

We now had many wounded, and the question of water was vital, as from 6 P. M. of the previous evening until now, 10 A. M. (about 16 hours) we had been without.

A skirmish line was formed, under Colonel Benteen, to protect the descent of volunteers down the hill, in front of his position, to reach the water. We succeeded in getting some canteens, although many of the men were hit in doing so; the fury of the attack was now over, and to my astonishment the Indians were seen going in parties towards the village. But two solutions occurred to us for this movement; that they were going for something to eat, more ammunition (as they had been throwing arrows), or that Custer was coming. We took advantage of this lull to fill all vessels with water, and soon had it by the camp kettle full; but they continued to withdraw, and all firing ceased, save occasional shots from sharpshooters, sent to annoy us about the water. About 2 P. M. the grass in the bottom was set on fire, and followed up by Indians, who encouraged its burning, and it was evident it was done for a purpose, which purpose I discovered, later on, to be the creation of a dense cloud of smoke, behind which they were packing and preparing to move their *tepees*.

It was between 6 and 7 P. M. that the village came out from behind the clouds of smoke and dust. We had a close and good view of them, as they filed away in the direction of Big Horn mountains, moving in almost perfect military order; the length of the column was fully equal to that of a large division of the Cavalry Corps of the Army of the Potomac, as I have seen it on its march.

We now thought of Custer, of whom nothing had been seen and nothing heard since the firing in his direction about 6 P. M. on the eve of the 25th, and we concluded that the Indians had gotten between him and us, and driven him towards the boat, at the mouth of Little big Horn river; the awful fate that did befall him never occurring to any of us as within the limits of possibilities. During the night I changed my position, in order to secure an unlimited supply of water, and was prepared for their return, feeling sure they would do so, as they were in such numbers. But early in the morning of the 27th, and while we were on the *qui vive* for Indians, I saw with my glass a dust some distance down the valley; there was no certainty for some time what they were, but, finally, I satisfied myself they were cavalry, and if so could only be Custer, as it was ahead of the time that I understood that General Terry could be expected. Before this time, however, I had written a communication to General Terry, and three volunteers were to try and reach him (I had no confidence in the Indians with me, and could not get them to do anything). If this dust were Indians it was possible they would not expect any one to leave. The men started and were told to go as near as was safe to determine if the approaching column was white men, and to return at once in case they found it so; but, if they were Indians, to push on to General Terry. In a short time we saw them returning over the high bluff already alluded to; they were accompanied by a scout who had a note from Terry to Custer, saying, "Crow scouts had come to camp saying he had been whipped, but that it was not believed." I think it was about 10:30 A. M. that General Terry rode into my lines, and the fate of Custer and his brave men was soon determined by Captain Benteen proceeding with his company to his battle ground, and where were recognized the following officers who,

were surrounded by the dead bodies of many of their men: General G. A. Custer; Colonel W. W. Cooke, Adjutant; Captains M. W. Keogh, G. W. Yates, and T. W. Custer; First Lieutenants A. E. Smith, James Callhoun; Second Lieutenants W. V. Reilly, of the 7th Cavalry, and J. J. Crittenden, 20th Infantry, temporarily attached to this regiment. The bodies of First Lieutenant J. E. Porter and Second Lieutenants H. M. Harrington and J. G. Sturgis, 7th Cavalry, and Asst. Surgeon G. W. Lord, U. S. Army were not recognized; but there is every reasonable probability they were killed. It was now certain that the column of five companies with Custer had been killed. The wounded in my lines were, during the afternoon and eve of the 27th, moved to the camp of General Terry, and at 5 A. M. of the 28th I proceeded with the regiment to the battle ground of Custer, and buried 204 bodies, including the following named citizens: Mr. Boston Custer, Mr. Reed (a young nephew of General Custer), and Mr. Kellogg, a correspondent of the *N. Y. Herald*. The following named citizens and Indians, who were with my command were also killed: Charles Reynolds (guide and hunter), Isaiah (colored), interpreter; Bloody Knife (who fell from immediately by my side); Bob Tailed Bull and Stab, of the Indian scouts.

After following over his trail it is evident to me that Custer intended to support me by moving farther down the stream, and attacking the village in flank, that he found the distance greater to the ford than he anticipated; that he did charge, but his march had taken so long, although his trail shows he moved rapidly, that they were ready for him: that Cos. C and I, and perhaps part of Co. E, crossed to the village or attempted it at the charge, and were met by a staggering fire, and that they fell back to secure a position from which to defend themselves; but they were followed too closely by the Indians to permit him to form any kind of a line. I think had the regiment gone in as a body, and from the woods in which I fought, advanced on the village, that its destruction was certain, but he was fully confident they were running or he would not have turned from me. I think (after the great number of Indians there were in the village) that the following reasons obtained for the misfortune: his rapid marching for two days and one night before the fight, attacking in the daylight at 12 A. M., and when they were on the *qui vive*, instead of early in the morning, and lastly, his unfortunate division of the regiment into three commands.

During my fight with the Indians I had the heartiest support from officers and men, but the conspicuous services Brevet Colonel F. W. Benteen, I desire to call attention to especially, for if ever a soldier deserved recognition by his Government for distinguished services, he certainly does.

I enclose herewith his report of the operations of his battalion from the time of leaving the regiment until we joined commands on the hill. I also enclose an accurate list of casualties as far as it can be made at the present time, separating them into two lists, "A," those killed in General Custer's command; "B," those killed and wounded in the command I had.

The number of Indians killed can only be approximated, until we hear through the agencies. I saw the bodies of eighteen, and Captain Ball, 2nd Cavalry, who made a scout of thirteen miles over their trail, says that their graves were many, along their line of march. It is simply impossible that numbers of them should not be hit, in the several

charges they made so close to my lines. They made their approach through the deep gulches that led from the hill-top to the river, and when the jealous care with which the Indian guards the bodies of killed and wounded is considered, it is not astonishing that their bodies were not found. It is probable that the stores left by them and destroyed the next two days, were to make room for many of them on their *travols*.

The harrowing sight of the dead bodies crowning the height on which Custer fell, and which will remain vividly in my memory until death, is too recent for me too ask the good people of this country, whether a policy that sets opposing parties in the field armed, clothed, and equipped by one and the same Government, should not be abolished. All of which is respectfully submitted.

M. A. RENO,

Major 7th Cavalry, Com'd'g Regiment.

Colonel Reno's Report.

We have succeeded in obtaining an official copy of Colonel Reno's Report of his operations with the 7th Cavalry on the Little Big Horn River, June 25, 1876, which is now for the first time printed. As the statement of the principal survivor of that disastrous affair, confirmatory in most respects of authentic accounts from others, and supplemented, as it happens to be, with the unsolicited endorsement by his entire command, of Colonel Reno's actions (accompanied by a request for his promotion) the report is a complete vindication of that officers' conduct. In the minds of most men such vindication is superfluous, but in the public consternation and distress at the loss of Custer and his men, many theories were advanced for the misfortune of a commander who was popularly esteemed to be well nigh invincible. Among other plausible theories, a "failure to co-operate" on Colonel Reno's part was asserted, long before the full list of casualties or other information as to the battle had come to hand. "In some way or other," said thoughtless partisans of the gallant Custer, "there was a want of skill or inclination to execute the orders given by the regimental commander, or this would never have happened." We are glad to know that this view was held by a very small minority, who, long before they could read the simple, soldierly, and yet thrilling story of the "Little Big Horn," which we print this week, have acknowledged with shame the grievous injustice which they had meted out to this officer. A veteran of twenty years' service, who had gained distinction in great wars and savage combats alike, assuredly won another laurel leaf on the 25th of June.

In Reno's account will be found many points of interest. His estimate of the numbers and organization of his enemy, for instance: "The very earth seemed to grow Indians," and as the Indians retired upon Terry's approach, "they filed away in almost perfect military order; the length of the column was fully equal to that of a large division of the Cavalry corps of the Army of the Potomac as I have seen it on its march." "I think we were fighting the whole Sioux nation, and also all the desperadoes, renegades half-breeds and 'squaw-men' between the Missouri and Arkansas and east of the Rocky Mountains." Apropos of the severity and nature of the Indian fire, he says "this was the signal for the beginning of a fire that I have never seen equalled; every rifle was handled by an expert and skilled marksman, and with a range that exceeded our cabins; it was