

Indian Warfare

Calzada de la Piedad 166,
Departamento 7,
Mexico, D. F.

Dear Mr. Vestal --

Citizenship -

The Mercury has forwarded your letter. It's always the dickens to know how much statistics ought to go into a magazine article and how much can be left out. Probably experts ought to be forbidden to read such things, or else nobody else should be allowed to.

Starting right off with Article 1, I'll have to announce that allotment in severalty of public lands to an Indian does not carry with it the boon of United States citizenship. It doesn't even make the fortunate recipient a freeholder. He doesn't own it; he doesn't pay taxes on it, and he can't sell, mortgage or even lease it without the consent of his district Indian agent and written permission from the Indian Bureau. The White River Utes are still under jurisdiction of the Indian agency at Fort Duchesne, Utah. I think you are right about Chief White Bull switching the procession off to Cheyenne River after they'd started for Pine Ridge. There was a very close friendship between the Dakotah Sioux and the Northern Utes at that time; much closer, despite improved communications, than there is now.

beaten off - shot to ribbon

As to my generality about Plains Indian methods of warfare. There is, I know, a great deal of authority with you and against me. Colonel Morrow of the old Seventh Infantry stated positively that the Cheyenne-Sioux were the most unlickable set he ever saw, and a retired general writing some years ago in the Mercury said the same thing perhaps a little more emphatically. But I'll have to stick to my statement nevertheless. As to whether the Indians could shoot straighter from a running horse than the soldiers I don't know, though I do know that their buffalo-killing was accomplished at a range usually of from three to eight feet. I've seen them kill cattle from horseback in my childhood, and one hell of a mess they made of it.

But to take the fights themselves. I can't call many of them by name, having few documents by me; but one that comes to mind naturally is Roman Nose's attack on Forsyth's command on the Republican River. I don't recall the percentage of casualties, but I do remember that a hundred and fifty soldiers, more or less, stood off about twenty-five hundred Indians and shot them up so badly that they left. If their loss was only 2 percent, it would mean that they couldn't stand much punishment. The testimony of men who fought on the Plains and remembered as fairly as they could exactly what happened is that the Indians always mounted up and charged, and the soldiers always bellied down and beat them off. That was true even of Crazy Horse, who is generally considered to have been the greatest tactician of his time, red or white. It wasn't that he didn't know better. It was simply that he commanded men who were used