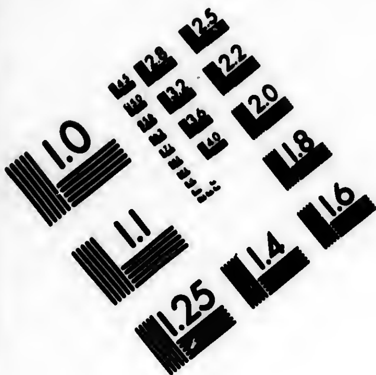
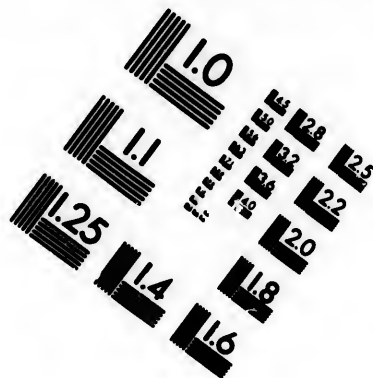

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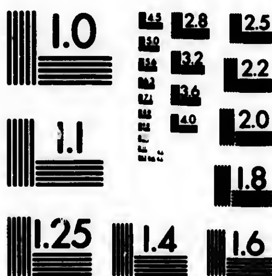
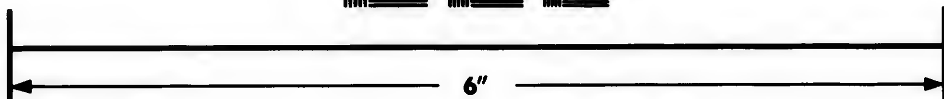

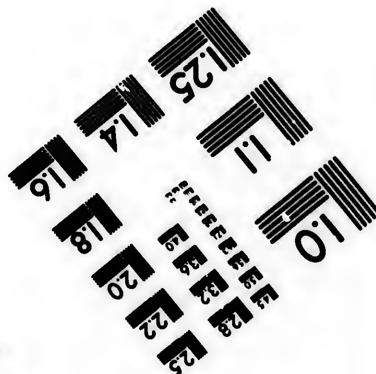

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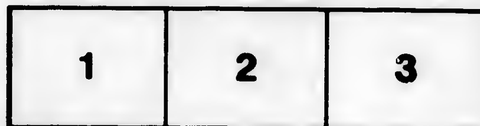

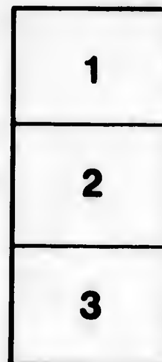

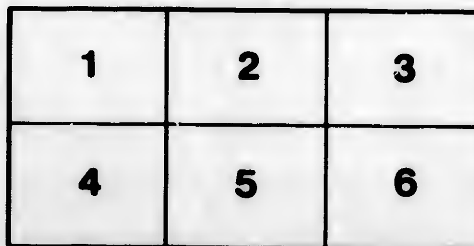

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CUSTER'S LAST BATTLE.

BY CAPTAIN CHARLES KING, U.S.A.

IT is hard to say how many years ago the Dakotas of the upper Mississippi, after a century of warring with the Chippewa nation, began to swarm across the Missouri in search of the buffalo, and there became embroiled with other tribes claiming the country farther west. Dakota was the proper tribal name, but as they crossed this Northwestern Rubicon into the territory of unknown foemen they bore with them a title given them as far east as the banks and bluffs of the Father of Waters. The Chippewas had called them for years "the Sioux" (Soo), and by that strange un-Indian-sounding title is known to this day the most numerous and powerful nation of red people — warriors, women, and children — to be found on our continent.

They were in strong force when they launched out on their career of conquest west of the Missouri. The Yellowstone and its beautiful and romantic tributaries all belonged to the Absarakás, or Crows; the rolling prairies of Nebraska were the homes of the Pawnees; the pine-crested heights of the Black Hills were claimed as the head-quarters of the Cheyennes and Arrapahoes; the western slopes of the Big Horn range and the broad valleys between them and the Rockies were owned by the Shoshones, or Snakes; while roving bands of Crees swarmed down along the north shore of the Missouri itself.

With each and all of these, with the Chippewas behind them, and eventually with the white invaders, the Dakotas waged relentless war. They drove the Pawnees across the Platte far into Kansas; they whipped the Cheyennes and Arrapahoes out of the Black Hills, and down to the head waters of the Kaw and the Arkansas; they fought the Shoshones back into the Wind River Valley, with orders never again to cross the "dead line" of the Big Horn River; and they sent the Crows "whirling" up the valley of the Yellowstone (which they proceeded to call the Elk); and when our great war broke out in 1861 they lent valuable aid and comfort to the rebellion by swooping down on our settlements in Minnesota without the faintest warning, and slaughtering hundreds of defenceless women and children, from whom they were begging or stealing but the day before. General Sully, with a strong command, was sent to give them a severe lesson in payment for their outrages, and he marched far into their territory, and fought them wherever they would assemble in sufficient force to block his way, but it did no lasting good. When '66 came, and our emigrants began settling up the West, they found the Sioux more hostile and determined than ever. The army was called on to protect the settlers, and to escort the surveyors of the transcontinental railways. Not a stake was driven, not an acre cleared, except under cover of the rifles of the regulars, and while the nation seemed rejoicing in unbroken peace and increasing prosperity, its little army was having anything but a placid time of it on the frontier. In the ten years that immediately preceded the centennial celebration at Philadelphia, the cavalry regiments had no rest at all; they were on the war-path winter and summer; and during those ten years of "peace" more officers of the regular army were killed or died of wounds received in action with the Indians than the British army lost in the entire Crimean war, with its bloody battles of the Alma, Balaklava, Inkerman, and the assaults on Sebastopol. The Indians were always scientific fighters, but when, in '74 and '75, they succeeded in arming themselves with breech-loaders and magazine rifles, the Sioux of the Northern plains became foemen far more to be dreaded than any European cavalry.

Treaties had been made and broken. A road had been built through the heart of the country they loved the best—the northeastern slope and foot-hills from the Big Horn to the Yellowstone; and far up in this unsettled region, surrounded by savages, little wooden stockaded forts had been placed and garrisoned by pitifully small detachments of cavalry and infantry. From Fort Laramie down on the Platte far up to the rich and populous Gallatin Valley of Montana only those little forts, Reno, Phil Kearny, and C. F. Smith, guarded the way. One day vast hordes of Sioux gathered in the ravines and cañons around Phil Kearny. Mach-

pealota (Red Cloud) was their leader. They sent a small party to attack the wood-choppers from the fort, who were working with their little escort. Two companies of infantry and one of cavalry went out to the rescue. These were quickly surrounded and hemmed in, then slowly massacred. After that for ten long years the Sioux held undisputed sway in their chosen country. Our forts were burned and abandoned. The Indian allies of the Dakotas joined hands with them, and a powerful nation or confederacy of nearly 60,000 souls ruled the country from the Big Horn River on the northwest down to the Union Pacific Railway. No longer dared they go south of that. Taking with them the Cheyennes and Arrapahoes, who had intermarried with them, the Sioux fell back to the North Platte and the territory beyond. From there they sent raiding parties in every direction. One Secretary of the Interior after another had tried the experiment of feeding, clothing, *bribing* them to be good. Agencies and reservations were established at convenient points. Here the old chiefs, the broken-down men, and the non-combatant women and children made their permanent homes, and here the bold and vigorous young chiefs and warriors, laughing at the credulity of the Great Father, filled up their pouches and *parflèches* with rations and ammunition, then went whooping off on the war-path against the whites wherever found, and came back scalp-laden to the reservation when they needed more cartridges or protection from the pursuing soldiery, who could fire on them only when caught outside the lines.

Two great reservations were established southeast of the Black Hills in the valley of the White River. One of these was the bailiwick of the hero of the Phil Kearny massacre, old Red Cloud, and here were gathered most of his own tribe (the Ogalallas) and many of his chiefs: some "good," like Old-Man-Afraid-of-his-Horses and his worthy son, but most of them crafty, cunning, treacherous, and savage, like Red Dog, Little-Big-Man, American Horse, and a swarm of various kinds of Bulls and Bears and Wolves. Further down the stream, twenty miles away, were the head-quarters of the Brulés, Spotted Tail's people, and "Old Spot" was loyal to the backbone, though powerless to control the movements of the young men. Other reservations there were along the Missouri, and into these reservations the Department of the Interior strove to gather all the Sioux nation, in the vague hope of keeping them out of mischief.

But the young Indian takes to mischief of that description as the young duck to the water. The traditions of his people tell of no case where respect was accorded to him who had not killed his man. Only in deeds of blood or battle could he hope to win distinction, and the vacillating policy of the government enabled him to sally forth at any time and return at will to the reservations, exhibiting to the admiring eyes of friends and relations the dripping scalps of his white victims. The fact that the victims were shot from ambush, or that the scalps were solely those of helpless women and children, detracted in no wise from the value of the trophies. The perpetrator had won his spurs according to the aboriginal code, and was a "brave" henceforth.

But there were those who never would come in, and never signed a treaty. Herein they are entitled to far more respect than those who came, saw, and conquered—by fraud; and one of those who persistently refused, and whose standard was a rallying-point for the disaffected and treacherous of every tribe, was a shrewd "medicine chief" of the Uncapapas, a seer, prophet, statesman, but in no sense a war chief, the now celebrated Tatonka-e-Yotanka—Sitting Bull.

Far out in the lovely fertile valleys of the Rosebud, the Tongue, the Little Big Horn, and the Powder rivers, Sitting Bull and his devoted followers spent their days. Sheltered from storm and tempest by the high bluffs through long, hard winters, living in the midst of untold thousands of buffalo, elk, mountain sheep, antelope, and deer, rejoicing in the grandest scenery on the continent, and in a climate that despite its rigor during the midwinter months is unparalleled for life-giving qualities, it is no wonder they loved and clung to it—their "Indian story land"—as they did to no other. But here flocked all the renegades from other tribes. Here came the wild and untamable Ogalalla, Brulé, Minneconjou, Sans Arc, Uncapapa, Blackfoot; here were all warriors welcomed; and from here time and again set forth the expeditions that spread terror to settler and em-

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igrant, and checked the survey of the Northern Pacific Railroad.

Eighteen hundred and seventy-five found trouble everywhere. White settlers swarmed in the Black Hills in search of gold. Ogalallas and Brulés stole their stock and killed their herders, claiming that the land was theirs and the whites were invaders. Sitting Bull's ranks swarmed with recruits from far to the southeast. The Interior Department found it useless to temporize. Orders were given to the army to bring him in or "snuff him out." Early in March, '76, General George Crook, famous for his successes with the Indians in Oregon and Arizona, was started up into the Sioux country with a strong force of cavalry and infantry. On "Patrick's Day in the morning," long before he was anywhere near Sitting Bull himself, his advance struck a big Indian village deep in the snows of the Powder River. It was 30° below zero; the troops were faultily led by the officer to whom he had intrusted the duty, and the Sioux developed splendid fighting qualities under a new and daring leader, "Choonka-Witko"—Crazy Horse. Crook's advance recoiled upon the main body, practically defeated by the renegades from the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail agencies. Early in May, warned by this lesson, three great expeditions pushed forward into the "Indian story land," where by this time full six thousand warriors had rallied around Sitting Bull. From the south came General Crook, with nearly twenty-five hundred men. From the east marched General Terry, with almost as many infantry and cavalry as had Crook, and a few light pieces of artillery. Down the Yellowstone from the west General Gibbon led a little band of long-trained frontier soldiers, scouting by the way, and definitely "locating" the Indians over on the Rosebud before forming his junction with General Terry near the mouth of the Tongue. If Sitting Bull had been alive to the situation, Gibbon's small force could never have finished that perilous advance, though they might have stood and defended themselves; but Bull was not a general; his talents lay elsewhere.

Early in June Crook's command was on the northeast slope of the Big Horn, and General Sheridan, planning the whole campaign, saw with anxiety that vast numbers of Indians were daily leaving the reservations south of the Black Hills

CUSTER'S BATTLE-GROUND, LITTLE BIG HORN RIVER, MONTANA.

1. Minneconjou Village. 2. Brulé Village. 3. Ogalallas and Sans Arcs. 4. Uncapapa Village. 5. Blackfoot Village. 6. Reno's Attack. 7. Reno's Retreat. 8. Custer's Attack. 9. Custer's Rally and Mount. 10. The Monument.

and hurrying northwestward around Crook to join Sitting Bull. The Fifth Regiment of Cavalry was then sent up by rail from Kansas to Cheyenne, and marched rapidly to the Black Hills to cut off these re-enforcements. The great mass of the Indians lay uneasily between Crook at the head waters of Tongue River and Terry and Gibbon near its mouth, watching every move, and utterly cutting off every attempt of the commanders to communicate with each other. They worried Crook's pickets and trains, and by mid-June he determined to pitch in and see what force they had. On June 17th the General grappled with the Sioux on

the bluffs of the Rosebud. He had several hundred Crow allies. The stirring combat lasted much of the day; but long before it was half over Crook was fighting on the defensive and coolly withdrawing his men. He had found a hornets' nest, and knew it was no place for so small a command as his. Pulling out as best he could, he fell back to the Tongue, sent for the entire Fifth Cavalry and all his available infantry, and lay on his arms until they could reach him. He had not got within sight of the great Indian village—city it should be called—of Sitting Bull.

Meantime Terry and Gibbon sent their scouts up stream. Major Reno, with a strong battalion of the Seventh Cavalry, left camp on the Yellowstone to take a look up toward the Cheetish or Wolf Mountains. Sitting Bull and his people—men, women, and children—after their successful defence of the approaches to their home on the Rosebud on June 17th, seem to have bethought themselves of roomier and better quarters over in the broader valley of the Little Big Horn, the next stream to the west. Their "village" had stretched for six miles down the narrow cañon of the Rosebud; their thousands of ponies had eaten off all the grass; they were victorious, but it was time to go.

Coming up the Rosebud, Major Reno was confronted by the sight of an immense trail turning suddenly west and crossing the great divide over toward the setting sun. Experienced Indian fighters in his command told him that many thousand Indians had passed there within the last few days. Like a sensible man, he turned about and trotted back to report his discovery to his commander. Then it was that the tragedy of the campaign began.

At the head of Terry's horsemen was the lieutenant-colonel commanding the Seventh Regiment of Cavalry, Brevet Major-General George A. Custer, United States Army, a daring, dashing, impetuous trooper, who had won high honors as a division commander under Sheridan during the great war of the rebellion, who had led his gallant regiment against the Kiowas and the Cheyennes on the Southern plains, and had twice penetrated the Sioux country in recent campaigns. Experience he certainly had, but there were those, superiors and subordinates both, who feared that in dealing with so wily and skilful a foe Custer lacked judgment. All had not been harmonious in his relations with his commanders in the Department of Dakota, nor was there entire unanimity of feeling toward him in the regiment itself, but all men honored his unquestioned bravery, and when General Terry decided to send his cavalry at once to "scout the trail" reported by Reno, the command of the expedition fell naturally to Custer.

Terry had promptly arrived at the conclusion that the Indians had simply moved their villages over into the valley of the Little Big Horn, and his plan was to send Custer along the trail to hold and hem them from the east, while he, with all his own and Gibbon's command, pushed up the Yellowstone and Big Horn in boats; then, disembarking at the junction of the Big and Little Big Horn, to march southward until he struck the Indians on that flank. His orders to Custer displayed an unusual mingling of anxiety and forbearance. He seems to have feared that Custer would be rash, yet shrank from issuing a word that might reflect upon the discretion or wound the high spirit of his gallant leader of horse. He warned him to "feel" well out toward his left as he rode westward from the Rosebud, in order to prevent the Indians slipping off southeastward between the column and the Big Horn Mountains. He would not hamper him with positive orders as to what he must or must not do when he came in presence of the enemy, but he named the 26th of June as the day on which he and Gibbon would reach the valley of the Little Big Horn, and it was his hope and expectation that Custer would come up from the east about the same time, and between them they would be able to soundly thrash the assembled Sioux.

But Custer disappointed him in an unusual way. He got there a day ahead of time, and had ridden night and day to do it. Men and horses were wellnigh used up when the Seventh Cavalry trotted into sight of the city on the Little Big Horn that cloudless Sunday morning of the 25th. When Terry came up the valley on the 26th, it was all over with Custer and his pet troops (companies) of the regiment.

He started on the trail with the Seventh Cavalry, and nothing but the Seventh. A battalion of the Second was with Gibbon's column; but, luckily for the Second, Custer would none of them. Two field guns, under Lieutenant Low, were

with Terry, and Low begged that he and his guns might be sent, but Custer wanted only his own people. He rode sixty miles in twenty-four hours. He pushed ahead on the trail with feverish impatience, and he created an impression that it was his determination to get to the spot and have one battle royal with the Indians, in which he and the Seventh should be the sole participants on our side, and by consequence the sole heroes. The idea of defeat seems never to have occurred to him, despite his experience with old "Black Kettle's" bands down on the Washita.

Only thirty miles away on his left, as he spurred ahead with his weary men that Sunday morning, over two thousand soldiers under Crook were in bivouac on Goose Creek. Had he "felt" any great distance out there the scouts would have met, and Crook would eagerly have re-enforced him, but he wanted nothing of the kind. At daybreak his advance, under Lieutenant Varnum, had come upon the scaffold sepulchres of two or three warriors slain in the fight of the 17th, and soon thereafter sent back word that the valley of the Little Horn was in sight ahead, and there were "signs" of the village.

Then it was that Custer made the division of his column. Keeping with himself the five companies whose commanders were his chosen friends and adherents, and leaving Captain Macdougall with his troops to guard the mule pack train in rear, he divided the six remaining companies between Major Reno and Captain Benteen, sending the latter some two miles off to the extreme left, while Reno moved midway between. In this order of three little parallel columns the Seventh Cavalry swept rapidly westward over the "divide."

Unlike the Second, Third, or Fifth Regiment when on Indian campaign, Custer's men rode into action with something of the pomp and panoply of war that distinguished them around their camps. Bright guidons fluttered in the breeze; many of the officers and men wore the natty undress uniform of the cavalry. Custer himself; his brother, Captain Tom Custer; his adjutant, Lieutenant Cook; and his old Army of the Potomac comrade, Captain Myles Keogh—were all dressed nearly alike in coats of Indian-tanned, beaver-trimmed buckskin, with broad-brimmed scouting hats of light color, and long riding-boots. Captain Yates seemed to prefer his undress uniform, as did most of the lieutenants in Custer's column. The two Custers and Captain Keogh rode their beautiful Kentucky sorrel horses, and the adjutant was mounted on his long-legged gray. The trumpeters were at the heads of columns with their chiefs, but the band of the Seventh, for once, was left behind, Custer's last charge was sounded without the accompaniment of the rollicking Irish fighting tune he loved. There was no "Garry Owen" to swell the chorus of the last cheer.

Following Custer's trail from the Rosebud, one comes in sight of the Little Big Horn, winding away northward to its junction with the broader stream. South are the bold cliffs and dark cañons of the mountains, their foot-hills not twenty miles away. North, tumbling and rolling toward the Yellowstone in alternate "swale" and ridge, the treeless, upland prairie stretches to the horizon. Westward, the eye roams over what seems to be a broad flat valley beyond the stream; but the stream itself—the fatal "Greasy Grass," as the Sioux called it—is hidden from sight under the steep bluffs that hem it in. Coming from the mountains, it swings into sight far to the left front, comes rippling toward us in its fringe of cottonwoods and willows, and suddenly disappears under or behind the huge rolling wave of bluff that stretches right and left across the path. For nearly six miles of its tortuous course it cannot be seen from the point where Custer drew rein to get his first view of the village. Neither can its fringing willows be seen, and—fatal and momentous fact—neither could hundreds of the populous "lodges" that clustered along its western bank. Eagerly scanning the distant "tepees" that lay beyond the northern point where the bluff dipped to the stream, and swinging his broad-brimmed hat about his head in an ecstasy of soldierly anticipation, he shouted: "Custer's luck! The biggest Indian village on the continent!" And he could not have seen one-third of it.

But what he saw was enough to fire the blood of any soldier. Far to the northwest and west huge clouds of dust rose billowing from the broad valley. Far across the hidden stream could be seen the swarming herds of ponies in excited movement. Here, there, and everywhere

tiny dots of horsemen scurrying away could be readily distinguished, and down to the right front, down along what could be seen of the village around that shoulder of bluff, all was lively turmoil and confusion; lodges were being hurriedly taken down, and their occupants were fleeing from the wrath to come. We know now that the warriors whom he saw dashing westward were mainly the young men hurrying out to "round up" the pony herds; we know now that behind those sheltering bluffs were still thousands of fierce warriors eager and ready to meet "Long Hair"; we know that the signs of panic and retreat were due mainly to the rush to get the women and little children out of the way; ponies and dogs, hastily hitched to the dust-raising *travois*, dragged the wondering pappooses and frightened squaws far out over the westward slopes; but seeing the scurry and panic, Custer seems to have attached only one meaning to it. They were all in full retreat. The whole community would be on the run before he could strike them. Quickly he determined on his course. Reno should push straight ahead, get down into the valley, ford the stream, and attack the southern end of the village, while he with his pet companies should turn into the long winding ravine that ran northwestward to the stream, and pitch in with wild charge from the east. To Reno these orders were promptly given. A courier was sent to Benteen, far off to the left, notifying him of the "find"; and another galloped to Macdougall with orders to hurry up with the pack trains where the extra ammunition was carried. Custer knew it would be needed.

Then the daring commander placed himself at the head of his own column, plunged down the slope, and, followed by his eager men, was soon out of sight, perhaps out of hearing of what might be taking place over in the valley behind the bluffs that rose on his left higher with every furlong trotted. The last that Reno and his people ever saw of them alive was the tail of the column disappearing in a cloud of dust; then the cloud alone was to be seen, hanging over their trail like a pall.

Pushing forward, Reno came quickly to a shallow "cooley" (frontierism for gully) that led down through the bluff to the stream. A brisk trot brought him to the ford; his troopers plunged blithely through, and began to clamber the low bank on the western shore. He expected from the tenor of his orders to find an open, unobstructed valley, down which, five miles away at least, he could see the lodges of the Indian village. It was with surprise, not unmixed with grave concern, therefore, that, as he urged his horse through the willows and up to the level of the low "bench" beyond, he suddenly rode into full view of an immense township, whose southern outskirts were not two miles away. Far as he could see, the dust cloud rose above the excited villages; herds of war ponies were being driven in from the west on a mad run; old men, squaws, children, draught ponies, and *travois* were scurrying off toward the Big Horn, and Reno realized that he was in front of the assembled warriors of the whole Sioux nation.

What Custer expected of Reno was, is generally believed, a bold, dashing charge into the heart of the village—just such a charge as he, Custer, had successfully led at the Washita, though it cost the life of Captain Hamilton, and eventually of many others. But Reno had no dash to speak of, and the sight that burst upon his eyes eliminated any that might be latent. He attacked, but the attack was nevertheless spiritless and abortive. Dismounting his men, he advanced them as skirmishers across the mile or more of prairie, firing as soon as he got within range of the village. No resistance of any consequence was made as he pushed northward, for the sudden appearance of his command was a total surprise to the Uncapapas and Blackfeet, whose villages were farthest south. Their scouts had signalled Custer's column trotting down the ravine, and those who had not rushed for safety to the rear were apparently rushing toward the Brulé village in the centre as the point which Custer would be apt first to strike. Reno could have darted into the south end of the village, it is believed, before his approach could have been fairly realized. As it was, slowly and on foot, he traversed the prairie without losing a man, and was upon the lodges when a few shots were fired from the willows along the stream, and some mounted Indians could be seen swooping around his left flank. He had had no experience in Indian fighting. He simply seemed to feel that with his little command of two hundred men he could

not drive the whole valley full of warriors, and in much perturbation and worry he sounded the halt, rally, and mount. Then for a few moments, that to his officers and men must have seemed hours, he paused irresolute, not knowing what to do.

The Indians settled it for him. They well interpreted his hesitation. "The White Chief was scared"; and now was their chance. Man and boy they came tearing to the spot. A few well-aimed shots knocked a luckless trooper or two out of the saddle. Reno hurriedly ordered a movement by the flank toward the high bluffs across the stream to his right rear. He never thought to dismount a few cool hands to face about and keep off the enemy. He placed himself at the new head of column, and led the backward move. Out came the Indians, with shots and triumphant yells, in pursuit. The rear of the column began to crowd on the head; Reno struck a trot; the rear struck the gallop. The Indians came dashing up on both flanks and close to the rear; and then—then the helpless, horribly led troopers had no alternative. Discipline and order were all forgotten. In one mad rush they tore away for the stream, plunged in, sputtered through, and clambered breathlessly up the steep bluff on the eastern shore—an ignominious, inexcusable panic, due mainly to the nerveless conduct of the major commanding.

In vain had Donald McIntosh and "Benny" Hodgson, two of the bravest and best-loved officers in the regiment, striven to rally, face about, and fight with the rear of column. The Indians were not in overpowering numbers at the moment, and a bold front would have "stood off" double their force; but with the major on the run, and foremost in the run, the lieutenants could do nothing—but lose their own gallant lives. McIntosh was surrounded, dragged from his horse and butchered close to the brink. Hodgson, shot out of saddle, was rescued by a faithful comrade, who plunged into the stream with him; but close to the farther shore the Indians picked him off, a bullet tore through his body, and the gallant little fellow, the pet and pride of the whole regiment, rolled dead into the muddy waters.

Once well up the bluffs, Reno's breathless followers faced about and took in the situation. The Indians pursued no further, and even now were rapidly withdrawing from range. The major fired his pistol at the distant foe in paroxysmal defiance of the fellows who had stampeded him. He was now up some two hundred feet above them, and it was safe—as it was harmless. Two of his best officers lay dead down there on the banks below; so, too, lay a dozen of his men. The Indians, men and even boys, had swarmed all around his people, and slaughtered them as they ran. Many more were wounded, but, for the present at least, all seemed safe. The Indians, except a few, had mysteriously withdrawn from their front. What could that mean? And then, what could have become of Custer? Where, too, were Benteen and Macdougall with their commands?

Over toward the villages, which they could now see stretching for five miles down the stream, all was shrill uproar and confusion; but northward the bluffs rose still higher to a point nearly opposite the middle of the villages—a point some two miles from them—and beyond that they could see nothing. Thither, however, had Custer gone, and suddenly, crashing through the sultry morning air, came the sound of fierce and rapid musketry—whole volleys—then one continuous rattle and roar. Louder, fiercer, it grew for full ten minutes. Some thought they could hear the ringing cheers of their comrades, and were ready to cheer in reply; some thought they heard the thrilling charge of the trumpets; many were eager to mount and rush to join their colonel, and with him to avenge Hodgson and McIntosh, and retrieve the dark fortunes of their own battalion. But, almost as suddenly as it began, the heavy volleying died away; the continuous rattle broke into scattering skirmish fire, then into sputtering shots, then only once in a while some distant rifle would crack feebly on the breeze, and Reno's men looked wonderingly in each other's faces. There stood the villages plain enough, and the firing had begun close under the bluffs, close to the stream, and had died away far to the north. What could it mean?

Soon, with eager delight, the little commands of Benteen and Macdougall were hailed coming up the slopes from the east.

"Have you seen anything of Custer?" was the first anxious inquiry.

Benteen and Weir had galloped to a point of bluff a mile or more to the north,

had seen swarms of Indians in the valley below, but not a sign of Custer's people. They could expect no aid from Custer, then, and there was only one thing left—intrench themselves, and hold out as best they could till Terry and Gibbon should arrive. Reno had now seven "troops" and the pack train, abundant ammunition and supplies. The chances were in his favor.

Now what had become of Custer? For him and his there was none left to tell the story except the Crow scout "Curley," who managed to slip away in a Sioux blanket during the thick of the fight, and our sources of information are solely Indian. The very next year a battalion of the Fifth Cavalry passed the battle-ground with a number of Sioux scouts who but a twelvemonth previous were fighting there the Seventh Cavalry. Half a dozen of them told their stories at different times and in different places, and as to the general features of the battle, they tallied with singular exactness. These fellows were mainly Brulés and Ogalallas. Afterward we got the stories of the Uncapapas—most interesting of all—and from all these sources it was not hard to trace Custer's every move. One could almost portray his every emotion.

Never realizing, as I believe, the fearful odds against him, believing that he would find the village "on the run," and that between himself and Reno he could "double them up" in short order, Custer had jauntily trotted down to his death. It was a long five-mile ride from where he sighted the northern end of the village to where he struck its centre around that bold point of bluff, and from the start to the moment his guidons whirled into view, and his troopers came galloping "front into line" down near the ford, he never fairly saw the great village—never dreamed of its depth and extent. Rounding the bluff, he suddenly found himself face to face with thousands of the boldest and most skilful warriors of the prairies. He had hoped to charge at once into the heart of the village, to hear the cheers of Reno's men from the south. Instead he was greeted with a perfect fury of flame and hissing lead from the dense thicket of willow and cottonwood, a fire that *had* to be answered at once. Quickly he dismounted his men and threw them forward on the run, each fourth man holding, cavalry fashion, the horses of the other three. The line seems to have swept in parallel very nearly with the general course of the stream, but to no purpose. The foe was ten to one in their front. Boys and squaws were shooting from the willows ("Oh, we had plenty guns!" said our story-tellers); and worse than that, hundreds of young warriors had mounted their ponies and swarmed across the stream below him, hundreds more were following and circling all about him. And then it was that Custer, the hero of a hundred daring charges, seems to have realized that he must cut his way out. "Mount!" rang the trumpets, and leaving many a poor fellow on the ground, the troopers ran for their horses. Instantly from lodge and willow Ogalallas and Brulés sprang to horse and rushed to the ford in mad pursuit. "Make for the heights!" must have been the order, for the first rush was eastward; then more to the left, as they found their progress barred. Then, as they reached higher ground, all they could see, far as they could see, circling, swooping, yelling like demons, and all the time keeping up their furious fire, were thousands of the mounted Sioux. Hemmed in, cut off, dropping fast from their saddles, Custer's men saw that retreat was impossible. They sprang to the ground, "turned their horses loose," said the Indians, and by that time half their number had fallen. A skirmish line was thrown out down the slope, and there they dropped at five yards' interval; there their comrades found them two days after. Every instant the foe rode closer and gained in numbers; every instant some poor fellow bit the dust. At last, on a mound that stands at the northern end of a little ridge, Custer, with Cook, Yates, and gallant "Brother Tom," and some dozen soldiers, all that were left by this time, gathered in the last rally. They sold their lives dearly, brave fellows that they were; but they were as a dozen to the leaves of the forest at the end of twenty minutes, and in less than twenty-five—all was over.

Keogh, Calhoun, Crittenden, had died along the skirmish lines; Smith, Porter, and Reily were found with their men; so were the surgeons, Lord and De Wolf; so, too, were "Boston" Custer and the *Herald* correspondent; but two bodies were never recognized among the slain—those of Lieutenants Harrington and "Jack" Sturgis. Down a little "cooley"

some thirty men had made a rush for their lives; the Sioux had simply thronged the banks shooting them as they ran. One trooper—an officer, said the Sioux—managed to break through their circle, the only white man who did, and galloped madly eastward. Five warriors started in pursuit—two Ogalallas, two Uncapapas, and a Brulé, all well mounted. Fear lent him wings, and his splendid horse gained on all but an Uncapapa, who hung to the chase. At last, when even this one was ready to draw rein and let him go, the hunted cavalryman glanced over his shoulder, fancied himself nearly overtaken, and placing the muzzle of his revolver at his ear, pulled the trigger, and sent his own bullet through his brain. His skeleton was pointed out to the officers of the Fifth Cavalry the following year by one of the pursuers, and so it was discovered for the first time. Was it Harrington? Was it Sturgis? Poor "Jack's" watch was restored to his father some two years after the battle, having been traded off by Sioux who escaped to the British possessions; but no mention was made by these Indians of a watch thus taken. Three years ago there came a story of a new skeleton found still further from the scene. Shreds of uniform and the heavy gilding of the cavalry buttons lying near, as well as the expensive filling of several teeth, seem to indicate that this too may have been an officer. If so, all the missing are now accounted for. Of the twelve troops of the Seventh Cavalry, Custer led five that hot Sunday into the battle of the Little Big Horn, and of his portion of the regiment only one living thing escaped the vengeance of the Sioux. Bleeding from many wounds, weak and exhausted, with piteous appeal in his eyes, there came straggling into the lines some days after the fight Myles Keogh's splendid sorrel horse Comanche. Who can ever picture his welcome as the soldiers thronged around the gallant charger? To this day they guard and cherish him in the Seventh. No more duty does Comanche perform; no rider ever mounts him. His last great service was rendered that Sunday in '76, and now, sole living relic of Custer's last rally, he spends his days with the old regiment.

But I have said that Sitting Bull was not the inspiration of the great victory won by the Sioux. With Custer's people slaughtered, the Indians left their bodies to the plundering hands of the squaws, and once more crowded upon Reno's front. There were two nights of wild triumph and rejoicing in the villages, though not one instant was the watch on Reno relaxed. All day of the 26th they kept him penned in the rifle pits, but early on the 27th, with great commotion, the lodges were suddenly taken down, and tribe after tribe, village after village, six thousand Indians passed before his eyes, making off toward the mountains. Terry and Gibbon had come; Reno's relic of the Seventh was saved. Together they explored the field, and hastily buried the mutilated dead; then hurried back to the Yellowstone while the Sioux were hiding in the fastnesses of the Big Horn. Of the rest of the summer's campaign no extended mention is needed here. The Indians were shrewd enough to know that now at least the commands of Crook and Terry would be heavily re-enforced, and then the hunt would be relentless. Soon as their scouts reported the assembly of new and strong bodies of troops upon the Yellowstone and Platte, the great confederation quietly dissolved. Sitting Bull, with many chosen followers, made for the Yellowstone, and was driven northward by General Miles. Others took refuge across the Little Missouri, whither Crook pursued, and by dint of hard marching and fighting that fall and winter many bands and many famous chiefs were whipped into surrender. Among these, bravest, most brilliant, most victorious of all, was the hero of the Powder River fight on Patrick's Day, the warrior Crazy Horse.

The fame of his exploit had reached the Indian camps along the Rosebud before this young chief, with his followers, Ogalalla and Brulé, came to swell the ranks of Sitting Bull. Again, on the 17th of June, he had been foremost in the stirring fight with Crook, and when the entire band moved over into the valley of the Little Big Horn, and the Brulés, Ogalallas, and Sans Arcs pitched their tepees in the chosen ground, the very centre of the camp, it is safe to say that among the best and experienced fighters, the tribes from the White River and their neighbors the Cheyennes, no chief was so honored and believed in as Crazy Horse.

In pitching the new camp, the Blackfeet were farthest south—up stream; next

came the Uncapapas, with their renowned medicine-man, Sitting Bull; then the Ogallallas, Brulés, and Cheyennes, covering the whole "bottom" opposite the shoulder of bluff around which Custer hove in sight; farthest north were the Minneconjoux; and the great village contained at least six thousand aboriginal souls.

Now up to this time Sitting Bull had no real claims as a war chief. Eleven days before the fight there was a "sun dance." His own people have since told us these particulars, and the best story-teller among them was that bright-faced squaw of Tatonka-he-gle-ska—Spotted Horn Bull—who accompanied the party on their Eastern trip. She is own cousin to Sitting Bull, and knows whereof she speaks. The chief had a trance and a vision. Solemnly he assured his people that within a few days they would be attacked by a vast force of white soldiers, but that the Sioux should triumph over them; and when the Crows and Crook's command appeared on the 17th, it was a partial redemption of his promise.

Wary scouts saw Reno's column turning back down the Rosebud after discovering the trail, and nothing, they judged, would come from that quarter. All around Crook's camp on Goose Creek the indications were that the "Gray Fox" was simply waiting for more soldiers before he would again venture forth. Sitting Bull had no thought of new attack for days to come, when, early on the morning of the 25th, two Cheyenne Indians who had started eastward at dawn came dashing back to the bluffs, and waving their blankets, signalled, "White soldiers—heaps—coming quick." Instantly all was uproar and confusion.

Of course women and children had to be hurried away, the great herds of ponies gathered in, and the warriors assembled to meet the coming foe. Even as the chiefs were hastening to the council lodge there came the crash of rapid volleys from the south. It was Reno's attack—an attack from a new and utterly unexpected quarter—and this, with the news that Long Hair was thundering down the ravine across the stream, was too much for Sitting Bull. Hurriedly gathering his household about him, he lashed his pony to the top of his speed, and fled westward for safety. Miles he galloped before he dare stop for breath. Behind him he could hear the roar of battle, and on he would have sped but for the sudden discovery that one of his twin children was missing. Turning, he was surprised to find the firing dying away, soon ceasing altogether. In half an hour more he managed to get back to camp, where the missing child was found, but the battle had been won without him. Without him the Blackfeet and Uncapapas had repelled Reno and penned him on the bluffs. Without him the Ogalallas, Brulés, and Cheyennes had turned back Custer's daring assault, then rushed forth and completed the death-gripping circle in which he was held. Again had Crazy Horse been foremost in the fray, riding in and braining the bewildered soldiers with his heavy war club. Fully had his vision been realized, but — Sitting Bull was not there.

For a long time it was claimed for him by certain sycophantic followers that from the council lodge he directed the battle; but it would not do. When the old sinner was finally starved out of her Majesty's territory, and came in to accept the terms accorded him, even his own people could not keep straight faces when questioned as to the cause of the odd names given those twins—"The-One-that-was-taken" and "*The-One-that-was-left.*" Finally it all leaked out, and now "none so poor to do him reverence."

Of course it was his rôle to assume all the airs of a conqueror, to be insolent and defiant to the "High Joint Commission," sent the following winter to beg him to come home and be good; but the claims of Tatonka-e-Yotanka to the leadership in the greatest victory his people ever won are mere vaporings, to be classed with the boastings of dozens of chiefs who were scattered over the Northern reservations during the next few years. Rain-in-the-Face used to brag by the hour that he had killed Custer with his own hand, but the other Indians laughed at him. Gall, of the Uncapapas, Spotted Eagle, Kill Eagle, Lame Deer, Lone Wolf, and all the varieties of Bears and Bulls were probably leading spirits in the battle, but the man who more than all others seems to have won the admiration of his fellows for skill and daring throughout that stirring campaign, and especially on that bloody day, is he who so soon after met his death in desperate effort to escape from Crook's guards, the warrior Crazy Horse.