

## Unbounded Ambition

### Colonel Nelson A. Miles as Revealed in His Private Correspondence with General William T. Sherman during the Sioux and Nez Perce Campaigns, 1876–1877

By most any measure, Nelson A. Miles was arguably the most consistently effective field commander operating on the American frontier during the last decades of the nineteenth century. A Boston crockery salesman at the outset of the Civil War, he attained high success in that conflict and emerged a major general of volunteers. During the Indian campaigns of the 1870s, 1880s, and early 1890s, Miles subdued, fought, and negotiated with Indian tribes throughout the West. As colonel of the Fifth U.S. Infantry Regiment, he campaigned against Southern Cheyennes and Arapahos, Comanches, and Kiowas in the Red River War, 1874–1875; Lakotas and Northern Cheyennes in the Great Sioux War, 1876–1877; and Nez Percés and Bannocks in 1877 and 1878. As brigadier general commanding the Department of Arizona (supplanting George Crook in that position), he finalized operations against Geronimo's Apaches in 1886, and as major general commanding the Military Division of the Missouri in 1890–1891, he directed the Pine Ridge Campaign involving the Lakotas, which embraced the tragic confrontation at Wounded Knee.<sup>1</sup>

For many field commanders who served on the frontier through the post-Civil War period, promotion became a passion. It affected Miles perhaps like no other, and, at least with select correspondents, he was

This work was originally presented at the “Forts, Wars, and Treaties of the Northern Plains,” symposium held 1–3 June 2017 at Black Hills State University in Spearfish, South Dakota. It is enhanced here with selected letters appended.

1. For background on Miles, see Peter R. DeMontravel, *A Hero to His Fighting Men: Nelson A. Miles, 1839–1925* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1998); Robert Wooster, *Nelson A. Miles and the Twilight of the Frontier Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993); and Virginia W. Johnson, *The Unregimented General: A Biography of Nelson A. Miles* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962).

nothing if not forthright about his professional objectives. It is often stated that Miles's principal rival for promotion was George Crook, who was already a brigadier general as of 1873, although other contenders at the time included Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer, Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie, Colonel Wesley Merritt, and even Colonel Eugene A. Carr, who was older.<sup>2</sup> But Miles succeeded in outmaneuvering, outperforming, and, in the case of Custer, surviving his competition. In 1895 he took charge of the army in Washington, D.C., and served through the Spanish-American War as its last commanding general before inauguration of the staff system in 1903, the year of his retirement as lieutenant general.<sup>3</sup>

Through intelligence, conviction, and performance, and despite his dearth of West Point credentials, Miles succeeded in his chosen vocation. A fearless soldier, he received wounds during the Civil War and ultimately garnered a Medal of Honor. Few officers, however, equaled his consuming ambition, a drive fostered in part by a fortuitous matrimonial alliance that opened for him singular opportunities. He married well, in 1868 taking as his bride Mary Hoyt Sherman, niece of Ohio Senator John Sherman and his brother, Major General William T. Sherman, a principal player the Civil War. General Sherman was destined to become commanding general of the army upon the inauguration of Ulysses S. Grant as president in 1869, and over succeeding years Miles, a consummate overachiever, unabashedly exploited the relationship in his quest for promotion and position. Miles thereafter benefited in securing a name for himself as the most successful field officer of the Indian wars with an enviable record of accomplishment.<sup>4</sup>

2. For Crook, see Paul Magid, *George Crook: From the Redwoods to Appomattox* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011) and *The Gray Fox: George Crook and the Indian Wars* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015); for Mackenzie, Michael D. Pierce, *The Most Promising Young Officer: A Life of Ranald Slidell Mackenzie* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); for Merritt, Don E. Alberts, *From Brandy Station to Manila Bay: A Biography of General Wesley Merritt* (Austin, Tex.: Presidial Press, 1980); for Carr, James T. King, *War Eagle: A Life of General Eugene A. Carr* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963); and for Howard, John A. Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch: Oliver Otis Howard* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964).

3. Wooster, *Nelson A. Miles*, pp. 215–48.

4. Mary Hoyt Sherman was the daughter of Judge Charles T. Sherman of Ohio's Northern Judicial District in Cleveland. Johnson, *Unregimented General*, pp. 32, 33. For

Much of how this advancement occurred is revealed in a remarkable correspondence between Miles and his uncle-in-law, General Sherman, that spanned the period from the colonel's initial involvement in the Great Sioux War following Custer's defeat at the Little Bighorn in late June 1876 through the Battle of the Bear's Paw Mountains, which ended the Nez Perce War in October 1877. The Miles-Sherman exchange consists of at least thirty-five *known* letters—nineteen from Miles to Sherman and sixteen from Sherman to Miles, and at least eleven more of which there is record but that have not yet been located. Possibly, too, there exist even more letters written between the men during this period from 1876 through 1877 that have yet to surface.

Historians have rarely alluded to this dialogue,<sup>5</sup> and it has never been fully illuminated. As presented here, the exchange significantly reveals Miles's forthright vision for his career, including his resolve to pursue his professional objectives with passion, certitude, and tenacity—to say nothing of arrogance—all while brazenly soliciting whatever favor Sherman might bestow. The exchange offers salient insights about Miles's campaigns, Sherman's observations about them, and related government matters not included here. It further presents an opportunity to inquire into the personalities of both men, to a degree, especially that of the resolute Miles.

On 8 July 1876, just two weeks after the Little Big Horn disaster, Miles addressed Sherman from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where he was stationed with his regiment, the Fifth U.S. Infantry, presenting his envisioned prototype of a light artillery piece for use against the Indians:

I am not surprised that poor Custer declined taking a battery of Gatling guns. They are worthless for Indian fighting for I have seen them well tested.<sup>6</sup> The range is no longer than [that of] the rifle & the balls

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General Sherman, see Robert L. O'Connell, *Fierce Patriot: The Tangled Lives of William Tecumseh Sherman* (New York: Random House, 2014); William T. Sherman, *Memoirs of General W. T. Sherman* (New York: Library of America, 1990); and Robert G. Athearn, *William Tecumseh Sherman and the Settlement of the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956).

5. See Wooster, *Nelson A. Miles*, pp. 85–86, 88–92, 97–98, and Johnson, *Unregimented General*, pp. 125, 131, 137, 154, 214.

6. The Gatling gun was an early form of machine gun patented by R. J. Gatling during

so small that you cannot tell where they strike. The mountain howitzers are [also] worthless as their range is not over 120 yards and twelve men with the modern rifle can keep them silent. All our other guns are too heavy for rough country. What we want is a gun similar to the light French steel gun. . . . A light steel . . . gun rifled & breechloading, throwing a small shell, with carriage so light that four men can pick the whole thing up and carry it anywhere, and that one or two horses can . . . handle readily over the roughest country. . . . I have had experience enough with Indians to *know* that they can be used to great advantage, and I presume this affair will not end in a few months. Neither is this the last Indian war we will have in this country.<sup>7</sup>

Miles and his troops journeyed by train and steamboat up the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers to gain the mouth of Rosebud Creek, Montana Territory, on 2 August. On 29 July, meanwhile, Sherman responded to Miles's assignment and to his request for new ordnance:

We have for years known that there were certain Sioux that would have to be subjugated before any attempt could be made to dominate them. . . . I surely never have underrated the trouble, or numbers, and have sent every officer & man that [Lieutenant General Philip] Sheridan . . . has called for. Genl Sheridan is in command with [Generals] Terry & Crook his lieutenants, and we look to them to settle this matter. . . .<sup>8</sup> As to your requisition for . . . [special artillery], you surely know that to obtain them you must get Terry to make a Requisition on the Ordnance Dept, and what is harder, get Congress to authorize

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the Civil War. Custer declined taking them because he feared they would impede his mobility, although he may also have questioned their efficacy. John Quick, *Dictionary of Weapons and Military Terms* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1973), p. 186; John S. Gray, *Centennial Campaign: The Sioux War of 1876* (Fort Collins, Colo.: Old Army Press, 1976), p. 143.

7. Miles to Sherman, 8 July 1876, William T. Sherman Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Microfilm Reel 23.

8. Lieutenant General Philip H. Sheridan commanded the Military Division of the Missouri, headquartered in Chicago, which included the Department of Dakota, headquartered in Saint Paul, Minnesota, under Brigadier General Alfred H. Terry, and the Department of the Platte, headquartered in Omaha, Nebraska, under Brigadier General George Crook.





*S. J. Morrow, Photo. Yankton, D. T.*

Frontier photographer Stanley J. Morrow recorded this image of Colonel Nelson A. Miles wearing a sealskin cap and officer's overcoat trimmed in bear fur around the time of his winter campaigns against the Lakota and Northern Cheyenne Indians in 1876-1877.

the purchase of steel guns abroad. . . . We will do our best to keep your Ranks full, and to supply you food, clothing, arms and ammunition. The rest is with you in the field. . . . I see in the long future a pretty hard course for you. By accident will likely devolve on you the building and furnishing [of] the remote posts on the Yellowstone, and it may be a long time before you will again have the pleasant home you had at Leavenworth. . . . I see you frozen up the Yellowstone with no communication for months with your family & friends, in the most inhospitable Region of the Continent. . . . Meantime, however, those Sioux must be terribly punished. If Crook and Terry can kill a thousand or more, I will expect that the Montana people will push their settlements & lines of travel down the Yellowstone. . . . My advice is to get your regiment wintered and if you get a good chance make it tell. . . . I will always be ready to befriend you & yours.<sup>9</sup>

On 23 August, Sherman wrote again, reporting what he had so far learned and indulging Miles's stated plans for an active winter campaign: "I see that Sheridan has ordered that you . . . remain on the Yellowstone this winter. I favor this, and hope you will make the most of it. If so you may have the chance you desire of a winter campaign." He added a note of caution, writing, "But remember that winter on the Yellowstone is another matter from winter on Red River. The thermometer measures 40° below zero, and many a brave man has perished. Still I hope for the best and that in due time it will result to your advantage."<sup>10</sup>

The correspondence continued. Miles wrote Sherman from the field on the Yellowstone on 23 October, describing important developments in the Sioux War. On the nineteenth and twentieth, he had met Sitting Bull and his chiefs in council at Cedar Creek some forty miles north of the newly designated Tongue River Cantonment and just south of the divide separating the Yellowstone and Missouri river drainages. On the

9. Sherman to Miles, 29 July 1876, Nelson A. Miles Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Container 4.

10. Sherman to Miles, 23 Aug. 1876, *ibid.*

JEROME A. GREENE / KATHRYN FEHLIG



Shown here is the area of the Great Sioux War of 1876-1877 including Miles's campaigns above and below the Yellowstone River and the site of the Battle of the Bear's Paw Mountains, 30 September-5 October 1877, during the Nez Perce War.

twenty-first, after negotiations failed, the Indians had tried to outmaneuver the Fifth Infantry troops, and a fiery clash erupted. Miles's men closely pursued them all the way to the Yellowstone, where some surrendered. Many with Sitting Bull, however, eluded the troops and fled north.<sup>11</sup> Four days later, Miles penned Sherman, presenting the results of his campaign:

Today I received the surrender of four principal chiefs who gave themselves up as hostages that other . . . [bands] will continue their retreat to the Cheyenne [River] Agency and submit to the orders of the govt. They claim to . . . control about 1300 lodges but I think between four & six hundred lodges will be about their number out in this country. . . . I know these are satisfied we can whip them every time and if their people are assured of anything but starvation they will all surrender. At least we have got the . . . [chiefs] and my work as far as those . . . [bands] are concerned is over. I am sure you will approve of my action.<sup>12</sup>

On 18 November 1876, from his bivouac on the south bank of the Missouri, Miles penned Sherman of his continued pursuit of the Sioux.<sup>13</sup> He provided more information about his recent fight with Sitting Bull at Cedar Creek, stating, "I could have captured the whole outfit if I had just one battalion of cavalry. . . , [but] I do not propose to ask for a single trooper. I can hunt them on foot but it is not easy for ten small Infy [infantry] companies with broken down mules & four scouts to capture the whole Sioux nation. If you expect me to be successful," he concluded, "see that I am supported or *give me command* of this whole region and I will soon end this Sioux war [emphasis added]."<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps most surprisingly, Miles took the occasion to express to Sherman in bold terms his most dearly held professional aspirations,

11. The Cedar Creek councils and skirmish are discussed at length in Jerome A. Greene, *Yellowstone Command: Colonel Nelson A. Miles and the Great Sioux War, 1876–1877* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), pp. 92–113.

12. Miles to Sherman, 27 Oct. 1876, Sherman Papers, Microfilm Reel 23.

13. For context and description of Miles's Fort Peck Expedition, see Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, pp. 120–46.

14. Miles to Sherman, 18 Nov. 1876, Sherman Papers, Microfilm Reel 23.

likely catching the general off guard. “There are two positions I am ambitious to hold,” Miles wrote,

that of Secty of War and the commander of a Dept. For the former I am willing to sacrifice a life position [i.e., his army career], and [I] know that from my experience & knowledge of the wants of the army I can manage that [War] department better than has been done for some time and at the same time save the Govt at least five millions of money annually. I would want the control of only those affairs that legitimately belong to that officer, [and] it would be as much for your interests as mine to have it occupied by a man who is really your friend. The other position [that of department commander] would give me an opportunity to organize success instead of being obliged to be constantly embarrassed by the failure of [administrative] actions.<sup>15</sup>

Over the seasonally lengthening mail transit from Montana Territory, it took several weeks for Miles’s letters to reach Washington, D.C., and Sherman evidently did not receive that of 18 November until early December, not long after the disputed presidential election of 1876.

Sherman responded on 18 December, directly addressing Miles’s ambition as articulated in his latest letter, as well as assessing the colonel’s current chances for *either* promotion or political appointment:

I note especially your ambition for promotion, which is right, and to be made Sec. of War, which is simply out of the question. If a vacancy in Brig. Genls occurs your name & McKenzie’s [Mackenzie’s] will be uppermost, and I assure you that I will be rejoiced if you succeed. . . . The chances are now that a vacancy will not occur before March 4 [the inauguration], and therefore that some other President will have to make the selection. But who is to be that President? The election of November was so close that even yet the question is not settled, and as the time comes for the constitutional decision we hear of conflict and violence. . . . The two great parties are so evenly balanced that the imprudence of a small knot of men anywhere may start the spark that may inflame a continent. So you see a great question is to be settled

15. Ibid.





General William T. Sherman served as commander in chief of the United States Army from 1869 to 1883. His exchange of letters with Colonel Miles reveals his nephew's rampant zeal for promotion and offers insight into events that presently closed the Sioux and Nez Perce campaigns.

before another Secretary of War has to be chosen. [And] I have never heard your name suggested as a candidate.<sup>16</sup>

Miles wrote Sherman on 1 February 1877, two weeks after returning from having defeated Crazy Horse's warriors on the upper Tongue River.<sup>17</sup> Numbingly cold temperatures, high winds, and heavy snow beset the campaign, and, as fitting counterpoint, Fifth Infantry bandsmen at the cantonment greeted the returning soldiers with the old war tune, "Marching through Georgia." In his missive, Miles again protested the deficiency in his supplies before revisiting the matter of his personal advancement:

Now regarding the two positions referred to in your letter, I will not disagree with you that the first is "out of the question" though I would sacrifice a life position for the chance of holding it a few years, for there is no better field for improvement than any subordinate position in this country. You may not think me qualified but I would convince you in two months that I was not only able to unite the interest of the army, and promote its efficiency thereby, but benefit the country & at the same time give you your true position & make it far more important.<sup>18</sup>

The other position [that of department commander] I believe I have fairly earned. Recommended for it years ago by such eminent men as Vice President Wilson, [Senator Charles] Sumner, [Secretary of War Edwin M.] Stanton, [and] General [George G.] Meade, now all in their graves. . . . I feel that [if] I was considered worthy of it then[,] my services since have but confirmed their good opinion. It so happens that I commanded larger bodies of troops during the [Civil] war than any man of my age. . . . In the West I have had important commands and on several occasions have fought and defeated larger and better armed bodies of hostile Indians than any other officer since

16. Sherman to Miles, 18 Dec. 1876, Miles Papers, Container 4.

17. For details, see Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, pp. 154–82.

18. Miles's allusion to Sherman's deserved "true position" acknowledged that the compulsory grade of commanding general was, in reality, one of nominal status rather than of viable function. See Leonard D. White, *The Republican Era: A Study in Administrative History, 1869–1901* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1958), p. 143.



the history of Indian warfare commenced, and at the same time have gained a more extended knowledge of our frontier country than any living man. If such a record is of value, then I would like the acknowledgement on purely military grounds and I believe my friends have a basis upon which to present my name. . . . And now my dear General while your recommendation would be invaluable to me, based as I believe it would be on military reasons, I must ask that you will not oppose it on the grounds of very distant relationship. That would be an injury I could never forget. . . . Should you be pleased to add your illustrious name, it would be a life-long gratification to me and a source of honorable pride to my descendants.<sup>19</sup>

Clearly, some of Miles's self-serving commentaries closely intimated favoritism, placing Sherman in an awkward and potentially embarrassing position. On 18 February, the general sent Miles a cautionary reminder of their need to be prudent in the propriety of their relationship as respected their correspondence: "I have received and well appreciated all your letters and would have written you more regularly, and more fully," Sherman stated, "but you know that division & dept commanders are furious when one of their subordinates corresponds directly with a common superior on official matters. . . . When the case comes up to me I will do you full justice."<sup>20</sup>

Following several more exchanges, on 30 April 1877, in a communication headed "*Confidential*," Colonel Miles pushed his agenda yet again:

Generals Hancock, Pope & Howard write me that they will recommend me very strongly for the appointment to the first vacancy in the list of brigadier generals of the army, and that they would advocate my promotion. I think General Terry will do the same and possibly some other general officers. . . . Of course, if the appointment is given me I wish it on military recommendations and believe five out of the six brigadier generals would recommend me. . . . I have friends enough and believe that my experience and services would warrant them in advocating my claims, yet it needs some *friend* [emphasis added] in Washington to unite the influence of my friends. These communica-

19. Miles to Sherman, 1 Feb. 1877, Sherman Papers, Microfilm Reel 23.

20. Sherman to Miles, 18 Feb. 1877, Miles Papers, Container 4.

tions will very properly be addressed to you as general of the army and if you will be please[d] to gather my various endorsements and see that they are presented favorably at the proper time to the President you will do me a very great and lasting favor.<sup>21</sup>

On 1 June, Sherman answered Miles's "confidential" message:

You need not be uneasy about being fully appreciated, and your claims to promotion entertained when an advancement occurs, of which event there does not seem to be the least probability, I am almost sure. Congress on meeting in October will insist on reducing the Army to twenty or even 17 thousand men. . . . The House of Representatives is [now] Democratic, holds the purse, and seems resolved to cut down the Army below the needs of the country, so that on an increase they can bring in some of *their* generals. . . . [I] will not be the least surprised if Congress would abolish my office next winter.<sup>22</sup>

After further intermittent exchanges, Sherman wrote from Fort Ellis, Montana Territory, on 19 August, after having met on 23 July with Generals Sheridan, Crook, and Terry aboard the steamer *Rosebud* on the Bighorn River to discuss the closing operations against the Sioux. By then, another Indian war was underway with the nontreaty Nez Perces from eastern Oregon and Idaho Territory. In June, following clashes with citizens and soldiers, several hundred Nez Perces under Chief Joseph fled their homeland as troops under Brigadier General Oliver O. Howard pursued them east into Montana Territory. While touring the "National Park" (Yellowstone), Sherman's party learned of the Nez Perces' bloody fight with Colonel John Gibbon's command at the Big Hole River in southwestern Montana Territory. In his letter, Sherman referenced the late Big Hole action, and on 28 August provided information of Sitting Bull's presence now in Canada, assuring Miles "that there were no signs of his crossing the border [back into the United States]."<sup>23</sup>

Following their own passage through the national park, the Nez Perces continued north. On 13 September, at Canyon Creek north of

21. Miles to Sherman, 30 Apr. 1877, Sherman Papers, Reel 24.

22. Sherman to Miles, 1 June 1877, Miles Papers, Container 4.

23. Sherman to Miles, 28 Aug. 1877, *ibid.*

the Yellowstone, they skirmished with and then eluded Colonel Samuel D. Sturgis's Seventh Cavalry, pressing on toward Canada to evade the army pursuit. At General Howard's behest, Miles entered the campaign with troops of the Second and Seventh cavalry regiments and the Fifth Infantry, driving diagonally northwest from Tongue River to head off the Indians. On 30 September, Miles found and attacked the Nez Perces near the Bear's Paw Mountains, just forty miles below the international line. Utilizing a newly received Hotchkiss gun formulated on the design he had earlier recommended to Sherman, he forced their surrender five days later.<sup>24</sup> Soon after, back at the cantonment, he boasted to Sherman of this latest success: "I think you will admit now that I have in campaigns against Grey Beard & Satanta in the south, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, [and the] surrender of Joseph earned the first consideration for the next vacancy," he wrote. "If I have not, I never can, and I hope that you will feel that you can recommend it officially on military grounds."<sup>25</sup>

Coincidentally, on 23 October, the same day Miles returned from Bear's Paw, Sherman, now back in Washington, extolled the victory, which he had read about in the papers: "Your success in capturing Joseph is universally appreciated by none more than myself. . . . In case of a vacancy I think your chances far the best, & that if any colonel is detached for a higher command you will be, but I see no immediate prospect."<sup>26</sup>

In accordance with Sherman's wishes, Miles sent his Nez Perce prisoners on to Fort Leavenworth, where they endured a harsh winter before being shipped on to the Indian Territory, where they remained until 1885. With the Teton Sioux either ensconced north of the boundary or harbored at agencies in Dakota Territory, and the Northern Cheyennes themselves largely consigned to the Indian Territory, Miles spent the ensuing three years monitoring the border country and white settlement in the Yellowstone hinterland.<sup>27</sup>

24. Miles's campaign against the Indians at Bear's Paw is related in Greene, *Nez Perce Summer*, pp. 253–320.

25. Miles to Sherman, 28 Oct. 1877, Sherman Papers, Reel 24.

26. Sherman to Miles, 23 Oct. 1877, Miles Papers, Container 4.

27. See Greene, *Nez Perce Summer*, pp. 325–51, and Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, pp. 225–34.

Although Miles advocated the military occupation of Montana Territory north of the Missouri River as an Indian reserve, an objective he believed might further warrant his promotion, Sherman resisted that course as long as white settlement proceeded smoothly and the British discouraged its Sioux and Nez Perce “alien refugees” from crossing back into the United States. Rather than the department he so coveted, on 14 September 1877 Miles achieved certain commensurate recognition—though but a measure of his objective—with War Department establishment of the Military District of the Yellowstone, headquartered at Fort Keogh with himself as commanding officer. A subunit of the Department of Dakota, the district included the region administered by Fort Keogh as well as its sister station, Fort Custer, along the Big Horn River. Miles occupied the position until December 1880, when he was promoted brigadier general to command the Department of the Columbia in Portland.<sup>28</sup>

So what does the 1876–1877 dialogue between Miles and Sherman reveal about either man? For one thing, the correspondence disclosed the building confidence that Sherman felt in Miles and his soldiers during their travails in the Yellowstone country. It is clear, too, that he esteemed Miles’s foresight, vigilance, and courage, and perhaps even his feisty grit in his pursuit of advancement. For another, it clearly evinced Miles’s rampant opportunism and his voracious quest to advantage himself in seeking promotion and position. While it is fair to say that in frontier army communities such impulses might have been common, most officers lacked the familial linkage that Miles enjoyed. It also confirmed that Miles sought to do his job—whatever the obstacles—in defeating the Sioux and Cheyennes and fulfilling his mission, and that he demonstrated an honest regard for his men as he sought to satisfy their needs time and again. Further, to some degree the correspondence reveals the selfish as well as selfless aspirations of a

28. Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, pp. 225–26. Miles went on command the Department of the Missouri (1885–1886), the Department of Arizona (1886–1888), the Division of the Pacific (1888–1890), the Division of the Missouri (1890–1891), the Department of the Missouri (1891–1894), the Department of the East (1894–1895), and the U.S. Army (1895–1900). Brian C. Pohanka, *Nelson A. Miles: A Documentary Biography of His Military Career, 1861–1903* (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1985), pp. 25–27.

career officer attempting to balance his personal objectives, as well as his professional obligations to his country, as he advantaged himself of his circumstances on the rapidly changing frontier. As such, the letters afford dimension for both men.

Miles's remaining army career prospered exceptionally, largely because of his continued success in the West. Following Sherman's death in 1891 and his own retirement twelve years later, Miles advocated compensating Lakota victims for what had happened to them at Wounded Knee, which he believed had been an abject massacre. It was a course that Sherman would have opposed, but one that Miles resolutely maintained until his own passing in 1925.<sup>29</sup>

29. Jerome A. Greene, *American Carnage: Wounded Knee, 1890* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), pp. 308, 369–70, 372.



Following the Ghost Dance troubles that culminated in the Wounded Knee massacre, Miles took charge of field operations in the area, commanding a force of about thirty-five hundred soldiers. John C. Grabill photographed this view of Miles (second from left) surveying the Indians' village on White Clay Creek on 16 January 1891, the day after they surrendered.

In editing the correspondence, occasional misspellings have been corrected and punctuation added where appropriate. Corrections to proper names and the insertion of words for clarity are indicated in brackets. Words underlined in the original have been italicized here. In the case of exceptionally long passages, paragraph breaks have been added. Both Miles and Sherman sometimes used expressions that today would be considered racially insensitive but were in common usage at the time; aside from the adjustments noted above, their correspondence appears here as they wrote it.

*Selected letters, Colonel Nelson A. Miles  
and General William T. Sherman, 1876–1878*

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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

June 15, 1876

Dear General,

Genl Reynolds<sup>30</sup> and myself had some correspondence about a transfer, and should he consent to it I hope you will not disapprove it, but favor the application, as I believe it would be an advantage to me.

I wrote a communication which I think will answer that of Colonel Clitz,<sup>31</sup> Tenth Infantry, and I only ask that it may receive the same consideration as his.

30. Joseph J. Reynolds graduated from West Point in 1843. He led soldiers at Chickamauga, Georgia, and Missionary Ridge, Tennessee, during the Civil War. In March 1876, he commanded the Third Cavalry of General Crook's command that attacked a Northern Cheyenne village on Powder River in Montana Territory. Reynolds's incompetence there led to his court-martial and ultimate retirement from the service in early 1877. See Paul L. Hedren, *Powder River: Disastrous Opening of the Great Sioux War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), pp. 304–32. Miles's correspondence with Reynolds appears to have been but a preliminary exploration subsequently dropped.

31. Colonel Henry B. Clitz had served in the Mexican and Civil wars and was brevetted brigadier general during the latter for gallantry and meritorious service. He commanded the Tenth Infantry from 1869 to his retirement in 1885. 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, 1903), 1:311.



Now about the Sioux, in case the three columns<sup>32</sup> should not succeed in subduing them this summer, I would like a chance next fall and winter provided I can have a good command, properly provided, to go up into their country and stay with them until they are worn out and subjugated. The one who has the last chance at them will be likely to reach the best results. I do not believe in magnified scouts but believe that a good command at least one half in Infantry can make their country so uncomfortable for them, and giving them no rest they would be compelled to sue for peace. At least I would be willing to undertake it provided it met your approval and I could have a suitable command and permission to remain until the work was accomplished.

With great respect  
Very truly yours  
Nelson A. Miles

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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas  
July 8, 1876

Dear General,

I expect to start in a few days for the Yellowstone. I presume the remainder of my regiment will soon follow. By a ruling which Genl Townsend made in June 30, 1874 my Regt was only allowed 400 men.<sup>33</sup> This I consider unfair, as it has done, and I hope will do as much service in the Indian country as any other organization. I have

32. Miles here refers to the three military columns initially sent to close on the Sioux-Cheyenne coalition early in 1876, each individually led by Brigadier General Alfred H. Terry, from Fort Abraham Lincoln, Dakota Territory; Brigadier General George Crook from Fort Fetterman, Wyoming Territory; and Colonel John Gibbon, from Forts Shaw and Ellis, Montana Territory.

33. Brigadier General Edward D. Townsend was the adjutant general of the United States Army from 1869 to 1880. Between October 1874 and October 1875, Miles's regiment was reduced from 549 to 426 enlisted men, as is reflected in U.S., Congress, House, *Report of the Secretary of War* (1874), Ex. Doc. 1, pt. 2, 43d Cong., 2d sess., p. 12; *Report of the Secretary of War* (1875), Ex. Doc. 1, pt. 2, 44th Cong., 1st sess., p. 41.



asked for 150 recruits which I hope you will order sent to join me at Bismarck fully armed & equipped even if you have to order out some of the permanent parties from the recruiting depots.

I presume that a different method will not be adopted in fighting the Sioux. I have no doubt you will have to use the three arms of the service<sup>34</sup> and now let me give you my ideas of what seems to be the importance of having a suitable piece of Ordnance. I am not surprised that poor Custer declined taking a battery of Gatling guns.<sup>35</sup> They are worthless for Indian fighting for I have seen them well tested. The range is no longer than the rifle & the balls so small that you cannot tell where they strike. The mountain howitzers are worthless as their range is not over 120 yards and twelve men with the modern rifle can keep them silent. All our other guns are too heavy for rough country. What we want is a gun similar to the light French steel gun of the one used in the Ashunter campaign of the English. A light steel or wire gun rifled & breechloading, throwing a small shell with carriage so light that four men can pick the whole thing up and carry it anywhere, and that one or two horses can [handle] readily over the roughest country. The mountain howitzers were well enough a hundred years ago when the Indians were armed with bows & arrows, but why not give us an effective weapon now that would give our men confidence and have the same superiority over the Indians?.<sup>36</sup>

I spoke to the chief of ordnance about this more than a year ago and if there are none in this country I hope you will order them made, for

34. Infantry, Cavalry, and Artillery.

35. George A. Custer, a West Point graduate, rose to the rank of major general during the Civil War and later served as lieutenant colonel commanding the Seventh Cavalry regiment. On 25 June 1876, Custer was killed and his command massively defeated by a coalition of Lakota Sioux and Northern Cheyenne warriors at the Little Bighorn River in Montana Territory. Heitman, *Historical Register*, 1:348. As noted earlier, Custer declined taking the Gatling guns for mobility and other reasons. Gray, *Centennial Campaign*, p. 143.

36. Miles refers to the then-recent Anglo-Ashanti Campaign against tribes of the African Gold Coast that involved the invasion of Ashantiland by British regulars and African auxiliaries under Major General Garnet J. Wolseley in 1873–1874. Byron Farwell, *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Land Warfare: An Illustrated World View* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2001), pp. 56–57. On the matter of improved ordnance that Miles recommended, see Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, pp. 76–77, 258.



Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer appears here in 1874, when he led a one-thousand-man expedition into the Black Hills. The expedition confirmed the presence of gold, setting in motion events that would lead to Custer's death at the Little Bighorn two years later. Photographer William H. Illingworth recorded the scene.

I have had experience enough with Indians to *know* that they can be used to great advantage, and I presume this affair will not end in a few months. Neither is this the last Indian war we will have in this country.

The command, though conscious of the work before them, leaves in fine spirits at the prospect of field service, and I trust you may hear good reports from us. The officers' families remain here [at Fort Leavenworth] for the present . . . Please send us up some of those little guns and you shall hear good results. . .

[Miles]

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Headquarters Army of the United States,  
Washington, D.C.     July 29 1876

Dear Miles,

I have just received your letter of July 23, and though I fear this may be long in reaching you I will venture. We have for years known that there were certain Sioux that would have to be subjugated before any attempt could be made to dominate them. Had the Govt allowed us the Military to keep control after 1869, this matter would have been settled, but the good people of New England would insist that we were a bloodthirsty race of men, and that the Christian Ministry alone could be trusted.<sup>37</sup> The result is as we know. I surely never have underrated the trouble, or numbers, and have sent every officer & man that Sheridan, Terry & Crook has called for. Genl Sheridan is in command with Terry & Crook his lieutenants, and we look to them to settle this matter. If any mistakes are made, they are out there not here.

As to your requisition for Krupp Guns, you surely know that to obtain them you must get Terry to make a Requisition on the Ordnance

37. The administration of Ulysses S. Grant instituted the so-called Peace Policy whereby Indian agencies were given over for operation by various religious denominations. See Henry E. Fritz, *The Movement for Indian Assimilation, 1860–1890* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), pp. 56–167.

Dept, and what is harder, get Congress to authorize the purchase of steel guns abroad. To get one or more would break me, for they are very costly, and I would have to pay out of my own pocket, for the Ordnance Dept *cannot*. You must content yourself with the arms & ammunition furnished by the Govt. Don't make the mistake now that every volunteer colonel did in 1861 to organize his regiment part infantry, part cavalry, and part artillery. We will do our best to keep your ranks full, and to supply you food, clothing, arms and ammunition. The rest is with you in the field.

I admired your spunk and spirit in responding so promptly to the call, but I see in the long future a pretty hard course for you. By accident will likely devolve on you the building and furnishing [of] the remote posts on the Yellowstone, and it may be a long time before you will again have the pleasant home you had at Leavenworth. The Northern Pacific Railroad is a great boon to that Region, but it cannot be operated after November, and I think I see you frozen up the Yellowstone with no communication for months with your family & friends, in the most inhospitable region of the continent. I remember in 1867 that reports came that the garrison at Fort Union (now Buford) was *all* massacred, and that the last seen of the wife of the commanding officer (Capt Rankin of the 13th) she was lashed a la Mazeppa & chased over the frozen prairie.<sup>38</sup> Months of painful anxiety passed—we tried to get couriers through from Fort Abercrombie & from Fort Sully, but they froze to death, or returned, headed off by Indians. At last the ice began to move, and a boat came down to Sully & reported all well at Fort Union. I mention this to caution you all to provide as far as human foresight can for the long & dreary winter there is before you.

Meantime, however, those Sioux must be terribly punished. If Crook and Terry can kill a thousand or more, I will expect that the Montana people will push their settlements & lines of travel down the Yellowstone, and from that quarter, rather than from the Mis-

38. The commanding officer was William G. Rankin, Thirteenth Infantry. In Lord Byron's lyric poem, *Mazeppa* (London: John Murray, 1819), a young page of that name has an affair with a young countess. Her older husband, the count, punishes Mazeppa, strapping him to a horse that runs away with him.

souri, I look for an amelioration of your region of the Yellowstone. In the whole expedition will be the 2nd, 3rd, 5th & 7th Cavalry—with 6 cos of the 4th, the 1st, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 9th, 17th, 20th and 6 cos of the 22nd [Infantry regiments]. Volunteers are offered from every quarter, but the President will not accept them, but Congress may be induced (though I doubt it) to increase the companies to 100 men. The law now admits of this for the cavalry, but the limit of 25000 men is a bar—for to increase the companies in the Sioux country to 100 men would leave the rest with none. I have ordered the artillery from the Atlantic to replace the troops ordered to the Sioux Country. My advice is to get your regiment wintered and if you get a good chance make it tell, but you are but one of many, and must be governed by Terry. Let what happen, I will always be ready to befriend you & yours.

Truly Yours, W. T. Sherman

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Headquarters Army of the United States  
Washington, D.C.  
Aug 23 1876

Dear Miles,

My latest date for you is July 7, but the newspapers describe the meeting of Terry's & Crook's forces on the 10th [of August] and your rapid march back to the mouth of Rosebud, & the distribution of your Command on the Yellowstone to push the passage north of the Indians. Since then we hear nothing, but I hope that the combination has proven successful, and that Terry & Crook have ere this overtaken the Indians and made havoc on them, since until we hear the final result I shall be apprehensive of a scuttling and consequent failure to do much execution.

I see that Sheridan has ordered that you & Otis<sup>39</sup> remain on the

39. Lieutenant Colonel Elwell S. Otis commanded companies of the Twenty-second Infantry operating along the Yellowstone in Montana Territory out of the Glendive Cantonment, a supply depot near present-day Glendive. His command ushered sup-

Yellowstone this winter. I favor this, and hope you will make the most of it. If so you may have the chance you desire of a winter campaign. But remember that winter on the Yellowstone is another matter from winter on Red River. The thermometer measures 40° below zero, and many a brave man has perished. Still I hope for the best and that in due time it will result to your advantage. Mary [Miles] is at Narragansett [in Massachusetts]. She has telegraphed me and written, and I have told her all I can or should. From this time till the election is over it will be impossible to gain the attention of anybody in politics. John [Sherman] is in Ohio, and all the public men are off [on vacation]—President at Long Branch [New Jersey], Sec. of War at Cape May [in New Jersey]. He & I will go via Leavenworth [Kansas] to California Sept 14, to return Oct 15. He takes three of his children & I take Mrs. Sherman, Elly, Tom and Cumpy.<sup>40</sup> Always send to him from you.

Truly your Friend, W. T. Sherman

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Camp near Fort Buford, D.T.  
October 2d 1876

Dear General:

Your most welcome letter was duly received. While my command was completing their stockades, I have made a reconnaissance of the country between Tongue River and Buford, and have concluded that the distance for a good wagon road between those points will not exceed one hundred and sixty (160) miles. I do not desire to be again embarrassed by the avarice of Army contractors, and have reported matters as they appear to me and asked for the necessary supplies; for proper material is the first element of success. It would be a poor reflection upon our Army system if one thousand men could not be supplied in the heart of our country for eight (8) or ten (10) months;

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ply wagons seventy miles along the Yellowstone to Miles's command farther upstream. Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, pp. 72–73.

40. Sherman refers here to his wife Ellen and children Thomas and Philemon Tecumseh. Athearn, *William Tecumseh Sherman*, pp. 7, 11, 108.



neither would it be considered wise to presume that a command can live in a frigid zone with the same clothing that you would supply them in a tropical country. When we spend thousands of dollars to fit out expeditions for the arctic regions, why not supply those who enlist to serve their country with substantial rainment to resist the severity of this extreme northern climate? Considering the results of past efforts, I am satisfied to remain and endeavor to accomplish something during the coming winter months, or, at least, be in position where I can obtain a thorough knowledge of the country, and be available for the Spring.

And here is where two important subjects arise: first, the character of the country, for it is extremely difficult for campaigning, and the requisite means to accomplish a desired result. I consider the stationing of supplies at accessible points of the first importance; next the kind of force to be used. Undoubtedly, infantry has the greatest influence, but a fair proportion of mounted troops, either cavalry or Indian allies, is essential, and to any one who has used it, the effect of artillery is most desirable, provided it is of the right kind; hence I have simply asked that my regiment be fully supplied and properly clad; that I have two (2) light guns which can be carried over these volcanic cliffs and ravines, and for a battalion of mounted troops; with this force I would feel quite independent in this vast area of country.

I am gratified that you are on that Army Committee, for while I consider it the result of a staff effort to defeat many commendable features of Banning's Bill, I am glad that you will have an opportunity of representing many fatal defects in our system of Army administration.<sup>41</sup> There can be no doubt that any system that takes the ar-

41. An Ohio Democrat, Henry B. Banning (1836–1881) served in Congress from 1873 to 1879 and in 1875 became chair of the House Military Affairs Committee. Charles Laman, *Biographical Annals of the Civil Government of the United States, during Its First Century* (Washington, D.C.: James Anglim, 1876), p. 20; *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774–1961* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961), p. 512. Banning's 1876 bill sought to improve the efficiency of the army through reduction and consolidation. In July, a congressional commission was appointed to consider elements of army reform and reorganization, and an act of Congress on 15 August 1876 reduced the force to a maximum of twenty-five thousand men. *Army and Navy Journal*, 4 Mar. 1876; *Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1876*



mament of our force out of the control of those who go with their commands into battle, and places it in the hands of those who never saw the puff of a hostile shot; of the supplying of an Army from those who know the necessities of troops and places it under those who are irresponsible or, as is often the case, too interestedly acquainted with unscrupulous contractors, must be susceptible of great improvement, and I trust that you will *contend* for such a system as will make the Army a complete unit in all its relations; then it will be the fault of administration if the Army is not effective. At present, too much consideration is given to men who live unmilitary lives, and the result is that when called upon they are found inadequate or incompetent for the simplest rudiments of their profession. After obtaining what necessary supplies I can, I return to the cantonment, expecting to spend several rather uncomfortable and weary months.

There are many features of this country most interesting, and I would be very glad if you would make up a party in the spring, and come up the almost unknown valley of the Yellowstone. We can go up to Pompey's Pillar, the Custer battle-ground, the trout fisheries, the goldfields of the Big Horn and Upper Yellowstone, and then visit the greatest wonder of all, the National Yellowstone Park.<sup>42</sup> As you would go principally by steamer, you could bring a party of gentlemen and ladies very easily and have a most enjoyable and interesting trip.

You will have much to answer for in advising the ladies not to come up for we could have made them very comfortable, but if you will bring them up in the spring we will pardon you. The cantonment is now almost like a post and from that point I intend to make the best use of my time & men.

With great respect,  
Your friend  
Nelson A. Miles  
US Army

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(New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1877), p. 41; *Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1877* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1878), p. 38.

42. President Ulysses S. Grant signed legislation creating Yellowstone National Park, the nation's first, on 1 March 1874. For background on its establishment, see Alfred

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Headquarters Army of the United States,  
Washington, D.C., Oct 20 1876

Dear Miles,

I got back from California in time to be present at the ceremony of unveiling of McPherson's statue,<sup>43</sup> and to preside at the several meetings of the Army of the Tennessee now on, and have been otherwise quite busy with business accumulated since my absence, and the current history connected with the S.C. [South Carolina] troubles<sup>44</sup> & the Indians. I must now hastily but I hope satisfactorily answer your letter of Oct 2, from Fort Buford with which I am well pleased. I note especially the soldierly willingness to accept a hard winter in hopes to secure an opportunity that will give great satisfaction to the Army & people of the U.S. of hitting Mr. Sitting Bull and his band of outlaws a blow that will need no repetition. If you succeed you will in time be amply repaid.

I certainly did positively discourage Mary and all applicants from attempting to reach you this winter. Had Mary gone, every wife would have gone [in] spite of the trouble exposure & increased labor have had on your command. Now I hope Mary will stay quietly at Cleveland, or come to us at Washington. She wrote Lizzie<sup>45</sup> as to quarters &c. at the Ebbitt [Hotel] where we will spend the winter, and I shall soon write her myself, assuring her that it will be eminently proper, and that I and all my staff will be her escort to wherever she may desire to go. Mary is deservedly much loved by all who know her, and she is an ornament to any circle. I am sure John Sherman will offer her a home at his house, but if Mary prefers to be independent there

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Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience*, 3d ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 33–47.

43. Major General James B. McPherson, killed in the Atlanta Campaign, 1864.

44. Race riots and other civil disturbances marked the 1876 election season in South Carolina, where Democrats sought to win control of the governorship and statehouse. President Grant ordered that vigilante groups disband and that Sherman prepare troops to act in the event of resistance. *Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia* (1876), pp. 719–21.

45. Elizabeth ("Lizzie") Sherman was Sherman's niece.

is no place better or more appropriate than with my family. Lizzie fairly worships her, and I would be more than pleased to have them together this winter and I am almost prepared to say that I will bring her to you in the spring. Together we can go on up to the geysers of the Yellowstone, and to Montana is another question [*sic*]. I don't want to make that trip but had always arranged to do so in connection with a trip I contemplate across to the Pacific at Puget Sound & then down to Arizona, and back by Texas. Although I have not much of importance to do, still if absent for a month or so I find I am called for. My relations with the Secretary & President are now frank & cordial. I could ask for nothing more. Belknap is deader than a mackerel. During our meeting[s] he has tried to recover lost friends, and we have all borne with him as an old comrade and our once trusted associate, but the feeling toward him is one rather of pity than respect.<sup>46</sup>

The election now engrosses all minds. There *is* danger that a united South, with a fractious north may imperil our war successes: I still trust that General Hayes will be elected by the quiet thoughtful vote of the North & West. Still if Mr. Tilden should be elected, I am almost *sure* that if the Fire Eaters of the South think they are going to rule in this land they will soon be sadly undermined. Tilden has the wisdom of the serpent—not such a character as I like *at all*, but he is no fool, and must see that in this land freedom and law must be supreme, and he cannot ignore the existence in spirit and in fact of the armies of 1864–5.<sup>47</sup>

46. Congress voted unanimously to impeach Secretary of War William W. Belknap (1829–1890), appointed from Iowa in 1869, for having sold for his personal benefit appointments to Indian post traderships and for violation of the Tenure of Office Act. Belknap resigned his position in March 1876 and was later tried by the Senate, but the vote fell short of conviction. William Gardner Bell, *Secretaries of War and Secretaries of the Army: Portraits & Biographical Sketches* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1982), p. 78.

47. The presidential race of 1876 between Republican Rutherford B. Hayes of Ohio and Democrat Samuel J. Tilden of New York was one of the most contentious in United States history. In the election of 7 November, Tilden would win the popular vote but fail to gain a clear majority in the Electoral College. Political wrangling and allegations of fraud in several southern states kept the outcome in dispute until 2 March 1877, following the decision of a special electoral commission. Hayes was declared winner of the electoral vote, 185 to 184, and took the oath of office shortly thereafter. Benson J. Lossing, *Harpers' Popular Cyclopaedia of United States History* (New York: Harper & Bros. 1893), pp. 1137–38.



Miles married Sherman's niece Mary Hoyt Sherman in 1868 and gained a personal connection to the army commander in chief. As a military wife, Mary Miles accompanied her husband to many of his western postings.

Keep up a good heart—maintain good discipline—make the best of a temporary hard fate. Every requisition that can minister to your comfort will be approved, and next summer we will make a new shuffle & new deal. You may tell your officers & men that I & many others here feel for and appreciate your sacrifices and labor. But make a hole in that pestiferous crowd of Indians if you get half a chance.

Ever yr friend,  
W. T. Sherman

25 Miles above Glendive—Glendive *Creek*

October 23, 1876

Dear General,

Since I wrote you I have had two long talks or councils with Sitting Bull and one good stand up fight in which this much talked about tribe of hostile Sioux were speedily driven from the field and sent flying back over the Yellowstone a distance of 42 miles. If I had had a regt or battalion of mounted men I could have captured the entire body estimated at upwards of 400 lodges, but it is not easy for Infy to catch them although I believe we can whip them every time. I intend to follow them up a short distance farther at least, although they now assure me that they will go straight to their agencies. I had my whole regt together and it has inspired them with great confidence and given them firm spirit. The Indians were nearly out of ammunition and unless they get more in the vicinity of Fort Peck [Indian Agency]<sup>48</sup> I believe we can soon wear them down.

Some time ago you wrote me to prepare for the cold winter. You can do that easier than I. Some time ago I asked for Sibley tents but was answered that they could not be furnished. Now I consider it refined cruelty to compel troops to remain out in this country in shelter tents or a-tents when Sibley tents<sup>49</sup> *can* be furnished and I hope you will order them forwarded, otherwise a large number of poor soldiers will be discharged in the spring with confirmed rheumatism.

48. Fort Peck Indian Agency stood on the north bank of the Missouri River several miles above the mouth of the Milk River. An early trading post, it served in 1873–1879 as an erstwhile federal agency for Lakota and Assiniboin Indians. Don Miller and Stan Cohen, *Military & Trading Posts of Montana* (Missoula, Mont.: Pictorial Histories Publishing Co., 1978), p. 71.

49. The conical, twelve-foot-high Sibley tent, which came into wide use during the Civil War, could accommodate up to twenty men and a small stove. The “A-tent,” named for its shape, consisted of a piece of material placed over a ridge pole and could sleep up to six men. Clarence R. Geier, Lawrence E. Babits, Douglas D. Scott, and David G. Orr, eds., *The Historical Archaeology of Military Sites: Method and Topic* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2010), pp. 65–67, 229.

The failure of the army to keep supplies or troops up here is a great disgrace at least to the Qr M. [Quartermaster] Dept. When I was at Buford a short time (this month) ago I saw a steamer come up to the post loaded with nothing but lumber which cannot possibly be used for eight months when some of the troops of the 22nd [Infantry Regiment] up here are without stockings and the animals will die before spring for want of food.

As I write this some Indians are coming in with a flag of truce from the south side, and if I can start in this body to their agency and thereby get rid of them, I can then turn north after the Cheyennes that went way round the Little [Big] Horn to the north. It is well to keep [them] divided as they are thereby easily handled. Some time when I get in I am going to . . . [illeg.] write you a letter on arms, for it is becoming a serious question. How did you like my letter to Wendell Phillips?<sup>50</sup>

With greatest respect,  
Nelson A. Miles, U.S.A.

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Hdqrs [Headquarters] Fifth Infy  
Opposite Cabin Cr  
Yellowstone October 27/76

Dear General,

Today I received the surrender of four principal chiefs who gave themselves up as hostages that other tribes will continue their retreat to the Cheyenne [River] agency and submit to the orders of the govt. They claim to respect or control about 1300 lodges but I think between four & six hundred lodges will be about their number out in this country. Now I think that you see that they know fair treatment as I know these are satisfied we can whip them every time and if their

50. Wendell Phillips (1811–1884) was a nationally prominent lecturer, reformer, attorney, writer, and advocate on the matters of slavery, American Indians, and other humanitarian causes. *Who Was Who in America* (Chicago: A. N. Marquis Co., 1967), p. 480.

people are assured of anything but starvation they will all surrender. At least we have got the heads and my work as far as those tribes are concerned is over. I am sure you will approve of my action as I have no desire to follow or escort them three hundred miles and if I took them to Tongue river it would take half my regt to guide them. They are now off my hands and I shall start back tomorrow for Tongue River [Cantonment], get fresh supplies and start *immediately* over the divide for those about the Big Dry [River] & Fort Peck. I am satisfied the scene of operations will change now from the south to far up in the north either near the Missouri or north of it. Those who remain hostile will endeavor to get as far away from [the] troops as possible. I have in the south 12 cos of cavalry besides Infy. I have nothing but my regt & 2 cos of the 22nd Infy, the latter at the cantonment, but I can keep it up for some time. You would understand why I want Sibley tents if you were out here one night and the absurd nonsense of saying they cannot be furnished amounts to nothing as they can be made out of the material at any Q.M. depot. I remain

With great respect  
Very truly yours,  
Nelson A. Miles

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Cantonment on Yellowstone [at Tongue River]  
November 1st 1876

Dear General,

As we stop here two days for supplies & clothing I will have time to drop you a few lines. Within the past fifteen days we have marched upwards of two hundred miles, placed the command between the main bodies of hostile Indians, intercepted Sitting Bull's movements, had one fair engagement with him, chased two or three thousand of them forty two miles, sent in an ambulance load of chiefs, and I hope disposed of a considerable body of the hostile Sioux and we are now ready to move north for that portion that have taken refuge along the southern tributaries of the Mo.



I estimate the number that we drove south of the Yellowstone at about four hundred lodges and if my plan succeeds (& I see no reason why it should not) I believe a much bigger number will follow. It is much easier to “divide and conquer” and in this way break the influence of Sitting Bull and his party. I look upon Bull Eagle as a man of nearly as much influence as Sitting Bull and he is one of the finest Indians I have ever met. He is in every sense a chief & keeps his people under the most perfect control. They are clever & more intelligent than any body of Indians I have ever met, and you may know that his soldiers belong to a pretty vigorous race as they go about stripped to the buff in the cold November air with apparent indifference.

These Indians fight almost entirely dismounted moving rapidly from point to point occupying every mound and ravine and present only their heads & puffs of smoke as targets. I presume they would close in very readily if we gave them a chance, as there is no discount on their courage. Sitting Bull is a man of medium height, has been wounded in the right arm or hand and walks a little lame, is very reserved and at times [shows?] a serious attitude & [is] respectful in his manners, and I judge always thinks wisely before saying anything, yet when he becomes agitated or angry his face lights up with savage ferocity and his eyes glow with a reddish fire as fierce as that of a wild beast. At such times he affects the embodiment of all the worst elements of the Indian character.

His immediate following are a set of the worst rascals I have ever seen together. Pretty Bear his sec’y of state or chief in council is a small energetic Indian with very low forehead & a man of low instincts who evidently [answers?] to the prejudice & superstition of his race. While . . . [illeg.] has the most resolutely determined face that I ever saw on mortal man. He was twice bayonnetted through the lungs by soldiers on those two rivers and left for dead, but boasts that he has killed sixteen white men since. I think the disaffected outlaws will now seek shelter along the tributaries of the Mo or go north of Ft Peck. If driven out they would likely go to the Big Horn country and the grass was burned there during the summer and the fall rains will make it green all winter. It is with this view that I will endeavor

to approach and strike them from the west. I take the Fifth Infy & 30 days supplies.

I have given Hazen all my information and asked him to place twenty days supplies at [Fort] Peck, and if [Sitting] Bull goes up [there] to seize all the ammunition in that region. This . . . [illeg.] chance, and I understand he has gone up with three cos. & a piece of artillery. If I have authority and anything like a fair chance, I would like to organize a force to contend against these Indians, but as it is I have to work with just what I can get, and under much disadvantage. If we do not get snowed in you may expect news from me in a few weeks. If we have a fight it will probably be one of considerable importance. Wishing to be very kindly remembered to the family, I remain, with great respect,

Nelson A. Miles

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Opposite Fort Peck Montana

November 18, 1876

Dear General,

We crossed the divide, passed down the Big Dry and arrived at this point on the 15th inst. The command came in only a few days behind a portion of Sitting Bulls band, and I find that not less than one hundred & nineteen lodges of hostiles have come in since our affair with Sitting bull Oct 21st. These have mixed in with these friendly Yanktonais and as this agency is absolutely under Genl Hazens authority I consider them now his Indians and shall not trouble myself further about them unless I get some authority or orders or find them out again. I believe we have divided Sitting Bull's people and that his strength & influence is fast breaking down. I think he as well as they are satisfied we can whip him every time, and that has a very damaging effect upon his people. His interpreter told me yesterday that they had a thousand lodges on the day of our engagement [21 October] but the whole crowd got stampeded. As I wrote you before I could have captured the whole outfit if I had just one battalion of



Hunkpapa Lakota leader Sitting Bull, photographed by David F. Barry, met with Miles in October 1876 but then fought his troops from the hills overlooking Cedar Creek, Montana Territory. Sitting Bull later took his people to Canada, where they remained until 1881.

cavalry but so much has been said about that arm of the service and the army almost disorganizing to strengthen it that as an Infantry officer I do not propose to ask for a single trooper. I can hunt them on foot but it is not easy for ten small Infy companies with broken down mules & four scouts to capture the whole Sioux nation. If you expect me to be successful see that I am supported or give me command of this whole region and I will soon end this Sioux war, and I would be very glad to govern them afterwards, for the more I see of them the more respect I have for them and believe their affairs can be governed to their entire satisfaction as well as for the interests of the govt.

There are two positions I am ambitious to hold, that of Secty of War and the commander of a Dept. For the former I am willing to sacrifice a life position, and know that from my experience & knowledge of the wants of the army I can manage that department better than has been done for some time and at the same time save the Govt at least five millions of money annually. I would want the control of only those affairs that legitimately belong to that officer, [and] it would be as much for your interests as mine to have it occupied by a man who is really your friend. The other position would give me an opportunity to organize success instead of being obliged to be constantly embarrassed by the failure of actions.

With great respect  
Your friend  
Nelson A. Miles

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Headquarters Army of the United States,  
Washington, D.C., Dec 4 1876

Dear Miles,

It seems like chasing . . . [illeg.] you is fatiguing, to attempt at this season of the year to reach you by letters. Indeed I fear that you and your men will suffer in that cold latitude more than you expected. Let the result be what it may. I will always bear in mind your zeal and that of your devoted regiment. We hear [of] you at Fort Peck, where

I hope you found supplies, and that you will have regained your cantonment by Christmas, with or without the scalp of Sitting Bull as the case may be.

It is impossible to attract public attention now to Indian affairs. The whole country is in peril by reason of the closeness of the Presidential vote. Almost a state of war exists at Columbia [South Carolina] where Governor [Daniel H.] Chamberlain is absolutely helpless without the backing of the troops under Genl [Thomas R.] Ruger. Ruger's orders are not as clear as they should be. Some go from the President and some from the Secretary of War. By the latter he is ordered to treat Chamberlain as Governor and to enforce his authority by the troops. Today both factions are supposed to be in the State House. Each with a speaker, clerk, &c. Today I understand Chamberlain will attempt with a civil police to eject the Democratic Speaker, and certain members not returned by the Board of Canvassing. The police will be resisted when the Governor will call on Genl Ruger, when orders may compel him to eject these members by soldiers, a case almost identical with that in Louisiana which raised such a rumpus, and was at last disclaimed by the Republican party and the President. Congress also meets here today, and on the day after tomorrow the Electors for President. John Sherman has been in New Orleans two or three weeks, but is now en route for Washington. Mary [Miles's wife] is still at Cleveland. Write to her every opportunity and I will do the same.

Truly yrs, W. T. Sherman

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Headquarters Army of the United States,  
Washington, D.C., Dec. 18, 1876

Dear Miles,

My last letters from you were of Oct 23 and Novr 18. [Sherman apparently had not yet received Miles's letters of 27 October and 1 November.] At the last date you were opposite Fort Peck. I hope you got back to your cantonment before the cold snap of Dec 10, but I fear you were caught on that high prairie between the Missouri River and

the Yellowstone, where firewood must be scarce and the exposure great. It is simply impossible for us here to undertake to supply you with Sibley tents or *anything* at this season. All wants ought to have been foreseen and sent you when it was possible from Fort Buford or [Fort Abraham] Lincoln.

I note especially your ambition for promotion, which is right, and to be made Sec. of War, which is simply out of the question. If a vacancy in Brig Genls occurs your name & McKenzie's [Mackenzie's] will be uppermost, and I assure you that I will be rejoiced if you succeed. Should a vacancy soon open, of which there is now no seeming chance, I feel inclined to believe that Genl Grant would give it to McKenzie because I *know* that such was his purpose when for a few days Howard thought of retiring rather than go to Oregon. The chances are now that a vacancy will not occur before March 4, and therefore that some other president will have to make the selection.

But who is to be that president? The election of November was so close that even yet the question is not settled, and as the time comes for the constitutional decision we hear of conflict and violence. No men or set of men openly propose a wish to resort to violence, but the two great parties are so evenly balanced that the imprudence of a small knot of men anywhere may start the spark that may inflame a continent. So you see, a great question is to be settled before another Secretary of War has to be chosen. I have never heard your name suggested as a candidate. You yourself can best guess whether Tilden will offer you the chance, or Hayes. Neither will consult me, & I am sure Jno [John] Sherman would advise some civilian whose acquired fame as a politician would give strength to the new Cabinet. I am at this minute more concerned for your personal safety and that of your command.

Mary is not here yet, but I am informed she will come soon after New Years.

Truly yrs, W. T. Sherman



## Cantonment on Yellowstone Montana [at Tongue River]

Dec. 25, 1876

Dear General,

Your more than kind letter of the 20th of October was received when near the high divide between the Mo & Yellowstone and your assurances of good will warmed *my heart* at least. When moving north the Indian trail I was following was entirely covered up by a blinding snowstorm, therefore we had to act on reports received through some friendly Indians & hunt up the hostiles. In order to take all the chances and make a good sweep of that country I divided my small force, which resulted successfully. Sitting Bull has been hunted to the Mo & back again and finally lost nearly his entire camp of 122 lodges and what little prestige he had left at Hd [head] of Red Water Dec. 18<sup>51</sup>—he is now trying to find Crazy Horse's or some other hostile camp.

My command is all in good condition. Will spend Sunday & Christmas and start again tomorrow. What few mules I have are nearly dead on their feet for they have been marching up and down this country for nearly one year. Sometimes they have grain but I have not a pound of hay to give them and the snow is eight inches & the thermometer registers 30 below zero. The way this command has been supplied would be a disgrace to the worst militia organized in the land. Many of my men have no stockings but before I start I shall order them purchased of the traders and trust the govt will not refuse to pay for them. One third of the small number of horses sent me were declared unserviceable by a board of survey, and I have now in my hands *more* horses & good ponies captured from the Indians than have been furnished me by the govt. While there are many things that annoy me exceed-

51. Miles's reference is to Captain Frank Baldwin's attack on Sitting Bull's camp on 18 December 1876, with three companies of the Fifth Infantry. The camp actually stood along Ash Creek, a tributary of the Redwater, north of the divide between the Missouri and the Yellowstone. Although no casualties resulted, Baldwin routed the Sioux, capturing meat and supplies, including buffalo robes and blankets, amid below-zero temperatures. Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, pp. 140–45.



Frederic Remington depicted Captain Frank Baldwin's trek through deep snow in the search for Sitting Bull, which resulted in the Fifth Infantry's attack on the village on a tributary of Redwater Creek on 18 December 1876.

ingly, yet I am satisfied with results so far and will keep it up as long as possible. I trust you will give me a command where I can organize success & control my own recourse & supplies & I will clear out this country entirely. But there is still much to be done and a wide field west & north of the Mo.

The killing of the [Sioux] men coming in under a flag of truce by the Crows was most unfortunate for I would have had the whole thing in my hands and they came within a few hundred yards of being safe.<sup>52</sup> No one could anticipate so cowardly a murder. Bull Eagle was the finest specimen of a real chief that I have ever seen and I had intended to recommend that he be recognized as the head chief of these Upper

52. On 21 December, Crow Indian scouts attacked and killed five Sioux leaders approaching the Tongue River Cantonment to meet with Miles. The incident obviously further compounded Miles's work with the Lakotas. *Ibid.*, pp. 150–52.

Sioux Indians and believe he would have proved as wise in council & in peace as he has been brave in war. He was a man about my own age, and had the most perfect control over his people of any man I have ever seen.

Now looking to other fields there may be a time about the 4th of March when we may have no Executive branch of the govt & on the verge of chaos when the country will look to you to defend its capitol and preserve the govt archives & treasure. Should there be signs of such a condition of officers do not fail to send me an order for myself or command. I can march to a railroad in 30 days & be in Washington in 35 or less.

I will send you a map of this country by the next mail.<sup>53</sup> Our last mail was lost and should you have written me I hope you will duplicate it as your letters are most cheering & valuable. I hope you will see my official report.

With the highest respect,  
I remain Truly yours,  
Nelson A. Miles, USA

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Camp on Tongue River  
Opposite Otter Creek Montana  
January 4 1877

Dear General,

I take pleasure in acknowledging your very kind letter of Dec. 4th which reached me four days ago and I assure you it was most welcome, as your expressions of sympathy and encouragement were given in good time. We have been slowly moving up this river—the deep snow, the glare ice, & rough frozen ground have made it difficult to move provided we had a good country but in addition to that we have something that does not deserve the name. It is simply the debris of a thousand volcanoes thrown together in one confused mass. Nature has formed the watercourses with mountain ridges—deep

53. So far as is known, Miles did not forward such a map to Sherman.

ravines, in fact it is cut in every possible shape entirely unlike any other part of the country. Along the bed of this stream there is an abundance of timber but outside of that you only see a few scattering cedars or pines on the tops or sides of the clefts. It is as impassable for wagons outside the valley of the stream as it would be for you to ride across the city of Washington without following the streets. The greatest part of today's march has been beneath bluffs from five hundred to seven hundred feet high. These mountain fastnesses occupied by a savage and enterprising foe compels us to move with great care and leave them as little advantage as possible. We have had two skirmishes and scouted the Rosebud & cleared this. Yesterday I lost a very good soldier by their making a sudden dash at two men driving cattle in rear of the command.

I fear that I will be able to accomplish but very little by this movement on account of the weakness of my mules and the worn out condition of my wagons. They have been in the govt service a long time and are not sufficient to keep my command out more than twenty days. If Crazy Horse's camp is within one hundred miles of my command I can reach them, but if beyond that point it is doubtful whether I can go far without endangering the infy of my command. I believe I can fight & whip them even if they have three or four to one, but the danger of getting blocked up in two feet of snow without food is something that I have to be careful about. I have frequently made recommendations & requests which if granted would have given me ample supplies and enabled me to continue active movements against these people, but for some unaccountable reason not a single one has been granted and I think without exception only one has received respectful acknowledgement. If those who control and supply commands would remain out here and take their chances with them it would be very well, but it does seem but just that if an officer is competent to be entrusted with the safety of the public interest and the lives of his command in such a country & under such circumstances he should have some control over that without which he can not succeed—namely his supplies, & not be the victim of indifference or uncertainty, one if not both, I am prepared to prove.



Clad in fur and heavy wool, Miles and a few of his officers were photographed by John H. Fouch on 29 December 1876 as they prepared to leave the Tongue River Cantonment in pursuit of Crazy Horse's warriors. From left are Second Lieutenant Oscar F. Long, Dr. (Major) Henry R. Tilton, Second Lieutenant James W. Pope, Colonel Miles, First Lieutenant Frank D. Baldwin, Second Lieutenant Charles E. Hargous, and Second Lieutenant Hobart K. Bailey.

I fear that one of your letters has been lost as I have only received two since your return from California, one immediately on your return and the other dated Dec 4. I trust you will not leave me out in this country if there is the least indication of trouble [back East] and I have no doubt there will be, as we are not different from the people of all other countries. In the next war the breech-loading rifle will give place to the magazine gun, the old models of artillery will disappear and the science of equipping, supplying & marching a command will be better understood. With love to all of the family I remain, Dear Genl, with great respect,

Your friend  
Nelson A. Miles  
USA

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Cantonment on Tongue River  
Montana Territory  
Feby 1st 1877

Dear General,

Your very kind letter of Dec. 18th is at hand, and I assure you your words of sympathy & interest for this command as well as myself are encouragements of which any soldier might feel a just pride. The command is in good condition, and we will pass this winter very comfortably. I would keep constantly moving and give these Indians no rest but for the mismanagement of those who have presumed to supply this command. Some time when I get time I will write you my plan of Indian campaigning for it may interest you, and as it enables me to know the strength & design of my enemy to always find, defeat & follow him, it must be admitted that it has advantages. I have heard so much of that word "can't" that I would prefer to keep constantly moving, but the exhausted condition of my mules & the limited amount of forage will not admit of it. When I turned back from pursuing "Crazy Horse," Mr. Wagon Master reported that I had not thirty mules that could carry a pack thru consecutive days. I could supply my command from Montana but I can have nothing from Dept Hd.Qrs.

Now regarding the two positions referred to in your letter, I will not disagree with you that the first is "out of the question" though I would sacrifice a life position for the chance of holding it a few years, for there is no better field for improvement than any subordinate position in this country. You may not think me qualified but I would convince you in two months that I was not only able to unite the interest of the army, and promote its efficiency thereby, but benefit the country & at the same time give you your true position & make it far more important.

The other position [of department commander] I believe I have fairly earned. Recommended for it years ago by such eminent men as Vice President [Henry] Wilson, [Senator Charles] Sumner, [Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton], General [George G. Meade], now all



in their graves. Endorsed by many other distinguished officers. I feel that I was considered worthy of it then. My services since have but confirmed their good opinion. It so happens that I commanded larger bodies of troops during the war than any men of my age. In the work of reconstruction I had an important command. In the west I have had important commands and on several occasions have fought and defeated larger and better armed bodies of hostile Indians than any other officer since the history of Indian warfare commenced, and at the same time have gained a more extended knowledge of our frontier country than any living man. If such a record is of value, then I would like the acknowledgement on purely military grounds and I believe my friends have a basis upon which to present my name. I believe and hope that Senator Sherman & others will urge it.

And now my dear General, while your recommendation would be invaluable to me, based as I believe it would be on military reasons, I must ask that you will not oppose it on the grounds of very distant relationship. That would be an injury I could never forget. I believe several of the General officers will recommend me either in an official or unofficial way, and should you be pleased to add your illustrious name, it would be a life-long gratification to me and a source of honorable pride to my descendants. . . .

With Kindest regards to the family,  
I remain with great respect  
Very Truly yours,  
Nelson A. Miles  
U.S.A.

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Cantonment on Yellowstone  
Montana  
Feby 5, 1877

Dear General,

I see that some extracts from my letters to you have found their way into the eastern papers. In these I am credited with saying I believed "the Sioux war over." This I think must be some mistake, for while I

have done my best with this small command to bring about so desirable a result, yet I have never been fully satisfied that we had reached a conclusion. I wrote Genl Terry after our success on Cedar Creek & [the] Yellowstone that I believed we had reached the “beginning of the end,” and if the same zeal and judgment had been manifested by officers on other parts of this line, we would have finished the affairs this winter.

The disarming of Indians who have been peaceable for years while the hostiles are still out has had the effect of increasing the number [of Indians] in the field. There is scarcely any Indians within striking distance of this command now, for we have secured a radius of one hundred & fifty miles of this country and my command has been cut down to about four hundred fighting men with thirty teams—two scouts & 35 days  $\frac{2}{3}$  frozen—so that it is simply a human impossibility for me to go where I know the Indians have retreated. When I *know* that fifteen hundred men could have been wintered here with a full battalion or regt of cavalry you cannot expect me to feel very kindly towards those who have deprived me of the opportunity of ending this war. Yet enough has been done to demonstrate what can be accomplished by a perfect spy system, a properly organized command, and such energy & management used as enables us to *find, follow, & defeat* large bodies of these Indians *every time* and under all circumstances. As you take more interest in our welfare & success than any one else, I will in a few days send you a description of the country, and what I believe the best means of settling forever this great question. If hostilities are continued next summer the field of operations will undoubtedly change.

What caused Genl Crook to turn east and return to his base?<sup>54</sup> He was advertised to go to the Rosebud where Crazy Horse was. About that time that large camp moved over from the Rosebud to Tongue river & camped along that stream directly on the line of march from

54. Miles here critiqued Crook's decision not to follow refugees directly as they fled north from the Northern Cheyenne village along the Red Fork of the Powder River that Mackenzie had attacked in late November 1876. See Jerome A. Greene, *Morning Star Dawn: The Powder River Expedition and the Northern Cheyennes, 1876* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), pp. 185–87.



*Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* carried this depiction of Miles's 8 January 1877 battle in the Wolf Mountains, where the Fifth Infantry accompanied by artillery defeated Crazy Horse's warriors amid heavy snow and freezing temperatures. The campaign assured a permanent military presence in the Yellowstone corridor, effectively nullifying further coordinated Indian opposition in the region.

Powder River to Rosebud and there remained several weeks until we drove them out [of the Wolf Mountains]. I may make another movement to the southeast while my grain lasts.<sup>55</sup> We are now completing our cantonment that we have neglected during the fall & winter. We have three large stores, ice houses, bakery & music hall and every thing will be in readiness to receive you in the spring.<sup>56</sup> Great interest is felt in the affairs of the East and we all hope that the patriotism &

55. A parenthetical note in the margin stated that the paragraph up to this point was "Personal, & not intended for the press."

56. A full plat of the Tongue River Cantonment's appearance as of February 1877 appears in William F. Zimmer, *Frontier Soldier: An Enlisted Man's Journal of the Sioux and Nez Perce Campaigns, 1877*, ed. Jerome A. Greene (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1998), p. 40.

better judgment will prevail & save the Republic the [illeg.] of our people & preserve our fine country from the devastation of war.

With the highest respect  
Very Truly yours,  
Nelson A. Miles

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Headquarters Army of the United States,  
Washington, D.C., Feb 18 1877

Dear Miles,

I have received and well appreciated all your letters and would have written you more regularly, and more fully, but you know that division & dept commanders are furious when one of their subordinates corresponds directly with a common superior on official matters. In general terms I have admired your perseverance in spite of winter & cold in stirring up the hostile savages. I know that Genl Sheridan will send you at the earliest moment possible infantry reinforcements, also the 7th Cavalry, and with this I hope you will be able to clean out the Yellowstone and Big Horn countries presently. As soon as spring unlocks the ice, boats will be pushed forward to bring you materials for the two new posts,<sup>57</sup> but I expect you can devolve on some subordinate this work whilst you give your attention to the Indians. The newspapers will have kept you advised of the complications and dangers which have environed us here. The present appearances are that Hayes will be our next President and that the Democrats will submit, though they are loath in denouncing fraud. It is very hard for an impartial mind to arrive at the truth, and I am going to give the whole force of my influence and power to the decision of the tribunal established by Congress to ascertain & declare the electoral vote, and the probabilities are that this decision will be made known this week, which only leaves another full week to get ready for the inauguration of the new President.

57. The new posts would be Fort Custer, on the Big Horn River, and Fort Keogh, near the site of Miles's Tongue River Cantonment on the Yellowstone. See Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, pp. 223–24.





*P. H. Sheridan*  
*Lieut General*

As commander of the Military Division of the Missouri, Lieutenant General Philip H. Sheridan oversaw operations in the region extending roughly from the Mississippi River into the Rocky Mountains and north from Texas to the Canadian border.

I think Terry & Sheridan will do you full justice in the matter of those Indians captured by you on the Yellowstone of whom you took hostages. When the case comes up to me I will do you full justice. Mary & Cecelia are well. Mary writes you almost daily.

Truly yr Friend,  
Sherman

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Headquarters Army of the United States,  
Washington, D.C., February 28, 1877

Dear Miles,

Yours of Feb. 1 . . . was rec'd yesterday. Most undoubtedly will I *not* oppose any effort on the part of your friend [likely Sherman himself] to secure promotion or advancement in any way, but I will help all I can consistent with a fair & honest regard to the claims of others. At present there is no vacancy in the grade of brigadier general—nor do I see any near prospect of such vacancy. The temper of Congress and the country is not favorable to any increase of the number of general officers, but rather the reverse. Banning's bill for the induction of 2 regts of cavalry, 1 of artillery, and 9 of infantry is appended to the appropriation bill, and may defeat the passage of the appropriation bill itself, for I am sure the Senate will not approve such a destructive measure. In any event, however, the 2500 men provided by the bill last spring for the Sioux War must be discharged in all June of this year, and I am anxious that all should be done that can be done in this short interval.<sup>58</sup>

Genl Terry is now here, and tells me that he will send you at the earliest possible day, a force of about 2400 men, with which to scour the country round about the Tongue, Rosebud, and Big Horn Rivers.

58. Many recruits who enlisted in the Seventh Cavalry after Little Bighorn as so-called Custer Avengers were subsequently distributed among all line components beginning in the fall of 1876. Douglas C. McChristian, *Regular Army Oi: Soldiering on the Western Frontier, 1865–1891* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017), pp. 72, 128–29, 419, 441.



Genl Crook will approach from the south but I hope there will be no conflict of authority or of interest. There ought to be but one department over all that country, but I cannot at present accomplish so radical a change. Terry tells me you will be in to St. Paul soon. I advise you not to tarry but to work hard this year, for whoever brings this Sioux War to a close will be in the fairest way to promotion. McKenzie [Mackenzie] starts today for Chicago and his regt at Red Cloud [Agency, Nebraska]. I suppose he will go to the Belle Fourche. Mary and Cecelia are well. Mary writes you daily. She ought not to go up the Yellowstone till July.

Truly yr Friend,  
W. T. Sherman

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Headquarters Army of the United States,  
Washington, D.C., March 21, 1877

Dear Miles,

Yours of March 1 is rec'd [this letter has not been found] and I think all arrangements have been made for a steamboat to take from Leavenworth the stores and property belonging to the 5th Inf. I suppose no questions will be asked as to the weight of the personal baggage of officers. But of this I have no official knowledge, as such matters are exclusively regulated by Department Commanders and the QM Dept. All orders of the most liberal nature have been made as to the supplies for the posts on the Yellowstone. The accounts for the Missouri River agencies and those of Spotted Tail and Red Cloud show that the Indians are coming in by squads from the hostile camps, surrendering ponies and arms, so that by spring you will have only the worst characters to deal with. I understand you will have 2500 men as soon as supplies can go up the river and with these I trust you will clean out that Big Horn region so that we will not have it to do over again.

A large expedition will surely go to the Black Hills and Big Horn region. In that I would not be astonished to find a community estab-

lished there by autumn that can defend itself. Meantime we want the Indian Bureau to move all the Sioux down to the Missouri River as near Fort Randall as possible.

The new cabinet & president are now in council on the southern problem, and the rush for offices. Times in civil life have been so hard that everybody I ever knew in life has turned up as an office seeker, and would take every instant of my time if I would read their testimonials and constitute myself their agent.

I think there must be a called session of Congress in all May to pass the Army Appropriation Bill. But everybody is afraid to call Congress because once assembled no man can tell what they will do.

Yrs truly, W. T. Sherman

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Hdqrs, Yellowstone Command

Tongue River Montana

March 29, 1877

Dear General,

I would suppose that a general officer could find some other employment than questioning a lying Indian and giving his statements to the press in such a way as to reflect discredit upon the honest efforts of a small part of the army not under his command. It will be remembered that with all the resources of a dept this same officer [i.e., Crook] started with the great "Powder River Expedition["] of twenty-two hundred men to subjugate or destroy this same body of Indians and that after the engagement of Mackenzie with the Cheyennes, and when within a few days march of Crazy Horse's camp he turned round & marched back to [Fort] Reno & then down toward Belle Fourche where there has not been a camp of hostile Indians in two years, camped fourteen days on a sagebrush plain & returned to winter quarters, having accomplished nothing but given the Indians renewed confidence. These insinuations come with very poor grace from a man who was a failure during the war and has been ever since. I not only have to contend against the same Indians with limited

means but against all the envy and jealousy of the old army & those who do not appear to be doing very much themselves.<sup>59</sup>

The truth is, all I expected to accomplish was to convince Crazy Horse & his following that I could whip them and drive them into the deep snows of the Big Horn Mountains. They had had no engagement since the Custer affair and of course were very confident in their own prowess. They left their big medicine man “Big Crow” dead on the field and have admitted here several times and at Fort Peck that they lost fifteen killed and thirty or forty wounded. It matters not how many were killed. I had followed them from near the mouth of Otter Creek. They had met a command they could do nothing with, and after the engagement I allowed the command to rest as they were very tired & the snow falling rapidly. The next day we marched *up* the valley several miles & my scouts & mounted men could see from the high bluffs I presume fifteen miles up the valley and not a sign of an Indian was visible, in fact they did not stop retreating until they reached the Little Horn at the base of the Big Horn Mountains. The result of that movement with others is a manifest willingness on their part to accept the terms of the gov’t and the whole camp was moving in this direction with my interpreter when a runner came out saying Spotted Tail was coming out bringing fresh animals loaded with presents & two kegs of powder and wanted them to go in with him [to surrender].

Like any people, they naturally endeavor to get the best terms and a large party came in to see if they could obtain any better terms. Their

59. This matter references the strained relationship between Miles and Crook, whose lukewarm performance in 1876 had received repeated castigation in the press as well as within the army establishment. In this statement Miles stressed to Sherman his pique at Crook’s performance in the Sioux War. Despite Crook’s controversial victory at Rosebud Creek in June 1876, his performance in closing the war was generally marginal compared to Miles’s own repeated successes, which Miles was unabashedly highlighting here. For Crook’s endeavors in 1876, see Paul L. Hedren, *Powder River: Disastrous Opening of the Great Sioux War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016); Jerome A. Greene, *Slim Buttes, 1876: An Episode of the Great Sioux War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982); and Paul L. Hedren, *Rosebud, June 17, 1876: Prelude to the Little Big Horn* (forthcoming from the University of Oklahoma Press). Miles’s successes are presented in Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, *passim*, as cited herein.



Brigadier General George Crook, who headed the Department of the Platte, was one of Miles's rivals in his ongoing quest for promotion. Crook went on to head the Military Division of the Missouri later in his career.

tribes camped at mouth of Otter creek and will move over to Little Powder to meet Spotted Tail. Nine of their prominent men remain here as a pledge that they are acting in good faith and that their people will come in, or go to their agency. I think some will come in here [Tongue River Cantonment] as they say they are nearly starved to death at their agencies. The three chiefs are Horse Roads (Sioux), the Ice or White Bull & Little Chief (Cheyennes). The "Hump" is a great leader among the Sioux, a young man of fine face & splendid physique [whose] remaining will have good effect among the young warriors. If they go in it will reduce the number of hostiles very much. They are very wild Indians and being subjugated by force will have to be governed by power for a few years or the peace will not be permanent. I have always been of the opinion that the Sioux war would finally end between the Missouri River & the British line, and that territory would be a good reservation for the Indians on account of the game and there being no gold to tempt the white settlers. The Yellowstone Valley would soon be settled up & thrown open to settlements and the gold hunters will overrun the Wolf & Big Horn Mountains this summer. It will be impossible for me to move before I get yours [i.e., your letter].

With great respect  
Your friend  
Nelson A. Miles  
USA

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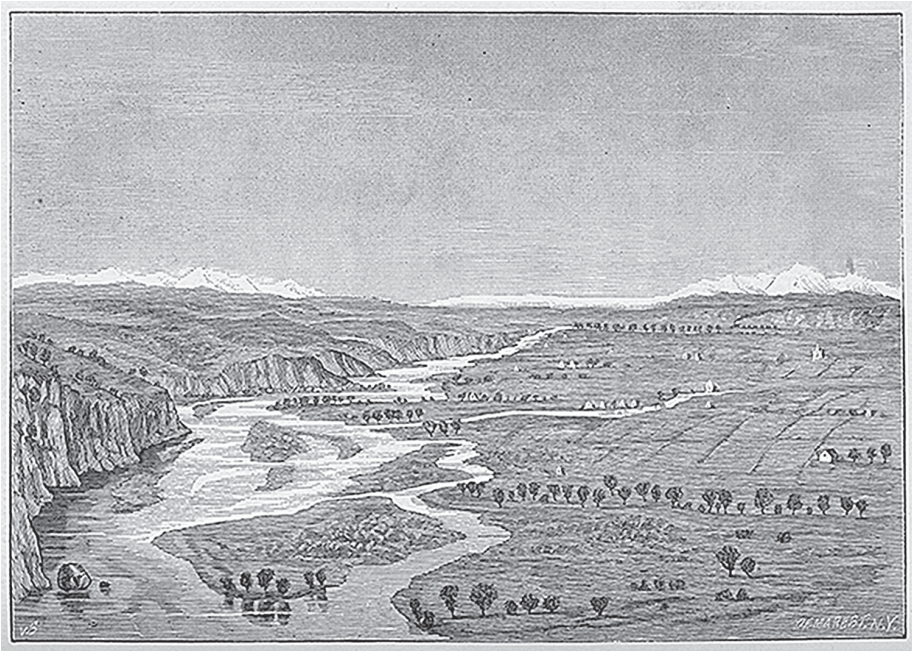
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Hdqrs Yellowstone Command  
Tongue River Montana  
April 8, 1877

Dear General,

Yesterday the ground was . . . [illeg.] and every indication of an early . . . [parts of letter destroyed] Today we have several inches of snow . . . [and it is?] quite cold. Still, the Yellowstone is . . . [illeg.] and several small boats come [illeg.] . . . from Montana. Four months ago . . . [I?]





The buildings visible in this view of the Yellowstone River valley above Billings around 1890 confirms Miles's prediction that white settlers would soon occupy the area.

requested authority to supply my command but have received no reply and the result is I am now trying to keep my animals alive on old grass & cottonwood [bark?] until a steamer can come up about . . . a month hence.

The nine Indians that remain here are quite contented and will look for their people [to come] in during the next twenty days. Doubtless some will go in with Spotted Tail and others come in here, while a portion will remain hostile. If any considerable number surrender at either place, it will be a good finale to our winter campaign and a good reward for our efforts.

You may be assured I shall lose no time in moving against those that remain hostile, as soon as I obtain supplies. These prominent men say they would prefer to surrender here, as they believe the power that can whip them can take care of them, and it is nearer the buffalo—that they were nearly starved to death at their agencies. Another reason is



some of the agency Indians have fought against them, and as they have been considered hostile every depredation committed near the agencies is charged to the “hostiles.” This is doubtless true, as I have seen murders charged to Crazy Horse’s band when his tribe was three hundred miles away.

I feel very grateful to you for your interest and confidence in giving me an important command this spring, and I will endeavor to make the best use of it. But you know, General, that without supplies any command is powerless and I think my experience during the past winter has shown the difficulty of campaigning with insufficient means. It is a somewhat remarkable fact that for seven months not a single important request or recommendation of mine has been favorably considered, and nearly all of my communications have been treated with silent contempt. This is not very encouraging. Now I tell you General there is something wrong in this matter and I write you freely rather than make public what would only reflect discredit upon the army. As you wish me to be successful, I trust you will not make my movements dependent upon some disinterested party at [Fort] Buford, St. Paul or elsewhere. In order that he who has to take the responsibility of disaster & contend against the Sioux in these “bad lands” should have a fair opportunity of closing this trouble in his own way & as speedily as possible, I would like a Dept command as it would give me authority to properly organize & equip my command to place supplies where I know I will want them, and to compel those disinterested people in the rear and along the agencies to give me prompt information and support whenever required.

If you can give me a department you will give me *more* than ample means of closing this Sioux war *and* do me the greatest kindness. The present seems a favorable time for such a change as I believe Genl [John] Pope would be pleased to go to New York and Genl Terry to Leavenworth, and the only two officers in this Dept who rank me have been here a long time and seem anxious to get away.<sup>60</sup> By giving

60. The two officers to whom Miles referred as “ranking” him were undoubtedly Colonel John Gibbon, stationed with the Seventh U.S. Infantry at Fort Shaw, Montana Territory, and Colonel William B. Hazen, at Fort Buford with the Sixth U.S. Infantry. A third, Colonel Thomas Pitcher, with the First U.S. Infantry at Fort Randall, Dakota Ter-

me such a command you give me control over my own resources and a fair field for all my energies or abilities for a number of years.

With kindest regards to the family.

I remain

With the highest respect

Your friend

Nelson A. Miles

U.S.A.

([P.S.] I hope you will come out this summer.)

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Headquarters Army of the United States,  
Washington, D.C., April 23, 1877

Genl N. A. Miles  
Cantonment of the Yellowstone

Dear Miles,

I have your letter of March 29, with the newspaper slip about your fight last winter. I see that you do not permit such a terrible winter to distract you in the least. It may be that Genl Crook had no more to do with the publication of the gossip of the Indians than I had. Or if he did he knows and appreciates the fact that your presence & activity during the bitter winter months stirred up those Indians so that now they are starved poor and begging for peace. It makes not a particle of difference whether they surrender to you or anybody else. You must trust to others to divine the cause.

Mary went with us west from Cleveland as far as Newark, Ohio, where with Genl Garfield's family she turned north, and we went on to St. Louis, where my family is reestablished. To live in Washington is simple torture day & night besieged by men [and] women begging for office. I don't know what is to be the upshot. All the Departments

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ritory, was slated for retirement. *Official Army Register for January, 1877* (Washington, D.C.: Adjutant General's Office, 1877), pp. 232–33.

are discharging clerks, males & females, who have not a cent where-with to pay board or to pay their way elsewhere. I do honestly believe you are better off on the Yellowstone than we are here. There is no possible employment for anybody here except by the Gov't, and as the work of the war, and of paper money is rapidly being ended,<sup>61</sup> the clerical force is being reduced, so that the city is full of wailing women.

I hope your boats will get up soon, and that things hereafter will brighten up on the Yellowstone. I am told hundreds & thousands of people are hurrying to the Black Hills and Big Horn Mountains, so that I would not be astonished to find settlements on the way from [Fort] Lincoln to Montana. We are now at standstill till Congress has its spend session in June & provides for the Army. As reduction & money are now the order of the day we must be prepared for serving reduction.

All who are here now are well, but all my family except Elly & Rachel are at the West.

Yrs,  
W. T. Sherman

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*Confidential*

Hdqrs, Yellowstone Command  
Tongue River Montana  
April 30, 1877

Dear General,

Generals Hancock, Pope & Howard write me that they will recommend me very strongly for the appointment to the first vacancy in the list of brigadier generals of the army, and that they would advocate my promotion. I think General Terry will do the same and pos-

61. President Hayes's incoming administration coincided with inception of a gold standard to prime the economy and help moderate effects of the depression of 1873. It effectually depreciated the value of paper currency then in circulation, rendering much of it worthless.

sibly some other general officers. General [Andrew A.] Humphries [Humphreys] is familiar with my record during the war as his official report shows and I would be glad to have his endorsement. Possibly General Sheridan is so much interested in Mackenzie that he may oppose my promotion although his official report at the close of the war and his annual report of 1875 are both very complimentary to my command and to me.

In General [George G.] Meade's report at the close of the war you will find very favorable mention of my command and he very kindly recommended me for the position eight years ago. Together with [those of] several other prominent men, I think you will find on file in the war office the recommendations of [former Secretary of War] Mr. [Edwin M.] Stanton, [Senator Charles] Sumner, [Major General James H.] Wilson and others. I understood Mr. Wilson to say that they were handed to General [John M.] Schofield when he was secty of war. Of course if the appointment is given me I wish it on military recommendations and believe five out of the six brigadier generals would recommend me if some friend would suggest it, but [I] do not feel like asking them. Still I prize the endorsements of those who have moved in the matter. General [Charles] Devens of the cabinet is a very good friend of mine. I have friends enough and believe that my experience and services would warrant them in advocating my claims, yet it needs some friend in Washington to unite the influence of my friends. These communications will very properly be addressed to you as general of the army and if you will be please[d] to gather my various endorsements and see that they are presented favorably at the proper time to the President, you will do me a great and lasting favor.

My command is now moving up Tongue River. I start tomorrow and hope to clear this Dept. south of the Mo River. . . .

[Miles]

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Headquarters Army of the United States,  
Washington, D.C., May 12, 1877

Dear Miles,

I have your letter of April 26, and am glad the Indians are coming in, but am sorry I cannot agree with you that you should hold them as prisoners to be fed out of your costly rations till they become recovered & fit for the process of civilization. The Army commissioners cannot afford out of our limited appropriations to feed captive Indians more than a few days. We will be absolutely without any appropriation at all after July 1. Whereas the bill for feeding Indians did pass, now the only chance these prisoners have of obtaining any rations at all will be from the agencies down on the Missouri River. Crazy Horse & most of the renegades have gone into the Spotted Tail & Red Cloud agencies on the Upper Niobrara where are now fifteen thousand Sioux. Already come complaints that the Indian Bureau is short of food, and there is danger that starvation may compel & justify the Indians to head out again in search of food. All ought to be sent on their own legs close to the Missouri River, where the appropriation can find them. It cannot possibly do so where they are, as hauling and transportation costs more than the food.

I think you should by the first boats that go out of the Yellowstone send all Indians to the agencies at Standing Rock or Cheyenne [River] and turn them over to the proper agents. If you do not your own rations will give out. Remember that after July 1 we get not a cent of pay. . . .<sup>62</sup> Congress will meet in October, but even then we don't know that they will appropriate. Everybody should economize. I can hardly venture to travel at my own expense this year, and am by no means sure that I will venture to the Yellowstone. Everything here seems tranquil, but I foresee much trouble for the Army.

Yrs truly,      W. T. Sherman

62. The Fifty-fourth Congress had failed to pass an appropriation bill to pay army personnel as of 1 July 1877. Officers had to make do or borrow funds, while enlisted men received services gratuitously. The appropriation was restored in 1878. William Addle-

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Headquarters Army of the United States,  
Washington, D.C., June 1, 1877

Dear Miles,

I have been on a scout to New York, New London, Newport, Boston & West Point two weeks, and am on the point of going to pay a promised visit to Mr. Cameron, ex Sec. of War.

You need not be uneasy about being fully appreciated, and your claims to promotion entertained when an advancement occurs, of which event there does not seem to be the least probability, I am almost sure. Congress on meeting in October will insist on reducing the Army to twenty or even 17 thousand men. This I infer cuts off both Sheridan and myself, for our rank is only compatible with the existence of a Corps—Armies usually can stand as 25000 men.<sup>63</sup> The House of Representatives is Democratic, holds the purse, and seems resolved to cut down the Army below the needs of the country, so that on an increase they can bring in some of *their* Generals. We hardly expected this reaction so soon, but in modern times events proceed more rapidly than of old. I have my family in Saint Louis and will not be the least surprised if Congress would abolish my office next winter. They shall not take me by surprise.

Meantime I want to come up and see you and the Yellowstone country. Mr. [James D.] Cameron [recently superseded secretary of war] also says he will come up. I think he wants to see Lizzie Sherman.<sup>64</sup> If so, we may come up in July. In that event Cameron would come back and I would go on to [western] Montana. But as all pay is cut off in July, I will not be able to go on to Oregon, California &c as I had intended, but would return via Corrine [Utah Territory] and the Pacific Railroad, as I must be here before Congress meets in October.

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man Ganoe, *The History of the United States Army* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1924), pp. 348–49.

63. In the army's 1877 administrative hierarchy, Sheridan's grade ranked immediately below that of Sherman. Heitman, *Historical Register*, 1:881.

64. Cameron had a romantic interest in Elizabeth Sherman, whom he would marry in 1878. Bell, *Secretaries of War and Secretaries of the Army*, p. 82.

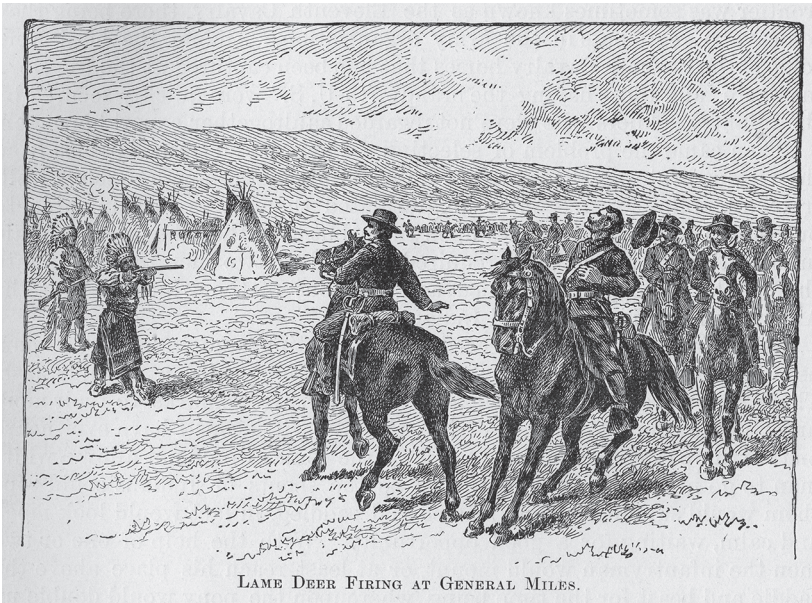


Our enemy is not now the Indians, but Congress.

We have heard of your fight on the Rosebud [the *Lame Deer* Fight on Muddy Creek on 7 May 1877], but have not got your official report. I have no doubt your operations last winter & this spring will make the Yellowstone as safe as the Platte. We have heard of Mary [Miles] & Lizzie [Sherman] at Fort Buford May 13. I infer they reached you in all May, but what of your household goods[?] Were they not on the *Don Cameron* sunk and lost[?]<sup>65</sup>. . . . If I come in July, you will hear of it well in advance.

Yrs truly, W. T. Sherman

65. The *J. Donald Cameron*, bearing Miles's wife and family as well as Elizabeth Sherman, snagged and sank in the Missouri below Sioux City on 10 May 1877, but the passengers were rescued by the crew of the nearby *General Sherman*. Mary Miles and her party transferred to the *Josephine* at Bismarck and gained the cantonment on 11 July. Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, pp. 222–23.



This illustration from Miles's 1896 memoir depicts the 7 May 1877 incident with Lame Deer, who had approached Miles to surrender when a white scout drew his rifle as a protective measure. Fearing he was about to be shot, Lame Deer drew his weapon and fired. The bullet missed Miles but struck a soldier nearby.

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Headquarters Army of the United States,  
Washington, D.C., June 9, 1877

Dear Miles,

Yrs of May 16 is rec'd, and my present purpose is to come up to the Yellowstone & beyond, how far will depend on time and circumstances.

Mr. Cameron intended to go with me as far as your post, but on a recent visit to him, and correspondence since, he has concluded not to attempt the trip now because there is to be a convention at Harrisburg Aug. 25 with whose proceedings he is deeply interested, *viz* on its action may depend the next legislation which elects the senator for six years, after his present short time, and his re-election is necessary for his future political career.

Therefore I will come with one aide, Bacon<sup>66</sup> & [son] Tom from St. Louis. Genl Terry writes me from St. Paul that he would like to go with me, and I have written a most cordial invitation to that effect naming July 8 as the probable date of my arrival at St. Paul. This should bring us to your post in all July. I will go on to Montana, but cannot say whether I will attempt to go further *viz* to Oregon this year, as I ought to be back here at the meeting of Congress Oct 15. I have not heard yet if your household goods were on the *Cameron* sunk at Sioux City. If so you will be in a bad way in that remote region without house furniture or pay. I hope however that you will receive this summer plenty of grub to carry you through the year, and I believe the road west of you will settle up, so that the Montana people will send you flour, vegetables, oats &c.

I am going to West Point Tuesday next June 12, and will leave for the West June 27, taking Elly and Rachel to Minnie Moulton's wedding<sup>67</sup> at Glendale June 28. Then to St. Louis where I expect to start

66. Colonel John M. Bacon served as an aide to General Sherman from 1871 to 1884. Heitman, *Historical Register*, 1:179.

67. Minnie Moulton (1856–1925) was the daughter of Sherman's sister, Frances Beecher Moulton, and Charles W. Moulton, of Cincinnati. "Mary 'Minnie' Moulton Probasco," in *Find a Grave*, [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com).

for the Yellowstone via Chicago & St. Paul immediately after the 4th of July. Hoping to find you all in good health & content about the 25th of July. With love to Mary, Lizzie & all friends,

I am truly yrs,  
W. T. Sherman

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Headquarters Army of the United States,  
Washington, D.C., June 11, 1877

Dear Miles,

I wrote you a few days ago and told you that Mr. Cameron had concluded not to attempt the journey to the Yellowstone by reason of a convention to be held at Harrisburg in August in whose deliberations he has a deep interest. I however will come up and go on to the Big Horn and Montana. If the road be practicable and you have light wagons, I would prefer that kind of travel for myself and escort, but if not I will depend on you to lead me to the next post by a small cavalry escort, preferably a company of the 2nd Cavalry belonging to the Dist. of Montana. I want the scantiest & lightest outfit and nothing but rations. I don't want my presence to interfere with the general movement of troops. If the boats are able to go up to Buell's post at the Big Horn I will get my outfit there and go to [Fort] Ellis, sending the escort back from there.

At Ellis I will use Inf'ty in wagons & take the usual stops from Bozeman.

Love to Mary & Lizzie  
Yrs truly,  
W. T. Sherman  
General

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Headquarters Army of the United States,  
Washington, D.C., June 27, 1877

Dear Miles,

Yours of June 19 from [Fort] Buford came yesterday and though I have already written you and Genl Terry very fully will now repeat that I will leave here tomorrow 9 p.m., reach Glendale near Cincinnati where I will attend Minnie Moulton's wedding, reaching St. Louis June 30. I am compelled to remain there till July 4 on a matter of business but July 4 p.m. I will be off for Chicago, St. Paul, Bismarck &c for the Yellowstone, expecting to reach Buford about the 12th and your post before the 20th. I propose to go as far as possible by boat to meet Sheridan if possible about the Big Horn [River], which he expects to reach July 25.

From the Big Horn I want an escort to Fort Ellis, probably a company of the 2nd Cavalry, which belongs in Montana. When in Montana I may conclude to go over to Walla Walla [Washington Territory], and under existing facts it will not be prudent to go without escort.<sup>68</sup>

Tell Lizzie Sherman that I have a present for her from Mr. Cameron too valuable to risk, and that I will count on her being at your post when I get there. If she contemplates leaving, tell her not to start till she knows she will surely meet me—or better, await my coming at Tongue River.

I have hundreds of applications to go along, but will come as light as possible, prepared to travel on horses & with pack animals. Poe<sup>69</sup> &

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68. Sherman expressed caution because of recently arising troubles between the army and the Nez Perce Indians' resistance to worsening reservation conditions in Idaho Territory and Oregon. For the official accounts of Sherman's trip west in 1877, see *Reports of Inspection Made in the Summer of 1877 by Generals P. H. Sheridan and W. T. Sherman of Country North of the Union Pacific Railroad* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1878); also available as William Tecumseh Sherman and Philip Henry Sheridan, *Travel Accounts of General William T. Sherman to Spokane Falls, Washington Territory, in the Summers of 1877 and 1883* (Fairfield, Wash.: Ye Galleon Press, 1984).

69. Colonel Orlando Poe served as aide de camp to General Sherman from 1873 to 1894. Heitman, *Historical Register*, 1:795–96.

Bacon will be aides & Tom my companion.

Love to all.  
Truly yr Friend,  
W. T. Sherman

Headquarters Army of the United States,  
Fort Ellis, Aug. 19, 1877

Dear Miles,

We got back from the Park yesterday. Will stay here tomorrow, and go to Helena Tuesday.

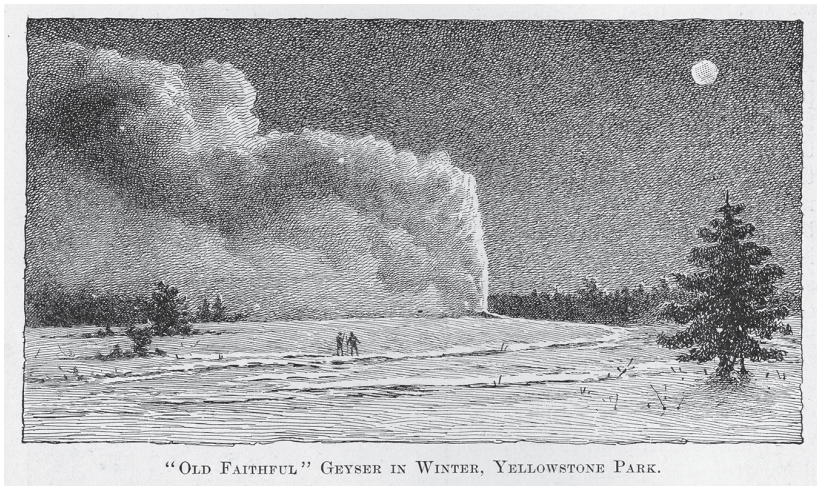
I received your letter of August 12 last night.

I have already made my official recommendation on the subject of the Arizona command and now must stand by it. To select a colonel in *any* Department to command that Department is easy, natural and proper. To select one in a Division could be tolerated, but to select one colonel at a district out of forty—every one having real claims[—] would be dangerous. The one selected would have reason for pride, but all the 39 [others] would feel down & hurt. I know this has been done but I know also that it has as a rule been wrong, insidious, and damaging to the best interest of the Service.

Gibbon's fight [at the Big Hole River] was splendid, but the Indians have not turned back for Idaho. They seem to be making for Wind River. Howard in close pursuit. I hope he will get another lick at them before they cross the mountains. If they succeed in getting over I will advise that the 7th Cavalry now coming this way turn south east of the mountains and try to catch them south of [abandoned] Fort C.F. Smith.<sup>70</sup>

70. Colonel John Gibbon commanded the District of Montana within General Terry's Department of Dakota. His battle with the Nez Percés on 9–10 August 1877 proved costly—twenty-nine men killed and forty wounded in the affray, compared with perhaps one hundred Indians killed and wounded. Jerome A. Greene, *Nez Perce Summer, 1877: The U.S. Army and the Nee-Me-Poo Crisis* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 2000), pp. 126, 129–40. For Fort C. F. Smith, see Robert W. Frazer, *Forts of the West: Military Forts and Presidios, and Posts Commonly Called Forts, West of the Mississippi River to 1898* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), p. 84.





Sherman and his party were among the early white visitors to view sights like Old Faithful at the newly established Yellowstone National Park. This image appeared with Miles's account of a march he made through the park the next summer following a campaign against the Bannock Indians.

Gibbon ought to have his four companies of the 2nd Cavalry. If you hold the 3 companies with Brisbin,<sup>71</sup> I may order the equivalent of the 7th Cav to come here. I gave up my escort (L, 2nd) & this company is now with Howard<sup>72</sup> about 200 miles sw of this at Pleasant Valley.

I took only 4 men with me to the Park<sup>73</sup> and shall go to Shaw, Rawlins, & Missoula without escort. Love to Mary & Lizzie.

W. T. Sherman

71. Major James S. Brisbin served with the Sixth Cavalry through most of the Civil War, rising to the grade of brigadier general by war's end. In the West, he commanded the Second Cavalry and became a principal leader in the Little Missouri Expedition that ended the Great Sioux War in 1877. See Jerome A. Greene, "Out with a Whimper: The Little Missouri Expedition and the Close of the Great Sioux War," *South Dakota History*, 35 (Spring 2005): 1–39.

72. West Point graduate Oliver O. Howard, from Maine, rose to the grade of brigadier general during the Civil War and commanded the Department of the Columbia as of 1874. In June 1877, he initiated operations against the Nez Percés in Idaho and directly pursued the tribesmen over the next three months. Howard's campaign is treated at length in Greene, *Nez Perce Summer*.

73. For overall context of the Nez Perce War, see Greene, *Nez Perce Summer*, and for Sherman's visit to the national park, see *ibid.*, pp. 169–70.



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Helena, Montana,  
Aug. 28, 1877

Dear Miles,

I am just back from [Forts] Benton and Shaw, and on the day after tomorrow will start for [Forts] Missoula and Walla Walla. I have as yet been unable to find out if I can go through with our ambulances. The road is so seldom traveled that it is reported impassable to wagons because of the fallen timber. I suppose you have watched the progress of the Nez Perces who have traversed Montana and must be at this time in the Big Horn Mountains. In passing the National Park they murdered two parties of visitors just where we were a couple of weeks ago.<sup>74</sup> Howard is still in pursuit, having replenished his supplies. I am told Sturgis is watching on the Yellowstone near the new Crow agency, and another party at Camp Brown. Still I fear those Indians will escape, do much mischief, and encourage others.

When at [Fort] Benton, Major [Guido] Ilges told me he had heard very recently from Colonel [James F.] McLeod of the Canadian Mounted Police that Sitting Bull and all his people were still at Wood Mountain, and that there were no signs of his crossing the border [back into the United States].<sup>75</sup> For the danger that threatens you, you are implicitly stronger than Gibbon, who has nothing but the 7th Infantry, reduced to mere squads for companies. I gave him up my escort, the only cavalry subject to his command, and I am traveling without escort. He should have had his other 3 companies 2nd Cavalry long ago, and with them I believe he could have stopped the Nez Perces. The truth is, of course, that the Army is too weak for the work imposed on them by events all over the country, but still Congress won't see it.

74. Only one of the tourist parties attacked by the Nez Perces in Yellowstone suffered fatalities. See Greene, *Nez Perce Summer*, pp. 181–92.

75. For background on the Lakotas in Canada, see David G. McCrady, *Living with Strangers: The Nineteenth-Century Sioux and the Canadian-American Borderlands* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), pp. 64–77ff; and Jerome A. Greene, *Beyond Bear's Paw: The Nez Perce Indians in Canada* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), pp. 24–46.

We are all in good health, and hope to reach Portland, Oregon, in all September, and I still aim to get back to Washington by the meeting of Congress Oct. 15th.

I have heard nothing of the Arizona matters, and suppose they will await my return in Washington for this & some other contemplated changes. Love to Mary & Lizzie.

Truly yrs,  
W. T. Sherman

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Headquarters Army of the United States,  
Washington, D.C., Oct. 23, 1877

Dear Miles,

I am at last back after an extraordinary trip, of which I have not had time to write more than a few official letters. I am also most busy now with piles of letters which demand attention, and have only to say that your success in capturing [Chief] Joseph is universally appreciated by none more than myself. I want the minutest facts and want you *now* to cut down expenses at your post, for it is simply impossible for the government to maintain Indians or anybody except the officers & soldiers in that expensive region.

In case of a vacancy I think your chances far the best, & that if any colonel is detached for a higher command you will be, but I see no immediate prospect.

It is now certain that the commission to Sitting Bull failed,<sup>76</sup> & if the English authorities permit those Sioux to stay where they are, armed & with horses, they will have the burden to carry, & if these Indians descended on our side the Canadian government will be responsi-

76. Concurrent with the ongoing Nez Perce conflict, American authorities worked with British officials to urge Sitting Bull and his followers, who had crossed the international border, to return to the United States. The resulting commission entered Canada and met Sitting Bull and its British counterparts at Fort Walsh, North-West Territories, on 17 October. The meeting failed altogether, and the American commissioners returned to the United States the following day. See Greene, *Beyond Bear's Paw*, pp. 39–44.

ble. Meantime, however, the occupation of the Yellowstone in force is very important so that you hold the key. I hear Lizzie is back, & that Mary will winter with you. When more is learned I will write you. Meantime, I want you to feel certain that all here give you full credit for the summer's work.

Truly yrs,  
W. T. Sherman

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Hd.Qrs. District of the Yellowstone  
Tongue River Montana  
Oct. 28, 1877

Dear General

Since I wrote you on the Mo [Missouri River], we now mark one of the most successful movements and had one of the finest engagements ever fought with Indians. As near as I can ascertain their loss in killed was 41, wounded about sixty, 107 ponies left dead on the field, & 810 brought away by the troops and Cheyenne Indians. I believe that Joseph is by far the ablest Indian on the continent and if they can be fairly treated will make as loyal friends of the govt as they have been dangerous enemies.

The country north of the Mo, particularly that about the Little Rockies & Bear Paw Mountains [is] very much like that near the Wichita Mountains in the Indian Territory and a most excellent place for all of these northern Indians. They would be out of the way of settlements. The valley of the Yellowstone is fast settling up, and if I can be allowed a little discretion I will keep the District of the Yellowstone clear of hostile Indians.

The Indians that have been driven in to the lower agencies do not remain there and I believe it would be better to let them all go north of the Mo and then put an army around them strong enough to compel them to keep the peace. I see there is an effort made to distribute the honors of the Nez Perce campaign. In the engagement at the Big Hole the Indians lost only eleven warriors and none in the skirmishes

with Sturgis. The Crow Indians killed 5 Nez Perces. And when every other command had abandoned the campaign I did not get the news or over the Yellowstone until six days after Sturgis crossed it at the mouth of Clark's Fork and [I] had fought the battle and surrounded the camp before that comd reached the Mo at Carroll. I was very glad that Genl Howard himself came up on the evening of the 4th to witness the surrender of the Indians on the morning of Oct 5th. I think you will admit now that I have in campaigns against Grey Beard & Satanta in the south, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, [and] surrender of Joseph earned the first consideration for the next vacancy. If I have not, I never can, and I hope that you will feel that you can recommend it officially on military grounds. As this arrives on [illeg.], I must say goodbye.

With kind regards to the family

Truly yours  
Nelson A. Miles  
USA

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Fort Keogh Montana  
January 8, 1878

Dear General,

From the latest information just in the whole hostile Sioux camp under Sitting Bull is reported on this side of the line numbering near one thousand lodges and about two thousand fighting men. This shows the utter farce of that commission council or squaw talk and the danger of trying to make out that Sitting Bull is an insignificant Indian and this matter can be treated with indifference. I must say that I was perfectly disheartened at the want of knowledge and interest shown in this unfortunate matter by officials in the East. Now I have taken greater risks than any other officer ever thought of doing in going hundreds of miles in mid-winter to meet powerful bodies of Sioux with small commands. Yet it is somewhat discouraging to think

of taking out a few hundred men from the only two posts in my command, mostly cavalry that I had never seen under fire, to meet three or four times their number of Sioux who have used the British territory as a recruiting depot and arsenal. It is especially so when there are nearly two thousand troops in this dept idle or when they are not needed, some of them on the race-track at Helena and five hundred miles east of the field.

In view of the fact of having driven these Indians out of the country in a destitute condition and not being allowed to move up to the line and in conjunction with the British authorities compel that miserable scourge to choose his country and abide by its laws, and in view of the possibility of another war which I could prevent had I the proper



Miles repeatedly urged his superiors not to underestimate the fighting prowess of the Indians on the northern plains, depicted here by Frederic Remington in "Sioux Warriors" from Miles's 1896 memoir.

control, I feel that I have a right to express my opinion very freely on this subject. Now I would be very glad to remain in this country for the next *five years* and I fail to see why the govt cannot show me something like the same consideration that other officers of the same or *less rank* similarly situated have received. In every military sense I cannot see why I am denied a similar command to that give[n] to Harney, Sumner, Augur, Davis, Crook, and many others, as I have said before. I consider Genl Terry's action for the past fifteen months anything but encouraging. He has held back, as I believe[,] every support that he could have easily given and when I came through St. Paul [recently] I asked him to place [Fort] Buford under my command that I might regulate the transportation, equalize the forage & obtain valuable and prompt information. He would not *do it*, and the way he has organized this District I *could not order any inspection, drill, or target practice by the very troops that I am expected to take out and risk my life with.*

If you think it more proper that I should put this complaint in official form I will do so. He has been in command of this Dept a good part of the time for eleven years, during which time there has been a chronic state of war and during the last fifteen months I have cleared this country twice of hostile Indians, yet I would as soon be called a slave hunter as an "Indian fighter" simply—if the authorities consider me only good for that kind of work. If I have not earned a command I never shall, and in my opinion there is every reason for placing in the hands of some officers right here discretionary power and force to overpower and govern all the Indian tribes in this region of country. It can easily be done and it only requires a word from you to accomplish that end. You have tried Terry & Crook in the field and the former as diplomat. Now suppose you suggest to the Sec'y of War or President to give me one chance at this business alone. It cannot be managed by men a thousand miles away anymore than you could have won the Atlanta campaign by remaining in Nashville.

I have commissary stores enough in this district for all the troops that will be sent into it and if I had my way I would order the six companies of the Third Infantry from the race-track at Helena to



the mouth of the Mussellshell and the Infantry from such places as [Forts] Stevenson, Lincoln & Rice &c to Fort Peck via Buford, taking what govt transportation could be spared with their supplies. I would consolidate all the friendly Indians, Rees-Mandans-Crows & others in our movement against the hostile Sioux and in six months I am satisfied that I could clear every hostile Indian out of this country and move in a way that they would be likely to remain. If the troops at agencies do not keep the Indians there, there is no use in marching them in to stay a few months in winter, but better keep them out where the hostiles remain. "The King of France marched his troops up the hill and marched them down again,"<sup>77</sup> but he did not do it twice every year a distance of eight hundred and a thousand miles.

I came up from Bismarck a distance of four hundred miles in six days and found all well. Up to the present time we have had no snow and one of the mildest winters I have ever known.

With kind regards to the family, I remain  
With great respect  
Nelson A. Miles  
U.S.A.

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Hdqrs. District of the Yellowstone  
Fort Keogh, Montana  
January 27, 1878

Dear General,

I am already to move and [am] waiting for the recruits to arrive so that I can leave 150 men at this post and 125 at Ft. Custer.<sup>78</sup> It was a great pity that I could not have brought the recruits out with me. If they arrive I will have about 800 men, outside of my train guards. I

77. Miles is likely referring to one of several versions of the popular nursery rhyme "The Grand Old Duke of York."

78. Fort Custer was established in 1877 under the same authorization that created Fort Keogh (Tongue River Cantonment). The government abandoned it in 1898. Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, pp. 223–24; Frazer, *Forts of the West*, pp. 79–80.

presume I could bring into line 650 men. I think the govt ought to send me definite instruction as to what is the status of those Indians who have been north of the line for nearly a year. The only information I receive from [illeg.] authorities is that they have recrossed the line, and that I knew from my own scouts—several weeks before it reached me from St. Paul.

Our govt at the request of the dominion of Canada has sent a commission to invite them to return, offering them pardon. They have indignantly and insultingly refused and declared their purpose to remain on English soil, and now they have recrossed in great numbers in defiance of both governments. As my force is the only one available, of course I will try to drive them out of the country again or prevent their camp from being the rendezvous of all the [illeg.] tribes in the country.

If I do not accomplish anything else I will try and wear down their ponies so that they can be captured in the spring or early summer. I intend to go down the Mussellshell and endeavor to get between here and the [Little] Rocky & Bear Paw mountains and the northern line. If we succeed you may hear of them on the Little Mo. or [in] the Big Horn country. The greatest obstacle I will have to meet is the passage of these great rivers and the danger of their breaking up at an unfavorable time; still if the Mo leaves us both north of it I hope to have 70 days' supplies and these we will have to fight it out. Please send me some instructions if there are any—if not, authorize me to use my own discretion in dealing with these Indians and I will endeavor to do the best that can be done under the circumstances.

I remain  
With great respect  
Very truly yours  
Nelson A. Miles  
U.S.A.

P.S.

You will find Major G. L. Gillespie's map Sheet No. 3 the best for tracing my movements. [This map was not found with the letter.]  
N.A.M.

I do not look with favor upon any proposition to go to N. York as long as I can have an important command. I would only be a clerk there for the Adj. Genl. N.A.M.

As indicated, Miles's military career continued to flower during his time in the West, where he went on to serve as brigadier general commanding the Department of Arizona and major general commanding the Military Division of the Missouri. In 1890, he became major general commanding the United States Army in Washington, D.C., a position he held during the Spanish-American War. In 1903, two years after Theodore Roosevelt's ascension to the presidency, Miles retired as lieutenant general but stayed active in quasi-military affairs. His wife, Mary, who had shared his life in the Yellowstone country, died in 1904. By then, Miles had already authored his memoirs (*Personal Recollections of General Nelson A. Miles*, published in 1896), and in 1911 offered *Serving the Republic*, a compilation of articles he had earlier published in *The Cosmopolitan* magazine.<sup>79</sup> Miles continued to live in Washington, D.C., while maintaining family contacts in his native Massachusetts, where in 1913 he unsuccessfully campaigned for Congress.

Ever the military man, Miles served as an observer during the Balkan conflict in 1913, and in one instance actually came under gunfire. He chaired a Medal of Honor review board in 1916, volunteered in vain for duty at the beginning of United States involvement in World War I, and made a futile request to command the expeditionary force to Siberia two years later. He was more successful as a frequent attendee at army ceremonies and veterans' parades. It was during this period, however, that he significantly championed compensation payments to Lakota victims of Wounded Knee, whom he long believed had been unjustifiably massacred in 1890.<sup>80</sup> Despite his rigorous support, the

79. *Personal Recollections and Observations of General Nelson A. Miles* (Chicago: Werner Co., 1896); *Serving the Republic: Memoirs of the Civil and Military Life of Nelson A. Miles, Lieutenant General, United States Army* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1911).

80. Greene, *American Carnage*, pp. 369–70; David W. Grua, *Surviving Wounded Knee: The Lakotas and the Politics of Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 6, 128, 139, 141, 145, 151, 157.



LIEUT. NELSON A. MILES  
22d Mass. Volunteers, 1861



MAJOR-GEN. NELSON A. MILES  
Commanding 1st Division, Second Army  
Corps, U. S. Volunteers, 1864-1865



NELSON A. MILES  
Colonel U. S. Infantry, Brigadier-General  
U. S. Army, 1866-1879



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LIEUT. GEN. NELSON A. MILES  
Commanding U. S. Army, 1895-1903

Miles's rise from lieutenant with the 22d Massachusetts Volunteers during the Civil War to commander of the United States Army in 1895 is captured in this composite of portraits from his forty-two-year military career.

reparations never materialized, a wrong that yet remains to be righted. On 15 May 1925, at the age of eighty-five, he died from a heart attack while attending a circus with his grandchildren in Washington, D.C.<sup>81</sup> For its time and place in the nation's history, Miles's life reflected significant merit and purpose.

81. Pohanka, *Nelson A. Miles*, pp. 316–18. See also DeMontravel, *Hero to His Fighting Men*, pp. 361–78.

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*On the covers:* A prominent figure in the Indian wars on the Northern Great Plains, Nelson A. Miles (front cover, lower right) began his military career as a lieutenant in the Civil War and retired as commander of the United States Army in 1903. In this issue, Jerome A. Greene offers insight into Miles's career rise through his 1876–1877 correspondence with General William T. Sherman, to whom Miles was related by marriage. (Back cover) In this photograph taken by John C. Grabill in 1891, Miles and his staff survey the Lakota camp on White Clay Creek following the Wounded Knee massacre.



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