

Map 17. Converging Columns, 1 April–9 June 1876

Gibbon's column from the west was next into the field. Gibbon chose to gather his widely separated companies at Fort Ellis. Accompanying him on his march from Fort Ellis on 1 April were 4 companies of the 2d Cavalry Regiment and 5 companies of the 7th Infantry Regiment, comprising a total of 450 men. After marching down the Yellowstone River and briefly halting at Camp Supply to improve his sustainment capability, Gibbon arrived near the mouth of Tullock Creek on 20 April. It was here that Crook's movements far to the south affected Gibbon's actions. Since Crook did not plan to take to the field again until mid-May, Terry ordered Gibbon to halt until his movements could be coordinated with the other columns. Thus, Gibbon waited at his camp between 21 April and 9 May.

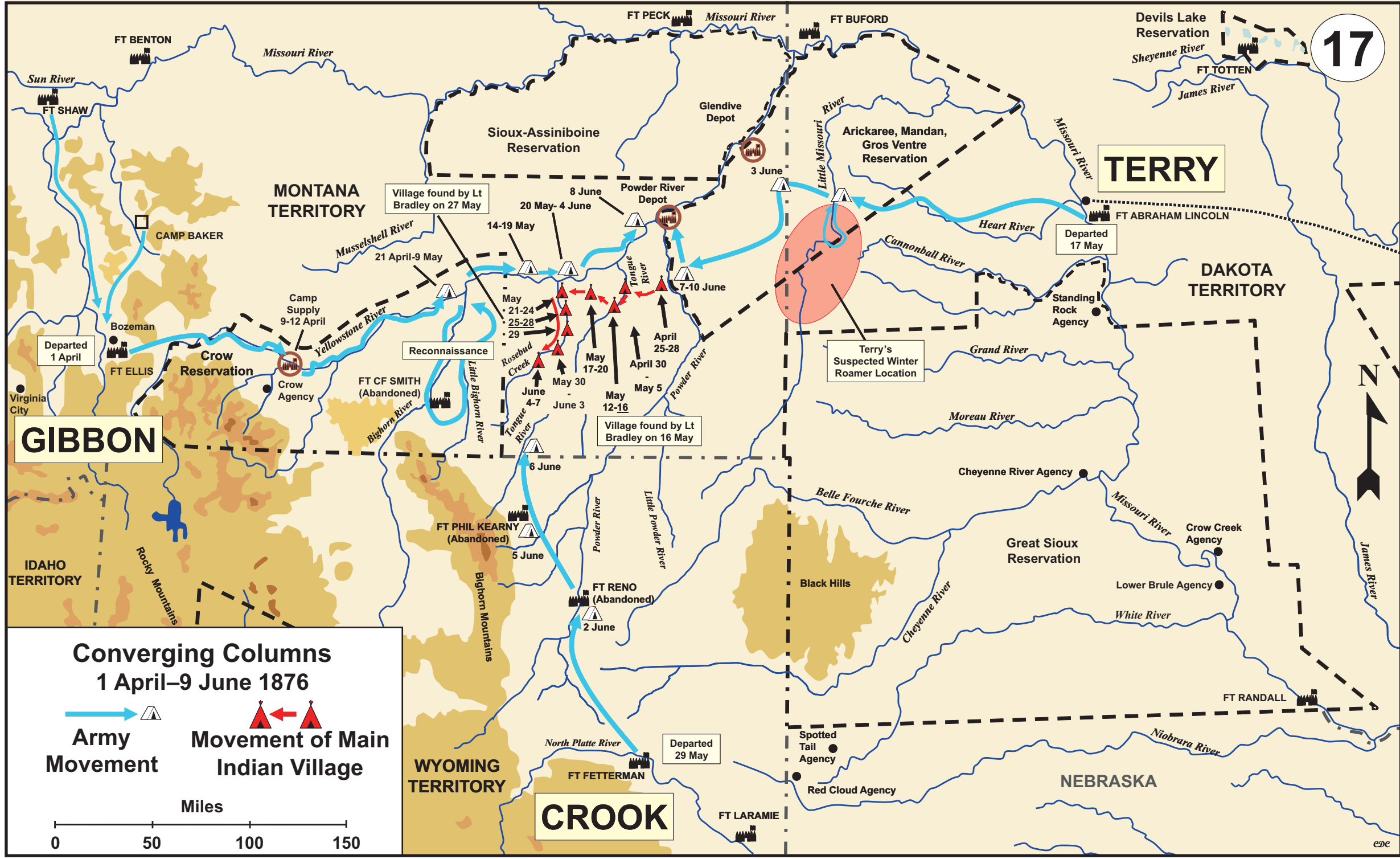
In this 19-day period, Gibbon sent out several reconnaissance patrols, most of which found no trace of the Sioux. However, in attempting to track Sioux horse thieves, on 16 May Gibbon's remarkable chief of scouts, Lieutenant James H. Bradley, pinpointed the location of a major Indian village on the Tongue River. On learning of Bradley's find, Gibbon ordered his command to march down the Yellowstone, cross to its south bank, and attack the village. Unfortunately, Gibbon's men proved unequal to the task of crossing the Yellowstone. After unsuccessful efforts lasting 1 hour, Gibbon canceled both the movement and the attack. Following this abortive attempt, Gibbon reported to Terry neither Bradley's finding nor his own failure to cross the Yellowstone. Meanwhile, this large Sioux village continued to send parties of warriors to harass Gibbon's camp until 23 May, when all contact with the hostile Indians ceased. Again, it was the enterprising Bradley who found the Sioux, this time on Rosebud Creek. Once again, Gibbon reported neither the Indians' harassment nor Bradley's discovery of the Rosebud camp.

During Gibbon's movements, inclement weather had delayed the departure of Terry's column for the field. In the interim, Terry busily collected supplies and planned river transport to support his overland march. The river route was to follow the Missouri

River northwest, then turn southwest up the Yellowstone, and end at Glendive Depot. At last, on 17 May, Terry's overland column departed from Fort Abraham Lincoln. His force consisted of 12 companies of the 7th Cavalry Regiment under the command of Custer and 3½ companies of infantry. Terry's column totaled 925 men.

Through a misreading of intelligence, Terry expected to find the Indians along the Little Missouri River, far to the east of where they actually were. Discovering no Indians at the Little Missouri, he moved farther west, camping on Beaver Creek on 3 June. Here, Terry received a dispatch from Gibbon (dated 27 May) that vaguely referred to sightings of hostile Indians but gave no specific details and skeptically dealt with Bradley's discovery only in a postscript. Because of this dispatch, Terry turned south on Beaver Creek and resolved to travel west to the Powder River. To facilitate his further movement, he instructed his base force at Glendive Depot to send a boat with supplies to the mouth of the Powder River. Reaching the Powder River late on 7 June, Terry personally went downstream to the Yellowstone the next day, hoping to consult with Gibbon. He was pleasantly surprised to find several couriers from Gibbon's force at the river. Here, he finally gained the intelligence that Gibbon had not heretofore reported. Terry now took personal control of both columns.

Meanwhile, Crook assumed direct command of the Bighorn and Yellowstone Expedition at Fort Fetterman. Crook had drawn together an impressive force from his Department of the Platte. Leaving Fort Fetterman on 29 May, the 1,051-man column consisted of 15 companies from the 2d and 3d Cavalry, 5 companies from the 4th and 9th Infantry, 250 mules, and 106 wagons. Grouard, an experienced scout who had worked with Crook on earlier campaigns, rode ahead of the column to recruit Crow warriors as scouts. On 2 June, in spite of the poor weather, Crook pushed his force northward to the site of Fort Reno, supremely confident that he would redress Reynolds' previous failure on the Powder River. At this point, Sheridan could finally say that all three columns were in the field.



GIBBON

TERRY

CROOK

MONTANA TERRITORY

DAKOTA TERRITORY

IDAHO TERRITORY

WYOMING TERRITORY

NEBRASKA



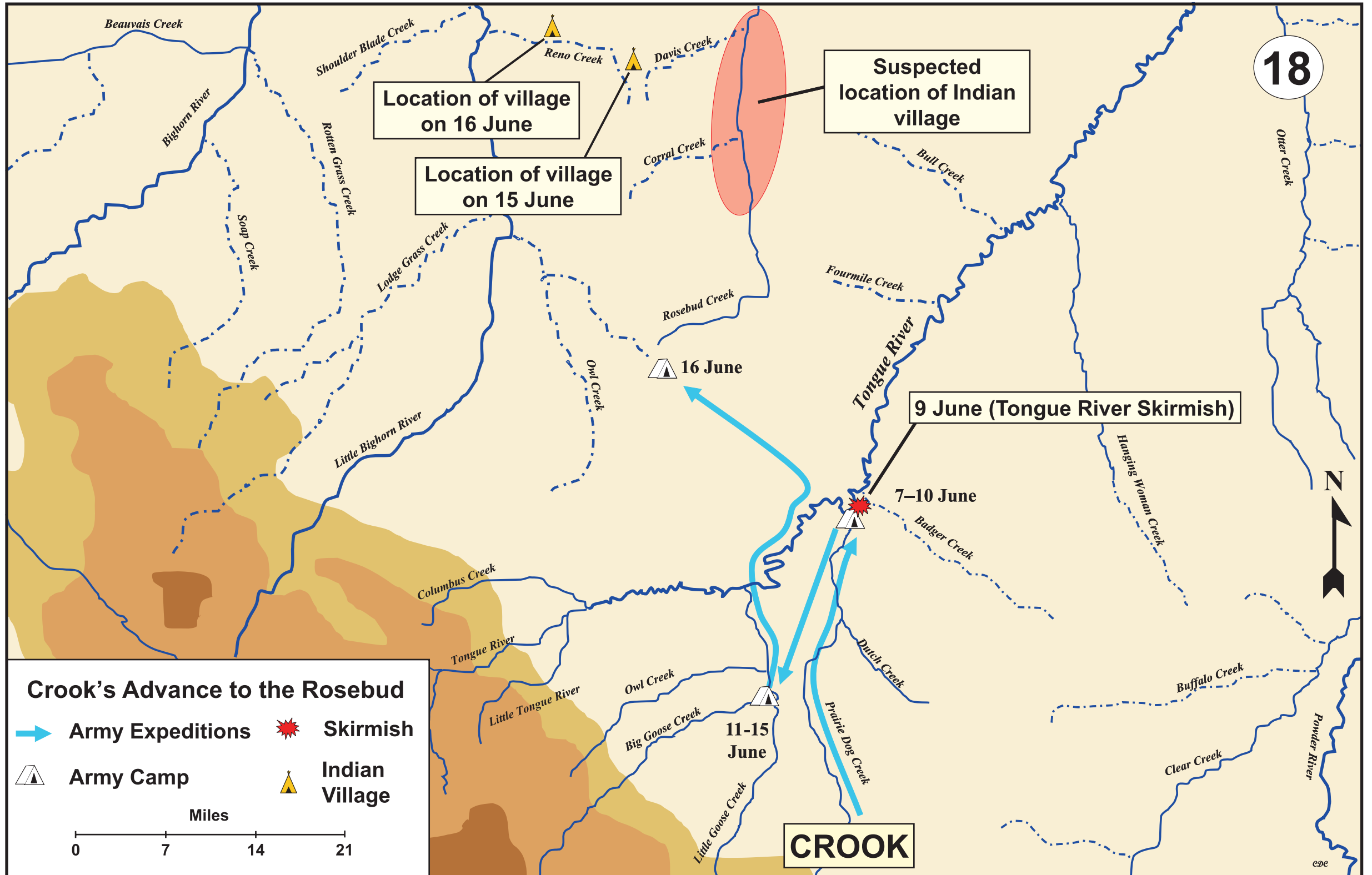
Map 18. Crook's Advance to the Rosebud

When Crook arrived at the ruins of Fort Reno, Grouard and the scouts were absent. Many of the Crow braves had balked at serving with the Army, and only extensive negotiations and Grouard's offer of substantial rewards would eventually convince them to join Crook. The day after arriving at Reno, Crook's column headed north without the Indian allies and camped the night of 5 June on the abandoned site of Fort Phil Kearny. Lacking Grouard's guiding hand, the expedition soon became lost. On 6 June, mistaking the headwaters of Prairie Dog Creek for Little Goose Creek, Crook led his column down the wrong water course. The next day, Crook's command moved to the confluence of Prairie Dog Creek and Tongue River, where it camped for the next 4 days. At this time, several Black Hills prospectors asked for permission to travel with Crook's column. Within a week, Crook's civilian contingent grew to approximately 80 men. On 9 June, Sioux or Cheyenne warriors raided the encampment on the Tongue River. Four companies of Crook's cavalry quickly repulsed the attackers. Although Crook's casualties were insignificant, the attack was evidence that the Indians were in the area and prepared to fight.

Finally, on 11 June, Crook led the column 11 miles back up Prairie Dog Creek, then 7 miles to his original destination at the forks of Goose Creek (present-day Sheridan, Wyoming), where he established a permanent camp. As the officers and men enjoyed the excellent hunting and fishing in the area, Crook prepared for the final phase of the campaign. On 14 June, Grouard arrived with 261 Shoshone and Crow allies to join the

expedition. Based on intelligence from Grouard, Crook now ordered his entire force to lighten itself for a quick march. Each man was to carry only 1 blanket, 100 rounds of ammunition, and 4 days' rations. The wagon train would remain at Goose Creek, and the infantry would be mounted on the pack mules. The infantrymen, many of whom were novice riders, received only a day's training on the reluctant mules, much to the delight of the cavalry spectators.

At 0600 on 16 June, Crook led his force of more than 1,300 soldiers, Indians, and civilians out of the encampment at Goose Creek. Major Alexander Chambers' 5 companies of mule-mounted infantry organized into 2 small battalions led the main column. Lieutenant Colonel William B. Royall's cavalry followed the infantry. His 15 companies of cavalry were organized into 4 battalions each commanded by a senior captain: Anson Mills (3d Cavalry), Guy Henry (3d Cavalry), Frederick Van Vliet (3d Cavalry), and Henry Noyes (2d Cavalry). The civilian contingent, organized into an auxiliary battalion called the Packers and Miners, brought up the rear. The Shoshone and Crow allies moved to the front and flank of the column. Crossing the Tongue about 6 miles to the north, the column proceeded downriver until early afternoon, when it turned west and crossed the divide to the headwaters of Rosebud Creek. At 1900, the lead elements of the force reached a small marshy area, near the source of the Rosebud, and bivouacked.



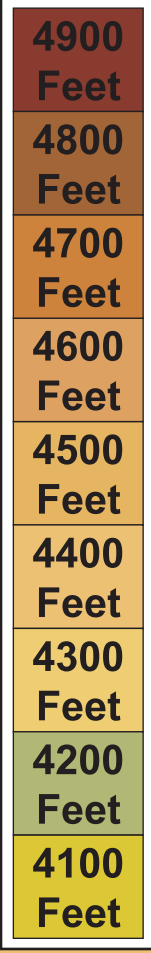
Map 19. The Battle of the Rosebud: The Sioux and Cheyenne Attack, 0800 to 0830

On 17 June, Crook's column roused itself at 0300 and set out at 0600, marching northward along the south fork of Rosebud Creek. Again the infantry took the lead but were soon passed by the faster moving cavalry. The holiday atmosphere that prevailed since the arrival of the Indian scouts on 15 June was suddenly absent. The Crow and Shoshone scouts were particularly apprehensive. Although the column had not yet encountered any sign of Indians, the scouts seemed to sense their presence. The soldiers, on their part, were apparently fatigued from the previous day's 35-mile march and their early morning reveille, particularly the mule-riding infantry.

At 0800, Crook stopped to rest his men and animals. The Crow scouts reported evidence of Sioux and recommended that Crook keep the column concealed in the valley while they examined the area. Although he was deep in hostile territory, Crook made no special dispositions for defense and only posted a few pickets in the hills to the north. The troops merely halted in their marching order and took advantage of the opportunity to brew morning coffee. The battalions of Mills and Noyes led the column, followed by

Captain Frederick Van Vliet's battalion and Major Alexander Chambers' battalion of mule-borne foot soldiers, Captain Guy V. Henry's battalion and a provisional company of civilian packers and miners brought up the rear.

A few of the Crow and Shoshone were well ahead of the column searching for the Indian village; fortunately, the allied Indians that stayed with the column remained alert while the soldiers rested. Several minutes later, the soldiers in camp could hear the sound of intermittent gunfire coming from the bluffs to the north. At first, they dismissed the noise as nothing more than the scouts taking potshots at buffalo. As the intensity of fire increased, a scout rushed into the camp shouting, "Lakota, Lakota!" The Battle of the Rosebud was on. Major George Randall and his Crow and Shoshone auxiliaries quickly reinforced the thin Army picket line north of the camp. By 0830, the Sioux and Cheyenne were hotly engaged with Randall's Indian allies. Heavily outnumbered and supported by only a few Army pickets, the Crow and Shoshone warriors were slowly pushed back toward the camp, but their fighting withdrawal gave Crook time to deploy his forces.



Sioux and Cheyenne Attacks

Sioux and Cheyenne Attacks

Sioux and Cheyenne Attacks

Scouts

Scouts

Scouts

Conical Hill

Crook's Ridge

Kollmar Creek

Royall's Ridge

The Gap

Pickets

Scouts

Shoshone (-)

Scouts

Crow (-)

4 & 9 Chambers

2 Noyes

Packers & Miners

Moore

D, F, C, G, H

A, B, D, E, I

3 Henry

B, D, F, L

3 Van Vliet

C, G

3 Mills

A, E, I, M

Rosebud Creek

The Battle of the Rosebud
The Sioux and Cheyenne Attack
 0800 to 0830

- Army Attacks
- Army Retreats
- Indian Attacks
- Indian Retreats



Map 20. The Battle of the Rosebud: Crook's Counterattack, 0830 to 0930

In response to the Indian attack, Crook directed his forces to seize the high ground north and south of Rosebud Creek. He ordered Van Vliet, with C and G Companies, 3d Cavalry, to occupy the high bluffs to the south. Van Vliet scaled the hill just in time to drive off a small band of Sioux approaching from the east. In the north, the commands of Chambers (D and F Companies, 4th Infantry, and C, G, and H Companies, 9th Infantry) and Noyes with three of his companies (B, E, and I Companies, 2d Cavalry) formed a dismounted skirmish line and advanced toward the Sioux. Their progress was slow because of flanking fire from Indians occupying the high ground to the northeast. To accelerate the advance, Crook ordered Mills to charge this group of hostiles with a portion of his battalion (A, E, and M Companies of the 3d Cavalry). Lieutenant Colonel William Royall, Crook's second in command, supported Mills with another three companies (B, I, and L of the 3d Cavalry). Mills' mounted charge forced the Indians to

withdraw northwest along the ridgeline, not stopping until they reached the next crest (now called Crook's Ridge). Here, Mills quickly reformed his companies and led them in another charge, driving the Indians northwest again to the next hill (Conical Hill). Mills was preparing to drive the Indians from Conical Hill when he received orders from Crook to cease his advance and assume a defensive posture.

Royall, after supporting Mills' initial charge, moved to the west end of the field to oppose Indians that were attacking the rear of Crook's camp. His force consisted of Henry's reduced battalion (D and F Companies, 3d Cavalry) and the three companies brought from the east end of the battlefield. Royall advanced rapidly along the ridgeline to the northwest, finally halting his advance near the head of Kollmar Creek.

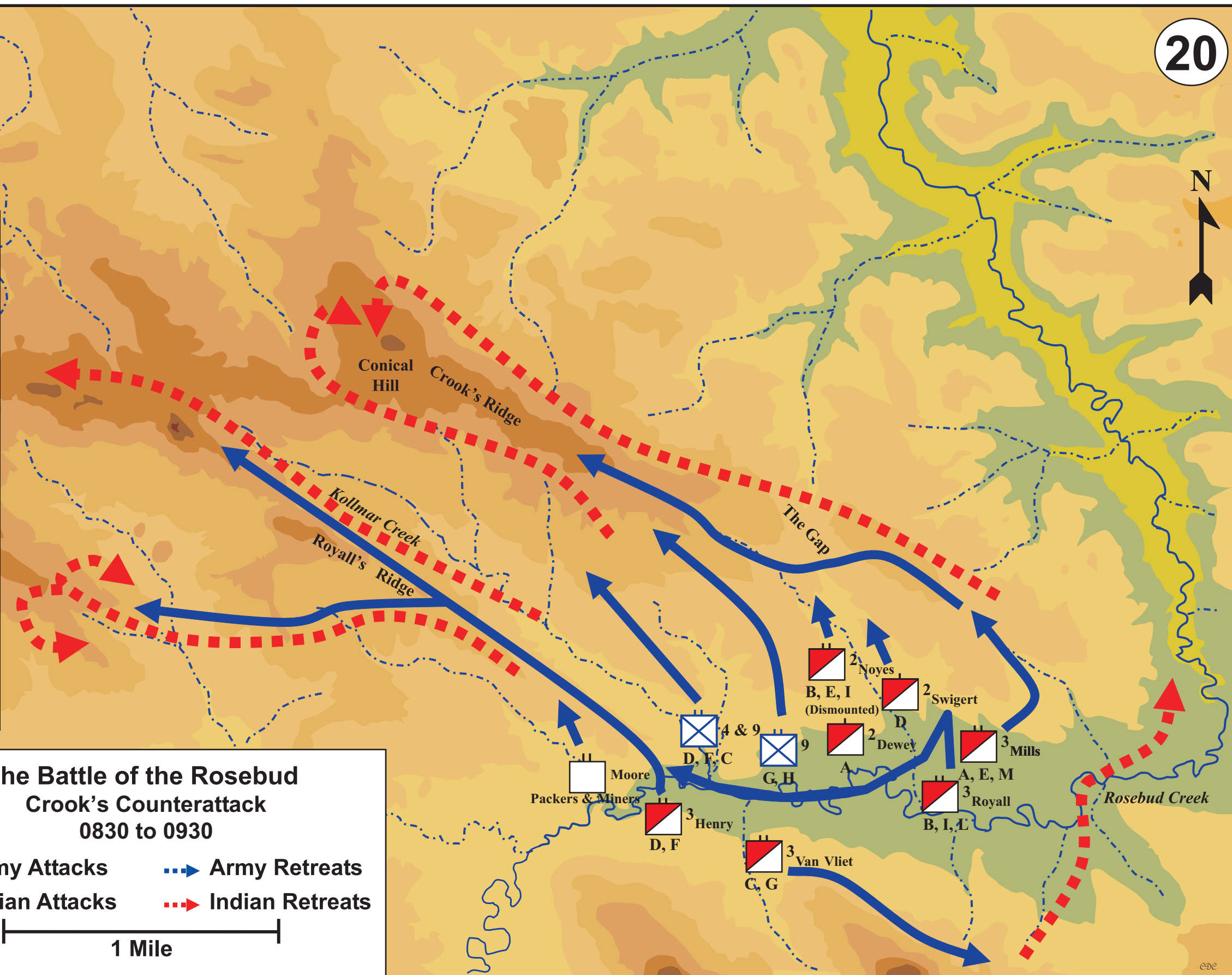


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4400	Feet
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4100	Feet

The Battle of the Rosebud
Crook's Counterattack
 0830 to 0930

-  Army Attacks
-  Army Retreats
-  Indian Attacks
-  Indian Retreats

1 Mile



Map 21. The Battle of the Rosebud: Crook's Dilemma, 0930 to 1030

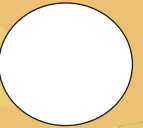
Chambers and Noyes led their forces forward and soon joined Mills on top of the ridge. The bulk of Crook's command, now joined by the packers and miners, occupied Crook's Ridge. Establishing his headquarters there at approximately 0930, Crook contemplated his next move.

Crook's most pressing concern was that Royall's detachment was a mile from the main body and in some danger of being cut off and destroyed. Sensing this vulnerability and exploiting their superb mobility, the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors shifted their main effort to the west and concentrated their attacks on Royall's troopers. Crook, recognizing the danger, wanted Royall to withdraw to Crook's Ridge. However, the order delivered to Royall directed that he extend his right until he connected with the rest of the command at Crook's Ridge. In reply, Royall sent only B Company to join Crook. That one company did nothing to cover the 1-mile gap. Instead, it significantly reduced the force Royall had available to defend his exposed position. He should have withdrawn all five companies. He later defended his decision and claimed that heavy pressure from the Indians made withdrawing the entire command too risky.

In addition to the danger to Royall's command, Crook faced a significant dilemma. His initial charges secured key terrain but did little to damage the Indian force. The

bluecoats' assaults invariably scattered the Indian defenders but did not keep them away. After falling back, the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors returned to snipe at the soldiers from long range. Occasionally, single warriors or small groups of Indians demonstrated their valor by charging forward and exchanging a few close-range shots with the troopers; when pressed, the Indians sped away on their nimble ponies. Crook soon realized his charges were indecisive.

Casting about for a way to defeat his elusive opponent, Crook returned to his original campaign plan. Since the Indians had been fighting him with unprecedented tenacity, it suggested that they might be fighting to defend their families in a nearby village. Thus, Crook decided to advance down the Rosebud Valley where he hoped to find the hostile encampment and force the enemy to stand and fight. At about 1030, Crook ordered Mills and Noyes to withdraw their commands from the high ground and prepare for an attack on the Indian village presumed to be somewhere to the north on the Rosebud. To replace the cavalry, Crook recalled Van Vliet's battalion from the south side of the Rosebud.



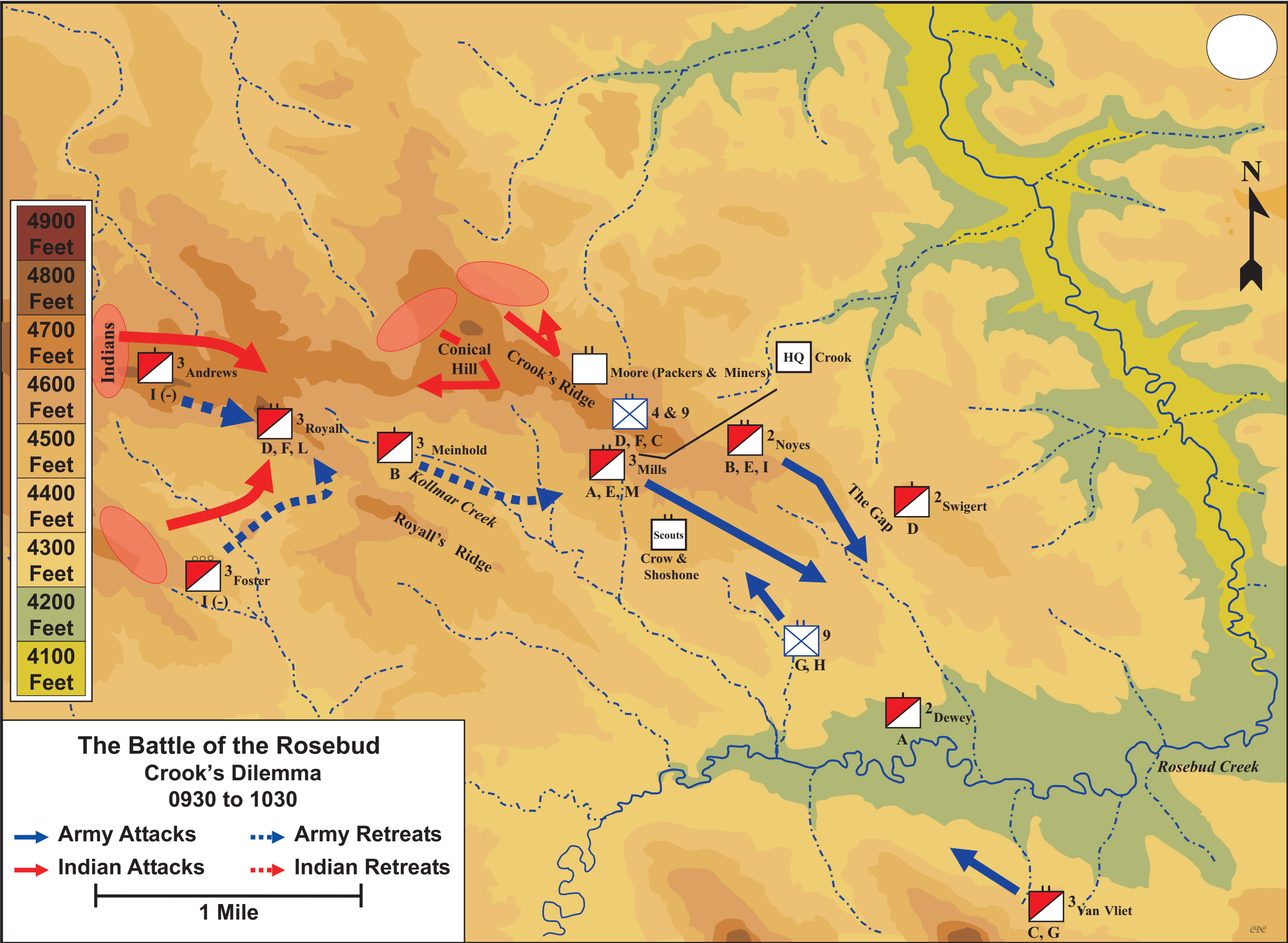
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4100	Feet

The Battle of the Rosebud
Crook's Dilemma
 0930 to 1030

Army Attacks Army Retreats
 Indian Attacks Indian Retreats

1 Mile



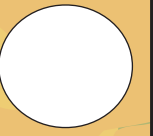
Map 22. The Battle of the Rosebud: The Strike for the Village, 1030 to 1130

One mile to the west, Royall's situation continued to deteriorate. Royall tried to withdraw across Kollmar Creek, but found the Indians' fire too heavy. Instead, he withdrew southeast along the ridgeline to a more defensible position. In an attempt to further isolate and overwhelm Royall's force, a large group of Indians charged boldly down the valley of Kollmar Creek, advancing all the way to the Rosebud. The fortuitous arrival of Van Vliet's command checked the Indians' advance. Crook then ordered his Crow and Shoshone scouts to charge into the withdrawing warriors' flank, throwing the hostiles into great confusion.

Troubled by the fire from Indians on Conical Hill and to cover Mills' movement into the Rosebud Valley, Crook ordered Chambers' infantry to drive the Sioux away. The foot

soldiers promptly forced an enemy withdrawal, but to little avail. It was a repetition of the same old pattern; the soldiers could drive the Sioux away at will, but they could not fix and destroy them.

At about 1130 Crook sent another message to Royall directing his withdrawal to Crook's Ridge. However, he decided not to wait for Royall's return and directed Mills to execute his drive for the village. He could only hope that Mills' advance down the valley would be successful.



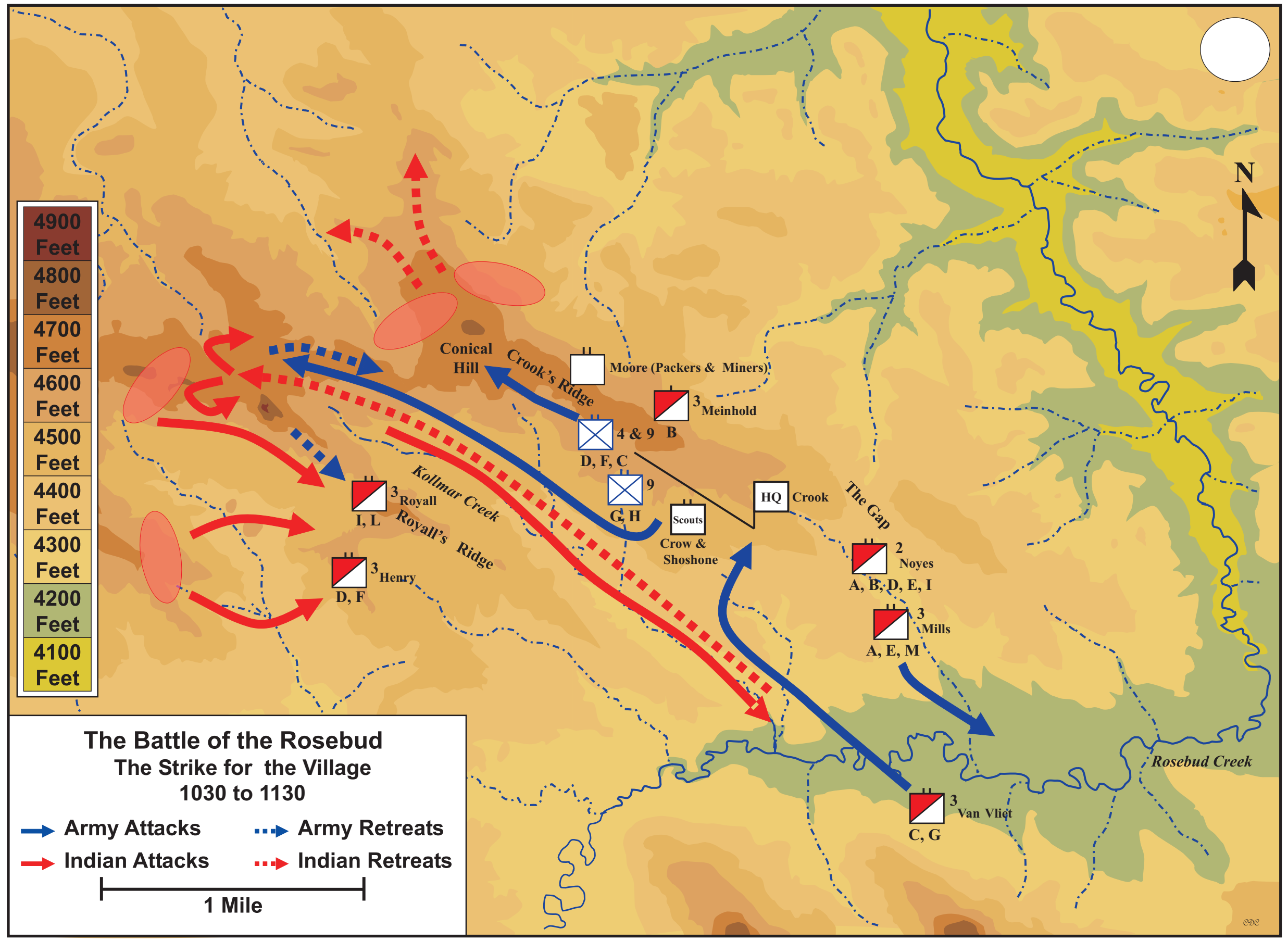
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4100	Feet

The Battle of the Rosebud
The Strike for the Village
 1030 to 1130

- Army Attacks
- Indian Attacks
- - - → Army Retreats
- - - → Indian Retreats

1 Mile



Map 23. The Battle of the Rosebud: The End of the Battle, 1130 to 1330

Mills' advance on the suspected Indian village did nothing to suppress the Indians. Crook's assumption about the presence of an Indian encampment proved totally false; there was no nearby Indian village. The most important consequence of Mills' action was to leave Crook without sufficient force to aid Royall and his hard-pressed command. While Mills made his way down the Rosebud, Royall's situation grew worse.

At approximately 1130, Royall withdrew southeastward a second time and assumed a new defensive position. From here, he hoped to lead his command across Kollmar Creek and rendezvous with Crook. Meanwhile, the Sioux and Cheyenne assailed him from three sides, growing ever bolder in their attacks. Observing the situation from his headquarters, Crook realized that Royall would need help in extricating himself. Consequently, Crook sent orders to Mills canceling his original mission and directing him to turn west to fall on the rear of the Indians pressing Royall.

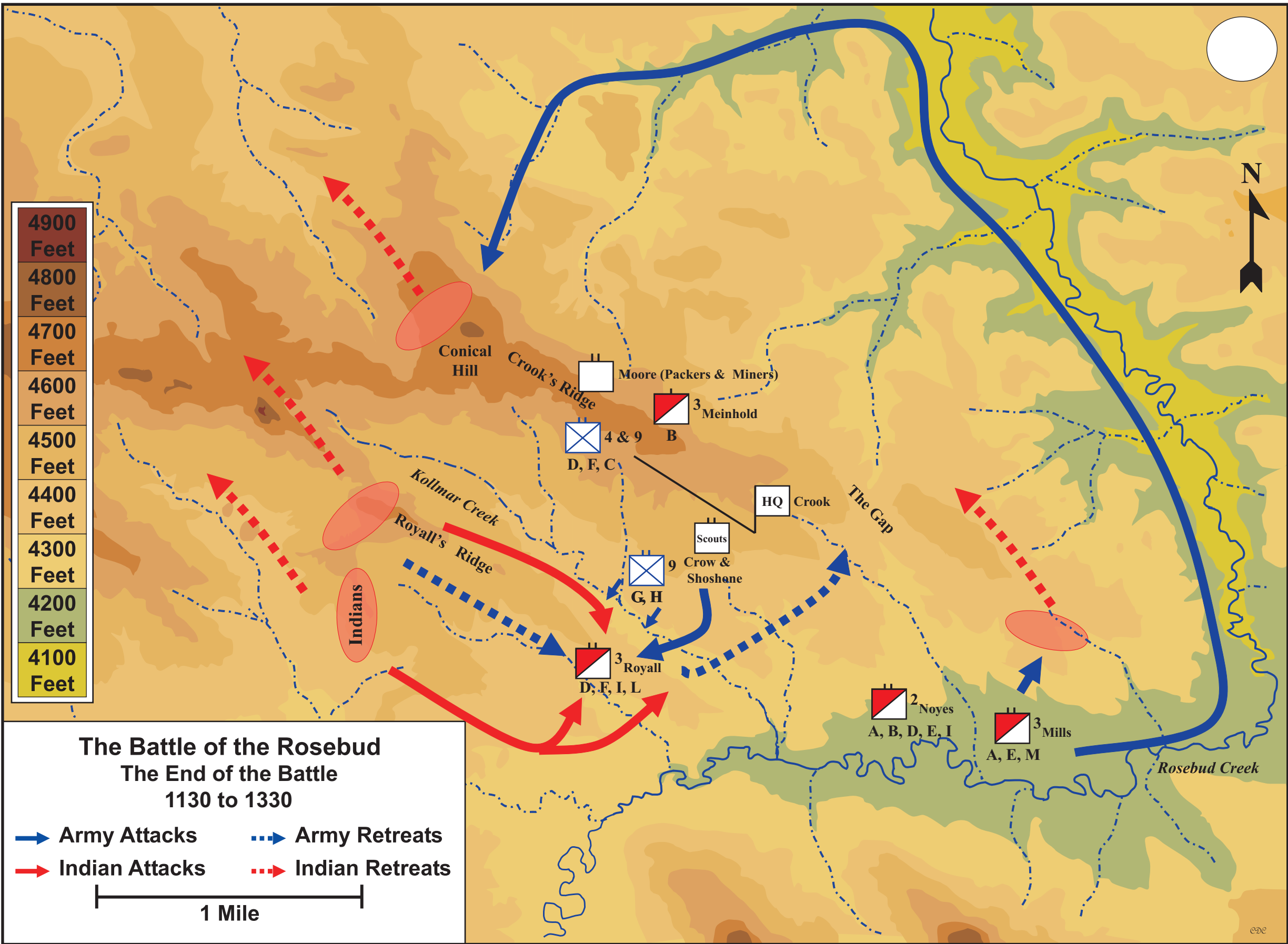
At approximately 1230, Royall decided he could wait no longer and began withdrawing his troopers into the Kollmar ravine to remount their horses. From there, his men would have to race through a hail of fire before reaching the relative safety of Crook's main position. As they began their dash, the Crow and Shoshone scouts countercharged the pursuing enemy, relieving much of the pressure on Royall's men. Two companies of infantry also left the main position to provide covering fire from the northeast side of the ravine. In spite of this gallant assistance, Royall's command suffered grievous casualties. Nearly 80 percent of the total Army losses (10 killed, 21 wounded) in the Battle of the Rosebud came from Royall's four companies of the 3d Cavalry (9 killed and 15 wounded).

While the last of Royall's men extricated themselves, Mills digested his new instructions from Crook. Since Mills' command had driven off a small party of Sioux near the bend in the Rosebud, it apparently led him to believe that the Indian village was

nearby. He wanted to continue the attack on the suspected Indian village, but obeyed his orders. Mills climbed out of the canyon and proceeded westward toward Conical Hill.

Mills arrived too late to assist Royall's withdrawal, but his unexpected appearance on the Indians' flank caused the Sioux and Cheyenne to break contact and retreat. Concentrating his mounted units, Crook now led them up the Rosebud in search of the nonexistent Indian village. However, the scouts refused to enter the narrow canyon, forcing Crook to abandon the pursuit. The Battle of the Rosebud was over. By the standards of Indian warfare, it had been an extremely long and bloody engagement. Never before had the Plains Indians fought with such ferocity, and never before had they shown such a willingness to accept casualties. The Sioux and the Cheyenne left 13 dead on the field and Crazy Horse later stated that the Indian losses were 36 killed and 63 wounded. Their sacrifice was not in vain. Concerned for his wounded, short on supplies, and shaken by the Indians' ferocity, Crook returned to his camp on Goose Creek. His Shoshoni allies soon departed when they saw Crook had no intention of continuing the fight.

Crook's report of the battle, dated 19 June, reached Sheridan's headquarters on 23 June (remarkably fast considering the technological limitations of the day). In his message, he claimed victory with respect to his retention of the battlefield but then acknowledged that he lacked the resources to continue without re-supply and reinforcements. He stopped short of estimating the number of Indians that opposed his column, but he did state they were sufficiently determined and strong enough to fight for several hours against his 1,300-man column. Sheridan forwarded the message to Terry that same day. Unfortunately, Crook's warning that the Indians were determined to fight did not reach Terry until 30 June, 5 days after the Battle of Little Bighorn. Crook and his command stayed at Goose Creek for 7 weeks awaiting reinforcements. They played no role in the momentous events at Little Bighorn.



Map 24. Terry's Campaign, 10–24 June

Unaware of Crook's activities but armed with the information furnished by Gibbon's messengers, Terry finally had specific, if somewhat stale, intelligence regarding the Indian locations which he believed to be somewhere on Rosebud Creek. This new information called for new orders, which Terry issued on 10 June (see map A). Major Marcus A. Reno of Custer's command was to take six companies of cavalry on a reconnaissance of the valleys of the Powder River, Mizpah Creek, and Tongue River and confirm that the Sioux had not moved to the east. Under no circumstances was he to venture west of the Tongue River so as not to alarm the Indians believed to be on Rosebud Creek. Reno was to finish his reconnaissance at the mouth of the Tongue, where he was to rejoin Custer and the rest of the 7th Cavalry Regiment. Following Reno's reconnaissance, Terry intended to drive southward in parallel columns, Custer's cavalry on the Tongue and Gibbon's predominantly infantry force on the Rosebud. After ascending the Tongue for an appropriate distance, Custer's more mobile command would turn west toward the Rosebud and descend that creek pushing the Sioux toward Gibbon's force.

While Reno failed to scout all of Mizpah Creek, he essentially followed Terry's orders until 15 June. After descending the Tongue River for only 8 miles, he then decided to turn west to investigate enemy signs on the Rosebud. Although he disobeyed Terry's direct instructions by advancing up the Rosebud, Reno was able to determine that

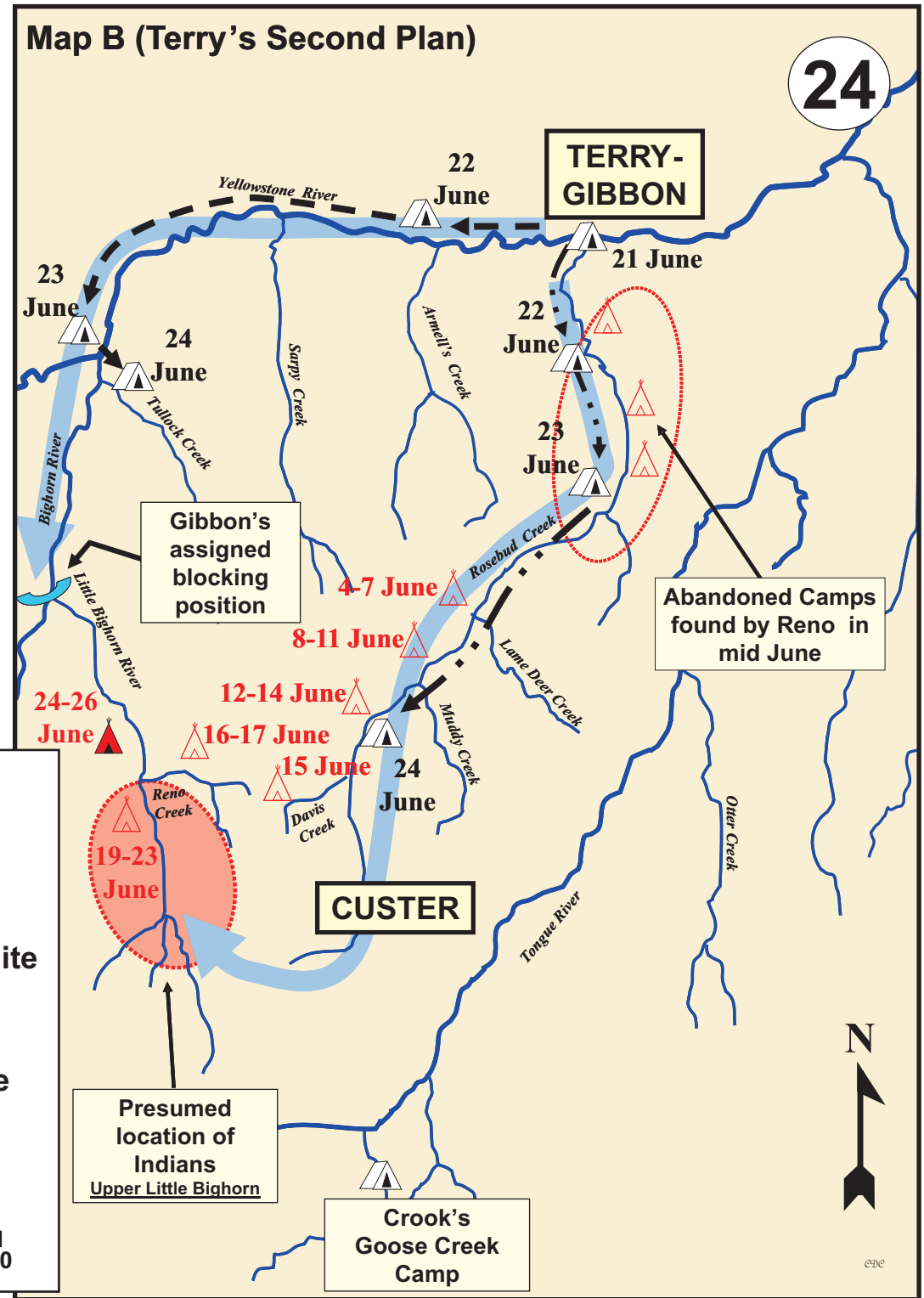
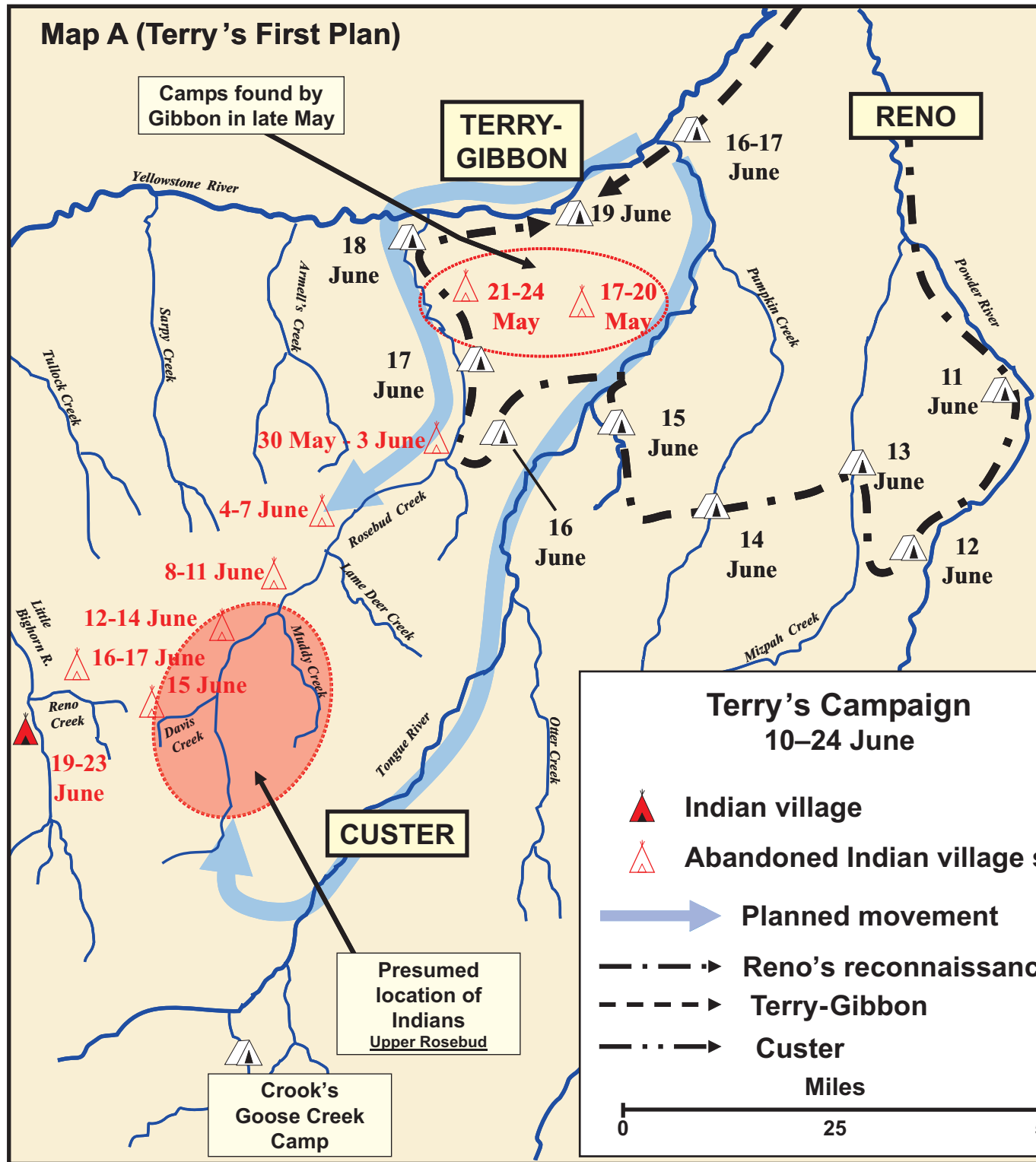
Terry's plan of parallel columns would not work; the Indians had already traveled beyond the area encompassed by Terry's pincer movement.

The information generated by Reno's reconnaissance caused Terry to formulate yet another plan (see map B). While all of his forces gathered at the mouth of the Rosebud, he designed a second pincer movement similar to the first. Terry's written orders provided full latitude for Custer to diverge from them; paradoxically, they also enumerated a specific set of instructions for Custer to follow. Whether Custer disobeyed orders is a controversy that continues to this day. Terry's orders directed Custer to ascend the Rosebud and follow the trail of the Indians. If the trail diverged from the Rosebud to the west, he was, nonetheless, to continue up that creek to ensure the Indians would not escape to the south. Near the headwaters of Rosebud Creek, Custer was to cross the divide into the Little Bighorn River drainage. Meanwhile, Gibbon's force was to move up the Yellowstone River, turn south up the Bighorn, and establish itself at the mouth of the Little Bighorn.

On 21 June, Custer departed with his regiment of 12 companies (652 men). Shortly thereafter, Terry and Gibbon led the remaining forces, 4 cavalry companies and 5 infantry companies (723 men), westward along the Yellowstone on their route to the mouth of the Little Bighorn. Each of these two columns followed Terry's plan to the letter until the evening of 24 June.

Map A (Terry's First Plan)

Map B (Terry's Second Plan)



Terry's Campaign 10-24 June

- Indian village
- Abandoned Indian village site
- Planned movement
- Reno's reconnaissance
- Terry-Gibbon
- Custer

Miles

0 25 50



Map 25. Custer's Approach to the Crow's Nest

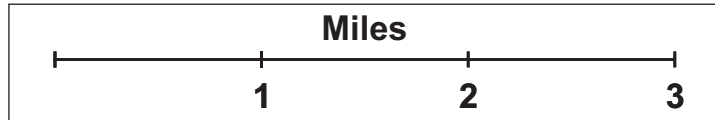
At 1945 on 24 June 1876, Custer camped at what is now the Busby Bend of Rosebud Creek. Throughout that day's march, he, his soldiers, and his scouts had seen increasing signs of the Sioux village. Still unclear was whether the Indians had continued up the Rosebud or had turned west toward the Little Bighorn River. At 2100, four Crow scouts returned to camp with news that the Sioux trail led westward out of the Rosebud Valley. Custer now faced a dilemma. Terry's orders directed him to continue up the Rosebud to its head, then turn west toward the Little Bighorn. Through this maneuver, Terry intended to trap the Indians between Custer's force and Gibbon's column. On the other hand, continuing up the Rosebud entailed several risks: possible discovery by Indian scouts, the loss of contact with the Indian village, and the possibility of leaving Gibbon's force to fight the Indians alone. After weighing his options, Custer chose to maintain contact by following the Sioux trail over the divide.

At 2120, Custer sent his chief of scouts, Lieutenant Charles A. Varnum, to a natural observation point called the Crow's Nest to pinpoint the location of the Sioux village. While Varnum was absent, Custer decided to move his column at night to the divide between Rosebud Creek and the Little Bighorn River. His force would then hide there throughout the day of 25 June in a small pocket nestled at the base of the Crow's Nest. That evening, he planned to approach the village, assume attack positions before dawn on 26 June, and attack the Indians at first light.

At 0030 on 25 June, Custer led his soldiers out of the Busby Bend camp toward the divide. After a slow, dusty, and disagreeable night march lasting nearly 3 hours, he halted his column about an hour before sunrise to cook breakfast. At 0730, Custer received a message from Varnum at the Crow's Nest. Although Varnum had not personally seen signs of the Sioux village (now in the Little Bighorn Valley), his Indian scouts claimed to have seen it. Unwilling to act without making his own observations, Custer and a small party left at 0800 for the Crow's Nest, while Reno brought the regiment forward.

During Varnum's wait for Custer at the Crow's Nest, his scouts saw two groups of hostile Indians that appeared to notice Custer's column. Custer reached the Crow's Nest at 0900, but like Varnum, he was unable to identify any signs of the Sioux village. Varnum's Indian scouts, however, convinced Custer of its presence in the Little Bighorn Valley. The scouts further argued that the column's movement had been compromised and that a stealthy approach to the village was now impossible. Custer adamantly rejected this advice while at the Crow's Nest and decided to continue with his plan to hide the regiment and attack at first light.

Custer's Approach to the Crow's Nest



Indian Trail



Army Scouts



Main Column

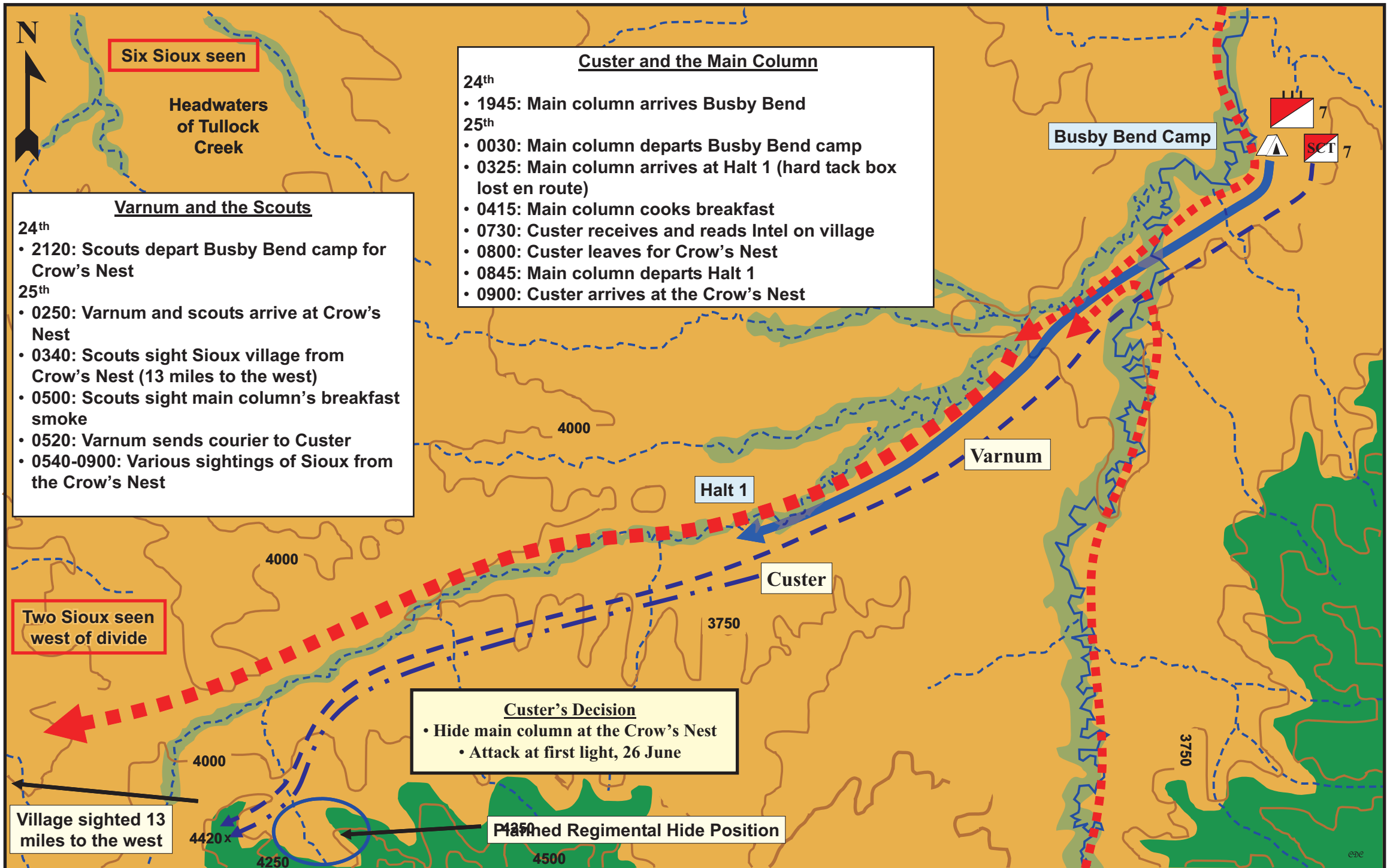
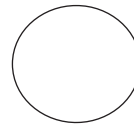


Custer



4000

Elevation in Feet



Map 26. Custer's Approach to the Little Bighorn

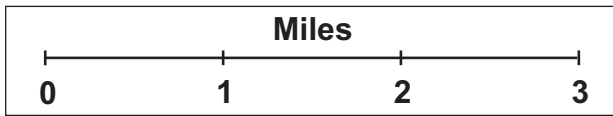
During Custer's absence, Reno had moved the column forward to a position just north of the Crow's Nest. On his return, Custer learned of a further threat to his force's security. During the night march, one of the pack mules had lost part of its load. The detail sent to retrieve it discovered several hostile Indians rummaging through its contents. The soldiers fired on the Indians, scattering them but not killing them. Coupled with the observations of Varnum's scouts, this latest breach of security forced Custer to discard his original plan for a stealthy approach. Instead of concealing his command throughout the day of 25 June, he would have to approach and attack the village immediately. Ironically, none of the Indians who spotted the column reported their findings to the village until after the battle, but Custer had no way of knowing that.

At 1050, Custer gathered his officers and detailed his new plan and the organization of the column. He directed each company commander to assign one noncommissioned officer and six men to accompany the pack train. The companies would depart in the order in which they finished preparations to move. The troopers resumed their march at 1145, with Captain Frederick W. Benteen's company in the van. They had not proceeded more than one-half mile past the divide when Custer ordered another halt. There, he reorganized his command into four parts: Benteen's battalion with D, H, and K Companies (120 men); Reno's battalion with A, G, and M Companies (175 men); Custer's battalion with C, E, F, I, and L Companies (221 men); and Captain Thomas M. McDougall's augmented company (B) with the pack train (136 men). Custer now

detached Benteen, ordering him to scout southward to determine whether the Indians were escaping in that direction. As soon as Benteen concluded that the Indians were not escaping, he was to rejoin the command as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, Custer and Reno continued their advance down what is now Reno Creek, with Custer's battalion on the right bank and Reno's on the left.

Benteen began his reconnaissance enthusiastically, but after crossing a series of ridges without finding any trace of the Indians, he concluded that he was being deliberately excluded from the fight. As a result, he lost his previous sense of urgency. In the meantime, Custer and Reno had proceeded down Reno Creek until they united on the right bank at a lone tepee containing the body of a warrior mortally wounded in the Rosebud fight. At the tepee, Custer's scouts reported that they could see the Sioux pony herd and Indians running in the distance. At 1415, Custer and Reno departed the lone tepee location at a trot and advanced nearly 3 miles to a flat area between Reno Creek and its north fork. There, more Sioux were seen, two of whom rode to a hill to give the alarm. Custer now ordered Reno to follow Reno Creek to the Little Bighorn, ford the river, and assault the fleeing village in a mounted charge. Custer promised Reno that he would support the attack with the remainder of the command. After Reno's departure, Custer briefly followed Reno's trail, reaching the north fork of Reno Creek at 1500. There, he received a series of surprising reports from Reno indicating that the Indians were not running as expected. Once again, Custer was forced to revise his plans.

Custer's Approach to the Little Bighorn



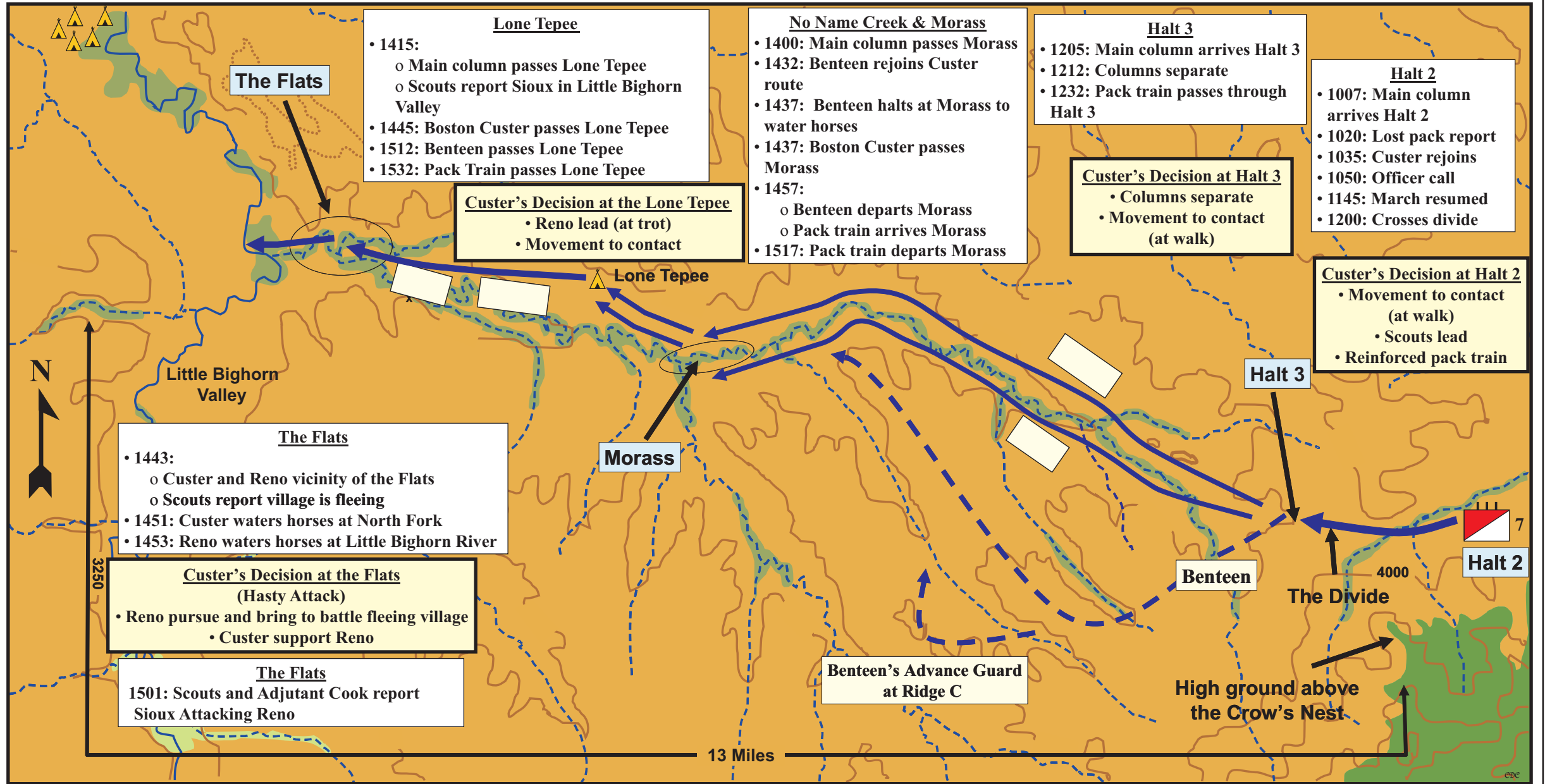
Indian village

← Custer and Reno



Elevation in Feet

← - - - Benteen



Map 27. The Battle of the Little Bighorn: Reno's Attack in the Valley, 1500 to 1533

After receiving his instructions and leaving Custer for the last time, Reno crossed again to the left bank of Reno Creek and followed the stream to its confluence with the Little Bighorn where he briefly stopped to water the horses. Five minutes later, Reno's battalion forded the Little Bighorn and deployed into a line across the valley. For the first time, Reno could see the edge of what now appeared to be an enormous Indian village.

At 1503, Reno ordered his men to advance down the valley. As their horses accelerated to a fast trot, several officers and men in the advancing line could see troopers from Custer's battalion on the bluffs to the east beyond the Little Bighorn. They could also see a swarm of Indian warriors gathering at the southern edge of the village. At the same time, Reno's Indian scouts, who initially formed the left flank of his line, veered westward toward the Indian pony herd on the bench above the Little Bighorn. Their task was to drive off as much of the herd as possible to prevent the Indians' escape. At 1513, officers and men in the charging line once again saw soldiers on the crest of the hill across the Little Bighorn. Several of Reno's men later testified that they could clearly see Custer waving his hat to the line of horsemen in the valley. Within a few minutes, Reno concluded that, without immediate support, his 135-man force could not attack through the village and hope to survive.

At 1518, Reno ordered his men to dismount and form a skirmish line. One of every four troopers was designated to hold the horses. While the horses were secured in a stand of timber on the right flank of the line, the remaining 95 men spread 400 yards across the valley to the low bluff on the west. Within minutes, the entire line was under pressure from hundreds of warriors spilling out of the village.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the river, Custer was faced with a situation that imposed a change of plans. From the orders he had given Reno, it appears that Custer originally had intended to reinforce Reno's charge in the valley. On being informed that the Indians were fighting rather than running, he may have felt he needed to support Reno by attacking the Sioux village from a different direction. While he hoped at any moment to see Benteen's command riding into sight, the urgency of the situation meant he could not wait. Consequently, Custer turned his battalion northwest to follow the bluff

line on the right bank of the Little Bighorn River. Apparently, he was seeking access to the river farther downstream to make a flank attack on the village.







Custer's force climbed to the crest of Reno Hill, where he gained his first glimpse of the valley. He could see Reno's command still making its charge and could view the southern edge of the largest Indian village any of the veteran soldiers had ever seen. In fact, the village contained up to 1,000 lodges and 7,120 people, including approximately 1,800 warriors. The sight of so many fighting warriors convinced Custer that he needed Benteen's command and the extra ammunition on the pack train immediately. He detached Sergeant Daniel Kanipe to find McDougall, commander of the pack train, with the message to move the train hurriedly cross-country: "If packs get loose, don't stop to fix them, cut them off. Come quick. Big Indian camp," and an added postscript for Benteen, if seen, to *come quickly*. But he had no time to wait for Benteen and the pack train; he had to continue his trek northwest. Just beyond Reno Hill, he descended into Cedar Coulee still attempting to gain access to the river and hoping that his approach would be shielded from the Indians' view.

Halting the command at a bend in the coulee, Custer rode to the high ground overlooking the valley (possibly Sharpshooter Hill or Weir Point) with several scouts including Mitch Boyer and the Indian scout, Curly. From the high ground, the small party could see that Reno's command had dismounted and was forming a skirmish line. If Reno could hold his position, Custer's command might gain enough time to become engaged. From the high ground, Custer could also see that Cedar Coulee joined another ravine (Medicine Tail Coulee) which would, at last, give him access to the river.

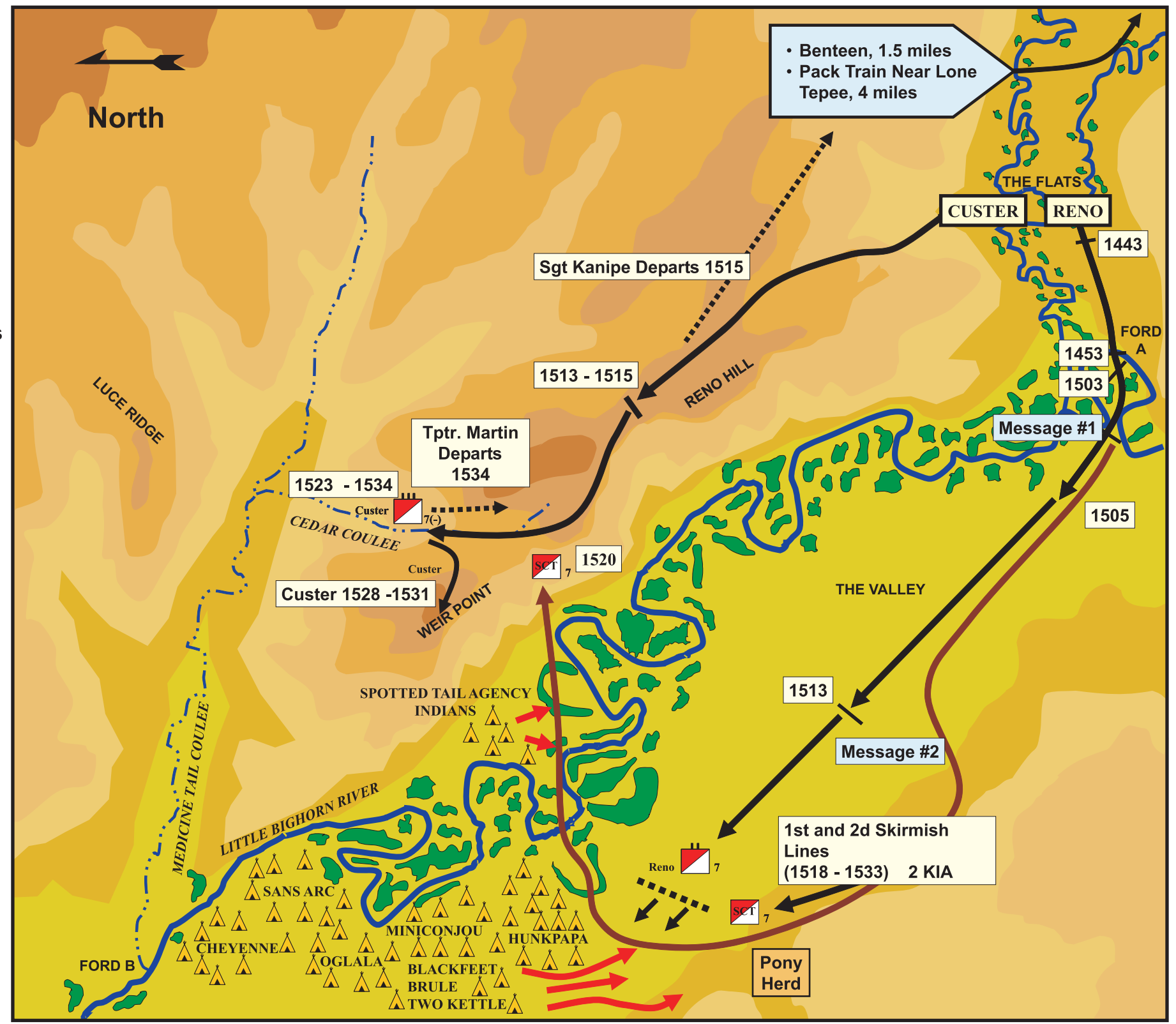
From the high ground, it is most likely that Custer also saw the dust cloud of Benteen's battalion and the pack train descending Reno Creek. He left Curly and Boyer on Weir Point to watch Reno's fight and then rejoined his command. After sending a trumpeter, John Martin, with another message for Benteen to bring the ammunition packs forward, he led the command down Cedar Coulee and into Medicine Tail Coulee to attack.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn

Reno's Attack in the Valley 1500 to 1533

-  Army Movements
-  Messenger
-  Army Scout Movements
-  Indian Attacks
-  Village
-  Skirmish Line

3450 Feet
3400 Feet
3350 Feet
3300 Feet
3250 Feet
3200 Feet
3150 Feet
3100 Feet



• Benteen, 1.5 miles
• Pack Train Near Lone Tepee, 4 miles

CUSTER RENO

Sgt Kanipe Departs 1515

1513 - 1515

Tptr. Martin Departs 1534

1523 - 1534

Custer 1528 -1531

1520

1513

Message #2

1st and 2d Skirmish Lines
(1518 - 1533) 2 KIA

Pony Herd

Message #1

1505

1443

1453

1503

FORD A

North

LUCE RIDGE

CEDAR COULEE

WEIR POINT

SPOTTED TAIL AGENCY INDIANS

LITTLE BIGHORN RIVER

MEDICINE TAIL COULEE

SANS ARC

CHEYENNE

OGLALA

MINICONJOU

HUNKPAPA

BLACKFEET

BRULE

TWO KETTLE

FORD B

RENO HILL

THE VALLEY

THE FLATS

Map 28. The Battle of the Little Bighorn: Losing the Initiative, 1533 to 1553

In the valley, Reno's troopers were outnumbered five to one. Threatened with being flanked and overwhelmed on his left, at 1533 Reno ordered the line to withdraw into the timber. In the trees, Reno tried to form a perimeter using an old riverbank as a natural breastwork. However, the area was too large for his small command to secure. In less than 30 minutes, the warriors worked their way through the brush and threatened to surround Reno's command. The timber was a good defensive position. However, Reno's most serious concern was that some of his companies were also running low on ammunition, and the only remaining supply was with the pack train somewhere to the rear. Reno was quickly coming to the decision that he needed to leave the timber and find the rest of the regiment.

In Cedar Coulee, Custer was unaware of Reno's deteriorating situation. His primary concern was to get his battalion off the high ground and into the fight to support Reno. He

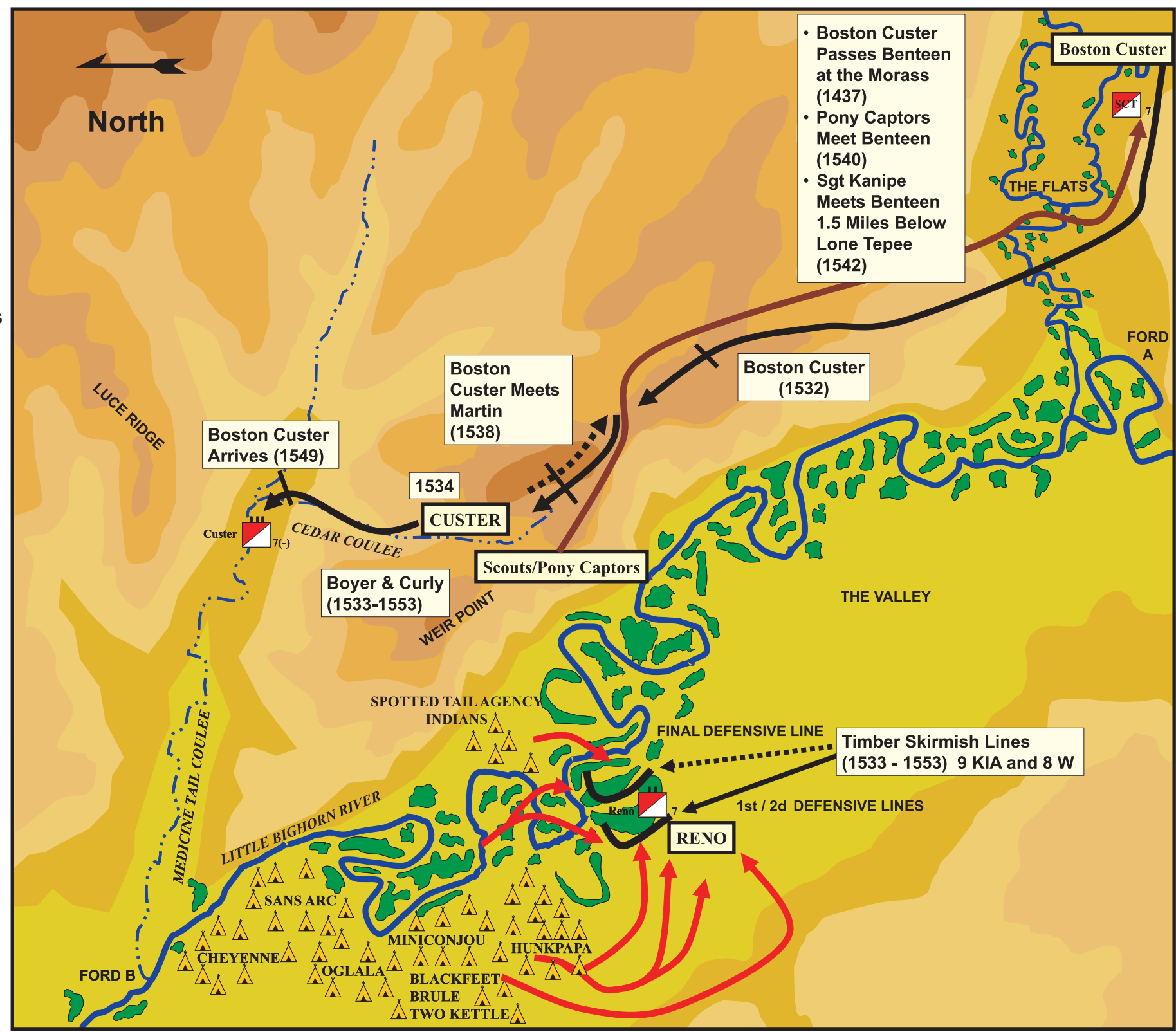
more than likely intended to attack down Medicine Tail Coulee into the village, the frontier Army's accepted tactic of hitting a village from multiple sides to cause surprise and panic. At approximately 1549, Custer received a valuable update from his younger brother, Boston Custer. Boston had abandoned his assignment with the pack train and ridden forward to join his brother for the fight. The younger brother would have been able to inform his brother that the back trail was open and confirm that Benteen had joined Custer's route. Boston may also have been able to verify that Reno was still heavily engaged in the valley, a confirmation for Custer that there was still time to move against the village's flank.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn

Losing the Initiative 1533 to 1553

-  Army Movements
-  Messenger
-  Army Scout Movements
-  Indian Attacks
-  Village
-  Army Defensive Perimeter

3450 Feet
3400 Feet
3350 Feet
3300 Feet
3250 Feet
3200 Feet
3150 Feet
3100 Feet



- Boston Custer Passes Benteen at the Morass (1437)
- Pony Captors Meet Benteen (1540)
- Sgt Kanipe Meets Benteen 1.5 Miles Below Lone Tepee (1542)

Boston Custer Meets Martin (1538)

Boston Custer Arrives (1549)

Boston Custer (1532)

1534
CUSTER

Boyer & Curly (1533-1553)

Scouts/Pony Captors

Timber Skirmish Lines (1533 - 1553) 9 KIA and 8 W

RENO

1st / 2d DEFENSIVE LINES

FINAL DEFENSIVE LINE

SPOTTED TAIL AGENCY INDIANS

- ▲ SANS ARC
- ▲ CHEYENNE
- ▲ OGLALA
- ▲ MINICONJOU
- ▲ HUNKPAPA
- ▲ BLACKFEET
- ▲ BRULE
- ▲ TWO KETTLE

Boston Custer

THE FLATS

FORD A

THE VALLEY

LUCE RIDGE

FORD B

MEDICINE TAIL COULEE

LITTLE BIGHORN RIVER

CEDAR COULEE

WEIR POINT

Custer

Reno

7

7(-)

7

7

Map 29. The Battle of the Little Bighorn: Disaster in the Valley, 1553 to 1627

Reno's situation in the valley was critical. The Indians threatened to surround Reno and soon set the woods afire. In response, Reno ordered his men to mount and move upstream where they could cross to high ground on the east bank. At 1553, Reno led the retreat out of the timber, but the movement quickly degenerated into a rout. Many men did not receive the order or were unable to withdraw and were left in the timber to fight in small pockets or hide until they could escape. Those who made it out of the woods were forced to cross the Little Bighorn at a narrow, deep ford that caused them to cluster. Meanwhile, the Indians vigorously pressed their attack, inflicting heavy casualties on the panic-stricken soldiers struggling to reach safety beyond the river. At 1610, the first troops reached the hill that would later bear Reno's name. More than 40 dead and 13 wounded troopers attested to the bloody fighting in the valley. Seventeen officers and men remained temporarily hidden in the trees west of the river.

Curly and Boyer, the scouts that Custer left behind on the high ground, witnessed Reno's disastrous retreat. Knowing the importance of this information, the two scouts descended Weir Point to rendezvous with Custer's column. Custer, having learned from

Boyer and Curly that Reno's force was in serious trouble, knew that he had to act immediately. Apparently intending to distract the Indians at his end of the village, Custer split his battalion into two parts: E and F Companies (76 men) under the command of Captain George W. Yates and C, I, and L Companies (134 men) under Captain Myles W. Keogh. He sent Yates' command down Medicine Tail Coulee to the ford to make a feint against the village. Custer led the remainder of the force up the north side of Medicine Tail Coulee to Luce Ridge. From there, Keogh's three companies could support Yates should he get into serious trouble, and at the same time, Custer could wait for Benteen's battalion and the pack train.

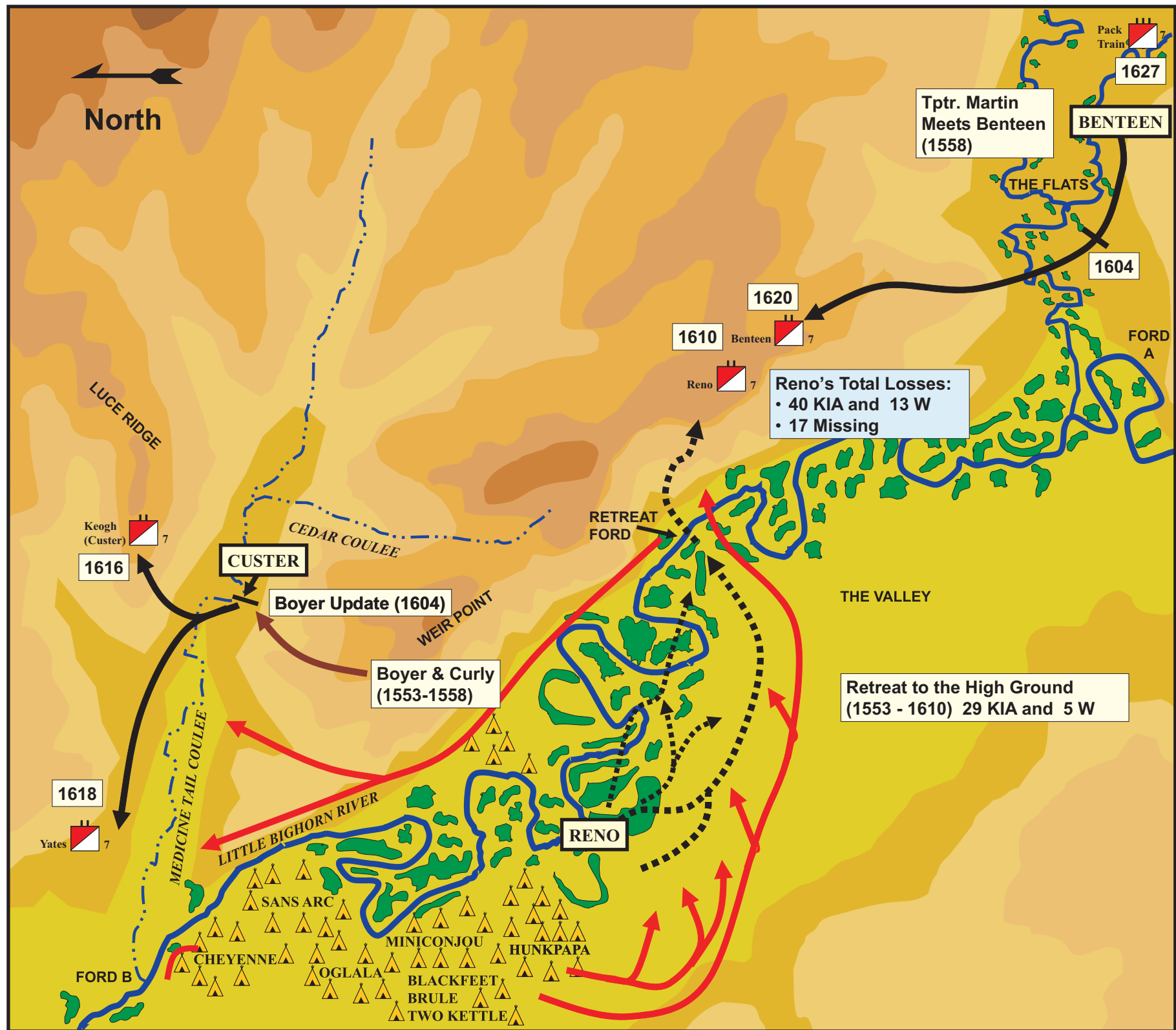
Yates made his charge toward the river and startled the village. Briefly, as the Indians recovered from their surprise, Yates' command was able to fire across the river relatively unopposed. The Indians soon rallied, however, and some began to pressure Yates frontally while others ascended Medicine Tail Coulee. From his position on Luce Ridge, Custer's men poured a heavy volley of fire into the advancing warriors.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn

Disaster in the Valley 1553 to 1627

-  Army Movements
-  Messenger
-  Army Scout Movements
-  Indian Attacks
-  Village

3450 Feet
3400 Feet
3350 Feet
3300 Feet
3250 Feet
3200 Feet
3150 Feet
3100 Feet



Map 30. The Battle of the Little Bighorn: Weir's Advance and Reno Hill





Having suffered grievous losses in the valley, Reno withdrew his men to the bluffs on the east bank of the Little Bighorn. The Sioux pursued them briefly, but by 1630, most of the warriors had broken contact with Reno and moved off to assist in the fight against Custer's force. Benteen's battalion and the pack train soon joined Reno atop the bluffs. From there, they could hear heavy and continuous firing to the north. While Reno and Benteen pondered their next move, Captain Thomas B. Weir initiated an advance by most of the command to a high point 1 mile to the northwest. Although this prominence (now known as Weir Point) offered an excellent view of the surrounding terrain, the cavalymen learned little about Custer's fate. To the west, they could see the valley of the Little Bighorn filled with tepees. To the north, they could see distant hills and ridges shrouded in dust with occasional glimpses of Indians in the dust cloud riding about and firing. They did not realize they were witnessing Custer's destruction (see map 31). By 1710, most of the firing had ceased. Now dust clouds appeared all over the area as the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors converged on the remainder of the 7th Cavalry. It appears that neither Reno nor Benteen provided any overall direction to the command; the company commanders decided independently to fall back to the original position on the bluffs. Lieutenant Edward Godfrey, commander of K Company, saw the danger of a disorderly retreat and, on his own initiative, acted as the rearguard. By 1810, Reno and Benteen had their battalions back on the bluffs and had formed a perimeter defense. Animals and wounded men were gathered in a circular depression in the center of the position. The Indians rapidly surrounded the bluecoats and began long-range sniping at Reno's men. While vexing, the Indians' fire caused few casualties, and the soldiers' firepower stopped all enemy charges. Darkness finally stopped the fighting at 2100. While the Indians withdrew to the village to celebrate their great victory, the troopers strengthened their position with improvised tools.

The fighting at Reno Hill would persist for the next 2 days. On the 26th the Indians continued their long-range sniping, supplemented by occasional charges. This time, Indian fire inflicted considerably more casualties. (On the hill, Reno lost 48 men killed and wounded on the 26th, compared to just 11 on the 25th.) Improved Indian fire may have persuaded Benteen to conduct some limited counterattacks. Seeing a large band of Indians massing near the south end of his position, he led H Company in a charge that quickly scattered the attackers. Benteen then persuaded Reno to order a general advance in all directions. This attack also succeeded in driving the Indians back and gained some relief from enemy fire, but the relief was only temporary. As the sun rose and the day grew warmer, the lack of water became a serious problem, especially for the wounded men lying without cover in the hot Montana sun. A plea from Dr. Henry R. Porter, the 7th Cavalry's only surviving physician, prompted Benteen to seek volunteers to go for water. Covered by sharpshooters, a party of soldiers made its way down what is now called Water Carriers' Ravine to the river and succeeded in bringing water back for the wounded.

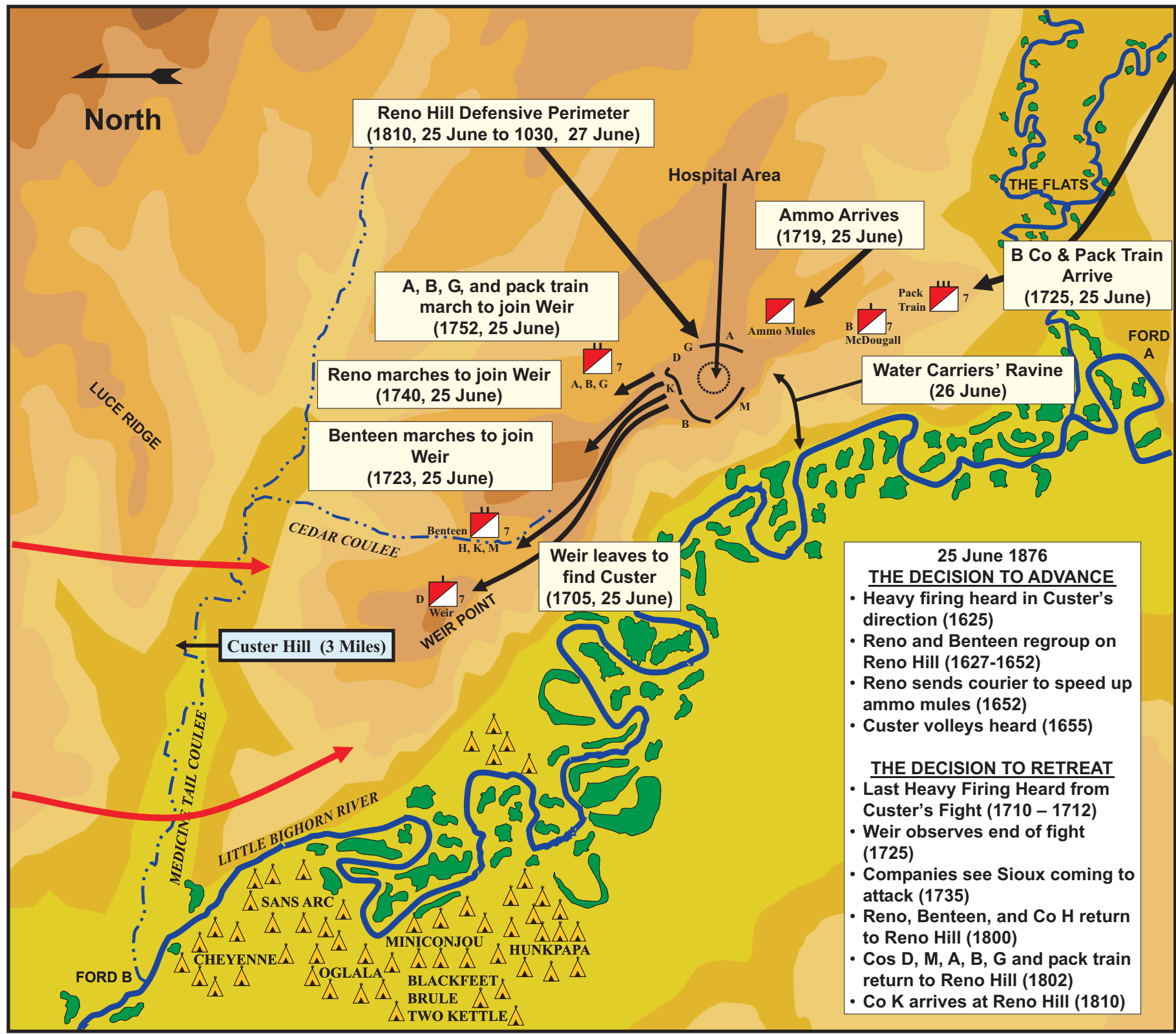
By late afternoon, the Sioux and Cheyenne appeared to be losing interest in the battle. Frustrated by their inability to finish off the bluecoats and apparently satisfied with what they had already accomplished, the Indians began to withdraw. While some warriors kept the soldiers pinned down, the Indians in the valley broke camp and set the prairie grass afire to hinder pursuit. At approximately 1900, Reno's men saw the huge band move upriver toward a new campsite in the Bighorn Mountains. Although unmolested following the Indian withdrawal, Reno stayed in his hilltop position the night of the 26th. The following morning, Terry's column arrived and informed Reno and Benteen of Custer's fate.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn

Weir's Advance and Reno Hill

-  Army Movements
-  Army Defensive Perimeter
-  Indian Attacks
-  Village

3450 Feet
3400 Feet
3350 Feet
3300 Feet
3250 Feet
3200 Feet
3150 Feet
3100 Feet



25 June 1876

THE DECISION TO ADVANCE

- Heavy firing heard in Custer's direction (1625)
- Reno and Benteen regroup on Reno Hill (1627-1652)
- Reno sends courier to speed up ammo mules (1652)
- Custer volleys heard (1655)

THE DECISION TO RETREAT

- Last Heavy Firing Heard from Custer's Fight (1710 – 1712)
- Weir observes end of fight (1725)
- Companies see Sioux coming to attack (1735)
- Reno, Benteen, and Co H return to Reno Hill (1800)
- Cos D, M, A, B, G and pack train return to Reno Hill (1802)
- Co K arrives at Reno Hill (1810)

Map 31. The Battle of the Little Bighorn: Custer's Last Stand

As Yates began to withdraw up Deep Coulee, Custer saw the necessity of reuniting his command. While Yates ascended Deep Coulee, Custer left Luce Ridge and crossed both Nye-Cartwright Ridge and Deep Coulee to the reunion point near Calhoun Hill. After the five companies rejoined on Calhoun Hill, the pressure from the Indians intensified. At this point, Boyer convinced Curly to leave the doomed command while he stayed with Custer. After Curly's exit, descriptions of Custer's fight are necessarily conjecture. However, the accounts by Richard A. Fox, John S. Gray, and Gregory F. Michno offer reasonable hypotheses about the battle from this point and are buttressed by the physical evidence: the placement of bodies, the location of artifacts, Indian testimony, and the terrain.

One of the most plausible theories is that Custer continued offensive movement, but delayed making a decisive thrust while he waited for Benteen's arrival (see map A). To support this maneuver, he positioned Keogh's wing (Companies C, I, and L) at Calhoun Hill as a rearguard. Yates' wing (Companies E and F) then maneuvered further to the north to threaten the noncombatants who had collected near Squaw Creek. Custer's movements were initially made without serious opposition from the Sioux or their allies; it took time for the warriors to reposition from their fight in the south against Reno to the new threat at the north end of the camp.

Calhoun Hill was a good defensive position. From this dominant location, the soldiers' fire controlled the Indian movement up Deep Ravine. Lieutenant James Calhoun's (Custer's brother-in-law) Company L and at least one platoon of Company C skirmished with the Indians for about 45 minutes. However, the surrounding ground was very broken, giving the Indians a myriad of concealed approaches from which to launch attacks. The mounting pressure on the soldiers ultimately overwhelmed the rearguard and forced the survivors off the hill in the only reasonable direction, northwest along

what is now called Custer Ridge. Keogh's I Company occupied a support position to the rear of L Company and was probably overrun before it could deploy (see map B).

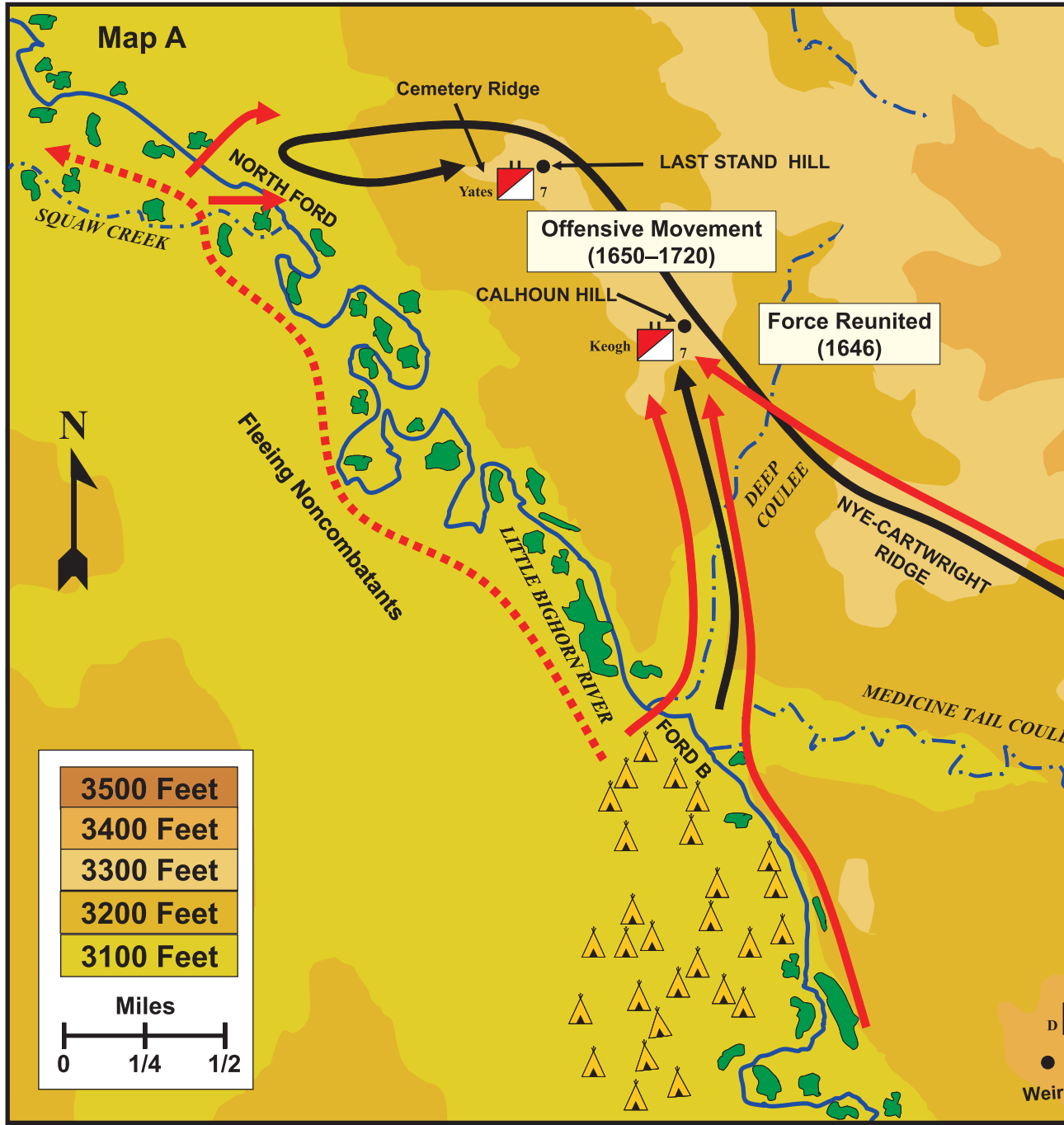
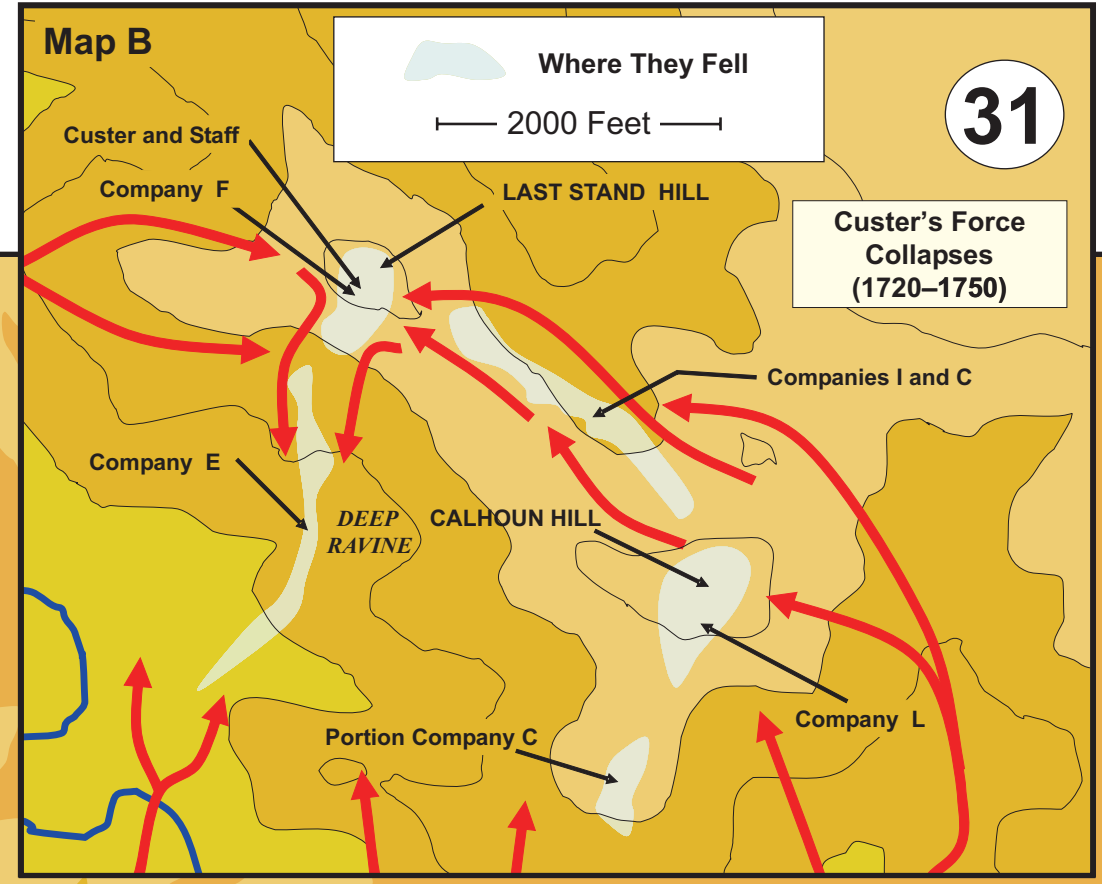
Meanwhile, Custer's other two companies continued the attack toward the vicinity of the North Ford (see map A). Custer probably aimed at corralling a large number of the noncombatants that would have caused the warriors to hold back in fear of causing further threat to their women and children. Although the number of warriors opposing Yates' battalion, at first, was not significant, it appears from Indian accounts that they were uncharacteristically aggressive. Instead of fighting a rearguard and shepherding their families out of harms way, they maneuvered against Yates' battalion. More than likely, Custer decided that his two small companies were insufficient to overcome the large number of noncombatants and turned back to link up with Keogh's wing to wait for Benteen.

Yates' wing fought a series of rearguard actions back up Cemetery Ridge toward Custer's Hill against increasing pressure as more warriors abandoned the fight against Reno and moved north to oppose Custer. It appears that the collapse of the Calhoun Hill position caused a similar disintegration of Yates' wing. The majority of the remaining soldiers in companies E and F retreated to Last Stand Hill (see map B). A small number of survivors from Keogh's wing joined them, but against such enormous odds no amount of gallantry could have saved the command. As the Indians swarmed about Custer's small force, the intense pressure forced some of the men to withdraw southwest toward Deep Ravine, forming what has been called the south skirmish line. From there, the few remaining troopers fled in isolation and were cut down, one by one, until no one remained alive. Custer's battle was over, but the legend of Custer's last stand was only beginning.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn

Custer's Last Stand

-  Army Movements
-  Indian Attacks
-  Indian Noncombatants
-  Village



31

Custer's Force Collapses (1720-1750)

Weir observes end of fight (1725)

Map 32. The Sioux Dispersal, July–September 1876

News of Custer's debacle at the Little Bighorn paralyzed Crook's and Terry's columns for over a month. The great Sioux camp dispersed shortly after the battle. Most of the bands withdrew to the southwest toward the Bighorn Mountains, satisfied with their great victory. After a few weeks of celebration in the mountains, the major bands headed northeast onto the plains. Sitting Bull's band traveled to the northeast, Long Dog's people eventually moved northwest, and Crazy Horse's people returned eastward to the Black Hills.

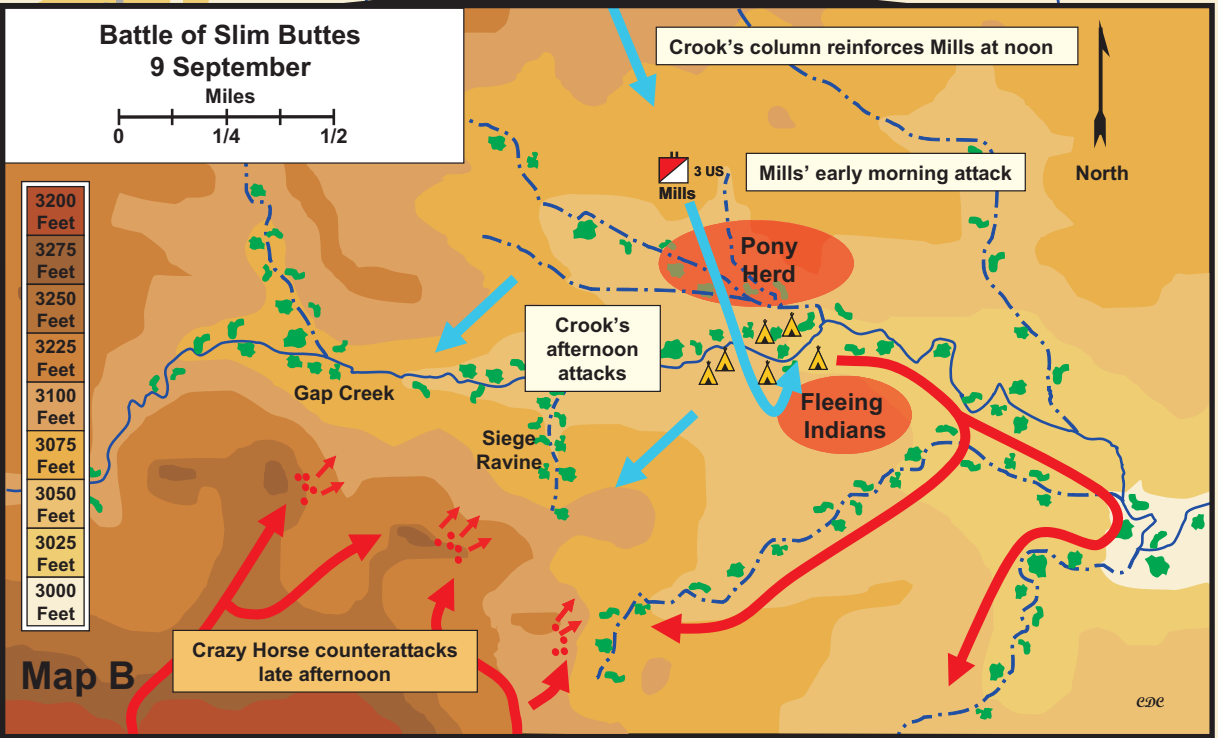
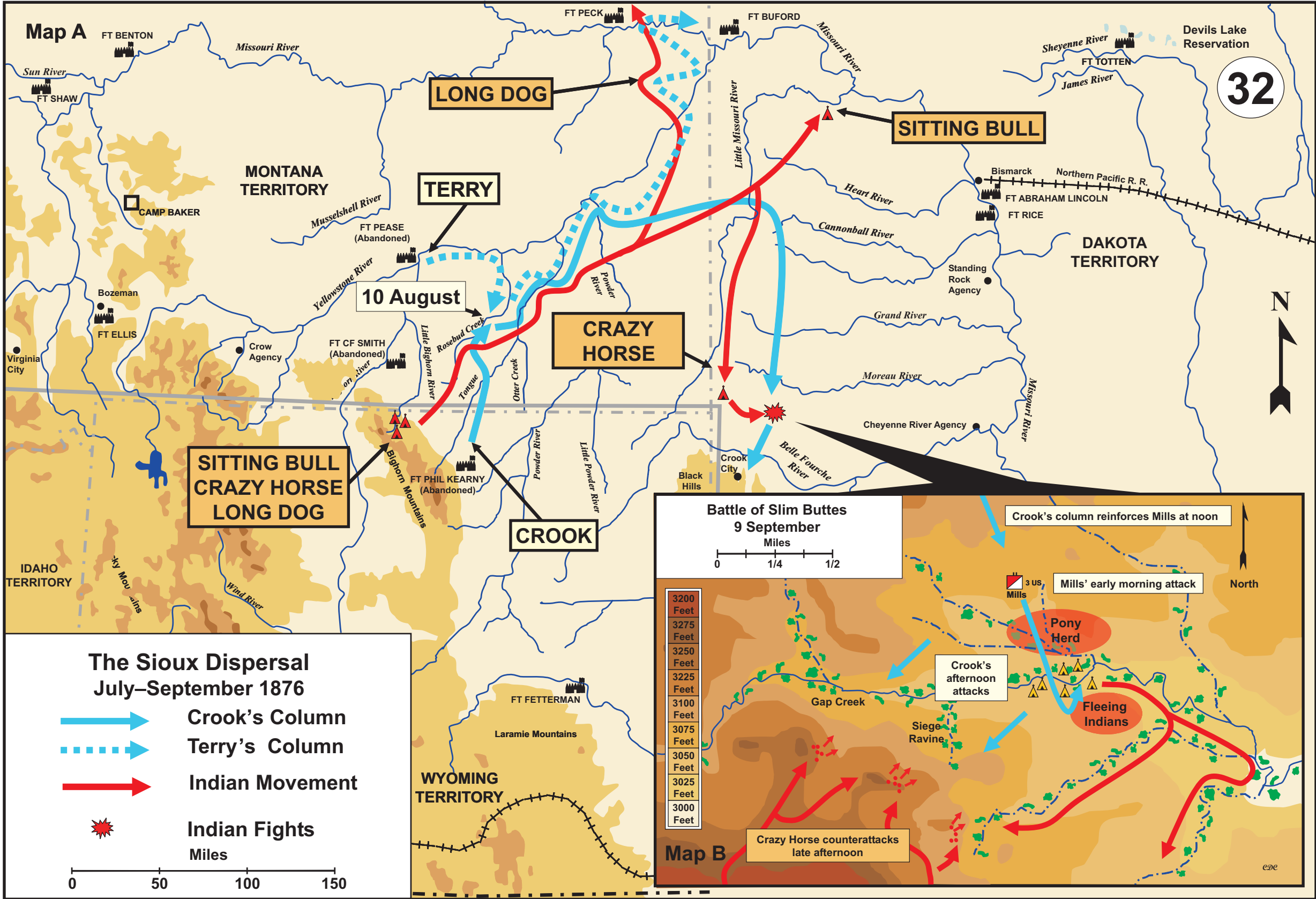
With the possible exception of Crazy Horse's band, which launched a few small-scale raids against miners in the Black Hills, the Sioux and Cheyenne appeared to have little interest in continuing the fight. Most of the Indians assumed that their overwhelming victory over Custer would cause the Army to give up the campaign—at least for a time. The inactivity of Crook and Terry following the battle seemed to support this view. Of course, the disaster at the Little Bighorn would have precisely the opposite effect on the US Army's intentions.

Both Crook and Terry called for and received substantial reinforcements. They finally got underway again in early August, but only after Indian trails in their respective vicinities had aged a month or more. On 10 August, the two forces met along the banks of Rosebud Creek, after initially mistaking each other for the enemy. The two commanders combined their already ponderous columns into a single expedition and proceeded northeast down the Tongue River Valley. This huge host quickly exhausted its rations and halted along the Powder River to await additional supplies.

With their commands partially re-supplied, the two commanders could not agree on how next to proceed and worked out a rough compromise. Basically, Terry would follow the Indians moving north deeper into his Department of Dakota, and Crook would follow

those Indians most likely to turn south toward his Department of the Platte. Crook set out due east on 22 August in one last attempt to salvage something from the campaign. By 8 September, Crook had succeeded only in exhausting and nearly starving his troopers. But on the morning of 9 September, a small detachment commanded by Captain Anson Mills found a small Indian village at Slim Buttes and promptly attacked it (see map B). Mills' troopers inflicted few casualties, but succeeded in capturing the camp and a small but welcome supply of buffalo meat. That afternoon, 600 to 800 warriors from Crazy Horse's band counterattacked Crook's now consolidated force of about 2,000 effectives. Although badly outnumbered, the Sioux occupied the high ground and fought Crook's exhausted men to a standstill. Following this inconclusive engagement, Crook made no effort to pursue the Indians but concentrated solely on getting his command back to a regular supply source. On 13 September, Crook finally obtained supplies from Crook City in the Black Hills, ending his men's ordeal. Meanwhile, Terry's force proceeded north to the Yellowstone, pursuing another cold trail. Terry encountered no Indians and quickly gave up the chase. A detachment under Reno briefly pursued Long Dog's band north of the Missouri, but soon abandoned the effort and proceeded to Fort Buford.

Perhaps the most important developments of the campaign took place far from the scene of action. Shocked by news of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, Congress passed the Sioux appropriation bill, which forced the Sioux to cede their remaining lands and withdraw to a specified reservation on the west bank of the Missouri. At the same time, Sheridan dealt harshly with the agency Indians, confiscating all of their weapons and ponies. Without guns or horses, the agency Indians could no longer reinforce the hostile bands.



**The Sioux Dispersal
July-September 1876**

- Crook's Column
- - - → Terry's Column
- Indian Movement
- ★ Indian Fights

Miles
0 50 100 150

Map B

epe

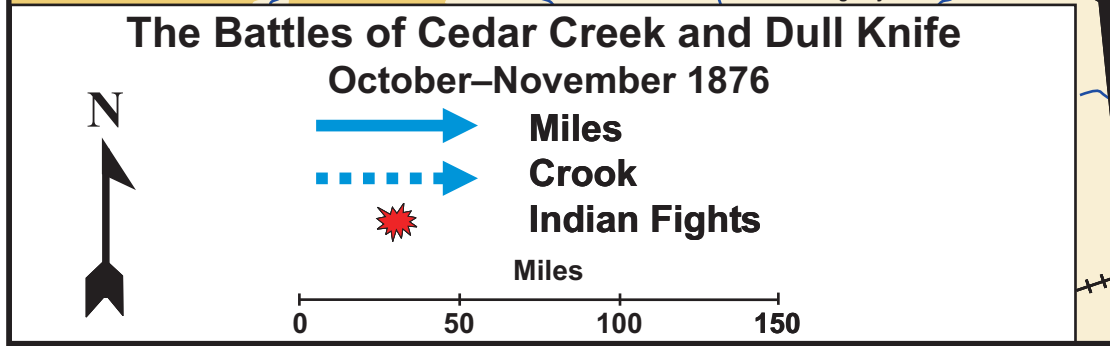
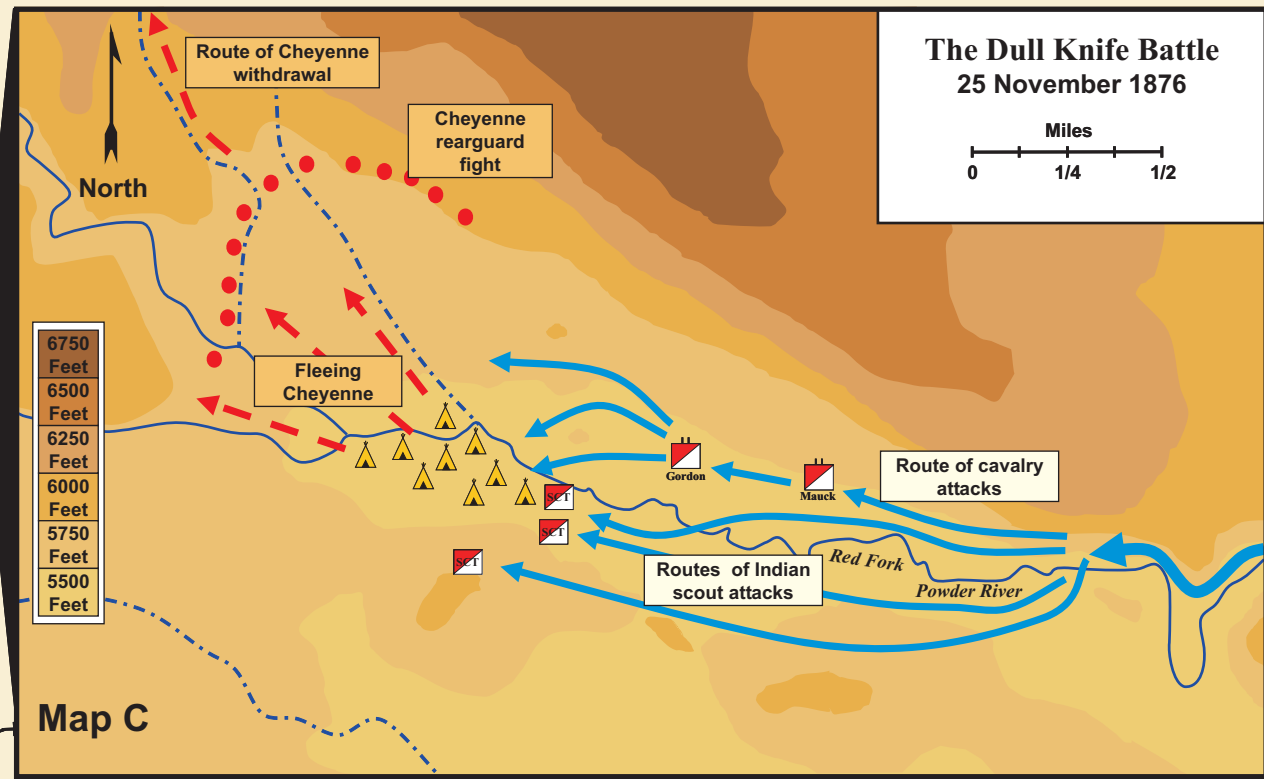
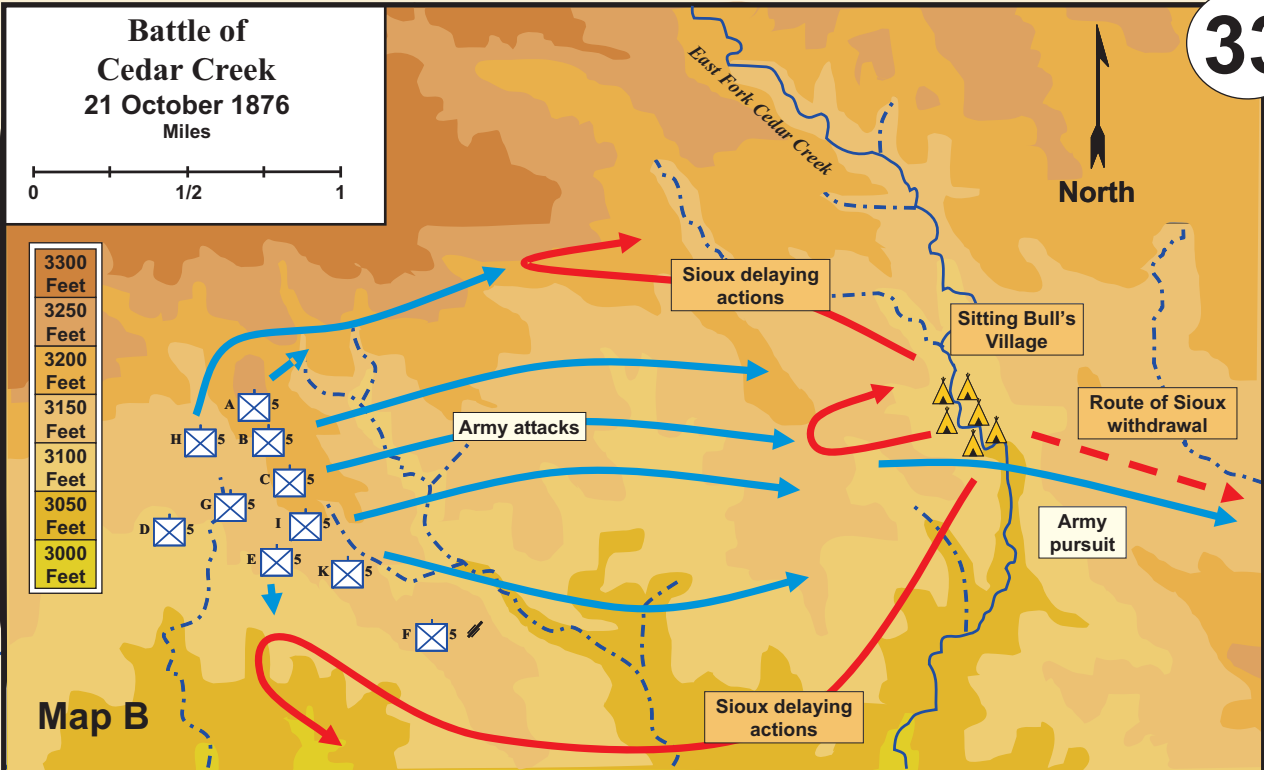
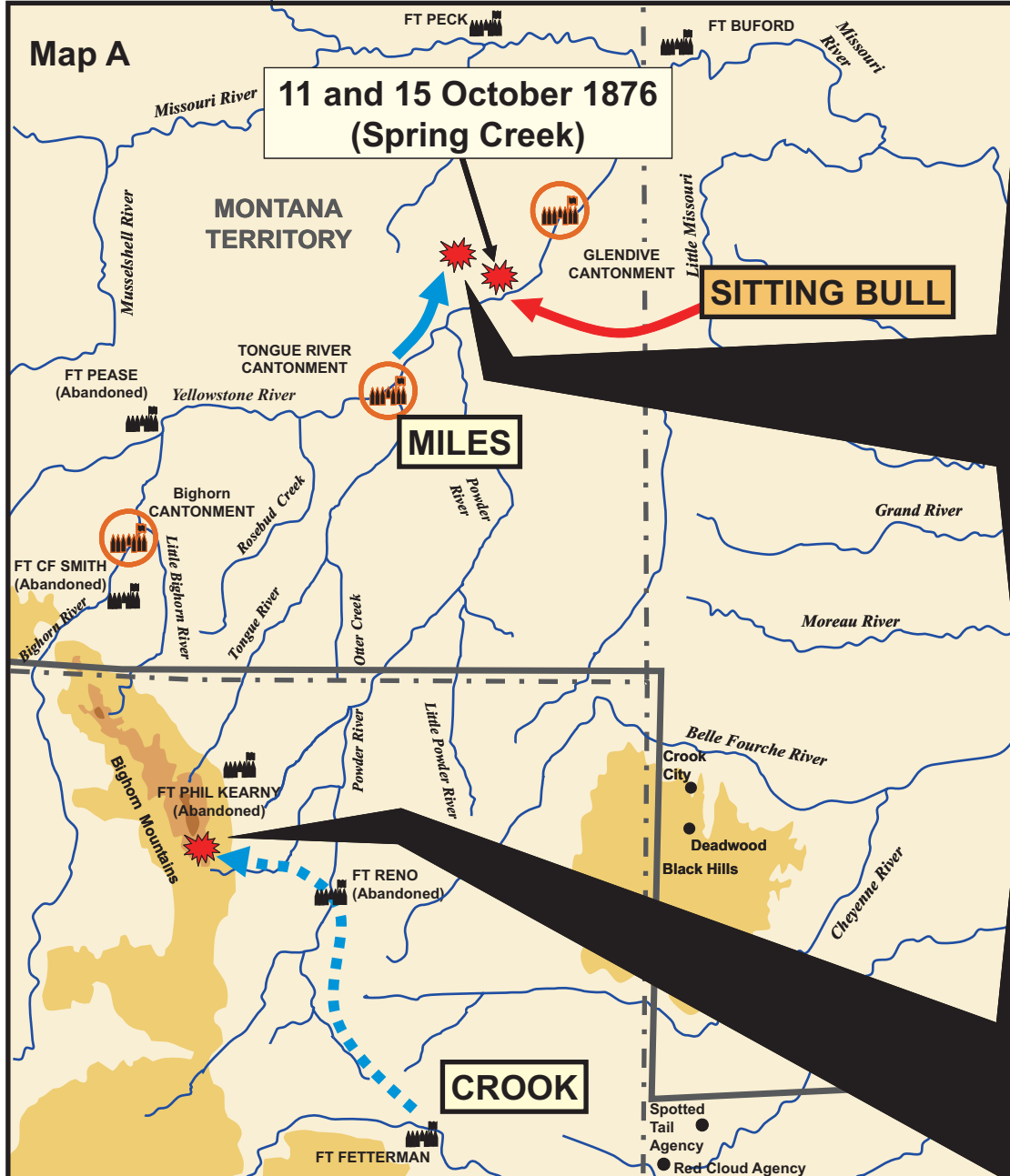
Map 33. The Battles of Cedar Creek and Dull Knife, October–November 1876

While Crook and Terry no longer pursued the Indians, Colonel Nelson A. Miles, commander of the 5th Infantry Regiment, established a cantonment at the mouth of the Tongue River and, in accordance with orders, continued operations against the Sioux. In early October, a large coalition of Hunkpapa, Miniconjou, and Sans Arc under the direction of Sitting Bull moved west from the Little Missouri River Valley into the region between the Glendive and Tongue River Cantonments. On 11 and 15 October, they skirmished with Miles' supply trains in the vicinity of Spring Creek. Soon after the skirmish, Miles gained intelligence on Sitting Bull's movements and marched northeast with the 5th Infantry, approximately 500 strong, to intercept the Sioux. His foot soldiers marched hard and overtook the Sioux near the headwaters of Cedar Creek on 20 October. That day, and the next, Miles and Sitting Bull negotiated between the lines. Sitting Bull demanded that all white men leave the region, and Miles demanded that the Sioux surrender and report to the agency—neither was willing to compromise. Miles broke off the negotiations when the Sioux began to break down their village and move away (see map B). At first, both sides maneuvered without shots being fired, but when the Indians set fire to the prairie grass to screen the village's movement, the soldiers opened fire. Approximately 400 to 600 warriors attempted to delay the soldiers. However, the steady advance of the soldiers forced the village into a hasty withdrawal and the abandonment of significant quantities of camp equipment and supplies.

Miles pursued the village for two days. During the Indian retreat, the large encampment broke into two groups. Sitting Bull, with an estimated 240 people and 30 lodges, headed north, and another 200 or more lodges retreated south toward the

Yellowstone River. Miles caught up with the large group on 27 October. Several Miniconjou and Sans Arc chiefs negotiated a surrender with Miles. In the long run, only about 40 lodges actually reported to the agency; the remainder moved up the Powder River and joined with Crazy Horse's band. Though disappointed that he had failed to capture Sitting Bull, Miles had severely damaged Sitting Bull's Indian coalition.

While Miles harassed the northern bands with only 500 men, Crook launched a massive expedition from Fort Fetterman on 14 November. His large column included elements of the 2d, 3d, 4th, and 5th Cavalry, and 4th, 9th, 14th, and 25th Infantry. Altogether, Crook had about 1,500 Regulars, 400 Indian scouts, and about 300 civilians responsible for 168 supply wagons and 400 pack mules. On 22 November, his scouts located a large Cheyenne village at the base of the Bighorn Mountains. The principal chiefs of the village were Dull Knife and Little Wolf, with about 200 lodges and 400 warriors. Crook ordered Colonel Ranald Mackenzie to take all the scouts and 10 troops of cavalry, about 1,100 men, and make a strike for the village. On 24 November, the detachment made a difficult night approach march and attacked early on the morning of 25 November, achieving complete surprise (see map C). The Cheyenne fled for their lives, leaving their ponies, tepees, and food. Having exposed the Cheyenne to the elements, Crook returned to Fort Fetterman and let freezing temperatures and starvation finish the job of subduing the hostiles. Despite the serious losses at the Dull Knife battle, the Cheyenne refused to give up the fight and struggled north to join with Crazy Horse's band of Sioux. It would now be up to Miles to finish the campaign.



Map 34. The Fort Peck Expedition, November–December 1876

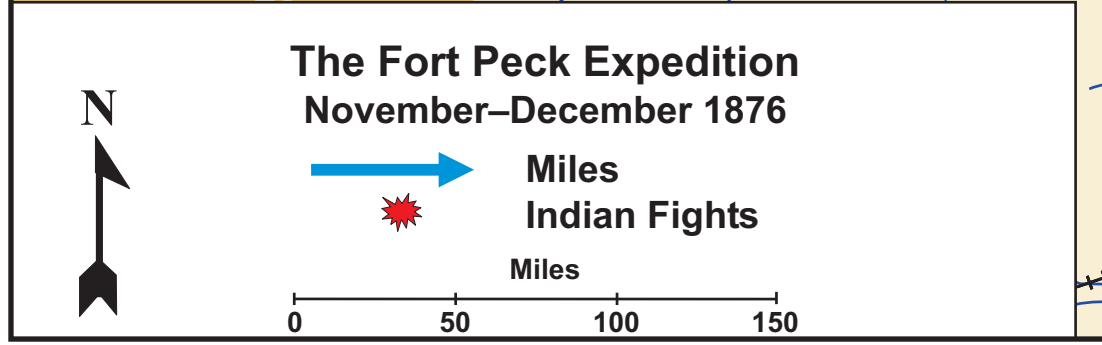
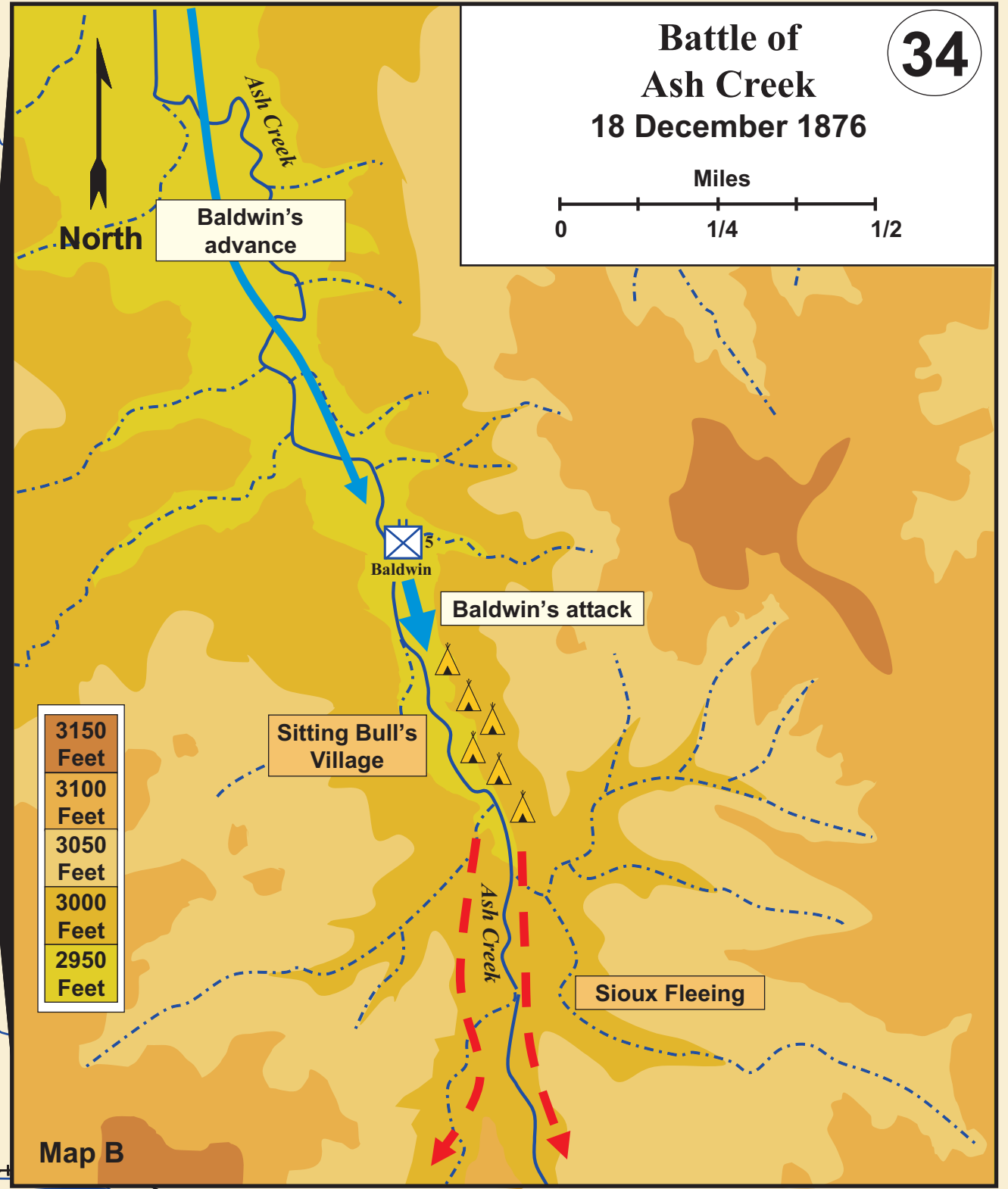
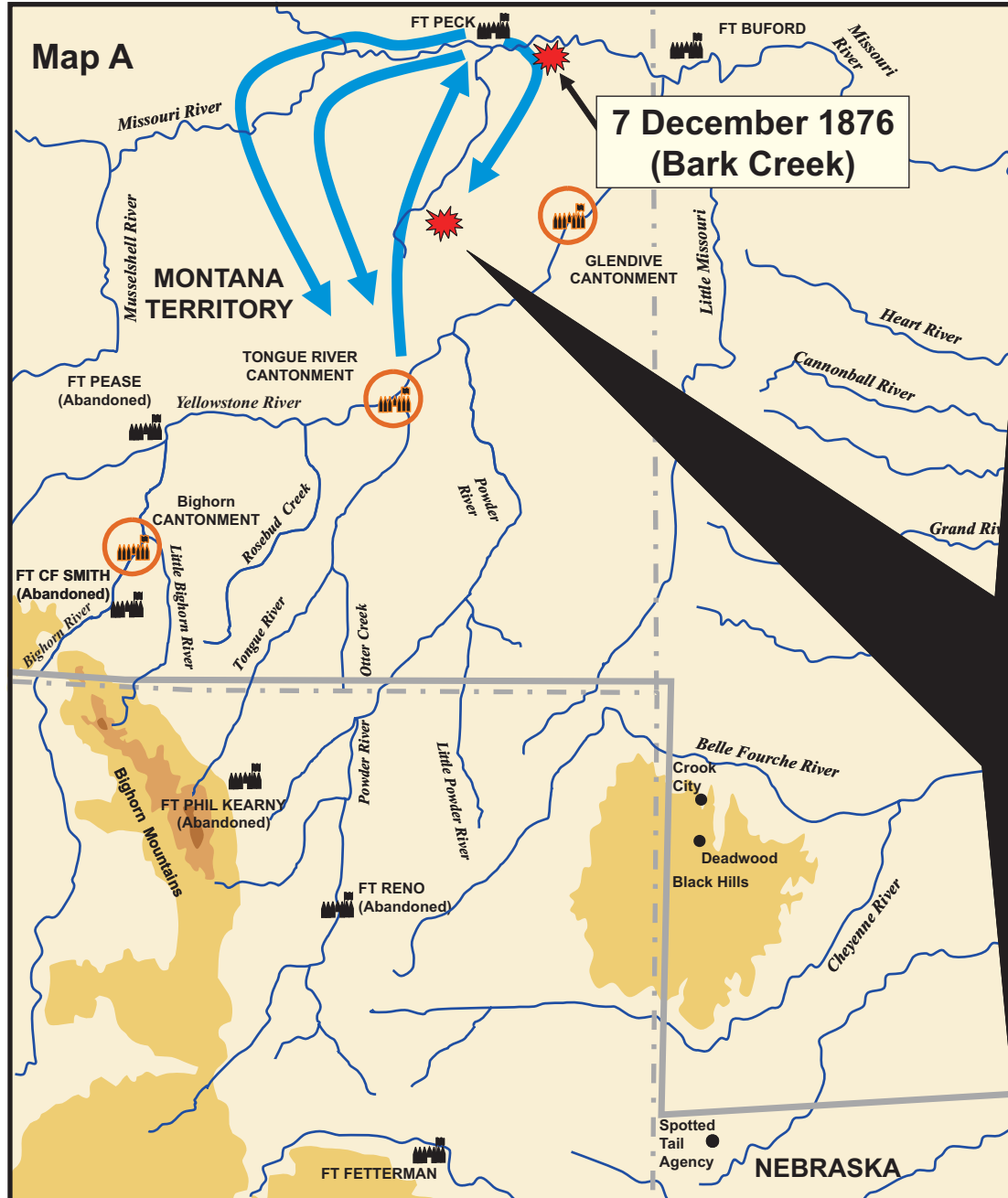
Miles, during the Cedar Creek negotiations with Sitting Bull (20–21 October), had warned the Sioux that he would continue the campaign against them through the winter if they did not surrender. Holding true to his word, Miles maintained his chase of the northward-bound Sioux with steadfast determination. Setting out on 5 November, Miles' troops began a search for the remnants of Sitting Bull's band in the expanse between the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers. Unlike other units, the soldiers of the 5th Infantry were thoroughly conditioned and equipped for their winter campaign on the harsh Northern Plains. Miles marched north to Fort Peck on the Missouri River but failed to find the elusive Sitting Bull.

At Fort Peck, Miles re-supplied his command and made preparations to continue the winter campaign. He divided his command into three columns and proceeded to comb the countryside again. On 7 December, a detachment under Lieutenant Frank D. Baldwin, operating under extreme winter conditions, located a recently abandoned Indian camp on Porcupine Creek and desperately sought to catch the fleeing Sioux. He needed to catch them before they could cross the frozen Missouri River to the south bank. Near Bark Creek, Baldwin's infantry closed with the Sioux and skirmished with the Indian rearguard just minutes after their families had crossed the river. The skirmish with Sitting Bull's warriors continued for several hours, and, at one point, Baldwin even pushed one company across the Missouri River. However, the grueling chase and excessive cold had exhausted Baldwin's soldiers and he decided to return to Fort Peck for supplies. Although Baldwin had failed to defeat Sitting Bull, he had forced the

Indians into a continuing movement that was fatiguing the Indian families and exhausting the Indian ponies.

The tenacious Baldwin re-supplied his small command of about 150 men at Fort Peck and then began collecting information from reservation Indians on Sitting Bull's location. On 10 December, he learned that Sitting Bull was located to the southeast, moving toward the Yellowstone River. He sent word to Miles and then mobilized his troops to resume the chase. The deep snow, rough terrain, and bitter cold took its toll on Baldwin's troops; at times up to 40 men were riding in the wagons suffering from exhaustion and frostbite. On 18 December, at about 1300, Baldwin caught up with Sitting Bull's village camped along Ash Creek (see map B). The village contained approximately 122 lodges and could have fielded as many as 240 warriors. However, most of the warriors were out hunting, and Baldwin's three small infantry companies in a matter of minutes overran the entire village, capturing most of the camp equipage and 60 ponies.

Baldwin re-outfitted his men from the village supplies, burned what he could not carry, and then made the difficult march to the Tongue River Cantonment. Sitting Bull's people were destitute. They had lost most of their lodges and the majority of their winter food supply. The Indians had also lost about 20 percent of their ponies, and those remaining were dying of hunger. To escape Miles and his inexhaustible "walk heaps," Sitting Bull and Long Dog would eventually lead their people into Canada.



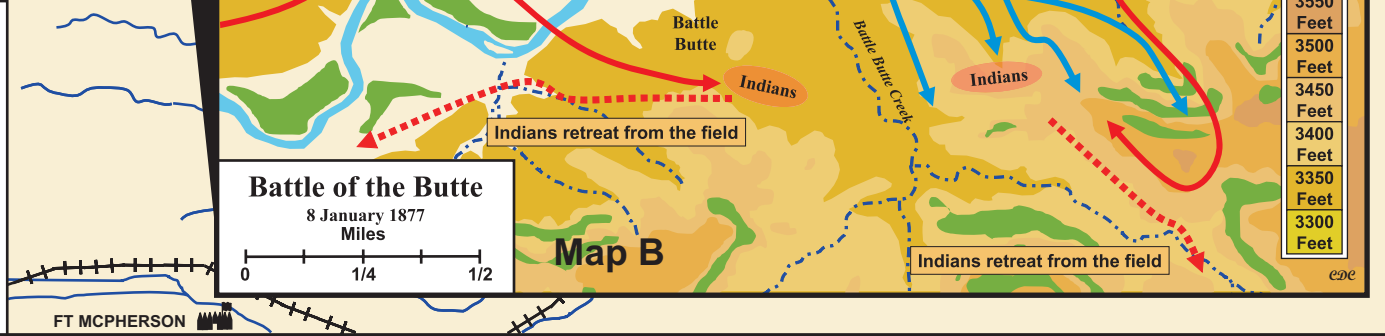
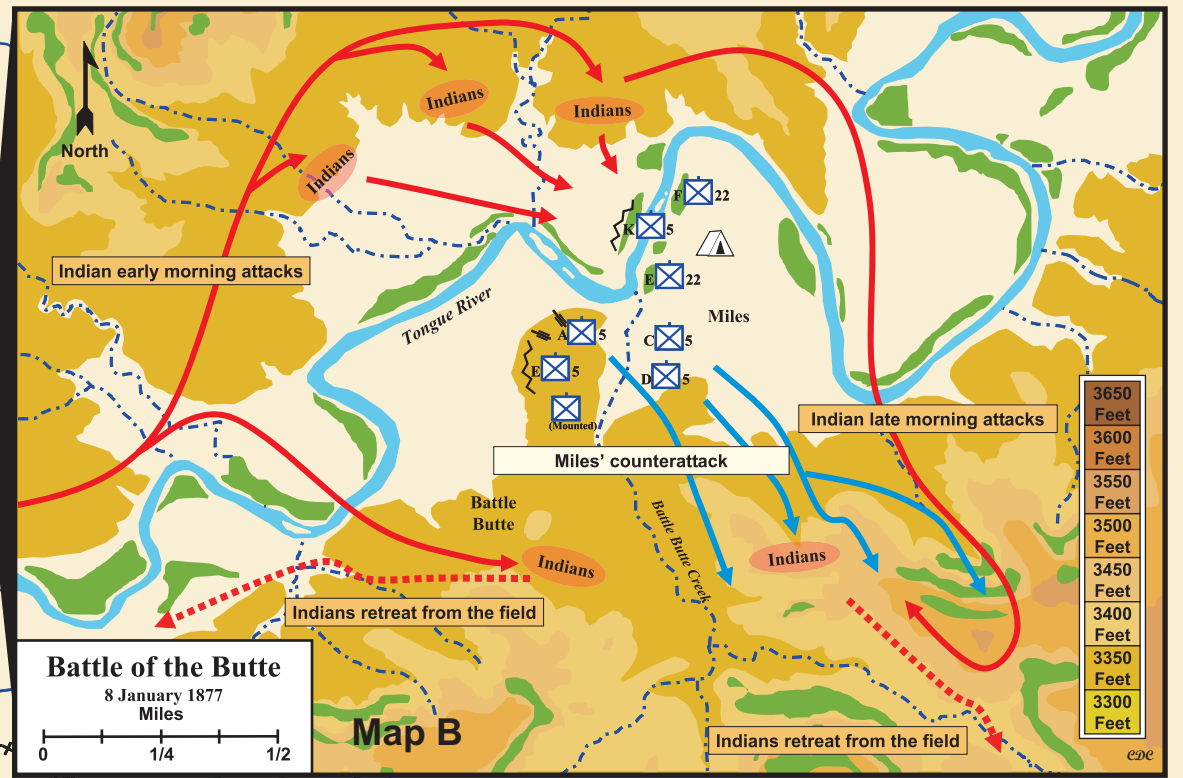
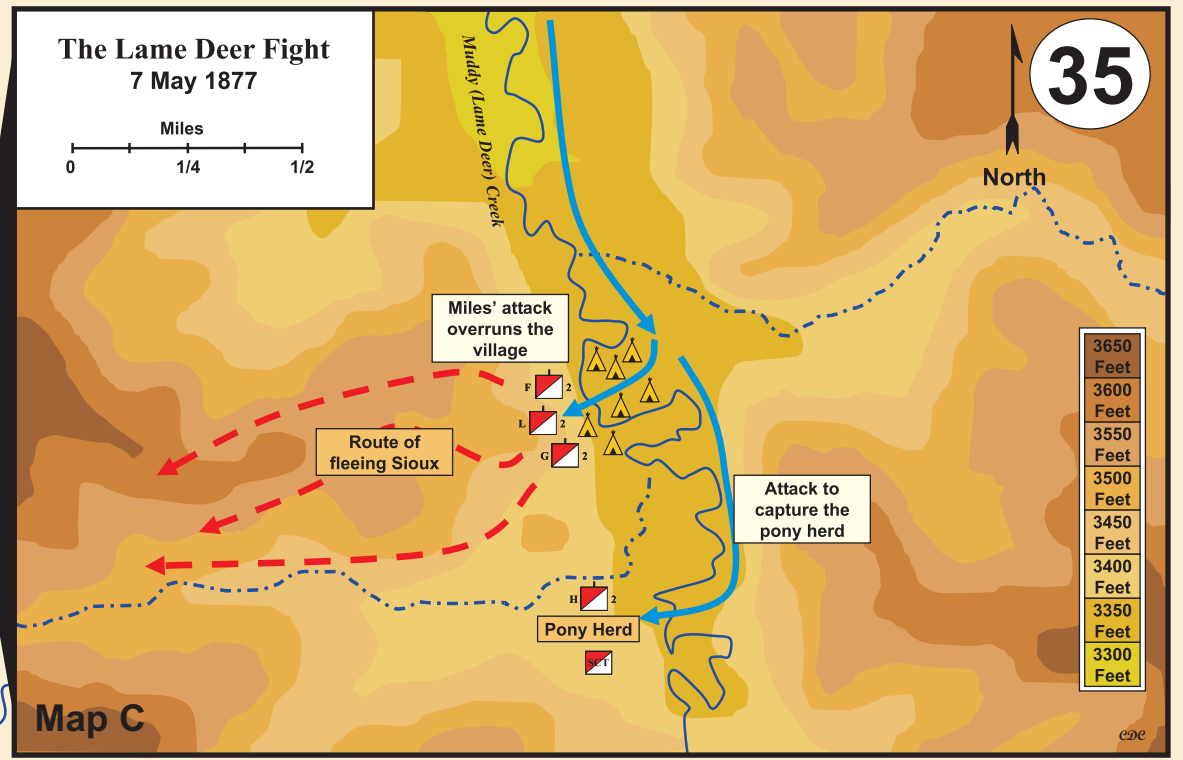
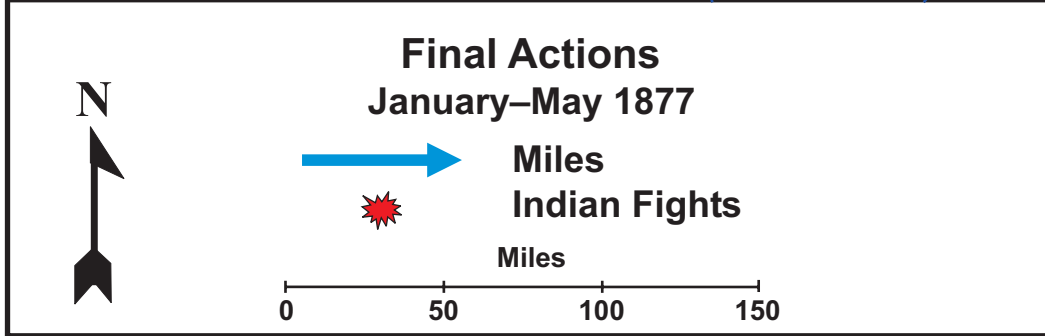
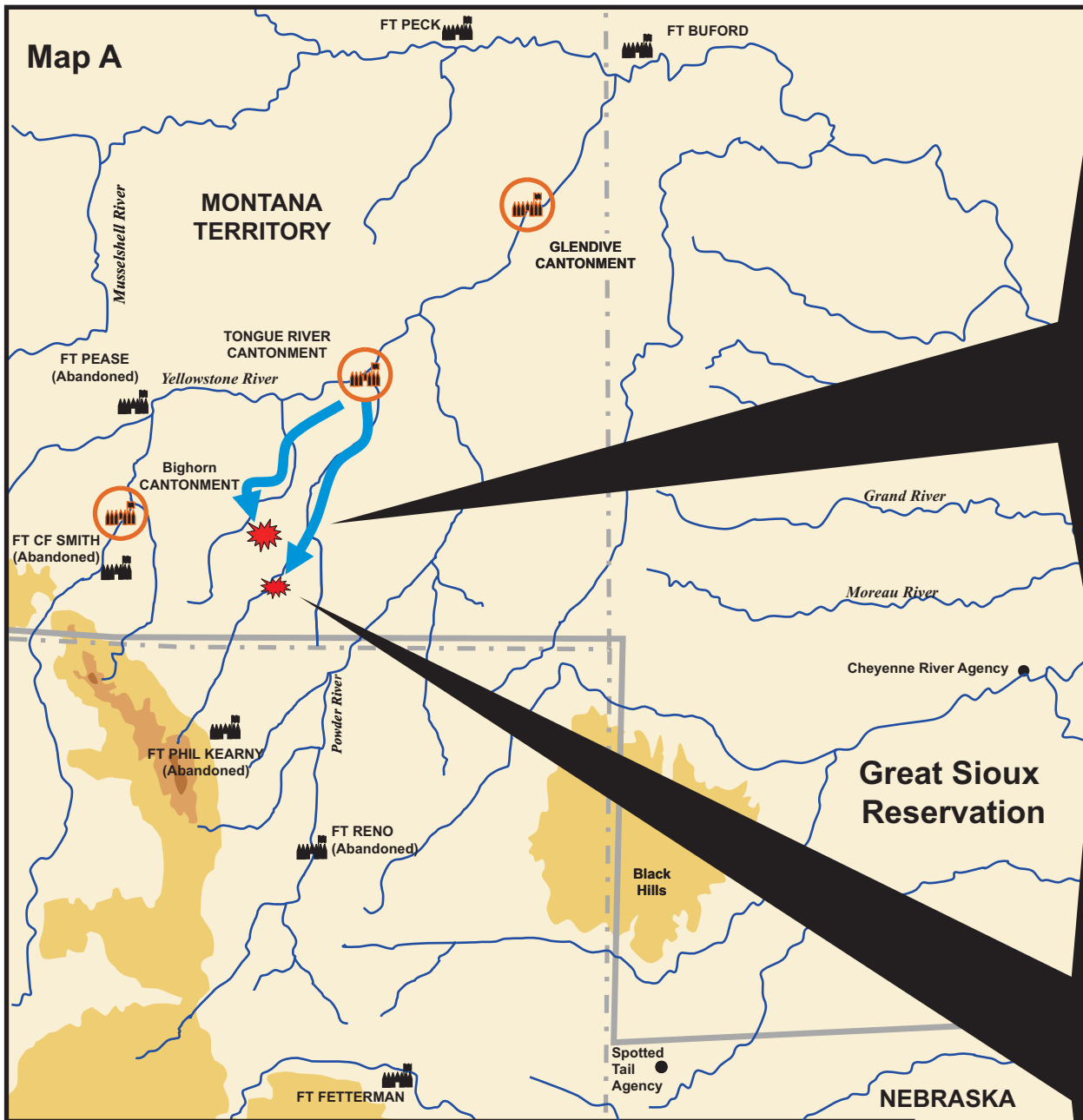
FT MCPHERSON

Map 35. Final Actions, January–May 1877

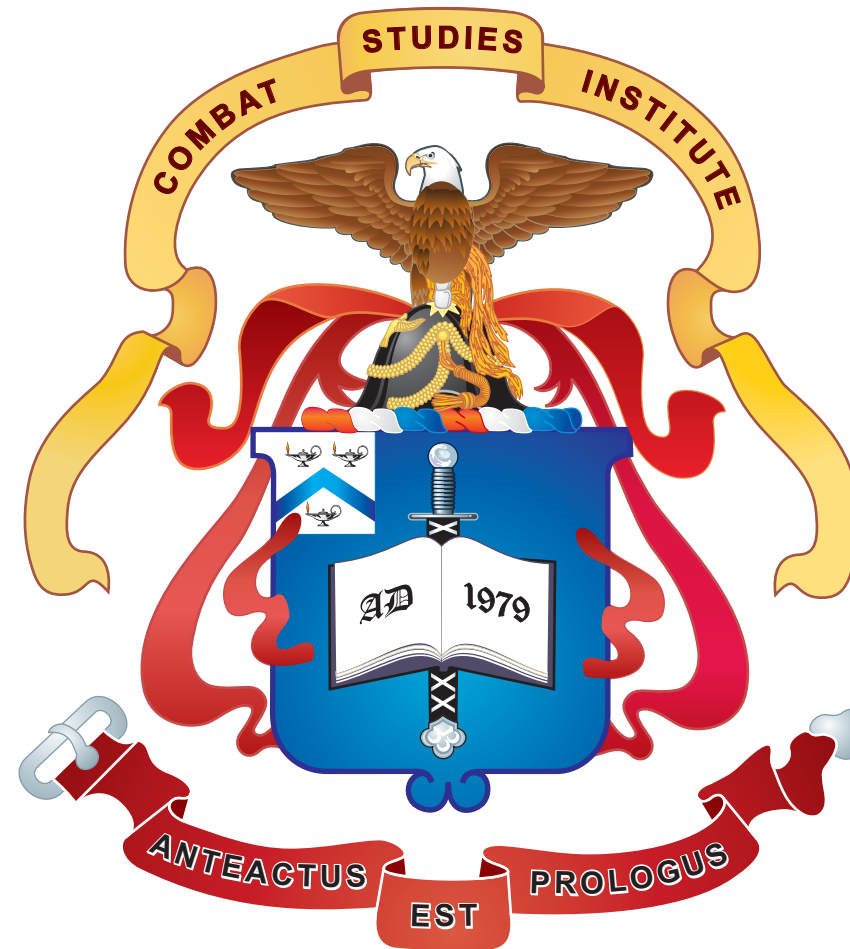
Having knocked Sitting Bull and those Indian bands north of the Yellowstone River out of the war, Miles could now redirect his attention toward Crazy Horse and the bands south of the Yellowstone. Ironically, earlier in December, these same bands had become discouraged because of the harsh weather and the defeat of the Cheyenne at the Dull Knife battle and were actually considering surrender. However, Crow scouts murdered their peace delegation as they were approaching the Tongue River Cantonment, and Crazy Horse used the incident to embolden his people to continue their resistance. The war chief initiated an active campaign of harassment against the cantonment to lure the soldiers into a chase. His plan was to lure Miles up the Tongue River valley and ambush his column. On 29 December, Miles accepted the challenge and marched up the Tongue River valley to make a strike against Crazy Horse's village. He estimated that the village, reinforced with the refugees from the Dull Knife fight, numbered possibly 3,000 inhabitants with maybe 600 to 800 warriors. Miles fought several skirmishes with the Sioux in his march up the Tongue River and openly acknowledged that the Indians were trying to lure him into an ambush. Nevertheless, he was confident that his 350 disciplined infantry could overcome the odds against them. On 7 January 1877, his scouts captured a small group of Cheyenne women and children. He encamped his men that night near a prominent butte fully expecting the Sioux to attack the next day. The next morning, with three feet of snow on the ground, Crazy Horse attacked with approximately 500 to 600 Sioux and Cheyenne warriors (see map B). Crazy Horse needed a major victory to encourage his disheartened people. Both sides maneuvered to gain the advantage, and Miles used his artillery to break up the concentration of warriors. Blizzard-like conditions hampered visibility, and, as with most Indian war battles,

casualties were light. Steadily worsening weather forced both sides to break contact at midday. The Sioux retreated to their village 20 miles to the south, and Miles returned to the Tongue River Cantonment. The Battle of the Butte was Crazy Horse's last battle, and he had failed to deliver the victory his people needed. Miles and Crook spent the remainder of the winter sending messengers to Crazy Horse to persuade him to surrender. Although Crazy Horse and his band held out until spring, starvation and exposure caused many Sioux to drift back to the agencies.

In late April 1877, a Sioux chief named Lame Deer vowed never to surrender. He and his band with 51 Miniconjou lodges separated from Crazy Horse and moved north to hunt buffalo. Having been reinforced with elements of the 2d Cavalry, Miles learned of Lame Deer's movement and again mobilized his forces for the chase. Ironically, Miles' column contained many prominent Sioux and Cheyenne warriors, who had only recently surrendered and were now serving as scouts for the Army. Miles' scouts found Lame Deer's village on a tributary of Rosebud Creek and Miles launched a surprise attack early in the morning on 7 May 1877, inflicting a crushing defeat on the Indians (see map C). His troops captured nearly 500 ponies and some 30 tons of meat and killed at least 14 warriors including Lame Deer himself. Crazy Horse and his band had surrendered the day before the Lame Deer Fight. Even though Sitting Bull and his followers managed to survive in Canada for a time and did not finally surrender until 19 July 1881, the Great Sioux War was over; all the Sioux within the United States were now confined to the reservation.



IV. Wounded Knee, 1890



Map 36. The Ghost Dance

In the late 1880's the Western Plains tribes grew increasingly discouraged over their confinement to the reservations and the disappearance of their traditional cultures. A Paiute prophet named Wovoka delivered a message of hope that prophesied of a future free from the influence of the white man. He preached a philosophy of nonviolence and promised that the Great Spirit would bring back the buffalo. His followers danced a slow shuffling dance that invited the return to life of dead Indians; thus, it became known as the Ghost Dance.

The once powerful Teton Sioux, who had dominated the northern plains from 1850 to 1876, were especially bitter and discouraged. They had lost all access to the Unceded Territory which became the states of Montana (1889) and Wyoming (1890). Their Great Sioux Reservation (see map 13) had been broken into several smaller reservations and they now laid claim to less than half of what they had controlled in 1876. Militant leaders among the Teton Sioux capitalized on their peoples' discontent and the general acceptance of the Ghost Dance to preach a violent overthrow of the white man. They also promised that sacred ghost shirts would protect them from the soldiers' bullets. Government officials feared an impending uprising on both the Pine Ridge and the Rosebud Reservations. Nearby settlements demanded that the Army provide protection. Therefore, President Benjamin Harrison ordered the War Department to contain the situation and position troops at agencies. The Army in turn used railroads to move units to the region from posts scattered across the nation; a major deployment that included elements of the 1st, 2d, 7th, and 8th Infantry, and the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th Cavalry.




The Sioux were at odds among themselves over how to proceed and divided into two factions. The friendlies wanted no trouble, and the hostiles (or militants) preached that

the whites must be driven from Indian land. In December 1890, some of the hostile ghost dancers gathered in the northwest corner of the Pine Ridge Reservation. They numbered approximately 500 to 600 men, women, and children. Bands of threatening Sioux also began to be identified on other reservations. Notably, Sitting Bull, at the Standing Rock Reservation, and Big Foot, at the Cheyenne River Reservation, refused to cooperate with agency officials.

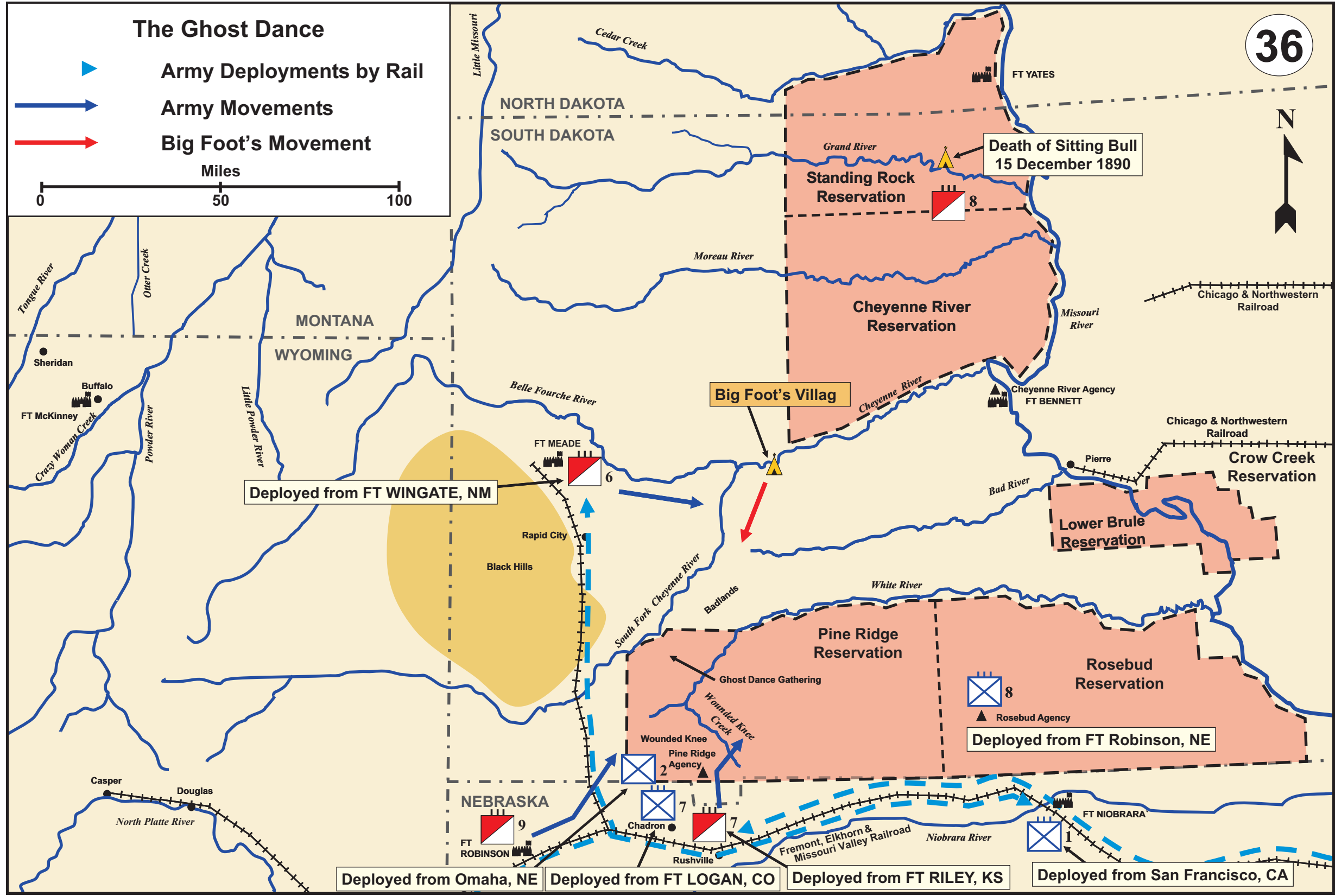
Major General Nelson A. Miles, now commander of the Military Division of the Missouri, hoped to avoid violence and initiated negotiations with the Pine Ridge militants. He also ordered the arrest of Big Foot and Sitting Bull to contain the spread of militant activity on the northern reservations. However, the death of Sitting Bull, killed by Indian policemen attempting to arrest him, further inflamed the situation. The militants at the Pine Ridge Reservation were more emboldened than ever to resist. Without their leader, the majority of Sitting Bull's Hunkpapa band abandoned the militant cause, but a few joined with Big Foot.

Though previously aligned with the militants, over time Big Foot came to recognize the futility of any armed struggle and began to build a reputation as a peacemaker among the other bands and local Army commanders. The friendlies at Pine Ridge Reservation asked him to come to Pine Ridge to help calm the situation. Big Foot and his band used the cover of night and quietly slipped away for Pine Ridge. Unfortunately, Miles failed to recognize Big Foot as an emissary for the friendlies on his way to mollify the hostility at Pine Ridge. Mistaking him, instead, as an advocate for the militants, Miles took personal charge of the situation and directed the 6th and 9th Cavalry to block Big Foot's movement to Pine Ridge.

The Ghost Dance

 Army Deployments by Rail
 Army Movements
 Big Foot's Movement

Miles
0 50 100



Deployed from FT WINGATE, NM

Big Foot's Villag

Death of Sitting Bull
15 December 1890

Deployed from FT Robinson, NE

Deployed from Omaha, NE

Deployed from FT LOGAN, CO

Deployed from FT RILEY, KS

Deployed from San Francisco, CA

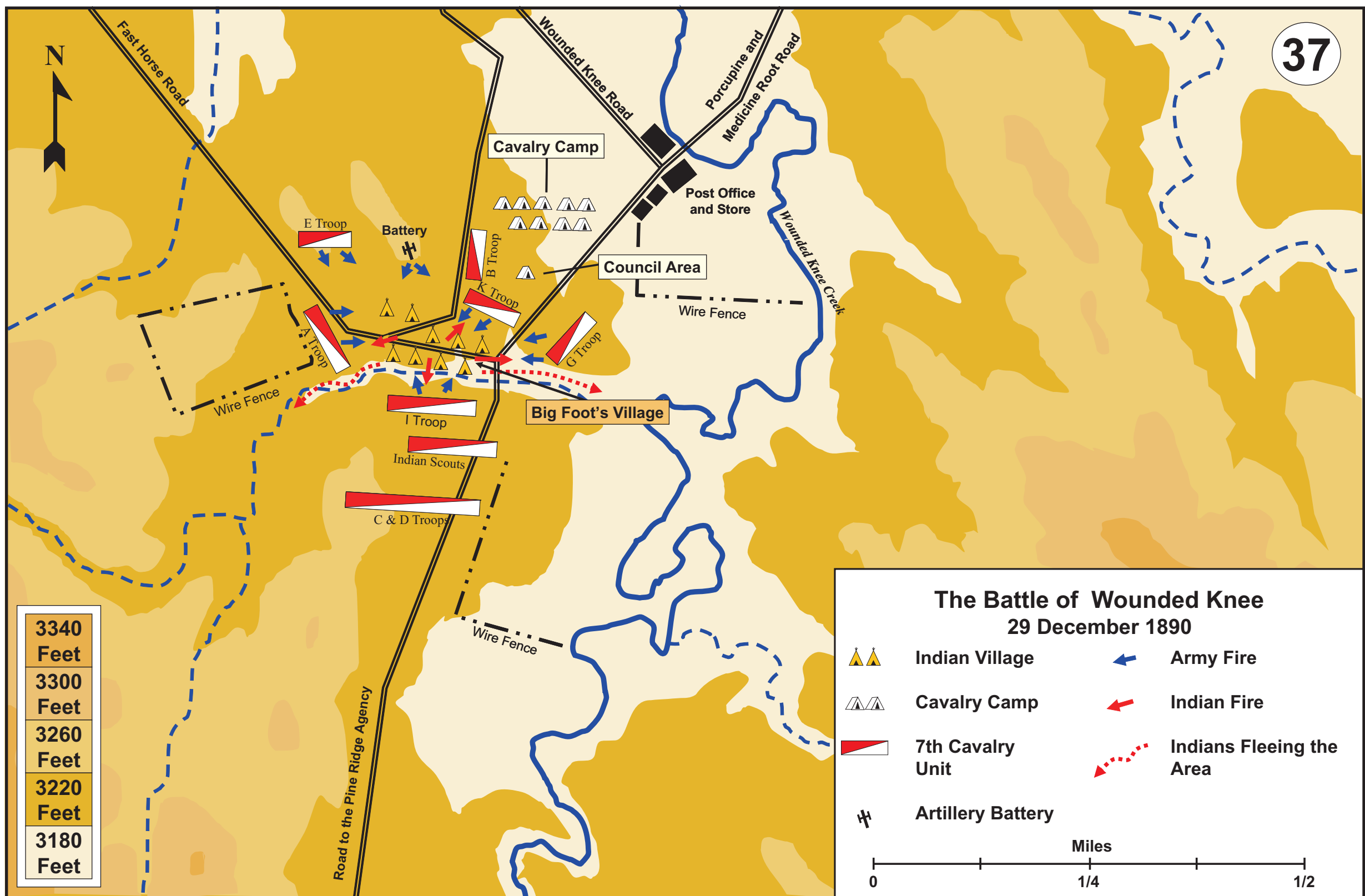
Map 37. The Battle of Wounded Knee, 29 December 1890

Big Foot eluded the cavalry patrols trying to prevent his movement to Pine Ridge by traveling through the Badlands. Therefore, Miles ordered the 7th Cavalry, commanded at the time by Colonel James Forsyth, to intercept Big Foot's band, disarm them, and march them to a railhead for movement to Omaha. On 28 December 1890, advanced elements of the 7th Cavalry located the elusive Sioux and escorted them to a campsite along Wounded Knee Creek. The remainder of the regiment arrived at the campsite that night. The Sioux awoke the next morning to find themselves surrounded by 500 soldiers and 4 field pieces. Big Foot's Sioux, with perhaps 120 men and about 200 women and children, recognized the hopelessness of their situation and agreed to be escorted to the railhead for transportation back to the reservation. The old chief was stricken with pneumonia, so the Army provided a heated tent for his care.

Forsyth did not expect resistance when he deployed his units to disarm the Indians. However, the Indians grew increasingly upset as the soldiers searched the lodges and clothing of both men and women. The situation suddenly grew more volatile when a medicine man named Yellow Bird called for the warriors to resist. During one search, a

soldier and an Indian scuffled for a rifle and the weapon accidentally discharged. Both sides opened fire at brutally close range as the women and children scattered in panic. The artillerymen on the hilltop added to the mayhem when they opened fire on the fleeing Indians.

The fighting ended when the Indians fled the battlefield. On the field lay 150 dead Sioux, including Big Foot. The immensity of the tragedy was magnified in that at least 62 of the dead were women and children. The Army suffered 25 officers and soldiers killed and another 39 wounded. Other than the Fetterman Fight and the Little Bighorn, the Battle of Wounded Knee was one of the Army's most deadly encounters on the plains. Miles was furious over the whole mismanaged affair. He relieved Forsyth of command (the decision was later overturned) and skillfully avoided further violence with the bands associated with the Ghost Dance. The influence of the Ghost Dance soon waned, and Wounded Knee marked the end of organized Indian resistance on the plains and the Army's last large deployment against the Indians of the Great Plains; the Sioux Wars were over at last.



3340 Feet
 3300 Feet
 3260 Feet
 3220 Feet
 3180 Feet

The Battle of Wounded Knee 29 December 1890

	Indian Village		Army Fire
	Cavalry Camp		Indian Fire
	7th Cavalry Unit		Indians Fleeing the Area
	Artillery Battery		

Miles

0 1/4 1/2

Suggested Reading

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Mr. Charles D. Collins, Jr. is an assistant professor and the Sioux Wars course author for the Staff Ride Team, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He received a B.A. in History from Southwest Missouri State University and an MMAS in History from the US Army Command and General Staff College. While on active duty, Mr. Collins served in various armor and cavalry assignments. He retired from the Army in 1996. Mr. Collins' published works include *The Corps of Discovery: Staff Ride Handbook for the Lewis and Clark Expedition* and numerous articles on a wide variety of military topics.

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