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The Germans and Swiss at the Battle of the Little Bighorn 1876

by Albert Winkler

The purpose of this study is to examine the Germans and the Swiss who participated in the Battle of the Little Bighorn to understand who they were, to assess their motives for joining the cavalry, and to appraise their experience in battle.

Germans and Swiss in the United States

The Germans have made significant contributions to the history of the United States, and they have long been associated with the exploration, settlement, and occupation of North America. People from Germany settled in America during the colonial period, fought in the United States War of Independence, served faithfully in the Civil War, and participated in the conquest of the American West. Germans have made many valuable contributions in the westward expansion of the United States, and they have participated in some of the most significant events and activities in the development of the American frontier. They were involved in the treks to the West, were found in many mining camps and pioneer settlements, and served in the US Army. They have also contributed a great deal to the politics, culture, and scientific advances of the United States. Some of the most well-known German Americans include Dwight Eisenhower, Babe Ruth, Marlene Dietrich, and Erich Maria Remarque. More Americans have ancestors from Germany than from any other nation. Currently, the population of twenty-three of the fifty states is predominantly German, and over fifty million people in the United States are known to have German ancestry.¹

¹ The best study on the Germans in America is Dietmar Kuegler, Die Deutschen in Amerika: Die Geschichte der Deutschen Auswanderung in den USA seit 1683 (Stuttgart: Motorbuch, 1983).
While Americans of Swiss ancestry are a much smaller group, some of them have also made valuable contributions. Curiously, Albert Einstein could fit into either category or both. He was born in Germany, but he renounced German citizenship after he moved to Switzerland, and he retained his Swiss citizenship for the remainder of his life. Perhaps the most illustrious of the Swiss Americans was President Herbert Hoover, who was one of the greatest philanthropists ever. Hoover complained bitterly about the use of the blockade against Germany during and immediately following World War I, and he brought food to Germany when the blockade was lifted. He fed millions of children in Russia during the famine of the 1920s, and he also brought food, “Hoover meals,” (Hooverspeisung) to millions of German children following World War II.

Both Germans and Swiss served as soldiers in the US Army. Among the most celebrated German and Swiss soldiers were those awarded the Medal of Honor, the highest decoration for bravery in the US military. There are 117 men born in Germany who have been given that honor. Thirty-eight Germans, seven of whom served with the Seventh Cavalry regiment, received the Medal of Honor for action in the Indian Wars between 1868 and 1899. Seven men born in Switzerland have likewise been given the Medal of Honor, including four Swiss who were so honored during the Indian Wars. Many other men from Germany and Switzerland fought no less bravely in the campaigns of the American West, including in the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876, where three Germans were awarded the Medal of Honor.

**Germans and Swiss in the Seventh Cavalry**

The Germans in the United States Cavalry during the Indian Wars between 1865 and 1890 were “invariably called Dutchies.”

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This term was a distortion of the word *Deutsch* (German), which many Americans had a hard time understanding or pronouncing properly. These German men had a fine reputation in the army and were considered “aggressive fighting men.” The Germans seemed to achieve the ranks of noncommissioned officers (sergeants and corporals) more readily than did soldiers of other nationalities, and a high proportion of the most important regimental sergeant majors and first sergeants were Germans. As in any army, the non-commissioned officers are the backbone of any military unit, making assignments and making sure orders are carried out. The German sergeants helped make the cavalry into an impressive force. They had the reputation for being “rigid” and “tough-minded,” and their contribution to the cavalry was significant.\(^5\)

The German soldiers had an advantage over other foreigners because they came from a country with a proud military tradition. After the brilliant German victory in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, the German Army enjoyed an impressive military reputation worldwide. Many Americans believed that Germans made good soldiers, a perception that still exists. Whereas during the Civil War, many American units copied the French Army and went to war dressed in Zouave uniforms used by the French in North Africa. After the Franco-Prussian War, the US Army copied aspects of German military uniforms. For decades, many American soldiers and officers wore ceremonial helmets and uniforms similar to those used by the German Army.

The Seventh Cavalry was organized in August 1866. The United States had over one million men in its army at the close of the Civil War in May 1865, but the defense needs of the nation were much reduced following that conflict, and over 800,000 men were discharged by the end of November in that year. By July 1866, the federal government decided it needed only 57,000 men to meet the requirements of the peacetime army, which was to patrol the US-Mexico border and to protect settlers from Indians. The Seventh

Cavalry was organized at that time. It had an authorized strength of twelve companies, and from the beginning many foreigners served in that unit. In 1866, more than half of the men were born in foreign countries, including Germany. Of the 131 Germans who served in the Seventh Cavalry in 1876, fifteen had joined in 1866 and twenty had joined in 1867.

The only German officer to serve in the Seventh Cavalry during the Indian Wars was Edward Myers. He was born in Germany in 1830. He emigrated to the United States in 1857 and enlisted in the First Dragoons of the army the same year. He achieved the rank of sergeant before the Civil War broke out, and his unit was renamed the First Cavalry in 1861. His leadership qualities were recognized, and he was promoted to lieutenant in July 1862. Myers served with such distinction at the battles of Todd's Tavern in May 1864 and Five Forks in April 1865 that he was given the brevet (temporary) rank of lieutenant colonel. His permanent rank became captain, and he was the commander of Company E of the Seventh Cavalry from 1866 to 1871.

Although Myers was a respected officer for most of his career, his physical and mental condition began deteriorating during the Civil War, and others even described him as dull-witted. In 1867, he was arrested for disobeying orders. On two occasions, he drew a gun on Lieutenant Robbins and challenged him to a duel. Myers also abused a doctor and called him a "God damn fool." The German was tried in a court martial and thrown out of the army in December 1867, but his sentence was overturned, and he returned to service in June 1868. His maladies were not specified, but his health continued to decline, and he died on July 11, 1871.

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Foreigners in the Seventh Cavalry

Often called "the Custer Massacre" or "Custer's Last Stand," the Battle of the Little Bighorn has become an iconic event in American history, that is frequently represented in film, paintings, novels, and histories. The engagement has long been lamented because George Armstrong Custer and five companies of troopers were wiped out, but it has also come to symbolize the last great victory of the native peoples in their attempt to maintain their independence and way of life. Custer remains one of the most controversial figures in the history of the American West. Flamboyant and nearly fearless, he was an effective cavalry commander during the Civil War, but his campaigns in the West are more questionable largely because he led the famous Seventh Cavalry at the disastrous Battle of the Little Bighorn.

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While historians have carefully examined many aspects of the battle, they have largely overlooked the role of the various nationalities of soldiers in the Seventh Cavalry. About 57 percent of the men in the Seventh Cavalry in 1876 were born in the United States, meaning that 43 percent of the soldiers in that unit were born in foreign countries. The two largest groups were men from Ireland and Germany at roughly 15 percent each. Many men at the Little Bighorn clearly had German roots. The most famous of these was George Armstrong Custer himself whose distant ancestors were Germans and whose original family name was Küster or Kuester. In addition to Custer, a number of soldiers including Christian Loeser, Anthony Knecht, and Christian Schlafer likely had German ancestry, but they were born in the United States. Loeser was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, while Knecht and Schlafer were both born Cincinnati, Ohio. Some soldiers had other German connections, such as Frank G. Geist from Würzburg who stated that he went to school in Germany with Alexander Stella (Stern) who was born in Athens, Greece. Those with German ancestry but born outside Germany and those with other German connections are outside the scope of this study. For this study, I will only examine men who claimed they were actually born in Germany or Switzerland.

When joining the army, the men were asked where they were born, and their birthplaces were listed in their service records. Some soldiers were born in the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine when these locations were part of France, but Alsace and Lorraine were incorporated into Germany in 1871, so these troopers could be considered either French or German. The men who stated they were born in Germany will be part of this study, and those who stated they were born in France will not be included. Louis Haugge (Hauggi),

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12 Douglas D. Scott, P. Willey, and Melissa A. Connor, They Died with Custer: Soldier's Bones from the Battle of the Little Bighorn (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 1998), 90-93. My numbers differ slightly from those presented on page [92] of this study.

13 Evan S. Connell, Son of the Morning Star: Custer and the Little Bighorn (San Fran.: North Point, 1984), 352-3.

William Saas, Henry Saaferman, and Loyse Louis Walter were from Alsace. Haugge was born in “Alsace Germany” and Saaferman was born “Strasburg Germany,” so they are part of this study. Although Walter was from Alsace, his place of birth was given as “Willer France” (Willer or Willer-sur-Thur), so he will not be considered a German. Joseph Monroe was born in “Lorraine France,” so he will not be part of this study. 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 study.

In the early summer of 1876, 131 men born in Germany were assigned to the Seventh Cavalry. All of these men were serving in the army except John Frett, a “citizen packer,” who accompanied the regiment on the campaign, and Charles A. Stein, who was a veterinarian and did not accompany the expedition. 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. In addition, twelve men born in Switzerland, each in the German-speaking areas, were part of Custer’s forces.15

Many of the military records relating to these men are unclear, leading to possible confusion of names and places. Much of this was probably the results of sloppy record keeping by army scribes, poor handwriting, and difficulty understanding what was said by the new recruits, who often spoke poor English.

Many Germans’ names were misspelled in military records, such as Frederick Shulte’s name, which was spelled in various ways, including Shutte, Schutte, Schulte, and Schuetze. Other examples include Roman Rutten (Ruttenauer), John Rapp (Ropp, Papp) and

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15 Important compilations of information on the troopers include, Frederick C. Wagner III, Participants in the Battle of the Little Bighorn, 2nd ed. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2016); Roger L. Williams, Military Register of Custer’s Last Command (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 2009); Richard G. Hardorff, Walter M. Camp’s Little Bighorn Rosters (Spokane, WA: Clark, 2002); Ronald H. Nichols, ed. Men with Custer: Biographies of the 7th Cavalry (Hardin, MT: Custer Battlefield, 2000); 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).
Christopher Pandtle (Pendle). Many of the soldiers also Anglicized their names, so they would not have to deal with constant issues of mispronunciations and misspellings. Names such as John, Charles, and Henry were probably English versions of Hans (Johann), Karl, and Heinrich. Otto Arndt was also known as Max Cernow, and Charles White’s name was originally Henry Charles Weihe. Some men gave an alias instead of a real name. For example, Adam Karl Reinwald said his name was Charles Brown, and he was known on military records by that name,¹⁶ and Christian Methfessel enlisted in the army as Frederick Smith in 1867, but he apparently used his real name when he reenlisted years later.

Some of the records contained inaccurate places of birth. There seemed to be little confusion when men were born in well-known places such as Berlin, but other areas presented problems. Sebastian Omlin (Omeling, Smeling) was reportedly born in Windaciler, Germany, which did not exist, and Elder Nees was listed as having been born in Ornirhessen or Quierhessen, which also did not exist. Frederick Meier was born in Delmenhort, which was a misspelling of Delmenhorst, and Gustave Korn was born in Sprollow, Silesia, which should have been spelled Sprottau. Probably to avoid such confusion, five of the Germans gave no city of their birth and simply said they were born in Germany. 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), while the men born in Berlin (eight) were listed separately. Large numbers of men also came from Württemberg (thirteen), Baden (ten), and Frankfurt am Main (five).

¹⁶ Williams, Military Register, 48, 59.
Some of the records regarding the Swiss contained inaccuracies as well. There seemed to be little confusion when the men were born in well-known areas of Switzerland such as the two men born in Bern, Frederick Lehman and Frank Braun, the two men born in Zurich, Robert Senn and John Lattman, and the two men born in Luzern, Joseph Kneubuhler and Vincent Charley. But John G. Tritten was listed as being born in Canton Rune, which does not exist. He was likely born in “Canton Berne,” but the handwriting of the army scribe has clearly led to confusion. Ludwig Borter was also listed as being born in DeWalle, which also does not exist, and John Rauter was born in Tyrol, Switzerland even though the Tyrol was a province of Austria, not Switzerland. Additionally, Francis Pittet was born in Freiburg, and Edmond Burlis was born in Klingnau. 17

Physical Attributes

The Germans had features typical of men from their country. Of the men whose appearance was described in military records forty-eight had brown (hazel) or black eyes, and seventy-nine had blue or grey eyes. 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 grey. The Swiss looked similar, and nine of them had grey or blue eyes and three had brown eyes, while ten of the men had various shades of hair color from light to dark. One of them, John Lattman, had auburn hair, and another, Vincent Charley, had red hair.

The Germans were average in height for the men in Custer’s command. The cavalry actively recruited men who weighed less than 200 pounds because heavier men would be more difficult for the horses to carry, and the Germans’ stature was consistent with this requirement. The average height of the Germans was 5 feet 7 inches, and 104 of them were between 5 feet 5½ inches and 5 feet 9.3 inches tall. The tallest German was August Finckle at 6 feet ½ inches, and

17 Williams, Military Register, 43, 46, 51, 67, 178, 179, 187, 189, 243-44, 249, 269, 291.
he was probably also the tallest man in the Seventh Cavalry. The shortest German was Anton Dohman at 5 feet 2½ inches. US Army regulations stated that men had to be at least 5 feet 3 inches tall to join, but Dohman was probably considered to be close enough.

The records indicate that some 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 at which men could join the army was eighteen, but a few teenagers were able to enlist at younger ages. August B. Siefert joined the army at age sixteen when he was 5 feet 3 inches tall, but when he later reenlisted, he was 5 feet 5 inches tall. The biggest growth of under-aged men came from Henry Voss who joined the army at age seventeen in 1866 when he was 5 feet 3.75 inches tall. By 1875, he had grown to 5 feet 8.75 inches.

Some men who had reached the proper enlistment age of eighteen also continued to grow after enlisting. Edwin Miller was 5 feet 8 inches tall when he joined at the age of eighteen in 1867. In 1872, he was 5 feet 10 inches tall. Charles Sanders was 5 feet 7 inches when he enlisted at the age of eighteen in 1861. Later, his height was recorded as 5 feet 10 ½ inches. Otto Voit was 5 feet 1 1/4 inches tall when he joined the army at nineteen in 1864. He was 5 feet 3.75 inches in 1875.

A few men who were in their twenties when they first enlisted also continued to grow. Philipp Spinner was 5 feet 3 ½ inches tall when he joined at the age of twenty-one in 1867, but he was 5 feet 6 ½ inches tall in 1870. Charles Hancke was 5 feet 2 ½ inches when he enlisted at the age of twenty-three in 1867, but he was listed as 5 feet 4 ½ inches in 1875. Harder to explain was Claus Schlieper who enlisted in 1864 at age 27 when most men have quit growing. He was 5 feet 7 inches tall at the time, but in 1866, he was 5 feet 9.75 inches tall. The heights of the Swiss were also average for those under Custer’s command, ranging from 5 feet 5 inches to 5 feet 10 inches.

The average age of the men in the Seventh Cavalry was twenty-five and a half in 1876, but the Germans were slightly older with an average age of twenty-eight and a half. One hundred Germans were from twenty to thirty-three years old, and the oldest was Charles
Louis Haak at fifty-one. Eleven of the Swiss were from twenty-six to thirty years old, the average between twenty-seven and twenty-eight, and the oldest was Francis Pittet at thirty-eight. The men were at the height of their physical vigor, and in 1876 the army had relatively few problems with teenage recruits and elderly men which had been the case during the Civil War.

Some have criticized the physical condition of the men. Prominent historian, James Donovan, for example, has stated that the army “recruiters largely ignored mental and physical requirements. If a man could mount a horse and carry a gun, he was good enough for the cavalry.” However, the physical examinations of the new recruits for the US military were much the same at that time as they are today. I have been given physical examinations twice for entry into the US Army and Navy, and the nature of my examinations are similar to those given to the men who entered the US Army at the time of the Little Bighorn. Donovan’s negative assessment is much exaggerated. In fact, many contemporary observers considered the men in Custer’s cavalry to have been fine physical specimens. Few of them suffered from ailments that hurt their ability to perform their duties, and some of those problems that did exist developed only after lengthy service. William Frank from Magdeburg for example, was listed as having “defective vision” after he turned fifty, but by that time, he had already performed his military duties well for twenty years.

These men came largely from disadvantaged circumstances, and knew how to work hard, face hardship, and do without many comforts. The Germans and Swiss were also far away from family, friends, and their native cultures. They often demonstrated the most impressive stamina, and frequently showed remarkable tenacity and courage under the most trying conditions. The disdain others expressed for these men at times probably had little to do with their character and much to do with the dislike many Americans had for the army and for foreigners.

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18 Williams, Military Register, 43, 46, 51, 67, 178, 179, 187, 189, 243-44, 249, 269, 291. and Scott, Willey, and Connor. They Died with Custer, 90-91.
19 Donovan, A Terrible Glory, 122.
George Armstrong Custer’s wife, Elizabeth Bacon Custer, saw the soldiers’ good qualities. While Elizabeth “Libbie” was very much in love with her husband, she still enjoyed flirting with other handsome officers in the cavalry including Captain Thomas Weir, Lieutenant William Cooke, and Captain Myles Keogh. She had an eye for attractive men, and saw much to admire in the troopers in the Seventh Cavalry: “The soldiers were a superb lot of men physically. The out-door life had developed them into perfect specimens of vigorous manhood.” Later, she added more detail: “The soldiers, inured to many years of hardship, were the perfection of physical manhood. Their brawny limbs and lithe, well-poised bodies gave proof of the training their out-door life had given. Their resolute faces, brave and confident, inspired one with a feeling that they were going out aware of the momentous hours awaiting them, but inwardly assured of their capability to meet them.”

The newspaper reporter John F. Finerty also saw much to admire in the US Cavalry when he accompanied General George Crook’s men on the Rosebud expedition in June 1876. Finerty stated that “the great mass of the soldiers were young men, careless, courageous and eminently light-hearted. The rank and file, as a

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20 Philbrick, The Last Stand, p. 21.
majority, were of either Irish or German birth or parentage. . . . Taken as a whole, Crook’s command was a fine organization.”

Character

Some have also unfairly criticized the character of the men. Private Thomas P. Downing who served in Company I of the Seventh Cavalry and was later killed at the Little Bighorn in 1876, wrote shortly after his enlistment in 1873 that “some of the hardest cases that I ever came across are at present serving in this company.”22 William Henry White who joined the cavalry in 1872, had a similar opinion of the men who enlisted: “Most of them were toughs, many of them the toughest sort of city rowdies. . . . Criminals and semi-criminals made up a large part of the one hundred men in the band with which I traveled.”

Many of the men who enlisted also ran away when they were sent to their first assignment. “Desertion greatly increased by the time we reached Fort Sanders. By the time we had become well settled in our military post there were only about fifty of us left.” White supposed that many men joined the army only to get free transportation to the West: “where they might hide from pursuit on account of offenses in the home region.” These men had no intention of serving in the army. To his knowledge, no deserters were apprehended. “Ordinarily it [desertion] was considered a natural way of weeding out the unworthy.”24

Desertions, or taking “French leave,” as many Americans called it, was a big problem 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 career before June 1876. The men deserted for many reasons including “inordinate

22 John F. Finerty, War-Path and Bivouac: The Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition (Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1966), 115.
demands on soldier labor, poor quarters, poor or inadequate food, lack of recreation, harsh noncoms or officers, low pay and lengthy intervals between paydays, [and] drunkenness.” But the most common reason seemed to be problems with brutal superiors. As a trooper with the Seventh Cavalry, Ami Frank Mulford in Company M, explained, “I believe the principal cause of desertions is the manner in which many of the harsh officers treat enlisted men.” He added that most men deserted in the spring time when much construction work was starting, and jobs were easier to get.

A major reason for the increase in desertions in 1871 and 1872 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, the desertion rates fell dramatically, and only 6.9 percent of the soldiers in the army deserted in 1876.

The problem with men leaving became so acute in the early 1870s that the army offered a general amnesty for any deserter who returned to the ranks by January 1, 1874. Nine Germans in who had deserted returned to the Seventh Cavalry by the specified date and were not punished. Some of these men had reenlisted in the army after their desertion, and a few had joined the Marine Corps. George Heid from Bavaria deserted in February 1872, but he enlisted in the Marine Corps as George Hyed in November 1872. He took advantage of the general amnesty and returned to the army in November 1873.

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26 Ami Frank Mulford, Fighting Indians in the 7th United States Cavalry, Custer's Favorite Regiment (Corning, NY: Mulford, 1879), 56-57.
Eduard Gustaf Delliehausen from Frankfurt did something similar. He deserted in 1867, but he joined again in July 1870 as Edward Housen and deserted again in June 1872, but he took advantage of the amnesty and rejoined in November 1873. The German, James Miles, deserted in January 1874, but reenlisted as Edward Hamilton in July 1875.

Many of these men were clearly good soldiers, and they had important military careers despite the fact they had deserted sometime during their service. Otto Voit from Baden, who took advantage of the general amnesty to return to the army in December 1873, later won the Medal of Honor for his bravery at the Little Bighorn. Charles Windolph from Bergen deserted from his infantry unit in July 1872. He joined the Seventh Cavalry later in the same year as Charles Wrangel and took advantage of the amnesty to clear his record in November 1873. He was also awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions at the Little Bighorn. One of the oldest troopers in the Seventh Cavalry, Aloys Bohner from Baden, deserted early in his career in 1858 but had a good military record until his death in 1877.

Few Germans caused discipline problems while serving in the Seventh Cavalry. 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. The actual crimes were often omitted when punishments were recorded, but Antony Assadaly from Prussia is recorded as having been arrested in December 1873 because he “damaged one public horse.” His punishment was to lose $10 of his pay per month for three months.29

Henry Voss from Hanover was under arrest on July and August of 1875 because he “struck saddler-sergeant Tritten without provocation.” John Godfried Tritten was a Swiss from Bern. There may have been more to the story because few men are violent with no reason,

29 Williams, Military Register, 31.
and Voss probably felt he was provoked. Also, Tritten could have just been in the wrong place at the wrong time and faced Voss's wrath. Another possibility was that the German and the Swiss exchanged jibes and insults in German, which the officers could not understand, making the attack appear unprovoked. Whatever the reason for the assault, Voss had to forfeit $8 of his pay per month for four months as punishment. Voss was also fined $5 in pay when he went absent without leave in November 1875. The punishment for his desertion was mild "in consideration of extenuating circumstances," which were not specified.

Even though some people thought that the men in the Seventh Cavalry were rough characters, the official records of the Germans were quite positive and reported that they clearly made good soldiers. Only about ninety of the 131 Germans who were in that unit in June 1876 were still alive and in the army after the Little Bighorn. When these men left the army or were eligible to reenlist, their officers often wrote comments about their quality as soldiers. Character descriptions were listed for seventy-eight of the men. Fifty-seven of them had excellent character, six had very good character, twelve had good character, and three had fair character. Some men were so impressive that references to their character were made numerous times, and Frederick Deetline's character was listed as excellent no less than six times. The Swiss were

30 Williams, Military Register, 31, 298.
not as highly regarded by their officers as were the Germans. Only seven Swiss survived the battle and were still in the Seventh Cavalry after the conflict, and three of them were listed as having excellent character, two had good character, and one had fair character.

Marriages

Because the men of the Seventh Cavalry were often stationed at isolated outposts for long periods of time, were frequently moved from one post to another, and were often on lengthy campaigns, few men had the opportunity to meet women and build long-term relationships with them, and few men married while in the army. Most of the officers were married, but very few of the enlisted men were. The army’s official policy was to prohibit married men from joining and to discourage enlisted men from getting married. The men had to get permission to take a wife, no more than four women were allowed to be associated with each company, and “the bureaucracy made life for married soldiers as difficult and unappealing as possible.”

The officers were paid much more than the enlisted men and had access to decent housing for families. In contrast, the enlisted men were poor and were expected to live in barracks with many other men. Housing for married enlisted men was often a tent, a condition that could be very challenging in cold climates. And many men could not possibly support a wife and children on army pay. To afford a marriage, the wives of enlisted men had to find jobs at the military posts, usually being laundresses or maids. Many of the single men missed family relationships, and many of them enjoyed spending time with children. Elizabeth Bacon Custer observed, “The soldiers were especially fond of children, and knew how to amuse them.”

About 265 men in the Seventh Cavalry were killed at the Little Bighorn, and Elizabeth Custer stated that “this battle wrecked the lives of twenty-six women at Fort Lincoln,” who had become

32 Custer, Boots and Saddles, 195.
widows. Thirty-three of the widows were wives of officers, and the other nineteen were married to enlisted men. This meant that only about seven percent of the enlisted men killed at the Little Bighorn were married. Charles Windolph, a German in the Seventh Cavalry, gave slightly different numbers. He stated that the husbands of thirty-seven women were killed at the Little Bighorn.

The army kept no records on marriages among the soldiers, so any account of those men must be incomplete, but we know that a few of the Germans were married. Francis Roth from Frankfurt had a wife but no children, but most of the other married men had offspring. Henry Dose from Holstein had a wife and two children, and Frederick Hohmeyer from Darmstadt, who died later at the Little Bighorn, had a wife, Mary, and four children: Lizzie, Lena, Nellie, and William. Gustav Klein from Württemberg also died at the Little Bighorn, and he had four children: Anton, Catherine, Mathias, and Franziska. John H. Meier from Hanover had a wife, Mary, and five children: John Henry, Anna, Joseph, Helen, and Leona who was born in October 1876 four months after the battle. Roman Rutten from Baden had a wife and one daughter, Emma, before 1876, and had five more children following the battle. Max Mielke from Frankfurt married Josephine Rosette and had one daughter, Lilly Josephine. In the spring of 1876, the veterinarian; Charles A. Stein from Prussia, “had a large family of small children,” but the number was not given at that time. Eventually, he had five children.

Edward Botzer from Bremerhaven married, and he attempted to keep that fact a secret. Albert Barnitz wrote to his wife. “Did I

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33 Custer, *Boots and Saddles*, 268.
40 Carroll, *They Rode with Custer*, 234.
ever tell you that Botzer went and married the young laundress, Mrs. Brush’s daughter? ... Well he did, and they kept it a great secret for about six or eight weeks, not even Mrs. Brush, it appears, being aware of the marriage! Poor Botzer, I think he could have done better.41 However, an aspect of their marriage remained secret because no one seemed to know the young woman’s name.

These men seemed to have stable relationships with their wives, but Nicholas Klein from Bavaria was not so fortunate. Reportedly, he married Lucetta “Settie” Belle Craig in 1874. She left Klein for Thomas Finnegan probably in 1878. Although Klein and Craig were probably never formally divorced, Klein married Margaret Darmstadt in 1883.42 Otto Durselew from Frankfurt told a friend that he had a wife and child in New York City, but if he really was married, his wife apparently made no claim to a government pension after Durselew was killed at the Battle of Bear’s Paw Mountains in 1877.43

Emma M. Klawitter, the wife of Ferdinand Klawitter from Prussia gave some insights into her life married to a German soldier. Emma was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, and her state was occupied by Northern troops following the Civil War. She made the unusual choice of marrying one of the occupation troops. She related, “I married a Yankee soldier in 1876, when most southern lassies [girls] were scared of ‘em. I wasn’t quite eighteen years old then.” Reflecting on the hard years as a soldier’s wife, she added, “[I] can’t figure out yet what got into me, unless it was the uniform.” Apparently, her husband was a handsome man in his military attire.

Emma lived for years in a tent, and she bore her first children in that modest home. To help with finances, she worked with her husband who was assigned as an orderly to Lieutenant Luther Hare. On one occasion, Hare wanted Emma to do some work for him in his bedroom. Even though there was another person present, which probably meant the invitation was innocent, Emma thought the

42 Williams, Military Register, 182.
43 Williams, Military Register, 113, 120.
request was improper; and refused to enter the room. Apparently, her husband’s nationality influenced Hare’s opinion of her, and he observed, “You’re pretty stubborn aren’t you? You must be a German.”

The soldiers were stationed at lonely outposts, and many soldiers had to look for what entertainment they could find. They often drank too much. They went to gambling halls where they were cheated, and they met whatever women were available. Frequently, dance halls and brothels or “hog farms” made much of their money from soldiers even when these establishments were located far from army camps. The army banned such businesses from federal lands, but they were often located nearby. 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. When the ice on the river started to melt in the spring of either 1875 or 1876, the water rose, and many of the women were washed away. Elizabeth Bacon Custer reported, “Those that were left waded back to their huts, and, unheeding the warning of that fearful day, began again their same miserable existence.”

Elizabeth Custer did not need to hold herself in moral superiority and regard those unfortunate women in disdain because her husband was not the model of restraint. There were numerous reports of George A. Custer’s affairs, and he had an unusually close friendship with an actor, Lawrence Barrett. Elizabeth commented that “it is hard to speak fittingly [in proper society] of the meeting of those two men. They joyed in each other as women do.” When the two men parted, “they gazed with tears into each other’s eyes and held hands like exuberant girls.”

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45 Custer, Boots and Saddles, 229-31.
46 Elizabeth B. Custer, Tenting on the Plains, or, General Custer in Kansas and Texas (New York: Webster, 1887), 346.
George A. Custer caught gonorrhea probably from a prostitute, when he was at the United States Military Academy in 1859. Apparently, he was cured of the ailment, but the treatment left him sterile. Even though Elizabeth clearly wanted a family, and the couple was married for twelve years, they had no children. 47

Custer was not the only soldier to catch a venereal disease. A few of the Germans in the Seventh Calvary were also unwise or unlucky in their amorous encounters, and at least seven of them got syphilis. The physician, James B. Ferguson, kept good notes when he treated Henry Lehmann from Berlin for venereal disease. Lehmann had caught the illness in Germany years earlier. He was suffering from pain in his shoulders and chest, and reported to the hospital in March 1874 after developing a node on his sternum. Dr. Ferguson removed the node and treated Lehmann with mercury and iodine. Lehmann seemed to be much improved, but he returned to the hospital in September with the same symptoms. Dr. Ferguson stated that the growth on the trooper’s sternum was then as large as a closed fist. He removed this tumor and again treated the disease with chemicals including mercury and iodine, but the Lehmann continued to suffer from the ailment. Lehmann’s was killed at the Little Bighorn, a fate that likely saved him from much physical misery and the development of severe mental problems. Three other Germans with syphilis were also killed in the battle, Robert Barth from Pforzheim and Anton Dohman and Henry Carl Voight from Hanover. 48

Skill Sets

The Germans and the Swiss probably joined the military for various reasons. Some likely sought adventure or wanted to demonstrate their patriotism for their adopted country, but most probably enlisted for financial reasons, because they could not find jobs. Most of these men were likely down on their luck due to the Panic of 1873 in the

47 Wert, Custer, 34. See also Shirley A. Leckie, Elizabeth Bacon Custer and the Making of a Myth (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 1993), 48, 84.
United States, which led to a lengthy economic depression during which as much as one third of the work force was unemployed. One prominent historian stated, "For workers, the depression was nothing short of a disaster . . . [and] widespread unemployment appeared in the major urban centers." 49 The condition could have been worse for Germans, Swiss, and other foreigners because many employers hired only native-born Americans.

The highly-effective and much-copied German school system resulted in a relatively high literacy rate among German troops in the nineteenth century. Very few of the German soldiers were listed as illiterate. Among the illiterate were Conrad Baumbach from Berlin and Frederick Deetline from Offenheim. Many of the men had not been in the United States long before they joined the army, but they seemed to learn English rapidly. Carl Bruns from Brunswick was the only trooper who seemed to have continual trouble speaking and understanding English. 50

Many of the Germans in the Seventh Cavalry were little more than semi-skilled workers before they joined the army, and this was the group that was hit hardest by the depression. The Germans had held a wide sweep of jobs, and the men mentioned forty-two different former occupations when they joined the army. The largest number of Germans listed their former occupation as laborer (twenty-one), which probably meant that they did whatever jobs they could find. The next largest group (sixteen) was made up of clerks and bookkeepers, which were occupations that required training. Farmers and gardeners (fourteen) made up the third largest group. Some of the Germans came from occupations requiring more training included musicians (seven), tailors (five), blacksmiths and farriers (three), machinists (three), and locksmiths and gunsmiths (three). Perhaps the most well-educated German in the unit was Charles A. Stein, who was a veterinary surgeon from Prussia. A few of the men had skills that would aid them during their service, including teamsters and

50 Williams, Military Register, 37, 50.
harness makers (six) and former soldiers (six).

The men's occupations before they joined the army often had little to do with the assignments they were given in the service. For some reason, the Seventh Cavalry used a very large percentage of Germans as cooks, even though only one German listed his occupation as cook, three as butcher, one as brewer, and four as bakers. Forty-eight men (37 percent) of the Germans served as cooks, three as bakers, and one worked in the kitchen some-time in their military career. None of the Swiss were used as cooks.

It is unclear why the army used so many Germans as cooks. The Germans probably had no more skill in cooking army rations than did soldiers from other nationalities, but some of them might have learned about baking German pastries from their mothers. The Germans could be innovative cooks, and they made some unusual foods. Probably to the delight of his companions, Jacob Huff from Bavaria used his skill as a baker to brew two barrels of beer for the centennial celebration of the United States in July 1876, using what materials that were available including wild hops, oats, and yeast cakes.\(^{51}\)

The Germans and Swiss had more cultural education than did many of the men from other countries, and the men from those Germanic states had considerable musical talent. Of the seventeen men in the band of the Seventh Cavalry, seven were Germans, and two were Swiss. In addition, the regiment's chief trumpeter was Henry Voss from Hanover.\(^{52}\)

Many of the Swiss were also little more than semi-skilled workers before enlisting, and they probably had been unable to find jobs. Three listed their occupations as farmer: Robert Senn, Vincent Charley, and Ludwig Borter; and two as laborer, Frank Braun and John Lattman. The more skilled Swiss men included: one saddler, John Tritten; one butcher, John Rauter; one carpenter, Francis Pittet; one upholsterer, Frederick Lehman; one horseshoer, John King; and two musicians, Edmond Burlis and Joseph Kneubuhler.

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\(^{51}\) Williams, *Military Register*, 159.

\(^{52}\) Williams, *Military Register*, 298, 350. Williams listed sixteen members of the band, but he forgot to include Jacob Huff in the list on page 350. See also page 159.
While five of the Swiss were already in military service before the economic depression struck, seven of them joined in 1873 and 1875. The term of enlistment was five years. Three men enrolled on October 4, 1873: John Lattman and John Rauter in Philadelphia and Ludwig Borter in New York. John Tritten had left the service in 1871, but he reenlisted on December 22, 1873. John King entered the army on September 22, 1875 in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Frank Braun and Robert Senn joined the following day in Philadelphia. Edmond Burlis, Vincent Charley, and Frederick Lehman had joined in 1871. Charley reenlisted in 1876 before the Little Bighorn campaign, but the term of enlistment of the other two did not expire until after the battle in June 1876.\(^5\)

Some of the men in the army in 1876 had little formal training and little practice with their weapons. New recruits were often sent to their units with little practical instruction. As Major Lewis Merrill of the Seventh Cavalry complained in 1872; “recruits are sent to the cavalry companies with practically no knowledge whatever of their duties.” An official report made in the following year stated much the same. Men arrived at their units “knowing nothing of the use of arms, or even the position of a soldier.”\(^5\) What formal military training the recruits received was simplistic, and was designed only to make the men look good while on parade.

The soldiers were issued only fifteen rounds of ammunition per month for marksmanship practice. The cavalry used the model 1873 Springfield trapdoor rifle which had a strong kick, and many men instinctively flinched when shooting the weapon because they knew the weapon would recoil violently. This habit often threw off their aim, causing them to miss their targets. Private Peter Thompson, who served in Company C of the Seventh Cavalry, admitted that he had been scared “spitless” every time he fired the weapon because he knew the recoil would hurt his shoulder.\(^5\)

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\(^5\) As cited in Coffman, *The Old Army*, 336.

\(^5\) Thompson as cited in Philbrick, *The Last Stand*, 41.
The model 1873 Springfield rifle was a single-shot device that had to be reloaded every time it was fired. The cavalry used the carbine version of the rifle because it had a shorter barrel and could be carried much more easily on horseback. But the shorter barrel meant that it had a shorter range than the longer-barreled version the infantry carried. The Springfield rifle was accurate to 250 yards. It could kill at greater ranges, and it could shoot a bullet up to 1,000 yards, but hitting a target at such extreme range was mostly accidental, and the penetrating power of the bullet was much reduced at such distances, making the weapon much less lethal. The army used the rifle because it was effective at the distances at which most fighting took place in conventional battles such as those in the Civil War, where most of the combat occurred at distances from 100 to 200 yards. In the hands of a skillful soldier, the rifle could be fired as many as seventeen times each minute. Most importantly, the rifle was also inexpensive.

The government was so interested in saving money that it overlooked the severe defects in the Springfield rifle, which tended to jam because the use of copper casings in the cartridge. When the weapon became hot after several shots were fired rapidly, the copper casing often became soft and failed to eject. At that point, the soldier had to pry it out of the breech of the rifle with a knife to load another round. Brass cartridges jammed less frequently, but they were more expensive and therefore were not issued to the troops.

A major problem with the Springfield rifle at the Battle of the Little Bighorn probably related to the dust and dirt on the battlefield. The cavalry threw up large columns of dust when they marched, and combat caused the same problem. The troopers often had to lie down on the ground while shooting, and the dust and dirt caused many of the rifles to jam. The failure of the Springfield to eject a spent cartridge in the heat of battle when the enemy was near would render the weapon almost useless and could cost a man his life. The deficiencies in the weapon were very apparent to many of the men in the cavalry and some

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57 Philbrick, *The Last Stand*, 177-78, 183.
58 Richard Allan Fox, Jr., *Archaeology, History, and Custer's Last Battle: The Little Big Horn Reexamined* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 1993), 239-42.
refused to use it. Men who could afford better rifles, such as officers and scouts, often discarded the Springfield for better weapons.

The men in the cavalry had a reputation as poor shots. In the battle of the Rosebud on June 17, 1876, the troopers shot about 25,000 rounds of ammunition to inflict less than one hundred casualties, killed and wounded, on the Indians. That meant that the cavalrymen hit their marks only once in 250 shots on the average. The marksmanship in that battle was so poor that one author has suggested the soldiers may have been intentionally missing their targets.\(^ {59}\)

Many new soldiers had no experience with horses, and some had never been on a horse before they joined the army. The troopers also never practiced firing from horseback. This lack of practice had serious consequences in battle because many soldiers had not been trained to fight from their mounts. Also, many horses were not used to gunfire, and were therefore often skittish and unreliable in combat.\(^ {60}\)

Many of the men in the Seventh Cavalry were new to the army. As Philbrick summed up: “A quarter of the troopers were new to the regiment in the last year; 15 percent were raw recruits, with approximately a third having joined since the fall of 1875.” The new recruits had to learn their trade by the example of the older soldiers and by the experience of campaigns.\(^ {61}\)

**Experience and Pay**

This was not the case with the Germans in the Seventh Cavalry because most of them 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 of them—Aloys Bohner,

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60 Donovan, *A Terrible Glory*, 121.

61 Philbrick, *The Last Stand*, 41.
William Frank, and Charles Haak—had joined between 1853 and 1856. Fifteen of these men had fought in the Civil War, and many of them were in the thick of fighting in that conflict.

John Frett was from Prussia, and his left shoulder had been injured twice during the Civil War, once in 1862, when he was thrown from a horse, and again in 1864. Aloys Bohner from Baden was discharged from the army in April 1863 on a medical disability, probably due to syphilis, but he reenlisted that following September. He was captured by the Confederates on July 30, 1864, and was released on parole on November 20 of that same year. Anthony Assadaly from Prussia was wounded at the Battle of Fredericksburg on Dec. 12, 1862, and he also received a gunshot wound to his left hip on May 15, 1864 at Old Church, Virginia.

A few of the Germans served in the Prussian army or in the armed forces of other states before they came to the United States. Otto Hagemann was from Hanover, and his military record stated he “served 3 yrs in German army.” Otto Durselew was from Frankfurt am Main, and he apparently claimed he had been a lieutenant in the Prussian Army during the Franco-Prussian War. August C. Finckle from Berlin told his German friend, Charles Windolph, that he had served as a captain in the German Army. If these reports were accurate, two proud German officers had fallen to minor positions in the army because Durselew was only a private and Finckle was a sergeant in the Seventh Cavalry.62

The men in the army faced many hardships, including fatigue and boredom, and the pay was poor. The men frequently complained about their wages. A popular chant often repeated by the soldiers expressed their opinion of their low compensation: “A dollar a day is damn poor pay, but thirteen a month is less.”63 In 1876, a private in the army made only $13 each month, and the highest pay for an enlisted man was $23 a month for a sergeant major. The wages of the enlisted men increased a dollar per month after three years and went

62 Williams, Military Register, 146 and Hardorff, Rosters, 66-67, 95.
63 As cited in, Don Rickey, Jr. Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay: The Enlisted Soldier Fighting the Indian Wars (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 1963), 96.
up by another dollar each month in the fourth and fifth years. These increases were incentives to retain the men, but a trooper received these bonuses only when he was discharged from the army, if he had served well. As a point of comparison, Leland Stanford paid "skilled" workers on the Central Pacific Railroad in 1868 "three to six dollars per day, whereas wagonmen earned ten dollars a day."  

The salary for a second lieutenant was $125 each month, or nearly ten times as much as a private made, and the pay for a lieutenant Colonel (Custer's rank) was $250 a month. This amount increased 10 percent for every five years the officer served. The officers also received additional compensation for such items as housing and fuel for cooking and heating.  

The vast majority of Germans in the Seventh Cavalry were the ninety-nine privates, who made the lowest pay. The twelve German sergeants made $22 a month each. The German chief trumpeter also made $22 a month, but the other four trumpeters probably made the same pay as a private. The five corporals made $15 a month, while the two farriers, two blacksmiths, and the three saddlers made $15 each. The only wagoner made $14 a month. The highest-paid Germans in the unit were the citizen packer, John Frett, at $50 a month, and the veterinarian surgeon, Charles A. Stein, who made $100 a month. Nine of the Swiss in the Seventh Cavalry in 1876 were privates. Two Swiss were listed as blacksmiths, Charley and King; and only one had the higher rank of saddler-sergeant, Tritten.  

Fortunately, the recruits had few expenses. Their jobs were secure, and they usually had tolerable shelter and something to eat. However, many have considered it the right of every soldier in the US Army to complain, and the troops had much to lament. The men were issued bad food with little nutrition and often no vegetables. One trooper simply stated: "The food was very poor." Gardens were often planted at government forts where the weather permitted, but  

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65 Williams, *Military Register*, 397.
the availability of vegetables was sporadic at best. Men complained in the 1870s that they were issued hardtack crackers that were made for men fighting in the Civil War ten years earlier. The troopers often had to purchase additional food with their meager pay. They were also issued uniforms that were made for the Civil War, and these items of clothing soon fell apart.\textsuperscript{66}

When they were not on campaigns, the men were housed in barracks with many other soldiers. These were long buildings that allowed for little privacy, and the soldiers were often disturbed by the noise and activities of the others. The men were kept together often for years in the same company to which they were assigned when they enlisted. "The men . . . lived in extremely close relationship with one another, and the members of one company usually did not associate with men from other companies. The company tended to be a self-contained social as well as military unit."\textsuperscript{67} Some men felt like they did not belong in this social circle, but many others developed a strong sense of comradery after spending so much time together. These bonds were strengthened by the fact these soldiers suffered and faced hardship together, and they knew on whom they could rely on each other in desperate circumstances.

Charles Windolph’s Background

Charles Windolph was a typical German soldier in the Seventh Cavalry. He was born on December 9, 1851 in Bergen, Germany, and his father, Joseph was a “master shoe maker,” who taught the trade to his son. Prussia annexed Bergen in 1866, and Windolph seemed to feel little loyalty to his new country. He was eighteen when the Franco-Prussian War started in 1870, and he knew he would soon be drafted into the cavalry, so he left for the United States to avoid military service. He arrived in New York with only $2.50 and speaking fewer than a dozen words of English. He found life in the city to be very challenging until he “met a cripple who could talk German.” The

\textsuperscript{66} Rickey, \textit{Forty Miles a Day}, 117-23.

\textsuperscript{67} Rickey, \textit{Forty Miles a Day}, 49.
man got Windolph a job in a shoe shop, but Windolph had trouble because the American method of making shoes was different from the method he had learned in Germany. “Finally an old man who was working next to me, and who talked German, told me to join the army and learn English so that I could amount to something.” The elderly man even accompanied Windolph to the army recruiting office where Windolph joined the service in November 1871.68

In 1870 the American Civil War had ended only five years earlier, and the memory of that horrible conflict was vivid in many people’s minds. Even though many men were unemployed at the time, few Americans were interested in joining the army. “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 certainly 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. There were hundreds of us German boys in that same fix.”69

The army brought Windolph’s group of three or four Germans was to Nashville, Tennessee, where they were assigned to Company H of the Seventh Cavalry. They were sworn into the service by the company commander, Captain Frederick Benteen, an experienced soldier with Dutch ancestry. Windolph took the oath to join the army even

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68 Windolph, I Fought with Custer, 3-4.
69 Windolph, I Fought with Custer, 4.
though he could not yet understand enough English to know what Benteen was saying. The new recruit had some practice with rifle drill in Germany, and he rapidly adjusted to the American method. Before the men in his company learned his name was Charles [Charlie], they initially called him typical nickname for Germans, “Dutchy,” “Sauerkraut,” and once in a while “Heinie.” Windolph’s early years of service were “pretty dull.” His company was stationed in the South, and they spend most of their time trying to destroy the Ku Klux Klan and to catch illegal whiskey distillers. 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.”

The Seventh Cavalry had spent years in the late 1860s fighting Indians in Kansas, and the “old-timers,” who had been on those campaigns, “could sure tell some blood-curdling Indian stories.” They said that the Indians would slowly torture any captive to death, and “they told all of us young soldiers, if we were ever wounded in an Indian fight and left behind in danger of being captured, that we must save our last cartridge to blow out our own brains.”

Windolph explained about the pride the men felt being in the military and in serving with the Seventh Cavalry. “You felt you were somebody when you were on a good horse, with a carbine dangling from its small leather ring socket on your McClellan 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 that his opinion was shared by everyone in the Seventh Cavalry: “It was a fine regiment, right enough. And

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71 Windolph, I Fought with Custer, 4-5.
72 Windolph, I Fought with Custer, 6.
there wasn’t a man in it who didn’t believe it was the greatest cavalry outfit in the entire United States Army.”

**Germans and Swiss in the Seventh Cavalry in 1876**

At the Little Bighorn, the Seventh Cavalry was comprised of twelve companies. The largest company was Company B with seventy-six men, while the smallest was Company H with fifty-seven men. The total number of men in these companies was 808, and the average number of men in all the companies was about sixty-seven. Germans were found in each of these companies and were spread fairly evenly among the troops, with an average of ten Germans in each company. Company B had the smallest number of Germans with four while K had the largest number with eighteen. Company F had fourteen Germans in it while H and G had fewer (seven and eight, respectively). The other companies had comparable numbers of Germans in them: Companies A, E, and I had nine each, while Companies Dan and L had ten each, and C an M had eleven each. In addition to the seven members of the band, there were one citizen packer, one chief trumpeter, one commissary sergeant, and one veterinarian surgeon from Germany who were not assigned to any particular company.

Many of these men were not at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, because they had other assignments and were on detached service at the time. When Custer moved from Fort Abraham Lincoln in the Dakota Territory, he left some men there. Later, he established the Powder River depot at the junction of the Powder and the Yellowstone Rivers. He decided to leave his wagon train there because he thought it would slow him down, and he advanced with a pack train. Subtracting this absent manpower, the Seventh Cavalry had about 584 men at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. The average number of men in each of the twelve companies in the Seventh Cavalry was reduced to forty-eight. The largest company then was M with fifty-eight men, while G was the smallest with thirty-five.

Of the 131 Germans in the Seventh Cavalry, at least five remained at Fort Abraham Lincoln to tend the gardens, and one stayed in the bakery. Six were sick, including Jacob Bauer from Baden, who had a fever; John Zametzer from Bavaria, who had a lung infection; and Anton Hutter also from Bavaria, who had been in a government hospital in Washington, DC, for the insane since 1872. Three men were absent because they had deserted, and one of these, John Muller from Hamburg, was in confinement and forced to do hard labor as punishment for his crimes.

Twenty-seven men were left at the Powder River depot including the seven Germans in the band. Curiously, three additional Germans who were not assigned to that unit stayed with the band at the Powder River depot. The actual number of Germans in the battle or on detached service remains uncertain because a few of the records were unclear. Francis Hegner from Berlin may have been on detached service at the Powder River depot, or perhaps he came to the battle with the pack train.\(^{74}\)

Assuming Hegner was at the Powder River depot, a total of fifty-three Germans had other assignments in June 1876 and escaped the hardships of the campaign and the misery of combat. The remaining seventy-eight Germans soon faced one of the greatest military ordeals in the history of the American West. These men were scattered among the twelve companies. B had the lowest number of Germans at three, while K had the largest number at ten. C, I, and H had four each. E and G had six each, D and L had seven each, and A and M had eight each. F had nine Germans. In addition, Henry Voss was a member of Custer’s staff as chief trumpeter, and John Frett was a citizen packer.

Of the twelve men from Switzerland in the Seventh Cavalry, five of them were absent from that unit during the Little Bighorn campaign, allowing them to escape the hardships of the campaign and battle. The two Swiss musicians in the regiment, Joseph Kneubuhler and Edmond Burlis, were left with the band.\(^{75}\) Ludwig Borter joined

\(^{74}\) Williams, *Military Register*, 152; and Hardorff, *Rosters*, 123.

\(^{75}\) Williams, *Military Register*, 51, 179.
the army in 1873, but he deserted in 1875. He was arrested on June 13, 1876, and he was in confinement at the time of the battle. He escaped again in August.\textsuperscript{76} Francis Pittet was on detached service at Fort Rice in the Dakota Territory starting in May 1876, and he was not with the Seventh Cavalry during the campaign. While Pittet was considered to be a valuable carpenter, he drank too much, which hurt his effectiveness as a combat soldier. John Tritten, an important saddler, was placed on detached service on June 14, 1876 at camp Powder River, Montana, and took no part in the campaign and battle.

The remaining seven Swiss, who were with the regiment during the engagement, were assigned to various companies. Two were with Company C, Rauter and King; two were in Company M, Braun and Senn; and one each was in companies D (Charley), G (Lattman), and I (Lehman). Frank Braun and Robert Senn were both twenty-seven years old. They joined the service on the same day, September 23, 1875, at the same place, Louisville, Kentucky, and they both joined company M on October 21, 1875. They likely were close friends who chose to serve together.\textsuperscript{77}

\section*{Background to War}

The Battle of the Little Bighorn was part of the Great Sioux War of 1876-7, which started when the US government tried to negate the Treaty of Fort Laramie of 1868. According to that agreement, large sections of what is now Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana, and South Dakota would belong to the native peoples forever, including the Black Hills of South Dakota, the most sacred lands of the Sioux. The treaty stated that, no white person “shall ever be permitted to pass over, settle upon, or reside in the territory.”\textsuperscript{78}

The United States refused to keep the treaty for long. The economic depression that started in 1873 continued for years, and the

\textsuperscript{76} Carroll, \textit{They Rode with Custer}, 33.
\textsuperscript{77} Williams, \textit{Military Register}, 43, 46, 51, 67, 178, 179, 187, 189, 243-44, 249, 269, 291.
\textsuperscript{78} "Treaty with the Sioux ... 1868" in \textit{Indian Treaties 1778-1883}, ed. Charles J. Kappler (New York: Interland, 1972), 998.
government believed that discoveries of gold and silver could give the sluggish economy the stimulus it badly needed. The sacred lands of the Black Hills in South Dakota were possible places to find such metals. In a glaring treaty violation, George Armstrong Custer was ordered to take the Seventh Cavalry on an expedition into the Black Hills in 1874. The incursion was illegal because it broke the Treaty of Fort Laramie. The reasons for the invasion seemed to be innocent because Custer’s men were supposedly on Sioux lands to explore, to survey a new route near fort Laramie, and to find a good site for a fort. But in reality, the expedition was a military invasion and an act of war. Many civilians looking for gold accompanied the expedition, and when these prospectors found the precious metal, they set off a gold rush, and many white men hurried into the sacred Black Hills.\(^\text{79}\)

This started the largest Indian war in the history of the American West which would cost many hundreds of lives. When the Sioux refused to sell the lands for a pittance, the Department of the Interior ordered all the Sioux to report to their reservations by January 31, 1876 or face military action. This ultimatum was virtually a declaration of war. Many Indians did not get the message until it was too late to trudge through the snow in time to meet the deadline, and those who did arrive at the reservations by the specified time were soon hungry because the agencies had too little food for them.\(^\text{80}\)

Captain Frederick Benteen clearly stated in 1879 what he considered to be the reasons for the “Indian outbreaks,” which was the starvation of the native peoples. “I think the Indian bureau has been entirely responsible, and the cause [of the outbreaks] has been the enormous pilfering and stealing from the Indians.” He added, “If they were treated more considerately and received what the government allows them, I think there is no doubt they would be perfectly peaceful and tractable.” He aimed his accusations specifically at the Indian agents responsible for feeding the Natives. “Their acts have created dissatisfaction among the savages [Indians] which they have been


unable to suppress. No agent can save $13,000 or $15,000 annually legitimately out of a salary of $1,500, and yet numbers of them do it.”

The Sioux were being cheated and starved, and they had little choice but to leave the reservations and be considered hostile.

Ben Arnold, a keen observer and a participant in the war, assessed the situation well. He stated that all the “fighting the Indians did was in self-defense.” He added, “Of all the wars in which the United States has been engaged, the least justification is found in the Sioux War of 1876. The Interior Department can never wash its hands of this crime.”

The Indians who left the reservations had little choice but to go to the only place in the West where they could find large herds of buffalo, because the animal was their main source of food. Tens of millions of buffalo had roamed the Great Plains of North America, but hide hunters converged on the animals in the 1870s and slaughtered them in huge numbers. The federal authorities realized that the destruction of the bison would solve the Indian problem, and government officials often gave hunters free ammunition for their task. In 1875 Sheridan praised the hunters, “These men have done in the last two years, and will do more in the next year, to settle the vexed Indian question than the entire regular army has done in the last thirty years. . . . Send them powder and lead, if you will; but for the sake of a lasting peace let them kill, skin, and sell until the buffaloes are exterminated.”

The German, Charles Windolph, understood the situation. “Once the buffalo, around whose existence the whole economy of the Indian was based, was killed off the nomads had nothing to do but submit to government control and become Agency Indians, degraded, whiskey-crazed, beaten.” By 1876, there were only a few thousand

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buffalo left, and most of which were found in the area near the borders of the modern states of Wyoming, Montana, and North and South Dakota. This was the last year the Indians could hope to live in their native environment and enjoy their culture because the bison would soon be gone.  

The Campaign to the Little Bighorn

In the early summer of 1876, the army planned to crush the Sioux and Cheyenne Indians between three columns. General John Gibbon marched east, General George Crook marched north, and General Alfred Terry advanced west. Terry was joined by the Seventh Cavalry, which was stationed at Fort Abraham Lincoln in the Dakota Territory. General Terry soon told the soldiers that they would come back to Fort Lincoln only after Sitting Bull and his followers had been caught, and the men knew they faced a long, hard campaign.

The trumpeter, Henry C. Dose from Holstein, Germany, was an experienced soldier, and he knew much about the ordeal he and his good friend, Sergeant Edward Botzer from Bremerhaven, would soon be facing. He wrote to his wife on June 8, 1876. “I wish for mine [my] part we would meet him [Sitting Bull] tomorrow. Sergeant Botzer and me we come to the conclusion, it is better anyhow to be home baking flapjacks. When we get home we will pay up for this, and bake flapjacks all the time.” Dose and Botzer never got their wish because they both soon died in battle.

Windolph, wrote about the courage of the troopers at the beginning of the campaign: “I suppose we all knew by this time that we’d be hitting into a dangerous country. But ... I don’t believe many of the troopers were very worried. We knew there’d be some hard fighting, but a soldier always feels that it’s the other fellow who’s going to get it. Never himself.” Shortly before the troopers left on

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86 For another view on the destruction of the buffalo, see Andrew C. Isenberg, The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920 (New York: Cambridge, 2000).

87 Dose to his wife 8 June 8, 1876, as cited in Rickey, Forty Miles a Day, 230.
the expedition there was one last call for letters. Windolph, who was far away from home, indicated some loneliness. “Of course, I didn’t have anybody to write to,” while many of the other men and officers “hurriedly scribbled letters to their dear ones.”

Custer took the Seventh Cavalry and left Terry’s column at noon on June 22, 1876, and pushed his men hard in the attempt to catch the Indians before they could scatter. His men often referred to Custer’s impressive stamina by calling him “iron butt” and “hard ass” because of his ability to stay in the saddle for long marches.

The column advanced seventy-five miles from June 22 to June 24, but the tired troopers were allowed little sleep that evening, and they were again on the march at 11:30 p.m. on June 24. After covering another ten miles, they were allowed a brief rest at 2 a.m. Captain Frederick Benteen stated that the men were “going into the fight, after an almost continuous march of 84 [eighty-five?] miles.”

The advance continued at dawn on the morning of June 25, 1876, and the men progressed another ten miles before Custer gave the orders for the deployment of his forces for battle. Lieutenant Edward S. Godfrey estimated that the men had marched even larger distances. “It has been asserted that the command was subject to long and exhausting marches. They were: June 22nd, 12 miles; June 23rd, 33 to 35 miles; June 24th, 28 miles; then June 24th at 11:30 p.m., about 8 miles; then from the divide between the Rosebud and the Little Big Horn to the battle, about 20 miles; in all about 113 miles.”

The Seventh Cavalry marched an average distance of over thirty-five miles each day. Captain Benteen complained that he had not slept at all during the first two nights of the campaign and had slept very little on the third. Major Marcus Reno agreed that the march was challenging, and it “had been harder on the men than on the horses. The men were badly in need of sleep because they had been

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88 Windolph, I Fought with Custer, 68.
89 Connell, Son of the Morning Star, 184.
up in the saddle.”93 The men were exhausted just when their endurance would be sorely tried by two days of battle.

Estimates of the size of the Indian village by contemporary observers vary considerably, but the camp was doubtless very large. There were likely between 1,000 and 2,000 lodges in the encampment, with about two warriors to every dwelling, meaning that the Indian warriors numbered between 2,000 and 4,000 men. After a thorough discussion of the sources on the number of warriors, Edgar Stewart concluded, “The probability is that there were not more than four thousand warriors, and possibly not that many.”94

More recent scholarship has tended to estimate that the number of warriors present at the Little Bighorn was much lower. One stated that only 800 to 1200 Indians warriors participated in the battle.95 These numbers appear to be too modest in view of the numerous reports of the size of the village. Likely, at least 2,000 to 3,000 Indian men were in position to defend the village and engage Custer’s men. But this still does not answer the question of how many warriors actually took part in the battle because many of them likely stayed in the village to protect their families rather than attack the army. The Seventh Cavalry probably had to deal with 1,000 to 2,000 warriors who came out to meet the troops.96

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94 Stewart, Custer’s Luck, 309-12.
95 Jay Smith, “A Hundred Years Later,” in Custer and his Times, 104.
96 Fox, Custer’s Last Battle, 255.
The night before the battle F. F. Girard, an interpreter for the Indian scouts with the cavalry, gave Custer a reasonable estimate of the numbers of his adversaries. The commander "asked me how many Indians I thought he would have to fight and I told him not less than 2500." Modern scholarship might state that Girard's estimate was a little high, but Custer had every reason to believe that the entire Seventh Cavalry was outnumbered about four to one. Custer probably did not believe Girard's numbers, but the cavalry leader should have given them some credence.

According to a careful calculation by the scholar, Roger L. Williams, the cavalry numbered about 566 enlisted men, twenty-six officers, twenty-nine Indian scouts, and nineteen armed civilians for a total of 640 men. But Custer divided his forces into smaller groups, and his column of five companies that was annihilated numbered only about 210 to 220 men. If this group faced 1,500 Indian warriors, then the troopers were outnumbered nearly seven to one. Custer had boasted that his men could defeat any number of warriors, and this assessment was soon tested.

Custer and his men arrived in the hills above the Indian camp at the Little Bighorn on June 25 too late in the day to stage a surprise attack at dawn, but the commander thought he could still strike the encampment before the Sioux and Cheyenne had time to flee, if he moved quickly and decisively. The commander's biggest mistake at the battle was to believe that his enemies were interested only in escaping, and he never seemed to consider the possibility seriously that his adversaries would stay and fight. Custer thought he could apprehend the Indians by converging on them in three separate groups. Half-Yellow-Face, an Indian scout with the cavalry, begged Custer not to attack the village: "Do not divide your men. There are too many of the enemy for us, even if we all stay together. If you must fight, keep us all together." When the commander refused, the scout warned Custer that they would be killed: "You and I are going home today, and by a trail that is strange to us both."

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97 F. F. Girard, "Testimony," in Reno Court of Inquiry, 35, 42.
98 Williams, Military Register, 17-18, 348, 363, 366.
99 Frank Linderman, Plenty-Coups: Chief of the Crows (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 1962), 175.
Captain Frederick Benteen was also concerned about dividing the command. When the German trooper, Charles Windolph, came to see Benteen about exchanging horses with another soldier, he found Benteen and Custer discussing the deployment of forces. The scout, Charley Reynolds, was with the two officers and was discussing “the biggest bunch of Indians I had ever seen.” They were all taking “very earnestly,” and Benteen finally concluded, “Hadn’t we better keep the regiment together? If that is a big camp we will need every man we have.” Custer dismissed all these arguments with a terse statement, “You have your orders.” He then called on the men “to horse,” which meant everyone should get on his mount and advance as ordered.100

Custer ignored the warnings, and he recklessly divided his command in the face of a numerically superior force. He gave Captain, Frederick Benteen, a battalion comprising three Companies D, H, and K with vague orders to ride away from the main column and “pitch in” to any target he might find.101 Custer gave his second in command, Major Marcus Reno, another battalion comprised of Companies A, G, and M, while the commander kept the largest force under his personal control consisting of Companies C, E, F, I, and L. Custer ordered Reno to advance across the Little Bighorn River and strike the Indian encampment while he took his troops to attack the side of the village farther down the stream.

**The Germans and Swiss with Reno in the Valley Fight**

Reno’s men galloped down a ravine and crossed the river about three miles from the village. The major sent company M on the left flank, which included eight Germans and two Swiss, Frank Braun and Robert Senn, while company A with another eight Germans was in the center. Company G with five Germans and one Swiss, John Lattman, was on the right. Six Germans were actually assigned to company G, but Henry C. Dose, a trumpeter from Holstein, was with

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Custer's column and did not participate in Reno's attack on the village. Twenty-one Germans and three Swiss were with Reno's forces, and they comprised almost twenty percent of the total.

Reno advanced with about 130 soldiers and with an additional twenty-two army scouts. Most of the troopers were in the three companies but many scouts were with them as well. Before the forces were engaged, Roman Rutten's horse almost ran away with him, and the German from Baden had trouble controlling the animal. Rutten believed that his horse had smelled the Indians and had become unmanageable by fear. He tried to control the horse, but it kept trying to run away. At one point, the horse became so confused that it ran straight for the Indian village far ahead of the rest of the cavalry. The mount circled to the right, and Rutten finally got back to the command.102

John H. Meier from Hanover, who was called "Snapsy" by the other soldiers, had a similar problem probably early in the battle when his "horse got away from him and bolted through the Indian's line." The animal probably took the German all the way to the village, and he was in a desperate situation. He pulled out his pistol and tried to fight his way back to the cavalry lines. Apparently, the troopers thought he had little chance of survival, "but he got back to us, shooting his way out with his six gun." His safe return almost seemed to be a miracle. As one observer stated, "how he ever did this is a mystery."103 Meier saved his life by his resourcefulness and courage, but he was also very lucky.

Custer led his forces across the ridge line to strike the Indian camp farther down the river, while Major Reno's forces attacked the village farther upstream. Henry Petring from Prussia looked up and saw Custer on a hill watching Reno's advance, and the German saw the commander wave his hat in support of the attack before he rode away. Some of the other men also saw their leader on the hill, and they said, "There goes Custer. He is up to something, for he is waving his hat."104

103 Daniel Newell as cited in Carroll, They Rode with Custer, 173.
104 Hardorff, Rosters, 141.
Petring probably did not watch the hill long because he had a more pressing concern at hand. He was soon engaged in heavy fighting.

Major Reno knew that the village facing him was very large, and it clearly could have contained hundreds of warriors. He realized that charging a huge village on horseback with his small force was nearly suicidal, so he ordered his men to dismount, create a skirmish line, and advance on foot. This disposition stabilized the line, but the men could advance only slowly and the troopers lost much tactical flexibility because they could no longer maneuver on horseback. Additionally, every fourth trooper had to be detached to hold the horses, and this disposition effectively reduced the effective fighting force to little more than one hundred men.¹⁰⁵

The men carried the model 1873 Springfield rifle carbine with fifty rounds of ammunition which most of them kept in their cartridge belts or in their pockets. In addition, they kept another fifty rounds in their saddle bags. They could have fired their ammunition

¹⁰⁵ Many of the accounts by the officers in Reno’s and Benteen’s battalions are found in Reno Court of Inquiry.
rapidly and been left with shortages even in the early stages of battle. Each trooper also carried a six-shot Colt revolver. This pistol was effective only at close range because of poor accuracy, and only a skilled user could handle it effectively. While the hand-guns could be fired rapidly, they could only be reloaded slowly, which was a severe disadvantage in close combat.

The Indians soon responded to the troopers' advance, and hundreds of warriors swarmed out of the encampment to attack the soldiers. Reno's left flank was badly exposed, and the Indians were also advancing through the trees on his right. His men were badly outnumbered by their adversaries, and his entire force was on the verge of being encircled. Reno made the only reasonable decision under the circumstances, and he ordered his men to fall back toward the trees along the river to a more defensible position.

The troopers could not adequately defend the new position, and their situation was soon desperate as the Sioux closed in. Reno later admitted, "I knew I could not stay there unless I stayed forever." When possible, the soldiers ran to their horses to mount them and escape, but some of the soldiers were not so fortunate, and were forced to flee on foot. The scout, F. F. Girard, later stated that the men "were in a great hurry to get out—no order at all; every man was for himself." The trees that lined the Little Bighorn River provided some protection and a place to hide for some of the troopers, but that position was not defensible. Most of the soldiers ran back across the Little Bighorn and went up the opposite bank to create a defensive position on a bluff later known as Reno Hill.¹⁰⁶

The Germans in Company A suffered little in the fight in the valley because the company was in the center, and its flanks were protected by the other two units. Each of the Germans in that company retreated successfully to Reno Hill. Only Sergeant William

¹⁰⁶ Reno and Girard as cited in Reno Court of Inquiry, 214 and 41, respectively.
Heyn from Bremen was injured. When he was on the skirmish line, his rifle got jammed when he was unable to eject a spent shell from the weapon. The model 1873 Springfield rifle was so deficient that it did not even have a ramrod that the sergeant could use to force out the jammed cartridge. He had to borrow a ramrod from another man who carried a non-regulation “sporting rifle.” One man called to Heyn, “For God’s sake, Sergeant, take your horse—we’re going to retreat.”

In the retreat, Heyn reached his horse, but came under heavy fire. He tried to ride away, but he suffered a severe gunshot wound in the left knee. The bullet went through his knee into his horse. The animal was also shot through the neck and the rump. Two men helped Heyn reach the summit of Reno Hill, but his survival depended greatly on his horse. After saving Heyn’s life, the animal died the next morning.

Sergeant Henry Fehler from Hanover was also with Company A. He was about thirty-nine at the time, and the trooper was described as “an elderly German who was of a rather placid nature.” Fehler had charge of the company’s horses in the trees. He was also assigned to hold the guidon (unit flag) for Company A. Fehler’s horse became unruly, and he had trouble controlling the animal and holding onto the flag at the same time. He threw the guidon away, so it would not slow him down. The flag was a point of pride for the regiment, and losing it was a big disgrace.

Companies G and M were on the flanks and were subject to much more enemy action, and they suffered much heavier casualties. Four of the five Germans in Company G who advanced against the Indian village were killed. Sergeant Edward Botzer from Bremerhaven was riding on a horse named Goat when he tried to ford the river during the retreat. He managed to reach the east side of the stream before he was killed. His roster book was found in the Cheyenne village led by Dull Knife after the camp was taken by the cavalry on November 25, 1876.

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In the retreat, Corporal Otto Hagemann from Hanover reached his horse but the animal was shot out from under him. His countryman, Roman Rutten, rode up to him and urged the Corporal to hold onto his horse, but Hagemann failed, and was killed. His body was found near the river after the battle, and there were seventy-five well-defined wounds in the corpse by actual count. Also, his arms and legs had been cut off.\footnote{Hardorff, Rosters, 146. See also Richard G. Hardorff, The Custer Battle Casualties: Burials, Exhumations and Reinterments (El Segundo, CA: Upton, 2002), 124-5. (hereafter cited as Hardorff, Battle Casualties).}

The mutilation of enemy bodies was a common practice among the Indians and was part of their culture. The Native Americans often cut up their dead enemies believing that those adversaries would not have a complete body to use against them in the afterlife. But much of the mutilation of corpses at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, including the desecration of Hagemann’s body, was excessive. Most of the bodies of the troopers who died in battle were never identified because they had been so brutally mangled.\footnote{For a compilation of sources by Indians, see Richard G. Hardorff, ed. Indian Views of the Custer Fight: A Source Book (Spokane, WA: Clark, 2004). See also Graham, The Custer Myth, 3-112.}

John Rapp from Württemberg was holding horses in the relative protection of the trees. He was Lieutenant Donald McIntosh’s orderly, and the German was trying to give his officer a means of escape when Rapp was killed. Rapp’s attempt to help the lieutenant failed because McIntosh was also killed. Henry Seafferman from Strasbourg was also killed nearby. After the battle, his body was found in the trees along the river.\footnote{Hardorff, Rosters, 148.}

Henry Petring was the only German in Company G who survived the attack on the village, but he narrowly escaped death. When he ran back into the trees to get on his horse, he found the animal dead. In desperation, he took another man’s horse. He rode this horse into the river, and he saw “four or five Indians on the bank ahead of me and very near.” The German saw one of the warriors bring up his gun to shoot. In that instant, Petring knew he had to kill or be killed. “I knowing that I was in great danger and would have to act quickly
drew up my carbine without taking aim and fired, and both the pony and the Indian dropped.” In his haste to get away he jumped down from his horse and “started downstream as fast as I could in water waist deep or deeper.” After he had run several hundred yards, he looked back, and “I saw two of the Indians carrying off the one I had shot, and the pony still lay there as if dead.” The German probably owed his life to the fact that the other warriors were more concerned about caring for their friend than to pursue and kill the trooper.

Petring was still in great danger. In his flight from the warriors, he had gone back across the river, and he was on the wrong side of the stream from the defensive position the soldiers had established on the hill. “I immediately went under a stump and later into thick willows” to hide, but his situation was desperate, and he feared torture if he were captured. He wondered if the best course of action was to “shoot myself.” When he heard and saw someone coming, the German was very frightened until he saw “a gleam of sunshine reflected from a [military] button on his clothing.” Petring called to the man and was greatly relieved when the man called back, “It is [Benjamin] Johnson of G Company.” Other men joined them, “and we soon had quite a party—a dozen or so dismounted men.”

Lattman and another man tried to get to Reno’s defensive position on the hill, but they were chased to the bank of the river where the Swiss saw his companion shot from his horse and killed. Lattman hid in the trees, and he soon joined Petring’s group. These men in Company G were also joined by Henry Charles Weihe from Saxony who was in Company M. Weihe had been shot in the right arm, and his horse was killed. He had been left in the trees with Petring, Lattman, and the ten other men.114

The thirteen men in the trees were prepared to defend themselves if attacked. “Some [of us] had taken ammunition from saddle bags, and we had plenty of it.” The Indians did not come into the woods to attack this small group, “but they set the woods afire,” in an attempt to drive the troopers out into the open where they could

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114 Hardorff, Rosters, 32, 72, 138; Williams, Military Register, 187, 304; Carroll, They Rode with Custer, 264; and Petring in Hammer, Custer in ’76, 134.
be killed easily. Petring described the agony of his fellow German, Weihe, who “was wounded and making loud cries, and we were afraid the sound would attract the Indians, but they did not come in.” Fortunately, “the wind changed and blew the smoke [and fire] in another direction, and we had no danger from that source.”

The men stayed among the trees until sundown, and the scout, George Herendeen suggested the men try to rejoin Reno’s command on the hill. The attempt was risky because the men were not sure what awaited them on the top of the hill. “Up on the bluff we could see two guidons [unit flags] and a crowd of men but could not make out whether they were soldiers or Indians, but we took the chance and started out of the timber.” The Indians only fired a few shots at the fleeing men. In a carefully executed military maneuver, the troopers ran to the river, and half of them stood guard while the other half forded the river. Once across these men protected the other half while they crossed the stream. With an obvious sense of relief, Petring stated, “We all went up the bluffs together and joined Reno’s command on the hill.” The Swiss, Lattman, did not follow this group up the hill, and he reached the summit only after midnight. Many other men were still in a desperate situation as they fled, and many of them were not as fortunate as Petring and his group.

The Swiss, John Lattman of Company G, gave further information on the battle and his survival. Lattman had stood in Reno’s skirmish line, and he noted that the Indians shot too high to do real damage to the command, but the warriors soon took up a threatening position behind the soldiers forcing the troopers to retreat. When the orders came to mount up, Lattman could not find his horse probably because someone else had taken it. The Swiss and another man from Company A fell back into the trees and joined the others. Lattman asked his companion, “What’s the use of sitting here waiting for the Indians to route us out [?]. I will go to the edge of the timber and if the other men start to move, you let me know.” The Swiss became angry when he returned to find out the rest of the

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115 Petring in Hammer, *Custer in ’76*, 133-34.
The Germans and Swiss at the Battle of the Little Bighorn

men went to look for Reno’s command and his companion failed to tell him.\textsuperscript{117}

After a long time, the two men caught six cavalry horses that had gotten loose and tied them up. Fortunately, these animals gave the troopers a timely warning. “All at once the horses began to pick up their ears and look, but we could see nothing and I said we will have to look out and the Indians must be coming.” Lattman held his rifle in readiness to shoot, “when an Indian rode into the timber, but the Indian could not see me.” The Swiss thought that he needed to be cautious, and “I decided not to shoot unless he tried to shoot me.” When the warrior saw the trooper, he was so scared that he nearly fell off his pony, and the frightened warrior soon rode away. The two soldiers mounted horses and crossed the river to the east side in an attempt to reach Reno’s men.\textsuperscript{118}

Some Indians saw them and fired at the Swiss. “When we go on the other side [of the river], I ran against a bank so steep I could not get the horse out.” He finally left the animal at the river and went to hide in the thick brush. His companion was not so fortunate because an Indian shot the trooper off his horse, “and I saw him fall.” Lattman stayed in his position and “got my carbine and pistol ready for defense.” Finally, the Swiss again tried to find Reno’s men after dark, and he “saw a man whom I took for a soldier and as I walked up he challenged me and told me where the camp was.” Lattman had stayed hidden almost the entire night, “and it was nearly daylight when I joined the command on the hill.”\textsuperscript{119} The Swiss had been fortunate to survive.

Company M with its eight Germans and two Swiss was in an exposed position on the left flank when Major Reno marched toward the village. When the Indians counterattacked, at least five hundred warriors advanced on the flank protected by Company M, and the soldiers had to use their resourcefulness and skill to survive. Charles

\textsuperscript{118} Lattman, Custer and Company, 78-80.
\textsuperscript{119} Lattman, Custer and Company, 78-80.
Hanke, nicknamed “Bounce,” was from Breslau and served as a trumpeter. He suffered from alcoholism, and was Drunk so often that he was forced to leave the army in August 1875, but he reenlisted the following month under the name, Charles Fisher. The army clearly thought his drinking hurt his ability to perform his regular duties, but he certainly did well in battle.

When Lieutenant Benjamin Hodgson was retreating across the river, he was riding to the left of the German, William Heyn. The lieutenant was shot through the groin, and he fell from his horse into the water. The bullet apparently went through Hodgson and into his horse. The lieutenant begged someone to help him get across the river, and Charles Hanke, a German, came to his aid. Hanke rode to the officer and told him to hold onto his saddle stirrup, and the trooper pulled the badly-wounded man across the river. Reportedly, Charles Fisher, another German in the company, also attempted to help Hodgson, and reportedly he also helped the wounded officer cross the river. Unfortunately, the rescue by Hanke and Fisher was not completely successful because Hodgson was shot in the head and killed when he reached the opposite shore, but Hanke and Fisher both escaped.\(^{120}\)

Henry Klotzbucher from Baden was shot through the stomach just when he was trying to mount his horse. He yelled, “Oh, my God, I have got it,” and he fell to the ground. Two men tried to save the badly-wounded Klotzbucher by dragging him to heavy underbrush to hide his body, hoping that the Indians would not find him. The men who helped him could see that he would probably die from his wound. They left him a canteen of water, and they joined the flight of the other troopers, leaving the German to die. After the battle, the troopers returned to the spot and found Klotzbucher’s body.

\(^{120}\) Carroll, They Rode with Custer, 86-87; Williams, Military Register, 147-48; and Richard G. Hardorff, The Custer Battle Casualties II: The Dead, the Missing, and a Few Survivors (El Segundo, CA: Upton, 1999), 93-98 (hereafter cited as Hardorff, Casualties II).
Apparently, the Indians had failed to find his corpse because it had not been stripped or mutilated.\textsuperscript{121}

The fate of George Lorentz from Holstein was just as tragic. The German had been ordered to hold his horse and those of three other men, when he was shot. The bullet hit him in the back of the head and came out his mouth. He was also shot through the stomach, and “he fell forward on his saddle and dropped to the ground.” He was in great pain, and he realized that his companions could do nothing for him. Rather than ask them to risk their lives for him, he “refused to be assisted.” His body was found after the battle.\textsuperscript{122}

Roman Rutten believed that as many as two-hundred Indians rode up to the soldiers when they were desperately trying to escape. A few of these warriors fired at the troopers, but most of them were laughing at the men as they fled. Rutten saw his good friend, Isaiah Dorman, an African American, trying to make a stand by himself after his horse had been shot. Dorman was trying to sell his life as dearly as possible, but he called out, “Goodbye Rutten,” as the German fled nearby. Rutten came to Lieutenant Donald McIntosh who “was surrounded by twenty or thirty Indians, who were circling about him, apparently determined to get him.” The German’s frightened mount knew just what to do, and “the horse tore right across the circle of Indians of which McIntosh was the center, and on he went.” The animal clearly saved Rutten’s life, but McIntosh was killed.

When Rutten reached the river, he saw that the water was “full of horses and men struggling to get across.” The German wanted to stay out of the muddle, so he tried to cross farther down

\textsuperscript{121} Carroll, \textit{They Rode with Custer}, 140; Williams, \textit{Military Register}, 179; and Hardorff, \textit{Rosters}, 210-11.

\textsuperscript{122} John Ryan as cited in Carroll, \textit{They Rode with Custer}, 152 and Morris as cited in Hardorff, \textit{Rosters}, 211.
the stream, but the opposite bank of the river was too high and steep, "and men were riding both upstream and downstream trying to find some place to get up." Finally, the men made a dash for a "narrow trail cut by buffalo in going for water, which cut through the steep bank at a moderate incline." Before Rutten could get to this narrow means of escape, a horse had been shot, had fallen into the rut, "and was choking the passage." Someone quickly pulled the animal out, allowing many men to escape by that route.\textsuperscript{123} The two Swiss in Company M, Frank Braun and Robert Senn, successfully escaped to the defensive position on Reno Hill. The remaining Germans: George Heid, John H. Meier, and Henry Voight also got across the river and joined the remainder of the command on Reno Hill.

Custer had ordered Reno to attack the village, but his charge never carried him into the camp. He has often been severely criticized for his lack of aggressiveness, and some historians have speculated that if he had pressed his attack, the outcome of the battle might have been different. By one calculation, the cavalry had staged eighteen successful attacks on Indian villages between 1868 and 1878. In each case, the army had taken the village and "captured it with little resistance."\textsuperscript{124} These statistics, however, are misleading. On March 17, 1876, Joseph J. Reynolds led an attack by four hundred cavalrymen against a Cheyenne village that numbered about 250 warriors. Reynolds and his men surprised the warriors and took the encampment easily, but the Indians retreated into the hills and kept up firing on the cavalry. Even though Reynolds held the village long enough to destroy much of it, he realized he was in trouble, and he was forced to retreat.\textsuperscript{125}

Similarly, Ranald Mackenzie attacked a village of Cheyenne Indians under the chief, Dull Knife, on November 25, 1876. Mackenzie had his adversaries outnumbered one thousand to four hundred, and he and his men took the Indian village in a surprise attack at dawn. But the warriors fought back all day and kept a heavy fire directed at the troops which kept many of them pinned down. The cavalry

\textsuperscript{123} Rutten in Hammer, pp. 118-19.
\textsuperscript{124} Smith, p. 105.
\textsuperscript{125} Winkler, \textit{Die Schlacht am Rosebud}, pp. 18-35.
held onto the village long enough to destroy it, but they failed to
dominate the combat that followed the initial attack. In each case
the cavalry was able to take the village, but the counter attack by
the Indians proved to be most challenging. The troopers held their
position largely because they had their enemies badly outnumbered.
If Reno had charged into the village, the Sioux would have had him
heavily outnumbered, and this charge would have probably meant the
annihilation of the cavalry.

The Germans and Swiss with Custer’s Column

While Reno’s men were fighting for their lives, Custer had
taken his five companies to strike at the encampment to the north,
farther down the river. When the commander got his first good view
of the camp, he was very impressed by its size, and he realized that
he had sent Captain Benteen in the wrong direction. Custer knew he
needed reinforcements badly, and he immediately ordered his adjutant,
Lieutenant William W. Cooke, to send a note to Benteen ordering him
to return. This note is perhaps the most famous quote from the battle,
“Benteen, Come on, Big Village, Be Quick, Bring [ammunition]
Packs. P.S. Bring Packs.” This message was carried by John Martin
(Giovanni Martini), an Italian who spoke with a strong accent and had
trouble understanding English. The note he carried to Benteen and the
Captain’s reaction to it became one of the most controversial aspects
of the battle. Martin might have been the last cavalryman to see
Custer’s command while the men were still alive.

While many aspects of Custer’s Last Stand are still obscure,
certain facts have been established. Custer’s men clearly had little
chance when many hundreds of warriors struck. The troopers were
badly outnumbered and faced superior arms as well. The single-
shot Springfield carbines used by the cavalry were highly effective

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128 For a recent discussion of the controversy, see Terence J. Donovan, Brazen Trumpet: Frederick W. Benteen and the Battle of the Little Bighorn (Lancaster, CA: Mohave, 2009).
at relatively long distances, one hundred to two hundred yards, but their relative slow rate of fire left the soldiers at a disadvantage in close combat. The Indians used many weapons, and investigators have found bullets from forty-three different kinds of guns on the battlefield, but hundreds of them wielded the lever-action Henry or Winchester repeating rifles. These rapid-fire weapons gave the warriors a big advantage because these rifles could fire much more rapidly than the cavalry carbines.

The German, Charles Windolph, reported on the weapons used by the Indians. "I believe that fully half of all the warriors carried only bows and arrows and lances, and that possibly half of remainder carried odds and ends of old muzzle-loaders and single-shot rifles of various vintages. Probably not more than 25 or 30 per cent of the warriors carried modern repeating rifles." If Windolph’s estimate on the percentages of Indians using repeating rifles is correct, the warriors still had hundreds of such weapons. The use of bows and

\[129\] Windolph, I Fought with Custer, 92.
arrows was also an advantage for the Indians, because the arrows could be shot in a high trajectory, and they would fall on the troopers from a steep angle. This allowed the warriors to use indirect fire to shoot over any obstacles on the battlefield and to engage the soldiers fighting on hill tops where the direct fire of rifles was much less effective. When the bodies of Custer’s men were found after the battle, many of them had arrows sticking in them.

One of the main reasons Custer’s men died was probably a lack of battlefield coordination. If they had been able to reach defensible positions and establish battle lines, their chance of survival would have greatly improved. The accounts by some of the Indians, including Red Horse, state that “Custer’s men fought in five brave stands.” But there was little physical evidence to support the opinion that these “stands” were composed of large numbers of soldiers.

Captain Frederick Benteen examined the battlefield right after the engagement, and he believed the location of the bodies told another story. “I went over the battlefield carefully with a view to determine . . . how the fight was fought. I arrived at the conclusion . . . that it was a rout, a panic, till the last man was killed; that there was no line formed. . . . You can take a handful of corn and scatter it over the floor and make just such lines.” He further stated that he saw little evidence that men fought in groups because he only saw the bodies “five or six” or “four or five” spaced at about the distance from each other as men in a skirmish line. “That was the only approach [similarity] to a line on the field.” The captain did say that, “only where Gen. Custer was found were there any evidences of a stand.”

Benteen’s observations do not take into account the possibility that the soldiers fled when their lines were breached, a factor that would account for the scattered location of many of their bodies. But Benteen’s analysis supports the supposition of the archaeologist, Richard Fox, who argued that many of the men panicked, dropped their weapons, and fled, making it easy for the warriors to grapple with them and kill them.

Custer’s column of five companies numbered about 210 or 220 men, and these men rode on the crests of a number of hills later known as Battle Ridge or Custer Ridge. Many aspects of Custer’s movements and intentions remain obscure at this point, and they are subject to many debates by historians. The best evidence of what happened came from the Indian accounts and the location of the bodies and other artifacts found on the field of battle. Custer probably divided his five companies into two battalions to strike the Indian camp at two places at the same time. One of these battalions or wings comprised three companies: C, I, and L. The other group included companies E and F.

These two wings went down from the ridge line to strike the village at two places. This allowed the Indians to defeat Custer’s

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131 Benteen in *Reno Court of Inquiry*, 145-46.
132 Fox, *Custer’s Last Battle*, 248-49.
133 Fox, *Custer’s Last Battle*, 23-35
forces one group at a time. Many of the warriors had returned from the attack on Reno’s column, and they turned their attention to the new threat. The two battalions marched down the ridge line, attempting to attack the village, but they were unsuccessful in taking the camp. Likely, hundreds of Indians came out of the village and struck the cavalry a hard blow. The troopers were nearly overwhelmed, and they fell back to the most defensible hills on the top of Battle Ridge. The cavalrymen knew that when they were badly outnumbered, it was wise to dismount and fight on foot. If they remained on horseback, the Indians had a distinct advantage and could ride down the troopers, very much like a buffalo hunt. The cavalrymen were ordered to dismount, so the men to coordinate their fire much better. However, this also required every fourth man to be assigned to hold the horses, reducing the number of men in combat by twenty-five percent. This loss of men in the fight was critical because the soldiers were already badly outnumbered.

While the bodies of few of the men who fell in the battle were positively identified, many of the corpses of the officers were recognized, and many of the men in their companies probably died near them. Lieutenant James Calhoun’s Company L tried to defend one of these positions at the southern end of the ridge now called Calhoun Hill. It was soon subject to heavy attack. Since large numbers
of spent cartridges were found on that position, we can assume that the troopers probably held out as long as they could, and they gave a good account of themselves. Recent archaeological evidence has demonstrated that there could have been a number of Indians nearby firing into the cavalry position with lever-action Henry rifles. So many spent cartridges have been found in that location that archaeologists have called it “Henryville.”

The seven Germans were in Company L were all killed, and their bodies were never identified. Antony Assadaly was probably the most experienced combat soldier among the Germans of the Seventh Cavalry, but even the skills he had developed from fighting in many battles during the Civil War did not save him, and he was killed with the rest. Louis Lobering from Hanover was as unfortunate as the others, and a change in assignment had meant his death. He had served for six years in the band of the Seventh Cavalry, but his transfer to the band was revoked in December 1875, and he was sent to a rifle company. If he had been allowed to stay in the band, he would have been on detached service and would have survived. Between enlistments in 1875, he had gone on furlough to Germany. At least he got to see his homeland one more time before he died.

Another German, Charles Schmidt from Württemberg, was also killed with Company L, but he could have avoided that fate. When the Seventh Cavalry left the Powder River on June 22, Schmidt graciously took the horse belonging to Michael Ragan [Reagan], a Civil War veteran, “and went in Ragan’s place.” Ragan did not participate in the campaign, and he survived. Schmidt took his place and was killed.

The bodies of six or seven men were found near the corpse of Lieutenant Calhoun. The survivors of the fight at Calhoun Hill either fled to other positions or were cut down as they ran. A few of them could have reached Company I, led by Captain Myles Keogh. The captain was riding the horse, Comanche, at the time. The animal later became famous as the only known survivor of the destruction of

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134 Fox, Custer’s Last Battle, 100-102.
135 Williams, Military Register, 191.
136 Usher L. Burdick, Jacob Horner and the Indian Campaigns of 1876 and 1877 (Baltimore, MD: Wirth, 1942), 14.
Custer's column. The bodies of five or six men were found near the captain's corpse on the east side of Battle Ridge.

Known as the "Wild I" because of the men's rowdy behavior, Company I had one Swiss in it, Frederick Lehman from Bern, and three Germans. The Swiss and two of the Germans, George Gross and Henry Lehmann from Berlin, were killed, but a mystery surrounds the survival and activities of Gustave Korn from Silesia. Sometimes called "Yankee Korn" by the men in the Seventh Cavalry, Korn stated that he said he survived the annihilation of Custer's men. Over the years, perhaps seventy men have claimed they survived from Custer's group. Almost all of these have no credibility and have been easily disproved, but Korn's statements may be true.

In an interview published in 1885, Korn "who speaks with a slight German accent" gave an account of his survival. He stated that the Indians "seemed to be retreating" when Custer's command approached. Because "my horse was considered a fine runner," Korn was ordered to ride in advance of Company I to see if a small stream was easily fordable. "I was turning to go back to my comrades and report the condition of the stream, when immediately 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.”

Sergeant Michael Caddle gave a slightly different account. “When the 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 Reno was.” After running several miles, his magnificent “horse dropped dead just when about two rods [11 yards] from the breastworks. He was shot five times. The man did not get a scratch.” The account of Korn’s escape from death with Custer’s column is supported by five men in the Seventh Cavalry. One of the men who supported Korn’s claim as a “story true” [sic] was James M. Rooney, who said the German “came up the bluffs after I had arrived with the packs.” Another man, William Hardy, stated that Korn’s horse took him through the Indian village on the way to Reno Hill.

Henry Jones who was with the pack train, and remembered that he had seen Korn coming toward the men at Reno’s position. His horse had worked hard, and he was foaming at the mouth. Korn was so frightened or excited that he could hardly speak coherently when he reached the other soldiers. Sergeant Milton DeLacy berated the German and accused the lucky survivor of deserting his unit, assuring Korn that official charges would be brought up against him. Korn probably would have talked more about his escape, but he likely feared that he could be punished for leaving Custer’s column and surviving the battle. Unfortunately, Korn was killed at the Battle of Wounded Knee in 1890 before his claim was more carefully examined.


139 Hardorff, Rosters, 166.

140 Williams, Military Register, 184.

141 For a thorough discussion of Korn’s claim, see Albert Winkler, “The Case for a Custer Battalion Survivor: Private Gustave Korn’s Story” Montana: The Magazine of Western History 63 (Spring 2013): 45-55.
The two Swiss in Company C, John King from Basel and John Rauter from “Tyrol, Switzerland,” were killed with the other men in that unit along Battle Ridge. The corpses of these Swiss were not identified, and the places where they fell are unknown, so little can be surmised about how these men died. The four Germans in Company C died as well, but the body of only one, Sergeant August Finckle from Berlin, was identified. Finckle fell between the bodies of Lieutenant Calhoun and Sergeant Jeremiah Finley, and the location of his corpse suggests that Finckle had died holding his ground with the leaders of the company.

Custer personally led Companies C, I, and L in an attempt to strike at the village further down the river. The effort was unsuccessful, and the warriors pushed Custer’s men back to a small hill now known as Custer Hill or Last Stand Hill. The last remnants of his command probably took refuge on this mount and attempted to stay alive. Apparently, some of these attempted to flee to the village on foot to escape. This was a bold gamble because running into the Indian camp to evade the enemy only invited the warriors to come after them more forcefully, and the bodies of twenty-eight men were found in a ravine leading to the Little Bighorn. Perhaps the soldiers thought they could fool their enemies by this unsuspected move. Most of these men were probably from Company E.

Five Germans were in Company E, and all were killed. While the bodies of two of the men, Henry Schele from Hanover and Robert Barth from Pforzheim, were not identified, the remains of the others were located. The bodies of William Huber from Württemberg, Albert H. Meyer from Prussia, and Sergeant Frederick Hohmeyer from Darmstadt were found in a bunch in a deep ravine. Also with them was Richard Farrell from Dublin, Ireland. The bodies of the men laid close together suggesting the three Germans and one Irishman had made their own stand. Looking to each other for support, they held off the warriors as long as possible until they were all overwhelmed and killed.

142 Scott, Whilley, and Connor, They Died with Custer, 108-12.
143 Hardorff, Rosters, 95.
The bodies of these men were mutilated, and their clothes were taken from them. Hohmeyer's body was completely naked except for one sock. As Captain Thomas McDougall explained, "Only a few of the men could be recognized. I knew Sergeant Frederick Hohmyer [Hohmeyer] at once; he had one sock left on his foot with his name on it." His name had been stitched into the sock probably by his wife. If so, it was perhaps her last small act of devotion.144

The nine Germans in Company F suffered a similar fate. This unit was probably part of Custer's attack on the village. The bodies of four of these men were never identified, but the location of the others may indicate how they died. The body of William Brown from Hamburg was found near his horse in the Indian camp. Brown was probably the only soldier who fought his way across the river with Custer's command, and he likely pushed his attack on the village harder than any other trooper. Henry Dose from Holstein was a trumpeter who was assigned to Company G at that time, but he clearly fought with Company F. He had descended from the bluffs above the river, and he was killed where Custer tried to the cross river. His naked body was found later, "propped in a kneeling position . . . [with his] back riddled with arrows." Another report stated that he had "three arrows in his head and one in his right shoulder." Dose left a wife, Elizabeth, and two children.145

The bodies of three Germans were found on Custer Hill near the corpses of George Armstrong Custer and his two brothers, Thomas and Boston. Markers for fifty-six men were placed on Custer

144 McDougall in Carroll, They Rode with Custer, 120. See also Williams, Military Register, 156 and Hardorff, Rosters, 117.
145 Hardorff, Rosters, 29. This information is under Henry Voss, but Hardorff states that the witnesses probably meant Dose not Voss. See also Carroll, They Rode with Custer, 77.
Hill to show how many men fell there, but historians believe that only forty-two soldiers died in that position. In either case, the bodies of three Germans were identified in the small group of men who fought bravely with their commander before they were all killed. The evidence on Custer Hill demonstrated the desperate nature of the fighting. The men with Custer shot their horses and attempted to use the bodies of the animals to construct a crude barricade that could defend them from the Indian bullets. It was a desperate and courageous gesture which failed, and all the soldiers were killed.

Gustav Klein from Württemberg “lay in Custer group near Teeman at the base of knoll and had his head crushed with a large flat rock.” Henry Voss from Hanover was the chief trumpeter on Custer’s staff, and he was not assigned to any particular company. His body was found near Custer. Voss had apparently fallen face first, and his corpse covered the head of John Groesbeck from New York, who had probably been killed earlier in the battle.

The body of Corporal William Teeman from “Denmark Germany” was also found in the group near Custer, but the condition of the corpse was very unusual because it had not been mutilated and only part of his scalp had been cut. Teeman’s military jacket had been thrown over his face, probably as a sign to leave him unmolested. When the soldiers buried him, they found a piece of paper in his pocket with his name written on it. Apparently, Teeman wanted his grave to be properly marked if he was killed in the battle, and he wrote his name on the piece of paper to make sure he was properly identified.

The Indian warrior, Rain-in-Face (Rain-in-the-Face), probably found and protected Teeman’s body. This warrior was associated with the killing of the soldiers on Custer hill, and he likely found the German’s corpse. Teeman reportedly became acquainted with the Indian when he was stationed at Fort Abraham Lincoln in 1874. The soldier was a kind man who gave the warrior tobacco and candies. Some of the troopers remembered that Rain-in-the-Face was in the

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146 James Brust, “Photo Essay of Historical Views of the Little Bighorn Battlefield,” in Hardorff, Casualties II, [196-97].
147 Hardorff, Rosters, 130-31.
guard house when Teeman was also incarcerated there for getting drunk while on duty. When they were in jail together, the German shared his food with the warrior and the other Indian captives. Apparently, Teeman also aided Rain-in-the-Face’s escape from jail. On that occasion, the German reportedly shook hands with the Sioux when he was set free. The protection Rain-in-the-Face gave Teeman’s body was clearly a tribute to his old friend.  

Recently, a new controversy about the German, August Finckle, has arisen based on the claims of a fraud. In 1921, forty-five years after the battle, a man who called himself Frank Finkle suddenly stated that he had fought at the Little Bighorn in Custer’s column. He said he had been wounded and escaped the fate of the other men who rode with Custer. The claim has been supported in a recent book, but the argument lacks merit. Frank Finkle stated he enlisted under the name of Frank Hall, but when that name was not found on the rolls of the Seventh Cavalry, Finkle changed his story and said he was August Finckle. He clearly did not realize that August Finckle’s body had been identified by at least two different witnesses.

Frank Finkle’s story of flight and survival is a bit fantastic, his reasons for remaining silent so long are not convincing, and the handwriting samples of Frank and August are different. Frank Finkle never even took the simple step of contacting authentic veterans of the Seventh Cavalry who could readily identify him. The German soldier, Charles Windolph, was still alive, and he lamented the loss of August Finckle whom he called “my German Friend.” No doubt Windolph would have been overjoyed to meet the real August Finckle again, but Frank Finkle made no attempt to contact Windolph. The only similarities Frank Finkle had with August Finckle was that they were both tall men with blue eyes. The claims of frauds such as Frank Finkle do a great dishonor to the brave men like August Finckle who actually fought and died in Custer’s command.

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150 Windolph, *I Fought with Custer*, 112.
"The end of Custer's command." Credit: Beyer's Deeds of Valor.
Germans and Swiss at the Siege of Reno Hill June 25, 1876

At the same time that Custer's column was being annihilated, the forces at Reno Hill noticed that the Indians facing them had withdrawn. If the warriors had pursued Reno's men who fled in disarray after the failed attack on the village, the soldiers would have been wiped out as well. Fortunately for Reno's troopers, the Indians let them alone for the time being, but they were still in a precarious situation. Major Reno later admitted that his losses had been severe in the valley fight. "I succeeded in reaching the top of the bluff with a loss of three officers and twenty-nine enlisted men killed, and seven men wounded." In addition, about twenty men were still separated from the command, and many of these would not reach Reno's position for hours. Reno had lost nearly half of his men, and those taking positions on the hill were confused, demoralized, and in disarray. The command badly needed reinforcements to fend off any new attacks by the Indians.

Captain Benteen followed Custer's orders earlier in the day and led his men to the left of Reno's and Custer's columns. After riding over a few hills, the captain realized that he had been ordered away from the action. He then led his men back to the trail taken by Custer and Reno. Benteen's horses had no water that hot summer day, and he took the time to allow them to drink from a swamp. Captain Thomas Weir was anxious that they push on, and he took Company D ahead of the rest of Benteen's command. The pack train was still behind Benteen's men, and the mules carrying the supplies were slow in advancing. The Italian,

151 Reno, "Testimony," in Reno Court of Inquiry, 278.
John Martin, soon arrived with the note from Custer to come quickly and to bring the ammunition packs. Benteen thought the message was confusing, and he did not know how he could "come quick" and wait for the ammunition with the pack train at the same time. Furthermore, Martin stated that the Indians were "skidaddling" or running away. Benteen thought it unwise to wait for the pack train, and the column "took to the trot," advancing more rapidly. The Captain soon saw "12 or 14 dismounted men on the river bottom, and they were being ridden down and shot by 800 or 900 warriors." The enemy clearly was not retreating.\textsuperscript{152}

At the same time, the troopers on Reno Hill saw men riding towards them. At first, some of them thought the column must be Custer's command, but they soon realized that it was Captain Benteen and his men in companies D, H, and K. The pack train supported by Company B also soon arrived. All together, this force numbered over 300 men, meaning it was big enough to have a fighting chance against the large numbers of warriors they would soon face.

When Captain Benteen met Major Reno, the Captain's first questions was, "where is Custer?" He showed Reno Custer's note to "come quick," but the Major said he did not know where Custer's commander was. Reno knew in which direction Custer had marched, but that had been hours earlier. Benteen could not support Custer if the captain had little idea where he should go.

Reno also thought Benteen should stay to help defend the position in case the Indians returned. But Captain Thomas Weir took the initiative and led Company D, attempting to reach Custer's command by following the direction the colonel was marching when last seen. When Benteen realized that Weir was continuing the advance without him, he followed with the rest of his command. Benteen soon noticed Weir's men returning with "hordes of Indians hurrying them." Weir had ridden to the top of a prominence, later known as Weir Point, where he saw much confusion and dust near the crest of a hill three miles away. He probably witnessed some of the action associated with

\textsuperscript{152} Benteen in Graham, \textit{The Custer Myth}, 180.
the Last Stand. His troopers soon came under attack by many warriors, and he had to withdraw.153

When Lieutenant Winfield Edgerly went to mount his horse so he could mount it and withdraw, the animal became unruly, and the officer had trouble getting on the frightened animal. He then handed his rifle to his orderly, Charles Sanders from Altenburg, so he would not be encumbered by the weapon and could successfully get on his horse. Sander’s demeanor surprised the lieutenant. “I noticed a broad grin on his face altho’ he was sitting in a perfect shower of bullets.” Edgerly was too busy trying to survive to ask Sanders what he found so amusing until the next day. The German answered, “I was laughing to see what poor shots these Indians were: they were shooting too low and their bullets were spattering the dust like drops of rain.” The lieutenant was surprised at the reply, and he stated obviously in admiration, “I never saw a cooler man under fire than Saunders [sic].” Edgerly was so impressed with Sanders’s conduct during the battle that he recommended the German for the Medal of Honor. Unfortunately, this request was not approved.154

In the retreat, Vincent Charley, a redheaded Swiss from Luzern was shot through the pelvis at the hip, and he fell from his horse. His head was cut open where it hit the ground, and the gash began to bleed. The severely wounded man tried to make his “way to the rear the best he could, half crawling on his feet and one hand.”155 Charley “cried out” that he was wounded and needed help, and he “implored” the other troopers to rescue him. Lieutenant Edgerly and Sergeant T. W. Harris were fleeing nearby, and they believed they were in too much danger to help the fallen man. Edgerly told the Swiss “to get into a ravine and out of danger for a while.” Then Edgerly and Harris abandoned the dismounted trooper to his fate. After they rode a distance, the two men looked back “and saw the Indians finishing up [killing] Charley.”156

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154 Carroll, They Rode with Custer, 219-20 and Williams, Military Register, 265-6, 282.
155 Sergeant Thomas W. Harrison in Hardorff, Battle Casualties, 160.
156 Harris as cited in Bruce R. Liddic and Paul Harbaugh, eds., Camp on Custer: Transcribing the Custer Myth (Spokane: Clark, 1995), 97-98.
Edgerly described, “Vincent Charley was killed and his body, when found afterward had a stick rammed down the throat.”

Lieutenant Edgerly was troubled because he had abandoned Charley, and he attempted to pass the blame to Captain Weir. The lieutenant said he tried to get reinforcements and return to rescue the Swiss, but Weir refused to allow the effort. Captain Weir stated that he had orders to fall back, and any attempt to save the Swiss was seen as a needless risk. The effort would likely have been fruitless anyway because Charley was probably already dead.

After the battle, Charley was buried where he had fallen, and the present-day marker at the location erroneously calls him Vincent Charles. In 1903 his corpse was exhumed, and in 1992 experts examined his remains. The body was easily identifiable because of its location, the gunshot wound in the pelvis, and its height. Charley’s service record stated he was 5 feet 10.25 inches tall, and the bones were those of a man 5 feet 10.67 inches tall. Additionally, the bones belonged to a man who was between twenty-five and thirty years of age, and the Swiss was about twenty-seven when he was killed. Charley’s remains give insights into the nature of his wounds and the condition of his health when he died.

The gunshot wound in the hip bone (right ilium) left a hole that was 13 mm (.51 inches) by 19 mm (.75 inches). The size of the aperture was consistent with a hole that would have been made by a .50 caliber bullet entering at a slight angle. The projectile entered from the back right, and the angle of the shot suggests that the bullet probably went through Charley’s abdomen, where it likely perforated the intestines, releasing bacteria and filth into his bowels. This would have caused peritonitis or an infection in the abdomen that would

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157 Edgerly in Hammer, *Custer in ‘76*, 56-57.
161 For a discussion of .50 caliber weapons used by the Indians, see Douglas D. Scott et al., *Archaeological Perspectives on the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 1989), 158-59, 176-81.
have caused him to die painfully within a few days.\textsuperscript{162} His wound would have killed him even if he had been retrieved from where he fell. One cut mark was found on the ilium, which was likely the result of the mutilation of the body. Two of Charley’s teeth on the right side of his mouth were broken, which could have happened when the stick was shoved down his throat.\textsuperscript{163}

Charley’s remains show that he was a large, robust man, but he also led a life that was physically challenging. His thigh bones (femurs) had facets on them that suggested that he had done much riding on horseback. There were also numerous lesions in his bones that had been caused by disease. He had suffered from a broken arm (radius), which had healed, and he might have had a broken bone in his foot (metatarsus), which also had healed. Charley suffered from spinal problems, including the breakdown of cartilage in the joints (osteoarthritis), and he had degenerative disks both in his back and in his neck near the skull. His oral health was very bad, and he had suffered from infected teeth. Many of his teeth were lost or had been removed, and he had only seven teeth remaining at the roof of his mouth, which included but one molar.\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{163} Scott, Willey, and Connor, \textit{They Died with Custer}, 197-202 and Scott and Willey, “Custer’s Men,” 22.
\textsuperscript{164} Scott, Willey, and Connor, \textit{They Died with Custer}, 197-202.
Vincent Charley. Credit: National Park Service, Midwest Archeological Center, Lincoln, NE.

Charley's muster roll for May-June 1876 stated that Charley was in debt to the army $1.14 for tobacco rations, but his teeth showed no signs of tobacco use. They had no stains from smoking or chewing, and they were not grooved by the use of a pipe. The Swiss probably bought the tobacco either to give or to sell to his comrades when they were in need.\textsuperscript{165}

When Captain Weir's men fell back to Reno Hill, Company K under Lieutenant Edward S. Godfrey tried to keep the Indians at bay. By this time, the various companies were mixed up, and men from Company M, including the Swiss, Frank Braun, were fighting with Godfrey's men. The Lieutenant placed the men at five-yard intervals and ordered them to withdraw slowly, but the soldiers soon became unnerved. As Godfrey described, "The bullets struck the ground all about us; but the 'ping-ping' of the bullets overhead seemed to have a more terrifying influence than the 'swish-thud' of the bullets that struck the ground immediately about us." When the Lieutenant saw some warriors "making all haste" to get to a hill that "would command Reno's position," he sent a detachment of ten men to hold that prominence.\textsuperscript{166}

The detachment was led by Sergeant John Ryan, and Frank Braun from Switzerland was one of the men who accompanied the leader on this dangerous mission, but Lieutenant Godfrey soon got orders from Major Reno to fall back as quickly as possible. The lieutenant then recalled Ryan and his men, and the Braun ran back with the rest. The cavalrymen did their best to fortify the top of the hill. The men got off their horses and established a skirmish line around the perimeter. They got the boxes from the pack train as

\textsuperscript{165} Scott and Willey, \textit{Custer's Men}, 21-23.
\textsuperscript{166} Godfrey in Graham, \textit{The Custer Myth}, 143.
protection and dug in as best they could using whatever implements were available including canteens, cups, and spoons. The men placed the horses in the middle of the perimeter where they would be more easily protected, and the soldiers also established a hospital within the lines, so the wounded could be tended.

Major Reno had been drinking during the entire battle. He was continually drunk, and he had lost his nerve early in the contest. He remained intoxicated during the siege, and many men no longer had any faith in his leadership. If he was giving orders, no one was paying attention to them. Captain Benteen was second in command, and he was the one who actually controlled the troops and organized the defense.

The two-day siege of Reno Hill started in the afternoon of June 25, and fighting continued that night and late into the following day. At the beginning of the siege, the men prepared their positions as best they could. As the German, Charles Windolph, stated, the troopers "hurriedly piled up such inadequate barricades" as they could. "We used pack saddles, boxes of hard tack, and bacon, anything we could lay our hands on." Despite the efforts Windolph was not impressed with the results. "For the most part it wasn’t any real protection at all, but it made you feel a lot safer." Windolph described the fighting.

The men in Windolph’s company were placed at long intervals of twenty feet from each other, and they lay on their stomachs so they would make smaller targets and could better steady their rifles when firing. "There was no full-fledged charge, but little groups of Indians would creep up as close as they could get, and from behind bushes or little knolls open fire." The warriors were very clever as Windolph explained, "They’d practice all kinds of cute tricks to draw our fire," and some of them took dangerous chances with death. "Maybe a

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naked redskin would suddenly jump to his feet, and while you drew a bead on him he'd throw himself to the ground.” At other times, “they’d show a blanket or a headdress and we’d blaze away, until we learned better.” Windolph also noticed that the warriors tried to show their courage and “count coup” on the soldiers by touching them with a stick. One warrior was too bold: “One Indian ran in close to our lines to touch one of our dead men with his ‘coup stick,’ and we filled him full of lead before he could get away.”

Braun from Bern came under fire, and he was hit twice, once in the face and once in the left thigh. The Swiss soldier was probably shot in a kneeling or crouched position with his left thigh parallel to the ground. This allowed the bullet to enter his leg near the knee and go up his thigh to lodge itself at the head of the unfortunate man’s femur (thigh bone). The lengthy path the bullet took through Braun’s body suggests he was shot at short range, when the ball traveled in a flat trajectory and retained much high velocity. The wound was severe and very painful, and it probably caused him to lose a lot of blood.

The Germans and Swiss held their positions on the hill, and they were often targets of the enemy. Joseph Kretchmer from Silesia was slightly wounded in the neck, and Henry Petring was also wounded slightly in the eye and right hip. Petring thought the wounds needed no attention, and he did not report them to the doctors or officers. The records on John Meier were not as clear. Some indicate that he received a gunshot wound in the neck, while Dr. Porter, who tended the wounded, stated he was also hit in the back. These three Germans: Kretchmer, Petring, and Meier were very lucky they were

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171 Scott, Willey, and Connor, *They Died with Custer*, 119.
not hurt more severely, but their countryman, Julius Helmer, was not so fortunate.\textsuperscript{172}

That evening Trumpeter Julius Helmer from Hanover suffered an extremely painful death. He “was shot through the bowels and died in great agony.” His pain was so extreme that he begged “his comrades to kill him to put him out of his misery.” His friends refused to shoot him, but they could do nothing for him, so the German died slowly and in great pain.\textsuperscript{173}

Captain Benteen has received much well-deserved praise for his conduct during the siege of Reno Hill. As one eminent historian of the battle has stated, “Through it all, Benteen had been magnificent. With bullets whistling all around him, he had strolled along the line oblivious to the rain of enemy fire, encouraging the men and helping them gauge firing distances.” His calm courage inspired everyone who saw him. He told the men they were in a serious situation, and they had to fight well to survive.\textsuperscript{174}

As Charles Windolph described, “the sun went down that night like a ball of fire.” When darkness fell the number of gunshots from the Indians also fell until all the firing stopped to the great relief of the soldiers. “There was no moon, and no one ever welcomed darkness more than we did.” However, the men were still apprehensive. “But welcome as the darkness was, it brought a penetrating feeling of fear and uncertainty of what tomorrow might bring.”\textsuperscript{175} The agony of the day was over, but the soldiers had to deal with additional problems in the night.

The darkness gave the army a chance to review the situation and organize a better defense. Private John Sivertsen from Norway went to see Sergeant Henry Fehler from Hanover to ask what should be done. Sivertsen asked the German, “What are we going to do, stay here all night, or try to move away?” By accident, Major Reno was standing nearby. The major remained drunk all day, and he had laid

\textsuperscript{172} Hardorff, \textit{Rosters}, pp. 107, 141, 201.
\textsuperscript{173} Luther Hare in Hammer, \textit{Custer in '76}, 67.
\textsuperscript{175} Windolph, \textit{I Fought with Custer}, 101-2.
in a rifle pit in a protected area during the siege, but he was moving around after dark like so many others. Reno responded to the private's statement, "I would like to know how the Hell we are going to move away." Sivertsen still addressed his remarks to Fehler: "If we are going to remain here we ought to be making some kind of barricade, for the Indians would be at us, the first thing in the morning." Also addressing his remarks to the German, Reno stated, "Yes, Sergeant, that is a good idea, set all the men you can at work at once." Fehler immediately got the men working "after a good deal of urging by the Sergeant," probably because the soldiers were exhausted. 176

Major Reno showed his ill temperament and intoxication when he confronted the civilian packers, Benjamin Franklin Churchill and John Frett from Prussia. When the German saw Reno approach, he saluted and said, "Good evening." The major asked, "Are the mules tight?" Apparently, Reno was so drunk that he slurried his speech, and when he said "tight" it sounded like "tied." Frett asked for a clarification and responded, "What do you mean by 'tight'?" Reno immediately lost his temper and said, "Tight, God damn you." With that statement, "he slapped me in the face and leveled a carbine at me and said, 'I will shoot you.'" Reno was obviously drunk, and he "had a bottle of whiskey in his hand and as he slapped me the whiskey flew over me and he staggered." Frett added, "A friend of mine named Churchill," reacted rapidly, and he probably saved Reno and Frett from a violent confrontation when he pulled the German away from the officer. 177

The men who could stay awake remained busy making their position more defensible, but they had few shovels and other tools to dig rifle pits or trenches. Most of the troopers were using whatever implements they could find. As Charles Windolph related, they were "digging shallow holes with our mess kits, our steel knives and forks and with our fingers." At least, the men "would not have to face the daylight without at least some little protection." But the ground was hard and the men were unable to prepare their position properly. Their defense "was pitifully inadequate, but it was something."

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176 John Sivertsen in Hammer, Custer in ‘76, 142.
177 Churchill and Frett in Reno Court of Inquiry 172, 186-7.
The soldiers were so exhausted from the long marches and one day of battle that even the fear of renewed combat could not keep many of them awake. Captain Benteen and Lieutenant Frank Gibson, the officers over Company H, “tramped the night of June 25th & 26th, doing our very best to keep the sentinels awake, but we just could not do it.” The officers even resorted to “kicking” the men, but Benteen and Gibson were the men who kept watch much of the night. 179

Germans and Swiss at the Siege of Reno Hill June 26, 1876

When dawn broke on June 26, Windolph stated, “Two shots sounded from the hilltop behind us. Soon there was firing all around.” 180 The soldiers described the Indians’ rate of fire as “tremendously heavy . . . which officers who had served through the war of the rebellion [Civil War] said they had never seen equaled” in all their service. 181 By this time Benteen, who admitted he was lacking “three night’s sleep,” had finally succumbed to exhaustion. At dawn he tried to take a nap, “but some wakeful red skin had pretty nearly my exact range, plumping me in the heel of an extended boot; another bullet scattered the dry dust under my arm pit.” These shots did not bother the sleepy officer. “I hadn’t the remotest idea of letting little things like that disturb me, and [I] think that I at least had gotten forty winks [nap].” He was only roused by a sergeant who said the men needed his leadership, and the captain again joined the battle. 182

Once again Benteen inspired his men with his courage and calm leadership. He remained standing the entire day and seemed unconcerned about the bullets that struck all around him. Windolph was very concerned about the captain’s safety, and the German admonished him, “You better get down, sir, or you’ll get killed.” Benteen answered showing little concern, “Don’t worry about me.

178 Windolph, I Fought with Custer, 103.
179 Benteen in Graham, The Custer Myth, 182.
180 Windolph, I Fought with Custer, 103.
182 Benteen in Graham, The Custer Myth, 182.
I’m all right.” Windolph further stated that “Benteen was walking in front of the line of battle under a tremendous fire from the Indians just as calmly as if he [had] just been on a fashionable promenade.” Another German, William Heyn, also saw much to admire in the Captain’s conduct. “Beneteen was walking around all the time, encouraging the men, while bullets were whistling all about him, and [he] was regarded as the hero of the fight.” Benteen admitted that he had been slightly wounded in the battle, “I got a slight scratch on my right thumb.” This small wound was not even a slight inconvenience for the brave captain.

Throughout the ordeal of battle, Benteen showed his ability to relate to his men. He came to a Windolph and gave the order, “Windolph, get up! I want to talk to you.” The German, who was under fire, admitted, “I wasn’t very anxious to get up and come to attention,” but he followed the directions. Benteen continued, “Windolph, if we ever get out of this alive you can write back to your folks in Germany and tell them how many Indians we are fighting today.” The captain then smiled and walked away. Benteen clearly admired the Germans in his company, and he knew how to show them his respect. As Windolph said, “Long afterward he sent his photograph to my people in Germany. He was a great man.”

The temperatures in the hills of Montana can vary considerably in the summer time. The highs sometimes go above 95 degrees and then fall to less than 55 degrees the same night. Charles Windolph stated it had been cold in the night, and “those old army blue coats felt good.” The German was laying next to his “buddy,” Julien Jones, and the two men “had scooped out a wide shallow trench and piled up the dirt to make a little breastwork in front of us.” They were under fire from “sharpshooters on the knob of a hill south of us and maybe a thousand yards away.” The actual distance was probably somewhat less, but the Indian marksman was clearly firing at extreme range. Jones mentioned that he was going to take off his overcoat, and he

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rolled on his side to get his arms out of the sleeves without exposing himself to enemy fire. “Suddenly I heard him cry out. He had been shot straight through the heart.”

The Indian marksman who had killed Jones tried to shoot Windolph as well, and “the lead kept spitting around where I lay.” Windolph looked at the hilltop, and he could see a man firing from a prone position. It “looked like he was resting his long-range rifle on a bleached buffalo skull.” The German badly wanted to hit his adversary, but the warrior was beyond the range of the model 1873 Springfield rifle, and no shot went far enough. But the Indian kept trying to hit Windolph.

Shortly after Jones was killed, “a bullet ricocheted from the hard ground and tore into my clothing.” At that time, a surgeon came to examine Jones, and the doctor asked Windolph if he was wounded. The trooper assured the doctor that he had not been hit, but the surgeon ordered, “Put you hand inside your shirt.” The German followed the instruction, and “when I pulled it out it was bloody.” The bullet had given him a flesh wound, and the soldier was so nervous or excited that he did not realized he had been hit. The surgeon wanted to put a bandage on the wound and take the German to the hospital, but Windolph refused to go to the aid station, saying there were other men in greater need of assistance, and he stayed in the battle. One source stated that Windolph also received a flesh wound in the buttocks. If so, this was a bit too embarrassing for the German to admit, and he made no mention of it in his accounts of the battle.

The confrontation with the Indian marksman continued, and a few minutes later “another bullet from the hilltop tore into the hickory butt of my rifle, splitting it squarely in two.” Windolph further stated, “I had just fired once and loaded up to fire again when a bullet hit the stock of my carbine, cutting it right in two in my hands.” The soldier was very angry at the Springfield rifle because it would not “let me return the compliment” and hit the warrior. The contest between the two enemies continued almost the entire day.

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Other soldiers along the line also had to deal with Indian marksmen, but the troopers had more success in dealing with them. The German, Gustave Korn, described how the soldiers took out an able enemy sniper. Probably referring to a hill later known as Sharpshooter Ridge, Korn said, “The Indians in one portion of the battlefield held a position about 1,000 yards distant, and one of their number annoyed us considerably, killing half a dozen of our men, and twelve or fifteen horses.” A number of the soldiers tried but failed to get the warrior because “their rifles did not carry as far as those of the Indians.” Finally, one of the cavalry officers with a Henry rifle “hid behind some little bushes,” when the rest of the men fell back probably after the soldiers had charged the enemy position on foot. Apparently, the marksman had fallen back with the other warriors, and he returned to his initial position which brought him into range of the Henry rifle. “The Indian exposed himself slightly, when the lieutenant let him have it, and there was no more firing from that Indian’s position.”

All the Germans at the skirmish lines came under fire from the Indians, and some of them were hit. Jacob Deihle from Württemberg was shot in the jaw, and the bullet knocked out four of his teeth. Otto Voit from Baden was shot in the left leg, a “flesh wound,” but he refused to go to the aid station and remained with his company. He was not listed as one of the men wounded in the battle. Henry Lange from Hanover said he was leading a mule back to the skirmish line after it had gotten away, when his left hip was badly bruised by a bullet that hit his cartridge belt and tore off three cartridges. Lange was also not listed as one of the wounded. Henry Petring also reported that his left cheek was injured when a bullet splintered a nearby rock.

Maximilian Mielke from Frankfurt was hit in the left foot, and he left the line to be tended with the other wounded. Roman Rutten, who so narrowly survived the fight with Reno’s forces in the valley, was not as fortunate on Reno Hill. He was shot in the right shoulder and received a severe wound.

190 Williams, Military Register, 107, 194, 218, 257-8, 297; Hardorff, Registers, 66, 203; and Carroll, They Rode with Custer, 71.
"The Indians proceeded to the first great assault." Credit: Boyer's Deeds of Valor.
Each of these men was more fortunate than Eduard Gustaf Delliehausen from Frankfurt, and Henry Voight from Hanover, both of whom were killed. Voight was killed in a dramatic fashion. One of the horses ridden by Captain Thomas French was with the other horses, and the mounts were kept near the wounded men. The unfortunate animal was shot in the head, and was “staggering about among the other horses.” It put the wounded soldiers at risk if the other horses also became unmanageable. Voight bravely came to the injured animal and attempted to lead the horse away from the others, but his courage was unrewarded. The German was immediately shot in the head and “had his brains blown out.”

Benteen’s Company H was in an exposed prominence that protruded from Reno Hill to the south, and the Indians fired into both sides of the position. The most critical point was the “horseshoe” at the end of the line, and it was defended by only ten men. At least three of them were Germans: John Pahl from Bavaria, Otto Voit from Baden, and Charles Windolph. Each of these Germans were wounded in battle. Fortunately, only three of the men in Company H were killed, but nineteen were reportedly wounded. But this list was incomplete because some of the men did not report being hit. In any case, the battle casualties numbered nearly half of the soldiers in the company. Some of the Indians probably shot high because many of the horses behind the lines were killed. The company was vulnerable from attack on two sides, and if that unit gave way, the entire defense on Reno Hill could collapse. Benteen got reinforcements from Company M, but the situation was still precarious. The warriors were so close that they “were amusing themselves by throwing clods of dirt, [and] arrows by hand” at the troops.

The Indians appeared to be massing for an attack that would obviously include hundreds of warriors and could easily overwhelm the cavalry’s position. The warriors were advancing on foot and “singing some kind of war cry.” Many of the soldiers’ rifles were also becoming hard to use. “Our guns had by this time been fired so long

191 John Ryan in Carroll, They Rode with Custer, 255.
192 Benteen in Graham, The Custer Myth, 182.
without cleaning that the shells stuck badly and [the] guns kicked so hard it became extremely irksome to fire them.”

The situation was desperate, and Benteen decided on a bold venture that could easily have been suicidal. He ordered some of his men, no more than a few dozen, to attack their enemies on foot. Benteen left his second-in-command, Lieutenant Frank Gibson, in charge of the position with the remaining soldiers. The captain told how he inspired his men to risk their lives in the attack. “I walked along the front of my troop and told them that I was getting mad, and I wanted them to charge down the ravines with me when I gave the yell: then each to yell as if provided with a thousand throats.” Benteen later admitted he had no “real trust” in the plan’s chances of success, but he thought he had to try something.

The few soldiers ran forward towards the Indians who numbered in the hundreds. If the warriors had stood and fought, the troopers would have been wiped out, but the Indians turned and fled. Benteen said that the attack was such a surprise to the warriors that some of them “somersaulted and vaulted as so many trained acrobats” in their hasty attempts to get away. Windolph went with the attack, and he also described the scene, “Yelling and firing, we went at the ‘double quick’ and the Indians broke and ran. When we had cleaned them out for a hundred yards ahead of us, we hustled back to our holes.” The attack had been a big success, and the Indians never rallied and massed to storm the position again. The troopers suffered few casualties, including John Pahl from Bavaria.

During the attack, Sergeant John Pahl was an inspiration to all the men. He was shot in the right side of his back early in the advance. The bullet entered near his spine, went through his body, and lodged near his left hip. Despite his wound, Pahl displayed “gallant conduct,” and he inspired the other men during the charge. Pahl “shouted to his men to go on and regain all the ground that they had lost.” Windolph, who witnessed many acts of courage at

194 Benteen in Graham, The Custer Myth, 182.
the battle and in his lengthy military career, expressed the highest praise for his fellow German and said that no "braver man ever lived" than Pahl. Benteen was also very impressed with Pahl's conduct and recommended the German Sergeant for the Medal of Honor, but the request was not approved.196

The warriors kept up a lively fire against the soldiers, who faced more challenges than enemy bullets, because the siege took place on hot summer days, and the troopers ran out of water. They felt that "the excitement and the heat made our thirst almost maddening," and the men took extreme measures to alleviate their suffering. "They put pebbles in their mouths to excite the glands; some ate grass roots, but did not find relief." A few potatoes were issued to the men to suck on them, but this only helped a little.197 All the soldiers suffered greatly from thirst, but the agony of the wounded was the most severe. When these men bled, their bodies desperately needed water to replace lost bodily fluids, making their thirst and misery even greater. The wounded soldiers were in agony even when the temperatures were lower after nightfall on June 25, and "you could hear them crying out for water all through the short night."198

Little could be done to help these men, but Henry Weihe did what he could. Ignoring his own painful wound, the German stayed with the other wounded men and did what he could to comfort them. "Sergeant White [Weihe], though badly wounded in the elbow, stayed on his feet and did everything he could to relieve the sufferers. He had a glassful of jelly in his [saddle] bags and each wounded man got small spoonful of that."199 But Weihe was unable to alleviate the real reason why the men suffered. They badly needed water.

The men on Reno Hill were about five hundred yards from the Little Bighorn River, the only source of water within reach, but anyone retrieving water from the stream was risking death. The Indians were in the area in large numbers, and anyone attempting

196 Windolph, "Battle," 70; Williams, Military Register, 241; and Hardorff, Rosters, p. 162.
197 Godfrey in Graham, The Custer Myth, 143.
198 Windolph, I Fought with Custer, 102-3.
199 Daniel Newell in Carroll, They Rode with Custer, 264.
to get water would probably be killed. A few very brave men tried to get the water anyway. One of the earliest men to go the river was the German, Philip Spinner. The Swiss, John Lattman, also claimed to have gone for water, but these two men probably went alone or in numbers so small that their courage made little difference in the desperate situation. The only way to alleviate the suffering of the soldiers was for large numbers of men to retrieve water.

Captain Benteen asked for volunteers to risk their lives to go to the river. Nineteen men came forward, and Benteen chose four, the best shots, to give covering fire for the others. Charles Windolph and Otto Voit were Germans, while Henry Mechling was born in Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania, and George Geiger in Cincinnati, Ohio. Windolph mistakenly stated that they “were all German boys.” Mechling and Geiger were probably from German families, and they likely spoke German well enough to fool Windolph into thinking they were from Germany. Geiger has been claimed by other groups as well. He has been listed as a Jew, and one historian of the Swiss in America stated that Geiger was Swiss.

Whatever their nationality, these four men had a very dangerous assignment. “We were to stand up and not only draw the fire of the Indians below, but we were to pump as much lead as we could into the bushes where the Indians were hiding.” At the same time, “the water party hurried down to the draw, got the buckets and pots and canteens filled, and then made their way back.” The four marksmen were on the top of a small ridge, and the warriors kept shooting at them. When they were on the north side of the hill’s crest, the “Indians off to the north had the range on us, and when their fire got too hot we had to get to the south slope of the hill, when the Indians to the south would crack away at us and then we would run over to the north slope.” These four men dodged death and stood on a ridge line for twenty minutes, but none was hit by enemy
The Germans and Swiss at the Battle of the Little Bighorn

"Four brave men kept in their dangerous position."
Credit: Beyer's Deeds of Valor.

fire even though, "they threw plenty of lead at us."\textsuperscript{205}

The other fifteen men, including Frederick Deetline from Offenheim, carried canteens and camp kettles and ran for the river. They raced eighty yards to a deep ravine, later known as Water Carrier Ravine, which gave them some shelter until they were within fifteen yards of the river. They then ran the remaining distance and filled the kettles and canteens before returning up the steep slope. The four marksman did their job well, and they probably disturbed the aim of the warriors. Even though the Indians fired on the water carriers, only one man was slightly wounded in the hand. Some of the men made several trips to the river and back.\textsuperscript{206}

Each of the four marksmen, including the two Germans, was given the Medal of Honor for their courage that day. Otto Voit's citation reads, "volunteered with George Geiger, Charles Windolph, and Henry Mechlin to hold an exposed position standing erect on the

\textsuperscript{205} Windolph, pp. 104-5.
brow of the hill facing the Little Big Horn River. They fired constantly in this manner for more than 20 minutes diverting fire and attention from another group filling canteens of water that were desperately needed.” Each of the fifteen water carriers also received the Medal of Honor. Frederick Deetline’s citation for the award reads, “Voluntarily brought water to the wounded [while] under fire.” In total, twenty-four men received the Medal of Honor for their actions at the Little Bighorn.207

Charles Windolph was modest about winning the Medal of Honor and stated “I got more than my share of credit that day.” He added, “Lots of times the men who most deserve the medals don’t get them, because no officer happened to see their deed of valor or, if he did see it, failed to turn in a recommendation for a decoration.” He stated, for example, that Sergeant John Pahl, should have gotten more recognition for his courage. But Private Windolph received another accolade that meant a great deal to him. Since Pahl was wounded, Company H needed a new sergeant. After Windolph had provided covering fire for the men retrieving water, Captain Benteen came to him and “told me he was making me a Sergeant—promoting me on the field of battle.” The German freely admitted, “I was always proud of that.”208

Late in afternoon of June 26 the fire from the warriors dropped off considerably until it disappeared entirely. The Indians then set fire to the grass, which was a common practice when they were planning to withdraw. “Then something happened that I’ll never

Otto Voit.

Credit: Beyer's Deeds of Valor.


208 Windolph, I Fought with Custer, 105.
forget if I live to be a hundred,” Windolph said of a stunning sight. “The heavy smoke seemed to lift for a few moments, and there in the valley below we caught glimpses of thousands of Indians on foot and horseback, with their pony herds and travois, dogs, and pack animals, and all the trappings of a great camp, slowly moving southward.” The scene got the German to think in grandiose terms. “It was some Biblical exodus; the Israelites moving into Egypt; a mighty tribe on the march.”

The battle had ended. The Indians had learned that General Terry’s column was approaching, and they retreated rather than face another army. Their departure probably saved the lives of the men defending Reno Hill because the soldiers were running out of ammunition, and they might have been annihilated if the battle had continued. However, the cost in casualties was still very high. Reportedly, about 212 or 214 men from Custer’s battalion were buried shortly after the battle, but there may have been other bodies that were not found at that time. Another fifty-two men were killed in the commands of Reno and Benteen for a total of about 265 to 275 fatalities. An additional fifty-eight men were reportedly wounded while fighting with Reno and Benteen, and six of them died later of these injuries.

Of the seventy-eight Germans who had participated in the battle, thirty-six were killed or forty-six percent, and eleven were 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 veterinarian from Prussia, who had not participated in the battle. Grant Marsh, the captain of the supply steamboat, the *Far West*, on the Yellowstone River stated that Stein “was the most scared man” he had ever seen.

Seven Swiss had participated in the battle. Four were dead, and one was critically wounded. Only two Swiss survived unscathed. While the Battle of the Little Bighorn was over,

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many trials faced the Germans and Swiss who continued to serve in the Seventh Cavalry.

**Germans and Swiss in the Seventh Cavalry after the Battle**

On June 27, the men from the Seventh Cavalry went to the areas where Custer and his men had been killed. The bodies had had two days to decompose in the hot sun, and the scene was ghastly. Some of the survivors of the battle looked for friends, and tried to identify them among the mutilated and rotting corpses, but many bodies were never recognized. The men from the Seventh Cavalry were joined by the soldiers from General Terry’s command, and they attempted to bury the dead. The ground was hard, and the men had few shovels, so the corpses were buried in shallow graves. The work was so awful that many men tried to forget it and never made mention of the work or tried to describe it. Years later, the bones were gathered up for proper burial. Remains of some of the fallen soldiers have been discovered many times over the years, and the bones of men were found as recently as the 1980s.

While Charles Windolph searched in vain for the body of his friend, August Finckle, he took some solace from the Indian camp where he found a dog and kept it as a pet. Another German, Gustave Korn, also found a pet on the battlefield. The horse, Comanche, was ridden by Miles Keogh commander of Company I in the battle, and Korn, also from Company I, was among those who found the severely-wounded animal. The German 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 horse to the river, where he washed the animal’s wounds.212

The other severely wounded horses found on the battlefield

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212 Korn in Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence, *His Very Silence Speaks: Comanche, the Horse who Survived Custer’s Last Stand* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State, 1989), 75-76.
were killed, but Indians had taken the healthy animals. These government horses were large mounts, requiring more food than the Indian ponies. They also did not have the skills that allowed the ponies to survive in a cold climate by pawing away snow to find the grass under it, and all the captured cavalry mounts probably died that winter.

The soldiers took Comanche back to Fort Lincoln where he was tended by the German veterinarian, Charles Stein. The animal’s recovery was slow, but it was able to move around without much aid by the spring of 1878. Comanche was the only known survivor, human or animal, of Custer’s command, and the horse was the pampered pet of the entire command. No one was even allowed to ride it, and Korn was given a special assignment to care for the animal. Comanche became very attached to Korn and followed him around like a faithful dog. Reportedly, the horse, perhaps being a bit jealous, often followed the German to the home of Korn’s “lady friend” where the animal would neigh until the soldier came out to lead it back to the stable. After Korn was killed at the Battle of Wounded Knee in December 1890, Comanche reportedly “mourned continuously for him.” It seemed that the animal had lost its interest in life, its health declined, and it died in November 1891. But Comanche was probably about twenty-seven years old at the time, and he had reached the limits of his expectancy.

While the battle was over, the wounded continued to suffer until they either recovered or died. Frank Braun, the badly-wounded Swiss soldier was taken on the Far West, a steamboat at the mouth of the Little Bighorn River, to Fort Abraham Lincoln, Dakota Territory, arriving on July 3. Braun’s condition deteriorated because he suffered from infection, and his wound failed to heal properly. Dr. J. M. Middleton, the post surgeon, placed the trooper under ether and operated on September 13. The physician probed and enlarged the wound, and he also made another opening in the leg which caused arterial hemorrhaging. This was probably an attempt to get the infection to bleed out. If so, it was unsuccessful, and Braun died

\[213\] Lawrence, Comanche, 108-9.
early in the morning of October 4, 1876.\textsuperscript{214} His death meant that five of the seven Swiss in the battle had been killed.

Dr. Middleton was so interested in Braun's wounds that he cut off part of the dead trooper's thigh and hip bone, and the physician shipped them to the Army Medical Museum, now known as the National Museum of Health and Medicine in Washington, DC, where they remain to this day. They reveal much about the nature of Braun's wounds, and the bullet which killed him is still lodged in the head of the femur. The specimen shows that Braun had made some progress in healing, but some of the bone had died, and it was still infected. The death of the Swiss demonstrated the limit of medical science at the time, because the physicians still poorly understood the causes of infection and had little knowledge in curing such maladies. Braun's death was the tragic loss of a young man, but his bones helped the doctors better understand the infection that killed him.\textsuperscript{215}

The courageous German, John Pahl, continued to suffer from the severe wound in his back, and he never fully recovered. He was also transported on the \textit{Far West} to Fort Lincoln where his treatment was inadequate, because 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, but he rejoined the next month. Yet his health remained poor, and he was finally considered fully disabled. 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 forty-nine.\textsuperscript{216}

Many soldiers wanted wives, and the two known widows of fallen German troopers soon remarried. Either these women already had someone in mind, or economic necessity helped them find husbands rapidly. Henry Dose's wife had no trouble finding a

\textsuperscript{214} Williams, \textit{Military Register}, 46.
\textsuperscript{215} Scott, Willey, and Connor, pp. 119-20. Braun was twenty-seven when he died.
\textsuperscript{216} Williams, \textit{Military Register}, 241.
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, and his widow married Sergeant Latrobe Bromwell, an American, on February 25, 1877, eight months after the battle.\textsuperscript{217} Luckily, Ottocar Nitsche from Prussia was able to find a wife, and he married Molly Jacobs in March 1878.\textsuperscript{218} Henry Lange from Hanover found a wife after the battle, and he married Augusta Herold on July 4, 1877. They later had seven children: William H., Edward, Fred, Lillie, Mildred, Harry, and Minnie.\textsuperscript{219}

The Indian Wars were not yet over after the Little Bighorn. When the Nez Perce tried to flee from the U S forces in 1877, Companies A, D, and K from the Seventh 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 during 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 increasing physical problems probably exacerbated 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 inflicted 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 due to chronic rheumatism. Henry Weihe was completely “broken down” and suffered chronic rheumatism from

\textsuperscript{217} Williams, \textit{Military Register}, 112, 156.
\textsuperscript{218} Williams, \textit{Military Register}, 233.
\textsuperscript{219} Nichols, \textit{Men with Custer}, 187.
repeated exposure on the field and from being wounded at the Little Bighorn.  

Joseph Kretchmer suffered from epilepsy contracted in the line of duty, and he was excused from military drills starting in 1883. Another German, William Marshall, was discharged from duty in November 1891 because of a lung infection also contracted while he was in the service, and he died in August 1892 at the age of forty-one. Roman Rutten was discharged in September 1890 because of debility from wounds, exposure, and the effects of his long service. Conrad Baumbach suffered from an unusual malady; he had frostbite in both feet. He was in the hospital for six months with the problem, 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, a malady now known as post traumatic stress disorder. In the 1870s, psychiatry was in its infancy, and there was little understanding of mental illness, its causes, and how to treat it. Many Americans believed that psychological problems were an aspect of weak character, or the sufferer was simply dodging responsibilities by acting strangely. 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 the excessive use of alcohol for many years. John H. Meier was described as having a “weakness for drink,” but he still lived until 1917.  

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 had been 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 sentenced to military prison for one year. One man, Louis Baumgartner, lost his mind entirely and was discharged from the army in November 1894 because of the “progressive paralysis of insane,” which he contracted while on military service. He died in an insane asylum in May 1895 probably at the age of forty-one.\textsuperscript{223}  

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, sadly, they hurt his relationship with his family. In 1885, he moved to Washington, DC, 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. He married again in 1901, but the couple also separated “because of his drunkenness and abuse.”\textsuperscript{224}  

Some Germans could no longer live with their physical and psychological pain, and they killed themselves. The first German to kill himself 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 picket.” It appeared that he had killed himself with an overdose of opium.\textsuperscript{225} Julius Gunther committed suicide by an unspecified means in 1902. Hugo Findeisen cut his own throat with a knife or razor; and he bled to death in May 1881. Philip Spinner shot himself in the chest in August 1895. Charles Fisher killed himself by asphyxiation from the inhalation of an “illuminating gas” in March 1898.  

Many of the Germans who were in the Seventh Cavalry in 1876 stayed in the army and continued to perform their duties well, and Willaim 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,  

\textsuperscript{223} Williams, \textit{Military Register}, 37 and Nichols, \textit{Men with Custer}, 16.  
\textsuperscript{224} Williams, \textit{Military Register}, 129, 132.  
\textsuperscript{225} Williams, \textit{Military Register}, 277.
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." William Saas was recommended to receive a certificate of merit "for bravery in action with Apache Indians at Huachuca Mountains on April 28, 1882 when he rode amidst a shower of bullets & rescued two comrades left behind dismounted [and] in range of the enemy." Frederick William Myers was given an even higher accolade because he was awarded the Medal of Honor for his action at White River, South Dakota, against Sioux warriors on January 1, 1891. His citation reads, "With 5 men repelled a superior force of the enemy and held his position against their repeated efforts to recapture it."

When Charles Windolph, left the army in 1883 after twelve years of service, he received exceptional praise from his 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."

Many of the Germans longed to visit their homeland once again, and several of them did. 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 furlough to his hometown of Darmstadt for six months starting in September 1890. Ernest Emil Wasmus from Brunswick also went to Germany for four months in 1880. When

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226 Williams, Military Register, 179-80.
227 Williams, Military Register, 265.
228 Windolph, "Battle," 72-3.
Christian Methfessel left the army, he went back to his hometown of Mühlhausen. He died there 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.

The Germans and Swiss who served in the Seventh Cavalry in 1876 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 two Swiss who survived the battle are examples of how the men continued with their lives. Robert Senn and John Lattman, both from Zurich stayed in the army for several years. Senn had various duties in the cavalry following the Little Bighorn including an assignment as a post school teacher, and he advanced from the rank of private to that of corporal and then to sergeant. On July 28, 1878, he was charged in a general court martial with aiding the desertion of a comrade by giving him advice on the best way to escape, but Senn was acquitted. He left the service at the end of his enlistment on September 22, 1880. He was erroneously referred to as a “private” of fair character at the time of his discharge even though he was a sergeant. The date of his death is unknown.

John Lattman had a number of assignments in the army following the Little Bighorn, and he worked as a gardener on several occasions. He served out his enlistment and was described as a private of excellent character when he was discharged on October 4, 1878. He then reenlisted for another five-year hitch. During that time, he served as a carpenter, gardener, and nurse. Lattman left the army on October 3, 1883, and he later homesteaded on 160 acres of land near Rapid City, South Dakota, where he raised cattle. He died on October 7, 1913 at the age of sixty-five.

Some of the Germans stayed in the army even after economic conditions improved. 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 sixty-four. 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 seventy-nine.

The government gave the men small pensions for serving in the Indian Wars, and the families of the men killed in battle received small payments as well. 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. These 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, DC, included Ernst Meineke, Anton Seibelder, and John Zemetzer.

Charles Windolph was typical of many of the Germans following the Little Bighorn. Windolph married Marry Jones in 1882, but she died the following year. Finally, his “old sweetheart,” Mathilda Lullow, 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, but his wife died in 1924. Charles lived for many years with his youngest child, Irene Fehliman.229

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

229 Windolph, I Fought with Custer, 114.
on March 11, 1950 and was the last German and the last cavalryman who survived the Little Bighorn.\textsuperscript{230}

The United States has a reputation of being an ungrateful nation that ignores its veterans, but this was not entirely true of the cavalry survivors of the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Many of them enjoyed much notoriety for the remainder of their lives. They were often praised for their courage in the face of long odds, and they deserved much adulation. Although, the Germans and Swiss at the Little Bighorn were thrown into battle, they showed great fortitude in two days of desperate battle. In addition, the thirty-six Germans and five Swiss who fell in battle demonstrated the greatest devotion possible. These were all fine, young men who sacrificed everything to support the policies of their adopted country. The Germans and Swiss at the Little Bighorn represent the proudest tradition of the US Army, and they also did great credit to the nations of their birth.

\textsuperscript{230} Windolph, \textit{I Fought with Custer}, 114.
List of Germans in 7th Cavalry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Co.</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Place of Birth</th>
<th>Job in the Army</th>
<th>Where in Battle</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charles Ackerman</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>5 Sept 1848</td>
<td>Baden</td>
<td>Waiter/Cook</td>
<td>Not Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Aller</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1847 Prussia</td>
<td>Prussia</td>
<td>Cooper</td>
<td>valley fight, hilltop fight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Andrews</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1843 Prussia</td>
<td>Bavaria</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
<td>Killed w. Custer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otto Arndt</td>
<td>Band</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1844 Bavaria</td>
<td>Musician</td>
<td>Not Present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Assadaly</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1842 Prussia</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
<td>Killed w. Custer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Barth</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1850 Pforzheim</td>
<td>Goldsmith</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jacob Bauer</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>Private</td>
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<td>Musician</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conrad Baumbach</td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>1840 Berlin</td>
<td>Musician</td>
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<tr>
<td>Louis Baumgartner</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1853 Baden</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>valley fight, hilltop fight</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Bender</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>Sergeant</td>
<td>1846 Berlin</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>Not Present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles H. Bischoff</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>23 Sept. 1855</td>
<td>Bremen</td>
<td>Barber</td>
<td>Not Present</td>
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<tr>
<td>August Bockerman</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Private</td>
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<td>Aloys Bohner</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Trumpeter</td>
<td>1830 Baden</td>
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<td>Edward Botzer</td>
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<td>Sergeant</td>
<td>1842? Bremerhaven</td>
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<td>Killed in valley</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>William Friedrich</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1 Nov. 1855</td>
<td>Wurtemberg</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>Not Present</td>
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<tr>
<td>Braendle</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1845 Aix-la-Chapelle</td>
<td>Turner</td>
<td>Pack train, hilltop fight</td>
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<td>John Bringes</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Farrier</td>
<td>1845 Hanover</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>valley fight, hilltop fight</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles Brown</td>
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<td>Commissary</td>
<td>1846 Bavaria</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
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<td>Joseph Brown</td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>1844 Berlin</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>hilltop fight</td>
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<tr>
<td>William A. Brown</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1843 Hamburg</td>
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<td>Killed w. Custer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carl August Bruns</td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>23 June 1830</td>
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<td>Charles J. Burgdorf</td>
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<td>Not Present</td>
<td>pack train, hilltop fight</td>
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<td>1853 Germany</td>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
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<td>Frederick Deetline</td>
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<td>1854 Wurtemberg</td>
<td>Bartender</td>
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<td>Name</td>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Profession</td>
<td>Fate</td>
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<td>Eduard Gustaf Delliehausen</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>14 Feb</td>
<td>Frankfurt</td>
<td>Mason</td>
<td>Killed in hilltop fight 26 June</td>
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<td>1849</td>
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<td>Bavaria</td>
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<td>Frederick Fox</td>
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<td>Wurtemberg</td>
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<tr>
<td>William Frank</td>
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<td>Magdeburg</td>
<td>Tailor</td>
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<td>John Frett Jr.</td>
<td>Citizen</td>
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<td>6 Jan.</td>
<td>Prussia</td>
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<td>Frank J. Geist</td>
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<td>16 Feb</td>
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<td>Miller</td>
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<td>Hunter</td>
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<td>Baden</td>
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<td>Louis Haugge</td>
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<td>April 1851</td>
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<td>Francis Hegner</td>
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<td>George Heid</td>
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<td>Julius Helmer</td>
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<td>1846</td>
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<td>Max Hoehn</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Birthplace</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Fate</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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