

EMMET CRAWFORD, PENNSYLVANIA VOLUNTEER TURNED INDIAN FIGHTER

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WITH the outbreak of the Civil War, Emmet Crawford, like thousands of other patriotic Pennsylvanians, quickly put in an appearance at the recruiting booth. Unlike the vast majority of volunteers, however, Crawford did not put aside his uniform upon the silencing of the guns at Appomattox. Instead, he turned Regular, became a cavalryman, and spent the remaining years of his life either fighting Indians or attempting to educate them into the ways of peace. His career as a professional soldier ended abruptly during the Geronimo Campaign of 1885-1886, when Captain Crawford valiantly exposed himself to save his Apache Scouts from Mexican scalp-hunters, but suffered death instead. His long association with the Plains Indians and his varied experiences with the frontier army, however, won for him a significant place in the early history of Western America.

On May 13, 1861, a youthful Emmet Crawford enlisted as a private of the volunteers at Philadelphia, the city where he had been born on September 6, 1844.¹ His regiment was a three-year outfit, the 1st California, raised and mustered in by Colonel Edward D. Baker.² In spite of the regiment's name, almost every man in it was a Pennsylvanian. Apparently the troops were considered Californians only because they belonged to one of the two regiments raised by Edward D. Baker, Senator from Oregon and onetime resident of San Francisco.

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¹ Adjutant General (AG) letter to Hon. Norris Brown, United States Senate, dated Dec. 30, 1907, in Crawford, Emmet, Appointments, Commissions, Personal File 4028ACP1877, records of The Adjutant General's Office, National Archives, Record Group 94, hereafter *Crawford ACP File*. Hereafter records in the National Archives are indicated by the symbol NA, followed by the record group (RG) number.

² Carded Record of Volunteer Service, Crawford, Emmet, 71st Pa. Inf. NA, RG 94.

Just four months later, the newly organized unit received its first taste of combat. On September 28, 1861, the soldiers of the 1st California plodded through the moonlit fields of Virginia in the van of a Union column. They were being marched toward the Potomac River and Poolesville, Maryland. Suddenly muskets barked as a band of Confederate raiders struck at Crawford's regiment. For a moment, all was confusion. Then the untried soldiers rallied, charged headlong into the hostile night through a patch of woods, and routed the ambush party. This brief action cost the 1st California four killed and fourteen wounded.³

Insignificant as it was in the drama of the Civil War, the affair at Munson's Hill marked Crawford's baptism of fire and a turning point in his life. One unexpected benefit was that the first sergeant of Company F stopped misspelling the young private's name. Previously, he had persisted in calling him "Emmit."⁴

Following the skirmish at Munson's Hill, the 1st California was next utilized as a reconnaissance in force to discover the enemy's strength around Leesburg, Virginia. On the afternoon of October 21, 1861, some 600 men of the regiment crossed the Potomac at Conrad's Ferry. In the resulting action at Ball's Bluff, Colonel Baker displayed remarkable courage. Gallantry, however, could not make up for faulty tactics; and, most disastrous of all, Baker ignored the possibility that he might have to withdraw. After Baker's death—four Confederate balls struck him almost simultaneously—his command was driven back to the water's edge. No boats were waiting, "and nothing was left to our soldiers but to swim, surrender or die."⁵ Little more than half of the soldiers who crossed the river into Virginia ever returned.⁶

Because the muster rolls of Company F show no great turnover of personnel following the battle, it seems unlikely that Crawford's

³"Report of Col. Edward D. Baker, Seventy-first Pennsylvania Infantry," Oct. 6, 1861, and "Report of Lieut. Col. Isaac J. Wister, Seventy-first Pennsylvania Infantry, Sept. 29, 1861," in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1881), Serial 5, v. V, Series I, pp. 217-229, hereafter *Official Records*, with appropriate citation.

⁴Carded Record of Volunteer Service. Crawford, Emmet, 71st Pa. Inf., NA, RG 94.

⁵Report of Brig. Gen. Charles P. Stone, U. S. Army," Oct. 29, 1861, in *Official Records*, Serial 5, v. V, Series I, p. 297.

⁶Report of Lieut. Col. Isaac J. Wister, Seventy-first Pennsylvania Infantry," Oct. 22, 1861, in *Official Records*, Serial 5, v. V, Series I, p. 326.

unit crossed the Potomac.⁷ At any rate, he was eyewitness to disaster.

From the banks of the Potomac, Crawford and his comrades of the newly-designated 71st Pennsylvania Infantry—as the 1st California came to be after Baker's death—were moved to the Yorktown peninsula where, in April 1862, Major General George B. McClellan was attempting a sudden thrust at Richmond. The 71st took part in the siege of Yorktown, fought at Fair Oaks, stood poised for a week before the defenses of Richmond, then fell back as McClellan abandoned his scheme. By August, the entire command was back at Alexandria, Virginia.

The morning of September 17, 1862, found Private Emmet Crawford splashing across Antietam Creek and moving westward up a gentle slope toward the sound of battle. One-quarter mile from the ford, Major General John Sedgwick halted his 2nd Division, II Corps, Army of the Potomac, faced it toward Sharpsburg village, and formed it into three lines. In the rear was the 2nd Brigade under Brigadier General O. O. Howard, with the 71st on its right.

Howard's difficulties began soon after Sedgwick set his division marching toward Sharpsburg. Fences and patches of woods on the left plunged the carefully dressed ranks into confusion. Enemy fire began falling among the blue-clad troops, but the Pennsylvanians shrugged this off and kept moving. Orders came for Howard to detach a regiment to support the troops of Major General Joseph K. P. Mansfield, and the 71st was pulled out of the line.

In the meantime, a crisis was fast developing on the left. Adjacent Federal units had begun to fall back—a blow to the confidence of Howard's troops and a serious threat to the brigade's shortened line. Now the division's leading elements were slamming headlong into the enemy's main defenses; suddenly Confederate troops appeared on the left flank; then Sedgwick was wounded. Howard assumed command and ordered a withdrawal.

Conduct of the 71st before Sharpsburg was above reproach. Although the entire left flank had crumbled, Private Crawford and his fellow soldiers retired in an orderly manner. In spite of the fact that the regiment was posted in perhaps the least exposed

⁷ Muster Roll, 71st Pa. Inf., Sept.-Oct., 1861, NA, RG 94.

position on that bloody field, the 71st suffered 121 of the brigade's 472 casualties; among the wounded was Emmet Crawford. Best indication of the steadfastness of the regiment was the fact that of 545 members of the brigade reported missing, only 18 belonged to the 71st.⁸

Hot upon the heels of this fierce battle on the banks of the Antietam came a reconnaissance in force not unlike that attempted by Colonel Baker a year earlier. On October 16, 1862, a Union force under Brigadier General Winfield Scott Hancock thrust from Bolivar Heights above Harpers Ferry to Charlestown, Virginia. On the following day, the Federal troops began retiring. Present for duty with the 71st was Emmet Crawford, but the Pennsylvanians had no contact with the enemy.⁹

Another battle bloodless for the 71st was gory Fredericksburg. During the unsuccessful attempt to plow through the Confederate defenses overlooking the Rappahannock River, the regiment was posted at Bank's Ford and suffered not a single casualty.¹⁰

In April 1863, Private Crawford entered the Chestnut Hill Hospital at Philadelphia. He remained there, probably under treatment for malaria, until July 2, 1864, when his regiment was mustered out of the Federal service.¹¹

Having no intention of remaining a civilian, Crawford enlisted on July 11, 1864, for 100 days' service with Company K, 197th Pennsylvania Volunteers. On July 19 he became company first sergeant.¹²

Shortly after it was mustered into Federal service, the 197th was sent to Rock Island Barracks, Illinois, to guard prisoners of war. While stationed there, Crawford applied for a commission as

⁸ "Report of Brig. Gen. Oliver O. Howard, U. S. Army, commanding Second Division, of the Battle of Antietam," Sept. 20, 1862, in *Official Records*, Serial 27, v. 19, Part I, Series I, pp. 305-308; "Report of Col. Joshua T. Owen, Sixty-Ninth Pennsylvania Infantry, commanding Second Brigade, of the Battle of Antietam," Sept. 21, 1862, in *ibid.*, pp. 318-319; Crawford ltr. to Grant, June 17, 1868, in *Crawford ACP File*.

⁹ "Report of Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, U. S. Army, commanding the Army of the Potomac, of operations August 14-November 9," Oct. 15, 1862, in *Official Records*, Serial 27, v. 19, Part I, Series I, pp. 90-96.

¹⁰ "Report of Brig. Gen. Joshua T. Owen, U. S. Army, commanding Second Brigade," May 7, 1863, *ibid.*, Serial 39, v. 25, Part I, Series I, p. 357.

¹¹ Carded Record of Volunteer Service, Crawford, Emmet, 71st Pa. Inf.; N.A., RG 94.

¹² Statement of Service, Emmet Crawford, July 24, 1878, in *Crawford ACP File*.

first lieutenant, United States Colored Troops. His application was approved, and on November 11 he was mustered out of Company K to join the 13th Regiment, United States Colored Artillery (Heavy).¹³

Upon reporting to the barracks at Bowling Green, Kentucky, Lieutenant Crawford was assigned to recruiting duty. Later he became an acting assistant quartermaster at Smithland, Kentucky.¹⁴ Apparently, his work was more than satisfactory, for he remained at Smithland after his regiment had been transferred from the area. In fact, he still was on duty there in December, 1865, even though he technically had been mustered out with his regiment the month before.¹⁵

Next, Crawford obtained an appointment as second lieutenant, 37th United States Colored Infantry. He signed his oath of office on February 15, 1866, and reported for duty at the Raleigh Barracks, North Carolina. There he was assigned duty as acting assistant quartermaster.¹⁶

While at Raleigh, on August 6, 1866, Crawford applied for a commission in the Regular Army. Unfortunately, he was not well enough known to merit the kind of endorsement that would win the approval of the Secretary of War, crusty old Edwin M. Stanton. The application, needless to say, was merely marked "file."¹⁷

Crawford, however, was determined to become a Regular, and fortunately he had friends to help him. On September 11, the lieutenant visited Representative William D. Kelley at Washington. The Pennsylvania politician penned a recommendation that Crawford be granted brevet promotions to captain and major of volunteers for his wartime service. Armed with this letter, Crawford visited the office of Secretary Stanton. The word of the Pennsylvania Congressman, it would seem, carried a great deal of weight, for on the same day Stanton endorsed the recommendation; and on April 10, 1867, the young officer acknowledged receipt of his

¹³ Crawford letter to AAG, Colored Bureau, Aug. 29, 1864, in *Crawford ACP File*.

¹⁴ Affidavit of Emmet Crawford, Aug. 1, 1870, in *Crawford ACP File*.

¹⁵ Jacob Foster letter to Secretary of War, Aug. 5, 1867, in *Crawford ACP File*.

¹⁶ Oath of office, Feb. 15, 1866, and Personal Report, Oct. 1, 1868, in *Crawford ACP File*.

¹⁷ Crawford to AG, Aug. 6, 1866, in *Crawford ACP File*.

brevet rank. His appointments as captain and major of volunteers dated from March 13, 1865.¹⁸

Another politician who aided Crawford in his quest for a Regular commission was W. W. Holden, provisional governor of North Carolina.¹⁹ The work of Holden and Kelley paid dividends. On May 20, 1867, Crawford accepted appointment as second lieutenant, 39th United States Infantry.²⁰

He was subsequently promoted to first lieutenant, 39th Infantry, with rank from June 5, 1868; but on April 20 of the following year, with the regiment slated for disbandment, he was transferred to the 25th Infantry. From the forts defending New Orleans, he moved to the blazing, sun-baked plains of Texas.²¹

On June 17, 1869, Lieutenant Crawford was placed in an unassigned status. The following month he requested transfer from Infantry to Cavalry; but not until December 3, 1870, was he ordered to the 3rd Cavalry.²²

Here, Crawford was introduced to a new type of warfare entirely different from anything he had encountered in the Civil War. "The Army," wrote Brevet Major General John Pope, "has nothing to gain by war with the Indians . . . exposed as it is to charges of assassination if Indians are killed; to the charge of inefficiency if they are not. . . ." ²³ But the Indians, in this case the Apache of Arizona, had to be pacified; the army had no choice; so in 1871 Lieutenant Crawford and the 3rd Cavalry helped round up Geronimo's tribesmen and herd them onto the reservation.²⁴

From the Arizona Territory, the regiment was transferred to Nebraska. First problem to confront the 3rd Cavalry after its

¹⁸ Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Dictionary of the United States Army* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903), I, 336; Kelley to Stanton, Sept. 11, 1866, and Crawford to AG, April 10, 1867, in *Crawford ACP File*.

¹⁹ Crawford to Kelley, Feb. 20, 1867, in *Crawford ACP File*.

²⁰ Heitman, *Historical Dictionary*; Crawford to AG, May 21, 1867, in *Crawford ACP File*.

²¹ Heitman, *Historical Dictionary*; "Position and distribution of troops in the Military Division of the South, etc.," in *Annual Report of the Secretary of War*, 1870, I, 41st Congress, 3d Session, House of Representatives Doc. 1, Part 2 (Serial 1446), p. 76, hereafter *Annual Report SecWar*, with year.

²² Heitman, *Historical Dictionary*; Crawford to AG, July 29, 1870, in *Crawford ACP File*.

²³ "Report of Bvt. Maj. Gen. John Pope," Sept. 1, 1875, in *Annual Report SecWar*, 1875, I, 44th Congress, 1st Session, House of Representatives, Ex Dec 1, Part 2 (Serial 1674), p. 76.

²⁴ *Army and Navy Register*, VII, No. 16, Washington, D. C., April 17, 1866, p. 244.

assignment to the Department of the Platte was the task of aiding victims not of Indians but of nature. The year 1874 was the year of the grasshopper. Crops throughout Iowa and Nebraska were destroyed; thousands were left destitute. Crawford was one of eighteen army officers in charge of enrolling the disaster victims and distributing to them the government rations and clothing.²⁵ Years later an Omaha newspaper would recall that "Lieutenant Emmet Crawford nearly wore himself out carrying Government relief to the sufferers in the Platte River valley."²⁶

The state of Nebraska, however, was not without its Indian problem. In Kansas to the south, a band of Cheyennes was finally brought to heel. According to government policy, its leaders were ordered deported to Florida. When this news broke, about half the tribe took to the warpath only to meet defeat at the hands of the white soldiers. Small bands fled northward toward the Sioux lands. In April, 1875, Lieutenant Crawford picked up signs of Cheyennes at the Kansas-Nebraska border, trailed the renegades to the North Platte River, but abandoned the pursuit when he realized that he could not catch them.²⁷ Experience of this sort would prove invaluable during the following year.

To Lieutenant General Philip Sheridan, the only answer to the Sioux problem was to construct a string of military posts throughout the tribe's territory. In this way, the army could determine which of the many villages were actually pacified and which were hostile. At any season of the year, army detachments could have struck at the bands of renegades which drifted aimlessly through the immense territory. General Sheridan's suggestions unfortunately were ignored. Instead, the government waited until the Sioux and Cheyenne had gone on the warpath, and then, on February 7, 1876, directed the army to track them down.

Brigadier General George Crook, a canny Indian fighter, was to strike northward from the Platte while Brigadier General Alfred H. Terry thrust westward into Indian Territory from the Department of Dakota. Since the hostile tribes were constantly

²⁵ "Report of Adjutant-General, Department of the Platte," Sept. 16, 1875, in *Annual Report SecWar*, 1875, p. 71.

²⁶ *Omaha Bee*, quoted in *Army and Navy Register*, VII, No. 16, Washington, D. C., April 17, 1886, p. 244.

²⁷ Ruggles to Drum, May 4, 1875, 2388-AGO-1875, NA, RG 94; "Report of Bvt. Maj. Gen. John Pope," Sept. 1, 1875, *Annual Report SecWar*, 1875, pp. 74-75.

on the move, the two forces could not be closely coordinated, but whenever possible Crook and Terry were to cooperate.²⁸

During March, while the 3rd Cavalry rode northwestward from the Platte Valley, Lieutenant Emmet Crawford remained behind in barracks at Sidney, Nebraska. Never before had an expedition against the hostiles been launched in such bitter cold. Before the troops had reached their objective, an Indian camp on the Powder River, Montana Territory, the mercury lay congealed in a lump at the bottom of the thermometer. Caught by surprise, the enemy fled, but the attackers were too numbed by the cold to pursue. In fact the listless troops could not prevent the Sioux from recapturing their ponies.²⁹ "The affair," reported General Sheridan, "was shamefully disgraceful."³⁰ Missing Crook's winter campaign had not harmed Crawford's career.

Now the scene shifted northward, as the snows finally melted, and General Terry took the field. Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer, commanding the 7th Cavalry, was at the head of Terry's column. On June 25, 1876, he saw what appeared to be a cluster of a hundred Sioux lodges. Three of his companies charged down on the village, while four others, the rear guard, moved up to join them. Custer with five companies darted toward the flank of the encampment, swept past the bluff that screened it, and found himself confronted by a force ten times the size he had estimated. The end was not long in coming.³¹

The massacre of five companies of cavalry could not pass unavenged. In August Crook pushed farther into the Indian country, and by September his command was running short on provisions. With a composite force of cavalry—including seventy-five troopers from the 3rd Cavalry under Lieutenant Crawford—screening his advance, Crook started across the Bad Lands toward the supply point at Deadwood City, South Dakota.

At three o'clock on September 8, 1876, as the horsemen were approaching Slim Buttes, Dakota Territory, a guide reported forty

²⁸ "Report of Lieut. Gen. P. H. Sheridan," Nov. 25, 1876, in *Annual Report SecWar*, 1876, I, 44th Congress, 2d Session, House of Representatives, Ex Doc 1, Part 2 (Serial No. 1742), pp. 439-448.

²⁹ *Ibid.*; "Subreport of General Crook," May 7, 1876, in *Annual Report SecWar*, 1876, pp. 502-503.

³⁰ Endorsement on Crook letter to AG, May 7, 1876, 2732-AGO-1876, NA, RG 94.

³¹ "Report of Lieut. Gen. P. H. Sheridan," *Annual Report SecWar*, 1876.

Indian ponies grazing nearby. In the shadow of the buttes lay a hostile village, a band of Sioux led by Roman Nose and American Horse.

Anson Mills, Captain, 3rd Cavalry, officer in overall command of the mounted detachment, was too shrewd an Indian fighter to attack at once. About two o'clock in the morning, the sound of their approach muffled by an icy rain, the troopers jogged to within a mile of the Indian camp. Crawford and Lieutenant Adolphus H. Von Luettwitz were to lead dismounted attacks from opposite sides of the village, while Lieutenant Frederick Schwatka and his men galloped directly through the camp to drive off the enemy's horses.

Just as the bugler was about to sound the charge, the alert Indian ponies scented danger and bolted. Surprise lost, Crawford and Von Luettwitz ordered their men to open fire. Now the Sioux were cutting their way out of their lodges—leather tepees laced tightly shut against the rain. As was their custom, the Indians fought a rear guard action while their squaws and children escaped. The "pony soldiers" easily overran the encampment, but once their families were hidden away in the folds of the buttes, the Sioux returned to the attack.

The wily renegades pushed a U-shaped skirmish line downslope, coiling it around the cavalry position. Small bands of braves crept close to Mills's lines, but headlong charges by mounted patrols under Crawford and Lieutenant John W. Bubb sent them reeling. At noon, Crook's main body moved into sight, and the Indians fled.

Left behind in the ruins of the Sioux camp were 5,500 pounds of dried meat, dried fruit, ammunition, arms, and ponies—items necessary for survival during the approaching winter. Most important of all, the 3rd Cavalry recovered a guidon and three horses which had belonged to its sister regiment, the 7th. Custer had been partially avenged.³²

Sitting Bull, generally acknowledged to be the leader of the uprising, was not brought to task for the Custer Massacre. He escaped into Canada. The campaign finally ended with the sur-

³² "Report of Captain Mills." Sept. 9, 1876, in *Annual Report SecWar*, 1876, pp. 509-511.

render of Crazy Horse to General Nelson A. Miles on January 7, 1877.³³

With the end of the Sioux War, Crawford resumed the routine garrison life of the frontier army. For his gallantry at Slim Buttes, he was recommended for the brevet rank of captain, but no action was taken.³⁴ In 1878, several anonymous friends rallied to his support and petitioned Vermont Congressman George B. Loring to plead Crawford's case before the Secretary of War. Loring, however, showed little vigor, and Crawford remained a first lieutenant.³⁵ It was June, 1879, before he was able to forward his acceptance of an appointment as captain, 3rd Cavalry. His date of rank was March 20 of the same year.³⁶

From the northern plains, the 3rd Cavalry was next transferred back to Arizona, where Geronimo had fled the reservation for a second time in 1882.³⁷ With the coralling of the renegades, Crawford became provost marshal at the San Carlos Reservation. Here his impartial and paternalistic supervision of his Apache wards won him their complete confidence. Crawford did not hesitate to risk censure when the best interests of the reservation were concerned. During one dispute with employes of the Interior Department, he vowed that "no man save my commanding officer will come between me and my Indians."³⁸ As a result of Crawford's efforts, his command at San Carlos led to lasting improvements and changes in the administration of that reservation.³⁹

When Geronimo and a large band of Apaches fled their reservation at Fort Apache in May, 1885, Captain Crawford once again took to the field. At first, he led a mixed force of cavalrymen and Apache Scouts—friendly Indians who searched out the hostiles and fought side by side with the soldiers—and then later solely

³³ *Dictionary of American History*, V, 87.

³⁴ "Report of Captain Mills," *Annual Report SecWar*, 1876.

³⁵ AG to Loring, March 4, 1878, and Dean to Loring, Feb. 20, 1878, in *Crawford ACP File*.

³⁶ Crawford to AG, June 25, 1879, in *Crawford ACP File*.

³⁷ For a detailed narrative of Crawford's actions in Arizona from his return in 1882 until his untimely death, see Bernard C. Nalty and Truman R. Strobridge, "Captain Emmet Crawford: Leader of the Apache Scouts," *Arizona and the West* (1964).

³⁸ Crawford to P. P. Wilcox, June 6, 1884, in *Miscellaneous Letters and Reports Concerning Gilson's Well*, 2823-AGO-1884, NA, RG 94.

³⁹ Lieutenant W. E. Shipp, Tenth Cavalry, "Captain Crawford's Last Expedition," *Journal of the United States Cavalry Association*, XIX, No. 40 (Oct., 1905), 280.

a large force of Apache Scouts. Through experience, the officer decided that only the White Mountain Apaches and the friendly Chiricahuas had the endurance and skill to successfully trail and surprise the wily renegades.

The long frustrating pursuit finally ended on January 10, 1886, when the scouts ferreted out the main renegade camp amidst the mountain fastness of the Mexican Sierra Madre. That night, a surprise assault routed the Apaches, and they quickly sued for a truce. Their request was granted, but before an official surrender could be effected, Crawford's scouts were attacked early the next morning by a group of Mexican scalp-hunters. In the ensuing battle, the captain mounted a boulder and attempted to signal to the Mexicans that his scouts were not renegades, but a rifle slug slammed into his head, fatally wounding him. Had Crawford lived, the renegades probably would have surrendered on the spot, but instead, Geronimo and a handful of braves slipped away and were not taken into custody until September, 1886.⁴⁰

Captain Crawford's last mission was, therefore, not a complete success, but as a fellow officer said of him, "though such men sometimes fail, yet the name they leave behind them is worth more than the greatest success."⁴¹ There could have been no more characteristic action by a man whom another soldier described as "the bravest among the brave, the gentlest among the gentle," than that Crawford willingly lay down his life rather than allow his scouts to shed their blood needlessly.⁴² When General Crook referred to "the lamented Crawford, who sleeps in a soldier's grave,"⁴³ he spoke for all who had ever known the man or his reputation. Little did the young Pennsylvanian volunteer dream that his later exploits on the Western Plains would earn for him a lasting place in the history of that land.

⁴⁰ George Crook, *Resume of Operations Against Apache Indians, 1882-1886* (Privately printed, 1886), p. 23.

⁴¹ Lt. Shipp, "Captain Crawford's Last Expedition," p. 300.

⁴² H. W. Daly, Chief Packer, Q.M. Department, U. S. Army, "The Geronimo Campaign," *Journal of the United States Cavalry Association*, XIX, No. 69 (July, 1908), 85.

⁴³ "Report of Brigadier-General Crook," April 10, 1886, in *Annual Report SecWar*, 1886, I, 49th Congress, 2d Session, House of Representatives, Ex Doc I, Part 2 (Serial 2461), p. 155.