

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

## 1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Wolf Mountains Battlefield

Other Names/Site Number : Battle at Belly Butte, Miles' Fight on the Tongue, 24RB787

## 2. Location

Street & Number:

Not For Publication:

City Or Town: Birney

Vicinity:

State : Montana

Code : MT

County : Rosebud

Code : 087

Zip Code : 59012

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.

(  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
____ entered in the National Register ____ See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
____ determined eligible for the National Register ____ See continuation sheet	_____	_____
____ determined not eligible for the National Register ____ See continuation sheet	_____	_____
____ removed from the National Register ____ See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
____ other	_____	_____

**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property : Private, Public/Federal

Category of Property: Site

Number of Resources within Property	
Contributing	Non-contributing
_____	_____ buildings
<u>2</u>	<u>1</u> sites
<u>3</u>	<u>2</u> structures
_____	_____ objects
<u>5</u>	<u>3</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions : Landscape/Unoccupied Land  
                           Landscape/Natural Feature  
                           Defense/Battle site

Current Functions : Agriculture/Agricultural Field

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification: N/A

Materials :  
 Foundation N/A  
 roof N/A  
 walls N/A  
 other N/A

**Narrative Description :**

The Wolf Mountains Battlefield is located approximately four miles southwest of Birney, Montana in a narrow corridor of the Tongue River Valley. The terrain exhibits many features that are characteristic of the rugged beauty for which this part of the country is known. The site is decorated by a series of brush-covered fields, benches, and towering elevations that spread dramatically from the riverbanks, creating the western vistas that inspired works by Remington and Russell. The site also contains man-made elements, whose introduction began with white settlement of the area in the years following the Great Sioux War of 1876-77. Although the passage of time has altered the site physically, the feel and overall appearance of the battlefield remain solidly intact.

(See continuation sheets)

**8. Statement of Significance**

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Applicable National Register Criteria: A, B

Criteria Considerations: C

Areas of Significance: Military, Ethnic Heritage

Period of Significance: 1877

Significant Dates: January 8, 1877

Significant Person: Crazy Horse  
Nelson A. Miles

Architect/Builder: N/A

Cultural Affiliation: Oglala Lakota  
Northern Cheyenne  
Crow IndiansNarrative Statement of Significance :

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The Wolf Mountains Battlefield represents a pivotal moment in American and Native American history, and has direct linkage to many significant events of the Indian Wars Era. Although a part of the Great Sioux War of 1876-77, the Battle of Wolf Mountains is not widely known. Yet, the origins of this battle can be traced from the flawed construction of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, to the Black Hills gold rush of 1874-1875, the Centennial Campaign of 1876 and George Armstrong Custer's crushing defeat at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. The greatest significance of the Battle of Wolf Mountains is that it proved to be the decisive moment in the Great Sioux War of 1876-77. The tactical victory enjoyed by Colonel Miles and the U.S. Army inflicted an unrecoverable defeat upon the Oglala war leader Crazy Horse and the warriors who fought with him. As a result of the losses in supplies and ammunition suffered at the Battle of Wolf Mountains, Crazy Horse never took the field against the United States again; he surrendered to army officials at Camp Robinson, Nebraska five short months later. As a result of the Army's victory, and the restriction of the Indians to the Great Sioux Reservation, vast expanses of territory in modern Montana, South Dakota, and Wyoming were opened to American citizens for homesteading, facilitating the final steps in the white settlement of the West. For these associations with broad patterns of history, the battlefield is nationally significant and worthy of listing in the National Register according to Criterion A.

The site gains significance according to Criterion B, for the leading participants of the Battle of Wolf Mountains were individuals significant to the history of the United States. Most notable among the participants were the Oglala war leader Crazy Horse, and future Commanding General of the Army Nelson A. Miles. At the time of the battle, Crazy Horse was among the leading war chiefs of the Lakota Nation; having distinguished himself in numerous battles against traditional native enemies, and white Americans since the early 1860s. Crazy Horse is best known for his leading role in the defeat of Custer at the Battle of the Little Big Horn six months before the Wolf Mountains engagement. Nelson A. Miles first won national fame in the Civil War, as a major general in the Army of the Potomac, before marching onto the Great Plains and fighting in nearly every theater of the Indian Wars Era. In addition to his significant contributions to winning the Great Sioux War of 1876-1877, Miles ended the flight of Chief Joseph's Nez Perce (1877) and was ultimately responsible for ending the Apache Wars in the American Southwest a decade later.

Finally, the Wolf Mountains Battlefield is likely to contain archeological evidence that, according to National Register Criterion D, may yield information important to understanding the character of the battle and the military events of that day. However, this has not been substantiated for purposes of this nomination.

(See continuation sheets)

Wolf Mountains BattlefieldRosebud County, Montana**9. Major Bibliographical References**

(See continuation sheet)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

 preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested. previously listed in the National Register previously determined eligible by the National Register designated a National Historic Landmark recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data

 State Historic Preservation Office Other State agency Federal agency Local government University Other: Author**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property: approximately 2756 acres

UTM References

The Wolf Mountains Battlefield is located in the E ½ Sec 21; All Sec 22; SW ¼ SW ¼ Sec 23; W ½, NW &amp; SW ¼s Sec 26; All Sec 27; E ½ Sec 28; NE ¼ Sec 33; N ½ Sec 34; W ½, NW ¼ Sec 35; T 6S, R 42E, M.P.M.

All in Zone 13:

	Easting	Northing		Easting	Northing
A	5018100	377620	D	5014050	378000
B	5017040	377600	E	5014100	375020
C	5017020	378000	F	5018180	375100

**Verbal Boundary Description:**

See boundaries as indicated on enclosed topographic map labeled Wolf Mountains Battlefield.

**Boundary Justification:**

The boundaries selected for the Wolf Mountains Battlefield encompass the areas significant to the engagement that took place there on January 8, 1877. In addition to the geographic formations central to the battle (the soldier campsite, Battle Butte, and the hills assaulted during the fiercest moments of the battle, the boundaries include locations where mounted warriors made their advances and formed their skirmish lines on each side of the river.

**11. Form Prepared By:**

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**Property Owner:**

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Street: HC 71 Box 1

telephone: (406) 984-6233

city or town: Birney state: MT zip code: 59102

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The battlefield spans the width of the Tongue River Valley for approximately two-and-a-half-miles, and extends along the axis of the river about two miles. It is naturally divided into three sections by the two streams passing through the site. The Tongue River passes through the center of the site and winds its way to the northeast in a series of horseshoe bends, separating the eastern and western portions of the battlefield. Flood plains extend from western opening bends to form lowland pastures on the north central and southeastern extremes of the battlefield. These lowland areas are disrupted by a towering rock-faced bluff that projects finger-like onto the field from the hills lying further to the north and west. This bluff skirts the northeastern arch of the river lying to the rear of the location where the military established its camp on January 7, 1877. The bluff slopes gradually to the lowlands, which fan out in grass-covered meadows west of the river. On the day following the Battle of Wolf Mountains, F Company, Twenty-second Infantry, established a lookout position at the top of the rock-faced wall, where they erected a rifle pit that can still be found.

The other stream, Battle Butte Creek, is a dry streambed for most of the year. It branches from the river on a course that runs north-south across the field. Straddling the creek at its intersection with the river are two areas significant to the Battle of Wolf Mountains. East and slightly to the north of this junction is the field where troops established their camp. It was situated under the bluff lining the river's western bank and a half mile from the ridges forming the inner-most wall of the valley. West of the campsite, a plateau rises from Battle Butte Creek's intersection with the Tongue River. This elevation (known locally as Battle Butte\*) follows the smaller stream across the valley floor to the mouth of a small canyon approximately one-half mile from the river. This plateau, or bench as some of the members of the military expedition referred to it, climbs out of the dry stream bed for slightly more than two hundred yards, before falling away in a forty-to-sixty foot drop to the valley floor. The elevation is distinguished by a 3,200-foot tall volcano-like knoll located in its center.

Historically, this plateau continued uninterrupted across the valley where it connected to the hills that formed the western wall of the canyon located in the southern portion of the battlefield. The canyon is several hundred yards wide and approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile long. The canyon walls are composed of densely packed hills, which rise steeply from the valley floor to heights of 3,300 to 3,500 feet on each side. In the later stages of the battle, the heights forming the eastern canyon wall were initially occupied by Lakota and Northern Cheyenne warriors, who were there fighting alongside Crazy Horse. From several of these flat-topped ridges, the warriors poured deadly rifle fire into the ranks of the soldiers before they were driven from the field by Miles' infantrymen. This is the area of the field where the fiercest fighting of the battle took place. It is also the location where a member of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, Wooden Leg, placed a traditional native stone marker to note the location where a warrior from his tribe, Big Crow, was shot during the battle. John Stands In Timber pointed out this marker to historians of the battle some years later.

### NOTE:

\*To avoid confusion, the "Battle Butte" referred to here is not the Battle Butte unfortunately mismarked on the U.S.G.S. map. The location referred to as Battle Butte by participants, and locals today, is the plateau north of Country Road 314. It is distinguished by the conical knoll in its center.

### Contributing Cultural and Historical Features

Rifle Pit: On the crest of this 3,200 foot elevation, one can still find the rifle pit dug by members of Company E, Fifth Infantry, who stood guard during the night of January 7, 1877 and fought from this position the following day. During battle, this rise was one of the key defensive locations for the soldiers fighting under Colonel Nelson A. Miles.

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**Big Crow Marker:** The traditional stone marker placed by Wooden Leg marks the site where oral tradition and written historic accounts agree that the Cheyenne medicine man Big Crow fell. Marked by a group of 5 or 6 sandstone rocks forming a low cairn, the site where Big Crow fell is a high bluff vegetated with grasses and sagebrush that commands a sweeping view of the battlefield and the Tongue River valley (see site map). This site lends definition and significance to the battlefield's cultural landscape, particularly its traditional importance to native people.

**Stone alignment:** A stone alignment, consisting of a series of seventeen cairns lies along the northwest edge of the spur ridge that projects out into the floodplain of the Tongue River where the battle unfolded. Built of local sandstone and encrusted with lichens, a total of 17 cairns extend at regular intervals along the end of this embankment. Stacked 3-4 stones high, they each measure roughly 2-3 feet in diameter and 18-24 inches in height (see site map). While the affiliation of this feature is not clear, it is a part of the indigenous cultural landscape integral to this battlesite.

**Stone circle:** A stone enclosure is located atop a high knoll near the southern boundary of the battle site. Measuring approximately four feet in diameter, it appears to be of some antiquity -- the stones are heavily lichenated, and the circle is overgrown with sage and juniper. While the enclosure likely predated the engagement, it lies within the range of the active fighting and may well have been used as a fortification during the battle. And again, although the origins of this structure are not known, it is a part of the indigenous cultural landscape that formed the backdrop to the battle (see site map).

### Integrity

Since the battle, intrusions have crept onto the field; however, the site retains much of its appearance and feel. One can not help but notice the signs of modernity that appear on the field. Most obvious of these are County Road 314, and the string of utility poles and telephone wires that bisect the eastern battlefield. These enter the battlefield site immediately in front of the ridges bordering the eastern edge of the field and cut a course between the soldier's defensive area and the formation labeled Battle Butte on U.S.G.S. maps. The road is unpaved and sees very little traffic, save for local ranchers and the occasional tourist who is interested in the site. While it is unfortunate that the road passes through the battlefield, it should be noted that it is the only way to approach the site.

Two other roads also traverse the site: one north and the other south of the river. Marked as "unimproved dirt" roads on the U.S.G.S. maps, they are best described as broken paths, overgrown with prairie grasses and other vegetation. The one lying in the southern field leaves the county road before it exits the site and turns south into the canyon, west of the dry creek bed, and follows a line of utility poles into the southern interior of the valley. The northern road crosses the site for only a short distance before exiting the field. It is located in the heights, behind the bluffs overlooking the river, and is not visible from the field.

In addition to these rural byways and utility lines, agricultural developments are present on the battle site. Since the early 1880s, much of the Wolf Mountains Battlefield has been under private ownership by the Brewster family, who currently own the Quarter Circle U Ranch. In the location where the soldiers camped, the ranch grows hay and other forage for their livestock. This field extends from a southward opening bend in the river to the fence line that runs fifteen yards short of the Country Road 314. An irrigation ditch also extends on an east-west axis across this field; it is approximately five feet deep and eight feet wide. Ranch livestock also grazes upon this ground and throughout the surrounding fields.

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Finally, some alterations have occurred at the battlefield since the time of that historic event. During the 1970s, a portion of the site west of Battle Butte was leveled to facilitate agricultural production. Soldiers were posted in this area, although the effected land is actually beyond the areas occupied by military troops. Likewise the Birney Cemetery is located on the southwestern portion of the battlefield, north of the county road, in an area that was not occupied during the battle. In addition, almost unnoticeable alterations to the battlefield have resulted from the use of metal detectors to locate and remove physical evidence from the field. While this hobby has uncovered evidence valuable to the historical record, it is impossible to fully assess the loss brought about by some of these relic hunters, and the practice should be curtailed. Any future studies involving metal detection, artifact removal or archaeological excavation should be conducted by professional archaeologist. Also, there are considerably more trees and other forms of vegetation present today on the battlefield. A home movie made by owners of the Quarter Circle U Ranch in the late 1920s contains black and white images of the canyon interior, which shows dramatically less vegetation on the slopes and crests of these elevations than exists today. Clearly, this would indicate a noticeable difference in appearance since the time of the battle, especially in the higher elevations and along the riverbanks.

Still, the Wolf Mountains Battlefield retains very strong integrity, and conveys a clear sense of the historical setting and feeling. For miles, the Tongue River valley is remote and relatively pristine; it has developed primarily as unbroken rangeland populated by native wildlife and range cattle. Due to the nature of the fighting, it is my great belief that any participant of the battle viewing it today would immediately recognize it as the scene of battle. Throughout the battle, the fighting centered upon elevations surrounding the campsite. The view shed is unique to this location and remains relatively undisturbed in appearance. And historical features that played a role in the events of that day can still be found on the battlefield.

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### Historical Background

The Battle of Wolf Mountains is best viewed in the context of events leading to the Great Sioux War, and its significance is revealed not so much through the actual combat of January 8, but the impact that the battle had on the tribal societies who fought it.<sup>1</sup> The Great Sioux War marked the final conflict in the cultural struggle for domination of the Northern Plains between the United States and the nomadic, buffalo-hunting, warrior cultures who claimed the region as their own. At issue in this struggle was ownership of the Black Hills and the unceded Indian territory given to the Lakota and Northern Cheyenne tribes for their exclusive use in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. Upon ratification of the treaty the United States government pledged its protection of the Indians' rights to this land, as well as their exclusive use of it.<sup>2</sup>

Americans wishing to develop the natural resources of the region resented being denied access to this territory. Since mid-century, rumors circulated on the frontier that told emigrants of fabulous gold deposits awaiting discovery in the cold mountain streams of the Black Hills. The exclusive domain given the Indians, however, barred entrance into these regions to all non-Indians. By 1874, the situation on the plains surrounding the contested territories had worsened. Settlers and Indians alike violated the boundaries of the treaty lands.<sup>3</sup> Reports of depredations by both groups, real and imagined, increased. In addition, the demand for access to the Black Hill rose steadily through the early years of the decade until it could no longer be ignored by officials in Washington. As historian Robert M. Utley states, "Indian rights seemed of minor consequence to men idled by the depression that gripped the nation in the wake of the Panic of 1873."<sup>4</sup> Finally, in June, General Philip Sheridan gave orders to Lt. Col. George A. Custer to organize an expedition into the Black Hills. Sheridan informed Custer that, among his numerous other duties, he was to find a suitable location for a military post that would put the army in a better position to strike marauding warriors. The famed commander of the Seventh Cavalry was also instructed to "unofficially" investigate the rumors of gold.<sup>5</sup>

Custer's report of gold being found from the "grass roots down" that summer triggered a massive rush to the Black Hills. In direct violation of the 1868 treaty, prospectors flooded the hills, valleys, and streams of the Indians' sacred hills. Realizing the futility of trying to restrain the fortune seekers, Washington hoped to side step its citizens' breach of contract by sending another treaty commission to the Great Sioux Reservation. It was charged with securing an agreement that would allow the United States to either lease the hills from the Indians or buy them outright. Treaty sessions lasted throughout 1875, but failed to achieve the desired results.<sup>6</sup> Washington officials were thrown into a precarious position, their citizens were flagrantly violating the government's treaty with the Indians and could not be restrained from doing so. Equally clear to federal authorities was that neither the Lakotas nor the Northern Cheyennes were willing to sell the ceremonial center of their universe. War was now unavoidable. In December 1875, President Ulysses S. Grant directed the commissioner of Indian Affairs to order all bands of Lakota and Northern Cheyenne Indians to return to the reservation by January 31, 1876, or they would be considered hostile and driven by force back to the agencies.<sup>7</sup>

In the spring of 1876, the most publicized military campaign in American western history began. Columns from Forts Ellis, Fetterman, and Abraham Lincoln left family and friends to begin their marches into the history and mythology of the United States. On June 25, 1876, Lt. Colonel (and Brevet Major General) George Armstrong Custer divided his command and attacked one of the largest gatherings of Indians ever assembled on the northern plains. This was, of course, the Battle of the Little Big Horn. The crushing defeat suffered by Custer and the Seventh Cavalry at the hands of Lakota and Northern Cheyenne warriors led by Crazy Horse, Two Moons, and others horrified the



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nation as it celebrated its centennial anniversary. Humanitarian groups, which had long opposed attempts by the government to abrogate the treaty of 1868, now joined in the demand to avenge the "Custer Massacre." The Congress of the United States immediately passed legislation authorizing the army to increase the company complements in all frontier cavalry and infantry units, and allocated substantial funds to the army to construct military posts in the war zone.<sup>8</sup> By defending their families and traditional ways of life, Lakota and Cheyenne warriors brought upon their people the full wrath of the United States Government, as it directed all its resources to destroying, once and for all, the military power of these tribes.

### **Colonel Nelson A. Miles, Crazy Horse, and the Road to Wolf Mountains**

Colonel Nelson A. Miles arrived in Montana on August 2, 1876, with five companies of the Fifth Infantry.<sup>9</sup> He and his men were part of the massive troop build up on the northern plains following the Custer disaster. His unit was assigned to Brigadier General Alfred Terry's Dakota column, the same one that Custer had belonged to prior to the Battle of the Little Big Horn, and Miles eagerly awaited the opportunity to lead his men into battle against the Lakota warriors who had killed his friend Custer. His first few weeks on the northern plains were spent keeping supply lines open to Terry's column, as it wandered aimlessly through the upper Yellowstone Valley. By month's end, however, it was apparent that the large gathering of Indians had scattered and that the large Dakota column had little chance of striking the smaller Indian bands. On August 25, General Phil Sheridan ordered the campaign closed and disbanded the Dakota column.<sup>10</sup>

To his great satisfaction, Miles was to remain in the combat zone. Sheridan detached the Fifth Infantry to separate from Terry and proceed to the junction of the Tongue and Yellowstone Rivers. The colonel and his men were to begin building one of the two posts Congress authorized following the Battle of the Little Big Horn. For Miles, the new assignment equated to an independent command away from the ineffectual Terry and an opportunity to devise his own strategy against the non-agency bands. Miles secured the transfer of the remaining companies of the Fifth Infantry from Fort Leavenworth to the Yellowstone, and the additional support of six companies from the Twenty-second Infantry, under the command of Lt. Colonel Elwell S. Otis. Like Sheridan, Miles was convinced that the best way to conquer a nomadic people was to campaign against them during Montana's arctic-like winter when the Indians settled in their permanent winter camps and food supplies for man and beast were scarce. Many years later, Miles stated in his memoir, "the only way to make the country tenable for us was to render it untenable for the Indians."<sup>11</sup>

With his independent command, Miles directed his attentions toward Sitting Bull. The chief had long since been singled out as the leader of all the non-agency bands and, as the infantry commander believed, the most influential war advocate among the Lakotas. If Sitting Bull's influence could be destroyed, the Colonel was convinced that the war in Montana would be short. Doggedly, the Fifth Infantry and their commanding officer kept the Hunkpapas in a constant state of motion, denying them the sanctuary usually found in the game-rich valleys of Montana's interior. The early campaigns effectively destroyed the military strength of Sitting Bull, rendering him, as one leading historian observed, "a remote ingredient in the war."<sup>12</sup> Miles and his troops engaged Sitting Bull three times during the fall of 1876, inflicting great losses of food, shelter, and supplies on the Indians.<sup>13</sup> As the country's centennial year drew to a close, Miles believed the military strength of the "hostile" bands to be on the verge of collapse. The colonel felt assured that his success against Sitting Bull, combined with the recent victories of other military commands in the region, would compel many bands that had previously scorned overtures of peace to surrender.

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To a degree Miles was correct in his estimation. The presence of soldiers throughout the former unceded territory convinced many Indian leaders of the futility of continuing the war. The tribal elders, headmen, and members of the warrior societies divided along factional lines between those wanting to make peace and those wishing to remain at war. At the agencies, family groups who spent the summer with the "hostile" bands began surrendering in large groups to escape the growing hardships inflicted upon them by campaigning soldiers in their winter sanctuaries. Yet, in the traditional non-treaty bands, like Sitting Bull's and Crazy Horse's, the influence of prominent war leaders held most peace advocates at bay. In the Oglala Lakota village of Crazy Horse, the young leader used his influence over the warrior societies to quell any thought of surrender throughout the fall.<sup>14</sup> Like Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse rejected the Fort Laramie treaty, opting to continue living according to traditional ways of life in the lands claimed by his people.

In early December, however, the attitudes of the villagers in Crazy Horse's camp were dramatically altered by the arrival of a band of Northern Cheyenne Indians. After spending weeks wandering through the winter wastelands of Wyoming and Montana territories with little food, a few blankets and buffalo robes, and little other clothing to protect themselves from the elements, surviving members of Dull Knife's Northern Cheyenne village found their way to Crazy Horse's camp.

The Cheyennes had been attacked in their lodges early on the morning of November 25, 1876 by expeditionary forces commanded by Col. Ronald Mackenzie.<sup>15</sup> Those villagers not killed in the cavalry's initial charge were driven from their lodges with only the clothing they had on their backs to protect them from the elements.<sup>16</sup> Their ordeal had been horrifying. The pitiful condition of the Cheyenne survivors shifted attitudes of several key Lakota councilors until a unanimous decision was reached to send out peace feelers to Colonel Miles in hopes of negotiating an end to the war.

Leading the peace faction was the Oglala headman Sitting Bull (not to be confused with the Hunkpapa Sitting Bull of Little Big Horn fame). The Oglala elder had been a long time friend of the white man, but had left the reservation in disgust over the loss of the Black Hills. After the arrival of Dull Knife's people to Crazy Horse's village, Sitting Bull argued that the misfortune of the Cheyennes was an unavoidable fate awaiting their own village if they did not surrender. The Oglala elder effectively persuaded the council that it would be better to discuss peace with the soldiers than to risk the lives of their women and children by remaining at war. Sitting Bull hoped that by going to see Miles, better terms could be arranged.<sup>17</sup>

Sitting Bull quickly won the unanimous support of the tribally mixed council, convincing other prominent members that it would be best to select delegates to go to the soldiers, than to await a repeat of the Cheyenne tragedy on their own villages. Albeit grudgingly, Crazy Horse followed the wishes of the council and supported their decision to make inquiries of peace with Miles. The appearance of Dull Knife's Cheyennes had been as shocking to Crazy Horse as it had to anyone in the village. As their leader he was responsible for their welfare, and the utter poverty of the Cheyennes in the wake of the soldier attack weighed heavily on his mind. Lakota holy man Black Elk, who was a teenager living in the Oglala village at the time, later stated that throughout the fall Crazy Horse remained steadfastly committed to remaining in his country. Yet the arrival of Dull Knife's people disturbed Crazy Horse greatly. "He was always a queer man," remembered Black Elk, "but that winter he was queerer than ever."<sup>18</sup> Black Elk stated that Crazy Horse often left the village to contemplate the fate of his people during these anxious days. The winter had

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come early that year and game was increasingly difficult to find. Already, Crazy Horse's people were reduced to living off the flesh of their ponies, who themselves were dying from exposure and a lack of nourishment. Faced with the growing scarcity of game and the prospect of attack, Crazy Horse agreed, perhaps for the first time in his life, that his people should make efforts to secure peace with the American soldiers.<sup>19</sup>

Within days, the council selected a delegation to journey down the Tongue and meet with the soldiers. Sitting Bull the Oglala and four Miniconjou delegates, along with a few warriors, left the village during the second week of December and arrived at the military post on December 16, 1876. Outside the post, the five peacemakers left the other members of their party behind, advancing under white flags of peace, and making gestures of peace to all who saw them. As the delegation neared the cantonment, a group of Crow warriors, serving as scouts for Miles, rode out to welcome the Lakotas. Offering their hands in friendship and assurances of hospitality, the two groups came together near the neatly stacked rows of firewood used by the fort. As the two groups met, however, the ancient animosity between the tribes flared up as the Crow warriors attacked the peace delegation, dragging them from their saddles, and slaughtering them.<sup>20</sup>

When Crazy Horse learned of the massacre, he exploded with anger and immediately demanded revenge for the slain peacemakers. The incident rearmed the war faction, and all but the most strident supporters of peace came back to the Oglala war leader. Crazy Horse demanded the council unanimously agree to make war on the soldiers stationed on the Tongue. Unquestioningly, the council supported a plan to send a small band of warriors as a decoy party to attack the cantonment, and draw the command out in pursuit. The decoy party would continue harassing the soldiers until they reached a predetermined location, where the main attack would take place.<sup>21</sup> It was an elaborate adaptation of the Lakota decoy tactic, similar to that used to lure Captain William J. Fetterman and his command to their deaths in 1866 along the Bozeman Trail.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Wolf Mountains Campaign**

Within days of the murders, it became apparent to Miles that another campaign would have to be organized and sent into the field that winter. On December 20, 1876, the military commander wired department headquarters in St. Paul, Minnesota declaring his intentions to launch an operation against Crazy Horse. Miles preferred making peace with the tribes, however, recent depredations by Lakota and Cheyenne war parties vividly demonstrated the disposition of the natives.<sup>23</sup> Raiders had attacked government contractors on December 18, stealing several government animals and forcing cancellation of mail service at the post. Warriors struck again on December 26, stealing nearly 250 head of cattle from the post's beef contractor, driving them into the interior of the Tongue River valley.<sup>24</sup> Although he was still organizing his strike force, the theft of the cattle herd forced Miles to dispatch three infantry companies (E and F, Twenty-second Infantry, and K Company, Fifth Infantry) under the command of Captain Charles Dickey to pick up the Indian trail before it could be lost by an unexpected change in the weather.

On December 28, 1876, Colonel Miles led the balance of his strike force away from the Tongue River cantonment. Joining the three units already in the field were Companies A, C, D and E, Fifth Infantry; a detachment of forty mounted infantrymen; two field artillery units (whose guns were covered with wagon bows and canvas as a disguise), several white and Indian scouts, and the campaign's supply train. As the column began its march, it was clear to all that nature would prove to be as much an adversary as Crazy Horse's warriors. Temperatures were at 30 degrees below zero and a freshly fallen ten inches of snow greeted the troops that morning for the first day of their march.

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Clad in buffalo or duck-lined winter suits, which covered numerous other layers of clothing, the company trekked through the Montana wilderness looking, as their commanding officer described, more like arctic explorers than soldiers.

Over the next several days, with the command united, Miles followed the Indian trail up the Tongue River valley. Fighting harsh winds, bitter temperatures, deep snows and frequent river crossings, the strike force steadily and hurriedly advanced up the Tongue. Miles firmly believed that if he could make a successful strike against Crazy Horse, he could break the fighting strength of the Indians and bring the war to a close by spring. He had neutralized Sitting Bull already; now, if Crazy Horse could be defeated, the Lakotas would be without their two most influential war leaders. The Indians cleverly enticed the rapidity of the troop advance by leaving fresh campsites for the military scouts to discover. In addition, the war party engaged Miles' rear-guard in small-scale skirmishes on the first and third days of the new year, encouraging the column's rush toward the awaiting Indian ambush.<sup>25</sup> Convinced of his proximity to the main Indian body, Miles was playing unwittingly into the grand designs of Crazy Horse.<sup>26</sup>

On January 7, 1877, however, the tides of war began to shift against Crazy Horse. That afternoon, a series of events unfolded that ultimately proved to be the decisive moments in the campaign. At noon, after an exhausting two and a half-mile march, Miles ordered the column into an early bivouac and directed the scouts to reconnoiter the valley. They had been away from camp for a couple of hours when guards reported them returning with prisoners. Chief-scout Luther "Yellowstone" Kelly reported to Miles that their Crow scouts had captured nine Northern Cheyenne women and their children a short distance to the southwest of camp. Their location, combined with the fact that they seemed to be carrying all their worldly possessions on their horses, led Kelly to believe the Indian women were searching for Crazy Horse's village. Miles agreed.<sup>27</sup>

Miles ordered Kelly to organize another reconnaissance and began reconsidering the strategy of the expedition. If the Indian village was near their present location, as he and Kelly believed, it would be necessary to increase the speed and maneuverability of the column. The presence of the Cheyenne prisoners led Miles to believe that Crazy Horse could not be more than a couple of days march from where his troops were currently encamped. He decided to leave his supply train behind and lead the command on a two-day reconnaissance of the valley using pack mules to carry the supplies. Meanwhile, Captain Ezra P. Ewers and E Company, Fifth Infantry, would be detained to guard the supply wagons. If he and Kelly were correct in their estimations of the distance to Crazy Horse's village, Miles needed to find it quickly, before it could be moved, and before he lost what he considered to be the upper hand.<sup>28</sup>

Kelly's report to Miles was correct, the Cheyenne prisoners had been attempting to find Crazy Horse when the Crow scouts spotted them. What Kelly and the others did not realize, though, was that the women had a warrior escorting them on their journey. He was a Northern Cheyenne warrior named Big Horse. He had left his traveling companions after spotting smoke from the soldier camp hovering above the valley. Miles' expedition was common knowledge among the tribes, on and off the reservation, and not knowing if the smoke belonged to the soldiers or their kinsmen, the warrior told his companions to remain concealed. Leaving the women in the hills to investigate the smoke, Big Horse slowly worked his way toward the encampment. The women, however, disregarded their escort's instructions and ventured out of their concealment, whereupon the Crow scouts promptly detected their movements. Seeing the Crow scouts surround them, and realizing he was helpless to prevent their capture, Big Horse raced away from the scene to find Crazy Horse and the women's kinsmen.<sup>29</sup>

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Throughout the remaining hours of January 7, Big Horse raced through the valley searching for his tribesmen. Near midnight, after a thirty-mile flight, he entered the village on Deer Creek, howling like a wolf to signal his arrival and pass the news of the capture to the village. The announcement spread through the mixed Lakota-Cheyenne village like a shock wave. Warriors immediately prepared themselves for battle, painting their faces and rounding up their best war ponies. Crazy Horse and members of the various Lakota warrior societies led the war party from the village on its mission to rescue the female captives. The Lakotas were given the honor of leading the attack as they were technically the guests of the Cheyennes on this expedition. The warriors rode through the night, following the Tongue until they were within a few miles of the bivouac, near Wall Creek, where they planned their attack. Undoubtedly, the war leaders were depending on the element of surprise to maximize their chances for success. It, however, had already been lost. Unbeknownst to Crazy Horse, Big Horse or anyone else in the Deer Creek village, fate had intervened in events near the soldier camp to cost the Indians any chance of victory.<sup>30</sup>

Within hours of Big Horse's departure for Crazy Horse's camp, tracks leading to the scene of the Cheyenne women's capture were discovered by members of the decoy party that had been harassing the expedition since its departure from the Tongue. Unaware of the efforts of Big Horse, and most likely believing that the women would be killed by the soldiers, the decoy party decided to take matters into their own hands. Concealing the bulk of their numbers, a few warriors lingered out in the open, hoping to be discovered, and, thus, enabling them to ambush any soldiers who might return to the area. Their wait was not long. Back in the soldier camp, Crow scouts reported seeing a few Lakota warriors in the hills south of camp. Hearing the news, Kelly, with Tom Leforge, George Johnson, James Parker, and John "Liver-Eating" Johnson rode out of camp hoping to repeat their earlier success. A little more than a mile to the southwest of the bivouac, the five scouts did indeed observe several Lakotas milling around the area where the Cheyenne women had been captured. The Indians appeared to be looking for signs of what had happened there a few hours before. Thinking the warriors unaware of their presence, Kelly drew his rifle and, with his fellow scouts close to his side, charged the Indians. The scouts raced forward firing their weapons, quickly narrowing the gap between themselves and their targets.

Suddenly a group of forty or fifty warriors sprang from the brush and poured a hail of rifle fire upon the unsuspecting scouts. Realizing they had been caught in an ambush, Kelly whirled his mount about and raced for a grove of trees a few hundred yards off to their right. Riding wildly, Kelly and the others made their destination, but not before two scouts had their horses shot from underneath them and "Liver-Eating" Johnson lost a few locks of hair from an Indian bullet that passed frighteningly close to his skull. Narrowly escaping the initial rush of the warriors, the scouts barricaded themselves behind the trees and threw up breastworks of anything that offered protection.<sup>31</sup>

The report of the Indian rifles sent the soldiers in camp scrambling for their weapons. Within moments officers formed their companies into skirmish lines and encircled the bivouac in a protective ring. Hearing the gunfire, Miles directed Captain James S. Casey to take his company (A, Fifth Infantry) and one of the field artillery pieces to a hilltop approximately three-quarters of a mile to the northwest. The commanding officers also directed Lt. Charles E. Hargous to lead his mounted infantry to a position near Casey's and assist in the relief of the scouting party. By the time Casey and Hargous were in position, the number of Lakota warriors had swelled to over two hundred. Intense firing lasted for over an hour, but began to wane when artillery shells found their mark within the ranks of the attacking warriors who by then occupied positions in the rock-encrusted hills opposite the scout's tree grove. By dusk, all in the valley was quiet. The three companies sent to relieve Kelly and the Crow warriors returned to camp,

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as the scouts themselves did, however, tensions still ran high. Miles thought the Lakota and Cheyenne had broken off their attack to regroup among the hills of the western divide, and were preparing to return for a direct assault upon the camp.

Miles promptly sent reinforcements to strengthen his perimeter guards. Company E, Fifth Infantry, moved onto the mesa (later referred to as Battle Butte) that lay across the eastern half of the valley south of camp. In its center was a conical knoll which rose to a height of nearly 3500 feet, offering a view of several miles across parts of the valley floor. Miles also directed K Company, Fifth Infantry, under the command of Lieutenant Mason Carter, to take position on the western bank of the river, in a grove of cottonwood trees. In addition, the commanding officer issued orders that no fires were to be lit during the night to reduce the opportunities for native snipers to find targets. Although the attack did not take place as the colonel believed it would, the night did not pass quietly. Native riflemen positioned in the bluffs overlooking camp fired blindly into the bivouac throughout the night, sending soldiers fleeing for cover in near perfect darkness.

Meanwhile, Crazy Horse, with approximately four hundred warriors, approached Miles' encampment in the shrouded mist of heavy falling snow. Unaware of the failed ambush, the leaders of Big Horse's rescue/war party believed they could execute their original plan of surprising the soldier camp and, finally, take revenge for the murders of their peace delegates. The leaders planned to lure the soldiers out of their camp by first launching a frontal assault from the western side of the river. It was hoped this action would draw the soldiers into a position where their rear flank would be exposed. Once the engagement was underway, a second group of warriors would charge from the hills east of the bivouac and catch the soldiers in a crossfire, whereby the entire command would be annihilated. Near the mouth of Wall Creek, the war party divided itself into two bodies and continued their march. Half the warriors crossed the river, where they camouflaged their approach by maneuvering through the foothills that formed the eastern valley wall. The others continued down the western bank of the frozen Tongue River, making no attempt to conceal their advance.

### The Battle of Wolf Mountains

Reveille sounded at 4:00 a.m. to awaken soldiers who had slept little during the night. Company commanders immediately set about preparing their men for the reconnaissance missions Miles had planned the previous evening.<sup>32</sup> As the sky began to lighten, the commanding officer sent his scouts out to make another search of the valley for signs of native movement. Nearly three feet of snow had fallen during the night, offering the chance to discover easily followed tracks. While officers divided their companies between the tasks of preparing breakfast and packing their mules trains, the scouting party raced into camp sounding the alarm of approaching warriors.

Mounting his horse, Miles sprinted to the plateau where Captain Ewers and E Company had passed the night. Through his field glasses, the colonel watched Crazy Horse's force pour out of the valley's western divide, scattering among the cottonwood groves lining the river, and spreading over the hilltops.<sup>33</sup> Though their presence did not surprise him, Miles was astonished to see a great many of the warriors dismounting their horses and forming what looked like firing lines a few hundred yards from his command. In his report of the battle, Miles would later state: [R]iding down they would leave their horses behind bluffs, and advance on foot, rifle in hand, filling every ravine and lining every crest . . . This engagement [sic] was unlike any other Indian fight I ever witnessed, it was fought on ground . . . they fought entirely dismounted, not a single rifle being fired on horseback . . .<sup>34</sup>

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Miles began barking orders to his aides. In his hand he held a small stick, which he waved through the air like a sword pointing out exactly where he wanted his companies stationed. Captain Casey, with A Company, and Lt. Hargous's detachment of mounted infantrymen were to join Ewers on the plateau. These two units were to support Second Lieutenant James W. Pope's two artillery pieces, which Miles directed to the northwestern edge of the elevation. The colonel then brought two companies into position to support Lt. Carter's K Company, which was to remain across the Tongue and dug in among the cottonwoods throughout the battle. To Carter's left, on the east bank of the river, Miles stationed Capt. Dickey and his members of E Company, Twenty-second Infantry. To their right, also on the east bank of the river and near the supply wagons, Lieutenant Cusick deployed F Company, Twenty-second Infantry. Miles held two companies as reserves in the valley south of camp and to the right of the dry creek bed fronting the plateau. Facing the rear, these two companies, C and D of the Fifth Infantry, were commanded by Captain Edmond Butler and Lieutenant Robert McDonald, respectively.<sup>35</sup>

At 7:00 a.m., Lakota and Cheyenne warriors dashed out of the ravines across open ground toward Carter's lines. Steadying his men, the lieutenant withheld the order to fire until the warriors were well within range of his riflemen. Brief, heavy skirmishing ensued until the Indians were repulsed by the three companies stationed along the river and a few well-placed rounds of artillery from Pope. Falling back, the warriors regrouped and charged again, this time probing the far right-hand side of Miles' front line. Throughout the early hours of the battle, the warriors repeated this action in an attempt to collapse Carter's line and force him to retreat across the river. Each advance, however, was met with rapid exchanges of rifle fire that were accentuated with the roar of artillery rounds, which eventually forced the warriors to melt back into the shelter of the ravines. As a member of Carter's company later recalled, "My gun barrel was sizzling hot and McQue was sending the shrapnel [sic] over our heads indicating we had the hottest place [in the valley]."<sup>36</sup> With each advance, the Indians hit slightly to the right of their previous effort trying to turn the line. Bullets, arrows and artillery shells flew thickly and freely, but did little damage to the fighting men on either side. Heavy firing in this part of the valley persisted throughout the early morning, until the Indians eventually worked their way into the bluffs overlooking camp. From these lofty heights, warriors positioned themselves in pockets among the rocks, offering cover fire to others who, again mounted on their horses, dashed over the bluffs and across the valley behind Miles.<sup>37</sup>

As the fighting raged in the western valley, mounted Cheyenne warriors also crossed the Tongue in front of the soldiers' position. From atop the conical knoll, Ewers observed the Indian movement and shifted his men to the southwest. His company now occupied a line that extended from the knoll in the center of Battle Butte to rock outcroppings on the extreme southwestern edge of the plateau. Behind these natural breastworks, the company fired repeated volleys at the approaching horsemen. The warriors, however, suffered no discernible casualties and managed to take up positions on a butte directly to E Company's left. Separated by a mere two hundred yards, the success of the battle rested upon the ability of Ewers's men to defend the high ground between the butte and the knoll. If the Cheyennes dislodged the infantrymen from their entrenchments, the rest of the command would crumble and face certain annihilation.<sup>38</sup>

With warriors now occupying the western valley, the butte south of his position, and crossing the river above and below his command center, Miles found himself nearly surrounded. Aware that he and his men were several hundred miles away from their closest allies, Miles boldly took the offensive. The colonel seized the opportunity after "Yellowstone" Kelly directed his attention to a growing number of Cheyenne and Lakota warriors gathering on a

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series of three flat-topped ridges southeast of the plateau. These were the warriors that had crossed the Tongue near Wall Creek before dawn. They had emerged from the network of thickly packed hills in the valley's eastern divide into a canyon that opened on Miles' rear flank. Crossing the dry creekbed that divides the canyon, the warriors again dismounted their horses and climbed the icy slopes of the elevations. The crests of these ridges offered a commanding view of the valley and, for the warriors atop them, a highly defensible position from which to launch assaults against the weakest point in the soldier lines. Recognizing his situation, Miles sent one of his companies to take the hills across the valley, and drew his reserves onto the plateau.<sup>39</sup>

The unit Miles dispatched across the valley was Company A, under Captain James Casey. Deploying his men in skirmish line order and marching toward the ridges south of camp, Casey began crossing the quarter-mile of open field. Encumbered by the deep snow and their buffalo-hide winter suits, the company's progress was slow going and awkward. Every foot of ground gained in the advance was marked by the outline of a soldier who had stumbled trying to manipulate his legs through the deep snow. Midway to their objective, Casey's command began taking fire from warriors positioned behind the butte across from Ewers. Luckily for the members of A Company, none of the shots found their mark, but the soldiers were steadily advancing into rifle range of the warriors staked-out on the hills in front of them.<sup>40</sup> Miraculously, Casey succeeded in taking the first hill without suffering any casualties. Half as high as the other two elevations, the company easily routed the warriors from its summit. The attack on the other two elevations, however, stalled not long after A Company took possession of the first summit. Considering the lay of the land, it is likely that Indian resistance strengthened after being dislodged from their initial firing positions. The three flat-topped ridges Casey was ordered to take jutted onto the field, decreasing in height as they advanced, forming a hidden corral in the gap between the first two elevations and the third summit. Retreating from the infantry, the warriors most likely reformed their lines in this gap and, joined by supporting fire from the third ridge, halted Casey's advance. Whatever the case may have been, Miles saw Casey's assault grind to a halt prompting him to send Company D, Fifth Infantry, to join Casey across the valley.

Leading the second assault, Lt. Robert McDonald advanced his men across the valley floor following the path made by A Company. As McDonald approached the ridgeline, he shifted his command to Casey's left, directing his assault up the face of the taller, steeper second hill. Fierce resistance greeted the soldiers throughout the ascent. The soldiers of D Company inched their way up the steep slopes of the second ridge, firing their rifles as they went, and occasionally falling when they failed to secure proper footing on the loose frozen gravel covering the surface. As an explanation for the particularly fierce resistance, observers from across the field stated that when McDonald's men began pushing the Indians back from the summit, a warrior began dancing across the ridge opposite the one D Company was assaulting. All witnessing this performance realized that the dancing warrior was trying to rally the fighting spirits of his companions.<sup>41</sup> The dancing warrior, a Northern Cheyenne medicine man named Big Crow, believed himself impervious to bullets from the soldier guns and was deliberately exposing himself to their fire.

Richard Wooden Leg, a Cheyenne participant of the battle later stated:

He used up his cartridges and came back to us hidden behind the rocks, to ask for more. Cheyennes and Sioux here and there each gave him one or two or three. He soon got enough to fill his belt. He went out again to walk along the ridge, to shoot at the soldiers and to defy them in their efforts to hit him with a bullet. All of us others kept behind the rocks, only peeping around at times to shoot. Crazy Horse, the Ogallala [sic] chief, was near me.<sup>42</sup>



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Big Crow danced along the rocks gathering bullets for the carbine he acquired following the Battle of the Little Big Horn, calmly loading and firing it each time he reached the end of his circuit. Dressed in bright red and wearing a war bonnet with a tail that dragged to the ground, the medicine man became the primary target of every soldier witnessing the performance. Incredibly, Big Crow managed to traverse his route several times without being hit by the nearly one hundred soldiers who were then positioned across from him. It was not until D Company succeeded in taking the second ridge that soldiers ended Big Crow's performance.

After several hard-fought attempts to dislodge the natives from their positions on the heights of the second hill, two of McDonald's riflemen stood below the lip of its summit watching the Cheyenne medicine man dance. Pulling their rifles to their shoulders, Sergeant "Danny" Burns and Corporal Byron Bronson took aim at the dancing figure and fired, dropping Big Crow limp into the snow two hundred yards away. The bullet that pierced Big Crow's abdomen destroyed the resolve of many warriors, especially among the Northern Cheyennes, to continue fighting. The medicine man was highly regarded among his comrades as one of their bravest and most powerful medicine men. Tribal members broke from the engagement to remove his dying body from the field.<sup>43</sup> Others who saw Big Crow's medicine fail him, deserted the ranks, interpreting the wound as a sign of impending disaster. Yet, by this stage of the battle, many of the warriors facing McDonald and Casey were Lakotas. These warriors had crossed from the western valley in great numbers with Crazy Horse, and were not as deeply affected by the loss of Big Crow. As the handful of their Cheyenne allies left the battlefield, the shrill sound of eagle-bone whistles filled the air as Crazy Horse rallied his tribesmen and attempted a daring foot-charge against the two infantry companies.

Dashing from the opposite crest, the warriors advanced across the neck connecting the second and third ridges to within fifty yards of McDonald's position. Captain Edmond Butler, who was across the valley on the plateau with Miles, stated that approximately 300 warriors were across the ravine from McDonald and Casey when the charge began. The report of the rifles firing across the gap echoed throughout the valley, signaling some of the most intense fighting of the battle. From his vantagepoint, Miles watched the warriors rush from their defenses and press the infantry lines. The critical moment of the battle had arrived, victory hinged upon whether or not his men could successfully push back the charge, and follow it up by driving Crazy Horse's warriors from the third ridge. Seeing the mix of Lakota and Cheyenne warriors close in upon the lines of his junior officers, Miles ordered the last of his reserve units to reinforce Casey and McDonald. Miles needed to maintain possession of the heights at all cost. His other troops were holding their positions throughout the valley, but the eastern heights remained the critical point on the field. Turning to Captain Edmond Butler, the colonel ordered another advance.

Butler, like McDonald and Casey before him, ordered his company (C) to the left face and deployed them to that flank in skirmish line order. Realizing the urgency of Colonel Miles' orders, the captain drove his men through the snow at double time speed to reach McDonald and Casey before disaster could befall them. When about half way across the valley, "a murderous fire from every hill and ravine in range" opened on Butler and his men. As had been the case with the previous troop movements, the Indian volleys failed to strike any of the soldiers. Ignoring the puffs of displaced snow, Butler continued to drive his men toward their objective. The warriors still occupied the neck between the ridges and were continuing to advance upon McDonald's lines. As C Company approached the elevations, however, Miles realized their captain was positioning the troop to reinforce McDonald. The colonel had wanted Butler to swing his command around McDonald's line and directly assault the third hill, which was being

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occupied by an ever-increasing number of warriors. Turning to his adjutant, Lieutenant Frank D. Baldwin, Miles impatiently barked orders redirecting Butler. Pointing to the third hill with the stick he had carried throughout the battle, Miles shouted to his lieutenant, "Tell him to take that infernal hill and drive the Indians away."<sup>44</sup>

Climbing into the saddle of his horse Red Water, Baldwin raced across the valley floor to catch Butler before he could commit to reinforcing A and D Companies. Noting that the commands already in place were running low on ammunition, the adjutant carried with him a half-empty crate of rifle cartridges that he intended to give the troops on the first two ridges. Near the base of McDonald's position, Baldwin delivered Butler's new orders directing him around McDonald and into an adjoining ravine.<sup>45</sup> Adjusting his approach, the captain advanced his men to the mouth of the ravine and gave the order to charge. In his report of the battle, published later in the Army and Navy Journal, Butler gave his account of the action:

The left of the company was a little in advance, owing to the nature of the initial movement. From ravines, and from behind rocks and fallen trees, the [Indian] force was concentrated on this portion of the line. It seemed to those who watched the movement that nothing could save this company from decimation. Butler's horse was shot under him as he led the charge up the first ascent. The steepest part of the ridge was yet to be scaled. Giving the Indians in the ravine a volley, and taking the run, Co. C moved up, its commander now on foot.<sup>46</sup>

The right of Butler's command advanced on Crazy Horse through a wide drainage channel that formed along the northern base of the hill occupied by D Company. The corridor provided this section of Butler's command a direct line of assault against the warriors still fighting on the neck between the second and third ridges. As Butler moved out with the left wing of his unit, Baldwin remained with the right and, as part of his endeavor to deliver the ammunition to McDonald and Casey, led this portion of C Company in their assault.<sup>47</sup>

The echo of rifle fire rolled like thunder through the valley. There were nearly five hundred combatants exchanging fire in this comparatively small area of the battlefield. The assault lasted throughout the late morning hours and the intensity of gunfire never dissipated until the final moments of the fight. The Indians defended their positions fiercely but, under the pressure of Butler's advance, Crazy Horse's warriors were forced to fall back into the valley and onto the summit of the third ridge. Concealed behind flat rocks and fallen trees scattered across its summit, the warriors were determined not to yield their position too easily to the advancing infantrymen. Butler later recalled, "Fully 400 shots were fired at this company from Winchester and Sharps rifles, and . . . only the plunging nature of the fire, . . . [and] the precipitate [sic] rapidity with which the Indians worked their magazine guns . . . saved this company from heavy loss."<sup>48</sup>

Miles noted the determined effort with which the Indians were holding their ground and ordered his field artillery repositioned. As had been the case the previous day, exploding shells from the Rodman gun and the twelve-pound Napoleon cannon compelled the warriors to remove themselves from their entrenched positions. At a distance of nearly seven hundred yards, Lt. Pope lobbed shells over the heads of his companions and into the warrior ranks. The Lakotas and Cheyennes began to fall further back. Butler, now joined by McDonald, reached the third summit and continued pushing the Indians into the valley divide. The warriors, however, did not break into an all-out retreat but continued reforming their lines and giving battle to the infantry. The pursuit lasted for nearly a mile, but was halted when a hard-driving snow suddenly descended on the valley around noon. Exhausted, running low on ammunition, and finally seeing the Indians in full retreat, Butler ordered an end to the chase. The battle was over.

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Snow fell throughout the afternoon as the battle weary troops made their way from the valley back to the plateau where they had started. Officers resumed the positions they had held earlier in the day, issuing orders to their men to prepare their midday meals and to remain watchful for another attack. Later, as a defensive security measure, Colonel Miles ordered the bivouac moved from the valley onto the plateau.<sup>49</sup> Although Crazy Horse and nearly all of his men had retired from the field, scattered pockets of individual warriors remained hidden throughout the heights surrounding the new campsite and occasionally fired shots at the soldiers. The move offered the additional benefit of providing an element of comfort for the command's wounded. Considering the staggering amount of ammunition discharged by the Indians, casualties were light with only one man killed and eight others wounded. Two of these would prove fatal before the command could return to the cantonment, but the availability of officer's tents at least offered shelter and a degree of warmth to the wounded.

After another tense night, Miles led six companies out of camp at dawn to reconnoiter the battlefield for clues of the Indian losses and the direction of their retreat. The colonel positioned his two remaining units as pickets atop elevations on each side of the valley.<sup>50</sup> Lieutenant Cusick and F Company moved to the western bank of the Tongue to occupy the bluff that overlooked the first campsite, and the other occupied the ridges captured by Butler, Casey and McDonald.<sup>51</sup> The reconnaissance companies spread across the width of the valley in skirmish lines and advanced slowly over the battlefield. Numerous pools of frozen blood and carcasses of dead ponies were readily available for the members of the reconnaissance to discover but, as was expected, the warriors had removed their fallen comrades from the field. Troops reported finding several places where the wounded had fallen and had been dragged through the snow by mounted warriors using lassos. Based on this information, Miles reported that "their loss is known to have been severe, they left pools of blood on the snow where they fought, on the ice [where] they crossed the river, and for five miles up the valley on their retreat."<sup>52</sup> Another member of the reconnaissance stated that Indian losses were probably fifteen dead and several more wounded.<sup>53</sup> The commanding officer also reported the direction of the Indian retreat to be toward the Big Horn Mountains. The latter prospect came as a great delight to Miles, as he believed they would find only deep snow, Crow Indians and little game awaiting them there.<sup>54</sup> Returning to Battle Butte at dusk, the commanding officer decided the expedition's objectives had been met and, noting the limitation of the supplies left to his command, announced that the troop would begin its march home the next day.

**Aftermath and Surrender**

The Battle of Wolf Mountains had been costly for the Indians, not in terms of the number of warriors wounded or killed, but what it ultimately represented to their worldview. Years later, Miles recorded in his personal memoir an assessment of the situation that captured the greater meaning of the battle for whites and Indians alike, "While the engagement was not of such a serious character as to cause great loss of life on either side, . . . it demonstrated the fact that we could move in any part of the country in the midst of winter, and hunt the enemy down in their camps wherever they might take refuge."<sup>55</sup> As Miles had predicted, when the tribes arrived in the Little Big Horn valley they were confronted by deep snows and a perpetual scarcity of game that very shortly began unraveling the unity of the village. Compounding the situation, within weeks of the engagement messengers sent by military officials began arriving in the camps telling the councils of the abundance of food, blankets and good treatment awaiting them if they would surrender.

The process of breaking the bonds that had held the free bands together began within weeks of the battle. Beginning in late January, the first of many messengers arrived in the Oglala and Northern Cheyenne camps that had fought with

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Crazy Horse at Wolf Mountains. These messengers bore promises of good treatment by military officials, Miles and others, who were now trying to convince these bands to surrender before campaigning renewed in the spring. As had been the case when Dull Knife's band arrived following MacKenzie's attack, the tribal councils split over the question of continuing the war or giving up their freedom and traditions. Throughout the early spring months the debates raged until the final bonds that had held the bands together finally ruptured. Defeated, starving, and facing the constant threat of attack from native enemies or soldiers, the bands decided to part ways and the question of surrendering was left for each man to decide. With the influence of the peace envoys sent from Miles and military officials now administering affairs on the reservation, and with their world shattering around them, one by one the headmen of the two tribal groups slowly led their people to Miles' post on the Tongue or the reservation. Only Crazy Horse's people, who were considered the last and only threat for a continuation of the hostilities, remained off the reservation. However, it would not be long before he too saw the futility of continuing the war.

On May 6, 1877, after a long journey delayed by hunger and fatigue, Crazy Horse led his people into Camp Robinson, Nebraska. Ragged and weary, the Oglalas streamed onto the post with the war leaders and band chief following the man who had championed their freedom and traditional way of life for so long. That afternoon, Crazy Horse shook the hand of Lt. Philo Clark. As a sign of friendship, He Dog, a close ally of Crazy Horse, placed his war bonnet on the lieutenant's head and his pipe in the officer's arms. There would be no more war between them. The momentum from the Battle of Wolf Mountains four months earlier came to a stop. The war was over.

**Criteria Consideration C**

The Battle of Wolf Mountains resulted in losses of life on both sides of the conflict, U.S. Army soldiers and Lakota and Cheyenne warriors. According to Northern Cheyenne historian Bill Tallbull, the historic boundaries of the battlefield contain the grave of a Northern Cheyenne warrior and a U.S. Army soldier involved in the engagement. However, because the site is significant for its historic associations with broad patterns of national military history and tribal cultural history, the site meets Criteria Consideration C, with respect to a grave or burial site. In addition, the boundaries include a small, rural burial ground, the Birney Cemetery. This is a non-contributing site within the historic district boundaries.

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Long... BATTLE of 'WOLF MTNS' 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Eng. Officer. Signed at bottom by Frank D. Baldwin.

### Interviews

Interviews were conducted as part of the research for this nomination, but at the request of those interviewed, I have purposely omitted their names and not cited their information.

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**SITE MAP  
Wolf Mountains Battlefield**

CONTRIBUTING FEATURES

RIFLE PIT

STONE ALIGNMENT

STONE CIRCLE

BIG CROW MARKER

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ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the Northern Plains Indian Wars, see Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: the U.S. Army and the Indian, 1866-1890*, (New York: Macmillan, 1973), chapters 7-9 and 12-15. Also recommended is Paul A. Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and His Army*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), chapters 13-15. For information covering the period from the Indian perspective, the author recommends: George E. Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk, A History of the Oglala Sioux* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937), chapters 7-15; James C. Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965); and Father Peter J. Powell, *Sweet Medicine: The Continuing Role of the Sacred Arrows, the Sun Dance, and the Sacred Buffalo Hat in Northern Cheyenne History*, 2 vols., (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969) chapters 10-14.

<sup>2</sup> A transcription of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 can be found in James C. Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*, 341-349.

<sup>3</sup> Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, 240-242.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 243-244.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 244; Paul A. Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and His Army*, 167-169 and 291-292; George E. Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 216-219.

<sup>6</sup> George E. Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 240-248; Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, 245-246; and Catherine Price, *The Oglala People, 1841-1877: A Political History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 150-153.

<sup>7</sup> President Grant's decision to set an ultimatum for the non-agency bands to return to the reservation came after manipulating cabinet positions and other appointments to secure political support for what was essentially a declaration of war against the Lakota bands who scorned the 1868 treaty and made the unceded Indian territory their permanent home. See Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, 246-247; and Paul A. Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and His Army*, 319.

<sup>8</sup> Paul A. Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and His Army*, 319.

<sup>9</sup> Jerome A. Greene, *Yellowstone Command: Colonel Nelson A. Miles and the Great Sioux War 1876-1877* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 36. In addition to Greene's work, there are several other notable volumes on Nelson A. Miles. Among the works consulted for this project: Nelson A. Miles, *Personal Recollections and Observations of General Nelson A. Miles*, (New York: The Werner Company, 1897), and Robert Wooster, *Nelson A. Miles and the Twilight of the Frontier Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>9</sup> Nelson A. Miles, *Personal Recollections*, 218.

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<sup>12</sup> Jerome A. Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, 154.

<sup>13</sup> Nelson A. Miles, "Rounding up the Redmen," *Cosmopolitan Magazine* II (June, 1911), 106-110.

<sup>14</sup> For insight into the political organization of the Oglala tribe, see Catherine Price, *The Oglala People*, chapter 1.

<sup>15</sup> Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, 275-276.

<sup>16</sup> Peter J. Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain: A history of the Northern Cheyenne Chiefs and Warrior Societies, 1830-1879, With an Epilogue 1969-1974*, 2 vols., (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1981), 1058-1071.

<sup>17</sup> Peter J. Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain*, 1073.

<sup>18</sup> John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being a Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 140.

<sup>19</sup> John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 139-140.

<sup>20</sup> Bozeman Avant Courier, January 8, 1877; Luther S. Kelly, *Yellowstone Kelly, The Memoirs of Luther S. Kelly*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), 166; Peter J. Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain*, 1073-74; Robert Wooster, *Nelson A. Miles and the Twilight of the Frontier Army*, 88; and Jerome A. Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, 157.

<sup>21</sup> Peter J. Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain*, 1074.

<sup>22</sup> For a description of the ambush tactic used in the Fetterman attack, see Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, 104-106.

<sup>23</sup> Jerome A. Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, 152-55.

<sup>24</sup> Luther S. Kelly, *Yellowstone Kelly*, 166; Alice Blackwood Baldwin, *Memoirs of the Late Frank D. Baldwin, Major General U.S.A.*, (Los Angeles: Wetzel Publishing Co., Inc., 1929), 79; and Jerome A. Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, 157.

<sup>25</sup> Nelson A. Miles to Assistant Adjutant General, January 20, 1877, in Report of the Secretary of War, 1877, p. 494. Nelson A. Miles to Assistant Adjutant General, January 20, 1877, *ibid.*, p. 495.

<sup>26</sup> Jerome A. Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, 158-163.

<sup>27</sup> Luther S. Kelly, *Yellowstone Kelly*, 169-170; Nelson A. Miles to Assistant Adjutant General, January 20, 1877, in Report of the Secretary of War, 1877, p. 495; Nelson A. Miles, "Rounding up the Redmen," 110 and *Personal Recollections*, 136-37; and Jerome A. Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, 163-64.

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<sup>28</sup> Cornelius Cusick, Letter from Cornelius Cusick, June 7, 1894. Record Group 94, Appointments, Commissions, and Document File, 1888, Box 1168 (hereafter, cited as Letter). Also, L. Brown, "The Tongue River Campaign and the Battle of Wolf Mountain," *The Oregon Veteran*, (August, 1922), 39; and Edwin M. "Trumpeter" Brown, *The Diary of Edwin M. "Trumpeter" Brown, 1876-1877*, 23 (hereafter cited as Diary).

<sup>29</sup> Peter J. Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain*, 1074-75; Luther S. Kelly, *Yellowstone Kelly*, 169-170; John Stands In Timber and Margot Liberty, *Cheyenne Memories*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 219-220; and Nelson A. Miles to Assistant Adjutant General, January 20, 1877, in Report of the Secretary of War, 1877, p. 495.

<sup>30</sup> Peter J. Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain*, 1075-76; John Stands In Timber and Margot Liberty, *Cheyenne Memories*, 220.

<sup>31</sup> Nelson A. Miles to Assistant Adjutant General, January 20, 1877, in Report of the Secretary of War, 1877, p. 495; Edwin M. "Trumpeter" Brown, *Diary*, 23; Luther S. Kelly, *Yellowstone Kelly*, 170-172; and Jerome A. Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, 164-165.

<sup>32</sup> Edwin M. "Trumpeter" Brown, *Diary*, 23.

<sup>33</sup> Nelson A. Miles, "Rounding up the Redmen," 110.

<sup>34</sup> Nelson A. Miles to Assistant Adjutant General, January 20, 1877, in Report of the Secretary War, 1877, p. 495.

<sup>35</sup> *Army and Navy Journal*, March 31, 1877, p. 541. The article was written by Captain Edmund Butler, who later received a Medal of Honor for his role in the Battle of Wolf Mountains.

<sup>36</sup> Leopold Holeman to W.C. Brown, May 21, 1932. W.C. Brown Papers, Box 21, Folder 36.

<sup>37</sup> For placement of the troops at the beginning of the battle, see: *Army and Navy Journal*, March 31, 1877; Nelson A. Miles to Assistant Adjutant General, in Report to Secretary of War, 1877, p. 495; Cornelius Cusick, Letter, June 7, 1894; Leopold Holeman to W.C. Brown; and Jerome A. Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, 165-66.

<sup>38</sup> Luther S. Kelly, *Yellowstone Kelly*, 167-68.

<sup>39</sup> Luther S. Kelly, *Yellowstone Kelly*, 173; Alice Blackwood Baldwin, *Memoirs of the Late Frank D. Baldwin*, 85; Nelson A. Miles to Assistant Adjutant General, in Report to Secretary of War, 1877, p. 495; Cornelius Cusick, Letter, June 7, 1894; Leopold Holeman to W.C. Brown; and *Army and Navy Journal*, March 31, 1877, p. 541. The location given by Kelly for this gathering has been the subject of considerable debate among historians of the battle. The location of the Indians at this stage of the battle is critical to its interpretation, because it is at this location where the fiercest fighting of the day took place. Most historians believe the Indians gathered on ridges south of Battle Butte, however the agreements end here. For example, local historian Charles B. Earlanston placed the warriors entirely on Battle Butte and Miles' troops entirely in the valley. See Charles B. Earlanston, *The Battle for the Butte: General Miles' Fight with the Indians on Tongue River, January 8, 1877*, (Privately Published, 1963), 16-17. Yet, the locations given by Miles, Butler, Holeman, and Cusick at the onset of the battle clearly eliminate this possibility.

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Later, Don Rickey, Jr. suggested that the warriors gathered on the southern portion of Battle Butte (south of the conical knoll), before being driven back by Captain Ewers and E Company, Fifth Infantry, once it captured the knoll. See Don Rickey, Jr., "Battle at Wolf Mountain," *Montana, The Magazine of Western History*, 13 (Spring, 1963), 49. Butler, however, states that Ewers occupied this position before the battle began. Furthermore, as Jerome A. Greene points out, Ewers held this position on and around the knoll throughout the battle (see *Yellowstone Command*, 167). Greene locates the warriors that Kelly observed on the butte immediately south of Battle Butte. Nevertheless, this location also does not appear to be the where the fiercest fighting took place. Butler states that the fiercest fighting of the day took place on a bluff "to the left and slightly to the rear of the knoll held by Capt. Ewers." Later this officer describes the bluff as a series of hills connected by a "neck" that the Indians raced across during the battle to charge soldier positions. Lt. Cusick echoes Butler's directions when he described the Indians as occupying hills "away in their rear and left flank." These hills were described by Baldwin as "three high hills," to which Miles added, were "three rough, piny [sic], rugged hills." Taking this information into account during my stay at the site during the summer of 1999, I have concluded that the actual location where Kelly saw the warriors gathering is about a quarter of a mile due east of the location suggested by Greene, or in the hills that are about a half miles due south of the Miles' camp. This would indicate almost a 90 degree shift in locations significant to the battle's interpretation. In this section of the valley, there are no other groups of hills that match the descriptions of eyewitnesses Butler, Miles, Baldwin, and Cusick. Additional support for this conclusion, interestingly enough, comes from a photo of John Stands In Timber taken by Earlanon. The photo shows an elderly Stands In Timber pointing to a pile of rocks that mark the location of where Big Crow was shot in the latter stages of the battle. During my time at the battlefield, I found the marker and matched the photo. The hill is the inner most in a series of three connected, pine covered, flat topped ridges that are to the left rear of Battle Butte and due south of the location where the soldier camp was.

<sup>40</sup> All subsequent troop movements are based on the account provided by Edmund Butler in the *Army and Navy Journal*, March 31, 1877, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>41</sup> Luther S. Kelly, *Yellowstone Kelly*, 174; Cornelius Cusick, Letter, June 7, 1894; Nelson A. Miles to Assistant Adjutant General, January 20, 1877, in Report of Secretary of War, 1877, p. 495; Nelson A. Miles, "Rounding up the Redmen," 110-111; *Army and Navy Journal*, March 31, 1877; and Peter J. Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain*, 1076.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas B. Marquis, *Wooden Leg: A Warrior Who Fought Custer*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 290-291. Also, see Peter J. Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain*, 1076-77 and Jerome A. Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, 175-176.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas B. Marquis, *Wooden Leg*, 291-292.

<sup>44</sup> Fred A. Hunt, "The Crumbling of Crazy Horse's Command," *Overland Monthly* (February, 1912), 162.

<sup>45</sup> Luther S. Kelly, *Yellowstone Kelly*, 174. Don Weibert, "Blood on the Snow at Wolf Mountain: 'You've Had Your Last Breakfast,'" *Hoofprints* 21 (Spring-Summer, 1991), 4 and 6. Weibert describes the route taken by Baldwin

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across the field to deliver orders to Captain Butler and ammunition to Lt. McDonald. Weibert found several cartridge boxes dropped by Baldwin as he made this heroic ride. Using a metal detector to make his discoveries, Weibert traced Baldwin's route from the northern edge of Battle Butte's plateau to the hill described above.

<sup>46</sup>*Army and Navy Journal*, March 31, 1877.

<sup>47</sup> Baldwin is credited by several sources as leading a charge during the assault on the Indian positions in the hills to the left rear of Miles. This account is based on the movements of C Company given by Butler, as well as information suggested by Miles, Brown, and Kelly.

<sup>48</sup> *Army and Navy Journal*, March 31, 1877.

<sup>49</sup> Edwin M. "Trumpeter" Brown, Diary, 24-25; Cornelius Cusick, Letter, June 7, 1894; and Jerome A. Greene, *Battles and Skirmishes of the Great Sioux War of 1876-1877*, 191.

<sup>50</sup> Edwin M. "Trumpeter" Brown, Diary, 24-25.

<sup>51</sup> Cornelius Cusick, Letter, June 7, 1894.

<sup>52</sup> Nelson A. Miles to Assistant Adjutant General, January 20, 1877, in Report of the Secretary of War, 1877, p. 495.

<sup>53</sup> Edwin M. "Trumpeter" Brown, Diary, 25.

<sup>54</sup> Nelson A. Miles, "Rounding up the Redmen," 111.

<sup>55</sup> Nelson A. Miles, *Personal Recollections*, 238-239.