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### EDWARD SETTLE GODFREY AND THE LITTLE BIGHORN

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EDWARD SETTLE GODFREY AND THE LITTLE BIGHORN

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

Raymond G. Kiely

Pittsburg State University

Pittsburg, Kansas

May 2021

EDWARD SETTLE GODFREY AND THE LITTLE BIGHORN

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## EDWARD SETTLE GODFREY AND THE LITTLE BIGHORN

An Abstract of the Thesis by  
Raymond G. Kiely

In 1876 Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer led five companies of the 7th U.S. Cavalry to complete annihilation near the Little Bighorn River in Montana Territory. One of Custer's subalterns, Lieutenant Edward S. Godfrey, wrote and spoke publicly praising his dead commander's tactical decisions. Godfrey was the most influential participant of Custer's last battle to shape the Little Bighorn narrative. Custer's widow, Elizabeth Bacon Custer, and ironically Custer critic Captain Frederick W. Benteen, swayed Godfrey to view Custer in a more positive light. I will argue that Elizabeth Custer and Frederick Benteen's coercion was important but ultimately Godfrey arrived at his own conclusions. His published analysis was factual and sound.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

GFP	GODFREY FAMILY PAPERS
LBH	LITTLE BIGHORN NATIONAL MONUMENT
LC	LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
SR	SERVICE RECORD
USMA	UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY



## CHAPTER I

### THE EARLY DAYS

In northwest Ohio, the village of Ottawa in Putnam County takes its name from the once powerful native tribe of the region. The first settler even lived with and accompanied the Ottawa when they relocated west to the “permanent Indian reserves” in Kansas, while the first permanent white residents arrived in 1824 by canoe.<sup>1</sup> Isolated in cabins and at the mercy of floods, pioneers cleared and farmed the land while their children, unaccustomed to new faces “would run and hide from us [whites] just as quick as from Indians.”<sup>2</sup> Removing trees, planting, harvesting, and grinding corn to make bread was hard work, the most dreaded of these tasks being the last. Grating and milling was done locally by hand unless one had time to transport the crop to another town’s water or horse powered mill. Laboring together to clear land, raise cabins, and share food made fond memories.

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<sup>1</sup> The first settler was Henry Leaf who came to the area at an unrecorded date, others arrived in 1824. Putnam County Historical Society, *Putnam County Pioneer Reminiscences, 1878-1887*, no. 2, (Ottawa, OH: Putnam County Pioneer Association, 1887), reprint (n.p.: Whipporwill Publication, 1981), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Putnam County Historical Society, *Putnam County Pioneer Reminiscences, 1878-1887*, no. 1, (Ottawa, OH: Putnam County Pioneer Association, 1878), reprint (n.p.: Whipporwill Publication, 1981), 30.

Despite the hard work, it was the superabundance of wildlife that kept many settlers fed in the 1820s. One two-man team felled eighty-five deer in a season, another sixteen raccoons in a night, and fish, seen from the banks of the Blanchard River, were enough to fill several barrels. Farmer and part-time hunter Henry Sheets estimated killing over 1,000 raccoons, 500-600 turkeys and over 200 deer in his lifetime. Wolves brought in \$4.25 a scalp. Nevertheless, a profitable farm required devoted energy and a thorough willingness to work. That first generation of pioneers took pride in their “industry and economy ... making a howling wilderness, blossom like a rose.”<sup>3</sup>

The Ottawa name comes from their word “adawe” meaning to trade, and in times past they had been important middlemen in the fur trade. Curious about the Indians, the settlers recorded their “red brethren’s” ways. As a joke, Indians would hold books that they pretended to read and enjoyed singing with the pioneers. When they caught a thief of their tribe, they removed his clothes, tied him down, and left him overnight for the insects. One bad-tempered Ottawa, nicknamed “Devil Jim,” wanted to be chief and disemboweled his rival. Making no attempt to escape, he stoically accepted his tribe’s decision to execute him, and was stabbed to death.<sup>4</sup> Indian ideals of ownership were more relaxed, and they must have been amused by the settlers’ habit of carefully laying out land claims such as “southwest quarter of the southwest quarter of section 5, township 2, range 6,” and working so hard.<sup>5</sup> In the 1817 Treaty of the Maumee Rapids,

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., no. 2, 43, 50; Marguerite Calvin, *People and Places Putnam County, Ohio 1800-1900* (Defiance, OH: Hubbard Company, 1981), 201.

<sup>4</sup> *Pioneer Reminiscences* no.1, 46-47.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., no. 2, 57.

the United States government temporarily reserved land for the Ottawa but did not grant them ownership, and until 1836 the natives retained some rights and would occasionally hunt, fish, trade, or visit.<sup>6</sup> These episodes were usually amicable and a friendly atmosphere generally prevailed.

However, the Indians had an annoying habit of showing up uninvited and demanding food. Pioneer Martha Wamsley was clearly angry and frightened while serving hungry, menacing guests a breakfast of baked bread, coffee, and tea. Some consumed seven cups each, and when the local chief's squaw, Kingeonel, downed her eighth, that crossed the line of decorum. Ottawas "would come in, sit down, and get out their knives, chatter around, look at the children and then they would go to the grind stone, grind their knives, then I would think they were going to kill us."<sup>7</sup> The Ottawa, resentful over the loss of their lands and coerced westward, could have argued that the settlers were getting the better deal. No longer a military threat, Indians suffered the twin curses of deadly diseases and alcohol addiction, which made them "physical wrecks."<sup>8</sup> Unscrupulous whites lived among them, furthering their degradation, and settlers who knew better avoided the Ottawa reserve. As the Indians divided into pro and anti-treaty

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<sup>6</sup> George D. Kinder, *History of Putnam County, Ohio: Its People, Industries and Institutions* (Indianapolis, IN: B.F. Bowen & Company, 1915), 88-89; *Encyclopedia of Indiana Indians, Vol. One, Tribes, Nations and People of the Woodland Areas A to Z* (St. Clair Shores, MI: Somerset Publishers, 1998), 281-289; *Pioneer Reminiscences* no. 2, 3. Most of the Ottawa were gone by 1836 but a small group remained in 1839 and a smaller number until 1842. Ten years after leaving a few Indians even returned for a brief visit.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. no.2, 58.

<sup>8</sup> Kinder, *History of Putnam County*, 95.

factions, hard feelings led to numerous inter-tribal murders.<sup>9</sup> Fortunately, the settlers and Indians were able to avoid major violence but it could easily have gone the other way. In 1829, a similar situation in Missouri Territory led to a fight with the Iowa Indians that went badly for the local militia. The Iowa killed four, and one captured militiaman was tortured to death.<sup>10</sup>

Descended from Welsh settlers and originally hailing from Adams County, Pennsylvania, twenty-one-year-old Charles Moore Godfrey was a hard-working, ambitious young man. In 1837, he and a brother-in-law traveled west by stagecoach, and stopped to visit his married sister, Lucy Ann Allen, in Leesville, Ohio. After three months he continued his journey west and, having delivered tin to Ottawa, Godfrey decided to stay. Smart and determined, he wanted a respected profession and, for two years, studied medicine under the only established physician in the area, Calvin T. Pomeroy.<sup>11</sup> Godfrey and Pomeroy must have been close as one of Charles' sons would bear the doctor's name. Dr. Pomeroy would lose two of his three children to disease, but

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 89, 95; *Pioneer Reminiscences* no. 2, 41.

<sup>10</sup> This was the Big Neck War which consisted of this one minor episode. The Iowa were put on trial but released when the militia admitted to starting the engagement. Alarm of an Indian uprising reached newly established Cantonment Leavenworth (future Fort Leavenworth) in eastern Kansas Territory and local and federal troops deployed. Colonel Forrest R. Blackburn *Cantonment Leavenworth 1827 to 1832* (Fort Leavenworth Historical Society pamphlet, reprint from *Military Review*, December, 1971), 8.

<sup>11</sup> *A Portrait and Biographical Record of Allen and Putnam Counties, Ohio, Containing Biographical Sketches of Many Prominent and Representative Citizens, Together with Biographies and Portraits of All the Presidents of the United States, and Biographies of the Governors of Ohio* (Chicago: A.W. Bowen & Co., 1896), 330; *Obituary Dr. Charles M. Godfrey*, (unknown newspaper, 1895), GFP, box 2.

with his wife and surviving son, Guy, he continued to work and would help raise his grandchildren.<sup>12</sup>

Charles M. Godfrey became Ottawa's postmaster and established its first drugstore while continuing his professional training with a winter of formal classes at the Ohio Medical College in Cincinnati.<sup>13</sup> Lacking money to continue he was unable to graduate but would eventually receive an honorary degree from the Cleveland Medical College.<sup>14</sup> A contemporary noted his intelligence, practicality, and diplomatic skill when dealing "with the ignorant and superstitious."<sup>15</sup> Dr. Godfrey also held several posts in government, including county treasurer from 1843 to 1847, and two stints as the colonel of the local militia while remaining an active and respected member of the community.<sup>16</sup> In 1843, at the age of twenty-seven, he bought property in western Putnam County, settling in nearby Kalida. Accompanying him was his new wife, Mary Chambers, the daughter of a well-off innkeeper and farmer from neighboring Gilboa. That same year,

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<sup>12</sup> *Pioneer Reminiscences* no. 2, 30.

<sup>13</sup> *A Portrait and Biographical Record*, 330-331; *Putnam County Centennial History 1834-1934: Centennial Celebration Putnam County, Ohio, U.S.A. Held at Kalida September 1, 2, 3, 1934*, (n.p.: n.d.), 67.

<sup>14</sup> *A Portrait and Biographical Record*, 330; Calvin Pomeroy Godfrey, "1843 Godfrey 1932 Taps for the Long Rest! End of Course well Run! Silent Host Receives One More of Ohio's Courageous and True!" *Putnam County Gazette*, March 16, 1933, GFP, 4; James M. McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny: The American Soldier in the Mexican War, 1846-1848* (NY: New York University Press, 1992), 54. Medical requirements could be quite lax in the nineteenth century. In 1876 an infantry line officer was appointed "Acting Surgeon" by Colonel John Gibbon. John S. Gray, *Centennial Campaign: The Sioux War of 1876* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 275.

<sup>15</sup> *Pioneer Reminiscences Number* no. 2, 32.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 32. He raised a company to fight in the Mexican War but it never served as the state exceeded its manpower quota. *A Portrait and Biographical Record*, 330.

on 9 October, their son Edward Settle was born in Kalida. Settle was his grandmother's maiden name.

Godfrey's mother died in childbirth two years later at the young age of twenty-two, with her infant son, Bartholomew, following her to the grave a week later.<sup>17</sup> Such tragedies were all too common in the nineteenth century, but Dr. Godfrey's 1846 marriage to widow Jane Braucher, was a good choice, as young Edward would remain close to his stepmother.<sup>18</sup> Jane brought her young daughter Elizabeth with her, and Jane would have three children with Charles: Evaline, probably born in 1850 or 1851, Zoe (1855), and Calvin Pomeroy (1863).<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth would pass away in 1856 at age fourteen after a brief illness.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, Edward spent his adolescent years in Putnam and nearby Allen Counties, attending the "local ungraded public schools" including the Select School in Ottawa during the winter of 1859-60.<sup>21</sup> In 1859, the Dayton and Michigan railroad reached the eastern side of the county and Putnam's population slowly shifted away from Kalida back to Ottawa. The Godfrey family eventually joined that migration.

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<sup>17</sup> *Pioneer Reminiscences* no. 2, 31; Godfrey "Taps for the Long Rest," 4; *Obituary Dr. Charles M. Godfrey; A Portrait*, 330. Bartholomew died February 1, 1845. Godfrey Genealogy, Dr. E.S. Godfrey Jr. Genealogical Data Extracted from notebook of Gen. E.S. Godfrey Sr., GFP, box 1, 2.

<sup>18</sup> *A Portrait and Biographical Record*, 330; *Obituary Dr. Charles M. Godfrey*; Wayne K. Stahl, *Edward Settle Godfrey Sr. and the Seventh Cavalry 1867-1879* (MA Thesis, Southern Illinois University, 1976), 5.

<sup>19</sup> Godfrey Genealogy, 2.

<sup>20</sup> *A Portrait and Biographical Record*, 330; "Obituary," *Kalida Sentinel* November 11, 1856, compiled by Marguerite Crist Calvin, *Newspaper Notices from Kalida, Ohio Putnam County 1855-1860*, Putnam County, OH District Library, 38.

<sup>21</sup> Godfrey, "Taps for the Long Rest," 4.

When the South seceded in 1860-61, the staunchly anti-slavery Dr. Charles Godfrey supported the Union.<sup>22</sup> Like many former Democrats, he had joined the newly created Republican Party in the wake of the Bleeding Kansas crisis in 1856 and would serve as a Republican state senator representing Putnam and six other counties at the state capital of Columbus, Ohio. When President Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to quell the rebellion in April 1861, seventeen-year-old Edward determined to join the Army. Naturally, his father was not enthusiastic about an underage son's desire to enlist. Edward recalled that "[i]t was not until I had hung on to his coat-tails and had pretty near torn them off and worn him out with my pleading that he consented, but with the proviso that I enlist for only three months."<sup>23</sup>

On 26 April, Edward joined Company D of the 21st Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment.<sup>24</sup> Civil War physicals were notoriously cursory -- there would not even be one on the regiment's next round of enlistments -- nevertheless it took Edward three attempts to pass. Initially rejected because he was underage, Godfrey convinced the examining surgeon with his persistence and resourcefulness, as indicated by an official rooster that incorrectly shows his age as eighteen.<sup>25</sup> The ninety-seven men of Company D were from Ottawa and neighboring towns, and thirteen were his relatives. Lawyer-turned-soldier Captain Thomas G. Allen, was the commanding officer, and his younger brother Charles,

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<sup>22</sup> *Obituary of Dr. Charles M. Godfrey*. Dr. Charles M. Godfrey died 8 May 1895.

<sup>23</sup> Stahl, *Edward Settle Godfrey*, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Discharge Certificate, GFP box 7.

<sup>25</sup> Carl F. Day, *Tom Custer: Ride to Glory*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2002), 31; Godfrey, "Taps for the Long Rest," 4.

who had studied medicine under Edward's father, got a quick promotion from private to first lieutenant. Confederates would kill both, one in the coming weeks and the other of wounds sustained at Chickamauga.<sup>26</sup> Corporal Jacob Wolf, a former regular Army sergeant, drilled the company on Ottawa's village common and the men encamped at a large barn owned by Dr. Pomeroy. Dr. Pomeroy's son, Guy, became the company's second lieutenant and, like the Allen brothers, would lose his life fighting Rebels.<sup>27</sup>

The nine companies of the 21st Ohio, commanded by Colonel Jesse S. Norton, were all present at Camp Taylor, Cleveland, Ohio on 22 May 1861. The following day the men boarded trains for Columbus to pick up arms and supplies before continuing southeast to Gallipolis, opposite the confluence of the Ohio and Kanawha rivers in what was then the western counties of Virginia.<sup>28</sup> The regiment remained in camp, not far from Rebel territory, for over a month before crossing the Ohio, and it was not until 14 July that D Company moved with other units to support Colonel Norton and part of the regiment already under attack. The night crossing in boats tested the nerves of the green troops and one soldier of the 1st Kentucky Volunteer Infantry accidentally fired his weapon.<sup>29</sup> Other Kentuckians thought they were under attack and opened fire, killing or

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<sup>26</sup> *Official Roster of the Soldiers of the State of Ohio in the War of Rebellion 1861-1866* (Akron, OH: The Werner Company, 1895), 432; Captain Silas S. Canfield, *History of the 21st Regiment Ohio Volunteer Infantry in the War of the Rebellion* (Toledo, OH: Vrooman, Anderson & Bateman Printers, 1893), 8; Godfrey, "Taps for the Long Rest," 4; *Pioneer Reminiscences* no. 2, 20-21.

<sup>27</sup> *Official Rooster*, 432; *Pioneer Reminiscences* no. 2, 20-21; Godfrey, "Taps for the Long Rest," 4.

<sup>28</sup> Canfield, *History of the 21st*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Terry Lowry, *The Battle of Scary Creek: Military Operations in the Kanawha Valley April-July 1861* (Charleston, WV: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1982), 98.



wounding five of their own men before resuming their movement and, along with Edward's D Company 21st Ohio, linked up with Colonel Norton. The next day saw more skirmishing, and Edward related how those involved “said the bullets whistled about them like hail.” He also noted receiving no letters from his father although Charles Allen had been luckier.<sup>30</sup>

On 17 July, Edward and his company saw their first action at Scary Creek, Virginia. As far as Civil War battles go this five-hour fight between 1,000 Union and 800 Confederates was a minor affair and when the overall commander, Brigadier General Jacob D. Cox's Yankees fell back, his commander, Major General George B. McClellan, charitably termed it “something between a victory and a defeat.”<sup>31</sup> A wounded Colonel Norton was among 3 colonels and a lieutenant colonel taken prisoner by the Rebels, who also killed 15, wounded 9, and captured 7 total while losing 4 killed and 6 wounded.<sup>32</sup> Two of the dead were from Edward's company: Captain Allen, who had presciently stated that if he had to die, he'd prefer a bullet directly in the middle of the forehead, and Second Lieutenant Pomeroy. Asked years later if he had fled during the fight, Godfrey replied “not till the rest of them.”<sup>33</sup> Seventeen-year-old Edward performed creditably

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>31</sup> Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Robert N. Scott (prepared under the direction of the Secretary of War), *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, Volume II, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880), reprint, (Harrisburg, PA: The National Historical Society, 1971), 288.

<sup>32</sup> Lowry, *The Battle of Scary Creek*, 162-163.

<sup>33</sup> Godfrey, “Taps for the Long Rest,” 4. Dr. Godfrey was the administrator of Thomas G. Allen's affairs and the executor for his brother's will. Charles W. Allen was severely wounded at Chickamauga in September 1863, and would die from his wounds at home on 9 January 1865. “Notice” and “Executor's Notice,” *Kalida Sentinel*, November 16, 1861 and January 12, 1865, compiled by Marguerite Crist Calvin, *Newspaper Notices from the Kalida Sentinel Putnam*

during the engagement by carrying water to the wounded under fire. He and thirteen other men took turns carrying the mortally wounded Lieutenant Pomeroy from the field in a blanket, but gripping the edge of the material caused so much pain to their fingers that they replaced it with a ladder found in a tobacco shed, but only after they debated whether it was right to seize property without the owner's permission. Pomeroy made it as far as a steamboat that was serving as an aid station, but died the next day, a crippling blow from which his father -- and Dr. Charles Godfrey's old partner -- never recovered.<sup>34</sup> Scary Creek was a sobering experience for young Edward -- one whose anniversary he would remember fifteen years later while on campaign following the debacle on the Little Bighorn River -- but his first tour was over.<sup>35</sup>

The 21st Ohio was a ninety-day regiment whose enlistments were past, so it returned to Columbus and mustered out on 12 August 1861. It had lost 4 men killed in battle, 8 dead from disease, and 3 more from drowning.<sup>36</sup> Company D returned by rail to Ottawa where speeches and a dinner awaited. Riding atop a boxcar near the locomotive, Edward went past the station where his father searched for him. They soon found one

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*County, Ohio 1861-1866*, vol. 3, Putnam County, OH District Library, 1, 90; Godfrey Genealogy, 1, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Godfrey, "Taps for the Long Rest," 4. In 1880, Dr. Pomeroy would drown along with his young grandson when the Lake Huron steamer, *Marine City*, caught fire off Alcona, MI. *Pioneer Reminiscences II*, 30; "Marine City (Steamboat), U16447, fire, 28 Aug 1880," *Maritime History of the Great Lakes*, available at [Images.maritimehistoryofthegreatlakes.ca/58138/data](http://Images.maritimehistoryofthegreatlakes.ca/58138/data).

<sup>35</sup> Edgar I. Stewart and Jane R. Stewart, eds., *The Field Diary of Lt. Edward Settle Godfrey Commanding Co. K, 7th Cavalry Regiment under Lt. Colonel George Armstrong Custer in the Sioux encounter at the Battle of the Little Big Horn: Covering the Period from May 17, 1876 when the Expedition Commanded by Brigadier Alfred H. Terry left Ft. Abraham Lincoln, Bismarck, Dakota Territory until the Return of the Battered Regiment a Few Days after September 24, 1876 to the Same Place*. (Portland, OR: Champoege Press, 1957), 25.

<sup>36</sup> *Official Roster*, 426.

another, and Edward was moved by his father's outpouring of affection. But it was now clear that the war was not going to be a ninety-day affair and, when most of Edward's fellow soldiers reenlisted in a reorganized 21st regiment, he declined, instead honoring the promise he had made to his father.<sup>37</sup> His old regiment would see action at Stones River, Chickamauga, Chattanooga, and participate in Sherman's March to the Sea, experiencing considerable loss of life and limb.<sup>38</sup> As a professional soldier in the years ahead, he must have reflected a great deal on this decision to leave the military, but might also have reasoned that his father's interference had kept him alive.

Bound by his promise but still intent upon military service Edward searched for another way into the Army. On 17 December 1861, without telling his father, he wrote the Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, for assistance in securing a cadet appointment to the Military Academy at West Point. Recalling his three months' service as a volunteer, Edward said he "liked [army life] very well" but his father is "not willing to let me go back, because, I am too young."<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately his Congressional district quota had already gone to a young man from nearby Wood County.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Godfrey, "Taps for the Long Rest," 4; Canfield, *History of the 21st*, 8.

<sup>38</sup> Putnam County Ohio had an 1860 population of 12,808 and contributed at least 1,392 soldiers to the war effort. The county's loss of young, working-age males was a hardship. The government, to relieve some of the burden, paid families a small stipend. At its highest amount, in March 1865 this was about \$6 a month. *Putnam County Centennial History 1834-1934*, 62-63.

<sup>39</sup> Colonel Charles Francis Bates, U.S. Army, ret., *Edward Settle Godfrey, The Association of the Graduates of the United States Military Academy*, June 9, 1932, Annual Report, 61; Godfrey, "Taps for the Long Rest," 4; Edward S. Godfrey to the Hon. S. Cameron, Sec. of War, 17 December 1861, U.S. Military Academy Cadet Application Papers, 1805-1866, National Archives Microfilm Publication 688, USMA Archives.

<sup>40</sup> Godfrey, "Taps for the Long Rest," 4. There is a year gap between Edward's initial inquiry of December 1861 and the next surviving correspondence of January 1863. Presumably he was not considered for an 1862 appointment.

No doubt disappointed, Edward enrolled in the private Vermillion Institute in Hayesville, Ohio, over 100 miles east of Kalida in Ashland County.<sup>41</sup> He chose the school because it was under Presbyterian control and friends had attended. In 1862, students elected Edward to represent them against the Ashland Board of Trustees when the board wanted them counted towards Ashland's draft quotas even though not all of the students were from Ashland County. The students lost and most left the school, while Edward learned typesetting and earned a three-year teacher's certificate in Putnam County. That September when Confederate raider John Hunt Morgan crossed into Union territory, Governor David Tod issued a call for armed volunteers to defend Cincinnati. Edward reasoned that he was participating in home defense and would not be breaking his promise about reenlisting in the Army. With the family shotgun over his shoulder, he started to the train station, bound for Cincinnati, but his father intercepted him. After an argument, he relinquished the shotgun and returned home.<sup>42</sup>

Later that year Edward received word that he was being considered for West Point as the designate from Wood County had been killed at Second Bull Run.<sup>43</sup> In February, his Congressional District Representative, James M. Ashley, nominated Edward although he was concerned about his ability to pass the entrance physical and

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<sup>41</sup> This was not a military institute, it was a civilian school.

<sup>42</sup> Godfrey, "Taps for the Long Rest," 4.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Since Second Bull Run was in August 1862 and Edward wrote a letter in January 1863 saying that he was an applicant for cadetship, it would follow that he was informed sometime in late 1862.

exam.<sup>44</sup> Edward may also have had some worry, writing on 19 January to the Secretary of War asking for specific health requirements for entering the Academy.<sup>45</sup> Edward's concerns are unrecorded, but he was known in later life, certainly by 1876, to be somewhat deaf. Whatever the issues, he must have been overjoyed on 28 February when the Secretary of War officially notified him of his conditional appointment as a West Point cadet.<sup>46</sup> Although Edward pursued his application to the academy without informing his father, it no doubt helped to be the son of a well-known state politician. Dr. Godfrey had presided over the 1859 Ohio Republican Convention that nominated abolitionist James M. Ashley for Congress.<sup>47</sup>

Edward reported in June to West Point, his incoming conditional cadet class living in tents, while they waited to take the entrance exams administered by professors of the Academic Board. Those from the more western regions were typically not as educated as the aspiring cadets from the Northeast. The government, not wishing an officer corps dominated by a single region of the country, consequently mandated that the exams, while difficult, were not overly strenuous.<sup>48</sup> Naturally the Academic Board found

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<sup>44</sup> James Ashley, U.S. Congressional Representative, to Dr. Godfrey [Charles M.], 30 Jan. 1863, *The Correspondence of Edward S. Godfrey 1843-1932*, LC, Manuscript Division, Book One.

<sup>45</sup> Edward S. Godfrey to the Hon. E. M. Stanton, Sec. of War, 19 January 1863, U.S. Military Academy Cadet Application Papers, 1805-1866, USMA Archives, National Archives Microfilm Publication 688.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, Edward S. Godfrey to the Hon. E. M. Stanton, Sec. of War, 16 March 1863.

<sup>47</sup> *A Portrait and Biographical Record*, 331. Years later Edward would meet James Ashley, the former Ohio representative, and Montana Territory Governor on a ferry boat in New York. Godfrey, "Taps for the Long Rest," 4.

<sup>48</sup> Walter Scott Dillard, *The United States Military Academy, 1865-1900: The Uncertain Years* (PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 1972), 259.

this directive vexing. Admitting less-qualified cadets meant less-qualified officers to say nothing of contributing to the Academy's high-academic failure rate. Additionally, professors would have to spend precious time conducting academic reviews while more qualified applicants faced rejection. Both Congress and the academy professors had valid reasons for their positions, but Congress had their eye on the big picture, the country as a whole needed representation in the nation's Army.

But that was not Congress's only concern, the academy nominating power gave Congressmen a way to reward political supporters. The Board of Visitors, an annual Academy inspection group, proposed competitive exams for aspiring cadets. The Board even conceded administration within each political district, but Congress balked. The recommendations made sense, accounting for a cross-section of the country and still allowing Congressmen to appoint candidates from their districts. However, merit-based admittance held no appreciable incentive for elected officials eager to maintain their positions.<sup>49</sup>

Edward passed the entrance exams and officially entered the Military Academy on 1 July 1863. More than half the class failed and their replacements would not present for some time, Edward's friend John M. Johnson from Iowa, not until November. Such inefficiency was another result of the political patronage system. West Point had increased the age of admission to allow deserving soldiers currently in the Army the opportunity to attend. His eighty-three freshman classmates ranged in age from sixteen to twenty-one and was one of the most military experienced group of students entering

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<sup>49</sup> Dillard, *The United States Military Academy*, 226-228; Ernest R. Dupuy *Where They Have Trod: The West Point Tradition in American Life* (NY: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1940), 313.

West Point.<sup>50</sup> Twenty-seven of its sixty-three graduates, like Edward, had served in the Army.<sup>51</sup>

Many of their biographies exhibit a common theme: young men or underage boys eager to serve the Union. Teenager William James Roe enlisted only to have it cancelled by his parents who took him to Europe to avoid the war. Promising that they would not object if the conflict was still ongoing in six months, they remedied that dilemma by getting him into West Point.<sup>52</sup> One father who wanted to protect his sons even enlisted in the same unit himself but one of his sons died nonetheless.<sup>53</sup> Some had seen considerable service and had held company-grade leadership positions. Twenty-year-old cadet Robert M. Rogers joined as a private, attained captain, and saw service at several battles to include First Bull Run, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg.<sup>54</sup> Other cadets, whose fathers

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<sup>50</sup> My cadet list is incomplete so there may be larger age range. *Official Register of the Officers and Cadets of the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY, June 1864-1867*, USMA.

<sup>51</sup> George W. Cullum *Biographical Register of Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, since its establishment in 1802* (NY: J. Miller, 1891), Available at [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/America/United\\_States/Army/USMA/Cullums\\_Register/Classes/1867.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/America/United_States/Army/USMA/Cullums_Register/Classes/1867.html), Class of 1867.

<sup>52</sup> Roe, upon graduating in 1867 went on leave of absence until March 1869 and then resigned to care for his sick father. "Author of Famous Philosophical Romance Is Disclosed in the Death of William J. Roe," *Newburgh Daily News*, GFP, Box 6, General Correspondence, 1910-1919, available at [www.myfamilybusiness.org/familytrees/roe/williamjamesroejr.htm](http://www.myfamilybusiness.org/familytrees/roe/williamjamesroejr.htm), part of this site uses a letter apparently written by Godfrey as an obituary for Roe, though labeled "E.S. Godfray." The two did in fact correspond and one of Roe's letters is in GFP.

<sup>53</sup> Mrs. Orsemus Bronson Boyd, *Cavalry Life in Tent and Field* (NY: J. Selwin Taint & Sons, 1894), 11-12.

<sup>54</sup> It would take Rogers almost twenty-four years to regain his Civil War rank. He would take a leave of absence in 1874-5 to serve as the colonel of engineers for the Khedive of Egypt. He was in the Spanish-American War and retired as a major in 1901. Cullum, *Biographical Register*, Graduate 2177.

were officers serving in the occupied South, got their sons into West Point by applying for academy quotas from Confederate states.<sup>55</sup> Among Edward's class was Frederick Mahan, the son of military theorist and West Point professor Dennis Hart Mahan. There were sons of several generals, four foreign born cadets, and even a Medal of Honor recipient.<sup>56</sup>

Although removed from the dangers of the battlefield, the inescapable discipline and strict routine of West Point created its own unique stresses.<sup>57</sup> Hazing or "devilizing" was very much a part of the school's culture and must have been exceedingly tiresome for those students who had already served in the Army. One night during Edward's first summer when most of the hazing occurred, cadets pulled him from his tent a supposed eighty times and rolled him into a ditch fifteen times. However, when a cadet officer attempted to hand out more demerits than deserved, he confronted that cadet and, according to his county newspaper, "soundly whipped him, won the respect of all, and thereafter made normal progress."<sup>58</sup> Hazing as a means to discipline and conform the incoming class was a problem for West Point throughout the nineteenth century, yet it

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<sup>55</sup> Seven graduating cadets had fathers serving in the Army and were appointed from Southern states or "At Large." Thirty-five of the graduating class got their appointments from a Southern state or "At Large." Cullum, *Biographical Register*, Class of 1867.

<sup>56</sup> Henry B. Osgood who was a 1st Lieutenant in the 27th Maine remained in the service after his enlistment expired during the Confederate invasion of Pennsylvania. About 300 27th Maine Soldiers did so as well and the MOH was a blanket award. A 1916 Army board rescinded the award, retired Brigadier General Osgood had already passed away in 1909. Cullum, *Biographical Register*, Graduate 2185.

<sup>57</sup> One graduate felt the word "Discipline" should be added to West Point's well-known motto. James Parker *The Old Army: Memories 1872-1918* (Philadelphia: Dorrance & Co., 1929), reprint (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003), 203.

<sup>58</sup> Godfrey, "Taps for the Long Rest," 4.



also promoted esprit de corps.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, such episodes suggested snobbery to anyone Jacksonian enough to sense northeastern elitism, and border state cadets often retained some of the their prewar southern sympathies.<sup>60</sup> Like his father, Edward strongly condemned slavery and some cadets regarded him as a “Black republican and damned abolitionist.” This name calling ceased when an upper classman from Ohio supported him.<sup>61</sup>

One of Godfrey’s classmates, Cadet William James Roe, later became a prolific writer whose works included a fictionalized exposé of the military academy titled, *Cut: A West Point Story*. To “cut” was to apply undue social pressure or ostracization that ultimately forced a cadet into the “Rogue’s March,” or shaming a soldier and coercing him to leave the service.<sup>62</sup> Another, *Cavalry Life in the Tent and Field*, published by the wife of Godfrey’s classmate Orsemus Boyd, chronicled their years on the frontier, but also recalled how a fellow cadet had wrongfully accused Boyd of theft. A humiliating “Rogue’s March” and ostracization resulted, and it was not until 1869 that the real culprit confessed.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Dillard, *The United States Military Academy*, 90.

<sup>60</sup> Available at [www.myfamilybusiness.org/familytrees/roe/williamjamesroejr.htm](http://www.myfamilybusiness.org/familytrees/roe/williamjamesroejr.htm).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.; Godfrey, “Taps for the Long Rest,” 4.

<sup>62</sup> William James Roe, *Cut: A West Point Story* (Philadelphia: J.B Lippincott Company, 1886). Godfrey, in later years corresponded with former cadet Roe who was grateful to Godfrey for being there to “guide, prod, and visit those of us who are in ‘sorrow, need, sickness, or any other affliction.’” William James Roe to Friend Godfrey 1 January 1916, LBH.

<sup>63</sup> Roe used a pseudonym for most of his writing. Charles King, of later fame with the 5th Cavalry, was the cadet adjutant at the time. The Academy nearly dismissed him over this incident. Paul Andrew Hutton and Durwood Ball, eds. *Soldiers West: Biographies from the Military Frontier*, Paul L. Hedren, “Charles King” (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press,

President Thomas Jefferson had directed the establishment of West Point in 1802 to educate engineers, primarily in canal and harbor construction. By the time of the Civil War the academy was losing its engineering preeminence and the conflict clearly demonstrated a need for a less technical-based curriculum. In fact, a reviewing officer termed the school too much of a “purely scientific institution” that neglected preparing officers for field duty.<sup>64</sup> Until 1866 all West Point Superintendents had to be engineering officers. Nineteenth century belief held that mathematical sciences developed and trained the mind in logical thought patterns. Still, surprisingly, there was no instruction in history or humanities which would be beneficial for Army officers. Though acknowledged as important their inclusion would mean hiring another professor and reducing a current professor’s period of instruction to accommodate the new subject. No one on the Academic Board was willing to relinquish their power. Not until 1883 would history make an appearance, at the illogical expense of half-a-year’s Spanish instruction, and then only because the Spanish instructor had retired and could no longer protest.<sup>65</sup>

Young Edward’s class standing steadily declined over his four years at West Point from the 56th percentile in his first year to 84th in his last. His best subject was Infantry Tactics (28th out of 66) in his junior year, and Drawing, his worst (65th out of 70) in 1865. In Cavalry Tactics, a course he would later teach, (he would serve his entire career in the cavalry) he finished fifty-second out of sixty-three (82nd percentile). His demerits

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2009), 361-362; Cullum *Biographical Register* Graduate 2209, 2216; Boyd, *Cavalry Life in Tent and Field*, 8-20.

<sup>64</sup>Anson Mills, *My Story* (Washington, D.C.: Anson Mills, 1918), reprint (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003), 104-105, 380.

<sup>65</sup> Dillard, *The United States Military Academy*, 247, 270.

totaled 235 for four years, a low enough total given that it took 200 in a single year to get a cadet expelled. Lateness, jacket not properly buttoned, laughing and talking in ranks were typical actions that earned him demerits, and a relative lack of military bearing and dress would follow Godfrey to his first command. Some classmates surpassed Edward's total demerits in only two years, and one graduated with 649. George Armstrong Custer, an 1861 graduate, accumulated 726 demerits.<sup>66</sup>

Like all cadets, Edward learned little about "border service" and combating Indians while at West Point. Even the 1862 *Cavalry Tactics Manual* by the "Father of the U.S. Cavalry," Colonel Philip St. George Cooke, gave little guidance in Indian fighting and Captain Randolph B. Marcy's *The Prairie Traveler*, which did, was not required reading.<sup>67</sup> Marcy had served much of his career on the frontier after graduating from West Point, and wrote that informative guide for the War Department in order to aid westbound citizens. It was full of practical advice like care of animals, supply needs, Indians, and marching. In 1859, the War Department purchased a thousand copies and distributed them to officers and government officials.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Judge William E. Moody and Joseph E. Moody, "Soldier of Valor" *Research Review: The Journal of the Little Big Horn Associates* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 15. My demerit listing is incomplete so there may be an even higher count. *Official Register of the Officers and Cadets of the U.S. Military Academy*; Robert M. Utley, *Cavalier in Buckskin: George Armstrong Custer and The Western Military Frontier* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 15.

<sup>67</sup> *The 1862 U.S. Cavalry Tactics* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1862); Captain Randolph B. Marcy, *The Prairie Traveler. A Handbook for Overland Expeditions. With Maps, Illustrations, and Itineraries of the Principal Routes Between the Mississippi and the Pacific*. (NY: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1859), reprint, (Carlisle, MA: Applewood Books, 1993).

<sup>68</sup> The War Department published Marcy's book to correct the inaccurate, Lansford Hastings, *The Emigrants Guide to California and Oregon* (Cincinnati, OH: George Conclin, 1845). Marcy, *The Prairie Traveler*, xi, xii, back page; Eugene W. Hollon, *Beyond the Cross*

With a rapidly receding frontier and the power and resources of the United States undisputed, her army prepared for little else but conventional warfare. Artillery and engineer officers stationed on the coasts stood little chance of ever engaging Native Americans, and their disdain for “Indian-fighters” reflected a wish to protect their own less arduous careers.<sup>69</sup> Even some officers who forged successful resumes on the frontier felt no need to have their past fights studied except as a point of entertainment.<sup>70</sup> Six months before Godfrey graduated Plains Indians annihilated two companies in Wyoming Territory, and 1867 would be one of the most violent periods in western history.<sup>71</sup> Those assigned to frontier duty could have used formal instruction on combating indigenous warriors. On 17 June 1867, a seemingly unexceptional Cadet Godfrey became Second Lieutenant Godfrey, the 2,208th United States Military Academy commissionee. Twenty-one of his classmates did not graduate, although, like past classes, presumably many “drop-outs” went on to successful careers.<sup>72</sup> Godfrey graduated fifty-third in a

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*Timbers: The Travels of Randolph B. Marcy, 1812-1887* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 234.

<sup>69</sup> Oliver Knight, *Life and Manners in the Frontier Army* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), 201.

<sup>70</sup> Edward M. Coffman, *The Old Army A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), 78; Robert M. Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian, 1848-1865* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 57.

<sup>71</sup> 1867 would see the most engagements (139) between the US Army and Natives in the forty-year period closing the Indian Wars. Gregory F. Michno, *Encyclopedia of Indian Wars: Western Battles and Skirmishes, 1850-1890* (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 2003), 362.

<sup>72</sup> It was a common complaint that West Point expelled numerous capable cadets often for failure to pass the math exam. Randolph, B. Marcy, *Border Reminiscences* (NY: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, Franklin Square, 1872), reprint (London: Forgotten Books, 2015), 297-298; Mills *My Story*, 47, 105. Godfrey’s son Edward, was found deficient in math and expelled from West Point in 1897. He became a highly successful epidemiologist and State Health

class of sixty-three -- and as President of the Class of 1867 -- was no mean feat considering the challenges met. As usual, the most highly ranked became engineer or ordnance officers, ninth ranked engineer classmate Edward Maguire would compose the Little Bighorn battlefield map. The rest of the class went to the combat arms: 43 to the artillery, 6 to the cavalry and a lone man to the infantry. Many of the newly commissioned officers would serve for decades; ten for over thirty years and twenty-one over forty.<sup>73</sup> Some, mainly in the cavalry, had hard frontier service ahead of them and 11 would die before their thirty-sixth year, 3 of them in Indian engagements.<sup>74</sup> Second Lieutenant Godfrey took graduation leave of absence until the end of September. He was then to report to the 7th Cavalry Regiment, which was patrolling the Kansas plains.

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Commissioner of New York. *Official Register of the Officers and Cadets of the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY, June 1897* (NY: U.S.M.A. Press and Bindery, n.d.), USMA, 18.

<sup>73</sup> Lieutenant Charles Shaler transferred out of the artillery to ordnance in July 1867, dropping the artillery total to forty-two. The class started with eighty-three cadets and lost twenty-one. Cadet Boyd was a holdover from the class of 1866 and brought the graduating total to sixty-three. These calculations, like today, include time spent at West Point. Colonel Samuel R. Jones would be the longest serving 1867 graduate at over forty-eight years. Brigadier General Walter Howe would serve for forty-seven years and the #1 class graduate Colonel Ernest Ruffner would serve forty-six years. The average time of service for the entire class, even calculating in the early deaths is twenty-four and a half years. Cullum, *Biographical Register*, Class of 1867.

<sup>74</sup> First Lieutenant Cranston, Arthur 26 April 1873, Modocs; First Lieutenant Almy, Jacob, 27 May 1873, Apaches; Major Thornburgh, Thomas, 29 September 1879, Utes. Thornburgh benefitted from rapid promotion by a transfer from artillery to the paymaster department. He was able to keep his rank when he transferred to the infantry where he was subsequently killed. Cullum, *Biographical Register*, Class of 1867.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FRONTIER

While Godfrey was finishing at West Point, most of the 7th Cavalry was marching through Kansas, parts of Nebraska and Colorado Territory in a generally vain attempt to apprehend raiding Cheyenne and Sioux warriors. Dubbed “Hancock’s War” after the Department of the Missouri commander, Major General Winfield Scott Hancock, the conflict brought little credit to the Army or its veteran Civil War officers, including Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer, who commanded the 7th’s field operations. Custer disregarded orders to remain in the field, forced marched a detachment across western Kansas and left two wounded soldiers behind, although another command rescued the one who lived. No other explanation than his Civil War service can explain the lenient punishment that followed: a year's suspension from rank and pay. Godfrey’s initial posting with the regiment was in Custer's absence, a disappointment for the new lieutenant who had requested assignment to the 7th Cavalry because he thought Custer a model cavalry officer.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Edward S. Godfrey to W.J. Ghent, 8 Sept. 1927, *Custer and the Seventh Cavalry*, LC, Ghent collection.

Second Lieutenant Godfrey reported for duty on 3 October 1867, just shy of his twenty-fourth birthday.<sup>76</sup> Like most western garrisons, there was no wooden palisade, just a grouping of buildings centered on a flagpole. The regimental headquarters at Fort Riley was seventy miles east and already served by the Union Pacific railroad. Fort Harker housed the headquarters of the District of the Upper Arkansas, a subdivision of the Department of the Missouri. That department, in turn, was part of the Division of the Missouri, which stretched from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. Four companies of infantry and cavalry made up the Fort Harker garrison, supported by 200 civilians. Dozens of professionally constructed buildings dotted the encampment, some two-stories and built of framed wood or stone and warmed by wood-burning stoves.<sup>77</sup> That summer, cholera had swept the post killing about one hundred people, including the post surgeon's wife. Godfrey's future commanding officer, Captain Albert Barnitz (G Company), had maintained his bearing and authority in the mist of this threat; to do otherwise would only have caused more dread. Not that he doubted its lethality. A seasoned combat veteran who had nearly been killed by plains warriors, Barnitz quipped that he "would rather see two Indians than one man with cholera."<sup>78</sup> The century had already seen even worse Asiatic cholera epidemics, yet the 1866 death toll in the U.S.

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<sup>73</sup> After graduation Godfrey returned home to Ohio. He was active in the Ottawa Mason's lodge and was made a Master Mason on 24 September 1867. Leave ended 30 September and the additional three days was travel time from Ohio to Fort Harker. Unknown paper, LBH; Military Orders, Regimental Order 61, HQ 7th Cav, Ft. Harker, KS Oct 3, 1867, LC.

<sup>77</sup> Leo E. Oliva, *Fort Harker: Defending the Journey West* (Topeka, KS: Kansas Historical Society, 2008), 31-50.

<sup>78</sup> Albert Barnitz, "Diaries and Letters of Albert and Jennie Barnitz, 1867-1868," quoted in Robert M. Utley, *Life in Custer's Cavalry: Diaries and Letters of Albert and Jennie Barnitz, 1867-1868* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), 86.

Army alone was 1,269, and an additional 156 soldiers stationed in Kansas would succumb the following year.<sup>79</sup>

Captain Barnitz had enlisted as a sergeant in the 2nd Ohio Volunteer Cavalry during the Civil War and risen to major by April 1865. On 26 June 1867, nine days after Godfrey graduated from West Point and was on leave in Ohio, Barnitz and forty-nine men had a sharp fight with some 200 Cheyenne, Sioux and Arapaho warriors near Fort Wallace, the westernmost Kansas post guarding the Smokey Hill Trail.<sup>80</sup> In a letter to his wife, Jennie, Barnitz described how the warriors “turned suddenly upon my line, and came literally *sailing* in.”<sup>81</sup> Such closeness to screaming Indians, coupled with the smell, sounds, and chaos of battle frightened the green troops and their horses, making them difficult to handle. It was too much for one sergeant, who fled to the fort calling on the men to follow. A few cavalrymen followed, but most held their place, though hotly pressed by adept native riders. Yelling out instructions and calling on his men by name, Barnitz regained control and, dismounting part of his command, repelled the Indians with volley fire from their Spencer carbines. Just over three feet in length, the breech-loading Spencer fired fixed metallic cartridges that fed from a seven shot tubular magazine loaded from a gate in the butt plate. Unlike the cumbersome muzzle-loaders that could

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<sup>79</sup> Ramon S. Powers and Gene Younger, “Cholera and the Army in the West: Treatment and Control in 1866 and 1867 in Military Affairs,” *The Journal of Military History, Including Theory and Technology*, vol. 34, no. (2 April, 1975): 50; Thomas Neville Bonner, *The Kansas Doctor: A Century of Pioneering* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1959), 36.

<sup>80</sup> The post-mortem wounds or more properly markings left on the dead cavalrymen show that warriors from all three tribes were present. Barnitz estimated the Indians numbered at least 200 warriors but this may have been high. William Y. Chalfant, *Hancock’s War: Conflict on the Southern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 374.

<sup>81</sup> Barnitz, quoted in Utley, *Life in Custer’s Cavalry*, 70.



fire only three to four shots a minute, repeating arms like the Spencer were a badly needed equalizer, but Barnitz's patrol still took a dozen casualties, including six killed and four severely wounded. One of the injured men was shot through the stomach with a "revenge arrow" altered to produce a more agonizing wound.<sup>82</sup>

Barnitz had been leading G Company without a lieutenant, so post commander Major Alfred Gibbs temporarily attached Godfrey. One of seven new lieutenants, he became the first academy graduate directly assigned to the 7th.<sup>83</sup> Barnitz, who had not attended the Military Academy, wrote his wife about the new officers. "Two are graduates of West Point [John M. Johnson was the other one]. About 5 of them are first class men, and will make good officers, and fine social companions-of the other two I have not formed so favorable an opinion....- very nice young men however."<sup>84</sup> Considering Barnitz's later comments, Godfrey was probably one of the other two.

The failure of "Hancock's War," trouble to the north with the warring Sioux, political pressure from eastern "sentimentalists," and the cost of campaigning convinced Washington to meet with the Indians in the hope of restoring peace. As part of this overall strategy a council was arranged with the five southern tribes, the Comanche, Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache (also called Plains-Apaches), Cheyenne, and Arapaho. Godfrey

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 75. War arrowheads were lightly attached to break off in a wound and the arrow shaft could be zigzagged to allow blood to more readily flow out and not coagulate. Mrs. D. B. Dyer, *Fort Reno or, Picturesque "Cheyenne and Arrapahoe Army Life," before the Opening of "Oklahoma"* (NY: G.W. Dillingham, 1896), reprint (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 100; Sandy Barnard, ed. *Ten Years with Custer: A 7th Cavalryman's Memoirs* (Terre Haute, IN: AST Press, 2001), 58.

<sup>83</sup> Alfred Gibbs to Edward S. Godfrey, 3 October 1867, Regimental Order # 61, Fort Harker, Kansas, LC; Barnitz, quoted in Utley, *Life in Custer's Cavalry*, 108.

<sup>84</sup> Barnitz, quoted in Utley, *Life in Custer's Cavalry*, 108.

found himself in the middle of the preparations. On 7 October 1867, the peace commission arrived at Fort Harker to pick up its cavalry escort, which included Barnitz's G Company. The council was to take place on Medicine Lodge Creek in southern Kansas, relatively close to the railhead so that transport expenses would be less. Twenty-six-year-old Joel H. Elliott commanded the cavalry escort. After enlisting as a private during the Civil War, Elliott had fought at Shiloh and elsewhere before commissioning in the 7th Indiana Cavalry. Although twice seriously wounded, he obtained a commission in the regular Army with Custer's endorsement, the two had served in Texas together immediately after the Civil War. Although other men in the 7th had held higher rank, and two of the regiment's captains had held brevets to brigadier general, the less experienced Elliott was a major.<sup>85</sup> Because he had already served as a superintendent of public schools and was quite intelligent, Godfrey attributed his regular Army commission to a high examination score, but Elliott's rank had actually resulted from a powerful political connection.<sup>86</sup> Whatever the reason, this junior major of the regiment often found himself in command and some of his seniors were jealous of his fortune, likeable and popular though he was. Commanding the third 7th Cavalry escort company was another decorated Civil War veteran, First Lieutenant Owen Hale. Sarcastically referred to as

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<sup>85</sup> William Thompson of the 1st Iowa Cavalry and Robert M. West of the 5th Pennsylvania Cavalry both served as colonels during the war with brevets to brigadier general.

<sup>86</sup> E. S. Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences, Including the Washita Battle, November 27, 1868," *The Cavalry Journal*, 37, no. 153 (October 1928): 481; Barnitz, quoted in Utley, *Life in Custer's Cavalry*, 258; Charles K. Mills, *Harvest of Barren Regrets: The Army Career of Frederick William Benteen 1834-1898* (Glendale, CA: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1985), 131.

“Holy Owen” for his use of profanity, he was one of the better company commanders and, like Elliott, destined to die “with his boots on.”<sup>87</sup>

Godfrey, against his wishes, was to command the Gatling gun battery. Although the 4th Artillery was part of the escort, it was common to assign Gatling guns directly to the cavalry when they were available. The only Gatling guns Godfrey had ever seen were in the ordnance museum at West Point, but he signed for the four hand-cranked weapons and their accompanying equipment, which included 10,000 rounds of ammunition, and eight mules with civilian drivers. A predecessor to Hiram Maxim's belt-fed machine gun, the revolving six-barreled Gatling fired regular rifle ammunition at a rate of 200 rounds per minute, but was far more prone to malfunction. On the positive side, it was an imposing machine whose presence at a negotiation would make anyone think twice about abandoning diplomacy. Godfrey found two soldiers who had some field artillery experience and figured out how to operate the weapons, although only allowed to test-fire them if he himself paid the government for the ammunition.<sup>88</sup>

The peace commission, a 200-soldier escort, some 300 wagons and ambulances, armed teamsters, and an unknown number of curious civilians headed towards the proposed meeting point about 120 miles south of Fort Harker. The column deployed outriders and 360-degree security around the two-mile-long caravan. Always commented on favorably were the sturdy one-ton mule/oxen-drawn "Government" wagons, capable

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<sup>87</sup> Hale would be killed in 1877 leading a charge against the Nez Perce Indians at Bear Paw Mountain in Montana Territory. Godfrey would be wounded in the same action.

<sup>88</sup> Edward S. Godfrey, *Reminiscences of the Medicine Lodge Treaty Peace Treaties*, LBH, Bates Collection, Godfrey papers, 1; Barnitz, quoted in Utley, *Life in Custer's Cavalry*, 107; Martin Peglar, *US Cavalryman 1865-1890* (London: Michelin House, 1993), 10.

of carrying 6,800 lbs. of cargo and organized into several trains of twenty-five wagons. “Bull-whackers” cracking sixteen-foot whips drove each wagon. Transporting repair equipment and supplies, they were a self-contained village on the move. One impressed 7th Cavalryman noted he never saw a government axle broken.<sup>89</sup>

Former Congressman Nathaniel G. Taylor, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and retired Major General William S. Harney led the peace commission. Representing the civilian and military halves of the delegation, they were a microcosm of US Indian policy -- a divided authority and whose components were at odds with each other. A Tennessean who had remained loyal to the Union, Harney was a wise choice for the council; he appealed to warriors more than any civilian bureaucrat could. Known for his violent personality, he could be calm and diplomatic when required. In 1861, while stationed in St. Louis, he supported a short-lived truce with Missouri State Guard Commander, Sterling Price. Nine newspaper reporters came along, including the *Chicago Tribune*'s Henry Morton Stanley, the ex-Confederate soldier and Union sailor who would find Dr. David Livingstone at Ujiji four years later. Passing near Fort Larned on 12 October, a small contingent of Indians joined them, among them Kiowa Chief White Bear, or Satanta. A broad-faced, muscular man, he was a feared war leader and often carried a bugle, which he blew to confuse the cavalry. He also craved attention, especially when drinking, and the correspondents were not only impressed by his stature but, in keeping with phrenology's nineteenth century popularity, measured his cranial size. Like most Kiowa, White Bear abhorred facial hair and some members of his

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<sup>89</sup> Bernard, *Ten Years with Custer*, 22.

delegation had even plucked out their eyebrows, a common Kiowa practice. His imposing presence was offset by that of Little Raven, the friendly Arapaho Chief “who had the appearance of one who lived well and took the world calmly.”<sup>90</sup>

To Godfrey’s surprise, they crossed “the great ‘Arkansaw’ dry shod at some places but [found] it a running stream above and below.” During the summer months many of the rivers dried up on the Great Plains, forming a line of ponds with no apparent connection. Riding to a high sand hill, he found an oak tree completely buried within.<sup>91</sup> The grass was sometimes up to the cavalry horses’ bellies and shadowing Indians often set it on fire. The plains had often been compared to the ocean; sameness as far as the eye could see. One traveler remarked that only those who had been at sea could appreciate their sheer immensity.<sup>92</sup> As the caravan made its way through herds of bison, seventeen-year-old teamster Billy Dixon watched an injured cow pursued by six large wolves. Not only were such grisly encounters frequent, but huge wolf packs dispatched so many bison that both Indians and whites believed them more destructive than people. In the years to come, professional hunters or “wolfers” killed tens of thousands of plains wolves with strychnine. In the words of one observer, when “a dollar can be made on the hide of an animal, that animal is doomed.”<sup>93</sup> Godfrey, Major Elliott, and several others

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<sup>90</sup> De Benneville Randolph Keim, *Sheridan’s Troopers on the Borders: A Winter Campaign on the Plains; An Account of the Lifeways of the “Horse” Indians in 1868*. Originally published 1870, reprint (Glorieta, NM: The Rio Grande Press, 1977), 273.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 18; Godfrey, *Medicine Lodge*, 2.

<sup>92</sup> Dyer, *Fort Reno*, 33.

<sup>93</sup> Olive K. Dixon, *The Life of “Billy” Dixon* (Dallas: P.L. Turner, 1927), reprint (Austin: State House Press, 1987), 37. The observer was presumably not calculating into the equation the white hide hunters of the 1870s. M. M. Quaife, ed. *Yellowstone Kelly: The Memoirs of Luther S. Kelly* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), reprint (Lincoln: Bison Books, 1973), 74, 136;

went bison hunting much to the displeasure of Chief Satanta, who noted that they killed more than they needed.<sup>94</sup> Hunting the animals in excess prior to a peace conference showed poor judgment, and Satanta complained to General Harney, who briefly arrested Major Elliott and, according to Godfrey, “stopped our sport.”<sup>95</sup>

The command arrived at Medicine Lodge Creek on 14 October with the army escort in the rear so as not to alarm the Indians. The gathering would reach 5,000 people and include Indian families, signifying peaceful intentions. Still native numbers dwarfed the small escort, so a barrier of ambulances were emplaced around the army camp. Sentries were alert -- sometimes doubled -- and Godfrey’s Gatling guns defensively-positioned. To keep the Indians from leaving to hunt, the army supplied 50,000 rations. Meanwhile, the Central Indian Superintendency, a subunit of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, handled the council's numerous administrative tasks.

Excluding the Cheyenne, the mood at the council was one of friendly curiosity with Indians exploring and the soldiers on guard to prevent theft. Young boys took a fancy to matches or “lucifers,” while the women, unexplainably, cherished discarded envelopes. Indians liked sugar and after finishing their coffee, would dip their fingers into the empty cups to retrieve the left-over granules.<sup>96</sup> Council member Senator John B.

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Eli R. Paul, ed. *Sign Talker: Hugh Lenox Scott Remembers Indian Country* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 131.

<sup>94</sup> Douglas C. Jones, *The Treaty of Medicine Lodge: The Story of the Great Treaty Council as Told by Eyewitnesses* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 68; Charles M. Robinson, III, *Satanta: The Life and Death of a War Chief* (Austin, Texas: State House Press, 1997), 64.

<sup>95</sup> Godfrey, *Medicine Lodge*, 3.

<sup>96</sup> Jones, *Treaty of Medicine Lodge*, 139, 147, 153-155; Keim, *Sheridan’s Troopers*, 209.

Henderson attempted to dress a just-skinned bison robe to the amusement of laughing Indian women. Godfrey visited an Arapaho camp one night in the company of Kansas Governor Samuel J. Crawford, Major Elliott, Captain Barnitz, and others, Barnitz quipping that the excursion was scarcely necessary as long as Indians filled the soldiers' camp.<sup>97</sup> One of the reporters found two white women among the Kiowa, one captured as a small child but the other a teenager when her parents were killed near San Antonio. After years with the tribe, neither wished to leave. The Kiowa, along with their more numerous Comanche allies, regularly raided the former Confederate Texas but the commissioners did not seem overly concerned about these attacks, including one led by Satanta that had recently killed members of the Box family and ransomed the survivors to Army officers. Satanta, who bragged that he made more money stealing white women than horses, did not seem overly concerned, either. Only Jesse Leavenworth, an Indian agent to Satanta's tribe, was disgusted with the military for not making an arrest.<sup>98</sup>

A week into the affair, a Kiowa sub-Chief named Stumbling Bear who was especially friendly with Major Elliott warned that the Cheyenne would appear the next day and that the soldiers should be on their guard.<sup>99</sup> The following day, well-armed Cheyenne warriors decked out in their best clothing galloped towards the whites, blowing

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<sup>97</sup> Barnitz, quoted in Utley, *Life in Custer's Cavalry*, 110.

<sup>98</sup> Robinson, *Satanta*, 48, 69; Jones, *The Treaty of Medicine Lodge*, 58, 87, 126, 148; Mills, *My Story*, 69.

<sup>99</sup> Godfrey refers to Stumbling Bear (more correctly translated as "Bear That is Shoving You Down") as an Apache sub-Chief. He probably meant the Kiowa sub-Chief who was a signatory of the upcoming treaty. Godfrey, *Medicine Lodge*, 5; Wilbur Sturtevant Nye, *Plains Indian Raiders: The Final Phases of Warfare from the Arkansas to the Red River* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 218-219.

trumpets, yelling, and firing their weapons into the air as they approached. The soldiers stood armed and ready in front of their tents awaiting the order to defend the camp.

General Harney told the men to remain calm and show no fear. When the Cheyenne were about two hundred yards from the soldiers, Harney signaled them to halt and for their leaders to come forward, peacefully. Stumbling Bear and some of his fellow Kiowa who had remained near Elliott “left in high good humor” according to Godfrey.<sup>100</sup>

Comanche was the primary language spoken and the lucky interpreter was paid nearly the equivalent of Godfrey’s annual salary. Initial talks centered on the peace commission’s apology for the Sand Creek massacre three years before, and the burning of a Cheyenne village by General Hancock more recently. Like most Indian tribes, Black Kettle’s Cheyenne band, encamped at Sand Creek, had elements at war with whites, but the brutality that followed was hard to believe. On 29 November 1864, 675 federalized Colorado militiamen, commanded by Colonel John M. Chivington killed and mutilated upwards of 160 Cheyenne and Arapaho, most of whom were women and children. Chief White Antelope was killed but Black Kettle, the leading Cheyenne peace chief was fortunate enough to escape along with his wife, who was shot nine times. The Cheyenne were outraged and Congress felt moved to atone without appreciating the situation. As horrible as Sand Creek was, Indians did not apologize for massacring whites or other Indians. Tribal negotiators were shrewd and the government’s excessive contrition led to some astonishing demands. Satanta wanted the railroad stopped in eastern Kansas unless

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<sup>100</sup> Dixon, *Life of “Billy” Dixon*, 43-44; Godfrey *Medicine Lodge*, 6.



it was transporting presents. He was, as the Kiowa expression went, "playing wolf with Washington."<sup>101</sup>

Government negotiators were trying to save native peoples by removing them from the path of white invasion. The nomadic way of life practiced by the tribes of the central plains was already doomed by the multitudes of settlers who headed west after the Civil War. During 1867 alone, forty-three steamboats hauled passengers and supplies up the Missouri River, wagon trains and stagecoaches took the Smokey Hill Trail west through Kansas, and the railroads pushed westward. Having encouraged this migration, the federal government was unable to control it, and Plains Indians were the losers. Governor Samuel J. Crawford of Kansas followed suit, insisting that all Indians including the recently arrived Ottawa leave Kansas and relocate to the south in Indian Territory by year's end. The talks lasted through the month, with Godfrey noting the "dignified bearing" of the chiefs and that much native eloquence was lost through "monotonous translation."<sup>102</sup> Little Raven made the commissioners squirm with his recital of past promises already broken. But one of the commissioners had a persuasive-sounding argument: the bison were already scarce, and soon the tribes would have to depend on the government and "walk the white man's ways." The commissioner urged signing before settlers got the good land. Satanta answered that when the bison were gone "we will let him [the President] know."<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Keim, *Sheridan's Troopers*, 183.

<sup>102</sup> Godfrey *Medicine Lodge*, 6.

<sup>103</sup> John Edward Weems, *Death Song: The Last of the Indian Wars* (NY: Indian Head Books, 1976), 23.

The first and most important term of the Medicine Lodge treaties was that violence against anyone under the authority of the United States, white, black or red would cease. The tribes would live south of the Arkansas River, the “dead-line,” but could venture north to hunt bison. In exchange, the U.S. government was to provide food, seed, farming implements, mills, houses, clothing, and education personnel. The whites were encouraging the plains tribes to adopt sedentary farming, but had not yet defeated them in a battle big enough to matter. On the other hand, the warriors' determination to fight again if pushed was hardly evident by their acceptance of the treaty -- even the defiant Satanta signed.

Bribery was a standard tactic: government representatives liberally disbursed presents -- left over Civil War uniforms, bugles, food, tobacco, and clothing -- as an enticement to sign. Billy Dixon thought it a humorous sight to see Indians attired in all the clothes issued to them, “bucks wearing two or three heavy coats and two high-crowned Army hats, one on top of the other.”<sup>104</sup> Those that failed to “touch the pen” would receive no presents, so even the reluctant signed. The most sought-after gifts were guns and ammunition and the government, in questionable compliance with the 1865 Little Arkansas Treaty, issued firearms and ammunition with the promise of more to come; largesse that shocked Godfrey, Barnitz, and the rest of the Army escort. They would have been more angered had they known that their government had purchased for the Cheyenne an additional one hundred Colt revolvers and fifty-four Henry repeating

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<sup>104</sup> Dixon, *The Life of “Billy” Dixon*, 50.

rifles, the latter a weapon far superior to the single shot rifles equipping the Army's own infantrymen.<sup>105</sup>

Negotiations and signing over, the command headed back to Fort Harker. At some point during the previous two weeks Captain Barnitz had changed his mind about Godfrey, now described in a letter to Mrs. Barnitz as “a splendid young man-quite handsome, and a good officer.”<sup>106</sup> Godfrey, still in command of the Gatling battery, along with four companies of the 7th Cavalry under Major Alfred Gibbs, marched east on 13 November to comfortable winter quarters at Fort Leavenworth. While there, Godfrey and academy classmate Lieutenant John Johnson had a conversation regarding the Custer factionalism in the regiment. Johnson asked, “Goddy, what are you going to do about this Custer business? It looks as though we have got to take sides with one or the other.” Godfrey, who was shaving at the time and in an apparent wish to demonstrate his strong feeling on the subject: turned on him, razor in hand, and declared: “I’m not going to side with either faction. It all happened before we joined, and I can’t see that it is any of our business to take sides.’... it was my decision to keep out of it. The result was that I was not in the confidence of either side, but caught h--l from the anti-Custerites!”<sup>107</sup>

While at Fort Leavenworth, Godfrey also struck up a friendly relationship with Captain Barnitz’s wife Jennie, meeting her socially several times and escorting her to a dance. Jennie, in turn, spoke well of him to her husband but despite her positive image of

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<sup>105</sup> Stan Hoig, *Washita*, 38. Billy Dixon says they were barred from trading firearms to the Indians. That did not stop him from selling an old cap and ball pistol for three buffalo robes and other “trinkets.” Dixon, *The Life of “Billy” Dixon*, 50.

<sup>106</sup> Barnitz, quoted in Utley, *Life in Custer’s Cavalry*, 121.

<sup>107</sup> Godfrey, *Custer and the Seventh Cavalry*, 1.

Godfrey, Captain Barnitz's opinion regressed. In February 1868 Jennie recorded, "Mr. Godfrey came in feeling very badly because Albert [Barnitz] had reproved him quite harshly for so much noise in his room."<sup>108</sup>

In April 1868, five companies under Major Elliott left winter quarters at Fort Leavenworth to patrol the Kansas frontier. Godfrey ended up in E Company near Ellis Station in the western half of the state. The station consisted of one house and a water tank for the section hands of the Kansas Pacific Railroad. In June, Godfrey went a few miles east to Hayes City to "capture" deserters.<sup>109</sup> When Barnitz learned that Godfrey would return to G Company, he was unenthusiastic, characterizing Godfrey "of little account in the company...very slovenly and lazy, and *unmilitary*," and presuming, "a great deal on his West Point education."<sup>110</sup> Barnitz even supplied the new lieutenant with an official copy of his orders as a way of assuring compliance. Perhaps Godfrey incited this by some egregious error or maybe the two men did not get along. More likely Godfrey was just not a good officer at this time. Like many others he was disillusioned with frontier service which held little resemblance to the Army life he had imagined at West Point.

The next evening Barnitz placed Godfrey under arrest "for disrespectfully reporting the Troop &c."<sup>111</sup> Four days later Barnitz released him but kept Godfrey under his supervision by ordering him to daily inspect the kitchen among other tasks. Shortly

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<sup>108</sup> Barnitz, quoted in Utley, *Life in Custer's Cavalry*, 133, 150, 172.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 159. Capture was a word Godfrey used.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 173.

thereafter Barnitz wrote, "Lt. Godfrey reported 'his presence' to me while I was bathing my face, and declined to receive the report of the 1st Sergeant, which of course has resulted in some "unpleasantness!"<sup>112</sup> Fortunately, by early August the two men had worked out their differences. Barnitz commented, "I am getting along very nicely with Lieut. Godfrey now. We had a little 'wrestle' together, as Lieut.[Samuel M.] Robbins would say, in which Lieut. Godfrey did not prosper, and since then he has been as good, and as attentive to duty as it is possible for an officer to be."<sup>113</sup>

Despite the Medicine Lodge Treaty, or perhaps because of it, warfare returned to the southern plains. The warrior culture of the plains tribes would not allow them to meekly accept reservation life. The Kiowa and Comanche continued their raids into Texas while the Cheyenne launched attacks near the Smokey Hill Trail and raided a government-allied Kaw village. As a result, the superintendent of Indian affairs ordered arms and ammunition promised to the Cheyenne in the Medicine Lodge Treaty withheld. When twelve to fifteen thousand Indians of the southern plains gathered near Fort Larned, Kansas to demand the weapons, elements of the 7th Cavalry reinforced Larned's small garrison to "overawe the Indians and to avert any trouble."<sup>114</sup> However, the superintendent of Indian affairs issued the tribes muzzle loading Lancaster rifles, pistols,

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>114</sup> E. S. Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences...Sully", 419. If Indians did gather in such numbers it would make it possibly the biggest gathering on the plains, even larger than the June 1876 Little Bighorn camp.

and ammunition. Barnitz, anticipating the upcoming trouble, noted how absurd it was “to fight Indians with one hand, and to make presents, and give them arms with the other!”<sup>115</sup>

The next day a mixed group of some 200 Sioux, Northern Cheyenne, Arapahoe, Southern Cheyenne and at least 7 white renegades raided settlements along the Saline and Solomon Rivers in Kansas, killing 15 settlers and raping 5 women. When a woman appealed to the renegades for protection, one of them merely leveled a gun at the Indians and allowed his white companions to continue raping her.<sup>116</sup> Thirty Fort Harker cavalymen commanded by Captain Frederick Benteen sped after the raiders, bloodying them and rescuing two girls.

While his company was scouting near the Arkansas River, Godfrey went north to Fort Larned to pick up the mail. Upon his return, he found that a locust plague had consumed much of the surrounding vegetation, eaten holes in his soldiers' uniforms, and the nap off of their blankets. The mail held a special letter for Godfrey: his promotion to first lieutenant would be effective on 1 February 1868. The promotion was due to luck rather than merit: a fellow 7th Cavalry officer's resignation had created a vacancy. Now assigned to Company K, First Lieutenant Godfrey bought a case of wine at the sutler's store for the customary “wetting” of his commission. And it was a special occasion; during the post-Civil War years, few officers were ever promoted beyond captain and many languished as lieutenants for decades. Godfrey, though still a lieutenant, was one

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<sup>115</sup> Barnitz, quoted in Utley, *Life in Custer's Cavalry*, 175.

<sup>116</sup> John H. Monnett, “When Custer was in Monroe,” *Research and Review: The Journal of The Little Big Horn Associates*, 34, (2020): 9. The white renegades lived outside of settlements and were probably involved in the whiskey trade.

step closer to captain. Even in the 4th Cavalry, where promotion was faster, making captain after twelve years' service was a remarkable feat. Conversely, long tours with the same regiment developed a strong *esprit de corps* and allowed the first echelon leaders to become very good at their jobs.<sup>117</sup>

In the mail that Godfrey brought back with him were orders for Major Elliott to move south to Fort Dodge as Indian raids continued and an expedition consisting mostly of the 7th was to take the field against the southern tribes. Commanding the force would be the District Commander for the Upper Arkansas, Lieutenant Colonel (brevet Brigadier General) Alfred Sully of the 3rd Infantry. During the last two years of the Civil War, Sully had conducted successful operations against the Sioux, but 1868 would be a different story. According to both Godfrey and Barnitz, Sully was too comfort-oriented for hard campaigning and, at least on this expedition, did not inspire the confidence of his officers and enlisted men. Not only did he ride in an ambulance instead of on horseback, but his frequent references to Roman history inspired more puzzlement than respect. He likened crossing into Indian Territory that September to crossing the Rubicon, and often included himself in a "Triumvirate of the S's: Sherman, Division Commander; Sheridan, Department Commander; and Sully, District Commander."<sup>118</sup>

From 8-12 September, Sully's command continually skirmished with the Indians near the Cimarron and Beaver Forks of the Canadian River. Godfrey participated in

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<sup>117</sup> A sutler was a storekeeper licensed to sell to the military. Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences... Sully," 420; Military Orders 14 August 1868, LC; Barnitz, quoted in Utley, *Life in Custer's Cavalry*, 184, 252-3; Stahl, *Edward Settle Godfrey*, 25. The 4th Cavalry had more success in moving disabled officers to the retired list, freeing up promotions. Parker, *The Old Army*, 47.

<sup>118</sup> Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences... Sully," 421; Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences... Washita," 419.

these engagements and occasionally the fighting was intense, but without aggressive leadership and better planning, little was accomplished. Sully remained cautious and the command made no credible effort to hunt down the bands and capture their villages. The Indians harassed the column and generally concentrated on cutting off any stragglers. On the morning of 11 September as the command broke camp, two men made the mistake of lingering behind the main force. Indians who had hidden in a nearby gully, seized the two and carried them off. The rear guard, commanded by Captain Louis Hamilton, was several hundred yards away but heard the commotion and immediately charged in pursuit. Supporting troops, sent by the acting adjutant, rushed to help. Sully, at the head of the column and angry that orders were given without his approval, had the troops immediately rejoin the command. Though wounded, Hamilton had rescued one soldier and was closing on the other when he complied with Sully's orders. The other man, Private Louis Curran was never seen again, and probably burned alive that night.<sup>119</sup>

Not only was the unnecessary loss of a soldier demoralizing, but Sully made matters worse by arresting Hamilton and the acting adjutant for pursuing the Indians without his permission. "We of the Cavalry had been imbued with the principle to take any risk to attempt the rescue of a comrade in peril" lamented Godfrey, and Sully had fallen short of that standard when it mattered.<sup>120</sup> Sully had also given up on his mission.

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<sup>119</sup> Richard G. Hardorff, ed., *Washita Memories: Eyewitness Views of Custer's Attack on Black Kettle's Village* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 164.

<sup>120</sup> Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences...Sully," 423-24; Robert C. Carriker, *Fort Supply Indian Territory: Frontier Outpost on the Plains*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 11. His name has also been reported as James Curran. Michno, *Encyclopedia of Indian Wars*, 221. Lieutenant James M. Bell states they were placed under arrest for permitting anyone to be behind the rear guard. Hardorff, *Washita Memories*, 164.



Frustrated by the terrain, he justified their return to Fort Dodge for supplies and reinforcements, but Godfrey knew that his commander was really admitting defeat. The enemy also knew who had won, shadowing the 7th on their retreat and “spank[ing] their buttocks” while making “other contemptuous manifestations.”<sup>121</sup> The retreating cavalymen suffered a self-inflicted death on the way back to Fort Dodge when a sentry got lost at night and wandered into another section’s zone, where he was mistaken for an Indian and shot. At the soldier’s funeral, his company commander, Captain Myles W. Keogh, thanked the officers for attending and said he hoped to return the compliment. His fellow officers noted the red-faced Keogh’s humor and also that he had “stammered a lame explanation, and then emphasized a ‘good-bye!’”<sup>122</sup>

Back at Fort Dodge, Sully sought a larger cavalry force and felt that Major Elliott lacked the experience to lead it. The obvious solution was for Lieutenant Colonel George Custer to return and resume command of the cavalry in the next expedition. Major General Philip Sheridan, commanding the Department of the Missouri, had already concluded that a winter campaign would be necessary and begun to marshal supplies for that purpose. He also wanted his old friend back and made the necessary arrangements for Custer to return. When Custer left from exile in Michigan in early October, most of the officers of the command -- even those in the “anti-Custer” faction -- welcomed him back. The frustration of the previous campaign probably had much to do with this change of heart, and it was not clear how long the optimism would last. Some of the

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<sup>121</sup> Godfrey, “Some Reminiscences...Sully,” 425.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 425.

7th's officers, notably Captains Robert M. West and Frederick W. Benteen truly hated Custer although West, who had earlier brought charges against him, put aside his personal feelings for the moment and welcomed their commander back. Benteen had commanded a brigade in the Civil War and was most known for his leadership and heroics at Mine Creek in 1864. His hard-earned experience came with his inflated ego and contempt for those around him. Although he surely had some interaction with Custer at Leavenworth the preceding winter, this was the first time Godfrey would serve under him. It is apparent from Godfrey's writings that he welcomed the return of one of his Civil war heroes, and an officer that he had hoped to serve under since his days at West Point.

Two of Custer's most important traits were his energy and sense of urgency. Incessantly active and likely humiliated by his recent court martial, he was eager to prove himself as a frontier commander and immediately ordered aggressive patrolling. But the resulting skirmishes were not always well planned. In October, Captain Thomas Custer, the general's brother, and another soldier unwisely peeled off from the column to bathe in a small creek. When their horses acted nervous Tom realized Indians were nearly upon them. With no time to spare, the naked men abandoned their clothes and saddles and sprinted to their horses, escaping just in time. Not everyone was so lucky. On 8 October, northwest of the 7th near the Colorado-Kansas border, Cheyenne warriors swooped down on a wagon train whose lead vehicle had gotten too far ahead and was captured. The two occupants, petite, pretty, twenty-year-old Clara Blinn and her two-year-old son Willie were captured. Described as an "inveterate joker" by her family the Ohio native held

herself together for herself and her son.<sup>123</sup> The rescue party, ten soldiers from Ft. Lyon, lost their trail as the raiders sped south towards Indian Territory. Five days later, warriors struck the homestead of newlyweds James and Anna Belle Morgan in Ottawa County, Kansas, shooting James in the hip and scooping up a terrified Anna Belle. In early November a confused, starving white woman wandered into the 7th Cavalry camp. Unable to relate what had happened to her, Custer theorized she was abducted and abused by Indians.<sup>124</sup>

This was a turning point in the history in the 7th Cavalry Regiment. When Custer and Sully clashed over how to respond, Sheridan transferred Sully so that Custer could assume full control. Once he did, he ordered intensive target practice and drill and made a controversial decision to color the horses. Mounting each company of a cavalry regiment on horses of a specific color had become a frequent practice during the Civil War, and made a regiment's companies appear more uniform. When within visual range of his companies, a regimental commander could tell which was which, making command and control easier. The disadvantage was that many of the 7th's cavalymen had become quite attached to their mounts and were infuriated by Custer's order.

Meanwhile, the Army had adopted a new strategy. Catching the hostiles in their villages during winter when war ponies were weak, food was scarce, and the weather was brutal would leave them with few good choices and make a decisive blow by U.S. forces easier to deliver. To accomplish this, Sheridan organized three columns of troops to

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<sup>123</sup> "The Saga of Clara H. Blinn at the Battle of the Washita," *Research and Review: The Journal of the Little Big Horn Associates*, 14, no. 1 (Winter, 2000): 11.

<sup>124</sup> The woman was not identified. Elizabeth B. Custer, *Following the Guidon: Into the Indian Wars with General Custer and the Seventh Cavalry* (NY: Harper & Brothers, Franklin Square, 1890), reprint (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 15.

converge on the southern tribes wintering along the Canadian and Washita Rivers in western Indian Territory. If all went as planned, the previously elusive enemy would not escape.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE WASHITA

In October, Billy Dixon, driving a team of six “wild” mules, along with 100 other wagons, helped establish the supply depot that would support Sheridan's upcoming expedition. The temperament of mules made the job especially frustrating but once hitched to the heavily loaded wagons the animals could do little but pull. Two stampedes later, one on the way down and a worse one returning with empty wagons, work on "Camp Supply" began. Of the hundreds of mules that had torn themselves from harnesses and upset wagons, many injured had to be put down and one team disappeared until 1871, when Dixon found it at the bottom of a canyon while hunting buffalo twelve miles from the trail.<sup>125</sup>

The 7th Cavalry was in Indian Territory 100 miles south of Fort Dodge by mid-November. By then, Camp Supply was under construction and garrisoned by five infantry companies. The Kansas Pacific Railroad transported teamsters and mules to Fort Hayes for the chilly, twelve-day journey south to the depot.<sup>126</sup> Because the supply base was nearer the zone of operations Sheridan could provide troops with refuge from the

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<sup>125</sup> Dixon, *The Life of “Billy” Dixon*, 59-60.

<sup>126</sup> Ultimately 450 supply wagons under Major Henry Inman would run from Fort Dodge to Camp Supply. Keim, *Sheridan's Troopers*, 102.

harsh winter and keep them in the field longer. On 21 November he arrived at the camp to personally oversee the operation. Custer's column would be the largest of three forces moving against the tribes. The other two columns, moving in from the west and northwest, were expected to drive the hostiles into the 7th. A beefed-up state regiment, the 19th Kansas Volunteer Cavalry, was to join the expedition but arrived late and Custer decided to leave without them. On 23 November 1868 at 3 a.m. reveille sounded at Camp Supply. Their baggage packed in a large wagon train, eleven companies of the 7th Cavalry and a detachment of Indian and white scouts departed three hours later. As they left in search of the Cheyenne, their regimental band struck up "The Girl I Left Behind Me." The snow was a foot deep and falling snowflakes limited vision, so Custer led the command south towards the Antelope Hills using a compass.

As commander of the First Platoon of Captain Robert M. West's K Company, Godfrey plowed through the snow with the rest of the men. The weather warmed and snowflakes melted on the soldiers' buffalo fur coats, wetting the men to the skin. After crossing Wolf Creek, the column covered about fifteen miles before encamping near some fallen timbers. Over the next two days, the 7th marched thirty miles and on the 26th, Custer detached Major Elliott with three companies to search the upper reaches of the Canadian River. The rest of the 7th crossed the South Canadian River under the summit of the Antelope Hills and prepared to move to the east, downstream. Custer and some officers, Godfrey among them, rode to the top of a nearby peak to scan the surrounding countryside. A cloud of frozen mist unexpectedly enveloped the group, and all were amazed to see an optical illusion. The phenomenon, called a sundog, reflected

ellipses with colorful tints unseen by those on the plain below. In the midst of this scene Custer looked through his field glasses and spotted a horseman.<sup>127</sup>

The rider was a courier from Elliott, whose Osage scouts had found an Indian trail. The twelve “trailers” as Custer calls them, were led by Little Beaver and Hard Rope, the latter of the Osage Heart-Stays band.<sup>128</sup> Enemies of the larger plains tribes, they thoroughly scoured the terrain and Custer admired their tracking ability. Further investigation revealed the recent campsite of a war party and an abandoned pack mule. Custer supplied the courier with a fresh mount and instructed him to have Elliott follow the trail until dark, make camp and await the rest of the command. Seven wagons and an ambulance commanded by Lieutenant James Bell were culled from the main train, loaded with supplies and extra ammunition. Custer ordered his men to keep 100 rounds on their persons in case they became separated from their horses and packsaddles.<sup>129</sup> The rest of the wagons were to follow as rapidly as possible with a guard of eighty men on the weakest mounts. Captain Louis M. Hamilton, Officer of the Day and a direct descendent

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<sup>127</sup> Godfrey, “Some Reminiscences... Washita,” 489.

<sup>128</sup> The band name means, their heartbeats remain steady and are not elevated in the face of danger. First translated as “Coeurs-Tranquilles” (Tranquil Hearts) by the French it lost it’s meaning in subsequent translation. Isaias McCaffery, “We-He-Sa-Ki (Hard Rope): Osage Band Chief and Diplomat, 1821-1883,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains*, 41, no. 1, (Spring 2018): 6.

<sup>129</sup> This was reduced at the Little Bighorn to about fifty rounds carried on your person and another fifty on your horse, a problem when the two became separated. Brian V. Hunt, *Reno Court of Inquiry: Conduct at the Battle of the Little Bighorn River June 25-26, 1876*, originally published in 1964 from National Archives microfilm, reprint (Lexington, KY: Big Byte Books, 2015), 356, 444, 504.

of Alexander Hamilton, was to command the main wagon train but exchanged positions with Lieutenant Edward G. Mathey who was suffering from snow blindness.

Custer guided the command diagonally across country and intercepted Elliott around 9 p.m. and, after a brief rest, the united regiment followed the trail made by a Cheyenne war party heading generally south. Godfrey believed them the same Indians that a detachment commanded by Captain Benteen had caught attacking an Army wagon train two weeks earlier.<sup>130</sup> With the Osage scouts a half mile in advance, the 7th followed the tracks through a cold winter night made worse by numerous crossings and re-crossings of the Washita. Around 1 a.m. the Osages discovered a sleeping Indian village nestled in a bend of the river, their herd in the valley below, ponies silhouetted against the snow. Chief scout Ben Clark and two companions got close enough to see smoke coming out of the teepees and confirm their location on the south bank. Interpreter Rafael Romero even got close enough to count fifty-one lodges, providing an estimate of a maximum 150 warriors.<sup>131</sup> Removing their sabers to prevent clanking, the officers crept forward to study the terrain in the moonlight, speaking in low whispers. At the crest of a hill, Custer “explained or rather conjectured” the location of the village from the cries of infants, the noise from the Indian pony herd, and the barking of the camp dogs.<sup>132</sup>

Custer planned to divide the regiment into four sections and attack at dawn as the band struck up “Garry Owen.” Major Elliott was to swing left with three companies and approach from the northeast while Captain William Thompson’s two companies would

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<sup>130</sup> Edward S. Godfrey, retired, “Unknown speech,” LBH, 3.

<sup>131</sup> Charles D. Collins, Jr., *The Cheyenne Wars Atlas* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 2010), 66.

<sup>132</sup> Godfrey, *Some Reminiscences... Washita*, 491.



slip around to the right, hit from the south, and link up with Elliott. Meanwhile, Captain Edward Myers's two companies would attack from the west with Custer, the remaining four companies (including Godfrey's), the band, and the scouts, charging the village from the north and driving the Indians into Elliott and Thompson. Dead reckoning in the darkness over unfamiliar terrain, the separate elements would have to veer wide to avoid being heard in the village, which Custer intended to capture. Dismissing his officers, he sent Godfrey back to Bell's wagons with orders for Benteen and his company to come forward. The camp guard was to remain with the wagons, and Benteen was to join Elliott's attacking force. Custer offered Godfrey as many men as he wanted for an escort, but the young lieutenant only took one orderly as additional men "would increase the chances of accident and delay."<sup>133</sup> Godfrey delivered his message and when Benteen's company arrived the regiment moved to their assault positions. Custer inched his force forward as far as he could without being detected and his men then hunkered down in the bitter cold to await dawn. Two officers and an Osage scout kept constant watch on the village. There were no fires or stamping of feet to keep warm, and soldiers killed their dogs to prevent barking. When a shooting star appeared, some mistook it for a flare, and as he waited in the cold, Godfrey thought the village abandoned.

At dawn, the 7th advanced slowly from four different directions as planned, with West's Company K, including Godfrey's First Platoon, on Custer's right flank. After charging through the village, Godfrey and his men were to round up a pony herd previously spotted at its eastern side. Dogs in the village began barking as the soldiers

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 492.

advanced, but no Indians took up arms. Captain Barnitz and Company G even surprised the Indians guarding the camp ponies but held their fire so as not to alarm the village. An Indian who had finally spotted the troops fired first but the regimental band did not fare as well -- after the first few notes of "Garry Owen," keys froze. Mounted troopers burst into the dimly lit village firing their revolvers and carbines at fleeing, indistinguishable figures. With their tepees lashed tight against the cold and themselves under buffalo robes, the Indians could not react with their usual speed and, taken completely by surprise, most fled south and east instead of fighting back. Many fell to Cooke's platoon of dismounted sharpshooters, which included two K Company men, firing from high ground on the opposite bank of the Washita River.

Meanwhile on the far-right flank of Custer's assault force, Godfrey led his twenty-man platoon towards the Washita only to encounter banks too steep for a crossing. Moving further right to a fordable spot took time and Major Elliott's force had already swept through the village firing indiscriminately into the tepees by the time Godfrey's troopers arrived. They also galloped among the teepees and shot into them, but without encountering a single warrior until almost clear of the village. When two Indians appeared, First Platoon of Company K gave chase. Godfrey identified one as female and yelled "Don't Shoot," but too late; Sergeant Elihu F. Clear had already fatally shot her with his pistol.<sup>134</sup> As he continued towards the pony herd about a mile below the village,

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<sup>134</sup> The following passage describes what happened as Godfrey cleared the village. Godfrey left it out of his published articles and it is missing passages and spaces are unedited. "[O]ur part in taking the village was very small, firing only as we passed through. ...I charged through the village, rounded up the pony herd -or just before I rounded up the pony herd saw going down the hill and got to the other side approaching with pistols drawn, I discovered that it was a squaw. Don't shoot! With that a shot went off from a rifle and down went the squaw. I was attended by Surgeon C who was my right and I detailed him to look after the squaw and the boy she had Black Kettle's daughter was the

Godfrey spotted Thompson's and Myers' men descending late from a high ridge to his right. Their delay had created a gap in the lines allowing many Indians to escape. South of the village, Godfrey spread his men out and rounded up as many of the 300-odd scattered ponies as he could, driving them to the teepees where most of the command was located. He turned them over to another of K Company's platoon leaders, Lieutenant Edward Law, and re-crossed the Washita in pursuit of Indians who were escaping to the north.

The fleeing Indians headed into a wooded gully, mounted ponies from a grazing herd, and made their escape. First Platoon chased them over foothills and came across a lone teepee where two of the escapees were circling their ponies. Godfrey recognized this signal as an alarm, and two of his sergeants also warned him of the possible danger ahead. Halting his platoon, he rode a half mile further to the top of a ridge to see whom the Indians signaled. To his surprise, "as far as I could see down the well wooded, tortuous valley there were teepees-teepees. Not only could I see teepees, but mounted warriors scurrying in our direction."<sup>135</sup> Godfrey was looking at the northernmost Indian camp, an Arapaho village, and was lucky the Washita River angled up on his right between himself and the Indians. His twenty men were four to five miles from the main command and the young lieutenant prudently ordered retreat at a trot. The pursuing warriors closed rapidly and forced the platoon to fight a rear-guard action to check their advance. Deploying in a skirmish line, Godfrey followed the 1841 Cavalry Tactics

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warrior chief of Black Kettle's." Godfrey, "Unknown Speech," 7-8. Note Godfrey says his men had pistols drawn but a rifle shot felled the woman. Surgeon C (Crittendon) was not with the command at this time.

<sup>135</sup> Godfrey, "*Some Reminiscences... Washita*," 493; General E. S. Godfrey, "Notes on Chapter XXII of Col. Wheeler's *'Buffalo Days'*," LBH, 3; Godfrey, "Unknown Speech," 8.

Manual and continued his withdrawal over the rugged terrain, with each odd and even numbered line covering the others' retreat from a preceding ridge. When some of the men forgot their numbers, he divided the platoon into two sections, each commanded by a sergeant.<sup>136</sup> As the retreating line fell back, the covering line waited to shoot until their comrades were concealed in depressions below the ridge, then fired over them. The troops were uncomfortable with this and "gravitated toward a flank so that after two or three passings the men grouped into two squads."<sup>137</sup> During their withdrawal, Godfrey and his men heard firing to the south "but being well up on the side hills" the trees obstructed their view.<sup>138</sup> The warriors attacking Godfrey's platoon broke off and the rest of the retreat was uncontested, First Platoon suffering no losses.

The firing they heard was initially rapid, then ceased briefly before again echoed heavily up the valley. Godfrey would later surmise that most of the warriors he fought had luckily moved on to that fight instead of catching up to his platoon and overwhelming it. Also by chance, Godfrey had stayed on the west side of the Washita River, most of the Indians inclined towards the more easily accessible southern fight. His platoon rounded up the 200 ponies that the fleeing Indians had used and returned to the

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<sup>136</sup> One of the sergeants, Hughes, had served in the old 4th Cavalry in this general area prior to the Civil War. The other, named Conrad, had been a captain of Ohio volunteers and would later be killed by robbers while escorting a paymaster in Montana Territory. Godfrey, *Some Reminiscences... Washita*, 493; Unknown author, quotes Major E. S. Godfrey, "Custer's Valiant Riders: Seventh United States Cavalry in Early Service," *Denver News* [?], 1897 or 1898 [?], LC, Ghent collection, box 24, Godfrey file 16.

<sup>137</sup> Edward S. Godfrey, "Cavalry Fire Discipline," *By Valor and Arms the Journal of American Military History*, 1976, 34, LBH.

<sup>138</sup> Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences... Washita," 495; "Valiant Riders."

village. Among the animals Godfrey recognized Captain Barnitz's horse, *General*, saddled but missing its bridle.

Godfrey immediately reported to Custer the firing he had heard as well as the presence of another Indian encampment. Custer exclaimed, "What's that?" and proceeded to question his subordinate with "a lot of rapid fire questions."<sup>139</sup> When Custer concluded, Godfrey mentioned finding Captain Barnitz's horse and was told that Barnitz was probably fatally wounded. Godfrey found his former company commander "under a pile of blankets and buffalo robes, suffering and very quiet," and sought out the surgeon.<sup>140</sup> Maneuvering G Company in the dimly lit morning attack, Barnitz had spotted warriors "distinctly outlined against the sky... striking out as hard as they could run for their ponies."<sup>141</sup> Charging them, he quickly shot two, though barely escaping an arrow in the neck. Bearing down on a third Indian, who was aiming a rifle at him, Barnitz and the warrior both attempted to fire with the least exposure to themselves. Barnitz hugged his horse and lowered his head behind the animal's neck, and tried to keep the warrior on his right "to better use my revolver."<sup>142</sup> He noted his adversary was no stranger to war, and preferred the left side. Repeatedly avoiding Barnitz's attempts to position him for a lethal shot and unwilling to chance his one bullet on a less than mortal wound, the warrior ducked and turned around his enemy's mount, using the animal as a shield. The captain "closed my right leg back of the girth, and carrying my bridle hard to

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<sup>139</sup> Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences... Washita," 495.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Barnitz, quoted in Utley, *Life in Custer's Cavalry*, 226, 228.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 226.

the left, caused my horse to passage, as it is called, ... to the left... to close up nearer the Indian,” but the warrior avoided the maneuver and back stepped, partially covering himself behind Barnitz’s horse’s head.<sup>143</sup> Apparently deciding enough was enough, Barnitz aimed at his opponent, though the Indian was still on his left, just as the warrior threw up a buffalo garment to startle his horse. Both men fired and the powder blast burned Barnitz’s overcoat as the ball tore into his left side, close to his spine, and clipped the top of his pants as it exited. When the muzzle blasts cleared, Barnitz was alarmed to see the warrior still on his feet, but his shot had found its mark. With an understandably “horrible grimace on his face,” the Indian looked to Barnitz as if he was searching for his scalping knife to make a last rush upon him, but later thought the man was just instinctively clutching his wound.<sup>144</sup> Taking no chances, Barnitz turned his horse to the left and with a clear shot of the warrior on the right, dispatched him with another bullet just as two of his men raced past pursuing the other Indians. Turning his horse towards the village, Barnitz rode until it became too painful, then sat down in the snow awaiting death, though he had the foresight to sit in a way that minimized his internal bleeding. Men of his company found him and carried him back to the village.

After Godfrey located Assistant Surgeon Henry Lippincott, he learned that the bullet had probably hit Barnitz’s bowels and that his friend would die unless kept perfectly still, an impossible situation given the circumstances. Lippincott insisted that

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Barnitz’s actual words are, “as though about to drop his scalping knife and make a rush upon me.” But from Barnitz’s writing it appears that the warrior was searching for his knife. Presumably this meant the warrior was about to drop his rifle, which was now empty, and rush the captain with his knife. In another letter Barnitz dictated to Godfrey that “the warrior reached for his scalping knife.” Ibid., 227-8, 230.

Godfrey tell Barnitz the bad news and the lieutenant “approached the momentous opinion of the surgeon as bravely as I could and then blurted it out.”<sup>145</sup> The wounded captain maintained he could recover and exclaimed, “Oh hell! They think because my extremities are cold I am going to die, but if I could get warm I’m sure I’ll be alright.”<sup>146</sup> Godfrey ordered fires built but Barnitz, suffering intense pain began to accept the possibility of death. At his request, Godfrey transcribed a letter to Jennie, the captain assuring her he did not “regret the wound so much” as he did leaving her.<sup>147</sup>

By now Godfrey probably knew that the command had captured Black Kettle’s Cheyenne village. Although the chief was peaceful, photograph albums, mail, and four white scalps were found there; an apparent testament to disagreement within his band.<sup>148</sup> Black Kettle and his wife tried to escape on horseback but were shot down and fell into the Washita River, probably victims of Cooke’s sharpshooters. Godfrey also learned that Major Elliott and seventeen men were missing. The major had spotted Indians fleeing east and pursued, calling to Lieutenant Owen Hale, “Here goes for a brevet or a coffin.”<sup>149</sup> Custer questioned Godfrey again about the village he had seen and took a keen interest in the hills just to the north where hundreds of mounted warriors gathered.

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<sup>145</sup> Godfrey, “Some Reminiscences... Washita,” 495.

<sup>146</sup> Assistant Surgeon Lippencott “found a mass of omentum (tissue connecting the stomach to the other visceral organs) protruding from the anterior wound, about the size of a man’s fist.” From the angle of the wound Lippencott presumed the intestines had been hit and that the wound would prove fatal. Barnitz, quoted in Utley, *Life in Custer’s Cavalry*, 237.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>148</sup> Hardorff, *Washita Memories*, 211; Duane Schultz, *Month of the Freezing Moon: The Sand Creek Massacre November 1864* (NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 200.

<sup>149</sup> Godfrey, *Wheeler’s Buffalo Days*, 2.

Godfrey, noting the heavy firing he had heard, wondered if it could have been Elliott's party. Custer countered that Captain Myers had been fighting in that area and had reported nothing unusual. After a scout said he saw Elliott riding after some Indians, Custer ordered a detachment under Myers to search down the valley, but they discovered nothing.

Custer also confirmed Godfrey's report of another village from the captured women, who added that there were two additional ones to the east: Cheyenne and Kiowa villages, each of which was larger than Black Kettle's. Warriors from those villages had driven in a small detachment left to guard the assault force's cumbersome overcoats and other gear. The 7th was strung out around the village exchanging long range shots with hundreds of these warriors. Limited attacks alleviated pressure on the skirmish line and Lieutenant Bell's wagons carrying the spare ammunition arrived in time. Custer ordered Godfrey to take Company K, "destroy everything" in the village, and allow no looting.<sup>150</sup> Fifty-three women and children were taken prisoner and after Godfrey let them retrieve what they wanted, the troops, starting at the upper end of the village, tore down the fifty-one lodges. The lodge poles were pulled outward and the lodge hides collapsed into each teepee fire. Once enflamed, buffalo robes, blankets, weapons, ammunition, and

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<sup>150</sup> Captain West, K Company's commander was serving as squadron commander of C and K companies and oversaw the destruction. Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences... Washita," 496; Collins, *Cheyenne Wars*, 83. Custer, like other Civil War commanders had experience with looting. Order and discipline needed to be maintained and the men could not be permitted to lose their cohesion to scavenge for gear. In 1876 on the Powder River a cavalry unit partially broke down as men became more interested in looting than maintaining the line. J.W. Vaughn, *The Reynolds Campaign on the Powder River* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 102. One of the 7th's officers, Lieutenant David W. Wallingford, was discharged during the Civil War for pillage, but reinstated through political connections. Barnitz, quoted in Utley, *Life in Custer's Cavalry*, 279.



gunpowder were added to the blaze. Godfrey seethed as he remembered the Medicine Lodge Treaty and the weapons and ammunition issued to these “same Cheyennes” as he tossed “rifles, pistols, powder, caps, lead and bullet molds” into the flames.<sup>151</sup> Barnitz’s wound had come from a Lancaster rifle, the type issued to Indians at the previous year’s peace conference. Godfrey cataloged what K Company destroyed, “241 saddles, 573 buffalo robes, ... 210 axes, 140 hatchets, 35 revolvers, 47 rifles, 535 lbs of powder, 1050 lbs of lead, 4000 arrows and arrowheads ... 300 lbs of bullets.”<sup>152</sup> One of the soldiers brought Godfrey a beautiful antelope skin bridal gown “adorned all over with bead work and elks’ teeth... as soft as the finest broadcloth.”<sup>153</sup> Elk-tooth dresses were the single most valuable article of female clothing, as only two eye-teeth or ivories could be taken from each animal. Indians were proud of these expensive garments as their frequency in photographs attest, and such a dress could be worth \$200 or eight ponies.<sup>154</sup> Struck by its beauty, Godfrey started to ask Custer if he could keep it. Remembering his command against looting, he thought “What’s the use, `orders is orders` and threw it in the

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<sup>151</sup> Godfrey, “Some Reminiscences... Washita,” 496. Presumably because of transportation issues no captured Indian firearms and equipment was used by the 7th.

<sup>152</sup> Louise Barnett, *Touched by Fire: The Life, Death, and Mythic Afterlife of George Armstrong Custer* (NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 157.

<sup>153</sup> Godfrey, “Some Reminiscences... Washita,” 496.

<sup>154</sup> Vivian Smith, “The Courtship and Marriage of the Cheyenne Maiden”, *Research and Review: The Journal of the Little Big Horn Associates* 15, no. 1 (Winter, 2001): 10. Col. Wheeler said each tooth was worth \$2-\$3, Colonel Homer W. Wheeler, *The Frontier Trail or From Cowboy to Colonel: An Authentic Narrative of Forty-three Years in the Old West as Cattleman, Indian Fighter and Army Officer* (Los Angeles: Times-Mirror Press, 1923), reprint (Ozark, MO: Dogwood Printing, 1990), 250. George Grinnell saw one such dress with over 900 elk-teeth and weighing 10-12 lbs. George Bird Grinnell, *The Cheyenne Indians: Their History and Way of Life*, vol. I, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), reprint (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 224. Mrs. D. B. Dyer possessed one with 1,450 teeth. Dyer, *Fort Reno*, 92.

blaze.”<sup>155</sup> Years later, Godfrey still regretted its destruction. In their haste to burn Black Kettle’s village, no one suggested replacing the lost coats with the 1,300 Indian robes and blankets. Four companies, including K, had a chilly ride back to Camp Supply.

With the destruction of the Cheyenne camp, West’s squadron was ordered to kill the Indian ponies, and Godfrey took a lead in this very disagreeable task. After the prisoners and scouts picked out mounts, the soldiers roped the animals and tried to cut their throats, but this proved impractical. Bell’s arrival with several thousand rounds of Spencer ammunition solved the problem, and 800 shrieking ponies were shot. The slaughter of the pony herd was a harsh but important action in Indian warfare, as raiding parties fought and hunted on horseback. Near dusk Custer mounted the 7th in column of fours with skirmishers out and advanced toward the Arapaho village that Godfrey had found earlier, seemingly intending to finish off the warriors who had been harassing the command. Godfrey rode at the front of the column with Custer while the band played “Ain’t I Glad to Get out of the Wilderness,” this time with properly functioning instruments.<sup>156</sup> Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Kiowa warriors maintained a discreet distance until they realized their villages were in danger and then sped away to evacuate their families. Given that there were over 700 soldiers and the Indians were not looking for a fight, it is surprising that Custer did not advance further. Chief of Scouts Ben Clark later said that he had talked Custer out of attacking because most of the ammunition was on the back trail and the regiment would be dangerously outnumbered.

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<sup>155</sup> Godfrey, “Some Reminiscences... Washita,” 496.

<sup>156</sup> The nineteenth century Army took their bands very seriously as a matter of regimental pride, often even bringing them on campaigns.

So, the 7th headed back under cover of darkness towards the Canadian River, linked up with the wagon train, and continued to Camp Supply. Godfrey oversaw the fifty-three women and children who had been captured. These included six wounded and women who would not care for a fair-skinned infant and another mistreated child until forced to do so. Custer would write of rescuing two white children in his initial report but remained silent on the matter thereafter. The two rescued children also appeared in subsequent narratives, including Godfrey's history of the regiment, and the fair-skinned infant would be entrusted to a Leavenworth, Kansas Catholic orphanage. It is curious that Godfrey, who had charge of the prisoners, did not relate any of this.<sup>157</sup> Custer's first account was probably a case of mistaking Indian children for white ones. Godfrey reluctantly gave permission for a woman to leave the column but after nearly an hour's absence regretted his decision. As he was fretting its possible consequences, the woman came galloping back amid a jubilant welcome from the other women. As she passed by, Godfrey noticed a tiny head peeking out of her blanket and later quipped that "[i]nstead of losing a prisoner I had gained one. The captives, who had sensed my worry, thought it a good joke."<sup>158</sup>

Lieutenant Godfrey and others were hoping that Major Elliott had returned with the wagons upon finding the village besieged but their regimental commander had

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<sup>157</sup> Nor does Godfrey acknowledge that some officers took sexual liberties with the captive women. Considering the Victorian time period this is not particularly odd.

<sup>158</sup> Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences... Washita," 498; Keim, *Sheridan's Troopers*, 119-120; Custer, *Following the Guidon*, 40; Hardorff, *Washita Memories*, 149; Katherine Gibson Fougera, *With Custer's Cavalry* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1940), reprint, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 125; Godfrey, *The Seventh Regiment of the United States Cavalry*, LC, 6.

already accepted Elliott's death.<sup>159</sup> Additionally, Captain Hamilton, commanding A Company, and three privates were dead or dying and fifteen other men wounded; the Indians put up a valiant fight even though taken by surprise. On a happier note, it now looked like Albert Barnitz would recover from his stomach wound and Godfrey was glad that he had not described it as mortal in his earlier letter to Jennie. Godfrey wrote Mrs. Barnitz again on 5 December that her "badly" wounded husband would probably recover.<sup>160</sup> The Plains Indians fared worse; Ben Clark estimating their casualties at seventy-five dead warriors and an equal number of women and children killed in the confusion of the predawn attack.<sup>161</sup> Many Indians claimed impossibly lower figures when later interviewed by historians, while Custer exaggerated in the other direction, claiming 103 dead warriors. A platoon leader's perspective was understandably narrower -- Godfrey counted seventeen dead Indians in one depression, but whatever the actual casualty figures, the loss of a village and pony herd was a severe blow.<sup>162</sup> The vastness of the plains and the harsh winters were no longer guarantees of safety and the psychological impact was undoubtedly great. For the 7th Cavalry, the loss of Major Elliott and his detachment was a blight for which Lieutenant Colonel Custer shares responsibility. Instead of keeping control, he had allowed his carefully laid plan to degenerate into a free-for-all once the Cheyenne village had been captured.

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<sup>159</sup> Godfrey, *Custer and the Seventh Cavalry*, 5.

<sup>160</sup> Barnitz, quoted in Utley, *Life in Custer's Cavalry*, 229, 244, 247. Barnitz had to retire and would die in 1912 from a growth around his Washita wound. A \$175 monthly pension ensured him a comfortable life.

<sup>161</sup> Clark, "The Battle of the Washita," 7.

<sup>162</sup> Godfrey, "Some Reminiscences...Washita," 493.

Although it was not the cause of Benteen's hatred for Custer, Elliott's death gave the long-serving H Company captain added motivation to demean his commander. Godfrey never knew the reason for Benteen's loathing, but assumed Custer had "stepped on" the toes of the vain captain.<sup>163</sup> In an anonymous letter that appeared in the *Missouri Democrat* and later, the *New York Times*, Benteen told a friend that Custer had abandoned Elliott and his men.<sup>164</sup> The letter's sarcastic tone also enraged Custer and, in early January before his assembled officers, he brandished a whip and threatened to beat the author. Custer was surprised when Benteen, with his hand on his pistol, admitted authorship.<sup>165</sup> Custer issued a face-saving warning and rightly took no physical action. His frontier autobiography, *My Life on the Plains*, naturally does not mention the episode, but surprisingly praises Benteen's Washita performance, even excusing the killing of a young boy. Aside from the killed and wounded, Benteen was the only officer mentioned in the official report. This omission rankled some, particularly Godfrey, who felt he deserved some credit for discovering the nearby village and warning the command.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Godfrey, *Custer and the Seventh Cavalry*, 4. Custer and Benteen did not get along from their first meeting 30 January 1867 at Fort Riley. According to Benteen, Custer's bragging and his dislike of Major General James H. Wilson, whom Benteen admired, sealed Benteen's hatred. Mills, *Barren Regrets*, 129.

<sup>164</sup> Benteen's lies had influence, Elliott's family believed he fell a ¼ mile from the village, sent there to die by Custer because Elliott was not a West Point graduate. Unknown author, *Daily Globe*, Dodge City, Kansas, March 6, 1930, LC, Ghent collection, box 31, folder 2. Benteen would do the same thing in 1887, an article appearing in the *Kansas City Times* demeaning his superior, Major General George Crook. Already in trouble, this 1887 article effectively ended his career.

<sup>165</sup> Godfrey never wrote of the incident but acknowledged it to Colonel W.A. Graham, although he gave no details. Benteen is the only source available. Colonel W. A. Graham, *The Custer Myth: A Sourcebook of Custeriana* (NY: Bonanza Books, 1953), 211-212.

<sup>166</sup> Godfrey, *Custer and the Seventh Cavalry*, 2; Hardorff, *Washita Memories*, 150. When asked by the Secretary of War to submit names for special mention, Custer declined saying all did

Benteen was a calm, soft-spoken Virginian who defied his family to fight for the Union. He had fought ably, and was popular with the officers and men of Company H, 7th Cavalry as well. He led from the front, treated his soldiers “like men” and was disgusted by Custer’s occasional draconian punishments. The last he hid behind southern charm, although “seething with rage” inside, and angered that he had to take orders from superiors he judged less capable than himself.<sup>167</sup> Competent and possessed of a driving personality, he was also a know-it-all eager to embarrass his superiors and therefore a festering sore within the regiment. Custer may also have given his insubordinate captain leeway because Benteen's connection with two reporters: cousin Lawrence A. Gobright and DeBenneville Randolph Keim, who was accompanying the 7th Cavalry in 1868-1869.<sup>168</sup>

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well. Since the issuing of brevets fell into disuse and the rarely awarded Medal of Honor was the only medal, official mention in reports was the standard for recognition.

<sup>167</sup> Mills, *Barren Regrets*, 35, 145.

<sup>168</sup> It is not clear at the time if Custer knew that Gobright and Benteen were related, but he certainly did by 1876. *Ibid.*, 184, 227-228.

## CHAPTER IV

### PURSUIT, THE SIOUX, AND RECONSTRUCTION

On 7 December 1868 the 7th Cavalry and ten companies of the 19th Kansas, some 1,700 men and 300 wagons, left Camp Supply for a return to the Washita battlefield. White, Osage, and Kaw scouts led the way. Hard Rope of the Osage lamented his old age and the bitter cold and hoped to capture a Cheyenne woman for warmth.<sup>169</sup> Thirteen teams of animals gave out the first day and the troops built huge bonfires for warmth that night, much to the disapproval of their Indian scouts. To guard against attack, the command was up at 4:00 a.m. and moving two hours later in a compact column of fours with a strong contingent of outriders. Though well supplied with winter gear, many suffered from the intense cold and often preferred walking to riding. The horses and mules fared worse: river crossings and long hours at night standing in the cold took their toll and troopers had to force them to move.

On the 11th, they arrived at the Washita battle site to find Major Elliott's detachment, but Godfrey remained in camp with the guard as "officer of the herds," unable to convince anyone to take his place.<sup>170</sup> As soldiers approached the former

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<sup>169</sup> Keim, *Sheridan's Troopers*, 130.

<sup>170</sup> Godfrey, *Buffalo Days*, 4.

village, thousands of ravens noisily took to the air and feasting wolves retreated to the surrounding hills. Had he accompanied the search party, he would have noticed how thorough he had helped destroy the village -- lodge locations could only be identified by circular pin holes with fire-holes in the center. Eight hundred pony carcasses littered the ground not 200 yards from where the tepees once stood and scattered Indian corpses lay about the battlefield, thirty in one area. Scarcely two miles from the camp lay the mutilated remains of Major Elliott's troopers. Assistant Surgeon Lippincott examined each soldier in detail, four of whom were so horribly disfigured they could not be identified. One was never found. The carnage told a story: Elliott had tried to retreat but was maneuvered onto open ground and quickly overwhelmed. In short, Custer's plan had been both too complicated and too ambitious.<sup>171</sup> With no limiting guidance, the company commanders in his column had chased after the Cheyenne village inhabitants instead of consolidating once the village had been taken. Like Custer, they assumed that there were no other Indians nearby, and Godfrey's interactions with Custer cannot be interpreted otherwise. Nor can Custer's mistakes: he had clearly lost control once his plan was set in motion and effective command of scattered troops in unknown locations was impossible. That Indians often camped near one another especially in winter was common knowledge.

Found near Elliott were the bodies of a white woman and an emaciated child identified as Clara and Willie Blinn. All three were covered in blankets and transported to Fort Arbuckle for burial, while burial details interred the enlisted men on the

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<sup>171</sup> Godfrey, "Cavalry Fire Discipline," 34.



battlefield.<sup>172</sup> Jarring as they were, the deaths of Major Elliott and his troops had at least been expected, but a mother and son were another matter. The Blinns had been hostages and Custer now knew that Colonel William Hazen, commanding the Southern Military Indian District, at nearby Fort Cobb, had been trying to ransom them.

After inspecting the battleground, the command continued south following the Washita River. On 18 December the troops arrived at Fort Cobb, having strong-armed Satanta's Kiowa village into following them.<sup>173</sup> Several weeks later, Custer took Cooke's sharpshooters into the Wichita Mountains, getting Arapaho and Cheyenne promises to surrender. Captain Thomas B. Weir, commanding D Company, later brought the Arapaho's in, sixty-five lodges under Little Raven. In February 1869, Godfrey helped escort the captured Arapaho to Fort Sill in Indian Territory. Captain Weir commanded, and their trip was uneventful except that Godfrey disciplined two men for arguing violently. The luckier of the two was arrested; the other, forced to carry a log.<sup>174</sup>

In early March, Custer led the 7th and 19th Kansas after Cheyenne who had not surrendered, with Godfrey now commanding Companies K and G.<sup>175</sup> Finding this force too large, Custer halved the command, and continued with the strongest horses. Lacking

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<sup>172</sup> Judith P. Justus, "The Saga of Clara H. Blinn at the Battle of the Washita," *Research and Review: The Journal of the Little Big Horn Associates*, Vol. 14, no. 1, (Winter 2000): 13, 15-17. The Blinns were at one point held in Black Kettle's village.

<sup>173</sup> A week later, Major Andrew Evans's column operating from New Mexico Territory, later the 7th Cavalry's lieutenant colonel, overran a Comanche camp at Soldier Springs but by then the fighting was generally winding down as discouraged Indians tried to avoid the army.

<sup>174</sup> Diary of 7th Cavalry enlisted man, blacksmith, 18 February 1869, LBH, Godfrey collection, C-4637. The diarist was Troop K farrier Winfield Scott Harvey, a Civil War veteran and original member of the regiment.

<sup>175</sup> Record from Regimental Archives, LC, "Edward Settle Godfrey," 2.

food and rest, many animals gave out, and a third of the men became infantry as they pushed through parts of present-day Oklahoma into the Texas Panhandle. Refusing to give up, Custer stubbornly stuck to the trail of a small group. The ever-sharp Osage did lead troops to a small Cheyenne camp, but the soldiers' barking dogs gave its occupants time to flee. This was the reason Indian war parties did not bring dogs, a lesson the 7th should have learned after the Washita.<sup>176</sup> Sixty-three years later, David L. Spotts, a 19th Kansas soldier, recalled meeting Godfrey during the march. Private Spotts was lagging behind the command and remembered Godfrey ordering him to “get up with the wagons and stay there.”<sup>177</sup>

On 15 March Custer's command surprised two Cheyenne villages totaling 260 lodges on Sweetwater Creek, in east Texas. When he learned the Indians held two captured white women, Custer forbade an attack. That Custer of all people should let an opportunity for revenge slip away angered troops of the 19th Kansas, whose regiment had missed the Washita fight. Daniel Brewster, whose sister was a captive of the Cheyenne, had to be physically restrained. Over the next three days, Custer negotiated with the Indians for the women's release. Understanding that they would be killed if fighting

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<sup>176</sup> General George Armstrong Custer, *My Life on the Plains*, originally published 1874, reprint (Secaucus, NJ: The Citadel Press, 1974), 540-542. In 1876, the 7th would leave their dogs behind at the Yellowstone depot.

<sup>177</sup> David L. Spotts, *Campaigning with Custer 1868-69* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 148; Letter, D. L. Spotts to Ida E. Godfrey, 11 November 1932, LC, Ghent collection, box 31, folder 2. Near the Red River, the command encountered a terrific cold snap. “Our mules froze to death standing at the wagons and in one day we lost over eighty mules from cold and exhaustion. The throats of the mules were cut to prevent their falling into the hands of the Indians should they recover.” “Valiant Riders.” Godfrey's regimental history also laments the loss of so many horses and mules. Godfrey, *The Seventh Regiment of the United States Cavalry*, 8.

broke out, Custer ordered, “Not a shot to be fired! Not a shot to be fired!”<sup>178</sup> Not until he threatened to hang three chiefs were the women handed over. This was Custer at his best, relentlessly pursuing the Cheyenne, refusing to quit, and serving as an inspiration to his officers and men. Instead of attacking he focused on saving the two female captives, Ann Morgan and Sarah White. At the time the 7th and 19th Kansas possessed superior numbers, and an assault would have routed the Indians. Nevertheless, the ambitious Custer passed on career-enhancing publicity and won the release of the women by avoiding violence.<sup>179</sup>

After Custer had obtained Cheyenne surrender promises, he led his wearied command back to Camp Supply, arriving on 28 March. From there Godfrey and K Company returned to Fort Harker. Two months' leave followed, and that summer he returned to Ohio to marry Mary J. Pocock in Hayesville, but the honeymoon was brief.<sup>180</sup> In July, Lieutenant Godfrey was back with the 7th on the Saline River, patrolling the Kansas frontier until December. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel Eugene A. Carr's 5th Cavalry and their Pawnee allies overwhelmed the still defiant Cheyenne at Summit

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<sup>178</sup> Charles Francis Bates, “In Memory of General Edward Settle Godfrey,” *Sixty-Third Annual Report of the Association of Graduates of the United States Military Academy, West Point, N.Y. June 9, 1932*, 68. On his deathbed, Godfrey's mind wandered back to this scene and he quoted Custer, “Not a shot to be fired! Not a shot to be fired!” Bates puts the timeline for the quote when the women were released and Custer was fearful the Kansans would still seek revenge.

<sup>179</sup> Even arch Custer critic Frederic Van de Water acknowledges Custer's superior 1869 campaign. Frederic F. Van de Water, *Glory-Hunter: A Life of General Custer* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1934), reprint (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 219.

<sup>180</sup> Mary is possibly pictured on a buffalo hunt in Kansas in September 1869. Lawrence A. Frost, *The Custer Album: A Pictorial Biography of General George A. Custer* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 111.

Springs, Colorado, effectively ending major combat operations. Godfrey wintered at Fort Harker, but by mid-February was again in the field as acting assistant quartermaster and acting commissary of subsistence. From 23 July to 9 August 1870, Godfrey was sick and confined to camp near Fort Hayes, but returned to patrolling until winter quarters at Fort Leavenworth. These patrols gave Godfrey considerable experience leading soldiers.

July 1870 was a key moment in the post-Civil War U.S. Army, and not in a good way for career soldiers. For the second time since the Civil War, Congress reduced the size of the army in that year's Appropriation Act, capping enlisted strength at 30,000 and eliminating corresponding officer positions. Review panels called Benzene or Hancock Boards were soon evaluating personnel records and removing the least efficient, and Captain Thomas Weir, commanding D Company, almost earned a discharge for excess drinking.<sup>181</sup> Much to his surprise, Godfrey was to appear before the board and believed his review had been instigated "by some one having personal animosity" toward him.<sup>182</sup> Actually there was nothing personal in Godfrey's case; unit commanders were under orders to submit the names of officers who, in their opinions, were not measuring up. That August, the regiment's commander, Colonel Samuel D. Sturgis at Fort Leavenworth had reported Godfrey as "Inefficient - Complains that Cavalry service interferes with his domestic comfort and convenience, and is distasteful to him. With these notions it is not probable that he will ever add to the efficiency of the service."<sup>183</sup> But Sturgis's view of

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<sup>181</sup> Benzene was a solvent and General Hancock held overall authority over the process. The hope was to encourage underperforming officers to resign. Ronald H. Nichols, *In Custer's Shadow: Major Marcus Reno* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 126.

<sup>182</sup> D. Gaylord to Charles M. Godfrey, 13 November 1870, LC, SR. Sturgis commanded the 7th Cavalry when Colonel A.J. Smith retired, Custer was the executive officer.

<sup>183</sup> Samuel D. Sturgis to W.G. Mitchell, 18 August 1870, LC, SR.

Godfrey was only a glimpse. When newly married and recovering from illness at Fort Hayes, Godfrey had requested a transfer to the artillery. Its wording and timing offended Colonel Sturgis, who knew nothing else about the officer who had written it.<sup>184</sup> But after observing Godfrey, Sturgis withdrew his negative recommendation, noting that Godfrey “did himself injustice in that communication and really [sic] the elements of a good officer.”<sup>185</sup> Worried that he would end up on the “Awaiting Orders” list and eventually forced out of the Army, he hardly suspected that he had nearly thirty-seven years left to serve in the Army.<sup>186</sup>

In 1871, the 7th Cavalry dispersed for Reconstruction duty. For the next two years Godfrey and Company K, commanded by Captain Owen Hale, would serve in South Carolina and briefly at Memphis, Tennessee. Back in Ohio, Mary delivered their first child and named him Guy, after Guy Mannering, the astrologer in the second of Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverly* novels.<sup>187</sup> We know little about Godfrey’s tour in the South, except that he seized a Ku Klux Klan constitution while on a raid in Sharon, South Carolina -- probably the only such document ever -- and that he testified in the subsequent trial.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> D. Gaylord to Charles M. Godfrey, 13 November 1870, LC, SR.

<sup>187</sup> Fougera, *With Custer’s Cavalry*, 172. The novel was *Guy Mannering; or, The Astrologer*. Guy became an Army captain and assistant surgeon, committing suicide in 1905 at Fort McPherson, GA, leaving behind a wife and son. *Edward Settle Godfrey Biography*, LBH.

<sup>188</sup> John D. Mackintosh, “Facing Down the Klan: The Seventh Cavalry in York County, South Carolina,” *Research and Review: The Journal of the Little Big Horn Associates*, 20, no. 1

In May 1873, the 7th assembled at Fort Rice, Dakota Territory, south of Bismarck on the Missouri River to escort Northern Pacific Railroad surveyors into Montana Territory. Ten companies of cavalry and twelve of infantry along with civilians and scouts made up the 1,500-man Yellowstone Expedition commanded by Colonel David S. Stanley of the 22nd Infantry Regiment. Stanley had led a force into that area previously. For Godfrey, the group discipline Custer imposed on the march to Fort Rice was annoyingly excessive. When a visiting officer left his horses grazing outside the camp, Custer “immediately issued a circular calling attention to the violation (not naming the individual) and using rasping language as if all officers were in the habit of this violation.”<sup>189</sup> The march took thirty-nine days and Custer issued over seventy such circulars. Godfrey attributed this pettiness to Custer’s lack of experience in company command, a billet he had skipped over in his meteoric rise to divisional command during the Civil War. Custer “never forgot the discipline of his cadet days” and tended to apply the same treatment to his officers.<sup>190</sup> And because he did not command Godfrey in garrison, field operations provided Godfrey with the only opportunity to judge Custer’s professional conduct. Despite those niggling circulars, that judgment was usually positive. Even after the Little Bighorn fiasco, Godfrey observed that “[d]uring the nine years of our service in the Seventh Cavalry I never changed my predilection for him as my ideal of a cavalry general, whose dispositions and actions were, in the light of his

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(Winter 2006): 14. A lucky Major Lewis Merrill was given \$20,000 by the state of South Carolina for performing such good work arresting Klansmen.

<sup>189</sup> Godfrey does not positively relate that this incident happened on this march. Godfrey, *Custer and the Seventh Cavalry*, 3.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

knowledge, correct.”<sup>191</sup> For a man of contrasts, Custer excited few neutral emotions; he was at once brave and selfish, humble and a braggart, magnanimous and ungrateful. Critics who have fixated on any one of these traits at the expense of others have created a historiographical trap -- a false dichotomy of Custerphobe versus Custerphile with no neutral ground in between. Because of Godfrey's generally favorable view, many critics have labeled him a blind devotee, even though his annoyance with Custer's pettiness proves otherwise. That Custer did not mention Godfrey's November 1868 contributions at the Washita caused at least as much well-documented resentment, which underlines the critics' error.

The expedition left Fort Rice on 15 June with Captain Owen Hale commanding Company K and Godfrey acting as his first lieutenant. On 4 August, Custer and about eighty-five men were in the lead near the Yellowstone and Tongue Rivers when a small decoy of Sioux warriors attempted to lure them into an ambush. Custer sensed the trap and held back, then broke up a Sioux charge with a dismounted skirmish line. The ever-present Arikara scout, Bloody Knife, felled the first Sioux with a shot from his pony. The cavalymen withdrew to some timber, and the Indians attempted to burn them out. When the rest of the command came into view, the warriors lost heart, and Custer charged the fleeing Sioux. Only one man was wounded but the regimental veterinarian and the sutler were slain after leaving the main force, despite the warnings of an Indian scout that hostiles were near.<sup>192</sup> Three days later, several Indian trails were discovered,

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>192</sup> Charles Windolph, *I Fought with Custer: The Story of Sergeant Windolph, Last*

and Custer force marched the 7th in pursuit to the Yellowstone. He needed volunteers to swim across the river with Bloody Knife and locate the hostiles. Because of an earlier incident, Godfrey knew who was qualified. While duck hunting earlier, he had accidentally dropped his rifle into the water and Private Lemuel G. Cherry had dived in to retrieve it. Godfrey picked him for the scouting mission and Cherry performed it well, but the cavalry was unable to follow. An angry Bloody Knife concluded that the whites had “little bird hearts.”<sup>193</sup>

At daybreak on 11 August when a large force of Sioux attacked the 7th's camp on the Yellowstone, those little bird hearts proved Bloody Knife wrong. As Sioux women and children watched from the surrounding bluffs and the regimental band struck up “Garry Owen,” Custer skillfully maneuvered his force and routed the attackers. During the subsequent pursuit, four companies including Godfrey’s received orders to charge a ridge. The Indians fell back except for Gall, a Hunkpapa Sioux. Wearing bright scarlet leggings and a blanket, he rode back and forth in front of the cavalry as hundreds of shots were sent his way. When some men finally dismounted to improve their aim, he wisely retreated. The fighting had been intense and a spooked Captain Myles Moylan confided,

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*Survivor of the Battle of the Little Big Horn*, (NY: Scribner, 1954), reprint (Lincoln: Bison Books, 1987), 27-28.

<sup>193</sup> This letter supported a pension increase and Cherry related the incident just to remind Godfrey who he was, neither mentions Cherry’s rank. Cherry does not say Bloody Knife swam the river but does mention him “chasing and shooting at Sitting Bull.” Bloody Knife probably did swim the Yellowstone to locate the hostile trail and since Cherry also claims to have swam it, it was presumably to provide security to the experienced tracker Bloody Knife. Cherry makes a couple of errors in his letter but I have attributed this to age. Lemuel G. Cherry to E.S. Godfrey, 23 November 1928, LBH. A Private Samuel C. Cherry is listed on the K Company rolls as participating in the 1874 Black Hills expedition. John M. Carroll and Dr. Lawrence A. Frost eds. *Private Theodore Ewert’s Diary of the Black Hills Expedition of 1874* (Piscataway, NJ: CRI Books, 1976), 118; Ben Innis, *Bloody Knife: Custer’s Favorite Scout* (Bismarck, ND: Smokey Water Press, 1994), 101.



“it is only a question of time until Custer will get us into a hole from which we will not escape.”<sup>194</sup> So far, men of the 7th were proud of their performance, and even Bloody Knife acknowledged their courage. But as on the Washita campaign, Custer declined to list individuals in his report, stating instead that “all did so well, no special attention can be made.”<sup>195</sup>

After the Yellowstone Expedition returned in early October, Godfrey spent the next two weeks escorting 7th Cavalry replacements from Fort Snelling, Minnesota, to the Missouri River Dakota posts below Bismarck. He then went into winter quarters with Company K at Fort Rice, thirty miles down the Missouri from Fort Abraham Lincoln where Custer and six other companies were wintering. From 11 November 1873 to 3 June 1874, Godfrey commanded Company K. Three other companies occupied Fort Rice with Hale and Godfrey’s K Company. One was Benteen’s H Company, and Benteen got along well with “God.” Godfrey’s “sweet frail” wife Mary was with him and half-sister Zoe visited that spring.<sup>196</sup> The trip nearly turned tragic for pretty nineteen-year-old Zoe, who set out with a few others to attend a ball in Bismarck, thirty miles to the north. Single officers and the designated escort Mollie McIntosh, accompanied Zoe and

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<sup>194</sup> Nathaniel Philbrick, *The Last Stand: Custer, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (NY: Viking, 2010), 260. The quote is not definitively stated as being Moylan’s in this source.

<sup>195</sup> Godfrey, *Cavalry Fire Discipline*, 34; Edward S. Godfrey, “Custer’s Last Battle,” *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana*, vol. IX, (n.d. but is a reprint of the 1908 Century article), 159; Innis, *Bloody Knife*, 92; Godfrey, *7th Cavalry Biography*, 11. This omission must have rankled. LTC Eugene Carr’s report of the 1876 Slim Buttes fight is a model of giving credit to those who stood out. Fred H. Werner, *The Slim Buttes Battle* (Luis Obispo, CA: Werner Publications, 1981), 36.

<sup>196</sup> Fougera, *With Custer’s Cavalry*, 172.

Katherine Garrett. Coming to a small bridge over the deep Little Heart River, Mollie refused to cross on the Army ambulance. When an inconsiderate rancher stopped to water his horse team halfway across the bridge, Mollie told her sister Katherine to get out and walk also and others, including Zoe and future husband Lieutenant Alexander Ogle of the 17th Infantry followed suit. Already agitated by the heat and tormented by insects, the passing Army mules took it out on the rancher's horses. In the subsequent flurry of rearing and biting, animals entangled themselves in harnesses and plunged both carriages and their occupants into the river. Only the dismounted would-be party goers survived, and they stared in dumbfounded silence until a grateful Zoe thanked Mollie for saving their lives.

On 2 July 1874, ten companies of the 7th Cavalry with accompanying soldiers and civilians left again for Sioux territory, this time to the Black Hills.<sup>197</sup> Numbering over a thousand men, the Black Hills Expedition remained in the field until the end of August. In so doing, they had violated the spirit of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 and the Sioux referred to their route of march as the "Thieves Road."<sup>198</sup> For whatever reason the Sioux, who had recently conquered that very same land from the Crow, did not reflect on their own motives or ethics. The official purpose of the expedition was to determine a location for an Army post in the Black Hills because the Sioux had been raiding

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<sup>197</sup> Godfrey and others took out life insurance policies, Godfrey with New York Life Insurance. The policy was careful to stipulate reimbursement in "times of peace," but would pay insurance to the families of the killed at the Little Bighorn, though noting under "no legal obligation to do so." GFP, box 6, folder Godfrey family 1869-1879, letters dated March 2[?] 1874 and July 12, 1878.

<sup>198</sup> Technically the Army did not violate the treaty as clause six, article eleven authorized "works of utility" which included scouting out a fort's location. Paul L. Hedren, *Powder River: Disastrous Opening of the Great Sioux War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 378.

Nebraska settlements and General Sheridan wanted a staging base for future operations against them.

But there was another less official consideration: rumors of gold in the Black Hills had circulated for years and expedition miners did find a modest amount -- enough to keep those rumors alive. Custer approved of exploiting mineral wealth in the Dakota Territory and spread the news with predictable results. Heedless of any treaty terms, miners trespassed into land the Sioux claimed as sacred and sought their fortunes.

Custer's Arikara scouts warned of impending war but except for the brief detention of a small Sioux band there were no confrontations. The scouts -- especially Bloody Knife -- were particularly disgusted because Custer would not let them slaughter the hapless group. "It was wrong to the Rees," he complained, and sulked for days.<sup>199</sup> The expedition was enjoyable as expeditions go, and some of the cavalymen remembered its picnic-like activities. Baseball was a popular pastime, and Godfrey even got a free dinner at a large ranch that he happened upon. As the assistant engineering officer in charge of mapping, he covered much ground without firing shots in anger. Photographs of the expedition show him with a huge "walrus mustache" of the type that experienced soldiers grew for protection from the summer sun. Godfrey kept his for life.<sup>200</sup>

Godfrey spent most of September at Fort Rice before receiving orders for Reconstruction duty, this time at Colfax, Louisiana. In command of Company K during November 1874 (Captain Hale was on temporary recruiting duty in St. Louis) he witnessed the sort of friction that military occupation can cause when Second Lieutenant

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<sup>199</sup> Carroll, *Ewert's Diary*, 67. "Ree" was slang for Arikara.

<sup>200</sup> Fougera, *With Custer's Cavalry*, 106.

Luther Hare, also of K Company, gave his pistol to a hotel clerk for safe-keeping and the clerk refused to return it. A deputy U.S. Marshal became involved, but the outcome is unknown. Meanwhile the 7th Cavalry experienced the ill effects of jurisdictional overlap among federal, state, and local authorities in Louisiana, and things occasionally got tense: At one point, a white mob nearly lynched Second Lieutenant Benjamin Hodges, and Godfrey's correspondence with his father evinces concern in both quarters. "I have no doubt you have a trying time among the 'White Leagues,' allowed Charles Godfrey, "but I hope you have done your duty according to orders... Mr. Ashley said you should obey no civilian (officer) but obey all orders from superior military officers."<sup>201</sup>

From 26 January to 13 February 1875 Godfrey was on detached service in New Orleans testifying before a congressional committee on those White League troubles, a paramilitary terrorist organization meant to maintain white supremacy. Godfrey was assigned to determine the death toll from the infamous Colfax Massacre of 1873.<sup>202</sup> Blacks had supported the election of a militia officer as Republican state representative and made the mistake of consolidating around a courthouse to defend the election. White Democrats, mostly Confederate army veterans, egged on by inflammatory newspaper

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<sup>201</sup> William A. Snow Deputy U.S. Marshal, undated but presumably November 1875, GFP, box 7, Military Receipts and Vouchers Prepared or Endorsed by Godfrey, 1874, 1886; letters dated 7 November 1874 and 20 January 1875, GFP, box 3, General E.S. Godfrey, Sr. Correspondence with Father, 1861, 1874-1892.

<sup>202</sup> From the Congressional Record, House of Representatives, 44th Congress, 2d Session, Ex. Doc. No. 30, "The Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States," 436. A biographer of the event concludes the Godfrey's figure was high at 105, and estimates sixty-two to eighty-one people killed. Charles Lane, *The Day Freedom Died: The Colfax Massacre, The Supreme Court and the Betrayal of Reconstruction* (NY: Henry Holt and Company LLC, 2008) 266. Godfrey actually did the report and Wallace submitted it as the Acting Assistant Adjutant-General, District of Upper Red River, Shreveport, LA.

coverage, attacked and killed the black militiamen before and after they surrendered. It was possibly the worst Reconstruction-era massacre. Meanwhile, Company K's desertion rate was relatively low (three General Courts Martial while in Louisiana), but Godfrey did notice a serious problem: Here as on the frontier the federal government's military commitment was inadequate.<sup>203</sup> As the readmitted southern states gained political power, their representatives and senators got Congress to reduce the strength of occupation forces there. So, too, would the coming disaster on the Little Bighorn refocus national attention on the West; Reconstruction's end in 1877 stemmed as much from these troop reductions and redeployments as from a compromise growing out of contested election results.

From Colfax, Godfrey moved to a post at McComb City, Mississippi.<sup>204</sup> Weather permitting, he drilled K Company twice daily in mounted riding through rough terrain. By the time Company K received orders for Dakota Territory, Godfrey had "44 well drilled, well mounted, good riders and brave men."<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Brian C. Pohanka, *9th Annual Symposium Custer Battlefield Historical and Museum Association Inc. Held at Hardin, Montana June 23, 1995*, "A Study of Company Discipline: General Courts-Martial of Enlisted Personnel, 7th Cavalry, 1875-1876," 34.

<sup>204</sup> About this time, Godfrey's wife Mary, along with Emily Bell, the wife of Captain James M. Bell, asked the new major, Marcus Reno for a picture. According to Reno, when he refused, they stole one from his house. Nichols, *In Custer's Shadow*, 240.

<sup>205</sup> Edward S. Godfrey, *Reminiscences of the Yellowstone Expedition, 1876*, LC, Ghent collection, 2.

## CHAPTER V

### THE LITTLE BIGHORN

In March, Brigadier General George Crook's Wyoming Territory-based Big Horn Expedition took the field with head scout Frank Grouard, a half Ogallala Sioux leading the way. Ben Clark, Custer's chief of scouts in the Washita campaign, accompanied the command even though he was unfamiliar with the area. Crook's expedition resembled the coming Little Bighorn operation in other ways as well: animosity among the officers, a fondness for publicity by their commander, and ultimately embarrassing court proceedings.<sup>206</sup> The soldiers struggled through freezing weather and harsh terrain and, on 16 March, Grouard spotted two distant Indian hunters, followed their back trail, and deduced their village's location. Crook immediately dispatched Colonel Joseph J. Reynolds and six companies of the 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Regiments to capture the village.<sup>207</sup> Crook commanded the Department of the Platte and recently enjoyed considerable success fighting Apaches in Arizona, earning a promotion from lieutenant colonel to brigadier general, bypassing colonel. Reynolds lacked that experience, was

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<sup>206</sup> Mills, *My Story*, 166.

<sup>207</sup> Crook gave verbal orders and Reynolds claimed he was to strike the village, not capture it, clearly not Crook's order. Crook came under scrutiny in Reynolds's subsequent Court Martial for dividing his command. He said he did so to protect the "impedimenta" – meaning the pack train and an injured soldier being transported on a travois. Hedren, *Powder River*, 122.

medically unfit for field service, but had been falsely accused of corruption and Crook wanted to give him a chance to clear his name. Traveling through the night they attacked the Powder River camp the next morning. The lead company rode quietly through the Indian horse herd and approached to within 200 yards of the 105 tepees and shelters before an Indian noticed them. Pushing forward they cleared the village in the ensuing pandemonium but the advantage of surprise rapidly played out. The lead company was alone in the Cheyenne-Sioux camp for over twenty minutes without support, in part because one of the 3rd Cavalry battalion commanders, Captain Alexander Moore, deployed his men incorrectly. Meanwhile, the village's 200 warriors quickly recovered and perched atop the high ground shot down into the soldiers, not until the other companies arrived was the half mile long battle line stabilized and Indian property destroyed. Regrouping from the botched initial assault, Reynolds concentrated on destroying the village, including clothing and supplies Crook had ordered him to capture for the expedition's use. After four hours Reynolds elected to evacuate his command, made no attempt to rescue a wounded private who had fallen into enemy hands, and neglected to put a guard on the captured horse herd, which the Indians reclaimed.<sup>208</sup>

Crook later reported that his cavalry under Reynolds had killed more than one hundred Indians in what became known as the St. Patrick's Day battle even though his officers could only account for two Indians killed.<sup>209</sup> His command had suffered four

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<sup>208</sup> The wounded man, Private Lorenzo Ayers, of Company M, 3rd Cavalry was deserted by three men on the field, his company commander, Captain Anson Mills made a half-hearted attempt to have another company rescue the private before turning the matter over to Colonel Reynolds who declined to help. Ibid., 183-193.

<sup>209</sup> Vaughn, *Powder River*, 180.

dead and six wounded in the process. So, too, had the weather taken a toll on Crook's force: seventy-four horses and mules were shot, abandoned, or otherwise rendered unserviceable and there were sixty-six cases of frostbite. Worst of all, a staggering total of 118 troopers received certificates of disability.<sup>210</sup> A Court Martial convicted and briefly suspended Colonel Joseph Reynolds and Captain Alexander Moore, but both left the service.

In late May, Crook, led fifteen companies of the 3rd and 2nd Cavalry, and smaller numbers of the 9th and 4th Infantry against the hostiles. In the green Rosebud Valley on 17 June, a well-armed Sioux and Cheyenne force surprised his lounging 1,000-man command, and the combatants were soon charging and counter charging over four square miles in the bottomland. Heard above the gunfire were eagle wing bone whistles that the warriors blew for spiritual protection. At day's end, the triumphant Indians departed, leaving Crook in possession of the battlefield and, with it, an excuse to declare victory. The Sioux and Cheyenne left thirteen dead warriors and 150 dead horses on the battlefield, and carried off an indefinite number of killed and wounded comrades. Under tight command and control the soldiers had fought well, but the dismounted fighting and 50,000 rounds required to repel Sioux and Cheyenne charges nevertheless indicated a poor state of training. And, although even the best frontier commanders would not have thought a massed Native American attack on such a large body of troops likely, Crook's security was poor and he had allowed his command to be surprised. Added to that, his subsequent withdrawal, six weeks of relative inactivity, and failure to directly inform

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<sup>210</sup> Bourke reported the horses "balling" on the march as they were in such pain and stress from the cold, lack of food and difficult terrain. *Ibid.*, 158.



Brigadier General Alfred H. Terry, Department of Dakota commander, of what happened are difficult to understand or justify. For Custer's 7th Cavalry, Crooks mistakes were critical: as the Indians left the Rosebud and scattered into Montana Territory, the 7th plodded directly toward them.

Meanwhile, all twelve companies of the 7th assembled two miles south of Fort Abraham Lincoln, near present-day Bismarck, North Dakota, in preparation for the campaign against the Sioux and Cheyenne. Custer did not join the expedition until mid-May as he was in Washington D.C. testifying before the Clymer commission on Indian corruption. Not only was Custer testifying, but his testimony implicated President Grant's brother Orvil in the proceedings and he was lucky to rejoin his command -- or unlucky as events would prove. Unwilling to spend enough on the Army to ensure success in the West, the United States government contended itself with half measures that would ultimately cost more in lives and treasure than an initial stronger commitment would have. Not only was the frontier army's authorized strength too low, but the pay was so poor that not even those troop levels could be maintained. A fully staffed cavalry regiment, minus the band, and a normal 10% sick or detached roster consisted of 900 men. The 7th went into the Little Bighorn valley with 597 cavalrymen and fifty Indian scouts, quartermaster employees, and citizens.<sup>211</sup> Of the thirteen officers absent from the campaign, the most significant were two of the regiment's majors, Joseph Tilford and Lewis Merrill. Tilford was on a year's leave of absence and Merrill, detailed as

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<sup>211</sup> The actual authorized strength for a typical cavalry regiment with the 20-man band was 1,057 men. The 7th Cavalry authorized strength was 1,249 men. Clayton KS Chun, *US Army in the Plains Indian Wars 1865-91* (NY: Osprey Publishing, 2004), 38-41; Gray, *Centennial Campaign*, 287.

presidential advisor at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. Custer had especially wanted the experienced Merrill with him, and it is revealing that the Army hierarchy had kept these senior regimental officers out of a major campaign. Other than Custer, Major Marcus A. Reno was the only officer of field rank available, even though a cavalry regiment was designated four. Custer held a dim view of Reno and was aware that he had written both Generals Terry and Sheridan angling for command of the 7th Cavalry. Reno had joined the 7th in 1871 but was often detached on assignment and rarely served with Custer, he was an unknown who lacked frontier experience.

Company K had a paper strength of seventy-two soldiers, but twenty-nine were on detached service, mostly at the nearby Yellowstone depot due to a shortage of horses. Four more were serving elsewhere within the regiment: Second Lieutenant Luther Hare with the Indian scouts, Sergeant Robert Hughes as Custer's flag bearer, and Corporal John Callahan and Private Elihu Clear as medical orderlies.<sup>212</sup> Captain Owen Hale was still in St. Louis, leaving First Lieutenant Godfrey in command, with New York-born First Sergeant DeWitt Winney, and the remaining thirty-seven men.<sup>213</sup> Of the 43 K Company men who entered the Little Bighorn valley that fateful June, 32 had been on the Black Hills expedition, 23 had been in the Army well over five years, 17 had two to three

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<sup>212</sup> Godfrey held \$320 for Private Clear, the same man at the Washita. Thomas B. Marquis, *Keep the Last Bullet for Yourself: The True Story of Custer's Last Stand* (NY: The Two Continents Publishing Group, Reference Publ. Inc., 1976), 49. Also left at the Yellowstone depot were the 7th's dogs to avoid unnecessary noise.

<sup>213</sup> This equaled a total of 39 men assigned to K Company on the morning of 25 June 1876. Private Michael Cornwall of G Company is listed as being assigned to K Company in *They Rode with Custer*, but the official records do not support this. John M. Carroll, ed., *They Rode with Custer*, (Mattituck, NJ: J.M. Carroll & Company, 1993), 59.

years' service, and the remaining 3 had joined in December 1874.<sup>214</sup> Those three new men gave Company K the lowest recruit average in the 7th at 7%, overall 26% of the regiment could be termed green. The regiment was deficient in all phases of training but especially marksmanship.

On 17 May 1876, the day the 7th's "Dakota Column" left Fort Abraham Lincoln, Godfrey began a field diary. Many of the notations were personal, like the 27 May entry, "Got mail this A.M. - two letters from my darlings. All well. Mary [his wife] struck for higher wages."<sup>215</sup> On 8 June Godfrey wrote "more mail and a letter from Genl Rice informing me that he had gone to see Genl Sherman and Sec. Taft in my interest without my solicitation but not against my desires."<sup>216</sup>

On 9 June, the 7th camped along the Powder River while General Terry met with Colonel John Gibbon, whose 7th Infantry had spotted the Sioux two weeks earlier while patrolling the west bank of the Yellowstone. The next day, Terry detached Major Reno with six cavalry companies and a handful of Indian scouts to patrol south along the

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<sup>214</sup> Of the forty-three men, seventeen were foreign born, at least three had served in the Civil War, and nearly all had excellent, very good, or good character ratings. The records are not all encompassing, but clearly K Company was comprised of mature, if undertrained, veterans. Carroll, *They Rode with Custer*.

<sup>215</sup> Edgar I. Stewart and Jane R. Stewart, ed. *The Field Diary of Lt. Edward S. Godfrey Commanding Co. K, 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment under Lt. Colonel George Armstrong Custer in the Sioux Encounter at the Battle of the Little Big Horn: Covering the Period from May 17, 1876 when the Expedition Commanded by Brigadier Alfred H. Terry left Ft. Abraham Lincoln, Bismarck, Dakota Territory until the Return of the Battered Regiment a Few Days after September 24, 1876 to the Same Place* (Portland, OR: Champoege Press, 1957), 2.

<sup>216</sup> Stewart, *Field Diary*, 6. This was Ohio Democratic Representative Americus Vespucius Rice (A.V. Rice for short). Rice had commanded Company E of the 21st Ohio when Godfrey was in Company D. Rice lost a leg at Kennesaw Mountain but stayed in the Army and made Brigadier General. After the War, he managed a bank in Ottawa, served in Congress from 1874-1879 and then founded his own bank, also in Ottawa that he ran for nearly two decades.

Powder and Tongue Rivers. Terry expected the Sioux to be in the Rosebud valley further west, but sought to first confirm they were not south. Writing anonymously for the *New York Herald*, Custer criticized both the mission and Reno for wasting time and possibly warning Indians that troops were near. Terry hampered Reno with exacting instructions and Reno found himself in a quandary when the Sioux turned up farther west than Terry had supposed. Reno decided to deviate from Terry's orders and follow the Indian trail instead of moving south. In so doing, he saved the command valuable time by determining the sought-after village's location, which was farther away than Terry thought. *New York Herald* correspondent Mark Kellogg, then accompanying the 7th, unfairly criticized Reno for disobeying orders, and his fawning description of Custer reads like a listing of imperial titles -- "a man possessing electrical mental capacity... the hardest rider, the greatest pusher, with the most untiring vigilance."<sup>217</sup>

It was aboard the steamer *Far West*, on the Yellowstone, that Terry, Gibbon, Custer, and Major James Brisbane of the 2nd Cavalry met on 21 June to plan what they hoped would be the crushing blow against the defiant Sioux. Absent was Custer's second in command, the sullen and disagreeable Major Reno. Foremost among everyone's thoughts was the fear that the Indians would scatter before the Army could force them to fight. Gibbon had been in the field for over two months without any major engagement. Terry offered Custer three companies of Gibbon's 2nd Cavalry and two Gatling guns but he declined both. The Gatling would not be able to keep pace over rough terrain; on

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<sup>217</sup> Mark Kellogg, "The Letter for Publication," *New York Herald*, July 11, 1876, quoted in W.A. Graham, *The Custer Myth: A Source Book of Custeriana*, (NY: Bonanza Books, 1953), 235.

Reno's earlier scouting mission it had been cached. The battalion of 2nd Cavalry would have been a valuable supplement -- perhaps even a battle-changing attachment -- but Custer had never worked with the 2nd before and radiating confidence to his command, confidently predicted that the 7th could handle any Indians it met. Terry detached Custer with sufficiently vague orders "so as not to hamper" the latter's movements in what was essentially a movement to contact.<sup>218</sup> Leaving much to Custer's discretion, Terry nevertheless advised him to move up the Rosebud River and prevent the Sioux from escaping to the southeast. Although he did not say so in the order, he expected Custer to strike the hostiles or he would not have offered Custer the Gatling guns and extra troops. In advising Custer to leave a hot Indian trail to block an escape attempt that might not happen, Terry had made his inexperience in Indian fighting obvious. Indians would not sit still while the Army marched around them.

After the *Far West* conference, Custer prepared for a long, hard pursuit and told his company commanders to pack extra forage. When Godfrey and Captain Myles Moylan of A Company voiced concerns that the animals would be unable to carry the extra weight, Custer reminded the officers that they were responsible for their companies and that the extra forage was only a suggestion. The 7th would follow the Sioux "no matter how far it may take us from our base of supplies" and, turning as he was about to enter his tent, added, "You had better carry along an extra supply of salt; we may have to live on horse meat before we get through."<sup>219</sup> The next night Custer told his officers to

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<sup>218</sup> Loyd J. Overfield II, *The Little Big Horn, 1876: The Official Communications, Documents and Reports* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), 23.

<sup>219</sup> Godfrey, "Custer's Last Battle," 364.

feel free to make any suggestions, toning down his “usually brusque and aggressive” manner.<sup>220</sup> Noting “an absence of that aggression, defiance and selfishness that usually pervaded Custer’s communications with his officers” Godfrey later concluded he was trying to “impress upon the officers his reliance upon their judgment, discretion, and loyalty.”<sup>221</sup> As the meeting broke up, Lieutenant George D. Wallace of G Company made a startling comment to Godfrey, prophesizing Custer might be killed in the coming campaign.<sup>222</sup>

After making his nightly security rounds, Godfrey happened upon the camp of the Indian scouts. Half Yellow Face, a Crow, motioned for Mitch Boyer, the mixed-blood interpreter and guide, to ask Godfrey if he had ever fought these Sioux. When Godfrey answered that he had, Boyer asked how many warriors did Godfrey think they would encounter? Quoting the intelligence from Custer, Godfrey said between 1,000 and 1,500. “Well do you think we can whip that many?” asked Boyer. “Oh, yes, I guess so” answered Godfrey. “Well, I can tell you,” Boyer replied emphatically, “we are going to have a damned big fight.”<sup>223</sup> Custer also knew how the Indian scouts felt and that they were prone to exaggerate. He dismissed their concern and, like most of his command,

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<sup>220</sup> Godfrey, “Custer’s Last Battle,” 365.

<sup>221</sup> Godfrey, *Some Reminiscences... Yellowstone*, 24. Lieutenant Charles A. Varnum disagrees with Godfrey’s assessment that Custer was depressed. John M. Carroll, ed., *Custer’s Chief of Scouts: The Reminiscences of Charles A. Varnum* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 29; Godfrey, “Custer’s Last Battle,” (1892), 365.

<sup>222</sup> Godfrey, “Custer’s Last Battle,” 166.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 365; BG Edward J. McClernand, “With the Indian and the Buffalo in Montana,” *The Cavalry Journal*, vol. XXXVI, no. 146 (January 1927): 16. Boyer gave this warning prior to 1876 as well.

was expecting a running fight. Godfrey felt that both Terry and Custer would have altered their plans had they known of Crook's defeat. Failure to relay such vital intelligence to other commands in the field was characteristic of the Army's bungling in the 1876 Sioux War.

Custer's Crow scouts knew the terrain and he kept them working hard to ensure that no large hostile bands splintered off from the main group undetected. Three days and seventy-three miles into Indian country, the 7th was closing on the Sioux. When Godfrey and others reported seeing smoke to the southeast, which could indicate escaping Indians, Custer assured them that the Crows had scouted this area and would have reported such a sign. Godfrey later learned that the "smoke" he had seen was merely a mirage from scattered clouds and heated air.<sup>224</sup> He thought he had discovered a large trail departing from the main course and Custer sent Lieutenant Charles Varnum and some Crows to double check an area they had already scouted. Godfrey's information turned out to be false and Varnum was angered that he had to ride "an extra twenty miles for nothing."<sup>225</sup> But by 24 June the Crows knew the Sioux were somewhere in the Little Bighorn valley and Custer decided to conceal the regiment for a day until his scouts could locate their village more precisely; the subsequent attack was to happen on the 26th. Assembling his officers Custer informed them of his decision.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Cyrus Townsend Brady, *Indian Fights and Fighters: The Soldier and the Sioux* (NY: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1904), reprint (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), 379.

<sup>225</sup> Carroll, *Custer's Chief of Scouts*, 61.

<sup>226</sup> Godfrey incorrectly states in *Custer's Last Battle* page 366 that Officers Call was sounded. However, no bugles were used until the 25th of June the next day. *Research and Review: The Journal of the Little Big Horn Associates*, vol. 14, no. (Winter 2000): 29.

As the meeting broke up the regimental flag twice blew over before Godfrey secured it in the ground. After the battle, Lieutenant George D. Wallace of G Company, would mention this bad omen to a less superstitious Godfrey, who had forgotten about it. But later on the 24th Godfrey overheard Custer and the Arikara scouts talking. Custer, who understood some Arikara, wanted to know what Bloody Knife was saying. According to the interpreter, Bloody Knife said that "we find enough Sioux to fight two, three days" to which Custer replied with a smile, "I guess we'll get through them in one day."<sup>227</sup>

The next morning, scouts on high ground observed a large pony herd and village twelve to fifteen miles away. Indians saw them, and soldiers at the rear of the column fired on a shadowing warrior. Now that they had discovered the 7th, the Sioux would scatter, so Custer abandoned all secrecy and moved his column at a steady gait toward the village sighting. Ironically both groups of Indians had stumbled onto the cavalry by chance and neither proceeded to warn the village. Leaving the high ground that divided the watersheds of the Rosebud and Little Bighorn a little after noon, Custer divided his command of twelve companies and proceeded generally west. Now at a lower elevation, he was unable to see the village and feared the Indians would escape to the left or south, precisely what General Terry had warned him to prevent. Companies D, H, and Godfrey's K, the battalion led by Captain Benteen, were to proceed to a line of bluffs, view the valley, let Custer know what they saw, and if nothing, "hurry and rejoin the command."<sup>228</sup> Custer and eight companies continued west towards the village with

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<sup>227</sup> Godfrey, "Custer's Last Battle," (1892), 367.



Captain Thomas McDougal's B Company and the slow-moving 175-mule train -- weighed down with 26,000 rounds of ammunition -- bringing up the rear. Because untrained wagon mules made up most of the pack train, the usual mobility advantage that a well-trained, well-run pack mule team had over bigger but slower wagons was diminished. Packing was a costlier and therefore more rarely practiced option, and all of that ammunition lagged behind.

Benteen detailed a few binocular-equipped troopers to scan the terrain from high ground so that the rest of his battalion would not be overtaxed climbing, but Godfrey's company was in the rear of the column and often had to trot to keep up. The increasingly rough ground made it unlikely any Indians would be found and Benteen angled his battalion west by northwest, picking up the regiment's trail after three-and three-quarter miles.<sup>229</sup> They had already heard gunshots and now, at 2 p.m., heard more but Benteen stopped for twenty minutes to water the horses at a morass. Boston Custer, a civilian accompanying the 7th and the youngest Custer brother, was assigned to the pack train, but passed Benteen at the watering hole on his way to join his brothers. Meanwhile, Captain Thomas Weir of D Company asked Godfrey to join him in getting Benteen to

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<sup>228</sup> Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign*, 259. Godfrey also notes they were to rejoin the regiment, refuting another Benteen lie. "Benteen was ordered to go to the left towards the Little Bighorn and if he got to it to strike down it and take any village he might find, otherwise to follow down and join." Godfrey letter *Allen County Democrat* August 1876.

<sup>229</sup> His actual "scout to the left" total distance, before hitting the main trail, was seven-and three-quarter miles, only one mile longer than Custer's. The routes were mostly parallel. This distance and timeline was what Benteen most tried to conceal. He would claim he went fifteen miles in an effort to hide his sluggish performance to rejoin the regiment. Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign*, 263. In a letter to his family, probably written on 4 July 1876 Godfrey notes they only went a few miles. Godfrey letter, *Allen County Democrat*. They also caught glimpses of F Company's gray horses, "marching at a rapid gait," again proving Benteen's lie of the distance traveled. Godfrey, *Custer's Last Battle*, (1892), 369.

hurry. Godfrey declined; he was only a lieutenant and Benteen would probably tell him to mind his own business. Angry at the delay, Weir marched his company to the front, prompting Benteen to follow as the slow-moving pack train caught up with the rest of the battalion at the morass.<sup>230</sup> Benteen pushed his own company to the front and “the march was continued very leisurely.”<sup>231</sup> At 3:12 p.m. they came across a lone teepee that was partially on fire, with a dead warrior inside. Thirty minutes later, Sergeant Daniel Knipe delivered a message from Custer telling Benteen and the pack train to hurry. As he passed down the line, Knipe reportedly said, “We’ve got ’em boys.”<sup>232</sup> Godfrey concluded that the village had been captured and that the fight “was over & that it could only have been a small village to be over so soon.”<sup>233</sup> Shortly after, another message arrived from Custer delivered by Trumpeter John Martin. “Benteen Come on. Big village. Be quick. bring packs. W.W. Cooke P.S. bring pacs.” Cooke, the regimental adjutant, had written this message because Martin's English was weak.

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<sup>230</sup> Kenneth Hammer, ed., *Custer in 76: Walter Camp's Notes on the Custer Fight* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 75; Edward S. Godfrey to J. Shoemaker, 2 March 1926, LBH; McClelland, “With the Indian and Buffalo in Montana,” 41. Godfrey authored the sidebar.

<sup>231</sup> Godfrey's diary says they preceded leisurely, Stewart, *Field Diary*, 11. Interviewed in 1917 and 1918 by Walter Camp he says they moved fast, at a gallop and that Weir set the pace. Camp, *Custer in 76*, 75.

<sup>232</sup> Godfrey, “Custer's Last Battle,” (1892), 372. In his 1879 Court of Inquiry testimony Godfrey said he did not understand anything else Knipe said besides the above comment. In interviews with Walter Camp in 1917 and 1918 Godfrey reported that Knipe said, “they are licking the stuffing out of them” etc. Hunt, *COI*, 275, 176; Hammer, *Custer in 76*, 75.

<sup>233</sup> Stewart, *Field Diary*, 12. Knipe's instructions to the pack train were directly from Captain Tom Custer, “bring the pack train straight across to high ground – if packs get loose, don't stop to fix them, cut them off. Come quick. Big Indian camp.” Graham, *The Custer Myth*, 249. To my knowledge no one has explained Captain McDougal's failure to follow these instructions. Knipe was initially upset that he was tasked as a messenger, afraid he would miss the fight.

Ignoring Custer's order to bring the ammunition but finally energized, Benteen upped the gait to a trot. Then the rate of the gunfire increased and Godfrey thought it was coming towards them. Apparently presuming that the Indians were fleeing from Custer's attack, Benteen formed his men into a line to meet them but, as they crested the bluffs, Godfrey saw a valley "full of horsemen riding to and fro in clouds of dust and smoke."<sup>234</sup> He also saw men on his right that he assumed were pickets securing a flank while other troops in the valley destroyed the Indian camp. Crow scouts rode up driving a small herd of Sioux ponies and, through signs, Godfrey asked them where Custer's command was. "Soldiers" answered Half Yellow Face, and motioned to the right where Godfrey thought he had seen only a picket line.<sup>235</sup> Godfrey then relayed this new information to Benteen and all three companies of his battalion headed in that direction. They soon met Major Reno, who "had lost his hat and had a handkerchief tied about his head, and appeared to be very much excited." Reno's next utterance indicates that he had lost more than a hat: "For God's sake, Benteen, halt your command and wait until I can organize my men!"<sup>236</sup> The time was 4:20 p.m. and, as Benteen pushed a skirmish line out to the bluffs, he showed Reno the message he had received from Custer. But neither took further action. According to Godfrey, Second Lieutenant Luther Hare, of K Company but attached to the Indian scouts, approached him, shook his hand "very heartily and excitedly" and reported that, "We've had a big fight in the bottom, [and] got whipped out" adding "I am damned glad to see you." With this, Godfrey began to figure out the bigger picture. "I was

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<sup>234</sup> Godfrey, "Custer's Last Battle," (1892), 372.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

startled, shocked, at this information" he remembered, "although I had already begun to suspect all was not right." Godfrey's next orders to Hare were those of an experienced leader: "Hold on, don't talk so that the men can hear you for they may get discouraged."<sup>237</sup>

After Custer had sent Benteen to scout on the left, he rapidly approached the Indian village and three miles out near the lone teepee, his scouts saw the Sioux fleeing. Custer ordered Reno to take three companies and most of the scouts, 175 men in all, and charge.<sup>238</sup> Custer had originally intended to follow and support Reno's attack with the remaining five companies' 210 troops but changed course when about 75 warriors appeared on his right. At 3 p.m., as Custer pursued those seventy-five, Reno crossed the Little Bighorn River and advanced into the open valley. It was only at that point that he realized how big the Indian camp was, and that the warriors were not fleeing. About one half mile from the village, he halted his charge and formed a skirmish line with the river on his right so that his troopers could repel the warriors to his front. But when the enemy countered by angling around his left, Reno moved his battalion into a stand of cottonwood trees with thick underbrush. Custer witnessed Reno's withdrawal to the timber, from atop bluffs to the east. With Reno on the opposite bank of the Little Bighorn, Custer slowed his advance to let Benteen and the pack train, escorted by Captain McDougal's B Company, catch up. Meanwhile hundreds of warriors swarmed around Reno's three company position and fired into the woods where he and his troopers

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<sup>237</sup> Godfrey, *Some Reminiscences... Yellowstone*, 35.

<sup>238</sup> Reno would later claim to only having 112 men and the Indian scouts, 147 men. Even his sympathetic biographer states this is indefensible. Nichols, *In Custer's Shadow*, 185.

had taken cover. The hostiles were too battle-wise to charge when at such a disadvantage, but a few worked their way around to the rear of the timber and fired a volley that struck both a trooper and Bloody Knife, whose brains splattered onto Major Reno.

Hypnotized by the danger, Reno fled the stand of timber and away from the Indians to his front. It was a panicked retreat: because he failed to alert his scattered command with a bugle call only the men nearest to him could immediately follow. Worse yet, he assigned no one to provide covering fire and his men made easy targets for the pursuing warriors as they fell back. Now with the woods to his left, Reno tried to retrace his path but enemy action forced him to re-cross the Little Bighorn below a steep bluff rather than exit out of the open valley. And the remains of his command were becoming more scattered by the minute. As he plunged into the river, some of his men were still a mile behind in the timber and seventeen of them, some horseless and others wounded, were unable to leave. Private Clear warned Lieutenant Hare that the command was leaving and brought him his horse while Lieutenant McIntosh's G Company, which had gotten farthest into the woods, hastily mounted to catch the rest of Reno's battalion. It was G Company in the rear of the column and M Company in the middle that bore the brunt of the attack. Private James Wilber of Company M remembered "the wild rush, with the Indians on all sides, yelling like devils, shooting into our ranks and even trying to drag men from their horses."<sup>239</sup> Reno lost forty men -- the equivalent of a full company -- most of them during his retreat from the timber. Captain Benteen's three

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<sup>239</sup> James Wilber, Undated Statement, LC, Ghent collection.

companies might have changed the battle's outcome, either by occupying the bluffs overlooking the valley or joining Reno below and stiffening his resolve. But Benteen did not hurry to the sound of the guns, even when ordered, twice.<sup>240</sup>

Benteen's three companies did manage to cover the scattered remnants of Reno's command as they straggled to the top of the bluffs and shared their ammunition though, as Godfrey observed, it was done "rather ungraciously."<sup>241</sup> He and several nearby officers studied the valley from the relative safety of the bluffs and discussed the situation. Recalled Godfrey, "[A]mong our number was Captain Moylan, a veteran soldier, and a good one too, watching intently the scene below. Moylan remarked, quite emphatically: 'Gentleman, in my opinion General Custer has made the biggest mistake of his life, by not taking the whole regiment in at once in the first attack.'"<sup>242</sup> While Reno and Benteen organized their companies they heard heavy firing in Custer's direction. Varnum described it as "fearful firing at the other end of the village that some one was getting it hot and heavy up there."<sup>243</sup> The partially deaf Godfrey and even McDougal on the back trail heard it. So did Marcus Reno, although he would later deny it. At this critical moment, Reno left the command for nearly half an hour to search for the body of his adjutant, Lieutenant Benjamin Hodgson, who had been killed at the river crossing. The valley below was almost deserted, but Godfrey noticed a small group of warriors

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<sup>240</sup> He was also initially ordered to hurry and rejoin the command. Conversely, if he bypassed Reno, without bringing the extra ammo, and joined Custer this could have meant disaster for the entire 7th.

<sup>241</sup> Godfrey, "Cavalry Fire Discipline," 34.

<sup>242</sup> Godfrey, "Custer's Last Battle," (1892), 373.

<sup>243</sup> Barnett, *Touched By Fire*, 294. After the battle, the significance of this firing became more important. At the time Godfrey was less concerned. Godfrey, *Original Yellowstone*, 36.

and, using his rifle like a mortar, scattered them with a close shot.<sup>244</sup> Gunshots continued to echo down the valley, and Godfrey heard someone remark that “Custer would be after Reno with a sharp stick” because of the major’s inactivity.<sup>245</sup>

When Major Reno finally returned to the hilltop, he sent Lieutenant Hare to hurry the pack train with the spare ammunition forward, and Hare borrowed Godfrey's horse. Captain Weir was disgusted by Reno’s inaction and took D Company on his own authority to assist Custer. Hare arrived shortly afterwards with an advance of ammunition and the rest of the 7th followed, the tardy pack train bringing up the rear. Reno would have been wise to launch a supporting attack into the unguarded village before him, but he was in no frame of mind for offensive action and only advanced toward Custer because Weir had forced the issue. The column moved along the bluffs but Reno halted when survivors of the valley fight emerged from the timber to rejoin the regiment. In two miles they came to a prominent hill, later named Weir Point, where D Company’s commander saw Indians in the distance engaging what he thought was Custer’s rearguard. It was just before 6 p.m.

To D Company’s left, K Company was spread out overlooking the valley where Reno had fought earlier. Some troopers fired at distant Indians before Godfrey ordered them to stop wasting ammunition. The Sioux and Cheyenne, riding triumphant over Custer’s battleground, spotted the soldiers and surged towards them. Except for companies D, K, and M the rest of the 7th moved back its original position on the bluff

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<sup>244</sup> Hammer, *Custer in 76*, 76.

<sup>245</sup> Godfrey later thought these were “signals of distress.” Godfrey, “Custer’s Last Battle,” (1892), 373.

overlooking the valley. Godfrey was surprised when a trooper noted that the command was gone and Lieutenant Hare, now acting adjutant for Major Reno, brought orders for K Company to retreat. Godfrey had taken them half a mile when Company M suddenly came over the bluffs followed by D Company. Their desire to get away from the Indians was jeopardizing the entire command now united under Major Reno and Godfrey later noted in a private letter that neither rearguard company fired much before deciding to rapidly fall back.<sup>246</sup> Lieutenant Winfield Edgerly and Private Charles Sanders of Company D, visible on Weir Point made a miraculous escape, but another man fell, and Godfrey formed a skirmish line to provide cover for a rescue that never happened. Sensing disaster, Godfrey assumed the rearguard and Hare, still acting-adjutant, and supposed to return to Reno, volunteered to help.<sup>247</sup>

Godfrey sent the horses back to the high ground later known as Reno Hill and, with the remaining twenty-two men, fired volleys that forced the Indians to a temporary halt. After a second order to fall back, he retreated slowly and, alternating between odd and even numbers, K Company kept up a steady fire on the growing mass of Indians.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 375. Hare, on Weir Point, thought Custer was still fighting the Indians. Hammer, *Custer in 76*, 67; W.A. Graham, *The Custer Myth*, 319. Edgerly says his men did a lot of shooting though he doubts they hit much. This was probably in reference to some firing prior to the immediate withdrawal. Francis B. Taunton, *No Pride in the Little Bighorn* (London: The English Westerner's Society, 1987), 25.

<sup>247</sup> Privately Godfrey was more critical of D and M Company's retreat. "I dismounted my troop for a rally of the retreating two troops. Did they rally? Not much! But left me to hold the sack!" Graham, *The Custer Myth*, 319.

<sup>248</sup> Curiously this is the same maneuver (having the men retreat by numbered files) that Godfrey used at the Washita and found that it did not work well. Godfrey was also angered by Reno's lack of support. "I had not only the attack to meet, but was harassed by Reno's *repeated* orders 'to retire at once.' But he made no attempt to give me reinforcement." Ibid.



Sensing danger, the men began firing less and retreating more, clustering in groups. With Hare's help, Godfrey ordered the men to fall back at the correct pace and, when the Indians renewed their attack, K Company's fire forced them to halt again. Then the retreat resumed as Indian fire intensified, Godfrey noting the "ping-ping" sound of the bullets as they flew overhead and the "swish-thud" sound when they struck the ground.<sup>249</sup> In compliance with the orders he had received from Major Reno, Godfrey put his men into line and ordered them to retreat on the double. Some of his men promptly took off "like sprinters" leaving others behind.<sup>250</sup> Since they were still some distance from support, Godfrey acted quickly to reassert authority, firing his revolver in the air, loudly cursing, and threatening to kill anyone who ran. Looking into the astonished faces of his men he thought it an "awful moment" but he had regained control.<sup>251</sup> About 500 yards from the command, a hill overlooked the 7th's perimeter and Godfrey ordered Hare to take ten men and secure it. Major Reno again ordered K Company to retreat and Godfrey recalled Hare, rejoining what was left of the regiment.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Godfrey, "Custer's Last Battle," (1892), 375.

<sup>250</sup> Godfrey, "Cavalry Fire Discipline," 35.

<sup>251</sup> Private John Burkman, of Company L, detached to the pack train, disputed this account and claimed Trumpeter George Penwell of K Company agreed with him. However, Burkman was not with K Company and there is no record of Penwell supporting his statement. It would seem unlikely that Godfrey would embellish the event in a speech to officers of the same regiment it happened in. Don Rickey, *Forty Miles A Day on Beans and Hay: The Enlisted Soldier Fighting the Indian Wars* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 303. Private William E. Morris of M Company said Captain Thomas H. French, his company commander, on Reno's skirmish line in the valley, also threatened to shoot anyone who ran. It may be indicative of the poor training that officers felt they had to remind men they would be shot for failure to do their duty. William E. Morris to Robert Bruce, May 23, 1928, LBH. Morris' discharge certificate says he was a private of worthless character but he later became a New York City judge and captain in the New York National Guard.

<sup>252</sup> From his writings, both public and private, it is clear Godfrey was justifiably proud of

While K Company fought the rear-guard action, Reno and Benteen positioned the remaining six companies back on the ground they just left, spreading the command out in a circle with the back end tapering off into a short, extended line. The north end, where K Company filled in, faced towards the oncoming warriors, and linked to the left with M and B Companies, and on their right with D Company. The back end, manned by Benteen's H Company, was close to the broken terrain and more accessible to the Indians, making it the more dangerous position. He tied in with M Company on his right and A Company and what was left of G Company on his left. The perimeter was on two hills with the field hospital and horses positioned in between on the low ground, Reno commanded the northern half and Benteen commanded the back half. Godfrey's men were now intermixed with other companies in a hasty defense whose return carbine fire kept the Sioux from overrunning their position. Godfrey was responsible for approximately 150 yards of the perimeter and luckily for him, it was relatively open ground on which the Indians had to keep their distance. But the hostiles held an advantage: they occupied the hill that Hare had not taken during the retreat and fired down on the command, especially Benteen's company. Like all the men, Godfrey was lying down and surprised himself by wondering if the sagebrush to his front was protection from a bullet. Jolted into action, he walked the line to encourage his men and restrain them from wasting ammunition. First Sergeant Dewitt Winney and Trumpeter

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his rearguard action that might have prevented another disaster. He apparently made Elizabeth Custer uneasy (she presumably wanted only one hero to be remembered at the Little Big Horn) as the following letter relates. "It is too bad that General Godfrey should have worried you by writing you erroneously about the Bill in Congress to commemorate the valor of his own unit of the 7th Cavalry with reference to the fight made on the hill just south of the Custer battlefield." Jim Shoemaker to Elizabeth Custer 25 March 1926, LBH. On his personal copy of the 1921 version of his article, Godfrey hand wrote, "Not a shot has been fired at Reno's Command Hill till after this troop arrived at position." Godfrey, "Custer's Last Battle," (1921), 26.

Julius Helmer were both shot, and Godfrey was standing over Winney when he was hit. He told both to remain quiet and promised that when the fire slackened, he would have them moved to the makeshift hospital in the center of the command. Winney died almost immediately but Helmer lingered for some time with an agonizing stomach wound.<sup>253</sup> Both died before they could be moved and the men urged Godfrey lie down because he was drawing fire. He complied, moved to the rear, and being exhausted, fell asleep.

After the firing tapered off, the troops rejoined their companies and began to dig in. The ground was dry and hard, and proper entrenching equipment, absent. Axes, forks, and tin cups filled in; only by improving their positions would the soldiers have cover. As Godfrey's men scratched at the earth, some thought they saw or heard columns of troops approaching. Sure that Custer or Crook was coming, one man rode down the lines encouraging all that reinforcements were on the way. Trumpet calls were even sounded to guide the relief column to their position. Captain Weir thanked Godfrey for his rearguard action during the retreat, and asked him whom they should follow in an emergency if Reno and Benteen disagreed.<sup>254</sup> Godfrey preferred Benteen, who had already taken unofficial control of the 7th at the urging of Captain McDougal. Later, this conversation would take on more meaning.

Early on the morning of 26 June the Indians opened fire, but Godfrey knew that K Company was short on marksmanship training, and therefore authorized only his two best

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<sup>253</sup> Godfrey, years later, thought his name was Hillman or Hellman, and wrote he was a recruit. He meant Julius Helmer, who was on his third enlistment. Carroll, *They Rode with Custer*, 116; Godfrey to John G. Neihardt, Jan. 6, 1924, "Regarding Incidents of the Little Big Horn Battle, LC, Ghent collection, box 24, Godfrey file 14, 1.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., Neihardt; Godfrey, "Custer's Last Battle," (1892), 375.

shooters, Privates Michael P. Madden and William W. Lasley, to return fire without permission.<sup>255</sup> Another man asked to fire on a warrior in plain view, but when permission was granted and the trigger pulled, nothing happened. Only then did Godfrey notice that the eager marksman had forgotten to cock his weapon. He was "one of the witty ones of the troop and a great joker" and gales of laughter followed.<sup>256</sup> In a more sobering development, the Sioux and Cheyenne were working their way towards both ends of Reno Hill, and Benteen had to move reinforcements to his side to drive them back. The northern side, where Godfrey and K Company were positioned, was also in danger of being overrun, and Benteen repeatedly urged Reno to take action. Benteen prepared the men and, on his signal, the soldiers on the north end, including K Company, rushed the warriors and drove them back. Reno charged simultaneously but ordered a halt after a short advance of one hundred yards.<sup>257</sup> One man had a premonition that he would be killed and remained in his trench crying. Those who charged sustained no casualties but the soldier who had stayed behind took a bullet in the head, fired either by an Indian or an angry comrade.<sup>258</sup>

As the fight progressed, the 7th's water supply was running out and Godfrey had to send an eleven-man detail to the river, even though the Indians had it well within

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<sup>255</sup> Stewart, *Field Diary*, 16.

<sup>256</sup> Godfrey, "Cavalry Fire Discipline," 36.

<sup>257</sup> In his diary Godfrey says 20 yards, but in his article 75-100 yards. Stewart, *Field Diary*, 17; Godfrey, "Custer's Last Battle," (1892), 378. His later revision says 70 to 100 yards. Godfrey, "Custer's Last Battle," (1921), 191.

<sup>258</sup> No allegation of murder was ever made.

range. Repulsed at first, they linked up with a detail from H Company, which provided covering fire while they filled canteens.<sup>259</sup> The mission cost one dead and several wounded including Private Michael Madden who lost a leg, but from that point on Indian fire was usually sporadic. Towards dusk, the Sioux and Cheyenne started a grass fire so that they could relocate their village to the north behind a smoke screen. The troops could see the mass of Indians departing but, fearing it was a feint, continued to improve their positions. It was no feint and late the next morning, 27 June, a dust cloud appeared in the valley. This time it was not Indians, but U.S. troops coming to their rescue. The 7th's troopers scanned the approaching column for Captain George Yates F Company's easily identifiable gray horses but did not see them and concluded that it must be Crook's command. They sent up a cheer for Crook but it was Lieutenant James H. Bradley of the 7th Infantry who first arrived at Reno Hill. He immediately asked to see his friend Godfrey and the two exchanged greetings before Godfrey asked the inevitable question, "Where is Custer?"<sup>260</sup> "I don't know," replied Bradley, who had already searched the bluffs on the river's far side with a small infantry scout detachment, "but I suppose he was killed, as we counted 197 dead bodies. I don't suppose any escaped."<sup>261</sup> Godfrey and the rest of the men on Reno Hill could scarcely believe what they heard, but General Terry and his staff soon rode up and confirmed the awful news.

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<sup>259</sup> There is a clear lack of control and coordination, company commanders, grouped together under battalion control, should not on their own be sending detachments out of the perimeter.

<sup>260</sup> Godfrey, "Custer's Last Battle," (1892), 383. Godfrey knew Bradley from Reconstruction duty.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

Caring for the wounded, consolidating the equipment, and destroying anything that could not be carried away occupied the rest of the day. The stench of dead horses, mules, and soldiers became so strong that the survivors moved nearer the river to escape it, returning to the battlefield the next day to bury the dead. Blacksmith Vincent Charley, the man Godfrey saw fall near Weir Point, was found with a stick rammed down his throat. First Sergeant James Butler was nearly a mile from his Company L position, heading east towards Reno Hill. Somewhere along the way his mount had lost its horseshoe and he had continued on foot until overtaken.<sup>262</sup> Godfrey noted “a pained, almost terrified expression” on his dead comrades' faces.<sup>263</sup>

Godfrey and several others identified George Armstrong Custer’s stripped body. Close by on the same ridge were his brother Tom and Sergeant Robert Hughes of K Company who had been carrying the regiment’s battle flag. Custer had sustained fatal bullet wounds to the left breast and temple as well as an arrow in the groin, and a deep knife gash on his left thigh – a comparatively small amount of mutilation. Tom Custer could only be identified by his tattoo. Godfrey did not mention that George Custer’s corpse had been mutilated and was bloated, decomposing, and fly-infested when found. Rumors of suicide circulated because he still had his scalp and conventional wisdom held that Indians did not scalp anyone who had killed himself.<sup>264</sup> On June 28, General Terry’s

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<sup>262</sup> Godfrey incorrectly states Butler was in Company C and had served in the British and the Union Army. He probably confused Butler with Lieutenant Henry J. Knowlan who was on detached service and missed the battle. The horseshoe was found in 1948 about 300 yards from Butler’s body, Greg Bence, “The Enigma of Sergeant Butler,” *Research and Review*, vol. 23, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 20-21, 23.

<sup>263</sup> Godfrey, *Custer’s Last Battle*, (1892), 383.

<sup>264</sup> This was the time before smokeless powder and Custer’s body had no black powder burns. When the claim appeared in a book Godfrey wrote a counter argument. E.S. Godfrey, “The

command, including the remnants of the 7th, began moving north towards the mouth of the Yellowstone, where the steamer *Far West* was located.

Almost from that day to this, the 7th Cavalry's humiliation on the Little Bighorn River has been historic, and would have been even if the dreadful news hadn't reached the east coast at the height of America's centennial celebration. The regiment suffered 263 killed -- 210 men with Custer and 53 with Reno, along with 59 wounded. Within this total, K Company suffered five dead including Corporal John Callahan and Private Elihu Clear, who were both with Reno in the valley. The Indian casualty count is more debatable, but Miniconjou Sioux Chief Red Horse, a battle participant of both the Reno and Custer fights, set the figure at exactly 296 warriors. How he came up with such a precise figure is not known; sometimes the Sioux and Cheyenne laid out their dead to determine losses, but this was rarely done and no one recalled such an act after the Little Bighorn fight. Cheyenne Chief Two Moons gives a total of 47 killed and about 100 wounded but that might not be accurate, as his count of 388 dead soldiers is significantly off on Custer's battlefield. Hunkpapa Sioux Chief Gall played a notable part in the battle, and when pressed on Indian dead put the total at 57 but admitted it was a guess.<sup>265</sup>

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Death of General Custer”” *The Cavalry Journal*, Vol. XXXVI, no. 148 (July, 1927): 469. The book claimed Sitting Bull and Custer were intimate friends. Godfrey said Custer never would have kept that a secret, as it would be too good a story for someone who sought “publicity of himself and his affairs.” Ironically the part Indian author, when exposed as lying, committed suicide. Sylvester Long, *Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance* (NY: Cosmopolitan Book Corporation, 1928), reprint (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995).

<sup>265</sup> Hare supports the Indian claim of low casualties saying the soldiers were untrained in shooting. Hammer, *Custer in 76*, 68. There are several sightings of dead white men in Indian lodges, the inference being they fought for the Indians. Godfrey notes this in his diary as well. Stewart, *Field Diary*, 25; Godfrey Manuscript for Rev. C.T. Brady, Sept. 12, 1903, LC, Ghent collection, box 24, Godfrey file 16.

Posterity has judged Custer's decision making harshly, but a close examination of the orders he issued before and during the battle reveals a more mixed performance. He had sent Reno and three companies into a level valley that was three-quarters of a mile wide and ideal for cavalry and then veered north with five companies, keeping the larger force under his direct command. And the gently winding Little Bighorn River was easily fordable in most places. The problem was the more broken terrain where Custer was headed -- should a rejoining of forces be necessary, the steep bluffs and gullies precluded an effective cavalry action. Because of that inhospitable landscape the Indians had camped on the more level and habitable west bank, opposite Custer with the river between them. From the bluffs, Custer could see the village as well as Reno's command sheltered in the timber to the south and, having faced a similar situation on the Yellowstone, he had reason to believe that Reno would be okay in the short-term.

Once he noticed that the warriors were focused solely on the valley fight west of the river, Custer determined to launch a supporting attack with Benteen's and McDougal's trailing four companies and the extra ammunition. It is true that Benteen had not responded to Custer's messages, but Boston Custer's arrival probably assured George Custer that the Benteen was on his way. Thinking that his orders to Benteen had been delivered and obeyed, Custer slowed his advance to give Benteen time to catch up. Then, when Reno inexplicably retreated from the river bottom, Custer sent Captain George Yates's F Company down Medicine Trail Coulee toward the village to feign an attack and take the pressure off of Reno. Custer, "thinking clearly and acting quickly,"



repositioned his companies to the high ground thereby keeping a corridor open for Benteen and the pack train.<sup>266</sup>

Of the five companies with Custer, Lieutenant James Calhoun's L Company was farthest away but supported by Captain Myles Keogh's I Company, both to the east, or the top of Custer's perimeter. Companies C, E, and F, commanded by Second Lieutenant Henry Harrington, Lieutenant Algernon Smith and Captain Yates respectively, were downhill to the west. Yates got the Indians' attention, pinned down some overly aggressive warriors, and then had F Company fall back slowly to the perimeter. For the next thirty minutes, most of the onrushing warriors remained to the west or bottom of Custer's defensive position, between him and the river. Then the Indians' 10 to 1 numerical advantage and the broken terrain came into play, as they filtered around and surrounded the 7th and then exchanged fire. Some warriors carried Model 1866 Winchester repeating rifles, giving them a firepower advantage over troopers armed with single shot Model 1873 Springfield carbines.

This was the volley firing at 4:55 p.m. that Reno claims not to have heard. The situation was getting serious for Custer, yet his senior subordinates did not grasp the overall state of affairs and remained fixated on their plight. Reno and Benteen's three companies had linked up thirty-five minutes earlier, and when Captain Weir heard gunfire to the north, he sought out Reno to get permission to move D Company toward the sound of the guns. But that took ten minutes, during which Custer's men were fighting dismounted and in need of more firepower because one out of every eight

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<sup>266</sup> The quote is from an officer of the 2nd Cavalry who relived the 7th and viewed the Custer's battleground. McClernand, "With the Indian and Buffalo in Montana," 52.

troopers was holding horses. Aware of the horse holders' vulnerability, Chief Gall directed his warriors to shoot them and as many horses as possible as he closed on Calhoun's and Keogh's companies. Not all of the horses were killed but the tactic worked anyway -- the wounded animals bolted and carried half of the remaining ammunition with them.<sup>267</sup> With no reinforcements and running out of ammunition, Custer's five companies disintegrated and survivors retreated to the high ground later known as Last Stand Hill.

Little is known of the final minutes save for evidence provided by the location of the corpses and ejected cartridge cases. Reinforcements never came and, realizing the hopelessness of their situation, some of Custer's men became so dumbed with fear that they offered no resistance. Others tried to surrender. One of the ninety odd men who made it to Last Stand Hill was Russian-born Private Ygnatz Stungewitz of Calhoun's distant L Company. Some incorrectly thought they found Custer's horse 150 feet from Last Stand Hill with its head pointed in that direction.<sup>268</sup> Most of the men were wounded and horses were shot to form a thirty-foot ring barricade. After Custer was killed, twenty-eight men, possibly led by scout Mitch Boyer, made an abortive break towards

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<sup>267</sup> Testimony at the Court of Inquiry implies that the required one hundred rifle rounds each soldier carried was close to evenly divided between being on-person and in the saddle bags. Since the horse had to carry it either way, it appears most of the men opted for comfort and put too much in the saddle bags.

<sup>268</sup> The observer says by the position of the horse's legs it appeared to be moving fast, which would require the horse to die and fall mimicking its stride. Although Custer was sure to be active. McClernand, "With the Indian and Buffalo in Montana," 52. In 1877 Lieutenants Homer Wheeler and John Bourke visited Custer's battlefield and found Custer's supposed horse. Wheeler, *The Frontier Trail*, 219. Godfrey states Custer's horse, Vic, was not found on the battlefield. Godfrey to E.S. Paxton "Regarding the Dress and Accouterments of the 7th Cavalry and the Scene on Custer Field," January 16, 1896, GFP, 2.

cover along the river, and Lieutenant Harrington and Corporal Nathan Short tried to escape in opposite directions, but neither would ever be found alive.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Harrington's body was found in 1877, but never reported to his widow, who convinced herself he was a prisoner of the Sioux. Barnett, *Touched by Fire*, 310. In August, miles from the battle, Godfrey and others found evidence of Corporal Short's unlikely escape. In the years to come Godfrey noted all the claimants to be sole survivors of the battle but no one ever claimed to be Short. E.S. Godfrey to Adjutant General, U.S. Army, 9 August 1920, GFP.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE AFTERMATH

Survivor's guilt and memories of Major Marcus Reno's failure to rescue Custer clouded the 7th's return to Fort Abraham Lincoln that September. The frames of the windows and doorways of the officers' quarters had been painted black for mourning and Elizabeth Custer wrote bitterly of "men who fell because they were deserted by dim cowards."<sup>270</sup> Such accusations only made the feelings of guilt worse, and they plagued the survivors of Little Bighorn the rest of their lives. The first investigation was an informal one conducted by the regiment's surviving officers on their return to garrison, and the survivors were as interested as the critics in finding out what went wrong. Private Gustave Korn of Keogh's I Company had been one of the luckiest, having escaped the slaughter when his unmanageable horse bolted; this we know thanks in part to Godfrey's later account.<sup>271</sup> Some confusion persisted for years, many veterans

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<sup>270</sup> Stewart, *Field Diary*, 28. Mary Godfrey stayed at the post during the campaign and was assured her husband was alive but the *Chicago Times* reported him killed, though his step mother, Jane, refused to believe it. She passed away 6 February 1877 at the age of fifty-five. Mary's notification of the battle is in Joseph Hanson's book. Joseph Mills Hanson, *The Conquest of the Missouri: The Story of the Life and Exploits of Captain Grant Marsh* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1909), reprint (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003), 312; Barnett, *Touched by Fire*, 38.

<sup>271</sup> Hanson, *Conquest*, 381.

thinking that the Sioux had led them into an ambush.<sup>272</sup> Other concerns, like Reno's performance were clearer. When they relieved the 7th on the battlefield, officers in the 2nd Cavalry, had noted much anger directed at Reno. George Yates's brother-in-law, acting as a correspondent on the *Far West* in June, heard Reno described as a coward.<sup>273</sup> Reno got into a brawl when an infantry officer questioned his actions, and was so worked up, he threatened a duel. Captain Myles Moylan, A Company's commander was similarly insulted and challenged his detractors to a fight.<sup>274</sup> A drunk Benteen accused all the officers, except Captain Thomas French, of having a yellow streak and in a letter to his wife, he passed along a rumor, with his opinions added, that three officers had "shown the white feather."<sup>275</sup>

Whatever Godfrey believed, he was a junior officer whose opinions on the battlefield were not sought and would not have been well-received if given. Writing his family in August, he acknowledges that "we waited some time for Custer, thinking he was in the village or he would return."<sup>276</sup> That same month he wrote *The Army and Navy*

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<sup>272</sup> Reno claimed at his Court of Inquiry it was a Sioux trap. Hunt, *COI*, 527.

<sup>273</sup> Roberts, *Custer's Route Project No. 28-c*, LBH, 1.

<sup>274</sup> Undoubtedly Godfrey was aware of the criticisms of Moylan's performance in the valley and either did not believe them or felt his friend did not deserve to have his hard-earned military reputation questioned for the failings of one day. In his 1892 article "Custer's Last Battle." Godfrey referred to Moylan as a "veteran soldier, and a good one too." However, Moylan, did not measure up to his past and future acts of courage on 25 June, Larry Skelnar, *To Hell with Honor: Custer and the Little Bighorn* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 185, 245, 256.

<sup>275</sup> The three officers were Myles Moylan, Francis Gibson and Charles De Rudio. John M. Carroll, ed., *The Benteen-Goldin Letters on Custer and His Last Battle* (NY: Liveright, 1974), reprint (Lincoln: Bison Books, 1991), 149.

<sup>276</sup> E.S. Godfrey, "The Little Bighorn Fight," *Allen County Democrat* August, 1876.

*Journal* but did not mention any delay on Reno Hill and stressed that Benteen knew of no battle plan.<sup>277</sup> Reno wrote directly to Lieutenant General Sheridan blaming the disaster on Custer as well as Colonel John Gibbon, who did not send additional cavalry to Custer's support. As a result, the account goes, Reno had been forced by the mistakes of his superiors to hold off the Sioux with only half the regiment.<sup>278</sup> His 5 July official report reads like a work of fiction, with every Indian rifle being “handled by an expert and skilled marksman,” and “all the desperadoes, renegades, half-breeds and squaw-men between the Missouri and the Arkansas” helping out the entire Sioux nation.<sup>279</sup> In 1922, Colonel W.A. Graham discovered Benteen’s private July 1876 letters while researching the battle. He showed them to Godfrey, who thought them “history” because they were written before the controversy had gained momentum and were therefore presumably free of partisanship. Sadly, both men vastly underestimated Benteen’s capacity for lying. As soon as Benteen had learned that Custer and all five of his companies were dead, he knew he was in the trouble and immediately made plans to fault Custer. During the battle, he had accurately estimated the strength of opposing formations, concluding that between 1,500 and 1,800 warriors were opposing the 7th. Upon learning of Custer’s death two

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<sup>277</sup> Benteen knew of no battle plan because he was expected to figure out the obvious. The article has several things out of order, such as volley firing before joining with Reno, Weir moving out, recalled, then the command moving to Weir Point, etc. Godfrey, “Col. Benteen’s Command,” to the Editor of *The Army and Navy Journal*, 7 August 1876, LBH.

<sup>278</sup> Nichols, *Custer’s Shadow*, 217-219.

<sup>279</sup> Like Custer, Reno declined to mention officers by name, except for Benteen. When Reno was writing his report Lieutenant Edgerly mentioned witnessing the courage of Godfrey and Hare in the rearguard action, saying they deserved brevets. Reno declined to mention either. Godfrey felt he did this so as not to draw a comparison to his retreat from the valley. Edgerly to Godfrey 17 January 1886, LC.

days later, he increased the number to 2,500 and 3,000 in a 4 July letter. He also extended his scouting mission to the left to ten miles. Three years later, he increased the distance to fifteen miles and added thousands of warriors, presenting a ridiculous total 8,000 to 9,000.<sup>280</sup>

Before the year was out, novelist Frederick Whitaker published a gushing 648-page biography, *The Complete Life of Major General George Armstrong Custer*. Encouraged by Elizabeth Custer, he embellished much and was so critical of Major Reno that Reno demanded a Court of Inquiry to clear his name. It was held in January 1879 at Chicago's Palmer House, and twenty-three men testified including most of the officers. Reno was fortunate that Captain Weir, commanding D Company had recently died and Captain Thomas French, who had commanded M Company in the valley, was so plagued by alcoholism that he could not even testify at his own Court Martial and did not appear in Chicago.<sup>281</sup> Not that French had been silent about the Little Bighorn; he had previously said that he should have killed Reno himself during the battle. Captain Frederick Benteen, who had commanded another of the three companies, lied repeatedly on the stand, and could not resist enriching the story so that he, and not Custer was the focal point. He testified to planting a flag on Weir Point, but otherwise painted a picture of a disorganized regiment with no plan by criticizing Custer's conduct of the battle -- conduct that Benteen himself had not been present to witness. The following day, when questioned about the Martin message and his tardiness, Benteen further claimed that Custer and his whole command were already dead when he received the message. Reno

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<sup>280</sup> Graham, *The Custer Myth*, 296-300; Gray, *Centennial Campaign*, 353.

<sup>281</sup> Godfrey was made captain upon Weir's death, 9 December 1876, it would be twenty years before he would see another promotion.

was a target as well. He should have been able to defend himself in the timber for five to six hours according to Benteen.

Reno's lawyer was Lyman D. Gilbert, a former deputy attorney general of Pennsylvania. Gilbert attempted to highlight any testimony about Custer and Benteen that was negative enough make Reno appear less culpable. For example, on the night of 25 June, Reno had struck civilian packer John Frett and leveled a carbine at him, prompting Gilbert to argue that those were hardly the actions of a coward. Gilbert also referred to civilian scout Charlie Reynolds, who died in the valley, as being "unnerved," and noted that Captain Weir had left a wounded man behind. The inference being that many were scared.

Some of the testimony was strange because of its irrelevance. When questioned about Custer's attack, Lieutenant Hare claimed it was not a supporting attack to assist Reno in the valley because Custer's attack obviously failed. Captain E. G. Mathey, who had been with the pack train, repeated a statement made by Lieutenant Charles DeRudio the year before: "If we had not been commanded by a coward we would have been killed."<sup>282</sup> Gilbert now implied that DeRudio's conduct had been questionable, and noted that second guessing was a common theme in the testimonies he was hearing. Dr. Henry Porter, who had been in the valley on 25 June but now in private practice, said that he thought Captain Benteen was in command on Reno Hill.

Godfrey's testimony was damaging to Reno, and would have been worse had he been a witness to the major's conduct in the valley. Even so, he referred to the major as

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<sup>282</sup> Hunt, *COI*, 409.



excited, uninspiring, nervous, and timid. Not only had Reno delayed the Weir Point movement, but Benteen repeatedly had to tell him to charge the Indians.<sup>283</sup> In an attempt at retaliation, Reno said that Godfrey had covered himself with bedding while lying in a depression. Moylan of A Company was the only company commander in the valley able to testify in Chicago and, when questioned by the court's recorder, Lieutenant Jesse Lee, he made the rout from the timber seem almost orderly. Then Reno's lawyer had Moylan repeat the part about Dr. Porter being scared. Only in cross examination did Moylan admit that Porter had performed his duties well, and that he had made the comment in passing a year ago.

Reno was the last witness and, like Benteen, falsified his testimony. Contradicting his own field report, he brazenly said that Custer's five companies were already dead by the time he had left the timber. Trying to minimize his half hour departure to search for his adjutant's body, he said that Lieutenant Hodgson might have only been wounded. Reno's personality did not help him in the 1879 proceedings. He not only heaped praise on himself and denigrated the interpreter and packers for their occupations, but referred to privates as having limited intelligence. Reno repeatedly stated that the only support Custer could have given him was from the rear. This was incorrect. When Custer observed the dilemma that he had put Reno in, he chose to support by a surprise attack on the Indian flank instead of joining his second in command in a bad position. This was something the court tried to get Reno to admit without success. When court reporter Lee noted the vulnerable village before Reno Hill, officers

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<sup>283</sup> Godfrey estimated they fought 3,000 warriors and that the scout to the left was five miles. Some of the civilian testimony was initially quite accurate: Porter estimated 1,000 lodges, and Interpreter Frederick Girard estimated 1,500-2,000 warriors. The following day both revised their estimates upward. Hunt, *COI*, 238, 274, 289, 477, 498.

claimed it was not possible to support Custer by attacking there. In the end, Reno's and Benteen's bold lies and the generally evasive testimony of most of the other witnesses ensured Major Marcus Reno's acquittal.

Seven months later, in August of 1879, Captain Godfrey was assigned to the Military Academy at West Point as a cavalry instructor, and his lectures on the Little Bighorn became the basis for his later writings on the subject.<sup>284</sup> Cadet (later Major General) Benjamin A. Poore was one of his students and recalled afterward that Godfrey was not supportive of Custer. According to Poore, it was "common knowledge that Godfrey held Custer responsible for the needless sacrifice of some of his most valued friends, and that he would not associate with nor even speak to those who defended Custer."<sup>285</sup> But Godfrey's own actions sometimes contradict Poore's account. On at least one occasion, Godfrey reproved Benteen in the presence of some young officers, as he was speaking ill of Custer.<sup>286</sup> Additionally, Elizabeth Custer contacted Godfrey after learning that he had made a speech at West Point praising her husband.<sup>287</sup> One comment

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<sup>284</sup> Godfrey's first major writing on the Little Big Horn, which predates his Century articles, probably began in 1879 at West Point. E. S. Godfrey, "Reminiscences of the Yellowstone Expedition, 1876," [ca. 1880], LC, Ghent collection, box 24, Godfrey file 17.

<sup>285</sup> This comment surprised the historians it was related to and they attempted unsuccessful clarification. Perhaps Poore mistakenly switched Reno for Custer? Graham, *The Custer Myth*, 122. In 1909, Joseph Hanson Mills published a biography on Captain Grant Marsh, who piloted the steamer *Far West* in 1876. Godfrey is credited with assisting throughout the book, and Hanson takes a more sympathetic view of Reno than one being advised by Godfrey would expect. Godfrey is quoted as saying, "Don't forget that Custer told Reno that the whole outfit would *follow* and *support* him. Reno had the advance, and Custer did follow to a point near the Little Big Horn and then branched off to the *right*, but that was not premeditated." Hansen, *Conquest*, 286.

<sup>286</sup> This incident undoubtedly occurred at or prior to West Point. Stahl, *Edward Settle Godfrey*, 105-6.

<sup>287</sup> Shirley A. Leckie, *Elizabeth Bacon Custer and the Making of a Myth* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 230. "Long ago I asked you to be the historian of the

that Benteen had made three days after the battle was especially troubling for Godfrey. He and Benteen were riding across the Custer battlefield on 28 June 1876, critiquing Reno as they went. Said Godfrey, “It’s pretty damn bad” to which Benteen replied, “God, I could tell you things that would make your hair stand on end.” When interrupted by a third party, Benteen clammed up but promised to elaborate later. He delayed, always finding excuses to maintain his silence.

When Benteen visited Godfrey at West Point in 1881, Godfrey cornered him but again they were interrupted and Benteen, probably enjoying himself, had found another excuse to stall. Later that year, at Point Pleasant, New Jersey, the Benteens and Godfreys were on a fishing trip, and Godfrey confronted him about the incident he alluded to on the Custer battlefield. Benteen finally revealed his secret:

Well on the night of the 25th Reno came to me after all the firing had ceased and proposed that we mount every man who could ride, destroy such property as could not be carried, abandon our position and make a forced march back to our supply camp. I asked him what he proposed to do with the wounded, and he said, Oh we’ll have to abandon those that can not ride. I said, “I won’t do it.”<sup>288</sup>

From that point on, Godfrey’s already negative attitude towards Reno became one of unforgiving contempt. He remembered Weir approaching him on the night of 25 June and asking who he would follow if a dispute arose between Reno and Benteen, and he linked the two incidents together. Godfrey theorized that since he and Weir belonged to Benteen’s battalion, Benteen had sent Weir to gauge his support. And despite Benteen’s

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battle.” Elizabeth B. Custer to E. S. Godfrey May 26, 1916 GFP, box 14 ESG correspondence folder. The letter is misdated as Elizabeth Custer references 1917.

<sup>288</sup> Of course, Reno did abandon the wounded in the timber. Benteen’s response varied in the telling from “I won’t do it” to “You can’t do that.” Godfrey to Shoemaker, March 2, 1926, LBH, C -4-128; Remarks of BG Edward S. Godfrey at the Annual Dinner of the *Order of Indian Wars*, 25 January 25 1930, LBH; Graham, *The Custer Myth*, 333.

professed desire to keep Reno's further humiliation quiet, he had told at least four other people. Godfrey finally revealed the episode in a 1926 letter to A. J. Shoemaker, the Secretary of the National Custer Memorial Association, in order to prevent the placing of a monument to Reno. He also revealed the story earlier that same year to the *Boston Post*, but the resulting article attracted little notice.<sup>289</sup> Four years later, when he related the same story at a Washington D.C. *Order of the Indian Wars* dinner, it generated far more publicity.

But was it true? Benteen had made no mention of this during the 1879 Court of Inquiry, and yet his telling of this narrative has been corroborated numerous times. The former captain demonstrated an untroubled capacity for lying and a distorted view of not only Custer but of all the post-war commanders under whom he had served. It would be in character for him to fabricate or misrepresent such a conversation for his own benefit. He cautioned Godfrey and others not to tell the story but, in 1892 -- three years after Reno's death -- he admitted the tale in correspondence with 7th Cavalry veteran and aspiring author, Theodore Goldin.<sup>290</sup> It is interesting how often Reno mentioned that he would not give up his wounded, as if he knew Benteen would use this against him. In a 1908 letter, former Private John McGuire of C Company claimed to have overheard an

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<sup>289</sup> The reporter, Lyday Sloanaker, inquired if Benteen was slow to get to the battlefield and Godfrey related the story of Reno considering abandoning the wounded. Reno was the only participant Godfrey really criticized, in answer to the reporter's inquiry of Benteen's slowness, he simply retold Weir's efforts to hurry Benteen at the morass, without further comment. Godfrey was surprised to see the story printed, as he, in retrospect, naively felt the discussion was confidential. In June 1876 Godfrey saw soldiers desecrating Indian dead found on scaffolds prior to the battle, but mentioned no names. Graham, *The Custer Myth*, 334; Godfrey to Shoemaker, 2 March 1926, LBH, C-4-128; Godfrey, "Custer's Last Battle" (1892), 362.

<sup>290</sup> Goldin claimed to have carried a message from Custer to Reno in the valley which Godfrey wisely doubted. Godfrey letter 19 March 1926. LC, Ghent collection, box 24, Godfrey file 14, 3.

officer meeting on the night of 25 June in which Reno said that he would never leave wounded men behind. As soon as he knew Custer was dead, Benteen had started lying, and that apparently selfless declaration may well have been another invention to shield himself from criticism. Who could fault him for saving the wounded against the wishes of a cowardly commanding officer? Benteen's revelation, lacking corroboration should be discounted even though Godfrey believed him. Godfrey's own predisposition against Reno probably made him accept Benteen's account. Benteen's conniving not only distanced Godfrey from Reno, but made Godfrey even more pro-Custer than he had been; an irony that Custer-hating Benteen must have grasped.<sup>291</sup>

On 25 June 1886 at the tenth anniversary of the Little Bighorn, 1,000 people attended, among them: Gall, Godfrey and Benteen. Elizabeth Custer would never participate, and of course neither would Major Reno. Gall guided Godfrey and others around the battlefield and related the courage of Custer's command. Godfrey assumed an impromptu speaking role, noting that Reno had discharged his pistols and thrown them away during his flight from the timber.<sup>292</sup> His contempt was therefore not only genuine, but unguarded.

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<sup>291</sup> Graham, *The Custer Myth*, 232. After Benteen's death, his private correspondence became known to Godfrey, and it showed him to be an embittered, dishonest man. He disparaged nearly everyone he knew, to include Godfrey. He referred to him as "anything but" a cavalryman and accused him of cowardice.

<sup>292</sup> Reno probably did do this, but if it was anyone else, perhaps Godfrey would not have named the individual. He would also relate it in his upcoming article. Richard Upton, ed., *The Battle of the Little Bighorn and Custer's Last Fight: Remembered by Participants at the Tenth Anniversary June 25, 1886 and the Fiftieth Anniversary June 25, 1926* (El Segundo, CA: Upton & Sons, Publishers, 2006), 19.

Elizabeth "Libbie" Custer had not been idle in her widowhood. She was active in society and published books championing her husband and their life together on the plains, and was angered when an 1890 article blamed him for the Little Bighorn disaster. Later, when critics accused Custer of disobeying orders, she sought out Captain Edward Godfrey to supply the military credibility that she lacked. When Godfrey did not write the desired response, she contacted *Century Magazine* and volunteered him anyway. The result was his well-received "Custer's Last Battle" (1892), whose concise and factual narrative was illustrated by Frederic Remington. Avoiding the usual nineteenth century rhetorical overkill, Godfrey spelled out the reasons for the disaster: Indian numerical advantage, "Reno's panic route from the valley," and defective carbine extraction of spent shells resulting in carbine jams. He also countered an argument that he expected many Civil War veterans to make: some "old soldiers who [had] participated only in battles of the Rebellion" thought Custer too aggressive.<sup>293</sup> According to Godfrey, Custer swung far to the right once he had gotten into trouble in order to capture the non-combatants and pony herds. By this action Custer was trying to demoralize the warriors.

Elizabeth Custer was pleased with the article except for the inclusion of Moylan's comment about Custer not keeping all twelve companies of the regiment together during the campaign.<sup>294</sup> She and the Godfreys remained on good terms ever after. In an 1892 letter, she wrote: "I am and always will be, under lasting obligation to

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<sup>293</sup> The last point, defective carbine extraction, is now largely thought to be overstated. Godfrey, "Custer's Last Battle," (1892), 367. In this article and his other correspondence, Godfrey disagreed the regiment was laden with excess recruits and overly tired. He says he examined the muster rolls of six companies and found few with less than six months service. E.S. Godfrey's letter dated about 19 March 1926, LC, Ghent collection, box 24, Godfrey file 14.

<sup>294</sup> Leckie, *Elizabeth Bacon Custer*, 260-261.

you. In your fearless, outspoken friendship for my husband.”<sup>295</sup> And when Godfrey revised his article in 1908, he deleted Moylan’s statement as Libbie had wished. There were other revisions: First, he added Custer’s division of the regiment into three battalions separated by significant distances as a possible fourth reason for failure. But even with the divided command, he held that if Reno had followed instructions and charged the village “or made a bold front,” Custer’s approach from the northeast would have caused a Sioux “stampede.”<sup>296</sup> In another new paragraph he characterized Reno’s leadership as the cause of “faltering advances,” a “disorganized, panic retreat to the bluffs,” and continual delays to Weir Point.<sup>297</sup> By now Godfrey was an anti-Reno, pro-Custer partisan, so firmly convinced of Reno’s disgrace that he would not write the forward of W.A. Graham’s *The Story of the Little Big Horn*, unless his friend Graham portrayed Custer more favorably.<sup>298</sup>

Edward S. Godfrey’s career spanned forty years and the Little Bighorn was not his last action; he would command the Department of the Missouri and achieve brigadier general rank in 1907. Like all who had survived the battle, he continued to dwell on the sight of his dead and mutilated friends as well as the possible alternate outcomes. A

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<sup>295</sup> Elizabeth wrote him congratulating him the day before his upcoming marriage. After his wife Mary died in 1883, he remarried in 1892. GFP, box 14, Elizabeth B. Custer-E.S. Godfrey Correspondence, 1892, 1910, 1916, letter dated 5 October but no year.

<sup>296</sup> Edward S. Godfrey, “Custer’s Last Battle,” with 1921 postscript, *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana*, vol. IX, 205-206. He also disputes the fallacious notion that Custer and the Terry/Gibbon column were somehow to unite on 26 June and trap the Indians between them, noting there was no talk of this before the battle.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 210-211.

<sup>298</sup> Graham, *The Custer Myth*, 217.

witness to Reno's failures, invigorated by Benteen's lie, and coopted by Elizabeth Custer, he wrote the definitive participant account of the battle and became part of the partisan bickering about who was to blame. And the more he learned, the more his position against Reno hardened. He, and not Custer was the catalyst of defeat for the 7th Cavalry.

Although the plains tribes were skilled warriors and expert raiders, their ability to conduct large conventional battles in the Euro-American sense, was less than impressive. The Sioux's most memorable victories were more lost by Army regiments and companies' mistakes than won by tribal war parties.<sup>299</sup> Warriors responsible for feeding and protecting their families could not sustain an extended campaign no matter how well they could ride, shoot, or survive in a hostile but familiar environment. Soldiers -- even poorly trained ones -- could, no matter how much an Indian's warrior skills might intimidate them in the short run. Handicapped by their continual need to hunt, provide, and protect, the plains tribes obeyed those cultural norms, making sustained combat not only tactically unrealistic, but a threat to their social fabric. Frontier commanders understood the power of an organized, disciplined column and often attacked numerically superior Indian forces knowing that their own more organized approach would prevail.

Custer mistakenly split his regiment into four smaller parts, but he quickly realized his error and took repeated action to consolidate his force. The 7th's defeat was the fault of two inadequate officers, one unable to lead effectively under the stress of combat and the other, sluggishly errant. Reno bolstered and accelerated the destruction of Custer's wing. Benteen's tardiness is secondary to Reno's gross ineptitude but, if

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<sup>299</sup> In 1854, Lieutenant John L. Gratton marched thirty men into a Sioux village and in 1866, Captain William J. Fetterman led eighty men into a large Sioux ambush, there were no survivors in either engagement.



Benteen had hurried, he might have prevented Reno's disastrous valley flight. Even with a steadier major and a senior captain operating with a due sense of urgency, there would have been severe casualties. But the 7th could have won.

Godfrey recognized Reno's rout from the timber as the cause of the 7th Cavalry's defeat at the Little Bighorn. His steadfast maintenance of that argument and his association with Elizabeth Custer, whose bias was obvious, resulted in his negative portrayal by historians taking the opposite view. Frederic Van de Water's 1934, *Glory-Hunter: A Life of General Custer* incorrectly portrays Godfrey as dedicated to preserving the memory of his hero, George Custer.<sup>300</sup> As a young lieutenant Godfrey sought assignment to the 7th Cavalry because Custer was its de facto commander, yet he did not join the Custer inner-circle and remained nonpartisan. This is evident by his noted criticisms of his commander and that Custer never had Godfrey stationed with him as he did other more supportive officers. Godfrey did criticize Custer's actions but not at the Little Bighorn where, in light of what was known, his tactical decisions were correct. Godfrey's 1908, revisions to his "Custer's Last Battle" article, even the deletion of Captain Myles Moylan's division of the regiment comment, were correct with the possible overstatement of the firearm extraction issue. Moylan's, after the fact declaration, was precisely what Custer was trying to rectify, and the captain had a hand in thwarting that effort. The Little Bighorn is the singular frontier event easily recognized by the vast majority of the general public. Nearly universal is the notion that Custer's poor generalship was the impetus causing the loss of the battle. Godfrey stated, "I have

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<sup>300</sup> Van de Water, *Glory-Hunter*, 18.

no desire to pose as the special champion of General Custer...My only purpose is to demonstrate the truth.”<sup>301</sup> The 7th Cavalry’s defeat at the Little Bighorn deserves careful study and Godfrey’s explanation of events ring true today as much as they did in 1892.

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<sup>301</sup> Cyrus Townsend Brady *Indian Fights and Fighters: The Soldier and the Sioux* (NY: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1904), 388.

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### Primary Sources

Carroll, John M., ed. *The Benteen-Goldin Letters on Custer and His Last Battle*. New York: John M. Carroll, 1974; reprint, Lincoln: Bison Book, 1991.

These are the private letters between retired Major Frederick Benteen and former 7th Cavalry Private Theodore Goldin, the latter sold them upon Benteen's death. They are highly inflammatory, misleading and portray a dishonest Benteen, who even contradicts himself in his own letters.

-----, ed. *Custer's Chief of Scouts: The Reminiscences of Charles A. Varnum Including his Testimony at the Reno Court of Inquiry*. Glendale, CA: A.H. Clark, 1982; reprint, 2nd ed. Lincoln: Bison Book, 1987.

Varnum, along with Luther Hare rarely spoke of the Little Bighorn, but on Varnum's death his manuscript was discovered. In charge of the Indian scouts he got little sleep in the two days before the battle. Prior to the fight all assumed it would be a pursuit plan, a "cowboy roundup." He saved his West Point roommate, G Company's, Lieutenant George D. Wallace's life on 25 June 1876. Wallace was detailed to regimental headquarters and was to accompany Custer's wing, but Varnum asked Custer if he could accompany Reno's force into the valley.

Carroll, John, M., and Dr. Frost, Lawrence, A., eds., *Private Theodore Ewert's Diary of the Black Hills Expedition of 1874*. Piscataway, NJ: Consultant Resources Incorporated, 1976.

Discovered in 1970, Ewert's diary was composed sometime after the Black Hills expedition as evident by the narrative care of the writing. The beautiful scenery, valley's full of game and immense flower beds are offset by the hard marching and burnt prairies necessitating the killing of some fifty cavalry mounts who were too weak to continue. The era's notorious nepotism, often portrayed as a widely-condoned practice, got no favor from the author who noted Custer's habit of assigning unqualified family members to government positions. Ewert grudgingly admired Custer's navigational skills, even taking the lead when the scouts became confused, and his talent for getting things done. He also noted Custer's callousness towards his men, being unconcerned with their injuries, and not even attending burials. The editors included Custer's report of the expedition to the War Department in which he enthusiastically extolls the agricultural and mineral virtues of the region. At no point does Custer mention the supposed purpose of the expedition, sites for a Black Hills fort, revealing that the expedition's true motive was a search for gold and accessibility into the region.

Custer, George A. *My Life on the Plains*. Originally published 1874; reprint, Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1993.

Custer's frontier autobiography is very entertaining but should be read with care, it is his portrayal of events. He makes some insightful observations of Indians, they fight with excessive caution and he notes each soldier should carry 100 rounds on their person, a recommendation not followed at the Little Bighorn. He usually neglected to give officers credit in his official reports but does occasionally mention them in his book.

Godfrey, Edward S. "Custer's Last Battle." *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 43, (January 1892): 358-384.

A straight forward telling of the 7th Cavalry's 1876 campaign. Godfrey writes plainly and without exaggeration. It is the most comprehensive published participant account.

------. "Cavalry Fire Discipline." *Journal of the Military Service Institution* 29, no. 83 (September 1896); reprint, *By Valor and Arms: The Journal of American Military History* (1976): 31-36.

A short explanation of his retrograde movements at the Washita and Little Bighorn, with comments on Wounded Knee. Godfrey observed three rules about developing a capable army - character, discipline and drill – in that order.

------. "Custer's Last Battle." Revised in 1908 with a 1921 postscript. *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana*, 9: 142-212.

An update to his 1892 publication with additions and deletions. Reno's failures are highlighted even more than the 1892 edition.

------. "Some Reminiscences, Including an Account of General Sully's Expedition Against the Southern Plains Indians, 1868." *The Cavalry Journal* 36, no. 148 (July 1927): 417-25.

There is surprisingly little material concerning Sully's 1868 Indian campaign and Godfrey's account is a necessary supplement. Sully was an experienced frontier commander but this effort was not his best.

------. "The Death of General Custer." *The Cavalry Journal* 36, no. 148 (July 1927): 469-471.

Godfrey's response to recurring rumors that Custer committed suicide.

------. "Some Reminiscences, Including the Washita Battle, November 27, 1868." *The Cavalry Journal* 37, no. 153 (October 1928): 481-500.

A valuable addition to Washita history written in Godfrey's careful style.

Godfrey Family Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Twenty-one boxes concerning Edward Godfrey and his family. Correspondence, photographs, newspaper clippings, obituaries, and detailed family history. Essential files for Godfrey's family history and career. By becoming the 7th's Little Bighorn historian he noted scarcely a month went by without someone inquiring to him about the battle.

Hardorff, Richard G., ed. *Washita Memories: Eyewitness Views of Custer's Attack on Black Kettle's Village*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006.

Forty-three participant interviews or published aspects of the Washita battle. Many of the accounts are available at historical sites but the book's inclusion provides easy first-hand testimony.

Hunt, Brian V. *Reno Court of Inquiry: Conduct at the Battle of the Little Big Horn River June 25-26, 1876*. Originally published in 1964 from National Archives microfilm; reprint, Lexington, KY: Big Byte Books, 2015.

An essential book for understanding the Little Bighorn, the word for word testimony of the 1879 Reno Court of Inquiry, all 723 pages. The Court well knew the options available to the Reno and Benteen officers, especially an assault on the village after his retreat from the valley to assist Custer. Both claimed Custer's command was already annihilated before Reno left the timber to cover their lack of aggression. Unlike a Court Martial a Court of Inquiry is limited in its questioning but the testimony captures the falsehoods of many in the 7th.

Keim, De Benneville Randolph. *Sheridan's Troopers on the Borders: A Winter Campaign on the Plains; An Account of the Lifeways of the "Horse" Indians in 1868*. Originally published in 1870; reprint, Glorieta, NM: The Rio Grande Press, 1977.

Correspondent Keim accompanied the Army in 1868-1869 on the southern plains and made many careful insights without hyperbole.

Marquis, Thomas B. *Memoirs of a White Crow Indian (Thomas H. Leforge)*. New York: Century Co., 1928; reprint, Lincoln: Bison Book, 1974.

Leforge was not at the Little Bighorn but was close friends with Mitch Boyer, Custer's scout, and had an intimate knowledge of the Crow Indians and their wars with the Sioux. He denies Curley, the Crow scout, was the sole survivor of the battle and relates that Curley said he even fled quickly.

McClermand, Edward J. "With the Indian and the Buffalo in Montana." *The Cavalry Journal* 35, no. 145 (October 1926): 500-511 and 36, no. 146 (January 1927): 7-54.

McClernand was a 2nd Cavalry officer who helped relieve the troops on Reno Hill, and examined the Custer battlefield. He noted the heavy 7th Cavalry criticism of Major Reno on 27 June.

Mills, Anson. *My Story*. Washington D.C.: Anson Mills, 1918; reprint, Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003.

Mills was a 3rd Cavalry officer, also not present at the Little Bighorn, but delivered the news of the battle to Brigadier General Crook, whose reaction was strange. His comments on West Point, the frontier army, and Indian policy are informative. He addresses desertion and the underlying problem of deficient pay, a penny-wise but pound-foolish strategy.

Overfield, Loyd J., II. *The Little Big Horn, 1876: The Official Communications, Documents and Reports with Rosters of the Officers and Troops of the Campaign*. Glendale, CA: A. H. Clark, 1971; reprint, 2nd ed. Lincoln: Bison Book, 1990.

A convenient publishing of the orders and rosters of the units involved with the Little Bighorn campaign. Most of the documents came from The National Archives, Old Military Records Section.

Putnam County Historical Society. *Putnam County Pioneer Reminiscences, 1878-1887*. nos. 1 and 2, Ottawa, OH: Putnam County Pioneer Association, 1878 and 1887; reprint, n.p.: Whipporwill Publication, 1981.

Provides essential background information about the residents of Putnam County, Ohio to include Dr. Charles M. Godfrey Sr. It is interviews with residents conducted in 1878-1887.

Stewart, Edgar I., and Jane R. Stewart, eds. *The Field Diary of Lt. Edward S. Godfrey Commanding Co. K, 7th Cavalry Regiment under Lt. Colonel George Armstrong Custer in the Sioux Encounter at the Battle of the Little Big Horn: Covering the Period from May 17, 1876 when the Expedition Commanded by Brigadier Alfred H. Terry left Ft. Abraham Lincoln, Bismarck, Dakota Territory until the Return of the Battered Regiment a Few Days after September 24, 1876 to the Same Place*. Portland, OR: Champoege Press, 1957. Reproduced from the collections of the Manuscript Division, LC.

This is Godfrey's field diary of the Little Bighorn campaign. An unaltered telling of what he thought in May and June 1876.

Utley, Robert M., ed. *Life in Custer's Cavalry: Diaries and Letters of Albert and Jennie Barnitz, 1867-1868*. New Haven: Robert M. Utley, 1977; reprint, 2nd ed., Lincoln: Bison Book, 1987.

Letters between Albert Barnitz and his wife, and an important view of Godfrey in his first posting after West Point. At first, Barnitz was often negative of Godfrey, fortunately Godfrey matured.

Westfall, Paul, ed., *Letters from the field: Wallace at the Little Bighorn*. Orange, CA: The Paragon Agency Publishers, 1997.

A collection of letters Lieutenant George D. Wallace wrote in 1876, before and after the Little Bighorn. His July 4, 1876 letter estimated Indian numbers at 3,000 warriors. Yet at the Court of Inquiry he testified to thinking 4,000 to 5,000 in 1876 and in 1879 claimed there were 9,000 warriors. His 4 July 1876 letter directly contradicts his earlier claims and may give credence that he intentionally altered his testimony to protect his superiors.

Wheeler, Homer W. *The Frontier Trail or From Cowboy to Colonel: An Authentic Narrative of Forty-Three Years in the Old West as Cattleman, Indian Fighter and Army Officer*. Los Angeles: Times-Mirror Press, 1923; reprint, Ozark, MO: Dogwood Printing, 1990.

The author was a rancher and post trader who actively participated in the 1875 Sappa Creek, Kansas fight with the 6th Cavalry and Cheyenne. He so impressed the Army he was offered a commission and retired as a colonel after more than three decades in uniform. His book is very readable and although not a member of the 7th Cavalry his frontier observations are always interesting.

## Secondary Sources

### Books

Adams, George Rollie. *General William S. Harney: Prince of Dragoons*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004.

Retired General William Harney was at the 1868 Medicine Lodge Treaties, had previous experience with the Plains tribes, and was surprisingly liked by Native Americans. Adams details his long, successful career and his practical recommendations to better combat Indians. His violent temper, and his condemnation of peaceful Indians are curious. Harney's attempt to trick the Sioux into believing he possessed magic, by drugging a dog and bringing it back to life, only to have it die is covered. Despite his faults, Harney, was a capable frontier commander and astute negotiator who well understood the Plains tribes.

Barnett, Louise. *Touched by Fire: The Life, Death, and Mythic Afterlife of George Armstrong Custer*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996.

Barnett's book has long been considered a mainstay of Custer history; she was one of the first modern writers to relate the story of the abandonment of the wounded at the Little Bighorn. She also discusses the dangers of Indian captivity and Elizabeth (Libbie's) influence after her husband's death. Elizabeth lived fifty-seven years after her husband and devoted her life to shaping his memory. In Barnett's book, Elizabeth, plays a strong supporting role. Barnett is not afraid to plainly tell the truth, noting at Custer's last battle, the Crow scouts took the "low road" and abandoned the 7th Cavalry. She relates the Lakota, or Sioux, fought against at least twenty-six other tribes and were an empire in their own right. Conventional wisdom held the Army, no matter the odds, should always attack Native Americans before they "scattered."

Carroll, John, M. *They Rode with Custer: A Biographical Directory of the Men that Rode with General George A. Custer*. Mattituck, NY: J. M. Carroll & Company, 1993.

Carroll lists many details and facts about the participants at the Little Bighorn. Rank, dates of enlistment, birth, disciplinary issues, manner of death, even mini-biographies, and a good book to fact check against, though there are occasional errors. He lists everyman in Godfrey's K Company.

Collins, Charles D. *The Cheyenne Wars Atlas*. Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 2010.

Detailed study of the combat operations of the 1868-1869 southern plains Cheyenne campaigns. Collins is very straight forward and includes helpful graphics and conclusions. Collins's fifty-one diagrams are easy to follow and very much help with understanding the terrain and troop and Indian movements.

Day, Carl F. *Tom Custer: Ride to Glory*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002.

A biography on George Custer's neglected younger brother, Thomas, who also served in the 7th Cavalry and died at the Little Bighorn. Day details the nepotism, poor pay and general diet and living conditions frontier soldiers had to endure while never forgetting his subject's humorous side. Tom Custer served throughout the Civil War in Godfrey's old unit, the 21st Ohio, and was twice awarded the Medal of Honor.

Dippie, Brian, W. *Custer's Last Stand: The Anatomy of an American Myth*. Lincoln: Brian W. Dippie, 1976; reprint, Lincoln: Bison Book, 1994.

Dippie covers the fascination with the "Last Stand" myth at the Little Bighorn and throughout history. Also, the culture and character of nineteenth century America, particularly the sentimentalism and the popularity of the Anheuser-Busch lithograph of "Custer's Last Stand" being perhaps responsible for the visual image of the 7th Cavalry's demise.

Dixon, Olive K. *Life of "Billy" Dixon: Plainsman, Scout and Pioneer*. Dallas: P.L. Turner, 1927; reprint, Austin, TX: State House Press, 1987.



The book is about a witness to the Medicine Lodge conference who later went on to become a buffalo hunter and Army scout on the Southern Plains. Written by his wife, the biography is an honest and straightforward rendering of Dixon's life without drama. Selling his pistol to Native Americans at Medicine Lodge, stampedes, and crossing the "deadline" in search of bison, all told plainly make the book a credible source. His comments on the reaction to Indian torture and the terror it inspired in some is a common theme throughout the settlement of the frontier.

Ellis, Richard N. *General Pope and US Indian Policy*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1970.

Pope was not directly connected with the events of Godfrey's life but the book does touch on General Alfred Sully's Santee Sioux campaigns and the issues facing a Department commander. Sully led part of the 7th Cavalry in 1868. Pope's careful observations and recommendations are accurate and insightful. He advocated only simple peace treaties with Native Americans, refusing to "bribe" them with peace offerings. Sully's observed the easiest way to defeat Native Americans is to incorporate them into civilization where alcohol and dependence on government largesse will render them harmless.

Fougera, Katherine Gibson. *With Custer's Cavalry*. Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1940; reprint, 2nd ed., Lincoln: Bison Book, 1940.

Katherine Gibson, the wife of Captain Francis Gibson, a 7th Cavalry officer, left her memoirs which were compiled by her daughter and published. She relates that Godfrey's sister, Zoe, during her visit to Fort Rice, was nearly killed in a carriage accident. Though sometimes repeating false information the book's value is as a social history of the officers and their wives. Glimpses of personalities emerge, rare in most history books.

Graham, W. A. *The Custer Myth: A Source Book of Custeriana*. New York: Bonanza Books, 1953.

Detailed source book of the Little Bighorn that includes later events and debates by military officers, Indian leaders, and historians. Colonel Graham was a scrupulously honest observer, who even published the letter exchange between himself and retired Captain R.G. Carter, who greatly disagreed with Graham. Carter's straightforward blame of Reno and his absolute reluctance to assert himself are hard to disagree with. Several chapters are devoted to Godfrey and the book includes many primary documents.

Gray, John S. *The Centennial Campaign: The Sioux War of 1876*. Fort Collins, Colorado: The Old Army Press, 1976; reprint, 3rd ed., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988.

Covers the entire campaign of 1876 leading up and after the Custer fight. Puts to rest many misconceptions like Indian numbers, and large amounts of 7th Cavalry recruits on the battlefield. Also details the myths, like Terry claiming the different Army columns were maneuvering to trap the Sioux between them. This was only said later to shift blame onto Custer and off Terry. Gray details Colonel John Gibbon's failures, gaining intelligence on the hostiles twice but inexplicitly failing to inform others and the farce the campaign degenerated into after Custer's death. Interesting tidbits are related, staff officers refusing to speak to each other and an infantry line officer appointed Acting Surgeon.

------. *Custer's Last Campaign: Mitch Boyer and the Little Bighorn Reconstructed*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991.

Gray's second book uses time-motion analysis to thoroughly detail the Little Bighorn battle. He proves that Custer launched his attack early and as a diversion to support Reno's ill-advised flight from the timber. Benteen's delay and Reno's inaction doomed Custer to utter defeat. Gray incorrectly concludes the Crow scout, Curley, was with Custer on his section of the battlefield, in fact, as Godfrey notes, Curly fled early.

Greene, Jerome A. *Yellowstone Command: Colonel Nelson A. Miles and the Great Sioux War 1876-1877*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991.

This book is about the aftermath of the Little Bighorn and the campaigning done by the ever-vigorous Colonel Nelson A. Miles, who, perhaps surprisingly, was an admirer of Custer. One of the few commanders involved in the 1876 Sioux War whose reputation was enhanced.

------. *Washita: The U.S. Army and the Southern Cheyennes, 1867-1869*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004.

A careful study of the 1867-1869 southern plains campaigns and events. Greene notes, Sully's campaign failure just encouraged the tribesmen.

Grinnell, George Bird. *The Cheyenne Indians: Their History and Ways of Life*. Vol. 1. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923; reprint, 6th ed., Lincoln: University of Bison Book, 1972.

This is a detailed account of Cheyenne life, history, and traditions. Valuable in relating the predominance of Cheyenne warrior culture and how it was overrepresented in all aspects of tribal life. For example, warriors presided over ceremonies that had nothing to do with war, but still required a warrior for prestige. Insights like hunting for survival was laborious and never for recreation let us better understand their culture.

------. *The Fighting Cheyennes*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915; 7th ed., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983.

Told from the Cheyenne viewpoint, but unlike his previous work more suited for general audiences. He does detail the camp layouts at the Medicine Lodge council and explain the Cheyenne soldier societies.

Halaas, David Fridtjof, and Andrew E. Masich. *Halfbreed: The Remarkable True Story of George Bent – Caught Between the Worlds of the Indian and the White Man*. Boston: Da Capo Press, 2004.

George Bent spent much of his life as an interpreter and had an informed position to observe the events of the 1860s and 1870s on the southern plains. He related that Custer's scout, Edmund Guerrier, intentionally led him away from the Cheyenne and the book is useful for relating the 7th Cavalry's early campaigns.

Hanson, Joseph Mills. *The Conquest of the Missouri: The Story of the Life and Exploits of Captain Grant Marsh*. Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1909; reprint, Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003.

Godfrey assisted the author with advice and facts, Hanson seems to claim Godfrey supported Reno not Custer in the aftermath of the Little Bighorn. He relates many interesting and revealing instances of the period and the river trade. Grant Marsh was paid \$1200 a month for his steamboat services and the *Far West* was rented at \$360 a day. Some of Godfrey's letters are quoted including one noting that officers were better cared for in death than the men. Marsh incorrectly relates stories favorable to Terry, like the supposed 26 June Army convergence on the Little Bighorn. As a witness after the fact, Marsh, was no doubt influenced by Terry and his officers attempting to make themselves less culpable.

Harcey, Dennis W. and Croone, Brian, R. with Medicine Crow, Joe. *White-Man-Runs-Him (Crow Scout with Custer)*. Evanston, IL: Evanston Publishing Inc., 1993.

The book is a reference for information before the Little Bighorn, like Indian life and warfare, Crow scout resistance to Army discipline and the subject's backstory. The discrepancies White Man Runs Him, a Crow scout with Custer, relates about the Little Bighorn demonstrate the level of deception used to explain his flight. Custer is portrayed as drunk and having a death wish, and incredibly White Man Runs Him puts himself on Last Stand Hill, only escaping at Custer's personal urging. At the end of the book the portrayal of Custer's death is absurd.

Hedren, Paul, L. *Powder River: Disastrous Opening of the Great Sioux War*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016.

Analysis of the Army's first move against the Sioux, the poorly-executed March 1876 attack on a Cheyenne village. In overall command was Brigadier General George Crook, who, like Custer, and most successful commanders, radiated confidence. Prior to the campaign he telegraphed messages detailing Indian dispositions to Custer. Crook's

subordinates, 3rd Cavalrymen, Colonel Joseph J. Reynolds and Captain Alexander Moore, badly botched the Powder River fight. Both had spotty records and Crook appears to have been motivated by simple goodwill to give them have a chance to reclaim their reputations. The book also details the environmental hazards of high plains campaigning in the frigid months.

Hoig, Stan. *The Peace Chiefs of the Cheyennes*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.

Details the hazards the Cheyenne found themselves in the latter 19th century and the divisions between the peace chiefs and the more warlike factions. The book is mostly on the southern plains conflicts and is a good background for events just before Godfrey arrived in the West.

Innis, Ben. *Bloody Knife: Custer's Favorite Scout*. Bismarck, ND: Smoky Water Press, 1994.

Study of Bloody Knife's life and the events around the Upper Missouri, particularly Fort Buford. Fred Gerard, who served with the 7th Cavalry and testified at the Court of Inquiry is often mentioned. Bloody Knife's anger when Custer, in 1874, refused to allow him to kill captured Sioux, underlines Native American attitudes to inter-tribal war.

Jackson, Donald. *Custer's Gold: The United States Cavalry Expedition of 1874*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966; reprint, 6th ed., Lincoln: Bison Book, 1972.

Jackson's sole focus is the, nearly bloodless, 1874 expedition. Godfrey served as the second officer in K Company and led a mapping team.

Jones, Douglas C. *The Treaty of Medicine Lodge: The Story of the Great Treaty Council as Told by Eyewitnesses*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966.

The main book on the 1868 Medicine Lodge Treaty Council, often seen through the eyes of the newspaper correspondents that attended. Facts about the council are related like Comanche being the dominant language, the interpreter being paid \$583.65, and the timeline of events. General William Harney's astute diplomacy and interest in Native Americans stands in contrast to many of the attending politician's actions.

Kroeker, Marvin E. *Great Plains Command: William B. Hazen in the Frontier West*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976.

Thoroughly researched telling of an officer who repeatedly clashed with Custer. Hazen was a hardworking and generally honest officer but, as Kroeker makes clear, reframed from angering dishonest superiors who could hurt his career.

Leckie, Shirley A. *Elizabeth Bacon Custer and the Making of a Myth*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993.

Focuses on Elizabeth Custer and the role she played in perpetuating her husband's legacy. She did encourage Godfrey's assistance, particularly in the *Century* articles and ensuring that no statue was put up to honor Major Reno.

McDermott, John D. *A Guide to the Indian Wars of the West*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.

This is a good background book to the Indian Wars in the West, explaining such things as the Indian Ring, Army strength totals year by year, lack of marksmanship training, and promotions. An officer joining the Army in 1867 averaged twenty-eight years' service before making captain.

Mills, Charles K. *Harvest of Barren Regrets: The Army Career of Frederick William Benteen 1834-1898*. Glendale, CA: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1985.

Written from Benteen's viewpoint though the author is not blind to his subject's faults. Well researched and factual, it is especially valuable regarding the Washita campaign. This book is essential to understanding Benteen's personality, the outward calm but inner rage. The reader will perhaps sympathize with Benteen's hatred of Custer, fully detailing the latter's selfishness and occasional unconcern for his men.

Milner, Joe E., and Forrest, Earle R. *California Joe: Noted Scout and Indian Fighter*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987.

A relatively unknown book that covers Custer's friend, Joe Milner, the Washita campaign scout. The author notes Custer's exaggerations, claiming Major Joel Elliott was outnumbered 100 to 1, "California Joe's" exceptional salary of \$100 a month, and how officers were buried separately from their men.

Nichols, Ronald H. *In Custer's Shadow: Major Marcus Reno*. The Old Army Press, 1999; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000.

This book attempts to soften the criticism of Major Reno and sympathetically portray a man haunted by the battle. In 1874, while stationed in Louisiana Godfrey's wife was marginally involved in a scandal concerning Reno. Thorough on Reno's career detailing the long stretches officers were allowed to be off duty, eleven months at one point for Reno, and the vast amount of time spent sitting on court martial boards, he sat on at least ten. Nichols will not defend Reno's deflating of the number of troops he commanded in the Little Bighorn valley to make himself appear even more outnumbered. Reno was also excluded, presumably on purpose by Custer, from the planning sessions before the Little Bighorn. This probably influenced Reno's subsequent distrust of Custer.

Philbrick, Nathaniel. *The Last Stand: Custer, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of the Little Bighorn*. New York: Viking, 2010.

Philbrick theorizes that Custer was always on the offensive at the Little Bighorn. After realizing he should have kept the regiment together, Custer compounded this error in further pushing his column to the “right.” The prudent course would have been to retrace his steps to Reno in the valley but Custer would not give up the chance for an unexpected offensive strike. He also relates Godfrey’s confession that Custer’s body was in fact mutilated and speculates that Tom Custer may have killed his wounded brother to prevent the latter’s torture. Perceptively he gives some credence to the narrative of Private Peter Thompson who has long been dismissed as unreliable. Thompson claimed to have seen Custer, by himself, riding along the banks of the Little Bighorn River just before the battle.

Robinson, Charles M. *Satanta: The Life and Death of a War Chief*. Austin, TX: State House Press, 1997.

Robinson covers the life of Kiowa Chief Satanta. He was present at Medicine Lodge and clashed with the 7th Cavalry on the southern plains. The book details continual Indian raiding in spite of the peace treaty, and the ultimate removal to reservations for the Kiowa. His telling of Indian agent, Jesse Leavenworth, demanding the Army arrest the raiding and ransom seeking Satanta was interesting. Instead, Army officers paid him his ransom.

Sarf, Wayne Michael. *The Little Bighorn Campaign March-September 1876*. Conshohocken, PA: Combined Books, 1993.

Informative and well researched with sidebars that further detail the history of the campaign. For example, his depiction of the “Reno-Benteen Defensive Site” and his section on “Orders or Suggestions” are quite good. Sarf notes that Custer was beaten by an enemy with literally no strategy at all. It is hard to find a mistake in the book and equally interesting that so many books since this one echo his conclusions.

Sklenar, Larry. *To Hell with Honor: Custer and the Little Bighorn*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000.

The author is thoroughly disgusted with Major Marcus Reno and feels Lieutenant George Wallace altered his 1879 testimony to protect him. He notes the lying both Reno and Benteen did to obscure their lack of action. They admitted to hearing Custer’s initial firing and both lied under oath denying it.

Stiles, T. J. *Custer’s Trials: A Life on the Frontier of a New America*. 4th ed., New York: Vintage Books, 2015.

A proponent of Custer the war leader, acknowledging his courage and tactical ability, but takes him to task on nearly everything else. Brings to light Custer’s political

side as well as the dislike between himself and Ulysses S. Grant. The Custer marriage may not have been as idyllic as often portrayed. Stiles shuns Frederick Benteen as a source, correctly noting his unreliability. He is too fixated on presentism, especially in racial matters, but the book is very entertaining and factual.

Utley, Robert M. *Cavalier in Buckskin: George Armstrong Custer and the Western Military Frontier*. 2nd ed., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989.

A short book with the emphasis, as the title suggests, on Custer's western career. Utley notes that whatever Custer's faults combat leadership was not one of them. He quotes Colonel Nelson Miles in the aftermath of the Little Bighorn, "The more I see of movements here the more admiration I have for Custer, and I am satisfied his like will not be found very soon again." However, Utley notes Custer's egotism and selfishness.

Van de Water, Frederic F. *Glory-Hunter: A Life of General Custer*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1934; reprint, 2nd ed., Lincoln: Bison Book, 1988.

An entertaining but over-the-top negative view of Custer. The author corresponded with Godfrey and termed his book "fiction with as authentic an historical background" as possible.

Wert, Jeffrey D. *Custer: The Controversial Life of George Armstrong Custer*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.

Wert's book is well-written and researched, a complete biography of Custer's life, the majority covering the Civil War. Custer's darker side emerges when he had his men flogged in violation of the law and threatened to horsewhip officers who angered him.

### Other

Dillard, Walter Scott. *The United States Military Academy, 1865-1900: The Uncertain Years*. Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1972.

An essential book to understand the post-Civil War West Point, the entrance requirements, and particularly political sponsorship. Thoroughly relates how Congressmen used West Point appointments for patronage gain.

Merkel, Charles, E. Jr. *Custer's Forgotten Lieutenant: Thomas B. Weir*. Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1996.

Details the unfortunate life of Thomas Weir, a 7th Cavalry company commander and vocal Custer partisan. Merkel concludes Custer's reported 1867 anger at Weir was because he let his wife, Libbie, wander past the sentries in Indian country possibly endangering her life. Weir's relationship with Elizabeth Custer was strictly platonic. Weir was in Custer's inner circle and was the officer who showed the most initiative in

advancing towards Custer on 25 June. His excessive drinking ended his life early and the author notes one out of twenty-five soldiers in that era were hospitalized for alcoholism.



## APPENDIX



Figure 1

Young Edward, his father Dr. Charles Godfrey, his stepmother Jane, and his sister Elizabeth, who would pass away at age fourteen, circa 1848. Courtesy of U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.



Figure 2

First Lieutenant Edward S. Godfrey, circa 1869. Courtesy of U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.



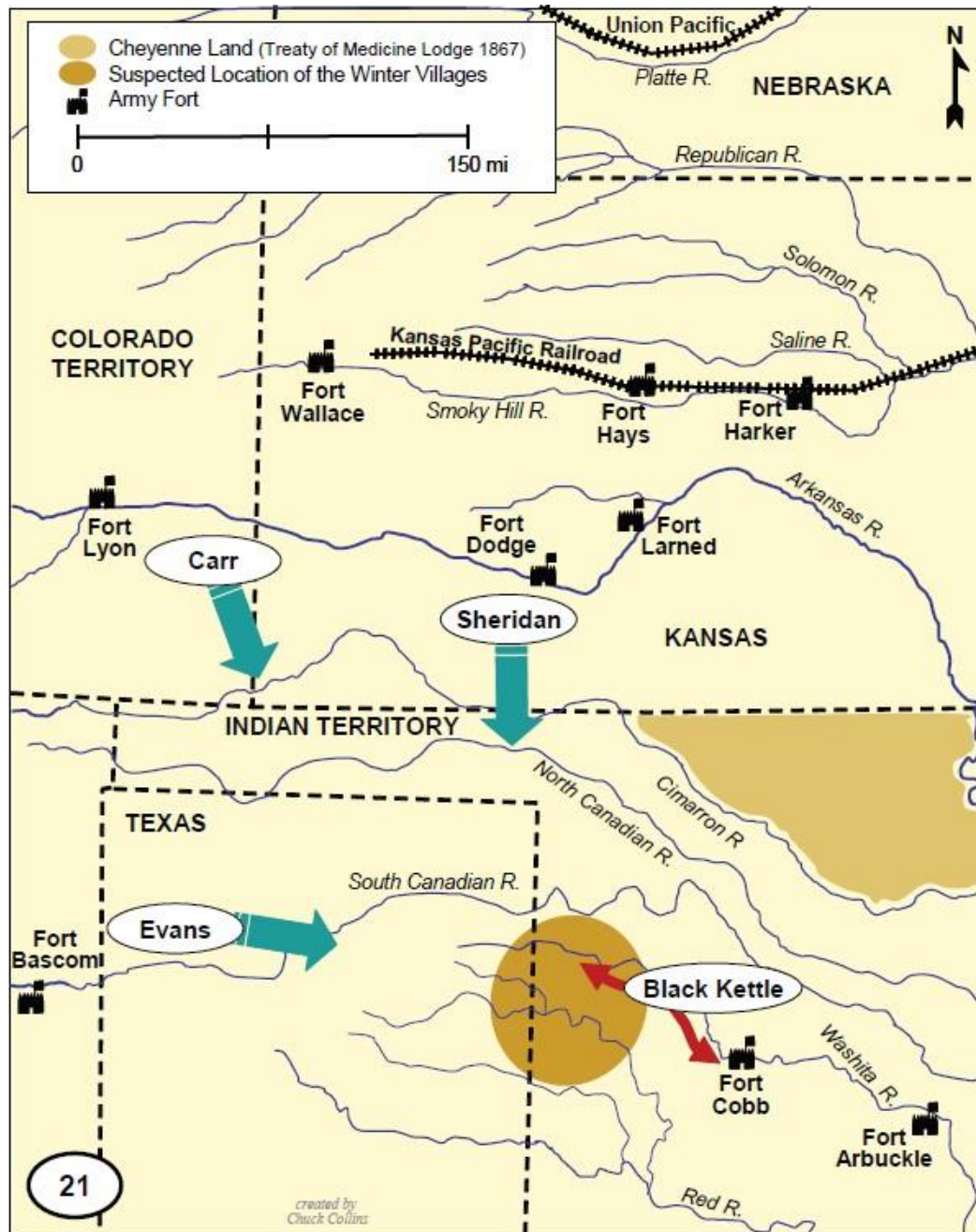


Figure 3

U.S. Army forts in Kansas, 1868. Note the westward advance of the Kansas Pacific Railroad, the year previous to the east of Fort Harker. In blue are the converging Army columns moving into Indian Territory and Texas in the winter of 1868. The 7th Cavalry was with Lieutenant General Phil Sheridan. Courtesy of Charles D. Collins. *The Cheyenne Wars Atlas*.

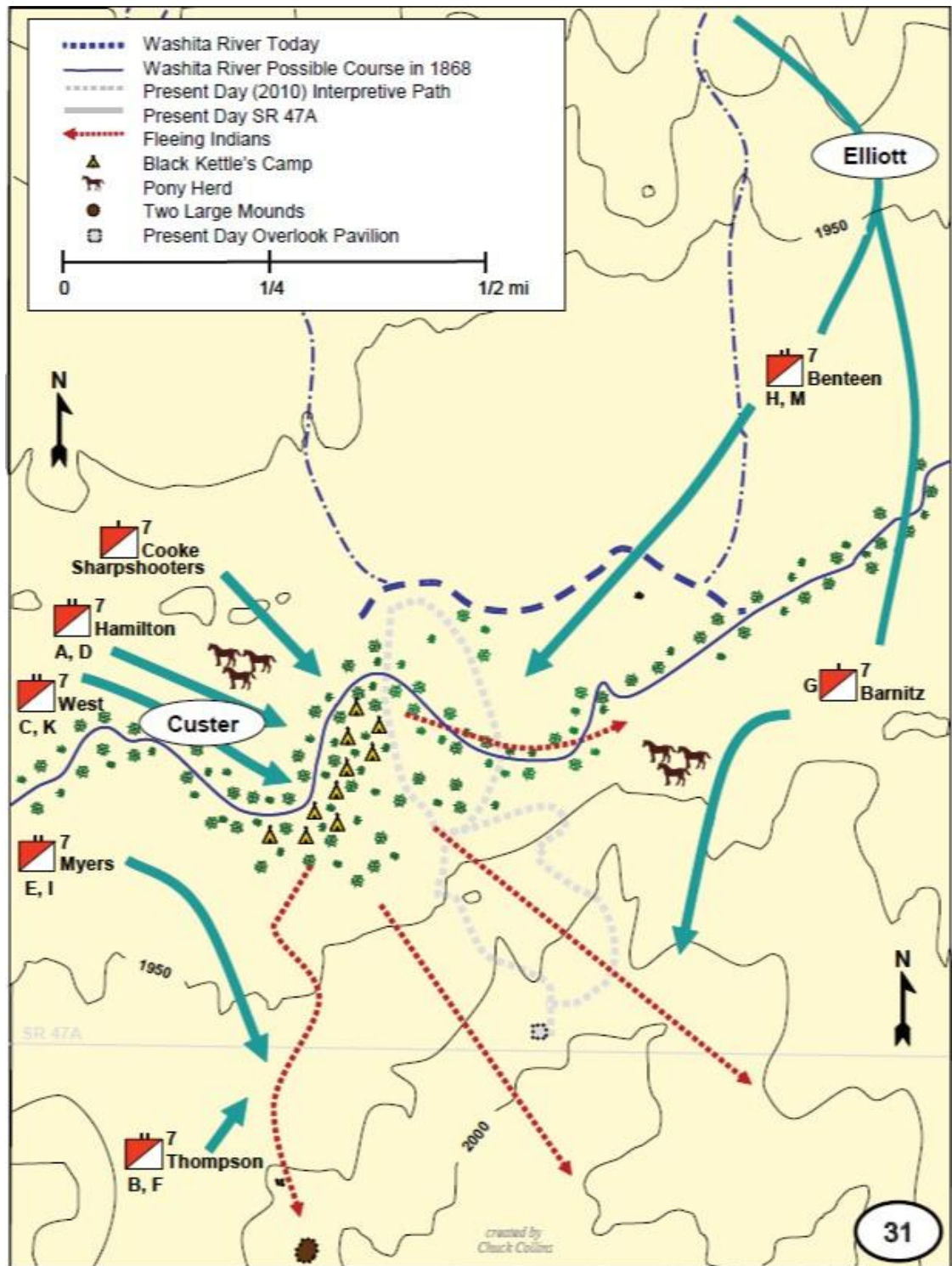


Figure 4

The initial assault at the Battle of the Washita. The red and white squares represent 7th Cavalry subunit designations. Godfrey's K Company is in Captain West's battalion which also includes C Company. Courtesy of Charles D. Collins. *The Cheyenne Wars Atlas*.

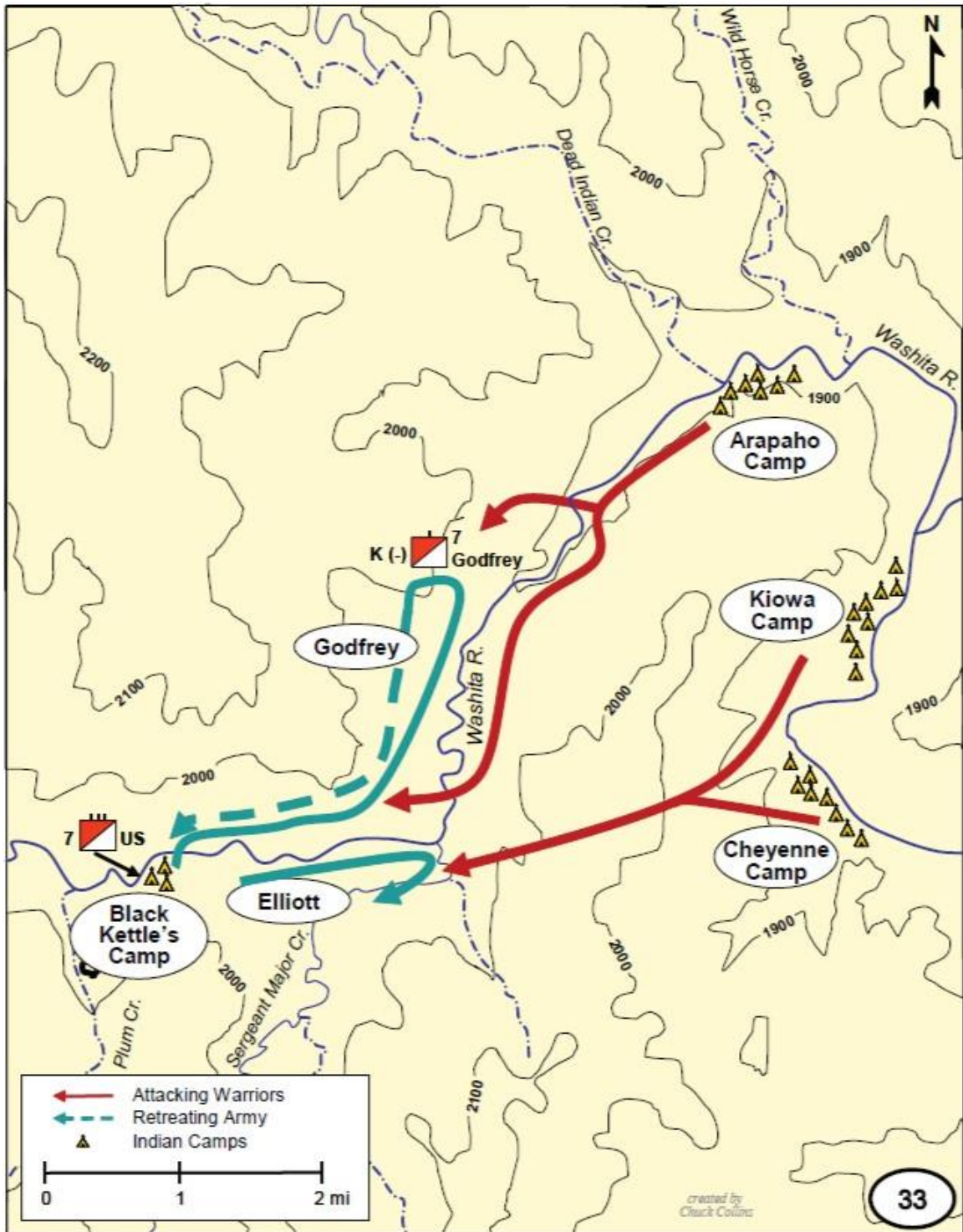


Figure 5

Godfrey's pursuit at the Washita Battle. The red and white squares represent unit designations, the 7th Cavalry Regiment and Godfrey's understrength K Company. Courtesy of Charles D. Collins. *The Cheyenne Wars Atlas*.





Figure 6

Cheyenne Drawing circa 1880's representing an earlier engagement with the U.S. Army.  
Courtesy of the Fort Leavenworth, Kansas Frontier Museum.

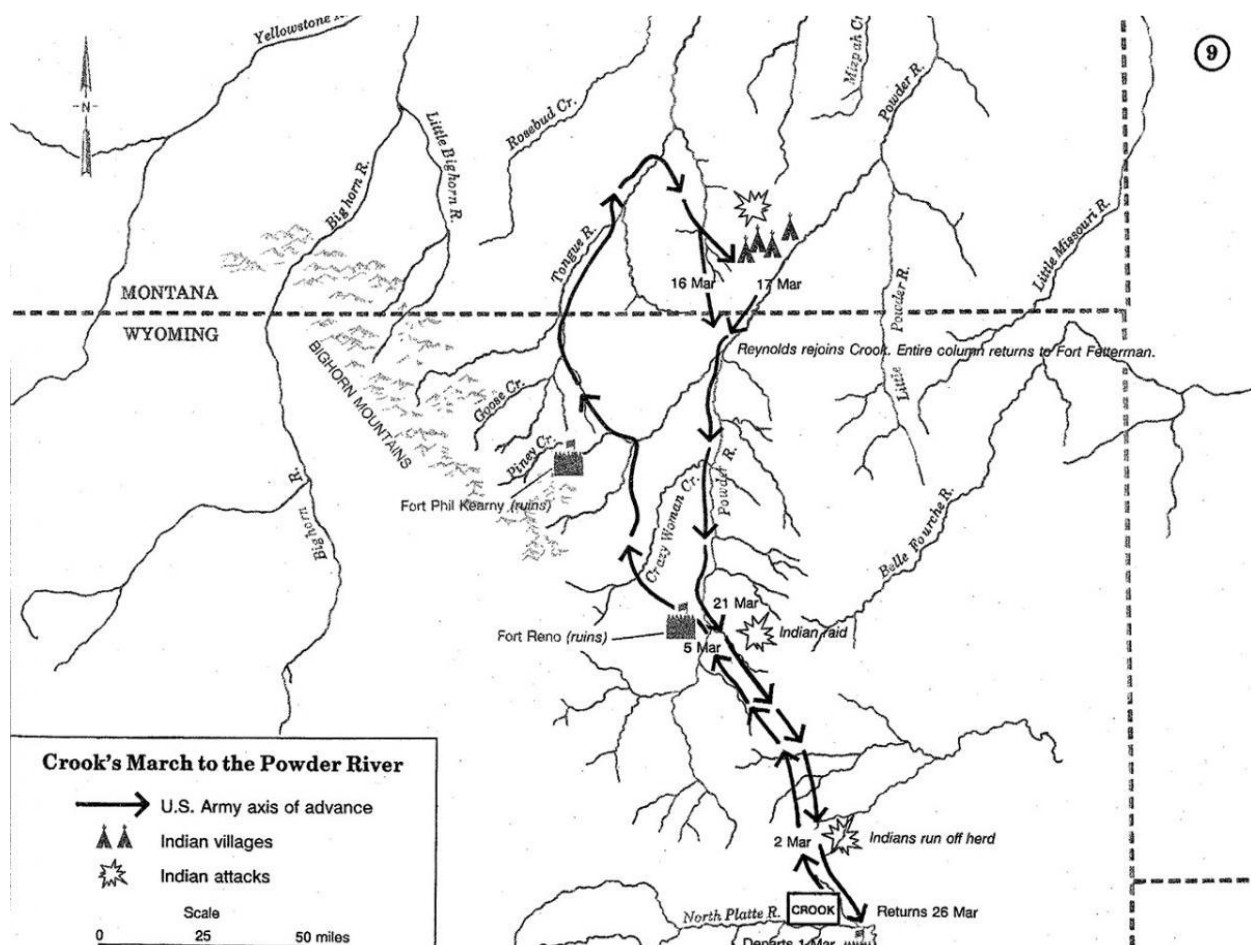


Figure 7

Major General George Crook's 1876 winter campaign culminating in Colonel Joseph J. Reynolds Powder River Fight on Saint Patrick's Day, 17 March 1876.



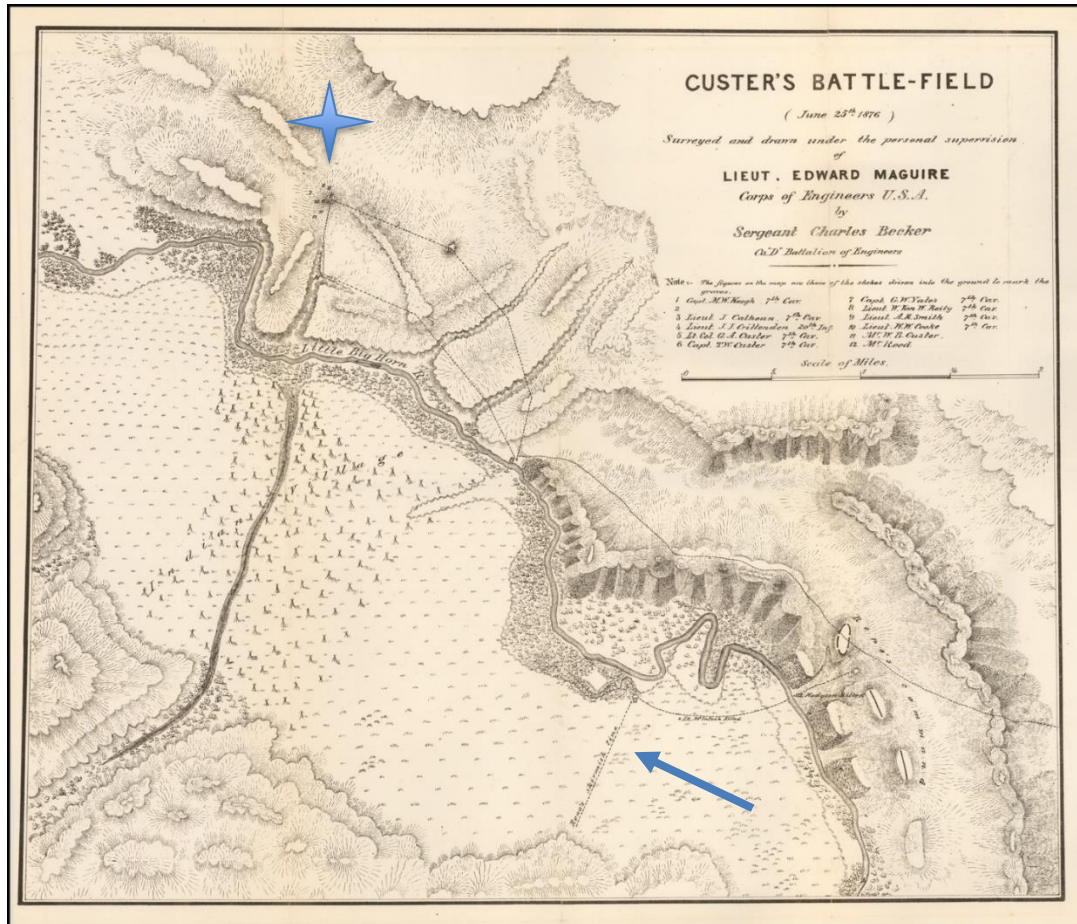


Figure 8

The Maguire map used at the 1879 Reno Court of Inquiry. Many witnesses noted it was somewhat inaccurate, including its author, who said it was hastily drawn. The Little Bighorn River's winding route and the timber placement are partially incorrect. Major Reno's advance is at the bottom right, at the valley entrance and moving towards the Indian village, marked by a blue arrow. The point of the arrow is close to where he dismounted and formed his skirmish line. That line was considerably shorter than noted on the map. Reno Hill is on the hilltops above the valley entrance. Last Stand Hill is in the upper left, just below the blue star. It was 4.5 miles from Reno Hill to Custer's body. Note the river and steep bluffs that separated both forces.

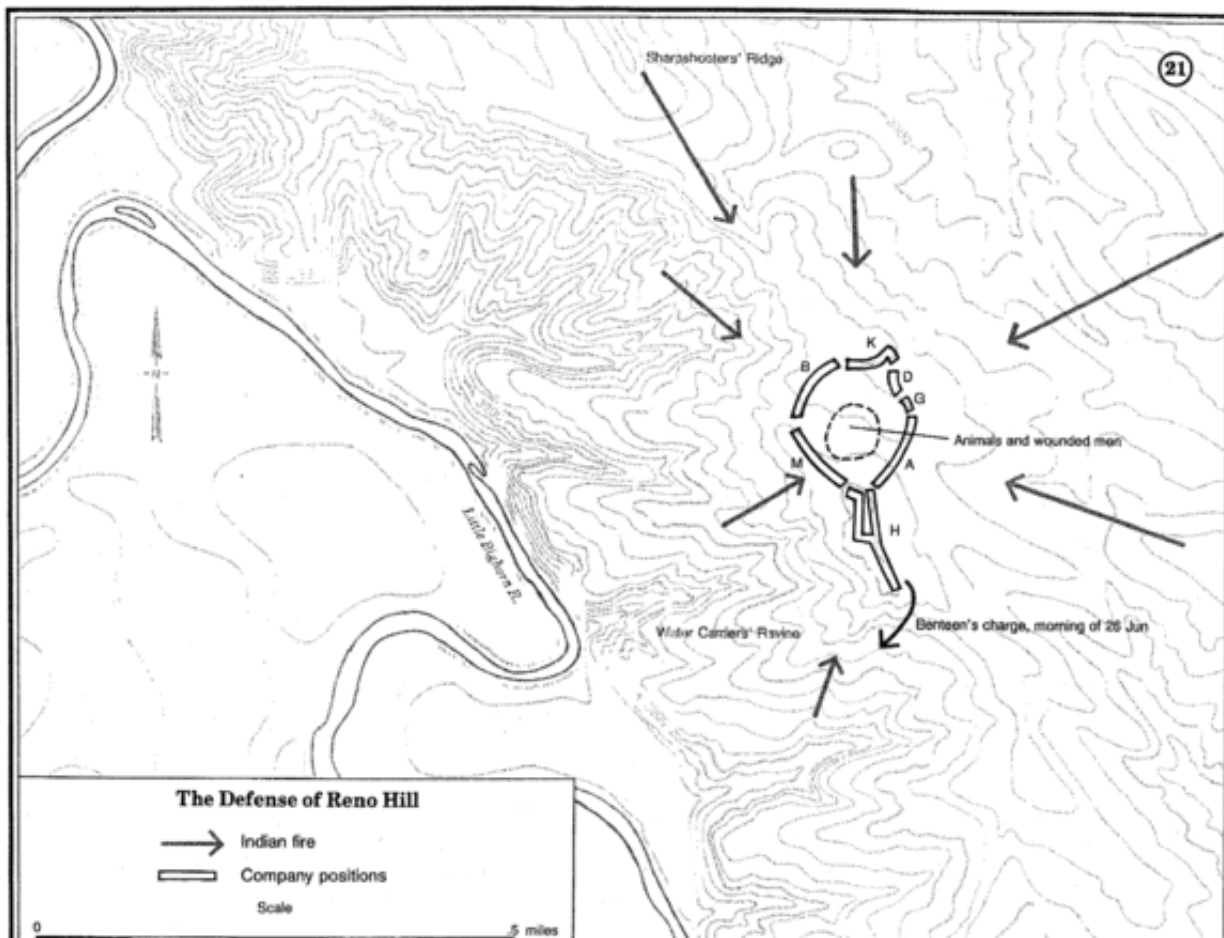


Figure 9

Reno-Bent's Fort, where the surviving seven cavalry companies defended against the Sioux and Cheyenne 25-27 June 1876. Godfrey's K Company is facing north.

### The Little Big Horn Fight.

From the Columbus Grove Vidette.

The following extracts from a private letter from Lt. E. S. Godfrey of the 7th cavalry will prove interesting to our readers; containing a vivid description of the fight with the Indians on the Little Big Horn River, in which the 7th cavalry was engaged at the time of the massacre of General Custer and five companies of his command.

Thank God we are safe through the fight of the Little Big Horn. I telegraphed you via Fort Ellis. 'Hare and myself all right, Sergt. Hughes missing.'

We left the mouth of the Rosebud on the 22d, Gen. Terry reviewed us and everybody seemed hopeful of the best results. We struck the trail a few miles up, on the 23d, marched nearly all day and nearly all night on the 24th, and marched about 25 miles on the 25th, we marched directly for the village.

As soon as we reached the Divide of Rosebud and Little Big Horn we were divided as follows: Keogh, Yates, Tom Custer, Smith and Calhoun with their companies (I, F, C, E, and L,) with Gen. Custer, French Moylan and McIntosh with Col. Reno, between Wier and myself with Benteen. Reno was in the advance, Gen. Custer followed him, Col. Benteen was ordered to go to the left towards the Little Big Horn and if he got to it to strike down it and take any village he might find, otherwise to follow down and join. It did not take but a few miles of hard travel to find that we could not do anything, it was simply going over high bluff after bluff, and we went over to the trail, and as a matter of course, considerably behind the other companies.

Col. Reno charged over the river bottom towards the village, and Gen. Custer told him he would support him.

After advancing three quarters of a mile or a mile, the Indians forced him to the woods. Gen. Custer went around to the village.

the village. He got to the ford when he was met by strong numbers and found he could not cross; they then moved down the river and to the right to some hills. Here they made a stand, here it was we found every man dead. On God the horrors of that field. We heard the firing down where they were about two miles below us in the hills, after we got up, but nothing to indicate desperate fighting. Col. Reno's command found that they had to cut their way out of the bottom, and charged again to cut through. McIntosh and Hodgson were killed, also Dr. DeWolf, and Private Clear, Co. K and DeRadio missing. Our companies came up soon after they got out of the bottom and they were glad to see us, for they had fired away most of their ammunition and could not see anything of General Custer. We shared our ammunition and put out a skirmish line, and waited some time for General Custer, thinking he was in the village or he would return. We started all our companies to join him, at one time, but from the bluffs could see no indication as to his whereabouts, and concluded he would take his time to join us.

The Indians came about us in great numbers, and we sought a place for defense. I was the last man there, having my company deployed as skirmishers dismounted to protect the retreat of the other companies. Immediately after we got into a fusillade which was continued until dark. The discipline and coolness of the company, when marching in the lines was spoken of by several officers as something to be proud of. I wrote up my diary for the 23d and 24th

of June, and prayed for night for General Custer. I had to use all my efforts to keep the men from wasting ammunition. Night came and it was a long and

anxious one waiting for General Custer.

At dark we had a respite from our savages and immediately I ordered all men to dig holes for intrenchments. I had my packs and bedding brought up and barricaded myself and Hare. I slept well; we had slept but little since the 23d.

Sergts. Wintry and Private Helner were killed. I was standing right over Sergt. Wintry when he was shot. I did not have any anxiety as to myself. Daylight on the 26th brought back our foes; I gave every man to understand that ammunition was our salvation, and that when that was gone we would be too. The fire was terribly hot and but for our intrenchments would have given us great fatality. I selected the best shots to use ammunition. About noon there was a relaxation of the fire; they had attempted to charge on us in great force twice, but both times we hurled them back. Once they got very near but Benteen sent them back howling.

About 3 p. m., they gave us a farewell fire and let us alone—except parties going after water. The first day we had no water. I forbade any man to use tobacco until we should get water, and Oh! how good the water did taste when we did get it. About 7 p. m., the Indians with their village moved away. It was a glad sight to us. It looked to be about three miles long and about three quarters of a mile wide, the largest outfit I have ever seen. We changed our position for a better one nearer to water, although any position we might take would require fighting to get water.

We slept soundly, and at dawn De Radio came into our lines; we were glad to see him, still we had no tidings from Genl Custer. About 11 a. m., we saw a column approaching far down the river, we hardly knew what to make of it, but

thought the Indians were playing a ruse on us; it proved to be Gen. Terry with four companies of the 2nd cavalry and six companies of infantry, medical stores, etc. Bradley, whom we knew at Yorkville, came up, and I can tell you we were glad to see each other. I asked him where Custer was; he said he was killed, that he had counted 197 bodies in the field, and he doubted if a man escaped. God help the poor widows and orphans! We moved our wounded and on the 28th inst., went and buried the bodies. I recognized Genl Custer, Cook, Tom and Riley. I did not see the others, although I waited to put a sprig of cedar in the graves of Smith and Porter and Harrington as a reason. Others saw and recognized the bodies of Keagh, Yates, Smith, Calhoun and Crittenden, the bodies of Porter, Harrington, Sturgis and Dr. Lord were not recognized, the clothing of Porter and Sturgis was found, but nothing of the other two. Sergt's Hughes and Calhoun were with General Custer, and Hughes' body found. The shock was terrible. Only one person is known to have escaped, one Crow Indian. He says they fought long and killed a great many Sioux, more than there were white men; but they were completely overpowered.

Madden had his leg cut off. Corcoran was shot through the breast and Mulke shot in the foot. I made Madden a Sergeant for bravery.

Church-Going One Hundred Years Ago

Figure 10

Newspaper *Allen County Democrat* August 1876. Courtesy of the Lima, Ohio Public Library.