

GEORGE NORTHRUP, FRONTIER SCOUT¹

WHEN GEORGE NORTHRUP was a boy living in central New York in the 1840's, he read Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* and other stories of the romantic West which filled his head with visions of Indians, prairies, and great forests. His desire to see these things at first hand resulted in many interesting experiences, which he describes in a collection of letters received by the Minnesota Historical Society from his grandniece, Mrs. Theresa MacEwan of Lafayette, New York. The present account of his career is based in large part upon these papers.

Northrup was born in central New York in 1837. When he was six years old, Alice M. Patten of Chicago painted his portrait at his parents' home in Lafayette. By 1852 the family had removed to Pompey, New York, and in that year the fifteen-year-old boy left home to work and study at Dennsville, in the same state. Before he finished his own education, he was invited to teach school and, thinking that he could learn as much by teaching as by studying, he accepted the offer. In his letters to his sister in this period, he urged her to progress rapidly in her studies and not to spend too much time at oyster parties. Many years later he wrote that "few place more value to an education than myself, no one can feel more keenly the grave mistake . . . of a life time, of a youth of fifteen years deserting the school room to adopt the wild habits of the Mountaineer and Voyager."²

From Dennsville Northrup wrote on June 20, 1852: "I

¹A revised version of a paper read at the afternoon session of the eighty-eighth annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society on January 18, 1937. *Ed.*

²Northrup to Teresa Northrup, November 8, 1852, January 24, 1853, March 5, 1855; to Alice Humphreys, December 3, 1863. All the letters cited are among the Northrup Papers in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

think some of going West next summer. I think it is the best thing I can do. . . . I shall go somewhere any how For I shall not stay around here long. that is certain And dont think it requires a great deal of Mental courage to Leave Dennsville." In March, 1853, he wrote that he might go to the copper mines on Lake Superior. Instead, he went to St. Paul and found employment in Auguste L. Larpeur's mercantile and fur-trading establishment. But life in the store was dull and commonplace, and wealth and adventure beckoned to the young Easterner from the wilderness farther to the northwest. His first letter from the West, dated St. Paul, September 3, 1853, tells of his plans:

I pen these few lines in a hurry to inform you that I start to day for Red River of the North next to the British line in the service of the American Fur Company. It is six hundred miles from this place to Pembina or selkirk through a pathless wilderness³

We pass through the Sioux, Winnebago Chippewa, and Assinaboines country on the Route. There are only Six of us, including Mr [James] Tanners wife who is as good a shot as any one of the party. she bought herself a double barrel[e]d gun yesterday. she is a Chippewa half breed as well as Mr Tanner who also is a half breed He is a Missionary and son of the Tanner that it speaks of in Thatchers Indian Traits.⁴ I bought me a good rifle and Revolver. It will take us about Forty Days to make the journey and we pass through the Buffalo Count[r]y. . . . I expect to do well so well that I shall come in the Dog train this winter, Loaded with Furs of my own You can still send your letters directed to me and put on the corner of the envelope, In the care of "G[eorge] H. Spencer Jun," St Paul who is a clerk in the store where I have been. . . .⁵

Having arrived at Pembina, Northrup wrote on November 18, 1853:

³ The distance from St. Paul to Pembina, on the Red River just south of the international boundary, is about four hundred and fifty miles. J. W. Bond, *Minnesota and Its Resources*, 334 (New York, 1853).

⁴ Tanner's father was the famous scout, John Tanner, whose story is told in Benjamin B. Thatcher's *Indian Traits*, 1: 107-114 (New York, 1833). The younger Tanner and his wife were returning to their station at Pembina, where they had labored since 1852. James P. Schell, *In the Ojibway Country*, 112, 123-126 (Walhalla, N. D., 1911).

⁵ In 1851 Spencer went from Kentucky to St. Paul, where he was employed by Larpeur for eight years. Thomas M. Newson, *Pen Pictures of St. Paul*, 1: 284 (St. Paul, 1886).

Well here I am away out of all creation & civilization, away something about two thousand and 500 miles from old Dennsville, and have been 200 miles beyond. Yes and I have walked out of that distance 900 miles what do you think of that nine hundred miles. To use the Yankee phrase it is "some pumpkins," . . . this may seem somewhat curious to you & mother but it is a fact that I did make the journey from St. Paul to Pembina for nothing more nor less than to go out on the plains and kill a Buffalo. . . . I killed my Buffalo and have the tongue which in all probability you will have a taste of, If I should go down in the Spring I did calculate to go down this winter but I have concluded to stay here this winter and teach the Protestant Mission School as the Missionaries wanted me to very much. And if I should take a notion to stay longer I shall receive a full salary of \$400 a year) I rec[e]ive 20 Dol a month now.

The young tenderfoot replaced Elijah Terry, who had been killed by hostile Sioux before he assumed his teaching duties. While Northrup instructed Chippewa, Cree, and Assiniboin children, he began to learn Ojibway, as well as French, for many half-breeds understood only the latter. He found that:

There is a regular war going on here between the Protestant and Catholic Missions The Catholic Priest told the Half breeds that if they sent their children [to] the Protestant school or the one of which I am teaching, The devil would have them that they had committed a sin which he could not forgive and God never would.⁶ However as soon as the school was established, The Children came in crowds to learn "kiji aniwene cum eganoko ami" or White mans knowledge as they expressed it. I have the honor of being the first Protestant teacher in this part of Minisota, That is teacher of a Protestant school Although I do not pretend to be a Protestant any more than a Catholic or Jew or Mohomadan, still I think I have as good a right to be ranked among the civilized as though I had been through all the process of Christian making. Not wishing to "brag" any but will say that I have not smoked a pipe of Tobacco, or Cigar, or chewed a cud of the "weed" or to swear any although I will say "Devil" once in a while when there is no one around. So after giving you a description of my character and morals I will make this addition, nor indulged in lasciviousness, for which this country Is the worst of any I ever saw. Every W[hit]e man that comes here leaves "his mark" in the shape of a human being⁷

⁶ The priest, Father Georges Belcourt, had been at Pembina since 1849, according to his own statement in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 1:180.

⁷ Northrup to Teressa Northrup, December 12, 1853.

Life in the northern wilderness involved a variety of hardships. On January 3, 1854, Northrup reported:

New Years Day is the general kissing day of these people. I wanted to get away without alone somewhere to escape the Kissing Fixings But could not as it was so cold, that it was imposible for me to stay out in the woods. If It had not . . . been sunday I should have taken my gun bundled myself up warm and left for the woods. I however made up my mind [to] stand the "brunt of battle" and shutting my teeth hard I went through with it. Old wrinkled squaws came painted up with all the Gaudiness of an Indians taste. These kissed me as [I] would rather give \$50 than kissed them. But the Half breed women were not so ugly. Well if I did not thank my stars when night came on "there theres no snakes in Ireland."

The youth who was the object of this attention was quite attractive in appearance, if a description in his letter of March 11, 1854, is accurate:

I was weighed the other day and weighed 161 pounds, and am in height 5 feet and 9 inches in my Moccasons. . . . If you should some day put your head into a log house that stands near the Red River, You would see a person with Auburn Hair reaching below the shoulders. A Blue Hudson's Bay coat of "Kapose" with a sort of Hood on the back to pull over the head when it is *very* cold weather, with white moleskin pants, and a Red Sash around the waist with a large knife in its scabbard stuck in the belt, with a pair of fancy Moccasons will complete the discription of the aforesaid person. Well that person is my self, and in the Half Breed Costume

Spring found Northrup "20 miles up the Pembina River," at a place called "Ke'che'na'ah'ynang," or the "Big Point of Woods." On May 14, 1854, he wrote:

We are building the Mission houses. There are but 4 of us, as there are no Indians or Half Breeds that have courage enough to work here in so small a party, With the exception of Pecheto with 3 tents who does not work, staying here merely to protect us. A large party of Sioux are on [the] other side of the Pembina Riv[er] opposite us also another war party of some 200 warriors are within $\frac{1}{2}$ days journey of Pembina and on the east side of the Red River. I have been in the woods to chop, When I have not the least doubt but that I was watched by half a dozen Sioux. For at one time a Half Breed discovered where several sioux had lain, together with 4 balls that they had lost from their pouches. myself and another man had worked close by there the day before. As for Myself, I rely upon my knowl-

edge of the Sioux language for safety, though that will avail me but little, unless I see them before I am fired upon. I have forgotten a good deal of Sioux since I have been here, having nobody to talk with in that language. I am making considerable progress in Chipewewa. in 3 weeks I shall go to the great Plains, with Pecheto who has invited me to go with him, giving me the use of a horse, one of the best Buffalo Runners in the country, also a cart if I want it. He will board me on the best that the country affords, Take the best care for my safety and Protection and does not charge me a cent. The party will be large as they go out to dry Buffalo Meat for the winter. They generally stay about 3 months.⁸ But I shall come back in 2 as Pecheto says he will send some of [the] loaded carts back on my account. my stay on the Plains was very limited last fall. I will also have a chance to pick up curiosities of the Region that stretches from the Red River to the Missouri. we shall go very close to the last named River if not to it. I shall also have a good opportunity to see and study Indian life. There will not be one who understands a word of English in the whole party, excepting myself and I do not pretend to understand much of that. our route will be about West.

The buffalo hunt lasted from the first of June until early September. From Pembina Northrup wrote on September 17, 1854, that he had returned "safe & Sound. We were within sight of the Missouri River. Travelled all through the Assiniboine Country, Following the Buffaloes from one side of the Plains to the other." He continues:

The next day after my Arrival or the next night after Mrs Spencer wife of our Missionary was shot through the window while lying in bed⁹ 2 half ounce balls passed directly through her breast and lodged in the timbers of the House A foul and cowardly deed. the sight of the poor woman whom I saw but a few hours before ali[ve] and well but now lying in the Agonies of death maddened me. I resolved to punish the fiendish murderers, and several nights I lay out with my rifle, — watching. I saw them but twice. One night I had taken to my old place. A little while after dark (the night was very dark,) I became aware that some one was near me although I could not see them, passing along very stealthily by me I observed some dark objects getting over the fence in a corner of which I had ensconced

⁸ The buffalo hunts of the Red River half-breeds took place in the summer and autumn of each year. John Pope, *Report of an Exploration of the Territory of Minnesota*, 31 (31 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 42 — serial 558).

⁹ Mrs. David Spencer and her husband had joined Tanner at the Pembina mission in May, 1853. Schell, *In the Ojibway Country*, 133.

myself. I had several bullets in my mouth ready to reload in case they made a stand, and putting my hand to my side for my horn to have a charge of Powder in my hand, when I discovered that I had lost it or left it at the house. To fire any [*sic*] only charge would be foolish; so the rascals got away. . . .

We are all going to the states this fall Tanner, Spencer, [Norman W.] Kittson & Myself So but 1 American will be left.¹⁰ they will return next summer; when, probably a fort will be erected here. I think of going to Nebraska or Kansas.

Very little is known of Northrup's whereabouts from September, 1854, when he wrote his last letter from Pembina, to January 27, 1855, when he wrote from St. Paul:

I have just returned from a trip to the headwaters of Black River in Wisconsin Where I came very near "Going Under" as the phrase goes. I was, with 4 others for nearly 4 weeks without food. I had the good fortune to kill a deer in the meantime. this lasted us two days. A few Prairie Hens 1 squirrel about a dozen muskrats, was all that passed our jaws, until we arrived in the Dutch settlements on the Mississippi more dead than alive.¹¹ 2 of my com[rades] are not expected to live I came up here by the River Mail Stage getting in last saturday night. . . . I am clerking in a book store at Present.¹²

On April 10, 1855, Northrup was still in St. Paul, but he had the wanderlust again, for he wrote:

Have packed up my books. shall start for the Missouri over the Plains in the summer. shall endeavor to make my trip a useful one. Am studying Mathematics, and navigation.

You will probably hear from me at some point near the Rocky Mountains. Am not certain which direction [I] shall take. have been offered 30 Dollars a month as guide and Indian Interpreter, but I do not like the Region they are going [to] (the North Shore of Lake Superior)

A few months later the eighteen-year-old lad started out to follow westward the trail covered by Isaac I. Stevens in

¹⁰ Kittson was engaged in the fur trade and had a store at Pembina between 1844 and 1854. Clarence W. Rife, "Norman W. Kittson, A Fur-Trader at Pembina," *ante*, 6: 225-252.

¹¹ The "Dutch settlements" were probably near the present village of New Amsterdam, Wisconsin, where a group of Hollanders settled in 1853. See "Historical Notes" in *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 8: 369 (March, 1925).

¹² There were three bookstores in St. Paul in 1856: C. Hamilton & Company, Combs & Brother, and George Little.

1853 on his survey of a route for a Pacific railroad. His only companion was a dog and all his supplies were packed in a handcart. For thirty-six days he trudged along without seeing a human face or hearing any voice but his own. He found the monotony of loneliness almost maddening. On the barren couteau of the Missouri he was no longer able to trace Stevens' trail and found instead a war path of the Sioux. One morning the contents of his handcart were missing. So he turned toward the nearest trading post, at Big Stone Lake. For four days he lived on raw frogs. Accounts of this expedition appeared in contemporary newspapers, but his letters contain no mention of it.¹³ Northrup left no known trace of his activities until July 28, 1855, when he wrote from "Pajuta Zee" or Yellow Medicine, the Indian agency on the upper Minnesota, saying very briefly:

I am in Uncle Sams service at *good* wages which I mean to *lay up* and with a good prospect of some thing better *soon*. I shall go up to the Big Stone Lake, head of Minisota or St Peters Riv. to give the Sissitons Sioux's some instruction in farming soon.¹⁴

On November 14, 1855, he reported that "6000 Sioux have received their annuities within a week I had to ticket them all in two days and in the Indian Language which is very difficult." In the following June, Northrup "received orders from head quarters, to take charge of an expedition of 15 men, 78 head of cattle and 8 heavy loaded waggon destined for the Upper Country." He expected to break five hundred acres of land for the Sisseton of Big Stone Lake and Lake Traverse.¹⁵

While still engaged at the agency, he toyed with the idea of buying some land and settling down. He tried to persuade his family and relatives to join him in the West by describing a particular spot in a letter of March 5, 1855:

¹³ See *New York Daily Tribune*, July 4, 1855; Edward Eggleston, "The Man-that-Draws the Handcart," in *Harper's Magazine*, 88: 466-475 (February, 1894); *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, February 4, 1894.

¹⁴ Northrup's name is not mentioned in the printed reports of the Indian agents in Minnesota for this period.

¹⁵ Northrup to Teresa Northrup and Mrs. L. E. Bishop, June 16, 1856.

Well in *all* my travels There is no spot which I have seen like Otter Tail lake; 110 miles North of St Paul. The lake is 40 miles long 15 wide and is the heart of the Red River. from here to Winnepeg a distance of 500 miles exists one continued stream of Navigation a steam boat will be built on here in less than two years. As yet No white person lives within 50 miles, and the eyes of but few white men have rested upon this beautiful lake

After mentioning the variety of wild fowl that frequented the lake and the abundance of wild rice and maple sugar groves, he concluded:

But few know of it, but as soon [as] it becomes more generally known; people will come in from all quarters. "Hole in the Day" a chippewa chief is in Washington treating for his land's this includes the lake, though a good ways from his country.¹⁶

On February 12, 1856, Northrup asked his mother to give him the authority, as the oldest child in the family, to pre-empt a hundred and sixty acres of land "somewhere in the vicinity of Shakopee 35 miles from Saint Paul." He was sure that "in one year it will be worth 10 Dollars per acre, and [I] can get it now at the Government Price \$1.25 per acre." There is no evidence in Northrup's letters, however, that he ever pre-empted land near Shakopee. He had another ambitious scheme when he wrote on April 18, 1857, from Yellow Medicine:

I want to lay off a town site Northward and make arrangements for a future home, then I am going to look around for a *partner*. Not yet 21 and think of marrying! this is decidedly a progressive age. Minnesota is my home now—my fortune lays in the future prospect of the soon will be state. the coming summer she forms a state constitution.

Northrup never married, and so far as is known he never laid out a town site. He decided that he was "as well posted up in the Indian Trade, the character of the Indians generally as any one," and he saw no reason why he could

¹⁶ In February, 1855, a treaty was negotiated at Washington by which the Chippewa of the Mississippi and other bands surrendered a large tract of land in northern Minnesota, including the Otter Tail Lake region. William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1: 307 (St. Paul, 1921).

not make money in the trade. He wrote on October 7, 1857:

Some two months since I dispatched a party of 3 men (with a team of 2 horses and who also took with them a heavy and valuable load,) to the Devils Lake to build a trading post cut hay &c. I had intended to go myself as I know my own business best, and better acquainted with the country than any one whom I could hire, but as I had promised the "Company" that I would not leave them until after the "Sioux Payment" (Which was protracted by difficulties with the Indians caused by the demand of the Governm[en]t to deliver up the spirit Lake Murderers Inka pa duta and others,) I was obliged to remain here¹⁷

None of Northrup's men returned at the end of two months, and it was rumored that they had been killed by Indians. Northrup was determined to carry on the fur trade and went himself to the junction of the Cheyenne and Red rivers. When no word was received from him for several months, a St. Paul newspaper expressed the fear that he had been killed. To the editor's surprise the missing hero walked into the newspaper office a short time later.¹⁸

Northrup mapped the route for Russell Blakeley's stage line from St. Paul to the Red River, and in July, 1859, guided the first two coaches that made their way over the road. Traveling in the coaches was a hunting party, including Sir Francis Sykes, en route to the buffalo ranges near Fort Edmonton. When the stage reached Georgetown, the steamboat "Anson Northup," on which the passengers intended to travel down the Red River, was found to be tied up for the season. A flatboat was, therefore, built and Northrup piloted it to Fort Garry. Thence he accompanied the hunters in a subordinate capacity, but before their return he was

¹⁷ Inkpaduta, a Sioux chief, was the leader of a massacre near Spirit Lake, Iowa, and in Jackson County, Minnesota, in the spring of 1857. By official order none of the Sioux of the Mississippi region received annuities until after they had attempted to capture Inkpaduta. Folwell, *History of Minnesota*, 2: 400-415.

¹⁸ *Pioneer and Democrat* (St. Paul), April 28, June 25, 1858.

made their chief guide.¹⁹ A short time later Northrup went to the Red River region again to examine the steamboat "Freighter," which had failed in an attempt to sail into the Red from the Minnesota. He was then in the employ of James C. Burbank and Company, which owned the "Anson Northup" and planned to refit it by using parts of the machinery of the "Freighter."²⁰ In the summer of 1860 Northrup served as a watchman on the "Anson Northup." Edward E. Eggleston, who encountered him on the steamboat, reported:

He is well known as the Kit Carson of the Northwest, and is employed by Mr. Burbank on account of his wonderful knowledge of the wilderness, through which he frequently travels on business for his employer. I had heard so much of him as a voyageur, that I expected to meet a stalwart, weather-beaten son of the forest, far advanced in life. Instead of that I found him a boyish looking man of twenty-three with soft beard, and flowing brown hair falling on his shoulders, but pushed back of his ears. His complexion is fresh and ruddy, and so far from having the "brag" that we always associate with the idea of a great hunter, he is modest almost to shyness, though very communicative. His whole bearing is such that you would imagine, but for his frontier dress, that he had been accustomed to a parlor rather than a forest. His language is always proper, frequently elegant, though as unaffected as a child. . . .

He has been among the Indians nine years and is thoroughly acquainted with their character, habits, and legends. He thinks Lynde's book will lack completeness because he has confined himself to one portion of the Dakota nation.²¹ I tried to persuade him to publish his own knowledge of the Dakota's but he says he has no ambition for distinction. He only came west to see these scenes and not for

¹⁹Among the passengers also were two Scotch women, Eleanora and Christina Sterling, one of whom was going to Lake Athabasca to marry an officer of the Hudson's Bay Company. *Boston Daily Journal*, June 25, 1859; *Pioneer and Democrat*, June 10, 26, July 9, 1859; *New York Evening Post*, July 2, 1859.

²⁰*Pioneer and Democrat*, November 22, 1859.

²¹James W. Lynd's "History, Legends, Traditions, Language, and Religion of the Dakotas" was never published. The author had just completed the manuscript, when he was killed in the Sioux Outbreak of 1862. While plundering the store at the Redwood agency, where the manuscript was kept, the Indians destroyed or disposed of a great deal of it. Some chapters were later salvaged and placed with the Minnesota Historical Society. Stephen R. Riggs, "Memoir of Hon. Jas. W. Lynd," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 3: 112-113.

celebrity. I had a curiosity to know where he got his mental cultivation as he has been in the west since he was fifteen years of age. He told me frankly that he had a library of 150 volumes at Graham's point. . . .²²

During the following winter this "Kit Carson" was engaged in carrying mail from Fort Abercrombie to Pembina. He journeyed by dog sledge with a half-breed assistant, sometimes through raging blizzards.²³ When he wrote again on July 15, 1861, from Georgetown, the Civil War had broken out:

As for my self I am lacking in that most important commodity, courage, and will hardly dare venture into the neighborhood of Dixie's worthy sons.

But should they carry the war "into Africa," and get me cornered I shall likely muster enough to—drop my shooting iron and run. However I don't think that I can be more useful in the army than on the frontier. We've got hard customers to take care of on the Border and unless they look well to No 1 we'll let them alone savagely.

I had a horse stolen and another shot not long since by the Indians I succeeded in getting him back about 200 miles out. I think there will be a good deal of such work this summer going on, and it will hav[e] to be met in the proper way to stop it. The Yanktons can become a dangerous enemy but I hope since Gen [Nathaniel] Lyon, [James H.] Lane, and [James] Montgomery have punished the Missouri rebels some what that Secession will not influence the Indian tribes. Their emissaries are no doubt at work but they cannot effect much at the back of an army, once commenced in the south and there remains no doubt but that it would spread to all the different Indian tribes.

Considerable excitement prevailed in Sa[i]nt Cloud Western Minnesota in regard to this subject and I addressed a couple of letters to persons' in that neighbor hood which had the effect to allay it. they were published and extensively copied.²⁴

I shall visit Saint Paul in the course of 2 weeks to meet a party of Englishmen whom I am to take out on the Plains

²² Eggleston, in the *Daily Minnesotian*, July 18, 1860.

²³ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, February 4, 1894.

²⁴ Two letters, dated June 4 and 7, 1861, appear in the *St. Cloud Democrat* for June 14, 1861. In them Northrup states that fears of an Indian uprising as a result of a Sioux council at Lake Traverse are ungrounded. He points out that the Chippewa named Bevaness, who spread the rumor that the Red Lake Indians intended to murder the whites, was a scoundrel and a liar. It was he who stole Northrup's best horse and shot another.

The experienced guide accompanied these hunters to a place near the Couteau of the Missouri, where they were attacked and captured by about two hundred and fifty Teton Sioux. After being robbed of horses, money, and provisions, and miraculously escaping death, they started on foot for Georgetown, where they arrived after eight days. A frontiersman who met them there observed that "George stood it well enough, but the Englishmen looked awful hollow."²⁵

Northrup says that he "was beginning to think of selecting some spot among the beautiful Lakes on the edge of Woodland . . . near the Upper Mississippi When the Clarion of War was sounded. the South had raised her head to rend asunder our devoted union. I enlisted."²⁶ He was mustered into service at Fort Snelling on November 2, 1861, sent to Benton Barracks in Missouri, and assigned to Company H of the Fifth Iowa Cavalry. Many of the letters that he wrote while in the service were addressed to Miss Alice Humphreys of Oberlin, Ohio. He never saw her, but a note that she slipped into a pair of socks fell into his hands and inspired an interesting correspondence.²⁷ He wrote to her on November 9, 1863, after an illness of some weeks:

I found my Regiment at Winchester and joined it just as the per-suit of the rebel "raiders" under [Joseph] Wheeler and [Gabriel C.] Wharton commenced. Once more in the saddle and I rapidly regained my usual strength and health, and during the month of October was on the march nearly every day.

Soon after Northrup enlisted he became fourth sergeant, and later attained the position of first sergeant. On December 3, 1863, he wrote:

²⁵ *Pioneer and Democrat*, August 29, October 13, 1861; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, February 4, 1894.

²⁶ Northrup to Alice Humphreys, September 22, 1863.

²⁷ Miss Humphreys sent copies of her letters from Northrup to his mother, and thus they were added to his papers. See Alice Humphreys to Louisa T. Howard, January 1, 1865.

Gen. [George] Crooks our Division commander sent for me one day and requested me to go into his "Scouts," it having been represented to him by some of his staff with whom I [was] acquainted, that I was guide and hunter for many years in the Northwest.

He has only six at present, and he relies wholly upon us for information in regard to the movements of the enemy and his wher[e]-abouts; although moving in close proximity and sometimes *among* the enemy, we *never* doff our uniform.

Before one of his scouting expeditions, he wrote to Alice: "I have a presentment that I shall never reach our lines again, when I shall have crossed into the enemys [line], on the present trip."²⁸ Northrup survived, however, and was able to enjoy a month's furlough, during which he visited his sister and her husband, Henry L. Cole, in Lafayette, New York. When Northrup re-enlisted, the three Minnesota companies in the Iowa regiment were organized into an independent battalion of cavalry under Major Alfred B. Brackett.²⁹ It was ordered to Fort Snelling, whence Northrup wrote on March 26, 1864:

This is a dull life for me. I am used to more excitement, since I have been in the army, and had much rather hear the shriek of shot and shell than the eternal "left left left" of the sergeants drilling new recruits in the Fort yard.

The organization of the expedition that is to penetrate the Indian Fronteers of the North west proceeds slowly—grass will not be high enough to subsist our animals until May.

Gen [Alfred] Sully will conduct another expedition up the Missouri, which we will join after drawing the Indians across the Missouri.³⁰ the whole column will then follow them up and then pass to the Black Hills. They must fight or loose their families which will most certainly fall into our hands. We may visit Idaho

²⁸ December 24, 1863.

²⁹ Isaac Botsford, "Narrative of Brackett's Battalion of Cavalry," in *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1: 573 (St. Paul, 1891).

³⁰ The Sioux Massacre of 1862 caused such intense hatred and fear of the Indians that an expedition was sent out in 1863 to capture or destroy the savages who were roaming the western plains. A fighting column, made up mainly of infantry regiments under the command of General Henry H. Sibley, failed to meet the cavalry contingent headed by General Sully. Since the 1863 expedition was not completely successful in attaining its object, another expedition against the Indians was organized in 1864. Folwell, *History of Minnesota*, 2: 278-295.

Ter. before we return. If I scout as much here as I did south, it may become a pleasant duty to relate or rather narrate, some very difficult scouts with "hair breadth" escapes," or the unpleasant duty of comrades to chronical the loss of my *hair* and inform you of the demise of your friend.

As correspondent of the *Saint Paul Press*, Northrup sent to that newspaper a series of letters written along the route of the expedition. Writing under the pen name of Icimani, he reported the arrival of the battalion at Sioux City, Iowa, in his letter of May 29 and added:

I am grieved to record the death of William T. Plummer of Company C, of this command.³¹ He was a likely young man, and although but a few months enlisted, gave every promise of making a good soldier. He was buried with the customary military honors, near the crossing of Floyd river.

Messrs. Geo. A. Brackett, Capt. [David] Redfield, Ans[on] Northrup [*sic*] and Geo. McLeod overtook us a day's march out from this place, having made the trip from St. Paul in the extraordinary short space of five days.³²

Besides furnishing the transportation for this Battallion throughout the entire campaign, he [*George A. Brackett*] also furnishes 500 head of fat cattle for Gen. Sully's command, to be delivered on the Missouri River, at the point where the "Minnesota" expedition forms a junction with Gen. Sully; also 200 yoke of oxen and same number of wagons for Gen. Sully's expedition, to be delivered here. These contracts, if successfully filled, will be enough to stamp him or any one else as a business man.

A letter written to Alice from Sioux City on May 26 reads in part:

The "Idaho" Boats were seized her[e] by the General for Government transportation, and the Gold Seekers will have to deter the opening of the rich gulches of Idaho, until we can get our mate-

³¹ Plummer enlisted on April 1, 1864, at the age of twenty-one and died on May 19, 1864, "on the march from Fort Snelling to Sioux City." *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1: 591.

³² Brackett, who was under contract to move Brackett's battalion from St. Paul to Sioux City, made the trip in a buggy. See Brackett's autobiography, p. 10, among his papers in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. The "Minnesota," or second brigade, met the first brigade, commanded by Sully, near the mouth of the Cannon Ball River late in June. David L. Kingsbury, "Sully's Expedition against the Sioux in 1864," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 8: 452.

rial for the campaign up to Ft. Pierre.³³ The Indians are reported as having assembled at a point near the mouth of Heart [?] river, well toward the Yellow Stone with the avowal [*sic*] purpose of resisting the advance of the expedition and putting a terminus to Idaho emigration.

. . . . I enclose you the picture of a *special* friend, the "Standing Buffalo," who is most likely with the Indians waiting for us above here.

Northrup expected to meet this Indian in battle despite the fact that earlier they had exchanged presents in a ceremony that bound them together as "Mita Hoda" or the "two friends." Northrup says "'Standing Buffalo' is the only Indian I would treat thus ceremoniously." The red man had tried to come to his rescue when he was taken prisoner by the Yanktons while hunting at Devil's Lake in 1858 or 1859. Northrup managed to escape by his own efforts, but he appreciated the good will of Standing Buffalo.

Northrup's letter of July 1 relates that:

Capt. Fielding was shot by the Sioux day before yesterday and died two or three hours afterward. The Indians laid in ambush at a pool of water in the bed of the Little Shayenne river near the head of the timber, calculating to kill the first person who approached the spot. It was the intention of Gen. Sully to camp on that stream and the Captain went on ahead with the advance Scouts, and was one of the first to get within range of their guns. There were only three Indians whom we pursued and killed. We chased them 8 miles when they finally took shelter in a Buffalo wallow, but not deep enough to completely cover them, they were soon stretched out. The general had their heads struck off and placed on posts near the spot where the Captain was shot.

Steamboats on the Missouri River and the passengers they were carrying to and from the gold mines are mentioned in Northrup's news letter in the *Press* of July 17.

³³The "Cutter" and the "Chippewa Falls" had proceeded up the Missouri to Fort Randall, when Sully's order brought back the "Chippewa Falls" after its passengers had been transferred to the "Cutter." *Saint Paul Press*, June 7, 1864. Gold had been discovered in northern Idaho in 1860. In 1862 the Teton Sioux, protesting the invasion of their lands, attacked one party of gold-seekers. Consequently the Sully expedition was instructed to erect military posts on the route to the gold mines. Folwell, *History of Minnesota*, 2: 295.

One of the steamers transported an immense quantity of buffalo robes and fresh buffalo meat. Northrup was disturbed because the fur companies were trading with the very Indians the government was trying to bring to terms.

From the site of Fort Rice near the mouth of the Cannon Ball River, Northrup wrote to Alice on July 11 :

One hundred and fifty miles from here we expect to meet the Warriors of the hostil[e] Sioux in battle. They are not anxious for peace and we must teach them a salutary lesson. we are determined to do it.

He adds a note of premonition: "Where my next may be written from I cannot tell. perhaps this may be the last you will ever receive from me." And it was his last letter.

On July 28 the battalion encountered the Indians in almost the very spot that Northrup anticipated. He was one of the two white men killed in this, the major battle of the expedition.³⁴ Later, one of his comrades wrote to his mother :

I have met the Q[uarte]r Master, & who was with & close to Geo when he fell. he was killed by both bullets & arrows, as there was a bullet passed clear through him & arrows sticking in him, he died instantly, & as I said before was some on ahead of his company. They laid him out & kept him one day before burial, & buried him in the eve, & so disguised his grave that the Indians will not find it. could not get a coffin & buried him in blankets.³⁵

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³⁴ For a description of the battle see *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1: 581.

³⁵ John Curtis to Mrs. L. E. Bishop, November 28, 1864.



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