

The Battle of the Little Big Horn is one of the most famous fought on American soil. Many accounts of the battle focus only on the death of George Custer and “all” 209 of his men at the “Last Stand.” It is rarely noted that about half of the approximately 675 men under Custer's command survived the fighting in the valley of the Little Big Horn River on June 25 & 26, 1876. It is even more unusual to see it referred to as the “Battle of the Greasy Grass,” the name given to it by the Native Americans.

Objectives

1. Students will understand that over 300 US soldiers survived the Battle of the Little Big Horn
2. Students will evaluate Custer's strategy of dividing his forces and attacking the Indian village along the Little Big Horn at different locations.
3. Students will evaluate Major Marcus Reno's charge and retreat.
4. Students will evaluate Captain Frederick Benteen's decision to support Major Reno's troops and not follow Custer's order to reinforce him.
5. Students will evaluate Reno and Benteen's defense of their position on June 25 & 26, 1876.
6. Students will understand the role the topography of the Little Big Horn valley, especially the coulees, ravines, hills and bluffs, played in the battle.
7. Students will examine maps to help them understand why the events of the battle occurred the way it did.

Activities

1. Students should be provided with background about Indian / Government relations in the West during the 19th century.
2. Students should review the specifics of the Campaign of 1876 to force Indians on to their reservations.
3. Students should look at the Google Earth map of the battlefield (link provided below). They should understand that the topography of the area with its coulees (seasonal river beds), ravines, hills and bluffs made it difficult for either side to know what the other was doing until they were engaged in combat.
4. Students should review the timeline of the battle (see below) along with the map of the battle to understand how the events unfolded the way they did.
5. Students should evaluate George Custer's decisions to divide his forces without knowing how strong his enemy was.
6. If available Teachers may choose to show segments from the videos listed below to enhance the lesson.

Content

July 1874 – Lt. Col George Custer leads scientific expedition into Black Hills. Gold is discovered.

September 1875 – Lakota refuse US Government offer of \$6 million for the Black Hills.

December 1875 – US Government issues ultimatum to all tribes to return to their reservations.

Spring, 1876 – Military campaign against tribes of Northern Plains initiated. Troops from Dakota, Montana and Wyoming territories head out in search of Sitting Bull and his allies.

June 17, 1876 - Lakota and Cheyenne attack Wyoming column under Gen George Crook along Rosebud Creek in Montana. Crook retreats to base camp in Wyoming.

June 22, 1876 – Dakota column commander Gen. Alfred Terry orders George Custer and 7th Cavalry to march up Valley of the Rosebud in search of Sitting Bull after evidence of abandoned village is found.

June 25, 1876

- 12:30 AM – Custer breaks camp, hoping to locate village and launch early morning surprise attack.
- 4:00 AM – Custer's scouts locate village
- 8:00 AM – Custer's troops spotted by Sioux scouts
- 11:00 AM – Custer decides to attack. Troops head north along ridge towards village.
- 12:00 PM – Captain Frederick Benteen, with approximately 200 men is ordered to scout to the west. Custer continues north along the ridge.
- 2:45 PM – Custer divides forces again. Major Marcus Reno, with about 200 men is ordered into valley to attack village along Little Big Horn River. Custer continues north, with about 220 men to attack village at opposite end. About 40 men are kept in reserve with pack mules and extra ammunition.
- 3:00 PM - Reno's men reach Little Big Horn river and stop to water horses before crossing.
- 3:15 PM - Reno crosses river, charges village but quickly aborts charge to form skirmish line and retreat out of valley to higher ground.
- 3:34 PM – Custer witnesses Reno's fight from “Weir Point”, sends Pvt. John Martin to find Benteen with note to “... bring packs, be quick..”. Custer continues along ridge to north.
- 4:00 PM – Martin finds Benteen south of Reno's position and delivers note.

- 4:15 PM Benteen follows Custer's trail but is met by a desperate Reno who pleads for help having lost about 80 men in his charge and retreat. Benteen decides to stay with Reno and keep pack mules as well.
- 4:20 – 5:15 PM Custer divides troops again, descends into valley to attack village. First shots fired about 20 minutes later. Last shots fired about 30 minutes later that. Troops engage in intense battle against overwhelming numbers. Fighting occurred in several areas in the vicinity of “Last Stand Hill” where Custer died.
- 4:55 PM – Captain Thomas Weir, determined to assist Custer after hearing distant gunfire, leaves with men and some pack mules.
- 5:15 PM - At “Weir Point” he is able to see and hear evidence of fighting about four miles away on “Last Stand Hill.” He also sees several hundred mounted Indians headed toward him and retreats back to Reno and Benteen. Last firing from distance heard by Reno and Benteen at about same time.

June 26, 1876

- Reno and Benteen are surrounded on Reno Hill but are able to withstand enemy fire on their position during the evening of June 25 and throughout the day on June 26.
- The Indians dismantle their village and depart. Fearing a trap Reno and Benteen decide to hold their position throughout the night of June 26.

June 27, 1876

- The Dakota Column of Gen. Alfred Terry and the Montana column of Gen. John Gibbon arrive and discover the dead bodies of Custer and his men. They will also find the survivors with Reno and Benteen.

Maps

Official National Park Service Map of the Battlefield from Mappery

<http://mappery.com/Little-Big-Horn-Battlefield-National-Monument-Map>

Google Earth map with markers showing Indian and troop location from the Uintah Basin-Teaching American History Online Resources Website

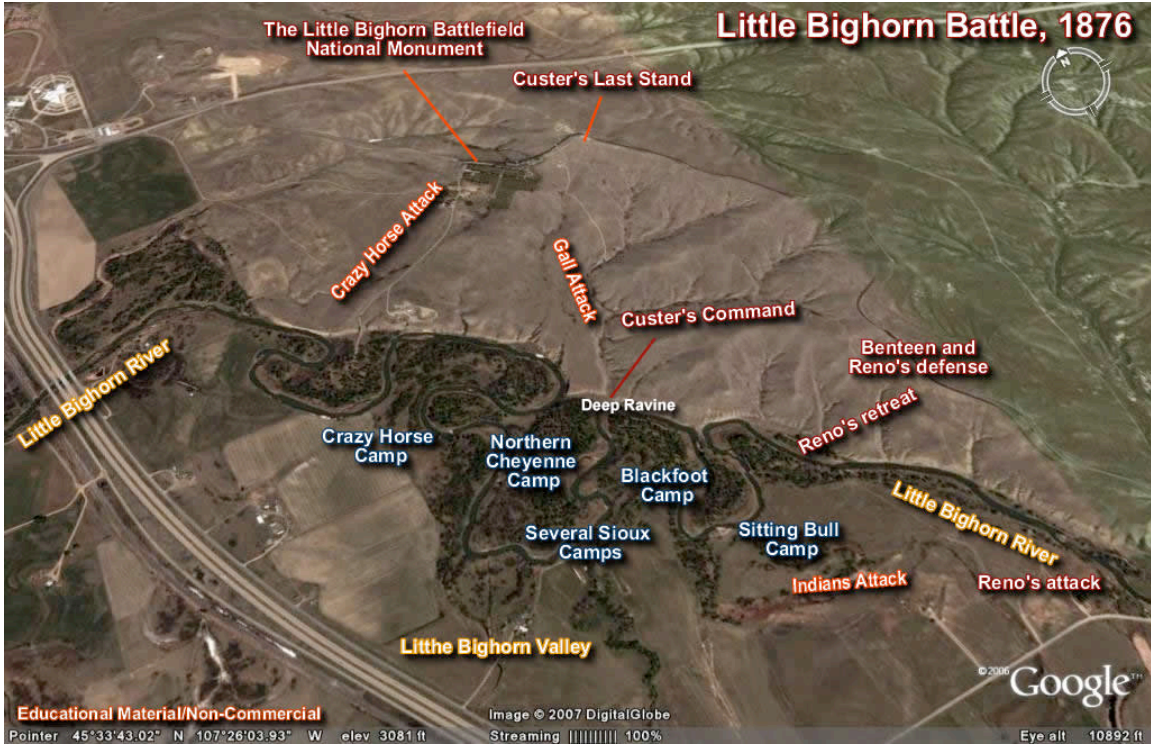
<http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.uintahbasintah.org/maps/mlittlebighorn.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.uintahbasintah>

Video Resources from PBS

The West, episode six, "Fight No More Forever, 1874-1877"

The Way West, Episode three, "The War for the Black Hills, 1870-1876"

Last Stand at Little Big Horn



The Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Little Bighorn Battle, 1876

Custer's Last Stand

Crazy Horse Attack

Gall Attack

Custer's Command

Benteen and Reno's defense

Reno's retreat

Little Bighorn River

Crazy Horse Camp

Northern Cheyenne Camp

Blackfoot Camp

Several Sioux Camps

Sitting Bull Camp

Deep Ravine

Little Bighorn River

Indians Attack

Reno's attack

Little Bighorn Valley

Educational Material/Non-Commercial

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Pointer 45°33'43.02" N 107°26'03.93" W elev. 3081 ft

Streaming 100%

Google™

Eye alt 10892 ft