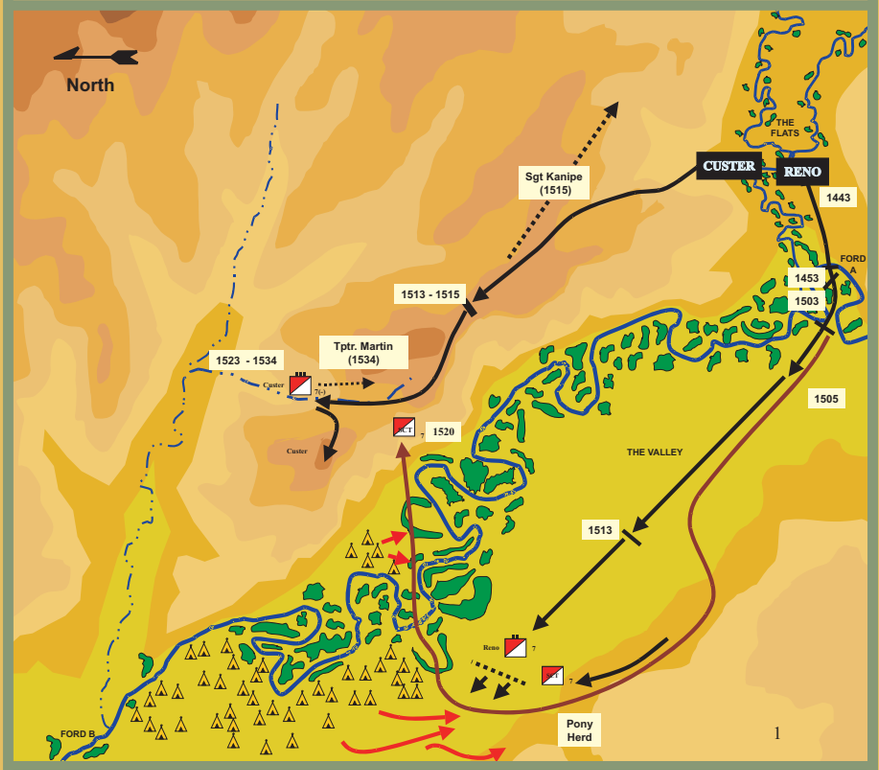
Atlas of the Sioux Wars

Second Edition

Charles D. Collins, Jr.



Dr. William Glenn Robertson, Consulting Editor

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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027

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by

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Foreword

In June 1992, the Combat Studies Institute (CSI) conducted the first Sioux Wars Staff Ride for Brigadier General William M. Steele, Deputy Commandant of the US Army Command and General Staff College. In September 1992, Dr. William Glenn Robertson, Dr. Jerold E. Brown, Major William M. Campsey, and Major Scott R. McMeen published the first edition of the *Atlas of the Sioux Wars*. Their work represented a modest effort to rectify the omission of the Indian Wars in the West Point atlas series by examining the Army's campaigns against the Sioux Indians, one of the greatest Indian tribes of the American West. The atlas has since served as an educational reference for hundreds of students of US Army campaigns against the Sioux during the conduct of dozens of Sioux Wars staff rides.

In 1992, CSI and the authors believed that soldiers serving in the post-Cold War Army could easily identify with the situation faced by soldiers of the post-Civil War Army. In both cases, the most serious threat to the nation's security had suddenly vanished, and the Army's very purpose was energetically debated. Meanwhile, many in political life and in the US Congress saw the change as an opportunity to reduce funding and other resources for a standing army—a longstanding trend in American political life. The Army's senior leaders, therefore, coped with the twin problems of mission definition and Draconian resource constraints. The Army's junior leaders of that era struggled to prescribe and execute proper training. Yet, conflict generated by civilian encroachment on Indian lands as part of America's rapid Westward expansion increasingly dragged the Army into conflict with the Indian tribes.

The Army found itself pulled in many directions as it was simultaneously directed to protect Indian lands from civilian encroachment while ordered to take strong measures to protect civilians against Indian tribes who desperately fought to maintain their land and culture. Combat veterans of the Civil War quickly discovered that finding and fighting Indian warriors was dramatically different from forming large battle lines across relatively confined battlegrounds. Having spent the past 4 years waging a conventional, high-intensity conflict, the Army suddenly had to learn techniques of warfare suited to an unconventional, low-intensity environment.

The relevance of the Sioux Wars for today's Army is even more evident in 2006 than it was in 1992. As with the campaigns against the Sioux from the 1860s to the 1890s, early 21st century operations array the conventional forces of the US Army against the unconventional forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Sioux campaigns are replete with valuable lessons for the professional soldier. The operations were operationally and tactically complex, unfamiliar terrain and logistics dramatically affected the multiphase engagements, and every operation took place in a complex political and cultural environment of shifting priorities. A serious study of the campaigns offers today's officers the opportunity to compare, contrast, and, most importantly, to discover the threads of continuity linking the unconventional warfare of the 21st century with that of their 19th century forebears.

The *Atlas of the Sioux Wars, Second Edition*, could not have been completed without the diligence of the original authors. As with the *First Edition*, section I deals with the difficulties of using volunteer forces to quell the rebellion of a suppressed people in the 1862 Minnesota Campaign. Additional material has been added for the Grattan Affair of 1854 and the continuation of the Minnesota Campaigns in 1863 and 1864. Section II, as before, deals with the 1866–68 Sioux War in Wyoming and Montana. It is the story of securing a fixed route of travel through hostile territory with limited resources. In this section, we have expanded the discussion of the Connor Expedition and added new material on the Fetterman and Wagon Box Fights not available in 1992. Section III discusses the conflict of 1876 and encompasses one of the largest and most ambitious missions conducted by the Army during the Indian Wars. Again, new material which was not available to the 1992 authors has been added. A closing section was added to discuss the Army's final operations against the Sioux in 1890 and the tragic encounter at Wounded Knee. The most notable addition to the *Second Edition* of the atlas is the inclusion of 37 all new, color maps.

While historical analogies are always fraught with danger, many of the difficulties faced by US soldiers fighting today parallel the tactical and operational dilemmas faced by soldiers fighting during the Indian Wars. Our goal is to learn from the experiences of these 19th-century soldiers. Thus, reflecting on the words of respected Indian Wars Historian Robert M. Utley, "A century of Indian warfare should have taught us much about dealing with people who did not fight in conventional ways, and our military tradition might reasonably have been expected to reflect the lessons thus learned." *CSI—The Past is Prologue!*

Timothy R. Reese
Colonel, Armor
Director, Combat Studies Institute

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge many people who made the publication of this work possible and thank them for their efforts. First, because this is an update of the original atlas published in 1992, I thank Dr. William Glenn Robertson, Dr. Jerold E. Brown, Major William M. Campsey, and Major Scott R. McMeen for a strong foundation on which to build. I would also like to thank my two editors: first, my wife, Judy, who made the careful initial edit of my very rough first drafts and continually encouraged clarification and other needed improvements, and, of course, Ms. Betty Weigand, Combat Studies Institute editor, who diligently and good-naturedly combed the drafts of the text and remarkably improved the narratives and maps. I also thank Mr. Charles A. Martinson III, a graphic artist with the Fort Leavenworth Multimedia/Visual Information Service Center, who polished the final draft into a professional package for publication.

I would also like to thank Dr. Robertson for his years of mentoring me during my study of the Sioux Wars. Without his help and insights, I would not have been able to complete this work or, more importantly, successfully teach the Sioux Wars elective at the US Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC). In addition, I would like to thank all of the members of the Staff Ride Team for their support and help in this project, especially Lieutenant Colonel Paul Gardner. Paul and I spent countless hours walking the rolling hills of Wyoming and Montana, reading the words of the battle participants, and discussing the events of the Sioux Wars. Likewise, I express my gratitude to all of the personnel involved in researching, interpreting, and preserving the various battlefields included in the ride. This group includes the members of the National Park Service (NPS), specifically those from the Little Bighorn Battlefield and Fort Laramie; the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Department for the Rosebud Battlefield; and the tremendously helpful professionals at the Fort Phil Kearny State Historic Site. Finally, I offer my special thanks to the many Wyoming and Montana ranchers who allowed us access to their land for this study and generously allow us each year onto their property for the conduct of the CGSC's annual Sioux Wars Staff Ride.

On a personal note, I offer my heartfelt thanks to my family, who have always supported me with my many staff rides to the Sioux Wars battlefields and other great battlefields. It has been such a great experience that it is hard for me to think of it as work.

Charles D. Collins, Jr.
Historian, Combat Studies Institute

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I. Introduction

Map 1. The Sioux and the Great Plains

One of the most recognizable of all Indian tribal names is the Sioux. Although numerous tribes spoke a Siouan dialect, the tribal name *Sioux* only applied to the largest of those tribes. The name originated with the Chippewa Indians who modified the French term *nadouessioux* meaning "little snakes" and applied it to their enemy—the Sioux.

The Sioux originally lived as Woodland Indians along the upper Mississippi River and dominated portions of present-day Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin. In the early 1700s, the Chippewa, armed with French guns, gradually pushed the Sioux further West. By the mid-18th century, many of the Sioux had migrated across the Missouri River both to avoid the Chippewa and to seek areas richer in fur and game. In their migration to the West, the Sioux separated into three major divisions: the Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota establishing three principal Sioux dialects, respectively: Santee, Yankton, and Teton. Each division name translated to mean "ally" in its own dialect.

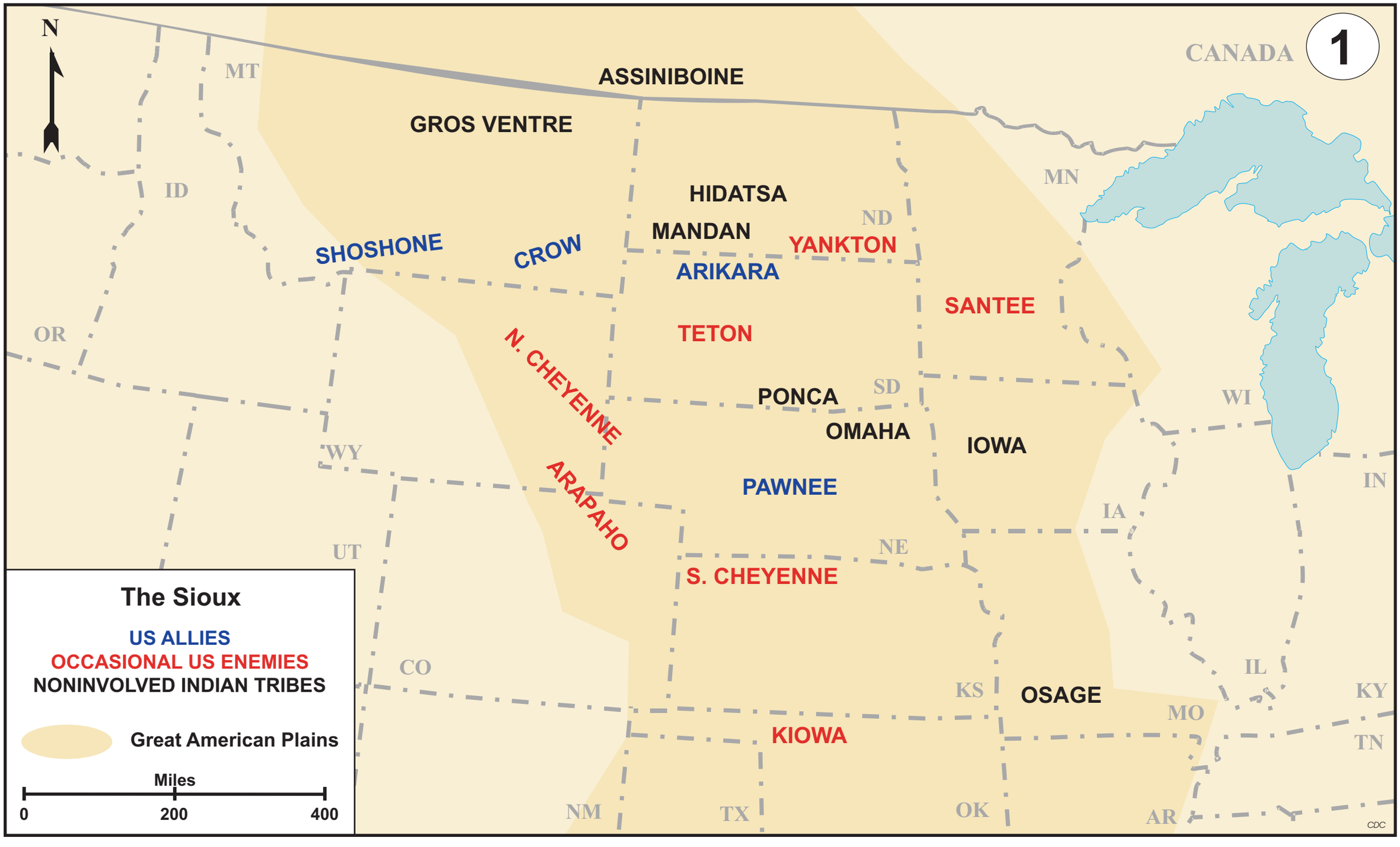
The Dakota remained in the Upper Midwest and primarily lived in parts of present-day Minnesota. Because of their dialect, they are also referred to as the *Santee* or *Eastern Sioux*. It was the Santee Sioux who were primarily involved in the 1862 Minnesota uprising.

The Nakota occupied a territory farther west in the prairie country of western Minnesota and the eastern portion of the Dakotas. The Nakota divided into two major bands, the Yankton and the Yanktonai. In reference to their Yankton dialect, they are often referred to as the *Yankton* or *Middle Sioux*.

The Lakota branch, which was the largest and best known of the Sioux divisions, made its homeland in the Northern Great Plains. The Lakota division was composed of seven bands or council fires: Brulé, Sans Arc, Hunkpapa, Oglala, Miniconjou, Blackfeet, and Two Kettles. All seven were bands of nomadic hunters whose primary food staple was meat, especially buffalo. All spoke a common Teton dialect and are commonly referred to as the *Teton* or *Western Sioux*. These bands made up a powerful confederation that, at first, did little more than harass the wagon trains passing over the Great Plains. Later, as the advance of white civilization increasingly threatened their way of life, the harassment escalated into fierce resistance. The Lakota were the US Army's primary opponents in the Sioux War of 1866–68, the Sioux War of 1876–77, and again in the final 1890 tragedy at Wounded Knee.

Numerous other tribes, besides the Sioux, also occupied the Great Plains of North America. To establish some meaningful convention for this atlas, the Indian tribes have been grouped into three categories: those in the course of the Indian campaigns, specifically the Crow and Shoshone, who were allied with the US government (text in blue), those who at some point in the course of these campaigns were enemies of the US government (text in red), and those who did not participate (text in black). The term "Sioux" will be used as it was in the 19th century and will invariably refer to tribes in armed opposition to US government policies.

Since warfare was a central part of the Plains Indian culture, it is easy to understand their violent resistance. It took massive force of arms to seize and occupy their lands. As warfare was deeply imprinted in the American settlers' culture as well, the stage was set for long periods of violence, broken only by intermittent lapses of peace, until one side finally achieved permanent dominance.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IOWA
ARAPAHO
PAWNEE
S. CHEYENNE
OSAGE
KIOWA
The Sioux
US ALLIES
OCCASIONAL US ENEMIES
NONINVOLVED INDIAN TRIBES
Great American Plains
Miles
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200
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CDC

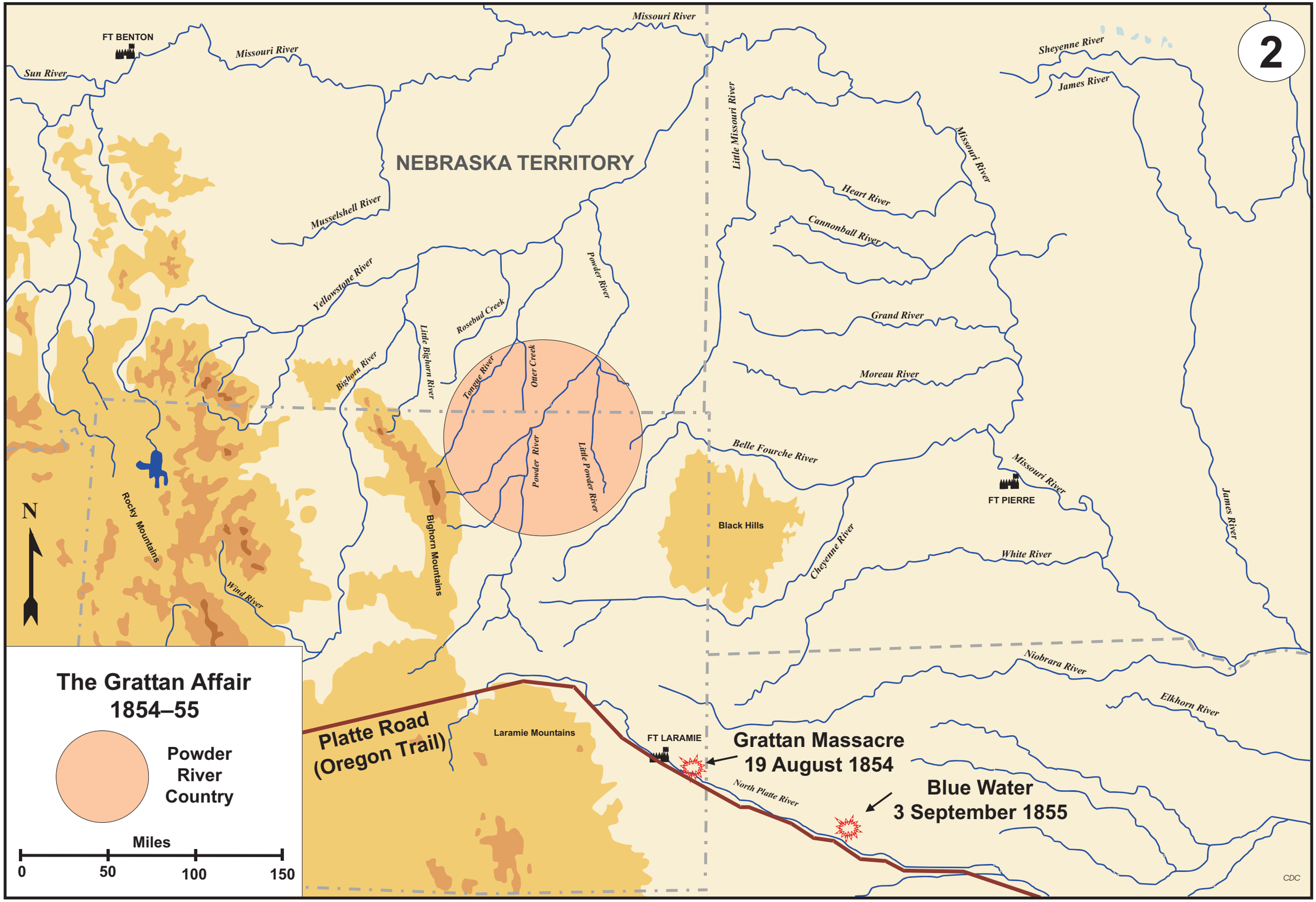
Map 2. The Grattan Affair, 1854–55

In 1851, the US government negotiated a treaty with the Sioux and their allies at Fort Laramie, Wyoming, to assure safe passage for emigrants traveling west along the Oregon Trail. The peace was tenuous, at best, by August 1854 when an emigrant reported to the commander of Fort Laramie that a Sioux warrior had stolen and butchered a stray cow. The inexperienced but enthusiastic Brevet Second Lieutenant John L. Grattan requested permission from his commander to take a detachment out to arrest the guilty warrior. The commander yielded to Grattan's request and authorized the young officer to take 29 men and 2 artillery pieces to a large Indian encampment where the violator was believed to be. The encampment the young lieutenant marched against consisted of a series of villages along the Platte River. Each year the Brulé, Miniconjou, and Oglala Sioux gathered near the fort to receive their annual annuity issue. The combined villages may have contained as many as 4,000 inhabitants.

Chief Brave (Conquering) Bear, the US appointed head chief of the Brulé, attempted to placate the over-eager lieutenant with an offer to buy the cow. However, Grattan demanded that the guilty warrior be handed over for punishment. At that point, it is unclear whether Grattan ordered his men to open fire or whether a nervous soldier panicked and fired into the gathering crowd. Regardless of how it began, the ensuing fight was brutally brief. Though the detachment's poorly sighted artillery caused little damage to the Indian village, it did mortally wound Brave (Conquering) Bear. The swift counterattack of the angry Sioux completely overwhelmed Grattan's small command killing the lieutenant and all but one of his men. Subsequently, over the next several months, the Sioux launched intensified retaliatory raids against emigrants along the Oregon–California Trail.

In retaliation for the massacre and attacks against emigrants, the US government ordered Brevet Brigadier General William S. Harney to punish the Sioux. In August 1855, Harney led a 600-man force of infantry and dragoons out of Fort Kearny, Nebraska, toward Fort Laramie. On 2 September, he located the Sioux village of Little Thunder (Brave Bear's successor) on Blue Water Creek near present-day Ash Hollow, Nebraska. Harney rejected Little Thunder's offer to negotiate and demanded that all those who had participated in the attacks against Grattan and the emigrant trail be turned over to the Army. The next day the village attempted an escape, but the soldiers cut them off, and Harney ordered an immediate attack. Little Thunder's warriors attempted to fight a rearguard action to allow their women and children time to escape. Even so, the soldiers quickly overwhelmed all resistance and utterly destroyed the village. The Sioux suffered 85 killed and 70 women and children captured; less than half of the 250 Sioux villagers escaped. Harney lost only five killed with another seven wounded.

Having avenged the destruction of Grattan's command, Harney then commenced to secure safe passage along the Oregon Trail. Threatening a repeat of the heavy-handed methods used against Little Thunder, Harney pressured the other Sioux leaders into agreeing to meet at Fort Laramie to negotiate an end to the hostilities. At Fort Laramie, Harney demanded that the Sioux stop interfering with traffic along the Oregon Trail and insisted they surrender all individuals involved in the Grattan Massacre. At the time, the Sioux had very little recourse but to accede to Harney's demands. Nevertheless, the affair would not be forgotten; the Sioux left in bitter anticipation of a day to avenge Harney's actions. Many of the Sioux bands also decided to move further west into the Powder River country and away from the troublesome emigrant trails. Their Westward migration displaced the Crow from the rich hunting grounds in the Powder River Basin and set the stage for future conflicts between the Sioux and the white man.


2
The Grattan Affair
1854–55
Powder
River
Country
Miles
0
50
100
150
N
FT BENTON
Sun River
Missouri River
Missouri River
NEBRASKA TERRITORY
Musselshell River
Yellowstone River
Little Bighorn River
Rosebud Creek
Powder River
Bighorn River
Tongue River
Otter Creek
Powder River
Little Powder River
Rocky Mountains
Wind River
Bighorn Mountains
Little Missouri River
Missouri River
Heart River
Cannonball River
Grand River
Moreau River
Belle Fourche River
Black Hills
Cheyenne River
Missouri River
FT PIERRE
White River
Sheyenne River
James River
James River
Niobrara River
Elkhorn River
Platte Road
(Oregon Trail)
Laramie Mountains
FT LARAMIE
Grattan Massacre
19 August 1854
North Platte River
Blue Water
3 September 1855
CDC

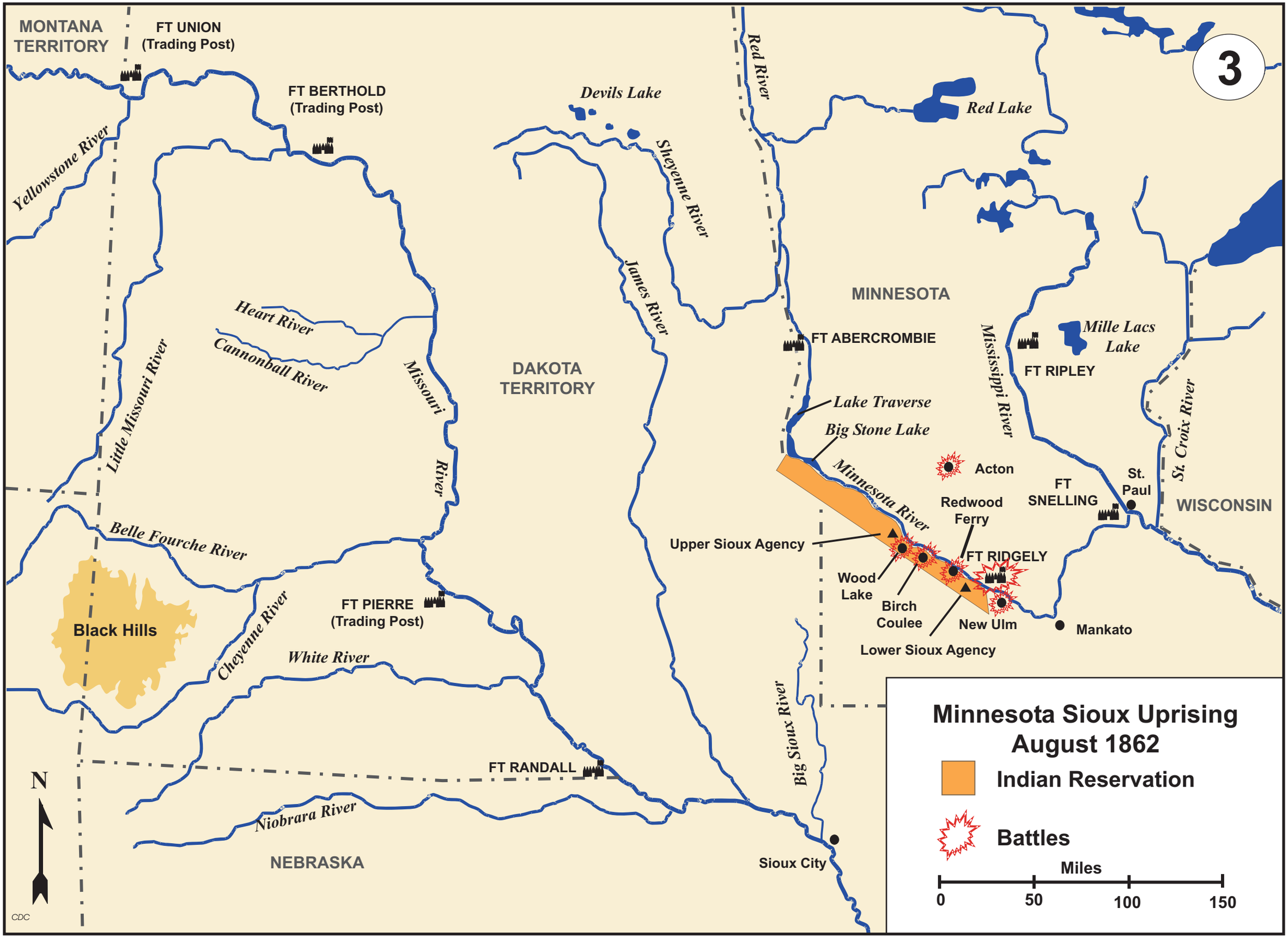
Map 3. Minnesota Sioux Uprising, August 1862

By 1862, the Santee Sioux had given up their traditional homelands, which comprised most of southern Minnesota, in exchange for a narrow reservation on the southern bank of the Minnesota River. As compensation for their lands, the Sioux were to receive cash annuities and supplies that would enable them to live without the resources from their traditional hunting grounds. Because of administrative delays, however, both the cash and food had not arrived by the summer of 1862. Crop failures the previous fall made the late food delivery particularly distressing to the Indians. Encroachment by settlers on reservation land and the unfair practices of many American traders also fueled Sioux suspicions and hatred. Furthermore, the Sioux were emboldened by the Minnesotans' relative weakness, brought on by the departure of many of their young men to fight in the Civil War. This combination of hunger, hatred, and the perceived weakness of the Minnesotans and the local military created an explosive situation that needed only a spark to bring on a full-scale war.

The spark came on 17 August 1862 when four Sioux warriors murdered five settlers near Acton, Minnesota. On 18 August, Indians at the Lower Sioux Agency rebelled, killing most of the settlers on their reservation. A few escapees managed to reach Fort Ridgely and warn its commander, Captain John S. Marsh, of the rebellion. Marsh and 47 men subsequently sortied from the fort only to be ambushed at Redwood Ferry, where half of them, including Marsh, were killed. Twenty-four soldiers managed to return to Fort Ridgely.

News of the rebellion spread quickly through the settler and Indian communities. For the Sioux, this was a catharsis of violence; for the settlers, a nightmare had come true. Most settlers in the Minnesota River Valley had no experience with warring Indians. Those who did not flee fast enough to a fort or defended settlement were at the Indians' mercy. The Sioux killed most of the settlers they encountered but often made captives of the women and children. In response, the Army marshaled its available strength, 180 men, at Fort Ridgely, where well-sited artillery helped the soldiers fend off two Sioux attacks. At the town of New Ulm, a magnet for settlers fleeing the rebellion, defenders also repulsed two Indian attacks. The stout resistance of the settlers and soldiers effectively halted the spread of the rebellion.

Now, the military seized the initiative. A relief expedition under Colonel Henry H. Sibley arrived at Fort Ridgely on 27 August 1862. Sibley's command consisted largely of green recruits with second-rate weapons. The Sioux surprised and inflicted a tactical defeat on Sibley's men at Birch Coulee on 2 September. This minor setback, in any case, did not change the course of the campaign. From 2 to 18 September, Sibley drilled his soldiers and received supplies and reinforcements, including 240 veterans of the 3d Minnesota Infantry Regiment. On 19 September, Sibley resumed his advance. This time, the expedition encountered and defeated the Sioux at Wood Lake on 23 September 1862. Three days later, hostilities ended when some of the Santee Sioux surrendered and released their 269 captives. However, many of those that had participated in the uprising fled west into the Dakotas. Outraged over the uprising, state authorities executed 38 Indian prisoners and banished the other captive Sioux to reservations outside Minnesota.


3
MONTANA TERRITORY
FT UNION (Trading Post)
FT BERTHOLD (Trading Post)
Yellowstone River
Little Missouri River
Heart River
Cannonball River
Missouri River
Belle Fourche River
Black Hills
Cheyenne River
FT PIERRE (Trading Post)
White River
FT RANDALL
Niobrara River
NEBRASKA
N
CDC
Devils Lake
Sheyenne River
James River
DAKOTA TERRITORY
Red River
Red Lake
MINNESOTA
FT ABERCROMBIE
Lake Traverse
Big Stone Lake
Minnesota River
Upper Sioux Agency
Wood Lake
Birch Coulee
Lower Sioux Agency
Big Sioux River
Sioux City
Mississippi River
Mille Lacs Lake
FT RIPLEY
Acton
Redwood Ferry
FT RIDGELY
New Ulm
FT SNELLING
St. Paul
Mankato
St. Croix River
WISCONSIN
Minnesota Sioux Uprising
August 1862
Indian Reservation
Battles
Miles
0
50
100
150

Map 4. The Sioux Campaigns of 1863 and 1864

In late 1862, the Army lacked the resources to pursue the Santee Sioux who fled west into the Dakotas. It wasn't until the summer of 1863 that General John Pope, Commander of the Department of the Northwest, managed to collect enough resources to continue the campaign. He directed his subordinates to conduct a two-pronged campaign to find and punish the fugitive Santee Sioux and to threaten both the Yankton and Teton Sioux who had begun to support their Eastern brethren. Pope's overall goal was to secure Minnesota's western border from any Indian threat.

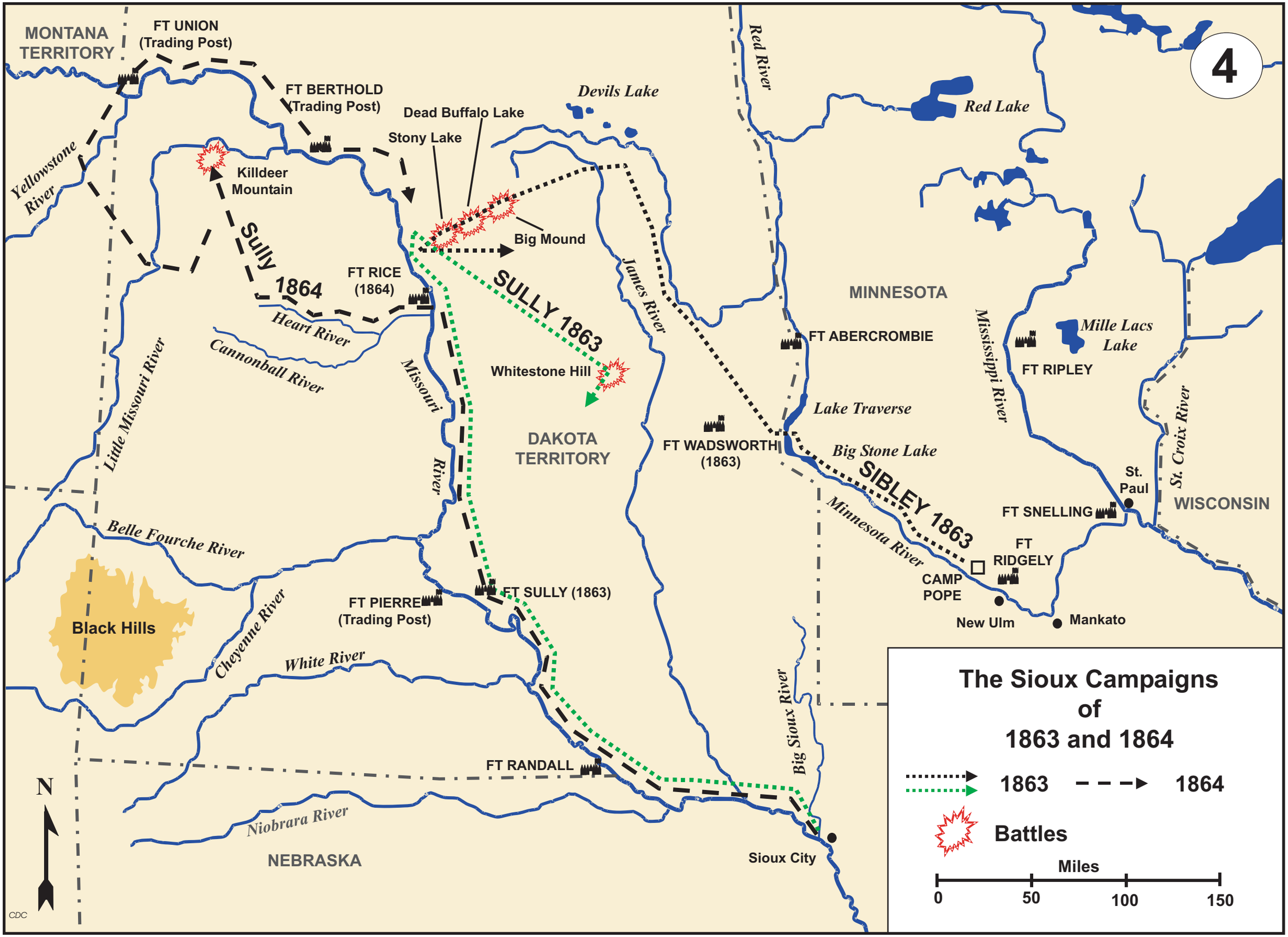
Brigadier General Henry H. Sibley commanded a 3,000-man column that marched west from Camp Pope, Minnesota. Brigadier General Alfred Sully commanded the second column. His command of about 1,200 men consisted of volunteer cavalry units from Iowa and Nebraska and some supporting artillery. He marched north from Fort Randall, South Dakota. The plan called for the two columns to rendezvous near Devils Lake in North Dakota.

Sibley's large column departed Camp Pope on 16 June 1863 and reached the vicinity of Devils Lake around mid-July. There he established a base camp and then commenced pursuit of a large band of Santee and some Yankton moving toward the Missouri River. On 24 July, Sibley's column caught up with the Sioux at Big Mound. The Indians escaped after fighting a desperate rearguard action that lasted most of a day. On 26 July, Sibley came close to overtaking the Sioux again at Dead Buffalo Lake when the Santee, reinforced with some Teton buffalo hunting groups, attacked Sully's column. Sully's troops cut short the Sioux attack with howitzer fire and then counterattacked driving them from the field. Sully pursued and caught up with the Sioux at Stony Lake on 28 July. Again, the Sioux fought a desperate rearguard action that allowed their families to escape over the Missouri River. In the course of the three fights, the Indians had lost an estimated 150 warriors and a large portion of their food supplies and equipage—a devastating loss. Though Sibley's losses at Big Mound had been minor, he was critically short of supplies. So after 3 days of searching unsuccessfully for Sully's column, Sibley decided to return to Minnesota reaching Fort Snelling on 13 September.

Delayed by low water on the Missouri River, Sully's command didn't arrive at the campaign area until the end of August at which time he learned that Sibley had returned to Minnesota. He also gained information that the uncaptured Santee Sioux had moved to the vicinity of the James River to hunt buffalo. Taking pursuit again, Sully caught up with the Indians near Whitestone Hill on the evening of 3 September. There he found a large village that may have contained as many as 1,000 warriors. In the confusion of a chaotic night battle, most of the Sioux managed to escape. However, the fighting was fierce; Sully lost 20 killed and 38 wounded, and the Army estimated Indian casualties at 150 to 200. In the ensuing pursuit, the Indians lost the majority of their equipage and 250 women and children captured. Sully had achieved a major victory and, being low on supplies, decided to return to Fort Randall.

In 1864, despite the decisive victories scored against them, a collection of free Santee, Teton, and some Yankton gathered together on the Little Missouri River and once again threatened the eastern Dakota settlements. In June 1864, Sully gathered over 3,000 men and marched up the Missouri River to disperse this conjoined band of Sioux. After establishing Fort Rice near present-day Bismarck, he turned his column west and commenced his pursuit. On 28 July 1864, he attacked the large Sioux contingent at Killdeer Mountain. During the battle, Sully formed his command into a British-style square and slowly advanced against the Indian encampment. In the day-long fight, the Indians suffered heavy casualties and were forced to abandon their village and most of their supplies. After the battle, Sully continued west to the Yellowstone River to intimidate the Teton, then returned to Fort Ridgely, Minnesota, in early October.

The campaigns of 1863 and 1864 had been highly successful in pushing the frontier further to the West. With the Santee Sioux decisively crushed, the Minnesota settlements no longer had any fear of an Indian threat. Anyway, the Teton Sioux participation in the hostilities had been minor. Only 2 years later, along the Bozeman Trail, the US Army directly challenged the Teton with very different results.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MONTANA TERRITORY
FT UNION (Trading Post)
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Dead Buffalo Lake
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Devils Lake
Red River
Red Lake
Yellowstone River
Killdeer Mountain
Sully 1864
FT RICE (1864)
Big Mound
SULLY 1863
James River
MINNESOTA
FT ABERCROMBIE
Mille Lacs Lake
FT RIPLEY
Mississippi River
Heart River
Cannonball River
Missouri River
Little Missouri River
Whitestone Hill
Lake Traverse
Big Stone Lake
DAKOTA TERRITORY
FT WADSWORTH (1863)
SIBLEY 1863
St. Paul
St. Croix River
WISCONSIN
FT SNELLING
Minnesota River
FT RIDGELY
CAMP POPE
New Ulm
Mankato
Belle Fourche River
Black Hills
Cheyenne River
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FT SULLY (1863)
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The Sioux Campaigns of 1863 and 1864
1863
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Battles
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II. The Sioux War of 1866–68

Map 5. The Bozeman Trail and the Connor Expedition

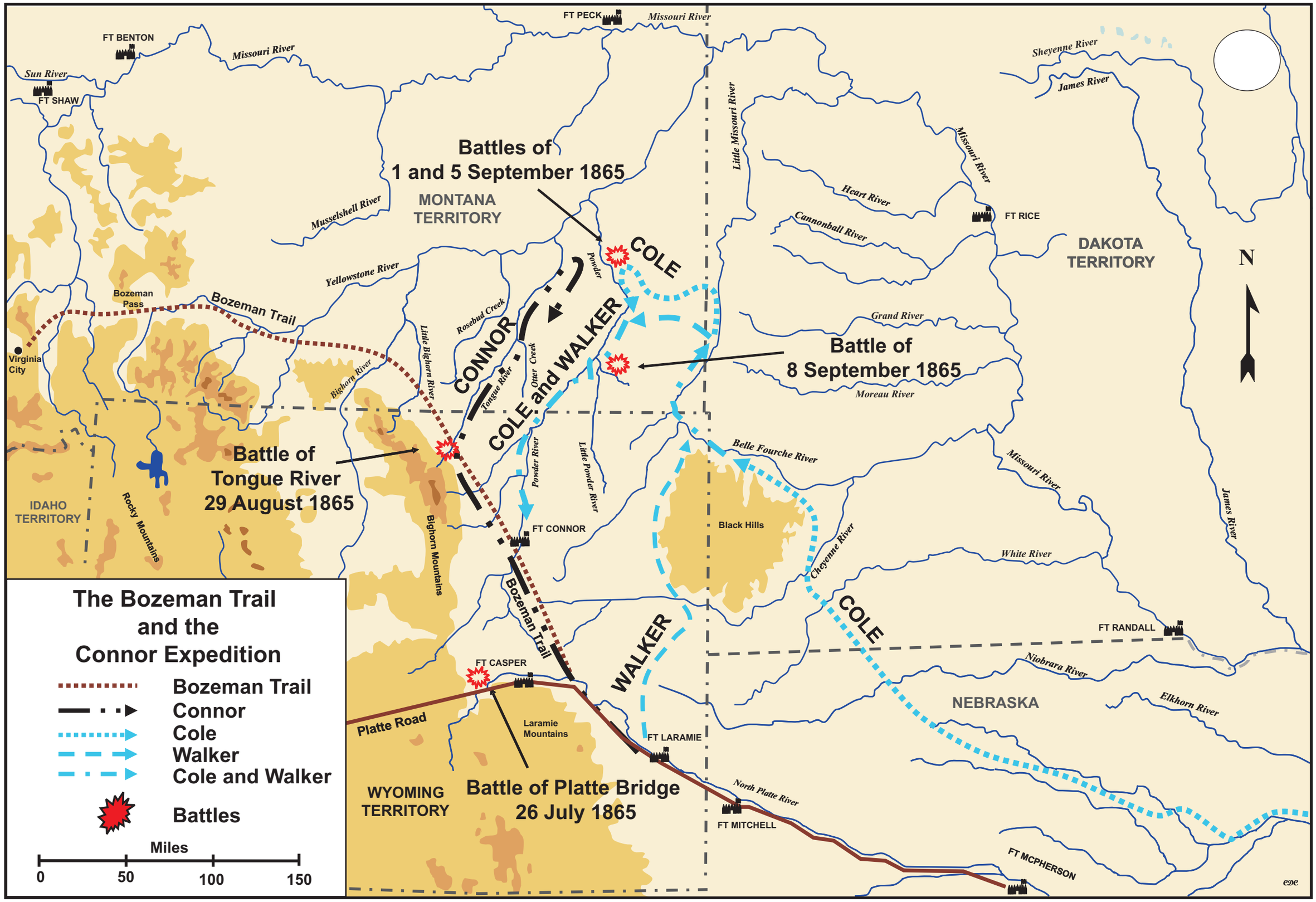
The discovery of gold in western Montana in 1862 around Grasshopper Creek brought hundreds of prospectors to the region. Nearly all of these fortune seekers had come up the Platte Road, the northern fork of the old Oregon–California Trail, and moved into Montana from the west. Others worked their way up the Missouri River as far as Fort Benton, then came down into the goldfields from the northeast. In 1863, two entrepreneurs, John Bozeman, a Georgian who had arrived on the frontier only 2 years earlier, and John Jacobs, a veteran mountain man, blazed a trail from the goldfields to link up with the Platte Road west of Fort Laramie. This route cut through Bozeman Pass east of Virginia City, crossed the Yellowstone and Bighorn Rivers, ran south along the east side of the Bighorn Mountains, crossed the Tongue and Powder Rivers, then ran south through the Powder River country to join the Platte Road about 80 miles west of Fort Laramie. It reduced by nearly 400 miles the distance required by other routes to reach the goldfields. However, the trail cut through prized hunting land claimed by the Teton Sioux and their allies along the Powder River. Travelers along the Bozeman Trail soon found themselves under fierce attack by hostile Indians.

In 1865, responding to an Indian attack against the Platte Bridge near modern Casper, Wyoming, and to demands by the emigrants for protection, the US Army sent three converging columns under the command of General Patrick E. Connor into the region. Colonel Nelson Cole commanded the Omaha column that consisted of 1,400 volunteer cavalry. Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Walker commanded the second column with 600 volunteer cavalry. Connor commanded the third column. His force consisted of 558 soldiers and another 179 Indian scouts. The strategy called for the three columns to rendezvous in early September on Rosebud Creek.

Connor reached the Upper Powder River by mid-August. He established Fort Connor then continued northwest in pursuit of the Indians. On 29 August he found and attacked the Arapaho village of Black Bear on the Tongue River near modern Ranchester, Wyoming. His attack overran the village and captured the pony herd. However, after completing the destruction of the village, several spirited Indian counterattacks convinced Connor that he should withdraw his outnumbered troops. Then, in the midst of early winter storms, Connor moved north to locate Cole's and Walker's columns.

Meanwhile, Cole had marched just north of the Black Hills and headed up the Belle Fourche River where he linked up with Walker's column on 18 August. Initially, the two columns continued to push deep into Indian lands until they grew dangerously low on supplies and decided to move toward the Tongue River and link up with Conner. On 1 September, a large Cheyenne war party attacked the columns altering Cole's decision to move toward the Tongue River. Instead, they headed down the Powder River hoping to replenish their supplies with the abundant game known to be in the Yellowstone River valley. The night of 2 September inflicted early winter storms on the columns. More than 200 of Cole's horses and mules, already weakened by hunger, died from exposure and exhaustion. Again, Cole changed his direction of march and decided to return to Fort Laramie for provisions. On the morning of 5 September, Cole and Walker unknowingly stumbled into the vicinity of a large village near the mouth of the Little Powder River. The village was an unprecedented gathering of Sioux, Northern Cheyenne, and Southern Cheyenne. More than 1,000 Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho warriors swarmed out of the village to attack the columns. The battle raged for 3 hours before the still undiscovered village moved safely out of the way, and the Indians broke off the fight. Then again on 8 September, the exhausted and starving troops unwittingly threatened the village. The Indian rearguard easily delayed the soldiers and the village escaped a second time.

Over the course of the next 12 days, the columns continued to plod along. Each day dozens of horses and mules died of starvation. The Indians hovered around the columns like vultures and, had it not been for the detachment's artillery, probably would have been more troublesome to the troops. On 20 September, Cole and Walker's troops straggled into Fort Connor. Connor's equally exhausted troops joined them on 24 September. The expedition had failed to subdue the tribes and, instead, had emboldened the Sioux to continue their determined resistance to any white incursion into Powder River country. Nonetheless, the presence of Fort Connor on the Bozeman Trail encouraged increased immigrant travel along the route and further amplified their demands for protection.


FT BENTON
FT PECK
Missouri River
Sun River
FT SHAW
Sheyenne River
James River
Little Missouri River
Missouri River
Heart River
Cannonball River
FT RICE
DAKOTA TERRITORY
N
Battles of
1 and 5 September 1865
MONTANA TERRITORY
Musselshell River
Yellowstone River
Powder
COLE
Bozeman Pass
Bozeman Trail
Rosebud Creek
Little Bighorn River
CONNOR
Tongue River
Otter Creek
COLE and WALKER
Grand River
Battle of
8 September 1865
Moreau River
Virginia City
Bighorn River
Battle of
Tongue River
29 August 1865
Powder River
Little Powder River
Belle Fourche River
Missouri River
IDAHO TERRITORY
Rocky Mountains
Bighorn Mountains
FT CONNOR
Black Hills
Cheyenne River
White River
James River
Bozeman Trail
WALKER
COLE
FT RANDALL
FT CASPER
Niobrara River
NEBRASKA
Elkhorn River
Platte Road
Laramie Mountains
FT LARAMIE
WYOMING TERRITORY
Battle of Platte Bridge
26 July 1865
North Platte River
FT MITCHELL
FT MCPHERSON
The Bozeman Trail
and the
Connor Expedition
Bozeman Trail
Connor
Cole
Walker
Cole and Walker
Battles
Miles
0
50
100
150
cpc

Map 6. The Bozeman Trail Forts, 1866–68

The failure of the Connor Expedition prompted the government to seek a diplomatic solution, and, in June 1866, while a number of the Powder River chiefs were at Fort Laramie negotiating a treaty to allow safe passage through the Powder River country, Colonel Henry B. Carrington led the 2d Battalion, 18th Infantry, toward the Bozeman Trail. His orders required him to garrison Fort Reno, formerly Fort Connor (built the previous year by General Connor), and to establish two new forts along the Bozeman Trail. From those forts, he was to provide protection and escort for emigrant travel into the Montana Territory. Considering the number of chiefs participating in the peace negotiations, the prospect for an early settlement seemed good, and the Army did not expect Carrington's mission to involve significant combat actions. Consequently, in addition to the 700 troops of the 18th, more than 300 women, children, sutlers, and civilian contractors accompanied Carrington. The column included 226 mule-drawn wagons, the 35-piece regimental band, 1,000 head of cattle to provide fresh meat for the force, and all the tools and equipment necessary to create a community in the wilderness.

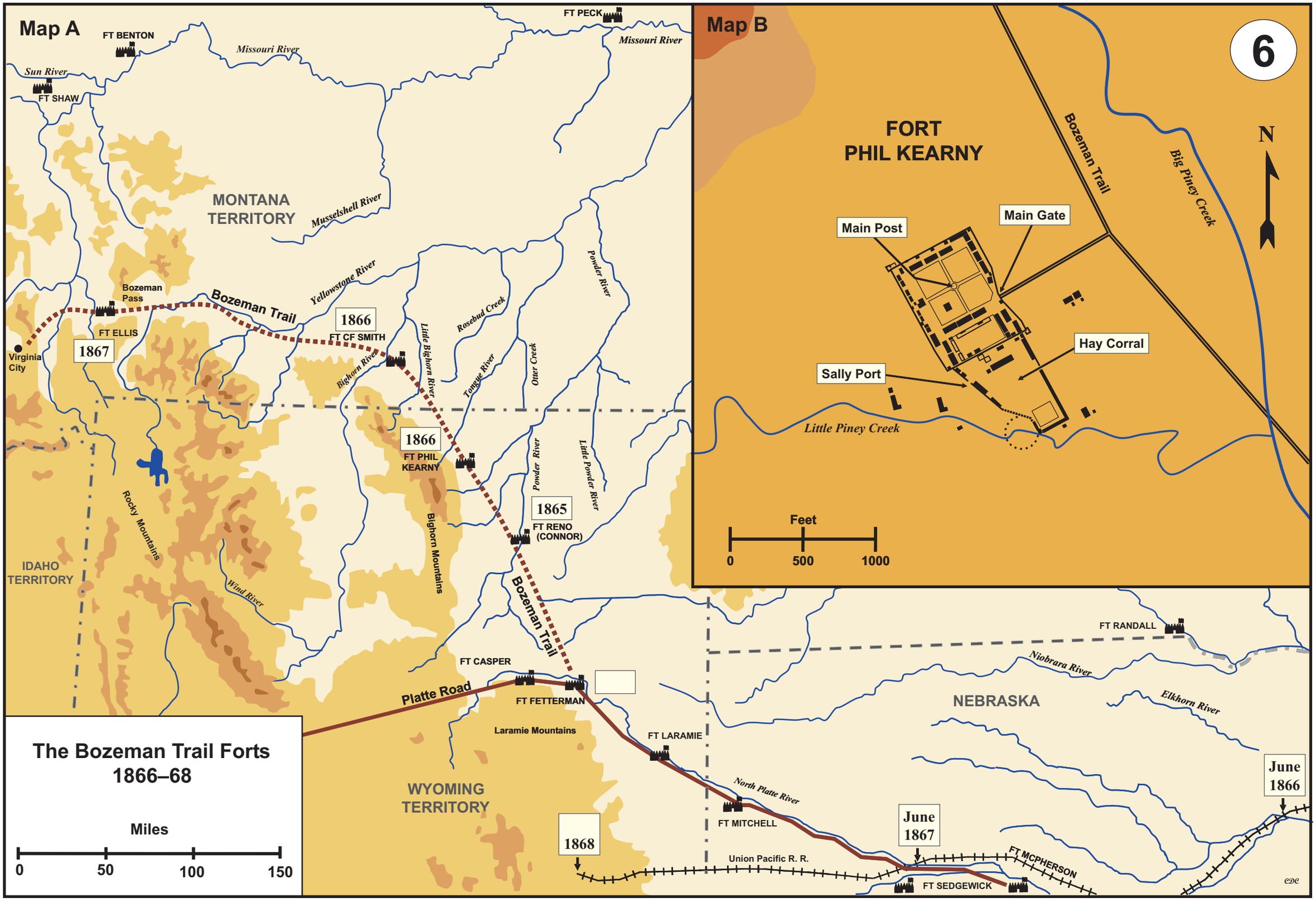
Carrington left Fort Laramie fully confident that he would be able to accomplish his mission without difficulty. He seemed to be well suited for his mission based upon his proven merit as a planner and organizer. A graduate of Yale, he was a practicing attorney when the Civil War began in April 1861. He volunteered immediately for service and secured a commission as colonel of the 18th Infantry on its organization in May 1861. He was brevetted brigadier general in November 1862. Although he saw no action with the 18th, he performed numerous staff duties efficiently and retained command of the 18th at the end of the war.

On 28 June 1866, Carrington's column arrived at Fort Reno. Here, Carrington spent 10 days repairing, provisioning, and garrisoning the fort with a company of infantry. On 9 July, the remainder of the 2d Battalion left Fort Reno with all its impedimenta. Four days later, Carrington selected a site for the construction of his headquarters post.

Carrington's chosen site lay just south of the point where the Bozeman Trail crossed Big Piney Creek. The large valley in which the fort sat was surrounded on three sides by high terrain. To both the north and south, the Bozeman Trail passed over ridges out of sight of the fort. To the west, the valley stretched 5 or 6 miles along Little Piney Creek before giving way to the foothills of the Bighorn Mountains. It was up this valley that the woodcutters and log teams would have to travel to provide the all-important building materials and fuel for the post's cooking and heating fires. Carrington's selection of this position has long been questioned. One weakness of the site was that the Sioux and Cheyenne continuously dominated the high ground and observed all movement into and around the fort.

Construction of Fort Phil Kearny began as soon as Carrington's column arrived and continued almost until it was abandoned. The main post (map B) was an 800-foot by 600-foot stockade made by butting together 11-foot-high side-hewn pine logs in a trench 3 feet deep. The stockade enclosed barracks and living quarters for the troops, officers, and most of their families; mess and hospital facilities; the magazine; and a variety of other structures. An unstockaded area encompassing shops, stables, and the hay corral extended another 700 feet from the south palisade to Little Piney Creek, the primary water source for the fort. Two primary entrances provided access for wagons to the post, the main gate on the east wall and a sally port on the west side of the unstockaded area.

In July, Carrington detached two companies under Captain Nathaniel C. Kenney to move even farther up the Bozeman Trail to build a third fort, Fort C.F. Smith, 91 miles north of Fort Phil Kearny near present-day Yellowtail, Montana. The Army also established two additional forts along the trail in 1867: Fort Fetterman near the trail's starting point and Fort Ellis on the west side of Bozeman Pass.


Map A
FT BENTON
FT PECK
Missouri River
Missouri River
Sun River
FT SHAW
MONTANA TERRITORY
Musselshell River
Bozeman Pass
Bozeman Trail
Yellowstone River
1866
FT CF SMITH
FT ELLIS
1867
Virginia City
Bighorn River
Little Bighorn River
Rosebud Creek
Tongue River
Otter Creek
Powder River
1866
FT PHIL KEARNY
Powder River
Little Powder River
1865
FT RENO (CONNOR)
Rocky Mountains
Bighorn Mountains
IDAHO TERRITORY
Wind River
Bozeman Trail
FT CASPER
Platte Road
FT FETTERMAN
Laramie Mountains
FT LARAMIE
WYOMING TERRITORY
North Platte River
FT MITCHELL
1868
Union Pacific R. R.
June 1867
FT MCPHERSON
FT SEDGEWICK
June 1866
FT RANDALL
Niobrara River
NEBRASKA
Elkhorn River
The Bozeman Trail Forts 1866–68
Miles
0
50
100
150
Map B
6
FORT PHIL KEARNY
Bozeman Trail
Big Piney Creek
N
Main Post
Main Gate
Hay Corral
Sally Port
Little Piney Creek
Feet
0
500
1000

Map 7. Fort Phil Kearny Besieged

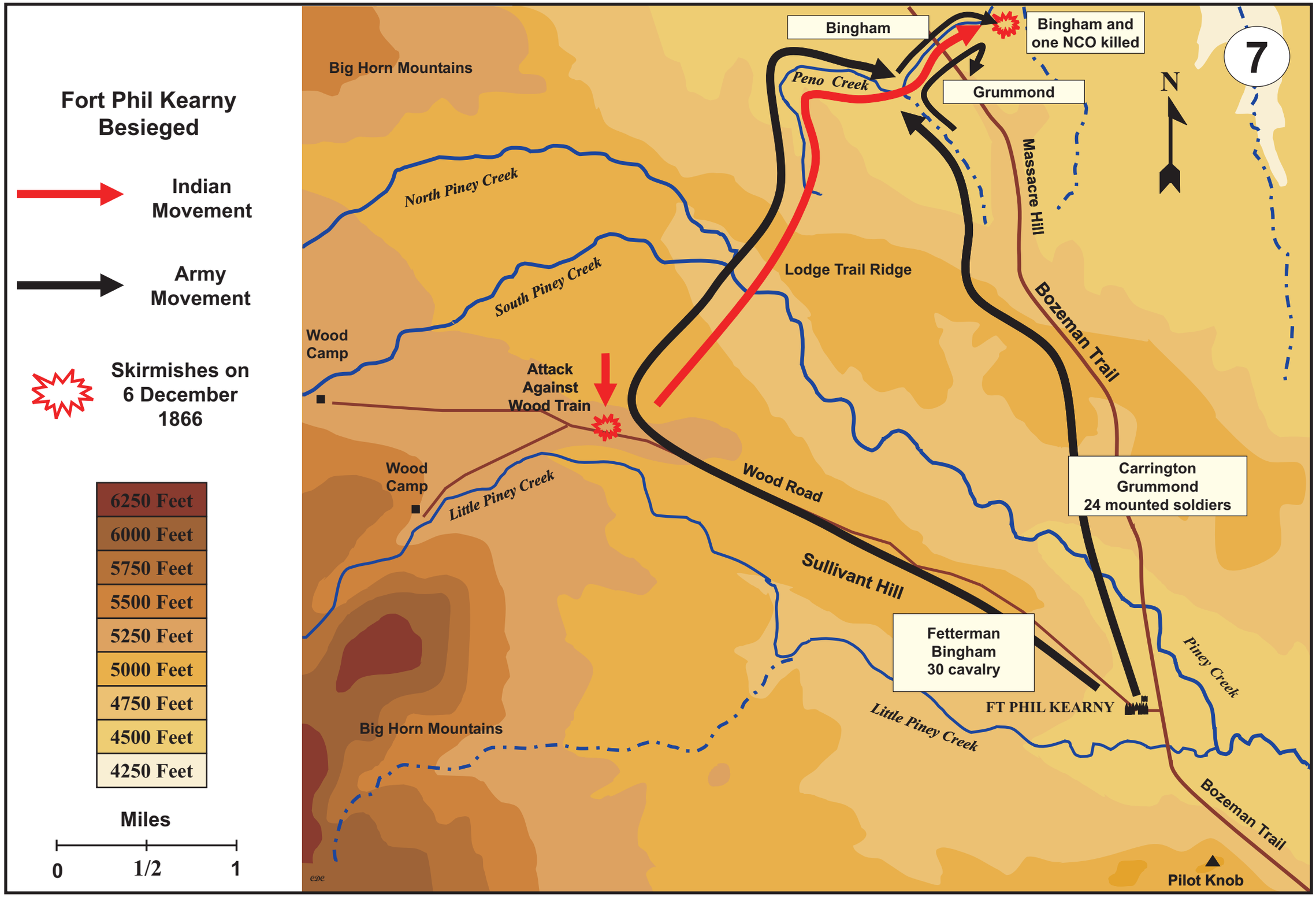
Red Cloud, an influential Oglala Sioux chief, was strongly opposed to the US Army's efforts to build forts along the Bozeman Trail. He had become convinced by episodes such as the Grattan Affair and Brigadier Harney's retaliation that his Oglala Sioux could no longer live in the Platte River Region near Fort Laramie. Therefore, in the late 1850's, the Oglala Sioux pushed west into the Powder River country hoping to stay away from the continuing US migration. He saw the Powder River country as his people's last refuge from the encroaching whites.

Almost as soon as Carrington began construction on his Bozeman Trail forts, hostilities commenced between the Army and the Sioux. Carrington concentrated all his limited resources on building Fort Phil Kearny. He applied little emphasis on training or offensive operations and only reacted to Indian raids with ineffectual pursuits. On the other hand, Red Cloud concentrated most of his efforts on sporadic harassments against Fort Phil Kearny and traffic along the Bozeman Trail. His warriors became very adept at stealing livestock and threatening the woodcutting parties. The Sioux avoided all unnecessary risk and easily avoided most Army attempts at pursuit, which demoralized the soldiers because of their inability to bring the Indians to battle. Red Cloud's warriors also presented a constant threat of attack along the Bozeman Trail. The forts' garrisons barely had the resources to protect themselves, so emigrant travel along the trail all but ceased. In essence, the trail became a military road, and most of the traffic was limited to military traffic bringing in supplies. Red Cloud's strategy of a distant siege had negated the shortcut to the Montana gold fields.

In November, Carrington received a small number of reinforcements. They included: Captain (Brevet Lieutenant Colonel) William J. Fetterman and Captain (Brevet Major) James Powell—both experienced combat veterans of the Civil War. The very aggressive Fetterman quickly joined with other frustrated officers to push Carrington for offensive action against the Indians. Unfortunately, like most of his fellow officers at the fort, he had no experience in Indian warfare.

In December 1866, the Indians were encouraged by their success in harassing the forts and decided to attempt to lure an Army detachment into an ambush. During that same time period, having completed essential work on the fort, Carrington decided to initiate offensive operations. Carrington planned to counter the next raid with his own two-pronged attack. He instructed Captain Fetterman to pursue the raiders and push them down Peno Creek. Carrington would then take a second group of soldiers over Lodge Trail Ridge and cut off the withdrawing warriors. On 6 December 1866, the Indians attacked the wood train and Carrington executed his planned counterattack. In the fight, Lieutenants Bingham and Grummond disobeyed orders and pursued Indian decoy parties into an ambush that resulted in the death of Bingham and one noncommissioned officer. Only stern discipline and timely action taken by Captain Fetterman who advanced toward the sounds of the guns prevented a larger tragedy on that day.

The 6 December skirmish influenced Carrington to suspend his plans for offensive actions and to concentrate on training instead. Conversely, the Sioux were encouraged by their success and continued to refine their ambush strategy. On 19 December, they made another attempt to lure an Army detachment into an ambush with an attack on the wood train. Captain Powell led the relief force and prudently declined to pursue the raiders. The Sioux quickly planned their next attack for 21 December.


Fort Phil Kearny Besieged
Indian Movement
Army Movement
Skirmishes on 6 December 1866
6250 Feet
6000 Feet
5750 Feet
5500 Feet
5250 Feet
5000 Feet
4750 Feet
4500 Feet
4250 Feet
Miles
0
1/2
1
7
N
Big Horn Mountains
North Piney Creek
South Piney Creek
Wood Camp
Attack Against Wood Train
Wood Camp
Little Piney Creek
Bingham
Peno Creek
Bingham and one NCO killed
Grummond
Massacre Hill
Lodge Trail Ridge
Bozeman Trail
Wood Road
Carrington Grummond 24 mounted soldiers
Sullivant Hill
Fetterman Bingham 30 cavalry
FT PHIL KEARNY
Little Piney Creek
Piney Creek
Big Horn Mountains
Bozeman Trail
Pilot Knob

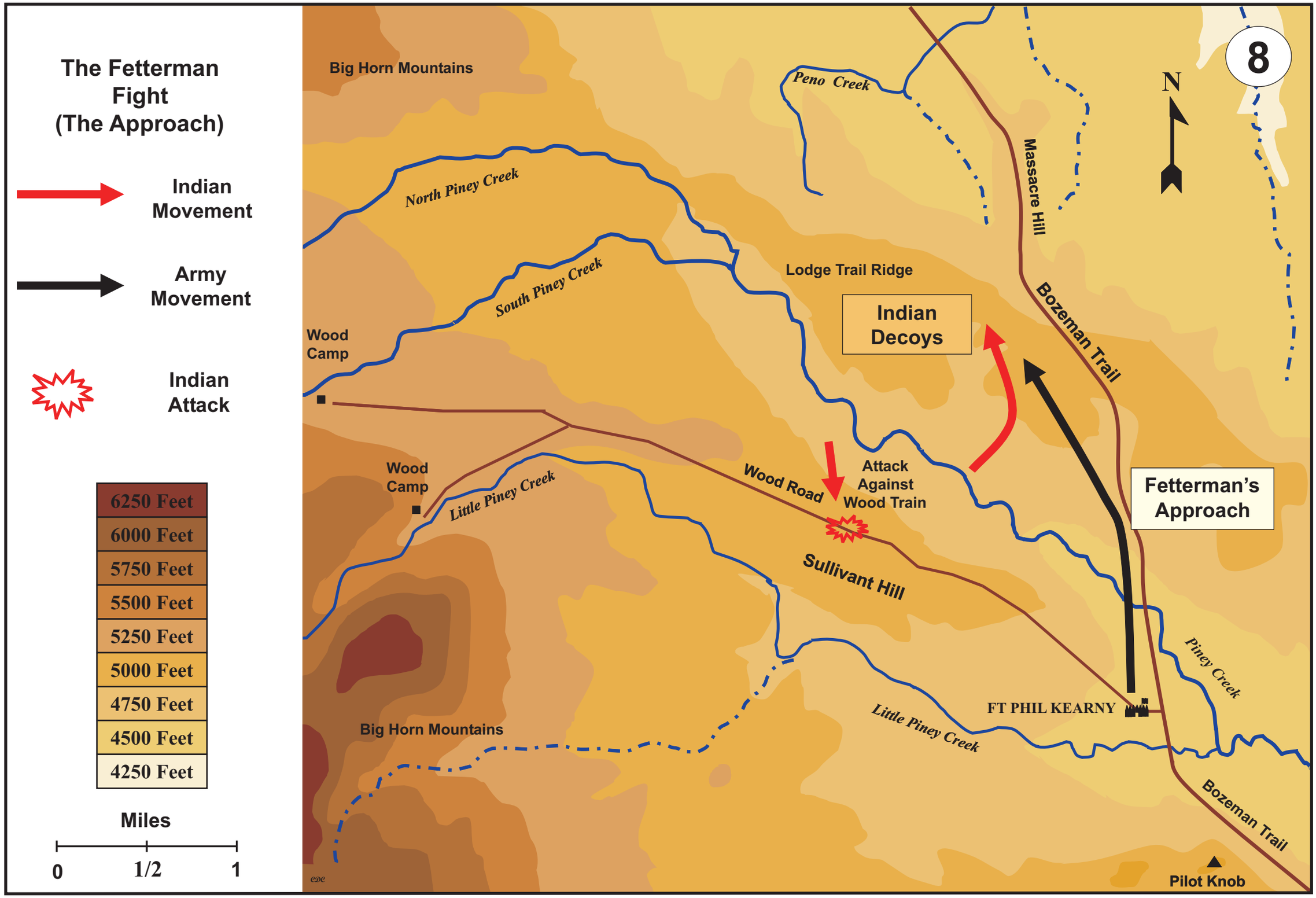
Map 8. The Fetterman Fight: The Approach

Friday morning, 21 December 1866, dawned cold and gray around Fort Phil Kearny. The temperature hovered below freezing, and snow blanketed the valleys, pine woods, and ridges in the foothills of the Bighorn Mountains. At about 1000, Colonel Carrington ordered the wood train to proceed to the pinery for the daily woodcutting detail. Knowing that an attack on the wood train was likely, he sent an especially strong escort with the wagons. Within an hour, the lookout on Pilot Knob signaled that the wood train was under attack, and firing could be heard at the fort. As he had done on similar occasions, Carrington immediately ordered a column to relieve the besieged detail. Captain Powell had successfully carried out a similar mission just 2 days earlier. But that morning, Captain Fetterman insisted on commanding the relief column.

There is considerable controversy about Carrington's orders to Fetterman. Most secondary sources agree that Carrington told him to relieve the wood train and then return to the fort. Under no circumstances was he to go beyond Lodge Trail Ridge. On the other hand, there is no contemporary evidence that Carrington ever gave the controversial order not to go beyond Lodge Trail Ridge. It is possible that Carrington's consent to Fetterman's request to lead the large relief force was another preplanned offensive movement designed to catch the wood train raiders as they withdrew into the Peno Creek drainage. The story of the order may be a postbattle fabrication intended to focus the blame for the tragedy on disobedience of orders instead of the failure of a planned offensive movement against the Indians.

At 1115, Fetterman moved out of the southwestern sally port of the fort with 49 handpicked men from 4 companies of the 18th Infantry Regiment armed with muzzle-loading Springfields (A Company: 21, C Company: 9, E Company: 6, and H Company: 13). A small number of the infantry, possibly the 13 men with H Company, may have been mounted. A few minutes later, Lieutenant George Grummond followed Fetterman with 27 mounted troops from the 2d Cavalry Regiment, mostly armed with Spencer repeating rifles taken from the regimental band. Captain Frederick Brown, a close friend of Fetterman, volunteered to join the column. James Wheatley and Isaac Fisher, two civilians armed with repeating rifles, also volunteered to go. Although Fetterman probably never uttered the phrase attached to his legacy, "With 80 men I could ride through the entire Sioux nation," he was, like most other Army officers, contemptuous of his Indian foes. Nevertheless, Fetterman did embark with 80 men.

Fetterman's route is also controversial. However, it is probable that he led his force directly north, passing to the east of Sullivant Hill before crossing the creek and ascending Lodge Trail Ridge. Fetterman's infantry most likely paralleled the road with the cavalry along the slopes on each side as flankers. Whether or not the order not to cross the ridge was factual, it was clear to all those watching from the fort that Fetterman's movement would take him over Lodge Trail Ridge.

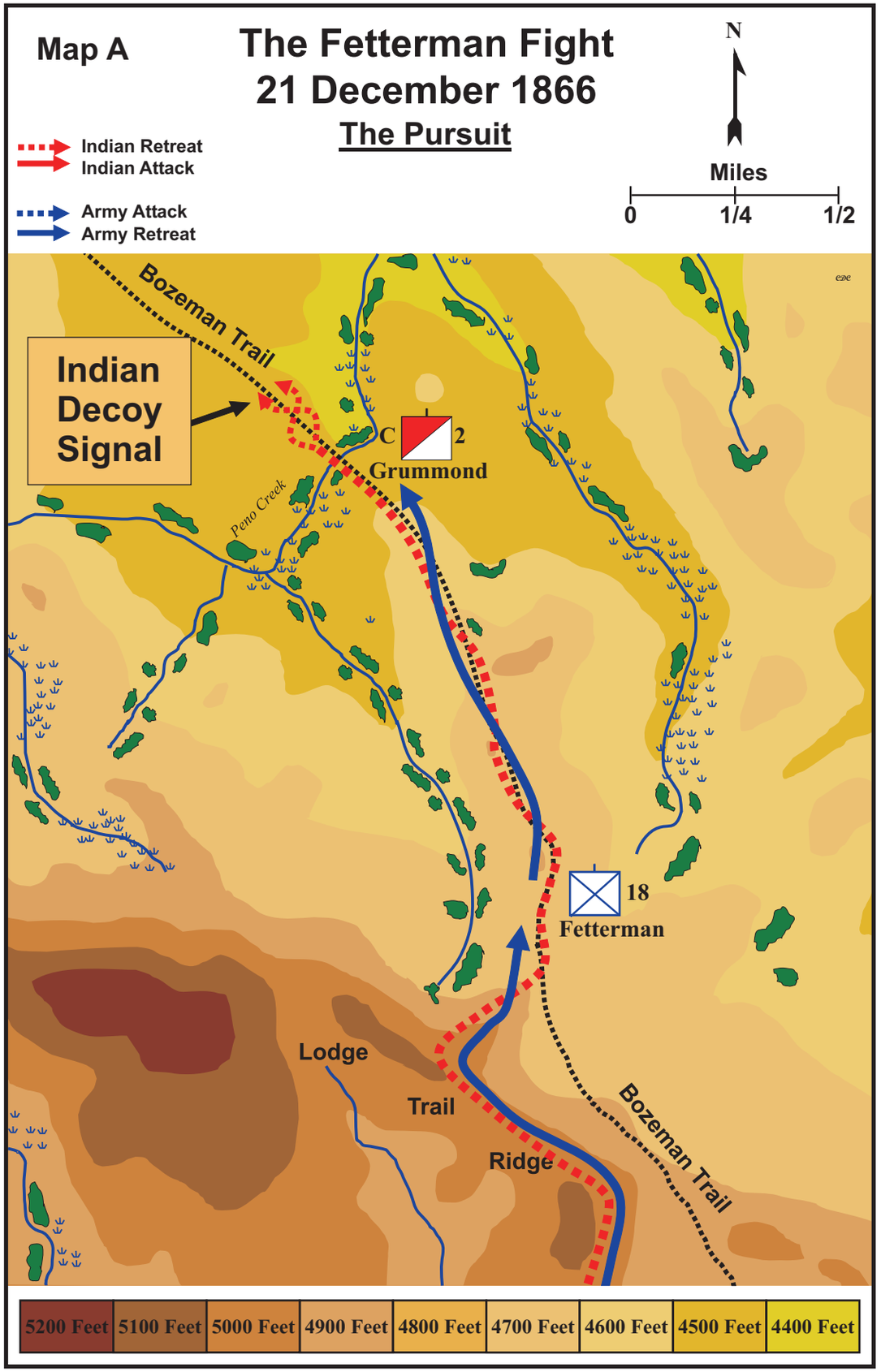

The Fetterman Fight (The Approach)
Indian Movement
Army Movement
Indian Attack
6250 Feet
6000 Feet
5750 Feet
5500 Feet
5250 Feet
5000 Feet
4750 Feet
4500 Feet
4250 Feet
Miles
0
1/2
1
Big Horn Mountains
Peno Creek
North Piney Creek
South Piney Creek
Lodge Trail Ridge
Massacre Hill
Bozeman Trail
N
8
Indian Decoys
Wood Camp
Wood Camp
Little Piney Creek
Wood Road
Attack Against Wood Train
Sullivant Hill
Fetterman's Approach
Piney Creek
FT PHIL KEARNY
Little Piney Creek
Big Horn Mountains
Bozeman Trail
Pilot Knob

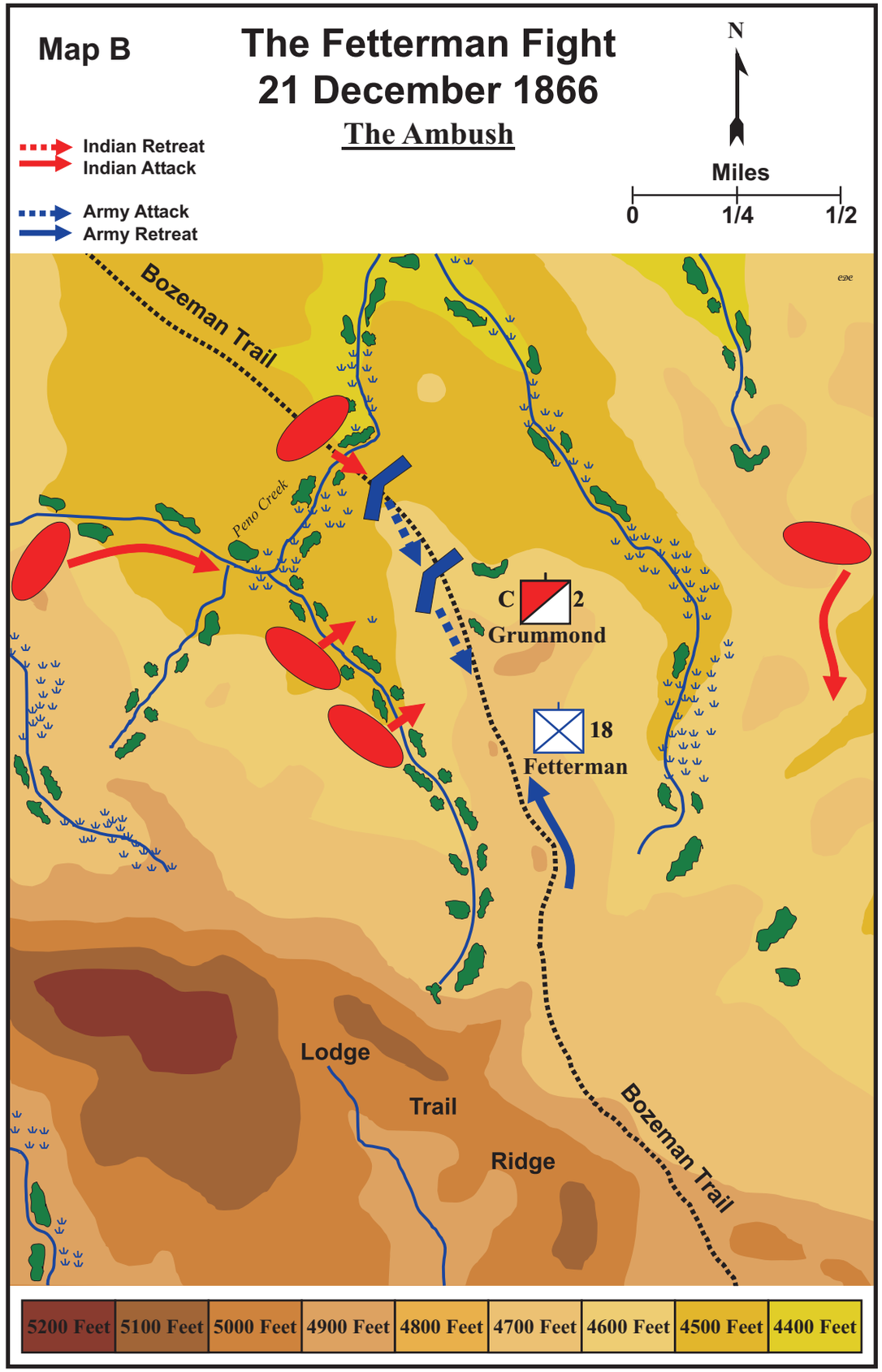
Map 9. The Fetterman Fight: The Pursuit and Ambush

Although the details of the fight are uncertain, it appears that the mounted troops and the foot infantry became separated (see map A). Whether Fetterman gave the order or Grummond was acting on his own will never be known, but the cavalry, along with a small detachment of mounted infantry and two civilians, moved ahead of the infantry soon after passing over Lodge Trail Ridge. Indian decoys demonstrated tauntingly before the relief column and lured them toward Peno Creek. Based on his past tendency for impetuous action, Grummond was probably anxious to come to grips with the foe.

At the foot of the slope, however, hundreds of Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho Indians sprang their trap (see map B). Indian accounts indicate that the Cheyenne were hiding to the west of the ridge in the trees, scrub, and depressions around Peno Creek and that the Sioux and Arapaho were in hiding to the north along Peno Creek and to the east of the road behind the next ridge.

Grummond's mounted detachment retreated back up the hill. Wheatley and Fisher, the two civilians, along with several veterans, dismounted and defended a small outcrop of rocks. These experienced frontiersmen understood that it was fatal to attempt a mounted retreat from attacking Indian horsemen. Wheatley and Fisher apparently used their repeating rifles to good effect before succumbing. Carrington later claimed in his report that there were 60 pools of blood surrounding the position. Nevertheless, the two civilians bought with their lives the time Grummond needed to rally his mounted troops at the top of the hill.


Map A
The Fetterman Fight
21 December 1866
The Pursuit
N
Miles
0
1/4
1/2
Indian Retreat
Indian Attack
Army Attack
Army Retreat
Bozeman Trail
Indian Decoy Signal
C
2
Grummond
Peno Creek
18
Fetterman
Lodge
Trail
Ridge
Bozeman Trail
5200 Feet
5100 Feet
5000 Feet
4900 Feet
4800 Feet
4700 Feet
4600 Feet
4500 Feet
4400 Feet

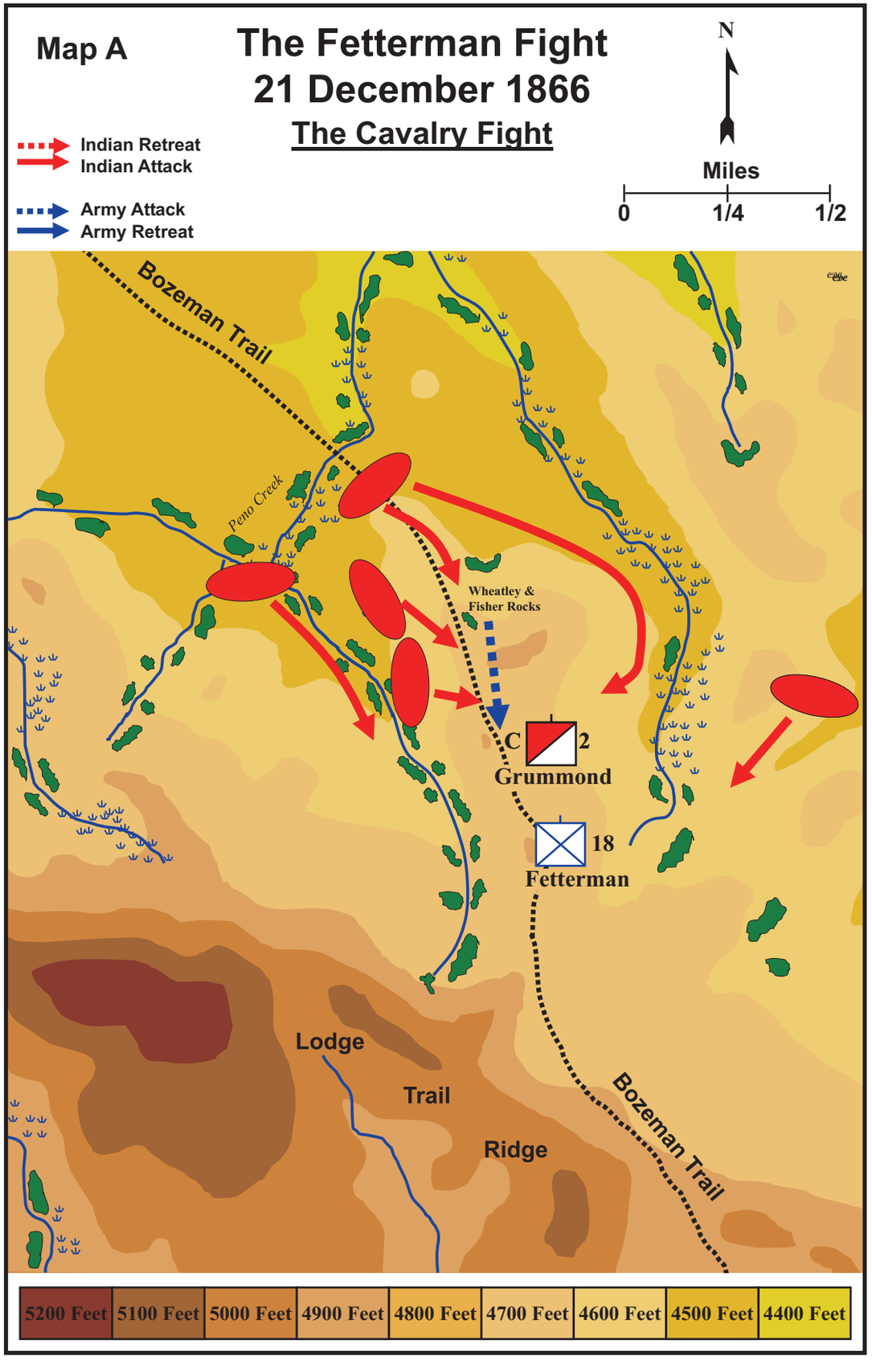

Map B
The Fetterman Fight
21 December 1866
The Ambush
N
Miles
0
1/4
1/2
Indian Retreat
Indian Attack
Army Attack
Army Retreat
Bozeman Trail
Peno Creek
C
2
Grummond
18
Fetterman
Lodge
Trail
Ridge
Bozeman Trail
5200 Feet
5100 Feet
5000 Feet
4900 Feet
4800 Feet
4700 Feet
4600 Feet
4500 Feet
4400 Feet

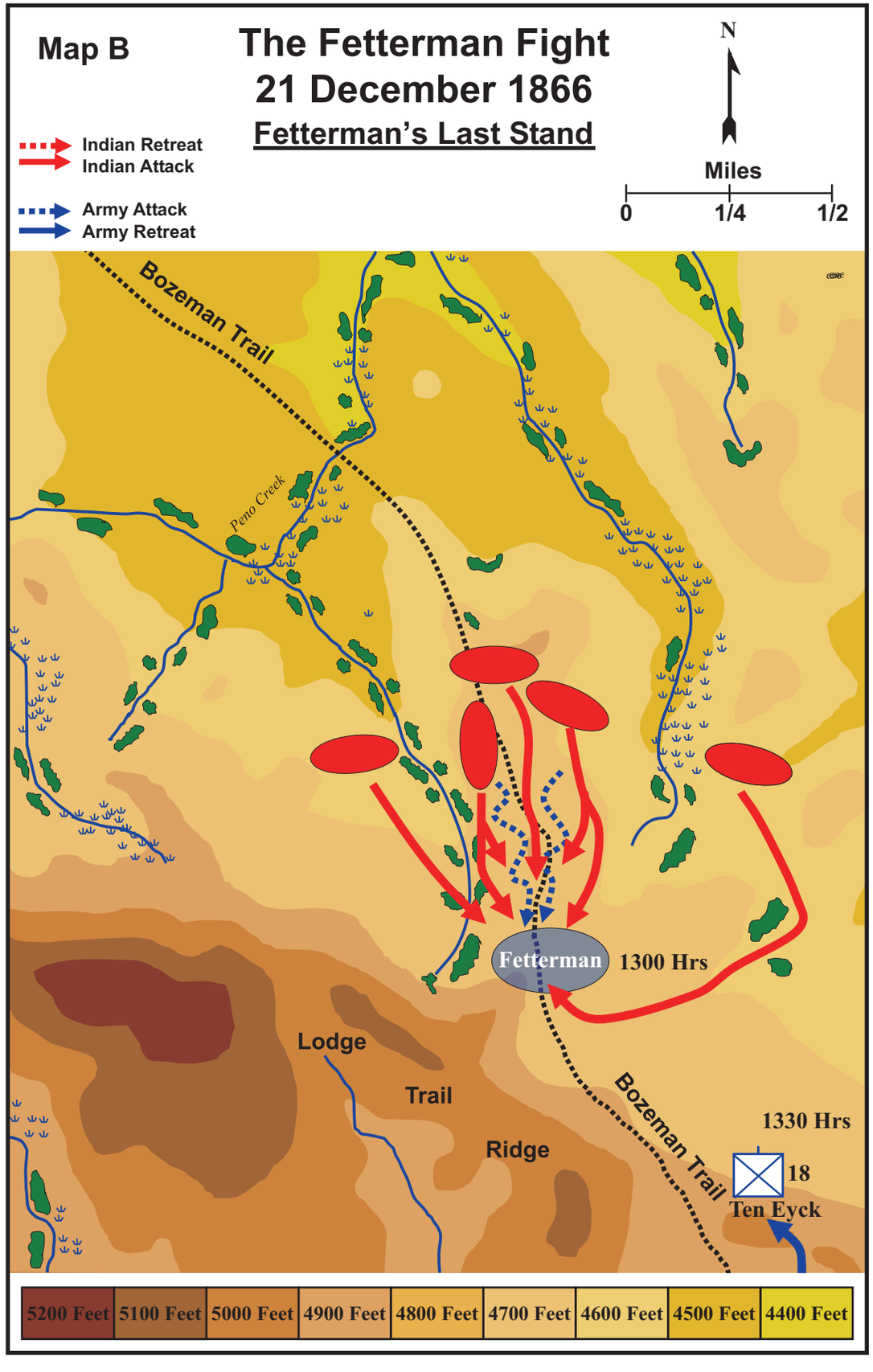
Map 10. The Fetterman Fight: The Cavalry Fight and Fetterman's Last Stand

The mounted troops retreated southward up the ridge to take cover behind a small hill (see map A). It appears that Grummond fought a dismounted delaying action here. Their skirmish line fired to the north and down the ridge to both sides. At some point, Grummond attempted to fall back to the south along the road toward the infantry. Nevertheless, the retreat disintegrated into a rout, and most of the mounted soldiers were chased down by the Indians before they could rejoin the Infantry (see map B). Grummond's body and several others were found scattered along the road between the cavalry skirmish line and the final infantry position. Indian accounts speak of a "pony-soldier chief" who was killed on the road and whose men then gave way and fled up the ridge. Other Indian accounts speak of a soldier chief on a white horse that fought a brave delaying action, cutting off an Indian's head with a single stroke of his saber. One of the last soldiers to die along the cavalry skirmish line was Adolph Metzger, a German-born bugler and Army veteran since 1855. Metzger fended off his assailants with his bugle until the instrument was a battered, shapeless mass of metal and his body was bleeding from a dozen wounds.

Fetterman, Brown, and 47 other soldiers, mostly infantry armed with Civil War era muzzle-loading rifle muskets, rallied at a cluster of large rocks further up the ridge. American Horse and Brave Eagle, both Oglala Sioux warriors, claimed that the soldiers fought hard and resisted several attempts to overrun their positions. However, Fetterman's infantry were hopelessly outnumbered and had little chance of holding out. Eventually, they were overwhelmed, and all were killed. At the fort, Carrington heard the heavy firing beyond the ridge. Fearing the worst, Carrington ordered Captain Tenador Ten Eyck to take what men could be spared from the remaining garrison to assist Fetterman. By the time Ten Eyck reached the hills overlooking the fight, it was too late to save Fetterman's doomed command.

After the battle, Carrington displayed remarkable determination in recovering the bodies of Fetterman's men even though he feared that the Indians would attack and overrun the drastically undermanned fort. He asked for and received a volunteer to carry news of the disaster to Fort Laramie. Arriving at Fort Laramie during a Christmas night ball, the volunteer, John "Portugee" Phillips, had ridden 235 miles in 4 days to report the disaster. On 26 December, General Phillip St. George Cooke, Carrington's commanding officer, ordered Lieutenant Colonel Henry W. Wessells, Carrington's subordinate at Fort Reno, to take command of the relieve expedition and assume overall responsibility for all three forts on the Bozeman Trail. The new commander diligently applied himself to improving morale at Fort Phil Kearny, but the garrison suffered greatly from the lack of supplies and the intense cold. The Indians also suspended their operations against the fort because of the extreme winter conditions. Both sides waited for spring to resume the contest for control of the Bozeman Trail.


Map A
The Fetterman Fight
21 December 1866
The Cavalry Fight
N
Miles
0
1/4
1/2
Indian Retreat
Indian Attack
Army Attack
Army Retreat
Bozeman Trail
Peno Creek
Wheatley &
Fisher Rocks
C
2
Grummond
18
Fetterman
Lodge
Trail
Ridge
Bozeman Trail
5200 Feet
5100 Feet
5000 Feet
4900 Feet
4800 Feet
4700 Feet
4600 Feet
4500 Feet
4400 Feet


Map B
The Fetterman Fight
21 December 1866
Fetterman's Last Stand
N
Miles
0
1/4
1/2
Indian Retreat
Indian Attack
Army Attack
Army Retreat
Bozeman Trail
Peno Creek
Fetterman
1300 Hrs
Lodge
Trail
Ridge
Bozeman Trail
1330 Hrs
18
Ten Eyck
5200 Feet
5100 Feet
5000 Feet
4900 Feet
4800 Feet
4700 Feet
4600 Feet
4500 Feet
4400 Feet

Map 11. The Hayfield Fight, 1 August 1867

In the spring and summer of 1867, the Indians resumed their harassment against Forts C.F. Smith and Phil Kearny. None of the attacks had been seriously pressed, and neither side had sustained significant casualties. In July 1867, Red Cloud gathered his coalition of Indian tribes in the Rosebud Valley for the sacred Sun Dance and to discuss the next move against the Bozeman Trail forts. The tribal leaders probably fielded as many as 1,000 warriors, but the loose confederation of tribes could not agree on which fort to attack and ended up splitting their forces. The majority of the Cheyenne, with some Sioux, moved against Fort C.F. Smith while the rest of the Sioux and some Cheyenne decided to attack a woodcutting party near Fort Phil Kearny.

Probably because action against the forts had been sporadic, the Indians were unaware that, early in July, a shipment of new M-1866, Springfield-Allin, .50-70-caliber, breech-loading rifles had arrived at the forts. The Springfield-Allin was a modification of the .58-caliber Springfield muzzle-loader, the standard shoulder arm of the Civil War. Although single shot, the new weapon, which used the Martin bar-anvil, center-fire-primed, all-metallic .50-caliber cartridge, was highly reliable and could be fired accurately and rapidly. Along with the rifles came more than 100,000 rounds of ammunition.

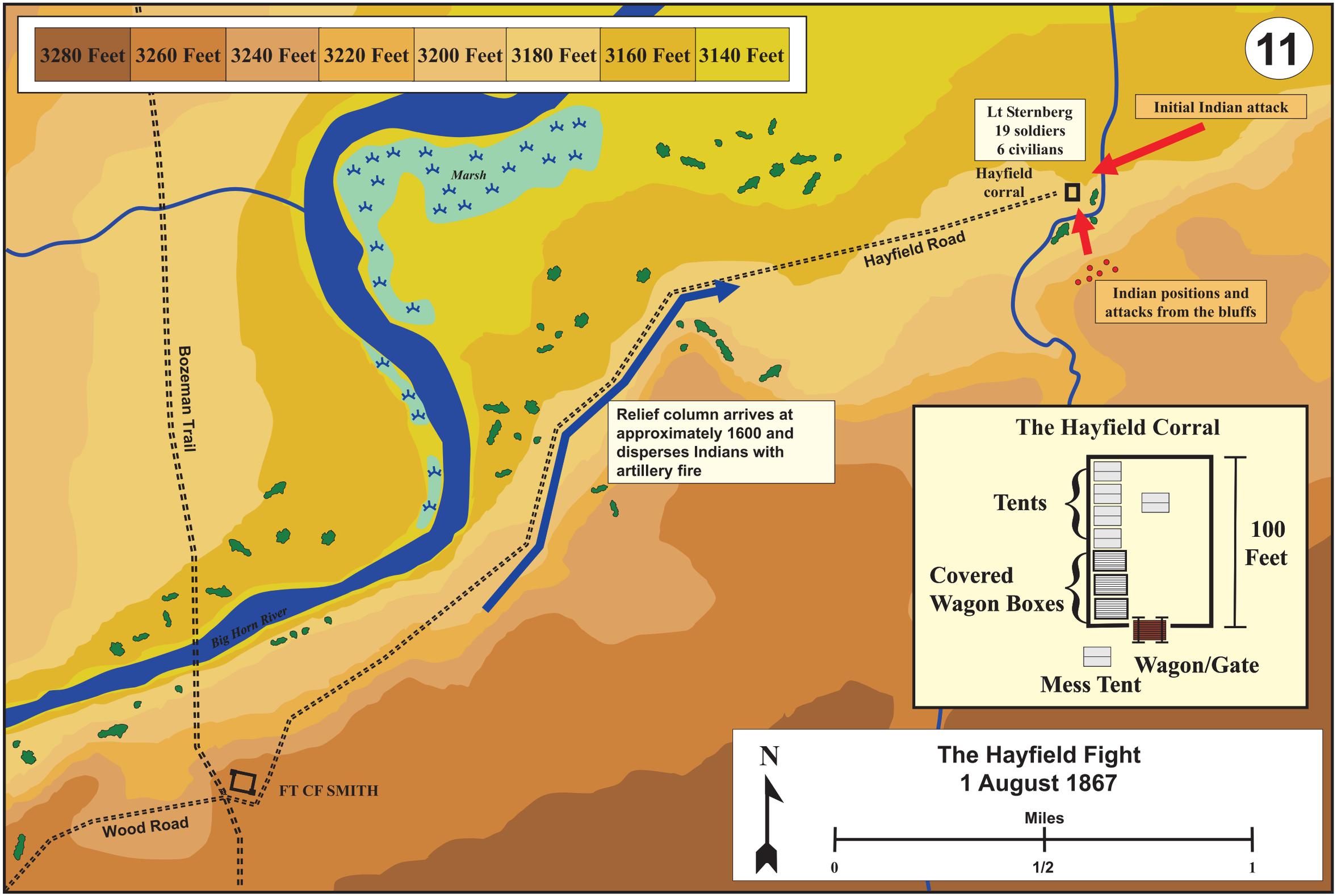
Both forts, C.F. Smith and Phil Kearny, were sufficiently strong, having no fear of a direct attack against their bastions. However, the forts did have exposed outposts. At Fort C.F. Smith, it was the hayfield camp located 2.5 miles to the northeast of the fort. At the hayfield camp, the contract workers had erected an improvised corral out of logs and brush as a protected storage area for their equipment and animals and as a defensive position, if needed. Nineteen soldiers, commanded by Lieutenant Sigismund Sternberg, guarded the six haycutters in the hayfield.

On the morning of 1 August 1867, the Indians attacked the detail working the hayfield. The combined Army and civilian force quickly took refuge in the corral and, except for the lieutenant, took cover behind the logs that lined the perimeter of the corral. Lieutenant Sternberg, with formal European military training and experience in both the Prussian and Union armies, did not consider it proper military protocol for officers to fight from the prone position and so decided to fight standing up. The 29-year-old lieutenant had only been at Fort C.F. Smith for 7 days and had no prior experience fighting Indians.

Though the actual Indian strength is unknown, it probably approached 500. The initial attack occurred sometime around noon. The Indians made several dashes at the corral hoping to lure the soldiers into chasing them. After that tactic failed, they conducted a mass charge on the corral. The warriors expected a volley of fire from the soldiers followed by a pause for the soldiers to reload their clumsy muzzle-loaders. During that pause, the attackers planned to rush in and overrun the corral. However, the pause never occurred, because the soldiers were able to quickly reload their new rifles. Even though the soldiers had not become thoroughly accustomed to their new weapons, their mass firepower threw back the attack. During the attack, Indian fire killed Lieutenant Sternberg with a shot to the head. Indian fire also seriously wounded Sternberg's senior NCO in the shoulder. Therefore, command was assumed by Don A. Colvin, one of the hayfield civilians who had been an officer during the Civil War .

With the failure of the first attack, many of the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors took cover on the bluffs 300 yards south of the corral and, from that position, kept the corral under fire until late into the day. The second attack came from the bluffs and was again repelled by the soldiers' massed fire. Twice more that afternoon the Indians launched mounted assaults from the high ground hoping to overrun the defenders. Each sweeping charge was stalled by the defenders' continuous fire forcing the Indians to retreat. The Indians commenced their final attack against the south wall of the corral on foot. The attackers managed to wade the shallow creek but were unable to force their way up to the corral wall.

Back at the fort, Colonel Luther P. Bradley, with 5 companies of available Infantry (10 officers and 250 soldiers), could neither see nor hear the fighting at the corral. News of the attack came sometime after lunch when the wood train, which had been working southwest of the fort, reported that they could see a large number of Indians attacking the hay detail. At first, the colonel was reluctant to send help. Perhaps he feared a Fetterman-like ambush was awaiting the relief party. However, he did send out a mounted reconnaissance at about 1530 which quickly returned to the post and reported the seriousness of the situation. The reconnaissance report, along with a desperate plea for help from a courier who had managed to break out of the hayfield corral and make a dash for the fort, prompted the colonel to organize a two-company relief force to send to the aid of the hayfield fighters. The appearance of reinforcements, at about 1600, and especially the exploding case shot of their accompanying howitzer, convinced the attackers to give up the assault and withdraw. Colvin and his outnumbered defenders had held their position for more than 6 hours. The combined Army/civilian force had sustained three killed and three wounded. Although the Army estimated 18 to 23 warriors killed, the Indians only acknowledged 8 killed and several wounded.


11
3280 Feet
3260 Feet
3240 Feet
3220 Feet
3200 Feet
3180 Feet
3160 Feet
3140 Feet
Marsh
Bozeman Trail
Big Horn River
Hayfield Road
Lt Sternberg
19 soldiers
6 civilians
Hayfield
corral
Initial Indian attack
Indian positions and
attacks from the bluffs
Relief column arrives at
approximately 1600 and
disperses Indians with
artillery fire
FT CF SMITH
Wood Road
The Hayfield Corral
Tents
Covered
Wagon Boxes
100
Feet
Wagon/Gate
Mess Tent
N
The Hayfield Fight
1 August 1867
Miles
0
1/2
1

Map 12. The Wagon Box Fight, 2 August 1867

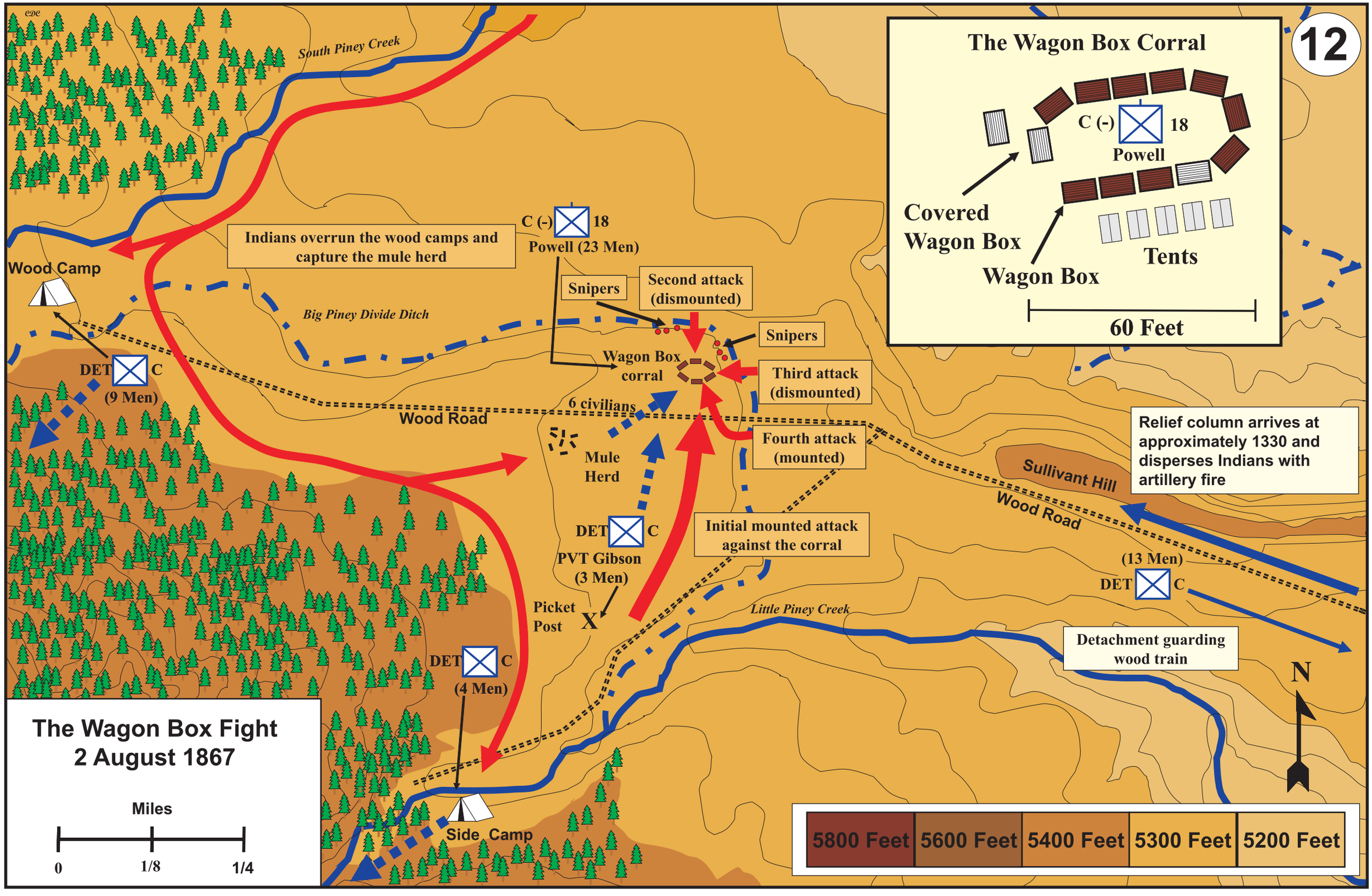
The exposed outpost at Fort Phil Kearny was the pinery located 6 miles to the west of the fort. Captain James Powell's C Company, 27th Infantry provided the guard for the civilian woodcutters at the pinery. The soldiers guarding the wood camps operated out of a corral located on a plateau between Big and Little Piney Creeks. The corral was made by removing the boxes from atop the running gear (wheels and axles) of wagons. The running gear would then be used to haul logs from the pinery to the fort. The boxes, approximately 10 feet long, 4½ feet wide, and 2½ feet high, were then placed in a rectangular formation approximately 60 feet by 30 feet. Two wagon boxes, with canvas still attached, held the rations for both soldiers and civilians and sat outside the corral.

The Indians, their martial ardor stirred by the recent religious ceremony, attacked the soldiers at the corral on the morning of 2 August 1867. Powell had already sent out the working parties when the Indians attacked. A small number of warriors crossed the hills to the west of the corral and attacked the woodcutter camps on the Big and Little Piney Creeks. The warriors then raced onto the plateau and captured the mule herd. The war chiefs had hoped the soldiers at the corral would rush out from their improvised wagon box fortress to be ambushed in the open. Instead, Captain Powell kept his men under control and by 9 o'clock had 26 soldiers and 6 civilians gathered into the corral. At this point, the war chiefs had no choice other than to attempt a mass attack against the soldiers. While Indian spectators gathered on the surrounding hills, mounted warriors made the first attack charging the corral from the southwest. The warriors expected the soldiers to send one volley of fire followed by a pause to reload their muzzle-loaders, allowing plenty of time for the Indians to overwhelm the defense. However, the soldiers were able to reload their new rifles quickly, and their continuous fire blunted the attack. The Indians, instead of closing in, circled around the corral using their horses as shields and then quickly withdrew behind the ridge to the north.

After the mounted charge failed, the war chiefs organized their warriors for an assault on foot. The second attack came from behind the ridge to the north. This time the warriors charged on foot while mounted warriors demonstrated to the south. The foot charge surged to within a few feet of the corral before it stalled under the continuous fire of the soldiers and fell back to take cover. At the same time, snipers hidden behind a rim of land fired into the corral. It was these snipers who inflicted most of the casualties suffered by the soldiers in the day-long fight. One of those casualties was Lieutenant John C. Jenness who had been repeatedly told to keep his head down. His reply that he knew how to fight Indians echoed just moments before he fell dead with a head wound. The third attack came up and over the rim of land just to the northeast of the corral. In this attack, the Indians' charge almost reached the wagon boxes before the soldiers' heavy fire forced them back again. The fourth and final attack came from the southeast. In this attack, the warriors attempted another mounted charge, but again failed to close with the soldiers.

The fight lasted into the early afternoon. The garrison at Fort Phil Kearny could hear the firing, but fearing an ambush, was reluctant to send support. Major Benjamin Smith did finally leave the fort with a relief column of 102 men and a mountain howitzer. Nearing the wagon box battleground, Smith fired his howitzer which resulted in the dispersal of the Indian attack. At a cost of three soldiers killed and two wounded in the wagon box perimeter, the soldiers had held off hundreds of Indian braves. Powell modestly credited his successful defense to the rapid fire of the breech-loading rifles, the coolness of his men, and the effectiveness of his position. The Indians also claimed victory in the fight. Their warriors had successfully destroyed the woodcutter camps and burned several wagons. They had also captured a large mule herd and killed several soldiers. Precise Indian casualties are unknown; Powell estimated 60 dead and 120 wounded. The actual casualties were probably much less.

In spite of the Army's small victories at the wagon box corral and the hayfield fight, the days of the Bozeman Trail were numbered. After 8 months of negotiations, the majority of the Indian chiefs finally agreed to the terms of a new treaty, but it was not until November 1868 that Red Cloud signed the document at Fort Laramie. The 1868 treaty met almost all of the Sioux demands, including the abandonment of the three forts in the contested area and the closing of the Bozeman Trail. In August 1868, the last US Army units departed Forts Phil Kearny and C.F. Smith. Even before the Army columns were out of sight, the Sioux and Cheyenne set fire to the remaining buildings and stockades and burned them to the ground.


12
The Wagon Box Corral
C (-)
18
Powell
Covered Wagon Box
Wagon Box
Tents
60 Feet
South Piney Creek
Wood Camp
Indians overrun the wood camps and capture the mule herd
C (-)
18
Powell (23 Men)
Snipers
Second attack (dismounted)
Snipers
Big Piney Divide Ditch
Wagon Box corral
Third attack (dismounted)
DET
C
(9 Men)
6 civilians
Wood Road
Fourth attack (mounted)
Mule Herd
Relief column arrives at approximately 1330 and disperses Indians with artillery fire
Sullivant Hill
Wood Road
DET
C
PVT Gibson
(3 Men)
Initial mounted attack against the corral
(13 Men)
DET
C
Picket Post
X
Little Piney Creek
Detachment guarding wood train
DET
C
(4 Men)
N
The Wagon Box Fight
2 August 1867
Miles
0
1/8
1/4
Side Camp
5800 Feet
5600 Feet
5400 Feet
5300 Feet
5200 Feet

III. The Great Sioux War of 1876–77

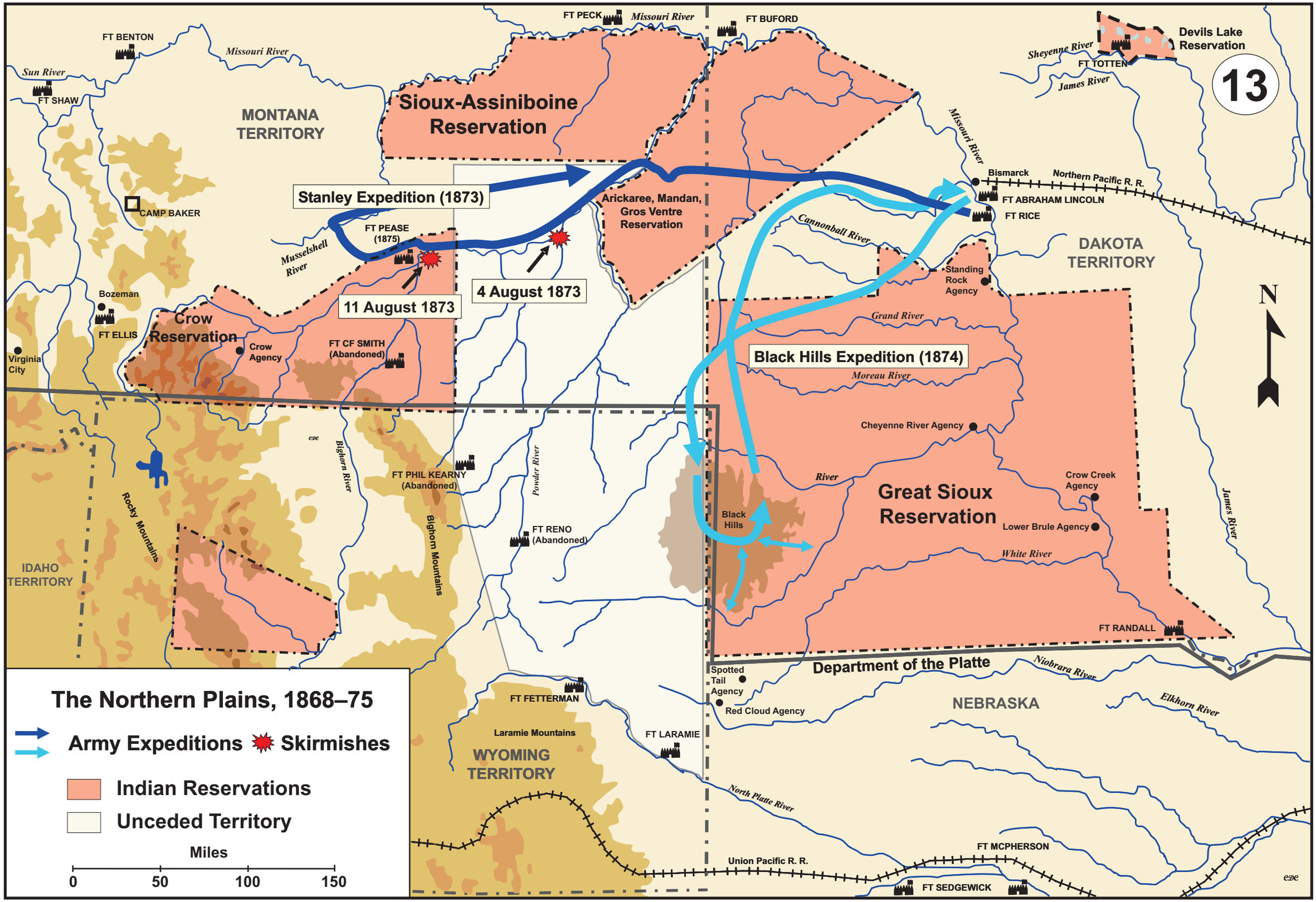
Map 13. The Northern Plains, 1868–75

The Sioux War of 1866–68 clearly established the dominance of the Oglala Sioux over US forces in northern Wyoming and southern Montana east of the Bighorn Mountains. The treaty of 1868 between the Sioux nation and the United States thereby recognized the right of the Sioux to roam and hunt in a vast tract of unceded territory. This territory was called unceded in recognition of the fact that although the United States did not recognize Sioux ownership of the land, neither did it deny that the Sioux had hunting rights there. The treaty also established a reservation in the Dakota Territory wherein "the United States now solemnly agrees that no persons except those herein designated and authorized so to do . . . shall ever be permitted to pass over, settle upon, or reside in the territory described in this article . . . and henceforth the [Indians] will, and do, hereby relinquish all claims or right in and to any portion of the United States or Territories, except such as is embraced within the limits aforesaid, and except as hereinafter provided." This provision clearly established the solemn rights of the Sioux to perpetual ownership of the reservation.

Although the treaty held the peace on the Northern Plains for several years, it was doomed by the seemingly irresistible march of settlers to the West. The entire region was the responsibility of Major General Philip H. Sheridan, the commander of Military Division of the Missouri. His area of responsibility extended from the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains and from Canada to Mexico. In 1873, the Sioux rejected overtures for a right-of-way for the Northern Pacific Railroad. Their resistance to the survey parties led Sheridan to the dispatch of a large military expedition under Colonel David Stanley up the Yellowstone Valley. During that expedition, Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer's 7th Cavalry fought two large skirmishes with the Sioux on 4 and 11 August 1873. Then in the spring of the next year, he directed his subordinate, Brigadier General Alfred H. Terry, commanding the Department of Dakota (present-day states of Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota), to send a reconnaissance party into the Black Hills to ascertain the suitability of establishing an Army garrison there. This reconnaissance party, commanded by Custer, not only determined the adequacy of the ground for a garrison but found evidence of gold. The news flashed through the nation, triggering a gold rush to the Black Hills of what is now South Dakota. The difficulty was that the Black Hills region was inside the territory reserved to the Sioux in the treaty of 1868. Nevertheless, no American government, no matter how progressive, would have attempted to restrain such a great number of citizens in their pursuit of happiness (as manifested by their dreams of gold). The predicament faced by President Ulysses S. Grant was that he could not prevent Americans from entering the Black Hills; at the same time, he could not legally allow them to go there.

Rationalizing an excuse for war with the Sioux seemed to be Grant's only choice to resolve the matter. If the government fought the Sioux and won, the Black Hills would be ceded as a spoil of war. But Grant chose not to fight the Sioux who remained on the reservations. Rather, he was determined to attack that portion of the Sioux roaming in the unceded land on the pretext that they were committing atrocities on settlers beyond the Indians' borders. Accordingly, Grant ordered the Bureau of Indian Affairs to issue an ultimatum to the Indians to return voluntarily to their reservation by 31 January 1876 or be forced there by military action.

There were two categories of roamers outside the reservation, most of whom ignored the ultimatum. One category, called winter roamers, spurned all sustenance from the white man and lived in the unceded area. Those in the other category, called summer roamers, took the white man's dole in the winter but pursued their old ways in warmer weather. When Sheridan received the mission to mount a campaign against the Indians in the unceded area, he believed he would be fighting the winter roamers only. As the weather turned warmer, the number of summer roamers grew in the unceded area, creating a greater threat to the soldiers.


13
The Northern Plains, 1868–75
Army Expeditions
Skirmishes
Indian Reservations
Unceded Territory
Miles
0
50
100
150
N
MONTANA TERRITORY
DAKOTA TERRITORY
IDAHO TERRITORY
WYOMING TERRITORY
NEBRASKA
Sioux-Assiniboine Reservation
Arickaree, Mandan, Gros Ventre Reservation
Crow Reservation
Great Sioux Reservation
Devils Lake Reservation
Stanley Expedition (1873)
Black Hills Expedition (1874)
11 August 1873
4 August 1873
Department of the Platte
FT BENTON
FT SHAW
FT PECK
FT BUFORD
FT TOTTEN
CAMP BAKER
FT PEASE (1875)
FT ELLIS
FT CF SMITH (Abandoned)
FT PHIL KEARNY (Abandoned)
FT RENO (Abandoned)
FT FETTERMAN
FT LARAMIE
FT ABRAHAM LINCOLN
FT RICE
FT RANDALL
FT MCPHERSON
FT SEDGEWICK
Bismarck
Bozeman
Virginia City
Crow Agency
Standing Rock Agency
Cheyenne River Agency
Crow Creek Agency
Lower Brule Agency
Spotted Tail Agency
Red Cloud Agency
Missouri River
Sun River
Musselshell River
Bighorn River
Powder River
Cannonball River
Grand River
Moreau River
Cheyenne River
White River
Sheyenne River
James River
Niobrara River
Elkhorn River
North Platte River
Rocky Mountains
Bighorn Mountains
Laramie Mountains
Black Hills
Northern Pacific R. R.
Union Pacific R. R.

Map 14. Sheridan's Campaign Plan

By 1876, the frontier Army had accumulated years of experience on the Great American Plains. However, most of the Army's offensive warfare experience was acquired on the Southern Plains against the Cheyenne, Comanche, and Kiowa. General Sheridan had successfully orchestrated two major campaigns on the southern plains, the Southern Plains War (1868-69) and the Red River War (1874). In the Southern Plains War, Sheridan implemented a bold winter campaign. He recognized that the highly mobile, nomadic Indian tribes were very difficult to catch and reasoned that the winter would weaken the grass-fed Indian ponies making them more susceptible to being caught by the Army's grain-fed horses.

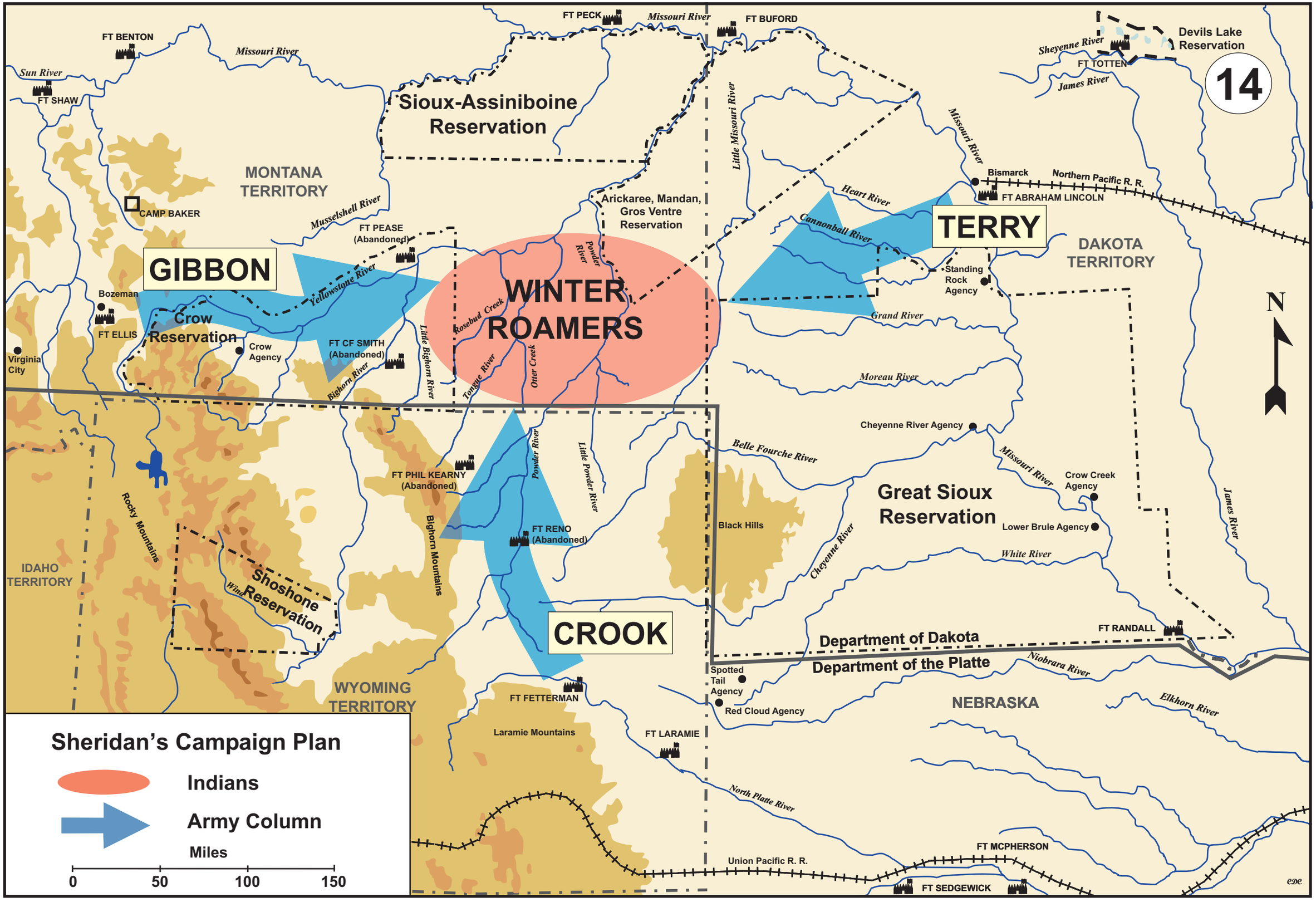
Overall, the Southern Plains War was a success for the Army. In the campaign Sheridan launched three converging columns into what is now western Oklahoma with orders to put into practice a technique of total war in which he targeted entire Indian villages for destruction. His strategy was that, even if an advancing column did not find the hostile Indians, it would help to drive the Indians into the other columns. His field commanders managed to surprise and overrun Indian villages in the war's three most significant engagements: the battles of Washita (November 1868); Soldier Springs (December 1868); and Summit Springs (July 1869). The destruction of these three villages was a major loss for the Southern Plains tribes; they could no longer count on the vastness of the territory and winter conditions to protect them from the soldiers. Many of the tribes acknowledged the futility of the struggle and grudgingly resigned themselves to life on the reservation and a temporary peace that lasted only four years.

Sheridan's next opportunity to coordinate a fight against the Plains Indians came in 1874 when the Cheyenne, Comanche, and Kiowa, angered by the slaughter of thousands of buffalo and the failed delivery of treaty annuities, began to launch a series of vengeful raids throughout the Texas Panhandle. Sheridan decided to punish the raiders and ordered five Army columns into western Texas. In the ensuing campaign, the Army fought as many as 20 engagements with the Southern Plains Indians. Most were small skirmishes, but the three largest fights again involved Indian villages. At the battles of Red River (30 August 1874) and Sweetwater Creek (12 September 1874), Indian rearguard actions managed to hold the Army units at bay long enough for their families to get most of the camp equipment out of danger. Then in late September, Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie's 4th Cavalry took up the chase. In his dogged pursuit of the Indians, he overran two hastily abandoned villages and burned more than 500 lodges. Later, at the Battle of Palo Duro Canyon (28 September 1874), he located approximately five Indian villages hidden in the canyon and routed the defenders in a surprise dawn attack. The soldiers destroyed all the captured lodges and slaughtered more than 1,000 horses. Eventually, the onset of winter curtailed offensive operations. However, the many months of military operations, especially the destruction of so many Indian ponies and lodges, proved too much for the Indians to bear. The campaign forced the Southern Plains tribes to give up their nomadic lifestyle and accept life on the reservation. Sheridan had validated his converging column strategy. At the tactical level, Sheridan's key subordinates (Major Andrew Evans, 3d Cavalry; Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie, 4th Cavalry; Major Eugene A. Carr, 5th Cavalry; Colonel Nelson A. Miles, 5th Infantry; and Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer, 7th Cavalry) established a formula for battlefield success: relentless pursuit, attack from multiple directions to confuse and panic the enemy, disciplined firepower to hold the undisciplined Indian warrior at bay, and offensive action to maintain the initiative.

Sheridan fully intended to apply the same techniques used in the conquest of the Southern Plains against the Sioux on the Northern Plains. From that experience, Sheridan and the professional military officer corps he commanded held several assumptions to be fundamental truths when fighting Indians. First, they believed the Indians would not stand against organized forces: in any situation where US forces met Indians—no matter the numbers—the Indians would run. A second belief was that the Indians would never seek battle with US troops unless the soldiers were in proximity to their villages. Finally, officers were convinced that even the meager opposition ordinarily offered by the Indians would be greatly reduced in the winter when the Indians were just barely surviving. On the foundation of these assumptions, Sheridan formed his campaign plan.

Sheridan directed Terry and Brigadier General George Crook, commanding the Department of the Platte, to find and defeat the Indians. Sheridan's communications with his generals clearly indicated that he wanted to conduct the campaign in the winter, catching the Indians in their worst circumstances. Unfortunately, the orders to these coequal department commanders specified no overall commander for the operation, nor did they even specify coordinating instructions between the two. Sheridan's own words in his annual report demonstrate the sparse attention he devoted to coordination: "General Terry was further informed that the operation of himself and General Crook would be made without concert, as the Indian villages are movable and no objective point could be fixed upon, but that, if they should come to any understanding about concerted movements, there would be no objection at division headquarters."

There was a practical consequence to Sheridan's vague instructions. Terry instructed Colonel John Gibbon, his subordinate commanding the District of Montana, to gather all of his scattered detachments and begin a march from the west. Terry himself would command a column moving from the east. Each of these forces was to follow the Yellowstone River and unite. Meanwhile, Crook was to form his own column and march from the south. Together, all these separate operational plans constituted what have commonly been referred to as Sheridan's campaign plan, and indeed, all of them flowed logically from his instructions. However, the final pincer movement was never clarified in any set of orders. Sheridan's disregard for coordination between his separate columns provides some indication of his contempt for the fighting capabilities of the Sioux. It was a contempt that would lead to ineffective combat operations throughout the winter and well into the summer of 1876.

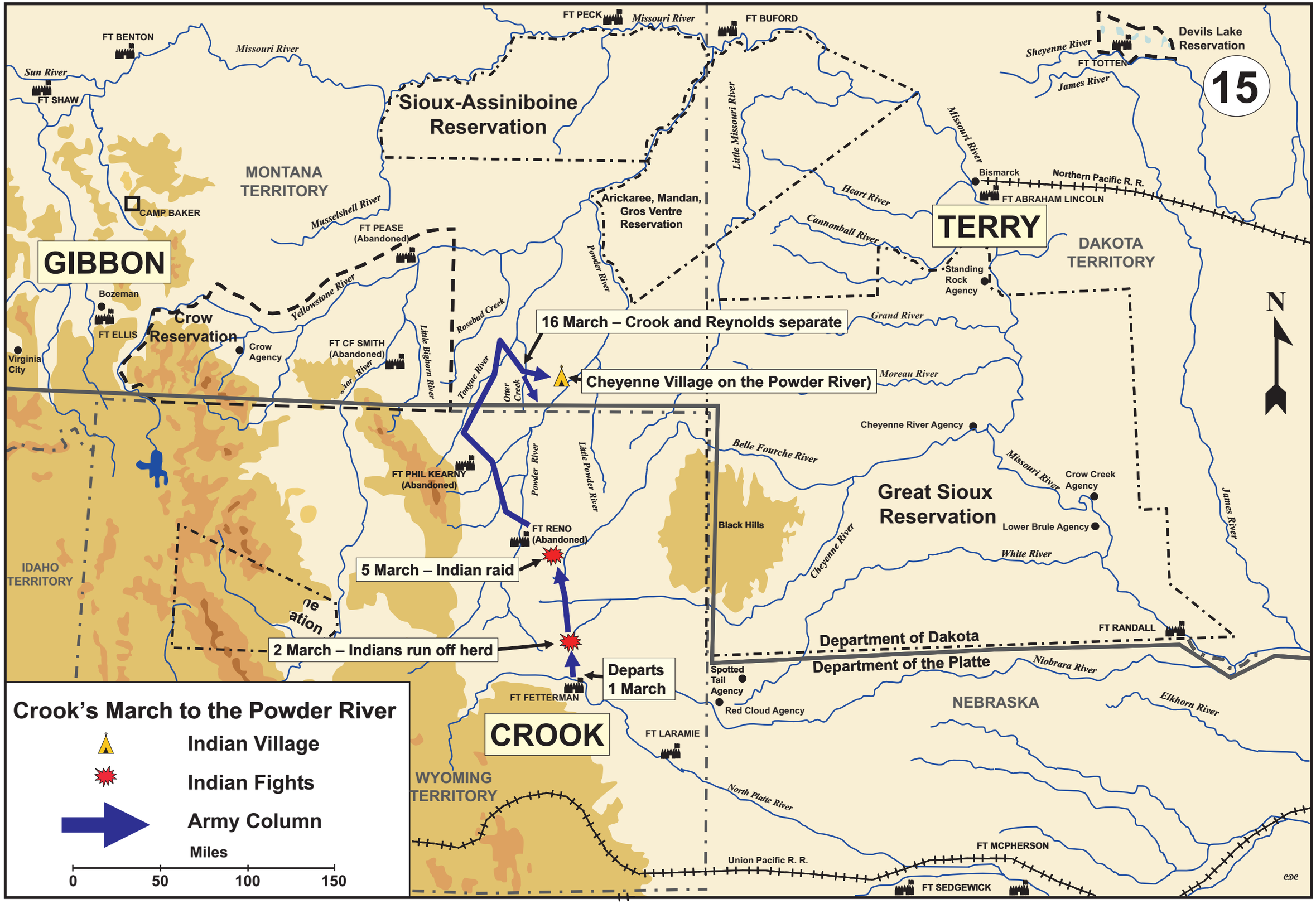

14
Sheridan's Campaign Plan
Indians
Army Column
Miles
0
50
100
150
GIBBON
TERRY
CROOK
WINTER ROAMERS
Crow Reservation
Shoshone Reservation
Sioux-Assiniboine Reservation
Arickaree, Mandan, Gros Ventre Reservation
Great Sioux Reservation
Devils Lake Reservation
MONTANA TERRITORY
DAKOTA TERRITORY
IDAHO TERRITORY
WYOMING TERRITORY
NEBRASKA
Department of Dakota
Department of the Platte
FT BENTON
FT SHAW
FT PECK
FT BUFORD
FT TOTTEN
CAMP BAKER
FT PEASE (Abandoned)
FT ELLIS
FT CF SMITH (Abandoned)
FT PHIL KEARNY (Abandoned)
FT RENO (Abandoned)
FT FETTERMAN
FT LARAMIE
FT MCPHERSON
FT SEDGEWICK
FT RANDALL
FT ABRAHAM LINCOLN
Bismarck
Bozeman
Virginia City
Crow Agency
Standing Rock Agency
Cheyenne River Agency
Crow Creek Agency
Lower Brule Agency
Spotted Tail Agency
Red Cloud Agency
Missouri River
Sun River
Musselshell River
Yellowstone River
Bighorn River
Little Bighorn River
Rosebud Creek
Tongue River
Otter Creek
Powder River
Little Powder River
Little Missouri River
Heart River
Cannonball River
Grand River
Moreau River
Belle Fourche River
Cheyenne River
White River
Sheyenne River
James River
Niobrara River
Elkhorn River
North Platte River
Rocky Mountains
Bighorn Mountains
Black Hills
Laramie Mountains
Wind
Northern Pacific R. R.
Union Pacific R. R.
N
EDE

Map 15. Crook's March to the Powder River

Crook was the first to depart for the field. Anticipating the coming campaign, he secretly had been gathering units from scattered posts throughout his department. When the order to fight came, he was nearly ready to start his northward march from Fort Fetterman (near present-day Douglas, Wyoming). When Crook's troops marched out on 1 March 1876, the weather was clear and bitterly cold. Having placed Colonel Joseph J. Reynolds in command of the column, Crook was nominally an observer. Crook, however, retained practical control, and Reynolds was largely a supernumerary. Marching with Crook and Reynolds were 10 cavalry companies, 2 infantry companies, and 62 civilian packers. These units, plus Crook's staff, the guides, and reporters totaled 883 men. Crook, a master of efficient and effective pack trains, had his column well prepared for its winter campaign.

Trouble began almost immediately. Soldiers spotted Indian spies every day, and the frequency of smoke signals suggested that their advance was being observed. On the second night out, the Indians successfully stampeded the livestock herd, depriving the troops of their only source of fresh meat. On 5 March, the Indians boldly staged a raid against the soldiers' camp. Crook, tired of marching under the watchful eye of the Indians, on the morning of 7 March ordered the infantry companies to make a great show of marching back to the abandoned Fort Reno site (near present-day Sussex, Wyoming) with the trains. At the same time, the cavalry, stripped down to minimum subsistence for 15 days, would hide that day and resume its march that evening.

The ruse worked; the 10 cavalry companies escaped the Indian spies and roamed unnoticed for the next 10 days. The problem was that Crook and Reynolds could not find the Indians. Finally, Frank Grouard, the most knowledgeable of the scouts, suggested that while the cavalry was searching along the Tongue River, the Indians likely would be sheltered in the Powder River Valley. Crook accepted Grouard's opinion and had him guide the force to the Powder River. True to his word, Grouard found signs of a village just north of present-day Moorhead, Montana. Crook now detached Reynolds (putting him truly in command of a combat expedition) with six companies of cavalry and most of the scouts. Grouard, exhibiting brilliant scouting, led the detachment through a blizzard to the vicinity of a Cheyenne village. The circumstances were now right for Crook to strike the first blow in the 1876 Sioux War and for Reynolds to display his prowess as a combat leader.

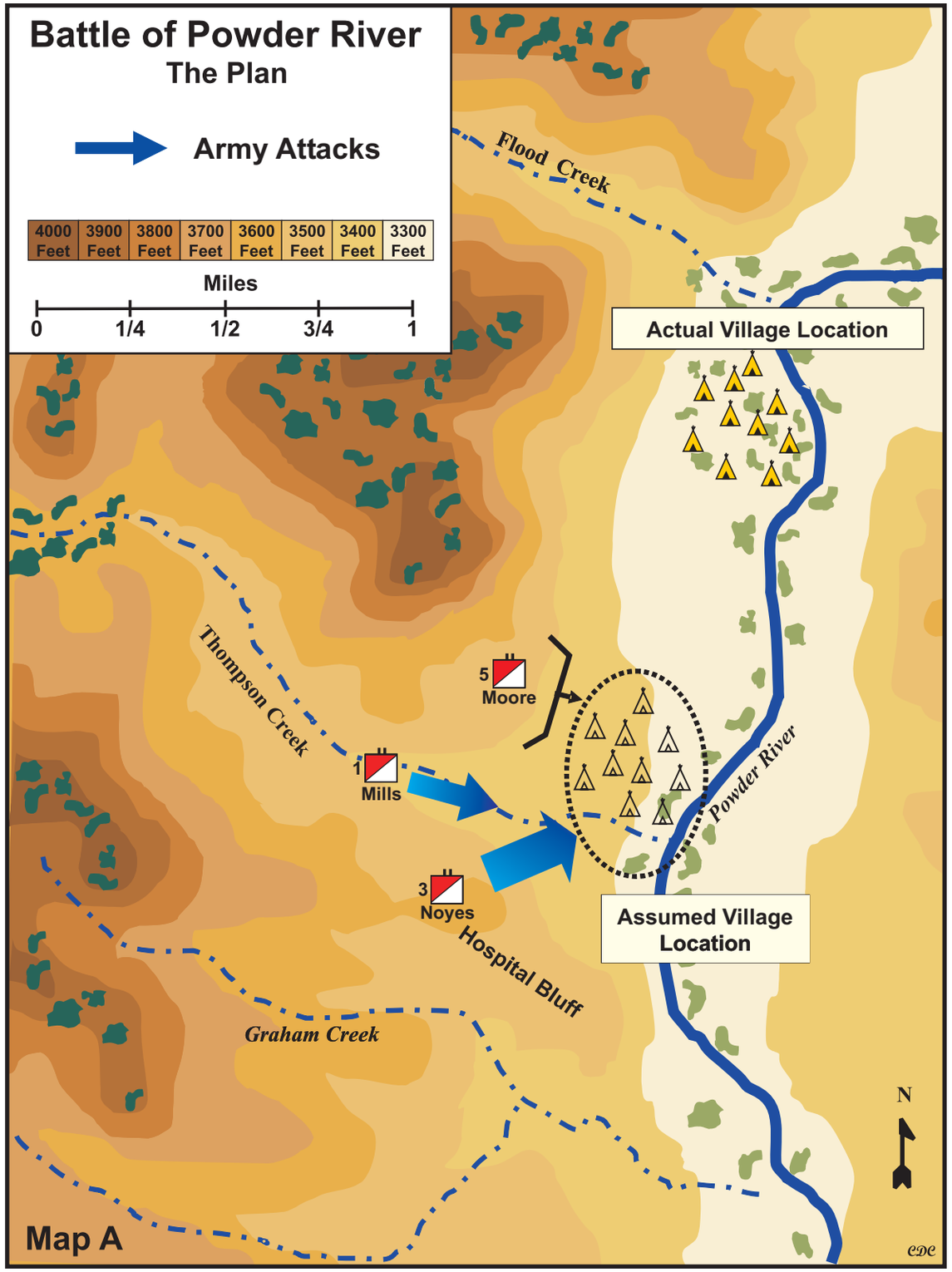

15
Crook's March to the Powder River
Indian Village
Indian Fights
Army Column
Miles
0
50
100
150
N
GIBBON
TERRY
CROOK
MONTANA TERRITORY
DAKOTA TERRITORY
IDAHO TERRITORY
WYOMING TERRITORY
NEBRASKA
Sioux-Assiniboine Reservation
Crow Reservation
Arickaree, Mandan, Gros Ventre Reservation
Great Sioux Reservation
Devils Lake Reservation
16 March – Crook and Reynolds separate
Cheyenne Village on the Powder River)
5 March – Indian raid
2 March – Indians run off herd
Departs 1 March
FT BENTON
FT SHAW
Sun River
Missouri River
CAMP BAKER
Musselshell River
FT PEASE (Abandoned)
Yellowstone River
Bozeman
FT ELLIS
Virginia City
Crow Agency
FT CF SMITH (Abandoned)
Little Bighorn River
Rosebud Creek
Tongue River
Otter Creek
Powder River
Little Powder River
FT PHIL KEARNY (Abandoned)
FT RENO (Abandoned)
FT FETTERMAN
FT LARAMIE
FT PECK
FT BUFORD
Little Missouri River
Heart River
Cannonball River
Bismarck
Northern Pacific R. R.
FT ABRAHAM LINCOLN
Standing Rock Agency
Grand River
Moreau River
Cheyenne River Agency
Belle Fourche River
Black Hills
Cheyenne River
Sheyenne River
FT TOTTEN
James River
Crow Creek Agency
Lower Brule Agency
White River
FT RANDALL
Department of Dakota
Department of the Platte
Niobrara River
Spotted Tail Agency
Red Cloud Agency
Elkhorn River
North Platte River
Union Pacific R. R.
FT MCPHERSON
FT SEDGEWICK

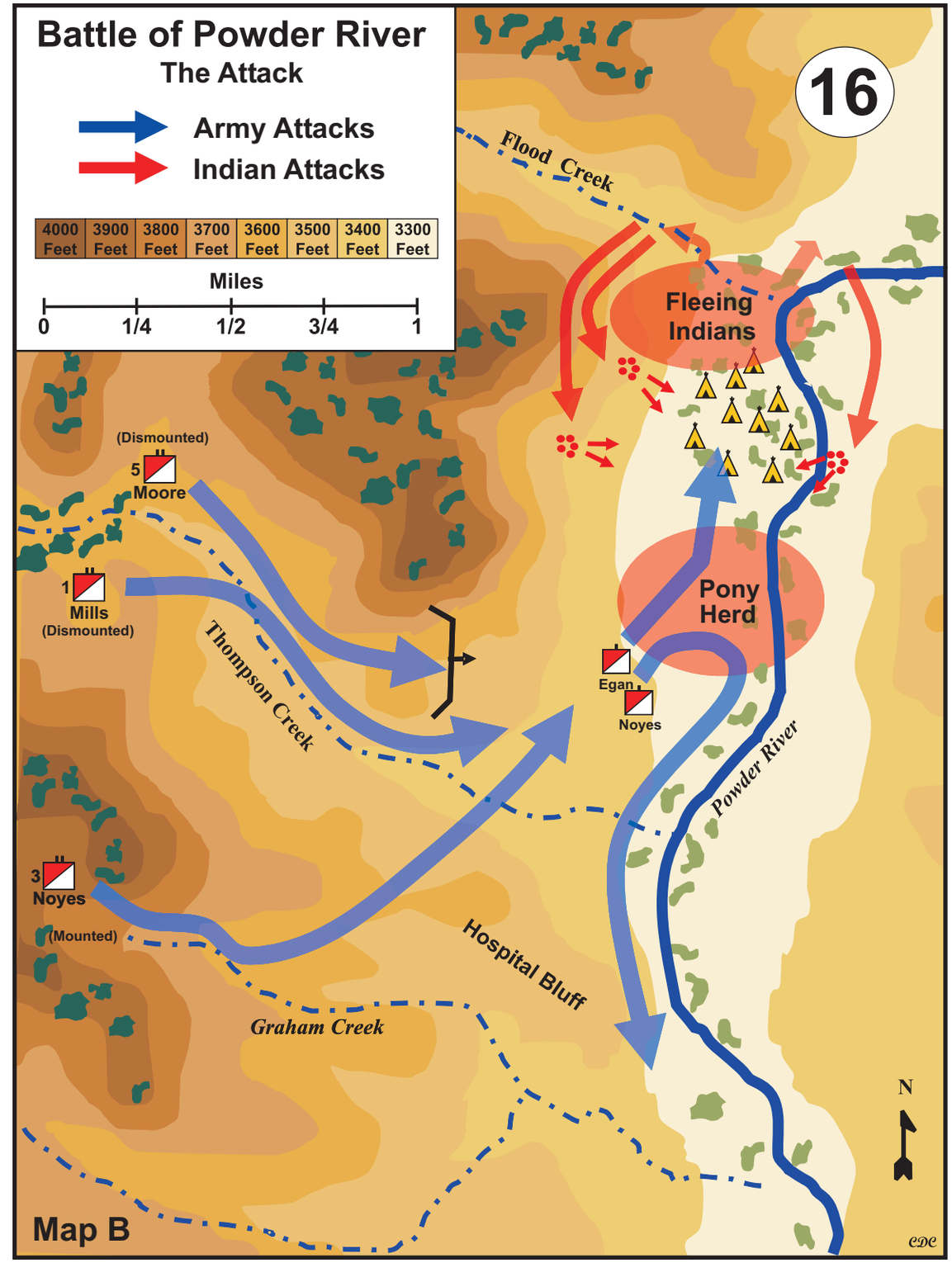
Map 16. Battle of Powder River

Reynolds sortied from Crook's command with three two-company battalions of cavalry: E and M Companies, 3d Cavalry, commanded by Captain Anson Mills; I and K Companies, 2d Cavalry, commanded by Captain Henry E. Noyes; and E Company, 2d Cavalry, and F Company, 3d Cavalry, commanded by Captain Alexander Moore. Also accompanying the expedition was Lieutenant John Bourke, Crook's aide-de-camp, who joined the detachment as Crook's observer. Most of the scouts also went with Reynolds. This was a discontented command; the officers had no confidence in their commander's tactical abilities nor his physical and moral courage. Perhaps it was a self-fulfilling prophesy, but Reynolds proved true to the low esteem in which his officers held him.

Through driving snow and temperatures that ranged as low as 80 degrees below zero, scout Grouard literally felt his way along the trail that led to the Powder River. At about 0230 on 17 March, he halted the column until he could locate the Indian village. While the troops waited in the bitter cold, Grouard successfully pinpointed the Indians' location. This was the grand opportunity to strike the Indians that US commanders had been awaiting. Reynolds formulated his plan of attack based on a misunderstanding of the actual location of the village. His attack orders were inexact, but he did issue a general outline of his tactical plan (see map A). Captain James Egan's company of Noyes' battalion was to approach the village quietly and assault it on being detected. Meanwhile, Noyes and his remaining company would drive the Indian pony herd away from the village. On its part, Moore's battalion was to dismount and move to the bluffs overlooking the village to support Egan's assault. Mills was initially given no mission, but eventually Reynolds had him follow Moore to assist where practical.

Approaching the village took much longer than expected because of the rough nature of the terrain and the village happened to be a mile north of its assumed position. Noyes and Egan moved into position and initiated the attack satisfactorily (see map B); however, Moore was not yet in position. Consequently, the Indians were able to flee to the bluffs that commanded a view of the soldiers now occupying the village. At this point, Egan's company was in great danger of being cut off, but Mills' battalion was soon available to reinforce it. When Moore's battalion belatedly entered the valley, it was added to the forces occupying the village. Noyes, who had successfully captured the pony herd, was resting his unsaddled horses when he was urgently ordered to join the fray in the village. Throughout the fight, Reynolds had become increasingly anxious about the safety and protection of his detachment. Fearing the loss of his command, he ordered the rapid destruction of the Indian village so that he could withdraw. Some Indian property was destroyed, but Reynolds' demand for haste caused much to be overlooked. The battle was a hollow victory for the Army. During the poorly managed withdrawal, the units left all their dead and one wounded soldier behind. The Indians also managed to retake most of their pony herd during the Army's march south. In exchange for the loss of four and the wounding of six troopers, Reynolds had gained virtually nothing beyond warning the Sioux of the government's intentions. Beaten and ashamed, Reynolds' force rejoined Crook at the mouth of Lodgepole Creek. Then, 26 days after its departure, the entire force returned to Fort Fetterman—worn, weary, and defeated.


Battle of Powder River
The Plan
Army Attacks
4000 Feet
3900 Feet
3800 Feet
3700 Feet
3600 Feet
3500 Feet
3400 Feet
3300 Feet
Miles
0
1/4
1/2
3/4
1
Flood Creek
Actual Village Location
Thompson Creek
5
Moore
1
Mills
3
Noyes
Hospital Bluff
Assumed Village Location
Powder River
Graham Creek
N
Map A
eDe


Battle of Powder River
The Attack
Army Attacks
Indian Attacks
4000 Feet
3900 Feet
3800 Feet
3700 Feet
3600 Feet
3500 Feet
3400 Feet
3300 Feet
Miles
0
1/4
1/2
3/4
1
16
Flood Creek
Fleeing Indians
(Dismounted)
5
Moore
1
Mills
(Dismounted)
Thompson Creek
Pony Herd
Egan
Noyes
Powder River
3
Noyes
(Mounted)
Hospital Bluff
Graham Creek
N
Map B
eDe

Map 17. Converging Columns, 1 April–9 June 1876

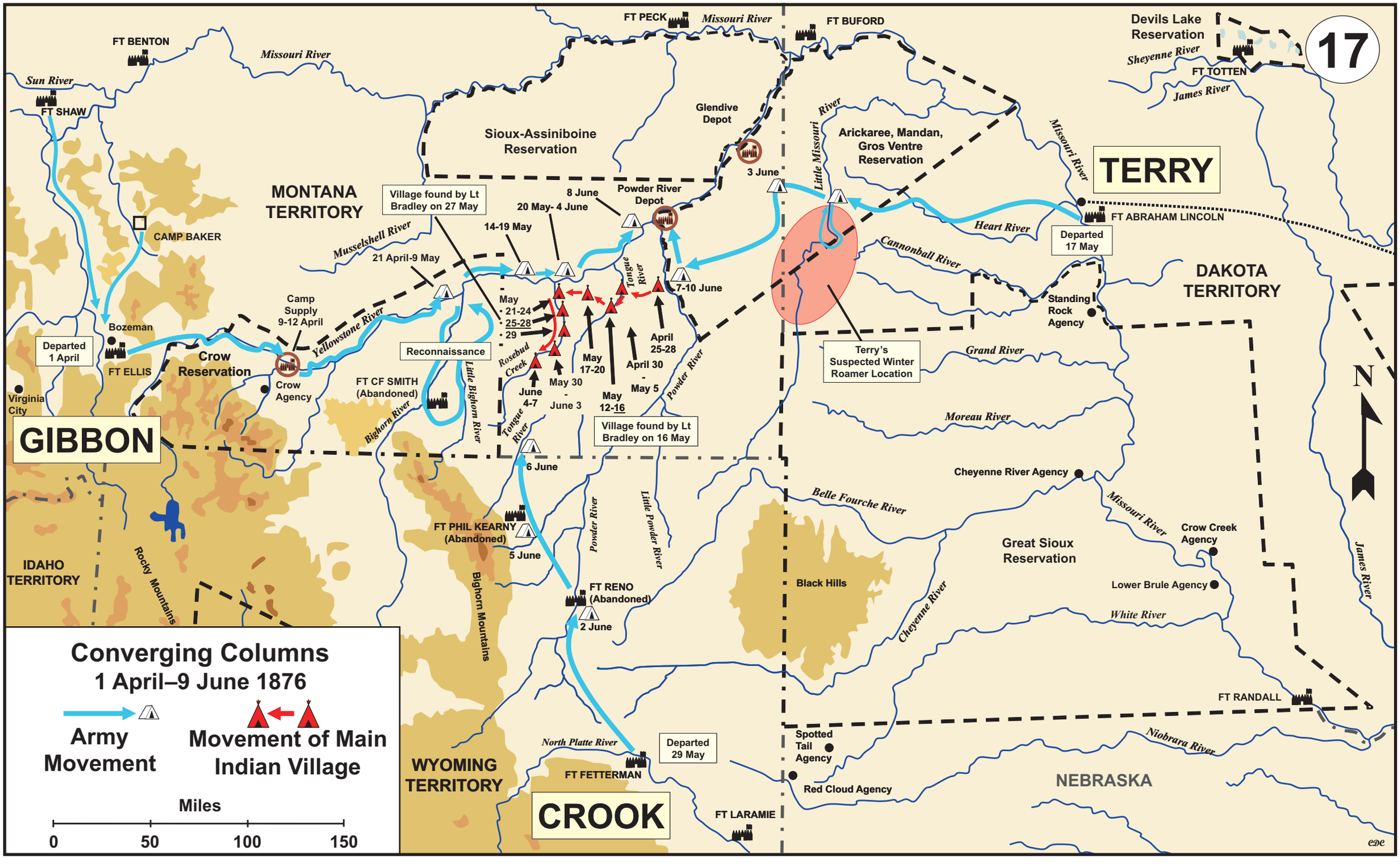
Gibbon's column from the west was next into the field. Gibbon chose to gather his widely separated companies at Fort Ellis. Accompanying him on his march from Fort Ellis on 1 April were 4 companies of the 2d Cavalry Regiment and 5 companies of the 7th Infantry Regiment, comprising a total of 450 men. After marching down the Yellowstone River and briefly halting at Camp Supply to improve his sustainment capability, Gibbon arrived near the mouth of Tullock Creek on 20 April. It was here that Crook's movements far to the south affected Gibbon's actions. Since Crook did not plan to take to the field again until mid-May, Terry ordered Gibbon to halt until his movements could be coordinated with the other columns. Thus, Gibbon waited at his camp between 21 April and 9 May.

In this 19-day period, Gibbon sent out several reconnaissance patrols, most of which found no trace of the Sioux. However, in attempting to track Sioux horse thieves, on 16 May Gibbon's remarkable chief of scouts, Lieutenant James H. Bradley, pinpointed the location of a major Indian village on the Tongue River. On learning of Bradley's find, Gibbon ordered his command to march down the Yellowstone, cross to its south bank, and attack the village. Unfortunately, Gibbon's men proved unequal to the task of crossing the Yellowstone. After unsuccessful efforts lasting 1 hour, Gibbon canceled both the movement and the attack. Following this abortive attempt, Gibbon reported to Terry neither Bradley's finding nor his own failure to cross the Yellowstone. Meanwhile, this large Sioux village continued to send parties of warriors to harass Gibbon's camp until 23 May, when all contact with the hostile Indians ceased. Again, it was the enterprising Bradley who found the Sioux, this time on Rosebud Creek. Once again, Gibbon reported neither the Indians' harassment nor Bradley's discovery of the Rosebud camp.

During Gibbon's movements, inclement weather had delayed the departure of Terry's column for the field. In the interim, Terry busily collected supplies and planned river transport to support his overland march. The river route was to follow the Missouri River northwest, then turn southwest up the Yellowstone, and end at Glendive Depot. At last, on 17 May, Terry's overland column departed from Fort Abraham Lincoln. His force consisted of 12 companies of the 7th Cavalry Regiment under the command of Custer and 3½ companies of infantry. Terry's column totaled 925 men.

Through a misreading of intelligence, Terry expected to find the Indians along the Little Missouri River, far to the east of where they actually were. Discovering no Indians at the Little Missouri, he moved farther west, camping on Beaver Creek on 3 June. Here, Terry received a dispatch from Gibbon (dated 27 May) that vaguely referred to sightings of hostile Indians but gave no specific details and skeptically dealt with Bradley's discovery only in a postscript. Because of this dispatch, Terry turned south on Beaver Creek and resolved to travel west to the Powder River. To facilitate his further movement, he instructed his base force at Glendive Depot to send a boat with supplies to the mouth of the Powder River. Reaching the Powder River late on 7 June, Terry personally went downstream to the Yellowstone the next day, hoping to consult with Gibbon. He was pleasantly surprised to find several couriers from Gibbon's force at the river. Here, he finally gained the intelligence that Gibbon had not heretofore reported. Terry now took personal control of both columns.

Meanwhile, Crook assumed direct command of the Bighorn and Yellowstone Expedition at Fort Fetterman. Crook had drawn together an impressive force from his Department of the Platte. Leaving Fort Fetterman on 29 May, the 1,051-man column consisted of 15 companies from the 2d and 3d Cavalry, 5 companies from the 4th and 9th Infantry, 250 mules, and 106 wagons. Grouard, an experienced scout who had worked with Crook on earlier campaigns, rode ahead of the column to recruit Crow warriors as scouts. On 2 June, in spite of the poor weather, Crook pushed his force northward to the site of Fort Reno, supremely confident that he would redress Reynolds' previous failure on the Powder River. At this point, Sheridan could finally say that all three columns were in the field.

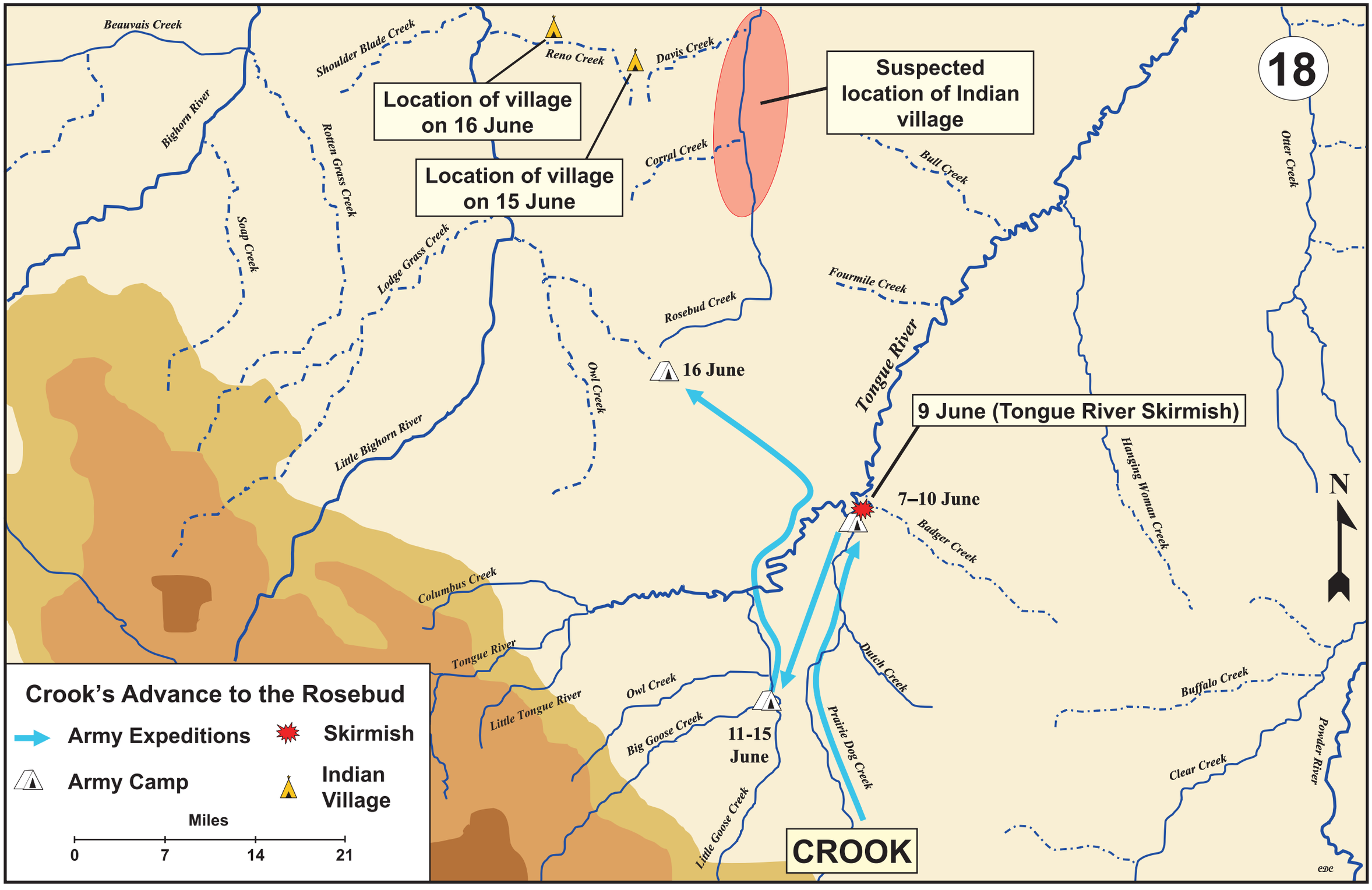

17
Converging Columns
1 April–9 June 1876
Army Movement
Movement of Main Indian Village
Miles
0
50
100
150
GIBBON
TERRY
CROOK
MONTANA TERRITORY
DAKOTA TERRITORY
WYOMING TERRITORY
IDAHO TERRITORY
NEBRASKA
FT BENTON
FT SHAW
Sun River
Missouri River
CAMP BAKER
Bozeman
Departed 1 April
FT ELLIS
Virginia City
Crow Reservation
Crow Agency
Camp Supply 9-12 April
Yellowstone River
Musselshell River
21 April-9 May
Village found by Lt Bradley on 27 May
Reconnaissance
FT CF SMITH (Abandoned)
Bighorn River
Little Bighorn River
Rocky Mountains
Bighorn Mountains
FT PECK
Sioux-Assiniboine Reservation
Glendive Depot
3 June
Powder River Depot
8 June
20 May- 4 June
14-19 May
May 21-24 25-28 29
Rosebud Creek
June 4-7
May 30 - June 3
May 17-20
May 12-16
April 30 - May 5
April 25-28
7-10 June
Tongue River
Powder River
Village found by Lt Bradley on 16 May
6 June
FT PHIL KEARNY (Abandoned)
5 June
FT RENO (Abandoned)
2 June
Little Powder River
North Platte River
FT FETTERMAN
Departed 29 May
FT LARAMIE
FT BUFORD
Little Missouri River
Arickaree, Mandan, Gros Ventre Reservation
Heart River
Cannonball River
Terry's Suspected Winter Roamer Location
Grand River
Moreau River
Belle Fourche River
Black Hills
Cheyenne River
Cheyenne River Agency
Great Sioux Reservation
Lower Brule Agency
White River
Crow Creek Agency
Spotted Tail Agency
Red Cloud Agency
Niobrara River
FT RANDALL
James River
Devils Lake Reservation
Sheyenne River
FT TOTTEN
FT ABRAHAM LINCOLN
Departed 17 May
Standing Rock Agency
N
eDe

Map 18. Crook's Advance to the Rosebud

When Crook arrived at the ruins of Fort Reno, Grouard and the scouts were absent. Many of the Crow braves had balked at serving with the Army, and only extensive negotiations and Grouard's offer of substantial rewards would eventually convince them to join Crook. The day after arriving at Reno, Crook's column headed north without the Indian allies and camped the night of 5 June on the abandoned site of Fort Phil Kearny. Lacking Grouard's guiding hand, the expedition soon became lost. On 6 June, mistaking the headwaters of Prairie Dog Creek for Little Goose Creek, Crook led his column down the wrong water course. The next day, Crook's command moved to the confluence of Prairie Dog Creek and Tongue River, where it camped for the next 4 days. At this time, several Black Hills prospectors asked for permission to travel with Crook's column. Within a week, Crook's civilian contingent grew to approximately 80 men. On 9 June, Sioux or Cheyenne warriors raided the encampment on the Tongue River. Four companies of Crook's cavalry quickly repulsed the attackers. Although Crook's casualties were insignificant, the attack was evidence that the Indians were in the area and prepared to fight.

Finally, on 11 June, Crook led the column 11 miles back up Prairie Dog Creek, then 7 miles to his original destination at the forks of Goose Creek (present-day Sheridan, Wyoming), where he established a permanent camp. As the officers and men enjoyed the excellent hunting and fishing in the area, Crook prepared for the final phase of the campaign. On 14 June, Grouard arrived with 261 Shoshone and Crow allies to join the expedition. Based on intelligence from Grouard, Crook now ordered his entire force to lighten itself for a quick march. Each man was to carry only 1 blanket, 100 rounds of ammunition, and 4 days' rations. The wagon train would remain at Goose Creek, and the infantry would be mounted on the pack mules. The infantrymen, many of whom were novice riders, received only a day's training on the reluctant mules, much to the delight of the cavalry spectators.

At 0600 on 16 June, Crook led his force of more than 1,300 soldiers, Indians, and civilians out of the encampment at Goose Creek. Major Alexander Chambers' 5 companies of mule-mounted infantry organized into 2 small battalions led the main column. Lieutenant Colonel William B. Royall's cavalry followed the infantry. His 15 companies of cavalry were organized into 4 battalions each commanded by a senior captain: Anson Mills (3d Cavalry), Guy Henry (3d Cavalry), Frederick Van Vliet (3d Cavalry), and Henry Noyes (2d Cavalry). The civilian contingent, organized into an auxiliary battalion called the Packers and Miners, brought up the rear. The Shoshone and Crow allies moved to the front and flank of the column. Crossing the Tongue about 6 miles to the north, the column proceeded downriver until early afternoon, when it turned west and crossed the divide to the headwaters of Rosebud Creek. At 1900, the lead elements of the force reached a small marshy area, near the source of the Rosebud, and bivouacked.

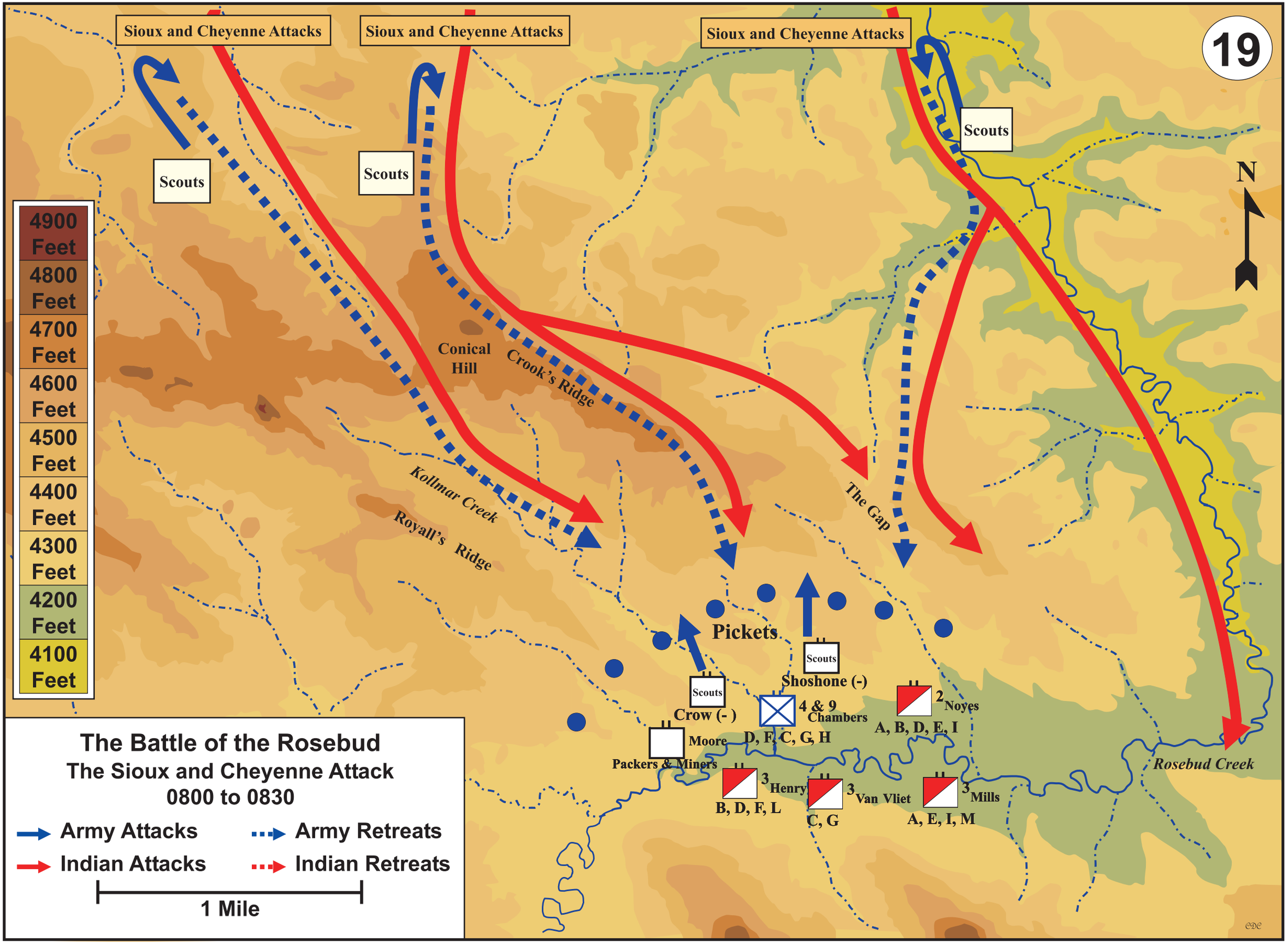

18
Crook's Advance to the Rosebud
Army Expeditions
Skirmish
Army Camp
Indian Village
Miles
0
7
14
21
Beauvais Creek
Bighorn River
Shoulder Blade Creek
Rotten Grass Creek
Soap Creek
Lodge Grass Creek
Little Bighorn River
Reno Creek
Davis Creek
Corral Creek
Location of village on 16 June
Location of village on 15 June
Suspected location of Indian village
Bull Creek
Otter Creek
Rosebud Creek
Fourmile Creek
Owl Creek
16 June
Tongue River
9 June (Tongue River Skirmish)
Hanging Woman Creek
7–10 June
Badger Creek
N
Columbus Creek
Tongue River
Little Tongue River
Owl Creek
Big Goose Creek
11-15 June
Little Goose Creek
Prairie Dog Creek
Dutch Creek
Buffalo Creek
Clear Creek
Powder River
CROOK
epe

Map 19. The Battle of the Rosebud: The Sioux and Cheyenne Attack, 0800 to 0830

On 17 June, Crook's column roused itself at 0300 and set out at 0600, marching northward along the south fork of Rosebud Creek. Again the infantry took the lead but were soon passed by the faster moving cavalry. The holiday atmosphere that prevailed since the arrival of the Indian scouts on 15 June was suddenly absent. The Crow and Shoshone scouts were particularly apprehensive. Although the column had not yet encountered any sign of Indians, the scouts seemed to sense their presence. The soldiers, on their part, were apparently fatigued from the previous day's 35-mile march and their early morning reveille, particularly the mule-riding infantry.

At 0800, Crook stopped to rest his men and animals. The Crow scouts reported evidence of Sioux and recommended that Crook keep the column concealed in the valley while they examined the area. Although he was deep in hostile territory, Crook made no special dispositions for defense and only posted a few pickets in the hills to the north. The troops merely halted in their marching order and took advantage of the opportunity to brew morning coffee. The battalions of Mills and Noyes led the column, followed by Captain Frederick Van Vliet's battalion and Major Alexander Chambers' battalion of mule-borne foot soldiers, Captain Guy V. Henry's battalion and a provisional company of civilian packers and miners brought up the rear.

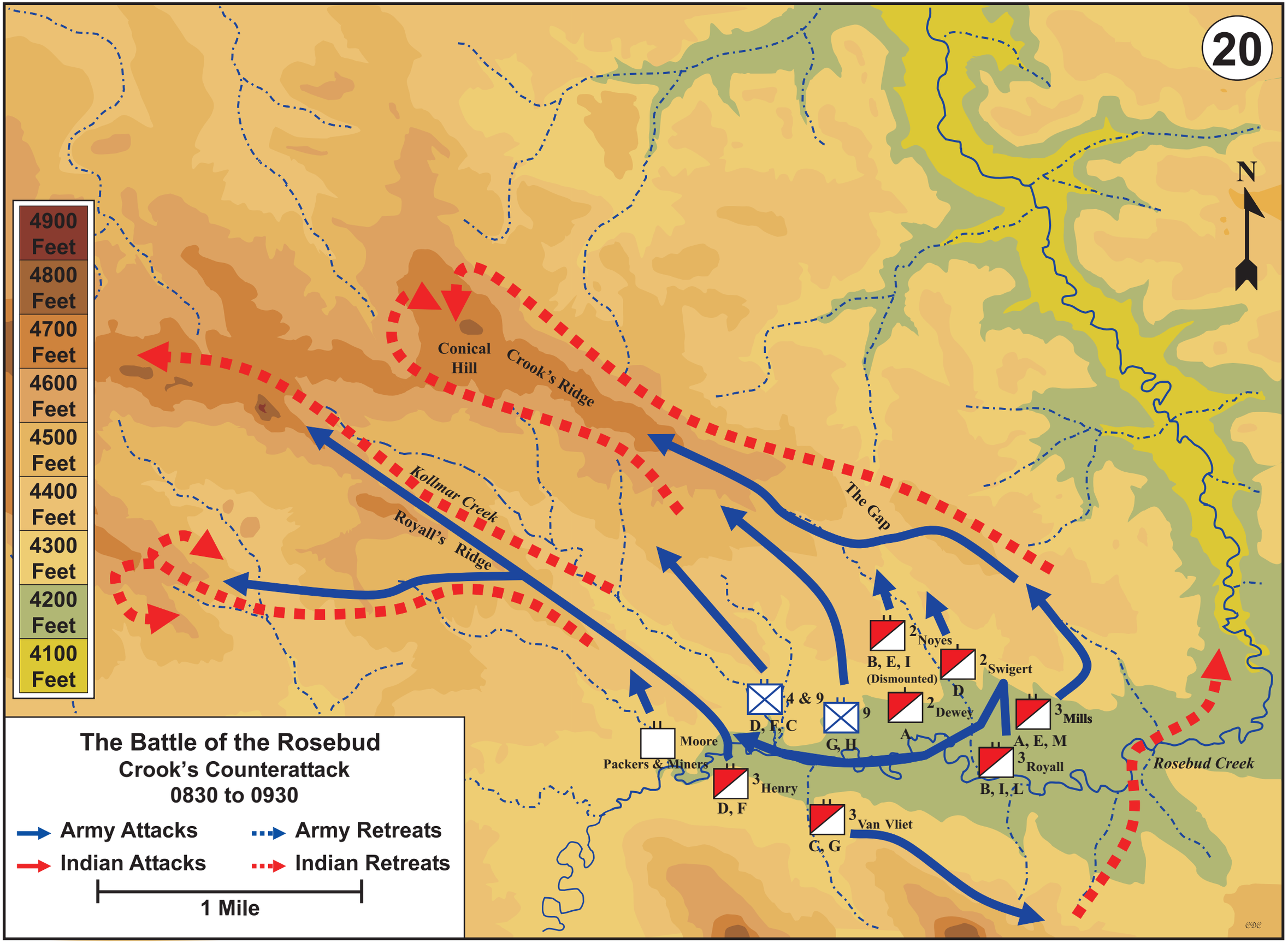
A few of the Crow and Shoshone were well ahead of the column searching for the Indian village; fortunately, the allied Indians that stayed with the column remained alert while the soldiers rested. Several minutes later, the soldiers in camp could hear the sound of intermittent gunfire coming from the bluffs to the north. At first, they dismissed the noise as nothing more than the scouts taking potshots at buffalo. As the intensity of fire increased, a scout rushed into the camp shouting, "Lakota, Lakota!" The Battle of the Rosebud was on. Major George Randall and his Crow and Shoshone auxiliaries quickly reinforced the thin Army picket line north of the camp. By 0830, the Sioux and Cheyenne were hotly engaged with Randall's Indian allies. Heavily outnumbered and supported by only a few Army pickets, the Crow and Shoshone warriors were slowly pushed back toward the camp, but their fighting withdrawal gave Crook time to deploy his forces.


19
Sioux and Cheyenne Attacks
Sioux and Cheyenne Attacks
Sioux and Cheyenne Attacks
Scouts
Scouts
Scouts
N
4900 Feet
4800 Feet
4700 Feet
4600 Feet
4500 Feet
4400 Feet
4300 Feet
4200 Feet
4100 Feet
Conical Hill
Crook's Ridge
Kollmar Creek
Royall's Ridge
The Gap
Pickets
Scouts
Shoshone (-)
Scouts
Crow (-)
4 & 9 Chambers
D, F, C, G, H
2 Noyes
A, B, D, E, I
Moore
Packers & Miners
3 Henry
B, D, F, L
3 Van Vliet
C, G
3 Mills
A, E, I, M
Rosebud Creek
The Battle of the Rosebud
The Sioux and Cheyenne Attack
0800 to 0830
Army Attacks
Army Retreats
Indian Attacks
Indian Retreats
1 Mile
CDC

Map 20. The Battle of the Rosebud: Crook's Counterattack, 0830 to 0930

In response to the Indian attack, Crook directed his forces to seize the high ground north and south of Rosebud Creek. He ordered Van Vliet, with C and G Companies, 3d Cavalry, to occupy the high bluffs to the south. Van Vliet scaled the hill just in time to drive off a small band of Sioux approaching from the east. In the north, the commands of Chambers (D and F Companies, 4th Infantry, and C, G, and H Companies, 9th Infantry) and Noyes with three of his companies (B, E, and I Companies, 2d Cavalry) formed a dismounted skirmish line and advanced toward the Sioux. Their progress was slow because of flanking fire from Indians occupying the high ground to the northeast. To accelerate the advance, Crook ordered Mills to charge this group of hostiles with a portion of his battalion (A, E, and M Companies of the 3d Cavalry). Lieutenant Colonel William Royall, Crook's second in command, supported Mills with another three companies (B, I, and L of the 3d Cavalry). Mills' mounted charge forced the Indians to withdraw northwest along the ridgeline, not stopping until they reached the next crest (now called Crook's Ridge). Here, Mills quickly reformed his companies and led them in another charge, driving the Indians northwest again to the next hill (Conical Hill). Mills was preparing to drive the Indians from Conical Hill when he received orders from Crook to cease his advance and assume a defensive posture.

Royall, after supporting Mills' initial charge, moved to the west end of the field to oppose Indians that were attacking the rear of Crook's camp. His force consisted of Henry's reduced battalion (D and F Companies, 3d Cavalry) and the three companies brought from the east end of the battlefield. Royall advanced rapidly along the ridgeline to the northwest, finally halting his advance near the head of Kollmar Creek.


20
N
4900 Feet
4800 Feet
4700 Feet
4600 Feet
4500 Feet
4400 Feet
4300 Feet
4200 Feet
4100 Feet
Conical Hill
Crook's Ridge
Kollmar Creek
Royall's Ridge
The Gap
Rosebud Creek
Moore
Packers & Miners
3 Henry
D, F
4 & 9
D, F, C
9
G, H
3 Van Vliet
C, G
2 Noyes
B, E, I
(Dismounted)
2 Swigert
D
2 Dewey
A
3 Mills
A, E, M
3 Royall
B, I, L
The Battle of the Rosebud
Crook's Counterattack
0830 to 0930
Army Attacks
Army Retreats
Indian Attacks
Indian Retreats
1 Mile

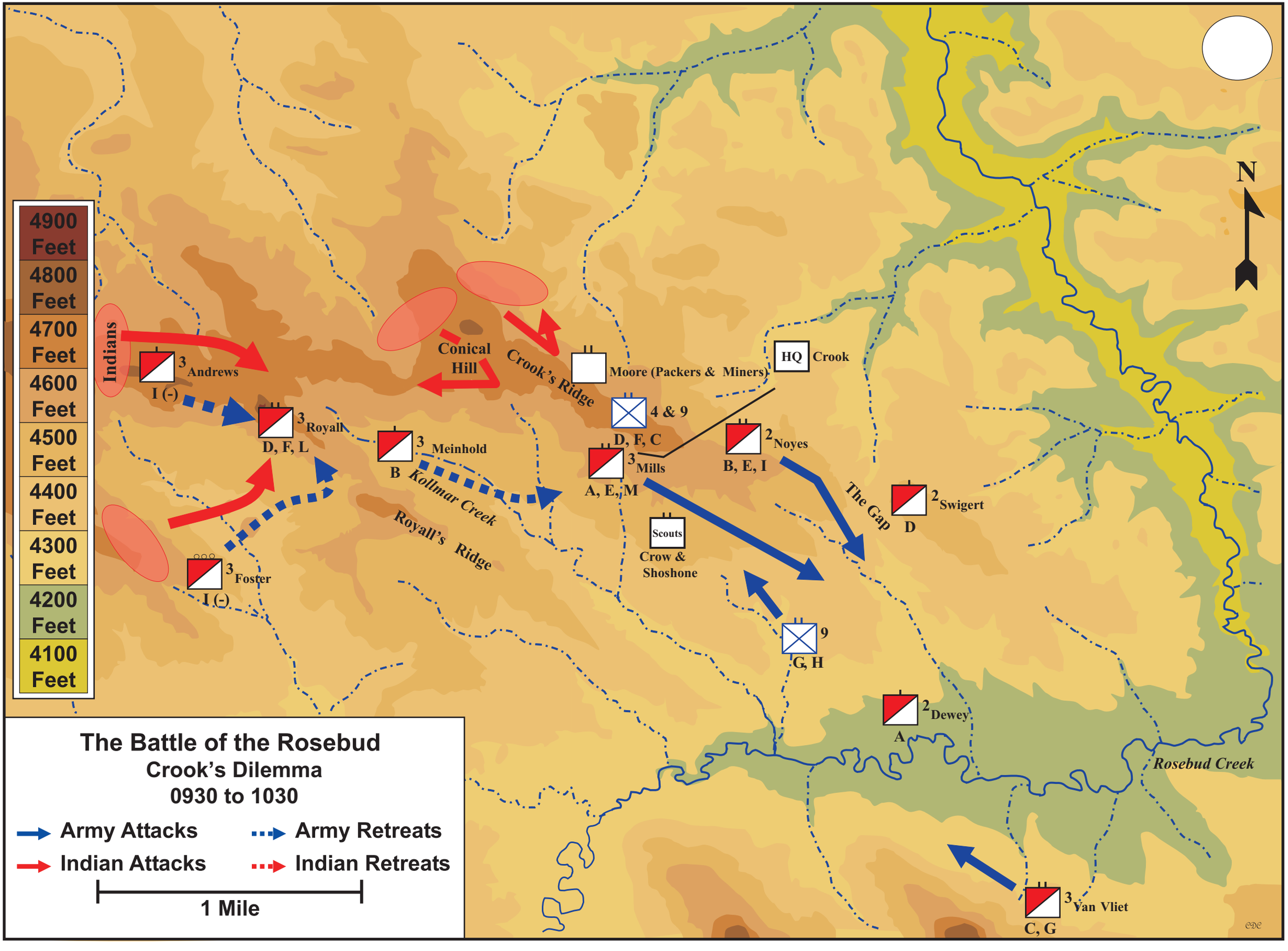
Map 21. The Battle of the Rosebud: Crook's Dilemma, 0930 to 1030

Chambers and Noyes led their forces forward and soon joined Mills on top of the ridge. The bulk of Crook's command, now joined by the packers and miners, occupied Crook's Ridge. Establishing his headquarters there at approximately 0930, Crook contemplated his next move.

Crook's most pressing concern was that Royall's detachment was a mile from the main body and in some danger of being cut off and destroyed. Sensing this vulnerability and exploiting their superb mobility, the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors shifted their main effort to the west and concentrated their attacks on Royall's troopers. Crook, recognizing the danger, wanted Royall to withdraw to Crook's Ridge. However, the order delivered to Royall directed that he extend his right until he connected with the rest of the command at Crook's Ridge. In reply, Royall sent only B Company to join Crook. That one company did nothing to cover the 1-mile gap. Instead, it significantly reduced the force Royall had available to defend his exposed position. He should have withdrawn all five companies. He later defended his decision and claimed that heavy pressure from the Indians made withdrawing the entire command too risky.

In addition to the danger to Royall's command, Crook faced a significant dilemma. His initial charges secured key terrain but did little to damage the Indian force. The bluecoats' assaults invariably scattered the Indian defenders but did not keep them away. After falling back, the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors returned to snipe at the soldiers from long range. Occasionally, single warriors or small groups of Indians demonstrated their valor by charging forward and exchanging a few close-range shots with the troopers; when pressed, the Indians sped away on their nimble ponies. Crook soon realized his charges were indecisive.

Casting about for a way to defeat his elusive opponent, Crook returned to his original campaign plan. Since the Indians had been fighting him with unprecedented tenacity, it suggested that they might be fighting to defend their families in a nearby village. Thus, Crook decided to advance down the Rosebud Valley where he hoped to find the hostile encampment and force the enemy to stand and fight. At about 1030, Crook ordered Mills and Noyes to withdraw their commands from the high ground and prepare for an attack on the Indian village presumed to be somewhere to the north on the Rosebud. To replace the cavalry, Crook recalled Van Vliet's battalion from the south side of the Rosebud.

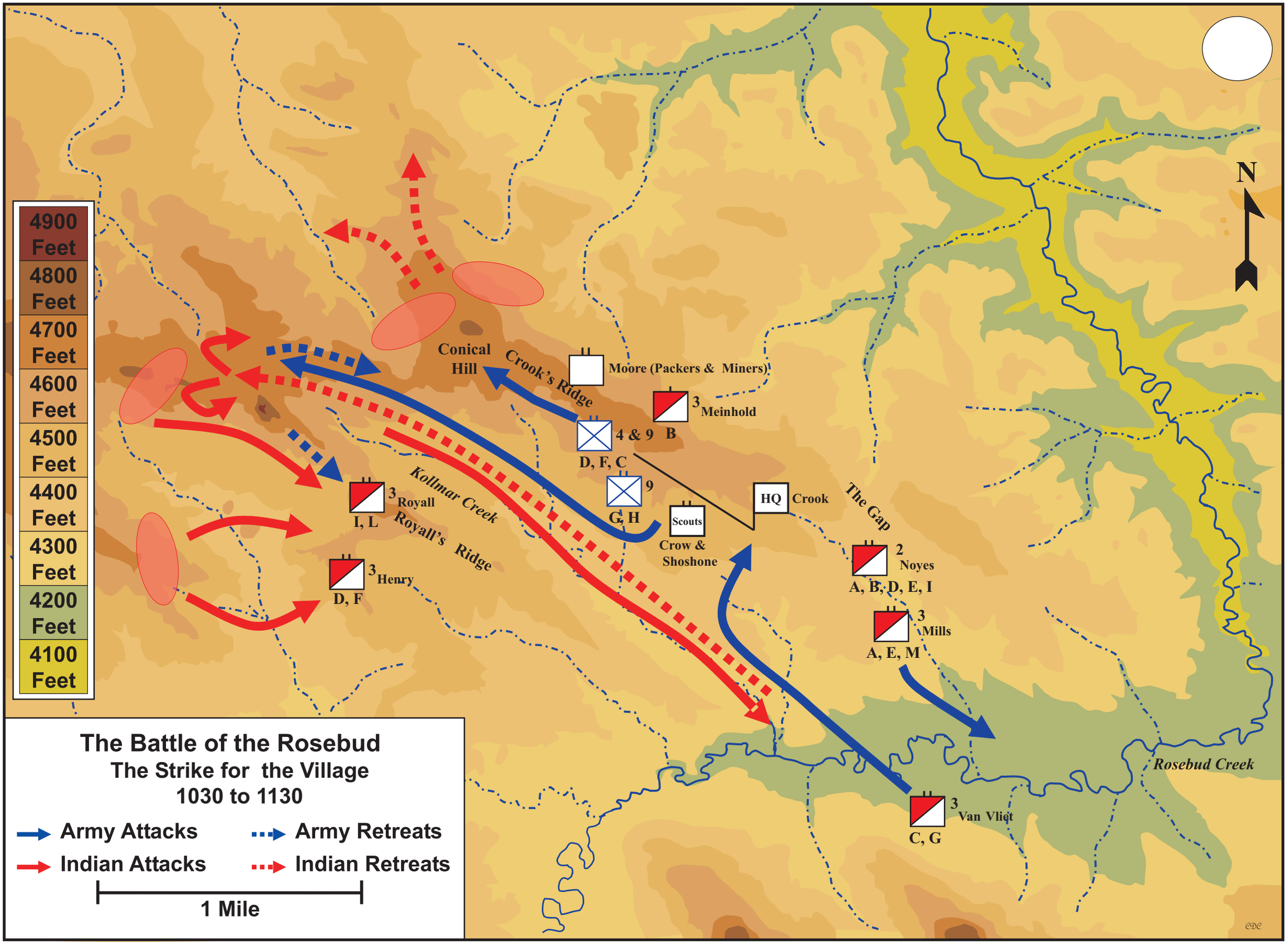

The Battle of the Rosebud
Crook's Dilemma
0930 to 1030
Army Attacks
Army Retreats
Indian Attacks
Indian Retreats
1 Mile
4900 Feet
4800 Feet
4700 Feet
4600 Feet
4500 Feet
4400 Feet
4300 Feet
4200 Feet
4100 Feet
N
Indians
3 Andrews
I (-)
3 Royall
D, F, L
3 Meinhold
B
Kollmar Creek
Royall's Ridge
3 Foster
I (-)
Conical Hill
Crook's Ridge
Moore (Packers & Miners)
4 & 9
D, F, C
3 Mills
A, E, M
Scouts
Crow & Shoshone
HQ Crook
2 Noyes
B, E, I
The Gap
2 Swigert
D
9
G, H
2 Dewey
A
Rosebud Creek
3 Van Vliet
C, G

Map 22. The Battle of the Rosebud: The Strike for the Village, 1030 to 1130

One mile to the west, Royall's situation continued to deteriorate. Royall tried to withdraw across Kollmar Creek, but found the Indians' fire too heavy. Instead, he withdrew southeast along the ridgeline to a more defensible position. In an attempt to further isolate and overwhelm Royall's force, a large group of Indians charged boldly down the valley of Kollmar Creek, advancing all the way to the Rosebud. The fortuitous arrival of Van Vliet's command checked the Indians' advance. Crook then ordered his Crow and Shoshone scouts to charge into the withdrawing warriors' flank, throwing the hostiles into great confusion.

Troubled by the fire from Indians on Conical Hill and to cover Mills' movement into the Rosebud Valley, Crook ordered Chambers' infantry to drive the Sioux away. The foot soldiers promptly forced an enemy withdrawal, but to little avail. It was a repetition of the same old pattern; the soldiers could drive the Sioux away at will, but they could not fix and destroy them.

At about 1130 Crook sent another message to Royall directing his withdrawal to Crook's Ridge. However, he decided not to wait for Royall's return and directed Mills to execute his drive for the village. He could only hope that Mills' advance down the valley would be successful.


4900 Feet
4800 Feet
4700 Feet
4600 Feet
4500 Feet
4400 Feet
4300 Feet
4200 Feet
4100 Feet
N
Conical Hill
Crook's Ridge
Moore (Packers & Miners)
3 Meinhold
B
4 & 9
D, F, C
9
G, H
Scouts
Crow & Shoshone
HQ Crook
The Gap
2 Noyes
A, B, D, E, I
3 Mills
A, E, M
3 Royall
I, L
Kollmar Creek
Royall's Ridge
3 Henry
D, F
3 Van Vliet
C, G
Rosebud Creek
The Battle of the Rosebud
The Strike for the Village
1030 to 1130
Army Attacks
Army Retreats
Indian Attacks
Indian Retreats
1 Mile

Map 23. The Battle of the Rosebud: The End of the Battle, 1130 to 1330

Mills' advance on the suspected Indian village did nothing to suppress the Indians. Crook's assumption about the presence of an Indian encampment proved totally false; there was no nearby Indian village. The most important consequence of Mills' action was to leave Crook without sufficient force to aid Royall and his hard-pressed command. While Mills made his way down the Rosebud, Royall's situation grew worse.

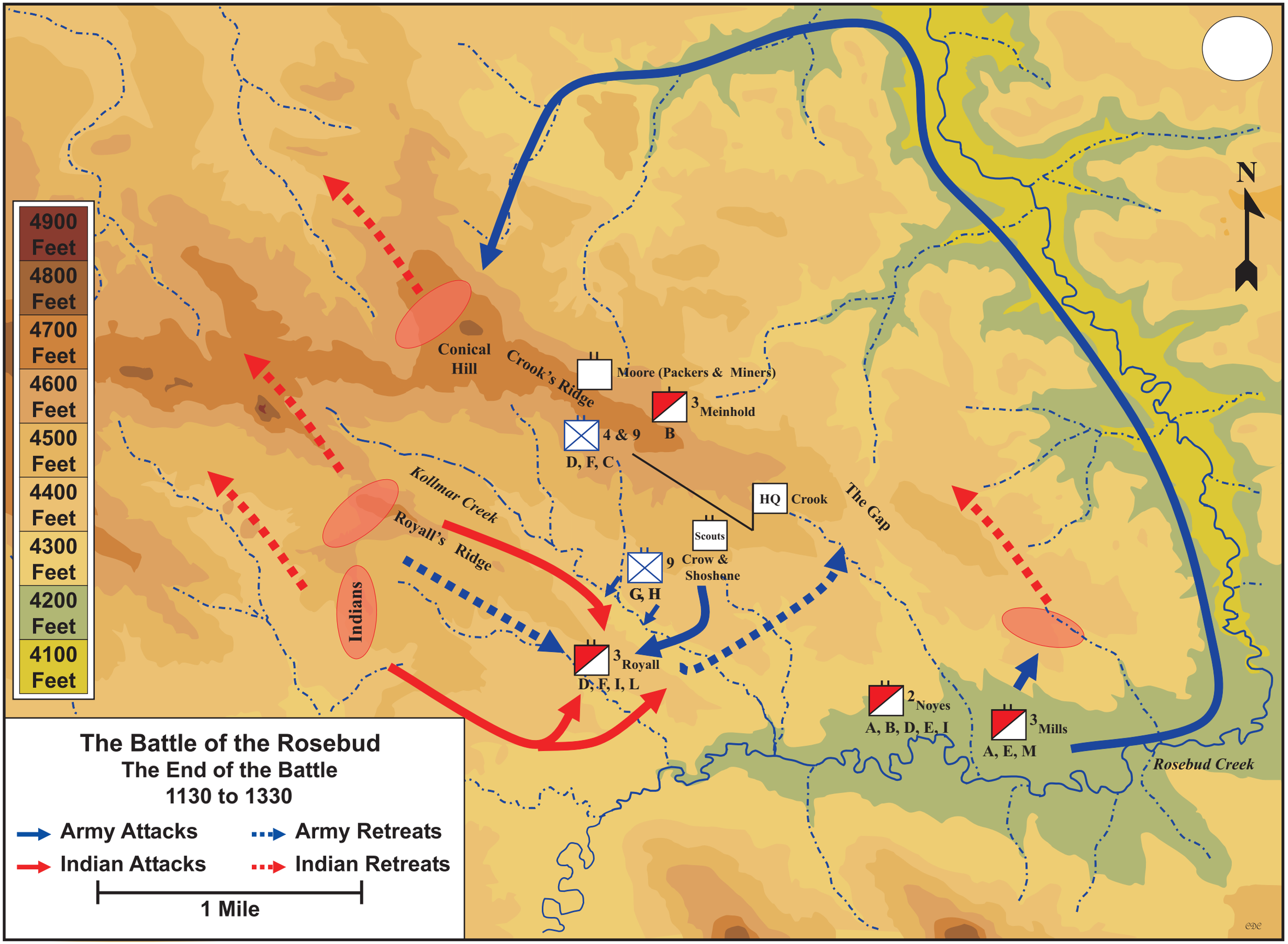
At approximately 1130, Royall withdrew southeastward a second time and assumed a new defensive position. From here, he hoped to lead his command across Kollmar Creek and rendezvous with Crook. Meanwhile, the Sioux and Cheyenne assailed him from three sides, growing ever bolder in their attacks. Observing the situation from his headquarters, Crook realized that Royall would need help in extricating himself. Consequently, Crook sent orders to Mills canceling his original mission and directing him to turn west to fall on the rear of the Indians pressing Royall.

At approximately 1230, Royall decided he could wait no longer and began withdrawing his troopers into the Kollmar ravine to remount their horses. From there, his men would have to race through a hail of fire before reaching the relative safety of Crook's main position. As they began their dash, the Crow and Shoshone scouts countercharged the pursuing enemy, relieving much of the pressure on Royall's men. Two companies of infantry also left the main position to provide covering fire from the northeast side of the ravine. In spite of this gallant assistance, Royall's command suffered grievous casualties. Nearly 80 percent of the total Army losses (10 killed, 21 wounded) in the Battle of the Rosebud came from Royall's four companies of the 3d Cavalry (9 killed and 15 wounded).

While the last of Royall's men extricated themselves, Mills digested his new instructions from Crook. Since Mills' command had driven off a small party of Sioux near the bend in the Rosebud, it apparently led him to believe that the Indian village was nearby. He wanted to continue the attack on the suspected Indian village, but obeyed his orders. Mills climbed out of the canyon and proceeded westward toward Conical Hill.

Mills arrived too late to assist Royall's withdrawal, but his unexpected appearance on the Indians' flank caused the Sioux and Cheyenne to break contact and retreat. Concentrating his mounted units, Crook now led them up the Rosebud in search of the nonexistent Indian village. However, the scouts refused to enter the narrow canyon, forcing Crook to abandon the pursuit. The Battle of the Rosebud was over. By the standards of Indian warfare, it had been an extremely long and bloody engagement. Never before had the Plains Indians fought with such ferocity, and never before had they shown such a willingness to accept casualties. The Sioux and the Cheyenne left 13 dead on the field and Crazy Horse later stated that the Indian losses were 36 killed and 63 wounded. Their sacrifice was not in vain. Concerned for his wounded, short on supplies, and shaken by the Indians' ferocity, Crook returned to his camp on Goose Creek. His Shoshoni allies soon departed when they saw Crook had no intention of continuing the fight.

Crook's report of the battle, dated 19 June, reached Sheridan's headquarters on 23 June (remarkably fast considering the technological limitations of the day). In his message, he claimed victory with respect to his retention of the battlefield but then acknowledged that he lacked the resources to continue without re-supply and reinforcements. He stopped short of estimating the number of Indians that opposed his column, but he did state they were sufficiently determined and strong enough to fight for several hours against his 1,300-man column. Sheridan forwarded the message to Terry that same day. Unfortunately, Crook's warning that the Indians were determined to fight did not reach Terry until 30 June, 5 days after the Battle of Little Bighorn. Crook and his command stayed at Goose Creek for 7 weeks awaiting reinforcements. They played no role in the momentous events at Little Bighorn.


4900 Feet
4800 Feet
4700 Feet
4600 Feet
4500 Feet
4400 Feet
4300 Feet
4200 Feet
4100 Feet
N
Conical Hill
Crook's Ridge
Moore (Packers & Miners)
3 Meinhold
B
4 & 9
D, F, C
HQ Crook
The Gap
Kollmar Creek
Royall's Ridge
Scouts
Crow & Shoshone
9
G, H
Indians
3 Royall
D, F, I, L
2 Noyes
A, B, D, E, I
3 Mills
A, E, M
Rosebud Creek
The Battle of the Rosebud
The End of the Battle
1130 to 1330
Army Attacks
Army Retreats
Indian Attacks
Indian Retreats
1 Mile

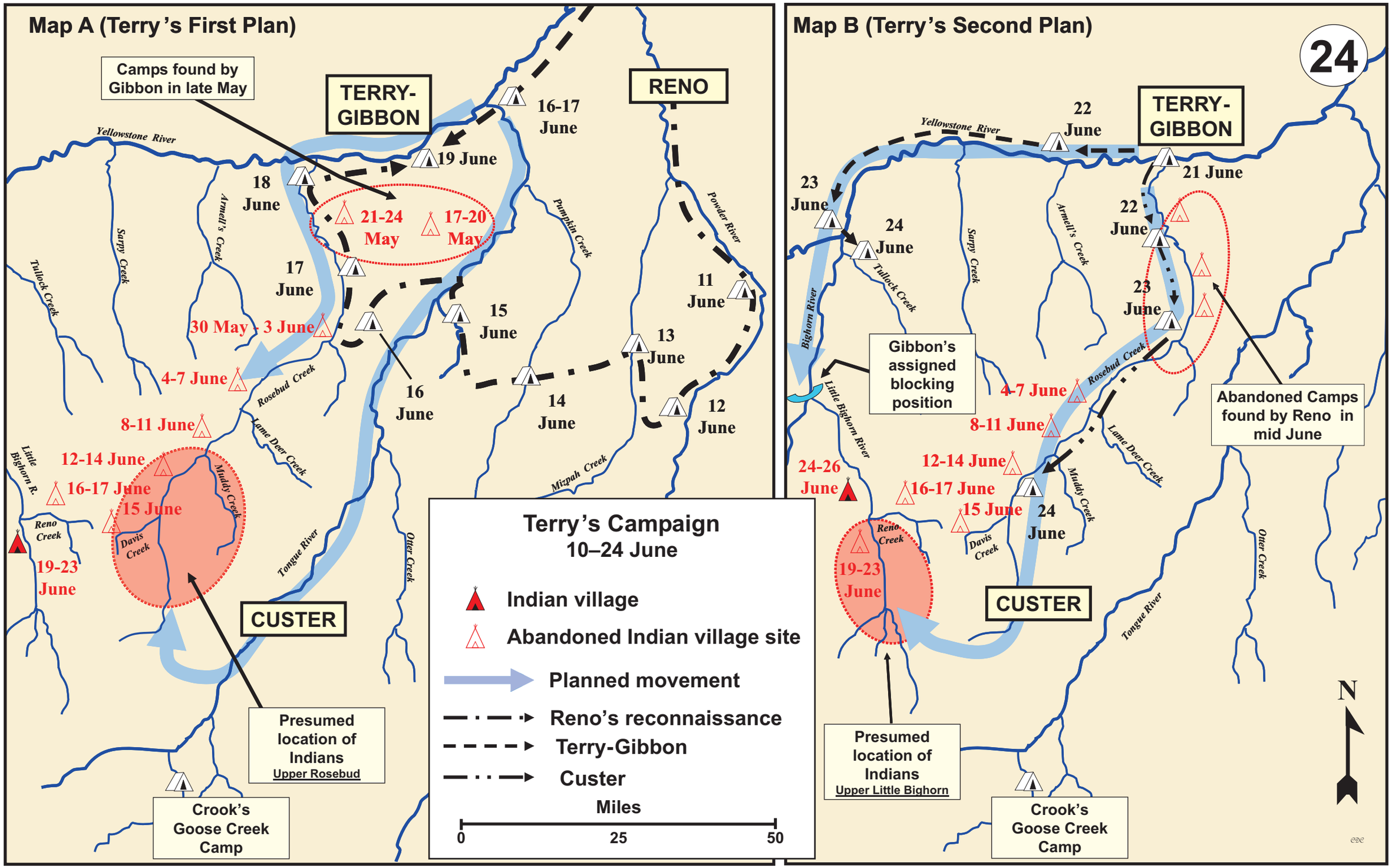
Map 24. Terry's Campaign, 10–24 June

Unaware of Crook's activities but armed with the information furnished by Gibbon's messengers, Terry finally had specific, if somewhat stale, intelligence regarding the Indian locations which he believed to be somewhere on Rosebud Creek. This new information called for new orders, which Terry issued on 10 June (see map A). Major Marcus A. Reno of Custer's command was to take six companies of cavalry on a reconnaissance of the valleys of the Powder River, Mizpah Creek, and Tongue River and confirm that the Sioux had not moved to the east. Under no circumstances was he to venture west of the Tongue River so as not to alarm the Indians believed to be on Rosebud Creek. Reno was to finish his reconnaissance at the mouth of the Tongue, where he was to rejoin Custer and the rest of the 7th Cavalry Regiment. Following Reno's reconnaissance, Terry intended to drive southward in parallel columns, Custer's cavalry on the Tongue and Gibbon's predominantly infantry force on the Rosebud. After ascending the Tongue for an appropriate distance, Custer's more mobile command would turn west toward the Rosebud and descend that creek pushing the Sioux toward Gibbon's force.

While Reno failed to scout all of Mizpah Creek, he essentially followed Terry's orders until 15 June. After descending the Tongue River for only 8 miles, he then decided to turn west to investigate enemy signs on the Rosebud. Although he disobeyed Terry's direct instructions by advancing up the Rosebud, Reno was able to determine that Terry's plan of parallel columns would not work; the Indians had already traveled beyond the area encompassed by Terry's pincer movement.

The information generated by Reno's reconnaissance caused Terry to formulate yet another plan (see map B). While all of his forces gathered at the mouth of the Rosebud, he designed a second pincer movement similar to the first. Terry's written orders provided full latitude for Custer to diverge from them; paradoxically, they also enumerated a specific set of instructions for Custer to follow. Whether Custer disobeyed orders is a controversy that continues to this day. Terry's orders directed Custer to ascend the Rosebud and follow the trail of the Indians. If the trail diverged from the Rosebud to the west, he was, nonetheless, to continue up that creek to ensure the Indians would not escape to the south. Near the headwaters of Rosebud Creek, Custer was to cross the divide into the Little Bighorn River drainage. Meanwhile, Gibbon's force was to move up the Yellowstone River, turn south up the Bighorn, and establish itself at the mouth of the Little Bighorn.

On 21 June, Custer departed with his regiment of 12 companies (652 men). Shortly thereafter, Terry and Gibbon led the remaining forces, 4 cavalry companies and 5 infantry companies (723 men), westward along the Yellowstone on their route to the mouth of the Little Bighorn. Each of these two columns followed Terry's plan to the letter until the evening of 24 June.


Map A (Terry's First Plan)
Camps found by Gibbon in late May
TERRY-GIBBON
RENO
Yellowstone River
16-17 June
19 June
18 June
21-24 May
17-20 May
17 June
30 May - 3 June
4-7 June
8-11 June
12-14 June
16-17 June
15 June
19-23 June
16 June
15 June
14 June
13 June
12 June
11 June
Sarpy Creek
Armell's Creek
Tullock Creek
Rosebud Creek
Lame Deer Creek
Little Bighorn R.
Reno Creek
Davis Creek
Muddy Creek
Tongue River
Otter Creek
Pumpkin Creek
Powder River
Mizpah Creek
CUSTER
Presumed location of Indians
Upper Rosebud
Crook's Goose Creek Camp
Terry's Campaign
10–24 June
Indian village
Abandoned Indian village site
Planned movement
Reno's reconnaissance
Terry-Gibbon
Custer
Miles
0
25
50
Map B (Terry's Second Plan)
24
22 June
TERRY-GIBBON
21 June
23 June
24 June
22 June
23 June
Bighorn River
Little Bighorn River
Gibbon's assigned blocking position
Abandoned Camps found by Reno in mid June
4-7 June
8-11 June
12-14 June
16-17 June
15 June
24-26 June
19-23 June
24 June
CUSTER
Presumed location of Indians
Upper Little Bighorn
Crook's Goose Creek Camp
N

Map 25. Custer's Approach to the Crow's Nest

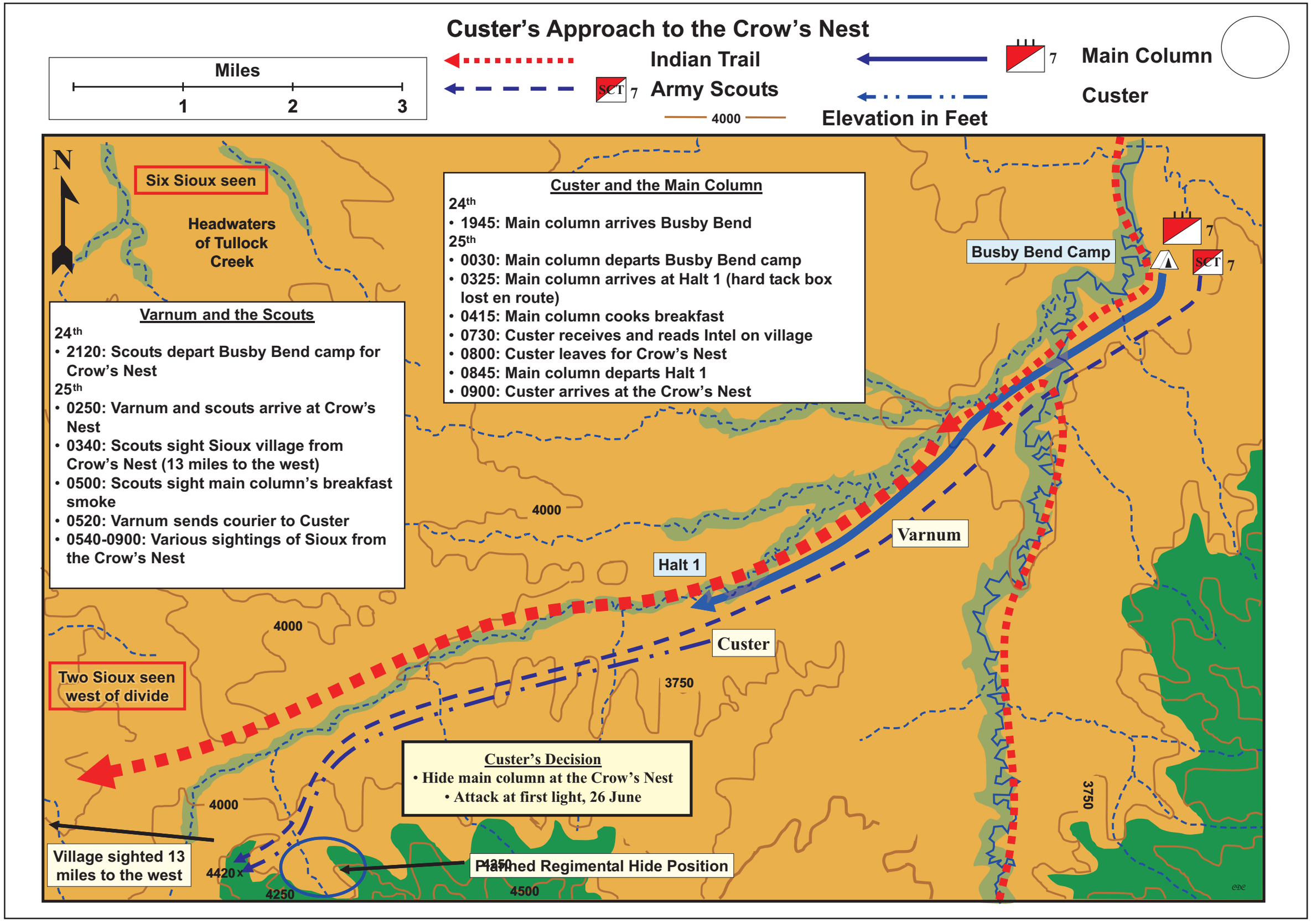
At 1945 on 24 June 1876, Custer camped at what is now the Busby Bend of Rosebud Creek. Throughout that day's march, he, his soldiers, and his scouts had seen increasing signs of the Sioux village. Still unclear was whether the Indians had continued up the Rosebud or had turned west toward the Little Bighorn River. At 2100, four Crow scouts returned to camp with news that the Sioux trail led westward out of the Rosebud Valley. Custer now faced a dilemma. Terry's orders directed him to continue up the Rosebud to its head, then turn west toward the Little Bighorn. Through this maneuver, Terry intended to trap the Indians between Custer's force and Gibbon's column. On the other hand, continuing up the Rosebud entailed several risks: possible discovery by Indian scouts, the loss of contact with the Indian village, and the possibility of leaving Gibbon's force to fight the Indians alone. After weighing his options, Custer chose to maintain contact by following the Sioux trail over the divide.

At 2120, Custer sent his chief of scouts, Lieutenant Charles A. Varnum, to a natural observation point called the Crow's Nest to pinpoint the location of the Sioux village. While Varnum was absent, Custer decided to move his column at night to the divide between Rosebud Creek and the Little Bighorn River. His force would then hide there throughout the day of 25 June in a small pocket nestled at the base of the Crow's Nest. That evening, he planned to approach the village, assume attack positions before dawn on 26 June, and attack the Indians at first light.

At 0030 on 25 June, Custer led his soldiers out of the Busby Bend camp toward the divide. After a slow, dusty, and disagreeable night march lasting nearly 3 hours, he halted his column about an hour before sunrise to cook breakfast. At 0730, Custer received a message from Varnum at the Crow's Nest. Although Varnum had not personally seen signs of the Sioux village (now in the Little Bighorn Valley), his Indian scouts claimed to have seen it. Unwilling to act without making his own observations, Custer and a small party left at 0800 for the Crow's Nest, while Reno brought the regiment forward.

During Varnum's wait for Custer at the Crow's Nest, his scouts saw two groups of hostile Indians that appeared to notice Custer's column. Custer reached the Crow's Nest at 0900, but like Varnum, he was unable to identify any signs of the Sioux village. Varnum's Indian scouts, however, convinced Custer of its presence in the Little Bighorn Valley. The scouts further argued that the column's movement had been compromised and that a stealthy approach to the village was now impossible. Custer adamantly rejected this advice while at the Crow's Nest and decided to continue with his plan to hide the regiment and attack at first light.

Custer's Approach to the Crow's Nest



Map 26. Custer's Approach to the Little Bighorn

During Custer's absence, Reno had moved the column forward to a position just north of the Crow's Nest. On his return, Custer learned of a further threat to his force's security. During the night march, one of the pack mules had lost part of its load. The detail sent to retrieve it discovered several hostile Indians rummaging through its contents. The soldiers fired on the Indians, scattering them but not killing them. Coupled with the observations of Varnum's scouts, this latest breach of security forced Custer to discard his original plan for a stealthy approach. Instead of concealing his command throughout the day of 25 June, he would have to approach and attack the village immediately. Ironically, none of the Indians who spotted the column reported their findings to the village until after the battle, but Custer had no way of knowing that.

At 1050, Custer gathered his officers and detailed his new plan and the organization of the column. He directed each company commander to assign one noncommissioned officer and six men to accompany the pack train. The companies would depart in the order in which they finished preparations to move. The troopers resumed their march at 1145, with Captain Frederick W. Benteen's company in the van. They had not proceeded more than one-half mile past the divide when Custer ordered another halt. There, he reorganized his command into four parts: Benteen's battalion with D, H, and K Companies (120 men); Reno's battalion with A, G, and M Companies (175 men); Custer's battalion with C, E, F, I, and L Companies (221 men); and Captain Thomas M. McDougall's augmented company (B) with the pack train (136 men). Custer now detached Benteen, ordering him to scout southward to determine whether the Indians were escaping in that direction. As soon as Benteen concluded that the Indians were not escaping, he was to rejoin the command as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, Custer and Reno continued their advance down what is now Reno Creek, with Custer's battalion on the right bank and Reno's on the left.

Benteen began his reconnaissance enthusiastically, but after crossing a series of ridges without finding any trace of the Indians, he concluded that he was being deliberately excluded from the fight. As a result, he lost his previous sense of urgency. In the meantime, Custer and Reno had proceeded down Reno Creek until they united on the right bank at a lone tepee containing the body of a warrior mortally wounded in the Rosebud fight. At the tepee, Custer's scouts reported that they could see the Sioux pony herd and Indians running in the distance. At 1415, Custer and Reno departed the lone tepee location at a trot and advanced nearly 3 miles to a flat area between Reno Creek and its north fork. There, more Sioux were seen, two of whom rode to a hill to give the alarm. Custer now ordered Reno to follow Reno Creek to the Little Bighorn, ford the river, and assault the fleeing village in a mounted charge. Custer promised Reno that he would support the attack with the remainder of the command. After Reno's departure, Custer briefly followed Reno's trail, reaching the north fork of Reno Creek at 1500. There, he received a series of surprising reports from Reno indicating that the Indians were not running as expected. Once again, Custer was forced to revise his plans.

Custer's Approach to the Little Bighorn

26

Miles
0 1 2 3

Indian village
4000 Elevation in Feet
Custer and Reno
Benteen

Lone Tepee
- 1415:
  - o Main column passes Lone Tepee
  - o Scouts report Sioux in Little Bighorn Valley
- 1445: Boston Custer passes Lone Tepee
- 1512: Benteen passes Lone Tepee
- 1532: Pack Train passes Lone Tepee

Custer's Decision at the Lone Tepee
- Reno lead (at trot)
- Movement to contact

No Name Creek & Morass
- 1400: Main column passes Morass
- 1432: Benteen rejoins Custer route
- 1437: Benteen halts at Morass to water horses
- 1437: Boston Custer passes Morass
- 1457:
  - o Benteen departs Morass
  - o Pack train arrives Morass
- 1517: Pack train departs Morass

Halt 3
- 1205: Main column arrives Halt 3
- 1212: Columns separate
- 1232: Pack train passes through Halt 3

Custer's Decision at Halt 3
- Columns separate
- Movement to contact (at walk)

Halt 2
- 1007: Main column arrives Halt 2
- 1020: Lost pack report
- 1035: Custer rejoins
- 1050: Officer call
- 1145: March resumed
- 1200: Crosses divide

Custer's Decision at Halt 2
- Movement to contact (at walk)
- Scouts lead
- Reinforced pack train

The Flats
- 1443:
  - o Custer and Reno vicinity of the Flats
  - o Scouts report village is fleeing
- 1451: Custer waters horses at North Fork
- 1453: Reno waters horses at Little Bighorn River

Custer's Decision at the Flats
(Hasty Attack)
- Reno pursue and bring to battle fleeing village
- Custer support Reno

The Flats
1501: Scouts and Adjutant Cook report Sioux Attacking Reno

The Flats
Lone Tepee
Morass
Little Bighorn Valley
N
3250
Halt 3
Halt 2
7
Benteen
4000
The Divide
Benteen's Advance Guard at Ridge C
High ground above the Crow's Nest
13 Miles

Map 27. The Battle of the Little Bighorn: Reno's Attack in the Valley, 1500 to 1533

After receiving his instructions and leaving Custer for the last time, Reno crossed again to the left bank of Reno Creek and followed the stream to its confluence with the Little Bighorn where he briefly stopped to water the horses. Five minutes later, Reno's battalion forded the Little Bighorn and deployed into a line across the valley. For the first time, Reno could see the edge of what now appeared to be an enormous Indian village.

At 1503, Reno ordered his men to advance down the valley. As their horses accelerated to a fast trot, several officers and men in the advancing line could see troopers from Custer's battalion on the bluffs to the east beyond the Little Bighorn. They could also see a swarm of Indian warriors gathering at the southern edge of the village. At the same time, Reno's Indian scouts, who initially formed the left flank of his line, veered westward toward the Indian pony herd on the bench above the Little Bighorn. Their task was to drive off as much of the herd as possible to prevent the Indians' escape. At 1513, officers and men in the charging line once again saw soldiers on the crest of the hill across the Little Bighorn. Several of Reno's men later testified that they could clearly see Custer waving his hat to the line of horsemen in the valley. Within a few minutes, Reno concluded that, without immediate support, his 135-man force could not attack through the village and hope to survive.

At 1518, Reno ordered his men to dismount and form a skirmish line. One of every four troopers was designated to hold the horses. While the horses were secured in a stand of timber on the right flank of the line, the remaining 95 men spread 400 yards across the valley to the low bluff on the west. Within minutes, the entire line was under pressure from hundreds of warriors spilling out of the village.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the river, Custer was faced with a situation that imposed a change of plans. From the orders he had given Reno, it appears that Custer originally had intended to reinforce Reno's charge in the valley. On being informed that the Indians were fighting rather than running, he may have felt he needed to support Reno by attacking the Sioux village from a different direction. While he hoped at any moment to see Benteen's command riding into sight, the urgency of the situation meant he could not wait. Consequently, Custer turned his battalion northwest to follow the bluff line on the right bank of the Little Bighorn River. Apparently, he was seeking access to the river farther downstream to make a flank attack on the village.

Custer's force climbed to the crest of Reno Hill, where he gained his first glimpse of the valley. He could see Reno's command still making its charge and could view the southern edge of the largest Indian village any of the veteran soldiers had ever seen. In fact, the village contained up to 1,000 lodges and 7,120 people, including approximately 1,800 warriors. The sight of so many fighting warriors convinced Custer that he needed Benteen's command and the extra ammunition on the pack train immediately. He detached Sergeant Daniel Kanipe to find McDougall, commander of the pack train, with the message to move the train hurriedly cross-country: "If packs get loose, don't stop to fix them, cut them off. Come quick. Big Indian camp," and an added postscript for Benteen, if seen, to *come quickly*. But he had no time to wait for Benteen and the pack train; he had to continue his trek northwest. Just beyond Reno Hill, he descended into Cedar Coulee still attempting to gain access to the river and hoping that his approach would be shielded from the Indians' view.

Halting the command at a bend in the coulee, Custer rode to the high ground overlooking the valley (possibly Sharpshooter Hill or Weir Point) with several scouts including Mitch Boyer and the Indian scout, Curly. From the high ground, the small party could see that Reno's command had dismounted and was forming a skirmish line. If Reno could hold his position, Custer's command might gain enough time to become engaged. From the high ground, Custer could also see that Cedar Coulee joined another ravine (Medicine Tail Coulee) which would, at last, give him access to the river.

From the high ground, it is most likely that Custer also saw the dust cloud of Benteen's battalion and the pack train descending Reno Creek. He left Curly and Boyer on Weir Point to watch Reno's fight and then rejoined his command. After sending a trumpeter, John Martin, with another message for Benteen to bring the ammunition packs forward, he led the command down Cedar Coulee and into Medicine Tail Coulee to attack.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn

Reno's Attack in the Valley 1500 to 1533

Army Movements

Messenger

Army Scout Movements

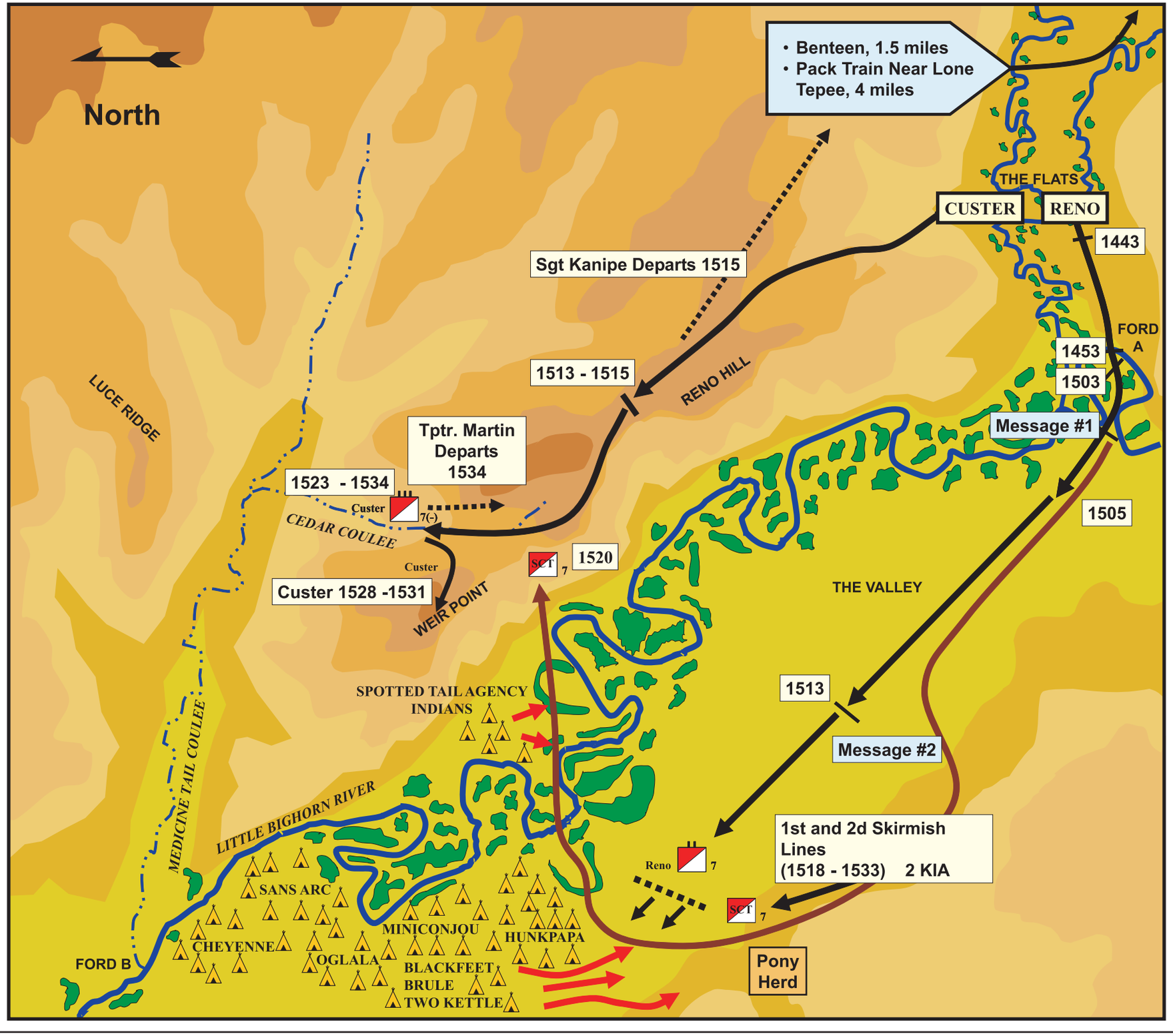
Indian Attacks

Village

Skirmish Line

3450 Feet
3400 Feet
3350 Feet
3300 Feet
3250 Feet
3200 Feet
3150 Feet
3100 Feet

Miles
0 1/4 1/2



Map 28. The Battle of the Little Bighorn: Losing the Initiative, 1533 to 1553

In the valley, Reno's troopers were outnumbered five to one. Threatened with being flanked and overwhelmed on his left, at 1533 Reno ordered the line to withdraw into the timber. In the trees, Reno tried to form a perimeter using an old riverbank as a natural breastwork. However, the area was too large for his small command to secure. In less than 30 minutes, the warriors worked their way through the brush and threatened to surround Reno's command. The timber was a good defensive position. However, Reno's most serious concern was that some of his companies were also running low on ammunition, and the only remaining supply was with the pack train somewhere to the rear. Reno was quickly coming to the decision that he needed to leave the timber and find the rest of the regiment.

In Cedar Coulee, Custer was unaware of Reno's deteriorating situation. His primary concern was to get his battalion off the high ground and into the fight to support Reno. He more than likely intended to attack down Medicine Tail Coulee into the village, the frontier Army's accepted tactic of hitting a village from multiple sides to cause surprise and panic. At approximately 1549, Custer received a valuable update from his younger brother, Boston Custer. Boston had abandoned his assignment with the pack train and ridden forward to join his brother for the fight. The younger brother would have been able to inform his brother that the back trail was open and confirm that Benteen had joined Custer's route. Boston may also have been able to verify that Reno was still heavily engaged in the valley, a confirmation for Custer that there was still time to move against the village's flank.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn

Losing the Initiative 1533 to 1553

Army Movements

Messenger

Army Scout Movements

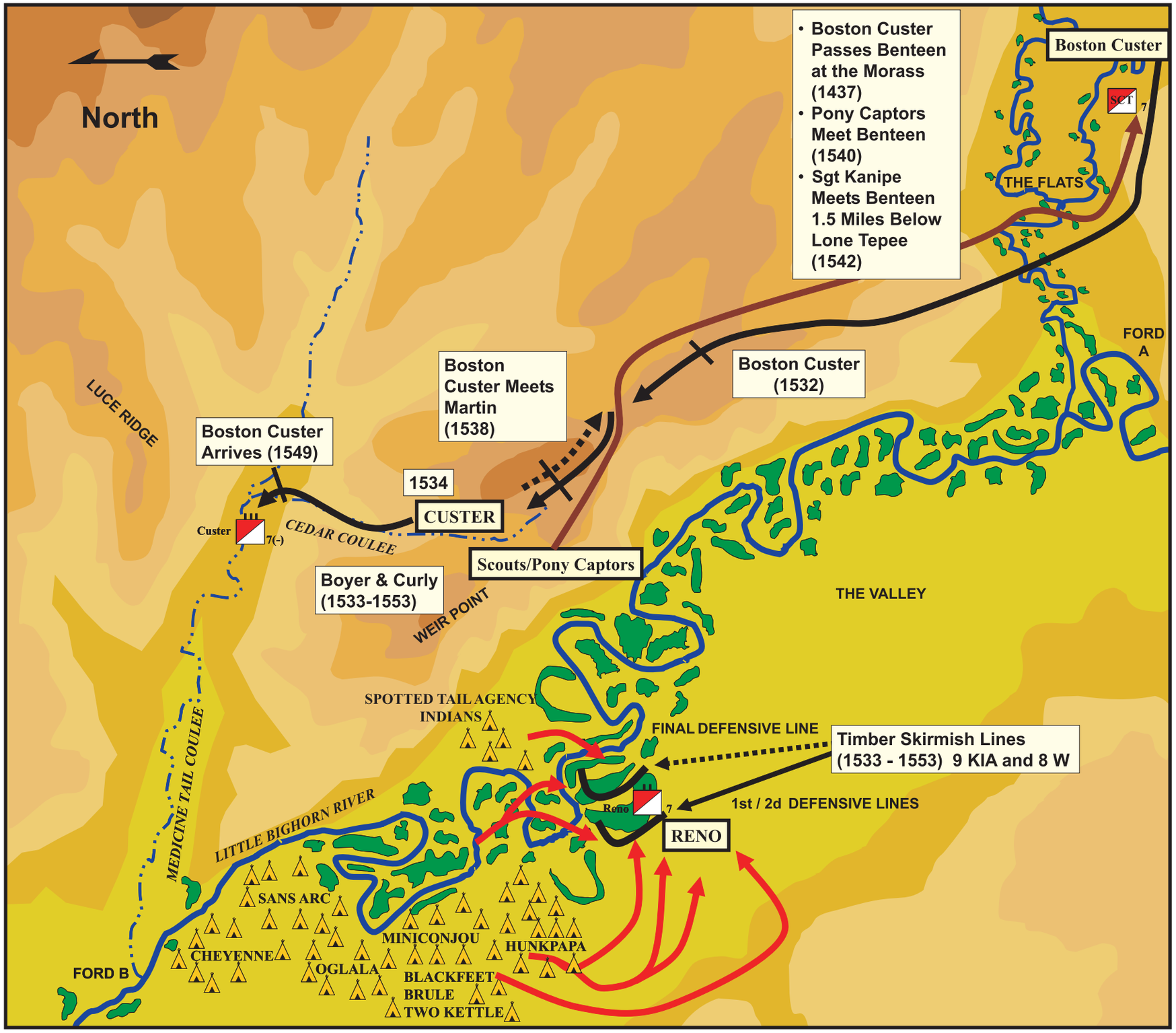
Indian Attacks

Village

Army Defensive Perimeter

3450 Feet
3400 Feet
3350 Feet
3300 Feet
3250 Feet
3200 Feet
3150 Feet
3100 Feet

Miles
0 1/4 1/2



Map 29. The Battle of the Little Bighorn: Disaster in the Valley, 1553 to 1627

Reno's situation in the valley was critical. The Indians threatened to surround Reno and soon set the woods afire. In response, Reno ordered his men to mount and move upstream where they could cross to high ground on the east bank. At 1553, Reno led the retreat out of the timber, but the movement quickly degenerated into a rout. Many men did not receive the order or were unable to withdraw and were left in the timber to fight in small pockets or hide until they could escape. Those who made it out of the woods were forced to cross the Little Bighorn at a narrow, deep ford that caused them to cluster. Meanwhile, the Indians vigorously pressed their attack, inflicting heavy casualties on the panic-stricken soldiers struggling to reach safety beyond the river. At 1610, the first troops reached the hill that would later bear Reno's name. More than 40 dead and 13 wounded troopers attested to the bloody fighting in the valley. Seventeen officers and men remained temporarily hidden in the trees west of the river.

Curly and Boyer, the scouts that Custer left behind on the high ground, witnessed Reno's disastrous retreat. Knowing the importance of this information, the two scouts descended Weir Point to rendezvous with Custer's column. Custer, having learned from Boyer and Curly that Reno's force was in serious trouble, knew that he had to act immediately. Apparently intending to distract the Indians at his end of the village, Custer split his battalion into two parts: E and F Companies (76 men) under the command of Captain George W. Yates and C, I, and L Companies (134 men) under Captain Myles W. Keogh. He sent Yates' command down Medicine Tail Coulee to the ford to make a feint against the village. Custer led the remainder of the force up the north side of Medicine Tail Coulee to Luce Ridge. From there, Keogh's three companies could support Yates should he get into serious trouble, and at the same time, Custer could wait for Benteen's battalion and the pack train.

Yates made his charge toward the river and startled the village. Briefly, as the Indians recovered from their surprise, Yates' command was able to fire across the river relatively unopposed. The Indians soon rallied, however, and some began to pressure Yates frontally while others ascended Medicine Tail Coulee. From his position on Luce Ridge, Custer's men poured a heavy volley of fire into the advancing warriors.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn

Disaster in the Valley 1553 to 1627

Army Movements

Messenger

Army Scout Movements

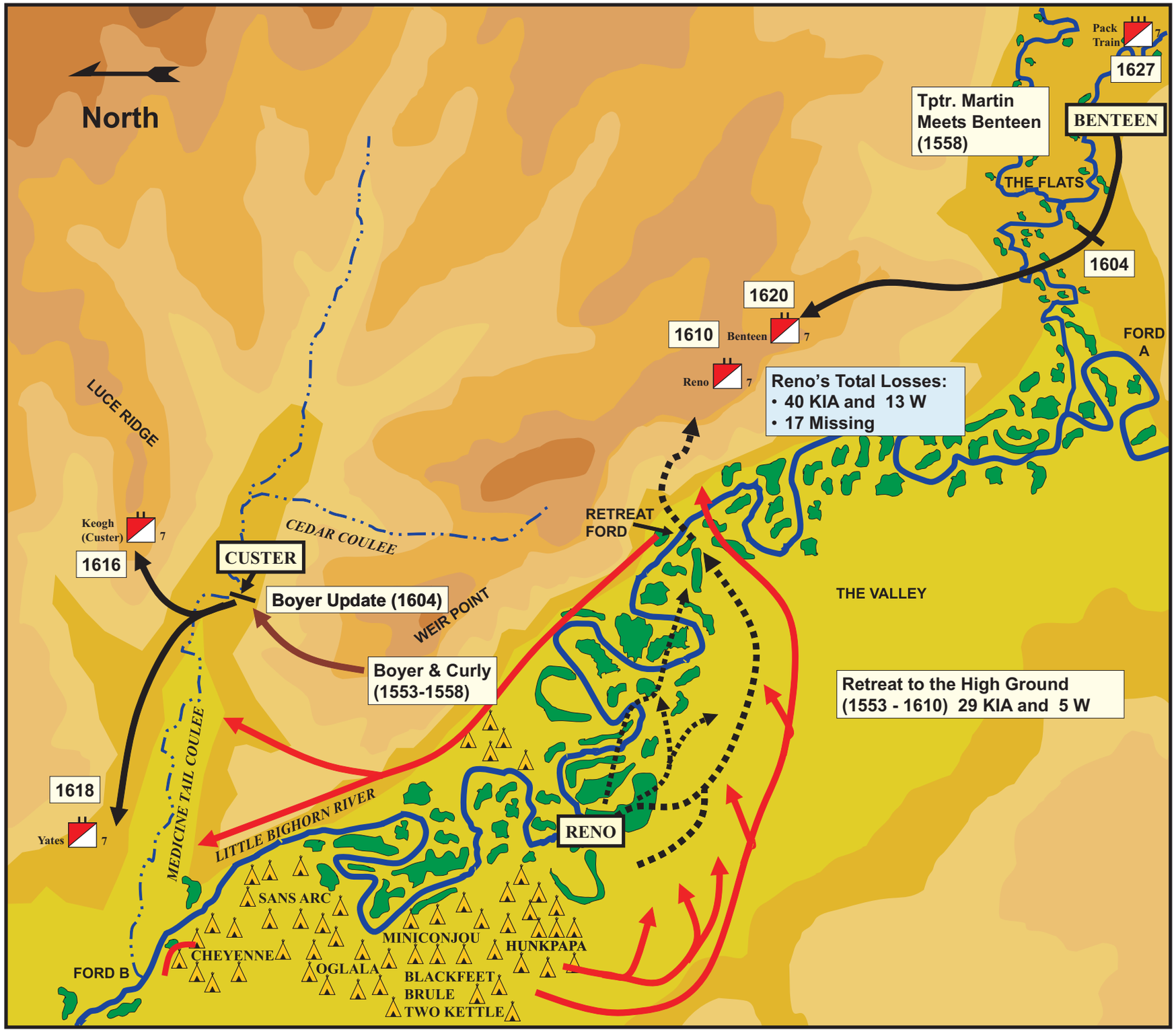
Indian Attacks

Village

3450 Feet
3400 Feet
3350 Feet
3300 Feet
3250 Feet
3200 Feet
3150 Feet
3100 Feet

Miles

0 1/4 1/2



Map 30. The Battle of the Little Bighorn: Weir's Advance and Reno Hill

Having suffered grievous losses in the valley, Reno withdrew his men to the bluffs on the east bank of the Little Bighorn. The Sioux pursued them briefly, but by 1630, most of the warriors had broken contact with Reno and moved off to assist in the fight against Custer's force. Benteen's battalion and the pack train soon joined Reno atop the bluffs. From there, they could hear heavy and continuous firing to the north. While Reno and Benteen pondered their next move, Captain Thomas B. Weir initiated an advance by most of the command to a high point 1 mile to the northwest. Although this prominence (now known as Weir Point) offered an excellent view of the surrounding terrain, the cavalrymen learned little about Custer's fate. To the west, they could see the valley of the Little Bighorn filled with tepees. To the north, they could see distant hills and ridges shrouded in dust with occasional glimpses of Indians in the dust cloud riding about and firing. They did not realize they were witnessing Custer's destruction (see map 31). By 1710, most of the firing had ceased. Now dust clouds appeared all over the area as the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors converged on the remainder of the 7th Cavalry. It appears that neither Reno nor Benteen provided any overall direction to the command; the company commanders decided independently to fall back to the original position on the bluffs. Lieutenant Edward Godfrey, commander of K Company, saw the danger of a disorderly retreat and, on his own initiative, acted as the rearguard. By 1810, Reno and Benteen had their battalions back on the bluffs and had formed a perimeter defense. Animals and wounded men were gathered in a circular depression in the center of the position. The Indians rapidly surrounded the bluecoats and began long-range sniping at Reno's men. While vexing, the Indians' fire caused few casualties, and the soldiers' firepower stopped all enemy charges. Darkness finally stopped the fighting at 2100. While the Indians withdrew to the village to celebrate their great victory, the troopers strengthened their position with improvised tools.

The fighting at Reno Hill would persist for the next 2 days. On the 26th the Indians continued their long-range sniping, supplemented by occasional charges. This time, Indian fire inflicted considerably more casualties. (On the hill, Reno lost 48 men killed and wounded on the 26th, compared to just 11 on the 25th.) Improved Indian fire may have persuaded Benteen to conduct some limited counterattacks. Seeing a large band of Indians massing near the south end of his position, he led H Company in a charge that quickly scattered the attackers. Benteen then persuaded Reno to order a general advance in all directions. This attack also succeeded in driving the Indians back and gained some relief from enemy fire, but the relief was only temporary. As the sun rose and the day grew warmer, the lack of water became a serious problem, especially for the wounded men lying without cover in the hot Montana sun. A plea from Dr. Henry R. Porter, the 7th Cavalry's only surviving physician, prompted Benteen to seek volunteers to go for water. Covered by sharpshooters, a party of soldiers made its way down what is now called Water Carriers' Ravine to the river and succeeded in bringing water back for the wounded.

By late afternoon, the Sioux and Cheyenne appeared to be losing interest in the battle. Frustrated by their inability to finish off the bluecoats and apparently satisfied with what they had already accomplished, the Indians began to withdraw. While some warriors kept the soldiers pinned down, the Indians in the valley broke camp and set the prairie grass afire to hinder pursuit. At approximately 1900, Reno's men saw the huge band move upriver toward a new campsite in the Bighorn Mountains. Although unmolested following the Indian withdrawal, Reno stayed in his hilltop position the night of the 26th. The following morning, Terry's column arrived and informed Reno and Benteen of Custer's fate.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn

Weir's Advance and Reno Hill

Army Movements

Army Defensive Perimeter

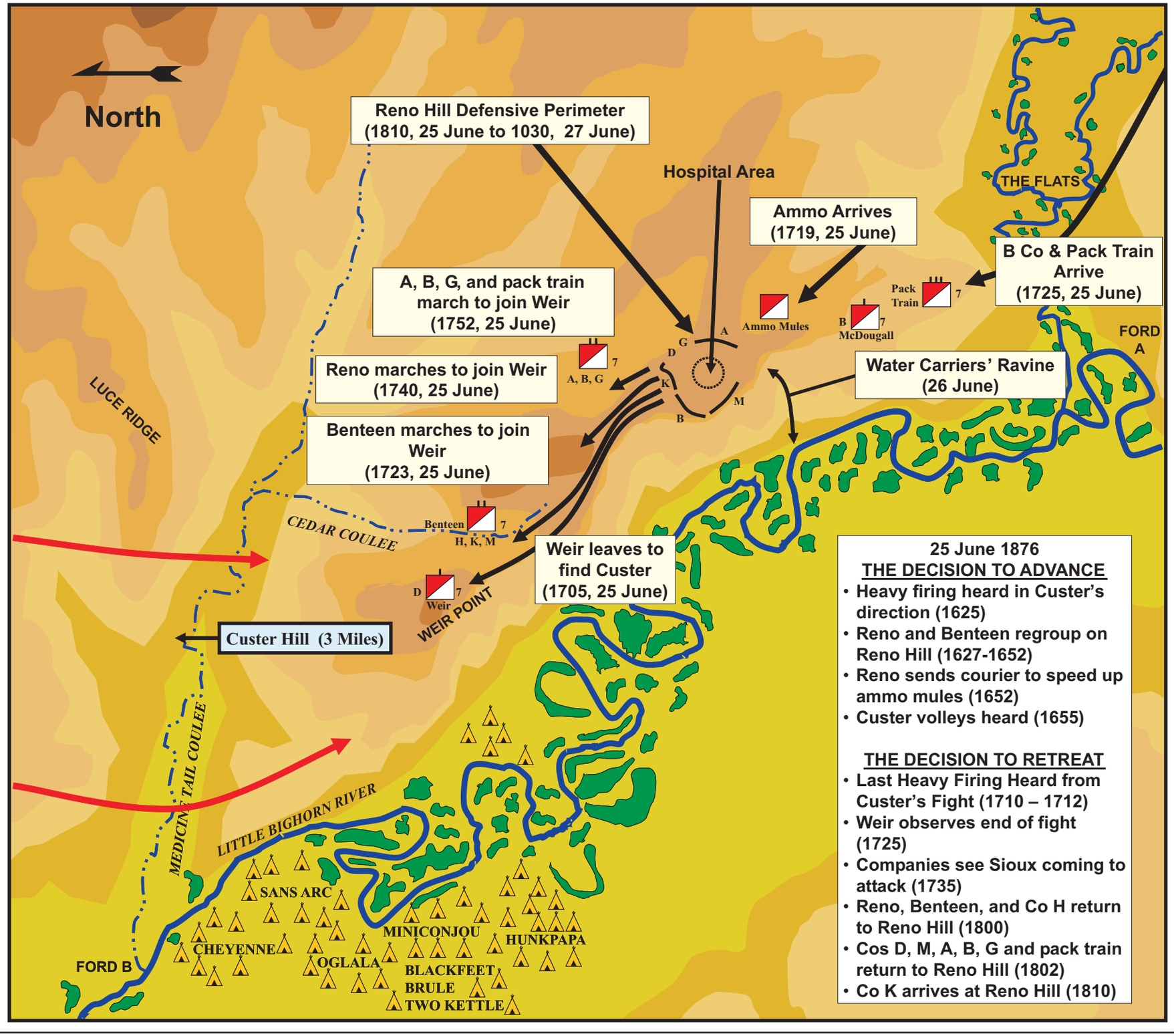
Indian Attacks

Village

3450 Feet
3400 Feet
3350 Feet
3300 Feet
3250 Feet
3200 Feet
3150 Feet
3100 Feet

Miles

0 1/4 1/2



Map 31. The Battle of the Little Bighorn: Custer's Last Stand

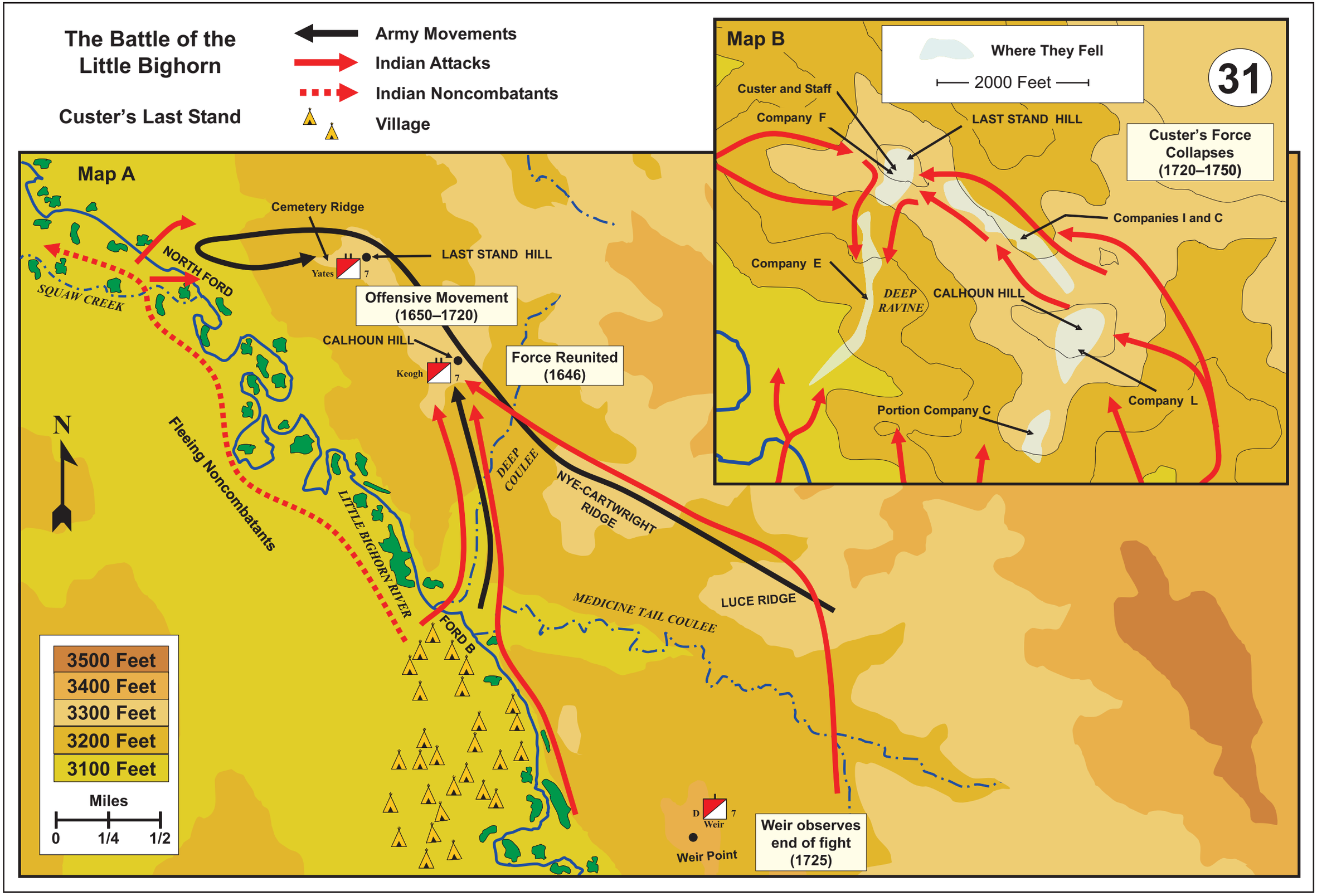
As Yates began to withdraw up Deep Coulee, Custer saw the necessity of reuniting his command. While Yates ascended Deep Coulee, Custer left Luce Ridge and crossed both Nye-Cartwright Ridge and Deep Coulee to the reunion point near Calhoun Hill. After the five companies rejoined on Calhoun Hill, the pressure from the Indians intensified. At this point, Boyer convinced Curly to leave the doomed command while he stayed with Custer. After Curly's exit, descriptions of Custer's fight are necessarily conjecture. However, the accounts by Richard A. Fox, John S. Gray, and Gregory F. Michno offer reasonable hypotheses about the battle from this point and are buttressed by the physical evidence: the placement of bodies, the location of artifacts, Indian testimony, and the terrain.

One of the most plausible theories is that Custer continued offensive movement, but delayed making a decisive thrust while he waited for Benteen's arrival (see map A). To support this maneuver, he positioned Keogh's wing (Companies C, I, and L) at Calhoun Hill as a rearguard. Yates' wing (Companies E and F) then maneuvered further to the north to threaten the noncombatants who had collected near Squaw Creek. Custer's movements were initially made without serious opposition from the Sioux or their allies; it took time for the warriors to reposition from their fight in the south against Reno to the new threat at the north end of the camp.

Calhoun Hill was a good defensive position. From this dominant location, the soldiers' fire controlled the Indian movement up Deep Ravine. Lieutenant James Calhoun's (Custer's brother-in-law) Company L and at least one platoon of Company C skirmished with the Indians for about 45 minutes. However, the surrounding ground was very broken, giving the Indians a myriad of concealed approaches from which to launch attacks. The mounting pressure on the soldiers ultimately overwhelmed the rearguard and forced the survivors off the hill in the only reasonable direction, northwest along what is now called Custer Ridge. Keogh's I Company occupied a support position to the rear of L Company and was probably overrun before it could deploy (see map B).

Meanwhile, Custer's other two companies continued the attack toward the vicinity of the North Ford (see map A). Custer probably aimed at corralling a large number of the noncombatants that would have caused the warriors to hold back in fear of causing further threat to their women and children. Although the number of warriors opposing Yates' battalion, at first, was not significant, it appears from Indian accounts that they were uncharacteristically aggressive. Instead of fighting a rearguard and shepherding their families out of harms way, they maneuvered against Yates' battalion. More than likely, Custer decided that his two small companies were insufficient to overcome the large number of noncombatants and turned back to link up with Keogh's wing to wait for Benteen.

Yates' wing fought a series of rearguard actions back up Cemetery Ridge toward Custer's Hill against increasing pressure as more warriors abandoned the fight against Reno and moved north to oppose Custer. It appears that the collapse of the Calhoun Hill position caused a similar disintegration of Yates' wing. The majority of the remaining soldiers in companies E and F retreated to Last Stand Hill (see map B). A small number of survivors from Keogh's wing joined them, but against such enormous odds no amount of gallantry could have saved the command. As the Indians swarmed about Custer's small force, the intense pressure forced some of the men to withdraw southwest toward Deep Ravine, forming what has been called the south skirmish line. From there, the few remaining troopers fled in isolation and were cut down, one by one, until no one remained alive. Custer's battle was over, but the legend of Custer's last stand was only beginning.


The Battle of the Little Bighorn
Custer's Last Stand
Army Movements
Indian Attacks
Indian Noncombatants
Village
Map A
Cemetery Ridge
LAST STAND HILL
Yates
7
NORTH FORD
SQUAW CREEK
Offensive Movement (1650–1720)
CALHOUN HILL
Keogh
7
Force Reunited (1646)
N
Fleeing Noncombatants
LITTLE BIGHORN RIVER
DEEP COULEE
NYE-CARTWRIGHT RIDGE
MEDICINE TAIL COULEE
LUCE RIDGE
FORD B
D
Weir
7
Weir Point
Weir observes end of fight (1725)
3500 Feet
3400 Feet
3300 Feet
3200 Feet
3100 Feet
Miles
0
1/4
1/2
Map B
Where They Fell
2000 Feet
31
Custer and Staff
Company F
LAST STAND HILL
Custer's Force Collapses (1720–1750)
Companies I and C
Company E
DEEP RAVINE
CALHOUN HILL
Company L
Portion Company C

Map 32. The Sioux Dispersal, July–September 1876

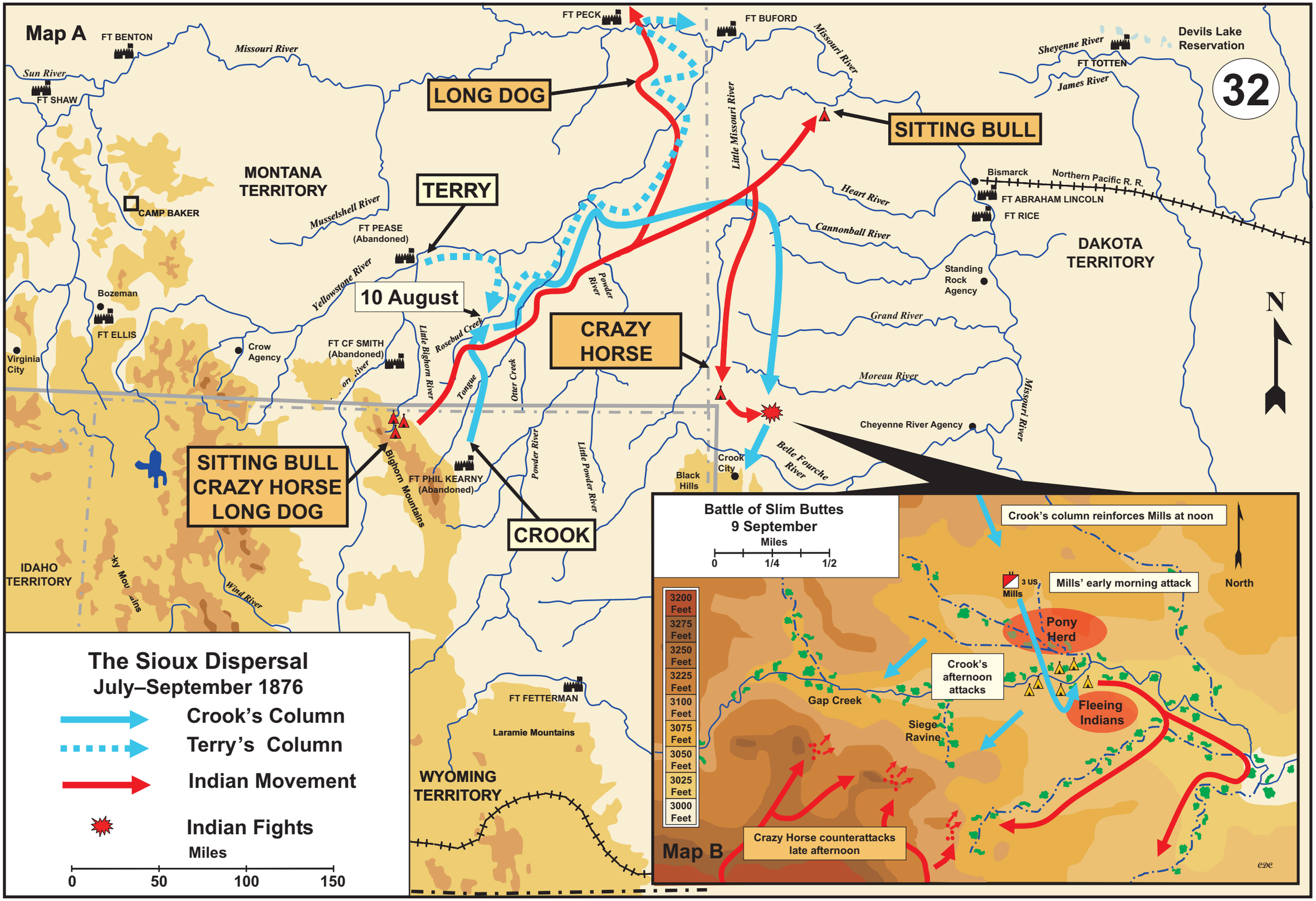
News of Custer's debacle at the Little Bighorn paralyzed Crook's and Terry's columns for over a month. The great Sioux camp dispersed shortly after the battle. Most of the bands withdrew to the southwest toward the Bighorn Mountains, satisfied with their great victory. After a few weeks of celebration in the mountains, the major bands headed northeast onto the plains. Sitting Bull's band traveled to the northeast, Long Dog's people eventually moved northwest, and Crazy Horse's people returned eastward to the Black Hills.

With the possible exception of Crazy Horse's band, which launched a few small-scale raids against miners in the Black Hills, the Sioux and Cheyenne appeared to have little interest in continuing the fight. Most of the Indians assumed that their overwhelming victory over Custer would cause the Army to give up the campaign—at least for a time. The inactivity of Crook and Terry following the battle seemed to support this view. Of course, the disaster at the Little Bighorn would have precisely the opposite effect on the US Army's intentions.

Both Crook and Terry called for and received substantial reinforcements. They finally got underway again in early August, but only after Indian trails in their respective vicinities had aged a month or more. On 10 August, the two forces met along the banks of Rosebud Creek, after initially mistaking each other for the enemy. The two commanders combined their already ponderous columns into a single expedition and proceeded northeast down the Tongue River Valley. This huge host quickly exhausted its rations and halted along the Powder River to await additional supplies.

With their commands partially re-supplied, the two commanders could not agree on how next to proceed and worked out a rough comprise. Basically, Terry would follow the Indians moving north deeper into his Department of Dakota, and Crook would follow those Indians most likely to turn south toward his Department of the Platte. Crook set out due east on 22 August in one last attempt to salvage something from the campaign. By 8 September, Crook had succeeded only in exhausting and nearly starving his troopers. But on the morning of 9 September, a small detachment commanded by Captain Anson Mills found a small Indian village at Slim Buttes and promptly attacked it (see map B). Mills' troopers inflicted few casualties, but succeeded in capturing the camp and a small but welcome supply of buffalo meat. That afternoon, 600 to 800 warriors from Crazy Horse's band counterattacked Crook's now consolidated force of about 2,000 effectives. Although badly outnumbered, the Sioux occupied the high ground and fought Crook's exhausted men to a standstill. Following this inconclusive engagement, Crook made no effort to pursue the Indians but concentrated solely on getting his command back to a regular supply source. On 13 September, Crook finally obtained supplies from Crook City in the Black Hills, ending his men's ordeal. Meanwhile, Terry's force proceeded north to the Yellowstone, pursuing another cold trail. Terry encountered no Indians and quickly gave up the chase. A detachment under Reno briefly pursued Long Dog's band north of the Missouri, but soon abandoned the effort and proceeded to Fort Buford.

Perhaps the most important developments of the campaign took place far from the scene of action. Shocked by news of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, Congress passed the Sioux appropriation bill, which forced the Sioux to cede their remaining lands and withdraw to a specified reservation on the west bank of the Missouri. At the same time, Sheridan dealt harshly with the agency Indians, confiscating all of their weapons and ponies. Without guns or horses, the agency Indians could no longer reinforce the hostile bands.

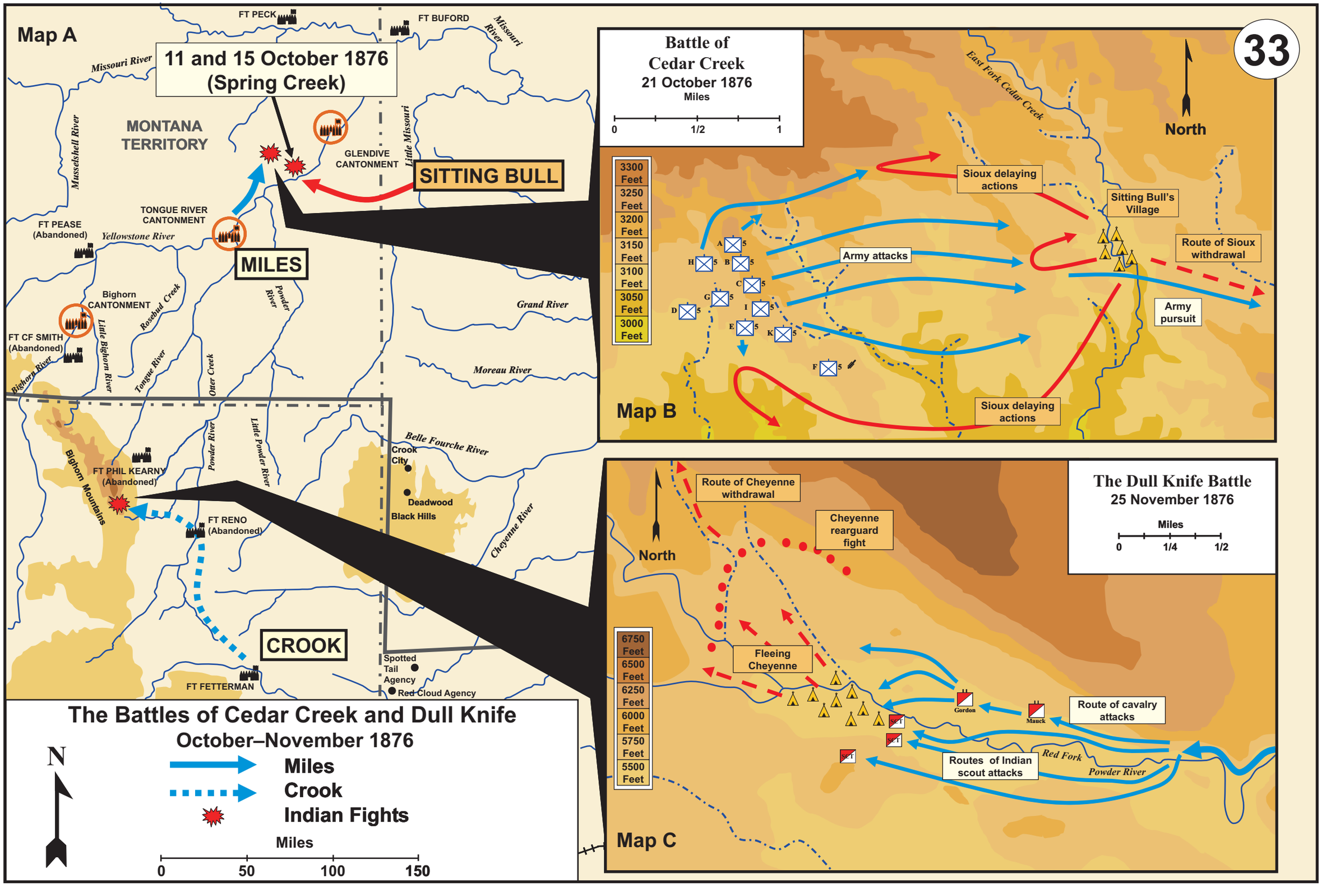

Map A
FT BENTON
Missouri River
Sun River
FT SHAW
FT PECK
FT BUFORD
Missouri River
Sheyenne River
FT TOTTEN
Devils Lake Reservation
James River
32
LONG DOG
SITTING BULL
MONTANA TERRITORY
CAMP BAKER
Musselshell River
TERRY
FT PEASE (Abandoned)
Little Missouri River
Heart River
Bismarck
Northern Pacific R. R.
FT ABRAHAM LINCOLN
FT RICE
Cannonball River
DAKOTA TERRITORY
Standing Rock Agency
Yellowstone River
10 August
Powder River
Bozeman
FT ELLIS
Virginia City
Crow Agency
FT CF SMITH (Abandoned)
Little Bighorn River
Rosebud Creek
Tongue
Otter Creek
CRAZY HORSE
Grand River
Moreau River
Missouri River
N
Cheyenne River Agency
SITTING BULL
CRAZY HORSE
LONG DOG
Bighorn Mountains
FT PHIL KEARNY (Abandoned)
Powder River
Little Powder River
Crook City
Black Hills
Belle Fourche River
CROOK
IDAHO TERRITORY
Wind River
FT FETTERMAN
Laramie Mountains
WYOMING TERRITORY
The Sioux Dispersal
July–September 1876
Crook's Column
Terry's Column
Indian Movement
Indian Fights
Miles
0
50
100
150
Battle of Slim Buttes
9 September
Miles
0
1/4
1/2
Crook's column reinforces Mills at noon
North
3 US
Mills
Mills' early morning attack
3200 Feet
3275 Feet
3250 Feet
3225 Feet
3100 Feet
3075 Feet
3050 Feet
3025 Feet
3000 Feet
Pony Herd
Crook's afternoon attacks
Gap Creek
Siege Ravine
Fleeing Indians
Crazy Horse counterattacks late afternoon
Map B
cpc

Map 33. The Battles of Cedar Creek and Dull Knife, October–November 1876

While Crook and Terry no longer pursued the Indians, Colonel Nelson A. Miles, commander of the 5th Infantry Regiment, established a cantonment at the mouth of the Tongue River and, in accordance with orders, continued operations against the Sioux. In early October, a large coalition of Hunkpapa, Miniconjou, and Sans Arc under the direction of Sitting Bull moved west from the Little Missouri River Valley into the region between the Glendive and Tongue River Cantonments. On 11 and 15 October, they skirmished with Miles' supply trains in the vicinity of Spring Creek. Soon after the skirmish, Miles gained intelligence on Sitting Bull's movements and marched northeast with the 5th Infantry, approximately 500 strong, to intercept the Sioux. His foot soldiers marched hard and overtook the Sioux near the headwaters of Cedar Creek on 20 October. That day, and the next, Miles and Sitting Bull negotiated between the lines. Sitting Bull demanded that all white men leave the region, and Miles demanded that the Sioux surrender and report to the agency—neither was willing to compromise. Miles broke off the negotiations when the Sioux began to break down their village and move away (see map B). At first, both sides maneuvered without shots being fired, but when the Indians set fire to the prairie grass to screen the village's movement, the soldiers opened fire. Approximately 400 to 600 warriors attempted to delay the soldiers. However, the steady advance of the soldiers forced the village into a hasty withdrawal and the abandonment of significant quantities of camp equipment and supplies.

Miles pursued the village for two days. During the Indian retreat, the large encampment broke into two groups. Sitting Bull, with an estimated 240 people and 30 lodges, headed north, and another 200 or more lodges retreated south toward the Yellowstone River. Miles caught up with the large group on 27 October. Several Miniconjou and Sans Arc chiefs negotiated a surrender with Miles. In the long run, only about 40 lodges actually reported to the agency; the remainder moved up the Powder River and joined with Crazy Horse's band. Though disappointed that he had failed to capture Sitting Bull, Miles had severely damaged Sitting Bull's Indian coalition.

While Miles harassed the northern bands with only 500 men, Crook launched a massive expedition from Fort Fetterman on 14 November. His large column included elements of the 2d, 3d, 4th, and 5th Cavalry, and 4th, 9th, 14th, and 25th Infantry. Altogether, Crook had about 1,500 Regulars, 400 Indian scouts, and about 300 civilians responsible for 168 supply wagons and 400 pack mules. On 22 November, his scouts located a large Cheyenne village at the base of the Bighorn Mountains. The principal chiefs of the village were Dull Knife and Little Wolf, with about 200 lodges and 400 warriors. Crook ordered Colonel Ranald Mackenzie to take all the scouts and 10 troops of cavalry, about 1,100 men, and make a strike for the village. On 24 November, the detachment made a difficult night approach march and attacked early on the morning of 25 November, achieving complete surprise (see map C). The Cheyenne fled for their lives, leaving their ponies, tepees, and food. Having exposed the Cheyenne to the elements, Crook returned to Fort Fetterman and let freezing temperatures and starvation finish the job of subduing the hostiles. Despite the serious losses at the Dull Knife battle, the Cheyenne refused to give up the fight and struggled north to join with Crazy Horse's band of Sioux. It would now be up to Miles to finish the campaign.


33
Map A
11 and 15 October 1876
(Spring Creek)
FT PECK
FT BUFORD
Missouri River
MONTANA TERRITORY
Musselshell River
GLENDIVE CANTONMENT
Little Missouri
SITTING BULL
TONGUE RIVER CANTONMENT
FT PEASE (Abandoned)
Yellowstone River
MILES
Bighorn CANTONMENT
Rosebud Creek
Powder River
Grand River
FT CF SMITH (Abandoned)
Little Bighorn River
Bighorn River
Tongue River
Otter Creek
Moreau River
Belle Fourche River
Crook City
Deadwood
Black Hills
Bighorn Mountains
FT PHIL KEARNY (Abandoned)
Little Powder River
FT RENO (Abandoned)
Cheyenne River
CROOK
Spotted Tail Agency
Red Cloud Agency
FT FETTERMAN
The Battles of Cedar Creek and Dull Knife
October–November 1876
N
Miles
Crook
Indian Fights
Miles
0
50
100
150
Battle of Cedar Creek
21 October 1876
Miles
0
1/2
1
East Fork Cedar Creek
North
3300 Feet
3250 Feet
3200 Feet
3150 Feet
3100 Feet
3050 Feet
3000 Feet
Sioux delaying actions
Sitting Bull's Village
Route of Sioux withdrawal
Army attacks
Army pursuit
Sioux delaying actions
Map B
Route of Cheyenne withdrawal
Cheyenne rearguard fight
The Dull Knife Battle
25 November 1876
Miles
0
1/4
1/2
North
6750 Feet
6500 Feet
6250 Feet
6000 Feet
5750 Feet
5500 Feet
Fleeing Cheyenne
Gordon
Mauck
Route of cavalry attacks
Routes of Indian scout attacks
Red Fork
Powder River
Map C

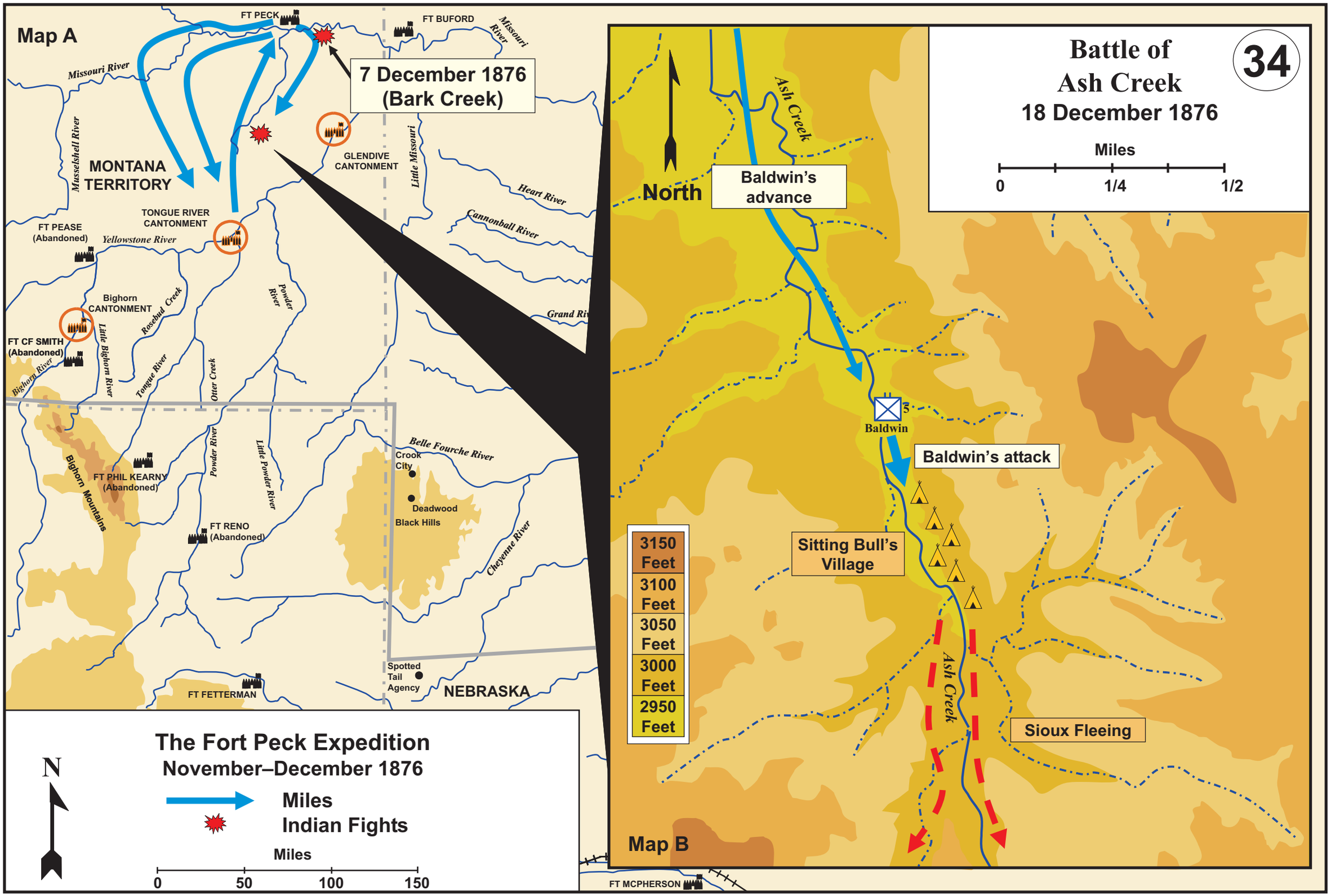
Map 34. The Fort Peck Expedition, November–December 1876

Miles, during the Cedar Creek negotiations with Sitting Bull (20–21 October), had warned the Sioux that he would continue the campaign against them through the winter if they did not surrender. Holding true to his word, Miles maintained his chase of the northward-bound Sioux with steadfast determination. Setting out on 5 November, Miles' troops began a search for the remnants of Sitting Bull's band in the expanse between the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers. Unlike other units, the soldiers of the 5th Infantry were thoroughly conditioned and equipped for their winter campaign on the harsh Northern Plains. Miles marched north to Fort Peck on the Missouri River but failed to find the elusive Sitting Bull.

At Fort Peck, Miles re-supplied his command and made preparations to continue the winter campaign. He divided his command into three columns and proceeded to comb the countryside again. On 7 December, a detachment under Lieutenant Frank D. Baldwin, operating under extreme winter conditions, located a recently abandoned Indian camp on Porcupine Creek and desperately sought to catch the fleeing Sioux. He needed to catch them before they could cross the frozen Missouri River to the south bank. Near Bark Creek, Baldwin's infantry closed with the Sioux and skirmished with the Indian rearguard just minutes after their families had crossed the river. The skirmish with Sitting Bull's warriors continued for several hours, and, at one point, Baldwin even pushed one company across the Missouri River. However, the grueling chase and excessive cold had exhausted Baldwin's soldiers and he decided to return to Fort Peck for supplies. Although Baldwin had failed to defeat Sitting Bull, he had forced the Indians into a continuing movement that was fatiguing the Indian families and exhausting the Indian ponies.

The tenacious Baldwin re-supplied his small command of about 150 men at Fort Peck and then began collecting information from reservation Indians on Sitting Bull's location. On 10 December, he learned that Sitting Bull was located to the southeast, moving toward the Yellowstone River. He sent word to Miles and then mobilized his troops to resume the chase. The deep snow, rough terrain, and bitter cold took its toll on Baldwin's troops; at times up to 40 men were riding in the wagons suffering from exhaustion and frostbite. On 18 December, at about 1300, Baldwin caught up with Sitting Bull's village camped along Ash Creek (see map B). The village contained approximately 122 lodges and could have fielded as many as 240 warriors. However, most of the warriors were out hunting, and Baldwin's three small infantry companies in a matter of minutes overran the entire village, capturing most of the camp equipage and 60 ponies.

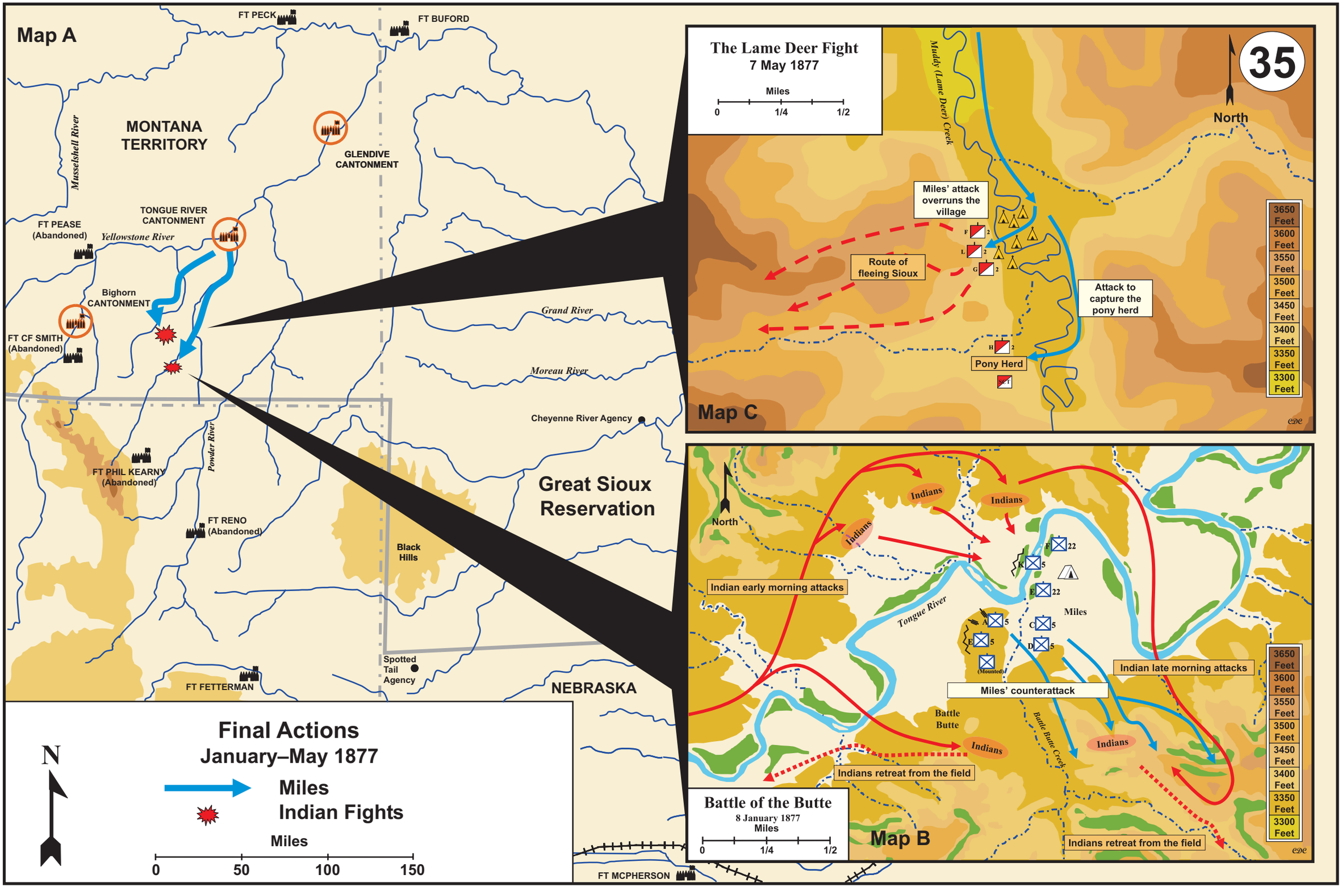
Baldwin re-outfitted his men from the village supplies, burned what he could not carry, and then made the difficult march to the Tongue River Cantonment. Sitting Bull's people were destitute. They had lost most of their lodges and the majority of their winter food supply. The Indians had also lost about 20 percent of their ponies, and those remaining were dying of hunger. To escape Miles and his inexhaustible "walk heaps," Sitting Bull and Long Dog would eventually lead their people into Canada.


Map A
FT PECK
FT BUFORD
Missouri River
Missouri River
7 December 1876
(Bark Creek)
Musselshell River
MONTANA
TERRITORY
GLENDIVE
CANTONMENT
Little Missouri
Heart River
Cannonball River
TONGUE RIVER
CANTONMENT
FT PEASE
(Abandoned)
Yellowstone River
Bighorn
CANTONMENT
Rosebud Creek
Powder
River
Grand Ri
FT CF SMITH
(Abandoned)
Little Bighorn River
Bighorn River
Tongue River
Otter Creek
Belle Fourche River
Crook
City
Bighorn Mountains
FT PHIL KEARNY
(Abandoned)
Powder River
Little Powder River
Deadwood
Black Hills
FT RENO
(Abandoned)
Cheyenne River
Spotted
Tail
Agency
FT FETTERMAN
NEBRASKA
The Fort Peck Expedition
November–December 1876
Miles
Indian Fights
Miles
0
50
100
150
N
Battle of
Ash Creek
18 December 1876
34
Miles
0
1/4
1/2
North
Baldwin's
advance
Ash Creek
Baldwin
Baldwin's attack
Sitting Bull's
Village
Ash Creek
Sioux Fleeing
3150
Feet
3100
Feet
3050
Feet
3000
Feet
2950
Feet
Map B
FT MCPHERSON

Map 35. Final Actions, January–May 1877

Having knocked Sitting Bull and those Indian bands north of the Yellowstone River out of the war, Miles could now redirect his attention toward Crazy Horse and the bands south of the Yellowstone. Ironically, earlier in December, these same bands had become discouraged because of the harsh weather and the defeat of the Cheyenne at the Dull Knife battle and were actually considering surrender. However, Crow scouts murdered their peace delegation as they were approaching the Tongue River Cantonment, and Crazy Horse used the incident to embolden his people to continue their resistance. The war chief initiated an active campaign of harassment against the cantonment to lure the soldiers into a chase. His plan was to lure Miles up the Tongue River valley and ambush his column. On 29 December, Miles accepted the challenge and marched up the Tongue River valley to make a strike against Crazy Horse's village. He estimated that the village, reinforced with the refugees from the Dull Knife fight, numbered possibly 3,000 inhabitants with maybe 600 to 800 warriors. Miles fought several skirmishes with the Sioux in his march up the Tongue River and openly acknowledged that the Indians were trying to lure him into an ambush. Nevertheless, he was confident that his 350 disciplined infantry could overcome the odds against them. On 7 January 1877, his scouts captured a small group of Cheyenne women and children. He encamped his men that night near a prominent butte fully expecting the Sioux to attack the next day. The next morning, with three feet of snow on the ground, Crazy Horse attacked with approximately 500 to 600 Sioux and Cheyenne warriors (see map B). Crazy Horse needed a major victory to encourage his disheartened people. Both sides maneuvered to gain the advantage, and Miles used his artillery to break up the concentration of warriors. Blizzard-like conditions hampered visibility, and, as with most Indian war battles, casualties were light. Steadily worsening weather forced both sides to break contact at midday. The Sioux retreated to their village 20 miles to the south, and Miles returned to the Tongue River Cantonment. The Battle of the Butte was Crazy Horse's last battle, and he had failed to deliver the victory his people needed. Miles and Crook spent the remainder of the winter sending messengers to Crazy Horse to persuade him to surrender. Although Crazy Horse and his band held out until spring, starvation and exposure caused many Sioux to drift back to the agencies.

In late April 1877, a Sioux chief named Lame Deer vowed never to surrender. He and his band with 51 Miniconjou lodges separated from Crazy Horse and moved north to hunt buffalo. Having been reinforced with elements of the 2d Cavalry, Miles learned of Lame Deer's movement and again mobilized his forces for the chase. Ironically, Miles' column contained many prominent Sioux and Cheyenne warriors, who had only recently surrendered and were now serving as scouts for the Army. Miles' scouts found Lame Deer's village on a tributary of Rosebud Creek and Miles launched a surprise attack early in the morning on 7 May 1877, inflicting a crushing defeat on the Indians (see map C). His troops captured nearly 500 ponies and some 30 tons of meat and killed at least 14 warriors including Lame Deer himself. Crazy Horse and his band had surrendered the day before the Lame Deer Fight. Even though Sitting Bull and his followers managed to survive in Canada for a time and did not finally surrender until 19 July 1881, the Great Sioux War was over; all the Sioux within the United States were now confined to the reservation.


Map A
FT PECK
FT BUFORD
MONTANA TERRITORY
Musselshell River
GLENDIVE CANTONMENT
TONGUE RIVER CANTONMENT
FT PEASE (Abandoned)
Yellowstone River
Bighorn CANTONMENT
FT CF SMITH (Abandoned)
Grand River
Moreau River
Cheyenne River Agency
Powder River
FT PHIL KEARNY (Abandoned)
FT RENO (Abandoned)
Black Hills
Great Sioux Reservation
Spotted Tail Agency
FT FETTERMAN
NEBRASKA
FT MCPHERSON
Final Actions
January–May 1877
Miles
Indian Fights
Miles
0
50
100
150
N
The Lame Deer Fight
7 May 1877
Miles
0
1/4
1/2
Muddy (Lame Deer) Creek
North
35
Miles' attack overruns the village
Route of fleeing Sioux
Attack to capture the pony herd
Pony Herd
3650 Feet
3600 Feet
3550 Feet
3500 Feet
3450 Feet
3400 Feet
3350 Feet
3300 Feet
Map C
Battle of the Butte
8 January 1877
Miles
0
1/4
1/2
North
Indians
Indian early morning attacks
Tongue River
Miles
Miles' counterattack
Indian late morning attacks
Battle Butte
Battle Butte Creek
Indians retreat from the field
Map B

IV. Wounded Knee, 1890

Map 36. The Ghost Dance

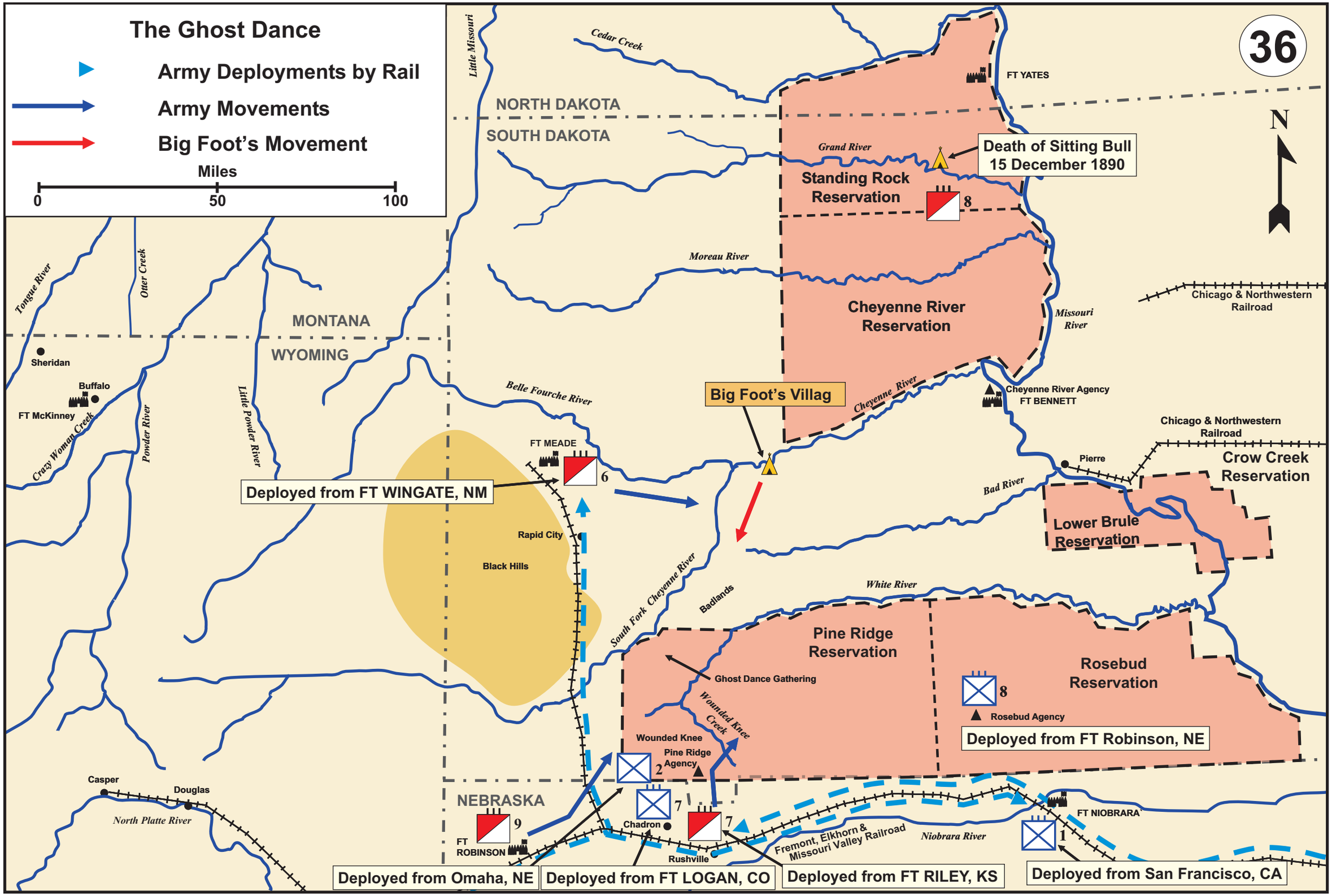
In the late 1880's the Western Plains tribes grew increasingly discouraged over their confinement to the reservations and the disappearance of their traditional cultures. A Paiute prophet named Wovoka delivered a message of hope that prophesied of a future free from the influence of the white man. He preached a philosophy of nonviolence and promised that the Great Spirit would bring back the buffalo. His followers danced a slow shuffling dance that invited the return to life of dead Indians; thus, it became known as the Ghost Dance.

The once powerful Teton Sioux, who had dominated the northern plains from 1850 to 1876, were especially bitter and discouraged. They had lost all access to the Unceded Territory which became the states of Montana (1889) and Wyoming (1890). Their Great Sioux Reservation (see map 13) had been broken into several smaller reservations and they now laid claim to less than half of what they had controlled in 1876. Militant leaders among the Teton Sioux capitalized on their peoples' discontent and the general acceptance of the Ghost Dance to preach a violent overthrow of the white man. They also promised that sacred ghost shirts would protect them from the soldiers' bullets. Government officials feared an impending uprising on both the Pine Ridge and the Rosebud Reservations. Nearby settlements demanded that the Army provide protection. Therefore, President Benjamin Harrison ordered the War Department to contain the situation and position troops at agencies. The Army in turn used railroads to move units to the region from posts scattered across the nation; a major deployment that included elements of the 1st, 2d, 7th, and 8th Infantry, and the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th Cavalry.

The Sioux were at odds among themselves over how to proceed and divided into two factions. The friendlies wanted no trouble, and the hostiles (or militants) preached that the whites must be driven from Indian land. In December 1890, some of the hostile ghost dancers gathered in the northwest corner of the Pine Ridge Reservation. They numbered approximately 500 to 600 men, women, and children. Bands of threatening Sioux also began to be identified on other reservations. Notably, Sitting Bull, at the Standing Rock Reservation, and Big Foot, at the Cheyenne River Reservation, refused to cooperate with agency officials.

Major General Nelson A. Miles, now commander of the Military Division of the Missouri, hoped to avoid violence and initiated negotiations with the Pine Ridge militants. He also ordered the arrest of Big Foot and Sitting Bull to contain the spread of militant activity on the northern reservations. However, the death of Sitting Bull, killed by Indian policemen attempting to arrest him, further inflamed the situation. The militants at the Pine Ridge Reservation were more emboldened than ever to resist. Without their leader, the majority of Sitting Bull's Hunkpapa band abandoned the militant cause, but a few joined with Big Foot.

Though previously aligned with the militants, over time Big Foot came to recognize the futility of any armed struggle and began to build a reputation as a peacemaker among the other bands and local Army commanders. The friendlies at Pine Ridge Reservation asked him to come to Pine Ridge to help calm the situation. Big Foot and his band used the cover of night and quietly slipped away for Pine Ridge. Unfortunately, Miles failed to recognize Big Foot as an emissary for the friendlies on his way to mollify the hostility at Pine Ridge. Mistaking him, instead, as an advocate for the militants, Miles took personal charge of the situation and directed the 6th and 9th Cavalry to block Big Foot's movement to Pine Ridge.

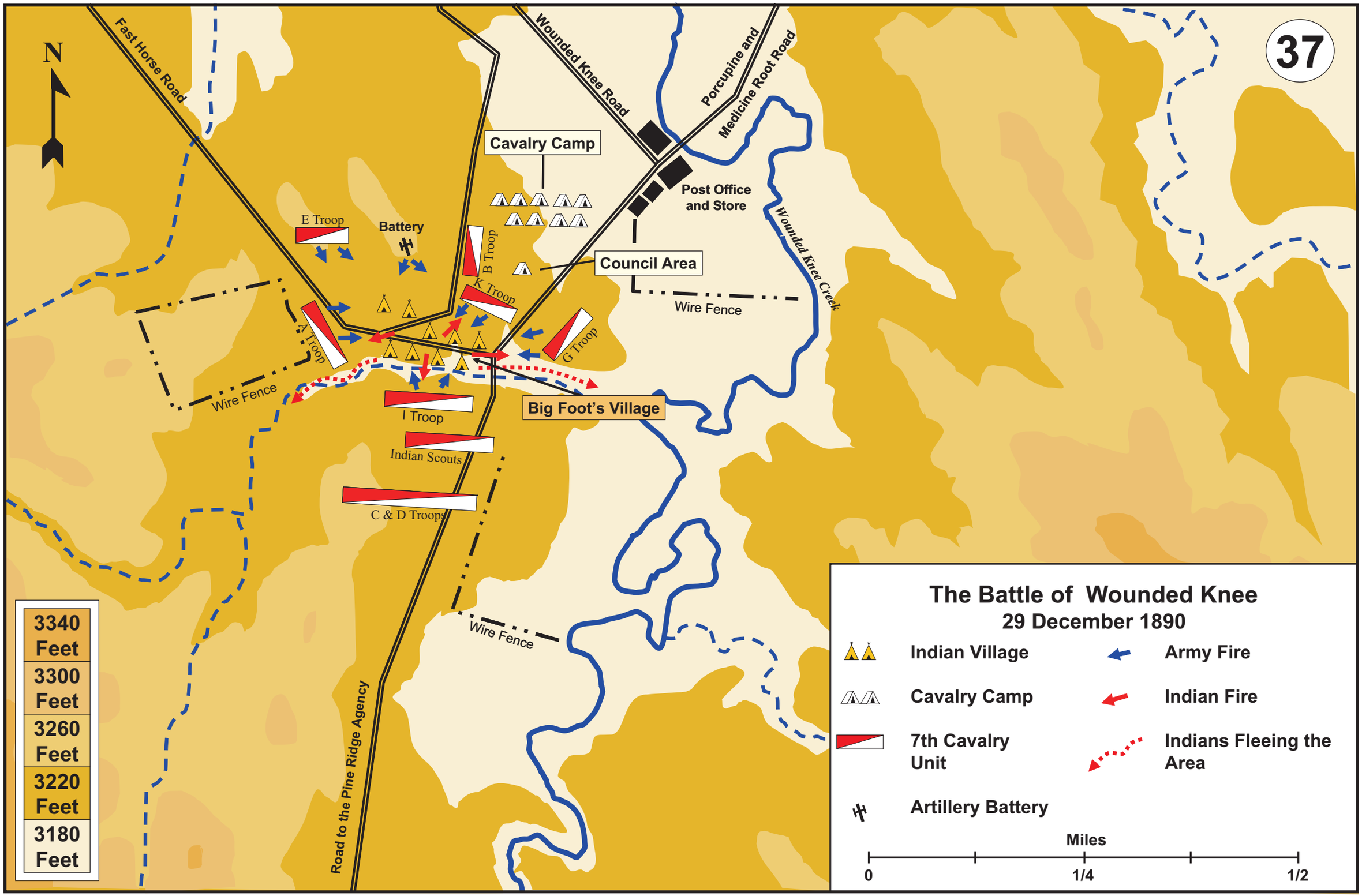

The Ghost Dance
Army Deployments by Rail
Army Movements
Big Foot's Movement
Miles
0
50
100
36
N
Little Missouri
Cedar Creek
FT YATES
NORTH DAKOTA
SOUTH DAKOTA
Grand River
Death of Sitting Bull
15 December 1890
Standing Rock
Reservation
8
Moreau River
Cheyenne River
Reservation
Missouri
River
Chicago & Northwestern
Railroad
Tongue River
Otter Creek
MONTANA
WYOMING
Sheridan
Buffalo
FT McKinney
Crazy Woman Creek
Powder River
Little Powder River
Belle Fourche River
Big Foot's Villag
Cheyenne River
Cheyenne River Agency
FT BENNETT
Chicago & Northwestern
Railroad
FT MEADE
6
Pierre
Crow Creek
Reservation
Deployed from FT WINGATE, NM
Bad River
Lower Brule
Reservation
Rapid City
Black Hills
South Fork Cheyenne River
Badlands
White River
Pine Ridge
Reservation
Ghost Dance Gathering
Wounded Knee
Creek
Rosebud
Reservation
8
Rosebud Agency
Deployed from FT Robinson, NE
Wounded Knee
Pine Ridge
Agency
2
Casper
Douglas
North Platte River
NEBRASKA
9
FT
ROBINSON
7
Chadron
7
Rushville
Fremont, Elkhorn &
Missouri Valley Railroad
Niobrara River
FT NIOBRARA
1
Deployed from Omaha, NE
Deployed from FT LOGAN, CO
Deployed from FT RILEY, KS
Deployed from San Francisco, CA

Map 37. The Battle of Wounded Knee, 29 December 1890

Big Foot eluded the cavalry patrols trying to prevent his movement to Pine Ridge by traveling through the Badlands. Therefore, Miles ordered the 7th Cavalry, commanded at the time by Colonel James Forsyth, to intercept Big Foot's band, disarm them, and march them to a railhead for movement to Omaha. On 28 December 1890, advanced elements of the 7th Cavalry located the elusive Sioux and escorted them to a campsite along Wounded Knee Creek. The remainder of the regiment arrived at the campsite that night. The Sioux awoke the next morning to find themselves surrounded by 500 soldiers and 4 field pieces. Big Foot's Sioux, with perhaps 120 men and about 200 women and children, recognized the hopelessness of their situation and agreed to be escorted to the railhead for transportation back to the reservation. The old chief was stricken with pneumonia, so the Army provided a heated tent for his care.

Forsyth did not expect resistance when he deployed his units to disarm the Indians. However, the Indians grew increasingly upset as the soldiers searched the lodges and clothing of both men and women. The situation suddenly grew more volatile when a medicine man named Yellow Bird called for the warriors to resist. During one search, a soldier and an Indian scuffled for a rifle and the weapon accidentally discharged. Both sides opened fire at brutally close range as the women and children scattered in panic. The artillerymen on the hilltop added to the mayhem when they opened fire on the fleeing Indians.

The fighting ended when the Indians fled the battlefield. On the field lay 150 dead Sioux, including Big Foot. The immensity of the tragedy was magnified in that at least 62 of the dead were women and children. The Army suffered 25 officers and soldiers killed and another 39 wounded. Other than the Fetterman Fight and the Little Bighorn, the Battle of Wounded Knee was one of the Army's most deadly encounters on the plains. Miles was furious over the whole mismanaged affair. He relieved Forsyth of command (the decision was later overturned) and skillfully avoided further violence with the bands associated with the Ghost Dance. The influence of the Ghost Dance soon waned, and Wounded Knee marked the end of organized Indian resistance on the plains and the Army's last large deployment against the Indians of the Great Plains; the Sioux Wars were over at last.


37
N
Fast Horse Road
Wounded Knee Road
Porcupine and Medicine Root Road
Cavalry Camp
Post Office and Store
Council Area
Wounded Knee Creek
Wire Fence
E Troop
Battery
B Troop
K Troop
A Troop
G Troop
Wire Fence
I Troop
Big Foot's Village
Indian Scouts
C & D Troops
Wire Fence
Road to the Pine Ridge Agency
3340 Feet
3300 Feet
3260 Feet
3220 Feet
3180 Feet
The Battle of Wounded Knee
29 December 1890
Indian Village
Cavalry Camp
7th Cavalry Unit
Artillery Battery
Army Fire
Indian Fire
Indians Fleeing the Area
Miles
0
1/4
1/2

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Mr. Charles D. Collins, Jr. is an assistant professor and the Sioux Wars course author for the Staff Ride Team, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He received a B.A. in History from Southwest Missouri State University and an MMAS in History from the US Army Command and General Staff College. While on active duty, Mr. Collins served in various armor and cavalry assignments. He retired from the Army in 1996. Mr. Collins' published works include *The Corps of Discovery: Staff Ride Handbook for the Lewis and Clark Expedition* and numerous articles on a wide variety of military topics.

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