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## Article Title: Battlefields as Material Culture: A Case Study from the Great Sioux War

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Article Summary: Whether they are well-known or largely forgotten, the battlefields of the Great Sioux War provide many examples of American military material culture. Most of them are both accessible to the public and intact. Some sites have been relocated after many years by scholars or enthusiasts. An appendix lists twenty-nine encounters of the Great Sioux War, 1876-1877.

### Cataloging Information:

Names: George A Custer, Anson Mills, Charles Morton, Charles King, George Crook, Frank Baldwin, James Griffith, Crazy Horse, Levi H Robinson, Christian Madsen

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Photographs / Images: 1890s view of Custer Hill obelisk erected to commemorate the battle and the reburial of Seventh Cavalry enlisted casualties; Walter Mason Camp (1867-1925); Brig Gen Edward S Godfrey, retired, and Walter Camp search for cartridge cases near Reno's Hill, Custer Battlefield, Montana, 1916; Brig Gen Frank D Baldwin, retired, and former scout Joseph Culbertson: they assisted William Carey Brown in locating Montana's Ash Creek Battlefield; Christian Madsen (Fifth Cavalry) and other celebrities attending the dedication of the Warbonnet Creek Skirmish monument, September 6, 1934; Jesse Wendell Vaughn and Don Rickey explore Rosebud Monument, Montana (mid-1950s); Paul Hedren, John D "Jack" McDermott, and Jerome Greene at the Sibley Scout monument in the Big Horn Mountains, Montana, 1994; map of battlefields discussed in the article

# Battlefields as Material Culture

## A Case Study from the Great Sioux War

By Paul L. Hedren

We are convened today to survey dimensions of the material culture of the Old Army, and my challenge is to explore how Indian wars battlefields, in and of themselves, also have tangible qualities related to this specialized study. Like other dimensions of military history, western battlefields have their own compelling intrinsic and interpretive stories, some hidden and some like the Fetterman and Little Bighorn battlefields intensely studied. Monuments of various shapes and ages commemorate many of the West's combat actions, and most fields have yielded a trove of artifacts. Measured by this collective attention from historians and enthusiasts, by their commemoration, and by discovered and interpreted tangible remains, the material culture of these fields becomes evident, whether disclosed individually, as a component of a larger whole, or massed in the collective geography of the West or the nation.

My focus today will not be a scattergun of western Indian wars battlefields but, rather, some of the major and minor combat fields of the Great Sioux War of 1876 and 1877. To know these scenes of warfare is to trace the handiwork of a small group of individuals who, in my opinion, brought these battlefields to the public's attention. This deliberate look at the battlefields of a two-year-long war stems both from a lifelong personal interest in this compelling saga and from a recent quest to lo-

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*Paul L. Hedren is superintendent of Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, Williston, North Dakota. His Traveler's Guide to the Great Sioux War was published this year by the Montana Historical Society Press.*



The granite obelisk crowning Custer Hill rose in mid-1881 to commemorate the battle and the mass reburial of Seventh Cavalry enlisted casualties. Individual marble markers were placed across the field in 1890 to denote sites of the original interments. These visitors in the 1890s were probably from nearby Fort Custer. Courtesy Jerome A. Greene

cate and chronicle its numerous sites. Certainly in its battlefields and partisans, however, the Great Sioux War has parallels to other Indian wars in the trans-Mississippi West as diverse as the Minnesota Uprising, the Bozeman Trail War, the Modoc and Nez Perce wars, and the Apache wars in the Southwest.

By my tally, the Great Sioux War was contested on twenty-nine different fields in the present-day states of Nebraska, Wyoming, North and South Dakota, and Montana. As well, wartime-era civilian blood was shed at nearly a score of other locations as disparate as Bridger's Ferry on the North Platte River, the Cheyenne-Black Hills road south of and north of Fort Laramie, Indian Creek, Wyoming, and the Belle Fourche River in the Dakota Territory.<sup>1</sup>

In studying the battlefields and related sites of the Great Sioux War, much

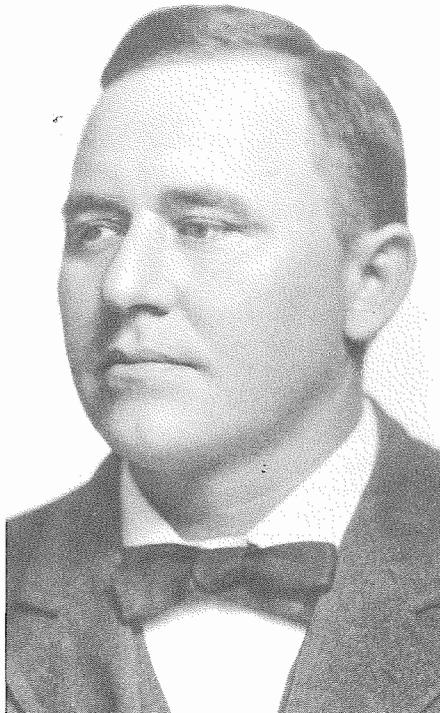
is made of so-called "lost" sites, an expression often used in the field. The term implies that specific geographical knowledge of an event somehow disappeared over time, whether by the loss of human memory or through conscious or unconscious human action. While we can recite the facts of the Lame Deer or Muddy Creek fight occurring on May 7, 1877, for instance, the growth of the modern-day Northern Cheyenne Reservation community of Lame Deer has virtually obliterated that field, and so we fairly accurately say that battlefield is lost. So, too, in the case of the so-called Sibley Scout occurring in mid-July 1876. While an ardent backpacker might today generally follow 2nd Lt. Frederick W. Sibley's flight into the Big Horn Mountains escaping pressing Lakota warriors, the written record of that episode overlaid against the geography of

the mountainscape constitutes an utterly confusing set of variables. Moreover, tangible evidence of Lakota encounters with Sibley is elusive, so, again, one might conclude that this site is lost.

Of all the fields of the Great Sioux War, perhaps the only one never to suffer neglect is the Little Bighorn Battlefield, site of the so-called "Custer's Last Stand." Three days after that devastating battle, Lt. Col. George A. Custer and other casualties of the Seventh Cavalry were buried where they were found. Although the remains of most officers were disinterred and removed to eastern cemeteries a year later, the enlisted casualties are still there. By mid-1877 Lt. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan commenced a well-publicized campaign to establish the Custer Battlefield as a national cemetery to provide perpetual care for those remains and also to memorialize the army's sacrifices during this protracted Indian war. In due course, on August 1, 1879, the headquarters of the army announced the establishment of the Custer Battlefield National Cemetery. Custer Battlefield's storied history turned a page in 1879, and those pages are still being turned.<sup>2</sup>

In large measure, attention received by the Custer Battlefield as it evolved into a national cemetery and army memorial came at the expense of other 1876-77 war sites. It seems that few whites other than a site's most local residents paid any heed to such battlefields as Powder River, Rosebud, or Wolf Mountains. And the more obscure fields like Tongue River Heights, Richard Creek, Red Canyon, and Crow Creek were even more easily and quickly forgotten. "Whites" are noted purposely here because Lakotas and Northern Cheyennes, if given opportunities to travel into war country from their respective reservations, were probably continually familiar with these places of Indian heroism and strife. Modern scholars increasingly understand that Indian societal memories of these battlefields were markedly different.<sup>3</sup>

While others may have been on the Sioux War battlefield trail by the first quarter century anniversary of that protracted saga, no one was more visible in this quest than Walter Mason Camp of Chicago. This railroad construction engineer spent most of his adult life trailing western Indian wars battlefields, and he was both a skilled searcher and a persistent researcher who obtained hun-



**Walter Mason Camp (1867-1925).**  
Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University

dreds of white and Indian participant accounts of warfare on the Plains. By his own tally, Camp visited eleven Great Sioux War sites, including nine major battlefields and also the Fort Pease site and what he called the Sibley Scout site.<sup>4</sup>

The chronicle of one of Camp's quests, his searches in 1914 and in 1917 for the Slim Buttes Battlefield, is both an insightful narrative of discovery and also a good accounting of his manner of searching. In 1914 Camp traveled with Anson Mills and Charles Morton, both

aged veterans of the battle, to the Slim Buttes in northwestern South Dakota. After a concerted search, the adventurers got close to the battlefield, but the veterans in 1914 could not verify the location, nor did they discover tangible evidence of the fight.

Armed in 1917 with additional data from other veterans, including a precise map drawn by Charles King, one of Brig. Gen. George Crook's engineering officers during the 1876 campaign, Camp resumed his search. Mills had insisted that the battlefield, whenever found, would yield broken utensils from the Indian village site, empty cartridge cases, and defensive entrenchments dug by the troops. After resurveying the ground explored in 1914, Camp learned from a local rancher of cartridge cases found on hilltops at Reva Gap near the northern end of the buttes. Camp soon confirmed this report by finding, as he wrote it, "empty shells lying promiscuously about." Soon the field's landmarks conformed to those depicted on King's map. The location of the Indian campsite was confirmed by the discovery of unmistakable evidence of a destroyed village, including flattened and hacked iron and tinware, broken utensils, and pieces of partially burned tipi poles, all surviving after forty-one years. Even the soldiers' rifle pits were now readily discerned.<sup>5</sup>

At the close of Camp's visit the Slim Buttes artifacts were entrusted to a local rancher for placement in a proposed museum. Ironically, Camp, Mills, and Morton had come within half a mile of the village site in 1914, but, as Morton put it, the surroundings were so commonplace that one would not know he was there until he actually ran "right onto it." As battlefield searchers know well, that is a truism holding for many of these places.<sup>6</sup>

In 1920 Camp was invited to Washington, D.C., to address the annual meeting of the Order of Indian Wars. This fraternity of veteran Indian wars officers gathered annually at Washington's Army and Navy Club for spirited comradeship and

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**Brig. Gen. Edward S. Godfrey, ret. (left), and Walter Camp search for cartridge cases near Reno's Hill, Custer Battlefield, Montana, 1916.** Courtesy Montana Historical Society.

to memorialize the services rendered by America's forces in the Indian campaigns. Surely Camp relished this opportunity because here was his chance to commune with veterans like Frank D. Baldwin, Andrew S. Burt, George F. Chase, Edward S. Godfrey, Charles King, Anson Mills, Julius H. Patzki, Charles F. Roe, and other key participants in the Great Sioux War and the western campaigns. Obtaining firsthand accounts of battles and sites was central to Camp's work, and he availed himself of opportunities of which modern scholars can only dream.<sup>7</sup>

Camp opened his evening address diplomatically. To these old soldiers he confessed that he was but a student of Western history and not one of its makers. But he soon hit stride, recounting in detail his search for and discovery of dozens of Indian war battlefields. All were typically unmarked, he noted, although they usually yielded cartridge cases or other confirming evidence. Camp's travelogue closed with an extensive recounting of the battlefields of the Great Sioux War. Neither Powder River, Rosebud, nor Slim Buttes were marked as yet, he noted, but in these instances government grave markers had been ordered and would be set in 1921. Of them all, the Little Bighorn Battlefield was clearly the most distinguished and best marked, with its prominent granite obelisk atop Custer Ridge and hundreds of marble headstones scattered across

the hillsides. But the Dull Knife, Redwater, Wolf Mountains, and Lame Deer battlefields, while recognized by historians and aging participants, were not yet permanently commemorated.<sup>8</sup>

This concern for monuments was not Camp's innovation. The placement of permanent memorials of one type or another was a product of the Victorian age, when the erection of marble, granite, and bronze monuments was a popular expression of public sentiment. Nowhere on America's battle landscape was this nostalgia more evident than on the Civil War fields of the East. Moreover, imbued with a sense of heroism and righteousness, aged veterans of the North and South routinely gathered on those hallowed grounds to engage in rituals of reconciliation and friendship. Monuments and reunions were national news from the late nineteenth century onward, and the sentiment logically extended to the Indian frontier. Indeed, Camp spurred the movement in the West, but others followed him directly.<sup>9</sup>

From his home in Denver, William Carey Brown was another individual prominent in this initial era of Indian wars battlefield discovery and memorialization. Among sites capturing Brown's attention was one Walter Camp labeled as the Redwater Battlefield and which today we call Ash Creek. As Anson Mills and other veterans had helped Camp locate Slim Buttes, Frank Baldwin, commander of Fifth Infantry

troops at Ash Creek, personally led Brown to that remote site at the divide north of the Yellowstone River at Terry, Montana. Brown later oversaw the placement of a monument on that battlefield.<sup>10</sup>

At nearly the same time several residents of Lusk and Casper, Wyoming, led by oilman Robert S. Ellison, joined forces to locate the place where William F. Cody took his much-celebrated "first scalp for Custer." While not of the combat magnitude of Rosebud or Slim Buttes, the Warbonnet episode was a political coup of considerable import to the army during the 1876 campaign. As well, perhaps Ellison and the others were spurred by a publicity-generating biography of Cody in 1928 that challenged the showman's actions at Warbonnet. Regardless of motive, however, fifty years after that small fight, the Warbonnet Creek site was another of the "lost" fields of the Great Sioux War.<sup>11</sup>

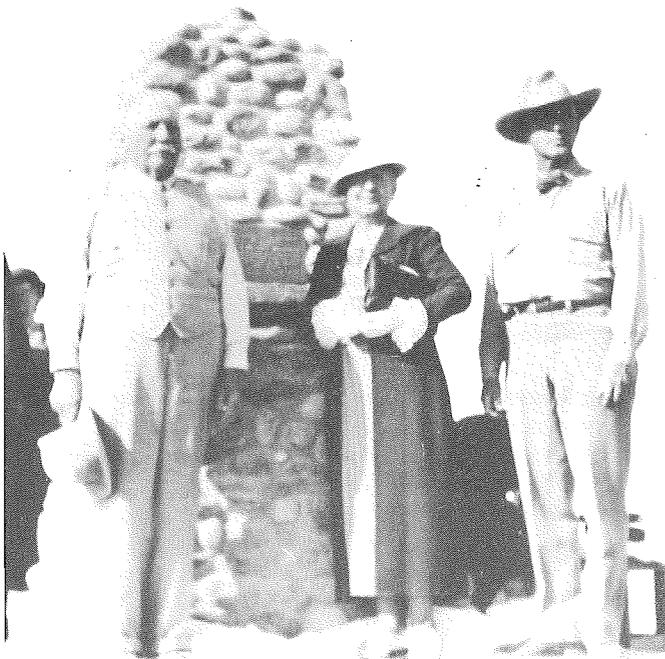
Ellison and his chief partner, James Griffith, quickly sought Brown in Denver, who renewed his contact with Charles King. General King was both a key Warbonnet participant and also that story's chief chronicler, and, as he did for Camp at Slim Buttes, he gave Ellison and Griffith detailed maps that helped outline their search. But Ellison, Griffith, and Brown also persuaded the eighty-five-year-old veteran to visit Lusk and join them on the dusty trail. This was important history to King, and in 1929 and again in 1930 he traveled from his home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to Lusk to assist in the Warbonnet discovery. The skirmish site was confirmed finally in 1930, although Christian Madsen, another Fifth Cavalry veteran, deserved principal credit for its discovery. Of the Warbonnet skirmish site, the "trees were too big," King insisted as he tried to reconcile his memory and the modern landscape. Amid elaborate ceremonies, monuments to the Fifth Cavalry and Cody were erected at Warbonnet in 1934.<sup>12</sup>

The year 1934 was also noteworthy at Fort Robinson, Nebraska. As the relief of



In 1920 Brig. Gen. Frank D. Baldwin, ret. (left), and Joseph Culbertson, a former scout during the Montana campaigns of the 1870s, assisted William Carey Brown in locating Montana's Ash Creek Battlefield. Courtesy Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Among celebrities attending the dedication of the Warbonnet Creek Skirmish monument on September 6, 1934, was Christian Madsen of the Fifth Cavalry (left). A skirmish veteran, Madsen helped verify the site in 1930. NSHS-C671-83



Fort Pease in February 1876 and the Powder River Battle in March had opened the Great Sioux War, the tragic killing of the Oglala chieftain Crazy Horse on the Camp Robinson parade ground on September 5, 1877, signalled war's end. That event was long remembered as a pivotal episode in the White River country, and in 1934 Fort

Robinson commander Maj. Edwin N. Hardy directed the construction of twin pyramid memorials to Crazy Horse and the post's namesake, 1st Lt. Levi H. Robinson. Placed in the yard between post headquarters and Highway 20, the monuments were unveiled in ceremonies held on the fifty-seventh anniversary of Crazy Horse's death. Among a bevy of dignitaries present were aged Lakota warriors, the quartermaster general of the army, and Camp and King cronies James H. Cook of Agate, Nebraska. But the great sleuths were not present, General King having died rather unexpectedly a year earlier, and Camp in 1925. Their era of battlefield discovery and memorialization, aided and sometimes guided by aged combat veterans, was ending.<sup>13</sup>

In 1952 the Colorado attorney Jesse Wendell Vaughn visited the Custer Battlefield for the first time. He spent four days roaming its hills and ravines and like others before and after him became thoroughly spellbound by the engagement and its context. In reading Custer literature Vaughn encountered frequent but vague references to the Rosebud Battle occurring eight days earlier, and on his return to Colorado he determined to sidetrack southeastward

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to that field. The Rosebud setting was captivating, and Vaughn subsequently returned repeatedly, each time armed with new research information and a metal detector. Vaughn found many cartridges on these visits, both empty and loaded, enabling him to precisely locate military and Indian positions across an expansive battlefield. Synthesizing his archival and field research, Vaughn published *With Crook at the Rosebud* in 1956 (Harrisburg, Penn.: Stackpole Company), a book that remains the classic account of the battle.

Where Camp and others had used battlefield debris to verify site locations, Vaughn for the first time used tangible remains to interpret this combat, sometimes augmenting written reports of the action and sometimes providing vital new information. Vaughn next turned his attention to the Powder River Battle of March 17, 1876, which was the first serious engagement of the Great Sioux War. His methodology there mirrored his Rosebud work. After first visiting Powder River in 1957 Vaughn commenced an exhaustive records search chiefly in the National Archives and followed it with repeated visits to the site armed with his metal detector. Vaughn's subsequent construction of the battle, titled *The Reynolds Campaign on Powder River* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), was published in 1961. Like his Rosebud history, this book remains the standard account of that consequential battle.

Vaughn applied his duo archival-metal detector research to several other episodes of the Great Sioux War. In one instance he probed Maj. Marcus A. Reno's valley positions in the Little Bighorn Battle, documenting soundly what before then had been vaguely registered movements. In another project he explored for, found, and interpreted the site of an Indian attack on a Fort Fetterman-bound supply train. While all of Vaughn's works are significant contributions to the historiography of the Great Sioux War, that small wagon train project was unique for its focus on a

theretofore virtually unknown episode of the war, involving civilians and Indians in 1876 and not the army.<sup>14</sup>

The "Heck" Reel wagon train attack occurred August 1 and 2, 1876, on Elkhorn Creek southeast of Fort Fetterman. In a surprise afternoon raid on August 1, wagon boss George Throstle was killed and two other teamsters wounded, and a wagon and its



**Jesse Wendell Vaughn (right) and Don Rickey explore the Rosebud Battlefield, Montana, in the mid-1950s. At mid-century Vaughn was America's premier Plains Indian wars battlefield hunter.** Courtesy American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

contents destroyed. The clash garnered scant attention in Wyoming's newspapers and local army records, yet it was a two-day affair with casualties and property loss, and actually but one clash in what was a sweeping Indian raid across eastern Wyoming. Vaughn was the first scholar to carefully chronicle a lesser action of the Great Sioux War and yet, as scholars appreciate so well today, it is both the major and minor episodes of this very sort that comprise the complex, intriguing fabric of this story.<sup>15</sup>

If the preservation and memorialization of battlefields is truly a dimension of army material culture, then per-

haps the sites of the Great Sioux War have fared better than most. Nearly all of the twenty-nine fields where American Army troops clashed with Lakota and Northern Cheyenne warriors are accessible to modern-day travelers, an exploration greatly aided by a traveler's guide published by the Montana Historical Society Press. Only two of these twenty-nine sites are irretrievably impaired by modern development, those being the Lame Deer or Muddy Creek Battlefield, which is obscured by the modern Lame Deer community, and the Bark Creek Battlefield, which is inundated by the Fort Peck reservoir. One should probably add the Little Bighorn Battlefield to at least an "endangered list," since the encroachments of highways and the sprawl of the Crow Agency are seriously impacting portions of that vast battleground. But in all, eleven of these sites are memorialized by markers or monuments, including six of the ten major battlefields.<sup>16</sup>

Remarkably, the scholarly quest for the battlefields and associated sites of the Great Sioux War is a continuing affair, even in this the fifth quarter century after its close. I am proud to have joined Jerome A. Greene in the discovery in 1988 of the Cedar Creek Battlefield of October 21, 1876. That clash between Col. Nelson A. Miles's Fifth Infantry and Sitting Bull's Hunkpapa Lakotas was among the first in a string of wintertime actions that brought Indian resistance on the northern Plains to a close. But for all its historical importance, the Cedar Creek Battlefield was long among the lost sites of the Great Sioux War.

In certain ways Greene's quest in the 1980s resembled Camp's work of seventy years earlier, although no aged veterans survived to support the effort, nor did local ranchers come forward showing or speaking of scattered artifacts or local museums exhibit caches of relics from bygone discoveries. Greene then was doing preliminary work on his book *Yellowstone Command* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), and was anxious to gain a firmer sense of that

landscape as he shaped his narrative of the Cedar Creek engagement.

At the inauguration of Greene's quest in 1981, descriptions of the fight, several later-day encounters with the site, and historical maps provided clues applicable to landmarks on several different branches of Cedar Creek at its origins north of the Yellowstone River. Visits to the area in the early 1980s were fruitless. In our joint visit in 1987 to what proved eventually to be the site, we sought tangible evidence to confirm our suspicions, but the land remained unyielding. We returned again in 1988 and headed to a gravelly outcropping that conformed to one mentioned in the official reports. We had been there before, Greene several times before. As we scanned about with a certain frustration, agreeing that this "must" be the place, I saw a .45-70 cartridge case of the very sort issued to infantrymen in 1876. As we walked the battlefield that day, other cartridge evidence was observed as well. The Cedar Creek Battlefield had shed its veil at last.<sup>17</sup>

A caution is in order about cartridge cases and other artifacts on these battlefields, since this is the matter of a continuing philosophical and legal debate that is more contentious than ever. Scholars fully understand that the collecting of artifacts as treasure alone baselessly devalues their interpretive potential, and on public lands is outright illegal. But the observation of tangible evidence, coupled with precise documentation and augmenting archival work, all leading to the dissemination of that effort through publication, is work of the most complimentary and vital sort. Camp's and Greene's discoveries provided elemental but first-time Great Sioux War site confirmations. Moreover, Vaughn and Greene used artifacts to interpret battle action, as Greene had already done in a 1973 monograph, *Evidence and the Custer Enigma*, that paired relic dispersements with Indian testimony in a pioneering interpretation of the Little Bighorn fight.<sup>18</sup>

But the traditional material culture

interpretive potential of the Great Sioux War was advanced most dramatically in the recent publications by Douglas D. Scott and Richard A. Fox, Jr. These archeologists were called to the Little Bighorn Battlefield after a sensational prairie fire there in August 1983. The fire denuded most vegetation on the Custer field, exposing an extraordinary array of artifacts lying across the surface. Seizing



**Paul Hedren (left), John D. "Jack" McDermott, and Jerome Greene pose at the Sibley Scout monument in the Big Horn Mountains, Montana, 1994. The granite marker commemorates an episode of the Great Sioux War occurring somewhere nearby.** Courtesy of the author

this opportunity to systematically explore portions of the battlefield and address a host of intriguing research questions, including several having to do with the arms and equipments of the combatants, Scott and Fox commenced a three-year-long archeological field program at Little Bighorn with the endorsement of the National Park Service. Their work eventually netted research and publications unique to scholarship on that fascinating battle.

In all, some 7,500 artifacts were discovered and mapped by Scott and Fox in a project that featured systematic metal detector surveys of both the Custer and Reno-Benteen units of the

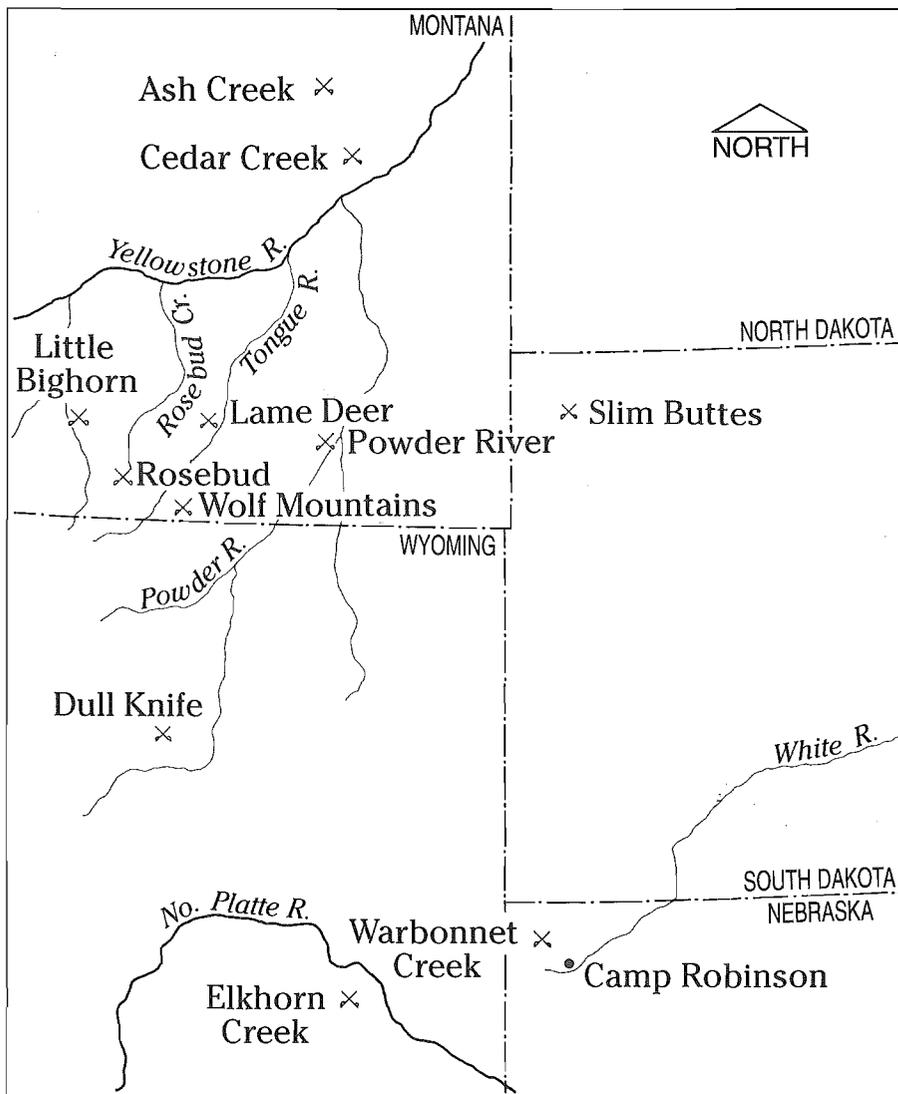
historic site. As well, there were opportunities to excavate methodically at grave marker sites and elsewhere. When the site of the Seventh Cavalry's equipment dump was located near the Reno-Benteen entrenchments, the National Park Service authorized a follow up excavation to explore that intriguing location more precisely.

One need only quickly peruse the four principal publications from this project to know that Little Bighorn scholarship had entered a sensational new realm. The most recent of these works is Richard Fox's *Archaeology, History, and Custer's Last Battle*, which, in the manner of Jerry Greene's *Evidence* monograph, paired artifact disbursements and Indian testimony to fashion a compelling reinterpretation of Custer's final battle. Fox portrays Custer's five cavalry companies as entering that afternoon's engagement in good order but whose cohesiveness disintegrated quickly and unexpectedly in the press of overwhelming, fluid resistance. Death on June 25, Fox writes convincingly, came amid terror and disarray. This is a powerful treatise that demands several readings and which some historians are labeling as the best book yet on the Custer Battle.<sup>19</sup>

Scott's and Fox's collaborations in 1987 and 1989, aided by authorities like Dick Harmon of Lincoln, Nebraska, first reported on the 1984 field season and then synthesized the entire Custer project. Both books were significant advances for our understanding of the Little Bighorn Battlefield, that special landscape in Montana, and, really, for the entire Great Sioux War. Previous to this, scholars were chiefly indebted to James S. Hutchins and John S. duMont who, in respective works on uniforms and equipments used by the Seventh Cavalry in 1876 and on firearms of the Little Bighorn Battle, had given Sioux War enthusiasts pertinent overviews of those matters drawn almost exclusively from documentary evidence.<sup>20</sup>

In a certain way Scott's and Fox's studies provided archeological confir-

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mation for many particulars in the Hutchins and duMont books, but they disclosed much that was new and dramatic as well. These archeologists identified forty-one different types of firearms used at the Little Bighorn, for instance. The 2,220 cartridge cases and bullets unearthed allowed determinations of common weapon types, including fairly dramatic numbers of .44 caliber Henry and .50 caliber Sharps, and revealed that no less than 371 individual firearms were used in the battle, of which some 210 might be considered

Indian weapons. Scott and Fox also identified an array of nonfirearm weapons, and confirmed specific clothing, equipment, and personal gear used by the Seventh Cavalry in this centennial-year campaign. Moreover, excavations at selected grave markers and the repeated discoveries there of human remains allowed the study of burial and reburial practices, analysis of postmortem mutilations, and the confirmation of anthropological variables like nativity, race, age, and stature. And Scott and Fox advanced theories on battlefield

patterning, postulating on what the artifacts say about individual and unit movements in that phenomenal battle.<sup>21</sup>

The fourth major book from this extraordinary project was Doug Scott's report on the equipment dump excavation of 1989. While this undertaking ultimately lacked the drama of the battlefield discoveries preceding it, Scott again advanced our understanding of certain material dimensions of the Great Sioux War. The target in this instance was the postbattle disposal site for weaponry, horse tack, and other debris being rendered useless to the Indians. While that excavation generated fewer firearms-related artifacts than anticipated, it did yield an array of tacks, nails, harness buckles, rivets, and similar gear that at once may be the most mundane, yet also the least understood and documented of the army's material culture. Like other results from the Custer Battlefield project, Scott's analysis was insightful and fully relevant to the other combatants and engagements of the Great Sioux War.<sup>22</sup>

My purpose here has been to explore ways in which Indian wars battlefields, particularly those of the Great Sioux War, are dimensions of American military material culture. In and of themselves, battlefields harken memories of the sometimes heroic, oftentimes tragic combat occurring there. These places can vary in magnitude from great fields and battles like Rosebud, Little Bighorn, and Dull Knife, to quickly forgotten confrontations like the Reel wagon train ambush, the death of a lone forager, or the shooting upon passing steamboats. But regardless of how great or small or anguished the story, these are the real places of Indian wars history and deserve special status in our national consciousness.

Fortunately, most Great Sioux War sites are readily accessible to the public, and nearly all are intact. Several key battlefields are preserved as public historic sites, and many more are on public lands. Eleven sites are memorialized, and of this conflict's major battlefields

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only Spring Creek, Cedar Creek, Wolf Mountains, and Lame Deer lack some form of monumentation. And while professional archeological work has, thus far, been limited to the Custer Battlefield, what has occurred there in the realms of traditional material culture discovery and analysis, and battle and site interpretation is both spectacular and wholly relevant to the greater story.

The material culture of the frontier army necessarily includes uniforms, weapons, mess hall ceramics, barracks, and other tangible remains of a soldier's existence. But the "places" of this history, the battlefields and their monuments, earthen works, and cartridge cases are evidence as well. To our good fortune the pioneering work of such battlefield enthusiasts and scholars as Camp, Ellison, Brown, Vaughn, Greene, Scott, and Fox have secured our awareness of one of the great stories in American military history.

### Appendix

#### Battles and Skirmishes of the Great Sioux War, 1876–1877

date	*denotes major engagement
name	
place	
combatants	
killed in action/wounded in action	
monument?	
<b>1876</b>	
Feb. 22–Mar. 17	
Fort Pease Relief	
Yellowstone River, Mont.	
Second Cav., Seventh Inf. vs. Lakotas	
6/6	
no	
Mar. 5	
Camp Skirmish	
Powder River, Wyo.	
Fourth Inf. vs. Lakotas	
0/1	
no	
Mar. 17	
Powder River Battle*	
Powder River, Mont.	
Second Cav., Third Cav. vs. Northern Cheyennes	
4/6	
yes	
Apr. 28	
Battle of the Blowout	

Grace Creek, Neb.	
Twenty-third Inf. vs. Lakotas	
1/1	
no	
June 9	
Tongue River Heights Skirmish	
Tongue River, Wyo./Mont.	
Second Cav., Third Cav., Fourth Inf.,	
Ninth Inf. vs. Lakotas	
0/1	
no	
June 17	
Rosebud Battle*	
Rosebud Creek, Mont.	
Second Cav., Third Cav., Fourth Inf., Ninth Inf. vs.	
Lakotas	
20/21	
yes	
June 25–26	
Little Bighorn Battle*	
Little Bighorn River, Mont.	
Seventh Cav. vs. Lakotas and Northern Cheyennes	
265/46	
yes	
June 25–26	
Killing of Courier	
Rosebud Creek, Mont.	
Seventh Cav. vs. Lakotas	
1/0	
yes	
July 7	
Sibley Scout	
Big Horn Mountains, Wyo.	
Second Cav. vs. Lakotas	
0/5	
yes	
July 17	
Warbonnet Creek Skirmish	
Warbonnet Creek, Neb.	
Fifth Cav. vs. Northern Cheyennes	
1/1	
yes	
July 29	
Steamer <i>Carroll</i> Skirmish,	
Mouth of Powder River, Mont.	
Twenty-second Inf. vs. Lakotas	
0/1	
no	
Aug. 1	
Red Canyon Skirmish	
Cheyenne River, Dak.	
Fourth Inf. v. Lakotas	
1/0	
no	
Aug. 2	
Powder River Depot Skirmish	
Mouth of Powder River, Mont.	
Sixth Inf., Seventeenth Inf. vs. Lakotas	
2/0	
yes	

Aug. 14	
Steamer <i>Key West</i> Skirmish,	
Yellowstone River, Dak.	
Seventh Inf. and Twenty-second Inf. recruits vs.	
Lakotas	
—	
no	
Aug. 22	
Steamers <i>Yellowstone</i> and <i>Benton</i> Skirmish	
Sixth Inf. vs. Lakotas	
1/0	
no	
Sept. 9–10,	
Slim Buttes Battle*	
Slim Buttes, Dak.	
Second Cav., Third Cav., Fifth Cav., Fourth Inf.,	
Ninth Inf., Fourteenth Inf. vs. Lakotas	
3/13	
yes	
Sept. 14	
Killing of Forager	
Owl Creek, Dak.	
Fifth Cav. vs. Lakotas	
1/0	
no	
Oct. 11	
Wagon Train Skirmish	
Spring Creek, Mont.	
Seventeenth Inf., Twenty-second Inf. vs. Lakotas	
—	
no	
Oct. 14	
Richard Creek Skirmish	
Richard Creek, Wyo.	
Second Cav. vs. Lakotas	
1/0	
no	
Oct. 15	
Wagon Train Skirmish*	
Spring Creek to Clear Creek, Mont.	
Seventeenth Inf., Twenty-second Inf. vs. Lakotas	
1/3	
no	
Oct. 21	
Cedar Creek Battle*	
Cedar Creek, Mont.	
Fifth Inf. vs. Lakotas	
5/0	
no	
Nov. 25–26	
Dull Knife Battle*	
Red Fork, Powder River, Wyo.	
Second Cav., Fourth Cav., Fifth Cav. vs.	
Northern Cheyennes	
31/25	
yes	
Dec. 7	
Bark Creek Skirmish	
Bark Creek, Mont.	
Fifth Inf. vs. Lakotas	
—	
no	

## Battlefields

Dec. 18  
Ash Creek Battle\*  
Ash Creek, Mont.  
Fifth Inf. vs. Lakotas  
—  
yes

**1877**  
Jan. 8  
Wolf Mountains Battle\*  
Tongue River, Mont.  
Fifth Inf., Twenty-second Inf. vs. Lakotas and Northern Cheyennes  
3/8  
no

Jan. 12  
Elkhorn Creek Skirmish  
Elkhorn Creek, Wyo.  
Third Cav. vs. Lakotas  
0/3  
no

Feb. 23  
Crow Creek Skirmish  
Crow Creek, Dak.  
Third Cav. vs. Lakotas  
1/0  
no

May 7  
Lame Deer Battle\*  
Muddy Creek, Mont.  
Second Cav., Fifth Inf., Twenty-second Inf. vs. Lakotas  
18/9  
no

Sept. 5  
Killing of Crazy Horse  
Camp Robinson, Neb.  
—  
1/0  
yes

### Notes

This essay was originally presented at the First Fort Robinson History Conference, "Material Culture of the Frontier Army," at Crawford, Nebraska, April 29, 1995.

<sup>1</sup> The twenty-nine encounters of the Great Sioux War are detailed in the appendix. For an overview of the war, see Paul L. Hedren, "Introduction," *The Great Sioux War, 1876-77: The Best from Montana The Magazine of Western History* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1991), 1-21.

<sup>2</sup> Paul L. Hedren, "Holy Ground: The United States Army Embraces Custer's Battlefield," in *Legacy: The Significance of the Battle of the Little*

*Bighorn, A Contemporary View*, Charles E. Rankin, ed. (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1996), chap. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Jerome A. Greene explored ways in which Lakotas and Northern Cheyennes remembered the Great Sioux War in *Lakota and Cheyenne: Indian Views of the Great Sioux War, 1876-1877* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994); and in "The Uses of Indian Testimony in the Writing of Indian Wars History," *Order of the Indian Wars Journal* 2 (Winter 1981):1-7.

<sup>4</sup> This battlefield tally appears in Kenneth Hammer, ed., *Custer in '76: Walter Camp's Notes on the Custer Fight* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1976), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Walter M. Camp, "Discovery of the Lost Site of the Slim Buttes Battle," reprinted by Jerome A. Greene in *Slim Buttes, 1876: An Episode of the Great Sioux War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 141-43.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-45.

<sup>7</sup> The bylaws and membership rolls of the Order of Indian Wars appear in John M. Carroll, ed., *The Papers of the Order of Indian Wars* (Fort Collins, Colo.: The Old Army Press, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> Walter Camp, "Some of the Indian Battles and Battlefields," reprinted in Hammer, *Custer in '76*, 20-24.

<sup>9</sup> Of this era of memorialization, see Richard West Sellers, "Vigil of Silence: The Civil War Memorials," *History News* 41 (July-Aug., 1986):19-21; and Edward T. Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 89-94.

<sup>10</sup> Brown's battlefield hunting is described by George F. Brimlow, *Cavalryman Out of the West: Life of General William Carey Brown* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1944), chap. 36.

<sup>11</sup> Kathryn Troxel, "Robert Spurrier Ellison—Collector of Western Americana," *The Westerners Brand Book, New York Posse* 2 (1955):77-78; Richard J. Walsh in collaboration with Milton S. Salsbury, *The Making of Buffalo Bill: A Study in Heroics* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1928).

<sup>12</sup> Paul L. Hedren, *First Scalp for Custer: The Skirmish at Warbonnet Creek, Nebraska, July 17, 1876, with a Short History of the Warbonnet Battlefield* (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1980), 88-90; Don Russell, *Campaigning With King: Charles King, Chronicler of the Old Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), xix.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas R. Buecker, "Marking History at Fort Robinson," *Nebraskaland* 73 (Mar. 1995):42-47;

"Souvenir Program, Dedication of Twin Monuments in Honor of Lt. Levi H. Robinson, Crazy Horse, Fort Robinson, Nebraska, September 5, 1934," original in the Fort Robinson Museum, Crawford, Nebraska.

<sup>14</sup> Jesse W. Vaughn, *Indian Fights: New Facts on Seven Encounters* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), chronicled the Rosebud battle in chap. 4, Reno's skirmish lines at the Little Bighorn, chap. 5, and the Reel wagon train burning, chap. 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 6; J. W. Vaughn and L. C. Bishop, *Burning of Heck Reel Wagon Train* (Douglas: Wyoming Pioneer Association, 1958).

<sup>16</sup> These sites and two dozen more are detailed in Paul L. Hedren, *Traveler's Guide to the Great Sioux War: The Battlefields, Forts, and Related Sites of America's Greatest Indian War* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1996).

<sup>17</sup> Jerome A. Greene, *Yellowstone Command: Colonel Nelson A. Miles and the Great Sioux War, 1876-1877* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), xiv, 92-106.

<sup>18</sup> Jerome A. Greene, *Evidence and the Custer Enigma: A Reconstruction of Indian-Military History* (Kansas City: Kansas City Posse of the Westerners, 1973). Greene also applied this methodology to his analysis of the Slim Buttes engagement and other Miles battles of 1876-77. In the instance of the Wolf Mountains fight, his study of maps, sketches, participant accounts, and artifacts led to a major reinterpretation of that battle.

<sup>19</sup> Richard A. Fox, Jr., *Archaeology, History, and Custer's Last Battle: The Little Big Horn Reexamined* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> James S. Hutchins, *Boots & Saddles at the Little Bighorn: Weapons, Dress, Equipment, Horses, and Flags of General Custer's Seventh U.S. Cavalry in 1876* (Fort Collins, Colo.: The Old Army Press, 1976); John S. duMont, *Custer Battle Guns* (Canaan, N.H.: Phoenix Publishing, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> Douglas D. Scott and Richard A. Fox, Jr., *Archaeological Insights into the Custer Battle: An Assessment of the 1984 Field Season* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987); Douglas D. Scott, Richard A. Fox, Jr., et al., *Archaeological Perspectives on the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> Douglas D. Scott, ed., *Papers on Little Bighorn Battlefield Archeology: The Equipment Dump, Marker 7, and the Reno Crossing* (Lincoln: J & L Reprint Company, 1991).