

Custer and the Little big horn

Gold in the Blackhills

Sioux were unhappy about the North Pacific Railroad passing through their hunting grounds.

Custer had been sent to protect the Railway surveyors. While he was there his men discovered gold.

Miners soon arrived making a bad situation worse.

In 1876, some Sioux bands left the reservations. They were ordered to return but under the leadership of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse they refused. The army was sent to force these bands back onto the reservations.

The Sioux Indians gathered together in Summer Camp near the Rosebud River. The Sioux were joined by Cheyenne and Arapaho. This was an unusual event as tribes of Indians didn't join together.

General Custer returned to the Black Hills but he was in disgrace as he had accused the President's brother of receiving bribes.

The Military Solution.

General Sheridan made plans to round up or destroy the bands of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse.

The bands were tracked to the Bighorn Mountains.

THE PLAN.

To surround the Indians with 3 columns.

- a) General Terry -advancing from the East.
- b) General Crook -advancing from the South.
- c) Colonel Gibbon -advancing from the West.

FIRST PROBLEM.

Crook unable to join Terry and Gibbon because of an Indian attack. Forced to retreat.

SECOND PROBLEM.

Terry knew the Indians were camped, but DID NOT know that Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse and Red Cloud had joined forces and there was a total force of 12,000.

REVISED PLAN.

Colonel Gibbon to march South following Bighorn River,

while the 7th Cavalry (led by Custer) would go around the Southern end of the Wolf Mountains and head North. Both forces would attack together.

THE PLAN GOES WRONG.

Custer did not follow orders. He followed the route set by Terry as far as the divide between the Rosebud and the Little Bighorn.

At this point, Scouts located Indians and reported that the Indians had spotted them.

Custer divided his force into three.

The first group under Benteen was sent to scout the ridges.

The second group, under Reno, was to move directly forward.

Custer would lead the third group.

Events(very simply)

Whatever Custer's options he did not follow orders.

Reno met fierce resistance, retreated and was held for a day or two. Benteen joined him later.

Meanwhile, Custer attacked, was pushed back and found that another force under Crazy Horse had advanced to the rear.

Custer and the 7th Cavalry were massacred. There was no white survivors.

Why were Custer and his men killed at the Little Big Horn ?

Custer had been a successful and lucky leader. He had used similar tactics before and had been triumphant.

Some historians say Custer was a hero who fought bravely against overwhelming odds.

Others believe he was unlucky.

Others think that he brought about his own demise. As he disobeyed orders and disregarded the safety of his own men.

It has been suggested Custer needed the victory as he had a desire to run for President. He had taken a newspaper reporter along with him so that his "victory" could be accurately reported.

Custer had been offered a battery of Gatling guns but refused them. He did not expect

the Indians to stand and fight. After all his considerable experience in fighting the Indians led him to believe they would not. His luck was to run out.

The Indians not only vastly outnumbered the Cavalry but they also had superior weapons. The cavalry had single shot rifles while the Sioux had obtained Winchester repeater rifles.

Custer was clearly a man with a strong personality. Many people would refer to him as arrogant and single minded. But how many great military commanders can this be said of ? Custer and his men fell due to a mixture of misjudgment and circumstances beyond their control. The degree to which Custer is personally to blame will continue to cause debate amongst historians.

Results of the Battle

In many ways the defeat of Custer hastened the demise of the Indian way of life. After the Little Big Horn few humanitarians were listened to, hardliners pushed on with the settlement of the plains and the forcing onto the reservations of the Indians.

The Sioux and Cheyenne bands were hunted down. Crazy Horse was captured and killed while, apparently, trying to escape.

The Ghost Dance

With the Buffalo gone, the Indian way of life was at an end. The traditions lived on but no Indians could practically live as they had.

The Ghost Dance gave false hope to the Sioux Indians. One last call on the Great Spirit to rid the Indians of the white man. No one would come to save them now. Most white Americans did not care what happened to the plains Indians.

At Wounded Knee a band of Indians were killed by soldiers. The Indians were ill equipped for battle.

The Indian Wars were over.