

# Of Memory and Massacre

A SOLDIER'S FIRSTHAND ACCOUNT OF THE

“AFFAIR ON WOUNDED KNEE”

INTRODUCED AND EDITED BY

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IN 1889, a Paiute Indian from Nevada named Wovoka experienced a vision. In it, he was transported to the afterworld, where he met the Creator and saw Indians who had died long ago enjoying themselves in a pleasant land filled with game. The Creator spoke to Wovoka, telling him that his people “must be good and love one another, and not fight, or steal, or lie.” He also gave Wovoka a dance to teach the Paiute. If they followed this sacred dance, the Creator promised Wovoka, his people would usher in a new world—a place where they would be reunited with their departed friends and relatives, and where they would all live together, free from sickness, death, and old age.<sup>1</sup>

Thus began what non-Indian observers in the 1890s dubbed the “Ghost Dance Religion” or the “Messiah Craze.” For many Native Americans, Wovoka’s vision of a world reborn would flower all too briefly before coming to a fateful end a little over a year later in a bloody encounter between the U.S. Army and Wovoka’s followers among the Sioux (Lakota) at a frozen creek known as Wounded Knee. Among those who witnessed the momentous events at Wounded Knee was a career soldier named John W. Comfort. Comfort’s account, unknown until it was donated by a descendant to the Princeton University Library and printed here for the first time, offers a rare firsthand glimpse at one of the most searing episodes in the long and troubled history of U.S. government–American Indian relations.

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<sup>1</sup>James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, 1892–1893, pt. 2 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1896), 764.

Wovoka's teachings spread rapidly from the Paiute to much of the rest of Native America in the months after his vision, finding an especially receptive audience among the Indian communities of the Great Plains. Confined over the preceding decade to reservations where they could no longer hunt the once-vast buffalo herds but were instead expected to farm or depend on government rations, the Arapaho, Cheyenne, Lakota, and other tribes found Wovoka's tale of a land in which the dead came back to life, the game returned, and non-Indians and their artifacts disappeared decidedly appealing. In the fall of 1889, the Lakota and Cheyenne sent delegates to visit Wovoka and learn the details of his teachings. By the following spring, the Lakota held their first "Ghost Dance" ceremony on Pine Ridge, one of the six reservations in North and South Dakota across which the various Lakota bands were scattered.

To reservation authorities, charged with "civilizing" the Lakota, Wovoka's religion represented an unwelcome new development. In addition to revitalizing the "primitive" beliefs that it was the Indian agents' responsibility to replace, the implicit goal of Wovoka's religion—to reverse Native Americans' colonial position—appeared to many officials to risk setting off a violent outbreak among a people who had been living at peace ever since 1881, when Sitting Bull (Tatanka Iyotake) and his followers left Canada and surrendered to the U.S. government. All through 1890, large groups of Lakota gathered across their reservations for multiday ceremonies during which participants danced, sang, and entered trancelike states in which they encountered long-dead relatives. During such events, tribe members offered chants, which to those who heard them seemed to encapsulate "the whole hope of the ghost dance":

The whole world is coming,  
A nation is coming, a nation is coming,  
The Eagle has brought the message to the tribe.  
The father says so, the father says so.  
Over the whole earth they are coming.  
The buffalo are coming, the buffalo are coming,  
The Crow has brought the message to the tribe,  
The father says so, the father says so.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 1072.



"Two Strike and Crow Dogs Camp Pine Ridge Agency, S.D. Dec. 18th 1890." Photograph by the Northwestern Photographic Company, Chadron, Nebraska. Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Some Indian agents thought these ceremonies would cease as soon as the Lakota realized that the promised new world would never arrive; but others responded with alarm. "Indians are dancing in the snow and are wild and crazy," reported Daniel Royer, the new agent at Pine Ridge Reservation. "*We need protection and we need it now.*"<sup>3</sup>

Although few observers could overlook the obvious desire of the "Ghost Dancers" to unmake American colonialism, non-Indians such as Royer nonetheless misunderstood many of the movement's essential elements. For all his messianic fervor, for example, Wovoka advocated spiritual rather than military resistance to reservation conditions. Indeed, his teachings were avowedly pacific. "You must not fight," Wovoka told his followers. "Do no harm to anyone."<sup>4</sup> Even the Lakota, who developed the novel feature of the "Ghost Shirt," a brightly painted garment that its adherents claimed rendered the wearer impervious to bullets (a notion that struck some observers as inherently hostile), never tried to test this belief in a violent encounter, either on or off the reservation, during the summer and fall of 1890.

Moreover, although Wovoka's teachings highlighted Native Americans' nostalgia for a lost Indian world, the "Ghost Dance" was as much a novel, syncretic blend of native and Christian beliefs as it was a return to traditional religious practices. Among the Lakota, many tribe members believed that Wovoka was the reincarnation of Jesus Christ. Having tried to help white people and been crucified for his efforts, the Son of God, according to the new Lakota cosmology, had now decided to eliminate whites from the face of the earth and restore Indians to their former dominance. Such a turn of events was believed likely to occur as early as the spring of 1891, lending the Lakota's ceremonies in 1890 a particular urgency.

With the potential new millennium drawing nigh, relations between the Lakota and reservation officials became correspondingly tense. Ironically, in their desire to head off an Indian outbreak, officials may have, through their heavy-handed treatment of Wovoka's followers, made a violent outcome far more likely. In November 1890, in response to the concerns of several Indian agents, the

<sup>3</sup>Royer to Robert V. Belt, Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, November 15, 1890. Quoted in Robert M. Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 111. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>4</sup>Mooney, *Ghost-Dance Religion*, 777.

U.S. Army dispatched the Seventh Cavalry Division (George Armstrong Custer's old unit) along with several other units to break up the "Ghost Dance" ceremonies. Altogether, the troops deployed to South Dakota constituted the largest force assembled by the army since the end of the Civil War. Although no one knew it at the time, they also represented the U.S. military's last major mobilization against American Indians.<sup>5</sup>

Upon the army's approach, some three thousand of Wovoka's followers among the Lakota fled into the Badlands in the northwest portion of Pine Ridge Reservation. Forgoing a direct assault in this rugged terrain, federal authorities opted instead to arrest those leaders of the movement they could locate. Prominent among these was Sitting Bull, at whose camp the first "Ghost Dance" on Standing Rock Reservation had taken place. At daybreak on December 15, 1890, a detachment of forty-three Indian police sent by James McLaughlin, the Indian agent at Standing Rock, surrounded Sitting Bull's house and seized the sleeping leader. As he was being led away, a confrontation flared up between the police and some of Sitting Bull's followers. In the ensuing melee, two of the police shot Sitting Bull in the head and chest. Sitting Bull's teenage son and six of his followers were also killed, along with six Indian police. Despite official concerns about the violent character of Wovoka's teachings, these casualties from Sitting Bull's arrest were, in fact, the first deaths connected to the "Ghost Dance" among the Lakota.

Less than two weeks after Sitting Bull's death, army scouts located a Lakota chief named Big Foot (Si Tanka) and his followers near a site on Pine Ridge Reservation called Wounded Knee Creek. Big Foot had been a participant in earlier "Ghost Dance" ceremonies and had accepted several of Sitting Bull's followers when they fled to his camp after their leader's death. Although Big Foot was on his way to surrender at the Pine Ridge agency, federal authorities worried that he was trying to link up with the other holdouts in the Badlands. The army rushed in additional forces under Colonel James W. Forsyth, who quickly surrounded Big Foot's encampment of some 350 men, women, and children. Big Foot, ill with pneumonia and in a clearly

<sup>5</sup>Jerry Green, ed., *After Wounded Knee: Correspondence of Major and Surgeon John Vance Lauderdale while Serving with the Army Occupying the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, 1890-1891* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996), 17.

inferior military position, agreed immediately to surrender. “We would have done so before,” he explained, “but we could not find you and could not find any soldiers to surrender to.”<sup>6</sup>

Forsyth’s orders were to disarm Big Foot and his followers. Shortly after daybreak on December 29, 1890, he dispatched several squads of soldiers to search the camp on Wounded Knee for weapons. To the army, the removal of Lakota weapons was a peaceful measure, designed to eliminate the tribe’s capacity to launch the violent outbreak that civilian authorities so feared. To Big Foot’s followers, however, the plan appeared to leave them vulnerable to the violence that had claimed the life of Sitting Bull just a few days earlier. Furthermore, disarmament did not seem essential to peace; in previous surrender negotiations, the army had allowed the Lakota to keep their rifles so that the men could continue to hunt.

For all the Lakotas’ obvious displeasure at the disarmament order, neither group seemed prepared for a fight that morning. Forsyth had arranged his troops around the Indian encampment in a hollow square that hindered the fire of many of the supporting units, particularly the four Hotchkiss cannon located on a nearby rise. For their part, the Lakota were not only outnumbered, outarmed, and flying a white flag of truce; they risked placing their families in danger if they launched any violent resistance. Nevertheless, as Forsyth’s men began to gather rifles and pistols from the reluctant Lakota, a scuffle erupted, then a shot (sources still dispute the source), precipitating a skirmish as nervous Lakota and soldiers fired upon one another.

Because of the disarmament procedure, the two groups were so close together when the fighting began that most combatants had little time to reload. The initial conflict thus rapidly devolved into a bitter hand-to-hand struggle. Once the soldiers closest to the Indian camp had either fallen or retreated, however, the supporting troopers were able to bring their fire to bear on the camp with deadly effect. Particularly devastating were the four Hotchkiss cannon. Few Lakota warriors had ever encountered this weapon, which could fire almost fifty rounds per minute. In less than an hour, Indian resistance to Forsyth’s troops collapsed. Early in the encounter, Big Foot had been shot to death near his tent. Eventually, most members of his camp were killed as well. A precise count of casualties remains elusive, as many

<sup>6</sup>*New York Times*, December 30, 1890, 1.

Lakota were killed while fleeing from the Wounded Knee campsite, but estimates of the dead range from 150 to almost 300 out of the 350 or so in Big Foot's original party.<sup>7</sup> The army suffered 25 dead and 39 wounded; many of the military casualties may have been "friendly fire" victims, killed by the volleys from outlying troops.<sup>8</sup>



The events at Wounded Knee have had a contentious place in American history in the years since 1890. Most press accounts from the time depicted the incident as a dramatic military victory over warlike Indians. The day after the battle, for example, the *New York Times* published an article titled "Big Foot's treachery precipitates a battle," which commended the Seventh Cavalry for "once more show[ing] themselves to be heroes." *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* enthused a few weeks later that "[i]n the annals of American history there cannot be found a battle so fierce, bloody, and decisive as the fight at Wounded Knee Creek. . . . With the greatest coolness, fortitude, and bravery the sturdy Seventh sent home their leaden messengers of death into the ranks of Big Foot's followers."<sup>9</sup>

Following the lead of the U.S. Army and the prevailing newspaper coverage, many early historians concluded that Wounded Knee was best understood as part of a "memorable Indian campaign" or as "the last real war with the Sioux."<sup>10</sup> In recent decades, however, scholars have increasingly come to question the appropriateness of describing Wounded Knee in purely military terms. For many present-day historians, Wounded Knee has come to represent something quite different from a battle: a particularly egregious episode of reservation mismanagement; a "regrettable, tragic accident" caused by mutual misunderstanding; an example of the violence unleashed by

<sup>7</sup>In his narrative, John Comfort put the total number of Indians killed at Wounded Knee at 243.

<sup>8</sup>The standard count of army casualties comes from Utley, *Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, 228. In his narrative, Comfort gave the army casualties as 28 dead, 47 wounded.

<sup>9</sup>*New York Times*, December 30, 1890, 1; *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, January 24, 1891, 479.

<sup>10</sup>Early histories that mention Wounded Knee include Annie D. Tallent, *The Black Hills; or, The Last Hunting Ground of the Dakotahs* (St. Louis: Nixon-Jones, 1899), 711; Frederic Paxson, *The Last American Frontier* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), 370–71; and Grace Raymond Hebard, *The Pathbreakers from River to Ocean: The Story of the Great West from the Time of Coronado to the Present* (Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1912), 199.

the capitalist consolidation of the American West; an emblem of the unrelentingly hostile approach Europeans have taken toward the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas; an act of genocide.<sup>11</sup>

From the beginning, American Indians have been active participants in these debates over the meaning of Wounded Knee. One of the first witnesses to the event was a young Lakota doctor named Charles Eastman, who treated many of the Lakota survivors and wrote a scathing evaluation of the incident in his autobiography, *From Deep Woods to Civilization*. Whatever discontent the Lakota manifested in the “Ghost Dance,” the movement was nonviolent, Eastman argued, and a logical response to the injustices of a corrupt reservation system. “[T]here was no ‘Indian outbreak’ in 1890–1,” he wrote. “[S]uch trouble as we had may justly be charged to the dishonest politicians, who through unfit appointees first robbed the Indians, then bullied them, and finally in a panic called for troops to suppress them.”<sup>12</sup> Another Lakota, Black Elk, also witnessed the event as a young man and later offered one of the best-known Indian accounts of the aftermath:

We followed down along the dry gulch, and what we saw was terrible. Dead and wounded women and children and little babies were scattered all along there where they had been trying to run away. The soldiers had followed along the gulch, as they ran, and murdered them in there. Sometimes they were in heaps because they had huddled together, and some were scattered all along. Sometimes bunches of them had been

<sup>11</sup> For a treatment of Wounded Knee as a tragedy and an example of reservation mismanagement, see the works by Robert Utley, especially *Last Days of the Sioux Nation* and *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866–1891* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 408. For a discussion of the connection between Wounded Knee and the capitalist consolidation of the American West, see Richard Maxwell Brown, “Violence,” in Clyde A. Milner II, Carol A. O’Connor, and Martha A. Sandweiss, eds., *The Oxford History of the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 416–19. For an account that portrays Wounded Knee as yet another episode in a long history of European violence toward Indian peoples, see Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970). For accounts that treat Wounded Knee as part of a program of genocide, see David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), and Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1998). These various schools of interpretation are not mutually exclusive and overlap one another in certain respects.

<sup>12</sup> Charles A. Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization: Chapters in the Autobiography of an Indian* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1916), 117.



killed and torn to pieces where the wagon guns hit them. I saw a little baby trying to suck its mother, but she was bloody and dead. . . . When I look back from this high hill of my old age, I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream.<sup>13</sup>

In the spring of 1892, less than a year and a half after the fighting at Wounded Knee, John W. Comfort wrote down his recollections of the battle, which he sent in a letter to his brother, Winchester. "I have been writing the enclosed narrative of the last Sioux Campaign a little at a time," he told "Chess." It and the "rough sketch of the Battle Ground of Wounded Knee may interest you."<sup>14</sup> Born in Pennsylvania in 1844, Comfort had first joined the army in 1861 and saw combat in the Union forces during many of the Civil War's best-known battles: Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Chickamauga, Chattanooga, and Sherman's "March to the Sea." Following Appomattox, Comfort re-enlisted and served in the Indian wars of the 1870s, winning a Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions during a skirmish against the Comanche and Kiowa on Texas's Staked Plain in 1874, when he single-handedly pursued and killed one of the leaders among the Indians. After a seven-year break from the army, during which time he worked as a mule packer and clerk, Comfort re-enlisted in 1885 and was assigned to the First Artillery Division. It was as a member of this unit that he was dispatched to Wounded Knee in the winter of 1890.<sup>15</sup>

Although Comfort's precise reasons for recording his experiences are unknown, from the tone of his account it would appear that he was particularly concerned with defending himself and his comrades against the charges—raised by a few press accounts and by a

<sup>13</sup> *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*, as told to John G. Neihardt (New York: William Morrow, 1932), 259, 270.

<sup>14</sup> John W. to Winchester Comfort, April 5, 1892, John W. Comfort Papers, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. The letter, map, and a photograph of Comfort were donated by Joseph Harbeson, Class of 1974.

<sup>15</sup> Merle Olmstead, "John W. Comfort: Portrait of a U.S. Regular, 1865–1892," *Military Collector and Historian* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1968): 126; Charles M. Neal Jr., *Valor Across the Lone Star: The Congressional Medal of Honor in Frontier Texas* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2002), 195, 200–203, 267–69.



John W. Comfort. This photograph is thought to have been taken at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, soon after Comfort was awarded his Medal of Honor on October 13, 1875. John W. Comfort Papers, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Gift of Joseph Harbeson, Class of 1974.

subsequent investigation into Colonel Forsyth's behavior—that the soldiers, motivated by a desire for revenge over Custer's death a decade and a half earlier, had fired upon fleeing women and children at Wounded Knee. Comfort's narrative therefore presents the encounter not as a police action gone awry but as a battle between well-matched adversaries—one that the Lakota had precipitated and in which they held many unrecognized advantages. Comfort's text also places the event alongside the smaller, lesser-known skirmishes that broke out between U.S. Army and Lakota forces afterward, suggesting that Wounded Knee was part of a larger outbreak of Indian hostilities. In many of these features, Comfort's account is consistent with subsequent army efforts to cast the events at Wounded Knee as a military encounter. Ultimately, the military would honor thirty-two men for their actions at Wounded Knee, including twenty to whom it awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.<sup>16</sup>

For present-day readers, Comfort's account is perhaps most valuable for the perspective that it offers on how an "ordinary" soldier experienced the events at Wounded Knee. The men serving under Forsyth on December 29, 1890, faced the difficult questions that confront virtually all soldiers when military force is directed against a predominantly civilian population: sorting out combatants from noncombatants; determining what constitutes a proportionate use of force; bridging the cultural and linguistic divides between the army and the local population; explaining, both to oneself and to the outside world, the tremendous loss of life that can result when superior force and weaponry are employed against an adversary. Although many of Comfort's judgments may not be ones that contemporary readers would like to imagine sharing, they nonetheless reflect what many Americans in the late nineteenth century considered an appropriate response to the nation's "Indian problem."



Because of the painful emotions that the incident still arouses, Wounded Knee remains a site freighted with historical significance for many Native Americans. In 1903, Lakota leaders on Pine Ridge erected a monument—inscribed with the words "Many innocent women and children who knew no wrong died here"—over the

<sup>16</sup>Green, *After Wounded Knee*, 39.

trench into which, a few days after the confrontation, white contractors had piled the frozen corpses of 150 or so of the Indians killed at Wounded Knee.<sup>17</sup> In 1973, members of the radical American Indian Movement (AIM) occupied the massacre site for seventy-one days, declaring it part of a newly formed independent Oglala Sioux Nation. AIM's actions triggered a siege by federal marshals and the Federal Bureau of Investigation during which two AIM members were killed. For many observers, the violence of this confrontation, as well as the ongoing deprivations on Pine Ridge and the other Lakota reservations—according to the 2000 census, 61 percent of the population on Pine Ridge lives below the poverty level—underscore the failed policies that continue to plague Indian peoples more than a century after the original massacre at Wounded Knee.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Richard E. Jensen, R. Eli Paul, and John E. Carter, *Eyewitness at Wounded Knee* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 183. See also Utley, *Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFacts?\\_event=Search&geo\\_id=01000US&\\_geoContext=&\\_street=&\\_county=&\\_cityTown=pine+ridge&\\_state=04000US46&\\_zip=&\\_lang=en&\\_sse=on](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFacts?_event=Search&geo_id=01000US&_geoContext=&_street=&_county=&_cityTown=pine+ridge&_state=04000US46&_zip=&_lang=en&_sse=on) (accessed June 24, 2004).

JOHN W. COMFORT'S NARRATIVE OF  
THE SIOUX CAMPAIGN

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The killing of Sitting Bull and a few of his immediate followers by the Indian Police, from Standing Rock Agency who had been sent to arrest him left only Big-Foot's Band, re-enforced by renegades from Sitting Bull's and others in a hostile attitude.

They were prevented by the disposition of Troops from entering the Bad Lands. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Dec' after having surrendered to Major Sumners<sup>1</sup> command they again made their escape. they headed south, their exact course not being known, but it was supposed that they would try to reach Pine Ridge Agency where the majority of discontented Indians were located. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of Dec' they were discovered by the Indian Scouts, of Major Whitesides,<sup>2</sup> who with 4 Troops of 7<sup>th</sup> Cav and 2 Hotchkiss Mt Guns, manned by a Detachment of Light Battery "E" 1<sup>st</sup> Arty, were lying on Wounded Knee Creek, about 18 miles from Pine Ridge Agency. Major Whitesides immediately put his command in motion, after a rapid march of about 9 miles the Hostiles were seen, The Troopers and Gun's were immediately prepared for Action, The Hostiles approached the command, with profuse professions of friendship, after considerable pow-wow-ing and re-iterating their claim of having always being good Indians, they surrendered (Without giving up any arms though) and were conducted to Camp on Wounded Knee. A heavy guard was placed so as to entirely surround their Camp, the Hotchkiss guns being placed on a slight elevation about 100 Yd's from the Camp, so as to be able to sweep it with canister if necessary.

A courier was immediately sent to General Brook's<sup>3</sup> commanding at Pine Ridge, with the intelligence of the Capture (so called) Gen<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Edwin V. Sumner, Lieutenant Colonel of Eighth U.S. Cavalry.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel M. Whitside, Major of the First Squadron, Seventh U.S. Cavalry.

<sup>3</sup> John R. Brooke, Brigadier General in charge of the Department of the Platte.

Brook's knowing that this band was that very worst of all the turbulent spirits of the Sioux Nation and knowing that if, they were allowed to come into the Agency, that they and the other Indians of like character, who were numerous and who would gladly help them in any deviltry that they might propose, and soon cause a general outbreak. Determined to disarm them, and send them away from Dacotah. To make sure of disarming them

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Batt 7<sup>th</sup> Cav', commanded by Cap't Illsly,<sup>4</sup> and 2 Hotchkiss Guns, Com<sup>d</sup> by Cap't Capron,<sup>5</sup> all under command of Col Forsyth<sup>6</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> Cav', were ordered to re-enforce the Troop's on Wounded Knee. The command left the Agency at 4 P.M. on Dec 28<sup>th</sup> and arrived in sight of the Camp fires of the Guard's over the Indians about 8 P.M. To prevent the Indians from knowing that the Troop's, that they had surrendered to, were being heavily re-enforced and cause a Stampede Col Forsyth's command made a long detour to the North and East, coming into the Camp of the 1<sup>st</sup> Batt on the flank farthest from the Indians.

As little noise as possible being made The Troopers silently unsaddling and bivouacking the Hotchkiss Guns being unpacked and placed on the hill on the right of the two already in position all the ammunition being placed near by the crews of the Guns remaining with them Saddle and Pack animals being sent to the rear with the animals of the other Gun's. The night was very cold and the Troopers and Cannoniers who were without Tents or Fires, passed a very uncomfortable night, most of them walking to and fro to keep warm, discussing what the probabilities were for the morrow, The Young lads who had never heard the whistling of hostile lead were eagerly discussing the chances for glory in the morning, While the Old Veterans of the War (There is still a few left in the Army) and participators in many Indian Fight's were conspicuous by their silence or an occasional growl about too much talking, but all things have an end the anxiously looked for morning came at last, clear and calm, The Troops after a hasty breakfast made their preparations for businiss silently and promptly, The Cannoniers on the hill preparing their Guns for immediate use each Gunner training his Peice on a point in the Indian Camp where in his judgement it would do the most good.

<sup>4</sup>Charles S. Ilsley, Captain of Second Squadron, Seventh U.S. Cavalry.

<sup>5</sup>Allyn Capron, Captain of Battery E, First U.S. Artillery.

<sup>6</sup>James W. Forsyth, Colonel of Seventh U.S. Cavalry.

About 8 O'clock all the Cavalry who were to remain mounted took their positions at a rapid gate, those that were dismounted taking their assigned positions as if going on Parade. The rough Sketch of the Camp and vicinity shows the position of every Troop and Gun as nearly exact as my memory recalls, at the moment immediately preceding the break made by the Indians. By the order of Col<sup>d</sup> Forsyth all the Warriors were notified to assemble on the open ground between the Indian Camp and the flank of the Camp of the 1<sup>st</sup> Batt 7<sup>th</sup> Cav<sup>d</sup> where three Troops of dismounted Cav were formed. The Indian Warriors obeyed slowly and sullenly—each Warrior being completely enveloped in a peice of white Cotton Cloth which hid from view whatever weapon he carried, they took the position designated and all squatted down in a compact body. Two dismounted Troop's were then placed so as to enclose them on three sides. They were then ordered to go by small squads to their Tepees to get their Arms and surrender them, the main body being held under control until each squad had been disarmed, The first squad that went After considerable delay during which they no doubt posted their Squaws how to act during the fight which they had determined to make returned and delivered up a few Old Guns—protesting that they were the only Guns they had, It was well known that they were lying for the day before when they surrendered the Buck's were told to form line for the purpose of counting so as to know how many rations to issue to them, which they eagerly did, and as the count was made it was then seen that each Warrior had a Rifle and a belt of ammunition and a considerable number of Revolver's. This Squad was then placed under a strong guard separate from the other Warriors. Several Squads of Soldiers from another dismounted Troop were then sent to search the Tepees and Squaws for arm's, The Squaws took advantage of every opportunity to prevent the Soldiers from finding and securing arms, some were detected hiding Rifles in the Grass, some would keep them concealed on their persons until the opportunity presented itself, and then hide them in a Tepee or Wagon that had been searched, some resisted with fury, the taking of weapons which were found on them, The result of the search made it very evident that nearly all the Warriors had their Rifles and other weapons his on their persons, It was then determined to disarm the Warriors without any more nonsense. The line of Troopers around the Warriors was then drawn closer, until there was but about 20 ft at the most open space between

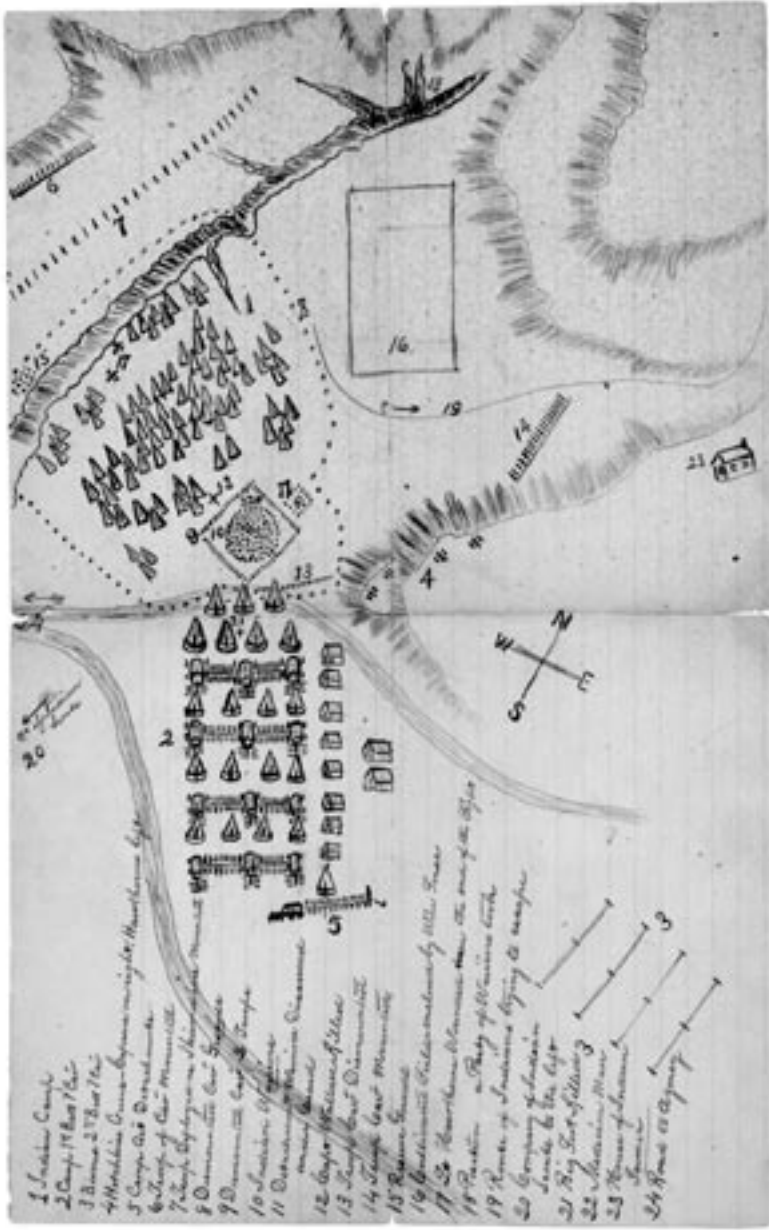
Soldier and Indian, The open side of the square being closed by the contraction of the of the line of Soldiers. A party of Soldiers then commenced to search the persons of the squad of Warriors that were held seperate.

Just at this time the Medicine Man<sup>7</sup> appeared dressed in a very fantastic suit of Buckskin and commenced an incantation, gestitating and chanting assuming all kinds of dramatic attitudes whistling a shrill weird tune, and finally after calling out in terribly earnest tones, with out-stretched arms and face turned toward the heavens, He suddenly stooped gathered both hands full of dirt and scattered it over the Warriors, Its effect was like a live coal thrown into magazine of loose powder. From an intensely dramatic scene, to a terribly tragic one was but the work of a moment.

The Warriors sprang to their feet as one man and from under their mantles each one produced a Rifle or War Club. then a single shot followed immediately by a volley right in the faces of the Troopers, a return volley from the Troopers, a mad rush, hand to hand, Shooting Stabbing Clubbing, Soldiers Warriors Squaws and Children all mixed, Horses hitched to Indian Wagons dashing wildly about. Tepees upset on fire every body running some for shelter and safety some in pursuit of a foe, The outside lines of Troopers pouring in a rapid fire. all this time the Artillery men on the Hill were standing lanyard in hand, gun's shotted with Canister. waiting for their comrades of the Cav' to get clear from amidst the Indians, Most of the line of outside guards who were dismounted rallied together on the farther side of the ravine, what was left of the two Troops that enclosed the Warriors and the squads of the third Troop who were amongst the Tepees and Squaws rallied on the hill in rear of and left of the Gun's, a great many in trying to get clear from amongst the Indians, rushed directly towards the Guns making it impossible for the Guns to open without slaughtering Friends as well as foe's. There was some cool old hand's serving the Guns, who by their advice and example kept their younger and hot-headed comrades in restraint, What seemed an hour to the Artillery men was really but a minute or two, finally the way was clear—crack—crash went the 4 Guns sending their Canister tearing into the mass of Warriors, Squaws Children, Horses. It was a terrible thing to do but the Warriors were mixed with the Squaws, and

<sup>7</sup>This was likely a Lakota spiritual leader known as Yellow Bird.





"Battle Ground of / *Wounded Knee* Creek / Fought on the 29<sup>th</sup> of December 1890 between the 7<sup>th</sup> Regt U.S. Cav<sup>y</sup>, four  
 (4) Hotchkiss Mountain Guns of Battery 'E' 1<sup>st</sup> Art'y, and Big Foots band of Sioux Indians—resulting in the destruction  
 of Big Foot and his band" (title on reverse of sketch), John W. Comfort Papers, Manuscripts Division, Department  
 of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Gift of Joseph Harbeson, Class of 1974.



“Copr. Paul Wernert [Weinert] and gunners of Battery ‘E’ 1st Artillery,” probably at the Pine Ridge Reservation, 1891. The seven Lakota scouts and four gunners are posed behind a Hotchkiss gun of the type operated by John W. Comfort. Weinert was awarded a Medal of Honor for his part in the Battle of Wounded Knee. Photograph by P. & V. Grabill, Deadwood, South Dakota. John C. H. Grabill Collection, Library of Congress.

were firing rapidly with their Winchesters, and Squaws were seen to kill Wounded Soldiers. In a moment more the Indian Herd of Horses, which had previously been brought in by the Squaws, and either saddled or hitched to Wagons—Dashed from the Camp some 70 or 80 of them ridden to escape from the Camp their safest way would have been to have made a rush to the South cross the Ravine and face the Company of Mounted Scouts (Cheyennes) who were of no account, to the West they would have to face two Mounted Troops and about 40 dismounted Troopers, To the East were the Guns, a full Mounted Troop on their right and about 80 dismounted Troopers on the left and<sup>8</sup> in rear—to the north was a barbed wire fence enclosing a peice of ground about two Acres in extent, They chose the worst, and came tearing directly toward the Guns until clear of the fence and then to the North endeavoring to reach the rough broken country. The Guns after exhausting their Canister used Percussion Shell continuing their fire until what was left of the flying Indians, were hid from view in a

<sup>8</sup>Manuscript: and and.

ravine about 2500 Yd's distant, where three Troops of Cav' rounded them up killing or capturing the entire party, nearly all the captured being wounded. The Warriors who had sought shelter in the Ravine on the west side of the Indian Camp, kept up a lively fire with their Winchesters, and give the dismounted Troopers a lively fight until they were killed. At a point where a side ravine joined the main one, a small party of Warriors had taken cover, and protected by the steep bank's were secure from the fire of the Skirmishers, except at such times as they chose to expose themselves in returning the fire of the Skirmishers who were lying flat on the ground about 30 or 40 Yd's from the banks of the ravine, One or Two at a time would rush up the bank where they could secure footing deliver their fire and fall back again they would receive the fire of fifteen or twenty Carbines, but it was not certain that they were always killed, and not knowing how many Warriors had taken shelter there, It was determined to try the effect of Shell on their hiding place for this purpose one of Lt. Hawthornes<sup>9</sup> Guns was used taking position on the high ground to the right (north) of the Wire Fence and about 75 Yds from it, It was soon found that the Shell could not reach the Indians from this position, and the Gun was then run down into the Indian Camp and took position on the bank of the ravine. and about 300 Yd's from the position occupied by the Indians, the explosion of the first shell among them drew the fire of the hidden Warriors on the Gun, almost immediately Lt Hawthorne was severely wounded and was carried out of range by one of the gun's crew. the shelling was continued by the Gunner and his men, and a second Gun was run down by its detachment, but had hardly taken position when both guns were ordered back to the hill by Cap't Capron, This was caused by a party of about 150 Warriors from the Agency coming out to assist Big Foot's band, making an attack on the three Troops of Cav', who had just finished rounding up the remnant of Big Foot's band, and who were about two Miles from the camp, Finding that they were too late and could effect nothing they soon retired. By Col' Forsyth's order all the Troop's were then drawn in, and preparations made to meet an attack by the Warriors from the Agency, who had left in a body, upon hearing of the fighting on Wounded Knee (Col' Forsyth had sent a courier to Gen<sup>l</sup> Brook's, shortly after the fighting commenced, he did not let the grass grow

<sup>9</sup>Harry L. Hawthorne, Second Lieutenant of Battery E, First U.S. Artillery.

under his horse's feet. but rode at top speed Yet the Indians at the Agency knew of the fighting as soon as Gen<sup>l</sup> Brooks.) All along the crest of the ridge occupied by the Gun's, a rude breastwork was hastily constructed, of Boxes of Hard Bread Sacks of Flour and Bacon, Bags of Grain, and anything else that would afford protection from bullets, The Wagons being placed in rear of the line, end to end, so as to protect the rear, and partially shelter the animals, should an attack be made in sufficient force to surround the command. Digging was not practicable, as the ground was frozen as hard as rock, and would require too much time. In the mean time all of the Wounded Soldiers were brought in and cared for, The Dead being gathered and placed in a row, near the temporary Hospital. About 3 PM order's were given to get ready to move back to the Agency. The wounded Soldiers placed in Wagons and made as comfortable as possible. The Dead piled on top of one another like Cord Wood in three Wagons. The Indian Prisoners placed in others under guard and a start made. The weather was pretty cool being several degrees below the freezing point and as night drew on got cooler still. The bodies of the Dead were as stiff as log's when placed in the Wagons, Among the Dead was a Trooper who had received a terrible wound in the head, he was unconscious when found, and not one among all those who saw him had the least idea that there was any life in him, he was placed in a wagon on top of dead bodies with a layer of dead over him, he remained in that wagon while it was drawn over a rough road or 18 miles, all the night of the 29<sup>th</sup> all of the 30<sup>th</sup> and until the morning of the 31<sup>st</sup>, and it was only discovered that he had life in him as they were in the act of taking him out of the Wagon to place him in his coffin, he recovered and is still living. with sight and hearing nearly gone. it was a close call. he had a constitution strong enough to keep death away from a dozen badly wounded.

The march back to the Agency was done slowly and cautiously, after night set in frequent halts been made, the road ahead and the country on both sides being carefully examined to prevent getting into a trap, great care being taken to insure that safety of the Wounded should the command be attacked. The command reached the Agency about 12 M. and went into their old camps. The loss of the Troops at Wounded Knee was. 1 Com' Off' Killed (Capt Wallace)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> George D. Wallace, Captain of Troop K, First Squadron, Seventh U.S. Cavalry.

and 27 Enlisted men. 4 Com' Off's Wounded and 43 Enlisted men—. Big Foot's band numbered 300 souls 120 of whom were Warriors, three days after the fight a strong party was sent out to bury the dead Indians, they found 243 bodies 108 of them being Warriors, as about 50 prisoners were brought in with the 7<sup>th</sup> it left only 7 or 8 not accounted for. A great amount of stuff was published in the Newspapers after the fight accusing the 7<sup>th</sup> Cav' of purposely butchering everything in sight, out of revenge for the Massacre of Custer and his men in 76. (Many of these Warriors being engaged in that affair) and that the Men of the 7<sup>th</sup> raised the cry of "Remember Custer," that was and is pure nonsense, there was no Battle Cry of any sort raised—very little talking being done by the Men or Officers, except to call out to one another that a Warrior was hiding here or there—or lookout for that fellow—he is playing Possum and will Shoot—which several of the Warriors did. The killing of Squaws and Children was unavoidable—in a mixed melee of a fight like that was, and there is no doubt but that the Shots fired by the Warriors in the first few minutes of the fight, did as much execution among Squaws and Children as the fire of the Soldiers, some of the Squaws fought as well as the Buck's. Then again it was said in the Papers, that such a strong force of Soldiers, should have disarmed the Indians without fighting (more nonsense) Had there been Ten times as many Soldiers they could not have disarmed those Warriors, they were the bravest and best Warriors of the whole Sioux Nation, The Messiah craze and Ghost dancing had got them to believe that the Soldiers bullets could not kill them, Their Medicine Man had just preached a wild fanatical sermon, had told them that the Soldiers would kill them all as soon as they give their arms up, had exhorted them to die fighting like Great Warriors, and the fight commenced

The disparity of force was not half as great as the difference in numbers. There was eight Troop's of Cav' numbering about 400 men, twenty two Artillery men with 4 Guns. Sixty of the Cav' were Recruits just joined a few days previous to the fight (inexperienced lads just from home), of the remainder not over two hundred had ever been on a campaign, and the half of them were never in a battle with either White men or Indians. The 120 Warriors had no superior on the earth as fighting men, they were taught to be brave, to shoot well and to fight to the Death from infancy, the whole aim and training of an Indian, and his sole ambition is to become a Great Warrior.

Physically they were the finest lot of Men I ever saw. Above the average height many of them over 6 feet, very powerfully built, some of them being Herculean in muscular development. The first shot fired in the Action, Mortally wounded Cap't Wallace (through the bowels) he made a gallant fight after receiving it emptying five chambers of his Pistol before he went down, from a blow on the head with a War Club, which caused instant death. I was looking right at Wallace at the time, but had to stand and look on with the rest of the Artillerymen I was number One of my Peice the second from the right. In the first rush after the two Troop's and the Warriors had poured their volley's into each other, I saw four Warriors close in on a Cav' Serg't having no time to load he used his Carbine as a Club he went down but so did they from the fire that was focused on them from several points A private in the act of loading his carbine was beset by a Warrior who placed the Muzzle of his Winchester right against the Soldier's breast and fired he killed the Soldier but fell dead beside him, I saw all this before the space between us and the Indians was clear of living Cavalrymen, After I was too busy in working my Peice to notice anything—except a good place to send in a shot. My Gunner was a fine young fellow but apt to shoot wild, so I aimed and fired the Gun myself. The Serg't Major of the 7<sup>th</sup> and a Hospital Steward were killed in amongst the Indian Tepees they had been assisting in searching for Arms, The QrMr'Srg't 7<sup>th</sup> Cav' who was taking a hand in the fight had his chin and lower front teeth partly carried away by a shot—he was an inveterate talker, it must have been great punishment to him to be unable to talk—he is a brave fellow though. Many of the Wounded came immediately to our Guns before they were directed to a place where their wounds could be attended to. leaving their Carbines and ammunition, Our numbers 3 and 4<sup>s</sup> could not resist the opportunity but picked up a carbine a peice and used them during the rest of the fight An old Man a Catholic Priest<sup>11</sup> who had been for many years among the Sioux and other Indians, who had came out from the Agency in the interest of peace, and was well known by these Indians, had a knife plunged into him by one of the Warriors, though seriously wounded he recovered and is still among the Indians.

When we reached our Camp after getting back from Wounded Knee, we found the Tents were still standing but neither Man Horse

<sup>11</sup> Father Francis M. J. Craft, a Jesuit missionary on Pine Ridge Reservation.

or Gun were present. what blankets and Clothing we had left were scattered about the Tents in the utmost confusion. everything showed that the Camp had been vacated in haste We had left a Lieut and 40 enlisted men, out 4 heavy field guns and Horses enough to draw two guns.

It appeared that as soon as the Indians at the Agency had heard of the fighting on Wounded Knee, they hastily left for the broken country in a body, a considerable number of them opening fire on the Agency employees and the Troops stationed there. By order of Gen<sup>l</sup> Brooks the Battery left their Camp which was on a flat near the White Clay creek, where there was shelter from the Cold winds, and about three fourths of a mile from the Agency. And took position on a hill close to and south of the Agency. where they could command the country for a long distance, and at the same time be supported by the Infantry. Ten Companies of the Second and Eight Regt's, who were posted in advantageous positions in the vicinity. The Indians who numbered about 1500 Warriors could have given the Troops a hard fight, but the sight of the big guns which they had a great dread of made them keep at a respectful distance, and from attacking the Agency in force, after a scattering fire at long range they disappeared, Their fire killed one Citizen employee and wounded five Soldiers. The Soldiers cursed Gen Brooks roundly for what they termed cowardice on his part in not letting them open fire on the Indians. Early in the morning of the 30<sup>th</sup> considerable firing was heard from a point about two miles North East of the Agency, This was caused by the Indians making an attack on a train of Wagons escorted by a Troop of the 9<sup>th</sup> Cav'. When Big Foots band was corralled at Wounded Knee. A courier was sent to Col' Guy V. Henry,<sup>12</sup> commanding a Batt of four Troop's 9<sup>th</sup> Cav' (Colored) who were scouting on White River in the edge of the Badlands, for this same body of Hostiles. He immediately made a rapid march to the Agency. arriving there about day-break of the 30<sup>th</sup> having covered over a hundred miles in the preceding 32 hours. the advance Companies had been in Camp but a short time, when their Train was attacked, they immediately saddled again and went back on a dead run to save it. accompanied by one of Hayden's Guns. As they went dashing by Boots and Saddles sounded in our

<sup>12</sup> Guy V. Henry, Major of Ninth U.S. Cavalry. In the late nineteenth century, the Ninth Cavalry was an all-black unit with white officers.

Camp (The 8 Troops 7<sup>th</sup> and our Hotchkiss 4 Guns) in a few minutes we were after them, The Attack proved to be but a slight a small party of Hostiles had managed to get close to the Train without suspicion by wearing the same clothes as Indian Scouts and succeeded in killing a Colored Trooper, They were easily driven off. assisted in their flight by Shell from Haydens Gun. All the Troops then returned to Camp expecting to get some rest, which both men and animals needed, We had just unpacked our Guns and unsaddled. when Boots & Saddles again sounded with Curses not only deep but loud the men sprang for their Horses and Mules, Packed and Saddled and in an almost incredible short time, were dashing through the Agency toward the hills to the North.

The Alarm this time was caused by several columns of Smoke arising beyond the range of hills to the North of the Agency. the hostiles were burning all the Houses and Haystacks belonging to the peaceably disposed Indians, who had left their little farms through fear of their hostile kindred, and had come into the Agency for protection. About five miles North in the Valley of the White Clay the Catholic Missionary Society had erected a fine and commodious brick building for the purpose of educating Indian Children, there were at this time several white female teachers in the building and it was to save these and the building from distuction that we were ordered out.

We marched rapidly passing several houses that had been burnt or were on fire. but found the Mission building and inmates safe. The command pushed on about a mile and a half farther when the advance was met by a sharp fire from the Indians ambushed on the crest of a ridge to the left front. The Troops were immediately formed for an advance in line or defence. The Country was very favorable for the Indians. Ridge after ridge, spurs of the main ridge that ran parallel to the Creek on both sides separated by deep ravines, each succeeding ridge commanded by the one beyond. after about half an hours Skirmishing and Shelling of ravines and small bodies of Indians who showed themselves, Col Forsythe became convinced that it was only the rear Guard of the Hostiles that were in his immediate front, and that the main force were probably in some very strong position, that would only invite disaster by attacking with the force present. Coming over to where my Gun was in position. he gave orders to Cap't Illsley (who was watching the effect of my Shell on a body of Warriors on the other side of the Creek below.) to move his Battalion back



to a good position, so as to cover the withdrawal of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. that as the Mission people were safe, he did not feel justified in pushing matters, and intended to return to the Agency. Our Batt' moved back to the Crest of the first ridge after crossing the Creek coming from the Mission. There being no position that our Guns could take that would not exposed to a short range fire from the hostiles Winchester. We were ordered to retire to where the led horses were, on the Creek bottom just behind the ridge. Had we taken position on the Crest with the Cav', (who by lying down behind the Crest and only exposing themselves partly when firing and who were comparatively safe) every artilleryman would have been killed our Wounded in a few minutes without having any show to return an effective fire on the Indians. The 1<sup>st</sup> Batt' then fell back and took position on the left of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Warriors becoming bold by the retreat of the Troops and reinforced by<sup>13</sup> many from the main body commenced to press the Attack and to try and work around the flanks.

The loud reports of our Guns and the continuous rattle of Rifles was plainly heard by the Troops and Citizens at the Agency. It was known that the hostiles could bring from twelve to fifteen hundred Warriors to battle with the 7<sup>th</sup> and the rough and difficult character of the Country made it possible that the Troop's could have been caught in a bad position, these facts coupled with the highly exaggerated reports of a couple of Citizens (who had accompanied the Column from the Agency, and who flew back as soon as the firing became sharp) That the whole command was surrounded in a bad place and were in danger of being massacred—and that it was another Custer affair, made every one at the Agency a little anxious. The four Troops of the 9<sup>th</sup> under Col Henry and one of Haydens guns were ordered out to assist the 7<sup>th</sup> In a few minutes after the 1<sup>st</sup> Batt' had gained its new position, All the Horses and Gun's were ordered to retire to the Mission, preparatory to another retrograde movement of the fighting line. After crossing the Creek the road ran along the base of high hills until near the Mission, seeing a position where a gun could shell the Indians by firing over the Troops and also command the Creek bottom for a long distance and also command any move on<sup>14</sup> the part of the Indians around the left and rear of the 7<sup>th</sup> I asked for and received permission to place my Gun there. I had barely placed my

<sup>13</sup>Manuscript: by by.

<sup>14</sup>Manuscript: on on.

peice in position, and was watching for a good opportunity for an effective shot. When along came the 9<sup>th</sup> Cav', Col' Henry on the lead, every Trooper yelling like a madman their horses at their full speed, Hayden with one of his Guns with them Leaving the road at a point just behind my position, they scrambled up the steep hills to the right dismounted and advanced as skirmishers leaving their animals with the N<sup>os</sup> 4. Hayden's Gun taking position a short distance to my right and opening fire on the Indians position over and beyond the 7<sup>th</sup>. The 9<sup>th</sup> not finding any hostiles in their immediate front were halted

The hostiles seeing this additional force, gave up the attack as unprofitable and retired to their main body, It is not the nature of Indians to persist in an attack, unless they are very certain of entirely crushing their foe. The entire body of Troops then returned to the Agency. The loss of the Troop's was One private Killed. One Commissioned Officer and six enlisted men wounded The loss of the Hostiles was never accurately known, rumor made it heavy, but it was probably very light. I never saw a fight with Indians where such rapid and continuous firing was indulged in, by both Troops and Indians, resulting in such slight loss. The Troops in this affair fought the Indians in their own style. (under cover)

Gen Miles<sup>15</sup> who had been directing the movement of Troops, from his Headquarters in Chicago upon hearing of the affair on Wounded Knee, immediately took the field in person, his presence made it lively for everybody, In a few days he had the Hostile Stronghold surrounded by a strong cordon of Troop's, which he kept drawing closer and tighter every day. soon it became impossible for the Hostiles to escape without fighting a heavy battle, a few Warriors might have slipped through the lines here and there but the body as a whole could not get away without suffering very heavily. Gen<sup>l</sup> Miles then invited the Hostile Chiefs, to come in and have a talk. they came and were given to understand that they must return to the Agency and surrender their Arms by a certain day or fight. Indians are pretty shrewd judges of character, and they saw that in Gen<sup>l</sup> Miles they had a man to deal with who meant just what he said and would stand no humbugging, they were aware that they were surrounded by a force greatly superior in numbers, and accompanied with guns that could slaughter them from a long distance They never had Artillery used

<sup>15</sup>Nelson A. Miles, Major General in charge of the Division of the Missouri.

against them before and the presence of our battery of (to them) big Guns after their experience with the Hotchkiss Mountain gun filled them with dread. then again they were suffering greatly from the cold the Winter had set in in earnest, the thermometer had registered twenty below zero several times while they were out, nearly all of them had left their poor miserable excuses for Lodges behind when they left (Which the Cheyennes about 2000 of whom were encamped near the Agency and who had not been affected with the Messiah Craze had carried off to their own Camp's) they had nothing but the Agency beef Cattle which they had Captured when they left to live on, and they would soon perish from Starvation and cold if kept close herded near their Stronghold, or be retaken by the Troops. So they came to the conclusion that the wisest plan would be to return and surrender—which they did, they were made to camp in a compact body along the line of White Clay Creek south of the Agency and about a mile from it. In a few days after over 3,000 Troops composed of Infantry Cavalry and Artillery were brought in and took position on the same Creek but a short distance south of the Indian Camp, and encamped in a long single line presenting a very imposing appearance. the next day the Troops were reveiwed by Gen<sup>l</sup> Miles. the weather was very cold, a snow storm had set in with a strong north wind, all the Mounted troops wore their heavy Buffalo Overcoats, fur Cap's and Gloves, with the exception of our Battery who had to be content with Caps and Gloves and were nearly frozen before the reveiw was over. the regulation Army Overcoat gives very little protection in a Dacotah blizzard. especially to men who have to sit still in the Saddle for any considerable time.

After the Reveiw the Troops returned to their respective Camps, and made preparations for a general breakup. the next day Jan'y 24<sup>th</sup> 91. Just two month's after our leaving Fort Riley. the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. Light Battery "E" 1<sup>st</sup> Arty and 4 Troops of Cavalry from Fort Leavenworth broke Camp and marched for Rushville.<sup>16</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Mounted formed line on the road and as the column passed gave cheer after cheer which was heartily returned. The Troop's were all very glad to return to their comfortable Posts The 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Cav' and 1<sup>st</sup> Reg't of Infantry remained in the field about two months longer Upon arrival at Rushville each Battalion shipped upon a

<sup>16</sup>Rushville, Nebraska.

separate Train. the 2<sup>nd</sup> Batt. 7<sup>th</sup> Cav and our Battery leaving last. All went well with us until within about 50 Miles of Fort Riley.<sup>17</sup> when our train which consisted of 6 Passenger Coaches for the enlisted men 1 Pullman for Officers. 2 Flat Cars for our Guns 18 Stock Cars loaded with Horses and 4 baggage Cars loaded with Harness Saddles and general Camp equipage Smashed into the North bound Epress train Our Conductor was drunk and pulled out from a station knowing that the Express which had the right of way had left the Station ahead. Both Engines were demolished the first two Coaches filled with Soldier were driven completely over the Engines. the next four Coaches partly telescoping each other The Pullman was lifted off its trucks and turned upside down to the left of the track by the heavy flat Cars containing our Gun's scouping under it. the three first Stock Cars which contained Horses belonging to the Battery were piled in a confused heap of broken timbers and horses on the right of the Flat Cars the rest of the Train remaining on the Track safe. On the Express only one Passenger was injured. the Engineer having put on his Air brakes and reversed in time to slow up enough to let the Passenger's jump off. Our Engineer put on his Air brakes and reversed. but the weight of the Car's containing Gun's Horses and baggage which had only hand brakes and not enough Train hands to man them made it impossible to avoid a collision. A Sergt of our Battery was torn to peices under our Guns. A Private of Cav' was killed he was riding on the Pilot of our Engine, and 35 enlisted men injured some very severely. Six of our Battery Horses were killed. Ten injured so badly that we had to Shoot them right there, and the rest more or less badly cut and bruised. we had hard work extricating them, my own two horses were very badly cut and would have been shot but I took them off and hid them in a barn and cared for them, bandaging them up, so that they would not bleed to death. they were as good as ever in two months. they were two young horses, that I had broken to Harness they are the best in the Battery to day. Our Gun Carriages and limbers were completely ruined, and are good for nothing except what they might sell for as old Iron. we have received new Carriages and limbers since coming to Sheridan. the smashup occurred just before dark. another train was sent to us, and we reached Fort Riley at 8 O'clock next morning. We remained at Fort Riley until Sept 29<sup>th</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Fort Riley, Kansas.



“Sioux Warriors taken prisoners at Pine Ridge and brought to Fort Sheridan, Illinois, in charge of Captain John B. Kerr, 6th Cavalry, U.S.A.” According to Richard E. Jensen et al., *Eyewitness at Wounded Knee* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 171, William F. (“Buffalo Bill”) Cody secured the release of most of these warriors in March 1891 and took them on a yearlong tour of Europe with his Wild West show. Photograph by George E. Spencer, Chicago. Courtesy of the Lake County Discovery Museum, Wauconda, Illinois.

91. when we we ordered to the new Post of Fort Sheridan<sup>18</sup> it is situated on Lake Michigan 24 Miles north of Chicago. It is only about half built yet. when finished will hold 2 Regt's of Infty, 4 Troops Cav' and 2 Light Batteries. The 15<sup>th</sup> Infty and our Battery are the present garrison.



*“A Soldiers life in garrison is a same-thing-over-again routine,” Comfort complained to his brother in the letter of April 5, 1892, accompanying his narrative. “I detest it I like to be on the move Campaigning the more danger the better[.]” Seven months later, the ailing soldier applied for a discharge, stating that “I am not able to perform all the duties required of a soldier and cannot compete with young and active men.” On November 29, 1893, less than three years after the events he witnessed at Wounded Knee took place, Comfort passed away. He is buried in Mount Peace Cemetery in Philadelphia.*

—KJ

<sup>18</sup>Fort Sheridan, Illinois.