Vestal - #1

The Army War College,
Washington, D. C.,
July 28, 1929.

Mr. Stanley Vestal,
Norman,
Oklahoma.

My dear cousin:-

All the Vestals that I have ever met have turned out to be cousins; practically all come directly or indirectly from Chatham County, North Carolina; and you must therefore pardon me for assuming the relationship. I am glad, indeed, to identify "Stanley Vestal." I have been asked many times; and I have always replied that Stanley Vestal is a cousin of mine. Your fine book has had many readers here at the Army War College. I have been accused, several time, of being Stanley Vestal; and my honest denials have served in more than one instance to convince people that I am the author of your book. I want to congratulate you upon the subjects that you are taking for serious research. It is a new and little explored field that you have entered; and, in my opinion, it is a very important part of our national history.

Your place of residence gives you many advantages in your work. I spent a month in 1895 and two months in 1897 at Hominy, Oklahoma, with an uncle, who was an old frontiersman. He arrived on the Custer battlefield, two or three days after the battle; and he retreated with Crook from the present site of Fort Keough to the Black Hills(I believe), as winter came on. I was stationed at Fort Keough from July 3, 1896, to the outbreak of the Spanish-American War. I spent a month in 1896 and three months in 1897 at Lame Deer, the agency of the Northern Cheyennes, as a member of a guard of fifteen men for the protection of the Indian agent. . While there, I talked with several Indians who claimed that they had been in the great battle. These were rosy times for me. The day after our arrival at Fort Keough in 1896, we started for Lame Deer. Late in April, 1897, the Cheyennes were on the eve of going on the war path. They killed a sheep herder, and the agent called for help. As a member of Co. E, 2nd Infantry, I started at 8 P. M., April 29, with Troop A, 8th Cavalry, for Lame Deer. We made the distance of 90 miles in three hours less than three days. I thought that it was a wonderful achievement until I read of Napoleon's march of 90 miles with 80,000 men immediately before the Battle of Dresden in 1813. Other troops came from Fort Custer. When things quieted down and the troops returned to their stations, I remained at Lame Deer as a part of the regular guard. I visited the Custer Battle field, with Lieutenants of the 2nd Infantry, on the 21st anniversary of the battle, June 25, 1897. There were then many fragments of human bones scattered around the ground. I suppose you have visited the place. Stones had been put up where each man fell. The monument to Custer had been destroyed by tourist vandals, and a wooden marker showed the spot where he fell. The story of the stones gave me a better idea of the fight than anything I have ever read.