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THE BEDFORD SERIES IN HISTORY AND CULTURE

Our Hearts Fell to the Ground

Plains Indian Views of How the West Was Lost

Edited with an Introduction by

Colin G. Calloway
Dartmouth College

BEDFORD BOOKS *of* ST. MARTIN'S PRESS
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to our chiefs and head men. Our old men used to be different; even our children were different when the buffalo were here."

NOTES

[1] Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties.* 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1904), 2:1002.

[2] The standard work on the buffalo, its place in Indian life, and its destruction is Frank Gilbert Roe, *The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in Its Wild State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970).

[3] Thomas B. Marquis, interpreter, *Wooden Leg, A Warrior Who Fought Custer* (Minneapolis: The Midwest Co., 1931), 35.

[4] Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains, 1800–1850," *Journal of American History* 78 (1991), 465.

[5] Henry M. Stanley, *My Early Travels and Adventures in America and Asia.* 2 vols. (London: Sampson, Low, Marston and Co., 1895), 1:203, 204, 270.

[6] Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy," 465–85. Yellow Wolf's speech is in Appendix to Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1847, Senate Executive Document, No. 1, 30th Congress, 1st session, p. 242, and quoted in Stan Hoig, *The Peace Chiefs of the Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 32–33.

[7] David D. Smits, "The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo: 1865–1883," *Western Historical Quarterly* 25 (1994), 313–38; quote at 333. William A. Dobak questions Smits's evidence of Army involvement in the destruction in *Western Historical Quarterly* 26 (1995), 197–202.

[8] Stanley, *My Early Travels and Adventures,* 1:228–29.

[9] John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988 ed.), 213.

[10] Charles S. Brant, ed. *The Autobiography of a Kiowa Apache* (New York: Dover Publications, 1991 ed.), 52.

[11] John C. Ewers, *Indian Life on the Upper Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 173.

[12] Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 52.

[13] Smits, "The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo," 338.

[14] Frank B. Linderman, *Plenty Coups, Chief of the Crows* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), 311.

[15] Karen Daniels Peterson, *Howling Wolf: A Cheyenne Warrior's Graphic Interpretation of His People* (Palo Alto, Cal.: American West Publishing Co., 1968), 21.

[16] James Mooney, "Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians," *17th Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology,* 1895–96, part 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1898), 349.

10

The Battle on the Greasy Grass, 1876

Few conflicts in American history are more famous than the Battle of the Little Big Horn, or the Greasy Grass as the Sioux called it. Few moments in American history are as clearly etched in the popular imagination as the last stand of Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer and his Seventh Cavalry. The image of Custer and his gallant band surrounded by hordes of Indian warriors has served as a symbol of Indian-white conflict, of "civilization" battling "savagery," of America's frontier identity. Yet the enduring image of the last stand — promoted and perpetuated by generations of writers, artists, and movie makers — is one created by people who were not there. This chapter reproduces several views of the battle by people who lived through it and told their stories in later life: an Arikara scout for the Seventh Cavalry; a Cheyenne warrior; a Sioux council chief; a Sioux who was fourteen years old at the time; and a Sioux woman who recalled the battle from the viewpoint of the village the soldiers attacked.

In the winter of 1875–76, in violation of the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, the government pressured the Sioux to sell the sacred Black Hills and to leave the Powder River country and go to the reservation. Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and their followers resisted. In the spring of 1876, the United States Army launched a campaign to drive the "hostile" bands of Sioux and Cheyennes off the plains and onto the reservation. Some 2,500 men advanced in three columns, to catch the Indians in their pincers. The Oglala Sioux chief Red Cloud warned General George Crook what to expect: The Sioux had many warriors, guns, and ponies, he said. "They are brave and ready to fight for their country. They are not afraid of the soldiers nor of their chief. Many braves are ready to meet them. Every lodge will send its young men, and they will all say of the Great Father's dogs, 'Let them come.'"[1] Crazy Horse fought Crook to a standstill at the Battle of the Rosebud in June. Meanwhile, Custer and about five hundred troops headed for the Little Big Horn River in southeastern Montana and

the Indian village that was reported to be in the area. Disregarding the warnings of his Crow and Arikara scouts about the immense size of the village, Custer divided his command and ordered an attack on the morning of June 25. Captain Frederick Benteen led three companies — about 125 men — to scout the hills overlooking the Indian village. Major Marcus Reno attacked the southern end of the village. Custer and five companies — about 210 men — swung north to attack the village from the opposite end.

Things quickly went wrong. The soldiers were attacking one of the largest encampments ever encountered on the plains, and soon were fighting for their lives against as many as 2,500 warriors. Recovering from their initial surprise, the Indians quickly routed Reno's command and pinned the survivors down in a defensive position above the river. When Benteen came up he could do no more than dig in alongside Reno's beleaguered troops. Then most of the Indians swung away to meet Custer's threat at the other end of the village. In less than an hour they overwhelmed and annihilated Custer's entire command. "It took about as long as a hungry man to eat his dinner," recalled Cheyenne chief Two Moons in later life.[2] "I feel sorry that too many were killed on each side," said Sitting Bull, "but when Indians must fight, they must."[3] The United States had suffered a humiliating defeat in the year of its centennial celebrations, and the Army's grand campaign lay in shambles.

In the years after the battle, Indian participants were reluctant to talk openly about their experiences, fearing retribution. Those who were interviewed often were evasive and only gave answers about troop movements and specific incidents. The narratives and pictures reprinted in this chapter are not intended to give a complete account of the battle, nor do they offer the full story from the Indians' perspective. All of the participants had only a partial view of what was going on. Some of the accounts show evidence of hindsight; some no doubt were recounted with a white audience very much in mind. But they do present views of the battle by some of the Indian people involved, and they offer more realistic images of the conflict than that which has dominated the national mythology for so long.[4]

The United States Army held investigations and courts of inquiry to establish responsibility for the disaster. Military historians have long debated the reasons for Custer's defeat, sometimes going into minute detail and timing movements with impressive precision.[5] For many Indian people, however, the reasons for their victory were quite simple. During a sun dance in which he sacrificed one hundred pieces of his own flesh, Sitting Bull had a vision in which he saw soldiers falling into camp

without ears. For the Sioux, the victory on the Greasy Grass was religiously sanctioned and divinely ordained.[6] Pretty Shield, whose husband, Goes Ahead, was one of Custer's Crow scouts, hinted at something similar: Custer, she said, "was like a feather blown by the wind, and *had* to go. . . . He *had* to fight, because he *had* to die."[7]

SIOUX SIGNS AND ARIKARA PREMONITIONS

The Battle of the Little Big Horn stands as the classic Indian-white conflict. It is easy to forget that it was also an Indian-Indian conflict, in which Crows and Arikaras served as scouts and allies for U.S. forces against Sioux and Cheyenne enemies.[8] Like the Crows, the Arikaras had good reason to serve with the Americans. Even after the Arikaras, Mandans, and Hidatsas congregated in Like-a-Fishook village on the Fort Berthold reservation in the wake of the 1837 smallpox epidemic, the Sioux continued to raid them. About forty Arikaras enlisted as scouts for the 1876 campaign. The Army also hired two interpreters: Frederick Gerard, an Indian trader who was post interpreter at Fort Lincoln, and Isaiah Dorman, an African American married to a Sioux woman. When the scouts first cut the Sioux trail, Gerard told them to sing their death songs.

The narratives of the surviving Arikara scouts, collected and recorded in 1912, offer an additional dimension to the view of the Little Big Horn as simply a clash between the Sioux and the Seventh Cavalry. The following selection from the narrative of Red Star (known at the time of the battle as Strikes the Bear) shows Indian scouts reading "Indian signs" as the cavalry approached their objective. The Arikaras sensed that the Sioux had powerful medicine and realized that Custer was heading into combat with an enemy that was both powerful and confident of a victory. Many of the Arikara scouts were young and inexperienced. They spat on clay they had brought from their homeland and rubbed it on their chests as good medicine. But the thin line of Arikaras fighting on the left of Reno's men was overwhelmed by the Sioux. Bloody Knife, known as Custer's favorite scout, had his brains blown out. Bob-tailed Bull died surrounded by circling Sioux warriors.[9] The Arikaras' premonitions had been well founded.

RED STAR

Reading the Sioux Signs

Next morning . . . the bugle sounded and we saddled up, Custer ahead, the scouts following and flanking the army that marched behind. Bob-tailed Bull was in charge, with Strikes Two and others on one side. About nightfall they came to an abandoned Dakota camp where there were signs of a sun dance circle. Here there was evidence of the Dakotas having made medicine, the sand had been arranged and smoothed, and pictures had been drawn. The Dakota scouts in Custer's army said that this meant the enemy knew the army was coming. In one of the sweat lodges was a long heap or ridge of sand. On this one Red Bear, Red Star, and Soldier saw figures drawn indicating by hoof prints Custer's men on one side and the Dakota on the other. Between them dead men were drawn lying with their heads toward the Dakotas. The Arikara scouts understood this to mean that the Dakota medicine was too strong for them and that they would be defeated by the Dakotas. Here they camped, the scouts at the left on the right bank under Bob-tailed Bull. They brought in two Dakota horses which had been discovered by Strikes Two. Bob-tailed Bull brought in one of them, a bald-faced bay, and Little Brave brought in the other, a black with white on the forehead (this indicated that the Dakotas had hurried away from the camp in great haste). On the right bank of the Rosebud as they marched they saw Dakota inscriptions on the sandstone of the hills at their left. One of these inscriptions showed two buffalo fighting, and various interpretations were given by the Arikara as to the meaning of these figures. Young Hawk saw in one of the sweat lodges, where they had camped, opposite the entrance, three stones near the middle, all in a row and painted red. This meant in Dakota sign language that the Great Spirit had given them victory, and that if the whites did not come they would seek them. Soldier saw offerings, four sticks standing upright with a buffalo calfskin tied on with cloth and other articles of value, which was evidence of a great religious service. This was also seen by Strikes Two, Little Sioux, and Boy Chief. All the Arikara knew what this meant, namely, that the Dakotas were sure of winning. Soldier said he heard later that Sitting Bull had performed the ceremonies here in this camp. After they passed this inscription of

O. G. Libby, ed., "The Arikara Narrative of the Campaign Against the Hostile Dakotas, June 1876," *North Dakota State Historical Society Collections* 6 (1920): 75–80.

the two buffaloes charging, they came to the fork of the Rosebud River (about where the Cheyennes are now located). Six of the Crow scouts with their interpreter had been out scouting and they returned at this camp. They reported many abandoned Dakota camps along the Rosebud. The whole army stopped here and ate dinner on a hill.

REPELLING RENO

The Northern Cheyenne warrior Wooden Leg provided one of the fullest accounts of the Battle of the Little Big Horn. Cheyenne tribal historian John Stands in Timber said that Wooden Leg erred in some of his statements and that he later retracted his claim that many of the soldiers were drunk and committed suicide.[10] Nevertheless, Wooden Leg's narrative is extremely valuable for the picture it affords of Indian warriors fighting out of their village to defend homes and families against enemy assault. It also conveys some of the confusion of the conflict as the Indians recovered from their surprise and rushed to repulse Reno's thrust.

WOODEN LEG

A Cheyenne Account of the Battle

In my sleep I dreamed that a great crowd of people were making lots of noise. Something in the noise startled me. I found myself wide awake, sitting up and listening. My brother too awakened, and we both jumped to our feet. A great commotion was going on among the camps. We heard shooting. We hurried out from the trees so we might see as well as hear. The shooting was somewhere at the upper part of the camp circles. It looked as if all of the Indians there were running away toward the hills to the westward or down toward our end of the village. Women were screaming and men were letting out war cries. Through it all we could hear old men calling:

"Soldiers are here! Young men, go out and fight them."

We ran to our camp and to our home lodge. Everybody there was

Thomas B. Marquis, *Wooden Leg: A Warrior Who Fought Custer* (Minneapolis: The Midwest Co., 1931), 217–21.

excited. Women were hurriedly making up little packs for flight. Some were going off northward or across the river without any packs. Children were hunting for their mothers. Mothers were anxiously trying to find their children. I got my lariat and my six shooter. I hastened on down toward where had been our horse herd. I came across three of our herder boys. One of them was catching grasshoppers. The other two were cooking fish in the blaze of a little fire. I told them what was going on and asked them where were the horses. They jumped on their picketed ponies and dashed for the camp, without answering me. Just then I heard Bald Eagle calling out to hurry with the horses. Two other boys were driving them toward the camp circle. I was utterly winded from the running. I never was much for running. I could walk all day, but I could not run fast nor far. I walked on back to the home lodge.

My father had caught my favorite horse from the herd brought in by the boys and Bald Eagle. I quickly emptied out my war bag and set myself at getting ready to go into battle. I jerked off my ordinary clothing. I jerked on a pair of new breeches that had been given to me by an Uncpapa Sioux. I had a good cloth shirt, and I put it on. My old moccasins were kicked off and a pair of beaded moccasins substituted for them. My father strapped a blanket upon my horse and arranged the rawhide lariat into a bridle. He stood holding my mount.

"Hurry," he urged me.

I was hurrying, but I was not yet ready. I got my paints and my little mirror. The blue-black circle soon appeared around my face. The red and yellow colorings were applied on all of the skin inside the circle. I combed my hair. It properly should have been oiled and braided neatly, but my father again was saying, "Hurry," so I just looped a buckskin thong about it and tied it close up against the back of my head, to float loose from there. My bullets, caps, and powder horn put me into full readiness. In a moment afterward I was on my horse and was going as fast as it could run toward where all of the rest of the young men were going. My brother already had gone. He got his horse before I got mine, and his dressing was only a long buckskin shirt fringed with Crow Indian hair. The hair had been taken from a Crow at a past battle with them.

The air was so full of dust I could not see where to go. But it was not needful that I see that far. I kept my horse headed in the direction of movement by the crowd of Indians on horseback. I was led out around and far beyond the Uncpapa camp circle. Many hundreds of Indians on horseback were dashing to and fro in front of a body of soldiers. The soldiers were on the level valley ground and were shooting with rifles. Not many bullets were being sent back at them, but thousands of arrows

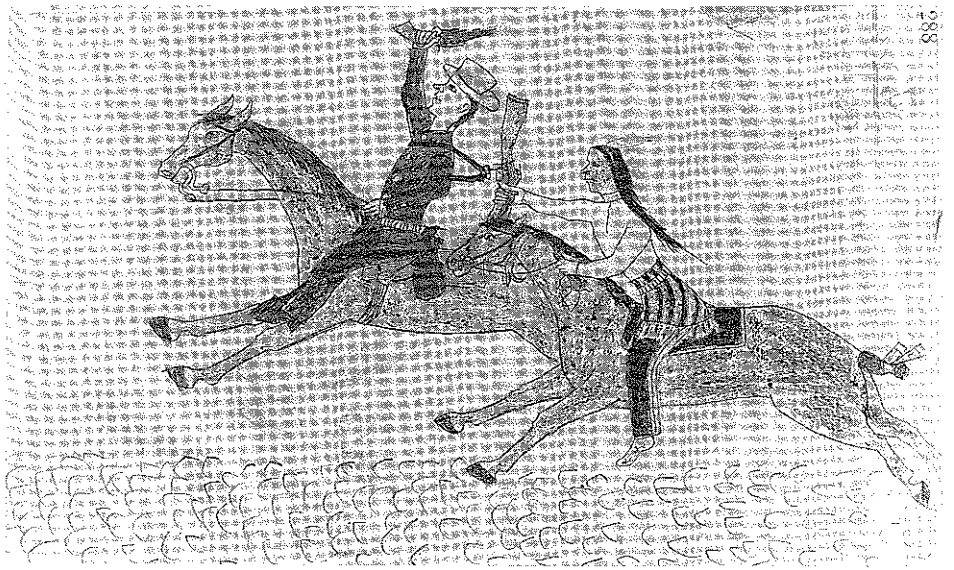

Figure 14. Seizing a Soldier's Gun at the Battle of the Little Big Horn
Drawn by Wooden Leg.

were falling among them. I went on with a throng of Sioux until we got beyond and behind the white men. By this time, though, they had mounted their horses and were hiding themselves in the timber. A band of Indians were with the soldiers. It appeared they were Crows or Shoshones. Most of these Indians had fled back up the valley. Some were across east of the river and were riding away over the hills beyond.

Our Indians crowded down toward the timber where were the soldiers. More and more of our people kept coming. Almost all of them were Sioux. There were only a few Cheyennes. Arrows were showered into the timber. Bullets whistled out toward the Sioux and Cheyennes. But we stayed far back while we extended our curved line farther and farther around the big grove of trees. Some dead soldiers had been left among the grass and sagebrush where first they had fought us. It seemed to me the remainder of them would not live many hours longer. Sioux were creeping forward to set fire to the timber.

Suddenly the hidden soldiers came tearing out on horseback, from the woods. I was around on that side where they came out. I whirled my horse and lashed it into a dash to escape from them. All others of my companions did the same. But soon we discovered they were not following us.

They were running away from us. They were going as fast as their tired horses could carry them across an open valley space and toward the river. We stopped, looked a moment, and then we whipped our ponies into swift pursuit. A great throng of Sioux also were coming after them. My distant position put me among the leaders in the chase. The soldier horses moved slowly, as if they were very tired. Ours were lively. We gained rapidly on them.

I fired four shots with my six shooter. I do not know whether or not any of my bullets did harm. I saw a Sioux put an arrow into the back of a soldier's head. Another arrow went into his shoulder. He tumbled from his horse to the ground. Others fell dead either from arrows or from stabbings or jabbings or from blows by the stone war clubs of the Sioux. Horses limped or staggered or sprawled out dead or dying. Our war cries and war songs were mingled with many jeering calls, such as:

"You are only boys. You ought not to be fighting. We whipped you on the Rosebud. You should have brought more Crows or Shoshones with you to do your fighting."

Little Bird and I were after one certain soldier. Little Bird was wearing a trailing warbonnet. He was at the right and I was at the left of the fleeing man. We were lashing him and his horse with our pony whips. It seemed not brave to shoot him. Besides, I did not want to waste my bullets. He pointed back his revolver, though, and sent a bullet into Little Bird's thigh. Immediately I whacked the white man fighter on his head with the heavy elk-horn handle of my pony whip. The blow dazed him. I seized the rifle strapped on his back [Figure 14]. I wrenched it and dragged the looping strap over his head. As I was getting possession of this weapon he fell to the ground. I did not harm him further. I do not know what became of him. The jam of oncoming Indians swept me on. But I had now a good soldier rifle.

RED HORSE: PICTORIAL RECORD OF THE BATTLE

In 1881, just five years after the event, Dr. Charles E. McChesney, Acting Assistant Surgeon, United States Army, at the Cheyenne River reservation in South Dakota, persuaded a Miniconjou warrior named Red Horse to produce a set of drawings of the battle. Red Horse, who described himself as a "chief in the council lodge" at the time of the fight, made forty-two drawings, the largest pictorial record of the conflict. McChesney sent the drawings to Garrick Mallery, who published some

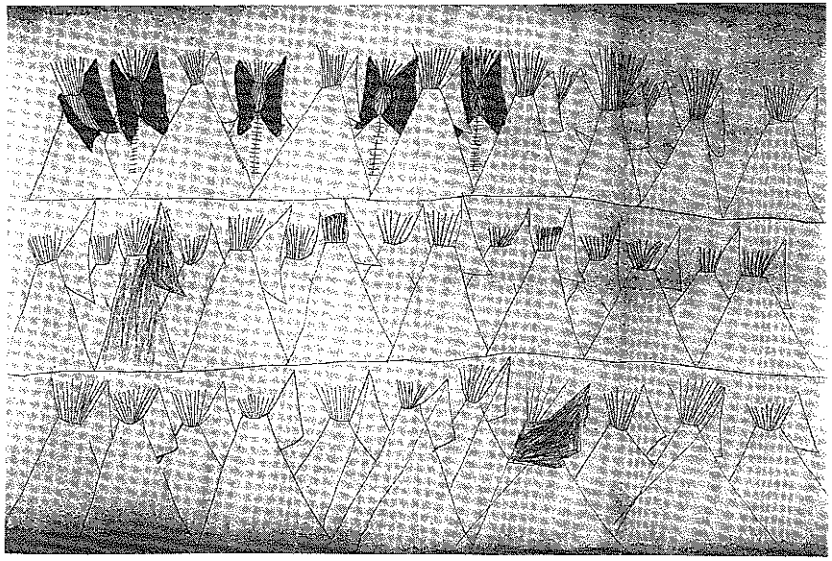

Figure 15. The Indian Village in the Valley of the Little Big Horn

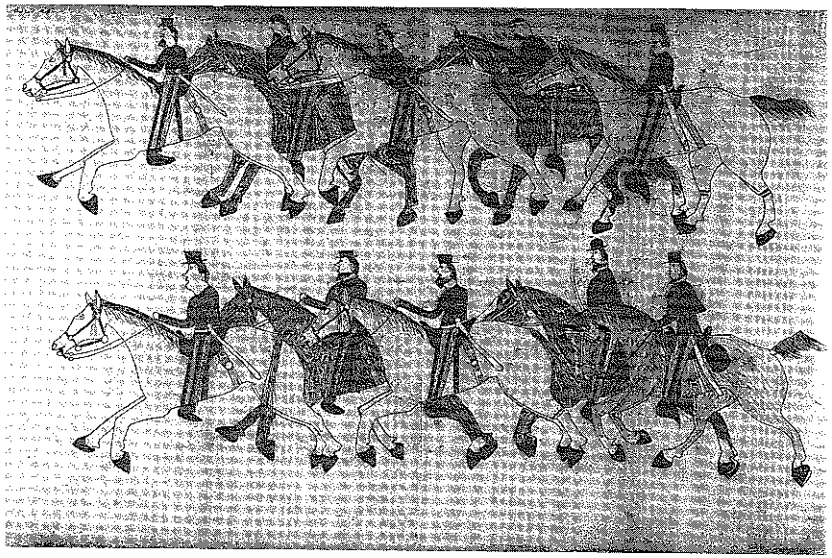

Figure 16. Soldiers Charging the Indian Village

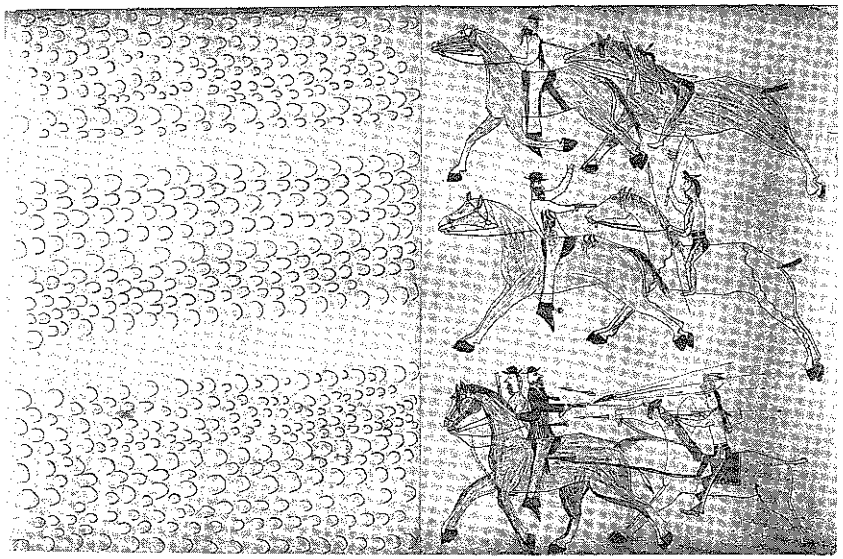

Figure 17. Repulsing the Attack, as Indicated by the Cavalry Being Forced Back over Their Own Hoofprints

"All the Sioux now charged the soldiers and drove them in confusion across the river," said Red Horse.[11]

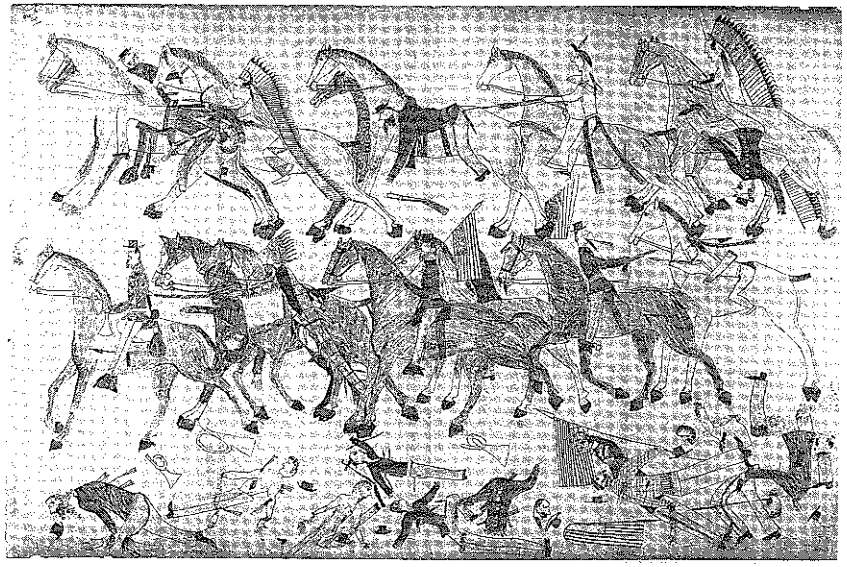

Figure 18. The Sioux Fighting Custer's Command

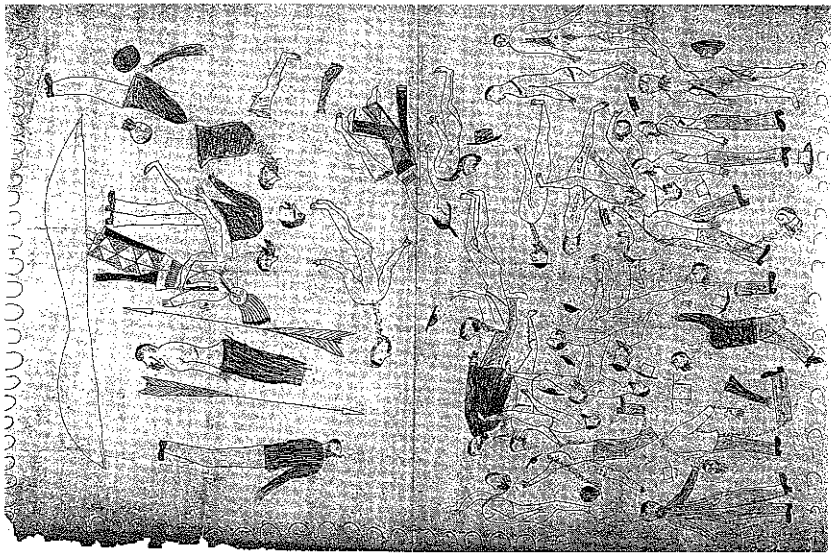

Figure 19. The Dead Soldiers and Indians

Figure 20. The Indians Leaving the Battlefield as They Hear that Relief Columns of Infantry Are Approaching

of them in his study of Indian picture writing, along with Red Horse's own account of the battle.[12] Many of the drawings depict similar episodes (there are five pages of soldiers approaching the village, for example), or generic fighting rather than specific actions. The six drawings reproduced here (Figures 15–20), convey the flow of events and suggest the battle had elements of a rout rather than of a heroic last stand. Like Wooden Leg, Red Horse suggested that many of the soldiers "became foolish" and, throwing away their guns, begged the Sioux for mercy.[13]

"THE SOLDIERS WERE ALL RUBBED OUT."

The cavalry's attack on their village brought youths as well as seasoned warriors into the fight. Iron Hawk, a Hunkpapa Sioux, was fourteen years old in June 1876. Many years later, in 1931, as John G. Neihardt interviewed Black Elk, Iron Hawk and other veterans of the battle listened and offered their own comments. Iron Hawk gave this account of his participation in the final stages of the fight on "Custer Hill."

IRON HAWK

Killing Custer's Men

By now a big cry was going up all around the soldiers up there and the warriors were coming from everywhere and it was getting dark with dust and smoke.

We saw soldiers start running down hill right towards us. Nearly all of them were afoot, and I think they were so scared that they didn't know what they were doing. They were making their arms go as though they were running very fast, but they were only walking. Some of them shot their guns in the air. We all yelled "Hoka hey!" and charged toward them, riding all around them in the twilight that had fallen on us.

I met a soldier on horseback, and I let him have it. The arrow went through from side to side under his ribs and it stuck out on both sides.

John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988 ed.), 119–25.

He screamed and took hold of his saddle horn and hung on, wobbling, with his head hanging down. I kept along beside him, and I took my heavy bow and struck him across the back of the neck. He fell from his saddle, and I got off and beat him to death with my bow. I kept on beating him awhile after he was dead, and every time I hit him I said "Hownh!" I was mad, because I was thinking of the women and little children running down there, all scared and out of breath. These Wasichus wanted it, and they came to get it, and we gave it to them. I did not see much more. I saw Brings Plenty kill a soldier with a war club. I saw Red Horn Buffalo fall. There was a Lakota riding along the edge of the gulch, and he was yelling to look out, that there was a soldier hiding in there. I saw him charge in and kill the soldier and begin slashing him with a knife.

Then we began to go towards the river, and the dust was lifting so that we could see the women and children coming over to us from across the river. The soldiers were all rubbed out there and scattered around.

The women swarmed up the hill and began stripping the soldiers. They were yelling and laughing and singing now. I saw something funny. Two fat old women were stripping a soldier, who was wounded and playing dead. When they had him naked, they began to cut something off that he had, and he jumped up and began fighting with the two fat women. He was swinging one of them around, while the other was trying to stab him with her knife. After awhile, another woman rushed up and shoved her knife into him and he died really dead. It was funny to see the naked Wasichu fighting with the fat women.

By now we saw that our warriors were all charging on some soldiers that had come from the hill up river to help the second band that we had rubbed out. They ran back and we followed, chasing them up on their hill again where they had their pack mules. We could not hurt them much there, because they had been digging to hide themselves and they were lying behind saddles and other things. I was down by the river and I saw some soldiers come down there with buckets. They had no guns, just buckets. Some boys were down there, and they came out of the brush and threw mud and rocks in the soldiers' faces and chased them into the river. I guess they got enough to drink, for they are drinking yet. We killed them in the water.

Afterwhile it was nearly sundown, and I went home with many others to eat, while some others stayed to watch the soldiers on the hill. I hadn't eaten all day, because the trouble started just when I was beginning to eat my first meal.

"THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN CRIED."

Most accounts of the Battle of the Little Big Horn are written — and most movies filmed — from the perspective of the attackers as they advance toward and then recoil from their objective. Rarely do we get a view of the battle from the village in the valley. The wife of the Hunkpapa warrior Spotted Horn Bull related her story of the fight to the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* in 1883 and again, when she was in her sixties, to Major James McLaughlin, formerly Indian agent at Standing Rock reservation, who knew her well.[14] McLaughlin reprinted her account in his book, *My Friend the Indian*, published in 1910. When Walter Campbell (pen name Stanley Vestal) was doing field work among the Sioux, some of the Hunkpapa men complained that McLaughlin had taken his account of the battle from a woman, rather than from a warrior who was in the fight: "In their opinion war is the business of a man and not a thing which women should be quoted on."[15] As McLaughlin pointed out, however, Mrs. Spotted Horn Bull was there, she had a remarkable memory, and she was eloquent. The male veterans of the battle may have had a clearer grasp of the fighting outside the village, but they could not share her memories of what it meant to be a noncombatant in the village while the battle raged.

MRS. SPOTTED HORN BULL

A View from the Village

Like that the soldiers were upon us. Through the tepee poles their bullets rattled. The sun was several hours high and the tepees were empty. Bullets coming from a strip of timber on the west bank of the Greasy Grass passed through the tepees of the Blackfeet and Hunkpapa. The broken character of the country across the river, together with the fringe of trees on the west side, where our camp was situated, had hidden the advance of a great number of soldiers, which we had not seen until they were close upon us and shooting into our end of the village, where, from seeing the direction taken by the soldiers we were watching, we felt comparatively secure.

The women and children cried, fearing they would be killed, but the men, the Hunkpapa and Blackfeet, the Oglala and Minniconjou, mounted

James McLaughlin, *My Friend the Indian* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910), 167–72.

their horses and raced to the Blackfeet tepees. We could still see the soldiers of Long Hair marching along in the distance, and our men, taken by surprise, and from a point whence they had not expected to be attacked, went singing the song of battle into the fight behind the Blackfeet village. And we women wailed over the children, for we believed that the Great Father had sent all his men for the destruction of the Sioux. Some of the women put loads on the travois and would have left, but that their husbands and sons were in the fight. Others tore their hair and wept for the fate that they thought was to be the portion of the Sioux, through the anger of the Great Father, but the men were not afraid, and they had many guns and cartridges. Like the fire that, driven by a great wind, sweeps through the heavy grass-land where the buffalo range, the men of the Hunkpapa, the Blackfeet, the Oglala, and the Minniconjou rushed through the village and into the trees, where the soldiers of the white chief had stopped to fire. The soldiers [Reno's] had been sent by Long Hair to surprise the village of my people. Silently had they moved off around the hills, and keeping out of sight of the young men of our people, had crept in, south of what men now call Reno Hill; they had crossed the Greasy Grass and climbed the bench from the bank. The way from the river to the plateau upon which our tepees stood was level, but the soldiers were on foot when they came in sight of the Blackfeet. Then it was that they fired and warned us of their approach. . . .

The shadow of the sun had not moved the width of a tepee pole's length from the beginning to the ending of the first fight; . . . Even the women, who knew nothing of warfare, saw that Reno had struck too early, and the warriors who were generals in planning, even as Long Hair was, knew that the white chief would attempt to carry out his plan of the attack, believing that Reno had beaten our young men. There was wild disorder in our camp, the old women and children shrieked and got in the way of the warriors, and the women were ordered back out of the village, so that they might not be in the way of our soldiers. And our men went singing down the river, confident that the enemy would be defeated, even as we believed that all of Reno's men had been killed. And I wept with the women for the brave dead and exulted that our braves should gain a great victory over the whites led by Long Hair, who was the greatest of their chiefs, and whose soldiers could then be plainly seen across the river. From a hill behind the camp, at first, and then from the bank of the river, I watched the men of our people plan to overthrow the soldiers of the Great Father; and before a shot was fired, I knew that no man who rode with Long Hair would go back to tell the tale of the fight that would begin when the soldiers approached the river at the lower end of the village. . . .

From across the river I could hear the music of the bugle and could see the column of soldiers turn to the left, to march down to the river to where the attack was to be made. All I could see was the warriors of my people. They rushed like the wind through the village, going down the ravine as the women went out to the grazing-ground to round up the ponies. It was done very quickly. There had been no council the night before — there was no need for one; nor had there been a scalp-dance: nothing but the merry-making of the young men and the maidens. When we did not know there was to be a fight, we could not be prepared for it. And our camp was not pitched anticipating a battle. The warriors would not have picked out such a place for a fight with white men, open to attack from both ends and from the west side. No; what was done that day was done while the sun stood still and the white men were delivered into the hands of the Sioux. . . .

I cannot remember the time. When men fight and the air is filled with bullets, when the screaming of horses that are shot drowns the war-whoop of the warriors, a woman whose husband and brothers are in the battle does not think of the time. But the sun was no longer overhead when the war-whoop of the Sioux sounded from the river-bottom and the ravine surrounding the hill at the end of the ridge where Long Hair had taken his last stand. The river was in sight from the butte, and while the whoop still rung in our ears and the women were shrieking, two Cheyennes tried to cross the river and one of them was shot and killed by Long Hair's men. Then the men of the Sioux nation, led by Crow King, Hump, Crazy Horse, and many great chiefs, rose up on all sides of the hill, and the last we could see from our side of the river was a great number of gray horses. The smoke of the shooting and the dust of the horses shut out the hill, and the soldiers fired many shots, but the Sioux shot straight and the soldiers fell dead. The women crossed the river after the men of our village, and when we came to the hill there were no soldiers living and Long Hair lay dead among the rest. There were more than two hundred dead soldiers on the hill, and the boys of the village shot many who were already dead, for the blood of the people was hot and their hearts bad, and they took no prisoners that day.

NOTES

[1] James C. Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 218.

[2] James Welch, *Killing Custer: The Battle of the Little Big Horn and the Fate of the Plains Indians* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 175, 294.

[3] Robert M. Utley, *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1993), 161.

[4] In recent years, scholars have paid increasing attention to Indian accounts of the battle. See, for example, Jerome A. Greene, ed., *Lakota and Cheyenne: Indian Views of the Great Sioux War, 1876–1877* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).

[5] For example, John S. Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign: Mitch Boyer and the Little Big Horn Reconstructed* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).

[6] Raymond J. DeMallie, "'These Have No Ears': Narrative and the Ethnohistorical Method," *Ethnohistory* 40 (1993), 515–38. The fact that the soldiers in the vision lacked ears refers to their unwillingness to heed Sioux warnings, rather than to mutilation of their bodies.

[7] Frank B. Linderman, *Pretty-shield: Medicine Woman of the Crows* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 235.

[8] Colin G. Calloway, "Army Allies or Tribal Survival?: The 'Other' Indians in the 1876 Campaign," in Charles E. Rankin, ed. *Legacy: New Perspectives on the Little Battle of Bighorn* (Helena: Montana Historical Society, 1996).

[9] O. G. Libby, ed., "The Arikara Narrative of the Campaign Against the Hostile Dakotas, June 1876," *Collections of the North Dakota State Historical Society* 6 (1920), 11–12, 84. The names of the Arikara scouts are given on 49–51; biographies of some of the scouts are on 177–209. See also David Humphreys Miller, *Custer's Fall: The Indian Side of the Story* (London: Corgi Books, 1953), 27–28.

[10] John Stands in Timber and Margot Liberty, *Cheyenne Memories* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 205. Wooden Leg's statements relating to whiskey and suicide are in Thomas B. Marquis, *Wooden Leg: A Warrior Who Fought Custer* (Minneapolis: The Midwest Co., 1931), 231–32, 246. Another Northern Cheyenne, Soldier Wolf, also said the soldiers acted drunk or panic-striken. Greene, ed., *Lakota and Cheyenne*, 51.

[11] Garrick Mallary, "Picture-Writing of the American Indians," *10th Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, 1888–89* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1893), 565.

[12] Evan M. Maurer, et al. *Visions of the People: A Pictorial History of Plains Indian Life* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1992), 200–01; Mallery, "Picture-Writing of the American Indians," 563–66.

[13] Mallery, "Picture-Writing of the American Indians," 565.

[14] Colonel W. A. Graham, *The Custer Myth: A Source Book of Custeriana* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1953), 81–87.

[15] Stanley Vestal, *New Sources of Indian History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 181.