

Crazy Horse, Sioux name Ta-sunko-witko, (born 1842?, near present-day Rapid City, South Dakota, U.S.—died September 5, 1877, Fort Robinson, Nebraska), a chief of the Oglala band of Lakota (Teton or Western Sioux) who was an able tactician and a determined warrior in the Sioux resistance to European Americans' invasion of the northern Great Plains.

As early as 1865 Crazy Horse was a leader in his people's defiance of U.S. plans to construct a road to the goldfields in Montana. He participated in the massacre of Captain William J. Fetterman and his troop of 80 men (December 21, 1866) as well as in the Wagon Box fight (August 2, 1867), both near Fort Phil Kearny, in Wyoming Territory. Refusing to honour the reservation provisions of the Second Treaty of Fort Laramie (1868), Crazy Horse led his followers to unceded buffalo country, where they continued to hunt, fish, and wage war against enemy tribes as well as whites.

When gold was discovered in the Black Hills, Dakota Territory, in 1874, prospectors disregarded Sioux treaty rights and swarmed onto the Native American reservation there. General George Crook thereupon set out to force Crazy Horse from his winter encampments on the Tongue and Powder rivers in Montana Territory, but the chief simply retreated deeper into the hills. Joining Cheyenne forces, he took part in a surprise attack on Crook in the Rosebud valley (June 17, 1876), in southern Montana, forcing Crook's withdrawal. Crazy Horse then moved north to unite with the main Sioux encampment of Chief Sitting Bull on the banks of the Little Bighorn River, where he helped annihilate a battalion of U.S. soldiers under Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer (June 25, 1876). Crazy Horse and his followers then returned to the hill country to resume their old ways. He was pursued by Colonel Nelson A. Miles in a stepped-up army campaign to force all Native Americans to come to the

government agencies. His tribe weakened by cold and hunger, Crazy Horse finally surrendered to General Crook at the Red Cloud Agency in Nebraska on May 6, 1877. Confined to Fort Robinson, he was killed in a scuffle with soldiers who were trying to imprison him in a guardhouse.

Crazy Horse

Facts, information and articles about Crazy Horse, Lakota Indian Leader and Native American Indian Chief, Born 1840 Died September 5, 1877

Native Name Ta-sunko-witko; birth name, Cha-O-Ha ("In the Wilderness" or "Among the Trees")

Spouses Black Buffalo Woman, Black Shawl, Nellie Larrabee (Laravie)

Achievements Leader at the Battle of the Little Bighorn

Crazy Horse Articles

Crazy Horse summary: Crazy Horse, more precisely called the man with the spirited or crazy horse, was born somewhere between 1840 and 1845 in to the Oglala Lakota tribe, a spiritual division of the Sioux. He rose to become the leader of that tribe and is most famed for leading one of the Indian war party to victory at the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876.

Through traditional Lakota vision quests and fighting prowess skirmishes both with traditional enemy tribes and the colonial settlers, Crazy Horse grew in stature and respect among his people. He participated in the Battle of Platte Bridge and the Battle of Red Buttes in 1865 to finally be elevated to the status of 'The Shirt Wearer,' the leader in battle.

He became a regular leader of large war parties of mixed Lakota and Cheyenne warriors. In this role, his band inflicted the worst victory to that date for the US Cavalry on The Great Plains in what was to be called The Fetterman Massacre. His luck was reversed in The Wagon

Box fight due to the unpredicted arrival of new breech loading rifles that reloaded faster and allowed three times as many rounds per seconds to be fired.

Although the level of his direct involvement in The Battle of Little Bighorn is in doubt due to a lack of formal Indian record keeping, Crazy Horse is definitely attributed with delaying the arrival of Custer's reinforcements which was decisive to his defeat. Learn more about Custer's last stand at the battle of Little Big Horn.

His end was sad for a warrior. He surrendered with his tribe, weakened by the cold and hunger of a harsh winter. His death in captivity remains controversial. He was stabbed in the back, supposedly in the confusion and trying to violently escape and being held back by friends.

Articles Featuring Crazy Horse From History Net Magazines

The Last Stand of Crazy Horse

By Kenneth W. Hayden

On the afternoon of September 9, 1876, 600 to 800 Lakota warriors led by Oglala leader Crazy Horse rode to the crests of some hills overlooking a broad depression near the Slim Buttes range of western Dakota Territory. What they saw below must have turned their stomachs. The village of Minneconjou Lakota leader American Horse lay in ruin. Most of the 40 lodges had been demolished, with dead ponies and personal belongings scattered about. Soldiers were everywhere, far more than Crazy Horse had expected to see. They were not shooting their guns now—there was no need to. No Indians were in sight.

Crazy Horse and his warriors had been called from their village some 10 miles away. The bluecoats had attacked and must be driven off. But

Crazy Horse had been told there were no more than 150 soldiers, fewer than the number killed earlier that summer along the Greasy Grass in Montana Territory. Crazy Horse had been there, too, and before that on the Rosebud battlefield. He knew how to fight soldiers. Before him now, though, were more than 1,000 bluecoats. Captain Anson Mills and 150 cavalymen had made the initial attack on American Horse's village that morning, but they had since been reinforced by many more of Brig. Gen. George Crook's troops. Most of the Indians from the village had fled to the south, and some women and children were captured. American Horse himself had surrendered after he was mortally wounded. Crook's men had found a number of relics from the Greasy Grass fight, better known as the Battle of the Little Bighorn, including a swallow-tailed guidon of the 7th Cavalry.

From their positions atop the hills, Crazy Horse's warriors opened fire on the troops. Crook immediately had his men form a defensive line around the horses and mules, while other soldiers went ahead and set the Indian village ablaze. The general then ordered some of his troops into skirmish lines to advance toward the warriors. Four companies of infantry led the way, with dismounted troopers from three cavalry regiments following. As the troops came within range, the Indians rained gunfire down on them, but the troops answered with a furious volume of fire and kept on coming. After 45 minutes of steady fighting, the troops drove most of the warriors from their positions on the hills. But some of the Lakotas held their ground, and at one point they charged Lt. Col. William Royall's 3rd Cavalry, on the perimeter of Crook's line. It took a well-aimed fusillade to drive them away.

The battle cost the lives of two cavalymen and one of Crook's scouts, Charles 'Buffalo Chips' White, but the outnumbered Indians, who had an estimated 10 killed, could not defeat the soldiers. That night, Crook's

men ate well while camping near the smoldering ruin that had once been American Horse's village. When the bluecoats pulled out on September 10 and headed toward the Black Hills, Crazy Horse had his warriors keep up a running fight. On September 15, Crook finally reached a supply column in the Black Hills and was no doubt glad to have Crazy Horse out of his hair.

The September 9 Battle of Slim Buttes (fought near present-day Reva, S.D.) marked the first time since the late June fight at the Little Bighorn that Crazy Horse had fought soldiers in large numbers. During those couple of months in between, avoiding a fight with the bluecoats had not been difficult. After learning of Lt. Col. George Custer's shocking defeat, Generals Crook and Alfred Terry had been unwilling to take on the Lakotas until reinforcements had arrived. Meanwhile, the Lakotas had kept on the move, traveling mostly east and burning the grass behind them to deny forage to the horses of any soldiers who might follow.

Crazy Horse had too few warriors to attack the soldiers in force, but he did all he could to resist the white intruders in Paha Sapa, the sacred Black Hills. Alone or with a few friends, he attacked miners and others, and then brought the spoils home to his people. One time he returned to his village with mules loaded with goods, and another time he brought sacks of raisins that the Indian children happily gobbled up. What he could not obtain enough of, though, was ammunition.

After the Battle of Slim Buttes, Crazy Horse and his people went west to the Tongue River. They settled in for the winter near Hanging Woman Creek. 'It snowed much; game was hard to find, and it was a hungry time for us,' recalled Oglala holy man Black Elk, who was Crazy Horse's cousin through marriage and just a teenager in 1876. 'Ponies died, and we ate them. They died because the snow froze hard and they could not find enough grass that was left in the valleys and there was not

enough cottonwood to feed them all. There had been thousands of us together that summer, but there were not two thousand now.'

Meanwhile, General Crook, having retreated to Fort Laramie on the Bozeman Trail, outfitted for a winter campaign against Crazy Horse. He had 2,200 soldiers and more than 400 Indian scouts, including 60 Sioux from the agencies. His cavalry was commanded by Colonel Ranald Mackenzie and his infantry by Lt. Col. Richard Dodge. The soldiers left Fort Laramie on November 5, 1876, and followed the Bozeman Trail to Fort Fetterman and then to Fort Reno. There, Crook learned that some Indians had gone to warn Crazy Horse of his approach. At that point, the general changed his plan, sending Mackenzie and the cavalry to attack the Northern Cheyenne village of Dull Knife and Wild Hog, some 37 miles away on the Red Fork of the Powder River.

Mackenzie hit the village at dawn on November 25 and destroyed it. Although the village had been warned of Mackenzie's approach, the attack was a surprise. Some 40 Cheyenne men, women and children were killed. The rest escaped, but only with the clothes on their backs. For two weeks they trudged northward through the snow and subfreezing temperatures to reach their only source of help, the village of Crazy Horse. Several people, mostly children, died along the way. Crazy Horse took in the surviving refugees, feeding, clothing and sheltering them as best he could. But Crazy Horse's own people could not keep up such support for long; they themselves were suffering. Some of the Northern Cheyennes left the village to surrender to the whites at Camp Robinson.

Mackenzie's attack on Dull Knife's village and the lack of game that winter convinced many of the Lakota leaders on the Tongue River to pursue peace. Crazy Horse, whose following at the time consisted of about 250 lodges, struggled with that concept and, according to Black

Elk, began to act even queerer than usual. 'He hardly ever stayed in camp,' Black Elk said. 'People would find him out alone in the cold, and they would ask him to come home with them. He would not come, but sometimes he would tell the people what to do. People wondered if he ate anything at all. Once my father found him out alone like that, and he said to my father: 'Uncle, you have noticed the way I act. But do not worry; there are caves and holes for me to live in and out here the spirits may help me. I am making plans for the good of my people.'"

Crazy Horse knew not only of Crook but also of Colonel Nelson A. Miles, who had established a cantonment at the mouth of the Tongue River (and would soon build Fort Keogh nearby). Miles, a veteran of the Red River War in Texas, had effectively campaigned against Sitting Bull and the Hunkpapa Lakotas in October and November. By mid-December, Crazy Horse had come to agree with those Lakota leaders who said it was in their best interests to talk peace with Miles. A delegation of 25 Lakotas and Northern Cheyennes made the trip. As they drew close to Cantonment Tongue River, five of them went ahead, carrying two white flags of truce. To reach Miles' headquarters, the peacemakers had to pass through a camp of Crow scouts. The Crows greeted the Lakotas, shaking their hands, but then, without warning, one of the Crows pulled a pistol and shot the Minneconjou Gets Fat With Beef. The Crows surrounded the others and killed them too.

The murders did not sit well with Miles, who ordered the remaining Crows disarmed and their horses seized. He sent the Lakotas the guns and the horses and a letter of apology, assuring them that the white men had nothing to do with the killings. Crazy Horse did not buy it. Clearly, the whites still could not be trusted, and he wanted revenge. Most of the other Indian leaders agreed with him. They held a council and decided to send a decoy party to draw the soldiers away from the post and into an

ambush by the main body of warriors. A similar Lakota tactic at Fort Phil Kearney in 1866 had enabled Crazy Horse and friends to annihilate Captain William Fetterman's force in the Fetterman Fight (also known as the Fetterman Massacre).

The decoy party struck the post on December 26, 1876, stealing nearly 250 head of cattle and driving them south. Miles immediately sent Companies C and F, 22nd Infantry, and Company D, 5th Infantry, all under the command of Captain Charles Dickey, in pursuit. The next day, Lieutenant Mason Carter's Company K, 5th Infantry, followed. On December 28, Miles himself set out with three companies (A, C and E) of the 5th Infantry, eight scouts, a 12-pounder Napoleon cannon and a 3-inch rifled Rodman gun. In all, Miles had 436 men in the field. The decoy party allowed Miles to follow it southwest through the Tongue River valley, engaging in small-scale skirmishes with his rear guard on January 1 and 3, 1877. The deep snow and freezing temperatures made conditions difficult for everyone, but the soldiers were better prepared. They wore buffalo coats over layers of clothing, as well as fur caps, rubber overshoes and warm mittens. 'Bear Coat' Miles, relentlessly eager to find Crazy Horse's village, was playing right into the hands of the Lakotas. The decoy party was leading him to a spot near Prairie Dog Creek, where the ambush was supposed to take place.

On January 7, Miles' scouts, led by Luther 'Yellowstone' Kelly, captured nine Northern Cheyenne women and children who were trying to reach Crazy Horse's village. Miles now knew that Crazy Horse was close. But a Northern Cheyenne warrior, Big Horse, had seen the soldiers seize the others, and he immediately went off to warn Crazy Horse that the troops were coming. Instead of waiting for Miles' attack, the Oglala leader would go on the offensive. Half of the warriors would strike from south of the soldiers' camp, and the other half, under Crazy

Horse, would attack from the west. Things did not work out as planned because the element of surprise was lost when the decoy party, fearing the nine captives might be killed by the soldiers, sprang the ambush early. Instead of waiting for the main war party to arrive, 40 or 50 warriors attacked Yellowstone Kelly's scouting party. The gunfire brought a company of Miles' foot soldiers and mounted infantry to the scene. By the time these bluecoats arrived, more than 100 Indians were in the fight. Small-arms fire was exchanged for more than an hour before the soldiers opened up with an artillery piece that forced the warriors to retreat into the rocky hills to the south.

Miles' camp was in a fairly good defensive position in a grove of trees on the south bank of the Tongue River. The camp was east of the Wolf Mountains, some 115 miles south of Tongue River Cantonment. To the northwest and southeast of camp rose rugged hills, and about a half mile to the south was a high, cone-shaped butte that came to be called Battle Butte.

Crazy Horse and some 400 warriors arrived on the scene early on the morning of January 8, unaware of the decoy party's attack the night before and still expecting to spring an ambush. In the falling snow, they maneuvered their way to the hills northwest of the camp. At about 7 a.m., Indians showed themselves on the northwest heights. Some of them yelled that the soldiers would 'eat no more fat meats.' With piercing war cries, Lakota and Northern Cheyenne warriors charged on foot down the hills toward a company-strong line of infantry under Lieutenant Carter, whom Miles had ordered to the north side of the Tongue River. The attackers were driven back by rifle fire and a few well-placed rounds of artillery. The Indians regrouped and charged again and again, but each time they were repulsed. Despite the intensity of fire, nobody was killed on either side.

While the gunfire continued in the valley west of Miles' camp, Crazy Horse led some of his men across the river to the bluffs southeast of the camp. They provided cover for warriors under Northern Cheyenne leader Medicine Bear, who crossed the river southwest of the camp and headed to the hills south of Battle Butte. Another group of Northern Cheyennes, under medicine man Big Crow, and warriors from the decoy party came up from the south and took positions on three ridges between Crazy Horse and Medicine Bear. Seeing this threat, Miles ordered Company A, 5th Infantry, under Captain James Casey, to advance through the deep snow toward the ridges. Before long, the company took fire from Medicine Bear's warriors, but nobody was hit. Casey proceeded to capture the first, and lowest, of the ridges. When he tried to move to the higher ridges, Indian resistance stiffened and his attack stalled.

Miles then sent Company D, under Lieutenant Robert McDonald, to help out. After crossing the valley in Company A's tracks, McDonald's men managed to climb up the second ridge and push the Indians back. Meanwhile, Big Crow tried to inspire his warriors by dancing along the summit of the third ridge, daring anyone to shoot him. His dancing and taunting went on for some time as bullets whizzed past him from 100 soldiers in the valley below. Finally, two soldiers from Company D, firing from the second ridge, dropped the daring Big Crow. His death discouraged some of the Northern Cheyennes, but other kinsmen fought on, as did the Lakotas.

Blowing on an eagle-bone whistle, Crazy Horse led a charge of some 300 warriors on foot from the third hill toward the commands of Casey and McDonald. They closed to within 50 yards of the soldiers, but the firing by both sides—perhaps because of the falling snow, poor visibility and intense cold—was inaccurate. Fearing the other two companies

would be overrun, Miles sent a third company, Company C under Captain Edmund Butler, into the fight. Butler and his men charged up the hill at Crazy Horse, who fell back at first but then took up a strong defensive position behind rocks and fallen trees near the top of the third ridge.

Miles needed more help, so he called in the field artillery, and the shells fired from the valley forced Crazy Horse and his men to abandon their positions. They did not flee in panic, however. As they fell back, they continued to fire at the soldiers, who pursued them for nearly a mile, until the snow fell too heavily to continue. The blizzard also covered the retreat of the warriors who had remained to fight from the hills northwest of the Tongue River. The five-hour Battle of Wolf Mountains (also known as the Battle Butte Fight) was over. Amazingly enough, the soldiers had suffered only a few casualties, one dead and eight wounded. One of the wounded would die the next day. The Indians' losses were apparently also light—three killed, including the daring Big Crow—though Miles reported seeing pools of blood on the snow where the Indians had fought. Crazy Horse obviously still had enough healthy bodies to fight on, but he had used up most of his ammunition, which could not be replaced. He led his people back up the Tongue and then over to the Little Powder.

On January 9, Miles began his march back to his post at the mouth of the Tongue River. Although the battle had been a draw, the colonel had demonstrated to the nonagency Lakotas and Cheyennes that the soldiers could find them and fight them any time, anywhere. Talk of surrender resurfaced. It didn't help that Hunkpapa leader Sitting Bull showed up in camp and announced that he was taking his people to safety across the Canadian border. Crazy Horse declined to join him; he knew it was even colder in Canada. But further resistance did seem futile to many of

Crazy Horse's followers. Colonel Miles and General Crook sent messengers to Crazy Horse's camp with food and tobacco and promises of fair treatment. Each commander wanted to get credit for the great Oglala warrior's surrender.

In early February 1877, Crook persuaded Spotted Tail, an uncle of Crazy Horse's and the designated (by Crook) chief of all agency Lakotas, to march for peace. He was to go to Crazy Horse with 250 Bruls and a pack train of gifts and promise him his own agency in the Powder River country if he would surrender to Crook. Spotted Tail left his agency near Camp Sheridan in western Nebraska on February 13 and eventually found Crazy Horse's camp on the Powder River. Crazy Horse was out on a solo hunt, but Spotted Tail told those present that unless they surrendered, Crook would attack them with the help of not only Crow and Shoshone scouts but also other Lakotas and Cheyennes.

Negotiations began without Crazy Horse participating. The elusive Oglala did send word through his father, Worm, that he would soon bring his camp of Oglalas and Northern Cheyennes, about 400 lodges, to the Red Cloud Agency. Red Cloud had once been chief of all the agency Lakotas, but Crook had stripped him of the title and given it to Spotted Tail. On April 5 at Camp Sheridan, Spotted Tail reported the news of Crazy Horse's imminent surrender, and the general naturally was delighted. Still smarting from his failure to defeat Crazy Horse at the Rosebud and jealous of Colonel Miles, Crook agreed when Red Cloud volunteered to go out and hurry the Oglala leader along. Red Cloud was allowed to take cattle and other provisions so that Crazy Horse and his followers would not have to stop to hunt on their way to the agency in western Nebraska.

Red Cloud found Crazy Horse on the trail to the Red Cloud Agency on April 27. 'All is well, have no fear,' Red Cloud told him. 'Come on in.'

Without hesitation, Crazy Horse laid out his blanket for Red Cloud to sit on and gave the older man his shirt as a symbol of surrender to him. Turning himself in, though, must have been agonizingly difficult for Crazy Horse, who had always lived as a free man in the traditional Lakota manner. Now, he would have to take handouts and obey the white man. But he was determined to do what was best for his people.

On May 6, 1877, Crazy Horse and 889 other Oglalas appeared outside Camp Robinson, near the Red Cloud Agency. They were the last major group of Lakota holdouts on American soil to surrender. The Great Sioux War was finally over, and Crazy Horse told his escort, Lieutenant William Philo Clark of the 2nd Infantry: 'Friend, I shake with this hand, because my heart is on this side....I want this peace to last forever.' As a token of surrender, Crazy Horse's longtime friend He Dog gave Clark his war bonnet and shirt. Crazy Horse gave nothing, saying, 'I have given all I have to Red Cloud.'

Crazy Horse carried a Winchester rifle across his saddle as he rode to the fort. He wore a single hawk's feather in his hair. His braids, wrapped in fur, fell across his buckskin shirt. He Dog and another old friend, Little Big Man, rode on either side of him. The procession stretched for two miles. Crazy Horse's loyal followers and the agency Indians alike began singing and cheering for Crazy Horse. 'By God,' said an Army officer who witnessed the event, 'this is a triumphal march, not a surrender.' The reception was a clear sign that Crazy Horse was a hero, even among many agency Indians who had not spent time with him in years.

Lieutenant Clark informed Crazy Horse that he could be chief of all the Lakotas if he visited President Rutherford B. Hayes in Washington, D.C. But Crazy Horse wasn't interested, even after Clark made him a noncommissioned officer in the U.S. Indian Scouts on May 15. Crazy Horse did say he wanted the agency that had been promised him. He

wanted it to be at a grassy spot on Beaver Creek where he had camped many times (in what is now northeast Wyoming). Clark and Crazy Horse soon came to an impasse. Crazy Horse wouldn't be going to Washington, but he wouldn't be getting his own agency (or become the big chief), either. Crazy Horse was also worried that the U.S. government would relocate all the Lakotas along the Missouri River. Just as Crazy Horse was suspicious of the Army and government, Clark and many others were suspicious of the popular new prisoner. Clark later described the Oglala as 'remarkably brave, generous and reticent, a pillar of strength for good or evil.'

Crazy Horse was apparently not suspicious of scout-interpreter Frank Grouard, but he should have been. Grouard had lived with the Lakotas for a time, and Crazy Horse regarded him as a friend. Back in March 1876, however, Grouard had guided Colonel Joseph Reynolds when Reynolds attacked a Cheyenne village that Grouard believed was Crazy Horse's camp. Grouard greeted Crazy Horse at Camp Robinson like a long-lost buddy, but he no doubt feared that the Oglala would learn the truth. As interpreter Louis Bordeaux later noted, Grouard had reason for wanting to get rid of Crazy Horse.

Not all the Lakotas supported Crazy Horse, either. Red Cloud and Spotted Tail, whose agencies were about 40 miles apart, were jealous of the young hero. They and their cohorts began spreading rumors that Crazy Horse intended to break out and renew his fight against the whites. Eventually, Crazy Horse softened his stance on the Washington trip. In July, he decided he would go. At a council on July 27, Lieutenant Clark read a message from Crook that said 18 of the best and strongest Lakotas, including Crazy Horse, would make the trip to the nation's capital. The general also promised that the Lakotas could go on a buffalo hunt. Crazy Horse was all for it, but Red Cloud was not, fearing that

such a hunt would add to Crazy Horse's stature. At the close of the council, Young Man Afraid of His Horses suggested that the customary council feast be held at Crazy Horse's camp. Red Cloud and his followers promptly left the council in protest, and that night warned Indian agents Benjamin Shopp and James Irwin that Crazy Horse could not be trusted. To Crazy Horse's chagrin, the sale of ammunition to the Lakotas was halted on August 4, and the next day the buffalo hunt was postponed. Furthermore, Red Cloud had his friends tell Crazy Horse that the trip to Washington was a ruse, and that if he went along he would be shipped off to prison in the Dry Tortugas, off the coast of Florida, where the worst Indians were put. Crazy Horse listened to the talk and, over the objections of He Dog, told the Army authorities he would not be going to Washington after all.

When Chief Joseph and other Nez Perces left their reservation in Idaho Territory and fled into Montana Territory in August 1877, Crook wanted to use Lakota warriors to subdue them. Crazy Horse refused, even though Clark offered him a horse, a uniform and a new repeating rifle. 'I came here in peace,' Crazy Horse told the lieutenant. 'No matter if my own relatives pointed a gun at my head and ordered me to change that word, I would not change it.'

Clark persisted. On August 30, Crazy Horse said, with exasperation, that despite his promise to the Great Spirit to fight no more, he would go north with the soldiers and fight until there wasn't a Nez Perce left. Interpreter Grouard, seizing the moment, translated it as 'go north and fight until not a white man is left.' Bordeaux caught the willful misinterpretation, and the Minneconjou leader Touch the Clouds later accused Grouard of lying. But many white authorities at Camp Robinson and elsewhere seemed to want to believe Grouard's lie. Crook was fast losing faith in Crazy Horse, but he didn't want to make a mistake on the

matter. On September 2, he left the Red Cloud Agency for a council on White Clay Creek with Crazy Horse and other Lakota leaders; he planned to discuss the fight with the Nez Perces. On the trail to the council, Crook's party was met by Woman's Dress, a nephew of Red Cloud, who told Crook that Crazy Horse intended to kill him at the council. Crook took the rumor seriously and turned back, sending orders for the agency chiefs to report to him at Camp Robinson.

On September 3, the friendly Lakota leaders all came, including Red Cloud, Spotted Tail and No Water, who had once shot Crazy Horse in a dispute over Black Buffalo Woman (see 'Western Lore,' P. 70). Crook told them that he wanted Crazy Horse arrested. Red Cloud and the others said that Crazy Horse was a desperate man and would fight if anyone tried to arrest him. It would be better, they said, to kill him. Crook said he could not condone murder, but he wanted Crazy Horse arrested and would provide cavalry to assist their warriors. After the Lakota leaders left, Crook gave orders to Colonel Luther Bradley, commander of Camp Robinson, to arrest Crazy Horse and put him on a train to Omaha. From there he would be taken to Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas.

The next morning, September 4, the chiefs rode out of Camp Robinson with 400 agency warriors and eight companies of the 3rd Cavalry to arrest Crazy Horse. When they reached his camp, about six miles away, they found he had fled, along with his wife Black Shawl, who was suffering from tuberculosis, to the Spotted Tail Agency in the hopes of finding a more peaceful existence. At the Spotted Tail Agency, he was met by Touch the Clouds and other friendly warriors. They escorted him to Camp Sheridan, where he intended to tell the authorities about his move. Spotted Tail appeared with a crowd of his warriors and told Crazy Horse that he must listen to and obey him. Crazy Horse, Spotted Tail and Touch the Clouds then all went to the office of Captain Daniel

Burke, commander of Camp Sheridan. According to Lieutenant Jesse M. Lee, acting Indian agent at the Spotted Tail Agency, Crazy Horse looked like a frightened animal as he explained that he never intended to go north and kill whites or to murder Crook. He had come to the Spotted Tail Agency, he said, because of all the bad talk at the Red Cloud Agency. He asked Lee to go to Camp Robinson with him to help explain the situation. Burke and Lee promised Crazy Horse that the Army did not wish to harm him and would listen to his side of the story.

On the morning of September 5, Crazy Horse took the trail toward Camp Robinson, along with Lee, Bordeaux, Touch the Clouds and other Indians—some of whom were friends of Crazy Horse and some of whom Lee found trustworthy. After traveling about 15 miles, the party was joined by a group of Spotted Tail's warriors. At that point Crazy Horse, according to Lee's account, realized that he was practically a prisoner. Still, he retained his spirit. Later on, he raced his horse ahead over a hill, where he met a Lakota family. When Spotted Tail's warriors caught up with him, Crazy Horse told them he had gone ahead to water his horse. Lee, though, thought the family had given him a knife. Crazy Horse was ordered to ride at the rear of Lee's ambulance the rest of the way.

When the party reached Camp Robinson at dusk, thousands of Lakotas were waiting to see Crazy Horse. Not all were friendly, but they parted to allow him to pass through. He Dog rode up, shook his hand and said: 'Look out—watch your step. You are going into a dangerous place.' Little Big Man, now an Indian policeman, came up to Crazy Horse as he dismounted and stayed close to him as his old friend walked across the parade ground. When a warrior shouted that he was a coward, Crazy Horse lunged at him, but Little Big Man held Crazy Horse back.

Lee immediately went to the office of Colonel Bradley but had little luck smoothing things over. Bradley told him that his orders could not be

changed; he was shipping Crazy Horse off to prison in the morning and there was no point discussing the matter. Before leaving, Lee asked if Bradley was willing to listen to Crazy Horse in the morning. Bradley hesitated, and then replied, 'Tell him to go with the officer of the day, and not a hair on his head should be harmed.' Informed of what Bradley had said, Crazy Horse apparently believed he would be allowed to meet with the commander in the morning. The Oglala warrior expressed his joy and shook the hand of the officer of the day, Captain James Kennington.

Kennington, with two soldiers and Little Big Man, then took Crazy Horse to the nearby guardhouse. It was Little Big Man who stepped up and led Crazy Horse inside. Perhaps this turn of events was a surprise to Crazy Horse, and he suddenly realized he was going to be locked up. Or perhaps he knew where he was going, but the sight of the cells and the men inside wearing balls and chains set something off inside him. In any case, he moved fast, wrenching his arm free of Little Big Man, pulling a knife and springing for the door. Little Big Man reacted quickly, too, grabbing Crazy Horse's arms. 'Let me go, let me go; you won't allow me to hurt anyone!' Crazy Horse said as he dragged Little Big Man outside. Crazy Horse freed a hand just enough to slash Little Big Man's wrist. At that point, Kennington yelled 'Stab the son of a bitch! Stab the son of a bitch!' or something similar. Guardhouse sentry William Gentles followed orders. He lunged with his bayonet, stabbing Crazy Horse in the back, near the left kidney. 'He has killed me now,' Crazy Horse announced as he fell to the ground. The wounded Little Big Man and some soldiers tried to grab his arms again, but he told them: 'Let me go, my friends. You have got me hurt enough.'

Kennington wanted to carry the mortally wounded Crazy Horse to the guardhouse, but Touch the Clouds said, 'He was a great chief and cannot

be put in a prison.’ Other Indians on the scene agreed. Camp doctor Valentine T. McGillicuddy went to Bradley and convinced him that there would be more killing if Kennington went ahead and put Crazy Horse in a cell. Instead, Touch the Clouds carried his friend into the adjutant’s office. There, Crazy Horse refused to be put on a bed, saying he wanted to lie on the floor, closer to the earth.

Touch the Clouds was still there at just before midnight when Crazy Horse died. Also on hand was Crazy Horse’s father, Worm; Captain Kennington; Lieutenant Henry R. Lemley, officer of the guard; interpreter John Provost; and McGillicuddy. What Crazy Horse’s last words were is not known. At some point he reportedly told Worm: ‘ah, my father, I am hurt bad. Tell the people it is no use to depend on me any more.’

In the morning, Crazy Horse’s parents took his body, wrapped in a red blanket, on a travois to the Spotted Tail Agency. About half a mile from Camp Sheridan, they placed the body on a small scaffold. Eventually a coffin was built and placed on the scaffold, and a crude fence was constructed to keep the cattle out. His parents mourned there for days. Worm finally buried his son somewhere in the Pine Ridge country of Dakota territory. A cousin of Crazy Horse named Chips said in 1910 that the location was near the head of the creek called Wounded Knee, but that he himself had reburied the remains several times after that, the last time in 1883. Crazy Horse’s final resting place is not known.

By Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa) in 1918

Crazy Horse

Crazy Horse was born on the Republican River about 1845. He was killed at Fort Robinson, Nebraska, in 1877, so that he lived barely thirty-three years.

He was an uncommonly handsome man. While not the equal of Gall in magnificence and imposing stature, he was physically perfect, an Apollo in symmetry. Furthermore he was a true type of Indian refinement and grace. He was modest and courteous as Chief Joseph; the difference is that he was a born warrior, while Joseph was not. However, he was a gentle warrior, a true brave, who stood for the highest ideal of the Sioux [Lakota.] Notwithstanding all that biased historians have said of him, it is only fair to judge a man by the estimate of his own people rather than that of his enemies.

The boyhood of Crazy Horse was passed in the days when the western Sioux saw a white man but seldom, and then it was usually a trader or a soldier. He was carefully brought up according to the tribal customs.

At that period the Sioux prided themselves on the training and development of their sons and daughters, and not a step in that development was overlooked as an excuse to bring the child before the public by giving a feast in its honor. At such times the parents often gave so generously to the needy that they almost impoverished themselves, thus setting an example to the child of self-denial for the general good. His first step alone, the first word spoken, first game killed, the attainment of manhood or womanhood, each was the occasion of a feast and dance in his honor, at which the poor always benefited to the full extent of the parents' ability.

Big-heartedness, generosity, courage, and self-denial are the qualifications of a public servant, and the average Indian was keen to follow this ideal. As every one knows, these characteristic traits become a weakness when he enters a life founded upon commerce and gain. Under such conditions the life of Crazy Horse began. His mother, like other mothers, tender and watchful of her boy, would never once place an obstacle in the way of his father's severe physical training. They laid

the spiritual and patriotic foundations of his education in such a way that he early became conscious of the demands of public service.

He was perhaps four or five years old when the band was snowed in one severe winter. They were very short of food, but his father was a tireless hunter. The buffalo, their main dependence, were not to be found, but he was out in the storm and cold every day and finally brought in two antelopes.

The little boy got on his pet pony and rode through the camp, telling the old folks to come to his mother's teepee for meat. It turned out that neither his father nor mother had authorized him to do this. Before they knew it, old men and women were lined up before the teepee home, ready to receive the meat, in answer to his invitation. As a result, the mother had to distribute nearly all of it, keeping only enough for two meals.

On the following day the child asked for food. His mother told him that the old folks had taken it all, and added: "Remember, my son, they went home singing praises in your name, not my name or your father's. You must be brave. You must live up to your reputation."

Crazy Horse loved horses, and his father gave him a pony of his own when he was very young. He became a fine horseman and accompanied his father on buffalo hunts, holding the pack horses while the men chased the buffalo and thus gradually learning the art. In those days the Sioux had but few guns, and the hunting was mostly done with bow and arrows.

Another story told of his boyhood is that when he was about twelve he went to look for the ponies with his little brother, whom he loved much, and took a great deal of pains to teach what he had already learned. They came to some wild cherry trees full of ripe fruit, and while they were

enjoying it, the brothers were startled by the growl and sudden rush of a bear.

Young Crazy Horse pushed his brother up into the nearest tree and himself sprang upon the back of one of the horses, which was frightened and ran some distance before he could control him. As soon as he could, however, he turned him about and came back, yelling and swinging his lariat over his head. The bear at first showed fight but finally turned and ran. The old man who told me this story added that young as he was, he had some power, so that even a grizzly did not care to tackle him. I believe it is a fact that a silver-tip will dare anything except a bell or a lasso line, so that accidentally the boy had hit upon the very thing which would drive him off.

Crazy Horse, Sacred Warrior

It was usual for Sioux boys of his day to wait in the field after a buffalo hunt until sundown, when the young calves would come out in the open, hungrily seeking their mothers. Then these wild children would enjoy a mimic hunt, and lasso the calves or drive them into camp. Crazy Horse was found to be a determined little fellow, and it was settled one day among the larger boys that they would “stump” him to ride a good-sized bull calf. He rode the calf, and stayed on its back while it ran bawling over the hills, followed by the other boys on their ponies, until his strange mount stood trembling and exhausted.

At the age of sixteen he joined a war party against the Gros Ventres. He was well in the front of the charge, and at once established his bravery by following closely one of the foremost Sioux warriors, by the name of Hump, drawing the enemy’s fire and circling around their advance guard. Suddenly Hump’s horse was shot from under him, and there was

a rush of warriors to kill or capture him while down. But amidst a shower of arrows the youth leaped from his pony, helped his friend into his own saddle, sprang up behind him, and carried him off in safety, although they were hotly pursued by the enemy. Thus he associated himself in his maiden battle with the wizard of Indian warfare, and Hump, who was then at the height of his own career, pronounced Crazy Horse the coming warrior of the Teton Sioux.

At this period of his life, as was customary with the best young men, he spent much time in prayer and solitude. Just what happened in these days of his fasting in the wilderness and upon the crown of bald buttes, no one will ever know; for these things may only be known when one has lived through the battles of life to an honored old age. He was much sought after by his youthful associates, but was noticeably reserved and modest; yet in the moment of danger he at once rose above them all — a natural leader! Crazy Horse was a typical Sioux brave, and from the point of view of our race an ideal hero, living at the height of the epical progress of the American Indian and maintaining in his own character all that was most subtle and ennobling of their spiritual life, and that has since been lost in the contact with a material civilization.

He loved Hump, that peerless warrior, and the two became close friends, in spite of the difference in age. Men called them “the grizzly and his cub.” Again and again the pair saved the day for the Sioux in a skirmish with some neighboring tribe. But one day they undertook a losing battle against the Snakes. The Sioux were in full retreat and were fast being overwhelmed by superior numbers. The old warrior fell in a last desperate charge; but Crazy Horse and his younger brother, though dismounted, killed two of the enemy and thus made good their retreat.

It was observed of him that when he pursued the enemy into their stronghold, as he was wont to do, he often refrained from killing, and

simply struck them with a switch, showing that he did not fear their weapons nor care to waste his upon them. In attempting this very feat, he lost this only brother of his, who emulated him closely. A party of young warriors, led by Crazy Horse, had dashed upon a frontier post, killed one of the sentinels, stampeded the horses, and pursued the herder to the very gate of the stockade, thus drawing upon themselves the fire of the garrison. The leader escaped without a scratch, but his young brother was brought down from his horse and killed.

While he was still under twenty, there was a great winter buffalo hunt, and he came back with ten buffaloes' tongues which he sent to the council lodge for the councilors' feast. He had in one winter day killed ten buffalo cows with his bow and arrows, and the unsuccessful hunters or those who had no swift ponies were made happy by his generosity. When the hunters returned, these came chanting songs of thanks. He knew that his father was an expert hunter and had a good horse, so he took no meat home, putting in practice the spirit of his early teaching.

He attained his majority at the crisis of the difficulties between the United States and the Sioux. Even before that time, Crazy Horse had already proved his worth to his people in Indian warfare. He had risked his life again and again, and in some instances it was considered almost a miracle that he had saved others as well as himself. He was no orator nor was he the son of a chief. His success and influence was purely a matter of personality. He had never fought the whites up to this time, and indeed no "coup" was counted for killing or scalping a white man.

Young Crazy Horse was twenty-one years old when all the Teton Sioux chiefs (the western or plains dwellers) met in council to determine upon their future policy toward the invader. Their former agreements had been by individual bands, each for itself, and every one was friendly. They reasoned that the country was wide, and that the white traders should be

made welcome. Up to this time they had anticipated no conflict. They had permitted the Oregon Trail, but now to their astonishment, forts were built and garrisoned in their territory.

Most of the chiefs advocated a strong resistance. There were a few influential men who desired still to live in peace, and who were willing to make another treaty. Among these were White Bull, Two Kettle, Four Bears, and Swift Bear. Even Spotted Tail, afterward the great peace chief, was at this time with the majority, who decided in the year 1866 to defend their rights and territory by force. Attacks were to be made upon the forts within their country and on every trespasser on the same.

Crazy Horse took no part in the discussion, but he and all the young warriors were in accord with the decision of the council. Although so young, he was already a leader among them. Other prominent young braves were Sword (brother of the man of that name who was long captain of police at Pine Ridge), the younger Hump, Charging Bear, Spotted Elk, Crow King, No Water, Big Road, He Dog, and the nephew of Red Cloud, and Touch-the-Cloud, intimate friend of Crazy Horse.

The attack on Fort Phil Kearny was the first fruits of the new policy, and here Crazy Horse was chosen to lead the attack on the woodchoppers, designed to draw the soldiers out of the fort, while an army of six hundred lay in wait for them. The success of this stratagem was further enhanced by his masterful handling of his men. From this time on a general war was inaugurated; Sitting Bull looked to him as a principal war leader, and even the Cheyenne chiefs, allies of the Sioux, practically acknowledged his leadership.

Yet during the following ten years of defensive war he was never known to make a speech, though his teepee was the rendezvous of the young

men. He was depended upon to put into action the decisions of the council, and was frequently consulted by the older chiefs.

Like Osceola, he rose suddenly; like Tecumseh he was always impatient for battle; like Pontiac, he fought on while his allies were suing for peace, and like Grant, the silent soldier, he was a man of deeds and not of words. He won from Custer and Fetterman and Crook. He won every battle that he undertook, with the exception of one or two occasions when he was surprised in the midst of his women and children, and even then he managed to extricate himself in safety from a difficult position.

Early in the year 1876, his runners brought word from Sitting Bull that all the roving bands would converge upon the upper Tongue River in Montana for summer feasts and conferences. There was conflicting news from the reservation. It was rumored that the army would fight the Sioux to a finish; again, it was said that another commission would be sent out to treat with them.

The Indians came together early in June, and formed a series of encampments stretching out from three to four miles, each band keeping separate camp. On June 17, scouts came in and reported the advance of a large body of troops under General Crook. The council sent Crazy Horse with seven hundred men to meet and attack him. These were nearly all young men, many of them under twenty, the flower of the hostile Sioux.

They set out at night so as to steal a march upon the enemy, but within three or four miles of his camp they came unexpectedly upon some of his Crow scouts. There was a hurried exchange of shots; the Crows fled back to Crook's camp, pursued by the Sioux. The soldiers had their warning, and it was impossible to enter the well-protected camp. Again and again Crazy Horse charged with his bravest men, in the attempt to bring the troops into the open, but he succeeded only in drawing their

fire. Toward afternoon he withdrew, and returned to camp disappointed. His scouts remained to watch Crook's movements, and later brought word that he had retreated to Goose Creek and seemed to have no further disposition to disturb the Sioux. It is well known to us that it is Crook rather than Reno who is to be blamed for cowardice in connection with Custer's fate. The latter had no chance to do anything, he was lucky to save himself; but if Crook had kept on his way, as ordered, to meet Terry, with his one thousand regulars and two hundred Crow and Shoshone scouts, he would inevitably have intercepted Custer in his advance and saved the day for him, and war with the Sioux would have ended right there. Instead of this, he fell back upon Fort Meade, eating his horses on the way, in a country swarming with game, for fear of Crazy Horse and his braves!

The Indians now crossed the divide between the Tongue and the Little Big Horn, where they felt safe from immediate pursuit. Here, with all their precautions, they were caught unawares by General Custer, in the midst of their midday games and festivities, while many were out upon the daily hunt.

On this twenty-fifth of June, 1876, the great camp was scattered for three miles or more along the level river bottom, back of the thin line of cottonwoods — five circular rows of teepees, ranging from half a mile to a mile and a half in circumference. Here and there stood out a large, white, solitary teepee; these were the lodges or "clubs" of the young men. Crazy Horse was a member of the "Strong Hearts" and the "Tokala" or Fox lodge. He was watching a game of ring-toss when the warning came from the southern end of the camp of the approach of troops.

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The Sioux and the Cheyenne were “minute men”, and although taken by surprise, they instantly responded. Meanwhile, the women and children were thrown into confusion. Dogs were howling, ponies running hither and thither, pursued by their owners, while many of the old men were singing their lodge songs to encourage the warriors, or praising the “strong heart” of Crazy Horse.

That leader had quickly saddled his favorite war pony and was starting with his young men for the south end of the camp, when a fresh alarm came from the opposite direction, and looking up, he saw Custer’s force upon the top of the bluff directly across the river. As quick as a flash, he took in the situation — the enemy had planned to attack the camp at both ends at once; and knowing that Custer could not ford the river at that point, he instantly led his men northward to the ford to cut him off. The Cheyennes followed closely. Custer must have seen that wonderful dash up the sage-bush plain, and one wonders whether he realized its meaning. In a very few minutes, this wild general of the plains had

outwitted one of the most brilliant leaders of the Civil War and ended at once his military career and his life.

In this dashing charge, Crazy Horse snatched his most famous victory out of what seemed frightful peril, for the Sioux could not know how many were behind Custer. He was caught in his own trap. To the soldiers it must have seemed as if the Indians rose up from the earth to overwhelm them. They closed in from three sides and fought until not a white man was left alive. Then they went down to Reno's stand and found him so well entrenched in a deep gully that it was impossible to dislodge him. Gall and his men held him there until the approach of General Terry compelled the Sioux to break camp and scatter in different directions.

While Sitting Bull was pursued into Canada, Crazy Horse and the Cheyenne's wandered about, comparatively undisturbed, during the rest of that year, until in the winter the army surprised the Cheyenne, but did not do them much harm, possibly because they knew that Crazy Horse was not far off.

His name was held in wholesome respect. From time to time, delegations of friendly Indians were sent to him, to urge him to come in to the reservation, promising a full hearing and fair treatment.

For some time he held out, but the rapid disappearance of the buffalo, their only means of support, probably weighed with him more than any other influence. In July, 1877, he was finally prevailed upon to come in to Fort Robinson, Nebraska, with several thousand Indians, most of them Ogallala and Minneconwoju Sioux, on the distinct understanding that the government would hear and adjust their grievances.

At this juncture General Crook proclaimed Spotted Tail, who had rendered much valuable service to the army, head chief of the Sioux, which was resented by many.

The attention paid Crazy Horse was offensive to Spotted Tail and the Indian scouts, who planned a conspiracy against him. They reported to General Crook that the young chief would murder him at the next council, and stampede the Sioux into another war. He was urged not to attend the council and did not, but sent another officer to represent him. Meanwhile the friends of Crazy Horse discovered the plot and told him of it. His reply was, "Only cowards are murderers."

His wife was critically ill at the time, and he decided to take her to her parents at Spotted Tail agency, whereupon his enemies circulated the story that he had fled, and a party of scouts was sent after him. They overtook him riding with his wife and one other but did not undertake to arrest him, and after he had left the sick woman with her people he went to call on Captain Lea, the agent for the Brules, accompanied by all the warriors of the Minneconwoju band. This volunteer escort made an imposing appearance on horseback, shouting and singing, and in the words of Captain Lea himself and the missionary, the Reverend Mr. Cleveland, the situation was extremely critical. Indeed, the scouts who had followed Crazy Horse from Red Cloud agency were advised not to show themselves, as some of the warriors had urged that they be taken out and horsewhipped publicly.

Under these circumstances Crazy Horse again showed his masterful spirit by holding these young men in check. He said to them in his quiet way: "It is well to be brave in the field of battle; it is cowardly to display bravery against one's own tribesmen. These scouts have been compelled to do what they did; they are no better than servants of the white officers. I came here on a peaceful errand."

The captain urged him to report at army headquarters to explain himself and correct false rumors, and on his giving consent, furnished him with a wagon and escort. It has been said that he went back under arrest, but this is untrue. Indians have boasted that they had a hand in bringing him in, but their stories are without foundation. He went of his own accord, either suspecting no treachery or determined to defy it.

When he reached the military camp, Little Big Man walked arm-in-arm with him, and his cousin and friend, Touch-the-Cloud, was just in advance.

After they passed the sentinel, an officer approached them and walked on his other side. He was unarmed but for the knife which is carried for ordinary uses by women as well as men. Unsuspectingly he walked toward the guardhouse, when Touch-the-Cloud suddenly turned back exclaiming: "Cousin, they will put you in prison!"

"Another white man's trick! Let me go! Let me die fighting!" cried Crazy Horse. He stopped and tried to free himself and draw his knife, but both arms were held fast by Little Big Man and the officer. While he struggled thus, a soldier thrust him through with his bayonet from behind.

The wound was mortal, and he died in the course of that night, his old father singing the death song over him and afterward carrying away the body, which they said must not be further polluted by the touch of a white man. They hid it somewhere in the Bad Lands, his resting place to this day.

Thus died one of the ablest and truest American Indians. His life was ideal; his record clean. He was never involved in any of the numerous massacres on the trail, but was a leader in practically every open fight. Such characters as those of Crazy Horse and Chief Joseph are not easily

found among so-called civilized people. The reputation of great men is apt to be shadowed by questionable motives and policies, but here are two pure patriots, as worthy of honor as any who ever breathed God's air in the wide spaces of a new world.

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Though Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa) doesn't specifically say so, Crazy Horse was a member of the Ogallala Lakota tribe, a band of the Sioux. He died on September 5, 1877.

Compiled and edited by Kathy Weiser/Legends of America, updated May 2020.

Excerpted from the book *Indian Heroes and Great Chieftains*, by Charles A. Eastman, 1918. The text as it appears here; however, is not verbatim as it has been edited for clarity and ease of the modern reader. Charles A. Eastman earned a medical degree from Boston University School of Medicine in 1890, and then began working for the Office of Indian Affairs later that year. He worked at the Pine Ridge Agency, South Dakota, and was an eyewitness to both events leading up to and following the Wounded Knee Massacre of December 29, 1890. Himself part-Sioux, he knew many of the people about whom he wrote.

Charles Alexander Eastman – Sioux Doctor, Author & Reformer

Native American Heroes and Leaders

Lakota, Dakota, Nakota – The Great Sioux Nation

Fort Robinson, Nebraska and the Red Cloud Agency