SIDELIGHTS ON THE SIBLEY EXPEDITION FROM THE DIARY OF A PRIVATE[1]

Our Minnesota historians have spent too much time on the local aspects of the Sioux War of 1862 and have placed too little emphasis upon its national significance. From the first newspaper account through the most recently published volume, relatively too much space has been given to the immediate causes of the outbreak, to the revolting atrocities perpetrated, and to the campaigns against and the final defeat of the Sioux. The interpretation of the causes and results of this Indian war from a national viewpoint, although quite obvious in general, has not been sufficiently emphasized. Dr. Wilson P. Shortridge in his book on Sibley states that "the most serious Indian massacre in American History took place in the valley of the Minnesota river in the summer of 1862. The uprising Sioux in their last stand against the white men for possession of the soil of Minnesota differed from other conflicts on the frontier chiefly in the area involved and the number of victims slain. Similar causes had produced similar conflicts over and over again as the pressure of population pushed the Indians farther and farther towards the setting sun."[2] This historian has come nearer to grasping the larger meaning of the subject than most writers, but he, too, strangely neglects to show the effects of this "national war" on frontier development. He does note incidentally in this general opening statement that the real cause of the struggle was the pressure of white population, but in his enumeration of causes he fails to list it.

[1] Read at the state historical convention under the auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society at Mankato on June 17, 1926. *Ed.*

[2] Wilson P. Shortridge, *The Transition of a Typical Frontier with Illustrations from the Life of Henry Hastings Sibley*, 146 (Menasha, Wisconsin, 1922).

The outstanding cause for and the most important outcome of the defeat of the Sioux in the Northwest was the opening up of vast new lands for settlement, not only in Minnesota but in the Dakota territory. The area gained by Minnesota in 1862 was not great — only the strip ten miles wide and about a hundred and fifty miles long on the south bank of the Minnesota River — but it was the final acquisition. In the preceding decade the federal government had extinguished the Indian title to all the land in southern Minnesota with the exception of this reservation and a smaller one near Mankato occupied by the Winnebago. During the fifties hundreds of people squatted in southwestern Minnesota. Dr. Folwell says that "the Sioux had hardly got settled before the white man appeared with his whiskey jug and began taking up preëmptions on the neighboring lands."[3] It was in 1862, after several abortive attempts, that the West forced the enactment of the homestead law, and the rush of population into the Northwest on a scale unprecedented in the history of the country began. "The public lands were entered upon the last great period of their existence."[4] Free land and the unrestricted immigration policy of the United States brought to southwestern Minnesota the German, the Welshman, and the Scandinavian, whose industry enriched the country and the government. If one would fully understand the Sioux War and its consequences he must study the national public land system, the Indian policy, the federal policy of unrestricted immigration, and finally frontier settlement in the Northwest during the decades of the forties, fifties, and sixties.

After the Sioux revolt had been crushed in 1862, there still remained the task of pursuing and punishing those Indians who had fled into the Dakota territory. The people of Min-

[3] William W. Folwell, *Minnesota, The North Star State*, 169 (*American Commonwealths* series — Boston, 1908).

[4] Frederic L. Paxson, *History of the American Frontier, 1763–1893*, 480 (Boston, 1924).

nesota felt that no expense or effort should be spared to mete out heavy justice to the fleeing marauders. The war department organized two expeditions for this purpose in the winter of 1863, one under Henry Hastings Sibley and the other under Alfred Sully. The Sibley column was instructed to proceed up the Minnesota Valley and to cross over to Devil's Lake, the objective of both forces. Sully was to go by way of the Missouri River.

Henry J. Hagadorn, the writer of the diary from which the following account is principally drawn, was a private in the ranks of the Sibley expedition and had seen service in the previous year's fighting.[5] The diary runs from January 11 to August 31, 1863; and while dealing with the affairs of the expeditionary force, comprises more of a personal record than a comprehensive outline of the events that occurred during the march. Most of the entries are of a limited nature, often touching only upon such things as the weather and the writer's general state of health. Despite this fact, however, it is possible to gather from this record some very pertinent information about the expedition and the country that it traversed, much of which is not found in the ordinary sources.

The country through which the troops passed included some of the most fertile land in the Northwest. This fact was not lost upon Hagadorn and he frequently mentions the beauties and richness of the territory. When in the neighborhood of the lower Sioux agency on May 1, he remarks that "the Country through which we have marched is the finest in the State for farming and Grazing and the only objection any man can make to it is the scarcity of Timber back from the River: but the land is beautiful rolling Pararie with Meadow and water in abundance and the soil is excelent." Farther on while at Camp Sheardown near the Sheyenne River on July 14 he is again struck by the unusual attractiveness of the land

[5] A copy of the Hagadorn Diary is in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

about him. He compares it with the East and his native state, New York, but he says that none of the beauties of the East "will compare with this spot so wild and uninhabited and so far from civilization." After the command returned from Dakota Territory and was near Sauk Center, the author with much enthusiasm declares that the country was "as delightful a spot as the sun ever shone upon, or man ever trod." He continues, "Surpassingly beautiful prairie, not level enough to be monotonous — a smooth, green sward as far as the eye can reach. A beautiful lake with gravelly bottom and beach, and fine grove. Imagination could not paint anything more beautiful in nature. The touch of art will make it nearly perfect. These broad acres will at some not far distant day be peopled and improved." [6]

The army, however, was not constantly treated to the best in nature. The men suffered frequently from inclement weather, and often were harassed by severe rain and wind storms. On one or two occasions the dryness of the vicinity through which they were traveling caused suffering among the soldiers. The heat on a few days was so intense that marching was prohibited temporarily. In general, however, marching conditions were good. The accounts of frequent rain storms given by Hagadorn directly contradict the usual story of "prairies parched with excessive drouth."

Transportation conditions in Minnesota at this time are the subject of much comment in the diary. Army supplies were carried overland by transport teams, and the fact that the roads were usually good is mentioned; trouble was encountered only in crossing swamps and in fording streams. Both mule and horse teams were used in transporting supplies by land. Sometimes as many as fifty to seventy wagons moved in a single body carrying commissary stores to the various camps.

[6] Hagadorn to his wife, August 29, 1863. The letter is in the possession of a descendant of Hagadorn.

That steamboats ran on the Minnesota with a fair degree of regularity is clearly shown, for as many as seven landings are recorded by Hagadorn while he was quartered at Camp Pope. The steamers "Ariel" and "Stella Whipple" are most frequently listed in the transportation of commissary goods and recruits, although the "Jeanette Roberts," the "Pomeroy," the "Eolian," and the "Favorite" also were used in military operations. Thomas Hughes in his "History of Steamboating on the Minnesota River" states that "the summer of 1863 was exceptionally dry, and though boats were able in May to ascend to Camp Pope, twenty-five miles above Fort Ridgely, by the middle of June the river had fallen so that all steamboat traffic above the rapids was suspended."[7]

In spite of the wild and unsettled nature of the country, mail service was unusually regular. Reception of mail from home was always a cause for gladness. The presence of newspapers and letters undoubtedly established a higher type of morale among the men. While the army followed the river mail was received by steamer, but later on it was brought overland by scouts. It is interesting to note that while the expedition was campaigning in the Dakota region letters and newspapers were delivered not only through Fort Abercrombie but also from Pembina. Just why mail addressed from St. Paul should have been sent by way of Pembina is a matter for conjecture.

Life in the army is fairly well illustrated by Hagadorn's narrative. The soldiers on the expedition were raw and not well trained. Discipline appears to have been more or less easy compared with that of the modern day, however. Cases of punishment are rarely recorded. "For disobedience of Orders," Hagadorn writes on May 30, "one poor Soldier is recieveing punishment by carrying Forty Five lbs of Brick in his Knappsack on his back in front of Head quarters for Three hours in succession where he is seen by every body." At

[7] *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 10: 152 (part 1).

Camp Atchison, on July 18, a man was shot by a lieutenant. Various stories concerning the cause were circulated but Hagadorn merely writes, "I have not heard the particulars of the Affair." This was the first instance of bloodshed on the expedition.

The soldiers appear to have been generally content. Complaints were expressed only under extremely unfavorable conditions, such as when the men were on the trail upwards of twenty-four hours, practically without food, water, or rest. At Camp McPhail, on June 21, the command was given that no soldier "leave the ranks for water while on the march." Hagadorn's entry for the following day illustrates the reaction to this restriction:

> We now began to see what hard ships we have to endure before we get to Devils Lake and back to civilization again but the worst of all so far was the enforcing of the Order read last evening and we marched 16 miles through a hot sun and dust without one drop of water to cool our parched throats when it was so handy to get that we were marched through the River but not alowed to fill our Canteens and one poor fellow a searget fell upon the ground exhausted and it was [only] by the best of care that his life was saved: The boys declare that they will get water at every Opportunity hereafter let come what will it will be hard enough for us if alowed all the comforts possible through this barren Country.

Again there is evidence of grumbling when Hagadorn writes on August 24 that "there was many curses heaped upon the Maj for the 3 hours battelion drill on double quick this P.M."

Perhaps the most serious difficulty within the ranks occurred at Camp Pope on June 3, when trouble developed "between the Cavelry and the Teamsters which caused the Col[onel] Com[manding] to call out the troops to still them." According to Hagadorn, the teamsters, who numbered about four hundred, were "sothern men," and after this disturbance it was necessary that they be "closely watched as they have already made their threats that they would kill every Union

man" with the party. Later Hagadorn states that the teamsters were both "black and white."

These three instances are about the only cases of real discontent recorded in the journal. Only three deserters are mentioned by the diarist. These men were readily caught but as readily escaped a second time.

One of the chief diversions of the soldiers on the campaign seems to have been playing horseshoes. A ludicrous instance of what Hagadorn brands as army depravity may be noted in this connection. On August 9 he writes:

> A Man by the name of Stanbuck of C E 10 reg died in the Hospital to day at noon and was burried this afternoon I must confess that I have seen but little of the wickedness and depravity of Man untill I joined the Army. it is so visible to day that I cannot let it pass unnoticed this poor soldier died in the Hospital Tent and but A few feet from it there is A gang of men pitching Horse Shoes and Swearing so loud that they can be heard all through the Camp but no one tries to stop them and they continue their game and do not stop even when the Corps is brought out in the Coffin and taken to its last resting place and the Chaplin passes them time after time without a word of advice. As wicked as I am these scenes strikes to my heart to see such wickedness especialy on the Sabath and the Officers share largely in them.

Despite the serious nature of the Indian expedition the Sibley troops do not appear to have been drilled effectively. Hagadorn remarks on May 25 that he has "drilled but 2 hours this season," and the season was advanced four months. Inspection was held every Sunday morning and this appears to have been the only regular drill. Dress parades were infrequent.

The hardships and vicissitudes experienced were not out of the ordinary. A scarcity of food for several days, the lack of medicine in times of sickness, and rain and dust storms constituted the chief troubles. From Mankato to Camp Pope, a march which lasted from April 28 to May 2 — five days — the men subsisted mainly on hard mouldy bread. Upon reach-

ing Camp Pope, however, the food increased in quantity and was better in quality. In Dakota Territory geese, ducks, deer, and buffalo were secured in sufficient quantities.

Hagadorn notes the lack of medicine on several occasions. In his many attacks of fever, he sought the surgeon for relief in vain. The doctor scarcely ever had any medicine. On the return trip to St. Paul seven soldiers were reported to have died of fever and Hagadorn asserts that this was due to lack of medicine.

Keen interest in the progress of the war in the South is reflected throughout the journal. Reports of battles were being continually received, but many times the first news was erroneous. For instance the battle of Fredericksburg, fought on December 13, 1862, was reported a victory for the Union forces on May 9, 1863; Richmond surrendered in 1863; and the fall of Vicksburg was celebrated on May 30, a month before it occurred. The false news of the triumph of Burnside at Fredericksburg was the occasion for a great jubilee. "Cheer after cheer" was given "for the brave Soldiers and their Glorious victory" and "the 12 pds Cannon was fired 3 times in honor of the victory at the South." When the facts of the battle became known on May 11 the difference in spirit was marked. The news caused sadness in the ranks and gave rise to a lengthy discourse on the part of Hagadorn about the heads of the national government and the incompetence of the Union generals. He writes:

For as we look at the Glorious Stars and stripes as they wave proudly over the Head Quarters here the heart is feint to hear once more of our defeat in its defense Alas: Alas: my Country where is thy boasted Liberty. yet we are told that our Army and our Generals are not discouraged but still hope to triumph. but why this defeat to the Army of the Raparhanoc is our General incompet[ent] if so why was it not discovered untill it is too late to avert this most inglorious retreat it is the heads of the Government that will have to answer this at some future day and may god have mercy on them if they fail to answer it.

Again when the news of the fall of the rebel capital was read from the *St. Paul Press* on May 13, "the air resounded with shouts of joy" and again the "12 Lbs Canon burst forth it[s] fire and smoke."

The Sibley expedition was not altogether successful. It encountered but few Indians and fought but two battles, only part of the army taking part in these. False reports of Indians were frequent and these resulted in many wild-goose chases. On one occasion eleven Indians caused a detachment of cavalry to return to camp when the men thought that the Indians were reënforced by a hundred more. It was later shown that the total number of Indians was eleven and the cavalry had been scared away by a delusion.

Another subject of special interest touched upon in the diary is the scalping of Indians. In many of the Indian wars, the whites have committed this barbarous act. The Sibley command was no exception. Hagadorn only alludes to the subject, but L. W. Collins, a captain in the same command, says:

> It was currently reported that the colonel commanding the cavalry told his men that he had a good deal rather see the scalps than to hear men talk — and probably lie — about the sure enough death after the fight. He also, it is said, told the men in the same connection that the scalp should be large enough to prevent all suspicion that the head of one Indian had been called upon to perform double duty. But no matter just how the colonel saw fit to put his views, scalps were on exhibition for several days after the skirmishes.[8]

On August 12 the Sibley expedition started its return trip. The Hagadorn journal is abruptly terminated at Camp Jones, about twelve miles from Sauk Center, on August 31.

In conclusion, it might be said that the conditions and events revealed in the diary are noteworthy. In general the Indians proved elusive; the army appears to have been poorly condi-

[8] L. W. Collins, *The Expedition Against the Sioux Indians in 1863, Under Gen. Henry H. Sibley*, 19 (St. Cloud, 1895).

tioned, the discipline was lax, the food was sometimes poor, and medicines were lacking. This is not to be wondered at, however, when it is considered that the Civil War was raging and the Union forces up until July were encountering defeat after defeat.

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