Reconnaissance Survey of Indian-U.S. Army Battlefields of the Northern Plains

by Jerome A. Greene

The Battle of Wolf Mountains, Montana Territory

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of the Northern Plains

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Indian Wars Battlefields of the Northern Plains
Introduction

This Reconnaissance Survey of U.S. Army-Indian Battlefields of the Northern Plains was completed by the Cultural Resources and National Register Program Services Intermountain Support Office-Denver, for the American Battlefield Protection Program. The study focuses on twenty-three sites of army-Indian battles and skirmishes that occurred between the 1850s and 1890 in what are now the states of Wyoming, Montana, South Dakota, and Nebraska. Together, the sites represent the ultimate manifestation of culture conflict that prevailed in that region of the trans-Mississippi West during the latter half of the nineteenth century, and in particular reflect the armed resistance of Native Americans to United States Indian policy and to the exploration and settlement practices of Euro-Americans during that period. While significant in that context, as well as in the context of the wars and campaigns in which they occurred, the battles (and thus their sites) additionally connote the continuous demise of tribal populations under the direct and unrelenting military pressure of the federal government. Many of the engagements also represent important events in the histories of the affected tribes as they resisted the incursions of miners, settlers, entrepreneurs, and soldiers. Moreover, many battlefield sites presently exist in remote areas, on public and private property that possess varying degrees of integrity. In some instances, the sites have been partially cultivated, and in others they remain relatively undisturbed. Yet many are increasingly subjected to relic collecting activities as the region attracts more visitors and new residents. As elsewhere, the prospect of imminent development threatens Indian wars battlefield sites, and it was therefore important to initiate this study while these historic properties remain relatively pristine.

A few of these battle sites have been previously recorded and evaluated for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The Powder River Battle or Reynolds Fight (24PR89), Sibley Fight (48SH486), and Tongue River Heights (48SH951) have all been determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The Bates Fight (48HO46) was enrolled in the National Register of Historic Places in 1974. The Baker Battle (24TL93) has been recorded and has been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. According to the Montana Historical Society, the nomination was not approved because the State Historic Preservation Office
was unable to determine a precise location of the site. The Slim Buttes Battle has been recorded and a National Register nomination form has been completed. The South Dakota State Historic Preservation Officer has not received permission from the owner to formally nominate the battle site.

The purpose of this reconnaissance survey was to identify, locate, and evaluate the integrity of battle and skirmish sites between the U.S. Army and various tribes of Indians on the Northern Plains. This information will provide fundamental data about these engagements for inclusion in the baseline data files of the American Battlefield Protection Program. It can later be used to help nominate sites to the National Register of Historic Places when requested by property owners. Previously well-chronicled battles such as Little Bighorn and Rosebud were not included (except contextually) in favor of lesser known battles and skirmishes that nonetheless contributed significantly to the course of Indian-government relations in the region of the Northern Plains. Further, it was deemed essential to consider sites representative of the several period conflicts that constituted the broad range of warfare in that region. Twenty-three representative engagements were thus selected, reflecting (1) the treaty period of the early 1850s through the early 1870s; (2) the period of climactic warfare during the mid- to late 1870s; and (3) what might be termed the early reservation period from the 1880s forward. Within this framework, most of the engagements considered reflect the height of Northern Plains warfare, the combat of the period 1876-1877 known as the Great Sioux War.

Methodology consisted of performing limited background research, followed by a brief site visit. Background research in government documents, books, articles, as well as in selected manuscript and microfilm sources, was conducted in private collections and libraries in the Denver area, the latter consisting of the special collections of the University of Colorado Libraries at Boulder, the Western History Collections in the Denver Public Library, and the National Park Service library (including interlibrary loans) at the Denver Service Center. In all instances, every effort was made to locate and consider Indian participant accounts of the battles/skirmishes under study and to incorporate those accounts in the study. Site visitation generally followed consultation with persons in the localities in which particular sites are located. When required, local landowners were consulted for permission to enter their property to find and/or visit certain battle sites. For sites on public land, an
effort was made to consult with the appropriate administering agency office before visitation occurred, and in several instances officials of those offices graciously provided assistance in reaching the properties. For nearly every site visited, the land was walked over to gain information respecting historical troop and Indian movements, estimates of overall acreage, topography, condition, and potential threats, the few exceptions to this procedure occurring when available documentation did not sufficiently define the tract or the battle movements that took place thereon. Each site was photographed (most from several perspectives) then plotted on the appropriate USGS map. Data for each site was then recorded on an inventory form addressing specifics and significance of the particular combat, information about landscape features, ownership, present condition, site integrity, monumentation, interpretation, viewshed, boundary, and principal sources of documentation. The forms were then submitted to the appropriate State Historic Preservation Officer for comment and incorporation into their statewide inventory. Importantly, these site visits did not involve any archeological survey work or use of metal detection equipment. It is recommended that all the sites identified in this report be intensively surveyed by archeologists to verify the battle sites.

Based on terminology gleaned from “Civil War Sites in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia: A Regional Assessment of Fifteen Battlefields (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service Interagency Resources Division, 1991),” the component elements of battle progress are designated “encounter, confrontation, violent interaction, and disengagement.” The terms “Core Area” and “Study Area” respectively connote the relative areas of intensive combat (where the component elements happened) versus places where support facilities and activities might be accommodated in the battlefield environment. Because of the surprise-assault nature of army combat techniques typically employed during the Indian campaigns, wherein troop columns often operated great distances from, and therefore independently of, their supply bases, most engagements took place in tightly confined areas most often associated with the presence of a village. With the possible exception of routes of approach by army troops (or by Indian warriors in rare cases), most of these battle sites encompassed all aspects of pre-battle preparedness, as well as the fighting, in a single, relatively constricted, core area and are thusly treated herein.
Finally, many of the battlefields considered in this study lie on private land. Some private landowners are clearly not interested in forging ties with government entities to provide for the formal study or interpretation of these resources, although some might profitably be approached on a case-by-case basis to entertain options for making the sites available for interpretive purposes. For those battlefields located on public lands, however, efforts to work with the administering agencies and planning offices might gainfully result in the development of interpretive packages designed to best convey the history and significance of these sites to the American public. Depending on results of evaluations for suitability and feasibility that would normally follow, the possibility of creating interpretive linkages among certain sites—those pertaining to the Great Sioux War of 1876-1877, for example—might be explored with an eye to creating interpretive corridors that could enhance the importance of this history for all Americans.
With the beginning of migration of large numbers of Anglo-Americans into the Trans-Mississippi West during the 1840s came the first sustained contact between United States military forces and the diverse groups of indigenous peoples who inhabited the Northern and Southern Plains. The increasing presence of white Americans intent on settlement and exploitation of fur and mineral resources impacted the tribes not only by gradually constricting their hunting territory, but by creating intensive competition among them for more limited game resources, thereby aggravating existing intertribal schisms or promoting new ones.

Following the War with Mexico, the United States government negotiated treaties in the 1850s and 1860s with representatives of the various plains tribes. These agreements attempted without success to restrict the Indians to designated reservations and thus remove them from the areas of principal migration and settlement. In return, the Indians were to receive stated benefits, including education and annuities of food and clothing. Generally, many treaty promises of the government went unfulfilled. Just as important, specifics of the agreements were often unclear to people unfamiliar with the subtleties of the English language or with legal vagaries in the documents.

Facing mounting cultural uncertainty, some tribes, or elements of them that did not subscribe to the treaty conventions (or were unaware of them), forcibly resisted the encroachment of white Americans and the troops sent to protect them. Others, reckoning with the challenge in ways best suited to advance their particular interests, aligned themselves with the government.

The continued traffic west, interrupted only by the hiatus of the Civil War from 1861-1865, presaged a period of contention and conflict between certain tribes on the one hand and the army, as the instrument of the United States government, on the other.
Northern Plains Cultures

On the Northern Plains, especially the area presently comprising the states of Montana, Wyoming, North and South Dakota, and Nebraska, the decades of warfare between troops and Indians mainly involved but a handful of tribes, some of whose own expansionistic designs had been superseded by those of white Americans. Among these were the Lakotas and Cheyennes, large groups of Siouan- and Algonkian-speaking peoples, respectively, who played dominant roles in the conflicts with the army from the 1850s to the 1890s. Both peoples had migrated west beginning in the mid-1700s from the prairie region in the vicinity of the Great Lakes, both pushed by neighboring tribes as they sought to contend with a burgeoning white population, while coincidentally drawn by the availability of horses among the western tribes.

West of the Missouri River, these people joined plains inhabitants like the Algonkian-speaking Arapahos and Blackfeet, whose forbears had seemingly moved from the east in ancient times. They also encountered the Crows, a Siouan-speaking tribe whose numbers had previously been decimated by disease. Historically affiliated with more sedentary peoples to the east, the Crows by the late 1700s hunted over the broad expanses of southeastern Montana and northern Wyoming, where their seasonal peregrinations for game brought frequent contact with neighboring groups like the Blackfeet and Arapahos, as well as the Lakotas and Cheyennes. A tribe that played an important yet somewhat less central role during the Northern Plains Indian wars was the Northern Shoshonis, a plateau people of eastern Idaho and western Wyoming. Longtime enemies of the Arapahos, in particular, part of the Shoshoni tribe in 1876 then friendly with the Crows provided scouts during the campaigns against the Lakotas and Cheyennes.

Within decades of the arrival of the Lakotas and Cheyennes on the Northern Plains, a Plains Culture evolved based on the omnipresent buffalo, the primary subsistence staple and ultimate cultural fixture that embraced numerous tribes. As the tribes followed the herds for sustenance, the Lakotas and Cheyennes, as well as the Crows, Blackfeet, Shoshonis, Arapahos, and other groups entered a period of increasing intertribal competition for game, guns, horses, and territory. And as white hegemony grew before
and following the Civil War, it brought increased intertribal conflict. Elements of some of the tribes moved south or pushed farther west; the Cheyennes and Arapahos divided into northern and southern groups that nonetheless retained familial affinities, while tribes of Lakotas, like the Hunkpapas and Oglalas, occupied remote and isolated parts of eastern Montana. Through intermarriage, the Northern Cheyennes, Northern Arapahos, and Lakotas (also known as the Teton Sioux, and composed of bands of Oglalas, Hunkpapas, Minneconjous, Brulés, Sans Arcs, Two Kettles, and Blackfeet Sioux) by the mid-nineteenth century maintained strong cultural ties, often living in proximity to each other and participating in mutual ceremonial activities.

These cultural/social connections also proved to be the antecedents of loose military alliances among these people as they contended with such neighboring tribes as the Crows and Shoshonis (and later with U.S. troops). As intertribal warfare escalated on the plains, smaller tribes found themselves squeezed territorially by larger ones and gravitated to the federal government as an ally and potential means of survival. Thus, tribes like the Crows and Shoshonis—themselves former mutual enemies—readily served as scouts against such traditional adversaries as the Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos in the military campaigns following the Civil War.
Treaties concluded between the United States and the Indians of the Northern Plains in 1851 and 1868 attempted to segregate the tribes from each other as well as to remove them from the major arteries of white emigration. The accord of 1851, signed near Fort Laramie by representatives of the United States and representatives of the Lakotas, Cheyennes, Arapahos, Assiniboines, Crows, and other tribes, fixed specific regions in which each group was to peacefully reside. The government thought it had gained concessions for building roads and army posts in the Indians’ domain in return for presents and promised annuities for the tribes. (A similar pact in 1853 affected tribes of the southern plains in a like manner.) Beyond questions of whether tribesmen of alien value systems clearly comprehended the specifics of the instrument, a flaw in the government’s rationale of dealing with the Indians was that Lakota leaders who signed the convention possessed no authority to speak for their kin in assorted bands that either did not attend or refused to endorse the proceedings. Again, in 1868, in the wake of mounting conflict between the army and the Sioux and Cheyennes, the government convened another assemblage at Fort Laramie in which it acceded to the Indians’ demands for the withdrawal of troops from lands in northern Wyoming and southeastern Montana and attempted to further define tribal boundaries. Most significant as it affected the course of Lakota/Northern Cheyenne/Northern Arapaho-government relations was the creation of the Great Sioux Reservation, embracing what is now the western half of the state of South Dakota, and the designation of adjoining areas in present Wyoming and Montana as “unceded hunting grounds,” on which the tribes could presumably live and hunt forever. Despite a spate of contributing events, it was the establishment of the reservation and the Indian peoples’ resistance to settlement upon it, that proved the ultimate cause for the long period of conflict with the army that followed.
The Character of Warfare

As preface to the history of Northern Plains warfare, a few comments about the character of army-Indian combat are appropriate. The specific nature of conflict between soldiers and Indians was unique and afforded some major differences in the way each group of combatants had traditionally conducted warfare. Within their particular cultural spheres, the Indians, operating more or less individually in combat, presented a guerilla style of surprise, ambush, and decoy that was anomalous to anything troops had been trained to expect. In open combat—that is, on battlefields where warriors might initiate contests usually far from village communities—the fighting consisted of aggressive assaults much in the character of age-old intertribal warfare, wherein parties of individually motivated warriors driven by competitiveness sought war honors in attacking either small groups of soldiers, or rarely, if their numbers permitted, large military columns. Tactically, warriors advantaged themselves of the peculiarities of the terrain in such encounters, striking forth quickly in small groups as opportunities and topography dictated, then melting away just as quickly to strike repeatedly in similar fashion. While through the use of firearms the Indians could inflict sizable casualties in such offensive engagements, their primary incentive in the confrontations appears to have been achievement of status through the conventional war honors approach.

Almost universally paramount among the Northern Plains tribes was the non-lethal feature of "counting coup," by which means a man achieved war honors and subsequent heroic status within a tribe by striking or touching an enemy and getting away unhurt, rather than by killing him (although coups might also be counted on the dead bodies of antagonists). A man's position with his band was enhanced based on the number of coups he tallied, and which were either claimed via oath or witnessed by other battle participants. Other means of distinction in combat consisted of wresting a weapon from an adversary's hands, stealing a horse, and rescuing a downed comrade from the clutches of the enemy. Less creditable were scalping and killing. However, in defensive combat initiated by an army assault upon a village, the war honors motivation took second place to the security of families; in these instances—which were common during the period of
the Indian wars—motivation most assuredly became the protection and defense of one’s home and loved ones. Certainly instinctively, the infliction of casualties upon the invaders in an attempt to drive them away while guarding the escape of noncombatants took precedence over all else under such circumstances.

For the army, the *modus operandi* for the conduct of warfare against Indians consisted of adapting mostly conventional procedures to the existing landscape and going after the tribesmen under the premise of “total warfare.” This concept though rarely specified during the period, in actuality represented but a refinement and redefinition of military practice as respected army attacks on Indians that had occurred during pre-Civil War days. “Total war,” as it evolved in the postwar period, carried over onto the plains warfare procedures garnered from Civil War operations, notably those in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia and in the Atlanta Campaign in 1864 and 1865. During the latter enterprise, for example, Union troops not only breached the Confederate military defenses protecting Atlanta, but sought to destroy all of the city’s potential war resources, especially its vital features as a supply, manufacturing,
transportation, and communications center. The campaign resulted in the relentless devastation of the city and, during the subsequent march to the sea, laying waste to bridges, farms, railroads, mills, homes, livestock, foodstores, buildings, and all forms of public and personal property that might be susceptible to war use. While these guerrilla-style operations did not purposefully mark civilians for death (although some killing occurred), they traumatized and demoralized with their destruction, inflicting costly psychological turmoil among the population.

Propounded during the postwar era by Lieutenant General Philip H. Sheridan, commander of the Division of the Missouri, the unorthodox methodology was quickly applied to most of the Northern and Southern Plains tribes. Total warfare, by definition, involved the total destruction of an enemy's resources to inhibit his ability to conduct future warfare. Seemingly, on the plains, the concept promoted a racial component, too, for by the nature of military surprise attacks entire families were immediately put in harm's way, and the deaths of noncombatants (women, children, and the elderly) as well as combatants, while usually incidental, seemed of little consequence to many army commanders in the pursuit of victory.

In its application against Indians, total warfare thus embraced the attack on, and destruction of, entire villages, including homes, livestock, food and material supplies. Columns of troops closed on a region where the targeted Indians were believed to be located, then smaller bodies of soldiers, usually cavalry, were sent forward to carry out the strike against isolated villages. Winter became the ideal time for such deployment because the tribesmen, otherwise highly mobile, were restricted by freezing temperatures to long periods in camp. But regardless of the season,
the surprise assault on villages—usually at dawn when the villagers slept—coupled with the simultaneous capture or dispersal of the pony herds became the common army tactic of the Indian wars period. And although individual commanders might sometimes admonish their troops against the killing of noncombatants, such losses inevitably happened and were an accepted result. In fact, most army assaults began with troops, on direction of officers, indiscriminately shooting into the tipis in which both warriors and their families were sheltered. Following the initial assaults, the troops burned and otherwise destroyed the lodges and their contents. From all evidence, such attacks instilled terror and psychological torment among the Indians so subjected. The army justified these assaults as being necessary because the resistant tribes seldom remained stationary and usually avoided direct encounters with the troops; arguably, they shortened the warfare and in the long run preserved life, for they imminently succeeded in forcing the tribesmen onto reservations.

Another factor that weighed heavily against the tribes as they sought to survive against the intense military prosecution was the superiority in firepower with which the soldiers facilitated their combat missions. During the period of initial confrontation in the 1840s and early 1850s, the Indians had relatively few firearms; their traditional armament consisted of bows and arrows, stone-headed war clubs, iron trade knives, and lances, weapons used in the normal course of intertribal conflicts. Indeed, these traditional weapons continued to be used to greater or lesser extent throughout the post-Civil War period of western combat. Increased trade brought them more firearms in the form of black powder muzzle-loading pieces, however, and in subsequent years they were able to acquire through barter and warfare technologically improved rifles, carbines, and pistols. Yet limited access to ammunition and replacement parts correspondingly affected the Indians’ long term chances for success in dealing with the troops (notwithstanding such major isolated victories as at Rosebud Creek and Little Bighorn in 1876).

In the long run, they lost militarily because of the sheer reality of warrior demographics vis-a-vis that of the soldiers.

Conversely, no major problems concerning armament plagued the soldiers, who since the 1850s advanced into battle with the tribes with progressively improved weaponry. At the beginning of the
period, military small arms consisted of smoothbore muskets charged with black powder and lead balls; by the aftermath of the Civil War, infantry troops in the West carried breech-loading rifled muskets (rifles) that used less cumbersome metallic cartridge ammunition. Cavalry troops employed the shorter yet similar pieces called carbines, as well as side revolvers. Added to this, commands ranging the plains and mountains in pursuit of Indians often dragged an artillery complement composed of one or more cannon, howitzers, or Gatling guns. And although the tribes occasionally mustered sufficient forces to defeat the soldiers, it was always because of the presence of superior numbers of warriors and not because of superior firepower.
Warfare of the 1850s

Most of the combat scenarios played out from the early 1850s to the 1890s between troops and Indians reflected elements of these attributes of armed encounter. It was against the backdrop afforded by the treaties of 1851 and 1868 that the military campaigns against the tribesmen, and their resulting specific combats, took place. Three years after the first accord, bands of Lakotas assembled near Fort Laramie to receive rations promised in the treaty. Relations between the Indians and the soldiers were strained following a confrontation in the summer of 1853 in which several Sioux were killed by the troops. Tensions continued to mount. On August 14, 1854, following the complaint of a Mormon emigrant that an Indian in the Brulé camp had killed his cow, a squad of twenty-nine soldiers of Company G, Sixth Infantry, and an interpreter, all under Brevet Second Lieutenant John L. Grattan marched out to the village to arrest the guilty tribesman. Grattan argued with the chief, Conquering Bear, then ordered his men to open fire. As the chief fell mortally wounded, the warriors turned on the soldiers, killing all but one who made his way back to the fort before dying. The Indians considered attacking the garrison at Fort Laramie, but instead moved away from the area.

In view of what came next, the Grattan fight became a catalyst for the tenor of Lakota-government relations over ensuing decades. A punitive expedition against the Indians followed, headed by Brigadier General William S. Harney, designed to discipline them not only for the Grattan affair but for mounting depredations against citizens along the overland trails. In August 1855, Harney entered the Sioux country with close to 600 men of the Second Dragoons, Sixth and Tenth infantry regiments, and the Fourth Artillery. Meantime, attempting to prevent war, the Bureau of Indian Affairs through its agents called for the Sioux to assemble below the North Platte River near Fort Laramie; tribesmen remaining north of that stream would be considered hostile. Many Lakotas complied. Villages of Brulés, Minneconjous, and Oglalas, with some Northern Cheyennes—the former headed by Little Thunder, successor to Conquering Bear, and containing men responsible for the recent depredations—did not conform and camped north of the Platte on Blue Water Creek, near the emigrant rendezvous at Ash Hollow,
Nebraska Territory. There on September 3, in one of the largest and most important army-Indian encounters, Harney’s command struck them, his mounted arm coordinating its movement with that of the infantry in delivering the tribesmen a devastating and demoralizing blow. The day-long fighting, which occurred in a spacious hilly area bordering the Blue Water, yielded eighty-five dead Indians compared to but four killed of Harney’s command. In addition, many women and children were captured. Harney then marched his men on to Fort Laramie before pushing north and east through the Sioux country to the Missouri River, his troops proving an intimidating presence for scattered bands of tribesmen in the aftermath of the Blue Water. The significance of the Battle of the Blue Water was profound. In addition to the human and material losses sustained by the Indians, coming in the wake of the Grattan defeat it set the tone of mutual distrust and enmity that characterized relations between the government and the Lakotas and Cheyennes for the balance of the nineteenth century.

Those feelings became compounded during the years immediately following the Blue Water encounter by events occurring on the southern plains, principally affecting the Cheyennes. Responding to reports of attacks on emigrants as well as on neighboring tribes, troops of the First Cavalry struck a Cheyenne camp on the Platte River in Nebraska, killing ten people. In 1857, Colonel Edwin V. Sumner led a column from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and on July 29 met some 300 Cheyenne warriors at the Solomon River. A saber charge scattered the Indians, the attack cowing the people while nonetheless promoting latent retaliatory urges among the younger men that would surface within a few years. The threatening implications of Sumner’s fight with the Cheyennes in Kansas were not lost among their brethren to the north, and as national events focused increasingly on sectional matters leading to the Civil War, military attention accordingly turned to the East.
Warfare of the 1860s

During the years 1861 to 1865, however, two episodes redirected attention to Indian affairs on the plains and proved ominous portents of coming events. The first consisted of the outbreak of the Santee, or Eastern, Sioux, in Minnesota following years of misdeeds by whites who encroached on their lands and cheated them of their annuities. Warfare erupted in August, 1862, and lasted more than a month, during which some 800 white settlers died and many more were captured by warriors led by Little Crow until state troops under Colonel Henry H. Sibley finally defeated them and halted the violence. Many of the Sioux participants fled west into Dakota, and their accounts of the Minnesota war further fired the spirits of the Lakotas. These conditions caused Major General John Pope, commander of the Department of the Northwest, to send cooperating columns to protect the Dakota settlements while impressing the western Sioux. One led by Sibley and consisting of Minnesota troops succeeded in finding and battling the Santees and their Yanktonais Sioux kinsmen into submission during the summer of 1863; the other, composed of Nebraska and Iowa soldiers under Brigadier General Alfred Sully, moved up the Missouri toward the villages of the Lakotas before turning northeast to coordinate with Sibley. In early September, Sully’s command fell on a large body of Santees at Whitestone Hill in present eastern North Dakota, inflicting death to 300 warriors and capturing 250 noncombatants. Sully lost twenty-two soldiers killed and fifty wounded in the fighting.

In the wake of this catastrophic attack, some chiefs sought peace, although Whitestone Hill steeled most for further resistance and proved a harbinger of the years of warfare to follow. To prevent further threats to settlers, the army strategically located a number of forts from roughly eastern Dakota Territory to the Yellowstone River. Furthermore, another campaign under General Sully, in command of troops from Minnesota, Iowa, Dakota, and Wisconsin, sought through a show of strength to intimidate the Western Sioux and to crush resistance to his presence among them. On July 28, 1864, Sully found the Indians encamped in a badlands area called Killdeer Mountains, in present western North Dakota, where more than a thousand warriors faced his troops. Aided by howitzers, Sully’s force prevailed in a
day-long combat that resulted in still more Indian deaths and with minimal losses inflicted among the troops. Intermittently harassed by the angry tribesmen, Sully then pressed on to the Yellowstone River, where his troops and artillery dealt them even more casualties. Finally, beset by dwindling rations, scarce water, and starving animals, Sully turned east and by early September was homeward bound, his campaign having succeeded in yet further antagonizing the Lakotas.

The second episode with momentous consequence for government-Indian relations in the north consisted of the horrific destruction of a village of Cheyenne Indians at Sand Creek, Colorado Territory, by militia troops under Colonel John Chivington. Largely peaceable since Sumner’s prosecution of them seven years earlier, despite the movement of miners and settlers through their lands to the Rocky Mountain gold fields, the Cheyennes and Arapahos by early 1864 had through fraud lost the lands given them in the Treaty of 1851, and the governor of Colorado Territory was demanding their restriction to a reserve on the upper Arkansas River. With no sustaining evidence, yet fearing impending hostilities by the Cheyennes, Governor John Evans ordered the Indians punished for stealing livestock. Attacks on them by detachments of Chivington’s men brought retaliatory raids by the Cheyennes and their Arapaho allies, and the warfare spread to the Kansas frontier and escalated to include warriors from adjacent bands of Sioux, Kiowas, and Comanches. By November, however, a body of Cheyennes under Chief Black Kettle, still desirous of peace and needful of supplies, settled on a tract near Fort Lyon, Colorado, where, according to a proclamation by the governor, they would be safe from attack by the troops. On the 29th, Chivington with about 700 men of the First and Third militia regiments accompanied by a brace of howitzers found them encamped at Sand Creek in eastern Colorado. Using a technicality as pretext for his action, he surrounded and attacked the village of approximately 500 people. Some of the Indians put up a defense that quickly collapsed; the others fled in terror as the troops cut them down. Of the 200 or so dead among the tribesmen, most were women and children. Although officials later judged Chivington’s action “a foul and dastardly massacre,” news of the butchery at Sand Creek swept like wildfire through the plains, and in the north members of the Lakota bands as well as those of the Northern Cheyennes and Arapahos, many of whom had friends and
relatives among the dead, prepared to respond in kind when opportunities presented. One cannot underestimate the significance of Sand Creek as it impacted Indian-white relations immediately and over succeeding decades. Coming almost in tandem with Sully’s offensive against them in the wake of the Minnesota war, Sand Creek further mobilized the tribes for a major conflict with the soldiers that now seemed inevitable.

Following Sand Creek, events quickened on the Northern Plains. Vengeful parties of Cheyennes, Sioux, and Arapahos struck back violently early in 1865, notably attacking Julesburg on the South Platte River in Colorado. Meantime, farther north, bands of Lakotas and Cheyennes drawn by prospects for hunting and trade continued a decades-long encroachment onto Crow treaty lands in western Dakota (present Wyoming) and Montana territories and were living along the headwaters of the Tongue and Powder rivers. Compounding this, in the early 1860s an entrepreneur named John Bozeman blazed a road northwest from near Fort Laramie through this same country to the gold camp of Virginia City, Montana. Prospectors who passed over the Bozeman Trail soon conflicted with the ubiquitous Sioux and Cheyennes, as did soldiers sent to protect the emigrant crossing of the North Platte River at present day Casper, Wyoming. The numerous scattered attacks along the mail and telegraph lines, as well as repeated skirmishes with troops from Fort Laramie and other posts, culminated in late July, 1865, in the Platte Bridge and Red Buttes Fights, in which a detachment of twenty-seven Kansas cavalymen headed by Second Lieutenant Caspar W. Collins, attempting to reinforce the escort of an incoming wagon train, was attacked soon after leaving their post near the crossing of the North Platte River. Both Collins’s party, as well as the wagon train escort under Sergeant Amos Custard, came under attack by hundreds of warriors. Custard’s command was wiped out at Red Buttes, while most of Collins’s party made it back to the post, the lieutenant among the killed.

Punishment of the tribes for Julesburg and for similar raids elsewhere along the South Platte, as well as protecting the emigrant routes, motivated the Indian campaign of 1865 headed by Brigadier General Patrick E. Connor. Connor, who had destroyed a Shoshoni village at Bear River in 1863, now drove his command north from Fort Laramie in late July, intending to cooperate with columns
under Colonel Nelson Cole and Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Walker. With approximately 700 men of Iowa, Ohio, California, and Michigan cavalry, and including contingents of Pawnee and Omaha scouts, Connor’s command, with a complement of artillery and a large wagon train, lumbered north on the Bozeman Road. On Powder River, the troops halted to build Fort Connor and during the following week skirmished with Northern Cheyenne warriors. Moving out with a smaller and more mobile command, including the scouts, Connor on August 29 found and destroyed a village of approximately 1500 Arapahos under Chief Black Bear camped on Tongue River. The fighting raged for several hours, the troops driving the Indians out of their camp and burning the lodges before withdrawing with only the fire from their howitzers keeping the warriors at bay. The Battle of Tongue River produced casualties of at least sixty-three killed among the Indians, compared to minimal losses for the troops. Two days later, the Arapahos encountered the nearby civilian surveying expedition of James A. Sawyers, intent on establishing a linkage to the Bozeman Road from Sioux City, Iowa, and attacked it, keeping that party and its military escort of Michigan cavalry under siege for two weeks from August 31 to September 12, when relief arrived from Connor’s force. Despite the length of the encounter, casualties in the Sawyers Battle were light on both sides.

Meanwhile, the other columns of Connor’s expedition rendezvoused and on August 28 reached a point on the Powder River approximately fifty miles above its confluence with the Yellowstone. Beginning in September, the combined columns of Kansas and Missouri troops faced repeated traumas in the form of starvation, alternating soaring and plunging temperatures that killed hundreds of their animals, and Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapaho warriors incensed at the presence of the soldiers in their midst. A major encounter occurred on September 5, 1865, wherein Sioux and Cheyenne warriors from large upstream camps assaulted the army command as it rumbled over bad terrain. Artillery fire, coupled with that from newly adopted Spencer repeating carbines, kept the warriors at a distance. Again, three days later, the troops came under attack by Lakotas intent on protecting their village that lay in the troop’s route of advance. In a spirited engagement along the banks of the Powder River, the soldiers continued their movement upstream with the aid of effective howitzer fire that repeatedly scattered the
warriors. Neither side sustained significant losses in the **Cole-Walker Fight** of September 8.

Under such conditions, Cole and Walker pressed up the Powder, finally meeting the Pawnee scouts from Connor's command and reaching Fort Connor before all withdrew from the field. Connor's multi-column campaign, despite the Tongue River battle, had failed in its purpose, and the post-Civil War reorganization of the army command structure presently slated regular troops to replace state forces in the Indian country. That change coincided with growing emigrant interest in the Bozeman Road, particularly now that Fort Connor stood guard over its strategic junction with Powder River to protect the route and provide a base for future military offensives.

Government officials hoped that that recourse could be avoided. With this intent, treaties were concluded with all seven tribes of Lakotas in the fall of 1865 by which the Indians consented to withdraw from existing as well as future overland routes. As before, however, elements of the Fort Sully treaties were often incomprehensible to chiefs who lacked authority to represent all tribal components or to enforce its provisions among their own followers; tribesmen inhabiting the Powder River country consequently paid little heed to the dictums of the 1865 accords and refused to withdraw from the area of the Bozeman Road.
As attacks on emigrants increased, the army in 1866 sent a battalion of the Eighteenth Infantry to establish a military presence near the road. Simultaneously, government emissaries met with Lakota chiefs at Fort Laramie trying to win their permission for forts along the trail. The coincidental arrival at that post of Colonel Henry B. Carrington and his battalion even while the deliberations proceeded betrayed the government design and offended many of the Sioux, including Chief Red Cloud of the Oglalas, who abruptly left the council and led his people north, sternly warning against further use of the Bozeman Road. During the summer of 1866, the army regarrisoned old Fort Connor, renaming it Fort Reno, and constructed and manned two new posts—one called Fort Philip Kearny, about seventy miles northwest of Reno at the Bozeman Road crossing of the forks of Piney Creek, in present northern Wyoming, and the other Fort C.F. Smith, some ninety miles farther north, at the road’s juncture with the Bighorn River in Montana Territory. Even though the forts technically stood on Crow—not Sioux and Cheyenne—land, their symbolic presence in the heart of a domain those people considered their own prime hunting grounds drew Red Cloud’s indignation. With increasing frequency, warriors from the Tongue River camps ran off livestock and staged attacks on army detachments out of Forts Kearny and Smith, as well as on military and civilian trains advancing over the Bozeman Road.

Typical of these aggressive assaults was that occurring at Crazy Woman Fork on July 20, 1866, when Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Northern Arapaho warriors beset an army wagon train en route from Fort Reno to Fort Kearny. In a manner reminiscent of Hollywood western films, the troops corralled the wagons and held off the Indians until relief arrived from Fort Kearny, sustaining but one fatality and several wounded while the Indians apparently lost four of their number killed. Following a host of similar incidents, the warfare climaxed on December 21, when Red Cloud’s warriors enticed a command of eighty men under Captain William J. Fetterman from the confines of Fort Kearny, then surrounded and killed them all. The so-called “Fort Phil Kearny Massacre” shocked the nation, inured to large casualty counts during the Civil War, by the fact that Fetterman’s command had been completely destroyed.
Despite the profound statement thus registered by the Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Northern Arapahos over the existence of the Bozeman Road, the army occupation continued with increased resolve to punish the tribesmen. While on the Southern Plains during the summer of 1867 army columns grappled with their kinsmen in a campaign rooted both in Sand Creek and the Fetterman disaster, the northern tribesmen tightened their pressure on the posts of Forts Reno, Kearny, and Smith, now garrisoned by more than 900 soldiers of the Eighteenth and Twenty-seventh infantry and Second Cavalry regiments. Civilian use of the Bozeman Road practically came to a standstill. Following an annual Sun Dance in the vicinity of Rosebud Creek, a conclave principally composed of Oglala, Minneconjou, and Sans Arc Lakotas, together with Northern Cheyennes and Northern Arapahos, conceived a concerted plan to attack the two northernmost forts. On the morning of August 1, one group struck a civilian hay-mowing party near Fort C.F. Smith guarded by an officer and nineteen soldiers, rushing the group repeatedly through the day. The troops, armed with newly converted Springfield breech-loading rifles
rather than the outmoded muskets, successfully repelled the charges of the Indians, who were armed mostly with bows and arrows, until a relief column arrived from the post late in the day. Of the party, three men were killed and two wounded in the Hayfield Fight; precise Indian losses went unknown. On the 2nd, ninety miles away, another body of warriors under Red Cloud in similar fashion charged an isolated civilian wood train west of Fort Kearny guarded by a company of infantrymen from the post. Armed in like manner, the soldiers dismounted wagon boxes from their running gear and formed them in a corral, from which they faced the Sioux and Cheyennes. Thirty-two men held off the warriors for nearly five hours until relief arrived from Fort Kearny. Army casualties in the Wagon Box Fight totaled six dead and two wounded, while Indian losses, estimated by an officer present, stood at sixty killed and twice that number wounded.

In spite of the army successes in the Hayfield and Wagon Box fights, the Indians showed no signs of abating in their war to oust the invaders. Yet, expenditures needed to maintain the posts and continue occupation of the country, together with the growing obsolescence of the Bozeman Road with emergence of new routes to the Montana gold fields, dictated an end to the standoff. Government officials, and ultimately the army hierarchy, conceded Red Cloud’s demand and extended peace overtures. In the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, the Northern Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahos received everything they desired, notably abandonment of the Bozeman Road and its guardian forts. Just as significantly, the treaty created the Great Sioux Reservation, encompassing the western half of present South Dakota, including the Black Hills, while affording hunting privileges in parts of Nebraska and Wyoming. At agencies to be established on the reservation, the tribesmen would receive annuities specified in the treaty. The treaty also vastly constricted the area of the Crow’s domain, and designated the tract adjoining the east side of Wyoming’s Bighorn range south to the North Platte as unceded Indian territory in which no whites were allowed. The northern boundary of the unceded lands was never delineated.
Warfare of the 1870s

Ironically, the Fort Laramie Treaty, which had been designed to forestall further immediate confrontation, instead planted the seeds for an even more ominous relationship between the government and the Lakotas and their allied tribes in the years ahead. With the beginning of the administration of Ulysses S. Grant in 1869 came formulation of the president’s peace initiative regarding the tribes. This strategy for handling Indian affairs, which lasted through most of the 1870s, envisioned placing all tribes on reservations removed from areas of white settlement. Guided by agents appointed from various Christian religious denominations, the Indians would there receive instruction in the rudiments of white civilization, especially farming, a course that Indian Bureau officials believed would prevent future outbreaks. Grant’s “Peace Policy,” as it was known, philosophically conflicted with military designs to forcibly prosecute the tribes, and thereby produced muddlesome prospects for peace on the frontier.

An early example involved the Blackfeet, an Indian confederacy of several tribes, one of whom, the Piegans, harbored elements believed responsible for the raiding and killing of settlers in northwestern Montana. On authority of the divisional commander, Lieutenant General Philip H. Sheridan, troops from Fort Ellis went after the alleged perpetrators, and on January 23, 1870, a command under Major Eugene Baker surprised a Piegan village on the Marias River, killing more than 170 people, many of them noncombatants. It was later determined that many in the assemblage were altogether innocent persons, and the controversy that flared after the Baker Battle (or Marias Massacre) pointed up the existing dichotomy between army brutality and the administration’s policy of conciliation. From a military standpoint, however, the action succeeded in subduing the Blackfeet and prevented their participation in all future conflicts.

Further evidence of the procedural disparity between the army and the Indian Bureau occurred during the early 1870s and once again involved the Lakotas, Northern Cheyennes, and Northern Arapahos. In July, 1874, army tendencies toward forceful solution were evident in the attack by Captain Alfred E. Bates and a company of Second Cavalry on a large village of Northern Arapahos nestled on the west side of
Wyoming's Bighorn Mountains. The battle was triggered by accusations of white settlers and Shoshoni occupants of raids by the Arapahos in the Bighorn Basin, an area those Indians were to avoid under terms of the 1868 treaty. The encounter known as The Bates Fight also involved the presence of a large number of Shoshonis with their chief, Washaki, all scouting for the army, and thereby reflected certain attributes of the intertribal conflict of earlier generations. Casualties in the engagement included but two soldiers and two scouts killed compared to approximately twenty-five Arapahos killed.

Further north and east, episodes of nascent commercial exploitation fostered repeated confrontation with the native inhabitants. In 1873, a military-escorted surveying party for the Northern Pacific Railroad penetrated the Yellowstone River lands occupied by several bands of Lakotas, mostly Hunkpapas and Oglalas under the nominal leadership of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, who had not subscribed to the Fort Laramie treaty. Warriors from the assorted bands aggressively resisted the intrusion in two encounters with Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer's Seventh cavalrmen along the Yellowstone in August, in which neither side sustained more than a few casualties. Increasingly augmented by Indians leaving the Great Sioux Reservation agencies, these "Northern Sioux," as authorities termed them, were increasingly perceived as disruptive influences among the reservation bands. In 1874, a more serious aggravation occurred with Custer's movement into the Black Hills, a part of the Great Sioux Reservation, ostensibly to locate a site for a post, but in reality to verify reports of deposits of gold existing there. Although the army rationalized its presence on the reservation in terms of national interest, the Lakotas apprehensively termed Custer's route "the thieves road."
The Great Sioux War, 1876-1877

Coupled with the army incursions into the Yellowstone country, the intrusion into the Black Hills and the reports of expedition geologists confirming the existence of gold there provided the major causes for the largest Indian war in American history. Within a year, as miners flooded into the Hills, the Grant Administration tried to buy the region from the Lakotas. Failing that, officials formulated plans to not only facilitate civilian occupation of the Black Hills, but to militarily compel the “Northern Sioux” onto the Great Sioux Reservation. Accordingly, early in 1876, following the tribesmen’s noncompliance with a War Department ultimatum to remove to the reservation, the army mobilized to force their submission.

The Great Sioux War of 1876-77 consisted of numerous sequential engagements between the army and the Indians spanning fifteen months in a region encompassing some 120,000 square miles of present Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota, and Nebraska. Army strategy called for three columns of troops to close on the Lakotas in the Yellowstone-Powder River country. Brigadier General George Crook was first afield, leading a column north from Fort Fetterman, Wyoming, amid frigid temperatures in early March 1876. At dawn on the 17th, part of Crook’s command under Colonel Joseph J. Reynolds attacked a village on Powder River in southeastern Montana Territory believed to contain Crazy Horse’s Oglalas, but which instead contained mainly Northern Cheyennes under Chiefs Old Bear and Two Moon recently arrived from the reservation to hunt. Reynolds’s men drove the people out and captured their ponies before destroying the camp and moving to

Lieutenant General Philip H. Sheridan, who commanded the Division of the Missouri, in which the Northern Plains campaigns occurred. Courtesy of the National Archives
rejoin Crook. Casualties amounted to four killed and six wounded for the soldiers and at least two men killed and a woman wounded for the Cheyennes. Warriors from the village later recaptured most of the horses, and Reynolds’s destruction of Indian supplies on which Crook hoped to subsist his troops led that officer to abandon the field. Significantly, Reynolds’s attack on the Northern Cheyennes in the Battle of Powder River further solidified the Lakota-Cheyenne alliance and served to bring more warriors directly into the fray with the army. News of the fight with Reynolds’s soldiers created discord among the Indians at the Sioux agencies and compelled many of them to join their relatives in the Yellowstone country during the spring.

It was amid the climate of restlessness at the agencies in the wake of the Reynolds fight that a skirmish occurred on April 28, 1876, involving Brulés and troops from Fort Hartsuff, Nebraska, likely instigated by the overreaction of fearful white settlers. Nonetheless, the so-called Battle of the Blowout, in which one soldier and possibly one warrior died, typified the generally agitated state of affairs existing on the frontier as heightened warfare with the Teton Sioux and Northern Cheyennes grew imminent.

The army reversal at Powder River portended a string of similar actions by tribesmen desperate to maintain their freedom and confident enough in their purpose and numbers to continue pressing the troops sent to fight them. In June, after Crook started north to cooperate with columns from Dakota and western Montana, the Sioux and Northern Cheyennes, who had assembled to observe traditional religious practices in the country around Rosebud Creek, initiated combat with his soldiers. On June 9, 1876, as Crook’s men bivouacked on Tongue
River in northern Wyoming, a force of Northern Cheyennes appeared on the bluffs above the army camp and opened fire before the troops were able to drive them away. The Tongue River Heights Skirmish, which involved negligible casualties on either side, served notice that the Indians would not be passive contestants in the burgeoning conflict. Further declaration of that intention came eight days later, when more than a thousand Sioux and Cheyenne warriors attacked Crook’s command and its Crow and Shoshoni auxiliaries as it wended its way north along the headwaters of Rosebud Creek. The day-long Battle of Rosebud Creek ranged over unfavorable ground for the troops and cost them ten men killed and twenty-one wounded, compared to eleven killed and five wounded of the Lakotas and Cheyennes. The contest forced Crook’s withdrawal into Wyoming to await reinforcements and supplies.

Strategically, with their defeat of Crook at the Rosebud, the coalition of warriors under Crazy Horse and Two Moon nullified army plans for the duration of the summer. A week after Rosebud, oblivious to Crook’s whereabouts, Brigadier General Alfred H. Terry sent Custer to find the Indians in the area of the Little Bighorn River, where they, including those who had recently fought Crook, had established an immense summer encampment of some 8,000 people including perhaps as many as 2,500 warriors. On June 25, Custer located the village. He attacked it at
midday, but in so doing placed his battalions beyond mutual supporting distance. The defending warriors not only drove back the initial attacking force under Major Marcus A. Reno, but destroyed Custer’s immediate command. Until relief troops under Terry arrived on June 27, the Indians besieged Reno’s command on the bluffs overlooking the river. Casualties in the fighting included more than 260 soldiers killed versus fewer than 100 killed among the Indians.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn constituted the greatest victory for the warriors in 1876 and the worst defeat by Indians for the army in the West. As the Sioux and Cheyennes gloried in their success, the army leadership, determined to both punish them and drive them onto the reservation, forwarded more troops and supplies. But by the time they reached the field, the tribesmen had broken into smaller groups and scattered. In July, two brief encounters occurred that lifted the morale of the soldiers who by that time had become inured to defeat. On July 7, a scouting party sent out by Crook ran into Indians fresh from the Little Bighorn. In the Sibley Fight and its aftermath, the twenty-eight men not only held off warriors surrounding their timbered position in the Bighorn Mountains, but managed a bold and successful flight back to Crook’s command.

Elsewhere, ten days later in extreme northwestern Nebraska, Fifth Cavalry soldiers under Colonel Wesley Merritt ultimately bound to reinforce Crook, encountered more than 100 Cheyennes headed north. The encounter saw one warrior, Yellow Hair, die as a result of a duel with William F. (“Buffalo Bill”) Cody, and the others and their families pursued by Merritt’s men back to their agency. (Later, on the eastern stage, Cody’s reenactment of his role in the Warbonnet Creek Skirmish enthralled audiences with the “First Scalp for Custer.”)

Meantime, throughout July and August, Terry and Crook scour the Yellowstone wilderness without avail. Finally, Crook broke away and headed east, and on September 9 in Dakota Territory (within the boundary of the Sioux reservation) scored the first major army triumph of the Great Sioux War when Captain Anson Mills of his command surprised a mixed village containing Lakotas and Northern Cheyennes who had been at the Little Bighorn. In the Battle of Slim Buttes, Mills’s Third cavalrymen drove the occupants out of the camp and secured it for the balance of Crook’s army. Crook arrived in time to engage the Indians as they returned
with warriors from Crazy Horse's nearby camp and attempted to recapture their horses and free captives taken by the troops. Finally driving the Indians away, the soldiers torched the village and destroyed its provisions before heading to the Black Hills and ending the summer campaign.

Following Slim Buttes, army strategy entailed establishing a permanent military presence in the territory occupied by the "Northern Sioux." To this end, a command headed by Colonel Nelson A. Miles took station for the winter in a cantonment built along the Yellowstone at the stream's confluence with Tongue River. In October, Sitting Bull's warriors resisted the garrison in their midst—first in the Spring Creek Skirmish of the 11th, wherein they attacked a supply train bound from Glendive Creek to the Tongue, and days later on the 15th when they attacked yet another. The engagements resulted in few casualties on either side, but significantly promoted Miles's councils on October 20 and 21 with Sitting Bull—the first face-to-face meetings between the leadership of the Indian coalition and a

Council between Colonel Miles and Sitting Bull at Cedar Creek, October 20, 1876
Courtesy of Jerome A. Greene
government representative since the fighting began. The meetings, however, revealed the intractable positions of both sides, and that of the 21st ended in contentiousness and, finally, the eruption of fighting. In the Battle of Cedar Creek, in which five tribesmen died, Miles and his Fifth Infantry soldiers pursued the Indians some thirty miles to the Yellowstone, where most of them yielded and agreed to go to the Dakota agencies (many later recanted and remained afield). During the pursuit, Sitting Bull and his immediate followers managed to break away from the main body and head north.

Miles's success prompted further drives against the Indians during the following winter. In November, Miles accompanied another column north to the Missouri River, where a detachment of infantry commanded by First Lieutenant Frank D. Baldwin chased Sitting Bull and his people across the frozen Missouri River at Bark Creek on December 7, then trailed them and attacked their village eleven days later. Baldwin's fight at Ash Creek occurred at midday when most of the fighting men were out hunting. His destruction of their camp and supplies demoralized the Hunkpapas so severely that Sitting Bull thereafter played but a remote part in the warfare; within months, the chief and his people crossed the international border into Canada.

Meantime, far south in Wyoming, General Crook opened another offensive to strike the winter camps of the Oglala leader, Crazy Horse, and other Lakotas in the Tongue River country. Instead, learning of the existence of a large camp of Northern Cheyennes in the Bighorn Mountains, Crook directed Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie to seek it out and attack. The village contained perhaps 2500 people, including the principal Northern Cheyenne leaders, Dull Knife and Little Wolf.
At daybreak on November 25, in one of the largest engagements of the war, Mackenzie and troops of the Second, Third, Fourth, and Fifth cavalry regiments, together with contingents of Pawnee and Shoshoni scouts, charged into the encampment, killing as many as forty warriors and driving the survivors into the cold. Army losses were less severe, comprising five soldiers killed and twenty-five wounded. Some of the Cheyenne escapees later made their way to the agencies and turned themselves in. Others faced freezing temperatures and snowdrifts in struggling north to join Crazy Horse’s people. Either way, the Dull Knife Battle ended significant Northern Cheyenne participation in the Great Sioux War.

Army success in the Baldwin and Mackenzie fights, respectively, promoted the final unraveling of the great intertribal coalition that had defeated Crook and destroyed Custer five months earlier. Only the large body of people (including the Cheyenne refugees) wintering with Crazy Horse on the upper Tongue River remained, and early in January, 1877, following an attempt by some of them to surrender to Miles, the colonel set out to attack the Oglala-Minneconjou camp. On January 8, as his soldiers breakfasted approximately ninety miles up the Tongue from their cantonment, the Sioux appeared. Determined to protect their families, they opened an engagement in the rugged terrain that lasted almost five
hours. Miles quickly responded, sending his troops to rid the heights of warriors, then leveling his artillery against them. Finally, a blizzard swept in to obscure the combatants from each other, and after the loss of a principal medicine man, the warriors withdrew up the Tongue to their village while Miles returned to the cantonment. In the Battle of Wolf Mountains the soldiers lost two killed and nine wounded, while the Indians sustained about three killed and a like number wounded. More significant, the engagement forced the Sioux to realize that continued resistance was futile.

Wolf Mountains precipitated several peace initiatives by the tribesmen. Beset with starvation and the loss of such nonrenewable resources as warriors, weapons, and ammunition, many now viewed surrender and survival as preferable to continuing the fighting. By the late spring of 1877, many had gone to the agencies. One band of Minneconjous under Lame Deer, however, determined to hold out, and at dawn on May 7, Miles attacked this camp with his
infantry and cavalry, killing and scattering its occupants, capturing their pony herd, and then destroying their possessions. Troop losses stood at four dead and nine wounded, while the Lakota dead totaled fourteen, among them Lame Deer. The Lame Deer Fight was the last major encounter in the Great Sioux War; by the autumn of 1877 most surviving elements of the Indian alliance had either gone to the reservation or had joined Sitting Bull in Canada. The spirit of resistance that had vitalized the Lakotas and Northern Cheyennes in 1876-77 was further quelled with the death of Crazy Horse by bayonet at Camp Robinson, Nebraska, in September 1877.
The Nez Perce and Bannock Wars, 1877

The fighting between government troops and the Lakotas and Cheyennes in the Great Sioux War was reflected among other tribes in areas adjoining the Northern Plains in 1877 and 1878. In 1877, several bands of Nez Perce Indians, facing circumstances like those affecting the Sioux, chose to leave their ancestral lands rather than to submit to government demands to live on a prescribed tract. After repeated and costly fighting with troops under Brigadier General Oliver O. Howard and Colonel John Gibbon in Idaho and Montana territories, respectively, the Nez Perces, led by Chiefs Looking Glass and White Bird, passed through Yellowstone National Park and gained the region of the Northern Plains in the late summer of 1877. On September 13, on the plateaus and rimrock adjoining Canyon Creek six miles north of the Yellowstone, Colonel Samuel D. Sturgis and his Seventh cavalrmen caught up with the tribesmen, but in a five-hour engagement the warriors managed to protect their families and get away. Sturgis lost four men killed and eight wounded, while the Nez Perces acknowledged only one man killed and several wounded.

Ten days later, the desperate Indians, determined to elude the soldiers and reach Canada, crossed the Missouri River at Cow Island and engaged a small detachment of Seventh infantrymen and civilians guarding a supply dump. The fighting lasted most of the night until the tribesmen, provisioned with goods, departed up Cow Creek. On September 25, a command of volunteers under Major Guido Ilges overtook and battled them, losing one man killed but not stopping the Nez Perces in their drive north. The flight of the Indians climaxed in the Battle of the Bear's Paw Mountains, in northern Montana, September 30-October 5, 1877, when their village was first attacked, then invested, by soldiers of the Second and Seventh cavalry and Fifth infantry regiments under Colonel Miles.

On the latter date, Chief Joseph, the sole remaining chief, surrendered. In this costly encounter, which prevented the majority of the people from gaining sanctuary in Canada, the Nez Perces lost at least seventeen killed and forty wounded against Miles's twenty-four killed and forty-five wounded, including two Northern Cheyenne scouts.*
The Nez Perce War was followed in 1878 by a conflict with a similarly mistreated neighboring tribe, the Bannocks. Pressured by settlers who encroached on their traditional lands, groups of Bannocks struck back killing several whites. In the warfare that followed, the Indians engaged army columns in Idaho Territory, Oregon, and Washington Territory. One band, however, turned east, paralleling part of the Nez Perces' route of the previous year in reaching the Northern Plains. On September 4, 1878, Miles's soldiers confronted them along Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone, just east of Yellowstone National Park, killing eleven and capturing thirty-one in forcing their return to Idaho.

*The Northern Plains engagements between the army and the Nez Perces are treated in detail in Jerome A. Greene, "The U.S. Army and the Nee-Me-Poo Crisis of 1877: Historic Sites Associated with the Nez Perce War" (Seattle: National Park Service, 1996).
Meantime, following their surrender in the Great Sioux War, most of the Northern Cheyennes briefly located on the Sioux reservation, but were eventually sent south to join relatives in the Indian Territory (present Oklahoma). For nearly a year they endured disease and starvation. Finally, in September 1878, their numbers dwindling, they started for Montana through Kansas and Nebraska, killing some settlers and several times skirmishing with soldiers as they proceeded north. A group under Little Wolf managed to reach Montana, where they were allowed to stay. Another, under Dull Knife, however, met arrest by soldiers near Fort Robinson, Nebraska. Imprisoned for two months in a heatless barrack pending their return south, the desperate families broke out on January 9, 1879, and for the next two weeks valiantly defended themselves in eleven encounters with the soldiers. On January 22, in the last of these, troops under Captain Henry W. Wessels, Jr., surrounded thirty-three Cheyennes at Antelope Creek, killing most. Three soldiers died in the assault. In time, the survivors of the Fort Robinson Outbreak were permitted to join Little Wolf’s people in Montana.

For the Teton Sioux, the conclusion of the Great Sioux War brought continued trauma for those who, with Sitting Bull, had spurned the reservation existence, as well as for those who acceded to it. Dogged by hunger, parties of the former frequently came south of the border seeking game and plunder, then fled north before the American troops could stop them. Typical of these contests was the Little Porcupine Creek Fight of March 8, 1880, after a party of Sioux warriors stole 100 ponies from the Northern Cheyenne scouts at Fort Keogh (former Tongue River Cantonment). Captain Frank D. Baldwin and two companies of mounted Fifth infantrymen chased the raiders across the Yellowstone to a point near the Little Porcupine where they dueled before the Indians escaped without casualty and losing only the captured horses.

Continuing hunger eventually forced the return of the Sioux bands from Canada. Among the first to appear in the United States were the followers of the Hunkpapa chiefs Gall and Crow, who arrived near the military post of Camp Poplar River in northeast Montana in December, 1880. Those leaders’ refusal to submit their approximately 400
tribesmen to subzero temperatures by moving immediately to Fort Buford incited Major Guido Ilges to surround them with troops and to fire rounds from his artillery at them. In the **Poplar River Skirmish** of January 2, 1881, eight Indians died, while Ilges’s command suffered no casualties. During the months following the incident, more Sioux trickled down from Canada, until finally, on July 19, 1881, Sitting Bull and 187 of his people came into Fort Buford, at the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers, and surrendered.

In time, Sitting Bull’s followers joined their relatives on what remained of the Great Sioux Reservation. But during the years since the Great Sioux War the reservation Lakotas had fared little better. By an 1876 agreement, they lost the Black Hills, and subsequent compromises with the government chipped away at the rest of the once vast tract, until by the late 1880s only six small reservations remained. Gradual loss of their land base compounded for the Lakotas and other tribes their transformation from pre-reservation days and contributed to their growing cultural asphyxiation. By the late 1880s, their societies thus buffeted and desperate for relief, many reservation Indians turned to the supernatural for deliverance. Insensitive government officials misinterpreted the associated ritual behavior as violent in nature, and the result was more armed conflict. Intertribal unrest fostered largely by their disaffected reservation status, including an unwillingness by the Indians to relinquish their freedom to hunt outside the reserve, provoked a civil disturbance among the Crows in early November, 1887. In the **Crow Agency Fight**, soldiers used Hotchkiss guns to put down the outbreak in which a principal collaborator, the fiery leader named Wraps-Up-His-Tail, was killed along
with six other Crows. Three years later, similar manifestations among the South Dakota reservation Sioux and other tribes led to promulgation of the Ghost Dance, a revivalistic movement which promised the return of the old way of life. Its appearance on the reservation, and the reaction to it by white agents who misunderstood its import, led directly to the death of Sitting Bull, killed December 15, 1890, and to the tragedy at Wounded Knee Creek two weeks later. Casualties in this last major confrontation between the army and the Lakotas included more than 250 men, women, and children killed. As well, Wounded Knee marked the end of the long period of combat between Indians and soldiers on the Northern Plains frontier.
Sitting Bull, Hunkpapa Lakota

Courtesy of Paul Harbaugh and Denver Public Library
Conclusion

The immediate result of the campaigns on the Northern Plains between the 1850s and 1890 was the opening of Indian lands to settlement, mining, and other forms of commercial exploitation in the interests of the United States government. In sum, the warfare accommodated the expansionist designs of white Americans at the expense of the Native Americans, in the end restricting them on the constricted land bases of reservations where over the next century they strove to live while attempting to preserve their cultures. The battlefields where many Indians and soldiers yielded their lives in the 1850s, 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s must be viewed as pockets of the same forces of Manifest Destiny that imbued white Americans throughout most of the nineteenth century. Many Indians today view their battles with the army as turning points in their respective tribal cultures, places that while signifying their people’s courage and sacrifices nonetheless denote the forcible confiscation of their freedoms and ways of life. As such, the sites of that warfare warrant identification and preservation as part of United States history as well as of the histories of the affected tribal societies. Taken together, the battlefields exemplify the ultimate form of culture conflict, a sense and appreciation of which must never be lost.
Sources and Suggested Further Reading


_____. *On the Border with Crook*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1891.


Riley, Paul D. “Oglala Sources on the Life of Crazy Horse,” *Nebraska History*, LVII (Spring, 1976), pp. 1-51.


Appendix

Indian Wars Battle and Skirmish Sites
Inventory Forms,
USGS Maps and Photographs
**Location:** Garden County, Nebraska, six miles northwest of Ash Hollow and four miles from the left bank of the North Platte River

**Date(s) of engagement:** September 3, 1855

**Duration of engagement:** One day

**Indian tribes involved:** Brulé, Oglala, and Minneconjou Lakotas; Northern Cheyennes

**Known Indian leaders present:** Little Thunder and Spotted Tail, Brulé Lakotas; Little Butte, Northern Cheyenne

**Army units involved:** Companies E and K, Second Dragoons; Company G (Light), Fourth Artillery; Company E, Tenth Infantry (mounted); and Companies A, E, H, I, and K, Sixth Infantry
Army leaders present: Colonel (Brevet Brigadier General) William S. Harney, Lieutenant Colonel Philip St. George Cooke

Number of troops: Approximately 600

Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): Approximately 250

Major phases of engagement (describe): The encounter began with an early morning approach by most of Harney’s command moving from the southeast. The infantry advance forced a southernmost camp of Brulés to pack up and start north. Chief Little Thunder briefly counceled with Harney, but the infantry advance resumed and the soldiers opened fire on the fleeing tribesmen. The troops’ gunfire signaled Colonel Cooke’s mounted soldiers to close in from their previously assumed position on the north, attacking the Brulés and a nearby camp of Oglalas, Minneconjous, and Cheyennes. Many Indian combatants and noncombatants took cover in caves and depressions in high ground, and the troops repeatedly fired volleys into these recesses causing many casualties. Other tribesmen fled east through the Bluewater bottom and into the adjoining hills as the troops pursued, killing, wounding, or capturing many more of them over a course of more than five miles. The soldiers destroyed the village and the provisions it contained.

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

☑ Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)

☑ Skirmishing (sporadic firing)

☑ Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)

☑ Artillery employed

☑ Determined assault (battle lines close)

☑ Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)

☐ Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)

☐ Sustained hand-to-hand fighting

☐ Investment and siege

☐ Surprise attack
Total casualties:

Of troops: Four men killed, 7 severely wounded and 3 slightly wounded, and 1 man missing

Of Indian force: Eighty-five killed, 5 wounded, including noncombatants

Noncombatant casualties: (In addition, seventy men, women, and children were captured.)

Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: The Harney expedition was conceived to punish the Brulés who had wiped out Lieutenant John Grattan’s force of thirty men near Fort Laramie in 1854, as well as to discipline the Indians for repeated attacks on emigrants traveling to Oregon and California along the North Platte River route. Harney’s attack on the combined Lakota-Northern Cheyenne assemblage along the Blue Water set the tone of government-Indian relations on the Northern Plains for the next two decades and beyond. The catastrophic event psychologically cowed the Indians into signing peace treaties at Fort Pierre, Dakota, in March 1856, in which their leaders agreed to a system whereby the government would hold designated chiefs directly responsible for all future wrongs by their people. Consequently, peace generally reigned over the region during the next decade, although Harney’s attack at the Blue Water created simmering resentment and distrust among the Lakotas that erupted in widespread warfare in the 1860s and 1870s and ultimately led to the final military subjection of the Lakotas and Northern Cheyennes. (In a technologically significant aspect, the Battle of the Blue Water saw the first army use of rifled muskets and the military Sharpe’s under combat conditions.)

USGS Quadrangles and date: Twin Buttes, Nebraska, 1971

Township, Range, and Section: Township 16 North, Range 42 West, Section 6; Township 17 North, Range 42 West, Sections 20, 21, 28, 29, 32, 33

Land ownership: Private (Kaye Carlson)

Acreage: Approximately 2,240

Current land use (check all that apply):

- Original forest
- Uncultivated natural grass (cattle grazing)
- Cultivated/agriculture (some small hay meadows near creek)
Residential use (buildings) (in Blue Water Creek bottom)

Other development (describe)

Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:

- Significantly changed
- Some major alterations
- Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain) (there is a power line on the bluff opposite the farm house)
- Similar (retains essential features with some changes)
- Very similar to period of engagement

Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):

- Low (little development activity in vicinity)
- Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity) (In the past, there have been plans to put a dam on the creek.)
- High (terrain is immediately threatened)
- Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

Perception of Threats to Site: None Immediate. Several proposals have been advanced for damming the Blue Water Creek, but such development does not seem imminent.

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. There are none beyond natural landforms of buttes, ridges, and the creek bottom. Much of the natural landscape is undisturbed, and modern intrusions have had little impact on the core battle site to date.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? The Indian dead were not buried. The soldiers were interred near the Oregon Trail on the south side of the North Platte River and approximately five miles south of the battlefield. The exact site of the burials is unknown.

Monumentation: None
Engagement can be interpreted from:

☑️ Public roads
☑️ Private roads
☐ Private property only

One of the best interpretive locations is on the crest of a hill several hundred yards east of the Carlson farm along the entrance road. From this point, the entire scope of the expansive battle action can be comprehended.

What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events?

The creek bottom, buttes, ravines, and other natural landforms that compose the battlefield on which the army and Indian forces contended all potentially contribute to the interpretation. The site of Harney’s meeting with Little Thunder is known from period battle maps, as well as the relative positions of the foot and mounted army forces. The sites of the Brulé and Oglala camps are also precisely documented on contemporary maps.

What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? None beyond the modern intrusions of the Carlson farm and its roads and appurtenances.

Visual considerations. Describe viewshed around resource: The viewshed consists of open scenic landscape for several miles in all directions.

Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data: A boundary could encompass the high ground extending for as much as two miles east of the core battle area on the bluffs, perhaps one mile north and west, and as many as five miles south and southeast (encompassing the route of Harney’s approach).

Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known): There is no zoning plan in Garden County. The landowner is opposed to development, and is also opposed to government acquisition.

Photographs. Views and dates: Views as indicated on photographs taken June 26, 1997

Date of recordation: June 26, 1997
Major sources:


Battlefield/Skirmish site name: Platte Bridge/Red Buttes Battles

Location: Casper and vicinity, Natrona County, Wyoming

Date(s) of engagement: July 26, 1865

Duration of engagement: The interrelated engagements occupied a total of approximately eight hours.

Indian tribes involved: Oglala, Minneconjou, Brulé, and Sans Arc Lakotas; Northern Cheyennes; Southern Cheyennes; and Northern Arapahos

Known Indian leaders present: Lakotas: Red Cloud, Old Man Afraid of His Horses, and Young Man Afraid of His Horses (Lakotas); Dull Knife, Roman Nose, and White Bull (Cheyennes)
Army units involved: Various companies of the Eleventh Kansas Cavalry, as indicated below

Army leaders present: Second Lieutenant Caspar W. Collins (Platte Bridge); Commissary Sergeant Amos J. Custard (Red Buttes)

Number of troops: 28 men, including Collins (Platte Bridge); 24 men, including Custard (Red Buttes)

Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): Estimates range from 1000 to 2000 warriors

Major phases of engagement (describe): The Platte Bridge Station engagement consisted of Lieutenant Collins’s troops, men of Companies I and K of the Eleventh Kansas, moving out of the post along the North Platte River (at present Casper) to escort and accompany Sergeant Custard’s supply train, known to be en route east from Sweetwater Station. Crossing the bridge and riding along the road in the direction of the train, Collins’s party got only one mile before the Indians attacked from all directions. The fighting amounted to a charge by the troops into the thick of the warriors as they attempted to return to the bridge. Collins was among the killed; most succeeded in fighting through and gaining the post. Later that morning, the same Indians surrounded Custard’s train and escort, consisting of detachments from Companies G and H, Eleventh Kansas, about five miles from the post. The fighting at Custard’s position, known as Red Buttes, lasted from about 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., when the warriors, having completely destroyed the small command, withdrew. Three of Custard’s men who departed for the station before the fighting had commenced managed to reach Platte Bridge Station unharmed.

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

☐ Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)

☐ Skirmishing (sporadic firing)

☑ Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)

☐ Artillery employed

☑ Determined assault (battle lines close)

☐ Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)

☑ Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)
Sustained hand-to-hand fighting

Investment and siege

Surprise attack

Total casualties:

Of troops: Five, including Collins, killed at Platte Bridge; 21, including Custard, killed at Red Buttes

Of Indian force: Unknown (Estimates for both actions range from 8 to 210 killed, and as many as 130 wounded.)

Noncombatant casualties: None

Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: The fights at Platte Bridge and Red Buttes climaxed a series of lesser engagements between troops and Indians in 1865 that stemmed largely from the Indians' urge to retaliate for the massacre of the Cheyennes at Sand Creek, Colorado Territory, in November, 1864. Following Platte Bridge and Red Buttes, government expeditions against the Indians began with intensity, notably offensives led by Brigadier General Patrick Connor, Colonel Nelson Cole, and Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Walker in the summer of 1865, which, while producing several major encounters with the Indians, failed to subjugate the tribes. The campaigning brought increased public attention to the area of Wyoming and the Bozeman Road, which had been illegally blazed through Indian lands in 1864, and its use ultimately produced the large-scale government expeditions of the 1870s that forced the tribesmen onto reservations. Doubtless their victories over Collins and Custard contributed to the warriors' assuming a sense of power and invincibility against the troops that, while sustained in a number of later engagements, was in the end unrealistic because of the unavailability of such renewable war resources as men, weapons, and supplies.

USGS Quadrangles and date: Goose Egg, Wyoming, 1961; revised 1984

Township, Range, and Section: Township 33 North, Range 80 West, Section 12 (Platte Bridge); Township 33 North, Range 80 West, Section 21 (Red Buttes)

Land ownership: Platte Bridge, Private; Red Buttes, Bureau of Land Management

Acreage: Platte Bridge, approximately 150 acres; Red Buttes, approximately 75 acres
Current land use (check all that apply):

☐  Original forest

☒  Uncultivated natural grass  Red Buttes (grazing)

☐  Cultivated/agriculture

☒  Residential use (buildings)  Platte Bridge

☒  Other development (describe)  Platte Bridge (highway department use, private businesses, gravel pit operation)

Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:

☒  Significantly changed  Platte Bridge

☐  Some major alterations

☐  Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)

☒  Similar (retains essential features with some changes)  Red Buttes

☐  Very similar to period of engagement

Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):

☐  Low (little development activity in vicinity)

☒  Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)  Red Buttes battle site

☐  High (terrain is immediately threatened)

☒  Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)  Platte Bridge battle site

Perception of Threats to Site: The Red Buttes battle site is located in a suburban area of west Casper and undoubtedly will be threatened as this area develops. While it lies on BLM property, it is immediately and completely surrounded by private property.

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. At the Platte Bridge battle
site, all natural features have been obliterated by heavy development; at the Red Buttes battle site, only the natural contour of the ground remains.

*Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield?* All bodies of soldiers killed in the Platte Bridge fight were removed for burial elsewhere. Twenty-one soldiers were interred on the Red Butte battlefield. Most of these dead were later removed to the cemetery at Fort Francis A. Warren, Wyoming, although some possibly remain on the site. The warriors removed Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho fatalities.

*Monumentation:* Platte Bridge: A monument once situated on the north side of the river has since been removed; Red Buttes: A highway historical marker is located about 1 mile southeast of the battle site along Wyoming Highway 220.

*Engagements can be interpreted from:*

- Public roads
- Private roads
- Private property only

Perhaps the best interpretation of both actions, and particularly the Platte Bridge encounter, can be attained from the reconstructed Fort Caspar. Because the Red Buttes site comprises, in effect, an enclave of BLM land encompassed by private land, access to the site would have to be obtained for on-site interpretation to occur.

*What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events?* The Platte Bridge site is completely obliterated by development; the North Platte River survives in the area of the battle and can be used as an orientation guide for interpretation. The landforms in the immediate vicinity of the Red Buttes site are largely intact, although close-in access is presently denied, thereby prohibiting on-site interpretation.

*What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events?* At the Platte Bridge site, wholesale development intrudes and detracts from interpretation. At the Red Buttes site, while the immediate battleground retains some integrity, the surrounding development (especially on the south side of the North Platte River) compromises the interpretation of events.
Visual considerations. Describe viewshed around resource: The site of the Platte Bridge encounter, along with its viewshed, has been critically compromised by area development in the form of residential areas and business and industrial establishments. The viewshed around the Red Buttes encounter site is considerably less compromised, the area mainly used for grazing of livestock, although some oil drilling has occurred nearby. The viewshed to the south, however, includes a large residential zone on the south side of the North Platte River.

Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data: No boundary is feasible for the Platte Bridge encounter site; a boundary for the Red Buttes site might consist of a zone of perhaps ¼ mile around the known perimeter of the battlefield.

Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known): In the case of the site of the Platte Bridge fight, land use options would be impracticable because of the severely compromised nature of the resource. In the case of the Red Buttes battle site, while the property is federal (BLM), the attitudes of adjacent landowners are apparently disposed against providing direct access; land use options are therefore limited if not altogether nonexistent.

Photographs. Views and dates: Various views of the sites of the Platte Bridge and Red Buttes fights, as indicated on photographs taken July 2, 1997.

Date of recordation: July 2, 1997

Major sources:


Location: Between Dayton and Ranchester, along U.S. Highway 14, Sheridan County, Wyoming

Date(s) of engagement: August 31-September 12, 1865

Duration of engagement: Thirteen days (major fighting occurred on August 31 and September 1)

Indian tribes involved: Northern Arapahos

Known Indian leaders present: Black Bear and Old David

Army units involved: Army escort to the train comprising the Sawyers wagon road expedition comprised two companies of the Sixth Michigan Cavalry.
Army leaders present: Captain Osmer F. Cole, Sixth Michigan Cavalry, with escort

Number of troops: Exact number unknown, but apparently considerably fewer than 100. On September 5, 27 more men of the Sixth Michigan Cavalry, a mail escort to Connor's command, joined the train defenders.

Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): Estimated at between 250-300 warriors

Major phases of engagement (describe): The Sawyers expedition was a private enterprise headed by James A. Sawyers intent upon surveying a wagon route from the mouth of the Niobrara River, in Nebraska, to Virginia City, Montana Territory. A contingent of the Fifth U.S. Volunteer Infantry (so-called "Galvanized Yankees") and a company of volunteer cavalry from Dakota Territory accompanied the expedition as escort. On reaching Fort Connor in present north-central Wyoming, the troops of the Sixth Michigan Cavalry supplanted the former escort. On August 31, as the expedition prepared to cross the Tongue River in present northern Wyoming, some of the same Arapaho warriors who on the 29th had fought Brigadier General Patrick Connor's command, attacked an advance party, killing Captain Cole. Next day, the warriors approached in force and a vigorous fight ensued. The Sawyers party corralled their wagons and livestock on a plain north of the river and opened fire with a mountain howitzer on the tribesmen sheltered in timber along the river. Following several sallies by mounted warriors who surrounded the corral, Sawyers attempted unsuccessfully to move his train. The Indians during the maneuver killed two civilian drovers. Over the following eleven days, leaders of the Sawyers expedition alternately negotiated with the warriors while preparing to meet them in further combat. Desperate, on September 11, the train started moving back over the trail to Fort Conner, when the men encountered a relief force en route to them from Connor's command. The Arapahos did not interfere with the column again and it proceeded on to Virginia City.

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

- ✔ Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)
- ☐ Skirmishing (sporadic firing)
- ☐ Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)
- ✔ Artillery employed
Determined assault (battle lines close)

Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)

Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)

Sustained hand-to-hand fighting

Investment and siege

Surprise attack

Total casualties:

Of troops: One officer killed (2 civilian drovers also killed)

Of Indian force: None reported

Noncombatant casualties: None

Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: The Sawyers fight represents the difficulties that private enterprise, seeking to establish itself with the support of government troops, endured on the Northern Plains Indian frontier. The expedition constituted a further penetration of heretofore Indian-occupied lands by Anglo-Americans, thus further complicating relationships among the tribes and between them and the federal government. The route that Sawyers blazed might have become an important route but for the imminent completion of the transcontinental railroad, which provided faster travel to the gold fields of western Montana Territory.

USGS Quadrangles and date: Ranchester, Wyoming-Montana, 1964; revised 1978

Township, Range, and Section: Township 57 North, Range 86 West, Section 26 (possibly parts of Sections 22 and 27, too) (Cole’s death reportedly occurred in the northwest quarter of the northwest quarter of Township 57 North, Range 86, Section 36.)

Land ownership: Private (Masters)

Acreage: Within an area of approximately 300 acres (exact acreage unknown)

Current land use (check all that apply):

- Original forest
- Uncultivated natural grass
• Cultivated/agriculture

☐ Residential use (buildings)

☐ Other development (describe)

*Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:*

☐ Significantly changed

☒ Some major alterations

☐ Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)

☐ Similar (retains essential features with some changes)

☐ Very similar to period of engagement

*Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):*

☐ Low (little development activity in vicinity)

☒ Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)

☐ High (terrain is immediately threatened)

☐ Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

*Perception of Threats to Site: Continued (and expanded) agricultural use*

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. Unknown; land is in agricultural use today.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? The three fatalities were buried in a common grave near the wagon corral. The precise location of the grave is unknown. The remains apparently have not been removed.

*Monumentation:* None; a historical marker adjoins a turnout on the north side of U.S. Highway 14 near the site.

*Engagement can be interpreted from:*

☒ Public roads
Private roads

Private property only

What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events? The nearby Tongue River constitutes an uncompromised resource related to this encounter. Other landscape features consist of the broad bottomland south of the present highway on which the corral was apparently located, but which is in agricultural use today, and the low bluffs north of the highway.

What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? Besides the present agricultural use of the lands adjoining the north side of Tongue River, there is a ranching/farming operation situated near the river.

Visual considerations. Describe viewshed around resource: The viewshed on the north, east, and south consists of open, hilly ridges for fully two miles in each direction; the Bighorn Mountains rise to the west.

Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data: Establishment of a resource boundary must await further on-site research to determine the precise location of the encounter site.

Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known): This is private land and the position of the owners is not known; the historic scene has been substantially compromised by agricultural use of the general resource site.

Photographs. Views and dates: View as indicated on photographs taken July 22, 1997

Date of recordation: July 22, 1997

Major sources:


INDIAN WARS BATTLE AND SKIRMISH SITES INVENTORY FORM

Battlefield/Skirmish site name: Cole-Walker Battle

Location: Approximately 5 miles northeast of Broadus, Powder River County, Montana, approximately 1½ miles above the mouth of the Little Powder River

Date(s) of engagement: September 8, 1865

Duration of engagement: Approximately 8 hours

Indian tribes involved: Oglala Lakotas

Known Indian leaders present: Red Cloud, Oglala Lakota

Army units involved: Second Missouri Light Artillery (acting as cavalry), Twelfth Missouri Cavalry, Sixteenth Kansas Cavalry, Fifteenth Kansas Cavalry (detachment)

Army leaders present: Colonel Nelson Cole and Colonel Samuel Walker
Number of troops: Approximately 2000 men

Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): Estimated at between 1000 and 4000 warriors

Major phases of engagement (describe): The engagement opened at about 10 a.m. when warriors intent on protecting their village, which stood in the troops’ line of march, struck Colonel Walker’s advance guard as it moved along the bluffs on the west side of Powder River. The Indians completely surrounded the Cole-Walker joint command, but lacking many firearms they inflicted little damage. The warriors were repeatedly driven away by the soldiers, who at first corralled their wagons but later continued moving up the valley in skirmish order, the warriors harassing them until nightfall. At one point, Colonel Cole sent his cavalry afoot to attack Indians assembling east of the stream, and eventually he and Walker’s commands forded the Powder to encamp on the east side. During the greater part of the action, Cole trained howitzer fire on the Indians, repeatedly scattering them.

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

- Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)
- Skirmishing (sporadic firing)
- Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)
- Artillery employed
- Determined assault (battle lines close)
- Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)
- Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)
- Sustained hand-to-hand fighting
- Investment and siege
- Surprise attack

Total casualties:

Of troops: One man killed and 4 men wounded

Of Indian force: Unknown, although apparently some Indians were killed.
Noncombatant casualties: None

Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: This encounter was the last in a series that the Cole-Walker columns had experienced with the Lakotas and/or the Cheyennes since September 1 after they entered the Powder River country. These engagements were significant as further manifestations of the fear the military presence caused among the tribes, and particularly of the simmering rage of the people following the previous year’s Sand Creek massacre in Colorado Territory. The Cole-Walker battles, coupled with those of Brigadier General Patrick E. Connor on Tongue River on August 29 and Colonel Sawyers’ a few days later, aggravated an already tense atmosphere of distrust among the tribes that affected the course of Indian-government relations on the Northern Plains for the next quarter century. The most immediate culmination of these events appeared in the warriors’ wiping out of Captain William J. Fetterman’s command of eighty-one soldiers at Fort Phil Kearny in December 1866.

USGS Quadrangles and date: Monday Creek, Montana, 1973

Township, Range, and Section: Township 4 South, Range 52 East, Sections 19, 20, 29, and 30

Land ownership: Private (Talcott and Quinlan)

Acreage: Extent of the area of the major fighting is unknown. This battlefield needs additional documentary study and on-site examination.

Current land use (check all that apply):

- Original forest
- Uncultivated natural grass (west bank area)
- Cultivated/agriculture (Hay is being grown in bottom on the east bank of Powder River.)
- Residential use (buildings)
- Other development (describe)

Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:

- Significantly changed
- Some major alterations
Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain) (This refers to the general area of the battlefield; specifics of the site remain to be determined through additional documentary research and examination of the terrain.)

- Similar (retains essential features with some changes)
- Very similar to period of engagement

**Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):**

- Low (little development activity in vicinity)
- Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)
- High (terrain is immediately threatened)
- Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

**Perception of Threats to Site:** Continued agricultural use poses a threat for those areas of the battlefield on the east side of Powder River; the area west of the river is uncultivated and seemingly is not threatened at present.

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. So far as is known, only existing landforms consisting of bluffs, ridges, and breaks, besides the Powder River, remain.

**Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield?** Available first-person army accounts suggest that the Indian casualties were carried away by other warriors; disposition of the single soldier fatality is unknown, although it is likely he was buried in the area.

**Monumentation:** None

**Engagement can be interpreted from:**

- Public roads (approximately three quarters of a mile east of the battleground)
- Private roads
- Private property only
What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events? Existing landforms of the river, its bottomland, the bluffs west of the stream, and the ridges and breaks in the area.

What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? Fence lines, crop areas, gravel roads, and farmsteads or ranches exist on the east side of Powder River. While visually impacting the overall scene, these features probably do not lie on the battlefield.

Visual considerations. Describe viewshed around resource: Beyond the modern developments listed above, the viewshed consists mostly of hills and ridges in all directions of the resource property.

Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data: Once a precise core area for the action is determined through additional research, a boundary of perhaps ¼ mile in all directions (avoiding developed areas) would be in order.

Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known): This is private land and is probably not conducive to establishment of a federal presence at this time.

Photographs. Views and dates: Views as indicated on photographs taken July 26, 1997

Date of recordation: July 26, 1997

Major sources:


Battlefield/Skirmish site name: Crazy Woman Fork Fight

Location: Johnson County, Wyoming, approximately 20 miles southeast of Buffalo, on the east side of Trabing Road approximately 14 miles east of Interstate 25.

Date(s) of engagement: July 20, 1866

Duration of engagement: Approximately 8 hours

Indian tribes involved: Lakotas, Northern Cheyennes, and Northern Arapahos

Known Indian leaders present: Unknown

Army units involved: Detachment of Company F, Second Battalion, Eighteenth Infantry
Army leaders present: First Lieutenant George M. Templeton, commanding until wounded; thereafter Second Lieutenant Alexander H. Wands, commanding

Number of troops: Five officers, 12 enlisted men (as escort to a train of five wagons and two ambulances); total individuals (including two noncombatant women), approximately 26

Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): Estimates range between 160 and 300.

Major phases of engagement (describe): The fighting at Crazy Woman Fork consisted of an attack by Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho warriors on a train enroute from Fort Reno to Fort Phil Kearny, Dakota Territory (now Wyoming) near the point where present Dry Creek joins Crazy Woman Creek. An officer (First Lieutenant Napoleon H. Daniels) out searching for game was killed at the inception of the combat, while another (Templeton) was wounded, after which the warriors initiated a surprise assault on the train, which quickly took a defensive position on a rise of land between the two streams. As the attack mounted, the wagon party came under fire from warriors in the timber along the streams, causing them to hurriedly move the wagons perhaps one-half mile south to a higher knoll, away from the Indian positions in the bottom and from which the small body of troops could command the area. Atop the hill, the troops raised entrenchments around the corralled wagons and took the brunt of several direct charges by the warriors on their position until evening, when the Indians withdrew. A relief force from Fort Kearny arrived on the scene shortly thereafter.

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

☐ Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)

☑ Skirmishing (sporadic firing)

☐ Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)

☐ Artillery employed

☐ Determined assault (battle lines close)

☑ Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)

☐ Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)

☐ Sustained hand-to-hand fighting
Investment and siege

Surprise attack

Total casualties:

Of troops: One officer killed, approximately 8 enlisted men wounded

Of Indian force: Apparently 4 killed; total casualties unknown

Noncombatant casualties: None

Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: The fight at Crazy Woman Fork was the largest of a series of encounters between the Indians and the army during the spring and summer of 1866 that proved a prelude to the famous Fetterman encounter outside Fort Phil Kearny on December 21, 1866, in which Red Cloud’s warriors wiped out an army detachment numbering 81 men. Such attacks as that at Crazy Woman Creek and Fort Kearny ultimately led the federal government to abandon for the present its effort to hold and occupy the Indians’ Powder River hunting lands. For the Lakotas and Cheyennes, the fight proved one of several victories against the soldiers over the next year. These, however, portended a reversal of fortune when government troops reentered the Indian country in 1873-74; lengthy campaigns in 1876-77 resulted in the ultimate removal of the tribesmen to agencies in Dakota Territory and Nebraska.

USGS Quadrangles and date: Trabing, Wyoming, 1970

Township, Range, and Section: Township 48 North, Range 81 West, Section 36; Range 80 West, Section 31 (possibly 32, too)

Land ownership: Private (Spiro Zezas)

Acreage: At least 50 acres, but total extent of resource area as yet undetermined.

Current land use (check all that apply):

- Original forest
- Uncultivated natural grass
- Cultivated/agriculture
- Residential use (buildings)
- Other development (describe)
Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:

- Significantly changed
- Some major alterations
- Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)
- Similar (retains essential features with some changes)
- Very similar to period of engagement

Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):

- Low (little development activity in vicinity)
- Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)
- High (terrain is immediately threatened)
- Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

Perception of Threats to Site: No immediate threats; erosion of landforms at the site constitutes a long-term threat.

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. Known landforms at the time of the fight and still existing include the courses of Crazy Woman Creek and Dry Creek, which may have changed negligibly, plus the hills and ridges over which the train traveled and its party fought. Vestiges of entrenchments possibly remain at the site.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? The enlisted man killed was buried on the knoll where the wagons were corralled; it is unknown if his remains are yet interred there. Lieutenant Daniels’s body was removed to Fort Reno where it was buried. The disposition of the Indian dead is unknown.

Monumentation: A headstone-type marker to the memory of Lieutenant Daniels (whose name has been misspelled) is on the site where the fight apparently started.
Engagement can be interpreted from:

- Public roads
- Private roads (Dirt road leading from asphalt Trabing Road)
- Private property only

What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events?
Crazy Woman and Dry creeks and the adjoining hills and ridges.

What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? A gravel access road (cited above) runs through the area of the encounter some 50 feet from the Daniels marker. This road is the only intruding element.

Visual considerations. Describe viewshed around resource: The viewshed consists of the natural prairie scenery in all directions. The broad area retains considerable integrity as regards its probably appearance in July 1866.

Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data: This site needs further research and ground truthing to establish the precise positions of the various combatants during the engagement. Resource boundaries can only then be established.

Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known): Because the property is privately owned, options are likely limited. They are unknown at present.

Photographs. Views and dates: Views indicated on photographs taken July 22, 1997

Date of recordation: July 22, 1997

Major sources:


Robert S. Ellison Collection, Walter M. Camp Papers, Western History Department, Denver Public Library. Item 9, Interview with F. M. Fessenden, October 16, 1913; Letter 96, Fessenden to Camp, July 5, 1919.

INDIAN WARS BATTLE AND SKIRMISH SITES INVENTORY FORM

_Battlefield/Skirmish site name:_ Baker Battle (a.k.a. Marias Massacre)

*Location:* Toole Country, Montana, approximately 7 miles south of Dunkirk, Montana, along Marias River. (Bureau of Reclamation records indicate that several locations for this site have been proposed by various researchers. Two locations have been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, but neither was listed because of lack of on-the-ground verification.)

_Date(s) of engagement:_ January 23, 1870

_Date(s) of engagement:_ Approximately 1½ hours

_Indian tribes involved:_ Piegans (Blackfeet)

_Known Indian leaders present:_ Heavy Runner, Bighorn, and Red Horn

_Army units involved:_ Companies F, G, H, and L, Second Cavalry; detachment of mounted men of the Thirteenth Infantry
Army leaders present: Major Eugene M. Baker

Number of troops: Approximately 250

Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): Approximately 275

Major phases of engagement (describe): Baker surprised the Piegan village shortly after dawn, his men firing into the lodges from bluffs on the south bank of the Marias River but located west of the Indian camp. The troops remained in this position pouring repeated volleys among the lodges for nearly an hour. The occupants were cut down running for shelter among the coulees bordering the river. Finally, the cavalry troops mounted and charged down the bluffs and through the camp, tearing down the lodges while the infantry soldiers rounded up survivors of the onslaught.

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

☐ Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)
☐ Skirmishing (sporadic firing)
☐ Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged) (repeated volleys delivered by troops alone)
☐ Artillery employed
☐ Determined assault (battle lines close)
☐ Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)
☐ Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)
☐ Sustained hand-to-hand fighting
☐ Investment and siege
☐ Surprise attack

Total casualties:

Of troops: 1 soldier killed

Of Indian force: 120 men killed

Noncombatant casualties: 53 women and children killed

Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: This action occurred as a result of complaints that various bands of Blackfeet Indians had killed settlers, stolen
livestock, and destroyed property with impunity in the area of northwestern Montana Territory. However, Baker had been instructed not to harm the village of Heavy Runner, a principal accommodationist chief among the Piegans. The slaughter of the tribesmen demonstratively influenced other Blackfeet/Piegan camps, and although the bands considered mounting all-out war against the soldiers, peace prevailed. While the army hierarchy rallied behind Baker, despite his disobedience in striking Heavy Runner’s camp, his devastating attack evoked a harsh media response in the East, where critics chastised the army for the killing of noncombatants and called for a reevaluation of military policy regarding Indians. Such repercussions from the event stymied a then-current resolution in Congress to transfer control of Indian affairs from the Interior Department to the War Department (this was never accomplished). They also led to the abolishment of the policy of using army officers as permanent Indian agents.

**USGS Quadrangles and date:** Presently undetermined

**Township, Range, and Section:** Unknown

**Land ownership:** Public (Bureau of Reclamation) and/or private

**Acreage:** Unknown

**Current land use (check all that apply):**

- Original forest
- Probably uncultivated natural grass
- Cultivated/agriculture
- Residential use (buildings)
- Other development (describe)

**Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:**

- Significantly changed
- Some major alterations
- Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)
- Similar (retains essential features with some changes)
- Likely very similar to period of engagement
Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):

✔ Low (little development activity in vicinity)

☐ Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)

☐ High (terrain is immediately threatened)

☐ Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

Perception of Threats to Site: Possible threats consist of river erosion through flooding and continued channel changes, along with long-term erosion of battlefield-related landforms.

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. Historical physical remains most likely include the bluffs along the south (west) side of the Marias River from which the soldiers attacked, and the immediately surrounding terrain over which the adversaries ranged during the event. It is important to note that the precise location of the village site in the river bottom has not been verified either through documentation or archeologically.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? Although unstated in the documents, the Piegan dead were probably left on the field and were buried elsewhere in the area by their relatives. (More than 100 tribesmen were captured by the troops but later released.) The lone soldier fatality was removed to Fort Shaw for burial.

Monumentation: None

Engagement can be interpreted from:

✔ Public roads

☐ Private roads

☐ Private property only

What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events?

While the terrain in the general area of the site appears to be largely unchanged since the day of Baker's attack, floods in recent decades have deposited several feet of silt in the Marias valley bottom, thereby considerably altering the
topography and historical landscape of that feature. Although the location of the
site has not been verified, contributory elements in the general area consist of the
river, its bottom, the bluffs on the west (south) side of the Marias River, and the
terrain immediately surrounding all.

*What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of
events?* Beyond occasional fence lines, there appear to be no major intrusions in
the general area of the battleground. In the vicinity there are unimproved roads
and trails.

*Visual considerations.* Describe viewshed around resource: There are bluffs and
open lands with river breaks in all directions from the general resource area.

*Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data:* Once the location is
precisely verified, a boundary might conceivably extend ½ mile in all directions
from the village site and the bluffs on the west.

*Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and
officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known):* Because the exact
location of this resource has not been determined relative to public or private
ownership, options for its preservation and interpretation are not presently
known.

*Photographs. Views and dates:* General vicinity views as indicated on photographs
taken August 20, 1997

*Date of recordation:* August 20, 1997

*Major sources:*

Ben Bennett, *Death, Too, for the Heavy Runner.* Missoula, Mont.: Mountain


John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains.* Norman:

Paul A. Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and His Army.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska


General area of Baker Battle 1870

USGS Quadrangle: Dunkirk, Montana
Battlefield/Skirmish site name: The Bates Fight (a.k.a. Snake Mountain Battle)

Location: Hot Springs County, Wyoming, approximately 30 miles southwest of Ten Sleep and approximately 25 miles east of Thermopolis, on Bates Creek approximately ½ mile west of the Washakie County line

Date(s) of engagement: July 4, 1874

Duration of engagement: Approximately 3 hours

Indian tribes involved: Northern Arapahos (village); U.S. Army scouts from the Shoshoni tribe

Known Indian leaders present:

Army units involved: Company B, Second Cavalry

Army leaders present: Captain Alfred E. Bates
Number of troops: Approximately 260 (including several civilians and approximately 190 Shoshoni scouts)

Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): Estimated at between 500 and 600

Major phases of engagement (describe): This encounter occurred following reported area raiding by the Arapahos, who were also believed to be encroaching into the traditional game lands of their enemy neighbors, the Shoshonis. Captain Bates and his command, from Camp Brown, located a village estimated to contain 112 lodges and attacked in the morning, killing many of the tribesmen as they attempted to flee and capturing more than half of their pony herd. Some of the warriors and noncombatants, together with the remaining horses, gained the high rocky bluffs immediately overlooking the village. By controlling these heights, the Indians were thus able to return the soldiers' gunfire and force the troops' eventual withdrawal before they could destroy the village.

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

☐ Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)

☒ Skirmishing (sporadic firing)

☒ Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)

☐ Artillery employed

☐ Determined assault (battle lines close)

☐ Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)

☒ Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)

☐ Sustained hand-to-hand fighting

☐ Investment and siege

☒ Surprise attack

Total casualties:

Of troops: Two enlisted men killed; 1 officer and 3 enlisted men wounded; 2 Shoshonis killed and 2 wounded

Of Indian force: Estimated 25 killed and perhaps 100 wounded
Noncombatant casualties: Unknown, but presumably included in the above figure.

Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: This engagement was not part of any particular army campaign waged against the Northern Arapahos. It was an isolated encounter that occurred in response to mounting reports of depredations by Arapaho warriors against settlers and the Shoshonis. Because Bates was sent out apparently at the behest of Lieutenant General Philip H. Sheridan, commander of the Military Division of the Missouri, then visiting Camp Brown, the ensuing strike against the Arapahos may have been undertaken partly to politically impress that senior officer. Further, the participation of the large complement of Shoshoni scouts in the action against their enemies gives the Bates battle added significance as a manifestation of the state of intertribal relations between these two tribes.

USGS Quadrangles and date: Battle Mountain, Wyoming, 1952

Township, Range, and Section: Township 41 North, Range 90 West, Section 12

Land ownership: Public (Bureau of Land Management); Private (Kenneth Orchard, Robert Baird)

Acreage: Approximately 400 acres

Current land use (check all that apply):

□ Original forest

☑ Uncultivated natural grass (cattle grazing)

□ Cultivated/agriculture

□ Residential use (buildings)

□ Other development (describe)

Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:

□ Significantly changed

□ Some major alterations

□ Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)

□ Similar (retains essential features with some changes)

☑ Very similar to period of engagement
Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):

☑ Low (little development activity in vicinity)
☐ Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)
☐ High (terrain is immediately threatened)
☐ Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

Perception of Threats to Site: No threats to the site are apparent beyond long-term wind and water erosion.

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. Historical remains consist of natural features, such as the course of Bates Creek; the ravines, ridges, and boulders in the area of the village site; and possible stone breastworks atop the south bluff of what is today called Battle Mountain.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? All of the Arapaho casualties were left on the field, with most located in the village. The dead were presumably retrieved afterwards and afforded traditional burials in the vicinity. The army fatalities were likewise left at the village site, and their ultimate disposition is unknown.

Monumentation: None

Engagement can be interpreted from:

☐ Public roads
☐ Private roads

☑ Private property only: While most of the battle area lies on public land, it must be accessed by passing through private property.

What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events? Existing landforms to include the Bates Creek bottom and its associated ravines and ridges, as well as the rocky blufftops adjoining the site manned by the warriors following the attack on the village.

What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? There are fence lines, cattle and game trails, stock watering ponds, and
unimproved roads and trails in the immediate vicinity of the site. These, however, detract only marginally from the resource.

*Visual considerations.* Describe viewshed around resource: The viewshed in all directions is naturally spacious and consists generally of buttes, rolling lands, stream valleys, and distant mountain ranges.

*Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data:* This site requires further delineation to align with historical accounts before a definitive boundary can be determined.

*Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known):* Although the major part of the resource is on public land, access is required through private property. Landowners are currently opposed to federal involvement in the area.

*Photographs. Views and dates:* Views as indicated on photographs taken September 12, 1997

*Date of recordation:* September 12, 1997

*Major sources:*


“Record of Medical History of Fort Washakie” covering the period from April 4, 1873, to June 30, 1887. Copy in compiler’s library, Arvada, Colorado, pp. 180-20.


INDIAN WARS BATTLE AND SKIRMISH SITES INVENTORY FORM

_Battlefield/Skirmish site name:_ Powder River Battle (a.k.a. Reynolds Fight)

Location: Powder River County, Montana, along Powder River approximately 36 miles southwest of Broadus, Montana.

_Date(s) of engagement:_ March 17, 1876

_Duration of engagement:_ Five hours

_Indian tribes involved:_ Northern Cheyennes, Oglala Lakotas

KNOWN _Indian leaders present:_ Old Bear, Little Wolf, and Two Moons, Northern Cheyennes

_Army units involved:_ Companies E, I, and K, Second Cavalry; Companies E, F, and M, Third Cavalry

_Army leaders present:_ Colonel Joseph J. Reynolds
Number of troops: Approximately 300

Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): Estimated at between 400 and 500 (including approximately 85 warriors)

Major phases of engagement (describe): The fighting began with a mounted charge by troops of the Second Cavalry into and through the village while others cut off and captured the large pony herd. Confused and demoralized at the surprise assault, the warriors at first resisted the troops while the noncombatants escaped, but when army reinforcements arrived they fled out of the north end of the camp, most reaching the rugged hills on the west, from which position they returned heavy fire against the soldiers. The balance of the engagement consisted of the troops destroying the village and its contents before they withdrew from the scene with the 700 captured ponies. (The warriors managed to recapture most of the herd during the darkness of the following morning.)

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

[ ] Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)
[ ] Skirmishing (sporadic firing)
[ ] Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)
[ ] Artillery employed
[ ] Determined assault (battle lines close)
[ ] Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)
[ ] Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)
[ ] Sustained hand-to-hand fighting
[ ] Investment and siege
[ ] Surprise attack

Total casualties:

Of troops: Four men killed and 1 officer and 5 men wounded

Of Indian force: Estimated at 2 men killed

Noncombatant casualties: One woman wounded
Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: As the first of numerous encounters between the army and the Cheyennes and Lakotas in 1876-1877, the Powder River battle is significant for the fact that the village occupants consisted mostly of Northern Cheyennes rather than the Lakotas that the troops had believed to be there. Consequently, the Powder River battle—one of the largest of the Great Sioux War—had the effect of further solidifying the existing alliance between the tribes and compounding the government’s campaign to forcibly remove the Indians onto the Great Sioux Reservation in what is now western South Dakota. The attack proved devastating for the Northern Cheyennes, for it drove the people from their homes and destroyed their winter food and supplies. They subsequently found relief among the Oglala and Hunkpapa Lakotas. The battle thus comprised a critical beginning for both the army and the tribesmen in the fighting over the next fifteen months.

USGS Quadrangles and date: Moorhead, Montana, 1970

Township, Range, and Section: Township 8 South, Range 48 East, Sections 28, 29, 31, 32, 33; Township 9 South, Range 48 East, Section 5

Land ownership: Private (B. & S. Cattle Company, Inc.) in Sections 28, 29, 31, 32, and 33, and in Section 5; Public (Bureau of Land Management) in parts of Sections 28, 29, 32, and 33

Acreage: Approximately 300 acres

Current land use (check all that apply):

- Original forest
- Uncultivated natural grass (Grazing)
- Cultivated/agriculture
- Residential use (buildings)
- Other development (describe)

Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:

- Significantly changed
- Some major alterations
Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)

Similar (retains essential features with some changes)

Very similar to period of engagement

Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):

- Low (little development activity in vicinity)
- Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)
- High (terrain is immediately threatened)
- Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

Perception of Threats to Site: None at present beyond long-term natural erosion and possible flooding of the Powder River. This property is at present (September 1997) for sale; it is not known what use the future owners will make of the land.

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. Features that remain consist of natural landforms, including the village site on a bench along the river, trees that were present at the time of the battle (and which reportedly have lead bullets embedded in them), the bluffs west of the river to which the noncombatants and warriors withdrew, and the surrounding ridges and terrain over which much of the battle action played out.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? The Indian dead were left in the village by the troops and were recovered by the tribesmen after Reynolds's withdrawal from the area. They were probably buried in the vicinity. The four soldiers killed in the fighting were left on the field (for which Reynolds was criticized), where the returning Indians found them. They were never buried, although an apocryphal story had Reynolds burying two of his dead beneath the ice of Powder River. No direct evidence that this occurred has been found.

Monumentation: Through the efforts of retired Brigadier General William C. Brown, a cobblestone monument incorporating headstones for the four soldiers killed was erected in 1934 along the road in Section 28.
Engagement can be interpreted from:

- Public roads
- Private roads
- Private property only

What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events? The natural features that all played roles in the battle, including the treed area near the river in which stood the village; the bluffs to the west from which Indian marksmen fired on the troops following their withdrawal from the camp; and the flats and breaks passed over by the attacking soldiers in their charge.

What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? Intrusive features consist of the gravel road bordering the west side of the battlefield, telephone poles, fence lines, cattle trails, and some irrigation ditches in the river bottom, including in the area of the village.

Visual considerations. Describe viewshed around resource: The viewshed consists of hills and bluffs extending for miles on the north and on the east and west sides of Powder River. The bluffs on the west factored in the battle action. Some development, such as the road and fence lines, is unavoidably included in the viewshed.

Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data: A suggested boundary would be the highest crest of the bluffs on the east and west, and a perimeter extending approximately 1/2-mile from the village site on the north and approximately 1 mile on the south.

Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known): The private property, which encompasses most of the core battlefield but comprises approximately 5000 acres, is presently (September, 1997) available for purchase for the sum of $395,000. The contact is Bill Bahny and Associates, Helena, Montana (1-800-237-7844).

Photographs. Views and dates: Views as indicated on photographs taken July 26, 1997

Date of recordation: July 26, 1997
Major sources:


Battlefield/Skirmish site name: The Blowout Skirmish (a.k.a. Grace Creek)

Location: Garfield County, Nebraska, in the sand hills approximately 2 miles from the north bank of the Calamus River, in close proximity to the Garfield-Loup County line

Date(s) of engagement: April 28, 1876

Duration of engagement: Approximately 5 hours

Indian tribes involved: Brulé Lakotas

Known Indian leaders present: Unknown

Army units involved: Squad of Company A, Twenty-third U.S. Infantry

Army leaders present: Second Lieutenant Charles H. Heyl
Number of troops: One officer and 9 enlisted men (ten men total)

Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): Six

Major phases of engagement (describe): The few troops, dispatched from Fort Hartstuff twenty miles away, reached the blowout (a physical declivity in the top of a sand hill commonly formed by wind erosion) at about 4:30 p.m. on the afternoon of April 28 after some local citizens had driven the warriors within the landform and surrounded them. Lieutenant Heyl and three soldiers charged the blowout, but the occupants killed one soldier and forced Heyl to withdraw. The troops and citizens then guarded the blowout until after dark, when the Indians managed to escape with an apparent loss of one tribesman killed.

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

☐ Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)

☑ Skirmishing (sporadic firing)

☐ Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)

☐ Artillery employed

☑ Determined assault (battle lines close)

☐ Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)

☐ Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)

☐ Sustained hand-to-hand fighting

☐ Investment and siege

☐ Surprise attack

Total casualties:

Of troops: One killed

Of Indian force: Possibly 1 man killed

Noncombatant casualties: None

Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: This small engagement occurred little more than a month after the first major battle of the Great Sioux War (March 17, 1876, at Powder River, in far distant Montana
Territory). While it had local significance for the settlers in the Loup and Calamus river valleys of eastern Nebraska in that it created some consternation among the populace regarding the possibility of a general Indian attack, its primary importance lies in its reflection of the unrest that existed among the agency Indians, from whence this small party of six had come likely seeking subsistence. The trail that the Indians followed to the Calamus Valley was a traditional route that in the past led to Pawnee villages, although by this time (1876) the Pawnees, tribal enemies of the Lakotas, had moved into the Indian Territory (present Oklahoma). It is also significant that Lieutenant Heyl and two enlisted men of his small force received Medals of Honor for their performance at the blowout.

**USGS Quadrangles and date:** Burwell, 1952 (It should be noted that this encounter is often mentioned as having occurred at Grace [sic] Creek, Nebraska. The site is actually some distance from Gracie Creek.)

**Township, Range, and Section:** Township 22 North, Range 16 West, Section 19 (and possibly part of 18)

**Land ownership:** Private (Owned by the Maude-Goodenow Estate; leased by Erma Dimmitt)

**Acreage:** The site of the blowout proper occupies approximately 15 acres; the overall site, including ridges likely occupied during the encounter, encompasses approximately 240 acres.

**Current land use (check all that apply):**
- Original forest
- Uncultivated natural grass
- Cultivated/agriculture
- Residential use (buildings)
- Other development (describe)

**Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:**
- Significantly changed
- Some major alterations
- Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)
Similar (retains essential features with some changes)

Very similar to period of engagement

Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):

- Low (little development activity in vicinity)
- Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)
- High (terrain is immediately threatened)
- Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

Perception of Threats to Site: At present, there are few threats beyond continued long-term wind erosion.

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. There are none beyond the natural landforms, primarily consisting of sand hills and ridges.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? The Indians under cover of darkness apparently carried the possible single Lakota fatality away. The lone army fatality (Sergeant William H. Dougherty) was buried at Fort Hartsuff on April 30, 1876. His remains were reinterred at the cemetery at Fort McPherson, Nebraska, in October 1881.

Monumentation: None

Engagement can be interpreted from:

- Public roads
- Private roads

Private property only

What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events? The hill and blowout on which the encounter occurred are still present, as are other natural features of the surrounding terrain occupied by troops and citizens. The entire area consists of a sandhills massif of ridges and breaks generally trending in a northwest to southeast alignment. The blowout is situated on a high point that juts out significantly from the surrounding topography.
What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? None

Visual considerations. Describe viewshed around resource: The view in all directions from the blowout consists of generally treeless sand hills sparsely topped with native grasses. On the north, east, and west the viewshed extends a distance of from one to four miles. One mile to the south is the valley of the Calamus River, which is two miles distant. At that point, the Calamus River forms a modern reservoir presently used for fishing, boating, and other recreational activities. Beyond the river, the viewshed extends to the south for another five or six miles.

Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data: A boundary might encompass all prominences surrounding the blowout for a distance of approximately 1,000 yards, or about equal to effective rifle range from that point.

Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known): Private land, with local residents generally resistant to state and federal involvement.


Date of recordation: June 25, 1997

Major sources:


Diary of Fort Hartsuff Contract Surgeon Dr. George W. Towar, copy provided by Roye D. Lindsay, Fort Hartsuff Historic Site, Nebraska.


Independent (Grand Island, Nebraska), May 27, 1876.


News Release, April 27, 1976, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Lincoln, Nebraska, citing centennial observance of the “Battle” of the Blowout.

Omaha Bee, May 8, 1876.

Platte Valley Independent, May 6, 1876.
**Battlefield/Skirmish site name:** Tongue River Heights Skirmish

**Location:** Confluence of Prairie Dog Creek with Tongue River, Sheridan County, Wyoming, adjoining County Road 1231, Beatty Gulch Road; site extends north across state line into Bighorn County, Montana

**Date(s) of engagement:** June 9, 1876

**Duration of engagement:** Approximately 1 hour

**Indian tribes involved:** Northern Cheyennes

**Known Indian leaders present:** Little Hawk

**Army units involved:** Principally Companies A, E, I, and M, Third Cavalry

**Army leaders present:** Brigadier General George Crook; Captain Anson Mills, Third Cavalry
Number of troops: Approximately 1000 troops were in Crook’s bivouac, and many of them were informally engaged in the initial assault. Mill’s companies of Third Cavalrymen, who actually mounted the bluffs against the warriors, probably numbered no more than 250 men.

Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): Estimated at 200

Major phases of engagement (describe): The encounter consisted of an attack by the Northern Cheyennes on Crook’s bivouac along Tongue River and its rejection by the cavalry troops. The Indians surprised the soldiers as they made camp at about 4 p.m., firing on them from the bluffs overlooking the Tongue. The troops protected their herd and returned volleys into the warriors on the bluffs. Some Indians tried to cross the Tongue one-half mile upstream, but Crook’s pickets prevented it. Meantime, Captain Mills mounted four companies of the Third Cavalry and forded the river. The men dismounted on the north side, then charged up a ravine to the top of the bluffs, formed a skirmish line, and drove the warriors away, exchanging fire with them as they fell back and finally withdrew.

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

☒ Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)

☒ Skirmishing (sporadic firing)

☒ Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)

☐ Artillery employed

☐ Determined assault (battle lines close)

☐ Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)

☐ Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)

☐ Sustained hand-to-hand fighting

☐ Investment and siege

☒ Surprise attack

Total casualties:

Of troops: One enlisted man wounded

Of Indian force: Unknown
Noncombatant casualties: Not applicable

Significance of battle-skirmish in context of campaign-war: This encounter was unusual in that the emboldened Northern Cheyenne warriors opened an attack on the troops as they maneuvered in the Indians’ game lands. Thus provoked by the tribesmen, the skirmish signified an unbowed attitude of confidence existing among them that presently translated into solid victories over the soldiers. Tongue River Heights proved a portent for their brave assault on Crook’s force eight days later along Rosebud Creek, one of the largest battles of the Great Sioux War, and for their defeat and destruction of Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer’s command at the Little Bighorn eight days after Rosebud.

USGS Quadrangles and date: Bar N Draw, Wyoming-Montana, 1968; revised 1978

Township, Range, and Section: Wyoming: Township 58 North, Range 83 West, Section 23 and parts of Sections 22 and 24; Montana: Township 9 South, Range 40 East, Section 33

Land ownership: Private (Wyoming—Ronald Mischke and Fred Trembath; Montana—Console Oil Company)

Acreage: Approximately 350 acres within the sections designated above

Current land use (check all that apply):

- Original forest
- Uncultivated natural grass
- Cultivated/agriculture
- Residential use (buildings)
- Other development (describe)

Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:

- Significantly changed
- Some major alterations
- Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)
- Similar (retains essential features with some changes)
Very similar to period of engagement

Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):

- Low (little development activity in vicinity)
- Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)
- High (terrain is immediately threatened)
- Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

Perception of Threats to Site: On the Montana side, coal mining constitutes a major industry and the battlefield land lying in that state is owned by a coal mining company. Consequently, the land should be considered seriously threatened. On the Wyoming side, where the area encompassing Crook’s bivouac is situated, the land is used for grazing. Future agricultural development in this area could have a detrimental impact on the resource.

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. Besides Tongue River and Prairie Dog Creek, the other physical remains comprise such landforms as the river bottom on the south side that constituted the bivouac area, and the bluffs on the north side of the river from which the Indians initiated the attack, including the tortuous ravines through which the cavalry troops raced in their counterattack on the Indians’ position.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? Not applicable for the troops; probably not applicable for the Northern Cheyennes

Monumentation: None

Engagement can be interpreted from:

- Public roads
- Private roads
- Private property only
What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events? All of the natural landforms contribute, including the river and creek, the bottom where the soldiers camped, and the bluffs north of the river.

What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? Modern intrusions consist of a gravel county road (1211) that borders the south side of the site, large power lines that cross over the bluffs north of the river, and various fence lines, one of which runs atop the bluffs approximating the course of the state line between Wyoming and Montana.

Visual considerations. Describe viewshed around resource: The viewshed comprises agricultural and grazing land in all directions, with occasional ranch buildings and roads. Trees and underbrush line the streams in the vicinity.

Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data: The gravel county road (1211) that rings the south periphery of the resource could constitute the south boundary; an area of 1/16 of a mile on the east and west of Crook’s bivouac would be appropriate, while on the north an area reaching for ¼ mile north of the bluff tops would insure that the total area of the cavalry-warrior action atop the bluffs would be protected.

Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known): Because the area is privately owned by at least two parties (one a coal mining company), it is probable that their present interest in preserving the resource is low.

Photographs. Views and dates: View indicated on photograph taken July 24, 1997

Date of recordation: July 24, 1997

Major sources:


Battlefield/Skirmish site name: Sibley Fight

Location: Bighorn National Forest, Sheridan County, Wyoming, approximately ten miles west of Dayton

Date(s) of engagement: July 7, 1876

Duration of engagement: Approximately 2 hours

Indian tribes involved: Lakotas and Northern Cheyennes

Known Indian leaders present: White Antelope, Northern Cheyenne

Army units involved: Scouting party of men selected from among various companies of the Second Cavalry

Army leaders present: Second Lieutenant Frederick W. Sibley, Company E, Second Cavalry
**Number of troops:** Twenty-six, including Sibley, plus two civilian scouts, a civilian packer, and a news correspondent (total 30 persons)

**Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants):** Estimates range between 300 and 400 warriors

**Major phases of engagement (describe):** The Sibley encounter occurred eleven days after the Battle of the Little Bighorn about 60 miles to the north and involved warriors who had taken part in that engagement. Sibley’s party had been sent out on July 6 from Brigadier General George Crook’s camp (near present Sheridan, Wyoming) to look for Indians. When warriors discovered the scouting party in the low country north of the Bighorn Mountains, Sibley’s men sought to elude them by moving into the mountains. Eventually, the party took refuge among dense pine trees on a hillside at the edge of a clearing and formed a skirmish line. From the surrounding ridges, the warriors leveled repeated volleys into the woods, but succeeded only in wounding several army horses that had been tied to the trees. The soldiers fired back repeatedly. After an exchange of two hours, Sibley, on the advice of his guides, decided to take his remaining ammunition, abandon the horses, and steal his men east through the dense forest in an attempt to escape what otherwise would seem to be certain eventual annihilation by the Indians. The ruse worked; the warriors did not immediately follow, and Sibley, over the course of the next two days, succeeded in getting his command out of the mountains and back to Crook’s camp without a single casualty.

**Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):**

- ✔ Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)
- ✔ Skirmishing (sporadic firing)
- ✔ Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)
- □ Artillery employed
- □ Determined assault (battle lines close)
- □ Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)
- □ Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)
- □ Sustained hand-to-hand fighting
- □ Investment and siege
• Surprise attack

Total casualties:

Of troops: None

Of Indian force: One killed, and an estimated 5 wounded (army estimate)

Noncombatant casualties: None

Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: Sibley’s fight, while an isolated incident of the Great Sioux War of 1876-1877, represented the first contact between troops and Indians following the Battle of the Little Bighorn. As such, and in view of the desperate circumstances that Sibley’s party endured and survived, the skirmish later took on a heroic quality that the American public embraced as a positive element of the war. For the Indians, the brush with Sibley’s men pointed up the reality of a sustained military presence in the area despite the victory over the troops under Custer twelve days earlier.

USGS Quadrangles and date: Burgess Junction, Wyoming, 1964

Township, Range, and Section: The precise location of the Sibley encounter has not been established. The area has not been surveyed for archeological resources. However, the most likely location, based on conclusions derived from study of the documentary evidence, is in Township 56 North, Range 88 West, Section 17.

Land ownership: Public (Bighorn National Forest)

Acreage: Approximately 250 acres

Current land use (check all that apply):

☑ Original forest

☐ Uncultivated natural grass

☐ Cultivated/agriculture

☐ Residential use (buildings)

☑ Other development (describe) Grazing and timber
Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:

- Significantly changed
- Some major alterations
- Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)
- Similar (retains essential features with some changes)
- Very similar to period of engagement

Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):

- Low (little development activity in vicinity)
- Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)
- High (terrain is immediately threatened)
- Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

Perception of Threats to Site: Increasing public use and long-term natural erosion

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. Beyond the existing landforms of grassy ridges and heavily forested mountains, such physical remains are unknown.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? The sole fatality (a Cheyenne leader) was removed from the field after the fight.

Monumentation: None on the site; a stone marker commemorating the Sibley Scout stands near U.S. Highway 14 at Sibley Lake, approximately 5 miles southeast of the probable skirmish site.

Engagement can be interpreted from:

- Public roads (Dirt roads and trails accessible only by four-wheel drive vehicles)
- Private roads
- Private property only
What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events?
Only the natural landforms of hills, ridges, and intervening terrain in the vicinity of the probable skirmish site

What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? None beyond an occasional unimproved road or trail in the vicinity

Visual considerations. Describe viewshed around resource: The viewshed in all directions consists of meadows interspersed with forested mountains and ridges with associated mountain streams.

Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data: No boundary can be advanced until this site has been definitively located by the discovery of appropriate artifactual evidence.

Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known): Although public land, this consideration is not applicable until the site has been confirmed.

Photographs. Views and dates: Views indicated on accompanying photographs, all taken on July 23, 1997

Date of recordation: July 23, 1997

Major sources:


George W. Webb (comp.), *Chronological List of Engagements between the Regular Army of the United States and Various Tribes of Hostile Indians which Occurred during the Years 1790 to 1898, Inclusive*. St. Joseph, Missouri: Wing Printing Company, 1939, p. 76.
Battlefield/Skirmish site name: Warbonnet Creek Skirmish

Location: Sioux County, Nebraska, approximately 17 miles northeast of the community of Harrison.

Date(s) of engagement: July 17, 1876

Duration of engagement: Approximately ½ hour

Indian tribes involved: Northern Cheyennes

Known Indian leaders present: Yellow Hair, while not a tribal leader, is associated with this action.

Army units involved: Companies B, I, and K, Fifth Cavalry (with four additional companies held in reserve)

Army leaders present: Colonel Wesley Merritt, commanding
Number of troops: Approximately 150 engaged (from three of seven companies totaling approximately 350 officers and enlisted men in proximity)

Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): Approximately twelve combatants in immediate engagement with the soldiers; approximately 100 situated on surrounding ridges within view about 1½ miles from the skirmish site.

Major phases of engagement (describe): The engagement consisted of a surprise attack by Merritt’s troops on a party of warriors who were themselves preparing to attack a small army supply train guarded by a few soldiers. Following the attack by Merritt’s men, the Indians fell back. The scout, William F. (“Buffalo Bill) Cody, killed one of them, Yellow Hair. The cavalrymen pursued the warriors for three miles before halting to await the balance of Merritt’s command.

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

☐ Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)

☒ Skirmishing (sporadic firing)

☐ Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)

☐ Artillery employed

☐ Determined assault (battle lines close)

☐ Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)

☐ Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)

☐ Sustained hand-to-hand fighting

☐ Investment and siege

☒ Surprise attack

Total casualties:

Of troops: No casualties

Of Indian force: One killed

Noncombatant casualties: None

Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: These Indians composed an advance party for a body of several hundred Cheyenne men, women,
and children under Little Wolf. He had left Red Cloud Agency to join the Lakotas and Northern Cheyennes who had recently defeated Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer's command at the Little Bighorn River in Montana. Following the skirmish at Warbonnet, the Little Wolf people hearing the shooting started back to Red Cloud Agency, pursued all the way by Merritt's troops. The skirmish represented the first substantive encounter between troops and Indians following the Little Bighorn and helped restore morale to the troops after that defeat. Cody's "duel" with Yellow Hair, broadcast in the media (and later played out in staged fashion in Cody's Wild West stage show) as the "First Scalp for Custer," fueled growing patriotic sentiment by white Americans over ensuing weeks and months.

USGS Quadrangles and date: Montrose, Nebraska, 1980

Township, Range, and Section: Township 34 North, Range 54 West, Sections 17 and 18

Land ownership: Public (Department of Agriculture)

Acreage: Approximately 1000 acres

Current land use (check all that apply):

- Original forest
- Uncultivated natural grass
- Cultivated/agriculture
- Residential use (buildings)
- Other development (describe)

Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:

- Significantly changed
- Some major alterations
- Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)
- Similar (retains essential features with some changes)
- Very similar to period of engagement
Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):

- Low (little development activity in vicinity)
- Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)
- High (terrain is immediately threatened)
- Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

Perception of Threats to Site: The only apparent threat is long-term erosion of the terrain.

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. The only physical remains present on the battlefield compose its existing landforms, most of which are apparently much the same as they appeared in 1876.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? The body of the single Northern Cheyenne casualty was left on the field, where relatives recovered it about a month later.

Monumentation: A cobblestone monument with bronze plaque was raised in 1934 atop the hill from which the troops first saw the approaching party of Northern Cheyennes. In 1996, lightning apparently destroyed this monument, and plans are currently underway to rebuild it. There is also a small cobblestone marker with bronze plaque below the hill at the approximate site where Cody killed the warrior, Yellow Hair.

Engagement can be interpreted from:

- Public roads (and property)
- Private roads
- Private property only

What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events? The existing landforms contribute, particularly the conical hill at the center of the field, along with the Hat Creek draw and rivulet bottom near the Cody-Yellow Hair marker.
What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? During a feared outbreak by Lakota Indians in 1890, the residents of the nearby community of Montrose raised entrenchments around the principal conical hill. Over the years, these have filled in naturally and grassed over, and they scarcely detract from the scene of the 1876 action. A county road (Hat Creek and Montrose) adjoins the south edge of the battlefield, along with telephone poles and lines. The Montrose community church and cemetery are located across the road (south) from the battlefield. A small-dilapidated house is north of the road and southeast of the Cody-Yellow Hair marker.

Visual considerations. Describe viewshed around resource: There is natural open terrain in all directions from the battlefield, with exception of the modern intrusions described above. The terrain is generally open to the horizon, miles away. There are trees lining the Hat Creek bottom drainage.

Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data: The north, east, and west boundaries might be designated at a 1-mile radius from the conical hill on the battlefield. The south boundary should be at the road.

Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known): This is federal land; however, the Nebraska State Historical Society has an interest in preserving the site. The attitude of local residents in this sparsely occupied area is not known, although there appears to be decided local interest in the history of the Warbonnet skirmish. A small sign at the gate leading into the site is marked, “Warbonnet Historic Site.”

Photographs. Views and dates: Views as indicated on photographs taken June 29, 1997

Date of recordation: June 29, 1997

Major sources:


Battlefield/Skirmish site name: Slim Buttes Battle

Location: Harding County, South Dakota, along Gap Creek, adjoining the south side of South Dakota Highway 20 at Slim Buttes, Harding County, approximately 22 miles east of Buffalo, South Dakota

Date(s) of engagement: September 9-10, 1876

Duration of engagement: Approximately 1 day

Indian tribes involved: Minneconjou, Oglala, and Brulé Lakotas; Northern Cheyennes

Known Indian leaders present: American Horse (a.k.a. Iron Plume, Iron Shield, or Black Shield), Minneconjou Lakota; Roman Nose, Oglala Lakota (not to be confused with the Cheyenne leader of the same name)

Army leaders present: Brigadier General George Crook and Captain Anson Mills

Number of troops: Approximately 1,950 officers and men total ultimately present at Slim Buttes

Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): Approximately 260 people (including warriors) in initial encounter; between 700 and 800 warriors in afternoon fight

Major phases of engagement (describe): On September 7, General Crook sent Captain Mills and 150 cavalrymen to seek provisions for his starving command in the Black Hills mining camps. Mills encountered the Sioux-Cheyenne village of 37 lodges on the evening of the 8th. The first phase of the battle consisted of Captain Mills's dawn attack on the village that captured the pony herd and forced the fleeing occupants to take refuge in the hills rising south of Gap Creek. The second phase consisted of the combined efforts of Mills and Crook (following the arrival on the scene of the balance of the command) to drive some of the villagers (both warriors and noncombatants) from a deep brush-covered ravine near the village site where they had taken refuge; some of these people died in the barrage of shooting the troops directed into the ravine, but most surrendered, including American Horse, who later died of wounds he received. The third phase of the battle occurred when warriors arriving from nearby Sioux camps attacked the soldiers in an attempt to retake the ponies and free the captives. The troops skirmished until dark with the warriors, when they withdrew without success. Finally, as Crook's force pulled away from the field on the morning of the 10th, his rearguard once more engaged tribesmen who harassed them with gunfire from the surrounding ridges.

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

☐ Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)

☒ Skirmishing (sporadic firing) (afternoon fight)

☒ Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged) (afternoon fight)

☐ Artillery employed
Determined assault (battle lines close) (morning fight; afternoon fight)

Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks) (afternoon fight)

Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)

Sustained hand-to-hand fighting

Investment and siege (ravine fight)

Surprise attack (morning fight)

Total casualties:

Of troops: Two men killed and 24 wounded; one civilian scout also killed

Of Indian force: Estimated at 8 killed

Noncombatant casualties: Estimated at 5 killed and at least 1 wounded

Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: This battle was significant as the first decisive army victory in the Great Sioux War, occurring six months after the contest began. It thus constituted the turning point wherein the soldiers finally attained the upper hand over the tribesmen who had previously bested them on such fields as Powder River, Rosebud, and Little Bighorn. Following the engagement at Slim Buttes, the Indians, cognizant of the inevitability of their military defeat, began turning themselves in at the Dakota and Nebraska agencies.

USGS Quadrangles and date: Battleship Rock, South Dakota, 1969; Reva, South Dakota, 1968

Township, Range, and Section: Township 18 North, Range 8 East, Sections 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, and 16

Land ownership: Private (George Lermen)

Acreage: Approximately 1500 acres

Current land use (check all that apply):

Original forest

Uncultivated natural grass
Cultivated/agriculture (hay grown on neighboring parcels)
Residential use (buildings) (nearby)
Other development (describe) South Dakota Highway 20 borders the north edge of the battle site. There are fence lines and telephone poles in the vicinity of the site.

Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:
- Significantly changed
- Some major alterations
- Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)
- Similar (retains essential features with some changes)
- Very similar to period of engagement

Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):
- Low (little development activity in vicinity)
- Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)
- High (terrain is immediately threatened)
- Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

Perception of Threats to Site: Besides long-term natural erosion and erosion caused by the flooding of Gap Creek, there appears to be increasing residential development in the area of the resource and possible encroachment by increasing agricultural use of the surrounding terrain.

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. The creek bottom where the village stood, the natural landforms of ridges and rising ground to the south where the afternoon fighting took place, and the surrounding hills where the troops bivouacked on September 9, 1876.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? The soldier and civilian fatalities were buried on the field. Crook
caused his cavalry to march their horses over the graves to obliterate them. Disposition of the Indian dead is unknown.

*Monumentation:* A metal shaft monument with bronze tablets stands south of Highway 20, erected in 1920 through the efforts of Walter M. Camp of Chicago. There is also a State of South Dakota historical marker near the highway.

*Engagement can be interpreted from:*

- Public roads
- Private roads
- Private property only

*What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events?* The natural landforms consisting of the creek bottom, the surrounding hills, ridges, breaks, and ravines, and the ground rising to the buttes south of the village site all contribute to the interpretation.

*What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events?* Other than fence lines, no modern intrusions directly impact the site at present. In the immediate vicinity, however, are unimproved roads, South Dakota State Highway 20, telephone poles, and some residences and outbuildings. Some land in the vicinity of the battlefield is used for growing hay.

*Visual considerations.* *Describe viewshed around resource:* The viewshed to the south and west of the battlefield generally consists of the magnificent Slim Buttes, although there is some residential development to the west, too. Besides the highway and telephone poles, the view to the north consists of hayfields and, rising beyond, more buttes. The view to the east is generally open prairie, although there are visual obstructions in the form of miscellaneous buildings and roads.

*Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data:* A boundary might consist of the highway on the north, the distant buttes on the south (approximately 1 mile distant from the highway), and an arbitrary distance of 1/8 mile either side of the core resource area on the east and west.

*Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known):* This is private
property adjoining Department of Agriculture land (Custer National Forest) at
Slim Buttes. The landowner appears not favorably disposed to public visitation of
the resource.

Photographs. Views and dates: Views indicated on photographs taken August 25,
1997

Date of recordation: August 25, 1997

Major sources:

John G. Bourke, On the Border with Crook. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons,
1891, pp. 368-76.

John F. Finerty, War-Path and Bivouac; or, The Conquest of the Sioux. Norman:

Jerome A. Greene (ed.), “Conflict in Dakota Territory: Episodes of the Great
Sioux War,” South Dakota History, XXIII (Spring, 1993), pp. 2-47.

Jerome A. Greene (comp., ed.), Lakota and Cheyenne: Indian Views of the Great

Jerome A. Greene, Slim Buttes, 1876: An Episode of the Great Sioux War.

Jerome A. Greene (comp., ed.), Battles and Skirmishes of the Great Sioux War,
pp. 95-115.

Charles King, Campaigning with Crook. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press,
1964, pp. 96-124.
Slim Buttes 1876

USGS Quadrangles: Battleship Rock, S. Dakota and Reva, S. Dakota
INDIAN WARS BATTLE AND SKIRMISH SITES INVENTORY FORM

**Battlefield/Skirmish site name:** Spring Creek Skirmish

*Spring Creek, view to the north, showing creek bottom and ridges fought along*

**Location:** Approximately ¾ mile north of Interstate 94, Pleasant View Road Exit, Dawson County, Montana, in the draw of present Sand Creek

**Date(s) of engagement:** October 11, 1876

**Duration of engagement:** Approximately 8 hours (the site at Spring Creek marks only the point where the day's fighting began)

**Indian tribes involved:** Hunkpapa, Sans Arc, and Minneconjou Lakotas

**Known Indian leaders present:** Gall, Hunkpapa Lakota; Bull Eagle, Minneconjou Lakota; and Red Skirt, Minneconjou Lakota

**Army units involved:** Companies G, H, and K, Twenty-second Infantry; Company C, Seventeenth Infantry
Army leaders present: Captain Charles W. Miner, Twenty-second Infantry, commanding

Number of troops: Approximately 160

Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): Approximately 400 warriors

Major phases of engagement (describe): This engagement consisted of a spirited attack by the Lakotas, intent upon stemming an invasion of their buffalo hunting grounds, on Captain Miner’s supply train enroute from the Glendive Cantonment to the Tongue River Cantonment. The troops had bivouacked at Spring Creek, and during the night of October 10 warriors stampeded many of the mules used to pull the wagons. At daylight on the 11th, while renewing their march, the warriors struck. Skirmishers were thrown out to ward off the mounted attackers and the wagons proceeded forward, the Indians following and intensifying their efforts from afar over the next eight miles. Finally, they forced Miner to turn about and return with the train to Glendive. (A subsequent supply train departed Glendive on October 15th guarded by more troops and a complement of Gatling guns under command of Lieutenant Colonel Elwell S. Otis. Traversing much of the same ground as Miner, the train succeeded in reaching the Tongue River Cantonment after prolonged combat with the Sioux.)

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

☐ Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)
☐ Skirmishing (sporadic firing)
☒ Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)
☐ Artillery employed
☐ Determined assault (battle lines close)
☐ Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)
☐ Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)
☐ Sustained hand-to-hand fighting
☐ Investment and siege
☑ Surprise attack
Total casualties: None
Of troops: None
Of Indian force: None
Noncombatant casualties: Not applicable
Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: This skirmish represented the resolve of the tribesmen to resist the army invasion of their hunting grounds in the fall of 1876 and to carry on their traditional pursuits in the region. By the Indians’ initiation of the fighting, the Spring Creek action also signified the Lakotas’ confidence in their own military abilities, in the wake of their major victories over the troops at Rosebud Creek and Little Bighorn, to succeed against the government forces.

USGS Quadrangles and date: Forest Park, Montana, 1967
Township, Range, and Section: Township 15 North, Range 54 East, Section 24
Land ownership: Private (Gary Carlson)
Acreage: Approximately 500 acres (start of encounter, moving southwest)

Current land use (check all that apply):

☐ Original forest
☒ Uncultivated natural grass
☒ Cultivated/agriculture (wheat and hay)
☒ Residential use (buildings)
☒ Other development (describe) Gravel road, power lines in the bottom terrain of Sand Creek

Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:

☐ Significantly changed
☐ Some major alterations
☒ Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)
☐ Similar (retains essential features with some changes)

☐ Very similar to period of engagement

Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):

☐ Low (little development activity in vicinity)

☐ Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)

☒ High (terrain is immediately threatened)

☐ Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

Perception of Threats to Site: The Sand Creek bottom, where the troops camped the night of October 10-11, would be further compromised with additional construction of residences or placement of trailer homes and installation of support facilities. The ridges immediately west of the creek, apparent troop positions, are presently unimpacted by development; however, various parts of the terrain lying to the west and southwest, over which the troops and Indians ranged during the fighting, are used for growing hay and wheat.

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. The natural landforms of the creek bottom and the prominent ridge on the west are present, along with the draw through which the military road passed. The road was later used for civilian traffic as late as 1910, so that its course can be easily discerned.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? Not applicable

Monumentation: None

Engagement can be interpreted from:

☑ Public roads

☐ Private roads

☐ Private property only

What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events? The creek bottom north of the old Carlson house (ca.1910), the ridge immediately
west with its break through which the wagon road passed, and the trace of the road proper all contribute.

What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? Intrusions consist of the modern developments of the gravel access road and the modern houses and trailer homes, together with such support features as power lines and telephone poles.

Visual considerations. Describe viewshed around resource: The country consists largely of rolling hills and intervening plains with occasional homes, roads, and buildings scattered in all directions. Interstate 94 is less than 1-mile southeast, and the Yellowstone River is approximately 2 miles southeast.

Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data: A resource boundary might embrace the creek bottom for ¼ mile on either side of the road trace and the adjoining terrain for ¼ mile on either side of the stream.

Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known): This is private land with no public use options.

Photographs. Views and dates: Views indicated on photographs taken August 23, 1997

Date of recordation: August 23, 1997

Major sources:


Jerome A. Greene, Yellowstone Command: Colonel Nelson A. Miles and the Great Sioux War, 1876-1877, pp. 81-90.


**Battlefield/Skirmish site name:** Cedar Creek Skirmish

*Location:* Prairie County, Montana, along the headwaters of the East Fork of Cedar Creek, approximately 21 miles northwest of Terry, Montana

*Date(s) of engagement:* October 21, 1876

*Duration of engagement:* Approximately 4 hours

*Indian tribes involved:* Hunkpapa, Minneconjou, and Sans Arc Lakotas

*Known Indian leaders present:* Sitting Bull, Hunkpapa Lakota; Gall, Hunkpapa Lakota; Bull Eagle, Minneconjou Lakota; and Red Skirt, Minneconjou Lakota

*Army units involved:* Companies A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, and K, Fifth Infantry

*Army leaders present:* Colonel Nelson A. Miles

*Number of troops:* Approximately 460 officers and men, including scouts
Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): Approximately 2500 (including perhaps 900 warriors)

Major phases of engagement (describe): The Cedar Creek skirmish followed two contentious meetings between Miles and Sitting Bull on October 20 and 21. On the latter date, when the Lakota leader failed to yield to Miles’s demand for the surrender of his people, the army advanced on the Lakotas’ positions in the surrounding hills and ridges, driving them from the tortuous terrain. A wide-ranging engagement followed, the first part consisting of a prolonged exercise in tactical maneuvering, with no shots being fired; shooting finally erupted as tribesmen ignited the grass and underbrush in the adjoining ravines, precipitating a smoky blaze through which the soldiers initially passed in pursuing the Indians for almost 20 miles until darkness set in. During the prolonged opening exchange and troop advance, fire from a Model 1851 Ordnance Rifle was directed against Lakota positions on the ridges and kept the warriors at a distance.

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

☐ Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position) (opening action)

☑ Skirmishing (sporadic firing)

☐ Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)

☑ Artillery employed

☐ Determined assault (battle lines close)

☐ Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)

☐ Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)

☐ Sustained hand-to-hand fighting

☐ Investment and siege

☐ Surprise attack

Total casualties:

Of troops: Two men wounded

Of Indian force: Five killed

Noncombatant casualties: Unknown
Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: In the skirmish at Cedar Creek, which followed the first meeting between a federal representative (Miles) and a principal leader of the Indian coalition (Sitting Bull) in the Great Sioux War, Miles indicated to the Lakotas his resolve to remain in the Yellowstone country and prosecute the tribesmen until they yielded. The councils and the fighting that followed aggravated existing schisms among the Lakotas about surrendering or continuing the war. Soon after the Cedar Creek affair, several of the Sioux leaders (minus Sitting Bull, who traveled north with his band) met with Miles along the Yellowstone River and agreed to lead approximately 2,000 of their people to the agencies in Dakota Territory and Nebraska. Only a few hundred of the tribesmen, however, actually turned themselves in, with most choosing to remain afield until forced by destitution to go into the agencies the following year.

USGS Quadrangles and date: Becker Dam, Montana, 1983 (provisional edition)

Township, Range, and Section: Township 15 North, Range 49 East, Sections 4, 5, 6, and 7

Land ownership: Public (Bureau of Land Management); Private (Frette and Cork, Diamond L Ranches, Inc., and Charles Grue Ranch)

Acreage: Approximately 2400 acres

Current land use (check all that apply):

☐ Original forest

☒ Uncultivated natural grass (cattle grazing)

☐ Cultivated/agriculture

☐ Residential use (buildings)

☒ Other development (describe) The gravel Cedar Creek Road bisects the site, and there are several unimproved trails in the battlefield area.

Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:

☐ Significantly changed

☐ Some major alterations

☐ Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)
Similar (retains essential features with some changes)

Very similar to period of engagement

Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):

- Low (little development activity in vicinity)
- Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)
- High (terrain is immediately threatened)
- Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

Perception of Threats to Site: None immediate beyond long-term erosion

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. Battle-related remains consist of the hills, ridges, ravines and intervening terrain over which the troops and Indians respectively moved during the engagement.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? The disposition of the Lakota dead is unknown, but it is likely that they were left on the field after the troops departed.

Monumentation: None

Engagement can be interpreted from:

- Public roads
- Private roads
- Private property only

What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events? All of the natural landforms consisting of hills, ridges, ravines, and the intervening terrain.

What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? The gravel county road that effectually bisects the battlefield, along with various unimproved roads and cattle trails.

Visual considerations. Describe viewshed around resource: Generally, because the resource is on the south side of the divide separating the Missouri and
Yellowstone river drainages, the viewshed affords a sweeping view for miles of the country on the south, east, and west. The view to the north is generally of the rising ground comprising the divide.

Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data: Because of the extent of this site, a suggested boundary might be established one-eighth mile beyond the known core area of the fighting in all directions.

Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known): Because public (BLM) land encompasses the area (Section 6) in which the principal fighting began, options for interpreting the action might be available. Most of the remaining battle-related property today composes privately owned tracts, therefore presumably with no or little use options.

Photographs. Views and dates: Views indicated on photographs taken August 23, 1997

Date of recordation: August 23, 1997

Major sources:


Indian Wars Battle and Skirmish Sites Inventory Form

Battlefield/Skirmish site name: Ash Creek Fight (a.k.a. The Baldwin Fight)

Location: Prairie County, Montana, approximately 35 miles northwest of Terry, Montana

Date(s) of engagement: December 18, 1876

Duration of engagement: Approximately 1 hour

Indian tribes involved: Hunkpapa Lakotas
Known Indian leaders present: Sitting Bull, Hunkpapa Lakota

Army units involved: Companies G, H, and I, Fifth Infantry

Army leaders present: First Lieutenant Frank D. Baldwin

Number of troops: Approximately 100 men

Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): Approximately 800, mostly noncombatants

Major phases of engagement (describe): This encounter consisted of Baldwin's surprise attack on the village in midday when most of the men were out hunting. The soldiers fired solid shot from a howitzer, forcing the villagers (mostly women, children, and the elderly) to flee, leaving the camp and its contents to be destroyed.

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

- Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)
- Skirmishing (sporadic firing)
- Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)
- Artillery employed
- Determined assault (battle lines close)
- Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)
- Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)
- Sustained hand-to-hand fighting
- Investment and siege
- Surprise attack

Total casualties:

Of troops: None

Of Indian force: Estimated 1 killed

Noncombatant casualties: Unknown
Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: The engagement caused the Hunkpapas to flee into the cold while their homes, food, and material necessities were destroyed by the troops. The attack seems to have succeeded in additionally fraying the authority of Sitting Bull thus further undermining the inter-Teton coalition. Ultimately, the Hunkpapa refugees sought solace from the Oglalas south of the Yellowstone before moving north into Canada in the spring of 1877.

USGS Quadrangles and date: Big Sheep Mountain NW, Montana, 1983 (provisional); Big Sheep Mountain, Montana, 1983 (provisional)

Township, Range, and Section: Township 16 North, Range 48 East, Section 21

Land ownership: Private (David Kasten)

Acreage: Approximately 250 acres

Current land use (check all that apply):

- Original forest
- 🗓 Uncultivated natural grass (cattle grazing)
- Cultivated/agriculture
- Residential use (buildings)
- Other development (describe) Unimproved roads, trails, and fence lines are present in the south part of the engagement area.

Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:

- Significantly changed
- Some major alterations
- Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)
- Similar (retains essential features with some changes)
- 🗓 Very similar to period of engagement

Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):

- 🗓 Low (little development activity in vicinity)
Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)

High (terrain is immediately threatened)

Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

Perception of Threats to Site: None at present; long range threats would include development on the immediate site, besides long-term erosion.

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. Natural landforms, consisting of the terrain in the Ash Creek bottom, plus the surrounding hills, ridges, and ravines.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? The disposition of the single Lakota fatality reported by Baldwin is unknown.

Monumentation: Through the efforts of retired Brigadier General William C. Brown, a cobblestone monument with bronze plaque was erected at the south end of the site in 1932.

Engagement can be interpreted from:

- Public roads
- Private roads
- Private property only

What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events? The Ash Creek bottom, where the Sioux lodges stood, along with the terrain over which the troops advanced on the village.

What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? Miscellaneous cattle trails, unimproved roads, fence lines, and a power line impact the scene at various places.

Visual considerations. Describe viewshed around resource: The view consists of ridges and hills for several miles south to the divide between the Missouri River and Yellowstone River drainages. The country north, east, and west is similar, although some small ranch buildings stand to the southeast of the resource area.
Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data: A suggested boundary would extend around the resource area approximately one-eighth mile from the core area.

Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known): While the present landowner appears to have an interest in maintaining access to the marker, it is doubtful that a federal presence would be welcomed.

Photographs. Views and dates: Views indicated on photographs taken August 23, 1997

Date of recordation: August 23, 1997

Major sources:


Ash Creek 1876

USGS Quadrangle: Big Sheep Mtn., Montana
Battlefield/Skirmish site name: Wolf Mountains Battle (a.k.a. Battle of the Butte)

Location: Rosebud County, Montana, approximately 3 miles southwest of Birney along the gravel Tongue River Road (County Road 314)

Date(s) of engagement: January 8, 1877

Duration of engagement: Approximately 5 hours

Indian tribes involved: Oglala Lakotas and Northern Cheyennes

Known Indian leaders present: Crazy Horse, Oglala Lakota; White Bull and Two Moon, Northern Cheyennes

Army units involved: Companies A, C, D, E, and K, Fifth Infantry; Companies E and F, Twenty-second Infantry

Army leaders present: Colonel Nelson A. Miles, Fifth Infantry
Number of troops: Approximately 450

Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): Approximately 600 warriors

Major phases of engagement (describe): The initial phase consisted of an attack by the Lakota and Northern Cheyenne warriors on Miles’s bivouac along Tongue River at about 7 a.m. Fearing he would be outflanked and surrounded, Miles responded by sending companies to hold strategic positions and to drive the Indians from the bluffs across the river and from their positions on the south. The subsequent fighting entailed the troops’ attempt to gain the high ground in all directions and to drive the warriors away, with the south bluffs comprising their principal point of attack. A 12-pounder Napoleon gun and a 3-inch Ordnance Rifle fired several rounds against the tribesmen, causing commotion but no physical damage among them. Eventually, the soldiers succeeded in gaining the crests of the bluffs and securing them against further encroachment by the Indians. A severe snowstorm blew in at about noon, causing such a visibility problem for the adversaries that the fighting ceased. The warriors then withdrew back up the Tongue Valley to their village.

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

- Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)
- Skirmishing (sporadic firing)
- Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)
- Artillery employed
- Determined assault (battle lines close)
- Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)
- Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)
- Sustained hand-to-hand fighting
- Investment and siege
- Surprise attack

Total casualties:

Of troops: One enlisted man killed, 9 wounded
Of Indian force: Exact figures unknown (with perhaps 3 killed and 3 wounded)

Noncombatant casualties: None

Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: Despite the relatively small number of casualties on either side at Wolf Mountains, the encounter was of major significance in leading the Lakotas and Cheyennes to reassess their circumstances. Many were tired of fighting the soldiers; moreover, such nonrenewable resources as arms and ammunition were depleted, they lacked food, and starvation threatened. These conditions led many of the people to resolve to comply with the government demands and turn themselves in at the agencies in Dakota Territory and Nebraska. Their action, coupled with the removal into Canada of the people with Sitting Bull, ended the Great Sioux War of 1876-77.

USGS Quadrangles and date: Birney, Montana, 1967

Township, Range, and Section: Township 6 South, Range 42 East, Sections 21, 22, 27, and 28

Land ownership: Private (Kay Brewster Lohof)

Acreage: Approximately 300 acres

Current land use (check all that apply):

☐ Original forest

☑ Uncultivated natural grass

☑ Cultivated/agriculture

☐ Residential use (buildings)

☑ Other development (describe) A gravel road bisects the battlefield.

Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:

☐ Significantly changed

☐ Some major alterations

☐ Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)

☑ Similar (retains essential features with some changes)
Very similar to period of engagement

Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):

- Low (little development activity in vicinity)
- Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity) (agricultural)
- High (terrain is immediately threatened)
- Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

Perception of Threats to Site: Continued agricultural development in the area would impact parts of the resource. A remote threat is the long-term cumulative effects of erosion.

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. Most of the physical remains comprise the natural landforms, such as the river, the bottom area where Miles's camp stood, and the ridges and buttes that were occupied at various times by the warriors and the soldiers. On a ridge on the north side of the Tongue River, vestiges of two rifle pits raised by the troops are present.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? The soldier dead were removed to the Tongue River Cantonment (at the mouth of Tongue River on the Yellowstone) for interment. The Lakota and Cheyenne casualties were apparently removed by the tribesmen; however, the body of a Cheyenne medicine man named Big Crow, mortally wounded in the fighting, was not removed at his own request. His remains were found by Cheyennes in March, at which time they were covered with stones.

Monumentation: None; a painted sign is present, raised by local 4-H members.

Engagement can be interpreted from:

- Public roads
- Private roads
- Private property only
What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events? The Tongue River and all of the surrounding buttes, ridges, and terrain that were present during the battle.

What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? A modern gravel road (County Road 314) bisects the battlefield. Fence lines, telephone poles, and cornfields also intrude and detract. On the west side of the central high knoll (known locally as “Battle Butte”), a major land leveling operation proceeded in the 1970s for agricultural purposes. That project effectually obliterated that part of the battlefield.

Visual considerations. Describe viewshed around resource: On the east side of the battlefield, the viewshed consists of hills, ridges, buttes, and trees in all directions—north, south, and east—for a distance of from 1 to 3 miles. The area impacted by land leveling lies to the west and cannot immediately be seen from the area east of the high central knoll where most of the fighting occurred.

Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data: A possible boundary might extend for a distance of ½ mile in all directions from the areas of battle action.

Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known): While this is private property, the owners are amenable to interpretation and visitation; several tour groups visit the site annually.

Photographs. Views and dates: Views indicated on photographs taken July 24, 1997

Date of recordation: July 24, 1997

Major sources:


Battlefield/Skirmish site name: Lame Deer Fight

Location: Rosebud County, Montana, along Lame Deer Creek on the southwestern edge of the present village of Lame Deer

Date(s) of engagement: May 7, 1877

Duration of engagement: Approximately 4 hours

Indian tribes involved: Principally Minneconjou Lakotas, but also members of other Lakota tribes

Known Indian leaders present: Lame Deer, Minneconjou Lakota

Army units involved: Companies F, G, H, and L, Second Cavalry; Companies E, F, and H, Twenty-second Infantry; detachment of mounted infantry from the Fifth and Twenty-second infantry regiments; Northern Cheyenne Indian scouts

Army leaders present: Colonel Nelson A. Miles
Number of troops: Approximately 350

Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): Estimated at approximately 425

Major phases of engagement (describe): The opening phase consisted of Miles’s mounted infantrymen and a company of the Second Cavalry charging through the village to stampede and capture the pony herd grazing above the camp, while the remaining cavalry units drove the tribesmen out of their lodges, across the creek, and up the bluffs west of the camp. Following this, Miles attempted to communicate with Lame Deer, but the chief tried to shoot the colonel before being killed himself. The remaining action consisted of the cavalry troops chasing down and skirmishing with the people who fled up the bluffs and into wooded ravines west of the camp. Then the village and its contents was destroyed.

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

- Skirmishing (sporadic firing)
- Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)
- Artillery employed
- Determined assault (battle lines close)
- Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)
- Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)
- Sustained hand-to-hand fighting
- Investment and siege
- Surprise attack

Total casualties:

Of troops: Four men killed, 9 wounded

Of Indian force: Fourteen killed (at least 4 men) and an unknown number wounded

Noncombatant casualties: Several, exact number unknown
Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: The Lame Deer Fight constituted the last major engagement of the Great Sioux War of 1876-1877. The encounter proved devastating to the Minneconjous because they not only lost more of their people killed and wounded, but they saw their village and its contents (including, presumably, much material culture) destroyed. The psychological impact of this seems to have hastened their subsequent movement to surrender at the Lakota agencies in Nebraska. The fight led Commanding General William T. Sherman to conclude that the Sioux war was over.

USGS Quadrangles and date: Lame Deer, Montana, 1958; revised 1973

Township, Range, and Section: Township 2 South, Range 41 East, Sections 3 and 4 (Lame Deer was apparently killed in the northwest quarter of Section 3.)

Land ownership: Northern Cheyenne Tribe

Acreage: Approximately 150 acres

Current land use (check all that apply):

☐ Original forest

☑ Uncultivated natural grass (bluff area west of village site)

☐ Cultivated/agriculture

☑ Residential use (buildings)

☑ Other development (describe) (Besides homes, there are tribally owned buildings, streets, fences, telephone poles, and related appurtenances.)

Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:

☑ Significantly changed

☐ Some major alterations

☐ Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)

☐ Similar (retains essential features with some changes)

☐ Very similar to period of engagement

Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):

☐ Low (little development activity in vicinity)
Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)

High (terrain is immediately threatened)

Lost (irreversible changes to terrain) This applies to the village site, the scene of the initial attack; the bluffs to the west up which the people fled has undergone little development.

Perception of Threats to Site: The village site is irretrievably lost to development; the area of the bluffs could be threatened by development. Long-term erosion constitutes a remote threat to the bluff area.

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. Except for the course of Lame Deer Creek and the bluffs up which the village refugees fled during the army assault, all landform features have been lost to development.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? The soldier dead were buried approximately 200 yards southwest of the creek. It is not known if the remains were later reinterred elsewhere. The disposition of most of the Lakota dead is unknown; the remains of Lame Deer were reportedly deposited in a sandstone cave in the bluffs not far from the site of his death.

Monumentation: None

Engagement can be interpreted from:

Public roads

Private roads

Private property only

What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events? The only contributing landscape features are the creek (although compromised by adjacent development) and the bluffs to the west of the village site.

What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? A major residential subdivision of the village of Lame Deer covers the entire site of the historic Lakota village. Montana Highway 39 roughly parallels the resource area of the historic village in a north-south course.
Visual considerations. Describe viewshed around resource: The resource of the village site today consists of a modern residential area of government housing with streets and an adjacent highway. The viewshed, which comprises the area between the bluffs west of the modern village and the bluffs east of the highway (approximately ½ mile distance west to east), as well as a north-to-south running stretch along the highway, thus reflects features associated with an active late-twentieth century rural community.

Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data: Not applicable; the core site is irretrievably lost.

Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known): Not applicable; site has been severely compromised by modern development.

Photographs. Views and dates: View as indicated on photograph taken July 24, 1997

Date of recordation: July 24, 1997

Major sources:


INDIAN WARS BATTLE AND SKIRMISH SITES INVENTORY FORM

**Battlefield/Skirmish site name:** Antelope Creek

![Antelope Creek, view to the northwest with pit area immediately right of small tree](image)

*Location:* Sioux County, Nebraska, approximately 21 miles north of Harrison and approximately ½ mile east of County Road 29 along Antelope Creek

*Date(s) of engagement:* January 22, 1879

*Duration of engagement:* Approximately one hour

*Indian tribes involved:* Northern Cheyennes

*Known Indian leaders present:* None

*Army units involved:* Companies A, E, F, and H, Third Cavalry

*Army leaders present:* Captain Henry W. Wessels, Jr.

*Number of troops:* Approximately 150

*Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants):* Thirty-three
Major phases of engagement (describe): The engagement consisted of the cavalry troops surrounding this position gradually closing on the Indians from all directions. A final charge by the troops on the position killed most of the defenders and ended the combat.

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

☑ Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)
☑ Skirmishing (sporadic firing)
☑ Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)
☐ Artillery employed
☑ Determined assault (battle lines close)
☐ Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)
☑ Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)
☐ Sustained hand-to-hand fighting
☐ Investment and siege
☐ Surprise attack

Total casualties:

Of troops: Three killed, 3 wounded

Of Indian force: Seventeen men killed, 1 wounded (apparently died later)

Noncombatant casualties: Seven women and children killed. (The remaining 8 women and children were captured.)

Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: This engagement was the last of a series of fights resulting from the January 9 outbreak of the Northern Cheyennes from the barracks at Fort Robinson where they had been held pending their return to the Indian Territory (Oklahoma). The remaining refugees fled to this location where they were concentrated defensively when the soldiers found them. (Total casualties during the entire affray, January 9-22, consisted of 64 Indians killed and 78 captured of the 149 people who initially fled Fort Robinson, along with 11 soldiers killed and 10 wounded.) For Chief Dull Knife's people, Antelope Creek represented a tragic terminus to their flight north from the Indian
Territory, to which place they had been removed following the Great Sioux War. These people had left the Indian Territory the previous September in an effort to escape the starvation and disease of that place and reach their homeland in Montana. One enlisted man received the Medal of Honor for his performance at Antelope Creek.

*USGS Quadrangles and date:* Story, NE, Nebraska, 1980

*Township, Range, and Section:* Township 34 North, Range 56 West, Section 12

*Land ownership:* Private (Andrew Federle)

*Acreage:* Approximately 160 acres

*Current land use (check all that apply):*

- [ ] Original forest
- [x] Uncultivated natural grass (pasture)
- [ ] Cultivated/agriculture
- [ ] Residential use (buildings)
- [ ] Other development (describe)

*Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:*

- [ ] Significantly changed
- [ ] Some major alterations
- [ ] Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)
- [x] Similar (retains essential features with some changes)
- [ ] Very similar to period of engagement

*Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):*

- [x] Low (little development activity in vicinity)
- [ ] Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)
- [ ] High (terrain is immediately threatened)
- [ ] Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)
Perception of Threats to Site: No immediate threats. In the long term, natural erosion poses a threat.

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. A depression that comprises the remains of an entrenchment (pit) used by the Northern Cheyennes is present. Existing natural landforms in the vicinity appear to have changed negligibly since the fight.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? The Indian dead were buried in the pit on the field, where they apparently remain today. The soldier dead were removed for burial in the post cemetery at Fort Robinson.

Monumentation: None

Engagement can be interpreted from:

☐ Public roads
☐ Private roads
☒ Private property only

What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events? The existing landforms consisting of ridges surrounding the creek bottom at various distances from the central entrenchment position occupied by the Northern Cheyennes. On these ridges, the soldiers surrounded the Indians before the final charge on their position.

What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? An irrigation ditch intrudes on the north end of the site. This ditch was apparently excavated many years ago; it is now grassed over and does not visually detract in a major way.

Visual considerations. Describe viewshed around resource: The lands around the resource consist of rising ground rolling for miles in all directions. There is little visual intrusion affecting the viewshed. The owner's ranch is located one-quarter mile west of the site; its presence is partially obscured by foliage in the Antelope Creek bottom.
**Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data:** One-eighth mile in all directions from the Northern Cheyenne entrenchment area.

**Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known):** Unknown, although it is likely that the landowner would oppose intensive government interest in his property.

**Photographs. Views and dates:** Views as indicated on photographs taken June 28, 1997

**Date of recordation:** June 28, 1997

**Major sources:**


Theophilus F. Rodenbough (ed.), *Uncle Sam’s Medal of Honor, Some of the Noble Deeds for Which the Medal has been Awarded, Described by Those Who Have Won It*. New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1886, pp. 325-27.

Battlefield/Skirmish site name: Little Porcupine Creek Fight

Location: Rosebud County, Montana, approximately 30 miles north of Forsyth, Montana, on Little Porcupine County Road, east of the Angela turnoff in the area of Lazy Mac Butte

Date(s) of engagement: March 8, 1880

Duration of engagement: Approximately 1½ hours

Indian tribes involved: Lakotas (probably Hunkpapas)

Known Indian leaders present: Unknown

Army units involved: Companies I and K, Fifth Infantry (mounted)

Army leaders present: Captain Frank D. Baldwin

Number of troops: 100
Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): 19

Major phases of engagement (describe): This skirmish occurred after the mounted infantry troops trailed the Indians to a large, flat-topped butte (present Lazy Mac Butte), atop which they had taken a position to watch for the soldiers while guarding a small herd of ponies on the plain below the north side of the butte. (Three days earlier, these warriors had captured some ponies from the Northern Cheyenne scouts at Fort Keogh and were driving the stock north to Canada, where Sitting Bull's people had lived in refuge since 1877.) The infantrymen took positions behind some natural breastworks about 400 yards southeast of the butte and exchanged fire with the Lakotas for perhaps an hour, when the warriors managed to descend the butte and escape on horseback, abandoning about 100 ponies to the troops.

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):
- Manoeuvre only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)
- Skirmishing (sporadic firing)
- Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)
- Artillery employed
- Determined assault (battle lines close)
- Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)
- Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)
- Sustained hand-to-hand fighting
- Investment and siege
- Surprise attack

Total casualties:
Of troops: None
Of Indian force: None
Noncombatant casualties: Not applicable

Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: The encounter on the Little Porcupine is significant because it typified the types of Lakota-army
engagements on the Northern Plains during the period following the conclusion of the Great Sioux War, 1876-77. By then, most of the Lakotas and Northern Cheyennes had long since surrendered at the agencies in Nebraska and Dakota Territory. Those Lakotas who followed Sitting Bull into Canada during the spring of 1877, however, finding game resources scarce, began to trickle back across the international boundary. Some warriors mounted raiding parties to steal livestock, and the skirmish at the Little Porcupine represented one result of these relatively common activities that continued more or less until the Indians with Sitting Bull returned from Canada and surrendered at Fort Buford, Dakota, in 1881.

**USGS Quadrangles and date:** Rough Creek NE, Montana, 1969

**Township, Range, and Section:** Township 11 North, Range 41 East, Sections 31 and 32; Township 10 North, Range 41 East, Section 5

**Land ownership:** Private (Kent Montgomery)

**Acreage:** Approximately 500 acres

**Current land use (check all that apply):**

- [ ] Original forest
- [ ] Uncultivated natural grass
- [ ] Cultivated/agriculture
- [ ] Residential use (buildings)
- [ ] Other development (describe)

**Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:**

- [ ] Significantly changed
- [ ] Some major alterations
- [ ] Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)
- [ ] Similar (retains essential features with some changes)
- [ ] Very similar to period of engagement
Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):

✓ Low (little development activity in vicinity)
☐ Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)
☐ High (terrain is immediately threatened)
☐ Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

Perception of Threats to Site: No immediate threats are apparent. A long-term threat is continued natural erosion.

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. Stone breastworks remain at the Lakota position atop Lazy Mac Butte, particularly along the east side. Some of the natural stone outcroppings that comprise the breastworks at the probable soldier positions, approximately 400 yards southeast of the butte, show evidence of having been reinforced with piled rocks. Other features consist of the intervening terrain lying between the respective positions of the belligerents, together with the ground north of the butte where the pony herd was corralled until the troops recaptured the animals.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? Not applicable

Monumentation: None

Engagement can be interpreted from:

✓ Public roads
☐ Private roads
☐ Private property only

What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events? The area of the butte and the surrounding terrain, including the breastworks at both the Lakota and army positions, and other natural landforms identified with these resource sites.

What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? Gravel roads lie within ½ mile of the site, and occasional cattle trails are
evident on the terrain, although these would scarcely impact interpretation of the site.

**Visual considerations.** Describe viewshed around resource: The viewshed runs approximately 20 miles in all directions from Lazy Mac Butte and consists of unbroken prairie and sagebrush flats and occasional buttes, bluffs, and ridges.

**Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data:** A suggested boundary might extend ¼ mile in all directions from the core resource area, consisting of Lazy Mac Butte and the supposed troop positions. This site could use further documentation to better establish an action chronology.

**Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known):** Because this is private property, use options, although unknown, are likely unavailable.

**Photographs. Views and dates:** Views as indicated on photographs taken August 22, 1997

**Date of recordation:** August 22, 1997

**Major sources:**

Robert S. Ellison Collection, Walter Camp Papers, Western History Department, Denver Public Library. Various manuscript items relative to the Little Porcupine skirmish, including an interview with Frank D. Baldwin conducted on June 18, 1919.


**Battlefield/Skirmish site name:** Poplar River Skirmish

**Location:** Roosevelt County, Montana, below Poplar Township and opposite the mouth of Poplar River on the Missouri River

**Date(s) of engagement:** January 2, 1881

**Duration of engagement:** 5 hours

**Indian tribes involved:** Minneconjou and Hunkpapa Lakotas

**Known Indian leaders present:** Gall and Crow, Hunkpapa Lakotas

**Army units involved:** Company F, Eleventh Infantry; detachments of Companies A, B, and E, Seventh Infantry; Companies A, B, C, F, and G, Fifth Infantry (mounted); Company F, Seventh Cavalry

**Army leaders present:** Major Guido Ilges
Number of troops: Approximately 300 men, including Northern Cheyenne scouts and citizen volunteers

Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants): Approximately 400

Major phases of engagement (describe): This confrontation occurred after Major Ilges attempted through ultimatum to force the surrender of these people who had recently returned south from their refuge in Canada. The chiefs believed it was too cold to move their people down the Missouri to Fort Buford, as Ilges demanded, and on January 2 the major surrounded the two villages, then situated in dense woods in a loop of the Missouri. The encounter began with Ilges’s advance without firing on the Minneconjou camp, which was largely deserted, its occupants having fled into the timber. Leaving troops to search out these people, Ilges proceeded on to Gall’s camp, likewise mostly deserted. The major sent rounds from a Hotchkiss gun into the woods, then sent troops into the camp where they exchanged fire with some of its remaining occupants and began destroying the lodges. After more shelling with his Hotchkiss gun, Ilges brought up an 1851 Ordnance Rifle to bear on the woods and ordered the tribesmen to present themselves immediately. Within minutes, the people emerged. Meantime, the cavalry company pursued and captured the Indians’ pony herd. Ilges burned any tipis still standing, and reported more than 300 captives.

Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):

- Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)
- Skirmishing (sporadic firing)
- Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)
- Artillery employed
- Determined assault (battle lines close)
- Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)
- Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)
- Sustained hand-to-hand fighting
- Investment and siege
- Surprise attack
Total casualties:

Of troops: None

Of Indian force: Eight killed or died of wounds later

Noncombatant casualties: At least 1 woman wounded

Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: This encounter signified the desperation of the destitute Lakotas who had gone to Canada in early 1877, in risking everything to remove back into the United States. It also demonstrated the government’s hard line in compelling the surrender of those people when they returned seeking subsistence. The Poplar River engagement presaged the action of the principal Sioux leader, Sitting Bull, in finally yielding his starving followers at Fort Buford on July 19, 1881.

USGS Quadrangles and date: Poplar, Montana, 1972; revised 1989

Township, Range, and Section: Township 27 North, Range 51 East, Section 18 and parts of Sections 7, 8, 13, and 17

Land ownership: Fee patent non-Indian land

Acreage: Approximately 260 acres

Current land use (check all that apply):

✔ Original forest

✔ Uncultivated natural grass (cattle grazing)

✔ Cultivated/agriculture (hay and alfalfa)

☐ Residential use (buildings)

✔ Other development (describe) (a hay/tractor shed)

Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:

☐ Significantly changed

☐ Some major alterations

✔ Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)
Similar (retains essential features with some changes)

Very similar to period of engagement

Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):

- Low (little development activity in vicinity)
- Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)
- High (terrain is immediately threatened)
- Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

Perception of Threats to Site: This site is on low bottom ground lying in a loop of the Missouri River. As such, it has been flooded frequently in the past and is subject to flooding, and consequent further erosion, in the future.

Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features. No historical remains associated with the skirmish are known to exist; natural features consist of the river that encompasses the site, along with the terrain on which the action occurred. Although the site was heavily foliaged historically, it is not known if any of the present tree covering existed during the 1881 skirmish.

Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield? It is not known where the burial of the Lakota fatalities took place.

Monumentation: None

Engagement can be interpreted from:

- Public roads
- Private roads

- Private property only

What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events? The Missouri River, the Poplar River, and the trees occupying the loop all apparently approximate the site's appearance at the time of the engagement.

What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? There are none immediately apparent at the site; most roads and
development exist on the north bank of the Missouri (particularly west of the skirmish site) and are thereby distant from the resource area.

Visual considerations. Describe viewshed around resource: The area immediately surrounding the site of the skirmish and encompassed by the river loop consists of thick growths of cottonwood and ash trees. Similarly, a heavy growth of deciduous trees and underbrush covers the ground on the north side of the river east of the loop. The area on the north bank west of the loop contains development consisting of roads and residential areas associated with the community of Poplar.

Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data: The tight natural loop of the Missouri River provides a natural boundary for this unusually constricted site.

Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known): As fee property, there exist no options at present.

Photographs. Views and dates: Views as indicated on photographs taken August 23, 1997

Date of recordation: August 23, 1997

Major sources:

Walter M. Camp, Interview with Dennis Lynch, October, 1908. Camp Collection, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington. (Microfilm, Reel 2, W.M. Camp Collection, Archives and Manuscripts, Brigham Young University, Harold B. Lee Library, Provo, Utah.)


Crow Agency Fight (a.k.a. Sword Bearer Fight)

Location: Approximately 3 miles north of the community of Crow Agency, Bighorn County, Montana, on either side of the Little Bighorn River

Date(s) of engagement: November 5, 1887

Duration of engagement: Approximately 1 hour

Indian tribes involved: Crows

Known Indian leaders present: Wraps-Up-His-Tail (a.k.a. the Sword Bearer)

Army units involved: Troops A, B, D, E, G, and K, First Cavalry; Troops D and H, Ninth Cavalry; Troop A, Seventh Cavalry; Companies B and E, Third Infantry; Companies D, E, G, and I, Fifth Infantry, and Company C, Seventh Infantry

Army leaders present: Brigadier General Thomas H. Ruger
**Number of troops:** Approximately 600

**Number of Indians (combatants and noncombatants):** Approximately 1500

**Major phases of engagement (describe):** The engagement opened west of the Little Bighorn River, approximately three miles north of the Crow Agency buildings where the troops and Indians had confronted each other following a series of incidents (including intertribal raiding) involving Wraps-Up-His-Tail, who army authorities believed was generating pernicious influences among the Crows. Ruger had given Crow leaders a deadline for surrendering the Sword Bearer and other young men the army believed responsible for fomenting disorder at the agency. The fighting opened after Ruger's deadline had passed and the Crow men began shooting off their firearms into the air. Two cavalry troops quickly moved on the warriors, who delivered a heavy volley against them. The soldiers, arrayed as skirmishers, pressed the tribesmen back toward the river while Hotchkiss guns previously deployed on the hills to the west opened on them. Two cavalry and two infantry companies blocked the Indians' route back to the agency, although a cessation of gunfire presently permitted noncombatants and others among the tribesmen who did not want to fight time to withdraw to the agency. Then the cavalry troops advanced, pursuing the warriors across the Little Bighorn in a protracted skirmish until they either fled circuitously for the agency or surrendered. Wraps-Up-His-Tail was among those killed in the fighting.

**Intensity of engagement (check all that apply):**

- Maneuver only (bivouac, marching, shifting for position)
- Skirmishing (sporadic firing)
- Battle lines advanced (volleys exchanged)
- Artillery employed
- Determined assault (battle lines close)
- Repeated attacks (attack repulsed and renewed, counterattacks)
- Lines intermingled (attack pierces defense, hand-to-hand)
- Sustained hand-to-hand fighting
- Investment and siege
- Surprise attack
Total casualties:

Of troops: One man killed and two wounded

Of Indian force: Seven killed and ten-wounded (estimate)

Noncombatant casualties: One

Significance of battle/skirmish in context of campaign/war: The fight was not part of a particular military campaign or war (although one could argue that its long-term origins lay in imposition of the government's reservation, or “removal” policy, among the Crows). Its significance doubtless lies in its manifestation of unrest and frustration among reservation tribesmen, even those who had historically allied themselves with the federal government against enemy tribes, as to the reality of what life now afforded them. Many of the problems leading to the encounter stemmed directly from issues of locally exercised government control over the tribesmen as it affected their age-old freedoms. The rise of Wraps-Up-His-Tail thus signified within Crow society a reactionary intra-tribal dynamic that by the late 1880s was also appearing among other tribes so impacted, including the Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos.

USGS Quadrangles and date: Little Dry Creek, Montana, 1967

Township, Range, and Section: Township 2 South, Range 34 East, Section 24 (probably parts of Sections 13 and 25, too); Range 35 East, Section 19 (possibly parts of Sections 18 and 30, too)

Land ownership: Crow Tribe

Acreage: Approximately 300 acres

Current land use (check all that apply):

☐ Original forest

✓ Uncultivated natural grass (Hills west of valley where hotchkiss guns were positioned, as well as bluffs east of river where some shells struck.)

✓ Cultivated/agriculture (initial Indian positions and skirmish area in the valley west of the river)

☐ Residential use (buildings)

✓ Other development (describe) Much of the area of the fighting today comprises a modern transportation corridor including the routes of I-90 and U.S. Highway
87, a railroad, and other gravel and asphalt roads, besides fence lines, telephone poles, pasture land, and agricultural land (sugar beets).

**Similarity of landscape to period of engagement:**

- □ Significantly changed
- ✓ Some major alterations
- □ Somewhat altered in appearance (many changes, but essential features remain)
- □ Similar (retains essential features with some changes)
- □ Very similar to period of engagement

**Assess the level of threats to the terrain (check one):**

- □ Low (little development activity in vicinity)
- ✓ Moderate (increasing activity in vicinity)
- □ High (terrain is immediately threatened)
- □ Lost (irreversible changes to terrain)

**Perception of Threats to Site:** Immediate threats consist of continued and increased agricultural use, along with further road construction and improvements that would further impact the resource area. Erosion poses a long-term threat.

**Describe historical physical remains on the property, e.g., structures, roadbeds, fences, entrenchments, other battle-related features.** The only landforms remaining in largely unaltered condition are the hills west of the present interstate highway from which the Hotchkiss guns fired, and the cutbank bluffs east of the Little Bighorn River struck by the shells during the engagement.

**Were dead buried on battlefield? Is there evidence that bodies were reinterred elsewhere later? Is there evidence (anecdotal or other) that burials remain on the battlefield?** Presumably, the remains of the soldier killed were removed for burial at Fort Custer, about twelve miles north of the site. These remains were likely reinterred at the Custer National Cemetery at Custer Battlefield after Fort Custer closed. The disposition of the Crow dead is not known.

**Monumentation:** No monument; a small marker raised in 1987 to commemorate the event stands in front of the police station in Crow Agency.
Engagement can be interpreted from:

- Public roads
- Private roads
- Private property only

What landscape features/elements contribute to the interpretation of events?
One can gain a general understanding of the events from the remaining landforms, primarily the hills and bluffs on either side of the valley and the agricultural fields located on the level bottomlands.

What landscape features/elements intrude or detract from the interpretation of events? All of the roads and modern appurtenances described above which impact the primary area of the encounter.

Visual considerations. Describe viewshed around resource: Besides the modern intrusions cited above, the viewshed consists of rolling hills on the east and west sides of the valley where the action occurred. In these areas, development appears to be minimal.

Suggested resource-based boundary based on above data: Not applicable

Current zoning and land use options (position of local residents, planners, and officials toward preservation or compatible land use, if known): This is Indian tribal land presently in agricultural production.

Photographs. Views and dates: Views as indicated on photographs taken July 25, 1997

Date of recordation: July 25, 1997

Major sources:


