

CHAPTER ONE



The Annuities are Late

*Headquarters Fort Ripley
June 18, 1862*

[Special Order, No. 30]

*1st Lieut. T. J. Sheehan of Company C, Fifth Regiment,
Minnesota Volunteers will proceed with fifty men to Fort
Ridgely and there report to Capt. Marsh, commanding post,
for further orders.*

*Francis Hall
Captain
Commanding Post*

Sunday, June 29, 1862

First Lieutenant Timothy J. Sheehan was one of those lucky individuals who feel that they have found the role in life for which they were born. In Lieutenant Sheehan's case that calling was the command of troops in

the field. At the age of twenty-three he enlisted in the Fourth Minnesota Volunteer Regiment, where his superiors quickly took note of his intelligence, enthusiasm, and knack for making good decisions. Because the rapidly expanding Union Army needed every man that was qualified for leadership, he was quickly promoted to sergeant, then second lieutenant, and finally, on March 9, 1862, to first lieutenant. This last promotion he accepted with mixed emotions because it meant a transfer to the newly formed Fifth Minnesota. The Fourth Minnesota was being shipped off to fight the Confederacy in the spring of '62, while the Fifth would remain behind to guard the Minnesota frontier. But his commanding officer assured Sheehan that the Fifth would be following them into battle soon, and he should not pass up a promotion which everyone knew he deserved. So with some reluctance he accepted the new position and was assigned to Company C of the Fifth Regiment at Fort Ripley.

As the cold, wet spring unfolded, Sheehan began to have regrets about his decision. The troops were at Fort Ripley ostensibly to protect American lives and property in the area, but there were few settlers that far north in Minnesota, so their real purpose was to back up the local Indian agent in his dealings with the Chippewa. The Chippewa did not seem much of a threat to Lieutenant Sheehan. In fact, most of the tribe viewed the whites as a source of help against their hereditary enemy, the Sioux, with whom they had been fighting in northern Minnesota and southern Canada for over one hundred years. The Chippewa had been the first to come in contact with white men and therefore the first to acquire firearms. They might resent and disdain the white man's culture, but they were not about to give up this advantage. As a result, the main task of the American army was to keep the Chippewa and Sioux from fighting, which seemed to Sheehan to be the job of a policeman rather than a soldier. Besides, it was a next to impossible task to accomplish since the war between the two tribes was fought in the form of small hit-and-run raids that could not even be called real battles. By the time the army was aware that a raid had taken place it was already over and the culprits long gone. The best that the foot soldiers could do was protect the agency, which did not appear to need protection in the first place, so Sheehan was not at all unhappy when new orders arrived to lead a detachment to Fort Ridgely. It might not be the storming of Richmond, but at least it was something different.

The fifty enlisted men assigned to the detachment were not disappointed either, both because they wished to relieve their own boredom and because

they would be serving under Sheehan. What makes some individuals natural leaders is often hard to define. Tim Sheehan was not imposing physically. He was of average height and weight with fair skin and dark, reddish-brown hair. He had a tendency to freckle under the summer sun and affected a thick mustache that was lighter in color than the hair on his head. He smiled a lot and had a good sense of humor, though he was certainly not a joker. His voice was deep and firm and his speech had the hint of an Irish brogue that he had picked up from his immigrant parents. At twenty-four years of age he was younger than many of the men in his command yet was admired and respected by all. Perhaps it was his self-confident way of giving orders so that his men never questioned whether it was the right one or not. Maybe it was that he treated even his lowest subordinate with fairness and respect, always using praise rather than punishment whenever possible to get the best out of his men.

Sitting astride his horse at the head of a column of fifty men and three supply wagons, Lieutenant Sheehan could see smoke on the horizon, white smoke from a chimney. Perhaps it was smoke from cooking fires at Fort Ridgely. That was the lieutenant's hope. It would mean the end of a two-hundred-mile march from the wet, mosquito-infested forests of the Chippewa to the open prairie inhabited by the Sioux. Sheehan was familiar with this country, having been raised in the southern Minnesota town of Albert Lee. The forest had been depressing, but this felt more like home. As for the Sioux, Sheehan knew relatively nothing, nor did he know what his mission was to be as far as the Indians were concerned. Some years back there had been a Sioux chief named Inkpaduta, he recalled, whose band had gone on a rampage in northern Iowa killing a good number of white settlers, after which they had simply vanished and had not been seen since. However, that group was considered to be renegades even by their own people, or so he had been told. These Sioux were supposed to be peaceful and friendly toward the whites, yet Fort Ridgely needed more troops. The "why" of that had been bothering Sheehan for several days as they got closer to their destination.

Engrossed in thought, Sheehan did not realize that his mount had come to a stop and was startled when addressed by his second-in-command, Sergeant Hicks.

"Sir, want me to have the men fall out for a spell?" asked Hicks. "They can fill their canteens at the creek up yonder."

“Yes, go ahead First Sergeant,” replied Sheehan, noticing for the first time the small creek about fifty yards ahead.

As Hicks shouted out the order, Sheehan dismounted and led his horse to the creek for a drink, thinking how glad he was that the sergeant had been included in his command. John Hicks was from east Tennessee, a part of the South that was still staunchly pro-Union. He had come north some years before to seek his fortune on the northern frontier but without much success. Then the war broke out and he became one of the original members of the Fifth Minnesota. Much like Sheehan, he had found soldiering to his liking. Tall and lean, with a large nose and prominent jaw, Hicks had a naturally commanding presence. It was no surprise that he and Sheehan developed a good working relationship.

After his mount was well watered, Sheehan led him back to the road where Sergeant Hicks was taking a long drink from his canteen. The men sat on the grassy shoulder drinking and gnawing on squares of hardtack.

“Have the teamsters water their horses, Sergeant,” said Sheehan. “Then we push on. I want to get to Ridgely before dark.”

“Very good, sir. We don’t want to keep the Sioux waiting,” Hicks replied with a straight face, though their mutual ignorance concerning the Sioux had been a source of discussion and amusement between them for the past several days.

Sheehan grinned. “No we don’t, First Sergeant. I’m sure they can hardly wait for our arrival. Maybe they’ll be kind enough to tell us why we are there.”

“Hmm. Doubtful, sir. But I’m sure Captain Marsh will have an opinion.”

“No doubt, Sergeant. No doubt.”

Lieutenant Sheehan’s command reached Fort Ridgely late that afternoon. The road approached the fort from the northeast, descending into a tree-lined ravine. It crossed Sheehan’s mind that the ravine would be a good place for an ambush, though of course he was not expecting one. Halting their march, Sheehan ordered Sergeant Hicks to spruce up the column. He wanted his detachment to make a good impression when they made their entrance, and he was pleased when the men stepped off smartly moments later as they headed up out of the ravine and turned south on the road leading to the fort.

The first buildings to come into view were a row of log cabins running in a line west to east. Beyond those were a pair of large stone buildings with wood-shingled roofs standing at right angles to each other. A soldier appeared between the two buildings, waved at them, and then took off at

a trot, disappearing from view. “Must be alerting the welcoming committee,” commented Sergeant Hicks.

The column proceeded to a wooden guardhouse manned by a corporal and a private who both came to attention and saluted as they approached. Sheehan identified himself and his unit and was directed by the corporal to turn left when they reached the end of the second stone building, which was identified as the commissary. There, Sheehan was told, he would find the parade ground and the post commander’s office.

As the column turned left to pass between the stone commissary and a wood frame building to the south, through a gap euphemistically called the “sally port,” they saw before them the parade ground, a flat expanse of bare, trampled dirt bordered by buildings everywhere except to the southeast. In the center was a flagpole flanked by three twelve-pound howitzers, each with its own stack of round shot. Next to that was their welcoming committee—three soldiers identifiable upon approach as a second lieutenant, a sergeant, and a private. With his smart, blue uniform the lieutenant, who was obviously the youngest of the three, gave the impression of a boy dressing up in his father’s clothes, so much so that Sheehan had to remind himself that the young man was an officer in the Union army and therefore deserved respect. All three saluted smartly as the column drew up to them, and the private stepped up to take the horse’s bridle as Sheehan dismounted. Trying not to show how wobbly his legs felt after a full day in the saddle, Sheehan extended his hand to the second lieutenant and gave him one of his patented Sheehan smiles, which had its usual effect. “Welcome to Fort Ridgely, sir,” offered the young lieutenant as he took Sheehan’s hand. “Second Lieutenant Thomas Gere at your service, sir. I am the adjutant to Captain Marsh.”

“Pleased to meet you, Mr. Gere. I’m Tim Sheehan and...Sergeant?” he called, turning to look for Hicks, who stepped up quickly. “This is my second-in-command, First Sergeant John Hicks.”

“Sir!” Hicks called out, coming to full attention and saluting smartly. The expression on his face showed no hint that he shared his commander’s opinion of Lieutenant Gere’s youth.

“Sir, allow me to present First Sergeant McGrew,” said Gere, after returning Hicks’s salute. “Sergeant McGrew is our post quartermaster.” McGrew, a short, stocky man with a full, black beard, stepped forward to salute Sheehan. He gave the immediate impression of a veteran soldier. “Captain Marsh sends his compliments, sir, and requests that you report to him as soon as you’ve been shown to your quarters and had something to eat.”

“That’s certainly thoughtful of the captain,” replied Sheehan. “What about my men?”

“Sergeant McGrew will direct them, sir. I’m sure they’re ready to eat a horse,” offered Gere with a chuckle. “Begging your pardon, sir,” he added quickly, his smile vanishing.

“Not at all, Lieutenant!” cried Sheehan with a laugh. “You’re exactly right about that. In fact, I’m sure they could eat two horses, and so could I,” he added, putting Gere immediately at ease.

“Then allow me to show you to your quarters, sir,” said Gere, coming to attention again. “The private will see to your horse, sir.”

“The horse first, Lieutenant Gere. That is, the one we are having for supper. Then you can give me the grand tour.”

“Very good, sir,” replied the young lieutenant. “Then allow me to show the lieutenant to the commissary.”

Sheehan dug into a plate of beans and slightly overdone beef along with some warmed-over biscuits slathered with fresh-churned butter, washing each bite down with freshly brewed coffee. He felt a little guilty that his men were probably cooking their own supper, but he was too famished to wait. The large commissary was empty except for the cook and several enlisted men on cleanup duty. Lieutenant Gere sat opposite Sheehan at one end of a long wooden table, sipping a cup of coffee. “I hope I’m not keeping you from your duties, Lieutenant,” said Sheehan after a long silence of blessed consumption.

“Oh no, sir. Right now I’m performing my duties by making the lieutenant feel at home. Captain’s orders.”

Sheehan chuckled, then proceeded to bombard Gere with questions about the Sioux, Fort Ridgely, Company B, and other related topics. Gere told him about his own company’s trek to Ridgely in the middle of winter, during which time he was in command of the company and the fort until Marsh arrived. He had high praise for Captain Marsh’s leadership and competence and how he had gone about training Company B to be a first-class unit. He also had high praise for Ordinance Sergeant John Jones and Quartermaster James McGrew, whom he thought should be an officer and soon would be promoted to one. He admitted that he had not known much about soldiering before coming to Ridgely but felt that he had learned a great deal from the aforementioned men. Sheehan listened with approval to the young lieutenant. He liked men who could admit ignorance and show a willingness to learn. The young man might look like a boy, but he was obviously on the way

to becoming a good officer. He was disappointed, however, when it came to Gere's knowledge of the Sioux. Naturally the young man could not be blamed, as he had had few chances to leave the fort, but the ignorance of his fellow officers about a potential, if not actual, enemy was beginning to annoy Sheehan. Of course he had to include himself in that group.

After supper, Gere took Sheehan to the officers' quarters just south of the stone commissary and showed him where he could bunk. "Should I send a man to retrieve your gear, sir?"

"How long are we going to be here do you think, Lieutenant?" Sheehan asked.

"Not more than a day, I believe, sir."

"Then I'd like to report to Captain Marsh now. I'll pick up what I need from the wagon afterward."

"Very well, sir."

"And by the way, Mr. Gere, where are we going tomorrow?"

"Oh, well, we're going to Yellow Medicine I believe, sir."

Wherever that is, thought Sheehan.

As the two officers approached the headquarters building, they could see the men of Company C preparing dinner over their fires in the flat, open area to the east where they had pitched their tents. Sheehan thought about walking over to check that they had everything they needed but dismissed the notion, realizing that Sergeants McGrew and Hicks were certainly capable of handling the job on their own.

The outer office of headquarters was sparsely furnished. A map table covered with paper sat to the left, and to the right was a simple wooden writing desk surrounded by chairs of mixed age and heritage. A small, dark man of middle age in civilian clothes occupied one of the chairs, and behind the desk sat Captain John Marsh, a well-built, round-faced young man. Both men rose as Gere and Sheehan entered. "Ah, Lieutenant Sheehan," the captain greeted him, smiling. Sheehan strode quickly up to the desk, came to attention, and saluted. "First Lieutenant Timothy J. Sheehan with Company C reporting as ordered, sir."

"At ease, Lieutenant, and welcome to Fort Ridgely," replied Marsh, smiling and offering his hand. After shaking hands, Captain Marsh introduced the civilian beside him as Peter Quinn, the post interpreter. Quinn's handshake was firm but his smile fleeting. He looked to be part Indian, and Sheehan hoped he could get some information about the Sioux from him despite his obvious reserve. "I trust that your trip was uneventful and that

Lieutenant Gere and Sergeant McGrew have satisfactorily seen to all the requirements of you and your men,” continued Marsh after the introductions.

“Much more than satisfactory, sir,” replied Sheehan. He liked the look of Captain Marsh, though he was slightly amused by the officer’s large mustache, which grew in one piece with his equally bushy sideburns, a style that was popular in General McClellan’s Eastern army but unusual on the Minnesota frontier. “The sergeant and Lieutenant Gere here have been most helpful.”

“Good. Glad to hear it, Lieutenant. Please have a seat. You’ve had a long journey.” Marsh returned to his seat behind the desk. Sheehan took a chair while Gere remained standing at ease. “I know that you will find Mr. Gere a great help on your mission to Yellow Medicine,” continued the captain, shuffling through the papers on his desk. “Speaking of which, I’ve just completed your orders. Why don’t you look them over? I’m sure you’ll have some questions.” Marsh handed a single sheet of paper to Sheehan and waited in silence as he read it.

Headquarters Fort Ridgely

[Special Order No. 57]

1st Lieut. T. J. Sheehan, Fifth Minnesota Regiment, with detachment of fifty men of Company C and one lieutenant and fifty men of Company B of said regiment, will proceed forthwith by the most expeditious route to the Sioux Agency on the Yellow Medicine River, and report to Major Thomas Galbraith, Sioux agent at that place, for the purpose of preserving order and protecting United States property during the time of the annuity payment for the present year.

2d. Interpreter Quinn will accompany the troops.

3d. The A.A.Q.M. and A.A.C.S. will furnish the necessary transportation, forage, and subsistence for the command.

*John S. Marsh,
Capt. Fifth Regiment, Commanding Post*

Sheehan looked up from the paper. “Sir, I do have some questions. I have to admit that I am not very knowledgeable about the Sioux or the country hereabouts. I’d appreciate anything that you could tell me.”

Captain John Marsh was one of the most experienced officers in the Fifth Minnesota. He had been in the Union army since early in 1861 and seen action in Virginia with a Wisconsin regiment. In the winter of '61, however, he requested to be detached from his duties to join one of the new Minnesota volunteer regiments being formed in his home state. Not only was he assigned to the Fifth Minnesota, which was being organized at Fort Snelling just south of the state capital, but he was promoted to captain and given command of Company B, garrisoning Fort Ridgely. The company was already in place at the fort when he arrived there in early April. He assumed command from the recently promoted nineteen-year-old second lieutenant, Thomas Gere, who was only too happy to turn over command of the fort to the more experienced, twenty-eight-year-old captain.

Like Sheehan, Marsh found garrison life dull. Aside from a few small incidents, the Sioux did not seem to be a threat to anyone but the Chippewa. In fact, the vaunted Sioux warriors seemed to spend most of their days sitting around eating, smoking, and talking while the women did all the work. Except for the occasional hunt or raid on the Chippewa, these so-called blanket Indians seemed content to do very little and perfectly happy to receive handouts from the government. As at Fort Ripley, Marsh was technically supposed to keep the Sioux and Chippewa from fighting, but with less than one hundred unmounted infantry it was an impossible task. Therefore, as long as they did not bother the agency people or the local settlers, there was little for Captain Marsh to do. That did not mean that he could not put his time at the fort to good use, however.

Captain Marsh was not lazy, nor would he allow anyone in his command to be. Eventually they would be sent to fight the rebellion, and in preparation for this he had the men follow a rigorous training schedule. He insisted that every man in his command be a proficient marksman to the best of their ability, even though the company was armed with foreign-made Lorenz rifled muskets of questionable quality. The fort was also equipped with six artillery pieces—one six-pound and four twelve-pound howitzers, and a twenty-four-pound garrison gun—which unlike the rifles were up to modern standards. And he was fortunate enough to have under his command Ordnance Sergeant John Jones, on detached duty from the Third Minnesota Light Artillery, whose expertise was used to train the men in the use of these weapons, so that by the end of June Captain Marsh had several well-trained teams for each gun. By the time Lieutenant Sheehan's detachment arrived

at the fort, there was no question that Company B was a well-drilled and well-trained outfit.

Unfortunately, although they were well prepared for battle against the Confederate Army, the men of Company B knew no more about Indians or Indian fighting than their commander. Nevertheless, Captain Marsh did his best to provide Lieutenant Sheehan with what he knew of the Sioux and the situation at the Yellow Medicine Agency.

“The Sioux are a primitive people just like the Chippewa,” Captain Marsh began, leaning back in his chair with his arms folded across his chest. “They have leaders but no real system of government. At least not one most white men could recognize. They are divided into four bands. The Mdewakantons and Wahpekutes are serviced by the Lower Agency on the Redwood River, just fifteen miles or so southwest of here, and the Wahpetons and Sissetons draw their annuities at the Upper Agency on the Yellow Medicine River. Since you will be going to the Upper Agency, you will be dealing with the latter two groups. There are Indians at both agencies who have been converted to Christianity, and they farm their land and dress like whites. How deep their conversions are, I cannot say, although the missionaries—Williamson, Riggs, and Hinman—are convinced that they are sincere, and they have spent many years working with them. You won’t have any trouble from them, and in any case they are a small minority. The rest of the Sioux try to maintain their traditional way of life, and some are highly resentful of the whites and Christian Indians. They may be a source of trouble for you, but I don’t think it will be anything you cannot handle.”

Captain Marsh paused to take a cigar from a box on his desk, offering one to the lieutenant. Sheehan declined but took the opportunity to ask another question. “Sir, can you tell me anything about the leaders of this potentially hostile group?”

“Well, sir,” replied Marsh, lighting his cigar and waving away the smoke, “what you have there is the crux of the problem. The Sioux don’t have political leaders as we know them. They have village chiefs and war chiefs and so on, but their authority is limited. It is very difficult to know who is in charge, if anybody.”

“I’ve heard about Little Crow,” offered Sheehan.

“Oh, yes, he’s a village chief of some influence to be sure. He speaks for the Mdewakantons in councils and sometimes the other groups as well. But you needn’t be concerned about him. He is almost a farmer-Indian, even attends church, I am told. In fact...perhaps you’ve heard of Inkpaduta?”

“Yes, sir, I have.”

“Then you’ve probably heard that he has caused all kinds of mischief to the south. Well, Little Crow himself led an expedition against Inkpaduta. Killed one of his sons. No, Lieutenant, I don’t anticipate any problems from Little Crow and his people. Your problems, if any, will come from a few young hotheads, not the major chiefs. You see, Lieutenant, the problem is that the tribe’s annual annuities are late in arriving. The government wanted to pay them in paper money, but the Sioux being a simple people did not want the white man’s paper. They insisted on gold, and that is something Washington is a little short on right now, as you can imagine. The result is that they have become impatient, and that has made the agent, Major Galbraith, nervous.” Marsh paused for a moment as if weighing his next statement. “Just between us, Lieutenant, I do not have much confidence in Major Galbraith. He does not have the knowledge of the Sioux that his predecessor, Major Brown, had. Brown is married to a Sioux woman, in fact. The major—a strictly honorary title, as you may know—has been absent from his post for most of the spring. And now that he has returned...well...let’s just say that a few painted Indians make him a bit nervous.” Marsh paused to take a deep draw on his cigar. “No, sir, do not expect an all-out Indian attack. The Sioux have never done so before and they won’t now. Your job will be to just keep order. Police work, pure and simple.”

Sheehan glanced occasionally at Quinn during the captain’s monologue, but the interpreter’s face never changed. This was not too surprising. In Sheehan’s limited experience with the Indians he had found that they tended to keep their thoughts to themselves, and he assumed it was the same with half-breeds. But he was hoping to get an idea from Quinn about the accuracy of Marsh’s assessments. Not that he distrusted Marsh, who was obviously a very competent officer, but Sheehan sensed that the captain had his eyes focused on a different conflict. His knowledge of the Sioux was likely limited by meager experience, lack of resources, and his own attitude toward his assignment as being a temporary one. Marsh himself confirmed this with his next statement. “Mr. Sheehan, I must confess to you that I am not an experienced Indian fighter, but this I do know: we do not have enough men here to do more than protect US property. We cannot prevent Sioux war parties from attacking the Chippewa as we are asked to do. First, because dismounted troops cannot keep up with the Sioux, and second, because they are not restricted to their reservation. They come and go as they please,

and we could not stop them from doing so in any case. I have already given you my assessment of the threat they pose and our ability to counter that threat. You seem concerned about your assignment, as any good officer should be, but let me assure you I would not put anyone in my command in needless peril.”

“Sir, if I have given you the wrong impression, I—.”

“Not at all, Lieutenant, you’ve made a fine impression, I assure you. Let’s get this job done here to the best of our abilities and get on with the main task of this army, crushing the rebellion! Now then, Lieutenant,” continued Marsh, rubbing out his cigar, “do you have any other questions?”

“Yes, sir, I do have one more request. If you would be so kind as to show me a map of the area and advise me of the proper route of march, I would greatly appreciate it.”

“Certainly, Lieutenant, I was just about to do that. Let’s adjourn to the map table, gentlemen.” Marsh rose from his chair and Sheehan and Quinn followed. They gathered around the table and watched in silence as the captain shuffled through a pile of papers. “Ah, yes, here we are. Mr. Gere, if you would assist me?” Gere held down one side of the map as Marsh unrolled it. Sheehan and Quinn stood on either side of the captain. The map revealed the whole Minnesota River Valley. From Big Stone Lake on Minnesota’s western boundary, the river flowed southeast for about two hundred miles to the town of Mankato, where it took an abrupt turn to the north. Staying on a mostly northerly course, it flowed about thirty-five miles, past St. Peter, Traverse Des Sioux, and Henderson, after which it turned northeast, winding its way to eventually enter the Mississippi immediately east of Fort Snelling. The Sioux reservation was identified by a dotted line starting in the southeast just west of New Ulm and ending above Big Stone Lake, which was actually not a lake at all but part of the river. “Here is where we are.” Marsh pointed to a dot representing the fort, about fifteen miles up the river from New Ulm on the eastern side. “And here are the two agencies,” he continued, pointing first to the Lower Agency about five miles below the confluence of the Redwood and the Minnesota, and then to the Upper Agency at the corner formed by the Yellow Medicine River and the Minnesota. Sheehan judged the distance from the fort to the Upper Agency to be about fifty miles.

“You’ll need to cross the Minnesota here at the ferry,” said Marsh, pointing to a spot on the river directly across from the Lower Agency. “And by the way,” he said, turning to Quinn, “there is no need for you to stay longer,

Mr. Quinn. You may take your leave if you wish.” Quinn nodded and left without a word. “Mr. Quinn is a man of few words, as you may have noticed, Mr. Sheehan,” Marsh commented when the interpreter had left. “Must be his Indian blood. But he is a good man, nonetheless. You can trust him when it comes to his knowledge of the Sioux. But as I was saying, you will need to use the ferry to cross. The river is rather high this time of year. From the Lower Agency you will then proceed northwest over the Redwood, past Rice Creek, and eventually over the Yellow Medicine to the Upper Agency, where you will report to Major Galbraith.”

Sheehan was disappointed that Quinn had been dismissed. He had hoped to approach him after the meeting for some more information. But Quinn would be traveling with his command, so there would be plenty of time to talk with him later. “These marks on the map, sir,” Sheehan said, pointing them out, “the names are unfamiliar.”

“Those are Indian villages, Lieutenant. Each one is named for its village chief. Here you see this one is Little Crow’s village.” Marsh pointed to a spot just above the Lower Agency.

“Ah, yes, I see now, sir.” There seemed to be lots of those villages, Sheehan observed, some with names that made sense to him, like Big Eagle and Traveling Hail. But others, like Red Middle Voice, Akipa, and Wabasha, left Sheehan wondering what they meant. Two familiar Indian names, Shakopee and Mankato, were also the names of Minnesota towns. He wondered if the towns were named after the chiefs or the other way around.

“Was there anything else you wanted to know, Lieutenant?” asked Marsh, breaking Sheehan’s train of thought.

“Ah, no, sir. Sorry, sir. I suppose I was wool gathering there for a moment, but I was just wondering—but no, sir, it’s not important.”

“Well then, I think our business is concluded here for the moment. I’m sure you will want a good night’s sleep before your journey tomorrow. I know I would.”

Realizing that he was being dismissed, Sheehan came to attention. “Thank you, sir. I should see to my men,” he said saluting. “Thank you again for your patience. I apologize for my ignorance and taking up so much of your time.”

“No apology necessary, Lieutenant.” Marsh returned the salute and smiled warmly. “My father used to say that ignorance is sin only when you don’t admit it.”

“Those are good words to remember, sir. Thank you again.”

“Not at all, Lieutenant.” As they walked to the door, Marsh placed his hand on Sheehan’s shoulder. “One more thing, Lieutenant. There is no need to make haste to Yellow Medicine. Your troops have just completed a long march. Take your time and get the lay of the land.”

Sheehan thanked the captain once more, and he and Gere both saluted again before leaving. Gere followed the lieutenant as he turned toward Company C’s encampment. “I don’t really think I’ll need any help from here on, Lieutenant,” Sheehan said over his shoulder. “I’m just going to check in with my sergeant and get my kit from the wagon.”

“Of course, sir. I just thought that if your men needed anything I would know where it was.”

“Well, that’s true. Thank you, Lieutenant.”

Most of the men had already turned in and the campsite was completely dark save for one campfire still flickering. Sitting beside it was a private who was slumped over sound asleep. They passed him quietly and presently found Sergeant Hicks by the wagons. “Evening, sir,” said Hicks, with a salute toward Sheehan and a nod toward Gere.

“Everything all right, Sergeant?” asked Sheehan, returning the salute.

“Yes, sir. We had a good feed, and the boys were bushed so most turned in early. I posted two sentries out south of the wagons, and the teamsters are watering the horses at a spring out to the south there.” Hicks gestured into the darkness where they could hear the horses faintly making their return. “Maybe I’d better light a torch so they can find their way back.”

“A moment, Sergeant,” Sheehan said, touching his arm to stop him.

“Lieutenant, do you think we need to put out sentries?” he asked Gere. “I assume that you already have men posted.”

“Yes we do, sir, and, no, I don’t think you need sentries. I’m sure the men need their rest. In fact I was just about to make the rounds of the posts.”

“Good. You can relieve the sentries, Sergeant.”

“Very good, sir. By the way, sir, I took the liberty of hauling out your kit. It’s down there by the wagon wheel.”

“Thanks, Sergeant,” replied Sheehan, reaching down for his knapsack. “Please carry on.”

“Well, sir, I suppose I had best see to my duties,” offered Gere as the sergeant strode away. “Will there be anything else, sir?”

“Just one thing, Lieutenant,” answered Sheehan, shouldering his pack. “Since we’re both junior officers and we will be working together for a time, when there is just the two of us, why don’t you call me Tim?”

“Well, thank you, sir—uh, I mean, Tim. Please call me Tom.”

“I’d be pleased to, Tom.” Sheehan extended his hand. “Just point me in the right direction before you go.”

Gere shook his hand and took his leave. Blushing at the compliment from a man he already instinctively admired, Tom was glad it was dark. He was well aware of how boyish he looked, and he wanted to make a manly impression.

Sheehan noticed a flicker of lightning in the sky to the southwest as he made his way back across the parade ground. *That might slow us down a bit tomorrow*, he mused.

Monday, June 30, 1862

Sheehan fell immediately asleep and nothing woke him, including a torrential thunderstorm that arrived in the early morning, until he heard the bugler blowing reveille. Heavy rain rattled on the roof, and weak sunlight barely illuminated the room. He was sitting on the edge of the bunk still trying to remember where he was when Lieutenant Gere burst through the door, slamming it behind him against the wind and rain. “Good morning Lieu—uh, Tim,” Gere greeted him, shaking out his wet slicker. “It looks like we’re going to get a late start today. The mud is up to your boot tops on the parade ground, and the trails won’t be any better.”

Sheehan rubbed his face, acknowledging Gere’s assessment with a grunt and a nod, then rose to his feet. “I’d better see to my men,” he said, looking around for a washbasin.

“No need to hurry. I’ve already sent your men to the barracks to dry out, and there is nothing else to be done for the moment.”

“Once again I am grateful to you, Tom. You are definitely a model of efficiency.”

“Thank you, sir. I take that as a compliment,” Gere replied with a grin.

The storm blew over by mid-morning, but the mud was still there, and when the sun came out the humidity was palpable. Noon came and went before the detachment could get underway and even then it moved at a crawl. It was all the horses could do to get the heavily laden wagons and twelve-pound cannon moving in the ankle-deep mud. As a result, the head of the column did not reach the ferry on the Minnesota River until early evening, and by that time both horses and men were sweat-soaked, mud-covered and thoroughly exhausted. Nevertheless, Sheehan wanted to at least get across the river, so they spent several more hours ferrying the column across. The

ferryman, a French settler called Old Mauly, did the best he could, but it was well after dark by the time the detachment went into camp close to the Lower Agency. Sheehan was disappointed that he did not have more of a chance to look things over. It took all the strength he had left just to take the first watch with Sergeant Hicks, and he was very relieved when the time came to turn it over to Lieutenant Gere and Sergeant Trescott of Company B.

Tuesday, July 1, 1862

Seeing no need to hurry, and wanting to give his men time to wash up in the river, Sheehan did not get the column moving until mid-morning. Meanwhile he made a brief inspection of the agency, accompanied by Peter Quinn, and was impressed by what he saw. It looked like a well organized small town, with several substantial brick buildings, which Quinn identified as warehouses for the traders' stores. A dozen or so well-built frame houses were pointed out to him as the homes of the traders, teachers, and other workers, both white and mixed-breed, that worked at the agency. There was also a school, a church, and a sawmill. The people they saw at the agency were all dressed like Americans, including the handful of full-blooded Sioux that Quinn identified as Christian farmer Indians. Sheehan was disappointed they did not encounter any non-Christian Sioux. He would have liked to at least shake hands with them to assess their attitude toward a man in uniform, but none seemed to be about that morning. His companion was also a bit of a disappointment. While Quinn answered every question when asked, he did not volunteer any information. Sheehan searched for some way to break through the interpreter's natural reserve, and finally, as they were returning to the camp, he said, "You know, Mr. Quinn, there were some names that I saw on the map yesterday that I was wondering about. I know that each village is named after its chief. But two of the names, Mankato and Shakopee, are also the names of white towns. Was the town of Mankato named after a chief?"

Smiling, Quinn actually chuckled at Sheehan's suggestion. "No, Lieutenant. In Dakota *mankato* means 'Blue Earth.' You can see the blue earth on the bluffs near the town. Chief Mankato was named for that bluff also. Mankato is a good man and a respected warrior among the Dakota, but I don't think he is seen that way among the whites."

"And Shakopee?" asked Sheehan.

"I am not sure. *Shakopee* is the word for the number six in Dakota. The Dakota village is named after Old Shakopee. I don't know about the town. Old Shakopee was also well respected, and strong for the white man, but

he died a few months ago. His son, Eatoka, which translates as Another Language, is now chief and took his name, which is the custom. He is called Little Shakopee. He is not like his father.”

“It does not sound like you approve of Little Shakopee,” offered Sheehan.

“I make no judgment, Lieutenant, but I do not believe he has his father’s good sense.”

“Do you believe that he could be a problem?”

“Perhaps, but more likely the problem will come from his uncle, Red Middle Voice.”

“I see,” said Sheehan, though he really did not yet. But at least he was finally getting some really useful information.

Chief Little Crow, born Taoyateduta, or His Strong Red Nation, was also seeking answers that morning. To the casual observer he would not have appeared to be a man of much importance, but in many ways he was the most powerful leader among the Mdewakanton Dakota and perhaps even among all four Minnesota bands. He was a village chief, renowned warrior, former whiskey trader, prospective farmer, and speaker for the Mdewakantons. Speaker was his only truly elected office, and he was well suited for it. His prowess as an orator was known among both his own people and the white men, and when he spoke in council his audience always felt that they were seeing and hearing the greatest of the Dakota chiefs. In face and form he epitomized the white man’s perception of a Sioux chief, possessing piercing dark eyes, high cheekbones, a hawk-like nose, and full, expressive lips. He was slender and well-built, with no hint of a middle-aged potbelly, and at the age of fifty-two he was still fit enough to keep up with younger men in either the hunt or the warpath, although of late he had done little of either.

None of his leadership qualities had been evident in his youth, however. Though his father was village chief of the Kaposia Mdewakantons, who lived near what became the city of St. Paul, Taoyateduta was not popular with the Kaposia. As a young man he was fond of alcohol and other men’s wives, and was generally known as an indifferent hunter and warrior. His reputation became so bad that he was forced to leave home and seek asylum with the Wahpeton band at Lac Qui Parle on the Minnesota River. But despite his obvious shortcomings he remained his father’s favorite son, and even in exile his father let it be known that he wished the honorary title of Little Crow to be passed to Taoyateduta upon his death. This did not sit well with most of the Kaposia, especially his two half brothers.

During his exile, Taoyateduta went through a transformation, however. At Lac Qui Parle he became a successful whiskey trader and accumulated enough wealth to purchase four wives, all sisters, from a prominent Wahpeton chief. Even while in the whiskey trade he gave up drinking himself and became quite popular among the young Wahpeton men, who pledged to help him gain the chieftainship of the Kaposia when the time was right.

Upon his father's death, Taoyateduta returned to the Kaposia with his family and supporters, but instead of seeking out his rivals he let them come to him. Eventually he was confronted by one of his half brothers, who threatened to shoot him where he stood in the middle of the village. Defiant, Taoyateduta folded his arms across his chest and said, "Shoot me then, where all can see." The brother did not back down, as perhaps Taoyateduta had hoped, but fired with his old muzzle-loading pistol. The bullet penetrated Taoyateduta's wrist and forearm but fortunately not his chest. Nevertheless, the wounds were grave, and it took him months to recover, leaving him with life-long deformities. Whether an act of bravery or foolishness, Taoyateduta's defiance was a political masterstroke, for he now had the respect of his band. There were some negative murmurings when several of his Wahpeton cohorts killed his two half brothers in a gun battle, but for the most part the Mdewakantons now accepted Taoyateduta as the new Little Crow. The prodigal son had returned.

After that Little Crow became a rising star in Dakota politics, and his popularity extended to the white authorities as well. This was especially true when he invited white missionaries to teach his people about the evils of alcohol. He led the chiefs in their negotiations with the white commissioners, which produced the Treaty of 1851, ceding all the Dakota land claims in Minnesota for a reservation along the Minnesota River and annual annuity payments. Although the treaty was not universally popular with their people, Little Crow and the other chiefs thought they had struck a good bargain. But lacking a true understanding of money and credit, the annuity system failed to provide the Dakota with the financial security the chiefs had expected. Mostly illiterate, the Dakota became easy marks for unscrupulous traders and agents.

Unfortunately for Little Crow and the other chiefs, when the Dakota people saw their annuity payments sliding through their fingers like sand through a sieve, many of them directed their frustrations toward their own leaders. Still, Little Crow was able to maintain his popularity for a while longer, when the always simmering conflict the Chippewa burst into full

flame in 1854 and his leadership was needed against the common enemy. However, Little Crow was less successful in forcing the United States government to fulfill its promises. The situation was made worse by the appointment of Joseph Brown as Indian agent to the Dakotas. Brown's goal was to convert the Sioux to farming. To this end he instituted policies that strongly favored any Dakota who would cut their hair and take up farming. The majority of Dakota men, however, found farming distasteful and beneath their dignity. This was especially true among the younger men of the tribe.

Things got even worse when in 1858 the government proposed a new treaty. In exchange for their reservation lands on the east bank of the Minnesota River, any Sioux who wished to farm would get their own plot of land, tools, implements, and a new house. And, as an inducement to the non-farming Indians, the annuities would also increase. Most of the chiefs were opposed to the treaty but nonetheless agreed to go to Washington to discuss it. Little Crow had been east before, as had many of the other chiefs, and they were not overawed by what they saw there. Still, the trip emphasized to them once again the extent of the white man's power. Although they protested the new treaty, they all eventually signed it. Thus they returned to their lands resigned to the fact that the Dakota way of life was rapidly slipping away, and to accusations by their people that they had sold out to the white man again. It did not help matters that Little Crow received a new frame house from Brown along with other compensations and that he had his wives plant crops, even though he took no direct part in the process. It was behind this house, in a buffalo hide tepee that he had erected for himself as a retreat, a place where he could go to feel and think like a Dakota chief, that Little Crow was now seeking answers.

His most pressing concern at the moment was the new Indian agent who had recently replaced Brown, Thomas Galbraith. He showed so little knowledge of his job that even the white traders did not respect him and scoffed at him behind his back. Certainly he knew nothing about the Dakota and seemed to care even less about their welfare. All spring he had been absent, and now that he had returned he spent his time recruiting half-breeds to go and fight the Southern whites. He did nothing, however, to hurry along the annuity money for the starving Dakota. Brown had been a thief and a liar, but at least he had been in charge. Brown also knew the Dakota people well, had even married a Wahpeton woman, and so the chiefs felt that he was someone they could deal with. This Galbraith was another problem altogether. His recruiting of mixed-breeds for the army only encouraged

the young fools among the Dakota who saw the war as a weakness to be exploited. If the Northern army was recruiting mixed-breeds, they reasoned, then they must be desperate, which meant that now was the time to strike. What ignorant fools they were! What did they know of the white men? Little Crow would join the young braves himself if he thought there was any chance of success. No, there would be no war with the whites, despite all they had suffered. There would be no war because no chief of any prominence would agree to it. No, those young men could plan and scheme all they wished, but they could do nothing of consequence on their own, and they knew it. At some level Little Crow admired the young braves' spirit, but he was too old and experienced himself to entertain such foolish dreams, and he could not in good conscience be responsible for the slaughter of his people. The only thing to be done for the Dakota was to accommodate the white man and try to preserve their traditional way of life as best they could for as long as they could.

Little Crow resented his decline in popularity. The young men had accused him of taking bribes from the white men. What nonsense! Did not a respected chief deserve a few presents from his white adversaries? Twice he had fought on the side of the whites. If he received a few gifts for his service, he was certainly entitled to them. Let them earn over twenty eagle feathers, each one representing a particularly brave action in battle, as he has done, and then they could talk!

Sitting in his tepee like this, puffing on his pipe and staring at the buffalo hide walls, he felt in touch with his Dakota soul, and in the semi-darkness he could imagine the world before the whites had intruded on their lives. But it was only an illusion of freedom. Little Crow himself had not even grown up in a tepee. His people lived in wood and bark lodges along the Mississippi where already the white culture had intruded. He had been taught to use a bow and arrow, but the flint arrowheads of his forefathers had been replaced by metal long before, as had the blades of their knives and tomahawks. In any case, guns were already favored over bows, and the women used iron skillets and copper kettles and adorned their best clothes with beads made by white technology. Tepees were only used when they traveled, and the buffalo hides of which they were made had to be bought from their Teton or Lakota cousins farther west. The truth was that the Dakota had not been conquered by white soldiers but rather seduced into a state of dependency on the products of white culture. Little Crow understood this, though in the darkness of his tepee he sometimes indulged himself in the fantasy that

they could still turn the clock back. Yet unlike the young braves, he was not willing to die for an illusion, or so he believed on that Sunday morning.

A scratching sound on the side of his tepee interrupted Little Crow's thoughts. "Who is it?" he called out irritably.

"It is I, Father, Wowinape," came the uncertain reply.

The chief's mood lightened at the sound of his favorite child's voice, and he bid him to enter. Wowinape, or The Appearing One, was sixteen years old and Little Crow's most devoted follower. In stature he favored his mother's people, being somewhat shorter than average, but his facial features left little doubt whom his father was. Everyone who had known his father as a youth was astounded by the resemblance, enhanced by the way Wowinape studied and copied his father's movements and manner of speech. Intelligent and thoughtful, Wowinape was still too young to have distinguished himself as a leader, but no one doubted whom the next Little Crow would be. For Wowinape's part, he truly revered his father and sincerely believed that he was the greatest man who had ever lived. He accompanied the chief wherever and whenever he could, and it was obvious that Little Crow enjoyed his companionship.

Wowinape entered the tent hesitantly, afraid of displeasing his father, but was relieved to see a smile on the chief's face. He stood and waited for permission to speak.

"Sit, my son!" said Little Crow, pointing with his pipe toward a blanket on the floor. "Your face tells me that you have news."

"Yes, Father. Forgive me for disturbing you, but I have just seen many bluecoat soldiers coming up the trail from the agency."

Little Crow's interest was piqued. "How many did you see?"

Wowinape thought for a moment and then replied, "Ten, tens." As he spoke, he held out both of his hands, opening and closing them once.

"Long knives?"

"I saw two on horses, father. One I have seen before, and another I have not."

"Wagons?"

"Yes, Father, several, and I think also a wagon gun."

"You are not sure?"

"I think so," replied Wowinape, sorry now that he had not looked more closely.

"Which direction are they going?"

"Toward the Redwood."

Little Crow paused for a moment to relight his pipe. "You did well to come to me with this news, my son. Go back now and count the soldiers again, and see if they have that wagon gun." Wowinape jumped quickly to his feet, pleased by his father's approval, and ducked through the entrance flap. Little Crow smiled at his son's eagerness as he contemplated what the boy had told him. The presence of soldiers to the west of the river was not particularly alarming but certainly unusual, since they seldom left the area of the fort. Unlike the traders, they did not interfere with the daily lives of the Dakotas. They did not sell whiskey or bother the Dakota women and were generally respected if also ignored. Curious boys like his son sometimes crossed the river to watch them shoot their guns and march about, but one did not get to know them well, for they never stayed very long and were frequently replaced by others. So what was their purpose today? They had wagons with them, probably containing supplies, which meant that they intended to travel some distance. Their likely destination, considering their direction, would then be Yellow Medicine. Were the Wahpeton and Sisseton causing trouble for that fool Galbraith? Possibly. Or it was possible that the soldiers were accompanying the annuity money? An intriguing thought. Yet why so many? Surely they did not think the Dakota would steal from each other? No, they would not send a hundred soldiers and a wagon gun for that. There were usually less than a hundred soldiers at the fort at any one time, so more must have been sent for. Yes, surely Galbraith must be expecting trouble.

Little Crow pictured that nervous woman Galbraith hiding in the agency building, afraid to come out until the soldiers arrived, and he smiled. He decided to seek out one of his head soldiers, Gray Bird, and have him send someone up to Yellow Medicine to see what was going on. Yes indeed, Wowinape had brought interesting news.

On Tuesday night, Lieutenant Sheehan and his men camped a few miles north of Rice Creek, and before dark he and Gere rode out onto the prairie to get the lay of the land. Lush and green from the spring rains, the prairie rolled out before them like a calm green ocean, with small clumps of trees like islands in the distance. It was still a big empty land, despite the seemingly endless tide of white settlers moving west. The two young men talked of their lives before joining the army, of families and girlfriends and what they might do after the war. Friendships form quickly when men serve together in wartime and often last for the rest of their lives. Sheehan sensed that he and Gere were forming just such a relationship. He liked the way Gere

handled himself despite his youth and decided that he would be able to trust the young man to do his duty well no matter what the circumstance.

Wednesday, July 2, 1862

From his seat beside the driver in the lead supply wagon, Peter Quinn watched Lieutenant Sheehan riding up the column. This man was different from most of the whites he had met, who viewed Indians either as contemptible savages or interesting curiosities of nature but never as real people. Sheehan, however, seemed genuinely interested in understanding his mother's people. All the previous day, and by the campfire in the evening, Sheehan had asked him questions about the organization of "the Sioux tribe," as he called it, and their attitude toward the soldiers and settlers. He was obviously hoping to find out what kind of trouble he might expect from the Dakota and from whom, and Quinn had tried to be helpful. But how could he explain to a person like Sheehan, who belonged to a world of written laws, rigid rules of conduct, and chains of command, that for the Dakota no such things existed? No one man or group ruled the Dakota. No one gave or took orders. A Dakota man made his own choices. Sheehan persisted in trying to understand, however, so Quinn was not surprised when he stopped and pulled his horse up alongside the wagon in order to have another of their chats.

"Good morning, Mr. Quinn," he called in greeting. "A beautiful morning to be out on the trail, wouldn't you agree?"

"Yes it is, Lieutenant," replied Quinn, who could not help but smile in response to Sheehan's infectious grin. Indeed it was a beautiful morning. The weather had turned sunny and dry as a cold front drifted down out of Canada, bringing a northwest breeze fresh with the smells of river and prairie.

"I must say that I am enjoying this trip immensely," Sheehan continued, "even though I have to admit I am still a bit confused as to what we can expect when we reach our destination. Our conversations yesterday helped a lot, but I must confess that I'm having difficulty keeping all the various chiefs and groups straight in my mind."

"That is certainly understandable, Lieutenant."

"You won't mind answering a few more questions, I hope."

"Of course, Lieutenant. I will do my best to answer them."

"Good, well, that's all I can ask. Yesterday you told me that the Indians were short on food and that the traders will not give them credit until the annuities arrive."

“Yes, the wild game is mostly gone near here, and the men have to go many miles away to get any. The farmers’ crops are not ready yet either.”

“But there is food in the storehouses?”

“Yes.”

“Couldn’t the Indian agent do something about that?”

“Perhaps. I do not know.” In fact, Quinn held his own opinions on the matter, but as he drew his pay from the agent he did not know how much he should say about him.

“Hmm, well...it seems to me something ought to be done. I can’t control what the traders or the agent do. I have no authority when it comes to them. I’m just trying to figure out what to expect when we get there.”

“I cannot say for sure,” said Quinn. “But as I have told you, most of the chiefs do not want trouble with the soldiers. Some of them may approach you and ask you for help though.”

“I really don’t know what I can do for them. What do you think should I tell them in that event?”

“The truth would best, Lieutenant. They will respect that.”

“Hmm, I suppose you’re right, Mr. Quinn. Well, thank you again.” With that Sheehan urged his mount into a trot and headed toward the front of the column.

His conversations with Quinn had left Sheehan feeling generally optimistic. It seemed that the vast majority of the chiefs were opposed to violence against the whites and that a majority of their people would follow their lead. But if the annuities did not arrive soon, and if the traders were too greedy in claiming their debts, he feared that could change. In such a case, every male in the tribe between the ages of sixteen and sixty was armed and knew how to fight, which meant his detachment of one hundred odd men would be quickly outnumbered two or three to one. But the lieutenant would do everything he could to make sure that didn’t happen. First, he would make sure his command gave the Sioux no excuse for violence; and second, any aggression by the Indians would be immediately and forcefully countered. But though he was confident that he could ensure the behavior of his own men, he had no control over the traders and agents, which was not a comforting thought.

Indian agent Thomas Galbraith was feeling particularly good that morning as he sat at his desk in the agency office. Across from him was a young agency employee by the name of James Gorman. They had just been discussing their

plans to form a group of mounted scouts made up primarily of mixed-breeds, which would join the regiments being formed for service in the Union army. It was an idea he had come up with earlier that spring when he realized that he was not really well suited to being an Indian agent. The gathering of Sioux at the Upper Agency to receive their annual annuity payments had been making him very nervous, but now that the arrival of soldiers from Fort Ridgely was imminent he felt that he could begin to proceed with his other plans.

Thomas Galbraith had been educated as an attorney. What he lacked in competence he made up for in his ability to ingratiate himself with important people, hence his recent appointment as the Sioux agent. His benefactors assured him that the position would lead to even better things for him in government, and that if he cooperated with the agency traders he could also accumulate some wealth along the way. Besides, his predecessor, Joseph Brown, had everything under control. The Sioux were now happy, peaceful, and best of all, contained on their large reservation. The treaty of 1858 had released thousands of acres of excellent land to white settlement, including those that Brown himself had purchased not far from the Upper Agency. However, Galbraith soon found that these assurances were not entirely true and that it was no easy task to step into Joseph Brown's shoes.

While Joseph Brown was being hailed throughout Minnesota for turning free-roaming savages into settled farmers, Galbraith discovered that in fact most of the Sioux were not and never would be farmers. Many acted as if there were no reservation at all. They came and went as they pleased, usually armed to the teeth, in order to hunt and conduct raids against the Chippewa. Unfortunately, Galbraith did not have Brown's confidence and charisma and could not even attempt to browbeat, cajole, and dominate the village chiefs the way Brown had. The traders, led by the Myrick brothers, Nathan and Andrew, were also out of his control. Although they implied that it would be worth the agent's while if he cooperated with them, it was clear that they intended to play by their own rules, with or without his help. In return for a portion of their profits, Galbraith had already consented to allow the traders to collect their debts before any money was distributed to the Indians. But the traders were out to steal as much as possible, and he was terrified of getting caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

For most of the winter the agent had managed to escape these problems by simply absenting himself from his post under the pretext that he had legal and financial affairs to settle in St. Paul. In the spring, however, when

the annuity payments were due to arrive, he had no choice but to return. He wanted desperately to get out of his post, but if he resigned he would likely ruin his career in government and would certainly forfeit his profits from the traders. But what if he were to leave for a greater cause, to fight against the Confederacy? He tentatively discussed the idea of forming a group of mixed-breed volunteers with friends in the state government and, receiving many positive reactions, began immediately to implement the plan, first enlisting the help of James Gorman. Gorman was not a mixed-breed but was popular and well respected within the agency community. Galbraith offered to make him second-in-command of the scouts and first lieutenant of the volunteers if he would recruit as many men as possible, and Gorman accepted the proposal enthusiastically. That morning he had brought Galbraith the names of over thirty men, half of whom had made a firm commitment. Galbraith praised him highly for his efforts and assured him that once the annuity payments were made he would personally lead the scout company to Fort Snelling to join the rest of the Minnesota volunteer units. The problem was, of course, that the annuities had not arrived, and Galbraith had no idea when to expect them.

In late May and early June, the Sisseton and Wahpeton bands had begun setting up their buffalo hide lodges along the Yellow Medicine River, expecting to receive their payments so they could purchase provisions from the agency traders, only to find out that the annuity money had not arrived. Food was scarce; hunting was difficult, and the crops raised by the Indian farmers were not ready to harvest. The traders had large stocks of food in their warehouses but refused to extend the Indians any more credit, and given his agreement with them Galbraith felt powerless to suggest they do so. Tensions were mounting, and meanwhile the two bands at the Lower Agency, the Wahpekute and Mdewakanton, were facing the same food shortages. Galbraith begged the post commander at Fort Ridgely to send troops to the Upper Agency, but Captain Marsh refused, saying he did not have enough men. So the agent reached out to his friends in the capital and finally wrangled the release of a detachment of Company C, Fifth Regiment from Fort Ripley. Thankfully they were arriving today. But while that was a relief, it was not a solution. That was why young Gorman's visit that morning seemed of the utmost importance.

"James, you've done a splendid job!" said Galbraith, reaching out to take the young man's hand as their discussion concluded.

"Thank you, sir," replied Gorman, shaking the agent's hand. Gorman was only twenty-two but had lived close to the Dakota Sioux most of his life

and understood them better than Galbraith ever would. "What is our next step, sir?" he asked. Before Galbraith could reply, they were interrupted by his eight-year-old son, who dashed unceremoniously into the office, which was attached to the agent's home, and announced with great excitement that an army officer had just arrived at their front door.

"Son, haven't I always told you to knock before entering this office, especially when I have guests?" admonished Galbraith sternly.

"I'm sorry, Papa," replied the boy breathlessly. "But I thought you would want to know right away."

"I assume your mother will make him comfortable in the parlor. Tell her that I will be there momentarily."

"Yes, sir!" shouted the boy, leaving just as quickly as he had come.

"Now as to your question, James," said Galbraith, turning back to Gorman. "Tell each man you've talked with that I wish to speak to him personally as well. Start with those that seem to have the strongest commitment. I will sign them on to an official roster, and when the others see that list it may motivate them to join up."

"That sounds like a good idea, sir. I'll get to it right away. Perhaps we could also pick a special name for the scouts that might impress our recruits?"

"Hmm, excellent idea. What would you suggest?"

"Well, I was thinking that since all our men would come from Renville County, we should call ourselves the Renville Rangers."

"Wonderful! I really like that idea, James. In fact it would be a perfect name. The Renville Rangers it is."

"Thank you, sir," Gorman responded, obviously flattered.

"I will be going downriver to the Redwood Agency once I have seen all the men on your list. There are a good number of possible recruits there as well," added Galbraith.

"It sounds like we are very close to forming up our company, sir. Will the annuities be arriving soon?"

"Quite soon, I am sure," replied the agent without pause. "Now if you'll excuse me, James, I must see to the officer."

"Of course, sir, I won't keep you any longer," said Gorman, and he left the office.

"Those damned annuities!" Galbraith cursed under his breath once he was alone. It was at that moment that he made a fateful decision. "No matter what happens with the annuities," Galbraith said to himself, "once the scout company is formed, whether I have ten men or fifty, we will go to

Fort Snelling. I will not be caught holding the bag with these redskins no matter what it does to my career.” His mind set, he left to put the best face on the situation for the army representative in his parlor.

Along their route, the soldiers had passed several Sioux farms where Indian men and women dressed in white man’s clothes worked their fields of young corn and wheat. Children had watched the soldiers curiously from the farmyards, and occasionally a dog had run out to bark at the column. Except for the dark skin of the farmers, the scene had been familiar and not unlike what one would see in any other part of rural Minnesota. When they reached the banks of the Yellow Medicine River, however, the scene had changed dramatically.

Upon reaching the river crossing, Sheehan had ordered Lieutenant Gere to proceed to the agency to inform the agent, Major Galbraith, of their arrival. He had also given his mount to Sergeant Solon Truscott so that he could accompany Gere with the purpose of finding a suitable campsite. It had been Sheehan’s intention to remain with the column so as to supervise the crossing of the river, and he was glad that he had done so, because it had given him a chance to observe his numerous new neighbors.

Standing on the north bank of the river’s ford, watching his men haul the wagons across its rain swollen waters, Sheehan thought that he had never seen so many Indians in one place at one time. Lodges were scattered in the timber along both banks and all along the trail to the agency. Children dashed about everywhere, many stopping to watch the soldiers cross while their mothers worked busily around their lodges or washed clothes in the river. Occasionally women looked up from their work to briefly eye the soldiers, but for the most part they seemed indifferent. The soldiers were the business of the men and not their concern. A few Sioux men came over to observe the activities, and they displayed a variety of reactions to the soldiers’ presence. Some waved and spoke something in Dakota that Sheehan took as a greeting and which he acknowledged by smiling and touching the brim of his cap. Others stared as if they had happened upon some curious bug, worth studying but not of much consequence. And some simply passed by, ignoring the whole event all together. The twelve-pound howitzer, which was the last item to cross the river, seemed to draw the greatest interest from both the men and the children, evoking several animated discussions among the onlookers.

Just as the cannon was finally being manhandled up the muddy bank, Lieutenant Gere and Sergeant Truscott came trotting up to Sheehan. "Major Galbraith sends his compliments, sir," said Gere as both men saluted. "He requests that you report to him at the agency as soon as practical."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Have we found a decent campsite, Sergeant?" he asked Truscott, taking hold of his horse's bridle as the sergeant dismounted.

"That we have, sir. We've got some high ground within shouting distance of the agency that seems adequate."

"Good. I want you to find Sergeants Hicks and Bishop and inform them of the location. I will leave it to you three to organize the camp."

"Very good, sir," replied Truscott, saluting smartly.

"You are dismissed, Sergeant."

"By your leave, sir."

"Alright, Tom," said Sheehan, swinging up into the saddle and turning his horse onto the trail. "Let's go meet the major."

Two of the Dakota men watching the bluecoat soldiers cross the river were twenty-year-old Brown Wing and his twenty-two-year-old brother, Breaking Up. Both were Wahpeton who had married Mdewakanton women and lived in the Rice Creek village of Red Middle Voice. Like many young men from that village, including their half brother Killing Ghost and cousin Runs Into Things, they were members of the Soldiers' Lodge and strong believers in its philosophy. Soldiers' lodges were usually informal and temporary groups of men who volunteered to assist the chiefs during times of conflict, but the present Mdawakanton Soldiers' Lodge had become a political faction dedicated to opposing the white man and his culture. Young men such as they were the most adversely affected by the treaties. The traditional roles of a Dakota man, hunter and warrior, were now severely curtailed or completely denied to them. Only through displaying generosity and self-sacrifice in hunting or in battle could a Dakota man earn respect and gain leadership status. But there was little left to hunt these days, and the whites were attempting to eliminate their battles with the Chippewa. The fact that the whites also cheated them out of their annuity money, regarded them as inferior savages, and even married their women only to discard them when white women became more available, all could have been tolerated up to a point. The loss of their manhood, however, was an indignity for which there could be no compromise.

Brown Wing and Breaking Up had been visiting their relatives at Red Iron's village near Lac Qui Parle and had accompanied them to the agency in anticipation of the annuity payments. They had intended to return to their homes on Rice Creek that day, but the arrival of the soldiers caused them to linger. "How does one shoot that thing, brother?" asked Breaking Up as they watched the cannon being lifted up the muddy bank.

"I don't know, brother, but I think that if the Soldiers' Lodge had two of those we could drive all the whites from our land in a few days!" replied Brown Wing.

"I wonder how much powder one would use?"

"More powder than you and I have for one shot, I think."

The young men looked away from the gun and watched as Lieutenant Gere rode up to Sheehan and made his report. "The long-knife soldier chief is the one with the lip-hair I think," offered Brown Wing. The caisson was just cresting the top of the bank as the two officers disappeared up the trail.

"I don't think the whites would be so brave without their wagon gun," declared Breaking Up. "Would he fight one of us with just his long knife if we only had a tomahawk?"

"One cannot say, brother. I have never seen the whites fight anyone. But I would like to see the wagon gun shoot." They stood in silence for a moment, watching the column of soldiers recede. "Maybe we should stay a little longer, brother. Perhaps the bluecoats will practice with their gun, and maybe we can learn something useful to take back to the Soldiers' Lodge."

Breaking Up grunted in assent. "I am in no hurry to return home."