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Article Summary: Two foreign participants in the massacre at Wounded Knee recorded their experiences, the Swede Ragnar Ling-Vannerus in a journal, the Englishman Walter R Crickett in a letter. This article uses their accounts to create a record of the battle that goes beyond standard depictions of the events. It includes additional comments by Konni Zilliacus, a Finnish journalist and war correspondent who witnessed the action.

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Photographs / Images: Ragnar Theodor Ling-Vannerus as a member of the Seventh Cavalry; Ling-Vannerus in 1936; Captain Charles Taylor's Indian scouts at Pine Ridge Agency, South Dakota; Sergeant Gustave Korn, killed at Wounded Knee; Captain George D Wallace, killed at Wounded Knee (Brigham Young University Camp Collection); Bernhard Jetter, Seventh Cavalry, killed at Wounded Knee; Porcupine Butte, a landmark that Big Foot's band passed on its way to Wounded Knee

FOREIGNERS IN ACTION AT WOUNDED KNEE

Edited by Christer Lindberg

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The story of the massacre at Wounded Knee on a cold December day in 1890 has been told in many books and articles. The first serious attempt to determine what really happened on that tragic day was James Mooney's *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*.¹ This source remains useful, mainly for its explanation of the impact of the ghost dance upon the Indians, but also for the splendid illustrations, such as George E. Trager's photographs from the scene.

Indian survivors have spoken in narratives by Stanley Vestal, David Miller, and in the Eli S. Ricker interviews edited by Donald F. Danker. The military point of view is presented in Robert M. Utley's brilliant *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation*.² Various foreigners also witnessed the events at Wounded Knee and left important accounts that have not been widely available in the past. In some instances these accounts complete, confirm, or contradict the standard sources.

The idea for this article was born in the summer of 1985 during research in England. I found a fifteen-page letter signed "W. R. C." in which an unknown individual related his experiences on the battlefield at Wounded Knee. The letter was donated to the American Museum in England by a resident of Bath in 1975. The National Archives in

Washington, D.C. helped me identify the author. It turned out to be a private in Troop I, Seventh U.S. Cavalry, named Walter R. Crickett.³ Crickett was born in Margate, Kent County, England, and was twenty-eight years old when he enlisted on April 10, 1889. He was a healthy young man, five feet seven inches tall, with sandy complexion, red-brown hair, and blue eyes. He was a carpenter in civilian life but after his discharge from the army on March 10, 1892, he worked as a mechanic until his death September 21, 1903.⁴ Crickett's letter to an unknown relative or friend in England supplements the longer account of First Sergeant Ragnar Ling-Vannerus.

Ragnar Theodor Ling-Vannerus was born June 1, 1856, at Fröslunda Manor in the county of Skaraborg, Sweden. He chose the profession of arms and became a lieutenant of the Jämtland Mounted Rifles but resigned in 1882. The same year he emigrated to the United States where, under the name Theodore Ragnar, he enlisted as a first sergeant in the army (officers' commissions were denied to aliens). His regiment, Custer's old Seventh Cavalry, was garrisoned in 1888 at Fort Meade in Dakota Territory near Sturgis. From there it was transferred for one year to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, then to Fort Riley, Kansas. The regiment was at Fort Riley when the "war" broke out. Badly wounded during the Drexel Mission Fight of December 30, 1890, Ling-Vannerus returned to Sweden and rejoined the army. Promoted to cavalry captain in 1896, he

was from 1902-13 commander of the record-office district of Gotland. He retired in 1923 and died in an apartment fire in Gothenburg twenty years later.

About 1894 Ling-Vannerus recorded his Wounded Knee experiences in a small notebook. He told in brisk prose of the comradeship among the men, the joys of campaigning, and everyone's longing for action. He presented the material to a local historian, Einar Malm, who used it in several of his books. The translation appearing in this article is from Malm's *Dödsdans i Dakota [Deathdance in Dakota]* that reproduced Ling-Vannerus's original manuscript.

Ling-Vannerus is recognized at the "Hall of Heroes" in the Pentagon, and in Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C. He was awarded a Medal of Honor in 1891 under the name Theodore Ragnar. The citation reads: "For bravery at White Clay Creek, Dec. 30, 1890." In Sweden Ling-Vannerus was appointed Riddare av Svärdsorden [Knight of the Order of the Sword] in 1913.⁵

Another foreigner whose account offers a brief supplement to the main one by Ling-Vannerus is Konni Zilliacus, a Finn. Zilliacus failed as a squire and in 1889 emigrated to the United States where he earned his living as a journalist and war correspondent. The title of "honorary correspondent" was bestowed upon Zilliacus, who accompanied Dent H. Roberts of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* to Pine Ridge in 1890.⁶ Nine years later

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Zilliacus published his first book, *Indiankriget [The Indian War]* in Helsingfors. Unfortunately, the book is unreliable and only a few excerpts can be used.

Bracketed material in the Ling-Vannerus account was added by Einar Malm or the editor. Annotations to the Crickett letter are the editor's. Some distances given by Ling-Vannerus were obvious errors and were corrected by Malm and the late Erik "Uncas" Englund. Ling-Vannerus wrote in Old Swedish so a certain modernization of words and verb forms, first by Malm and then by the editor, has seemed justified. Punctuation and spelling have been corrected in both accounts. Both sources are typical of their time in their use of invectives such as "red devils" and "savages," and show little respect for the Indian side of the Wounded Knee episode.

I am most grateful to Brigadier General Ulf Ling-Vannerus, the late Einar Malm, Lillemor Hollström, the American Museum in England, and Jan Frise. Their kind assistance made this work possible.

ON THE ROAD TO WOUNDED KNEE

Ling-Vannerus: One sunny day during the Indian summer in November 1890 I, 1st Sgt Ragnar Theodor Ling-Vannerus [enlisted as Theodor Ragnar] was sitting in the K Troop message room [at Fort Riley, Kansas] contemplating in the blue smoke from a newly-lit pipe the vanitas vanitatum here below, when my reverie was suddenly disturbed by martial steps, clinking spurs, and in by the door rushed my old troop leader George Wallace with a hearty "Good Morning! Well the devil's loose again now. The Sioux have broken out from their reservations, and we are ordered to Pine Ridge. So get the troop ready to embark at 11 tonight!"

His words were few, his voice kind but stern — alas, how soon silenced in Death's eternal stillness on the bloody field of Wounded Knee! . . . We had

long been awaiting this decampment, since of late the papers had had plenty of information about the new religious movement among Dakota's Indian tribes; there was also whispering of a widespread conspiracy between all the northern nations. However, they were said to expect a new Messiah, who would deliver them from the pale-faces, who were every one to be turned into buffaloes.⁷ They complained too, of shortened rations, but that was the same old tune, so we didn't pay much heed to that.⁸

Everything was astir now. The shrill notes of the bugle and the sullen boom of the alert gun called everyone back who was outside the garrison; orderlies ran and rode to and fro; while everybody hurriedly packed his kit and prepared for a long winter stay. The equipment of the troops went fast, but 75 horses had to be rough-shod, provisions and forage to be ordered and received. It all went smoothly, though, and at 10 p.m. I had the K Troop lined up at the railway station in full marching order alongside the seven other troops and a battery of light artillery. The "gallant" 7th was ready to go on the war-path.⁹

The rumor of the "Indian War" reached Chicago shortly after Christmas. Konni Zilliacus immediately packed his bag and boarded the train to Rushville, Nebraska. The rest of the journey to Pine Ridge was made on horseback. At the agency, the gathered newspapermen formed a club for "storytelling, conversation, and entertainment." A meeting was held every evening in the back room of the agency store.

Zilliacus recalled: Among the members . . . we had men like Major [John] Burke . . . a veteran from many Indian Wars; further Buckskin Jack [John W. Russell], a small Irishman who had grown up among the Sioux . . . [and] Broncho John, who had gain[ed] his fame in New Mexico and Arizona during the campaigns against the Apache Indians, although he had begun his career as a newspaper reporter in Chicago

. . . Buffalo Bill himself was elected honorary chairman of the board.¹⁰

The stories were swallowed along with hot whiskey toddy, and to judge by the reports Zilliacus and several of his companions left to posterity, the gentlemen must have looked very deeply into the glasses.

Ling-Vannerus's account continues as Christmas Day approached: The camp [at Pine Ridge] now began to assume a festive appearance. Every tent was decorated with firs and twigs, and long garlands of evergreens were stretched between the tents. At each end of the picket lines, sheaves were put up, and thousands of blackbirds, sparrows, and bullfinches flew twittering between the horses or sat happily on their backs and even heads in true companionship. In the kitchens everybody was busy; turkeys and geese were roasted or grilled and filled with apples and other delicacies, whole pigs were hung on the broaches, pastries and cakes were baked, and so on . . . Eventually came the feast eagerly longed-for, and mighty was the eating and drinking among high and low. The officers established a kind of saloon by combining some tents in a row, in the middle of which was a long table, groaning under its abundant spread of both substantial and delicious foods, flanked by bottles and decanters of all calibres and colours, from Piper Heidsieck to Old Rock and Rye Highland Whiskey . . . Along the walls there were low seats covered with a mixed collection of skin rugs, in whose soft, warm furs it was delightful to rest, while speeches, toasts, and songs made time unnoticeably go by. There were also Christmas gifts from near and far, but funniest were those which one gave to one another and which, owing to a thorough knowledge of person, were perfectly adapted to hit the nail on the head and to give rise to the most hilarious "contre-temps" and pranks, without in the least disturbing the mutual harmony. The iron bands of discipline were moderately loosened, and all through the camp one heard choir

after choir, innocent laughter, and merry talk that interrupted the usual deserted emptiness of the nights. To many — a last Christmas feast . . .

The day of December 26 opened up overcast and severe, snowflakes were falling here and there, but everything was quiet and a kind of mist seemed to be suspended over the countryside. The ordinary forenoon duties were going on as usual, but both officers and men seemed out of spirits, and even the memories of the Christmas festivities had lost their charm during this slow, depressing wait for the orders to march. Noon came and brought varying gusts of wind, which drifted the soil stirred up by the cattle and made it whirl over the heath. They penetrated even into the mess tent, where we sat in despondent silence having our simple meal — when suddenly a sound so familiar, so dear to every trooper, made us all start. First two high, then a low note, twice repeated, then the whole scale of the heart-warming alert came dancing on the wings of the wind from the main guard. We listened with beaming eyes, holding our breath; then came the battalion signal — one moment, and the alert had been repeated in every troop of our battalion. A roaring hurrah! and away went knives and forks, away the chairs, away the whole party of brave troopers, away as chaff before the wind, everybody to his task . . . Big Foot's band had appeared near Porcupine Creek, only 50 kilometres from the agency.¹¹

However, the wind increased, it grew to a hurricane, and the demons of the air seemed to have conspired to prevent our march. The air filled with smoke and dust so that one could hardly see; tents collapsed or were wrenched from the hands of those who tried to fold them up, and people ran into one another or tumbled headlong on the ground. Notwithstanding all this, within half an hour we were on our way with supply[ies?], troops and all, rapidly trotting towards Porcupine Creek.¹² It was growing cold now, and we wrapped ourselves up tightly in our



Ragnar Theodor Ling-Vannerus as a member of the Seventh Cavalry (above) and in 1936 (below). Courtesy of Brigadier General Ulf Ling-Vannerus.



buffalo furs . . . Night was drawing on and the sun fast approached the horizon. Since we rode through enemy territory, we had full guard, and it was peculiar to see in the undulating countryside, how the last rays of the sun were reflected in the vanguard's arms and fittings . . . We had marched for about 3 hours when we saw the leading guidon be raised high into the air, the signal for a halt; at the same time we heard galloping riders leaving the vanguard.

Now we advance at a flying gallop. We turn to the right past some houses, go down a steep descent, over a creek whose course has an ice-cover . . . and then up a long slope until a halt is called at the crest. The moon was up now and shed her light over the neighborhood in front, which extended slopingly to the Northwest with the usual alternation of heights and ravines. Dark and threatening, there loomed in the distance Porcupine Butte, a sugar-loaf-shaped mountain formation a couple of hundred feet high that rises above the plain, sparsely overgrown with pine and chaparral. Along a creek to the left, our patrols were seen in hot pursuit of some shadows that showed in some places where the moon was bright. The hunt seemed to have been in vain, however, for soon they returned, and the column marched back in its track down and over the little creek mentioned before in order to pitch camp on the other side. We were on Wounded Knee Creek. Since the heavy package [pack?] train was one or two hours late, we had to settle ourselves in the best possible way while we waited. The horses were unsaddled and tied troop-wise by the halters . . . After the posting of guards, the campfires were soon merrily flickering, and a simple but welcome meal was prepared.

Crickett states: Crossing the creek was very bad, the ice being about eight inches thick and as our horses step[p]ed off the bank, they went through the ice up to their _____ some deeper, which made them plunge about; and to make everything better

[worse?], it was so dark you couldn't see your hand in front of you, but we got over alright, the horses was cut up a bit, and some of us wet from falling off, and in less than 10 minutes — stiff but being hardened to it didn't notice it much. We got in about twelve and pitched tents, made some coffee and turned in for the night.¹³

*Ling-Vannerus differs with Crickett when he noted, "Not a single tent was pitched. People slept around the fire, saddle under head, and arms by side."*¹⁴ *Ling-Vannerus described the scene that greeted the command the next morning [December 27]:* Day broke and radiant sun lit up the countryside where before long, such scenes of bloodshed and suffering were to take place. . . . We were encamped on flat ground that extended about 1000 feet to the southwest in the direction of Pine Ridge. On our right we were protected by a hill about 30 feet high that stretched parallel to the camp before finally sloping into the creek behind us. In front of us the plain spread, gradually rising to a ridge in the east — joining Pine Ridge. The western flank was bounded by a wire fence, but the wires had been removed so that only the poles remained. . . . On our left and to the front, there was a 500-metre-long ravine, or rather sandhole, which with vertical sides stretched up to the big plateau.¹⁵

Crickett relates: About noon [December 28] the scouts brought in two prisoners they had captured belonging to Big Foot's band, and said they could see the main body about twelve miles off. In less than ten minutes we were all in the saddle and off to Porcupine Butte when we came in sight of them two miles away.¹⁶

*Ling-Vannerus confirms the statement and adds that the prisoners refused to answer Major Samuel Whitside's questions:*¹⁷ However, the bugle sounded "mount" and soon we were well on our way up to the plateau in the direction of Porcupine Butte. The camp with the prisoners had been left under the cover of a troop. . . . Here we were now,

200 brave troopers trotting along in the sun, happy and light of heart, towards the goal so long coveted. . . . A halt was called and binoculars were used; soon messages came in confirming the presence of the enemy. The guards were withdrawn, a double column was formed, and forwards we trotted again.¹⁸

I daresay we were about a mile from the redskins, who hardly seemed to take any defensive measures. They made the impression of being quite surprised and teemed back and forth, while the wind sometimes conveyed a subdued murmur. As we approached, we found that a broad ravine with gradually sloping sides separated us from the opposite Indians, who had a fairly good position. The ravine was about four hundred metres broad, and to advance over this country, even in open formation, against an enemy armed with magazine rifles and under good cover, was equivalent to exposing oneself to a loss of men that could not have been justified, even by a possible success of the attack! We marched in double columns over open, bare country, with the ammunition train some kilometres behind, towards three hundred hardy, desperate warriors, of whom not even the heads were visible, and every moment we expected the cloud of death to burst over us.¹⁹ But providence has fools under its special protection. Not a shot was fired, and as calmly as on parade we approached the crest.²⁰

About 60 metres in front of us was grouped a crowd of the most satanic, hang-dog physiognomies I ever was unlucky enough to meet, apparently in no order and without command. To our eyes they seemed without number. . . . and I cannot but admit that my heart experienced a short thrill, although I ought to have been inured to scenes like that. It was a selection of the worst characters in the Sioux nation. . . . masters of deceit and cunning who regarded death as an offering at the altar of their hatred towards the whites. They were tall, scowling figures with fiendish

tattooings, ornamental embellishments, and with menacing gestures. . . . Even our commander seemed nervous for the moment, although the advantage was now with him. He gave the orders, "halt" and "dismount," and deployed the battalion forward right and left. Our small mountain gun also came up in a flying hurry and was placed in front of the centre, loaded with case shot. There we stood now, "order carbines," and the Indians murmured, with their magazines full of cartridges, 30 metres ahead of us. Finally a white flag became visible, and a cart drawn by a team of mustangs came slowly through the Indian ranks. Silence spread everywhere, and Major Whitside made for the vehicle that was occupied by Big Foot himself and his squaw. The chief was dying of lung fever and wanted peace.

The negotiations seemed to go well and after a lot of handshaking, it was announced that the band was willing to surrender and follow us as prisoners.²¹ The redskins came forward with outstretched hands and many tokens of friendship; they even was permitted to look at the cannon. "Heap good, heap big gun," they mumbled while they came forward to tap it. . . . Big Foot was placed in an army ambulance and with the Indians in front of us we started towards Wounded Knee.

Behind our column the elderly women followed with their baggage. It was drawn by mustangs — on travois. . . . It was getting dark when finally we arrived at our camp, where space was found for our prisoners a couple of hundred yards at the front. They were surrounded at once by a cordon of mounted guards with order[s] to prevent all braves from going away but to let the women come and go at pleasure; rather a delicate task in the dark, where "buck" and "squaw" were alike! The weaker sex, however, were as busy as bees, gathering fuel or cutting tent poles, so that their village was soon ready and the rising smoke-trails announced that a meal was being prepared. With usual kindheartedness and



Captain Charles Taylor's Indian scouts at Pine Ridge Agency, South Dakota. (NSHS-W938-119-8B)

in good fellowship, the Sioux had been provided with bacon and hard bread from the troopers' rations.

I forgot to mention that immediately after the surrender, the message was signaled to Pine Ridge from the top of Porcupine Butte. A courier was also sent away with [a] request for reinforcement — out of fear that the redskins . . . would try to surprise us, escape, or put up a fight in the morning.²²

THE BATTLE

Ling-Vannerus: When the first shots went off at Wounded Knee, I was standing on the right flank of my dismounted troop [Troop K] 10 metres from the line of fire. The disarmament would be accomplished by the troops B and K, who were dismounted and formed a right angle in front of the Sibley tent in which Big Foot had spent the night, tended by Dr. [Asst. Surgeon James D.] Glennan. Orders were sent to the male population that they should be gathered between the two camps where [Col. James W.] Forsyth with his staff, the interpreter [Philip Wells], Father [Francis M.] Craft, and several others already had been assembled.²³

Slowly, one by one, the warriors approached . . . and took place[s] in a semi-circle on the ground. Upon Forsyth's request the interpreter demanded that all guns were to be handed over against cash compensation. Not a word was replied. The demand was repeated with more determination — at the same time the speaker [now Father Craft] pointed out how useless any attempt at resistance would be and how well they have been treated. A party of twenty warriors rose slowly from the ground and returned to their village, where the women at once began to pull down the tents. Forsyth informed the chief that fire would be opened at the camp unless the warriors did not immediately come back with their guns, and in cold rage the men tardily reappeared. They handed over 8 useless flint-locks.²⁴

The colonel was rapidly losing his patience. He ordered a detachment to search the village while the rest made a "closed square" around the unruly savages. From both flanks the dragoons penetrated the Indian camp, received by screams and cursings. Tent by tent, bundles and packages were

searched, yes! even the squaws whom in most cases was sitting on top of arms or keeping them hidden under clothes or blankets. Besides some axes and clubs, the soldiers found 24 rifles, many of them unfit for use.²⁵

Now one [soldier?] was going to search the warriors themselves, but before that, fermentation had reached its peak. The medicine man, Yellow Bird, suddenly appeared; a grand figure of a man, with green-colored face and yellow nose, terrifying to behold, he wore with pride his floating crown of eagle feathers, while his costume was a wonder of wild adornments [he was dressed in a ghost shirt].²⁶ He steps forwards, turning to his bretheren, and raises his arms high towards the sky, then lowers them again. He faces the sun with outstretched hands as if it were an invocation. Standing in that way silent for a couple of minutes, he then produces a small pipe [of eagle bone] which he incessantly blows, turning his body to all directions. Meanwhile, the others are sitting there in unperturbed silence, but their eyes are becoming lustrous and occasional fidgets can be seen. Now he begins to

circle with solemn steps round the crowd [as in the ghost dance], speaking in a deep, passionate voice and wildly gesticulating. Now and then he stoops to the ground and rubs some sand on his head. The Great Spirit has rendered the enemy into their hands. His rifles cannot go off, his bullets cannot pierce the sacred ghost shirts!²⁷

Through the interpreter, Wells, Forsyth ordered the medicine man to sit down. The latter ignored the injunction. Just then, a sergeant discovered that an Indian walked behind the semicircle with a rifle under his blanket. He was quickly disarmed and there followed a general search from head to foot. A deaf warrior was on his way to the pile of weapons in front of the colonel when two soldiers intervened and brutally wrenched the loaded weapon from the young man's hands. At the same moment Yellow Bird threw a handful of dust at the soldiers. Five or six braves pulled out hidden Winchesters from under their blankets, while others staggered up to their feet, helplessly pointing at the white flag. Fast, like a prairie fire, came the response [to an accidental shot]. Destroying and appalling the bullet rain strikes the Indian mob But after the first volley we had no time to reload but used the carbines as clubs when the revolver was not resorted to. It was a fight hand to hand.²⁸ What a spectacle beneath the clear winter sun; the Indians' demonical war-songs, the troopers' silent but resolute killing, the injured's groaning, the dying's wheezing, and the cracking of shots — there a skull is splintered by a terrible butt blow, there a fine-looking trooper sinks down with a knife up to the hilt in his broad chest, there, white and red tumble confusedly on the grass in embraces that will come loose only in death. There, alas, my troop leader [Captain George Wallace] keeps four Indians at arm's length with his revolver but in the next moment succumbs to a club blow from a warrior attacking him from behind.²⁹

Crickett notes at the same moment that a comrade beside him fell after



Sergeant Gustave Korn was killed at Wounded Knee. Courtesy of Brigadier General Ulf Ling-Vannerus.

being struck by a bullet: They kept up a running fire. I fired at the Indian at the same time but only struck him in the leg. He returned my fire and struck my revolver which knocked me down, which saved me . . . he didn't go much farther, our Capt. [Henry J.] Nowlan shot him through the heart.³⁰

Ling-Vannerus continues: The flight of the Indians was not panicky but took place under continued firing.³¹ I saw for instance one redskin who walked backwards in fleeing, all the time coolly aiming until I at last put a bullet through his brain.³² Most of the warriors lie where they had fallen, with torn clothes and gaping wounds The smell of blood wrap[s] around one, sweet and nauseating.³³

However, I now got orders to mop up the ravine with troop K up to the position held by the troops D and E, who had dismounted and kept up incessant firing at the escaped redskins. We advanced in firing-line and stepped watchfully and laboriously down the almost vertical sides of the "hole." Everywhere reigned the silence of death; the destroying angel had forsooth passed here! As was mentioned above, the Indians had begun to prepare a breaking of camp when we first attempted to disarm them. When the shelling started, all red women and children in the camp had immediately taken to flight. Unrestrainable they threw themselves into carts or rushed desperately away — some up the valley to the right, others again in wild panic towards the ravine down whose sides they blindly rode, drove, or precipitated themselves, only to be massacred against the rugged rocks at the bottom or to be shot down without mercy by the skirmish line on the opposite side. Here we found them now in big heaps, piled on each other. Women, the children in their arms, young and old, horses and mules in various positions, broken carts and clothing.³⁴ More scattered, the warriors lay on their faces, still clutching their weapons. There lies a whole family, except the father, under an overturned

cart body, with the horses still in the shafts; with their legs crushed [meaning the family] they are writhing in agony. There a papoose cries by its mother's breast which, cold and insensible, can nourish it no more; there lies a young girl with her long hair sticky of blood, hiding her mutilated face — they are all lying there in death's unspeakable majesty. And here — here rests the beautiful young squaw whom yesterday I offered a cigarette — dying, with both her legs shot off. She lies there without wailing and greets me with a faint smile on her pale lips.

In silence we advanced at last into this valley of death without meeting any resistance — until suddenly the sides converged and formed a narrow pass, penetrable only by a few men if they walked side by side. We were just going to slip through, pressing ourselves against the walls, when all of a sudden a couple of shots cracked — but the slugs buried in the sand on each side. At the same time, the voice of Lieutenant [John C.] Waterman of troop D [Troop I] warned me against penetrating any further — the redskins lay in hiding in wash-outs ahead of us, and not the Devil could see a feather, whereas for themselves they seemed to have an advantageous survey of all visitors. All the attempts to expel them had failed at a great loss of men. And since my casualties were bigger than I considered the whole of the Sioux nation to be worth, and I had furthermore already carried out my instructions, I in this case found discretion the better part of valour and ordered the troop to ascend the far bank of the ravine and form up at the crest. After this had been carried out, I crawled with a comrade and worming like a snake to the edge of the hope of having a snap-shot at one of our opponents. Then bang, there is a crack. Zip! Zip! whistle the bullets and my cap flies without ceremony from my head, while a scorch along my scalp tells me how close I have come to visiting Valhalla. My brother-in-arms whispers calmly, "the bastard got me!" and sinks down



Captain George D. Wallace, Killed in 1890 at Wounded Knee Creek. Courtesy of the Brigham Young University Camp Collection.

by my side . . . Swift as lightning I roll back . . . but only to find myself in a whole cactus family!

The troops was ordered back from the ravine; the cannons was in position, and soon shell after shell fell down in the "pit." The Indians responded with some excellent marksmanship; a couple of the gunners got wounded and the commander, Lt. [Harry C.] Hawthorne got a bullet in the groin. The firing was kept up for twenty minutes — the response became weaker and weaker. We advanced once again . . . Below us we found . . . mangled and bleeding bodies, a terrible revenge for our dead comrades and brothers.

Cricket also tells of the mopping up in the ravine: We found them in another washout farther up the ravine. We exchanged shots with them and lost one man; after a bit the interpreter [probably Philip Wells] came up and told them to come out and surrender and they shouldn't be hurt. After a bit they came out and laid down their arms,

and we dressed their wounds as they was full of holes . . .³⁵

Sniping continued after the main fighting was over, according to Ling-Vannerus: With the regular close combat being over and the fight transferred to the ravine, the people in the camp itself [i.e. the soldiers and onlookers], of course, expected to be left alone. But in the course of the forenoon, it was observed that the men suddenly dropped dead or wounded without one being able to establish, in the general busyness, from where the shots came. Then a bugler-boy was shot through the chest just at my side. The bullet grazed my ear before stopping in the poor child's heart, and for a few hours deafened my hearing . . . At last however, smoke was seen to issue forth at the foot of a Sibley tent [near the one Big Foot had occupied] and at once all stood clear. With fiendish cunning, one of the savages had hidden there and whenever he was sure of his victim, he directed his assassinating bullets against the unsuspecting soldiers — firing under the canvas and changing places at every shot. Before he was discovered, eleven men had been put out of action. A hundred rifles were now levelled at the tent, which soon looked like a riddle — without his fire ceasing. Then a madcap from troop A ran up to the tent and ripped it open with his knife — but fell at once with a bullet through his body. Now a Hotchkiss gun was trained . . . the stove in there was hit, and a cartouch whizzed through the thin canvas . . . Soon the tent was ablaze and when everything was over, we found only a charred corpse.

The firing at Wounded Knee could be heard faintly at Pine Ridge Agency. Sioux, mostly Brulé from Two Strike's band, rode towards the battlefield. Ling-Vannerus estimated their number at about 600 and Crickett says 300: 150 to 200 is a more realistic figure. The agency Indians attacked troops C and D, which had rounded up escapees fleeing the battle. After a brief clash, the Indians withdrew, but forced the cavalrymen to abandon some twenty prisoners.

While the fight was in progress at Wounded Knee many of the Indians at Pine Ridge Agency prepared to flee. Some fired on the agency at long range and set fire to a few outbuildings. The majority of the Brulé, along with some Oglala, headed northwest down White Clay Creek. Meanwhile the Seventh Cavalry gathered its dead and wounded and departed the battlefield for Pine Ridge, where it arrived about 9:30 P.M.

Ling-Vannerus continues: After having tended the wounded and loaded what was most necessary, including the killed men, the battalions were ready to return to Pine Ridge.³⁶ Yet the moon was up and shed her silvery light over the neighborhood. Slowly, for the sake of the wounded, the long column left the battleground where the reds were lying as dark spots in the winter night, and their sign of peace, the white flag, was moving gently with the wind, whispering its solemn "Peace be with your restless spirits in the happy hunting grounds."

THE DREXEL MISSION FIGHT

Crickett reported the resumption of action on the morning of December 30: Just at daybreak the alarm sounded and out we turned, the 9th Cav. baggage train was surrounded by the red devils . . . went about four miles before we came in sight of them but no sooner than they saw us they was off, only got a few shots at them.³⁷

Ling-Vannerus adds to the short account of Crickett: A dispatch rider was sent to Pine Ridge and the gallant 7th hurried to the rescue. At the first sight of blue boys, the Indians scattered and went headlong for the hills where we could not follow them. But two among them were not lucky enough to escape. We had brought with us a mountain gun and just as a couple of the redskins were disappearing behind a hill, the gun was discharged, shells struck the ground close behind them, and I could see through my binoculars how both men and steeds tumbled down, torn to pieces by the splinter[s].



Bernhard Jetter, Seventh Cavalry, killed at Wounded Knee. Courtesy of Brigadier General Ulf Ling-Vannerus.

It was an excellent shot at the distance of two thousand feet.

No sooner had I returned to the camp where I was busy supervising the watering, when I was anew disturbed by the shrill note of the bugle ordering us to mount, and before long, the regiment was again on the march against the reds. After we had moved out of the agency we saw fire and flames breaking out in all directions of the western horizon.³⁸

The soldiers found everything in order at the Mission and moved on. Koni Zilliacus remained behind at the Mission as an observer. He reported: [No

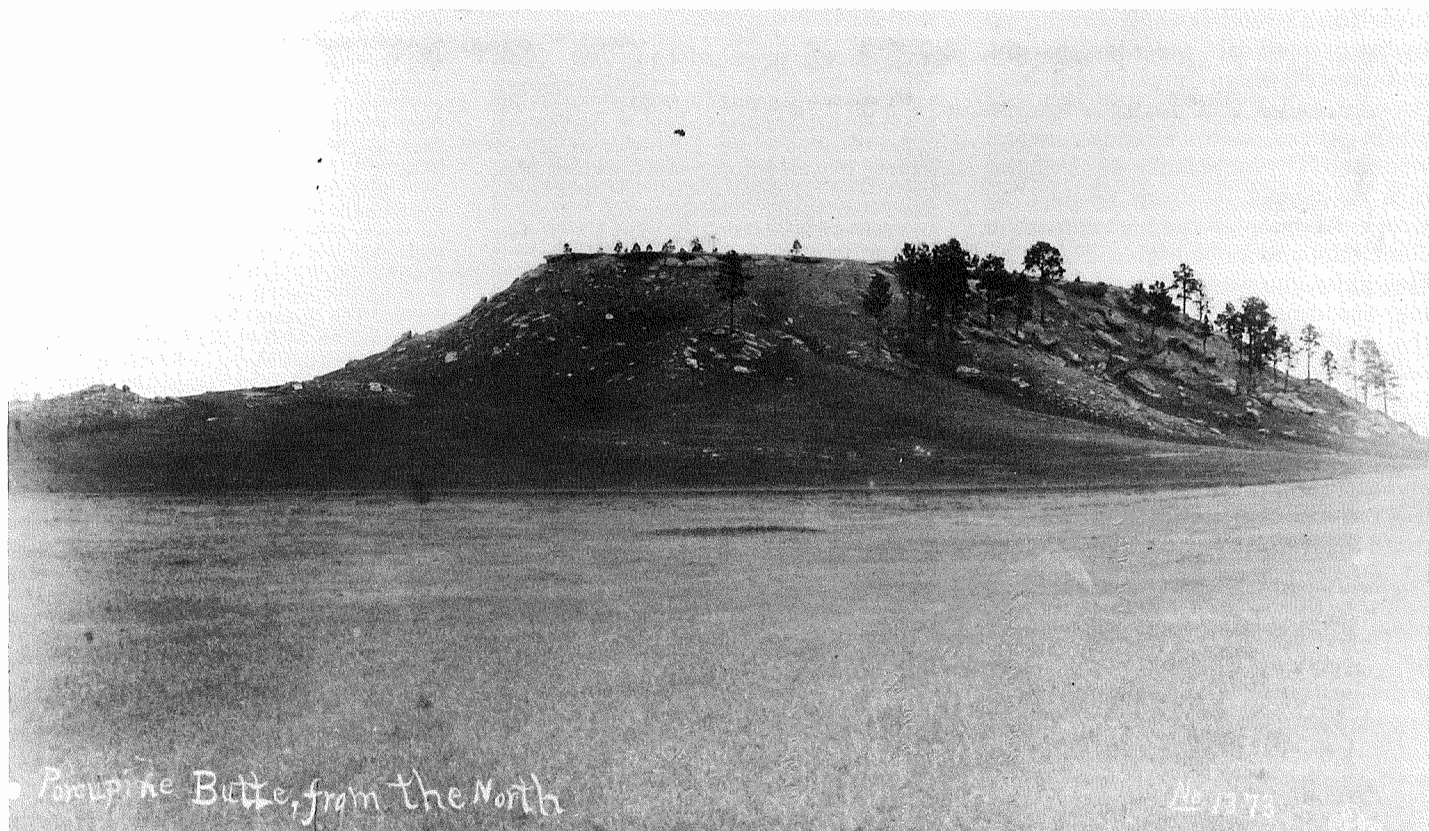
one else remained] except for the pater himself [Father John Jutz], some subordinates of the male sex, and the nuns, who were entrusted with the education of the girl pupils and with the care of the small children taken in charge by the mission. These latter were the only orphans that remained in the stately mission building. All the older and more advanced pupils had disappeared on the night after the annihilation of Big Foot's braves at Wounded Knee . . . The pater himself had stayed on his post during the disturbances without the reds in the least molesting neither him nor the other staff.³⁹

Ling-Vannerus: We advanced without a break on the valley bottom until the vanguard reached the crest ahead, when suddenly a steadily increasing rifle fire was heard — and the vanguard was thrown back in disorder.⁴⁰ The main force at once was set trotting until it was within 100 feet from the crest, where the regiment dismounted and the first battalion was ordered forward in extended order. But the ground, cut up by continual deep clefts and crevices, was such as to afford only about [a] 30-metre-wide disposable front with a free view. And instead of occupying this with a single troop, the whole battalion was packed together there, so that the men were lying almost shoulder by shoulder. Ahead of us and 20 metres below, stretched another valley of great extension, densely overgrown with thickets. To the right and somewhat to the front there rose a hill, neatly 30 metres high; it completely commanded our position.

Suddenly firing started up from the right flank and our men bit the dust one after the other. The enemy had occupied the hill to the right, but now, however, we had got a target to fire at — since it was quite bare, it was impossible even for a redskin to hide completely. We also had the satisfaction of seeing some of them tumbling down into the precipice.

What the second battalion did in the meantime is to me incomprehensible. But a sure thing is that before long we

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Big Foot's band of 400 passed Porcupine Butte on its way to Wounded Knee. (NSHS-W938-119-22A)

were exposed to cross-fire from the left flank too.⁴¹ Unless we wanted to be shot down we had to abandon our positions; to advance was impossible. Thus we retired step by step during which my new troop leader, Lieutenant [James D.] Mann, was mortally wounded, whereupon I took command of the troop. The redskins, of course, immediately occupied the abandoned position. Behind us there was a small height of little extension — but which dominated the descent to the valley. While the rest of the battalion moved to the left in an attempt to outflank the enemy, orders were given to Captain [Charles A.] Varnum with the B troop and myself with the K troop to defend this height to a man. Soon we had our men posted along the crest, as well hidden as the conditions permitted, and soon had the pleasure of seeing one or

two redskins peeping out from our former position. To the left of us, the other troops lay well hidden in a deep wash-out, while the first battalion was heard skirmishing at the far right. It was calm, but we lay there, fingers on the trigger, resolved to give the Indians a warm reception. Group after group now began to appear, whispering between them and pointing at us. I suppose they smelled a rat and hesitated to advance. But Little Wound at once interfered, and in a long, winding line they crept like snakes against our position. Not a shot was fired on either side. They were before long at the foot of the hill, and then with wild war-whoops they rose like a man and made a rush for us. But we received them warmly, extraordinarily warmly!

Calmly as at a target-shooting, our men put bullet after bullet into these

horrible figures, while a raking fire from the wash-out decimated their ranks. This was too much for them, and in the greatest disorder they fled back to their first position. I was just going to send a farewell shot at them, when I myself got a souvenir from my copper-coloured friends that for ever has separated me from their company. After having previously been firing in a lying position, I rose on my knee to get a better view with the carbine resting on my leg put forward, when suddenly I felt a burning pain in my ankle where I had got a bullet that positively would have hit my head had I not changed positions. The pain was transitory, however, and I stayed on my post during heavy enemy firing until I lost consciousness.⁴²

Ling-Vannerus experienced the final phase of the Mission fight lying in an ambulance: When I woke up, I found

myself on a stretcher which was carried by two medical orderlies to the ambulance where my wound was dressed and I was put in a waggon where there were already several wounded. The ambulance was situated in a ravine not far from White Clay Creek. Above rose the high mountain chain bare and inhospitable. There the Hotchkiss gun was stationed. Its roaring, accompanied by the whizzing of the shells, the distant cracking of the rifles, now and then followed by the troopers' hurrahs, the Indians' shrill shouts or dull war songs, not to speak of certain unmistakable signs of retreat and threatening annihilation — all this was not precisely things likely to calm down the feverish minds of the wounded. Of course we had difficulties in following the course of the fight. But partly there arrived from time to time new wounded, partly there came orderlies who gave superficial knowledge of the situation.

*On January 12 the last Indian resisters came in to Pine Ridge, desperately in need of food and clothing. Zilliacus reported that they arrived in "full attire but without weapons and war paint. They were no less than sixteen in number and all had war-bonnets or thick eagle feathers . . . The only one to look neither stately nor dignified was Red Cloud . . . Dressed in a long greatcoat of brown plush with a red woolen lining, boots, and a black felt hat, Red Cloud presented an all but venerable picture of the red man."*⁴³

After extended negotiations, the Sioux capitulated on January 15. Short Bull, Kicking Bear, and about twenty other "firebrands" surrendered themselves as hostages for the good conduct of their people. They were supposed to go to prison, but instead they were allowed to accompany William F. Cody's "Wild West" show on a year-long tour of Europe.

NOTES

¹James Mooney, *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890* (originally published as the Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of

American Ethnology, 1892-93).

²Stanley Vestal, *Sitting Bull: Champion of the Sioux* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1932; second ed., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957) and *Warpath and Council Fire* (New York: Random House, 1948); Donald F. Danker, ed., "The Wounded Knee Interviews of Eli S. Ricker," *Nebraska History* 62:2 (Summer 1981); David H. Miller, *Ghost Dance* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1959); Robert M. Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).

³Michael E. Pilgrim, military service branch, National Archives and Records Administration, to Christer Lindberg, March 2, 1987.

⁴File XC 2 654 633, Veterans Administration, Washington, D.C. Crickett moved to Sioux City, Iowa, after his discharge. He married Josephie Lickband on October 5, 1895. She applied for a widow's pension December 5, 1932.

⁵The biography of Ling-Vannerus is compiled from Einar Malm, *Dödsdans i Dakota* [Deathdance in Dakota] (Stockholm: Rabén and Sjögren, 1961); *Berömda Indianhövdingar* [Famous Indian Chiefs] (Stockholm: Rabén and Sjögren, 1974); and letter of Colonel Ulf Ling-Vannerus to Christer Lindberg, March 22, 1987.

⁶Elmo Scott Watson, "The Last Indian War, 1890-91: A Study of Newspaper Jingoism," *Journalism Quarterly* 20:3 (September 1943), 210.

⁷See Mooney, *Ghost Dance Religion*. It seems likely that Ling-Vannerus had read Mooney before writing his recollections of Wounded Knee.

⁸Newspaper coverage of the "hostilities," and statements by the panic-stricken Pine Ridge agent D. F. Royer, promoted fears that a real war was likely. As former agent Dr. V. T. McGillycuddy put it, "There was never a Sioux outbreak. No citizen of Nebraska or Dakota has been killed, molested, or can show the scratch of a pin and no property has been destroyed off the reservation." Quoted in Watson, "Last Indian War," 205.

⁹On November 19-20 the Pine Ridge and Rosebud agencies were occupied by cavalry and infantry, while mobile units soon had the Cheyenne River Reservation under surveillance. By the end of November more than 1200 soldiers under Brigadier General John R. Brooke were bivouacked at Pine Ridge. The Seventh Cavalry arrived on November 26. See Utley, *Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, for the best summary of events leading up to the Wounded Knee fight.

¹⁰Konni Zilliacus, *Indiankriget: Amerikanska Gränsmarkshistorier* [The Indian War: American Frontier Tales] (Helsingfors, Finland: Wentzel Hagelstams Förlag, 1898), 16ff.

¹¹Big Foot's band had not yet been located when the Seventh Cavalry was ordered to take the field. On the movement of the various Indian bands and military units, see Utley, *Last Days of the Sioux Nation*. Throughout his narrative Ling-Vannerus is inconsistent in his use of English or metric units of measure. Some parts of his narrative may have been written soon after the battle, when his military service had him thinking in English units. Other parts of the narrative were written after he had returned to Sweden.

¹²Major Samuel M. Whitside had been ordered to intercept Big Foot and his band. The battalion consisted of Troops A, B, I, and K of Custer's old regiment, the Seventh Cavalry, a total of ten

officers and 225 enlisted men. Some Oglala scouts, including mixed-bloods John Shangreau and Baptiste Garnier, accompanied Whitside's command.

¹³Walter R. Crickett, "With the 7th Cavalry from Ft. Riley to Pine Ridge Agency, South Dakota, 1890 and 91." Hereafter W. R. C. letter.

¹⁴Young Hugh McGinnis and fifteen other recruits had been ordered to follow on foot as escort for seven mule-drawn wagons. It was late when McGinnis and his comrades reached camp. In contrast to Ling-Vannerus's matter-of-fact account, McGinnis found the night taxing on his nerves. The silence was spooky; whenever a horse neighed, McGinnis gave a start, suspecting an attack. In Einar Malm, *De Kämpade, Förgäves* [They Fought in Vain] (Stockholm: Rabén and Sjögren, 1967), 133-34.

¹⁵John Shangreau and some scouts spent December 27 combing the valleys of Wounded Knee and Porcupine Creeks for the Minneconjou band. Meanwhile the soldiers established signal stations on the hills.

¹⁶W. R. C. letter.

¹⁷In an interview, Ling-Vannerus gave a brief description of the two braves: "Both have [had] eagle feathers in the hair and were seated light on their ponies. One had his face painted in red, crossed by white lines, and the other was painted in blue with similar lines." Einar Malm, *Siouxindianernas Sista Strid* [The Last Battle of the Sioux Indians] (Stockholm: Norstedt and Söner, 1929), 142.

¹⁸Ling-Vannerus added later that all conversation was prohibited and that only the sound of the horses' hooves marked the passage of the column. *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁹The soldiers were inexperienced, and Ling-Vannerus's account suggests that their misgivings were exaggerated. There were about 120 warriors in Big Foot's band. The soldiers outnumbered them almost two to one. Nor were the Indians in a fighting mood. They were hungry and suffering from exposure. Nevertheless Philip Wells recalled later that Big Foot's band occupied a position from which it might have made significant resistance to Whitside's force had the Indians been inclined to fight. The Minneconjou's decision to surrender on December 28 tends to confirm that the next day's fighting was not premeditated.

²⁰This portion of Ling-Vannerus's recollection was for reasons unknown, not presented in *Dödsdans i Dakota*. The excerpt is from Malm, *De Kämpade Förgäves*.

²¹Big Foot was willing to surrender but he refused to hand over the weapons until the band reached Pine Ridge. Shangreau advised Whitside to postpone the disarmament until the Indians and soldiers reached camp at Wounded Knee.

²²During the evening — accounts differ as to the exact time — Colonel James W. Forsyth and the rest of the Seventh Cavalry arrived at Wounded Knee. The additional troops camped just north of Whitside's battalion. Pine Ridge trader James Asay had brought along a keg of whiskey, and the officers seized the opportunity to resume the interrupted Christmas celebration. The Sioux, aware of the arrival of more troops, spent an uneasy night.

²³See Utley, *Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, for a more detailed description of the preparations for

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disarming the Indians. Thomas H. Tibbles in *Buckskin and Blanket Days* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1957), 311, quotes an unidentified officer as saying that the troops' disposition around the council site was peculiar; should fighting break out, the soldiers would be firing into one another. Among the civilians present were reporters Charles W. Allen, *Chadron Democrat*; William F. Kelley, *Lincoln Nebraska State Journal*; and Will Cressy, *Omaha Daily Bee*. See also Danker, "Wounded Knee Interviews."

²⁴Accounts differ about the number of guns turned in. Ling-Vannerus put it at eight and so did John Shangreau in an interview with Eli Ricker. Mooney, *Ghost Dance Religion*, and Crickett refer to two guns. Allen, in the *Chadron Democrat*, states that one Winchester and two old squirrel rifles were handed over to Forsyth. Other figures are given in interviews by Ricker in Danker, "Wounded Knee Interviews."

²⁵Ling-Vannerus's statement that the soldiers were received by "screaming and cursing" can be compared to Lieutenant James D. Mann's deathbed letter, which described a less confrontational situation during the officers' search for weapons in the village. Mann's letter is quoted in Utley, *Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, 209-10.

²⁶Ling-Vannerus's reference to Yellow Bird by name is further evidence that he had read Mooney before writing his recollections.

²⁷The mixed-blood interpreter Philip Wells, known to the Sioux as Tonkala (The Fox), translated Yellow Bird's words as follows: "Do not be afraid and let your heart be strong to meet what is before you. We are all well aware that there are lots of soldiers about us and that they have lots of bullets; but I have received assurance that their bullets cannot penetrate us. The prairie is large and the bullet will not go toward you but over the large prairie and if they do go towards you they will not penetrate you. As you saw me throw up the dust and it floated away, as will the bullets float away harmlessly over the prairies." Philip

Wells interview in Danker, "Wounded Knee Interviews."

²⁸The fighting is described graphically in the Joseph Horn Cloud, Philip Wells, Dewey Beard, and other interviews in Danker, "Wounded Knee Interviews." At least twenty Indians fell in the cross-fire during the initial fighting, along with more than thirty soldiers. Because the soldiers had been drawn up in a square, many casualties likely were from the fire of their own comrades.

²⁹Crickett corroborates Ling-Vannerus's account: "Captain Wallace was in charge of the searching party; the war club he had his brain knocked out with was one he took from the tepees and was swinging it about in his hand, that was the last I saw of him until he was picked up with his head smashed, his revolver was in his hand empty and four Indians dead just in front of where he laid." W. R. C. Letter. The Wells interview says Wallace was killed by a bullet in the head.

³⁰W. R. C. letter.

³¹The Indians broke through the line of soldiers and some ran east across the agency road; others circled K troop en route to the Indian village.

³²The fight at the council site was over in less than ten minutes. The focus of the fighting then shifted to Wounded Knee Creek and southward to the ravine.

³³While Ling-Vannerus and his comrades were occupied near the council square, the fighting continued on the fringes of the battlefield as the soldiers tried to run down fleeing Indians. Utley, *Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, 217-18; Malm, *De Kämpade Förgäves*, 163-64; *Siouxindianernas Sista Strid*, 159.

³⁴With regard to the killing of women and children, Ling-Vannerus recalled years later that many recruits behaved in a manner "not worthy of the uniform." Most of the Seventh Cavalrymen had never been under fire and nearly a fifth were recruits, some of whom had joined the regiment only two weeks earlier. Utley, *Last Days of the*

Sioux Nation, 202.

³⁵W. R. C. letter.

³⁶The troops suffered the loss of twenty-five killed and thirty-seven wounded. Utley, *Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, 228.

³⁷W. R. C. letter. The Ninth Cavalry had made a forced march from Fort Robinson, Nebraska, to Pine Ridge. A couple of miles from the agency the regiment's detached wagon train was fired upon by Indians. The Seventh Cavalry sent out a relief column from the agency and escorted the train to safety. Utley, *Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, 236.

³⁸The Indians had set fire to a small log cabin near the mission. The soldiers feared that the Catholic Drexel Mission was in flames.

³⁹Zilliaccus, *Indiankriget*, 173; Malm, *Dödsdans i Dakota*, 238; Wells interview in Danker, "Wounded Knee Interviews." Kicking Bear and his followers had been at the mission but did not harm Father John Jutz or his staff, who had fed the Indians and tended some of the wounded.

⁴⁰Crickett states that the march beyond the mission was an outright breach of orders. "Our colonel had orders only to go as far as the mission, instead of which he went about five miles farther on." W. R. C. letter.

⁴¹Forsyth had marched his whole command into a cul-de-sac where it was pinned down by no more than fifty Indians until the Ninth Cavalry arrived to relieve it. Although Forsyth's conduct was the subject of a military court of inquiry, no disciplinary action was taken. Utley, *Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, 240, 244-49.

⁴²About 1:30 P.M. Guy V. Henry's battalion of the Ninth Cavalry made contact with Forsyth and covered the withdrawal of the Seventh Cavalry from its exposed position. Seventh Cavalry casualties were one killed, five wounded, and Lieutenant Mann mortally wounded. Utley, *Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, 239. Indian casualties are unknown.

⁴³Zilliaccus, *Indiankriget*, 174-75.