



**BELLE FOURCHE BEE**  
**Thursday, February 19, 1914**

**CUSTER'S LAST FIGHT by Peter Thompson, Alzada, Mont.**

Peter Thompson, the author of this story, is at the present time one of the prosperous horse raisers of southeastern Montana. He enlisted in the United States Army in 1875, and was mustered out at Sturgis, South Dakota in 1880. He then moved to Lead, S. D., where he remained until 1886 when he removed to his ranch on the Little Missouri River near Alzada, Montana. This narrative is one never before published and is an authentic, unprejudiced recital of exactly what transpired up to and following the memorable Battle of the Little Big Horn.

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My father emigrated to the United States in the year 1865 from Fifeshire, Scotland, where I was born December 28, 1856. He first settled in a place called Banksville now included in the City of Pittsburg [sic], Pennsylvania. Sometime after this he purchased a farm in Indiana county to which he shortly moved his family. After assisting father on the farm for some years, I took a decided dislike to that kind of work and became anxious to get away from it. The thought of becoming a soldier took possession of my mind.

In the month of September, 1875, I went to Pittsburg to visit some friends who recently came from our old home in Scotland. While there I learned of a United States Army recruiting station. I thought, "Now is my opportunity to become a soldier." I was only eighteen years of age but represented myself as being twenty-one. I enlisted in the cavalry for the period of five years, and with other recruits was sent to St. Louis where we found quarters at Jefferson Barracks. Here were about one hundred other recruits who had come from different parts of the country. From this place we were sent to the various regiments needing men.

Here let me say for a scientific exactness as to the amount of food to sustain life without actual starvation Jefferson barracks was the place. I do not wish to state that the government intended to starve its soldiers but the provisions passed through the hands of such dishonest men from the Commissary Sergeant to the cook, that it is no wonder that the rations were short to those who were bound to take what they could. Another fraud upon the common soldiers was the sutler who was at that

time attached to all government posts.

We had been at the barracks but a few hours when we were informed that we would have to draw a sutler's check on our pay for the purpose of buying ourselves a camp outfit, consisting of tin plate, cup, knife, fork, and spoon. This certainly was robbery, for the government was supposed to supply such articles. If anyone had money he could buy where he pleased, but very few had, and those who had not had to comply with orders. We were also given to understand that the sutler had the regulation article for sale. The price charged for the outfit was four dollars; we found out afterwards that we could have bought the same thing in St. Louis for a dollar and a half. Should our checks call for more than the bill, did we get change in United States money? Oh no, not much; we were simply given a paper ticket which practically said, "Call again." There was no remedy, for the tickets were receivable nowhere else but the sutler's store.

Early in the month of the same year a little more than a hundred of us recruits were transferred from St. Louis to Dakota in order to increase the strength of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, which was stationed at Fort A. Lincoln on the Big Missouri River. Fort Lincoln was the head-quarters of the regiment but there were only six companies at the fort at this time. The other six companies were stationed at different posts in the department of the Missouri. The troops were separated and assigned to the various companies according to their strength. My lot fell with Company C, which was under the command of Capt. Tom Custer, 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Calhoun, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Harrington. When I arrived at my post of duty I was ordered to turn over my four dollar outfit as though it was government property.

The camp-life of a soldier is not very interesting, a round of guard duty and plenty of other work. But we soon learned one thing that was of considerable interest to us, that was that there were a great number of hostile Indians in the vicinity of the post. Scarcely a week passed without an alarm being given of the approach of Indians; the cannon on the hill-top would boom out its warning, and the bugle-call of "Boots and Saddles" would be heard, the sleepy post would soon be teeming with life; each soldier would throw his sling-belt over his left shoulder, hook his carbine by a swivel attached to a sling-belt, throw it over his right shoulder, tuck his saddle blanket under his left arm, grasp his cartridge [sic] belt in his right hand and make a dash for the stable, amid the clatter of hurrying feet and the loud call of the bugle. As each company was naturally desirous of getting into saddle first, every soldier got there with a rush, but in perfect order and without confusion.

About one mile from Fort Lincoln and perched on the top of a bluff overlooking the then small town of Bismark [sic], the Missouri River, and the surrounding country, was a small infantry post, which had been built somewhat earlier than Fort Lincoln. While on detail duty one day at this post, I was fortunate enough to see the Indians approaching. The sentry gave notice of the danger, and the garrison was immediately aroused by the booming of the cannon. The gunners gauged the distance between themselves and the enemy and threw a few shells into their midst. This no surprised them that they began to scatter, and to complete their rout the cavalry came dashing over the hill, but the Indians, having the advantage of over a mile could not be overtaken.

The military posts established by the United States government along the Big Missouri River and in the interior of the country, generally termed the Northwest, were built at great expense and risk of life. It was almost impossible to hire citizens to venture so far beyond the confines of civilization for the purpose of building posts as the Indians were more numerous and savage than was consistent with their life and happiness, but as all trades were represented in the rank and file of the army the work of building went steadily along. The advance of civilization soon rendered many of the forts useless and unnecessary as a means of protection.

The rule in the extreme Northwest has always been never to trust an Indian unless he was dead. This may seem strange to Quakers and other lovers of the noble red man; but those who have come into close contact with him have found him to be a brute in human form.

The trouble with the Indian began with the history of the United States but it is not my purpose to treat on this subject, but rather of the sad ending of the expedition of 1876 in which the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was engaged under the command of Genl. G. A. Custer.

The headquarters of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry were, as I said before, at Fort A. Lincoln. When we arrived at this place General Custer was absent, having been called to Washington, D. C., to give testimony in the famous Belknap case, and, to my mind, he was honest enough to tell the truth.

General Grant was president of the United States at this time. After General Custer had given his testimony in the case, he was sent from Washington under arrest to report to the Department Commander of the Missouri, General A. Terry. Why this was done none of us soldiers could understand, and neither did we believe that the real facts were made public. When the news came to Fort Lincoln that General Custer was under arrest it caused a great commotion among the soldiers. The various companies discussed the matter and all seemed to arrive at the same conclusion, namely, that it was spite on the part of President Grant. Two reasons were given for arriving at this conclusion, first – Grant's friendship for Belknap; second – Grant's desire to retaliate on Custer for his conduct to his son while on an expedition some time before. From what appeared to the men to be reliable information, Lieutenant Grant was continually getting under the influence of liquor, making it necessary for General Custer to place him under arrest thus giving offense to the young man and also to his father who might not be fully informed as to the conduct of his son. But I only state the conclusions the men came to.

During the absence of General Custer, Major Reno was in command at Fort Lincoln. While he was in command, our company suffered several severe reprimands. We were forced to the conclusion that his treatment of us was prompted by pure spite. Take a regiment of men isolated from civilization as we were, and there will always be found a number who will always show their animal spirit with singing, dancing, and shouting and having what they called a “general good time.” This was the case in our company as well as the others. When our men were enjoying themselves in this manner, Reno would send his orderly to the orderly-sergeant of our company ordering him to stop the noise, whilst other companies were permitted to enjoy their hilarious fun. An order to the same effect was sent to us so frequently that our company longed for the return of General Custer. Whether it was a dislike to our company or to the Custers that made him cranky with us, I do not know, but the conclusion that the members of the company came to was that for the Custers, Major Reno had no love.

Near the close of the month of March, our company was made happy by the return of Custer to his command. He had been released from his arrest at St. Paul, and made the journey from that place to Fort Lincoln by sled as the Northern Pacific railroad, whose terminus at this time was Bismark, was blockaded with snow. Custer's first act on his return was to restore Frank Gerard to his old position as interpreter from which, during the commander's absence, he had been discharged by Reno.

After Custer's return we were not long in doubt as to our future plan of action. We were put to work overhauling stores, sacking grain, etc. Wagon trains also began to arrive from other posts to be loaded with grain, food, ammunition, tents, packsaddles, and other articles that are necessary for a campaign. The work was heavy, but we performed it cheerfully. The object of all this work and hurry was a matter of conjecture with us. We knew we were going to move, but in what direction was a secret to all but those in command. By the end of April everything was in order, preparations fully completed and

the soldiers waiting for marching orders.

On the fourth day of May, 1876, we moved out of our quarters and passed in review, marching around the post and thence towards our first camping place three miles below Fort Lincoln. We marched in the following order: cavalry first, artillery next, infantry next, the wagon train bringing up the rear.

I might say that before we left the barracks, some of the members of our company formed in line one behind the other and marched around and around inside the soldier's quarters to the music of two bugles making noise enough to be heard by Major Reno. The object of this was to show that they held the former orders of the Major in contempt.

All the companies of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry converged at this point. While lying in camp here, we learned that the expedition formed, was against a large body of Indians which had left their different reservations stirred up and lead by a turbulent warrior chief named Sitting Bull and other dissatisfied chiefs and squaw men.

Our regiment was composed of twelve companies, about seventy men and officers composing a company. There were three majors, each commanding four companies. One colonel or general, as he is usually called, commanding the whole regiment. We were short two majors, several captains and lieutenants, the majors on sick leave, named Majors Tilford and Merrill, the captains and lieutenants being on staff and other duties distant from this field of action. It is hardly possible to get the full strength of a regiment into the field as there is always some on [one?] on sick leave and others on detached service, and ours was no exception to the rule.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of May orders were given us to move to Hart River where we would meet the paymaster and receive our wages and all stragglers not going with the expedition would be cut off. But oh! We here again met the blood sucking sutler with his vile whiskey, rotten tobacco, and high priced notions. It was plain to be seen that he would reap a rich harvest on this expedition.

General Terry had joined us at Fort Lincoln, hence the expedition was under his command. Terry was a gentleman in every respect; he exercised very little of his authority on the march but let genral Custer have charge of it.

During the earlier part of the expedition it rained quite often making the advance of the wagon train slow and tedious. The train was composed of about one hundred and sixty wagons, twenty of which belonged to citizens and some of their stock became so weak that it was all they could do to haul their empty wagons. When we came to a long hill, a muddy place, or a ford we had to get ropes and help them out of the difficulty. What a nuisance they were! A government team consisted of six powerful mules to each wagon and they very seldom got into a place out of which they could not pull. There were places where we had to build bridges and grade approaches before we could cross, a work which ought to have been done by each company in turn. But this was not the case. The captain of our company, Tom Custer, was on his brother's staff. Lieutenant Calhoun was in command of Company E [sic] and this left Lieutenant Harrington in command of our company. He had us at nearly every bridge building or road grading until we began to grumble and in no undertone either. Our dissatisfaction became so pronounced that one day Major Reno overheard us. The next time our company was brought up by Harrington, Major Reno ordered us to the rear. Were we sorry? Not much.

As we traveled across the trackless prairie we came across the trail made by Stanley when in conjunction with Custer in '73 he drove the Sioux across the Yellowstone River. We followed this trail

until we came to the Little Missouri River where we camped for some time for the purpose of constructing a crossing over the river and scouting up the river.

Major Reno being the only officer of that rank in the expedition while on the march was in command of the right wing, and Captain Benteen who was senior captain was in charge of the left wing. Each wing camped in separate but parallel lines.

It was about the 20<sup>th</sup> of May that we came to the Little Missouri River. While here Custer took Company C up the river to look for signs of Indians. We passed over a very rough country and were compelled on that account to cross the river many times, making it very hard on our horses. They had to clamber up the slippery banks and on recrossing to slide down into the river with their legs braced. The distance we traveled was 22 miles, the only sign of Indians we saw was a camp some months old. So we retraced our weary way and arrived in camp late at night with our horses completely tired out.

We had along with our expedition two companies of infantry and while crossing streams they would climb onto the wagons like bees on a hive. The poor fellows had a hard time of it when the days were hot or when it rained. General Terry suggested to Captain Sangers of one of the infantry companies that when the ground was favorable he should allow his men to ride on the wagons. Captain Sangers replied that his men could walk thirty miles a day and run down an antelope at night. But we all noticed that he clung very close to his saddle during the march. It was all nice enough for a captain of infantry on horseback with his men following behind him to speak thus. All the soldiers would like to have seen him on foot after making such a remark.

The first day's march after leaving the river was very disagreeable for it rained all day. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of May we came in sight of the Bad Lands which at a distance presented a curious and pretty appearance. Some parts of them looked fiery red, other dark brown and black. What brought about this freak of nature I could not tell. There has been much speculation about it by travelers; some think that it was underlaid by a bed of coal that in some way caught fire, burning, upheaving, and throwing the surface into all manner of shapes, but others think that it is of volcanic formation. Roads there were none and where water was found it was very bad on account of the alkali it contained. We were two days constructing a road for the passage of the wagons. While the rest of the regiment was busily engaged in constructing the road; a company of infantry, for the country was almost impassable to horses, was deployed on both sides of us as skirmishers. We were very glad when we reached the open prairie. Timber is seldom seen in this country, a few cottonwoods along the streams and red pine on the bluffs being all there is and sometimes not even in these places was wood to be found.

The first camping place after leaving the Bad Lands found us without wood but by dint of hard rustling and breaking up extra wagon tongues and such other odds and ends as we could find we managed to warm some coffee and cook some salt meat.

As we approached the Powder River the country began to be very rough and broken. When about fifteen miles from the river General Custer took half of our company and dashed off towards it. His object was to find as easy and direct a route as possible. We rode in this mad way for nearly an hour when we came to a halt. Riding up to one of our corporals named French, Custer told him to take a man and ride in a certain direction where he would find a spring of water and ascertain what condition it was in. Custer then wheeled his horse around and dashed away in a westerly direction, leaving us standing at our horse's heads until his return. Custer's brother, Tom, was the only one who went with him. This action would have seemed strange to us had it not been of almost daily occurrence [sic]. It seemed that the man was so full of nervous energy that it was impossible for him to move along

patiently. Sometimes he was far in advance of all others, then back to his command; then he would dash off again followed by the orderly named Bishop, who tried in vain to keep Custer in sight. He would either return to us again or seek an elevation where he could catch a glimpse of the general dashing ahead over the country and try to intercept him on his way back. General Custer had two thorough-bred horses, one a sorrel and one a dark brown, and no common government plug had any show whatever to keep up with them when he was riding at full speed. He also had a number of greyhounds for hunting purposes and many a chase he and his brother had when on his march. But after we crossed the Powder River hunting ceased.

Corporal French soon returned looking very foolish. General Custer rode up to and said, "Did you find the spring?" "No, sir," said French, "there is no spring there." "You are a liar," said Custer. "If you had gone to where I told you, you would have found it." He spoke in such a positive manner that we felt sorry for poor Corporal French, for Custer knew the country well, even better than the scouts who were hired by the government to guide the expedition. We had two scouts along with us, one named Chas. Reynolds, a quiet and dignified man. He led the wagon train, piloting it and avoiding all bad places; a better scout for a white man would be hard to find; his mount was invariably a grey mule. The other was a half breed named Mich Burey [sic] who was well informed regarding the country. He had crossed this part of the country before, hiding during the day time and traveling during the night for fear of the Sioux who were jealous of all strangers. With the expedition were also twenty-four Ree scouts, and a dirtier set of rascals would be difficult to find. Their interpreter was a half breed named Frank Gerard, and their chief guide was Billy Jackson, also of Indian extraction. But of these we will have more to say by and by.

But to come back to the story. As we were waiting and speculating as to our next move, Lieutenant Cook [sic], adjutant of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry and a member of Custer's staff, rode up and said that it was General Terry's desire that we should go into camp and not attempt too long a march. So we went back and found the regiment in its camping place for the night.

On the following day we continued our march and arrived at Powder River early in the forenoon. Immediately a scouting party was formed composed of the six companies B, C, E, F, G, and L, which was all of the right wing. These were commanded by Major Reno. Each company was provided with a sufficient number of mules to carry the necessary provisions and ammunition. I do not think there were half a dozen men in the scouting party who knew how to pack a mule without having the load work loose. But fortunately there were five citizens along with us who know the business and soon the boys learned to lash a pack saddle and load securely. After two days of preparation this scouting party started off in a northwesterly direction. The only wheeled affair we had was a large Gatling gun drawn by four horses.

On this scout as well as on the expedition proper we saw a great deal of game, such as antelope, rabbits, and a few deer; the last named prefer to graze in the night time. The old soldiers remarked upon the absence of buffalo, but we arrived at the conclusion that the Indians who were in the neighborhood had driven them into bunches further west of our position. Our progress with mules was comparatively easy, but sometimes they became a little too sociable. One day we made our way through some pine covered hills; the trail was so narrow that the horses were jostling and jamming one another all the time. A mule belonging to Company B, jammed the leg of one of our men between his saddle and a cracker box on its load. This hurt the man severely and in order to relieve the pressure he struck the mule on the nose, causing it to jump to one side. Captain McDougall of Company B, seeing this spurred forward and threatened to pull the man from his horse. It was well for him that he did not undertake to carry out his threat for there would certainly have been trouble.

The third day after leaving Powder River we came to Rosebud Creek. The first night here our company was fortunate enough to secure a good camping place. But our good fortune was of short duration for Major Reno sent orders for us to exchange places with Company F. We knew this was an outrage upon us, but as Company F outranked us, their captain being with them, we had to comply. If Captain Custer had been with us it might have been different, but Lieutenant Harrington had more sense than grit.

But so I may be clearly understood let me describe how we go into camp. Suppose Company C is next to headquarters; the other companies follow by twos. This is much better than by fours. As in the latter case the center horses are much worried by the outside ones. Company C would first be ordered to front into line, dismount, and unsaddle. Then the next company would pass by and take its position next to Company C and so on until at last the first company would finally become last and the last first. When the march commenced again Company C would be the first to start and the others following, all would regain their former positions. It is a recognized rule that when the regiment goes into camp, the company takes whatever position falls to them whether it be good or bad. When we exchanged places with Company F we got a poor camping place and a miserable sage brush to graze our horses on. You can imagine the feelings of our company when this exchange took place. The laws of United States army recognize in every commissioned officer, a gentleman, but all officers are not such. You cannot make a gentleman of a hog whether inside or out of the United States army.

Near the close of the first day's march up the Rosebud we struck the trail of a large body of Indians who seemed to be going in the same direction as ourselves. The trail was wide and so torn up by teepee poles that we found it difficult to secure a good camping place for the night. This was especially so around watering places which were so necessary to us.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of June we commenced following the trail. Rosebud Creek undoubtedly derives its name from the fact that its banks are covered with rosebushes. At this season of the year the air was laden with the odor of the roses and but for the fact that we were on business our march in its vicinity would have been pleasant.

When the day's march was over and we had moved into camp, orders were given that no bugles were to be blown, no loud noises were to be made, and double pickets were to be placed around our camp. Our scout, which was Mich Burey [sic], was of the opinion that we could overtake the Indians in a day's march. We began to speculate as to what Major Reno would do. When morning dawned all doubt regarding the major's actions disappeared for he faced to the rear and began to march towards the Yellowstone River. When we reached it we found the water high and muddy, but we secured a very pretty camping place and plenty of grazing for our horses which they so badly needed. Our horses had become quite jaded for our grain had all been consumed and grazing had been poor and the load that a cavalry horse has to carry is not light. Besides his rider and saddle, he has to carry an overcoat, extra blanket, one half of a dogtent, one hundred rounds of ammunition, gun, pistol, and several days' rations. We had left our Gatling gun a few miles in the rear on a high, abrupt hill. We found it impossible to bring it down without the aid of ropes. Next day a party of men were sent out with the necessary appliances to bring it in; a messenger was also dispatched to the headquarters of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, which was at this time at the mouth of Tongue River. Here also the wagontrain was parked.

(To Be Continued.)



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(Continued from last week.)

Major Reno wished to receive instructions regarding his future actions. In due time we received orders to remain where we were and headquarters would join us next day. Accordingly on June 20<sup>th</sup> the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was united again. The wagon train was to remain where it was protected to two companies of infantry. The companies which had joined us brought pack mules. Our transportation facilities were very slim. We were to be supplied with fifteen days' rations from a steam boat named, the "Far West," which was expected at our camping place on the 21<sup>st</sup> inst. The companies composing the left wing which had now joined us were A, D, H, I, K, and M. It was understood that when the right wing left the Powder River for the scout under Reno that on its return the left wing was to take its turn on a scout providing we failed to discover anything. But the scouting trip under Reno had proven somewhat of a success. We now began to brace up for a rough trip; for all knew that General Custer, if left to his own devices, would soon end the campaign one way or another. Custer and some other of the officers were anxious to witness the opening of the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia in July 1876. It was reported among us that when General Terry and Custer joined us on the banks of the Yellowstone and confirmed by those in position to know, that when Reno made his report of the discovery of the Indian trail and the supposed direction in which they were moving, General Custer upbraided him very bitterly for not finding out the exact number and the direction the Indians were taking instead of supposing and guessing. There were some sharp questions and short answers, but General Terry interposed and smoothed the matter over. The plan of action in this case seemed to be that General Custer was to take



the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry and try to intercept the Indians and prevent them from going any further, while General Terry was to go up the Yellowstone to the place Gillen's [sic] infantry and part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry were encamped, move them over to the west bank of the river and march to the assistance of Custer. What orders Custer received from Terry is merely a matter of speculation, but it seems to me that Custer was to use his own judgment as the case might require.

On the forenoon of the 21<sup>st</sup> the "Far West" arrived with our needed supplies and soon numbers of us were helping to unload them. But the article most anxiously inquired after was plug tobacco and with few exceptions all used it.

On the afternoon of the 22<sup>nd</sup> the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was ready to move. There were about 140 mules packed with 15 days rations for the twelve companies. The Gatling gun which Major Reno had taken with him on the scout was placed on the steamboat. This was one of the first blunders of the expedition as later events proved.

The whistle of the "Far West" as it left the bank of the river brought forth a cheer from the throats of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. Custer rushed along the bank and motioned for the boat to put back to the landing. When this was done he leaped aboard and lugged Mich Burey [sic] ashore amid the cheers of our command. Mich was very popular, not only for his quiet demeanor but on account of his knowledge of the country. He always inspired us with confidence.

During this exciting episode, many of the soldiers climbed up into the cottonwood trees which lined the bank of the river and placed their overcoats in convenient forks and crotches making them as secure as possible so that they would not be dislodged by the wind. They gave all manner of excuses for their conduct, namely: that they were going to travel so fast that it would take them all their time to keep their hats on; it was too warm; it is not going to rain, etc; but the true reason was to lessen the burden their horses had to carry. But I kept mine as I had grave doubts of our ever returning that way and future events proved my doubts to be correct.

The steamboat with General Terry on board had hardly started up the river again before we were on our way to victory or death. A very solemn feeling seemed to settle down upon the men from this time. Numbers of us felt that when Custer took active charge of the expedition there would be no more funny work. He meant business. Some of the men knew by previous experience that when General Custer turned himself loose, he made things hum. Some of our men had served under Custer in his Kansas campaign against the Indians.

In Colorado while lying in camp, numbers of cavalry men deserted, some in a sneaking way under cover of night, others in broad daylight. They would ride off with the government horses, until their strength was considerably depleted. Custer saw that the only way to stop this wholesale desertion was to use some harsh measures.

One day it was reported to him that a few more men had deserted. He took a body guard, mounted a good horse and started in pursuit. The deserters were soon overtaken. Without a word to the deserters he ordered his men to fire into them. They did so, killing some and wounding others. This had a tendency to stop desertion for some time.

There is another story regarding him to the effect that when on the Black Hills expedition his brother, Tom, overslept himself and consequently failed to report his company. Presently Custer walked to his brother's tent and set fire to the high, dry grass surrounding it. It is needless to say that Captain Custer

got out of his sleep and his tent in double time quick.

These seemed harsh measures but we must remember that at that time the country was full of hostile Indians ever ready to take advantage of any slackness of discipline or to cut off any who had the misfortune to stray away from the command. But we did not approve of such extreme measures.

As we are now approaching the most important period of the expedition, I will endeavor to give as accurate an account of it as possible.

In the first place you will notice that we started from the Yellowstone River on the afternoon of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June; General Custer in command of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, General Terry on board the steamer, the "Far West." The object of the latter's mission I have already stated.

We traveled about fifteen miles that afternoon, then moved into camp. Orders were given that no bugles were to be blown; no firing of guns and no straggling were to be allowed. It may seem rather early for such precaution to be taken; we had not seen any Indians, and so far no settlers had put in their appearance. And all through that hard campaign the unbroken prairies and hills were as bare of human habitation as an iceberg is of grass.

The only evidence we had that white men had ever been in that country was some pegs driven in the ground by the Northern Pacific surveyors, which we found just before reaching the Yellowstone.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June we moved over a very rough piece of country. While moving along the ridge of an abrupt hill a laughable incident occurred. One of our men named Bennett was mounted on a bob-tailed horse which had proven to be very tricky. While crossing a shelving rock overhanging a deep and rocky gorge, the horse stood stock still and lifting up the right hind foot began to scratch his ear. Bennett looked around helplessly; first down the rocky gorge and then at his laughing comrades. As soon as he could he induced his horse to stop combing his ear and edged away from that locality.

Then one of our mules named Barnum stumbled and fell, and went rolling down the hill with two boxes of ammunition on his back. As we watched him rolling we made some calculations as to how mule would be left in case the ammunition exploded. But contrary to all expectations, when he reached the bottom of the hill he scrambled to his feet again with both boxes undisturbed and made his way up the hill again and took his place in the line as soberly and quietly as if nothing happened.

We camped that night on Beaver Creek where we found plenty of bad water, but good grazing for our horses. It kept them busy to fill themselves up after they were picketed out for we had made very long marches. Custer seemed tireless himself and seemed to think his men were made of the same stuff.

It is a hard sight to see men, who have been roused out of their sleep at half past three in the morning, not only once but day after day, sleeping in their saddles, and lucky indeed was the man who had a quiet and steady horse that allowed the luxury of a sleep while traveling. I often took a nap in that way although my horse was a very restless brute.

On June 24<sup>th</sup> we reached the Rosebud again where we moved into camp. There were numerous beaver dams in this stream and at this point the country was flat so that one of the dams would back the water for a considerable distance only to be succeeded by another of similar construction.

We received orders in a quiet way to be ready to move that night at twelve o'clock, for the purpose of

crossing the divide which separates the Rosebud from the Little Horn River.

The men began to ask one another if they were going to travel all the time. We then made preparations for a short nap. No canvas was stretched [sic]; no mules were unpacked except those which were carrying the necessary supplies for supper.

It was on this same stream (the Rosebud) that ten days before General Crook had a slight skirmish with the Indians. It is said that he was driven from his camp leaving behind him two raw recruits who fell into the hands of the Indians. The poor fellows, thinking that mercy would be shown them handed their arms to the Indians, but what mercy these savages have in their breast has yet to be discovered. It is needless to say that the Indians killed them in a most shocking manner. This was done in sight of General Crook's command. It may seem strange to some that the command could see this outrage committed without trying to rescue them. But if we take General Crook's career as an Indian fighter we will be forced to the conclusion that he was a failure.

When midnight came you may be sure we moved promptly. Each company had to lead its own pack mules; it was too dark to see to drive; no moon, simply the faint starlight to guide us. We kept at a lively gait for three hours.

As soon as the first faint streaks of daylight appeared we moved into a grove where we were ordered to unsaddle and rest for several hours. A picket line was thrown out and each company detailed some of their own men for the purpose of guarding their own horses and pack mules. No canvas was stretched for shelter as we knew our stay would be comparatively short. Each man made a pillow of his saddle and a mattress of his saddle-blanket and overcoat, if he had an overcoat. As it was warm covering was unnecessary. We laid as much as possible under trees and shrubbery as a person always feels more secure under some sort of shelter. This probably arises from force of habit rather from any real security.

I will state here that I am too hard-headed to believe in dreams, but will here relate one which, in spite of my unbelief, disturbed me. I had laid down under a tree and had fallen into a doze when I dreamed that Indians attacked a small detachment of us soldiers. We were all dismounted and the Indians put us to flight. At point I awoke expecting to find it real but seeing the outstretched forms of my comrades [sic], I composed myself and laid down to sleep again. But my dream, instead of being cut off by my awaking began to run in the same channel, only this time I alone was the victim. An Indian with an uplifted ax came after me; there was no skulking but a fair and square race, and for the life of me I could not tell why I ran from the Indian. Just as the savage got close enough to me to strike I awoke only to find all vanish into thin air. But so profoundly had the dream impressed itself upon me that I could get no more sleep. Getting up I strolled through the camp looking at the horses and noting how poor and gaunt they were becoming. This was not to be wondered at when we take into account the long marches they had made without any grain to sustain their strength: nothing but dead grass or perhaps a little green grass which was very short this season of the year.

I also noted the pickets that were thrown out to prevent a surprise. Of all duties picket guard is the most important and responsible while camping in an enemy's country. He has ever to be on the alert whether standing, sitting, or lying down. The latter position is the most preferable as he can see an object quicker than in either the other positions.

On this expedition the picket's orders were never to challenge anyone approaching from the outside as all such were considered enemies unless specially ordered. Picket duty is very lonesome, but as we

said before, very responsible. He not only has his own personal safety to look after, but also the safety of hundreds of others. He has his regular beat to look after, the number of pickets being regulated by the distance they are removed from the command.

There is also a guard placed over the horses whose duty it is to see that none are taken away by anyone without an order from the officer of the company, or should any break loose from their picket ropes, to secure them before guard is relived, which change is made every two hours.

This morning the soldiers were lying in every conceivable manner when the canvas was not stretched.

Early as it was General Custer and two of his staff, namely Captain Custer and Lieutenant Cook [sic], were in earnest conversation. What the subject of their conversation was, no one will ever know, but it must have been of deep interest to them for the interview lasted quite a long time.

The mules were all unpacked and grazing at will. The water was very bad, being full of alkali. At half past six, the cook was awakened to prepare breakfast for the men, and that meal consisted simply of coffee, bacon, and hardtack; a kind of provision all old soldiers are well acquainted with.

It was half past eight o'clock when we moved out of camp. This was on the mornig of the 25<sup>th</sup> of June, 1876, a day I will never forget as long as I live. Our gait was a lively walk. Having had a few hours sleep the men began to be talkative, and speculation ran high on how soon the campaign would end. One old soldier said that it would end just as soon as we could catch old Sitting Bull. Another said, "if that is all, the campaign will soon be over, and Custer will take us with him to the Centennial." "Of course," said a wag, "we will take Sitting Bull with us." This created a roar of laughter among those who heard him. The conversation continued; each one telling his neighbor what he would take when Sitting Bull's camp was captured.

While still joking and laughing, we came to one of the camping places of the Indians. Here we came to a halt for the purpose of noting the extent of the camp, and by this means to approximate the number of Indians in the party. After wandering around we found that but a small party had made this their camping place, but from all appearances they must have had a "high old time."

They had placed in the ground four upright posts upon which they had made a small platform of the limbs of trees. On this they had placed the heads of several buffaloes and from appearance of the ground they must have had what is called a buffalo dance.

A short distance from this one of the members of Company C found two scalps dangling from a short willow which had been struck [sic] in the ground. From the appearance of the hair one scalp belonged to a man and the other to a woman. The hair on both scalps was light in color.

Our stay here was of short duration and we began to follow what appeared to be a valley stretching out between two low lying ranges of hills. This dipped toward the Little Horn River. By following this valley we were well protected by the hills on either side. Our progress was unhindered and we moved rapidly along feeling that there was something ahead of us that we must see.

We had not traveled a very great distance before we came upon a large camping place which the Indians had evidently vacated but a few days before. While here they had rounded up and slaughtered quite a number of buffalo, and then moved further down the valley.

Our next resting place was in a deep depression of the valley. Custer rode some distance ahead of us and then turning to the right ascended to the highest point of the hills where he must have been able to see a long distance. He was long in returning and then the bugle was blown for the first time for a number of days. It was a call for the officers and they were soon gathered around the chief. Frank Gerard so far forgot himself as to go and sit down near the place where the consulting officers were gathered. General Custer looked at him and said, "Go where you belong and stay there." He did not wait for a second bidding. It was Custer's desire to keep everyone in his proper place. This was perfectly right as in military life there must be discipline.

Our company was resting quite close to the place where the officers sat in council. This resting place was on a piece of ground slightly elevated above the officers position which for the first time on the expedition gave me an opportunity of seeing the officers all together and of noting their appearances. The most notable among them was Captain Benteen. He was senior captain of the regiment. There was also present: Yates, Rehoe [sic], Custer, McDugal [sic], Smith, Ware [sic], French, Moline [sic], Lieutenant Cook [sic], adjutant of the regiment on Custer's staff; Calhoun, Varnum, MacIntosh [sic], Wallace, Harrington, Agerly [sic], Sturgis, and other officers whose names I have entirely forgotten. It would be difficult to find a finer set of officers in the service of any country. From the manner of the conversation it would seem as though Custer had discovered something that was of great importance. We could not hear the conversation, but we could see that they were deeply interested. The younger officers did not seem to take any part in the conversation but paid great attention while Custer and the more experienced officers were seeking to solve some difficult problem.

In a short time the council broke up and once more we were on the move down the valley. As we proceeded the signs of Indians became more and more numerous. As these signs increased in numbers, Bloody Knife, one of the chiefs of the Ree Indians became greatly excited, and his followers partook of his spirit and became excited also.

While we were at the Yellowstone six Crow Indians joined us, Half Yellow Face being their head man. The Sioux and Crows were bitter enemies and were continually fighting one another as opportunity offered. The Crows had held the country between the Big Missouri and the Yellowstone, but the restless Sioux had driven them slowly but surely back to the confines of the Yellowstone where they made their last stand and with the aid of the government kept the Sioux in check. The Crows therefore were ever ready to accompany any expedition that would afford them an opportunity to strike a blow at their old enemies. The government generally placed confidence in their friendship.

Water was exceedingly scarce in the valley but we knew that the latter was short and we had hopes of something better when we got out of it.

We found as we proceeded that the camping places of the Indians were but a short distance apart showing that they were traveling in a leisurely manner, for the purpose of giving their ponies an opportunity to feed or it might have been that each tribe camped by itself. But be that as it may, the ground was eaten quite bare in most places, showing that they must have had a great number of animals with them. One of their camps must have been broken up in confusion for numerous articles were left behind, such as coffee pots, tin plates, cups, axes, hatchets, and other articles that were good for further use. These articles were scattered about from one end of the camp to the other.

The sight of these things puzzled us greatly. Was it for the purpose of lightening their burdens that they might travel the quicker? Or for transporting the buffalo they had slaughtered? Or was it a hasty flight? These questions we could not answer.

We had just passed through this camping ground when we discovered a single teepee standing near a large clump of cottonwood trees. The sight of this teepee caused a commotion among us. Lieutenant Cook [sic] rode rapidly up to Major Reno, giving him orders to take three companies of the left wing, cross the Little Horn River to its left bank, and proceed down the stream. He then ordered a detail of Company F which was in advance with headquarters to investigate and find out the contents of the teepee. This left Captain Benteen with three companies of the left wing and one of the right, as Captain McDugal's [sic] company was rear guard and had charge of the pack train. General Custer then took Companies C, E, F, G [sic, I – G was with Reno] and L, intending to go down the right bank of the stream, under cover if possible. The plan marked out was to attack the Indians in the following manner: Major Reno was to cross the river to its left bank and proceed down until he struck their village and endeavor to keep the attention of the Indians until Custer had time to pass down the right bank and cross over and attack them in the rear.

(To be Continued.)



**BELLE FOURCHE BEE**  
**Thursday, March 05, 1914**

**CUSTER'S LAST FIGHT by Peter Thompson, Alzada, Mont.**

Peter Thompson, the author of this story, is at the present time one of the prosperous horse raisers of southeastern Montana. He enlisted in the United States Army in 1875, and was mustered out at Sturgis, South Dakota in 1880. He then moved to Lead, S. D., where he remained until 1886 when he removed to his ranch on the Little Missouri River near Alzada, Montana. This narrative is one never before published and is an authentic, unprejudiced recital of exactly what transpired up to and following the memorable Battle of the Little Big Horn.

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(Continued from last week.)

On the left side of the river the country was flat, on the right it was very rough and broken; there was a low range of hills cut up by numerous intersecting ravines.

It was Custer's intention to keep out of sight of the Indians until he had time to cross the river three miles below. After Reno left us we commenced to travel in parallel lines with the Little Horn River which was thickly screened by cottonwood trees and underbrush.

We now left the valley in which we had been traveling and commenced to climb the bluffs overlooking the river and surrounding country. At this time our horses were in a trot. At our right, and on a slight elevation, sat General Custer and his brother Tom reviewing the companies as they passed by. This was the last review General Custer ever held. Cook [sic], the adjutant, was giving the orders wherever Custer deemed it necessary. When we reached the top of the hill we were ordered to form into sets of fours which would make us a more solid and compact body. Each one was told to remember his number. Let me explain the meaning of numbers.

In the morning before mounting the companies form in single lines. Each man, commencing at the head of the company, calls out in turn his number, one, two, three, four, and so these are repeated until the company is all numbered into sets of fours. Cavalry men dismount and fight on foot except when a

charge is made, but when a dismount is ordered, number four remains on his horse and numbers one, two, and three dismount and hand their reins to number four who holds the horses while they deploy as skirmishers. The men composing the four with myself were Fitzgerald, Brennan, and Watson, and although composing one of the sets of fours that entered into action with Custer not one of us ever reached the battlefield which proved so fatal to Custer and his men. Both Brennan and Fitzgerald turned their horses to the rear when they had gone two miles beyond the lone teepee.

We soon gained the top of the bluffs where a view of the surrounding country was obtained. The detail of Company F which was sent to investigate the teepee now passed by us on their way to the front with the report that it contained a dead Indian and such articles as were deemed necessary for him on his journey to the "Happy Hunting Grounds."

About a half mile further on we came in sight of the Indian village, and it was a truly imposing sight to anyone who had not seen anything like it before. For about three miles on the left bank of the river the teepees were stretched, the white canvas gleaming in the sunlight. Beyond the village was a black mass of ponies grazing on the short green grass.

When the companies came in sight of the village they gave the regular charging yell and urged their horses into a gallop. At this time a detail of five men from Company F was sent ahead to reconnoiter and from this point I was gradually left behind in spite of all I could do to keep up with my company. There were others also in the same fix. All urging on my part was useless. Getting vexed I dismounted and fastened on my spurs, when I heard my name called and on looking up I saw Brennan near me on horseback. He asked, "What is the matter." I told him that I was afraid my horse was entirely played out. "Well," he said, "let us keep together." I straightened myself up and said, "I will tell you what I will do. I will trade horses with you if you will." He gave me a strange look and turned his horse around and rode towards the rear, leaving me to shift for myself. "Well," I thought, "I will get along anyway." I finished putting on my spurs, mounted my horse again and rode on after my company but my progress was very slow.

My spurs having been poorly fastened came off again, and seeing a pair lying on the trail, I got off my horse to secure them. Hearing an oath behind me, I looked back and saw my comrade Watson trying to get his horse on its feet. The poor brute had fallen and was struggling to gain an upright position. Beside him I saw Sergeant Finkle of our company sitting calmly on his horse looking on and making no effort to help Watson in his difficulty. But finally the poor animal gained his feet with a groan, and Finkle passed on with a rush to overtake our company.

By this time the last of the companies had disappeared over the crest of the hill. I was still tugging away at my spurs when Watson came up and asked what the trouble was and then passed on in the trail of the soldiers. I mounted my horse again but found that a staggering walk was all I could get out of him.

I then looked across the river at the Indian village, it was all in commotion. One party of Indians was dashing down the river; others were hurrying towards their ponies; others were rushing toward the upper end of the village. The cause of this commotion was Major Reno with three companies of men about a mile distant from the upper end of the village, dashing along at a gallop towards them. The officers were riding in order a little in advance of their respective companies. It was a grand sight to see those men charging down upon the village of their enemies, who outnumbered them many times. The well trained horses were kept well in hand. There was no straggling; they went together neck and neck, their tails streaming in the wind, and the riders arms gleaming in the sunlight. It was no wonder



that the Indians were in great commotion when they beheld the bold front presented by the cavalry. But alas! How deceptive are appearances. The cavalry dashed into the village where one of the non-commissioned officers halted and stuck up the company's guidon alongside of a teepee before he was shot from his horse. The halt was but for a moment, for the Indians came rushing towards them in great numbers. At this juncture the dry grass caught on fire threatening the destruction of the village, but the squaws, fearless as the braves themselves, fought the fire and tore down the teepees which were in danger of burning. Major Reno, seeing that he was greatly outnumbered, ordered an immediate retreat to a grove of cottonwood trees, which stood on the bank of the river about half a mile from the upper end of the village, where they found shelter for their horses and protection for themselves.

Major Reno dismounted his men in the usual manner, number four remaining on horseback to hold the horses of the others. A skirmish line was formed which advanced to the edge of the timber to await the enemy who soon appeared in great numbers. The shots exchanged were few, and here to my mind, is where Major Reno made a blunder. Instead of secreting his men as he should have done he ordered them to mount their horses and lead a retreat which not only proved fatal to a number of his own men, but also to Custer. Had he remained where he was he would undoubtedly have held a great number of Indians in check. Although his numbers were less his advantages were greater. The grove of timber was not so large but that his men could have defended all of it and by this means engaged a sufficient number of Indians to give General Custer an opportunity to cross over the river and come to his assistance by attacking the Indians in the rear. As I have before mentioned, Major Reno led the retreat toward the river and across it and up to the top of the bluff. In crossing the river there was great confusion, each man seemed to be for himself. Here Lieutenant MacIntosh [sic] with numbers of others were shot from their horses.

After Major Reno gained the top of the hill he was joined by Captain Benteen with his three companies, likewise by Captain McDugal [sic] with the pack train making seven companies besides twenty men of the right wing who had been detailed to attend to pack mules of the right wing.

All the above transpired in a very short space of time.

Meanwhile, I was pursuing my way along the trail on foot leading my horse; for I was afraid he would fall down under me so stumbling and staggering was his gait.

After the disappearance of Custer and his men, I felt that I was in a terrible predicament to be left alone in an enemies' country leading a horse practically useless.

While mediating upon the combination of circumstances which had brought me into this unhappy condition I looked ahead and saw Watson but was unable to overtake him, as slow as he was going. He suddenly turned aside from the trail as if he wished to avoid some threatening danger. While I was wondering what it could be, I saw a small party of Indians about thirty in number driving a small bunch of ponies and mules, coming towards us. I thought my time had surely come; it was too late to retreat.

While I was making calculations as to leaving my horse and trying my luck on foot I thought I saw something familiar in their appearance. On coming close I saw that they were our Ree scouts and two Crow Indians, one of whom was Half Yellow Face or Two Bloody Hands. He had received this latter name from the fact that on the back of his buckskin shirt was visible the print of two human hands, either put there by red paint or blood.

When close enough I gave them to understand the condition I was in and asked for an exchange of

mount. Half Yellow Face only shook his head and said, "Heap Sioux, heap Sioux. Heap shoot, heap shoot. Come," and motioned for me to go back with them. I shook my head and answered, "No." They made their way to the rear and I went on ahead. The animals the scouts had they had captured from the Sioux.

I had lost sight of Watson and thinking that I could make my horse go faster by mounting him I did so. I had not gone far before I became aware of the fact that I had company. When I had nearly gained the top of the hill, I saw five Sioux Indians. We discovered each other about the same time. Three of them turned aside and rode toward my rear. The other two brought their guns to their shoulders and aimed at me. Almost instantly my carbine was at my shoulder aiming at them; but it was empty. While in the ranks or on horse back I made it a practice to carry it empty. There we sat aiming at one another; the Indians did not fire and I couldn't. True, my revolver was loaded, but I was not fool enough to take my chances, one against five.

After aiming at me for a few seconds they slid off their ponies and sneaked after the other three. I now looked around to see how I was going to escape; I knew I could not retreat. With five I could not cope and within the last few moments a few more Indians had gained the trail ahead of me, and to make my way down the face of the bluff I knew was nearly impossible as the Indians were climbing up to gain the trail.

Looking to my right I saw a ravine and at the bottom of it a small clump of wild cherry bushes. But beyond on a higher elevation than on which I stood was a pillar of rocks, which I thought might afford me a means of defense. I knew I would have to act quickly if I was to save my life, so dismounted from my horse, which had carried me so many miles, I dashed down into the ravine toward the bushes, but the sudden flight of a flock of birds from that point caused me to turn aside and I made a bee line for the pillar of rocks above me. After arriving there I took an inventory of my ammunition. My pistol contained five cartridges; my belt contained seventeen cartridges for my carbine, a very slim magazine as a means of defense. I had left a hundred rounds in my saddle bags, but owing to the incomplete condition of my prairie belt I was unable to carry more with me.

Belts for carrying ammunition were at this time just coming into use, and a great many of us had nothing but a small cartridge box as means of carrying our ammunition when away from our horses.

I was disappointed with my place of defense. I found that the pillar was barely eighteen inches through; it was about seven feet high with a piece of rotten cottonwood on top. It has been built by Indians for some purpose or other.

After completing my inventory I sat down and began to reflect on my chances for life, if I remained where I was. I knew that if the cavalry drove the Indians from the village they would scatter in all directions and if any of the straggling devils came across such an unfortunate as myself I would stand a poor show. I looked back towards the trail where I had left my horse; he was still in the same place with an Indian riding around him. I thought that if he was going to be stripped it was a pity that the ammunition that I had left should fall into the hands of an enemy.

I thought that my time for acting had again arrived and that I had better seek other quarters, so I determined that I would try to reach the trail where it made a turn toward the river. I began to make tracks once more in a lively manner and in a short time reached the point I had started for. At this point the trail was washed very badly on both sides as it descended towards the river. I looked back and saw a mounted Indian coming full speed after me.

When my thoughts wander back to that incident I am led to believe that the bold front of an enemy sometimes puts a strong man to flight. Such was the case with me, at any rate, at this time. I am ashamed to say that I did run several hundred feet and then checked myself and began to walk very slow, for I knew I had the advantage of the savage. If ever I wanted to kill anybody it was right then, but when the savage saw me slow up he wheeled around and galloped back over the trail as fast as he could go, leaving me to pursue my way in peace as far as he was concerned, but I was badly disappointed for I wanted his pony and if necessary would have shed his blood to obtain it, but no such luck was for me.

The trail I was on led directly to the river and thence into the village. The commotion in the village had subsided; the signs of life were few; it appeared to me that it was deserted, so quiet and deathlike was the stillness. But when I looked closer, I could see a few Indians sneaking around here and there and every once and again an Indian would dash out of the village, as if anxious to get to some given point in the least possible time.

While making these observations I also made a pleasant discovery. Down at the foot of the hill which I was descending, I saw a white man riding in a slow leisurely way. Suddenly he left the trail and made his way up the river. Wishing to have company I was about to call for him to stop but happily for me I did not for I saw the reason why Watson, for such he proved to be, turned aside. He was making his way towards a party of Indians who were standing close to the river bank near a clump of underbrush. They were talking and gesticulating in a very earnest manner. The day was extremely warm, but for all that the Indians had their blankets wrapped around them. Some of the blankets were stamped with the large letters I. D. meaning Indian Department. I then knew they were some of the hostiles we were after.

Watson had evidently not made this discovery. I was anxious to save him and if I did I must act quickly. So leaving the trail I ran down the hill at full speed and came to a place where there was a deep cut with steep sides that I would not have dared to face had I been able to check myself in time. But I could not so I gave a leap which landed me many feet below, and strange to say, I did not lose my balance. Fortunately for me the soil was soft and loose to light upon.

When I got close enough to Watson I called to him in a guarded voice. On hearing me he checked up his horse and looked around. I rushed up to him and asked him where he was going. He answered, "To our scouts, of course." I then told him when he passed our scouts on the trail above. "Well," said he, "who are those ahead of us?" I told him that I was under the impression that they were hostiles and that we had better keep clear of them. He came to the same conclusion. The problem that now perplexed us was what we were to do. We finally concluded to enter the village by way of the trail. "And now Watson", said I, "I will help myself along by hanging on your horse's tail as I cannot otherwise keep up with you." So we started in the proposed direction.

We had not gone far before we saw a sight that puzzled us very much. Coming out of the river was one of our Crow scouts, mounted on his horse with the end of a rawhide rope over his shoulder, which he held firmly in his right hand. At the other end of the rope, straining and tugging to get away, was a Sioux squaw. The rope was tied around both her hands, but struggle as she might, she could not break away.

While looking on and wondering where the Crow was going we were further astonished by seeing General Custer dash out of the fording place and ride rapidly up to the Crow and commence to talk to

him. Custer was well versed in several Indian languages. The conversation with Indian did not last long, and what the nature of it was I do not know, but the Crow released the Sioux woman and she seeming glad to be free came running towards us in a half stooping posture and in her hand was a long bladed knife of ugly dimensions. So fierce did she look that my hand involuntarily sought the handle of my revolver. She must have noticed the movement for she made a short circle around us, ran over the bank, crossed the river, and disappeared in the village.

The Crow then left Custer and rode in a jog trot towards the river and disappeared.

Custer was mounted on his sorrel horse and being a very hot day he was in his shirt sleeves; his buckskin pants were tucked into his boots; his buckskin shirt fastened to the rear of his saddle; and a broad brimmed, cream colored hat on his head, the brim of which was turned up on the right side and fastened by a small hook and eye to its crown. This gave him opportunity to sight his rifle while riding. His rifle lay horizontally in front of him; when riding he leaned slightly forward. This was the appearance of Custer on the day that he entered his last battle, and just one-half before the fight commenced between him and the Sioux. When the Crow scout left him, he wheeled around and made for the same point in the river where we had first seen him. When he was passing us he slightly checked his horse and waved his right hand twice for us to follow him. He pointed down the stream, put spurs to his horse and disappeared at the ford, never uttering a word. That was the last I ever saw of General Custer alive. He must have gone thence directly to his command. We wondered why none of his staff were with him. In all probability he had outrun them. His being all alone shows with what fearlessness he traveled about even in an enemies' country with hostiles all around him.

We reached the fording place as soon as possible, but all signs of Custer were gone. Whether he had gone through the village or waded down the stream to reach his command is a question that cannot be answered; but as we had seen no signs of him crossing to the opposite side we naturally thought that he had made his way down the stream.

When we came to the fording place we found that the water was rushing very rapidly. Both banks were wet with the splashing made by the animals going to and from the village. We could see the guidon fluttering in the breeze. This was the flag which has been placed there by the corporal just before he was shot. The sight of this increased our courage.

Our plan was for Watson to cross the river first to show how deep the water was. Being very thirsty I forgot everything else, and stooping down, began to dip water from the river in my hands and drink. While I was thus engaged and Watson had forded to the middle of the stream, I heard the crack of three rifles which caused me to straighten up quickly and look around to see what the trouble was. Standing on the opposite bank of the river and at the very point we wished to gain were three Indians with their smoking rifles in their hands. Watson looking around at me, said, "What in thunder is the matter?" I answered, "If you don't get off your horse at once you will be shot." He did not need a second bidding; neither did he dismount in military style, but more like a frog landing with feet and hands in the water at the same time. This ungainly dismount caused the water to fly in every direction. The Indians no doubt thought that they had finished him for two of them turned around and disappeared in the village.

The one that was left stood facing me, still disputing our passage across the river. From his decorations of paint and feathers I judged he was a chief.

(To be Continued.)



**BELLE FOURCHE BEE**  
**Thursday, March 12, 1914**

**CUSTER'S LAST FIGHT by Peter Thompson, Alzada, Mont.**

Peter Thompson, the author of this story, is at the present time one of the prosperous horse raisers of southeastern Montana. He enlisted in the United States Army in 1875, and was mustered out at Sturgis, South Dakota in 1880. He then moved to Lead, S. D., where he remained until 1886 when he removed to his ranch on the Little Missouri River near Alzada, Montana. This narrative is one never before published and is an authentic, unprejudiced recital of exactly what transpired up to and following the memorable Battle of the Little Big Horn.

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(Continued from last week.)

Watson began to crawl out of the water. If he was as thirsty as I was before he dismounted I guarantee he was in that condition no longer.

I made up my mind to climb to the top of the bank and let drive at our painted friend. I called to Watson to keep quiet for a few moments and began to walk backwards up the steep bank keeping my eyes fixed on the Indian and watching his every movement. When he saw my maneuvers he took aim at me and shot. But the only result was that the lead lay buried in the red clay at my side. The bank being very wet my feet slipped from under me several times. The Indian without lowering his rifle blazed away a second time with the same result as before. I began to get my dander up and climbed to the top of the bank in no dignified manner. The red devil still kept aiming at me. I was a better target for him now than before. When I thought it was time for him to fire I dropped on my left side; the bullet whistling over my head buried itself in the bluff behind me. As this duel had been one sided so far I determined to try my hand. So loading my carbine which was done in a moment, I took aim at him as he turned to go to his pony, which was about thirty feet back of him on a slight elevation winding up his rawhide rope as he did so. I fired, but missed him because Watson who was on a line with the Indian made a movement which distracted my aim. I threw open the breech lock of my carbine to throw the shell out but it was stuck fast. Being afraid that the Indian would escape, I worked at it in a desperate manner and finally got it out far enough to use my thumb nail which proved

effective. The cartridge was very dirty, a nice predicament for a man to be in when in close quarters with an enemy. I was careful to put in a clean one next time, and calling for Watson to remain quiet for a moment, I fired when the Indian was within three feet of his horse. The ball plowed through his body and buried itself in the ground under the horse, throwing dirt in every direction. The Indian threw up his hands and fell with his head between the legs of his pony. It may seem hard to take human life, but he had been trying to take mine and self preservation is the first law of nature.

When I fired this shot Watson jumped to his feet and began to lead his horse out of the stream toward me. I asked him if his horse was not played out; he said it was. In that case I told him he had better leave it as it would take us all our time to take care of ourselves. He studied for a moment and then waded out of the stream leaving his horse with everything on it as I had done.

After he joined me we had a consultation as to the best course for us to pursue. It was clear that the Indians still held the village, and it would be foolish for us to again attempt to enter it. To wade downstream was an impossibility. We finally decided to go down the right bank of the stream and see if we could not get sight of Custer's command and join our ranks where we were much needed.

Watson cast a last fond look at his horse and then we started on our perilous journey. We saw plenty of Indians on our side of the stream; they seemed to get bolder and more numerous, but so far they were some distance away. We kept very close to the underbrush which lined the bank of the river.

Suddenly a small band of Indians came up towards us on a jog trot which made us seek the cover. When they had passed we moved on our way. Again we were sent to cover by the approach of more Indians. No doubt they were coming this way in order to enter the village by the ford. We concluded to seek some sheltered nook to cover ourselves from the extreme heat of the sun, and to wait until the Indians had quieted down for they were beginning to be like a swarm of bees. They were coming from every direction, so unlike what they were a half an hour previous when they were first surprised by the Seventh Cavalry, for surprise it must have been to them. But now they were beginning to recover themselves. After they had driven Major Reno across the river we noticed that the village was beginning to teem with life. The herd of ponies which had been grazing at quite a distance was now rounded up close to the teepees so that the Indians had available mounts. Ponies were dashing here and there with their riders urging them on; the dust would rise and mingle with the smoke of the burning grass and brush. The squaws had the fire under control and had it confined to a comparatively small space.

We managed to secrete ourselves in a bend of the river which turned like a letter S and gave us running water on three sides of us. In a clump of red berry bushes we found a log which made quite a comfortable seat for us. Peering through the brush I thought I recognized the horse which Billy Jackson, our guide had ridden. One of its hind legs was fearfully gashed with a bullet. I called Watson's attention to it, but he did not think that it was the horse. He had met Jackson when on the trail on the top of the hill but a short distance from the place where it turns towards the village. He said Jackson was in a fearful state of mind. Watson asked him what was the matter. He replied, "Have you seen Custer?" Watson, surprised, answered "No," and again asked him what was up. Then Jackson informed him that Custer had shot at him cutting away the strap that connected his stirrup to the saddle, and in order to save his life he had ridden away. Watson said he saw that the stirrup strap was broken off and Jackson without any hat presented a wild looking appearance. He cast fearful glances around him as in mortal terror. Suddenly he put spurs to his horse and rode away, his long hair streaming in the wind and looking right and left as if expecting his enemy to appear at any moment. "And the strangest part of it," added Watson, "was that instead of taking the back trail he struck straight from the

river across the country and as far as I could see him, he was urging his pony to its utmost speed.” I then asked Watson if that did not account for General Custer’s presence away from his command. He shook his head and said he did not know.

We had scarcely been concealed ten minutes before we heard a heavy volley of rifle shots down the stream followed by a scattering fire. I raised to my feet and parted the brush with my gun; the stalks being covered with long sharp thorns which made it quite disagreeable for a person’s clothes and flesh. Looking through the opening down the stream I could see Custer’s command drawn up in battle line two men deep in a half circle facing the Indians who were crossing the river both above and below them.

The Indians while fighting remain mounted, the cavalry dismounted. The horses were held back behind and inside of the circle of skirmishers. The odds were against the soldiers for they were greatly outnumbered and fought at a great disadvantage. Their ammunition was limited. Each man was supposed to carry one hundred rounds, but a great many had wasted them by firing at game along the route. It does not take long to expend that amount of ammunition, especially when fighting against great odds.

Watson took hold of the sleeve of my coat and pulled me down urging me to be careful as the Indians might see me and called my attention to the village which was in a perfect state of turmoil. Indians were leaving the village in all speed to assist in the fight against the cavalry, others arrived from the battlefield with double burdens of dead and wounded. Then commenced a perfect howl from one end of the village to the other made by the squaws and papooses. The noise gradually became louder and louder until it became indescribable and almost unbearable to the ears of civilized persons. Then it would almost die out until some more dead or wounded were brought in. This would put fresh vigor into their lungs. I could not keep still and so got onto my feet again. The firing was continuous. I removed my hat so that I would not attract attention and looked over the panoramas it was spread out before me. I could see the fight was well under way. Hordes of savages had gained a footing on the right bank of the river and had driven the soldiers back a short distance.

The Indians were riding around in a circle and when those who were nearest to the cavalry had fired their guns (riding at full speed) they would reload in turning the circle. The well formed ranks of the cavalry did dreadful execution for every time the soldiers fired I could see ponies and riders tumbling in the dust. I could also see rider less ponies running away in every direction as if anxious to get away from such dreadful scene. Cavalry men were also falling and the ranks gradually melting away but they sternly and bravely faced their foes, the cavalry men fighting for \$13 a month, Indians for their families, property, and glory. It seemed to be the desire of each to utterly exterminate the other.

Round and round rode the savages in a seemingly tireless circle. When one fell either dead or wounded he was carried from the field, but still there remained plenty to take his place but if a soldier fell there was no one to take his, or if wounded there was no one to bring him water to quench his thirst; if dying, no one to close his eyes. It was a sad, sad sight. Lucky indeed was the soldier who died when he was first shot for what mercy could be expected from a Sioux. If their enemy fell into their hands wounded or dying it was simply to be put to the worst torture possible. Being in our present predicament we were utterly powerless to help as we wished we could. We knew our duty but to do it was beyond our power. Look where we would we saw Indians. We two on foot could not cope with the scores of them on horseback.

During the fight between Custer and the Sioux scores of Indians had stationed themselves on the bluffs

overlooking the village as far as we could see, so that any movement on our part would have led to our discovery. But nevertheless we made up our minds not to remain long in our present place of concealment. So we began to map out a course by which we could rejoin our command, where we felt we were so much needed. We found that we had made a mistake and had taken a wrong trail. The trail we had followed had been made by buffalo when going to and from the river.

Both Watson and myself had failed to notice the trail made by the cavalry in making their efforts to reach the lower end of the village. And thus we were brought to the fording place near the center of the village. A person could easily be mistaken, for the road over which they passed was rocky and sandy and hard, consequently, the marks left by the horses' hoofs were very faint. Notwithstanding, this mistake left us in a very critical condition.

Looking in the direction of the battle I saw that the cavalry were being driven towards the foot of a small hill, their number greatly reduced. The firing was growing less every minute but the Indians still kept up their seemingly tireless circling, making a great cloud of dust.

The Indians who seemed to be detailed to bring in the dead and the wounded were continually coming into the village with double burdens, showing that the soldiers though greatly decreased in numbers, were still doing effective work. The squaws and papooses now kept howling without intermission. The noise they made resembled the howling of a coyote and the squealing of a cat.

Watson kept his seat during the time of our concealment buried in deep thought. He seemed to come to one conclusion, and that was that the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was going to be whipped. He said, "The Indians greatly outnumbered the soldiers. While here we have seen more Indians twice over than the combined strength of the Seventh." I told him that I could not bring myself to believe such would be the case. But Watson persisted in his conviction and said, "Its no use talking, they are going to get the worst of it." But I was just as positive in my belief that the cavalry would win.

The plan we had mapped out for ourselves was to climb the west bank of the river to gain the trail of the cavalry and then if possible join our company. It was a foolish undertaking for a short distance below us the bluffs came close to the river and the water washing at the base for so long a time had caused the bluff to cave in and for the distance of a hundred feet up was so steep that even a goat could not climb it. On top of the bluff just where we desired to go were seated three Indians with their ponies but a short distance behind them. We did not feel any way alarmed on their account for we felt able to cope with that number. So we left our retreat and moved down as far as we could for the cut in the bank. I felt exceedingly thirsty and said to Watson that I proposed to have a drink. So jumping from the bank I landed at the edge of the water, and I must say that the water tasted good. I asked Watson to hand me his hat and I would fill it with water and he did so. When I was handing his hat back to him I noticed that the three Indians had discovered us and were watching our every movement. But without fear we commenced our march up the hill keeping as near to the cut bank as the nature of the ground would permit. When about half way up the bluff I noticed something that made me hesitate. Watson was a short distance behind me and was keeping watch on the flat below. What I discovered was several more Indians peering at us over the edge of the bluff. In all I counted eight and concluded that they were too many for us, especially with an uphill pull on our side. While I looked at them one rose to his feet and beckoned for us in the most friendly manner to advance. But I knew he was a hostile and we stood no show whatever on foot with such a number against us. So I turned and called to Watson to run for it and I went after him full speed but kept my eye on their movements but seeing that they were making preparations to fire at us I called out, "Stretch yourself, Watson." And he did and gradually left me behind. The Indians let fly with their rifles with the usual result.



One of the Indians mounted his pony and rode to the edge of the bluff abreast of us. Jerking off his blanket he waved it in a peculiar manner and shouted out some lingo to those in the village and then pointed toward us. We felt we were discovered.

It was our intention to hide ourselves in our former place of concealment but the Indians were watching us, so passing it we came back again to the fording place. We looked to see if the horse was there, but there was no trace of it. No doubt it had passed into the hands of the Indians. Passing the ford on the run we came to some underbrush when we slowed down to a walk, Watson still being some distance ahead of me.

I now heard the clatter of hoofs behind me. On looking around I saw a white man and what I supposed to be a Crow Indian. I called for Watson to stop and told him that we had friends coming. I turned around, intending to wait until they came up. No sooner had I faced them than they stopped, turned their horses across the trail, dismounted, threw their guns across their saddles, and took aim at us. To say that we were astonished would faintly express our feelings. There was nothing left for us to do but to run. The trail we were on ran through a thick clump of bushes and we put our best foot first in order to gain its shelter. But before we could reach it they fired at us, but as usual missed but the twigs and leaves were cut by the bullets and we came to the conclusion that we were not to be killed by the Indians. But if we were not wounded in our bodies we were in our feelings. We determined to ambush them if they attempted to pursue us. We followed the trail for several hundred feet then forced our way through the brush, and with our revolvers cocked, lying at our feet and our guns in our hands we waited and watched for their appearance. But we waited in vain. They must have suspected our intentions. One thing we had made up our minds to do, that was to kill the white man even if the Indian escaped.

We had been two hours and a half in our concealment in the bend of the river watching the fight between Custer and the Indians. It had taken us one half hour to reach this place, making three hours in all. The firing in the direction of the battlefield had just now ceased showing that this act of the tragedy was ended.

The question may be asked why we attempted to join our command after two hours and a half. My answer is, a sense of duty, and love of our comrades in arms. Then others may ask why we did not go sooner. We were repulsed at the ford, we were surrounded by Indians on the bluffs, we were without horses and when we did make the attempt we did so at nearly the cost of our lives.

We were now undecided which way to go. We knew we were surrounded by Indians and we would be very fortunate if we escaped at all. The noise in the village was as great as ever, which told us that the Indians still held it. We were ever on the alert, but could see very little on account of the underbrush. I ventured to raise myself and scanned the top of the bluffs to see if there were any Indians in sight. But I could not see any, and this puzzled me very much but on looking down to the lower end of the bluffs I could see a body of men on horseback mounting slowly up the trail on top of the bluffs. Then I saw several guidons fluttering in the breeze, which I knew as the ones which our cavalry carried on the march. I called Watson's attention to the approaching horsemen, but he was firmly convinced that they were Indians. I drew his attention to the orderly manner in which they moved and the guidons they carried and told him we had better try to join them before they passed us. "Well!" he said, "let's move." So we started, following the trail until we were entirely clear of the brush and then began to climb the face of the bluff in order to reach the trail on which we saw the cavalry were moving.

We had secretly got clear of the underbrush before we became aware that we had run into a hot place. Before we reached the foot of the bluffs we came upon an opening in the timber and brush with several

large cottonwood trees lying upon the ground, stripped of their bark. They had undoubtedly been cut down by the Indians during some severe winter when the snow was very deep and the ponies had to live upon the bark, not being able to get to grass.

Near the water's edge some distance up the river we saw a large body of Indians holding a council, and that we might avoid them kept as close to the cover of the brush as possible and went as rapidly as we could towards the face of the bluff.

So intent were we in our endeavor to escape the attention of the Indians by the river that we did not receive another party which was on the road we wished to take until the guttural language of the savages called our attention to them. I jumped behind one of the fallen cottonwood trees. Where Watson went I could not at the time tell. I peeped over the fallen tree and saw a group of mounted Indians, gesticulating, grunting out their words, and pointing towards the advancing cavalry. Suddenly they broke up and advanced toward my place of concealment. I began to think they had seen me and I crouched as close to the tree as possible. Drawing my revolver I made ready to defend myself. I made up my mind that all but one shot should be fired at the Indians and that one would go into my own head for I had determined never to be taken alive. With open ears and eyes I waited their coming. They passed my hiding place without seeing me and made their way toward the river. I jumped to my feet and started off once more, hardly caring whether the Indians saw me or not for the presence of the cavalry had put fresh courage into me. I had not gone far before I heard my name called and on looking around I saw Watson coming after me at full speed. I was glad to see him safe. It gave me renewed courage and we hoped that we would soon be entirely safe. After we began to climb the hill I found my strength giving out and in spite of the fact that we were in full view of the Indians I laid down to rest and all my entreaties for Watson to go on and save himself were fruitless. He would not budge. But there was something that made us move sooner than I wished. A large body of Indians had crossed the river and were coming across the flat towards the hill we were climbing. I struggled to my feet and staggered after Watson. The heat at this time seemed to be intense but it might have been on account of my exhausted condition. Watson did not complain for, like myself, he knew it would do no good. After we had climbed nearly halfway up the bluffs the Indians commenced to fire at us but that did not trouble us because we knew that the Indians when excited were very poor shots and in our case the bullets went wide of the mark.

(To be Continued.)



**BELLE FOURCHE BEE**  
**Thursday, March 19, 1914**

**CUSTER'S LAST FIGHT by Peter Thompson, Alzada, Mont.**

Peter Thompson, the author of this story, is at the present time one of the prosperous horse raisers of southeastern Montana. He enlisted in the United States Army in 1875, and was mustered out at Sturgis, South Dakota in 1880. He then moved to Lead, S. D., where he remained until 1886 when he removed to his ranch on the Little Missouri River near Alzada, Montana. This narrative is one never before published and is an authentic, unprejudiced recital of exactly what transpired up to and following the memorable Battle of the Little Big Horn.

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(Continued from last week.)

We were becoming so tired that the presence of the Indians were no longer a terror to us. The hill we were climbing seemed very long; so much so to me that I fell down and lay there without any inclination to move again until Watson called my attention to the head of the column on cavalry which came into plain view. So with renewed energy we made our way up amid showers of lead. The savages seemed loath to let us go.

When we stepped into the trail at the head of the advancing column it was about five o'clock in the afternoon. The first man we recognized was Sergeant Knipe of our company. He had been sent back by Custer to hurry up the ammunition. He informed us that Sergeant Hanley, who had charge of our companies' pack mules, had taken Barnum, one of our pack mules, loaded with ammunition and drove it full speed toward the battlefield. He got as far as the pillar of rocks which I have already mentioned when the Indians opened fire on him. He quickly made up his mind to retreat as the Indians were too numerous to be dealt with single handed. So rapidly had they been moving that it was with great difficulty that he succeeded in turning the obstinate mule which he finally did, and drove it to the rear amid a shower of lead. The Indians made a desperate effort to cut him off, but he succeeded in returning to the pack train without any mishap. This was the only attempt made to take ammunition to Custer's command. There is no doubt that they needed it very badly. Someone failed to do his duty. It may be out of place to criticize, but the duty that Major Reno owed to General Custer is too plain to be

misunderstood. According to military rule it was Reno's duty to report to his superior officer, whether he failed or succeeded in his mission, but instead of sending an escort with ammunition to Custer he simply allowed one man to take that dangerous journey alone. How much better it would have been had he with his seven companies gone to the assistance of Custer. He no doubt would have been successful and the loss of life would not have been so great.

But here he was. Nearly three hours had elapsed since his retreat from the river bottom and during all this time Custer had been fighting against fearful odds, his men melting away, and his ammunition running shorter every moment until the last round was fired. And then who can conjecture the fate of the few that remained of that devoted band, slowly murdered at the leisure of the noble savage of the plains.

The forces under Major Reno, at the time we stepped into the trail, were six companies of the left wing and one company of the right, namely Company B under the command of Captain McDougal [sic]. Seven companies in all; and still Reno hesitated to act. We no sooner made our appearance than the command came to a halt. We were questioned closely as to what we knew about Custer, as to where he was and what he was doing, etc. We answered all the questions as well as we could.

Sergeant Knipe then told me that my horse had been found and was in charge of Fitzgerald, the horse farrier. Knipe added, "We all thought you were a gonner." This was good news to me.

Just then the order was given to retreat and Reno's command began to march slowly to the rear. Of course we all wondered at this but said nothing. It was our duty not to question, but to obey. I made a dive through the retreating column in quest of my horse and found it in the center of the command led by Fitzgerald who seemed greatly surprised at seeing me, saying, "I thought the Indians had your scalp." I told him I was too good a runner for that. On examining my saddle I was glad to find everything as I had left it.

We did not retreat very far for that was impossible. The Indians were closing in around us. Our retreat was covered by Company D, commanded by Captain Weir. He was the only captain who wished to go to the relief of Custer. He had begged in vain to have Reno advance to Custer's relief. That being denied he asked permission to take his company and ascertain Custer's position, but he was refused that privilege.

Major Reno moved to the left of the trail and went into a flat bottomed ravine. By this time the Indians were pouring a shower of lead into us that was galling in the extreme. Our horses and mules were cuddled together in one confused mass. The poor brutes were tired and hungry. Where we made our stand there was nothing but sand, gravel, and a little sage brush. We were in a very precarious condition. Our means of defense were very poor. There were numerous ravines leading into the one which we occupied. This gave the savages a good opportunity to close in upon us and they were not long in doing so. Some of us unloaded the mules of the hardtack they were carrying and used the boxes for a breastwork. We knew if we did not do so we would be picked off one by one. We formed the cracker boxes in a half circle and kept them as close together as possible.

By the time we had everything arranged the sun was going down. We all knew that the Indians never fought after nightfall. We thought we would time enough to fortify ourselves before the light of another day appeared. But in the mean time several accidents happened which helped make it a serious matter for us. We saw that our horses and mules were beginning to drop quite fast, for they were in a more exposed position. This is very trying to a cavalry man, for next to himself he loves his horse,

especially on a campaign of this kind. A peculiar accident happened to a man lying next to me, sheltered by a cracker box and talking in a cheerful manner about the probabilities of us getting out of our present difficulty when a ball came crashing through the box, hitting him. And killing him instantly. There was but one gasp and all was still. He had made the mistake of placing the box the wrong way, the edge of the crackers toward the outside. While meditating upon the uncertainty of life a bullet struck the box behind which I lay and as I heard the lead crashing through its contents I wondered if the time had come for me to wear a pair of wings. But no, the ball stopped and I gave a sigh of relief. I noted with great satisfaction that the night was closing in around us.

As soon as the fire of the Indians ceased we once more mingled with one another. In comparing notes we found that a few men had been killed and a number wounded but our stock had suffered the most. The men were greatly puzzled about the whereabouts of Custer and as all the men loved their general, it was but natural that they should sneer at the idea of Custer getting the worst of any fight he might enter against the Indians. The story we told of Custer's battle they did not disbelieve but as to him getting the worst of the fight, that was all bosh. For my part I deemed it best to say nothing further about it as contradiction was a thing I could not stand when I knew I was right. There was no possibility for doubt that Reno's command heard the firing between Custer's men and the Indians. Besides, Custer had sent two messengers back, the first one Sergeant Knipe of Company C, the second one bugler Martin from Company H to Captain Benteen commanding him to bring his company to his assistance. I have not the least doubt but that Captain Benteen would have done so if he possibly could. But on his way to the river he met Major Reno on his retreat and the result was that Reno assumed entire command of the forces.

Let us now see what efforts were put forth by Reno to assist Custer. As I have said before, to my certain knowledge the battle lasted three hours. The question is, what was he doing during that time? I was not with him so I can only tell what I heard from the members of the companies who were with him and they told me it was nothing but hesitancy as to what he should do. It is evident that he was no man for the position he occupied and seemed unable to act energetically in an emergency, if he had things would have been different. There is no excuse for Reno's remaining in ignorance of Custer's real position.

After the firing of the Indians had ceased I went where I had left my horse in charge of a man named McGuire. Here I saw something that, under other conditions would have been laughable. McGuire had been given charge of five horses. When I left mine with him he was sitting on the ground his head shrunk down between his shoulders and his eyes bulged out to the fullest extent, and when I returned he was in exactly the same position, still holding the reins of the five horses in his hand, but three of them were lying dead. I asked him if he knew that three of the horses were dead. He mournfully shook his head, but as one of the dead horses was mine I left in disgust and began to figure the possibilities of getting another. I was soon forced to the conclusion that my chances were very slim. As I strolled around I found everybody awake and talking with each other. The subjects of conversation were; the probability of getting out of our present fix and the whereabouts of Custer. The thought seemed to be that if Custer would only turn up our present difficulties would soon vanish. I was wise enough to hold my peace.

I wandered to the edge of the bluff overlooking the village. By this time it was quite dark. I could plainly see several large fires which the Indians had built. There was a noise in the village which increased as the night advanced. The deep voices of the braves, the howling of the squaws, the shrill piping of the children, and the barking of the dogs made night hideous. But they appeared to enjoy it amazingly.

Suddenly we heard above all the other sounds, the call of a bugle. The sound came from the direction of the village, and immediately following was the sound of two others. The officers hearing those bugle sounds ordered our buglers to sound certain calls and waited to see if they would be answered. The only answer was a long wailing blast. It was not what was expected. I now turned around and made my way to the place where my dead horse lay and stripped the saddle of everything and then went and made my bed behind my cracker box. The last thing I heard as I lay down upon the ground was the howling of the Indians and the wailing of the bugles. I slept so soundly that I heard and knew nothing until I felt some one kicking the soles of my boots. Jumping to my feet I saw Captain Benteen standing by my side. When he saw that I was fully awake he told me that I would have to render some assistance at the head of the ravine up which the Indians were trying to sneak. He added, "If they do succeed it will be all day with us."

The Indians had been pouring in volleys upon us long before I had been awakened and they were still at it. Under the cover of darkness they had gained a foothold in some of the numerous ravines that surrounded us. It seemed as if it would be impossible to dislodge them. Some of them were so close to us that their fire was very effective. The ping of the bullets and the groaning and struggling of the wounded horses was oppressive. But my duty was plain. The way I had to go to my post was up a short hill towards the edge of the bluff and the head of the ravine. While packing my ammunition in order to carry it easily I glanced up in the direction I had to go and for the life of me I could not see how I could possibly get there alive for the bullets of the Indians were ploughing up the sand and gravel in every direction, but it was my duty to obey.

After getting everything in shape I started on the run. The fire of the Indians seemed to come from three different directions and all exposed places were pretty well riddled. Even as secure a place as where we had formed our breastwork was no longer safe. The red devils seemed determined to crush us. As I ran up the hill which was but a short distance I was seized with a tendency to shrink up, and was under the impression that I was going to be struck in the legs or feet. I was not the only one to run for the head of the ravine. Captain Benteen was busily hunting up all the men he could to go to the same point in order to keep the Indians in check and if possible to drive the Indians out of the ravine. It did not take me long to reach the top of the bluffs, where I got a glimpse of the village, the river and the mouth of the ravine.

I had gotten so far without being hit that I thought I was going to get through safe, but as I was entering the mouth of the ravine a volley was fired by the Indians who occupied it and over I tumbled shot through the right hand and arm. A short distance below I saw several cavalry men who were soon joined by others, eleven in all; a slim force indeed to clean out the ravine held by so many Indians, but they were resolute men. Captain Benteen soon joined them and made a short speech. He said, "This is our only weak and unprotected point and should the Indians succeed in passing this in any force they would soon end the matter as far as we are concerned." "And now," he asked, "Are you ready?" They answered, "Yes." "Then," said he, "charge down there and drive them out." And with a cheer away they dashed, their revolvers in one hand and their carbines in the other. Benteen turned around and walked to the extreme left, seemingly tireless and unconscious of the hail of lead that was flying around him.

Knowing that in my condition I was useless I looked around to see if I could find anyone who could direct me to a surgeon. I knew that there were two with General Custer but I was not sure whether we had one with us here or not.

A short distance from me lay a wounded man groaning and struggling in the agony of death. Just as I

was thinking of getting up I heard an order given by a Sioux Chief. A heavy volley of bullets was the result. My wounded neighbor gave a scream of agony and then was still. After the volley was past it was a wonder to me how I had escaped. I now struggled to my feet and found that I was weak and dizzy from loss of blood. I looked around me and saw what remained of those who had gone down the ravine against such fearful odds. Few of them returned but they had accomplished their object. We had men with us who seemed utterly fearless in the face of danger. One man had the courage of a lion. Wherever duty called him, whatever the danger might be, he was always found at his post.

Going in the direction of the horses I saw what suffering the poor brutes were enduring from thirst and hunger. But we ourselves were no better off. I found in the center of our place of defence [sic] that we had a surgeon busily attending to the wounded and dying. I asked him to attend to me when he had time to do so. He soon bandaged up my wounds and told me the only thing that could be done was to apply plenty of water. What mockery! Water was not to be had for love or money. Our way to the river was cut off excepting by the way of the ravine out of which the eleven brave men drove the Indians. But to attempt to get water by that route was too risky. I looked on while the doctor attended to the wounded that were brought in. Some of the poor fellows would never recover, others would be crippled for life and I would carry a broken hand.

The sun reflecting on the sand and gravel made it very hot. The loss of blood and lack of water made me so dizzy that I reeled and fell and lay unheeded. But this was getting to be a common sight. I still clung to my carbine and revolver. When I fell I managed to roll over on my face and place my carbine under me. I knew that if someone needed such an implement they were liable to take it. I do not know how long I lay there, but I have a faint recollection of being turned and my gun taken from me. This aroused me and I managed to struggle to a sitting posture, but the man and the gun were gone. He had left his own in its place but it was practically useless, the breech being broken.

While I was meditating on the meanness of human nature I saw Captain Benteen dash into the midst of our horses and drive out several men who were hiding and skulking among them. "Get out of here," he cried, "and do your duty."

It soon became known that the Indians were concentrating for an attack upon our lines. They had closed in around us on three sides and so close were they that we could hear them talking. Captain Benteen seemed to be aware of the impending danger and was forming all the men he possibly could into line at the point where it was expected that the Indians would attack us.

The heat of the day was oppressive and guns of the Indians were silent and these facts brought a feeling of depression over us. We all realized that our lives were not worth betting on, but the expression on the faces of the men was that of a dogged determination to sell them dearly.

We only had two spades, the others having been either broken or lost so our means of digging rifle pits were limited and natural defenses there were none. History hardly records a predicament such as we were in. It does mention the hardships of the soldiers of the late Civil War, but it is nothing to campaigning against Indians. A white man capturing an enemy usually spares his life but if captured by hostile Indians his days are numbered and he is known of men on earth no more.

How were we going to transport our wounded? We had plenty of them and some of them very badly hurt. Look where you would, you could see either dead or wounded soldiers and the end not yet.

The silence was suddenly broken by a loud command given by a hostile chief, which was followed by a

terrific volley and a great many of our horses and mules passed over the range. Our men never wavered but hugged the ground as close as possible and fired whenever they found the slightest opportunity to do execution. All realized that the less ammunition expended the better. Although the Indians outnumbered us many times they lacked the courage and determination of the day previous when they fought Custer. They no doubt had been taught a bitter lesson. Had it not been for the watchfulness of our men, they certainly would have got the best of us. Whenever they attacked our men were always ready. While the hottest of the fight was going on and the tide of battle seemed to be against us, our doctor dropped his bandages, and grasping a gun started toward the skirmish line. Some of the men seeing his action begged him to stay, telling him that it would go hard with the command if anything should go wrong with him, and to enforce their arguments a wounded man was brought in who needed his immediate attention. This for a time seemed to deter him for he laid down his gun and commenced work at his former occupation. He was kept very busy for some time.

I made my way slowly over the small place in which we huddled together and was very much pleased to see some of the men stretching canvas over the wounded and dying. This canvas the officers had brought along for their own use, but it was given up by them for the humane purpose of sheltering the helpless. The canvas had to be stretched very close to the ground. The supports that were used were short pieces of wood of any kind that we could procure without risk.

(To be Continued.)





**BELLE FOURCHE BEE**  
**Thursday, March 26, 1914**

**CUSTER'S LAST FIGHT by Peter Thompson, Alzada, Mont.**

Peter Thompson, the author of this story, is at the present time one of the prosperous horse raisers of southeastern Montana. He enlisted in the United States Army in 1875, and was mustered out at Sturgis, South Dakota in 1880. He then moved to Lead, S. D., where he remained until 1886 when he removed to his ranch on the Little Missouri River near Alzada, Montana. This narrative is one never before published and is an authentic, unprejudiced recital of exactly what transpired up to and following the memorable Battle of the Little Big Horn.

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(Continued from last week.)

We had no use for firewood if we could have gotten it as we had no water to cook with, hence our wounded were deprived of the comforts that a sick man needs. As I strolled around I could see something of the horrors of our position. It was not a question of days but of hours. We could in all probability bury our unfortunate comrades who had fallen in battle, but it would be impossible for us to dispose of our dead horses and mules. The stench would become so great that it would drive us from our present position and where were we to go? It was utterly impossible to move our wounded as we had no means at hand with which we could do so. We were quite willing to change our location if we could but we hesitated for several reasons. We were separated from our leader and our forces were divided. The Indians seemed determined to exterminate us if possible. The only hope for us to accomplish our purpose was to make the effort after night came on. I wondered if any of the other members of Company C had been as unfortunate as myself. Although that company had endured the fight with General Custer there were a few who had been detailed on the pack train. So I commenced to search around for them. I first found a man by the name of Bennett whom to know was to respect. I could see that his days were numbered. Kneeling down beside him I asked, "Can I do you any service?" He grasped my hand and drew me closer to him and whispered, "Water, Thompson, water, for God's sake!" Poor fellow, he was past speaking in his usual strong voice. I told him I would get him some if I lived. He released my hand and seemed satisfied and then I began to realize what the promise I had made meant. This was on the 26<sup>th</sup> day of June, a day long to be remembered by all who

took an active part, in fact a day never to be forgotten. As far as getting water was concerned it was a matter of the greatest difficulty. All routes to the river were cut off by the Indians. I was determined to make the effort nevertheless, and looked around for a canteen. I thought of the ravine which was cleared by the eleven brave men and hoped that I might be able to make my way to the river by that route. I made some inquiries of some skulkers whom I found in among the horses and from what they told me I concluded that the ravine was the only safe one to take. In a short time I secured two canteens and a coffee kettle. I made my way to the head of the ravine which ran down to the river. I found that very little change had taken place since the incident in the morning.

The firing on the part of the Indians was rather dilatory. A person could make his way around with a little more comfort, but how long this would be continued it was impossible to tell. As I gained the rise of ground that commanded a view of the village, river, and surrounding country, I saw a small group of men examining an object lying on the ground, which I found to be an Indian bedecked in all of his warpaint which goes to make up a part of their apparent courage and fierce appearance. He was found very close to our position which goes to show how closely we were confined. The Indians were able to occupy every available position afforded by nature on account of their numbers. If it had not been for the terrible position we were in we could have had a panorama view of the snow capped hills of the Big Horn Mountains, which form the fountain heads of the Little and Big Horn rivers.

While wondering as to my next move, I was suddenly brought to myself with the questions, "Where are you going, and what are you going to do?" The questioner belonged to my own company and I naturally expected him to sympathize with me in my errand of mercy. He not only tried to dissuade me but called to Sergeant Knipe and told him of my intention of going to the river. The Sergeant told me of the hopelessness of the undertaking telling me that if I should ever attempt to make the trip I would never get back alive. I told him that as I could not carry a gun I thought I had better do something to help the wounded and the dying.

Seeing that I was determined to go they said no more but one of the men of Company C, named Tim Jordan gave me a large pocket handkerchief to make a sling for my wounded hand. I started down the ravine but halted for I found I had not my belt in which I usually carried my pistol, having given it to one of my comrades. But on going back to the man and asking him for it he seemed to be confused and stated that he had lost it. So there was nothing for me to do but to console myself with the reflection that I had better have taken care of it myself. I turned around and made my way through the midst of several citizen packers who accompanied us on our expedition. No doubt they thought the position they occupied was the safest one to serve their country in. As I went down the ravine I found it got narrower and deeper and became more lonesome and naturally more depressing. I noticed numerous hoof prints showing that the Indians had made a desperate effort to make an opening through our place of defense by this route. But now it was deserted. After I had traveled a considerable distance I came to a turn in the ravine. Pausing for a moment I looked cautiously around the bend, and there before me was running water, the Little Bighorn River. On the opposite side was a thick cover of cottonwood timber the sight of which made me hesitate for a moment. It was possible that some of the Indians were concealed in it to pick anyone off who was bold enough to approach the water. But I could see no signs of life and concluded to proceed. I made my way as rapidly as possible toward the bank of the river. I found the ground was very miry. So much so that I was afraid that I might get stuck in the mud. I concluded that there was nothing like trying. I laid down my canteens and took my kettle in my left hand and made several long leaps which landed me close to the water's edge. The water at this point ran very shallow over a sandbar. With a long sweep of my kettle up the stream I succeeded in getting plenty of sand and a little water. Making my way back towards the mouth of the ravine a volley of half a score of rifle balls whistled past me and the lead buried itself in the bank beyond. I gained the

shelter of the ravine without a scratch and I was thankful. I wondered whether it would be safe to stop long enough to put the water into the canteens as the fire of the Indians seemed to come from a bend in the bank a short distance from the mouth of the ravine on this side of the river. I was not sure but that the Indians might take a notion to follow me. Had I been armed I would have been more at my ease. I knew I could travel with greater ease if I left the kettle behind, so I placed it between my knees and soon transferred the water from it to the canteens. I started on looking back once in a while to see if the Indians were coming. I soon turned the bend of the ravine but no signs of them did I see. Although my thirst was great I did not stop to take a drink until I landed amidst my fellow soldiers. I offered to divide the water of one canteen with some of the men of Company C. They refused my offer when I told them that my effort was made in behalf of the wounded members of our company. On coming to Bennett I placed a canteen in his hand, but he was too weak to lift it to his lips. He was attended by John Mahoney of our company and I had no fear but he would be well cared for. I skirmished around and found two more of my company slightly wounded. I gave them the other canteen and told them that if they should not require all the water that I would like to pass it around to some other wounded ones lying close by which was done. A man by the name of McVey, to whom I handed the canteen that he might drink seemed determined to keep it in his possession. I jerked it from his grasp and passed it on to the next. With a cry of rage he drew his revolver from beneath his overcoat and taking aim at me he told me to skip or he would put a hole through me. I was too much astonished for a moment to even move or speak but when I did regain my speech I used it to the best advantage, as that was all the weapon I had. Fortunately I was not armed or I would have committed an act that I would have been sorry for afterwards. My action would have been justified by the law, as it would have been an act of self defense. The offers of money by the wounded for a drink of water were painful to hear. "Ten dollars for a drink," said one. "Fifteen dollars for a canteen of water," said a second. "Twenty dollars," said a third, and so the bidding went on as at an auction.

This made me determine to make another trip and to take a larger number of canteens. So I would not have to make so many trips. The firing on the part of the Indians was very brisk at intervals. On our part we never expended a cartridge unless we were very sure that the body of an Indian was in sight.

My next trip to the river was taken with more courage. But as on the former occasion when I came to the bend in the ravine I halted and looked carefully around the corner. I was astonished at seeing a soldier sitting on a bank of earth facing the river with his back towards me. I was curious to know who he was. I came up to him and saw that he had two camp kettles completely riddled with bullets. He had his gun in his hand and his eyes fixed on the grove of timber across the river, watching the enemy. On looking him over I could see the reason for his sitting and watching as he did. I discovered a pool of blood a short distance from him which had come from a terrible wound in his leg. It was impossible for him to move any further without assistance. I asked him how he received his wound. He told me he had gone to the river for water and when he was coming up from the bed of the river with his two kettles filled with water a volley had been fired at him, one of the bullets hitting him and breaking his leg below the knee, the other riddling his kettles. He had managed to make his way under cover of the ravine to the place where I found him. I then told him as it was my turn now I would proceed to business. He tried to dissuade me, but as I would not go back without water and it was useless for me to remain at this place, I laid down my canteens and grasped the camp kettle which I had left on my previous trip. I walked forward looking into the grove for signs of Indians, but not a sign of life could be seen. Looking to see where the water was the deepest I made a few long leaps which landed me in the water with a loud splash. I knew it was useless for me to try to avoid being seen so I depended on my ability to escape the bullets of the Indians. A volley was fired, but I again escaped. Madden, the wounded man I had just left watched me with the greatest interest. When I returned to him I urged him to take a drink but he refused to do so saying he was not in need of it. This caused me some surprise as

I knew he had lost a great deal of blood which is almost invariably followed by great thirst.

I made haste to fill the canteens and started on my way to camp bidding Mike Madden be of good cheer and he made a cheerful reply. When I reached the place of our defense I found that the firing was not so brisk. Only a few scattering shots now and then. But our men were still on the alert. There was no weak place left unguarded, no ammunition was being wasted. Although we had 24 boxes of ammunition which amounted to thousands of rounds, the men fired only where they thought they were going to do execution.

After leaving three canteens for the wounded at the hospital, I took the other two and gave them to my wounded comrades. After this I began to feel very sick and looked around for a sheltered place to avoid the heat of the sun. This sickness was caused by the loss of blood and the pain in my hand, which at this time had swelled to a great size. I did not like to get under the canvass where the wounded were as that was already crowded, so I crawled under one of our horses which was standing with a group of the others. I could not but wonder what sort of a fix I would be in if the horse under which I was lying happened to get shot and fall down on me. But this soon passed out of mind, as there was always something going on which attracted my attention.

I began to watch the action of the men. A short distance from me was a man belonging to Company A. He was lying on his face so still that I thought he was dead. Two men came towards him dragging a piece of canvas with which they were going to construct a shelter for the steadily increasing number of wounded men. Toney, for that was the man's name, was lying in the place best suited for the shelter and the men called to him to get out of the way but he never moved. One of the men began to kick him and yelled for him to get up. He struggled to his feet; his face bore tokens of great fear. He said he was sick. A more miserable looking wretch it would be difficult to find. The man was almost frightened to death. He walked a few steps and fell to the ground heedless to the heat of the sun or anything else going on around him.

Another young man was going around in a most helpful manner. Here, there, and everywhere he thought he was needed. I noticed him quite frequently and it did my heart good to see in what a cheerful manner he performed his duty. He was a trumpeter, belonging to either Company L or I and I am very sorry that I have forgotten his name.

With few exceptions the soldiers performed their duty with great bravery and determination.

The Indians had in their possession three guns which time and time again our men tried to silence. These guns were in the hands of good marksmen. The position they occupied was behind some rock in our rear. All we could see when they fired was a puff of white smoke, but the result was very disastrous to our horses and mules. The shot hardly ever missed its mark. The number of dead animals was growing very large. While leaning on my left hand and wondering what to do, the horse under which I was lying backed slightly and planted his hoof on my hand. I thought from the pain I felt that it was disabled, but after persuading the horse to raise his hoof so that I could release my hand I found that I could still use it. This slight incident made me realize that I had no business to be loafing. So working my way from among the animals I tried to secure a gun hoping that I might be able to use it in case the Indians succeeded in breaking through our lines.

The left wing of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was thrown out as skirmishers facing the village. They had to take every opportunity the ground afforded to secure themselves against the fire of the enemy. In walking down the line I noticed that Company D had made good use of their time during the previous night.

They seemed to be better provided with rifle pits than the rest of the company.

Here I saw an act by a member of Company D which showed the utter indifference in which some men hold their lives. His name was Pat Goldman, a young man of striking appearance, dark hair and eyes, black mustache, tall, straight as an arrow and nimble as a cat. It seemed that shooting from the shelter of a rifle pit was not suitable to him and to get a better view of the enemy he sprang out of the pit and commenced to fire at anything that appeared to him like an Indian. He was urged by his comrades to come under cover as it was too dangerous to expose himself that way. Heedless of the danger he held his position amid a shower of lead, both a challenge and a target to the fire of the Indians. It was not long before he was hit by a ball, but he still kept his place. Again he was struck but he still kept his feet firing when the opportunity presented itself apparently paying no attention to the entreaties of his comrades to come under shelter. He called out as another bullet struck him, "Boys, that is number three, but I'm still here. Number four," he shouted as another bullet struck him and he still kept his feet and loaded and fired his gun. Every man of his company admired his pluck, but could not help but see he was throwing his life away. Finally a ball went crashing through his brain, his lifeless body rolled into the rifle pit which became his grave.

Finding that I could not get a gun that was fit for use I turned and made my way back towards the head of the defense and when I came to where the horses were huddled together I heard a voice feebly calling my name. Looking up the direction of the sound I saw a man by the name of Tanner lying close to some sage brush. Someone had thrown the cape of an overcoat over him to protect him from the sun. Kneeling down by his side I asked him what I could do for him. He told me he was done for and asked me to get him a drink of water. I saw from the nature of the wound that his hours were numbered. I secured a blanket on which I placed him. Having only one hand with which to do the work I found it hard work to move him. I then got an overcoat and made a pillow for his head and used my overcoat to shelter him. I now made a hurried search for some more canteen and in making my way towards the head of the ravine, again my attention was called to the fact that Major Reno had at least come out of his hole. He held a pair of field glasses to his eyes looking in the direction of the village. Presently he dropped the glasses and looked around and saw me. He motioned for me to stop telling me at the same time that the Indians were concentrating for a unified attack and ordered me to go back as it was dangerous for me to go down to the river. I had been aware of this for some time. Evidence existed on every hand which showed what they had been trying to do since daylight. As I stood looking at him I could not help wondering if he knew what his duty was. Here he was with about four hundred men surrounded by hordes of savages. If ever soldiers needed a good example it was here. Did he show such an example? Did he give cheer to his men? Did he show how a true soldier should act under difficulties and die if need be in defense of his country? No! Instead of this he kept himself in a hole where there was no danger of being struck and no doubt would have pulled the hole in after him if he could, and if he even dreamed that by so doing he could have increased his security.

Turning to the left I walked through a herd of horses until I got a sufficient distance from the Major not to be noticed by him and then I made my way to the river. I found Madden had been removed and it made me feel a little lonesome on this trip. But I had become so indifferent to my surroundings that I did not care whether the Indians fired at me or not. So I walked into the river, filled my camp kettles and as slowly returned to my task of filling my canteens. All this time the Indians did not fire at me. It occurred to me that the stillness was almost oppressive. After filling my canteens I looked towards the timber. There was no sign of life there. When I reached the top of the bluff again I saw Captain Benteen hard at work placing a few men here and a few there. He was as cool and collected as ever. I noticed that blood was making its way through the leg of his trousers and I concluded that he had received a flesh wound but with the exception of a slight limp he gave no signs of pain. His presence

was cheering and encouraging to the men. Wherever he went their faces lighted up with hope.

Lieutenant Varnum seemed to be trying to do his duty. He had been in command of the Ree scouts up until the 25<sup>th</sup> when all but three retreated to Tongue River where the wagon train was parked. Varnum was with Reno when the latter made the charge upon the upper end of the village. In the confusion of the retreat he had lost his hat and his head was now decorated with a white handkerchief.

Lieutenant Wallace, a fine looking officer, of over six feet in height was also doing all he could to keep our position as secure as possible. What we needed more than anything else was artillery. If we had had but one piece, either a Napoleon or a Gatling gun, the village could have been destroyed in a very short time. But we had neither.

I thought I would go and see how Tanner was getting along. When I approached the place where I had left him I saw a man tugging away at the overcoat which I had placed under his head. Rushing forward I seized the man by the coat collar and sent him sprawling on the ground some distance away. He sprang to his feet with a loud curse and with vengeance in his eye looked me over from head to foot. I said, "Get out of here and be quick about it." We will call him Nelson although that was not his real name, but we will have reason to mention him again so it is well to call him something. He was the most profane man I ever heard. After he had gone I turned to Tanner and found that he was dead. He had died before his wish for a drink of water could be gratified. He was a man of excellent qualities. A bond of warmest friendship had bound us together which was only severed by death. I drew the cape over his face. It was the last thing I could do for him. I thought this was a hard way to die and I did not know how soon my turn might come. I now picked up my canteens which I had dropped when I grasped Nelson. I distributed the water among those who needed it but kept one canteen for Bennett. I told Mahoney who was attending him that I would leave more water with him that I might come around for a drink once in a while. I asked him if he thought Bennett would pull through. He shook his head sadly and said, "I don't think so." I knew Bennett would receive the best attention so I made my way out of the basin in which the hospital was situated.

I was too nervous to remain inactive and I was bound to see what was going on. I went to a point below where the left wing was lying. The ground here was broken with the river a short distance away. I stood looking into the valley to see how many Indians were in sight. I only saw one occasionally making his way at full speed either to the upper or lower end of the village. A large herd of ponies were grazing near the village and whom were guarded by a small number of Indian boys. I then looked into the timber where Reno had formed a skirmish line before retreating, but I could see no one there. I was in doubt as to where all the Indians had gone. There were none where I expected to see them. But I suddenly was made aware of their presence by a command given in a loud voice by one of their chiefs. This was followed by a heavy volley which continued for several moments. Our men did not flinch and very few replied to the Indian's fire. A hissing sound near my head caused me to turn and I saw an arrow with its barb buried in the ground. I saw I had had a close shave. I picked the arrow up and on examination found it to be a regular hunting arrow. Whether it was poisoned or not I could not tell. I know that the one who had shot the arrow could not be a great distance from me.

While thinking whether I should keep it as a souvenir or not I heard a yell mingled with curses. Turning around I saw a man lying on the ground holding his leg in both of his hands. I went to see what the matter with him was. I recognized in him Nelson of the overcoat incident. He stopped his swearing long enough to tell me he had been struck with a rock which had broken a bone in his leg. I did not know whether to believe him or not, until his limb was uncovered. The only thing visible was a red bruise on his shin bone but his leg was broken. The one throwing the rock must have been very

close to us. We had been standing on the edge of the broken ground so it was possible that some of the Indians were closer to us than we were aware of. But we were unable to tell just at which place to look for them.

As two men were taking Nelson away a loud voice from behind the bluff called me in good English, "Come down here you white livered ----, and I will cut your heart out and drink your blood." The loud bleat of a sheep was the only answer I gave him.

(To be Continued.)



**BELLE FOURCHE BEE**  
**Thursday, April 2, 1914**

**CUSTER'S LAST FIGHT by Peter Thompson, Alzada, Mont.**

Peter Thompson, the author of this story, is at the present time one of the prosperous horse raisers of southeastern Montana. He enlisted in the United States Army in 1875, and was mustered out at Sturgis, South Dakota in 1880. He then moved to Lead, S. D., where he remained until 1886 when he removed to his ranch on the Little Missouri River near Alzada, Montana. This narrative is one never before published and is an authentic, unprejudiced recital of exactly what transpired up to and following the memorable Battle of the Little Big Horn.

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(Continued from last week.)

The fire on the part of the Indians became continuous. If they had any hopes of driving us back from our position they were disappointed. We were like rats in a hole, we could go no further. From about three o'clock in the afternoon until the day wore away the Indians fire grew less thus showing that they were getting disheartened at the prospect of getting our scalps or their ammunition was running low. The latter I think was the real cause for they had consumed a tremendous amount of it in their attack on Custer's and Reno's commands.

There was a large body of Indians engaged against us so they must have had plenty of ammunition.

On my way down into the ravine I found the five citizen packers. As packers they were a success, but as fighters, they were failures. Before they had found shelter of the ravine the head packer had received a serious wound in the head by a spent ball. His bandaged head and blood stained face made him look "tough".

A little farther down I found Sergeant Hanley, our quartermaster sergeant, surrounded by enough food to last four companies instead of one. He no doubt thought that it was a good opportunity, while confusion reigned supreme to make provision for the future. He had made a breastwork out of cracker boxes. There he was as far as we could see, a perfectly contended man.



Seeing he had a new tin bucket I could not resist the temptation of making another trip to the river, so borrowing it from him with the pledge to return it when I came back I started on my trip. The way to the river was easy enough but on coming back I found I was very tired. When nearing the head of the ravine and looking ahead I saw two men separating from each other, one of them coming towards me. On coming up to the first one he placed himself in my way demanding a drink. I told him he was strong enough and well enough to go after water for himself. I rushed past him and made my way as rapidly as possible towards where Sergeant Hanley was stationed. When the second man came up to me and made the same request as the previous one I told him that I was carrying water for disabled men and not for those who could help themselves. The man drew his revolver telling me he was going to have a drink or he would know the reason why. I lowered the bucket placing it partly on my foot. "Now," I said, "fire away. In neither case will you get any water." I saw Hanley make a sudden motion with his left hand. He held his gun in his right hand. When he saw he had attracted my attention he motioned me to step aside, at the same time dropping on his knees and resting his gun on the upper cracker box and pointed his gun in our direction. The man still held his revolver in his hand and did not seem inclined to yield. He had his back towards Hanley and was not aware of the latter's intention. I knew Hanley was a dead shot. I also knew that when he fired it would be at this man. He kept shaking his head for me to get out of the way. I made a sudden grab for the bucket and jumped aside with my eyes turned earnestly in Hanley's direction. This sudden movement of mine caused the man to turn around and what he saw caused him suddenly to vanish. After coming to Hanley I asked him what he intended to do. He said he had been watching the men's actions and had either of them made a bad break, "I would have bored daylight through him." I was very grateful to Hanley for the interest he had taken in me but I determined to make no more trips to the river. I was becoming exceedingly tired. I quickly got rid of the water and returned the bucket to its owner. I then went to where some of my comrades were in possession of a rifle pit, and there I spent the time in conversation and wondering as to the outcome of this unequal contest. From where we were stationed we could see a large portion of the village and observe any movement the Indians might be making. As this long to be remembered day was drawing to a close we became conscious that the firing on the part of the Indians was gradually ceasing, and we began to move around with a little more freedom. About seven o'clock in the evening we noticed that the Indians were massing their ponies close to the village. We also noticed that the teepees were being rapidly torn down and the women were packing their effects and strapping them on their pack animals. As the evening grew dark they began to move slowly away from the river to the direction of the Big Horn Mountains. We tried to estimate the number of their fighting men but it was difficult to do owing to the fact that they had their families with them, a conservative estimate of the number of warriors was about 2800. A few of the Indians remained and kept up a scattering fire as if loath to give us up. As darkness closed around us the last shots came whistling over our heads. Thus a close came to one of the shortest and bloodiest engagements between the government and Indians which had taken place in recent years. With the exception of the sentries and the wounded, whose moanings could be heard at any hour of the night, our camp was wrapped in slumber. As for myself, I could have slept under almost any circumstances.

On the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> we discovered that three men, Lieutenant DeRudio, Private O'Neil, and Frank Gerard, our interpreter, had come into camp during the night. On making inquiries of Gerard I learned that during Reno's retreat these three had become separated from their respective companies. DeRudio and O'Neil had lost their horses but Gerard still retained his. On getting together they decided to remain concealed not knowing what else to do. I asked Gerard why he had not attempted to join Reno's command again, but he simply shook his head. I had him attend to my wounded hand and as he unwound the bandage he told me that he had seen two men belonging to Company A whose horses ran away with them carrying them into a large body of Indians where they disappeared and undoubtedly were put to death. Sometime after this Gerard told a strange story of General Custer and his brothers,

Tom and Boston, his nephew Anthony [sic] Reed, and Lieutenant Cook [sic]. He said that they came across a scaffold similar to others upon which Indians were buried. It was simply four poles standing in an upright position with cross poles fastened closely together on the top, with the dead on top of this were placed some cooking utensils, hunting outfit, usually consisting of a knife, bow and arrow, and if fortunate enough a gun and a little powder and food, which he could hunt with in the country through which he passed on his way to the Happy Hunting Grounds. Gerard went on to say that these five men despoiled that grave and took away such trophies as they fancied, and solemnly added that himself and Jackson were the only two left of the Company that witnessed the affair, and intimated that it was the vengeance of God that had overtaken them for this deed. Yes, we know how Jackson left the field and never stopped until he reached the Tongue River some thirty miles away. We also know that Gerard never fired a shot at the enemy but lay secreted for over forty hours, until all danger was over.

To us, of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, it was a well known fact that Lieutenant DeRudio was closely associated with one important event of history and I will here relate it.

On the night of January 14, 1858, all Europe was startled by the news that an attempt had been made to assassinate Emperor Napoleon and Empress Eugenie by the explosion of three bombs charged with fulminating mercury, which had been placed under the wheel of their carriage as they were driving home from the opera in the Rue Lepelletier. Though the Emperor and Empress escaped uninjured, an unknown number of persons were killed or wounded. The London Times in its issue of January 18, 1858, says the following statement of facts:

The assassins had provided themselves with hollow projectiles of the most deadly description and contrived to fling them on the ground under the carriage, where they instantly exploded and spread destruction among the bystanders. One of the carriage horses was killed on the spot and the other wounded. The carriage itself was broken to pieces. General Rogwet, who sat in front was slightly wounded it is said and two footmen who stood behind were dangerously hurt. A fragment of the shell passed through the Emperor's hat but did not touch him. The Empress was also unhurt. Several lancers of the escort were seriously wounded; two or three are said to have been killed. The number of persons hurt is probably not less than sixty (fourteen of them afterwards died.) Four of the chief conspirators are already in custody. They are Piere, Orsini, Soumes, and another who calls himself DaSelva, but whose real name is DeRudio. All are Italians.

Soumes was subsequently set at liberty; the other three were convicted and condemned to die by the guillotine. DeRudio had lived for some time in the town of Nottingham, England, and had married there. His wife interested the socialistic elements of that city in his behalf; they were then called chartists, and also some of the newspapers. A petition was prepared and funds were raised to enable her to go to Paris and present it to the Empress and ask her to intercede for her husband's life. This was done and a commutation of sentences followed.

The subsequent events are recorded in a Paris letter to the Times, dated March 13, 1858.

At 5:30 last evening the warrant to execute the sentence of the court of Assize, upon those convicted of the attempt in the Rue Leppelletier was received by the Procurer General. As I previously announced to you, that warrant only included Orsini and Piere. The punishment of DeRudio is commuted into penal servitude for life. Since their condemnation it was deemed proper to employ the strait-waist-coat with the three convicts, as a precautionary measure against any possible act of violence, either on themselves or those placed in contact with them. The reprieve of DeRudio rendered that restraint no longer necessary and the governor did not delay a moment in serving orders to free DeRudio from it.

When the turnkeys who were charged with the duty entered DeRudio's cell they found him buried in sleep. They shook him once or twice before he awoke. When he opened his eyes and sat up on his pallet he stared fearfully at them and for a moment seemed bewildered. He thought they came to announce that his last moments had arrived and he recoiled from their touch. "Don't be afraid," they said, "we are not going to hurt you, far from it. We bring you good news, you are to have a commutation of punishment, and we are going to take off your strait-waist-coat."

Piere and Orsini were the next day, Saturday, March 14, led to the scaffold. Both died with great bravery.

I am just informed that DeRudio is to be sent to London to serve evidence against Bernard. Bernard or Dr. Bernard, was a French chemist living in London, who was arrested and tried at the instance of the French Government for complicity in the plot. He was suspected of being the maker of the bombs. He was acquitted after a most exciting trial. DeRudio did not appear as a witness against him, yielding to representations that the entire Orsini plot had been hatched in London.

Lord Palmerston introduced a bill into parliament to restrict the right of asylum in England, but this raised such a storm of indignation that he was compelled to resign from office. This feeling, however, soon blew over, and the next year he resumed power.

DeRudio shortly afterwards received a full pardon. He returned to Nottingham and essayed to enter the lecture field, but the attempt signally failed. Notwithstanding what might be expected to be a natural curiosity to see a man who had passed through such peril there were barely twenty-five persons in the hall with a seating capacity for a thousand. Two of these men were reporters, the rest were scowling carbonaries who sat in silence.

Thinking that his life was in danger from his former associates, DeRudio came to the United States.

His military career is set as follows, in Hammerly's complete regular Army Register:

DeRudio, Charles C., born in Italy, appointed from New York, Private company A, seventy-ninth New York volunteers August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1864. Discharges October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1864. Second Lieutenant United States, colored troops November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1864. Mustered out January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1866. Second Lieutenant, Second Infantry August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1867. Appointment canceled September 20<sup>th</sup>, 1867. Appointment renewed October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1867. Unassigned April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1869. Assigned to Seventh Cavalry July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1869. First Lieutenant December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1875.

The cancellation of DeRudio's commission in 1867, it is understood at the War Department arose out of the Orsini affair being called to the attention of the officers, who, after inquiry ordered his reappointment.

It was about seven o'clock in the morning that a Crow scout came dashing into our midst with the news that a body of men were coming up the left bank of the river, but whether they were Indians or soldiers he could not tell. Major Reno then called for volunteers to go and ascertain whether they were friends or foes. The scout who had brought the report – Half Yellow Face or Two Bloody hands by name – and one of the soldiers volunteered and away they went, full speed. I might state here that another Crow scout came to us with half Yellow Face, early in the morning. He was badly wounded, being shot through the wrist and thigh, but he bore his suffering nobly. We were all in a great state of excitement at this time wondering what the moving column was. Was it the Indians coming back to finish their

deadly work? In about half an hour, the soldier returned, his horse covered with foam, with glad news that General Terry with some of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry and Gibbons [sic] with his infantry were coming. We all gave a loud shout of joy, waving our hats in the air. Terry soon made his appearance and when he had looked around on the scene of desolation he wept. He soon recovered himself, and ordered the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry to move across the Little Horn River and camp with the troops which had just arrived and gone into camp on the site of the Indian village. It was about one mile from our camp to the new one, and it took us a long while to remove the wounded soldiers as all had to be carried on rudely constructed stretchers. When we came to our new camping place we saw the position Custer was in when he made his last fight. Dead men and horses were scattered all over the ground. It was an awful sight, not on account of the dead only, but because of the mutilated condition of their bodies. The only one which was not stripped of his clothing and mutilated was General Custer. He still had on his blue shirt, buck skin pants, with the legs pushed in the tops of his long legged boots. The rest of the officers and men were gashed with knives all over their bodies and their heads crushed in with stone mallets. The bodies were turning brown from the heat of the sun and were swollen to a great size. As they were not to be buried till the next morning we turned our attention to the wounded.

The tents which the infantry had brought with them were put up for the use of these suffering men, and everything was done which could possibly be for their comfort. General Terry had brought with him some artillery and our strength made it impossible for any body of Indians to cope with us.

(To be Continued.)



**BELLE FOURCHE BEE**

**Thursday, April 9, 1914**

**CUSTER'S LAST FIGHT by Peter Thompson, Alzada, Mont.**

Peter Thompson, the author of this story, is at the present time one of the prosperous horse raisers of southeastern Montana. He enlisted in the United States Army in 1875, and was mustered out at Sturgis, South Dakota in 1880. He then moved to Lead, S. D., where he remained until 1886 when he removed to his ranch on the Little Missouri River near Alzada, Montana. This narrative is one never before published and is an authentic, unprejudiced recital of exactly what transpired up to and following the memorable Battle of the Little Big Horn.

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(Continued from last week.)

The Indians no doubt had received information of Terry's coming, which was the cause of their rapid retreat. One company of soldiers was sent out to ascertain in what direction the Indians had gone. It was one of the companies of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. There was vengeance in every man's heart on account of the horrible way in which the Indians had treated our dead.

Having a desire to get some trophy as a memento of the affair, I commenced to search the site of the Indian village, but all I could find that was easy to carry was one of our Cavalry snaps belonging to a canteen. I saw quite a number of saddles, but all the leather had been cut away. I also saw a few muzzle loading spencer carbines and gun shells of every kind. The Indians had left two teepees standing, with dead Indians inside. There were thousands of buffalo robes scattered around, a number of which were kept for the use of the wounded. The rest went up in flame and smoke together with the teepees. Quite a number of stone mallets covered with hair and blood, which had undoubtedly been used by the squaws on the heads of the dead and wounded soldiers were scattered around. The mallet is a rock made round by the action of the water in a running stream. It weighs about five or six pounds. A number of willows of sufficient length to cover the stone and form a handle are laid crosswise. The rock is laid in the center and the willows are gathered very tightly around it. They are then bound from the rock to the end of the willow, thus forming a handle. While noting these things I saw a couple of cavalymen running toward me, shouting "Indians," at the same time pointing to a body of men approaching our camp on a trot. I was inclined to run myself, but on taking a closer view, I discovered that it was the company which had been sent out on a scouting trip. Turning to the right I was surprised to see such a number of ponies lying down disabled or dead. There must have been hundreds of them lying in the brush. While I was making my way to the river I came across the body of one of the greatest scouts on the western plains, Mich Burey [sic]. He had become separated from Reno's command and fallen by the hands of the savages. While looking at the body, I heard a grunt behind me. Turning, I saw Half Yellow Face watching me. I was glad to see him as I was deeply interested in him. I asked him where he was when the fight

took place. He pointed to a spot on the opposite side of the river. It was a small flat bordered by some underbrush. He told me that when the cowardly Ree scouts started for Tongue River, the Crows came to the determination to return and fight against their bitterest foes. Secreting themselves and their ponies on the right bank of the river, they kept up a continuous fire into the village until they were discovered when they had to retreat. In the meantime, his partner had been shot through the thigh, and a short time afterwards, while taking aim, a ball struck him in the wrist making him useless as a fighter. But the hardest work of all was for Half Yellow Face to lift his partner onto a pony for he was a very heavy man. He succeeded, but none too soon, for some of their enemies had crossed the river and were trying to capture them. But with great determination he succeeded in keeping them at bay while they made their escape. He told this with a great deal of pride, that his partner had killed six while he, himself, had only killed five of the enemy. "But," said Yellow Face, "Come, I show you him." So we made our way slowly through the underbrush, to where his comrade was. He was a fine specimen of a warrior, but as I have stated before, badly wounded. He was cheerful and seemed glad to see us.

An officer and a detachment of men had been left at our late place of defense with orders to destroy all food and government property that could not be removed, and to bury all the dead. The rifle pits came into use as graves. Early on the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup> what remained of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry crossed the river to bury their dead. Some of the bodies of the officers were missing. Lieutenant Harrington's body could not be found. What had become of it, it is difficult to tell. It is supposed that the bodies of Lieutenant Porter, Sturgis, and assistant Surgeon Lord were also missing. If found they could not be recognized, owing to the horrible manner in which they were mutilated. Major Reno says concerning Harrington: "I am strongly of the opinion that he is not only dead, but that he was burned at the stake, for while the great battle was going on I and some other officers looking through field glasses saw the Indians, miles away, engaged in a war dance about three captives. They were tied to the stake, and my impression was that Harrington was one of them." But we never found any evidence that Harrington suffered such a death. But we all know that the Indians are capable of such cruelties. Major Reno makes another mistake. He says that Custer "bore down on the Indians with his handful of men for the purpose of gaining all the credit for himself. The attack which occasioned the massacre was unwarranted, because the Indians were the rightful possessors of the land and were entirely peaceable, and many a brave man fell in that fight simply to gratify Custer's ambition." Major Reno forgets that General Custer was acting under orders. This expedition was undertaken for the express purpose of driving the Indians back to their respective reservations, which they had no business to leave for the purpose of committing lawless acts against settlers. Major Reno had ample opportunity to get some credit for himself on two occasions. First when sent to attack the Indians on the right giving Custer time to collect his forces and attack the enemies flank, but he remained inactive for nearly three hours, even when urged to go to Custer's relief by two messengers sent by Custer's command. One of the messengers was Sergeant Knipe of Company C. The command was to hurry up the ammunition and reinforcements but the only effort made as far as the ammunition was concerned was by Sergeant Hanley of Company C, taking the pack mule Barnum, and also trying to comply with Custer's request. The next one to come and the last, was their trumpeter Martin, with orders to bring on reinforcements, and the pack train, undoubtedly meaning the ammunition mules of which we had twelve, carrying twenty-four boxes of cartridges. It is useless for military men to say it was impossible for Reno to do otherwise than he did. He had seven companies under his command, for Captain Benteen had joined Reno shortly after his retreat from the village, and so had Captain McDugal [sic] with pack train, making their united strength about four hundred men. I am aware of all the movements of Reno's command from the time he retreated from the village till we joined his command on the bluff. His conduct, to me seems cowardly in the extreme. His refusal to allow Captain Weir of Company D to go to Custer's relief when he begged permission and his own inaction goes to show his incapability. Major Reno says: "When we found the men dead on the battlefield they laid in such a position as to show that they fled after the first fire and the Indians pursued and shot them down, for in almost every instance they were shot in the back."

What a slander! Does he think that anyone will believe that the cavalry dismounted for the purpose of running away from mounted savages? No one will believe it. They faced their foes like men and died like heroes, unlike their traducer who fled like a coward. Again Reno says: "When I came to the body of Captain Tom Custer and saw that his heart was cut out I knew that Rain-in-the-Face had done it for Tom had him arrested for larceny of some cloth."

But it was for murder that Custer had Rain-in-the-Face arrested and he should have been hung for it, but he had escaped from the guardhouse at Fort Lincoln. Tom Custer's body was mutilated and so were all the others with the exception of General Custer. He remained just as he had been shot, with two balls in his body. Again, Major Reno says:

"General Custer lacked courage. I have known him to flourish his sword about his head and shout, 'Follow me, men! Follow me!' and when the fight began he would be found in the rear. During the rebellion I discovered him hiding behind a tree when the battle was waging."

This is the kind of talk Major Reno indulged in after the fight took place. A very unmanly act on his part. Early in the afternoon, when the bodies of officers and men had been covered by earth, orders were given to move camp five miles down the river slowly, for we had nearly fifty wounded men. The method of transporting the wounded was very simple. The only wheeled concerns we had were the several pieces of artillery brought up by Terry. Those who had been severely wounded were placed on a traveling travois. A travois is simply two long poles fastened to a horse, the same as the shafts of a cart and two ends trailing on the ground, and cross pieces fastened at suitable distances behind the horse to keep the poles from spreading. Rawhide is then stretched from pole to pole and fastened by rawhide thongs. Plenty of buffalo robes were placed on top of this. It made a fine bed and if the poles were long enough so as to have plenty of spring it was far superior to a wheeled vehicle. The two horse travois was built similarly to the single one. Only gentle horses were used for such purposes, and after what they had gone through they were all gentle enough. For my part I preferred to ride on horseback. I secured a horse that an earthquake could not excite. I experienced very curious sensations on this five mile ride. My head would spin round and I felt so sick I feared I would fall off my horse. I placed my head on the horse's neck and grasped his mane with my sound hand hanging on for dear life. An officer seeing my condition touched my arm and told me I had better get on a travois, but I only shook my head. I felt too bad to take any notice of anything that was going on around me, and glad indeed was I when we moved into camp. We remained there for twenty four hours, until the cool of the evening of the twenty-ninth. Here I would state that the only surviving thing that came from the Custer battlefield was a large buckskin colored horse belonging to Captain Keough [sic]. He was wounded in five different places and great doubts were expressed as to whether he would live or not. He did live for a great number of years afterward. His name was Comanche. On the twenty-ninth we moved down the Little Horn five miles or more. Such easy stages were very favorable to the wounded and showed great consideration on the part of General Terry.

Two messengers were sent with dispatches to General Cook's [sic] headquarters, commanding him to join forces with Terry's command at what was called the supply camp on the east side of the Yellowstone River, for the purpose of conducting a most vigorous campaign against the Indians. At this time there were no railroads or telegraph lines in the country. All dispatches and news of importance had to be carried by courier and a risky business it was. For the messenger generally had to travel by night with the stars for his guide. All the men who volunteered to do this work as far as I have learned succeeded in opening communication with the various troops in the field. What was most needed in a courier was a cool head, plenty of courage and the best horse that could be found. They would sometimes make eighty miles or more in twelve hours. On the 30<sup>th</sup> we again moved slowly down the river bank and were told that the steamer "Far West" had succeeded in coming up the Big Horn River to within a short distance of the mouth of the Little Horn. As darkness came on bonfires were lighted to guide us to where the boat lay but it was nearly ten o'clock when we reached it. The wounded were carried on board while the cavalry and infantry camped a short distance away. Then we could see why Terry had been twenty-four hours too late in coming to relief. The boat had to carry Gillon's [sic] command from the east side of the Yellowstone River to the west. A cavalry horse is a hard animal to manage if he sees strange sights and hears strange sounds. On the account Terry lost one day in the operation. In traveling, infantry cannot make so many miles a day as cavalry, but on this occasion the infantry begged to be allowed to make a forced march, but their request was not granted them. The reason that Terry's and Custer's forces did not unite at the point agreed upon was that Custer gained a day by long forced marches from time he left the Yellowstone on the 21<sup>st</sup> until he struck the Indians on the Little Horn on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Had the two forces united and then brought on an engagement with the Indians the object of the expedition would have been accomplished. With the number of men and heavy guns Terry had with him, united with the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry they would have been able to

subdue the Indians and made them return to their reservations. But on account of a blunder 267 officers and men lost their lives, and the Indians were allowed to escape. It took years to remedy the mistake.

The campaign of '76 cost over a million dollars, and was an utter failure. Had the spirit of unity, instead of rivalry prevailed, which was so manifest in one of the officers in the field, the outcome would have been very different. Where was General Crook all this time? Could he be unaware of the existence of the Indians who had attacked him on the Rosebud on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June, only eight days before Custer had the fight with them? It would take a good deal of persuasion to convince the men that he was hunting the enemy.

We laid over all day the 31<sup>st</sup> [sic] of June and placed on board the steamer all supplies not needed by the troops. It was only two days march from where we were to the supply camp.

The wounded horse, Comanche, and one of General Custer's horses were put on board the steamer.

It was on the morning of the 1<sup>st</sup> of July that the "Far West" moved out of the Big Horn, into the Yellowstone River while the cavalry, infantry, and artillery moved down the west bank to a place opposite the supply camp. The steamboat was utilized to carry the troops across the river. But for the number of wounded on board the crossing of the river would have been very pleasant. They all tried to be cheerful but it was plain to be seen that some of them were not long for this world. It was late in the evening when we reached the camp. The wounded were transferred to hospital tents which were large and roomy, and were attended by doctors who gave them every attention. On July 2<sup>nd</sup> the remainder of the command arrived on the west bank of the river. These were also transferred across the river in the steamer, first the horses, mules, guns and supplies arriving and lastly the men. We laid in camp all the next day, but on July 4<sup>th</sup> we commenced to steam down the Yellowstone River. Captain Marsh of the steamer endeared himself to all on board by his fund of humor and his kind attentions to the wounded.

The steamer was well protected in case of an attack by the Indians. The pilot house was covered with strong sheet iron. The first deck was piled around with cord wood.

Our first stopping place was at the mouth of Tongue River, where we laid over for about two hours. This gave us time to hunt our blankets. Here a little incident occurred which shows how unpopular a man may make himself. When the steamer touched the bank, a man named Billy Jackson jumped on board and rushed up to the captain who was stationed on the upper deck. As he went past where the wounded were lying, a growl of savage rage greeted him which made him quicken his pace. One of the men drew his revolver with the evident intention of shooting him, but Billy was too quick for him. The impression seemed to prevail amongst the men that he was in part responsible for the disaster which had overtaken General Custer. He led the five companies one mile below the proper fording place which was the one where Watson and I attempted to enter the village. How Jackson escaped from the boat without detection I do not know. I watched very closely for him after getting my blankets. I determined to speak to him if possible but my plan failed. As we steamed down the river I learned that when Jackson and the Ree scouts returned with the information that the Indians were thirty miles away, and later with the news of Custer's defeat, the citizens teamsters demanded higher wages and guns with which to defend themselves. It was a difficult matter to settle but was finally adjusted satisfactorily.

Our next stopping place was Fort Beauford [sic], where ice was taken on board and one of the men named King, who had died was buried. Fort Beauford is located on the Big Missouri River. The river was greatly swollen by the recent heavy rains so that when we started again we went at great speed. Wood and bacon were fed to the hungry furnaces. As we were speeding along we saw a large herd of buffalo rush over the bank into the river just ahead of the steamer. We went plowing through among them, but it did not check their course for the mass behind kept pushing those in front. No doubt numbers of them were drowned.

Captain Marsh told us that they were undoubtedly stampeded by Indians as he had seen the savages through his glasses.



I will here relate an incident that has always remained a mystery to me. We had in our company a man by the name of St. John. Why they called him "saint" I cannot tell. He appeared to me to be nearer related to fallen angels. He had been released from the guardhouse in order that he might serve with his company on the campaign. He was a good hunter and while on the expedition prior to the 12<sup>th</sup> of May he was allowed to leave his command for the purpose of killing such game as he wished to. He, of course, was not the only one who went on these hunting trips but he is the one of whom I wish to speak. He did not possess a knife and it is almost as bad for a hunter to be without a knife as for a ship to sail without a compass. I overheard him speaking of his need, and feeling that I had no use for mine, gave him it. There was a name marked on the one side of the handle, and the initials of a name on the other. An oblong place was broken from the end of the handle. I knew that St. John had the knife when he went into battle on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June. I walked back to the rear of the boat and took a seat near Bennett, who seemed glad to have me beside him.

While looking around I saw an Indian leaning against the wheelhouse. He had a bandage on one of his arms which showed he had been wounded. I did not recognize him as one of our scouts which made me take particular notice of him. He had two rifles in his possession and attached to the belt which he wore was a knife scabbard in which I saw the knife I had given St. John.

To say I was astonished is putting it mildly. To make sure I moved closer toward him and the closer I got the more certain of the handle and the name marked in plain letters were visible. I wondered how he could have gotten possession of it. I began to study the face of the Indian but he soon noticed my attention and seemed to avoid my gaze. I determined to obtain possession of the knife if possible and I thought of the coming night when I might have a chance to get it while he was asleep. I forgot that we were nearing a small place called Fort Berthold. As we came in sight of the fort we saw an Indian woman by the water's edge washing some material. There was a little child a few feet above her putting out its hands to help her out of danger, as our steamer was hugging the bank very closely. We were wondering whether the wheel would strike the woman or not. I saw two rifles which had been thrown from the boat fall on the bank of the river. Looking around to see who had thrown them I saw the Indian I have already mentioned make a leap from the boat and reach the bank in safety. I noticed the squaw still standing by the water's edge unhurt and also saw the Indian scramble up the bank, take his guns, and go away. Was he a hostile or was he friendly? How did he get the knife, and why did he leap from the boat when it was going full speed? These are questions I cannot answer.

Late on the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup> of July we arrived at Bismarck, where we laid over till next morning, when we continued our journey to the landing at Fort Lincoln. We found that we were the first to bring the news of the disaster. When the news was broken to the widows of the dead officers and soldiers it was a sight which brought tears to all eyes.

The wounded were removed to the hospitals and the dead were buried in the graveyard on the hill.

Poor Bennett died on the afternoon of the 5<sup>th</sup> of July with my hand clasping his. So died a man who always gave me good advice and always tried to follow the advice he gave.

(THE END.)