

Indian Casualties According to Red Horse

By Rodney G. Thomas

Red Horse drew five sheets of Indian casualties showing a total of 60 warriors who died in the battle. There are two more Indian casualties in sheet 32 mingled in with the Cavalry dead. His testimony indicated 136 who died so there is a discrepancy between art and testimony.¹² It is possible that Red Horse included five Cheyenne casualties in sheet 30. If these five figures truly are Cheyenne casualties then Red Horse presents the same number of Cheyenne as did White Bird in his artwork and most Cheyenne testimony.¹³ Hardorff included these five sheets in his research about the Indian casualties and notes they include Cheyenne casualties as well.¹⁴

Sheet 27 in the series is missing from the NAA collection. Mallery reproduced it as his PLATE XLV and had he not included it in his report we would not have it today. It is hoped that the sheet can someday be located and returned to the collection.

Weapons shown in these five drawings indicate that most were armed with repeating rifles and most look to be Henry's. There are non-repeating rifles shown and most do not have a definite depiction but look to be single shot carbines. Traditional weapons are shown but the majority of weaponry indicates a large number of repeating weapons. Each warrior is shown with distinctive dress and regalia allowing viewers to recognize the individual. Some are shown with what appears to be simple battle dress while others are shown in warrior society dress and accoutrement.

Given the disparity between Red Horse's art and word as to the number of Indian casualties is there a possibility of resolving the differences or not? The majority of the Indian testimony indicates a much smaller number of casualties than Red Horse says. It is only speculation to suggest that he included all those who subsequently died from wounds or was just wrong. Hardorff's detailed research on the Indian casualties is quite clear incorporating all the testimony, listings, etc. Based on this, the evidence supports 30-40 people were killed. While Red Horse "signs" 136, he draws 60 again in conflict with his word and with the accepted evidence. There may be a solution for at least part of these differences. First we need to find the Cheyenne casualties.

There is almost universal agreement about the seven Cheyenne casualties of which two died after the battle from wounds. Is it possible to identify them from their dress and accoutrement? Yes, but the two tribes had intermingled so much by 1876 that characteristically Lakota decorations and styles would be used by Cheyennes and vice versa. Considerable effort

would be needed to ferret out the distinctively Cheyenne attributes correctly in these drawings. There is one way that we think Red Horse identified them that would be easier for everyone to use. He drew them upside-down from the Lakota casualties. Sheet 30 contains 13 figures of which five are reversed. Red Horse would have known of the five who were killed in the battle directly but may not have known of the subsequent deaths of Noisy Walking and Open Belly. Another possibility is that Red Horse was unaware of the two Cheyenne deaths in the valley fight and here portrays the five Cheyenne casualties in the Custer battle area. In any case, we think the five figures upside-down in sheet 30 are five Cheyenne warriors. There may be additional evidence these are the five Cheyenne casualties in the Custer fight and will be discussed shortly. If these are the Cheyenne, then Red Horse drew 55 Lakota casualties. But did they all die in battle?

A conventional pictographic portrayal of death or dying is blood flowing from the mouth of an animal or enemy. There are individuals in each sheet, except sheet 29, without blood flowing from their mouths although all have suffered grievous injury. Three are in sheet 26; six in 27; five in 28; none in 29; and five in 30 for a total of 19 figures that may, in conventional fashion, indicate only wounded and not dead. There are 34 figures who clearly, in conventional manner, dead. Of note, and this may help with the Cheyenne casualties, two of the upside-down figures in sheet 30 do not have blood flowing. Is it possible that not only are these five figures Cheyenne but that Red Horse indicated the two who were wounded?

All these indicators point to more research and thought about how the casualties are drawn as well as reconciling the differences in numbers. Our initial conclusion that the 136 number was a mistranslation did not stand up when considering the same number is given to Colonel Wood four years earlier. This is like so many other aspects of this battle that may never be reconciled. We think the images are perhaps a more telling story than the narratives. Using conventional pictographic techniques the numbers align more closely with the preponderance of Lakota testimony about the casualties. For now, the 136 appears to be an anomaly, just like the mistranslated Arikara/Arapahoe point. If Dr. McChesney attempted to reconcile the differences that record has yet to be found.