

# Captain Benteen's Two Views of the Reno Valley Fight

By Gerry Schultz

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of June, 1876, the U.S. Seventh Cavalry crossed the divide of the Wolf Mountains and descended into the valley of the Little Bighorn. The Army followed a tributary, Ash Creek that flowed to the Little Bighorn River.

Captain Benteen and his battalion of three Companies H, D, and K, were ordered to the left of General Custer, on a valley hunt. Benteen described his orders, "to proceed out into a line of bluffs about 4 or 5 miles away, to pitch into anything I came across."<sup>1</sup> Captain Benteen's battalion moved south of Ash creek, separating from General Custer's and Major Reno's battalions.

General Custer with five companies and Major Reno with three companies, continued down Ash Creek to the Little Bighorn River. Reno received orders to cross the river at and strike the village. Before reaching the river, Custer and his five companies would turn right and ascend the bluffs to the north.

Captain Benteen, separated from Custer, would continue on the valley hunt until he did not see any Indians, returned to and followed down Ash Creek to the Little Bighorn. Reaching the river, Benteen viewed the battle underway and then moved north and viewed the battle the second time.

The following events are based on Captain Benteen's two views of Major Reno's fight in the valley. The first view as viewed from Ford A, is documented in the RCOI, (Record of a Court Of Inquiry<sup>2</sup> sometimes referred to as Reno Court of Inquiry) and the second view is written in a letter that Benteen wrote to his Wife, July 4, 1876. Nine days after the battle.<sup>3</sup>

## First view is Benteen's RCOI view from ford "A"

Captain Benteen stated, "At the ford "A"; that was my first sight of the Little Big Horn. There I saw an engagement going on and I supposed it was the whole regiment. There were twelve or thirteen men in skirmish line that appeared to have been beaten back. The line was then parallel with the river and the Indians were charging and re-charging through those men."<sup>4</sup> In a later statement Benteen said, "I did not hear any firing till I got right at the ford "A", and then I saw and heard it both. There were at least 900

Indians there engaged in demolishing about 13 men as I thought on the skirmish line."<sup>5</sup>

## Second view is Benteen's letter to his wife July 4.

"My Darling," ... "When getting on top of hill so that the village could be seen – I saw an immense number of Indians on the plain – mounted of course and charging down on some dismounted men of Reno's command; the balance of R's command were mounted, and flying for dear life to the bluffs on the same side of river that I was."<sup>6</sup>

The following is written close to chronological order, forming an event-timeline. Certain events need to take place in advance, leading up to Captain Benteen's two views of Major Reno's valley fight.

## Events leading up to Benteen's RCOI View

These events take place to set the stage:

Major Reno received orders to cross the Little Bighorn and strike the village. Reno moved down the valley. About a mile distant from the upper end of the village, Reno ordered the three companies in a single line. Galloping, the troops went together neck and neck with the officers riding in order, a little in advance of their respective companies.<sup>7</sup> Company G on the left, Co A in the middle and Co M on the right. Major Reno saw Indians coming out of a ravine. Reno stated that he "could not successfully make on offensive charge. Their numbers had thrown me on the defensive."<sup>8</sup> "Halt! Prepare to fight on foot-dismount"<sup>9</sup>

Reno stopped the gallop and said he "dismounted by telling the company officers. Lieut. Hodgson gave the order to company G, and I gave it to the companies M and A, I gave the order to dismount and prepare to fight on foot, and their horses would be sheltered in this point of timber."<sup>10</sup>

Major Reno ordered the soldiers to form a skirmish line. A skirmish line is a line of soldiers standing, kneeling, or lying about five foot apart from each other. The men were standing at the point of dismount and the horses were taken into the timber. Co A took their horses into a small glade in the opening of the timber while Co M and G go further down to the flat bottom clearing and hold their horses below.

The three Company lines wheeled out to full formation out over the plains, facing the Indians and

the village to the north. This maneuver looks like this: Imagine a minute hand on a clock pointing at three. Co G is in the center of the clock or left side of the hand, A is in the middle of the hand, M is on the end of the hand at the three or on the right side of the hand. Then move the minute hand of the clock from three to nine. G is still in the center but is now on the right, A is still in the middle of the hand, and M is on the nine but now on the left. The order of the companies reverse from G-A-M pointing to the three to M-A-G pointing to the nine. This reversing of the order of the three companies may have been as simple as Pvt Morris showed on his map. Where Co G on the left of the dismounting soldiers, first move west and take the line adjacent to the timber. Co A then moves beside Co G. Then Co M moves behind Co G and Co A out into the open plains to the left of the skirmish line. Thus reversing the order of the companies.<sup>11</sup> Co M would have been the last company to move out to the skirmish line for they had a squad of men reconnoitering the lower timber area for the horse holders and had formed a flanking skirmish line.<sup>12</sup>

The skirmish line is deployed. Co M is on the left out towards the bluffs to the west, Co A in the middle, and Co G on the right with the end resting on the timber. Facing downstream towards the Indian Village.

There were probably five hundred Indians coming from the direction of the village as Lieutenant Hodgson walked up and down the line encouraging the men to keep cool and fire low. Some of the men laid down while others knelt down.<sup>13</sup>

Captain Benteen's Battalion at this time, was in Ash Creek. Benteen has received Trumpeter Martini's message from Lieutenant Cooke, conveyed from Custer and the last message received from Custer's battalion. "Benteen Come on, Big village be quick bring pack. W.W. Cooke PS bring packs" Benteen's command had three companies of troopers, about one hundred twenty five soldiers.<sup>14</sup> Benteen took the advance of the troops. Captain Weir's Company D troop took the point, Co H following with Co K as rearguard. The Battalion followed a trail that turned out to be Major Reno's route to Ford A.

Lieutenant Edgerly with Weir's Co D stated, that after messenger Martini gave Benteen the written message, Martini "said it was the biggest village he ever saw, that they had found the Indians all asleep in

their tepees – that Major Reno was charging it and killing everything"<sup>15</sup>

Reno on the skirmish line stated, "We had been out there about fifteen or twenty minutes under a pretty hot fire. When word came to me from out the timber that the Indians were turning our right. I left Lieut. Hodgson, my Adjutant, to bring me word what went on there, and I went with Company G to the banks of the river."<sup>16</sup> Reno entered the timber for the first time as Co G withdrew from the skirmish line.

Lieutenant McIntosh of Co G and Major Reno took Co G into the timber and moved north to the river past the G and M horse holders who were taking fire from across the river. Reno stated, "I went with Company G to the banks of the river. I supposed there were forty men in it. When I got there, I had a good view of the tepees, and I could see many scattering tepees."<sup>17</sup>

Captain Moylan of Co A, extended the skirmish line to cover the area vacated by the withdrawing of Co G. Moylan and Hodgson are together on the edge of the timber.

The skirmish line was flanked on the left and rear by one hundred plus mounted warriors while two hundred ascended the bluffs to the west and another two hundred were coming in on the front.

Co M turned the left of the skirmish line to face the west banks and the flanking warriors. Lt DeRudio said, "then the fire being on that flank, it turned."<sup>18</sup> DeRudio would enter the timber.

Back in Ash Creek, Lieutenant Edgerly Co D, stated, "About a mile of where Reno crossed the river, we saw mounted men in the bottom-we could not see whether they were Indians or white men."<sup>19</sup> Edgerly stated, "Perhaps we heard faint firing a mile from there".<sup>20</sup>

Captain Moylan Co A on the skirmish line with Co M, responding to the flanking of the warriors, dropped to the edge of the timber, upon seeing Reno, "Called to him to come up there and look at the situation of affairs himself, so that he might see how the thing was going."<sup>21</sup> Reno left the timber the first time and meet Lieutenant Hodgson and Captain Moylan.

Reno stated, "I then rode out on the plain. There was firing there that I could hear, but not see. Lieut. Hodgson came to me, said the Indians were passing

to our left and rear, and I told him to bring the skirmishers in round the horses.<sup>22</sup>

Moylan stated that, Reno “took in the situation, and ordered the line to be withdrawn.”<sup>23</sup>

Reno returned into the timber, the second time and went to Lieutenant McIntosh.

On the retreating skirmish line, Sargent Miles F. O’Hara Co M is killed in action. KIA<sup>24</sup>

Captain French, “with the command, “Steady, men – fall back, slowly; face the enemy, and continue your fire.” “M” troop fell back slowly and in perfect order.”<sup>25</sup>

Co A and the larger portion of Co M skirmish line moved back in flank movement, then on flank withdrew into timber.

The retreating skirmish line was by then flanked by two hundred to now four hundred warriors. Some of the warriors moved into close range of the retreating skirmish line soldiers.

Company A withdrew into timber to their horses. Next a large portion of Co M withdrew into timber to their horses.

Captain French, Co M, ordered two squads, or a platoon of fifteen comprising of 12-13-15 soldiers, to form a skirmish line and provide cover fire as Indians were riding in and firing on the soldiers retreating. Co M had forty-four men. Eleven, one out of four, were earlier used as horse holders in the timber, leaving thirty-three men for the skirmish line.

Moylan stated, “About half of M company had to face to the left again I order to change front in the direction of the hills, as this attack was being made from that direction by Indians closing at the time the line was being withdrawn.”<sup>26</sup>

These soldiers of the 12-13-15 M skirmish line, all of Company M, are: Sergeant White, Corporals Streing and Schollin, Privates Morris, Summers, Smith, Rutten, Thorpe, Turley, Neely, Lorentz, Meyer, and Gordon. Captain French and Captain Moylan present.

Lieutenant Hodgson dropped into the timber and joined Major Reno and Lieutenant McIntosh.

Captain Moylan stated,” After my company and a portion of M company had been withdrawn, with the remaining part of M company, there was a change of

front made in order to face the bluffs on the opposite side of the valley from us, and on the same side of the river, in order to resist an attack by some Indians that were coming in on these men, as they were retiring by the flank.”<sup>27</sup>

As the 12-13-15 M skirmish line changed front facing the bluffs, the Indians came in on the skirmish line.

Lieutenant Varnum moved into timber.

At this time there are 12-13-15 men on the M skirmish line, facing the bluffs to the west, with Indians coming in on these men. All the other soldiers are withdrawn into the timber and are trying to find their horses.

Back in Ash Creek, Captain Weir and Lieutenant Edgerly have moved down Ash Creek to about one half mile from Ford A.

Captain Benteen is four or five hundred yards in advance of his battalion and Captain Weir is two hundred yards to his rear.<sup>28</sup>

Benteen views the Little Bighorn River and the valley. Down below is where previously Reno’s Battalion crossed the river and would become known as Ford A.

“My Command did not go with me to A”<sup>29</sup> Said Benteen as he was in advance of his three companies.

### **1: Captain Benteen’s RCOI view:**

“There were twelve or thirteen men in skirmish line that appeared to have been beaten back. The line was then parallel with the river and the Indians were charging and re-charging through those men.”<sup>30</sup>

Benteen stated in an interview, August 8, 1876, “About twelve or fifteen dismounted men were fighting on the plain with Indians charging and recharging them.”<sup>31</sup>

Captain Benteen’s RCOI first view of Major Reno’s valley fight was of the final movement, almost complete, of the three company skirmish line withdrawn to the timber. Majority of Reno’s troops were down in the timber to horses. Leaving only the 12-13-15 M skirmish line facing west to the bluffs in the open plain. This skirmish line was online in order to resist an attack by some Indians that were coming in on these men. The Little Bighorn River flows predominantly to the north. As the skirmish line was

facing west to the bluff, the skirmish line would appear to be parallel with the river as viewed by Benteen.

### **Events leading up to Benteen's Wife's Letter View**

Up on the 12-13-15 M Skirmish line: Captain Moylan moved into the timber, to the glade, and to the Co A horses. Captain French left the skirmish line and moved into timber and joined the portion of Co M around the horses. Leaving the 12-13 soldiers on the skirmish line.

As the Indians were charging and re-charging through those men. Private George E. Smith Co M is KIA. "Geo E. Smith killed at edge of timber."<sup>32</sup>

Sergeant White moved down into the timber with Privates Lorentz, Morris and Neely.

Private Rutten said, "Cpl Streing Co M killed near the edge of timber."<sup>33</sup> Corporal Frederick Streing Co M is KIA.

Half-Yellow-Face, a Crow scout for the Seventh Cavalry, across Ash Creek on the bluff, north of Benteen, signaled. Benteen stated, "To my right I noticed 3 or 4 Indians, probably 4 or 500 yards from me...they were Crows."<sup>34</sup>

Lieutenant Edgerly Co D said, "When got down near river saw horsemen scampering toward bluffs and thought must be Indians Reno was driving out of village, but Half Yellow Face beckoned to come up toward right and went up there."<sup>35</sup>

Captain Benteen moved north to cross Ash Creek. Captain Weir Co D in the advance followed by Captain Benteen, Co H and Co K.

Down in the timber: Major Reno gave orders for the men to prepare for movement and mount their men and bring them to the edge of the timber where they would be formed in column of fours. Word spread and passed on to the men at their horses to prepare for a charge.

Major Reno orders Lieutenant McIntosh to mount up his men, Co G, who were skirmishing toward the village across the river. Reno left the G horse holder area and moved out of the bottom into a small open glade area on the edge of the timber, meeting Captain Moylan and Lieutenant Hodgson. Reno then ordered Hodgson to go to French to mount up. "I left the timber sending orders to Capt. French by Lieut.

Hodgson, and giving the order in person to Captain Moylan and Lieut. McIntosh, to mount their men and bring them to the edge of the timber where they would be formed in column of fours."<sup>36</sup>

Lieutenant Wallace looked for Co G, only to find a few men, as McIntosh had Co G at the river firing into the village. Wallace out of view of Reno mounts up a portion of G and heads up and out.

Corporal Roy Co A said, "Ordered in from skirmish line and went into timber about 50 yds. To get horse. Met Wallace mounted and leading G troop out,"

Captain Moylan ordered Co A to mount.<sup>37</sup> Major Reno in the glade beside Moylan, spoke to scout Bloody Knife. Co A mounts up and forms inline. Reno stated, "I think I stood some ten minutes while the formation was going on. I had nothing to do with it. They had orders to form in column of fours out of the timber."<sup>38</sup>

Sergeant White, Privates Lorentz, Morris and Neely go to their horses where the Co M horse holders are.

Major Reno talked to scout Bloody Knife. Reno recalled, "I was trying to get from him by signs where the Indians were going"<sup>39</sup>

Lieutenant Hodgson met Captain French with the Co M horse holders and passed on the order to mount and get ready to leave. Privates Lorentz, Morris, Neely and the other men began to move up to the glade where Co A is mounted. Reno "had already given the orders to the Company Commanders."<sup>40</sup>

Scout Herendeen, "mounted and rode down to a little park in the timber and here saw a company drawn up facing the east, or left of the line as toward the village. Reno was there sitting on his horse."<sup>41</sup> In the glade, Co A is mounted in line facing east.

"Indians now fired a volley into timber from the south and, Bloody Knife and a private were hit. Bloody Knife was killed"<sup>42</sup>

Private Lorentz is shot through the stomach and fell from his horse, refused help and was left.<sup>43</sup> Private Neely caught him and Private Morris tried to lift him on his horse.<sup>44</sup> Private George Lorentz Co M is KIA.

Major Reno stated, "I saw Bloody Knife, one of the scouts, shot; and a man from M" Company wounded."<sup>45</sup> Bloody Knife is killed "within a few feet of me"<sup>46</sup> Scout Bloody Knife is KIA.

“Reno immediately ordered his men to dismount and then quickly to mount, and everybody left the timber on the run.”<sup>47</sup>

Some troopers of Co A dismount and mount back up in a disorderly manner. Reno bolted out of the glade. Captain Moylan left the timber and moved out into the open plains and assembled Co A and a portion of Co M into column of fours.

Captain Benteen’s battalion, Co D, H, and K, crossed Ash creek and commenced to climb the bluffs to the north.

Captain Moylan stated, “When about one-half of my company was mounted up, I went up out of the timber and formed the men in column of fours as they came up.”<sup>48</sup>

Captain French brought a portion of Co M out of the timber and assemble alongside to the left of Co A.<sup>49</sup>

Captain Moylan in the open plain stayed in the rear of the assembly of the column of fours and directed troops as they were coming out of the timber.

The Indians who had flanked to the south, all pull up and stop as they watch the troops come out to the edge of the open plain and assemble. The Indians not sure what the soldiers were doing.

Private Rutten on the M skirmish line told, “As many as 200 Indians, he would think, rode up on his right and had stopped or nearly stopped, and were doing some very loud yelling as the soldiers were getting out of the timber. ...undecided as to what movement the soldiers were about to execute.”<sup>50</sup>

As the two companies A and M are assembled and ready to move, the M skirmish line received orders to withdraw into timber and mount. Captain Moylan stated, “Those men, when ready to move, were withdrawn from this position, and ordered down to their horses.”<sup>51</sup> Captain French went over to the M skirmish line and ordered them to withdraw to their horses.

Private Morris said Co M, “held the Indians in check until “A” and “G” had mounted.”<sup>52</sup>

Private Rutten, with the withdrawing M skirmish line, moved down into the timber to horses, said “Reno rode past to the border of the timber and cried: “Everybody follow me.”<sup>53</sup>

Major Reno rode out of the glade and joined the assembly of troops with Captain Moylan. Reno stated, Moylan “was immediately at my side.” and “observing the formation.”<sup>54</sup> Reno stated, “The column was formed so as to go through the Indians on that side.”<sup>55</sup>

Captain Moylan rode to the head of the column of fours assembled.

Reno will have to charge to get through the now four to six, possibly nine hundred Indians up on the plains who have flanked to the east, south, and west of the timber area. Many Indians are flanking the north and the east as the Indians passed through the timber and river area.

Lieutenant Varnum left the timber, “I think Lt. Hodgson, Lt. Wallace, Capt. French and Lt. McIntosh were all behind me.”<sup>56</sup>

The assembly of troops are facing east toward the river. Moylan stated, “on our right and rear as we were then, looking toward the river, there were a few Indians here and there – perhaps a good many.”<sup>57</sup> The Indians to his rear had been charging and re-charging into the 12-13 M Skirmish Line.

Lieutenant Wallace would lead a small portion of Co G out of the timber. The remainder of Co G were with Lieutenant McIntosh.

Reno stated, “I was at the head of the column”.<sup>58</sup> Moylan would join Reno at the head and recalled, “In a few moments he gave the order to move forward, and the command moved forward at a trot.”<sup>59</sup>

Captain French returned from ordering the M skirmish line to horses. French sees that Co M with Reno have already trotted off. Reno’s command moved forward at a trot “and then at a gallop”,<sup>60</sup> recalled Moylan. French rides to catch up with the galloping companies.

Major Reno and Captain Moylan lead the charge through the Indians between them and the river. As the troops began to leave the Indians began chasing the troops. As Reno began the charge, the warriors flanking mostly on left, some right.<sup>61</sup>

Meeting the Crow scouts on the bluffs north of Ash Creek, Captain Benteen said, “They said there was a big “pooh poohing” going on, which I had already seen”. Benteen then left the Crow scouts and moved north along the bluffs.<sup>62</sup>

Lieutenant Wallace and Co G came out of the timber and charged toward the fleeing companies, A and M. The three companies thus formed what appeared to be a triangle with each side a Company M A G each.

The Indians “buffalo charge” after the fleeing Co G. Another group of twenty to forty warriors ride in close to where the soldiers had come out of the timber.

Lieutenant McIntosh left the timber with some of the remaining G that did not go out with Lieutenant Wallace and rode into the middle of the warriors just outside the timber.

Private Petring Co G left the timber, “As I emerged from the timber onto open ground, this horse was shot from under me.”<sup>63</sup> **Petring is dismounted** on foot.

Scout Herendeen left the timber and rode out about one hundred fifty yards into the open and his horse is shot and he is dismounted. Herendeen returned toward the timber.<sup>64</sup>

Captain Moylan stated, “After the command was in motion at the gallop, the heads of the companies were almost on a line; the Indians closed in very close on the outer flank, and on the inner flank toward the timber.”

Guide Charley Reynolds now left the timber. Herendeen stated that, “I saw Reynolds come out of timber, and said; ‘Charley, don’t try to ride out. We can’t get away from this timber.’”<sup>65</sup>

Scout Herendeen reentered the timber having passed through twenty or more Indians.

The former M skirmish line soldiers mount their horses and begin to leave the bottom out into the open assembly area. Herendeen said, “When he got back to the timber, soldiers were still leaving it”<sup>66</sup>.

“Sergeant Charles White was wounded in the arm and his horse killed. He was left in the woods,”<sup>67</sup> The Co M soldiers: Corporal Schollin, Privates Thorpe, Rutten, Turley, Neely, Meyer, Gordon, Summers, Morris and others made their way out of the timber onto the plains. Private Morris says he was the last to leave the timber except Lieutenant Hare.<sup>68</sup>

Lieutenant Hare left the timber with Private Clear, Co K. “When he started, Co A and M had gone quite some time and G had left just ahead of him.”<sup>69</sup>

Private Elihu F. Clear, Co K is KIA just after leaving timber.

Many other men were late to leave the timber including, Lieutenant DeRudio, Private O’Neill Co G, guide Charley Reynolds, interpreter Isaiah Dorman, Lieutenant Varnum, and scout Herendeen.

As most of the Indians were riding after the three companies of retreating soldiers, there were at least twenty to thirty Indians that approach the straggler soldiers coming out of the timber.

Scout Isaiah Dorman left the timber area.

Lieutenant Varnum left the timber into the open plain. Varnum said he “let my horse have his head and pretty soon overtook the head of the column.”<sup>70</sup>

Corporal Scollin left the timber into the open. Followed by Private Thorpe. Co M Privates Morris, Summers and others leave the timber into the open. Morris recalled that Private “Summers was killed just as he emerged from timber.”<sup>71</sup> Private David Summers, Co M, KIA

Private Morris said, “Scollin’s horse was shot and went down”. Scollin took his carbine and said: “For God’s sake boys, don’t leave me here.”<sup>72</sup>

**Isaiah Dorman is dismounted.** An Indian recalled, “We passed a black man in a soldier’s uniform and we had him. He turned on his horse and shot an Indian right through the heart. Then the Indians fired at this one man and riddled his horse with bullets. His horse fell over on his back and the black man could not get up. I saw him as I rode by.”<sup>73</sup>

Private Rutten saw, “A little way from the timber Isaiah’s horse had been shot down, and the colored man was making a stand, down on one knee, coolly firing his sporting rifle.”<sup>74</sup>

“I saw Isaiah, he was standing and firing into the Indians. His horse was killed. As I went by him he shouted ‘goodbye, Rutten’.”<sup>75</sup>

Isaiah is on the ground. Rutten rode past him and Isaiah cries out “Goodbye Rutten”<sup>76</sup>

Guide “Charley Reynolds were on their horses fighting.”<sup>77</sup> Rutten wrote.

Rutten said, “Corpl. Scollin fell in some low or soggy ground not far from the timber”.<sup>78</sup>

Private “Thorpe stopped and took him (Scollin) on behind his horse and just as he did so this horse was shot down.” recalled Morris. <sup>79</sup> **Both Scollin and Thorpe are dismounted.**

Corporal Roy Co A said “About 75 or 100 yds. From timber I saw Charlie Reynolds dismounted and wounded with pistol standing still and showing fight.”<sup>80</sup> **Reynolds is dismounted.**

Lieutenant McIntosh was, “trying to make his way. He was singled out by himself, and he was trying to urge his horse along but was not succeeding well. His lariat was dragging, which seemed to bother the horse. McIntosh was surrounded by twenty or thirty Indians, who were circling about him, apparently determined to get him.”<sup>81</sup> Said Private Rutten.

Private Rutten rode through center of Indians surrounding McIntosh. “The horse tore right across the circle of Indians of which McIntosh was the center and on he went.”<sup>82</sup>

Private O’Neill Co G on foot left the timber and says, “He then, with others, followed on after the retreating column on foot.”<sup>83</sup> **O’Neill is dismounted on foot**

The twenty to thirty Indians continued to surround and closed in around these dismounted men.

“I saw Corporal Hagerman of G troop as his horse was shot under him. I passed through a bunch of Indians that had him surrounded and I shouted to him to ‘hold on to my horse’, He was not wounded then,”<sup>84</sup> wrote Rutten. **Hagerman Co G is dismounted**

**Lieutenant McIntosh is dismounted.**

Lieutenant Varnum came up to the head of the columns half way to the river and “saw Major Reno and Capt. Moylan”.<sup>85</sup>

Moylan over half way to the river in the retreat flight, “I dropped from the head of my company down to a point about the middle of the company, and I found the rear of my company was very much broken up, as the shooting into it was very severe.”<sup>86</sup> Varnum stated, “The rear portion of the column was scattered.”<sup>87</sup>

Scout Herendeen stated, “While I was in the timber, I saw Indians shooting at Isaiah”<sup>88</sup>

During the retreat flight, Co M moves more to the right towards Ford A. Lieutenant Hare said, “he

caught up to M, Co. M had taken away off to right, on a line straight for ford A and French had become separated from his Co and 3 or 4 Indians after him”<sup>89</sup> French riding in the rear of his Co M as he had been over at the M skirmish line ordering them to withdraw when Reno began the retreat charge.

At this point of time, there are at least eight dismounted men: Petring, McIntosh, Isaiah, Scollin, Thorpe, O’Neill, Hagerman, and Reynolds.

Captain Benteen gained the top of the bluffs, out of Ash Creek, one half mile south of the modern day Reno Hill granite marker. Benteen’s view of the surrounding country was a full view looking across the valley. Below would be the Little Bighorn River surrounded by a large timber area to the west. For about three miles the left bank of the river was in view, downstream the teepees were stretched. Benteen looking down the steep bluffs into the valley below, more than three quarters of Reno’s eastwardly retreat path would be in view, the last quarter to the river crossing would be out of view to Benteen.

## 2: Benteen’s Wife’s Letter Second View

“My Darling,” ... “When getting on top of hill so that the village could be seen – I saw an immense number of Indians on the plain – mounted of course and charging down on some dismounted men of Reno’s command; the balance of R’s command were mounted, and flying for dear life to the bluffs on the same side of river that I was.”<sup>90</sup>

Benteen’s wife’s letter view: The twenty to thirty Indians were charging down on the eight or more dismounted men outside the timber. Reno’s command was crossing the valley in retreat. Co M riding now on the south, Co A strung out, moving to the river crossing and in the rear Co G, all in rapid retreat on the way to the river. Most of Reno’s troops, A M G in flight to river. This is the same account that Benteen uses in several later accounts as his “first” view of Reno’s command. The RCOI first view from Ford A was given only once during the RCOI and once to the New York Herald. His wife’s letter view from the bluffs south of Reno Hill was Benteen’s best view and he repeated it often.

The killing of the dismounted fight continued as Benteen left the viewing area and moved north as described in Benteen’s letter to his wife.

### **Events that occur before Benteen meets Reno.**

The following events take place as Captain Benteen moves to the north, leaving the view point described to his wife. As he moves north along bluff, Major Reno crosses the river and begins the climb up the bluff.

“Thorpe then caught an Indian pony and escaped, Scollin was left”,<sup>91</sup> recalled Private Morris.

Private Petring returned to the timber “I ran back into the timber and saw a few horses running around loose and caught one of them up.”<sup>92</sup>

Reno’s lead reaches the river. Not under pressure, Varnum stated, “half way to the crossing and by the time I got there, the Indians in our front had run off.”<sup>93</sup>

Co M turned to the left towards Reno crossing.<sup>94</sup> Lieutenant Hare said Captain French’s, “co turned to left and forded where rest did”.<sup>95</sup>

Major Reno crossed the river and held up a short period as the troops cross the river.

Co A reached the river. Then Co G reached the river and the last to reach the river was Co M.<sup>96</sup>

Major Reno and Co A were the first to reach the river and are in the middle of the crossing. Co G, though strung out, reached the river on the north end or left of Co A and intermingled. Captain French had ridden Co M a further distance off to the right towards Ford A,<sup>97</sup> thus Co M is the last of the companies to arrive at the river on the south end of crossing, to the right of Co A and intermingled with the troopers crossing the river.

A, G then M reach the crossing as described by Private Morris.<sup>98</sup> Lieutenant Hodgson, Major Reno’s Adjutant reached the river crossing. Indians closed in on the soldiers crossing the river.

The Indians swarm into close contact with the dismounted men outside the timber area.

Lieutenant DeRudio led his horse to the edge of timber, seeing Reno in full retreat and some men climbing the bluff, saw Reynolds kneeling on one knee firing. DeRudio horse broke away, leaving him on foot.<sup>99</sup>

Dismounted, Petring returns to timber, “I ran back into the timber”<sup>100</sup>

Dismounted Corporal Otto Hagerman Co G is KIA

Lieutenant Benjamin H. Hodgson is KIA at the river crossing, as viewed by Billy Cross, scout, in a New York Times<sup>101</sup> correspondent interview July 4. Billy Cross then saw McIntosh killed.

Lieutenant Donald McIntosh Co G is KIA.

Corporal Henry M. Scollin Co M is KIA<sup>102</sup> “Scullen and Klotzbucher were killed on the flat.”<sup>103</sup> Private Henry Klotzbucher Co M is KIA.

Guide Charles Reynolds is KIA, “Reynolds was trying to mount his horse. He finally got about 150 yds. when he was shot, and Isaiah fell near him”<sup>104</sup>, said Herendeen. Interpreter Isaiah Dorman is KIA.

Lieutenant DeRudio reentered the timber and heard the Indians at a distance, cease fire. Looking out saw Benteen’s battalion was in full view.<sup>105</sup> Benteen’s battalion reach the Reno retreat hill top and met Major Reno with his battalion crossing the river and climbing up the bluffs.

Of the eight dismounted men, five were KIA: McIntosh, Isaiah, Reynolds, Hagerman and Scollin. Thorpe was dismounted and made it to the river. O’Neil and Petring were dismounted and returned to the timber.

The above study was driven by Captain Benteen’s two views of the Reno valley fight. Two views from different locations and at different times. Benteen’s first view from close to Ford A. The second view from atop the bluffs. Captain Benteen’s first view was of only twelve or thirteen or fifteen men in skirmish line that appeared to have been beaten back. The line was then parallel with the river and the Indians were charging and re-charging through those men. Who were those men and what action did Benteen see? The platoon of Co M skirmish line holding back the Indians as the remainder of the skirmish line dropped into the timber to the horses. Half-Yellow-Face had signaled Captain Benteen, who would move to the north, cross Ash Creek and move up the bluffs as Major Reno retreated out of the timber. Benteen’s second view atop the bluffs was of Major Reno’s full retreat flying across the valley floor and the straggling group of eight or more dismounted men who had come out of the timber and charged down by Indians.



**“Morning Coffee on the Banks of the Little Bighorn”** Photo of Gerry Schultz by Toni Meglitsch. Digital enhancement by Jim Horner.

Gerry Schultz is a member of the Little Big Horn Associates having joined in 2008. He is an active member of the LBHA Message Pro Board and can be found there as “Gerry”. Known as a proponent of Private Peter Thompson, Co C, Seventh Cavalry. Gerry first began his studies after finding an original copy of “Custer’s Last Fight, The Experience of a Private Soldier in the Custer Massacre” by Peter Thompson. This document guided him through his studies.

Gerry can be found every year at the Real Bird Custer Battle re-enactment, and be found at Fort Abraham Lincoln, Fort Buford and various forts that played a part in the 1876 campaign. Gerry also speaks at various organizations. After speaking at the Carter County Historical Society, Brice Lambert, publisher/editor of the “Ekalaka Eagle”, wrote, “Dressed as cavalry trooper Schultz took the audience through Thompson’s enlistment, his training at Jefferson Barracks in St Louis, his posting to Fort Lincoln at Bismarck, and his trek with Custer’s command to the Little Bighorn in Montana. As he progressed through Thompson’s story, Schultz stopped frequently to offer details of a trooper’s life during the campaign...During the desperate battle itself, Thompson’s experiences came alive.”

Gerry and his wife, Cori, raised three girls and are now the proud grandparents of seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. A veteran, 1973-77, U.S. Navy. Honored with a degree of Doctor of Teletype Therapeutics. FCC Licensed. In 2014 Gerry retired after 36 years working in telecommunications for the BNSF Railway. Gerry and Cori reside at Bloomfield, MT.

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<sup>1</sup> RCOI p356 Captain Frederick W. Benteen Co H, Battalion Commander

<sup>2</sup> RCOI “*The Official Record of a Court of Inquiry*”, 1951 by Colonel W.A. Graham.

<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/History.Reno> Convened at Chicago, IL, January 13, 1879 by

the President of the United States upon the request of Major Marcus A. Reno, Seventh U.S. Cavalry to investigate his conduct at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, June 25-26, 1876.

<sup>3</sup> CMyth: Colonel W.A. Graham, *The Custer Myth A source Book of Custeriana*, (New York: Bonanza Books, 1953 second printing 1957) p297

<sup>4</sup> RCOI p357 Captain Frederick W. Benteen Co H

<sup>5</sup> RCOI p378

<sup>6</sup> CMyth p297 Benteen

<sup>7</sup> Private Peter Thompson, Co C “*Custer’s Last Fight*” self-published.

<sup>8</sup> RCOI p501 Major Marcus Reno, Battalion Commander

<sup>9</sup> DBL: Michael N. Donahue, “*Drawing Battle Lines, The Map Testimony of Custer’s Last Fight*” (El Segundo: Upton and Sons, 2008). Private William Morris Co M. Map p130

<sup>10</sup> RCOI p501 Reno

<sup>11</sup> DBL p126 Morris

<sup>12</sup> OTLBHWWC: Compiled and Edited by Richard G. Hardorff, *On the Little Bighorn with Walter Camp, A Collection of W.M. Camp’s Letters, Notes and Opinions on Custer’s Last Fight* (El Segundo: Upton and Sons, 2002), p14-17 First Sergeant John Ryan

<sup>13</sup> CMyth p242 Ryan

<sup>14</sup> RCOI p358 Benteen

<sup>15</sup> RCOI p390 Lieutenant Winfield S. Edgerly Co D

<sup>16</sup> RCOI p501 Reno

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p501 Reno

<sup>18</sup> RCOI p269 Lieutenant Charles DeRudio Co A

<sup>19</sup> RCOI p389 Edgerly

<sup>20</sup> RCOI p391 Edgerly

<sup>21</sup> RCOI p186 Captain Myles Moylan Co A

<sup>22</sup> RCOI p501 Reno

<sup>23</sup> RCOI p186 Moylan

<sup>24</sup> CMyth p242 Ryan

<sup>25</sup> IFaF: Cyrus Townsend Brady, *Indian Fights and Fighters*, (Lincoln/London, University of Nebraska, 1971, 1904) p403 Private William E. Morris Co M letter

<sup>26</sup> RCOI p186 Moylan

<sup>27</sup> RCOI p191 Moylan

<sup>28</sup> RCOI p357 Benteen

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<sup>29</sup> RCOI p.359 Benteen  
<sup>30</sup> RCOI p357 Benteen  
<sup>31</sup> CMyth “Statements of Captain F. W. Benteen and Major M. A. Reno” *New York Herald*, August 8, 1878. p228  
<sup>32</sup> Cin76 p131 Morris  
<sup>33</sup> Cin76: Edited by Kenneth Hammer, *Custer in 76, Walter Camp’s Notes on the Custer Fight* (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman and London, 1976). p118 Rutten  
<sup>34</sup> RCOI p357 Benteen  
<sup>35</sup> Cin76 p55 Edgerly  
<sup>36</sup> RCOI p502 Reno  
<sup>37</sup> Cin76 p107 Private Thomas F. O’Neill Co G  
<sup>38</sup> RCOI p502 Reno  
<sup>39</sup> RCOI p503 Reno  
<sup>40</sup> RCOI p503 Reno  
<sup>41</sup> Cin76 p223 Kenneth Hammer on Herendeen  
<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p223 Hammer  
<sup>43</sup> OTLBHWWC p19 William Morris  
<sup>44</sup> Cin76 p131 Morris  
<sup>45</sup> RCOI p593 Reno  
<sup>46</sup> RCOI p503 Reno  
<sup>47</sup> Cin76 p223 Hammer  
<sup>48</sup> RCOI p186 Moylan  
<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p186 Moylan  
<sup>50</sup> Cin76 p118 Private Roman Rutten Co M  
<sup>51</sup> RCOI p191 Moylan  
<sup>52</sup> IFaF: Cyrus Townsend Brady, *Indian Fights and Fighters*, (Lincoln/London, University of Nebraska, 1971, 1904) p403 William E. Morris Co M  
<sup>53</sup> Cin76 p118 Rutten  
<sup>54</sup> RCOI p503 Reno  
<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p503 Reno  
<sup>56</sup> RCOI p156 LT Charles Varnum, Cmdg Scouts  
<sup>57</sup> RCOI p192 Moylan  
<sup>58</sup> RCOI p504 Reno  
<sup>59</sup> RCOI p186 Moylan  
<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p186 Moylan  
<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p186 Moylan  
<sup>62</sup> RCOI p357 Benteen  
<sup>63</sup> Cin76 p133 Private Henry Petring Co G  
<sup>64</sup> Cin76 p223 George Herendeen, scout  
<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p223 Herendeen  
<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p223 Herendeen  
<sup>67</sup> IFaF p403 Morris  
<sup>68</sup> Cin76 p132 Morris  
<sup>69</sup> Cin76 p66 Lieutenant Luther R. Hare Co K, with scouts.  
<sup>70</sup> RCOI p124 Varnum  
<sup>71</sup> Cin76 p131 Morris  
<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p131 Morris

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<sup>73</sup> Evan S. Connell, *Son of the Morning Star: Custer & the Little Bighorn*, (Promontory Press, 1984) p24-27  
<sup>74</sup> Cin76 p119 Rutten  
<sup>75</sup> WContheLBH: Private William O. Taylor Co A, forward by Greg Martin, *With Custer on the Little Bighorn*. (Viking Penguin, 1996). p182 Rutten  
<sup>76</sup> Cin76 p119 Rutten  
<sup>77</sup> WContheLBH p182 Rutten  
<sup>78</sup> Cin76 p119 Rutten  
<sup>79</sup> Cin76 p131 Morris  
<sup>80</sup> Cin76 p112 Corporal/Sgt Stanislaus Roy Co A  
<sup>81</sup> Cin76 p119 Rutten  
<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p119 Rutten  
<sup>83</sup> Cin76 p107 Private Thomas O’Neill, Co G  
<sup>84</sup> WContheLBH: “*With Custer on the Little Bighorn*” by William O. Taylor forward by Greg Martin, 1996. “*Reno’s Fight, Run*” by Roman Rutten p182  
<sup>85</sup> RCOI p124 Varnum  
<sup>86</sup> RCOI p186 Moylan  
<sup>87</sup> RCOI p144 Varnum  
<sup>88</sup> Cin76p223 Herendeen  
<sup>89</sup> Cin76 p66 Hare  
<sup>90</sup> CMyth p297 Benteen’s letter to wife  
<sup>91</sup> Cin76 p131 Morris  
<sup>92</sup> Cin76 p133 Private Henry Petring, Co G  
<sup>93</sup> RCOI p130 Varnum  
<sup>94</sup> Cin76 p66 Lt Luther Hare, with Scouts  
<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p66 Hare  
<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p66 Hare  
<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p66 Hare  
<sup>98</sup> DBL p126 Private William Morris, Co M, Map. “*Drawing Battle Lines The Map Testimony of Custer’s Last Fight*” by Michael N. Donahue  
<sup>99</sup> Cin76 p85 Lt Charles DeRudio, Co A  
<sup>100</sup> Cin76 p133 Private Henry Petring Co G  
<sup>101</sup> *New York Times*, “From Our Own Correspondent. Camp on the Yellowstone, Near Powder River, Montana Tuesday, July 4, 1876.” Interview with scout Billy Cross  
<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p131 Morris  
<sup>103</sup> WContheLBH p182 Rutten  
<sup>104</sup> Cin76 p223 Herendeen  
<sup>105</sup> Cin76 p85 DeRudio