

REPORT  
OF  
THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

IN COMPLIANCE WITH

*A resolution of the Senate of the 1st instant, calling for copies of the correspondence respecting the massacre of Lieutenant Grattan and his command by Indians.*

JULY 1, 1856.—Read, ordered to lie on the table and be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT,  
Washington, July 19, 1856.

SIR: In answer to the resolution of the Senate, dated the 1st instant, I have the honor herewith to transmit "a copy of the correspondence between the Adjutant General and Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Hoffman, respecting the massacre of Lieutenant Grattan and his command by the Indians."

Further information in relation to Lieutenant Grattan's engagement may be found in Executive Document No. 63, (House of Representatives,) 2d session 33d Congress.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JEFF'N DAVIS,  
Secretary of War.

Hon. J. D. BRIGHT,

*President pro tempore of the Senate of the United States.*

No. 1.

HEADQUARTERS, FORT LARAMIE, N. T.,  
November 19, 1854.

MAJOR: I have the honor to make the following report of the massacre of Lieutenant Grattan and his command, as required by your instructions of the \_\_\_\_\_:

It appears that, in August last, a cow, belonging to a Mormon emigrant, was killed by a Sioux Indian belonging to the Miniconjee band, who was at the time living with the Brulés. On the 18th the Bear, the head chief of the Sioux, reported the fact to Lieutenant Fleming, and told him he would give up the offender. On the 19th Lieutenant Fleming sent Lieutenant Grattan, with the interpreter, a sergeant, corporal, and twenty-seven men, and two twelve-pounder howitzers,

to receive the man, with discretionary orders in case of refusal to give him up.

There is no doubt that Lieutenant Grattan left this post with a desire to have a fight with the Indians, and that he had determined to take the man at all hazards. On reaching Mr. Budeau's trading house, which was just within the camp, he had an interview with the Bear, and finding that he could not, or would not, give up the man, he moved his command into the camp, and placed his cannon and his infantry in line fronting the lodge occupied by the offender. Here he held a council with the chiefs, which resulting unsatisfactorily, he appears to have ordered his men to fire. After the first discharge of their muskets the soldiers were quite at the mercy of the Indians, and they were all massacred.

It does not seem that the affair was anticipated by the Indians; but they evidently prepared themselves for it as soon as they knew what the troops came for.

What occurred after the party entered the village is only known through the Indians.

One report says that just at the close of the interview Lieutenant Grattan took out his watch and said: "It is getting late and I can't wait any longer." To which the Bear replied: "I have done all I could, and since you will have him now push and take him," or something to that effect, and then turned to walk away. As he did so he was shot by the soldiers and wounded in three places.

I am inclined to think this report is true.

It is not improbable that the Bear was sincere in his desire to give up the man, but he could not carry out his wishes.

I enclose the report of Lieutenant Fleming in relation to the affair. A statement made by a young gentleman, Mr. J. H. Reed, of St. Louis, who was here living with Lieutenant Grattan, and who heard all the reports that were circulated at the time; and statements made by Mr. Budeau, at whose house the first talk with the Bear took place; and by a young man named Allen, a man of character and veracity, I think, who accompanied Lieutenant Grattan from the post to Budeau's house.

It is Mr. Budeau's interest to put the case in as favorable a light for the Indians as he can.

These statements will enable the general to form a judgment on the merits of the case.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

W. HOFFMAN,

*Major and Bvt. Lieut. Col. 6th Infantry, commanding.*

Bvt. Maj. N. F. PAGE,

*Assist. Adjt. General, Dept. of the West,*

*Jefferson Barracks, Missouri.*

*Endorsement of the Adjutant General upon the foregoing letter, respectfully submitted to the Secretary of War.*

There is nothing in the accompanying papers which corroborates the statement of Lieutenant Colonel Hoffman that "*there is no doubt that Lieutenant Grattan left this post with a desire to have a fight with the Indians.*" While this remark adds nothing to the character of Lieutenant Grattan for bravery, it would seem to detract from his judgment as an officer.

S. COOPER, *Adjutant General.*

ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE, *January 3, 1855.*

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At the request of Colonel Hoffman, I make the following statement in regard to the massacre of the troops under the command of Lieutenant Grattan, on the 19th of August last.

I was on my way to Salt Lake city, with Colonel Steptoe's command, when I met with an accident which entirely disabled me, whereupon I was conveyed by my friends in the train to Fort Laramie. Arriving there on the 16th of July, I was taken to Mr. Grattan's room, and remained there a recipient of his kindness until his death. During this time several instances of insubordination manifested themselves among the Indians. The most prominent was the killing of some cattle belonging to the post interpreter, even within the government reserve. At length the act was done which led to the massacre of Mr. Grattan and his men. I state nothing in this paper which I do not believe myself, and my belief is founded not on the quantity of reports which I may have heard, but on the character of the men from whom they came. I am glad to say that every man in the country, who has not a direct interest in another direction, comes to the same conclusion that I do.

A few days before the slaughter of the troops an emigrant informed Mr. Fleming, who was temporarily in command of the fort, that on the road below an Indian had shot at him, and afterwards had killed a cow or an ox belonging to him. Nothing was said on the subject, and we set it down as another instance of the contempt felt by the Indians for the power and authority of the government. On the 18th of August, Martoh Iowa, (which literally means the "Bear that scatters,") who was appointed a chief of the tribe by Colonel Mitchell, in his treaty in 1851, came to the fort to inform Mr. Fleming that a cow belonging to an emigrant had been killed by an Indian, and to tell him that if he would send down for the Indian, he would be delivered up to him.

Before proceeding, I will state, that although it is now denied by some persons in this neighborhood that the Indian did shoot at the emigrant, and asserted that the cow was deserted by its owner and wandered into the Indian village, yet I do not believe such to be the facts. The emigrant, as I am informed, stated that he had been shot

at, and the Indians confirm it. The story derived from the Indians is, that the man who did the deed had lost some relatives in a skirmish which took place in the summer or fall of 1853. That the offender said that his relatives were dead, and that he wanted to die, but not until he had avenged himself upon the whites. The Indians, in continuation, say, that this offending Indian approached the owner of the cow, who was with his animal, with three arrows in his hand, one of which he shot at the emigrant, but missed him. The Indian then said, "I have missed you, you are in the hands of God Almighty, but I will kill your cow," which he did. The emigrant was offered ten dollars for his cow when passing the trading house of Mr. Bordeaux, but declined accepting that amount, asking twenty-five dollars for her.

To return to the place from which I digressed. On the day following the one on which the Bear had informed Mr. Fleming of the matter, I asked Mr. Grattan if he would like to be sent against the Indians. He said he would like very well to go, but would not go unless he had orders to bring the offender. He did not think that it would be necessary to fight in order to obtain him; but in the course of this conversation, as well as on several other occasions, he told me that if it was ever necessary to fight Indians when they were in their village, that he would place his artillery some three or four hundred yards from their village, and run the risk of their driving him from his position. This assertion was made to me while Mr. Grattan was preparing to start on the expedition. I am not, therefore, prepared to believe that he marched straight into the midst of two or three villages for the purpose of attacking them. Mr. Grattan had, ever since I had known him, a great admiration for the "Bear," and implicit confidence in him. Whether the Bear was treacherous or not, no man can tell. I have it from the best authority, that before Mr. Grattan left Bordeaux houses for the purpose of marching into the village, and while he was still demanding the man, that the Bear spoke to his young men in the Sioux language, and from that moment they commenced catching their horses, stripping off their robes, and preparing for battle. They certainly had taken their positions and were concealed, when Mr. Grattan entered into their midst. Some who were in the vicinity, say that the Bear told Mr. Grattan "that he was a soldier, to come in and take the man," others say that promises were made that the man would be given him. It was something that occurred after they were in the village which produced the fight, as all accounts agree that Mr. Grattan did not commence firing upon his entrance, but some time elapsed, during which his men were lying about on the grass. His musketry was discharged before his cannon, and the Bear was wounded in three places. There is as much difficulty in telling who fired first as in any of the other details of the transaction, and it is my belief that no Frenchman in this country can tell the same story twice the same way, if the incidents come under their observation when they are cool, much less can they take notes accurately, and repeat the details correctly, when they know that the scene which they are witnessing involves life and property.

Every one whom I have heard speak on the subject coincides in say-

ing that great blame is to be attached to the interpreter. He has been for a long time very odious to the Indians, and there is no doubt that on this occasion he inflamed them by rash speeches and threats. Mr. Grattan made several unsuccessful efforts to restrain him.

Some other reports prejudicial to Mr. Grattan's memory were circulated for a short time after his death; they bore the marks of untruth with them, and failed to obtain credence. Such were the stories of his having run away during the fight, his being intoxicated at the time, and his boasting on the way that "he was going down to give the d——d red skins hell." Some of these stories I know to be untrue, the others are disproved by witnesses in whom I confide.

J. H. REED.

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*Statement of Mr. Bordeau, a trader living at the place where the affair occurred.*

I was at home when Mr. Grattan came down with his party. He stopped at my house and told me he had come down to take prisoner an Indian who had killed a cow belonging to a Mormon, and he wished me to assist him. At his request I sent for the chief, Marto Ioway, who is the chief of the band, the Brulés, to which the offender belonged; and on his arrival from the camp, which was very near my house, I told him, for Mr. Grattan, that he had come down for the Indian who had killed the cow, and that he (the Indian) must go with him to the fort, to remain there till the agent arrived, when he would decide what should be done in the matter. The chief said very well, but I must go and put on my dress coat before I give an answer. He returned in a few minutes with three other chiefs, and they were immediately followed by a messenger from the camp, who said that the man refused to give himself up; he said he would die first. Lieutenant Grattan then asked where his lodge was, and the chief pointed it out to him. The lieutenant said he would take his command within sixty yards of it, and he'd have him dead or alive. He then moved around the house, and went a little way into the camp, when he halted. Then a second messenger came and said, as the former had said, that the man would not give himself up, he would rather die. The lieutenant said again that he would go within sixty yards of the lodge, and that he must have him. He then told his men what he was going to do, and how they must act, that when he gave the word, they must fire on every man that was not a white man. I then told the chiefs they had better be in a hurry and get the man as quick as they could. The chief said it was their custom to make a demand four times, and if it was not agreed to then, then they acted, and he wanted the lieutenant to observe this rule. He said that he was determined to go to the lodge. I told him that he was going into a very bad place, and that he had better prepare himself well. He said he had two revolvers with twelve shots. I told him to take them out of his holsters, and be ready. I then turned

back and got upon a robe press, where I could see him till he halted. During this time his interpreter was in the camp, bantering the Indians and irritating them. I told him that he would make trouble, and that if he would put him in my house I would settle the difficulty in thirty minutes. He said he would stop him. He had told him several times to stop, but he did not mind him.

As soon as he halted he was immediately surrounded by Indians, and one of the chiefs came running to me and said, "My friend, come on, the interpreter is going to get us into a fight, and they are going to fight if you don't come." I got on a horse to go, but finding the stirrups too long I turned back, and the chief came to me a second time, urging me to go. I started with him, but when I got within 150 yards, I saw that it was too late, the excitement was too great. At this moment the first gun was fired by the soldier on the right, and I then heard an Indian call out not to fire, that they had killed one man and might be satisfied; but the words were hardly out of his mouth before the firing commenced on the left. Then I turned back home, and before I reached the house I heard one cannon fired, and when I got on the top of my house I saw the second cannon fired by Lieutenant Grattan, and then he fell. As he was firing the cannon I saw the soldiers putting three wounded men in the wagon, and when he fell the wagon moved off. Two other men fell about ten feet from him. One soldier who was holding on to the wagon was killed in about twenty yards, and the wagon was pursued by Indians on horseback to a little rise about half a mile distant, where they stopped it, and killed the other soldiers. I then completed the arrangements I had been making to protect myself. A rush was made on the house by a number of Indians, but our friends among them interfered and prevented them doing us any harm. Then a chief, Little Thunder, came and told me that, since the Indians had killed all the soldiers at the camp, they were going to kill all at the fort, and burn it up. I told him to stop them, that if they didn't do any more harm, and didn't disturb anybody on the river, I thought their grand father would forgive them for what they had done. He went out immediately, and with all the other chiefs harangued the Indians, and did all they could to put down the excitement; but my opinion is, that if the sun had been two hours higher they couldn't have stopped it.

They immediately broke up their camp and crossed the river, all except the old chief, who was wounded, who remained with a strong guard about him all night. Little Thunder was going backwards and forwards all night to keep down the excitement. Indians were coming to my house all night begging; they said they had been waiting on the agent two months, that their children were starving, and that they were bound to have what they wanted. The chiefs told me to give them what they wanted, because they were just trying to pick a quarrel with us to kill us all, and I gave them whatever they demanded. During the night, some of the friendly Indians brought in a wounded soldier, and said if his wounds did not kill him, nobody should hurt him. A few minutes after, a chief came in and advised me to hide him somewhere outside, for fear some of the other Indians would find him there, and make it an excuse for killing us. The



man said if I would send some one with him he would prefer to go to the fort, and I sent a white man and two Indians with him, who accompanied him about a mile, and he then said he could go himself. About one o'clock at night, I sent an express up to Lieutenant Fleming to tell him what had occurred. The next morning, after they had taken the wounded chief over the river, about 500 of them came back and took from me what they wanted, and then went up to the American Fur Company's house and took from there the presents which were stored there for them. In the evening they returned and took the goods belonging to the Fur Company. The massacre took place on Saturday evening, and on Monday morning I received a note from Lieutenant Fleming, requesting me to bury the dead, and I did so. It is not true that the Indians told me I should not bury the dead, that the soldiers must come and do it themselves.

After daylight in the morning, the wounded soldier returned just as the Indians were leaving, and I kept him till next day, Monday, when I sent him to the fort.

There was no excitement before the soldiers arrived, and when they came in sight the Indians expressed their surprise, and wondered who they were. No one at my house knew anything of the difficulty, and had heard nothing of the soldiers coming.

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FORT LARAMIE, *November 19, 1854.*

SIR: In compliance with your instructions, I have the honor to make the following report concerning the massacre of a detachment of G company, 6th infantry, by the Sioux Indians, near Fort Laramie, and also the orders given Lieutenant Grattan by me:

On the 18th of August, 1854, an emigrant came to the fort, reported that the Sioux Indians had killed one of his cattle, and that he had barely escaped with his life. The same day the head chief of the Sioux, "the Bear," came and reported that one of the Indians had killed a cow belonging to an emigrant, and wished to state to me that the offender did not belong to his band, but was a Miniconga. At the same time he spoke about the depredations of the Miniconga band at the bridge, one hundred and thirty miles above the fort, this summer, and said their hearts were bad towards the whites, and promised to give up the offender. On the 19th I sent Lieutenant Grattan, with the interpreter, one sergeant, one corporal, and twenty-seven men, with two twelve-pound howitzers, to receive the offender. I learned that there were only about fifteen lodges of the Miniconga band encamped with the other Indians, and I gave Lieutenant Grattan orders to receive the offender, and, in case of refusal to give him up, after ascertaining the disposition of the Indians, to act upon his own discretion, and to be careful not to hazard an engagement without certainty of success. I also gave Lieutenant Grattan directions to tell the chief that the Indian would not be injured in any way whatever, and that I would keep him at the fort till his father, the agent, arrived. It appears that the chief tried, or at least made Lieutenant Grattan

think that he tried, to give up the Indian who committed the depredation. Last year we had a skirmish with the Miniconga band, but were on the best and most friendly terms with all the others, and the force sent was sent only to act, if necessary, against the few lodges of the above hostile band. It may be thought that the treacherous Indians were trusted too far, but at the same time we must remember that, with so few troops as were stationed at Fort Laramie, so far in the Indian country, surrounded by thousands of Indians, it becomes absolutely necessary to rely on the good faith of some of them, even for the safety of the garrison itself. Lieutenant Grattan, with his whole command, was massacred, and I have no doubt, from all I am able to learn, he was dealt with in a most treacherous manner.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

H. B. FLEMING,

*Second Lieutenant 6th Infantry.*

Brevet Lieut. Col. WILLIAM HOFFMAN,

*Commanding Fort Laramie.*

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*Statement of Mr. Obridge Allen.*

I arrived at this post the day before the massacre of Lieutenant Grattan and his command. On the day of the massacre I accompanied the party to Mr. Bordeau's trading house. We stopped a few minutes at Mr. Gratiot's, eight or nine miles below this post, when, finding there might be some trouble with the Indians, I left my overcoat. Whilst here Lieutenant Grattan ordered his men to load, and just below the house he gave them his orders, telling them to obey only his orders, or those of the sergeant. Said he, "When I give the order, you may fire as much as you d—d please." He told them he did not believe a gun would be fired, but "he hoped to God they would have a fight."

As we passed the Oga-lar-lar village, which was on the river, about three-fourths of a mile from the road, and a mile and a half above that of the Brulés, Lieutenant Grattan told some person—I do not know to whom he was speaking—to tell them not to leave their camp, if they did he would "crack it to them."

About half a mile from this point I looked back and saw that the Oga-lar-lars were driving up their horses, and I called Lieutenant Grattan's attention to the fact. On reaching Mr. Bordeau's the lieutenant asked for him, and, when he came out, he told him what he had come for, and requested him to send for the Bear, the chief of the Brulés. The chief was somewhere near, and came in a minute or two. The lieutenant asked Mr. Bordeau to tell him that he had come for the man who had killed the cow, and he wanted to know if they would give him up. The Bear made some answer, and I asked the man with whom I was talking what he said. He replied, "They are not going to give him up." Then Mr. Grattan said to Mr. Bordeau, in a very emphatic manner, "You tell the Bear that I have come



down here for that man, and I'll have him or die." The Bear then spoke to the Indians who were standing about, (there were a good many,) and they all went into the village. He then asked the lieutenant to go down to the lodge and see the man himself. Then Lieutenant Grattan marched his party into the village, accompanied by the Bear, who was mounted behind the interpreter. I then went with a friend, a trader, to his lodge, a few steps off, and returned in a minute or two and mounted my horse to join the lieutenant; but just then Mr. Bordeau asked me to let him have my mare to ride to the village, and I did so. I then got on top of the house to see what would happen.

The party was halted about thirty yards from the lodges, which were pitched on the edge of a small slough which ran through the camp, in one of which the offender lived. The two cannon were placed near each other, the largest on the right, and the infantry were divided into two parts, half on the right of the cannon and half on the left. The cannon were loaded at Bordeau's house. The men all sat down on the ground. The council lasted about three quarters of an hour, and during this time I saw many Indians collecting and mounting their horses near the river, and the women and children were leaving the village. At length I saw the soldiers stand up, and bring their pieces down as if to fire; and at this moment I heard, I thought, the report of Indian guns, followed immediately by that of muskets. The two cannon were fired directly after. I then saw the limber of the gun turned and start to leave the camp, followed by the wagon. A man was trying to get into the wagon. At the same time the soldiers all commenced to retreat, pursued by the Indians. The limber was overtaken in a quarter of a mile, and the wagon reached the first point of the bluffs which crosses the road, near half a mile, before it was overtaken. The footmen, about eighteen in number, some who had been with the cannon without arms, reached the road between the two bluffs which cross it, about a mile, where they were all killed by Indians who followed them, and, as I supposed, by those who came from the Oga-lar-lar camp above. I saw a great many coming from there over the second point of bluffs. Three or four men were killed near the cannon.

The interpreter, who was mounted, and a soldier who was on the lieutenant's horse, were overtaken by some Indians, who came from near the river below Bordeau's house, passing close to it, near the wagon, when they were killed. The soldiers were loading and firing as they retreated.

Mr. Bordeau's house was surrounded by some two to three hundred lodges, in one group, having a vacant space in the centre, and adjoining this group was another of about a hundred lodges, also having a space in the centre. It was in this village that the lodge of the offender was situated, about three hundred yards from the house.

When the firing took place there were only about fifty Indians in front of the troops; the others were either concealed in the slough or were getting ready near the river, which was three or four hundred yards distant.

I have heard that it is said that Lieutenant Grattan was intoxicated

at the time, but there is no truth in the charge. He did not drink a drop of liquor, that I saw, from the time he left the post till I parted from him, and there was no appearance of his having drank anything. At Mr. Gratiot's he took a drink of water. On the way down I noticed that the interpreter was drunk, and I told Mr. Grattan that he had a small flask of liquor. The lieutenant asked him for it to take a drink, but instead of drinking he broke it on his saddle.

I remained at Mr. Bordeau's all night. The Indians came back there immediately after the affair and tried to break into his house; but some friendly Indians, and men with him, prevented their doing so. They came there frequently during the night, and Mr. B. gave them what goods they demanded of him.

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No. 2.

FORT LARAMIE, N. T., *June 10, 1855.*

SIR: I have recently learned with much regret, from various sources, that my report of the 19th November, in relation to the massacre of Lieutenant Grattan and his command, does not meet the approbation of the War Department; and what I have heard is in a degree confirmed by the fact that a letter addressed by Colonel Steptoe to the Secretary of War, based on a private letter from this place, giving what seems to be a more acceptable relation of the affair, was furnished to a member of Congress (Mr. Hibbard) and quoted by him in a speech before the House.—(See "Globe," March 13.)

I have, therefore, obtained statements from officers of the army, which—together with that of Mr. Allen, an eye-witness, whose veracity is not questioned by any one, forwarded with my report—not only clearly establish the correctness of the view I took of the affair, but show also that Colonel Steptoe's information and inferences were erroneous in all essential particulars, and that his informant, Mr. Reed, advised Lieutenant Grattan not to return to this post without the offending Indian. In justice to myself I feel obliged, reluctantly, to lay these statements before the Secretary of War, in confirmation of the accuracy of my report.

Lieutenant Grattan was unknown to me personally, but I am assured that he was a young officer of much promise, full of military enthusiasm, ambitious of distinction in his profession, and of undoubted gallantry, but without the experience requisite to conduct a delicate service. Unfortunately, he was permitted to undertake a service of no trifling hazard, requiring much circumspection and self-possession, in the performance of which, urged on by injudicious advice and a mistaken apprehension of what his duty and the honor of the service required of him, he was led to take a course which resulted in the sacrifice of himself and his command.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

W. HOFFMAN,

*Major and Brevet Lieut. Colonel 6th Infantry, commanding.*

Colonel S. COOPER,

*Adjutant General United States army, Washington, D. C.*

*Endorsement of the Adjutant General upon the foregoing letter.*ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE, *July 30, 1855.*

Respectfully submitted to the Secretary of War with the original report of Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Hoffman referred to. In obtaining the statements of officers to establish the views entertained in his former report, it is not seen why Lieutenant Colonel Hoffman should have omitted Lieutenant Fleming, especially as reference is made to this officer in the statement of Assistant Surgeon Page. Lieutenant Fleming was at Fort Laramie when these statements were procured, and as he was the officer who ordered the expedition under Lieutenant Grattan, it is presumed he knew something of the views and intentions of Lieutenant G. in reference to the affair; he could at least have stated whether, as commanding officer, he was "importuned" for the command by Lieutenant Grattan; and whether, but for this importunity, he would have passed over the offence committed by the Indians, as intimated by Dr. Page.

S. COOPER, *Adjutant General.*


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 FORT LARAMIE, N. T., *May 31, 1855.*

SIR: Some weeks since, in a conversation relative to the "Grattan massacre," I heard Mr. Reed make use of the following language: "It is better that he (Grattan) should be where he is, than that he should have returned to this post without the Indian he went to receive," or words to that effect.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

ED. JOHNSON,

*Captain and Brevet Major, 6th Infantry.*

Lieutenant Colonel W. HOFFMAN,

*Commanding Fort Laramie.*


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 FORT LARAMIE, N. T., *May 28, 1855.*

DEAR COLONEL: In answer to your question of what was my opinion of the impressions of Mr. Grattan in regard to the Indians, and what were his designs towards them when he left here by Lieutenant Fleming's order to bring an offender prisoner to the fort, I have to reply: It was Mr. Grattan's opinion, as expressed often and in earnest, that, with thirty men, he could whip the combined force of all the Indians of the prairie. He considered them arrant cowards, and thought the discharge of a piece of artillery would scare them into a precipitate flight; and I think he made no difference between Indians in defence of their lodges, women, and children, and a roving band of

bucks on a thieving expedition. Mr. Grattan was a brave young man, impetuous, bold, and daring. He had the enthusiastic ardor of his race, (Irish,) and when he was killed it was unchecked by age or experience. He was proud of his profession, and if it had been his fortune to have seen much service would have been distinguished in the American army for bravery. With what design he went to the Indian village I can form merely an opinion; of one thing I feel very certain, that he would have been very loath to have returned to the post without the prisoner, because he had been laughing at several citizens in the vicinity for chasing a small party of Cheyennes, who had killed an ox of the post interpreter's herd, and halting (having accomplished nothing) three hundred yards from the Indians, who had taken position for a fight; and another reason why I think he was very desirous to take the prisoner is that he had importuned Mr. Fleming, his commanding officer, to send him after this offender; and if he had returned without him he would have been the subject of a brother officer's jeers, to him more galling than death. I think he was anxious to have an engagement, not with Indians particularly, but for want of a more noble foe, even with them, to gain credit for himself and for his profession. He was very friendly to the Indians, but was always very anxious to punish promptly any depredations. I do not think Mr. Grattan was anxious to urge the Indians to fight, but would have been pleased at the prospect of a skirmish in hopes of distinguishing himself, and showing the Indians the power of the white man's arms. Instead of taking a regular detail from the company to perform a duty, he asked for volunteers on perilous service, and was a volunteer himself to all intents, having solicited the order from Lieutenant Fleming; and I believe, but for his earnest solicitation, the offence would have been overlooked until the Indian agent, who was daily expected, should have arrived.

Hoping this may prove sufficiently comprehensive, I have the honor to be, yours respectfully,

CHARLES PAGE,

*Assistant Surgeon, United States Army.*

B'vt Lieut. Col. W. HOFFMAN,

*United States Army, Fort Laramie.*

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FORT LARAMIE, N. T., May 25, 1855.

COLONEL: In answer to your inquiries respecting my knowledge of the orders and advice which Lieutenant Grattan received from individuals at this post, a short time previous to his fatal engagement with a band of the Sioux Indians, in August last, I give the following as the substance of what I recollect to have been told by Mr. J. H. Reed, a gentleman from St. Louis, who was living here at the time of the unfortunate occurrence above alluded to. Mr. Reed says: Grattan came to my room a short time before starting for the Sioux village, and declared to me his intention of not going for the Indian who had

killed the emigrant's cow, unless he should receive orders from the commanding officer to take him "any how." I advised Grattan that if he went after the Indian not to return to the post without him.

Yours, very respectfully,

ALDEN SARGENT,  
*First Lieutenant 9th Infantry.*

Colonel W. HOFFMAN,  
*Commanding Fort Laramie.*

FORT LARAMIE, N. T., *May 29, 1855.*

COLONEL: In answer to your inquiries whether Mr. Reed told me that he had advised the late Lieutenant Grattan, previous to the affair of the 19th of August last, not to return to this post without the offender, I reply that Mr. Reed did tell me that he had given such advice, or what conveyed to me that meaning.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JOHN T. SHAAFF,  
*Second Lieutenant 2d Cavalry.*

B't Lt Col. Wm. HOFFMAN,  
*Major 6th Infantry.*

No. 3.

FORT LARAMIE, N. T., *July 8, 1855.*

SIR: I saw yesterday, for the first time, and with infinite surprise, in a speech made by Mr. Benton in Congress on the 27th of February, that you had endorsed on my report in relation to Lieutenant Grattan's affair as follows: "there is nothing in the accompanying papers to corroborate the statement of Lieutenant Colonel Hoffman that Lieutenant Grattan left his post with a desire to have a fight with the Indians."

You do not say that the opinion expressed by me is not sustained. The phrase I used is a mere expression of my opinion, though I believe I entertained it in common with almost every individual at the post, but you say "the statement," &c., which is equivalent to accusing me with having made a distinct charge against Lieutenant Grattan, without any evidence to sustain it. You thus place me in a false position, and then condemn me for occupying it.

I deny that I made the statement you attribute to me, and I insist that the opinion I expressed on this point is clearly sustained by the evidence accompanying the report. If the threat of Lieutenant Grattan to the Ogalallahs on his way to the Brulés, that he would "crack it to them" if they left their camp; if his making preparation for battle by loading his cannon in the presence of the Indians; if his allowing his drunken interpreter to aggravate and bully the Indians with insulting threats; if his announcing in an emphatic manner to "the Bear" and those with him, that he had come for the offender



and would have him or die; if his rash—to say the least of it—entry into the midst of a camp of hundreds of warriors excited to deeds of blood by his drunken interpreter; if none of these incidents nor all of them together sustain my opinion, will not his own deliberate hope to have a fight, expressed in the presence of his men, and to them, at the same time calling on his Maker to witness his sincerity, establish his desire to have a fight? If you deny this, you accuse him of uttering an untruth almost with his last breath.

That he expressed this hope is established on the testimony of Mr. Allen, a young man of excellent character, who was sent here on business as the agent of a gentleman in California, whose veracity I have never doubted, nor have I ever heard it questioned by any one, and in whom I was induced to place confidence by the favorable manner in which I heard Major Winship speak of him at Fort Leavenworth.

If you pronounce the testimony of Mr. Allen false on this point, you must reject it all, and there is none other offered to give a favorable view of this sad affair, not even to contradict the report that Lieutenant Grattan was under the influence of liquor at the time; and as a further consequence, if you reject this testimony which has been abundantly corroborated, you must reject all the testimony offered, which leaves every one at liberty to fashion the narrative to suit his preconceived prejudices.

I was ordered to investigate the affair—no pleasant duty I assure you—on the most reliable information which I could obtain, and did so, conscientiously, and without favor or affection; and for doing so you charge me with making a statement unsustained, in spite of the written evidence which was laid before you. The charge is published to the world, and I, at the distance of two thousand miles from you, only learn it through the newspapers, after a lapse of four or five months, when a defence of myself is impossible.

I cannot permit myself to believe that the adjutant general read my report and the accompanying papers so carelessly as to overlook any point in them, and that the charge against me was therefore a mistake; and, in my dilemma as to how it occurred, I will not venture to form an opinion.

But I beg you will allow me to say that you have done me an irreparable injury; how great I cannot estimate, for I do not know how far its influence extends. I find myself, after twenty-five years of service, and after having discharged in this case a specific duty with fidelity, publicly charged by the adjutant general with having made an unsustained report against one who is not longer living; and this is done in such a way as to give me no opportunity to refute the charge. Being a soldier yourself you can understand the mortification I experienced at having my best efforts in the faithful performance of my duties so unexpectedly and so unjustly converted into so serious a charge against me.

In making my report I purposely refrained from expressing an opinion on matters where there was a shadow of doubt, preferring that, where I could see nothing to palliate the extreme folly of the whole affair, except the youth and inexperience of the second and brevet second lieutenants, who had the ordering of it, the general should



draw his own conclusions from the testimony offered, and I little dreamed that all the censure would fall on me. Did I order this important post to be left in charge of those young officers, after a serious difficulty had occurred within the year previous, and threats of vengeance had been made by the Indians? Did I advise that the garrison of the post should be reduced to one company of infantry? On the contrary, did I not, while in command at Fort Atkinson, say in my official reports that an officer of rank and experience should command, and that a post of one company, at so distant a point, was more calculated to create a war than to prevent it? And was not a war with the Kioways on the eve of being brought about at that post, some two years since, under precisely similar circumstances, and only prevented by the judicious and commendable conduct of the officer in command, who, seeing that there was no alternative between returning without the offending Indian, as the chief advised, and the inevitable sacrifice of his command, wisely chose the former.

I have not made particular reference to the statement of Mr. Bordeau, not because I have no confidence in it, but because it is unnecessary. He bears here the character of an honest upright man; and, making allowance for his partialities for the Brulés, his relations, his testimony is entitled to credence. At all events, I have heard nothing yet that contradicts its main features.

It would be but justice to myself to make this letter public, to remove, as far as practicable, the reproach which the public announcement of your endorsement has exposed me to, but, as my object is self-defence, and not to censure Lieutenant Grattan, nor to give further occasion for animadversion on the management of army affairs, I prefer to leave the mode of making me reparation to your own sense of what is due to me.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

W. HOFFMAN,

*Major and Brevet Lieut. Col. 6th Infantry.*

Col. S. COOPER,

*Adj't Gen. U. S. A., Washington, D. C.*

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No. 4.

ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,

*Washington, August 20, 1855.*

SIR: I have received your letter of the 8th ultimo, in which you take exception to an endorsement made by me on your report (dated November 19) of the massacre of Lieutenant Grattan and his command.

You remark that I do not say the "opinion" expressed by you is not sustained, but that I say "the statement," &c., which you consider equivalent to accusing you of having made a distinct charge against Lieutenant Grattan without any evidence to sustain it. You also assert that the phrase you used is a mere expression of your opinion, and you deny that you made the statement I attribute to you.

I presume when you prepared this letter you did not refer to the retained copy of your report, or you would not have pronounced the positive assertion you therein make "a mere expression of your opinion." That there may be no further question as to what you did say in that report, I will quote the sentence. It is as follows, and is the beginning of a paragraph:

"There is no doubt that Lieutenant Grattan left this post with a desire to have a fight with the Indians, and that he had determined to take the man at all hazards."

If you intended this as a mere expression of your opinion you were certainly unfortunate in your language. I cannot imagine any form of assertion more positive than the one you here use. You do not give it as an "opinion," but declare it as a *fact* admitting of "no doubt," and you now claim for it not the consideration due to a mere "*opinion*" but of an indisputable fact.

Having given this quotation from your report, it is proper I should add the remarks made by me in submitting the report to the Secretary of War. The following is an exact copy of my endorsement:

"There is nothing in the accompanying papers which corroborates the statement of Lieutenant Colonel Hoffman that '*there is no doubt that Lieutenant Grattan left this post with a desire to have a fight with the Indians.*' While this remark adds nothing to the character of Lieutenant Grattan for bravery, it would seem to detract from his judgment as an officer."

These remarks, as expressly set forth, are based on the information furnished by your report and the "accompanying papers," and on a re-examination of those papers I cannot conceive how it is possible to arrive at a different conclusion.

The paper on which you appear mainly to rely in support of your assertion is the statement of Mr. O. Allen. I do not mean to question the veracity of that gentleman when I say that there is a difference between the two statements furnished by him, one to Major Winship and the other to yourself, in some essential points, so much so as to produce different impressions respecting the motives and action of Lieutenant Grattan. But I confine myself to his statement furnished with your report. It will be recollected that this statement refers wholly to matters which transpired after Lieutenant Grattan left the post, at a distance, probably, of more than eight miles from it, on his way to the scene of action. It does not speak of the feelings or intentions with which that officer *left* the post, and can have no reference to the subjects in question, and yet the recitals made by you from that statement of incidents which occurred near the Indian force do not, in my judgment, justify the reflections cast upon Lieutenant Grattan. One of these incidents, causing his cannon to be loaded in the presence of the Indians, a wise precaution, which no officer would fail to observe under similar circumstances, entitles him to praise rather than censure. But there is another paper which materially bears upon the subject, and the conclusions I draw from it are adverse to the "opinion" (if you meant it merely as such) advanced by you. It is the statement of Mr. J. H. Reed, in which he says: "I asked Mr. Grattan if he would like to be sent against the Indians. He said

he would like very well to go, but would not go unless he had orders to bring the offender. He did not think it would be necessary to fight in order to obtain him. [In respect to this last expression, see also Mr. Allen's statement to the same effect.] But in the course of this conversation, as well as on several other occasions, he told me that if it was ever necessary to fight Indians when they were in their village, he would place his artillery some three or four hundred yards from the village, and run the risk of their driving him from his position. This assertion was made to me while Mr. Grattan was preparing to start on the expedition."

Nothing is here said of his desire to have a fight; he did not even think it would be necessary to fight in order to obtain the offender, and this was his opinion when he left the post, repeated, too, after he was several miles from it. Had he gone forth with a *desire* to fight, it is not probable he would have made the efforts he did make to obtain peaceable possession of the offender. Besides, considering the friendly relations between the parties, their unreserved confidence, and free discussions on subjects relating to the Indians, it is not likely that Lieutenant Grattan would have withheld from Mr. Reed a full disclosure of his wishes and intentions; and it is to be presumed that had the purpose to bring on a conflict existed, Lieutenant Fleming, the commanding officer of the post, would also have known something of it, yet both these gentlemen are silent on the subject. Lieutenant Grattan's expression of disinclination to go upon the expedition unless he had orders to bring in the offender, is no evidence that he desired to force himself into a fight. The expedition could accomplish no useful purpose unless the offender was secured for trial; and, doubtless, viewing the matter in this light, Lieutenant Grattan, with proper professional pride, was unwilling to place himself voluntarily at the head of a fruitless enterprise.

You say I have done you an irreparable injury; I am not conscious of this, and I should regret it if such were the fact. It certainly was no part of my intention, and it appears to me that the injury which has been done in this instance is to the gallant dead. I have but sought to discharge a plain duty in defending the reputation of a brother officer against what I conceived to be an undeserved reproach.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

S. COOPER, *Adjutant General.*

Bvt. Lieut. Col. WILLIAM HOFFMAN, *U. S. A.,*

*Commanding Fort Laramie, N. T.,  
via Independence, Missouri.*

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No. 5.

HEADQUARTERS, FORT LARAMIE, N. T.,

*October 11, 1855.*

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 20th of August, and however ingenuous your reasoning may appear, I cannot in justice to myself suffer it to pass without one more effort to convince you of its fallacy.

Ex. Doc. 91—2

Though my report was made to the commanding general of this department in expectation that he would form his own opinions from the accompanying papers and those he had received from other sources, and that, as a matter of course, *his* judgment and not *mine* would be accepted and acted on, which papers caused me to be less critical in my expression, still I do not think I was "unfortunate" in the language I used. Taking the phrase in connexion with the last paragraph of my report, it means simply: *This is my opinion based on the accompanying papers.* From them you may decide on the merits of the case. You say, "I cannot imagine any form of assertion more positive than the one you here used," alluding to the term "there is no doubt," &c., and yet you yourself employ it in the same sense—"and, doubtless, viewing the matter in this light, Lieutenant Grattan with proper professional pride was unwilling," &c.—evidently here giving only an *opinion*. Why is my form of assertion more positive than the one you here use? That I was confident in the opinion given, I do not deny, and I am now even more confident of my correctness.

It would appear from your endorsement on my report that you do not deem it commendable in a young officer to *desire* to be engaged in a battle, or, in other words, to have an opportunity to distinguish himself. I will not question the wisdom of your views, still it is a desire felt and expressed by almost all young officers. I used the word "desire" in its usual acceptation, and by distorting it into a *determination* to seek a fight, right or wrong, you do me very great injustice.

Again, because the statements forwarded by me do not say, in so many words, that Lieutenant Grattan expressed a desire to have a fight until after he left the post, you assume that he had no such desire. You assert that Mr. Allen's statement "refers wholly to matters which transpired after Lieutenant Grattan left the post, at a distance probably of more than eight miles from it." This is incorrect. *The statement of Mr. Allen commences at the post.* It was only "just below Gratiot's," which is called four miles, that Lieutenant Grattan declared his "hope to God to have a fight." But of what avail would it be to the reputation of Lieutenant Grattan if you could prove that this desire to have a fight did not arise until after he had *left* the post? It is not shown that anything occurred in this distance to awaken his desire, and is his declaring it then no grounds for the opinion that it existed when he left the post?

Lieutenant Fleming does not say in his report, that having himself headed a successful expedition against a village of Miniconzhoes the previous year, in which three or four were killed, it was promised to Lieutenant Grattan that he should go out on the next occasion; nor that the expedition was only determined on at the dinner-table a short time before it marched; nor that Lieutenant Grattan was a volunteer and earnestly sought the duty; nor that the commanding officer was so little aware of what was going forward that he did not know how many men went with the party; yet these are all relevant facts, and you cannot sustain yourself on what he did *not* say.

I have shown in my letter of the 10th of June, that Mr. Reed was

the adviser of Lieutenant Grattan, and it could not be expected that he would say anything that could be understood as reflecting on his friend's judgment or prudence. I requested a statement from him, knowing his partialities, but not knowing his personal interest, being anxious that all that could be said to justify Lieutenant Grattan should be laid before the general. The disbelief of Lieutenant Grattan in the courage of the Indians and in their willingness to fight, is of little force to show that he did not wish to fight them. And that he did not attack them in the manner he told Mr. Reed he intended, only shows that he changed his mind on that point.

Major Winship says in his report, "Lieutenant Grattan *doubtless* imagined that these indications were all unfavorable to the object of his expedition, and determined to bring the matter to an issue by submitting the alternative of an immediate surrender of the offending Miniconzhoë, or instant hostilities against the Brulés." This shows, in his *opinion*, that Lieutenant Grattan determined to attack; and as he was then in the midst of the village, and as we know of nothing to prevent his taking a position outside of it, it is fair to suppose he thought such a change would be over-cautiousness.

Towards the close of your letter you say, "it is to be presumed that had the purpose to bring on a conflict existed," &c., and again, "is no evidence that he desired to force himself into a fight." I used no such language. It is a perversion of my meaning, and it proves the strength of my position, since it can only be assailed by such means.

You say that "Lieutenant G., with proper professional pride, was unwilling to place himself, voluntarily, at the head of a fruitless enterprise." From which I conclude you think it was proper to send a brevet second lieutenant, with a party of twenty-nine men, to a village of six hundred lodges of Indians, with orders, in certain contingencies, to attack them. Yet, "*doubtless*," such an order, given by any officer above the grade of second lieutenant, would subject him to dismissal from the army by a court martial. In this case, the order to attack, it appears, was not given. On the contrary, from the report of Major Winship, "Lieutenant G. was ordered to bring in the Indian, if practicable, without unnecessary risks." But Lieutenant Grattan's views coinciding with yours, and being determined to head no "fruitless enterprise," he resolved with his small command to give battle to an Indian force of a thousand warriors, the first fruits being the sacrifice of himself and his twenty-nine soldiers. The ultimate consequences can better be estimated at the close of the Sioux war.

Let me notice one more instance of your partial judgment. You endeavor to make it appear that Lieutenant Grattan made "efforts" "to obtain peaceable possession of the offender." Surely you cannot claim, as such, his "emphatic" assertion to the "Bear," that he would "*have him or die*;" nor the taunts of his drunken interpreter. Little else occurred at the interview at Bordeau's, except that he, Bordeau, offered to settle the difficulty in a few minutes if Lieutenant Grattan would silence the interpreter. It appears from statements furnished, that after the command entered the village, urgent requests



were sent twice by the "Bear," not by Lieutenant Grattan, to Mr. Bordeau to come and prevent a fight.

I enclose herewith letters written at my request, which will put the case fully before you, and I trust you will feel that in endeavoring to shield "the gallant dead," a young officer of less than a year's service, from imputations which are not contained in my report, you have, without cause, reflected on the living, whose length of service at least would entitle him to a hearing before condemnation. My correspondence on this painful subject bears on its face ample evidence of my kindly feelings for the unfortunate Lieutenant Grattan, but I must confess that my charity shrinks from such wantonness as would sacrifice truth and justice in any cause, or to promote any interest.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

W. HOFFMAN,

*Maj. and Brevet Lieut. Col. 6th Infantry, commanding.*

Colonel S. COOPER,

*Adjutant General United States army, Washington, D. C.*

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*Endorsement of the Adjutant General upon the foregoing letter.*

ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE, November 13, 1855.

As the service is not likely to be benefited, but may to some extent be prejudiced by continuing this controversy, I am content that Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Hoffman should have the full benefit of his arguments in this letter without further reply from me.

I may take occasion, however, to say that my endorsement on his report of the 19th November last had reference wholly to the facts as presented in that report and the accompanying papers. Those remarks do not impugn his motives, nor were they intended to cast censure, either on his report or his conduct in making it. He may have had other reasons for the conclusions he came to respecting Lieutenant Grattan than those given in the statements furnished with his report; and it would seem probable, since the receipt of this letter with the accompanying statement of the Rev. Mr. Vaux, that those reasons existed when his first report was made; at all events, Lieutenant Colonel Hoffman had then (Mr. Vaux living at the post) the same means of obtaining that statement as at the present time. Had he furnished with his first report the facts which are now disclosed by Mr. Vaux, I should have been saved the necessity of making the endorsement I did make, and this correspondence would not have taken place.

As the statement of Mr. Vaux materially changes the character of this whole affair, it is respectfully submitted for the information of the Secretary of War, together with the report and correspondence of Lieutenant Colonel Hoffman on the subject of the Grattan massacre.

S. COOPER, *Adjutant General.*



*Endorsement of the Secretary of War.*

The view of the adjutant general in declining further to continue the correspondence is concurred in, especially as the statements now presented are mainly the opinions of officers who were not at the post when the event occurred, and of recitals of conversations with persons having no official relations to the command; whilst the testimony of the commanding officer of Fort Laramie, from whom Lieutenant Grattan received his orders and instructions, seems not to have been sought in relation to the point now raised.

The strictures upon the act of the colonel of the regiment, who at the time was commanding general of the department, for having detached the senior officers, whereby the command of the post devolved upon a junior lieutenant, are wholly uncalled for and improper in the letter of a subordinate.

J. D.

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FORT LARAMIE, N. T., *October 10, 1855.*

COLONEL: I have the honor herewith to present my views in regard to the difficulties which occurred between the Sioux Indians and the troops near this post some fourteen months since. My opinions have been formed after diligent inquiry, and upon evidence, oral and written, of eye and ear witnesses. As many contradictory statements have gone forth relative to this affair, and many erroneous ones, upon which public opinion has been formed, it may be well briefly to state what is now received and considered as the true state of the case. It appears that the difficulty had its origin in the act of one individual of the Mineconjou band of Sioux Indians, who killed a lame cow belonging to a Mormon emigrant. This Indian, we are informed, was a Missouri Indian, who, when he came over to the Platte, said that he intended to do something bad before he left. An opportunity, as he conceived, offered, and he killed the emigrant's cow. He carried out his threat.

Immediately after this occurrence, the Bear chief, who was a Wazahgie, one of the bands of Sioux Indians, came up to the fort and informed the commanding officer of the affair, stating that the Indian was not a Wazahgie, but a Mineconjou; and that if the commanding officer would send for him he thought he would be given up, or that he, the Bear, would endeavor to have him given up. This occurred on the day on which the cow was killed. The commanding officer, it is confidently affirmed by those who were here, declined sending on that day for the offender, and had definitely postponed any action in the matter, until the arrival of the Indian agent, who was expected daily. He appears to have come to the conclusion that it was a matter for adjustment between the Indians and the agent. The Indians considered it as the act of an individual, and did not wish to be implicated in the affair. The Bear chief, in order to anticipate any action

in the matter, reported it promptly. The day after this occurrence, and the report of it by the Bear at dinner, the commanding officer decided to send an officer and twenty men for the offender. He appears to have come to this decision suddenly, and then, in consequence of the repeated and urgent solicitations of Lieutenant Grattan, that *he* might be sent. Lieutenant Grattan, we are told, urged the commanding officer to send, and earnestly requested that he might go. He is said to have entertained for the Sioux Indians a great contempt. He had frequently said that with ten men he could whip any number of them, and had expressed a desire to have an opportunity of chastising them.

He appears to have been a young officer of courage, but rash and impulsive almost beyond belief. The commanding officer detailed him for this service, with twenty men and two pieces of artillery, with instructions "to bring in the Indian, if *practicable, without unnecessary risks.*" Volunteers were called for from the company for dangerous service. Instead of twenty men, as the official reports show, thirty went. The party did not leave the post until 3 o'clock, p. m., on the day after the killing of the cow. When preparations were making for the service, the ordnance sergeant, an old and faithful soldier, was requested by Lieutenant Grattan to go along, which he declined doing, because, as he says, he believed the lieutenant to be *rash*; that there would be a difficulty, and that he had no confidence in his judgment.

At that time there was a Mr. Reed, of St. Louis, staying at the post, and occupying the same room with Lieutenant Grattan. He says that he heard Lieutenant Grattan say that he would not go unless he had orders to bring the Indian. Mr. Reed says that he advised him not to come back without the Indian. Lieutenant Grattan had jeered some citizens who had, on a certain occasion, pursued a party of Indians without accomplishing anything, although they had overtaken the party. He had been very severe upon them in his remarks concerning the affair.

There is a matter connected with and bearing in some degree upon this affair, which has not been mentioned. The summer before, a Mineconjou had fired at a soldier who was crossing the Platte in a boat. Lieutenant Fleming was sent at night with a detachment across the river to bring in the offender, or some others, as hostages. He went to their encampment and made the demand, but the offender and nearly all the warriors were absent at the time. The Indians became alarmed and fled, firing as they ran; as they did so they were fired upon by the troops, and three or four killed.\* The next day the band came in and talked the matter over with the commanding officer, and the affair was amicably adjusted. They did not seek summary vengeance, and kill the herd party, the hay party, or the party at the farm, some fifteen miles distant. They came in and talked the matter over, and said, that perhaps the whites were right, after their manner of thinking, or after their way; there the matter ended. It was after this occurrence that Lieutenant Grattan solicited, and had the promise made him, that, on the occurrence of any other difficulties, he, Lieutenant Grattan, should be sent against the Indians. It is said that he considered that the officer in command on this occasion

had distinguished himself, and he was anxious for a like occasion. The occasion, as he conceived, presented itself, and he urged his claim. He earnestly and strongly urged it, and he was sent as above stated.

These were the influences operating upon him; the advice of others urging him to bring the Indian, regardless, it appears, of his instructions, which were "to bring in the Indian, if *practicable, without unnecessary risks*;" the fear of his being laughed at, in case he did not accomplish the object of his mission; and his eager desire to chastise the Indians, and thereby distinguish himself.

He was heard to say, on leaving the post, that he would "conquer them or die," or words to that effect. He requested Mr. Reed, in case he did not return, to pay his man a sum of money due him. He is reported by all to have left the post in a state of *unusual excitement*. A Mr. Allen, who had just arrived the day before, accompanied the command. The "Man-that-is-afraid-of-his-horses," head chief of Ogalahlas, and the post interpreter, also went along. Arrived at Mr. Gratiot's, about four miles from the post, the party halted, and the interpreter got some liquor, which, together with what he had already taken, made him quite drunk. Just before this, as the party ascended the bluffs which overhang the Platte valley, from which point the Indian encampment was distinctly visible, stretching along the Platte and around Mr. Bordeau's houses, Mr. Allen remarked, "Lieutenant, do you see how many lodges there are?" "Yes," was his reply, "but I don't care how many there are; with thirty men I can whip all the Indians this side of the Missouri." There were at least six hundred lodges visible at the time this remark was made. Soon after, at the suggestion of Mr. Allen, he halted his command, ordered them to load, and gave them the necessary orders as to how they should conduct themselves in the event of a fight, concluding by saying, "Men, I don't believe we shall have a fight; but *I hope to God we may have one*." Mr. Allen states that the interpreter became quite drunk, and was charging over the plain at a furious rate, uttering threats of defiance against the Indians, towards whom he is represented to have long entertained a very bitter hatred. Mr. Allen told him he had better not run his horse down, and suggested the probability of having need of his speed before night; but the interpreter did not heed him. The party arrived at Bordeau's trading houses, some eight miles from the post, and three or four from Gratiot's. The Indians came out to see who had come—men, women and children. They were met by the interpreter, who exclaimed, with insulting gestures, "We have come to fight, not to talk. Last summer we killed some of you, but now we have come to wipe you out; you are women. If you want to fight, come on; we have come to drink your blood and eat your *liver raw*;" and much in the same strain. Mr. Bordeau came out at the request of Lieut. Grattan, and hearing the outrageous and insulting language of the interpreter, told Lieut. Grattan to shut his (the interpreter's) mouth; if he did not, there would *certainly* be a *difficulty*. He further told him that if he would make his interpreter hush, he (Bordeau) would settle the matter in *thirty minutes*. The Bear chief was sent for. He was the chief of the Wazahzies, but had

been made by Colonel Mitchell chief of the Sioux nation. His influence was very great among his own band, and mainly attributable to his great personal courage. But over individuals of the other bands into which the Sioux nation is divided, his influence was not so great as that of the various chiefs of those bands. Lieut. Grattan demanded the Indian who had killed the cow. The Bear, we are told, said that the Indian would not be taken, or that he could not make him deliver himself up. The cow killer was prepared for the worst; had armed himself, and was waiting the result in his lodge some distance from Bordeau's houses. Lieut. Grattan said he "would have the man or die," and started to go into the midst of the village. Mr. Bordeau advised him not to go in, and said that he was going into "a bad place." The lieutenant replied that "he was not afraid, that he had two revolvers." "Draw one, then," said Bordeau, "and be on your guard." During all this time, the drunken interpreter was bullying and insulting the Indians, by the most offensive language and gestures. In vain had Mr. Bordeau and his employés endeavored to make him desist; in vain had Mr. Bordeau appealed to Lieut. Grattan, and requested him to shut the interpreter's mouth, urging as a reason, that unless he did so, there would certainly be a difficulty, and volunteering his own services, as interpreter, to settle the difficulty in thirty minutes. Lieut. Grattan marched his command into the heart of the village, and halted it about sixty yards from the lodge occupied by the cow killer and his adherents. There a further conversation ensued between the Bear and the lieutenant. What transpired we do not know, except from Indian testimony.

The Ogalahla chief, the Man-that-is-afraid-of-his-horses, who came with the party from the fort, and who had been with them up to this time, says that the Bear urged the lieutenant to go home, and defer the matter until the arrival of the agent. He further states, that the Bear offered the lieutenant a mule in place of the cow, if the lieutenant would "*cover up*" the trouble until the arrival of the agent. This much we do know *certainly*, that *twice* during the conversation the Ogalahla chief came in great haste to Bordeau from the Bear, requesting him to come out *immediately* and prevent a difficulty. This message was, "To come *quick* and talk; that the interpreter was drunk, and did not talk *straight*; that all his talk was about *fighting*." Mr. Bordeau says that the Ogalahla chief came to him *twice* with this message, and that he started to go, but turned back. The Ogalahla chief states that he went *twice* with the above message. He states, further, that he went *twice* with the Bear to the lodge of the cow killer to see if he would give himself up, and that his only reply was, "Tell the white chief I am ready to die," or "I wish to die." Soon after this the firing commenced, as all say, on the right of the detachment. I believe the troops fired first. The firing was heard and seen from the top of Bordeau's house, and immediately all was confusion. The Indians were attacked, and they defended themselves. Lieutenant Grattan had put himself into their power. He did not think they would fight, or, if they did, he thought that he could, with his party, whip all the Indians this side of the Missouri river. The In-

dians were numerous, numbering from ten to fifteen hundred men. The result is known.

We can but lament the fate of Lieutenant Grattan. He appears to have been a young officer of courage, and exhibited much zeal in the discharge of the duties of his profession; but he appears to have acted under improper influences. He was ambitious, and, regardless of his instructions, hazarded the safety of his command by his rashness. I believe firmly that he was desirous of having a difficulty with the Indians, and that he anxiously awaited an opportunity of making them feel the power of the military. I do not say that this was the sole motive that prompted him. He was, doubtless, desirous of getting possession of the Indian, but not in the least averse to a resort to arms should any obstacle, however slight, present itself to the immediate accomplishment of his mission. If not desirous of a difficulty, why did he allow his mouthpiece, his drunken interpreter, to bully, insult, and dare the Indians to a fight? Why did he not check him, or tie him, when urged by Mr. Bordeau to "shut his mouth?" Why did he allow him to go with his party into the village and there continue to upbraid the Indians with the most opprobrious language? He was warned at the outset of the consequences, but he heedlessly disregarded them. He seems to have had an overweening confidence in himself and his handful of men, and a thorough contempt for the foe with whom he had to contend.

This affair has been termed an ambuscade, a deeply laid scheme to entrap the troops and massacre them in consequence of the weakness of the garrison at Fort Laramie. The garrison was weak, and its weakness was well known at headquarters. You, sir, are aware that repeated calls had been made for more troops at the frontier posts. But there is not a shadow of evidence to show that the Indians desired a difficulty; on the contrary, it is very evident that they did not wish to come in collision with the troops. The Bear was heard to say that he was indebted to the whites for all that he was and all that he had. He is known to have killed two or three Indians in defence of the rights of the whites; he has been known to return stolen property at great personal risk; and yet it is sought to make it appear that his coming and reporting the affair was done to *ensnare the troops*. He did not know that the troops were coming; the commanding officer had decided *not* to send the troops. Besides, would the Indians have allowed thirty men and two pieces of artillery to enter the heart of their village and they prepared for an ambuscade? Their women and children were all present, and when they saw the troops approach they ran out, expecting to meet the agent. The failure of the Bear to deliver up the Indian is nothing more than might have been expected, for we all know how feeble the authority of a single chief of one band is over the individuals of other bands. Lieutenant Grattan had orders to bring in the Indian if practicable, but to run no *unnecessary* risks. Did he obey these instructions when, in spite of advice, and heralded by a drunken interpreter bullying and insulting the Indians, he rashly went into the midst of six hundred lodges?

You were sent out to investigate this sad affair, and in the discharge of a delicate duty thus confided to you, after collecting all the evidence



possible, and after maturely weighing every circumstance connected with the affair, you came to the conclusion that it was no ambushade, but that it was the result of rashness on the part of the officer in command of the party, and inexperience on the part of the commanding officer of the post. A post in the heart of the Indian country was left in command of a second lieutenant of a little more than a year's service; and the duty of taking, with only thirty men, an Indian from a village of six hundred lodges, was assigned to a brevet second lieutenant who had not been a year in service.

I fully concur with you in the views entertained by you relative to the origin of the Sioux difficulties. You have been, I concur, unjustly censured for your reports relative to the difficulty; your motives impugned, and the views you have taken attributed to bias, prejudice, and selfish motives.

You did not wish, nor do I, to reflect upon the character of the dead, but justice to the living renders it necessary that the truth, and the whole truth should be told, "*justicia fiat cælum ruat*" should be our motto; yes, let justice be done, though the heavens fall.

I have of late conversed with many officers on the subject of the Grattan difficulty, and all say that the version of the affair, as given by those who have collected all the testimony, and who have been here since the occurrence, differs very materially from what they had heard in the States, and I believe they now concur in the views entertained of the origin of the difficulty, by those who have been stationed at this post.

You are at liberty to make such use of this letter as you may think proper.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

ED. JOHNSON,

*Captain and Brevet Major 6th Infantry.*

B'vt Lieut. Col. WM. HOFFMAN,

*6th Infantry, com'g Fort Laramie, N. T.*

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FORT LARAMIE, N. T.,

*October 4, 1855.*

COLONEL: In reply to your inquiry as to my knowledge of the character, &c., of the late Lieutenant Grattan, I beg respectfully to say that, I was on terms of the greatest intimacy with him from the day of arrival at this post until the hour of his departure for the fatal mission, which I believe he sought and undertook. It is in connexion with this that I shall limit my opinion.

However unpleasant the duty, and the ungracious fact of censuring one who has so sadly fallen a victim to his temerity, justice and truth demand an impartial testimony.

Mr. Grattan, I know, had an unwarrantable contempt of Indian character, which frequently manifested itself in my presence and at my quarters; and often, at the latter place, have I reprov'd him for acts which I conceived highly improper, such as thrusting his clenched



fist in their faces, and threatening terrible things if ever duty or opportunity threw such a chance in his way. I have said to him again and again, "Mr. Grattan, if you choose to act in this way, I must beg you to indulge elsewhere than at my quarters." Indeed, so notorious was this trait, that it was remarked to me by a trader here, "If ever G. gets into a difficulty with the Indians, I hope he may come out safe, but I doubt it." Meaning by this remark that from his contempt of the Indians and an undue reliance on his own powers, he would be led into conflict when there was no hope of success.

On the day of Mr. Grattan's departure, I saw him when about starting, and could not but notice his extreme agitation. And some days after the fatal affair, I was fishing with Mr. Renald, (who was present during the whole of the difficulty,) and he assured me, most solemnly, that G. was quite intoxicated. I do not vouch for this, at the same time I cannot doubt its truth.

The awful consequences of the whole occurrence, with the existing state of things, and the unknown future results, I conceive to be the *effects*, and not the *cause* of culpability. That cause is to be traced to the fact of the garrison being left under the command of inexperienced and rash boys.

"Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!"

Respectfully, your obedient servant,

WILLIAM VAUX,  
*Chaplain U. S. A.*

Col. HOFFMAN, U. S. A.,  
*Commanding Fort Laramie, N. T.*