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The Germans in the Seventh U.S. Cavalry at the Battle of the Little Bighorn

Dr. Albert Winkler

While many aspects of the Battle of the Little Bighorn have been carefully examined, the nature of the various nationalities in the Seventh Cavalry has yet to be thoroughly investigated. Roughly 57 percent of the men in that unit were born in the United States, and the remainder, 43 percent, were born in other countries. These troopers originated in many nations from Norway to Italy, but the largest groups of the foreign born were the Irish and the Germans who each comprised about 15% of the total. A better understanding of the national minorities in the Seventh U.S. Cavalry helps further our understanding of that combat unit. The study of Germans in the United States is also significant because the ancestors of more Americans came from Germany than any other nation. The population of twenty three of the fifty states is predominantly German, and over fifty million people in the United States have German ancestry.

Many Germans have served in the U.S. Army. Among the most celebrated were those awarded the Medal of Honor, and 117 men born in Germany have been given that honor. Thirty-eight received the award for action in the Indian Wars from 1868 to 1899, and seven of them served with the Seventh U.S. Cavalry at that time. Additionally, three Germans: Charles Windolph, Otto Voit, and Frederick Deetline received the award for their courage at the Little Bighorn. While virtually all claims that there was a survivor from Custer's battalion in the famous "Last Stand" have proven to be fraudulent, recent scholarship argued compellingly that a German, Gustave Korn, survived.

The Germans in the United States Cavalry during the Indian wars from 1865 to 1890 were invariably called "Dutchies." This term was a distortion of the word Deutsch [German], which many Americans had a hard time understanding or pronouncing properly. The Germans had a fine reputation in the army and were considered "aggressive fighting men." These men seemed to achieve the ranks of noncommissioned officers (sergeants and corporals) more readily than other nationalities, and a high proportion of the most important regimental sergeant majors and first sergeants were Germans. These men had the reputation for being "rigid" and "tough-minded," and their contribution to the cavalry was significant.

The German soldiers had an enhanced reputation over many other foreigners because they came from a country with a proud military tradition, a perception that was strengthened after the important German victory in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. At that point, the German army enjoyed an impressive military reputation worldwide, and the United States Army copied aspects of German military uniforms. For decades, many American soldiers and officers wore ceremonial helmets and uniforms as part of their dress uniforms similar to those used by the German army. Many Americans believed that Germans made good soldiers, a perception that still exists.

Many of the men in the Regiment had German roots, including George Armstrong Custer whose distant ancestors came from Germany, and the original family name was Küster or Kuester. Many soldiers had German names; including Christian Loeser, Anthony Knecht, and Christian Schlafer; and may have had German ancestors; but each was born in the United States. Only enlisted men actually born in Germany will be part of this study. Fortunately, the men were asked where they were born when they joined the army, which was recorded in their service records.
Some of these soldiers were born in the disputed provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. When they were born, these locations were part of France, but they were incorporated into Germany in 1871. When the men stated they were born in Germany including Louis Haugge (Hauggi), who said he was born in “Alsace Germany,” they are included in this study. Aloyse Louis Walter was also from Alsace, but he stated his place of birth was “Willer France” (Willer or Willer-sur-Thur), so he will not be considered a German. Additionally, William Teeman was born in “Denmark Germany” meaning that he was probably born in an area of Schleswig-Holstein that was annexed by Prussia in 1864 and was later incorporated into Germany, so he will be considered a German in this article. 9

In June 1876, 131 men born in Germany were assigned to the Seventh Cavalry. Each of these men were serving in the army except John Frett and Charles A Stein. Frett was a “citizen packer” who accompanied the campaign, but Charles A. Stein was a veterinarian on detached service and did not participate in the battle. Even though Frett was a civilian in 1876, he was an experienced soldier who had fought in the cavalry for four years during the Civil War. Many of the military records relating to these men are unclear leading to possible confusion of names and places. This was probably the result of sloppy record keeping by army scribes, their poor handwriting, and their inability to understand clearly what was said to them by men who often spoke poor English. Some men probably gave an alias instead of their real name, including Adam Karl Reinwald who said his name was Charles Brown. 10

Many of the soldiers also Anglicized their names perhaps to solve constant issues of mispronunciations and misspellings. Otto Arndt was also known as Max Cernow, and Charles White’s name was originally Henry [Heinrich] Charles Weihe. Frederick Shulte’s name was spelled in various ways including Shutte, Schutte, Schulte, and Schuetze. Other examples include Roman Rutten (Ruttenauer), John Rapp (Ropp, Papp), and Christopher Pandtle (Pendle). Christian Methfessel also enlisted in the Army as Frederick Smith in 1867. 11

Some of the records were confusing, and men were listed as originating in places that did not exist, but there is enough information to state where many men originated. The men came from various areas of Germany. The largest number claimed Bavaria (seventeen) as their place of birth. Other areas with significant numbers were Hanover (fifteen) and various areas of Prussia (fifteen). The men born in Berlin (eight), a city in Prussia, were listed separately, and large numbers of men also came from Württemberg (thirteen), Baden (ten), and Frankfurt am Main (five). 12

The Germans had typical features of men from their country. Of the men whose appearance was listed, forty eight had brown (hazel) or black eyes, and seventy nine had blue or grey eyes, while forty six men had light or light brown hair, and seventy nine had brown or dark hair. Only one man, John H. Meier, had red hair. When Charles Louis Haak (Haack) first enlisted in 1856 at age thirty one, he had brown hair, but by 1876 his hair was listed as gray. 13

The Germans were average in height for the men in Custer’s command. Their stature was consistent with the cavalry which actively recruited men who weighed less than 200 pounds because heavier men would be more difficult for the horses to carry. The average height of the Germans was 5 feet 7 inches, and 104 of them were between 5 feet 9 1/3 inches and 5 feet 5 1/2 inches tall. The tallest German was August Finckle at 6 feet 7 inches, and he was probably also one of the tallest men in the Seventh Cavalry. One of the shortest Germans was Anton Dohman at 5 feet 2 1/2 inches. Army regulations stated that men had to be at least 5 ft. 3 inches tall to join, but Dohman was probably considered to be close enough.

The records indicate that a few men grew during the terms of their enlistments, because the height of some of the men changed when they reenlisted years later. This was often the case when the men joined as teenagers or in their early twenties before they achieved their final stature. The minimum age when men could join
the army was twenty-one, but a few teenagers were able to enlist at younger ages. August B. Siefert joined the army at age sixteen when he was 5 ft. 3 inches tall, but later he was 5 ft. 5 inches tall. The biggest growth was for Henry Voss who joined the army at age seventeen in 1866 when he was 5 ft. 3 ½ inches tall. In 1875, he had grown to 5 ft. 8 ½ inches. Otto Voit was nineteen when he joined in 1864 when he was 5 ft. 1 ½ inches tall. He was 5 ft. 3 ¾ inches in 1875. A few men in their twenties continued to grow, including Philipp Spinner who was twenty-one when he joined in 1867, and he was 5 ft. 3 ½ inches tall. He was 5 ft. 6 ½ inches tall in 1870.

The average age for the men was twenty-five and a half years in 1876, but the Germans were slightly older, the median being twenty-eight and a half years. The youngest Germans were twenty years old, and 100 men were aged from twenty to thirty-three. Charles Louis Haak was the oldest among them at fifty-one. The men were at the height of their physical vigor, and the army in 1876 had relatively few problems with teenage recruits and elderly men as had been the case during the Civil War.

These men came largely from disadvantaged circumstances and they knew how to work hard, face hardship, and do without many comforts. They were also far away from family, friends, and their native culture. The troopers often demonstrated the most impressive stamina, and they frequently showed remarkable tenacity and courage under the most trying conditions. The newspaper reporter, John F. Finerty, also saw much to admire in the U.S. Cavalry in June 1876 when he accompanied General George Crook’s men on the Rosebud expedition. Finerty stated that “the great mass of the soldiers were young men, careless, courageous and eminently light-hearted. The rank and file, as a majority, were of either Irish or German birth or parentage. Taken as a whole, Crook’s command was a fine organization.”

The problem with desertions or taking “French leave,” as many Americans called it, was a major concern in the army, but the desertion rates of the Germans in the Seventh Cavalry was quite low. The records of only eighteen Germans (14 percent) stated that they had deserted or gone AWOL (Absent Without Leave) sometime in their careers before June 1876.

A major reason for the increase in desertions in 1871 and 1872 in the army was a decrease in pay. “In July, 1870, Congress had reduced the pay of enlisted soldiers from $16 to $13 per month, effective June 30, 1871.” In 1871, 32.6 percent of the men in the army deserted, 31.7 percent of the soldiers deserted in 1872, and 29.2 percent left the following year. H. Harbers, who enlisted on April 16, 1872, explained, “The pay at that time was
Sixteen Dollars per month [for privates]. Congress changed it to Thirteen Dollars and hosts of men deserted.”

Six of the Germans who deserted from the Seventh Cavalry left in 1872 and 1873. After the economic collapse in 1873 and the steep rise in unemployment, the desertion rates fell dramatically, and only 6.9 percent of the soldiers in the army deserted in 1876.

Few Germans were discipline problems while serving in the regiment. Before the Battle of the Little Bighorn, only about ten Germans—aside from deserters—had been arrested or placed in confinement as a means of punishment. Antony Assadaly was arrested in December 1873 because he “damaged one public horse.” His punishment was to lose $10 a month from his pay for three months. Henry Voss was under arrest on July and August of 1875 because he “struck saddler-sergeant Tritten without provocation.” As punishment Voss had to forfeit $8 of pay per month for four months. Voss was also fined $5 in pay when he went absent without leave in November 1875. The reason for the mild punishment for desertion was “in consideration of extenuating circumstances,” which were not specified.

Few men had the opportunity to get married, and very few enlisted men had wives. The army’s official policy was not to allow men with wives to join and to discourage enlisted soldiers from getting married. The men had to get special permission to take a wife. No more than four married men were allowed in each company, and “the bureaucracy made life for married soldiers as difficult and unappealing as possible.” The army kept no records on marriages. Housing for married enlisted men was often a tent, a challenging condition in cold climates, and many men could not support a wife and children on meager army pay. To afford a marriage, the wives of enlisted men had to find jobs at the military posts, usually being employed as laundresses or maids.

Two hundred sixty-eight men were killed at the Little Bighorn, and Elizabeth Custer stated that “this battle wrecked the lives of twenty-six women at Fort Lincoln” because their husbands had been killed. Seven of the widows were wives of officers, and the other nineteen were married to enlisted men. This meant that of the enlisted men killed at the Little Bighorn only about 7 percent were married. Charles Windolph, a German in the Regiment, gave slightly different numbers because he stated that the husbands of thirty-seven women were killed at the Little Bighorn. Another five died of wounds after the battle.

A few of the Germans married. Francis Roth had a wife but no children, but others had offspring. Henry Dose had a wife and two children, while Frederick Hohmeyer had a wife and four children as did Gustav Klein.
Roman Rutten had a wife before 1876 and one daughter, Emma. Following the battle, he had five more children. In the spring of 1876, the veterinarian, Charles A. Stein, “had a large family of small children.” He later had a total of five offspring. These men seemed to have stable marital relationships, but Nicholas Klein was not so fortunate. Reportedly, he married Lucetta “Settie” Belle Craig in 1874. She probably left Klein for Thomas Finnegan in 1878. Klein and Craig were probably never formally divorced, but the German married Margaret Darmstadt in 1883 anyway.

Frequently, dance halls and brothels or “hog farms” were located near army posts. The Seventh Cavalry was stationed at Fort Abraham Lincoln in the Dakota Territory in 1876, and the brothels were located directly across the Missouri River. With such names as “The Lady’s Bower” [bedroom], these businesses were obviously selling the services of women. At least seven Germans in the Seventh Cavalry were unwise in their amorous encounters and got syphilis.

Henry Lehmann was treated for venereal disease which he had caught in Germany years earlier. Dr. Ferguson removed a node from his chest at least twice, and the growth was once as large as a closed fist. The doctor also treated his patient with mercury and iodine, but the man continued to suffer from the ailment. Lehmann was killed at the Little Bighorn, a fact that probably saved him from much physical misery and severe mental problems. Three other Germans with the disease were also killed in the battle, Robert Barth, Anton Dohman, and Henry Carl Voight. The official records of the Germans were quite positive, and these men clearly made good soldiers. Of the one hundred thirty one Germans in that unit in June 1876, ninety-five of them were still alive and in the army after the Little Bighorn. The character of seventy-eight of these men was stated when they tried to reenlist. Fifty-seven men had excellent character, six had very good character, twelve had good, and three had fair. Frederick Deetline’s character was listed as excellent no less than six times.

The Germans represented a wide range of jobs, and the men mentioned forty two different occupations when they joined the army. The largest number of men listed their former occupation as laborer (twenty one), which meant that they probably did whatever jobs they could find. Clerks and bookkeepers were well educated and formed the next largest group (sixteen), but there were almost as many farmers and gardeners (fourteen). Other occupations requiring much skill included musicians (seven), tailors (five), blacksmiths and farriers (three), machinists (three), and locksmiths and gunsmiths (three). A few of the men had skills that would aid them during their service including teamsters and harness makers (six), and six men also listed their former occupation as soldier.

Most of the Germans in the regiment had long been in the army, and they were competent soldiers. Only four of them had been in the service less than six months. Many of the men were veterans with long service records, and
young recruits were wise to observe these men and follow their example. Sixty-one or 47 percent of the Germans had joined the army in 1870 or earlier, and three men—Aloys Bohner, William Frank, and Charles Haak—had joined between 1853 and 1856. In all, fifteen of these men had fought in the Civil War, and many of them were in the thick of fighting in that conflict.

Charles Windolph was a typical German soldier in the Seventh Cavalry. Born in Bergen, Germany, Windolph was eighteen at the start of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870. He knew he would soon be drafted into the cavalry so he came to the United States to avoid military service. His life was challenging, so he joined the army to learn English and support himself. “A good many German boys like myself had run away from the compulsory military service and the Franco-Prussian war, but about the only job there was for us over here was to enlist in the United States Army.” Windolph saw the irony in the situation. “[It] always struck me as being funny; here we’d run away from Germany to escape military service, and now, because most of us couldn’t get a job anywhere else, we were forced to go into the army here.”

Before the men in his company remembered his name was Charles [Charlie], they initially called him “Dutchy,” “Sauerkraut,” and occasionally “Heinie.” Windolph’s early years of service were “pretty dull.” The men “wanted some action. It’d be fun to do a little Indian fighting,” and they were pleased when they were sent to the Dakota territory. “We’d see some service now. And we wanted it, too. We were tired of garrison duty.”

Windolph explained how the men regarded serving in the regiment. “You felt you were somebody when you were on a good horse, with a carbine dangling from its small leather ring socket on your ... saddle, and a Colt army revolver strapped on your hip; and a hundred rounds of ammunition in your web belt and in your saddle pockets. You were a cavalryman of the Seventh Regiment. You were a part of a proud outfit that had a fighting reputation, and you were ready for a fight or a frolic.” Windolph believed his opinion was shared by everyone in the Regiment. “It was a fine regiment, right enough. And there wasn’t a man in it who didn’t believe it was the greatest cavalry outfit in the entire United States Army.”

Custer left many of his men at various outposts who did not participate in the Little Bighorn campaign. The actual number of Germans in the battle or on detached service remains uncertain because the records on Francis Hegner are unclear. He might have been left behind, or he might have been with the pack train and participated in the battle. If Hegner was absent, fifty-three Germans were not present at the battle and escaped the hardships of the campaign and the misery of combat. The remaining seventy-eight Germans soon faced one of the most significant military events in the history of the American West.

Thirty-six of them were killed or 46 percent, and eleven listed as wounded. They had fought with courage and skill, and the only negative
comment made on their bravery was directed at Charles A. Stein, the German veterinarian. Grant Marsh, the captain of the supply steamboat Far West on the Yellowstone River, stated that Stein “was the most scared man” he had ever seen, and Stein did not participate in the battle.32 When the Battle of the Little Bighorn was over, many trials faced the Germans who continued to serve in the regiment.

Charles Windolph searched in vain for the body of his “German friend,” August Finckle, but he took some solace when he found a dog in the Indian camp and kept it for a pet. Another German, Gustave Korn, also found a future “pet” on the battlefield. The horse, “Comanche,” was ridden by Myles Keogh, commander of Company I. Korn, also from Company I, was among the many who claimed to have found the severely-wounded animal. He later described the horse, “standing alone on the battlefield, bleeding, dying from six bullet wounds in his side, was the horse Comanche.” One soldier suggested they cut its throat to put the animal out of its misery, but Korn objected, perhaps thinking that the horse was a link to the many friends he had lost in battle. The German took the animal to the river, where he washed the animal’s wounds.33 The soldiers took Comanche back to Fort Lincoln where it was tended by the German veterinarian Charles Stein. Korn was later made permanent caretaker of the horse. Korn was to continue to see action and was later killed in the Wounded Knee massacre.

While the battle was over, the ordeal of the wounded continued until they either died or recovered. John Pahl suffered from a severe wound in his back, and he never fully recovered. He was taken to Fort Lincoln where his treatment was inadequate and the bullet was not removed. He returned to duty in December 1876, but he was again absent in October of the following year from the effects of his wound. Pahl briefly left the army in October 1878 when his enlistment ended, and he rejoined the next month. But his health remained poor, he was considered fully disabled, and he was discharged in August 1879. He underwent an operation in the spring of 1880 that finally removed the bullet. It was found six inches from where it had entered. Pahl died in 1895 at age 49.34

Many soldiers wanted wives, and the two known widows of fallen German troopers soon remarried. These women either already had someone in mind, or economic necessity helped them find husbands rapidly. Henry Dose’s wife had no trouble in finding a new father for her two children, and she married Sergeant Edward Garlick from England on November 22, 1876, only five months after the battle. Frederick Hohmeyer left a wife and four children: Lizzie, Lena, Nellie, and William; his widow married Sergeant Latrobe Bromwell, an American, on February 25, 1877, eight months after the battle.35 Luckily, Ottocar Nitsche was also able to find a wife, and he married Molly Jacobs in March 1878.36

The Indian Wars were not yet over after the Little Bighorn. When the Nez Perce tried to flee from the United States forces in 1877, Companies A, D, and K from the Seventh U.S. Cavalry, who had fought at the Little Bighorn the year before, were among the troops sent to meet them. At the Battle of Bear’s Paw Mountains (Snake Creek) in Montana and the subsequent siege of the Nez Perce from September 30 to October 5, 1877, the Germans in those
companies suffered many casualties. Frederick Deetline was shot in the right shoulder, John Meyers was shot in the left arm, John Schwerer was shot in the left ankle, John Shauer was shot in the heel of his left foot, and Emil Taube was shot in the scalp. Otto Durselew, Maximilian Mielke, and Francis Roth were killed in the battle. Roth was survived by his wife.

As the men aged, they had increased physical problems probably enhanced by the difficulties associated with many years of military service. Jacob Deihle, who had been shot in the jaw at the Little Bighorn, fell from his horse in 1882 and broke his arm. He also suffered from a malady that afflicted many veterans, chronic rheumatism (back pain). He died September 1885 in a “Soldiers’ Home” in Washington, DC, at age thirty-one. Charles Haak was discharged in August 1876 also due to chronic rheumatism. Henry Weihe was completely “broken down” and suffered chronic rheumatism from repeated exposure on the field and from being wounded at the Little Bighorn.

Joseph Kretchmer suffered from epilepsy contracted while in the line of duty, and he was excused from military drills starting in 1883. William Marshall was discharged from duty in November 1891 due to a lung infection also contracted while he was in the service, and he died in August 1892 at the age of 41. Roman Rutten was discharged in September 1890 because of debility from wounds, exposure, and the effects of his long service. Conrad Baumbach had frostbite in both feet. He was in the hospital for six months, but the malady kept recurring, and he finally deserted in June 1878.

Many of the soldiers clearly suffered from psychological problems brought on by the brutality of the military system and the hardships of campaigns and battles, which is now called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. In the 1870s the discipline of psychiatry was in its infancy, and there was little understanding of mental illness and how to treat it. Many Americans believed that psychological problems were a sign of weak character, or the sufferer was simply dodging responsibilities by acting strange. Often such victims were treated with cruelty to shock or shame the sufferer into “acting normally.” When the soldiers badly needed comfort, patience, and toleration, they often faced derision. Abuse never did anyone any good, and many men turned to alcohol to dull their senses and deal with their pain. This was true of the Germans as well as everyone else.

Henry Fehler died of alcoholic poisoning in May 1889. Charles Hanke was charged with intemperate habits and chronic alcoholism, and he was punished for the problem twice in 1878 alone. Frank Lambertine died in 1913 from cirrhosis of the liver caused by excessive use of alcohol for many years. John H. Meier was described as having a “weakness for drink.” In his case, the alcohol probably led to a much more rapid death because he might have been drunk when he fell down stairs in February 1899 and died from a fractured skull.

Other men were hurt because they had been drinking, and Paul Schleiffarth suffered a contusion to his leg while drunk. Drinking often led to discipline problems, and Jacob Bauer was drunk at the morning inspection and used abusive language to his company commander. He was given a dishonorable discharge from the army in May 1888 and was sentenced to military prison for one year. Louis Baumgartner lost his mind and was discharged from the army in November 1894 because of the “progressive paralysis of insane,” from syphilis, which he contracted while in the Army. He died in a hospital in May 1895 probably at the age of 41.

John Frett was an example of a man who suffered a great deal from his military experiences, both in the Civil War and the Indian Wars, and they sadly hurt his relationship with his family. He moved to Washington, DC, in 1885 where he and his wife, Mary Catherine, divorced in February 1887. He got custody of their four young children. Divorce was very rare at that time, and Frett’s conduct must have been very bad for his marriage to fail. They remarried again in 1901, but the couple again separated “because of his drunkenness and abuse.”

Some Germans could no longer live with their physical and psychological pain, and they
killed themselves. The first German to commit suicide after the Little Bighorn was John Steintker who died on November 28, 1876. He had been drinking hard for two weeks when he was found dead in his bed with an empty bottle of "laudanum in his pocket." It appeared that he had killed himself with an overdose of opium.42 Julius Gunther committed suicide by an unspecified means in 1902. In May 1881, Hugo Findeisen cut his own throat with a knife or razor, and he bled to death. Philip Spinner shot himself in the chest in August 1895. Charles Fisher killed himself by asphyxiation in March 1898 from the inhalation of an "illuminating gas."

Many of the Germans who were in the regiment in 1876 stayed in the army and continued to perform their duties well. William Heyn received an award for his meritorious service on the Indian campaigns. Gustave Korn was given a citation for his good conduct against the Nez Perce Indians in the battle of Canyon Creek, Montana, on September 13, 1877. He was later described as "a most excellent blacksmith an honest faithful soldier & in every respect a good thoroughly reliable man."43 William Saas was recommended to receive a certificate of merit "for bravery in action with Apache Indians at Huachuca Mountains 28 April 1882 when he rode amidst a shower of bullets & rescued two comrades left behind dismounted [and] in range of the enemy."44 Frederick William Myers was awarded the Medal of Honor for his action at White River, South Dakota, in 1891.

When the German, Charles Windolph, left the army in 1883 after twelve years of service, he received exceptional praise from his highly-respected company commander, Captain Benteen. About a week before the German's enlistment was scheduled to expire, Benteen came to Windolph and said, "Give me a piece of paper. I do not often recommend a man, but I am going to write a recommendation for you." He wrote, "To whom it may concern: Sergeant Chas. Windolph has been a member of my troop for two enlistments. He has been a gallant soldier. I take pleasure in recommending him to anyone who needs the service of a man. He has been faithful to me, F. W. Benteen." Writing in 1940, fifty-seven years after Benteen paid him this compliment, Windolph stated that the document "is my proudest possession. Money could not buy it."45

Many of the Germans longed to see their homeland once again, and several of them visited Germany. Charles Brown deserted in November 1876, and claimed that he was going to Germany. Charles Sanders went on leave for six months to Germany starting in April 1897, and August Siefert was on leave for six months starting in September 1890 to his hometown of Darmstadt. Ernest Emil Wasmus also went to Germany for four months in 1880. When Christian Methfessel left the army, he went back to his hometown of Mühlhausen where he died in August 1905. Ottocar Nitsche went on furlough to Europe in July 1883 for three months. He deserted while on leave and never returned to the army.

Many of the German veterans went on to lead productive lives in the United States. Some of them served for decades in the army, but many others took advantage of the much improved economic conditions in the 1880s and left the military for other occupations. The government gave the soldiers retirement equal to three-quarters of their pay after thirty years of service, but few men had the physical stamina to remain so long in the army. Frederick Deetline retired in 1900 after thirty years of service. He died in 1910 at age 64. Ernest Meineke served for twenty-one years, but the was discharged in 1896 because of "general debility and old age." He died in 1907 at age 79.

The men were given small pensions because they had served during the Indian Wars, and the families of the men killed in battle were also given small payments. Some Germans received this pension for many years. Ferdinand Klawitter received this payment for forty-six years, and Charles Windolph got his pension for over forty-eight years. The veterans were allowed to go into homes for old soldiers late in life where they were cared for until they died. The hospitals were located in various cities including the National Soldiers Home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and the Soldiers
Home in Washington, DC. Some of the German veterans who died in the home in Washington, D.C., included Ernst Meineke, Anton Seibelder, and John Zemetzer.

Charles Windolph was typical of many of the Germans following the Little Bighorn. Windolph married Mary Jones in 1882, but she died the following year. Finally, his “old sweetheart,” Mathilda Lulow, came from Germany with his father and mother. “I asked her to marry me, and I remember as if it was yesterday how she pointed to my First Sergeant’s chevrons and said, ‘Charlie, you must choose between the army and me.’” He stated, “I chose her, and I never regretted my choice.” Windolph tried to earn a living by raising cattle, but he failed. He then worked for the Army Quartermaster Corps for three years. He finally took a job as a harness maker with the Homestake mines in Lead, South Dakota, a position he held for forty-eight years. He had three children: Maria, Robert, and Irene, and his wife died in 1924. Charles lived for many years with his youngest child, Irene Fehliman.46

Many German soldiers who survived the battle and the rigors of military service enjoyed a long life. For example, Wilhelm Braendle died at age seventy-seven in 1932, Charles Ackerman died at age eighty-one in 1930, Ferdinand Klawitter died at age eighty-seven in 1924, and Joseph Kretchmer died when he was about ninety in 1928. But Charles Windolph outlived them all. He died at age ninety-eight on March 11, 1950, and was the last German and the last cavalryman who survived the Little Bighorn.47

The survivors of the Battle of the Little Bighorn enjoyed much notoriety for the remainder of their lives. They were often praised for their courage in the face of long odds, and they received much adulation. The Germans at the Little Bighorn were thrown into battle and showed great fortitude in two days of desperate battle. In addition, the thirty-six Germans who fell in battle demonstrated the greatest devotion possible to support the policies of their adopted country.

Endnotes

8. Short biographies of the troopers taken from their service records are found in Roger L. Williams, Military Register of Custer’s Last Command (Norman, OK: Clark, 2009) and John M. Carroll, ed. They Rode with Custer: a Biographical Directory of the Men that Rode with General George A. Custer (Mattituck, NY: Carroll, 1993).
9. Williams, Military Register, 151, 288, 301.
10. Ibid., 48, 59.
11. Carroll, They Rode with Custer, 21, 196, 206, 216, 227, 264 and Williams, 217.
13. Williams, 145.
14. Ibid. and Scott, Willey, and Connor. They Died with Custer, 90-1.
21. Ibid., 268.
23. Williams, 112, 156, 178-9, 255-6, and 257-8 and Carroll, 77, 120, 139, 213-4, and 216.
25. Williams, 182.
29. Ibid., 4-5.
30. Ibid., 53, 56.
32. Carroll, p. 234 and Williams, 277.
33. Korn in Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence, *His Very Silence Speaks: Comanche, the Horse who Survived Custer’s Last Stand* (Detroit: Wayne State, 1989), 75-6.
34. Williams, 241.
35. Ibid., 112, 156.
36. Ibid., 233.
37. Ibid., 304.
38. Ibid., 147-8.
40. Ibid., 37.
41. Ibid., 129, 132.
42. Ibid., 277.
43. Ibid., 179-80.
44. Ibid., 265.
47. Ibid., 114.

**About the Author**

Albert Winkler is the history librarian at Brigham Young University. He has three master’s degrees and a Ph.D. in History. He has published a score of articles including nine dealing with the Indian Wars of the American West. Dr. Winkler has been honored twice with awards for the best article of the year published in the *Utah Historical Quarterly* each dealing with the Indian Wars in Utah. In addition, Dr. Winkler has published nine books in Germany also dealing with the Indian Wars.