



Site where General Custer and 51 of his gallant troopers fell. COURTESY, K. F. ROAHEN, BILLINGS, MONT.

Army, ever obedient to the dictates of a democratic government, played in conquering the last frontier. It also memorializes Gen. George Armstrong Custer and his men.

Immediate Causes for Indian Wars of 1867–77

Following a series of hostilities and negotiations, the United States Government, in 1868, signed a treaty with the Sioux, Cheyenne, and other tribes of the Great Plains, designating a large area in western Dakota and Nebraska and part of eastern Wyoming as an Indian reservation. The United States Government agreed "to protect the . . . Indian nations against the commission of all depredations by people of the United States . . ." In less than 6 years after the treaty was signed, General Custer was ordered to lead an official reconnaissance expedition into the Black Hills, the heart of the Indian reservation. Prospectors who accompanied Custer found gold in the Hills and soon this information became general knowledge.

The lure of gold started a rush to the Black Hills. Brig. Gen. George Crook, acting by direction of the President, attempted to keep the gold seekers out of the Black Hills by use of an armed force, but public opinion did not condone such drastic action. The Indians became more and more hostile and, in anticipation of an outbreak, the Indian Commissioner, in December 1875, issued an ultimatum to the Indians ordering them to return to their respective reservations before January 31, 1876. Weather conditions prevented the peaceful Indians from complying with these orders, and the more hostile group made no attempt to obey them. The Secretary of the Interior, administering Indian affairs, then called upon the War Department to enforce the order.

The Campaigns of 1876

After General Crook had been unsuccessful in his attempt to subdue the Indians, a more comprehensive campaign was organized under Gen. Alfred H. Terry for the summer of 1876. Three columns were to cooperate—Crook's force from Wyoming, Colonel Gib-