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Sent to Bill Hunt

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May 7, 1963

Annual report of Lieutenant Edward Maguire, Corps of Engineers,
for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1876

Exporations and Surveys in the Department of Dakota

Camp on the Yellowstone River
near the mouth of the Big Horn
River July 10, 1876

General: I have the honor to submit the following report of
operations in the Department of Dakota from the date on my assignment
to duty to close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 1876:

In obedience to orders received from the Adjutant Generals
office, I have reported in person to Brig. Gen. A. B. Terry, at
St. Paul, Minn., on the 22nd of May, and was assigned to duty
vice Capt, Wm Ludlow, Corps of Engineers, United States Army,
relieved. In compliance with orders from headquarters Department

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I left St. Paul early in the morning of the 10th, and preceeded to Fort Abraham Lincoln, Dakota Territory, to join the troops about to take the field against the hostile Sioux. Mr. W. H. Ward, assistant engineer, with the detachment of enlisted men, and preceded some days. On arriving at Fort Lincoln, I learned from the commanding general that unless the services of my assistant were necessary, it was desirable that he should not accompany the column. As his services would have been simply a convenience to me, and in no respect a necessity, I directed him to return to Saint Paul where he has remained. The detachment of the batallion of engineers, consisting of Sergeant Wilson and Private Goslin and Gulligan, has accompanied me on the expedition, and has performed most excellant service. Sergeant Becker, with two privates, had previous to my assignment, been ordered to Montana to accompany the column under command of Colonel Gibbon, Seventh Infantry.

After detention of a few days near Fort Lincoln, due to rain, we finally broke camp at 5A.M., May 17, and the march westward was commenced. The column was commanded by Brig. Gen. A.H. Terry, and was composed of the following troops: The Seventh Cavalry, commanded by Col. G. A. Custer; a battalion of infantry, commanded by Capt. L.H. Sanger Seventeenth Infantry; headquarters guard, consisting of one company of the Sixth Infantry; commanded by Capt Stephen Baker, a battery of three $\frac{1}{2}$ inch Gattling guns, commanded by Second Lt. W.H. Low, Twentieth Infantry; 45 scouts, guides and interpreters, under the command of Second Lt. G.S. Varnum, Seventh Cavalry; the wagons and pack trains and herd, with their numerous attaches. There was a total of 50 officers, 963 enlisted men, 190 civilian employees and 1694 animals.

I was furnished with a four mule ambulance for the transportation of my instruments and men. To the wheels of this ambulance were

attached the adometer.

The column reached Powder River without having seen an Indian, nor even a trace of recent origin. The only difficulties encountered, with the exception of a snow storm, which commenced on the night of the 31st of May and lasted until the 3rd of June, were those offered by the nature of the country to the passage of the heavily loaded train. There was not a day when bridging was not necessary, but the journey through Davis Creek to the Little Missouri through the Bad Lands immediately west of the latter stream, and then the descent into the valley of the Powder demanded almost incessant bridging and road making. We reached the Powder River late in the evening of June 7. From this camp, Major Reno, Seventh Cavalry, with six companies of his regiment was sent on a scout up Powder River to the forks, then across to the Rosebud, and back to the mouth of the Tongue. on June 11, we marched down the valley of the Powder and reached the Yellowstone where a depot was established under command of Major Moore, Sixth Infantry. Leaving the wagon train at this point, Lt. Col Custer, with the troops and pack trains proceeded to the mouth of the Tongue River. General Terry and the staff went on the steamboat ^{to} the same place, there meeting Reno, who reported that he had found a fresh heavy Indian trail leaving the Rosebud in a westerly direction. The whole command was then moved up to the mouth of the Rosebud where we met Gibbon's column. At this point, a definite plan of campaign was decided upon; and as this plan is clearly set forth in the letter of instruction furnished to Custer, insert in full:

Camp at mouth of Rosebud River:
June 22, 1876

Colonel: The brigadier general commanding directs that as soon as your regiment can be made ready for the march, you proceed up the Rosebud in pursuit of the Indians whose train was discovered by Major Reno a few days ~~ago~~ since.

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. He will, however, indicate to you his own views of what your action should be, and he desires that you should conform to them unless you shall see sufficient reason for departing from them. He thinks that you should proceed up the Rosebud until you ascertain definitely the direction in which the trail above spoken of leads; should it be found (as it appears almost certain that it will be found) to turn toward the Little Big Horn, he thinks you should still proceed southward as far as the head waters of the Tongue, and then left, so as to preclude the possibility of the escape of the Indians to the south or the south-east by passing around your left flank.

The column of Colonel Gibbon is now in motion for the mouth of the Big Horn, as soon as it reaches that point, it will cross the Yellowstone and move up at least as far as the forks of the ~~the~~ Big and Little Horns.

Of course, its future movements must be controlled by circumstances as they ~~arise~~ but it is hoped that the Indians, if upon the Little Big Horn, may be so nearly inclosed by the two columns that their escape will be impossible. The department commander desires that on your way up the Rosebud you should thoroughly examine the upper part Tulloch's Creek and that you should endeavor to send a scout through to Colonel Gibbon's column with information of the result of your examination. The lower part of this creek will be examined by a detachment from Colonel Gibbon's command. The supply steamer will be pushed up the Big Horn as far as the forks, if the river is found to be navigable for that distance, and the department commander (who will

accompany the column of Colonal Gibbon) desires you to report to him there not later than the expiration of the time for which your troops are rationed, unless in the meantime, you receive further orders.

Respectfully
E. W. Smith
Captain Eighteenth Infantry
Acting Assistant Adjutant General

Lieutenant Colonel Custer,

These instructions were supplemented by verbal information to Custer, that he could expect to find Gibbon's column at the mouth of the Little Big Horn not later than the 26th.

Pursuant to these instructions, Custer took up his line of march about noon of the 22nd of June. His command (counting officers, enlisted men and civilians) numbered nearly 650 mounted men.

Both men and beast were in excellent condition, and there was not one of the command who was not filled with high hopes of success. Upon Custer's departure General Terry and staff proceeded up the Yellowstone with Gibbon's column, and when near the mouth of the Big Horn, the command was crossed to the right bank of the former stream. Gibbon's column, as now constituted, consisted of four companies of the Second Cavalry, and five companies of the Seventh Infantry and Lt. Low's Gattling Battery, amounting in all (including civilian employees) to 377 fighting men. The night of June 24 we passed in camp on Tulloch's Creek, The next day we crossed the divide between the Tulloch's Creek and the Big Horn, and reached the latter stream after a severe march of twenty-two miles. The country was exceedingly rough, hill after hill, and ravine after ravine, with but little grass and plenty of ~~ubiquitous~~ sage and cactus. The soil was alkaline and the air was filled with dust, clogging up the nostrils, and ears. In addition to this, the day was very warm and not drop of water to be obtained on the march. The infantry had understood

that we were to follow Tulloch's Creek and knowing that in case they could obtain water at any time they did not fill their canteens. The consequence was that they suffered terribly, and the numbers of men toward the close of the march dropped on the way completely exhausted. The refreshing sight of the Big Horn finally gladdened their hearts and those left on the ____ road having brought in, they remained in camp that night. General Terry, taking the cavalry, pushed on, and a most wearisome and disheartening march we made of it. The night was black, and a cold rain drenched us. Besides this we were obliged to cross a very rough country; and the descent and ascent of steep declivities, with no other guide than an occasional white horse (if so lucky as to get directly behind one) was anything but pleasant. The Indian scouts finally found a pool of alkaline water after a march of 12 miles, and we encamped in the mud for the short remaining portion of the night. About 11 o'clock the following morning (June 26) we were joined by the infantry near the mouth of the Little Big Horn and we then proceeded up the valley of that river. We went into camp that night only after the infantry has made a march of more than 50 miles in two days. The next morning the march was resumed and we soon sighted two tepees in the valley. Those tepees were filled with dead warriors, and were all that remained of a large Indian village. We found the ground strewn with skins, robes, camp-equipage, etc., indicating that the village had been hastily evacuated. The cavalry saddles and dead horses lying around gave us the first inkling of the fact that there had been a fight, and that the ~~troops~~ troops had been worsted; but we were not prepared for the whole truth. As we passed on we were met by Lt Wallace of the Seventh Cavalry, who informed us that Major Reno, with the remnant of the seven companies, was intrenched on the bluffs across the river where he had sustained a siege for nearly two days. We ascended the steep bluffs ~~across the river~~ and the welcome we received was

such as to move the most callous. Officers and men relieved their surcharged natures by hysterical shouts and tears. The question then arose on all sides. "Where is Custer?" The reply came too soon. About three miles below Reno's position, we found the hills covered with dead bodies of officers and men.

Of Custer's fight we, at present, know nothing, and can only surmise. We must be content with the knowledge gleaned from the appearance of the field, that they died as only brave men can die, and that this battle, slaughter as it was, was fought with a gallantry and desperation of which the "Charge of the Light Brigade" cannot boast. The bodies with few exceptions, were frightfully mutilated, and the horrors stared us in the face at every step.

I proceed to give details of Custer's march from Rosebud, and of the battle, as I have been able to collect them up to the present time. On the 22nd they marched 12 miles; and on the 23rd they marched 35 miles; on the 24th they marched from 5 A.M. till 8 P.M. or about 45 miles; then they rested for 4 hours. at 12 they started again and proceeded 10 miles. They were then about 23 miles from the village. They reached the village at 2 P.M. on the 25th. They had made a march of 78 miles in a day and a half, and Captain Benteen tells me without a drop of water. At some distance from the village, Custer made his disposition of the regiment. He ordered Benteen, with three companies, to move to the left and scout the country for Indians; he ordered Reno with the companies, to advance parallel with his (Custer's) own command. When the village was sighted he ordered Reno to charge with his three companies, telling him that he would be supported. Reno crossed the river at point A (See sketch herewith) and moved down the woods at C without encountering much opposition. On reaching this latter point, the men were dismounted and deployed as skirmishers on the line indicated on the sketch. The Indians immediately swarmed

around them, and Reno, finding that they were getting in his rear in large numbers, remounted his command and charged through them in retreat to the bluffs on the opposite side of the river. There were Indians on all sides of them, and Lt. Hodgson, reached the bluffs, and being joined by Benteen and his command they succeeded in keeping the Indians off. Benteen had received orders from Custer to hurry up, as the village had been struck and in moving up Reno's retreat, was seen and joined on the bluffs as quickly as possible. The Indians were all around them and kept up an incessant fire of unerring accuracy. In the meantime Custer had gone downstream and attempted to make a crossing at point B but was met by an overwhelming force, and the troops retreated to the hills in rear in order to procure a more defensible position. From the position of the dead bodies on the field, I conclude that they retreated on the two lines marked on the sketch to concentrate at ~~E~~ E, which was the highest point on the ground. At Hill D, a stand was undoubtedly made by the company under command of Lt Calhoun to protect the men passing up to E. Lt Calhoun and ~~officers~~ were ~~all killed~~ Crittendon were killed on this hill. Captain Keough was killed about half way up the slope to E. The column which retreated along line BHE must have been dismounted, and fighting along the whole distance, a portion of the men taking to the ravine H for shelter, must have been surrounded by the Indians. There were twenty-eight bodies in this ravine. From H to E stretched a line of dead men with skimish intervals. The crest E was literally covered with dead officers and men. Here we found General Custer and his brother, Captain Custer, Captain Yates, Lt. Smith, Lt. Cook and Lt Riley. The Indians must have been present in overwhelming numbers, for this part of the fight did not, from all accounts last over two or three hours.

As night came on, the attack on Reno ceased, and the troops were

enabled to entrench. The attack was renewed early on the morning of the 26th, and continued until late in the afternoon, when the Indians, seeing Gibbon's column advancing in the distance, left Reno, and packing up their village moved off toward the Big Horn Mountains.

The number of Indians is estimated to have been fully 3,000 (three) thousand warriors, and they marched off with all the precision of movement and regularity of formation of the best drilled soldiers. The officers tell me that they (the Indians) fought with the utmost bravery and coolness and that they were well drilled and disciplined. Volleys were fired by them at the commands "Ready! Aim! Fire!"

The casualties of the Seventh Cavalry are as follows: 16 officers; 250 enlisted men; 9 civilians; 277 killed and 59 wounded. The number of Indians killed and wounded is not known.

We remained two days on the field to bury the dead and burn the material left by the Indians, and then returned to the boat with the wounded who have all been sent to Fort Lincoln. We are here waiting in camp for instructions.

There are some conclusions which force themselves upon the minds indubitable. They are as follow:

1st The number of Indians was underestimated at the outset of the campaign.

2nd The courage, skill, and in short, the general fighting ability of the Indians has heretofore been unerestimated and scoffed at. It has been forgotten that the Indian traders, by furnishing the Indains with the best breach loading guns, and all the ammunition they desire, have totally changed the problems of the Indain warfare. Sitting Bull has displayed the best of generalship in this campaign; He has kept his troops well in hand, and moving on ~~the~~ interior lines, he has beaten us in detail.

3rd The Indians are the best irregular cavalry in the world ~~ld~~ and

are superior in horsemanship and marksmanship to our soldiers, besides being better armed. Our regiments of cavalry are composed of men about three-fourth of whom are recruits, who have never fought with Indians. They are never drilled at firing on horseback, and the consequence is the horses are as unused to fighting as the men, themselves and become unruly in action.

4th The carbine has not sufficiently long range, and considering it simply as a weapon for close encounters, it has not the advantages of a magazine gun.

The ~~trail~~ has been kept and observation with sextant have been made whenever practicable.

Edw Maguire
1st Lt. C.E.
Chief, Eng. Dept Dakota

B. Gen. A.A. Humphreys
Chief of Engineers, USA

