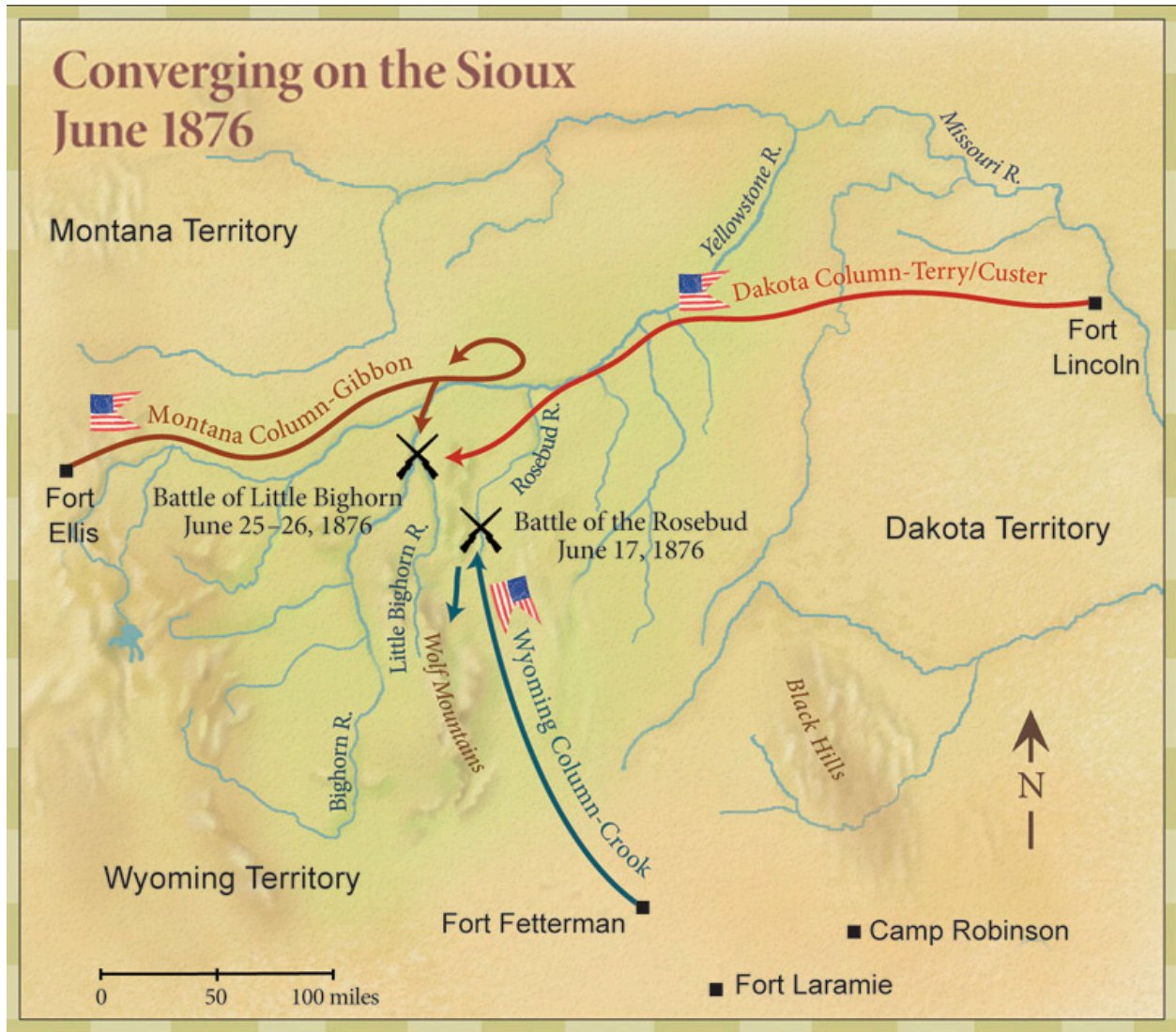


**Combat Studies Institute  
U.S. Army Command and General Staff  
College  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas**

**Compiled by  
Dr. William Glenn Robertson  
Dr. Jerold E. Brown  
Major William M. Campsey  
Major Scott R. McMeen**

Given the number of combatants, the Battle of the Rosebud was one of the largest confrontations waged in the Indian Wars. To historians of the battle as well as Native Americans today, the Rosebud is acknowledged as a positive chapter in the Lakota and Cheyenne defense of their lands and lifeways. However, it was not a simple fight between whites and Indians. To the Crows and Shoshones who scouted for the Americans, it was their battle too, against the Lakotas and Cheyennes who were encroaching on their lands and lifeways.



### Crook's Advance to the Rosebud

In the spring of 1876, the U.S. Army took to the field against the Lakota (Sioux) and Cheyenne. The tribes had not met an ultimatum to return to their reservations in the

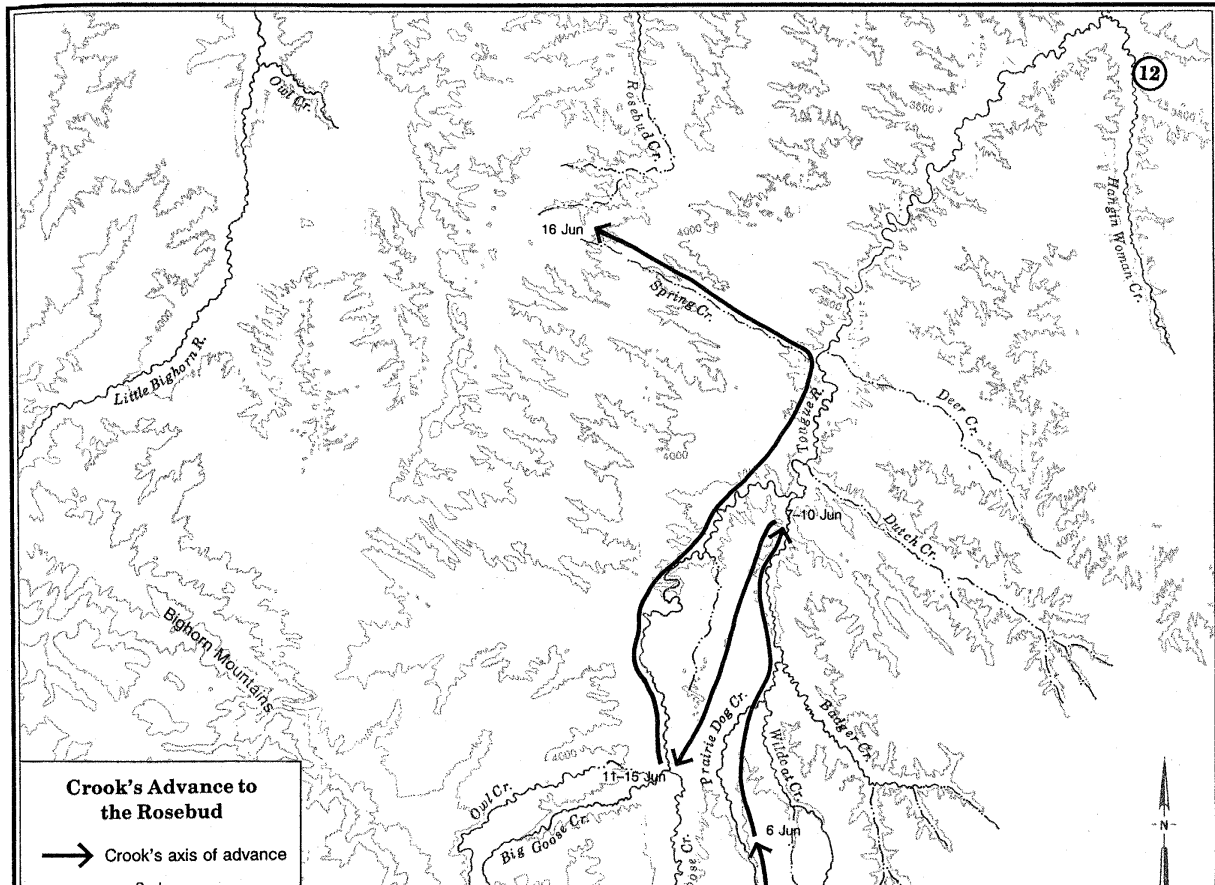
Dakotas and Nebraska after U.S. negotiations to acquire the sacred Black Hills had failed in the fall of 1875.

On 28 May 1876, Brigadier General George Crook assumed direct command of the Bighorn and Yellowstone Expedition at Fort Fetterman. Crook had drawn together an impressive force from his Department of the Platte. Leaving Fort Fetterman on 29 May, the 1,051-man column consisted of 15 companies from the 2d and 3d Cavalry, 5 companies from the 4th and 9th Infantry, 250 mules, and 106 wagons. Frank Grouard, an experienced scout who had worked with Crook on earlier campaigns, rode ahead of the column to recruit Crow warriors as scouts. On 2 June, in spite of the poor weather, Crook pushed his force northward to the site of Fort Reno, supremely confident that he would redress Reynolds' previous failure on the Powder River.

When Crook arrived at the ruins of Fort Reno, Grouard and the scouts were absent. Many of the Crow braves had balked at serving with the Army, and only extensive negotiations and Grouard's offer of substantial rewards would eventually convince them to join Crook. The day after arriving at Reno, Crook's column headed north without the Indian allies, Lacking Grouard's guiding hand, however, the expedition soon became lost. On 6 June, mistaking the headwaters of Prairie Dog Creek for Little Goose Creek, Crook led his column to a campsite six miles from where Captain Henry E. Noyes and an advance party were waiting. The next day, Crook's command moved to the confluence of Prairie Dog Creek and the Tongue River, where it camped for the next four days. At this time, several Black Hills prospectors asked for permission to travel with Crook's column. Within a week, Crook's civilian contingent grew to approximately eighty men. On 9 June, Sioux or Cheyenne warriors raided the encampment on the Tongue. Four companies of Crook's cavalry quickly repulsed the attackers. Although Crook's casualties were insignificant, the attack was clear evidence that the Indians were in the area and prepared to fight.

Finally, on 11 June, Crook led the column eleven miles back up Prairie Dog Creek, then seven miles to his original destination at the forks of Goose Creek (present-day Sheridan, Wyoming), where he established a permanent camp. As the officers and men enjoyed the excellent hunting and fishing in the area, Crook prepared for the final phase of the campaign. On 14 June, Grouard arrived with 261 Shoshone and Crow allies to join the expedition. Based on intelligence from Grouard, Crook now ordered his entire force to lighten itself for a quick march. Each man was to carry only 1 blanket, 100 rounds of ammunition, and 4 days' rations. The wagon train would be left at Goose Creek, and the infantry would be mounted on the pack mules. The infantrymen, many of whom were novice riders, received one day's training on the reluctant mules, much to the delight of the cavalry spectators.

At 0600 on 16 June, Crook led his force of more than 1,300 soldiers, Indians, and civilians out of the encampment at Goose Creek. Crossing the Tongue about six miles to the north, the column proceeded downriver until early afternoon, when it turned west and crossed the divide to the headwaters of Rosebud Creek. At 1900, the lead elements of the force reached a small swampy area, near the source of the Rosebud, and bivouacked.



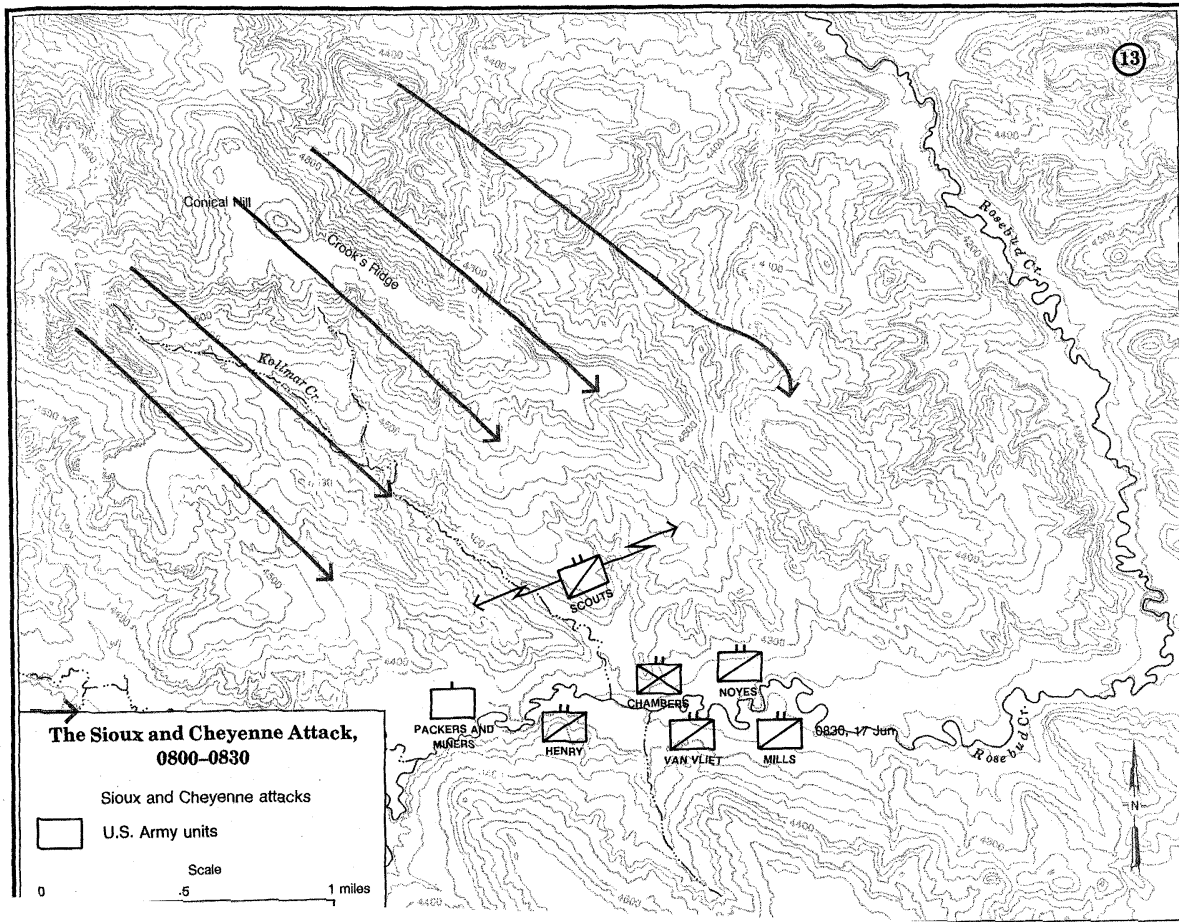
### **The Battle of the Rosebud: The Sioux and Cheyenne Attack, 0800-0830**

On 17 June, Crook's column roused itself at 0300 and set out at 0600, marching northward along the south fork of Rosebud Creek. The holiday atmosphere that prevailed since the arrival of the Indian scouts on 15 June was suddenly absent. The Crow and Shoshone scouts were particularly apprehensive. Although the column had not yet encountered any sign of Indians, the scouts seemed to sense their presence. The soldiers, on their part, were apparently fatigued from the previous day's 35-mile march and their early morning reveille, particularly the mule-riding infantry.

At 0800, Crook stopped to rest his men and animals. Although he was deep in hostile territory, Crook made no special dispositions for defense. His troops merely halted in their marching order. The battalions of Captains Anson Mills and Henry E. Noyes led the column, followed by Captain Frederick Van Vliet's battalion and Major Alexander Chambers' battalion of mule-borne foot soldiers, Captain Guy V. Henry's battalion and a provisional company of civilian miners and packers brought up the rear.

Fortunately, the Crow and Shoshone scouts remained alert while the soldiers rested. Several minutes later, the soldiers in camp could hear the sound of intermittent gunfire coming from the

bluffs to the north. At first, they dismissed the noise as nothing more than the scouts taking potshots at buffalo. As the intensity of fire increased, a scout rushed into the camp shouting, "Lakota, Lakota!" The Battle of the Rosebud was on. By 0830, the Sioux and Cheyenne had hotly engaged Crook's Indian allies on the high ground north of the main body. Heavily outnumbered, the Crow and Shoshone scouts fell back toward the camp, but their fighting withdrawal gave Crook time to deploy his forces.

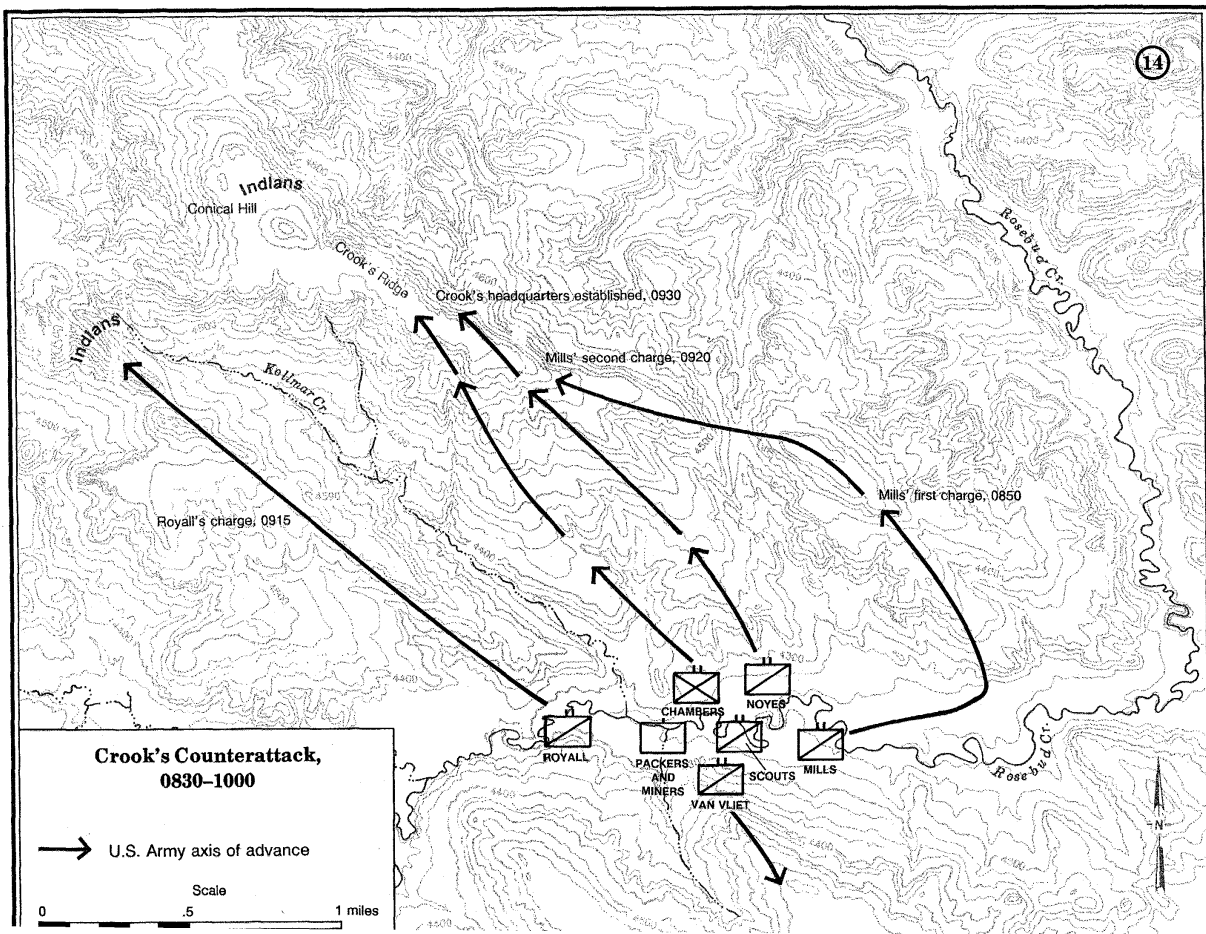


### The Battle of the Rosebud: Crook's Counterattack, 0830-1000

In response to the Indian attack, Crook directed his forces to seize the high ground north and south of the Rosebud. He ordered Captain Van Vliet, with C and G Companies, 3d Cavalry, to occupy the high bluffs to the south. Van Vliet scaled the hill just in time to drive off a small band of Sioux approaching from the east. In the north, the commands of Major Chambers (D and F Companies, 4th Infantry, and C, G, and H Companies, 9th Infantry) and Captain Noyes (B, E, and I Companies, 2d Cavalry) formed a dismounted skirmish line and advanced toward the Sioux. Their progress was slow, however, because of flanking fire from Indians occupying the high ground to the northeast. To accelerate the advance, Crook ordered Captain Mills,

commanding six companies (A, B, E, I, L, and M) of the 3d Cavalry, to charge this group of hostiles. Mills' mounted charge unnerved the Indians and forced them to withdraw northwest along the ridgeline, not stopping until they reached the next crest (now called Crook's Ridge). Here, Mills quickly re-formed three of his mounted companies (A, E, and M) and led his troopers in another charge, driving the Indians northwest again to the next hill (Conical Hill). Mills was preparing to drive the Indians from Conical Hill when he received orders from Crook to cease his advance and assume a defensive posture. Chambers and Noyes now led their forces forward in support and, within minutes, joined Mills on top of the ridge. The bulk of Crook's command, now joined by the packers and miners, occupied Crook's Ridge. Establishing his headquarters there at approximately 0930, Crook contemplated his next move.

Meanwhile, at the west end of the field, Lieutenant Colonel William Royall, Crook's second in command, pursued the Indians attacking the rear of Crook's camp. Leading Captain Henry's battalion (D, F, and L Companies, 3d Cavalry) and two companies (B and I) borrowed from Mills' command, Royall advanced rapidly along the ridgeline to the northwest, finally halting his advance near the head of Kollmar Creek. Royall's detachment was now a mile from the main body and in some danger of being cut off and destroyed. Sensing this vulnerability and exploiting their superb mobility, the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors shifted their main effort to the west and concentrated their attacks on Royall's troopers. Crook, recognizing the danger, sent orders to Royall to withdraw to Crook's Ridge. Inexplicably, Royall sent only B Company to join Crook. Royall later claimed that heavy pressure from the Indians made withdrawing the entire command too risky. However, B Company's limited losses (one man wounded) belie Royall's claim.



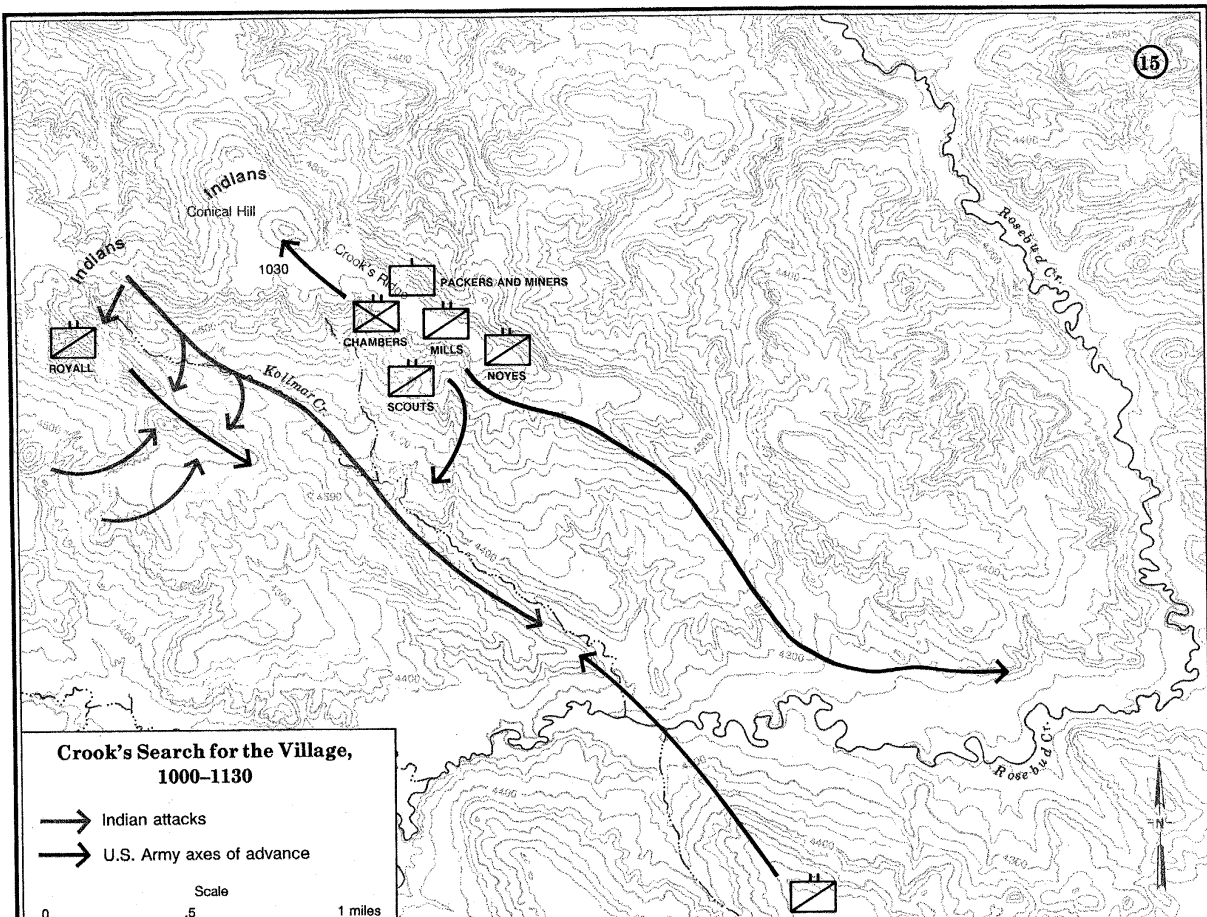
## The Battle of the Rosebud: Crook's Search for the Village, 1000-1130

Crook's initial charges secured key terrain but did little to damage the Indian force. The bluecoats' assaults invariably scattered the Indian defenders but did not keep them away. After falling back, the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors returned to snipe at the soldiers from long range. Occasionally, single warriors or small groups of Indians demonstrated their valor by charging forward and exchanging a few close-range shots with the troopers. But when pressed, the Indians sped away on their nimble ponies. Crook soon realized his charges were indecisive.

Casting about for a way to defeat his elusive opponent, Crook returned to his original campaign plan. Since the Indians had been fighting him with unprecedented tenacity, it suggested that they might be fighting to defend their families in a nearby village. Thus, Crook decided to advance down the Rosebud valley where he hoped to find the hostile encampment and force the enemy to stand and fight. At about 1030, Crook ordered Mills and Noyes to withdraw their commands from the high ground and follow the Rosebud north. To replace the cavalry, Crook recalled Van Vliet's battalion from the south side of the Rosebud.

One mile to the west, Royall's situation continued to deteriorate. Royall tried to withdraw across Kollmar Creek but found the Indians' fire too heavy. Instead, he withdrew southeast along the ridgeline. In an attempt to further isolate and overwhelm Royall's force, a large group of Indians charged boldly down the valley of Kollmar Creek, advancing all the way to the Rosebud. The fortuitous arrival of Van Vliet's command, however, checked the Indians' advance. Crook then ordered his Crow and Shoshone scouts to charge into the withdrawing warriors' flank, throwing the hostiles into great confusion.

Troubled by fire from Indians on Conical Hill, Crook ordered Chambers' infantry to drive the Sioux away. The foot soldiers promptly forced an enemy withdrawal-but to little avail. It was a repetition of the same old pattern; the soldiers could drive the Sioux away at will, but they could not fix and destroy them. Crook could only wait and hope that Mills' advance down the valley would be successful.



### The Battle of the Rosebud: The End of the Battle, 1130-1330

Mills' advance on the suspected Indian village did nothing to suppress the Indians. Crook's assumption about the presence of an Indian encampment proved totally false; there was no nearby Indian village. The most important consequence of Mills' action was to leave Crook



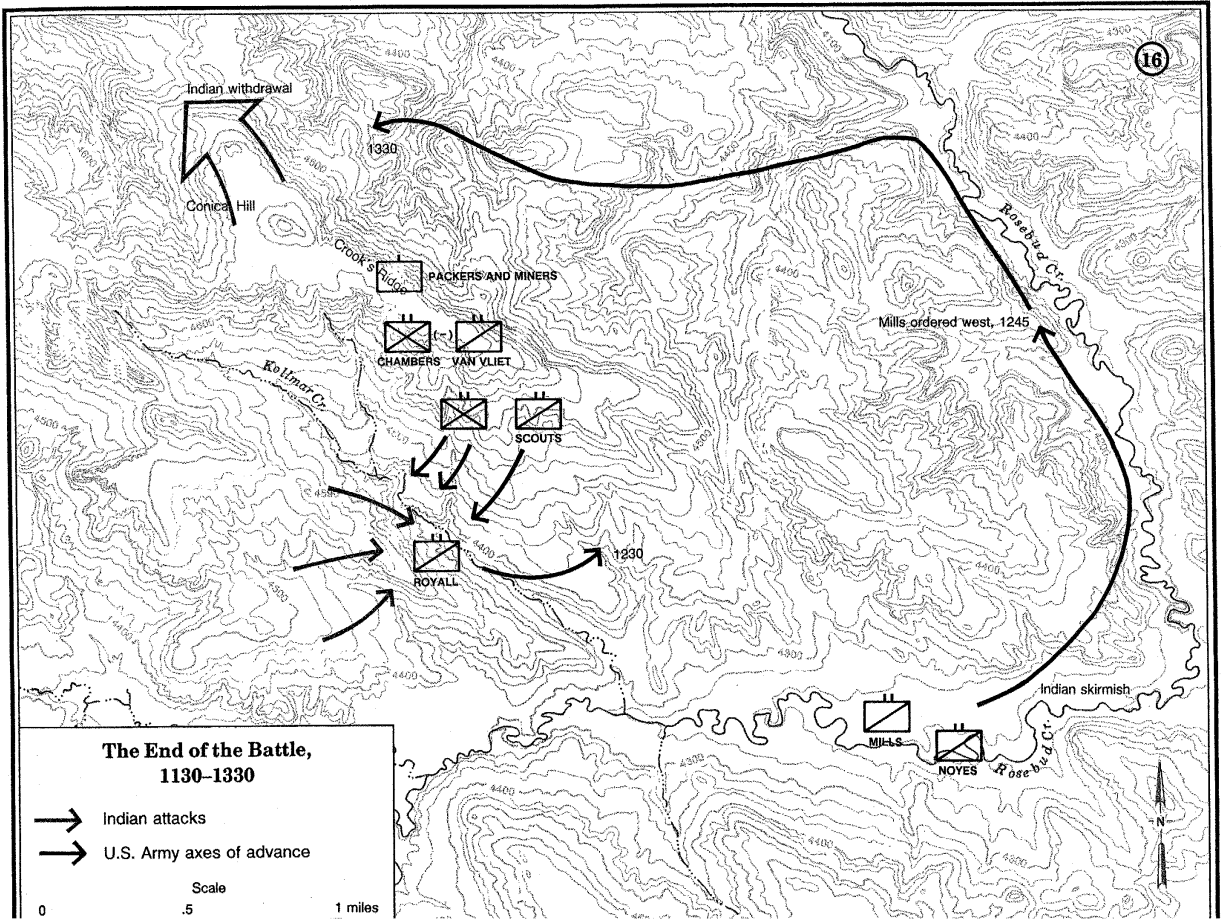
without sufficient force to aid Royall and his hard-pressed battalion. While Mills made his way down the Rosebud, Royall's situation grew worse.

At approximately 1130, Royall withdrew southeastward a second time and assumed a new defensive position. From here, he hoped to lead his command across Kollmar Creek and rendezvous with Crook. Meanwhile, the Sioux and Cheyenne assailed him from three sides, growing ever bolder in their attacks. Observing the situation from his headquarters, Crook realized that Royall would need help in extricating himself, help only Mills' force could provide. Consequently, Crook sent orders to Mills canceling his original mission and directing him to turn west to fall on the rear of the Indians pressing Royall.

At approximately 1230, Royall decided he could wait no longer and began withdrawing his troopers into the Kollmar ravine to remount their horses. From there, his men would have to race through a hail of fire before reaching the relative safety of Crook's main position. As they began their dash, the Crow and Shoshone scouts countercharged the pursuing enemy, relieving much of the pressure on Royall's men. Two companies of infantry also left the main position to provide covering fire from the northeast side of the ravine. In spite of this gallant assistance, Royall's command suffered grievous casualties. Nearly 80 percent of the total Army losses (ten killed, twenty-one wounded) in the Battle of the Rosebud came from Royall's four companies of the 3d Cavalry (nine killed and fifteen wounded).

While the last of Royall's men extricated themselves, Mills digested his new instructions from Crook. Since Mills' command had driven off a small party of Sioux near the bend in the Rosebud, it apparently led him to believe that the Indian village was nearby. But Mills' scouts were extremely reluctant to proceed. They thought that the narrow valley of the Rosebud was an ideal ambush site and predicted disaster if the column continued northward. Crook's new orders ended the controversy. Mills climbed out of the canyon and proceeded westward toward Conical Hill.

Mills arrived too late to assist Royall's withdrawal, but his unexpected appearance on the Indians' flank caused the Sioux and Cheyenne to break contact and retreat. Concentrating his mounted units, Crook now led them up the Rosebud in search of the nonexistent Indian village. Again, the scouts refused to enter the narrow canyon, forcing Crook to abandon the pursuit. The Battle of the Rosebud was over. By the standards of Indian warfare, it had been an extremely long and bloody engagement. Never before had the Plains Indians fought with such ferocity, and never before had they shown such a willingness to accept casualties (estimates of Indian casualties run as high as 102 killed and wounded). Nor was their sacrifice in vain. Concerned for his wounded, short on supplies, and perhaps still shaken by the Indians' ferocity, Crook returned to his camp on Goose Creek and stayed there for seven weeks awaiting reinforcements. His command would play no role in the momentous events at Little Bighorn.



Indian withdrawal

Conica Hill

1330

Crook's Ridge

PACKERS AND MINERS

CHAMBERS VAN VLIET

Mills ordered west, 1245

Kollmar Cr.

SCOUTS

1230

ROYALL

MILLS

NOYES

Indian skirmish

Rosebud Cr.

N