

***Custer or Crazy Horse? How
Custer should have won.***

Gary Heartsill

August 20, 2019



Monument



Ghost Picture

Foreword (Part 1)



The Boy General of the Golden Lock



Custer or Crazy Horse?

“Ho-ka he! A great day to die¹”

No one knows how many books – some say over 5,000 - have been written about the Battle of Little Bighorn or Custer’s Last Stand but I have heard more has been written on this Battle of the Greasy Grass than has been written on the Battle of Gettysburg (yes, it is called by a lot of names – how about Custerology?).

This short essay is to not try and outdo some of the great historians and writers who have thrown their truly thoughtful and inventive ideas into the pot. Speculation abounds with how Custer lost, how Custer should have won, whether he should have divided his troops, or had waited for the generals Terry and Gibbon at the mouth of the Little Bighorn River.

This debate will go on for many moons - if not forever.

My comments will be from different angles, directions, and perspectives:

1. Have been to the Battleground.
2. Have read some of the books.
3. This one won’t count for much (is a long shot) but there was an episode on the battle in “The Twilight Zone.”

So, basing all my ideas on the above **I do have a way** to suggest how Custer could have won the fight.

Therefore, the question for discussions (again) is how could Custer have won the battle? What could he have done differently to have beaten back the Lakota hostiles and thwarted Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull from killing almost half of his command?

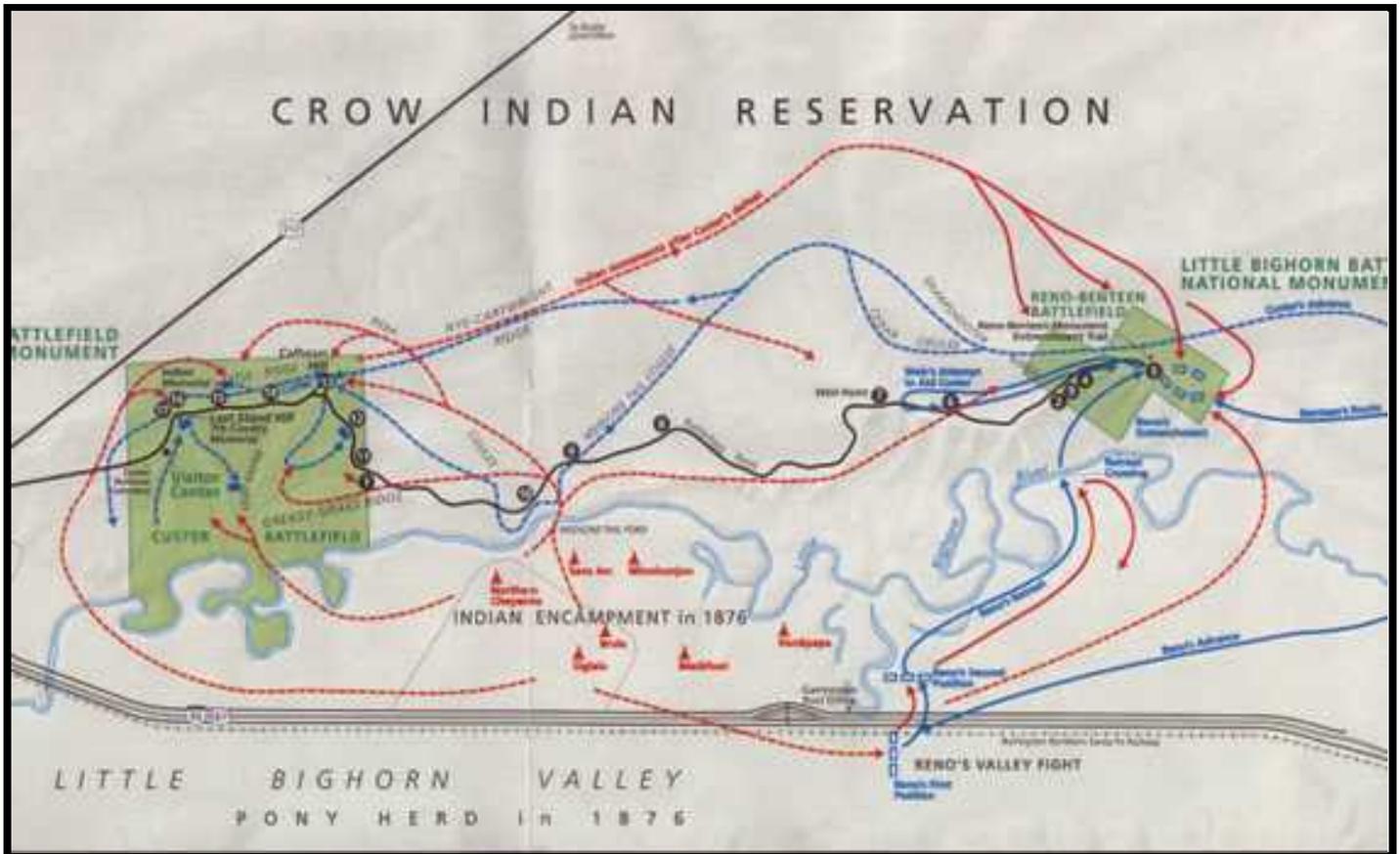
Another way of saying this is “Who’s side are you on - and why?”

¹ Ambrose, Stephen E. (1996). *Crazy Horse and Custer: The parallel lives of two American warriors*. New York, NY: Anchor Books. For the full jest of his mantra see page 440.

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

It was back in 'ought nine' when Jeanne, Biscuit, and I headed up north to Montana. As a matter of fact it was this day August 20th we were in the Little Bighorn Valley on the Crow Indian Reservation. We spent two memorial days on the Battlefield. This was a highlight of our vacation trip. We had driven up the path north to Ogallala, Nebraska – the cattle drive path in McMurtry's book "Lonesome Dove," discovered and visited the Crazy Horse project, peeked over at the four presidents, and then drove on up to The Little Bighorn.

All the way up I was reviewing what books and notes I had on the fight trying to see in my mind what it would look like in person. Will have to admit my sympathy was with Custer. I felt he should have beat the Indians - the "hostiles" should have been beaten.



This brochure map is located at: <https://www.nps.gov/libi/planyourvisit/maps.htm>

This Web site has just about as much as one needs to understand 'everything' about the Battle. A ton of pictures and great comment on what they think took place on August 25, 1876. The Visitor's Center was well equipped with people, rangers, answers, and book/relic material to make it a great day for the consumer or history student of this Battlefield.

Note: the map is actually pointing (the grid) to east-northeast which makes north-south go east-west as it is laid out above (north is 10:00 o'clock). The left green is the Custer Battlefield and the right green is the Reno-Benteen Battlefield. Blue is the 7th Cavalry and the red is for the hostiles – of course, most of these are conjectural paths. The Web site has pictures of every place marked with both numbers, titles of encampments, and fighting areas.

There is a splendid nine minute video of the Battle and is taken from the brochure. This info is based on Robert M. Utley's research. This is as good as any nine minutes you will spend on this piece of American History...great overview.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0mGyK9uwoE> Almost as good as being there – but not quite!



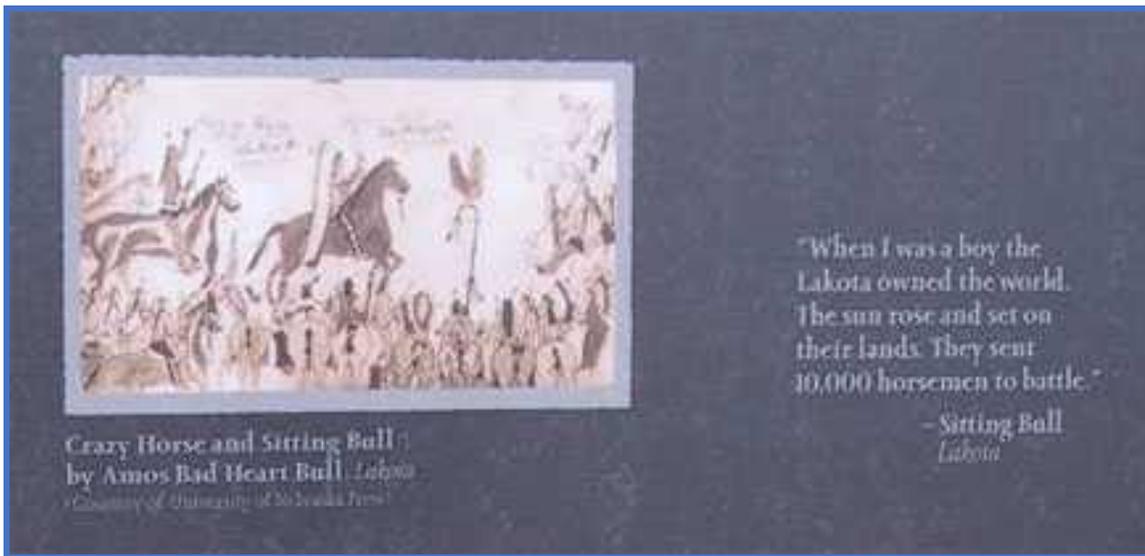
Allan Mardon (b. 1931). *The Battle of Greasy Grass*, 1996. Oil on linen, 76 x 136 inches. Museum Purchase with funds from the William E. Weiss Memorial Fund, Mr. and Mrs. Gordon H. Barrows, and the Franklin A. West Memorial Fund.



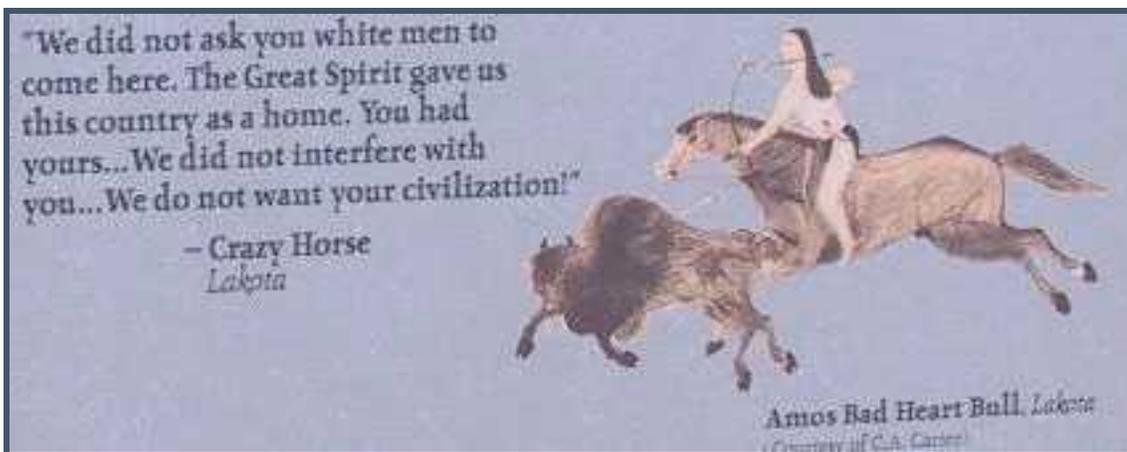
Indian Memorial (2009).

The Indian Memorial is just next to the National Monument (down the hill) and was added in 2003. Of note, in the Final Brief video the park ranger says this addition was not well received initially as “it changed the environment a lot.”

The number of people who visit each year is about 400,000.



These two are on the same panel just inside the Indian Memorial (pix gh '09)



For what it is worth, this portion of the Sioux Nation Memorial was preserved in these two pictures I took while there. When reviewing the nine minute video the National Park Service scans/pans this area; however, these two panels above – to me the most important panels there – were covered up by a pretty red-headed lady in the last one-thousandth of a second in the video. I bring this out, in part, to say some of the same pictures Jeanne and I took are on my Web site².

At this point (2009) my persuasion, like I said earlier, was to be behind Custer – he should have won the battle – and I favored his task of wiping out the hostiles. My sympathy was with the 7th Cavalry and had always been that way; however, the trip to the Battlefield changed my mind and sometime during this trip my allegiance went to the Indians. For the record after getting back home and continuing the study I have ended up now being back on Custer's side. My guess for the switching back and forth had to do with what/who I was reading/seeing or feeling/hearing.

I did not know about the “ghosts fighters” but going down the path from the Center/Last Stand Hill late on the second evening I heard the dull roar of battle, could almost feel the thumping of the horses, and did not know then but there are other folks who have experienced the same feelings. Some will say ‘the fight is still going on.’

² www.gheart.net Magazine Montana Trip or (maybe) <http://www.gheart.net/MontanaTrip2009.pdf>



Toward the Deep Ravine.



Looking down the Deep Ravine, a “then and now,” Battlefield marker.³

³ LITTLE BIGHORN BATTLE FIELD STUDY CUSTER HILL FINAL BRIEF
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzSVP7I3J1U> (10:33)

Well done ranger report who ends with “A spiritual place – especially at 11:00 at night.”

“When you run from an Indian you are his meat” (R.J. Smith, frontiersman).



Andy Thomas "Crazy Horse at Little Big Horn" \$995.00 (in stock).

So far in this forward, or my discussion on having been to the Montana Battleground, I have just been shooting some flares and kicking some dirt clods to get us started in Custer and Crazy Horse and how BVT. MAJ. GEN. G.A. Custer should have won the battle.

Getting into Custer's Last Stand (or whatever you want to call it) is like stepping in quicksand. You just can't skip over this and say you have been there. You just can't read a couple of books or watch two or three YouTube videos and claim you are done...you may be done, but you surely will not be at the end of it. I have, like others, determined there is no end.

Therefore, before I move on to the second part on the books, let me make a couple of learning statements to hold this first session in the tension of "we will never get to the bottom" of this battle...there is more quicksand than we know.

While at the National Monument – listening to the Park Rangers and their stories.

The Rangers do a masterful and scripted briefing worth every minute of what you hear. They are proud to be there and they are proud of what they say. Some have their own ways of telling the story and you can listen to some of the Indian Rangers who have 'just a little slant' on their presentations. This is all good.

a. The first issue is to learn/see/understand the fight. This means the attack position(s) of Custer, the hostile response(s), and how it all ended – to mean some of the research they did to find bullets, shells, body parts, and arrow heads to have a track record of where the fighting was the most severe and most productive.

- b. The second issue is to paint the large picture of gathering up the bodies, preserving the names of both the soldiers and the hostiles, and why the Battlefield is a National Monument.
- c. I did not hear a word about Crazy Horse while listening to three different (one guy twice) briefings. I had forgotten this until I looked back at my notes.
- d. Most Rangers started off with discussing how head strong Custer was at wanting to make a name for himself and immortalize his death.
- e. Same thing for learning Custer played around with some of the Indian women. Yes, Libby knew about this...
- f. The Rangers spent some time showing some of the weapons used and we found out about half of the hostiles had better Henry and Winchester repeating rifles than the soldier's Remington 1875 single shot carbines.
- g. Each time I sat and listened to the Rangers talk I kept looking up at the Monument wanting to get on the path and go around to each spot and review the Battlefield – to maybe feel some of the fight.

Speaking of books (next up) let me quote one of the historians Larry McMurtry who said at the end of his book:⁴

"In my visits to the Custer battlefield, I found myself wondering why my fellow tourists were there. Few of them looked like history buffs. The battlefield was a major listing in the tour guides: it was just something you did if you were in that part of Montana.

Great battlefields – the Marne, Omaha Beach, Stalingrad, Shiloh, Vicksburg, the Little Bighorn – are places where death once ruled, and people want to see what death left us: rows of crosses mostly" (page 171).

Have noted on my Web site a comment each ranges make at the conclusion of his talk:

**AND NOW,
YOU KNOW MORE ABOUT
LITTLE BIG HORN THAN
GENERAL CUSTER DID
ON 25 JUNE 1876.**

⁴ McMurtry, Larry (2012). *Custer*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.



This is one section depicting the end of battle which is displayed in the Visitor's Center.

It is breath taking in person.

Have been told this painting is by Eric von Schmidt. There is another one of his paintings on the brochure the historians say is one that more accurately portrays the battle. I think both are called "Here Fell Custer."



The 7th Cavalry Garry Owen - Song with lyrics - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtLBWCAU7vc>

Books (Part II) – Attack overview

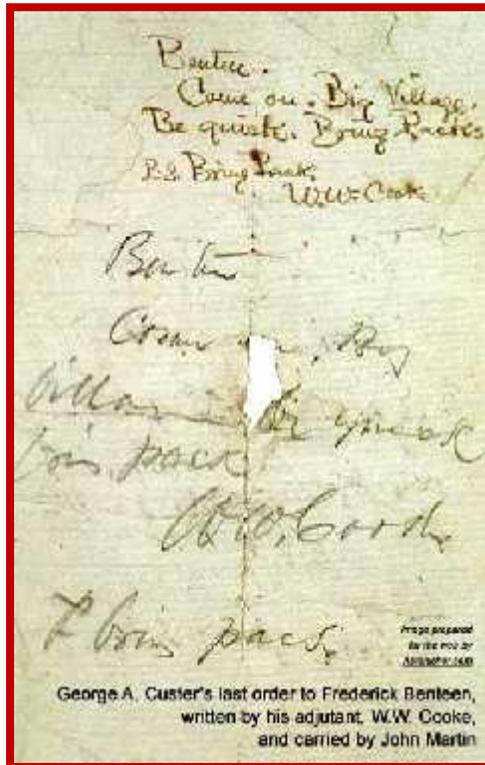
“I could whip all the Indians on the Continent with the Seventh Cavalry” (Custer, on June 25, 1876 - Ambrose⁵)

“After Custer gave the battalion orders, Half Yellow Face spoke through Boyer. ‘Do not divide your men,’ he said. ‘There are too many of the enemy for us, even if we stay together. If you must fight, keep us all together.’

Custer was in no mood to hear dire predictions. **You do the scouting, and I will attend to the fighting,**’ he said.

The Crow began to strip off his clothes and paint his face, Custer asked what he was doing.

‘Because you and I are going home today, and by a trail that is strange to us both,’ said Half Yellow Face” (Donovan, *A terrible glory*⁶, p. 212)



Come on. Big village. Be quick.

See p. 98 of McMurtry. This note survives and is in the library at West Point.

“Once or twice, the troopers saw Custer’s battalion on the bluffs across the river, moving downstream. Some of the men began to cheer and wave their hats, but Reno, now in the rear of A Company, Shouted, ‘Stop that noise!’ Then he yelled ‘Charge!’ At least one A Company trooper heard the order slurred and glanced back to see the Major drinking from a half-full flask and passing it to Benny Hodgson.

One hundred and fifty men rode down the valley of the Little Bighorn” (Donovan, p. 221).

⁵ Ambrose, Stephen E. (1996). *Crazy Horse and Custer*. Page 435

⁶ Donovan, James. (2008), *A terrible glory: Custer and the Little Bighorn – the last great battle of the American West*. New York, NY: Back Bay Books.

“Though Custer had accomplished the rare feat of surprising a large Indian village at midday, the Sioux and Cheyennes were quickly mobilizing to defend their families” (Donovan, p. 228).

“Then word spread quickly: *‘Crazy Horse is coming! Crazy Horse is coming!’*” (p. 235).

“Death came swiftly and frequently” (p. 242).

“More than anything, the Indians all agreed later, the battle resembled a buffalo chase” (p. 243).

“Where is Custer?” (p. 260).

“We circled all around them – swirling like water round a stone” (p. 261).

“Weir’s D Troop had been standing beside their horses for a long while...When the thunderous crash of two or three distinct volleys could be heard – a signal of distress to some – his Second Lieutenant, Winfield Edgerly, said to him, ‘We ought to get down there.’

Weir asked his subaltern what he thought they should do.

‘Go get Custer, of course,’ said Edgerly (p. 265).

“Almost an hour had passed since Reno’s command had reached the hill” - the hill where Weir was (p. 275).

“Custer’s hope of relief from Benteen and Keogh was soon quashed...about fifty men now occupied the position” (p. 275).

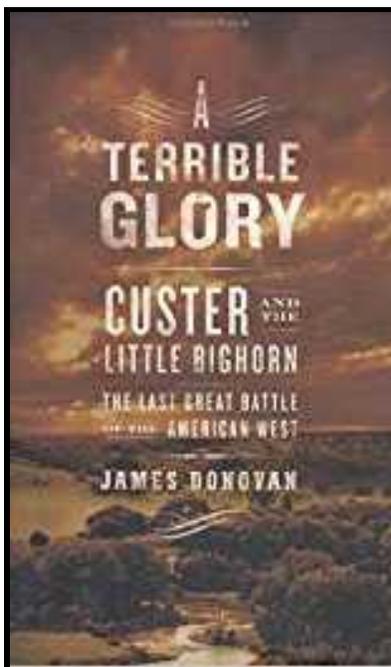
“...the outcome no longer in doubt...”

They had too few guns and too few men to use them efficiently...

Custer took a shot in his left breast that knocked him back. He dropped his rifle and drew his English bulldog pistols. Many of the men around him were dead when another bullet smashed into his left temple and killed him instantly...”

[The ten or so survivors got up and ran toward the deep ravine and they were all killed.]

“As had happened on other parts of the field, some of the soldiers killed themselves just to get it over with. No white man wanted to be alive when he fell into the hands of Indians” (pp. 276-277).



“They stripped the bodies and scalped some of them, though most of the soldiers had hair too short for the effort. Then, as the men of the village threw themselves on their ponies and rode south toward the bluecoats standing on the high point near the river, the old men, boys, and old men who had waited on their ponies out of range arrived to help kill the wounded and begin the important task of mutilation. Many warriors had died, but far more *wasichus*⁷ lay dead along this ridge. There were skulls to crush, eyes to tear out, muscles and tendons to sever, limbs to hack off, and heads to separate from bodies. These soldiers would not move through the next world in comfort” (Donovan, p. 278).

[Hence, my systemic problem with the Indians. “Tom Custer’s head...was smashed flat with mallets. And, puzzlingly, there was a corpse with 105 arrows in it. Why?” (McMurtry, p. 144). I just thought the Japs were barbaric in WWII.]

Why he should have won

At my fantasy supper one of the invited guests will be George Custer and my first question to him will be something like “How could you have lost that fight? From the bluff you saw the Indians through the field glasses and turned to your men and said ‘Courage, boys, we’ve got them!’ Reno’s headlong charge into the village was the surest method of creating panic to the village and your charge from the rear to scatter the rest in a pincer attack should have worked like it did at Washita. Please sir, what happened?”

Of course, from here on out is conjecture, guess, hope, hell-fire, damnation, and abysmal reality of the riot that took place. Most will say it was doomed from the beginning. Glory hunting! I say he was let down by his troops – especially his number two man Major Reno – first and foremost this drunken bluecoat did not charge anything. He failed to do his job – he lost his liquid courage - and in doing so, by just losing ONE soldier he retreated, which shifted the hostile warriors back to Custer’s advance. Yes, we all know Reno despised his commander...

And his soldiers – 70% were recruits, foreigners, and guys looking for a job – some will say and I agree they were almost a bunch of ragamuffins not in shape to fight the fight and follow the orders that Custer gave them. These two conjectures on my part are as old as the war and some of it does not hold water or stand up under the scrutiny of more notable historians.

This first fault of ‘no charge’ by Reno led to the domino effect and finally the loss of battlefield cohesiveness. When Reno set up the skirmish line and went to defense it didn’t take long for the hostiles to figure it out and they turned toward Custer who was on the high ground.

So Custer with his left and right wing were waiting for Benteen and the Ammo Pack to show up as re-enforcements. If they had the two pronged attack might just have worked...operative word ‘might.’

⁷ The Lakota uses this “*Wasi’chu*” word to describe newcomers and it means “takes the fat” or “greedy person.”



Custer's crossed sword guide-on flag.

A few notes on the command:

Custer (with his band) had companies E and F lead by Yates and formed the left wing (battalion).

Custer also had companies C, I, L, that were led by Keogh and formed the right wing (battalion) – total of ~220 troopers.

The spot on the map, about two miles from the last stand point, is called the trail separation.

Reno had A,G,M with 140 troops.

Benteen had D, H, K, with 115 men.

McDougal had B company, the ammunition pack train with 135 men.

Reno ordered his charge at 2:43 (Chicago time – all times are Chicago time)

Custer leaves trail separation point at 3:01.

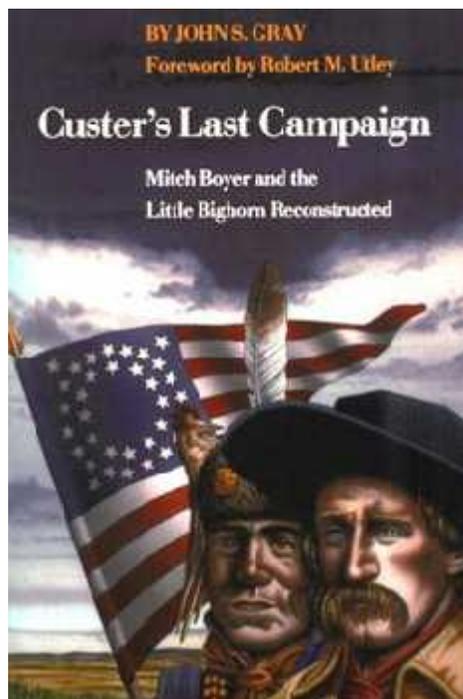
Reno starts his charge at 3:03

Benteen reaches Reno Hill and joins Reno battalion at 4:20.

Pack train reaches Reno Hill at 5:25.

The battle on Custer Hill ends at 5:25...

These times come from John Gray's book⁸ and his research goes into correlating where and when the events took place.



⁸ Gray, John S. (1991). *Custer's last campaign: Mitch Boyer and the Little Bighorn reconstructed*. Lincoln, NE: U. of Neb. Press.

A short paragraph by Richard Fox⁹ to hold the tension of battle by ‘fixing blame’ (underlines are mine).

“In sum, Indians released from the Reno engagement thwarted the strategy employed by the Custer battalion. The warriors, when provoked, did stand to fight, and as cohesion crumbled, they rushed the cavalry in considerable numbers. Surely, the no-show of reinforcements (Benteen and the packtrain) obviated any alternative to the outcome, whatever that might have been. But although these factors perpetrated a desperate predicament, as we so well know in hindsight, poor judgment in confronting a fluid strategic environment may also be implicated. Miscalculation of Indian tactics (infiltration), failure to perceive or anticipate the enemy’s resolve (after all, the cavalymen were about to attack the Indians’ families), inattentiveness to potential threats posed by odds, and the vulnerability of stationary cavalry in such situations, all coupled with maintenance of a dispersal strategy until too late, reflect singularly poor judgment while operating from Custer Ridge. So in the end, the enterprise of fixing blame is not so simple as one might expect. The subtle but fatal interplay between complex variables resulted in the sudden disintegration and subsequent annihilation of the Custer battalion” (Fox, p. 294).

“These white men [in Custer’s battalion] wanted it, they called for it and I let them have it” – Iron Hawk, Hunkpapa Sioux

The informative study on the distribution of firearm components in the Fox book is worth the price of the book – not withstanding his ‘Chicago clock’ timing of the battlefield events. He says “Government troops possessed the .45-caliber Springfield carbine (single-shot) and the six-shot, .45-caliber Colt single-action pistol...As for Indian bullets, they are represented by .50-caliber bullets and balls, .44-caliber bullets, and miscellaneous specimens” (pp. 79-80). The numbers of the rifles for the Indians showed 62 Henrys and 7 Winchester Model 1873s.

Q. How long did the fight last on [Custer Hill]

A. Just a few minutes.

- Hollow Horn Bear’s response to Walter Camp’s query

This number is shown in more than one place and shows between the times 16:46 and 17:35. Others say less than 20.

“*[The soldiers] at Custer Hill were all killed before those were down along the ravine.*” – *Respects Nothing*

More quick sand – some have suggested the reason for losing was because they did not bring the Gatling guns. As early as he attacked and as much as he surprised the hostiles having Reno’s troopers with a Gatling would have leveled the playing field – no doubt about it.

Course, having a walkie-talkie, 81mm mortar, 30 caliber water cooled machine gun would have added – heck, even a tank would have been helpful!

⁹ Fox, Richard A. (1993). *Archaeology, history, and Custer’s last battle: The Little Bighorn reexamined*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Custer's mistakes

Ambrose suggests, in order of importance, these mistakes:

"First, he refused to accept Terry's offer of four troops of the 2nd cavalry...Had Custer had two more troops with him, he might have made it up the hill...

"Second, Custer badly underestimated his enemy, not so much in terms of numbers (where his guess of 1,500 was not a fatal underestimate) as in terms of fighting capability, where he was disastrously wrong. Spitting his force four ways was thus a major error...

"Custer's third mistake was assuming that his men could do what he could do; to put it another way, he attacked too soon. He should have spent June 25 resting, then attacked the next day, when Gibbon could have, on urgent request, reinforced him...

"His fourth mistake was to commit his command when he did not know his enemies' position, strength, or location...

"Finally, when Custer lost the initiative, he failed to gain the high ground and dig in although here one should perhaps blame Custer less and praise Crazy Horse more...

"As the Sioux nation dispersed, Crazy Horse counted up the losses. Forty men dead, or thereabouts. He mourned for them, of course, but not too deeply, because it had been a good day to die" (pp. 444-447).

In trying to shovel some quick sand Ambrose is correct on Custer not getting the high ground. If they had gotten there and dug in they might have been able to pull it off – especially if Benteen, Reno, Weir, or even Gibbon had shown up. Ambrose says it best: "...if Crazy Horse had not swung around Custer's flank and hit him from an unexpected direction, the 7th Cavalry could have survived the battle of the Little Bighorn. With only enemies in the front to worry about, it would seem that it should have possible for Custer to make it to the top of the hill, not just near its crest where Crazy Horse caught him...**Crazy Horse ruined it all**" (pp. 445-446).

Before we end – a dozen of the 5,000+ books!

George Custer has a unique way of writing and this sentence (quoted a lot) holds his feeling¹⁰ on Indians: "*If I were an Indian, I often think I would greatly prefer to cast my lot among those of my people adhered to the free open plains rather than submit to the confined limits of a reservation*" (p. 25).

Elizabeth B. Custer¹¹ closes her book with a letter from her husband: "Mouth of Rosebud, June 21, 1876. Look on my map and you will find our present location on the Yellowstone, about midway between Tongue River and the Big Horn...

I send you an extract from General Terry's official order, knowing how keenly you appreciate words of commendation and confidence, such as the following:

It is of course impossible to give you any definite instructions in regard to this movement; and were it not impossible to do so the Department Commander places too much confidence in your zeal, energy, and ability to wish to impose upon you precise orders, which might hamper your action when nearly in contact with the enemy" (p. 266).

Note: Listen to "Boots and Saddle" Bugle call - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PEmi-9ULG4o>

¹⁰ Custer, George A. (1874-2006). *My life on the plains: Personal experiences with Indians*. New York, NY: Barnes & Noble.

¹¹ Custer, Elizabeth B. (2009). *Boots and saddles: The experiences of General Custer's wife on the Western Plains*. LaVergne, TN: Leonaur.

James S. Brust¹², et al, gets into the weeds bones of the battlefield. The photographs are spectacular.



Chapter 14 "Custer Hill"

"A visit to the site reinforces rather than diminishes the legend" (p. 126). He also touts the first picture taken there.

James Bray's quote¹³ is helpful concerning Custer's collapse: "Custer elected to recommit his battalion to containing scatteration. Repeatedly dividing his immediate command into overextended wings deployed as strike force and reserve, he committed an inadequate force over a field that stretched like taffy - the ideal terrain for Crazy Horse to test his reading of army psychology" (p. 238).

Gregory Michno¹⁴ has two quotes giving enough inspiration to spend \$18.00 on a new book (bought at the Korczak's Heritage – The Crazy Horse Memorial - on 17 Aug '09).

It may be 3:00 o'clock in Chicago but on the Little Bighorn River it is *Lakota Noon!*

"*Lakota Noon* does not tell the Indian side of the story – it lets the Indians tell it. There is a great difference. Indians recalling the battle in 1886 or 1926 were not concerned with political correctness or how they might conspire to lay a guilt trip on a future generation. They told us what happened. That is all we wish to know. *Lakota Noon* uses their words to tell what happened and leaves the sermons to novelists and ideologues" (p. x).

"If we show that the entire sequence took three hours, it is not so important when the battle starts. I chose 3 P.M. to correspond with John Gray's exhaustive time-motion study of the soldier movements at the Little Bighorn, allowing for ready-made comparisons and reference points between my work and his" (p. xi).

To even the most interested reader you can see how narrow my reading list is, as this small group of the 5,000+ are all, well mostly, bunched up or bundled together. A reader who likes an author like Donovan for instance, will look at what he recommends or who he references in his works. For me this has paid off in spades – and saved me some book money.

Minchno covers each phase from the Indian view and uses Chicago time like Fox does – This fills in a lot of gaps.

¹² Brust, James S., Pohanka, Brian C., & Barnard, S. (2005). *Where Custer fell: Photographs of the Little Bighorn Battlefield then and now*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

¹³ Bray, Kingsley M. (2006). *Crazy Horse: A Lakota life*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

¹⁴ Michno, Gregory F. (1997). *Lakota Noon: The Indian narrative of Custer's defeat*. Missoula, MT: Mountain Press.

Speaking of Jim Donovan¹⁵, his illustrated book in 2001 (see his *Glory* book quotes above) is one of the first to show the detailed pictures of Custer and the Battle.

“General Alfred Terry brought the terrible news: Every man of the five companies under Custer’s command had been found dead four miles downstream – a total of 210 men” (p. 180).

“A few badly wounded cavalry mounts wandered among the carnage. They were all destroyed except one: Comanche, Captain Keogh’s bay, whose seven wounds were bound up. He would recover to live another fifteen years, the pride of the Seventh Cavalry. In 1878, a general order would decree that Comanche would never be ridden again” (p. 181)

Larry McMurtry, again, and last.

He doesn’t waste 447 pages on ‘splaining’ anything...he just gets it done. He lists his four long books about Custer and his fate; “...all of them are valuable books, but none of them says what I just said; at least they don’t say it plainly. One reason I prefer the short life to the long life is that in the former plain speaking is usually required” (p. 7).

A point of contention by everyone is Custer’s only win at the Battle of Washita (“Wash’heata” – some of us say it like the Indians say it, but the rangers at the National Park in Montana claim the Lakota’s say it like they are from Kansas...). Custer attacked in the middle of winter in the snow on a place in the Black Kettle where the Indians were supposed to be on their reservation. At least 103 Indians died – but only 11 were adults. Custer abandoned Major Elliott and his men were slaughtered. Most cover this ordeal and McMurtry covers it short and sweet...another reason for reading his book. I agree with most of what is said about how poor this battle settled with Custer’s troops – especially Benteen, but further review by me will have to be in another essay. Yes, he split his troops here too. See Chapter 15 of his book.

“Black Kettle’s wife received nine wounds at Sand Creek, but Black Kettle carried her to Fort Lyon and she lived, only to be finished off by Custer on the Washita. Sand Creek was very brutal; on a stage in Denver, Chivington exhibited one hundred Cheyenne scalps, and some pudenda, to wild cheers” (p. 51). Yeah, I had to look the word up too...

In the middle of McMurtry’s book are 20 pages of historical paintings. These art works are worth the price of the book. The center of the book shows two pages “Custer’s Last Stand” and is overflowing with detail – some not correct, by the way, as Custer still has some hair on his head - and this maybe the correct cut - but his goldilocks are sure not there.

“As I have said, Major Marcus Reno proved to be the principal antihero of the Battle of the Little Bighorn” (p. 139). He was given specific order to charge. To charge through the Indians and pursue the warriors who would be in the fight. As I have mentioned this before I will add like some others (like Libby), his name should not be on the monument... I am showing my ethnocentric reluctance to give proper weight to calling Reno what he really was...

“...overwhelming numbers beat technological superiority” (p. 168).

“Why, with so many marks against him, did he become an almost instant hero?” (p. 169).

We may never get out of the quicksand but we can move on with this essay. With a critical eye, learned from these Custer historians, I shall now explain how he could have won.

¹⁵ Donovan, Jim (2001). *Custer and the Little Bighorn: The man, the mystery, the myth*. Stillwater, MN: Voyageur Press. Notice he changed his name on his second book to James...took me a while to figure that out...same Donovan in Dallas.

Custer's Last Stand (Part III) – BBC Documentary

A fortuitous documentary came out in March of this year and for the first time (for me) I am able to see the Battlefield with the ridges, coulees, and rivers with proper definition – it was filmed on sight in Montana. This is also fortuitous because they use live troopers and live Indians (Rangers call them “hostiles”).

The picture below opens up the film with General Custer shown with his crossed sabers flag. This scene is actually toward the very end of the movie – and the battle is just about over with as tactical stability and disintegration has made defeat almost certain.



BBC Documentary https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPjTFXpAZ_g (48:39)

It is at this point, and reason to watch this last stand, is the park ranger being interviewed says – and we don't hear this very often – Custer almost won the battle. Had he made it across the river and gathered up the women and children he would have made the case for the braves to give up the fight. This strategy comes from his using the women and children as hostages in the Washita Battle.

The video shows him sending gray horses (part of E Company) down to the river near Medicine Tail Ford to see if this was the end of the Indian camp and if they could cross his battalion there. The video shows Custer then going west to get around the back side and then cross the river - this would be close to the present cemetery.

The documentary is done well and clearly shows the attitudes of Custer, Reno, Benteen, his troops, and a bunch of upset Lakota Indians. It also supports the idea of why he did not get the backup from Reno and Benteen.

Observe the Sun Dance by Sitting Bull who then had the vision of the Bluecoats coming. (See Ambrose pp. 416-418).

A perfect way to wind down this paper...as we now have a good reason why he divided up this troops for the attack.

The last part (Part IV) – The Twilight Zone!

Just happen to have in my possession all of the 150 episodes of the Twilight Zone. This one is one of my favorites and is titled “The 7th is made up of phantoms” – and this is episode 130 which came out in December of 1963. I will point out a visitor to my TV War Room will enjoy a playing of this and other movies, shorts, and film. Sometimes one may get to see “They died with their boots on” which shows, among other things, Custer at West Point. There is one scene high on my list to watch and it has to do with the separation of the cadets as the Civil War is almost ready to begin. The scene shows the cadet corps on the parade field with the announcement of what will be expected of a United States Army officer when the war breaks out.

The commandant finishes reading and looks to a staff person who then says in a commanding voice to the corps “Gentlemen from the South, One Step Forward, Left Face, March!”

The commandant turns to the band director and says “Play Dixie!”

I promise you, at this music, all present **WILL** stand at attention!...



McCluskey, Connors, Langsford

Are three Army National Guardsmen on maneuvers in Montana.



They are driving in this tank which is called an M4 in the video but it looks more like a U.S. M3A3 Light Tank Stuart as in (Stuart V) to me but this is just like trying to sort out some more quicksand.

Note: You may/can watch this on Amazon dot prime at:

https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B005HG2FE6?tag=clicker_nonpiv-20

The story has these three troopers (tankers?) out driving by the lone “wigwam” [teepee (tipi)] which “was located on the north side of Reno Creek, about 4 miles from the Little Big Horn” (Gray, p. 247). They get out to see about the tipi and notice a 7th Cavalry water canteen. The wind blows and they are in The Twilight Zone.

That evening sergeant Connors tries to tell the captain they are on the trail that the Custer troops took toward the final battle but he won't hear of it; of course, “that was 80 years ago! Do you want a section 8?” The captain orders them to leave out again at 06:00 to follow the river.

Back at the same spot they hear shots, see puffs of smoke, shoot at some noise with a carbine and have a rider-less Indian war pony go galloping by. Now it is serious. They know there is a war some where and they are familiar with Custer's last stand.



McCluskey taking three shots.



Alarmed with getting closer to the fight they head out.

As they get close, they leave the tank and move forward toward the top of the hill as the battle is raging on the other side. On the top they can see what is going on and simultaneously decide they will join the fight. They go to battery with all weapons shown here with three 1911 .45s and two carbines.

They lean in striking the pose below before going down the hill.



Sergeant Connors says **“Alright fellows, let’s do it!”**

The next scene shows the captain and lieutenant at the Custer Battlefield National Monument “In memory of the 261 men of The 7th Cavalry.” A jeep drives up and says they found the tank on the ridge but no troopers. The captain says for them to keep looking. The lieutenant then points out to the captain that the names of the three missing troopers, Connors, McCluskey, and Langsford are listed on the monument.



The lieutenant said “Quite a coincidence?”

The captain replies **“Quite a coincidence...Too bad they couldn’t have brought the tank up – it would have helped.”**

Epilogue (Part V)

Many, many, moons will pass as the cosmic ebb of time will move tide and title to where the frontier land is back once again to prairie grass and mountain range. The bearded bison will be back but all else will be gone and forgotten – Custer’s tombstone will have fallen, as well as the Statue of Liberty. Relics of the past, covered by the efficacious abyss, will be no more.

But the roaming herds will look up at the rock solid figure of face, finger, mane, and wonder...

Then, they will ask “Is that Crazy Horse?”

