

Offers a unique perspective on events long fixed in the historical imagination

Bluecoat and Pioneer

The Recollections of John Benton Hart, 1864–1868

Edited by John Hart

By John Benton Hart

In 1918, urged on by his son Harry, John Benton Hart began to tell stories of a three-year period in his youth. He recalled his days as a trooper in the Eleventh Kansas Cavalry, fighting in Missouri and on the frontier, and his time as a civilian jack-of-all-trades doing risky work for the U.S. Army on the Wyoming-Montana Bozeman Trail in the middle of the Indian resistance campaign known as Red Cloud's War. Once started, John Benton Hart became an enthusiastic raconteur, describing events with an almost cinematic vividness, while his son, an aspiring writer, documented his father's testimony in what became several manuscripts. Compiled and reproduced here, edited by historian John Hart, John Benton Hart's great-grandson, this memoir is a singular document of living history.

As a young Kansas cavalryman, John Benton Hart participated in two momentous episodes of the Civil War era—Sterling Price's Missouri Expedition of 1864, including the Battle of Westport, and such engagements in the Plains Indian Wars as the Battle of Platte Bridge in July 1865 and the Hayfield Fight near Fort C. F. Smith in 1867. In the engaging style of a natural storyteller, Hart re-creates these events as he experienced them, giving readers a rare glimpse at moments of historical import from the point of view of the "ordinary" soldier. In arresting detail, he also tells of crossing the Plains as a bullwhacker, carrying the mail between the beleaguered forts on the Bozeman Trail, and befriending scout Jim Bridger and Mountain Crow Chief Blackfoot.

Framed and supplemented with the editor's biographical, historical, and explanatory notes, Hart's memoir offers a new perspective on events long fixed in the historical imagination. As history writ large or on a personal scale, *Bluecoat and Pioneer* tells a remarkable story.

John Hart is an independent historian specializing in environmental policy and history. His articles have been widely published, and he is the author of sixteen books, including *Storm over Mono: The Mono Lake Battle and the California Water Future* and *San Francisco Bay: Portrait of an Estuary*.

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