

C. Ruff's Reports The Fort Child Letters 1848 – 1849

October 1848 Arrival and Initial Assessment
February 26, 1849 No Post of Equal Importance

October 1848**Ruff Report 1**

I found on my arrival here that Lieut Col Powell Missouri Volunteers, previously in command of this Post, had left for Fort Leavenworth on about the 9th of October, leaving as a garrison for this place, one 1st Lieut & 18 privates these under my instructions. I immediately ordered to report at Fort Leavenworth, for which post they left on the 30th of same month (Octr) Our situation at this post will be for this winter, one of extreme hardship & I fear of much suffering, we have our shelters yet to erect, both for men & horses & the weather already exceedingly cold, has every indication of a heavy snow with severe cold & the material of which this post is to be constructed (sod & sun dried brick) cannot be procured or worked in the snow in consequence of the scarcity of forage at the Post.

I have considered it best to send back to Fort Leavenworth, a portion of our horses, reserving 70 (about sufficient to mount four fifths 4/5 of each company) & the larger portion of these I fear must perish in this northern latitude & exposed prairies., without shelter; I have placed my entire command, with the exception of a sufficient Guard, upon duty constructing shelter, under the direction of 1st Lieut Woodbury Engineer corps I regret that the extraordinary conduct of Lieut Col Powell, in ordering or permitting Asst Surgeon Joseph Walker U.S.A. to accompany him to Fort Leavenworth has left us entirely without medical attendance & never did troops need a medical officer more than this garrison, composed entirely of raw recruits. I have accordingly directed the Asst Qr Master to employ a suitable person, but have not the slightest suspicion that any person can be procured, for the compensation allowed by Regl (regulations) \$40 per month to come at this most inclement season of the year, this distance (220 miles) beyond the frontier of Missouri. I trust therefore the department will see the urgent necessity of prompt action & that the secretary of war will direct a medical officer to report to this post immediately. Dr. Walkers presence with Col Powell could not have been necessary as a medical officer as such, as the strength of Col Powell's escort, was as I am informed, only 4 men, including the medical officer of his own Volunteer Battalion. In connection with the department of Lieut Col Powell I report also that he carried off with him all books, papers, order, or instructions, relative or belonging to this Post, copies of which last I suggest may be forwarded to me. Two days previous to leaving Fort Leavenworth, I addressed the Hd Qr of this Dept relative to the destitute condition of the troops of this squadron in woolen clothing, and I now repeated to the Department, that the enlisted men of this command are absolutely suffering for good and sufficient clothing; at Fort Leavenworth previous to leaving, I made every effort to procure wool overalls, but there was no pair of (in) any arm of the service at that Post, I trust that this will receive the consideration of the Dept as I fear in consequence of the illness.³³

³³C. Ruff to R. Jones, November 1, 1848, Fort Kearny, Nebraska, Letters Sent, 1848-71, Records of the U.S. Army Continental Commands, Record Group 393, National Archives and Records Administration.

February 26, 1849
Ruff Report 2

The only possible good to be derived from occupying Fort Kearny (on the Missouri River) is the obtaining a better road & direct Route to this Post (on the Platte) & others on the Oregon Route. A military garrison is not necessary there for the protection of the frontiers of Missouri; this Post being for that purpose far more effective with a garrison of mounted troops (Fort Childs is) Situated more than 200 miles beyond and west of the frontier of Missouri & of civilization in the midst of & on the very battle ground of the most numerous & at the same time the most inveterate enemies of each other (the Pawnees & Sioux Indians) of the great & only travelled road from one half of our continent to the other half there is no Post on the western Frontier of equal importance to the safety of life and property of a vast emigration & great trade & considerations which demand the presence of a respectable force to prevent the levy of Black Mail by the war parties of one or the other of the contending tribe upon our own citizens. I am deeply impressed with the humanity, indeed the necessity of leaving to the commanding officers of the several Posts of this Route the exercise of a sound discretion in making issues of provision to such Emigrant parties of our own citizens who either in returning from or going to Oregon who frequently stand much in need of instant & substantial relief. Parties have passed during the last fall who without being so relieved by the private charity of individuals must have perished from want.³⁷

³⁷C. Ruff to R. Jones, February 26, 1849, Ibid.