

The battle of the little bighorn



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

By 1876, most of the Sioux had followed Red Cloud and gone to live in the great Reservations. Although most Indians had followed and respected Red Cloud's decisions, many of the younger warriors had been against this way of life. These young Renegades, led by Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, refused to give up their nomadic, free way of life, in favour of a humiliating, and enclosed life. Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, along with their vast following of Sioux and Cheyenne renegades took to the Bighorn Mountains and used them as a base to defend themselves against the White Man.

The US Government were extremely annoyed at the thought of these Indians living on the Plains with freedom, and furthermore, Gold had recently been discovered in the very mountains being inhabited by these renegades. The US army was quickly sent in to deal with them. The Indians were seen as inferior to the rest of the American population. The government had decided years before the Battle of the Little Bighorn that Indians would be confined to reservations, the worst and least arable land on the Plains, and would live off of government rations.

This existence was exactly what the renegades were against, and therefore why they took to the Bighorn Mountains, causing the army, and Custer, to be sent in. The Battle of the Little Bighorn was an immense victory for the Indians, and a huge humiliation for the White Man. The American people found it hard to comprehend that a group of ' Savages' could ever defeat the 7th Cavalry because the Indians were still seen as lesser life forms, and besides, the 7th Cavalry had already defeated the Indians 60 times.

The confidence and extreme arrogance of Custer and practically all of the American people were to play a major part in the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Custer's early career started with his education at the West Point United States Military Academy, the finest and most famous Military Academy in America. His time there revealed a lot of his personality. Custer graduated last in his class. He was not the worst or most stupid, in fact, he was quite the opposite. His graduating place was determined by his personality.

Custer did not like taking orders from anyone. He hated being told what to do, and therefore refused to work hard as a result of this. This personality trait is evident from his appalling record from the Military Academy. It is also a personality trait that played a large part in the loss at the Little Bighorn. Also Custer was extremely arrogant and didn't believe that anyone else's ideas and opinions could have any merit. This was again, obvious from his West Point report, and was evident in the loss at the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

Custer's arrogance, and his unwillingness to take orders earned him 726 demerits at the Military academy, but earned him a much worse punishment in his final battle. After graduating, he was promoted very quickly to the rank of Brigadier-General during the Civil War owing to the increased need for trained officers to lead the unqualified, volunteered men fighting in the Civil War. He became the youngest General ever in the US army. This actually inflated Custer's already rather large ego, something that influenced everything he did at the Little Bighorn. Custer, however arrogant and selfish he may have been, was an excellent war leader.

He was willing to take all sorts of calculated risks in order to win. This all stemmed from the fact that Custer liked to be a hero and loved to win. His actions at the Battle of the Little Bighorn were part of this willingness to take as many risks as it took for him to get his own way. Little Bighorn was his final, but greatest risk. At the end of the Civil war, he was reverted to the rank of Captain, something that made him even more determined to prove himself. Also, Custer and the 7th Cavalry had defeated the Indians in 60 battles already, the most famous of which was Wachita.

At Wachita, Custer and the 7th cavalry defeated Black Kettle, an Indian leader in a miraculous victory that included killing many Indians, but only losing 6 of his own men. These victories had inflated Custer's ego even more and given him an obscene amount of confidence. This confidence was exactly what made Custer feel so sure that he would win at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Custer may have been an excellent war leader, but his arrogant nature, amalgamated with his immense ambition meant that he had great political ambitions. The Democratic Party saw him as the ideal candidate for US president.

He was charismatic and a war hero. Custer was offered the job as the leader of the Democrat Party, and therefore a chance to run for President.

Unfortunately though, this came at a price. The Democrats decided that Custer would need a publicity stunt to win support. They gently hinted that he would need a great victory to prove himself to the American people as a noble war leader, because, after all, the President of the USA would have been the commander of the entire American army, a job that Custer would

have loved. Custer decided that he would try and win glory and support by winning at the Little Bighorn by himself.

He felt that without the victory, he would not be able to win a presidential election. Custer was also extremely vain. He wanted the presidency and the idea of being so famous and powerful appealed to him greatly. Evidence of his vanity is everywhere. Even in the army, where hair was to be cut short as a regulation, Custer disobeyed and kept his long blonde curly locks. He also loved portraits of himself, and after finding that many American people treasured pictures of their presidents, he did not hesitate to try and gain the victory that he would need to win the election.

Custer's ambition actually led him to take Mark Kellogg, a newspaper reporter from the New York Herald along on the journey to the Little Bighorn with him. This disobeyed orders, but as shown earlier, Custer was unopposed to breaking the rules and disobeying orders. It was dangerous to take Mark Kellogg along because of safety, but Custer's reasoning (which he did not voice to anyone else), was that he wanted fast news and evidence of his amazing victory to reach the papers straight away, and what better way to do it than with a reporter witnessing the battle first hand. This shows his vanity and ambition.

It also shows that Custer had been devising a way to win long before General Sheridan put his own plan into action. Custer's egotistical ideas and ambitions were to play a big part in his defeat. General Phillip Sheridan drew up the Battle plan. It concerned 3 main army columns trapping the Indians in the Valley of the Little Bighorn between them. The first column was to be led

by General Terry, with assistance from Colonel George Custer and the 7th Cavalry. The 2nd column was mainly the infantry and foot soldiers led by Colonel Gibbon, and General Crook led the 3rd column.

Scouts, Indians who had changed sides and were now spying for the US army to avoid the reservations or death, managed to locate the Indian camp in the valley of the Little Bighorn in the Bighorn mountains. Sheridan's plan involved each army column taking different routes to trap the Indians in the valley. General Crook was to lead his column of 1049 cavalry and infantry northwards from Fort Fetterman and around to the East of the Indian Camp. Colonel Gibbon's column was to march southwards and attack the North of the camp.

The last column was split in two, so that General Terry remained back with half of the men to act as reinforcements, whilst Custer would take the 7th cavalry around the Wolf Mountains to attack the camp from the south. The three columns would then trap the Indians between them. However, there were a number of unfortunate events that occurred before June 26th 1876, the set date for the battle. General Crook's column rested on the Rosebud Creek for a coffee break. As they played a game of Whist, Crazy Horse ambushed them, leading a full frontal attack with around 1500 warriors.

Crook's men were completely taken by surprise. Unfortunately, Crook did not manage to win the battle of the Rosebud as he soon lost 28 men with 63 wounded even after firing 25,000 rounds of ammunition. He was forced to retreat south to Fort Fetterman. Four days after this, General Terry and Colonel Gibbon had to join forces on the Yellowstone River. Terry divided his

forces again. The infantry was to march along Yellowstone towards the valley, and Custer was ordered to march south along the trail found by Major Reno and approach the Little Bighorn from the South.

He had the longest route but on horseback, it was easier. He was offered 180 extra men and Gatling Guns, but he refused them due to his extreme confidence and arrogance. This seemed to be his first major mistake. Custer rode south but then disobeyed orders. He didn't circle the Wolf Mountains, but instead, cut across them. By marching through the night and managing to drive his men as hard as possible, he actually reached the Little Bighorn a day early, exactly what he had planned. The Indians were taken by surprise when he attacked on the 25th June 1876, but his men and horses were exhausted.

Although he had had severe warnings from scouts that he should wait for the rest of the army before attacking, as there were thousands of Indians, he ignored the scouts and carried on. Custer knew that this camp was the largest Indian camp on the continent, and was well aware that the Indians might escape. He decided to split his troops into Battalions to set his own trap. He used the tactics that he had successfully used at the Battle of Wachita, his most famous victory. He sent Major Reno with 125 men South to attack the South of the camp, whilst Captain Benteen and 125 men were sent around the Southern end.

Captain McDougall took B Company and the Pack train to the North, and Custer himself took 260 men even further north across the river to attack the camp first. The battle really began when the Sioux stopped the attack by

Major Reno. He was forced to retreat across the river, where he had to take up a defensive position, where Benteen and his men joined him. They became unable to move on and support Custer as they had been ordered because they were surrounded and were suffering many casualties throughout the day. This was to play a part in the final battle.

There were no army survivors; so exactly what happened to Custer is not really known. As far as Indian accounts have shown, Custer and his men failed to cross the river. 2000 Indians attacked him quickly and he was forced to turn back and make for higher ground. Crazy Horse's attack was overwhelming. While half of the Indian forces stayed to defend the camp, the rest were led by Crazy Horse to surround Custer. For the Indians to fight a pitched battle was a new concept. They usually fought with a delaying action. Their success showed Crazy Horse to be a great leader.

The Indians had Winchester Rifles and therefore managed to overpower the Springfield single-shot rifles of the cavalrymen. Custer made it to high ground, but his position was not as good as it should have been. Without Reno and Benteen's men, he was totally outnumbered. Most of Custer's men fought to the end, but many may have tried to escape. Either way, the only survivor was 1 scout who got out alive by disguising himself as a Sioux warrior. Custer was killed in the Battle. There were many factors out of Custer's control when he went into the battle, most of which were due to his own arrogance, ambition and vanity.

Firstly, nobody bothered to check exactly how many Indians Custer would be up against. Custer had assumed that this battle would be as easy to win as

the others he had fought with the 7th cavalry. He had depended entirely upon his own confident instincts. He was hopelessly outnumbered by Indians, as there were over 2000 against his 260 men. He had actually been offered an extra 180 men, but had turned them down as soon as Terry offered them. This was due to his pride as well. Another problem was that the Indians were armed with Winchester Rifles. Against the Springfield Single-shot guns of Custer's men they were far superior.

The Springfield rifles continuously overheated and got jammed with the shells of the bullets. Men had to dig out the shells with penknives before they could shoot again, leaving them with little time. This was ironic because Custer was actually offered Gatling Guns, which would have served him well on top of the hill that he was surrounded on at the end of the battle. Custer had turned these down because he felt that he could defeat the Indians without them. Arrogance and ambition blinded him in this decision.

Understandably, Custer had believed that the Indians would run away and surrender.

He had been told this by many Generals and great soldiers because the Indians had never tried to fight back before this particular battle. Confidence was increased when Custer believed that this would be a walkover and a quick surrender from the Indians would be obtained. Unfortunately, the overwhelming numbers of Indians and their determination was to overpower Custer's attack. Custer was unlucky to be up against Crazy Horse, and equally strong-minded leader. Custer's confidence was justifiable because of the 60 battles he had already won, but he was complacent.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn was an immense tragedy brought on by inflated egos, confidence and a lot of arrogance. Custer's personality was vain, arrogant, proud and complacent, as well as determined, strong-willed, brave and courageous. He was a great war leader because of his determination, skill and willingness to take risks, but other areas of his personality conflicted with this, especially when his vanity and pride caused him to decide to disobey orders and cause this tragedy. I believe that Custer's personality was the major downfall of the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

The events that followed Custer's decision to try and win the battle alone are no so important because the fact still remains that his arrogance, pride and vanity led him to disobey orders and try and win alone. This was the decision that ruined the Battle. Given the amount of Indians in the valley, this would have been virtually impossible to win in the way Custer planned it. I think that the blame for this disaster lies on Custer's personality and character, although, his already magnified ego was unfortunately even more bloated by the fame and hints of presidency that he received from the American public.

I would say, however, that it was completely Custer's fault because everyone should take responsibility for his or her own actions. The praise and fame that inflated his ego may have helped his disastrous decisions but they would not have, had Custer not been so vain and proud. Custer's personality traits unfortunately clashed horribly and overpowered each other, causing him to be rather irrational and completely arrogant. The bad points of his character overwhelmed the good and the outcome was the Battle of the Little Bighorn.