

season. The time, however, was fast approaching when it would be necessary to lay in the supply of firewood for the succeeding winter. Failing in every effort to draw the soldiers out and into ambush Red Cloud and his allies had determined to concentrate all of their forces about Fort Kearney and utterly destroy it, and then proceed to the other posts, Reno and Smith, which would be easily overcome. All of that summer the entire Wyoming country was kept in a state of terror, travel on the Montana trail was utterly abandoned except by the military expeditions carrying the re-inforcements and supplies to the forts. Just at the time when Red Cloud had mobilized his army on the slopes of the Big Horn about Phil Kearney the wood cutting at Piney Island was resumed.

"The wood was to be cut and delivered at the fort by a civilian outfit which had entered into a contract with the government for the purpose. One of the stipulations of the contract was that the woodmen were to be guarded and protected by the soldiers. Wood cutting began on the 31st of July, 1867, and Captain and Brevet Major James W. Powell, commanding Company C of the Twenty-seventh infantry, a part of the command which had built the fort and to which Fetterman and his men belonged, was detailed with his company to guard the contractor's party. Arriving at Piney Island, some seven miles from the post, Powell found that the contractor had divided his men into two parties; one had its headquarters on a bare, treeless and comparatively level plain, perhaps 1,000 yards across, which was surrounded by low hills, backed by mountains farther away. This was an admirable place to graze the herds of mules required to haul the wagons. As will be seen it could be also turned into a strong defensive position. The other camp was in the thick of the pine woods about a mile / ³⁷⁴ away, across the creek at the foot of the mountain. This division of labor necessitated a division of force, which was a misfortune, but this could not be avoided. Powell sent twelve men under a non-commissioned officer to guard the camp in the woods and detailed thirteen men with another non-commissioned officer to escort the wood train to and