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Nelson A. Miles' winter campaign of 1876/77 and the Battle of Wolf Mountain

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Wolf Mountain**

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San Jose State University, 1990

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NELSON A. MILES'
WINTER CAMPAIGN OF 1876/77
AND THE
BATTLE OF WOLF MOUNTAIN

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
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December, 1990

Approved for the Department of History

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ABSTRACT

NELSON A. MILES' WINTER CAMPAIGN OF 1876/77 AND THE BATTLE OF WOLF MOUNTAIN

by John F. Golda

This thesis addresses the topic of Colonel Nelson A. Miles' winter campaign of 1876/77 against the Sioux and Cheyenne and concentrates on the Battle of Wolf Mountain. The type of warfare typical to Sioux society and the U. S. Army are examined to understand the nature of the conflicts that took place on the plains during the late 1870s.

The course of the Sioux War of 1876 is developed to explain the importance of a winter campaign. While much of the Army went into winter quarters, Miles continued to pursue the Indian camps. By keeping a constant pressure on the hostile bands, Miles was able to force the Sioux to surrender and return to the agencies. The Battle of Wolf Mountain was a key step in the surrender of the Sioux.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO MILES' WINTER CAMPAIGN

Most people today think of Custer, cavalrymen, and mounted Sioux warriors when the Sioux War of 1876 is mentioned. This is part of the popular conciousness for many people. But there were events which often slip from view and memory. One such event was the close of the Sioux War and one of its most important battles, the Battle of Wolf Mountain. The 1876 summer campaign against the Sioux had been a failure. In an attempt to force the Sioux to accept the reservation and bring an end to the hostilities, the idea of a winter campaign was considered. This winter campaign is often overlooked in many histories; people just assume that the war eventually ended and the Sioux returned to the reservations, but little thought is given to how this was achieved. Yet the conclusion of any phase of history, and its results, are as important as its beginning.

In order to understand the nature of the Army's winter campaign against the Sioux in 1876/77, and its conclusion in the snowy fields of Montana, one must look at the participants. The Sioux and the Army were the central characters in this drama. As such, some time must be taken to weave together the varied forces and influences which shaped each of them. There was a considerable

history involved in the growth of the Sioux society and what led it to develop into the imperial power that it became. Likewise, there were factors which led the Army to become what it was during the Nineteenth Century. Its people and its duty were key parts of what the Army was. With these points considered one can then look into the nature of the campaign itself. The winter campaign and in particular the Battle of Wolf Mountain were atypical in terms of the stereotyped "Plains Battles." There were no cavalry used by the Army, few Indians were mounted on their ponies, and it took place on a wintry, ice encrusted bluff in Montana. This is hard to reconcile with the flat, hot plains most envision as the site of the Sioux Wars. Yet this campaign and its battles were more important than the defeat of Custer at the Little Big Horn, as it signified the end of armed, hostile resistance from the Sioux and the acceptance of the reservations.

For many, the vision of the Sioux Wars is one of gallant Army cavalrymen in hot pursuit of swift Sioux horsemen. Names like Little Big Horn, Custer, Fetterman, Sitting Bull, and Crazy Horse surface in a long line of brave deeds and tragic mistakes. But there is a great deal more to these events than what these names typically bring to mind. There is a complex history of interaction and reaction that took place on those wind swept plains. The Sioux Wars were a clash of peoples; each felt that they were right, each fought for their way of life and their future. In the years that followed the view that many shared over this clash would vary. Initially, the view was one of the Army

trooper chasing down a savage enemy who had no regard for the life of his foe, whether it be man, woman, or child. The Indian was a vicious savage who would not stop until every white was murdered and horribly mutilated. The only person who could stop him was the Army cavalryman; a gallant, almost semi-divine (though sometimes Irish) fighting man who braved the dangers to rescue the wagon train from the hordes of screaming Indians. But nothing is free from change and this view soon began to shift. The Indian became the symbol of what was honorable and noble. They fought for their homes and their families in the face of an evil, corrupt government who was bent upon their total annihilation. The wicked instrument of this destruction was none other than the cavalryman. Like any stereotype there is a kernel of truth in these scenarios surrounded by the chaff of bigotry and ignorance. Much of what really happened is lost in the emotional wave of what many believe might have happened.

Many people feel that the Sioux and their culture had existed as it had for hundreds, if not thousands, of years prior to the advent of white settlement in the New World. Yet in fact the culture that we recognize as that of the Plains Indians was a product of Europeans. Plains Indian culture was shaped by the responses to changes brought by Europeans, whether by the expansion of hostile eastern tribes who found advantages in trading furs for guns or by the mobility offered by the horse. The introduction of the horse

particularly made the Sioux warrior as formidable a foe as has ever existed. Such factors must be considered in any study of the Sioux.

The Army too, must be considered in the light of its time. It was then considered the "Guardian of Civilization," if by no one else but itself. To civilians in the Montana Territory the Army was a blessing, yet for most of the nation it was something that was seen as a financial burden and a haven for troublemakers. The men who served in it and the factors which influenced its control were key elements in how it was used on the Plains. They responded to the Sioux and the conditions of service on the Plains in a variety of ways, many of which depended upon the individual commander and his ability to cope with the problems around him.

The ever increasing pressures that were brought to bear in Montana by the flood of miners and settlers were an important part of any effort to examine the nature of the conflict between the Sioux and the government. As civilians poured into Montana, they put pressure on the Sioux who had been guaranteed certain rights by the government in Washington. Tensions naturally rose. The civilians, who were often the source of much trouble, spent considerable effort crying for the government's aid in solving their problems, particularly opening the territory for white settlement. The situation finally erupted into war in the spring of 1876.

A plan was made for a quick strike into the heart of the Unceded Territory of the Sioux. A source of game and traditional freedom, this area represented a valuable asset to the Sioux who still

clung to the nomadic ways of life and who had little desire to live on the reservation. Three columns headed into the area, each was strong enough to face any potential threat that was expected to be found there. But the Army troops met stronger resistance than any of the planners had foreseen. In fact, the destruction of Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer and his detachment of the Seventh Cavalry was just such a bitter failure. But it was a turning point for the nation. It shocked the Americans down to their roots and filled them with a desire to put an end to the threat of the Sioux. For the Sioux it was a turning point in the nature of their conflict against the U. S. government. They rallied behind a victory which they saw as an omen. The remainder of the summer of 1876 was spent by the Army in attempting to find the hostile Sioux, but afraid that if they found them they would share Custer's fate.

With summer slipping away and winter approaching, the Army's command decided to attempt a winter campaign. A young colonel, Nelson A. Miles, was convinced that he could succeed where others had failed miserably. He asked, politicked, and pleaded to lead a campaign in the middle of winter. This was no idle offer. Montana had a winter climate in which arctic conditions frequently killed men and animals and made transportation nearly impossible. But this plan had merit. The Indians would be unable to offer effective resistance, nor be able to flee as readily as they might when the summer's grass allowed fodder for their ponies and plentiful game. It

was hoped that this move would bring the resistance to an end in the quick stroke that had eluded the Army all summer long.

So in the wintery December of 1876, Miles set out with the men of the Fifth and Twenty-second Infantry. They searched, hoping to find Sitting Bull, the Chief who had been at the head of the Sioux during the summer fighting. As they moved along the Tongue River they found signs of hostile Sioux. After several small skirmishes they found the main encampment of the Sioux in that area. It was under the leadership of Crazy Horse, a war leader of great reputation. On January 7, 1877, Miles engaged the Sioux and Cheyenne forces on the icy slopes of the buttes around Wolf Mountain. The following battle proved to be of great importance to the continuation of hostilities by the Sioux. While the battle itself was only a skirmish in size and nature, it forced the Sioux to accept several factors which could not be denied. The most important was that the Army was determined to finish the war and they would not allow faint hearted campaigns to continue. It also allowed the peace factions within the Sioux nation to regain the initiative over those who declared that continuation of hostilities was the only way for the Sioux to survive.

Wolf Mountain was the key to closing the Sioux War. After the winter campaign ended and the spring thaws came, the Sioux began to return to the reservation. Even this return and the credit taken for it was fought over by Miles and General George Crook, rival officers in the Army itself. Slowly the Sioux and Cheyenne returned; they would never again leave the reservations in the numbers that had

attempted to maintain their traditional ways of life. With the exception of the outbreak of the Ghost Dance, in 1890, the Sioux were no longer a threat to the continued white settlement of Montana.

CHAPTER II

THE SIOUX AND WAR

They were described by Captain Anson Mills of the United States Army as "...the best cavalry soldiers on earth."¹ Mills was well qualified to make such an assessment of the Sioux Indians. He and many fellow officers and soldiers had faced these warriors during the late nineteenth century. Accounts of these encounters have affected the view that most of the world holds for American Indians. The Sioux, or Dakota, Indians are the stereotypical Indians of North America and as such they are often greatly romanticized. As anthropologist Wendell H. Oswalt stated, "the image of warriors astride horses recklessly chasing herds of bison or enemies across the plains conveys a sense of daring and freedom."² A large part of the Sioux mystique is due to their role as warriors. These people fought in the defence of their way of life against the ever increasing pressure of white settlement and contact that characterized the better part of the nineteenth century. Ironically, the Sioux way of life developed out of adaptation to new forces and factors introduced by the whites.

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¹ Neil C. Mangum, Battle of the Rosebud, (El Segundo: Upton & Sons, 1987), p. 62.

² Wendell H. Oswalt, This Land Was Theirs, (Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1988), p. 218.

If one factor alone was responsible for the Sioux culture, it was the introduction of the horse. The life of the Sioux revolved around the horse and the changes it brought. It is a classic example of revolutionary change, a change affecting all aspects of one's life. Specifically, transportation, subsistence activities, the value of material goods, warfare, and even interpersonal relationships were affected by the advent of the horse. The Sioux, and other Plains Indians, represented a major obstacle in the expansion of American settlement in North America. These Indians were considerably different from the 'savages' that so many Americans believed them to be. They were a force the likes of which the U.S. military had never encountered. To gain some understanding of what the Sioux were as warriors and as opponents of the U.S. Army, one must examine the place of warfare in Sioux society.

In the era preceding the arrival of the Europeans in North America, the Sioux shared a common linguistic background with other groups that lived in much of the central and northeastern United States. It appears that the Dakota and their relatives lived in the area around the upper-Mississippi,³ living on the woodland edges of the Plains. They inhabited small, semi-sedentary villages and depended upon hunting and gathering for their subsistence. They supplemented their diet with limited agriculture, largely maize, but possibly also beans, and squash. With the arrival of Europeans,

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³ Ray Allen Billington and Martin Ridge, Westward Expansion, Fifth Edition, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1982), p. 272.

several new factors were introduced that altered and disrupted the life of these people.

The first, and most important factor, was the introduction of the horse from tribes located south of the Sioux. In the early 1500s the Spanish brought horses with them to Mexico and the Southwest. From the Spanish, the Indians began to learn to use the horse. Soon the horse and horse culture began to spread among the Indians to the north. Through trading and raiding, the Sioux began to acquire horses possibly as early as the 1740s, mostly from their southwestern neighbors, the Cheyenne and Arikara. The horse allowed a greater mobility, and with this mobility the Sioux found that they could better exploit the vast herds of bison which flourished on the Plains. As a consequence the Sioux began to give up much of their agriculture and village life in preference to pursuit of the bison. Following the bison the Sioux ranged further and further west onto the Plains. This move coincided with increased pressure of other tribes from the northeast and east.

These neighboring tribes, especially the Chippewa and the Cree, began dealing with French fur traders by the 1650s and the British after 1670.⁴ A result of this trade was the introduction of firearms. This increased capability for aggression, coupled with the desire for increased territories for fur trapping, led the Chippewa and Cree into conflict with their Sioux neighbors. The Sioux suffered because they

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⁴ James Austin Hanson, Metal Weapons, Tools, and Ornaments of the Teton Dakota Indians, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), p. 3.

could not obtain similar firearms. There was an attempt by one Sioux leader in the 1690s to acquire a source for weapons. He made the long journey to Montreal in an attempt to gain trade goods and weapons, but this seems not to have been successful.⁵ James A. Hanson notes that less than ten percent of the Sioux had firearms in 1805, while all Chippewa warriors owned one.⁶ The result was continued pressure on the Sioux to fall back from their traditional homelands onto the Plains. As the Sioux left for the Plains, the horse offered more and more options to them. Soon most Sioux were moving out of the Minnesota area, taking advantage of the Plains and the river bottoms. The herds of bison supplied many of the necessities of life, and much of the other materials needed could be found in the bottom lands along the rivers cutting through the plains. By 1800, the culture of the Sioux people had crystalized into what we know it as today. By the 1830s, Sioux groups occupied much of the area of Montana, Wyoming, North and South Dakota, and Nebraska. Many of the people who had been previously living there were displaced and forced out, including the Iowa, Otos, Arikara, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Crow.⁷ Thus Sioux became invaders who, having been forced from their homes, in turn forced out others.

By the mid Nineteenth Century the Sioux controlled much of the north-central Great Plains. The name we have for them, the Sioux, was derived from their Chippewa neighbors. To the Chippewas

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⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

they were known as the *Nadowe-is-iu*, meaning "adder" or "snake," and by extension, "enemy." But among the Sioux themselves, they were known as the Dakota, from the term *koda*, meaning "ally" or "friend."⁸ For the purpose of this paper the term Sioux will be used, as it commonly represents the bulk of the Siouan peoples of the Northern Plains. Among the Sioux there were divisions of tribes. The people living in the eastern region comprised the Santee, Sisseton, and Wahpeton. These were the Santee Sioux or Dakota. In the central area were the Yanktons and Yanktonais, these were the Nakota. And in the western area were the Teton Sioux or the Lakota. Due to the increase of population they experienced, they were able to split into several related groups. Among these were the Ogalala, Brules, Sans Arcs, Blackfeet, Minneconju, Two Kettles, and Hunkpapa.⁹

In a society such as ours, which has grown accustomed (or calloused) to huge battles with losses in the thousands, the confrontations on the Plains seem small and insignificant. This was the case in the nineteenth century as well. There were battles during the Civil War, for example Gettysburg, in which more than 7,000 people were killed and more than 23,000 were wounded in three days' fighting.¹⁰ It is unlikely that there were that many people

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⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

⁹ W.J. McGee, "The Siouan Indians," from the Fifteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, 1895, reprinted edition (New York: Sol Lewis, 1973), p. 8.

¹⁰ R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor Dupuy, The Encyclopedia of Military History, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), p. 887.

fighting in all the Plains' area at any given time. The average confrontation on the Plains was small in scale; in fact a skirmish is a more appropriate term.¹¹ In part this is due to the nature of the native society and the dictates of life on the Plains. The population base was not so big as to create the pressures and surplus that would allow large numbers of combatants. Also the political organization was one that led to the development of smaller armed forces, not the large armies of Euro-American experience.¹²

As a result of the small number of combatants, the style of warfare was often limited. An attack might be made where a small group would face an entire village. Thus the raid was common, a small, quick attack and an equally quick retreat. Ambushes were a familiar tactic as well. Both required surprise and speed. With these tactics, a few warriors could attack an unsuspecting enemy. Then, successful or not, the attackers could quickly flee the scene before an effective defense or retaliation could be mounted. Prior to the introduction of the horse, skirmishes and raids were a common occurrence on the borders of tribal lands. But after the horse's arrival there appears to have been a shift in the style of warfare. Raids were

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¹¹ Lecture by Dr. H. Gailey on the Plains Wars, given at San Jose State University on March 25, 1988.

¹² There were exceptions to this rule. Royal B. Hassrick cites a battle between the Sioux and the Pawnee in 1873. The Pawnee had encroached upon Sioux hunting areas and the Sioux retaliated with over 1,000 warriors. Royal B. Hassrick, The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), p. 4.

more frequent and could happen anywhere. A raiding party might be away for months at a time and venture into the very heart of the enemy's homeland. Here they would attack the enemy, showing their bravery and daring by traveling far into the enemy's territory and far from any helpful friends. Raids and ambushes were keys to success for a Sioux warrior because of the opportunities they allowed for advancement and leadership. There were a large number of material reasons for conducting a raid and a raid was a form of economic enterprise as much as it was a military endeavor.

One of the most important reasons to go raiding was for the acquisition of horses. This was probably how the first horses were acquired by the Indians of the Southwest. Trade and breeding allowed for an increase of an individual's stock of horses, but a large number could be readily and quickly taken through several successful raids. The horse allowed the new lifestyle to be practical and the more horses one owned the more one became successful in that lifestyle. In order to ensure their future survival, the Sioux would raid to maintain their herds and deplete those of their neighbors. Royal B. Hassrick stated that "an economic race with keen competition was developed, and it must be kept in motion if the new security were to be maintained. War made this possible."¹³

Raids could be waged for reasons other than horses. Other materials and goods could be obtained through conquest. Weapons, metal tools, food and supplies, all could be acquired this way. Among

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¹³ Ibid., p. 20.

the Sioux and other Indians, rifles were a valued commodity. They could be obtained through trade, but warfare and booty offered another means of gaining an advantage in firepower. Initially, the Sioux had been relatively weak in terms of the number of rifles they had owned. But by the 1870's, the Sioux had acquired a considerable number of rifles, among them, newer repeating rifles like the Winchester. There have been frequent claims that the Sioux were better armed, especially with such rifles, than the U. S. Army had been. But there seems to be little evidence that repeating rifles were that common. Once a rifle was acquired it was kept until it was irrevocably damaged, for this reason muzzle loading flintlocks were still in common usage.¹⁴ Many rifles had been acquired through traders and on reservations, others as prizes of war. With increased trading with the whites, even the arrows the Sioux used began to change as well. By the 1870's, the Sioux used mainly iron or steel in the production of their arrow heads. These lasted longer than the older bone or flint heads which were traditional before the coming of the Europeans. The metal for these heads was often traded for, and many were made in the East as trade goods for the Indians.

Raids were also commonly conducted to avenge the death of a family or tribe member who had been killed in an enemy raid or ambush. These retaliations were very important points of honor. They also were a means of exacting payment for economic loss. A

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¹⁴ Hanson writes that 160 muzzle loading were rifles captured from the Sioux and Cheyenne in 1877. Ibid., p. 20.

family depended upon its hunters to survive, and the loss of an able bodied hunter might endanger the family in the months or even years to come. A family would initiate the organization of retaliatory raid, and often expected the tribe to lend its support to the cause. The military societies, or *Akicitas*, that an individual belonged to would also help to coordinate a raid for revenge. A sign of success for such a raid would be the return of the group with scalps of the enemy.

The practice of taking scalps existed among the Sioux, as well as among many other Indians of North America. Its beginnings have been attributed to whites and their influences on the fur trade and French and Indian Wars. For the Sioux, there was a great deal of importance placed in the practice of taking scalps. According to Hassrick, ".... the scalp was a badge of honor, a sign of victory, and a symbol of life itself all in one."¹⁵ The hair was closely associated with the human spirit. The spirit was a part of the hair and the hair was a tie to the spirit. So a scalp meant more than a grisly, physical trophy of some past victory. It was the symbolic and spiritual essence of a fallen warrior. The scalp represented the return of the essence of a relative lost to the enemy and also undermined the spiritual strength of the enemy, as well.¹⁶ As such a symbol, it was well respected and much ceremony was done to honor the return of a successful raid.

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¹⁵ Ibid., p. 84.

¹⁶ Jason Hook, The American Plains Indians, (London: Osprey Publishing Co., 1985), p. 19.

Raids and full wars, as in most of the world, were also waged for the expansion of territorial boundaries and economic networks. This was not uncommon on the Plains during the upheavals accompanying the Sioux's arrival in the early nineteenth century. In these conflicts, continued pressure against a given tribe would force that tribe from their lands. The reason for this expansion was primarily to control the better hunting areas. Repeated raids into an enemy hunting ground made its use dangerous. With time, its original owners would leave it or be driven from it. Better hunting areas ensured a better future for the Sioux. The Sioux continued to expand, taking the better lands for themselves. The list of tribes which felt the pressures of Sioux expansion is fairly extensive; the Crow probably lost the most to the Sioux. The lands that we so often associate with the Sioux, such as the Big Horn Mountains, were originally the domain of the Crow. The term "Imperial Sioux" was one which accurately reflected the nature of Sioux society and views. The Sioux were as much an empire building people as were the Europeans or Americans of the time.

There were numerous material reasons to wage a series of raids against an enemy. But in a society in which war was so important, there were also rewards for the successful warrior. War allowed the individual warrior to show his courage and daring in the face of great danger. There were four paths towards success and acclaim in Sioux society: bravery, fortitude, generosity, and

wisdom.¹⁷ Bravery seemed the most important and was a characteristic and virtue that all men and women of the Sioux strove for. Honor could be attained through fighting and the most noted feats of skill and daring were the counting of coup.

Counting coup was a form of stylized warfare in which warriors attempted to strike the first blow against their opponents. The warriors would approach each other and attempt to hit one another with a 'coup stick.' This coup stick might be a whip, wooden stick or club, or even a rifle butt. The idea was that one could show his bravery by riding through an enemy firefight and enter hand to hand combat, take coup on his enemy, and then return to his associates. The awarding of coup could be for the hitting of a living, or even dead, opponent, but also for feats like the killing of an enemy, the leading of a successful raid, the theft of an enemy's horse, or even taking an enemy's gun from him in battle.¹⁸ These feats varied in the amount of honor that they awarded, but the more daring the more valuable the coup. The 'first coup' was most important, it was usually reserved for the warrior who led the raid. The warrior's record of coups represented the accomplishments of that warrior. They were often recorded and attested to by the wearing of feathers in a war bonnet or by indications marked on the clothing or even the horse of the warrior. These indications might be a vertical stripe on the leggings of the warrior or a feather notched in

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¹⁷ Hassrick, The Sioux: The Life and Customs of a Warrior Society, p. 32.

¹⁸ Jason Hook, The American Plains Indians, p. 19.

a certain way. Or it might be a more descriptive symbol, such as a hand, a cross, or a horse, painted on his robe or horse. These would signify the feat and its importance. Often red paint was used to signify that the warrior was wounded in the performance of this feat.¹⁹ The acquisition of coups allowed the warrior an honored place in his tribe, he was allowed the right to pierce children's ears, to name children, and to cut down the Sun Dance pole, not to mention the honor of proclaiming his ability to all around him.²⁰

There were other rights associated with bravery and good leadership among the Sioux. A leader led because of his popular following, not by some appointment or inherited right. The more numerous the successful raids a warrior led and participated in, the more likely he was to be accepted as a leader of a raid or as a leader of the village as a whole. But a warrior needed to show that he possessed other attributes that were held in esteem by the Sioux to guarantee a role as a leader. Here again the role of warfare was important. Horses could be acquired in these raids, likewise food and supplies could be captured or acquired through hunting, these would often be given to those who had none. This was a show of the generosity of a warrior. And war allowed the warrior's strength, stamina, and wisdom to manifest itself. Warfare was thus an important part of the individual's life among the Sioux, and Sioux society as a whole was shaped by war and its demands.

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¹⁹ Hassrick, The Sioux: The Life and Customs of a Warrior Society, p. 91.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 92.

Life among the Sioux centered on fighting as much as it did on the bison herds that roamed the Plains. Initially, the Sioux were largely hunters and gatherers. They supplemented their subsistence with some agriculture along the river bottoms. There they grew maize, beans, and squash. With the introduction of the horse the Sioux were given more freedom. The bison could furnish nearly all of the needs of a Sioux family- food, shelter, clothing, and the like. The tribes of Sioux were able to range further out onto the plains and draw more and more upon the resources of the bison herds. In a relatively short time they moved away from their river bottom homes. They were no longer tied to farming for support. They could hunt bison and supplement their diet with vegetables found on the Plains or trade with their more sedentary relatives or neighbors. And of course there was conquest.

The huge numbers of bison ensured the Plains Indians of a large, readily available food supply. This security allowed them time to concentrate on the pursuit of military endeavors. Among many Plains people voluntary military societies or clubs, *Akicitas*, came into being. These societies were organized throughout many of the tribes and branches of the same organization could be found in many different villages. They were based on the vision or guidance of an individual who had encountered one of the guardian spirits of the Sioux cosmology. In return for following certain observances and restrictions, the spirit would guard the member against death in battle.

The *Akicitas* offered a system of military organization of persons used to working together and they reinforced military values. Any village was likely to have several *Akicitas* which performed civic duties in the village. During times of war or when under attack they acted as a defense force and a guiding organization for raids. The *Akicitas* also helped to preserve the values and practices of warfare. Many required its members to show unswerving bravery in the face of danger, rescue wounded comrades, and never retreat. In this way they helped to preserve and reinforce the values of the Sioux military mindset. During journeys and hunts they acted as policemen to guide villagers. They were also responsible for proper management of hunts, making sure none of the hunters began the hunt prematurely, and thereby scattering the herd and ruining the hunt for others. They also were responsible for the conduct of the journey to new campsites. They enforced the line of march.²¹ These duties were all a part of ensuring the safety of the people and the continued survival of the village, and also protected Sioux ideals.

The Sioux had thus adopted warfare both as a means of survival and expansion. The continued success of the Sioux depended on the reinforcement and acceptance of this warfare. To this end the Sioux were taught from childhood how to fight and protect what they had. Games included mock warfare, familiarization with weapons, and rough and tumble games that would help to "toughen" children

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²¹ Ibid., p. 46.

to the rigors of the life that lay ahead of them. As a boy grew he was allowed more and more participation in battles and raids. Around the age of ten or twelve he would begin as a mascot, helping to bring water and doing other menial chores.²² But as he matured and showed his ability he took a more active role in the fighting. Soon several young men might sneak away from the camp at night to try their own raid. If successful they would return and announce their victory, if not, then they would quietly return to the village and try again later. It was this spirit that caused so many problems in keeping the peace between the Sioux and the whites, be they Army or settlers.

Women were not excluded from the military life, though it was uncommon. During the Battle of the Rosebud in 1876, a warrior was wounded and knocked from his horse. Another person braved the Army's gun fire and rescued him. That person turned out to be the man's sister, Buffalo Calf Road Woman. Such bravery was greatly honored. To the Sioux, the Battle of the Rosebud is known as the battle "Where the Girl Saved Her Brother."²³

The development of aggression and warfare led to the growth of a strong Sioux ethnocentricity. All cultures feel that they are better than others, but the Sioux felt this to a great extent. Hassrick believed that this grew out of the need for conquest and expansion as the Sioux initially moved out the Plains. He argues that without

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²² Ibid., p. 73.

²³ Neil C. Mangum, Battle of the Rosebud, p. 60.

developing this attitude they would have only been pushed to and fro by the same factors that allowed the Chippewa and the Cree to force them from the Minnesota region. The fact that they defeated their opponents and that war was their means of survival reinforced this ethnocentricity. Additionally, the Sioux felt they could overcome any opponent. So each factor built on the other in an ever growing spiral. Hassrick states, that the "boastful attitude, to be self-assertive to the point of overbearance, was the keynote of individual and national survival."²⁴ This view would be hard to reconcile with the ever increasing number of whites who began to flood the Plains in the nineteenth century.

Warfare was a path that the Sioux took in establishing themselves and their culture in the Great Plains. They had adopted a new style of life in which conquest and conflict were needed to support their economy and defend their security from aggressors. The impetus for this change was the influence of the European settlers in North America. While initially the influence was indirect, it was substantial. The horse allowed the Sioux to revolutionize their society. They were now able to ensure properly their subsistence and mobility, as well as defend themselves from, and attack, potential enemies. This adoption of the horse began at the same time that there was an increased pressure from their old neighbors the Cree and the Chippewa.

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²⁴ Hassrick, The Sioux: The Life and Customs of a Warrior Society, p. 68.

The Sioux ventured further and further onto the Plains. They claimed territories formerly belonging to others, as their own. They did this through conquest and constant pressure. By the time the white settlers were moving out onto the Plains, the culture we recognize as that of the Plains Indians was firmly in place. But the territory that the Sioux controlled was still growing. There was constant fighting and skirmishing over territory and long term quarrels. The first white settlers found this chaotic situation as they began to push out across the Plains.

Direct trade and intercourse with the whites profoundly affected the Sioux. The Indians supplied the whites with buffalo hides and other furs, which brought high prices on the Eastern markets. In exchange, the Sioux received a wide variety of trade goods. Metal implements and tools, cloth, and trinkets were very common. But most valued were rifles and ammunition. These were items that the Indians had no substitute for. They could not repair or manufacture guns of their own. They grew more and more dependent upon the white trade for these items. Fortunately for the Sioux, there was a seemingly endless means of acquiring these goods. The trade in furs was one which drew numerous entrepreneurs who brought goods and rifles to entice the Sioux into trading. Early in the nineteenth century the mountain men fur company gatherings were centers for trading and exchanges. As the whites began to settle nearer and nearer, they found that permanent posts could be very profitable. These posts could attract Indians from hundreds of miles.

American settlers by mid-century were flooding into the Plains. The valleys and woods of the eastern Mississippi Valley had begun to fill by the 1840s. Farms and villages grew in what was once wilderness. Americans began to turn their eyes towards Oregon and the West. As settlers made their way to Oregon, they found that the Missouri River offered a natural highway towards Oregon. Soon settlers began to trickle through Sioux lands on their way west. In 1849, that trickle became a flood as news of California gold spread. The Sioux found that they faced considerable trouble and disruption from these migrating settlers and those who would later come to settle directly onto Sioux lands. They drove off game, tore up the land, and inevitably seemed to cause problems with the younger warriors. The Sioux had to deal with both the settlers and their own people. The treaties with the government in Washington had given assurance that their lands would be safe from white pressures and would provide a means of working out grievances, but rash warriors and settlers often ignored the treaties and dealt with the problems in their own ways. These were most often violent.

With pressures in the East from humanitarians to protect the Indians' interests the Federal government set up reservations which theoretically would guarantee specified lands for use only of the Sioux. These lands were the property of individual tribes and theirs to administer. The government also adopted a policy of appeasement and purchased the cooperation of the Sioux. Gifts and annuities were a common feature of any treaty or council in which the government

participated. When those annuities were disrupted or curtailed violence could quickly erupt. In 1862-63 the annuities paid to the Minnesota Sioux were halted due to the stress put upon the government by the Civil War. Relationships between the whites and the Sioux soured. In 1862, the northeastern plains exploded in a bloody uprising in which many settlers were killed. The Army was called to quiet the troubles. The Sioux were stopped and their leaders rounded up. It was only the intercession of President Lincoln which saved many from being executed. But the Sioux were driven from Minnesota and soon scattered among the other Plains tribes. They began to spread the word of the treachery of the whites and the danger all Indians faced.

More settlers and miners arrived in lands once promised inviolate. These Americans put increasing stress on the traditional values and lives of the Sioux. The power of the government to deal with its own people and maintain the integrity of its treaties was no longer sufficient to protect the Sioux. In 1864 word of massacre and destruction came from Colorado. Peaceful Cheyenne and Arapaho were attacked by Colonel J. M. Chivington and the Colorado Militia at Sand Creek. The camp of Chief Black Kettle, who thought his people were protected by the Federal authority, was destroyed and 450 Indians were killed. This led to a greater feeling of distrust for the Americans. Revenge was a cry common among the Plains Indians at that time. The Great Plains, especially those of the Montana Territory,

was a powder keg just waiting for the right spark. That spark came in 1866.

Montana was a rapidly growing area; miners had reported the great wealth of the land in a variety of minerals and metals. Towns such as Virginia City, Bozeman and Helena sprang up around the mining areas.²⁵ With the increased traffic of freight and people into Montana, the government decided upon the opening of a road through the Sioux territories. This road would cut through some of the Sioux's best hunting lands in the Big Horn area. This was the Powder River Road or Bozeman Trail. The Sioux strongly objected to this proposed road and threatened that violence would follow. In the midst of negotiations between government representatives and Sioux chiefs, among them Red Cloud, word spread that an Army column was marching in to build forts along the Bozeman Trail. Red Cloud declared that the government was planning to take the land even while they negotiated for its sale.²⁶ The increasing pressures and his denouncement of the government triggered a war.

The powerful Sioux chief, Red Cloud, harassed the construction and supply of these forts during the summer and autumn of 1866. The worst incident was the Fetterman massacre in which a party of soldiers under Captain W. J. Fetterman was completely destroyed. On December 21, 1866 Fetterman left Fort Phil Kearny to aid a party of

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²⁵ Ray Allen Billington and Martin Ridge, Westward Expansion, 5th edition, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1982), p. 597.

²⁶ Robert M. Utley and Wilcomb E. Washburn, Indian Wars, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977), p. 213.

wood cutters who were being harassed by Red Cloud and his warriors. Thinking they had routed the Indian troops, Fetterman chased the Sioux from the besieged wood cutters and pursued them some distance away from the fort. He made the mistake of falling into one of the Sioux's favorite tactics, an ambush. The entire party of eighty-two men was killed. While this was not a massacre, as both parties were aware of danger and were armed, it did have a strong effect on the views of the Americans and Sioux alike.

The Sioux were jubilant. They had destroyed a detachment of the Army and word spread of their success. They followed it up that summer by harassing nearly all the forts in the area. They would not consider peace until the forts were removed from the Bozeman Trail. The Sioux found that they could be victorious over the Army; this went a great way towards reinforcing the Sioux view of their own superiority and abilities. Americans, especially the humanitarians, felt that this was just more evidence that the system of dealing with the Indians needed some serious revision. They noted that the division of authority between the Department of Interior and the Department of War was the key problem. Ray A. Billington writes, "the former, through its Indian Office, attempted to placate the tribes with gifts, reservations, and annuities; the latter punished the Indians savagely for every infraction of the rules."²⁷ This duality and conflict of authority and responsibility would lead to further trouble many argued. A peace commission was established to bring the

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²⁷ Billington and Ridge, Westward Expansion, p. 598.

conflict to an end and to change the system to keep future troubles from arising. In autumn of 1867 the commission set out to convince the Sioux that they could bring the hostilities to an end.

The first step was an end to the war itself. In the Fort Laramie Treaty, the government agreed to end hostilities and yield the Bozeman Trail to the Sioux. They further promised to remove the forts. The Treaty guaranteed nearly all of present day South Dakota as a reservation for the Sioux and the other northern tribes. Furthermore, it granted the right to hunt in the unceded areas along the Republican River and north of the Platte River in Nebraska and Wyoming. Finally, it gave the Sioux control over the Black Hills and guaranteed that no white would be allowed to enter there without the approval of the Sioux. The government had decided that these were concessions worth making, especially due to the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad. They contended that the Bozeman Trail was obsolete due to the rapid increase of rail service in Montana. With each mile of track laid it became easier to reach Virginia City and the rest of Montana.²⁸ Also the Black Hills were far enough away from the rail lines that they would not interfere with their progress and the hilly, wooded terrain was not inviting to farmers or ranchers.²⁹ The war over the Bozeman Trail was the one war which can be declared a Sioux, if not an Indian, victory against the U. S. government. Red Cloud had fought over a specific issue which could

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²⁸ Robert M. Utley, Frontier Regulars, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), p. 135.

²⁹ Billington and Ridge, Westward Expnsion, p. 599.

be settled upon by the government. The government was able to concede the points he demanded. Much of the credit belonged to Red Cloud. He was the only Sioux leader who was able to unify his people under his leadership long enough to bring about the American concessions. Future leaders would not be as lucky in their control of their people, nor in the ability of the government to take a new stance and thereby concede the points made by the Sioux.

The Fort Laramie Treaty laid the groundwork for the peace of 1867, but it was also the root of many of the problems that would surface in the mid 1870s. The system of reservations that was developing was unfamiliar to the Sioux and not what they had anticipated. The reservations became a concentration of Indian peoples. The idea was to provide education and to aid in making the transition from a nomadic lifestyle to a settled, agrarian one. But few Sioux had any desire for such a life. It was not how they had lived in the past, nor was it how they wanted their children to live. The troubles that would surface during the following decade would be due to a number of factors such as growing pressure from white miners and settlers upon Sioux lands and the destruction of the bison herds to facilitate the construction of the railroads. But the worst problem the Sioux and Americans faced was that neither had a good grasp of what the other really wanted or how they viewed their situation. This breakdown in understanding and communication led to the escalation of tension in the Montana Territory. This is not to say that the conflict was avoidable; in fact the two societies were

already on a collision course. Two imperial powers can rarely share borders without deciding to test their strength. This is especially true when there is land, or gold, or one's home involved.

This brief view of the Sioux and who they were is important if one is to understand the nature of how events developed on the Plains in the late Nineteenth Century. The Sioux were a people whose culture changed due to the intervention of Europeans, and white culture. The horse and then the rifle were important in defining the Sioux warrior and his society. But no people or system develops in a vacuum; there are always other factors which must be considered. The Americans too, especially the Army, must be examined in order to determine how it was affected by the Great Plains and the advancing frontier.

CHAPTER III

THE ARMY ON THE PLAINS

The United States during the late nineteenth century was in a state of rapid change. The nation was turning its eyes towards the west as well as to the world at large. The men and women who would carve a nation from the wilderness of the west were beginning their journeys past the frontiers and civilization of the States and into the unknown, and often dangerous, lands controlled by Indians. With these settlers went the United States Army. The Army was part and parcel of the Old West. Of the popular images and myths of this nation, none are more prominent than those of the Army and the Indians. Indians clad in buckskin and troopers in blue, astride their trusty mounts, racing across the Plains, is the stuff that heroes and legends are made of. A cursory view of any Western movie would support this popular view. For many this is what the Plains Wars were like during the latter years of the nineteenth century. However, for many others the Army exists as a model of genocidal rage, bent on the complete destruction and subjugation of the native inhabitants of America. Somewhere between these extremes lies the truth of the Army and the men who formed it. It was an organization that reflected the nature of its environment and its components. The grand, sweeping changes that the Civil War wrought on America

were as important to the Army as were the decisions and perceptions of the individuals within the Army. Many factors must be considered in any examination of the Army, but one must look at the individuals, the men of the Army, not just the legislation and politics of the time, to gain an appreciation of the Army during the last half of the nineteenth century.

The American Civil War was a fire which forged and tempered many of the elements that influenced the nation and the Army after 1865. The Civil War had been a popular war among the people of the United States. Support for its cause and its continuation was strong throughout all levels of American society. The support came not only from men willing to fight for their nation and homes, but in the financing and support of the soldiers themselves after they marched off to war. This was an important element in the perceptions that Americans had about the Army.

With the call to war, Americans flocked to the recruitment centers in huge numbers. It was a volunteer's war. Men volunteered to fight in both the Regular Army units, those which existed as a full time fighting force, and in the volunteer units which each state and territory began to build. These volunteer units were very important to the war effort. Each state formed units which it would organize, equip, and train. After these units were formed they were given over to the Federal government for use in the war. The volunteer units formed the bulk of the fighting men of the Civil War.

As these volunteers were from specific states, if not locales, they formed a fairly homogeneous group which enjoyed the support and enthusiasm of their home towns and regions. Part of this enthusiasm was manifested in their supplies and equipment. Especially in the early stages of the war, the local governments did much to see that their units were well supplied and equipped while in the field. This almost "family" like view often extended to the leadership of these units as well. An officer might have been appointed by local officials, or even elected into place by the men of the unit. This process rarely reflected any military ability or experience which the leader should have possessed for such a position. Yet the vast numbers of these volunteers and the needs of the government in procuring men and leadership made the system work. When the war ended the soldiers happily returned home to their families, farms, and businesses. The fighting was done and there was no longer a need for a large army. So the costs of a standing army could be slashed, thereby saving the nation and the taxpayers a large sum. After the Revolution, Americans remembered the Minutemen and the militia as being the winners of the war; the Continental Army took a secondary role. The same was true of the Civil War. It was obvious to most that the volunteers had won the war. In their view, they had done the bulk of the fighting and dying. To be sure, the Regular Army had been important in defending the frontiers, but it was the volunteers who had sprung to the defense of their nation. With the end of the conflict the American populace

seemed to have assumed that if any new threat would arise, they would come forward and crush it as they had done before. In this view there is no place for a standing army, it is only a burden and threat.

Public attitudes of economy and cost cutting were reflected by Congress following the War. Measures were taken to trim away some of the excess costs associated with the Army. An act signed by President Johnson in July 1866 set the relative size and strength of the post-war Army, but it went through a series of changes and adjustments. In 1869, an appropriation bill was passed which reorganized and cut the size of the army. Where the bill of 1866 had authorized some 54,000 men in forty-five regiments, the new bill reduced the number of men and regiments. With the new changes the army was cut back to some 37,313 men in twenty-five regiments. The number of officers, including brigadier generals, was also cut back. But more reductions were yet to come. In January 1870, the Congress passed further restrictions which limited the number of enlisted men in the army to 30,000 and further reduced the number of brigadier and major generals. In 1874 one last series of reductions led to the restriction that no appropriations would be allowed for troops in excess of 27,000 men. This number included enlisted men as well as officers. Within five years of the bill of 1866, the Army had been reduced to one half of its strength. With the exception of the bill of 1869, these cuts were geared towards the reduction of the numbers of men, but not the number of regiments.

So the remaining men were spread thinly through the existing regiments and companies in an attempt to keep the regiments functioning. The result was small, weak units which were unable to do the job that faced them. When conflict became apparent another unit was rushed to reinforce the first, weakening that unit's position.¹

During the Civil War, the regiment had been the common tactical unit, but after the cuts infantry company and cavalry troop became the basic unit. During the 1870s and 1880s an average cavalry troop consisted of 58 men and officers, an infantry company 41, and an artillery company 40.² Even these units were normally understrength. According to Robert M. Utley, despite the ceiling of 27,000 men the actual number of men on the rolls was rarely above 19,000. He lists "discharge, death, and desertion" as causes.³ During most of the late Nineteenth Century the basic components of the regiments, the company and troop, were scattered across the frontier for garrison duty. For officers who served in the Civil War this was a far cry from the huge numbers of men they had previously led.

One of the benefits that arose out of these cutbacks was the increased overall quality of the officers who remained. The cutbacks had left many officers without troops to command. During the Civil

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¹ Robert M. Utley, Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), p. 17.

² Ibid., p. 16.

³ Ibid.

War brevet ranks were awarded to many officers due to the need for adequate numbers of officers for the many regiments. With the close of the war many of these officers remained in the Army even when their volunteer troops went home, but at a lower rank. With the cuts in appropriation the army was forced to release a number of its officers. This reduction first came from those officers who had neared retirement. They were give the option, if not actively encouraged, to step down for the younger officers. Yet this was still not enough to decrease the huge surplus of officers. So the Army set out to remove some of the officers who were less than adequate for their duties. The boards which determined the officers' capabilities, or lack there of, became known as "Benzine Boards," benzine being a solvent for fats. These boards could remove officers who had not shown ability to the degree expected by the Army. While many officers were probably released unfairly, the quality of those who remained tended to be quite high. These officers usually had considerable field experience gained in the Civil War or had been graduates of West Point.⁴

Another problem with the budget cuts related to equipping and supplying the men in the army. The Civil War had left huge depots full of uniforms, boots, equipment, and food. Much of this found its way to the soldiers in the field. These huge stores could be used for the Army and were expected to be so used by the Congress. Uniform

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⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

supplies from the Civil War were not exhausted until the 1880s.⁵ Yet the quality of such supplies were hardly exemplary. There were stores of food from the Civil War being used up to the end of the century. It was common to find cases of hardtack or salt pork, which dated from the Civil War, which were full of weevils, mold, or mice.

The government also contracted with businessmen for supplies for the troops. Often these businessmen were less than honest when it came to the quality of the food and supplies. The hats issued by the Army were unsuitable for use on the Plains. The short brim did not keep off the sun, nor did it survive the harsh weather. The rains and the heat would often wear it away in very little time. The men found it necessary to replace these issued hats for hats of better quality bought from civilian markets.⁶ Another example was the attempted sale of grain to the Seventh Cavalry under Lt. Col. George A. Custer in 1874. A government contractor had supplied grain in bags marked with the identification of the Indian Bureau. Custer refused to accept the grain as it was not meant for his men, but for the Indian reservation. The bags of grain were then noticed to weigh some twelve to fifteen pounds less than they should have.⁷ The charges of fraud and corruption began to spread. Corruption and poor business ethics seemed rampant throughout the period.

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⁵ Ibid., p. 74.

⁶ James S. Hutchins, Boots and Saddles at the Little Big Horn, (Ft. Collins, Co.: The Old Army Press, 1976), p. 6.

⁷ Charles Windolph, I Fought With Custer, ed. Frazier Hunt and Robert Hunt, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), p. 130.

Other factors arose from the ashes of the Civil War. The most important was the relationship of the Army and the civilians. The Army became something unacceptable to the populace at large. As we have seen, the people wanted to forget about wars and armies. The view of careers in the Army was a poor one for most people. People tended to exert considerable pressure on those members of their family or friends who thought of joining the service. So much peer pressure was placed on some people that recruits would actually resort to using an alias when joining. So they tended to down-play the role of the Army. The far flung, often desolate, duty stations of the Army only reinforced this feeling.

After the Civil War the Army was responsible for a number of duties. Foremost was the necessity of Reconstruction. Much of the Army was stationed in the southern states after the war. They were used to help support the new state governments and to ensure peace in the South. They were also used as a police force against such elements as the Ku Klux Klan. This took them away from much of the attention of the public, or at least the Northern public. Approximately one third of the Army was stationed in the South after the war for this duty.⁸

The Army was also responsible for the defense of the coastal forts and batteries. These were the garrisons located in the various coastal port areas. Another role performed by the Army was as strike breakers. During much of the late Nineteenth Century, strikes

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⁸ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 12.

and riots were all too common. The Army was often ordered to quiet such disorders and prevent chaos. During the depressions of 1877 and of 1894, there were riots and the President found it expedient to order the Army to guarantee peace.⁹ Both of these duties involved some interaction with the public, but the use of the Army as a police force was not appreciated, especially among those who were demonstrating.

On the frontier the Army, was responsible for the protection of both the Indian and the approaching settlers. Facing the small numbers of soldiers was a considerable number of Indians. Edward M. Coffman states that "at the end of the Civil War there were 270,000 Indians, of whom fewer than 100,000 were considered hostile..."¹⁰ The role of the Army in garrisoning the frontier was one which rarely gained much appreciation by the public. But by 1870, almost two thirds of the American Army was stationed in the departments of the western United States.¹¹ These frontier posts were far beyond the reach of most of the public and so received little attention. The needs and duties of the Army never got as much publicity as they needed to gain any real wide scale support. There were occasional circumstances which brought the Army to the front

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⁹ Edward M. Coffman, The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 246.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 254.

¹¹ Robert Wooster, The Military and United States Indian Policy, 1865-1903, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 198.

of the national consciousness; these were usually when there was a crisis. While most of the public forgot about the military, there were those who actively sought to bring them to their towns.

While the rest of the nation might forget or overlook the Army, the towns springing up in the West were very interested in the Army and its forts. A fort in a nearby area would help to ensure peace and protection for the settlers of that area. Many municipal, territorial, and state governments lobbied to have forts built in their districts. There was more at stake than just peace and quiet for these towns. While soldiers were often less than desirable to most townspeople, their money was not. An Army fort could bring in a considerable amount of money to a town's economy. Forts and garrisons meant supplies, transportation, and other opportunities for the local populace to make a living. The government contracts for these could make an would-be entrepreneur a wealthy man. The people of a fort town could supply food, supplies, and its transportation, at a price, for the government. Another source of ready income was in the soldiers themselves. The soldiers often had pay and nowhere to spend it. The citizens were usually more than happy to help with this predicament. Forts and posts would give store owners a new market for their items, whether it was clothing, food and supplies, or the myriad numbers of everyday items one needs.

The Civil War and the politics of the nation were instrumental in forging the shape the Army during the Nineteenth Century. Yet,

while Congress and the War Department might make official policies, it was individuals who had to carry out the daily activities and functions determined by those policies. The Army was shaped by the men in it. The officers who served in the Army during the last decades of the 1800s were among the most experienced men available. Most of them had served during the Civil War or some even earlier in the Mexican-American War. The skills and experiences learned on those battlefields led to a generally high level of expertise among the officer corps. These men had learned the dangers of warfare up close. To some, the fighting on the Plains would remind them of their earlier days fighting in the Civil War. More than one remarked that the firing of the Indians' rifles reminded them of the 'old days' during the Civil War. In one of his letters home after the Battle of the Rosebud, Captain Gerhard Luke Luhn of Company K of the Fourth Infantry, wrote that "it reminded me of old times to hear the bullets go by zip."¹²

Many of the men who stayed in the Army following the Civil War had been Regular Army, men who had originally set out for a career within the Army. Many of these Regular Army officers came from the academy at West Point. But some of the officers who had volunteered during the War, found they liked the military life, and decided to make the Army their home. Most of these officers had received brevet, or war time, temporary promotions. This created a

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¹² James H. Nottage, "The Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition of 1876", in Annals of Wyoming, v. 45, (#1, 1973): p. 32.

large number of officers of high rank after the War. As the Army was consolidated and reduced in size, the officers found it necessary to revert to prewar ranks. So men who had been generals became colonels or even captains. George Custer is a classic example of this. During the War he reached the rank of Major General, but afterwards, he reverted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. With so many officers and men of experience, there was difficulty getting promotions. Officers might remain at their current rank for years. Often the only chance for promotion would depend on a superior officer's decision to retire or on his being killed in battle. In a peace time army these were not common occurrences. This was hardly a desirable situation for most up and coming young officers.

Officers came from a great variety of civilian backgrounds. Most were of the upper middle class and occasionally even the upper classes. This background had given these men an education which their enlisted men seldom shared. The West Point graduates had been given considerable training in engineering and mathematics, but many of the others had received private training in medicine, law, business, and even theology. While these might not be typical military skills they do show the variety and diversity of the men of the officer class.

Many of the officers reflected the nature of the Army. Some, like their men, were of foreign birth. Immigrants played an important part in the lower ranks, but some were able, on account of their abilities, to become officers. Others had received training in

foreign armies. A Frenchman, Regis de Trobriand, was a colonel in the late 1860s and 70s. There were many Irish and German immigrants in the nineteenth century Army. The poor economies of these lands led to a massive immigration to the United States. Many of those immigrants found employment in the Army.

Not only did there exist differences among the backgrounds of the officers, but there were also differences in their duties. There was a deep division between staff and line officers. The line officers were assigned to lead the men who served in the garrisons and outposts. These were field commanders who were sent to distant posts, often separated from civilization by hundreds of miles. On the other hand, staff positions were considerably easier. These men served the commanding generals in bureaucratic capacities. Their posts were in such cities as Washington, D.C., New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. These officers faced very few deprivations in such posts. Their positions tended to perpetuate themselves as well since most staff positions were based on politics and patronage. The more well known an officer became the more he could expect to remain in a position of influence and rank. There was often very little association between ability and promotion. These posts gave staff officers access to the politicians and leaders who influenced the Army. This access allowed them to reap many benefits that line officers could never hope to see, benefits such as promotion, political influence, and opportunities to advance into well paying positions after retiring from the Army. General Nelson A. Miles stated that in

1889, there were 110 officers in the Army who had not received a promotion in twenty years.¹³ With the troubles concerning the rate of promotion and the desolation of many of the frontier posts, it is not hard to imagine why animosity could be generated between the line and staff officers. There were also vast differences between the conditions of service of officers and enlisted men.

The enlisted men and the officers of the Army reflected the society of their time. There was often very little contact directly from the officers to the men. It was almost a caste system. The men had little intercourse with their commanding officers. Elizabeth Custer remembered an incident that happened when she convinced a sergeant to take her out across on a swollen river. She later wondered,

Why the brave sergeant ever listened to such a wild proposition, I do not know. It was the maddest sort of recklessness to attempt such a crossing, and the man had nothing to gain. With the strange, impassable gulf that separates a soldier from his officers and their families, my imploring to be taken over the river, and my overwhelming thanks afterward, were the only words he would ever hear me speak.¹⁴

For most line officers, the duties of garrisoning forts were hard and lonesome tasks. They were paid little by the standards of the time, especially in light of the costs associated with living so far from

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¹³ Edward M. Coffman, The Old Army, p. 230.

¹⁴ Elizabeth B. Custer, Tenting On the Plains, (New York: Charles L. Webster and Company, 1887), p. 465.

towns and cities. And the comforts which these posts could furnish were meager at best. But the officers were not the only ones to face the task of protecting the frontier, the enlisted men faced the same deprivations to an even greater degrees.

The enlisted men came from all walks of life, but they were typically from the lower classes, especially from the urban poor and immigrants. The Army often presented a means of solving the problems that faced many, whether the problem was work, a search for adventure, or just escape. Because so many of the soldiers were from the lower income strata, the Army and its enlistment was tied to the economy. As the economy shifted towards recession and unemployment, the Army's ranks would swell with new recruits. As times got better and employment was more accessible there were fewer volunteers. The Army offered a steady income, which while only thirteen dollars a month, was better than nothing. To many of the immigrants the Army offered a chance to learn English and earn enough money to get a new start.

Some of the men who joined the Army were not the typical recruit. Some had an education or even a professional background. What appealed to these men was the adventure of the Army. It was a chance to go see the Indians and the mysteries that the west had to offer. It was also a chance for some to get a start on a home or ranch on the ever progressing frontier. For some of the more unruly characters the Army was a good choice compared to time in jail. There were a number of recruits who found that the Army gave

them the chance to escape a prison term and find fresh pastures for gambling and theft. But these recruits probably weren't common.

Immigrants in the Army were a common sight. In fact, the Army was made up to a large extent of immigrant recruits. The immigrants found that life in the Army had several benefits that could not be overlooked. It was not as terribly prejudiced against immigrants as the rest of the populace was. Immigrants were usually able to find fellow countrymen in the ranks of the Army. One unfortunate exception was the case of one Nino Roos, a Swedish enlistee, who found that there were no other Scandinavians in his troop. He wrote a letter to his parents stating how much he disliked the Germans and Irish of the troop, the food, and the duty. Not long after he wrote the letter he deserted.¹⁵ The Army also helped to teach the immigrants English while they were in regular employ. This was an important opportunity for many. They could make a living and expect to leave with some savings that might not have been possible in the outside world.

The immigrants made up some forty percent of the Army, with Irish and Germans being the most numerous. The Irish formed some twenty percent of the Army, and the Germans twelve. Windolph expressed his amusement that he, like so many others, had left Germany so as not to be drafted into the army as the Franco-Prussian War approached. After his arrival in the United States, he found that the best way to get ahead was to enlist in the American

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¹⁵ Edward M. Coffman, The Old Army, p. 373.

Army.¹⁶ Many of these immigrants had served in other armed services before coming to America. It was a certain adventuresomeness that helped to lead them to the American Army. An Italian trumpeter for the Seventh Cavalry, John Martini, had been a drummer boy for Garibaldi in Italy as a boy.¹⁷ And Captain Myles Keogh was said to have been in Italy as well. He served as a Papal Zouave.¹⁸

Despite whatever experience the new recruits might have had, they received little formal training while in the Army. From the recruitment centers, usually in the urban areas, the new recruits would be shipped to various centers, or recruitment depots, to be dispersed to the units which needed replacements. For the cavalry, Jefferson Barracks, Missouri acted as the center depot. The infantry and artillery had David's Island, New York and Columbus Barracks, Ohio. These depots were only a temporary station for the soldiers. There had originally been no intention that any training take place there, but towards the end of the Indian Wars the Army recognized the need for some indoctrination and basic training.

The lack of training was a theme which ran through the Army for much of the Nineteenth Century. The soldiers rarely received any kind of training during their enlistment. The concept of target practice was downplayed at most posts. The reason for this was that

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¹⁶ Windolph, I Fought With Custer, p. 4.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁸ Robert M. Utley, Cavalier in Buckskin, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), p. 46.

the government felt the cost was prohibitive. Even the classes and education made available at the posts were often very modest, if they existed at all. Perhaps the most striking example of this lack was that many cavalry men had little or no training in riding.

There is a popular view of the U.S. soldier on the Plains as a mounted cavalryman. But much of this view is incorrect. The cavalryman was essentially a mounted foot soldier. When the cavalry set out on patrol or in pursuit of the enemy they rode, but as soon as they prepared to fight they usually dismounted. The standard procedure was that one man in four would lead the horses of his group to the rear of the formation for their protection. While this dismounted fighting improved the accuracy of fire, it severely limited the number of men who could participate in combat. This meant that a troop of cavalrymen suffered a loss of fighting ability without suffering a single casualty. A cavalryman also was armed with a lighter carbine, which did not compare in accuracy to the infantryman's rifle.¹⁹

Men on the plains could spend a great deal of time in the saddle or marching on campaign searching for an elusive enemy. The life of most soldiers on campaign was a poor one. Food was usually limited in amount and quality. Hard tack and old salt pork or bacon were standard fare. The heat and dust would drain most men of their vitality. The seasons of Montana and the northern plains could range from very hot and dry during the summer to Arctic-like blizzards in

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¹⁹ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 49.

the winter. The return to the post was usually the most welcomed part of the campaign.

When soldiers were not out in the field, their time was usually taken up by building projects. They were responsible for the building and maintenance of the post. This was especially common at new posts which needed to be constructed from the ground up. Many complaints were raised as to what were the duties of soldiers. Most men felt that they had not enlisted to become carpenters. Men were generally required to stand watch or go out on patrol only to return to mundane building and construction chores.

Life at a frontier garrison was very hard for all of the soldiers. The things that we feel are essential to a healthy, if not comfortable, life were largely lacking at most forts. Housing was inadequate. Often men lived in shacks made of crudely cut lumber, buildings whose walls could not keep out the wind and which were very poorly heated. Sometimes log cabins might be used, but these were often too small, cramped, and dirty. Soldiers also suffered from poor hygiene as well. There might be only one bathtub for each company of men. Sixty men sharing the same bathtub did not lend itself to cleanliness let alone improved health.

The food was also very poor and not healthy. As noted above, it would often be very old or well past its prime by the time it reached the troops. But the nature of the food, both in type and quantity, was not conducive to good health. A normal daily ration consisted of 20 ounces of beef, 12 of bacon, 18 of soft bread, 2.4 of beans, 2.4 of

sugar, .6 of salt, and 1.28 of roasted coffee.²⁰ For this daily meal the average cost in 1874 was 16.77 cents per man. Sometimes this diet was supplemented with dried fruit or local game when available. As a regular diet though, it did not include any vegetables or potatoes. The lack of green vegetables did cause some cases of scurvy among the soldiers. But most posts had a garden whose maintenance was included as a part of the duties of the soldiers. These gardens added some of the badly needed vegetables, a variety to the otherwise bland diet of the soldiers.

Taking into consideration factors such as food, housing, and demanding duties, it is not hard to imagine the grim life that faced most soldiers on the frontiers. The men often turned to whatever escape was available. Whiskey was usually that escape. Local saloon keepers were only too happy to help supply this particular form of relief, among others, to the soldiers. Saloons and red light districts would mushroom in fort towns. "Hog Ranches," as they were known to the soldiers, could offer whiskey as well as the affections, albeit short term, of the opposite sex. Brothels and saloons were favorite haunts of the soldier following pay day. The sight of a drunken or hung over soldier returning to the post following a pay day drinking spree was a common sight throughout the West; so much so that the problem of alcoholism, as well as venereal disease, was a serious worry for the Army.

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²⁰ Edward M. Coffman, The Old Army, p. 340.

Alcoholism was a very serious problem in the Army. With so many problems, desertion became a means of escaping all of the troubles of the military life, and not just a temporary one either. Utley notes that there was a turnover rate of twenty-five to forty percent among the enlisted men due to disease, desertion, and death. He goes on to state that desertion alone claimed 32.6 percent of the Army in 1871.²¹ It might be noted that Private Charles Windolph, the last survivor of the Battle of Little Big Horn, had deserted from his initial enlistment in the Second Infantry.²²

If life on the frontier was this hard for the men who went there, it could have been no better for the women who followed the Army to the desolate outposts. As with the officers and the enlisted men, there was a great variety of types of women with different reasons for accompanying soldiers to the frontier posts. There were the ladies, usually married or related to the officers, the laundresses, and the prostitutes. Of these, the officers' wives offer us the most information about life on the frontier.

These women reflected the backgrounds of their husbands. They were predominantly upper middle class and often daughters of military families. They brought to the distant posts a considerable education. Many kept diaries and wrote letters to their families left behind. These journals are a remarkable collection of viewpoints that probably would not have been preserved had it been left to their

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²¹ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 23.

²² Windolph, I Fought With Custer, p. XIV.

husbands to record them. The women not only told what the frontier areas were like, but they included a great deal of what they perceived around them. Elizabeth Custer, George A. Custer's wife, for one, left diaries and published books on her experiences on the frontier.

The women mentioned the great sense of separation and isolation on the frontiers. This isolation was not just from their families and friends, but from civilization and society as well. They sensed and told of the deprivation of life on the plains; everything took on a savage and dangerous air. Worry was one common thread running through most of the stories. The women often worried about the Indians of the areas in which they were stationed. The Indians were why the Army was there and trouble could flare up at any time and claim the life of someone close. One of the most persistent fears was that of capture by Indians. Elizabeth Custer, dwelled upon the prospect of being captured by the Indians. She constantly related her worries and little anecdotes concerning her brushes with the possibility of capture. She stressed the fact that the men felt that death at their hands would be kinder than allowing a woman to fall into the hands of the Indians.²³

The wives of the officers were important to most of the men in the Army. They were one of the few ties with the world they had left behind, a sense of society and civilization in a savage land.²⁴ But

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²³ Elizabeth B. Custer, Boots and Saddles, (Williamstown, Mass.: Corner House Publishers, 1885; reprint ed. 1969), p. 163.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 130.

there existed the same class barrier as between the enlisted men and the officers. This distinction existed between both the officer's wives and the men and the women of lesser class or position. These women were usually the laundresses of the camp.

The laundresses held a very tenuous relationship to the Army. There was no official recognition of their status as dependents or as military personnel. This meant that the Army did not authorize provisions or housing for the laundresses and their children. This responsibility fell on their husbands. If you discount the prostitutes and Indian women who were common around the posts, the laundresses were usually the only women with whom the soldiers could associate. As such they were in ready demand as spouses for the soldiers. It was not uncommon to find a laundress married to a succession of men from the post as her husbands might die or desert. There was always someone at hand to step in and take up the woman's time and attentions.

The women who married into the Army still tried to live a normal life. They raised families on the posts and carried them along as their assignments moved around the nation. The children of these families were educated at the schools that some posts were able to maintain, or if they were the children of wealthier officers, they might be sent away to school in the East. The sight of children playing on the parade grounds was a familiar one to most soldiers. Upon the return of Company F, Fourth Infantry, from the summer campaigns of 1876, the men encountered a body of people

approaching them as they neared Fort Fetterman. Gerhard Luke Luhn wrote, "some were mounted more afoot all mixed up, when I got nearer I found they were all children. My son Henry... having the best mount was in Command."²⁵

The government had sought to reduce the numbers of the laundresses and their children by restricting those allowed on post as nondependents. In 1878 the laundresses were banned from posts. The Army also tried to recruit single men, hoping that this would reduce the number of women and children on the posts. The women and children of enlisted men had no provisions provided for them by the government. There was no housing. The women were forced to rely on their own ingenuity and that of their husbands. The result was usually a collection of shanties and shacks built on the edges of a camp or post. They were usually made of whatever could be found and were invariably of poor condition. The post doctor or surgeon often condemned them and labeled them "not fit to live in" or "a standing menace."²⁶

There were also the women of the "hog ranches" which offered the soldiers some momentary comfort. Liquor and prostitution was common among the frontier towns near forts. These women were a great source of worry for most commanders in the higher positions of the Army, not for moral reasons, but as a matter of health. Venereal disease was rampant among the soldiers of the Army.

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²⁵ James H. Nottage, The Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition of 1876, p. 46.

²⁶ Edward M. Coffman, The Old Army, p. 309.

These women, whether laundresses or prostitutes, would have offered an alternative view of what the frontier duty of the Army was like. Unfortunately there is little or nothing left of their reminiscences. They did not usually come from a background which encouraged reading and writing, or at least the keeping of journals and diaries. And as for the prostitutes, most Victorians would have been scandalized even to imagine someone of that ilk writing the memoirs of her sordid life.

The Army was in a state of change during the later part of the Nineteenth Century. The Commanding General and other officers saw that the Army suffered from severe problems which had to be corrected if the Army was to do its job properly. A growing interest in the troubles that faced the men of the Army, both officers and enlisted men, developed among the officer corps. The Army also turned its eyes to the rest of the world to try to gain some answers and comparisons. The Army commanders recognized that it was in need of a new professionalism. Observers were sent abroad to examine the armies of the other great powers and to find what could be learned from them. The Prussian army was held by most as a shining example of a professional army. It set the trend for many American innovations.²⁷ The most serious problem for the Army was the high rate of desertion. The inadequate food, shelter, and life style in general that most soldiers had was detrimental to an effective

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²⁷ Robert Wooster, The Military and United States Indian Policy, p. 170.

army. It was hard enough to keep them in the ranks, let alone fight. So some steps were taken to bring the standard of living up for the men in the ranks.

The soldier's diet was one which began to be modified by reformers. The diet of hard tack, salted meats, and flour began to be supplemented by more healthy products. In June 1890, Congress authorized an increase in the amount of bread and added one pound of vegetables to the soldier's daily diet.²⁸ Soldiers were appointed cooks. These men had actually been given instruction, or had some experience in cooking. Prior to this innovation soldiers shared cooking duties; while this might have seemed democratic, the wastage of food was terrible. Many of the cooks had no idea how to prepare food and there was a great deal of food they prepared which could not be eaten.

Another innovation with regards to the food came in the development of the canteen system. The Army allotted each unit and its components a certain amount of money to purchase food in addition to the basic fare. This money only covered the very basics and little else. But as canteens were opened on the posts, the units found a new source of income. The canteen was a combination of services for the men. One could buy wine and beer there, but it also served some meals as well. It was also a source of recreation for the men. There were card tables, books, newspapers, and a place to escape from the barracks and the chores at the end of the day. The

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²⁸ Edward M. Coffman, The Old Army, p. 342.

proceeds of the canteen's sales went back into the unit's food allotment. The men were the benefactors in both cases. The canteen gave the men some badly needed diversion and entertainment, but the extra money enabled foods of better quality and more diversity to be purchased for the soldier's mess. In 1884, it was found that the incidents of guard house confinement fell by 62 percent within six months of the opening of the canteens.²⁹ Morale and discipline also were on the rise due to these canteens.

Steps were taken to improve the soldier's housing. Studies were made concerning what was the most suitable type of quarters for the men, both in size and nature, but also in the ventilation and amount of cubic air space per man. The studies indicated that 600 cubic feet per man was the bare minimum. In the 1870's the New York Metropolitan Board of Health suggested that 1,000 cubic feet was the minimum for tenements in that city. Great Britain required the use of at least 600 cubic feet of air space for their barracks. Of the 146 American barracks surveyed in 1870, only 39 had 600 cubic feet or more.³⁰ The older barracks were to be replaced by newer, better designed and constructed buildings. As the Plains began to quiet down and the Indians accepted the reservations many forts were simply closed down. Those that remained were among the ones which were refurbished.

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²⁹ Ibid., p. 360.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 344.

The uniforms of the soldiers underwent examination as well. The older Civil War vintage uniforms were replaced with newer, better fitting uniforms. Climate and weather conditions to be encountered were taken into consideration, too. Heavy wool garments were replaced with cotton and lighter materials in the Southwest and other hot climates. The cut and design of the uniforms were made more comfortable with better gradations in size being made. Boots were redesigned. The old style of stock boot with brass tacks fixing the soles to the uppers were done away with. The brass tacks had been wonderful conductors of heat and cold. During the summer the boots were a form of torture to march in, especially in the hot, dry Southwest. During the winter there was seemingly little difference from marching barefoot in the snow.

The Army also began to change its views on the necessity of regular drill and practice. During the 1880s and 1890s target practice became a craze. Units competed with each other for prizes and titles for the best marksmen. The state of Nevada even offered a trophy to the unit which had the best record of marksmanship.³¹ The earlier Congressional restrictions that had been placed on the money that would have been "wasted" on target practice seemed to have been lifted. Perhaps it was the stories of poor accuracy in the field that helped convince the Congress.

Men were also given regular drill and exercise. Soldiers would line up to drill and go through a planned series of exercises designed

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³¹ Ibid., p. 355.

to keep them in shape. Long maneuvers in the field, including extended marches to toughen up their troops were popular among many officers. The Commander of the Platte noted that almost all of his troops had made marches of 107 to 170 miles during the course of the summer maneuvers of 1896. He went on to state that they were used to weekly marches of twelve to fourteen miles during six months of the year.³²

A popular sport among the troopers was baseball. Townball and baseball had been popular throughout the period (there are photographs of impromptu games in the field during the Yellowstone Campaign), but now it was more organized. The craze had spread throughout nation. Actual teams and leagues were established. Teams made up from companies played other companies' teams, local civilian teams, and even the occasional professional team. In the celebrations of July 4, 1885, there was a prize of two barrels of Milwaukee beer for the winners of a game between the team of Company A, Thirteenth Infantry and a team of local cowboys. The troopers won, but the prize was shared by the winners, losers, and spectators as well.³³

There were other changes made in the nature of the terms of enlistment after the 1880s. Before this time the period of enlistment was for five years. Desertion was a crime punishable by prison terms and fines. But these did not serve to really prevent the desertion of

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³² Ibid., p. 354.

³³ Don Rickey, Jr., Forty Miles a Day On Beans and Hay, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), p. 205.

the men who did not find the Army to their complete liking. To combat the high rate of desertion, men were given the option to leave the service before their enlistment was over. The Americans adopted a British system for early discharge in 1889. After the thirteenth month of service a soldier could buy his discharge for 120 dollars. After the thirteenth month the cost decreased by five dollars every month. In the following year the rate of desertion fell to a little over six percent. In later years it fell even lower.³⁴

These changes, and others which took the welfare of the men to heart, made a significant difference in the nature of military service. The Army was becoming more of a viable option as a career, not just a way out of momentary trouble or a source of adventure. But there were changes in the way the men and especially the officers began to see their role in the Army and the Army itself. The sense of professionalism spread throughout the officer corps; officers began to realize that they could learn from and teach each other.

One of the developing forums of the growing professionalism was the numerous journals at the disposal of the officers and men. Examples are the *Journal of the United States Cavalry Association*, or the *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States*. These journals and magazines allowed officers access to opinions and ideas which might have gone unsaid in previous times. Articles covered a variety of topics, from the use of the pistol as a replacement for the traditional saber; from the use of the

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³⁴ Edward M. Coffman, *The Old Army*, p. 374.

cavalryman as a mounted infantry to the use of Indian soldiers. The types of articles written weren't as important as the fact that they were being written and considered.

The men of the Army, whether they were in high command or humble troopers, were affected by their own perceptions and feelings about the situations that confronted them. These perceptions and opinions varied with each individual. As with any situation, if one presents an identical problem to several people one will usually receive several interpretations of the problem and its obvious solution. The Indians represented a unique problem for the style of warfare that America had found as a result of the Civil War. As individuals, the men of the Army had been profoundly affected by their experiences in the Civil War. The Civil War was one of the first examples of an industrial war which was taken to the civilian population. The impact and the acceptance of this style of war shaped how the American Army would look at fighting and especially affected the way the Army would wage war against the Indians.

Total war involves the taking of the war to the enemy, to his homes, businesses, and factories. By making the war incredibly expensive and destructive one can ensure a quick, final solution to a problem. By crushing an enemy's will to fight one can be sure of lasting peace. Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan learned this lesson from the Civil War. It would only be natural to expect that those lessons would be used against the hostile Indians. This attitude is part of the

problem which many people have with the history of the Plains Wars, and with the treatment of the Indians as a military enemy.

The buffalo represented to the Indians what the factories and farms were to the Confederate States. They were the source of food, shelter, clothing, and material. As long as the buffalo survived, the Indians had the potential for future mobility, independence, and conflict. In 1874, the Secretary of the Interior, Columbus Delano, spoke before the congress concerning the Indians and the bison. Delano felt that "the buffalo are disappearing rapidly, but not faster than I desire. I regard the destruction of such game as Indians subsist upon as facilitating the policy of the Government, of destroying their hunting habits, coercing them on reservations, and compelling them to begin to adopt the habits of civilization."³⁵

The view of total war and its being taken to the homes of the enemy found its expression on the plains in the winter campaigns against the Indian villages. The Indian proved to be a difficult enemy to fight. In a straight up fight the Army almost always could win, but the Indian rarely submitted to this. Instead, the Indian warrior was a master of guerilla tactics, of hitting and running before a counter thrust could be organized. But in the winter the Indian warriors had severe limitations. Food, both for their horses and themselves was not as plentiful as in the summer and spring. For this reason the large tribal villages broke into smaller groups and spread out. This

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³⁵ Robert Wooster, The Military and United States Indian Policy, 1865-1903, p. 171.

made the individual villages perfect targets for the Army. The Indians could not move as fast as in the summer, nor could they afford to lose the supplies that might be captured in a successful attack on the village. The ability to resupply in the midst of winter was simply not there.

One of the most important factors in the attacks against winter villages was the fact that the women and children of the village were there as well. They could not be as successful at avoiding being found by the Army in the winter snows. Their presence helped lead to much of the controversy concerning the slaughter of traditional noncombatants, the women and children. If a white settler's wife had helped to defend her home and family, she would be praised for a valiant spirit. But for the Indian woman this caused a great deal of trouble and misery. The soldiers found themselves forced into a position where they had to treat women as combatants. The humanitarians and even the soldiers themselves rebelled at the thought of killing women, but in a life or death fight there wasn't always enough room to accept that situation and not shoot back.

Much can be said of the factors which influenced the opinions of the white soldiers and their wives concerning the Indians, but the most accurate would be the fact that they were very diverse. There was no set answer on the nature of the Indian. Some would say they were a fine and noble people, not unlike the Indians of a James Fenimore Cooper novel; others would say they were barbaric thieves and scoundrels. Despite the variance in opinion, one can discern that

there were several trends and constant factors at work in the diaries and memoirs of the time.

The nature of the Indian and his character depended upon the state of affairs in the area of the military post at the time. During the periods of peace the Indian was usually given even treatment. At these times Indians were a common sight at many of the posts. In fact for Ada Vogdes, the wife of an officer stationed near the Sioux Reservation in the 1860s and 1870s, the Indians were a common feature in her home. She entertained such men as Red Cloud, the Sioux chief who had led so many Sioux to war several years earlier.³⁶ She gave her family in the east a very good report of Red Cloud. But as hostilities and tensions rose, the attitudes of the people towards the Indians became more reserved and less understanding. The variable attitude towards the Indian can be reasonably explained by the fact that these Indians were the same ones who were at war with the soldiers. It would be hard to face the prospect that one's husband could be killed by these people and not have some bias against them, at least in times of conflict. The state of worry and mistrust did not last continually at most posts, and as a rule many people learned to respect the Indians as they began to know them personally. After being given a chance to show one's personal qualities, many Indians were able to form a good relationship, if not an actual friendship, with the soldiers.

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³⁶ Edward M. Coffman, The Old Army, p. 297.

There were some common characteristics which cut across racial barriers and brought a better understanding of the Indians as individuals and human beings. It seemed that the women had more affinity, or just a better chance of finding these common ties. They were usually the small things in life that were universal to both cultures. One example given by Coffman was the introduction of one woman to the Indian women of the Southwestern post to which her husband had been stationed. The Indian women expressed great interest and delight in the clothing and material in the woman's dress and petticoats. She was willing to even undress, to a certain degree, to allow the Indian women a better view of the material.³⁷ Children seemed to forge another tie to each group. A baby could create a great deal of interest among the native women. There were stories of Indian women watching in fascination while a mother would bathe her baby or perform other daily chores. Perhaps these ties were a closer link to the recognition that each of the groups, whether Indian or white, were similar in at least some respects and just as human.

If there was any consensus of opinion of the soldiers on the frontier it would have been on the nature of civilization and the role that the Indian and the white played in its progress. Upon beginning my inquiry into this field of research I was struck by the dedication of John G. Bourke's book, *On the Border With Crook*. In it he invokes the memory of the "...brave officers and enlisted men of the regular

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³⁷ Ibid., p. 301.

Army, who did so much to conquer and develop the empire beyond the Missouri...."³⁸ Taking this type of statement into consideration one would imagine that there would follow a great deal of rationalization and encouragement of the concepts of imperialism and colonialism. Phrases like "Manifest Destiny" should be common. Yet this attitude does not seem to appear in most of the works. What is apparent is the idea that the land was going to waste under Indian tutelage and not being used as God had intended. The idea that the western expansion of the white's civilization was inevitable appears in most of the works. General Nelson A. Miles, in the dedication to his book, *Personal Recollections and Observations of General Nelson A. Miles*, also cites the growth of civilization in the West.³⁹ There was no doubt in the Victorian mind that the Indian could only benefit from the presence of the whites and their civilization. The Victorians had a very paternalistic attitude towards the Indians. They seemed to feel that they were doing the Indian a great favor by saving him a place, albeit a small one, in the new world they were making on the Plains.

The reservation system was a part of that paternalism. By taking the Indian from the open plains and confining him to the reservation, the white was allowing the Indian to participate in the new world. There would be plenty of room for agriculturalists, but

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³⁸ John G. Bourke, On the Border With Crook, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891; reprint Columbus: Long's College Book Co., 1950), p. i.

³⁹ Nelson A. Miles, Personal Recollections and Observations of General Nelson A. Miles, (Chicago: Werner Co., 1896), p. ii.

the time of nomadic bands had passed. They only needed to convince the Indians of this fact. That process would take several more years. The Indian Wars have been commonly given the closing date of 1891 with the Massacre of Wounded Knee. After 1891 there were still occasional outbreaks of violence, but the last of the large scale resistance to the white direction of Indian life had come and gone. The Army would begin to look towards other areas now. At the end of the century the Spanish-American War would herald a new age for the Army, the Old Army was gone for good.

The Old Army was a part and parcel of the western growth of this nation. It was a number of things to a number of people; it still is to this day. It was the representative of the government's will, and by extension, the people's will in lands which had no government or law and order. Yet it was subject to a great many factors which dictated the way in which it could perceive the challenges that faced it. The role of the politics of the nation and the influence of the government was very important on the Army, especially following the Civil War. The restrictions which were placed on the Army and its size and expenses did much to 'cripple, or at least hobble, it in the performance of the many duties it had. Yet despite this restraint, the Army developed a degree of professionalism which had never existed before.

The Army was an organization which functioned along bureaucratic lines like most large organizations, but the influence of the individual was still clearly felt. The character of the men and

women who served in the ranks or followed the soldiers onto the frontier were responsible for a great deal of how the Army handled the duties which were given to it. This point cannot be emphasized enough. Orders might have come down from Washington, but it was still up to the individual commanders to see that those orders were carried out. The manner in which these orders were carried out often depended on the nature of the individual and his experiences.

With an understanding of how the Army was organized and how it viewed itself, one can gain a better insight into what happened during the Sioux War of 1876/77. The War was one which involved a great many people and a monumental effort. It was a clash between two different cultures and determined to a large extent what would become of each.

CHAPTER IV

THE SIOUX WAR OF 1876/77

The war began because of a decision made in Washington. As with most decisions of importance, there were numerous factors that influenced it- factors such as the economy of the United States, the welfare of the Indians, and the belief in the necessity to take a decisive stand against the Plains Indians. In December 1876, President Grant met with several of his advisors to discuss the matter of the Sioux and the increasing demands to open the Black Hills and much of the Montana Territory to American settlers. Much of this pressure was from people who demanded that the territory be opened. As previous attempts to purchase the land in question had failed, the course of forcing the reluctant Sioux militarily was decided upon. That pressure would be brought to bear by the U.S. Army. Many planners felt that the war would entail a brief show of force that would drive the hostile Sioux and Cheyenne back to reservations. Contrary to such optimism, the Army would instead be pushed into a war which would last all summer and the following winter. The events of the summer campaign are very important in understanding the nature of the winter campaign which ended the war.

The situation in the early 1870s was dismal. The Crisis of 1873 had stifled the economy. Depression caused rampant unemployment and the populace was looking for a means to restore prosperity . There were numerous ways of attempting this, but one that seemed practical was opening up the wealth that the western territories held. An example of what wealth was to be found was in the Black Hills of South Dakota. The Black Hills had been held in great reverence by the Sioux. Standing like some great monument, they thrust up at the edge of the Badlands. The land was full of tall pines and game and had been an officially acknowledged part of the Sioux lands since the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. But tension was growing in the area due to increasing incursion by miners and settlers. Sioux warriors from the Black Hills harassed whites in the Department of the Platte. To counter these raids, it was proposed that a fort be built in the area to keep an Army presence within the heart of the Sioux homeland. In the autumn of 1873, General Sheridan met with President Grant and the Secretaries of War and the Interior to discuss an expedition into the Black Hills.¹ Its purpose was to locate a suitable site for a fort in the Black Hills. In addition, the party was to map the area and determine the resources of the area. It was decided that Custer should lead a column into the Black Hills to reconnoiter.

On July 2, 1874, Custer left Fort Abraham Lincoln with more than 1,000 cavalry and infantrymen. His party also contained

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¹ Robert M. Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 244.

"practical miners" who could accurately determine the mineral wealth of the area.² Like so many expeditions in this period, the entire affair took on the appearance of a continued picnic or party. The men hunted, fished, sang, and played baseball. Amidst all of this recreation they found time to map the terrain and find a site for a fort along the southeastern border of the Black Hills, near Bear Butte.³ The miners also determined that there were some traces of gold in the Black Hills. While the official report stated that there was some gold, but only in limited quantities, the popular view was that the government was holding back information on the opportunities that lay waiting . The President had stated that the Army would keep prospectors out of the Black Hills, but the measures taken proved not to be enough to prevent a wave of eager miners and gold seekers from advancing on Sioux land. The pressure of the settlers and the miners to move into the land was growing every day.

Something had to be done to stem the tide of miners and other trespassers who swept into Sioux Territory. The government was in an embarrassing situation. It had pledged protection of the Sioux lands from the encroachment of the whites. Yet popular opinion was demanding the government to open the Montana Territory. The government ordered troops to patrol the area and turn back miners. This of course had little, if any, effect on the numbers of men who sneaked past the patrols. The official view might be of Sioux

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² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

sovereignty, but the men who did the enforcing were usually sympathetic towards the miners. This was especially true of the civil governments of the area. A man might be found trespassing and arrested, but the courts would willingly set him free with, at worst, a reprimand.⁴ Even the Sioux, who threatened miners with death, could do little. Utley cites research done by Harold E. Briggs, a western historian, who estimated that by the winter of 1875 there were some 15,000 miners in the Black Hills.⁵ The government, to avert potential trouble and to bring these valuable lands under their jurisdiction, attempted to purchase the land.

In June 1875, a council was called of the Sioux chiefs and representatives of the government agencies. The council met at the Red Cloud Agency to determine the likelihood of a sale of the Black Hills. The Sioux were willing, but at a high price. They demanded that each family be given one pair of horses, as well as cattle, sheep, and chickens, annual subsidies of food and clothing, and that for seven generations the Sioux would be supplied with beef at government expense. On top of these demands the Sioux also demanded a sales price of \$600,000,000. It was clear that the Indians did not want to become white men, but if they were forced to do so they would have the government pay the costs.⁶ The government was only willing to authorize payment of \$400,000 for mining rights or a sales price of

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⁴ George Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937), p. 247.

⁵ Robert M. Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 247.

⁶ Ibid.

\$6,000,000.⁷ Clearly neither side had any real interest in the negotiations. The Chiefs and commissioners went their separate ways.

In Washington, the commissioners reported that the sale had failed due to the spirit and temper of the Sioux. If the Black Hills were to be opened to settlement then a new course of action would have to be taken. To facilitate the shift of blame, the Sioux were declared to be the prime reasons for the failure of Grant's peace policy, the failure of the commission to purchase the Black Hills, the troubles in Montana, and almost every other woe that could be attributed to them. It was argued that the Sioux had broken their promises of the Treaty of 1868 by not becoming self-sufficient farmers. According to this Treaty the Sioux were to begin using their lands, under the government's tutelage, for farming. This experiment had failed. Few Sioux tribesmen had attempted any farming and those who had tried received very little support from government's agents. The Sioux were also cited for the necessity of maintaining Army troops on the reservations. These troops were responsible for policing the reservations and keeping conflict among the various Indian groups, as well as between the Indians and the whites, at a minimum. These troops, according to the government, negated the clause which restricted the entry of whites into the Sioux lands. According to Hyde, if the government couldn't legitimately purchase the Black Hills, then these troubles would form the excuses for the

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⁷ Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, p. 245.

seizure of the Black Hills, as well as the Powder River and Big Horn areas.⁸ All of these lands could be taken for a fraction of the cost that the government had been willing to pay for the Black Hills.

On November 3, 1875, President Grant met with an advisory board. These advisors were the Secretary of War William W. Belknap, Secretary of the Interior Zachariah Chandler, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs Edward P. Smith, and Generals Sheridan and Crook. It was decided that the troops would be pulled out of the Black Hills. Without the Army's policing influence, the miners would be given a free hand in their movement into the Black Hills. The Sioux hunting bands would also be denied access to the uncaded territories which bordered the Sioux lands and those of the settlers. This would reduce the potential for friction between the Indians and the whites. It would also open up the Black Hills for settlement.⁹

Within less than one week of this decision the means to facilitate this course of action was handed to the government. Inspector E. C. Watkins had finished a tour of the Sioux lands to evaluate the situation there. His view was that a number of bands were roaming at will through the uncaded territory. These bands, under the leadership of Sitting Bull and other chiefs, were attacking and harassing the white settlers and friendly Indians. According to Watkins, the best move would be to "send troops against them in the winter... and whip them into subjection."¹⁰

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⁸ Ibid., p. 250.

⁹ Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, P. 247.

¹⁰ Ibid.

In Washington, the decision to proceed was made. The Indians were given until January 31, 1876, to leave the unceded areas and report to the agencies. Those who did not report would be left for the military to bring in. The demands went out from the agencies just before Christmas. Runners were sent out to find the winter camps of the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne. While the message was well received by most of the tribes, Hyde doubts that any of the Sioux really planned on complying with the demands.¹¹ But even if they had desired to turn themselves in, the Sioux claimed that the weather prevented any movement. The severity of winter travel supposedly made it impractical to move to the agencies until the following spring. Hyde states that this excuse was really very shallow. The Sioux often moved their camps over a considerable distance in the dead of winter, either when the game began to dwindle or when an area could no longer support the horses of a band. The argument was a clear indication, at least to the government, of the Sioux's unwillingness to make any moves towards the agencies and a settled way of life. The failure to report to the agencies made a great number of Indians hostile by official definition. The government now had its reason to open hostilities.

The decision to use force was one which the government believed would be most expedient. It was commonly held that the Sioux needed to be taught a lesson. This would be for the 'benefit' of the reservation Indians, but especially for the "wild" northern

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¹¹ Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, p. 252.

Indians who had little contact and even less dependence on the reservations. The proposed winter campaign against the Sioux was expected to be a brief show of force, after which the cowed Indians would be herded onto the reservations. No real resistance was expected on the part of the Sioux.

The winter campaign was a popular idea in many military circles. It offered clear advantages that the Army could not overlook. The Sioux, being a very mobile opponent, could literally run circles around the Army. On the Plains, where Army transport and supply lines were vulnerable to attack and being cut off, the Army fought at a disadvantage. Long term campaigns often ended up being fruitless chases in which the enemy would strike then disappear. The Indians seemed always out of reach. But the winter snows would even up the odds for the Army. The Indians could be found in large numbers in the unceded territories during the summer months. Many Indians left the agencies, where they had spent the winter, to join tribes already in the unceded territory.¹² Here the summer grass provided forage for thousands of ponies. But with the winter snows the plains were a different place. The Indian tribes would break up and scatter across the country. These smaller bands were better able to feed themselves and find forage for their pony herds. But these smaller bands were unable to defend themselves against more numerous opponents. The Indians were also unable to mount the long range hit and run raids which were so successful for them. Villages and camps

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¹² Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, p. 248.

became more vulnerable as well. The Army would often be able to find the Indian's villages and force the war upon the Indians where they lived. This strategy had won the Civil War for the Union and its lesson was not lost on the Army's military staff. The winter campaign would be very important in the following year.

January 31, 1876, came and went with no great numbers of Sioux reporting to the agencies. The very next day, on February 1, Secretary Chandler gave the matter of the Sioux and their problems over to the Secretary of the Army Belknap. Chandler stated that, "Said Indians are hereby turned over to the War Department for such action on the part of the Army as you may deem proper under the circumstances."¹³ General Sheridan began the planning and execution of the 1876 winter campaign.

The rapid deployment and strike that the Army had hoped for did not come. Sitting Bull was found to be encamped further west than the Army had previously realized. This greater distance and severe snow storms forced the troops under General Terry to delay their march. The preparations of supplies and men at Fort Abraham Lincoln, South Dakota, were stalled by constant delays. Terry's advance would have to come in the spring.

General Crook had better luck with his expedition out of Fort Fetterman. His troops were assembled and on March 1, they marched from Fort Fetterman towards the Big Horn country. Crook left with five troops of the Second Cavalry, five troops of the Third Cavalry,

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¹³ Ibid.

and two companies of the Fourth Infantry, nearly 900 officers, men, and civilians. In nominal command was Colonel Joseph J. Reynolds; officially Crook went along as an observer.¹⁴

The winter weather was the harshest opponent that Crook and Reynolds faced in that early stage of the campaign. The temperature dropped below zero and a blizzard raged for almost four days. The exhausted men still searched for the hostile camps. On March 16, Crook's scouts found signs of Indian presence and Crook dispatched Reynolds to follow up on it. Reynolds left with three squadrons, totaling about three hundred men. During the night the scouts determined that a village of some 100 lodges lay on the nearby Powder River. Both the troops and Hyde believed that this village belonged to Crazy Horse, but Utley states that the evidence proves that the village was actually that of the Cheyenne chief Old Bear. In the village were also some 200 Ogalala Sioux under He Dog.

On March 17, Reynolds attacked the village from two directions. The scouts had not reported a clear picture of the terrain and as a result the attack was poorly coordinated. One squadron reached the village and proceeded to drive the inhabitants from the village onto the bluffs above. While the troops in the village began to destroy the Cheyenne's lodges and supplies, another troop captured a herd of between 400 and 600 ponies. But then the Indians mounted a counter assault. The command was unable to develop a successful resistance and the troops were themselves forced out of the village.

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¹⁴ Ibid.

In addition, that night the Indians were able to recapture most of their ponies. Reynolds lost four troopers killed and six wounded.¹⁵ It remained unknown to the Army how many Indian lives were lost in this fight.

The combination of foul weather and a poor showing in the initial engagement forced the disheartened troops back to Fort Fetterman. Crook proceeded to press charges against Reynolds for mismanagement of the Powder River affair. It would be a source of conflict that would be maintained throughout the rest of the Sioux War.¹⁶ Crook spent the time at Fort Fetterman to resupply and prepare for the next step in the campaign against the Sioux.

The winter phase of the campaign of 1876 was a failure in the eyes of the Army. It had brought no tangible results and actually created in the minds of some officers a strong bias against winter operations. The weather was an implacable foe, it disrupted supply and communications, taxed the men, and gave shelter to the Indians. It made many of the senior commanders uncertain of the value of winter campaigns in the West. The cost in men, animals, and supplies did not justify the results they had achieved. A new attempt to bring in the Sioux came with summer.

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¹⁵ Ibid., p. 251.

¹⁶ The charges were brought to court in January 1877, under General John Pope. The court concluded that Reynolds was guilty of the bulk of the charges brought against him. He was sentenced to suspension from rank and pay for one year. The President intervened on his behalf, but the damage had been done. Reynolds retired on grounds of disability in July 1877. Ibid., note 36, p. 264.

With the approach of summer, a strategy different from that of the winter campaign was in order. Due to the hide and seek nature of previous campaigns against the Indians, especially against the Sioux, the military planners decided on a simple strategy- the Army would have to force an encounter. The mobile Indian forces would be more than a match for the slower Army troops, who were tied to their supply lines and depots. Sheridan and the commanding generals decided that three columns would enter the Sioux territories from different directions. These separate columns would move towards the center of the territory, driving the Indian forces before them. If the Indians stood to fight, the columns would be more than strong enough to best any conceivable opponent. If the Indians forces fled from the troops, then the other columns would be in a position to force an engagement. This would place the Indians between a hammer and an anvil. This campaign was designed along the same lines as that of the Red River War of 1875. That campaign had been very successful and there was no reason to expect anything less in 1876. These columns were independent commands working towards the same goal, but in no way coordinated with each other. There was never any intention that the three columns would meet to form a larger, more cohesive force.

General Gibbon was given command of the first, or "Montana Column." On March 30 Gibbon left Fort Ellis with six companies of the Seventh Infantry and four troops of Second Cavalry, as well as some Crow Indian scouts, altogether some 475 men. Gibbon proceeded

east, along the Yellowstone River, into the heart of the Sioux territory. He was to intercept any hostiles who might try to leave the Missouri for the north.

The second column, the "Dakota Column," was placed under the command of General Terry. This column consisted of the entire Seventh Cavalry under Lt. Colonel Custer¹⁷, twelve companies in all, two companies of the Seventeenth Infantry, one company of the Sixth infantry to defend the supply train, three gatling guns, and some forty Arikara scouts, in all, some 950 men. This column would march west, towards the Yellowstone River, and then southward, searching for hostile Sioux.

General Crook was in charge of the third column. This column's base was Fort Fetterman. It was composed of ten troops of the Third Cavalry, five troops of the Second Cavalry, two companies of the Fourth Infantry, and three companies of the Ninth Infantry. There was a total of over 1,000 men in this command. They marched out of Fort Fetterman on May 29 and headed north, past the Powder River, towards the Rosebud.

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¹⁷ Custer had become involved in the partisan politics over the Belknap Scandal in Washington. He had angered Grant by his testimony to a committee which was not friendly towards the Grant Administration. Grant had given command of the Dakota Column to Terry as punishment to Custer. Custer pleaded with Grant to be allowed to lead his own troops in the campaign. Sherman added his voice to Custer's plea and Grant allowed Custer to participate solely as the Seventh's commanding officer. Ibid., p. 252.

Crook also took with him some of the experience and practices that he had found useful in the Southwest. As when he fought the Apache, he attempted to enlist the aid of Indian scouts and auxiliaries. Crook found that there were certain psychological benefits to be had when hostile Indians found their own kinsmen following them and willing to fight for the Army. He had tried to enlist reservation Sioux to find their hostile relatives. This plan collapsed due to the influences of Red Cloud and the Agent of the Red Cloud Agency. Crook settled for 176 Crow and 86 Shoshoni, or Snake, scouts.¹⁸ These scouts joined him at his basecamp, which had been established on Goose Creek, on June 14.

As for the Sioux and Cheyenne, during the late winter and early spring the call was sent out to all of the tribes. Reynolds' attack on the Cheyenne camp on the Powder River in March had given fuel to those in opposition to compromise. In April, Sitting Bull stated that "he'd give the U. S. a war if that's what they wanted."¹⁹ At the Red Cloud Agency there was considerable fear over what would happen. No one there wanted a war, especially those who were permanent residents. But many of the younger men and the northern Indians who spent little time, if any, on the reservations were ready to fight. It has been stated that Red Cloud, arguably the greatest of the Sioux generals, was tired of fighting and feared the outcome of a war. Hyde, however, argues that in fact he desired to join Sitting Bull and

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¹⁸ Mangum, Battle of the Rosebud, p. 46.

¹⁹ Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, p. 256.

the other hostiles. But his people at the agency held him back. His son, Jack, who left to join Sitting Bull, was his only representation in the war against the whites.

During the spring, many Sioux and Cheyenne left the reservations and agencies to join those Indians in the unceded territories. Most of these were from the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail Agencies.²⁰ Life was typical in those first months; horse raids were conducted in the Black Hills and the tribes hunted buffalo and other game on the prairies. The major camp was moved to the Little Bighorn country about June 1, but they found little game there. On June 5 the Indians decided to move the camp to the Rosebud to better feed their families.²¹ Several weeks later the camp would be moved again to the Little Bighorn country.

The Army had moved into the Sioux country and were ready to engage the hostile forces that awaited them there. By the end of May there were over 2,600 men, both troopers and Indian scouts, who faced an uncertain number of hostile Sioux and Cheyenne. The Army had no clear idea of how many Indians were in the field. Estimates varied a great deal. Information came in from the Indian Agencies as well as from the Army itself. During the winter, the Indian Bureau estimated that there were about 500 lodges in the unceded territory. As spring approached, that number was increased by agency Indians and those who had spent the winter at the agencies. Indian agents

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²⁰ Ibid., p. 260.

²¹ Ibid.

reported that young men and entire lodges were moving out to join the bands already in the Sioux country. This was hardly a new occurrence. During the summer months the various tribes and bands would regroup to hunt and socialize. It was especially true during 1876. The troubles that had been raised over the Black Hills had led to an increased migration from the agencies. With the growing troubles around them, this seemed to be the year to strengthen the ties that bound the people of the Sioux and Cheyenne. Utley also notes the declining conditions at the agencies and the encroachments of the government on Sioux freedom as causes for increased numbers of hostile lodges. From an approximate number of some 500 lodges in March, the numbers grew probably to exceed 2,000 lodges in June.²² This number of lodges might have contained between 10,000 and 15,000 people in the combined Sioux and Cheyenne camps. Such a number of families could provide anywhere from 1,500 to 4,000 warriors.²³ While debate has raged over how many Indians were in the field that summer, many historians believed that the actual number of warriors lay between 3,000 and 4,000.

While bands of Indian warriors and their families moved into the unceded territories to join those already there, the Army began its campaigning as well. Along the ridges above Rosebud Creek, Crook was the first to encounter the hostile Sioux, Crazy Horse and his warriors. Sitting Bull had accompanied the expedition, but only as

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²² Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 253.

²³ Ibid., p. 254.

an observer. Prior to the fight Sitting Bull had participated in the Sun Dance and had had a vision of soldiers falling into their camp from heaven. From their camp on the Little Bighorn, he moved with the warriors to the Rosebud to meet the soldiers, but was too weak to fight himself.

While stopping to rest the mounts and make coffee, Crook and his troopers were attacked by Crazy Horse. The army's Indian scouts were the first to face the Sioux and were able to buy the time the troopers needed to saddle up and prepare for the fight. The terrain was a rough combination of ravines and ridge lines that broke up communications and coordination of the troops. The fight was one of disjointed attacks and counterattacks. Crook was able to drive the Sioux from a series of heights which allowed the Army to turn and face the attack. The fighting was hard. In Crook's experience as an Indian fighter he had never seen such fighting, unless it was in defense of a village²⁴. Crook assumed that the village must lie down the ravine from which the warriors attacked. On the eastern flank Crook dispatched Captain Anson Mills to take his cavalry to attack the village. The village did not exist, but the orders to seize it allowed Mills to take up a position behind the Sioux lines as the battle progressed. Crook was never able to take the initiative from the Sioux, but with no clear win in sight and Mills threatening their rear, the Indians fled the field. They retreated back down the ravine from which they attacked. Crook feared an ambush waiting for him in the

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²⁴ Mangum, Battle of the Rosebud, p. 70.

ravine, so refused to follow up his advantage. He had lost twenty-eight men dead and fifty-six wounded. The Sioux had lost thirty-nine killed and sixty-three wounded.²⁵ The Sioux and Cheyenne had fielded somewhere between 1,000 and 1,500 warriors.²⁶ Due to the heavy fighting and the large numbers of warriors he faced, Crook decided to fall back to his supply camp to await reinforcements. Groups of warriors harrassed Crook's command all the way back to his camp on Goose Creek.²⁷ Crook feared that the Sioux and Cheyenne had been seriously underestimated. A little over a week later that fear would be proven correct above the Little Bighorn.

While Crook was fighting, Gibbon was moving west and scouting the Tongue and Yellowstone River areas. On June 9, Gibbon and Terry met to discuss the next step in the campaign. They had scouted the area and all indications pointed towards the conclusion that the hostile Sioux and Cheyenne were in the Little Bighorn area. Gibbon and Terry met to decide what would be done. They agreed that Gibbon would follow the Little Bighorn from the north. Custer, being allowed to lead the Seventh Cavalry, would come in from the south, after marching to the headwaters of the Rosebud. But he was not to initiate any combat until Gibbon was able to bring his troops into the action. These orders were somewhat vaguely framed, possibly to give Custer a little more control over the situation he might find or possibly in sympathy over the troubles that had

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²⁵ Ibid., p. 88.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, p. 264.

recently befallen him.²⁸ On June 22, Custer set off up the Rosebud before turning towards the Little Bighorn.

At dawn on June 25, Custer's scouts reported finding the Sioux village some fifteen miles off. Custer feared that the Sioux had seen him and the element of surprise was quickly disappearing. Despite a march of some forty miles during the previous day and a half, Custer ordered his troops to move forward and prepare to attack the Sioux village. Without any clear idea of where and how large the encampment was, Custer divided his troops to cut off any Indians who attempted to flee the village. Major Marcus Reno was sent against the village with three troops of cavalry, while Captain Frederick Benteen was sent to scout the southern flank with three troops. Custer himself, led five troops along the bluffs towards the northern flank of the village.

As Reno moved against the village he came under attack. The village that Reno attacked was actually the smaller village of the Cheyenne, and not the main Sioux encampment. The reaction of the Sioux and Cheyenne was greater than he felt he could handle. He ordered his troops to fall back to the protection of some nearby woods, dismount and form a skirmish line. Then almost immediately, he ordered them to remount and retreat towards the bluffs. The Indians swept upon the troopers and a melee followed. Not all of the men heard all of the orders and a confused rout resulted. Almost half

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²⁸ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 258.

of Reno's men were killed or wounded in this fight.²⁹ Those left fled up the steep slopes of the bluffs and and before long were joined by Benteen's troops who had returned from their scouting duties.

As Reno was entering into his first engagement, Custer rode over the crest to encourage him from the heights. The warriors flowed through the smaller village towards Reno. Custer seems to have taken this as a sign that the Sioux were fleeing the village. Custer sent word for Benteen to hurry and join him in his attack on the village. Custer then proceeded along behind the bluffs towards the village. Sioux warriors under Gall crossed the Little Bighorn at the Medicine Tail Coulee and filled in behind Custer, cutting him off from the rest of the command. More warriors joined Gall as Reno was forced out of the village and back to the bluffs.

What exactly happened to Custer and his command will never be fully explained. From archaeological evidence and historic accounts one may trace many of the troop movements, but what the circumstances and motivations were will be forever lost. Today marble markers indicate where troopers were found when the

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²⁹ Arguments still rage over the charge that Reno and his actions caused Custer's destruction. Utley wrote that prior to his confused orders to dismount and mount, Reno was sprayed by gore when his scout Bloody Knife was shot through the head. Robert M. Utley, Great Western Indian Fights, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), p. 245. This, when added to the overwhelming attack by the Indians, seems to indicate that Reno lost control of his composure and fled the field. There is no excuse for Reno's behavior, especially in regards to the leadership his men desperately needed in that situation. But this is not proof of his "cowardice."

reburial detail returned to the Little Bighorn. The markers trace the route that the troops took. Here and there markers show where troopers fell singly or in pairs. In other areas, a number of markers indicate where troops tried to stand their ground and died in the process. Custer, several of his family members, and other survivors fled to a bluff that overlooked the village, there they made their "last stand."

Reno and Benteen heard the shots and saw the smoke and dust of the fight, but were unable to move to Custer's aid. An attempt was made, but it was driven back. On the distant bluffs the sounds of rifle fire died out. No one knew what had happened, but all suspected the worst. In the end, Reno and Benteen's troops came under siege and were pinned down in a bowl shaped depression and in rifle pits scratched into the hard soil. For the next day and a half Reno and Benteen held out against the Sioux and Cheyenne. They knew that Gibbon would be there soon. The Sioux and Cheyenne packed up and left the area on the evening of the 26th. The next morning Gibbon and Terry marched into the area and found the grim testimony of what had happened to Custer and his command.

Gibbon and Terry decided to bury the dead and quickly leave the area. They withdrew down the Yellowstone. The wounded were loaded on the steamer, *Far West* and taken to Bismark. Fear of what fate was waiting upon the plains haunted the troopers and their officers for the rest of that summer. In all, some 263 men were killed and fifty-three wounded. This was one of the worst defeats inflicted

by Indians on the U.S. Army since the disastrous campaigns in the Northwest Territory in the 1790s.

The Battle of Little Bighorn was the high water mark for the Sioux and Cheyenne who fled the reservations to fight for what they held dear. The number of casualties the Indians suffered are unknown, estimates range from thirty to three-hundred.³⁰ But the news of their victory spread to others who had wavered in their decision to leave the reservation. More warriors began to head for the hostile camps in the unceded areas. But the large camps and concentration of warriors were not to last. Shortage of game and grass to feed the Indians and their mounts forced the villages to break up into smaller bands. Likewise, fear of retribution led the chieftains to move their people away from the Little Bighorn. At first the departures were just a trickle, but in August the bands broke up at Blue Stone Creek on the Powder River. Sitting Bull took his people to the Yellowstone country, while Crazy Horse left for the Bear Butte area.³¹ It was hoped that the fighting had made the Americans listen to the Sioux and accept their decision to be left alone. The tribes felt it would be business as usual and that life would resume its normal pace.

However, in Washington, the mood was hardly one of acceptance. The news reached an America that was in the midst of celebrating its one hundredth anniversary. It came as a shocking

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³⁰ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 261.

³¹ Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, p. 275.

slap in the face. All over the nation people wondered how a band of savages could have destroyed the representatives and protectors of the American people on the frontier. Military action was called for. Men from all over the nation rushed to join the Army. Revenge was the byword in that burst of anger and disbelief that followed in the wake of the Little Bighorn. Troops were called from distant posts and moved towards the Montana Territory.³² Among these troops were Nelson Miles' Fifth Infantry. The reservations were turned over to the military on July 26 and all sales of ammunition was prohibited for two years. Likewise, economic sanctions were demanded. The public looked at Indian subsidies and support from public funds. As benefactors of such funding, many argued that the Sioux should not be allowed to possess such valuable lands. On August 15, Congress passed the Sioux Appropriation Bill. The bill would not allow any more money to be given to Sioux reservations and programs unless the Black Hills, Powder River, and Bighorn areas were ceded to the U. S. government. The Sioux must then return to the Missouri River reservations or the Indian Territory.³³ The reservation Indians feared starvation and reprisals if they did not agree. The earlier Treaty of 1868 stipulated that any treaty to be made with the Sioux required 2/3 of all the male council members to sign before it could be validated. To avoid any legal entanglement, the government opted to call the seizure and its validation an "agreement." The Black Hills

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³² Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 268.

³³ Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, p. 279.

and much of the Sioux's best lands were now open for American expansion.³⁴

Humanitarians tried to speak out against such actions, they stated that these were the same troubles that had faced the nation from 1867 to 1870, but with Custer's defeat there was no one willing to listen. The people who were most affected at that stage were the reservation Indians. The Army and popular opinion failed to take into account that those who were hostile were not reservation Indians, but northern Indians who only wintered on the reservations to take advantage of government subsidies. In the summer of 1876, the population on the reservations was one half of what it had been in the previous winter.³⁵ Unfortunately, there were few who cared to listen and such matters were of little relevance to the troopers and warriors who were still fighting the war in Montana.

The Army pulled back and regrouped after the defeat it had suffered at the hands of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse. Reinforcements arrived and the armies again took to the field. Miles arrived with his six companies of the Fifth Infantry from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. But there was a new air of caution and worry for the commanders. Crook, Terry, and Gibbon were concerned that a fate similar to Custer's lay in wait for them unless great care was exercised. In July, many companies were ordered to police the areas between the

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³⁴ While the seizure was accepted by the government, Congress would later claim that it was indeed an illegal act. *Ibid.*, p. 283.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

hostile camps and the reservations to prevent any additional warriors from joining the hostiles.

By August 5, Crook had assembled units of cavalry, infantry, and Indian scouts, some 2,000 men altogether. He had expected to find Terry upon the Yellowstone. Taking rations for fifteen days, Crook set out to find Terry's command, tie into his Yellowstone supply line, and resume the search for the hostile Sioux.³⁶ Terry had gathered his troops and reinforcements as well. He now had about 1,700 men. Miles and his six companies of the Fifth Infantry arrived on August 2, via the steamer, *E. H. Durfee*.³⁷ On the day before, Lt. Col. Elwell Otis had arrived with his six companies of the Twenty-second Infantry. His forces complete, Terry marched up the Rosebud on August 8.

The commands moved closer towards each other without realizing that they were so near. On August 10, Terry's command saw dust and deployed his troops thinking that they had found the Sioux. Each command moved closer, readying to face the enemy, when the wagons and troops belonging to the cavalry were recognized. An Indian scout ventured too close to Crook's command and was shot by "Buffalo Bill" Cody, who was acting as a scout for Crook.³⁸ After a brief, anxious moment the scouts realized that they each faced

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³⁶ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 268.

³⁷ Edwin M. Brown, Terror of the Bad Lands, the memoirs of the Sioux Expedition. U. S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, p. 1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

another part of the U. S. Army. The generals opted to join their commands and proceed after the Sioux, but they had no clear idea of where the hostiles were. Miles was sent to hold the major fords of the Yellowstone and patrol the river aboard the steamer, *Far West*.³⁹ The remainder of the troops spent the rest of the summer lumbering through rains and mud after the traces of an elusive enemy. The Sioux camps had broken up by this time, yet the generals were unaware of what they might face. Caution was still the order of the day.

It became increasingly apparent to the Army that the Sioux would not be brought to bay during that summer. On September 3 the Indian's trail finally disappeared on the banks of Beaver Creek. Terry disbanded his command and sent most of his troops back to forts in the area. While the generals gently probed and cautiously sought out the Sioux, the younger commanders complained that this was not the way to find or fight the hostiles. Miles was as outspoken on this topic as on any. Convinced of his own abilities, he pressed his wife's uncle, General Sherman, to allow him to try a winter expedition. He proposed to launch a campaign from a fort in the heart of the Tongue River country. His plan for a winter campaign was pushed along until the commanders finally agreed.

Miles was given permission to prepare the quarters and lay in the supplies he would need for winter operations. The crude log huts that would be known as the Cantonment were built by the Fifth

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³⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

Infantrymen. Brown states that "every man had to work with his musket by his side; for any monement we were liable to be attacked...."⁴⁰

Crook stayed in the field looking for signs of any hostile activity. On September 5 he found them. Despite being low on provisions and only four days from Fort Lincoln, Crook opted to pursue these traces rather than spend the time to resupply. He sent runners to ask General Sheridan to have supplies forwarded to Custer City, where he could restock and continue his pursuit. So began the "Mud March" and the "Horsemeat March." Autumn rains set in and turned the plains into a quagmire. The rough conditions slowed the march to a crawl. Rations, men and animals gave out. With no rations left, the soldiers were forced to eat the horses and mules as they expired. In desperation, Crook ordered Capt. Mills to take his Third Cavalry to Deadwood, some 100 miles to the southwest, to obtain supplies for the troops. Mills chose 150 troopers who still had good mounts and left on August 7.⁴¹

Enroute to Deadwood, Mills found the camp of the Sioux chieftain, American Horse. Mills attacked the camp at Slim Buttes at dawn on August 9. He drove the Indians from the village, but then came under fire himself. The fight lasted until noon when Crook and the remainder of the command came to their aid. Several Indians who had been pinned in a gulch near the village were convinced to

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⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴¹ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 270.

surrender, and among them was the mortally wounded American Horse. Later that day the command again came under attack by some 200 warriors who were believed to be from Crazy Horse's camp. This second attack was soon repulsed and Crook ordered that the camp be destroyed. The next day, as the command marched away from the remains of the camp, they came under attack once more. The rear guard was able to drive off this attack. The total loss for the Army in this engagement was three men killed and twelve wounded.⁴² After Slim Buttes, the command was broken up as Crook brought his campaign to an end.

Crook's return marked the end of the summer campaign against the Sioux in 1876. There had been little accomplished and the Indians had not been brought to heel. With the summer slipping away, the younger officers had a chance to try their hand at bringing an end to the war. At this stage most people tend to leave the Sioux War of 1876/77. Among some people there is an assumption that the war came to a conclusion with little said as to how that was done. The summer campaign was one which showed some of the weaknesses that the Army faced in dealing with an unconventional opponent. It also was marked by the fear of what could happen when an army lost faith in itself. Little scouting and poor intelligence led the army to probe gently for the Sioux, but they did so only in numbers large enough to ensure their own success if they encountered hostile warriors. The size of the commands themselves

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⁴² Ibid., p. 271.

prevented the Army from being able to catch the smaller, more mobile Indian camps. The time was ripe to attempt some new strategies. In pursuing those strategies, men like Miles and Colonel Randal S. Mackenzie, were to make their marks on the history of the war.

But history had been made during that summer. Custer would become a symbol to a later generation of the noble sacrifice required to tame a wild frontier. To an even later generation he would symbolize the evil and inhumanity of American imperialism. Somewhere between these two extremes lies the reality of the situation. The desires of the American people to open up the Montana Territory and the President's obedience to that desire clashed with the desires of the Sioux to remain a free people. In any case, the Sioux, Custer, and the summer campaign have become a part of the popular view of America and what we are. But the story is still left unfinished if one does not look into the winter campaign and the conclusion of the Sioux War.

CHAPTER V

THE WINTER CAMPAIGN AND THE BATTLE OF WOLF MOUNTAIN

The summer campaign of 1876 ground to a halt with little to show for its efforts. Many of the troops went into winter quarters to await another spring and another long summer campaign. It was, however, the time for others to make their bid to conquer the Sioux, Nelson A. Miles had worked and politicked to lead a winter campaign against the Sioux. During the autumn and early winter preparations had been made and the work was now about to begin. Miles had not only to fight the Sioux, but he had to prepare to battle the arctic conditions that ravaged the plains during the winter months. Despite these problems, Miles would be instrumental in forcing an end to the conflict that had drawn over one third of the U. S. military to the plains of Montana in 1876.¹

Miles spent considerable effort trying to persuade his superiors that he was the best qualified to lead future campaigns against the Sioux. On July 22, 1876, Congress passed a bill that authorized the construction of two posts in the Yellowstone country. But due to the approach of autumn and the difficulty of transporting goods along

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¹ Harry H. Anderson, "Indian Peace-talkers and the Conclusion of the Sioux War of 1876," Nebraska History, vol. 44, 1963, p. 233.

the rapidly shrinking rivers, building permanent forts was put off until the following spring. Instead, two temporary cantonments were constructed and strongly garrisoned.² Miles begged for the command of those posts and the country around them. He wrote to General Sherman, "if you expect me to be successful see that I am supported or give me command of this whole region and I will soon end this Sioux war." He went on to further state that he would be "very glad to govern them afterwards."³ Those troops under Miles spent their time preparing the cantonments on the Tongue and Yellowstone Rivers and gathering supplies. The Cantonment on the mouth of the Tongue River would later be named Fort Keogh. The second cantonment was near the present city of Glendive. Lieutenant H. G. Otis was given the responsibility of escorting the supply trains from the camp on the Yellowstone to the Tongue River Cantonment. There were frequent problems with the supplies. Low water on the Yellowstone forced the steamers to unload further downriver. From there teamsters packed the supplies to Otis and then to Miles on the Tongue River. This, and the frequent breakdown of the wagons, added considerable time and hazard to the delivery of supplies. The Sioux continually harrassed the supply lines and drove off herds of beef intended to feed the soldiers. Brown notes that about four hundred head of beef had been run off from the Tongue River

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² Brian C. Pohanka, Nelson A. Miles: A Documentary Biography of his Military Career - 1861-1903, (Glendale, CA: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1985), p. 92.

³ Ibid., p. 90.

Cantonment alone.⁴ These delays would later be cited as reasons for the setbacks and troubles in Miles' command. Miles also complained bitterly that he had not recieved the level of support in men and supplies that had been promised to him. In letters to his wife, he stated that he was prepared to "prove before any investigation or committee of Congress" that the Cantonment had been able to house 1,500 men for the winter. Instead, he was only given a few more than four hundred.⁵

While Miles was busy preparing his base and readying his men, others were active as well. Despite the increased number of soldiers sent to guard the Agencies, Sheridan had decided that there were too many Indians on the agencies to be safely watched by the Army troops stationed there. To prevent potential trouble among the agency Indians, the Army ordered that the Indians should be disarmed and dismounted. To this end, Mackenzie was sent to the Red Cloud Agency. On October 23, Mackenzie and the Fourth Cavalry surrounded the Agency and demanded the surrender of the weapons and ponies of those on the agency.⁶ Colonel Samuel D. Sturgis was sent to the Little Missouri Agency with similar orders. These orders were successfully carried out by Mackenzie and Sturgis. The ponies captured at these agencies were to be sold to furnish the Indians

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⁴ Brown, Terror of the Badlands, p. 5, file X-7, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks.

⁶ Miles' letters to his wife, (dated January 19, 1877), cited by Virginia W. Johnson, The Unregimented General (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1962), pp. 155-6.

⁶ Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, p. 285.

with livestock which could be used to help them on their road to becoming settled farmers. To further protect American interests, the government decided to remove Red Cloud as their official representative to the Sioux. Spotted Tail was appointed head chief of both the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail Agencies. Many of the Indians on these agencies were shocked by this turn of events and feared what the future might bring. Some fled the agencies to join those Indians who remained free in the unceded territories.⁷

In October, Miles began active engagements with Sitting Bull's and Crazy Horse's warriors. In the first few weeks of October, a large group of Hunkpapa, Miniconjou, and Sans Arc Sioux under Sitting Bull, Gall, No Neck, Bull Eagle, Red Skirt, Pretty Bear, and others had moved into the Yellowstone area.⁸ They began to harrass Lieutenant Otis and the wagon train he was escorting. On October 11, 15, and 16, a body of 400 to 600 warriors skirmished with Otis. An Indian emmissary approached Otis under a white flag to demand supplies and ammunition from him. Otis refused, but gave them some bacon and hardtack instead. This seemed to appease Sitting Bull and they withdrew. Prior to this, Miles received word from a scout that the wagon train had been "coralled" by the Indians some forty miles from the post.⁹ Miles went to find it. He took along the entire Fifth Infantry, almost 500 men.

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⁷ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 272.

⁸ Ibid., p. 273.

⁹ Brown, Terror of the Badlands, p. 5.

Miles reached the wagon train on October 17, and conferred with Otis who confirmed that Sitting Bull's Sioux were harrassing the area. The Indians became aware of Miles' presence and withdrew. On October 18, the wagon train left for the Cantonment, while Miles pursued Sitting Bull. Two days later, on Cedar Creek, Miles sighted a large body of Indian horsemen. Again an Indian approached bearing a white flag. This time he requested that Miles hold a council with Sitting Bull between the two lines. Miles agreed and proceeded out with a small escort. They talked on October 20 and again on October 21. Sitting Bull demanded that the whites leave the territory and Miles demaded that they surrender and return to the agencies immediately or fight. Sitting Bull withdrew a small distance with his chiefs and discussed the matter. During this time, some Indians circled around and reconnoitered the command. They found that the wagons were deployed within a hollow square of skirmishers and that a Rodman gun had been set up on an overlooking bluff.¹⁰ The scouts returned to Sitting Bull with the news of the disposition of the troops and their stregnth. He returned to Miles and asked to be allowed the night to decide the course that they would take. Miles agreed and withdrew the command eight miles and set up camp.¹¹

Sitting Bull took the time he had bought to begin moving his camp. Early the next morning, Miles began his pursuit. The Sioux left behind warriors to slow the Army's advance on their families. As the

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¹⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 8.

soldiers approached, the Indians set the prairie grass on fire and occupied the bluffs to the soldiers' left and front. A fight ensued that lasted all day. The soldiers fought in suffocating fire and smoke. The Rodman cannon which Miles brought along was deployed on a high bluff and used to keep the Indians at a distance.¹² That night the soldiers camped on the hills. All through the night the men were kept awake with shots aimed at the pickets and the shouts and yelling of the Indians. The Sioux were still there the following morning. They were ready to fight, but not at close quarters. As the soldiers moved out of camp, Indians fired from behind them and wounded two men. The progress of the soldiers' pursuit was hindered by occasional shots from the Indians. But Miles was persistent. He trailed the Sioux to the Yellowstone River, forty-two miles away.¹³ The soldiers followed a trail marked by the scattered debris and cast-offs that would have slowed the fleeing Indians.

On October 27, Miles was approached by a group of Indians under a white flag of truce. These were Miniconjou and Sans Arc Sioux who had become disenchanted with the prospects of fighting the Army during the coming winter. The chiefs stated that there were some 2,000 Indians willing to return to the reservation. Miles could not feed nor watch this many Indians, so he took five chiefs as hostages and instructed the rest to turn themselves in at the Cheyenne River Agency in South Dakota. Brown states that during

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¹² Ibid., p. 10.

¹³ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 274.

these negotiations, a party of Sioux attempted to cut the supply wagons off from the command. The quick deployment of the artillery and the shelling of a group of Indians was enough to turn the attack on Miles' supply train. Brown remarked that the "novelty of the affair was to see a conversation of peace in the front of the command and war in the rear."¹⁴ But this "attack" did not seem to have any effect on the council between Miles and the chiefs. The chiefs were taken to Standing Rock, North Dakota, under guard. The remaining Indians were given thirty days to hunt buffalo before returning to the agency.¹⁵ On November 30 some forty lodges, the immediate following of those five chiefs, reached the Cheyenne River Agency and surrendered. The remaining Miniconjou and Sans Arc turned south and joined the Ogalala and Cheyenne camp of Crazy Horse.¹⁶

After accepting the surrender of the Miniconjou and Sans Arc, Miles turned towards the Tongue River Cantonment. He arrived there on November 3 and took on supplies for a forty day reconnaissance. The command laid over to rest for one day and was again in the field on November 5. When Miles left he was equipped with winter gear and clothing which had been shipped up to the Tongue River Cantonment.¹⁷ He was determined that the hostiles should have not a moment's peace in which to hunt their winter supply of meat. The command proceeded to the Dry Forks of the Missouri. From there

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¹⁴ Brown, Terror of the Badlands, p. 14.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁶ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 274.

¹⁷ Ibid.

they headed to Fort Peck. In all, the march covered a total of some 130 miles, part of which was in snow and decreasing temperatures. The command stayed near Fort Peck for two days, then seperated into three columns. Four companies, C, D, F, and K, stayed along the south bank of the Missouri under Captain Simon Snyder. The remaining six, A, B, E, G, H, and I, were divided between Miles and Lieutenant Frank D. Baldwin. Miles took A, B, and E; Baldwin companies G, H, and I.¹⁸ Miles proceeded along the north bank of the Missouri.¹⁹ After marching some two hundred miles, Captain A. S. Bennet was ordered to take Company B to the trading post and check on the availability of arms and ammunition and to issue orders to prevent the sales of those items. As trumpeter for Company B, Brown participated in this assignment.²⁰ They rejoined Miles' command several days later. In the meantime, Miles had crossed the river. The river was full of ice. While Miles was crossed the river, the moorings on his raft broke and he drifted down stream until his raft caught on a snag. He was on that raft from "8 o'clock A.M. till four o'clock P.M."²¹ Finally, a member of Company E volunteered to swim out to the raft with a rope. He leaped into the icy river and proceeded to rescue his commanding officer. In gratitude, Miles promised the man a thirty day furlough.²²

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¹⁸ Pohanka, Nelson A. Miles, p. 96.

¹⁹ Brown, Terror of the Badlands, p. 17.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 20.

²² Ibid., p. 21.

The march back to the Tongue River Cantonment was a long, cold one. The thermometers often froze and temperatures plummeted to 35 degrees below zero for the duration of the march. Both men and animals suffered from the cold. Miles found the occasional frozen carcass of a mule or an abandoned wagon of Captain Snyder's supply train. His animals were hardly better off. Those that were alive were thin and starving. A scout was sent ahead to have forage sent back in order to keep the mules alive until they could reach the Cantonment. As a result, the command reached the Cantonment in good condition, "with the exception of a few frozen feet and hands."²³ The march had shown little indication of any hostiles in the Missouri country between the Yellowstone and the Mussleshell. Snyder's command had marched 308 miles, while Miles' command had covered 408 miles.²⁴

After leaving Miles, Lt. Frank D. Baldwin and his command marched to Fort Peck and was informed that Sitting Bull was camped about eight miles from the fort. In order to move quickly, Baldwin decided to leave his supply wagons at the fort and packed his supplies with him. He proceeded towards the camp and decided that a morning attack would offer better hope of success. In the early morning of December 7, the companies came within view of the hostile camp.²⁵ To their surprise and concern, the camp outnumbered the soldiers some five to one. There were 600 Indians

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²³ Ibid., p. 23.

²⁴ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 474.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 275.

in that camp. While the Indians showed no desire to fight, they called out to the soldiers to leave, saying that there would be another massacre like that which Custer had suffered.²⁶ Baldwin withdrew and returned to the fort to gather the wagons he had left behind. He then proceeded to the Cantonment. Enroute, Baldwin came across a camp of hostile Sioux on the Redwater Creek on December 18. As the warriors were away hunting, the occupants fled the village, leaving it to Baldwin. Baldwin captured much of the camp's supplies, as well as some forty ponies, which he took along.²⁷ The occupants fled into the wintry prairie with little more than hope that other camps would take them in. The influx of refugees added to the drain of supplies on other Sioux and Cheyenne camps. By the time Baldwin returned to the Cantonment on December 23, his command had marched 716 miles.²⁸

Miles' men were not the only ones who were active in the winter phase of the Sioux War. Crook had assembled almost 2,200 men, among them infantry, cavalry, Indian scouts, and civilian teamsters, to mount another campaign.²⁹ Crook led his command towards the Rosebud, believing that Crazy Horse was camped near

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²⁶ Brown, Terror of the Badlands, p. 24.

²⁷ There is some controversy as to the number of Indians in this camp. Brown claims that there were forty lodges in this camp (Terror of the Badlands, p. 26), while Utley states there were 122 lodges that belonged to Sitting Bull (Frontier Regulars, p. 274). In any case, there were a large number of Indians who were forced to seek shelter with other camps.

²⁸ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 274.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 275.

the site of his earlier battle. As they moved closer, scouts reported the discovery of a Cheyenne camp in the nearby Bighorn Mountains. Crook ordered Colonel Randal S. Mackenzie to take all ten troops of cavalry and the Indian scouts to attack the camp.³⁰ At dawn on November 25, Mackenzie led his cavalymen into the camp of the Cheyenne chiefs, Dull Knife and Little Wolf. There were some 200 lodges in the canyon on the Red Fork of the Powder River. The attack was a surprise and the warriors, carrying little more than their rifles and ammunition, tried to get their families up into the ravines and bluffs above the camp. The battle quickly became one of confused hand to hand fighting. Soldiers and Indian scouts set fire to the tepees, while Cheyenne warriors fired from the cover of the boulders and ravines. The fight became one of long range sniping for both sides. Mackenzie captured 700 ponies and destroyed most of the Cheyenne's supplies and goods. Mackenzie lost six men killed and twenty-six wounded. The Cheyennes lost forty killed. But their most important losses were in supplies and food. They were forced to scatter and try to find Crazy Horse's camp and get help. The frigid temperature took its toll on the Cheyenne children, eleven babies died enroute to Crazy Horse.³¹

Crook took his command to the Belle Fourche, then to the head of the Little Missouri. Fierce blizzards and the temperature falling to more than forty degrees below zero forced Crook to rethink his

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³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., p. 276.

options. There was pressure from Sheridan to stop the campaign due to the high cost of such a large undertaking in the severe weather. It was also taking its toll on Crook's men and animals. By the late part of the month Crook agreed to call off the campaign.³² He withdrew his troops and put them on garrison duty.

With the pressures that were being put on the hostile camps during the winter, there was a growing fear of what the future would bring. Many people in the Sioux and Cheyenne camps were beginning to question the wisdom of continued resistance. Factionalization over the question of surrender began to become more and more apparent. The peace faction of Crazy Horse's camp was led by Sitting Bull the Good, a chief of the Ogalala.³³ The Hunkpapa had left the Red Cloud Agency over the tactics that the government had used in the seizure of the Black Hills in October, 1876.³⁴ The peace faction was made up predominately of agency Indians and those who had had their fill of fighting the Army. Many of these Indians had lived in the agencies, but fled to join Crazy Horse due to the seizure of the ponies and arms in September and October. As for the war faction, many of these

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³² Ibid.

³³ This Sitting Bull is not the famous Hunkpapa chief who led the Sioux against Custer. This Sioux chief was known as Sitting Bull, the Good, or Sitting Bull, the Ogalala. He was a moderate, who lived on the Red Cloud Agency. President Grant personally presented him with a rifle in 1875, as a reward for his friendship towards the government. Harry H. Anderson, "Indian Peace-talkers and the Conclusion of the Sioux War of 1876," Nebraska History, vol. 44, 1963, p. 236.

³⁴ Ibid.

were leaders of the warrior societies or older leaders of the Northern Indians who had great hatred of the whites.³⁵ As the winter progressed and the pressures of additional refugees grew, the peace faction began to gain more sympathy with the moderates among Crazy Horse's camp. By December, there were an estimated five to six hundred lodges in that camp, or approximately 3,500 people.³⁶ Hyde estimated that this was perhaps two thirds of all of the hostile Sioux and Cheyenne that were in the field that winter.³⁷ Among them were people with a growing desire to see what terms the government might be willing to give for a peaceful end of the war.

With the close of Crook's campaign and the general curtailment of military operations, the stage was set for negotiations between the Indians and the Army. Crook was ready to try bringing in the hostiles peacefully if he could. In early December, several emissaries were sent out to bring word of the Army's willingness to discuss peace. Their terms were that in return for unconditional surrender of all ponies and firearms, the government would assure the Indians that no retribution would be taken for the Custer "massacre."³⁸ Crook also believed that the government would back his plans for a Sioux homeland in the Powder River country.³⁹ Two notable Miniconjou subchiefs, Important Man and Foolish Bear,

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³⁵ Ibid., p. 235.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, p. 288.

³⁸ Anderson, "Indian Peace-talkers ...," p. 235.

³⁹ S. L. A. Marshall, Crimsoned Prairie, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 185.

volunteered to act as messengers. They left the Cheyenne River Agency early in December and succeeded in finding Crazy Horse's camp on December 22. As events turned out, this would be a little more than two weeks too late.

Led by Sitting Bull, the Good, a party of chiefs set out from Crazy Horse's camp to discuss surrender with Miles at the Tongue River Cantonment. Dee Brown states that Crazy Horse accompanied some thirty chiefs and warriors to Miles' camp. Supposedly, Crazy Horse and twenty-two of the group stayed outside of the camp, watching from a nearby hill.⁴⁰ A party of eight chiefs and their warriors went out to talk with Miles. On December 16, under a white flag of truce, this delegation approached the Cantonment. As they entered the camp, they passed by the lodges of the Crow scouts. It should be noted that the Sioux and the Crow had long been enemies. The lands around the Little Bighorn had originally been Crow homeland. Brown also claims that a little prior to this event, a party of Sioux had fired into a Crow camp and killed two women.⁴¹ As the Sioux approached the camp, the Crow scouts began to fire on them, despite the flag of truce. The Sioux continued to ride towards the Cantonment, but seeing that they were being surrounded they began to return fire on the Crow. As the officers and soldiers rushed out to investigate the shots, the Sioux fled from the Cantonment. The majority of the scouts followed after them. The Sioux left behind five

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⁴⁰ Dee Brown, Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, (New York: Washington Square Press Publications, 1959, 1981), p. 292.

⁴¹ Brown, Terror of the Badlands, p. 28.

of their number who had been killed by the scouts; among them was Sitting Bull, the Good.⁴² The other casualties were Bull Eagle, Tall Bull, Red Cloth, and Red Horse.⁴³ The officers attempted to salvage something of the situation and tried to arrest the Crows, who had fled into the bluffs and hills nearby. The scouts were coaxed back with promises that they would not be punished if they stayed in the Cantonment. Their ponies were confiscated and sent to the Sioux as a sign of peace and with hopes that talks could be opened.⁴⁴ But the Crow scouts had shattered any attempts that might be made to open negotiations. In Crazy Horse's camp, the peace faction was completely discredited and for the time, gave up on all thoughts of surrender or talks. The actions of the scouts were used by the war faction to illustrate what the government and Army had in store for the hostiles. Crazy Horse and the others decided that operations against the soldiers would begin again.⁴⁵

At this time that the two Miniconjou chiefs, Important Man and Foolish Bear, reached the camp with word that the government wished to open talks. Their words fell upon deaf ears. The war faction spoke for the council when they said that they "had not started the war; but they were now determined to continue fighting as long as they had the means to resist."⁴⁶ Furthermore, the war

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⁴² Ibid., p. 27.

⁴³ Don Rickey, Jr., "The Battle of Wolf Mountain," Montana, the Magazine of Western History, (vol. 13,) Spring, 1963, p. 46.

⁴⁴ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 276.

⁴⁵ Anderson, "Indian Peace-talkers ...," p. 236.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 237.

faction decided that no one would be allowed to leave the camp for the agencies. When several groups tried to leave with the messengers, Crazy Horse had them stopped and had their ponies killed and their weapons taken. Without transportation and weapons, the group was stranded in Crazy Horse's camp.

The Sioux began to harass the Cantonment again. This time they hoped to destroy the soldiers through ambush. Small parties of warriors would attack the post, then fall back, hoping that the soldiers would follow them into the rough country around the Cantonment. Here other warriors waited to attack. Miles was quick to take the bait that was offered to him. A part of the command, under Major Dickey, was sent after the Sioux on December 27. Along with these troops, Dickey took several ox-wagons loaded with grain and supplies.⁴⁷ Miles planned to leave several days later and overtake them after some sixty or seventy miles.⁴⁸ Miles left the Cantonment on December 29, leaving behind a small detachment of each company to act as a garrison.⁴⁹

The troops marched out into the frozen and stormy Montana wilderness. Miles felt that the command was ready to take up the

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⁴⁷ Miles' report to the Assistant Adjutant General, January 23, 1877, cited by Virginia W. Johnson, The Unregimented General, pp. 137-8.

⁴⁸ From the letters of Nelson Miles to his wife, p. 55.

⁴⁹ Edwin M. Brown was a member of this garrison. He reported the activities of those who went after Crazy Horse, as they were reported to him by his "bunky," Brown, Terror of the Badlands, pp. 29-30.

chase, despite having just recently returned from the field. There was some question as to the state of the troops. Major Alfred L. Hough of the Twenty-second Infantry felt that they had not yet recovered from the exhausting campaign of early December. Hough wrote his wife,

Miles is working his men to death. He was in only four days from his campaign in the north when he started out again taking all but two companies. His men are tired and worn and all men and officers seem dissatisfied. His animals are nearly dead. I am afraid he is overdoing the matter; that is, the results do not compensate for the criticism.⁵⁰

Whatever their condition, the troops were again dressed in their winter gear and marched into the field. G. W. Baird described them as they marched out.

Over the heavy woolen clothing supplied to the army for winter wear, the men were, many of them, furclad from head to foot; in lieu of a face there was presented to the observer a frost-covered woolen muffler frozen solidly upon an ice-clad beard, "trimmed with same" in the form of icicles, so that a long thaw had to precede disrobing. Enormous overshoes of rubber or of buffalo skin flesh side out, drawn over German socks, gave warmth to the feet that they robbed of all nimbleness.⁵¹

On the first day, December 27, Major Dickey's command marched twelve miles up the Tongue River and proceeded to make camp. They remained in this camp on the next day. That day they captured some cattle that had earlier been run off by the Sioux. The command

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⁵⁰ Harry H. Anderson, "Nelson A. Miles and the Sioux War of 1876-77," p. 26.

⁵¹ G. W. Baird, "General Miles' Indian Campaigns," Century, July 1891, p. 356.

travelled twenty-eight miles over the next two days. On December 30, Miles reached Dickey's party with the remainder of the command. Altogether, there were 436 men of the Fifth and Twenty-second Infantry, a number of scouts, and two pieces of artillery hidden in a wagon.⁵² Luther S. "Yellowstone" Kelly states that there were a number of mounted scouts with Miles, including several Crow, a Bannock named Buffalo Horn, and three named Johnson, of whom one was known as "Liver-eating Johnson."⁵³

On January 1, 1877, the command encountered a party of Sioux warriors. A brief skirmish followed and the Sioux were driven off. The command then continued upriver. The terrain became more rugged and mountainous with a thick covering of pine and cedar. Before daylight on January 3, a mounted man of Company C of the 5th Infantry, by the name of Battey, was shot and killed by Sioux warriors.⁵⁴ The command pursued the Indians' trail over the next two days, but lost it after being forced to leave the riverbank on January 5. On that day the command camped in an abandoned Indian camp two miles in length. The following day, the command marched another twelve miles and passed another deserted Indian camp. Edwin M. Brown says that this camp was even larger than the previous one and had been abandoned no more than five hours

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⁵² Nelson A. Miles, letters to his wife, (dated December 27, 1876), Cited by Virginia Johnson, The Unregimented General, p. 138.

⁵³ Luther S. Kelly, Yellowstone Kelly, ed. by M. M. Quaife, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), p. 167.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

before.⁵⁵ The weather turned for the worse and by morning of January 7, there was four inches of fresh snow on the ground. In all, there was some three feet of snow piled up.⁵⁶

The Sioux and Cheyenne sent scouts out to determine the position of the Army. They found that the Army was moving closer each day. The leaders in the Indian camp decided that it should be moved upstream and as Black Elk stated, as "there was no better place to go, we got ready to fight."⁵⁷ The camp was thus moved a small distance upriver. During this time, a group of Cheyenne were moving to the main camp on the Tongue River from a camp at Belle Fourche.⁵⁸ In this party there were four women, two children and one warrior, Big Horse, who had decided to move to Two Moon's camp with Crazy Horse. Only one day away from Crazy Horse and Two Moons' camp, Big Horse and the women spotted black smoke beyond a hill. Big Horse went to investigate. He took a long time to find a position which would allow him to observe the camp without being seen. In the meantime, the women went forward to look for themselves. Big Horse got into position just in time to see the women and children being taken into Miles' camp.⁵⁹ Unable to do anything

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⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 32.

⁵⁷ John G. Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1932, 1988), p. 137.

⁵⁸ John Stands-In-Timber and Margot Liberty, Cheyenne Memories, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 219.

⁵⁹ The exact number of people captured seems to vary with the source. Miles states in his letters to his wife that "one young warrior and seven women and children "were captured (Miles' letters to his

alone, Big Horse went to find Crazy Horse's camp. He found it thirty miles further upriver, where today stands the Tongue River Dam.⁶⁰ As soon as the news reached the camp, there was a force immediately assembled to try to rescue the Army's prisoners.

Luther "Yellowstone" Kelly was one of the scouts who had brought the prisoners into Miles' camp. He stated that the Crow scouts who were with him rode along the prisoners and "touched each gently with the coup stick" while he motioned for them to continue along the path.⁶¹ He took them to Miles, who treated them well and gave them food and shelter. Soon after that there was an alarm that Indians were approaching. Kelly gathered his four white scouts and quickly moved up river to intercept this group. As they neared the place where they captured the prisoners, they noticed ten or fifteen Indians on the ridge. He quickly decided to move into a better position nearer the Indians. When he was within fifty yards of them "some forty or fifty of them who had been concealed rose up and delivered their fire...."⁶² Kelly and his small band returned fire. No one was hurt, but in view of the strong enemy fire, they fell back into a stand of woods. The Indians would pop up and shoot at them,

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wife, cited by Virginia Johnson, The Unregimented General, p. 150). Brown states that the scouts brought in a family of two women and three children (Brown, Terror of the Badlands, p. 32). Kelly states that "there were three women, a boy, a girl, and a child" (Kelly, Yellowstone Kelly, p. 169).

⁶⁰ Stands-In-Timber and Liberty, p. 220.

⁶¹ Kelly, Yellowstone Kelly, p. 169.

⁶² Ibid., p. 170.

then duck down again just as quickly. The warriors moved around the woods to surround it on three sides and soon began to pour fire into the woods. The Indian scouts had by that time assembled and moved to a point some two hundred yards downstream from Kelly and protected Kelly's flank with their gun fire.

As soon as shots were heard, Miles ordered a detachment under Lt. Hargous to move upstream to engage the Indians, but cautioned them to beware of an ambush. The fighting began to subside. Kelly estimated that there were more than one hundred Sioux.⁶³ The scouts "fully expected to be charged by the... Indians," when a shell was fired over their heads by the artillery posted behind them. The shell found its mark a "little beyond their line" and helped to scatter the warriors.⁶⁴ Lt. Hargous quickly marched his detachment of Company A, Fifth Infantry up to the defense of the scouts. The Indians pulled back from the approaching soldiers. Hargous covered the scout's retreat from the woods, then due to the failing light, withdrew himself. That night the warriors surrounded the camp and yelled to the prisoners who called back in Cheyenne. There was an occasional shot exchanged during the night, but the Indians withdrew.

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⁶³ Miles initially estimated that the number of Indians was closer to 250 (Miles' letters to his wife, dated January 19, 1877, cited by Virginia Johnson, The Unregimented General, p. 150), but in his autobiography he notes that there were about 300 (Miles, Personal Recollections and Observations of General Nelson A. Miles, (Chicago: The Werner Co., 1896), p. 237.)

⁶⁴ Kelly, Yellowstone Kelly, p. 172.

The Battle of Wolf Mountain, one of the most important fights of the Sioux War of 1876-77, was about to begin. The morning of January 8 dawned cold with grey storm clouds drifting across the sky. The Army camp had been made along the wooded, western bank of the Tongue River, in a narrow canyon where Hanging Woman Creek joins the Tongue River, near present day Birney, Montana. A bench above the camp formed a small mesa. A sloping bluff extended to a ridge some four hundred yards away. As the soldiers finished their breakfast of hardtack, salt pork, and coffee, the scouts came in with word that the Indian forces had appeared on the snowy bluffs to the front and the left of the command. Edwin M. Brown stated that the Indians took their positions with a discipline that would have "done credit to a batallion [sic] of troops."⁶⁵ They spread out and took advantage of the cover of the ravines and rocks. From these heights the Indians called out that soldiers had had their last breakfast and that they "would eat no more fat meats."⁶⁶

Miles ordered Major Dicky of the Twenty-second Infantry to take Companies E and F and a small detachment of the Fifth to form a skirmish line and proceed to the front. This line stretched across the front of the command's position. Behind this line the rest of the command formed up. Captain James S. Casey and Company A, Fifth Infantry assembled facing the steep hill on the left flank of Miles' position. In the center, Captain Edmund Butler took Company C and

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⁶⁵ Brown, Terror of the Badlands, p. 33.

⁶⁶ Miles' letters to his wife, (dated January 19, 1877), cited by Virginia Johnson, The Unregimented General, p. 150.

formed up facing the butte and its connecting ridgeline that dominated the battlefield. Lieutenant Robert McDonald and Company D were ordered to attack the Indian position on the bluffs that joined that butte. To McDonald's right, Companies K and E formed up along the bench above the river. Miles ordered the cannon moved up to the small mesa, behind the infantry, "in a position to resist attack, or to be held in reserve for any emergency."⁶⁷ The Indian, Stands-In-Timber, stated that the soldiers built breastworks on this mesa.⁶⁸ Here "General Miles stood with a little switch in his hand directing operations."⁶⁹ As the battle offered the "scout... little freedom to exercise strategy in stealing upon the enemy," "Yellowstone" Kelly joined Miles on the mesa.⁷⁰

As for the Indians' deployment, they formed a large, mixed force that lined the bluffs and ridgelines above the soldiers' positions.⁷¹ Leaving their ponies hidden behind them in the brush at the base of the ridge, they took cover among the rocks, ravines, and the occasional pine on the bluffs. Across the river, a large body of Indians attempted to circle around behind the command. The Indian

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⁶⁷ Kelly, Yellowstone Kelly, p. 172.

⁶⁸ Stands-In-Timber and Liberty, Cheyenne Memories, p. 220.

⁶⁹ Kelly, Yellowstone Kelly, p. 173.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Several sources state that the warriors fought as separate tribal groups. But Wooden Leg, a Cheyenne warrior who fought in that battle, stated that the warriors had joined camps prior to the battle and that they "mingled themselves as being of one tribe." Wooden Leg, A Warrior Who Fought Custer, interpreted by Thomas B. Marquis, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1931), p. 290.

forces were divided roughly in half, each force working down a side of the canyon. The Cheyenne medicine man, Big Crow, and Crazy Horse took their place on the steep hill to the Army's left.⁷² Miles estimated that approximately six hundred warriors faced him in this engagement.⁷³

Miles had his troops in position to defend or attack and at 7:00 a. m., the first shots rang out in the narrow valley.⁷⁴ The first phase of the battle was a push by the Indians attempting an encirclement of the troops from across the river. Seeing this danger, Miles ordered Company E to cross the river ice and turn back the Indians. Company E proceeded across the river and began to dig rifle pits above the river.⁷⁵ By this time there was a general fight on both sides of the canyon; warrior and soldier took advantage of cover where they could and poured fire into their enemies. On the right, the Indians rode towards Company E's position then dismounted and attempted to force the soldiers out of that position. Company E was able to turn back the Indian attack. The warriors charged within fifty yards of the soldier's line before withering rifle fire broke the attack and forced them to fall back.⁷⁶ In the meantime, across the river, a detachment of soldiers gained a foothold on the central butte, now

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⁷² Ibid., p. 291.

⁷³ Miles' report to the Assistant Adjutant General, January 23, 1877, p. 2.

⁷⁴ Don Rickey, Jr., "The Battle of Wolf Mountain," p. 49.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

known as Battle Butte.⁷⁷ This position on the right flank gave Miles greater control of the situation. As he was operating on interior lines of deployment, Miles was able to anticipate the Indians' movements and support the areas which needed reinforcement.

With the attack on the right flank contained, the Sioux and Cheyenne decided to make a push on left flank. Many warriors were moved behind the bluffs, from the right to the left flank. They swarmed over the ridge and began to concentrate their fire against the infantrymen. Companies A and C, under Captains Casey and Butler, moved against the Indians on the steep hill along the left flank. Capt. Frank Baldwin feared that the soldiers had spent too much of their ammunition in the previous fire fight, so he loaded a box of ammunition in front of him on his horse and raced to the soldiers. Despite spilling part of its contents enroute, he reached the troops.⁷⁸ From a position behind the men he then waved his hat and urged them on.⁷⁹

Baldwin was not the only leader to encourage his men. Big Crow danced below the ridge of the steep hill on the left, in full sight of Indian and trooper alike. Clad in a "red daubed war shirt and red blanket" he moved along the ridge, occasionally firing at the soldiers.⁸⁰ As he did so, he yelled encouragement and defied the soldiers to hit him with their bullets. The soldiers seemed only to

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⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 50.

⁷⁹ Kelly, Yellowstone Kelly, p. 174.

⁸⁰ Don Rickey, Jr., "The Battle of Wolf Mountain," p. 50.

pleased to accommodate him, for "the longer he was the object of attention the faster the soldiers blazed away."⁸¹ When he ran out of ammunition, he moved to the warriors along the ridge and asked for some of theirs. After getting more cartridges he returned to the ridge to fire at the soldiers. At this point Big Crow received a fatal wound from the rifle fire. He tottered and fell, alive but obviously badly wounded. Wooden Leg and two Sioux warriors crawled out to Big Crow and tried to drag him to cover. As they tried, the soldiers poured more fire at them. They were forced to abandon Big Crow until the shooting quieted down. When they attempted to remove him a second time he was said to have stated, "Just leave me here where there is shelter. I will die anyhow. Go on home."⁸² When they returned later, they found that he had died.

Even as Big Crow fell, Casey and Company A pushed up the steep, icy slope. The movement against the hill was very much like storming a fortified position. Snow and ice impeded the soldiers' movements. The men frequently slipped and fell on the icy slopes. Artillery shells fired by the cannon on the mesa would scatter clusters of Indian forces. The Indians fired from covered positions uphill of the soldiers. The snowfall increased as an approaching storm moved down the river valley. Despite these advantages, the Indians were forced to withdraw before the soldiers' advance. But the issue had not been decided. The Indians gathered a larger force

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⁸¹ Kelly, Yellowstone Kelly, p. 174.

⁸² Stands-In-Timber and Liberty, Cheyenne Memories, p. 221.

in an attempt to retake the hill. They charged on foot along the connecting ridge at the infantrymen. Miles stated that they charged through fire aimed at them by Company A and got within fifty yards of the soldiers' line.⁸³ Major Butler's company, which also stood before the Indians, poured their own bullets into the Indians. Major Butler's horse was shot out from under him, while leading a "gallant and decisive" charge.⁸⁴ Likewise, Lt. McDonald's Company D turned to support Companies A and C, and began an enfilading fire from the Indian's left flank. One of the two Army casualties in this battle, Corporal August Bathman of Company A, Fifth Infantry, died in this assault on the hill. The Indian forces withdrew to the cover of the bluffs behind them, shooting as they retreated. Wooden Leg said that his brother called to him, saying, "... come, we are going away from here."⁸⁵ The Sioux and Cheyenne forces withdrew and were unable to mount a successful counterattack. Firing continued sporadically throughout the late morning, but the snowfall increased to blizzard conditions by noon which battered the command. Miles called a halt to the pursuit. So ended the Battle of Wolf Mountain.

By comparison to battles such as that on the Little Bighorn or the Rosebud, this was a fairly small action. Of the 436 infantrymen involved, one was killed in the assault on the hill and one died the

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⁸³ Miles' report to the Assistant Adjutant General, January 23, 1877, p. 2.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Wooden Leg, A Warrior Who Fought Custer, p. 292.

next day from wounds recieved. Seven men were wounded.⁸⁶ Among the Sioux and Cheyenne, two Sioux warriors had died and Big Crow was the only Cheyenne casualty.⁸⁷ Rickey cites Red Sack, a Sioux warrior, who stated that three others were wounded, two of whom died at a later date.⁸⁸ Brown gives the estimated Indian casualties as fifteen killed and twenty-five wounded.⁸⁹ Miles accepted these numbers as being close to his official casualty estimate as well.⁹⁰ It is very likely that the Indian accounts are accurate. Despite the great deal of ammunition expended, there were relatively few casualties. This was a common feature of many Indian fights. With the emphasis on marksmanship taking such a low place in the training of both Army and Indian soldiers, it is not surprising there were so many misses.

It is commonly believed, by the Army if no one else, that artillery had a severe effect on the morale of Indian forces on the plains.⁹¹ There has been much made of the impact of the artillery on the outcome of this battle. Miles and some historians stated that the

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⁸⁶ Miles' report to the Assistant Adjutant General, January 23, 1877, pp. 6-7.

⁸⁷ Wooden Leg, A Warrior Who Fought Custer, p. 293.

⁸⁸ Don Rickey, Jr., "The Battle of Wolf Mountain," p. 52.

⁸⁹ Brown, Terror of the Badlands, p. 35.

⁹⁰ Miles estimated twelve to fifteen killed and twenty-five to thirty wounded. Miles' letters to his wife, (dated January 19, 1877), cited by Virginia Johnson, The Unregimented General, p. 152.

⁹¹ Utley discusses the nature of artillery used by the Army against the Indians. He cites the Army's belief in artillery's role in dispersing and demoralizing concentrations of Indian warriors. Frontier Regulars, p. 72.

surprise factor of the artillery being suddenly uncovered from beneath the bows and canvas of the supply wagons had an important "surprise" impact. Yet the artillery had been used the day before to aid the scouts in their withdrawal, so that "surprise" must have been relatively mild. Even so, the artillery did play a role in aiding the infantry in their work. It helped to disperse the large concentrations of Indian warriors. Miles lauded the skill with which Lt. Pope and Lt. Casey, who assisted Pope, handled the artillery.⁹² Several Indians had taken cover in a ravine and built a fire to keep warm when they heard a whistling noise. A large cannon ball landed a few yards away. Later, it was taken home and drilled into by the Indians, who found a quantity of powder and small, round shot in it.⁹³ The Army seemed to have trouble with getting their shells to explode properly. One Indian, Medicine Bear, had his horse hit by yet another cannon ball which did not explode. The horse reputedly lived through the experience, but would later bear a black spot on its hide where the ball had struck.⁹⁴

As the blizzard and increasing snowfall impeded movement, Miles decided to call a halt to the day's hostilities. The command returned to camp for the night. The next day, January 9, three companies moved out as skirmishers to reconnoiter the area. They

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⁹² Miles' report to the Assistant Adjutant General, January 23, 1877, p. 2.

⁹³ Stands-In-Timber and Liberty, Cheyenne Memories, p. 220.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 221.

found several dead ponies which had been killed by shells.⁹⁵ Pools of blood were also reported to be found over the course of some five miles up the valley.⁹⁶ The troops also found that the Indians had abandoned the area. They saw tracks and signs which indicated that the camp had divided into two groups and headed in separate directions.⁹⁷ Wooden Leg stated that the Sioux and Cheyenne began to disband and leave the area on the same day as the battle. They moved all that night and it was the next day before they stopped. Some of the Ogalalas moved up Hanging Woman Creek. The Cheyenne and Sioux, under Crazy Horse and Water All Gone, continued up the Tongue River.⁹⁸ Twenty-five warriors mounted the strongest horses returned to watch Miles' command to determine their intentions and, if possible, to rescue the prisoners.⁹⁹

Miles led the command back to the Cantonment on January 10, owing to the poor condition of his pack animals. His men were little better. They returned worn out and tired. Miles wrote that he would request Congress grant "a gratuitous issue" of one suit of clothing to each man, as they had worn theirs out.¹⁰⁰ Brown noted that many soldiers got "frozen hands, feet, ears, and noses...." on the trip

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⁹⁵ Brown, Terror of the Badlands, p. 34.

⁹⁶ Miles' letters to his wife, (dated January 19, 1877), cited by Virginia Johnson, The Unregimented General, p. 152.

⁹⁷ Brown, Terror of the Badlands, p. 34.

⁹⁸ Wooden Leg, A Warrior Who Fought Custer, p. 293.

⁹⁹ Stands-In-Timber and Liberty, Cheyenne Memories, p. 221.

¹⁰⁰ Miles' letters to his wife, (dated January 21, 1877), cited by Virginia Johnson, The Unregimented General, p. 157.

back.¹⁰¹ The weather was just as cold on the way back, but much of the snow had warmed and refrozen making marching hard.¹⁰² At 2:00 p. m., on January 18, 1877, the command marched into the shelter and warm quarters of the Tongue River Cantonment to the sounds of the Fifth Infantry Band playing "Marching Through Georgia."¹⁰³ With his return to the Cantonment, Miles declared his winter campaign closed.

The end of Miles' winter campaign marked the conclusion of a very important stage of the Sioux War of 1876/77. The war had been carried on during the summer months with no apparent results. Many officers fully expected to take the field against the Sioux the following spring. But the efforts of Miles and his command on those wintry plains had forced the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne to reconsider the options that faced them. Soldiers had marched into the snowy fastness of the Tongue River and forced a confrontation with the Sioux. Despite continued harrassment, a field battle, and the ravages of an arctic climate, the soldiers were able to dog the Indians' movement. Even distant camps were not safe from their advances. In all, the soldiers marched 258 miles and crossed the Tongue River 107 times, all in the frigid, icy weather of mid-winter.¹⁰⁴ Now the Indians had to decide what price they would put

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¹⁰¹ Brown, Terror of the Badlands, p. 35.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Miles' letters to his wife, (January 21, 1877), cited by Virginia Johnson, The Unregimented General, p. 157.

¹⁰⁴ Miles' report to the Assistant Adjutant General, January 23, 1877, p. 6.

on their freedom and their homes. For Miles, the military campaign might be over, but there was still the chance for him to claim the prize of the surrender of the hostile Indian forces loose in the uncaded territory.

CHAPTER VI

THE AFTERMATH OF THE WINTER CAMPAIGN AND THE CLOSE OF THE SIOUX WAR

The winter campaign had ended. Miles had chased Sitting Bull through the Yellowstone country and scattered Crazy Horse's warriors at Wolf Mountain. The end of the war was within sight. Continued campaigning would hasten its end. When Miles found that a continued military campaign would not be possible, he turned to negotiation to bring the war to a close. Miles had competition in attempting this and he seemed ready for the contest. Crook had begun his own negotiations with the hostile Sioux and Cheyenne. As for the Indians, they had much to consider in the coming months. With the Army striking at distant villages and camps, many more leaders again questioned the decision of continued resistance. On the other hand, the traditional freedoms that the Sioux and Cheyenne had fought for was not something that would be allowed on the agencies. But it had now become more than just a question of freedom, it had become a question of survival.

Orders from the Department of Dakota Headquarters were waiting when Miles reached the Cantonment. They instructed him to discharge all but two of his scouts, all of his civilian packers, and send all but thirty wagons to Fort Buford. As Miles complained to his

wife, it "virtually compels me to abandon the campaign and do just what Sitting Bull wanted me to do two months ago, to go into winter quarters and there remain."¹ In his anger and disappointment over not being allowed to continue, Miles hinted that perhaps there was "a determination that this war shall not be ended this winter, or that it shall not be ended by this command."²

With orders to curtail, or at least restrict, his activities, Miles looked for reasons why he should be put in check. The foremost, at least to Miles, was a feeling that Crook was being given preferential treatment. Miles complained to his wife.

From all I can learn through the papers that great Powder River expedition must have been out nearly a month and I suppose would be on the head waters of the Powder, Tongue and Rosebud. I see by the papers that Crook has had everything given him and the resources of a large Department. My lot has been quite the reverse. He is moving against the same body of Indians as my command, and has thirteen hundred troops while I have four hundred and twenty, a difference of nearly a thousand men. I hope there will be no investigation of this Indian business this winter as my testimony, I fear, would not be very favorable to the authorities.³

Once back in camp, Miles talked of continuing his operations. But as he had been successful in driving the hostile bands from the Tongue

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¹ Miles' letters to his wife, (dated January 19, 1877), cited by Virginia Johnson, The Unregimented General, p. 155.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., (dated December 27, 1876), p. 164.

River country, only small bands remained.⁴ If he were to continue military operations then he would need more support.⁵ His orders indicated that there would be little support. So Miles turned to diplomacy. "We have shown them our strength, and we will now show them our kindness."⁶

Miles decided that the prisoners captured on January 7 would make ideal emissaries. Miles sent two of the women with John Brughier, a half Indian scout, to find Crazy Horse and relay the message that Miles wished to talk about surrender.⁷ Brughier set out on February 1. Miles' terms were simple and straight forward "unconditional (surrender), with subsequent compliance with such orders as should be received from the higher authorities, at the same time informing them that in case of a noncompliance the troops would move against them."⁸ In short, surrender and return to the reservations or continue to fight. Anderson writes that Miles offered an additional incentive, a northern agency of the Sioux's own

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⁴ Ibid., (dated February 5, 1877), p. 157.

⁵ Miles' animals were in poor condition because of little forage. Complaining to his wife, he wrote, "I give Generals Terry and Hazen, Colonel Otis and Major Card the full credit for this. My animals are living on about one half or one third the ordinary allowance of forage and I will be entirely out in a short time." Ibid., (dated February 19, 1877), p. 155.

⁶ Ibid., (dated March 15, 1877), p. 152.

⁷ Anderson states that Miles only sent one woman, named Sweet Taste Woman. Harry H. Anderson, "Miles and the Sioux War of 1876-1877," p. 32.

⁸ Nelson A. Miles, Personal Recollections and Observations of Nelson A. Miles, p. 239.

choosing. Miles, says Anderson, was convinced that he could arrange the establishment of an agency in the Sioux territory.⁹ This must have been a tempting offer to many war weary Sioux.

In the hostile camps the time was ripe for talk of surrender. The war faction had been faced with a major setback with their failure to bring about a decisive victory at Wolf Mountain.¹⁰ They had predicted the defeat of the Army, but instead they were again forced to flee the area. Supplies were low and it was hard to feed a camp of 3,000 people. The peace faction again felt that it was time to discuss surrender, before more troops attacked their camp.¹¹ The words of Important Man and Foolish Bear, the emissaries who reached the Sioux just after the death of Sitting Bull the Good, found a receptive audience. Swelled Face, a Miniconjou, had decided to lead his people from Crazy Horse's camp and head for the agency. Seventy-five lodges tried to leave, but were forced to return by the warrior society's police. Despite repeated attempts to leave Crazy Horse's camp, Swelled Face's people were kept from leaving. The police even resorted to shooting some of Swelled Face's followers horses. After a great deal of trouble, Swelled Face was finally able to lead fifty-two lodges out to the agency.¹² He complained that his

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⁹ Harry H. Anderson, "Miles and the Sioux War of 1876-1877," p. 27.

¹⁰ Harry H. Anderson, "Indian Peace-talkers and the Conclusion of the Sioux War," p. 238.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Colonel W. H. Wood, Report to the Assistant Adjutant General, (dated February 24, 1877), frame 673.

people had "been held almost like prisoners all winter and not allowed to leave."¹³

The peace faction found even more support from Sitting Bull, the Hunkpapa leader. Approximately one week after Wolf Mountain, Sitting Bull joined Crazy Horse's camp. He brought ammunition and supplies that he had received from Red River traders near the Canadian border. Sitting Bull was taking his people to the safety of Canada. He had decided that continuing the war was unwise and had come to gather his Hunkpapa people.¹⁴ With Sitting Bull leaving and so much dissent in his own camp, Crazy Horse decided to break up the Tongue River camp.¹⁵ The Ogalalas and Cheyennes went west to the Little Bighorn and the Miniconjou and Sans Arc broke into small camps and moved to the Little Missouri country. Some small groups began to trickle back to the agencies as well.¹⁶

General Crook had also begun working on opening negotiations with the Sioux. While Crook was at Fort Robinson to determine the situation there, the first news of Miles' achievements at Wolf Mountain arrived. According to Anderson, Lieutenant John G. Bourke, Crook's aide, reflected on some of the competition that existed

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¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Harry H. Anderson, "Miles and the Sioux War of 1876-1877," p. 32.

¹⁵ There is some debate over the exact date on which the camp broke up. Anderson states that the camp remained where it was on the Tongue River until Sitting Bull joined it enroute to Canada. He maintains that the camp did not disband on the day of the battle. Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

between Miles and Crook. He wrote that "it was vain to hope for any further chance of distinction. Miles had evidently whipped the last of the Indian bands into fragments; at least so his telegraphic dispatches assert. Still we hoped for the best."¹⁷ Crook worked with Spotted Tail, the leader of the Brule people and according to U. S. officialdom, all other Sioux. Crook had him go out and talk to some of the hostile bands and discuss their surrender. Red Cloud would not act as a peacemaker until the terms of surrender were made more tolerable. He knew that the hostile Indians would not agree on returning to a reservation in the Missouri River country.¹⁸ Even Spotted Tail would not participate in any talks unless freedom from recriminations for the summer's fighting could be guaranteed. During the time in which Spotted Tail was being convinced of Crook's good intentions with regard to a northern agency, other emissaries were sent out. Major Mason commanding officer at Fort Robinson, Nebraska, sent out Sword, the leader of the Ogalala Bad Face band. Sword and a group of thirty people left Fort Robinson on January 16.¹⁹

On February 9, emissaries came in from the hostile camps. They stated that they would agree to surrender, but only if Spotted Tail would act as Crook's representative.²⁰ Crook reacted quickly by

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¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Harry H. Anderson, "Indian Peace-talkers and the Conclusion of the Sioux War," p. 241.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 242.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 243.

going to the Spotted Tail Agency and assuring Spotted Tail that if any one could get a northern agency guaranteed by the President, Crook was the man. President Hayes had served as a Brigadier General under Crook in the Civil War.²¹ Crook sent word to Washington that he could bring in the hostiles if a northern agency was created. In return, the Sioux would relinquish their arms and the ponies would be distributed among Spotted Tails' party as payment for their services.²² On February 13, Spotted Tail left with 200 warriors, a number of whites and a large pack train of Army mules laden with gifts. Meanwhile Brughier and the Cheyenne woman, Sweet Woman, reached Crazy Horse's camp. Sweet Woman was the sister of White Bull's wife. White Bull was an important medicine man among the Cheyenne. Sweet Woman reported on the good treatment the prisoners received in Miles' Cantonment.²³ She also spoke of Miles' willingness to discuss surrender and the strong possibility of a northern agency.²⁴ That hostile camp began the move eastward, towards the Cantonment. The chiefs decided they would accompany Brughier to discuss surrender terms with Miles. Among these were the Cheyenne chiefs, Old Wolf, Crazy Head, Little Creek, Two Moons, and White Bull.²⁵

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²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., p. 244.

²³ Wooden Leg, A Warrior Who Fought Custer, p. 296.

²⁴ Harry H. Anderson, "Indian Peace-talkers and the Conclusion of the Sioux War," p. 246.

²⁵ Wooden Leg, A Warrior Who Fought Custer, p. 297.

On February 19, Brughier arrived at the Cantonment with twenty-nine hostile Indians.²⁶ Miles writes that the Indians were "disposed to strong talk" initially, but that there could only be one "big chief" in that part of the country and Miles "proposed to occupy that position."²⁷ Miles and the hostile leaders met in council to discuss the surrender. During these meetings, according to Stands-In-Timber and Liberty, Miles offered the hostile Cheyenne a reservation of their own choosing if they would "stop fighting and to help his soldiers quiet down some other tribes."²⁸ In these meetings most of the chiefs found Miles' terms agreeable and promised to return to their camp to bring their people in.²⁹

At this time the runners from Spotted Tail arrived in Crazy Horse's camp. They discussed the terms that Crook offered the Indian leaders.³⁰ The terms of surrender which Crook proposed were no different from those that Miles had placed before the chiefs. The importance lay in who represented the Army commanders. Brughier was a half Indian scout and Miles was an Army officer above all else. But Spotted Tail was given considerable respect by the hostile bands. His involvement in these negotiations was enough to sway many

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²⁶ Miles' letters to his wife, (dated February 19, 1877), cited by Virginia Johnson, The Unregimented General, p. 158.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Stands-In-Timber and Liberty, Cheyenne Memories, p. 224.

²⁹ Harry H. Anderson, "Indian Peace-talkers and the Conclusion of the Sioux War," p. 247.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 247.

Indians towards Crook's offer.³¹ The Sioux almost entirely accepted Spotted Tail's offer.³² It was easier to believe a Brule chieftain than an Army Colonel. But the Cheyenne were still undecided on what course to take. There were those who wanted to fight, but they were a minority. Hoping to get a little more for their people out of the negotiations, the Cheyenne returned to Miles to discuss the surrender.³³

Miles met with the Cheyenne chiefs on March 17. The Cheyennes wanted to gain extra concessions from Miles, but Miles was not disposed to make any more. Due to a lack of supplies and an inability to take the field, Miles resorted to playing his last card by keeping "up as bold a front as possible."³⁴ Miles felt that he was in a particularly bad position. He still complained of the crippling results of Otis and Hazen's "mismanagement" of the delivery of his supplies. He stated that they had "consumed 1,500,000 lbs., of grain in getting up about 500,000 lbs., to my command."³⁵ With supplies so short he could not undertake another campaign. His only hope was to convince the Indians to report to the agencies. One of the surest means to force the hostiles to turn themselves in was to take hostages. Miles wrote,

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³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., p. 249.

³³ Ibid., p. 248.

³⁴ Miles' letters to his wife, (dated March 20, 1877), cited by Virginia Johnson, The Unregimented General, p. 163.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 164.

I would like to retain them all; but it might look like bad faith. Although I would be justified in my own mind in so doing as they have not come in just as I told them to. But it might not be the best policy as it might prevent others from coming in.³⁶

Miles was becoming impatient. He told the Indians that the councils would have to come to an end, they would have to decide to surrender or not. If they chose not to surrender, then the Army would "move against them."³⁷ At this point Miles suggested that perhaps several hostages be left as "a pledge of their good faith". White Bull agreed to stay behind as a hostage. Miles also hoped to use these hostages as scouts in hunting down hostile Indians.³⁸ After seeing White Bull in an Army uniform, the other Cheyenne chiefs believed White Bull would be safe in the Cantonment and several others stayed behind as well.³⁹ Miles asked for similar assurances from the Sioux who were present. Hump, a war leader, agreed to remain as well. It appears from Miles' letters that he had some hope of installing Hump as a chief among the Sioux. He hoped to help build Hump a reputation as "being as wise in council as he had been valiant in arms."⁴⁰ These hostages would stay at the Cantonment and be entertained by the troops. The soldiers had built a music hall and even organized a minstrel company.⁴¹ Miles wrote that the chiefs

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³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., (dated March 24, 1877), p. 165.

³⁸ Wooden Leg, A Warrior Who Fought Custer, p. 297.

³⁹ Stands-In-Timber and Liberty, Cheyenne Memories, p. 225.

⁴⁰ Ibid., (dated March 24, 1877), p. 70.

⁴¹ Ibid., (dated February 5, 1877), p. 63.

were greatly amused by the band and the acrobats of the "variety troop."⁴²

On April 5, Spotted Tail returned to Camp Sheridan to report to Crook and reported the success he had had with the hostile bands. As if to illustrate the point, small groups began to show up daily soon after his arrival.⁴³ Soon Red Cloud became involved in negotiating with the hostiles. He left Camp Robinson early in April with a large following and a great deal of goods and presents.⁴⁴ He had in mind to speed the return of Crazy Horse and his camp. Anderson notes that Red Cloud was promised that he would be reinstated as the head of the Red Cloud Agency if he agreed to help bring Crazy Horse in.⁴⁵

The winter's snow and ice began to thaw and more groups of Indians moved into the agencies to surrender. The first large group arrived at at Camp Sheridan on April 14. Groups of Miniconjou and Sans Arcs, 105 lodges in all, had listened to Spotted Tail's appeals and surrendered to Crook.⁴⁶ Then a week later another group of Indians arrived, these were Cheyenne.

Indians began to surrender at the Tongue River Cantonment as well. On April 22, 300 Cheyenne and about one dozen Sioux arrived to surrender to Miles. These were mostly people related to the

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⁴² Ibid., (dated March 31, 1877), p. 74.

⁴³ Harry H. Anderson, "Indian Peace-talkers and the Conclusion of the Sioux War," p. 250.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

hostages taken in March.⁴⁷ But these were the only Indians that came to Miles. Most of the Sioux and Cheyenne had gone to the agencies to surrender. Miles looked at this as proof that Crook had "stolen" his Indians⁴⁸ and he had every right to see this as an "attack." In an Army which rarely recognized ability by promotion, Miles seems to have felt he lost the chance to make the most of his achievements. Crook had been able to attract some 3,000 Sioux and Cheyenne; Miles only had a few more than 300.

The crowning touch to all of Crook's efforts was when Crazy Horse surrendered in early May. Crazy Horse rode into Fort Robinson at the head of several hundred warriors, "all decked out in war bonnets of all kinds, with red and blue blankets, and leggings and war shirts ornamented with items of silver, brass, tin, and glass."⁴⁹ Behind these warriors came the old people, the women, and the children. There were 146 lodges altogether, perhaps some 900 people. There was an immense pony herd of some 2,000 ponies as well.⁵⁰ Crazy Horse had listened to the arguments of his people and those of Red Cloud. He at last decided that surrender was the best method of insuring his people's survival. The last of the powerful bands had surrendered or fled to Canada. For all practical purposes the Sioux War was over.

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⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 252.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 253.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

There were some final matters to deal with. During Crazy Horse's march into the agency, fifty-one lodges under Lane Deer, a Miniconjou leader, broke away. They decided to move towards the Rosebud in order to hunt buffalo.⁵¹ These diehards had decided that for them, there would be no surrender. Miles received word of this escape and decided to pursue. It probably was a welcome change for Miles. During the time prior to Lane Deer's escape, the bulk of the time in the Cantonment seemed to have been spent in building it up and preparing it for the arrival of soldier's and officer's wives and families.⁵² To round out Miles' force, he had been assigned additional troops in late April, four companies of the Second Cavalry.⁵³ Miles took these cavalymen, commanded by Captain Edward Ball, two companies of the Fifth and four companies of the Twenty-second Infantry to follow Lane Deer's people. Miles also had several of the Indian hostages with him acting as scouts, including Hump, White Bull, and Brave Wolf.⁵⁴

Miles' scouts soon found Lane Deer's village on the Big Muddy. On May 7, Miles ordered the scouts and mounted infantry to stampede the Indians' ponies down the valley, while the cavalry attacked the village.⁵⁵ The surprised Sioux fled the village with only

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⁵¹ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 279.

⁵² Miles' letters to his wife, (dated April 15, 1877), cited by Virginia Johnson, The Unregimented General, p. 168.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 280.

⁵⁵ Miles, Personal Recollections and Observations of General Nelson A. Miles, p. 250.

what they could carry. During the fight a group of warriors were separated from the village and were enticed by Hump to surrender to Miles.⁵⁶ The warriors, including Lane Deer and the war leader Iron Star, laid down their weapons. It was a very tense moment, Lane Deer trembled with nervousness and excitement. A scout rode along side Miles and the other officers, while the Indian leaders conferred with Miles. Fearing for Miles' safety, the scout covered the Colonel with his rifle. Lane Deer saw this and panicked. He grabbed up his rifle and pointed it at Miles. Sensing danger, Miles reared his horse and the shot went past him and struck a soldier.⁵⁷ Lane Deer and Iron Star turned and ran. The soldiers quickly fired on the fleeing Sioux, killing them both. The total casualties were fourteen Sioux and four soldiers killed, and seven soldiers wounded.⁵⁸ Some of the captured ponies were used to mount the infantry, the remainder were killed.⁵⁹ Lane Deer's camp was looted and burned.⁶⁰ Approximately 225 Sioux under Fast Bull, Lane Deer's son, fled the camp and remained in the field for the rest of the summer. Utley states that chasing these Indians occupied most of Miles' time that summer. Occasional skirmishes and continual harassment

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⁵⁶ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 280.

⁵⁷ Miles, Personal Recollections and Observations of General Nelson A. Miles, p. 251.

⁵⁸ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 280.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Miles, Personal Recollections and Observations of General Nelson A. Miles, p. 251.

ultimately forced the hostiles to surrender at Camp Sheridan, near the Spotted Tail Agency, between July and September.⁶¹

On July 16, a steamer carried Generals Sherman and Terry to the Tongue River Cantonment. They had come to see what Miles had done with a small piece of Montana wilderness. Amid the addresses and speeches, Sherman awarded medals to thirty soldiers in recognition of combat heroism.⁶² Miles referred to a letter addressed to Secretary of War, George W. McCrary, by General Sherman.

I now regard the Sioux Indian problem, as a war question, as solved by the operations of General Miles last winter, and by the establishment of the two new posts on the Yellowstone, now assured this summer. Boats come and go now, where a year ago none would venture, except with strong guards. Wood-yards are being established to facilitate navigation, and the great mass of the hostiles have been forced to go to the agencies for food and protection, or have fled across the border into British Territory.⁶³

It seems peace had come to the Yellowstone. The last of the Sioux were gone and the land was opened up to settlers and miners. In June, 1877, the first steamers carried the families of some of the soldiers stationed on the Tongue River. Miles' wife and daughter arrived on one of those steamers. This marked the "beginning of

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⁶¹ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 281.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Miles, Personal Recollections and Observations of General Nelson A. Miles, p. 255.

civilized and domestic life in that vicinity. The presence of women added a charm and a ray of sunshine to the lives of the soldiers."⁶⁴

As for the Sioux and the Cheyenne, the promises used to bring them in seemed never to materialize. On May 28, 1877 Cheyenne were accompanied by a troop of the Fourth Cavalry to an agency in the Indian Territory to join the Southern Cheyenne. The trip took them seventy days.⁶⁵ They soon became homesick and were unable to adapt to the new agency. Utley states that the Cheyenne died by the dozens there during the winter of 1877.⁶⁶ Finally Dull Knife and Little Wolf led a desperate break for their northern homeland. They fled through Kansas, attempting to reach the Sioux agency in the north. One group was finally stopped by a patrol and taken to Camp Robinson in October 1878. They stayed there for two months, until the government tried to force them to return to the Indian Territory. The Cheyenne refused every offer and threat and the commander then resorted to cutting off all supplies, water and firewood.⁶⁷ After trying to survive a week of January winter without these necessities, the Cheyenne made a break for freedom. The garrison pursued them and a massacre ensued, nearly half of the Cheyenne who had fled were killed. The government, in remorse or sympathy, allowed the survivors to join the Sioux agency in the north.⁶⁸ Many of the Sioux

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⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 256.

⁶⁵ Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 282.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 283.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

were faced with a move too. There was some talk of the Sioux agency being moved to the Missouri. In late September, 1877, a party of Sioux chiefs, including Red Cloud and Spotted Tail, went to Washington, D. C. to make a case for the agency they had been promised. Crook went to talk to the President as well. President Hayes promised that if the Sioux would return to the Missouri for the winter, supplies would be stockpiled and they would be given an agency of their choosing in the following spring.⁶⁹ But even while these steps were being taken, a group of 2,000 Sioux left the agency and headed for Canada and Sitting Bull. Some of these were Crazy Horse's band.⁷⁰ Despite these troubles, the government honored the promise of two northern agencies within traditional Sioux lands. In 1878, Spotted Tail and the Brules were granted land on the White River which would become the Rosebud Agency. Further to the west, Red Cloud and the Ogalala were granted lands on White Clay Creek, which became Pine Ridge Agency.⁷¹ The Northern Cheyenne were eventually given an agency of their own as well. In 1884, the Tongue River Reservation was created as an agency within the Cheyenne's traditional homeland.

While the War had been brought to a close, there were still worries that haunted the Northern Plains. Crazy Horse was unhappy with agency life and many people feared he would try to flee back to the Powder River. In the summer of 1877, the Nez Perce made their

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⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 283.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

bid for freedom. The Army went to the Sioux to recruit scouts to aid in the capture of the Nez Perce. Crazy Horse argued against this. Fear of an outbreak under Crazy Horse rose. To prevent the potential for trouble, the arrest of Crazy Horse was ordered by Crook. On September 5, during that arrest, Crazy Horse was killed in a scuffle.

Despite the death of Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull was still a concern for many people in Montana. By October 1877, Sitting Bull had some 4,000 Sioux living with him in Canada.⁷² General Terry, went to Canada to attempt to bring the Sioux home to a reservation in the U. S. But here he failed and returned empty handed. Miles saw this as Terry's failure of leadership and again petitioned his superiors for the command of Montana and the Dakotas. With that command he argued that he could go into Canada and "drive back Sitting Bull & Co."⁷³ The idea of antagonizing the Canadians in this way did not appeal to the U. S. government, but in the summer of 1879 many Sioux began to cross the border into the U. S. due to famine and a general desire to return home. Most returned just to hunt buffalo; some 200 lodges, one-third of the Sioux in Canada, returned to the reservations. The Sioux ventured into the Assiniboine reservations on their hunting trips. The agent at that reservation complained to the military authorities and Miles was dispatched to drive the Sioux hunters back across the border. On July 17, a hunting party under Sitting Bull fought a running battle with Lieutenant Philo Clark. Miles caught up

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⁷² Ibid., p. 284.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 286.

with Clark and pursued Sitting Bull to the border. The end was in sight, as over the next year many Sioux would return to the reservations in the U. S. On July 19, 1881, Sitting Bull returned with almost 200 Sioux. He surrendered to the commander of Fort Buford, Major David H. Brotherton, saying he "was the last man of his tribe to surrender his rifle."⁷⁴

With the death of Crazy Horse and the surrender of Sitting Bull the potential for conflict with the Sioux came to an end. But despite his importance in bringing an end to the fighting, Miles was not present at Sitting Bull's surrender. In December 1880, Miles' persistence and ability won him the rank of Brigadier General and the command of the Department of the Columbia.⁷⁵ Utley cites a description of Miles made by John F. Finerty, a correspondent of the *Chicago Times*, who observed Miles in 1876. Miles was described as "a splendid field soldier, prompt, bold, and magnetic."⁷⁶ These qualities and an unswerving belief in his own abilities propelled Miles through his career in the Army. On October 25, 1895, he was appointed to the position of General-in-Chief, the last officer to be so appointed.⁷⁷

In 1876, the U. S. Army met defeat on the slopes above the Little Bighorn at the hands of hostile bands of Sioux and Northern Cheyenne. A war which the Army and government leaders felt would

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⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 288.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 289.

⁷⁷ "Nelson Appleton Miles," in United States Army Recruiting News, October, 1936: pp. 2-3.

last a few weeks ground out through a long and frustrating summer. A summer filled with fear and setbacks died away as cautious and exhausted Army units retired to winter quarters. The following year, the Army forced the hostile Sioux and Cheyenne back to the reservations. In many popular views of the history of the Sioux War of 1876-1877 there is little indication of just how the Army was able to perform such a feat. It just happened. But in fact, the War was brought to an end by the pressures doggedly brought to bear upon the hostile tribes by the officers and men of the Fifth and Twenty-Second Infantries. In the frigid dawning days of 1877, Colonel Nelson A. Miles led his men through the snowy canyons of the Tongue River in the shadows of the Wolf Mountains and forced Crazy Horse's Sioux and Cheyenne to recognize the determined persistence of the U. S. Army. The Battle of Wolf Mountain marked the beginning of the end of the Sioux War.

The coalition of hostile tribes that defeated Custer had fragmented after the Little Bighorn. With that fragmentation, the Sioux forces became susceptible to defeat in detail by a determined Army. But, the generals who led the Army against the hostile Indians that year lacked the courage or confidence to strike out at them. Nelson A. Miles had the persistence and courage, or arrogance, to believe that he could succeed where his superior officers had failed. He pressed the fighting on the Indians all through the closing weeks of 1876. The continued destruction of Indian villages and camps forced many Indian leaders to consider surrender and acceptance of

the reservations as the only means to ensure the survival of their people. Discontent and fear for the future mounted in the camp of Crazy Horse. In order to maintain their prestige and control of the camp, the war faction needed a victory over the Army. With the Indian defeat, albeit a minor one, at Wolf Mountain, the peace parties were able to regain the initiative in making decisions for their people. The decision to return to the reservations was made to ensure the survival of the Sioux people.

The Battle of Wolf Mountain was one of the key stages in the long war against the Sioux. Popular and romantic conceptions of the Sioux War always include dry dusty plains, mounted soldiers, and Indians on swift ponies. Rarely do such visions include the long marches made on foot through frozen, windswept landscapes, yet it was this type of action which brought the Sioux War of 1876/77 to its end.

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Officers at Tongue River Cantonment, Montana. Left to Right: First Lieutenant Oscar F. Long; Dr. Henry R. Tilton; Lieutenant J. W. Pope; General Nelson A. Miles; Lieutenant Frank D. Baldwin; Lieutenant Charles E. Hargous; Lieutenant H. K. Bailey.

(National Archives)

Photograph Taken Prior To Departure Of Command After Crazy Horse In Wolf Mountains, Montana. Left to Right: Luther S. Kelly (mounted), Scout; Lt. O. F. Long, 5th Inf.; Dr. H. R. Tilton, U.S.A.; Lt. J. W. Pope, 5th Inf.; General N. A. Miles, Comdg., Lt. F. D. Baldwin, 5th Inf.; Lt. C. E. Hargous, 5th Inf.; Lt. H. K. Bailey, 5th Inf.; Headquarters Guard and Orderlies to rear. (National Archives)

Cantonment at the Mouth of the Tongue River, Montana. Built and occupied by the 5th Infantry, this Cantonment was later renamed Fort Keogh.

(National Archives)