

Marshall Pursues the Hostiles

Colonel Marshall had left in his pursuit of the fleeing hostiles on October the Thirteenth. Along with troops from the Sixth, Seventh and Third Regiments, he was also accompanied by Lorenzo Lawrence and John Otherday to serve as scouts. The scouts found the trail of a large party of Dakota the very next day and the command set off in pursuit of it. But it soon became apparent that the marching infantry would never catch up to the Dakota, so Marshall and the detachment from the Third, who were now all mounted, had to leave them behind. A few days later they managed to catch up to the fugitives near the James River and, there being few braves among them, apprehended them without a shot being fired. The Sioux women wailed upon their capture, believing that they were all going to be killed. However, once Colonel Marshall reassured them that he only wanted them to return to their former homes, the Indians came along peacefully. They reunited with the rest of the troops on their way back toward camp and all seemed to be going as planned, until they ran out of food and had to confiscate some from their captives. Forced now to travel at the slow pace of the infantry, Marshall ordered his two scouts to ride ahead to Camp Release and send back additional supplies.

Marshall feared that their expedition was turning into a fiasco. Not only were they all hungry and cold, but they had to contend with several large prairie fires burning to the north and west which were sending noxious smoke their way and covering them with a gray ash that fell down like snow at times. Such fires were a normal occurrence on the prairie in the fall, part of the natural cycle which stimulated the growth of fresh grass in the spring by clearing away dead vegetation and adding nutrients to the soil. The prairie tribes sometimes even set these fires on purpose to renew their pastures. But the soldiers would not have appreciated their benefits, even if they knew about them, as they choked on the smoke and brushed soot off their uniforms and equipment. It was, as Colonel Marshall later described it, “like marching through the outer provinces of hell.”

A supply column finally reached them that morning accompanied by one of General Sibley’s staff officers. “General Sibley sends his compliments, Colonel Marshall, and his congratulations on your successful mission,” said the young major after introducing himself.

Marshall was in no mood for pleasantries. He could not see what was so successful about expending that much effort to corral a party of only a hundred Indians, most of whom were women and children. He realized it would be unfair of him to take out his frustrations on the young major, however, so he held his tongue. “Thank you, Major. Please give my compliments to the general when you see him. Does he have any messages for me?”

“Yes, sir. General Sibley wanted you to know that we will be abandoning Camp Release in the next few days and our camp at the Yellow Medicine also. All of the prisoners and their women and children, and the friendly Indians as well, will be moved to a camp on the Redwood River.”

“I thought we were going to send the prisoners to Fort Snelling,” Marshall commented.

“No, apparently those plans have changed, sir. Our orders from General Pope are now to complete the trials at Camp Sibley, and--.”

“Camp Sibley?”

“Yes, that is what the general has named our future camp on the Redwood, sir.”

“Oh, I see,” replied Marshall. “Please continue, Major.”

“Yes, sir. Well sir, after we conclude the trials, those that have been convicted will be moved to a prison camp at Mankato where the condemned will be executed.”

“And the others?”

“They will be taken to Fort Snelling where they will stay until a suitable place can be found to relocate them, sir.”

“Very well, major.” Marshall removed his hat to shake off a layer of soot. “Please tell the general that we will arrive at Camp Release within the next two days.”

