

WILLIAM MATSON has produced and directed an award-winning video, *Sitting Bull's Voice*, as well as the two-part video series, *The Authorized Biography of Sitting Bull by His Great-Grandson*, and the four-part video series, *The Authorized Biography of Crazy Horse and His Family*. He regularly speaks about these videos and their content at film festivals and has been working with the Crazy Horse family since 2001 to tell their story.

FLOYD CLOWN, DOUG WAR EAGLE, and DON RED THUNDER are the representatives of the Crazy Horse family and often speak at historical gatherings and national parks about their family's history.

THE MAN  
THE MYTH  
*and the*  
LEGEND  
*A New*  
*Perspective*

Floyd Clown, Doug War Eagle, and Don Red Thunder, representatives of the Crazy Horse family, via writer William B. Matson, reveal family stories that illustrate the famous leader's life and death in ways that will alter the commonly held knowledge of the Lakota warrior. It is time that this rich source of oral history, told in a Native American voice, is heard.

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MATSON  
CRAZY HORSE  
*The Lakota Warrior's  
Life & Legacy*



CRAZY  
HORSE  
*The*  
*Lakota  
Warrior's  
Life & Legacy*

THE EDWARD CLOWN FAMILY  
*as told to*  
WILLIAM B. MATSON

In *Crazy Horse: The Lakota Warrior's Life & Legacy*, the Edward Clown family, descendants of the Oglala Lakota war leader, presents the family tales and memories told to them about their famous grandfather. In many ways, the Clown family's oral history differs from what has become the standard and widely accepted biography of Crazy Horse. The family clarifies the inaccuracies and shares their story about the past, including what it means to them to be Lakota, the family genealogy, the life of Crazy Horse and his motivations, his death, and why they chose to keep quiet with their knowledge for so long before finally deciding to tell the truth as they know it.

This is a powerful and deeply personal account of the life of one of the greatest Native American warriors of the nineteenth century. It is a story of Native American history, told by Native Americans, that provides a unique perspective on a rich culture, on a way of life, and on an iconic legend.

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## CHAPTER NINE

### *The Name Is Passed*

**D**uring the fall of 1858, our family camped along the Shifting Sands River in what is today northeastern Wyoming. The Americans now call this river the Powder River.

A short distance from our camp, a young Lakota mother, who had her young son with her, was cleaning buffalo meat in the river. A Shoshoni war party appeared from a stand of trees near the river and spotted her. One of the Shoshoni warriors broke from his war party and attacked her. He beat her to death with his war club. However before he killed her, the mother yelled to her son to run away.

When the Shoshoni warrior was satisfied that the mother was dead, he turned his attention to her fleeing son.

Ca-oha was training a newly acquired brown and white paint horse that he had named *Wakiyan* near the river. He was utilizing a long chokecherry branch to maintain the horse's attention and obedience when he heard her screams. *Wakiyan* means Thunder or Thunder Beings in English.

He looked in her direction and saw the Shoshoni warrior kill her. When the Shoshoni started after her young son, he sprang into action.

With the Shoshoni closing in fast on the boy, Ca-oha rode up from behind him and took the Shoshoni out with his war club. After making sure he was dead, Ca-oha looked around and noticed the rest of the Shoshoni war party watching him from the trees. His immediate thought was that our camp needed to be protected. So he instructed the boy to go back to our camp to warn them and get help.

Having seen one of their own go down, and unsure if Ca-oha was part of a larger group, the war party turned tail and rode away. Ca-oha chased them and was able to get close enough to count coup and whip some of the Shoshoni on slower mounts with the tip of his chokecherry branch.

Once the Shoshoni reached their war party's camp, Ca-oha rode high up on a ridge and stopped. Seeing he was not going to enter their camp, and finally realizing that he was by himself, the Shoshoni became brave and charged him. Ca-oha turned and galloped

away. As they chased him over the ridge, a group of our warriors, which had been hastily assembled after learning of the Shonshoni war party from the young boy, greeted the Shonshoni with a vengeance. Our warriors ended up surrounding the Shonshoni and wiping them out. Ca-oha is said to have taken down three of them that day.

When Ca-oha returned and told his father what had happened, his father knew that his son had now achieved the status of a full battle-tested warrior. It made Crazy Horse think back to the time when he had become a warrior and what his father, Walks With Sacred Buffalo, had done for him.

He knew his son would need a new name. So the proud father gathered his son and called all our people to the center of our village. As our people congregated, he planted his staff in the ground and our village went silent. Ca-oha stood quietly as his father spoke.

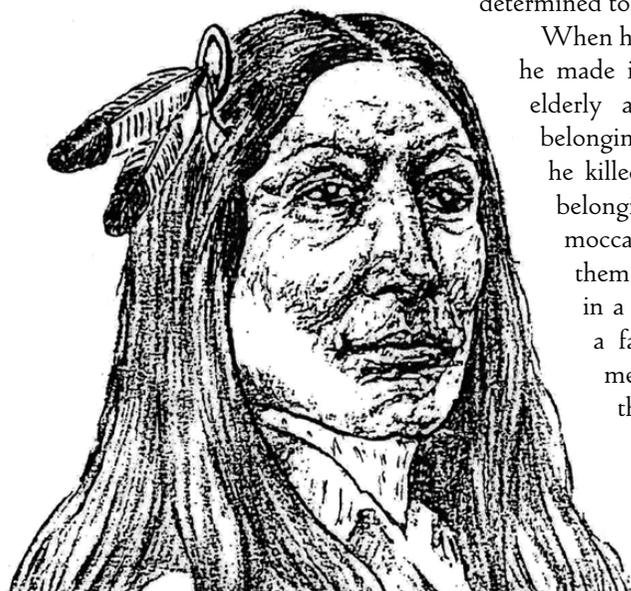
“Ca-oha my son, from this day on you will go by the name of *Tashunke Witko*. And I will take a new name that shall be taken from the simplest thing that has been shown to me. I shall carry the name *Waglula*.”

Waglula, roughly translated to English means Worm. Upon hearing this, our men whooped and our women trilled in celebration. It was a good day for our family. Our sacred name of Crazy Horse had once again been passed to a new generation. Ca-oha now carried the sacred name of Crazy Horse.

Our people already knew he was a great protector. However, the additional recognition of being chosen to carry our family’s sacred name of Crazy Horse had given him a greater status among our people and a greater feeling of personal responsibility. He was determined to honor the name.

When he went to defend our people, he made it a point to remember our elderly and bring them back the belongings of enemy warriors that he killed because quite often those belongings, like buffalo robes and moccasins, would be of use to them. When he captured horses in a raid, he would give them to a family in need. He brought meat back from his hunts to the elderly widows who had no warriors to depend on. He would spend time teaching our children our Lakota ways and our people came to love him.

During an overcast day in 1860, Crazy Horse had been out



Tashunke Witko drawn by a migrant artist from a description by his sister Iron Cedar. Once she saw the finished drawing she cried tears over the resemblance. Courtesy Edward Clown family.

hunting elk in an area west of what is today Deadwood, South Dakota. He was carrying a pistol that his father had given to him in a leather bag.

His hunt had been successful and he was leading a horse packed with elk meat along a heavily wooded ridge back to our camp when he came across a party of about nine Crow. The Crow spotted him and two of them immediately charged up the hill to try to kill him. However by the time he was able to fire his bow and kill them both, the remaining Crow had surrounded his position. He decided to lie low in the wooded area and wait.

The Crow were anxious to flush him out, and one of them crawled behind a large rock which was uncomfortably close to Crazy Horse’s position. Spotting him, Crazy Horse pulled his father’s pistol out from its leather bag and fired at the Crow who had unwittingly left both his legs exposed. The bullet pierced both legs and the Crow dragged himself down the hill where his fellow Crow could pull him to safety.

The standoff continued all afternoon. Crazy Horse had very few bullets for his pistol, so he fired at the Crow just often enough to let them know he was still there and still dangerous. As the sun began to set, Crazy Horse ate a piece of dried meat he was carrying to gain some additional energy and then used the cover of darkness to escape the encirclement with his pack horse full of elk meat still in tow. Once he was beyond them, he looked back and saw that they had not detected his escape.

After Crazy Horse returned to our camp, he rounded up some of our warriors. Then he led them out to fight the Crow. However, the Crow were no longer there. All that was left were the blood traces of those he had taken out.

There was general disappointment among our warriors that the Crow had left. However upon seeing the site, our warriors marveled at how Crazy Horse had beaten the long odds and lived to tell about it.

Around 1862, a tragic event took place to the east that had another strong impact on our attitudes towards the white people.

Our people to the east, namely the Dakota living in what is today south central Minnesota, had been trying to adapt to the white man ways. They wore white people’s clothes, attended white people’s churches, and tried to learn farming, but still they ended up depending on government annuities to keep from starving.

Prior to 1862, the white traders in the area had extended the Dakota people credit until the annuities arrived and then they would get reimbursed out of the Dakota’s annuities prior to the Dakota receiving them, quite often for much more than what had been loaned. When the Dakota realized what a big portion the traders were deducting from their annuities, they did not like it. Finally, in 1862, the Dakota demanded that this practice stop. When it did, the traders stopped extending credit.

Thus, when the annuities of 1862 were late once again, there was no credit to buy any food to tide the Dakota’s hunger over until the payment arrived. So, many of the Dakota begged to regain their credit so they could buy food. The traders seemed determined to teach the Dakota a lesson and bluntly turned them down. In fact, one trader was heard to say “If they are hungry, let them eat grass.”

Hungry and desperate, the Dakota rose up and killed some of the traders so they could gain access to their provisions and procure food for their families to keep them from starving.

Frightened, the traders called for the soldiers to protect them, and when the soldiers came, they took many of the Dakota into custody. Of those in custody, the US government's head man, Abraham Lincoln, told the soldiers to hang 38 of them. It was the most people the Americans claim to have ever hung at once in the history of their people. When Crazy Horse and our people heard about this from the survivors who had fled to our camps, it made them angry.

To make matters worse, shiny metal had been found once again, this time in the northern Rocky Mountains. Unfortunately, the quickest way the whites could reach this new discovery was by traveling through our best hunting grounds, which they did without asking. Their incursions were getting to be too hard to stomach. Their arrogance had to stop.

During our next summer solstice gathering, our head men made a decision to protect our people from these advancing white people. With this decision in place, Crazy Horse led raids against soldier patrols and soldier supply wagons in order to capture rifles and gun powder so that our warriors would be able to use the same deadly weapons on the white people that they used on us, and push them from our hunting grounds.

Around 1863, Waglula and Red Leggings had another boy, named Makah, which translated into English means Earth. Waglula was following through on his desire to make sure his children had plenty of siblings. Crazy Horse took time off from his raiding to congratulate them. He was happy to have another new brother to love and defend, but the defense of our Nation continued to call him. So after a brief reunion, he returned to his raids.

Black Buffalo's youngest son Hump, who was now in his fifties, still participated on many of our war parties. He never grew tired of the fight. Normally our warriors stopped riding with war parties when they reached



Makah also known as Peter Wolf in later life.  
Photo courtesy Edward Clown family.

their forties. At that age they would take on the role of an advisor or an elder to our people. However Hump had too much energy for that. As long as his heart felt young, he would continue do as he pleased.

When he wasn't fighting, Hump would quite often be found visiting with the Cheyenne people. He really liked their women and had married five of them. He had fathered three sons with them, Little Crow, Hump Two, and High Back Bone along with a daughter, Two Cows. However one of his wives had been killed by the Shoshoni in a raid and he never forgave them for what they had done.

Through Hump's women and other Cheyenne who had married into our people, our family became quite familiar with their ways, while at the same time they had become familiar with ours. The Cheyenne, who roamed an area mostly south of ours, had also become increasingly concerned about the white people's invasion. With both our tribes wanting to keep our hunting grounds for ourselves, we had a common goal that brought our two people together.

However, not all of the Cheyenne wanted to fight the Americans. There were bands within the Cheyenne Nation that wanted to coexist. The Cheyenne head man Black Kettle's band was one of them.

In the fall of 1864, white settlers, in what today is Colorado, fired a cannon at an approaching group of peaceful Cheyenne waving a white flag. This made the Cheyenne quite angry. Later some of the white settlers spread the word that they thought the Cheyenne were another tribe and that it was just a mistake. But still they showed no remorse for what they had done. This further infuriated the Cheyenne. The Cheyenne returned the favor by attacking wagon trains and ranches all throughout the Colorado Territory. In response, the Colorado Territory's head man, who went by the name of Governor Evans, asked a white holy man named Reverend Chivington to lead some soldiers out to fight the Cheyenne. Governor Evans offered \$25 for each Cheyenne scalp that the soldiers brought to him. At the time we did not understand what \$25 was or the value of paper money. But the soldiers did.

Black Kettle was aware of all that was going on. He wanted to keep his people safe, so he surrendered to the soldiers. He requested to camp where his people would not be mistaken with any of those wanting to fight the whites. The soldiers gave him a place to camp where they said he would be safe, and also gave him a colorful piece of cloth they called an American flag to fly over his village in case other soldiers came by so he could show them that he was a friend.

However Reverend Chivington and his soldiers ignored Black Kettle's American flag, along with his people's claims of peace, and brutally attacked his village. He and his soldiers butchered their elderly, women, and children in a heinous act of barbarism. The atrocities reached the point where many of his soldiers kept dead Cheyenne body parts as souvenirs.

When word reached our camp, Hump's women became distraught, which later smoldered into a white hot anger knowing that their relatives and people had been mutilated so extensively. It made all of us angry and sick. It was an event our people could not ignore, and if there was any lingering doubts about the cruelty of the soldiers

after the Blue Water massacre, the attack on Black Kettle's helpless village answered those doubts.

When the Cheyenne came to us and asked for help in their fight against the soldiers, we could not help but agree. We were hard and fast allies from that point forward.

However, before we could join them, some impatient Cheyenne warriors had already vented their rage on a soldier fort called Camp Rankin. Camp Rankin guarded a white settlement, named Julesburg, on the banks of the south fork of the Shell River. They killed several soldiers.

When our warriors finally arrived, they joined the Cheyenne for an attack on the Julesburg settlement. Together they burned the town to the ground. However, our family stayed up north because Waglula and Red Leggins had just brought another son into the world named Comes Home Last and our family wanted to enjoy the newborn. In our Lakota way, our children are sacred and always come first even during difficult times.

Following our summer solstice gathering in 1865, Crazy Horse joined the fighting to the south and rode with a group of our warriors to the Shell River area to help the Cheyenne push the whites out. The whites had built a wagon road going west that they called the Oregon Trail and they had built soldier forts along that route. One of their smaller forts sat on the banks of the north fork of the Shell River which overlooked a great wooden bridge they had built to drive their wagons across the river.

We thought if we could take this fort out then we could take the bridge down too. The wagons would then have a hard time crossing into our hunting grounds. It would also be a good place for us to capture additional guns.

At the south end of the bridge was the fort which the military called the Platte Bridge Station. It housed the soldiers that were supposed to chase us away from their road if we got too close. Along this wagon road the soldiers had built a long string of wooden poles with noisy, or singing wires, attached which they called their telegraph. The singing wires were how the soldiers talked to each other over long distances. A singing drum or telegraph relay resided inside the Platte River Station. The telegraph poles were planted permanently into the ground, and that was something we had not agreed upon in any of our treaties.

Around July 26, 1865, our scouts told us that there were some supply wagons heading towards the fort from the west. A few hours before the wagons were to arrive, a group of about twenty soldiers rode out of the fort. We knew they were sending these soldiers to meet and escort the wagons back because we had seen them do it before. Along their route to the wagons, they spotted two of our warriors about a quarter mile in front of them cutting the telegraph wires. We planned for them to see it. It was a decoying tactic.

A decoying tactic usually consisted of a handful of warriors or human decoys whose job it was to lure the enemy into an ambush by getting them to believe our warriors would be an easy kill. If our decoys were successful, the soldiers quite often never lived to see the sunset.

Although Crazy Horse was not one of the two warriors cutting the wires that day, he was a participant in the ambush that we and our Cheyenne allies were about to spring on the soldiers.

Upon seeing the soldiers, our two decoys quickly slid down the telegraph poles and hopped on their horses. When the soldiers hesitated to follow, our two decoys pretended that their horses had become lame. Seeing this, the soldiers thought they would indeed be easy pickings and stormed after them. Our decoys rode away at half speed.

After the soldiers chased them a short distance, our decoys led them over a rise. Waiting on the other side was a large group of our Lakota warriors mixed in with our Cheyenne allies. When we sprang the ambush, the soldiers panicked. They turned around and began riding for their lives back to their fort. We raced to cut them off and were able to kill five of them, including their leader, and wound several others before the soldiers ducked back into their fort for safety. With the soldier patrol licking their wounds in the fort, we could now wait for the supply wagons without worrying much about their soldiers riding to the rescue.

### Late that afternoon the wagons showed up.

Upon the wagons' appearance, the soldiers in the fort were indeed too frightened to come help, so they decided to let us have the wagons. All they did was fire a cannon to warn the wagons that we were coming, but it did no good.

There were three wagons with about twenty white men. It did not take long for our warriors to overwhelm them, killing all but three of their men who somehow made it to the fort. Once the fighting was done, our warriors pushed their wagons into a dried up creek area and emptied them of all their weapons and shells. Our warriors then set them on fire and watched them burn. It gave us great satisfaction. Our Cheyenne allies went to work on the wagon train's dead. It was payback for Sand Creek.

Unfortunately our victory did nothing to solve our problem with the white man's encroachment upon our food sources. The white people seemed to be finding new ways to enter our hunting grounds. Farther north, small groups of white people were continuing to travel through our hunting grounds and kill our buffalo on their way to get some of the shiny metal that had been reported in the Rocky Mountains. These small parties began to grow into large wagon trains.

We stopped the first of these larger northbound groups of wagons that tried crossing through our lands. We told them that this was our hunting area and to please leave. But their wagons continued to invade and cross through our hunting area, scaring the game away and scarring the earth to the point that it created a new trail that the white people called the Bozeman Trail. Soon their wagon trains numbered around 150 wagons in each group.

We had now come to the realization that the whites had no ears. We hated that we had to fight these people who were now bringing their families with them. Killing women and children was not our way. So we scaled back our attacks to see if there was another solution.

In Waglula's younger days, he and a Lakota friend named Black Dog would go on raids and hunts together with an older, much respected warrior named Lone Man. Now those days were long past. Lone Man had passed to the other side. However Lone Man's lineage lived on. Lone Man's daughter Blue Day Woman had married Black Dog. They

had a son together named He Dog. As a teenager, He Dog had sometimes joined Waglula and his father as a horse holder on a few of their forays.

## Lone Man also had a son named Red Cloud.

When Black Dog came to visit Waglula late that summer, his brother-in-law Red Cloud accompanied him. Upon seeing Red Cloud, it instantly brought back happy memories of his old friend Lone Man to Waglula.

Lone Man's family camp was normally located around what is today Mobridge, South Dakota. He had had many friends among our Minnikojou band, even though he hailed from a different Lakota band called the Cut Heads. The Cut Head Band got their name from a time when some of their warriors brought back the heads of our enemies to camp.

Lone Man had even known Waglula's father, Walks With Sacred Buffalo, and father-in-law, Black Buffalo from long past buffalo hunts. Waglula's family and Lone Man's family often camped in the same camps during these fall hunts. Lone Man's son, Red Cloud, was about eleven years younger than Waglula and was still very young when his father got lost in the whiskey bottle and died from too much of it.

After his father's death, Red Cloud was taken by his mother, Walks As She Thinks, to live with her brother Smoke. Smoke was the head man of the Loafers and spent a great deal of time trading with the whites. Red Cloud watched and learned the art of negotiating and surviving among the whites from his uncle Smoke.

Red Cloud grew into a fierce warrior, and around 1841, he killed another Lakota head man named Bull Bear in a dispute between two families. However Waglula did not judge him on that, he only saw him as the son of an old friend.

Red Cloud was now an *akicita* head man for a band led by Conquering Bear's son, who had taken his father's name of Conquering Bear. Conquering Bear's son spent much of his time as an intermediary between our people and the soldiers at Fort Laramie, just like his father had. *Akicita* in the Lakota language roughly means "police."

Waglula knew that Red Cloud observed soldier movements around Fort Laramie every day and asked him if he could supply this useful information to his son, Crazy Horse.

Red Cloud had inherited his father's warrior mind and had also learned the white ways from his uncle Smoke. He had many skills. However Red Cloud was also a polarizing figure among our people. Many of our young warriors wouldn't even talk to him because of the Bull Bear incident. Red Cloud was smart enough to know that those who avoided him would listen to his words if they came through the mouth of a respected warrior like Crazy Horse.

Red Cloud had the mind of a politician. Waglula set up a meeting for Red Cloud to meet his son. When Red Cloud and Crazy Horse finally met at our family's camp, Red Cloud advocated attacking any and all whites that entered our hunting grounds. It was exactly what Crazy Horse was thinking, too. Red Cloud looked to capitalize.

## CHAPTER TEN

# *Fighting for Our Hunting Grounds*

**T**he wagon trains of the gold seekers were no match for Crazy Horse and our warriors in a fight. So the gold seekers cried to their government and their government listened.

They sent soldiers to defend these gold seekers, even though they knew they were in the wrong. During the summer of 1865, their soldiers invaded our prime hunting grounds near the Shifting Sands River to try to push us out. They failed. We gave them a hard time and then disappeared into places where they could not find us.

While on this invasion, the soldiers came across the Arapaho head man Black Bear's village on the Beaver Tail River near what is today Ranchester, Wyoming. In our Lakota way we see a beaver tail as looking similar to a tongue. We believe a misinterpretation by the Americans is responsible for its present name of the Tongue River.

Since the Arapahos were friends of ours, the soldiers decided to attack their village and left many of their women and children dead. After the attack, the soldiers went ahead and built a fort along their Bozeman Trail which they called Fort Connor after their head man, General Connor.

Following the soldier's savage attack, the Arapahos went from being our friends to becoming active allies with us and with the Cheyenne in our fight to push the soldiers from our hunting grounds. With all three of our tribes fighting together, our raids became more frequent and we finally forced the government to come to their senses. They sent word that they wanted to talk peace with us at Fort Laramie the following spring. With that piece of news, we felt our efforts had finally become successful.

Red Cloud, who we knew to be a good speaker, took up the role as our main negotiator at the talks. We expected him to set them straight and get them to abandon their new fort so we could continue to live in our traditional ways.

However, once Red Cloud arrived at the fort in the spring of 1866, he found out that US government wanted to trade presents from "The Great White Father in Washington"

(this is what the white people liked to call their head chief) in exchange for keeping their new road, and building additional forts along it. We couldn't believe our ears. We did not understand what they were thinking.

Our Mother the Earth is our mother. How could we trade away our mother? How could we sell our food source? Our grandparents' bones? Our children's future? What kind of people would that make us? Our Mother the Earth belongs to all Creation and all Creation belongs to her, including us.

However, we became even more alarmed when Red Cloud actually began to think their proposal over. Red Cloud told the Americans that he had been the one who was leading our warriors against their soldiers even though we knew it to be untrue. So the Americans began to treat him like a more important head man than he actually was, and he liked it. He liked it so much that he considered doing things he shouldn't have. It made Crazy Horse think twice about how committed Red Cloud was to maintaining our Lakota ways.

While Red Cloud was considering his reply to the Americans, a big group of about one thousand soldiers arrived at the fort. When one of our people at the peace talks asked why they were there, the soldiers' head man said they were on their way to build forts on the new road.

When word got back to Red Cloud, he was stunned. He found that he wasn't as important as he thought he was. It made him angry. He railed against the fact that "The Great White Father" had shown him presents in exchange for selling the road, but then ordered his soldiers to steal the road before he had a chance to tell him yes or no. With his pride wounded, Red Cloud stormed out of the talks.

While all this was happening, our summer solstice was taking place. During this annual celebration, Crazy Horse was appointed one of our shirtwearers. His grandfathers had been shirtwearers, as had his father, and now it was his turn. It meant a great deal to him and he was proud to accept the role and prove his worth. Waglula's heart swelled with pride when he heard one of our elders call his son's name to bestow this great honor on him.

Not long afterwards, while our family was staying at Iron Cedar Creek, Red Leggin delivered Waglula his last child, a daughter named Iron Cedar. She was named for the family camping area that now held Red Leggin's mother's and uncle's graves.

Once again the addition of a new life in Waglula's tipi gave our family's happiness a boost. They feasted. Iron Cedar would eventually become our paternal great grandmother. She was the one who passed much of our oral history to our grandparents, who later passed it to us.

While our ancestors enjoyed little Iron Cedar, messengers interrupted our bliss with news that the soldiers were building new forts in our hunting grounds. It made us mad.

During the winter, our people normally camped at our winter camp in the Black Hills. It was a camp located along Eagle Head Creek which is today called French Creek, in what is present day Custer State Park in South Dakota. The camp is nestled in a valley that runs near the edge of our Black Hills. The many hills that surround this valley help

shield us from the icy winter winds. There is also a spring that yields water there that never freezes in the winter.

However, 1866 was not a normal year. The soldiers had built three forts that fall. They had rebuilt Fort Connor into Fort Reno, and had built Fort C. F. Smith and Fort Phil Kearny from scratch. We knew we could not let these forts take root in our hunting grounds. So we stayed that winter to force them out.

Red Cloud wanted to lead the fight. However he had listened to the Americans when they asked to buy the new road that belonged to all our people and not just to him. As a result, Crazy Horse and many of the rest of us had no ears for him. We would fight without him.

When it came to fighting, our people never brought our families along. We wanted to make sure they were protected. So, for that reason, we kept our women and children in a camp about two days ride away in the Wolf Mountains near what is today the Montana and Wyoming border. By camping there, our families were away from the fighting, but were near enough for our warriors to visit and make sure their families were fed.

In contrast, our Cheyenne allies often brought their families to a fight. Their women would sometimes even participate in the fight to the point that if their husbands were killed, they would put on his war paint and carry his name into battle.

We decided to concentrate on Fort Phil Kearny. It was located near Clear Creek which is today called Little Piney Creek by the Americans. Clear Creek flows in present day north-central Wyoming.

Our main objective was to get the soldiers away from the fort and out in the open. To achieve this goal, we burned the grass around the fort so the soldiers would have to go away from the fort when it came time to cut hay for their horses. This exposed them to longer waits if they needed to be reinforced from the fort during a fight. We engaged the soldiers in several skirmishes, including whenever they left the fort to cut logs for building or firewood for the winter months.

On December 6, 1866, some soldiers and wagons left the fort to cut wood. Once they were out among the trees, our warriors attacked. The soldiers responded by sending additional soldiers from the fort in a counterattack and pursued our warriors to a place they now call Lodge Trail Ridge.

Lodge Trail Ridge was a tall ridge line northwest of a rounded hill that the soldiers called Sullivant Hill, which is almost directly west of Fort Phil Kearny. Once we got to the western side of Lodge Trail Ridge, we could not be seen by the soldiers at the fort who were by then nearly two miles away. We knew this area would be a good place for an ambush. So our objective became to bring the soldiers to this area where we could fight them without anyone in the fort knowing how the fighting was progressing. We would also be too far away from the fort for them to fire their cannons at us.

During the skirmish, our warriors were successful in luring some of their soldiers beyond Lodge Trail Ridge and we were able to wipe a few of them out. After that taste of success, we decided to try to lure a larger soldier unit into the area and take care of them once and for all. So Crazy Horse and some of our elder warriors, like Hump, began to devise a plan.

Meanwhile, Red Cloud took a trip south to do some trading near Fort Laramie and secure extra guns. He also was trading for bacon and coffee. He did not make it back in time to participate in helping us wipe out the soldiers. We did not miss him.

The ground was hard and frozen on December 21 when we put our plan to work. Once again we attacked the soldier's wood gathering party. As they had done so many times before, the soldiers sent men from the fort to chase us away. Some of the men were on horseback while others were on foot. Crazy Horse and nine other Lakota and Cheyenne warriors had been sent to decoy these men into an ambush. After some taunting, Crazy Horse and the rest of the decoys were successful in capturing their attention. They flashed their behinds and fired shots at them and then just sat on their horses and watched the soldiers get closer. Soon the soldiers advanced close enough that our decoys were within easy rifle range. The soldiers would stop to fire and our decoys would ride off. If the soldiers hesitated to continue their pursuit, Crazy Horse and the rest of the decoys would act like their horses had gone lame or had been wounded and hop off and pretend to check their hooves for injury. Crazy Horse and our warriors rode high on the ridges the entire time so that they could be easily seen. They teased them so that the soldiers pushed beyond where they were safe. The soldiers followed them for nearly two miles until they had journeyed beyond Lodge Trail Ridge.

Our decoys lead them to a place that is today known as the Peno Creek Valley which is just beyond Lodge Trail Ridge. Upon entering the Peno Creek Valley, our decoys split up. One group rode along a ridge on the western side of the valley, called Peno Head Ridge, while Crazy Horse and the rest of the decoys rode to the top of what is now known as Fetterman Hill and sat on their horses in full view of the soldiers and stared at



Peno Creek Valley from Magpie Creek. The Wyoming State Memorial is slightly left of center. Crazy Horse decoyed Fetterman up Fetterman Hill which is second to the left in the photo while the cavalry pursued the other decoys along the ridge on the right hand side of the photo. Photo by Bill Matson.

them. The soldiers were so excited about taking out all ten of our decoys that they split up. The soldiers on horseback rode after the six decoys who chose to ride along Peno Head Ridge and those soldiers on foot charged up Fetterman Hill to get at Crazy Horse and our other three decoys.

Meanwhile, a handful of Cheyenne women had set up a small camp on the north-western end of the Peno Creek Valley in front of Magpie Creek which today is called Peno Creek by the Americans. There was brush all around the creek. The women were pretending to help injured warriors. This was also a decoy tactic. Our six decoys who had been riding along Peno Head Ridge turned down into the valley towards the women. The soldiers who were on horseback left the safety of the upper ridge and entered into the valley. Attacking the women and injured warriors was just too hard to resist.

### **Now we had the soldiers right where we wanted them.**

We had about five hundred warriors hiding behind the ridges that lined the valley. They had been monitoring the soldier's location along the way by listening to the shots exchanged between them and our decoys. As soon as those soldiers on foot got close enough, Crazy Horse and three decoys with him rode over the hill and out of sight. As the soldier's pursuit reached near the top of the hill, our warriors swarmed out from behind the eastern ridges. The soldiers didn't have a chance.

When the horse soldiers in the valley got near the Cheyenne women, about 200 Cheyenne warriors led by Little Wolf came out from behind the western ridges and circled around behind the soldiers to close off their return route to the fort while a second large group of warriors came out from behind the women and the bushes of Magpie Creek. Suddenly we had the horse soldiers in big trouble, too.

The horse soldiers, seeing they were badly outnumbered, galloped to rejoin the foot soldiers on Fetterman Hill. Once they arrived there, we had them all encircled at the top of the hill where they were easy targets. The soldiers backpedaled up the hill and our Lakota and Cheyenne captured more and more guns from the soldiers they had killed. The fighting lasted about forty minutes.

### **Our warriors wiped them out to the last man.**

Some of our warriors also added to their herds by gathering the now riderless soldier horses. They were distinctive because they had a branding that said US on their hip.

Afterwards, the Cheyenne women once again repaid the soldiers for their atrocities at Sand Creek and mutilated the soldiers in the same manner that their loved ones had been mutilated by the soldiers two years earlier.

We took many casualties in the fight and had to take time to take care of our dead. We then decided to head back to the warm campfires in our family camp for the rest of the winter to heal and get strong again.

Later we heard that a retrieval party of soldiers went out to the battlefield and discovered that the soldier's head men in the battle had been killed by soldier bullets. Of course, most all of the bullets shot that day were fired with soldier rifles because Crazy Horse and our warriors had soldier rifles, too—either prior to the battle, or captured during it.

The following spring we allowed our ponies to regain their strength and fatten for future battles. After celebrating our summer solstice of 1867, we decided to resume the fighting. However, we became undecided whether to take out Fort C. F. Smith or Fort Phil Kearny first. So we split our warriors up, with about half going north to attack Fort C. F. Smith, located in south-central Montana, while Crazy Horse and the rest of our warriors concentrated once again on Fort Phil Kearny.

At Fort Phil Kearny, we observed that the soldiers' behavior had not changed much over the winter and they had even added more soldiers to their fort. These soldiers still went to cut wood. They were making the fort even bigger. These wood cutting soldiers would stay out at the same place every night about five miles northwest of Fort Phil Kearny where they would sleep with their horses in the center of a circle of wagon boxes without wheels.

Around August 2, 1867, we counted about thirty soldiers at this wagon box circle. We had around six hundred warriors. The wood cutting soldiers were spread out all over the area that day and Crazy Horse and our head men decided that it would be a good time to attack, so we did.

One group of our warriors attacked the woodcutters in the forest and burned their wooden wagons while Crazy Horse and a few other warriors attacked their horse holders down by the creek. He had hopes of luring the larger group of soldiers away from the safety of their wagon box encirclement and into the waiting arms of an ambush.

In the attack on the horse holders, Crazy Horse killed one of the soldiers and took his rifle. It was different from anything he had ever seen. It could fire bullets one right after the other or almost four times as fast as any rifle he had ever seen. Later we learned that it was called a breech-loading Springfield Allin Conversion rifle. Now all of the soldiers carried one. He showed it to some of our other warriors and they became excited and wanted to capture one of their own.

When our attack on the horse holders became known to the soldiers in the wagon box circle, they began to assemble for a counter attack. Unfortunately, some of our younger warriors in their haste to show their bravery spoiled our ambush by revealing themselves before the soldiers had left the confines of the wagon boxes. This caused their sentries to race back to the wagon boxes for cover. Now our warriors would have to attack the soldiers in a fortified area.

While all this was taking place, Crazy Horse was in the wooded area to the south of the wagon box camp watching for any additional wood cutting soldiers that might appear from the timbers.

Sitting on a hill to the southeast of the wagon boxes were a handful of warriors led by the Cheyenne head man Little Wolf. They stood watch in the direction of the fort, looking for any soldier reinforcements. Corn, Hump, and some other elders watched from a hill northeast of the wagon boxes for any supply trains traveling down from the north.

We thought that this fight would be a good place for our younger warriors to gain some fighting experience. Since we outnumbered the soldiers by such a large number, we thought it would be an easy fight, even though we had lost the element of surprise. Many of our younger warriors were in their mid-teens to their early twenties and wanted

to prove themselves. We allowed them to make the attack with a few of our older warriors to lead them. They represented about a third of our warriors.

## It was a disaster.

Our warriors fell like leaves on a fall day. The fight kept our elk dreamers who watched from the hills with their long flowing war bonnets busy. Our elk dreamers were like medics because when they saw somebody fall they would ride down and administer their elk medicine which would help heal the fallen warrior so they could fight again. Our elk dreamers did not learn that they were to be elk dreamers from a vision, they learned their path at birth. Those of other cultures think these men on the hills with the long flowing war bonnets were head men or chiefs but our head men usually just wore two or three feathers.

Prior to this fight, the soldiers had used muskets that required a long pause in between shots which our warriors used as an opportunity to get closer and closer to the soldiers. Now the pause no longer existed with the soldiers' new quick-firing rifles, and our young warriors were not able to adjust. We lost about twenty percent of our young men, so we withdrew.

Our respect for these new rifles grew and we became unsure if we wanted to try again. However a Cheyenne elder took it upon himself to show our young men how to be brave. He grabbed a rifle and a pistol and charged the wagons by himself. They cut him down, but his bravery inspired our younger men. So they attacked the wagon boxes a second time, only this time on foot.

They got to within a few feet but once again they took such heavy casualties that they had to pull back. We fought the soldiers for about half of the day until we realized that their new rifles made an attack on them way too difficult. Nearly one third of our warriors were either killed or wounded that day. When more soldiers came from the fort firing their cannons, we decided it was time to leave.

We retrieved our dead and headed north so we could heal once again.