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The Case for a Custer Battalion Survivor: Private Gustave Korn's Story

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While nearly all of the accounts of men who claimed to be survivors from Custer's column at the Battle of the Little Bighorn are fictitious, Gustave Korn's story is supported by contemporary records. Korn was one of the troopers who later cared for Captain Miles Keogh's Comanche, the famous horse found alive after the battle. Korn and Comanche are pictured here at Fort Abraham Lincoln in June 1877.
One of the most intriguing aspects of the Battle of the Little Bighorn is the mystery surrounding George Armstrong Custer's battalion and the five companies in it. "Custer's Last Stand" has never been fully explained partially because there were no known cavalry survivors. Many men claimed to have escaped the annihilation of Custer's command, but virtually all of them can be easily dismissed as frauds. As eminent battle scholar E. A. Brininstool stated, "I have read, I dare say, a hundred accounts of the death of 'last survivors of Custer's command.' All such stories are absolutely false, and there were no survivors of Custer's command—every man was killed." Winners of the West, a popular newspaper on the Indian wars, received so many such claims that the editor commented in 1936: "There have been so many 'last survivors' and 'only survivors' of that famous engagement whose accounts sent to us have found a last resting place in our waste basket." Custer biographer Edgar I. Steward also scoffed at such stories, stating that each man "invariably" had "a very ingenious explanation of how he happened to escape from the field of carnage and an equally ingenious reason for having remained silent so long." In view of such skepticism, an examination of evidence that indicates one man—Gustave Korn—survived the engagement is all the more interesting.

Gustave Korn's military records state that he was born in Sprottau, Silesia, in the German state of Prussia. He immigrated to the United States and joined the U.S. Army on May 17, 1873, in St. Louis, Missouri, at the age of twenty-one. Enlistment records describe him as standing just over 5 feet 9 inches tall with hazel eyes, light hair, and a light complexion. Korn, also known by the nickname "Yankee Korn," was assigned to Company I of the Seventh Cavalry at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, on June 3, 1873, as a private, serving extra duty in the quartermaster department from December 1875 to May 1876. In June 1876, Korn participated in the Battle of the Little Bighorn.2

The facts of the battle are well-known. As part of the Great Sioux War of 1876-1877, the Seventh Cavalry was sent to bring potentially hostile Indians to various government reservations. On June 25, 1876, in a tragic miscalculation, Custer, whose force consisted of about 640 troopers, failed to appreciate the fact that his troops faced between 2,500 and 4,000 Sioux and Cheyenne warriors.3 The Indians' camp was located on the west side of the Little Bighorn River in southern Montana Territory, and the cavalry approached the encampment from the opposite side of the stream. The commander of the Seventh Cavalry apparently believed that the Indians would flee at his approach, and he divided his command to apprehend them by striking at the enemy camp from different directions. Custer sent Captain Frederick Benteen in command of three companies (D, H, and K) in a southwest direction with imprecise orders to "pitch in" when the opportunity arose. Major Marcus Reno led another three companies (A, G, and M), and he was ordered to cross the river and strike the Indian encampment. Company B, along with troopers from each of the other companies, was assigned to protect the packtrain following the command to protect the all-important ammunition supplies. At the same time, Custer took a battalion of five companies (C, E, F, I,
and L), probably to attack the huge village farther down the river. Custer’s column of approximately 210 men was annihilated, and the bulk of Company I, to which Gustave Korn was assigned, died with their commander.

Reno’s companies, numbering about 130 men, advanced on the village, but they were ordered to dismount and fight as skirmishers before they reached their objective. Threatened by hundreds of warriors, the command fell back to some trees near the river, and the troopers then fled across the stream to a bluff top later known as Reno Hill. Benteen’s command and the packtrain soon joined them there. This combined command of approximately 430 soldiers held the position for the rest of the day and throughout June 26. The men had little water and suffered from the heat. Among the most courageous troopers in the battle were the water carriers. While under fire, these men went to the river to retrieve water for the wounded. The battle ended when the Indians withdrew later in the day after they learned that another army column under the command of General Alfred Terry was advancing on them.

After the June debacle, the surviving Seventh Cavalry soldiers spent a fruitless summer campaigning with Terry’s column, returning to Fort Abraham Lincoln in Dakota Territory that September. Korn was given the assignment as a blacksmith on August 4, 1876, and participated in the skirmish with the Nez Perce led by Chief Joseph on September 13, 1877, at Canyon Creek, Montana Territory. Korn continued his army service, reenlisting in 1878, 1883, and 1888. Each time, he was given high praise for his “excellent character.” In 1883, the assessment was more specific: Korn was noted as “a most excellent blacksmith[,] an honest soldier & in every respect a good thoroughly reliable man.” He was killed at the Wounded Knee massacre on December 29, 1890.4

Most scholars of the Custer battle have maintained that, despite stories to the contrary, there were no survivors from Custer’s cohort. In view of such skepticism, an examination of evidence that indicates one man—Gustave Korn—survived the engagement is all the more interesting. Above, Captain George Sanderson and the Eleventh Infantry returned to the scene in 1879 on the third burial mission to the battlefield and built the first monument to the fallen army soldiers. In his official report dated April 7, 1879, Sanderson wrote: “I accordingly built a mound out of cord wood filled in the center with all the horse bones I could find on the field. In the center of the mound I dug a grave and interred all the human bones that could be found, in all, parts of four or five different bodies. This grave was then built up with wood for four feet above ground. The mound is ten feet square and about eleven feet high; is built on the highest point immediately in rear of where Gen’l Custer’s body was found.” Sanderson’s men buried other soldiers where they were found. The Sanderson detachment is pictured, above, near Medicine Tail ford on the Little Bighorn River.
In a coincidence, Captain Keogh’s horse, Comanche, the only horse from Custer’s column known to have survived, and Gustave Korn became close friends, and Comanche followed Korn around like a faithful dog. According to one story, the animal would follow Korn when he went to visit his girlfriend. The animal would then neigh until the man led him back to his stall at the post. 5

While there have been hundreds of books and articles written about the campaign, historians have given little attention to Gustave Korn’s role. In his 1972 compilation of short Seventh Cavalry biographies, historian Kenneth Hammer misrepresented Korn’s participation. He asserted that “[Korn was] in the valley and hilltop fights. His horse bolted and was killed near the river. Korn rejoined the command of Major Marcus Reno on the night of June 25.” 6 Others copied this statement verbatim or changed the phrasing. 7

However, the assertion that Gustave Korn was with Reno’s command during its attack on the Indian village lacks merit. Korn was assigned to Company I, and there was no reason why he, as a private with no special or needed expertise, would be posted with any of Reno’s units. Additionally, Korn was the orderly for Company I commander Captain Myles Keogh, according to the trooper George Lisk. 8 If Korn chose to join another company without permission, he could have been severely punished for abandoning his command.

The Bismarck Tribune printed the first known newspaper account of Korn’s survival. In an article published on May 23, 1884, the reporter, “Catka,” stated that he had just heard Korn’s story:

It has just leaked out that there is a survivor of the Custer massacre and that he was actually in the fight. His name is Gustave Korn . . . . He was in the first rank of that reckless charge on Sitting Bull’s camp; his horse being wounded at the first fire, broke and ran. Gustave succeeded in getting to Reno’s camp before the horse dropped dead from loss of blood. 9

In an interview published on July 26, 1885, in the Milwaukee Sentinel, Korn told how he survived to an unnamed reporter, who described the trooper as “an intelligent and pleasant man” who “expresses himself quite freely.” The correspondent placed Korn’s account in quotation marks as though it was recorded verbatim, but he perhaps paraphrased what the trooper said: “The battle of that eventful day was outlined something like this by Trooper Korn, who speaks with a slight German accent,” the newspaperman explained. 10

According to the Sentinel story, Korn advanced with Company I of Custer’s column until the cavalry first engaged the warriors. The trooper then escaped to Reno Hill, where the other cavalry units were establishing a defensive position. Korn gave the details:

A rapid ride brought us in sight of the Indians, who seemed to be retreating. I was ordered to ride a little ahead, to the Beecorn [Bighorn?], a small stream in our front, to ascertain whether it was easily passable, as my horse was a fine runner. The entrance to the stream was not in good order, but the other shore was excellent, and I was turning to go back to my comrades and report the condition of the stream, when immediately
Korn's Escape

Native Village

Korn's Likely Escape Route

Reno's Line

Reno's Retreat

Custer's Route

Valley Depression

Little Bighorn River

Last Stand Hill

Calhoun Hill

Reno Hill

Medicine Tail Coulee

Custer's Cos.

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in my front the Indians opened fire from the tall grass where they had been concealed. I was not wounded, but a rifle ball struck my horse's neck and rendered him unmanageable. I was carried away toward Maj. Reno's position, and to that accident I am indebted for my life.\

Korn was modest in describing his experiences. The printed interview ran roughly ninety-two lines, and Korn talked about his escape in only sixteen. He spent much more time discussing the reasons why the Seventh Cavalry was defeated, speculating on the number of Indians in the engagement, arguing that the warriors were better armed than the troopers, and relating how "one of our lieutenants" shot an Indian marksman. In the end, Korn credited his survival more to his magnificent horse than to any other factor. The badly wounded animal carried the trooper perhaps four miles.

Korn's account is plausible, but it needs to be carefully examined. Korn claimed that he was with Custer's column until the fighting began, and thus his successful evasion was likely early in the contest, before the warriors overwhelmed the cavalry. By "Beecorn," Korn was perhaps referring to "Big-horn," and his German accent led to confusion when the newspaperman transcribed the account. However, that river was hardly a "small stream." Korn's "stream" could have been the Medicine Tail Coulee near its mouth. At various places, this gully had relatively steep slopes opposite a low bank on the other side.

One of historians' major theories on the route to the village taken by some of Custer's units, including Company I, argues that the companies approached Medicine Tail Coulee and attempted to cross the Little Bighorn River at the ford at the coulee's mouth before they were repulsed. This theory is supported by a number of Indian accounts, including those of Sitting Bull and Waterman. In an interview probably conducted in 1910, William G. Hardy of Company A related that "Bustard of F Co had Delacay's [of Company I] horse and this horse was found dead on the village side of the river down near ford." The location of the horse's body supports the idea that Company I tried to cross the river at Medicine Tail Ford. Moreover, the theory was advanced long after Korn's death; he could not have known about this location unless he had been there.

As far as can be verified, the Milwaukee Sentinel interview was the only formal statement Korn gave, but there are other firsthand sources that support his description of events. When Chicago's Daily Inter Ocean reported Korn's death, "a former member of the old Seventh Regiment" sent a "Special Telegram," which the newspaper published on January 7, 1891. The unnamed fellow trooper told about Korn and his experiences: "Poor fellow [Korn], he was the sole survivor of the Custer massacre on the Little Big Horn River in 1876."

Korn rode, as is often the case in the service, a chronic runaway, a horse with an iron mouth and, besides, he was a cribber or wind-sucker. At the last half before the direct movement was made on the portion of the Sioux village designed by General Custer for his attack, Korn noticed that his saddle girth was loosening up, caused by the side of the cribber he rode relaxing as they always do after a couple of hours of ride. Korn knowing the temper of the beast he rode, requested permission of gallant Keogh, his troop commander, to dismount and regirth. It was given and just as he loosened the girth, the command passed down the column to move forward. An old cavalry horse, as a rule, will raise a fearful row if being left by the troop, and the vicious brute poor Gus was trying to regirth was no exception to the rule, for he made things lively, but Korn succeeded in swinging into the saddle and headed for the column, now a long way off and moving at a rapid trot.

His horse taking the bit in his teeth and his chin on his breast, pulled out on the dead run. Korn soon saw that he was powerless on the back of the vicious beast. He hoped that the horse would stop on overtaking the column, but he did not. He kept on, and in a short time was in the center of the Indian village, and going like a train of cars down hill. The Sioux opened up a fearful fire on the horse and rider. The horse was struck, but, only maddened by the stinging lead, he fairly flew. A crevice in the dry prairie directly in
his path was cleared by the horse in splendid style, and, dashing on, he ran into Reno’s outfit on the other side, the horse falling dead as Korn pulled up and dismounted.\textsuperscript{15}

Relating how Korn retraced the avenue of his escape to understand better what had happened, the anonymous source said: “Three days after [the battle] Korn went back over the road taken by his horse, and on arriving at the crevice, to use his own words, ‘my hair stood straight up.’ How a horse could make such a leap was a mystery to Korn all his life.” The correspondent gave a final tribute to his friend: “He was a brave man and a good comrade. God rest his soul is the wish and the prayer of his old friends.”\textsuperscript{16}

While the Daily Inter Ocean account is not identical to Korn’s, the two are not mutually exclusive, and they might both be authentic. Korn could have been ordered to report on the suitability of crossing the ravine but been delayed when he stopped to tighten

One theory on the route taken by some of Custer’s units, including Company I, argues that the soldiers approached Medicine Tail Coulee and attempted to ford the Little Bighorn River at its mouth (shown here). The Medicine Tail Ford theory, advanced by historians after Gustave Korn’s death, is supported by a number of Indian accounts. Korn’s escape account seems to place him near the crossing, which would confirm his presence with Custer’s column at the time his horse was shot.
his saddle. In this scenario, his horse then raced ahead of the command, where Korn encountered the warriors. The flight through the Indian village, though it would have placed Korn in a very dangerous position, is credible, as other troopers had such experiences. Early in the battle, when Reno's column advanced on the Indian village, Roman Rotten's horse almost ran away with him. The trooper tried to control the animal, but it kept running, and "the only thing he could do was to continually circle him [the horse] around the 3 troops [Reno's companies]." Finally "the horse lunged ahead of the command and took him considerably nearer to the Indians." Rotten returned only after he had circled "back through the timber." 

Moreover, for Korn, riding toward the village was a likely avenue of escape. When the warriors first attacked Custer's column, Reno Hill had probably not been firmly established as a defensive position, but Korn knew that Reno's companies were attacking the village, meaning that the men should be near the camp. If his horse fled in that direction, Korn had a chance of joining them.

There were other men in the Seventh Cavalry who knew about Korn's story of survival, and Walter M. Camp, who interviewed scores of cavalry and Indian survivors between 1905 and 1925, asked some of them what they had heard about it. John Burri said he knew Korn: "I can tell you how he escaped [sic], which he told me himself a many times, when the fight started his horse ran away and Gen. Custer haled to him to kill the horse, to shoot him but he did not, and his horse by chance carried him back to Renos Command." 

Michael Caddle was assigned to Company I, and he knew Korn well. His account appeared in Joseph Mills Hanson's *The Conquest of the Missouri*:

There is one thing I forgot to mention about the Custer fight that very few know about. The company blacksmith of I Company, 7th Cavalry [sic]. Captain Keogh's company, was Gustave Korn. When ... [Custer's] command was about a half mile from the Indian camp, he [Korn] had to stop to cinch up his saddle. When he came up to the company again he could not stop his horse, which ran right through the Indians to where Colonel [Major] Reno was. His horse dropped dead just when about two rods from the breast-

Gustave Korn became the first horse that was issued to me when I came to N. D. [North Dakota], in 1873. I traded with Korn before starting out on the trip, for another horse. 

Caddle wrote to Walter Camp on October 4, 1909: "I can give you account of one man that was with Custer and got away at the time of the fight Gustave Korn." A month later, he described what he knew:
J. W. Burkett described himself "as a Bunkie [bunkmate] of Gustave Korn and with him 1876, 1877, 1879." Burkett explained of Korn:

Being with his Troop and having a horse that he could not keep his saddle from slipping forward and his horse being what was called a bolter or a horse with a roman nose he asked permission from his troop Capt Keogh to dismount and fix his saddle after getting his saddle adjusted his horse took the bit in his teeth and bolted and went by the command [sic] and turned around and made back tracks so that is what saved Korn.21

John McCollum was another one of Korn’s close acquaintances who believed his story. "Conrad Korn was my bunkie [bunkmate] in the year[s] of 1873 and 1874 while on the Northern Boundary Survey, Major Reno’s command, and 1875 in Fort Lincoln, then North Dakota Territory. He was in the same room with me," McCollum stated. "Gustave Korn and I were good chums and I was well acquainted with the incidents of his escape by his horse bolting and running away, thus saving his scalp, and talked with him after the fight and can say that this account is correct by personal acquaintance with the facts."22

George Lisk, who had served in the U.S. Cavalry from 1877 to 1887, made a similar claim. "I met ‘Yankee’ Korn at Ft. Riley, Kans." in 1889. Lisk summarized Korn’s account:

When Custer went in the fight June 25th, Korn was in Custer’s command, and he was appointed orderly for Capt. Keogh. The horse took the bit in his mouth and he was unable to hold him back. He ran down the hill and crossed the creek to the Indian village [sic] on a big plateau on the west side of the creek, ran up the creek and got into Reno’s command. . . . This is the story that "Yankee” Korn told me himself.

Lisk joined those who were saddened at Korn’s death, saying, "I was sorry to hear that old ‘Yankee’ had been killed."23

Henry P. Jones was in Company I during the battle, but he was assigned to the packtrain and survived because he was not with Custer. As a member of the same unit, Jones knew Korn well, and Jones’s account, related in a May 1911 letter to Walter Camp, lends credibility to Korn’s story.

When the packs were ascending the “Hill” we saw Korn coming towards us very much excited his horse foaming at the Mouth. Sergt. Delacy who was in charge of I Troop packs asked him how it was he left the Troops, he said his horse ran away with him. . . . He was on the “Hill” the 25th and 26th and proved himself no Coward, having brought water a great many times.24

In a second letter to Camp, Jones wrote that "Sergt. DeLacy accused him of deserting the Company (!) telling him that Capt. Keogh would prefer ‘General Charges’ against him. Korn could scarcely speak when we met him, his voice trembled and seemed to choke when he uttered these words, ‘My horse ran away with me.’ I never heard him say anything more on the subject.” Jones continued, “There was too much excitement and confusion at that time to go into details as to where he left Custer’s Battalion and the way he took to reach our pack-train.” "I know he had a very fractious horse, hard-mouthed and very stubborn, used a No. 4 bit (largest size) Korn was a man of a nervous and excitable temperament [sic] and fortunately his unmanageable horse . . . carried him to safety."25

Jones added that Korn made a report relating to his activities in the battle “to the Court at Fort Lincoln shortly after we returned from off the Campaign, also those who were seperated [sic] from Reno’s Battalion made statements (Lieut. De-Rudio [DeRudio], Srgt. Thomas O. Neil [O’Neill] G. co. Interpreter Girard [Gerard] and William Jackson).” Jones did not know what happened in the proceedings: “I was always anxious to know what their statements were, but never could find out any thing official.”26

The account by Jones was very valuable because he saw Korn precisely when he arrived at Reno Hill. Jones’s comment that he “never heard him [Korn] say any more on the subject” was not surprising because Jones was transferred to Company A on October 1, 1876, and probably had little contact with Korn after that time.
Korn's confusion upon his escape was confirmed by James M. Rooney, a trooper with Company F, who survived the battle because he was assigned to the packtrain. Walter Camp's interview notes paraphrased Rooney's statements: "Says Korn's story true. Says Korn came up after he (Rooney) got up with Luther [Hare?]... Asked him [Korn] many questions but all he could [say?] was I don't know." William G. Hardy was with Company A and heard the frightened trooper tell his story apparently while the battle still raged. These statements were shortened by Camp: "Hardy heard Yankee Korn's story Korn claimed to have rode thro village, past skirmish ground & up the bluffs. Korn told this to Hardy at the time."27

Dennis Lynch of Company F was not in the battle, but he claimed that a man named Frank Hunter told a survival story that sounded much like Korn's: "His horse ran away from Custer across Ford B [Medicine Tail Ford]." The horse "carried him through the Hunkpapa [Sioux] camp up over Reno's battleground and onto hill and joined Reno about 4:00 P.M. He was unhurt. Thinks... was nicknamed 'Yankee' Herman or like name."28

Not everyone believed Korn's story. William Othniel Taylor was a private with Company A. He was aware of Caddle's *The Conquest of the Missouri account, and he was highly skeptical of it. "That outrageous [sic] story about Gustave Korn stamps him [Caddle] as being eligible for the Ananias [liar's] Club."29 Taylor failed to explain why he thought the account was so unbelievable.

Stanislas Roy was also in Company A, and he was skeptical of Caddle's account as well. "I knew Blacksmith Korn... but I do not know anything about him getting [sic] parted from Custer's Command, but I Know he was on Reno's Hill at the time of the fight, and don't remember of at any time hearing that he had accomplished [sic] what Sergt. Saddle [Caddle] says."30

August B. Siefert (Company K), John A. Bailey (Company B), and George Gaffney (Company I) also never heard about Korn's escape. However, the fact that these men knew nothing about Korn's story neither affirms nor detracts from its validity; it simply demonstrates that not everyone knew about it.31

During his army career, Gustave Korn earned much praise. Henry P. Jones stated that he brought water to the wounded at the Battle of the Little Bighorn "many times" on June 26. If so, he might have gone after water with smaller groups of men later in the siege since he was not among the main
Many accounts support Korn's tale of survival, and his account is further enhanced by reports of good character made throughout his life. An army assessment made in 1883 observed that Korn was "a most excellent blacksmith[,] an honest soldier & in every respect a good thoroughly reliable man." Above, in dress uniform, Korn poses with Comanche at Fort Lincoln, Dakota Territory.

Ultimately, the credibility of Gustave Korn's experience lies with the plausibility of his story and with his character. Korn told about his experiences as soon as they happened, and he made no outlandish claims about his escape. He also sought no recognition, adulation, or money for telling his story, and he never portrayed himself as being either courageous or resourceful. The trooper simply told how he survived. Those comrades who knew Korn personally believed him. Circumstantial eyewitness evidence supports Korn's claim: Korn could not have left Custer's command before the warriors started firing because his horse was critically injured by gunfire. It is known that Korn rode to Reno Hill, where he participated in the defense of that position. When taken as a body, the evidence indicates that Korn was with Custer's column and that he did, in fact, survive "Custer's Last Stand."

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not of right, but of favor,” the court must agree to it. Winston complained that his client’s situation should be “shocking to the sense of justice of every American,” not just because Dietz had been falsely accused but also because the law only allowed funds for witnesses “within the district where the case is tried.”


82. Sheboygan (WI) Press, Aug. 27, 1933. Newspapers made the announcement about the name change by July 18, 1933.


84. The author was privileged to participate in the panel “Racist Stereotypes and Cultural Appropriation in American Sports,” at the symposium held at the National Museum of the American Indian on Feb. 7, 2013. The webcast can be viewed at http://nmai.si.edu/multimedia/webcasts/ or www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGgSrecPoJo.

85. The National Congress of American Indians attempted to meet and discuss the issue with the team’s former owner, Jack Cooke Kent. Kent refused a meeting but spoke through a reporter and the UPI service on Jan. 22, 1988: “There’s not a single, solitary jot, tittle, what chance in the world that the Redskins will adopt a new name.” Suzan Shown Harjo, “Fighting Name Calling,” in Team Spirits: The Native American Museum Controversy, ed. C. Richard King and Charles Fruehling, Springlewood (Lincoln, NE, 2001), 194.


89. Ibid., Specifically, the judge’s eighty-three-page report states: “There is no evidence in the record that addresses whether the use of the term ‘redskins’ in the context of a football team and related entertainment services would be viewed by a substantial composite of Native Americans, in the relevant time frame, as disparaging. . . . The problem, however, with this case is evidentiary. The Lanham Act has been on the books for many years and was in effect in 1967 when the trademarks were registered. By waiting so long to exercise their rights, Defendants make it difficult for any fact-finder to affirmatively state that in 1967 the trademarks were disparaging.”


The Case for a Custer Battalion Survivor

1. E. A. Brumfield, Troopers with Custer: Historic Incidents of the Battle of the Little Big Horn (Harrisburg, PA, 1952), 66. “Who Knew Gustave Korn of Troop I, Seventh U.S. Cavalry in the Custer Fight?” Winners of the West, Jan. 30, 1996; Edgar L. Stewart, Custer’s Luck (Norman, OK, 1955), 490. For a good summation of many of the claims, see Michael L. Munnelly, I Survived Custer’s Last Stand (n.p., 2006). This study has been greatly facilitated by Roger L. Williams’s recent research summarizing the “Korn stories” and “his alleged experience” at the battle. See Williams, Military Register of Custer’s Last Command (Norman, OK, 2009), 179–80n. 31, 183–84.


3. After a thorough discussion of the sources, the historian Edgar L. Stewart concluded, “The probability is that there were not more than four thousand warriors, and possibly not that many.” See Custer’s Luck, 303–12.

4. As cited in Williams, Military Register, 179–80.

5. See Edward S. Luce, Keogh, Comanche, and Custer, 2nd ed. (Ashland, OR, 1974), 81–82, 84–85; and Elizabeth Aywood Lawrence, His Very Silence Speaks: Comanche—The Horse Who Survived Custer’s Last Stand (Detroit, 1989).


7. See, for example, Bruce R. Liddic and Paul Harbaugh, eds., Camp on Custer: Transcribing the Custer Myth (Spokane, WA, 1993): “[Korn] was detached to Major Reno’s Battalion. However, he did not rejoin Reno’s command until that night [June 25]. His horse bolted and was killed near the river on the retreat from the bottom, leaving Korn afoot and stranded” (p. 74).

8. George Lisk, “Yankee Korn,” Winners of the West, May 31, 1956. Lisk was a member of the Seventh Cavalry from 1877 to 1887 and knew Korn personally.


11. Ibid.


14. William G. Hardy, interview, bfr 10, bx 2, Little Big Horn Battle of, 1876, H. Walter Mason Camp Papers, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington (hereafter Camp Papers, H).

15. “Incident of the Custer Massacre,” Chicago Daily Inter Ocean, Jan. 7, 1891. The Winners of the West published a 1936 account attributed to Korn that can be dismissed as a fake. The article stated:
“The following account of the Custer Battle was printed on the back of a large photograph of the horse, COMANCHE,” which was ostensibly signed by Gustave Korn. The account had many errors, including incorrect battle dates and times, and was so superficial that anyone with even a vague knowledge of the engagement could have written it. “Who Knew Gustave Korn?”

“Incident of the Custer Massacre,”

17. Roman Ratten, interview by Walter Camp, in Custer in ’76: Walter Camp’s Notes on the Custer Fight, ed. Kenneth Hamner (Provo, UT, 1976), 128. John H. Meier had a similar problem during Reno’s approach to the village. His mount, Snopy, panicked and ran. As the eyewitness Daniel Newell described it: “Meyer’s [sic] horse got away from him and bolted through the Indian’s line.” His situation was desperate, “but he got back to us, shooting his way out with his six gun. … How he ever did this is a mystery.” See Daniel Newell, as cited in Carroll, They Rode with the Custer, 173. Another trooper was in a desperate situation among the Indians, and he was able to escape being killed by them, meaning that Korn could have done so as well. Luther Standing Bear, Turtle Rib, and Red Father related that another man escaped from Custer’s command late in the battle, but he panicked and killed himself. Red Feather said: “The Indians took after him, and shot and shot at him, but couldn’t hit him or catch him. They saw some smoke and the report of a gun, and saw him fall off his horse. The Indians went over and he had shot himself.” The trooper was perhaps Corporal John Foley. See “Interview,” Aug. 19, 1920, in Lakota Recollections of the Custer Fight: New Sources of Indian-Military History, ed. Richard G. Hardoff (Spokane, WA, 1991), 86; Richard G. Hardoff, Markers, Artifacts and Indian Testimony: Preliminary Findings on the Custer Battle (Short Hills, NJ, 1985), 29–30.

18. John Burri to Camp, Nov. 16, 1910, fldr 14, bx 1, Walter Mason Camp Collection, Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT (hereafter Camp Collection) (HCM)


20. Cardile to Camp, Nov. 8, 1909, fldr 10, bx 1, Camp Collection, BYU.

21. Burkett to Camp, Apr. 11, 1912, Walter Mason Camp Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.


23. Lisk, “Yankee Korn.”

24. Henry Jones to Camp, May 17, 1911, fldr 17, bx 1, Camp Collection, BYU.

25. Henry Jones to Camp, June 2, 1911, fldr 18, ibid.

26. Ibid. No record of the investigation has been found.

27. James M. Rooney interview, bx 4, Camp Collection, BYU; Hardy interview.

28. Dennis Lynch interviews, in Hammer, Custer in ’76, 139–40. Francis Hunter was in Company F, but he was with the packtrain at that time, and since Korn’s nickname was “Yankee,” Lynch was likely referring to him.


30. Roy to Camp, Nov. 10, 1909, Camp Collection, BYU.

31. Liddic and Harbaugh, Camp on Custer, 73, 83–94.


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4. See Roy Rosenzweig, Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870–1920 (New York, 1983); 151; Russell Lynes, The Lively Audience: A Social History of the Visual and Performing Arts in America, 1890–1950 (New York, 1985); Russell B.