



The legendary **COL. GEORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER** led his 7th Cavalry into battle against the Lakota at Little Big Horn Valley, but did not survive to tell the tale.

Custer was born in Ohio, the second of four sons. As a young man, he attended West Point Military Academy, but did not take to his studies, graduating at the bottom of his class. As the Civil War broke out, Custer joined the Union army. He rose quickly through the military ranks due to his daredevil courage and aggressive fighting style. Custer soon earned his reputation as a dashing military hero, after the young soldier survived, without a single wound, despite having 12 horses shot out from under him in battle. His men, marveling at his good fortune, named his invincibility "Custer's Luck."

While fighting in the Civil War, Custer met Libby Bacon and the two immediately fell in love. Once Custer had risen in rank to an Army General, Libby's father allowed the inseparable couple to marry. But soon duty called once again, tearing Custer away from his precious "durl." The U.S. government had high hopes of claiming the gold-laden Black Hills, despite the Lakota who had lived there for centuries. Custer was chosen as Colonel of the 7th Cavalry, with orders to end the "Indian Problem" once and for all.

As Custer's 7th neared the Lakota camp, scouts warned their Colonel that the tribal warriors far outnumbered his troops, advising him to wait for reinforcements before launching the attack. But Custer refused, convinced that a clear victory over the Lakota would earn him the American people's adoration and guarantee him the Presidency of the United States. As the Colonel rode into battle, blonde head held high, Lakota warriors swarmed in from all sides. Not one soldier survived that day, which would go down in history as "Custer's Last Stand," honoring the leader for the reckless courage that had sealed his fate.





THOMAS WARD CUSTER was the younger brother of Col. George Armstrong Custer. He was born in New Rumley, Ohio along with the other three Custer children, but always had a special bond with George, who he adored and admired. The feeling was mutual—George used to say, “Tom should have been the General and I the Lieutenant.”

Thomas gained recognition as a courageous soldier during the Civil War. He was given two Congressional Medals of Honor, one of only 19 people ever to receive this award twice. In 1866, Thomas became 1st lieutenant of the 7th Cavalry, and later rose in rank to Captain of Company C.

As Custer and his men approached Little Big Horn Valley in June of 1876, scouts suspected from tracks on the ground that the Lakota numbered many—far more than expected. Riding into battle the next day, Thomas vowed to fight alongside George until the end, no matter the odds against them. As he watched his older brother fall, Thomas knew he had fulfilled his promise—and continued to fire until he, too, was killed.

After the battle, Lakota warriors mutilated Thomas’ dead body, punishing him for fighting so long and hard. He was identifiable only by a tattoo on his arm—still intact—which was all that remained.

The Battle of Little Big Horn was a triumph for the Lakota. But victory soon turned to defeat. Their defense against Custer’s attack was reported as a “massacre” in the U.S. newspapers, and revenge from the government would soon come.





BOSTON CUSTER was the youngest brother of Col. George Armstrong Custer. One of five children, he was born in New Rumley, Ohio in 1848. When the boy was barely 15, the Custer family left Ohio and moved to Michigan. His oldest brother, Nevin, had become a farmer due to asthma and rheumatism, while George was already a famous hero of the American Civil War. Boston's closest brother, Tom, had become a military officer as well, fighting bravely for the Union in its struggle against the South.

But Boston was too young to fight for the Union and, even later, was unable to officially serve in the Army due to poor health. So, he joined his brothers as "forage master" for the U.S. 7th Cavalry in the 1874 Black Hills Expedition. His job: finding food for the army in the areas surrounding their camps. He also worked as a guide, packer and scout for the 7th Cavalry in 1876 as they prepared to do battle with the Lakota.

On June 25, 1876—along with his 18-year-old nephew, Henry Armstrong "Autie" Reed—Boston Custer was with the pack train at the rear of his brother's troops, looking after the soldiers' supplies. Hearing from a messenger that George had requested ammunition for a battle that was just about to begin, Boston and Autie grabbed what was needed and headed for the battlefield. The pair joined brother George's soldiers as they moved into position to attack the Lakota village along the Little Big Horn River. Had he chosen to stay with the pack train where he was assigned, Boston would have lived to tell the story of the Battle of Little Big Horn.

However, like his brothers and nephew, Boston was killed at a place known as Last Stand Hill. A marble marker shows the spot where his body was found. Though originally buried on the battlefield, both Boston's and Autie's remains were dug up and sent home to Michigan for a "proper burial."





MITCH BOUYER was a French and Santee Indian frontiersman who worked as Colonel George Custer's interpreter.

Boyer rode with Custer's army to the Battle of Little Big Horn where he scouted the area for the enemy. He reported to Custer that the Lakota warriors greatly outnumbered the Cavalry. "If you don't find more Indians in that Valley than you ever saw before," he said, "you can hang me!"

Custer decided to continue onward into battle despite the warning, believing he would still be triumphant. Major Reno led his troops into the valley first, but Custer's men did not reinforce them as expected. Greatly outnumbered, the soldiers under both commanders were killed by the Lakota warriors and their Cheyenne allies.

Boyer also warned Curly, the Crow scout, to leave the battle before it was too late. Curly did run away and became one of the only 7th Cavalry survivors. He also provided one of the few Army accounts of what happened on the battlefield that day. Even though Bouyer advised retreat, he himself stayed and fought with Custer until the bitter end.

The Battle of Little Big Horn was a triumph for the Lakota people. But victory soon turned to defeat. Their defense against Custer's attack was reported as a "massacre" in the Wasichu newspapers, and revenge from the government would soon come.





ISAIAH DORMAN was a former slave who enlisted in the 7th Cavalry, became its most skillful interpreter and eventually fought alongside its leader—Colonel Custer—at Little Big Horn. He was the only black man present at the battle.

Isaiah was born on a plantation in the American South around 1820. With slavery still at its height, the young African American was “owned” by his master, forced to work and never free to do anything without permission from the “boss man.” Of course, Isaiah didn’t like this way of life. So he did what many others did—escaped slavery and found his way to freedom along The Underground Railroad, a network of “safe houses” that helped slaves travel north to a new life.

Soon after Isaiah gained his freedom, he found his way to the Great Plains and began living “siwash.” He married a Lakota woman and lived among her people for many years. Eventually, Dorman left the Lakota community. No one knows why he went, but he may well have felt out of place within their society.

After leaving the Lakota, Isaiah joined the 7th Cavalry to be an interpreter. The Army desperately needed his help to understand the language and customs of the enemy. Though Isaiah would be fighting against the people he had lived with for so long, he had always been poor and was not able to resist the Army’s pay—a small fortune in 1876—\$75 a month!

Though he knew that he would likely die, Isaiah stuck by Custer as they rode into the Little Big Horn Valley. Lakota hated Dorman because they felt he had betrayed them. So, the warriors targeted him during the battle where he was shown no mercy and viciously killed.



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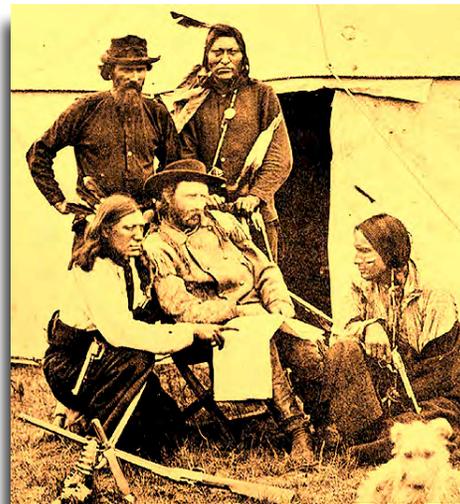
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BLOODY KNIFE was Col. George Armstrong Custer's most trusted scout. Born to an Arikara mother and a Hunkpapa father, he always felt out of place while growing up in his father's Lakota camp. Because of his mixed tribal heritage, other boys treated Bloody Knife as an outcast. Finally, his mother could watch the abuse no longer, and returned with her sons to live among the Arikara. Bloody Knife's sister and father remained behind.

As Custer and his soldiers prepared to attack the Lakota—with high hopes of claiming the Black Hills and its gold for the U.S. government—the Army relied on scouts like Bloody Knife to guide them. Because most officers were unfamiliar with the fighting ways of the "Red Man," they needed a few trustworthy, Native people to help them track the enemy in battle. Bloody Knife proved himself to Custer as a quick-witted and skillful guide, quickly earning the Colonel's favor. Ever since Lakota boys had abused Bloody Knife long ago, the scout felt no sympathy for the tribes. So he aided the Wasichu—their enemy—with pleasure.

As Custer's 7th approached Little Big Horn Valley, Bloody Knife suspected from tracks on the ground that the Lakota warriors numbered many—far more than his Colonel expected. Riding into battle the next day, his worst fears were confirmed. Bloody Knife knew the Wasichu would not survive the Battle of Little Big Horn—and neither would he.



After the battle, two Lakota girls discovered Bloody Knife's head, separated from his body, and brought it back to their mother. She took one look at the stony face and recognized her long-lost brother. Bloody Knife had returned home at last.