

Adventures on the American Frontier

Following the Frontier West

Part Eight

John Phillips Saves Fort Phil Kearney



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By 1848, the United States reached all the way to California. The Santa Fe Trail, the Oregon Trail, and the California Trail were roadways by then. With the bigger and better roadways, travel and trade grew greater. Then gold was discovered in California and in other places in the West. Americans swarmed all over the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains. The outposts along the trails had more business than ever, and many of them grew into settlements.





The Native Americans saw the white man taking the land the government had said was theirs to keep. They became more and more angry, and they often raided wagon trains. The United States government sent



soldiers to the West to keep peace. It built forts for the soldiers and bought many of the old trading posts. For the next twenty years, the men of the cavalry manned the outposts, helping travelers go west in safety.

But by 1865, the wagon train days were almost over. The Native American fighting was worse than ever. Great warriors like Chief Red Cloud were trying to stop the white man from taking over their last good hunting grounds.

But no matter how hard the Native Americans tried, the white man would not be stopped. The famous mountain man Jim Bridger was asked to mark out a trail in Wyoming on which there could be a chain of forts, from Fort Laramie to the new gold fields in Montana. Fort Reno had been built, and now Fort Phil Kearney on the Little Piney River was ready, too.

It was December 20, 1866. Each day since early in July, a long train of wagons had left the new fort to go to a pine forest



five miles away. There the big crew of woodcutters had cut the pine trees from which the fort had been built. On this day, the wagons were bringing back firewood. With the fort finished, only the winter's supply of firewood was left to be brought inside.

Young John Phillips pulled his mule team to a stop. The gates of Fort Phil Kearney were open, but John and the other woodcutters waited to let the patrol of soldiers ride into the fort.