

CHEYENNES AT THE LITTLE BIG HORN — A STUDY OF STATISTICS

By HARRY H. ANDERSON*

Students of the plains Indian wars have long been in disagreement as to the size of the Sioux and Cheyenne camps at the Little Big Horn when it was attacked by Custer and the Seventh Cavalry on June 25, 1876. In examining the case of the Cheyennes, the present day reader is faced with a choice between two extreme schools of thought. The first is represented by two foremost students of the Cheyenne tribe, Dr. George Bird Grinnell and Dr. Thomas B. Marquis. Each received his information through first-hand contact with the Cheyenne people over a long period of time. Grinnell and Marquis write that at the time of the Custer fight, the Cheyenne circle numbered 200 lodges, and Marquis goes further to state that it contained some 1,600 people.¹

The opposite point of view is championed by two other noted Indian authorities, George E. Hyde and Dr. Charles Eastman. The latter, a half-blooded Sioux, made a study of the size of the Little Big Horn camp about the turn of the century, and mainly on Sioux information, stated that the Cheyennes numbered fifty-five lodges.² Hyde, the distinguished historian of a number of plains tribes, obtained a great deal of valuable material on the history of the Cheyennes through correspondence with George Bent, an educated mixed blood Cheyenne. Hyde's investigations led him to the conclusion that the Cheyenne camp, when the village was attacked by Custer, was about fifty lodges in size.³

In conducting his study of this subject, the present writer leaned toward the position of Hyde and Eastman, although in the final analysis, it is felt that they were too low with their figures, but not nearly as low as Grinnell and Marquis were high. Perhaps the best starting point in explaining this conclusion is to set forth what statistics there are available on the total population of the Northern Cheyenne tribe.

On November 10, 1874, a census was taken at Red Cloud Agency where the Cheyennes were issued their rations, and it was learned that there were present 1,202 people of that tribe.⁴ There is every reason to believe this count was an accurate one, and that it included all of the Northern Cheyennes. This census was the result of a long series of attempts on the part of the Red Cloud agent to get his charges to submit to a count, so that the ration issues would be based upon official figures

*Mr. Anderson is Assistant Secretary of the South Dakota Historical Society, Pierre, South Dakota.

¹George B. Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1956), p. 356; Thomas B. Marquis, *A Warrior Who Fought Custer* (Minneapolis, 1931), p. 206. This is the story of the Cheyenne warrior, Wooden Leg.

²Charles A. Eastman, "The Story of the Little Big Horn," *Chautauquan*, No. 31, (July, 1900), p. 354.

³George E. Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1937), p. 261.

⁴Hyde, p. 223.

and not the estimates given by the Indians themselves. By late 1874, Red Cloud Agency had become the wintering place for nearly all the various camps and bands of Cheyennes and Oglala Sioux, and not just those groups known as agency Indians. The wilder hunting bands now made it a practice to come down from the north and live on free beef and other issues during the winter, and then strike out for the Powder river — Little Missouri regions in the spring as soon as the grass was up and the ponies could travel. Nearly all of the northern bands were at Red Cloud Agency at the time of the census, with the possible exception of the group of hostile extremists led by the Oglala, Crazy Horse. All the Cheyennes appear to have been present.⁵

Further figures on the Cheyenne population can be found in the record kept of bands coming in to surrender to the military at Red Cloud Agency in the spring of 1877, after the so-called "Sioux War" of the previous year. These statements show that a total of 869 Cheyennes gave themselves up to the Army at Red Cloud by May 15, 1877.⁶ In addition, 291 more had surrendered to Colonel Nelson A. Miles at the mouth of Tongue river on April 22, of the same year.⁷ These two counts total 1,160 people, a figure very close to the census count of two and a half years earlier. Perhaps an even more accurate count of the tribe's size is given in the reports of the military escorting the Cheyennes south to their new home in Indian Territory, May to August, 1877. A party of 942 men, women, and children were sent from Red Cloud Agency to live with their kinsmen, the Southern Cheyennes.⁸ Again adding the 291 at the Tongue river post, we have a figure even closer to the 1874 census results, 1,233. Still checking further, we know that when the attack was made on the Cheyennes in the Big Horn mountains on November 25, 1876, the tribal winter camp there contained some 175 lodges.⁹ Figuring seven people to a lodge, the camp numbered a little over 1,200.

It is of interest to note that this fairly constant state of the tribal population during the period 1874-1877 existed for nearly a decade

⁵Hyde (p. 225) states that the Cheyennes were at the agency and in a bad humor because the government was trying to force them to move to Indian Territory by stopping their rations. Weasel Bear, then a young boy of 12, was with an extremely wild band of Cheyennes that took part in the Bates fight with the Arapahoes on July 4, 1874. These Cheyennes spent the rest of the summer in Montana and were near the Black Hills in the fall. They probably came to Red Cloud Agency for rations and were with the rest of the tribe when the census was taken. The Arapahoes who had been licked by Captain Bates on the head of Powder river were also at the agency and were counted at the same time as the Cheyennes. Weasel Bear's story is in Frazier Hunt, *I Fought With Custer* (New York, 1950), pp. 215, 216.

⁶Report of Lieutenant W. P. Clark, 2nd Cavalry, on the hostile Sioux and Cheyennes that surrendered at Red Cloud Agency, dated May 24, 1877.

⁷*Report of the Secretary of War for 1877*, p. 55. (These reports are hereafter cited as WAR, with date.) The official accounts generally state that 303 hostiles surrendered to Miles on this date and that they were all Cheyennes. Actually, there were two lodges of the Sioux in that party under Hump, the Miniconjou (12 people), and the true number of Cheyennes was 291.

⁸WAR, 1878, p. 48. This increase over the total reported in the surrender record included a small number of Cheyennes who never left Red Cloud Agency during the hostilities, and scattered groups that arrived after Lieutenant Clark's report had been submitted.

⁹WAR, 1877, p. 55.

prior as well. During the summer of 1866, nearly all of the Northern Cheyenne chiefs, and some Southern Cheyenne leaders as well, visited Colonel Henry B. Carrington at the Bozeman Trail post, Fort Phil Kearney. Carrington recorded that those present represented 167 lodges. However, from further information he gives on these chiefs, it appears that at least one leading tribal chief and his band were not present.¹⁰ Three years later, after the hostilities of the Red Cloud or Powder river war, the Cheyennes were at Fort Laramie to meet with representatives of the Board of Indian Commissioners. On September 21, 1870, Dull Knife, Little Wolf, and several other chiefs representing 350 people, met with the Commissioners. Dull Knife told them that the rest of the tribe, 130 lodges, was on its way to the fort from Bear Lodge under the tribal head chief, Medicine Man. Dull Knife said the Cheyennes would abide by any decisions the Commissioners and Medicine Man could agree upon.¹¹

However, for the period here under study (1874-1877), it seems safe to state that the population of the Northern Cheyenne tribe was some 1,200 people and 175 lodges.

NOVEMBER, 1874	— At Red Cloud Agency —	1,202 people — ca. 172 lodges
NOVEMBER, 1876	— Tribal camp in the Big Horn Mountains	ca. 1,200 people — 175 lodges
APRIL, 1877	— Surrendering Cheyennes —	
	a. At Red Cloud Ag.	869 people — ca. 124 lodges
	b. At Tongue river	291 people — ca. 42 lodges
SUMMER, 1877	— Removed to Indian Terr. —	942 People — ca. 135 lodges
	Still at Tongue river —	291 people — ca. 42 lodges

In order to trace the movements of the Indian and military forces which were to clash at the Little Big Horn, it is necessary to go back to events of the previous winter. With the information available, it is possible to pin down with more than a fair degree of accuracy the winter locations of the Northern Cheyennes. A large part of the tribe was at Red Cloud Agency where they were waiting uneasily, for the government had renewed its efforts to effect their removal to Indian Territory. Wintering away from the agency was at least one big camp of Cheyennes, that perennially hostile group led by Medicine Man in 1866 and Old Bear in 1876. Two Moon also lived in this camp, and it is sometimes referred to as "Two Moon's band," although he was merely a minor warrior leader, inferior in tribal rank to the "old man" chief, Old Bear.

On the morning of March 17, 1876, Old Bear's band was in a camp 100 lodges in size, located on the west side of Powder river, not far above the mouth of the Little Powder. Also in this camp were the regular companions of these Cheyennes, Crazy Horse's Oglalas and an extremely

¹⁰Grace R. Hebard and E. A. Brininstool, *The Bozeman Trail* (Cleveland, 1922), Vol. 1, p. 277.

¹¹*Report of the Board of Indian Commissioner for 1870*, pp. 59, 60, 68.

hostile band of Miniconjous. Early on the morning of the 17th, portions of General George Crook's command, led by Colonel J. J. Reynolds, attacked and captured the combined village. After their success in the initial attack, the fighting was poorly handled by the Army leaders. They permitted the Indians to recapture their pony herd, and eventually ordered the destruction of the entire village and its contents, contrary to Crook's intention to use it as a base for further strikes against the hostiles.¹²

The statement that Old Bear's band were the Cheyennes in the camp when it was attacked is based upon the accounts recorded by Dr. Marquis.¹³ Captain John G. Bourke, Crook's aide, who was with the attacking force, states that the Cheyennes were camped at one end of the village in forty new canvas lodges, and that they had recently arrived from Red Cloud Agency. This now appears to be only partly correct. Kate Bighead also gives the size of the Cheyenne camp as forty family lodges, but implies that the band had not been at Red Cloud since at least the previous fall. This is corroborated by the Red Cloud agent, James Hastings, who reported that earlier in the winter the Cheyennes were encamped in the Powder river region, at least 100 miles northwest of Bear Butte. This was late in January (the 28th) as Hastings was reporting on the movements of the couriers he had sent out a month earlier with the ultimatum to the hunting bands to come in to the agencies or be considered hostile.¹⁴ The runners sent to the Cheyennes had not yet returned by the date of Hasting's report. Had the Old Bear Cheyennes been at Red Cloud in December, the couriers need not have been sent. Furthermore, had they been near the agency, the runners would have returned by January 28 (the message had been sent out just before Christmas). Under such circumstances it is necessary to conclude that Bourke was in error when stating that the forty lodges of Cheyennes had been at Red Cloud shortly before the village was attacked.

Much has been made by the Army of the fact that these Cheyennes had just come from the Agency loaded with guns and ammunition supplied by the Indian Bureau.¹⁵ This charge is open to serious question.

¹²John G. Bourke, *On the Border With Crook*, (Columbus, Ohio, 1950), pp. 273-280.

¹³Wooden Leg, in *A Warrior Who Fought Custer*, p. 165, and also the story of Kate Bighead, a Cheyenne woman, as recorded by Dr. Marquis in the pamphlet, *She Watched Custer's Last Battle*.

¹⁴The Kate Bighead story reads: "White Bull and White Moon, my two brothers left to go to the hunting grounds and I went with them. Word was sent to the hunting Indians that all Cheyennes and Sioux must stay on their reservations in Dakota [i.e., come in to the agencies] In the last part of the winter we were camped on the west side of Powder river" The Hastings report is in *House Executive Document No. 184*, 44th Congress, 1st Session, p. 25.

¹⁵Particularly by Bourke. Referring to the burning of the village (p. 276): "they [the lodges] exploded as soon as the flames and heat had a chance to act upon the great quantities of powder in kegs and canisters with which they were all supplied" Further on (p. 278): "As for ammunition, there was enough for a regiment; besides powder, there was pig-lead with molds for casting, metallic cartridges, and percussion caps."

The only Indians that seem to have come out from Red Cloud Agency during the winter were two lodges of Sioux who had arrived two days prior to the attack, intending to trade with the Mininconjous. Agent Hastings denied the Army's charges that the captured camp was an arsenal of weapons and ammunition obtained at his agency. He stated to the newspapers that the mixed-blood Oglala scouts with Crook told him only five pounds of powder, twenty of lead, and a small box of gun caps had been found in the village.¹⁶

After counterattacking against the troopers of Reynold's command, the Sioux and Cheyennes fled northeastward through the freezing weather to a large camp of Hunkpapa Sioux under Sitting Bull located near Ekalaka, in present day Montana. From here the combined tribes began their movements that continued throughout the spring and brought them to the banks of the Little Big Horn on June 25. It was during these movements to the Little Big Horn that the Sioux and Cheyennes were joined by additional camps of their fellow tribesmen. Wooden Leg, the Cheyenne, gave Dr. Marquis the only details we have on these groups, and it is with his statements regarding the Cheyennes that we are primarily concerned with.

According to Wooden Leg, the first addition to the Cheyenne circle in what now will be referred to as the "hostile" camp was a party coming from Red Cloud Agency led by Lame White Man, a Southern Cheyenne. Wooden Leg states that this was a "big band," and it is here that issue must be taken with his remarks concerning the size of the Cheyenne groups joining the hostiles. His figures, as set down by Dr. Marquis from forty to fifty years after the incidents took place, just do not fit in with contemporary evidence on the size of the Cheyenne camp. There is no reason to doubt that a band of Cheyennes under Lame White Man joined the camp where Wooden Leg says they did, but it was not a big party, nor were any of the others arriving after it.¹⁷

Following further the travels of the Cheyennes and Sioux as given by Wooden Leg, the hostiles crossed from the Powder river into the valley of the Tongue. At a point some thirty or forty miles from the junction of Otter creek with the Tongue, more Cheyennes arrived under another of the "old man" chiefs, Dirty Mocassins. The date seems to have been sometime early in May.¹⁸

Dirty Mocassins is called Black Moccasins by Grinnell, and was also known to the Sioux by that name. Black Mocassins was the father

¹⁶Hyde, p. 259.

¹⁷Marquis, p. 183. Hastings, the agent at Red Cloud, in his annual report dated August 10, 1876, states that the Cheyennes had been slipping away from his agency in small parties since the Reynolds fight on Powder river (March 17). *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1876*, p. 33.

¹⁸Marquis, p. 184.

of White Bull (also called The Ice), the noted medicine man and warrior leader of the Northern Cheyennes.¹⁹

It is significant to note that following the Custer battle, Black Moccassins and a party of ten lodges remained with the Sioux after the hostile camp split up, rather than move with their own tribe.²⁰ The size of his camp is what is important, for this seems to have been his personal following, and was probably about the same size when Black Moccassins joined the hostiles in May. Further on it will be seen that when Little Wolf, another of the "old man" chiefs, arrived in the camp on June 25, after the annihilation of the Custer command, he had with him in his party only seven lodges. The group that arrived under Lame White Man was probably about the same size as those of Black Moccassins and Little Wolf, from seven to ten lodges.

The last party of Cheyennes that Wooden Leg mentions as having arrived before the Custer battle, reached the camp when it was located on the Rosebud, six or eight miles up from the Yellowstone, on or about May 19. Here Charcoal Bear, the chief medicine man of the Northern Cheyennes, joined the tribe bringing with him the tribal medicine lodge and the sacred buffalo head.²¹ On the basis of what is known about the size of the other parties mentioned previously, it is likely that Charcoal Bear's also contained about ten lodges.

Up to this point, and based upon Wooden Leg's statements as to the leaders of the parties and our own approximations as to their size, we have the following groups in the Cheyenne camp:

Old Bear's band	ca. 40 lodges
Lame White Man's party	ca. 10 lodges
Dirty Moccassins party	ca. 10 lodges
Charcoal Bear's party	ca. 10 lodges
	<hr/>
Total	ca. 70 lodges

By way of checking these figures, we can utilize the reports of Lieutenant James Bradley, the scout commander of Colonel John Gibbon's Montana column, who with his Crow scouts, sighted the hostile village while it was still on the Tongue on May 15. From the amount of smoke given off by the lodge fires, the Crows with Bradley estimated the size of the village to be about 300 lodges. One month later, another Army scout, Mitch Bouyer, examined the remains of this camp and counted 360 lodge sites. He estimated there was enough extra people

¹⁹This relationship is based upon Grinnell, and also from statements made by Sioux informants in 1877. Present day Cheyenne tribal historians deny this, maintaining that White Bull's father was called "Starts Big-Walk," and was part Arapahoe. Letter to present writer from Rufus Wallwing, May 18, 1956.

²⁰Grinnell, p. 383.

²¹Marquis, p. 187.

in the camp to make a total of nearly 400 lodges.²² The entire hostile force then moved westward to the Rosebud where it was joined by other parties, including the Charcoal Bear Cheyennes. To give the Cheyennes a total of seventy lodges at this point certainly seems ample, considering that only a few days before the entire hostile camp did not number more than 400 lodges.

From what is known of the Indian movements, it is clear that by June 16, the camp had moved up the Rosebud, across the divide towards the Little Big Horn, and were camped on the forks of Reno creek. From here scouts discovered the troops under General George Crook further south on the Rosebud, and on the morning of June 17, large numbers of Cheyenne and Sioux warriors attacked the Crook column.

In the accounts of the battle of the Rosebud obtained by Dr. Grinnell from Cheyenne participants, there is the significant statement by White Elk that there were about ninety Cheyenne in all in the hostile force.²³ Weasel Bear states that in the party he rode with there were fifty-seven warriors. By way of explanation, Grinnell was told that the Cheyennes went in several different groups. One led by Little Hawk probably numbered about thirty warriors. The main party of Cheyennes, the fifty-seven warriors which Weasel Bear spoke of, was led by the younger Two Moons, and was accompanied by a larger number of Sioux.²⁴

The accounts of White Elk and Weasel Bear are of particular importance, in that they both clearly indicate a warrior force of Cheyennes far too small for a camp of 200 lodges, which both Grinnell and Marquis state the Cheyennes had at the Little Big Horn only a week later.²⁵

Some question seems likely to arise when this estimated figure of a camp of seventy lodges and a fighting force of ninety warriors is evaluated in the light of the generally accepted yardstick of two warriors to a lodge in a plains Indian village. This yardstick may have been accurate, but there seems to be sufficient basis for questioning it with regard to this case of the Cheyennes. Again referring to the statistics kept on

²²Charles E. DeLand, "The Sioux Wars," *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. XV, p. 345.

²³Grinnell, pp. 336, 337.

²⁴Weasel Bear, in Hunt, p. 216; Grinnell, p. 332.

²⁵Some writers claim that the entire warrior force did not leave the village to fight Crook. It does not seem reasonable, in light of the extremely war-like attitude exhibited by the Sioux and Cheyennes, to contend that one half of the fighting men in the village stayed home to defend the women and children. First of all, what leader among them possessed the authority to organize such a home guard? The warriors were eager to fight and count their *coups*, and it is foolishness to expect half of them to have remained behind in the village. The military organization of the plains tribes simply did not provide for such a degree of effective discipline, even on formally organized war parties. And in addition, it should be kept in mind that while the hostiles knew Gibbon was on the lower Yellowstone, and possibly that the Terry-Custer force was moving westward from Fort Lincoln, there is no evidence to indicate they feared an attack by either of these forces. Certainly they were not expecting an attack a week later when Custer struck their village on June 25.

the tribe when they surrendered at Red Cloud Agency in the spring of 1877, we find that in a total of 124 lodges, there were only 212 adult males. The largest single group to come in contained seventy-five lodges and only 115 adult males.²⁶

	<i>Lodges</i>	<i>Warriors</i>	<i>Ratio</i>
A. Estimated Cheyenne circle June 25, 1876	70	90	1.29 warriors per lodge
B. Total surrendering Spring, 1877	124	212°	1.71 adult males per lodge
C. Largest single band Spring, 1877	75	115°	1.53 adult males per lodge

°Denotes adult males, old men as well as those of warrior age

This statistical table makes no distinction between warriors of fighting age and older men. Speculation as to how many warriors were included in totals B and C provides nothing conclusive, for the ratio established for item A is based upon a maximum estimate of lodges present, and cannot be taken as a constant. In addition, there is no way of knowing how many of the warriors were in the camp (A) without their families. Their presence would raise or lower the ratio, depending upon your point of view.²⁷ However, the significant point these figures do make, is that the estimated Cheyenne force of warriors and lodges presented here cannot be refuted merely because it does not conform to the rule of thumb of two warriors per lodge. It is clearly evident that the Cheyennes at the time of their surrender did not average two adult males to a lodge, let alone two warriors.

In 1855, Thomas Twiss, agent for the Indians of the Upper Platte (Brule and Oglala Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes) set down the population for the tribes under his jurisdiction. He used the estimate of two fighting men per lodge but clarified it by stating that this referred to males "capable of bearing arms." That would include boys and old men outside the age range generally used to classify as warrior (about sixteen to thirty-eight). If a village was under attack the old men and boys would certainly aid in its defense, and the estimate of the two fighting men per lodge would hold true. If however, a war party left a village to go on a raid, and included all its eligible warriors, which rarely happened, it is doubtful if the force would average two warriors for each lodge in the camp. Then too, the size of the lodges increased

²⁶Lieutenant Clark's report on May 24, 1877.

²⁷Then too, consideration must be given to the casualties suffered by the Cheyennes in the Crook and Custer fights during the summer, the Mackenzie attack on the winter camp in November, and the skirmishes with Miles in January, 1877. These would increase the population totals, particularly for the warriors, over what they were at the time of the surrenders. From both white and Indian accounts, the Cheyenne casualties in the actions with Custer, Crook, and Miles were negligible, in spite of the large numbers involved. However, the tribe suffered heavily when McKenzie attacked them in the Big Horn Mountains in November. About forty Cheyennes were killed, the majority males, and probably a number of women and children died from exposure as the survivors fled to refuge in the Sioux camps.

from 1850 when only buffalo hides were used in their construction, to say 1875, when the bands that went into the agencies were issued canvas, and often more than one family lived in these larger dwellings. All things considered, the estimate of two warriors per lodge in a camp would probably prove to be wrong as often as it was right.

Getting back to Wooden Leg's chronological account of the arrival of the Cheyenne parties, we see that on the afternoon of June 25, after the troops of Custer's immediate command had been wiped out, Little Wolf, another of the "old man" chiefs arrived in camp with his party of seven lodges. Scouts from this group had sighted the Seventh Cavalry on the evening before, prior to its crossing of the divide between the Rosebud and the Little Big Horn. The route of march by the troops was such that Little Wolf's band had been unable to get into the hostile camp until after Custer had attacked and his columns destroyed or immobilized.²⁸ These Cheyennes are the last band known to have arrived in time to take part in any of the fighting, in this case the attacks on the morning of the 26th against Major Reno's command entrenched on the bluffs on the east bank of the Little Big Horn.

On the basis of the evidence presented, therefore, it appears that the maximum size of the Cheyenne camp when attacked by Custer was some seventy lodges, ninety warriors, and in all about 500 people. This does not include Little Wolf's seven lodges, containing at the most perhaps ten warriors and a total of fifty persons. While these figures are, of course, only estimates, they are based upon a common sense interpretation of the evidence at hand.

It now seems necessary to go further into this examination of Cheyenne affairs, particularly studying the activities of that part of the tribe still located at Red Cloud Agency at the time of the Custer battle on the Little Big Horn. In addition to its value as general information, such an undertaking serves to buttress the conclusions already set down.

At Red Cloud Agency during the summer months of 1876, the Government again began to put pressure on the Cheyennes there to agree to their removal to Indian Territory. This, together with the uneasiness caused by the military campaigns and the increased influence of the Army at the Sioux agencies, caused the Cheyennes to break camp early in July and move northward to join the hostiles. Colonel Wesley Merritt's Fifth Cavalry had been placed in a position between the southern agencies and the hostile camps. Merritt, communicating with the authorities at Red Cloud, learned of the preparations of the Cheyennes to leave the agency. On July 17, advance elements of the Fifth Cavalry, including its chief scout, Buffalo Bill Cody, struck the regular trail from Red Cloud Agency north to the Powder River country where

²⁸Marquis, pp. 249, 250.

it crosses Warbonnet or Hat Creek, thirty miles from Red Cloud in the extreme northwest corner of Nebraska. Here they skirmished with a scouting party of forty-five Cheyenne warriors and Cody is said to have killed the leader, Yellow Hand. The scouts fled back to the main party, reporting the presence of the troops, and the entire body turned back towards the agency. The Cheyennes did not go into Red Cloud Agency. Instead they turned off the trail and headed in the direction of Spotted Tail Agency, a short distance to the southeast.²⁹

The reports Merritt received from the agency on the break-out by the Cheyennes placed the size of the party at about 800 people. This figure seems a little high for the Cheyennes alone, since there were probably not more than 600 or 700 of that tribe at Red Cloud in July. Merritt, however, wrote after his arrival at the agency that a number of Sioux had accompanied the Cheyennes, thus explaining the extra people in the party.³⁰ The important point to note here is that early in July, *after* the Custer battle, there were still at least 600 Cheyennes at Red Cloud Agency who had never been in the hostile camp. The total population of the Northern Cheyennes has already been rather conclusively established at about 1,200 people or 175 lodges, therefore leaving only 500 or 600 of the tribe (about seventy to eighty-five lodges) who could have possibly been present at the Little Big Horn on June 25.

The Cheyennes that were turned back on the trail by Merritt split up before reaching Spotted Tail Agency, and about half, led by the tribal head chief, Dull Knife, again set out to reach the hostile camp. This time they were successful. Dull Knife was the last of the "old man" chiefs of the tribe to leave the agency. Wooden Leg states he joined the other Cheyennes after they separated from the Sioux, which we know took place late in July.

Those Cheyennes remaining at Red Cloud Agency during the summer were the most peaceful portions of the tribe, under chiefs Living Bear, Standing Elk, Black Bear, Turkey Legs, and Calfskin Shirt. They had gone in to the agency when the Dull Knife party left again for the northern camps. These chiefs were still at Red Cloud late in September when the Black Hills Treaty Commission visited there, and their names are found on the treaty as signing for the Cheyenne tribe.³¹ They appear to have left the agency late in October, again only as a

²⁹Stanley Vestal, "The Duel With Yellow Hand," *Southwestern Review*, (Autumn, 1940) Vol. XXVI, pp. 66-76; Charles King, *Campaigning With Crook*, (Milwaukee, 1880), pp. 19, 28.

³⁰Colonel Stanton of Crook's staff was at Red Cloud Agency and sent Merritt the dispatch regarding the pending outbreak and the size of the party. Merritt's report of July 18, written after he arrived at Red Cloud, states that information obtained at the agency indicated a large party of Sioux were with the Cheyennes. Agent Hastings reported on August 10, that there were three to four hundred Cheyennes still at the agency. These were about half the party turned back by Merritt. They did not follow Dull Knife when he led a second attempt to move north to the hostiles.

³¹*Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1876*, p. 352.

result of some crisis which shook them out of their peaceful inclinations. Perhaps the question of removal was again brought up. More likely these Cheyennes fled after learning of the action taken by the soldiers in disarming and dismounting the Sioux of Red Cloud and Red Leaf's bands.³²

When Colonel Nelson A. Miles moved against the combined Sioux and Cheyennes camped on the upper Tongue in early January, 1877, he captured some Cheyenne women who told him parties had come from the agencies earlier in the winter.³³ These seem to have been the bands of Standing Elk, Black Bear, and Turkey Legs, who reached the Cheyenne winter camp in the Big Horn Mountains shortly before it was attacked and destroyed by Colonel R. S. Mackenzie on November 25. Official reports state this camp numbered 175 lodges, about 1,200 people — the entire Northern Cheyenne tribe. When the Army opened surrender negotiations late that winter, Black Bear, one of the chiefs who signed the Black Hills treaty took part in the talks with Miles,³⁴ and another, Standing Elk, was among those who surrendered at Red Cloud in April.

Standing Elk's position was a curious one. In the report submitted on the surrendering bands, the largest group of Cheyennes came in to Red Cloud on April 21, and was listed as the "Standing Elk Band." Dull Knife, the leading "old man" chief of the tribe was in this party and contemporary newspaper accounts refer to the band as being under his leadership.³⁵ This notoriety given Standing Elk by naming the band after him in the official Army report is puzzling, since he was inferior in tribal rank to Dull Knife, Little Wolf, and other chiefs as well.

The answer, although partly conjecture, seems to be involved in the problem of removing the Cheyennes to Indian Territory. This subject was brought up almost immediately after the main party of Cheyennes and the leading chiefs surrendered (April 27). The tribal leaders met and selected Standing Elk to speak in the council with Generals Crook and Mackenzie and to voice the tribe's sentiments as being strictly opposed to removal. To the Cheyenne's surprise, Standing Elk rose up in the council and said the tribe had agreed to go. Since there was little that could be done to stop the action once Standing Elk had

³²Hyde, pp. 284, 285. The Red Cloud and Red Leaf bands constantly talked trouble and the Army feared they would go out and join the hostiles. The Cheyennes no doubt realized they were in line for similar treatment. Hastings had complained in August that they were the worst Indians at the agency. General George Crook told a newspaper man after the confiscation that "quite a number [of Indians from the agency] left and have gone northward to the hills." *New York Herald*, November 4, 1876. These were undoubtedly the Cheyennes.

³³"The prisoners now in our hands have but recently come out from Red Cloud Agency." Miles, in *WAR, 1877*, p. 495.

³⁴Grimmell, p. 384.

³⁵*New York Herald*, May 11, 1877.

expressed this official decision, the Cheyennes were all but forced to begin their trip south early in May.³⁶

There is no way of knowing how the entries read in the day-to-day surrender records, but when the official report was sent to General Crook to be forwarded to higher headquarters, the main party of Cheyennes was listed as the "Standing Elk Band." All this indicates that Standing Elk was promised that he would be elevated over the other tribal chiefs in the eyes of the military in return for his cooperation in getting any sort of "official" tribal approval regarding the move to Indian Territory. Standing Elk had been selected by the tribal council to speak for the Cheyennes, and his assent, regardless of how the people really felt, was all that the government needed.

As the result of Standing Elk's "cooperation" General Sheridan was able to write in his annual report for 1877: "about 1,000 of the Northern Cheyennes *elected to go* to the Southern Indian Territory . . ." and further on, that the Cheyennes were transferred "*at their own option*" (italics added).³⁷ Knowing the definite opposition of the Cheyenne tribe to such a movement, Sheridan's remarks cannot be taken seriously. They are based upon at best, a half-truth, and this made possible only through what amounted to the bribing by Crook's subordinates of an ambitious minor tribal chief.³⁸

This conclusion is not as unreasonable as it may first appear, when it is considered along with some of the other maneuvering and skull-gurgery that involved certain Army officers and the leaders of the hostile and agency bands at Red Cloud and Spotted Tail Agencies during the spring and summer of 1877. For example, the Army made some very generous concessions to get the Cheyennes to move south even after Standing Elk's promise had been given. When the tribe arrived in Indian Territory, they were fully armed and well mounted. This rather embarrassing cat was let out of the bag by General John Pope, whose command included Indian Territory, when he reported the circumstances surrounding the Northern Cheyenne outbreak of 1878.³⁸

Much had been made by the military of the fact that the hostile Sioux and Cheyennes had been thoroughly whipped and were permitted to surrender in 1877 only on the Army's terms — after they gave up their firearms and the bulk of their pony herds. Yet here were the Northern

³⁶Grinnell, p. 400; Marquis, pp. 308, 309.

³⁷WAR, 1877, pp. 56, 57.

³⁸The tribe did not accept Standing Elk's leadership. By 1876, he headed only the peaceful segment of the tribe along with Calfskin Shirt and Turkey Legs at the Southern Cheyenne Agency in Indian Territory. When the "non-progressive" element made the tragic Northern Cheyenne breakout later that summer, they were once more led by the two ranking "old man" chiefs, Dull Knife and Little Wolf.

³⁹It was Pope's intention to completely disarm the Cheyennes when they arrived, but he was informed by Mackenzie that such action was not in keeping with the promises made to the tribe before they left the Department of the Platte. WAR, 1878, p. 40.

Cheyennes, nearly all of whom came under the heading of "surrendered hostiles," marching into the Southern Cheyenne and Arapahoe Agency at Darlington, Indian Territory, well armed and with plenty of horses. What other conclusion is possible than that the Army officers at Red Cloud were willing (or obliged) to make all sorts of compromises and concessions in order to manage the supposedly conquered hostiles.⁴⁰

In conclusion, this survey of the movements of the Northern Cheyennes during the hostilities of 1876 had as its purpose an attempt to shed some light that is truly "new" and of sound foundation on the battle of the Little Big Horn. Considering the evidence that has been presented, it does not seem unreasonable to believe the Cheyenne camp contained about seventy lodges at the time of the attack by the Seventh Cavalry. Certainly the exaggerated figures given by Marquis no longer can be given consideration. It remains for a similar study to be attempted for the several Sioux groups that were with the Cheyennes in the Little Big Horn camp. Other evidence, such as the remarks of Kate Bighead regarding the use of wicki-ups and the movements of the lodges within the camp during the battle must be considered when evaluating the statements made by Indian and white participants, or by those who examined the village site after the battle.⁴¹ It has been the experience of the present writer that because of the greater numbers involved and the difficulty of locating a complete set of reliable census figures to use as check points, it will be extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible, to arrive at a reasonably accurate figure for the Sioux. On the basis of the evidence that is available, however, it appears that the estimates of 2,500 to 3,000 warriors for the entire Little Big Horn camp are far too high. If this Cheyenne study has supplied an indication of the degree of error involved, a more accurate figure would be about half that number.

⁴⁰Additional research into the affairs of the former hostiles at Red Cloud and Spotted Tail Agencies has revealed that the surrender of their guns and ponies was a short lived thing for the Sioux as well as the Cheyennes. A good many of the confiscated horses and weapons (or suitable replacements) were back in the hands of their former owners within a few months at the most.

⁴¹Kate Bighead stated that as a result of the initial attack by the Seventh Cavalry, a number of lodges were taken down in preparation for flight. After Custer's immediate command had been annihilated and the immediate threat to the camp was over, some of these lodges were put up again, but at new locations. Other families did not bother to re-erect their lodges, and instead spent the night in temporary shelters, or wicki-ups. The large number of wicki-ups found in the camp is usually said to have housed considerable numbers of young warriors who were present without their families. In light of Kate Bighead's story, this does not seem to have been the case. Similarly, the relocation of the lodges would render almost useless the estimates of the size of the camp based upon a counting of the lodge sites after the Indians had left.

MARK KELLOGG TELEGRAPHED FOR CUSTER'S RESCUE

By OLIVER KNIGHT*

Mark Kellogg, the *Bismarck Tribune* correspondent who died with Gen. George A. Custer at the Little Big Horn and who was the only accredited newspaper correspondent on the expedition, has been a shadowy figure for historians to trace.¹ But out of the shadow there comes another story of Kellogg in something of a hero's role. For he would appear to have been the man who telegraphed for rescue when General and Mrs. Custer, along with a good many other persons, were stranded on a train imbedded in a massive snow drift in the spring of 1876.

Kellogg's full biography has not yet been traced, but he is known to have been both telegrapher and newspaperman which also meant printer at that time. He once edited the *Council Bluffs Daily Democrat*; worked for the *Bismarck Tribune* in 1873, the year in which Clement A. Lounsberry established the paper; served as a telegrapher during the Civil War; and was a train dispatcher on the Northern Pacific, a job that required a telegrapher. Something of a footloose individual, as many printers and telegraphers were during that period, Kellogg left the *Tribune* during the winter of 1873-74 and next emerged as a straw boss in a haymakers camp on Painted Woods Prairie, north of Bismarck. The camp was owned by John A. Stoyell, a Bismarck attorney under whom Kellogg studied law.² Kellogg was about 43 years old in 1876.³

Kellogg left Bismarck and went at least as far east as St. Paul, for he appears — or certainly seems to — in the story Mrs. Custer told, and made as harrowing as possible, of the time she and the General were stuck in a snowdrift.

The way Mrs. Custer told the story,⁴ she and the General had spent the winter of 1875-76 in the East, but had to start homeward in February because their money had run out. Reaching St. Paul, they encountered a major problem in that the Northern Pacific did not expect to start running trains until April at the earliest. She detailed the account thus:

. . . . The railroad officials, mindful of what the general had done for them in protecting their advance workers in the building of the road, came and offered to open the route. Sending us through on a special train was a great undertaking, and we had to wait some time for the preparations to be completed. . . .

The train on which we finally started was an immense one, and certainly a curiosity. There were two snow-ploughs and three enormous engines; freight-cars

*Mr. Knight is Assistant Professor of Journalism at Indiana University. He holds a doctorate in history having specialized in frontier history. He is the author of *Following the Indian Wars, The Story of Newspaper Correspondents Among the Indian Campaigners*... Published by the University of Oklahoma Press in 1960.

¹See John C. Hixon, "Custer's 'Mysterious' Mr. Kellogg," *North Dakota History* (July, 1950), 145-63.

²*Ibid.*, 148-49, 156.

³*Bismarck Tribune*, July 19, 1876.

⁴Elizabeth B. Custer, "Boots and Saddles," or *Life in Dakota with General Custer* (New York, 1885), 253-60.

with coal supplies and baggage; several cattle-cars, with stock belonging to the Black Hills miners who filled the passenger-coaches. There was an eating-house, looming up above everything, built on a flat car. In this car the forty employes of the road, who were taken to shovel snow, etc., were fed. There were several day-coaches, with army recruits and a few passengers, and last of all the paymaster's car, which my husband and I occupied. This had a kitchen and a sitting-room. . . . Sometimes we came to drifts, and the train would stop with a violent jerk, start again, and once more come to a stand-still, with such force that the dishes would fall from the table. The train-men were ordered out, and after energetic work by the stalwart arms the track was again clear and we went on. One day we seemed to be creeping; the engines whistled, and we shot on finely. The speed was checked so suddenly that the little stove fairly danced, and our belongings flew through the car from end to end. . . . Before our train there seemed to be a perfect wall of ice; we had come to a gully which was almost filled with drifts. The cars were all backed down some distance and detached; the snow-ploughs and engines having thus full sweep, all the steam possible was put on, and they began what they called "bucking the drifts." This did a little good at first, and we made some progress through the gully. After one tremendous dash, however, the ploughs and one engine were so deeply embedded that they could not be withdrawn. The employes dug and shovelled until they were exhausted. The Black Hills miners relieved them as long as they could endure it; then the officers and recruits worked until they could do no more. The impenetrable bank of snow was the accumulation of the whole winter, first snowing, then freezing, until there were successive layers of ice and snow. It was the most dispiriting and forlorn situation. . . .

Thus were they stranded for several days, according to her version. Food ran low and, worse, so did the wood for the little stove in the Custers' car. [Her overwriting almost carries the reader beyond memory of the cars containing coal.] "Finally the situation became desperate," she said, "and with all their efforts the officers could no longer conceal from me their concern for our safety."

At that point, a search was made for anyone among the passengers who could telegraph, a small battery and a "pocket-relay" having been found in the Custer car. Without naming him, she said a man finally was found who understood telegraphy. The main telegraph line was cut, wires from the portable instrument were connected to either end of the severed cable, and the stranded train crew and passengers at last had contact with both Fargo and Fort Abraham Lincoln. As a result, Colonel Tom Custer came after them in a mule-drawn sleigh.

But who was her unnamed telegrapher?

Custer gives a clue in a letter written to Mrs. Custer from the mouth of the Tongue River on June 17, 1876. In it he referred to the accident at the mouth of Powder River when the mail sack was lost, including an article he had written for *Galaxy*. He said the *Galaxy* article "was recognized by a young newspaper reporter and telegraph operator who came up on the train with us from St. Paul, and he took special pains in drying it."⁵

⁵*Ibid.*, 310.

Kellogg was the only newspaper reporter on the expedition, and also was identified with the Powder River incident. He told of the accident in his dispatches, and one secondary version says he helped Captain Grant Marsh of the *Far West* fish the mail sack from the river and dry its contents.⁶

Although neither General or Mrs. Custer mentioned Kellogg by name, the files of the *Bismarck Tribune* indicate clearly that Kellogg was on the train, for he reached Bismarck the same day as the train, Monday, March 20, 1876, a week to the day after the Custers arrived.

The *Tribune* reported the arrival of Kellogg and the train separately, saying of Kellogg: "Mark Kellogg, the well-known newspaper correspondent, returned to Bismarck on Monday enroute for the Black Hills. Mark is looking better and feeling better this spring than for years before. He goes to the Hills with Dodge's party which will leave as soon as the snow disappears."⁷

The *Tribune* did not devote a whole story to the snow-blocked train and the adventures of its passengers, probably because that was the sort of local story everyone knew about before a weekly newspaper could come out.⁸ Nevertheless, there were enough references to connect it directly with the incident reported in Mrs. Custer's book.

In the preceding issue — of Wednesday, March 15 — the *Tribune* had noted the return of General and Mrs. Custer, and had expected the train to arrive that same Wednesday night. Two other references were made to the "blockaded" and "delayed" train.⁹

But there was much more to the incident than showed on the surface in Mrs. Custer's book. With true Custer swish, she had made it appear that the Custers were all that mattered. Actually, the *Bismarck Tribune* shows, the arrival of the train was of the utmost importance to Bismarck economically.

And there were other important passengers on the train, too — Lounsberry, publisher of the *Tribune*, Mayor John A. McLean, and J. W. Watson. They had just returned from a six-week trip each in an effort to strengthen Bismarck's position in its bid for the burgeoning trade into the Black Hills gold region, into which the gold rush was just beginning. The return of the Lounsberry party was given precedence over the Custers, being reported at the top of the first column on page one, immediately above the story reporting the return of the Custers.¹⁰

On an inside page appeared the notation that three lieutenants still were on the "blockaded" train with detachments for Custer's forth-

⁶*New York Herald*, June 27, July 11, 1876; Frederic Van de Water, *Glory Hunter. A Life of General Custer* (Indianapolis, 1934), 311.

⁷*Bismarck Tribune*, Mar. 22, 1876.

⁸This characteristic has been observed elsewhere in the history of American journalism, especially in the colonial press.

⁹*Bismarck Tribune*, Mar. 15, Mar. 22, 1876

¹⁰*Ibid.*, Mar. 15, 1876.

coming expedition against the Sioux, with this comment: "Gen. Custer, the Bismarck delegation and others came in on an express, and a number of others on foot."¹¹

But of the greatest importance was the content of the freight cars. One would never know it from Mrs. Custer's account, but those cars were loaded with merchandise for Bismarck merchants hoping to profit from the Black Hills. The *Tribune* said: "After the arrival of the train to-night Bismarck can furnish everything needed for Black Hills outfits, reports to the contrary notwithstanding. Bismarck merchants knowing that they are seventy miles nearer the gold region than any other railroad town, have laid in supplies accordingly, and if a full line of goods and low prices will bring the Black Hills trade to the Missouri river, then Bismarck will get that trade."¹²

After the train arrived on the Monday of the following week, the *Tribune* said: "The delayed train arrived Monday morning, and the several stores are now literally packed and jammed with goods, and Bismarck merchants are now prepared to furnish everything needed in the way of Black Hills supplies, miners outfits, &c."¹³

Following up, the *Tribune* reported the next week: "The trade at our leading stores has averaged a thousand dollars a day during the past week."¹⁴

Something of what the arrival of new merchandise in the spring meant can be seen from a later advertisement of James Douglas & Co., doing business at Main and 3d. A display advertisement began: "Ho! Black Hillers, Ho!" It then shouted that the store had 25 dozen gold pans, 10 dozen spring point shovels, 10 dozen axes and helves, 50 dozen tin plates, 25 dozen tin cups, picks, pick-handles, camp kettles, bake ovens, dirks, butcher and hunting knives, then in stock and in transit.¹⁵

In the weeks succeeding the arrival of the train, the *Tribune* recorded the departure of several parties for the Black Hills, including one led by the frontier character, California Joe, who had been known to his mother as Moses Embree Milner, and another by J. C. Dodge. Kellogg had been supposed to accompany the Dodge party, but his was not among the few names listed when the party left on March 28.¹⁶ Dodge, incidentally, was murdered in the Black Hills on that trip, and the blame laid to Indians, although he was not scalped.¹⁷

The absence of further reference to Kellogg in the paper leaves his later Bismarck activities under a cloud, but at least he was there in

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³*Ibid.*, Mar. 22, 1876.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, Mar. 29, 1876.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, Apr. 19, 1876.

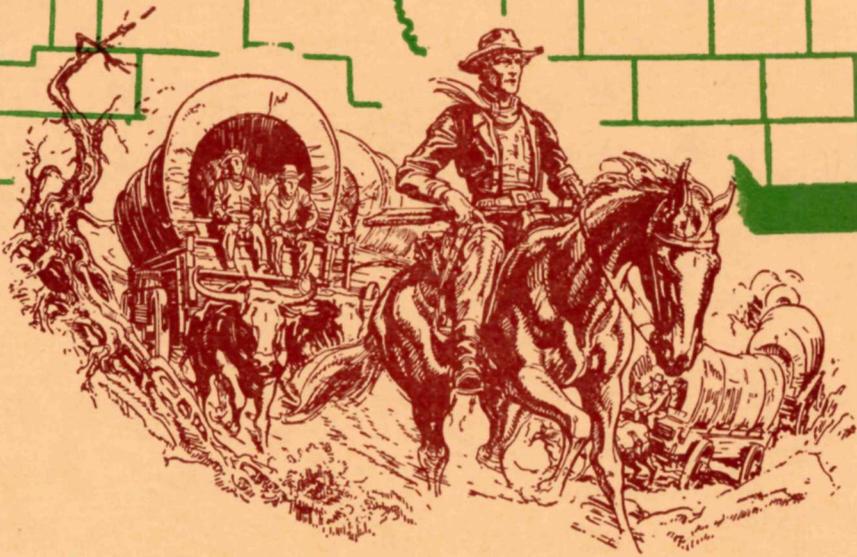
¹⁶*Ibid.*, Mar. 29, 1876.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, May 31, 1876.

mid-May to begin covering the expedition that General Alfred Terry led against the Sioux, with Custer in train for the Little Big Horn.

In conclusion, it can be said that nowhere is there specific identification by name of Kellogg as the telegrapher on the stranded train. Certainly, it is possible that another telegrapher could have been present. But more certainly, the deduction from internal evidence points to Mark Kellogg as the man who sent the telegraphic message that brought a rescue party for George and Elizabeth Custer, held prisoner in the snow waste of a Dakota prairie.

NORTH DAKOTA HISTORY



VOLUME 27

SPRING, 1960

NUMBER 2

Published Quarterly by
THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Bismarck, North Dakota

North Dakota History

Volume 27, No. 2 — Spring, 1960

Printed each January, April, July and October
and sent free to members of the State Historical
Society of North Dakota. Separate numbers may be
purchased at one dollar each from Superintendent
Russell Reid, Bismarck, North Dakota.

Published Quarterly by the
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NORTH DAKOTA
at Bismarck, North Dakota

Second Class Mail Privileges authorized at Bismarck, North Dakota

Membership Dues in the State Historical Society
of North Dakota \$3.00 a Year

Microfilm copies of NORTH DAKOTA HISTORY are available from
University Microfilms, 313 North First Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Copyright, 1961
State Historical Society of North Dakota