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☞ PREFACE ☜

“With eighty men I could ride through the entire Sioux nation.” The story of the Fetterman Fight on December 21, 1866, near Fort Phil Kearny on the Bozeman Trail, is built almost entirely on this infamous declaration attributed to Capt. William J. Fetterman. Accounts of the incident point to this statement to support the premise that Fetterman’s arrogance blinded him to the danger of Indian warfare. Historians claim that bravado, vainglory, and contempt for the fort’s commander, Col. Henry B. Carrington, compelled Fetterman to disobey Carrington’s orders “not to cross Lodge Trail Ridge,” thus leading his men directly into a well-planned Indian ambush.

The near universal acceptance of this thesis, presented in scores of books and articles in the more than 140 years since the battle—including most of the classics of Indian Wars history—is striking. Dee Brown’s *The Fetterman Massacre*, originally published as *Fort Phil Kearny: An American Saga* in 1962, is widely regarded as the authoritative study of the event. Citing the doomed officer’s “reckless boasts” and “cocksureness,” Brown portrays Fetterman as so contemptuous of the Plains Indians’ military skills that he was oblivious to the overwhelming evidence of their superiority during his short-lived frontier service.

Most historians point to Fetterman’s arrogance and the strained relationships between Colonel Carrington and his officers to explain Fetterman’s fatal decision to lead his men into ambush. Fetterman is positioned as a catalyst that ignited a long-smoldering resentment held by the fort’s officers, all battle-hardened Civil War veterans, toward Carrington, a book-learned militarist who had never seen combat. The subsequent inference is

that Carrington had so little military control at the fort that Fetterman felt free to disobey orders out of scorn for his commander. All of these conclusions are drawn from the assumption that Fetterman was driven by a one-dimensional obsession: his belief that a small detachment of white soldiers could easily handle any number of Indian warriors. In seeking to explain the events leading up to the catastrophe, all answers become corollaries to this presumption of Fetterman's undaunted arrogance—completely obscuring any other potential interpretation. These analyses overlook the underlying political, social, and cultural influences that played a critical role in the story. Described by historian Robert Utley as “the opening of the final act of the frontier drama,” this incident reflects the complex inter- and intracultural dynamics of the United States and the Plains Indians at a pivotal point in history.¹ Taking these factors into account offers a credible alternative to the traditional story's dénouement that caricatures Fetterman's arrogance and begs the question of how his reputation was so permanently marred.

My quest to answer that question was launched in a documentary editing course in graduate school at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln when I stumbled across a letter in the Eli Ricker Collection in the archives at the Nebraska State Historical Society. In this letter, Frances Ten Eyck, daughter of Tenodor Ten Eyck, an officer who served under Carrington at Fort Phil Kearny, pleaded with Ricker and Carrington to help clear her father's name after he had been portrayed as a coward in a recently published Wyoming history volume. Little did I know that this one letter would lead to a five-year obsession with the Fetterman story.

The professor of the documentary editing course was Dr. Gary Moulton, acclaimed editor of the Lewis and Clark Journals and internationally recognized guru of historical editing. He was also the chair of my master's degree committee. Moulton admonished us to “be as curious as possible” and to annotate to a nearly ridiculous level in order to learn how to make the hard

decisions of what to cut, for editing is the disciplined “study of scarcity.” Moulton’s rules were uncompromising. We were required to look at all aspects of a document and approach each with skepticism. And so it was that I dug so far into the Ten Eyck story that I came out on the other side! My editing project grew from the one letter to seventeen found in three different archives, and by the end of the semester I had read dozens of Fetterman books and articles including the Carringtons’ books and Brown’s excellent version. I think Moulton gave me an A for effort and sheer volume, as the eighty-one-page document I handed in is a real groaner. My twenty pages of notes were mostly taken from secondary sources and, like everyone else, I believed at that time that Fetterman was an arrogant jerk. But my journey to the Bozeman Trail had just begun because I couldn’t leave the story alone.

During the next semester I approached the evidence from two new angles under the direction of two professors who have had a profound impact on my career and life. Dr. Susan Miller, in a challenging seminar titled “Indigenous Perspectives on American History,” helped me flesh out the story by exploring it from a Native American perspective. Many years later, I know I have barely scratched the surface of the Indian side of this story—and I have much yet to learn about applying indigenous frameworks in my scholarship—but I hope that some of Dr. Miller’s rigorous training comes through and I don’t embarrass her too much. The real “aha” in this story came in a Women in the West course with Dr. Charlene Porsild. I knew there was something hiding in the volumes of primary material I had collected and was sure I could make a thesis out of this jumble. My working thesis was that Frances Ten Eyck’s letter-writing campaign to Carrington and Ricker had successfully changed the story of the event. Dr. Porsild asked, “How was a Victorian woman able to change the history of a military event?” Her typically astute line of questioning led me to study how women influenced this story—and opened a great big can of worms.

To determine if and how women manipulated the historical

record of this incident, I had to study all of the primary material available and try to build a chronological historiography of the event. Shortly after I began this adventure, I stumbled onto a brief statement by a private who had served under Fetterman in the Civil War and at Fort Phil Kearny. Private F. M. Fessenden, who was a member of Carrington's regimental band, described Fetterman as a warm and friendly man who played with Fessenden's infant daughter.² I couldn't shake that image from my head. Fessenden's description of a genial, affable officer controverted the commonly accepted account of a patently arrogant and violent egomaniac. Could this be the same man known for fits of rage and cursing and who had supposedly allowed sergeants to beat privates under his command? A month later I had combed every primary source I could find that described Fetterman. Other than Carrington's reports months after Fetterman's death, every record or description of the man was positive. As I dug deeper and deeper into the records to try to find out when Fetterman's reputation took such a sharp turn, it became clear that women did indeed shape the story we know today.

What has emerged is an alternative explanation to the prevailing version that has clearly evolved from women's work. By combining new research and interpretations with up-to-date scholarship, this book builds on the work of those experts who have come before and revises the familiar story by presenting it from a different perspective—one that eliminates the bias of the women's accounts. In this book, the story is presented chronologically, integrating military, political, social, and cultural influences into the narrative. This places the characters' actions in context and alters the currently accepted rendition of the event. As my exposure to the craft of historical analysis grew, so did my understanding of the significance of this story. I am particularly indebted to the scholarship of Shirley A. Leckie in *Elizabeth Bacon Custer and the Making of a Myth* and Brian W. Dippie in *Custer's Last Stand: The Anatomy of an American Myth*. Their eloquent analyses of the evolution of the Custer myth

were invaluable as I struggled to articulate the shaping of the Fetterman myth.³

The story concludes with an analysis of the historiography of the incident. Comparing primary and secondary documents illustrates specific examples of the impact women had on the evolution of the historical narrative. By placing a well-documented, plausible version of this dramatic event alongside a historiographical analysis, I seek to show that the story that has been popularized was derived from a history shaped by gender roles. It is a history that I believe was revised and controlled through the efforts of women defending their men with the might of their pen.

I am indebted to the Department of History at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln for taking a gamble on this former software salesperson who wanted to become a historian. The timing of my graduate program was nothing short of perfect, for I was blessed with a series of classes that, in retrospect, seem to have been custom built just for me. Professors John Wunder, Gary Moulton, Charlene Porsild, Ken Winkle, Susan Miller, Emily Greenwald, Gustavo Paz, Alan Steinweis, and Andre Gunder Frank have all left their marks on my training—and my life—and are collectively responsible for anything that resembles historical talent in my work. Gary Moulton supervised my thesis, and I am proud to be one of his last graduate students. Bringing my drafts to his office and picking up his edited chapters was a delight, even though they were dripping with red ink.

I am most grateful to Dr. John Wunder for his patient guidance and enduring support of my career despite the many detours I have taken. He is more than my doctoral committee chair, he is my idol. His intellectual inspiration and gently delivered directives have steered many grad students in the right direction; he is responsible for the successful careers of countless scholars of western and American Indian history. John's lectures are more entertaining than going to a movie, his exams keep students up all night, all while he continues to be a prodigious author and scholar. Above all, John is a genu-

inely caring mentor and dear friend. In short, he is just the kind of professor I aspire to be.

My family and friends met my apparent midlife crisis with love and support—albeit many thought I was nuts for abandoning a twenty-year career to be a poor grad student. Becky and Kirk Kilpatrick and Michele Haws made it very difficult to leave Denver, but their emotional (and other) support got me through the first years of school. I am sure I would never have survived Lincoln without my sister, Kylie Smith, and her many friends who have since become my dear friends. Once they got over the shock of my career change, my parents and extended family became my greatest champions. Thanks, Dad and Sherry, for your love and encouragement. This book would not exist if my aunt and uncle, Lois and Larry Schaffer, had not read my master's thesis and encouraged me to try to get it published. They passed it around to every western history buff they knew and sent me their feedback. It was a positive note they forwarded from Paul Hedron of the National Park Service that encouraged me to seek publication. At the same time, my sister, Kirsten Vick, took my manuscript home to Chicago and, after reading it, passed it on to her well-read father-in-law, Mike Vick. Their combined enthusiasm and positive comments boosted my confidence enormously. My uncle, Saylor Smith, the real writer in our family, sent his copy back with so many very necessary edits I was floored they had gotten by all the previous readers.

By the time I handed the manuscript to Elizabeth Demers at the University of Nebraska Press, it had been read by dozens of people and no one seemed to hate it. Elizabeth liked the story, too, and I ended up working with a truly great press and truly great people like Heather Lundine and Gary Dunham. I have been blessed with the professional and personal support of some awesome scholars who have become dear friends, including my department chair at Oglala Lakota College, Dr. Holly R. Boomer; Clark Whitehorn, past editor of *Montana the Magazine of Western History*; and the inimitable Patricia Y. Stallard of *Glittering Misery* fame. Indeed, I have had the good fortune to have met many

“movers and shakers” in my new avocation of western history and they have been some of the nicest, funniest, and most genuinely helpful people I have ever come across.

Last, but not least, I want to thank my daughter, Katie Calitri, for growing up fast when I needed her to and being a big support to her mother. She has uprooted her life and made personal sacrifices so I could follow my dreams. Now I get to watch her pursue her own and I can't wait.

Any strokes of brilliance in the following pages can be attributed to one or more of the above mentioned people. The mistakes are those of this green historian.

❧ CHAPTER ❧

1

Prelude to Disaster

At the most fundamental level, the Fetterman battle is the story of a fight over land. Fort Phil Kearny is located in the heart of a land that was known by non-Indians as Absaroka when Fetterman met his fate. Covering more than one hundred thousand square miles in present-day Wyoming, Montana, and South Dakota, it is a majestic country of mountains, valleys, and rolling hills fed by hundreds of rivers and streams. Named for the Crow Indians, the indigenous people at the time European explorers entered this region, Absaroka comes from the name given them by their sister tribe, the Hidatsas. Early French explorers translated the Hidatsa word *Absaroka* into “children of the large beaked bird,” which eventually became simply “Crow.”¹ The first Euro-American cartographic definition of Absaroka came with the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. It was delineated as an “area bounded on the east by the Powder River, on the west by the headwaters of the Yellowstone River, on the north by the Missouri and Musselshell River, and on the south by the Wind River Mountains.”² Although the Crows’ realm was far greater than the forty million acres designated as their land in this treaty, this became the land known as “Absaroka, home of the Crows.”³

Absaroka was a land of conflict for many years before Euro-

Americans arrived. When Fort Phil Kearny was founded in 1866, the Crow nation had been almost completely removed from Absaroka by an alliance of Plains Indians led by bands of the Teton Lakota Sioux. According to Richard White, historians have been guilty of “viewing intertribal history as essentially ahistoric and static, refusing to examine critically the conditions that prompted Indian actions.”⁴ This is the case when writers frequently explain the events surrounding the Fetterman battle in terms of the Lakota’s fight for their *ancient* homeland. In reality, when the U.S. Army entered Absaroka in the mid-1860s, the Lakota were at their peak of military and political power and had only recently ascended to dominance after fifty years of conflict with the Crows and other tribes of the region. The army then became one of many combatants in a preexisting war zone and permanently altered the dynamics of a decades-long intertribal struggle for the land.

The Crows adopted Absaroka as their homeland at the end of the seventeenth century after an epic migration from present-day Wisconsin that began in the early 1500s. French fur traders spent a year with the Crows in 1742, but for the next fifty years the only exposure the Crows had to whites was disease transmitted through trade with other Indian nations who brought goods, and microbes, from their own trade with Euro-Americans. By the end of the century, smallpox reduced their nation from two thousand to three hundred lodges and forced the Crows to separate into smaller bands. The early 1800s found the Crows reunited and trading with various British and American companies. But they were also fighting to protect Absaroka from the encroachment of other Indian nations who were being pushed out of their own lands by the westward expansion of Euro-American settlers. In 1825, in an effort to prevent Indian trade with the British, the United States sent envoys to negotiate treaties of “friendship” with various tribes, including the Crow nation. The Crows signed the Treaty of Friendship of 1825 hoping the Americans would ally with them in their fight against other tribes for control of Absaroka. Support from their

new white allies never materialized and for the next twenty-five years the wars escalated between the Crows and a loose coalition of Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos.

The Plains Sioux consisted of seven divisions joined in a confederation called the Oceti Sakowin, or Seven Council Fires. The Seven Council Fires included the Tetonwan, known as the Teton *Lakota*; the Ihanktonwan and Ihanktonna, known as the Yankton *Nakota*; and Mdewankanton, Wahpeton, Sisseton, and Wapekute, known as the Santee *Dakota*. The Lakota further subdivided into their own Oceti Sakowin consisting of the Oglala, Brulé, Hunkpapa, Miniconjou, Sans Arc, Two Kettles, and Siskasas. Each of the council fires, or bands, operated independently of the larger nation, and each was generally under the authority of a number of leaders, known as Shirt Wearers. The primary allies in the fifty-year fight with the Crows over Absaroka were the Oglala and Minneconjou Lakota bands along with groups from the Northern Cheyenne and Northern Arapaho nations. Although the Seven Council Fires of the Lakota had never united against an enemy, alliances of several bands against a common foe were not unusual. Over time, representatives from other Lakota council fires such as the Brulés, Sans Arcs, and Hunkpapas joined the alliance in Absaroka, especially when the enemy became the United States.⁵

After gold was discovered in California in 1849, the U.S. government met with the warring Indian nations to negotiate safe passage for the rush of miners and emigrants crossing Indian lands. Anticipating another opportunity to ally with the Americans and diplomatically resolve their conflict with the Lakota, the Crows attended the meeting.⁶ In the summer of 1851, more than ten thousand representatives of the Crows, Lakota-Nakota-Dakota Sioux, Cheyennes, Arapahos, Shoshones, Arikaras, and Assiniboines gathered on the banks of the North Platte River in a valley near Fort Laramie. From July to September, tribal delegations converged on the region, and soon a vast city of tepees had developed in the meadows surrounding the fort, with the combined horse herds grazing down the grass

for thousands of acres. The spectacle of the largest gathering of Indians in the history of the plains, and probably the nation, had to be amazing—and intimidating—to the few hundred soldiers stationed at the post. Indeed, managing the logistics of the huge gathering soon overwhelmed the officers of the small fort and they ordered the bulk of the encampment to relocate to Horse Creek, about forty miles to the east, as they waited for the gifts to arrive so the negotiations could begin.⁷

The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 established the first boundaries ever imposed on the Indian nations of the Northern Plains. The Crow negotiators agreed to relinquish all of their territory east of the Powder River, including the Black Hills, because the Lakota already dominated that area. In return, the Crows asked for enforcement provisions—for the Americans to help protect their claim to the rest of Absaroka—but the American negotiators did not include this stipulation. For accepting the terms and boundaries of the treaty, the Crows were promised fifty thousand dollars in supplies, including weapons for defending their land. But when they returned to Absaroka, the Lakota and their allies continued to raid and hunt in their territory. The Crows were never able to collect the promised annuities because Lakota dominance around the periphery of Absaroka prevented them from getting to the designated forts to claim their goods. On the other hand, the Sioux bands, including the Lakota, had easy access to their promised supplies and constant contact with traders to acquire guns and ammunition. Soon, the Crows were forced to withdraw farther west and north, giving up the heart of their homeland—the Powder River Basin.⁸

In 1862, as the Crows and Lakota continued to clash in Absaroka, gold was discovered just to the north in Idaho Territory. The rush of miners and emigrants from the overcrowded and depleted fields of California and Colorado swelled the area's Euro-American population to twenty thousand by the time Congress created Montana Territory from Idaho Territory in 1864. Routes to the Montana goldfields from the east were costly, circuitous, and time consuming. Steamboats slowly

made their way up the Missouri River to Fort Benton, Montana, delivering emigrants to stagecoaches and wagon trains for a two-hundred-mile journey across three mountain ranges. An alternate land-based route was no less arduous: taking wagons east on the Platte River road, emigrants traversed the Rocky Mountains and turned north around Salt Lake City. Then they would follow the western slope through Utah and Idaho and recross the mountain range eastward into Montana. In 1863 John Bozeman discovered a more direct overland route, staking a trail from the Platte River road along the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains directly to the goldfields. Cutting through Powder River country—the heart of Absaroka—the trail took the miners through a war zone where the Lakota and their allies had just wrested control from the Crows. The powerful, dominating Lakota were not inclined to allow Euro-American trespassers on a trail through the last, best hunting grounds of the Northern Plains that they now claimed as their own.⁹

The original political structure of the Sioux nations did not embrace the use of an individual leader, but after years of diplomatic relations with Europeans and Americans, the concept of a single “chief” speaking for all of his people at treaty-making meetings eventually developed. Both Indians and Euro-Americans acknowledged the growing reputation of Red Cloud, an Oglala Lakota, as a leader of the factions with a “stiffening attitude against the whites.” Red Cloud was not a formally recognized Lakota leader; he had been passed over as a Shirt Wearer, but at over forty years old, his reputation as a great warrior and leader in battle was renowned among the Lakota and carried enough weight to position him in an undeniable seat of power.¹⁰ Other Lakota leaders, Spotted Tail and Man Afraid of His Horses, to name a few, were more inclined to negotiate with the Americans, and before long Red Cloud was recognized as the primary chief of the so-called hostile bands of Plains Indians.

Conflicts between Indians and Americans added to the incendiary atmosphere on the High Plains. The Sioux Uprising in Minnesota in 1862, the Sand Creek Massacre of Cheyennes in

1864, and Gen. Patrick E. Connor's attack on a peaceful Arapaho camp in 1865 contributed to Red Cloud and his followers' understandable sense of distrust and hostility toward the army and white encroachment. This acrimony, combined with the desire to protect their way of life, drove Red Cloud's Lakota alliance to step up attacks on whites who dared to pass through their hard-won land in Absaroka.¹¹ Despite the risks, intrepid emigrants and miners flocking to Montana's goldfields continued to use Bozeman's faster, more direct route. Shortly after the close of the Civil War, as the floodgates of western expansion opened, the mass of citizens desiring safe passage to their hoped-for riches in Montana called on their government for protection on the Bozeman Trail.

This public clamor, coupled with the post-Civil War need to replenish the treasury with gold from the Montana fields, compelled the U.S. government to resolve the conflict in Absaroka. However, the newly reunited nation had its own internal strife to contend with before it could effectively turn its attention to the problems in the West. The demands of managing and integrating the South into the Union while controlling and supporting an exploding population in the West nearly overwhelmed the government—especially the military—at this time. Lingering political tensions after four years of war created an atmosphere of distrust and discord at the highest levels of government while barely surmountable bureaucratic problems brought much of its operations to a near halt. This postwar government ineffectualness set the stage for the Fetterman incident.

The reason that nearly every rendition of this story is more myth than reality can be clearly linked to the highly charged post-Civil War political landscape. The vitriolic debate regarding the scope, mission, and size of the peacetime military went on for months and ultimately led to the impeachment of Pres. Andrew Johnson. Although the four-year ordeal of the Civil War was over, scars and animosity ran deep throughout the North and the South. New political forces intending to shape the future of the reunited country were coming to power and

they had many pressing issues with which to contend. Millions of freed slaves required protection and guidance to enter society, the South had to be supervised while being brought back into the fold of the Union, and the settlement of the remaining western frontier needed support. These problems required the military, but politics and massive war debt stood in the way. So, while the politicians fought, the all-but-abandoned army became bogged down in bureaucracy.

A military historian once labeled this the beginning of “the army’s dark ages,” during which the disparaged military struggled “almost helplessly against problems that multiplied with each passing day.”¹² Congress spent much of the first year after the Civil War locked in debate about the scope, funding, and mission of the peacetime army. Radical Republicans wanted a large army to enforce their vision of a punitive Reconstruction on the conquered South. At the same time, western representatives lobbied for a strong army to protect emigrants and settlers on the frontier. On the other side of the debate, congressmen bent on making their reputations by saving taxpayers money set their sights on shrinking the army even smaller than its prewar force. Minimizing the problems of both the South and the West, President Johnson and his fiscally conservative followers worked to prevent the army from retaining its wartime power and prominence. While simultaneously trying to cut back the military, politicians and their constituents made huge demands on the army. “Whereas the prewar Army of the 1850’s was essentially a frontier Army, the postwar Army became something more,” writes army historian Maurice Matloff. “To defense of the frontier were added military occupation of the southern states, neutralization of the Mexican border during Napoleon’s colonial enterprise under Maximilian, elimination of a Fenian (Irish Brotherhood) threat to Canada in the Northeast, and dispersion of white marauders in the border states.”¹³ As Carrington and Fetterman’s Eighteenth Infantry Regiment began its mission to the frontier, politicians were still grappling with how to address these needs while transforming the army from a war machine of volunteers to a professional branch of the government.

Military and political leaders also struggled with the development of an agreeable Indian policy. The Union army had perfected the Napoleonic “strategy of annihilation” during the Civil War and the army that professional soldiers aspired to was a battle-driven military fraternity, not a national police force. Army officers who set policy and strategy based it on their own ideals and Civil War experiences rather than the reality of the current situation. This left the army without a common recognizable mission. In situations calling for occupation and policing, the army could only respond with blunt force because it was meant to be an offensive instrument. By way of comparison, Canada’s Mounted Police had greater success in peacefully controlling the relationships between Indians and settlers because, as historian Joseph Manzione points out, it was “a genuine police force, not an occupational army acting as a national posse.” Manzione described Canada’s frontier military as a “trained, highly visible, paramilitary police force that used relatively nonviolent tactics of civil regulation and crisis deterrence.” On the other hand, the United States’ Indian policy utilized a “highly visible, poorly trained army, [and a] crazy-quilt system of local justice and overlapping political venue.”¹⁴

The divided authority of the Department of War and the Department of the Interior over Indian policy was a constant source of conflict for officers in the field as well as those attempting to set policy. The two departments and their employees were locked in a never-ending jurisdictional battle over whether to address Indian problems with force or with patient negotiating. The result of this confusion and fractious infighting was an ambiguous mission and a record of failures including Fetterman’s annihilation. The military was in legislative and doctrinal limbo for more than eighteen months after the Civil War, and the Fetterman disaster was a manifestation of the chaos ensuing from the army’s massive restructuring without formal approval or direction.

After the Confederate surrender in April 1865, the army began the demobilization process. Nearly one million vol-

unteers were mustered out of service during the next twelve months. Although the regular army had retained its separate identity throughout the Civil War, it had shrunk to a fraction of its prewar enlistment due to the superior benefits and attractions of the volunteer regiments. The first step in regarrisoning the regular army was to rebuild the officer corps. A frenzy of veteran regular army and volunteer army officers vied for commissions. Regular officers who had held high rank in the volunteers reverted to their regular grades, while volunteers who aspired to a regular army career applied for the percent of vacancies apportioned to them. All contended for brevet grades in recognition of wartime services; these were not empty honors, as an officer could be assigned to commands based on brevet rank. Officers who were generals only a few months earlier found themselves as colonels, majors, and sometimes even captains, while colonels and majors found themselves lieutenants. Most officers' initial postwar assignment was recruitment duty, and by mid-1866 the army was re-recruited to more than thirty thousand men, a number hardly sufficient to meet the demands pouring in from the South and the West.¹⁵

Adding to the postwar chaos of the officer corps's realignment and massive demobilization and recruitment efforts was a complicated reorganization of the army's geographical commands. When examining the accountability and responsibility for the incident at Fort Phil Kearny, historians seldom look higher than Carrington or lower than Fetterman in the military chain of command. Yet, it is the turmoil, disorder, and political gyrations at the top of the military organization—including Pres. Andrew Johnson, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, General of the Army Ulysses S. Grant, and division commander Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman—that put Fetterman in his precarious position.

A few weeks after the close of the Civil War, Grant appointed Sherman to command the Military Division of the Missouri, basically the territory between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains north of Texas. Sherman, a westerner at heart

who lived in California, Kansas, and Missouri in the years before the war, had already moved his family from Ohio to St. Louis in anticipation of this frontier assignment. He knew that cities, roads, and railroads were soon to be built to support the thousands of emigrants seeking their fortunes in the West. According to Sherman's biographer, Robert Athearn, Sherman felt there was only one place for a soldier to be of value: "On the compass of destiny, the magnetic pull came from the West."¹⁶ He quickly established his division headquarters in St. Louis and set to figure out his mission.

It did not take long to determine that the division's main problem was the conflict with hostile Indians who had been surrounded and squeezed by white expansion and were going to fight for every inch of land they had left. However, before Sherman could address "the Indian problem," he had to fight the political machine in Washington for resources and authority. For the next several years, Sherman was battered between his western constituents clamoring for protection and a recalcitrant Congress of eastern city-dwellers who believed Indians should be handled by treaty. Sherman's initial strategies reflected these political problems. He sought to establish policies and procedures that would stretch his meager force as far as possible. He envisioned small army posts supporting cavalry expeditions used to protect emigrants that were to follow regular roads in an orderly fashion. Sherman knew that the intercontinental railroad would be completed in about a year, speeding up the settlement of the West, improving military efficiency, and ultimately sealing the fate of the nomadic Plains Indians. Thus, Sherman's first stance on the Plains was one of defense. He needed a year to eighteen months of peace until the railroad was complete and Congress allocated him adequate resources so he could enlist, equip, train, and mount his new cavalry.

Unfortunately, Sherman was not given a grace period to recruit and train a new frontier army. He had to make many decisions on the fly as situations arose within his territory, and frequently Grant or the War Department made decisions for