Two

Indian Battles

ROBERT K. BOYD

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Battle of the Little Big Horn
June 25, 1876

Battle of Birch Coulee
Sept. 2nd and 3rd, 1862

BY ROBERT K. BOYD
of Eau Claire, Wisconsin

DEDICATION

This little book is dedicated to the descendants or relatives of Major Marcus A. Reno and of Captain Hiram P. Grant, and to all who have a kindly feeling for the man who in time of great danger has done his best, only to be repaid by calumny and false charges against his record as a soldier.

The Battle of Little Big Horn

An outline of Custer's campaign mostly compiled from the work of Lieut. Col. W. A. Graham of the U. S. Army.

This work by Col. Graham is made up from official reports and authentic records and information, including interviews with living survivors of the campaign.

CHIEF ACTORS IN THE CAMPAIGN

The expedition of about 600 men was made up of the 7th Regiment of U. S. Cavalry in command of Col. George A. Custer. At about noon on the day of the battle the regiment had been divided into battalions as follows:

Three companies, 112 men, in command of Major Marcus A. Reno.

Three companies, 125 men, in command of Captain F. W. Benteen.

One company, with some men detailed from the other companies, about 130 in all, making up a pack train, in command of Captan McDougal.

The remainder of the regiment, five companies, 225 men, under the personal command of Col. Custer.

The three officers named above, Custer, Reno and Benteen, were the ones who led their respective commands in the actual fighting in the valley of the Little Big Horn.

CHARACTER OF GENERAL CUSTER

In the year 1861 at about the beginning of the Civil War George A. Custer was graduated from West Point and at once entered the army. By his courage and gallantry in action he advanced rapidly in rank and was very active in the campaign leading up to Lee's surrender. At the close of the war he held the rank of Major General of Volunteers. He continued in the service as Lieut. Colonel of the 7th Regiment of U. S. Cavalry in the Regular Army. He was in some respects indiscreet, and made some personal enemies; this feeling probably inspired to some extent by his rapid promotion and his personal popularity.

Some years after the civil war he was censured by the War Department for some criticisms made by him and so incurred the personal enmity of President Grant.

As a soldier, in spite of his brilliant record, he was charged with improper conduct at the battle of Washita and it was said that he lost the old time confidence of his regiment.

In the spring of 1876, shortly before his last campaign he was censured by the War Department and removed from his command by President Grant. He was however reinstated at the urgent request of General Terry under whom he had been making preparations to serve in the expedition against the Indians. During the campaign ending in his death there were, among his officers and men, two factions. "Custer" and "anti Custer"; and his two leading officers, Reno and Benteen, were his personal enemes. But in justice to all parties it may be said that there is no evidence that this enmity affected the conduct of either of these three officers, either before or during the battle; all were true to the service and to each other.

Custer's last campaign was in Montana in the region lying south of the Yellowstone River, which here flows in an easterly direction . The Rosebud runs north and joins the Yellowstone, while farther west the Little Big Horn runs north and after joining the main Big Horn flows into the Yellowstone at a point about 30 miles west of the mouth of the Rosebud.

Custer's route was up the Rosebud and westerly over the divide into the valley of the Little Big Horn where the Indians had their encampment and where the battles took place. On June 22nd 1876 General Terry was in camp at the mouth of the Rosebud River having in his command General Gibbon, Col. Custer and some subordinate officers.

After a conference with his officers and with the approval of all, he placed Col. Custer in command of an expedition.

Custer was to go with his regiment, 600 strong, up the Rosebud River and examine a fresh trail lately discovered, which was believed to lead westward toward the Little Big Horn River. He was then to go south some distance, and then turn west, so that he would be south of a supposed encampment of Indians in the valley of the Little Big Horn.

General Gibbon with his forces was to go west up the Yellowstone River to the mouth of the Big Horn, and then south so as to approach the supposed encampment from the north. Custer and Gibbon were to approach each other if possible on June 26th, from opposite sides of the supposed Indian camp, Custer from the south and Gibbon from the north.

WHAT THEY BELIEVED IN REGARD TO THE INDIANS

Terry and the officers present believed that the Indians had a force of 1,000, or possibly 1,500 men, while some would place their numbers at a much lower estimate. It should be borne in mind when reading of this campaign, that the purpose was to surround and capture the Indians before they would take the alarm and escape. None of the officers belived that they would stand against the white forces in battle.

THE REAL FACTS IN REGARD TO THE INDIANS

They had a force of more than 4,000 men, armed largely with the latest model of Winchester repeating rifles and Colts navy revolvers. Only about a week before this, under the command of Crazy Horse, a daring warrior and really a general, and unknown to Terry, they had repulsed General Crook only a short distance from the Little Big Horn field.

CUSTER'S MEN—MANY RAW RECRUITS

Custer and his officers were good men and experienced Indian fighters, and so were many of his soldiers; but about one third of his men were recruits who knew nothing of war or the use of arms. They had the common fault of all recruits in their first battle; that they would fire away their cartridges when there was nothing in range to shoot at, a fault hard to prevent in the excitement of a battle.

CUSTER'S ADVANCE UP THE ROSEBUD

Custer marched up the Rosebud and found the trail leading west over the divide toward the Little Big Horn and sent his scouts ahead to explore and to look for signs of Indians.

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE BATTLE

On the evening of June 24th Custer's Indian scouts reported that the trail which they had found led west across the divide into the valley of the Little Big Horn. He resumed the march at once, intending to make camp in the night near the divide and lie concealed on the 25th; then to advance on the Indians on the morning of June 26th.

THE CAMP NEAR THE "CROW'S NEST"

Camp was made at 2 A. M. on June 25th, and Custer sent his scouts to a high peak on the divide, known as the "Crow's Nest", and overlooking the valley of the Little Big Horn, which lay to the west and northwest. At break of day the scouts reported an Indian village about 15 miles away, with many tepees and immense herds of ponies Shortly after eight o'clock the regiment moved forward slowly and Custer went to the Crow's Nest. The regiment halted, and Custer on his return disputed the evidence of the scouts and declared that there was no Indian village in sight.

Several Indian scouts had been seen riding west toward the valley, and Custer decided that from the fact that he could not conceal his forces, it would be best to advance into the Little Big Horn valley at once.

Shortly after noon on June 25th, the regiment was divided into battalions. The first battalion of about 112 men was given to Major Reno, the second, of about 125 men to Captain Benteen, and the third, about 225 men was kept under the command of Colonel Custer. There was also a pack train of 130 men under Capt. McDougal.

CUSTER DISREGARDS HIS INSTRUCTIONS AND DIVIDES HIS FORCES

Up to this point at 12:15 on June 25th Custer had followed the instructions given him by Gen'l Terry; but now instead of turning his course to the south and west to approach the valley from the south, and meet the forces which were to come up the valley from the north on the 26th, he divided his forces and sent Captain Benteen with his battalion along the high ground to the southwest, with no definite orders except to hunt for Indians, to "pitch into them", and let him know.

THE CONDITIONS AS CUSTER SAW THEM

Custer did not know that the Indians had a force of more than four thousand men instead of one thousand, or fifteen hundred which was the outside estimate of their numbers. He did not know that only a week before, General Crook had been defeated, and had saved his command by being too wise to fall into the trap set by Crazy Horse and to follow a small band of retreating horsemen, who

would have led him into the center of the whole Indian force. He did not know that the Indians were armed with Wnchester repeating rifles, the best weapon in the world at that time, and probably far better in an Indian battle than would have been the rifles used in the World War forty years later. He did not take into account the fact that his own troops were armed with single shot carbines, so defective that the shell would often become fast in the cartridge chamber and render the weapon for the time worse than useless, a weapon that no hunter of that age would have carried into a wild country.

But Custer did not choose the weapons of his soldiers; he did the best he could with what he had. He was ignorant only of the facts which were beyond his reach. He was brave, impulsive and often reckless; the kind of man who, if favored by fortune does great things, but always at the risk of great disaster. He was imprudent and perhaps sometimes at fault in dealing with men; he made strong friends and sometimes bitter enemies. The fact that he had incurred the censure of the War Department and of the President and had enemies in his own command, without doubt made him reckless in this campaign. His faults were the faults of all men of his kind; his virtues were the virtues of the bravest of men in every age.

After Benteen had left Custer's command at or near the head of a branch of Reno's Creek, which flowed west to the Little Big Horn, Custer and Reno followed down the creek, Custer on the right bank somewhat in the advance, and Reno on the left bank, for about nine miles. At about 2:15 P. M. a party of Indians were seen between the troops and the river, running down the valley. This was reported to Custer as Reno and his battalion were just coming up. They were then on Reno Creek a short distance from its mouth and near the Little Big Horn. Benteen with his battalion was then about 10 miles away to the southeast, their location unknown to Custer, Reno, or any of their command.

CUSTER SENDS RENO IN ADVANCE

Then Custer ordered Reno with his battalion of 112 men to advance and "charge the Indians wherever he could find them." This was a verbal order and there is some disagreement as to its wording, but at a Court of Inquiry held in 1879 all the witnesses said that the closing words were that Reno would be "supported by the whole outfit."

When this order was given there was no village in sight, and aside from those ridng down the valley none had been seen by the commander or by the scouts.

RENO'S ADVANCE TOWARD THE VILLAGE

Reno with his 112 men rode three miles to the river and crossed at about 2:30 P.M., accompanied by two of Custer's officers, who rode back and joined his command. As Reno crossed the stream his Indian scouts reported that the Indians were not running, but were coming with a heavy force up the valley to meet him. Then Girard the interpreter rode back on the trail and reported the fact

to Cooke, Custer's Adjutant; and Cooke aswered that he would report the fact to Custer who at that time was still slowly following Reno.

RENO'S BATTLE

After crossing the stream (the Little Big Horn) Reno halted, re-formed his command and sent another messenger to Custer, that he had the enemy in force on his front.

With his troops he went down the valley at a swift trot somewhat more than two miles and formed his battle line, extending from the bluff on the left to the river on the right, with the Indian village in front about one fourth of a mile away and hundreds of warriors in front and on his left flank. His men fought on foot, protecting the horses by placing them in a grove of timber which filled a bend in the river at the right. But now the Indians were massing on his left and firing from across the river on his right where his horses were lodged in the woods.

There was danger now that the Indians would stampede the horses, so he drew one company to the timber; but now his line was so weak that his left flank was turned. A halfbreed scout was asked to ride back to ask Custer for help, but the scout waving his arm toward the Indians said, "No man can go through there alive."

The line was held for some time, but now the Indians were streaming through the woods to the right and rear, and the men were ordered to go to the horses; but in the confusion and noise many failed to hear or to understand it. Reno gave the command "Mount" and as he did so his Ree scout, Bloody Knife, standing by his side, was shot through the head and his brains splashed in Reno's face.

RENO'S RETREAT

The Indians in great numbers were coming closer; all hope of relief from Custer was gone and Reno with his men must either leave the ground or remain there forever. A retreat was ordered, and with broken ranks they made their way up the valley and across the river to a point nearly two miles from the first battle line. During the retreat and especially at the crossing, the Indians were shooting the retreating men. Climbing to the higher ground, in great disorder and following the ridges, they at last reached a high hill which gave them a somewhat safer position, but at this time nearly half the men were killed or wounded.

During the retreat or perhaps earlier, some of the Indians were leaving Reno to join in the battle against Custer, but this was unknown to Reno, for with all the shooting near him he could hear no guns except those close at hand.

It was after four o'clock when Reno gained the hill, and the question now was, "where is Custer, and where is Benteen?" Up to about 4:30 some scattering men were coming in, those who had been left behind in the retreat from the woods where the horses had been placed. Some of the Indians crossed the river but most of them turned back to join in the battle against Custer.

HELP AT LAST—BENTEEN JOINS RENO

At 4:30 Benteen came and joined Reno on the hill, his horses and men exhausted and all his pack mules left behind. He had heard the firing and from a distance had seen Reno in the valley on his retreat.

BENTEEN'S SIDE TRIP INTO THE BAD LANDS

When Benteen left Custer and Reno at the rendezvous near the divide, he was ordered to go to the southwest as far as the second valley. He went in this directon and soon reached a small creek, a branch of Reno Creek, but farther on found himself in the "bad lands" with no sign of any such valleys as were mentioned in his orders. At last he gave up going to the southwest, and turned toward Custer's course, his horses and pack mules exhausted and suffering from heat and thirst, having gone about fifteen miles; this was about 3:30 P. M., June 25th. Reaching Custer's trail he followed it toward the Little Big Horn. On his way a messenger met him with an order from Custer, the last of which there is any record, "Benteen—come on, big village, bring packs"; this was about 4 o'clock. The messenger's horse had been wounded and he had been in sight of Reno fighting in the valley. Benteen did not wait for the pack mules, some of which were mired in a swamp where they had rushed for water, but rode with his troops toward the sound of guns which could then be heard. As he rode on the Indians fired on him but without effect, the distance being too great. Then he saw some of his Indian scouts on the higher ground to the right, and they motioned him to keep on to the right, and directed him to the hill held by Reno and his men. On the hill he reached Reno, excited, breathless and without his hat, and he shouted, "For God's sake, Benteen, halt your command and help me; I've lost half my men."

Reno's men were disorganized and excited, only a few of them remaining cool and self-possessed. Reno himself had broken down and lost his nerve so that Benteen became the real commanding officer, and at once re-formed the companies and prepared to defend the camp. A courier was sent to order the pack train to come on with, the ammunition. There was heavy firing down river and Benteen showed Custer's order to Reno, but no one knew where to look for Custer except as indicated by the firing down the valley. Then Captain Weir with two companions advanced about a mile and from a high point saw some Indians firing at objects on the ground, the killing of Custer's wounded men.

Reno waited until about 5 o'clock when the pack train came up with its supply of ammunition, and then followed Weir's advance, carrying his wounded men. This advance, led by Benteen, reached Weir at about 6 o'clock. The Indians were now advancing and the position being dangerous, they went back to the hill, arriving at about 7 o'clock when the battle commenced again, lasting till darkness came, putting an end to the killing and wounding of many men and horses. During the night all worked hard in the stoney ground making earthworks to protect themselves from the battle that they felt sure would be resumed in the

morning. At break of day the battle commenced again and the heat being intense, volunteers crept down to the river a quarter of a mile away, to bring back what little water they could carry to the wounded men. After fighting till past 12 o'clock and losing still more men and horses the Indians withdrew and joined those in the village who were breaking camp and moving south toward the Big Horn Mountains. They had about four thousand in fighting strength not counting women and hildren, with from fifteen thousand to twenty-five thousand ponies, all marching in perfect order, the largest gathering of Indians ever seen on the plains.

The Indians were gone, but where was Custer? Why had he left them to their fate? Had he ridden north to join Terry and Gibbon, or had he gone south to search for Crook?

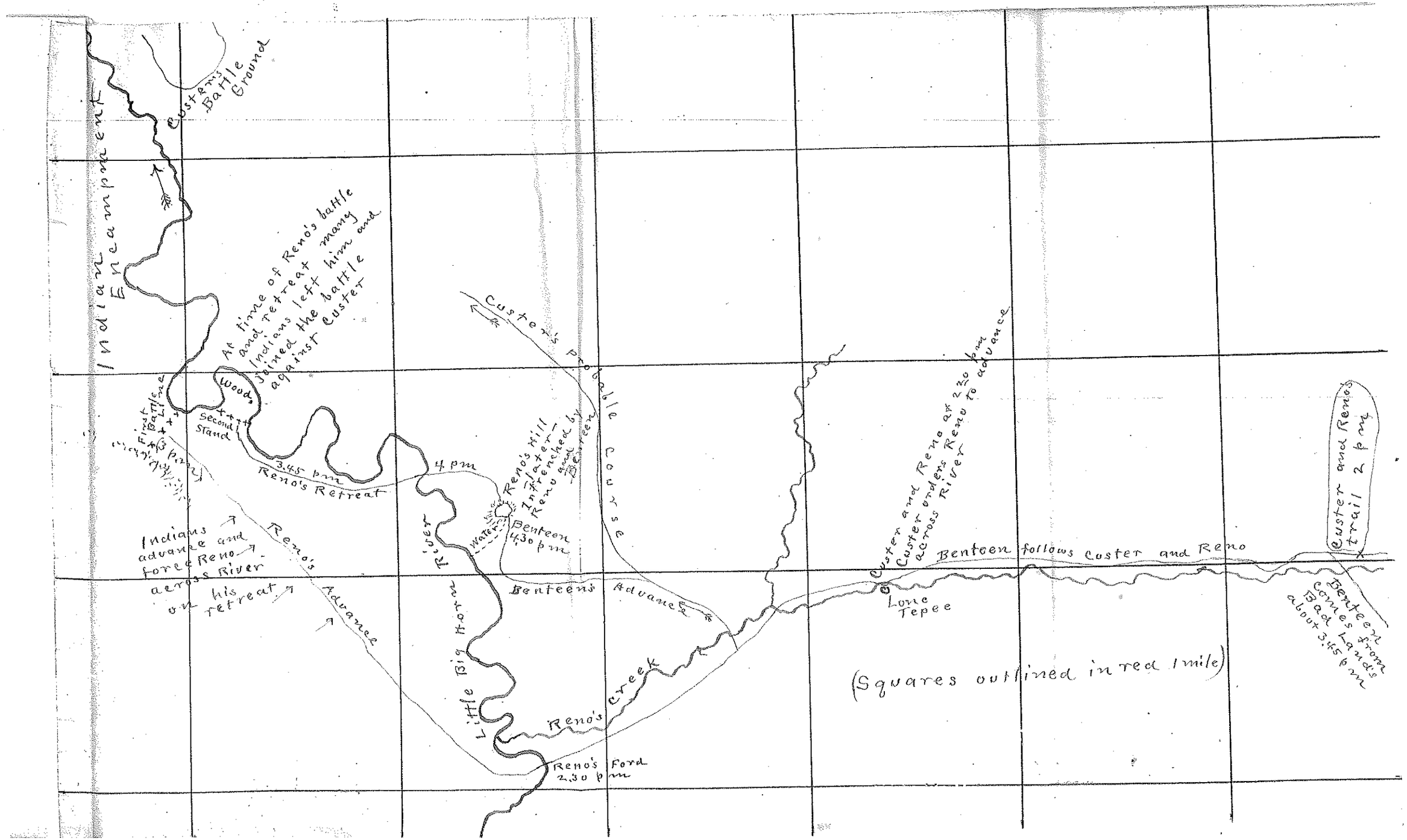
But Terry and Gibbon had been approaching from the north, and it was the news of this that caused the Indians to quit their siege of Reno's troops on the hill and join those who were breaking camp and moving south to the Big Horn Mountains. From their hill Reno's men saw Gibbon's troops coming up the valley from the north and when they met the battle was over.

MAJOR RENO

It is a great misfortune to be compelled to work in the shadow of a greater man, as Reno worked with Custer on this expedition. For many years the story was published and believed that Reno was to blame for Custer's defeat; that he remained inactive knowing that Custer was surrounded by the enemy. But on July 4th ten days after the battle, 236 of the enlisted men of Custer's regiment, being nearly all of the survivors, sent a petition to the President asking the promotion of Major Reno to the position of colonel of their regiment in place of Custer, whose life had gone out only a few days in the past. The petitioners say that only for his bravery, not an officer or man of the regiment would have escaped the fate of Custer and his battalion.

CRITICISM OF RENO AND BENTEEN

Soon after the battle there was bitter criticism of both Reno and Benteen who were openly accused of disobedience of orders and of deliberately holding their troops away while Custer and his men were being killed. Reno was discredited before the whole world, and after vainly asking a congressional investigation, at last gained a hearing in January, 1879, before a Court of Inquiry held by order of the President. At this hearing the testimony of every surviving officer of the expedition was taken and is published in Col. Graham's work. In every case this evidence shows that both Reno and Benteen did their full duty; that Benteen was in obedience to Custer's own orders far away when the battle commenced. Also that he and Reno were hard-pressed and out-numbered in defending themselves up to the close of the battle. It was proved that in Reno's first engagement, he altered his position and finally ordered a retreat when to have done otherwise would in a very few


Indian Encampment
Custer's Battle Ground
At time of Reno's battle and retreat many Indians left him and joined the battle against Custer
Custer's Route
Woods
First Battle Line
Second Stand
3.45 pm
Reno's Retreat
4 pm
Reno's Hill
Entrenched by Reno and Benteen
Benteen 4.30 pm
Water
Custer and Reno at 2.30 pm Custer orders Reno to advance
Custer and Reno Trail 2 p mx
Benteen follows Custer and Reno
Benteen comes from Back Lands about 3.45 pm
Indians advance and force Reno across River on his retreat
Reno's Advance
Benteen's Advance
Little Big Horn River
Reno's Creek
Reno's Ford 2.30 pm
Lone Tepee
(Squares outlined in red 1 mile)

minutes have ended in the death of himself and of every man in his command. The only statement that was made to Reno's discredit was, that at the time when he was compelled to give way, his commands were not heard and understood, owing to the noise and confusion of the battle; and that he did not have full control of his men, especially after breaking away from the timber on his retreat. It was also said that his nerve failed, especially after the Indian scout was killed by his side, his brains splashing into Reno's face; and that his retreat was really a rout.

It is true that on the hill when Benteen joined him his strength had given way and his nerves had collapsed. While he and Benteen were together it was Benteen, although lower in rank than himself, who was mostly in command. But from all the evidence it is true beyond dispute that Reno, while not really himself, rallied and used his remaining strength the best that he could in every emergency.

The reader can decide for himself if this breakdown in his strength should be held to his discredit as a soldier.

There may be a limit to every man's strength and energy, and in the mind of the writer, the man who would condemn or ridicule one who has gone through danger doing his best, but at last finds that he has gone beyond his strength, is a man who has never himself heard the sound of the enemy's guns or the yells of a savage foe.

And what can we say of Custer's battle? His route from the ridges near Reno's Creek to the place where he met his death has never been known, and the story of his battle has never been told by his comrades.

Longfellow has written:

"The sudden darkness of death
Overwhelmed them, like the breath
And smoke of a furnace fire;
By the river's bank, and between
The rocks of the ravine,
They lay in their bloody attire."

And this is all that we shall ever know.

The Battle of Birch Coulee

A GREAT DISASTER IN THE INDIAN WAR OF 1862

WHO SHOULD BEAR THE BLAME?

A Story of the Battle and a Vindication of
Captain Hiram P. Grant

By Robert K. Boyd, a Survivor of the Battle

Written history should not only be true in detail, but it should be true in the belief that it creates in the mind of the reader.

THE BATTLE OF BIRCH COULEE

This battle was fought in Western Minnesota with the Sioux Indians on September 2nd and 3rd, 1862, fifteen days after the beginning of the great outbreak.

This was fourteen years before the death of General Custer on the Little Big Horn, and up to that time it was the most severe Indian battle ever fought in the West. Like the Custer battle it has been the subjct of much discussion and there is no written history which gives a fair answer to the question as to whose fault or mistake it was that brought on the disaster.

In this writing the motive is not to censure those who were at fault, but to give a brief description of the battle and to do some measure of justice to the memory of a man who did his full duty, but was compelled to go through life with a cloud upon his name, when he should have been honored as a brave soldier who did his best in a time of great danger.

CONDITIONS BEFORE THE BATTLE, AUGUST 31, 1862

It was two weeks after the outbreak, Col. H. H. Sibley was in command at Fort Ridgely with nine companies of the 6th Minnesota Infantry and some other troops including a squad of cavalry under Captain Anderson of St. Paul, also some halfbreed scouts known as the Renville Rangers. Fort Ridgely, which had not been built for defense, but was a storage place for goods and supplies, had been occupied by many refugees and a few soldiers. The first battle of the war had been fought at Redwood Ferry, twelve miles up the Minnesota River, and 23 soldiers out of 50 had been killed, but their bodies had not been buried. There were also the bodies of many people in the nearby settlement

lying unburied. Two battles had been fought at Fort Ridgely but Little Crow and his followers had in each case been repulsed.

The town of New Ulm had been raided, many people had been killed, and the place had been abandoned by the survivors. The massacre had extended from the line of Iowa northward as far as Fort Abercrombie on Red River, and many hundreds of the fronter settlers had been killed, with more than 300 women and children held as captives. The Indians, with from 600 to 1,000 warriors, were believed to be up the Minnesota River from 30 to 50 miles away.

Sibley's troops were new recruits, knowing nothing of war, and only a few had any knowledge of the frontier or practice in the use of arms. There were, however, a few who were good frontiersmen, and the halfbreeds of the Renville Rangers were very efficient as scouts and explorers.

On August 31st Col. Sibley detailed Capt. Hiram P. Grant, of Company A, 6th Minnesota Infantry, to go with his company to Redwood Ferry and the nearby agency, and bury the dead at the battle ground and in the adjoining settlement. The party consisted of Captain Grant's company, some cavalry under Captain Anderson, some scouts and a few citizens. There was also a special detail of 20 men who were to act as a burial party, the writer, then 17 years of age, being one of this detail. In all there were about 150 men. A man named Joseph R. Brown, who held the title of Major from having been an Indian agent, went with the party. Major Brown's family, of part Indian blood, were prisoners with the Indians. He was anxious to learn something of his family, and it was believed that his advice would be of value to Captain Grant.

Grant's party were in the field for two days and had buried the 23 soldiers at Redwood Ferry with many settlers, about 80 in all.

On the second day the party divided, and Captain Anderson with Major Brown and some scouts made a circuit some distance up river but found no Indians. The writer was with the main party under Captain Grant when a wounded woman was found and taken into one of the wagons.

At some time before dark Captain Grant made his camp on the prairie near a narrow valley known as Birch Coulee. Captain Anderson and Major Brown with their party joined the command soon after the camp was located . No Indians had been seen although our officers had made diligent search for them across the prairie with their field glasses. Major Brown did not think there were any Indians in that vicinity, and at this camp assured the men that they were just as safe as if they were in their own homes.

It was the general belief among all the officers that the Indians would not fight against the white troops, and would only be anxious to escape to the plains farther west with their prisoners and such plunder as they could take with them. And so the camp was made with absolutely no preparations for defense, except the usual practice of placing picket guards arcund the encampment.

In making camp there was a line of twenty wagons placed end to end in the form of a horseshoe, enclosing a space of about one-half acre. The horses (from 92 to 96 as estimated) being placed in front of the open part of the corral to complete the inclosure, the horses being on the east side of the corral which was about 200 yards west of the coulee.

It should be considered that our men were new recruits, nearly all ignorant as to the use of arms and carrying army rifles which were strange to them; not one of the guns ever having been fired at a target. Not over three shots had been fired by any one of our infantry force, and even these shots were not aimed at any definite object or target.

On the next mornng at break of day the battle commenced, while many of the men were asleep and none of them expecting an attack. The camp was surrounded by a force of Indians out-numbering our party at least three to one, of probably the best skirmish fighters in the world after having gained their position in the dark.

Not to dwell on the details of the battle, it may be said that a murderous fire was kept up all day, and at night there was an occasional volley. On the second day with the number of Indians greatly increased it lasted until about noon when Col. Sibley with his full force came to our relief. We had been without food or water and the ammunition was nearly gone. The writer then a boy of seventeen was wounded early in the battle and was bleeding in five places. Of our party of 150 men we had 23 killed and mortally wounded, with 50 disabled and all the horses had been killed.

AFTER THE BATTLE

The dead were buried, the wounded given such care as was possible, and the party went to Fort Ridgely 16 miles away, arriving after dark.

Up to this point there had been no lack of harmony, no confusion, no disagreement among the officers as to rank or authority, and no conflict in regard to orders; each had worked for the common good, and all seemed satisfied that we had escaped.

AT FORT RIDGELY, CAPTAIN GRANT IN TROUBLE

On September 4th after a night's rest Captain Grant made a written report of the expedition and battle, and presented it to Col. Sibley. On the same day Captain Anderson made a report of his activities in the battle and presented it to Major Joseph R. Brown as "Commander of the Expedition". This report is given in "Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars", volume 2, page 212. This report does not mention the name of Captain Grant as having been in the expedition or the battle.

CAPTAIN GRANT'S REPORT

As stated above, Captain Grant presented his report to Col. Sibley, but Sibley refused to receive it. Captain Grant destroyed this report and no copy of it was preserved but at a later date he wrote a very full account of the expedition and battle, and this was published, (Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars, vol. 2, page 215.)

FROM GRANT'S REPORT AS OFFICIALLY PUBLISHED

"I was ordered by Col. Sibley to report to Col. Crooks, commanding my regiment; I reported and received the following orders:

To take command of a force consisting of Company A, 6th Minnesota Infantry, Captain Anderson's company of Mounted Rangers and a detail of 20 men to act as a burial party, about 150 men in all, and proceed to the Sioux Agency, bury the dead, and afford relief to any who might have escaped from the Indians. I was further told that a few citizens wished to go; also Major Joseph R. Brown who feared that his family had been killed; also that Major Brown was well informed as to Indian signs, character, etc., and that if I wanted any advice to consult the Major."

After an account of the expedition and battle Capt. Grant says, "Suffice it to say that all did well and a few such men as Captain Anderson, Lieut. Swan, Lieut. Gilham, Sergeants Barnes and Gardner, Corporal Auge, Hon. James J. Egan, and George D. Redfield, a citizen, by their courage and bravery helped others to be brave and courageous. All did well. After a night's rest at Fort Ridgely I made a report of the expedition and took it personally to my commanding officer. It was handed back to me, and I was coolly informed that I should make my report to Major Brown who was in command of the expedition. This was the first I had heard of it. We had been gone four days, two of which we had been engaged in deadly fight. No order had been given by Major Brown, not an intimation that he considered himself in command. I then and there destroyed my report and never made another. If any blame rests on anyone for the selection of camps, or in carrying out any of the details of the expedition it rests on me. All officers, soldiers and citizens obeyed my orders; I had full charge."

COL. SIBLEY WRITES; DOES NOT MENTION CAPTAIN GRANT

In I. V. D. Heard's history of the Sioux War, page 137, he quotes from Col. Sibley's report as follows:

"That the command was not destroyed before I arrived to rescue them from their perilous situation may be ascribed chiefly to the coolness and nerve displayed by Major Brown and Captain Anderson, both of whom were severely wounded."

COL. McPHAIL CALLS IT GRANT'S COMMAND

On September 5th the second day after the battle, Col. Samuel McPhail who led the advance troops of the relief party, in his report to Col. Sibley says: "I left camp near Fort Ridgely on Sept. 2nd and proceeded to the relief of Capt. Grant's command." (Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars, vol. 2, page 214.)

CHARLES W. JOHNSON, THE HISTORIAN SAYS THAT GRANT WAS IN COMMAND

"Col. Sibley detailed Company A of the 6th Regiment under Capt. H. P. Grant"; also that "Major Joseph R. Brown an experienced Indian trader, was along." (Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars, vol. 1, page 305.)

J. J. EGAN'S ACCOUNT

In his story of the battle (Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars, vol. 2, page 219) Mr. Egan says: "The whole force consisted of 150 men under Major Joe Brown, one of the oldest and most experienced Indian traders in the state."

I. V. D. HEARD'S STATEMENT

In his history of the Sioux War, page 131, the author says that the expedition was under the command of Major Joseph R. Brown. After Sibley had discredited Grant and left him out of his report, and given special honors to Anderson and Brown, it is evident that the records were made up in accordance with this course. In fact every officer and prominent man in the expedition except Grant had been honored and complimented for his part in the expedition and battle.

WHAT DOES IT MATTER WHO WAS IN COMMAND?

After considering all these conflicting statements, the reader may ask why we should care whether Grant or Brown was actually in command. The result of the expedition was a disaster, and it is logical to say that somebody was at fault; and that the reputation of being in command would at best be but a doubtful honor. There would be much force in this view, that is, if the question of who was in command were the only matter affecting Grant's reputation as a soldier.

THE CAMP GROUND

Coupled with the fact that Grant was discredited in the part that he had taken in the expedition and battle, was the statement which was true beyond question, that Grant had located his camp before the arrival of Captain Anderson accompanied by Major Brown. Then as soon as it appeared that Grant was under a cloud, the story went everywhere that he had chosen a dangerous camp ground, with the inference that by his incompetence in this respect the results of the battle were far worse than they otherwise would have been.

Those who were not in the battle and had never seen the ground, were of course the most positive, and in a short time when the battle was spoken of or Capt. Grant's name mentioned, it only brought to the mind of the hearer, that he was the man who had exposed his men to slaughter by placing them in a camp that was manifestly dangerous.

In Heard's history, page 134, he says: "In fact a worse place to repel an attack could not have been found." But Heard was not in the battle and it is doubtful if he ever saw the ground.

A CLOUD UPON THE NAME OF A GOOD SOLDIER

Grant and his friends always believed that he had been dishonored, and by implication slandered and disgraced, after having done the best he could, and the best that anyone could have done in his place. They felt that the charge of the dangerous camping place was not honestly made, but that it was only a part of the plan to make him a scapegoat to save the reputations of those who were really at fault. The writer does not vouch for the truth of this view,

but asks the reader to consider the records of reliable history, with the evidence of the camp ground itself, and decide in his own mind if Grant did or did not receive fair treatment from those who were above hm.

WAS THIS IN FACT A DANGEROUS CAMP GROUND?

First let us consider that shortly after Grant had halted his column at the selected site of the camp, and long before dark Capt. Anderson and Major Brown came into camp and joined Grant's party. If they had believed it a dangerous place and so expressed themselves, the camp could have been moved, but it is evident that none of them feared in the least that there would be an attack and probably took little notice of the camp ground. But even then, the question still remains, whether the location was or was not a dangerous place. On this point the writer feels competent to give his evidence.

EXAMINATION OF THE BATTLEGROUND IN 1926

In May 1926 and also in September of that year I was on the site of the battle, and on four separate afternoons spent several hours in marking the exact location of the corral. I had been a land looker all my life, could pace distances accurately, and felt a desire to do my best regardless of the time expended on the work.

The ground was in the center of a field, the wheat about six inches high, and there was nothing to mark the site of the corral which was probably less than one half acre in extent. I got the location in a general way by pacing 610 feet south from a monument standing at the border of the highway. It was not stated whether the 610 feet was to reach the center of the battle site or only to its border, so this information was not very definite. So I set my stakes to give an outline of the ground, allowing reasonable space for twenty wagons, five Sibley tents and ninety-six horses.

I moved my stakes again and again, taking views from all different directions, and as I did this my memory grew on me, and toward the last I was not only satisfied with my work, but I had a much better picture in my mind of the corral and its surroundings than I had at first.

In September I went on the ground a second time, and with some men with shovels I made a ridge of earth to show the line of wagons, a circular trench 18 feet across for each of the five Sibley tents, and mounds to show an outline of the ground occupied by the horses—five feet in width for each horse—92 to 96 as estimated.

During this time I had become not only familiar with the ground itself, but I had a very good knowledge of the surrounding country for some distance away.

As the result of all this work I can positively say that if I were compelled to choose a camp ground in that vicinity with all the conditions as they were in 1862, and knowing that the Indians would attack the camp, the only alteration that I would make in the location would be to move the site about 100 feet to the southwest. The conditions which would justify this change would not be noticed by the unpracticed eye, considering that a heavy growth of prairie

grass would have made all slight elevations and slopes more or less obscure. There was a slight swell of ground that gave the enemy a chance to approach us below the level of our line of sight. Our heaviest firing came from this direction, for they could stand on their knees and fire and then drop down out of our view. Otherwise this location gave a better view of the ground surface in all directions than any place that I could have chosen in that vicinity.

Whatever mistakes may have been made in other respects, the charge of the dangerous camp ground was unjust to Captain Grant.

NO DIRECT CHARGES AGAINST CAPTAIN GRANT

It is true that no direct statements or charges of any kind were ever made against Grant. After carrying out the purpose of the expedition with rare ability and conducting the defense of his camp as well as it would have been possible for a more experienced man to do, he was simply ignored by his superiors and others who should have stood by him. But the story was published and believed everywhere, that he was largely at fault for the great calamity by the false claim that he had made his camp in a dangerous place and absolutely not a word ever went before the public that he was the leader in conducting a brave defense.

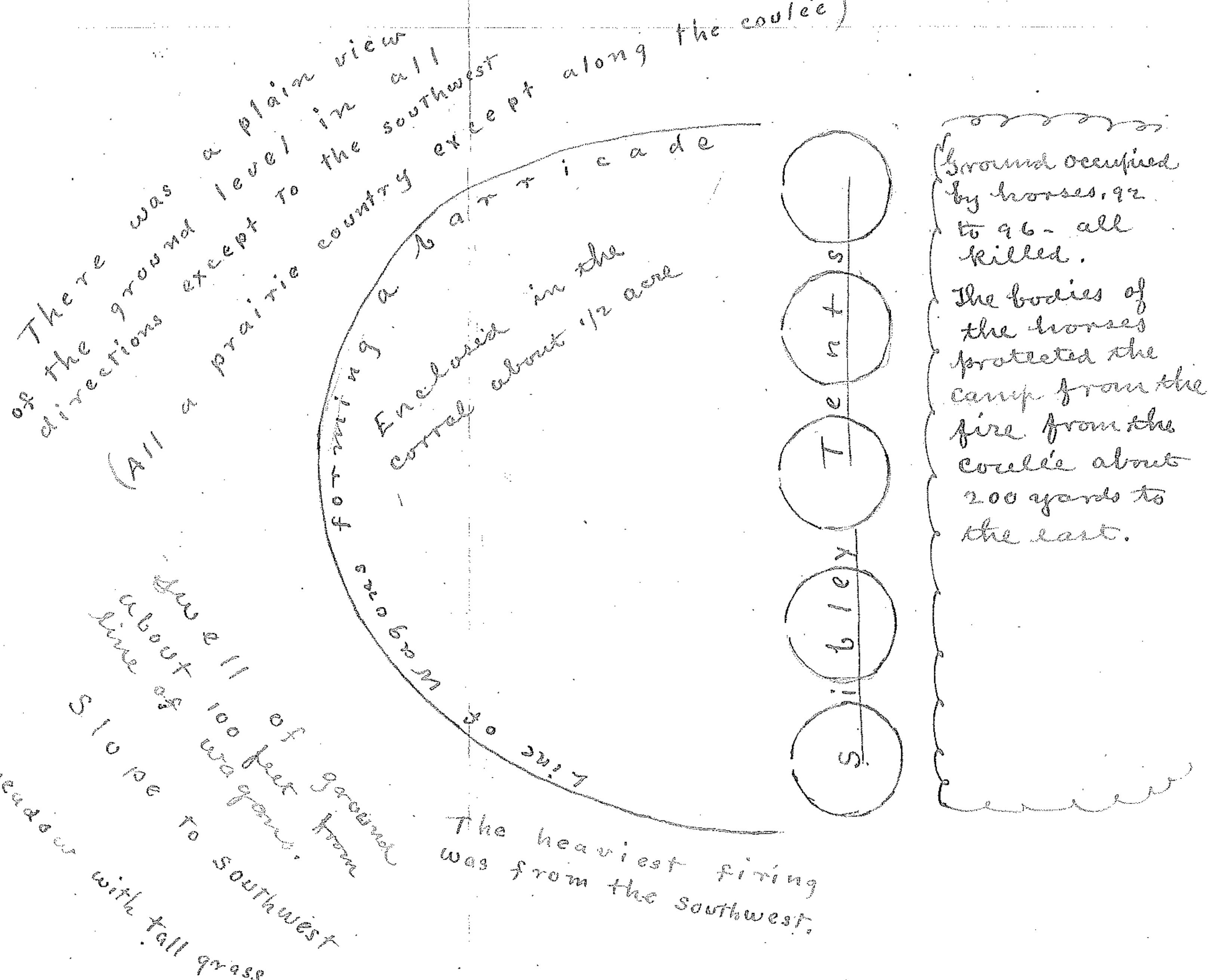
WHO SHOULD BEAR THE BLAME?

It is right to say that Col. Sibley was a man of strong character and ability, but it is plain that he did not rise to his responsibility until after this battle.

In his later advances into the Indian country he showed good discretion and ability of a high order. In the advances leading up to Camp Release where he rescued 300 captives, he displayed great patience and tact under conditions where an indiscreet move might have brought on a general massacre of the women and children. He made the best possible use of the influence of the friendly Indians in dealing with the hostiles, and after much delay rescued every prisoner.

But at first it is evident that he and all his officers fell into the belief that when the white troops came to Fort Ridgely the Indians were so in fear of them that they would only try to go west with their plunder and prisoners, and above all, to escape punishment for their crimes. It is very easy for a newly appointed officer to be so impressed with the appearance of a few hundred men, with arms and in uniform, that he will form the opinion that no mob of savages, regardless of their numbers, will dare to oppose them.

It is evident that the belief spread, perhaps unconsciously, among the officers, that the Indians were only a disorderly mob, and that they, like a police force in the time of a riot, need not consider the disparity in numbers between themselves and the enemy; they did not know that it was war. If we consider that Sibley and all his officers, Grant, Anderson, Major Brown and all the others, fell into this delusion and indifference to the strength of the enemy, then we can account for all that followed. It is hard for us to understand how they could shut their eyes to the slaughter at Redwood Ferry, at the Agency and at New Ulm, and in fact on the whole frontier for a distance of over 200 miles, including two battles at Fort Ridgely where they were re-


There was a plain view of the ground level in all directions except to the southwest
(All a prairie country except along the coulée)
Line of wagons forming a barricade
Enclosed in the corral about 1/2 acre
Sibley Tents
Ground occupied by horses, 92 to 96 - all killed.
The bodies of the horses protected the camp from the fire from the coulée about 200 yards to the east.
Swell of ground about 100 feet from line of wagons.
Slope to southwest
meadow with tall grass
The heaviest firing was from the southwest.

pulsed but not defeated. Even Major Brown who knew the Indians all his life, and whose family were prisoners at the time, had no conception of what they would do in time of war. The fact is beyond dispute that Brown, on the evening before the battle, told Grant and his men that they were as safe as if they were in their own homes. Acting under the delusion that seemed to control them we cannot blame them personally, but the penalty for their mistake was a great disaster.

But Col. Sibley was a military officer and the leader of that campaign, and it was no accident or unusual act of the enemy that brought us into the hands of this powerful force of Indians with our weak party. It does not require a military critic to see the truth of the self-evident principle that a small, slow moving force should never be sent into the field of the enemy. Sibley had no right to think that he could send this expedition without its being discovered, traveling as it did by daylight through an open country along the only road leading up river from Fort Ridgely. He knew that the Indians could bring into action at least 600 and probably 1,000 men. He knew that they were well mounted and well armed, and that their couriers could in a few hours carry the news to all the villages on the Reservation. In any campaign the commander should expect the enemy to do the best (or we might say the worst) that is in his power.

If before this expedition was sent out a little bird had whispered into Col. Sibley's ear: "Do not ignore or underrate the power of the enemy; you never know what he will do"; there would have been no slaughter at Birch Coulee.

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