The Death of
Lyman S. Kidder

BARTON R. VOIGT

In mid-June of 1867 newly commissioned Second Lieutenant Lyman S. Kidder arrived at Fort Sedgwick, Colorado Territory, where he was assigned to Company M, Second United States Cavalry. Less than two weeks later he was sent out on a mission that resulted in his death and the annihilation of his entire command.

This “Kidder massacre,” as it is called by historians, has received considerable treatment in newspapers, books, and magazine articles over the years. There are two main reasons for this interest. First, the Kidder fight was a true massacre—there were no survivors left on one side to tell their story, thus leaving a mystery for later writers to attempt to solve. Second, the role of General George A. Custer in the events surrounding the massacre has stimulated the interest of the many professional historians and “Custer buffs” who study his career. Custer’s similar fate nine years later also has added an element of irony to the story.

Those who have written about the Kidder massacre have tended to see the event mainly in its relation to General Custer and his activities during the summer of 1867. Another story is

told, however, in the reaction of Lieutenant Kidder's family to his death. Jefferson P. Kidder was an associate justice of the supreme court of Dakota Territory at the time of his son's death. Judge Kidder wrote to numerous military officials in an attempt to learn the exact details of the massacre, and to gain support for his plan to recover his son's remains. The responses that the judge received, plus the Kidder family letters concerning Lyman's death, relate in detail the oft-repeated trauma of a family's experience with the violent death of a son in warfare.

Fort Sedgwick, Colorado Ter.
June 16, 1867

My dear Father

I arrived here safely this morning at 6 o'clock. Intend to leave for Laramie at 9 a.m. There has been no Indian difficulty within the last week. I wrote you from Omaha asking for a remittance of $50. to be sent by express to Ft. Laramie, D.T. via Omaha. I suppose my sabre has arrived at Sioux City by this time, by express from St. P. [St. Paul, Minnesota]. If so I would like to have you see that it is forwarded to me.

Love to all.
Yours affectionately
Lyman

Fort Sedgwick, C.T.
June 28, 1867

My dear Father

Capt. Mix of the 2d has arrived here with his Co. and as he had no 2d Lt. with him concluded to telegraph to the Comd’g Officer in order to have me assigned to his company. The answer to the telegram has been received and I am temporarily attached to his Co (M). I think it is quite probable we shall get an order in a few days assigning me. I am very much pleased with this Post, from the fact that it is at the terminus of the RailRoad. I find the officers of the garrison very agreeable gentlemen. Maj. Cain has treated me very handsomely since I have been here. I room and mess with him. I have been sitting on a court-martial for the last two days. We are trying the Sgt. Major of the 4th U.S. Inft. The Indians appear to be

2. "Father" in these letters is Judge Jefferson Parish Kidder of Vermillion, Dakota Territory.
very quiet about here. However, we do not know how long they will remain so. Gen'l Custer is about 100 miles south of here on the Republican River. It is very difficult to decide as to whether there will be an expedition season. We expect a telegram here today which will decide the matter. If my sabre and the money have been sent, I shall receive them as they have to pass through this office.

Give my love to Mother & Silas
Yours affectionately
Lyman

I start for the forks of the Republican tomorrow with ten men. I am to carry dispatches to Gen'l Custer, to be absent 7 days.3

Fort Sedgwick, C.T.
July 14th, 1867

J.P. Kidder, Esq.
Vermillion, Clay Co. D.T.

My dear Sir

I deem it my duty to inform you of the fact that Lieut. L.S. Kidder left this post at about 11 o’c on the 29th ult. as bearer of dispatches to Genl Custer, then supposed to be on the Republican River about an hundred and ten miles distant. He was accompanied by a detachment of ten men of Co. M, 2nd Cavliry and two guides. Since leaving here no intelligence has been received from him, tho’ Genl Custer was heard from 40 miles west of this Post on Wednesday last, up to which time Lieut. Kidder had not reported to him. When Lieut. Kidder left here it was supposed he would be able to accomplish his mission in the course of a week or ten days at furthest, and his friends are becoming alarmed for his safety. I was commissioned by him, before leaving, in case any accident should befal him to convey to you a knowledge of the facts; but have hesitated until now to write you in the hope that, as day succeeded day, some news from him might reach us. I should be extremely sorry to give you causeless alarm by this communication, but his protracted absence raises in my mind a feeling of apprehension, and I feel that my promise binds me to inform you. I need not tell you how ardently we all hope for his coming, nor indeed have we given him up entirely, there are so many reasons why he might be delayed in the execution of his orders. And be assured I will take the earliest opportunity to inform you of any new facts concerning him.

3. This postscript was pinned to Lt. Kidder’s letter of 28 June. Young Kidder probably wrote the note and hastily mailed the letter after receiving his orders to leave the post.
Hon. J.P. Kidder

Dear Sir

I deem it my duty to inform you of the following facts concerning your son Lieut. Kidder, 2nd U.S. cavy. Upon the 29th day of June he was ordered with ten men to carry dispatches from Gen. Sherman to General Custer, who was encamped at forkes of Republican (100) one hundred miles south of this Post. It was thought that he would reach Custer's camp in two days, and rest one day & return in two more. He took an Indian guide & six days provisions. He had ten picked men & two extra horses & besides the guide these men had just been twice over the country. He was to follow the trail of Maj. Elliot of the 7th Cavy, who had come from Custer's camp & returned with ten men only (2) days previous & had seen no Indians. Capt. Mix of Lieut. Kidder's Co. had just returned from a long scout in same country with forty men, without seeing a sign of Indians.
There was therefore no thought of danger, although every precaution was taken in arming & equiping the men.

Upon the 5th day of July, Gen. Custer came to Platte road (40) forty miles above here & had not seen or heard of Lieut. K. Custer had left his camp on the eve. of 29 & made forced marches. In two days time Gen. Custer took up his line of march for Smoky Hill route. Since which time we have not heard from him. Lieut. Kidder has now been out sixteen days & still no news of him. The gravest apprehensions are entertained for his safety. There are no Cavy. here to send for him. If he does not return before the return of M. Co. 2nd Cavy., which is on a scout up Pole Creek, Gen. Potter proposes to go in search of his party. I will give you the earliest information which may be received.

I am very respectfully
your obt. servt.

H[iram] Latham
Post Surgeon

Vermillion, D.T.
July 22, 1867

My Dear Brother

As we have not heard from you since the later part of last month, and as you are in an Indian country where you are exposed to the dangers of the same, we would be pleased to have you write us as often as possible, or at every opportunity, on mother’s account as well as our own. We have observed an account of your departure from Ft. Sedgwick on the 29 of June with an escort of ten men and a guide—that you have not been heard from since. Although it appears to be serious, we can not believe the reports to be true. If you have been spared—as we hope and trust you have—although we may be in suspense for several days, we hope you will be careful not to expose yourself to the dangers you are every day subject to.

We all send our love and pray that you may be protected by that divine Providence which has protected us all for so many long years.

Affectionately,

S.W. Kidder

Fort Sedgwick, C.T.
July 25th, 1867

Hon. J.P. Kidder
Vermillion, Clay Co.
Dacotah Territory

4. Silas W. Kidder, the lieutenant’s younger brother, donated the family letters to the South Dakota State Historical Society in 1901.
Dear Sir:

Since my last letter to you was written it has been ascertained that our worst fears concerning Lieut. Kidder’s fate have been more than realized. It has become my painful task to apprise you of the terrible fact of his overthrow and death, while in the execution of his orders.

It appears, by information from official sources, that Lieut. Kidder’s party reached the Republican River at the point where it was expected he would intercept Genl Custer’s column, but found it had passed that point, going west, a day or two previous to his arrival. From circumstances, it would seem, that Lieut. Kidder discovered that a numerous body of Indians were hovering about the column of General Custer, and even intercepting his line of retreat upon Fort Sedgwick. Finding himself thus placed we infer that he endeavored, by diverging to the south to reach the military post of Fort Wallace, and had succeeded in gaining a point within forty-seven miles of that station when he was overtaken and forced to succumb to superiority of numbers. His body, and those of ten men of his detachment, was discovered by a party from Genl Custer’s command and was decently interred. I am not able to furnish any further particulars of this sad occurrence. I may only add, that his brother officers and friends at this Post, from whom his gentlemanly bearing and excellent qualities of head and heart, made apparent during his brief sojourn among them, had won for him their highest respect and esteem, would acquaint you with the knowledge of the heartfelt sorrow entertained by them for the fate of one who had become uncommonly dear as a companion and friend. They would extend to you and the mourners that tender sympathy which can only be felt by those who appreciate, in some degree, the magnitude of the calamity which has befallen you. We mourn the untimely extinction of that young life so lately full of budding promise, quickened with high aspirations, whose silver cord has been thus rudely severed, and be assured, you who have been thus suddenly called to bear this deep affliction, that there are here his late comrades, who feel for you and would bear the weight of this great sorrow with you.

Deeply regretting the painful circumstance which makes this communication necessary, I remain, Sir,

Very respectfully,

Your obedient Servant,

E.L. Bailey
2d Lieut. 4th Infantry

St. Paul
July 25th [1867]

My very dear Parents & Brother,

Doubtless you were sooner advised than us of the fate of our loved
son & Brother. I feel it my duty to write (or to make the attempt) but language is inadequate. You can better understand my heart, so deeply burned, by your own sad experiences. How my sympathies go out to the living ones; and to think we are so far from each. I wanted to start at once to you—to mingle our tears together, but Dana thought perhaps it would be best for you to come here. Still, if you desire me to come, I am ready to start soon as the message comes. How true it is “death loses a shining mark.” It seems I cannot wait to hear from you, as all afflictions bind more those left. And so, “another golden link is broken,” but we know it is for our good, as “he whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, & scourgeth every son he receiveth.” If we only could fathom these things here, as I trust we may hereafter, we would indeed rejoice in afflictions. Oh! Mother, I think most of you; whose love is so immeasurless as a mothers’. All I am capable of saying is to look to Him who is higher than we; surely there is a balm in Giliad. May we all realize this in its fullness—though He so sorely afflicts, “he is able to sustain to the ultimate.”

How comforting it is to think he was permitted to visit you so long his last visit. One word touching what is paramount of importance to all things. His final hour we all fly to with such vivid earnest tho’t. His last prayer was heard by Him who “doeth all things well.” The time of separation is short. If we live as we should, we shall visit when our final hour arrives. He is not dead but gone gone gone to the lasting home we are hastening. What greater consolation can we ask, to know we shall again meet, no more to be separated, when “God shall wipe all tears from our eyes.” All wish to be remembered. I with a prayer wafting upward that you may be made strong, even in sickness,

I am ever your loving

Marion

Head Qrs. Ft. Laramie, W.T.

August 2, 1867

Mr. J.P. Kidder
Vermillion, D.T.

Dear Sir

Your letter to the Post Master at this Post has just been handed to me and I hasten to reply.

I am very sorry that I can not remove your cause of anxiety but I will give you all the information we possess in regard to your son. As you saw by the dispatch from Ft. Sedgwick, he was sent out with dispatches to Genl Custer, with a guide and ten men, and nothing more was ever heard

5. Lyman’s older sister, Marion, was married and living in Saint Paul, Minnesota, where the Kidders had lived before moving to Vermillion.
of him or his band until their bodies were found by Custer's Command when crossing from the Platte to the Smoky Hill.

He was killed by Indians somewhere on Beaver Creek. We can not tell exactly where from the information we possess, and really this is about all that we know about it.

That he was sent out from Sedgwick, that he did not return, and that after a time his body was found is probably all that will ever be known in regard to the fate of your son. I understand that the bodies of all the men were found very near each other, which would indicate that he died like a soldier fighting to the last.

If hereafter anything comes to my knowledge that might be of interest to you and his bereaved friends, I will not fail to let you know.

I am, Sir, with much sympathy,
Your obdt servt
A.E. Bates
2d Cav
Post Adjutant

Fort Sedgwick, Col.
August 10, 1867

Dear Friend [J.P. Kidder]

Your letters were received yesterday. I should have written you promptly upon the receipt of official information of your son's fate, but I understood that Lieut. Bailey had done so. I will now give you all the information in our possession relating to this unfortunate expedition. I will say first, however, that upon the arrival of Lieut. K. at this Post enroute to Ft. Laramie I made his acquaintance & we more naturally fell into each others society when we found that we were born & reared in the same valley & had so many acquaintances in common. My impression and the impressions of others were so favorable of your son that, as M co 2 cavy was in need of a Lieut. I recommended to Capt. Mix that he telegraph to Regt HdQuarters to have him assigned to his co. & as your son was very anxious to stay here, Capt. Mix's request was granted. There had been no Indians in this vicinity for a long time and they had then seemed desirous to steal only, avoiding all fighting in the Platte Valley. 3 or 4 weeks prior to this expedition, Capt. Mix traveled through the whole Republican Valley with forty men & saw no Indians, nor signs of Indians. Ten days prior Gen. Custer started from Ft. McPherson, 100 miles below here, to march to the Republican & traveled up that stream to a point south of this Place, & from that place sent Maj. Elliot to this Post with ten men. From McPherson to this Post not an Indian nor an Indian sign was seen. Maj. Elliot returned with the ten men the 28th. The 29th an escort with dispatches was ordered from here by Gen. Potter. It was shot by all who knew of Indian affairs that it was perfectly safe to go down with the ten
men. Lieut. K. was perfectly willing to go with this no. & when he started out we all were sure of seeing him at the end of the five days. His instructions were to take Maj. Elliot’s trail & proceed to Gen. Custer’s camp. If Gen. C. had moved he was to follow his trail & deliver the dispatches.

Now I must relate events that occurred after Maj. Elliot left Gen. Custer’s Camp to come to this place. At the same time that Gen. C. sent Maj. Elliot here he sent a train to Ft. Wallace which is 85 miles south of the Forks of the Republican, where Gen. C. was camped, and 190 miles south of this point. I think that he sent a full co. of cavy with the train. Soon after this departure of the train, Gen. C.’s camp was surrounded with Indians & one man killed & a bold attempt made to stampede his stock. The same day, the 23rd or 24th, a party of Gen. C.’s command was attacked 15 or 20 miles from his camp, by 2 or 300 Indians & obliged to retreat to camp for safety. This party numbered 35 & was under command of Capt. Hamilton. About the same time the train before spoken of was attacked on its return from Ft. Wallace, by 4 or 500 Indians & had hard fighting. This body of Indians & the party that fought Capt Hamilton no doubt were in the immediate vicinity of Gen. C.’s camp when he moved, which was the morning of the 30th, one day ahead of Lieut. Kidder. Gen. C. went directly west up the north fork of the Republican for about 50 miles when he struck north to the Platte.6

These hostile Indians, no doubt, hung on the rear & flanks of Gen. C.’s column. When Lieut. K. reached Custer’s old camp he no doubt pushed out on his trail & as he had marched for two days over a burning plain with only water at night his men and animals were wearied and worn out and in this condition he must have pushed on right among the Indians. But as he had, as we think, a faithful & sagacious Indian guide who might have given him notice of Indian signs in time to have enabled him to have traveled quite a distance. From the fact that he was found so far south, it is evident that he was cut off from retreat to this Post & when he reached the old camp of Custer’s in his retreat he took the trail south just made by Gen. C.’s wagon train. He must have had a running fight to the point where he was found, from what other point it is impossible to only conjecture. I think that he found the Indians in the vicinity of Gen. C.’s column which must have been 50 miles at least from the camp, west. And as he was found forty miles from this old camp, I think he fought thru 80 or 90 miles. He might, however, have struck Indians at the old camp. I hope soon to know the truth from the friendly Indians, for which purpose I have addressed a letter to the Gov. Interpreter with them. On the ground where they were found there were signs of a desperate fight, but no signs of capture nor torture. The mutilation was the same as usual with Indian

6. This information about the movement of Custer’s column is inaccurate, as is much of the speculative information in these letters. Custer actually moved south for a few miles on the Fort Wallace trail before turning west toward the south fork of the Republican. This proved significant when Lieutenant Kidder and his party lost the Custer trail at this point.
Custer, Ft. McPherson to Riverside Station
Custer, Riverside Station to Pt. Wallace
Kidder, Ft. Sedgwick to Beaver Creek
victims. I am unable to say whether they were buried in separate graves or not. I will try and ascertain that fact. His watch was with him & also his money, & must have been captured with him. I send a list of his effects, which will be sent to you as soon as the box & $20 is received from Ft. Laramie where it went. It is impossible to tell when he was paid last. The Paymaster General can tell. There are no outstanding debts or charges at present. I presume there may be on the money, sword & box, which I will pay & forward bill to you.

The guide who went out was Red Beard an old Indian who has lived with the whites for years & who is identified with them. His stock was stolen by Indians this summer & his family & all he has in the world are here. It is impossible that he was treacherous. Lieut. K. had ten picked horses & men of the Post, and all the ammunition he could carry & several extra horses.

I think it is impracticable to obtain his body at present. I will obtain the address of Comstock, the guide with Gen. Custer when the bodies were found, so that we may obtain all the particulars & have some one who can at any time guide a party to the spot where your son rests.

If there is any blame resting upon any one in sacrificing your son, it is with the Gov. in carrying out such an imbecile policy toward the Indians. Not only your son & his heroic little band have been slaughtered, but hundreds of others, and still the people of the east have not learned that the Indians want war. Your state, Judge, is disgraced by an Indian com., by name of Sanborn, who prates of Laws & rules & decessions as though he was pettifogging a case before a cross roads justice instead of dealing with fiends who know no laws nor rules & abide by no decessions. I think that every Indian should be shot, or put on to a Reservation away from whites. It is a crime to treat with them & allow them to mix with whites or live in a country when whites are allowed to settle. I think such men as Sanford & Buford should be held to answer to this crime of murder. But enough of this.

You have the sympathy in your great loss of all who knew your son. All tender their condolence, especially Maj. Cain & myself, who are Vermonters. I remember him as a boy in W. Randolph of 5 or 6 years, and his sister of 9 or 10, at the little white cottage, or on the way to school, hand in hand, she exercising such sisterly care & restraint over him. When I saw him here it immediately reminded me of it.

Any thing that I can do for you I will do cheerfully. Hoping that you may be bro’t to be resigned to your great loss, and that you will view it as the removing of one more great treasure to that country to which we are all so surely traveling.

I am yours in sympathy,

H. Latham
Post Surgeon
My very dear Father,

I have been visiting to Aunty this eve, and will try and write a few lines to you. I was very glad to see Mother & Silas, though did not expect them so soon. I had felt so anxious about Mother. She controls herself better than I expected she could. She is very much distressed at times, and feels that her heart is breaking, and that she cannot long survive the shock. Oh, dear Father, it is so hard for us all—you know how hard, you loved Lyman so well. I cannot think of anything else day or night. Poor, poor Lyman, to think that his dear young life he had to yield up in that dreadful manner, he was so noble. But now his dear aching heart rests beneath the sod, all unconscious of the loved ones who mourn & weep for him. I hope and trust he is at rest in Heaven on high, where all is purity and goodness, gazing down upon those who loved him, with a pure undying love, which only Angels can know. Every one speaks of him in such a praise worthy manner. We have the sympathy of all, but that does not console us in this hour of great trial.

The “Lord doeth all things well,” and we must try to be submissive to his holy will. We cannot have him with us on earth again. The time will not be very long before we shall meet, never more to part. Oh, blessed thought. How thankful I am that I can raise my cries to Jesus to sustain you My dear Father & Mother, in this our great affliction, when but a few short months ago all was darkness. I do hope you can get his loved remains, but I am afraid you cannot unless you go yourself. He has been dead so long I am afraid they cannot be identified. Could we have had but one last look of our beautiful and loved one. Oh, how thankful we would be, but, as it is, it seems we can never realize our great sad loss. Mother thinks she will go back to you in about four weeks. I cannot endure the thought of her going so soon, but she thinks you will be so lonely there alone, and I know you must be. Poor dear Father & Mother, how much I feel for you, how much I wish you could come and make a visit. I think it would do you good. I know the change will do Mother a great deal of good.

We are all about as usual. All send love.

With much love,
from,

Marion

Fort Sedgwick, C.T.
August 20th/7 [1867]
Sir,

I am in receipt of two letters from you. Dr. Latham informs me that he has written the particulars of your son's death and enclosed orders rec'd by Lt. Kidder from Bvt. Brig. Genl. J.H. Potter, Lt. Col. 30th Infy, Commanding Ft. Sedgwick.

Dr. L—being an interested friend of Genl Potter had no trouble in obtaining the orders referred to. Lt. Kidder was at this post about two weeks—the 29th June he rec'd orders from Genl Augur to Genl Custer. Having failed to reach Genl C—he proceeded towards Ft. Wallace Kansas. On account of being attacked by Indians I think he must have had one of the most desperate fights that was ever made as there is but very little doubt but that several hundred Indians attacked him and his small but gallant little band.

At the time your son left here I didn't think it right to send him one hundred miles from the Post with but ten men and an Indian guide especially to the Republican where it was known there were several thousand Indians. Genl Custer had a very good chance the day before your son arrived at the Republican and a few days afterwards to fight them, but he declined and he had about three hundred men at the time. It is not right to send such small parties out a great distance from a Post when it is known that there several hundred and often times thousands of Indians who are ready to meet and murder them.7

Bvt. Brig. General Hunt, Major 4th Infantry, has charge of your son's effects. Genl Hunt is at this Post.

I knew you by reputation several years ago having heard my Father speak of you quite often and have seen him address letters to you. I can assure you, Mr. Kidder, that your son's death is very much regretted by the officers at this Post. I became very much attached to him the short time I had the pleasure of knowing him. Lt. Bailey 4th Inf at my request, wrote to you some time ago concerning your son's death.

It cannot but be a very sad blow to you and Mrs. K—. He often spoke of his Father and Mother to me. I don't believe a child ever loved his parents more dearly than your son loved his Father and Mother. He frequently remarked to the officers here that he didn't expect to live until October. Why he made this remark I am unable to say for he always appeared to be in good health. Any other information I can give you I shall be pleased to do so.

I am very truly
your friend
A.B. Cain
[Major, 4th U.S. Infantry]

7. This paragraph was obviously written with the aid of hindsight. At the time Lieutenant Kidder's party left Fort Sedgwick, it was believed that the area between that post and the Republican River was relatively free from Indians.
J.P. Kidder, Esq.

My dear Sir

Yours of the 18th inst. is just received. In reply I will endeavor to state all the facts and circumstances connected with the finding of your son's remains. He with ten men, one an Indian guide belonging to the Pawnees was sent as bearer of dispatches from Fort Sedgewick to the forks of the Republican river where I was supposed to be encamped with my command. This point is distant from Sedgewick about ninety miles in a S.E. direction. The dispatches of which your son was the bearer were important orders by telegraph from Genl Sherman. Unfortunately, upon the evening of the day of the departure of Lieut. Kidder from Ft. Sedgewick I broke camp and set out upon a lengthened march westward leaving the main southern trail which led to Ft. Wallace and over which a considerable force had passed but twenty four hours previous. I am this minute in detail as it was at this point that your son left my trail and followed the larger trail towards Wallace. In returning from my scout I marched for Ft. Wallace, striking the trail referred to above but a few miles south of the point at which I had left it. I at once discovered the trail of Lt. Kidder and party going towards Wallace, and knowing the dangerous country through which he must pass and the probabilities of his encountering an overwhelming force of savages, I became at once solicitous regarding his fate. The second day after striking his trail we reached Beaver Creek at a point about forty miles north east from Fort Wallace. Here we discovered evidences of a conflict. Two horses which had been recently slain first excited my suspicions. I halted my command and grazed for a few hours, in the meanwhile sending out parties in different directions to discover further evidences of the engagement which had evidently here taken place. The horrible truth of the massacre of your son and his entire party was soon rendered evident. Upon being informed that a number of bodies had been discovered near by, I in company with several of my officers at once visited the spot. There were eleven bodies discovered.9 This being the number of your son's party, I as well as all the officers with me endeavored to discover or distinguish the body of your son from those of his men. The Indians however had carried off everything

8. Red Bead was not Pawnee, but Sioux.
which might indicate his rank, and our efforts in this respect were rendered fruitless. I regretted this particularly knowing what a satisfaction it would have been to his parents to have had it in their power to remove his remains at some future time. I caused a grave to be prepared on the spot where the lives of this little band had been given up, and consigned their remains to one common grave.

From the large number of arrows picked up from the ground and from other indications to be observed, it was evident that a desperate struggle had ensued before the Indians were successful in over-powering their victims. It is satisfactorily believed that the party attacking your son was “Roman Nose” and his tribe of Cheyenne warriors, numbering over five hundred warriors. The ground near which the bodies of your son and party lay was thickly strewn with exploded metallic cartridges, showing conclusively that they had defended themselves a long time and most gallantly too, against their murderous enemies. Another proof of the determined gallantry exhibited by your lamented son and his little party was the fact that the bodies, which were probably found as they fell, were lying near each other, thus proving that none had endeavored to flee or escape, but all died nobly fighting to the last. No historian will ever chronicle the heroism which was probably here displayed because no one is left to tell the tale, but from the evidence and circumstances before us we can imagine what determination, what bravery, what heroism must have inspired this devoted little band of martyrs, when, surrounded and assailed by a vastly overwhelming force of bloodthirsty barbarians, they manfully struggled to the last equally devoid of hope or fear. Believe me Sir, although a stranger to you, and unknown to your son, I deeply sympathise with you and yours in this most sad and lamentable bereavement. And gladly would I tender to the wounds of your afflictions such healing consolation as lies in the power of mortals to give, but I know how weak and futile must my efforts prove. And that in great bereavements like that to which you are now subjected there is but one Power, one Source to which we may hopefully look for that consolation you so much require.

Very truly yours,
G.A. Custer
Bvt Maj Genl
[7th U.S. Cavalry]

J.P. Kidder, Esq.

All the bodies found had been scalped and pierced with numerous arrows. As several days had elapsed since the massacre, and as the wolves had disfigured the remains very much it was impossible to determine whether any indignities or barbarities other than scalping had been perpetrated by the Indians. The latter had carried off almost every piece of clothing belonging to our men thereby preventing recognition. Your son
was ordered from Fort Sedgwick. Bvt Brig Genl Potter was at that time comdg that post and undoubtedly is the officer who gave the order you inquire about.

Very truly yours,
G.A. Custer
Bvt Maj Genl

P.S.
Upon one of the bodies was a flannel shirt, white with black stripes in each direction. In the pocket of another was a round metallic baggage check, in another was found a printed sutler's check or ticket. These were the only articles found which could by any possibility be the means of identification.

If I can serve you in any way please command me. 10

G.A.C.

Saint Paul
Aug 30 [1867]

My Dear Husband,

Yours of the 24th inst was yesterday received, being only five days reaching this place. I have thought many times that I would write you & day before yesterday I commenced a letter but was obliged to put it away without finishing. My mind is occupied with but one & the same subject night & day, my precious boy lost lost & gone forever. There is agony in the thought that I shall never behold his dear face again, never again hear his sweet voice say Mother & then that awful warning, but was powerless to rescue. Tomorrow would be his birthday & two months yesterday he started out on that terrible fatal journey. Oh what is life that we should desire to live.

I do not think Silas' cough is any better & he has raised fresh blood. Marion went with him two weeks ago to consult Dr. Murphy & Wharton. They examined his lungs & say the disease is in the bronchae tubes & by being very careful he will get over it in a year, but I do not agree with them. I wish I could, but I fear it is incurable. Were it not for Silas' health I should want to remain here until next spring. You will be surprised to know my reason for wishing to stay. Marion is expecting to have an addition to her family & the event will occur in January or early part of February. I regret it very much as I shall feel that I must be with her. I suppose Silas wrote you concerning our visit to brother Lymans. I heard

10. This updated letter (labeled 25 August 1867 on the back) appears to be in response to specific questions from Judge Kidder. Custer probably received a letter from the judge after writing, but before mailing, his own letter of 23 August. He then wrote a second letter and mailed the two together.
there of the death of Uncle Rufus Kidder. Your friends here are all well. Mr. & Mrs. Rice have called upon me & many others. Flint is a sad looking sight.

I have dear Lyman's photograph & I would like to get one enlarged & painted with a large frame. I hope you will approve of it. If so you will have to send me $25 to meet expenses. I think now that we shall start for Dakota on or about the 17th of Sep't. We expect to have Mrs. Byron Smith's company as far as Denison.

Please write immediately so that I may have time to get the picture finished.

Silas expects company from Farribault today.

I think our early cabbages would keep two or three months if brought into the house.

I will enclose letter from Mr. Write. I must close with much love.


Leavenworth, Kansas
29 Sept 1867

Burleigh Esq
Yankton D.T.
Sir

I have the honor to hand you the following statements as far as known regarding the death of Lt. L.S. Kidder 2nd US Cav.

On the 28th June last, he left Fort Sedgewick C.T. with ten men Co M 2 US Cav and an Indian Scout named "Red Bead" with dispatches for Gen GA Custer's command then supposed to be at the Forks of the Republican River. Gen Custer's command left the Forks on the 30th June not knowing that Lt. Kidder was on his way to him and on the 11th July when on our return march from the Platte River to Fort Wallace Ks at a point 68 miles north of Fort Wallace we found Lt. Kidder's trail he having followed an old trail proceeding to Fort Wallace from the Forks instead of our trail which was along the South Fork of the Republican River. We followed Lt. Kidder's trail and when we reached Beaver Ck our scouts found the remains of himself and party they having been attacked and all killed by a larger party of Indians. There was signs of the Indians having followed his trail for some 5 or 6 miles from the place where he was attacked.

We buried all the bodies in one grave on a small ridge on the North Bank of Beaver Ck at a point about ½ mile east from the crossing of the

11. Mary Ann Kidder was the wife of Judge J.P. Kidder.
12. This is probably Dr. Walter A. Burleigh, agent to the Yankton Sioux Indians. Burleigh evidently gave the letter to Judge Kidder, who added it to his own letters.
trail on Beaver Ck and 44 miles north from Fort Wallace. Lt. Kidder and party are supposed to have been killed on the evening of the 2nd July 1867.

I am Sir
Respectfully
Henry Jackson
Lt. 7 US Cav
Fort Leavenworth Ks
Oct. 8 67

Judge Kidder

My dear Sir

Your favor in reply to my last letter came duly to hand, and would have been answered at once but that my time was completely occupied with my trial, now in progress before the General Court Martial assembled here. I recognized the piece of flannel enclosed in your letter as identical with the shirt found upon one of the bodies, and am satisfied that the body was that of your son. Of this I have not a doubt. In regard to your best course I would suggest that you come from Omaha to this point (Dept Hdqs) from here you can go by Union Pacific Railroad to Ft. Hays, which is about two hundred and fifty miles west of here, from Ft. Hays to Ft. Wallace is about one hundred and fifty miles. Stages run regularly and government trains pass between these posts almost weekly. From Ft. Wallace to the resting place of your son is about forty miles. An escort and transportation could readily be obtained from the Post Commander of Fort Wallace to go with you. Ft. Leavenworth is on your direct route, no other way practicable, being at least one hundred and seventy miles from Platte through an Indian country. I would particularly recommend you stopping here and have no doubt the Dept Commander would extend every facility to aid you in accomplishing your purpose. The Sergeant who prepared the graves &c is now here (Sergeant Connolly of D Co 7th Cav).

I would now offer another suggestion for your consideration. From the time elapsed since the interment of the bodies, they must necessarily 13. General Custer was being court martialed for his actions during the summer campaign of 1867. He was found guilty on several counts and removed from duty for one year. See Frost, *The Court Martial*. 14. In his autobiography General Custer describes an emotional meeting in his office at Fort Leavenworth “late in the fall of 1867” in which he and Judge Kidder discovered the striped shirt as a means of identifying the lieutenant’s body (G.A. Custer, *My Life on the Plains* [New York: Sheldon and Co., 1874], pp. 100-101). Actually, this discovery was made via correspondence between Custer and Judge Kidder. The general either forgot the circumstances or chose to dramatize the event.
be in a state of advanced decomposition. In case you are unable to recognize the remains of your son, why not collect those of the entire party. They would occupy but little space, and transport them to the spot intended for your son, surely it would but be fitting and appropriate that the noble little band that gave up their lives in one common defence should repose in the same honored grave. I must mention this for your consideration.

I trust and am confident that the restraint I am now under will be removed in a few days and that an honorable acquittal awaits me. When you come I would be glad to render you any assistance in my power.

Believe me
Truly yours
GA Custer
Bvt Maj Genl

Vermillion, Dakota
Oct. 22nd, 1867

Bt. Maj. Genl. G.A. Custer
Ft. Leavenworth, Ks.

Sir:

Your kind letter in relation to my late son, of the 8th inst., was duly recd., & I am sorry to feel myself under the necessity of further troubling you in the premises. I can’t start after his remains until about the middle of December next in consequence of my courts which come in between now & then. Where do you expect to be at that time? Where will Sergeant Donnelly who prepared the graves be then? Someone who knows where the grave is should go with me, or I might not find it. Could I be furnished with transportation from Ft. Hays by the government (military) to the place where the bodies are for myself & to return with the remains? Would the Post Commanders be willing to make such an order? or would you? or should I get such an order from Genl. Sherman? I want to know how this is, for, altho. I should not hesitate in relation to the expense if within all I possess on earth if it should come out of me, yet I prefer to know just how it is before I start. I am aware that a box of sufficient size to receive the remains could not conveniently be carried on a common stage coach; so I should be obliged to have an ambulance, or some other transportation than a coach.

Were the skeletons of the men separated at the joints? or were they whole? If separated, I might need a surgeon to find all the parts, even if I could identify the head, or any other part of the body.

If I obtain the remains I intend to remove them to Saint Paul Minn, where some of our relations are buried. Which will be the best Railroad route from Leavenworth, in the winter, to St. Paul?
It will give me great pleasure to hear that you have been honorably acquitted of the charges preferred against you.

I have the honor to be
Your obt. Servt.
J.P. Kidder

P.S.
I should like to hear from you at your earliest convenience consistent with your personal duties.

J.P.K.¹⁵

Headquarters Military Division
of the Missouri
Saint Louis, Mo.
Oct. 29, 1867

Hon. J.P. Kidder,
Judge U.S. District Court
Vermillion, Dakota Territory

Dear Sir,

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of October 24, and to say that certainly I will do all that is possible to enable you to secure the remains of your son, who was killed last June near Beaver Creek by the Indians.

In order that you may understand all the facts before starting, I enclose you a copy of General Custer's official report, in which you will note that he describes the locality where the remains when discovered were buried, but all the thirteen skeletons were put in one common grave.¹⁶ Even then, within a month of their death, he could not identify the bones of your son, and expressed the opinion that his nearest relative could not have identified the remains. After the lapse of five or six additional months in a common grave, I doubt if you can distinguish your son. Still, if you propose to try, your best course will be to go to the end of the Kansas Pacific Railroad, now at Fort Hays, of course by rail. There take the regular Denver stage to Fort Wallace, a distance of 140 miles. The commanding officer, on seeing this letter, will give you an escort to the point indicated in General Custer's report; but, as it may be better to obtain as guides, one or more of the very men who were with Custer, you had better stop at Fort Harker, and there see General A.J. Smith, or such

¹⁵. Original letter in the collection of Dr. Lawrence A. Frost of Monroe, Michigan.
¹⁶. There were twelve bodies, not thirteen.
other officer as commands the District, who will know where to find them. General Custer had with him six companies of the 7th Regular Cavalry, all of which is still serving on that Smoky Hill line, and I doubt not General Smith will remember the very company that buried the bodies, in which case he will send one or more of them, with an escort, along with you to the graves. He will also order the remains, if identified, to be carried to Ft. Wallace, there carefully boxed and marked and sent to the Railroad at Fort Hays in a Government wagon. From Fort Hays to your house would require a money order for transportation, and this you had better apply, directly, to the War Department for; and by reciting the fact that I will do all that can be done by means of soldiers and quartermasters wagons, I doubt not the Secretary of War will give an order for transportation and payment by the Government of all the other expenses.

Again tendering you my heartfelt sympathy for the loss of your son, in his early manhood, in so unhappy a manner,

I am, with great respect,
Yours truly,
W.T. Sherman
Lieutenant General

[An official copy of General Custer’s 7 August report concerning the finding of the bodies of the Kidder party was enclosed with General Sherman’s letter of 29 October 1867 to Judge Kidder:]

(copy)
Fort Riley Kansas
Aug 7, 1867

Lieut. S.B. Weir
A.A.A.G. Dist. Upper Arkansas

I have the honor to report the following facts regarding the finding of the bodies of Lieut. Kidder and party of the 2nd Cavalry. My command reached Beaver Creek forty-seven miles N.W. from Fort Wallace on the 12th ult. I was riding at the head of the column in company with the guide Comstock, and two or three of the Delaware scouts. Upon approaching the vicinity of Beaver Creek a most horrible stench was observable, at the same time numerous vultures or buzzards were to be seen flying in the air. These circumstances added to the fact that the carcasses of three or four horses were visible, gave rise to the impression that a fight with Indians had recently taken place on that ground. I immediately thought of Lieut. Kidder and party, and would here explain how he happened to reach Beaver Creek, instead of following me to the Platte. When Lieut. Kidder
left Sedgwick to join me, I was encamped at the fork of the Republican, on the North bank. While encamped there my train with a considerable escort was sent to Wallace for supplies, and had returned making quite a heavy trail. As soon as my train returned, which it did the same day Lieut Kidder left Sedgwick, I broke camp and moved out about (5) five miles on the Fort Wallace trail intending to follow up the south bank of the south fork of the Republican. The next morning I left the Fort Wallace trail, bearing off almost at right angles to the West. Lieut. Kidder undoubtedly reached my camp at the fork of the Republican, found I had left, and seeing the trail fresh, followed.

He probably reached the point at which I left the Wallace trail after dark in the evening or before daylight in the morning, and overlooking my departure from the Wallace trail, continued to follow the latter, hoping to overtake me. In no other way can his presence at Beaver Creek be accounted for. I was made aware of the mistake on my return from the
Lyman S. Kidder

Platte. I struck the Wallace trail again about thirty miles north of Beaver Creek, and it having rained just previous to Lieut. Kidders having passed over it, his trail was easily seen; the guide Comstock determining even the number of his horses.

Impelled by the doubts arising from the suspicious circumstances herein stated, I directed the Delawares to examine the ground in the vicinity of the trail and creek, hoping to discover additional circumstances that would be evidence of the fate of Lieut. Kidder and party. In the meanwhile I moved my command across the creek and prepared to graze and rest. Before completing my dispositions for a halt, one of the Delawares returned and reported the finding of a number of bodies of white men within half a mile of my Camp. Taking a medical officer and a small party with me, I visited the ground and examined closely the bodies of the dead, hoping to be able to identify Lt. Kidder. We found eleven bodies in all.

They had been stripped of nearly all their clothing, a few still retained their drawers or shirts. Ten had been scalped and their skulls broken in the most horrible manner.

The bodies had been so mutilated and disfigured that I doubt if the most intimate relative could have recognized any of them. It was impossible to recognize in any manner the body of Lieut. Kidder. One of the bodies had on a woolen shirt, white with black stripes, running in each direction. In the pocket of another was found a Sutlers check. Another had a round metallic baggage check. I can give neither the number of check, nor name on Sutlers check, but both are in possession of Lieut. Moylan, Adjt of the 7th Cavalry. One of the bodies was not scalped, at least the scalp remained near the skull as if left undisturbed. I am now confident that this was the body of the guide Red Bead, as the hair was long and undoubtedly that of an Indian, while the scalp-lock had a brass ring attached about one inch in diameter. My guide Comstock, who knew Red Bead, remarked at the time, that the body was that of an Indian, and the scalp of Red Bead.

From the relative positions of the bodies and their close proximity to each other as well as the large number of exploded metallic cartridges lying near by, I am convinced that Lt. Kidder and his little band resisted gallantly until the last had fallen. I believe the band of Sioux and Cheyennes that attacked Lt. Robbins and party on the 26 June, numbering over five hundred warriors, was the same that encountered Lieut. Kidder and party. The latter had evidently taken their stand in a dry ditch or ravine about thirty yards in length and from two to four deep. Unfortunately the ravine was the lowest line of ground in that vicinity and was commanded on all sides by points within arrow-range. The Indians had used the bow and arrow very freely. The crests of the ravine in which Lieut. Kidder and party had fought were all bristling with arrows. Hundreds were picked up from the ground and carried away by my men. The bodies of the slain were thrust full of arrows, their arms and equipment were carried off by the Indians. Three or four horses were killed near where the bodies were lying. Every circumstance seemed to
indicate that the Indians had come upon the party at the point where the bodies were found, except the fact that the bodies of two horses, branded "M.2.C." were found about two miles from that point on the trail toward Wallace.

I caused the bodies to be collected and all consigned to one grave. The grave being prepared near the point where they gave up their lives. I have endeavored to state all the facts connected with this most unfortunate affair.

Respectfully submitted

(signed) G.A. Custer
Bvt. Maj. General

Head Quarters Mil Div of the Mo.
St. Louis
Oct. 29, 1867

W.A. Nichols
Assistant Adjt General

Fort Leavenworth, Ks.
Nov. 2nd, 1867

Hon J.P. Kidder

Dear Sir

Yours of the 22 ult. came to hand yesterday and it affords me pleasure to be able to furnish you any information I possess which will serve you. I will reply to your inquiries in the order given by you. I expect to remain at this post during the entire winter and spring. Sergeant Connolly in all probability will remain here also, and I have no doubt the Dept Commander would authorize him to accompany you and assist in identifying the remains of your son. The furnishing you with transportation from Fort Hays and returning is a matter which could be decided by the order of the Department Commander, or the Commanding Officer of the District, and while not authorized to speak for either, I do not hesitate to express the opinion that either of these officers would gladly extend this and all other means of facilitating you in accomplishing the object of your sad journey. Maj. Genl. AJ Smith Comdg the Dept in the absence of Genl Sheridan will probably be in command when you arrive here, he left for St. Louis a few days ago to be absent until Saturday. Were he here I would have endeavored to secure from him a promise of the necessary transportation etc. However, I anticipate no difficulty on this score. You can procure a suitable box at Fort Wallace from the Post Commander, to whom I would be pleased to furnish you
with introductory letters. If you should happen to see Genl Sherman it
would aid you greatly if you were to receive from him a letter of
introduction generally to officers whom you may meet in the Dept. This is
not absolutely essential, however, as I trust no officer would hesitate or
decline to extend all possible assistance in recovering the remains of a
brother officer who died gallantly at the post of duty.

The skeletons of one perhaps two of the men were separated at the
joints. That, however, which I now believe to have been that of your
lamented son was not so separated, but was entire in all its parts. Sgt.
Connolly would be of great assistance in this matter and I have no doubt
could identify the body. If a medical officer were required, the Post
Surgeon at Fort Wallace, I presume, could be made available. I can not
advise you as to the best winter route from here to St. Paul.

Hoping to see you during the winter, I remain

Truly yours,
G A Custer

Fort Harker, Kansas
5 November 1867

J P Kidder Esq.

Sir

On my return yesterday from the Indian Commission I was handed
your letter of the 22nd ult. In answer I would state that the body of your
son as near as I can now remember was in the following condition when
found—

The arms were on the body. The scalp was taken off with nearly all
the hair, it has only a little left near the neck at the back of the head. The
skull was smashed in. There was a strip of the shirt left round the neck
about 3 or 4 inches broad, the rest was torn off. I cannot remember about
the legs. I think they were off. The bodies had been so mutilated and
dragged about by the wolves. The bodies are buried in one grave about 700
yds down the creek from the crossing of the trail from Fort Wallace to the
Forks of the Republican on the north side of the creek — about 30 or 40
yds from the creek.

Sergeant Connelly of Company D 7 U S Cav who will be stationed at
Fort Leavenworth was the Sergeant of the working party who buried the
bodies.

Any other information I can give you in regard to this I shall be only
too glad to give.

I remain, Sir
Yours respectfully

Henry Jackson
1st Lt 7 U S Cav
Sergeant Connelly is positive he can recognize the body of your son.

H.J.

Fort Laramie D.T.
November 18th, 1867

Hon J.P. Kidder
Vermillion Dakota

Dear Governor

Your letters of the 22nd, 24th and 29th ultimo have all come to hand.

The best route, as I now understand to go to Saint Paul in Winter now is by Prairie du Chien, McGregor and the Minnesota Central. You can go all the way by railroad now it is said.

I have had a long talk with Sherman. He cannot pass anybody over the road. If he should be personally present and request a pass for you he could get it. I could do the same with some roads but can do nothing by writing. Sherman told me that he had written you a full statement what he could do and said he would do everything for you that he could.

We have learned nothing yet from any Indian or interpreter about the destruction of that party. When talking for peace we do not like to refer to such events. The interpreters have men can find out about it I have no doubt. I cannot learn anything of the cash and money yet. But Grimes is about and I will make a farther effort when he returns and will let you know the result.

Sherman says that from the official reports of the condition of the dead bodies of your son’s party it will be impossible to recognize the remains of any one in particular. Still I suppose you feel like trying. Certainly I wish you all success, and you can rely upon me to do anything in my power to aid you. Hoping to hear from you again soon and of your success in recovering the remains of your son, I remain

Truly Yours
John B. Sanborn

17. Fearing retribution, Indian participants in the Kidder fight refused for many years to tell their side of the story. Eventually, they stated that the Kidder party was attacked by Sioux from the camp of Pawnee Killer and by a few Cheyenne warriors under Howling Wolf, Tobacco, and Big Head (George E. Hyde, A Life of George Bent Written From His Letters [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967], pp. 274-75). Custer had at first believed that the Indians were led by Roman Nose, a famous Cheyenne.
Hon. J.P. Kidder
Vermillion, Dakota Territory

Sir,

Your communication of the 7th inst. to General Grant, on the subject of recovering the remains of your son Lieut. Kidder, killed by hostile Indians in the neighborhood of Beaver Creek, Kansas, in July last, with a copy of Lieut. General Sherman’s letter to you dated Oct. 29, 1867, has been referred to these Headquarters endorsed as follows, which by direction of the Lieut. General, I have the honor to transmit for your information.

“Respectfully returned to Lieut General Sherman who is authorized to have through the troops, the body called for recovered and shipped to such point as will enable Gov. Kidder to get it. There is no authority to give the money order asked for.”

(signed)

U.S. Grant
Sec of War
Ad int

I am Sir, Very Respectfully
Your Obediant Servant

W.A. Nichols
Asst Adjt General
Bvt Major General U.S.A.

Head Quarters, Fort Wallace, Ks
Dec 9th 1867

J.P. Kidder Esq
Vermillion D.T.

Sir,

Your letter of the 30th ultimo has just been received. I have questioned Mr. Comstock the Guide at this Post who was present when the remains of your son were found. He informs me that there can be no trouble in going from Ft. Wallace to Beaver Creek in January or at any time of the year. Comstock will probably be at this Post and can guide you to the spot where the remains of the party with your son were buried and
thinks Lt. Kidder's body can be identified by a shirt which compared with
a piece reed by Genl Custer from yourself. I shall be glad to furnish any
assistance in my power should I remain at the Post.

Very Respectfully
Your Obt Servant
H.C. Bankhead
Bvt Col U.S.A.
Comdg Post

Mr. Comstock informs me that the spot where the remains of the party is
buried is 47 miles from this Post. Should you pass Ft. Leavenworth, Depnt
Head Quarters, it would be advisable to consult with the Department or
District Commander who may, if considered practicable & necessary,
authorize an escort be furnished you.

Resply
H.C. Bankhead
Bvt Col US
Comdg Post

Ft. Wallace, Kansas
Feb'y 22nd, 1868

My dear Son

I arrived here this morning at 3 o'clock in good health but tired riding.
The officers will extend to me every facility in their power, several having
volunteered to go with me. I shall have an escort of one co. of cav. It is
comd. by Capt. Brewster, of St. Paul, Mom I well knew. We shall have a
train of four wagons, can't travel faster than a walk. It is expected we shall
meet Indians, but it is not expected that we shall have to fight. Still we
shall be prepared for the worst; but I pray you, my good boy, don't have
any fearful apprehensions in regard to us until you hear from me again.

Oh, happy sensation! that I am within 47 miles of the remains of dear,
dear Lyman, & so soon expect to clasp them in a father's loving embrace.
We start tomorrow morning at 7 — & expect that it will take us five days,
at least, to make the trip. When I return here will at once write you. We
intend to bring here all the other bodies & inter them in the military
grounds.

All advise me not to go out to Beaver Creek, but stay here & let the
military bring in all the bodies; but no money could hire me to stay the
while—I might lost some means of identification. Again, I want to see
where he so bravely gave up his precious life & where he has slept these
long sad months on the ground where he "fought his last battle."

Regards to friends.

Your affectionate
Father
Lyman S. Kidder

Rose Creek
Feb 28th 1868

Hon. Judge Kidder

Dear Sir

I will do any thing sir to help you towards gitting the remains of your son. Wait seven days and I will go myself and get them and bring them to you at fort Wallace. I am on my way to the Arkansas but I will stop and accomadate you as an act of honor after seeing a letter sent to you that I would be here.

Bill Comstock

Ft. Wallace, Ks.
March 6th, 1868

My dear Son

We went out to Beaver Creek, as I last wrote you we expected to, in two days. It is in Colorado. We found the grave at once—had traveled over it when covered with snow. In the morning, exhumed the bodies & found our dear, dear Lyman's almost entire; the most of anyone. I am positive I have his precious remains! The evidence I can state to you when we meet which has caused me to come to this conclusion. It is enough for me to know that I am satisfied. His remains we put into a separate box. The others we brot in with us, & they will all be buried tomorrow morning in one honored common grave under martial orders and religious ceremonies. His body with the assistance of the surgeons I have properly prepared & tenderly “laid out” in the sheet I took from home with me for that purpose & a nice wollen white military blanket & deposited the same in a black walnut coffin as good an one as can be made here—and have put the coffin into a square pine box which is ready for transportation. I would have started to day, but for a tempestuous storm which is now raging.

The team, a six mule team, will start tomorrow morning with it for the end of the R.R. & an escort of 12 soldiers, which will take about 5 days to reach. I shall start tomorrow eve. & will arrive there in advance of the team. From the time I start on the railroad it will take me 5 or 6 days...
to reach St. P. only unless I am interrupted. Unless I am delayed you may
not expect to hear from me until I arrive at St. Paul. Having rescued our
sacred relic! from the burning & barren prairie, the howling wolves & the
half open sepulchre, under circumstances that would have deterred almost
anyone but a father or mother, my mind goes back to my dear wife &
loving children whom I have not heard from since I left, but I pray are
well—Dear Marion I have often of late thought—may she be safe in my
constant prayer. When I return to Ft. Hays I shall expect to find letters
from all of you.

There is not a house in a 150 miles of here, except what are merely
holes in the ground, & except at military posts, nor a cord of wood
growing. When we were out in the snow storm, relying on “Buffalo chips”
for fuel, the snow covering & wetting them so that they were not fit for
use, we had to cut up our wagon boxes for fuel to keep from perishing. I
never want to hear any thing more about cold weather, high winds, or
scarcity of timber in regard to Dakota. “Bleeding Kansas” beats everything
in that direction I ever had any conception of.

Col. Bankhead, the com’t of this post sent his wife’s remains on a few
days since (who died here last summer of cholera) to N.Y. for interment.
He expects to go on with her & overtake them at the end of the track.
Write me at St. P. on the receipt of this.
My regards to friends.

Your most affectionate
Father

P.S.

Two soldiers went out from this post last night on special duty & were
expected to return in a short time, have not been heard from. It is
expected they have frozen. The whole garrison is after them today. I am
almost alone & commandant.

Prairie du Chien, Wis.,
Sunday, March 15th, 1868

My dear Son

I came up to Sunday here & lay over until tomorrow morning. I have
with me those precious remains! I arrived here from Ft. Hays, Ks., in just
three days. I have been ahead or behind all accidents & now feel as if I
shall get to St. Paul & home safe. My fearful forebodings have nearly left
me.

At Ft. Hays I recd. letters from Mother, Friends Jolley & Stickney —
From what Col. Jolley wrote I learn that you had written me. I did not
receive yours. I expect to stay in St. Paul about a week & stop en route
home about two days in Chicago. You can write me there in care of S.D.
Haskell, No. 259 Wabash Avenue.
Present my compliments to Messers. Jolley & Stickney, & say to them I thank them for their kind letters & would have responded to them if I had had time to do so — I have traveled eight days & nights without taking off my clothes.

Your affectionate
Father

St. Paul
March 23d, 1868

My dear Son

Yours of the 13th inst. I have recd. here. I arrived here safe on the 16th inst. as I wrote you at P. du Chien that I expected to with the remains of dear Lyman! & on the 19th we performed our last sad rite over them in the presence of a large concourse of friends and placed them where his tomb can be watered by the tears of affection. He was buried with full military honors.

You will rejoice with your dear, good mother & myself that success has crowned my efforts, & that I have passed thro. all the perils that attended me in that long, melancholy journey hither without injury.

We expect to leave here Wednesday or Thursday next, stop over at Madison on our old friend Vilas a day or two and arrive in Chicago Staurday, and Wednesday morning of next week start for Vermillion, providence permitting. Mr. & Mrs. Haskell will wait for us in Chicago.

All in usual health & send love.
My kind regards to friends.

Your affectionate
Father

P.S.

Hadn’t you better make some hens nests in some proper places, that you may save all the eggs? You have very good skill in most matters, now let’s see what you can do in this regard.

The successful recovery and reburial of Lyman’s body appeared to be the end of the Kidders’ ordeal. But a final letter in the family papers reveals an ironic climax to the already unhappy story. Lyman’s sister, Marion, had repeatedly written to her parents that “the time of separation is short” and “we shall again meet, no more to be separated.” Eight months after Lyman was buried at Saint Paul, Judge Kidder again wrote home to his son, Silas, from that city:
My dear Son

I arrived here last evening as I expected. I suppose you received a telegram announcing the death of our dear, dear Marion last Monday, after I left. I did not learn of the fatal result until I arrived almost here, altho. I anticipated it as you are well aware. I met a man on the train who told me.

Yes, that sweet daughter, as pure as the driven snow, is in Heaven, and we should all so live here as to meet her there in a blessed immortality. May the winds be tempered to the shorn lambs. Harry and the Babe are well.

She knew Mother when she arrived. Aunt Harriet is here yet. The neighbors have been very kind during her sickness.

Mother sustains herself better, much better, than I anticipated. She is very calm, & does not seem to suffer with grief near as much as when she heard of the death of poor Lyman. I think she will be able to go home any time when I get ready. You can rejoice with me that your good Mother sustains herself under this terrible affliction so well. I can safely say, that you need not have any fearful apprehensions in regard to her.

I telegraphed that I was en route here, & they preserved her remains — the funeral is to be tomorrow at the Jackson St. M.E. church — she looks perfectly natural, sweet in death as in life.

My heart is now turned toward you as our only! child. May God in his infinite mercy be a guard around & shield & protect you, & preserve your life, long. Don’t get disconsolate, but look at the future on the bright side.

I have said nothing yet about returning — shall remain here a week or more. Will let you know when we fix on a time for starting.

Now, my dear boy, take good care of yourself, & we will be with you—providence permitting—as soon as we reasonable can under the circumstances.

Affectionately,
Father

20. She evidently died of typhoid fever.
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