

Little Big Horn

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General George Armstrong Custer became one of the greatest legends of his time. He was genuinely liked by some and completely despised by others. He went from being picked on and ridiculed as a child to being a very confident and driven officer during the American Civil War. It was the Indian Wars and his performance in the west that the public remembers the most. A culmination of all his experiences gave him a false confidence that bled into the arrogance that was the greatest contributing factor in the U. S. Army's defeat at Little Big Horn.

#### Education and Pre-Military Life

General George Armstrong Custer's early childhood and education contributed to the development of an arrogant adult personality that was the greatest contributing factor in the U.S. Army's defeat at the Little Big Horn. General Custer's family life, social status, school years, and early employment combined with childhood ridicule, unearned praise, and personal ambition established the foundation of an arrogant persona in adulthood. However, numerous people, past and present, view General Custer as a great leader, brilliant military tactician, and true patriot. In theory they are correct but the views in general validate the thesis that General Custer was an arrogant man, no matter how likeable he may have been.

General Custer was born in New Rumley, Ohio on 5 December 1839. He was the third of five children born to Emanuel and Maria Custer (Wert 4). The family was an extremely close and loving family. General Custer's mother, Maria, practically babied him and to many outsiders he was a "momma's boy." General Custer was the favorite of the five Custer children and since General Custer, as a baby, pronounced Armstrong as "Autie" the Custer family and close friends referred to him by that name. Likewise, Emanuel referred to General Custer as his "yellow-haired laddie" in public due to long blonde hair. One can make the assumption that

children and others used the name “Autie” or “yellow-haired laddie” in a derogatory manner to ridicule him. Emanuel would constantly brag about the accomplishments of his son to all that would listen; this in turn placed pressure on General Custer to meet the expectations that the bragging placed upon him. The protected and favored nature of General Custer’s family life drove him to succeed and overcome the stereotype of a “momma’s boy.”

Emanuel Custer was a blacksmith and served as the local justice of the peace (Barnett 12). Although Emanuel Custer owned his blacksmith shop and was the justice of the peace the Custer’s were not well to do nor mingled in the social circles of Harrison County, Ohio. Emanuel Custer was also extremely politically active in the area; however, as a vocal Jacksonian Democrat in a Republican district he was definitely a minority (Wert 6). The combination of social status and political affiliation placed the Custer family in a position that would only allow upward movement in the local society circles. The local population did view the Custer family as hard working, loving, and loyal, which allowed Emanuel to earn the respect of the locals thus electing him to six terms as the justice of the peace. General Custer was known as a mischievous prankster at school, church, and play by the locals; however, the locals also believed he was a good child. The belief of the local people that General Custer was a prankster and from the “other side of the tracks” pushed him more.

General Custer was just an average student in school, one that was more into fun and pranks more than into his studies. Emanuel and Maria would never accept the fact that General Custer would never become an academic and his failure of a furniture maker apprenticeship probably forced them to send him to live with his half-sister in Monroe, Michigan in 1852 (Wert 6). General Custer adored his sister, Lydia Ann, and was ready for the new challenge. General

Custer lived in Monroe for the next three years and attended two different schools. However, there is no indication as to whether he did any better in school but he still maintained his impulsive behavior as a prankster. In 1855 General Custer returned to New Rumley, Ohio and attended a boarding school to continue his studies (Barnett 19). General Custer's studies were cut short when he accepted a teaching job at Beech Point School in Athens Township, Ohio. He would utilize the \$28.00 per month salary to finance his own education. This was a major change in General Custer's life; he was becoming a man. General Custer at this time was finding favor with the local young women and he extremely enjoyed their company. The long blonde hair he possessed had many friends remark as to "what a pretty girl he would have made." The prankster was also the brunt of pranks against him; one day his class locked him out of the schoolhouse and would not allow him in. General Custer went directly to the headmaster instead of handling it himself; this action would lose a bit of favor with his students and he would not finish teaching the winter term. General Custer's mediocre education, assumed failure at a career, and pranks played upon him fueled his drive to succeed.

General Custer did receive a teaching certificate in 1856 and accepted a teaching position in District Number Five of Cadiz Township (Wert 8). General Custer found himself on his own and he needed a place to reside. So, he boarded with the Holland family. Alexander Holland was the superintendent of an infirmary and was very well connected within local Harrison county social circles. Alexander Holland had a teenage daughter Mollie and she and General Custer fell in love. Alexander Holland did not approve of the relationship. Alexander Holland's disapproval of the relationship may have been due to Custer's reputation or just to protect his daughter's reputation. After an incident where General Custer and Mollie spent the night together

in the Alexander home, Custer was removed from it. General Custer remained a teacher and the 17-year-old Custer and 15-year-old Mollie continued the relationship, against Alexander Holland's wishes. General Custer would not have received his appointment to West Point if not for Alexander Holland. General Custer was a democrat and the local congressman, John Bingham, was a republican; however, Alexander Holland was a close personal friend to the congressman and called in a favor to separate General Custer and Mollie Alexander (Barnett 21). The rejection of Alexander Holland towards the relationship of General Custer and Mollie Alexander again fueled the fire for him to excel and climb the social ladder.

General Custer did have a loving and supportive family but the pampering, failures in his young life, rejection, and ridicule helped to develop an internal drive to succeed and be in a position to ensure he would never have to face rejection again. This drive started as a quest and matured into the early development of an arrogant personality. This drive was fueled more by life experiences yet to come, and ultimately ended with the U.S. Army's defeat and General Custer's death at the Little Big Horn (Russell 31).

#### West Point

George Armstrong Custer's life at West Point molded him into a military officer and leader. His years spent at the academy influenced and molded his military career. He was a natural born leader and great soldier; however, during his four years as a cadet at West Point, he never excelled or conformed to rules and regulations. While attending West Point he gained the admiration and friendship of fellow cadets while losing the favor and good graces of several faculty members because of his cocky attitude. In addition, he was almost dismissed from the academy for poor performance.

Custer's appointment to West Point was considered a stretch of luck because his family was poor and democratic. He was granted an appointment during the time when appointments to West Point were granted primarily because of wealth and political party affiliation. Custer originally wanted to be a lawyer, but changed his goals because his family could not afford to pay for his training. He later decided that West Point would be a way of getting a good education at the government expense. His number one priority was to get a good education and improve his chances for a better life. Louise Barnet, author of Touched by Fire, quoted Custer as saying, "I would rather have a good education and no money than a fortune and be ignorant" (Barnet, 13). At the age of seventeen, Custer wrote to Congressman John Bingham and visited him about an appointment to the military academy. The congressman was impressed with Custer's letter of appointment and requested that he be granted admission to West Point. Custer's father Emanuel played a large role in his attendance at West Point. He sold the family's 18-acre farm to help his son gain admission. While attending West Point, the actions of George Custer caused him to become well known throughout the academy. He was very immature and undisciplined. This was a characteristic that seemed to become a permanent part of his daily life. He appeared to receive this character from his stepfather. Emanuel was known for doing whatever he wanted to do regardless of the outcome. Moreover, Custer's reckless actions and carefree attitude caused him to be admired and envied by many of his peers. Custer did not apply himself at the academy because he was bored with the subjects and thought they were a waste of time. Furthermore, he felt that many of the classes had nothing to do with improving his ability in battle. He broke academy rules on numerous occasions. It appeared that carelessness and folly was a part of his daily routine. Custer and other cadets would sneak out at

night and attend dances. They would stay out all night and not return until the next morning. He would get into trouble for throwing snow balls, missing formations, and inappropriate socializing. Custer often reported to formations with the wrong uniform or weapon. He was known for putting on escapades for the entire student body to enjoy. One day he dismissed the entire Spanish class at the instructor's surprise. He organized night raids on first year students. During the raids, he and other upper classmates placed the new cadets into two groups and exchanged their clothes.

Custer was punished numerous times for his rebellion and childish actions during his cadetship. "Over a four year period, he had to work 66 Saturdays as punishment for his offenses and reckless actions" (Hutton, 43). Custer was forced to watch his friends and peers depart for fun and recreation while he remained on guard duty as punishment for his numerous acts of folly.

Custer received many demerits for his inability to obey orders. He found it very hard to obey the 101 rules that governed cadet behavior. His inability to conform earned him the reputation of a daredevil. "It was recorded that he received 52 demerits in his last term alone" (Barnett, 17). West Point viewed his large number of demerits as an indication of bad behavior. Custer had enough bad marks to be expelled from the academy but someone corrected his tally of demerits and he was able to remain a student at the academy. Although Custer had a large number of demerits, it did not mean he was a bad leader. It was not uncommon for an entire graduating class to have scores that averaged 120 demerits. Neither the students nor faculty took demerits serious at the military academy.

Throughout his four years at West Point, Custer struggled with academics, but he excelled in athletics and horsemanship. Although he performed poorly in his classes, his lack of effort was sometimes overlooked due to his popularity among the cadets. Most of his bad grades can be contributed to his lack of interest for the subjects that were being taught. It was obvious through his writings that Custer did not have a high regard for many of his studies. He considered drawing, painting, and foreign languages to be of little value to him in battle. The only academic area that Custer was interested in was riding lessons; he took riding lessons whenever he had time.

Custer graduated last in his small class of 34 students. His low class ranking was a result of poor academic efforts and other factors. One of the reasons he graduated last in his class was because many of the original students had already departed. "His class began with 125 students, but only graduated 34. All of the Southern students resigned from the academy and went home to fight in the war. Several of the departing students had similar or lower grades than Custer" (Merington, 23). Moreover, a poor record at the academy did not mean a cadet was a poor leader. The academy set such high standards and many students were dropped due to academic failure. In Custer's class 40 potential students failed the entrance exam and an additional eight were dropped for academic failure during the first year.

During his cadetship Custer met a lot of great future leaders and developed some lasting friendships. Custer had a long list of friends: Cadet McCrea, Jim Parker, J. M. Wright, Marcus Reno, Evan Andruss, and many more. Some of them became great allies to him during his cadetship and military career.

Custer's last days at West Point were marred by his reckless actions and poor decision-making. They were filled with disappointment and failure. Many times Custer would find himself in trouble because of his foolish actions. He was arrested for neglect of duty and restricted to his tent right before his class was to graduate. He failed to break up a scuffle between two cadets while performing his duties as officer of the guard; instead, he encouraged the two men to have a fair fight. Custer was court-martialed as a result of his actions and pleaded guilty to all charges. The two cadets that caused all the trouble and others testified favorably on his behalf. The trial was brief and ended with Custer receiving a light punishment. He was sentenced to be reprimanded in orders, but it was never physically carried out. "Custer was released quickly and allowed to graduate because of the urgent need for trained officers to fight in the war and the political influence exercised by his classmates in Washington" (Sifakis 18).

Custer had a special love for West Point. The academy had a profound impact on his life. He learned many principles while attending the academy. In addition, he received inspiration that would begin to shape him into the leader he was known to be. During his four years at West Point, he learned the importance of discipline through his attitude of rebellion against it. This became the one thing he embraced throughout his military career. He embraced the rule of strict discipline and believed that it was essential to winning victories on the battlefield. Custer was totally devoted to West Point and expressed to his family and friends that he wanted to be buried there. In 1877 his remains were returned to the cemetery at West Point, New York where they remain until this day.

George Armstrong Custer's life at West Point molded him into a military officer and leader. Although he never appeared to excel or conform to rules and regulations, his years spent at the academy influenced and shaped his military career. He went on to become a very successful officer who was admired and hated by his peers.

#### Civil War Service

Custer was one of the bravest and most widely known officers in the United States Army. He was known to the country and to his comrades as a man who feared no danger and a soldier in the truest sense of the word. He was daring to a fault and more generous than most men. Immediately upon leaving West Point he was appointed Second Lieutenant in Company G of the Second United States Cavalry, a regiment that had formerly been commanded by Robert E. Lee. He reported to Lieutenant General Scott on the 20th of July, the day before the Battle of Bull Run. The Commander in Chief gave him the choice of accepting a position on his staff or of joining his regiment, under command of General McDowell in the field. Longing for an opportunity to see active service, and determined to win distinction, Lieutenant Custer chose the latter course, and after riding all night, he reached McDowell's headquarters at daybreak on the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup>. Preparations for the battle had already begun. He delivered the dispatches from General Scott, quickly gulped a mouthful of coffee and a piece of hard bread and then joined his company. The battle didn't go as well as planned and Lieutenant Custer's company was among the last to leave the field. It did so in good order, bringing off General Heintzelman, who had been wounded in the engagement.

Lieutenant Custer continued to serve with his company, and was engaged in the drilling of volunteer recruits in and around Washington. When Phil Kearny was appointed to the

position of Brigadier General, Custer was given a position on his staff. Custer continued in this position until an order was issued from the War Department prohibiting Generals of Volunteers from appointing officers of the regular Army to staff duty. He then returned to his company again. He was however, warmly complimented by General Kearny on the prompt and efficient manner in which he had performed the duties assigned to him. Upon his departure, General Kearny predicted that Custer would be one of the most successful officers in the Army. These predictions were not without a speedy realization.

With his company, Lieutenant Custer marched forward with the Army of the Potomac. They marched into Manassas after its evacuation by the rebels. The cavalry was in advance, under General Stoneman and encountered the rebel horsemen for the first time near Catlett's Station. The commanding officer made a call for volunteers to charge the enemy's advance post. Lieutenant Custer was among the first to step to the front, and in command of his company, he quickly made his first charge. He drove the rebels across Muddy Creek, wounded a number of them, and only had one of his own men injured. This was the first blood drawn in the campaign under Gen McClellan. After this, Custer went with the Army of the Potomac to the Peninsula and remained with his company until the Army settled near Yorktown. There he was detailed as an Assistant Engineer of the left wing, under Gen Sumner. Acting in this capacity he planned and erected the earthworks closest to the enemy's lines. He also accompanied the advance under General Hancock in pursuit of the enemy from Yorktown. Shortly afterward, he captured the first battle-flag ever secured by the Army of the Potomac.

From this time on he was almost always the first one to jump in every work of daring. When the Army reached the Chickahominy, he was the first man to cross the river looking for

the best fording location; he did so in the face of the fire of the enemy's pickets, and at times found himself wading up to his armpits. For this brave act General McClellan promoted him to a Captain and made him one of his personal aids. He served in this capacity during most of the Peninsula campaign, and participated in all its battles, including the bloody seven days fight. He performed the duty of marking out the position that was occupied by the Union Army at the battle of Gaines' Mills. He also participated in the campaign that ended in the battles of South Mountain and Antietam. Upon the retirement of General McClellan from the command of the Army of the Potomac, Custer accompanied him serving as his personal aid, and for a time was out of active service.

He was next engaged in the battle of Chancellorsville, and immediately after that fight he was made a personal aid by General Pleasonton, who was commanding a division of cavalry. Serving in this capacity he took an active part in a number of hotly-contested engagements and marked himself as one of the most dashing, some said the most reckless, officers in the service.

When Gen Pleasonton was made a Major General his first business was to remember the valuable services of his Aid de Camp. He requested the appointment of four Brigadiers to command under him, and with this recommendation which was indorsed by Generals Meade and Hooker, young Custer was made a Brigadier General and assigned to the command of the First, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Michigan Cavalry. He did noble service at the battle of Gettysburg. He held the right end of the line, and was obliged to face Gen Hampton's division of cavalry, headed up by Gen J.E.B. Stuart. After a hotly contested fight, he routed the rebels and prevented them from reaching the trains of the Union Army. Custer had two horses shot out from under him in this fight. Custer was a strong supporter of his own abilities. He said of his performance

at Gettysburg: "I challenge the annals of warfare to produce a more brilliant or successful charge of cavalry" (Hatch 116).

The battle had barely concluded when he was sent to attack the enemy's train, which was trying to make its way to the Potomac. He destroyed more than four hundred wagons. At Hagerstown, Md., during a severe engagement, he again had his horse shot out from under him. At Falling Waters, he attacked the rebel rear guard with his small brigade. The Confederate commander General Pettigrew was killed and his command routed, with a loss of 1,300 prisoners, two pieces of cannon, and four battle flags. For some time after this fight he was constantly engaged in skirmishes with the enemy. During the winter that followed he secured the Rapidan between the two armies.

Gen Custer participated in the battle of the Wilderness in 1864, and on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May of the same year, under General Sheridan, he set out on the famous raid toward Richmond. His brigade led the column, captured Beaver Dam, burned the station and a train of cars loaded with supplies, and released 400 Union prisoners. Rejoining Gen Grant's Army at Pamunkey, he took an active part in several engagements. After the battle of Fisher's Hill, he was placed in command of a division, and remained in that position until after Gen Lee's surrender.

At the ever-memorable battle of Cedar Creek his division was on the right, and not engaged in the rout of the morning, so when Gen Sheridan arrived on the field, after the twenty-mile ride, he found Gen Custer's command ready for service. His immediate order was "Go in Custer"(Flynn B1)! General Custer was eagerly waiting for the word. He took his division into the fight and didn't come out until the enemy was destroyed and driven several miles beyond the battlefield. Nearly one thousand prisoners were captured, among them a Major General. Forty-

five pieces of artillery were also taken. For this service Custer was made a Brevet Major General of Volunteers. Gen Sheridan, as a further mark of appreciation, detailed him to carry the news of the victory and the captured battle-flag to Washington. Gen George Armstrong Custer and his division played a major role in the final battle with the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox. When the battle was over and the terms of surrender agreed upon, Gen Custer was given the honor of receiving the first flag of truce from the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Court-House. Gen Custer was mustered out of the volunteer service on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1866.

#### Desolate Years Post Civil War

After the Civil War, Custer reverted to his regular Army rank of Captain. However, the inactivity of war nearly drove Custer crazy. He even considered joining the Mexican Army, so that he could take part in an actual shooting war. When the Army was enlarged in order to cope with the growing Indian menace on the Great Plains, Custer was appointed to LTC, and accepted the position of Commander, 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry Regiment, where he gained the reputation as an Indian Fighter.

In 1865, shortly after the United States passed the Homestead Act, encouraging settlements in the West, the Lakota and Cheyenne Indian tribes began attacking white settlements and transportation that invaded their land in Indian Territory. The Native tribes recognized that the encroaching white men were killing their buffalo and transforming their homeland into sprawling settlements.

In 1866, war chiefs, including Chief Red Cloud, met with U.S. officials at Fort Laramie to negotiate access to the Powder River Basin. During the talks, the U.S. troops continued

moving into the area, and the war chiefs suspended their negotiations and begun Red Cloud's War, which lasted through the brutal winter of 1866 and into the following summer. Ultimately, the U.S. admitted defeat and signed the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, which defined the Great Sioux Reservation as Indian land and guaranteed the Sioux the right to hunt in unceded lands. The Army agreed to withdraw from the Black Hills, a region sacred to the Lakota tribes.

In 1867, Lieutenant General Grant assigned a campaign to Major General Hancock to move the Southern Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, and other Indian tribes to be settled south of the Arkansas River, and the Sioux north of the Platte River. With the relocation of the tribes, a wide swath of Nebraska and Kansas would be opened to the railroad and to white homesteaders. The regiment played a prominent part in the Hancock campaign. General Hancock, LTC Custer, and other officers met with a delegation of about a dozen chiefs, asserting that Indian raids against railroad construction crews, settler cabins, and stagecoach stations must cease or the chiefs would be responsible for war. Disappointed over the number of chiefs who had come to the fort, Hancock announced that he would march to the village for a council. The chiefs departed. The next day, White Horse of the Cheyenne and Pawnee Killer of the Sioux visited General Hancock who agreed to a meeting the next morning with all the chiefs. When the chiefs did not appear, Hancock ordered a march to the village. They found an Indian line of battle directly across the line of march. Before either side made a tragic mistake, Wynkoop rode ahead and assured the Indians of their safety. Consenting to a meeting, the chiefs met Hancock midway. The chiefs agreed to allow the troops to bivouac near the village. Later that night, upon learning that women and children fled the village, more negotiations ensued, ending with the promise that the woman and children would return to the camp. However, an Indian interpreter informed

Hancock that the Indian men were preparing to leave. The General ordered Custer to surround the village only to find the village deserted. Furious at what he believed to be Indian treachery, Hancock ordered Custer to find the Indians. In the pursuit of finding the Indian tribes along with numerous other problems that Custer faced, many months had passed, and Custer found himself desperately missing his wife, Libbie. Therefore, one evening with a small group of men, Custer left Wallace heading to Fort Harker to be with Libbie. It was a beginning of a journey into controversy.

On 27 August 1867, Lieutenant General Ulysses Grant ordered a general court-martial to be held on 17 September 1867 for LTC Custer. LTC Custer was being charged with "Absence without leave from his command" with one specification, "Conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline" with three specifications. In the first charge, LTC Custer left his command without proper authority to proceed to Fort Harker, Kansas, a distance of about 275 miles, which was actively engaged against hostile Indians. In the second charge, LTC Custer seriously prejudiced the public interest by "over marching" troops, damaging horses, unauthorized use of ambulances and mules, neglected his duty by not trying to recover or bury the bodies of two troopers, the ordering of deserters to be shot down without a trial, and denying the wounded men medical treatment. Custer pleaded not guilty. He argued that he undertook the trip to secure supplies at Fort Harker because the reserve of stores at Wallace were exhausted, to obtain new orders for his unit, to gather additional horses, and to get more medical supplies. Unfortunately, the reasons cited by Custer were not true. He chose to hide the truth. The court found Custer guilty of all charges, but cleared him of criminality concerning the ambulances and

the treatment of the deserters. Custer was suspended from rank and command for one year and forfeits his pay for the same time.

In the summer of 1867, General Sheridan was removed from command after a dispute with the governor of Texas, which resulted in a six-month leave of absence. Afterwards, he reported to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas as Commander of the Department of the Missouri. Earlier that summer, Congress created a peace commission whose purposes were to secure the area between the rivers for white settlement and to concentrate tribes on reservations. The government wanted to place the Indians on designated lands where they could be Christianized and taught to be farmers. By mid-summer, Sheridan's frustrations with the Army's failures to subdue the Indians had boiled over. Nowhere on the Kansas frontier were settlers safe. Sheridan had concluded that he required the services of an officer who could bring energy and aggressiveness to the operations.

#### 7th Cavalry and the Indian Wars

Custer had no friend in Washington due to his frequent magazine articles about the corruption in President Grant's administration and pointed criticism of the president's brother Orville. Many politicians opposing President Grant backed Custer and encouraged his political ambitions (Ege 54).

On September 24, 1868, General Sherman recalled Custer back to active duty. Upon rejoining his troops on Bluff Creek the fort was attacked by Indians. General Sherman's winter campaign put Custer on the point of attack. The Battle of Black Kettle is where Custer gained his fame in Indian fighting (Ege 38). The attack of the Indian village came at night, while the Indians slept; his troops killed 11 warriors and massacred 92 women and children. Once Indians

from other villages began to enter the fight Custer retreated back to Camp Supply, without determining the fate of one of his Majors and the 19 men with him. They were later found dead, turning many of Custer's command and soldiers against him (Ege 58).

From 1870 until 1872 Custer's 7th Cavalry was disbanded and used throughout the Southern States to enforce federal taxes on distilleries and suppress the activities of the Ku Klux Klan.

The large number of settlers and miners in the Dakota Territory caused reoccurring hostilities between the Indian tribes and the civilians, putting the military right in the middle. Custer and the 7th Cavalry were recalled to the western territory in 1873, to regain control over the Indian up risings. During this time, Custer lost interest in fighting Indians. The fiercest Indians of the Plains had not impressed him as a foe. The Indians were timid and would run away before his troops could mount an attack. To amuse himself, Custer would take his officers on buffalo hunts. He would have contests, between two teams, to see which could kill the most buffalo in one day (Ege 63).

The Army half-heartedly tried to keep out prospectors from the Sioux's Black Hill (sacred grounds), until September of 1875. Once gold was found the government offered to buy the land, but the Sioux refused to sell. The prospectors flooded the area once the reports of gold reached the east and tensions grew to the point that war was inevitable. The 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was relocated to the Montana Territory to defeat any uprising (Cozzens 48).

The Army's strategy in 1876 was to round up and trap the hostile tribes. One of the last and largest remaining hostile tribes was the Sioux, who some believed were massing for resistance in southeastern Montana (Cozzens 56). On June 22, General Alfred Terry met with

his officers and reiterated the grand strategy for trapping the hostile tribes between the three armies now converging on southeast Montana Territory. The exact location of the Indians was uncertain, so to ensure that they would be found and not escape, Terry decided to split the Dakota Column. He sent Custer and his 7th Cavalry on a loop south along the Rosebud River and south of the Little Bighorn Valley, while the main column would continue moving west along the Yellowstone and turn south to follow the Bighorn River, where the two forces should meet up on June 26 or 27, about the time when Gibbon and Crook's columns might be arriving as well (Ege 97).

Historians generally agree that Custer disobeyed General Terry's orders and split his command of the 7th Cavalry Regiment, which numbered only 650 men total into three battalions. Driven by arrogance and glory Custer made four major mistakes that lead to his defeat; splitting his command into three battalions, refusing to wait on attacking the Indians until General Terry's troops arrived, refusing gatling guns and Infantry soldiers offered by General Terry (Custer believed they would slow him down), and choosing to ignore his scouts' reports about the number of Indians they would be facing (Ege 120).

The size of the Indian encampment located on the banks of the Little Big Horn River was the largest concentration of Indians from six tribes that history has ever recorded. Present were the Cheyenne, Sans Arcs, Miniconjoux Sioux, Oglala Sioux, Blackfoot and Hunkpapa Sioux (Cozzens 61).

Custer divided his regiment into 3 columns, one under Capt. Benteen, who was to scout out the surrounding area. The second column under Major Reno was to attack the southern part of the village, and Custer was to attack the northern end. What they did not know was that the

village was well over 5 miles long. The 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, with a force of 650 men, attacked a village of 7,000 Indians, 2,500 of which were considered warriors (Ege 135).

By 3 P.M., Gen. Custer and 225 men lay dead on the hillside near the Big Horn River. Major Reno and Capt Benteen were trapped on a hillside 5 miles to the south. On the morning of the 27th, the Indians pulled up their camp and left the Big Horn Valley. Major Reno lost 47 men in his battle. No one knew what happened to Custer until a relief column came. On the afternoon of the 27th, scouts of General Terry's column found LTC Custer and his men (Cozzens 79).

Five members of the Custer family were killed at the Battle of the Little Big Horn; Custer himself, his brother Capt. Tom Custer, brother-in-law Capt. James Calhoun, with younger brother Boston, and Nephew Autie Reed. Calhoun's younger brother and nephew were both civilians. The 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry lost 272 men during the battle, almost half the regiment (Ege 136).

Though he was very successful as a commander and leader during the Civil War, General Custer never lost his free spiritedness. His desire to excel was realized, but he found it hard to follow anyone but himself. He demanded strict discipline even though he was not very disciplined himself. His persona was, at least in his own mind, larger than life. He truly felt he could conquer the Indians by himself. He believed so strongly in his own strengths and the weaknesses of his adversaries that neither all the information available nor the orders of his commander were of any concern to him. If he had of listened to his scouts and waited on the other Army units the way the plan was laid out, the whole world would have remembered him differently. His false confidence and arrogance cost not only his life, but also the lives of 271 of his men.

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