Document 9: Darren Parry's Written Account

Source: Excerpt taken from the book The Bear River Massacre: A Shoshone History*, published in 2019 by Darren Parry, former Chairman of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone and descendant of several Shoshone survivors of the violence on the Bear River.*

Chief Sagwitch, being an early riser, got up as usual on the morning of January 29, 1863. He left his teepee and stood outside surveying the area around camp. The hills to the east of camp were covered with a steaming mist, which seem to creep lower down the hill. Sagwitch suddenly realized what was happening: the soldiers from Camp Douglas had arrived. The chief was not surprised. He started calling to the sleeping Indians, who woke, and quickly gathered their bows and arrows, tomahawks and a few rifles. Some of the Indians were so excited that they gathered up whatever was in sight to fight with. Some picked up their woven willow winnow pans and baskets and stuck their rifles through them. It appeared as though they had shields for protection. Chief Sagwitch shouted to his people not to shoot first. He thought that perhaps this military man would be a wise man who would ask for those responsible for the latest attacks on the white settlers, whom Sagwitch would turn over to the soldiers. He told his people to be brave and calm. Some of the Indians ran toward the river and dropped into the snow. They knew that they were not all guilty, but had no choice but to fight for their lives if attacked. Some dropped into the children's play holes that had been dug along the riverbank. Without so much as asking the Indians for the guilty party, the Colonel and his men began to fire on the Indians. Arrows were nothing compared to the Army rifles. Indian men, women, children, and babies were slaughtered like wild rabbits. Most of the violence took place along the river and among the willows. According to the Indians, the massacre started early in the morning and lasted until the early afternoon. The Bear River, frozen solid in the morning, was now starting to flow. The Shoshone people were jumping into the river and trying to escape by swimming across. The blazing white snow was brilliant red with blood. The willow trees that were used for protection were now bent down as if in defeat.