

Little Bighorn Warrior Fatalities

By C. Lee Noyes

Renown historian Kenneth Hammer has compiled a list of 55 potential warrior fatalities at the Battle of the Little Bighorn on June 25-26, 1876. This compilation has been posted on the CBHMA web site for review and speculation.

Ethnographic challenges have complicated any serious attempt to document Indian casualties accurately. Confusion concerning tribal affiliations and warrior names (among other factors) has frustrated efforts by historians to compile a complete and definitive list of warriors (*and* non-combatants) who died at the battle.

Part of the challenge is the fact that distinctions between the seven Lakota divisions of the Sioux were not as precise as our stereotypes divide them. Although there were no apparent major linguistic or other cultural differences that separated Hunkpapa from Oglala, there were significant geopolitical divisions *within* each Lakota band: the non-reservation, "Northern" roamers led by Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull; the permanent residents of the reservation established by the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty; and the Summer roamers from the agencies who temporarily joined the northern bands.

Moreover, these bands intermingled and intermarried. Close ties existed, for example, between the Oglala war leader Crazy Horse and the Minneconjou because of his mother's affiliation with the latter group. As a child he often lived with the Minneconjou. After the death of his mother, his father married two sisters of the Brulé leader Spotted Tail; and prior to his death in 1877, Crazy Horse had fled to the agency named after his famous "uncle." The Minneconjou White Bull, nephew of Sitting Bull (Hunkpapa), was camped in the tribal circle of his Sans-Arc wife on the day of the battle.

Further compounding and accounting for such confusion is the fact that two (or perhaps more) men of the same name had different tribal affiliations. For example, there was a prominent Minneconjou as well as an Hunkpapa leader known as Black Moon. Moreover, the Lakota knew the Cheyenne by different names (for example, Lame White Man/Bearded Man; Limber Bones/Flying By, etc.). Marriages outside the Lakota further defy such categorization. The father of the "Arikara" scout Bloody Knife, for instance, was Hunkpapa.

In addition to sources cited by Dr. Hammer, please refer to Richard G. Hardorff, *Hokahey! A Good Day to Die*. For an examination of Lakota affiliations, customs and organization, we recommend James R. Walker, *Lakota Society*. Articles on the Warrior Marker Project at Little Bighorn Battlefield appeared, for example, in the June 23, 2006 and June 26, 2008 issues of *Billings Gazette* and Fall 2006 *Dispatch*. Please contact the editor for copies.

The editor may be contacted at the email or postal address noted on page 4 of the Fall 2008 Battlefield Dispatch. Dr. Hammer's original compilation listed 54 warriors. A revision of this list contains the name of one additional fatality (Hawk Man).