

*William Selby Harney.
National Archives.*

A Crisis Averted? General Harney and the Change in Command of the Utah Expedition

BY WILFORD HILL LECHEMINANT

IN MAY 1857 THE UNITED STATES ARMY assigned the command of its Utah Expedition to Gen. William Selby Harney who promptly announced that to solve the Utah problem “he would capture Brigham Young and the twelve apostles and execute them in a summary manner and winter in the temple of the Latter-day Saints.”¹ He was

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¹Logan U. Reavis, *The Life and Military Services of General William Selby Harney* (St. Louis, 1878), pp. 276-77.

well known as a tough and experienced Indian fighter. Two years earlier the public had labeled him "squaw killer" after his regiment massacred a village of Sioux Indians near Ash Hollow. This dubious exploit was one of many controversial incidents in Harney's long military career. His proponents defended him as an exemplary soldier with a flare for gallantry, while to his enemies he was an impulsive officer with an inclination for provoking disputes. Such was the reputation of Harney, the man who briefly held the Utah command twice yet never saw Utah as a military authority. On August 29, 1857, his Utah command was given to Col. Albert Sidney Johnston and the expedition became known as Johnston's Army. Then for a few weeks the next spring Harney held the command of the newly formed Department of Utah and was over Johnston. He was two weeks en route to Utah when the government learned peace had been established with the Mormons and reassigned Harney to Oregon.

The army's advance to Utah and its subsequent occupation of the territory might have been significantly different under General Harney than it was under Colonel Johnston. To help one conjecture how Harney might have behaved differently from Johnston, a sketch of the actual Utah Expedition is presented and then an account of the Mormon reaction to Harney's threat. This is followed by a view of Harney and his character as revealed through the impressions of contemporaries and by his role in a number of controversies. A theme common to these disputes is Harney's propensity to disregard orders for what he deemed more important goals. In contrast, Johnston, a quiet, strong-willed man demonstrated during his Utah command a patient compliance to government instructions, including those contrary to his own ideas and opinions. It is on this point, conformity to orders, that one might imagine differences of consequence between Harney and Johnston in directing the Utah Expedition and the impact upon Utah and the Mormons.

On first taking command in 1857 Harney realized the late season posed the danger of trapping his forces in the mountain snows that winter. While Harney was organizing his troops at Fort Leavenworth, an officer wrote, "Now as to Utah. General Harney is opposed to going, strongly so. He has written on that it is impossible to move from here with an army this season with any possible advantages, and it is the general impression here that we will not

go.”² General-in-Chief Winfield Scott, a long-time antagonist of Harney, recalled that “General Harney, its first commander, threw cold water upon the Utah Expedition at the outset. Those under him were infected by discouragement and desertions and tendered resignations followed.”³ Harney and his Fifth Infantry regiment were called as a part of the forces for Utah from the swamps of Florida where they had been tracking Seminole Indians. They had sustained debilitating wounds and illness and were openly disgruntled when ordered to make the trek to the distant Rockies. Some 200 men deserted and several of Harney’s officers resigned. It was even suspected that Harney himself arranged with Kansas Gov. Robert J. Walker to persuade President Buchanan to keep him and his dragoons in Kansas to quell the civil strife there.⁴

When Colonel Johnston actively assumed command on September 11, the advanced units committed by Harney were already near Fort Laramie. Johnston also realized the season was late, but he hurried to join his soldiers with the intent of being in Salt Lake Valley before the onset of severe weather. In mid-October he found his command scattered across the high Wyoming plains, struggling with the snow and bitter cold. Johnston did an extraordinary job in gathering his desperate soldiers together and creating winter quarters at Camp Scott. Hundreds of army cattle and horses died in the cold, but Johnston lost only one man, not to the weather but to tetanus. By spring his men had not only survived on limited rations but were in fit condition.⁵

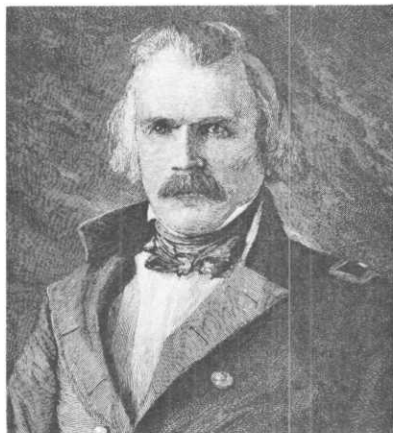
There is no evidence that Johnston had any preconceived antagonism for the Mormons or their institutions. However, as he gathered his troops at Camp Scott he soon looked upon the Mormons as insurgents and as an enemy who needed to be soundly defeated and punished. He disagreed with Gov. Alfred Cumming’s policy of conciliation, yet he patiently waited through the spring before entering the valley and thereby allowed peaceful resolution to many of the government’s differences with the Mormons. During

² *The Utah Expedition, 1857-1858: Letters of Captain Jesse A. Gove*, ed. Otis G. Hammond (Concord: New Hampshire Historical Society, 1928), p. 7.

³ Gen. Winfield Scott to Secretary of War John B. Floyd, October 30, 1858, Records of the Headquarters of the Army, vol. 9-7, Letters Sent, 1857-59, p. 432, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁴ Norman F. Furniss, *The Mormon Conflict, 1850-1859* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 101.

⁵ Charles P. Roland, *Albert Sidney Johnston, Soldier of Three Republics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), p. 189-200.



Albert Sidney Johnston
National Archives.

his nearly two years at Camp Floyd he essentially confined himself to the desolate surroundings of the camp; he never went to Salt Lake City. He made every effort to restrain his troops from disturbing the rights of Utah citizens. His “rigid protection of Mormon life and property belied his feelings toward Mormon ways—a loathing which increased with time and proximity.”⁶ During the army’s second year in Utah Brigham Young noted, “The army is still quietly concentrated in Camp Floyd obviously more to the benefit and gratification of the people of Utah than to itself or the public at large.”⁷

Harney seemed to have had no strong feelings against the Mormons. Reavis, his biographer, claims that had Harney executed church leaders, “he would not have done so because of any personal concern about the Mormon religion, for that was a matter of indifference to him.”⁸ Knowledge of this would not have placated the Mormons during the summer of 1857 as they prepared for a confrontation with Harney. They undoubtedly conjectured about their future under the man whose reputation they perceived largely through his brutal victory at Ash Hollow.

President Buchanan was quite successful in keeping secret from the Mormons his intention to send a military force to Utah. It was not until July 23, 1857, during a three-day celebration of the Mormons’ tenth anniversary in the territory that A. O. Smoot and Judson Stoddard arrived from St. Louis to report to Brigham Young that troops had probably already started for Utah on July 15 and that the

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁸ Reavis, *William Selby Harney*, p. 277.

Mormon mail contract had been cancelled by the government. They had seen preparations for the expedition at Fort Leavenworth early in July and brought with them New York and St. Louis newspapers in which details of the expedition plan were printed.⁹

Mormons in England knew of Harney and the Utah Expedition well before those in Utah, according to Asa Calkin, a missionary at the church's headquarters in Liverpool. On June 17, five weeks before Smoot and Stoddard reached Utah, his journal reads, "It seems a settled thing that an army is to be sent against the Citizens of Utah, commanded by the blood thirsty coward Gen'l Harney who immortalized his name by the Indian massacre at Ash Hollow in September, 1855." Two weeks later, July 3, Calkin noted, "The civil war in Kansas is assuming a serious impact. Slavery and anti-slavery is making quite a stir sufficient for the moment to turn attention from the 'Mormons.' Harney is ordered to employ the whole of the Utah Army to preserve the peace in Kansas." The *Millennial Star*, a Mormon weekly published in England, does not mention the expedition until August 15.¹⁰

Brigham Young's several letters in early August reveal his knowledge of the government's plans for Utah and of Harney's threat to execute Mormon leaders. One such letter stated, "The government has at last hit upon the long sought for plan to extinguish 'Mormonism.'" Young listed the president's appointees to territorial offices and identified them as coming from the ranks of the Mormons' "most bitter enemies." He continued:

Then there are 2500 regulars coming with them as a bodyguard to execute their commands, to sustain them in their exalted positions. . . . The mission of these War Dogs is, of course, peaceful as the saintly squaw killer, General Harney, is supposed commandant of the expedition; and the current report is that he has committed himself on the peace side by openly avowing that he felt no hostility to the settlers of Utah further than myself and about 39 others and all those who believe as we do. A Jubilee is to be declared, means and protection are to be afforded to all who wish to return to the states. In fact, the Mormons are going (?) to be christianized, civilized and victimized by the high-minded (?) officers of Uncle Sam's regulars. To offset this there is a strong probability that the troops will not reach further than Laramie this fall, and still stronger probability that they will *not get here*.

⁹ Young to Cannon, August 4, 1857, Outgoing Correspondence, Brigham Young Papers, LDS Church Library Archives, Salt Lake City.

¹⁰ Asa Calkin Journal, LDS Church Library Archives; *Millennial Star* 19 (1875):526.

To church leaders in the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands Young wrote:

Tis reported that amongst the officers it is a query whether they will hang me with or without a trial. The idea prevails generally amongst the editors that the object of the expedition is to kill Mormonism partly by hanging the authorities, here, and partly by working upon the fears of the masses.

In another letter he said, "We have been tried and condemned without a voice in the matter, but there is a 'catching before the hanging' as they may find, to their cost."¹¹

The Mormon people were as much aware of Harney's reputation as was Brigham Young. They added to one of their favorite songs this verse:

Old squaw killer Harney is on his way
The Mormons for to slay
Now, if he comes, the truth I'll tell
Our boys will drive him down to hell.¹²

Most of the general's background was probably unknown to the anxious Mormons. William Selby Harney was born in Tennessee on August 22, 1800. He and his family were friends of Andrew Jackson and strong supporters of Jackson's Democratic party. In February 1818, while seventeen years old, he enlisted in the army and received a second lieutenant's commission. His first experience with the Plains Indians was in 1825 as part of Gen. Henry Atkinson's expedition to the upper Missouri River. As a young officer he campaigned against Jean Lafitte, the pirate, in the bayous of Louisiana. He fought in the Black Hawk War and in several Seminole campaigns and was cited for bravery in the war with Mexico.¹³

During the Black Hawk War twenty-nine-year-old Captain Harney became friends with two younger officers, Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis. Nearly fifty years later, 1878, Davis described Harney: "At that period of his life he was physically the finest specimen of a man I ever saw . . . tall, straight, muscular, broad-chested, and gaunt-waisted. . . . He would run faster than a white man, further than an Indian and in both show that man was or-

¹¹ Young to Cannon, August 4, 1857; Young to Hamblin, August 4, 1857; Young to Smith, Richards, and Partridge, August 4, 1857; Young to Wright, September 4, 1857; Outgoing Correspondence, Brigham Young Papers.

¹² J. P. Dunn, Jr., *Massacres of the Mountains* (New York, 1886), p. 251.

¹³ Eugene Bandel, *Frontier Life in the Army*, ed. Ralph Bieber (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1932), p. 83 n.

ganized to be master of the beast.” Davis recalled how Harney had run down one of his fleet hunting dogs and flogged it for disturbing the company garden at Fort Winnebago. He remembered Harney “as a bold horseman, fond of the chase, a good boatsman and skillful in the use of the spear as a fisherman. Neither drinking or gaming, he . . . is no doubt indebted to this abstinence for much of the vigor he has possessed to his present advanced age.”¹⁴ Harney lived to be nearly eighty-nine years old.

The year of the Ash Hollow massacre Harney, fifty-five years old, was described:

His form was that of the ideal soldier; six feet four in height, as straight and erect as any Sioux chief that ever lived; brusque in manner; rough in mould and mien, as in voice; proud of his name and his honest titles to distinction; harsh of speech and in no way fastidious about his choice of adjectives to emphasize his commands or displeasure. He was yet so tender of heart, after all, that even a wronged Army mule could arouse in him the most practical sympathy.¹⁵

Harney’s character sometimes failed to match his physical perfection. At the beginning of the Mexican War he and his second dragoon regiment were assigned to Texas. In October 1846, without orders and contrary to instructions, Harney carried out a brief invasion of Mexico and occupied the town of Presidio. He encountered no resistance and wanted to go on to Monterrey, but his fellow officers convinced him to return to Texas. This venture greatly depleted badly needed supplies, and because Harney so delayed his return Gen. John E. Wool placed him under arrest until he was back at headquarters. From then on Harney refused to shake hands with General Wool.¹⁶

Friction between Winfield Scott and Harney existed for much of their careers and probably stemmed from a derogatory remark Harney had made about Scott at the time of the Black Hawk War. Early in General Scott’s advance to Mexico City he expressed concern over Colonel Harney’s dependability and directed that Harney turn over the command of six of the eight companies in his regiment to Maj. Edwin V. Sumner. Harney responded with a letter of compliance and a request for an explanation. When he did not receive an answer to his satisfaction, he wrote Scott’s headquarters:

¹⁴ Reavis, *William Selby Harney*, p. iv.

¹⁵ Bandel, *Frontier Life in the Army*.

¹⁶ Reavis, *William Selby Harney*, p. 154; K. Jack Bauer, *The Mexican War, 1846-1848* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1974), p. 146 n.

If General Scott does not deem me capable of discharging my appropriate duties he may arrest me, but he shall not unresistingly degrade me. It is painful to be driven to this alternative. . . . As long as I am a colonel I shall claim the command of my regiment, it is a right which I hold by my commission and the laws of the land, and no authority short of the President of the United States can legally deprive me of it. In adopting this course, I feel that I am not only defending my own, but the rights of every officer of the army. . . . It is well known by your presence with the army that an important expedition against the enemy is at hand, and my desire to participate in it will not allow me to await redress by an appeal to a higher authority.

Gen. William J. Worth arrested Harney for court-martial. The court found him guilty of disobedience of orders and innocent of insubordinate conduct. He was “reprimanded in orders,” an unusually light sentence. General Scott personally forgave Harney, remitted his sentence, and later allowed Harney to lead his entire regiment in the campaign.¹⁷

Three and a half months later, on April 18, 1847, Harney had his greatest moment of glory and for it he was decorated. He led his men in a charge up a steep, rocky, 700-foot hillside at Cerro Gordo to take the fortified ridge manned by Santa Anna and his veteran soldiers. After the charge Scott was so moved by Harney’s heroism that he embraced him. Gen. G. T. Beauregard described the scene more than thirty years later:

I had the honor, while quite young, of making the acquaintance of General Harney, just before the Battle of Cerro Gordo when Captain R. E. Lee and myself . . . met him at General Scott’s headquarters to explain to him the topography of the country. . . . I remember distinctly the quiet and officer-like manner in which General Harney received our information and the facility with which he seemed to understand all we had to say on the matter. . . . The next morning when the attack commenced, it was truly exhilarating to see him charging, sword in hand, along the steep slope of that high hill, his tall manly figure towering above the gallant officers and men who surrounded him. It was a sight never to be forgotten! He was one of the first inside the enemy’s works, unhurt and ready to attack the other positions on our right still held by the Mexicans. . . .

From the battle to the end of the war General Harney became the favorite of all the young officers of the army, whom he always treated with that kindness and urbanity of manners which distinguish him to this day.¹⁸

¹⁷Reavis, *William Selby Harney*, pp. 166-71; Charles W. Elliott, *Winfield Scott, the Soldier and the Man* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1937), pp. 449-50.

¹⁸Reavis, *William Selby Harney*, p. vii.

The United States Army in Mexico had a serious problem with desertion. Over 9,000 men deserted during the war. Many joined a Mexican foreign legion and fought against their former comrades. The Mexicans encouraged this with offers of land and other inducements. Some of these appeals may have used the Catholic religion of America's Irish soldiers. One group of deserters was known as Mexico's St. Patrick's (San Patricio) Battalion. However, desertions were most often provoked by the rigid discipline and overly harsh punishment for minor offenses. The execution of twenty-nine deserters after the capture of Chapultepec Castle was directed by Colonel Harney. He announced a delay in the execution until the condemned men could see the American flag replace the Mexican flag over the castle. This brought a cheer from them for they had believed the stronghold would not be taken. From a nearby hospital another soldier, Charles Hamilton, watched and described the prisoners standing "in wagons with their hands tied behind them, their feet tied together and a rope around the neck of each attached to the beam above. For two long hours the poor fellows stood together, but as the American flag was seen to rise to the peak of the flagstaff of the castle, the word was given, the teams started and the 29 deserters paid the penalty of their treason with their lives."¹⁹

The Ash Hollow massacre in which General Harney acquired the derisive name "squaw killer" was an important battle in the early stages of the Sioux Wars. These wars, a series of battles between the Plains Indians and the army, included George A. Custer's defeat at the Little Bighorn and lasted until the Battle of Wounded Knee in 1890. It all started in August 1854 when 1,500 Sioux and Cheyenne Indians were peacefully camped a few miles southeast of Fort Laramie alongside the Oregon Trail. They were awaiting annual gifts from the government as established by the Horse Creek Treaty of 1851, a treaty designed to maintain peace among the Indians and to protect emigrant traffic from Indian depredations.

On August 18, 1854, a Mormon wagon company of Danish emigrants passed the Indian camps. A lame cow lagged behind the company's herd and was killed by an Indian and shared with his friends. The same day the loss of the cow was reported to officers at Fort Laramie by the Mormons and also by Chief Conquering Bear

¹⁹ Elliott, *Winfield Scott*, pp. 545-46 n., 555-56; Charles Winston Smith and Charles Judah, *Chronicles of the Gringo* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968), p. 437.

who was anxious that his tribe not lose their government annuity. He brought a horse as restitution for the slain cow.

The next day John L. Grattan, a rash twenty-four-year-old lieutenant, just a year out of West Point, led a volunteer force of twenty-nine soldiers with two cannon to arrest the cow killer. His interpreter, Lucien Auguste, was drunk and belligerent toward the Indians. In the heart of the Indian camp Grattan negotiated through the drunk Auguste but was unable to peacefully take the cowkiller. Witnesses at the Bordeaux Trading Post 300 yards away saw the soldiers fire their muskets and the cannon, after which they were immediately attacked by hundreds of braves who until then had remained hidden in the nearby brush. The soldiers were killed and Grattan's body, next to the cannon, contained twenty-four arrows. The rampaging Indians then looted the Gratiot Trading Post of the undistributed government gifts.²⁰

The Grattan massacre became a national issue. Testimony before congressional committees argued that the Indians were not at fault and should not be punished. However, Jefferson Davis, secretary of war, convinced Congress to outfit a regiment for the purpose of "chastizing the Indians." To command the regiment General Harney was recalled from a leave he had recently earned for again subduing the Seminole Indians in Florida. In late August 1855, as General Harney and 600 troops left Fort Kearney to engage the perpetrators of the Grattan massacre, the Indian agent at Fort Laramie, Thomas S. Twiss, sent runners to instruct friendly Indians to move south of the North Platte River and expel all hostiles from their camps.²¹

Harney followed the Platte River and arrived at Ash Hollow September 2, 1855. Little Thunder and his band of Brule Sioux had ignored Twiss's warning and were camped six miles north of the Platte on Blue Water Creek. At 2:00 A.M. the next morning the troops were awakened. Harney's instructions were heavily laced with profanity. At 3:00 A.M. Col. Philip St. George Cooke led four mounted dragoon companies to positions behind the village. At 4:30 Harney moved five companies of infantry up the creek. The Indians struck camp and began to move out. Little Thunder appeared with a

²⁰ Lloyd E. McCann, "The Grattan Massacre," *Nebraska History* 37(1956): 1-25; LeRoy Hafen and Francis M. Young, *Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West, 1834-1890* (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1938), pp. 221-26.

²¹ *Millennial Star* 17 (1855):701-2, 727-28; Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, p. 239.

white flag and pled for his people, proclaiming his friendship for the whites. The parley lasted almost an hour. Harney later described the meeting to Congress:

I stated the causes of the dissatisfaction which the government felt towards the Brules and closed the interview by telling him that his people had depredated upon and insulted our citizens whilst moving quietly through our country; that they had massacred our troops under most aggravated circumstances, and that now the day of retribution had come; that I did not wish to harm him, personally, as he professed to be a friend of the whites; but that he must either deliver up the young men whom he acknowledged he could not control, or they must suffer the consequences of their past misconduct and take the chances of a battle.

Little Thunder was unable to deliver up his “guilty warriors” and returned to warn his people of Harney’s decision.²²

The infantry with long-range Minie rifles advanced against the arrows and outmoded flintlock guns of the Indians, forcing them toward the waiting cavalry. An infantryman wrote:

I never saw a more beautiful thing in my life. When the infantry saw the dragoons coming down in such beautiful style, they gave a yell which resounded far and wide. The Indians threw away everything they had in the world. . . . We, of necessity, killed a great many women and children. We took 40 women and children prisoners, a good many horses, buffalo meat enough to supply a whole company for some time. I do not suppose the Indians in this country ever had such a perfect clearing out as upon this occasion. They will have cause to remember General Harney for some time.²³

Colonel Cooke reported, “There was much slaughter in the pursuit which extended from five to eight miles. . . . In the pursuit, women, if recognized were generally passed by my men, but that in some cases certainly these women discharged arrows at them.” Harney’s report tallied 86 Indians killed, 5 wounded, and about 70 women and children captured. Harney’s casualties were 4 killed, 4 severely wounded, 3 slightly wounded, and 1 missing. Items from the Gratiot Post and from a murdered mail party were found with the Indians. Later, at Fort Laramie, Harney received Sioux chiefs, who where under the protection of Twiss, and sternly demanded that their only hope for peace was to surrender the murderers of the mail party, return stolen property, and stop their depredations. Two

²² U.S., Congress, Senate, Sen. Ex. Doc. 1, pt. 1, pp. 49-51, 34th Cong., 1st sess. (1855-56).

²³ *Daily Missouri Republican*, September 27, 1855, cited in Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, pp. 241-42.

incriminated braves surrendered and were taken to Fort Leavenworth to be hanged but were later pardoned.²⁴

Col. Edwin V. Sumner, a protege of Winfield Scott and much at odds with Harney since the Mexican War, was to follow Harney by a week to support him in the Indian campaign, but for unexplained reasons he returned to Fort Leavenworth for the winter. Harney denounced Sumner for cowardice and desertion and demanded his court-martial. This was denied by the War Department. During the time between Harney's two Utah commands he was involved in two more courts-martial of Sumner. At the first one, in November 1857, Sumner objected to Harney as a member of the court claiming he was strongly prejudiced against him. In being excused from the court, Harney insulted Sumner by explaining, "I did prefer charges against him (Sumner), nearly two years ago, for 'disobedience of orders' and conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman. . . . As to the prejudice I entertain towards him, I can only say that I never have had any, or very little respect for him as a soldier." Sumner was acquitted but then pursued Harney with messages which seemed to challenge Harney to a duel. Because dueling was against army regulations, Harney again preferred charges against Sumner. This court-martial in March 1858 also acquitted Sumner. Because of these court appearances Harney saw little action in Kansas after he was relieved of his first Utah command.²⁵

In April 1858 the War Department created the Department of Utah under Gen. Persifor F. Smith with Harney as second in command and both over Johnston in Utah. Smith died on May 7. Government records indicate that Harney's attempt in May 1858 to assume command of the military forces in and destined for Utah was repudiated by the War Department for overstepping his authority. Nevertheless, Harney did hold Department of Utah command until assigned to Oregon on June 28, 1858.²⁶

At this time the unsettled boundary between Washington Territory and Canada left the control of San Juan Island near Puget Sound in question. A conflict arose on the island between a handful of American settlers and the Hudson's Bay Company. An American

²⁴ U.S., Congress, Senate, Sen. Ex. Doc. 58, pp. 1-4, 34th Cong., 3d sess. (1856-57); see also Sen. Ex. Doc. 1.

²⁵ Reavis, *William Selby Harney*, p. 249; *New York Times*, October 21, November 20, 1857, February 15, 16, March 2, 13, 1858.

²⁶ Robert H. Gruber, Navy and Old Army Branch Military Archives Division, National Archives, to author, April 9, 1982.

shot a pig belonging to an Englishman, and British authorities sought to bring the American to trial at Victoria for the offense. The Americans petitioned for protection from the British and also claimed marauding Indians had killed a few settlers. Some blamed company officials for urging Indians to frighten Americans from the island. Harney at Fort Vancouver received the request and, encouraged by Gov. Isaac I. Stevens of Washington Territory, dispatched a company of soldiers. The British governor protested and proclaimed British sovereignty of the island. A British warship was at hand and confronted the entrenched American soldiers. Fortunately, the British officer refrained from landing his marines, and each side awaited instructions from its government.²⁷

Ambitious motives were attributed to Harney by his possession of San Juan Island which is just ten miles from the coast of Vancouver Island. He had earlier stirred the Oregon legislature with a speech that, in tune with Manifest Destiny, looked upon Vancouver Island as a potential American acquisition and a step toward ultimately annexing British Columbia west of the Rockies. In this speech he proclaimed that, "Vancouver Island is as important to the Pacific states as Cuba is to those on the Atlantic." Another reason given for Harney's occupation of the island was that, in concert with government officials in the Northwest, Harney saw a chance of averting America's imminent Civil War by uniting the feuding North and South against a common foreign enemy, Great Britain.²⁸

President Buchanan reprimanded Harney for nearly involving the country in a war with Britain and sent seventy-three-year-old Winfield Scott on a 7,000-mile sea voyage by way of Panama to Oregon where within two weeks the diplomatic Scott resolved the issue peacefully. Both sides were to occupy the island with a military detachment of 100 men at opposite ends of the island until the two countries could peacefully resolve the boundary dispute. On November 15, 1859, just before Scott left for New York, he wrote Harney strongly suggesting he accept the command at St. Louis, anticipating that the British would insist on Harney's removal. Harney declined Scott's suggestion, and in January he explained the events to the legislature of Washington Territory which formally

²⁷Alfred Tunem, "Dispute over San Juan Island's Boundary," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 23 (1932): 136-37, 196-204, 286-90; *New York Times*, January 2, 1860; Reavis, *William Selby Harney*, pp. 317-46.

²⁸Richard W. Van Alstyne, "International Rivalries," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 46 (1945):212-13; Tunem, "Dispute over San Juan Island's Boundary," p. 197 n.

expressed its full support and commended him for his actions. Then, on April 10, 1860, Harney acted contrary to Scott's agreement with the British by changing the commander of the American detachment on the island. He also openly argued that Congress had intended to include San Juan Island in the territory of Washington. For these actions Jefferson Davis sent a letter of censure to Harney which he made public and explicitly instructed him to abide by Scott's agreement with the British.²⁹

A vehement condemnation of Harney was made by George Ihrle in 1860. Ihrle and H. V. DeHart were junior officers who aroused the displeasure of Harney in July 1859 when they reported he had furloughed soldiers to work on his personal home and farm near Fort Vancouver, Oregon. DeHart was arrested and possibly Ihrle also. After resigning from the army, Ihrle presented to the War Department documents to clear his name and to a Harney letter of 1859 that had maligned his character responded: "He [Harney] goes on to state to you his own opinion of me, and thus to offer his character against mine. I am, therefore, justifiable in reminding you that his character, particularly in the army, is anything but enviable, being notorious for profanity, brutality, incompetency, speculation, recklessness, insubordination, tyranny and mendacity." Ihrle then resurrected a murder charge against Harney from 1834 for which Harney had been tried and acquitted. He claimed Harney had starved a slave girl to a state of emaciation and then beaten her to death. He produced the St. Louis County grand jury indictment against Harney which charged "that William S. Harney . . . not having the fear of God before his eyes, but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the devil . . . upon one Hannah, a slave, . . . did make an assault, . . . with a certain cowhide of the value of twenty-five cents" on June 26, 1834, causing injuries which led to her death the next day. Concerning Harney's acquittal, Ihrle commented, "Considering his position in the army, the lubricating influences of the oil of gold, the experience of his lawyers and the long time that elapsed (nine months) before a trial could be had, the result could hardly have been otherwise." Ihrle further claimed that the records of the Criminal Court of St. Louis County contained several indictments against Harney for assault and battery.³⁰

²⁹ Elliott, *Winfield Scott*, pp. 665-70; Reavis, *William Selby Harney*, p. 345; Tunem, "Dispute over San Juan Island's Boundary," pp. 286-88; *New York Times*, October 31, 1860.

³⁰ Official Correspondence of Brig. Gen. W. S. Harney and 1st Lt. George Ihrle with the U.S. War Department, pp. 1-16, microfiche, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

While Scott was in Oregon to resolve the dispute with England, he suggested to Harney that he “take credit for a generous act” and release DeHart from prison. Harney argued strongly against this and forced Scott to order DeHart’s release. Then Harney appealed directly to the adjutant general at Washington requesting that the president hear the issue. The secretary of war responded that Harney had not explained the charge of the enlisted men working on his personal farm. Scott advised the secretary that in his opinion DeHart was arrested for vengeance and not discipline and concluded his comment:

In dismissing this nauseating subject I beg permission to add that the highest obligations of my station compel me to suggest a doubt whether it be safe in respect to our foreign relations, or just to the gallant officers and men in the Oregon Department to leave them longer, at so great a distance, subject to the ignorance, passion and caprice of the present headquarters of that department.³¹

In November 1860 Harney returned to St. Louis to command the Department of the West. Shortly after the Civil War broke out the next spring Harney started for Washington, but his train was stopped at Harper’s Ferry by Confederate soldiers. He was taken as the first prisoner of the war to Richmond, Virginia, where he was invited to take a Confederate command. He declined and was released to continue on to Washington. He held his St. Louis command only until the end of May when political advisers to Lincoln’s secretary of war brought about his release. In so doing, one of them, Montgomery Blair, wrote,

As to Harney, his public course, viewed from this point, seems reasonable enough. . . . I think it possible, that, if Harney had about him some resolute, sensible men, he would be all right all the time. It is only because he falls into the hands of our opponents that he is dangerous, his intention being good but his judgment being weak.

Some suspected him of being a Southern sympathizer. He did not receive another command in the Union Army and was not militarily active in the Civil War.³²

In February 1888 a correspondent described a gathering in honor of Harney, then eighty-seven years old:

On the wide gallery of his handsome residence in this cheery suburb of New Orleans in the warm sunshine . . . sat nearly all yesterday morning

³¹ Reavis, *William Selby Harney*, pp. 300-303; Robert Carlton Clark, “Military History of Oregon, 1849-1859,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 36 (1935): 52-53.

³² Reavis, *William Selby Harney*, pp. 350-77.

General William S. Harney. Many of his neighbors called upon him, bringing congratulations. . . . for he celebrated the 70th anniversary of his appointment as an officer in the United States Army. The old soldier was pleased with the attention paid him and called his wife to exhibit to visitors the musty bundle of parchments (promotion orders) which he had received from time to time as he advanced in rank. . . . General Harney's tall soldierly figure and snow-white hair are among the familiar sights. . . . In the last year General Harney has become quite feeble in mind. Although his health is good . . . it is sad to see him as he sits in the sun, with all the great deeds of his life forgotten, caring for nothing but the sunlight on the water or the birds singing in the trees.

When Harney died fifteen months later his obituary noted that he was the oldest officer of the United States Army.³³

Each phase of the Utah Expedition required the leadership of a patient man — the winter quarters at Camp Scott and the long wait there through the spring, the isolation at Camp Floyd, and the firm control of soldiers to prevent conflict with wary Mormons expecting government persecution. Johnston succeeded at this assignment remarkably well. It seems that Harney would have acted differently. The risk of impulsive and combative leadership, had Harney retained the command, would have threatened the expedition with the possibility of turbulent confrontations between Harney and the Mormons and ensuing casualties and scars. By almost any measure it would seem that the Mormons, Utah, the army, and the country were fortunate that the colorful and controversial William S. Harney was relieved of his command of the Utah Expedition and replaced by Albert Sidney Johnston.

³³*New York Times*, February 15, 1888, May 10, 1889.