

Conflict in Dakota Territory: Episodes of the Great Sioux War

edited by JEROME A. GREENE

Spanning a period of fifteen months between March 1876 and May 1877, the Great Sioux War involved more than a dozen armed engagements between the United States Army and the Teton Lakota (Western Sioux) and Northern Cheyenne Indians. The immediate cause of the struggle for control of approximately one hundred twenty thousand square miles in present-day Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana, and North and South Dakota lay in the refusal of elements of these American Indians to honor a military ultimatum requiring them to go to an assigned reservation in Dakota Territory. Troops sent to enforce the order, which was partly intended to free up the Black Hills for white gold miners, suffered repeated setbacks, culminating in June 1876 with Lt. Col. George A. Custer's defeat at the Little Bighorn River. The desire to avenge the overwhelming loss of this military catastrophe brought a renewed sense of urgency to those directing the army's operations.

Among the reinforcements sent afield were the entire Fifth Cavalry Regiment and several companies of the Fourth, Ninth, and Fourteenth infantry regiments, all of whom, together with elements of the Second and Third cavalry regiments, formed Brig. Gen. George Crook's Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition in the summer of 1876. The following account of Capt. J. Scott Payne, originally entitled "Campaigning with Crook," details both the pivotal role the Fifth Cavalry played in the first army successes of the Great Sioux War and the infamous "Starvation March," during which the soldiers were

2 South Dakota History

forced to subsist on horsemeat. Payne's account, which first appeared in Frank Leslie's *Popular Monthly* in 1890, climaxes with the battle at Slim Buttes, Dakota Territory, the army victory that tilted the outcome of the war toward the Indians' defeat and surrender. As a chronicle of his regiment's role in the frustrating and oft-unrewarding operations of 1876, Payne's heretofore obscure memoir comprises a valuable addition to the literature of the Great Sioux War.¹



Capt. John
Scott Payne,
pictured here as
a West Point cadet,
chronicled the role
of the Fifth Cavalry
in the Big Horn
and Yellowstone
Expedition.

1. Payne's account was first published in *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* 30, no. 3 (Sept. 1890): 327-38. For general background on the Great Sioux War of 1876-1877, see Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1973), pp. 236-48; Paul L. Hedren, Introduction to *The Great Sioux War, 1876-77: The Best from Montana the Magazine of Western History*, ed. Paul L. Hedren (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1991), pp. 1-21; Paul A. Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and His Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), pp. 282-301; and John S. Gray, *Centennial Campaign: The Sioux War of 1876* (Fort Collins, Colo.: Old Army Press, 1976), pp. 1-34.

John Scott Payne's military career coincided with the height of the Indian wars on the Northern Great Plains. Born in Warrenton, Virginia, in 1844, Payne was appointed from Missouri to the United States Military Academy in 1862. He graduated four years later. A classmate at West Point remembered him as talented in "oratory and argument—gifts which, in a young man impetuous in speech and not always sound in judgment, proved dangerous possessions. Either in the section room or in class debate Payne was frequently in hot water."²

Payne's initial military service was short-lived. Commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Fifth Cavalry, he was stationed in the South during the immediate post-Civil War years and saw Reconstruction duty in Alabama and Tennessee. In May 1867, he was promoted to first lieutenant. During this period, Payne developed an avocation as a political speaker, and, in September 1868, he impulsively resigned his commission to practice law in Knoxville, Tennessee. He also edited two newspapers, the *Rogersville Journal* and the *Knoxville Daily Whig and Register*, from 1870 to 1871. Between 1871 and 1873, he served as commissioner for the United States Circuit Court, District of East Tennessee. After four years of civilian life, Payne reconsidered his decision to leave the army and, with the direct intercession of the president, was appointed second lieutenant in the Sixth Cavalry in February 1873.

Virtually all of Payne's remaining army career was spent on frontier duty. At Fort Lyon, Colorado Territory, and Forts Dodge and Wallace, Kansas, he engaged in scouts after Indians. In August and September 1874, Payne participated in an expedition into Texas, where he fought the Southern Cheyennes, Comanches, and Kiowas on the Red River. Reassigned to his old unit, the Fifth Cavalry, early in 1875, he was briefly posted in Arizona Territory. In July, he returned to Fort Dodge, where he was promoted to captain.

From mid-July to late October 1876, Payne commanded Company F of the Fifth Cavalry on the Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition, participating in the events described in the following narrative. After the Great Sioux War, he performed scouting duty with the Fifth in Wyoming Territory while stationed variously at Forts D. A. Russell, Fred Steele, and Laramie. In the fall of 1877, Payne and his unit pursued the Nez Perce Indians and early the next year helped to capture disaffected Bannock tribesmen in Idaho Territory. In 1879, Payne accompanied Maj. Thomas T. Thornburgh's expedition to relieve the

2. Charles King, "John Scott Payne," in *Twenty-seventh Annual Reunion of the Association of the Graduates of the United States Military Academy, at West Point, New York* (Saginaw, Mich.: Seemann & Peters, 1896), p. 81.

4 South Dakota History

White River Ute Agency in Colorado. Enroute, Thornburgh was killed in the Battle of Milk River, and command devolved on Payne, who was himself twice wounded. Suffering heavy losses, his soldiers held out for five days until troops under Col. Wesley Merritt arrived to end the siege. Payne's performance drew plaudits from Generals Sherman, Sheridan, and Crook, as well as from the Wyoming Legislative Assembly. In 1890, he received a brevet of major for his conduct at Milk River.

Payne's later service took him to numerous posts in Wyoming, Nebraska, Kansas, and the Indian Territory, as the army kept watch over the reservations in the aftermath of the major Indian campaigns. His health failing largely because of his rigorous frontier service, Payne retired from the army in April 1886. He served on the Board of Pension Appeals from 1894 until his death in Washington, D.C., on 16 December 1895, at the age of fifty-one.³

Payne authored several other articles about his experiences in the Indian wars, among them "Incidents of the Recent Campaign against the Utes," "Indian Story-Land," and "Spotted Tail's Last Sun-Dance."⁴ In the selection presented here, paragraph breaks have been added to improve readability, but the author's spelling and punctuation have been retained to preserve the flavor of the original text. Annotation has also been provided to insure accuracy and clarity and to augment Payne's material.

Payne's account presents a vivid picture of everyday military life during the Great Sioux War—both the drama of battle and the hardships of the march. Through it and the related documents in this issue, which detail more closely the Battle of Slim Buttes, twentieth-century readers will also gain insight into the attitudes of military personnel toward their adversaries. The use of derogatory terms to describe American Indians will offend readers today but reflects the views of nineteenth-century Americans in general. Taken together, the three obscure documents presented here give us not only a glimpse of the day-to-day life of the soldier but also a better understanding of the effects of conflict throughout the West.

3. For biographical data about Payne, see *ibid.*, pp. 81-84; George W. Cullum, comp., *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U. S. Military Academy at West Point, N. Y., from Its Establishment, in 1802, to 1890*, 3 vols. (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1891), 3: 75-76; *Records of Living Officers of the United States Army* (Philadelphia: L. R. Hamersly & Co., 1884), pp. 140-41; and George F. Price, comp., *Across the Continent with the Fifth Cavalry* (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1959), pp. 449-51.

4. These articles appeared in *United Service* 2 (Jan. 1880): 114-29, 2 (June 1880): 677-91, and 6 (Feb. 1882): 184-98, respectively.

Marching with the Fifth Cavalry: The Reminiscence of J. Scott Payne

Toward the close of a cold January day in 1876 two canvas-covered vehicles were to be seen rapidly approaching the military post of Fort Dodge, Kan., from the south, and whilst the tired mules were fording the Arkansas River the section of a light battery on the parade-ground belched forth the salute due to the lieutenant-general of the army. Before the thunder of the guns had died away or the smoke lifted, the new-comers pulled up at the commanding officer's quarters, and the distinguished arrivals, Generals [Philip H.] Sheridan and [George] Crook, and Messrs. Coolbaugh and Loomis, of Chicago, were soon within-doors, receiving a hearty frontier greeting and such cheer as the writer and Major E. B. Kirk, post quartermaster, could provide for the occasion.⁵ The lieutenant-general's party had been taking an outing down at "Sheridan's Roost," in the Indian Territory, east of Camp Supply, and were now on their way home, full of pleasant memories of a successful turkey-hunt, and laden with the rich spoil of the rifle and gun.

Although he had served in General Crook's command in Arizona, the writer had never before seen that celebrated Indian fighter, who had but recently been transferred to the Department of the Platte, destined soon to become the theatre of military operations before unknown to the frontier. Our guests remained at Dodge but a few hours, and at nine o'clock, accompanied by myself and several other officers of the garrison, were driven to a siding near the post, where they took the train *en route* for the head-quarters of their respective military commands. For some time past it had been understood in army circles that the Sioux Indians, whose reservations were chiefly in Dakota, were restive, and that trouble might be apprehended in the Spring; but few had any forebodings of the terrific storm that was brewing.⁶ While waiting for the train that night, however, this

5. From his Chicago headquarters, Lieutenant General Sheridan commanded the Military Division of the Missouri, which embraced several military departments that covered the plains states and territories. Brigadier General Crook commanded one of these subdivisions, the Department of the Platte, headquartered in Omaha.

6. The Sioux Indians belonged to the seven tribes of Teton Lakota, namely, Oglalas, Hunkpapas, Minneconjous, Brulés, Blackfeet, Sans Arcs, and Two Kettles. Their ethnography and history is presented in Royal B. Hassrick's *The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964) and three books by George E. Hyde: *Red Cloud's Folk: A History of the Oglala Sioux Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937), *A Sioux Chronicle* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), and *Spotted Tail's Folk: A History of the Brulé Sioux* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961).

6 *South Dakota History*

subject was uppermost in our minds, and the writer put such questions to the two distinguished soldiers who were our guests as the bounds of official propriety would permit. Not much information was imparted by them, it must be confessed, but the impression was, nevertheless, left on our minds that my own regiment, the Fifth Cavalry, would soon be following the standard and fortunes of Crook in another and more important Indian campaign than any in which it had ever before participated.

It was but a few weeks later that the storm burst in the Northwest. It is not the writer's purpose to attempt in this paper a detailed narrative of the events that made our centennial year the bloodiest in the history of the border; such an attempt were useless in the brief space allotted to this article, for volumes might be compiled from the abundant material relating to the operations of Crook and others in the struggle which broke the spirit of the Sioux Nation and brought that haughtiest and most formidable of savage tribes under subjection to the Government. The people of this country had little knowledge of the magnitude of that struggle, and have lost sight of the fact that its termination opened for speedy settlement the vast territory out of which several new States have since been created. The campaign was conducted and concluded while the people were celebrating the Centennial of the Declaration of Independence and engaged in the excitement of a Presidential election, followed by a dispute as to the result that for a time threatened civil war. Under the circumstances it was natural that more proximate events should dwarf occurrences whose importance the most intelligent mind could not then fully measure. Had not the destruction of Custer's command shocked the public and sharply drawn attention to the border, it is safe to say that the great Sioux War of 1876 would have received but passing mention, and gone into history unnoted and unsung. As it was, that memorable tragedy fixed the public gaze, while the reverse of the picture where successful feats of arms, and the prowess, fortitude and courage of the American soldier are shown, has never attracted popular attention.

In dealing with hostile Indians it was General Crook's way to be in person at the theatre of war, and to this habit may be fairly ascribed much of the success that attended his campaigns. It was from no want of confidence that he pursued this course, but from a sense of responsibility he was always ready to assume, as well as from a natural taste for frontier service. In this successful soldier and mighty hunter was developed the highest genius of the frontiersman; and he loved the rod, the chase, the rifle, the gun, the saddle, the camp and bivouac, and, when duty called, the war-path.

He even found recreation in pursuits that, to men less energetic and intense than himself, were distasteful and irksome. For instance, during the brief respite between the terrible Fall campaign of 1876 and the severe Winter campaign that followed he enjoyed his holiday shooting black-tail deer at the base of Laramie Peak.⁷

The immediate cause of the Sioux outbreak in 1876 may be found in the encroachments on the Black Hills of white men, who had

A veteran
Indian fighter,
Gen. George Crook
epitomized the
frontier soldier.



7. Crook's military service was extensive. An 1852 West Point graduate, he fought Indians in the Northwest before the Civil War. During that conflict, he took part in numerous operations in the eastern theatre, fighting at Winchester, Cedar Creek, and in the actions preceding Appomattox in 1865. Thereafter he served on the Great Plains and in the Northwest and Southwest, garnering a reputation as a premier Indian fighter. He died in 1890. See Jerome A. Greene, "George Crook," *Soldiers West: Biographies from the Military Frontier*, ed. Paul A. Hutton (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), pp. 115-36, and George Crook, *General George Crook: His Autobiography*, ed. Martin F. Schmitt (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960).

8 South Dakota History

been lured there by glowing reports of the natural beauty of the country, the fertility of the soil and the golden wealth that glistened in the sands of every stream and lay buried in the quartz of the mountains. Custer and [Col. Richard I.] Dodge had made expeditions into this famous region, and it soon became evident that the restless spirits of the border were bent on an invasion of this new El Dorado. The Government made show of keeping the intruders out, and in several instances trespassers were arrested and their wagons destroyed. But the final issue was inevitable; settlers poured in; the Indians first became restive, then protested, and finally, *more majorum*, began to steal, murder and scalp.⁸

8. Custer's expedition into the Black Hills occurred in 1874, while Dodge's took place the following year. For more on the Black Hills and how they factored in the opening of the war with the Lakotas, see Donald Jackson, *Custer's Gold: The United States Cavalry Expedition of 1874* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966); Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and His Army*, pp. 290-300; and Paul L. Hedren, *Fort Laramie in 1876: Chronicle of a Frontier Post at War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), pp. 10-18.

News of the rich resources of the Black Hills traveled back to civilization with Gen. George A. Custer's expedition, pictured here in the French Creek Valley in 1876.



A serious state of affairs thus confronted the department commander, and General Crook at once made preparations for a vigorous campaign. The first collision of importance between the troops and savages occurred in March. Crook, setting out from Fort Fetterman, Wyoming, beat up the quarters of the Sioux on Powder River, and surprising Crazy Horse in his camp on that stream, destroyed his villages and captured a thousand ponies, after a sharp contest in which both sides suffered severe loss. This large capture of ponies might have been of incalculable importance, but by some mishap they were recovered by the Indians.⁹ During this brief campaign and subsequently the weather was so intensely cold that the mercury froze in the bulb, and there was much suffering throughout the command.

A continuance of the severe weather necessitated the suspension of hostilities, and preparations were made for a more extensive campaign against the hostiles, who had left their camps on the Upper Powder and gone north, where they were being heavily reinforced from the different agencies. Nothing of importance occurred until June 17th, when was fought in South-eastern Montana the battle of the Rosebud, between a strong force of cavalry under Crook and the greater part of the Indians, who a week later defeated [Maj. Marcus A.] Reno and destroyed Custer on the Little Big Horn. The battle of the Rosebud was a fiercely contested and serious affair, and it was with difficulty that General Crook was enabled to beat off the immense force by which he was beset.¹⁰

By May it had become plain that the outbreak in the North-west was an affair of the most serious importance, and steps were taken to put in the field as large a force as could be spared from the various posts in the Division of the Missouri. The whole Sioux Nation, embracing 85,000 souls, was involved, and in addition to the immense force this great tribe could muster were the Northern Cheyennes,

9. The attack on the village, actually composed largely of Northern Cheyennes, was led by Crook's subaltern, Col. Joseph J. Reynolds, who was later court-martialed for his performance. A detailed account of the campaign and battle is found in J. W. Vaughn, *The Reynolds Campaign on Powder River* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961).

10. For accounts of the Battle of the Rosebud, see Neil C. Mangum, *Battle of the Rosebud: Prelude to the Little Bighorn* (El Segundo, Calif.: Upton & Sons, 1987), and J. W. Vaughn, *With Crook at the Rosebud* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Co., 1956). For more on the Battle of the Little Bighorn, see Edgar I. Stewart, *Custer's Luck* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), John S. Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign: Mitch Boyer and the Little Bighorn Reconstructed* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), and Robert M. Utley, *Cavalier in Buckskin: George Armstrong Custer and the Western Military Frontier* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pp. 165-202.

10 *South Dakota History*

a fierce and warlike people, who brought to the aid of their allies 1,500 skilled and trained warriors.¹¹ To meet the Sioux, reinforced by the Cheyenne contingent, there were available in General Crook's department the Third and one-half of the Second Cavalry, and fragments of infantry that could be spared from various posts in his department. Eight troops of the Fifth Cavalry were sent to him from the Department of the Missouri, and later on the other four troops of that regiment followed. Later still the Fourth Cavalry was sent to him, and took part in the final operations at the Red Cloud Agency in October and in the Winter campaign against the Cheyennes.

On reaching the Department of the Platte the eight troops of the Fifth Cavalry referred to above were occupied in scouting the country south of the Black Hills, and, under command of General [Wesley] Merritt, then their colonel, did invaluable service in preventing the Indians from the Agency at Red Cloud stampeding in a body and reinforcing Crazy Horse in the north.¹² The other four troops came into the department about the middle of July. Two of these were dispatched to Laramie, and the others—one of them the writer's—ordered to overtake General Merritt, who was on the wing, to join Crook. It took hard riding to catch Merritt, for he was proceeding with great expedition. The distance from the Chugwater to Fetterman, sixty-three miles, was covered in two days, and the

11. Payne exaggerates the number of Sioux involved in the war. According to the commissioner of Indian affairs, the Indians living at the Sioux agencies in Dakota, Montana, and Nebraska in 1876 numbered just under thirty thousand, a figure that included a small number of Northern Cheyennes and Arapahoes. Another fifteen thousand Sioux were listed as "absent from agencies," bringing the total to approximately forty-five thousand. This number includes Dakotas and Nakotas from the Sisseton, Santee, Devil's Lake, Yankton, and Crow Creek agencies, who, like many Lakota, did not participate in the Great Sioux War. U. S., Department of the Interior, Office of the Secretary, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, 1876* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1876), pp. 208, 210, 214. Peter J. Powell provides scholarly treatment of the Northern Cheyennes in *Sweet Medicine: The Continuing Role of the Sacred Arrows, the Sun Dance, and the Sacred Buffalo Hat in Northern Cheyenne History*, 2 vols. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), and *People of the Sacred Mountain: A History of the Northern Cheyenne Chiefs and Warrior Societies, 1830-1979, with an Epilogue, 1969-1974*, 2 vols. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981). See also George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956).

12. Merritt's action at Hat, or Warbonnet, Creek in extreme northwestern Nebraska stopped for a time the men and supplies traveling from the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail agencies to the Powder River country. The fight is chronicled in Paul L. Hedren, *First Scalp for Custer: The Skirmish at Warbonnet Creek, Nebraska, July 17, 1876, with a Short History of the Warbonnet Battlefield* (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1980).

squadron, leaving the latter point at midnight of July 26th, forded the Platte River by moonlight, and, without unsaddling, marched until 3 A.M. of the 28th. General Merritt was bivouacking on the South Fork of the Cheyenne River, and it was difficult to determine his whereabouts in the darkness, it finally becoming necessary to use trumpet-signals. "Officer's call" repeated several times at last got a response, and the sweet strains coming to us on the soft Summer breeze guided our weary column to the sleeping lines.

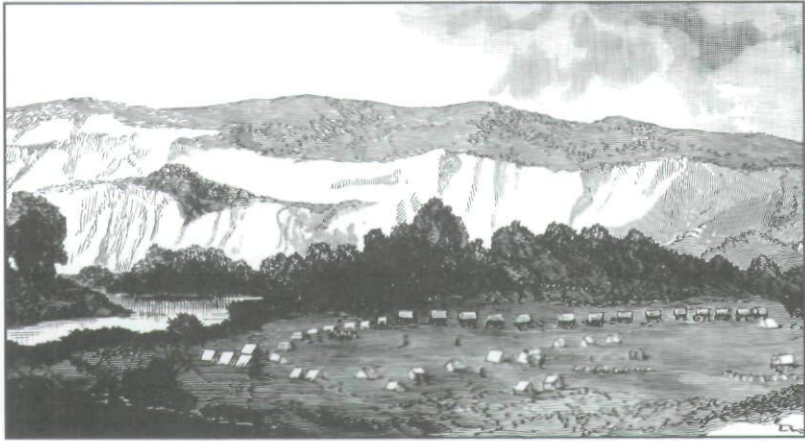
Wyoming State Museum



Gen. Wesley Merritt commanded a large portion of the cavalry reinforcements sent afield after Custer's defeat at the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

The united command reached Crook's camps on Goose Creek, Montana, on August 2d, and was gladly welcomed by that commander, who was now ready to make head against the power of the Sioux. When the writer paid his respects to the general, he found him the picture of health, and deeply bronzed from the exposure of several months. He looked the frontier soldier to perfection; his

12 *South Dakota History*



General Crook launched the Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition from his supply camp on Goose Creek at the head of the Tongue River.

dress was simple and adapted to scouting, and his yellow-brown beard was braided in the only "red tape" he used on the coming expedition.

The 3d and 4th were spent in preparation. Horses were shod; tents and superfluous baggage packed in the wagon train, and the command stripped to the lightest marching order. Not a wheel went with the expedition, and all supplies, consisting only of reserve ammunition, hospital stores and ten days' rations, were transported on pack-mules. Each trooper carried three days' rations of hard bread, bacon, sugar and coffee in his saddle-pockets, in which were transported also one hundred rounds of carbine and twenty-four rounds of pistol ammunition. In addition, his thimble-belt was full of cartridges. Curry-combs and brushes were discarded; lariat, picket-pin and side-line were carried on the saddle. Nose-bags were left, for the horse must live on grass alone. Each man was allowed one blanket and his overcoat; these, with the saddle-blanket, and the saddle for pillow, must suffice for bedding. Officers were not permitted to carry subsistence-stores other than those allowed the men. The ration must do for all; the commanding general had no more; the private, no less. Several extra horses were allowed each troop, to replace those that might give out *en route*. Suitable restrictions were likewise imposed on the ten companies of splendid infantry that accompanied the expedition.

Besides the regular troops, was a large contingent of Crow and Snake Indians, and also a body of frontier scouts, conspicuous among whom was W. F. Cody ("Buffalo Bill"), the bravest and most daring of Indian fighters, and Frank Gward [Grouard], the chief guide, who had passed several years in captivity among the Sioux. In charge of the train of pack-mules was Tom More [Moore], assisted by Dave Mears, both well known in army and frontier circles. The cavalry was brigaded, Merritt being its chief, with [Lt. Col. Eugene A.] Carr and [Lt. Col. William B.] Royall as his subordinate commanders.

The "Red Fox" left his lair on the morning of August 5th, and the march to the northward began. Horses and men were in fine condition, and an inspiring spectacle was presented as the command swung out of the Valley of Goose Creek and stretched out over the rolling plateau east of Tongue River. For several days the column moved down that stream, crossing it repeatedly. In some places its valley narrowed to a picturesque cañon; in others it broadened to a wide expanse of meadowland fringed with cottonwood-trees, beneath whose grateful shade our path occasionally led. Meantime the Indian trail had been struck, and the third day led the column due west across a spur of the Wolf Mountains to the Rosebud, at a point a little below the battle-ground of June 17th. The troops camped on the Rosebud that night, and remained there part of the next day, the guides being at fault about the trail. The multitude of pony-tracks going in all directions created confusion, and the difficulty was increased by a dense cloud of smoke which, drifting from prairie-fires lighted by the Indians, had settled like a pall in the valley of the stream.¹³

In this camp an amusing incident occurred, which I must narrate here. Accompanying the writer as his guest was a very agreeable young gentleman, who came along as a newspaper correspondent. He had joined at Cheyenne, and up to the time we had reached General Crook (barring soreness from riding a cavalry-horse, mitigated by frequent relays in the ambulance) he had done fairly well. But now, when subsistence was limited to the field-ration, he was miserable. Being a man of delicacy, however, he made no complaint,

13. Other contemporary descriptions of the march of Crook's army in August and September 1876 are found in John G. Bourke, *On the Border with Crook* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), pp. 344-80, and Charles King, *Campaigning with Crook and Stories of Army Life* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1890), pp. 78-142. For a modern synthesis, see Jerome A. Greene, *Slim Buttes, 1876: An Episode of the Great Sioux War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), pp. 25-58, 93-104.

14 *South Dakota History*

and my lieutenant and myself were unconscious of his suffering. His agony became unbearable at last, and going to Captain [Lt. John G.] Bourke, of General Crook's staff, he unburdened his heart to that officer, and declared that he was starving. Bourke took it all in on the instant, and hospitably invited Mr. T_____ to dine that day at headquarters. When the hour arrived, the invited guest, all expectant of a rare feast, proceeded to General Crook's bivouac, where he dined on bacon and hard-tack, washed down with coffee out of a tin cup. It is safe to say that the British officer who was led blindfold[ed] into the presence of Marion and shared the partisan's frugal meal of sweet-potatoes was far less astonished than was the tenderfoot from Park Row when he banqueted *al fresco* with the Red Fox in that little thicket by the side of the beautiful Rosebud. Shortly afterward, when the command reached the Yellowstone, Mr. T_____ left, thereby escaping the sufferings of a later period, when, had he been with us, he would joyfully have renounced all future interest in canvas-back and terrapin for a sufficiency of the food against which his stomach now revolted!¹⁴

When found, the Indian trail went down the Rosebud, and the day being far spent before starting, the march was continued well into the night. The next day, about eleven o'clock, a great cloud of dust was seen moving up the valley toward us, and for a time it was believed that the Indians were advancing to offer battle. Skirmishers were thrown forward, and moved rapidly to the front, and in a little while a corresponding movement was made by the approaching force. It was not, however, until the two skirmish-lines rode into each other that the discovery was made that the new-comers were the troops of [Brig. Gen. Alfred H.] Terry, who, like ourselves, were disappointed at meeting friends instead of foes.¹⁵ That night the two commands camped together on the Rosebud. The united commands numbered about 4,500 men, of whom 2,700 were of the cavalry. The

14. "Mr. T_____" was probably J. J. Talbot, a reporter apparently working for the *New York World*, the *New York Graphic*, and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. See Oliver Knight, *Following the Indian Wars: The Story of the Newspaper Correspondents among the Indian Campaigners* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), pp. 252, 288.

15. Terry commanded the Department of Dakota, headquartered in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and it was mostly in his administrative sphere that the events of the Sioux War unfolded. A Yale-educated lawyer, he had gained prominence during the Civil War and had chosen to remain in the regular army afterwards. For a discussion of his role in the Great Sioux War and in other matters concerning Indians, see John W. Bailey, *Pacifying the Plains: General Alfred Terry and the Decline of the Sioux, 1866-1890* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979).

Conflict in Dakota Territory 15

contrast between the two commands was marked, and we of Crook's outfit were not a little mortified during the interchange of visits to observe the comforts surrounding Terry's people. When we called, we were received under canvas and seated on camp-stools, whilst our visitors must choose between standing and sitting on the ground.



Gen. Alfred H. Terry provided his men with comforts that General Crook's spartan leadership style would not allow.

The march was resumed next morning, the two commands moving in parallel columns, and following the broad Indian trail that at this point left the Rosebud and doubled back to Tongue River. The line of march lay over pine-clad spurs of the Wolf Mountains, from the loftier eminences of which a magnificent view of the broken and picturesque country was had. Behind was the glorious sweep of the Big Horn chain, from which sprung the snowy crest

16 *South Dakota History*

of Cloud Peak, flashing like a white jewel set in a crown of azure. In front and on either side the landscape rose and fell; here a rugged "butte," there a valley and brawling stream, and everywhere vast plateaus of wind-swept verdure, while from the great buttress behind, stretching out like the headlands of some mighty coast, ran the spurs of the receding mountains. Off to the northward lay the great Valley of the Yellowstone, but so far away that its presence there were unsuspected but for a soft tracery of dreamy, blue haze hanging in the heavens that arched this noble stream. That march was a delightful one, and memorable from the fact that the fine weather was at an end. The day was perfect; a delicious breeze moderated the heat of the sun, and everybody enjoyed the beautiful scenery and the exhilarating atmosphere. That night-camp was made on Tongue River once more. It was here that the bodies of three white men who had been killed by Indians were found, but it was not possible to identify them. The remains had been stripped of outer clothing, but several military buttons found lying about induced the belief that three of Custer's men had escaped from the field of battle on the Little Big Horn, and reached this point before being overtaken and killed.

The guides were now again at fault about the trail, and it was after noon of the next day before the troops were in motion. The morning had broken dark and threatening, and when the march was resumed rain was falling. After a short march the troops halted, and at sunset put into camp in a narrow flat at the foot of high bluffs that overlooked the valley and river. That night the flood-gates were opened and the deluge came. There was no shelter for us of Crook's command, and we had to choose between standing and lying in the wet grass and mud. Next morning, however, it was clear, and we proceeded down-stream, until, several days later, the trail left the Tongue, and again bore away eastward. Still in pursuit, we continued on, and after consuming three days in passing through the Bad Lands, and overcoming the obstacles interposed by rugged bluffs, precipitous hills and difficult ravines, dropped down into the Valley of Powder River.

The troops were now out of rations, and it became necessary to proceed to the supply camp at the mouth of the Powder, where we remained from the 22d to the 25th of August, during which time such stores as Terry could spare were transferred to Crook. This delay was most opportune for man and beast, for both sadly needed rest. The horses, especially, required time for recuperation, as they were much reduced by long marches and the want of forage, their sole subsistence since leaving Goose Creek having been grass.

While in this camp the troops suffered severely for want of shelter, for the equinoctial storms had come a month before their time, and there was much rain. The horrors of our last night on the Yellowstone will never fade from the recollection of those exposed to the fury of the tempest that raged.

The rain descended in wind-swept sheets, and the wide flat—that offered no ark of refuge to man or beast—ran ankle-deep in water, whilst the poor horses stood motionless, and the drenched soldiers, crouching together in squads, peered out into the inky darkness and waited, patiently as they could, for the slow coming of the dawn. There was but little wood in the vicinity, and had it been abundant no fires could have lived beneath that terrific downpour. It was this night, especially, we realized the contrast between the comparative comfort of Terry's canvas-covered hosts and our own bedraggled and forlorn estate.

From the mouth of Tongue River several officers and a number of men were sent down the Yellowstone, invalided; and Mr. T_____ and several other newspaper men took advantage of the same comfortable means of conveyance to escape the future hardships of an expedition of which they had had enough. "Buffalo Bill" also made his exit at this time, and went East to fulfill a professional engagement on a stage where he has since achieved success by making wonderfully vivid and realistic in mimic portrayal the exciting scenes through which he had passed in the "wild and woolly West."¹⁶

One day whilst we were lying on the Yellowstone several Mackinaw boats, laden with canned goods and such odds and ends of clothing as are worn by frontiersmen, and which had ventured down from the settlements up-stream on the chance of a market, came along; and before they could reach the shore were boarded and surrounded by hundreds of clamoring men, who, the day being fine, were bathing in the river, while their clothes, already washed, were drying on the bank. As the goods bought were in great demand, the cargoes were rapidly sold out at fancy prices, and the hardy boatmen realized many hundred per cent. on their risky investment. It was on this occasion, while engaged in the laundry business in a small way, the writer encountered General Crook similarly occupied, and placidly contemplating and evidently enjoying the animated scene before him.

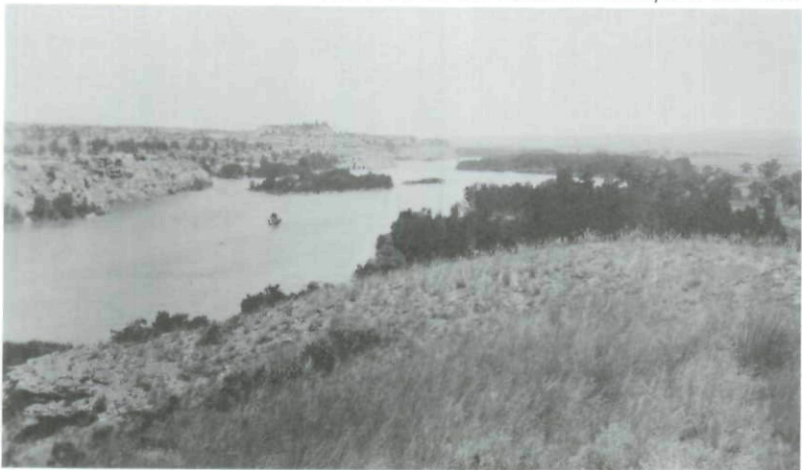
16. Cody started downriver but was shortly persuaded to carry dispatches to Terry's command. He subsequently accompanied Terry's brief expedition north of the Yellowstone before finally departing on 5 September. Jerome A. Greene, *Yellowstone Command: Colonel Nelson A. Miles and the Great Sioux War, 1876-1877* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), pp. 54-55, 58-59, 63.

18 *South Dakota History*

Until it became necessary to temporarily suspend the pursuit and seek supplies on the Yellowstone it had been confidently expected that the Indians would be brought to bay and the campaign terminated by a successful and brilliant feat of arms. From the natural obstacles in the way, and from no fault of commander or troops, however, this hope had now proved illusory, and it was conceded on all sides that more trying work and greater hardships than it had yet encountered lay before the expedition. The end, indeed, was not yet. And it was not to come till slow, persistent and relentless pursuit had worn the Indian's endurance out and defeat subdued his valor—till the soldier's mettle had been tried in battle, and his discipline and fortitude proved to the uttermost in the sufferings of a march through storm and mud, when for many days and nights his food was raw horse-meat, his bed the sodden prairie, his only canopy the raining sky.

When on August 25th, 1876, the Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition left the mouth of Powder River and began the second chapter of its eventful history, it was well that from human prescience the horrors of the next three weeks were withheld. The start was made under a clear sky, but before many miles had been covered the clouds assembled and a heavy shower of rain fell. That night the troops went into camp at the point where the Indian trail left the

The Yellowstone River served as an important link between civilization and troops in the field.



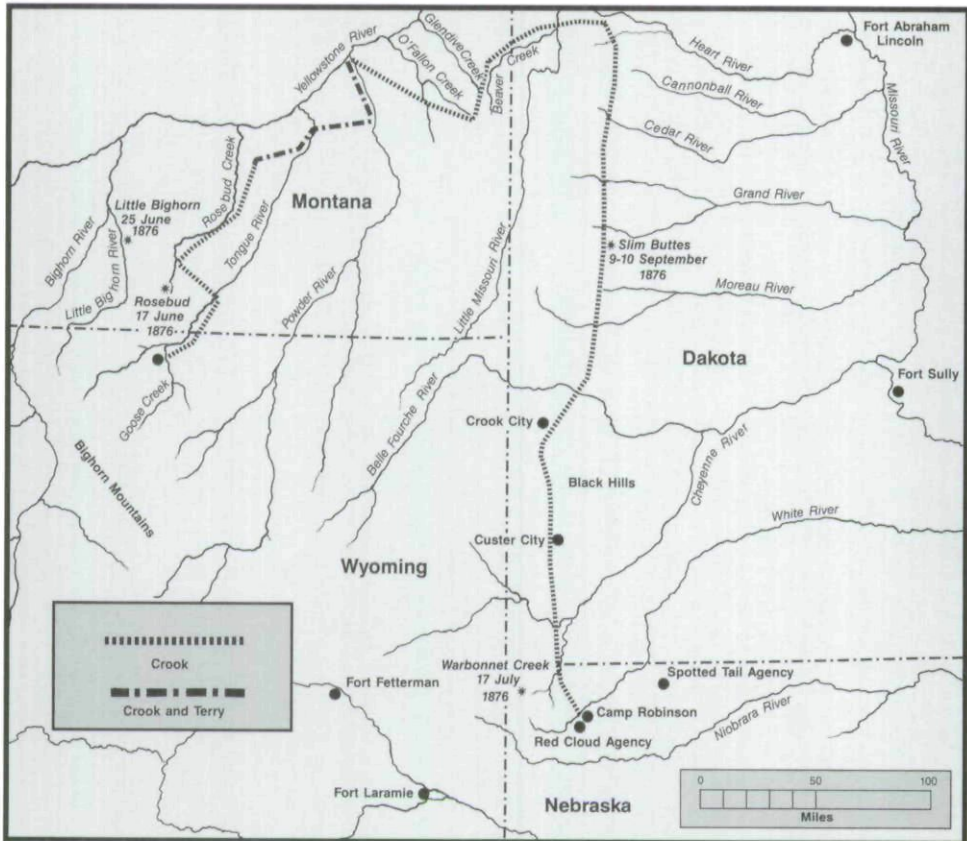
Powder, and next morning the head of column was directed to the east. The rain had abated over night, and the command moved blithely along, cherishing the hope that for the present, at least, the storms were over. But the hope was soon dissipated, for though there were periods of sunshine and starlight, it rained daily and nightly. Wet blankets made sore backs, and the poor horses, toiling painfully through the deep mud, rapidly lost flesh and strength. The trail was now being marked by dead or abandoned animals, and by castaway saddles, side-lines and the like—whilst the dismounted troopers, incumbered by their heavy cavalry-boots, vainly struggled to keep pace with the infantry. The course lay north of east, and took us over the Blue Mud Hills and the Powder River Mountains, and across O'Fallon, Beaver and Glendine [Glendive] Creeks, the Little Missouri River, and other tributaries of the Yellowstone. Much of the way was very rugged, and the cavalry had frequently to dismount and lead their wearied horses. In that high latitude the Summer was already spent, and at night the discomfort of the men was greatly aggravated by the cold.

It was when the command was lying in bivouac one afternoon, resting after a long day's march, that there occurred a phenomenon, very unusual even in that region of remarkable atmospheric disturbance. Into what but a moment before had been a clear sky came suddenly and swiftly, sweeping up portentously from the northern horizon, a vast black cloud, emitting forked tongues of flame and great bolts of purple fire, and pealing forth crash after crash of thunder that shook the surrounding hills to their rocky foundations. As the cloud attained the zenith, it was violently rent in twain by some force within itself, and the two sections, caught by diverging currents of the upper air, were whirled apart, revealing between the angry edges of the receding fragments a narrow strip of soft and exquisite azure.

The Little Missouri was reached on September 3d, and during the succeeding day's march a party of Indians were overhauled by some of the scouts, and a pretty running fight took place in view of a part of the column.¹⁷ That night found the troops on Hart [Heart] River, and practically out of rations. And just here a momentous question forced itself on the commanding general for his determination. The situation was briefly this: The troops had now for a month been following the trail of the hostiles, which at this point turned sharply to the right, and led southward. Men and horses were in sad need of rest and opportunity for recuperation, and the supplies were ex-

17. A description of this action is found in Greene, *Slim Buttes*, pp. 34-35.

Crook's Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition, August-October 1876



map by Sarah Ackermann

hausted. [Fort Abraham] Lincoln was but eighty-five miles distant, and rations, forage and clothing could be speedily obtained by marching in the direction of that post. To go to Fort Lincoln, however, was to abandon the immediate purpose had in view, and would leave defenseless the Black Hills, toward which the Indians were marching. Moreover, the withdrawal of the troops to the northward would embolden the discontented spirits at Red Cloud Agency, who needed but little inducement to join their friends with Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull. On the other hand, the Black Hills were 200 miles away, and the intervening country unknown, except, vaguely, to one of the few Indian scouts yet remaining with the command. The difficulties in the way of conducting 2,000 men that distance, through

a hostile country, without rations, would have dismayed a heart less stout than Crook's. The obvious advantages of following the trail and giving the hostiles no respite were controlling factors in the mental problem to be solved; so, concluding that the command could subsist for a time on horse-flesh, the general put aside the tempting alternative presented by the abundance of Fort Lincoln, and resolutely resolved to pursue the flight of his quarry. There was much speculation amongst the officers that night on Hart River as to the course to be taken next day; but not till the march had fairly begun and the head of column bore steadily to the south did we fully realize that we were going to the Hills.

The constant rains had thoroughly saturated the ground, and a serious trouble of the march was the adhesion of the peculiar mud of the country to the feet of men and horses. Those afoot (and the cavalry now led their horses much of the time) were forced to make frequent halts to remove with their knives sticky accumulations of clay. Many horses gave out this day, and the late afternoon found the column, after a long march, camped on an open flat, with not a stick of wood with which to build fires. The rations were now all gone, and at this camp horse-flesh (raw and without salt) was eaten for the first time. It was this night the writer cut away the leather from two stirrups, and made of the little wood thus procured a small fire, with which he boiled the last cup of coffee he drank for many a day.

Now that starvation was added to the sum of all our woes, it is interesting to observe that even in the distressed condition the command found itself there was no relaxation of discipline, nor any departure from systematic methods in supplying the troops with the ghastly substitute for rations upon which alone reliance was had for subsistence. The weakest horses were butchered like beef-cattle and transported on pack-mules, and the meat regularly issued in camp. There was no wood to cook it, no salt to season it, and, as will be readily believed, not until the demands of hunger became imperative did the men eat the repulsive stuff. But they came to it at last, and after a day or two lost all their fastidiousness. I recollect shooting a wild duck, one evening, on a tributary of the Cannonball River, and anticipating, with delight, a rare supper, but found the fowl fishy, and far more unpalatable than raw horse.

During the night of September 7th-8th Captain [Anson] Mills, of the Third Cavalry, was sent in advance, with his battalion, with orders to proceed as rapidly as possible to the Black Hills, and there to collect provisions and convoy them back to the command, which

22 *South Dakota History*

would follow his trail. The purpose for which this detachment had been made was soon known to the troops, and next day they moved cheerfully forward, forded Grand River, and after toiling patiently along through deep mud, and in a cold, drizzling rain, had accomplished by night-fall many miles on their difficult way.

Mills, riding hard to the southward, discovered [near Slim Buttes, D. T.], late in the evening of the 8th, a large Indian village, directly in his path. This he carefully reconnoitered, and determined to attack next morning. Just at dawn of the 9th he went at the sleeping savages with a rush, and after a brief but sharp combat, in which both parties suffered severely, he carried the village and dispersed the Indians. Being incumbered with his wounded, and rightly judging that he was in the vicinity of the main body of the Sioux, Mills

Upon arriving in the Black Hills, soldiers reenacted the hardships of their "Starvation March," such as this staged fight over horsemeat, for photographer Stanley J. Morrow.



concluded to make good his captures and await the arrival of Crook, to whom he dispatched his news.¹⁸

The couriers met the head of column in the Bad Lands, east of Grand River, and it was not long before the purport of their tidings was trickling back through the sets of fours and giving animation to the wearied troopers. The command was pushed forward as speedily as practicable, and in a state of exhilaration which the horses seemed to share the troops made rapid progress. A little before noon the Indian tepees and Mills's horses, grazing on a hillside, came into view, and in a quarter of an hour the column was halted, and Mills reporting that he had seen no Indians since his fight that morning, the troops were put into bivouac and the horses sent out to graze as usual, precautions being taken, however, to strengthen the various herd-guards.

It had happened that, about ten o'clock in the morning, while some troopers were exploring a ravine about a hundred yards from the village, in search of wood, a shot had been fired from the *arroyo* and one of the party killed. It was Mills's belief that a single wounded Indian had taken refuge there after the fight, and he deemed it best to defer capturing the savage until some way could be devised to secure him without risking another life. Some time after the main body arrived several shots were fired from the same ambush at men who, despite the warning they had received, recklessly encroached upon the dangerous territory. It was now apparent that more Indians than one were in hiding, and the soldiers, becoming exasperated, gathered around and began firing into the ravine without orders from their officers. The latter were quickly on hand, but not before several men had been hit, and "Buffalo Chips" [Charles White], a scout, and a follower of "Buffalo Bill," had been shot through the brain and instantly killed. The soldiers were now ordered out of range, and a position having been secured from which a fire could be delivered into the ravine without effective return, a tremendous fusillade began, and continued until a signal of surrender was made by the Indians. The firing then ceased. When the ravine was entered a horrible and sickening spectacle was presented. Crouching in an excavation made in the bank were sev-

18. Mills's own account of the Battle of Slim Buttes appears in his autobiographical *My Story* ([Washington, D.C.]: By the Author, 1918). A comprehensive treatment of the action can be found in Greene, *Slim Buttes*, pp. 59-96. See also the following reprint of Charles King's "Into Flashing Depths," which describes the ravine fight at Slim Buttes. The official reports of the infantry involved in the action are also published in this issue of *South Dakota History*.

24 *South Dakota History*

eral women and children and a single warrior, unhurt, while under and around these were the bleeding forms of the wounded and the dead. The brave's last cartridge was spent, else there had been no thought of submission. When a close inspection of the ravine was made, it was discovered that American Horse, a sub-chief under Roman Nose (it was the latter's village had been taken), was fatally hurt, and that the wounds of others were mortal. A remarkable instance of that fortitude for which the Indian is so celebrated was furnished on this occasion by American Horse, when, rising to his feet and holding his protruding entrails in his hands, the grim old warrior walked unaided, sixty yards, to a couch of skins that had been prepared for him by his squaw. There he sat, half recumbent, without uttering a groan, holding the hand of his savage spouse, and clinching between his set teeth a hard stick he had placed in his mouth. He died that night. Whilst one of the lodges was being overhauled, a little girl was found hiding in a pile of skins. Her heel had been shattered by a chance shot that morning, and the poor child, suffering acutely, had lain there for hours, giving no sign.

The day was not to pass without further excitement. News of Mills's fight at Slim Buttes had been carried to Crazy Horse as well as to Crook, and about four in the afternoon the former's dusky warriors came riding out of the defiles west of our camp, fully prepared for a reckoning with the troops. The men, in their respective bivouacs, were seeking much needed repose, when a single shot rang out at a distant outpost. Other shots followed in rapid succession, until the firing extended along the entire western and southern fronts of our position. Skirmish-lines were quickly deployed and thrown forward to meet the rapidly advancing hostiles, who in great force were pushing their long, irregular line of horse-men against that part of the position held by the troops offering the best chance of success. Here was a salient of the cavalry lines, and the pressure was becoming strong. Zip!—zip! the bullets came, hitting some of the men. Crack! crack! the replies rang out, and there was a hot fight before the Indians, despairing of breaking through, relaxed their efforts at this point and prepared for another attack. Meantime the cavalry herds, gallantly covered by their respective guards, came thundering into camp, thus removing the serious apprehension that our horses might be lost. The Indians, foiled in the first effort, resorted to their favorite tactics, and galloping around the extended position of the troops, made spirited and enterprising dashes in search of weak spots, only to be repulsed with loss. Later, General Crook took the offensive, and pushing the cavalry, dismounted, and the infantry out in all directions, cleared his front

Conflict in Dakota Territory 25

and drove the Indians before him until night put an end to the conflict. Had our horses been fit, the savages must have been crushed, but the rascals knew our condition, and feared nothing from pursuit. There was more or less firing at the outposts during the night, and next morning, when we resumed our march toward the Black Hills, the savages attacked our rear-guard. After a brief contest they were easily repulsed, and troubled us no more.



*Capt. Anson
Mills led the
9 September attack on
the Indian village
at Slim Buttes.*

Among the captures at Slim Buttes were several hundred ponies and many buffalo-robes and other articles of value in the domestic economy of the Indians. The ponies were a serious loss to the hostiles, and on the 9th they made repeated efforts to retake them. Some dried meat was also found in the lodges, but in such small quantities as to be of little use to us. One of my men found seven

26 *South Dakota History*



Indian prisoners taken in the Battle of Slim Buttes line up before a captured lodge and a Seventh Cavalry guidon lost earlier in the summer at the Little Bighorn battlefield.

plugs of chewing tobacco of the kind issued to soldiers, of which he gave me a part to be distributed to the officers of the regiment, and divided the other among his comrades in the troop. This find proved a blessing to those who shared it, for, as experience has taught, there is nothing like tobacco for mitigating the pangs of hunger. In the village was recovered a guidon that had been taken by the Indians in the battle of the Little Big Horn, June 25th, nearly three months before, and in the pony herd was found a cavalry-horse that had been ridden by one of Custer's troopers on that fateful Summer day. Before leaving Slim Buttes our dead were buried, and all traces of their graves obliterated, that the bodies might not be found and mutilated according to savage custom.¹⁹

There had been for some time past a number of sick officers and men in the command, and as there were no ambulances along, each

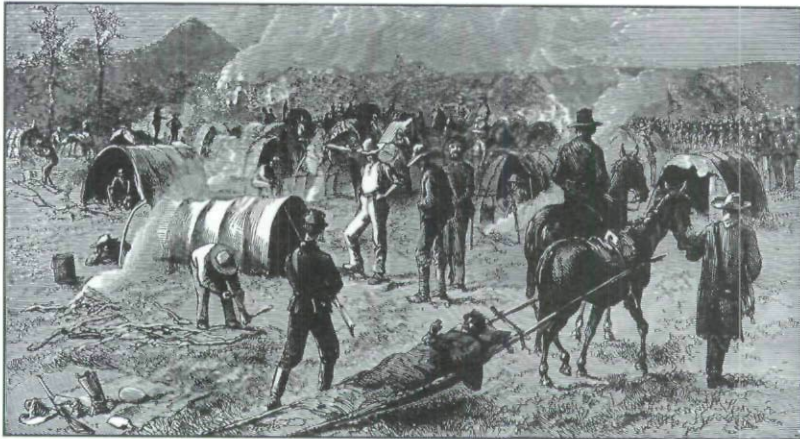
¹⁹ Nonetheless, soldiers returning to the scene after Crook's departure found that the bodies had been exhumed and desecrated. Greene, *Slim Buttes*, p. 99.

person had to be transported in a *travois*. The *travois* consisted of a piece of canvas or blanket suspended between two long poles, fitted to a mule, like shafts, with the rear ends dragging on the ground. This was a primitive, but on smooth ground by no means an uncomfortable, mode of conveyance. We now had our wounded, some with amputated limbs, and a long procession of *travois* accompanied the column.²⁰ With them traveled the surgeons and hospital corps, from whom the patient sufferers received every possible attention.

On the night of September 10th [actually, the morning of the 11th] a second detachment, mounted on ponies captured from the Indians, was dispatched to the Black Hills for supplies, which, as it happily transpired, got through without interruption or detention. When, on the morning of the 11th, the command climbed the heights that rose above the camp of the night before, and halted to draw breath at the top of the steep ascent, a dismal and dreary prospect lay in front. Through the rainy mist some of the guides were seen slowly riding down the narrow and crooked path which,

20. Army and civilian casualties at Slim Buttes numbered three killed and twenty-four wounded. Approximately ten Indians were killed or wounded. John F. Finerty, *War-Path and Bivouac; or, The Conquest of the Sioux* (1890; reprint ed., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), pp. 342-43; Greene, *Slim Buttes*, pp. 128-29, 170n.101.

The travois took the place of the ambulance in transporting the wounded from Slim Buttes to the Black Hills.



28 *South Dakota History*

following the crest of a precipitous ridge, led to the great plain several hundred feet below. Far as the eye could pierce the drifting vapor there was only barrenness. Neither grass nor bush nor tree grew in that sterile soil, and the broad expanse, scarred with deeply washed gullies and hideous with dirty white splashes of alkali, was suggestive of no thought but solitude and desolation. Dismounting and leading the horses, the long column wound down the difficult descent in single file, and in a little while, enveloped in mist, was patiently making its way across the gloomy and forbidding waste.

At our halting-place on Owl Creek that night a limited quantity of wood was found, and the soldiers were able to cook their horse-meat and enjoy the warmth of a fire for the first time in a week. It rained, however, during part of the night, and the unprotected officers and men suffered greatly from the wet and cold. The distance from Owl Creek to the Black Hills was estimated to be about forty-five miles, and it was indeed well that we were nearing the end of our journey, for the state of affairs had become critical. Suffering from hunger, long marches and constant exposure, men and animals were well-nigh exhausted, and many of the footmen got into camp that night after dark.

On arriving at Owl Creek the scouts discovered a fresh Indian trail crossing our line of direction at right angles, and General Crook, wishing to obtain information as to their movements, [next day] sent three troops of cavalry after the party of savages, with orders to pursue them during that day, to attack them, if overhauled, but for the detachment to join the main body the next night. During this "side scout," which developed the fact that several parties of Indians were hovering on the flanks of the column, one of the troopers ventured too far afield in search of game, and was killed and scalped by the savages.²¹ Nothing better illustrates the desperate straits to which we were now put than an incident that occurred when this detachment was ready to set forth on its mission. The question of rations was naturally uppermost in the minds of the departing troopers, but not until, at the last moment, the chief commissary of the expedition turned over to the battalion an Indian pony, mare and colt, were the men's minds relieved of all apprehensions of starvation!

September 12th was the most memorable day of the campaign, not only because the most trying, but because it brought our difficulties to an end. From early morning until far into the night the

21. The soldier was Pvt. Cyrus B. Milner of Company A, Fifth Cavalry. Greene, *Slim Buttes*, p. 173n.15.

troops waded sloughs, passed ravines, climbed slippery hill-sides, floundered through marshes and toiled along in the deep mud of the prairie. Many of the men, worn out by hunger and fatigue, lagged behind, and a battalion of cavalry was kept in their rear, both for encouragement and protection. When the night had come on, the various subdivisions had difficulty in keeping the trail, which, when lost, could only be regained by following the dull sounds of the horses' feet as they tramped through the deep mud. The men were too weary and wretched for speech, and I recall the fact that, while riding for hours that night with a brother-captain, in the interval between our respective troops, though rather a talkative man generally, he uttered not a word. It was whilst thus groping, in moody silence, through the darkness of midnight, that a shout was heard far in advance, and in an instant there, rolling back along the extended column, came the joyful news that fires had been sighted and camp was near at hand. Everybody braced up at once, and the men, paraphrasing an old hymn, burst into song:

"Star of hope to wanderers weary,
Bright your beams that shine on me
Light the soldier's vision dreary,
Away out here on the cold prairie."

The troops, fortunate enough to get into camp at all that night, bivouacked where they halted, and the horses were unsaddled and turned loose. There was no danger of their stampeding. Next day, as soon as all the detachments and stragglers were up, we made a short march over to the Belle Fourche, and crossing that lovely stream, went into camp in a beautiful grove of cotton-woods. Here were beef-cattle and abundant fuel, and the sky being clear, the night was passed in comfort and contentment. In the afternoon of the 14th [15th] we passed over to Driftwood [Whitewood] Creek, near Crook City, and found the abundance of the Black Hills at our service. Soon after we got into this camp a little canvas village sprung up near us, and there being a good deal of money in the command, the store-keepers did a rushing business. At Driftwood [Whitewood] General Crook turned the command over to General Merritt and posted off to Fort [Camp] Robinson, Neb., where he began putting things in train for the grand *coup* with which he designed closing the campaign. Meantime the troops by easy marches proceeded through the picturesque scenes of the Black Hills to Custer City, near their southern extremity, where we met our wagon-train, with tents, forage and other necessary supplies. Here also awaited us an accumulation of newspapers and welcome letters from "sweethearts and wives." The golden glory of the Autumn now hovered over the

30 *South Dakota History*

land, and we greatly enjoyed our sojourn in the beautiful valleys surrounding Custer City. While there, quite a number of the sick died, and almost daily the sweet, sad strains of "taps" were heard, as some poor fellow, sewed up in his blanket, was laid away in his final resting-place on those distant, lonely plains.

During all this time General Crook, at Fort Robinson, was preparing to disarm the Indians at the agency there, preliminary to starting on his expedition against the Cheyennes. Our part in this programme was to move down from the north and interpose a barrier to the escape of the savages in that direction, should they resist when their arms were demanded of them. The duty of disarming the Indians was intrusted to the troops on the spot. In pursuance of the general design, Merritt's column left Custer City on October 9th [14th], and, after thoroughly scouting the country along the Cheyenne River east of the Black Hills, marched to Fort Robinson, and there played the part to which it had been assigned. So well had General Crook's plan been considered, and so carefully was it concealed, that not until the moment came for carrying it into

A supply train carrying assorted necessities and luxuries met the weary troops at Custer City in the southern Black Hills.



Conflict in Dakota Territory 31



Leaving his men behind, General Crook moved on to Camp Robinson, where the Sioux would later be disarmed.

effect did the savages discover his purpose. It was then too late for resistance, and they submitted to the inevitable.²²

So far as the troops composing the Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition were concerned, active work for the year was now over, and they were distributed to the various posts in the Department of the Platte. Hostilities were not yet over, however, for Dull Knife's band of Northern Cheyennes were still at large, and a strong contingent of the Sioux kept the field with Sitting Bull. The latter were defeated several times by General Miles in the Yellowstone country, and finally driven across the line into British America. In his Winter campaign against Dull Knife General Crook was fortunate enough to bring that chief to a speedy trial of strength. In December [November] the Cheyennes were found in their strongholds, on the head-waters of Powder River, and immediately attacked. A fierce conflict ensued, in which both sides were roughly handled, but the final

22. Moving the Sioux back to the military-controlled Red Cloud and Spotted Tail agencies where they could be disarmed and dismounted had long been an essential part of General Sheridan's strategy for winning the war. See Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and His Army*, pp. 319, 322, 325-26.

32 *South Dakota History*

result was favorable to the troops. With the submission of Dull Knife and his band, which soon followed this affair, came the end of the great Indian War of 1876.²³

The army's success at the Battle of Slim Buttes is noted as a turning point in its fortunes during the 1876-1877 campaign against the Sioux. The fight among the rugged clay-and-limestone formations in the northwest part of present-day South Dakota comprised four distinct engagements. The first, the 9 September dawn attack by Capt. Anson Mills and the Third Cavalry, scattered the inhabitants of an Indian village camped on Gap Creek. The second involved combat surrounding the ravine where some of the men, women, and children had taken refuge after the initial assault. The third action consisted of an attack led by Crazy Horse as the army went into bivouac in the late afternoon, and the last occurred on the morning of 10 September as the rear guard of the departing troops skirmished at long range with the warriors.

*The following account of Charles King, who was regimental adjutant of the Fifth Cavalry during the Great Sioux War, describes in detail the ravine fight that culminated in the surrender of Chief American Horse. An 1869 West Point graduate, King served in the West until 1879, when a wound suffered years earlier forced his retirement. He became a writer, mostly of novels and stories that reflected his frontier experiences. When King died in 1933, he was among a handful of surviving officers of the Great Sioux War.²⁴ His brief essay, originally titled "Into Flashing Depths. The Bravest Deed I Ever Saw," first appeared in the *Youth's Companion* in 1893. It was subsequently*

23. While the sacking of Dull Knife's village on 25 November 1876 by members of an expedition led by General Crook and Col. Ranald S. Mackenzie marked the end of Northern Cheyenne participation in the warfare, the Great Sioux War lasted seven more months. See John G. Bourke, *Mackenzie's Last Fight with the Cheyennes: A Winter Campaign in Wyoming and Montana* (1890; reprint ed., Bellevue, Nebr.: Old Army Press, 1970). Throughout the winter of 1876-1877, Col. Nelson A. Miles campaigned with the Fifth and Twenty-second infantry regiments further north along the Yellowstone River, besting the Sioux and Cheyennes and prompting their surrender at the agencies in the spring of 1877. The Indians who followed Sitting Bull into Canada remained there for several years before returning to the United States and a reservation existence. For details of Miles's operations, see Greene, *Yellowstone Command*.

24. For biographical information on Charles King, see William H. Powell, comp., *Powell's Records of Living Officers of the United States Army* (Philadelphia: L. R. Hamersly & Co., 1890), p. 332, and, especially, Don Russell, *Campaigning with King: Charles King, Chronicler of the Old Army*, ed. Paul L. Hedren (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).

reprinted in Daring Deeds: Selections from the Youth's Companion (Boston: Perry Mason Co., 1902). An example of a typical late 1890s adventure story, King's melodramatic account pits "good" soldiers against "evil" Indians. His use of terms like "redskin" and "squaw," which would not be accepted today, reflects the usage of the earlier time.

Charles King's Description of the Ravine Fight at Slim Buttes

It was the summer of the terrible Custer Massacre (1876), and night and day we were pursuing the Sioux, hoping to overtake and punish them. But they had burned the prairie grass before us, and then seemed to have scattered over the face of the earth.

Sitting Bull, with a great following, had crossed the Yellowstone and gone north. Crazy Horse, a brilliant and daring leader, with a host of Ogallallas and Brules at his back, was known to have made for the fastnesses of the Bad Lands of western Dakota.

Thither General Crook was now leading us, a column strong in numbers, for we had some forty companies of regulars, as well as a goodly force of scouts, packers and others.

Rations were well-nigh exhausted. We were living on quarter portions of bacon, hardtack and sugarless coffee. We had men enough to overcome all the Indians in Dakota; but with starving horses and half-starving soldiers little can be done in the way of aggressive warfare.

About seven o'clock in the morning of September 9th the news flew down the column like a flash: "Sioux village—big one—fifteen miles ahead!"

Colonel Mills, then a senior captain serving with the Third Cavalry, had been sent forward by General Crook two nights before with orders to push through to the Black Hills with his command, one hundred and fifty picked horses and men and a pack-train, load up with all the provisions he could buy, and hasten back to meet us.

This very morning at daybreak he had dashed into the village which his scouts located during the night, and was now hanging on to his prize until we could reach him.

Well, we got there, pushing ahead through mud, mist and rain. Being adjutant, I happened to ride at the head of the column as we neared the scene, and so obtained a capital view and a lasting impression of the situation.

34 *South Dakota History*

For the time being there was a lull in the fight. Forty-one big lodges were scattered about the ravines in a deep amphitheater of the craggy hills known as Slim Buttes. Mills had scattered the Indians just at dawn, captured a herd of four hundred ponies, found several Seventh Cavalry horses, one of Custer's beautiful silken guidons, Capt. Myles Keogh's gauntlets, and other trophies which proved that



Milwaukee County Historical Society

Charles King, who eventually attained the rank of general, wrote scores of books and articles set on the western frontier.

these fellows had been concerned in the massacre, and that they must be part of Crazy Horse's big band.

Late that afternoon the whole party came, Crazy Horse with hundreds of his warriors, and a lively fight we had with them; but meantime occurred what seems to me perhaps the bravest thing I ever saw in Indian warfare.

"Look out for that ravine!" said Colonel Mills to me, as I was riding in among the lodges. "There's a wounded Indian in there, and he has killed one of my men."

Sure enough! Out on the slopes near the deep, brush-hidden depths of the little gorge a cavalry soldier, Wenzel, was toppled forward on his knees, stone-dead, and Sergeant Hass [Edward Glass] had just got a bullet through the arm.

It was plain that there must be more than one Indian in there, for two quick shots suddenly rang out, and a couple of scouts crossing the lowlands near the mouth of the gully ducked their heads and ran for shelter.

My orders required me to place the Fifth Cavalry in position facing the bluffs to the south of the captured village. After this duty was performed, and I had seen the commanders and given them the colonel's instructions, I had leisure to look about me. I did not dream what a living volcano there was at the head of that little ravine.

I had found a little patch of grass down in a sheltered nook, and had there picketed my poor old troop-horse and was coming back afoot toward the big lodge of skins beside which the colonel had unsaddled, when I caught sight of three or four scouts and troopers crawling toward the opening of the ravine, evidently bent on getting a shot at the occupants.

In a moment those fellows were flattened out on the ground like a hunted squirrel on the trunk of a tree, and the moisture-laden air rang with shots as the lead whizzed over their heads.

Every one seemed to wake up all at once to the realization that there was a nest of redskins up at the head of the gully. Presently a concerted effort was made to fetch them out.

Half a dozen officers and several dozen soldiers and scouts took part, and, as if by common consent, the leadership devolved on one of the handsomest, bravest, manliest cavalymen it was ever my lot to know, Philo Clark, then lieutenant and aide-de-camp to General Crook.

I remember him vividly as he looked that day, the broad brim of his scouting hat tossed back from his forehead, the collar of his buckskin hunting-shirt loosely fastened at the throat, no sign of uniform about him, for in those days we rarely wore the army blue on Indian campaigns.

He came striding forward, rifle in hand, and waving the men to go in along the slopes to the right and left of the ravine. He himself, to my horror, coolly pushed straight forward into what might be called the mouth of the gully, straight on past the point where the venturesome troopers had been flattened out so short a time before.

In an instant, it seemed to me, the clump of bushes at the upper end began to spit fire like a Fourth of July mine. A blue cloud of sulphur smoke hung over the Indian burrow. The clatter of rifle-

36 *South Dakota History*

shots was like that of a Gatling gun. Several soldiers dropped in their tracks along the grassy slopes.

Reeling back from the sudden shock, our men at the moment scattered right and left, for we had struck a formidable ambush. Not a vestige of an Indian could we see; yet that scooped-out shelter of theirs was evidently crammed with them.

I myself was over on the right bank at the time, and ducked with amazing promptitude when that storm of fire and lead burst on us. My next thought, when I found myself unhurt, was for Clark. We had been warm friends from our cadet days at West Point, and my heart was in my mouth with fear for him.

There he stood, just where I had seen him the instant before, with the same quiet smile on his face, never bending, never swerving, if anything rising higher on tiptoe, as if striving to peer into those dark, fire-flashing depths up the gully.

Mechanically he was thrusting another cartridge into the breech of his rifle. Bang! bang! went the Indian guns. Whiz! zip! spat the bullets.

"Down, Clark! Down!" shouted dozens of voices in tones of agonized dread.

"Come out of that, Philo, for heaven's sake!" yelled a Second Cavalry man close beside me. But just as placidly and unconcernedly as he would have strolled into his troop stables, smiling the while at the consternation he was creating, even finding time for a half-laughing rejoinder to the appeal of a comrade from our side, Clark pushed ahead until he could peer in through the veil of smoke, raised his rifle, aimed and fired.

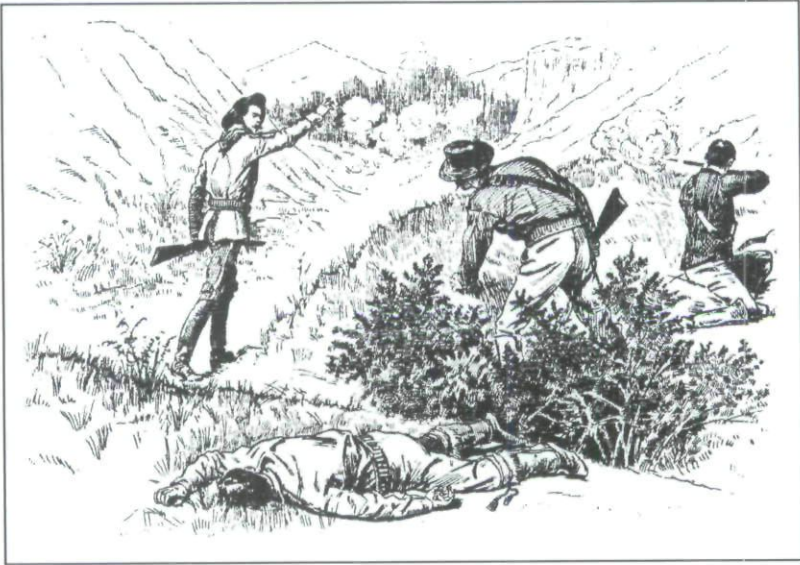
Then as coolly he motioned, "Come on! Come on!"

It was too much for the crowd. Everybody seemed to make a simultaneous dash. In vain the hidden Indians fired and strove to sweep the ravine.

A moment more and brave old Captain [Samuel] Munson had leaped in from one side and was half-dragging, half-lifting out some terrified squaws. Other willing hands were passing out some screaming little Indian children, so as to get the women and papooses out of harm's way before closing accounts with the warriors.

Then finding their "non-combatants" kindly treated, instead of being slaughtered, as would have been the case had we been the besieged, the Sioux called out for quarter and surrendered. One old villain who went by the name of American Horse was already shot through the body and past praying for. Another fellow, who called himself Charging Bear, subsequently became an Indian scout

Conflict in Dakota Territory 37



The dashing officer waving his men into the ravine at Slim Buttes in the illustration above closely resembles the real-life Philo Clark, who appears fourth from the left in the photograph below.



38 *South Dakota History*

in our service, and behaved very well. The others were kept as prisoners until we got to the agency at Red Cloud.

I had seen some Indian fighting before this affair, and have been in one or two campaigns since; but I recall no piece of individual daring and bravery and consummate coolness under fire to eclipse Philo Clark's exploit at Slim Buttes in 1876.

Gallant fellow! He became a captain a few years later, and was serving in Washington City on the staff of Lieutenant-General Sheridan, who thought the world of him, when death, which had spared him a hundred times over in Indian warfare, cut him down in the midst of peace, security, and in the very prime of a vigorous life.

The following official reports of the Fourth, Ninth, and Fourteenth infantry troops engaged in the encounters at Slim Buttes on 9 and 10 September 1876 are located in the National Archives in Washington, D.C.²⁵ With the exception of the lead report of Col. Alexander Chambers, who commanded the infantry battalion of Crook's army, the accounts of the various companies have not been published previously. Chambers's report alone accompanied those of Gen. George Crook, Capt. Anson Mills, Lt. Col. William B. Royall, and Lt.

25. Department of the Platte, Letters Received, Entry 3731, Box 45, Records of United States Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, Record Group 393, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Rugged bluffs overlook the area near the Slim Buttes battlefield.



Col. Eugene A. Carr when they appeared in the 1876 Report of the Secretary of War.²⁶ Designated subreports, the infantry accounts are reprinted here in their entirety. All spelling and punctuation have been left as they appear in the original documents.

Reports of the Infantry Battalion at Slim Buttes

HdQrs Princ. Depot G. R. S.
Fort Columbus N. Y. H.²⁷
November 1876.

The Asst. Adjt. General
Big Horn & Yellow Stone Expedition
Omaha, Neb.
Sir!

I have the honor to make the following report of the disposition of the Troops of the Infantry Battalion on the afternoon of the 9th and morning of the 10th of September 1876, at Slim Buttes or Rabbit Creek Dak. Ty.²⁸

Four Companies "F" Capt. G[erhard] L. Luhn, "D" 1st Lieut. Henry Seton 4th—"H" 9th 2nd Lieut. Chs. M. Rockefeller and "C" 14th Infantry, Capt. D[aniel] W. Burke, under command of Capt. A[ndrew] S. Burt, 9th Infantry took the commanding Hills and Bluffs to the South and South West of the Camp, driving away the Indians who were annoying the Camp by a desultory fire at long range.

This movement was made without Casualty with the exception of Private Robert Fitz Henry Comp. "H" 9th Infantry slightly wounded.

Companies "B" Capt. J[ames] Kennington, "F" Capt. Thomas F. Tobey and "I" 1st Lieut. Frank Taylor, 14th Infantry, were posted on the South side of Camp concealed by bluffs ready in case an attack should be made from that direction.

26. U. S., Congress, House, *Report of the Secretary of War* (1876), Ex. Doc. 1, pt. 2, 44th Cong., 2d sess., pp. 506-13. Chambers's report is also reprinted in Jerome A. Greene, *Slim Buttes, 1876: An Episode of the Great Sioux War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), pp. 130-39.

27. Located on an island in New York Harbor, Fort Columbus was a former Revolutionary War outpost that in 1876 housed the General Recruiting Service.

28. The "Rabbit Creek" referred to in these reports is the present-day Gap Creek.

40 *South Dakota History*

Companies "C" Capt. Samuel Munson and "G" 1st Lieut. Wm. L. Carpenter 9" Infantry took a range of bluffs on North side of Camp driving away the Indians.

Company "G" 4" Infantry Capt. Wm. H. Powell reported to General Crook to perform the duty of a complete destruction of the village.

These Companies having performed the duties assigned them were withdrawn after dark and strong pickets posted.

Before daylight on the morning of the 10" Capt. Wm. H. Powell with "G" Comp. 4", and B, F, & "I" 14" Infy under their respective Commanders were moved to and occupied a strong position on the bluffs south and south west of Camp skirmishing with Indians after daylight till the whole Command was under march when they joined the Infantry Battalion.

The Report is made at this late day owing to sub-reports having been lost but recently found.

The Officers and men of the Command performed their duties in their usual gallant manner.

Attention is called to the enclosed sub-reports.

I am Sir

Very Respectfully

Your Obedt Servant

Alex Chambers

Major 4" Infantry

Commddg. Infy. Batt.

Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition

In bivouac, Whitewood Creek, D. T.

Sept 15th 1876

Lieut. Thad. Capron

Adjutant Infantry Regiment

Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition

Sir,

I have the honor to submit the following report of the part taken by the four companies (H, 9th Inf. C, 14th Inf. F and D, 4th Inf) placed under my command, in the affair on the 9th of September 1876, at Slim Buttes, Rabbit Creek, D.T.

My orders were to take the bluffs to the south of our bivouac, from which the Indians were delivering an annoying fire. The four companies having been reported, were moved by the flank down

Conflict in Dakota Territory 41

to and across the flats of Rabbit Creek, where Co. H, 9th Inf. and Co. C, 14th Inf. were deployed as skirmishers and soon Co. F, 4th Inf. with Co. D, 4th Inf. as reserve.

In this manner the command advanced at a run and took the bluffs designated, losing only one man wounded, Private Robert Fitz Henry, Co. H, 9th Inf.

Subsequently discovering a movement of the Indians on the right, as if concentrating, I replaced Co. H, 9th Inf. with half of Co. D, 4th Inf. and sent the former to the right.

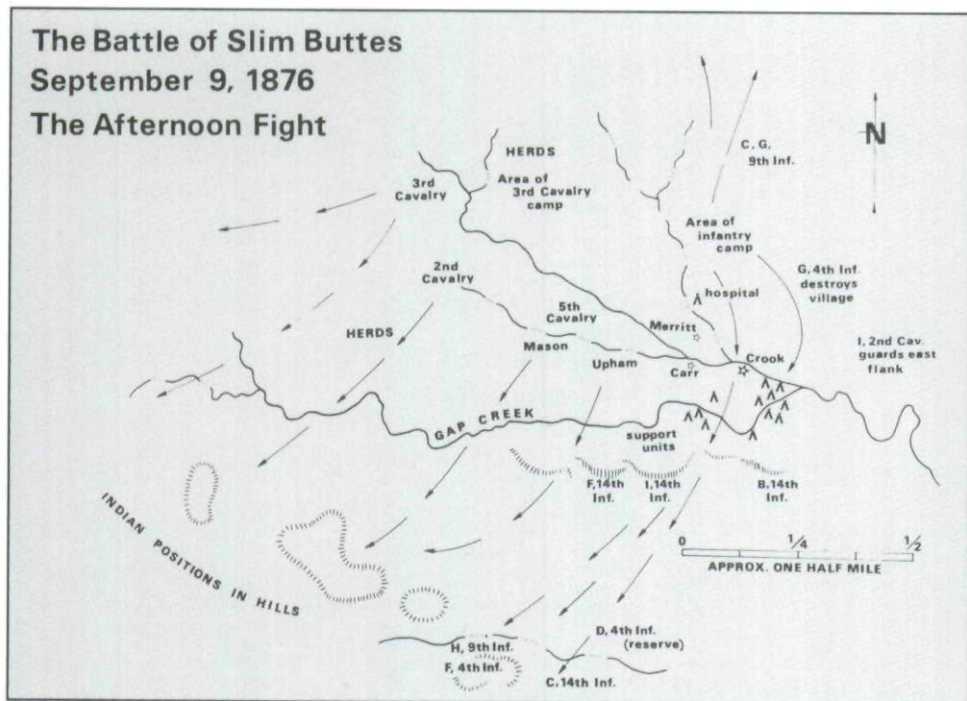
The officers and men did as ordered, promptly and well.

I am, sir, respectfully
Your obedient servant
A. S. Burt
Capt. 9th Inf.

Capt. Andrew S. Burt led four infantry companies in a secondary skirmish with the Sioux on the afternoon of 9 September 1876.



The Battle of Slim Buttes **September 9, 1876** **The Afternoon Fight**



Whitewood Creek D.T.
Sept. 15, 1876

Lt. T. H. Capron 9' Inf'y
Adjutant Inf'y Battalion
Sir

I have the honor to report that on the 9' of Sept. 1876 at Rabbit Creek W.T. where an indian village had been captured by Capt. Mills 3d Cav'y & his command, Comp'y 'I' 14' Infantry of which I had command was at about 5 P.M. when some firing by indians took place in our front, ordered to take position at the crest of a steep bluff opposite to the camp of the infantry column and on the left of Co. F 14' Inf'y. The company remained there until its movement would be concealed by darkness when it was ordered to retire.

Very resply
Frank Taylor
1' Lt 14 Inf
Comdg Co

Conflict in Dakota Territory 43

Report of Company "D," 4th Infantry, of part taken in action at
Rapid Creek D. T. on Sept. 9th 1876,

At about 4 o'clock P.M. of Sept. 9th, the 9th Company "D" Co. 4th Infantry, was ordered to report to Bvt Major Andrew S. Burt, U.S. Army, Captain 9th Inf. to assist in repulsing the attack of hostile Sioux on left and centre of Camp; I marched out with the Battalion, and by command of Major Burt was halted at the foot of the hill held by Company "F" 4th Infantry. The company was held in reserve, and took no further part in the action than to be held in readiness for active duty if called upon.

I remain Major
Very Respectfully
Your Obedient Servant
Henry Seton
1st Lieut 4th Infantry
Comd'g Company "D"

Camp on Whitewood Creek D.T.
Sept 15, 1876

1st Lt. T. H. Capron 9' Infy,
Adj't Infy Battn, B H & Y Expedtn
Sir

I have the honor to submit the following report of the operations of my company ("F" 14' Infy) in the action of 9' inst.

About 5 p.m. the affair having then gone on perhaps half an hour, Major Chambers, comd'g battalion, ordered me to advance my company (at that time formed in single rank & waiting orders) across the flat, south of the infantry camp, form it along the bank rising from the flat to the mesa (keeping the men covered from observation as well as could be without impairing the effect of their fire) and be in readiness either to support the skirmishers deployed on the bluffs on my right front, or to open fire on any Indians who might appear in my neighborhood within reasonable range. I immediately marched the company across the flat and up the bank, formed it as directed, the right resting close to the ravine where American Horse was captured, and made the men lie down under cover of the bank. I remained in this position till dark (about 7 p.m.) but no Indians showed themselves in my front, the attack having swept round to the north & west of the camp. After dark, by order of the battalion commander, I withdrew the company to its position in camp.

44 *South Dakota History*

The strength of the company present under arms in the affair was two officers (Lieut. F[rederic] S. Calhoun, 14th Infy & myself) and 34 enlisted men.

Very Respectfully
Your obedient servant
Thomas Tobey
Capt 14th Infy, Comdg Co. F

Camp on Whitewood Creek
Sept 15th 1876.

Capt. A. S. Burt 9th Inf
Sir:

I have the honor to report for your information the part taken by my Company ("F" 4th Infantry) in the Battle of Rabid Creek fought on the 9th day of Sept. 1876.—Viz—

The Company was ordered out as a line of skirmishers upon the "foot hills" under the direction of Capt Burt 9th Inf about 4. o'clock P.M. Upon arriving in position, it became necessary to open a rapid fire, as the Indians were about from 500 to 800 yards in our front.—They were rapidly driven to the Hills and adjacent timber by our fire, excepting a few scattering braves who dared to throw themselves in view every little while. Upon one occasion, I am of the opinion, that one Indian was either Killed or wounded and one Pony Killed in our front. The Company remained in position until after dark, when they were withdrawn and ordered to Camp. The firing during the fore part of the Engagement was very heavy from the Indians but the Company Escaped unhurt.

I am Sir
Very Respectfully
Your Obt. Servant
G. L. Luhn
Captain 4th Infantry
Comdg Co. "F"

Camp on Whitewood Creek Dak.
Big Horn & Yellowstone Expedition
Sept. 15, 1876

Adjutant Infantry Battalion;

Sir, In compliance with instructions received I have the honor to report that about 5 o'clk p.m. on the 9th of Sept. 1876, Co. G, 4th Inf, under my command was detached from the Infantry Battalion,

and by direction of Gen. Crook, destroyed and burned 32 lodges, with their effects, consisting of a large number of Robes, tanned and untanned, skins, over 200 saddles, some of them Army saddles, evidently captured in the Custer fight, a large amount of ammunition and other Indian effects belonging to the village of Bad Hand that day captured; this at the commencement of an attack by the Indians on our lines. This duty was completed just at dark.

Also, that about 3 a.m. on the 10th, Co. G 4th Inf. in company with B, F, & I Cos. of the 14th Inf., under my command, occupied the rocks and bluffs on the southern side of the Indian village. The company occupied the extreme right of the line, and was withdrawn when the troops were all on their way in their movement towards

Seven of the officers whose reports are presented here appear in this Stanley J. Morrow photograph. They are, front row from left, Capt. Thomas Tobey, Capt. Daniel W. Burke, 1st Lt. Frank Taylor, and Capt. Gerhard L. Luhn. Capt. William H. Powell appears immediately behind the second officer in the second row, while 1st Lt. Henry Seton and 2d Lt. Charles M. Rockefeller are seated on the rocks at top right.



46 *South Dakota History*

the Black Hills—Lieut. A[lbert] B. Crittenden, 4th Inf was present with Co.

I am Sir, very Respy Your obt svt
Wm H. Powell
Capt. 4th Inf
Comg Co. G

Camp on Whitewood Creek Dakota
Sep't 15'' 1876.

Lieut T. Capron 9'' Infy
Battalion Adjutant
Sir:

In compliance with instructions from Battalion Hd''qrs. I have the honor to report that I was ordered to report to Capt Burt 9'' Inf'y on the evening of the 9'' of Sep't 1876, with my company for the purpose of repelling an impudent assault of Sioux Indians on our Camp on Rabit Creek. I was directed by Cap't Burt to take and hold the rocky ledge immediately in front of the Infantry camp and on the left and most advanced position. This ledge was occupied by Indians when we advanced, the company moving to the front on a run driving the Indians from the ridge and occupying the same when we found numerous pony tracks and several shells of Calibre 45 and some reloading shells of Cal 50. While advancing we were subjected to a brisk fire from the Indians but fortunately their fire was very high. After occupying ridge the Indians did not come within range and the company was relieved after dark.

Respectfully submitted
Daniel W. Burke
Cap't 14 Infy
Comdg Co

Camp on White-Wood Creek D. T.
Sep 15'' 1876

To T. H. Capron
1st Lt. 9'' Infantry
Battalion Adjt
Sir.

During the skirmish which ocured between our troops and the Indians on the Evening of the 9'' of September last in the vicinity of their village captured that morning by Col. Mills, "B" Co. 14'' Infantry occupied the extreme left of the Infantry line, but were almost immediately after forming line detached and ordered across the

Conflict in Dakota Territory 47

valley in their front to take position on the opposite hill deployed as skirmishers. While crossing over to obey this order of Col. Chambers commanding, the company were under fire of Indians stationed on the bluffs surrounding us, but upon gaining position the Indians mounted were seen retiring rapidly and circling toward our left at a safe distance in our front. The company remained in position as ordered until after dark when it returned to camp.

Very Respectfully
Your Obdt Servant
J. Kennington
Capt 14th Infantry

Camp in the Field
Whitewood Creek W. T. Sept. 15th .76

Cpt. A. S. Burt 9th Inft.
Bvt. Maj. U. S. A.
Sir:

I have the honor to report that during the engagement between the U.S. forces under Brig Genl Geo. Crook and the Sioux Indians on Rabbit Creek D. T. Sept. 9th 1876, Co. H. 9th U. S. Inft. Consisting of Forty enlisted men and two Commissioned officers present for duty, was as directed by you in person, deployed by my command as skirmishers and took possession of a ridge or knoll of land fronting the Inft. Camp of that day, said ridge being taken from the Indians who were firing from the shelter afforded by it, on the Inft. camp. Thereafter the Co. was moved to the extreme right of the line of Inft. skirmishers and performed excellent service in driving or assisting to drive from our lines front a force of between 150 and 200 Indians. During the engagement one Indian was seen to fall from his horse in front of this Company's fire and several others as well as several ponies were evidently struck by shot fired from the ranks of the Company. Pvt. Fitz Henry of the Co. was wounded during the engagement. Lt. [Edgar B.] Robertson and all enlisted men of the Co. acted promptly and well in the discharge of all their respective duties. The Co. held its position until relieved by you at Twilight of that day.

I am sir
Very Respectfully
Your Obdt svt,
C. M. Rockefeller
2nd Lt. 9th Inft Comdg.
Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition
In bivouac, Whitewood Creek, D.T.

Copyright of South Dakota History is the property of South Dakota State Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.

All illustrations in this issue are property of the South Dakota State Historical Society except for those on the following pages: front cover, from Harry H. Anderson, Milwaukee, Wis.; p. 2, from United States Military Academy Library and Archives, West Point, N.Y.; pp. 7, 15, 41, from Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, Crow Agency, Mont.; p. 11, from Wyoming State Museum, Cheyenne, Wyo.; pp. 12, 27, from Charles King, *Campaigning with Crook and Stories of Army Life* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1890); pp. 18, 37 (bottom), from Montana Historical Society, Helena, Mont.; p. 25, from National Archives, Washington, D.C.; p. 34, from Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wis.; p. 37 (top), from *Daring Deeds: Selections from the Youth's Companion* (Boston: Perry Mason Co., 1902); p. 42, from Jerome A. Greene, Denver, Colo.; p. 100, from Paul L. Hedren, Williston, N.Dak.