

George Crook -- "The Gray Fox" Prudent, Compassionate Indian Fighter

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# GEORGE CROOK -- "The Gray Fox"



The Apache chiefs, Geronimo (center) and Natchez (far right) were photographed with their warriors in battle array by C. S. Fly of Tombstone, Ariz. The photograph was converted to this etching, published in 1886, while the U. S. Army was trying once more to bring the Apaches to reservation confinement.



The Powder River Expedition crossing the Platte River on November 14, 1876, was published in Harper's Weekly on December 16 of that year in a special feature devoted to the Sioux War and the campaigns of General George Crook. This is one of several drawings by Harper's "special artist with the troops."



# Prudent, Compassionate Indian Fighter

—by HENRY P. WALKER—

SOME TIME AGO, during the course of an academic “bull session,” the question was raised, “Was George Crook a great Indian fighter?” Immediately there sprang to mind a comparison between his successful operations against the Apaches in Arizona and the stand-off with the Sioux and Cheyenne in Montana. The question has been kicked around until it seemed desirable to attempt an answer.

In 1871, the territory of Arizona was in a turmoil. The *Arizona Miner*, in the autumn of that year, published a list of the murders and atrocities perpetrated by Indians from March, 1864, to the current date. The paper listed 301 persons killed, fifty-three wounded and crippled for life, and five carried into captivity.<sup>1</sup>

The United States Army, at the time, had a force of 83 officers and 1,528 enlisted men of the First and Third Cavalry and the 12th and 21st Infantry regiments scattered among some dozen small posts.<sup>2</sup> Colonel George Stoneman, Department Commander, had been fairly successful in bringing the Apaches in out of the mountains and establishing them on reservations. Unfortunately some of the citizens of Tucson became convinced that the Indians collected around Camp Grant were continuing their depredations from the shelter of the army post. A gang of civilians and Papago Indians attacked the Apache camp on April 30, 1870, killed a number of aged Indians, women and children and, in a few hours completely undid the work of the army. Practically all the Apaches, in fear for their lives, fled the reservations and went once more on the warpath. Much of the Indian trouble in the Southwest can be ascribed to vacillation in Washington and the lack of any clear-cut policy concerning the Indians. From 1864 to 1886 there were fourteen military commanders in Arizona and

from 1864 to 1872, five Indian Commissioners came and went.<sup>3</sup> Clearly a strong hand was needed in Arizona.

In 1870, General George H. Thomas, commanding the District of the Pacific—of which the Department of Arizona was a part—had offered the position of department commander to Lieutenant Colonel George Crook. Crook had declined, saying he was tired of fighting Indians and that, since the climate of Arizona had a bad reputation, he feared for his health.

After General Thomas' death, his successor, General J. M. Schofield, made the same offer, to which Crook made the same reply. Early in the next year, Governor A. P. K. Safford of Arizona interviewed Colonel Crook but would not accept “no” for an answer. Safford had the California delegation in Washington pressure President U. S. Grant to appoint Crook to the Arizona command over the heads of the Secretary of War and the General of the Army, William T. Sherman.<sup>4</sup>

Crook had graduated from West Point at the age of twenty-three in 1852, standing thirty-eighth in his class. From 1852 to 1861, he was stationed in northern California and southern Oregon where the Rogue River Indians were on the warpath. Here, as a lieutenant leading small detachments of troops—twenty to thirty strong—he developed a system of operations that he was to employ throughout most of his active career. The first step was careful, personal re-

<sup>1</sup> Frank C. Lockwood, *Pioneer Days in Arizona* (New York, 1932), 164-65.

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Adjutant General, 1870, *H. Ex. Doc. 1, pt. 2*, 41 Cong., 3 Sess., (Serial 1446).

<sup>3</sup> James T. King, *War Eagle: A Life of General Eugene A. Carr* (Lincoln: U. of Nebraska Press, 1963), 126-127.

<sup>4</sup> George Crook, *Autobiography*, ed. by Martin F. Schmitt (Norman: U. of Oklahoma Press, 1946), 160.

connaissance—usually accompanied by only one or two soldiers—to locate the Indians, note the position of their camp, and estimate their strength. This was followed by a night march to within striking distance of the enemy camp; the use of outposts and sentinels was not commonly part of Indian strategy. Finally, a dawn attack would strike the hostiles while asleep or unaware of the near presence of troops.

The great hobbies of Crook's life were hunting and fishing. In pursuit of these hobbies he learned much about the country in which he operated and became adept at reading Indian sign. As his aide-de-camp, Captain John G. Bourke said, he became more an Indian than the Indians themselves. It was a compliment to George Crook's abilities when the Apaches named him "The Gray Fox."

During the Civil War, Crook had advanced from captain in the regular army to brevet brigadier general and major general of volunteers, commanding both infantry and cavalry. Five times he was breveted for gallantry and meritorious service. After the war, he returned to the West as a lieutenant colonel to command the District of Boise, Idaho, from November, 1866 to January, 1867 and the Department of the Columbia from January, 1867 to August, 1870. During this time he directed and led a number of small, effective operations against the Piute Indians of southern Idaho.<sup>5</sup> The advancement to command of a department over the heads of many senior officers—even against his wishes—caused much hard feeling.

THE APACHE INDIANS were a marvel of adaptation to an area of rugged terrain and hostile climate. Because water and arable land were in short supply, they lived in small bands of possibly thirty or forty warriors, plus the old folk, women and children. The Apaches were not normally horse Indians, like those of the Great Plains or

northern mountains. When they could, they stole horses and mules, rode them to death, and then dined off the carcass. In the summer they ranged the forested mountains where they hunted, carried on a small amount of farming, and collected wild berries and roots. In the winter, they moved down to the water holes on the warmer desert. A warrior on the warpath carried little more than his weapons and could cover an amazing distance on foot. An army officer told of seeing a wounded Apache scout scratch a match on the sole of his calloused bare foot. On the trail, he relieved his thirst by putting a small pebble in his mouth to stimulate the flow of saliva. The mobility of the Apaches and their intimate knowledge of the terrain made it exceedingly difficult for the soldiers to bring them to battle.

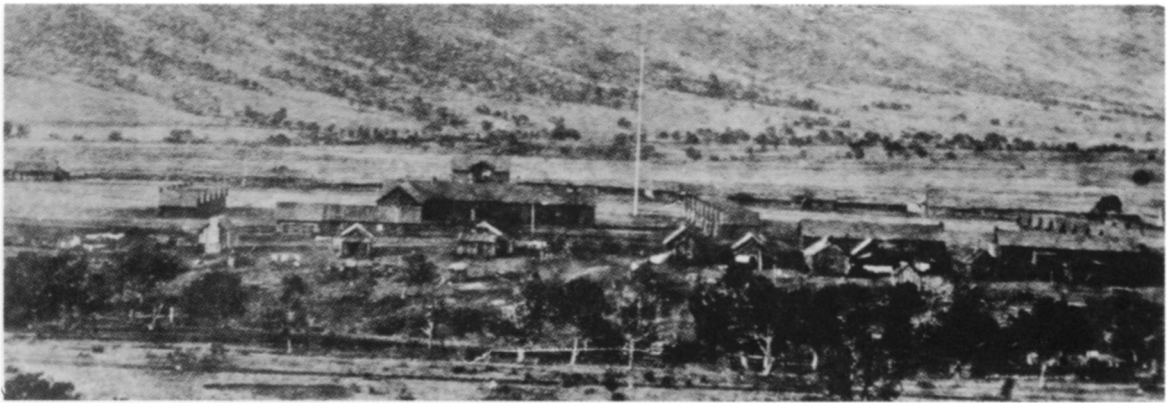
Colonel Crook reached Tucson on June 4, 1871 and at once set about learning all he could about the troops under his command and the country in which they operated. He called in all officers of the department and pumped them for all they knew: lines of travel, mountain trails, nature of the soil and its products, character of the climate, and condition of the army's transportation.<sup>6</sup> In his first report as department commander, he advised that his wagons were in bad condition from shrinkage of the wood, that the issue saddle was not good for the same reason and many of his pack mules were unserviceable for want of proper care. Moreover he recommended the issue of an extra pair of shoes to all troops.<sup>7</sup>

The colonel's ability to learn, without revealing his own thoughts, made a great impression on all who met him, although this secrecy was, at times, exasperating to his subordinates. Dr. Henry R. Porter, a physician in Crook's command in 1872 and 1873, said, "General Crook is very quiet and secret in his movements and we know nothing about them until a

<sup>5</sup> George W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy* (3rd ed., 7 vols., Boston, 1891), III.

<sup>6</sup> Bourke, *On The Border With Crook*, 108.

<sup>7</sup> Report of Colonel Crook, *H. Ex., Doc. 1, pt. 1*, 42 Cong., 2 Sess. (Serial 1503), 77.



FORT APACHE, established in 1870, was photographed nine years later while it was still an important outpost in the Apache campaigns. A trading post, government school and a sanitarium for the treatment of trachoma among the Indians are still maintained at the site.



FORT BOWIE, photographed by William A. Bell of the Kansas Pacific Railroad survey party, was the subject matter for one of the first photographs ever taken in Arizona Territory. The fort was rebuilt in 1869 on the flats one half mile to the Southwest.

FORT GRANT, established in 1859, is now the site of Arizona's industrial school for boys. The military was withdrawn from the fort in 1898 to fight in the Spanish-American War, and the buildings were abandoned entirely by the Army in 1905. Officers quarters may be seen in this picture, with cavalry troops standing muster in the right foreground.



day before we are ordered off.”<sup>8</sup> Crook issued few orders, expecting his officers to know what had to be done and to do it.

Five weeks after his arrival in Tucson, Colonel Crook set out on his first campaign—a march of 110 miles to Fort Bowie in eastern Arizona. He had companies of cavalry and a company of fifty scouts and trackers—Navajos, Apaches, Optas, Yaquis, Pueblos, Mexicans, Americans and half-breeds. In the march, Colonel Crook studied his tools. He learned which scouts were reliable and which were worthless. At Fort Bowie, he dismissed his Mexican scouts. He learned all he could about the art of packing mules and which commercial packers were good and which were bad. He found that mules long driven in harness were not acceptable for use in pack trains. The bits had spread their mouths so they could not scoop up water while moving through a stream but had to stop to drink, thus losing time. Careful training of the animals and careful fitting of the *aparejos* allowed loads of up to 320 pounds instead of the regulation average of 175 pounds.<sup>9</sup>

Small parties of troops and scouts were kept out on the column’s flanks at all times. Crook saw to it that the troops learned the country and how to march. He required his officers to wear the same canvas uniform as the soldiers; their baggage was restricted to what they could carry on their backs or in the limited supply of bedding carried in the pack train. On the advice of the scouts, most officers and men soon exchanged their boots and shoes for moccasins or sandals which were quieter on the trail and gave better footing on the rocky slopes.<sup>10</sup>

This first march was extended from Fort Bowie to Camp Apache. In all, the troops covered some 650 miles before



GENERAL  
OLIVER O.  
HOWARD

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returning to their home stations. Before Crook could bring the Apaches to battle, the problem was taken out of his hands. Vincent Collier was sent out from Washington to make peace with the tribesmen. When Collier failed, he was followed by General O. O. Howard, who also failed. Between September 1, 1871 and September 4, 1872 there were fifty-four separate attacks on the white settlers in Arizona.<sup>11</sup> In September 1872, General Schofield wrote:

I think it must now be evident that forbearance toward the Apaches of Arizona has reached its extreme limit, and that no course is left us but a vigorous and unrelenting prosecution of the war they have so long invited, until they are completely subdued. I recommend that General Crook be given ample means and full authority to deal with this difficult problem.<sup>12</sup>

Crook used this period of quiet to extend his knowledge of the country, to enroll a command of Apache scouts which, as he said, “I saw was to be my main dependence,” and to bring his pack trains to top efficiency.<sup>13</sup> As early as September, 1871, Captain Guy Henry re-

<sup>8</sup> Gene M. Gressley, (ed.), “A Soldier with Crook: The Letters of H. R. Porter,” *Montana*, VIII, (July 1958), 33-47.

<sup>9</sup> Fairfax Downey, *Indian Fighting Army* (New York, 1941), 165.

<sup>10</sup> Bourke, *On the Border With Crook*, 138-39, 150. Lansing B. Bloom, “Bourke on the Southwest”, *New Mexico Historical Review* IX (April, 1934), 159-183.

<sup>11</sup> S. J. Bayard Schindel, “Historical Resume of Certain Indian Campaigns,” *Winners of the West*, II, (December 1924).

<sup>12</sup> Letter, Major General J. M. Schofield forwarding General Crook’s report, *H. Ex. Doc. 1, pt. 2, 42 Cong., 3 Sess.*, (Serial 1558), 72.

<sup>13</sup> Crook, *Autobiography*, 175.



GENERAL  
JOHN M.  
SCHOFIELD

NATIONAL ARCHIVES PHOTO

ported that the combination of Apaches and soldiers had exceeded his most sanguine expectations and that the Indians were invaluable as trackers.<sup>14</sup>

CROOK'S FIRST major campaign in the Southwest started on November 15, 1872. It was designed to force the Indian bands into the higher mountains where life in winter would be most difficult. From Camp Grant a number of columns set out to sweep the Tonto Basin by converging on the center and then marching out by different routes. The column with which Captain John G. Bourke marched consisted of two companies of the Fifth Cavalry and thirty Apache scouts.<sup>15</sup> Thirty days' rations were carried by the accompanying pack train. Colonel Crook stayed at the front, moving from point to point around the periphery of the net.<sup>16</sup> A number of sharp engagements soon convinced the Apaches that life on a reservation was preferable to death on the mountains. Throughout 1874 and until September 1875 there were no large Apache bands in the field except for Victorio, who was in Mexico.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Report of Colonel Crook, *H. Ex., Doc., 1, pt. 2*, 42 Cong., 2 sess., (Serial 1503).

<sup>15</sup> The 5th Cavalry had relieved the 3rd Cavalry. Report of Col. Crook, *H. Ex., Doc. 1, pt. 2*, 42 Cong., 3 sess., (Serial 1158), 73.

<sup>16</sup> Bourke, *On the Border With Crook*, 181-84.

<sup>17</sup> Schindel, "Historical Resume."

According to Bourke, Crook's success lay first, in his handling of his men, second, the use of Indian scouts, and third, his development of the pack train. The Acting Assistant Inspector General of Arizona in 1877 said that the Apache Scouts

... made good and efficient soldiers when they act with white troops—alone they are not reliable; and without them the white troops are almost helpless in the pursuit of Indians.<sup>18</sup>

Lieutenant Thomas Cruse who was in charge of Captain Emmett Crawford's pack train in 1880 said it was the pack trains that finally defeated the Apaches because they allowed the troops to stay on the trail for prolonged periods. He noted that the Apaches were temperamental, they did not like to be followed. They would invariably stop and make a stand, hoping to scare their pursuers—but in the process would shoot up their scarce ammunition supply.<sup>19</sup>

Although his primary mission was to defeat the Apaches in battle, Crook showed sympathetic understanding of the enemy in all his dealings. Three months after assuming command in Arizona, he wrote:

I think the Apache is painted in darker colors than he really deserves, ... our vacillating policy satisfies him that we are afraid of him, ... I am satisfied that a sharp, active campaign against him would not only make him one of the best Indians in the country, but it would save millions of dollars to the treasury, and the lives of many innocent whites and Indians.<sup>20</sup>

As soon as the Indians were settled on reservations, he directed "an exact and even-handed justice to red men and white alike." Crook did all he could to encourage agriculture by buying hay, wood and grain from the Indians at reasonable prices. The officers he

<sup>18</sup> Report of the Inspector General, *H. Ex. Doc. 1, pt. 2*, 45 Cong., 2 Sess., (Serial 1794), 54.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Cruse, *Apache Days and After*, ed. by Eugene Cunningham (Caldwell, Caxton Printers, 1941), 54-55.

<sup>20</sup> King, *War Eagle*, 126.



placed in charge of the reservations were hand-picked young men of integrity who took an interest in the progress of their charges. All this earned for The Gray Fox the respect and admiration of the Apaches.<sup>21</sup>

BY MARCH OF 1875, Arizona was quiet. But in the Dakotas and Montana, the Sioux and Cheyenne were on the warpath. George Crook, who had now been advanced to his old Civil War brevet rank of brigadier general, was transferred to command the Department of the Platte. This promotion and transfer again moved him over the heads of

ment turned them over to the War Department.<sup>23</sup>

Having prepared for a winter campaign, General Crook left Fort Fetterman, Wyoming Territory, on March 1, 1876 with ten companies of the Second and Third Cavalry regiments under the command of Colonel J. J. Reynolds of the Third, and two companies of the Tenth Infantry. This force, along with guides, packers and others, amounted to 883 officers and men.<sup>24</sup>

Moving north, the column left its wagon train at the ruins of old Fort Reno, then pressed on with pack trains. For three nights, on March 9, 10 and 11,



GENERAL CROOK'S HEADQUARTERS at Fort Fetterman in the deadly winter of 1876 appeared in this sketch, published in December, 1876, in *Harper's Weekly*. It was during this period of his service that Crook was accused of overcaution and near-cowardice in dealing with the Sioux.

senior officers, especially Nelson A. Miles, who now became one of Crook's bitterest critics.<sup>22</sup>

Over a period of some years, many Indians of the northern plains had moved to reservations. But there were still a number of bands, including that of Sitting Bull, which had refused to take up a sedentary life. In 1874, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs estimated these roving bands as numbering about 3,000. When the "wild" Indians did not report to their reservations by January 31, 1876, the Interior Depart-

ment turned them over to the War Department.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Bourke, *On the Border*, 224-25.

<sup>22</sup> Virginia Weisel Johnson, *The Unregimented General: A Biography of Nelson A. Miles* (Boston, 1962), 44, 75.

<sup>23</sup> Report of General W. T. Sherman, *H. Ex. Doc. 1, pt. 2*, 44 Cong., 2 sess., (Serial 1742), 28.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*; Bourke, *On the Border With Crook*, 254-55.

<sup>25</sup> Bourke, *On the Border With Crook*, 257-63.



of the column.<sup>26</sup>

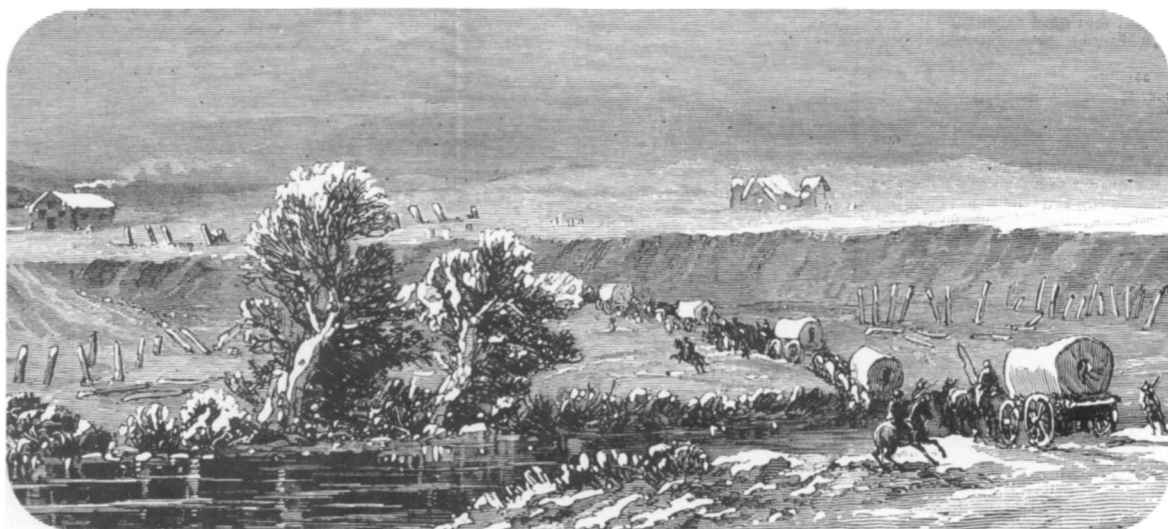
Reynolds found the camp, attacked successfully, then panicked. He ordered a withdrawal so hasty that his men did not have time to retrieve the heavy winter clothing they had discarded on entering the fight. A number of dead and wounded were abandoned to the mercy of the Indians.

Faced by the loss of his beef herd, run off by Indians near Fort Fetterman, and by the number of cripples caused by sickness, wounds and freezing, Crook abandoned his campaign and returned to Fort Fetterman.<sup>27</sup>

General Crook set out from Fetterman

to finally settle the problem. Crook would come in from the south, General Alfred H. Terry from Fort Abraham Lincoln, D. T. in the east, and Colonel John Gibbon from Fort Ellis, M. T. in the west and north. General Sherman later said:

. . . up to that date the military authorities were bound to assume that the peaceful or treaty Indians were at the agencies, and that either of these three columns could not encounter more than the hostiles estimated by the Indian Bureau at 500 warriors, or by anybody at the time at more than 800 warriors.<sup>29</sup>



OLD FORT RENO, seen from the south, became a depot of supplies for General Crook's command. This drawing also appeared in the December 16, 1876 issue of Harper's Weekly which thoroughly covered the Sioux campaign of that fateful year. It was here that Crook's column left its wagon train and moved out with pack trains.

again on May 29 with a stronger force: ten companies of the Third Cavalry, five of the Second, and five companies of the Fourth and Ninth Infantry, totaling forty-seven officers and 1,002 enlisted men, plus packers, scouts and newspaper reporters.<sup>28</sup> The column was now supported by a train of 103 six-mule wagons, plus hundreds of pack mules.

Crook's column was one of three which now were to move into northern Indian country as a massive pincers movement

On June 14, Crook was joined by 327 to 347 Crow and Shoshone Indians, including Chief Washakie.<sup>30</sup> Two days later the column cut loose from the wagons at Goose Creek, near the head of Tongue River. Each man carried four days' cooked rations, one blanket and one hundred rounds of ammunition. About 175 infantrymen were mounted on pack mules.<sup>31</sup>

Marching down the valley of the Rosebud on June 17, the column had halted for a rest and to graze the horses when

<sup>26</sup> Joe DeBarth, *Life and Adventures of Frank Gruard* (Norman: U. of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 94.

<sup>27</sup> Bourke, *On the Border With Crook*, 270-80; Anson Mills, *My Story* (Washington, author, 1918), 166.

<sup>28</sup> J. A. Leermakers, "The Battle of the Rosebud," 1955 *Brand Book*, New York Posse, The Westerners, II, no. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Report of General W. T. Sherman, *H. Ex. Doc. 1, pt. 2*, 44 Cong., 2 sess., (Serial 1742), 29.

<sup>30</sup> Grace Raymond Hebard, *Washakie* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1930), 179-183.

<sup>31</sup> Leermakers, "Battle of the Rosebud," 24.

there was a burst of rifle fire among the ridges to the left and some of the Indian allies came dashing into the valley crying, "Sioux, heap Sioux." Crook at once rode to the top of a nearby hill to reconnoiter. When he returned he found that Major A. H. Nickerson had scattered the troops, sending two companies of cavalry to a hill some half mile off and Major Royall with a battalion off to the left. Crook at once recalled Royall but it was two hours before the latter could disengage and rejoin the column.<sup>32</sup>

While the Indian allies delayed the Sioux, the troops hastily organized and mounted a counterattack which cleared one ridge and then another.<sup>33</sup> While the counterattack was in progress, Crook ordered Major Anson Mills to take his battalion downstream through the canyon of the Rosebud to attack the Indian village which Crook thought was at the lower end of the canyon about ten miles away. Mills had not gone far when he received a message from Nickerson stating the General had cancelled his advance and wanted him to defile out of the canyon by the left flank and fall on the rear of the Indians facing Royall. Upon the appearance of troops in their rear the Indians fled, leaving the battlefield to the soldiers.

Crook later explained his recall to Mills: the doctors would not stay with the wounded unless protected by the infantry and one squadron of cavalry. Crook could not have properly supported Mills if he left that many troops in the camp. In addition, Frank Gruard, the chief scout, was convinced the Sioux planned to ambush the column in the canyon of the Rosebud.<sup>34</sup>

On taking inventory of his command after the battle, Crook found he had lost nine men killed. There were 20 wounded who had to be cared for, rations were nearly gone, and his troops were down



MAJOR  
ANSON  
MILLS

MONT. HIST. SOC. PHOTO

to five to ten rounds of ammunition. He decided that the only proper course was to return to his wagons.<sup>35</sup> From the wagon camp, Crook sent off his train to Fort Fetterman with the wounded, along with his report and a request for reinforcements. The train was to return with more supplies.<sup>36</sup>

The wagon camp was continually harassed by Indians who burned off the grass, shot at details of troops, attempted to stampede the horses and mules, fired into the camp from long range, and drove back messengers. Crook tried to send out to establish contact with General Terry.<sup>37</sup>

Crook's conduct of the battle has been the subject of much discussion. An unknown correspondent of the *Daily Independent* of Helena, Montana, writing from Fort Laramie, 150 miles away, wrote:

The officers of the post speak in terms of unmeasured condemnation of Gen. Crook's behavior, and denounce his retreat in the face of the savage enemy as *cowardly*. . . . The idea of two regiments of American cavalry being stampeded by savages and having to *rally* behind friendly Indians is regarded as incredibly revolting to the pride and honor of the army.

<sup>32</sup> Bourke, *On the Border With Crook*, 194.

<sup>33</sup> DeBarth, *Life and Adventures of Frank Gruard*, 117; John Frederick Finerty, *War-Path and Bivouac* (Chicago, 1880), 91.

<sup>34</sup> Mills, *My Story*, 408; DeBarth, *Life and Adventures of Frank Gruard*, 121.

<sup>35</sup> DeBarth, *Life and Adventures of Frank Gruard*, 121; Finerty, *War-Path*, 93.

<sup>36</sup> Finerty, *War-Path*, 97.

<sup>37</sup> Crook, *Autobiography*, 197.

MAJOR  
A. H.  
NICKERSON



NATIONAL ARCHIVES PHOTO

On the other hand, Robert E. Strahorn, correspondent of the *Rocky Mountain News* of Denver, who was with Crook, stated in a letter to E. A. Brininstool that Crook with 1,100 men was attacked by two to four thousand Indians and in falling back to his wagons did the only smart thing he could do.<sup>38</sup>

Estimates of Indian strength at the Rosebud vary greatly. Crook reported to General Sheridan that he was outnumbered three to one.<sup>39</sup> John F. Finerty, a reporter with the column, reported the Indian strength at 5,000.<sup>40</sup> When Crook received a message from Sheridan, "Hit them again, and hit them harder," he commented, "I wish Sheridan would come out himself and show us how to do it. It is rather difficult to surround three Indians with one soldier." Major Anson Mills estimated four to five thousand and noted that in talking with other officers after the battle they agreed they were lucky not to have been wiped out.<sup>41</sup> Chief Crazy Horse later claimed that he had had 6,500 warriors and had used 1,500 in the initial attack.<sup>42</sup> A recent writer set the Indian strength at 2,000 and, because the soldiers were better armed, said, "All in all, the odds were

about even." He forgot that when cavalry fought dismounted—as they did at the Rosebud—one man out of every four served as a horse holder and so was out of action.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, when the Indians fought dismounted, their ponies were trained to graze nearby or to stand quietly at the end of the lariat despite the uproar of battle.<sup>44</sup> Crook's strength on the firing line could not have much exceeded 750 men.

Regardless of whether the Indian strength was 6,500 or 2,000, Crook faced something entirely new in the experience of the United States Army: several thousand hostiles in one place at one time. As General Charles King said, Crook "was up against an Indian proposition the like of which neither he nor Sheridan had ever known before."<sup>45</sup> Captain H. R. Lemly, who was present, said much later, "That his success was incomplete, must be admitted, but his timely caution may have prevented a great catastrophe."<sup>46</sup> Chief Washakie later said, "It would have been like throwing his men into the grave for General Crook to have followed up the Rosebud fight."<sup>47</sup>

It was just a week after the fight at the Rosebud that Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer divided his command in the face of an enemy of unknown strength and rode to his death at the head of 211 men of the Seventh Cavalry at the Little Big Horn. Some writers continue to blame Crook's failure to continue his northward advance (after the Rosebud) for Custer's defeat.<sup>48</sup> Yet, after waiting for his wagon train to return, Crook received word that Colonel Merritt with ten companies of the Fifth Cavalry had been ordered to join him

<sup>38</sup> Leermakers, "Battle of the Rosebud", 28.

<sup>39</sup> H. R. Lemly, "The Fight on the Rosebud", *Proceedings, Annual Meeting of the Order of Indian Wars*, March 2, 1917.

<sup>40</sup> Charles King, Address, *Proceedings, Order of Indian Wars*, February 26, 1921.

<sup>41</sup> Lemly, "Fight on the Rosebud," 42.

<sup>42</sup> Hebard, *Washakie*, 202-03.

<sup>43</sup> Crawford, *Rekindling Campfires*, 261-62.

<sup>38</sup> Jesse Wendell Vaughn, *With Crook at the Rosebud* (1st ed., Harrisburg, Penna., Stackpole Co., 1956), 160.

<sup>39</sup> King, *War Eagle*, 159.

<sup>40</sup> Finerty, *War-Path*, 129.

<sup>41</sup> Mills, *My Story*, 409.

<sup>42</sup> Hebard, *Washakie*, 186.



NATCHEZ (left) and GERONIMO stand captive in this drawing, published in 1886 and taken from a photograph by A. Frank Randall of Deming, New Mexico. From this point on, General Crook devoted himself to righting what he considered to be injustices done the Apaches, a tribe he believed was "painted in darker colors" than it deserved. The drawing was captioned "The Hostile Apaches—The Captors and the Captured."

and it was left to Crook's discretion whether to move or wait for Merritt. Crook decided to wait. Merritt did not join until August 3 and on the 11th Crook's augmented command joined that of General Terry. Thereafter the campaign, for Crook's column, consisted of a long grueling march, often referred to as "The Horse Meat March," and one fight with the band of Chief American Horse after which clothing and equipment from Custer's men were found in the Indian camp.<sup>49</sup>

In November, 1876, Colonel Raynald Mackenzie, commanding the advance of another column commanded by Crook, fell on the camp of Bull Knife, Cheyenne chief, drove the Indians out, and destroyed the winter supply of clothing, food and shelter. Crook arrived too late with the infantry despite a night march of twenty-six miles in twelve hours.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Bourke, *On the Border With Crook*, 344-80.

<sup>50</sup> Fairfax Downey, *Indian Fighting Army*, (New York, 1949), 224-26.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Crook, *Autobiography*, 246-47; Report of General Crook, 1883, *H. Ex. Doc. 1, pt. 2*, 48 Cong., 1 sess., (Serial 2182), 160.

WHILE GEORGE CROOK was commanding the Department of the Platte, trouble with the Apaches again broke out in Arizona. The General was ordered back to the scene of his former work, assuming command of that department on September 4, 1882. He set about at once repairing the damage done during his absence. Riding into the mountains, he soon persuaded most of the hostiles who still remembered and trusted *The Gray Fox*, to return to their reservations. One troublesome band of about 500 was living in Mexico and raiding into the States.<sup>51</sup> Crook reorganized his companies of scouts and his pack trains. In April, 1883, under a treaty with Mexico, he led an expedition of 193 Apache scouts and one company of the Sixth Cavalry, two officers and forty-two enlisted men, into Mexico. After several sharp fights he brought back to San Carlos reservation 52 men and 273 women and children, including the chief Geronimo.<sup>52</sup> Later Geronimo fled to Mexico and again Crook followed. At a conference with the chief, Crook agreed that if the Indians came in, the families would not be separated and any exile from Arizona would not exceed two

years. On the way back to the reservation, Geronimo again went on a spree and took to the hills. General Sheridan, now in Washington, took Geronimo's latest escapade as a repudiation of the terms made with all Apaches and ordered all terms of surrender re-negotiated on an unconditional basis. But Crook had given his word. He refused to go back on it and asked to be relieved of his command.

On April 2, 1886, General Nelson A. Miles relieved General George Crook as commander of the Department of Arizona, ending the long, hard career of an Indian fighter.<sup>53</sup> Until his death, Crook worked hard to right the injustices imposed on the Apaches—separation of families and particularly the imprisonment in Florida of some of his most faithful scouts.

George Crook, by all standards, had proven himself to be a great Indian

fighter. Twice by a combination of the mailed fist of war and the velvet glove of understanding, sympathy and honesty, he had pacified Arizona. In Montana his success was not as notable. The failure of the winter attack on Crazy Horse's camp was at worst a case of relying on subordinates who proved to be incapable. After the Battle of the Rosebud, he did the only sensible thing a commander who had any thought for his men, could do. Faced by an entirely new and unexpected situation, he dug in, replenished his supplies, asked for reinforcements and tried—however futilely—to communicate with the other columns in the field. If anyone doubts this, let him think of George Custer's fatal division of his forces and committing them to an attack in a situation which was anything but clear.

<sup>53</sup> C. L. Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apaches* (Norman: U. of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 199; Downey, *Indian Fighting Army*, 286.



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