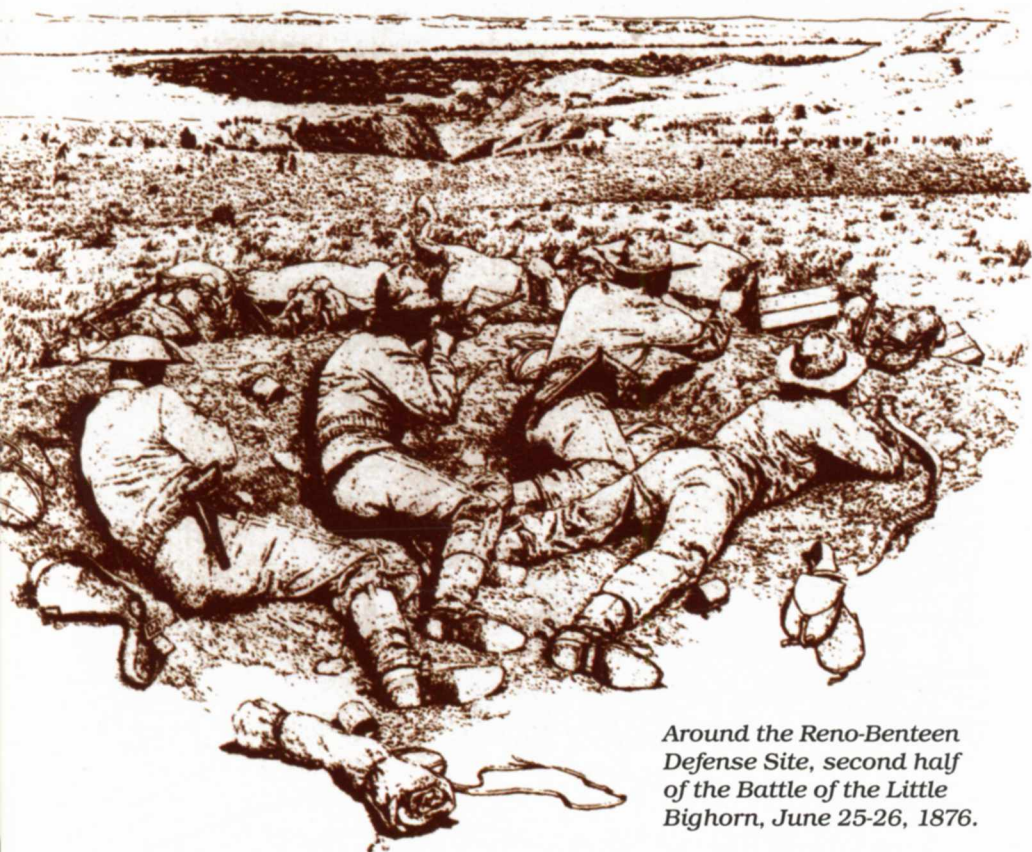


RENO-BENTEN ENTRENCHMENT TRAIL



*Around the Reno-Bent
Defense Site, second half
of the Battle of the Little
Bighorn, June 25-26, 1876.*

LITTLE BIGHORN BATTLEFIELD
National Monument • Montana

For Your Safety

Beware! This is Rattlesnake country. Please stay on paved pathways.



Portions of the Entrenchment Trail are wheel chair accessible; however, physically challenged visitors should use caution on the trail due to several steep grades. Designated parking is available at the parking lot.

Help us protect the resources

- *Extinguish all smoking material before entering trails.*
- *Stay on paved trail*
- *Do not disturb wildlife or vegetation*
- *Do not deface headstones*
- *Please do not litter*
- *Caution: There are steep grades!*
- *BE PREPARED! Wear appropriate head and foot wear.*
- *Bring a canteen.*



**FEDERAL LAW PROHIBITS RELIC HUNTING
AND USE OF METAL DETECTORS.
REPORT OFFENDERS TO PARK HEADQUARTERS.**

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Introduction

At approximately 4 p.m. on Sunday, June 25, 1876, the battered remnants of Major Marcus A. Reno's three companies reached these bluffs following their disastrous attack in the valley. The Indians who had pursued Reno's men to the river left suddenly and went downstream. Reno was soon joined by Captain Frederick W. Benteen's battalion of three companies (125 men) and the pack train with its escort of 130 men. About this time gunfire was reported to the north, in the direction of Custer's probable advance.



Reno's Retreat

Artwork by Martin Pate

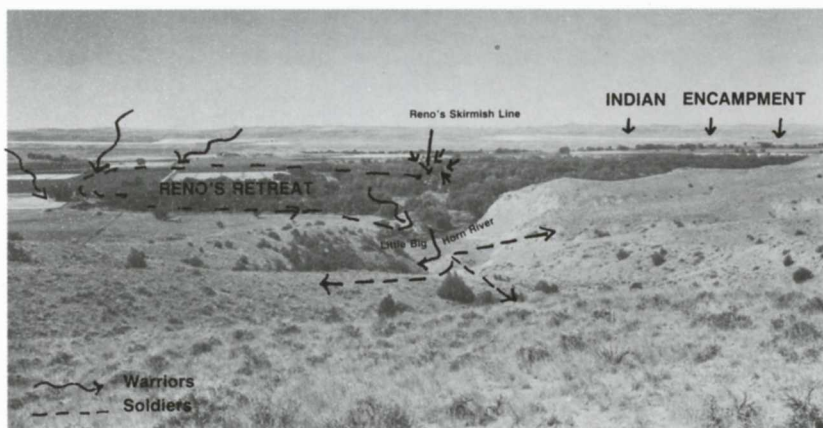
Elements of Reno's force, in an attempt to open communication with Custer, proceeded to Weir Point, about one mile north. Confronted there by an overwhelming number of Sioux and Cheyenne, the cavalry was forced back to this site. Here Reno and Benteen established a defense perimeter at about 7 p.m. Hundreds of warriors, now finished with Custer, surrounded the remaining seven companies of the 7th Cavalry and began firing a hail of bullets into the soldiers' position.



Battle of the Little Bighorn (Reno-Benteen defense site)
Painted on muslin by White Bird, Northern Cheyenne,
age 15 when he participated in the battle

"...everybody now lay down and spread himself out as thin as possible. After lying there a few minutes, I was horrified to find myself wondering if a small sagebrush, about as thick as my finger, would turn a bullet, so I got up and walked along the line, cautioned the men not to waste ammunition, ordered certain men who were good shots to do the firing, and others to keep them supplied with loaded guns."

Lt. Edward S. Godfrey





1. Reno's Retreat

Looking down the ravines toward the Little Bighorn River, you can see where Major Marcus Reno led Companies A, G and M back across the river in retreat from where he earlier attacked the southern end of the Indian encampment. Hundreds of warriors counterattacked and outflanked Reno's men, forcing them first into the timber and then routed them here.

The defense line at this position was occupied by Capt. Thomas H. French's M Company. McDougall's B Company defended this area on June 26, when French was summoned to support Benteen.

"We were not very well entrenched, as I recall that I used my butcher knife to cut the earth loose and throw a mound of it in front of me upon which to rest my carbine...a bullet struck the corner of this mound, throwing so much dirt into my eyes that I could scarcely see for an hour or more...while lying face down on the ground, a bullet tore off the heel of my left boot as effectively as though it had been sawed off!"



*Little Bighorn survivors at the 50th Anniversary
Newell, Slaper and Morris, 1926*

Pvt. William C. Slaper, M Company

Not all of Slaper's comrades were so lucky:

"A soldier named (Pat) Golden was...beside me. We had been talking at intervals during the battle that afternoon, and when the fighting stopped shortly after dark, I started to talk to him again. He didn't answer as I rattled on, and at last when I reached out my hand and touched his head, it was covered with blood."

Pvt. Edward Pigford, M Company



2. Capt. French Reinforcements

Warriors took up positions close to the side of the defense area during the night of June 25 and the early morning of June 26. Captain Frederick W. Benteen asked for more men, so Captain French brought M Company over to reinforce this segment of the line. Indian riflemen were posted behind the hills and ridges to the west of this position.



3. Field Hospital

The only surviving doctor, Assistant Surgeon Henry R. Porter, collected the wounded and set up an improvised field hospital at the site now marked in the depression between here and the memorial monument. Many of Reno's men had been wounded in the valley fight and retreat, and Indian bullets were taking their toll as other men were hit along the line.

"...Corporal (George) Lell...was fatally wounded (in the abdomen) and dragged to the hospital. He was dying, and knew it. 'Lift me up boys,' he said to some of the men, 'I want to see the boys again before I go.' So they held him up in a sitting position where he could see his comrades in action...then they laid him down and he died soon after...I will never forget Corporal Lell."

Pvt. Charles Windolph, H Company



Corp. George Lell



4. Shallow Trench

This shallow trench was dug under fire the morning of June 26 by some of Captain Benteen's men. Only three or four shovels were available, and much of the digging was done with knives, hatchets and mess gear. Dead horses and mules were dragged up and laid on the parapet as added cover. These trenches have been restored to their original dimensions.



5. Indian riflemen

Using the carbines and ammunition taken from the Custer dead, Indians turned them on Reno and Benteen's force. Indian riflemen occupied the ridges to the east and southeast of here.

"I went with other young men to the higher hills around the soldiers. I stayed at a distance from them and shot bullets from my new rifle. I did not shoot many times, as it appeared I was too far away, and I did not want to waste any of my cartridges."

Wooden Leg, Cheyenne



Wooden Leg



6. Without water

By the morning of June 26, the command had been without water for many hours.

"The excitement and heat made our thirst almost maddening. The men were forbidden to use tobacco. They put pebbles in their mouths to excite the glands, some ate grass roots, but did not find relief; some tried to eat hard bread, but after chewing it awhile would blow it out of their mouths like so much flour."

Lt. Edward S. Godfrey

"...the sun beat down on us and we became so thirsty that it was almost impossible to swallow."

Pvt. Jacob Adams, H Company

The wounded were suffering terribly for lack of water. Doctor Porter advised Major Reno and Captain Benteen that some of the wounded would soon die unless they were given water. Benteen called for volunteers to go down to the river, in the face of Indian gunfire, to fill kettles and canteens. During the morning, several groups of volunteers went down the deep ravine in front of this point and obtained enough water to ease the wounded. Four men went down to the edge of the river bluff, above the mouth of the ravine, and stood up, firing their carbines to pin down some of the Indians and draw fire away from the water carriers.

These four, and fifteen of the volunteer water carriers, later received the Medal of Honor. Only one of the water carriers, Pvt. Mike Madden of Company K, was seriously wounded in the dash to the river. An Indian bullet shattered his leg so badly that he had to be carried back to the defense position by Half Yellow Face, the Crow scout.

Madden's leg was later amputated in the temporary field hospital at Gibbon's camp in the valley floor. Madden survived to live many years after his discharge from the army, but for reasons unknown, he was not awarded the Medal of Honor, nor was Half Yellow Face.



Water Carriers Ravine

Sharpshooters

Sgt. George H. Geiger, Co. H	Blacksmith Henry Mechling, Co. H
Saddler Otto Voit, Co. H	Pvt. Charles Windolph, Co. H

Water Carriers

Sgt. Stanislaus Roy, Co. A	Sgt. Rufus D. Hutchinson, Co. B
Pvt. Neil Bancroft, Co. A	Pvt. Michael Madden, Co. K
Pvt. Abraham B. Brant, Co. D	Pvt. James Pym, Co. B
Pvt. Thomas J. Callan, Co. B	Pvt. George D. Scott, Co. D
Pvt. Frederick Deitline, Co. D	Pvt. Thos. W. Stivers, Co. D
Pvt. Theodore W. Goldin, Co. G	Pvt. Peter Thompson, Co. C
Pvt. David W. Harris, Co. A	Pvt. Frank Tolan, Co. D
Pvt. William M. Harris, Co. D	Pvt. Charles H. Welch, Co. D

The Medal of Honor was awarded to 24 men of the Reno-

Benteen command for such brave deeds as retrieving an ammunition-laden pack mule from within Indian lines; for conspicuous gallantry on the firing line; and for recovering the body of Lt. Benjamin Hodgson from within the Indian lines.

7. Restored Trench

This L-shaped trench was restored in June, 1958. Skeletal remains, buttons and scraps of uniform cloth revealed that two or three men were buried in the trench after the fight was over. Pvt. Julian Jones and Thomas Meador were killed on the firing line about 35 yards further south along the trail. The remains were most likely those of Jones and Meador.

8. Charles Windolph, Co. H

Charles Windolph, last survivor of the Reno-Benteen contingent, pointed out the places where Jones and Meador were killed. Windolph died at the age of 98 on March 11, 1950.



Charles Windolph

"When the firing commenced in the morning (June 26), I said to Jones, 'Let's get off our coats.' He didn't move. I reached down and turned him over. He was dead, shot through the heart."

Pvt. Charles Windolph, H Company

9. Long Road

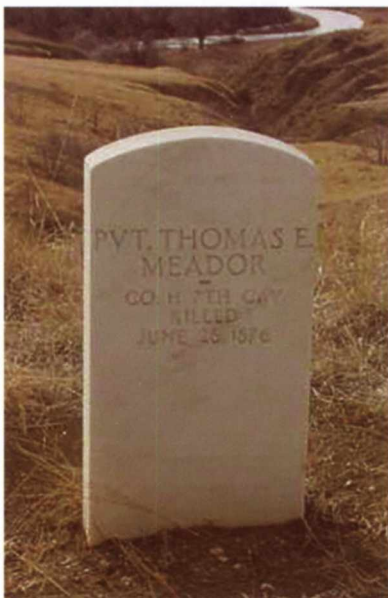


During the night of June 25, a large number of warriors crawled up the ravines leading from the river to this point. When the firing resumed the next morning, they were near enough to throw dirt clods into H Company's position. Long Road, a young Sans Arc warrior, rushed the soldiers, but was killed at the bottom of the slope, within a few yards of Benteen's line.

With his position under a heavy cross-fire, Captain Benteen realized that the Indians threatened to break the defense perimeter. He requested reinforcements from M Company and led a counterattack from this point at about 9:00 on the morning of June 26. This charge surprised the Indians and drove them back into the ravines.



Long Road Marker



Pvt. Meador marker

"...when the throttles of the "H sters" were given full play, and we dashed into the unsuspecting savages...they somersaulted and vaulted as so many trained acrobats, having no order in getting down those ravines, but quickly getting de'il take the hindmost!"

Capt. F.W. Benteen

One soldier, Pvt. Thomas Meador, was killed as the line retired and another, Pvt. James J. Tanner, was mortally wounded.



10. Indian firing positions

Looking south and east, you can see some of the Indian firing positions. Warriors occupied virtually all the hilltops and many of the ravines, beginning at the river and extending in a huge arc around to your left. The long ridge, 1,000 yards (over 1/2 mile) due east, was a principal position.

"On the second day...H Company had three men killed and twenty-one wounded. We occupied the most exposed position and the Indians had a clear fire at us from four sides, and my only wonder is that every one of us wasn't killed."

Lt. Frank Gibson, H Company



Lt. Frank Gibson



11. Dog's Backbone

At about mid-day on June 26, the Minneconjou warrior, Dog's Backbone, was killed about 200 yards northeast of this point. Just as he uttered a warning for his tribesmen to be careful, Dog's Backbone was shot through the forehead.



12. Company A

The members of Company A fought here from behind a makeshift barricade of pack saddles, hardtack boxes, sides of bacon, dead mules and horses, and anything else that might possibly turn a bullet. The remains of one soldier were discovered in June 1958, where the marble marker now stands. Many horses and mules were also killed in this end of the saucer-shaped depression.

"The surviving (mules and) horses were arranged in a semi-circle

with their saddles and bridles on, the wounded being in the valley, between the horses..."

Pvt. Francis J. Kennedy, I Company



Skeletal remains discovered in 1958



13. Rifle Pit

Rifle pit, restored to its original size in an archeological project in June, 1958. This position was defended by Company G.



14. Two restored rifle pits.

Two restored rifle pits. The lack of available tools kept the men of K Company from preparing better defenses. The night of June 25, after the firing stopped for awhile, the men:

"...settled down to the work of digging rifle pits. The men worked in pairs, in threes and fours. The ground was hard and dry. There were only three or four spades and shovels in the whole command; axes, hatchets, knives, table forks, tin cups, and halves of canteens were brought into use. However, everybody worked hard, and some were still digging when the enemy opened fire at early dawn..."

Lt. Edward S. Godfrey, K Company



Lt. Edward S. Godfrey, K Co.

15. Original rifle pits

The shallow depressions here are original rifle pits, unrestored since 1876.

16. Restored rifle pit

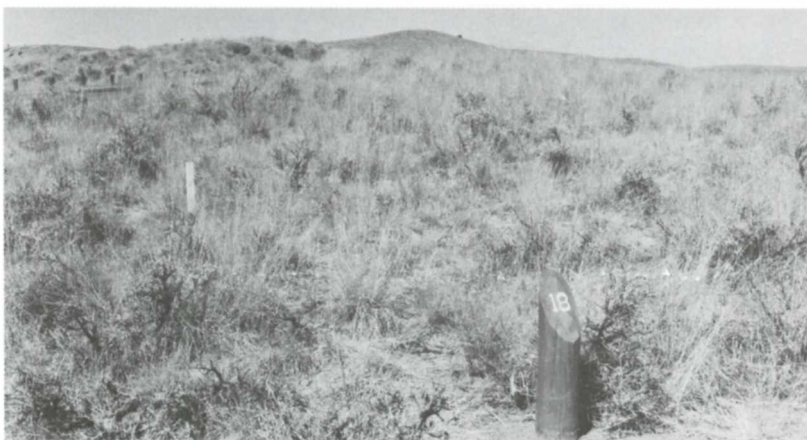
Rifle pit (restored in 1958) defended the men of Company K.

17. Marble Marker

The marble marker to the left of the trail indicates the site of an 1876 grave pit where the remains of at least one 7th Cavalryman were originally buried. Archeological excavation revealed that most of the remains in the pit were long ago disinterred, probably in 1881 when the mass grave was prepared around the Memorial Shaft on Last Stand Hill, 5 miles north.

18. Sharpshooter Ridge

Sioux and Cheyenne warriors occupied vantage points all around the Reno-Benteen position. The warriors were armed with a variety of different weapons, including the



Sharpshooter Ridge

Model 1860 Henry Rifle and Model 1866 Winchester. A few were armed with long range Sharps Rifles. A sharpshooter on the ridge 500 yards north of here made life extremely hazardous for the troopers lying along this portion of the line.



**John Ryan, Captain in
the Police Force, West
Newton, Mass., 1900**

"There was a high ridge on the right...and one Indian in particular I must give credit for being a good shot. While we were were lying in the line, he fired a shot and killed the fourth man on my right. Soon afterward he fired again and shot the third man. His third shot wounded the man on my right, who jumped back from the line, and down among the rest of the wounded. I thought my turn was coming next. I jumped up with Captain French and some half a dozen members of my company, and instead of firing straight to the front, as we had been doing...we wheeled to our right and put an end to that Indian, as there were no more men killed at that particular spot."

1st Sgt. John M. Ryan, M Company



Fruitless Victory

Artwork by Kenneth Riley

On the evening of June 26, the Indians broke camp and moved off slowly toward the Big Horn Mountains, seen in the distance to the south. The men on Reno Hill were relieved; still they were hesitant to let down their guard. Unsure why the Indians had suddenly departed, many suspected a trick. So, the soldiers spent another miserable night on the bluffs. Early the next morning, the nearly exhausted soldiers spied a large dust cloud in the river valley to the north, and soon learned that General Terry, with Colonel Gibbon's infantry and cavalry column, was marching up the river.

"All the men were—when I got there—in spite of all their hardships and sufferings, cheerful and apparently as cool and nonchalant as though nothing much had happened and though the announcement of Custer's fate fell on them like an unexpected shock, they soon rallied... They appear to be just beginning to realize what it all means."

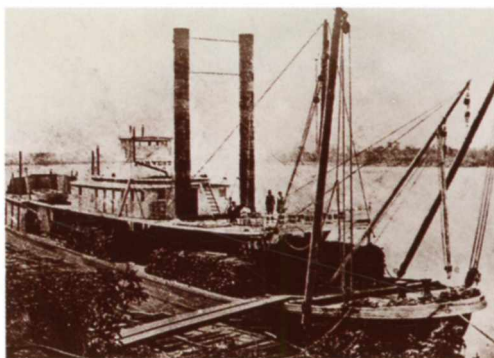
Assistant Surgeon Holmes O. Paulding
Terry-Gibbon Column

The Terry-Gibbon Column bivouacked on the flats immediately west of the river, where they were soon joined by the 355 survivors of the Seventh Cavalry, plus the civilian packers and guides. On



Army mule litter, 1876

June 28, the Custer dead were counted, identified to the extent possible, and given a hurried burial. Litters were rigged for the seriously wounded men of the Reno-Benteen contingent and that evening the entire force moved slowly back down the Little Bighorn to its mouth. The steamer "Far West" awaited them at



The steamer "Far West"

the confluence of the Big Horn, near present Hardin, where about 30 badly wounded men were placed on board for transport back to Ft. A. Lincoln, Dakota Territory.

The campaign would continue, but the Battle of the Little Big Horn had passed into history.

RENO- BENTEN DEFENSE SITE TRAIL

JUNE 25-26
1876

HEAVY
INDIAN
FIRE AT
500 YDS

