Document 6: Sgt. William Beach's Account

Source: William Beach was a sergeant in Company K of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment of the California volunteers under Colonel Conner's command. He drew a map of the location of the massacre and wrote an account 16 days after the massacre. [Changed to make it easier to read.] Found at https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/civil-war-saints/bear-river-massacre-new-historical-evidence

When they got to the place they are shown on the drawing, Major McGarry gave the commands to dismount and prepare to fight on foot which was instantly obeyed. Lieutenant Chase and Capt. Price then gave the command to move forward to their soldiers, after which no officer was heard or needed. The boys were fighting Indians and planned to whip them. It was a free fight, every man fighting on his own. Companies H and A got there after about three minutes and jumped into the fight like the others. Cavalry horses were sent back to bring the infantry across the river as soon as they arrived. When across the river, they hurried to the place they are shown on the drawing. They fought California style, every man for himself and the Devil for the Indians. We sometimes heard the Colonels' voice encouraging the men, telling them to take good aim and save their ammunition. Majors McGarry and Galiger were also loud in their encouragement to the men.

The Indians were soon routed from the top of the ravine and tried to retreat but were not able to escape. Major McGarry sent some cavalry on their horses down the river to stop the Indians' retreat in that direction. Seeing that death was their doom, they fought desperately in the lower end of the ravine where it felt like we were rushing on to death if we charged them. But the victory was not yet won. With a deafening yell the angry soldiers rushed together down the steep banks into the middle of the Indians. Then the work of death really started. With the roar of guns and loud noise of pistols could be heard the [Indians'] cry to surrender but there was no surrendering that day. Some Indians jumped into the river and were shot trying to cross. Some jumped on their ponies and tried to run through the soldiers in different directions but were shot while others ran down the river (on a narrow strip of ice that was on the riverbanks) to a small island and a

thicket of willows where they were met by a few of the boys [soldiers] who were waiting for stragglers to come…. The fight lasted four hours and was more like a frolic [game] than a fight, the wounded cracking jokes with the frozen. Some were frozen so bad that they could not load their guns so they used them as clubs…Our loss—fourteen killed and forty two wounded. Indian loss—two hundred and eighty killed.

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This View Represents the Battlefield on Bear River fought Jan. 29th /'63 Between four companies of the Second Cavelry and one company third Infantry California Volenteers under Colonel Conner And three hundred and fifty Indians under Bear hunter, Sagwich and Lehigh [Lehi] three very noted Indian chiefs. The Newspapers give a very grafic account of the Battle all of which is very true with the exception of the positions assigned the Officers which Cos K and M cavelry were first on the ground

When they had arrived at the position they occupy on the drawing Major McGeary [Edward McGarry] gave the commands to dismount and prepare to fight on foot which was instantly obayed. Lieutenant [Darwin] Chase and Capt. [George F.] Price then gave the command forward to their respective companies after which no officer was heeded or needed The Boys were fighting Indians and intended to whip them. It was a free fight every man on his own hook. Companies H and A came up in about three minutes and pitched in in like manner. Cavelry Horses were sent back to bring the Infantry across the River as soon as they arrived. When across they took a double quick until they arrived at the place they ocupy on the drawing they pitched in California style every man for himself and the Devil for the Indians. The Colonels Voice was occasionally herd encourageing the men teling them to take good aim and save their amunition Majs McGeary and Galiger [Paul A. Gallagher] were also loud in their encouragement to the men.

The Indians were soon routted from the head of the ravine and apparently antisipated a general stampede but were frustrated in thair attempt Maj McGeary sent a detachment of mounted cavelry down the River and cut of their retreat in that direction Seing that death was their doom they made a desparate stand in the lower end of the Ravine where it appeared like rushing on to death to apprach them But the victory was not yet won. With a deafening yell the infuriated Volenteers with one impulse made a rush down the steep banks into their very midst when the

work of death commenced in real earnest. Midst the roar of guns and sharp report of Pistols could be herd the cry for quarters but their was no quarters that day. Some jumped into the river and were shot attempting to cross some mounted their ponies and attempted to run the gauntlet in different directions but were shot on the wing while others ran down the River (on a narrow strip of ice that gifted the shores) to a small island and a thicket of willows below where they foung [found] a very unwelcome reception by a few of the boys who were waiting the approach of straglers. It was hardly daylight when the fight commence and freezing cold the valley was covered with Snow—one foot deep which made it very uncomfortable to the wounded who had to lay until the fight was over. The fight lasted four hours and appeared more like a frollick than a fight the wounded cracking jokes with the frozen some frozen so bad that they could not load their guns used them as clubs No distinction was made betwen Officers and Privates each fought where he thought he was most needed. The report is currant that their was three hundred of the Volunteers engaged That is in correct one fourth of the Cavelry present had to hold Horses part of the Infantry were on guard with the waggons While others were left behind some sick with frozen hands and feet. Only three hundred started on the expedition.

Our loss—fourteen killed and forty two wounded Indian Loss two hundred and eighty Kiled.

The Indians had a very strong natural fortification as you will percieve by the sketch within it is a deep ravine {with thick willows and vines so thick that it was difficult to see an Indian from the banks} runing across a smooth flat about half a mile in width. Had the Volunteers been been in their position all h—l could not have whiped them. The hills around the Valley are about six hundred feet high with two feet of snow on them. . . .

In the language of an old Sport I weaken

.... Trail in the snow

^^^^^^^^^ Lodges or Wickeups in Ravine

iii iii iii Retreating Indians

::: ::: ::: Co. K, 3rd Infantry

!!!!!!! Cavelry four companies afterwards scattered over the field

Sergeant W. L. Beach. Co. K, 2nd c. C. V.

Camp Douglas. Feb. 14th /63

I recieved six very severe wounds in my coat. W. L. Beach