

Bullets, Boots, and Saddles

Bullets, Boots, and Saddles

John P. Everett

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Books by Ethan E. Harris

The Bare Bones List
Custer Survivors 101
They Survived Custer's Last Stand: The Impostor Roster

As editor:

Left by the Indians
Sixty-six Years in Custer's Shadow
Stop Them Now
The Court Martial of Thomas H. French

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INTRODUCTION

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Being the Personal Recollection of Men Who Took Part
in the Battle of the Big Horn in Montana Territory,
June 25, 1876, as Told to John P. Everett¹

Greater battles have been fought. Single salvos of artillery in the great war killed more men than were contained in the old Seventh Cavalry. In the history of warfare, before and since, whole regiments have been wiped out with none but the victors to tell the tale. But the mystery, the surprise, the fatal blunders and gallant heroism attending the Battle of the Big Horn will keep it alive in the memories of men long after the horrors of Armageddon have been forgotten. It is but one installment of the bloody price the white man paid for the winning of the West, of them all the most interesting.

The statement that there were no survivors of the battle of the Big Horn is somewhat misleading to those unfamiliar with the whole story of that tragic but glorious day. True, of the two hundred twenty-five officers and men under General [George Armstrong] Custer's immediate command who finally closed in deadly strife on that memorable afternoon, no one lived to carry the message of defeat. But Custer's part is not the whole of the, Battle of the Little Big Horn. The ghastly tale revealed by those five troops of dead men is the history of but one corner of the battlefield.

Six hundred cavalymen rode with Custer on the morning of June 25, 1876, riding west from the Rosebud and over the divide separating that stream from the valley of the Little Big Horn. Two hundred and fifty-two were still able to fight on the morning of the 27th. Every man of the command had during all this time been engaged in a terrific charge or defending a siege, almost hopelessly outnumbered, without water or sufficient medical care and opposed by the ablest and best armed band of North American Indians ever assembled on this continent.

About noon of that day, after being warned by his scouts that he was greatly outnumbered, after being shown by them the encampment of the Sioux, which he professed not to see, he separated his command when about fifteen miles from the enemy. Here he sent [Frederick William] Benteen with troops H, K, and D, about one hundred and twenty-five men, off to the south and nearly at right angles to his own line of march. For days he had been following the trail of a huge band of Indians and was hot on the trail at that moment. Benteen had been ordered to ride to the south and "pitch into anything he might find," but his route took him into a rough and broken country where there was no

¹ Queen City Mail, Spearfish, South Dakota. 19 Nov 1930. Page 3.

hopes of finding the enemy and away from where the enemy was known to be, and after proceeding for several mile, and knowing that an error had been made, he turned back and started In search of Custer, but he was still many miles away and his whereabouts unknown to the rest of the command when Custer despatched a messenger to hunt him up. Before he could act, the god of war had written “Finis” to Custer and his men.

After detaching Benteen. Custer proceeded with the rest of the regiment along the trail of the enemy which led directly to the Little Big Horn and across It to their camp in the bottom on the west side. And when about a mile from the river and without waiting [f]or the ammunition train[,] which was also many miles away, he directed Major Reno with Companies M, A and G to cross and attack the Indian camp at the upper end, saying “and I will support you with the entire outfit.” Reno’s command consisted of but one hundred and twelve men. Reno did as he was directed, galloping down the valley until he met the enemy who counter attacked him with a force outnumbering his more than ten to one.

THE PROMISED SUPPORT FROM CUSTER NEVER CAME

Here, after dismounting and fighting for some thirty minutes, when, hopelessly outnumbered, his devoted little group whipped, cut to pieces, bewildered and out of shells, he retreated in the direction from whence he charged, across the river and up the bluffs on the eastern side, where a few minutes later he was joined by Benteen and his troops who were just coming up, and still later by [Thomas Mower] McDougal in charge of the ammunition train. Here the whole outfit took position, and after a conference, started north or down the river, in the direction taken by Custer, and where firing had recently been heard, but here again the crushing force of the Sioux stopped them and drove them back to Reno Hill, where they hastily entrenched and, until the morning of the 27th, held the Sioux at bay. During the charge and retreat twenty-nine of Reno's men were killed, which together with the victims of the siege made a total loss of fifty-six dead and fifty-nine wounded.

No one knew or suspected what had become of Custer until the morning of the 27th, when the Indians, despairing of routing their stubborn foe, and frightened by the approach of Gibbon and Terry with their infantry, withdrew to the south and took refuge In the [v]astnes[s]of the Big Horn Mountains.

After sending Reno to the attack, we were able to follow Custer for about two miles. He was four miles away when death overtook him and his band, and of his movements in the meantime or his reasons for failing to follow Reno as he had promised, nothing will ever be defin[i]tely known. After sending Reno to the charge he started off to the north, and after proceeding for about two miles he left the command and rode to the top of a bluff overlooking the camp of the Ind[i]ans. Here he dispatched Trumpeter John Martin [John, aka Giovanni Martini], with a note hastily scribbled by his Adjutant, Cook [William Winer Cooke], directing Benteen to come up with the packs. This note got to Benteen too late to do any good.

Trumpeter Martin is the last white man to see Custer alive, excepting those who shared his fate, and excepting possibly Peter Thompson and James Watson, who reported seeing him riding alone and galloping in the direction where he was later found. The exact time of this with reference to Martin's departure is not known. But this much is certain; that the routing of Reno and his retreat[,]and the annihilation of Custer must have been very close to [the] other and certain it is that the same Indians, under their able generals Crazy Horse and Gall, took part in both incidents; that it was really one battle with the forces of the white man split. It is improper and unfair to speak of the event as the Custer Massacre. Every victim of that day went down fighting. It was a battle — the Battle of the Little Big Horn— in which the white man was outnumbered, outgeneraled and fairly whipped.

Hence the assertion that it is somewhat inaccurate and misleading to say that there were no survivors of the Battle of the [Little] Big Horn.

There were many Indians who knew of Custer's move from early in the morning of the fatal 25th until about four o'clock that afternoon when he and the last of his immediate command lay stark and lifeless on Big Horn's barren bluffs.

But for many years none of these would talk and their reluctance to tell is not difficult to understand. Assurance of immunity from the white man were taken with a great deal of scepticism [sic] by the Indian who could recall of but a few instances where the white man had ever kept his faith when dealing with the Indians. True, after many years, some of the forces of Gall and Crazy Horse were induced to give accounts of their recollections of that tragic day. But many of these statements were guarded, and some, mere vainglorious boastings. and so what was in Custer's mind and exactly what he did after dispatching Reno on his hopeless ride, will never be known.

But of the survivors. Fifty years to a day, on June 25, 1926, the survivors of that ever interesting episode in the winning of the West, together with several thousand of their countrymen, gathered upon the bluffs where stand the monuments marking the graves of their comrades of that day. At that time there were still living four officers and a few score of men who lived through that stirring time, and those who relate these stories are of that number. Only nine actual white survivors were present on that 50th anniversary. The first is the story of one of that gallant one hundred and twelve who, following their leader's orders, galloped down the valley of the Little Big Horn with Reno, armed with single fire, undependable, built over Springfields, to attack an army of some [three thousand Sioux, better mounted],² armed with Winchester repeaters and a righteous cause. This, like the Charge of the Light Brigade, was glorious, heroic, spectacular, but it was not war. Someone had blundered. Here follows the personal account of one who was first to ride, who went through

² Text in brackets were transposed elsewhere.

the ensuing hell, and though wounded, escaped in the retreat and took part in the glorious defense of Reno Hill.

Private Dan Newell, of M Company, 7th U. S. Cavalry, Captain French's company, remained with the remnant of his regiment for some time after that campaign and was with the regiment when it was later stationed at Fort Meade, near Sturgis. where he was mustered out of service and where for fifty years he has resided. Today, retired from active business, full of years and the respect of his countrymen, he contributes this first hand addition to the stirring history of the Last West. Reluctant and never given to boasting of his own deeds, he was inveigled into the office of his chronicler, where after a little careful cross-questioning and suggestion he was launched upon his story. A stenographer sitting at his back captured it as it was.

(To Be Continued)

Begin Dan Newell's own story next week and don't miss a chapter.

SECOND INSTALLMENT

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I was born at Ballinlough, Roscommon County [sic], on March 17th, 1847, one of a family of thirteen children. At fifteen years of age I left home and went to London, where I worked for several years learning the trade of a blacksmith. In 1870 I came alone to America, landing in New York. I enlisted in the Seventh U. S. Cavalry, the Old Seventh, at Philadelphia on October 8th, 1873, and was honorably discharged at Camp Ruhion, D. T. on October 8th, 1878. Camp Ruhion was located on the site of the present Fort Meade, near Sturgis, South Dakota. After my discharge I went to what is now North Dakota but returned to Fort Meade in 1879, where I worked as post blacksmith until 1884. On July 9th, 1882 I was married to Mary Harlow at the chapel at Fort Meade and we have resided at Sturgis ever since. My wife is no tenderfoot herself. She came to the Black Hills with her parents in 1879, together with a party of immigrants, driving mule teams from Fort Pierre, traveling together under armed guards for mutual protection. She can relate some interesting stories herself regarding the early days of the Hills.

THE LURE OF ADVENTURE

I wasn't so old in 1872 but that I was interested in anything promising excitement or adventure, and this I suppose, was what prompted me to enlist in the army. I was destined to find plenty of both before I got through.

I was with Custer in 1874 when he made his voyage of exploration of the Black Hills. There were about one thousand mounted men in the expedition, besides one hundred and ten wagons. We passed over the very ground where Fort Meade and Sturgis were later located, and where I was after a while to settle down for life. At that time there was not a white habitation west of Fort Lincoln on the Missouri River, for a distance of eight hundred miles or so. Indians, buffalo, antelope, and deer everywhere. And the Indians did not take kindly to our invasion, even for exploration purposes, of this vast territory which had been set aside for the exclusive use by a solemn t[rea]ty with the Government "so long as grass grows and water flows." I didn't blame them any. Who wouldn't fight to retain such a wonderful country? And it was theirs anyway and always had been, treat or no treaty.

It was during this expedition that gold was discovered in French creek by a member of our party named Ross, and Custer wanted some one to carry the news to the outside world. Charley Reynolds, one of the greatest scouts of the Old West, as fine a gentleman as ever lived, volunteered to carry the news to Fort Laramie nearly two hundred miles to the south, through a Sioux-infested country. In those days, mind you, you didn't step into an auto or even a Pullman car and let someone pull you along for a few hours to your destination. Charley had to go horseback, traveling night, and sleeping hidden during the daytime. The owners of that country didn't want people trespassing on their grass and scaring their buffaloes. And every precaution had to be taken in order to fool

them. So before starting out I was called on the shoe his horse. I placed the shoes on backward. It was some job to do this in such a way as not to interfere with the animal's gait and still leave a track going the wrong way and one that the Indians would not get onto. However, the trick was done and Charley made the trip without any great trouble. Trouble enough came of that gold discovery afterwards, however.

THE INDIAN CAMPAIGN OF 1876

But you want to know about the Battle of the Little Big Horn and who was to blame for the result. I am going to tell you what I know of the facts. You can judge for yourself as to who was in blame.

As soon as the news had leaked out back in the States that somewhere out in that unknown country there existed a wonderful pine covered range of mountains shot with gold from the grass roots down, our treaty with the Indians had become a scrap of paper to the selfish or adventurous, and many stragglers began to filter into this forbidden land. For a time the Government made a sort of an attempt to keep out the whites, but the lure of gold was too strong even for the United States Army and so the Sioux took the matter into their own hands. They could see what was coming and that in a few years they would not have any country. And in the summer of 1876 some of their biggest generals—and don't forget they had some big ones—commenced to gather an army big enough to amount to something. Warriors would slip away from their agencies a few at a time and all got together off up in what is now Montana, under the leadership of such chiefs as Crazy Horse, Gall, Sitting Bull, Rain-in-the-Face, Two Moons and others. Their big medicine man was Sitting Bull who wasn't much of a war chief, but who it was later proved, was the real thing as a medicine man. For on the day before the battle of the Little Big Horn they say he went off into the hills somewhere and had a vision in which he foresaw that the white soldiers would come and all be wiped out. I guess it wasn't all his medicine which told him that, for we now know that he had a first class organization of scouts who could tell him at any time of the numbers and every move of the troops from the time they got within fifty miles of his camp. He knew that Custer had six hundred men coming his way on tired horses and armed with rather poor single-shot carbines. He knew that he had about thirty-five hundred warriors in his camp, with maybe fifteen thousand ponies, and most of them armed with the new repeating Winchesters. It wasn't the Great Spirit told him that but as long as his people thought it was, it worked just as well and gave them plenty of courage.

But anyway, up to the time of the Big Horn battle the army did not know how many Indians were in this gathering and they had been misled by the reports of the different Indian agents who continued to report that they had the required number at their agencies and drawing rations. So it naturally looked as if there wouldn't be many Indians on the war path if they were all at the agencies where they belonged. It was known however, that this band was together and supposed to be on the war path, and early in the spring of 1876. It was decided to round them up once and for all. Their general location was known. That is,

they were known to be anywhere within a little spot the size of Montana. An expedition was dispatched from the posts on the Union Pacific to the south, another from Fort Lincoln on the Missouri. The latter included the 7th Cavalry. General Custer, because of some trouble he had gotten into, had been forbidden to accompany this expedition, but at the last minute the orders were changed and he was allowed to go in charge of his old regiment.

THE START FROM FORT LINCOLN

We set out from Fort Lincoln which is located on the Missouri River just across from Bismarck, N. D. on the 17th day of May, 1876. There were twelve troops, six hundred men in this regiment. At the start there were wagon trains, Gatling guns, as well as the regular cavalry and several troops of infantry. I remember that it was very hot and in the afternoon there came up a big thunderstorm and the rain poured down as if it was coming from a kettle. I know we came to a ravine where there had never been any water, and we had to hitch from ten to fourteen mules to each wagon in order to get across. At that time there were no more roads in the country than there would be in the ocean. We just went by following the sun, headed generally into the west, although the Crow and Ree scouts were able to give general information as to the lay of the land.

After dragging along through the mud all that day we finally got into camp but it was so wet we couldn't make the campfires although details were sent out and returned with plenty of wood, which wouldn't burn. I had given an Indian a dollar for the hind quarters of an antelope and so had a feast in sight but no way to cook it. But we had a man with us called "Buckeye" —Ricketts was his name—and he contracted to cook it if we would take him into our mess. The bargain was struck and pretty soon he came along with some pieces of an oak tongue and a reach. We had pork and bacon and a bunch of us got the antelope cooked and had a feast. Some people were no more careful of government property in those days than they are now.

I didn't keep a diary as some of the boys did and so do not remember how far we went the next day, but I do know that from there to the Little Missouri we had pretty fair going and it didn't rain much. Just what day it was I am not sure we camped about three miles from the Little Missouri. I was cutting into a cottonwood log to make firewood when my captain, Tom French, came along, and after watching me for a while said, "Say, a heaver could do better work than that. Let me show you how to do that." So I gave him the axe and after he had made a few strokes and commenced to sweat he offered me the axe saying, "There that's the way to do it." "Stick to it Captain," I told him, "you are doing fine." "He grinned but I had to cut up that log after all.

Next day we pulled out for the Little Missouri and went into camp. I suppose to fix up a crossing or something like that. We laid over the next day anyway and got a crossing fixed, and that day General Custer went up the river exploring. I don't know how many miles he went but he laid out a tr[ai]l for us which we followed up the river, crossing it some sixteen times. At times we would have to go across on the trot the quicksands were so bad. Custer himself was always on the go. He was a rather lean, wiry man about 38 years old, and

it seemed as though he never slept. He didn't seem to see any use of the rest of us sleeping either. And he had no more mercy on our horses than he had on us. He always had a bunch of his own saddle stock and could change as often as he wanted to. But he was a brave man even if he did sometimes lack judgment, and his men would follow him anywhere. He was never a man to be bound by rules and always preferred to fight according to his own plans. And for many years he had succeeded in getting away with it but as we shall see, on the trip he overlooked a well known rule of war once too often.

STRIPPING FOR ACTION

I think it was on the last day of May that we went into camp in the Bad Lands of the Little Missouri. Everything was alright when went to bed but in the morning we found ourselves and our tents covered with snow. This made things pretty uncomfortable for a while [sic] but there was nothing to do but stand it. We stayed there for three days I think, but un[f]ortunately it was not so very cold at that time of the year and we had plenty of wood and shelter. On the 4th of June we pulled out and the next stop I remember was at the Powder River which empties into the Yellowstone. There we laid over and fo[r]two days were busy fixing up the pack mules. For this purpose we selected the smallest of the mules, loading them with food consisting mostly of hard tack, bacon, beans, coffee, etc. Some of them also carried ammunition for our carbines. This wa[s]in addition to what each man carried with him in his belt and on his saddle.

THIRD INSTALLMENT

ON THE TRAIL OF THE SIOUX

03 DEC 1930, PAGE 7

SYNOPSIS

In the introduction, the author, Mr. Everett, induced the narrator into his office and after placing a stenographer just behind him, succeeded in getting a true story of the Little Big Horn battle as told in the following story. The narrator started with General Custer's troops from Fort Lincoln, near Bismarck, N. D., and told of the trip to the Powder River, where they laid over two days of fix packs and prepare for the rest of the trip.

Now go on with the story.

THIRD INSTALMENT

From there our general course was westward and I believe our next stop was at the Tongue [R]iver. Through all this country there are many small creeks and rivers flowing in a northerly direction and emptying into the Yellowstone. This latter river is navigable for flat bottomed river steamers at least as far as the Big Horn, and on this occasion our supply steamer, Far West, under Captain Grant Marsh, went up even the Big Horn to the forks of the Little Big Horn. The water in all these streams was high at that time of the year, due to the melting snows in the mountains to the south where they mostly head.

THE TRAIN OF THE SIOUX

When we got to the Tongue River we all passed in review before General Terry. This was on the 21st or 22nd of June. We went into camp that evening and on the 23rd we marched all day, going into camp on the Rosebud. We were now traveling in light marching order, having left the wagons on the Powder River, and everything we carried with us was on the backs of our horses or on the pack mules. Before leaving the Powder River, General Terry had urged Custer to take along two Gatling guns, which we could have handled easily enough, but Custer it seemed, did not want to be bothered with them so they were left behind. If we had taken them this story might never have been told. That certainly was one error. Also at the time the Ree scout, Bloody Knife, who had been scouting ahead, was asked about the location of the Sioux and their number. His answer was to scoop up a handful of sand and let the grains trickle through his fingers, indicating the number of Indians we were following. Later when we struck their trail on the Rosebud we all knew that his estimate was not far off.

All along this trip from this on we saw many magpies and one of my comrades, Johnny Powers, said to me "Dan we are hooded. Those birds figure on picking us before this thing is over." Such remarks were recognized as jokes but just the same it was not so easy to laugh them off at that particular time.

We started up the Rosebud in a southerly direction on the morning of June 24th. Rode all day until about eight or nine o'clock in the evening. I wasn't allowing to ride any farther and wanted to take a swim. I took a bunch of canteens and went down to the Rosebud and had a swim and just as I was getting into my clothes the order came to pick up right away and be on the march. We were not looking for this and the men and horses were all tired out, but there was nothing to do but go.

THE PREMONITION

While I was down swimming my Bunkie, Scollen [Henry M. Scollin, aka Henry M. Cody], had been sleeping but when I got back he was writing in his diary and he read to me what he had written. I said to him, "What in the hell are you thinking about, you don't count on dying do you?" He said to me, "Dan if anything happens to me, notify my sister, Mary, who lives in Gardiner, Mass. My name is Henry Cody and the name Henry Scollen is assumed." He had told me this before when we were in camp on the Tongue. I think he had a premonition of what was in store for him, and in less than 24 hours he was lying dead on the bottom of the Little Big Horn, his body riddled with bullets. I'll tell you about him later on.

So we travelled on up the Rosebud all that night. Now all I now of Custer's orders for that march is what I have learned from the written instructions given him by General Terry and which have since been made public. From this it is known that General Terry directed him to march up the Rosebud to its head but to make no attempt to follow the trail of the Indians, which Reno had already found leading west in the direction of the Big Horn, until Terry himself could get there, which it was calculated would be on the 27th of June. Terry had planned to take his forces and those of Col. Gibbon around to the north and then up the Big Horn to the south, thus getting the Indians somewhere between them. Why General Custer failed to follow out this plan I can only guess.

Anyway we travelled all night of the 24th until about daybreak. Here we went into a brush camp and the order came to make coffee. I unsaddled my horse and put him out on the half picket, holding the rope in my hand. I was all tried out and laid down on the ground with my saddle for a pillow and was asleep right away. My Bunkie, Scollen lay beside me. In less than no time we were awakened and told to saddle up. We might have slept an hour or it might have been a week for all we knew, but I guess it was less than an hour. All I know is that neither of us got any coffee or anything else and Henry was mad about it. I told him to cheer up, that we had plenty of nice fresh water. He was sore about losing his sleep but he got a good long one that afternoon.

BENTEN TO THE LEFT

So we marched along to the west until about sun rise I guess and again came to a halt on the pra[irie]. I remember the sun soon got up so that it was nice and warm there on the grass. I would say that we rested there about two or three hours, and then were ordered to saddle up again. As I was saddling my horse I was standing within six feet of General Custer and Captain French and I heard

the General say, "It will be all over in a couple hours. I was at their camp last night and they only have ten or twelve teepees." I thought it was strange, as the trail we had seen on the Rosebud was about a quarter of a mile wide and must have been made by thousands of ponies, some of them dragging travois. However it wasn't my put in. The officers then had a council of war and we were soon on our way again. When we got to the top of the divide separating the Rosebud from the Little Horn. Captain Benteen with companies H, K and D, under himself and Captain Weir and Lieutenant Godfrey, left the command and struck off to the left or south. Why they were sent off I do not know, and I only know where they went from what I learned later. I do know that we were mighty glad to see them later in the day.

Major Reno had been placed in command of Companies M, A, and G. My company was M and was commanded by Captain French. Company A was commanded by Captain French. Company A was under command of Captain Moylan, and Lieutenant McIntosh had charge of G. Lieutenant McIntosh was a full blood Indian himself who had been left an orphan by some of the Indian wars in Texas, and had been brought up and educated by General McIntosh.

The rest of the outfit was under direct command of the General and he had five companies, C, E, F, I and L, each commanded by its own captain or lieutenant. After Benteen was sent off to the left the rest of us kept on to the west in the direction of the Little Horn. Captain McDougal with the pack train and ammunition was somewhere behind. We rode down a little creek which emptied into the river, our outfit riding on the south side most of the way and Custer and his bunch on the north. Pretty soon we came to a [deserted Indian camp with a couple of teepees left standing. One of]³ these had a dead Indian inside. I have seen this described as the lone teepee but as I remember there were two. They were all pictured on the outside with drawings in charcoal showing Indians taking scalps and

things like that. I suppose this may have been the camp the General referred to when I heard him tell my captain there were only ten or twelve teepees, and likely he thought they were on the run. My notion is that these teepees were left there with their picture writings on them to warn us of what they intended to do to us. You see this same bunch of Indians had met General Crook at a point not over three or four miles from the camp on the 17th and had given him a pretty good licking, causing him to withdraw his troops in a hurry and glad to get out. So they must have been feeling pretty chesty. But of course Custer knew nothing of this. There must have been some lack of cooperation somewhere, but of course it was not easy to get news around at that particular time and place. It could only be carried on horseback and whoever started alone in that country would not be apt to deliver his message.

RENO'S CHARGE

³ Text in brackets were transposed elsewhere.

We went on from here down the creek and when we got about a mile from the river we crossed over the creek to where Custer's men[] were. From there our outfit went on ahead toward the river which we crossed. Ten of us in charge of Lieutenant Hare were ordered on ahead of the rest and were not given time to fill our canteens or even water our horses as we forded the river. In this bunch of ten there were, Gillin [Jean B. D. Gallenne], "Snopsy" Meyers, Sergeant White, Neeley, Klotzbucher, Thorpe and myself. I cannot remember the others. We were ordered down the bottom to the north on our tired horses, at a gallop, and right away we saw what we were in for. We didn't go far before we could see the draws on our left and in [fr]ont of us as well as the timber on our right packed full of Indians waiting for us. I remember Gilling saying to Sergeant White, "Sergeant, the Captain didn't tell us to go in on a gallop." I said "Shut up. What's the odds whether you gallop or walk. If you are going to be hit you will be hit anyway." I was riding Number One in my set of fours. About then I heard Lieutenant Hare say—"Look here, we have been sent in to draw out the Indians. They are drawing us out instead." So we slowed up until our company caught up and then fell in line and all went in together.

As we galloped down that bottom and into that nest of Sioux I remember seeing Custer's command on the bluffs on the opposite side of the river marching along to the north possibly a mile or so from the point where we had left them. Captain Varnum said later that he also saw them and that they were moving at a trot. I didn't pay much attention at the time. I had something else on my mind.

Major Reno's command consisted of 112 men and I know I am safe in saying that we had at the very least a thousand or fifteen hundred Sioux in sight in front of us. And as we galloped they of course closed in on our flanks and behind us. What they meant by letting [an]y of us out alive I cannot understand. Certainly th[ey] could have killed every man of us if they had tried.

(To Be Continued)

(Next week, "The Clash" and "Reno's Retreat." Don't miss an installment.)

FOURTH INSTALLMENT

10 DEC 1930, PAGE 7

SYNOPSIS

We have told so far, how Private Dan Newell was induced into the office of the author, Mr. J. P. Everett, and a stenographer placed to take down the story as related to the author. We have been with General Custer since he left Fort Lincoln at Bismarck, North Dakota, on his untiring march to subdue the Sioux. We left General Custer's command last week, to be with Major Reno on his expedition, of which Mr. Newell was a part. As we left off last week, we were riding to attack the Sioux, already realizing that we were hopelessly outnumbered. We begin this week with the encounter.

THE ENCOUNTER

After our squad had fallen back in line we got on the right of the troop and kept on to about a quarter of a mile of the nearest Indian camp. Major Reno must have seen that we couldn't possibly go any further and soon the order came to dismount and fight on foot. We threw a skirmish line across the valley, each number four standing behind and holding the horses. Today there is a railway station, Garryown, right where our line crossed the valley. There we got down to real fighting. It was no trouble to find something to shoot at. They were soon on three sides of us and fast getting on the fourth. We didn't fight there long until we got orders to fall back to the timber nearer the river on our right. We went like a bunch of sheep. On the way I came to a buffalo wallow and I said to myself—"Here is a good breastworks." I dropped into it and fired five shots at the Indians with my carbine. Then I looked around and could not see a blessed man, so I moved on for the timber. When I got to where the horses were I went to look for mine. My Number 4, Gillin, didn't have him. I asked where he was and he said Neely had him. So I hunted up Neely and took my horse and got into my place on the line, and while we were standing there waiting for orders, horses all in line, I heard Captain French say to Major Reno—"What are we going to do now?" Without waiting for Reno to reply our first Sergeant, Jack Ryan, spoke up and said—"There is nothing to do but mount your men and cut your way out. Another fifteen minutes and there won't be a man left." Then I heard Reno say, "Mount your horses and follow me."

Just then I got a bullet in the left leg. I said to Patsy [Patrick] Carey next to me, "I am hit." He replied, "Mount your horse and stick to him as long as you can. You are fighting Indians, not white men." I tried to get on but couldn't get the wounded leg up to the stirrup. So I got around to the right side and finally managed to get up. Mine was only a flesh wound but during the rest of the fighting it gave me some pain and swelled to twice its natural size.

THE RETREAT

When Reno gave the order to mount many of the men mounted and started to run just any way. Sergeant Ryan called out and stopped them, telling them to

go slowly and fight as they moved ahead. He held a good many in some kind of order and got them to the river. Jack Ryan is entitled to as much credit as anyone [f]or getting us out of there alive. It was he who saved the 7th Cavalry for Major Reno took his advice at a time when we were taking a desperate chance whatever we did. If we had stayed there we would have been wiped out as Custer was. Then it would have been a simple matter for the Sioux to surround Benteen and cut him off from the ammunition train, and probably not a man of the six hundred would have escaped.

Now during all the time I have been telling about, there was firing on every side of us and bullets were falling around us like hail against a window. It was just one continuous roar. The Sioux would gallop in bunches and deliver their fire and then retreat, their places to be filled instantly by another bunch. They were mostly naked and tied to their horses with rawhide thongs and many hung on the sides of their horses when attacking, making them hard to hit. In all this galloping they raised a terrific dust and much of the time they couldn't see us nor we them. I suppose this is what enabled us to get back to the river. Of course we were returning the fire the best we could and must have killed a lot of Indians. We could see one drop now and then but the rest would right away pick him up and carry him away on their horses. And those who were tied on were dragged away by their ponies. So there were very few found after the battle and no one knows for certain what the Indian losses were.

Our first idea on retreating to the river was to get back to the place where we had forded, but the Indians hidden in the timber, and whom we had passed in our charge down the valley were busy by now and had us cut off there. So there was nothing to do but cut through the line between us and the river. "Snopsy" Meyer's horse got away with him and bolted through the Indian's line on our right, but he got back to us, shooting his way out with his six gun. How he ever did it is a mystery. Before that one of our men, Smith, got lost that way. His horse ran away with him and took right in the direction of the village. We never even found his body. As "Snopsy" got to the river his horse was shot from under him and he started for the river afoot. I saw him and Benny Hodgson—we called him the Jack of Clubs—starting on the same horse. "Snopsy" got on the horse and Hodgson hung on to a stirrup and was dragged to the other side of the river and was hit by a bullet and killed just as he got across. Soon after we started with Sergeant Ryan on the retreat I saw my bunkie, Scollen, fall. He was on ahead and when I got up there I saw that his horse had fallen in a short of a wallow and thrown him out of the saddle. He had been shot but was still alive when I got to him. I couldn't help him and he was beyond help anyway. All he could say was "Goodbye boys."

Just then my horse got shot on the right side but he lived to get me across the river. I jumped him in and we got across but as I was climbing the bluff on the east side another bullet took him in the fetlock and he couldn't take me any farther. He had been hit altogether three times before he gave up. I got down and a man named St. Rider [Hobart Rider], a corporal in my company, came out from under some cover and asked me if I was wounded. I said, "Yes, and I can't walk." "Crawl around here under cover," he said, and I did so and we

stayed ther[e u]ntil the fire slackened. We didn't know then why the fire slackened but droves of Indians were leaving on the gallop for the north or down stream. Of course we knew later that they had gone to help Crazy Horse clean up on Custer.

COLLECTING THE REMN[A]NTS

As soon as we could we crawled up on the hill but there weren't many there. Captain Varnum was there wearing his straw hat and trying to rally enough men to go back for the wounded. The Sergeant came up with ten men and [Edmund H.] Burke, blacksmith for K Troop, said, "Where are all your men?" "Ten is all I can muster Burke," he told us. They were all scattered around and after awhile we got together. Twenty-nine of the original 112 had been killed in the fight on the bottom or while climbing the bluff and many wounded. Most of us were out of shells but by the time we had commenced to get together Captain Benteen came up with his three troops. But the ammunition train was not in sight. It came up before long, however, and the officers held a council of war and we all started down stream in the direction Custer had taken. I was able to ride a horse and Thorpe loaned me his. We moved maybe a couple of miles with Captain Weird and his company perhaps a half mile ahead and the we all got checked and had to back up. The Indians were coming back from the north by thousands. We backed up, fighting as we went and looking for a position. Pretty soon we got back to the place we had started from. Pretty good position, on a hill and back of us to the east was prairie.

THE SIEGE

We all got down and threw out a skirmish line and the Indians surrounded us and we fought that way until dark. Indians on every side of us and they were pumping lead into us in a steady stream. The only way we could escape it was by hugging the ground, and being on a high point I suppose most of the bullets went over us. At that, somebody would get hit every little while and several were killed right there. While the fighting was the thickest, one of the pack mules with the load on its back, started to leave. He had gone maybe a hundred yards when he was overtaken by a man we called "Crazy Jim" Seivers [James W. Severs] who brought him back. He was exposed to the fire of the Sioux from the minute he started until he got back. I saw this and it was a mighty brave deed but Seivers never got any medal of honor for it that I know of. Sergeant Hanly [Richard P. Hanly] got a medal for doing practically the same thing on the retreat back to the hill, and well deserved it.

During all this fighting I was near Captain French helping get the guns loaded whenever an empty shell would stick, and this happened to most of the guns as soon as they got hot. Captain French was a crack shot and always carried a "Long Tom" infantry rifle. This gun had a ramrod carried under the barrel and I think it was the only ramrod in the outfit. Whenever a shell would stick he would recover the gun and either pick it out with his knife and I would punch it out with his ramrod. We would then load the gun and return it to its owner.

In doing this Captain French was exposed most of the time, but was perfectly cool and for some reason or other escaped unhurt.

THE ARMISTICE OF NIGHT

And so it went until dark and it was a long time getting dark. At about nine o'clock. Then the firing let up and we all got busy throwing up entrenchments. All we had for this work was butcher knives and tin plates but we made these do. By morning we had a low wall of dirt and sod around the rim of the hill in a sort of an oval shape. The wounded were placed in a kind of depression inside the circle where the bullets could not reach them. Two of our doctors had been killed and the only one left was Dr. [Henry Rinaldo] Porter, a very fine man. He worked continuously day and night doing the best he could. There were few medicines, bandages, or anything of the sort and of course no water, and he could only clean out and bandage the wounds with whatever he could find. His presence was a great comfort the wounded, and although several different times he took a rifle and started for the firing line, the wounded always begged so hard that he returned and stayed with them.

DEEDS OF HEROISM

Without water and adequate care, the suffering of the wounded was terrible. One man, McVey [Jonathan McVay], was terribly shot in the abdomen. He kept begging for water and several times I heard him say "Seventy-five dollars to the man who will bring me a drink." On the second day of the siege a number of men succeeded in getting down to the river and got a little water. McVey was begging piteously for water. I was near him and he said, "I know I am going to die, but I can't until I get a drink." Someone gave him a drink. The water ran out the wound in his stomach but he laid back and died in peace.

Easily in the morning of the 26th the Sioux got to pressing pretty close to Benteen's company which was guarding the south side of the hill. Benteen decided to charge them and M Company came over from the north to reenforce him. They charged and drove the enemy back but Tanner [Jacob Henry Gebhart, aka James J. Tanner] of my company was badly wounded in the charge. He was carried back to the hospital and I said to him, "Poor old Tanner, they got you." "No," he gasped, "but they will in a few minutes. To this day I choke every time I try to tell of his death.

Sergeant White [Henry Charles Weihe, aka Charles White] though badly shot in the elbow, stayed on his feet and did everything he could to relieve the sufferers. He had a glass full of jelly in his bags and each wounded man got a small spoonful of that.

Major Reno, Captain Benteen, Captain French and other officers stayed on their feet during all the night, walking back and forth along the line keeping the men from going to sleep and encouraging them in every way.

No one knew where Custer had gone and mostly we had given up hope of any rescue from that source. I heard a great deal of cussing and swearing at Custer for what we figured for his desertion of us. No one had any idea that he had

been wiped out. We thought that he had found things too hot and gone to join Terry who was known to be somewhere to the north and headed our way. But nobody expected that Terry would be able to get to us in time to do any good. We all realized that we were in a mighty bad fix and knew just what to count on as soon as daylight came.

And sure enough just as soon as it commenced to get light here they came. At first just a few shots then a steady fusilade. And this thing kept up pretty much all day of the 26th. We had to save our ammunition as much as possible for no one knew how long we would be there.

People trying to make a hero out of somebody and a goat out of someone else have said that during all this fight Reno was drunk. I know better. And this is just one of the many lies that have been told by people who were not there, in an effort to find somebody to blame. I saw Reno several times during the hottest of the fight on the bottom and was close to him. Also during the siege on the hill and if he had been the least bit drunk I would have known it.

(Continued Next Week)

Next week, Terry rescues Reno's men.

Beginning the story as told by Oscar One Bull of the Sioux.

FIFTH INSTALLMENT

17 DEC 1930, PAGE 6

SYNOPSIS

If you have not followed the story, we enticed Private Dan Newell into the office of the author and after placing a stenographer out of his light, got the old veteran launched on the story of the Big Horn Campaign. We started with General Custer from Fort Lincoln near Bismarck, N. D. on the long march to meet the Sioux. We crossed the Powder [R]iver and after dividing the troops left Custer and went with Major Reno. We attacked the Indians and were driven back to Reno's Hill, where bre[a]stworks have been thrown up and se are now fighting vainly to hold the ground.

FIFTH INSTALMENT

On the 26th the wounded got to suffering so that someone had to go for water. The only way to get to the river was by following down a gulch which headed on the south side of the bluff. Several of the men made the trip and got back with wter. One of these, Mike Madden [Michael P. Madden], was badly shot in the leg. So bad that Dr. Porter had to take the leg off. To fortify him the doctor gave him several drinks of whiskey and I am pretty sure he had some sort of an anaesthetic also. But anyway they tell a story to the effect that after the operation he offered to trade the other leg for another drink of whiskey. I saw and heard the whole performance and that wasn't just what Mike said, but I don't want to spoil a good story. It took lenty of verve to go through what Mide did. Another man named Arthur also lost a leg.

THE SIEGE SUBSIDES

TERRY'S APPROACH

The firing was not so fierce on the afternoon of the 26th, and along about sundown it let up and the Sioux began to pull out. Their camp was about four miles long up and down the bottom on the west side of the river and it is generally estimated that there were near fifteen thousand men, women and children. I know they made a big procession when they struck off to the south toward the Big Horn Mountains. It took all the afternoon for them to pass. But even after they commenced to leave we did not know what it all meant and it was late in the afternoon before we got the horses down to the river and were able to make coffee and get something to eat. Also the dead were buried and we moved camp down to the river to get away from the smell of the dead horses.

On the morning of the 27th Terry's command came in sight from the north. Finally they got up to us and gave us the first news of what had happened to Custer. When word got around it seemed as though every man in the outfit broke down and cried. His force had been surrounded on the open prairie about four miles from our position and every man killed. Not a single white man lived who could tell just how it happened.

After Terry's command came up we all moved over to the Indian's deserted camp. I went down to the river on horseback and in crossing my horse stumbled and hurt my wounded leg badly. So I got off and tried to walk over to the camp. This inflamed my leg so that it swelled to twice its normal size. It had had no attention and after I got to camp I rigged up a crutch and got down to the river and soaked the wounded leg in ice cold water, pouring water over the wound with my tin cup until the swelling went down, and that is all the care that wound got.

The bodies of all our comrades who fell in the fight on the bottom were hunted up and buried. The body of my bunkie Henry Scollen, or Henry Code, was all hack up. Later I sent his sister his prayer book which was found in his trunk at Fort Riley when his effects were sold. She wrote wanting to know whether his body had been mutilated. I answered and told her it had not but it had. I wanted to spare her feelings all I could. I suppose she is dead by now and there is no harm in telling it. I would have given most anything if I could have recovered his diary but I suppose the squaws got that when they stripped his body. Poor boy. His life's biggest adventure never got into that diary.

I wasn't able to work so didn't get up to the place where they found Custer's command, when they were buried, but from the stories told by my comrade [William C.] Slaper and other[s] who helped in this work, the squaws had done some horrible work on them too. None of the bodies were very well buried. There were few tools to dig with. Where the ground was soft they got some kind of a grave but where it was hard they were not much more than covered up.

We stayed in the [S]ioux camp two or three days resting up and taking care of the wounded. We were pretty badly used up bunch of men. Remember, we had ridden hard all day of the 24th and all the following night with only a short time to rest. Then riding and fighting all day of the 25th and all that night with no expectation of ever getting out alive, was about all a human being could be expected to stand.

ABOARD THE "FAR WEST"

Later we moved down the river to where the "Far West" was tied up. The badly wounded were carried on stretchers or travois. At the steamer they had prepared pretty well for us. Hay had been cut and dried and spread all over the deck. We all laid down and the doctor came around and gave us all a stiff drink of whiskey. The wounded were given every care but one of them, a man named George [Lell] from H Company died right beside me. He was badly shot and suffering terribly and begged for an opiate to stop the pain. The doctor gave it to him but it did no good.

After we were all loaded on the "Far West" Captain Grant Marsh got orders to lose no time in getting back to Fort Lincoln. He must have known his business pretty well. The Big Horn at the point where the boat was is just a big creek with scarcely room to turn around. But he got it turned around and headed down stream to the Yellowstone and then the Big Missouri, making the

trip in 56 hours. The distance I believe is about 800 miles. On the way down the Missouri the boat ran through a big herd of buffaloes. I suppose they were hunting better pastures on the other side of the river. One of them was shot and hoisted aboard the steamer.

BREAKING THE NEWS

We were the first to bring the news to Fort Lincoln. Many widows of the slain were there to meet us and it was not pleasant to answer their questions and tell them that their loved ones would not be back.

COMMANCHE

[The only survivor of Custer's command was the horse Commanche and he was kept at Fort Meade for many years. He was a buckskin somewhat dappled, and was the horse that carried Captain Keogh into the fight. After the battle he was found on the field badly wounded but was always cared for after that as long as he lived. No one]⁴

Was ever allowed to ride him, and while at Fort Meade he was a privileged character. He was allowed to run at large all over the parade ground and spent most of his time rummaging around in the garbage cans. Often he would wander around to my shop while I was working and make himself at home. I nailed the last set of shoes on him when he started for his last march to Fort Riley, Kansas, where he died. Later in 1893, at the World's Fair in Chicago my wife and I saw his stuffed and mounted skin. He looked very natural and his body I understand is now in the m[u]seum at the State University [University of Kansas] at Lawrence, Kansas.

CRUCIFIXION OF RENO

If ever a man received a raw deal in connection with the whole Big Horn tragedy that man was Major Reno. Custer was dead and was made a hero. Reno who had helped save most of us, lived and he was crucified. The public had to find someone to blame, and Reno was the most prominent one they could find. Of course Custer was not willfully to blame as some have charged. He did not send our little band of 112 men down against several thousand Sioux just to get rid of Reno who was said to have been a personal enemy. But it is just as false and a great deal more cruel to charge that Reno refused to go to Custer's aid for the same reason. As I have already told you he did go to Custer's aid as soon as he could rally his men and get a supply of ammunition, but Custer and all his men were dead before this, and it was utterly hopeless anyway. Even with Benteen's and McDougal's forces we were outnumbered ten to one. Custer simply had not taken the precaution to find out what he was up against.

The attacks of Custer's friends go so nasty that Major Reno became an outcast. The newspapers would give him no chance to fight back and finally which was held. All the evidence available was introduced and he was exonerated of any

⁴ Text in brackets were transposed elsewhere.

blame in connection with the affair. One of the witnesses who testified against him was fifty miles away at the time of the fight. All the officers present at the fight testified in his favor, out there are still people who do not know the facts who try to lay the blame on Reno. I saw Reno frequently while at Ft. Meade after the fight. I never heard that he claimed to be a hero, but he did his job on this occasion as well as anyone could and made the best of a bad situation.

When the regiment was moved to Fort Meade at Sturgis, S. D., I came [with them and was discharged on October 8, 1878. In 1879 I went to work there for the government as a civilian employe[e] and stayed until 1884.]⁵

(To Be Continued)

⁵ Text in brackets were transposed elsewhere.

SIXTH INSTALLMENT

FIFTY YEARS LATER

24 DEC 1930, PAGE 6

On June 25th 1926 a big celebration was held on the Big Horn Battlefield. Many thousands of people were present, but of the old 7th who took part in that fight, only nine attended. Lieutenant Godfrey, now General Godfrey, retired, was one of these, and together we went of the entire field. He and I were no0t able to agree over the location of one of two points on Reno Hill and I proved my claim by digging up some empty shells. The General complemented on my memory of the affair.

I suppose there are other interesting things in connection with all this which came to my notice at the time and one cannot remember everything.

THE SIOUX VERSION OF THE BIG HORN BATTLE

As told by Oscar One Bull (Tatanka Wangila) the Author

“My mother was Wiyaka Washte Win (Good Feather) who was a sister of Tatanka Eyotaka (Sitting Bull). Sitting Bull when a young man was very religious, always praying to Wakontanka. When he grew up he fought many battles and was wounded many times. He was always lame from a bullet he got when a young man. He always took care of the Lakota (Sioux) children who had lost their parents, also the old women and old men. One time some white men came to Lakota camp.

“I was in Sitting Bull’s camp on Big Horn River, One Horn Band, Minkowoji Teepee. They were called that because the4y planted their gardens near the river. Itazipco (Without Bow) was another band. Ogalala was the Red Cloud band. Ta Shonka Witko (Crazy Horse) was in charge of another band. Nother band, Schiyelo means Cheyenne. They were a different tribe, not Lakota. They were friends of Lakota.

“Pizi (Gall) had another band. All the different bands camped together. There were many other chiefs with their bands. Four Horn and Two Moon and many others. Whenever the chiefs held a council they went to Sitting Bull’s camp because he was a good medicine man.

“Lakota and Cheyennes had gone to this camp to look after their buffalo and so young men and women could get acquainted. White men had driven our buffalo away from Lakota land. So we went where buffalo were to take care of them and keep white men away.”

THE SURPRISE ATTACK

“I was a young man 22 years old. On the day of the fight I was sitting in my teepee combing my hair. I don’t know what time it twas. About this time maybe (two p.m.). Lakota had no watches in those days. I had just been out and picketed my horses and was back in my teepee. I saw a man named Fat Bear

come running into camp he said soldiers were coming on the other side of the river and had killed a boy named Deeds who went out to picket a horse. Then I came out of my teepee and saw soldiers running their horses toward our camp on the same side of the river. We could hear lots of shooting. I went to teepee of my uncle Sitting Bull and said I was going to take part in the battle. He said, "Go ahead, they have already fired."

GUIDED BY WAKONTANKA

"I had a rifle and plenty of shells, but I took that off and gave it to Sitting Bull and he gave me a shield. Then I took the shield and my tomahawk and got on my horse and rode up to where the soldiers were attacking us. They were firing pretty heavy. They were all down near the river in the timber. Lakota were riding around fast and shooting at them. I rode up to some Lakota and said "Let's all charge at once." I raised my tomahawk and said "Wakontanka help me so I do no sin but fight my battle." I started to charge. There were five Lakota riding behind me. We charged for some soldiers that were still fighting and they ran to where their horses were in the timber. Then the soldiers all started for the river. I turned my horse and started that way too and there was a man named Mato Washte (Pretty Bear) right behind me and he and his horse were shot down. I followed the soldiers. They were running for the river. I killed two with my tomahawk. Then the soldiers got across the river. I came back to where Pretty Bear was and got him up on my horse. He was wounded and covered with blood. I started my horse toward the river where the soldiers were, trying to get across. [Before we broke camp that night we saw the walking soldiers coming.]⁶

"Then I let Pretty Bear get off my horse and I went across the river after the soldiers. I killed one more then with my tomahawk.

"Then I saw four soldiers ahead of me running up the hill. I was just about to charge them when someone rode along beside me and said, "You better not go any farther. You are wounded." That was Sitting Bull. I was not wounded but I was all covered with blood that got on me when I had Pretty Bear on my horse. So I did what Sitting Bull told me. Then Sitting Bull rode back but I went on. Another Lakota went after these four soldiers. He had a rifle and shot one of them off his horse. One of the soldiers kept shouting back but without hitting us. The man that was with me was a Lakota but I did not know who he was. Now the soldiers were getting together up on the hill and we could see the other soldiers coming with the pack mules a long way off.

THE END OF CUSTER'S MEN

Then I went back across the river and rode down it a way, then I rode with the man who was shooting at the four at the four soldiers and we crossed the river again just east of Sitting Bull's camp. We saw a bunch of horsemen up on a hill to the north and they were Lakotas. We rode up to them and I told them I had

⁶ Text in brackets were transposed elsewhere.

killed a lot of soldiers and showed them my tomahawk. Then I said I was going up and help kill Custer's soldiers, but Sitting Bull told me not to go so I didn't go but we rode up where we could see the Lakotas and Cheyennes killing Custer's men [from down the river but my uncle said "We won't fight them. We have killed enough. We will go on now."]⁷

They had been shooting heavy but the Indians charged them straight from the west and then some rode around them to the north and when I saw them there were not many soldiers shooting and the Indians were knocking them off their horses and killing them with tomahawks and clubs. They were all killed. There were a lot of Sioux killed. The others were picking them up on their horses and taking them back to camp.

Then we had a war dance all night and in the morning we heard that the soldiers with the pack mules were up on the hill and the Sioux started after them. I went with Sitting Bull and volunteered to go help kill these soldiers but Sitting Bull said no. So we watched the fight from the hill. I didn't have my rifle with me then, just my tomahawk. The Sioux surrounded them and they fought that way all day. The soldiers had ditches dug all around the hill. Then along towards sundown the Sioux broke camp and went to the mountains.

The Sioux did not take any prisoners that I know of. I didn't see any.

I don't know how many Indians there were, but it was a very big band. Many bands together.

I was with Sitting Bull all the time we were in camp on the Big Horn and saw him during the battle. He was telling his men what to do. The first I knew of any soldiers was when they killed the boy who went to picket his horse across the river from Sitting Bull's camp.

"One Bull, did you ever hear about the Crow scout Curley escaping [through the Sioux lines by covering himself with a blanket?]"⁸

The old warrior looked thoughtful for a moment and then said, "If he had been trying to get away with a blanket over him the Sioux would have seen him and killed him. The Sioux and Cheyennes were mostly naked."⁹

"And did Rain-in-the-Face cut out the heart of Tom Custer and eat it?" he was asked. He smiled and said "I think Rain-in-the-Face was bragging. But I don't know about that." Custer's soldiers were all killed in a few minutes. Most of them were killed when I got up where I could see the fight."

Note—This story of One Bull throws a little light on Custer's acts after sending Reno into the charge. Apparently it was Custer's command that killed the boy Deeds, and it must have occurred while Reno was riding to the charge. The

⁷ Text in brackets were transposed elsewhere.

⁸ Text in brackets were transposed elsewhere.

⁹ Text in brackets were transposed elsewhere.

story also throws a great deal of light upon one point of bitter controversy, viz, as to whether Reno was to be blamed for not going sooner to Custer's aid. This story is strong evidence that most of Custer's men were dead before Benteen's command reached Reno.

THE BATTLE OF THE BIG HORN

As Related by Charles Windolph, Company H, Old Seventh Cavalry, U. S. A.
to John P. Everett

Sergeant Windolph is another of the command of Colonel Benteen who took part in the defense of Reno Hill at the Battle of the Big Horn in June 1876. Mr. Windolph was born in Germany and came to the United States as a young man. He enlisted in the Old Seventh Cavalry in 1871 and in 1873 accompanied General Stanley upon the survey of the Northern Pacific as far as Pompey's Pillar in the Yellowstone country. He accompanied the Seventh Cavalry when it escorted the Ludlow exploring expedition of the Black Hills in 1874. He also took part in the Nez Perce campaign of 1877. For many years he has been in charge of the harness department of the great Homestake Mine at Lead, South Dakota. Here follow his story of June 25, 1876.

I was serving under Captain Benteen in Company H when the Seventh Cavalry started from Fort Abraham Lincoln, Dakota Territory, on May 17th, 1876. At that time there were no white men living west of the Missouri River and north of the Nebraska line until one reached the western part of what is now the state of Montana. The greater part of that country including the Black Hills had been set aside by treaty to the Sioux Nation. And beyond that the Sioux held a great part of the buffalo range by force of arms. The story of the expedition against them in 1876 has been told in detail by many men during the last fifty years, and I shall not repeat it here. This is the story as I saw it, of the events occurring on June 26th and immediately before and after.

CUSTER'S WARNING

Rosebud Creek and the Big Horn River flow side by side from south to north and empty into the Yellowstone. Our expedition had camped on the Rosebud on the night of the 23rd and started with all the Seventh under General Custer, upstream on the morning of the 24th. It was a hard day's ride and took us well along into the evening before we finally came to a halt. We were all tired out and all the men supposed that we were in for a good night's rest. However, we were disappointed and after making coffee and eating a little lunch orders came to saddle up and be on our way. We rode in close formation all that night, following the general course of the Rosebud, and came to a halt just about daybreak. Here we again made coffee and the men all threw themselves on the ground and got what little sleep they could. However there was no order to go into camp and every man was held in readiness to be on the move again. I was riding a horse called "Roman Nose" and a man named [Joseph J.] McCurry came to me and wanted to trade his horse "Tip" for mine. Tip was a little hard to handle and McCurry did not like him. I was a good horseman in those days and figured I could ride anything so I told him it would be alright if agreeable

to Captain Benteen. So I went to look him up and found him in company with General Custer and the rest of the officers holding a conference. I approached as near as seemed respectful and was waiting to get his attention and heard some of the conversation. Charley Reynolds, the famous scout, was with them and I heard him say to the General something about "the biggest bunch of Indians he had ever seen." They all seemed to be talking very earnestly and finally Captain Benteen said, "Hadn't we better keep the regiment together? If that is a big camp we will need every man we have." Custer's only answer was, "You have your orders. Sound to horse, [men!]"¹⁰

OUR FORCES SEPARATED

So in a little while we were on our way again travelling west and over the divide which separates the Rosebud from the Big Horn. We reached the top of this divide about noon or maybe a little earlier, and here Captain Benteen with companies H, K, and D turned off to the left or south. The rest of the command continued on to the west.

"Nothing of any importance occurred on this march of our to the left. We were continually on the lookout for Indians but saw no sign of any. The further south we went the rougher the country became and it became very apparent that we would find no Indians there. I do not know just how far south we went but imagine it was some seven or eight miles. Then the command turned to the right and back in the direction of the course we knew Custer had taken and toward the Big Horn. Along about the middle of the afternoon we came across Custer's trail and followed that in the direction of the river. Soon after striking Custer's trail we met Sergeant Kanipe from Custer's command who it seems had been sent back to hurry up the ammunition train. Captain Benteen directed him to follow back on Custer's trail where he would find Captain McDougal with the packs. A pack train can never travel as fast as the mounted troops and McDougal must have been some distance behind when Benteen turned off to the left. You must remember that this pack train had been travelling all night and the previous day and the animals were in worse shape than the cavalry horses. At any rate we had travelled some ten or fifteen miles after leaving them and still had come in ahead of them on Custer's trail. After sending Kanipe back toward the pack train we continued on west for a while and soon met Trumpeter Martin carrying a written message from Custer. This of course was Custer's famous last message directing Benteen to hurry up the packs. At this time the battle had already started, for Martin's horse had been struck and was bleeding. Firing could be heard on ahead and we now hurried along toward the place where we found Reno.

As you will now see, the regiment at this moment was divided into four bodies, and the battle already started: McDougal with his troop in charge of the ammunition train was several miles to the rear; Benteen with three troops was about half way between McDougal and Reno; Reno with three troops was

¹⁰ Text in brackets were transposed elsewhere.

fighting for his life in the valley at the south end of the Indian camp, and nobody knew where Custer and his five troops were.

FIRST GLIMPSE OF RENO'S MEN

Soon we came to the top of the bluffs on the east side of the river and got our first glimpse of what had happened. Reno's men were scattered along the river valley on the west side and some of them were coming up the bluffs in our direction. Hundreds of mounted Indians were firing on them and thousands more could be seen down the river to the north for several miles. A little bunch of Reno's men had got together on a hill overlooking the river and the rest were struggling across the river and up the bluffs to unite with them. Reno, Var[n]um and French were trying to rally them when we rode up, and about this time the last of the Indians left for the north or down the river. The ammunition train could be seen coming over the back trail and Lieutenant Hare was sent back to hurry it along."

(To Be Continued)

FINAL INSTALLMENT

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From the survivors of Reno's command we soon learned that companies M, A and G had been sent on [b]y Custer to attack the Indians at the south end of their camp which was strung along the river bottom on the west side for a distance of some four miles. They had charged the camp with only 112 men, expecting Custer to follow them up. Their attack had been met in the open by probably ten times their number and they were being rapidly cut to pieces and were faced with the choice of getting back to the bluffs to a better position, or staying a half hour longer to be wiped out. As it was a large number had been killed and many were wounded. Most of them were out of cartridges and all we now had was being carried by our command, until the pack train came up. While we were waiting for them the officers got together and it seems that Captain Weir was for going right away to look up Custer without waiting for the packs. It is known that he had a heated argument with Reno and soon started off alone with his one troop under command of himself and Lieutenant [Winfield Scott] Edgerly.

BENTEN ASSUMES COMMAND

Captain Benteen now took charge of the situation. He was an experienced soldier and universally respected and trusted. Reno and all his officers and men were excited, mad and bewildered. Some say that Reno was drunk, but a more cowardly lie was never told. And I cannot see that he showed cowardice either. It seems to me that he used pretty good judgment in getting his men out when he did, and certainly he was right in refusing to start out to hunt up Custer until the ammunition came up. He didn't know where Custer was nor what he might run into. Just as soon as the ammunition came up we all started north, following the course taken by [Thomas Benton] Weir. I should say that we were less than a half mile behind him. He had gone perhaps one mile when we came up to him, without any sign of Custer. He had however run into a large band of Sioux and was backing up in our direction, fighting as he came. Thousands of Indians were coming from the north and from the river and our united command was only a handful in comparison. Together we retreated to the hill where we first came up to Reno and there took up a position.

We had no time to throw up entrenchments, but a line was thrown around the rim of the hill and this gave us a little advantage on the north, west and south. The east side was more exposed. We got down on our bellies behind packing boxes, saddles or anything we could get. The animals were placed in a little hollow at one end of the hill and nearby a hospital was established to take care of the wounded. There were several of these by the time we took position, and there were plenty more before another day. Dr. Porter was the only physician left and the whole care of the wounded fell on him with the exception of what help he could get from the slightly wounded.

The Indians were pressing us hard when we got into this position and in a few minutes had us surrounded on every side. It seemed as if they had no end of ammunition. Being on high ground was the only thing that saved us, and at that their fire got a lot of the men and animals. People have asked me how many Indians there were. No one knows for certain, but I am sure that four thousand fighting men would be a safe estimate. And there were less than 300 of us.

THE VIGIL OF THE NIGHT

This happened on the afternoon of the 25th of June. When it got dark the firing slackened and every able man got down to digging up breastworks. All the tools we had were knives, spoons and tin plates. There may have been a few shovels in the packs but not enough to do much good. However we managed to get a pretty fair ridge of dirt around the hill which gave some protection as long as we hugged the ground. There wasn't much trouble keeping the men down, but Reno, Benteen, French, Weir and other officers took some long chances, staying on their feet and patrolling the lines to keep up the spirits of the men.

My company, H, under Benteen held the south side of the hill. On this side a deep draw headed, running to the west and to the river. Up this the Indians swarmed and ours was the hardest position to hold. For a while that night everything was quiet. No one was supposed to sleep, but now and then a man would topple off in spite of everything. But before daylight the attack commenced again and nobody slept after that.

During the night I was on guard and off to the southwest I could see someone coming. No one could tell whether it was friend or foe, but soon we heard a cry, "It is [Charles (Carlo) Camillo] DeRudio."

He rushed into the shelter of our lines and it proved to be Lt. DeRudio. With him was Private [Thomas F.] O'Neill. These two and several others had been cut off in the retreat from the river bottom the day before and had stayed hidden in the brush with the Sioux all around them until darkness made it safe for them to start out and look us up. It was a miracle they ever got to us that. [Once during the night while we were lying in the trenches Captain]¹¹ Benteen came up to where I was and said, "Windolph, get up, I want to talk to you." I wasn't very anxious to get up just then, but whatever Captain Benteen said went with me. So I got up and came to attention. "Windolph," he said, "if we ever cut out of this alive, which I greatly doubt, you can write back to your folks in Germany and tell them how many Indians we are fighting today." He smiled and passed on. Long afterwards he sent his photograph to my people in Germany. He was a great man.

I remember that after things began to quiet down a bit it threated to rain, did sprinkle just a little. A man named [Julien J.] Jones and I got on our overcoats and laid down, side by side. When the firing commenced in the morning I said

¹¹ Text in brackets were transposed elsewhere.

to him, "Let's get off our coats." He didn't move. I reached down and turned him over. He was dead, shot through the heart. A long time after I met his mother and sister in Milwaukee and told them about it.

SECOND DAY OF THE SIEGE

As soon as it got light enough to see the Sioux were at us again in earnest. All we could do was lie and watch our chances and pick off a Sioux whenever one showed himself. We were saving our ammunition as much as possible. Once the enemy on the south side of the hill commenced to mass for an attack. If they had made it it would soon have been all over with us. But Col. Benteen went over to the north side of the hill and came back with a bunch of M Troop and together we charged them. We drove them out alright and got back but Tanner of M Troop got a wound which took him off that night.

All day long we lay there in the hot sun. In our troop the only ones hit were picked off by sharp-shooters. The Sioux had rifles that outranged ours. One fellow in particular off on a hill to the south kept pouring the lead into us all day. We could see him plainly enough. He was resting his gun over an old whitened buffalo skull. Time and again I tried to get him but my Springfield wouldn't carry up. I had just fired once and had loaded up to fire again when a bullet hit the stalk of my carbine, cutting it right in two in my hands. The only wound I got was a little scratch in my side which I didn't realize until afterward.

Honor and Medals of Honor

In the afternoon of the 26th the wounded got to crying so pitifully for water that volunteers were called for to go down the draw on our side of the hill, and get it from the river. Several volunteered and made the trip under fire from the Sioux hidden in the brush on the opposite side of the river. Col. Benteen sent four of us, [George] Geiger, [Henry William Bigler Mechling] Meckling, [Otto] Voit and myself to a point on the [missing text] er with order to cover their trip.

We were exposed all the time and bullets were falling around us pretty thick, but we managed to keep the timber on the other side of the river so full of lead that the water carriers were able to make the trip several times. For this we were all later given the Congressional Medal of Honor, including most of the water carriers. But there were many men that day deserving medals who never got them. There was Sergeant Paul who got shot leading a charge on the north side of the hill. A braver man never lived. And "Crazy Jim" Sievers and Dan Newell, Slaper and many more. No one is to blame for that though. It just happened that their acts didn't happen to come to the attention of the officers reporting them. Many things are overlooked in a time like that.

I will never forget Sgt. Lell. He was fatally wounded and dragged to the hospital. He was dying and knew it. "Life me up boys," he said to some men. "I want to see the boys again before I go." So they held him up to a sitting position, where he could see his comrades in action. A smile came to his face as

he saw the beautiful fight the 7th was making. Then they laid him down and he died soon after.

In the afternoon of the 26th the Sioux gave us up although they needn't have. They had us at their mercy if they had only known. It. But something had taken the heart out of them, and in the afternoon they broke camp and started off up the river bottom to the south. Miles and miles of them were strung along the valley in the direction of the Big Horn Mountains. But we stayed where we were that night except to get the horses to water and the next morning we could see the infantry coming from the north, miles away. They passed Custer's field down the river about four miles from us and found what had happened to him and his men. That was the first news any of us had of Custer.

My First View of the Tragedy

Late in the afternoon of the 27th Col. Benteen, Captain Weir, Captain Varnum, Lieut. Edgerly and fourteen men of H troop rode up to the scene of Custer's last stand. I was one of them. We were the first there after their discovery by Lieut. Bradley of the 7th Infantry. It was a terrible sight. There the bodies lay, mostly naked, and scattered over a field maybe a half mile square. We went among them to see how many we could recognize. I was looking especially for my comrade. Corp. [Finkle, but I never was able to recognize him.]¹²

I have read that Lieut. Bradley later wrote that the bodies were not badly mutilated. That was kind of him to spare the feelings of their relatives, but they were badly mutilated, some of them too bad to tell about. I saw the body of Tom Custer though, and must say that the story of his heart having been cut out by Rain-in-the-Face is not so. Col. Benteen took a little piece of wood, hollowed it out on one side, and wrote Gen Custer's name on it and stuck it in the ground near Custer's body. Shortly after that they were all buried as well as we were able with the tools we had.

Gibbon and Terry, with the Infantry and Gatling guns had come up the river from the north, arriving on the morning of the 27th after the battle was over. If Custer had waited for them there would have been a different story. Maybe there would have been no fight but the result would have been different if we had fought. The Indians never could stand the big guns. But it would not have been easy if the Sioux had wished a fight for they outnumbered us many times even with the whole expedition united.

¹² Text in brackets were transposed elsewhere.



Sgt. Chas. Windolph, Old 7th Cav. U. S. A. wearing his Congressional Medal of Honor for distinguished service at the Battle of the Big Horn Montana Territory, June 25 and 26, 1876.

And I am sure that they knew every move we made, probably from the time we left Fort Lincoln. They had a first class set of scouts and knew every inch of the country and could get messages around quicker than we could. Then, too, they had a system of signals by means of signal fires with a code which they all understood. In the way they could send messages many miles across country about as well as a telegraph. They had some good leaders like Two Moons, Crazy Horse, Gall, Rain-in-the-Face and others, and when they saw Custer getting too close with help a long way off and his command split four ways, they knew their chance had come and they made quick work of it.

After we were relived the whole command went into camp on the bottoms on the west side of the river in the place where the Sioux had been. While prowling around in the brush I found a magnificent pair of saddle bags that had been lost by some Sioux. I had these along time after the fight, but gave them to Joe McCurry who took them east with him. I didn't realize the value of such things at the time.

Also I came across a dog that had been left behind when the Sioux pulled out. He was frightened, cross and surly but I finally made friends with him and kept him with me for a long time but someone stole him later at Fort Berthold.

A T R I B U T E F R O M B E N T E E N

I stayed with the regiment until I was discharged at Fort Meade in 1883. Captain Jackson urged me to stay in the army and offered to make me his first sergeant, but in the meantime my life's companion had come over from Germany and we were married and she convinced me that the army was no place for a married man. About a week before my enlistment expired Col. Benteen came into the orderly room where I was and said, "Give me a piece of paper. I do not often recommend a man but am going to write a recommendation for you." He took the paper and wrote the following which he gave to me. "To whom this may concern: Chas. W. Windolph has been a member of my troop for two enlistments. He has been a gallant soldier. I take pleasure in recommending him to anyone who needs the service of a man. He has been faithful to me. F. W. Benteen, Bvt. Col. U. S. A." This document in the clear vertical handwriting of that great soldier is my proudest possession. Money would not buy it.

This is my personal experience in connection with that memorable battle. For more than fifty years there has been a great deal of controversy as to who was to blame for its result. I am sure that a great deal that could throw light on the subject has never been published. Some day it may come out but not now.

C O N C L U S I O N

Why should this battle, now more than half a century past, retain such a grip on the interest of Americans? Doubtless we are a romantic people, and in that day war and romance went together. To day war is accompanied with no very elevating emotions. During all these years a bitter controversy has raged over the question as to who was to blame for the outcome of this famous battle. There are still Custer partisans and Reno partisans, and some of the most bitter charges have come from the pens of those who were not there, frequently ignoring the proven facts. Inferences should drawn only from the latter. These are the stories of men who know.

T H E E N D