BUFFALO HUNTERS: The Gun Runners (June 1867)
By: Bob Fincham

The wooden crates were stacked next to an empty freight wagon with a shattered wheel. There were ten long ones marked ‘Farm Tools’ while labels on five short ones said ‘Bibles’. The stenciling showed evidence of wear, and the crates themselves showed signs of splintering as if they had come from some distant location and been tossed around on the way.

One man, Mose, sat on top of the long crates. He held a Henry repeating rifle cradled in his arms. It looked like a toy in his large, meaty hands. He was over six feet tall and weighed at least 250 pounds. His left ear was mostly missing, and a broad scar from that partial ear crossed his left cheek to disappear into a full, greasy, black beard.

Tobacco juice dripped from his beard and stained his ragged, Confederate Army shirt. A dirty-brown, slouch hat and torn, black trousers completed his attire. A pair of shiny black boots looked out of place with his scruffy appearance. Carrion flies circled his head as if looking for a place to feed or lay their eggs. He ignored them as he scanned the horizon for uninvited guests.

A fly landed on his arm. He swatted it and crushed it with his right hand. Then he flicked it at one of the two men who were cursing and sweating as they worked at replacing the broken wheel on the wagon. The replacement wheel was old and would not last very long, and the two men were not very happy about it.

The two men were the Conner brothers, Sam and Joe. By chance, the flicked fly caught Sam with his mouth open, and he inhaled it. Sputtering and coughing, he stepped back from the wheel as Joe finished pushing it onto the axle.

Reaching for his pistol, Sam yelled at Mose, “You dumbass. I’m gonna shoot your other ear off your ugly head for that.”

Mose grinned and pointed his rifle at Sam. He said, “You’re gonna do what?”

Before it got ugly, a fourth man rode up beside the wagon. Jake Bannister oversaw the men, and he had scouted ahead while they worked on the broken wheel. Reining his horse to a stop, he said, “You two stop playin’ with your guns. We got to get this wagon reloaded and back on the road.”

The men knew better than to grumble. They got back to work. Sam reholstered his gun and Mose climbed down from the pile of crates with the grin still on his face. Joe secured the replacement wheel with a large pin, and everyone worked to reload the wagon. While the Conners loaded the long crates, Mose stacked the smaller ones next to them. When finished, the brothers collapsed by the wagon while Mose reached under its seat for a plug of tobacco. As he bit the end off of it, he said, “Man works up a bit of thirst in this heat. Good thing I got me a chew to keep the juices flowin’.”

Mose got into the wagon seat and whipped the mules into motion. The Conners groaned a bit before mounting their horses and following it onto the road. Jake rode beside Mose and told him to take it easy. He’d ride ahead and wait at a campsite he’d scouted out earlier.

This stretch of road was a rough one, and once they got through it, things would get a lot easier. It had been a long haul from Nashville, and they still had several days until they reached Independence. The shattered wheel had been showing signs of loosening spokes for the past few
days. He thought it would last until they reached a blacksmith. Now they had to use a wobbly spare.

The load of crates weighed nearly a ton and put considerable strain on the wheels even under the right conditions. The four mules pulling the wagon were holding up, but grass was becoming scarce, and they might have to find fodder for them. Perhaps the Conners could find a ranch where they could take some. Maybe they'd even pick up a few dollars at the same time.

Jake Bannister was an average man with big plans who had a history of bank robbery and murder. He had figured out a way to get rich in the Dakota Territory. During the past war, he served with Quantrill’s Raiders and had even split off with his own smaller command. A gang of cutthroats who served for personal enrichment, they burned and robbed throughout Kansas and Missouri until the Union Army sent large cavalry units to protect the areas.

They became less active as security improved, and their numbers shrank until the war finally ended. They could no longer say they fought for the South and became common outlaws. Eventually, the army caught up to them, and just the four of them escaped, heading farther west.

Bannister remained in charge. Mose, the hulking brute on the crates was his second in command. The Conners were handy with their guns and seemed to enjoy killing. They were very creative at finding ways to convince farmers to give up their hidden stashes of gold. Sometimes they even frightened Jake with their methods.

Four days later, they drove their wagon into the lot behind the Rosebud Merchantile in Independence. They were stopping to purchase some supplies for the rest of their journey to Fort Laramie. While there, the Merchantile sold them a spare wheel and suggested they accompany the three wagons of the C&W Freight Line. They had just left the lot and would be camping outside the city.

Thinking that joining with other freighters might help protect their cargo and allay any suspicions on the part of the local army units, Jake decided to try and hook up with them.

On the way out of the city, they stopped at a blacksmith’s shop to get the wheels checked and greased. While the work was underway, Jake rode ahead looking for the C&W Freight wagons.

He found them three miles outside of Independence, camped alongside the main road. He looked them over and decided they should not be too much trouble. The tall Negro could be a problem, but it should be easy to handle him. Negroes were cowards. The other two were shorter and looked puny. The one in the black coat and hat was a downright runt.

James Washington, a former First Sergeant in a colored regiment of the United States Army, was talking to Baptist Jim and John Carter, his two partners. He noticed a rider some distance away, staring at them. The rider approached, and Washington asked him, “Can I help you with somethin’?”

He replied, “My name is Jake Bannister, and I’m lookin’ for the C&W Freight wagons.”

“You done found us,” Washington replied as he gave the stranger a hard look. Jake dismounted and offered his hand to Washington. “Pleased to meet you,” he said. Washington just stood staring at him and said, “You still ain’t said why you be lookin’ for us.”

Dropping his hand and stepping back, Jake looked around the camp and said, “I was hired by a group of Quakers back in Philadelphia to deliver a wagon load of farm tools and
Bibles to their agent at Fort Laramie. Since I am not familiar with the West, I wanted to join up with other travelers. I prefer other freighters over a bunch of farmers immigratin’ to Oregon.”

Jake paused for a minute before continuing. “I have three other men traveling with me. If we combine forces, there will be six of us with four wagons. Outlaws and Indians won’t cause us any problems.”

While Jake was talking, Washington was intently watching him and trying to form an opinion about his honesty. It all sounded sincere, but their cargo was suspicious.

“You ain’t gonna find many Injuns what can read,” Carter said.

“I don’t know any Indian agents around Fort Laramie, but I do know the Quakers be showing some interest in the treatment of the Indians across the west,” Baptist Jim said.

Jake said, “All I know is I’m getting’ paid to haul Bibles and tools across the country to Fort Laramie. What happens to them after delivery ain’t my concern. If we combine forces, I’ll have a safer journey.”

Washington looked at Carter and Baptist Jim, who nodded their agreement.

Carter introduced everyone to Jake and then went on to say, “Bring your wagon into our camp. We’ll travel together for the time being.”

Jake had little respect for any Negro and figured these three would be easy to handle if the one called Washington was in charge. It surprised him when Carter took over the conversation and gave instructions.

It was near dark when Jake and his men showed up with their wagon. They camped nearby and kept to themselves. The next morning the Conner brothers visited with Carter and Baptist Jim.

“Are you going all the way to Fort Laramie or just to Kearny on this trip?” Joe Conner asked.

“We be goin’ to Laramie. The same as you all,” Carter answered.

Baptist Jim gave them a hard stare and said, “How come it takes four of you to deliver a wagonload of Bibles and tools?”

“Me and my brother, Sam, here are just goin’ along for the company. We’re on our way to California. We hear there is still a lot of gold waitin’ to be found,” Joe said.

“Who’s that big, ugly gob hitchin’ up your mules?” Carter asked.

“That’s Mose. Don’t let him hear you talkin’ about him like that. He ain’t easy goin’ like us. Since he’s hitchin’ up, we best be goin’,” Joe said as they started walking away.

As the four wagons moved out, Bannister rode next to Carter in the lead wagon. He asked Carter, “Do you think we’ll have a smooth trail to Fort Laramie?”

“It’ll be easy to Fort Kearny. I don’t know about the rest of the way. The Sioux and Cheyenne are makin’ things hard for the army, but that be farther north on the Bozeman Trail. Besides, we’ll probably come across some army patrols along the way.”

Carter noticed a brief look of concern on Bannister’s face when he mentioned the army. It went away so fast he thought he was mistaken.”

When Bannister rode back to his men, Carter thought to himself, “I think I’ll try to get a look inside of those crates of Bibles. Somethin’ don’t seem quite right with those fellas.”

The Conners were riding their horses directly behind their wagon. Bannister joined them and said, “We’ll be meeting army patrols from time to time. When we do, don’t act suspicious. If
they nosy around the wagon, we’ll have to direct them toward the crates on the outside or top of the pile. They actually have Bibles and tools in them.”

“What if they dig deeper and find the rifles?” Sam asked.

“We’ll have to kill them all if that happens. The Sioux are giving us ten thousand dollars for these rifles and nothing is goin’ to mess that up.”

“Travelin’ with a freight line should keep them from bein’ too nosy, as long as Mose don’t get out of hand and start somethin’,” Sam said.

“The Yanks will figure he’s an ex-Confederate soldier who didn’t like losin’ the war. A lot of that kind came west after the war,” Jake said.

It was mid-day when an army patrol out of Independence caught up to them. The captain in charge examined their papers and checked their cargoes.

Washington stood watching as several troopers uncovered his load, and the Captain checked his paperwork. “What are you fellas lookin’ for?” Washington asked the sergeant in charge of the soldiers.

“We got word that someone is selling whiskey and guns to the Sioux. We have to check wagons on the Oregon Trail to make sure that they ain’t comin’ outta Independence.”

After talking to Carter and checking the first three wagons, the Captain and several troopers approached Bannister. “According to Mr. Carter, you are hauling tools and Bibles to an agent at Fort Laramie for some Quakers.”

“That’s right, Captain. Here is the paperwork,” Bannister said as he handed a letter and an invoice to the captain.

The troopers uncovered the crates while the captain scanned the letter and invoice. He watched Bannister out of the corner of his eye as they pulled the tarp. They opened two of the long crates and one of the smaller ones. They contained tools and Bibles.

Handing the paperwork back to Bannister, the captain had noted on the bottom that everything was correct. “If any other patrols stop you, show them this paperwork, and they shouldn’t examine your cargo as closely as we did. It will save you time.”

“Thank you, Captain,” Bannister said as his men retied the load.

Going back to Carter, the captain saluted and said, “You men can go on to Fort Laramie. Have a safe journey.”

As they resumed their trip, Carter was relieved that he did not have to try and sneak a look inside some of Bannister’s crates. However, he was still suspicious about the whole thing. Why send four men to escort a load of tools and Bibles?

Two weeks later, they arrived at Fort Kearny. Carter purchased fodder for their horses and mules. Grass was scarce along the trail, and the only time they could graze the animals was when they ventured a few miles out onto the prairie. He expected Bannister to purchase his own fodder.

Carter, Jim, and Washington found a saloon that served food and settled down for a meal. After eating, Jim left to check on the wagons and tend the stock. Washington and Carter stayed behind to have a few drinks and relax.

While they were talking, Mose and Bannister came into the same place and took a separate table with a bottle of cheap whiskey.

“Y’all think they be on the up and up?” Carter asked Washington.
“The army says they are. They even looked inside some of the crates to make sure,” Washington said.
“I still can’t figure why they need four men to go with one wagon carryin’ Bibles and tools,” Carter said.
“Maybe they plan on takin’ our wagons,” Washington said.
Carter mulled the thought over in his mind and said, “I don’t think so. The army checks the paperwork too closely.”
“They don’t know what we look like. Our pictures ain’t on the paperwork. If they do plan on tryin’ somethin’, it’ll be close to Fort Laramie. Probably a day or two out.”
“Maybe we should go ahead on our own,” Carter said.
“I don’t think so. We can watch them better if they travel with us. We have to keep our guns handy.”

Bannister and Mose had drunk half their bottle of whiskey when Jake stood and walked outside. After he left, Mose got up and walked over to Washington and Carter. He stood beside their table right next to Washington and said, “I don’t like niggers. I especially don’t like uppity niggers what think they be better than me. I’m gonna teach you a lesson.”

While he was talking, Washington stood and faced him. Mose was two inches taller and thirty pounds heavier than Washington. His beard was filthy with stale food, dried tobacco juice, and assorted vermin. Washington was used to some foul odors, but he almost gagged from the smell created by Mose’s unwashed body and his stinking breath from rotting teeth.

When he finished speaking, Mose reached for his pistol. As he pulled it from his holster, Washington raised his hands behind his head and said, “Please don’t shoot me.”

Mose hesitated for an instant before continuing his draw. That was all Washington needed. He had grabbed the Bowie knife from the scabbard between his shoulder blades while pleading with Mose. Now he whipped it out and slashed downward, chopping into Mose’s hand as the gun was coming up.

At first, Mose just grunted as the gun was knocked from his hand and fell to the floor, along with his thumb. Then the pain hit him, and he got angry. He made to grab Washington’s throat but stopped when he felt the prick of the Bowie at his throat.

“I think your throat be right about here, behind that thing you call a beard,” Washington said. “Move a muscle, and I will end your life here and now.”

Mose tensed and might have tried something anyway, but Bannister returned. He took it all in at a glance and yelled for Mose to back off. Grudgingly, Mose took a slow step away from Washington and grabbed a grimy rag out of his pocket to wrap around his bloody hand.

As Mose and Bannister left the room, Carter asked Washington, “Do y’all think they were makin’ a play for the wagons, or just testin’ us?”

“No, I think Mose just had too much to drink, and he doesn’t like Negroes very much. But we better go and check on Jim anyway.”

They found Baptist Jim spreading his bedroll by the campfire a short distance from the fort. “You have any problems with the Conners?” Carter asked right away.

“No, I think they were askin’ about what we are carrying to Fort Laramie. When I didn’t say much, they headed back to their camp.”
Carter told him about the trouble with Mose and went on to say, “I suspect they might be getting’ ready to try and take our wagons. That episode with Mose may have pushed their timetable ahead a bit.”

Jim said, “If they were carryin’ Bibles, they wouldn’t be actin’ like they are.”

“So far, only Mose has been a problem. He appears to be big and dumb. Maybe the others are genuine,” Carter said.

“We’ll find out for sure in a week or two. Until then, we’ll keep an eye on them and leave a good amount of space between them and us when we stop at night,” Carter said.

As everyone settled in for the night, Bannister was treating Mose’s wound while the Conners watched.

Bannister said, “You did a stupid thing back there. You could’ve ruined our whole plan. We will get rid of them when we get close to Fort Laramie, not before. Now they will be on their guard.”

“I’m gonna cut that nigger into little pieces and see how loud I can make him scream,” Mose said before biting into a leather strap.

“Will he scream like this,” Bannister said as he pressed a red-hot knife blade against the stump of Mose’s thumb.

All Mose did was gurgle as he bit into the strap. Then, as he threw the knife to the side, Bannister said, “Now your gun hand ain’t gonna work for a while. Let’s hope you can use it by the time we reach Laramie.”

Spitting the strap out of his mouth, Mose yelled several profanities and promised he’d kill Washington most painfully. He’d be using his gun hand long before they reached the fort.

“If you try to kill Washington before we sell the rifles to the Sioux, I will put a slug into your thick skull myself. Just be happy he didn’t slit your throat when he had the chance,” Bannister said as he gave Mose a hard stare through narrowed eyes.

Bannister left Mose to wrap his wound by himself and told the Conners what Mose had done. Then he went on to say, “If Mose tries anything before we make our deal, shoot him dead.”

Sam and Joe looked at each other, shrugged, and said, “More for us to divide up.”

“The three of us will take turns standing watch at night until we get close to Fort Laramie,” Bannister said as they settled in for the night while listening to Mose alternate between snoring and moaning.

The next week on the road passed without any significant incidents. The two groups maintained a distance from each other, and an uneasy peace prevailed despite the hatred in Mose’s face every time he looked at Washington.

They were three days from Fort Laramie when Washington made a discovery. He was riding Nightshade on his regular afternoon scout for a campsite off the main road when he came across some Indian sign. There were tracks from three Indian ponies paralleling their route. He thought they might be looking to steal some horses.

That night he kept an especially vigilant watch and saw Bannister and Sam Conner sneak out of their camp toward some trees a couple of hundred yards to the north. They were carrying something wrapped up into a bundle.

Washington woke Carter and Jim. Jim kept a watch on the camp as Washington and Carter followed the others to the trees. As they came near, they heard voices. Carefully moving
to where they could make out the speakers, they saw an open bundle laying on the ground in front of three Sioux warriors. There were two Henry repeating rifles laying on the blanket, and Bannister was talking.

“We have one hundred of these rifles for you with much ammunition. Do you have the gold that we agreed on?”

The leader of the Sioux, Crazy Fox, picked a sack off his pony and dropped it next to the rifles. “Here is the yellow metal and paper you call money for the rifles. We take from the long knives. Yellow Hawk say to tell you it equal one hundred dollars for each gun.”

“When will they come for the rifles?” Bannister asked.

“You bring rifles here tonight. Gray Dog will be here tomorrow with many warriors. We wait and watch until they come. You must stay by your wagon until then. You not leave.”

Bannister nodded and said, “We want you to kill the men who drive the other wagons. They will not wait here with us. Kill them when they camp tomorrow night. Their wagons carry many good things for the long knives at Fort Laramie. You take what you want. Then burn the wagons.”

“We do this for ten more rifles. You leave here with the rest,” Crazy Fox said.

“That is a deal,” Bannister said as he reached for the rifles on the blanket.

“Those stay,” Crazy Fox said.

As they picked up the sack of money, Bannister said, “Okay, but I kept my part of the deal. If anything happens to these rifles once we unload them, that is your problem.”

Washington and Carter stayed put while Bannister and Sam returned to their camp. As they disappeared into the darkness, the three Sioux started arguing among themselves. They were fighting over the two rifles. Washington saw an opportunity in their distraction. He pulled a tomahawk from his belt. Carter saw it and took out a Bowie knife. They quietly moved toward the distracted Sioux, who were now shoving each other.

One Sioux hit another with the butt of a rifle, knocking him down and stunning him for a moment. When he raised the gun into the air and started to let out a whoop, a tomahawk came out of the darkness and buried its blade in the center of his chest, knocking him backward into some brush.

The third warrior did not see what had happened but wondered about the sudden silence. He turned toward the fallen brave and spoke his name. Before he took a step, Carter was beside him, plunging his Bowie into his chest. He was dead before he hit the ground.

The stunned Sioux started to get up. Washington knocked him out with the butt of his pistol. Then he retrieved his tomahawk. Carter asked him, “Why didn’t y’all kill that one too? You know he will go for the rest of his people when he comes around.”

Wiping his tomahawk clean on the leggings of the unconscious Sioux, Washington said, “I am counting on it.”

“What have you got in mind?”

“When this one gets back to his chief, he’ll tell him how the gun runners ambushed them and took the money. When they come here bent on revenge, they’ll find two dead braves and a hundred defective rifles.”
Carter wondered about the rifles but figured he would soon find out. He dragged the two bodies out of sight while Washington secured the unconscious Indian onto a pony and slapped its rump. Then he sent the other two ponies along after it.

Carter circled back to their camp and told Baptist Jim what they were doing. He was to keep a small fire going and fill their blankets with grass or hay so anyone sneaking around would think they were all in camp. After doing that, he should get the mules and horses into their traces and be ready for a quick exit.

Washington was waiting when Carter came back. A short time later, they heard the muffled sounds of a wagon approaching. The mules had burlap on their hooves.

The four men had sneaked away from their camp and planned to unload the rifles and ammunition where they had met the Sioux. When they reached the site, Joe asked Jake, “Ain’t them Indians supposed to be waitin’ for us?”

“Who knows what them red devils got goin’ through their minds?” Jake replied. “Let’s just get this wagon unloaded and back to the camp before those other three miss us.”

It took about a half-hour to stack the crates. Then they headed back to camp. The Conners rode together on the wagon. Sam said, “I’m glad that’s over. We got the money and tomorrow them Sioux will use their new rifles to kill those three who act so high and mighty. I hope we can watch them die.”

“That’d be fun,” Joe replied.

They got back to camp without any problems, and removed the burlap and unhitched the mules before settling in for the night. Jake took time to check the other camp, and discovered everyone was asleep. He did not notice the mules and horses standing beside the wagons in their traces.

“Tomorrow will be a great day.” He thought to himself on the way back to his camp.

Carter had brought some tools with him when he came back from their camp. They pried crates open and discovered the rifles, ten to a case. Washington used a hammer and chisel to damage the firing pins while Carter opened and then resealed cases. He was careful to hide any signs of tampering.

It was just a couple hours before sunrise when they finished ruining the rifles. They had to leave the ammunition, but it was useless without the guns.

On the way back to camp, Washington visited the others and left his bloodied tomahawk on the seat of their wagon. Joe Conner was on guard duty but had fallen asleep. He had tapped him on the head with the haft of the tomahawk before leaving it.

As soon as he got back to where Jim and Carter waited by the wagons, they hitched up the teams and quietly took to the road. They went a short distance before stopping. Washington and Carter mounted their horses and rode back to where Bannister’s crew had picketed their mules and horses. Firing their guns and making a lot of noise, they drove the panicked animals onto the prairie.

Returning to their wagons, they put them into motion toward Fort Laramie. The others would need all day to round up their animals, and they would not have all day.

When the noise started, Jake and the others rolled out of their bedrolls and groggily stood with their guns drawn. They had nothing to shoot at. It was still dark, and their animals were stampeding off into the distance. Jake went looking for Joe and found him stretched out on the
ground. He kicked him into a semblance of consciousness and said, “You dumb sonofabitch, now we have to try and get our animals back before those Indians get here. I hope you had a good nap.”

“My head hurts,” was all Joe could think to say in response. Then he said, “Someone hit me on the head. I didn’t fall asleep.”

“Nobody could hit you on the head if’n you had been awake,” Jake said. Letting Joe sit there holding his head, Jake walked back to the others. Mose was on the wagon holding a tomahawk. “Where’d you get that thing?” he said to Mose.

“That big nigger left it here. I’m gonna give it back to him when I split his skull with it.” Sam stirred the coals of the campfire into a flame and said, “Might as well have some coffee. When it gets light, we’ll have to chase down our horses. I hope they didn’t go too far.” Jake said, “We'll check the rifles on the way. I want to make sure they didn’t find them.” Sunrise found the four of them at the crates. Jake took a close look at several of them and said, “Do these look disturbed to any of you?”

“It’s hard to say,” Sam said. “They were all banged up from being tossed around in the wagon. I don’t see anything new.”

“It’s suspicious they took off like that the night we met the Indians. I think we better open some of these cases and check the rifles.” Jake said.

Joe shook his head and said, “We can’t do anything about it if they are damaged. We need our horses first. Then we can check the rifles.” Jake said, “Sam, you and Joe go for the horses and get back here as quick as you can. Mose and I will check some of these cases.”

Mose went back for a bar and hammer while the Conners followed the trail of their horses. By the time Mose returned, they saw some dust in the direction taken by the Conners. “You think they found the horses already?” Mose asked.

“Hardly,” Jake said. “Besides, that much dust is coming from a large group of horsemen.”

They waited less than five minutes before a group of over fifty Sioux and Cheyenne rode up to them. The leader, a chief named Gray Dog, signaled to two riders who rode up leading the Conners on their horses. They were swaying in their saddles with blood running down their faces. Gray Dog signaled, and they were knocked off their horses, to moan and writhe in the dirt.

Jake raised his hands and said, “Why do you act this way? We have brought you the rifles as agreed. We plan to bring more at another time.” Before Gray Dog could respond, a group of warriors off to the side started whooping. They dismounted from their ponies and disappeared into some brush. When they came out of the brush carrying two bodies, the war party surrounded the four men and pointed an assortment of weapons at them.

Jake started sweating profusely and said, “We know nothing about these two warriors. The white men who left here this morning must have killed them.”

Gray Dog had Jake and Mose disarmed and knocked to the ground. Then he said, “White man lie. We see if rifles are as promised. These two,” he continued as he pointed at the Conners, “pay for dead warriors.”
He spoke to his braves, who scalped the Conners and dragged them to a nearby mound where they staked them out by spread-eagling each one to four stakes in the ground. Then one of the braves used a sharp knife to remove their eyelids, so they had to stare at the sun. By that time, the screaming had become whimpers, and they lay there while assorted insects were attracted to the blood oozing from the tops of their skulls.

During the torture of the Conners, Jake and Mose became panicked. They became even more agitated when Gray Dog told them that the Conners would only need to endure this torture for a few hours. Then they would light a fire on each of their bellies, and watch them die.

Several men opened one of the crates and passed out ten of the rifles. The braves loaded them with ammunition and tried to fire them. When they did not fire, the braves smashed more of the crates open and tried other rifles. None worked. They quickly turned their attention to Bannister and Mose. Forgetting about the Conners, they dragged the two men to their wagon and tied them each to one of the wheels.

An hour later, the war party left the area. Behind them were a burning wagon, four mutilated bodies, and a pile of smashed rifles. They were traveling north, farther into Indian territory. Their chiefs were planning a series of attacks on the army along the Bozeman Trail and had been counting on the defective rifles. They would be disappointed, but the attacks will still take place.

Two days later Carter led three freight wagons into Fort Laramie. They held an assortment of freight goods for the army that included a hundred breech-loading carbines with ammunition. Soldiers unloaded their wagons at the base supply building, and the C&W Freight Company received full pay.

Baptist Jim and Washington went to the Sutter’s building to relax and have a good meal. Carter would meet them there later. First, he had to report to the post commander and make a report on the gun runners. Then the army could handle it from there.

Jim and Washington were destroying a venison roast when Carter joined them. “How did it go?” Washington asked.

The Colonel is sending out a large patrol to see what happened. He wasn’t too happy about the whole thing and questioned me about the specifics of what we did to the rifles. That seemed to satisfy him.”

“Good. Now help us eat this venison. It tastes terrific, even if I didn’t make it myself,” Jim said.

After the waitress brought Carter some cutlery and a plate, he said, “I should also mention that the Colonel told us to stay put for a few days. He had another freight job for us.”

Washington said, “We can enjoy good food and rest the livestock and make some more money. Sounds good to me.”