

# The battle of the little bighorn

War



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In 1861 the US government introduced the reservation solution. Plains Indians were to be moved to designated areas known as reservations. There they would receive payments from the government and be taught the ways of the white men. However the Indians who refused to surrender their lives and the Grace land that they and their brothers had lived upon, long before the white men's unexpected arrival, soon disrupted this plan. The breaking of the treaty, which prevented white settlers to settle upon their land, and also them passing through it, angered Red Cloud. There were many Sioux attacks on travellers.

These attacks went on for many years, until 1866. The US army ignored their accusations and set up forts along the reservation, to prevent further attacks. Red Cloud in disgust attacked the army. The forts, which had been built upon the Bozeman trail, were soon under siege. The Sioux alone were not strong enough to capture the forts, which were equipped with weaponry the Plains Indians had rarely see before, Rifles. Red Cloud kept a force of several Sioux Bands and had also allied with the Arapaho and the Cheyenne. The incentive, of their livelihoods spurred them on.

They fort for many months. Red Cloud also had the vision to try and persuade the Crow, traditional enemies of the Sioux, to fight with his people. Although this did not happen, Red Cloud and his people fought on. In 1868 the government admitted that the Indians could not be defeated militarily. So the Us government signed the treaty of Fort Laramie, which saw the creation of the great Sioux Reservation. No non-Indians were to set foot inside this reservation. As soon as the army had left, the forts were burnt to the Ground. It was the start of many years of peace for Red Cloud.

However not all of his people agreed with the life that they had been handed. Red Clouds power decreased and the Sioux now looked towards the more militant leaders such as Sitting Bull and Red Cloud. However there were worse times to come for the people of the Sioux. The Peace Treaty could not be maintained forever, could it? In 1874 a man by the name of George Armstrong Custer led the seventh Cavalry to the Black Hills, to see whether the area held, the shiny stone that the White Men craved. In doing this he broke the Peace Treaty of Fort Laramie, which had been signed 6 years earlier.

Custer had found Gold, hills full of it, 'From the grassroots down'. This enticed thousands of miners, in search of happiness to the area. The army could not prevent this, and the government did not want to. The Sioux did. The inhabitants attacked many miners. The Government of the United States offered huge sums of money, per year, to the Sioux, in return for the rights to the Gold that they were obviously not using! But the Indians were not interested in round pieces of metal, that the white men exchanged and they were not willing to give up the Birthplace of their people up easily.

In December 1875 all Sioux were ordered to return to their disturbed reservation. The Indian numbers made this hard. There were reported to be 7000 Indians, amongst them Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull. Sitting Bull refused to agree to reservation life, and so many Sioux looked upon him as their new leader. February 1876 saw the army been ordered that any Indians that was not inside the reservation were to be treated as Hostile. This led to a three-pronged campaign, ordered by General Philip Sheridan. The campaign that followed led to the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

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Bighorn being the mountain ranges where the battle was to take place. And so George Armstrong Custer and his 7th Cavalry set out along with two other parties to force the Indians back to their reservations. Custer rode along the Rosebud River with the men he had been allocated by General Terry. Whilst riding into position, Custer spotted the Sioux village about 15 miles ahead. Custer contemplated attacking, ignoring the conversation he had had with General Terry earlier, Terry: " Don't be greedy, wait for us" Custer: " No, I won't

Little did any of them know, that this would be one of the most controversial and misinterpreted conversations, ever made? Custer ignored Terry's orders and prepared to fight. He split his battalion up in three, and planned to send troops under Captain Frederick Benteen, who was ordered to prevent the Indian's usual tactic of escaping. Another group of men were given to Major Marcus Reno, who was to pursue the group. Custer hoped to attack the camp from the North and South Simultaneously. By looking at the tactics he prepared, you would come to the conclusion that he was a very intelligent man, with a lot of experience and will power.

However, he was soon to realise that these tactics were not properly thought out, in fact they were soon to be the biggest mistake of his life. A life that, would not see another battle, or another day. Custer had not used his Scouts well; he had barely used them at all. He had Indian Scouts from the enemy tribe of the Sioux, who could of told him a great deal about the strength of the Indian Camp he was preparing to attack, about the firepower of the Indians and the terrain that surrounded the camp. Custer sidelined the

scouts, he was the man that ran the show, he knew everything, and he was the noble and brave war veteran.

Well, at least this is what he had thought, and if truth were told, so did his men. They had not lost under Custer; he was a respected and experienced Indian fighter. He had never needed scouts before, why was this battle going to be any different? He needed Scouts, especially ones who could blend in, and this would be different. Little did George Armstrong Custer know that the Indian camp he was about to attack with only his battalion was three times his strength, containing not only Sioux, but also Cheyenne warriors. Custer's plan was put into action:

Reno's squadron of 175 soldiers attacked the northern end of the camp. Quickly finding themselves in a desperate battle with little hope of surviving, Reno halted his charging men before they could be trapped and killed, they fought for ten minutes in un-orderly state, hoping that it wasn't going to be their scalps upon the mass of tee-pees they saw before them. Reno withdrew his men into the woods that lined the river. When that position proved indefensible, they retreated uphill to the bluffs east of the river, pursued hotly by Cheyenne and Sioux Warriors.

Just as they finished driving the soldiers out, the Indians sighted roughly 200 of Custer's men coming towards them, through the tough terrain at the other end of the village. This then took the pressure off of Reno's men. Cheyenne and Hunk papa Sioux together crossed the river and locked horns with the advancing soldiers, forcing them back to a high ridge to the north.

Meanwhile, another force, largely Oglala Sioux under the command of Crazy Horse, swiftly moved downstream and doubled back in a sweeping arc.

This boxed the un-defeated men of the 7th cavalry enveloping Custer and his men in a pincer move. The Indians began pouring in gunfire and arrows. Gunfire came from Winchester repeating Rifles. Rifles that they traded with white men for fur. The exact rifle that Custer had ordered to be left behind, as this would hold his men up, in a battle where, he thought, guns were not necessary. Custer thought a lot of things would weigh him down. The gattling Guns, Sabres and extra troops for example. All because he thought they'd slow him down.

But how much he would of wanted them despite their 'weight', whilst surrounded by the 'savages' he had promised to leave in peace. The peace was broken, and so was Custer's plan. As the Indians closed in, Custer ordered his men to shoot their horses and stack the carcasses to form a wall, but they provided little protection against bullets. In under an hour, Custer and his men were killed in the worst American military disaster ever. Proving that Custer was greedy and Custer didn't wait. There were many factors that led to the defeat of Custer.

However by reading the facts about the war, above, you can see that Custer eyes were clouded over. An urgency to go down in American history as the noblest man, the greatest Indian slayer and most of all The President of the United States. A great Indian slayer should be able defeat a camp of Indians on his own? This was why George Custer did not use Scouts. Therefore he ran into a camp that was 3 or 4 times larger than he had first anticipated. So

the men he obtained, of which he thought he had sufficient were outnumbered 3 to 1. This obviously was a huge factor to why he and his men were slain.

He did not expect to come across a camp of this size, let alone a camp that were equipped with a greater fire power than his squadron. This was another factor. Custer had not expected the Indians to have Guns as well as the knives and bows and arrows they were expected to own. This meant Custer's men were facing 3 times as many warriors as he had, who were more equipped in the white mans fire arms than them. Having known this a war veteran would have surely come up with alternative tactics. So you see, lack of and misinterpreted information led to unsuitable tactics.

It was like a chain of events. Lack of knowledge meant lack of weapons and firepower, which meant poor tactics. This lack of knowledge could have so easily been avoided, by sending out some of their many Indian Scouts. Who could have quite easily got an insight into the size and firepower that the rival Indians had. But Custer' eyes were clouded with greed, he needed no scouts. Custer definitely went down in history. He went down as the General who led his men into worst military disaster in American History. What happened to the Sioux after the battle?

Although the Indians won the Battle of the Little Bighorn, it was not a major event in Sioux history. Knowing that there would be severe punishment for their victory, the Indians immediately split up and traveled on so that the U. S. Cavalry would have a difficult time trying to find them. Eventually, they would be forced to live on reservations as their land went into the hands of

the U. S. government for mining and farming. Something the Indians did not do or intend on doing. They had fought hard in a losing battle. They had success in the Battle of the Little Bighorn, but had lost their way of life.

Their victory attracted even more discrimination and racism and gave the white men an extra incentive to wipe out the Plains Indians altogether. They would now be forced to live as the white men, be taught to farm crops and live in captivity. Some Indians killed themselves rather than live a false life with their humiliated and half annihilated brothers. So the Battle of the Little Bighorn was not really a victory for the Indians. They had fought with their lives, and what had they won, a life of shame, cruelty and eventually death. The reward for their victory was nothing.