

THE SIOUX WAR

The causes which led in February, 1876, to a military campaign against that portion of the Sioux Nation, known as the non-treaty Sioux, or followers of Sitting Bull, were fully detailed in the last annual report of this office, as also the fact that after the opening of hostilities they received large accessions to their number from the agency Sioux. This report showed that such desertions were largely due to the uneasiness which the Indians had long felt on account of the infraction of treaty stipulations by the white invasion of the Black Hills, seriously aggravated at the most critical period by irregular and insufficient issues of rations, necessitated by inadequate and delayed appropriations.

Of this campaign a full and detailed account will of course be found in the reports of the honorable Secretary of War. It has, however, seemed to me proper to present herewith a brief outline of its principal events, in order that the records of the Indian Department may contain, at least, a summary of the most important Indian war of recent date, and one which has involved every interest of the largest tribe with which this office has to deal. The campaign was carried on for the most part in the region south of the Yellowstone, between the Big Horn and Powder Rivers, in Montana and Wyoming. It opened with an attack made upon an Indian camp on the Powder River, March 17th, 1876, by forces under General Crook, who had approached from the north by way of Forts Reno and Phil Kearney. After this attack the troops returned to Fort Fetterman, March 26th, and remained there until the last of May, when they again started out, pursuing the same route as before, and on June 17th engaged in an all-day fight with the hostiles near the head of the Rosebud, after which they went into camp, and General Crook sent for reinforcements, which arrived August 4th.

About the middle of May a force of about one thousand men under General Terry left Fort Abraham Lincoln and ascended the Yellowstone to the mouth of the Rosebud. There the Seventh Cavalry, numbering 600 men, commanded by General Custer, left General Terry with orders to proceed up the Rosebud and across to the Little Big Horn. General Terry then proceeded to the mouth of the Big Horn, where he was met by a body of 450 men under General Gibbon, which had marched from Fort Ellis down the Yellowstone. The combined forces ascended the Big Horn to the mouth of the Little Big Horn, which latter stream they also ascended, and arrived June 27th at a point about forty miles above its mouth. Here they found that two days previous the forces under General Custer had had an engagement on this ground with the hostiles, which had resulted in the entire destruction of five companies under General Custer's immediate command; and that by their arrival the remaining seven companies, under Major Reno had narrowly escaped sharing the same fate. The troops then returned to the mouth of the Big Horn, leaving behind 259 dead and carrying with them 53 wounded.

A month later, July 26th, at the request of Lieutenant General Sheridan, the Interior Department conceded to the military the supervision of the Lower Brule, Cheyenne River, and Standing Rock agencies; and military officers were made acting agents at the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail agencies.

About the same time, General Terry, who had meanwhile received reinforcements, descended the Yellowstone to the Rosebud, and ascended the Rosebud 36 miles, where, August 10th, he joined General Crook. The Indians, however, took this opportunity to escape in the direction of Tongue River. The trail was followed down the Tongue, across to the Powder River, and down the Powder to its mouth. At this point, on August 25th, the two forces separated, General Terry going north of the Yellowstone to prevent escape in that direction. General Crook followed the trail southeast toward the Black Hills until it became so scattered as to be indistinguishable. During this pursuit, on September 14th, General Crook's advanced column surprised and attacked a village of thirty lodges near Slim Buttes, 180 miles from the Cheyenne River agency. This was followed up by an attack on his main column by the band of Crazy Horse. The troops then came into the vicinity of the Black Hills, and soon after assisted in disarming the agency Indians of Red Cloud and Spotted Tail. General Terry likewise disarmed and dismounted the Indians at Cheyenne River and Standing Rock.