Red Cloud's War

1866—March 27, President Johnson vetoes Civil Rights Bill. April 1, Congress overrides the President's veto of Civil Rights Bill and gives equal rights to all persons born in United States (except Indians); President empowered to use Army to enforce the law. June 13, Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving Negroes rights of citizenship, is forwarded to states for ratification. July 21, several hundred die in London cholera epidemic. July 30, race riot in New Orleans. Werner von Siemens invents the dynamo. Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment and Whittier's Snowbound are published.

In the spring of that year the white man’s Civil War had been brought to an end, and the trickle of white emigration to the West was showing signs of increasing to a flood. What the treaty commissioners wanted was right of passageway for trails, roads, and eventually railroads across the Indian country.

Before autumn ended the commissioners completed nine treaties with the Sioux—including the Brulés, Hunkpapas, Oglalas, and Minneconjous, most of whose warrior chiefs were nowhere near the villages on the Missouri. Government authorities in Washington hailed the treaties as the end of Indian hostilities. At last the Plains Indians were pacified, they said; never again would there be a need for expensive campaigns such as Connor’s Powder River expedition, which had been organized to kill Indians “at an expense of more than a million dollars apiece, while hundreds of our soldiers had lost their lives, many of our border settlers been butchered, and much property destroyed.”

Governor Edmunds and the other commission members knew very well that the treaties were meaningless because not one warrior chief had signed them. Although the commissioners forwarded copies to Washington to be ratified by Congress, they continued their efforts to persuade Red Cloud and the other Powder River chiefs to meet with them at any convenient location for further treaty signings. As the Bozeman Trail was the most important route out of Fort Laramie to Montana, military officials at the fort were under heavy pressure to coax Red Cloud and other war leaders to cease their blockade of the road and come to Laramie at the earliest possible date.

Colonel Henry Maynadier, who had been assigned to Fort Laramie as commander of one of the Galvanized Yankee regiments, attempted to employ a trustworthy frontiersman such as Blanket Jim Bridger or Medicine Calf Beckworth to act as an intermediary with Red Cloud, but none was willing to go into the Powder River country so soon after Connor had aroused the tribes to anger with his invasion. At last Maynadier decided to employ as messengers five Sioux who spent much of their time around the fort—Big Mouth, Big Ribs, Eagle Foot, Whirlwind, and Little Crow. Referred to contemptuously as “Laramie loafers,” these trader Indians were actually shrewd entrepreneurs. If a white man wanted a first-rate buffalo...
gain, or if an Indian up on Tongue River wanted supplies from the fort commissary, the Laramie Loafers arranged exchanges. They would play an important role as munitions suppliers to the Indians during Red Cloud’s war.

Big Mouth and his party were out for two months, spreading the news that fine presents awaited all warrior chiefs if they would come in to Fort Laramie and sign new treaties. On January 16, 1866, the messengers returned in company with two destitute bands of Brulé led by Standing Elk and Swift Bear. Standing Elk said that his people had lost many ponies in a blizzard and that game was scarce over on the Republican. Spotted Tail, the head man of the Brulé, would come in as soon as his daughter was able to travel. She was ill of the coughing sickness. Standing Elk and Swift Bear were eager to sign the treaty and receive clothing and provisions for their people.

“But what about Red Cloud?” Colonel Maynadier wanted to know. “Where was Red Cloud, Man-Afraid-of-His-Horses, Dull Knife—the leaders who had fought Connor’s soldiers?” Big Mouth and the other Laramie Loafers assured him that the warrior chiefs would be there in a short time. They could not be hurried, especially in the Moon of Strong Cold.

Weeks passed, and then early in March a messenger arrived from Spotted Tail informing Colonel Maynadier that the Brulé chief was coming in to discuss the treaty. Spotted Tail’s daughter Fleet Foot was very ill, and he hoped the soldiers’ doctor would make her well again. A few days later, when Maynadier heard that Fleet Foot had died en route, he rode out with a company of soldiers and an ambulance to meet the mourning procession of Brulé. It was a cold sleety day, the Wyoming landscape bleak, streams locked in ice, brown hills patched with snow. The dead girl had been wrapped in a deerskin, tightly thonged and creosoted with smoke; this crude pall was suspended between her favorite ponies, a pair of white mustangs.

Fleet Foot’s body was transferred to the ambulance, her white ponies fastened behind, and the procession continued toward Fort Laramie. When Spotted Tail’s party reached the fort, Colonel Maynadier turned the entire garrison out to honor the grieving Indians.

The colonel invited Spotted Tail into his headquarters and offered sympathy for the loss of his daughter. The chief said that in the days when the white men and the Indians were at peace, he had brought his daughter to Fort Laramie many times, that she loved the fort, and he would like to have her burial scaffold mounted in the post cemetery. Colonel Maynadier immediately granted permission. He was surprised to see tears well up in Spotted Tail’s eyes; he did not know that an Indian could weep. Somewhat awkwardly the colonel changed the subject. The Great Father in Washington was sending out a new peace commission in the spring; he hoped that Spotted Tail could stay near the fort until the commissioners arrived; there was a great urgency to make the Bozeman Road safe for travel. “I am informed that the travel next spring will be very great,” the colonel said, “to the mines of Idaho and Montana.”

“We think we have been much wronged,” Spotted Tail replied, “and are entitled to compensation for the damage and distress caused by making so many roads through our country, and driving off and destroying the buffalo and game. My heart is very sad, and I cannot talk on business; I will wait and see the counselors the Great Father will send.”

Next day Maynadier arranged a military funeral for Fleet Foot, and just before sunset a procession marched to the post cemetery behind the red-blanketed coffin, which was mounted on an artillery caisson. After the custom of the Brulés, the women lifted the coffin to the scaffold, laid a fresh buffalo skin over it, and bound it down with thongs. The sky was leaden and stormy, and sleet began falling with the dusk. At a word of command the soldiers faced outward and discharged three volleys in succession. They and the Indians then marched back to the post. A squad of artillerymen remained beside the scaffold all night; they built a large fire of pine wood and fired their howitzer every half-hour until daybreak.

Four days later Red Cloud and a large party of Oglalas appeared suddenly outside the fort. They stopped first at Spotted Tail’s camp, and the two Teton leaders were enjoying a reunion when Maynadier came out with a soldier escort to conduct both of them to his headquarters with the pomp and ceremony of drums and bugles.

When Maynadier told Red Cloud that the new peace com-
missioners would not arrive at Fort Laramie for some weeks, the Oglala chief became angry. Big Mouth and the other messengers had told him that if he came in and signed a treaty he would receive presents. He needed guns and powder and provisions. Maynadier replied that he could issue the visiting Oglalas provisions from the Army stores, but he had no authority to distribute guns and powder. Red Cloud then wanted to know what the treaty would give his people; they had signed treaties before, and it always seemed that the Indians gave to the white men. This time the white men must give something to the Indians.

Remembering that the president of the new commission, E. B. Taylor, was in Omaha, Maynadier suggested that Red Cloud send a message to Taylor over the telegraph wires. Red Cloud was suspicious; he did not entirely trust in the magic of the talking wires. After some delay he agreed to go with the colonel to the fort's telegraph office, and through an interpreter dictated a message of peace and friendship to the Great Father's counselor in Omaha.

Commissioner Taylor's reply came clicking back: "The Great Father at Washington ... wants you all to be his friends and the friends of the white man. If you conclude a treaty of peace, he wishes to make presents to you and your people as a token of his friendship. A train loaded with supplies and presents cannot reach Fort Laramie from the Missouri River before the first of June and he desires that about that time he be agreed upon as the day when his commissioners shall meet you to make a treaty."  

Red Cloud was impressed. He also liked Colonel Maynadier's straightforward manner. He could wait until the Moon When the Green Grass Is Up for the treaty signing. This would give him time to go back to the Powder and send out runners to all the scattered bands of Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahos. It would give the Indians time to gather more buffalo hides and beaver skins for trading when they came down to Fort Laramie.

As a goodwill gesture, Maynadier issued small amounts of powder and lead to the departing Oglalas, and they rode away in fine good humor. Nothing had been said by Maynadier about the Pawnee Road; nothing had been said by Red
Cloud about Fort Reno, which was still under siege on the Powder. These subjects could be postponed until the treaty council.

Red Cloud did not wait for the green grass to come up. He returned to Fort Laramie in May, the Moon When the Ponies Shed, and he brought with him his chief lieutenant, Man-Afraid-of-His-Horses, and more than a thousand Oglalas. Dull Knife brought in several lodges of Cheyennes, and Red Leaf arrived with his band of Brulés. Together with Spotted Tail’s people and the other Brulés, they formed a great camp along the Platte River. The trading posts and sutlers’ stores became a swirl of activity. Never had Big Mouth and the Laramie Loafers been so busy arranging trades.

A few days later the peace commissioners arrived, and on June 5 the formal proceedings began, with the usual long orations by commission members and the various Indian leaders. Then Red Cloud unexpectedly asked for a few days’ delay while they awaited the arrival of other Tetons who wanted to participate in the discussions. Commissioner Taylor agreed to adjourn the council until June 13.

By a trick of fate, June 13 was the day that Colonel Henry B. Carrington and seven hundred officers and men of the 18th Infantry Regiment reached the vicinity of Fort Laramie. The regiment had marched from Fort Kearney, Nebraska, and was under orders to establish a chain of forts along the Bozeman Road in preparation for the expected heavy travel to Montana during the summer. Although plans for the expedition had been under way for weeks, none of the Indians invited to attend the treaty signing had been told anything about this military occupation of the Powder River country.

To avoid friction with the two thousand Indians camped around Fort Laramie, Carrington halted his regiment four miles east of the post. Standing Elk, one of the Brulé chiefs who had come in during the winter, watched from his distant tepee while the soldiers formed their wagon train into a hollow square. He then mounted his pony and rode over to the camp, and the soldier guards took him in to see Colonel Carrington. Carrington summoned one of his guides to interpret, and after they had gone through the formalities of pipe smoking, Standing Elk asked bluntly: “Where are you going?”

Carrington replied frankly that he was taking his troops to the Powder River country to guard the road to Montana.

“There is a treaty being made in Laramie with the Sioux that are in the country where you are going,” Standing Elk told him. “You will have to fight the Sioux warriors if you go there.”

Carrington said he was not going to make war on the Sioux, but only to guard the road.

“They will not sell their hunting grounds to the white men for a road,” Standing Elk insisted. “They will not give you the road unless you whip them.” He added quickly that he was a Brulé, that he and Spotted Tail were friends of the white men, but that Red Cloud’s Oglalas and the Minneconjous would fight any white men who came north of the Platte.

Before the next day’s treaty proceedings, the presence and purpose of the regiment of Bluecoats were known to every Indian at Fort Laramie. When Carrington rode into the fort next morning, Commissioner Taylor decided to introduce him to the chiefs and quietly inform them of what they already knew—that the United States government intended to open a road through the Powder River country regardless of the treaty.

Carrington’s first remarks were drowned out by a chorus of disapproving Indian voices. When he resumed speaking, the Indians continued muttering among themselves and began moving restlessly on the pine-board benches where they were assembled on the fort parade ground. Carrington’s interpreter suggested in a whisper that perhaps he should allow the chiefs to speak first.

Man-Afraid-of-His-Horses took the platform. In a torrent of words he made it clear that if the soldiers marched into Sioux country, his people would fight them. “In two moons the command will not have a hoof left,” he declared.

Now it was Red Cloud’s turn. His lithe figure, clad in a light blanket and moccasins, moved to the center of the platform. His straight black hair, parted in the middle, was draped over his shoulders to his waist. His wide mouth was fixed in a determined slit beneath his hawk nose. His eyes flashed as he began
scolding the peace commissioners for treating the Indians like children. He accused them of pretending to negotiate for a country while they prepared to take it by conquest. "The white men have crowded the Indians back year by year," he said, "until we are forced to live in a small country north of the Platte, and now our last hunting ground, the home of the People, is to be taken from us. Our women and children will starve, but for my part I prefer to die fighting rather than by starvation. . . . Great Father sends us presents and wants new road. But White Chief goes with soldiers to steal road before Indian says yes or no!" While the interpreter was still trying to translate the Sioux words into English, the listening Indians became so disorderly that Commissioner Taylor abruptly ended the day's session. Red Cloud strode past Carrington as if he were not there, and continued on across the parade ground toward the Oglala camp. Before the next dawn, the Oglalas were gone from Fort Laramie.

During the next few weeks, as Carrington's wagon train moved north along the Bozeman Road, the Indians had an opportunity to appraise its size and strength. The two hundred wagons were loaded to the bows with mowing machines, shingle and brick machines, wooden doors, window sashes, locks, nails, musical instruments for a twenty-five-piece band, rocking chairs, churns, canned goods and vegetable seeds, as well as the usual ammunition, gunpowder, and other military supplies. The Bluecoats evidently expected to stay in the Powder River country; a number of them had brought their wives and children along, with an assortment of pets and servants. They were armed with obsolete muzzle-loaders and a few breech-loading Spencer carbines, and were supported by four pieces of artillery. For guides they had secured the services of Blanket Jim Bridger and Medicine Calf Beckworth, who knew that Indians were watching the daily progress of the train along the Powder River road.

By June 28 the regiment reached Fort Reno, relieving the two companies of Galvanized Yankees who during the winter and spring had been kept virtual prisoners within their own stockade. To garrison Fort Reno, Carrington left about one-fourth of his regiment, and then moved on north, searching for a site for his headquarters post. From Indian camps along the

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Powder and Tongue, hundreds of warriors now began gathering along the flanks of the military train.

On July 13 the column halted between the forks of the Little Piney and Big Piney creeks. There in the heart of a luxuriant grassland near the pine-clad slopes of the Bighorns, on the best hunting grounds of the Plains Indians, the Bluecoats pitched their Army tents and began building Fort Phil Kearny.

Three days later a large party of Cheyennes approached the encampment. Two Moon, Black Horse, and Dull Knife were among the leaders, but Dull Knife kept in the background because the other chiefs had been chiding him severely for remaining at Fort Laramie and signing the paper which gave the soldiers permission to build forts and open the Powder River road. Dull Knife insisted that he had touched the pen at Laramie in order to obtain presents of blankets and ammunition, and he did not know what was written on the paper. Yet the others rebuked him for doing this after Red Cloud had turned his back on the white men, disdainfully their presents and gathering his warriors to defy them.

Under truce flags the Cheyennes arranged a parley with the Little White Chief Carrington. Forty chiefs and warriors were given permission to visit the soldier camp. Carrington met them with the military band he had brought all the way from Fort Kearney, Nebraska, entertaining the Indians with spirited martial music. Blanket Jim Bridger was there, and they knew they could not fool the Blanket, but they did fool the Little White Chief into believing they had come to talk of peace. While the pipe smoking and preliminary speeches were going on, the chiefs studied the power of the soldiers.

Before they were ready to depart, the Little White Chief sighted one of his howitzers at a hill and exploded a spherical case shot upon it. "It shoots twice," Black Horse said with forced solemnity. "White Chief shoot once. Then White Chief's Great Spirit fires it once more for his white children." The power of the big gun impressed the Indians, as Carrington had hoped it would, but he did not suspect that Black Horse was deriding him with that bland remark about the Great Spirit firing it "once more for his white children." When the Cheyennes prepared to leave, the Little White Chief gave them pieces
of paper saying that they had agreed to a "lasting peace with the whites and all travelers on the road," and they departed. Within a few hours, villages along the Tongue and Powder heard from the Cheyennes that the new fort was too strong to be captured without great loss. They would have to lure the soldiers out into the open, where they could be more easily attacked.

Next morning at dawn, a band of Red Cloud's Oglalas stampeded 175 horses and mules from Carrington's herd. When the soldiers came riding in pursuit, the Indians strung them out in a fifteen-mile chase and inflicted the first casualties upon the Bluecoat invaders of the Powder River country.

From that day all through the summer of 1866, the Little White Chief was engaged in a relentless guerrilla war. None of the numerous wagon trains, civilian or military, that moved along the Bozeman Road was safe from surprise attacks. Mounted escorts were spread thin, and the soldiers soon learned to expect deadly ambushes. Soldiers assigned to cut logs a few miles from Fort Phil Kearny were under constant and deadly harassment.

As the summer wore on, the Indians developed a supply base on the upper Powder, and their grand strategy soon became apparent—make travel on the road difficult and dangerous, cut off supplies for Carrington's troops, isolate them, and attack.

Red Cloud was everywhere, and his allies increased daily. Black Bear, the Arapaho chief whose village had been destroyed by General Connor the previous summer, notified Red Cloud that his warriors were eager to join the fighting. Sorrel Horse, another Arapaho, also brought his warriors into the alliance. Spotted Tail, still believing in peace, had gone to hunt buffalo along the Republican, but many of his Brulé warriors came north to join Red Cloud. Sitting Bull was there during the summer; he later drew a picture of his capture of a split-eared horse from white travelers on the Powder River road. Gall, a younger Hunkapa, was also there. With a Minneconjou named Hump and a young Oglala named Crazy Horse, he invented decoy tricks to taunt, infuriate, and then lure soldiers or emigrants into well-laid traps.

Early in August Carrington decided that Fort Phil Kearny was strong enough to risk dividing his force again. Therefore, in accordance with his instructions from the War Department, he detached 150 men and sent them north ninety miles to build a third fort on the Bozeman Road—Fort C. F. Smith. At the same time, he sent scouts Bridger and Beckwourth out to communicate with Red Cloud. This was a difficult assignment, but the two aging frontiersmen went in search of friendly go-betweens.

In a Crow village north of the Bighorns, Bridger obtained some surprising information. Although the Sioux were hereditary enemies of the Crows and had driven them from their rich hunting grounds, Red Cloud himself had recently made a conciliatory visit in hopes of persuading them to join his Indian alliance. "We want you to aid us in destroying the whites," Red Cloud was reported to have said. The Sioux leader then boasted that he would cut off the soldiers' supplies when the snows came and would starve them out of the forts and kill them all. Bridger heard rumors that a few Crows had agreed to join Red Cloud's warriors, but when he rejoined Beckwourth in another Crow village, Beckwourth claimed that he was enlisting Crows who were willing to join Carrington's soldiers in fighting the Sioux. (Medicine Calf Beckwourth never returned to Fort Phil Kearny. He died suddenly in the Crow village, possibly from poison administered by a jealous husband, more likely from natural causes.)

By late summer Red Cloud had a force of three thousand warriors. Through their friends the Laramie Loafers, they managed to assemble a small arsenal of rifles and ammunition, but the majority of warriors still had only bows and arrows. During the early autumn Red Cloud and the other chiefs agreed that they must concentrate their power against the Little White Chief and the hated fort on the Pineys. And so before the coming of the Cold Moons they moved toward the Bighorns and made their camps along the headwaters of the Tongue. From there they were in easy striking distance of Fort Phil Kearny.

During the summer raiding, two Oglalas, High Back Bone and Yellow Eagle, had made names for themselves with their carefully planned stratagems for tricking the soldiers, as well as for reckless horsemanship and daring hand-to-hand attacks after
the soldiers fell into their traps. High Back Bone and Yellow Eagle sometimes worked with young Crazy Horse in planning their elaborate decoys. Early in the Moon of Popping Trees they began tantalizing the woodcutters in the pinery and the soldiers guarding the wagons which brought wood to Fort Phil Kearny.

On December 6, a day with a cold wash of air flowing down the slopes of the Bighorns, High Back Bone and Yellow Eagle took about a hundred warriors and dispersed them at various points along the pinery road. Red Cloud was with another group of warriors who took positions along the ridgetops. They flashed mirrors and waved flags to signal the movements of the troops to High Back Bone and his decoys. Before the day was over, the Indians had the Bluecoats dashing about in all directions. At one time the Little White Chief Carrington came out and gave chase. Choosing just the right moment, Crazy Horse dismounted and showed himself on the trail in front of one of Carrington’s hot-blooded young cavalry officers, who immediately led a file of soldiers galloping in pursuit. As soon as the soldiers were strung out along the narrow trail, Yellow Eagle and his warriors sprang from concealment in their rear. In a matter of seconds the Indians swarmed over the soldiers. (This was the fight in which Lieutenant Horatio Bingham and Sergeant G. R. Bowers were killed and several soldiers severely wounded.)

In their camps that night and for several days following, the chiefs and warriors talked of how foolishly the Bluecoats had acted. Red Cloud was sure that if they could entice a large number of troops out of the fort, a thousand Indians armed with only bows and arrows could kill them all. Sometime during the week, the chiefs agreed that after the coming of the next full moon they would prepare a great trap for the Little White Chief and his soldiers.

By the third week of December everything was in readiness, and about two thousand warriors began moving south out of the lodges along the Tongue. The weather was very cold, and they wore buffalo robes with the hair turned in, leggings of dark woolen cloth, high-topped buffalo-fur moccasins, and carried red Hudson’s Bay blankets strapped to their saddles. Most of them rode pack horses, leading their fast-footed war ponies by lariats. Some had rifles, but most were armed with bows and arrows, knives, and lances. They carried enough pemmican to last several days, and when an opportunity offered, small groups would turn off the trail, kill a deer, and take as much meat as could be carried on their saddles.

About ten miles north of Fort Phil Kearny, they made a temporary camp in three circles of Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahos. Between the camp and the fort was the place selected for the ambush—the little valley of Peno Creek.

On the morning of December 21 the chiefs and medicine men decided the day was favorable for a victory. In the first gray light of dawn, a party of warriors started off in a wide circuit toward the wood-train road, where they were to make a feint against the wagons. Ten young men had already been chosen for the dangerous duty of decoying the soldiers—two Cheyennes, two Arapahos, and two from each of the three Sioux divisions, Oglalas, Minneconjous, and Brulés. Crazy Horse, Hump, and Little Wolf were the leaders. While the decoys mounted and started off toward Lodge Trail Ridge, the main body of warriors moved down the Bozeman Road. Patches of snow and ice lay along the shady sides of the ridges, but the day was bright, the air cold and dry. About three miles from the fort, where the road ran along a narrow ridge and descended to Peno Creek, they began laying a great ambush. The Cheyennes and Arapahos took the west side. Some of the Sioux hid in a grassy flat on the opposite side; others remained mounted and concealed themselves behind two rocky ridges. By midmorning almost two thousand warriors were waiting there for the decoys to bring the Bluecoats into the trap.

While the war party was making its feint against the wood train, Crazy Horse and the decoys dismounted and waited in concealment on a slope facing the fort. At the first sound of gunfire, a company of soldiers dashed out of the fort and galloped off to rescue the woodcutters. As soon as the Bluecoats were out of sight, the decoys showed themselves on the slope and moved down closer to the fort. Crazy Horse waved his red blanket and darted in and out of the brush that fringed the frozen Piney. After a few minutes of this, the Little Soldier Chief in the fort fired off his big twice-shooting gun. The de-
coys scattered along the slope, jumping, zigzagging, and yelling to make the soldiers believe they were frightened. By this time the war party had withdrawn from the wood train and doubled back toward Lodge Trail Ridge. In a few minutes the soldiers came in pursuit, some mounted, some on foot. (They were commanded by Captain William J. Fetterman, who had explicit orders not to pursue beyond Lodge Trail Ridge.)

Crazy Horse and the other decoys now jumped on their ponies and began riding back and forth along the slope of Lodge Trail Ridge, taunting the soldiers and angering them so that they fired recklessly. Bullets ricocheted off the rocks, and the decoys moved back slowly. When the soldiers slowed their advance or halted, Crazy Horse would dismount and pretend to adjust his bridle or examine his pony’s hooves. Bullets whined all around him, and then the soldiers finally moved up on the ridgetop to chase the decoys down toward Peno Creek. They were the only Indians in sight, only ten of them, and the soldiers were charging their horses to catch them.

When the decoys crossed Peno Creek, all eighty-one of the cavalrmen and infantrymen were within the trap. Now the decoys divided into two parties and quickly rode across each other’s trail. This was the signal for attack.

Little Horse, the Cheyenne who a year earlier gave warning to the Arapahos of General Connor’s approach, had the honor of signaling his people, who were concealed in gullies on the west side. He raised his lance, and all the mounted Cheyennes and Arapahos charged with a sudden thunder of hooves.

From the opposite side came the Sioux, and for a few minutes the Indians and the walking soldiers were mixed in confused hand-to-hand fighting. The infantrymen were soon all killed, but the cavalrymen retreated to a rocky height near the end of the ridge. They turned their horses loose and tried to take cover among the ice-crusted boulders.

Little Horse made a name for himself that day, leaping over rocks and in and out of gullies until he was within forty feet of the besieged cavalrymen. White Bull of the Minneconjous also distinguished himself in the bloody fighting on the hillside. Armed only with a bow and a lance, he charged a dismounted cavalryman who was firing at him with a carbine. In a piéto-

graph that White Bull later drew of the event, he showed himself clad in a red war cape, firing an arrow into the soldier’s heart and cracking him over the head with his lance to count first coup.

Toward the end of the fighting the Cheyennes and Arapahos on one side and the Sioux on the other were so close together that they began hitting each other with their showers of arrows. Then it was all over. Not a soldier was left alive. A dog came out from among the dead, and a Sioux started to catch it to take home with him, but Big Rascal, a Cheyenne, said, “Don’t let the dog go,” and somebody shot it with an arrow. This was the fight the white men called the Fetterman Massacre; the Indians called it the Battle of the Hundred Slain.

Casualties were heavy among the Indians, almost two hundred dead and wounded. Because of the intense cold, they decided to take the wounded back to the temporary camp, where they could be kept from freezing. Next day a roaring blizzard trapped the warriors there in improvised shelters, and when the storm abated they went back to their villages on the Tongue.

Now it was the Moon of Strong Cold, and there would be no more fighting for a while. The soldiers who were left alive in the fort would have a bitter taste of defeat in their mouths. If they had not learned their lesson and were still there when the grass greened in the spring, the war would continue.

The Fetterman Massacre made a profound impression upon Colonel Carrington. He was appalled by the mutilations—the disembowelings, the hacked limbs, the “private parts severed and indecently placed on the person.” He brooded upon the reasons for such savagery, and eventually wrote an essay on the subject, philosophizing that the Indians were compelled by some paganistic belief to commit the terrible deeds that remained forever in his mind. Had Colonel Carrington visited the scene of the Sand Creek Massacre, which occurred only two years before the Fetterman Massacre, he would have seen the same mutilations—committed upon Indians by Colonel Chivington’s soldiers. The Indians who ambushed Fetterman were only imitating their enemies, a practice which in warfare, as in civilian life, is said to be the sincerest form of flattery.
The Fetterman Massacre also made a profound impression upon the United States government. It was the worst defeat the Army had yet suffered in Indian warfare, and the second in American history from which came no survivors. Carrington was recalled from command, reinforcements were sent to the forts in the Powder River country, and a new peace commission was dispatched from Washington to Fort Laramie.

The new commission was headed by Black Whiskers John Sanborn, who in 1865 had persuaded Black Kettle's Southern Cheyennes to give up their hunting grounds in Kansas and live below the Arkansas River. Sanborn and General Alfred Sully arrived at Fort Laramie in April, 1867, and their mission at this time was to persuade Red Cloud and the Sioux to give up their hunting grounds in the Powder River country and live on a reservation. As in the previous year, the Brulés were the first to come in—Spotted Tail, Swift Bear, Standing Elk, and Iron Shell.

Little Wound and Pawnee Killer, who had brought their Oglala bands down to the Platte in hopes of finding buffalo, came in to see what kind of presents the commissioners might be handing out. Man-Afraid-of-His-Horses arrived as a representative for Red Cloud. When the commissioners asked him if Red Cloud was coming in to talk peace, Man-Afraid replied that the Oglala leader would not talk about peace until all soldiers were removed from the Powder River country.

During these parleys, Sanborn asked Spotted Tail to address the assembled Indians. Spotted Tail advised his listeners to abandon warfare with the white men and live in peace and happiness. For this, he and the Brulés received enough powder and lead to go off on a buffalo hunt to the Republican River. The hostile Oglalas received nothing. Man-Afraid returned to join Red Cloud, who had already resumed raiding along the Bozeman Road. Little Wound and Pawnee Killer followed the Brulés to the buffalo ranges, joining their old Cheyenne friend Turkey Leg. Black Whiskers Sanborn’s peace commission had accomplished nothing.

Before the summer was done, Pawnee Killer and Turkey Leg became involved with a soldier chief whom they named Hard Backsides because he chased them over long distances for many hours without leaving his saddle. Later on they would call him Long Hair Custer. When General Custer invited them to come to Fort McPherson for a parley, they approached the fort and accepted sugar and coffee. They told Hard Backsides they were friends of the white men but did not like the Iron Horse that ran on the iron tracks, whistling and snorting smoke and frightening all the game out of the Platte Valley. (The Union Pacific Railroad tracks were being laid across western Nebraska in 1867.)

In their search for buffalo and antelope, the Oglalas and Cheyennes crossed the railroad tracks several times that summer. Sometimes they saw Iron Horses dragging wooden houses on wheels at great speed along the tracks. They puzzled over what could be inside the houses, and one day a Cheyenne decided to rope one of the Iron Horses and pull it from the tracks. Instead, the Iron Horse jerked him off his pony and dragged him unmercifully before he could get loose from his lariat.

It was Sleeping Rabbit who suggested they try another way to catch one of the Iron Horses. “If we could bend the track up and spread it out, the Iron Horse might fall off,” he said. “Then we could see what is in the wooden houses on wheels.” They did this, and waited for the train. Sure enough, the Iron Horse fell over on its side, and much smoke came out of it. Men came running from the train, and the Indians killed all but two, who escaped and ran away. Then the Indians broke open the houses on wheels and found sacks of flour, sugar, and coffee; boxes of shoes; and barrels of whiskey. They drank some of the whiskey and began tying the ends of bolts of cloth to their ponies’ tails. The ponies went dashing off across the prairie with long streamers of cloth unrolling and flying out behind them. After a while the Indians took hot coals from the wrecked engine and set the boxcars on fire. Then they rode away before soldiers could come to punish them.10

Incidents such as this, combined with Red Cloud’s continuing war, which had brought civilian travel to an end through the Powder River country, had a strong effect upon the United States government and its high military command. The government was determined to protect the route of the Union Pacific Railroad, but even old war dogs such as General Sherman were
beginning to wonder if it might not be advisable to leave the Powder River country to the Indians in exchange for peace along the Platte Valley.

Late in July, after holding their sun-dance and medicine-arrow ceremonies, the Sioux and Cheyennes decided to wipe out one of the forts on the Bozeman Road. Red Cloud wanted to attack Fort Phil Kearny, but Dull Knife and Two Moon thought it would be easier to take Fort C. F. Smith, because Cheyenne warriors had already killed or captured nearly all the soldiers' horses there. Finally, after the chiefs could reach no agreement, the Sioux said they would attack Fort Phil Kearny, and the Cheyennes went north to Fort C. F. Smith.

On August 1 five or six hundred Cheyenne warriors caught thirty soldiers and civilians in a hayfield about two miles from Fort C. F. Smith. Unknown to the Cheyennes, the defenders were armed with new repeating rifles, and when they charged the soldiers' log corral they met such a withering fire that only one warrior was able to penetrate the fortifications, and he was killed. The Cheyennes then set fire to the high dry grass around the corral. ("The fire came on in rolling billows, like the waves of the ocean," one of the soldiers said afterward. "When it arrived within twenty feet of the barricade it stopped, as though arrested by supernatural power. The flames arose to a perpendicular height of at least forty feet, made one or two undulating movements, and were extinguished with a spanking slap, like the flapping sound of a heavy canvas in a hard gale; the wind, the succeeding instant, carried the smoke . . . into the faces of the attacking Indians, who improved the opportunity, under cover of it, to carry away their dead and wounded.")

This was enough for the Cheyennes that day. Many warriors suffered bad wounds from the fast-firing guns, and about twenty were dead. They started back south to see if the Sioux had found any better luck at Fort Phil Kearny.

The Sioux had not. After making several feints around the fort, Red Cloud decided to use the decoy trick which had worked so well with Captain Fetterman. Crazy Horse would attack the woodcutters' camp, and when the soldiers came out of the fort, High Back Bone would swarm down on them with eight hundred warriors. Crazy Horse and his decoys carried out their assignment perfectly, but for some reason several hundred warriors prematurely rushed out of concealment to stampede the horse herd near the fort, giving the soldiers warning of their presence.

To salvage something from the fight, Red Cloud turned the attack against the woodcutters, who had taken cover behind a corral of fourteen wagon beds reinforced with logs. Several hundred mounted warriors made a circling approach, but as at Fort C. F. Smith, the defenders were armed with breech-loading Springfields. Faced with rapid and continuous fire from the new weapons, the Sioux quickly pulled their ponies out of range. "Then we left our horses in a gulch and charged on foot," a warrior named Fire Thunder said afterward, "but it was like green grass withering in a fire. So we picked up our wounded and went away. I do not know how many of our people were killed, but there were very many. It was bad.

(The two engagements were called the Hayfield and Wagon Box fights by white men, who created a great many legends around them. One imaginative chronicler described the wagon boxes as being ringed by the bodies of dead Indians; another reported Indian casualties at 1,137, although fewer than a thousand were there.)

The Indians considered neither fight a defeat, and although some soldiers may have thought of the Hayfield and Wagon Box fights as victories, the United States government did not. Only a few weeks later, General Sherman himself was traveling westward with a new peace council. This time the military authorities were determined to end Red Cloud's war by any means short of surrender.

In late summer of 1867 Spotted Tail received a message from the new Indian commissioner, Nathaniel Taylor. The Brulés had been roaming peacefully below the Platte, and the commissioner asked Spotted Tail to inform as many Plains chiefs as possible that ammunition would be issued to all friendly Indians sometime during the Drying Grass Moon. The chiefs were to assemble at the end of the Union Pacific Railroad track, which was then in western Nebraska. The Great Warrior Sherman and six new peace commissioners would come there on the Iron
Horse to parley with the chiefs about ending Red Cloud’s war.

Spotted Tail sent for Red Cloud, but the Oglala declined again, sending Man-Afraid to represent him. Pawnee Killer and Turkey Leg came in, and so did Big Mouth and the Laramie Loafer. Swift Bear, Standing Elk, and several other Brulé chiefs also responded to the invitation.

On September 19 a shiny railroad car arrived at Platte City station, and the Great Warrior Sherman, Commissioner Taylor, White Whiskers Harney, Black Whiskers Sanborn, John Henderson, Samuel Tappan, and General Alfred Terry alighted. These men were well known to the Indians, excepting the long-legged sad-eyed one who was called General Terry. Some of them would confront One Star Terry’s power under quite different circumstances nine years late on the Little Bighorn.

Commissioner Taylor began the proceedings: “We are sent out here to inquire and find out what has been the trouble. We want to hear from your own lips your grievances and complaints. My friends, speak fully, speak freely, and speak the whole truth. . . . War is bad, peace is good. We must choose the good and not the bad. . . . I await what you have to say.”

Spotted Tail replied: “The Great Father has made roads stretching east and west. Those roads are the cause of all our troubles. . . . The country where we live is overrun by whites. All our game is gone. This is the cause of great trouble. I have been a friend of the whites, and am now. . . . If you stop your roads we can get our game. That Powder River country belongs to the Sioux. . . . My friends, help us; take pity on us.”

All through that first day’s meeting, the other chiefs echoed Spotted Tail’s words. Although few of these Indians considered the Powder River country as their home (they preferred the plains of Nebraska and Kansas), all supported Red Cloud’s determination to keep that last great hunting ground inviolate. “These roads scared all our game away,” said one. “I want you to stop the Powder River road.” “Let our game alone,” said another. “Don’t disturb it, and then you will have life.” “Who is our Great Father?” Pawnee Killer asked with genuine wonderment. “What is he? Is it true that he sent you here to settle our troubles? The cause of our troubles is the Powder River road. . . . If the Great Father stops the Powder River road, I know that your people can travel on this iron road without being molested.”

On the following day the Great Warrior Sherman addressed the chiefs, blandly assuring them that he had thought of their words all night and was ready to give a reply. “The Powder River road was built to furnish our men with provisions,” he said. “The Great Father thought that you consented to give permission for that road at Laramie last spring, but it seems that some of the Indians were not there, and have gone to war.” Subdued laughter from the chiefs may have surprised Sherman, but he went on, his voice taking a harsher tone: “While the Indians continue to make war upon the road it will not be given up. But if, on examination, at Laramie in November, we find that the road hurts you, we will give it up or pay for it. If you have any claims, present them to us at Laramie.”

Sherman launched into a discussion of the Indians’ need for land of their own, advised them to give up their dependence upon wild game, and then he dropped a thunderbolt: “We therefore propose to let the whole Sioux nation select their country up the Missouri River, embracing the White Earth and Cheyenne rivers, to have their lands like the white people, forever, and we propose to keep all white men away except such agents and traders as you may choose.”

As these words were translated, the Indians expressed surprise, murmuring among themselves. So this was what the new commissioners wanted them to do! Pack up and move far away to the Missouri River? For years the Teton Sioux had been following wild game westward from there; why should they go back to the Missouri to starve? Why could they not live in peace where game could still be found? Had the greedy eyes of the white men already chosen these bountiful lands for their own?

During the remainder of the discussions the Indians were uneasy. Swift Bear and Pawnee Killer made friendly speeches in which they asked for powder and lead, but the meeting ended with an uproar when the Great Warrior Sherman proposed that only the Brulés should receive ammunition. When Commissioner Taylor and White Whiskers Harney pointed out that all the chiefs had been invited to the council with the promise of an issue of hunting ammunition, the Great Warrior withdrew his
opposition, and small amounts of powder and lead were given to the Indians.\textsuperscript{18}

Man-Afraid wasted no time in returning to Red Cloud’s camp on the Powder. If Red Cloud had had any intention of meeting the new peace commissioners at Laramie during the Moon of Falling Leaves, he changed his mind after hearing Man-Afraid's account of the Great Warrior Sherman's high-handed attitude and his remarks about removing the Sioux nation to the Missouri River.

On November 9, when the commissioners arrived at Fort Laramie, they found only a few Crow chiefs waiting to meet with them. The Crows were friendly, but one of them—Bear Tooth—made a surprising speech in which he condemned all white men for their reckless destruction of wildlife and the natural environment: “Fathers, fathers, fathers, hear me well. Call back your young men from the mountains of the bighorn sheep. They have run over our country; they have destroyed the growing wood and the green grass; they have set fire to our lands. Fathers, your young men have devastated the country and killed my animals, the elk, the deer, the antelope, my buffalo. They do not kill them to eat them; they leave them to rot where they fall. Fathers, if I went into your country to kill your animals, what would you say? Should I not be wrong, and would you not make war on me?”\textsuperscript{14}

A few days after the commissioners’ meeting with the Crows, messengers arrived from Red Cloud. He would come to Laramie to talk peace, he informed the commissioners, as soon as the soldiers were withdrawn from the forts on the Powder River road. The war, he repeated, was being fought for one purpose—to save the valley of the Powder, the only hunting ground left his nation, from intrusion by white men. “The Great Father sent his soldiers out here to spill blood. I did not first commence the spilling of blood. . . . If the Great Father kept white men out of my country, peace would last forever, but if they disturb me, there will be no peace. . . . The Great Spirit raised me in this land, and has raised you in another land. What I have said I mean. I mean to keep this land.”\textsuperscript{15}

For the third time in two years, a peace commission had failed. Before the commissioners returned to Washington, however, they sent Red Cloud a shipment of tobacco with another plea to come to Laramie as soon as the winter snows melted in the spring. Red Cloud politely replied that he had received the tobacco of peace and would smoke it, and that he would come to Laramie as soon as the soldiers left his country.

In the spring of 1868 the Great Warrior Sherman and the same peace commission returned to Fort Laramie. This time they had firm orders from an impatient government to abandon the forts on the Powder River road and obtain a peace treaty with Red Cloud. This time they sent a special agent from the Indian Bureau to personally invite the Oglala leader to a peace signing. Red Cloud told the agent he would need about ten days to consult with his allies, and would probably come to Laramie during May, the Moon When the Ponies Shed.

Only a few days after the agent returned to Laramie, however, a message arrived from Red Cloud: “We are on the mountains looking down on the soldiers and the forts. When we see the soldiers moving away and the forts abandoned, then I will come down and talk.”\textsuperscript{16}

This was all very humiliating and embarrassing to the Great Warrior Sherman and the commissioners. They managed to obtain the signatures of a few minor chiefs who came in for presents, but as the days passed, the frustrated commissioners quietly departed one by one for the East. By late spring only Black Whiskers Sanborn and White Whiskers Harney were left to negotiate, but Red Cloud and his allies remained on the Powder through the summer, keeping a close watch on the forts and the road to Montana.

At last the reluctant War Department issued orders for abandonment of the Powder River country. On July 29 the troops at Fort C. F. Smith packed their gear and started marching southward. Early the next morning Red Cloud led a band of celebrating warriors into the post, and they set fire to every building. A month later Fort Phil Kearny was abandoned, and the honor of burning was given to the Cheyennes under Little Wolf. A few days after that, the last soldier departed from Fort Reno, and the Powder River road was officially closed.

After two years of resistance, Red Cloud had won his war. For a few more weeks he kept the treaty makers waiting, and then
on November 6, surrounded by a coterie of triumphant warriors, he came riding into Fort Laramie. Now a conquering hero, he would sign the treaty: "From this day forward all war between the parties to this agreement shall forever cease. The government of the United States desires peace, and its honor is hereby pledged to keep it. The Indians desire peace, and they now pledge their honor to maintain it."

For the next twenty years, however, the contents of the other sixteen articles of that treaty of 1868 would remain a matter of dispute between the Indians and the government of the United States. What many of the chiefs understood was in the treaty and what was actually written therein after Congress ratified it were like two horses whose colorations did not match.

(Spotted Tail, nine years later: "These promises have not been kept. . . . All the words have proved to be false. . . . There was a treaty made by General Sherman, General Sanborn, and General Harney. At that time the general told us we should have annuities and goods from that treaty for thirty-five years. He said this but yet he didn't tell the truth." 17)

**SUN DANCE CHANT**

Look at that young man.
He is feeling good
Because his sweetheart
Is watching him.