

1876, between the different battalions of Gibbons' command, Indian scouts were sent out to discover the whereabouts of the hostiles, and secure, as near as possible, the numbers of the enemy. Upon the return of these scouts, who located the Indian village in the vicinity of the Little Bit Horn, they reported the strength of the hostiles to be between three and five thousand fighting warriors. But the agents at the different agencies had previously given it as their opinion that the hostile force did not amount to over one thousand fighting men; and, strange as it may appear, both Gibbon and Terry seemed to have placed greater reliance on the estimates of the agents than in the actual observation of the friendly Indian scouts. Custer, from all accounts, shared the opinion of his superiors, and expressed himself as able to whip the allied forces of Sioux and Cheyennes with his own regiment if he were only permitted the opportunity.

Camp at the mouth of the Rosebud was broken on the morning of June 22d, Custer, with his regiment (the Seventh Cavalry) and pack train moving up the Rosebud, and Terry and Gibbon with their forces, going up the Yellowstone. At the council of war held before the commands separated, what was determined upon as the line of action is now shrouded in doubt, some holding that Custer was not to attack the hostiles until the different commands were close enough together to form a junction, while others maintain that Custer himself said he was authorized to attack the enemy whenever and wherever he found him.

But there is documentary evidence in existence which goes far toward proving that Custer received "definite" instructions, and that he permitted his enthusiasm to take advantage of the loophole left in them. He was to have moved up the Rosebud in pursuit of the Indians whose trail Reno had discovered some days previous. "It is of course impossible to give any definite instructions," reads this interesting memento, "in regard to this movement, and, were it not impossible to do so, the department commander places too much confidence in your zeal, energy and ability to wish to impose upon you precise orders which might hamper your action when nearly in contact with the enemy. He will, however, indicate to you his own view of what your action should be, and he desires that you should conform to them, unless you shall see sufficient reason for departing from them."

Here's a case of "close the door, please, unless you desire to leave it open."

If Custer found that the Indian trail (discovered previously by Reno) turned toward the Little Big Horn, he was to have kept to the left toward the headwaters of the Tongue river, in order that no band or bands of hostiles should be permitted to escape to the south or southeast by passing around his left flank. He was to feel his way cautiously from the Tongue river westward to the valley of the Little Big Horn, where he was to carefully examine Tullock creek (a tributary of the Big Horn) at its upper end, and report to Gen. Gibbon, whose command would be located at the forks of the Little and Big Horn rivers. With Custer's command on the headwaters of the Little