

Big Horn (east), Crook's in the Goose creek valley (south), and Gibbons' at the head of the Little Big Horn valley (north), the Indians (if located in the latter valley, and it was almost impossible to suppose they were anywhere else, as the trail led in that direction and the scouts had located their village on or in the vicinity of the Little Big Horn), would find it impossible to escape the cordon of troops unless they penetrated the mountains and crossed the range to the west, a move which was highly improbable because next to impossible.

But Custer did not allow instructions to "hamper his actions" when he found himself upon the hot trail of the Indians on the Rosebud. The headwaters of the Tongue were permitted to take care of themselves. Custer saw sufficient reason for departing from his orders, and pressed on in pursuit of the savages. By the time the valley of the Little Big Horn was reached, he had other plans than the one mapped out by the commanding General to examine the upper part of Tullock creek. His scouts had reported the Indian village but a short distance ahead, but whether they also reported on the strength of the hostiles will never be known.

251 It is enough to know, however, that the hostiles' trail was discovered when the Custer command reached a point twenty miles up the Rosebud, after leaving the Gibbon command. It lead up that stream for many miles, and finally turned off to a tributary of the Little Big Horn. When Custer reached a point eighteen miles from the Indian village, he called Reno, Benteen, McDougal and his other officers together and divided his command into three battalions taking troops C, E, F, I and L himself. Troops A, M and G were assigned to Reno, while Benteen was given charge of troops H, D and K. B troop, under Captain McDougal, was made an escort to the pack train. From the scouts the exact location of the Indian village at its upper end; Reno was to keep on the east side of the stream until he came to about the center of the village and then begin the attack, and Custer was to follow down stream to the extreme lower end of the camp and attack it there, so that the three forces would begin the fight at different points almost simultaneously. When the three battalions had reached a point five miles from the village, Benteen crossed the river and followed down under the shadows of the mountain, while the Custer and Reno commands marched side by side yet a little further. Then Custer bore off to the east, into the hills, while Reno passed down to the river and soon after engaged the Indians. He met a force that he could not drive--a host that he had not looked for. Demoralization took possession of his battalion, and in the retreat which ensued his men were mowed down like grass.

252 Benteen, in a statement made to Mr. Finerty, says there was to have been no connection between Reno, McDougal and himself in Custer's order. He was sent off to the left several miles from where Custer was killed to "actually hunt up more Indians." When he set off on his mission, he left the remainder of the regiment at a halt and dismounted. He soon saw, he says, after carrying out Custer's order, and two other orders which were sent to him by the General that the "Indians had too much horse