

WHY CUSTER WAS NEVER WARNED

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**THE FORGOTTEN STORY OF THE TRUE
GENESIS OF AMERICA'S MOST ICONIC
MILITARY DISASTER, CUSTER'S LAST STAND**

PHILLIP THOMAS TUCKER, PH.D.



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*Why Custer Was Never Warned:
The Forgotten Story of the True Genesis of America's Most Iconic
Military Disaster, Custer's Last Stand*

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Introduction



No battle in the annals of American military history has been more romanticized or myth-shrouded than the fascinating story of “Custer’s Last Stand.” Seemingly every possible aspect has been written about in regard to this iconic battle that raged deep in the Montana Territory on a hot June afternoon in 1876. Today, the death of Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer and the annihilation of his five companies of the 7th Cavalry have become one of the most immortalized sagas in American history. Millions of visitors have paid homage to “Custer Hill,” where Custer breathed his last with a last surviving band of his closest friends, relatives, and the top fighting men of his famed cavalry regiment. Ironically, what few of these millions of visitors realize is the fact that Custer’s fate had already been sealed by what happened more than a week before at the relatively little-known battle of the Rosebud. This sharp clash of arms along the clear waters at the head of the Rosebud (named for the wild rose bushes that grew along the river) on the morning of June 17, 1876 led to a series of developments that made the most famous military disaster in American history all but inevitable. It is one of the

great ironies of the story of the dramatic showdown along the Little Bighorn River on the afternoon of June 25, 1876.

It is well known that Hollywood is one the greatest historical fiction producing machines of all time, especially when it comes to misrepresenting some of the most iconic moments in the annals of American history. As could be expected, “Custer’s Last Stand” was one such iconic moment in America’s saga that has received lavish coverage by the American film industry for generations. As usual, Hollywood’s penchant for gross distortion of the historical record has resulted in considerable myth-making. For instance and most famously, Warner Brothers reinvented and rewrote the story of the battle of Little Bighorn in the 1942 movie by Warner Brothers, *They Died with Their Boots On*.

This immensely popular production was in fact the first major film devoted to “Custer’s Last Stand.” It captivated generations of American audiences, as well as a seemingly endless number of historians. As could be expected, what was presented by a team of experienced Warner Brother’s scriptwriters was a highly-fictionalized and romanticized version of one of the most famous disasters in the annals of American military history. Dashing Tasmania-born actor Errol Flynn played Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer in the popular film. Although a relatively minor military action fought in a remote section of the Montana Territory, Custer’s defeat at the Little Bighorn has long loomed large in the American public consciousness for a host of psychological, emotional and even racial reasons. As a national symbol (first forged as a dynamic cavalry commander during the Civil War) representing the advance of Manifest Destiny, modernity, and the spread of American civilization across the Great Plains, Custer embodied the national spirit of the day in the struggle

to subjugate the then so-called barbarians with dark skins, people who fit the day's popular definition of the "savage."

One of America's ancient racial fears became a dark reality at the bloody showdown at the Little Bighorn. Throughout the course of American history, it was the omnipresent fear that in the racial struggle against native inhabitants, disaster would result should large numbers of these dark-skinned people (the Lakota, or Sioux, in this case) turn against those who sought to "civilize" them.

Contrary to the general consensus and endless romanticizing myths however, Hollywood may have actually gotten it right in some regards. Amid the overly-embellished and exaggerated historical narrative about the battle of Little Bighorn, brought forth from a pool of talented scriptwriters in Hollywood, might some truthful conclusions have emerged almost by accident from these overly-romanticized portrayals of Custer's famous last stand?

Not long after the Korean War's beginning, an international event that shattered the post-Second World War peace, and also due to the emergence of new threats to America with Communism's rise in remote corners of the Third World, American films predictably became more patriotic to meet the requirements of new international challenges. Self-sacrifice became an increasingly common theme of this new wave of American war films from numerous production companies. These films educated a new generation of young Americans then approaching military age about the high future sacrifice that was required to safeguard democracy in an increasingly dangerous world.

Robert L. Lippert Films was one such production company that thrived during this period. Faithfully adhering to its usual formula of producing inexpensive but captivating films, the company released a

short (only 86 minutes in length) cinematic work devoted to a historical subject that had long intrigued American audiences. Playing its part to raise patriotism across the United States, which faced the Cold War on the horizon, this film was simply entitled *Little Big Horn*. Without much fanfare, the film was released on June 15, 1951, just before the 75th anniversary of the famous battle in which Custer's famed luck finally ran out on June 25, 1876. Unlike so many other small budget films of this period during which America served as the leader of the free world in the fight against the march of Communism, this almost now completely forgotten film was actually a rare gem among the routine mediocrity steadily cranked out by small film companies with low budgets.

Ironically, despite a title that promised to tell the fascinating story of Custer's fight during which five companies of the 7th Cavalry were annihilated deep in the Montana Territory, this film failed to depict anything that even remotely resembled the actual battle of Little Bighorn. Clearly, the title had been created by the film company's savvy marketing department. Despite its interest-inducing title that ensured a good many people filled the seats of movie theaters across America during the summer of 1951, the film was disappointing because it failed to depict anything about one of the most famous battles in American history. However, Lippert's production had in fact unwittingly offered to the public a novel premise related to the legendary battle, perhaps only to supply drama and suspense for audiences. Although the movie fit neatly into the demands of the growing Cold War culture of the American film industry, (focused primarily on raising the level of patriotism across the United States), the film's thesis was that these men in blue had bravely sacrificed themselves for

the greater good of their comrades, (their distant cavalry regiment) during a key moment of the 1876 Sioux Campaign. Therefore, this little film presented the novel story of noble sacrifice by a mere handful of courageous American fighting men, (fifteen 7th Cavalry troopers had separated from Custer's famed regiment), who displayed great courage in the face of severe adversity and impossible odds.

Of course, what was conveniently left out of the film was the fact that this ambitious campaign that initiated a new war against the Lakota people had been orchestrated by cynical political and military leaders at the White House in Washington, D.C. to not only permanently secure the beautiful region known as the Black Hills in today's South Dakota, but also to bring an end of the threat posed by the largest hostile tribe in America, the Sioux. It was a crassly manufactured war in true Machiavellian fashion by the nation's top military and civilian leaders, including the president.

Without the usual romance and glorification found in almost every other film of the day, this short film told the dramatic story of the death ride of this small detachment of isolated 7th Cavalry troopers through a lengthy expanse of hostile Indian country in a desperate bid to warn Custer and their 7th Cavalry, and to save them from the cruel fate that awaited them along the clear waters of the Little Bighorn River.

In the popular movie's opening shot, the silhouette of a thin formation of fifteen cavalymen riding in single file against an ominous darkened sky foretold of the many tragedies that lay ahead of them. Upon this foreboding visual background, a brief narrative was presented on the screen to summarize the film's setting. Catching the sober mood of the main characters, a band of duty-minded American

fighting men riding to their death in a heroic sacrifice for God and country, the screen reads: “Behind Custer’s immortal last stand is a saga, never told before, of fifteen brave men who fought their way through 250 miles across seething Sioux territory to warn Custer’s tiny band of the massacre they faced at Little Big Horn.”

Of course, behind the romantic myths that have long surrounded this legendary battle in the Montana Territory, there was no “massacre” along the Little Bighorn on the afternoon of June 25, as first proclaimed by almost all of the newspapers across America in the day. This engaging story of a lone patrol of courageous 7th Cavalry troopers pulled by destiny and a cruel fate toward their own annihilation deep in the heart of Indian country was entirely fictitious. The gritty realism of suffering and death of these cavalymen was not a fabrication or exaggeration however, but rather a representative example of the stern challenges and surreal terrors experienced by Custer’s men at the Little Bighorn.

Like most productions churned out by the Hollywood machine during this early period of the Cold War, this film was nothing more than an intriguing story fabricated by imaginative scriptwriters. Nevertheless, the Lippert film successfully captured the mood and feeling of the 7th Cavalry troopers before they met their tragic ends. Most importantly, this film was correct in emphasizing that Custer and his men were never warned about what lay before them: a determined and highly-motivated opponent far more formidable in terms of numbers and modern weaponry than previously imagined by anyone at the time. Significantly, this tragic situation has raised a key, but seldom-asked, question, missed by generations of historians who have mostly focused on the tactical aspects of the battle of the Little Bighorn: Why wasn’t Custer warned?

Indeed, absolutely nothing in the historical record has indicated that any troopers or even a single scout (Indian or white) ever attempted to warn Custer's command that a far more powerful opponent than ever previously encountered on the Northern Great Plains now lay waiting before the 7th Cavalry, in a remote river valley deep in buffalo country. In fact, Sitting Bull's expansive village of mostly Sioux extended several miles along the Little Bighorn, representing the largest concentration of Native Americans, (including the Cheyenne and smaller tribes), ever seen in the history of the Northern Great Plains.

In truth, no effort at all was ever undertaken by anyone to warn the General Alfred H. Terry-Custer northern column, not even by the nearest troops, the southern column under West Pointer General George Crook, who could have warned them in time. With great expectations for easy victory, Crook's column had marched north from Fort Fetterman in the Wyoming Territory on May 29 to gain an advanced northern point at the headwaters of the Rosebud River (sometimes called Rosebud Creek at this southern point upriver), located just east of the Little Bighorn River. This was all part of a multi-column pincer movement calculated by army headquarters to entrap the so-called "hostiles" between the northern and southern columns in the buffalo hunting grounds located just below the Yellowstone River, including the Little Bighorn River country. The southern arm of the pincer movement, Crook and more than 1,000 of his men, the campaign's largest column, possessed ample time to send a timely warning north to the General Terry-Custer Dakota column and also to the Colonel John Gibbon Montana column (part of the northern pincer movement that had trekked east from Fort Ellis in western Montana and united with the Terry-Custer column on June 21 at the mouth of the Rosebud River).

However, such a timely warning was never issued when it was most needed by Custer and his ill-fated 7th Cavalry. A jealous rival of Custer going back to Civil War days, Crook made no effort to warn the northern column about the massive concentration of warriors, despite having suffered his most humiliating defeat at the hands of Crazy Horse and hundreds of his Sioux and Cheyenne warriors on the upper reaches of the Rosebud River on June 17. He had been struck at mid-morning when encamped along the Rosebud after having moved north in the hope of striking Sitting Bull's village that was reported to be located on the Rosebud. As fate would have it, shortly after Crook's battle, Custer's 7th Cavalry began its march to the Little Bighorn by first moving southward into the pristine Rosebud River Valley before turning west, while Crook had moved northwards into the Rosebud Valley barely a week earlier, before encountering that most determined Native American resistance yet seen on the Northern Great Plains. Significantly, the distance between the Little Big Horn and Rosebud battlefields was only around 25 miles.

By the time that Custer rode south up the Rosebud, Crook and his southern column were not moving north to link with the northern column as expected by the troopers of the 7th Cavalry. In fact, General Crook and his men were no longer even in the Montana Territory! Unknown to Custer to his dying day, which partly resulted from this remarkable development and reveals the greatest negligence of the 1876 Campaign, the entire southern column had retreated and was now situated far-away in the Wyoming Territory by the time that Custer met his tragic fate at the Little Bighorn. In the end, Custer's old Civil War rival had failed him and all but ensured the fiasco of June 25; Crook's and Terry's columns never united and Custer was never warned of the Indians' numbers, increased resolve

of fight to the bitter end, and superior weaponry. Because Crook ordered a withdrawal all the way back to the Wyoming Territory, the Sioux and Cheyenne were handed their greatest strategic success of the 1876 Campaign to set the stage for the Little Bighorn disaster barely a week later.

Instead of depicting the famous last stand of Custer and the doomed troopers of his five companies on June 25, the movie *Little Big Horn* provided its own mini-“Custer’s Last Stand” in symbolic fashion, with every surviving trooper dying heroically in a last-ditch bid to charge through swarms of angry Native American warriors and warn Custer in time, basically, the crucial and urgent mission that a scout or small detachment of Crook’s men should have performed after their June 17 defeat at the Rosebud.

This fictional Hollywood story of a squad of 7th Cavalry troopers riding to their doom in a suicidal final charge had been created not for entertainment value alone. Ahead of its time because its realistic quality, this hard-hitting movie in terms of gritty realism did nothing to glorify war, presenting a grisly portrayal of ugly deaths and the horrors of war without the usual romance forthcoming from films of this period. This decidedly stark portrayal of brave American men faithfully performing their duty and going selflessly to their deaths against the odds was necessary to remind audiences in the most graphic means of the necessary sacrifice that was required by a new generation of Americans to meet Cold War challenges in the future: the menacing threat posed by the expansion of a nuclear-armed Soviet Union and the spread of Communism around the world. Clearly, this inexpensive movie was very much a product of an anxious time for the American public when America’s future and way-of-life seemed to be under threats worldwide.

However, this entirely fictionalized film held an interesting thesis that has not been explored by historians and writers until the publication of this present book. Might the June 25 tragedy along the Little Bighorn have been entirely avoided by a sudden turn of luck or fortune, especially a timely warning that might have saved Custer and his command? Was there any truth at all to the basic premise that Custer and his men could have been saved by a timely warning sent by a single messenger or a small detachment of dedicated men dispatched by Crook, who had learned first-hand more than a week before just how formidable this opponent had become?

Even more, had Crook's sizeable southern (Wyoming) column simply continued to advance north down the Rosebud Valley to link with the other columns—Colonel John Gibbon's column was encamped at the Rosebud's mouth on June 17—that shortly united under General Terry according to the campaign's masterplan, instead of immediately withdrawing all the way back to the Wyoming Territory, then there would have been no battle of the Little Bighorn as we know it today.

Quite simply, there should never have been a battle of the Little Bighorn. Historians have shied away from such an intriguing question of whether Custer could have been warned in time in part because of the romance and myths surrounding the dramatic June 25 showdown along the Little Bighorn. For such reasons, this topic needs to be explored at long last as the battle's 150th year anniversary is approaching.

Also, a highly-dubious alternate myth has been created to seemingly discourage deeper investigation in regard to this key question: the pervasive denial that any warning to the Terry-Custer column would have made any difference whatsoever, allegedly because Terry

and Custer would have formulated the same aggressive tactical plan and proceeded to conduct operations in exactly the same way. The basis of this flimsy historical excuse relies upon the oldest and most worn-out tenet of the iconic battle, that due to his own foolishness, Custer was the lone person responsible for leading his command to annihilation, leaving no one else to blame for the monumental disaster.

In truth, Custer became the convenient scapegoat of a massive cover-up to protect the reputations of the 7th Cavalry and the top leaders of the United States Army and the nation's top civilian leaders. Despite being only hypothetical and having no existing primary evidence to make such a claim, historians nevertheless have long maintained that even if Terry and Custer had been warned in time about the superior numbers, determination, and weaponry of the Sioux and Cheyenne, they still would have gone ahead with their aggressive tactical plan. It is a convenient excuse that shifts all blame away from General Crook and his failures that set the stage for the disaster, masking the truth of what really happened and exactly why.

Of course and as mentioned, this popular sentiment and unreasonably firm conviction has absolutely no basis in fact. Nevertheless, this speculative conclusion about a hypothetical situation has been long upheld as a fundamental truth about the 1876 Campaign to this day. Instead of dealing with such intriguing questions, the vast majority of historians have focused almost exclusively on the familiar story of the endlessly over-analysed tactical details about the battle, the pathos of the June 25 disaster, and Custer's colorful personality, all of which have continued to ceaselessly intrigue the American public.

However, what cannot be denied was the fact that the most important intelligence that Custer and Terry of the northern column most desperately needed to know was that they could count on no

assistance whatsoever from the sizeable southern column (the campaign's largest) under Crook. This information was absolutely vital because the men of the northern column fully anticipated assistance from Crook's southern column all the way up to the time of the Little Bighorn disaster. Instead of playing a role that might have saved Custer and his five companies, General Crook hastily exited the campaign with his Wyoming column and retreated far to the south, after his defeat at the Rosebud, a relatively minor defeat with light losses that simply did not warrant an extensive withdrawal of the entire southern column all the way back into another territory, Wyoming. Even the expenditure of ammunition and supplies provided Crook with an even more urgent reason to continue north to link with the northern column.

What real factors lay behind such an inexplicable, if not inexcusable, development that paved the way to the fiasco along the Little Bighorn? For posterity and with great care, General Crook's image as one of America's premier Indian fighters had been carefully crafted by press correspondents, biographies, his admiring men, and especially by himself. He was a master of self-promotion without peer. What they produced was in truth a central myth about the 1876 Campaign, that Custer could not have been warned in time, and therefore the disaster was inevitable because of the Custer's unbridled ambitions and foolishness. Incredibly, in regard to the historical record, General Crook has escaped censure (then and today) for the excessively passive part that he played in doing absolutely nothing in regard to ensuring that there would be no Little Bighorn fiasco. He almost immediately withdrew from the campaign based on the flimsy excuse that his wounded men (barely 20) needed care, while ignoring the fact that moving so far south would all but doom a large number of men in the northern

column. Crook even had the audacity to maintain that he had already won a victory along the Rosebud on June 17 to fully justify a long withdrawal, which was definitely not the case. Worst of all, he led his large command all the way out of the Montana Territory and back to the Wyoming Territory, leaving the northern column, including Custer, on its own.

Instead of blaming General Crook for having played a significant part in the Little Bighorn disaster, generations of historians have laid the primary blame for the unprecedented fiasco first on Custer, or his two top lieutenants, Major Marcus Albert Reno and Captain Frederick William Benteen. Both senior 7th Cavalry officers failed to ride to Custer's support during the fight downriver on that fateful day. Historians and writers have long emphasized that the debacle's central cause was rooted in Custer's decision to divide his 7th Cavalry to attack from multiple directions instead of anything having to do with Crook. Custer commanded only five companies (less than half of the 7th Cavalry), when he met with annihilation. It was extremely unwise to divide his forces in the face of concentrated superior opponent, *but only if* Custer had previously known the true overwhelming size of his opponent armed with superior weaponry, information that Crook could have easily provided long beforehand. Indeed, while dividing the 7th Cavalry (a standard tactic that had often resulted in past victories) made defeat much easier in the end, it was not the primary cause, which was in fact leadership failures, especially by general officers (primarily Crook but also his superiors). These were the true culprits that ensured the unprecedented disaster on June 25.

While Reno's and Benteen's failure to come to Custer's aid played a role in ensuring his command's annihilation, what has been generally overlooked was the larger case of splitting up of the

attacking force in widely-separated divergent columns in the overall campaign plan and especially in regard to General Crook's large southern column. The sizeable Wyoming column should have provided assistance by continuing to push north down the Rosebud Valley after the battle of the Rosebud. A continuance of the campaign by Crook advancing farther north after the Rosebud fight was absolutely required for a successful campaign and *fully expected by headquarters*. Certainly the last thing expected by Crook's superiors and the men of the northern column, including Lieutenant Colonel Custer, was for him to retreat entirely out of the Montana Territory. It amounted to an abandonment of the northern column, Custer, and the 7th Cavalry, all whom eagerly looked to the southern column for support. Instead, Crook informed no one of his unilateral decision to retreat, even after the threat had vanished from the Rosebud Valley after retiring west.

Significantly, Crook's unwarranted decision guaranteed that Custer (the 7th Cavalry served as Terry's mobile strike force) was on his own to face impossible odds, setting the stage for the destruction of Custer's five ill-fated companies. Instead of facing Crook's column (more than 1,000 men) that served as the southern arm of the pincer movement that should have been moving north, the Sioux and Cheyenne were allowed the luxury of concentrating the full force of their considerable might in the Little Bighorn Valley, located just west of the Rosebud. Thanks to General Crook's notable absence, especially on June 25, the Northern Great Plains warriors never faced America's strongest force in the field, or the serious threat of two forces simultaneously advancing from opposite directions in a pincer movement, (Terry-Custer's column from the north and Crook's column from the south). Rather, the tactical situation they faced allowed for a

total focus on Custer who commanded too few troopers, outgunned and far from support, in confronting such a massive concentration of warriors.

Despite all of the finger-pointing and back-and-forth recriminations that consumed the 7th Cavalry's survivors, especially the officer corps, after the June 25 disaster that caused the American people and the press to start asking serious questions that reached all the way to the White House, General Crook and his lofty image, despite having been largely manufactured in the first place, and his reputation as a premier Indian fighter still went unscathed. After all, the deceased Custer could not defend his decisions and actions, and thus conveniently took all the blame for the fiasco; Crook continued his military career without a stain on his record, despite his abrupt exit from the campaign during its most crucial phase and for two months. In fact, he continued to gain widespread recognition and even won a major general's rank in 1888.

As could be expected, in order to disguise his own large role in the unprecedented disaster along the Little Bighorn, General Crook even had the audacity to explicitly blame the Little Bighorn disaster on Custer, just like so many other high-ranking civilian and military leaders did to mask their own considerable errors that paved the way to the disaster. Ironically, if Crook had demonstrated the same boldness on the battlefield as he did in orchestrating excuses, Custer and his men would have lived to fight another day. Generals Crook, William Tecumseh Sherman, and Philip Henry Sheridan (Crook's West Point roommate) and many others, including even President Ulysses S. Grant, were able to permanently shift the blame to the ideal scapegoat: Custer, the ambition-driven fool who allegedly led his men to disaster without a tactical plan for victory.

Other forgotten factors allowed Crook to escape censure for his central role in the Little Bighorn disaster. Because blame was placed on Benteen and Reno for their failures to come to Custer's assistance, this master politician and expert at the art of political maneuvering successfully maintained his lofty reputation, which was actually the greatest victory of his lengthy career. After all, Crook had friends in high places, especially his old West Point roommate General "Little Phil" Sheridan, the commander of the Military Division of Missouri and also President Rutherford B. Hayes, who shortly followed Grant to sit in the White House. Therefore, largely for political reasons, General Crook has been overlooked for his multiple failures, ensuring that Custer was left on his own to face far more angry warriors and better armed than he had ever seen in his life.

Likewise and no coincidence, it just so happened that Custer was an arch-enemy of Crook, and they had long been rivals with outsized egos and career ambitions. These were almost certainly factors that played a role in Crook's inexplicable decision to suddenly withdraw from the campaign and provide no support or even any warning to the northern column. Crook knew that Custer and his 7th Cavalry would spearhead the search for the Indians in pushing south. Hence, in strictly personal terms, under these circumstances in a purely selfish and career-oriented sense that was classically Machiavellian, Crook wisely retired from the Rosebud to guarantee that his lofty reputation and career prospects remained intact. Meanwhile, he practically did everything that he could to allow his rival to ride headlong to his doom along the Little Bighorn near where Crook should have advanced north to support them. Doing the inexcusable, Crook made absolutely no attempt to warn Custer or anyone else for that matter about the large numbers of heavily armed warriors that

were now concentrated in preparation for a final showdown with the pony soldiers. Therefore, without ever knowing the extent of the danger, Lieutenant Colonel Custer led his 7th Cavalry with confidence straight to the Little Bighorn without this most critical of all intelligence that would have certainly saved him and his five companies from annihilation.

What has been most forgotten and not fully understood in the story of Crook's failure have been the ugly personal hatreds and jealousies, including those going back to the Civil War, which had long existed among the army's high-ranking officers on the western frontier. First and foremost, most military commanders of that time were often cynical and ruthless men who had been hardened by the horrors of the Civil War and the Indian Wars. Seasoned career officers like Benteen, Reno, and Crook were ambitious and cunning men who were determined to get ahead at almost any cost, including at the expense of fellow officers. Waging their own personal wars, they harbored deep-seated jealousies, vindictiveness, and resentments that extended back decades in some cases. These same divisive factors plagued the dysfunctional Custer-Crook dynamic and had an impact on what happened with tragic results along the Little Bighorn on June 25.

Of course, well-known animosities had long existed between Custer and his two top lieutenants Marcus Albert Reno and Frederick William Benteen. These fostered a tense situation that led to deep fissures in the 7th Cavalry that were completely irreconcilable and sapped the regiment's morale and combat capabilities in the ultimate crisis situation. Lesser known but equally bitter rivalry and personal animosities existed between Custer and Crook. As events in the Little Bighorn Campaign demonstrated, these war-hardened and often utterly

ruthless officers were fully capable of allowing a personal enemy and rival in the same blue uniform to go down in miserable defeat on their own and without urgent assistance in a crisis situation. Such high-ranking men of ambition were fully capable of ignoring their responsibilities in order to doom a personal opponent or rival to a tragic fate. Allowing the dark side of human nature to rise to the fore, the most jealous and petty officers were fully capable of passive-aggressive inaction to benefit themselves in regard to their reputations and careers.

It is well known in the 7th Cavalry that Reno and Benteen resented Custer and his long list of past Civil War successes in the eastern theater. Could this resentment have extended to the point of deliberately allowing his superior to go down in defeat by providing no urgent assistance during a crisis situation? In regard to no timely warning to the northern column by Crook after his June 17 defeat along the Rosebud, it was almost as if the far-sighted and publicity-savvy general realized that the only chance for his own reversal at the Rosebud to be overlooked by the nation and by his superiors was to set the stage for a greater defeat that garnered all the attention. The failure of an old personal rival and enemy who was a national figure with a higher reputation stemming from far more past battlefield accomplishments would completely overshadow his own setback on June 17.

Providing an explanation to his behavior that is more calculating than apathetic in this case, Crook's deep-seated resentments of Custer help to reveal and explain his mysterious actions during the 1876 Campaign. Without them, Crook's actions are entirely inexplicable on any realistic and rational level. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that given a comparable opportunity in regard to leaving an old rival on his own in a dangerous situation, Crook performed in much the same way as Reno and Benteen on the afternoon of June 25 by deciding to

play no role whatever in assisting Custer, including not even issuing a warning of what to expect when he advanced south, which he was sure to do in only a matter of time. At the time, many people strongly believed that Custer was basically sacrificed by others in high places, including General Crook, for a host of personal and professional reasons. It was a perfect storm of political intrigue, jealousies, and rivalries, not only within his own 7th Cavalry, but also within the United States Army at large that doomed Custer and made him the ideal scapegoat.

However, for a variety of reasons and especially because of a favorable image deliberately cultivated by the press and his cronies, Crook's key role in setting the stage that doomed Custer and his command has been generally overlooked by historians to this day, but significantly, it was not overlooked among the desperate men of the 7th Cavalry at the time. While Benteen and Reno have become the primary villains in the Little Bighorn story, the fact that Crook played his own key role in setting the stage that allowed overwhelming numbers of Sioux and Cheyenne to face the small mobile strike force detached from a single column instead of facing two threats simultaneously in a strategic pincer movement, it did nothing to deter his longtime place in the good graces of Presidents Grant (the eighteenth chief executive), who was a political foe of Custer, and Rutherford B. Hayes (the nineteenth chief executive), who was a diehard supporter of Crook. Therefore, Custer was left without a supporter in regard to two presidents, which also helped to make him the perfect scapegoat for the Little Bighorn disaster and ensured that Crook's role was ignored and eventually forgotten.

Not even Crook's lofty reputation as one of America's premier Indian fighters was tarnished by his dismal performance (forgotten