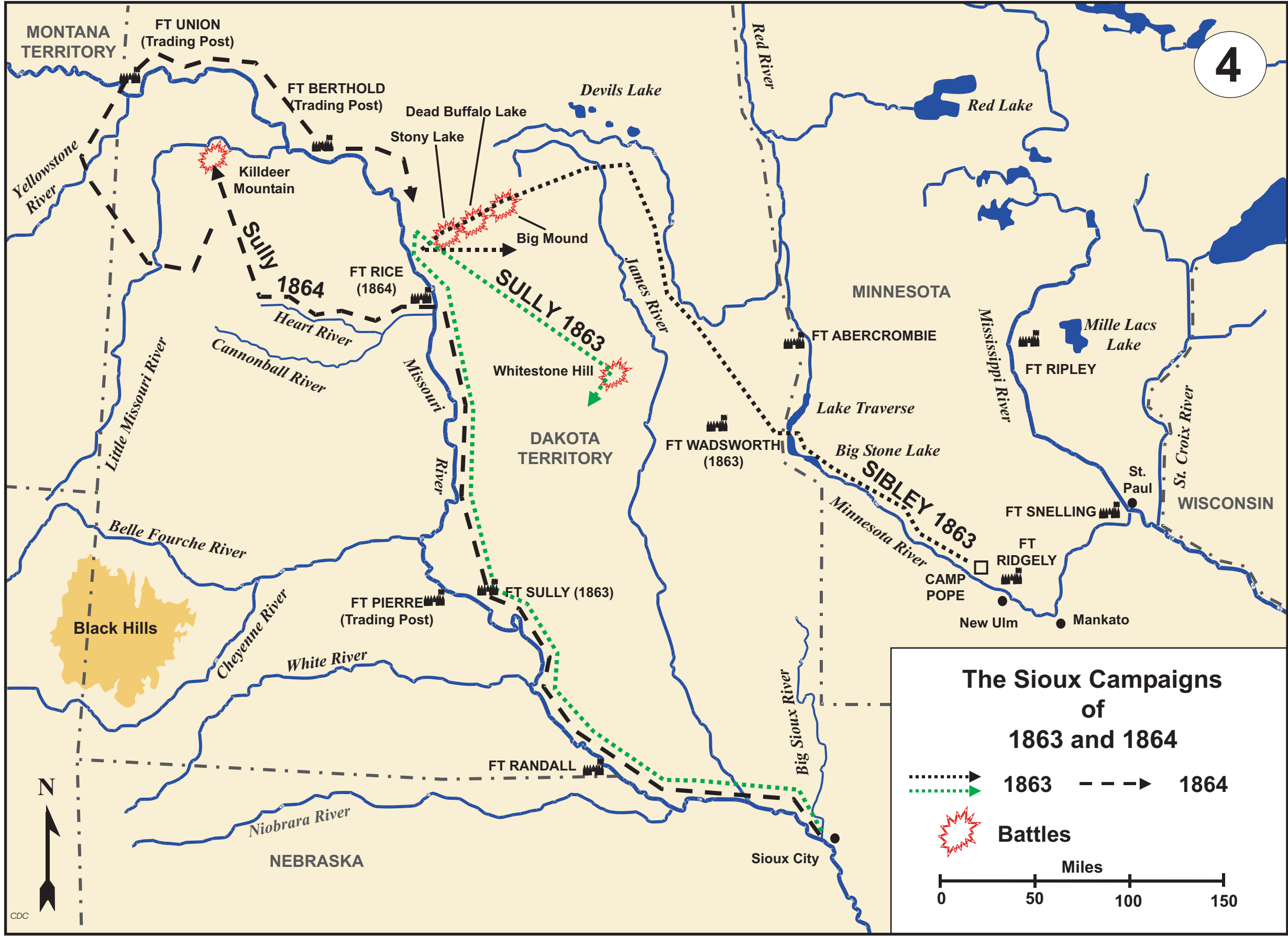
Brigadier General Henry H. Sibley commanded a 3,000-man column that marched west from Camp Pope, Minnesota. Brigadier General Alfred Sully commanded the second column. His command of about 1,200 men consisted of volunteer cavalry units from Iowa and Nebraska and some supporting artillery. He marched north from Fort Randall, South Dakota. The plan called for the two columns to rendezvous near Devils Lake in North Dakota.

Sibley's large column departed Camp Pope on 16 June 1863 and reached the vicinity of Devils Lake around mid-July. There he established a base camp and then commenced pursuit of a large band of Santee and some Yankton moving toward the Missouri River. On 24 July, Sibley's column caught up with the Sioux at Big Mound. The Indians escaped after fighting a desperate rearguard action that lasted most of a day. On 26 July, Sibley came close to overtaking the Sioux again at Dead Buffalo Lake when the Santee, reinforced with some Teton buffalo hunting groups, attacked Sully's column. Sully's troops cut short the Sioux attack with howitzer fire and then counterattacked driving them from the field. Sully pursued and caught up with the Sioux at Stony Lake on 28 July. Again, the Sioux fought a desperate rearguard action that allowed their families to escape over the Missouri River. In the course of the three fights, the Indians had lost an estimated 150 warriors and a large portion of their food supplies and equipment—a devastating loss. Though Sibley's losses at Big Mound had been minor, he was critically short of supplies. So after 3 days of searching unsuccessfully for Sully's column, Sibley decided to return to Minnesota reaching Fort Snelling on 13 September.

Delayed by low water on the Missouri River, Sully's command didn't arrive at the campaign area until the end of August at which time he learned that Sibley had returned to Minnesota. He also gained information that the uncaptured Santee Sioux had moved to the vicinity of the James River to hunt buffalo. Taking pursuit again, Sully caught up with the Indians near Whitestone Hill on the evening of 3 September. There he found a large village that may have contained as many as 1,000 warriors. In the confusion of a chaotic night battle, most of the Sioux managed to escape. However, the fighting was fierce; Sully lost 20 killed and 38 wounded, and the Army estimated Indian casualties at 150 to 200. In the ensuing pursuit, the Indians lost the majority of their equipment and 250 women and children captured. Sully had achieved a major victory and, being low on supplies, decided to return to Fort Randall.

In 1864, despite the decisive victories scored against them, a collection of free Santee, Teton, and some Yankton gathered together on the Little Missouri River and once again threatened the eastern Dakota settlements. In June 1864, Sully gathered over 3,000 men and marched up the Missouri River to disperse this conjoined band of Sioux. After establishing Fort Rice near present-day Bismarck, he turned his column west and commenced his pursuit. On 28 July 1864, he attacked the large Sioux contingent at Killdeer Mountain. During the battle, Sully formed his command into a British-style square and slowly advanced against the Indian encampment. In the day-long fight, the Indians suffered heavy casualties and were forced to abandon their village and most of their supplies. After the battle, Sully continued west to the Yellowstone River to intimidate the Teton, then returned to Fort Ridgely, Minnesota, in early October.

The campaigns of 1863 and 1864 had been highly successful in pushing the frontier further to the West. With the Santee Sioux decisively crushed, the Minnesota settlements no longer had any fear of an Indian threat. Anyway, the Teton Sioux participation in the hostilities had been minor. Only 2 years later, along the Bozeman Trail, the US Army directly challenged the Teton with very different results.



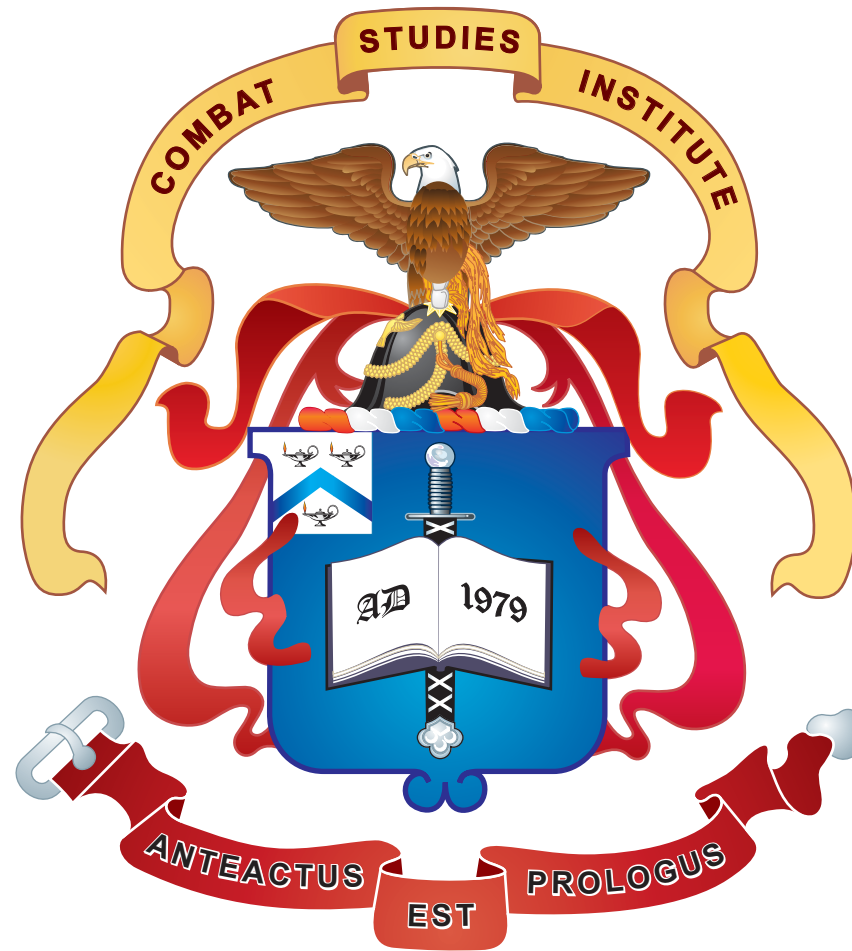
The Sioux Campaigns of 1863 and 1864

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II. The Sioux War of 1866–68



Map 5. The Bozeman Trail and the Connor Expedition

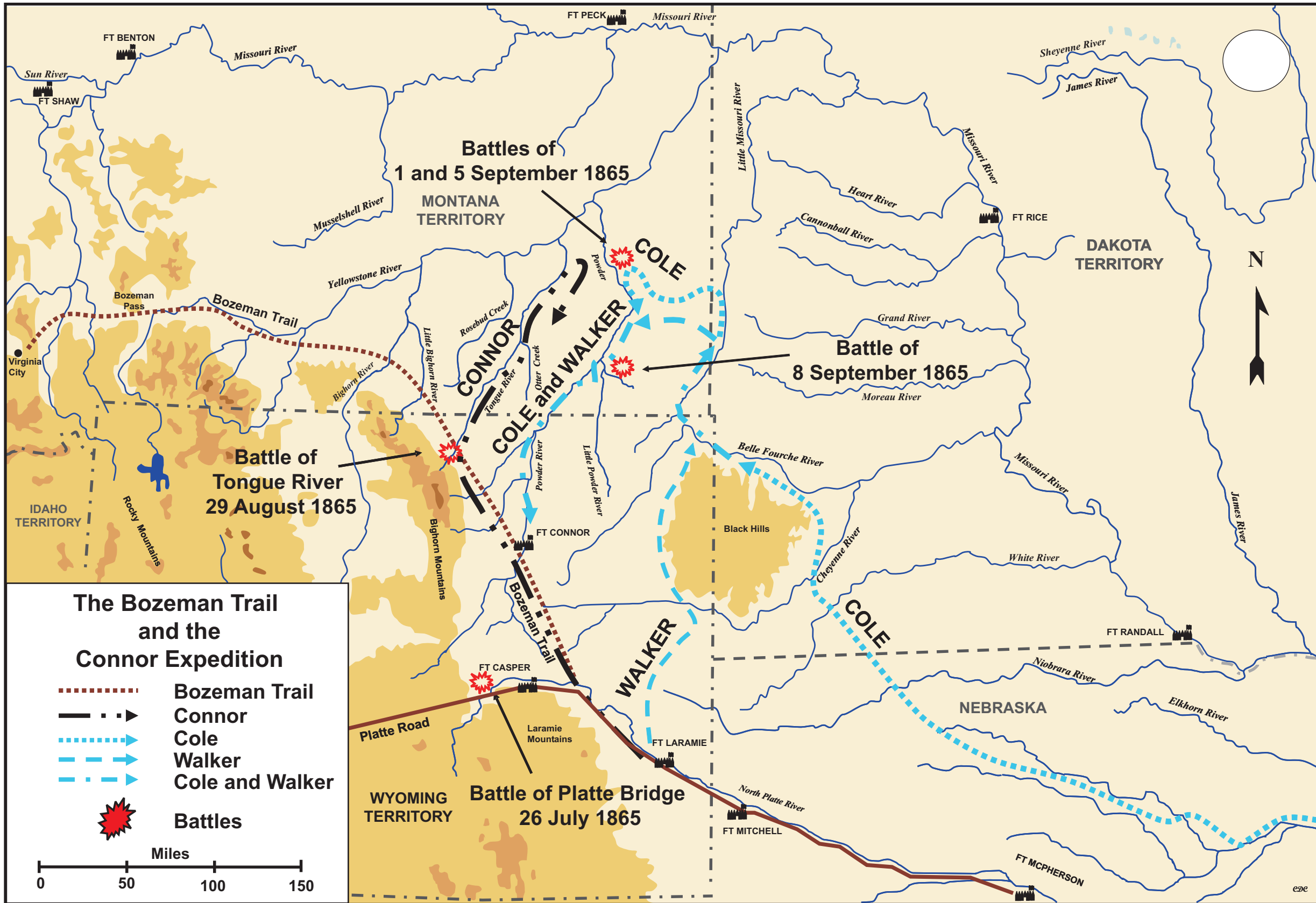
The discovery of gold in western Montana in 1862 around Grasshopper Creek brought hundreds of prospectors to the region. Nearly all of these fortune seekers had come up the Platte Road, the northern fork of the old Oregon–California Trail, and moved into Montana from the west. Others worked their way up the Missouri River as far as Fort Benton, then came down into the goldfields from the northeast. In 1863, two entrepreneurs, John Bozeman, a Georgian who had arrived on the frontier only 2 years earlier, and John Jacobs, a veteran mountain man, blazed a trail from the goldfields to link up with the Platte Road west of Fort Laramie. This route cut through Bozeman Pass east of Virginia City, crossed the Yellowstone and Bighorn Rivers, ran south along the east side of the Bighorn Mountains, crossed the Tongue and Powder Rivers, then ran south through the Powder River country to join the Platte Road about 80 miles west of Fort Laramie. It reduced by nearly 400 miles the distance required by other routes to reach the goldfields. However, the trail cut through prized hunting land claimed by the Teton Sioux and their allies along the Powder River. Travelers along the Bozeman Trail soon found themselves under fierce attack by hostile Indians.

In 1865, responding to an Indian attack against the Platte Bridge near modern Casper, Wyoming, and to demands by the emigrants for protection, the US Army sent three converging columns under the command of General Patrick E. Connor into the region. Colonel Nelson Cole commanded the Omaha column that consisted of 1,400 volunteer cavalry. Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Walker commanded the second column with 600 volunteer cavalry. Connor commanded the third column. His force consisted of 558 soldiers and another 179 Indian scouts. The strategy called for the three columns to rendezvous in early September on Rosebud Creek.

Connor reached the Upper Powder River by mid-August. He established Fort Connor then continued northwest in pursuit of the Indians. On 29 August he found and attacked the Arapaho village of Black Bear on the Tongue River near modern Ranchester, Wyoming. His attack overran the village and captured the pony herd. However, after completing the destruction of the village, several spirited Indian counterattacks convinced Connor that he should withdraw his outnumbered troops. Then, in the midst of early winter storms, Connor moved north to locate Cole's and Walker's columns.

Meanwhile, Cole had marched just north of the Black Hills and headed up the Belle Fourche River where he linked up with Walker's column on 18 August. Initially, the two columns continued to push deep into Indian lands until they grew dangerously low on supplies and decided to move toward the Tongue River and link up with Connor. On 1 September, a large Cheyenne war party attacked the columns altering Cole's decision to move toward the Tongue River. Instead, they headed down the Powder River hoping to replenish their supplies with the abundant game known to be in the Yellowstone River valley. The night of 2 September inflicted early winter storms on the columns. More than 200 of Cole's horses and mules, already weakened by hunger, died from exposure and exhaustion. Again, Cole changed his direction of march and decided to return to Fort Laramie for provisions. On the morning of 5 September, Cole and Walker unknowingly stumbled into the vicinity of a large village near the mouth of the Little Powder River. The village was an unprecedented gathering of Sioux, Northern Cheyenne, and Southern Cheyenne. More than 1,000 Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho warriors swarmed out of the village to attack the columns. The battle raged for 3 hours before the still undiscovered village moved safely out of the way, and the Indians broke off the fight. Then again on 8 September, the exhausted and starving troops unwittingly threatened the village. The Indian rearguard easily delayed the soldiers and the village escaped a second time.

Over the course of the next 12 days, the columns continued to plod along. Each day dozens of horses and mules died of starvation. The Indians hovered around the columns like vultures and, had it not been for the detachment's artillery, probably would have been more troublesome to the troops. On 20 September, Cole and Walker's troops straggled into Fort Connor. Connor's equally exhausted troops joined them on 24 September. The expedition had failed to subdue the tribes and, instead, had emboldened the Sioux to continue their determined resistance to any white incursion into Powder River country. Nonetheless, the presence of Fort Connor on the Bozeman Trail encouraged increased immigrant travel along the route and further amplified their demands for protection.



Map 6. The Bozeman Trail Forts, 1866–68

The failure of the Connor Expedition prompted the government to seek a diplomatic solution, and, in June 1866, while a number of the Powder River chiefs were at Fort Laramie negotiating a treaty to allow safe passage through the Powder River country, Colonel Henry B. Carrington led the 2d Battalion, 18th Infantry, toward the Bozeman Trail. His orders required him to garrison Fort Reno, formerly Fort Connor (built the previous year by General Connor), and to establish two new forts along the Bozeman Trail. From those forts, he was to provide protection and escort for emigrant travel into the Montana Territory. Considering the number of chiefs participating in the peace negotiations, the prospect for an early settlement seemed good, and the Army did not expect Carrington's mission to involve significant combat actions. Consequently, in addition to the 700 troops of the 18th, more than 300 women, children, sutlers, and civilian contractors accompanied Carrington. The column included 226 mule-drawn wagons, the 35-piece regimental band, 1,000 head of cattle to provide fresh meat for the force, and all the tools and equipment necessary to create a community in the wilderness.

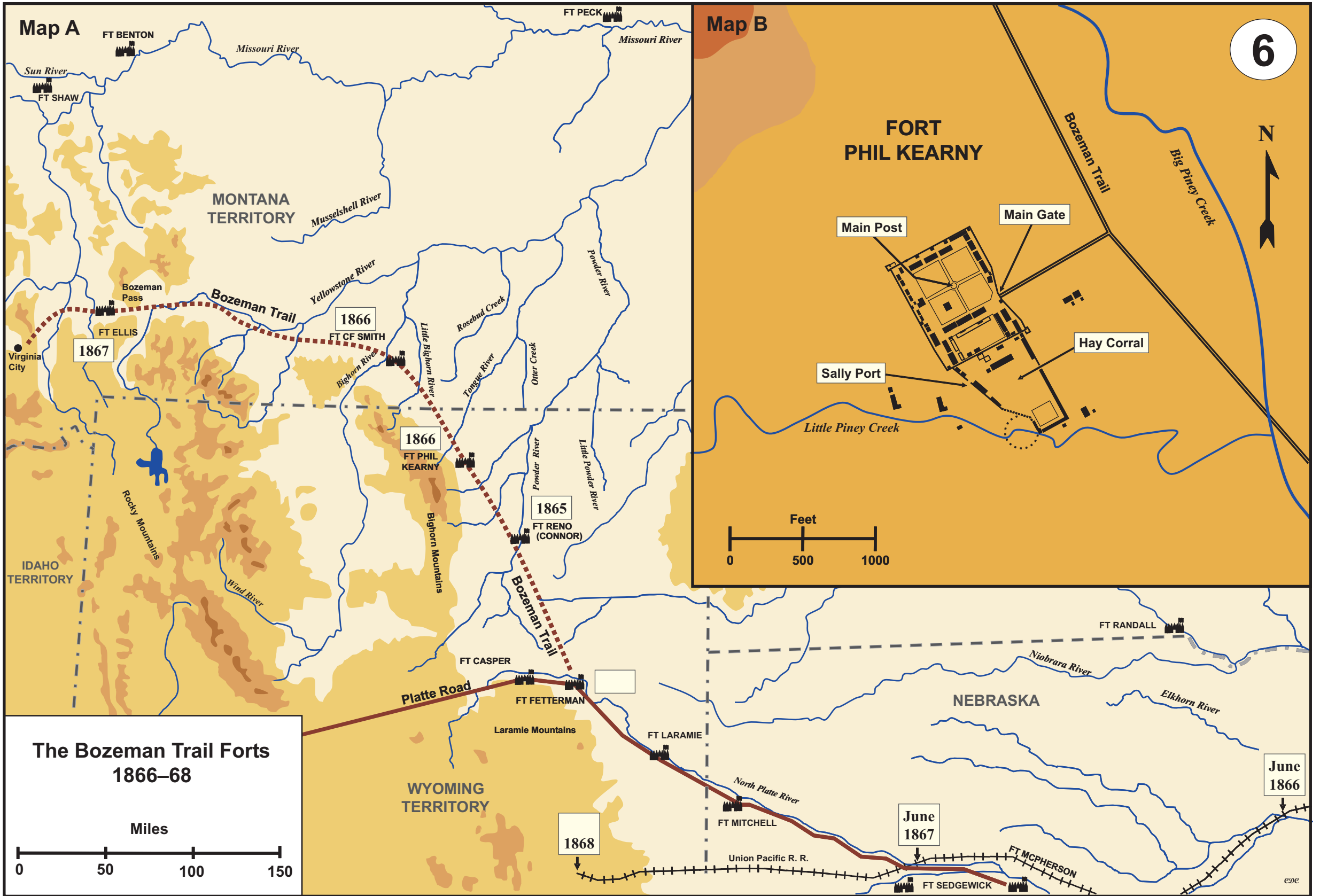
Carrington left Fort Laramie fully confident that he would be able to accomplish his mission without difficulty. He seemed to be well suited for his mission based upon his proven merit as a planner and organizer. A graduate of Yale, he was a practicing attorney when the Civil War began in April 1861. He volunteered immediately for service and secured a commission as colonel of the 18th Infantry on its organization in May 1861. He was brevetted brigadier general in November 1862. Although he saw no action with the 18th, he performed numerous staff duties efficiently and retained command of the 18th at the end of the war.

On 28 June 1866, Carrington's column arrived at Fort Reno. Here, Carrington spent 10 days repairing, provisioning, and garrisoning the fort with a company of infantry. On 9 July, the remainder of the 2d Battalion left Fort Reno with all its impedimenta. Four days later, Carrington selected a site for the construction of his headquarters post.

Carrington's chosen site lay just south of the point where the Bozeman Trail crossed Big Piney Creek. The large valley in which the fort sat was surrounded on three sides by high terrain. To both the north and south, the Bozeman Trail passed over ridges out of sight of the fort. To the west, the valley stretched 5 or 6 miles along Little Piney Creek before giving way to the foothills of the Bighorn Mountains. It was up this valley that the woodcutters and log teams would have to travel to provide the all-important building materials and fuel for the post's cooking and heating fires. Carrington's selection of this position has long been questioned. One weakness of the site was that the Sioux and Cheyenne continuously dominated the high ground and observed all movement into and around the fort.

Construction of Fort Phil Kearny began as soon as Carrington's column arrived and continued almost until it was abandoned. The main post (map B) was an 800-foot by 600-foot stockade made by butting together 11-foot-high side-hewn pine logs in a trench 3 feet deep. The stockade enclosed barracks and living quarters for the troops, officers, and most of their families; mess and hospital facilities; the magazine; and a variety of other structures. An unstockaded area encompassing shops, stables, and the hay corral extended another 700 feet from the south palisade to Little Piney Creek, the primary water source for the fort. Two primary entrances provided access for wagons to the post, the main gate on the east wall and a sally port on the west side of the unstockaded area.

In July, Carrington detached two companies under Captain Nathaniel C. Kenney to move even farther up the Bozeman Trail to build a third fort, Fort C.F. Smith, 91 miles north of Fort Phil Kearny near present-day Yellowtail, Montana. The Army also established two additional forts along the trail in 1867: Fort Fetterman near the trail's starting point and Fort Ellis on the west side of Bozeman Pass.



Map 7. Fort Phil Kearny Besieged

Red Cloud, an influential Oglala Sioux chief, was strongly opposed to the US Army's efforts to build forts along the Bozeman Trail. He had become convinced by episodes such as the Grattan Affair and Brigadier Harney's retaliation that his Oglala Sioux could no longer live in the Platte River Region near Fort Laramie. Therefore, in the late 1850's, the Oglala Sioux pushed west into the Powder River country hoping to stay away from the continuing US migration. He saw the Powder River country as his people's last refuge from the encroaching whites.

Almost as soon as Carrington began construction on his Bozeman Trail forts, hostilities commenced between the Army and the Sioux. Carrington concentrated all his limited resources on building Fort Phil Kearny. He applied little emphasis on training or offensive operations and only reacted to Indian raids with ineffectual pursuits. On the other hand, Red Cloud concentrated most of his efforts on sporadic harassments against Fort Phil Kearny and traffic along the Bozeman Trail. His warriors became very adept at stealing livestock and threatening the woodcutting parties. The Sioux avoided all unnecessary risk and easily avoided most Army attempts at pursuit, which demoralized the soldiers because of their inability to bring the Indians to battle. Red Cloud's warriors also presented a constant threat of attack along the Bozeman Trail. The forts' garrisons barely had the resources to protect themselves, so emigrant travel along the trail all but ceased. In essence, the trail became a military road, and most of the traffic was limited to military traffic bringing in supplies. Red Cloud's strategy of a distant siege had negated the shortcut to the Montana gold fields.

In November, Carrington received a small number of reinforcements. They included: Captain (Brevet Lieutenant Colonel) William J. Fetterman and Captain

(Brevet Major) James Powell—both experienced combat veterans of the Civil War. The very aggressive Fetterman quickly joined with other frustrated officers to push Carrington for offensive action against the Indians. Unfortunately, like most of his fellow officers at the fort, he had no experience in Indian warfare.

In December 1866, the Indians were encouraged by their success in harassing the forts and decided to attempt to lure an Army detachment into an ambush. During that same time period, having completed essential work on the fort, Carrington decided to initiate offensive operations. Carrington planned to counter the next raid with his own two-pronged attack. He instructed Captain Fetterman to pursue the raiders and push them down Peno Creek. Carrington would then take a second group of soldiers over Lodge Trail Ridge and cut off the withdrawing warriors. On 6 December 1866, the Indians attacked the wood train and Carrington executed his planned counterattack. In the fight, Lieutenants Bingham and Grummond disobeyed orders and pursued Indian decoy parties into an ambush that resulted in the death of Bingham and one noncommissioned officer. Only stern discipline and timely action taken by Captain Fetterman who advanced toward the sounds of the guns prevented a larger tragedy on that day.

The 6 December skirmish influenced Carrington to suspend his plans for offensive actions and to concentrate on training instead. Conversely, the Sioux were encouraged by their success and continued to refine their ambush strategy. On 19 December, they made another attempt to lure an Army detachment into an ambush with an attack on the wood train. Captain Powell led the relief force and prudently declined to pursue the raiders. The Sioux quickly planned their next attack for 21 December.

Fort Phil Kearny Besieged

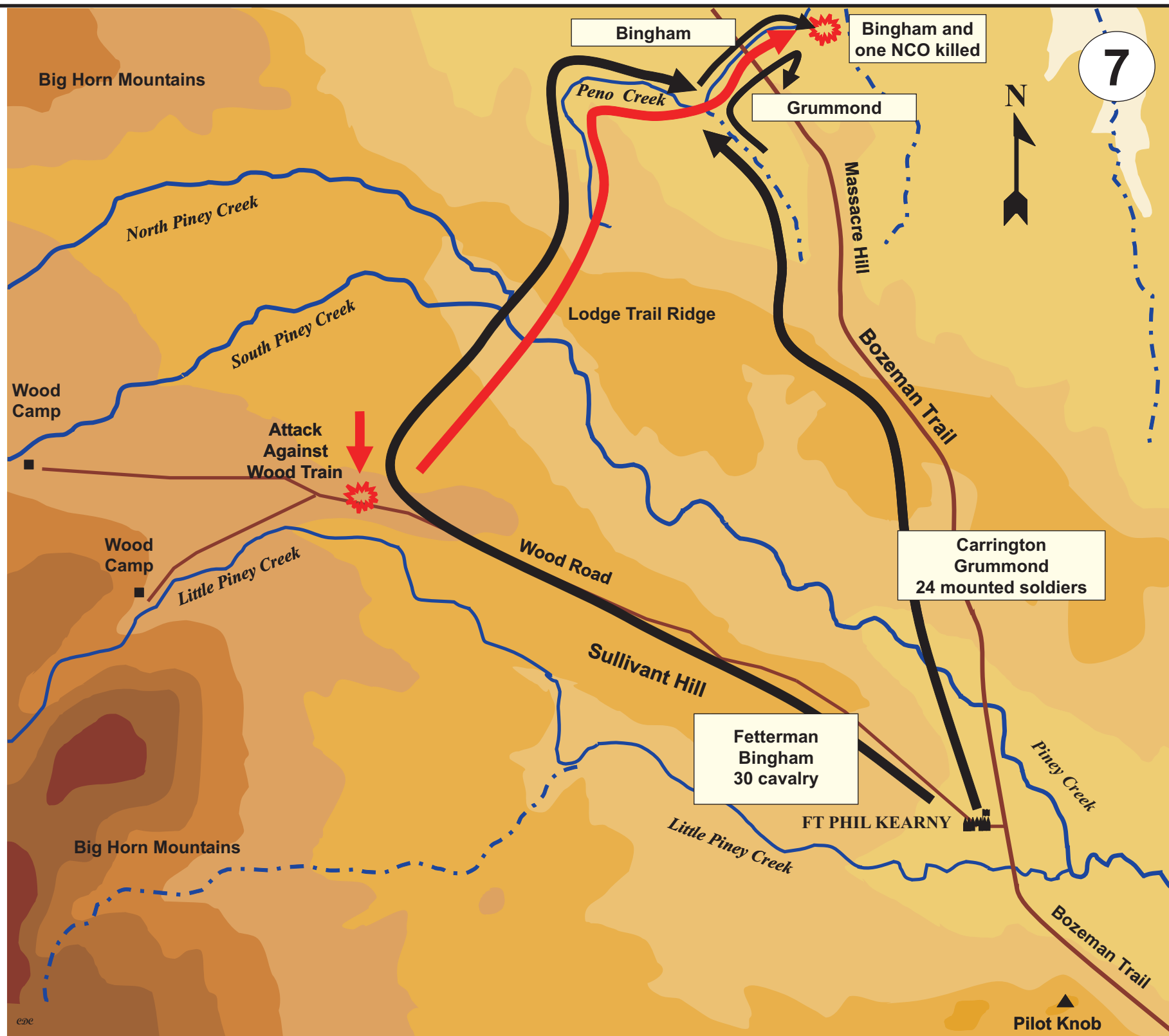
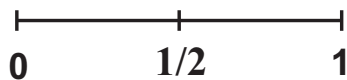
 Indian Movement

 Army Movement

 Skirmishes on 6 December 1866

6250 Feet
6000 Feet
5750 Feet
5500 Feet
5250 Feet
5000 Feet
4750 Feet
4500 Feet
4250 Feet

Miles



Map 8. The Fetterman Fight: The Approach

Friday morning, 21 December 1866, dawned cold and gray around Fort Phil Kearny. The temperature hovered below freezing, and snow blanketed the valleys, pine woods, and ridges in the foothills of the Bighorn Mountains. At about 1000, Colonel Carrington ordered the wood train to proceed to the pinery for the daily woodcutting detail. Knowing that an attack on the wood train was likely, he sent an especially strong escort with the wagons. Within an hour, the lookout on Pilot Knob signaled that the wood train was under attack, and firing could be heard at the fort. As he had done on similar occasions, Carrington immediately ordered a column to relieve the besieged detail. Captain Powell had successfully carried out a similar mission just 2 days earlier. But that morning, Captain Fetterman insisted on commanding the relief column.

There is considerable controversy about Carrington's orders to Fetterman. Most secondary sources agree that Carrington told him to relieve the wood train and then return to the fort. Under no circumstances was he to go beyond Lodge Trail Ridge. On the other hand, there is no contemporary evidence that Carrington ever gave the controversial order not to go beyond Lodge Trail Ridge. It is possible that Carrington's consent to Fetterman's request to lead the large relief force was another preplanned offensive movement designed to catch the wood train raiders as they withdrew into the Peno Creek drainage. The story of the order may be a postbattle fabrication intended to focus the blame for the tragedy on disobedience of orders instead of the failure of a planned offensive movement against the Indians.


At 1115, Fetterman moved out of the southwestern sally port of the fort with 49 handpicked men from 4 companies of the 18th Infantry Regiment armed with muzzle-loading Springfields (A Company: 21, C Company: 9, E Company: 6, and H Company: 13). A small number of the infantry, possibly the 13 men with H Company, may have been mounted. A few minutes later, Lieutenant George Grummond followed Fetterman with 27 mounted troops from the 2d Cavalry Regiment, mostly armed with Spencer repeating rifles taken from the regimental band. Captain Frederick Brown, a close friend of Fetterman, volunteered to join the column. James Wheatley and Isaac Fisher, two civilians armed with repeating rifles, also volunteered to go. Although Fetterman probably never uttered the phrase attached to his legacy, "With 80 men I could ride through the entire Sioux nation," he was, like most other Army officers, contemptuous of his Indian foes. Nevertheless, Fetterman did embark with 80 men.

Fetterman's route is also controversial. However, it is probable that he led his force directly north, passing to the east of Sullivant Hill before crossing the creek and ascending Lodge Trail Ridge. Fetterman's infantry most likely paralleled the road with the cavalry along the slopes on each side as flankers. Whether or not the order not to cross the ridge was factual, it was clear to all those watching from the fort that Fetterman's movement would take him over Lodge Trail Ridge.

The Fetterman Fight (The Approach)

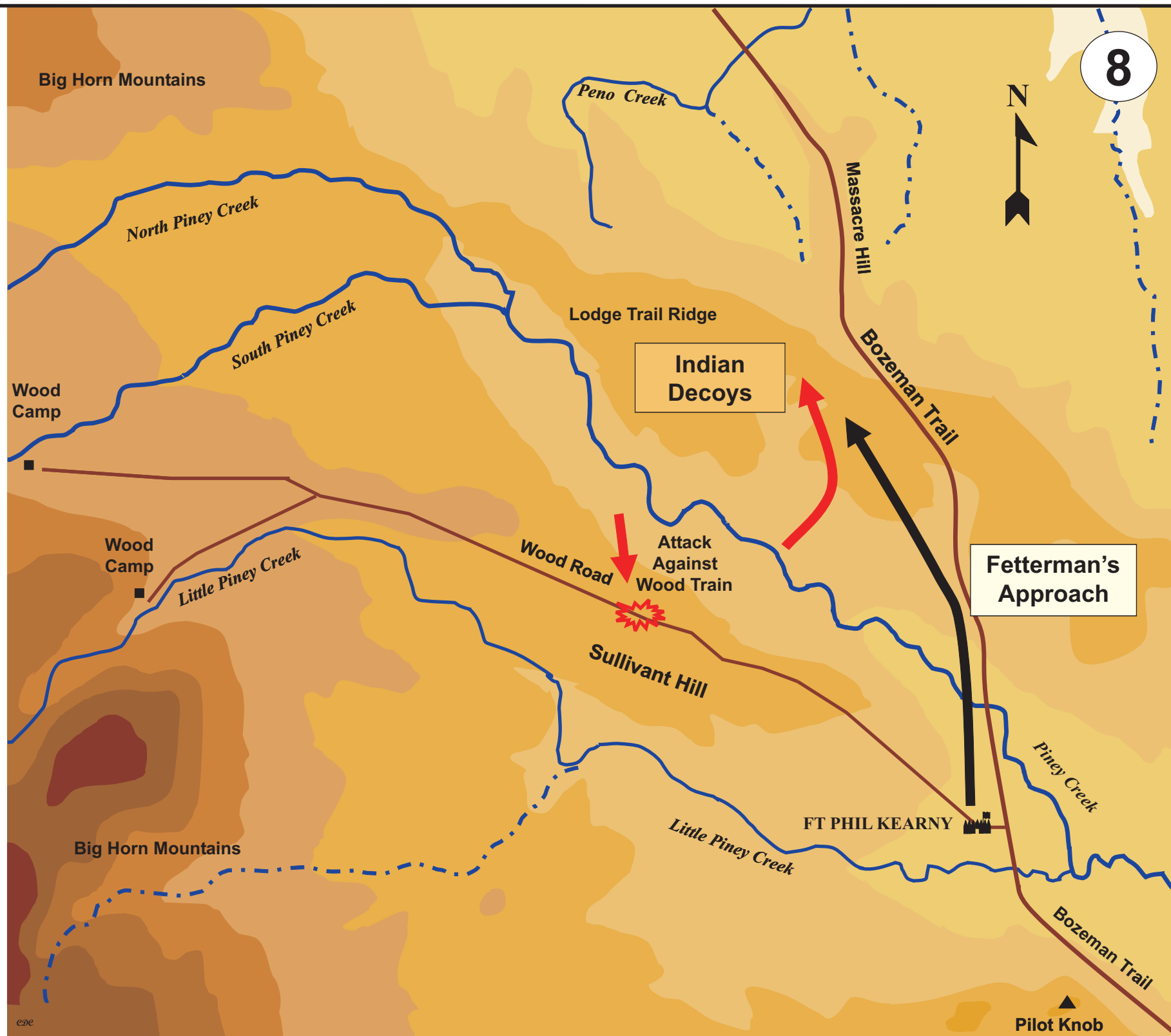
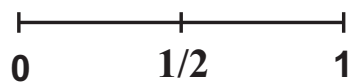
 Indian Movement

 Army Movement

 Indian Attack

6250 Feet
6000 Feet
5750 Feet
5500 Feet
5250 Feet
5000 Feet
4750 Feet
4500 Feet
4250 Feet

Miles



Map 9. The Fetterman Fight: The Pursuit and Ambush

Although the details of the fight are uncertain, it appears that the mounted troops and the foot infantry became separated (see map A). Whether Fetterman gave the order or Grummond was acting on his own will never be known, but the cavalry, along with a small detachment of mounted infantry and two civilians, moved ahead of the infantry soon after passing over Lodge Trail Ridge. Indian decoys demonstrated tauntingly before the relief column and lured them toward Peno Creek. Based on his past tendency for impetuous action, Grummond was probably anxious to come to grips with the foe.

At the foot of the slope, however, hundreds of Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho Indians sprang their trap (see map B). Indian accounts indicate that the Cheyenne were hiding to the west of the ridge in the trees, scrub, and depressions around Peno Creek and

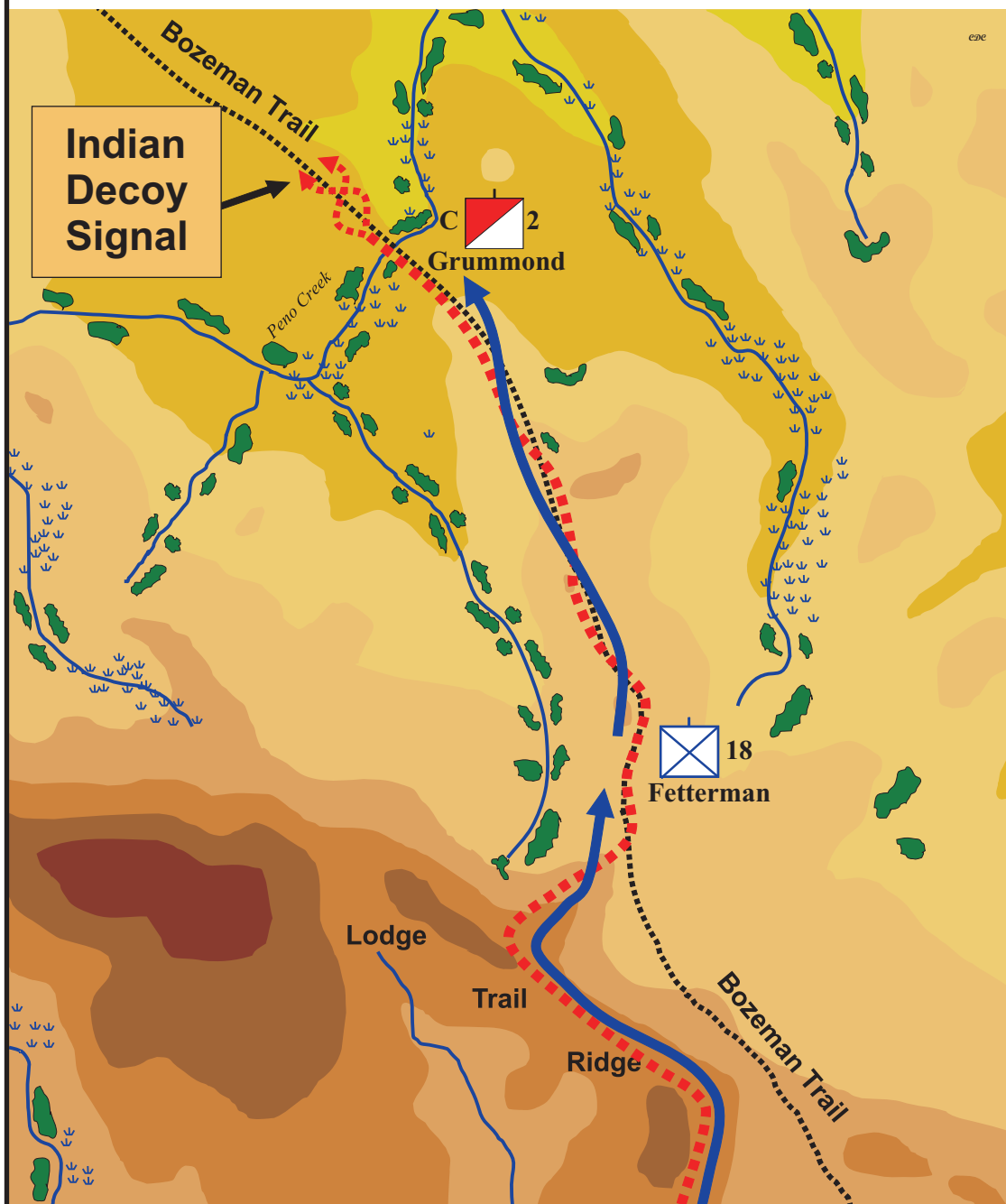
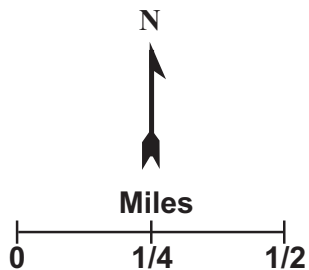
that the Sioux and Arapaho were in hiding to the north along Peno Creek and to the east of the road behind the next ridge.

Grummond's mounted detachment retreated back up the hill. Wheatley and Fisher, the two civilians, along with several veterans, dismounted and defended a small outcrop of rocks. These experienced frontiersmen understood that it was fatal to attempt a mounted retreat from attacking Indian horsemen. Wheatley and Fisher apparently used their repeating rifles to good effect before succumbing. Carrington later claimed in his report that there were 60 pools of blood surrounding the position. Nevertheless, the two civilians bought with their lives the time Grummond needed to rally his mounted troops at the top of the hill.

Map A

The Fetterman Fight 21 December 1866 The Pursuit

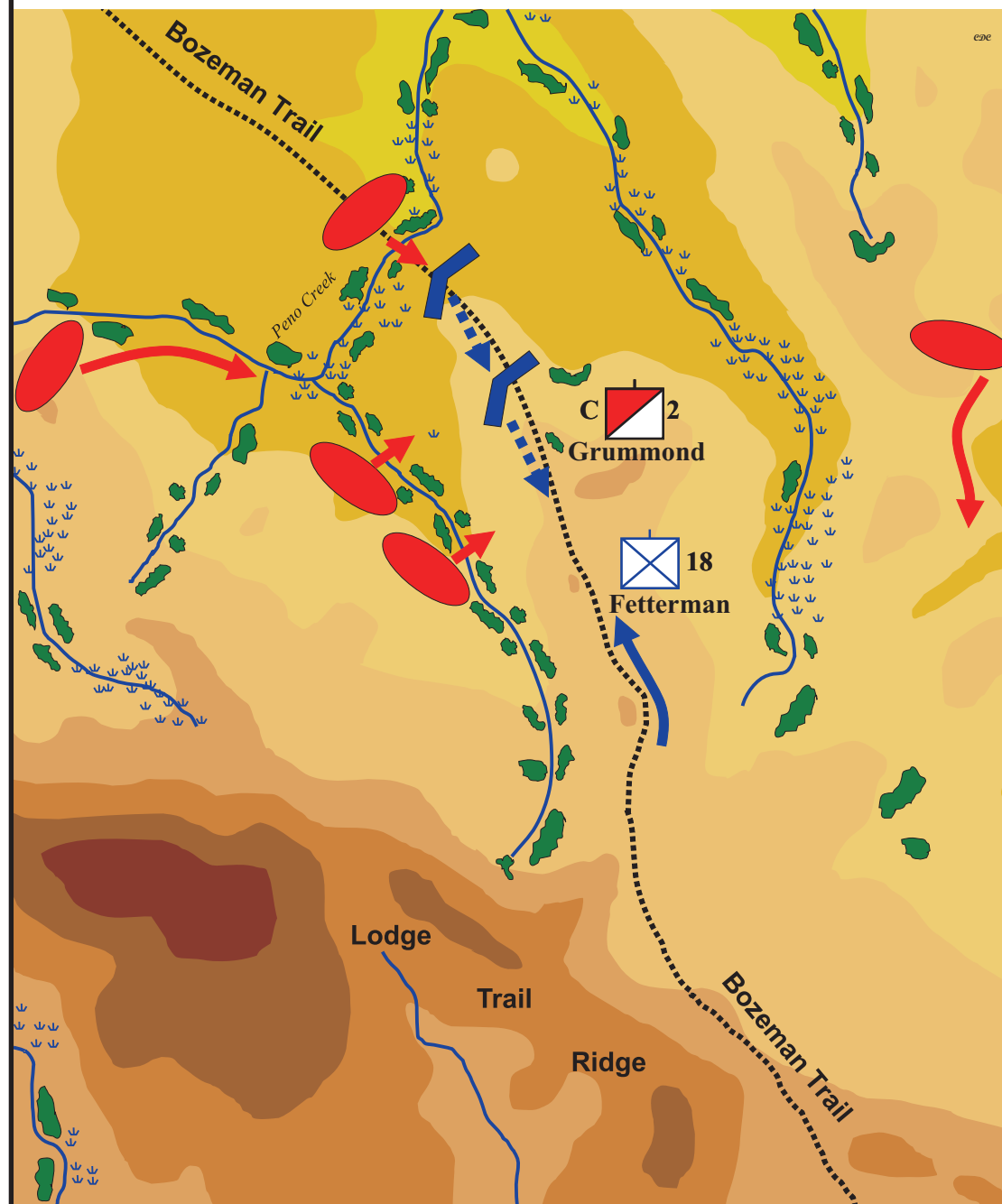
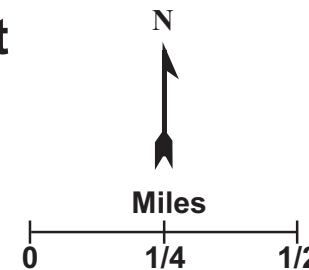
- Indian Retreat
- Indian Attack
- Army Attack
- Army Retreat



Map B

The Fetterman Fight 21 December 1866 The Ambush

- Indian Retreat
- Indian Attack
- Army Attack
- Army Retreat



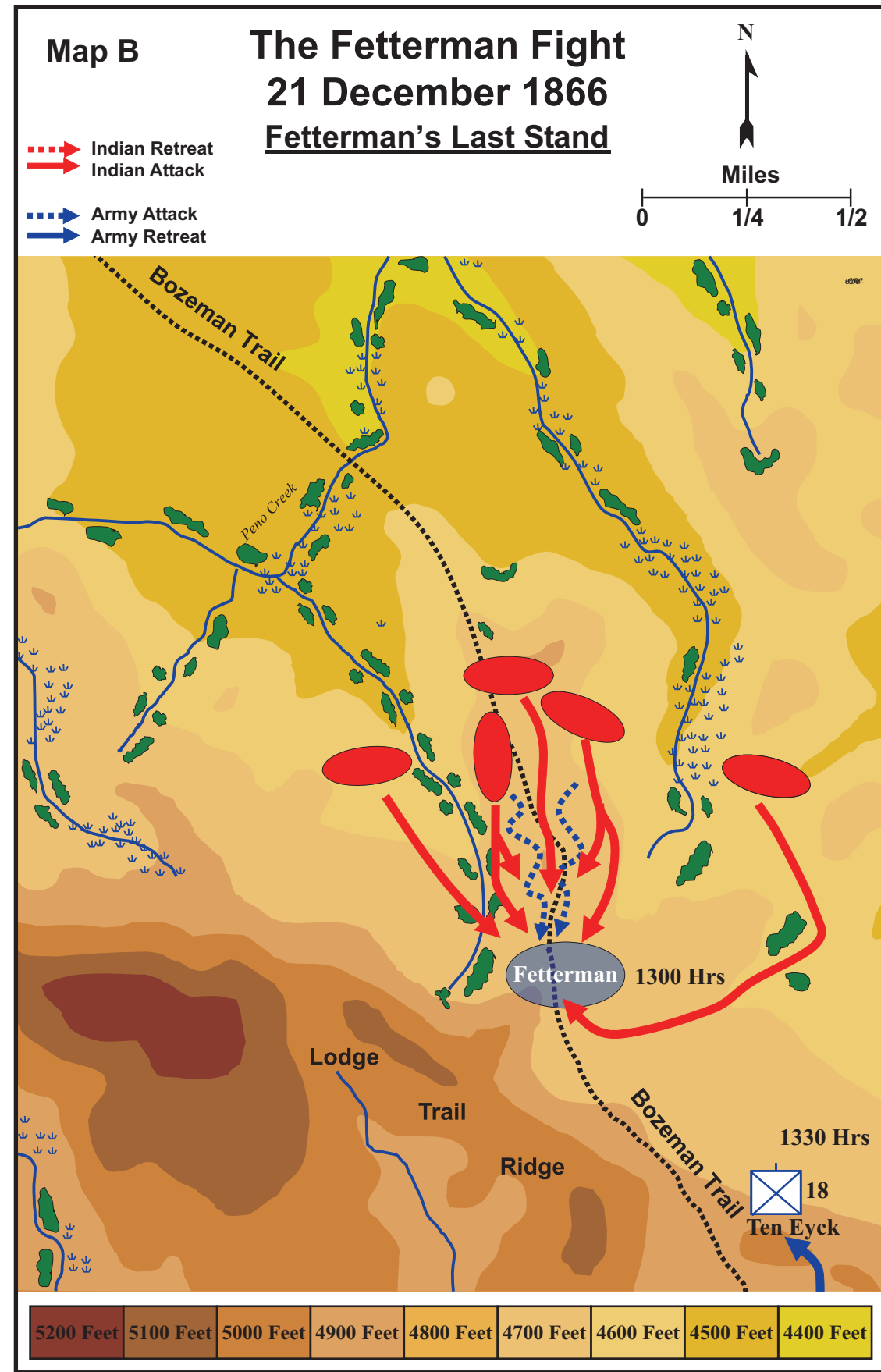
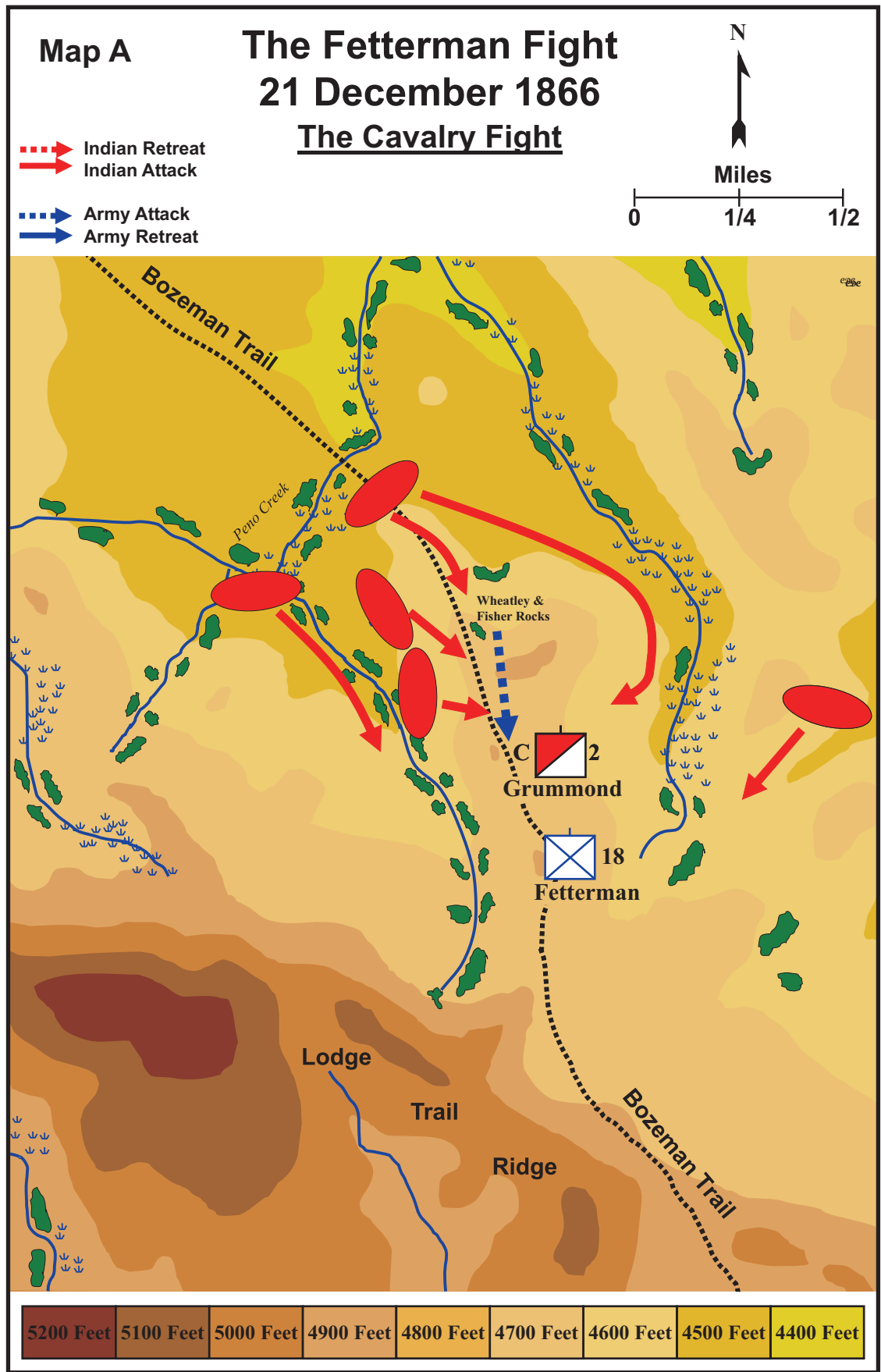
Map 10. The Fetterman Fight: The Cavalry Fight and Fetterman's Last Stand

The mounted troops retreated southward up the ridge to take cover behind a small hill (see map A). It appears that Grummond fought a dismounted delaying action here. Their skirmish line fired to the north and down the ridge to both sides. At some point, Grummond attempted to fall back to the south along the road toward the infantry. Nevertheless, the retreat disintegrated into a rout, and most of the mounted soldiers were chased down by the Indians before they could rejoin the Infantry (see map B). Grummond's body and several others were found scattered along the road between the cavalry skirmish line and the final infantry position. Indian accounts speak of a "pony-soldier chief" who was killed on the road and whose men then gave way and fled up the ridge. Other Indian accounts speak of a soldier chief on a white horse that fought a brave delaying action, cutting off an Indian's head with a single stroke of his saber. One of the last soldiers to die along the cavalry skirmish line was Adolph Metzger, a German-born bugler and Army veteran since 1855. Metzger fended off his assailants with his bugle until the instrument was a battered, shapeless mass of metal and his body was bleeding from a dozen wounds.

Fetterman, Brown, and 47 other soldiers, mostly infantry armed with Civil War era muzzle-loading rifle muskets, rallied at a cluster of large rocks further up the ridge. American Horse and Brave Eagle, both Oglala Sioux warriors, claimed that the soldiers fought hard and resisted several attempts to overrun their positions. However,

Fetterman's infantry were hopelessly outnumbered and had little chance of holding out. Eventually, they were overwhelmed, and all were killed. At the fort, Carrington heard the heavy firing beyond the ridge. Fearing the worst, Carrington ordered Captain Tenador Ten Eyck to take what men could be spared from the remaining garrison to assist Fetterman. By the time Ten Eyck reached the hills overlooking the fight, it was too late to save Fetterman's doomed command.

After the battle, Carrington displayed remarkable determination in recovering the bodies of Fetterman's men even though he feared that the Indians would attack and overrun the drastically undermanned fort. He asked for and received a volunteer to carry news of the disaster to Fort Laramie. Arriving at Fort Laramie during a Christmas night ball, the volunteer, John "Portugee" Phillips, had ridden 235 miles in 4 days to report the disaster. On 26 December, General Phillip St. George Cooke, Carrington's commanding officer, ordered Lieutenant Colonel Henry W. Wessells, Carrington's subordinate at Fort Reno, to take command of the relieve expedition and assume overall responsibility for all three forts on the Bozeman Trail. The new commander diligently applied himself to improving morale at Fort Phil Kearny, but the garrison suffered greatly from the lack of supplies and the intense cold. The Indians also suspended their operations against the fort because of the extreme winter conditions. Both sides waited for spring to resume the contest for control of the Bozeman Trail.



Map 11. The Hayfield Fight, 1 August 1867

In the spring and summer of 1867, the Indians resumed their harassment against Forts C.F. Smith and Phil Kearny. None of the attacks had been seriously pressed, and neither side had sustained significant casualties. In July 1867, Red Cloud gathered his coalition of Indian tribes in the Rosebud Valley for the sacred Sun Dance and to discuss the next move against the Bozeman Trail forts. The tribal leaders probably fielded as many as 1,000 warriors, but the loose confederation of tribes could not agree on which fort to attack and ended up splitting their forces. The majority of the Cheyenne, with some Sioux, moved against Fort C.F. Smith while the rest of the Sioux and some Cheyenne decided to attack a woodcutting party near Fort Phil Kearny.

Probably because action against the forts had been sporadic, the Indians were unaware that, early in July, a shipment of new M-1866, Springfield-Allin, .50-70-caliber, breech-loading rifles had arrived at the forts. The Springfield-Allin was a modification of the .58-caliber Springfield muzzle-loader, the standard shoulder arm of the Civil War. Although single shot, the new weapon, which used the Martin bar-anvil, center-fire-primed, all-metallic .50-caliber cartridge, was highly reliable and could be fired accurately and rapidly. Along with the rifles came more than 100,000 rounds of ammunition.

Both forts, C.F. Smith and Phil Kearny, were sufficiently strong, having no fear of a direct attack against their bastions. However, the forts did have exposed outposts. At Fort C.F. Smith, it was the hayfield camp located 2.5 miles to the northeast of the fort. At the hayfield camp, the contract workers had erected an improvised corral out of logs and brush as a protected storage area for their equipment and animals and as a defensive position, if needed. Nineteen soldiers, commanded by Lieutenant Sigismund Sternberg, guarded the six haycutters in the hayfield.

On the morning of 1 August 1867, the Indians attacked the detail working the hayfield. The combined Army and civilian force quickly took refuge in the corral and, except for the lieutenant, took cover behind the logs that lined the perimeter of the corral. Lieutenant Sternberg, with formal European military training and experience in both the Prussian and Union armies, did not consider it proper military protocol for officers to fight from the prone position and so decided to fight standing up. The 29-year-old lieutenant had only been at Fort C.F. Smith for 7 days and had no prior experience fighting Indians.

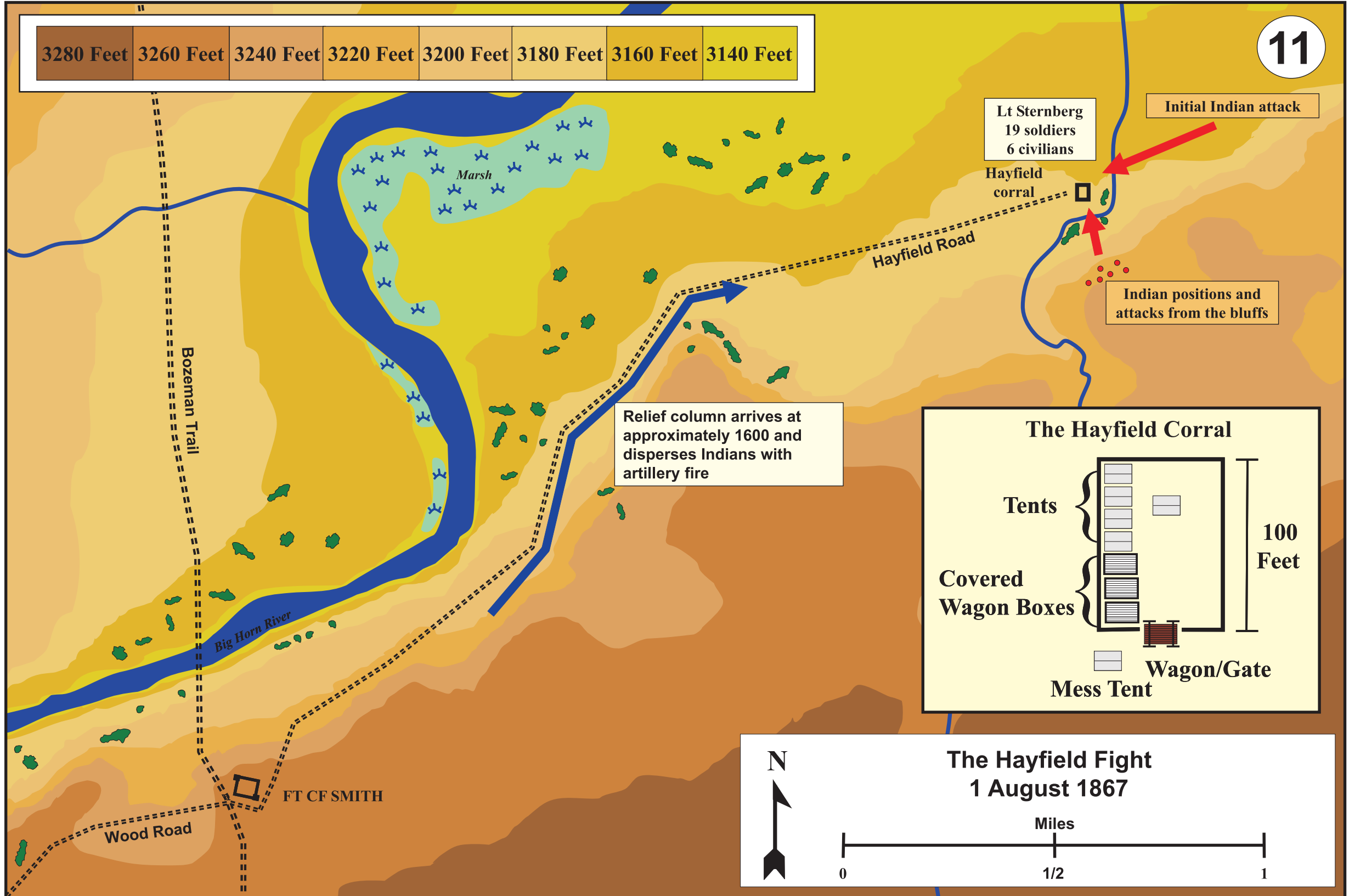
Though the actual Indian strength is unknown, it probably approached 500. The initial attack occurred sometime around noon. The Indians made several dashes at the

corral hoping to lure the soldiers into chasing them. After that tactic failed, they conducted a mass charge on the corral. The warriors expected a volley of fire from the soldiers followed by a pause for the soldiers to reload their clumsy muzzle-loaders. During that pause, the attackers planned to rush in and overrun the corral. However, the pause never occurred, because the soldiers were able to quickly reload their new rifles. Even though the soldiers had not become thoroughly accustomed to their new weapons, their mass firepower threw back the attack. During the attack, Indian fire killed Lieutenant Sternberg with a shot to the head. Indian fire also seriously wounded Sternberg's senior NCO in the shoulder. Therefore, command was assumed by Don A. Colvin, one of the hayfield civilians who had been an officer during the Civil War.

With the failure of the first attack, many of the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors took cover on the bluffs 300 yards south of the corral and, from that position, kept the corral under fire until late into the day. The second attack came from the bluffs and was again repelled by the soldiers' massed fire. Twice more that afternoon the Indians launched mounted assaults from the high ground hoping to overrun the defenders. Each sweeping charge was stalled by the defenders' continuous fire forcing the Indians to retreat. The Indians commenced their final attack against the south wall of the corral on foot. The attackers managed to wade the shallow creek but were unable to force their way up to the corral wall.

Back at the fort, Colonel Luther P. Bradley, with 5 companies of available Infantry (10 officers and 250 soldiers), could neither see nor hear the fighting at the corral. News of the attack came sometime after lunch when the wood train, which had been working southwest of the fort, reported that they could see a large number of Indians attacking the hay detail. At first, the colonel was reluctant to send help. Perhaps he feared a Fetterman-like ambush was awaiting the relief party. However, he did send out a mounted reconnaissance at about 1530 which quickly returned to the post and reported the seriousness of the situation. The reconnaissance report, along with a desperate plea for help from a courier who had managed to break out of the hayfield corral and make a dash for the fort, prompted the colonel to organize a two-company relief force to send to the aid of the hayfield fighters. The appearance of reinforcements, at about 1600, and especially the exploding case shot of their accompanying howitzer, convinced the attackers to give up the assault and withdraw. Colvin and his outnumbered defenders had held their position for more than 6 hours. The combined Army/civilian force had sustained three killed and three wounded. Although the Army estimated 18 to 23 warriors killed, the Indians only acknowledged 8 killed and several wounded.

3280 Feet 3260 Feet 3240 Feet 3220 Feet 3200 Feet 3180 Feet 3160 Feet 3140 Feet



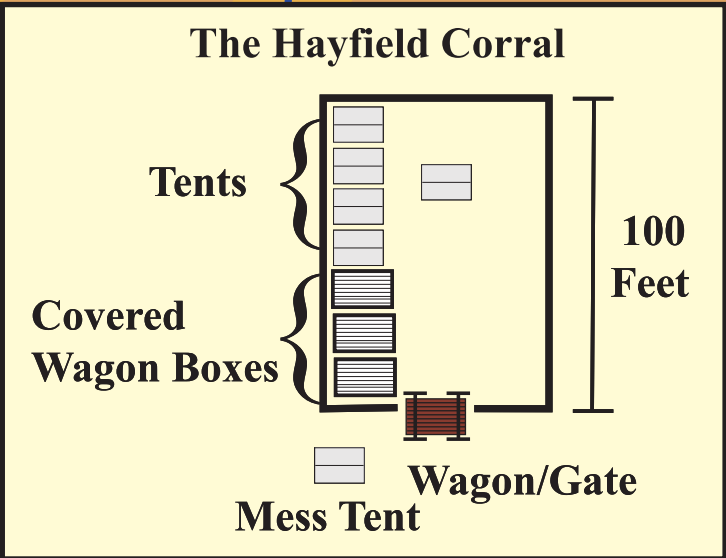
Lt Sternberg
19 soldiers
6 civilians

Initial Indian attack

Hayfield corral

Indian positions and attacks from the bluffs

Relief column arrives at approximately 1600 and disperses Indians with artillery fire



The Hayfield Fight
1 August 1867

N

Miles

0 1/2 1

Map 12. The Wagon Box Fight, 2 August 1867

The exposed outpost at Fort Phil Kearny was the pinery located 6 miles to the west of the fort. Captain James Powell's C Company, 27th Infantry provided the guard for the civilian woodcutters at the pinery. The soldiers guarding the wood camps operated out of a corral located on a plateau between Big and Little Piney Creeks. The corral was made by removing the boxes from atop the running gear (wheels and axles) of wagons. The running gear would then be used to haul logs from the pinery to the fort. The boxes, approximately 10 feet long, 4½ feet wide, and 2½ feet high, were then placed in a rectangular formation approximately 60 feet by 30 feet. Two wagon boxes, with canvas still attached, held the rations for both soldiers and civilians and sat outside the corral.

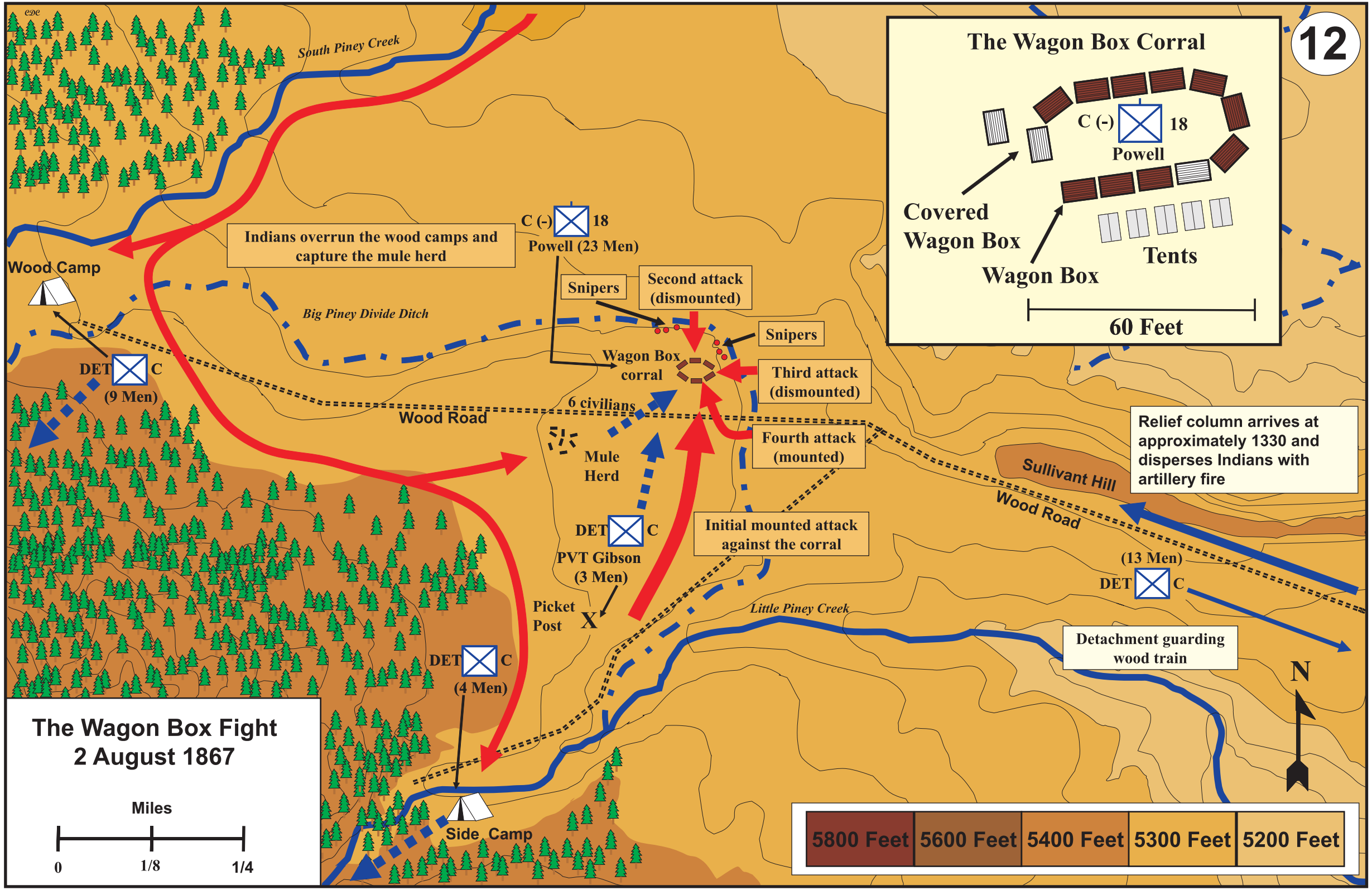
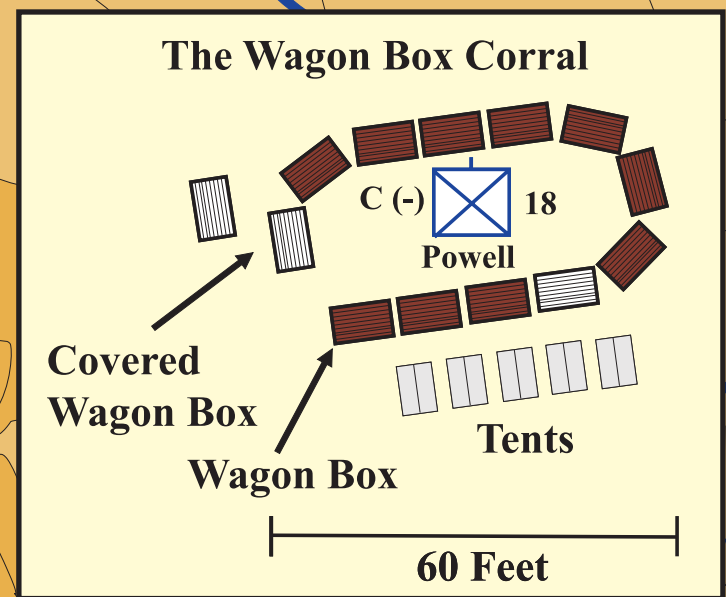
The Indians, their martial ardor stirred by the recent religious ceremony, attacked the soldiers at the corral on the morning of 2 August 1867. Powell had already sent out the working parties when the Indians attacked. A small number of warriors crossed the hills to the west of the corral and attacked the woodcutter camps on the Big and Little Piney Creeks. The warriors then raced onto the plateau and captured the mule herd. The war chiefs had hoped the soldiers at the corral would rush out from their improvised wagon box fortress to be ambushed in the open. Instead, Captain Powell kept his men under control and by 9 o'clock had 26 soldiers and 6 civilians gathered into the corral. At this point, the war chiefs had no choice other than to attempt a mass attack against the soldiers. While Indian spectators gathered on the surrounding hills, mounted warriors made the first attack charging the corral from the southwest. The warriors expected the soldiers to send one volley of fire followed by a pause to reload their muzzle-loaders, allowing plenty of time for the Indians to overwhelm the defense. However, the soldiers were able to reload their new rifles quickly, and their continuous fire blunted the attack. The Indians, instead of closing in, circled around the corral using their horses as shields and then quickly withdrew behind the ridge to the north.

After the mounted charge failed, the war chiefs organized their warriors for an assault on foot. The second attack came from behind the ridge to the north. This time the warriors charged on foot while mounted warriors demonstrated to the south. The foot charge surged to within a few feet of the corral before it stalled under the continuous fire of the soldiers and fell back to take cover. At the same time, snipers hidden behind a rim

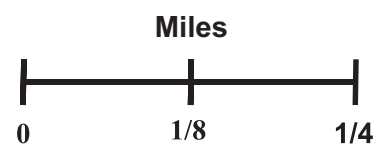
of land fired into the corral. It was these snipers who inflicted most of the casualties suffered by the soldiers in the day-long fight. One of those casualties was Lieutenant John C. Jenness who had been repeatedly told to keep his head down. His reply that he knew how to fight Indians echoed just moments before he fell dead with a head wound. The third attack came up and over the rim of land just to the northeast of the corral. In this attack, the Indians' charge almost reached the wagon boxes before the soldiers' heavy fire forced them back again. The fourth and final attack came from the southeast. In this attack, the warriors attempted another mounted charge, but again failed to close with the soldiers.

The fight lasted into the early afternoon. The garrison at Fort Phil Kearny could hear the firing, but fearing an ambush, was reluctant to send support. Major Benjamin Smith did finally leave the fort with a relief column of 102 men and a mountain howitzer. Nearing the wagon box battleground, Smith fired his howitzer which resulted in the dispersal of the Indian attack. At a cost of three soldiers killed and two wounded in the wagon box perimeter, the soldiers had held off hundreds of Indian braves. Powell modestly credited his successful defense to the rapid fire of the breech-loading rifles, the coolness of his men, and the effectiveness of his position. The Indians also claimed victory in the fight. Their warriors had successfully destroyed the woodcutter camps and burned several wagons. They had also captured a large mule herd and killed several soldiers. Precise Indian casualties are unknown; Powell estimated 60 dead and 120 wounded. The actual casualties were probably much less.

In spite of the Army's small victories at the wagon box corral and the hayfield fight, the days of the Bozeman Trail were numbered. After 8 months of negotiations, the majority of the Indian chiefs finally agreed to the terms of a new treaty, but it was not until November 1868 that Red Cloud signed the document at Fort Laramie. The 1868 treaty met almost all of the Sioux demands, including the abandonment of the three forts in the contested area and the closing of the Bozeman Trail. In August 1868, the last US Army units departed Forts Phil Kearny and C.F. Smith. Even before the Army columns were out of sight, the Sioux and Cheyenne set fire to the remaining buildings and stockades and burned them to the ground.



The Wagon Box Fight
2 August 1867



III. The Great Sioux War of 1876–77



Map 13. The Northern Plains, 1868–75

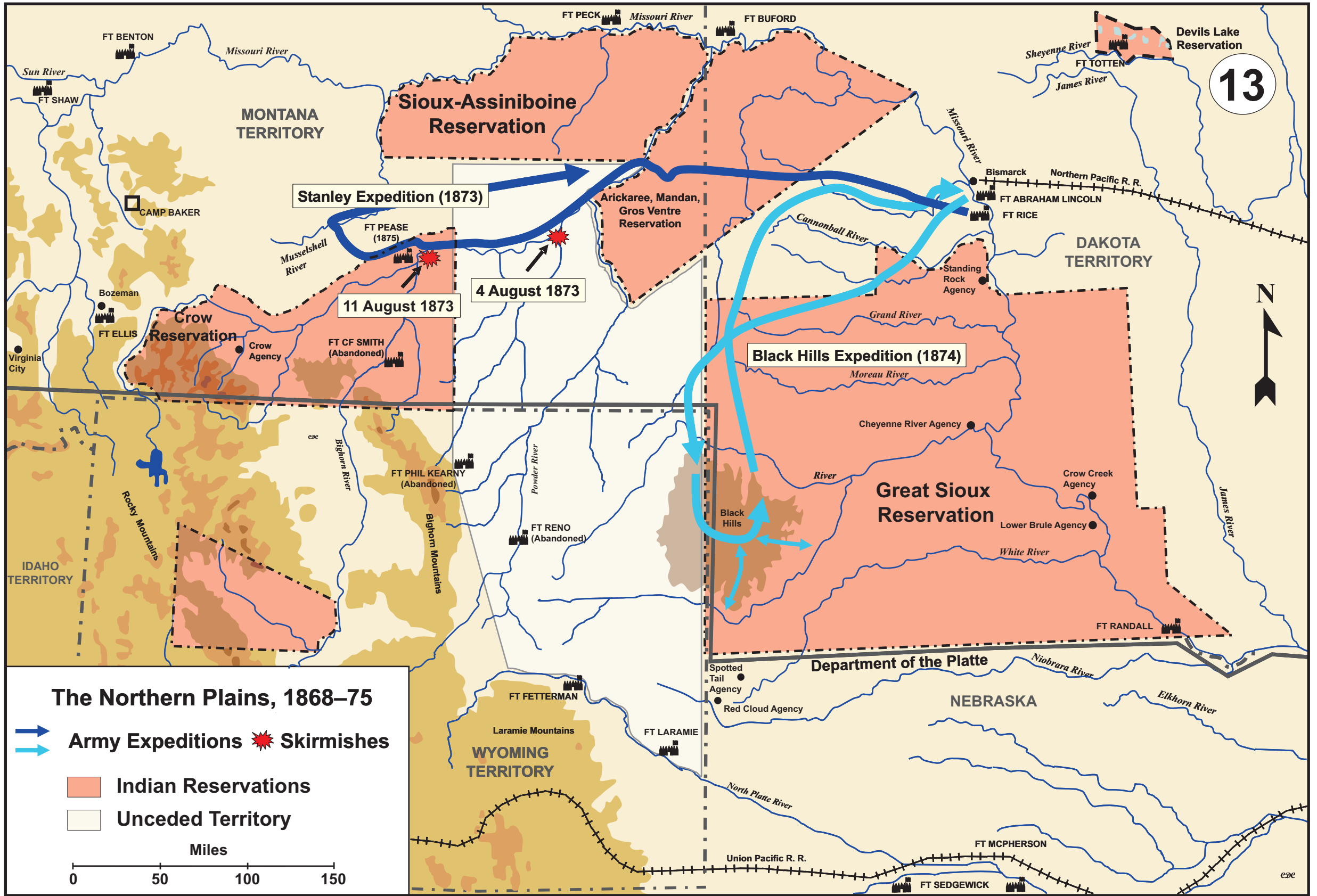
The Sioux War of 1866–68 clearly established the dominance of the Oglala Sioux over US forces in northern Wyoming and southern Montana east of the Bighorn Mountains. The treaty of 1868 between the Sioux nation and the United States thereby recognized the right of the Sioux to roam and hunt in a vast tract of unceded territory. This territory was called unceded in recognition of the fact that although the United States did not recognize Sioux ownership of the land, neither did it deny that the Sioux had hunting rights there. The treaty also established a reservation in the Dakota Territory wherein “the United States now solemnly agrees that no persons except those herein designated and authorized so to do . . . shall ever be permitted to pass over, settle upon, or reside in the territory described in this article . . . and henceforth the [Indians] will, and do, hereby relinquish all claims or right in and to any portion of the United States or Territories, except such as is embraced within the limits aforesaid, and except as hereinafter provided.” This provision clearly established the solemn rights of the Sioux to perpetual ownership of the reservation.

Although the treaty held the peace on the Northern Plains for several years, it was doomed by the seemingly irresistible march of settlers to the West. The entire region was the responsibility of Major General Philip H. Sheridan, the commander of Military Division of the Missouri. His area of responsibility extended from the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains and from Canada to Mexico. In 1873, the Sioux rejected overtures for a right-of-way for the Northern Pacific Railroad. Their resistance to the survey parties led Sheridan to the dispatch of a large military expedition under Colonel David Stanley up the Yellowstone Valley. During that expedition, Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer’s 7th Cavalry fought two large skirmishes with the Sioux on 4 and 11 August 1873. Then in the spring of the next year, he directed his subordinate, Brigadier General Alfred H. Terry, commanding the Department of Dakota (present-day states of Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota), to send a reconnaissance party into the Black Hills to ascertain the suitability of establishing an Army garrison there. This

reconnaissance party, commanded by Custer, not only determined the adequacy of the ground for a garrison but found evidence of gold. The news flashed through the nation, triggering a gold rush to the Black Hills of what is now South Dakota. The difficulty was that the Black Hills region was inside the territory reserved to the Sioux in the treaty of 1868. Nevertheless, no American government, no matter how progressive, would have attempted to restrain such a great number of citizens in their pursuit of happiness (as manifested by their dreams of gold). The predicament faced by President Ulysses S. Grant was that he could not prevent Americans from entering the Black Hills; at the same time, he could not legally allow them to go there.

Rationalizing an excuse for war with the Sioux seemed to be Grant’s only choice to resolve the matter. If the government fought the Sioux and won, the Black Hills would be ceded as a spoil of war. But Grant chose not to fight the Sioux who remained on the reservations. Rather, he was determined to attack that portion of the Sioux roaming in the unceded land on the pretext that they were committing atrocities on settlers beyond the Indians’ borders. Accordingly, Grant ordered the Bureau of Indian Affairs to issue an ultimatum to the Indians to return voluntarily to their reservation by 31 January 1876 or be forced there by military action.

There were two categories of roamers outside the reservation, most of whom ignored the ultimatum. One category, called winter roamers, spurned all sustenance from the white man and lived in the unceded area. Those in the other category, called summer roamers, took the white man’s dole in the winter but pursued their old ways in warmer weather. When Sheridan received the mission to mount a campaign against the Indians in the unceded area, he believed he would be fighting the winter roamers only. As the weather turned warmer, the number of summer roamers grew in the unceded area, creating a greater threat to the soldiers.



Map 14. Sheridan's Campaign Plan

By 1876, the frontier Army had accumulated years of experience on the Great American Plains. However, most of the Army's offensive warfare experience was acquired on the Southern Plains against the Cheyenne, Comanche, and Kiowa. General Sheridan had successfully orchestrated two major campaigns on the southern plains, the Southern Plains War (1868-69) and the Red River War (1874). In the Southern Plains War, Sheridan implemented a bold winter campaign. He recognized that the highly mobile, nomadic Indian tribes were very difficult to catch and reasoned that the winter would weaken the grass-fed Indian ponies making them more susceptible to being caught by the Army's grain-fed horses.

Overall, the Southern Plains War was a success for the Army. In the campaign Sheridan launched three converging columns into what is now western Oklahoma with orders to put into practice a technique of total war in which he targeted entire Indian villages for destruction. His strategy was that, even if an advancing column did not find the hostile Indians, it would help to drive the Indians into the other columns. His field commanders managed to surprise and overrun Indian villages in the war's three most significant engagements: the battles of Washita (November 1868); Soldier Springs (December 1868); and Summit Springs (July 1869). The destruction of these three villages was a major loss for the Southern Plains tribes; they could no longer count on the vastness of the territory and winter conditions to protect them from the soldiers. Many of the tribes acknowledged the futility of the struggle and grudgingly resigned themselves to life on the reservation and a temporary peace that lasted only four years.

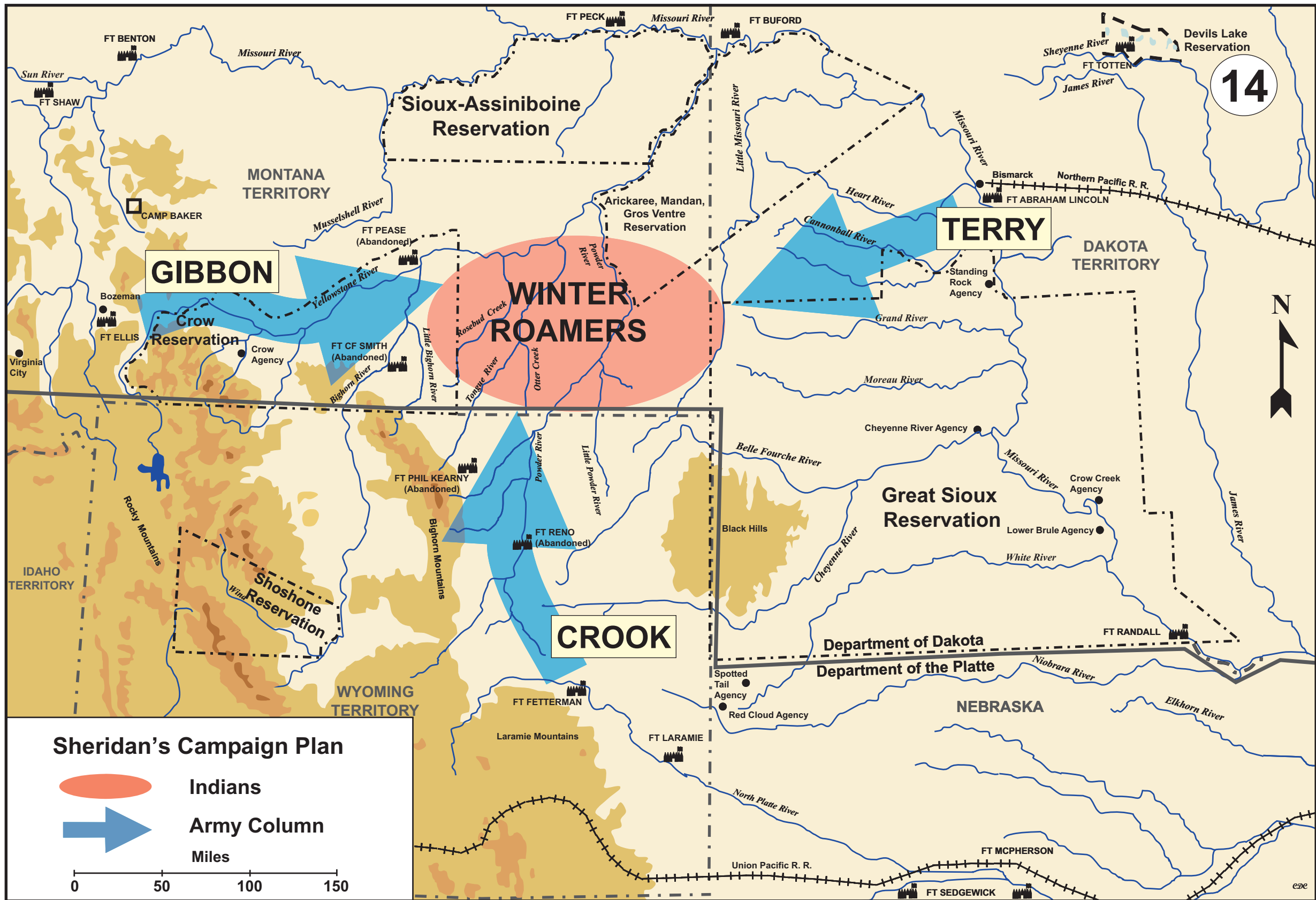
Sheridan's next opportunity to coordinate a fight against the Plains Indians came in 1874 when the Cheyenne, Comanche, and Kiowa, angered by the slaughter of thousands of buffalo and the failed delivery of treaty annuities, began to launch a series of vengeful raids throughout the Texas Panhandle. Sheridan decided to punish the raiders and ordered five Army columns into western Texas. In the ensuing campaign, the Army fought as many as 20 engagements with the Southern Plains Indians. Most were small skirmishes, but the three largest fights again involved Indian villages. At the battles of Red River (30 August 1874) and Sweetwater Creek (12 September 1874), Indian rearguard actions managed to hold the Army units at bay long enough for their families to get most of the camp equipment out of danger. Then in late September, Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie's 4th Cavalry took up the chase. In his dogged pursuit of the Indians, he overran two hastily abandoned villages and burned more than 500 lodges. Later, at the Battle of Palo Duro Canyon (28 September 1874), he located approximately five Indian villages hidden in the canyon and routed the defenders in a surprise dawn attack. The soldiers destroyed all the captured lodges and slaughtered more than 1,000 horses. Eventually, the onset of winter curtailed offensive operations. However, the many months of military operations, especially the destruction of so many Indian ponies and lodges, proved too much for the Indians to bear. The campaign forced the Southern Plains tribes to give up their nomadic lifestyle and accept life on the reservation. Sheridan had validated his converging column strategy. At the tactical level, Sheridan's

key subordinates (Major Andrew Evans, 3d Cavalry; Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie, 4th Cavalry; Major Eugene A. Carr, 5th Cavalry; Colonel Nelson A. Miles, 5th Infantry; and Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer, 7th Cavalry) established a formula for battlefield success: relentless pursuit, attack from multiple directions to confuse and panic the enemy, disciplined firepower to hold the undisciplined Indian warrior at bay, and offensive action to maintain the initiative.



Sheridan fully intended to apply the same techniques used in the conquest of the Southern Plains against the Sioux on the Northern Plains. From that experience, Sheridan and the professional military officer corps he commanded held several assumptions to be fundamental truths when fighting Indians. First, they believed the Indians would not stand against organized forces: in any situation where US forces met Indians—no matter the numbers—the Indians would run. A second belief was that the Indians would never seek battle with US troops unless the soldiers were in proximity to their villages. Finally, officers were convinced that even the meager opposition ordinarily offered by the Indians would be greatly reduced in the winter when the Indians were just barely surviving. On the foundation of these assumptions, Sheridan formed his campaign plan.

Sheridan directed Terry and Brigadier General George Crook, commanding the Department of the Platte, to find and defeat the Indians. Sheridan's communications with his generals clearly indicated that he wanted to conduct the campaign in the winter, catching the Indians in their worst circumstances. Unfortunately, the orders to these coequal department commanders specified no overall commander for the operation, nor did they even specify coordinating instructions between the two. Sheridan's own words in his annual report demonstrate the sparse attention he devoted to coordination: "General Terry was further informed that the operation of himself and General Crook would be made without concert, as the Indian villages are movable and no objective point could be fixed upon, but that, if they should come to any understanding about concerted movements, there would be no objection at division headquarters."

There was a practical consequence to Sheridan's vague instructions. Terry instructed Colonel John Gibbon, his subordinate commanding the District of Montana, to gather all of his scattered detachments and begin a march from the west. Terry himself would command a column moving from the east. Each of these forces was to follow the Yellowstone River and unite. Meanwhile, Crook was to form his own column and march from the south. Together, all these separate operational plans constituted what have commonly been referred to as Sheridan's campaign plan, and indeed, all of them flowed logically from his instructions. However, the final pincer movement was never clarified in any set of orders. Sheridan's disregard for coordination between his separate columns provides some indication of his contempt for the fighting capabilities of the Sioux. It was a contempt that would lead to ineffective combat operations throughout the winter and well into the summer of 1876.



Sheridan's Campaign Plan

-  Indians
-  Army Column

Miles

0 50 100 150

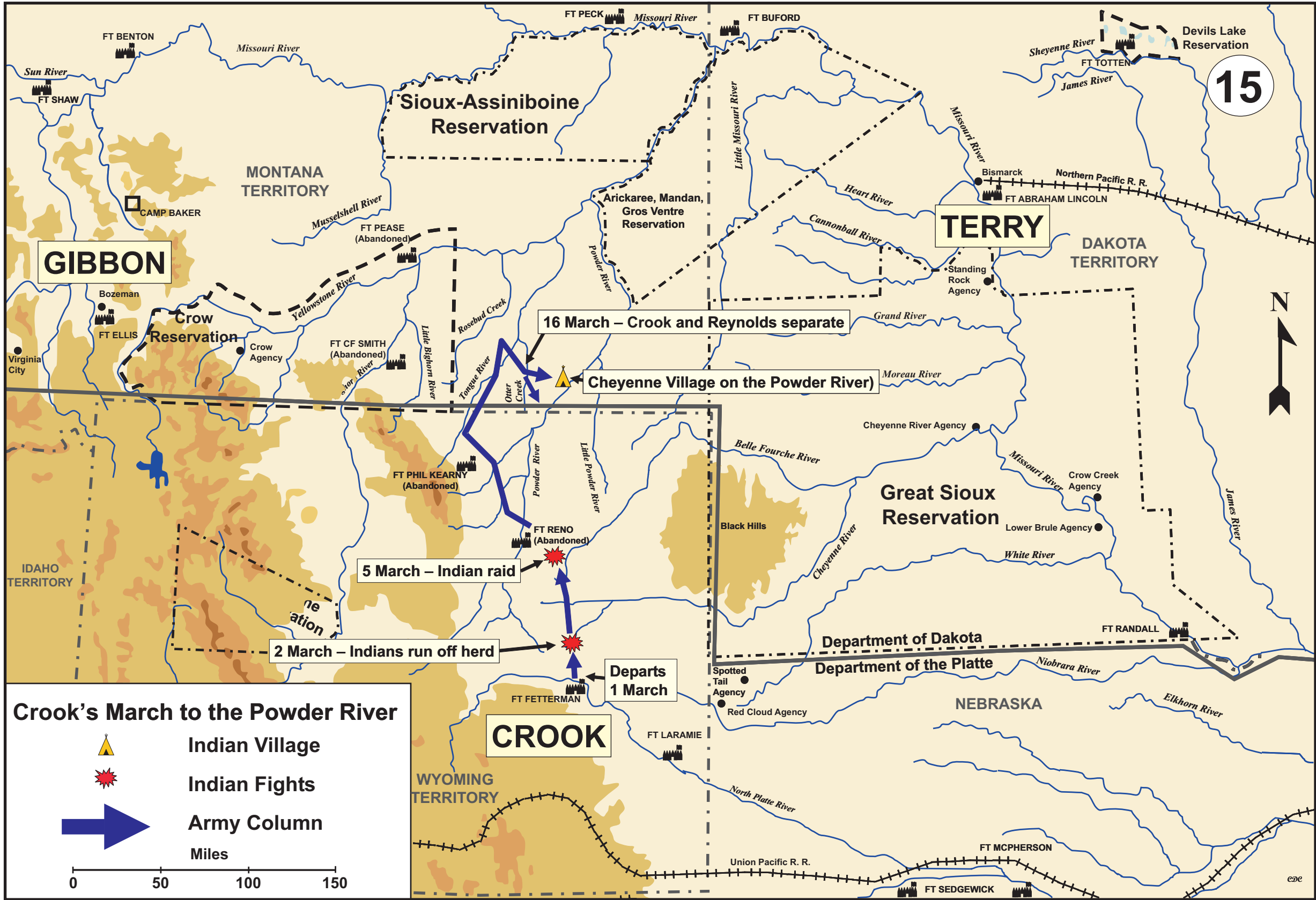
Map 15. Crook's March to the Powder River

Crook was the first to depart for the field. Anticipating the coming campaign, he secretly had been gathering units from scattered posts throughout his department. When the order to fight came, he was nearly ready to start his northward march from Fort Fetterman (near present-day Douglas, Wyoming). When Crook's troops marched out on 1 March 1876, the weather was clear and bitterly cold. Having placed Colonel Joseph J. Reynolds in command of the column, Crook was nominally an observer. Crook, however, retained practical control, and Reynolds was largely a supernumerary. Marching with Crook and Reynolds were 10 cavalry companies, 2 infantry companies, and 62 civilian packers. These units, plus Crook's staff, the guides, and reporters totaled 883 men. Crook, a master of efficient and effective pack trains, had his column well prepared for its winter campaign.

Trouble began almost immediately. Soldiers spotted Indian spies every day, and the frequency of smoke signals suggested that their advance was being observed. On the second night out, the Indians successfully stampeded the livestock herd, depriving the troops of their only source of fresh meat. On 5 March, the Indians boldly staged a raid against the soldiers' camp. Crook, tired of marching under the watchful eye of the

Indians, on the morning of 7 March ordered the infantry companies to make a great show of marching back to the abandoned Fort Reno site (near present-day Sussex, Wyoming) with the trains. At the same time, the cavalry, stripped down to minimum subsistence for 15 days, would hide that day and resume its march that evening.

The ruse worked; the 10 cavalry companies escaped the Indian spies and roamed unnoticed for the next 10 days. The problem was that Crook and Reynolds could not find the Indians. Finally, Frank Grouard, the most knowledgeable of the scouts, suggested that while the cavalry was searching along the Tongue River, the Indians likely would be sheltered in the Powder River Valley. Crook accepted Grouard's opinion and had him guide the force to the Powder River. True to his word, Grouard found signs of a village just north of present-day Moorhead, Montana. Crook now detached Reynolds (putting him truly in command of a combat expedition) with six companies of cavalry and most of the scouts. Grouard, exhibiting brilliant scouting, led the detachment through a blizzard to the vicinity of a Cheyenne village. The circumstances were now right for Crook to strike the first blow in the 1876 Sioux War and for Reynolds to display his prowess as a combat leader.



Crook's March to the Powder River

-  Indian Village
-  Indian Fights
-  Army Column

Miles
0 50 100 150

Map 16. Battle of Powder River

Reynolds sortied from Crook's command with three two-company battalions of cavalry: E and M Companies, 3d Cavalry, commanded by Captain Anson Mills; I and K Companies, 2d Cavalry, commanded by Captain Henry E. Noyes; and E Company, 2d Cavalry, and F Company, 3d Cavalry, commanded by Captain Alexander Moore. Also accompanying the expedition was Lieutenant John Bourke, Crook's aide-de-camp, who joined the detachment as Crook's observer. Most of the scouts also went with Reynolds. This was a discontented command; the officers had no confidence in their commander's tactical abilities nor his physical and moral courage. Perhaps it was a self-fulfilling prophesy, but Reynolds proved true to the low esteem in which his officers held him.

Through driving snow and temperatures that ranged as low as 80 degrees below zero, scout Grouard literally felt his way along the trail that led to the Powder River. At about 0230 on 17 March, he halted the column until he could locate the Indian village. While the troops waited in the bitter cold, Grouard successfully pinpointed the Indians' location. This was the grand opportunity to strike the Indians that US commanders had been awaiting. Reynolds formulated his plan of attack based on a misunderstanding of the actual location of the village. His attack orders were inexact, but he did issue a general outline of his tactical plan (see map A). Captain James Egan's company of Noyes' battalion was to approach the village quietly and assault it on being detected. Meanwhile, Noyes and his remaining company would drive the Indian pony herd away from the village. On its part, Moore's battalion was to dismount and move to the bluffs overlooking the village to support Egan's assault. Mills was initially given no mission, but eventually Reynolds had him follow Moore to assist where practical.

Approaching the village took much longer than expected because of the rough nature of the terrain and the village happened to be a mile north of its assumed position. Noyes and Egan moved into position and initiated the attack satisfactorily (see map B); however, Moore was not yet in position. Consequently, the Indians were able to flee to the bluffs that commanded a view of the soldiers now occupying the village. At this point, Egan's company was in great danger of being cut off, but Mills' battalion was soon available to reinforce it. When Moore's battalion belatedly entered the valley, it was added to the forces occupying the village. Noyes, who had successfully captured the pony herd, was resting his unsaddled horses when he was urgently ordered to join the fray in the village. Throughout the fight, Reynolds had become increasingly anxious about the safety and protection of his detachment. Fearing the loss of his command, he ordered the rapid destruction of the Indian village so that he could withdraw. Some Indian property was destroyed, but Reynolds' demand for haste caused much to be overlooked. The battle was a hollow victory for the Army. During the poorly managed withdrawal, the units left all their dead and one wounded soldier behind. The Indians also managed to retake most of their pony herd during the Army's march south. In exchange for the loss of four and the wounding of six troopers, Reynolds had gained virtually nothing beyond warning the Sioux of the government's intentions. Beaten and ashamed, Reynolds' force rejoined Crook at the mouth of Lodgepole Creek. Then, 26 days after its departure, the entire force returned to Fort Fetterman—worn, weary, and defeated.

