

ADDENDA ON THE FORT PHIL KEARNEY BUGLER STORY

L. From "The Sioux Wars" by Charles E. De Land (South Dakota Historical Collections, Vol. XV. pp. 87-90)

Some light may perhaps be found touching this subject (i.e. the Petterman disaster) in Second Lieutenant George P. Belden's reference to this fight in his "Belden, the White Chief". And -- while some of his assertions --- as it has been found in the case with numerous of his expressions regarding other phases of his frontier life -- are wanting in strict fidelity to facts otherwise established, or are obviously exaggerated, yet the fact that he for long years among and as a member of the Crow tribe, stood high among the Indians, and while not present at Fort Kearney on this date, yet was attached to all three of the posts on the Bozeman Trail at times, after about October 1, 1866 and until the end of the Red Cloud War, lends to his observations some substantial weight in considering the movements of the Indians upon and immediately preceding the date of Petterman's last and fatal engagement. He observes in relating his return with Major Gordon to Fort Kearney after an expedition of relief of parties attacked by Indians near Fort C.F. Smith:

"As we returned to the fort, we rode over to the Phil Kearney massacre ground, and Major Gordon pointed out to me the places where the hardest fighting had taken place. One bugler boy was seen to knock two Indians down with his bugle before he was run through with an Indian lance."

(Note by E.S.W. : Italics mine)

~~xxxxxx~~...The references to the "bugler boy", to the movements of the Indians the day before the fight and to the probable scattering of Petterman's forces "at the moment the ambush was discovered" indicate that Belden relied upon accounts coming directly or indirectly from Indian sources, as well as upon appearances ~~at~~ on the battle ground.

2. From "Indian Horrors, or, Massacres by the Red Men" by Henry Davenport Northrop, (no place of publication given. date circa 1891) On pp. 335-6, quoting the narrative of a certain Lieut. W.R. Balch.

Passing now to the year 1867, I return to personal narratives of wars and adventures with the Sioux, those inveterate enemies of the entire human race, themselves excepted. It chanced that in this year military duty called me to the Powder River country of the Rocky Mountains -- the very region, in fact, of the Fort Phil Kearney massacre. Our route lay up the Platte River to Julesburg, thence to old Fort Laramie. We marched to Fort Petterman, and then to Reno, where I met the command of General Sweitzer, and reported to that officer, who ordered me to Fort Phil Kearney.

One day when I was returning with a cavalry company from a ride taken in the interests of an endangered train which was making its way to the fort, I visited the massacre ground with Major Gordon, who pointed out to me where the hardest fighting had taken place..... One boy was seen to knock two Indians down with his bugle before he was run through with an Indian lance. (Italics mine - E.S.W.)

Note by E.S.W.

From the similarity of phrasing in these two accounts, it would seem that either Lieut. Balch cribbed from Lieut. Belden or vice-versa. And since Belden's