Edited and Introduced by JEROME A. GREENE

An Artilleryman at Wounded Knee and White Clay Creek

The Reminiscence of Private John W. Comfort

Private John W. Comfort of Battery E, First Artillery Regiment, United States Army, took part in the military occupation of Pine Ridge Agency, South Dakota, from late November 1890 to late January 1891. He participated in the army's disastrous effort to disarm Chief Big Foot's Miniconjou and Hunkpapa Lakota Sioux followers at Wounded Knee Creek on 29 December and engaged in the following day's skirmish with warriors on White Clay Creek. Comfort's account of Wounded Knee is significant not only for its unparalleled detail due to the author's hilltop vantage point overlooking the unfolding turmoil, but also because his is the only known enlisted artilleryman's perspective of the melee that left at least two hundred Lakota men, women, and children dead with many more injured, as well as sixty-six soldiers killed and wounded.

What happened that morning stemmed from a succession of calamitous events that had beset the Lakotas since the 1850s. In the wake of several wars with the United States during the 1860s and 1870s, a succession of treaties and land-cession agreements had confined the people to reservations, where they were expected to live under the rule of government-appointed Indian agents. Making matters worse, each new land agreement diminished the size of the reservation designated in the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, which had promised the Lakotas all of present-day South Dakota west of the Missouri River. In 1876, the federal government imposed an agreement on the Lakotas that resulted in the loss of their sacred Black Hills. Another agreement in 1889 opened much of western South Dakota to white settlement. Dependent on government rations, which could be unreliable, and wracked by crippling diseases such as whooping cough, measles, and influenza, the Lakota people were in crisis by 1890.[1]

1. Jerome A. Greene, *American Carnage: Wounded Knee, 1890* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), pp. 9–64.

In response, many Lakotas came to embrace a restorative movement that included the Ghost Dance, which gave them hope but alarmed white settlers in northwestern Nebraska and around the Black Hills. On 13 November 1890, following a request for troops from Daniel F. Royer, the agent for the Pine Ridge Sioux, President Benjamin Harrison ordered the army to keep the peace on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations, thus setting the stage for possible armed conflict. Royer was a political appointee with no prior experience working with the Lakotas when he arrived at Pine Ridge in October. Under the overall direction of Major General Nelson A. Miles, commander of the Military Division of the Missouri with headquarters in Chicago, many soldiers took the field. Among them was the bulk of the Seventh Cavalry Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer's old unit. The Seventh Cavalry contingent departed Fort Riley, Kansas, for Pine Ridge Agency in late November along with Battery E, First Artillery Regiment, and its accompanying Hotchkiss cannons.[2]

Private Comfort arrived at Pine Ridge with Battery E. Born in Philadelphia in 1844 and a carpenter in civilian life, Comfort was an army "lifer." He served in the Civil War with the Twenty-ninth Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, seeing action on such battlefields as Winchester, Antietam, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Lookout Mountain, Resaca, Kennesaw Mountain, and Atlanta. Within months of mustering out as a sergeant with the volunteer troops in 1865, the twenty-one-year-old signed on with the regular army and joined Battery K, First Artillery, on the Mexican border. According to his service record, Comfort stood 5 feet, 7 and ½ inches tall and had grey eyes, dark hair, and a fair complexion. Discharged in 1868, he reenlisted in 1870, serving with the Fourth Cavalry and participating in several engagements against Indians in west Texas. During an encounter with Comanche and Kiowa Indians in early November 1874, Comfort's valor garnered him a Medal of Honor.[3] *Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie, his*

2. Ibid., pp. 65–102.

3. U.S., Department of War, Register of Army Enlistments, 1798–1914, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group (RG) 94, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (hereafter NARA-DC), accessed online at ancestry.com; John W. Comfort, "Military History of John W. Comfort, U.S. Army," enclosed in John W. Comfort to Winchester Comfort, 5 Apr. 1892, Box 1, John W. Comfort Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Princeton, N.J.; Merle C. Olmsted, "Collectors Field Book: John W. Comfort: Portrait of

regimental commander, recommended Comfort for the medal and called him "a distinguished soldier" who displayed "personal gallantry."[4]

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a U.S. Regular, 1865–1892," *Military Collector & Historian* 20 (Winter 1968): 126–27; U.S., Department of the Army, Public Information Division, *The Medal of Honor of the United States Army* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1948), p. 222.

4. Mackenzie to Adjutant General, United States Army, 31 Aug. 1875, in Joe F. Taylor, ed., *The Indian Campaign on the Staked Plains, 1874–1875* (Canyon, Tex.: Panhandle-Plains Historical Society, 1962), p. 155.

John W. Comfort is pictured here wearing a dress uniform and his Medal of Honor about 1875. Although the chevrons on his sleeve appear to be those of a first sergeant, no record of Comfort holding that rank has been found.

In 1875 Comfort reenlisted at Fort Sill, Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma), and continued with the Fourth Cavalry until taking his discharge "for disability" at Fort Clark, Texas, in 1878, yet a private. He then worked as a teamster for the army quartermaster department. In 1885, he enlisted again in the First Artillery at the Presidio of San Francisco and served until his discharge in 1890 at Fort Douglas, Utah Territory. Despite years of regular army service spanning several notable Indian campaigns and official records vouching for his good character, Comfort never regained his Civil War rank of sergeant. He signed up once more on 5 July 1890. This enlistment brought him to Pine Ridge Agency and, ultimately, the Wounded Knee and White Clay Creek actions.[5]

The thoughtful composition of Private Comfort's narrative suggests that its author was a knowledgeable man who recorded his recollections carefully. In the interest of readability, the editor has occasionally corrected spelling, punctuation, and capitalization to conform to modern usage, with words inserted in brackets where needed to clarify the author's meaning or add necessary information. Comfort occasionally used words that today would be considered racially insensitive. Such expressions were in common usage at the time, and his narrative is presented here much as he wrote it.

Accompanying the document is Comfort's hand-drawn map of the Wounded Knee site. John Comfort enclosed the account of events at Wounded Knee together with the map in a letter to his brother Winchester Comfort of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, dated 5 April 1892 and sent from Fort Sheridan, Illinois. The original reposes among the John W. Comfort Papers, Box 1, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Princeton, New Jersey. The editor is indebted to R. Eli Paul, Special Collections Manager, Kansas City (Mo.) Public Library, for bringing the letter to his attention.

5. Comfort, "Military History of John W. Comfort"; Register of Army Enlistments, ancestry.com.

Brother Chess', ...[6]

I have been writing the enclosed narrative of the last Sioux Campaign a little at a time. All my time in daylight is taken up by various duties and [I] am compelled to write at night. I have had my eyes badly injured and although my sight is still good, writing or reading by artificial light causes my eyes to pain so much that I can do but little of it at any one time.[7] So a letter addressed to Sis or William or you must do for all. I cannot find anything worth writing about very often. A soldier's life in garrison is a same-thing-over-again routine. I detest it. I like to be on the move campaigning[–]the more danger the better. . . .[8]

The killing of Sitting Bull and a few of his immediate followers by the Indian police from Standing Rock Agency who had been sent to arrest him left only Big Foot's band reinforced by renegades from Sitting Bull's and others in a hostile attitude.[9] They were prevented by the disposition of troops from entering the Bad Lands. On the 22nd of Dec. after having surrendered to Major Sumner's[10] command they again made

6. The material omitted here concerns a package of photographs Comfort sent to his brother and various letters exchanged among family members.

7. The nature of Comfort's eye injury is not known. For details of military life on the Indian frontier, 1865–1890, *see* Don Rickey, Jr., *Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay: The Enlisted Soldier Fighting the Indian Wars* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), and the thorough case study provided in Douglas C. McChristian, ed., *Frontier Cavalry Trooper: The Letters of Private Eddie Matthews, 1869–1874* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013).

8. Omitted here are Comfort's opinions on the role of the United States Navy in defending the country's interests.

9. The Hunkpapa Lakota medicine man Sitting Bull was killed during an attempt to arrest him on 15 December 1890. At least thirty-eight of his followers who fled the Standing Rock reservation eventually joined the Miniconjous under Chief Big Foot along the Cheyenne River in South Dakota. For details, *see* Greene, *American Carnage*, pp. 170–90. A solid biography of Sitting Bull is Robert M. Utley, *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1993).

10. Major Edwin V. Sumner, Jr., Eighth Cavalry, served through the Civil War and earned a brevet promotion to brigadier general. His father was a Mexican War veteran and had risen to the rank of major general during the Civil War. Francis B. Heitman, comp., *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army, from Its Organization, September 29, 1789, to March 2, 1903*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), 1:936. In 1890, Sumner campaigned out of Fort Meade, South Dakota, and commanded troops along the Cheyenne River. *See* Greene, *American Carnage*, pp. 199–207.

their escape. They headed south, their exact course not being known, but it was supposed that they would try to reach Pine Ridge Agency, where the majority of discontented Indians were located. On the 28th of Dec. they were discovered by the Indian scouts of Major Whitside,[11] who with 4 troops[12] of 7th Cavalry and 2 Hotchkiss mountain guns,[13] manned by a detachment of Light Battery E, 1st Artillery, were lying on Wounded Knee Creek, about 18 miles from Pine Ridge Agency. Major Whitside immediately put his command in motion. After a rapid march of about 9 miles the hostiles were seen. The troopers and guns were immediately prepared for action. The hostiles approached the command with profuse professions of friendship. After considerable powwowing and reiterating their claim of having always being [been] good Indians, they surrendered (without giving up any arms though)

11. Canadian-born Major Samuel M. Whitside had served in the cavalry during and after the Civil War. In 1890, he commanded a squadron of the Seventh Cavalry. Heitman, *Historical Register*, 1:1031.

12. The basic unit of cavalry in the frontier army in 1890 was the troop, normally commanded by a captain who was assisted by a first lieutenant and a second lieutenant. Equivalent units in the infantry and the artillery were called "companies" and "batteries," respectively. Cavalry regiments had consisted of twelve troops for most of the post-Civil War era, and Congress had authorized as many as one hundred enlisted men in each troop during periods of intense frontier warfare. However, the congressionally mandated army reorganization of 1890 had reduced the number of troops in a regiment to ten, with only forty-four privates plus several corporals and sergeants per troop. In reality, most frontier army units were chronically understrength. Gregory J. W. Urwin, *The United States Cavalry: An Illustrated History, 1776–1944* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), p. 164; Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866–1891* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 15–18, 25; Jack D. Foner, *The United States Army between Two Wars: Army Life and Reforms, 1865–1898* (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), pp. 1–2; U.S., Department of the Army, Center of Military History, "The U.S. Army in the 1890s," www.history.army.mil/html/forcestruc/usa-1890.html.

13. The breechloading Hotchkiss mountain guns could fire either canister rounds or percussion shells of 1.65 inch caliber. Canister rounds consisted of tin cylinders packed with lead balls that scattered with an effect like that of a large shotgun when the weapon fired. In contrast, percussion shells exploded on impact with their target. As Comfort's account shows, Battery E used both ammunition types to deadly effect at Wounded Knee. Thomas Wilhelm, *A Military Dictionary and Gazetteer* (Philadelphia: L. R. Hamersly & Co., 1881), pp. 85–86; *New York Times*, 15 Dec. 1891; Albert Manucy, *Artillery through the Ages* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1949), pp. 64, 88.

and were conducted to camp on Wounded Knee.[14] A heavy guard was placed so as to entirely surround their camp, the Hotchkiss guns being placed on a slight elevation about 100 yards from the camp, so as to be able to sweep it with canister if necessary.

A courier was immediately sent to General Brooke,[15] commanding at Pine Ridge [Agency], with the intelligence of the capture (so called). General Brooke, knowing that this band was the very worst of all the turbulent spirits of the Sioux Nation, and knowing that if they were allowed to come into the agency, that they and the other Indians

14. Whitside established his camp about eighteen miles northeast of Pine Ridge Agency along Wounded Knee Creek, which runs generally north to empty into the White River some twenty-three miles away. Whitside to John R. Brooke, 27 Dec. 1890, Letters Received, Department of the Platte, 1890–1891, RG 393, NARA-DC.

15. A Pennsylvania native, Brigadier General John R. Brooke had fought in numerous Civil War battles, including Gettysburg and Cold Harbor. He assumed command of the Department of the Platte in 1888 and led field operations on the Lakota reservations from November 1890 until Major General Nelson A. Miles took personal command on 31 December. Heitman, *Historical Register*, 1:248; Greene, *American Carnage*, pp. 139, 290.

The men of Battery E, First United States Artillery, are pictured here with a Hotchkiss mountain gun. Private John W. Comfort stands second from the left between Captain Allyn Capron (far left) and Second Lieutenant Harry L. Hawthorne, both of whom are mentioned in his account.

of like character who were numerous and who would gladly help them in any deviltry that they might propose and soon cause a general outbreak, determined to disarm them and send them away from Dakota.[16]

To make sure of disarming them, the 2nd Battalion,[17] 7th Cavalry, commanded by Capt. Ilsley, two Hotchkiss guns, commanded by Capt. Capron, all under command of Col. Forsyth 7th Cavalry, were ordered to reinforce the troops on Wounded Knee.[18] The command left the agency at 4 p.m. Dec. 28th and arrived in sight of the campfires of the guards over the Indians about 8 p.m. To prevent the Indians from knowing that the troops that they had surrendered to were being heavily reinforced and [then] cause a stampede, Col. Forsyth's command made a long detour to the north and east, coming into the camp of the 1st Battalion on the flank farthest from the Indians. As little noise as possible being made, the troopers silently unsaddling and bivouacking, the Hotchkiss guns being unpacked and placed on the hill on the right of the two already in position, all the ammunition being placed near by the crews of the guns remaining with them, saddle and pack animals being sent to the rear with the animals of the other [already emplaced] guns. The night was very cold and the troopers and cannoneers who were without tents or fires, passed a very uncomfortable night, most of them walking to and fro to keep warm, discussing what

16. Following their disarmament, Whitside's troops were to conduct Big Foot and his people south to the railroad at Gordon, Nebraska, and send them east for detention at Fort Omaha. Greene, *American Carnage*, pp. 217, 224.

17. A battalion was a group of companies (but less than a regiment) operating together, typically commanded by a major or a senior captain. The army officially changed its terms for cavalry units in 1889, substituting "troop" for "company" and "squadron" for "battalion." Infantry units continued to use the previous terminology. Ibid., p. 202.

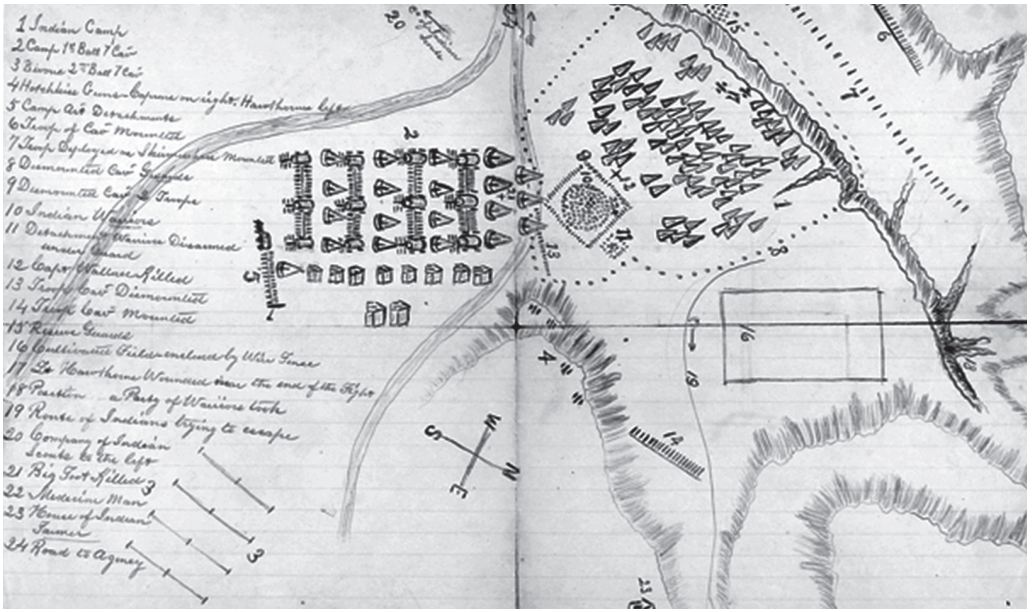
18. Captain Charles S. Ilsley was a Civil War veteran, having served as an officer in the Fifteenth Maine Volunteer Infantry. Commissioned a lieutenant in the regular army in 1866, he had joined the Seventh Cavalry in 1870 and was promoted to captain in 1871. Captain Allyn Capron, a native of Florida, graduated from West Point in 1867 and had served with the First Artillery throughout his army career. James W. Forsyth, from Ohio, graduated from West Point in 1856. He spent much of the Civil War as an aide to Major General Philip H. Sheridan and attained the brevet rank of brigadier general. He became colonel of the Seventh Cavalry in 1886. Heitman, *Historical Register*, 1:281, 430, 562.

the probabilities were for the morrow.[19] The young lads who had never heard the whistling of hostile lead were eagerly discussing the chances for glory in the morning, while the old veterans of the war (there is still a few left in the Army) and participators in many Indian fights were conspicuous by their silence or an occasional growl about too much talking, but all things have an end. The anxiously awaited morning came at last, clear and calm. The troops after a hasty breakfast made their preparations for business silently and promptly, the cannoneers on the hill preparing their guns for immediate use, each gunner training his piece on a point in the Indian camp where in his judgment it would do the most good.

About 8 o'clock all the cavalry who were to remain mounted took their positions at a rapid gait, those that were dismounted taking their assigned positions as if going on parade. The rough sketch of the camp and vicinity shows the position of every troop and gun as nearly exact as my memory recalls at the moment immediately preceding the break made by the Indians. By the order of Col. Forsyth all the warriors were notified to assemble on the open ground between the Indian camp and the flank of the camp of the 1st Battalion, 7 Cavalry, where three troops of dismounted cavalry were formed. The Indian warriors obeyed slowly and sullenly—each warrior being completely enveloped in a piece of white cotton cloth which hid from view whatever weapon he carried. They took the position designated and all squatted down in a compact body. Two dismounted troops were then placed so as to enclose them on three sides.[20] They were then ordered to go by small squads to their tepees to get their arms and surrender them, the main body being held under control until each squad had been disarmed. The first squad that went, after considerable delay during which they no doubt posted

19. Only the soldiers of Major Whitside's squadron of the Seventh Cavalry, who had reached Wounded Knee two days earlier to search for Big Foot's people, had tents with them. Some of Forsyth's men spent the night lying on the ground in buffalo overcoats. Greene, *American Carnage*, p. 217.

20. These were Troops B and K, commanded by Captains Charles A. Varnum and George D. Wallace, respectively. These soldiers occupied an inward-facing V- or U-shaped formation along the south and west sides of the open ground that effectively enclosed the area where the warriors had assembled. Ibid., p. 225.



Private Comfort's vantage point on a hill overlooking the Lakota camp is at the center of his sketch of Wounded Knee. The north arrow on his map actually points in a westerly direction.

their squaws how to act during the fight which they had determined to make,[21] returned and delivered up a few old guns—protesting that they were the only guns they had. It was well known that they were lying, for the day before when they surrendered the bucks were told to form [in] line for the purpose of counting so as to know how many rations to issue to them, which they eagerly did, and as the count was made it was then seen that each warrior had a rifle and a belt of ammunition and a considerable number of revolvers. This squad [of Indians] was then placed under a strong guard separate from the other warriors.

Several squads of soldiers from another dismounted troop were then sent to search the tepees and squaws for arms.[22] The squaws took advantage of every opportunity to prevent the soldiers from finding

21. This statement is presumption on Comfort's part.

22. Those "squads of soldiers" were drawn from among the men of B and K troops previously aligned to enclose the south and west sides of the council ground. Loyd S. McCormick, "Wounded Knee and Drexel Mission Fights, December 29th and 30th,

and securing arms. Some were detected hiding rifles in the grass. Some would keep them concealed on their persons until the opportunity presented itself, and then hid them in a tepee or wagon that had been searched. Some resisted with fury the taking of weapons which were found on them. The result of the search made it evident that nearly all the warriors had their rifles and other weapons hid on their persons. It was then determined to disarm the warriors [in the council area] without any more nonsense. The line of troopers around the warriors was then drawn closer until there was about 20 ft at the most of open space between soldier and Indian. The open side of the square being closed by the contraction of the line of soldiers, a party of soldiers then commenced to search the persons of the squad of warriors that were held separate.

Just at this time the medicine man[23] appeared dressed in a very fantastic suit of buckskin and commenced an incantation, gesticulating and chanting [and] assuming all kinds of dramatic attitudes, whistling a shrill weird tune and finally, after calling out in terribly earnest tones with outstretched arms and face turned toward the heavens, he suddenly stooped [and] gathered both hands full of dirt and scattered it over the warriors. Its effect was like a live coal thrown into [a] magazine of loose powder. From an intensely dramatic scene to a terribly tragic one was but the work of a moment.

The warriors sprang to their feet as one man, and from under their mantles each one produced a rifle or war club. Then a single shot, followed immediately by a volley right in the faces of the troopers, a return volley from the troopers, a mad rush, [fighting] hand to hand, shooting, stabbing, [and] clubbing. Soldiers, warriors, squaws and children all mixed, horses hitched to Indian wagons dashing wildly about, tepees upset on fire, everybody running, some for shelter and safety, some in pursuit of a foe, the outside lines of troopers pouring in a rapid fire. All this time the artillerymen on the hill were standing, lanyard in

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1890," p. 9, U.S. 7th Cavalry Collection, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, Crow Agency, Mont.

23. The precise identity of this individual remains unknown. He was later referenced by several names, including Yellow Bird, Black Fox, Black Coyote, Sits Straight, Good Thunder, and Shakes Bird. Greene, *American Carnage*, p. 227.

hand,[24] [Hotchkiss] guns shotted with canister, waiting for their comrades of the cavalry to get clear from amidst the Indians.

Most of the line of outside guards who were dismounted rallied together on the farther side of the ravine.[25] What was left of the two troops that enclosed the warriors, and the squads of the third troop who were amongst the tepees and squaws, rallied on the hill in rear of and left of the guns.[26] A great many, in trying to get clear from amongst the Indians, rushed directly towards the guns, making it impossible for the guns to open without slaughtering friends as well as foes. There was some cool old hands serving the guns who by their advice and example kept their young and hot-headed comrades in restraint. What seemed an hour to the artillerymen was really but a minute or two. Finally the way was clear—crack—crash went the 4 guns sending their canister tearing into the mass of warriors, squaws, children & horses. It was a terrible thing to do, but the warriors were mixed with the squaws and were firing rapidly with their Winchesters, and squaws were seen to kill wounded soldiers.

In a moment more, the Indians' herd of horses, which had previously been brought in by the squaws and either saddled or hitched to wagons, dashed from the camp, some 70 or 80 of them ridden, to escape from the camp. Their safest way would have been to have made a rush to the south, cross the ravine, and face the company of mounted scouts (Cheyennes [and Oglalas]) who were of no account. To the west [east] they would have to face two [one] mounted troops and about 40 dismounted troopers.[27] To the east [west] were the [Hotchkiss] guns, a full mounted troop on their right and about 80 dismounted troopers

24. The lanyard was a strong, twelve-foot-long cord with an iron hook at one end and a wooden pull handle at the other that was used to fire an artillery piece. For each shot, the hook was attached to a friction primer on the gun. When a gunner standing off to the side pulled the cord, the primer ignited the main powder charge and fired the weapon. Wilhelm, *Military Dictionary*, p. 235; Francis A. Lord, *Civil War Collector's Encyclopedia* (New York: Castle Books, 1965), pp. 42–46.

25. This extensive ravine, measuring some twenty-five feet deep and perhaps one hundred fifty feet across, lay to the south of the Lakota camp and the unfolding events in the council circle. The "outside guards" were members of the chain guard established the night before to surround the Indian camp. *See* Greene, *American Carnage*, pp. 214, 218–20.

26. Comfort's "third troop" seemingly composed part of the surrounding chain guard.

27. Comfort appears to have misoriented his map by 90 degrees, thus making the

on the left,[28] and in rear to the north [west] was a barbed wire fence enclosing a piece of ground about two acres in extent. They chose the worst [course], and came tearing directly toward the guns until clear of the fence and then to the north [west], endeavoring to reach the rough broken country. The guns, after exhausting their canister, used percussion shell, continuing their fire until what was left of the flying Indians were hid from view in a ravine about 2500 yards distant, where three troops of cavalry rounded them up, killing or capturing the entire party, nearly all the captured being wounded. The warriors who had sought shelter in the ravine on the west [south] side of the Indian camp kept up a lively fire with their Winchesters, and gave the dismounted troopers a lively fight until they were killed.

At a point where a side ravine joined the main one, a small party of warriors had taken cover and, protected by the steep banks, were secure from the fire of the skirmishers, except at such times as they chose to expose themselves in returning the fire of the skirmishers, who were lying flat on the ground about 30 or 40 yards from the banks of the [side] ravine.[29] One or two [warriors] at a time would rush up the bank where they could secure footing, deliver their fire, and fall back again. They would receive the fire of fifteen or twenty carbines, but it was not certain that they were always killed, and not knowing how many warriors had taken shelter there, it was determined to try the effect of shell on their hiding places for this purpose. One of Lt. Hawthorne's[30] guns was used, taking position on the high ground to the right (north) of the wire fence and about 75 yards from it. It was soon found that the

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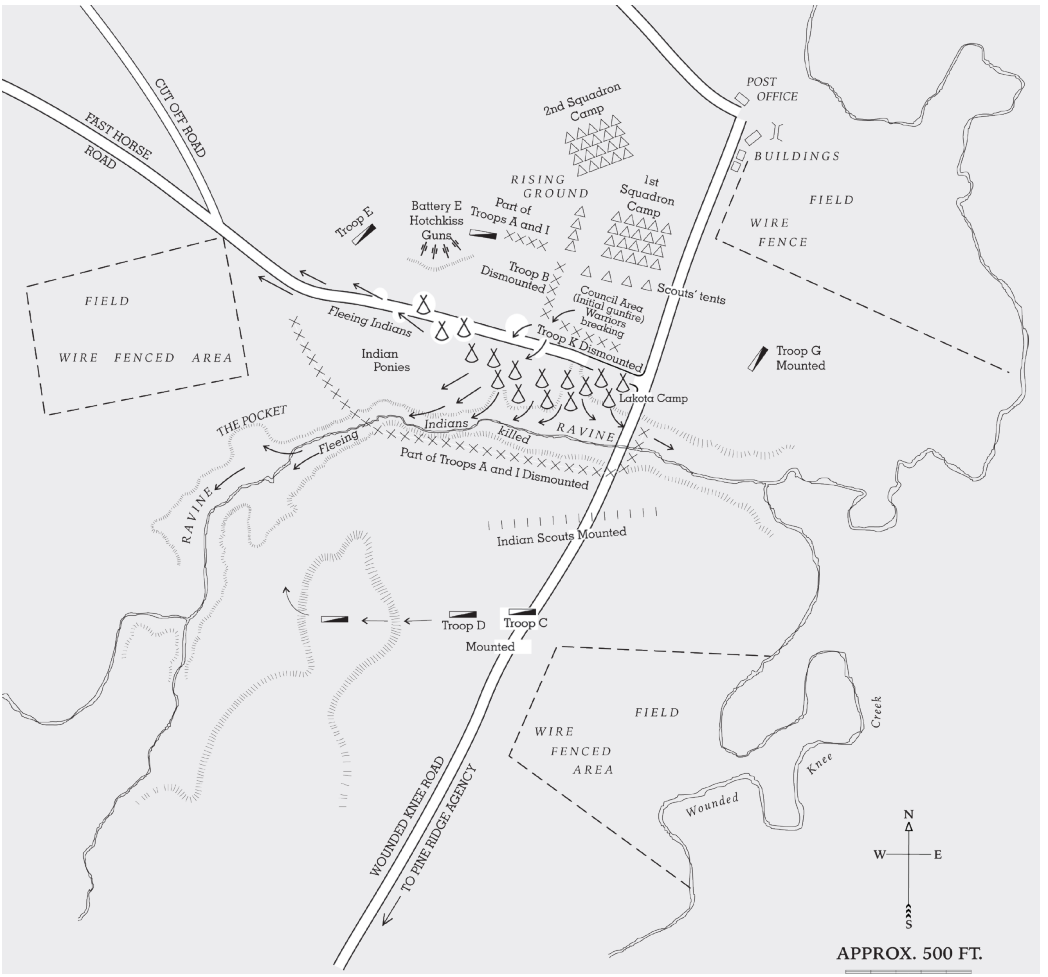
directions he gives here rather confusing. The north arrow on Comfort's map actually points in a westerly direction. The single mounted unit was Troop G. The dismounted troopers belonged to Troops A and I, which composed the chain guard. "Scene of the Fight with Big Foot's Band Dec. 29th 1890 Showing position of Troops when first shot was fired" (map), Envelope 207#1, Box 19, Miscellaneous Files, RG 94, NARA-DC.

28. The mounted troop west of the guns was Troop E. The dismounted troopers belonged to the surrounding chain guard. Ibid.

29. This deep-walled subordinate gulch area of the main ravine lay approximately two hundred fifty yards southwest of the Hotchkiss guns. It branched from the north rim of the main ravine, although Comfort's map erroneously located it along the south rim, and was known as "the pocket." Ibid.

30. A Minnesota native, Second Lieutenant Harry L. Hawthorne graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1882 and served in the navy until 1884, when he trans-



This modern view of Wounded Knee shows the paths taken by fleeing Indians after the first shots were fired. (Map by Robert G. Pilk)

shell could not reach the Indians from this position, and the gun was then run down into the Indian camp and took position on the bank of the ravine and was about 300 yards from the position occupied by the Indians.[31] The explosion of the first shell among them drew the fire of

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ferred to the Second Artillery. He was attached to Battery E, First Artillery, for operations on the Lakota reservations. Hawthorne received a Medal of Honor for his service at Wounded Knee. Heitman, *Historical Register*, 1:513–14.

the hidden warriors on the gun. Almost immediately, Lt. Hawthorne was severely wounded and was carried out of range by one of the gun's crew.[32] The shelling was continued by the gunner and his men, and a second gun was run down by its detachment, but had hardly taken position when both guns were ordered back to the hill by Capt. Capron.

This was caused by a party of about 150 warriors from the agency coming out to assist Big Foot's band [by] making an attack on the three troops of cavalry, who had just finished rounding up the remnant of Big Foot's band, and who were about two miles from the camp. Finding that they were too late and could affect nothing, they [the Indians] soon retired.[33] By Col. Forsyth's order, all the troops were then drawn in and preparations made to meet an attack by the warriors from the agency, who had left [there] in a body upon hearing of the fighting on Wounded Knee. (Col. Forsyth had sent a courier to Gen. Brooke, shortly after the fighting commenced. He did not let the grass grow under his horse's feet, but rode at top speed. Yet the Indians at the agency knew of the fighting as soon as Gen. Brooke.)[34]

All along the crest of the ridge occupied by the guns, a rude breastwork was hastily constructed of boxes of hard bread, sacks of flour and

31. Corporal Paul H. Weinert rolled the gun into position to open fire on the "pocket." He later received the Medal of Honor for his action. *Medal of Honor of the United States Army*, p. 236. For discussion of the "pocket" action, *see* Greene, *American Carnage*, pp. 238–39, 278–80.

32. Private Joshua B. Hartzog, Battery E, First Artillery, rescued Hawthorne and "carried him out of range of the hostile guns," an action for which Hartzog received the Medal of Honor. *Medal of Honor of the United States Army*, p. 236. For the later controversy over the Medals of Honor awarded for actions at Wounded Knee, *see* Greene, *American Carnage*, pp. 355–57.

33. These warriors were largely Brulés (Sicangus) from among Chief Two Strike's followers, just arrived from Pine Ridge Agency where they had heard the distant booming of the Hotchkiss cannon. The soldiers involved were from C, D, and G troops of the Seventh Cavalry. Greene, *American Carnage*, p. 241.
American Carnage, pp. 355–57.

34. The principal courier was Second Lieutenant Guy H. Preston, Ninth Cavalry, of the Indian scout detachment. He probably departed Wounded Knee shortly after 10:00 a.m. and gained Brooke's office at Pine Ridge Agency shortly after noon. A similar message scribbled by First Lieutenant Charles W. Taylor, Ninth Cavalry, went forward via an Indian scout at about the same time and reached the agency at 12:30 p.m. Oglalas at Pine Ridge also heard the Hotchkiss cannon discharging far away and soon learned the news via Indian messengers. Ibid., pp. 235, 245, 493n55.

bacon, bags of grain, and anything else that would afford protection from bullets, the wagons being placed in rear of the line, end to end, so as to protect the rear and partially shelter the animals should an attack be made in sufficient force to surround the command. Digging was not practical, as the ground was frozen as hard as rock and would require too much time. In the meantime, all of the wounded Indians were brought in and cared for, the dead [soldiers] being gathered and placed in a row near the temporary hospital.[35]

About 3 p.m., orders were given to get ready to move back to the agency. The wounded soldiers [were] placed in wagons and made as comfortable as possible. The dead [were] piled on top of one another like cordwood in three wagons, the Indian prisoners placed in others under guard and a start made. The weather was pretty cool, being several degrees below the freezing point, and as night drew on got cooler still. The bodies of the dead [soldiers] were as stiff as logs when placed in the wagons. Among the dead was a trooper who had received a terrible wound in the head. He was unconscious when found, and not one among all those who saw him had the least idea that there was any life in him. He was placed in a wagon on top of dead bodies with a layer of dead over him. He remained in that wagon while it was drawn over a rough road for 18 miles, all the night of the 29th, all of the 30th and until the morning of the 31st, and it was only discovered that he had life in him as they were in the act of taking him out of the wagon to place him in his coffin. He recovered and is still living, with sight and hearing nearly gone. It was a close call. He had a constitution strong enough to keep death away from a dozen badly wounded [men].[36]

The march back to the agency was done slowly and cautiously. After night set in, frequent halts were made, the road ahead and the country on both sides being carefully examined to prevent getting into a trap, great care being taken to insure the safety of the wounded should the command be attacked. The command reached the agency about

35. Doctors and hospital corpsmen located a field hospital east of the Hotchkiss guns, near the Seventh Cavalry first squadron's bivouac area. Ibid., p. 241.

36. This soldier has tentatively been identified as Private Harry L. Duncan, Troop A, Seventh Cavalry, who had received a "pistol shot of face" at Wounded Knee. Muster Roll, Troop A, Seventh Cavalry, 31 Dec. 1890, RG 94, NARA-DC.

12 m [midnight] and went into their old camps.[37] The loss of the troops at Wounded Knee was 1 commissioned officer killed (Capt. Wallace) and 27 enlisted men, 4 commissioned officers wounded and 43 enlisted men. Big Foot's band numbered 300 souls, 120 of whom were warriors. Three days after the fight a strong party was sent out to bury the dead Indians. They found 243 bodies, 108 of them being warriors.[38] As about 50 prisoners were brought in with the 7th, it left only 7 or 8 not accounted for.

A great amount of stuff was published in the newspapers after the fight accusing the 7th Cavalry of purposely butchering everything in sight out of revenge for the massacre of Custer and his men in '76 (many of these warriors being engaged in that affair) and that the men of the 7th raised the cry of "Remember Custer." That was and is utter nonsense. There was no battle cry of any sort raised[39]—very little talking being done by the men or officers except to call out to one another that a warrior was hiding here or there, or look out for that fellow—he is playing possum and will shoot—which several of the warriors did. The killing of squaws and children was unavoidable in a mixed melee of a fight like that was, and there is no doubt but that the shots fired by the warriors in the first few minutes of the fight did as much execution among squaws and children as the fire of the soldiers.[40] Some of the squaws fought as well as the bucks. Then again it was said in the papers

37. Other accounts state that the column reached Pine Ridge Agency around 9:30 to 10:00 p.m. *See* Charles B. Ewing, "Wounded of the Wounded Knee Battlefield, with Remarks on Wounds Produced by Large and Small Caliber Bullets," *The Transactions of the Second Annual Meeting of the Association of Military Surgeons of the National Guard of the United States* (St. Louis: Becktold & Co., 1892), p. 39.

38. The precise source of Comfort's tallies is unknown. Official documents recorded army losses at thirty killed, including one Indian scout, and thirty-six wounded, six of whom later died of their injuries. Lakota losses numbered at least two hundred killed with an unknown number wounded. One hundred forty-six Lakotas, including Big Foot, were interred in a mass grave atop the hill near where the Hotchkiss guns had been positioned. Greene, *American Carnage*, pp. 288, 500n35.

39. Comfort correctly describes the alleged revenge motive for the actions of the Seventh Cavalry at Wounded Knee as largely a creation of the press. For a full explanation, *see* ibid., pp. 309–10.

40. Many women and children died when Lakota men in the council circle opened fire on Troops B and K, Seventh Cavalry, situated on the southern and western portions

that such a strong force of soldiers should have disarmed the Indians without fighting (more nonsense). Had there been ten times as many soldiers they could not have disarmed those warriors. They were the bravest and best warriors of the whole Sioux Nation. The messiah craze and ghost dancing had got them to believe that the soldiers bullets could not kill them.[41] Their medicine man had just preached a wild fanatical sermon, had told them that the soldiers would kill them all as soon as they gave their arms up, had exhorted them to die fighting like great warriors, and the fight commenced.[42]

The disparity of force was not half as great as the difference in numbers. There was eight troops of cavalry numbering about 400 men, twenty-two artillerymen with 4 guns. Sixty of the cavalry were recruits just joined a few days previous to the fight (inexperienced lads just from home). Of the remainder, not over two hundred had ever been on a campaign, and the half of them were never in a battle with either white men or Indians. The 120 warriors had no superior on the earth as fighting men.[43] They were taught to be brave, to shoot well and to fight to the death from infancy. The whole aim and training of an Indian, and his sole ambition, is to become a great warrior. Physically, they were the finest lot of men I ever saw, above average height, many of

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of the circle. Some of the warriors' bullets passed through the soldiers' ranks and struck their own noncombatants. However, as the warriors fought their way through the cavalry ranks while struggling to reach the large ravine, the soldiers wheeled about. Army gunfire then struck running men, women, and children seeking shelter in the ravine and beyond over the next half hour or more. Ibid., pp. 28–35. *See also* the map accompanying Father Francis Craft's account, reproduced in Thomas W. Foley, ed., *At Standing Rock and Wounded Knee: The Journals and Papers of Father Francis M. Craft, 1888–1890* (Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark, 2009), p. 309.

41. Many of the Lakota men, women, and children wore decorated muslin "ghost shirts," which they believed to be bulletproof. Greene, *American Carnage*, pp. 80–81, 442n37.

42. For this episode before the fighting broke out, *see* ibid., pp. 227–28.

43. Forsyth's command of 472 officers and men, consisting of most of the Seventh Cavalry plus Battery E and various hospital corpsmen and scouts, included forty-nine recent recruits who had little or no training. Big Foot's band numbered approximately 370 people, including some thirty-eight Hunkpapa followers of Sitting Bull and thirty followers of Miniconjou Chief Hump. Only about 120 of these Indians were warriors. Ibid., p. 221.

them over 6 feet, very powerfully built, some of them being Herculean in muscular development.

The first shot fired in the action mortally wounded Capt. Wallace (through the bowels). He made a gallant fight after receiving it, emptying five chambers of his pistol before he went down from a blow on the head with a war club, which caused instant death.[44] I was looking right at Wallace at the time, but had to stand and look on with the rest of the artillerymen. I was number one of my piece, the second from the right.[45]

In the first rush after the two troops and the warriors had poured their volleys into each other, I saw four warriors close in on a cavalry sergeant. Having no time to load, he used his carbine as a club. He went down, but so did they from the fire that was focused on them from several points. A private in the act of loading his carbine was beset by a warrior who placed the muzzle of his Winchester right against the soldier's breast and fired. He killed the soldier but fell dead beside him. I saw all this before the space between us and the Indians was clear of living cavalrymen. After, I was too busy in working my piece to notice anything except a good place to send in a shot. My gunner was a fine young fellow, but apt to shoot wild, so I aimed and fired the gun myself. The sergeant major of the 7th and a hospital steward were killed in amongst the Indian tepees—they had been assisting in searching for

44. A South Carolinian, George D. Wallace graduated from West Point in 1872 and spent his entire army career with the Seventh Cavalry. He had fought at the Little Bighorn in 1876 and was promoted to captain in 1885. Heitman, *Historical Register*, 1:998. For a full biography, *see* John D. Mackintosh, *Custer's Southern Officer: Captain George D. Wallace, 7th U.S. Cavalry* (Lexington, S.C.: Cloud Creek Press, 2002).

45. Comfort was apparently facing the Indian camp. Based on his experience, he was likely the gun commander who oversaw the piece and observed where the shots landed. His team would have included a loader, an aimer, and a gunner who discharged the piece. The Hotchkiss mountain gun had an effective range in excess of thirty-five hundred yards. U.S., Department of War, *Annual Report of the Secretary of War for the Year 1880*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880), 3:132–34; Edward S. Farrow, *Farrow's Military Encyclopedia*, 3 vols. (New York: Military-Naval Publishing Company, 1895), 2:57. For more information on the operation of the guns, *see* Larry D. Roberts, "Battery E, 1st Artillery, at Wounded Knee—December, 1890," *Heritage of the Great Plains* 13 (Spring 1980): 4–9.

arms.[46] The Q.M. [quartermaster] sergeant, 7th Cavalry, who was taking a hand in the fight had his chin and lower front teeth partly carried away by a shot. He was an inveterate talker. It must have been great punishment to him to be unable to talk—he is a brave fellow though.[47] Many of the wounded came immediately to our guns before they were directed to a place where their wounds could be attended to, leaving their carbines and ammunition [with us]. Our numbers 3 and 4[48] could not resist the opportunity, but picked up a carbine apiece and used them during the rest of the fight. An old man, a Catholic priest who had been for many years among the Sioux and other Indians, who had come out from the agency in the interest of peace, and was well known by these Indians, had a knife plunged into him by one of the warriors. Though seriously wounded, he recovered and is still among the Indians.[49]

When we reached our camp [at Pine Ridge Agency] after getting back from Wounded Knee, we found the tents were still standing, but neither man, horse, or gun were present. What blankets and clothing we had left [the previous evening when departing for Wounded Knee] were scattered about the tents in the utmost confusion. Everything showed that the camp had been vacated in haste. We had left a lieutenant and 4 enlisted men, our 4 heavy field guns and horses enough to draw two guns.[50] It appeared that as soon as the Indians at the agency had heard of the fighting on Wounded Knee they hastily left for the

46. The fatalities were Sergeant Major Richard W. Corwine and Hospital Steward Oscar Pollock. Regimental Return of the Seventh Cavalry, Dec. 1890, RG 94, NARA-DC.

47. Although badly wounded near the Lakota camp, Quartermaster Sergeant Charles Campbell survived the encounter at Wounded Knee. Muster Roll, Seventh Cavalry, 31 Dec. 1890, RG 94, NARA-DC.; Ewing, "Wounded of the Wounded Knee Battlefield," pp. 42–43.

48. Comfort again refers to the four-man crews that operated the Hotchkiss mountain guns.

49. Father Francis Craft was a Jesuit missionary who accompanied the soldiers to Wounded Knee to help negotiate the anticipated disarmament. As the melee erupted, Craft suffered a severe knife wound to his lungs, which he survived. He was only thirty-eight years old, considerably younger than Comfort. For a biography, *see* Thomas W. Foley, *Father Francis M. Craft: Missionary to the Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

50. First Lieutenant Ezra B. Fuller, regimental quartermaster of the Seventh Cavalry, commanded the camp guard of forty men. Greene, *American Carnage*, p. 215.

broken country in a body, a considerable number of them opening fire on the agency employees and the troops stationed there. By order of General Brooke, the battery left their camp, which was on a flat near the White Clay Creek, where there was shelter from the cold winds, and about three-fourths of a mile from the agency, and took position on a hill close to and south of the agency, where they could command the country for a long distance, and at the same time be supported by the infantry, ten companies of the Second and Eighth regiments, who were posted in advantageous positions in the vicinity. The Indians, who numbered about 1500 warriors, could have given the troops a hard fight, but the sight of the big guns, which they had a great dread of, made them keep at a respectful distance and from attacking the agency in force. After a scattering fire at long range they disappeared. Their fire killed one citizen employee and wounded five soldiers. The soldiers cussed Gen. Brooke roundly for what they termed cowardice on his part in not letting them open fire on the Indians.[51]

Early in the morning of the 30th considerable firing was heard from a point about two miles northeast of the agency. This was caused by the Indians making an attack on a train of wagons escorted by a troop of the 9th Cavalry. When Big Foot's band was corralled at Wounded Knee, a courier was sent to Col. [Major] Guy V. Henry, commanding a battalion of four troops [of] 9th Cavalry (colored) who were scouting on White River in the edge of the Badlands for this same body of hostiles. He immediately made a rapid march to the agency, arriving there about daybreak of the 30th, having covered over a hundred miles in the preceding 33 hours.[52] The advance companies had been in camp but a short time. When their train was attacked, they immediately saddled

51. Brooke feared that returning fire might bring on a greater barrage from the Indians. For details of the fighting near the agency on the afternoon of 29 December, *see* Thomas W. Wilson, "The Attack on the Pine Ridge Agency, S.D.," *United Service*, n.s., 7 (June 1892): 562–68.

52. Major Guy V. Henry commanded the Ninth Cavalry squadron. During the Civil War, Henry had earned brevets for bravery at Petersburg, Virginia, and other engagements. He also served during the Great Sioux War of 1876–1877. Heitman, *Historical Register*, 1:523. On 24 December 1890, General Miles had directed Brooke to send Major Henry's cavalrymen out to find Big Foot and his people. The Buffalo Soldiers left Pine Ridge Agency on the afternoon of Christmas Eve, traveling north beyond White River and covering forty miles before stopping at 4 a.m. Over the next few days they can-

again and went back on a dead run to save it, accompanied by one of Hayden's guns.[53] As they went dashing by, "Boots and Saddles" sounded in our camp (the eight [Seventh Cavalry] troops, [the artillerymen,] and our 4 Hotchkiss guns), [and] in a few minutes we were after them. The attack proved to be but a slight [illegible]. A small party of hostiles had managed to get close to the train without suspicion by wearing some clothes as Indian scouts and succeeded in killing a colored trooper.[54] They were easily driven off, assisted in their flight by shell from Hayden's gun. All the troops then returned to camp expecting to get some rest, which both men and animals needed.

We had just unpacked our guns and unsaddled when "Boots and Saddles" again sounded with curses not only deep but loud. The men sprang for their horses and mules, packed and saddled, and in an almost incredible short time were dashing through the agency toward the hills to the north. The action this time was caused by several columns of smoke arising beyond the range of hills to the north of the agency. The hostiles were burning all the houses and haystacks belonging to the peaceably disposed Indians who had left their little farms through fear of their hostile kindred and had come into the agency for protection. About five miles north in the valley of the White Clay [Creek] the Catholic Missionary Society had erected a fine and commodious brick building for the purpose of educating Indian children.[55] There were at this time several white female teachers in the building, and it was to save these and the building from destruction that we were ordered out.

We marched rapidly, passing several houses that had been burnt

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vassed the country to the northwest and southeast but failed to intercept the Sioux, who had followed a course farther to the east. After Wounded Knee, Brooke alerted Henry, and the major undertook his forced march back to the agency. Greene, *American Carnage,* pp. 204–5, 289, 291.

53. Second Lieutenant John L. Hayden, First Artillery, had accompanied Henry's scouting force with two Hotchkiss guns of Battery E. Roberts, "Battery E, First Artillery," p. 5.

54. The fatal casualty was Private Charles Haywood of Troop D, Ninth Cavalry. Greene, *American Carnage,* p. 398.

55. Philanthropist Katherine Drexel of Philadelphia funded the construction of the Holy Rosary Mission and boarding school in 1888. Ibid., p. 86.

or were on fire, but found the mission building and inmates safe. The command pushed on about a mile and a half farther, when the advance was met by a sharp fire from the Indians ambushed [ensconced] on the crest of a ridge to the left front. The troops were immediately formed for an advance in line or defense. The country was very favorable for the Indians. Ridge after ridge, spurs of the main ridges that ran parallel to the creek on both sides separated by deep ravines, each succeeding ridge commanded by the one beyond. After about half an hour skirmishing and shelling of ravines and small bodies of Indians who showed themselves, Colonel Forsyth became convinced that it was only the rear guard of the hostiles that were in his immediate front, and that the main force were probably in some very strong position that would only invite disaster by attacking with the force present. Coming over to where my gun was in position, he gave orders to Capt. Ilsley (who was watching the effect of my shell on a body of warriors on the other side of the creek below) to move his battalion back to a good position so as to cover the withdrawal of the [other] battalion, that as the mission people were safe he did not feel justified in pushing matters and intended to return to the agency.

One battalion moved back to the crest of the first ridge after crossing the creek coming from the mission. There being no position that our guns could take that would not [be] exposed to a short-range fire from the hostiles' Winchesters, we were ordered to retire to where the led horses were on the creek bottom just behind the ridge.[56] Had we taken position on the crest with the cavalry (who by lying down behind the crest and only exposing themselves partly when firing, and who were comparatively safe) every artilleryman would have been killed or wounded in a few minutes without having any show [i.e., chance] to return an effective fire on the Indians. The 1st battalion then fell back and took position on the left of the 2nd. The warriors, becoming bold by the retreat of the troops and reinforced by many from the main body, commenced to press the attack and to try and work around the flanks.

The loud reports of our guns and the continuous rattle of rifles [car-

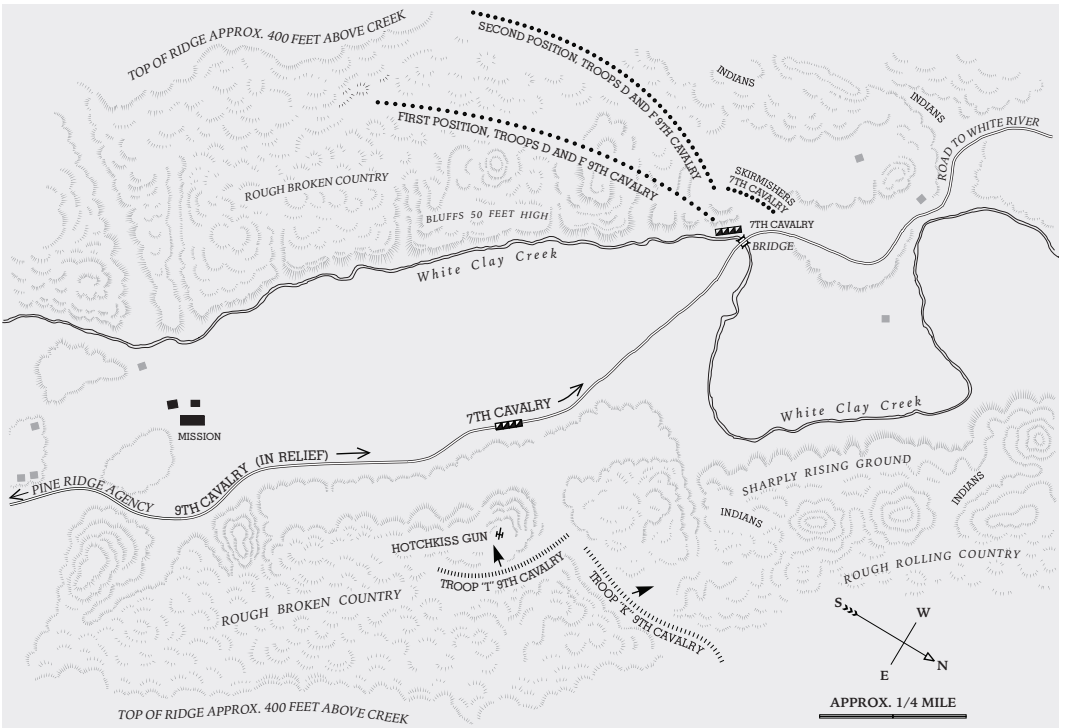
56. In dismounted skirmish combat, every fourth trooper was designated to link four horses together and lead them to cover behind the firing line. *See United States Cavalry Tactics* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1890), pp. 266–69.

bines] was plainly heard by the troops and citizens at the agency. It was known that the hostiles could bring from twelve to fifteen hundred warriors to battle with the 7th, and the rough and difficult character of the country made it possible that the troops could have been caught in a bad position. These facts coupled with the highly exaggerated reports of a couple of citizens (who had accompanied the column from the agency, and who flew back as soon as the firing became sharp) that the whole command was surrounded in a bad place and was in danger of being massacred—and that it was another Custer affair—made everyone at the agency a little anxious. The four troops of the 9th under Col. [Major] Henry and one of Hayden's guns were ordered out to assist the 7th.

In a few minutes after the 1st battalion had gained the new position, all the horses and guns were ordered to retire to the mission, preparatory to another retrograde movement of the fighting line. After crossing the creek the road ran along the base of high hills until near the mission. Seeing a position where a gun could shell the Indians by firing over the troops and also command the creek bottom for a long distance and also command any move on the part of the Indians around the left and rear of the 7th, I asked for and received permission to place my gun there. I had barely placed my piece in position and was watching for a good opportunity for an effective shot, when along came the 9th Cav., Colonel [Major] Henry in the lead, every trooper yelling like a madman, their horses at their full speed, [and] Hayden with one of his guns with them. Leaving the road at a point just behind my position, they scrambled up the steep hills to the right, dismounted, and advanced as skirmishers, leaving their animals with the nos. 4,[57] Hayden's gun taking position a short distance to my right and opening fire on the Indian position over and beyond the 7th. The 9th, not finding any hostiles in their immediate front, were halted.

The hostiles, seeing this additional force, gave up the attack as unprofitable and retired to their main body. It is not the nature of Indians to persist in an attack unless they are very certain of entirely crushing

57. This term refers to the cavalrymen who managed the horses while their comrades were fighting on foot.



After the Seventh Cavalry encountered Lakota warriors near a bridge over White Clay Creek on 30 December 1890, commanders called in part of the Ninth Cavalry as reinforcements. Soldiers of both regiments eventually withdrew after a long but inconclusive exchange of gunfire with the Indians. (Map by Robert G. Pilk)

their foe. The entire body of troops then returned to the agency. The loss of the troops was one private killed, one commissioned officer and six enlisted men wounded. The loss of the hostiles was never accurately known. Rumor made it heavy, but it was probably very light. I never saw a fight with Indians where such rapid and continuous firing was indulged in by both troops and Indians resulting in such slight loss. The troops in this affair fought the Indians in their own style (under cover).[58]

General Miles, who had been directing the movement of troops from

58. This engagement lasted approximately three hours. Private Dominic Francischetti of Troop G, Seventh Cavalry, died on the battlefield. The wounded officer, First

his headquarters in Chicago, when hearing of the affair on Wounded Knee, immediately took the field in person.[59] His presence made it lively for everybody. In a few days he had the hostile Stronghold surrounded by a strong cordon of troops, which he kept drawing closer and tighter every day.[60] Soon it became impossible for the hostiles to escape without fighting a heavy battle. A few warriors might have slipped through the lines here and there, but the body as a whole could not get away without suffering very heavily. General Miles then invited the hostile chiefs to come in and have a talk. They came and were given to understand that they must return to the agency and surrender their arms by a certain day or fight. Indians are pretty shrewd judges of character, and they saw that in General Miles they had a man to deal with who meant just what he said and would stand no humbugging.[61]

They were aware that they were surrounded by a force greatly superior in numbers and accompanied with guns that could slaughter them from a long distance. They never had artillery used against them before,[62] and the presence of our battery of (to them) big guns, after their experience with the Hotchkiss mountain guns, filled them with

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Lieutenant James D. Mann of Troop K, succumbed to his injuries on 15 January 1891. Estimated Lakota casualties ranged between three and nine, but the precise number remains unknown. Greene, *American Carnage*, pp. 292–97, 398, 504n14.

59. Major General Nelson A. Miles, of Massachusetts, served through the Civil War and acquired an enviable military record during the Indian wars that followed. He was an active field commander during campaigns on the Plains during the 1870s and in the Southwest during the 1880s. Miles commanded the Military Division of the Missouri with headquarters in Chicago when President Harrison ordered troops to South Dakota in 1890. For the general's post-Civil War career, *see* Robert Wooster, *Nelson A. Miles and the Twilight of the Frontier Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993). Miles had not come to Pine Ridge directly from Chicago. In fact, the general had established a forward headquarters in Rapid City on 17 December after learning of the death of Sitting Bull. After the fighting at Wounded Knee, he personally assumed command at Pine Ridge Agency on 31 December 1890. Greene, *American Carnage*, pp. 193, 290, 311.

60. The Stronghold was the army's term for a mesa located in the Badlands north of Pine Ridge Agency where a large contingent of Lakota Ghost Dancers took shelter during the early weeks of the military occupation. The Indians termed the place "High Pockets Place," or "Ground that Defends Us." Most Stronghold occupants had already surrendered at the agency by 29 December 1890. Ibid., 156–66, 191–92, 203.

61. For Miles's meeting with the chiefs, *see* ibid., pp. 314–16.

62. Comfort is mistaken here. In 1876–1877, Miles had used two pieces of artillery during a campaign against the Lakotas and Northern Cheyennes in Montana Territory.

dread.[63] Then again, they were suffering greatly from the cold. The winter had set in in earnest, the thermometer had registered twenty below zero several times while they were out. Nearly all of them had left their poor miserable excuses for lodges behind when they left (which the Cheyennes, about 2000 of whom were encamped near the agency, and who had not been affected with the Messiah Craze, had carried off to their own camps).[64] They had nothing but the agency beef cattle, which they had captured when they left, to live on, and they would soon perish from starvation and cold if kept close herded near their Stronghold, or be retaken by the troops. So they came to the conclusion that the wisest plan would be to return and surrender, which they did. They were made to camp in a compact body along the line of White Clay Creek, south of the agency and about a mile from it. In a few days after [the surrender], over 3000 troops composed of infantry, cavalry, and artillery were brought in and took position on the same creek but a short distance south of the Indian camp, and encamped in a long single line presenting a very imposing appearance.

The next day the troops were reviewed by General Miles. The weather was very cold, a snowstorm had set in with a strong north wind. All the mounted troops wore their heavy buffalo overcoats, fur caps and gloves, with the exception of our battery who had to be content with caps and gloves and were nearly frozen before the review was over. The regulation army overcoat gives very little protection in a

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Jerome A. Greene, *Yellowstone Command: Colonel Nelson A. Miles and the Great Sioux War, 1876–1877* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), pp. 76–77ff. It is true, however, that many of the young warriors of 1890 had not previously encountered artillery.

63. General Miles had ordered earthen fortifications to be built at Pine Ridge Agency following the fighting at Wounded Knee. The earthworks contained Gatling guns and other ordnance, some of it heavier than the Hotchkiss mountain guns employed at Wounded Knee. Greene, *American Carnage*, p. 311. A photograph of some of this weaponry is in Richard E. Jensen, R. Eli Paul, and John E. Carter, *Eyewitness at Wounded Knee* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), p. 144.

64. There were 517 Northern Cheyennes living at Pine Ridge Agency in 1890. Following the Lakota submission on 15 January 1891, most of the Cheyennes departed for Fort Keogh, Montana, and, eventually, the Tongue River reservation (now known as the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation) near Lame Deer. Greene, *American Carnage*, pp. 62, 333, 520n68.

Dakota blizzard, especially to men who have to sit still in the saddle for any considerable time.[65]

After the review, the troops returned to their respective camps and made preparations for a general breakup. The next day, January 24, '91, just two months after our leaving Fort Riley, the 7th Cavalry, Light Battery E, 1st Artillery, and 4 troops of cavalry from Fort Leavenworth, broke camp and marched for Rushville [Nebraska]. The 6th and 9th Cavalry mounted, formed line on the road, and as the column passed gave cheer after cheer, which was heartily returned. The troops were all very glad to return to their comfortable posts. The 6th and 9th Cavalry [regiments] and 1st Regiment of Infantry remained in the field about two months longer.[66]

Upon arrival in Rushville, each [cavalry] battalion shipped upon a separate train, the 2nd battalion, 7th Cavalry, and our battery leaving last.[67] All went well with us until within about 50 miles of Fort Riley when our train, which consisted of 6 passenger coaches for the enlisted men, 1 Pullman for officers, 2 flat cars for our guns, 18 stock cars loaded with horses, and 4 baggage cars loaded with harness, saddles, and general camp equipage, smashed into the northbound express train. Our conductor [engineer] was drunk and pulled out from a station knowing that the express, which had the right of way, had left the station ahead. Both engines were demolished. The first two coaches filled with soldiers were driven completely over the engines, the next four coaches partly telescoping each other. The Pullman was lifted off its tracks and turned upside down to the left of the track by the heavy flat cars containing our guns scooping under it. The three first stock cars, which contained horses belonging to the battery, were piled in a confused heap of broken timber and horses on the right of the flat cars, the rest

65. In its issue for 7 February 1891, *Harper's Weekly* termed the review "the grandest demonstration by the army ever seen in the West."

66. Only two troops of the Sixth Cavalry, two of the Ninth, and seven companies of the First Infantry remained at Pine Ridge Agency after the main body of troops withdrew. Most of the remainder were gone within two months, and the last soldiers departed at the end of July 1891. Greene, *American Carnage*, pp. 340–41.

67. The Seventh Cavalry and the First Artillery soldiers departed Rushville on 28 January 1891. Ibid., p. 342.

of the train remaining on the track safe.

On the express, only one passenger was injured, the conductor [engineer] having put on his air brakes and reversed in time to slow up enough to let the passengers jump off. Our engineer put on his air brakes and reversed, but the weight of the cars containing guns, horses and baggage which had only hand brakes and not enough train hands to man them, made it impossible to avoid a collision. A sergeant of our battery was torn to pieces under our guns. A private of cavalry was killed [while] he was riding on the pilot [cowcatcher] of our engine, and 35 enlisted men [were] injured, some very severely. Six of our battery horses were killed, ten injured so badly that we had to shoot them right there, and the rest more or less badly cut and bruised. We had hard work extricating them. My own two horses were very badly cut and would have been shot, but I took them off and hid them in a barn and cared for them, bandaging them up so that they would not bleed to death. They were as good as ever in two months. They were two young horses that I had broken to harness. They are the best in the battery today. Our gun carriages and limbers[68] were completely ruined and are good for nothing, except what they might sell for as old iron. We have received new carriages and limbers since coming to [Fort] Sheridan. The smashup occurred just before dark. Another train was sent to us and we reached Fort Riley at 8 o'clock next morning.[69]

We remained at Fort Riley until Sept 29th '91, when we were ordered to the new post of Fort Sheridan. It is situated on Lake Michigan 24 miles north of Chicago. It is only about half built yet, [and] when finished will hold 2 regiments of infantry, 4 troops [of] cavalry and 2 light batteries [of artillery]. The 15th Infantry and our battery are the present garrison.[70]

Private John W. Comfort received a formal citation in 1891 "for bravery

68. Limbers were two-wheeled carts used to help move horse-drawn cannon. They also carried one or more ammunition chests and provided seating for gun crews while on the move. Wilhelm, *Military Dictionary*, pp. 281, 377.

69. For more about the accident, *see* Greene, *American Carnage*, pp. 341–43.

70. A brief contemporaneous description of Fort Sheridan is in James B. McCrellis, *Military Reservations, National Military Parks, and National Cemeteries: Title and Jurisdiction* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), p. 52.

in action against hostile Sioux Indians, at Wounded Knee Creek, South Dakota."[71] *He completed his account of Wounded Knee and the White Clay Creek engagement little more than a year after participating in both actions and just months before retiring from military service. By November 1892, Private Comfort, then forty-seven years old, was wearing down. He requested an early discharge, explaining, "I am not able to perform all the duties required of a soldier and cannot compete with the young men."*[72] *The army approved his release on 30 November 1892. Comfort died a year later in Philadelphia and was interred in the city's Mount Peace Cemetery.*[73]

71. The citation is reprinted in *US Army Gallantry and Meritorious Conduct, 1866–1891* (N.p.: Planchet Press, 1986), p. 164.

72. Quoted in Olmstead, "Collectors Field Book," pp. 126–27.

73. Register of Army Enlistments, ancestry.com; "John Winchester Comfort," in *Find a Grave*, www.findagrave.com.