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Article Summary: David Mears was with General Crook, as transportation manager, during the campaigns against the Sioux from 1874 to 1879. This is a contemporary account of battles with the Indians in 1875-1876 and the subsequent capture and death of Crazy Horse. This was read before the annual meeting of the Nebraska State Historical Society, January 14, 1903.

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CAMPAIGNING AGAINST CRAZY HORSE.

READ BEFORE THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NEBRASKA STATE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY, JANUARY 14, 1903.

BY DAVID T. MEARS,¹ CHADRON, NEBRASKA.

In 1875-76 I was in Washington, D. C. In January I received a letter from General Crook, who was then in command of the Department of the Platte, to report to him at Cheyenne, Wyoming, as soon as possible to organize his transportation for a summer campaign against the Sioux and other Indians who were then on the war-path, killing settlers and committing all kinds of depredations. I landed in Cheyenne in due time and went to work at once. My particular business was to organize pack-trains. Right here is a good place to describe a pack-train. It consists of a lot of medium sized mules on which to carry supplies for the army when we cut loose from the wagon trains. We could then keep up with the command, let the soldiers go when and where they

¹David Young Mears, Chadron, Nebraska, was born in Westmoreland county, Pennsylvania, December 13, 1833, son of John Blair and Martha Young Mears. At the age of fifteen years he went to Pittsburg, and for several years was employed on the steamboats plying the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. In 1856 he went to the Pacific coast, where he engaged in mining and freighting. He later went to Idaho, and thence to Montana, and in 1869 to White Pine, Nevada. Mr. Mears was with General Crook, as transportation manager, during the campaigns against the Indians from 1874 to 1879. - In the spring of 1880 he went to Ft. Niobrara. He was the original settler on the land that now embraces the site of Valentine, county seat of Cherry county, and was one of the commissioners appointed to organize that county. He served as county commissioner there, and as postmaster at Valentine. He later located at Chadron, and became one of the first county commissioners of Dawes county and the first mayor of Chadron. He served subsequently as justice of the peace, police judge, water commissioner, and member of the city council.

would or travel as fast as they wished. The pack-train was right at their heels, with their provisions, blankets, ammunition, tents, or feed for the horses. A pack-train generally consists of about sixty pack and ten riding mules, led by one bell horse. An army horse will do, just so he is gentle and is a good kicker. Mules are very playful, and the horse that kicks, bites, and fights them most is the horse that suits them best. Keep the bell horse in hand, and Indians will get very few mules in case of a stampede.

We had eight such trains as above described when we left Cheyenne for the Bighorn country in Wyoming. besides about one hundred wagons divided into four trains, each train under the supervision of a wagon-master and one assistant.

About the first of March, 1876, we left Cheyenne on our Indian hunt. The weather was very cold nearly all the time we were gone on that trip. We went via Ft. Laramie and Ft. Fetterman. The latter fort was close to where the village of Douglas, Wyoming, now stands. From there we went over to the Dry Fork of Powder river, where we had our first alarm from Indians. We had some beef cattle with the command and every few days had one killed. There were about a dozen left, and as Indians are very fond of beef they will run some chances to get the cattle. One night they shot the herder, ran off all our beef cattle, and we never saw any of them since. Our scouts from here were sent out in advance to locate the Indian village. They were to meet the command at the crossing of the Crazy Woman's fork of the Powder river. The scouts returned and reported that they had seen signs of Indians, and after a needed short rest were again sent ahead to locate, if possible, their village. After a few days the scouts returned with what they called good news. They had located a village of about sixty tepees. For two days we had orders not to shoot under any circumstances, nor to make any undue noise, as we had to make a sneak to surprise the Indians. The night before we jumped the Indians was one of the coldest nights I had ever experienced. We left

camp about two o'clock in the morning of March 17, and opened the campaign on St. Patrick's day. Several companies rode through the village, shooting right and left and stampeded the Indians, who soon rallied, returned, and bravely defended their families. A great many people have an idea that Indians are not brave, that they will only sneak on the enemy; but let such be undeceived. Indians will average with white men in bravery. I noticed on this trip that when the troops were surprised in camp, as occurred several times during the summer, they would try to dodge every bullet that came. After the fight in the early morning several soldiers were found killed. How the Indians suffered in killed and wounded we never knew, as the troops never went back to the battlefield, but left their dead in the hands of the Indians.

General Crook decided to return to Cheyenne to reorganize for a summer campaign against the same Indians. We were in rendezvous camp near Cheyenne several weeks and made a start for the Bighorn country well equipped for a summer campaign. We took the same route we had taken before, and arrived by easy marches at old Ft. Reno, Wyoming. The scouts had been sent out a few days previously and soon brought in news that Indians were plenty but they could not locate their camp. We broke camp and moved farther west and located camp on Tongue river. We had not been in camp long when the Indians surprised us by firing into camp. The next day we packed the wagons, mounted the infantry on pack mules, and with four days' rations we left camp for Rosebud, as the scouts had located the Indian camp on that stream. The second day from camp we found the carcasses of several buffalo which had been very recently killed by the Indians. Although it was not more than nine o'clock A.M., General Crook decided to go into camp until the Indian village was definitely located. But the Indians were on the lookout for us, and had come about six miles to attack us, which they did before we got into camp. They were in front, rear, flanks, and on every hilltop, far and near. I had been in several Indian battles, but never saw so many Indians at

one time before, at least not when they were on the war-path. We had about six hundred men, having left about three hundred to guard the wagon train. We also had eighty Shoshones, eighty Crows, and fifty Pawnees as allies. They made good scouts and did good work. They all acted very brave, each tribe vying with the others to outdo in acts of bravery.

I had a very close call myself at this Rosebud fight. We were half a mile from the creek and needed water badly, especially in the hospital. I started with several canteens, went on foot, and kept well out of sight, going down a ravine. There was a Shoshone Indian who had left his saddle at the creek when the fight started and was going after it. We kept together for several hundred yards. He then left me and went alone for his saddle, as I could strike the creek in a nearer way. The first thing we knew the Sioux had us cut off from the command. There were eight or ten of them who opened fire on us. I got behind a bank and stood them off until some of the troops came toward me and drove the Indians away, but they got my Indian friend. When I saw that the Sioux had him going ahead of them, I knew he would not last long. He turned around and fired at the Sioux, and when they found his gun empty a couple of Sioux ran up so close on him that he had no time to load his gun. The Shoshone jumped off his pony and sprang over a bank of the creek. A Sioux who was at his heels lit upon him and stabbed him in the back with a butcher knife, leaving the knife in the Shoshone's back. After the day's battle I went directly to find my Indian and found him lying on his face, dead, with the knife through his heart. I pulled it out and returned it to its scabbard which was lying in the ground where the Sioux Indian had left it in his hurry to save his own scalp. He did not even scalp the Shoshone, which proves what a great hurry he was in.

The Rosebud battle lasted from about nine o'clock in the morning until near sundown, when the Indians withdrew and were soon out of sight. The battle was fought on the 17th day of June, 1876. The Indians had gained their point, which

was to hold us there until they could get their camp moved about forty miles from the Rosebud, and go into camp again on the Little Bighorn, where eight days after General Custer met them and was utterly defeated by them. We had ten men killed and several badly wounded in this fight. The Indians suffered a good deal as we afterwards learned. General Crook returned with his command to the wagon train, and went into camp on Goose creek to await orders from General Sheridan. We were in camp a long time without hearing from the outside world. The Indians were very brave, thinking they had got the best of it at the Rosebud, and I guess they had as much to crow over as anybody. They would often fire into our camp. At last, about the 4th of July, a courier came from Ft. Fetterman with the news of the Custer massacre, which had been known all over Europe eight or nine days before we heard of it, although we were within sixty miles of where it occurred. General Crook had tried to get in communication with General Terry who was in command of the Department of Dakota, but the scouts always returned with the cry of "too many Indians" between the commands. We were in camp until troops arrived from all points that could spare a corporal's guard, when we broke camp and relieved the monotony by marching through the Indian country with two thousand men and ten days' rations. We went where we wished with a command so large, though the Indians still had the best of it numerically and their knowledge of the country gave them a chance to run or fight. We soon made a junction with General Terry on the Yellowstone river, but the Indians had scattered and we were not molested much by them.

We left General Terry and started for the Black Hills, thinking to come across some Indians. They had divided up into small bands which would give them a better chance to depredate against the settlers in the vicinity of Deadwood. General Crook scoured the country all he could, but as the rainy season had set in it was very difficult to do much scouting. The next twelve days was one of the hardest marches

United States troops ever made. We came down to horse meat for rations, and that so poor, there was not fat enough on a dozen horses to season the gruel for a sick grasshopper. The horses were not killed until they gave out and could go no farther. With the last meal of beans we had in the pack-train I concluded to have quite a blow-out and invite the General to breakfast. Next morning our cook got all the beans he could get together for one grand mess. He cooked them in the evening, and some soldiers came around camp and offered him \$20 for the beans. The cook told me of the offer. I told him not to sell for any money, as I had invited General Crook and staff to breakfast. Well, the next morning the beans were all gone—stolen. The cook swore he did not sell them, neither did he eat them, but I will always think that cook got what he could eat and sold the balance.

It rained every day. The horses were giving out, soldiers walking through mud. In the evening when we went into camp there was not a thing to eat but meat from poor horses, ten or fifteen of which were killed each evening and eaten with no seasoning whatever.

Seventy-five miles from Deadwood we surprised a large band of Indians, about forty tepees, American Horse's band. We kept out of sight until daybreak, when we made the attack. Several were killed on both sides and a great many soldiers wounded. American Horse soon had runners out to other Indian camps. Crazy Horse was soon on hand with all his force and made it very interesting for us for six hours. After this battle, called "Slim Buttes," we fared a little better for something to eat. We had buffalo meat, and besides the Indian ponies were fat and we had plenty of them. I really thought that horse meat was good and wondered why we did not eat more horse at home. We could not follow the Indians on account of lack of rations, and the only thing that I could hope for was, that the man who stole the beans was killed. We arrived at Deadwood and were met by the citizens of that place with open arms and a generous hospitality that only those big-hearted miners know how to give. From there

the command came to Ft. Robinson, Nebraska, where a great many Indians had come in to give themselves up. We found them to be, generally, women and children and old and decrepit men with no guns. This was just what the fighting Indians wanted—to get rid of those non-combatants who were only an encumbrance to them. Let the Government feed the squaws while the bucks fought the troops.

General Crook was not satisfied with the surrender, and decided to make a winter campaign against Mr. Crazy Horse. We started again from Ft. Robinson and Ft. Laramie in November, 1876, with a large command which required an extra amount of transportation to carry supplies. We arrived at Crazy Woman's creek and went into camp, having seen no Indians, but the scouts had been busy and had located a large village in the Bighorn mountains on the headwaters of the creek we were then camped on. Here again is where the pack-trains came into play. We cut loose from the wagon train and proceeded up the creek where it would be impossible for wagons to go. It began to get cold. After a march of twenty miles we laid in camp all day expecting to make a night march. We dared not build a fire as the Indians would see our smoke. Cold? well I should say "Yes." Our spread for dinner was frozen beans, frozen bread, with snow balls and pepper on the side; supper the same, less the beans. We began to think that the government was treating us rather cool. Horse meat would have been a Delmonico dinner. The scouts came into camp in the evening and reported the Indian camp, supposed to be that of Crazy Horse, Standing Elk, and Young American Horse. We made the attack at daybreak and completely surprised the Indians, who soon rallied and came very near turning the tables on us, when eighty packers left their mules in the rear of the command and joined in the fight and soon had the Indians on the retreat. We looted the village and burned everything we could not take away. This was the most telling battle against the Sioux that was fought during that 1876 campaign. It had more to do to make them surrender than all the other fights. We found that Crazy

Horse was not in that fight, but was camped on Powder river. Had he been there with all his determined braves the battle might have had a different termination. He was so disgusted with that camp for retreating and giving up everything that he would hardly let the starving, freezing Indians come into his camp. His action in this case had its effect on him at his final surrender. General Crook made up his mind to try to strike Crazy Horse if possible before he left the country, but the cavalry horses and wagon mules were getting poor, the snow so deep, and the weather so terribly cold that it was beginning to tell on the men, and he concluded to give up the chase. We made a detour of a few days' march on the Powder river and headwater of the Bellefourche and Cheyenne river which brought us to Pumpkin Butte, where we camped on Christmas Eve, just twenty-six years ago this day, and a colder day and night I never slept out of doors. Several mules froze stiff and fell over during the night. So on the 25th of December we left Pumpkin Buttes and Crazy Horse behind and started for Cheyenne, which caused a general rejoicing among men and mules. The backbone of the Indian war was broken, but the main vertebra was still defiant, viz., Crazy Horse.

The next summer General Crook started again. He sent troops in all directions to bring in all Indians that had not previously surrendered. They had been coming in during the winter to Chief Red Cloud's camp which was then situated near Ft. Robinson, Nebraska. General Crook went personally to Ft. Robinson to superintend the surrender as they arrived. They were coming and going all the time, and he intended to put a stop to that. So he issued an order that no Indian should leave the agency without his permission. That made the Indians "heap mad," and they concocted a scheme to kill him. They were to call a council to talk with him about the surrender, when some one was to shoot him and have a general fight. An Indian, whom General Crook had befriended at some time, told Crook all about the plan. When the time came for the talk the General had the whole place

surrounded with troops. When the Indians saw such an array of soldiers they thought better of the plan, and the assassination did not take place. The Indians appeared to be undecided what to do, whether to go out again on the war-path or to surrender.

Crazy Horse was still out and had runners going back and forth all the time. They kept him posted about affairs at the agency. General Crook concluded to disarm the Indians and set a time for them to appear and give up their arms. When the time arrived three-fourths of the Indians started out again on the war-path. They went about twenty-five miles and entrenched themselves on Chadron creek, just four miles from where I am now writing. The General had "boots and saddles" sounded, and a large body of troops took along with them a couple of mountain howitzers and a Gatling gun. When they arrived within gunshot, no shot having been fired as yet, the commanding officer called to the Indians under a flag of truce and told them he would just give them five minutes to surrender. When the five minutes were up he let go his cannon and the flag went up instanter. They were taken back to the agency, where they were all disarmed. Crazy Horse was on his way to the agency, the General having sent friendly Indians out to meet him. His marches were very slow as his ponies were very poor, the squaws and children worn out, cold, and hungry. When within twenty miles of the agency he stubbornly refused to go further, but the General sent him word by other Indians that he would bring him in if he had to call all the troops in the United States. He sent some of his aids-de-camp with plenty of provisions and wagons to haul the women and children. After a long talk and being assured he would not be hurt he reluctantly agreed to come in. There was a general rejoicing among the Indians when he agreed to come in, and he was met by nearly all the Indians at the agency. It was an imposing sight to see all those Indians, several thousand in all, headed by Crazy Horse himself, who was riding beside Lieutenant Clark of Crook's staff. He was escorted directly to General Crook,

who shook hands with the chief and directed that he should be made comfortable as well as all his people. The next day was set to disarm Crazy Horse's band. They had come into the fort, and the agency was located a short distance away. In the morning Crazy Horse, personally, was not at the fort, but was said to be at the agency, where he was found by the Indian police that had been sent after him. But he refused to return to the fort with them; the police so reported on their return to the fort. General Crook sent the police back—those police were all Indians—to take an ambulance with them and bring Crazy Horse to the fort. We all expected it would bring on a big fight as the Indian police were very determined, but they brought him in without much of a demonstration from the other Indians. He was put in the guard-house, where there was the usual guard, and as a precaution several Indians were detailed as extra guards. Crazy Horse was very sullen and morose. All of a sudden he jumped up, brandishing a large knife, and made for the door. An Indian jumped on his back and pinioned his arms. The soldier guard sprang forward with his gun at a charge. Crazy Horse was seen to fall. When the excitement was over Crazy Horse was dead, having been pierced through the body with either a knife or the bayonet of the soldier. Thus died one of the greatest Indian war chiefs that ever fought a battle with the white men.
