



Nebraska History posts materials online for your personal use. Please remember that the contents of *Nebraska History* are copyrighted by the Nebraska State Historical Society (except for materials credited to other institutions). The NSHS retains its copyrights even to materials it posts on the web.

For permission to re-use materials or for photo ordering information, please see:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/magazine/permission.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* and four issues of *Nebraska History News* annually. For membership information, see:

<http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/members/index.htm>

Article Title: “‘The Men Behaved Splendidly,’ Guy V Henry’s Famous Cavalry Rides”

Full Citation: Thomas R Buecker, “‘The Men Behaved Splendidly,’ Guy V Henry’s Famous Cavalry Rides,” *Nebraska History* 78 (1997): 54-63.

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1997GuyHenry.pdf>

Date: 7/7/2010

Article Summary: Captain Guy V Henry commanded troops from Fort Robinson, Nebraska, on two winter marches, sixteen years apart: in 1874 and 1890.

Cataloging Information:

Names: George A Custer, John Gordon, H W Bingham, Thomas M Tolman, Alfred H Terry, Robert H Ottley, Columbus Delano, William W Belknap, Luther P Bradley, Edward O C Ord, William H Jordan, William L Carpenter, Raymond [a white frontiersman guide into the Hills], John H Bridgeman, Dr John A Ridgely, James B Fry, Richard I Dodge, Sitting Bull, Nelson A Miles, William O Wilson, Cyrus T Brady, Falling Stars, Guy V Henry Jr, Rain-in-the-Face

Place Names: Fort Robinson; Fort Sully; Missouri River; Elkhorn River; Niobrara River; Cheyenne River; Black Hills; Spotted Tail Agency; Fort Laramie; Elk Creek; Red Cloud Agency; Camp Robinson; Camp Sheridan; White River; Wounded Knee Creek; Badlands; Ash Springs; Bear Butte; Drexel Mission; Chadron, Nebraska; Custer, South Dakota; Standing Rock Agency; Omaha

Keywords: Minneconjou Lakota; Brule; Fort Laramie Treaty; Sioux; Gordon Party; Hunkpapa; Company D; Buffalo Soldiers; Ninth Cavalry; *Army and Navy Journal*; *Cheyenne Daily Leader*; Ghost Dancers; Cuny Table; Wounded Knee; Seventh Cavalry; *Harper’s Weekly*; *Indian Fights and Fighters*

Photographs / Images: Major Guy V Henry on his horse “George,” Bellevue, Nebraska, 1890s; Map of 1874-1875 Ride; Richard I Dodge illustration of “Winter on the Plains—A Terrible Experience in the Teeth of a Norther,” published in *Our Wild Indians*, 1884; Officers of the Ninth Cavalry at Pine Ridge Agency, 1890-91 with Guy V Henry; Map of 1890 Ride; Troop K of the Ninth Cavalry at Pine Ridge Agency, 1890-91

"The Men Behaved Splendidly"



Guy V. Henry's Famous Cavalry Rides

By Thomas R. Buecker

One great ride in a cavalryman's career would stand as a fitting testament, but *two* such feats would seem without precedent. However, one man, Guy V. Henry, Sr., a noted United States Army officer during the Indian Wars period, did just that. He commanded troops from Fort Robinson, Nebraska, on two marches—separated by sixteen years—that became a celebrated part of western military lore. Those memorable episodes, along with his reputation as a "born soldier" and a "noble and genuine Christian gentleman," have long been remembered.¹ The details of Henry's rides seem to confirm these high opinions.

In the fall of 1874 Capt. Guy V. Henry commanded Company D, Third Cavalry, stationed at Camp Robinson near Red Cloud Agency in northwest Nebraska. Rumors abounded that parties of miners had entered the mysterious and forbidden Black Hills of Dakota Territory. Several months previous a large army column led by Lt. Col. George A. Custer legally entered the Hills on a reconnaissance expedition. Miners accompanying the expedition found gold, confirming a fact known to westerners for several decades. Reports of their findings spurred considerable interest, regardless of the treaty forbidding whites to enter the Black Hills region.²

The 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty established the bounds of the Great Sioux Reservation, which included the Black Hills. The treaty also prohibited unauthorized entry into the Hills; however,

to some enterprising whites the reward was worth the risk. The job of preventing their illegal entry into the dangerous yet tempting Sioux domain fell to the United States Army. The army undertook the task, ill-prepared as it was, to prevent a war that any white invasion of the Hills would undoubtedly bring.³

To the military the assignment of keeping miners out was a virtual impossibility. With the vast open territory around the Hills, bands of miners could slip in from several directions. Because there were no nearby posts or cantonments, any field deployment of troops presented the army with huge logistical problems. The difficulty of pursuit and supply would only be compounded in the winter months. Cold weather did not keep out small, daring groups of miners seeking the promised riches.⁴

In early October 1874 a small party of adventurers organized by John Gordon left Sioux City, Iowa, for the Black Hills. The so-called "Gordon Party" consisted of twenty-six men, one woman with a small boy, and six wagons. They inconspicuously traveled westward along the Elkhorn and Niobrara River valleys into northwest Nebraska. Hoping to avoid any contact, the party then followed the White River into the Dakota Badlands. As the party reached the Cheyenne River, it was spotted by Sioux Indians and again as it moved up Elk Creek. Undaunted by being discovered, the Gordon party traveled north along the eastern slope of the Hills to Bear Butte. Here it entered the Hills proper and followed Custer's trail south to the interior. On December 23 the party reached the site of Custer's main camp (near present

Custer, South Dakota), where traces of gold had been found on French Creek. Anxious to commence prospecting, the Gordon party made its last camp and began construction of a substantial log stockade.⁵

Evidently the Sioux who saw the party crossing Cheyenne River reported them to H. W. Bingham, the Indian agent for the Cheyenne River Agency, some distance to the east on the Missouri River. Bingham quickly contacted Captain Robert H. Offley, post commander at Fort Sully, seven miles below the agency, for troops to pursue and eject the intruders. On December 5, Offley received orders to act on Bingham's request. He sent Captain Thomas M. Tolman with twenty-one First Infantry soldiers, temporarily mounted, to chase the reported miners. Agent Bingham also accompanied the detachment.

Department of Dakota commanding general Alfred H. Terry, from his headquarters in St. Paul, Minnesota, had reservations about not sending cavalry on the pursuit, but the only regularly mounted troops in the department were companies of the Seventh Cavalry stationed at posts far distant from Fort Sully. The regiment had recently participated in the arrest of the Hunkpapa chief Rain-in-the-Face at the Standing Rock Agency far to the north. Terry worried over the excitement and unrest his capture stirred among Standing Rock Indians, explaining "I am unwilling to weaken Custer just at present."⁶

Meanwhile, on December 6 the small force of mounted infantry left Fort Sully. It quickly moved west and actually followed the Gordon party thirty miles into

Thomas R. Buecker is curator of the Nebraska State Historical Society's Fort Robinson Museum.

Guy V. Henry's Famous Cavalry Rides

the Black Hills, "at times close behind."⁷ But Tolman's horses gave out, and he decided it best to give up the pursuit and return to the post. The detachment was in the field for eighteen days and rode more than four hundred miles. While on the outbound march, Tolman had a conference with some "hostile" chiefs who wanted to send their young men after the miners. They promised to await word of the success of his pursuit. General Terry was openly chagrined over Tolman's actions in counseling with the Indians: "Captain Tolman seems to have converted his expedition from one intended to drive out those lawbreakers into one for their protection."⁸

After the detachment returned, agent Bingham telegraphed the commissioner of Indian affairs that "troops should be sent at once to drive out the miners." Secretary of the Interior Columbus Delano concurred and admonished Secretary of War William W. Belknap to use "the most effective measures within the powers of the War Department . . . toward all persons making encroachments upon said territory," and that "all intruders be pursued, overtaken, and expelled from it."⁹

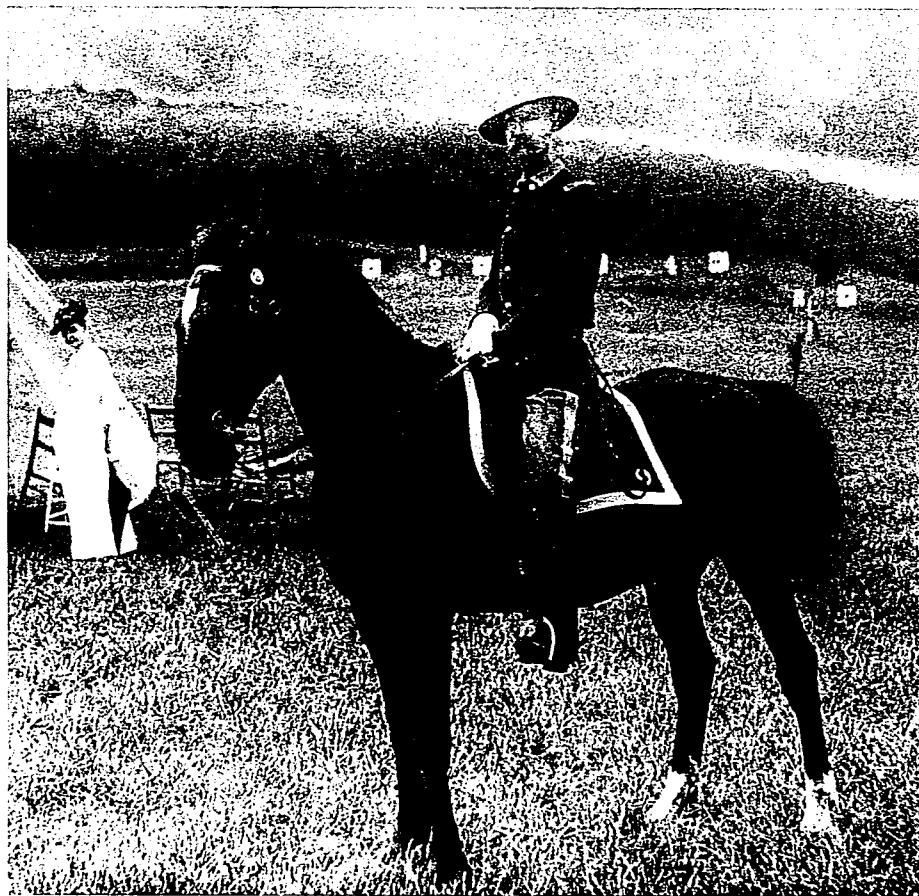
On December 17 an Indian called Falling or Twenty Stars reached Spotted Tail Agency, the Brulé agency forty miles northeast of Red Cloud Agency. There he reported that twelve days earlier, he had met twenty-one whites with six wagon teams on Elk Creek. Word of the intruders was quickly sent to District of the Black Hills headquarters at Fort Laramie. District commander Lt. Col. Luther P. Bradley telegraphed the news to Brig. Gen. Edward O. C. Ord at Department of the Platte headquarters in Omaha. On December 22 Ord passed the reported sighting to Division of the Missouri headquarters and asked if he should send out a cavalry company to intercept the miners. The next day he received approval from the division.¹⁰

That same day (December 23) Bradley at Fort Laramie was notified to send out troops as soon as the weather permitted. In a hastily written dispatch Brad-

ley ordered Capt. Guy V. Henry, Third Cavalry, at Camp Robinson to find the reported trespassers. A small but mobile force under Henry's command was to proceed from Robinson to Camp Sheridan, the military post at Spotted Tail, to pick up as its guide the Indian who saw the party. Henry was then to march to the Black Hills "to discover and expel a party of miners reported as having been on Elk Creek."¹¹ Capt. William H. Jordan, post commander at Camp Robinson, was to assign one lieutenant and enough enlisted men from the Ninth Infantry to increase Henry's field strength to fifty men.

By this time in his career, Guy Henry was a respected and experienced troop commander. Graduating from West

Point in 1861, he eventually commanded the Fortieth Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry through much of the Civil War. During the war he received repeated brevets for "gallantry and meritorious service in action" and by war's end held the rank of brigadier general of volunteers. He was later awarded the Medal of Honor for actions at the Battle of Cold Harbor. After the war Henry became a captain in the Third Cavalry and served in Arizona Territory against the Apaches. In 1871 the regiment moved to the northern Plains, and Henry served at several stations in the Department of the Platte. On November 12, 1874, he and his company reported for duty at Camp Robinson near the turbulent Red Cloud Agency.¹²



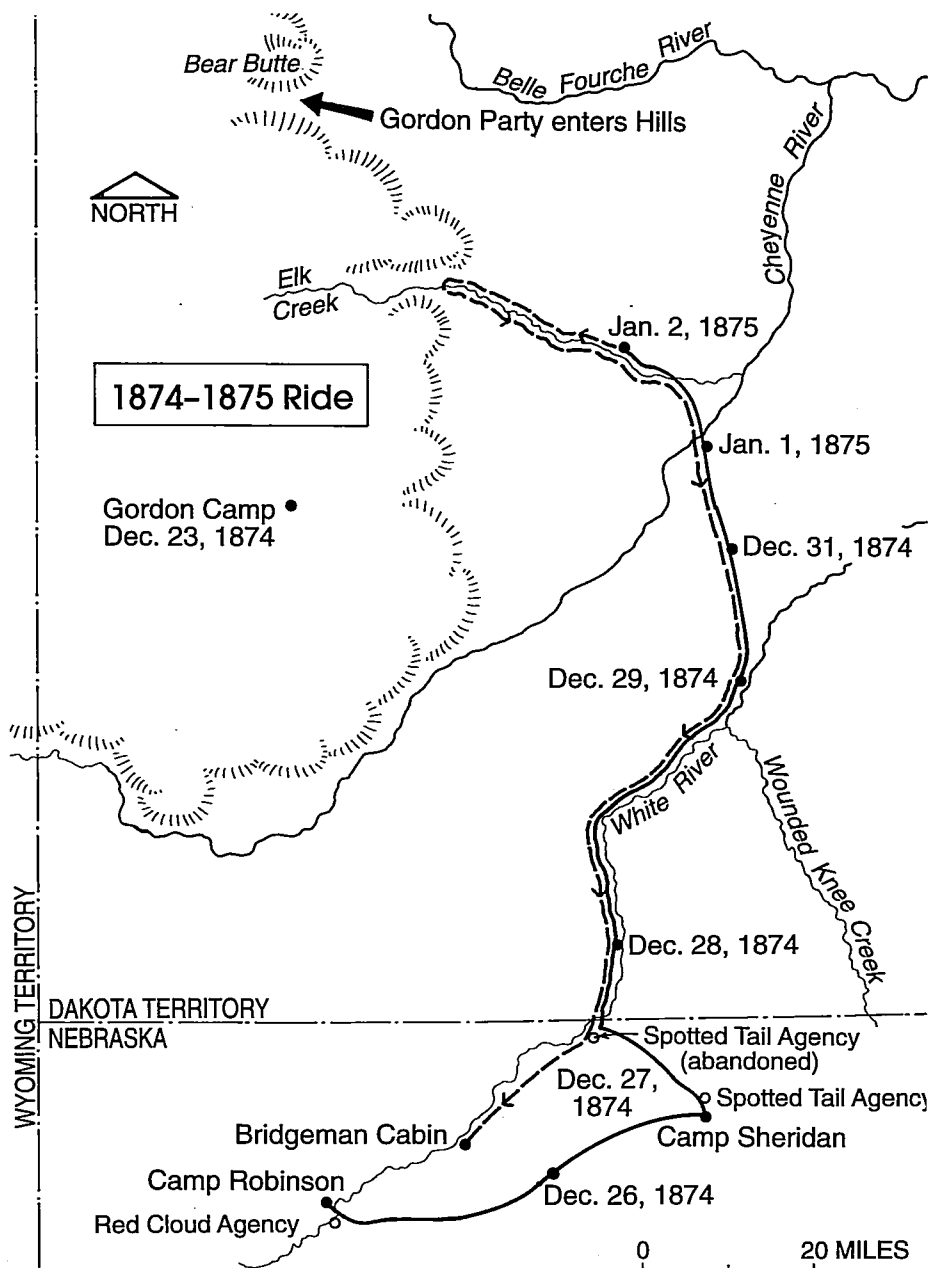
Maj. Guy V. Henry on his horse, "George," at the army's Bellevue, Nebraska, rifle range, 1890s. Henry rode George during the winter march at Wounded Knee. Courtesy U.S. Army Military History Institute

After word of the deployment was received by mounted courier at Camp Robinson on December 24, arrangements for Henry's winter march were quickly made. As per orders Captain Henry and thirty-six enlisted men of Company D were joined by 1st Lt. William L. Carpenter, Ninth Infantry, and twelve enlisted men from the various companies of that regiment at the post. The command gathered rations and forage for thirty days and "a plentiful allowance of ammunition" that was carried by twelve wagons, apparently to be driven by the infantrymen. Wall tents with Sibley stoves—borrowed from the infantry companies at Camp Robinson—were taken to shelter the soldiers while in overnight camp. Likewise, horse blankets were taken to protect the 140 horses and mules carrying the men and supplies.¹³

Departure for the "expedition to the Black Hills" was set for December 26. Henry later recalled, "The day after Christmas the command . . . bidding adieu to families and friends, started on our march into the wilderness."¹⁴ Besides having an expectant wife, field service brought other concerns. That fall had seen particular unrest among the Sioux at Red Cloud Agency. To Henry the Indians "were far from friendly, and were liable to break out at a moment's notice. The knowledge of all this made our farewell a sad one."¹⁵

As the detachment left Camp Robinson, Bradley telegraphed Ord that he thought the assigned search would require several companies, not just one. He was also concerned about snow in the Hills and thought a force sent on such duty would need supplies for at least sixty days. Ord was also concerned about the winter weather and as a consequence did not want to place additional troops in the field. Henry's command would be alone on this difficult mission.¹⁶

Unfortunately for Captain Henry and his soldiers, the winter of 1874-75 proved to be one of the most severe on record. A correspondent from Red Cloud Agency wrote the cold snap had



"put the oldest inhabitants to comparing dates, and they have at last arrived at the conclusion that since the winter of 1848-9 they have never known it to get up and howl as it has done." During the last of December and into January, temperatures in the double digits below zero were reported with uncomfortable frequency from all upper Plains loca-

tions. The writer from Red Cloud also noted, "We fear we may yet hear of great loss of life."¹⁷

On the evening of December 26, Henry's command made camp halfway to Camp Sheridan, the troops having enjoyed comparatively mild weather. The first night's camp was made with "horses under the shelter of a bank"

Guy V. Henry's Famous Cavalry Rides

with blanket covers; the men in their tents, with stoves, were comfortable.¹⁸ Camp Sheridan was reached the next evening. Henry found that Falling, the Sioux guide, could not be persuaded to accompany the command. Prudently fearing the weather, neither he nor any other Indian would agree to guide the troops to the Hills. Finally a white frontiersman named Raymond offered his services. Henry found out that Raymond was an "old soldier" and well acquainted with the country. Besides serving as a guide, he could also act as an interpreter "in case of meeting Indians so that the object of our trip could be explained and no trouble caused." Before leaving, Henry drew five more days' rations for his men.¹⁹

On the morning of December 28 the troops left Camp Sheridan, marching to the White River, where they camped for the night. The soldiers found the river valley contained good shelter, wood, and grass for the animals. As a harbinger of things to come, however, some of the men had to be treated for frostbitten fingers. Setting up camp proved to be a time-consuming process. With the ground frozen solid, wooden tent pins were nearly impossible to drive, and the next morning they were equally difficult to remove. The men were forced to tie their tent ropes to trees or bushes. Additionally all food had to be thawed before cooking. Before mounting, bits had to be warmed before putting them in the horses' mouths.²⁰

While on the march the command generally moved through rolling, treeless country, without any shelter from the wind. A thermometer with the command once recorded forty degrees below zero. During the whole trip the weather was stormy with the threat of heavy snow at any moment.

Camp on December 29 was made where Wounded Knee Creek entered the White River. The next day the troops entered the Badlands. Remembering their march through the desolation of what he termed "the lower regions with the fires extinguished," Henry recalled:

Here are found what scientists regard as the richest deposits of bone, backs of turtles, etc. It may be easily imagined, however, that under the circumstances this subject did not occupy our thoughts.²¹

Camp on New Year's Eve was at Ash Springs, between White River and the Cheyenne. On New Year's Day the soldiers crossed the divide and camped on the Cheyenne. When the command crossed the river, Raymond, the guide, said he would prospect a little. He reasoned if there was gold in the Hills it would show in the Cheyenne. All Henry saw him accomplish, however, was to thaw out a couple of frozen fingers.²²

Meanwhile, back at district headquarters the military authorities tried to enlist Sioux assistance in locating miner trespassers. Bradley ordered the commanding officers at Camps Robinson and Sheridan to advise agents at their respective agencies to send out "competent and discrete" Indians to search for illegal parties in the Hills. In theory the scouts were only to locate, not attack, the miners, and then lead troops to them. Considering the harshness of the weather, the agency Sioux did not jump at this opportunity.²³

On January 2 the soldiers reached Elk Creek. Henry's men made a careful search on both sides of the creek valley, but could find no signs of the miners' trail. Raymond told Henry that Elk Creek was the only route into the Black Hills along its eastern slope. The troops then moved up the creek toward the Hills until they were south of Bear Butte. Here they surmised the miners had entered the interior farther north and west of where the troops had been ordered to search; in fact, the miners had followed Custer's exit trail into the Hills, not Elk Creek.²⁴

By this time the weather had turned severely colder. The troops had been out a week and were suffering. Frostbite forced some of the men from their saddles to ride in the forage wagons. With no trace of the miners and the specter of losing more men to the cold, Henry decided it was best to turn back to Camp Robinson.

He had wanted to return by way of the Cheyenne River, following it until they were directly north of Camp Robinson, but his wagons were beginning to break down, and following the Cheyenne route might bring unknown hazards. There was also the chance of a heavy snow at any moment, so he chose the route they knew.

The return march through the Badlands was tough on men, horses, and equipment. It once took three hours for the wagons to ascend a hill. One of the wagons was so badly damaged it had to be abandoned. It was the only government property lost on the expedition, although five other wagons broke down at one time or another.²⁵ Luckily for the suffering command the wind was light and at their backs for several days. When in camp the men could make themselves and their animals more comfortable.

On the last day's march (January 8) the troops broke camp early in the morning "in gay spirits, as we thought that evening would bring us to Camp Robinson."²⁶ As the command moved out, the cavalry rode ahead on a different trail and became separated from the wagons. At 7:00 A.M., an hour out of camp, a strong Arctic wind arose, what the frontiersmen called a "norther," and hit the column with full force. Producing extremely low wind-chills, the norther was one of the dreaded hazards of winter travel on the upper Plains. One experienced military officer and plainsman described how "oftentimes without the slightest warning, a wind will come from the north, so piercing that on exposure to it for any length of time is certain death to anything."²⁷ Henry called the norther worse than fire or shipwreck, deadly if men or animals were caught in the open without shelter. With the freezing wind that day came blinding snow, causing piling drifts and loss of any sense of direction.²⁸

Henry found his command in a tough situation. With the blinding snow and wind, the men could not find the protected campsite they had just left,



"Winter on the Plains—A Terrible Experience in the Teeth of a 'Norther.'" From Richard I. Dodge, *Our Wild Indians* (1884)

and, even if they had, the wagons with their tents would not have been there. Sending parties to search for the wagons could not be done without risking lives. Henry decided it was best to push on for Camp Robinson.

Throughout the morning and into the afternoon, the suffering troops plodded on. The cold was so intense Henry had the men dismount and lead their horses to keep from freezing. As the snow piled up, the exhausted soldiers struggled to keep moving and to control their frantic mounts. Hands and faces froze, noses and ears bled, and eyes became "absolutely sightless from constant pelting of frozen particles."²⁹ Many of the weakened men gave out, refused to move any farther, and were beaten to keep them moving and alive. Captain Henry and the stronger soldiers lifted exhausted men and tied them in their saddles to

keep the command together. To be abandoned in the norther was to die.

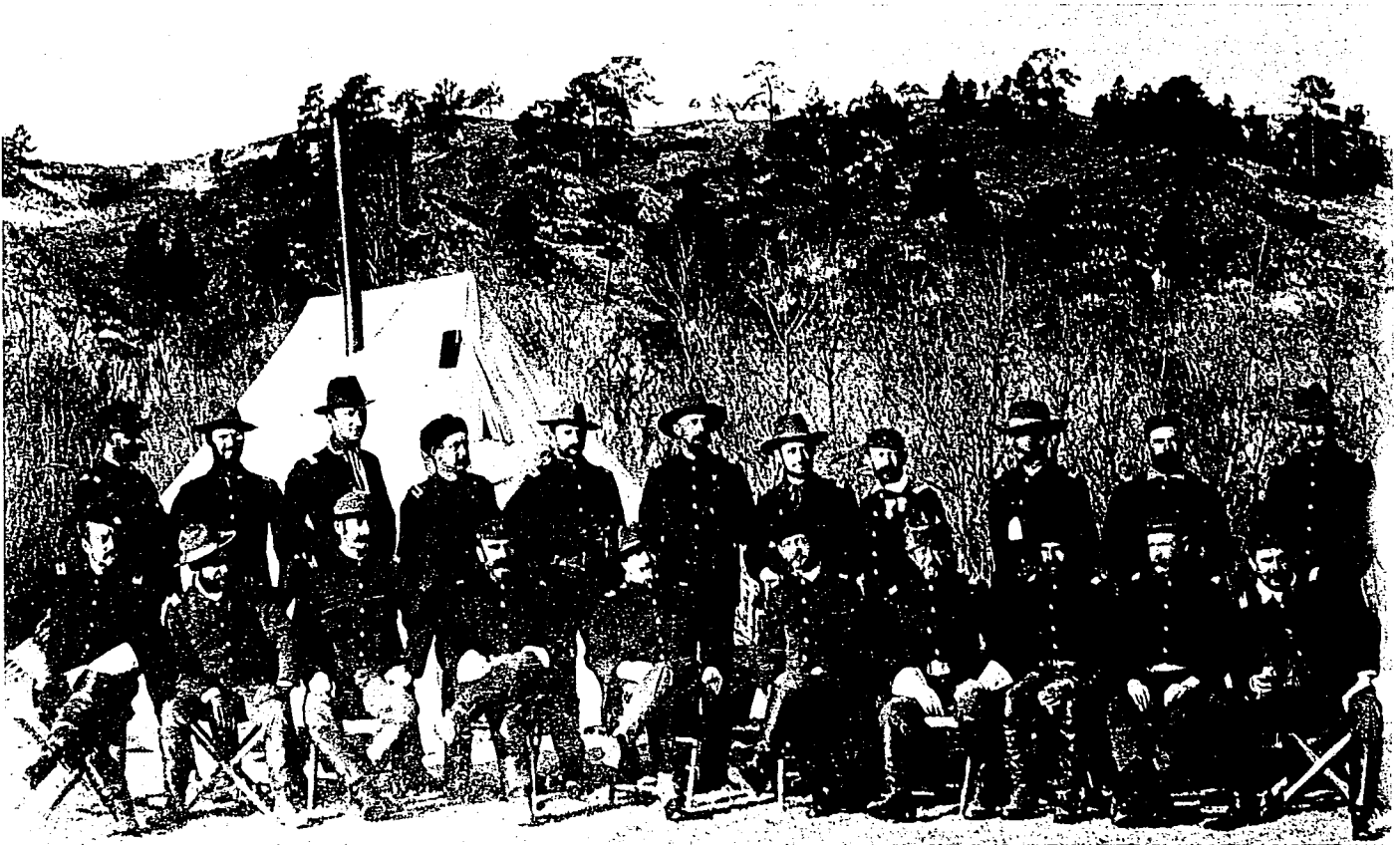
The march became a desperate struggle for life, the men's only hope in knowing the post could not be far away and someone would reach it. Finally, in a last bid for survival, Henry ordered his men to mount. Lost in the terrible storm, he realized their only chance was to trust the horses to somehow find shelter. Henry ordered the men forward hoping "the instinct of our horses would alone save those who could hold out."³⁰

On through the storm the beleaguered command staggered, when suddenly, after turning the curve of a hill, they came upon a half-buried ranch. The owner and occupant, John H. Bridgeman, promptly rendered assistance to the frozen detachment. The horses were put up in his corrals, while some thirty men crowded into his small

cabin to thaw out. Bridgeman told Henry he was only fifteen miles from Camp Robinson; the ranch was located along the White River, several miles north of the road between Robinson and Camp Sheridan, explaining why the soldiers had not seen it before.³¹

Aware that shelter at the ranch offered only a temporary respite, and considering the physical condition of his frozen command, Henry knew that he would have to send word to the post for assistance. Because of the unabated danger of the storm, an Indian colleague of Bridgeman's at the cabin could not be persuaded to ride for help; therefore Henry and three of his men set out for the post. They arrived that evening, and the next morning Captain Jordan sent an ambulance and several wagons with blankets and robes to bring in the disabled. Meanwhile

Guy V. Henry's Famous Cavalry Rides



Officers of the Ninth Cavalry at Pine Ridge Agency, 1890-91. Guy V. Henry is seated, fifth from right. NSHS-W938:21-1

Henry's supply wagons also stumbled across Bridgeman's cabin before the Camp Robinson relief arrived. It was said "the scene was pitiful," with a cabin full of frost-damaged, exhausted men—but every man was present and alive.³²

After a night to warm up, Lieutenant Carpenter arrived at Camp Robinson on the morning of January 9 with twenty-five men. Ten other soldiers who were unable to ride were brought in later that day by the relief wagons. With them came Henry's supply wagons and their infantry teamsters.

Recovery for the frozen command was a slow process. Dr. John A. Ridgely, the civilian contract surgeon at Camp Robinson, took "great interest . . . in the performance of his duty in relieving the suffering" of Henry's men.³³ Of the two officers and fifty men on the ill-fated expedition, both officers and forty-five of

the enlisted men required immediate medical attention. So many of Henry's men were incapacitated from exposure, some for weeks, that Captain Jordan reported Company D as unfit for duty. While the cavalymen recovered, infantrymen at the post cared for their horses and provided their barracks with water and wood. Lieutenant Carpenter suffered severe frostbite to his nose and right ear. Contrary to some reports and subsequent retelling, however, there were no major losses from amputation.³⁴

It was Henry who suffered the most, "so much so that it is said he will not be able for duty in a long time."³⁵ After the ride from Bridgeman's ranch, Henry recalled, "Entering my own quarters I was not recognized owing to my black and swollen face."³⁶ His hands were so stiff from being cold his gloves had to be cut off. When the leather strips were re-

moved, "flesh sloughed off, exposing the bones."³⁷ All his fingers were frozen to the second joint; one finger on the left hand was amputated at the first joint. The joints in his left hand had become so stiff from the cold, he was never again able to bend his fingers fully. Although his recovery was slow—for months he was lost to duty on sick report—his personal sufferings were lightened by the birth of his son, Guy V. Henry, Jr., on January 28.

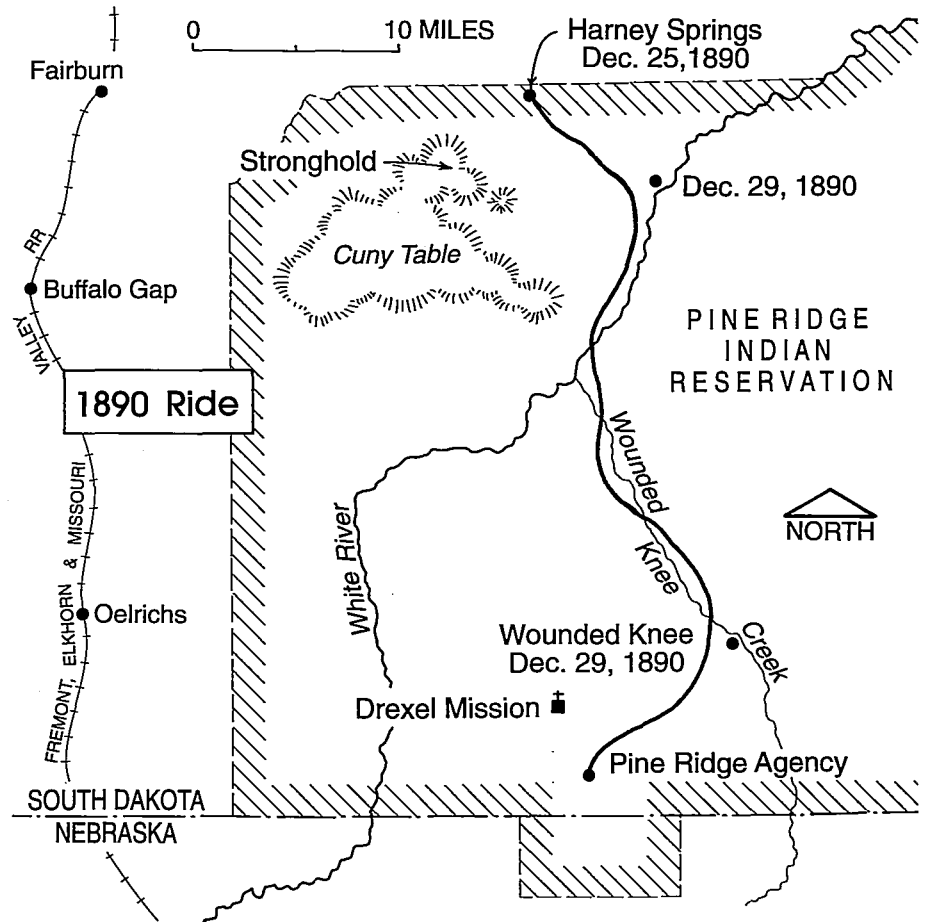
After hearing of the plight of Henry's men, General Ord requested that troops from his department be ordered into the Black Hills only conditionally, depending on the state of the weather. In his words, any such movements made before April were "extremely hazardous."³⁸

On February 4 the men of Company D penned a resolution of thanks to Dr. Ridgely for his care during their conva-

lescence. Copies of the document were sent to the *Army and Navy Journal*, a national publication, and the *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, where it was published as a testament of their appreciation. Ridgely humbly thanked the company for “the flattering language which they represent my professional services to them.” He added that duty and humanity demanded nothing less.³⁹

Later that spring another cavalry company successfully located the Gordon party and escorted it out of the Black Hills.⁴⁰ By then the damage had been done. The increased incursions into the Hills by miners after gold brought a clamor to purchase the Hills from the Sioux, a diplomatic effort that failed. This failure eventually led to a military solution by the U.S. government, the Great Sioux War of 1876–77, which brought the defeat of the Sioux and the final opening of the Black Hills to whites.

Although initially reported in the contemporary press, Henry’s Black Hills “march” was first chronicled in book form in 1879. Col. James B. Fry included the tale in his volume on Indian Wars battles and exploits.⁴¹ Fry’s reason for publishing the book was summed up with this statement: “Stories without end might be told of the hardships and sufferings endured by our soldiers and of which the world knows nothing.”⁴² Three years later the march appeared in Col. Richard I. Dodge’s tome about life on the frontier.⁴³ By the mid-1880s the march or “ride” became an integral part of frontier army lore. In later years whenever the names of Henry or Fort Robinson were brought up in the press, the winter march was often mentioned, a touchstone “still remembered as one of the heroic achievements of the period.” And inevitably, as the story was told and retold, it was distorted. One version had the command chasing renegade Cheyennes all the way to the Canadian border, where it was caught in a snowstorm. Another has Henry sitting “stark and stiff” in his saddle “as though he were an object of stone,” chilled almost to insensitivity.⁴⁴



In each telling Henry’s leadership and devotion to duty loomed large, his “intrepidity and bulldog courage” recounted and extolled. Nevertheless, he never took full credit for saving the command; rather he praised his men for their fortitude and determination. “All the men,” he reported, “behaved splendidly during the whole, and especially the worst part of the trip.”⁴⁵

Sixteen years after his 1874–75 march, Guy V. Henry, now a major in the Ninth Cavalry, again found himself commanding troops in the dead of winter in the Dakota Badlands. It was the time of the 1890 Pine Ridge Campaign, when troops were called to the Sioux Reservation to ease the fears of agency employees and quell rebellious Ghost Dancers. Among the first units mobilized in November and moved to the

reservation were Troops F, I, and K of the all-black Ninth Cavalry stationed at Fort Robinson. Later Major Henry, with Troop D of Fort McKinney, Wyoming, arrived to join the regimental camp at Pine Ridge Agency. Henry took command of the Ninth Cavalry squadron and prepared the “buffalo soldiers” for the eventuality of field service against the Sioux.⁴⁶

Camp life at the agency was fairly routine until mid-December. The violent death of Sitting Bull at the Standing Rock Reservation on December 15 changed the situation. A large band of Minneconjou Lakotas left the Cheyenne River Reservation, supplemented with many of Sitting Bull’s followers, and all were thought to be heading for the Ghost Dance camp at Pine Ridge Reservation. The camp was located on the

Guy V. Henry's Famous Cavalry Rides

Cuny Table, a geographic feature called the "Stronghold," some fifty miles northwest of Pine Ridge Agency. Fearful that the arrival of these newcomers would upset the delicate negotiations underway to coax the dancers back to Pine Ridge, Gen. Nelson A. Miles, in overall command of army operations, ordered Henry's squadron to investigate the Stronghold vicinity. If possible, it was also to find and intercept the Minneconjous.

On the afternoon of December 24, Henry's troopers moved out. With cheers of "Merry Christmas!" from their comrades remaining behind, the riders clattered out of the agency camp and headed northwest.⁴⁷ Behind the column followed a long train of wagons and pack animals loaded with supplies for the men and their horses. After a long night's march the squadron reached the Stronghold on Christmas morning; one of the cavalry troops had covered fifty-three miles in twenty-one hours. The soldiers set up camp at Harney Springs, coincidentally near the same site Henry's earlier expedition used on its march to the Black Hills.

For several days the soldiers scouted the area, examining the approaches to the Stronghold and looking for the

Minneconjous. Under winter conditions the scouting was rough work. Luckily no severe storm blew in.

On December 29 after a long day in the saddle, Henry's squadron made camp for the night. The men were just settling in when a courier suddenly arrived with the alarming news of the Wounded Knee fight and with orders for the troops to return to the agency immediately. Henry with three troops left camp at 9:45 P.M. on a forced march; one troop followed with the pack mules and wagon train. Thus began Henry's second winter ride.

In spite of winds and snows that night, Henry pushed his column on, aiming to reach the agency before daylight to avoid being attacked. Of that night march he later recalled:

The wind was cold, and as it howled out of the canyons and swept over the valley, it carried with it the crystals that had fallen the day before. There was no moon, the night was inky dark, even the patches of snow which lay here and there on the ground gave no relief to the eye.⁴⁸

Through the night the column moved on. Finally, at 6:00 A.M. on the morning of December 30, the tired troops rode into Pine Ridge Agency. Including the

distance traveled while scouting on the 29th, the three troops had covered eighty-four miles in twenty-four hours.

As the weary cavalymen prepared to make camp, Corp. William O. Wilson, who earned a Medal of Honor for this gallant deed, galloped in with word that the wagons were under attack.⁴⁹ When the train was about two miles north of the agency, a large band of warriors—angered at the killings at Wounded Knee—attacked, killing one of the column's advance guards. The wagons were quickly circled as a sharp fight ensued. Henry's men remounted and rode to the relief of the train. The attackers were chased off and the wagons escorted to the squadron camp.

As the black troopers again relaxed, word came that Sioux warriors had turned with a vengeance elsewhere. They had set fire to a cabin near the Drexel Mission, four miles north of the agency. Seventh Cavalry troops were dispatched to investigate, while Henry's command was allowed to rest. North of the mission the Seventh came under heavy fire from Indians commanding the hills on both sides of the regiment's position. The call came for Henry's squadron to help extricate the white



Troop K of the Ninth Cavalry at Pine Ridge Agency, 1890-91. NSHS-R659-2599

troopers from their precarious situation.

At noon Henry's squadron "moved at once to the sound of the guns."⁵⁰ Reaching the mission, he quickly divided his troops, who swept the warriors off the hills above the imperiled Seventh Cavalry. After the brief skirmish both commands returned to the agency. The fight at Drexel Mission was the last major engagement between Sioux Indians and United States soldiers.

The march of the buffalo soldiers on December 29 and 30 has gone down in history as "Henry's Ride," during which the troopers traveled 102 miles in thirty hours, all over rough country in winter weather. Accordingly, it was memorialized as the most famous ride ever performed by troops in the United States.⁵¹

By mid-January the last of the belligerent Ghost Dancers had returned to the agency and surrendered to the army. As the situation cooled and army forces returned to their stations, the Ninth cavalrymen remained at their Pine Ridge camp. Although the winter of 1890–91 began fairly mild, January and February turned bitter. One correspondent wrote from the cavalry camp:

We have had 12 snow storms in 30 days. Nothing but snow can be seen, and above our camp, under the bank, it forms a wall at least 40 feet high and 10 feet thick.⁵²

As the cold weeks slowly dragged on, the men suffered in the cold. One reflected, "ours is not to reason why, [ours is] but to freeze and cry."⁵³

In late March the troops finally received the welcomed orders to return to the comforts of Fort Robinson. Unbelievably, one last winter march remained for Guy Henry! On March 24 the remaining soldiers left Pine Ridge Agency for Nebraska. After a hard march, and with a blizzard threatening, Henry led the troops into Chadron, Nebraska, the midpoint for their return journey. There a local roller skating rink was rented to provide shelter for the command. The march continued the next day through heavy snowdrifts (ironically very near the site of Bridgeman's cabin). Many of the men

suffered from the cold and from snow blindness. Late in the day the hard-pressed command reached Fort Robinson, a two-day march totalling sixty-three miles through heavy snow drifts. Recalling Henry's earlier winter experience, one correspondent gently reminded his readers—and Henry—"for a winter's march or exposure to the cold of a Dakota climate a necessity should always exist."⁵⁴

Together with his epic 1874–75 march, Henry's 1890 winter ride also became an important part of army lore. One was invariably compared to the other. In 1893 an endurance ride between Vienna and Berlin by German and Austrian army officers attracted worldwide attention. Countering European boasts of human and equine endurance, Henry's winter 1890 ride was offered as proof of one of the "Great Rides by Americans."⁵⁵ In 1895 Henry, himself, wrote about both "rides" for a *Harper's Weekly* series on "Adventures of American Army and Navy Officers." Several years later Cyrus T. Brady, a personal friend of Henry's, wrote of both in his frontier army classic, *Indian Fights and Fighters* (1904 and subsequent editions) and brought these exploits to the attention of another generation. Under the dogged leadership of Guy V. Henry, the accomplishments of his Third cavalrymen and Ninth Cavalry "buffalo soldiers" were duly recorded in the annals of the Old West.

Notes

The author wishes to thank Dr. James W. Wengert, Omaha, for biographical materials on Guy V. Henry and assistance with the preparation of this article.

¹ *New York Christian World*, Nov. 2, 1899; *Omaha Daily Bee*, Oct. 28, 1899.

² For more on Custer's Black Hills expedition, see Donald Jackson, *Custer's Gold* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966).

³ Watson Parker, "The Majors and the Miners: The Role of the U.S. Army in the Black Hills Gold Rush," *Journal of the West* 11 (Jan. 1972): 102.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁵ "Narrative of the John Gordon Stockade Party in 1875 Contributed to the Custer Chronicle by

One of the Party, David Aken, Vona, California," undated typescript, Fort Laramie National Historic Site, Fort Laramie, Wyoming.

⁶ Telegrams, Dec. 6, 23, 1874, "Citizen Expeditions" to the Black Hills, Feb. 1874–Oct. 1875, "Special Files" of Headquarters, Division of the Missouri, Relating to Military Operations and Administration, 1863–1885, *National Archives Microfilm Publication M1495* (Washington: National Archives and Records Administration, 1987), roll 2; hereafter cited as "Citizen Expeditions."

⁷ Telegram, Dec. 21, 1874, "Citizen Expeditions."

⁸ Telegram, Dec. 23, 1874, "Citizen Expeditions."

⁹ *Army and Navy Journal*, Jan. 9, 1875, 329. See also U.S. Congress, Senate, *Message from the President of the United States, transmitting, in answer to a Senate resolution of March 15, 1875, information in relation to the Black Hills country in the Sioux Indian Reservation*, 43rd Cong., spec. sess., S.Doc. 2, Serial 1629.

¹⁰ Telegram, Dec. 22, 1874, "Citizen Expeditions."

¹¹ Special Orders No. 10, Dec. 23, 1874, Headquarters, District of the Black Hills, Records of the United States Army Continental Commands, Record Group (RG) 393, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.; hereafter cited as "Special Orders, RG 393."

¹² Dan L. Thrapp, *Encyclopedia of Frontier Biography 2* (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur Clark Co., 1988):649; Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army 2* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903):523.

¹³ Special orders No. 10, RG 393.

¹⁴ Guy V. Henry, "A Winter March to the Black Hills," *Harper's Weekly*, July 27, 1895, 100.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Telegram, Dec. 28, 1874, "Citizen Expeditions."

¹⁷ *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, Jan. 21, 1875; *Army and Navy Journal*, Feb. 20, 1875, 436.

¹⁸ Henry, "Winter March."

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; *Army and Navy Journal*, Jan. 30, 1875, 390, contains Henry's report of the march. Raymond is probably Enoch W. Raymond, who married into the Brulés and resided near the Spotted Tail Agency.

²⁰ Henry, "Winter March."

²¹ *Ibid.* Henry, regarded by others as possessing "an admirable Christian character," probably preferred this description for the Badlands rather than the earthier "Hell with the fires out."

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Special Orders No. 13, Dec. 31, 1874, RG 393.

²⁴ *Army and Navy Journal*, Jan. 30, 1875, 390.

²⁵ *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, Jan. 21, 1875; *Army and Navy Journal*, Feb. 20, 1875, 436.

²⁶ Henry, "Winter March."

Guy V. Henry's Famous Cavalry Rides

²⁷ *Army and Navy Journal*, Feb. 20, 1875, 436; Richard I. Dodge, *Our Wild Indians* (Hartford, Conn.: A. D. Worthington & Co., 1882), 502–3.

²⁸ Henry, "Winter March."

²⁹ Dodge, *Our Wild Indians*, 510.

³⁰ Henry, "Winter March."

³¹ *Army and Navy Journal*, Jan. 30, 1875, 390; Dodge, *Our Wild Indians*, 511. John H. Bridgeman was married to an Oglala woman of Young Man Afraid of His Horses's band. Later in 1875 Bridgeman served as an assistant farmer at Red Cloud Agency. From the published clues his ranch was near the 1871–73 site of the Spotted Tail Agency along White River.

³² Henry, "Winter March;" *Army and Navy Journal*, Feb. 20, 1875, 436; *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, Jan. 21, 1875.

³³ *Army and Navy Journal*, Jan. 30, 1875, 390.

³⁴ Record of Medical History of Post [Fort Robinson], tablet 31, Eli S. Ricker Collection, MS 8, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln; Capt. William H. Jordan to asst. adj. gen., Jan. 16, 1875, Letters Received, Dept. of the Platte, RG 393; Merrill J. Mattes, *Indians, Infants and Infantry: Andrew and Elizabeth Burt on the Frontier* (Denver: Old West Publishing Co., 1960), 198.

³⁵ Medical History of Post; *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, Jan. 21, 1875.

³⁶ Henry, "Winter March."

³⁷ *Ibid.*; Cyrus T. Brady, *Indian Fights and Fighters* (New York: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1904), 344.

³⁸ Telegram, Jan. 11, 1875, "Citizen Expeditions."

³⁹ *Army and Navy Journal*, Feb. 27, 1875, 452; *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, Feb. 16, 1875. Descendants of Dr. Ridgely donated the original, handwritten resolution to the Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS Museum Collections 11,468-1).

⁴⁰ Watson Parker, ed., "The Report of Captain John Mix of a Scout to the Black Hills, March–April 1875," *South Dakota History* 7 (Fall 1977):385–401.

⁴¹ James B. Fry, *Army Sacrifices, or, Briefs from Official Pigeon-Holes* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1879), 118–26.

⁴² *Army and Navy Journal*, Feb. 22, 1879, 519.

⁴³ Dodge, *Our Wild Indians*, 509–11. In an earlier work, *The Plains of the Great West and Their Inhabitants* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1877), 41, Dodge alluded to the 1874–75 Black Hills expedition, but gave no specifics.

⁴⁴ Brady, *Indian Fights and Fighters*, 344. For examples of incorrect versions of the story, see *Chicago Chronicle*, Oct. 28, 1899, and *Omaha Daily Bee*, Oct. 29, 1899, written at the time of Henry's death.

⁴⁵ *Army and Navy Journal*, Feb. 20, 1875, 436.

⁴⁶ The standard source on the Ghost Dance

troubles and subsequent Pine Ridge campaign remains Robert M. Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).

⁴⁷ Unless otherwise noted, this account of Henry's ride was reconstructed from the author's paper, "The Ninth Cavalry in the Pine Ridge Campaign of 1890," presented at the University of Wyoming's symposium, "Blacks in the West: Image and Reality," Sept. 21–23, 1995.

⁴⁸ Guy V. Henry, "A Sioux Indian Episode," *Harper's Weekly*, Dec. 26, 1896, 1274.

⁴⁹ The life and career of Cpl. William O. Wilson are examined in Preston E. Amos, *Above and Beyond in the West: Black Medal of Honor Winners, 1870–1890* (Washington: Potomac Corral of The Westerners, 1974), 36–39.

⁵⁰ "Report of Major General Miles, September 14, 1891," *Report of the Secretary of War 1* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1892):151.

⁵¹ Alex W. Perry, "The Ninth United States Cavalry in the Sioux Campaign of 1890," John M. Carroll, ed., *The Black Military Experience in the American West* (New York: Liveright, 1971), 254; Brady, *Indian Fights and Fighters*, 354.

⁵² *Army and Navy Journal*, Mar. 14, 1891, 491.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Mar. 7, 1891, 471.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Apr. 4, 1891, 546.

⁵⁵ *Omaha Daily Bee*, Jan. 29, 1893.