

The following excerpt is taken from:

“The Dakota War of 1862”.

Minnesota’s Other Civil War

by Kenneth Carley

Chapter 1: Causes of the Sioux Uprising

From the reservations along the upper Minnesota River, the proud Native Americans known as the Dakota or Sioux Indians, under the leadership of Chief Little Crow, rose to take the settlers in the Minnesota Valley by surprise. Before the Sioux Uprising (or Dakota or Sioux War, as it is sometimes called) could be brought under control, at least 450 – and perhaps as many as 800 – white settlers and soldiers were killed, and considerable property was destroyed in southern Minnesota. Measured in terms of numbers of civilians lives lost, the outbreak was one of the worst in American history, and it launched a series of Indian wars on the northern plains that did not end until 1890 with the battle of Wounded Knee in South Dakota.

The correct name of this Native American nation is Dakota, meaning “friends” or “allies.” Sioux is a contraction of Nadouessioux (meaning “snake” or “snakelike enemy”), a name originally given them by their enemies, the Chippewa (or Ojibway)...

The exact number of dead in the war will never be known. The most thorough student of uprising casualties, Marion P. Satterlee, a Minneapolis newspaperman, arrived at a figure of 447 whites, civilians and military, in his final list compiled in 1919. Assuming the Satterlee missed some, the figure of 500 once offered by Governor Alexander Ramsey seems a good estimate. Since the Indians always tried to carry away or conceal their dead, we have no clear idea of Sioux losses. Later testimony by Indians indicated a total of twenty-one Dakota dead in various battles.

What caused the 1862 uprising on the Minnesota frontier? The answer lies in a complex of reasons, some stemming from past events and some immediate and peculiar to the time. In the broadest sense, the war of 1862 was a small segment of the Sioux’s long history of conflict, first with other Indian tribes and then with the white man.

Chapter 8: The Two Battles of New Ulm

The morning of August 18 was a festive occasion in New Ulm. The people turned out to give a rousing send-off to a recruiting party, heading west over the prairie to enlist Civil War volunteers among the farmers working in the August sunshine. As we have seen, this group was ambushed in Milford Township. The survivors raced back to New Ulm, bringing what was possibly the town’s first word of the Indian outbreak. About the same time, farm families began to stream into the settlement with the terrifying news.

The first Sioux assault on New Ulm came about 3:00 P.M. on Tuesday, August 19, when perhaps a hundred warriors dismounted on the bluff behind the town and began firing. The small number of citizens with rifles returned the fire as best they could and kept the Indians pretty well at bay...

Late in the afternoon the defenders got a big assist from a thunderstorm that seemed to discourage the Indians... the Indians appeared about ready to leave when Boardman and his men arrived from St. Peter in time to get in on the very last of the fighting and to occasion arguments from that day to this over who saved the town on August 19.