

CAMP RELEASE--THE STATE BREATHES A SIGH OF RELIEF

Camp Release: what was it? who was there? Why were they there? what happened there?

Camp Release is the name given to the area of land in present day southeastern Lac qui Parle County, Minnesota, where Dakota warriors who had begun the U.S. Dakota War of 1862, along with their families, with their white captives (mostly women and children), and mixed blood captives, and soldiers under the command of Colonel Sibley, all met up in late September 1862. In this setting the captives were turned over to the U.S. Army for protection, Dakota warriors and their families were put under the army's control. The camp's population at its largest was around 3800.*

Number of people at Camp Release

Dakota warriors, 738

families of the Dakota warriors, about 1200

the captives , 269 (107 whites, 162 mixed bloods)

Sibley's troops about 1600

** based on Samuel J. Brown's statement of 2188 in the Dakota and friendly camps, and Sibley's forces about 1600 (1619 less deaths and injuries from the Battle of Wood Lake.)*

Who was there?

- the Dakota warriors: Little Crow knew that Col. Sibley and his army of some 1600 men had been sent out to defeat them, were marching up the Minnesota River Valley, and drawing nearer. The Dakota warriors determined to make one final assault on the troops, which was the Battle of Wood Lake.
- the captives: the women and children taken captive by the Dakota during the conflict had been forced to move up the Minnesota River Valley along with Little Crow's warrior band and their families. The captives' presence raised questions among the warrior group: should the captives be released? killed? The captives were well aware of the uncertainty and the potential danger they were in.
- the friendlies: Among the captives and hostages were friendly Dakota and friendly mixed-blood people; they decided they must protect the white captives from Little Crow and his warriors, so the friendly "Peace Party" Dakota and mixed-blood leaders moved the captives to a separate camp and protected them. Some protectors used an old Indian method of digging a trench inside their tent in which to hide people, then covering the trench with blankets and possessions.
- Col Sibley and his troops. He had been at Fort Ridgely since the Sept. 2 battle at Birch Coulee; he was waiting there for much-needed reinforcements and when they arrived, Sibley left on September 19 with 1619 men to march up the valley to fulfill his mission to defeat and capture the Dakota. On the way north the Battle of Wood Lake occurred, temporarily stopping their progress and causing a loss of men through death and injuries. DW 62.

Why were they there?

- Little Crow could not proceed farther north. On September 9, 1862 Little Crow moved the entire group north, as part of his continuing plan to stay ahead of Sibley's approaching troops. When Little Crow's group got as far north as Red Iron's village, they were stopped by Chief Red Iron who, backed by Chief Standing Buffalo and _____, who had come in from the plains to stand behind him, told Little Crow he could not enter his Red Iron's territory, so the Little Crow and all his entourage set up camp just south of Red Iron's territory, in present-day Lac qui Parle County.

- Col. Sibley and his troops were there to capture the hostile Dakotas and protect the captives.

- the captives had no choice. They knew if they tried to escape they would have been hunted down by the Dakota and brought back.

What happened there?

Prior to Little Crow's arrival on September 9, a council was held by Sisseton leaders at the mouth of the Chippewa River on September 6, 1862 to discuss what to do about the conflict and Little Crow's actions. Present were Standing Buffalo, Mazakutemani, Red Iron, Scarlet Plume, Wanata, Ecetukiya, and Star. The leaders spoke against joining the conflict. This led to their stopping Little Crow's movement north when he reached Red Iron's village. TDE 200, 204.

Sept. 8-12, 1862: Little Crow and Col. Sibley communicated about reasons for the war, and conditions for peace, including freeing the captives, but reached no agreement. Messages were carried back and forth by couriers, including Thomas Robertson and Tom Robinson. Along with Little Crow's last communication to Sibley of Sept. 12, 1862, a secret message was sent with the couriers, signed by chiefs Wabasha and Taopi, asking how they could get under Sibley's protection. Sibley answered that they should send a message with a half-breed and approach with a white flag.

September 21, 1862: word reached Little Crow that Col. Sibley was marching up the Minnesota River Valley with a large army of men. The Dakota realized they could not allow Sibley's army to advance any farther, and decided to make a final, all-out attack on the soldiers. Little Crow aroused all his warriors, including the mixed blood men, and left the evening of Sept. 22, heading toward the area just south of the Yellow Medicine agency where Sibley and his troops were reported to be camped for the night.

Sept. 23, 1862: The Battle of Wood Lake took place. It was the last battle of the conflict in Minnesota; the Dakotas suffered a decisive defeat, which "marked the end of organized warfare by the Sioux in Minnesota, and it pointed the way for the release of the captives and the capture of many of the Indians." Kenneth Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862*. See Carley's The Dakota War of 1862 Chapter 12. DW 59-63

Sept. 23-24, 1862: the mixed bloods who were part of the Peace Party, and who had been forced to go with Little Crow's forces to the Wood Lake Battle site, had snuck away during the night, returned to Little Crow's camp, and moved most of the captives to their own friendly camp.

Sept. 24, 1862: When the Dakota warriors returned to their camp from Wood Lake, they found the captives missing. The warriors were now faced with the choice of fleeing or remaining to surrender to Col. Sibley. A number of the Dakota warriors and their families, including Little Crow, Shakopee, Red Middle Voice, Medicine Bottle and others, chose to flee. They left the next morning, heading to the prairies of Dakota Territory. DW 64

Sept. 25-26: The captive, now in the friendlies' camp, waited eagerly for the arrival of Col. Sibley and his troops. Finally, on the morning of September 26, 1862, they were overjoyed to see in the distance the glint of sunlight reflected from bayonets of the approaching soldiers, signaling their coming rescuers. When the soldiers entered their camp, the white prisoners were "sobbing hysterically and clinging to their rescuers with a death-like grip, as if they were not quite sure of their emancipation." MH 5:16.

"No grander sight ever met the eyes of anybody than when the troops marched up with bayonets glistening in the bright noon day sun and colors flying, drums beating and fifes playing." Samuel J. Brown, TDE 224.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS FOLLOWING SIBLEY'S ARRIVAL

For a detailed chronology of events at Camp Release, see Lac qui Parle County. Chronology
The Dakota warriors, women and children who did not flee were turned over to Col. Sibley at Camp Release. There were about 1200 of them at first; some of the Dakota who fled decided they were better off surrendering to the U.S. government and "came in", bringing the number of Dakota close to 2000.

Trials of the Dakota men by military tribunals began at Camp Release and were continued at the Lower Agency. Some 303 Dakota warriors were convicted and sentenced to hang. The condemned prisoners were taken to Camp Lincoln near Mankato and then to a prison in Mankato.

Some soldiers sought revenge: a number of the soldiers at Camp Release were so incensed by the deprivations they had observed and the condition they observed among the captives that a number of soldiers planned revenge against the Indians. Their leaders prevented them from proceeding with their plans. MH 5:17-18.

Temporary prison erected for the warriors. A prison made of logs was put up to hold the warriors. The men who had been convicted were put in chains.

Some freed captives allowed to leave: Oct. 4-5, a group of 94 women and young children with no living relatives were sent to Fort Ridgely, and a small group of women left when their husbands, having learned their wives were alive and at Camp Release, came for them.

Moving some of the captives: on Oct. 4, 1862 a large number of people from Camp Release were moved to the Yellow Medicine agency. The group included about 1250 Indians (286 men and the rest women and children), about 150 soldiers with provisions, and baggage wagons. They were sent to the agency because food and supplies were running low at Camp Release. They were to live on the crops (potatoes and corn) planted by the farmer Indians at the agency. Samuel J. Brown accompanied the group as interpreter (TDE 225).

Oct. 5-23, 1862: trials continued at Camp Release for the Dakota men.

Oct. 23-24, 1862 Sibley moved his troops and the Indian prisoners out of Camp Release down to the Lower Agency, where the trials continued.

For chronology and details of Camp Release see section Lac qui Parle County, Chronology.

•The families of the non-hostile prisoners and many of the half-blood men and their families who had been moved to the Yellow Medicine Agency were moved again on October 12, 1862 to the Lower Agency, where they were kept until November 1862 when they were taken to Fort Snelling. They spent the winter of 1862-1863 at Fort Snelling and were exiled from Minnesota in May 1863.

BOOKS

CM, DD, DU, DUV, DW, DII, HHS, LCSS, M&I, TDE, TN, TT

See Resource section for Book titles and Codes, Journal titles and Codes

ARTICLES

"The Significance and Challenge of Camp Release, 1862-2012", Alan R. Woolworth, MH 5:6.

"A Massacre Averted", Stephen E. Osman, MH 5:12

Prisoners released: Sibley's Official Report, and list of prisoners from St. Paul Pioneer MH 5:21

"A List of the White Persons and Half Breeds delivered at Camp Release, Oct., 1862" MH 5: 24-27.

First Person Accounts: Perspectives on Camp Release. Includes accounts by Joseph Coursalle's daughters; Wilhelmina Ienenfeldt; Snana; Benedict Juni/Euni; Fred Lammers, and George H. Spencer, Jr. MH 5:27

"Captivity among the Sioux August 18 to September 26, 1862" Urania S. Frazer, (Mrs. N.D. White), MH 5:100

Dr. Gary Clayton Anderson's Speech on the Dakota War Trial: A Critique MH 6-19

Letters sent by Col Sibley to Gen. Pope, Sept. 26 and Sept. 28, 1862, NYT. The War With the Indians: Col. Sibley's Dispatches.
<http://www.nytimes.com/1862/10/13/news/the-war-with-the-indians-col-sibley-s-dispatches.html>

Rediscovering Camp Lincoln MH 6

See Resource section for Book titles and Codes, Journal titles and Codes

WEBSITES:

Dakota Conflict Trials 1862

<http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/dakota/dakota.html>