



Thomas Montgomery and family papers.

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Copy of letter written by Thos. Montgomery Corporal Co. K. 7th
Reg^t Minn Inf. Vols. in August 1863. to his friends at Cleveland.
Minn - Copied Dec 7th 1888.

Indian Expedition Dakota Territory.

Camp Williston. August 5th 1863.

My dear Parents and Mothers -

With great pleasure I seat myself
this pleasant afternoon to write you once more, and to
answer your welcome letters of July 17th received to-day
from the fort by our half breed mail carrier.

I was pleased to learn that you were all in good
health. I have good reason to thank God that my own
health is very good, and that I have been spared through
so many dangers to the present to enjoy this privilege.

Since I wrote last, July 21st on James River the detached
expedition has seen some lively times as we anticipated.
and I know not that I can give a better account of our
experiences than by a daily transcript from my diary.
I will say to begin with however, that we found the
Indians, fought them in three engagements, whipped &
completely routed them, destroying their property and
driving them across the Missouri River.

Now to my diary - July 22^d was a cool, airy day. We marched
westward 20 miles over a level country, camping at 1 P.M.
Camp Kimball. To our left as we marched was a high
country the Plateau de Coteau de Missouri. The Scouts
reported that the Indians had left & crossed the Missouri.

23^d - A calm warm day. Marched S. W. 20 miles to Camp
Grant, on the edge of a chain of nice lakes and by spring
water. The prairies rolling and destitute of timber.

24th Friday. Was Corporal of Regimental Guard last night. The bloody 7th in advance. Lieut. Col. Marshal of our Regt. pursued and killed an antelope. Saw 3 others. At 10. a.m. passed between two beautiful lakes, called Twin Lakes the site of our camp as I write. We advanced six miles further and were halted, the Scouts reporting a large camp of Indians four miles west of us.

The first thing we discovered was the advance guard on the hill a few rods ahead of us loading their pieces rapidly, the General and Staff and one section of the battery close by them and all looking anxiously before them. Presently Col. Marshal ran down and ordered us to load which we did. Then we awaited further orders well pleased that we at last had found the savages after such a long, laborious and to the present fruitless search.

Meanwhile the long train was hurried up as close as possible, the stragglers joined their Companies and all were anxious to know how matters stood.

The Scouts had been talking with the Indians, who declared themselves ready to fight with us.

They enquired of our Scouts our numbers and were informed there was more than at Wood Lake.

The Indians told our Scouts they lied for they saw us coming. This as told by Col. Marshal was received by bursts of laughter for we had over

2000 men along. Our Regt. was closed in mass in a hollow out of sight, but we could see the Indian spies on a mound a mile off, which gave a commanding view of the whole country.

After a consultation with his Staff Gen. Sibley decided to place the train in a safe position before fighting.

3/ It was accordingly corralled on the margin of a lake close by, the several Regts taking position as in Camp. A detail from each Co. was set to work entrenching the rest of the Corps putting up tents & digging wells (for the water of the lake was salt). Each man was furnished with 40 rounds of Cartridges. Knapsacks and haversacks were laid aside and as it was warm, many divested themselves of their blouses. Thus we worked till 2 P.M. Meantime some of the officers rashly went out with the Scouts and stark hands with the Indians a mile away. Just then we saw an Indian brought into camp by a Scout (his father). He had been with the Indians since last fall against his will, and had now deserted them. He was excited at what he saw but his father washed him and had him clothed and he is now with us.

While thus engaged in camp we could distinctly see the Indians on the hill south of us watching our operations. Presently there was firing heard, and a messenger galloped in leading a horse, telling us his rider Surgeon Weiser of the Cavalry was shot dead. Excitement was intense. The various Regiments were called into line at once. Dr. Weiser had just turned his back after shaking hands and talking with the Indians, when he was shot in the back. Others were also fired at. The Dr. turned on his horse and discharged his revolver at them twice. He fell from his horse and they were about scalping him but were prevented by the Scouts. Co. D. 7th was deployed east of the battery. Leo's E. F. G. & K. 7th under Col. Marshall were ordered to deploy as skirmishers in front of the advanced

4/ Section of the battery, the remaining Cos being sent elsewhere. The 6th 10th Regts were on the left and did not leave camp. Lt. Col. Marshal marched us in front of the battery where we deployed to 5 paces apart, our 4 Cos averaging 30 men each, and our line extending nearly half a mile long. We then advanced double quick the Indians in force on the hills to our front dancing and waving their blankets before us in sign of defiance, the battery meantime throwing shells over our head at them, making them leave in a hurry. We double quicked over half a mile and as we came in range were ordered to commence firing, which we did briskly. Lieut. K. was in the right center and I being on the left was in the middle of the line. As we advanced to the crest of the hills the Indians retreated we rushing up at them not knowing what we might meet. As lieutenants Clapp, Turritin and I were ascending the large mound with our rifles at our shoulder and cocked our brave leol. rode up meeting us and told us to forward as the enemy had left. We all, ^{then} rushed over the top of the hill, and discovered the Indians in retreat on the slope before us. We saw on the mound a stone covered with blood and the leggings of an Indian which showed where he probably met his fate. We were then pretty tired running but still kept on after them firing every chance. They then made a turn towards their camp and halted behind a rocky hill. We wheeled after them and when pretty close the impetuous command came again from our Lt. Col. Forward! double quick! March! Suddenly we charged up the hill firing at every opportunity but reaching the top found the enemy in full retreat. We thus continued charging on them, driving them from ridge to ridge for about two miles, when they made a

5) Stand, occupying a strong position on an extended rocky eminence above and before us, dancing and defying us as before. We still kept forward, cheered on by our brave Lt. Col. till within range when we lay down behind a little rocky ridge firing away. This was the most critical period for us, for our Co. being far in advance, being in the centre received the heaviest fire. For a few minutes as a few of us lay close behind some rocks, the balls whistled past us close & fast, making it necessary to dodge several times to avoid being hit at least so it seemed to us. Eight or ten balls came as close to me as from one to six feet. At that critical moment Col Marshal rode up repeatedly commanding "Forward! double quick boys, up and on to the devils, give them hell boys," &c which no brave man could help obeying. We then as one man rushed up the steep hill side as before, but Mr "big Injun" was gone as usual. We then concluded that if they could not hold that hill, we could just drive them before us right along which we did, as they did not make another stand. We pursued them two or three miles further without halting, driving them out of the hills entirely, encouraged by Col Marshal that we would pen them in, as the Regt of Cavalry which followed us had gone around the hills to get before them. The Cavalry was too late however for when we reached the last hill of the series the Indians were half a mile below us, scattered in hundreds over the level plain and running away as fast as possible. Their camp on the western edge of these hills had hastily

been struck a ~~short~~ ~~blow~~ during the battle and we saw
their train in rapid flight westward. When the Indians
made their last stand on the rocky hill. Col Marshall
requested Col McPhail to charge on them with his Cavalry
which were right behind us all the time so far, and
he offered to lead them in command but Col McPhail
refused, taking a circuitous route with his Regt and letting
the Indians slip away. If McPhail had not shown the
white feather, but had yielded to Marshall's earnest
requests we could have surrounded the Indians with
all ease, charged on them, and slaughtered two to three
hundred of these murderers of women and children.
but it is not for us to censure. None of our men were
even hurt but we were very tired being on a continuous
double quick from the camp for about six miles. The
battle lasting two hours. We assembled and went down
to a lake on the right to get water, but it was unfit to use
so went without, and after resting an hour and sending
back for food and drink we started forward again being
previously joined by the other companies of our Regt.
We were preceded by the Cavalry and a section of the Battery
who followed the Indians on their trail. The Cavalry
lost another golden opportunity in not charging on
the Indians on the bottoms. If they had, they could
with very small loss to themselves have killed scores
of them and destroyed their train. The general impression
is that Col. McPhail is a coward. His own Captains
declare him such. After the march of a mile we
reached the Indian camp near a marsh of fresh water.
We waded into the water and eagerly quenched our
thirst. Here we found a Squaw hid among the rushes.
The camp ground was strewn with Indian property.
It was now nearly sunset, but we followed on their
trail 10 miles further halting about 9 o'clock.
Having wet my feet in wading after the water. On
coming out I pulled off my shoes & stockings to dry them

7) but before I could do so, I found myself alone, and barefoot, and thus I ran over a mile along the trail, before I overtook my comrades and found time to flip on my shoes, so rapid was our pursuit. The battery in advance kept shelling the Indians who were skeddaddling at a lively rate, and before dark it nearly overtook them. Their trail was strewn with dozens of buffalo robes, skins, hides, large quantities of dried buffalo meat, teepee poles, feathers and other property, which the boys, tired as they were appropriated to themselves. We made our supper of pemmican which we thought then very good. After placing a few guards around, we lay down ^{for the night} in a drizzling rain some in their shirt sleeves, covering ourselves with the robes and skins, when we were suddenly aroused by the Cavalry returning. They had killed 11 of the Indians and described the others as lagging back, but as darkness settled around they were ordered to return. After a consultation it was agreed that we should all start back to camp and get something to eat. If we only had had our supper we all felt more like going forward till morning. At 10 P.M. we started back to camp, the provisions not reaching us although sent. We thought we might reach camp by midnight, but our ideas of distance were rather mixed for once, for it took us till sunrise next morning to get back to camp and then we came straggling in one after another for we lost our way among the hills and after firing cannon and throwing up rockets we got no response

8) we lay by till morning light should guide us on our weary way. Never were men better pleased than we at the sight of Camp. Tired, cold and hungry but well pleased with our adventures. Seeing they were over, I would not have missed being among that number for considerable. Part of the way I rode straddle of one of the howitzers, and rough as it was, I felt rested. I have been thus particular in noticing the events of that day because it was more particularly our battle for none but the 7th had any hand in it, till the Indians were driven from their own chosen position, and it was a good one for them to fight in but poorly they held it.

The battle is called the battle of the big mound and the Camp Sibley. There was killed on our side Dr. Weiser, Lieut Freeman and private Stark all of the mounted Rangers. Another of the Cavalry boys was killed by lightning from a thunder storm which occurred during the fight. Mr. Brackett from St. Peter a cattle Contractor was missing and supposed to be killed till to day when the mail from Camp Atchison brought us the intelligence that he was still alive, but had suffered great hardships.

I will now keep closer to my diary record.

July 25th Struck tents at noon and marched 6 miles to Camp Whitney, the tired boys riding of which I was one.

26th Sunday. Starting at 5 a.m. we marched by our old battle ground through the Indian Camp and when out 10 miles the scouts reported Indians meeting us. We halted and went into Camp at Buffalo Lake. Camp Phender. Lines were thrown out and the battery kept up a shelling to the front.

9) Immediately Indians were seen all around us and the whole Command fell into line.

Just then a Squad of Mounted Indians swept down the hill from the west, among the cattle and teams with a view to stampede them. But fortunately a Company of Cavalry were in line facing them who swiftly pursued the Indians as they forced to fly. ~~Killing~~ four of their number. Three were said to be Chiefs, one White Bear. I saw his scalp and body soon after, and several other scalps. Skirmishing was kept up all afternoon. 16 Indians killed, only one M. R. wounded. Captured a squaw.

27th The 7th in advance Co's DTK deployed in front next to Scouts. Indians seen during forenoon but they kept retreating. Marched 25 miles over a level prairie and Camped at Stone Lake - Camp Shuneman. Was Corp of Correll Guard that night and next day.

July 28th The train had scarcely started when cannonading was heard in advance and a brisk Skirmish ensued for an hour. The Indians suddenly appeared on all sides horse and foot by the hundred. Our forces were deployed to meet them till our train was again formed, the Cannon firing away at them. They were certainly afraid of the shooting. ~~For they~~ ^{the} wagons ~~for they~~ always kept at a safe distance from them. We advanced, they retreating, over a level prairie 25 miles and Camped on Apple Creek, Camp Steers. Quite a number of teams gave out. A wounded Soldier died and was buried. Five Indians were killed this morning, and one who was captured during the march.

10) reported 62 killed in all. Three Indians were killed and scalped since coming into camp. I was in a position this morning to see the whole affair. To see the consternation and hurrying amongst the teamsters, the hurrying to and fro of Companies, the Cavalry deployments, the menacing gestures of the Indians, the daring taunts of our Scouts, the yelling & ^{ho}hooping of the Savages the rapid volleys of musketry and discharges of artillery, the screeching of the shells the whistling of the bullets and the galloping from side to side on both sides, made a grand sight. 29th Reveille at 1.30 am. Three hours occupied in crossing the stream. Marched towards Missouri River which came in sight at 9 am. Saw hundreds of Indians on the opposite hills. The Cavalry & battery went ahead early, the latter shelling the dense timber land along the river bottom. The 7th lay in the hot sun while the 6th advanced as skirmishers through the woods to the river some two miles.

They returned in the evening without accomplishing much, only making observations. They found that the Indians had crossed the river in great haste, leaving on this side 150 wagons with great quantities of harness, robes, pemmican and other property.

The orders to the battery was to shell the river bottom only. If they had been permitted to shell the Indians on the high bluffs before them, many of them might have been killed. It is supposed large numbers of Squaws and Papozes were drowned in attempting to cross this Great river which is here from a half to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile wide. As they had no means of crossing except by attaching tree pole to the wagon boxes. The then marched down the river 5 miles and camped at Apple river. Camp Slaughter.

"The Indians fired on the skirmishers as they reached the river to get water but the balls fell short in the water. At night it was found that three were missing, one Lieut. Beaver a volunteer aid on Gen Sibley's Staff, an English Lord of fortune and high respectability, and a graduate of Oxford University; the two others privates of Co K, 6th Reg. Signal guns were fired and rockets thrown up during the night but they did not come in and were supposed to be killed. Lt Beaver was bearing despatches from Gen Sibley to Col. Crooks, and when last seen was on his way back. July 30th Indians fired the prairies last night in order to burn us out, but no harm resulted. Pick firing was kept up by the pickets. The Regts turned out under arms and remained out some time. Will stay here a day or two. Fired signal guns. After dinner a force of 4 Co's from each Regt went out under Col. Crooks, to search for Lt Beaver and the missing corps of his Regt, and to destroy all the Indian property on this side of the river. Our Co. went out to guard a forage train. At dark the corps returned. They found the body of Lt. Beaver and the others and killed two Indians. Ford Beaver on his return had taken the wrong trail and was shot with two arrows and his horse with balls. It is supposed he killed two Indians as two pools of blood were seen close by him. His hair being short he was not scalped, but a piece was taken out of his chin with hair on. He was robbed of everything he had but his shirt and drawers. One of Co K, 6th Reg boys was also found killed & scalped.

12/ The other was sun struck and returned to camp. They destroyed about 120 wagons, harness & other property and brought some up to camp.

Signal guns were fired and rockets thrown up to notify Gen. Sully of our presence if he was in the country near by. 31st Lt Beaver was buried at 10 am with Masonic ceremonies and honors. Co. K. went out to guard a forage train. On our return I with some other boys crossed Apple river and went up on a high hill one mile south of camp. where we had a glorious view for 15 miles or more in every direction. At dress parade that evening

Congratulatory orders were read from Gen. Sibley announcing that 44 Indian bodies had been found and that from 120 to 150 Indians were known to have been killed. that only 3 of our men were killed and three wounded. that the objects of the expedition were fully accomplished, the enemy routed and that we would start homeward in the morning.

Lt Col. Marshal in an order also complimented his men. Scouts saw Indians in squads crossing to this side of the Missouri. An attack expected. At 10 P.m. nearly the whole Brigade turned out and deploying round camp dug some extra rifle pits and lay on our arms all night. They fired into camp and a brisk fire was kept up in reply. The cattle were stampeded across the camp but no serious damage was done.

Indians are supposed to be in force in the timbered bottom close to camp. but as we have only 5 pontoon boats along out of 21 we could not cross the train over the river and it would seem to be a needless sacrifice of life to try and pursue them further. A council of war was held. Some were in favor of pursuing the

13 enemy with a select few, while others opposed it and finally it was decided to return, which perhaps was wise as we only had rations enough to get back with and did not know what might happen.

Aug 1. Bade good bye to the Missouri and started home toward the 7th in advance. Co's F & H deployed in front. Indians fired on our rear scouts, and numbers of them were in camp shortly after we left. Marched near our old trail & camped by plenty water & grass at Camp Braden. Corp^l of Reg Guard to right. Signal guns. Rockets & fire balls fired to signal Gen. Sully is in the country. 2nd Marched 20 miles East of Camp Braden. Saw a herd of buffalo. 3rd Marched 14 m. N of E to camp Kennedy over a stormy country towards the big hills. Windy. Saw 3 buffalo within 1/2 mile. Camped by spring water & plenty of grass. A scout died this morning. At night had the heaviest rain and thunder storm of the season. 4th 7th in advance. Marched N of E 18 m. to Camp Welliston ^{at Twin Lakes} our present camp. At 11 am reached Camp Sibley near where we had the first fight. The big hills and mound in sight all day. We stop here a day for rest because the mules are giving out. Early on the 5th the Scouts reported Indians all over the prairie before us, but it proved to be the mail with half breed escort, which we were all rejoiced to receive as all were excited to hear from our other camp, as well as from friends at home. I received a letter as stated at first. Part of the forces left at Camp Atchison had gone to Devil's Lake after some Indians, but were too late to capture them.

14) They captured Little Crow's son. Little Crow himself having been killed some time before. We were also glad to hear of Brackets safety.

Camp Philfillan Aug 6th 1863.

Had to cease writing last night & go on guard. Marched today 18 m. and now by candle light hasten to close as the mail leaves in the morning. St Paul & Col Marshal starts in the morning also, with dispatches and probably also to find out what disposition will be made of the troops on their return to Minn. We will probably reach Fort Abercrombie in two weeks. It is 280 m. from St Paul which we may reach by the middle of Sept. I have now given you a synopsis of our doings and will reserve the details till I get home. I hope what I have written may interest you if not will try and do better next time. What I have stated is accurate in every particular as near as I can find out. This is a vast prairie country without timber, but middling well water with little lakes.

The water in some is salt, in others alkaline in others fresh. We have dug wells at every camp to get good drinking water. We always camp by a lake, river or marsh. The grass is better than it used to be, but the high lands are still barren and very often stony & hilly. The mules although having lighter loads than formerly, cannot stand as long a march as the soldiers. We could march faster but for them. Many of them fall out entirely and we had to burn the wagons we could not take along. We stand the marching remarkably well. No one in the brigade has died of sickness since we left Camp Pope.

Camp Hall. Aug. 7. The mail did not leave this morning because the General's dispatches were not ready. Marched over the Missouri Coteaus to near the James River 16 miles. The Scouts surprised and captured 13 Indians today, 3 being warriors the rest Squaws & popooses. Causing quite an excitement in camp. These Scouts have proved themselves faithful thus far in every instance.

Panama - 30 Mm (1st 14 (narrow))
33 " "

TM Transcribed
his Sibley Expedition
letters of July 21 -
August 6, 1863.

[he noted transcription
from his letters sent
home and his journal.