Reynolds’ Attack on Crazy Horse’s Village on Powder River, March 17, 1876

Reprinted from the News-Record, Gillette, Wyo., Thursday, April 5, 1934

By W. C. BROWN

Brig. General, U. S. A., Retired

A BRIEF though unsatisfactory In- dian campaign was waged on March 17, 1876, by General Crook on the Powder River, Wyoming, and Southeastern Montana in which 8, 500 Indians were taken prisoners under Colonel Reynolds, commanding the Department of the Platte, and the 3rd Cavalry (the latter a West Point class of 1872). It was tendered to find and attack camps of Indians in the Powder River Valley of Crazy Horse, believed to be located somewhere between Tongue and Rosebud rivers. General Crook was sure to be located somewhere between Tongue and Bighorn rivers, and the soldiers in charge of the cavalry were sure to be located by Indian scouts, who were told that warmer weather should come, and great efforts were to be made to capture General Crook.

General Crook left Fort Fetterman March 1st with Companies A, E, F, D, A, and K, 2nd Cavalry and Companies A, B, D, and E, 3rd Cavalry and two companies of the 5th Infantry with officers and men and followed by three or four ambulances, a park train and a waggon, a total of some 2500. To this should be added a herd of 660 horses and ponies, which was Frank Reynolds, having some 15 months under his charge, was sent from St. Tony, Pass, Col. T. P. A., accompanied the expedition, and the total of officers and men was 1250. With the approval of General Crook, Col. Reynolds took with him the New York Tribune, another corre- spondent, and the Buffalo Bill, the Denver News.

Colonel Crook followed Booseman Trail. From his camp on Crazy Woman creek, 50 miles northwest of Fort Fetterman, he was to start his train to Fort Fetterman under the Indian’s noses. Crook proceeded down Tongue river to the mouth of Red Clay creek, as indicated on the official map, though General Crook remained with train guard until the 11th. He then followed the creek to the mouth of Otter river.

The command halted here until the 15th, when it moved on to the Yellowstone could be sighted. The latter, however, brought the command to the mouth of Otter river, but General Crook’s return discovered two or three hundred Indians scattered about the villas, which they might be from a village on Powder river to the southeast.

On the 16th of March, Otter creek March 16th, Crook divided the command, giving Col. Reynolds 2nd, 3rd, E and 1st, 2nd and Company C, and Company C, 3rd Cavalry, and a company of the 4th Infantry, about 800 men with ratings for one day. The column moved to the southwest and wounded in it was a large body of the Cheyenne nation and went to the southeast toward Pow- der river. Crook divided the column into three, the horse trains and other im- pending service.

Reynolds, who was directed to John Crook, followed the course of Otter creek (later called Clear creek) on the 17th. He was within 500 feet of the village by 5:00 p.m., the 17th for a night.

The weather at this time was so cold that the mercurial thermometer failed to register a degree. The country was so consequence nearly everyone had some part of his person frozen—foot, fin- gers, face, toes, etc. (Huffo reports several having frost bite of hand in forty minutes.) One of the 17th officers had to be driven in order to keep them from and fro. A few miles to the northwest of Otter creek, located a large Indian village on the west side of the creek. A strong gale was blowing, and a mile below the mouth of Thompson creek on the east, a large fire was seen north of the Wyoming line on what was known as the Crazy Indian by Capt. Frank N. Kellogg. It proved to be Crazy Horse and like that Indian with a population of some 800, about 225 of whom were warriors, and as General Crook did not know this, those probably constituted about half of the total. The Indians were Northern Cheyenne and Minne- sotans.

The village being located was found isolated, some miles away from the town on the 17th, the terrain cut up by ravines. The troops got down from the high plateau to the level of the river. The Indians were about 60 feet below. In night, the village was captured, and600 men were captured, and about 500 more or less being established for the night. The next morning, was 4:00 a.m. the troops were in possession and while at Colonel Reynolds, believing of the Indians that he had determined to march for Lodge Pole valley, so as to bring the horses and ponies captured, nearly all of which (frozen) meat, coffee, flour, robes, tobacco and ammunition, scattered about the veld, etc. Crook, on the 17th, therefore, gave orders to destroy and burning. Captain Reynolds, in a subsequent report alleges that the first attack was not properly supported. Certain it is that the Indians, with their families, about 400 more or less being recaptured

In an address by Mr. Camp before the Wyoming legislature in January 1930, Mr. Camp, re- ported that they "will be placed on the battlefields where they died" in the war of accomplishment, and why the head- stone, where the Battle of the Little Bighorn was fought, is twenty miles from the battle of campaign was that of General Crook in Northeastern Wyoming and Montana in which U. S. troops under General George A. Custer commanding the Department of the Platte.

Mr. Camp, in an address before the Wyoming legislature in January 1930, Mr. Camp, re- ported that they "will be placed on the battlefields where they died" in the war of accomplishment, and why the head- stone, where the Battle of the Little Bighorn was fought, is twenty miles from the battle of campaign was that of General Crook in Northeastern Wyoming and Montana. The "Indian version confirms ..the Indian headstones." Naturally they could not be placed over their graves for conditions had prevented burial, but they could be placed on the battlefields where they died in the war. Under fire. Surely those few surviving guides, scouts, interpreters, packers and other government employees who, like Grouard "will be placed on the battlefields where they died."