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Article Summary: In campaigning against the Indians of the Plains, Custer and his frontier cavalry could fight but was anchored to his ration supply: the pack train. There were "professional" pack trains at this time, but the cavalry did not use them, instead employing its own soldiers to pack, operate, and guard the train. The inefficient pack train was not a determining factor in Custer's defeat, but it did drain off fighting men and contribute to the scattering of the regiment.

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Photographs / Images: Custer's wagon train winding through Castle Creek Valley in Black Hills of South Dakota; Mules transporting barrels of flour; mules transporting the sick and wounded; portrait General Custer; Supper in Crook's camp on French Creek fall 1876



Custer's wagon train winding through Castle Creek Valley in Black Hills of South Dakota.

THE PACK TRAIN ON GEORGE A. CUSTER'S LAST CAMPAIGN

By John S. Gray

In campaigning against the Indians of the Plains, the frontier cavalry faced continual frustration. It could fight but scarcely move, while its foe could do both.

The Indian was born to live off the land, but the trooper was anchored to his ration supply. The warrior boasted many ponies capable of subsisting on cottonwood bark, while the cavalryman nursed a single, grain-dependent horse throughout an entire campaign. An Indian village could easily cover thirty miles a day and a good deal more if pushed. But even the best-managed supply train could hardly expect to maintain twenty miles a day.

Even rough calculations expose the magnitude and drag of the problem of supporting a cavalry regiment in the field. It required rations for the men, forage for the horses, and ammunition for weapons. It needed even more, but for the moment we may neglect such other essentials as shelter, digging tools, farrier instruments and supplies, and medical stores.

The twelve-company cavalry regiment of 1876 was authorized at three officers and seventy-two men per company, with field staff and band in addition. Though the aggregate might reach 840, regiments were rarely at full strength and never so in the field. We may adopt a round number of 750 men and the same for horses, although officers were permitted more than one mount.

Daily field rations consisted of one pound of hardtack, three-fourths of a pound of bacon, one-sixth pound of beans, and one-fourth pound of sugar and coffee. As packed for

transportation, they weighed 2.73 pounds on the scales, to say nothing of the stomach.¹ On a long campaign scurvy became inevitable.

The heaviest drag stemmed from the horses. Full daily forage for one horse amounted to twelve pounds of grain, or fourteen of hay.² Ammunition for the Springfield carbine consisted of the light-charge, metallic cartridge of caliber .45, packed twenty to a paper carton and fifty cartons to a wooden box, making a gross weight of 105 pounds for 1,000 rounds.³

When such a regiment embarked on a summer campaign, fully rationed and foraged for thirty days and carrying 200 rounds of spare ammunition per man, even these incomplete supplies came to 175 tons! Without considering similar support for teamsters and draft animals, they required a train of forty-three freight wagons, each loaded with four tons.

This example should make it clear why large supply depots had to be established in the field; why steamboat transportation was called upon whenever possible; why the daily marches were restricted to leave time for grazing as a substitute for part of the forage; and why the column often trailed a beef herd to furnish rations-on-the-hoof. Yet all this may have accomplished no more than to deliver the regiment to the theater of operations.

Once there, it became necessary to conduct seek-and-destroy missions. Even when these were launched from a well-stocked field depot, supply problems still plagued the cavalry. If support was limited to what the trooper could carry on his person, rations were reduced and forage eliminated. Half-rationed men could outlast unforaged horses bearing a heavily-equipped rider in hard marching. Short marches and long grazing periods could extend the duration of the mission, but not the distance covered, and hopelessly retarded speed. Such a foray, necessarily brief and self-punishing, had to be followed by rest and recuperation at the field depot, especially for the animals.

It should come as no surprise that field operations entailed more idleness than action, and that the consumption of horses sometimes reached phenomenal proportions. Nor is it any wonder that Indian villages, to say nothing of war parties, proved exasperatingly elusive.

A more rapid means of transporting supplies was a military imperative. The frontiersman had long since found an answer in the humble pack mule, but the army was slow to adopt this

proven means. Not until after the Civil War did General George Crook, "the father of the military pack train," develop and perfect its use on the Pacific coast. He made highly effective use of it in the ensuing campaigns in Arizona and Wyoming, but other officers, finding his system too expensive and technical, continued to rely on amateur trains that fell far short of requirements.

What were the features of a professional pack train such as Crook developed? The chief pack-master organized his train into self-sufficient units composed of a pack-master, a cargador (assistant pack-master), ten packers, a blacksmith, a cook, and fifty pack mules. The quartermaster employed civilian experts for these crews, but the pack-master drilled and disciplined them. Having carefully selected the mules, the crew trained them to the packing routine and to travel at special gaits most conducive to the stability of their loads. They also trained them to follow a bell-horse on the trail, and to graze, unpicketed, within earshot of the hobbled bell-horse. This was especially important, for it enabled the mules to remain fit on grazing alone. In order to prevent saddle-sores, the packers skillfully fitted the professional, heavy-duty pack saddle, known as the *aparejo*, and shunned the primitive cross-tree saddle, known as the *sawbuck*. Once formed and drilled, such a team could not be disbanded and reassembled at convenience, but had to be retained in regular service.

On campaign such a professional train neither asked nor needed any assistance from the troops it served, and man for man it could defend itself as well. On the march a packer rode his own mule beside each fifth pack mule, alert to any difficulty and ready instantly to correct it. With such management, the mules could carry a standard load of 250 pounds at five miles an hour for twenty-five miles a day. They could maintain this indefinitely, *without carrying any forage for themselves*. On forced marches or over rugged terrain, a reduction in load to 200 pounds enabled them to maintain this performance. In any long haul the train could run a cavalry column to exhaustion.⁴

To wage the major Sioux war of 1876, three separate columns moved into the theater of operations—General Crook's Wyoming column, General John Gibbon's Montana column, and General Alfred H. Terry's Dakota column, which included General George A. Custer and the 7th Cavalry. Each column

established supply depots in the field, Terry alone having the opportunity to deliver stores by steamboat as well as wagon.⁵ When it came to seek-and-destroy operations, all resorted to pack trains, but Crook's were as professional as the others were amateur.

The first witness to this fact is Lieutenant John G. Bourke, Crook's military aide, who first watched Terry's train on the Rosebud, August 10, 1876. The sight inspired him to write:

The pack train, made up, as it necessarily was, of animals taken out of the traces of the heavy wagons, was the saddest burlesque in that direction which it has been my lot to witness. . . . One could see the pack train, a string of mules of all sizes, each led by one soldier and beaten and driven along by another—attendants often rivaling animals in dumbness—and it was hard to suppress a smile, except by the reflection that this was the motive power of a column supposed to be in pursuit of savages. On the first day's march after meeting Crook, Terry's pack train dropped, lost, or damaged more stores than Crook's command had spoiled from the same causes from the time when the campaign commenced.⁶

General Gibbon, although one of the butts of Bourke's ridicule, made the same invidious comparison:

Our only means of transporting supplies were the mules taken from the teams, and unbroken to packs, unsuitable pack saddles, and inexperienced soldiers as packers. These latter soon learned to do their part tolerably well, but at the expense of the poor animals, whose festering sores after a few days' marching appealed not only to feelings of humanity, but demonstrated the false economy of the course pursued. . . . The contrast between the mobility of our force and that of General Crook's well-organized pack train, with trained mules and its corps of competent packers, moved almost independently of the column of troops, and as fast as they could move. His ranks were not depleted by drafts to take charge of the packs and animals, for each mule faithfully followed the sound of the leader's bell and needed no other guides, and his pack mules were neither worn out nor torn to pieces by bad saddles and worse packing.⁷

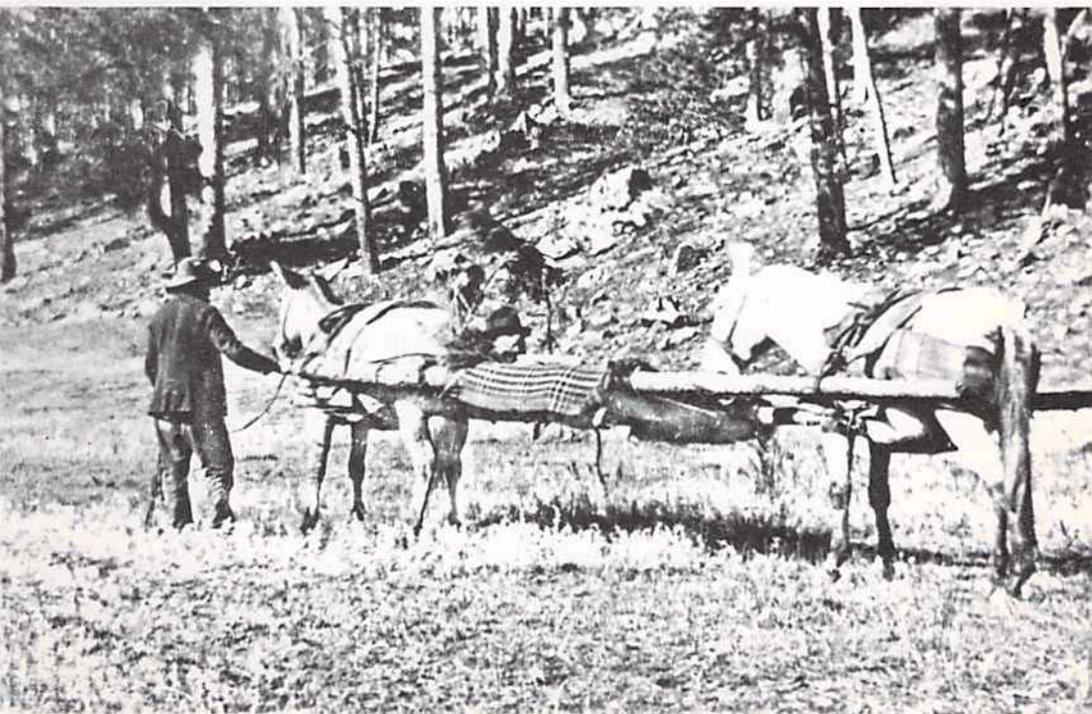
General Terry himself revealed why his department made such a poor showing. He admitted that "no train of pack-mules has ever been organized in this department, and the marching columns were necessarily dependent on wagons. . . . There were, however, carried in wagons about 250 pack-saddles to be placed on the mules of the train in an emergency."⁸ These saddles were nearly all primitive sawbucks, and expedition correspondent Mark H. Kellogg reported that the column started out with only ninety-five pack animals,⁹ revealing the intention to call on draft teams.

When the foreseeable "emergency" came, Terry had to draft novice packers from the fighting ranks of his command, for his hired pack-master, John C. Wagoner, was provided with only



Mules were used to transport barrels of flour.

Mules were also used to transport the sick and wounded.



nine assistants: Moses Flint, John Frett, Frank C. Mann, E. L. Moore, William Alexander, John Lainplough, William Lawless, and H. McBratney. The last four would see little service, although one teamster, Benjamin F. Churchill, was converted to a packer in the field.¹⁰

Even the few pack mules had not been previously trained to their work, for reporter Kellogg wrote on May 17, the day the expedition left Fort Abraham Lincoln:

The incident of today to me has been the antics of Wagoner's pack mules. Some of them are fresh in the work and mule-like, after becoming wearied with their loads, commenced bucking and kicking to rid themselves of it. It would make a stoic show his molars to see "them devilish critters" cut up. However, Wagoner and his assistants brought them to time and in camp in good order.¹¹

When the column camped on the Little Missouri May 30, the pack train received its first trial. Custer took four companies of the 7th Cavalry on a futile, day-long scout twenty-five miles upstream and back. "Each company carried their own rations, and Wagoner, with five mules packed, accompanied the reconnaissance," wrote Kellogg,¹² and Custer added that these mules carried forage.¹³ Four pounds of grain for each of 260 horses would have made 208 pound loads for each of the five mules.

On reaching Powder River June 7, Terry ordered preparations made for a scout upstream by the entire 7th Cavalry, unsupported by wagons. Accordingly, eleven pack mules were issued to each of the twelve companies. Since these totaled 132, some must have come from the draft teams. The result was amateur day at the 7th Cavalry rodeo, as recorded by Lieutenant Edward S. Godfrey in his diary:

Had considerable amusement with the raw mules—one I had two water kegs on—over and away he went, bucking and jumping until he got one off and the other was thrown from one side to the other. Another trial with two sacks of grain and they were torn and he got rid of that load and broke the saddle [a sawbuck?]. I had the aparejo and two boxes of ammunition [put on?] and he succumbed without a struggle.¹⁴

Private Charles Windolph commented on the same colorful scene from the trooper's standpoint:

We started training pack mules and we had a lot of fun doing it. They were the ordinary army wagon mules. We had a few experienced [civilian] packers with us, but I think they must have been pretty disgusted trying to teach us to throw the diamond hitch. The mules were just as green as the men, but both of us learned. We first tried out our mules with sacks of grain and water kegs and we had a lot of fun laughing at the other fellow. Eventually we all learned fairly well, but right up to the big battle itself, we had some trouble with the mules and pack saddles.¹⁵

When Terry returned to this camp from a steamboat conference with General Gibbon and his Montana column, he revised his original plan by ordering Major Marcus A. Reno to take only the six right wing companies and a Gatling gun on a scout up Powder River and back to the mouth of the Tongue, where the main columns would meet him. He had orders to carry by pack train full rations and one-sixth forage for twelve days. According to Godfrey's diary, the six left wing companies turned over four of their eleven mules to make fifteen for each of Reno's companies and a total of ninety for his wing.

Regarding this reconnaissance, Private Peter Thompson wrote:

Each company was provided with a sufficient number of mules to carry the necessary provisions and ammunition. I do not think there were half a dozen men in the scouting party who knew how to pack a mule without having its pack work loose. But fortunately there were five citizen packers along with us who knew the business, and the boys soon learned to lash a pack saddle and load securely.¹⁶

We suspect, but cannot prove, that the five citizen packers referred to were Wagoner, Flint, Moore, Mann, and Churchill.

For this mission the officers and men of the six companies averaged about fifty. Their twelve days' rations and one-sixth forage came to 56.7 pounds per man, or 2,835 pounds per company. One company mule was probably reserved for ammunition, so that the load for the other fourteen mules came to 202 pounds each, appropriate enough for a scout over rough country. If, in addition, we allow two mules for Reno's headquarters, two for medical supplies, and three for the Gatling squad and scouts, we reach a probable total of ninety-seven mules in the pack train.

Leaving on June 10, Reno's reconnaissance covered some 240 miles in ten days. On his return he reported that the mounts were "leg weary and in need of shoes,"¹⁷ but the pack mules, as Godfrey recalled, "were badly used up and promised seriously to embarrass the expedition."¹⁸ Packed by novices using inferior equipment, saddle-sores were inevitable. The animals may also have deteriorated from undergrazing, for being untrained and without bell mares, they had to be close picketed.

Meanwhile the remainder of the Dakota column had proceeded on June 11th down to the mouth of Powder River, where Major Orlando H. Moore's infantry battalion was setting up a supply depot with the aid of the steamboat *Far West*.

Although the wagon train, now nearly empty, trailed behind, the companies took advantage of the opportunity to acquire experience with their remaining seven pack mules. Godfrey, who commanded the rear guard this day, recorded in his diary that "his pack mules were some trouble at first. . . .I got three miles behind waiting for the pack train."

On June 15 Custer led the left wing up to the mouth of Tongue River to rendezvous with Reno's returning half of the regiment. The *Far West* followed with heavy reserve supplies and a pack train carried immediate needs, although no one has mentioned the number of mules or packers. As near as can be determined, John Frett was the sole hired packer, since all the others not already with Reno appear to have been left at the supply depot. We suspect that the mules had been restored to eleven per company, but Terry's own diary reveals that he also ordered an extra twenty-five to be taken along as replacements for any lost in Reno's service.¹⁹ This would make a probable total of ninety-one mules with Custer.

On this two-day march Godfrey's diary again noted that after having "considerable trouble" with the pack animals they were all placed "under charge of Lt. Hare and kept in the rear." This implies that they had previously marched with their companies, but were now gathered in a train under an officer in the rear. How many troopers it took to manage them, however, is nowhere disclosed.

Reno having returned, Custer proceeded with the full regiment up to the mouth of the Rosebud, where Terry outlined his plan of campaign against the hostile village whose trail up the Rosebud Reno's scouts had discovered. The regiment, now reduced by the detachment of over 150 troopers to thirty-one officers and 566 men, drew supplies from the *Far West* and prepared to start up the Rosebud on June 22nd, supported again by pack animals. We must now inquire into the composition of this important train.

The first problem concerns the number and identity of the hired packers who would soon figure in the great battle. Lieutenant Mathey, in charge of this train, testified to four or five; Captain McDougall, in charge of its escort, testified to five or six; John Frett testified to six or seven,²⁰ and Private Thompson recalled there were five or six. We have settled on six, since we can identify this number by name. Pack-master John C.

Wagoner was one, for he received a head wound during the defense of Reno Hill. The quartermaster report names Frank C. Mann as a packer killed in battle on June 25. John Frett and Benjamin F. Churchill testified at the Reno inquiry to their presence. A "local" in the *Bismarck Tribune* (September 13, 1876) welcomed Moses Flint as one of Reno's packers on his return from the field. E. L. Moore has stated that he was a packer during the fight.²¹ Since Frett testified that he had joined the column at Powder River "five [sic] days before the battle," we have suggested that he came up with Custer while the other five had been with Reno.²²

The number of mules in the train have been variously estimated from Lieutenant Hare's testimony of 140 to Major James S. Brisbin's statement of 185, but without always specifying whether the figures referred to the total or only those assigned to companies. Lieutenant Mathey testified to "about 160," but we accept the testimony of packer Churchill, the most knowledgeable witness on such a matter, who gave a total of 175. This figure holds up well, and has already guided our earlier inference that Custer's wing had brought ninety-one to unite with the eighty-four still-serviceable animals from Reno's wing.

Private Windolph and Thompson both recalled that twelve large mules equipped with aparejos were assigned to carry 24,000 rounds of spare ammunition.²³ This is reasonable, for two 1000-round boxes made a balanced load of 210 pounds for each of the twelve animals. A helpful memo made up purely of numbers on the back pages of Terry's diary, must tabulate his estimates of mules required *before* Custer rejected the Gatling battery. It lists nineteen for ammunition, implying that he had assigned seven to carry the heavier Gatling gun ammunition.

Private Windolph further recalled that twelve mules equipped with army pack-saddles, presumably sawbucks, were assigned to each company, thus accounting for another 144 animals. Sergeant John Ryan recollected that there were twelve or fifteen so assigned, but his total of 150 is compatible only with the smaller number.²⁴ Terry's memo proposed 144 for the 564 company enlisted men and twelve for the twenty-five company officers. This implies that a mule shortage erased the officers' luxury, reducing them to sharing with the men. Each company mule thus served 4.1 men.

These company mules were just sufficient to handle the rations

and forage for the company personnel and horses (assuming one horse each). The command was ordered rationed for fifteen days, but Lieutenant Godfrey recalled that they packed only twelve days' of bacon and none of beans, making a somewhat skimpy subsistence and confirming the mule shortage. He added that Custer urged them to take "extra" forage, but the officers protested that this would break down the mules.²⁵ They apparently packed only one-sixth forage (two pounds a day), just as had been permitted Reno's reconnaissance. This is substantiated by Lieutenant Wallace's testimony that they took "no more than a pound or two of grain." On this basis, the sum of rations and forage was 52.4 pounds per man, or 30,864 pounds for the 589 company personnel, making a load of 214 pounds for each of the 144 mules. Since only one "extra" pound of daily forage would have upped the load to an impossible 274 pounds, the officers' objections had been well-founded.

The acceptability of Churchill's total of 175 mules now depends on how reasonably we can account for the remaining nineteen mules. For this purpose Terry's memo is especially helpful. He had allowed four to the headquarters staff of five commissioned and non-commissioned officers (1.25 persons per mule); two to the three medical officers and their medical supplies (1.5 persons per mule); and two to carry necessary tools. Although he had apparently allowed seventeen animals to the fifty scouts, packers and citizens, we have only eleven left. But it is only to be expected that these auxiliaries would share in the animal shortage (4.55 persons per mule).

At high noon of June 22, Terry held a grand review of the 7th Cavalry as it began its fateful march up the Rosebud. None but Lieutenant Godfrey, however, admitted that a flaw marred the ceremonial parade: "Our pack trains proved troublesome at the start, as the cargoes began falling off before we got out of camp, and during all that day the mules straggled badly."²⁶ How many troopers served the circus in the rear has never been disclosed, but if the practice prevailed that Lieutenant Bourke later described, there were twenty-four per company—one to pull and one to push each mule!

Only twelve miles were covered that first afternoon, but as a result of experience, officers no longer rotated on pack train duty; Custer saddled Lieutenant Mathey with the job as a regular duty, with orders to report daily on the efficiency of the various company packers.

When Captain Frederick W. Benteen's company and two others were cited as least efficient, Custer detailed them to the rear guard the next day, with strict orders to remain behind the very last mule. The testy captain obeyed to the letter, although he grumbled that "it took exactly one hour and thirty minutes to get that pack train across the creek and get it started on the other side." He watched morosely as the main column faded into the dusty distance and never glimpsed it again on the day's march of 33 miles.

Having struggled eight miles only to see the mules strung out over a two-mile span, it abruptly dawned on Benteen that one small Indian boy with a snapping blanket could place the entire regiment *hors de combat*. He halted the van of the train until all had closed up, then stationed one company at its head, one on the exposed flanks, and one in the rear. In this more military fashion he finally overtook the main column long since in comfortable bivouac. When he reported to Custer that he had disobeyed orders for the safety of the train, he was disarmed by the appreciative reply, "I am obliged to you, Colonel, and I will turn over the same order of march for the rear guard to the officer who relieves you."²⁷

Much to the relief of the pack details, Custer interrupted the 28-mile march of June 24 with several halts, one of three hours. But then in the black of midnight came orders to resume the trail. The train spent two hours crossing to the west bank of the Rosebud. Captain Keogh, who now had the rear guard, spoke for all when he made "the very air sulphurous with blue oaths," according to Benteen, who added, "I don't believe that Job ever had much to do with shaved tail mules."²⁸ After a slow climb up the divide, the column halted, and Custer later proceeded to the Crow's Nest, where at dawn his scouts had spotted the hostile village in the nearby valley of the lower Little Big Horn.

When evidence poured in that hostile spies had spotted his own force, Custer felt compelled to attack a day earlier than he had planned. The convincing evidence of discovery had come as a legacy from the inept pack train. The packers of Company F had lost a load in the night march, and the next morning when Sergeant William A. Curtis led a detail back to recover it, he found a party of hostiles happily breaking open a box of hardtack. The looters fled at the first volley, and no one doubted that they left on the dead run to alarm the village.



General Custer

Just before surmounting the divide overlooking the valley of the Little Big Horn, Custer paused to make battalion assignments for the coming action. It was already noon and he could only assume that the village, still some fourteen miles distant, had been alerted. He would have to make an exposed approach down the slope as rapidly as prudence would allow. To speed up the pack train he detailed one non-commissioned officer and six men from each company to push their twelve company mules along, as recorded in Godfrey's diary, leaving the remaining animals to the six hired packers, one Indian scout, and four troopers from his headquarters fatigue detail. Lieutenant Mathey retained command, but Custer also selected Captain McDougall's company to furnish an escort.

The amateur pack train thus drained 126 troopers (22 percent) from Custer's fighting ranks. Despite this the train was destined to lag far behind, holding back all the reserve ammunition. Had the Indians known this, they could have destroyed it to make a clean sweep of the regiment. This was the defect of an inefficient pack train, but fortunately such a super-disaster did not materialize.

At twelve minutes past noon, Custer's and Reno's battalions headed down Reno Creek toward the village, while Benteen's battalion diverged a little to the left on orders to examine the

valley from a nearby ridge for signs of Indians fleeing upriver and then hurry to rejoin the others. Twenty minutes later the pack train got into motion. Its advance reached a morass 4.5 miles out just as Benteen's battalion was leaving it. The captain, having spotted no Indians, had returned to Custer's trail, but had paused for fifteen minutes to water his horses at the morass.

Benteen poked along to fall an hour and twenty minutes behind Custer and Reno, thereby absenting himself from the feeble strikes made on the hostile village. The pack train, having spent twenty minutes at the morass, traveled another four miles before Sergeant Daniel Kanipe met it with verbal orders from Custer to make all possible speed. The general had seen that the village was a large one, not fleeing as he had feared, but marshaling some two thousand fired-up warriors for battle. He needed every man and called for the spare ammunition on the double.

Halting for fifteen minutes to allow the strung-out mules to close ranks, the train resumed the trail in better order, but still at little better than a walk. Custer followed his first call for the train by a second written demand carried by Trumpeter John Martin. Since he addressed the note to Benteen, he must have concluded that the latter's unexplained delay meant he had tarried to aid the train—contrary to orders. But Benteen retained the messenger and did nothing about the message. By this time Reno's initial attack with some 129 troopers was turning into a mad scramble for safety to the rear on Reno Hill, and Custer's supporting flank attack with 193 troopers, delayed by terrain, was destined to become his last stand.

Benteen finally joined Reno's remnants on the Hill at 4:20 p.m., but not until a further twenty minutes had passed did they decide to send Lieutenant Hare on a run back to the train to hurry up the ammunition. Packers Churchill and Mann cut out two of these animals and forged ahead to Reno Hill. The rest of the train arrived at about 5:15 to learn that Custer's battalion had vanished somewhere downstream.

In the disorganized search for Custer's missing force, commonly called the Weir advance, Reno brought up the rear. The pack train had scarcely nudged into motion when the advance came storming back to entrench on Reno Hill. Benteen ordered Mathey to return the pack details to their companies to help man the skirmish line. The more than forty soldier-packers

from Custer's companies and the hired packers corraled the train in a slight central depression and threw up packs to form a flimsy breastworks. In the ensuing hot fight that raged until dark, packer Frank C. Mann was killed and pack-master Wagoner was wounded.

After the firing had subsided, two of the packers had a peculiar encounter with Major Reno. The latter testified that he had several times gone to the packs to drive out skulkers, the last time at 9 or 10 p.m. He also admitted that he had a pint of whiskey in his personal effects with the packs. Frett and Churchill both testified that they had gone to the packs at the same time to get blankets and some grub, of which they had not had a bite all day. There they met Reno, who asked if the mules were tight. Frett asked what he meant by "tight"? Such a bit of repartee suggests they had interrupted the major in a surreptitious nip from his flask.

Reno testified that the packer's answer so angered him that he struck him and may have threatened to shoot him if he found him there again. Both packers testified that the major struck Frett and threatened him with a carbine and that when the blow was struck whiskey showered them from an open bottle in the major's hand. So intemperate a reaction convinced them the major was drunk. This seems impossible, if, as Reno claimed, troopers killed the pint two days later while burying the sun-bloated bodies on the Custer field. But his insistence that he had taken but one nip that night, and that one at midnight, leaves us with a vision of his flourishing an open flask for some hours before he could bring himself to sample it! The significance here is not that Reno took a nip, but that he proved so contemptuous of underlings.

At dawn the next morning the Indians attacked with renewed vigor and determination, especially on the southern arc of the skirmish line manned by Benteen's company. The captain commandeered all the loose troopers with the packs to man his lines. It would seem that this was the only organized use made of the men detached from Custer's companies in the defense of Reno Hill. On the line and in the charge that Benteen soon led, these troopers shared in the casualties.

On the afternoon of June 26, the Indians withdrew from the siege and the subdued 7th Cavalry survivors watched the entire village parade in triumph up the river toward the Big Horn



Supper in Crook's camp on French Creek in South Dakota after the arrival of a supply train (September or October, 1876).

Mountains. The next morning their cheers at the sight of a rescue column under Terry and Gibbon quickly turned to dismay on learning that Custer's entire battalion lay stripped on a hill four miles downstream. The Battle of the Big Horn proved a fleeting triumph for the harassed Sioux and Cheyenne, for within a year they were all compelled to surrender or seek temporary refuge in Canada.

The inefficient pack train was clearly no determining factor in the Custer disaster, but it did drain off fighting men and contribute to the scattering of the regiment. Since it also held back the reserve cartridges, it is possible that feared depletion of ammunition speeded Reno's decision to retreat and actual depletion hastened Custer's annihilation.

The lesson was not lost, however. Two years later a new subaltern of the 7th Cavalry, Lieutenant Hugh L. Scott, destined to rise to Army chief of staff, made a bold suggestion to General Philip H. Sheridan that brought the regiment its first

professional pack train. Reminiscing in a nostalgic mood, Scott wrote:

The sound of the pack-train bell means food, shelter, and ammunition to me; without these an officer, even on the verge of victory, must let go and retire to save his men from capture. I fear that the sound of that bell has little meaning nowadays for the men of this age, who listen for the honk of an automobile, which cannot climb mountains where there is no road, as can our long-eared comrade of the plains, the mule.²⁹

NOTES

1. *Revised Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1861* (Philadelphia, 1862).
2. *Ibid.*
3. Major James M. Whittemore and Lieutenant F. Heath, "Ammunition, Fuses, Primers, etc." Ordnance Memorandum No. 21 (Washington, D.C., 1878).
4. H. W. Daly, *Manual of Pack Transportation* (Washington, 1917).
5. All otherwise undocumented details of this campaign are based on extensive primary sources cited: John S. Gray, *Whip Them into Subjection: The Sioux War of 1876* (Fort Collins, Colorado, in press).
6. John G. Bourke, *On the Border with Crook* (New York, 1891), 352.
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22. Unsigned dispatch of June 28, *New York Herald*, July 8, 1876.
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24. "Narrative of John Ryan," in W. A. Graham, *The Custer Myth* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1953), 241.
25. Godfrey, 130.
26. *Ibid.*, 134.
27. "Benteen's (1890) Narrative," in W. A. Graham, *The Custer Myth* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1953), 177-178.
28. *Ibid.*, 179.
29. Hugh Lenox Scott, *Some Memories of a Soldier* (New York, 1928), 91.